POCKET ESSENTIALS LITERATURE

Brion Gysin William Burroughs Jack Kerouac

Howl Neal Cassady

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The Subterraneans The Nova Trilogy Kaddish

On The Road The Wild Boys

Doctor Sax Naked Lunch



The Beat Generation

Jamie Russell

The Pocket Essential

The Beat Generation

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To Julian and William, for being such great friends
To Louise, for so much happiness

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1. Introduction: Rebirth Of Cool

Never in the history of literature and literary movements has so much been owed to so few. Three men—Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William S Burroughs—became the core of a literary and social phenomenon that (to borrow Burroughs' comments about Kerouac's most famous novel) 'sold a trillion pairs of Levis and a million espresso coffee machines, and also sent countless kids on the road.'

The Beat phenomenon transformed American society. Not only was it the first expression of what we would now dub youth culture—paving the way for the hippies, punks, grungers and ravers as well as a thousand and one other styles—but it was also the first moment in Western culture when literature, music and film became cool. In other words, it was totally opposed to the boring adult world of work, money and responsibility.

These days the Beats are part of the establishment. Kerouac, Burroughs and Ginsberg can be found on all kinds of college and school reading lists. (There's a great photo of American military cadets sitting in class reading Ginsberg's 'Howl'—how the world changes!) What's more, the Beats are big bucks. Reprints of their books, academic critiques, T-shirts, CD recordings and posters are everywhere. The principal characters in the Beat saga (all of them now dead and buried) have become mythical figures whose continuing status as visionaries, rebels and hipsters guarantee their various estates a regular (and very large) income.

Yet in spite of this acceptance into the mainstream, the Beats are still considered cool. What makes the Beat phenomenon unique is the way in which it has remained so popular with each successive generation of young rebels. While 1960s acid culture has generally been disowned and mocked, the Beats and the literature that they spawned remain as much a symbol of youthful rebellion today as they were back in 1957. Reading *On The Road*, 'Howl' or *Naked Lunch* has become a rite of passage. It doesn't seem to matter that these books were written almost half a century ago, they've still got what it takes, Daddy-O.

Perhaps this isn't all that surprising. Back in the 1950s, the Beats were obsessed with exploding society's taboos, from drugs to sex to censorship. At the dawn of this new millennium these issues still seem as relevant today as they did back then. Things may have changed since 1950, but we still seem a long, long way from the kind of open, inclu-

sive society that the Beats dreamt of. Drugs are still demonised, homosexuality is still frowned upon, hetero sex is only permitted if it's selling something and the censor still guards us like an overbearing nanny.

The Beats are still as relevant today as they were fifty years ago. After all, why else do the American broadcasting authorities still ban readings of 'Howl' on the radio before midnight?

Before The Beats

1945. The closing stages of World War Two. As the Third Reich collapsed, American infantrymen withdrew from the battlefields of Europe and returned home to their native soil. Some of them were elated, flushed with the adrenaline of victory. Others were in a state of despair, having witnessed a catalogue of atrocities that neither peacetime nor their military training had prepared them for. Few of them were ready—emotionally or physically—for the shock of returning home.

The social impact of World War Two stretched far beyond the simple realities of warfare. During the years that followed Pearl Harbour an unprecedented mobilisation of human resources took place, and it was in this upheaval that the seeds of the Beat Generation were sown. As men and women from all across the United States were thrown together by the war, the fabric of American society was torn apart. People from different walks of life began to exchange ideas, opinions and lifestyles. Whites suddenly met the country's minorities first-hand, women were given the opportunity to prove that they could carry out traditionally 'masculine' jobs in the absence of America's men and the draft gave everyone first-hand experience of the power of the state over the individual.

By the time the war was over, America had irrevocably changed. As the veterans returned they added their own experience to the mix, bringing a restless energy back with them, an energy that laid the foundations for the discontented youth movements that soon emerged.

Nelson Algren, one of America's foremost novelists of the period, summed up the sense of post-war social unrest in his books. Talking about *The Man With The Golden Arm* (1949), his classic story about heroin addicts in the slums of Chicago, Algren claimed: 'I was going to write a war novel. But it turned out to be the *Golden Arm* thing. I mean, the war kind of slipped away, and those people with the hypos came along and that was it.'

Junkies were big news in the late 1940s. Many veterans had returned with drug habits that they'd picked up after being wounded and given shots of morphine. Meanwhile, on the home front, the war had meant that stolen drugs were frequently available on the black market, fuelling a sudden rise in morphine and heroin addiction that continued well into the 1950s (and beyond). The media were obsessed with junkies—their lifestyle, criminal activities and depraved sexual acts.

But it wasn't just junkies who emerged from the upheaval of the war years. Suddenly, outlaw subcultures were springing up everywhere. Packs of thrill-seeking motorcyclists had begun to prowl the highways of the West Coast, terrorising the patrons of remote bars as they roared up on their Indians and Harley Davidsons. Ex-GIs who hadn't been able to settle down after returning home, these outlaw motorcyclists (who would eventually become the Hell's Angels) seemed to herald the coming of a new lawlessness. Meanwhile, in the cities, a new breed of criminal—the juvenile delinquent—had appeared. These poor, predominantly working-class children ran riot through the streets, unafraid of their parents or the police.

In the conservative eyes of the media these different gangs were a new threat to the Land of the Free—an enemy within. What was worse, these wild groups seemed to be encouraging America's other minorities to become equally vocal. African-Americans, immigrants and homosexuals were suddenly demanding rights and freedoms. Was it a Communist plot against American democracy? And where would it end?

Going Underground: Subterranean Adventures

The history of America in the years after World War Two is a history of subcultures. From junkies to bikers, gays to juvenile delinquents, and African-Americans to immigrants, America's population was split between the normal majority and the deviant minority. Academic sociologists (like the Chicago School of Albert Cohen, Milton M Gordon and others) catalogued these different groups by writing about their habits, language and behaviour. Delving into the subterranean worlds of America's underbelly, these academics tried to understand the political, economic and social reasons why the members of these groups felt cut off from mainstream society.

This interest in the forbidden underworlds wasn't just limited to a bunch of academics, though. The men and women who would form the

first wave of the Beat Generation were similarly excited by the prospect of experiencing the kicks that could be found in the ghettos and poor neighbourhoods. Living amongst what Herbert Huncke called the 'dikes, faggots, a certain so-called hip element, the swish places and the she-she places' of New York, Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs were all obsessed with life on the edges of society. It was a characteristic that, in later years, their critics would mock. As Norman Podhoretz (a fervent hater of the Beats) wrote at the height of Beat fever in 1958: 'The spirit of … the Beat Generation strikes me as the same spirit which animates the young savages in leather jackets who have been running amok in the last few years with their switchblades and zip guns.'

Yet, by taking bits and pieces of each of these subcultures, the Beats began to create a new lifestyle that rejected mainstream *I Love Lucy* American culture in favour of the restless energy of the underworld. Experimenting with drugs, crime, sex and jazz, the Beats tried to shatter every taboo that the straight world held.

Hip, Beat Cats

As with most literary movements, there isn't a birth date for the Beat Generation. No one ever issued a manifesto or printed off a pamphlet announcing the arrival of the Beats, it simply happened. Ginsberg, Kerouac and Burroughs met in New York in 1944. They were introduced through a series of mutual friends, liked one another and began to hang out together. The three of them formed the central hub of the Beats and around them grew a wide circle of friends and acquaintances, the Beat Generation itself.

Legend has it that Jack Kerouac was the first to call himself, Ginsberg, Burroughs and their acquaintances 'The Beat Generation.' John Clellon Holmes made a note of the phrase and used it as the title of an essay in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1952, 'This Is The Beat Generation.' But 'Beat' was a term that existed long before this casual use by Kerouac. It had a rich heritage with many links to the subcultures that these writers were so enamoured with. The word 'beat' had been used in African-American jazz circles for years to mean exhausted or broke. The Times Square world of petty thieves, junkies and prostitutes that William Burroughs worked his way into—after meeting one of its true denizens, Herbert Huncke—also had the word in its vocabulary, with a similar kind of meaning. But on the lips of excited young men

like Kerouac, Holmes and Ginsberg, beat came to signify something else—a combination of both exhaustion and empowerment. Kerouac's vision of beat relied on a definite shift in meaning from earlier usage. If something was beat it wasn't simply downtrodden by life in post-war America, it also rejected the oppressive world around it, transforming exhaustion into defiance and reaching towards religious transformation ('beatitude'). As John Clellon Holmes remarked, 'To be beat is to be at the bottom of your personality, looking up.' Like the 'hipster' who Norman Mailer glamorised (with much offensive racist nonsense) in his famous essay *The White Negro*, the Beat hero throws himself into the subcultures of American life and tries to find an alternative to the boring realities of the nuclear family. But, unlike the hipster, whose main quality is a knowing coolness, the Beat hero is characterised by desperation in his search for kicks, wearing himself out in his attempt to live life large and experience a spiritual rebirth.

The Ace In The Hole

The one thing that characterises all the Beat writers is their willingness to throw themselves into the underbelly of American society in search of kicks. Being cool meant finding an alternative to the mainstream and, in the 1940s and 1950s, the alternative lifestyles were to be found in the cities' bars, ghettos and downtown clubs. Rejecting their bourgeois family values (particularly Burroughs, a Harvard graduate whose family had once been heir to the Burroughs Adding Machine fortune), the Beats began to experiment with everything that 1940s and 1950s America classified as illegal: drugs, crime, gay sex, racial integration.

Burroughs felt most comfortable in the hustler world of Times Square and teamed up with authentic petty thief Herbert Huncke to score for drugs while funding his habit through a combination of his family's $200 a month allowance and 'working the hole' (robbing drunks on the subways). Kerouac experimented with a variety of stimulants and eventually became addicted to Benzedrine inhalers (bennies). Ginsberg, with the help of Neal Cassady, discovered the extent of his homosexuality.

Such forays outside of polite society brought their own problems, though. The first bout of serious trouble that struck the group was in 1944 when Lucien Carr, a handsome blond boy who looked like Arthur

Rimbaud, murdered Dave Kammerer. Carr had been responsible for introducing the principal Beats to one another and, although he never published anything worthy of his peers, he has remained a key component in the Beat Generation's history ever since. Dave Kammerer, who knew both Carr and Burroughs from St Louis, had followed the golden-haired, angelic boy up to New York as he attended classes at Columbia. He was obsessed with Carr, even though there was a clear lack of reciprocation. Those who witnessed their strange relationship claimed that Carr often seemed to encourage the older man, enjoying the level of power he held over him while never giving him exactly what he wanted. Eventually, as the obsession became increasingly desperate, Kammerer's adoration turned into violence.

According to Carr, on the night of 13 August 1944 he had met Kammerer during a drinking bout. In the early hours of the next morning, as they sat on the riverside, Kammerer made 'an indecent proposal' to Carr, who rejected it. A fight ensued and the older, heavier Kammerer would have won, but Carr stabbed him twice with his scout pocket knife. Binding Kammerer's hands and feet together with his shoelaces and belt, Carr dumped the body into the river. A few hours later he confessed to Burroughs (who advised him to turn himself in and claim self-defence on the basis of a homosexual advance). He then woke up Kerouac and confessed again. Together they disposed of the murder weapon and then spent the day drinking, watching a movie and visiting a gallery. Later that afternoon Carr turned himself in to the District Attorney.

When the body was found Carr was arrested along with Burroughs and Kerouac as material witnesses. Burroughs' father made the long journey up to New York and bailed his son out, returning with him to St Louis. Kerouac's father disowned him—"No son of mine ever got mixed up in a murder"—and it was left to the parents of his girlfriend Edie Parker to bail him out, on condition that he first marry their daughter. The press dubbed the killing an 'honour slaying,' playing up the Kammerer's homosexual proposition and Carr was given a sentence of 1-20 years, but was released after serving just two.

Five years later, in April 1949, the dangers of consorting with the underworld became apparent as Ginsberg, Huncke and two petty thieves (Vicki Russell and Little Jack Melody) were arrested after crashing a stolen car. Of the four it was Huncke, an old-time thief and junky, who bore the brunt of the courts' wrath, receiving a five-year

prison sentence. Ginsberg escaped with nothing more than a spell in a psychiatric institute after his Columbia professor, Lionel Trilling, spoke in court on his behalf.

Both of these incidents are typical of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs' infatuation with those who lived on the margins of American society. While all three wanted to experience the authentic lifestyles they saw around them, they were also in a position to step out of—or be rescued from—those lifestyles at any time by playing the ace in the hole (their middle-class families) that acquaintances like Huncke couldn't lay claim to.

The Best Minds

It wasn't just brushes with the law that the Beats had to cope with. They also had to deal with the fact that most of their peers and elders thought they were stark raving mad. Stepping outside the realm of normal behaviour in post-war America was likely to get you thrown into a straightjacket. As Ginsberg wrote in 'Howl'—'I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked...'

Kerouac's early experiences with the Navy during World War Two are a case in point. Fed up with the boring regimes of naval life Kerouac cultivated a misfit reputation, breaking various petty rules, brawling with his superiors and finally (in what was considered a shocking display of insubordination) putting down his rifle in the middle of drill practice and walking off. Hauled before naval psychiatrists and asked to identify himself by name and rank, Kerouac told them "I'm only old Samuel Johnson" (an allusion presumably to his literary pretensions). Hinting that he might be homosexual—an unpardonable sin in the 1940s American Navy—Kerouac was discharged after being diagnosed as a schizophrenic.

Just as Kerouac bamboozled the psychiatrists in his evaluation by referring to a literary figure they had never heard of, so William Burroughs confounded his doctors in Bellevue by name-dropping Van Gogh. After his affair with bisexual hustler Jack Anderson ended badly, Burroughs cut off one of his fingers with a pair of garden shears. His shocked psychoanalyst put him in Bellevue where he impishly told doctors that he'd been trying out a 'Van Gogh kick.' Sadly his Bellevue doctors had never heard of the Dutch painter and so failed to grasp Bur-

roughs' point. They thought Van Gogh was just a figment of his imagination.

But it was Ginsberg who really had first-hand knowledge of the head doctors. As a child he had watched his mother's mental breakdown. Naomi Ginsberg was a schizophrenic and received years of electric shock therapy to little avail before being given a prefrontal lobotomy. Ginsberg wondered if he had inherited some of her mental instability since, as a young man, he had his own psychotic episode (he heard the voice of the eighteenth-century poet William Blake reading to him). Overwhelmed by this vision, which he claimed gave him an insight into the oneness of the universe, Ginsberg felt he was on the verge of mental collapse.

After the stolen car incident, Ginsberg committed himself to the Columbia Psychiatric Institute for treatment and evaluation. But he didn't find any help there. Instead he met Carl Solomon, another middle-class boy who'd decided that normal society wasn't all it was cracked up to be. A big fan of the French philosopher Antonin Artaud (who claimed that normal society was itself mad), Solomon shaved his head and arrived on the steps of the asylum demanding a lobotomy. Needless to say, the doctors instantly committed him.

As well as these visits to the nuthouse, Ginsberg and Burroughs underwent hours upon hours of psychoanalysis to cure their homosexuality. These sessions with analysts eventually convinced them that psychoanalysis was simply a means of controlling those who were too bright, too visionary or too difficult to fit comfortably into normal society. Burroughs finally turned his back on the whole profession, claiming: 'Analysis is an instrument of tremendous possibilities but, like most every thing else at the present time, is in the hands of cowardly, weak, stupid and vicious men.'

Madness, or at least the idea of finding an alternative to the boring world of normality, was an integral part of the Beat Generation's mindset, prompting Kerouac to write in *On The Road*: 'The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of saying everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous roman candles...' Rejecting normal society, the Beats searched for ways of seeing the world differently from the rest of the herd. Madness, drugs, sex and crime all offered ways of finding a new vision of life and a new way of living.

The Need For Speed

One product of too many (chemical) stimulants, mental instability and the never-ending search for kicks was the general sense of restlessness that characterised both the writers and their works. Speed dominated the Beat aesthetic, a need for constant motion that sent Kerouac and Ginsberg travelling across the United States and urged Burroughs to become a professional expatriate, moving from New York to Texas to Mexico and then finally overseas for almost four decades. Glamorising motion in a manner that was reminiscent of the Futurists (an early twentieth-century avant-garde movement that was obsessed with industrial society's technology of speed), the Beats tapped into the kinetic energy inherent in jazz, bebop and amphetamines, criss-crossing the United States in Greyhound buses, cars and railroad trucks.

Neal Cassady, the man Kerouac called 'a new kind of American saint,' embodied this obsession with restless motion. A teenage joyrider who fixated on automobiles and sex, Cassady was the driving force behind Kerouac's journeys across America's developing highway systems. Burroughs, who wasn't much enamoured with Cassady, summed up this unrelenting need to be on the move: 'Neal is, of course, the very soul of the voyage into pure, abstract, meaningless motion. Wife and child may starve, friends exist only to exploit for gas money. Neal must move.'

Speed became an attempt to reach some altered state, a movement that might offer some freedom from boring normality—the creation of a private world on the road—and the chance to discover America at a grass-roots level. The journey itself was the destination, and for Cassady the road became a symbol of total freedom: 'You spend your whole life of non-interference with the wishes of others... and nobody bothers you and you cut along and make it your own way... What's your road man?—holyboy road, madman road, rainbow road, guppy road, any road. It's an everywhere road for anybody anyhow.'

Only a blink of an eye separated the time between the emergence of the Beat Generation as a literary movement and their commercialisation into a fashion or fad. No sooner had the Beats arrived then the media tried to make them into a craze. Before 1957, the Beats were shadowy figures. Hollywood had picked up on the youth movement and the various youth subcultures in a variety of sensationalist films—like *The Wild One* (1954), *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955) and *The Man With The Golden Arm* (1955)—but they hadn't been able to find a catch-all term for the youthful discontent that seemed to be brewing everywhere. The Beat Generation would serve that purpose perfectly.

The Hollywood films that were released before the Beats paved the way for the public's understanding of the Beat Generation since they gave the population of the United States their first contact with the hipster and the Beat drop-out, whether it was James Dean's tortured adolescent angst in *Rebel Without A Cause* or Brando's surly existentialism in *The Wild One*. (Indeed, Brando's posturing came, in many ways, to be *the* epitome of Beat cool on the silver screen during the 1950s.) When Johnny in *The Wild One* is asked "What are you rebelling against, kid?" the answer is pointedly confrontational: "Whatcha got?" A whole generation of teenagers and parents sat through these movies about gang wars, juvenile delinquents and drug addicts. As a result, when the Beats arrived they were quickly accepted as yet another bunch of crazy, no-good kids.

The Beats first emerged in 1952, when John Clellon Holmes published his article 'This Is The Beat Generation' in the *New York Times Magazine*. Although he was a friend of Kerouac, Holmes was never much more than a bit player in the Beat drama, an observer on the touchlines who had a habit of jotting down his friends' conversations in the hope of turning them into a novel—which he eventually did in *Go* (1952). Living vicariously through Kerouac, Ginsberg and their circle, Holmes secured the Beats' first moment of media fame.

