

*"The Heart Beat of America: A Beatnik Collection"*

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In high school, I once dated a boy who was something of a rebel - an intellectual punk kid who liked to cause ruckuses and shock our fellow classmates with his radical ideas. In all actuality, he wasn't much of an original character and our relationship did not last long - the only thing of his that left a lasting impression on me was his love of Beatnik poetry and literature. I remember the day that I picked up his copy of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* as the day that I realized why my rebel then-boyfriend was so enchanted by the Beatnik movement - the earnestness and sheer urgency of Kerouac's writing was enough to give me fever with desire for that kind of real life. I read *On the Road* in one afternoon, and when I finished it, I knew that I had just embarked upon a literary journey that I would never forget.

"What is that feeling when you're driving away from people and they recede on the plain till you see their specks dispersing? - it's the too-huge world vaulting us, and it's good-by. But we lean forward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies." This quote, from *On the Road*, sums up the necessity that I felt, upon finishing the novel, for living life as it would move me, rather than living blindly by socially acceptable perceptions. Like Kerouac's main character, Sal Paradise, I aim to live fully and outside of my personal conventions and inhibitions. Unlike so many of my peers, whose main concerns lie not with the world as a whole, but in their own private worlds which contain only those whose lives intimately touch their own, I do not want to exist uninformed, ignorant, or sheltered. Or rather, I want this entire world in all its glory and pain to shelter me.

Before discovering these extremely frank and manic writers, I was one of many that found little merit in American writers and literature, and generally basked in the eloquence of all things European. However, Beatnik writing has truly opened up my eyes to the beauty of this country and all her writers. To me, these writers - in particular, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Charles Bukowski, Diane Di Prima, Gregory Corso, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti - helped define a distinctly American genre of literature with this country in mind. Their rebellious nature reflects, for me, the very essence of how this country was founded, and relates a call for Americans to forsake the materialism that held society (and still does) and retreat into inner spirituality.

This collection, though small, is continually being added to, hindered only by lack of funds. I have learned to scan used bookstores' poetry shelves for the familiar 4 by 5 inch City Lights Books with the black bands on the top of bottom of each cover denoting a "Pocket Poets Series" book, and for the lengthy and amusing titles of Bukowski's poetry. Regardless of their condition or age, I will continue to cherish these free-spirited and determined writers.