But it wasn't until October 1955 that the Beat Generation really emerged, at the Six Poets at Six Gallery reading in San Francisco. Discreetly billed as a 'charming event' with 'no charge, small collection for wine and postcards' the evening became an historic moment in twentieth-century American poetry. The six poets (Allen Ginsberg, Philip Lamantia, Michael McClure, Kenneth Rexroth, Gary Snyder and Philip

Whalen) brought the house down with an impassioned reading that bore little relation to whatever 'charming event' the audience might have expected. Kerouac, who was present in the audience, held a collection and returned with several gallon jugs of wine. As the alcohol took hold of the poets and the audience, the reading began to possess the improvisational energy of the bop scene with members of the audience shouting "Go! Go!" as if they were at a jazz club. Ginsberg's reading of 'Howl' defined the evening as a momentous occasion in American literature. His epic sledgehammer of a poem, full of insight, emotion and debauchery created, in the words of one audience member, "an orgasmic occasion." Poetry would never be quite the same again. But the 'Howl' reading was a literary event, restricted to an audience of about a hundred. While it would mark out Ginsberg and the fledgling Beat Generation as the vanguard of America's literary scene, it never became front-page news. That honour was left to Kerouac's second novel, *On The Road* (1957).

The Beats Have Landed

By the end of the 1950s, the Beats were the new stars of the media, applauded and loathed in equal measure. Thousands of column inches in the press were devoted to them and it soon became impossible to avoid their names and faces. This media feeding frenzy was the result of just one book: Kerouac's *On The Road*. While 'Howl' caused a sensation in Bohemian literary circles and *Naked Lunch* would later be the centre of lengthy censorship battles in the courts, *On The Road* achieved the kind of popular fame that sent cash registers ringing across America.

There are certain novels that capture the Zeitgeist, occasionally to such an extent that they become milestones for a decade. *On The Road* is just such a book. It was a hymn to the American dream of self-reliance, individualism and freedom that came to epitomise the Beat Generation and, importantly, laid the foundations for the counter-culture of the 1960s. After the novel was published Kerouac became a celebrity, often to such an extent that he felt as though the novel were his curse. Reporters swarmed over him, wanting to hear his comments on the Beat Generation ("Is America going to go Beat?" "What kind of society are we going to have in two years time?") and eager to have him explain the novel's autobiographical aspects (many wrongly believed that Kerouac

was Dean Moriarty, when actually it was Cassady who inspired the novel's restless speed-freak character). Kerouac's own self-mythologising didn't do much to stave off the press. Claiming that he'd written the original manuscript in a three-week burst of (Benzedrine-fuelled) creativity on a single roll of paper 120 foot long, Kerouac played directly into the media's search for a story, leaving him to complain naively: 'Wasn't there a time when American writers were left alone by personality mongers and publicity monsters?'

As the Beats were dragged into the mainstream they were rebranded the Beatniks. The Russian launch of the Sputnik satellite gave the press the 'nik' suffix. The additional letters underlined middle America's fears that the Beats might not be working in the best interests of the American Way and could well be as dangerous as the 'reds under the bed' who had previously threatened Mom and Apple Pie earlier in the decade. The backlash against the Beats had begun within minutes of their being lauded as the 'new generation.'

The major magazines of the period were saturated with Beatnik style. In *Life* magazine a reporter quoted a local police officer's definition of a Beatnik as someone who "doesn't like work [and] a vagrant." Mothers were told to lock up their daughter in case the evil Beatniks sold them into drug-addled sex slavery. Meanwhile, the streets of Greenwich Village were overflowing with smoky cafés full of bongo-playing, goatee-sporting drop-outs whose vocabulary consisted of little other than repetitive bursts of "cool," "crazy" and "Daddy-O." Bookshops stocked hundreds of Beat cash-ins including *The Beat Generation Cookbook* that contained recipes for Beat fare such as—would you believe it?—Ginsburgers. The irony was that it wasn't the Beats themselves who'd sold out—they'd been totally railroaded by the media.

It wasn't long before Hollywood picked up on the new trend in movies like *The Beat Generation* (1959), *The Rebel Set* (1959) and, inevitably, *The Beatniks* (1960). In fact, Hollywood showed such scant regard for the real Beats that when one of Jack Kerouac's novels actually made it onto the screen—*The Subterraneans* (1960) with George Peppard as the hero—the novel's interracial love affair was completely whitewashed and rewritten as an affair between a white American and a white French woman.

By the beginning of the 1960s, mainstream Beat culture was at its lowest ebb. As with all fads, the public had quickly lost interest in the rebellious bongo players and had begun to search for new titillating sub-

jects. The real Beats continued to write, but the faddish Beatniks slowly disappeared back to their suburban homes, with their bongos tucked under their arms. But, as the 1950s drew to a close the Beat movement itself proved to be far from over. Across the ocean in Tangiers and Paris, Burroughs had missed the media circus that had engulfed his friends and, closeted in junky seclusion, had produced a novel that Ginsberg would tout as 'the masterpiece of the century.' This sprawling, chaotic book, entitled *Naked Lunch*, would be the third and final work that would secure the Beat Generation's literary and cultural success. Proving that the Beats were more than the media-fuelled youth movement that had fallen out of fashion, *Naked Lunch* joined *On The Road* and 'Howl' as one of the defining pieces of twentieth-century American literature and proved, once and for all, that the Beats were more than just a bunch of ragged Beatniks. They were here to stay.

2. Lonesome Traveller: Jack Kerouac

Biography

Jack Kerouac was born on 12 March 1922 in the town of Lowell, Massachusetts. The son of job printer Leo Kéroak and housewife Gabrille L'Evesque, Ti Jean (Little Jack) was baptised Jean Louis Lebris de Kerouac in respect of his French ancestry. Growing up in Lowell's French-Canadian neighbourhood, Ti Jean only began to learn English when he started school.

As a child Kerouac was something of a loner. He filled the days of his Depression era youth by relying on his imaginative ability. Using the Saturday matinees and pulp magazines of the time as source material he wrote novels and short stories and even published his own horse racing newspaper.

By adolescence, Kerouac had gained a High School football scholarship and a reputation as 'a fleet-footed backfield ace.' His skill on the sports field got him accepted to Columbia University in New York. But luck was against him. Shortly after arriving he broke his leg during training and dashed his hopes of sporting fame.

Disheartened, Kerouac decided to drop out of college. After working in various odd jobs (from gas station attendant to sports reporter) he joined the US Marines. As soon as he signed up he realised he'd made a terrible mistake. Panicking, he skipped town and signed up as a seaman on a merchant ship.

Returning to Columbia after this spell at sea, Kerouac considered recommencing his studies and restarting his sporting career but decided instead to join the Navy. Six months of naval discipline convinced him he wasn't cut out for life in the armed forces and he feigned mental instability to secure an honourable discharge.

The restlessness of these early years—an uncertainty of purpose that would continue for some time longer—took him back to Columbia again. Mixing with the new members of the campus, Kerouac was introduced to Lucien Carr and through him met Ginsberg and Burroughs. Throughout 1944 Kerouac's friendship with these men and the rest of the circle of friends and contemporaries who would become the Beat Generation (Carr, Dave Kammerer, Herbert Huncke, Edie Parker, Joan Vollmer) grew. When Kammerer and Carr's unorthodox relationship came to a violent climax on 13 August 1944, Kerouac was close enough

to the events to be arrested as a material witness to Kammerer's murder and was bailed out by the parents of his girlfriend, Edie Parker.

Kerouac's first sustained literary effort began in 1946 as he started work on what would eventually become his first novel, *The Town And The City* (1950). During this period Kerouac met Neal Cassady, a joy-riding tearaway who would become his muse. Under Cassady's guidance Kerouac started travelling and developed a passion for life on the road that would be second only to his love of writing.

Through December 1948 to January 1949, Kerouac and Cassady travelled on a (rather purposeless) journey across the States, criss-crossing back and forth with Cassady at the wheel. These impromptu journeys became punctuation marks that broke up the long writing spells that Kerouac spent at home with his mother.

By the time that *The Town And The City* was published in 1950, Kerouac had already begun work on the manuscript that would grow into *On The Road*. But stylistic issues were a problem. He wanted to find a method of spontaneous writing that would allow him to capture the speed and immediacy of his travels. Having married a second time (to Joan Haverty), Kerouac worked as hard as he could to finish the novel while also playing with other literary projects.

After a brief sojourn with Burroughs in Mexico City, where Kerouac stayed high on the cheap local marijuana and wrote *Doctor Sax*, he returned to New York. The Beat Generation was developing into a media phenomenon. John Clellon Holmes had received a $20,000 advance for his novel *Go* and its publication had been greeted with favourable reviews. Frustrated by his own lack of success, Kerouac was furiously jealous of Holmes, particularly since he had been little more than a peripheral member of the Beat group and had used Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs and the rest of their circle as the cast of his novel.

In 1953 Kerouac wrote *The Subterraneans* in a three-night amphetamine-fuelled burst of creativity. The novel was based on his brief affair with an African-American girl whom he had met amongst the Greenwich Village hipsters. The affair didn't last long, though, since 'Mardou' was sexually frigid and Kerouac was unwilling to commit to a girl who was so (racially) different.

With the continuing rejection of his manuscripts and the absence of his close friends (Ginsberg and Burroughs were both abroad, his relationship with Cassady was becoming strained), Kerouac became increasingly depressed. The years of restless wandering, partying and

writing had begun to take their toll on his health. When his ex-wife Joan Haverty brought a paternity suit against him, Kerouac's bedraggled appearance in court was enough to convince the judge that he was unable to pay child support. His exhausted mental and physical state and the continuing phlebitis in his legs (a symptom of excessive Benzedrine use) clearly rendered him unfit for work (although Kerouac denied being the father, he would later admit to Allen Ginsberg that Haverty's daughter looked just like him).

During 1954 Kerouac became interested in Buddhism, finding particular solace in Buddhism's first law: All life is suffering. Although he never renounced his Catholicism, Kerouac fervently studied Buddhism, bolstering his depression and exhaustion with dreams of spiritual renewal.

In 1955 Kerouac received an advance from Viking Press for *On The Road* with the proviso that he revise extensive chunks of the manuscript. With money finally in his pocket, Kerouac hit the road again, visiting Bill Garver, an old-time junky and friend of Burroughs in Mexico City. While he was there he had an affair with a local Mexican woman, a junky and prostitute, who would be the inspiration for his story 'Tristessa.' Returning to the United States later that year Kerouac visited Ginsberg on the West coast and attended the famous Six Gallery poetry reading where Ginsberg read 'Howl'. Meeting the literary players of the West coast scene—Philip Whalen, Kenneth Rexroth and Gary Snyder—Kerouac expounded his Buddhist theories, only to discover that almost all of Ginsberg's Berkeley friends were students of Oriental literature and philosophy.

During his visit Kerouac became good friends with Gary Snyder, who took him into the mountains on an extended hike. Kerouac's romantic daydreams of living in the wilds were shattered by the reality of the arduous trek. Halfway up the mountainside he developed vertigo and never made it to the summit, earning himself the nickname 'the Buddha Known as the Great Quitter.' Snyder shared his knowledge of the backwoods with Kerouac and told him about working as a fire-watcher in the Washington State mountain range. In the summer of 1956 Kerouac took Snyder's advice and spent several months alone on Desolation Peak as a fire-watcher. He had planned to use the solitude to write, but the loneliness sapped his creative energy: 'no liquor, no drugs, no chance of faking it but face to face with ole Duluoz Me.' The experience would form the basis of *Desolation Angels*.

Shortly before *On The Road* was published Kerouac and Ginsberg visited Burroughs in Tangiers. They found him engaged in writing *Naked Lunch* and helped him organise and type the pages before they returned home. No sooner had they reached America than Kerouac was engulfed by the overnight success of *On The Road*.

On The Road was the literary event of the 1950s. The media were obsessed with the Beats. But rather than embracing this fame as the success that he had been searching for, Kerouac found the attention wearing. Journalists and reporters descended on him, wanting his opinion on a range of issues, but rarely treating him as a serious writer. Drinking heavily, Kerouac tried to retreat from it all, buying a house for himself and his mother and giving her increasing power over his life as she restricted which friends she let have access to her Ti Jean (she even wrote to Ginsberg threatening to report him to the FBI if he attempted to visit). The fact that *On The Road* had become a popular (as opposed to highbrow) success continued to bother Kerouac. Truman Capote famously mocked Kerouac's bursts of non-stop writing claiming that they were more akin to typing than writing. Lauded as 'King of the Beatniks,' Kerouac felt seriously undervalued, even as his publishers hurried to release the various novels that he had been working on over the preceding years.

Exhausted, paranoid and suffering the effects of alcoholism and depression, Kerouac lived out the 1960s relatively quietly, trying to downplay his celebrity status. He moved back to his childhood town of Lowell and nursed his mother after she had a paralysing stroke. He married local girl Stella Sampas and became a regular patron of the town's bars and clubs. Dismayed by the counter-culture of the 1960s—which Cassady was to be a vital part of until his death in 1968—Kerouac felt increasingly out of step with the times. Finally, in the autumn of 1969, he died at home at the age of forty-seven from abdominal haemorrhaging.

The Town And The City (1950)

Summary: The focus of the novel is the life of the Martin family (comprised of five sons and three daughters) from Galloway, Massachusetts. The plot is a typical family melodrama that deals with the impact of the pre-war and war years on the family as the children grow up and move from the town (Galloway) to the city (New York).

Subtext: Like many of Kerouac's novels, *The Town And The City* uses autobiographical material to flesh out its characters. Each of the Martin children possesses something of Kerouac's personality, although it is Peter Martin (the athlete who wins a football scholarship) who is most closely based on his creator's experiences. Peter's departure for New York is a reflection of Kerouac's own movement from Lowell to Columbia. In addition to these autobiographical elements, *The Town And The City* relies upon Kerouac's circle of friends for character material. Peter's New York associates are clearly based on the fledgling Beat Generation: Kenneth Wood is Lucien Carr; Leon Levinsky is Allen Ginsberg; Will Dennison is William Burroughs; and Waldo Meister is Dave Kammerer. *The Town And The City* also replays the Carr/Kammerer incident, although the murder is tactfully revised into a suicide.

Behind The Beat: Kerouac's first novel was a modest success on publication in 1950, earning a handful of favourable reviews. He claimed that it was written 'according to what they told me at Columbia University' and, considering the manner in which it constantly strives to imitate the Great American Novel, it's easy to see what he meant. The novel's conflict between the rural town of Galloway and the city is fairly conventional, as are its themes: the corrupting influence of the city and the destruction of small town life and values in the turbulent war years. The influence of Thomas Wolfe, one of the novelists whom the young Kerouac particularly admired, can be seen in the plot and subject matter (the novel is reminiscent of Wolfe's *Look Homeward Angel*) and Kerouac quite openly admitted that his desire during the early 1950s was to be follow in Wolfe's footsteps.

Hip Or Square?: Minor Kerouac and not very Beat, but an impressive first novel. 2/5

On The Road (1957)

Summary: The narrator (Sal Paradise) joins freewheeling, speed freak Dean Moriarty on a journey across the United States. Searching for the freedom and self-reliance that once existed on the American frontier, these latter-day cowboys desperately want to rediscover an America that—as Sal slowly realises—has long since disappeared.

Subtext: *On The Road* belongs to the picaresque tradition of literature. Like *Don Quixote* or *The Adventures Of Huckleberry Finn*, Kerouac's novel is structured as an episodic sequence of events, held

together only by the narrator, Sal Paradise (Kerouac's alter ego). Criss-crossing from the East to the West coast, Sal Paradise and his travelling companion Dean Moriarty (who was based on Neal Cassady) are on a quest into the heart of the American Dream.

Behind The Beat: The novel that became Kerouac's best-selling work, and secured his status as one of the most famous American writers of the twentieth century, has a suitably exciting history. Although Kerouac began *On The Road* in 1948 it took him until April 1951 to find the right tone for the story. Three weeks later, on 27 April, after a marathon typing session fuelled by copious amounts of stimulants, Kerouac had completed a first draft of the novel. Obsessed with the need to be able to type non-stop, Kerouac had taped sheets of paper together and fed them into the typewriter. The final manuscript was a 120-foot long roll of paper typed as a single-spaced paragraph. When *On The Road* was first published it achieved instant success. Yet, for many years it was given short shrift by academics, critics and other writers, many of whom disliked its improvisational style. In addition, many readers have questioned Kerouac's romanticisation of life on the road and, more importantly, have expressed their dislike of Kerouac's treatment of ethnic minorities in the novel. Certainly, some of Sal Paradise's gushing descriptions of African and Mexican Americans are insultingly stereotypical.

Hip Or Square?: Love it or loathe it, *On The Road* is where the Beat begins. 5/5

The Subterraneans (1958)

Summary: The novel's storyline is a fictionalised version of Kerouac's relationship with an African-American girl in which Kerouac quite frankly highlights her sexual frigidity and his sexual jealousy. Gregory Corso and Allen Ginsberg both have roles in the novel's cast, with Corso's character eventually seducing the girl.

Subtext: The real impact of *The Subterraneans* comes from the novel's language. Kerouac tried to create a distinct style in the novel, a prose that would reflect the rhythms of bop. As a result of this experimentation the novel's prose tries to build up a structure like that of jazz, offering a central theme or image and then improvising around this, creating echoes, additional branches and counterpoints before returning to the original point. Much of this experimentation emerged from Ker-

ouac's interest in what he called 'spontaneous prose.' Later he outlined this literary method in an essay in *The Evergreen Review*, claiming that the kind of writing that he wanted to produce was like 'jazz and bop, in the sense of, say, a tenor man drawing a breath, and blowing a phrase on his saxophone, till he runs out of breath.' This madcap, improvisational attempt to push further and further 'out there' into breathlessness is in keeping with Kerouac's own amphetamine-fuelled prose riffs that try to push the written word to the limit, running off as many phrases as possible, desperately trying to capture the moment on the page before it becomes lost again.

Behind The Beat: Allen Ginsberg first introduced Kerouac to the group of Greenwich Village hipsters dubbed 'The Subterraneans' in 1953. Hanging out in Fugazzi's bar, the Subterraneans were prototypes of the Beats, a group of druggy jazz lovers. Kerouac had little in common with these urbane hipsters, appreciating their style but not really feeling part of it. Yet he had a brief (two month) affair with one of their outer circle, an African–American girl named Alene Lee. After they broke up Kerouac sat down at his typewriter and typed out *The Subterraneans* in a three-day Benzedrine-aided session. By the time the novel was complete Kerouac claimed he was as 'pale as a sheet and had lost fifteen pounds and looked strange in the mirror.' With typical myopia Hollywood chose this novel as the first of Kerouac's books to hit the screen, losing the experimental quality of the prose and replacing the African-American heroine with a (far less controversial) white French girl.

Hip Or Square?: *The Subterraneans* stands as one of Kerouac's most impressive achievements. It is an experimental novel that tries to discover a new, Beat style of prose writing. 4/5

The Dharma Bums (1958)

Summary: Ray Smith goes into the mountains with his friend Japhy Ryder in search of adventure and spiritual awakening.

Subtext: Like Kerouac' road novel, *The Dharma Bums* is focussed on the relationship between Kerouac (here called Ray Smith) and one of his friends. In place of the Dean Moriarty/Sal Paradise relationship Kerouac substitutes Japhy Ryder/Ray Smith, using the same format as the earlier novel: narrator Smith follows, watches and learns from his friend Ryder. The Japhy Ryder character is based on Gary Snyder. In compari-

son with Kerouac's self-taught Buddhism, Snyder had been an ardent student of the 'Zen Lunatics of China' for many years, adopting an ascetic life of poverty and poetry that was a stark contrast to the wild madness of Kerouac's other muse Neal Cassady. Through Snyder, Kerouac not only deepened his understanding of Buddhism but was also introduced to the joys of the wild. Snyder was a competent trekker who was quite used to living in the woods and, in Kerouac's eyes, he symbolised a kind of rugged, self-reliance that the American Transcendentalists (Whitman, Thoreau, Emerson) had made so attractive in the mid-nineteenth century.

Behind The Beat: After *On The Road*, *The Dharma Bums* is Kerouac's best-known novel. During the 1960s it was one of the main handbooks of alternative culture, a how-to novel whose vision of a great rucksack revolution sent countless kids off into the wilds just as *On The Road* had seduced them onto the highways. *The Dharma Bums* is a novel about the search for dharma (the Buddhist concept of the true meaning of life) through being a bum (dropping out and living in the peace of the wilds). Unlike the outlaw craziness of Kerouac's road novel, *The Dharma Bums* is more concerned with a search for peace, self-acceptance and contemplative understanding. It's a quest that carries its own risks and fears (see, for instance, Smith's terrified experience on the mountain peak when he first goes trekking), but it promises to offer the kind of contemplative insight that the wandering Buddhist monks sought when they undertook their own cross-country journeys.

Hip Or Square?: Reviewers scorned Kerouac's vision of a rucksack revolution, but the 1960s proved him right as thousands of hippies dropped out and, brandishing little other than a rucksack, love beads, a pocket full of pot and Kerouac's novel, took off into the backwoods. 4/5

Doctor Sax (1958)

Summary: Described as *Faust Part Three*, *Doctor Sax* is part gothic fairy tale, part myth of puberty. It's a surreal story about a boy's involvement with the exotic title character as he battles the forces of evil.

Subtext: Doctor Sax possesses a strange hallucinatory quality that clearly stems from Kerouac's liberal use of drugs while writing. Its fantastic narrative, closer to Burroughs than anything in the rest of Kerouac's work, mixes various sources from Aztec mythology to the pulp

fiction of Kerouac's childhood (*Weird Tales* and *The Shadow* particularly), Kafka, Goethe and even *The Wizard Of Oz* (which Kerouac watched at a cinema while staying in Mexico).

Behind The Beat: Kerouac claimed that *Doctor Sax* was the favourite of all his books. 'It's the greatest book I ever wrote, or that I will write,' he proclaimed. It began as an hour-long, tape-recorded monologue about Kerouac's life in Lowell as a young teenager. More was added to the story when Kerouac visited Burroughs in Mexico City in 1952, during which time Kerouac hid out in Burroughs' toilet smoking dope and scribbling in his notebooks. Burroughs himself has something of a starring role as the inspiration for the mysterious Sax. Kerouac described the novel's style as a search for what he dubbed wild form, a kind of prose that's 'the only form that holds what I have to say—my mind is exploding to say something about every image and every memory.'

Hip Or Square?: Proof that too much marijuana makes you loco. 2/5

Maggie Cassidy (1959)

Summary: Set in Kerouac's home town of Lowell, Massachusetts, the novel tells the story of a bitter-sweet romance between Jack Duluoz and Maggie Cassidy.

Subtext: On its own terms, *Maggie Cassidy* is an interesting novel that not only offers an insight into what Ginsberg would call Kerouac's 'adolescent woe-time' but also offers an emotional portrait of Kerouac's feelings of loss and rejection. The love affair between Jack and Maggie is torn apart by Jack's restlessness, his need to escape the small town for the city. Love cannot survive this desire to experience life beyond the confines of the local community, nor the destructive impact of time. The novel's framing narrative, in which Jack returns from the city in an attempt to seduce the virginal Maggie, is particularly poignant. Not only has Jack's ambitious flight to the city ended with him getting a job as a garage man—suggesting that he's been foolish in his choices—but he's also changed so radically that Maggie rejects him. The novel's final scene, in which Jack tries to force himself on Maggie, ends with nothing but ridicule and sadness: 'she laughed in his face, he slammed the door shut, put out the lights, drove her home, drove the car back skittering crazily in the slush, sick cursing.'

Behind The Beat: Jack Duluoz is based on Kerouac as an adolescent and Maggie is supposed to be based on Kerouac's own first love from

High School, Mary Carney (she later said that the novel's depiction of their relationship was three-quarters accurate). Written as early as 1953, *Maggie Cassidy* was Kerouac's attempt to write a mainstream, sellable novel that would encompass the kind of autobiographical themes that interested him. These autobiographical elements are particularly important since this novel is the first to introduce Jack Duluoz as the author's alter ego. Duluoz, meaning 'louse' in French-Canadian, became a self-mocking tag that Kerouac applied to himself, building up the autobiographical, chronological Duluoz Legend across his work: *Visions Of Gerard* and *Doctor Sax* (childhood), *Maggie Cassidy*, *Vanity Of Duluoz* and *The Town And The City* (adolescence), *On The Road*, *Visions Of Cody*, *The Subterraneans* and *Lonesome Traveler* (Beat Generation years), *Tristessa* (Mexico trip), *The Dharma Bums* (Buddhist interests), *Desolation Angels* (period spent fire-watching), *Big Sur* (fame and its aftermath), *Sartori In Paris* (last trip abroad in search of his ancestry).

Hip Or Square?: One of Kerouac's most mainstream books, but still worth checking out. 3/5

Lonesome Traveler (1960)

Summary: A collection of short, non-fiction articles connected by the theme of travelling. As Kerouac says in the introduction, the articles encompass 'Railroad work, sea work, mysticism, mountain work, lasciviousness, solipsism, self-indulgence, bullfights, drugs, churches, art, museums, secrets of cities, a mishmash of life as lived by an independent and penniless rake going anywhere.'

Subtext: As an introduction to Kerouac's writing these short, easily digestible, pieces are superb. They capture the freewheeling excitement of *On The Road*, growing out of the same restless wandering that fuelled so much of Kerouac's fiction. Shifting from travelogue to snapshots, to essays on the American Hobo, Kerouac blends fact and opinion to create a series of entertaining vignettes.

Behind The Beat: Some of the best pieces started life as magazine articles. 'The American Hobo' tells the story of the bums and panhandlers who travelled across the USA in the decades before the young kids of the 1950s discovered the joys of the open road (and so acknowledges the Beats' debt to this underclass of wanderers). 'New York Scenes,' a portrait of the Beat Generation in New York, began as 'The Beat Nightlife Of New York' for *Holiday* magazine and was the product of Ker-

ouac's spontaneous composition experiments. Kerouac wrote the piece with the help of Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky and Gregory Corso, getting them to chat about the city while he took notes, in an attempt to capture the energy of New York's nightlife (its jazz joints, poetry readings, parties and Chinese restaurants). Kerouac also had the help of these friends while writing the American Hobo article, splitting his original magazine fee with them (Ginsberg and Orlovsky used their $500 to buy passage on a ship to India, while Corso characteristically gambled his away at the local racetrack).

Hip Or Square?: An excellent introduction to Kerouac's work. 5/5

Big Sur (1962)

Summary: *Big Sur* is an autobiographical account of fame, (mis)fortune and alcoholism, a mid-life crisis novel in which Kerouac takes stock of himself and his accomplishments through an alcoholic haze of beer and spirits.

Subtext: *Big Sur* is certainly one of Kerouac's most moving books, offering proof that publication and fame—the very things Kerouac had always wanted prior to 1957—didn't bring happiness or contentment but instead left him as confused and restless as he'd always been. It's a startlingly honest portrait of alcoholism, beginning with Kerouac dead drunk on Skid Row and concluding with the call for yet more drink. As if to prove his point Kerouac celebrated the novel's completion by ordering a case of cognac. The barely-remembered two-week spell of drinking that followed put him in hospital.

Behind The Beat: In *Big Sur* Kerouac writes 'My work comprises one vast book like Proust's except that my remembrances are written on the run instead of afterwards in a sick bed.' Such self-conscious comments are typical of *Big Sur*'s attempt to face up to the media and celebrity legend that was Jack Kerouac, aka 'King of the Beatniks.' Kerouac was never able to deal with the celebrity status that *On The Road* bestowed upon him. Treated as a lowbrow, popular novelist by the press, who couldn't see past the rip-roaring Dean Moriarty character, Kerouac yearned to be treated as a serious writer. He was tortured by the fact that it was writers like JD Salinger and Philip Roth who were earning the critical plaudits while, in Kerouac's own words, his only readers were 'kids who steal my books in bookstores.' Bouts of depres-

sion and binge drinking followed. *Big Sur* was a product of this despair and a glimpse into the man behind the Kerouac myth.

Hip Or Square?: *Big Sur* marks the end of Kerouac's period of great work, a final creative burst, typed during a ten-night session on a roll of paper (just like *On The Road*) before the rot set in. 3/5

Desolation Angels (1965)

Summary: *Desolation Angels* follows Jack Duluoz from 1956 to 1957, offering a portrait of the Beat scene of the time and Kerouac's desperate attempts to find happiness and a sense of self-worth.

Subtext: *Desolation Angels* is full of Kerouac's Buddhist studies—even its storyline owes much to the Buddhist search for Enlightenment. The novel is also packed with autobiographical detail: Kerouac's time spent on Desolation Peak as a fire-watcher (which gives the novel its title); the Beat Generation scene of parties and readings; and his travels through Mexico, New York and Tangiers (where he and Ginsberg met up with Burroughs in time to help him type up the manuscript of *Naked Lunch* for publication). But without a Dean Moriarty or Japhy Ryder character as the focus, *Desolation Angels* is reliant on Duluoz alone and the effect isn't quite the same. As a result of this absence of a foil for Kerouac's character, the novel didn't excite many reviewers or readers.

Behind The Beat: By 1965 the majority of reviewers were writing off Kerouac's novels as soon as they were published, declaring him a washed-up has-been and cruelly punishing him for having once been so applauded and famous. Many of them took exception to *Desolation Angels*' sombre tone. There's a great sadness in the novel, a kind of staring into the void and getting maudlin sensibility that's slightly adolescent. But instead of offsetting this tone against the book's search for spiritual growth, many of Kerouac's original critics just used it as an excuse to tear him down to size. A response that was mostly born out of jealousy.

Hip Or Square?: A solid entry in the Kerouac canon. A little maudlin perhaps, but so was Kerouac himself by 1965. 3/5

Visions Of Cody (1973)

Summary: A companion piece to Kerouac's most successful novel, *Visions Of Cody* continues his obsession with Neal Cassady and can be read, as Allen Ginsberg claimed, as 'an in-depth version of *On The Road*.'

Subtext: During the 1950s Cassady made several attempts, with Kerouac's encouragement, to write his autobiography but found that he wasn't much of a writer—always too frantic to actually finish the sentence he was writing before moving on to the next. In the light of Cassady's difficulties, Kerouac's *Visions Of Cody* is the best testimony of Cassady's Beat Generation status as a new kind of American saint.

Behind The Beat: Although excerpts from this ambitious, experimental novel were published during Kerouac's lifetime, it was only after his death (and once his reputation was finally established) that any publisher was willing to undertake the risk of publishing it in full. Unlike *On The Road*'s fairly linear structure, *Visions Of Cody* eschews a straightforward narrative in favour of a series of sketches that have no linking story apart from the Kerouac/Cassady relationship. During the 1950s, when Kerouac was first working on *Visions Of Cody*, he developed a prose technique described as 'sketching.' Carrying a pocketbook and pencil around with him at all times, Kerouac found he was quickly able to render a scene, conversation or event on paper, sketching it in words like an artist's drawings and capturing the immediacy of the experience. Sketching forms an important part of *Visions Of Cody*, as do monologues, soliloquies and tape-recorded conversations with Cassady, many of which Kerouac transcribes verbatim in order to pinpoint the nuances of his friend's speech patterns. As a result of this incessant shifting between different styles *Visions Of Cody* came to be regarded (by Allen Ginsberg at least) as 'a holy mess' and was consistently turned down by publishers. In more recent years, however, the novel has gained a reputation as an important volume in the Kerouac canon.

Hip Or Square?: Kerouac's biographer, Gerald Nicosia, claims that *Visions Of Cody* is one of the best-organised works in American literature since Thoreau's *Walden*. High praise indeed. 3/5

Miscellaneous Works

Written as early as 1951, *Pic* (1971) is a novella about the adventures of a ten-year-old North Carolina boy called Pictorial Review Jackson. The novella is told by Pic in the first person and is most notable for Kerouac's attempts to mimic the speech patterns and rhythms of African-American, North Carolina dialects. *Sartori In Paris* (1966) is an account of Kerouac's final trip abroad in search of his French ancestry. The trip itself was far from successful, particularly since Kerouac was constantly drunk. The haze of alcohol affects both his experiences in France and the telling of the story. Preceded by *The Subterraneans* and *Maggie Cassidy*, *Tristessa* (1960) is the story of Kerouac's involvement with an Indian girl in Mexico. Kerouac tried to save her from a life of prostitution and drug addiction by offering her money to keep her from the streets, but he refused to actually commit anything other than his American dollars. A maudlin response to the death of Kerouac's older brother Gerard in 1926, *Visions Of Gerard* (1963) possesses a strong religious theme (with Gerard as a martyred saint). In *Vanity Of Duluoz* (1968) Kerouac wrote the final instalment in the Duluoz Legend, basing the novel on his teenage, high school years when he still had hopes of becoming an all-American football hero. Kerouac also published several collections of poetry—the best of which is *Mexico City Blues* (1959)—some Buddhist pieces and *Book Of Dreams* (1960).

3. The Howling Poet: Allen Ginsberg

Biography

Allen Ginsberg was born on 3 June 1926 to Louis and Naomi Ginsberg, second-generation Russian-Jewish immigrants. Ginsberg's parents were both left-wing radicals with an enthusiastic interest in everything that was modern: Marxism, vegetarianism, nudism and feminism. Louis was a successful poet whose work regularly appeared in a variety of well-respected publications such as the *New York Times Magazine*.

The most important moment in Ginsberg's childhood was his mother's mental breakdown. In 1935 Naomi began to experience a variety of maladies (hypersensitivity to light and sound, confusion, anxiety) that the doctors were unable to explain. This was followed by a prolonged period of mental imbalance that would today be diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenia. After spending some time in a State mental hospital, Naomi was allowed to return to her family. However, the delusions and ravings continued to occur with increasing regularity, putting immense strain on Louis Ginsberg and his sons Eugene and Allen. After a breakdown in which she told Allen that there were "wires in [the] ceiling," she was committed and eventually given a prefrontal lobotomy.

As a child, Ginsberg was bookish and shy. Although he guessed that he was different from other children because of his homosexual feelings, he never voiced them or acted upon them until he was in his twenties. On attending Columbia University in September 1943 Allen met, and fell in love with Lucien Carr, 'the most angelic kid I ever saw' (it was a love that would never be reciprocated in any terms other than the platonic). Carr's fearsome intellect and worldliness made quite an impression on the young Ginsberg and his new friend introduced him to the Greenwich Village world of bars, gay clubs and jazz sessions. Carr was also responsible for introducing Ginsberg to several other disreputable influences, including William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac.

The Columbia years of the 1940s were a pivotal period in the history of the Beat Generation. Not only were the principal protagonists introduced to one another, but they also began the exchange of ideas and visions that would influence their work. Fascinated by the French poet Arthur Rimbaud, the Beats adopted his belief in 'the derangement of all the senses' as their unofficial motto.

William Burroughs was a major influence on Ginsberg during this period. Much older than the young undergraduate, Burroughs possessed a formidable knowledge of literature, history and anthropology and became Ginsberg's mentor. Another influence on Ginsberg was Neal Cassady. Cassady's amazing sexual appetite, which rarely distinguished between girls and boys, helped Ginsberg to face up to his homosexuality. The relationship was far from happy, though, with Ginsberg forced to compete with various girls (including Neal's long-suffering wife Carolyn Cassady) for his beloved's attention.

Ginsberg's involvement with the Beat circle caused its fair share of problems. Although his Columbia English teachers generally respected him as an excellent student, the questionable reputation of his friends was frowned upon. After he was discovered (fairly innocently) in bed with Kerouac in his student accommodation, Ginsberg was suspended from the campus. Tensions with the Columbia authorities came to a head when Ginsberg was arrested in April 1949 along with three petty thieves who were part of the Beat circle: Herbert Huncke, Little Jack Melody and Vickie Russell. Pulled over by a police officer while driving a stolen car, the gang tried to escape but Little Jack crashed the car, overturning it. Ginsberg, Russell and Huncke escaped, but were arrested at their apartment after the police found the address on papers that Ginsberg had left in the car. While Huncke bore the brunt of the sentencing, Ginsberg was able to convince the judge that he had only been present in the car as an onlooker gathering material for a story on criminals.

As a result of this incident, Ginsberg was sent to the Columbia Psychiatric Institute for evaluation and treatment. He had been suffering from various mental traumas for quite some time. In addition to his unresolved conflicts about his homosexuality, Ginsberg had experienced a strange episode in May 1948. Lying in bed in his East Harlem apartment, he was reading William Blake's *Songs Of Innocence And Experience* when he began hallucinating. He heard Blake's voice reading to him and had a vision of the unity of the universe and his place in it. Seeing God, Ginsberg was thrown into rapturous turmoil. It was to be a defining point in his life and in his career as an artist and it was this Blake vision that would later encourage him to experiment with various psychedelic drugs, yoga and meditation.

Ginsberg met Carl Solomon in the Columbia Psychiatric Institute and it was through their friendship and Solomon's family ties to the publishing world that Ginsberg would later be able to get Kerouac and

Burroughs published. After eight months of treatment Ginsberg was released. He was convinced that he needed to reject his homosexuality and embarked on a lengthy period of heterosexuality that, for a while, was remarkably successful.

Once free of the Psychiatric Institute, Ginsberg rejoined the growing Beat circle, meeting young poet Gregory Corso, experimenting with peyote and throwing himself into the New York subculture of bars and parties. His poetic breakthrough came in the early 1950s when, exhausted and depressed, he typed out several pages of prose from his journals as poetry stanzas and sent them to his mentor William Carlos Williams. Williams was ecstatic, claiming that Ginsberg had finally found his voice.

The turning point of Ginsberg's career came in 1955 with 'Howl'. Reading the poem at the San Francisco Six Gallery Ginsberg electrified the audience and secured a reputation as one of America's foremost young poets. After the reading poet and publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti sent Ginsberg a telegram parodying Emerson's famous remarks to Walt Whitman a century before: 'I greet you at the beginning of a great career. When do I get the manuscript?'

In May 1956 Ginsberg's mother died. Instead of attending the funeral he signed onto a ship sailing to the Arctic Circle so that he could spend some time alone. It was the first of many trips that he would make across the world during the next few years. After returning from this Arctic voyage he set out to visit Burroughs in Tangiers and then travelled through Italy, France and England. He was accompanied on his travels by Peter Orlovsky, a poet and artist's model who he had met in 1954 (they would remain life-long lovers).

Returning to America in 1958, Ginsberg suddenly found himself elevated to the position of Beat Generation spokesman (largely because Kerouac's alcoholism was making him increasingly erratic and incoherent). After the widely-publicised legal battle over the publication of 'Howl', Ginsberg found himself involved in the infamous *Chicago Review*/*Big Table* censorship battle (a dispute that occurred because the *Chicago Review* owners had objected to the editors' inclusion of 'obscene' material by Beat writers).

Throughout the 1960s, Ginsberg became an important member of the burgeoning counter-culture and its international ambassador. Travelling through India, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Russia, Czechoslovakia and England, Ginsberg met various poets and artists and spread his

counter-cultural vision of free love, drugs and poetry (often facing police harassment and extradition for his trouble). Various poetry collections were published, including *Reality Sandwiches: 1953-1960* (1963) and *Airplane Dreams* (1968). He returned to America again in 1967, strengthening his links with the counter-culture and becoming a central figure along with Timothy Leary and Ken Kesey of the psychedelic movement. He also became increasingly politically active, taking part in the 1968 Chicago demonstrations, forging links between the Hell's Angels and the hippies, visiting the aftermath of the Stonewall riots of 1969, as well as participating in numerous political rallies.

During the 1970s, Ginsberg expanded his Buddhist interests. A devoted follower of guru Chögyam Trungpa, despite the teacher's questionable reputation, Ginsberg played an important role in the foundation of the Naropa Institute and the Jack Kerouac School Of Disembodied Poetics. At the same time he continued to maintain his role as a counter-cultural spokesman (touring with Bob Dylan) and as one of the leading lights of American literature (receiving various prestigious honours, including membership of the American Academy of Arts and Letters).

In the 1980s and 1990s Ginsberg continued to build upon his reputation as a cultural figure, pursuing a hectic schedule of readings, collaborations (with artists such as John Cage) and support for political causes, despite his growing ill health. There were plans for a *MTV Unplugged* performance (with luminaries such as Johnny Depp, Bob Dylan and Paul McCartney) but after being diagnosed with liver cancer Ginsberg was forced to curtail his torturous schedule. He died on 5 April 1997.

Empty Mirror, Early Poems (1961)
The Gates Of Wrath: Rhymed Poems 1948-51 (1972)

The poetry of these two collections is fairly typical of Ginsberg's output during the birth of the Beat Generation. Although it lacks the energy, anger and power of his later, better-known work, the early poetry is still essential to an understanding of Ginsberg's development into the poet of 'Howl' and 'Kaddish.'

There's a definite sense of self-consciousness about this early poetry, including a particular obsession with poetic forms and conventions that sucks the majority of the verse dry of its vitality. 'A Very Dove' is typical of this kind of limitation. Its standard images of doves, hawks and nightingales are little more than poetic window dressing.

The young Ginsberg was swamped by the classics. Many of the poems echo the Elizabethan verse that Ginsberg was reading for his English BA course at Columbia (especially the work of Marvell, Donne and Marlowe). A brief glimpse at the titles in these collections shows the extent of this influence: 'Metaphysics,' 'Epigram Of A Painting Of Golgotha,' 'Psalm I & II,' 'Hymn.' Yet, among these dry verses the spark of Ginsberg's future genius can be found.

Two things stand out in these early collections—an obsession with visionary states and an awareness of the need for poetry to get involved with the nitty-gritty of daily life. Ginsberg's Blake vision had occurred in 1948. As he lay in bed in his Harlem apartment, reading Blake's poetry and masturbating, Ginsberg heard Blake's voice reciting poetry from *Songs Of Innocence And Experience*. The universe crumbled around him and he glimpsed into the void, infinity, Heaven and Hell. It was a turning point in Ginsberg's life and career. The first poem to address the experience was 'The Eye Altering Alters All' and its failure sums up the problems that Ginsberg encountered in trying to deal with his vision in his poetry. Instead of offering us an insight into the visionary event, 'The Eye Altering Alters All' tries to recapture the nature of the vision. The result is a poem that's little more than a confused jumble of imagery.

It was through the help of William Carlos Williams, who acted as the young poet's mentor, that Ginsberg overcame these difficulties. Following Williams' famous dictum 'No ideas but in things,' Ginsberg began to understand the need to cut down on his reliance on flowery conventions in favour of facing reality head on. Several poems in these collections result from this new method, the best of which is 'The Bricklayer's Lunch Hour.' Ginsberg took the poem from his journal, transforming the story from prose into poetry by breaking up the sentences into stanzas.

This success taught Ginsberg that poetry could embrace real life without sacrificing the truth of the experience of living that life, and it was this knowledge that enabled him to commit his visions to paper in a far more direct way than he had managed in 'The Eye Altering Alters All'. 3/5

Reality Sandwiches: 1953-1960 (1963)

As the title hints, the poems in this collection are the result of Ginsberg's attempts to make his poetry deal with real life. Embracing reality, however, was always going to be problematic. The Beats' lifestyle was so far removed from the conventions of middle-class America that any attempt to transform the world of pimps, drugs and sex into poetry would inevitably shock. But most dangerous of all, circa 1953, was the homosexual content of Ginsberg's verse. 'The Green Automobile' and 'Love Poem On A Theme By Whitman' are more than frank about the nature of their author's sexual desires, a brave subject to commit to paper during the years of Senator McCarthy's witch-hunts against communists and sexual subversives.

'The Green Automobile' is a fantasy about Neal Cassady. The poet imagines taking Cassady from his wife and children out onto the open road for a cross-country excursion. Transforming the journey into the search for (sexual) freedom that Kerouac would rely on in *On The Road*, the heroes explore the downtown pool rooms, jails, brothels and jazz clubs as well as each other's bodies. The poem's fantasy structure ends with both of its characters safely back in their respective homes—but the damage has already been done—American family life has been well and truly bulldozed by Ginsberg's fantasies.

This rejection of mainstream American life resurfaces in 'My Alba' in which Ginsberg laments the years he spent working in dull offices. The contrast between this Manhattan world of work and the possibilities of other ways of living to be found in 'Siesta In Xbalba' and 'Havana 1953' is striking, and the poet's belief that the American order of dollars and dimes is crumbling offers one of the first indications of Ginsberg's howling critique of American capitalism. 5/5

Howl And Other Poems (1956)

The original edition of *Howl And Other Poems*, published by Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Press, took its epigraph from Walt Whitman: 'Unscrew the locks from the doors!/Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!' It's impossible to think of a better quotation to begin Ginsberg's masterpiece of angry discontent. 'Howl' is a poem full of biblical energy. Its *Old Testament* rhythms produce a thunderous indictment of 1950s America, capitalism and consumer society. First

unleashed on an unsuspecting public at the Six Gallery in San Francisco in 1955, 'Howl' became an overnight success.

It's definitely a poem designed to be read aloud—the long lines are just the right size to fit within the scope of a single breath—and it was this, coupled with Ginsberg's impassioned readings, that led at least one critic to describe Ginsberg as 'Poet of the New Violence.' As a howl, this epic poem is like the wailing madhouse screams that Ginsberg had heard during his stay in the Psychiatric Institute (a reference made clear by the dedication to Carl Solomon).

In his preface to the poem, William Carlos Williams warned Ginsberg's readers about the nature of the work that awaited them, famously declaring: 'Hold back the edges of your gowns, Ladies, we are going through Hell.' As journeys into the inferno go, few artists have managed to paint such a terrifying picture of physical, emotional and spiritual collapse.

The poem is comprised of four sections. The first gives an overview of the suffering of the best minds of Ginsberg's generation (with reference to a host of Beat artists and muses, such as Cassady, Solomon, Huncke and others). The second section attributes the blame for the suffering of these figures, indicting American capitalism (Moloch). The third section declares solidarity with Carl Solomon's self-inflicted suffering in the madhouse after he had arrived on the steps of the Psychiatric Institute with a shaved head, requesting a lobotomy. The fourth section forms the 'Footnote to Howl' and ends the poem by arguing that the world and the flesh are divine and do not deserve to be treated with anything but tenderness and love.

Ginsberg's poetry was greatly influenced by the American Transcendentalists. Transcendentalism was an East Coast literary movement in the mid-nineteenth century that was an offshoot of German Expressionism. The main writers associated with the movement were Ralph Waldo Emerson (in particular his essay 'Nature' (1836)) and Henry David Thoreau (who attacked American materialism in his book *Walden* (1854)). Rejecting organised religion in favour of recognising the divinity of each individual person, Transcendentalism was associated with self-reliance, reform, slavery abolition, feminism and utopian idealism. The work of Emerson and Thoreau had a significant impact on Walt Whitman and his poetry in *Leaves Of Grass* (1855). Openly homosexual, yet also ruggedly masculine, Whitman's poetry unabashedly celebrated free love and liberal individualism, while maintaining a religious

(in the broad sense of the term) tone. Ginsberg's poem 'A Supermarket In California' acknowledges his Whitmanic debt, updating the Transcendentalist's disgust with materialism to 1950s America. 5/5

Kaddish And Other Poems: 1958-1960 (1961)

In May 1956, Ginsberg's mother died from a cerebral haemorrhage. She had been institutionalised for several years after being diagnosed as what today we would call a paranoid schizophrenic, and had been so mentally disturbed that her doctors had lobotomised her. Ginsberg did not attend the funeral—he was in San Francisco when news of her death arrived—and so was particularly upset when he heard that the service was so small that there weren't enough male mourners present for the rabbi to read the Jewish funeral elegy, the kaddish. Promising to make up for this omission, Ginsberg wrote his own version of the service for his mother. The resulting poem, 'Kaddish: Proem, Hymmnn, Lament, Litany And Fugue,' proved to be Ginsberg's most mature and involving work.

'Kaddish' is an amazingly personal poem, so personal in fact that it challenges the conventions of how much personal detail poems should possess. Ginsberg resurrects his mother (minutely detailing her life and suffering) in order to finally lay her to rest. The poem's great achievement is in being as joyous as it is upsetting—Ginsberg's purpose is to celebrate her life as well as mourn her death. On seeing 'Kaddish,' Ginsberg's father proclaimed it 'a magnificent, heart-wrenching poem' and said that he had read it 'with tears.'

The other poems in the collection are less emotional than 'Kaddish,' though several of them remain very personal. Most interesting are Ginsberg's drug poems—'Mescaline,' 'Lysergic Acid' and 'Laughing Gas'—which are vast, rambling and kaleidoscopic glimpses into the void in search of God. Just as Ginsberg's Blake vision brought him to the highs and lows of rapture and despair so his experiments with hallucinogens produced similarly paradoxical reactions. Yet Ginsberg continued to experiment with states of altered consciousness, becoming closely involved in Timothy Leary's LSD research program in his attempt to rediscover the 'total consciousness' of his Blake vision. He also experimented with verse forms that would allow his readers to share these altered states. Much like Burroughs' use of the cut-up technique, Ginsberg sought a form of poetry that would offer 'a series of

vowels which if you pronounce them in proper sequence *with the breathing* indicated by the punctuation… will get you high physiologically.' A legal buzz that no cop could bust you for! 4/5

Planet News (1968)

The most eye-catching poem in *Planet News* is 'Television Was A Baby Crawling Towards That Deathchamber.' It's a great title. So great in fact that the poem itself has a hard time living up to it. Hurtling off in all directions, it is by turns funny, angry and sad—a Cold War vision of the world's craziness, filtered through the nuclear age, conspiracies, paranoia and the CIA. It's a vision that crops up again in 'Who Will Take Over the Universe?' where Ginsberg, writing in 1961, predicts the American Revolution that would soon take hold of the nation's youth.

Considering the date of its publication, *Planet News* is a timely collection, full of the mystic-revolutionary madness of the hippie movement and the anti-war demonstrations. The collection includes references to many of the key events of the counter-cultural years. In 'First Party At Ken Kesey's With Hell's Angels,' Ginsberg turns the historic intersection of the LSD freaks with the bikers into a strangely gentle snapshot poem, while modestly making no mention of his role in forming an alliance between the violent, reactionary Angels and the hippie counter-culture.

'Wales Visitation' is a poem written under the influence of acid—a kind of Wordsworthian confrontation with nature while tripping. In 'Uptown' Ginsberg captures the prevailing antagonism between straight and hippie culture, with the story of the pro-war citizen who threatens to cut off the poet's long hair and ship him out to Vietnam. The war resurfaces again in 'Wichita Vortex Sutra' with Ginsberg quoting McNamara's infamous 'bad guess' about the number of American troops who would be required to fight in Vietnam.

But the best expression of 1960s radicalism is 'Pentagon Exorcism'—a poem that sets its sights on the symbol of the military/industrial complex's secretive power. Ginsberg's attack on the Pentagon mind-control machinery is as funny and pointed as the hippies' attempts to levitate the building during demonstrations in the late-1960s. 3/5

Plutonian Ode: Poems 1977-1980 (1982)

'Plutonian Ode' opens with a photograph of Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky and 'friends of the Rocky Flats Truth Force' meditating on railroad tracks just outside a plutonium bomb trigger factory in Colorado. This peaceful protest took place on the day that Ginsberg wrote the poem and succeeded in halting a train carrying nuclear waste. It's a striking way of opening the collection but it inadvertently illustrates the problems that Ginsberg's poetry was experiencing after the end of the 1960s.

In the 1950s Ginsberg had perfected his poetic craft, producing a wide range of work that would secure his reputation as one of America's most important literary voices. In the 1960s he had continued his poetic development but had also begun to use his position in American society as political leverage, becoming heavily involved in radical politics and playing the role of elder statesman for the hippies.

The effect that Ginsberg's political activism had on his poetry was devastating. His commitment to marches, campaigns and demonstrations sapped his poetic voice, as 'Plutonium Ode' demonstrates. It's an earnest but totally lacklustre protest poem. It is more specific in its politics than 'Howl' but about as persuasive as a moan.

There's no denying that Ginsberg was a first-rate, completely committed activist. His political influence covered a range of issues (from gay rights to environmentalism) and continued up until his death. Despite its negative influence on his poetry Ginsberg remained committed to this activism. In fact, in 'Ode To Failure' he laments the fact that he hadn't been able to change the world more by trading poetry for politics. The only glimmer of Ginsberg's previous glory in this collection is the light-hearted 'Birdbrain!' a very funny attack on global stupidity and arrogance. 2/5

Journals

Ginsberg was an incorrigible hoarder. Throughout his life he kept scrapbooks, cuttings files, journals, letters, manuscripts, notebooks and, in his later years, faxes and computer disks. His journals—in three collections: *Journals: Early Fifties, Early Sixties* (1977), *Indian Journals* (1970) and *Journals: Mid Fifties* (1995)—are a testament to the importance of his literary record-keeping, since they offer an insight into the

poet and his lifetime. Full of dream records, diary entries, notes, drawings, musing and snatches of verse, the journals are valuable literary documents in their own right, frequently containing the seeds of Ginsberg's published poetry. *Journals: Early Fifties, Early Sixties* is particularly important since it contains an account of Ginsberg's trip to South America during which he tried to find the hallucinogen *yagé* that Burroughs had sampled there years before. But it's the frankness of Ginsberg's writing that's most interesting, the open manner in which he discusses his dreams, talks of his family and of his relationship with Peter Orlovsky. The journals let us delve into the poet's mind far better than any biography could ever hope to. 3/5

Miscellaneous Works

Ginsberg's poetry collections cover far more territory than that included here, with various small press publications and limited runs. Among Ginsberg's other works are: *Airplane Dreams* (1968), *Ankor Wat* (1968), *The Fall Of America: Poems On These States 1965-1971* (1972), *Iron Horse* (1972), *Sad Dust Glories: Poems Work Summer In Woods 1974* (1975), *Mind Breaths: Poems 1972-1977* (1978), *Poems All Over The Place: Mostly Seventies* (1978), *Straight Heart's Delight: Love Poems And Selected Letters: Allen Ginsberg And Peter Orlovsky* (1980), *White Shroud: Poems 1980-1985* (1986), *Death & Fame: Last Poems, 1993-1997* (1999). The best place to start is *Collected Poems 1947-1980* (1985), which includes all of Ginsberg's best-known work. His letters to and from Neal Cassady have been published in *As Ever: The Collected Correspondence Of Allen Ginsberg And Neal Cassady* (1977).

4. The Third Mind: William S Burroughs

Biography

William S Burroughs was born on 5 February 1914 in St Louis, Missouri. His grandfather was the inventor of the automatic adding machine and founder of the Burroughs Corporation. By the time of Burroughs' birth, the family's stake in the company had been sold off, but it had produced a big enough windfall to ensure that his parents were comfortably well off for the rest of their lives (and could give Burroughs a regular monthly allowance of $200 for much of his early adult life).

Burroughs fared well at school (academically if not socially) and graduated from Harvard, majoring in English Literature. He studied for a term at the Vienna Medical School and then dropped out and returned to the States to take graduate classes in anthropology at Harvard. While in Austria he married a Jewish woman in order to secure her a visa to escape the Nazis. Back in the US Burroughs tried to join the military when the war began, but was rejected by the navy, the air force and the OSS (the fledgling CIA). A very brief spell in the army came to an end when the authorities discovered the contents of his psychiatric file.

Aware of his homosexuality from an early age, Burroughs had had relationships with other men, including a hustler named Jack Anderson, in the 1940s. Anderson's rejection of him led to a finger-chopping incident in which Burroughs amputated one of his little fingers with a pair of shears. The psychiatric report from Bellevue hospital was part of the file that the military authorities got hold of.

Living in New York during the early 1940s, Burroughs survived on his parental allowance. He was intrigued by the criminal underworld and frequently hung out in seedy bars and cafeterias, chatting with hustlers, petty thieves and robbers. He planned a bank heist but drank so much Dutch courage that he was too inebriated to carry it out.

During this period Burroughs met Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac through Lucien Carr, who Burroughs had known from St Louis. Much older than Ginsberg and Kerouac, Burroughs became their mentor, impressing them with his knowledge of literature and history as well as his cultured manner. As Kerouac later remarked, what impressed them was that he had 'finish.' Burroughs also met Herbert Huncke, who gave

him his first experience of hard drugs and taught him the tricks of the junkie lifestyle.

As the Beat Generation grew, Burroughs moved into an apartment with Joan Vollmer who would become his common law wife. She developed an addiction to Benzedrine inhalers (which contained strips of paper soaked in amphetamine) that quickly got out of control. After Joan became pregnant with Burroughs' son they moved to Texas, where Burroughs grew cotton and marijuana crops. The marijuana crop was a failure and Burroughs and his wife shipped out to New Orleans, where Burroughs was arrested for possession of heroin. Fortunately, he avoided a jail sentence since the police had illegally searched his house. Skipping the States to avoid further legal problems, the family moved to Mexico City where Burroughs studied Mayan and Aztec history on the GI Bill.

South America proved the perfect environment for Burroughs. Boys were cheap, drugs were easily available and no one paid him any notice. He had an affair with a young American, Adelbert Lewis Marker, and travelled with him through the South American jungles in search of the hallucinogenic drug *yagé*. But Marker wasn't really gay and their relationship soon ended.

On 6 September 1951, tragedy struck. Burroughs and Joan were at a party and had been drinking heavily throughout the day. At some point in the evening Burroughs told his wife "It's about time for our William Tell act." Although they had never played such a game before, Joan put a glass on her head. Burroughs aimed at it with his gun, fired and missed. The bullet hit Joan in the forehead, killing her instantly.

Skipping the country on the advice of his lawyer, Burroughs eventually ended up in Tangiers. He quickly settled into life there and began writing seriously. His first novel, *Junkie*, was published in 1953. He worked on a sequel, entitled *Queer*, as well as the book that would become his greatest success, *Naked Lunch*. Although isolated from the rest of the Beat Generation, Burroughs kept in regular letter contact with Kerouac and, in particular, Ginsberg. After a brief romance with Burroughs, Ginsberg had become his closest friend and also acted as his literary agent.

In 1957 Ginsberg and Kerouac visited Tangiers and helped prepare the *Naked Lunch* manuscript for publication. When Maurice Girodias' Olympia Press finally accepted the novel it marked the beginning of Burroughs' fame. Banned in the Unites States, *Naked Lunch* got entan-

gled in the same headline-grabbing legal battle that Ginsberg had faced over *Howl And Other Poems*. The judge finally ruled in the book's favour.

Moving to Paris in 1958, Burroughs took up residence in what would come to be known as the Beat Hotel. It was in Paris that he became friends with the painter Brion Gysin, who would have an enormous influence on Burroughs' work during this period. One day while cutting through a sheaf of newspapers with a Stanley blade, Gysin noticed that he was producing new sentences out of the newspaper headlines. Finding them hilarious, Gysin rushed over to Burroughs and let him read them. Burroughs thought that the technique had serious potential as a literary device and began to produce 'cut-ups.' The cut-up technique obsessed Burroughs over the next few years and he began to produce thousands of these random sentences by typing up his own texts with other works (by Shakespeare, TS Eliot, Rimbaud) and then cutting the pages into sections and rearranging the sections to create new texts. Gysin and Burroughs both believed that this would let literature catch up with painting techniques such as montage. They also thought that the cut-ups were magical (predicting future events), could induce experiences similar to drug highs and might even operate as a means of freeing the individual from unspecified controlling forces.

Obsessed with this new literary method, Burroughs spent the majority of the 1960s working on cut-ups. The result was the Nova trilogy (*The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded* and *Nova Express*) as well as hundreds of hours of tapes of cut-up street sounds and conversations. He also worked on a series of films with British director Anthony Balch: *Towers Open Fire*, *The Cut-Ups* and *Bill And Tony.*

From 1966 to 1973 Burroughs lived in London, continuing his cut-up experiments and investigating Scientology. He had started using the E-Meter, a piece of equipment that operated like a lie detector and was used by the Scientologists to help 'decondition' their followers. During his time in London Burroughs worked on *The Wild Boys*, *Port Of Saints* and *Exterminator!*, still using his cut-up technique but mixing it with patches of straight narrative. Life in London took its toll on Burroughs though, and when Ginsberg visited him in 1973 he was shocked by his old friend's withdrawn lifestyle. Arranging a teaching position for Burroughs on a creative writing course in New York, Ginsberg encouraged him back to the States.

Returning to New York in the 1970s Burroughs began to enjoy celebrity status. Living in an old YMCA building, (dubbed the Bunker because of its lack of windows) Burroughs hired a young secretary, James Grauerholz, to run his day-to-day affairs. Grauerholz's enthusiasm brought Burroughs out of obscurity. Giving lucrative college readings, hanging out with famous stars like Andy Warhol, the Rolling Stones and Patti Smith, Burroughs suddenly became the epitome of 1970s junkie *chic*. Ironically it was because of his new-found fans that Burroughs got hooked on heroin again after being clean for several years.

After getting into the methadone programme in 1980, Burroughs finished his come-back novel *Cities Of The Red Night*. Moving out of New York in search of peace and quiet, he returned to the Mid-West to live in the small university town of Lawrence, Kansas. He spent the rest of his life there, writing two sequels to *Cities Of The Red Night* (*The Place Of Dead Roads* and *The Western Lands*) and fending off a constant stream of unannounced visitors. The eldest of the three principal Beats, Burroughs survived both his friends, dying in August 1997, just months after Allen Ginsberg.

Junkie (1953)

Summary: *Junkie* follows William Lee (the pen-name Burroughs frequently used, based on his mother's maiden name) as he moves through the New York underworld of the 1940s as a junkie and a thief. Lee narrates his attempts to score, avoid the police and fund his habit (through petty crime). As the novel ends he's about to depart for South America in search of a hallucinogen called *yagé* that, he hopes, will be the 'final fix.'

Subtext: *Junkie* is an autobiographical, journalistic report told in the first person. It's the most straightforward of all Burroughs' books, often sounding like a hardboiled detective story in the Raymond Chandler mode. It's more like a documentary account than a novel, and even criticises the United States' drugs laws by arguing that junkies only become a problem to society when being an addict is a criminal offence.

Behind The Beat: Originally, *Junkie* was supposed to have been published together with *Queer* by Carl Solomon who was working as an editor at Ace Paperbacks. In the end, though, Ace published the novel as part of its Double Book series with Maurice Helbrandt's autobio-

graphical *Narcotic Agent*. At first Burroughs wasn't keen on being lumped together with a narc, but decided that Helbrandt's story wasn't as bad as he'd expected. The novel was marketed as a cheap, sensational paperback and didn't achieve much recognition until after Burroughs became famous.

Hip Or Square?: Since being republished by Penguin in the 1970s (as *Junky*), the novel is generally regarded as one of Burroughs' most accessible books. 4/5

Queer (1985)

Summary: *Queer* was designed as a sequel to *Junkie*, continuing the story of William Lee's search for drugs as he leaves the United States for South America. Unlike *Junkie*, though, *Queer* is a love story centring on the relationship between Lee and Eugene Allerton, a young American man he meets in Mexico City. Allerton is essentially straight, but Lee tries to seduce him. The resulting relationship ends badly as Allerton rejects Lee.

Subtext: Although *Queer* shifts from the first-person narration of *Junkie* into the third person, it's still as autobiographical as its predecessor. Burroughs met Adelbert Lewis Marker in Mexico City and the Lee/Allerton affair is based on their time together. No longer on junk, Lee is now addicted to Allerton and suffers the same highs and lows of the junkie as he pursues him. The most important part of the novel is the story of Burroughs' search for the hallucinogenic drug *yagé* in the Amazon jungle. When he finds the drug he experiences a bisexual vision that throws him into confusion.

Behind The Beat: Burroughs wasn't the only person searching for *yagé* in the 1950s. Both the CIA and the KGB had been experimenting with it during the period, planning to use it as a brainwashing truth drug in the Cold War. Burroughs hoped that the drug might allow him to achieve his ultimate goal – freedom from conditioning. But on trying to take the drug back to America he found that it didn't survive for long once the vines it was brewed from were cut.

Hip Or Square?: Embarrassed by his autobiographical story of unrequited gay love, Burroughs refused to publish *Queer* for over thirty years. When it was finally released it received a mixed response. It's quite unlike any of Burroughs' other books and is more personal and emotional than anything else Burroughs has written. 3/5

Interzone (1989)

Summary: This collection of short stories and Burroughs' early 'routines' (comic vignettes) dates from 1954 when Burroughs moved to Tangiers.

Subtext: The work collected in *Interzone* offers a fascinating insight into Burroughs' shift from the writer of *Junkie* and *Queer* (straightforward, linear novels) to the demented genius behind *Naked Lunch*. The material in *Interzone* is collected into three sections: 'Stories,' 'Lee's Journals' and 'Word.' Among the short stories, the two that stand out are 'The Finger' and 'Twilight's Last Gleamings.' The first tells the autobiographical story of Burroughs' Van Gogh kick when he amputated one of his little fingers with a pair of garden shears. 'Twilight's Last Gleamings' introduces the character of Doctor Benway, one of Burroughs' best-loved villains, who returns again and again throughout the novels.

Behind The Beat: 'Lee's Journals' are a mix of autobiography and routines, offering William Lee's perspective on Tangiers and its inhabitants while he waits for his next shot of morphine. The pieces fall halfway between the first-person narration of *Junkie* (with its street tough style) and the weird trippyness of *Naked Lunch* (with its use of routines). But it's the final section, 'Word' that really makes the transition from Burroughs' early work to the kind of material that would comprise *Naked Lunch*. As Burroughs writes in the opening, 'This book spills off the page in all directions, kaleidoscope of vistas, medley of tunes and street noises, farts and riot yipes…' Several of the passages from 'Word' ended up in *Naked Lunch*, but most of all it's the style that preempts Burroughs' masterpiece. 'Word' sacrifices story coherence in favour of a series of surreal visions. It's completely outrageous (even more so considering it was written in 1954), full of sex, drugs and the kind of nightmarish characters that only Burroughs could come up with.

Hip Or Square?: Excellent examples of how Burroughs' writing changed between *Junkie* and *Naked Lunch*. 3/5

Naked Lunch (1959)

Summary: There's no easy way to describe *Naked Lunch* other than to compare it to *Junkie* written on drugs. The story (if it can be called that) follows Lee as he tries to score for drugs and ends up going through withdrawal. The novel is made up of a series of 'routines' or sketches that are like a sick junkie's nightmares—hellish glimpses of the world through the addict's eyes.

Subtext: *Naked Lunch* is the novel that secured Burroughs' reputation and caused a whirlwind of controversy, debate and legal proceedings when it was released in the US. For all its status as a piece of pornography, it's a very serious work with a clear social intent. As the title suggests, Burroughs uses the novel to unveil (make naked) the mechanisms of control and repression that rule American society. Burroughs shows how the law and the health authorities persecute both addicts and homosexuals, and turns this persecution into a mad vision of hell. It's both a warning against drug addiction and a critique of society's treatment of those branded undesirable.

Behind The Beat: While living in Tangiers, Burroughs sent a series of letters home to Ginsberg. In each letter he added a 'routine' (short comic skits, the literary equivalent of dirty jokes). Talking assholes, mad doctors and surreal pieces on Tangiers' nightlife were among the stories that managed to escape surveillance by the postal authorities. Much of the material was written while Burroughs was on a variety of drugs and it has the strange, broken up feel of writing under the influence. But it's also hilariously funny, scathingly satirical and quite unlike any other piece of Beat fiction. The novel was first published by Olympia Press in Paris, who were internationally renowned for printing pornographic novels as well as the odd racy literary classic (Henry Miller's novels, for instance). When Grove Press planned to publish the novel in the United States in 1961, Burroughs' work became embroiled in the same kind of censorship trial that had dogged Miller's *Tropic Of Cancer*. After a fierce legal battle it received the courts' endorsement under the First Amendment and was unleashed on an unsuspecting America.

Hip Or Square?: Obscene, funny and completely off-the-wall, this is Burroughs' masterpiece. 5/5

The Nova Trilogy:
The Soft Machine (1961)
The Ticket That Exploded (1962)
Nova Express (1964)

Summary: The trilogy's story is pretty vague but the main theme is the invasion of the Earth by a group of intergalactic criminals known as the Nova Mob. Like an extraterrestrial version of the Mafia, the Nova Mob move in on Earth and try to take over everything, from the legal system to the minds of each individual member of the planet. But the Nova Mob aren't the usual kind of space invaders—they're two-dimensional virus organisms that invade the minds of humans through their addictions (to drugs, sex, money, power, etc.). Only Inspector J Lee of the Nova Police and a handful of partisans can save the Earth, but first they have to use the cut-up technique to free themselves from the invaders' mind-control techniques.

Subtext: The Nova trilogy is a very strange piece of science fiction that's unlike the usual kind of work written in the genre. The science fiction scenario is an excuse for Burroughs to expand his obsession with addiction and control and explain his new cut-up method. Burroughs suggests that the cut-up is the only way of freeing yourself from the influence of control: cutting up sounds, images and words will allow you to break free from the word and image locks that keep you imprisoned in a fake reality and in your bodies. The cut-up becomes a means of reaching a higher consciousness without drugs: 'learn to make it without any chemical corn' is Burroughs' advice.

Behind The Beat: Critics have always been divided over whether the Nova trilogy ought to be regarded as the most important moment of Burroughs' career or as his greatest failure. Reading the books is certainly hard work: 'The question caught our ticket that exploded—need the White Smoke to circumstance—Remember I was the door—It's the old naked dream beside you—You got sex and pain information?—mouth of hair?—' Burroughs was aware of the problems his readers faced and put the novels through several revisions. He ultimately claimed that he wasn't completely satisfied with the results.

Hip Or Square?: Although it's difficult to read, the Nova trilogy is a fantastic concept, a twenty-first-century literary work that deserves serious attention and recognition. 4/5

The Wild Boy Quartet:
The Wild Boys (1971)
Port Of Saints (1973)
Exterminator! (1973)
Ah Pook Is Here (1979)

Summary: The world is in chaos. After an unspecified disaster decimates the first world and plunges it back to a low level of technological sophistication, wild packs of boys roam the deserts of North Africa. Children from all over the world run to join them, leaving their parents and turning their backs on civilisation in order to run wild. The characters reappear throughout the quartet, except in the short stories of *Exterminator!* But many of the characters in *Exterminator!* possess the same agenda as the wild boys—violent revolution—and so can be linked with them.

Subtext: The wild boys have obvious links to the 1960s counter-culture, except that they're all gay. Rejecting their families and heterosexuality, the wild boys set up gay communes and wage guerrilla war on the rest of the world. Two army squadrons are sent out after them, a group of middle-aged soldiers and a lesbian commando unit. But the boys wipe them out. There's lots of gay sex (even more than in Burroughs' other novels!) and many critics have found Burroughs' accompanying misogyny hard to deal with.

Behind The Beat: Burroughs described *The Wild Boys* as a personal fantasy and there's a sense that he's writing the kind of science fiction that he'd like to read himself. These novels are more accessible than the Nova trilogy, with cut-up material used sparingly. Their focus on adolescent boys allows Burroughs to include lots of autobiographical material about his childhood in St Louis and the time he spent on the summer camp ranch (the site that would later be used to build the first A-bombs).

Hip Or Square?: The Wild Boy quartet bridges the gap between the complicated literary experiments of the Nova trilogy and the Red Night trilogy of novels in the 1980s that begins with *Cities Of The Red Night*. 3/5

Cities Of The Red Night (1981)

Summary: A virus plague begins to spread across the Earth. A team of scientists speculate about its origin, while a 'private asshole' called Clem Snide investigates the disappearance of a missing American boy. The story switches back between the present, the past and the future. In one of the plot stands, an eighteenth-century pirate captain tries to establish a libertarian commune on Madagascar. Other sections tell the story of a future world where a radioactive virus destroys the Cities of the Red Night. As the novel continues, various plot threads intertwine, the time-frame collapses and it's revealed that the CIA is part of an intergalactic conspiracy designed to enslave the Earth.

Subtext: *Cities Of The Red Night* plays with many of the themes of Burroughs' earlier work—addiction, viruses, gay sex, the search for freedom—but tries to follow the linear storytelling of a conventional novel. Although the novel's storyline eventually collapses into confusion it's certainly one of Burroughs' most coherent works. Burroughs' stories about eighteenth-century pirate communes are part of his continuing interest in alternative lifestyles and societies (something that was first seen in *The Wild Boys*). He presents the novel as a 'retroactive utopia' that tries to imagine what life could have been like if these communes had survived the hostility of the rest of the world.

Behind The Beat: The novel was written during Burroughs' comeback in the 1980s. Burroughs relied on his secretary James Grauerholz to help edit the material (much as Allen Ginsberg had edited *Naked Lunch*) and it seems that this had a positive influence, giving the novel a more coherent structure. Christopher Isherwood proclaimed the novel as Burroughs' 'masterpiece,' but it's unlikely to ever eclipse *Naked Lunch* as the novel that Burroughs is best known for. Many critics have noted the way in which it allowed Burroughs to escape from the complicated experiments that he had been working with in the 1960s and 1970s.

Hip Or Square?: One of Burroughs' best works, *Cities Of The Red Night* is a distillation of many of his most important themes. 4/5

The Place Of Dead Roads (1983)

Summary: In the Old West, at the turn of the century, Kim Carsons (a young teenager) sets out to become a shootist. Enjoying the relaxed laws of the frontier, Carsons gathers a gang together (The Wild Fruits) and gets involved in various criminal activities. His feud with a local rancher and his flagrant disregard for the laws of the society he rejects eventually get him shot.

Subtext: Burroughs uses the frontier as a space to imagine an alternative to mainstream, heterosexual culture. His cowboys are gay, drug-taking outlaws who hate the mean-spirited nature of straight society. Kim tries to defy every rule possible, uses black magic in his gunfights, time-travels (visiting Venus in the 1980s) and forms a criminal underworld of 'Johnsons'—a group of moral criminals who are totally opposed to the 'Shits' of the world. It's best described as a science fiction western and, like Burroughs' other work, its central theme is the escape from control. Kim tries to live his life the way he wants to, but constantly finds that the rest of the world is imposing its laws on him. One critic, David Glover, has suggested that the novel could be read as Kim's last dying thoughts. The novel opens with Kim being shot in the back during a gunfight and ends with him dying on the ground, what lies in between could be read as a split-second fantasy in which Kim imagines the world differently in the moment before he dies.

Behind The Beat: Burroughs had frequently mentioned his desire to write a western and many of his fans were eager to see the result. *The Place Of Dead Roads* is both a sequel to *Cities Of The Red Night* and an independent novel. Burroughs borrows the concept of the Johnson from Jack Black's autobiographical story of life among the bums and hobos of the United States—*You Can't Win* (1927)—that he had read as a child. Black used 'Johnson' to denote someone who was a criminal but was still honourable.

Hip Or Square?: *The Place Of Dead Roads* is a fantastic novel, full of rich characters and events and very, very funny. 5/5

The Western Lands (1987)

Summary: In the final novel in the Red Night trilogy, Burroughs continues the story of Kim from *The Place Of Dead Roads*. Kim was assassinated by one of his own lieutenants, Joe the Dead, who feared that his adolescent behaviour was going to jeopardise the outlaw culture that Kim had helped establish. After death, Kim journeys into the Western Lands, the Egyptian Land of the Dead. The story concerns the search for immortality (by Kim and his creator, Burroughs) and continues the fight against the oppressive controlling forces of mainstream society.

Subtext: *The Western Lands* is a novel about Burroughs' approaching death. He makes this quite explicit, writing himself into the story as 'the old writer' who lives with his cats. But it is also a novel about AIDS, written in 1987 when the epidemic was at its peak. Death is everywhere in the novel, but the most important kind, according to Burroughs, is soul death. Using Norman Mailer's novel *Ancient Evenings* as a reference, Burroughs explains the Egyptian theory of the Seven Souls and uses this in his indictment of modern society. The controllers want to kill off the seven souls and reduce the Earth's population to mindless zombies. As usual the Venusians and their followers run the conspiracy, but this time Burroughs isn't confident about our chances of winning. Exhausted, he ends the novel on a pessimistic note: 'The old writer couldn't write anymore because he had reached the end of words, the end of what could be done with words.'

Behind The Beat: Since *The Western Lands* is so concerned with its author's death it's fitting that it was to be Burroughs' last novel. The works that would follow—*Ghost Of Chance* (1991), *The Cat Inside* (1992), *My Education: A Book Of Dreams* (1995), *Last Words* (2000)—were at best novellas, at worst edited selections from Burroughs' journals and dream diaries.

Hip Or Square?: The last of Burroughs' great novels and a fitting end to both the Red Night trilogy and Burroughs' career. 4/5

Miscellaneous Works

In between Burroughs' great books lies a host of other works. Oliver Harris' edited collection of Burroughs' correspondence—*The Letters Of William S Burroughs 1945 To 1959* (1993)—is a treasure trove of material that includes several drafts of Burroughs' earliest routines, sent to Ginsberg from Tangiers during the 1950s. Irascible, hilarious and always opinionated, Burroughs' letters prove to be one of his best works. Among the other published pieces is *The Yage Letters* (1963), documenting Burroughs and Ginsberg's separate adventures in South America. The cut-up technique gets the manifesto treatment in *The Third Mind* (1978), where Burroughs and Gysin explain and demonstrate the cut-ups. Other cut-up material can be found in the Burroughs, Corso, Gysin, Beiles collaboration *Minutes To Go* (1968) and *The Burroughs File* (1984). *Ali's Smile/Naked Scientology* (1972) collects together Burroughs' opinions on the Scientology movement. *The Last Words Of Dutch Schultz* (1975) is a film script that's interesting, if flawed. The essay collection *The Adding Machine* (1985) covers a diverse range of subjects, from CIA weaponry to Ernest Hemingway.

5. The Beat Generation Movement

While Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs are the names most often associated with the Beat Generation, they are actually just the most recognisable personalities of a literary and social movement that included many more (less well-known) writers and artists. In the early days of the Beat Generation, around the late-1940s and early-1950s, the movement didn't extend much further than the friendship of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs. But as the media turned the Beats into a social phenomenon, the Beat lifestyle suddenly swept across America's cities and into the rest of the world. A whole generation of artists, writers and musicians saw their own concerns reflected in the Beat Generation and pledged allegiance to the Beats' challenge to straight society.

The Beats found friends and followers in all walks of the arts. Sadly there's not space here to list all the musicians, painters, poets and even stand-up comedians who they influenced. But the writers in this chapter are the key members of the Beat movement, the ground troops who acted as muses, fellow artists and political agitators (and sometimes all three). Many of them were there from the start (Herbert Huncke, John Clellon Holmes), while others form a bridge between the Beats and the hippies (Neal Cassady, Alexander Trocchi). Some deserve an honorary mention simply because they were influenced by the Beat movement and often carried the Beatnik flag (Norman Mailer, Hunter S Thompson).

Nelson Algren

Although not usually mentioned as a member of the Beat Generation, Nelson Algren (1909-1981) deserves credit as one of the few American novelists, pre-Beat, willing to tackle the growing world of post-war subcultures. Born in Chicago, Algren charted the wild side of the concrete jungle in his novels. He remains most famous in literary circles for his love affair with Simone de Beauvoir, the French feminist writer and lover of Jean-Paul Sartre.

The Man With The Golden Arm (1949)

Summary: Frankie Machine is an ex-army tough guy who deals cards in an illegal Chicago gambling joint. His wife Sophie is always nagging

him for more money, but his heroin addiction is burning a hole in his pocket. His stripper girlfriend Molly tries to convince him to get straight, but he can't quite manage it.

Subtext: Just as the Beat Generation would look to the underworld's lowlife characters for inspiration, so Algren sets his story in the downtown tenement blocks of Chicago. It's a grim world, full of bedraggled characters like Nifty Louie, Frankie Machine's neighbourhood drug dealer, and Sparrow, Frankie's best friend. Algren explicitly sets Frankie's drug addiction against the background of the war and its aftermath.

Behind The Beat: Burroughs was always quite dismissive of Algren's work, noting that he'd never actually lived the life of a drug addict. While Burroughs set out to clear up the myths and lies that surrounded drug addiction, writing in an attempt to convey his first-hand experiences with drugs, Algren proved to be less interested in drugs themselves than in the personal relationships that the junkie's world depends on. Like nineteenth-century French novelist Emile Zola, Algren's depiction of the abject poverty to be found in the real world is a means of arguing for social reform.

Hip Or Square?: Although it's not exactly Beat, Algren's obsession with the blue-collar, Skid Row world of dimes and dope paved the way for the Beat Generation. 3/5

Carolyn Cassady

Carolyn Robinson was the prototype Beat woman. Born in 1923 in Nashville Tennessee, she studied for a drama degree, learning the Stanislavsky method acting technique that would become so famous in America after the war. Moving to Denver in 1947 to begin an MA course, she met the young Neal Cassady, who instantly fell in love with her and promised to divorce his teenage wife, LuAnne. Innocently believing Cassady's spiel, she became one of his many lovers of the period. Through Cassady she met Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg and remained close friends with them (especially Kerouac) during her turbulent relationship with Neal. Although shocked by her boyfriend's voracious sexual appetite—she briefly dumped him after discovering him in bed with Allen Ginsberg and LuAnne—she married him on April Fool's Day, 1948. As Neal continued to run wild, frequently abandoning her and their children, Carolyn did her best to support the family

single-handedly. During the 1950s she had a brief affair with Kerouac, partly at Neal's suggestion. Sacrificing her artistic ambitions as a writer and painter to look after her children (including the immature Neal and Jack), Carolyn Cassady has since become an important Beat spokeswoman and has recently been involved in the planned film adaptation of *On The Road*.

Off The Road: Twenty Years With Cassady, Kerouac And Ginsberg (1990)

Summary: Carolyn Cassady's autobiographical book tells the story of her marriage to Neal Cassady and her love affair with Jack Kerouac.

Subtext: Giving a woman's view of the traditionally macho Beat scene, Carolyn Cassady cuts through the posturing to the core of Kerouac and Neal Cassady's man-child personalities—criticising and celebrating them in equal measure.

Behind The Beat: First published in *Rolling Stone* magazine and then in the book *Heart Beat: My Life With Jack and Neal* (1976), Carolyn Cassady's memories of the Beats during the years before they became America's favourite *enfants terribles* make for fascinating reading. They also ensure Carolyn Cassady a place as one of the most important female Beats—a muse, mother and artist who bucked social convention and suffered the full brunt of Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac's selfish machismo while holding them both enthralled. The relationships discussed in *Off The Road* became the basis of the film *Heart Beat* and Carolyn Cassady was consulted regarding the casting and the script.

Hip Or Square?: Although never allowed to take up her place on the road or behind the wheel, Carolyn Cassady's work is never square. 4/5

Neal Cassady

Born in 1926—while his parents were driving through Salt Lake City, if legend is to be believed—Neal Cassady's life was dominated by speed (the movement as well as the drug). As a teenager he stole cars, drove them around until he became bored with them, then stole another one. By his own estimates he stole 500 cars between 1940 and 1944. In 1947, Cassady came to New York where he met Ginsberg and then Kerouac. Sharing girls with Kerouac and having an on-off, turbulent affair with Ginsberg, Cassady became the Beat Generation's foremost

muse—a madcap symbol of their desire to break through the boundaries of society's inhibitions. Cassady remained close friends with Kerouac—and a regular character in his novels—until the late 1950s when he was imprisoned for possession of marijuana. Afraid of repercussions, Kerouac cut his ties with him. In the 1960s Cassady joined Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters, driving their psychedelic Day-Glo bus across the US as they carried out their 'acid tests.' He died in 1968 after accidentally overdosing on a cocktail of barbiturates and alcohol.

The First Third (1974)

Summary: The first volume of Cassady's autobiography covering his early years up to the mid-1940s.

Subtext: *The First Third* tells the story of Cassady's early youth, in particular his vagabond upbringing, experience of juvenile prisons and his first meetings with the emerging Beats.

Behind The Beat: While *The Second Third* exists as a collection of taped recordings made during Cassady's time with the Merry Pranksters, Cassady died before completing the final third of his life. His role in the Beat Generation's history is pivotal. Without him there would never have been *On The Road* and without that novel it's easy to imagine Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs continuing to work in obscurity. His crossover from Beat to hippie is, perhaps, a fitting symbol of the close ties between the two counter-cultural groups (ties that Kerouac didn't understand at all—unlike Ginsberg or, to a lesser extent, Burroughs).

Hip Or Square?: The embodiment of the Beat Generation's quest for speed, free love and large quantities of drugs. 3/5

Gregory Corso

Although Gregory Corso (1930-2001) wasn't present at the beginning of the Beat Generation, he quickly established himself as one of the movement's leading writers after meeting Ginsberg in 1950. An Italian-American teenager, worldly-wise after several years in prison, Corso was a street urchin poet who, like Herbert Huncke, had first-hand experience of the wrong side of the tracks. Abandoned by his parents, Corso had spent most of his childhood with various foster parents before committing a string of offences that landed him in The Tombs.

Under Ginsberg's guidance and promotion, he developed his poetry and soon became one of the Beats' most vocal spokesmen. Although rehabilitated through poetry, Corso never quite shed his tendency to make off with other people's property, famously selling all of Allen Ginsberg's furniture in order to finance a trip to Europe. Adolescent, manic and disruptive, Corso was the Beat movement's foremost *enfant terrible*.

Gasoline (1958)

Corso's poetry is often as wild as the person himself. His second published collection *Gasoline* secured his literary reputation at home and abroad by deliberately highlighting this wild edge while also proving that he was knowledgeable of past poetic tradition. Much of Corso's poetry—including 'Ode To Coit Tower,' the opening poem of *Gasoline*—shows the influence of the English Romantics, especially Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley. Like his Beat colleagues, Corso is well aware of the harshness of the world and rages against its cruelty in several of the poems. In 'The Last Warmth Of Arnold,' for instance, Corso tells the story of a young schoolboy who's too innocent and timid to survive in the real world. After being attacked he starves to death alone—an image of the way in which the world crushes those who are too sensitive to fight back (after all, Corso had to learn how to defend himself while serving time in juvenile reform schools).

Hip Or Square?: The Beat Generation's leading poet after Ginsberg. 3/5

Diane DiPrima

Beat poet Diane DiPrima (b.1934) was a well-known figure on the Bohemian New York scene of the late-1940s. Her teenage involvement with the Bohemian artists brought her in contact with Ezra Pound, with whom she corresponded before finally meeting in person in the early 1950s. In 1957, at the height of the Beat phenomenon, DiPrima met Ginsberg, Kerouac and Peter Orlovsky, famously joining them in an orgy. Unlike many women on the Beat scene, DiPrima was always more than just a muse, publishing several books of poetry and prose (*This Kind Bird Flies Backwards*, *Dinners And Nightmares* and *Revolutionary Letters*). In the 1960s she spent time on the West Coast and became

part of Timothy Leary's acid heads, before joining the political activists called the Diggers.

Memoirs Of A Beatnik (1969)

Summary: An autobiographical novel told in the first person, *Memoirs Of A Beatnik* is based on DiPrima's youthful experiences in the 1950s as she partied her way through the Bohemian/Beat scene.

Subtext: A semi-pornographic 'memoir' that secured DiPrima's position as a Beatnik goddess—something that her legendary orgy with Ginsberg, Kerouac and Peter Orlovsky had already gone some way towards doing. But, considering its 1969 release, it's also an important feminist statement—quite a rarity in the male-dominated Beat world.

Behind The Beat: As well as being a poet and a writer, DiPrima played an important role in the publishing world of the Beat scene, co-editing and producing the *Floating Bear* newsletter with LeRoi Jones in the early 1960s and suffering the wrath of the censor for her troubles. Her memoirs *Recollections Of My Life As A Woman* was published in 1999.

Hip Or Square?: Telling it like it really was, man. 4/5

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Although Lawrence Ferlinghetti (b.1919) was never a principal Beat writer, he was a fervent supporter of their work. Without the help of Ferlinghetti and his City Lights publishing/distributing facilities, the careers of many of the Beat poets (especially Ginsberg, Corso and Snyder) would have been much less fruitful.

City Lights Bookstore opened in June 1953. By 1955 Ferlinghetti had bought out his partner and had begun publishing poetry books under the City Lights imprint. In addition to his business acumen, Ferlinghetti was also a successful poet and it was his collection *Pictures Of The Gone World* that was the first book to be published by City Lights in 1955. Ferlinghetti's poetry was influenced by e e cummings and, as the years continued, was increasingly characterised by radical social commentary. As one of the principal poets of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance in the 1950s, Ferlinghetti became an important spokesman of the new counter-culture and, after publishing 'Howl,' vocally

defended the new literature against the censorship laws. The City Lights Bookstore remains an important landmark in San Francisco to this day.

A Coney Island Of The Mind (1958)

Ferlinghetti's poetry is always characterised by a revolutionary idealism of the pacifist, anarchist and, more recently, ecologist persuasion. The key to his poetry is an unshakeable belief in the essential wonder of life. While Ginsberg, Kerouac and the other East Coast Beats were always willing to highlight the horrors of modern life (making them 'Beat' in terms of being 'beaten down'), the West Coast poets held a more dignified and optimistic view of the world ('beatitude'). The Zen/Buddhist studies of Ferlinghetti, Snyder, Philip Whalen and others led them to adopt a more hopeful approach to life. Also, unlike the East Coast Beats, Ferlinghetti and his circle were wary of the media circus that Kerouac and Ginsberg openly courted. Ferlinghetti's work is remarkable because of its simple pleasures. He creates a poetry that's much lighter than Ginsberg's rants. Much of the poetry in *A Coney Island Of The Mind* is designed for oral readings (preferably with jazz accompaniment) rather than the printed page. Comic, lively and slightly surreal, Ferlinghetti's work was also always ready to show political commitment. His libertarian anarchist beliefs could never be silenced for long. 3/5

Brion Gysin

Brion Gysin (1916-1986) was a painter, poet and writer who had a profound influence on the career of William Burroughs. They first met in Tangiers in the mid-1950s, where Gysin ran a local restaurant, the 1001 Nights, but it was only later in 1958 when they were both living in the Beat Hotel in Paris that they became close friends and collaborators. Gysin introduced Burroughs to various occult practices, including mirror gazing, and was credited with inventing the cut-up method that Burroughs used throughout the Nova trilogy and other works. In addition to his paintings, Gysin collaborated on several books with Burroughs as well as writing a novel, *The Process* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970).

Here To Go: Planet R-101 (1982)

Summary: Combining interviews with Gysin with selections from his texts, essays, short stories and biographical material, *Here To Go* is the best introduction to Gysin's work.

Subtext: The various pieces collected together in *Here To Go* show the influence of Gysin on Burroughs' work. The subjects discussed here—American and Russian interest in mind control, the occult, altered states of consciousness—will be more than familiar to readers of Burroughs' novels. After Gysin's death in 1986, Burroughs told Ginsberg that Gysin was 'the only man I ever respected. He understood everything I'd done.'

Behind The Beat: Although he never achieved a great deal of recognition as either a painter or a writer, Gysin is a pivotal figure in Burroughs' career and an important (if peripheral) member of the Beat Generation. In *Here To Go* Gysin discusses his research into the twelfth-century Muslim leader Hassan I Sabbah, the 'Old Man of the Mountain' as well as the medium Eileen Garrett and the Dream Machine (a stroboscopic device he invented to induce altered states of consciousness).

Hip Or Square?: One of the most fascinating members of the Beat Generation—a one-off original. 5/5

John Clellon Holmes

John Clellon Holmes (1926-1988) always remained half in and half out of the Beat circle. He spent the war years in the US Navy before studying literature and philosophy at Columbia. After meeting Kerouac and Ginsberg he became a regular face on the Beat party scene and was convinced that his friends and contemporaries might well be the vanguard of a new literary movement. But while he was intrigued by the Beats' love of drugs, sex and crime, he remained deeply sceptical of the lifestyle they were adopting and their infatuation with underworld figures such as Herbert Huncke. Playing the role of observer rather than participant, Holmes' first book *Go* was based on the adventures of his Beat friends.

Go (1952)

Summary: Paul Hobbes is a struggling young writer in post-war New York. The novel follows him through parties, bars and jazz clubs as he battles his artistic demons and forges friendships with a group of other would-be artists.

Subtext: Like Holmes, Hobbes is an observer. Although immersed in the Beat Generation he always remains slightly detached, his conservative opinions making him wary of the mad excesses of his friends, David Stofsky (Ginsberg), Gene Pasternak (Kerouac), Hart Kennedy (Cassady) and Albert Ancke (Huncke).

Behind The Beat: Originally titled *The Daybreak Boys* after a nineteenth-century New York river gang, *Go* tells the story of the youthful Beat Generation from the perspective of Holmes' alter ego, Paul Hobbes. As first novels went in the 1950s, Holmes did rather well out of the publication, receiving a $20,000 advance (much to Jack Kerouac's annoyance). He became one of the first commentators on the new movement—even before they had published the work that would make them famous. He is generally credited in accounts of the origins of the term 'Beat Generation' since, according to legend, Kerouac used the term in a throwaway fashion as he chatted to Holmes at one of the many Beat parties. Holmes noted it in his journal for prosperity and used it as the title for a *New York Times* article on his friends in 1952: 'This Is The Beat Generation.'

Hip Or Square?: Never quite willing to become Beat, Holmes instead adopted the less dangerous role of the Beat Generation's first chronicler. 4/5

Herbert Huncke

Herbert Huncke (1915-1996) is often described as the original Beat. A Times Square hustler whose repertoire included hustling, thieving, drug dealing and male prostitution, Huncke was a gutter philosopher. He was one of the principal Beat muses; an authentic vagabond who taught the middle-class Beats the reality of life on the streets (famously, he introduced Burroughs to heroin in the late 1940s). During the 1960s, as the Beat and hippie ethos boomed, his writings were published. Many of these were fragments of autobiography, stories, overheard conversations and observations that he had jotted down in pay toilets and

cafeterias while waiting for his next connection. In his later years he lived in the Chelsea Hotel, in a room paid for by the Grateful Dead.

The Evening Sun Turned Crimson (1980)

Summary: Huncke's autobiographical account of his childhood and his relationship with the Beat Generation in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.

Subtext: To anyone who knows Huncke by reputation as a thief, liar and all-round charlatan, his writing style comes as quite a shock. His simple, honest style is more like a confession than an autobiography, and to his credit he never tries to excuse or defend his actions. He is, as a later book would ironically proclaim, *Guilty Of Everything*.

Behind The Beat: Part autobiography, part historical snapshot, *The Evening Sun Turned Crimson* was first published by Cherry Valley Editions in 1980. The book offers one of the best insights into the early days of the Beat Generation, with Huncke giving warts-and-all portraits of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs. There are some great anecdotes here: Huncke's first meeting with Burroughs (where he takes Burroughs' trademark suit and snap-brim hat as evidence that he's an FBI agent); hanging out with old time junkies in Times Square; smoking dope with the ship's pet monkey on a sea voyage.

Hip Or Square?: The best of Huncke's published writings, a fantastic set of sketches that are testament to a life spent on the wrong side of the tracks. 5/5

LeRoi Jones (aka Amiri Baraka)

LeRoi Jones (b.1934) became one of the leading African-American poets of the early 1960s. Moving from New Jersey to Greenwich Village in 1957, Jones began writing and set up various publishing ventures including the *Floating Bear* newsletter that he co-edited with Diane DiPrima. The mimeographed publication, with just 300 subscribers, became an important part of the Beat literary sphere and eventually ran into problems with the authorities in 1961, when Jones and DiPrima were arrested for distributing obscene material (the issue contained Jones' poetry and excerpts from *Naked Lunch*). The charges were eventually quashed. In 1966 Jones dropped out of white culture altogether, converted to Islam and changed his name to Amiri Baraka. His influ-

ence on African-American literature—as an artist and an activist—is extensive and he is often credited with being the Malcolm X of literature. He is one of the few African-American Beat era writers to have received recognition within the white-dominated movement.

Preface To A Twenty-Volume Suicide Note (1961)

The poems in this collection date from the period 1957-1961 and were written against the background of the Beats' rise to fame and their subsequent loss of popular appeal as they were overexposed in the media. Jones clearly associates himself with the movement, name-dropping Kerouac (in 'In Memory Of Radio') and dedicating other poems to Allen (Ginsberg, one presumes) and Gary Snyder. Yet, although he is closely linked to the Beats (his poetry's irreverence and use of bits and pieces of pop culture are characteristic of the beat aesthetic), Jones also manages to step back from the movement in order to question what the legacy of the Beats will be. In 'Way Out West,' dedicated to Snyder, Jones plays with the San Francisco poets' love of nature by offering an urban-nature poem in which the beauty of the natural world is tinged with hideous images of junkies, rhesus monkeys and brains being sucked out. In 'To A Publisher… Cut Out' he's more direct in his questioning, remarking we have come a long way and are uncertain which of the masks is cool—a fitting comment on the predicament of the Beats after the hullabaloo of media fame had burnt itself out at the end of the 1950s. 3/5

Norman Mailer

Norman Mailer (b.1923) was more a contemporary of the Beat Generation than a proper member of the group. Like his Beat friends, Mailer's life became more notorious than his novels. He secured newspaper headlines in 1960 after he stabbed his second wife (he used a penknife and she escaped without serious injury). Further uproar greeted the publication of *An American Dream* (1965)—where the hero strangles his wife to death and gets away with the murder. Throughout the 1960s Mailer continued to get his name in the papers, with a series of bar-room brawls, arrests and a failed attempt to run for Mayor of New York. Although his 1983 novel *Ancient Evenings* sold for $1 million,

critics have remained dubious about accepting him as the great American novelist that he has always wanted to be.

The White Negro (1957)

Summary: *The White Negro* argues that the hipster (the prototype of the Beats) is a mid-twentieth century hero produced by the stress of the nuclear age.

Subtext: Mailer believes African-Americans are more cool, sexual and primal than their white counterparts.

Behind The Beat: Although Mailer makes an important distinction between the hipsters and the Beats (claiming that the Beats are white, middle-class wannabes), *The White Negro* has become one of the most important non-fiction works about the Beat counter-culture of the 1950s. Written at the height of Beat fever in 1957, *The White Negro* celebrates the hipster's love of sex, jazz and marijuana, claiming that he's a new kind of revolutionary, a hedonistic outlaw who is totally opposed to white, middle-class culture. Although it is sometimes offensive—African-American novelist James Baldwin famously complained that it was yet another myth about black men and sex—it's an important work highlighting the ways in which the hipsters were experimenting with a lifestyle that was the opposite of the nuclear family mainstream. It was, of course, this kind of lifestyle that the Beats wanted to create for themselves.

Hip Or Square?: Mailer is always more square than hip, but in *The White Negro* he proves that he has some idea of where the counter-culture was coming from. 4/5

Gary Snyder

One of the principal poets of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance, Gary Snyder (b.1930) first met Ginsberg in September 1955 when the latter arrived at Berkeley to study for an MA. After reading with his new friend at the Six Gallery poetry event, Snyder became an integral part of the Beat Generation, immortalised by Kerouac in *The Dharma Bums* as Japhy Ryder. A learned student of Oriental literature and philosophy, Snyder was deeply interested in Buddhist thought (and planned to join a Zen monastery in Japan). His enthusiasm for Buddhism encouraged Kerouac and Ginsberg's interest in the subject. Sny-

der's work includes several poetry collections—*Riprap And Cold Mountain Poems* (1959), *Myths And Texts* (1960), *The Back Country* (1968), *Regarding Wave* (1970)—as well as books of prose and interviews.

Riprap And Cold Mountain Poems (1959)

The dominant theme of this early collection is the conflict between life in the city and life in the countryside or woods. Written after Snyder worked in Yosemite in 1955 as a trail crew labourer, the poems in *Riprap* are full of images taken from America's rural landscapes: 'Mid-August At Sourdough Mountain Lookout,' 'Piute Creek,' 'Hay For The Horses.' The title of the collection refers to the man-made trail of cobblestones laid on mountainsides to allow horses to walk without slipping. Making a path or journeying through nature was one of Snyder's recurring themes. Like the Transcendentalists, Snyder believed that the experience of the natural world would allow spiritual growth—an idea that Kerouac would adopt in *The Dharma Bums*. Of course, this rejection of the city was closely tied to Snyder's Zen interests. It's important to note that in *Riprap* Japan becomes a symbol of the poet's belief in a society that isn't as consumer-obsessed as America, something that Snyder touches on in poems such as 'Higashi Hongwanj,' 'Kyoto: March' and 'A Stone Garden.' The poems hope that the spiritualism of the East might offer America salvation. It was a hope that Snyder would develop and rework throughout his career. 3/5

Hunter S Thompson

Although Hunter S Thompson (b.1937) is a writer whose work first found recognition after the Beat phenomenon had ended, he remains an interesting example of how influential Beat culture was. A journalist, novelist and all-round wild boy, Thompson's work grows out of the Beat obsession with experiencing life before writing about it. His subjects include the Hell's Angels, the death of the American Dream (*Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas*) and the presidential elections (*Fear And Loathing: On The Campaign Trail '72*).

Hell's Angels (1966)

Summary: Written as a piece of first-hand reportage, *Hell's Angels* follows Thompson's research into and interviews with various members of the Hell's Angels Motor Cycle Club. In the course of his uneasy friendship with the bikers, he buys a Harley Davidson and joins one of their runs.

Subtext: Thompson's gonzo style—which he used in *Hell's Angels*, *Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas* (1972) and his political writing for *Rolling Stone* magazine—is best described as a form of journalism that requires the participation of the writer in the events that he's reporting. As a result, Thompson always places himself in the firing line, whether he's riding with the Hell's Angels or running for Sheriff to experience the American political system. It's a search for authentic experience that mirrors Burroughs' *Junkie*—the writer adopting a lifestyle in order to report back to the rest of the world.

Behind The Beat: Thompson's brave attempts to befriend the Angels inevitably lead to a savage stomping. Although he tried to prove his macho credentials by displaying his arsenal of shotguns, he was never quite accepted by the greasy bikers, who knew that he was a member of the press and guessed that he'd probably stitch them up at the first available opportunity.

Hip Or Square?: Angry, defiant and always ready to rumble, Thompson takes the Beat's love of first-hand experience to new extremes. 4/5

Alexander Trocchi

Alexander Trocchi (1925-1984) bears the remarkable distinction of being the only Scottish Beat writer. Born in Edinburgh, Trocchi attended Glasgow University. He lived in Paris during the early 1950s, editing the avant-garde magazine *Merlin* from 1952-1955. During these years he was involved with the early Situationists (a group of revolutionary artists). In 1957 Trocchi moved to New York, where he became part of the Beat scene. His literary works include several French-English translations as well as a series of pornographic books written for Maurice Girodias' Olympia Press: *Helen And Desire*, *Thongs*, and *White Thighs*. His most influential works were *Young Adam* (1954) and *Cain's Book* (1961). In the 1960s Trocchi focused his energies on Project Sigma, an underground movement that wanted to kick-start a revo-

lution by putting international artists in contact with one another. This 'Invisible Insurrection,' as one of his essays termed it, would subvert Western society through offering free universities, new methods of publishing and (somewhat optimistically) global chain letters.

Cain's Book (1961)

Summary: Necchi is a Scottish immigrant working as a scow captain on the Hudson River. He is also a junkie and a writer. *Cain's Book* charts his writing of the novel while trying to keep himself in heroin. Various incidents (shooting up with fellow junkies, fulfilling the chores of a scow captain) merge with his drugged recollections (his childhood in Scotland, past sexual encounters).

Subtext: *Cain's Book* ranks with Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* as one of the most important novels about heroin and addiction. Its narrator (Necchi) is an autobiographical creation whose drug experiences mirror Trocchi's own. Necchi slowly becomes Cain, the biblical character who kills his brother and steps outside of society by breaking the rules.

Behind The Beat: Writing *Cain's Book* was a torturous experience for Trocchi. He remained an addict throughout the novel's composition and after he'd spent his advance on drugs, the editors at Grove Press (anxious to see the novel finished) struck a deal with him. He was paid a small contribution for each set of pages that he completed. Produced in this piecemeal fashion, the book became even more disjointed than it was originally destined to be. Unlike Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, *Cain's Book* doesn't offer a fantastic portrait of the junkie's world, but instead a very realistic picture of addiction. In addition to this, Trocchi's tone is defiantly unapologetic. *Cain's Book* is a nihilistic rejection of everything except the artist's own consciousness.

Hip Or Square?: An underground classic, *Cain's Book* was Trocchi's greatest achievement. It was also the last major work he completed before heroin finally robbed him of his creative strength. 5/5

6. Beats At The Movies

If the Beats hadn't come along when they did, Hollywood would have had to invent them. In the 1950s the studios realised that one of the most important audiences for feature films was what is now called the youth market. As post-war affluence spread across America, teenagers suddenly had money in their Levis pockets and were willing (in the words of the song) to spent their 'Saturday Night At The Movies.'

From Elvis to the Beats, the youth craze proved to be a viable film market—both in the sense of films *for* the kids and films *about* the kids. The first wave of films was comprised of sensational pictures fuelled by the media hysteria surrounding the juvenile delinquents, bikers and junkies (*The Blackboard Jungle*, *The Wild One*, *The Man With The Golden Arm*). Designed for adults and parents, these movies offered titillation under the guise of addressing real social issues.

The second wave of films were designed to tap into the youth market itself, appealing to the kids by offering them stories about their lives and loves. Setting up a series of youth stars (most notably James Dean and Marlon Brando) these films were designed to cash in on the kids' own fascination with rebels and outlaws.

But the lucrative youth market didn't just line the pockets of the studio executives. Out of it came the American independent cinema boom of the 1960s. Roger Corman's cheap and cheerful genre films—whose target audience were the Beatnik kids and their hippie followers—allowed a stream of young film-makers (including such luminaries as Nicolas Roeg and Dennis Hopper) to gain first-hand experience working on a film set. These youngsters would later become the key players who brought the 1960s counter-culture to the screens.

The Wild One (1954)

Crew: Director: Laslo Benedek. Producer: Stanley Kramer. Writer: John Paxton, based on *The Cyclists' Raid* by Frank Rooney. Cinematographer: Hal Mohr. Film Editor: Al Clark. Production Designer: Rudolph Sternad.

Cast: Marlon Brando (Johnny Strabler), Lee Marvin (Chino), Mary Murphy (Kathie Bleeker), Robert Keith (Sheriff Harry Bleeker), Jay C Flippen (Sheriff Stew Singer).

Summary: Johnny is the leader of an outlaw motor gang The Black Rebels Motorclub. Riding into a small American town the gang begin to raise hell, upsetting the locals in the process. Johnny falls for waitress Kathie only to discover that she's the sheriff's daughter. When a rival motorcycle gang led by Chino rides into town, a fight ensues. By the conclusion Kathie's love saves Johnny from a life of lawlessness.

The Subtext: Brando is the epitome of Beat cool. His brooding, moody presence is bursting at the seams with hipness, a cool insolence that rejects every established value and symbol of authority. In the film's most famous line of dialogue a young girl asks Johnny what he's rebelling against—"Whattaya got?" comes the surly reply. Brando and his outlaws are Beat prototypes and their dialogue is full of hip talk like "nowhere," "Daddy-O," "crazy" and "squares." They're also based on the outlaw motorcycle gangs of the early 1950s, the gangs who would later evolve into the Hell's Angels.

Behind The Beat: Banned in the UK until 1968, *The Wild One* is actually a pretty tame film with little in it that's likely to rock the fabric of society.

Hip Or Square?: The happy ending, in which Kathie brings her man back into the loving arms of society (and presumably makes him into her husband, son-in-law of a policeman!) is a real drag, but Brando's iconic performance goes down in history as pure hip. (Incidentally, Brando directed and starred in the only hipster western, *One Eyed Jacks* (1961).) 2/5

Rebel Without A Cause (1955)

Crew: Director: Nicolas Ray. Producer: David Weisbart. Writer: Stewart Stern. Cinematographer: Ernest Haller. Film Editor: William Ziegler. Art Director: Malcolm Bert.

Cast: James Dean (Jim Stark), Natalie Wood (Judy), Sal Mineo (John 'Plato' Crawford), Jim Backus (Frank Stark), Ann Doran (Mrs Stark).

Summary: Jim, a troubled young teenager, moves to a new town and starts classes at the local high school. Ostracised by the main gang, Jim finds friends in Judy and the shy, bullied Plato. But trouble continues to follow him. The school bullies force him to prove himself in a series of fights and car races with disastrous results.

The Subtext: Although it's best described as a juvenile delinquent film rather than a true Beat film, *Rebel Without A Cause* deserves a

mention in any survey of Beat cinema simply because so much of the Beats' anti-authoritarian stance grew out of the juvenile delinquent culture in early 1950s America. While most films portrayed the delinquents as working-class slum kids, Nicolas Ray's film explicitly set up Jim as a middle-class teenager. Saddled with unsympathetic parents and challenged by his own peers, Jim only wants to find the space and freedom to do his own thing. Dean became a proto-Beat icon when his early death turned him into some kind of martyr (he was never hip or cool enough to better Brando, though, who had the Beat act down pat).

Behind The Beat: Angry, rebellious and defiant, *Rebel Without A Cause* sows the seeds of Beat discontent. Best of all is Ray's willingness to question gender stereotypes—Jim is forced to be a man by his father and his peers when all he really wants to do is drop out and sit on the sidelines. Meanwhile, Plato's infatuation with Jim (implicitly homosexual) was particularly progressive for a mainstream 1950s movie.

Hip Or Square?: A little too earnest for its own good, but Dean's frustrated anger is powerfully Beat. 3/5

The Blackboard Jungle (1955)

Crew: Director: Richard Brooks. Producer: Pandro S Berman. Writer: Richard Brooks, based on *The Blackboard Jungle* by Evan Hunter. Cinematographer: Russell Harlan. Film Editor: Ferris Webster. Art Directors: Cedric Gibbons, Randall Duell.

Cast: Glenn Ford (Richard Dadier), Anne Francis (Anne Dadier), Vic Morrow (Artie West), Louis Calhern (Jim Murdock), Sidney Poitier (Gregory Miller).

Summary: Richard Dadier starts teaching at a new school. He soon discovers that there's a major discipline problem, with a gang of delinquents terrorising the staff and pupils. Dadier tries his best to teach the unruly class, reaching out to black student Gregory Miller, but after he's wrongly branded a racist the class turns against him.

The Subtext: Like *Rebel Without A Cause* (released the same year), Richard Brooks' film of Evan Hunter's novel deals with the problem of juvenile delinquents. There are striking similarities between Morrow's gang of switchblade-carrying hoodlums and the Beats, particularly their jive talk and their rejection of authority (here cast as the teachers). The gang isn't allowed to develop beyond the usual delinquent stereotypes

and they are clearly labelled as dangerous and wrong by the film's heavy-handed moral code.

Behind The Beat: *The Blackboard Jungle* was a sensational attempt to cash in on the early 1950s hysteria over the delinquents. One tagline read: 'I'm a teacher. My pupils are the kind you don't turn your back on, even in class!' Famously, its 'Rock Around The Clock' soundtrack caused uproar when the film was screened in Britain as Teddy boys rioted in cinemas, ripping up the seats. It's also a message movie—particularly in the way it handles the racism theme.

Hip Or Square?: A film that's more interesting as evidence of how Hollywood approached the youth subcultures, rather than as a film about the delinquents or the Beats. 2/5

Pull My Daisy (1959)

Crew: Directors/ Producers: Robert Frank, Alfred Leslie. Writer: Jack Kerouac. Cinematographer: Robert Frank. Film Editors: Leon Prochnick, Robert Frank, Alfred Leslie.

Cast: Allen Ginsberg (Himself), Jack Kerouac (Narrator), Larry Rivers (Milo), Gregory Corso (Himself).

Summary: Milo, a railroad brakeman, lives with his wife and son in a Manhattan apartment. Two poets arrive at the apartment and wait for Milo's return. They smoke a joint and argue about poetry. Milo returns from work and tells them that he's expecting a guest, a Bishop. The Bishop arrives with his mother and sister and they talk to the assembled company. The poets berate the Bishop about what is holy—"Are alligators holy? Is baseball holy?"—until he leaves.

The Subtext: Generally regarded as the first Beat film, *Pull My Daisy* contains all the classic elements of Beat art. The film's style is improvisational, both in terms of the acting and the way it's shot. The theme is pure Beat—the poets challenge a figure of authority and respectable middle-class values.

Behind The Beat: The incident of the Bishop and his family was (as is so often the case with the Beats) drawn from a real-life discussion between Kerouac, Ginsberg and a Bishop that took place at the Cassady's house in the mid-1950s. Kerouac used the incident as the focus of a play, entitled *The Beat Generation Or The New Amaraean Church* and it was this drama that became the source of the film script. After discovering that *The Beat Generation* had already been registered by

MGM as a film title, the film-makers took *Pull My Daisy* from one of Ginsberg's poems (one critic, John G Handartd, has suggested that 'pull my daisy' refers to taking off a stripper's G string).

Hip Or Square?: The most 'beat' of all Beat films, *Pull My Daisy* is an obscure treat. 5/5

Shadows (1959)

Crew: Director/Writer: John Cassavetes. Producer: Maurice McEndree. Cinematographer: Erich Kollmar. Film Editors: Len Appleson, Maurice McEndree. Production Designers: Randy Liles, Bob Reeh.

Cast: Lelia Goldoni (Lelia), Ben Carruthers (Ben), Hugh Hurd (Hugh), Anthony Ray (Tony), Dennis Sallas (Dennis).

Summary: Hugh is an African-American jazz musician. His younger brother Ben spends most of his time hanging out with his white, Beatnik friends. Meanwhile various young men are courting their sister Lelia. The film follows these three characters through their daily lives in New York.

The Subtext: The most striking thing about *Shadows* is its racial theme. While Ben is clearly African-American, his brother and sister have a light-skinned complexion that allows them to pass as white. The main focus of this passing is Lelia, who has a one-night stand with a white man. After he discovers that her family is black he's so shocked (and so bigoted) that he unceremoniously dumps her.

Behind The Beat: On the strength of *Shadows*, Cassavetes is generally regarded as the father of American independent cinema. Predating the New York Underground film revolution of Andy Warhol and others, *Shadows* is caught between the Beat Generation and the 1960s counterculture. Released in 1959 on a double bill with *Pull My Daisy*, the film won instant critical acclaim. While *Pull My Daisy* has a limited focus—never straying from the apartment meeting between the poets and the Bishop—*Shadows* is much wider in scope, following its Beatnik characters across a New York world of bars, jazz clubs and parties. Although history has proved that Cassavetes' claim that the whole film was improvised—"If we had had a writer we would have used a script"—was rather exaggerated, the film does possess an edgy, rough-and-ready quality that's in keeping with an improvisational piece.

Hip Or Square?: Challenging, independent and full of a very personal vision of life and relationships, *Shadows* is a major film in the Beat cinema canon. 4/5

The Beat Generation (1959, aka This Rebel Age)

Crew: Director: Charles F Haas. Producer: Albert Zugsmith. Writers: Richard Matheson, Lewis Meltzer. Cinematographer: Walter H Castle.

Cast: Steve Cochran (Detective Dave Culloran), Mamie Van Doren (Georgia Altera), Ray Danton (Stan Hess), Fay Spain (Francee Culloran), Maggie Hayes (Joyce Freenfield).

Summary: A serial rapist dubbed The Aspirin Kid is terrorising New York. Detective Dave Culloran tracks him through the coffee houses of Greenwich Village, giving us a glimpse of the lives and loves of the Beatnik kids.

The Subtext: *The Beat Generation* was a B-movie piece of exploitation film-making that wore its cash-in credentials on its sleeve. The original tagline for the picture read: 'The wild, weird, world of the Beatniks! Sullen rebels, defiant chicks, searching for a life of their own! The pads... the jazz... the dives... those frantic 'way-out' parties... beyond belief.' Combining shocking footage of a gang of Beatniks at play, with a salacious story about a serial rapist (what exactly is the connection there?), *The Beat Generation*'s target audience were middle-aged men who had read about the Beatnik phenomenon in the *New York Times* and wanted to catch a glimpse of the sex and drugs lifestyle. Pure titillation, with Mamie Van Doren (the 1950s answer to Pamela Anderson) squeezing into a series of tight sweaters.

Behind The Beat: One of a series of cash-in B-movies starring Beatniks (others include *Bucket Of Blood* (1959), *The Rebel Set* (aka *Beatsville*, 1959) and *Beat Girl* (1959)). It's good trashy fun, though it should be remembered that it was films like this that sounded the death knell of the Beatniks as a counter-culture, sucking them into the mainstream of late-50s America. Movie trivia fans may be interested in the supporting cast, which includes Louis Armstrong (as himself) and cult horror babe Vampira (as a Beatnik poet). There are also roles for James Mitchum (son of Robert) and Charles Chaplin Jr. (son of, well … guess who).

Hip Or Square?: Definitely squaresville, Daddy-O, but unintentionally hilarious. 1/5

Bucket Of Blood (1959)

Crew: Director/Producer: Roger Corman. Writer: Charles B Griffith. Cinematographer: Jacques R Marquette. Film Editor: Anthony Carras. Art Director: Daniel Haller.

Cast: Dick Miller (Walter Paisley), Barboura Morris (Carla), Anthony Carbone (Leonard DiSanso), Julian Burton (Maxwell Brock), Ed Nelson (Art Lacroix).

Summary: Nerdy waiter Walter wants to be as successful as the Bohemian clientele who patronise the café where he works. After accidentally killing his landlady's cat, Walter covers the evidence in plaster. But when the mummified cat is found, Walter's hailed as a talented sculptor. Finally popular and famous, Walter's desperate to keep the in-crowd happy and so does some more sculpting—only this time of humans.

The Subtext: Building on the B-movie trash of *The Beat Generation*, Corman's cheapo horror comedy reworks the Beatniks for the drive-in audience. There's a half-baked message about the vagaries of fame hidden in there somewhere—particularly apt since 1959 was the beginning of the end for Kerouac and friends as media darlings.

Behind The Beat: Admittedly, Beat culture is just another excuse for Corman to put a few Bohemians on screen, but at least *Bucket Of Blood* has the decency to be entertaining. Corman was the master of the low-budget genre flick and this horror comedy is one of his best efforts. It was reputedly shot over just five days and came in so far under budget that Corman had enough money to embark on the ultra-low budget *The Little Shop Of Horrors* (1960). Griffith' s script does a god job of parodying the Beats (with Allen Ginsberg suffering the brunt of the satire) and exaggerates the Beat slang jive talk into complete and utter nonsense.

Hip Or Square?: Jokily affectionate rather than spiteful, Corman's film is the best of the B-movie cash-ins. 3/5

The Subterraneans (1960)

Crew: Director: Ranald MacDougall. Producer: Arthur Freed. Writer: Robert Thom, based on *The Subterraneans* by Jack Kerouac. Cinematographer: Joseph Ruttenberg. Film Editor: Ben Lewis. Production Designers: George W Davis, Urie McCleary.

Cast: George Peppard (Leo Percepied), Leslie Caron (Mardou Fox), Janice Rule (Roxanne), Roddy MacDowall (Yuri Gilgoric), Anne Seymour (Charlotte Percepied).

Summary: Leo Percepied is a San Francisco Bohemian who has an tumultuous affair with French girl, Mardou.

The Subtext: An insight into the Beatnik world, a love story, or just another sign of how overexposed the Beats had become by the early 1960s? At best *The Subterraneans* can be described as a mainstream exploitation picture—'From the book by Jack Kerouac that shocked America' read the taglines—with a colourful Beatnik scene made up of bongo players with goatees, several pretty girls and a few real-life jazz musicians (Art Pepper and Art Farmer) making cameos in a failed attempt to lend some credibility to the Bohemian backdrop.

Behind The Beat: The film venture that Kerouac hoped would mark his emergence as a literary star of the first order turned out to be a dismal mess. Ripping Kerouac's novel to shreds, Robert Thom's screenplay replaces black love interest Mardou with white girl Caron (who is supposed to be French—perhaps the film-makers thought that was a daring enough cross-cultural relationship for clean-cut Peppard to be involved in). Losing sight of the whole point of the novel—i.e. the race theme—MacDougall serves up a half-baked picture that's little better than B-movie cash-ins like *The Beat Generation*. Peppard makes a poor Jack Kerouac and ambles along without much conviction. After *The Subterraneans* he starred in another toothless literary adaptation, *Breakfast At Tiffany's* where the novel's gay plot was shelved in favour of romance between Peppard and Hepburn's characters.

Hip Or Square?: Proof that Hollywood is not the place for literary classics. 1/5

Thee Films: Towers Open Fire (1963), The Cut-Ups (1967), Bill And Tony And Others (1972)

Crew: Director/Cinematographer: Antony Balch. Writer: William Burroughs.

Summary: In *Towers Open Fire*, the best of the short films, Burroughs stars as a resistance fighter. Armed with a Ping-Pong ball gun he battles the forces of Control, storming the Reality Studio. In *The Cut-Ups*, Balch applies Burroughs' literary techniques to film, scenes are cut together randomly, with a voice-over that is equally fragmented:

"Hello—Yes—Hello—Does it seem to be persisting?" Burroughs stars in much of the footage (playing a doctor examining a teenage boy, wandering the city, on the subway) and the final reels were given to an editor who randomly cut and spliced each foot of film together (thereby removing artistic or narrative coherence). *Bill And Tony And Others* (aka *Who's Who*) has Burroughs and Gysin reading from a Scientology text and the script of Tod Browning's cult film *Freaks* (1932). The original plan was to use the film in a live performance where the footage of Burroughs would be projected onto Gysin's face and that of Gysin onto Burroughs' face.

Subtext: Influenced by the cut-up method that Burroughs and Gysin had been experimenting with during the 1960s, the films are the cinematic cousins of Burroughs' Nova trilogy.

Behind The Beat: These films were the result of the collaboration between Antony Balch, Burroughs, Brion Gysin and Ian Sommerville during the years 1962-1970. Rescued from destruction by Genesis P-Orridge in the 1980s, the footage is now collected together (along with other shorter pieces like *William Buys A Parrot* and *Ghosts At No. 9*) under the title *Thee Films*. At the time of their release the films were shown in just a couple of London cinemas, with Balch only managing to get a two-week run for *The Cut-Ups*. Many audiences reacted badly to the disorientating footage—often demanding refunds. Also there was a bizarrely high quantity of bags, coats and umbrellas left in the auditorium after each screening.

Hip Or Square?: Weird, wonderful and difficult viewing—much like Burroughs' novels of the period. 5/5

Chappaqua (1966)

Crew: Director/Producer/Writer: Conrad Rooks. Cinematographer: Robert Franks. Film Editors: Kenout Pettier, Cécile Decugis. Art Director: Régis Pagniez.

Cast: Conrad Rooks (Russel Harwick), Jean-Louis Barrault (Doctor Benoît), William S Burroughs (Opium Jones), Allen Ginsberg (Messiah), Paula Pritchett (The Water Woman).

Summary: Alcoholic junkie Russel Harwick leaves New York to undergo withdrawal treatment at a sanatorium in France. At the château he meets Doctor Benoît and the sinister figure Opium Jones (the personification of his addiction to heroin, and a character familiar from Bur-

roughs' fiction). A hallucinatory period of withdrawal nightmares ensue, which include reworkings of the St Valentine's Day Massacre (with Rooks and Burroughs shooting Tommy guns) and several bizarre encounters with imaginary figures. Eventually Harwick's treatment ends and he leaves in a helicopter. But as he departs he sees himself standing on the balcony of the château, waving goodbye.

The Subtext: The story owes much to Burroughs' fiction, in particular Burroughs treatment of drug addiction in *Naked Lunch*. But Rooks acknowledges the debt.

Behind The Beat: Although *Chappaqua* is a defiantly personal story of addiction, Rooks ensured the film cult Beat status by convincing Burroughs and Ginsberg to appear in it. Ian Sommerville, who had worked with Burroughs on his cut-ups sound recordings and on the Anthony Balch films, played a role in the film's sound production. Rooks was one of the many film-makers who considered the possibility of making a film of Burroughs' novel *Naked Lunch* in the 1960s. When this project never transpired he turned his attention to *Chappaqua's* autobiographical tale of addiction and enlightenment. The original print of the film was acquired by Universal who offered to distribute it, but then let it fall by the wayside in favour of other projects.

Hip Or Square?: Frequently dismissed as little more than a flaccid drug movie, Rooks scores unlimited Beatnik points by convincing Burroughs to play such a fantastic role. 3/5

Heart Beat (1979)

Crew: Director: John Byrum. Producers: Alan Greisman, Micheal Shamberg. Writer: John Byrum, based on the autobiography by Carolyn Cassady. Cinematographer: Laszlo Kovacs. Production Designer: Jack Fisk.

Cast: Nick Nolte (Neal Cassady), Sissy Spacek (Carolyn Cassady), John Heard (Jack Kerouac), Ray Sharkey (Ira).

Summary: The film follows the relationship between the Cassady family and Jack Kerouac during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.

Subtext: Although melodramatic in tone, *Heart Beat* is a fairly faithful adaptation of Carolyn Cassady's memoir *Heat Beat* (that would later become the basis of her book *Off The Road*).

Behind The Beat: Allen Ginsberg is present in *Heart Beat* but is named Ira since the poet objected to the way he was portrayed in the

film. During the period covered by the film Kerouac and the Cassadys had a *ménage à trois*, with both men sharing Carolyn Cassady (at first this was at Neal's instigation but it later began to make him jealous). Despite their great affection for one another (and their shared bisexuality) Neal and Jack never developed their own relationship any further than being just good friends—a fact that had more to do with Kerouac's reservations than Neal's.

Hip Or Square?: A better stab at approaching the Beats than the earlier *The Subterraneans*, *Heart Beat* is a respectable, rather than successful, attempt to translate Beat lives onto the screen. 2/5

Drugstore Cowboy (1989)

Crew: Director: Gus Van Sant. Producers: Nick Wechsler, Karen Murphy. Writers: Gus Van Sant, Daniel Yost. Cinematographer: Robert Yeoman. Film Editors: Curtis Clayton, Mary Bauer. Production Designer: David Brisbin.

Cast: Matt Dillon (Bob), Kelly Lynch (Diane), James Le Gros (Rick), Heather Graham (Nadine), Max Perlich (David). William S Burroughs (Father Murphy).

Summary: Bob and his gang are junkies who support their habit by robbing drugstores. Hassled by the law and quickly running out of pharmacies to rob, they skip town. After the youngest member of the gang overdoses, Bob decides to get straight and checks into a detox hostel where he meets an old-time junky priest, Father Murphy. But Bob's past catches up with him.

The Subtext: Gus Van Sant's drugs film is less preachy than most of the Just Say No scare films about the dangers of addiction. Refusing to moralise, Van Sant maintains a neutral position as his characters play out their roles.

Behind The Beat: Van Sant collaborated with Burroughs during the late 1980s and early 1990s, producing a student film called *The Discipline Of D.E.* (based on a short story in *Exterminator!*) and filming Burroughs in *Thanksgiving Prayer* (1991). In *Drugstore Cowboy*, Father Murphy bears a striking resemblance to the main character in Burroughs' short story 'The Priest They Called Him.' Burroughs and his secretary James Grauerholz rewrote the original scenes for Father Murphy with this character in mind. As a result, Murphy becomes the film's conscience, adding gravitas to the film and taking a radical view on the

US drug policy: “Drugs have been systematically scapegoated and demonised in this country.”

Hip Or Square?: Burroughs’ cameo performance as Father Murphy makes what would have been a good film into a great film. 4/5

Naked Lunch (1991)

Crew: Director: David Cronenberg. Producer: Jeremy Thomas. Writer: David Cronenberg, based on *Naked Lunch* by William S Burroughs. Cinematographer: Peter Suschitzky. Film Editor: Ron Sanders. Production Designer: Carol Spier.

Cast: Peter Weller (William Lee), Judy Davis (Joan Lee/Joan Frost), Ian Holm (Tom Frost), Julian Sands (Yves Cloquet), Roy Schieder (Doctor Benway).

Summary: The year is 1953. William Lee is working in New York as a pest exterminator. His wife Joan becomes addicted to the bug powder that he uses in his work. A giant talking bug recruits Lee for some obscure espionage operation. After shooting Joan, Lee escapes to Interzone (an imaginary Tangiers) and begins to write *Naked Lunch*. Lee finds himself embroiled in a bizarre conspiracy, manipulated by forces out of his control.

The Subtext: Lee’s confusion is part sexual and part artistic. Cronenberg presents the story as Lee’s coming out as both a gay man and a novelist. In imitation of the nightmarish universe of Burroughs’ novel, Lee is manipulated by alien forces, addicted to non-existent drugs (the black meat) and compelled to shoot Joan over and over again (actress Judy Davis plays two characters, both of whom are shot in the forehead by Lee).

Behind The Beat: Since its publication numerous Hollywood players had expressed an interest in the book (even, briefly, Mick Jagger), but no one had ever got past the discussion stage. David Cronenberg was probably the only director who could have tackled Burroughs’ infamously unfilmable novel. His interest in body horror was heavily influenced by Burroughs’ work. Cronenberg’s master stroke was in realising that the novel couldn’t be taken on its own terms. Blending the novel with fragments of Burroughs’ biography, he creates a loose adaptation of the novel that, while different in plot and action, captures the book’s themes of addiction and control.

Hip Or Square?: Although excising most of Lee/Burroughs' homosexuality (an important theme in the novel), Cronenberg achieves what no one else could have—a successful translation of Burroughs' phantasmagoria. 4/5

Miscellaneous Films

As such acclaimed literary luminaries, the Beats found their antics preserved on film and video cameras (indeed, they were positioned as one of the first literary movements to benefit from the mass media of cinema and television). Among the many documentaries and minor films that are centred on or include the Beats the following stand out as particularly interesting:

William Burroughs: The Movie (Howard Brookner, 1983) a series of interviews and archive footage of the author that includes rare footage of Burroughs' alcoholic son Billy, who died during the film's production in 1981.

Commissioner Of Sewers (Klaus Maeck, 1986) combines interviews with performance footage of some of Burroughs' mid-1980s readings.

What Happened To Kerouac? (Richard Lerner, 1985) is a series of testimonials and recollections about Kerouac from various Beat voices (Burroughs, Corso, Edie Parker, Ginsberg, Snyder) that also includes footage of Kerouac's television appearances.

Cain's Film (Jamie Wadhawan, 1969) is a biography of Alexander Trocchi and the story of how *Cain's Book* fell foul of the censors.

Wholly Communion (Peter Whitehead, 1965) is a rarely seen documentary filmed during the International Poetry Incarnation at the Albert Hall where Trocchi acted as Master of Ceremonies and poets such as Corso, Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti (as well as many others) performed.

The Life And Times Of Allen Ginsberg (Jerry Aronson, 1986) is a biography of the Beat poet laureate with recollections from Burroughs, Norman Mailer, Abbie Hoffman and others.

7. Resource Materials

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Magazines

BeatScene. A hip magazine devoted to all aspects of Beat lives and art. Back issues and subscriptions are available from their Website http//www.beatscene.freeserve.co.uk or from 27 Court Leet, Binley Woods, Near Coventry, Warwickshire, CV23 2JQ. Email: kev@beatscene.freeserve.co.uk

The Kerouac Connection. A literary journal devoted to the life and works of Jack Kerouac and the other members of the Beat Generation. Running for over 15 years, *The Kerouac Connection* is one of the best literary journals on the movement. Their Website is at http://www.angelfire.com/ca2/kerouacconnection. Contact: kerocon-nec@aol.com or PO BOX 7250, Menlo Park, CA, 94026-7250.

Webpages

Beat Generation Resources. A useful starting place, offering links to a variety of Beat-flavoured Internet sites. http://www.connectotel.com/marcus/beatfaq.html

The Beat Museum is an excellent online resource, full of art, photographs and extracts from Beat writers. http://www.beatmuseum.org/

The Beat Page is a professional-looking resource with plenty of photos and information. The main focus is on novels and poetry, with individual pages given to each of the main Beat writers. http://www.rook-net.com/beatpage/

Literary Kicks has been running since July 1994 and is still one of the best Beat sites around. It focuses on four main areas: the Beats; the Bohemians; the Transcendentalists; and the 1960s Counter-culture. A wealth of material for any Beatnik fan. http://www.litkicks.com

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More than 20 years after his death, Alfred Hitchcock is still a household name, most people in the Western world have seen at least one of his films, and he popularised the action movie format we see every week on the cinema screen. He was both a great artist and dynamite at the box office. This book examines the genius and enduring popularity of one of the most influential figures in the history of the cinema!

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Kubrick's work, like all masterpieces, has a timeless quality. His vision is so complete, the detail so meticulous, that you believe you are in a three-dimensional space displayed on a two-dimensional screen. He was commercially successful because he embraced traditional genres like War (*Paths Of Glory*, *Full Metal Jacket*), Crime (*The Killing*), Science Fiction (*2001*), Horror (*The Shining*) and Love (*Barry Lyndon*). At the same time, he stretched the boundaries of film with controversial themes: underage sex (*Lolita*); ultra violence (*A Clockwork Orange*); and erotica (*Eyes Wide Shut*).

Film Noir by Paul Duncan, £3.99

The laconic private eye, the corrupt cop, the heist that goes wrong, the femme fatale with the rich husband and the dim lover - these are the trademark characters of Film Noir. This book charts the progression of the Noir style as a vehicle for filmmakers who wanted to record the darkness at the heart of American society as it emerged from World War to the Cold War. As well as an introduction explaining the origins of Film Noir, seven films are examined in detail and an exhaustive list of over 500 Films Noirs are listed.

Noir Fiction by Paul Duncan, £3.99

For every light that shines, there must always fall a shadow, a dark side - Noir. Noir has infiltrated our world, like some insidious disease, and we cannot get rid of it. The threads of its growth and development have been hinted at but no-one has yet tried to bind them together, to weave the whole picture. This book takes you down the dark highways of the Noir experience, and examines the history of Noir in literature, art, film, and pulps. Sensitive readers are warned - you may find the Noir world disturbing, terrifying and ultimately pessimistic. Features: Jim Thompson, Cornell Woolrich, David Goodis, James Ellroy, Derek Raymond, Charles Willeford and more.

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The directors of the French New Wave were the original film geeks - a collection of celluloid-crazed cinéphiles with a background in film criticism and a love for American auteurs. Having spent countless hours slumped in Parisian cinémathèques, they armed themselves with handheld cameras, rejected conventions, and successfully moved movies out of the studios and on to the streets at the end of the 1950s.

Borrowing liberally from the varied traditions of film noir, musicals and science fiction, they released a string of innovative and influential pictures, including the classics *Jules Et Jim* and *A Bout De Souffle*. By the mid-1960s, the likes of Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, Louis Malle, Eric Rohmer and Alain Resnais had changed the rules of film-making forever.

Bollywood by Ashok Banker, £3.99

Bombay's prolific Hindi-language film industry is more than just a giant entertainment juggernaut for 1 billion-plus Indians worldwide. It's a part of Indian culture, language, fashion and lifestyle. It's also a great bundle of contradictions and contrasts, like India itself. Thrillers, horror, murder mysteries, courtroom dramas, Hong Kong-style action gunfests, romantic comedies, soap operas, mythological costume dramas... they're all blended with surprising skill into the musical boy-meets-girl formula of Bollywood. This vivid introduction to Bollywood, written by a Bollywood scriptwriter and media commentator, examines 50 major films in entertaining and intimate detail.

Mike Hodges by Mark Adams, £3.99

Features an extensive interview with Mike Hodges. His first film, *Get Carter*, has achieved cult status (recently voted the best British film ever in *Hotdog* magazine) and continues to be the benchmark by which every British crime film is measured. His latest film, *Croupier*, was such a hit in the US that is was re-issued in the UK. His work includes crime drama (*Pulp*), science-fiction (*Flash Gordon* and *The Terminal Man*), comedy (*Morons From Outer Space*) and watchable oddities such as *A Prayer For The Dying* and *Black Rainbow*. Mike Hodges is one of the great maverick British filmmakers.

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