

# **Rise and Decline of Beat Literature**

Afsana Tabassum

12303002

Department of English and Humanities

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Inspiring Excellence

BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

# **Rise and Decline of Beat Literature**

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Afsana Tabassum

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### **Abstract**

In the post-World War II America, beat generation started its journey to find a new vision of life that would enable people to experience life with freedom and hope; and to find that new vision, literature was the method that made the connection between the journey for the new vision and the new found faith and spirituality. Beat literature produced great literary works that would inspire generations to overcome personal struggle, as well as the fear of social and cultural restrictions, material society and global conflicts. This dissertation attempts to trace the origin of beat literature, its characteristics and its decline, as well as its remaining legacy as it continues to influence numerous subcultures and cultural and political movements.

## Introduction

Beat Literature was a short lived but highly influential era of literature that surfaced throughout the 1940s and 1950s. A group of young American authors known as “Beat Generation” originated this extraordinary form of literature along with other cultural phenomenon that were considered rebellious in the then American culture and lifestyle. One of the biggest reason for which this literature was inspired to be created was perhaps the aftermath of World War II. The political tension and the humanity crisis caused a great sense of despair in the American youth. At the same time, there was a want for abandoning the old forms of social norms and values and move past the stigmas of racism and sexism. All these contributed to the philosophy of beat generation. Beat generation influenced a lifestyle of freedom and spirituality through various adventures, exploration of faith and beliefs and experiments with drugs and sexuality. The impact of this phenomenon can be recognized by the cultural elements and movements that were inspired throughout its timeline and later years. Beat generation died out by the end of 1960s. Even though the practice of beat literature ended with the decline of beat generation, it should not be considered as the failure of this cultural and literary movement. This paper will discuss how the association and influence on society, culture and politics prove the reason behind the sudden rise and decline of beat literature; which was to start a flow of change in various aspects of life that was very much needed it that time period and would lead the way for the days in future.

In this paper, I will highlight different characteristics of beat literature, as well as the elements that inspired the beat writers. I will be focusing on the lives of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg and their literary creations. In the first chapter of my paper, I will briefly talk about these two beat figures to introduce beat generation and will give a brief discussion on Kerouac’s

1957 novel *On the Road* and Ginsberg's poem "Howl". These two publications perfectly bring out different sides of beat literature and can help the readers understand the dynamics of this literary and cultural movement. My second chapter will discuss the important aspects of society and culture that are most prominent in beat literature: revival of the "American Dream" and romanticism, religion and spirituality, jazz, race and diversity, drugs and sexuality. I will try to show how these important elements helped to create this amazing form of literature and turn into a subculture and social movement. In these two chapters, I will mention how mainstream society and academics had dismissed beat from any kind of literary discussion; at the same time how it was accused of being "offensive" and threatening to social and religious values. In the third chapter, I will show how these barriers and some other things caused the decline of beat literature. Finally, in my fourth chapter, I will show the aftermath of beat literature. I will discuss, even after all the negligence and refusal from the mainstream society, writers of beat generation and their philosophy and creations continued to influence people to rebel against the society; not to bring chaos and destruction, but to show a form of protest and inspire people to live life with spirituality, creativity and spontaneity.

America during the 1940s and 1950s was full of lost hopes and dreams. At one side, there was the humanity crisis throughout the world after the end of the World War II and on the other hand, there was the grasp of capitalism and establishments that mostly resulted in financial downfalls of the American commoners. Moreover, the collision of traditional American values and the freedom of American dream resulted into mental and social despair. Lucien Carr, one of the influential figures of the beat generation, described himself and his friends as a "rebellious group" in the mid-1940s; who were "trying to look at the world in a way that gave it some [new] meaning. Trying to find values... that were valid. And it was through literature that all this was

to be done”; he and his friends were inspired to create a “New Vision” that would challenge the existing social conventions.<sup>1</sup> In order to do that, the beat writers decided to express the raw emotions of life: no control, no restriction. Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* which was in one way- a journey to celebrate life in America, on the other hand it carries the dark and conflicting moments of one’s journey in the road of life:

I realized these were all the snapshots which our children would look at someday with wonder, thinking their parents had lived smooth, well-ordered lives and got up in the morning to walk proudly on the sidewalks of life, never dreaming the raggedy madness and riot of our actual lives, our actual night, the hell of it, the senseless emptiness. All of it insideendless and beginningless emptiness. Pitiful forms of ignorance (“Road” 231).

Beat writers wanted their readers to know and realize these dilemmas in life; because they recognized that the road towards self-discovery would never be easy; still the journey was worth all the emptiness.



## Chapter 1: Beat Generation

“Beat Generation” refers to the group of writers and inspirational figures that wrote and inspired beat literature; as well as it can refer to the subculture that was based on the alternative lifestyle of beat writers. It usually refers to the writers, poets and other figures such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Carl Solomon, John Clellon Holmes, William Burroughs, Diana Di Prima, Neal Cassady and many more who started this literary and cultural movement.

Jack Kerouac is one of the most important and successful writers of beat generation. He was born on March 12, 1922 in Lowell, Massachusetts, United States. Kerouac was interested in writing since he was a little child. He decided to become a writer at the age of seventeen, inspired by a local young poet named Sebastian Sampas (Chapter 1). Kerouac’s favourite writers ranged from Walt Whitman to Saroyan, Hemingway and Wolfe. However, his writing style was influenced by the jazz musicians. He used the beats and rhythm of the genre to help create his own writing style which he described as “spontaneous prose”. Just like the rhythm of jazz, Kerouac used a combination of short and long lines of stream of consciousness to design his writing style. Jack Kerouac wanted to find the meaning of life through travelling. His travelling was the primary source for the storylines of his novels including *The Town and the City*, *On the Road*, *Doctor Sax*, *The Dharma Bums*, *Mexico City Blues*, *The Subterraneans*, *Desolation Angels*, *Visions of Cody*, *The Sea Is My Brother* and *Big Sur*. Characters from most of these novels are based on the people from Kerouac’s life who are also part of the beat generation. His life and work was hugely influenced by his friend Neal Cassady whom he met in 1945. Cassady’s lifestyle influenced Kerouac to embark upon various journeys and take interest in spiritual and spontaneous lifestyle. Jack Kerouac’s most successful novel is *On the Road*. It was published in 1957. This was one of the few beat writings that earned fame during the timeline of

beat generation. However, praise about this book made the mainstream media to take interest in the alternative lifestyle of the novel's characters. He could not make them understand the underlying meanings of the characters' lives and recognize the literary components of his writing. In 1969, Jack Kerouac died at the age of 47 due to alcohol related complications.

Another important member of beat generation was Allen Ginsberg. He was born in New Jersey on 3 June in 1926 and died on 5 April, 1997 in New York. Allen Ginsberg was influenced by Walt Whitman's poems and started to write about political and cultural issues from a very early age. He used to write letters to *The New York Times* regarding various issues including the World War II and the following crisis in economic sector. He met fellow beat writers including Jack Kerouac and Lucian Carr during his first year in university and immediately started to emphasize on his writing as a career (Raskin). Through his poems Ginsberg showed his strong anti-establishment sentiment and opposed materialism and sexual and cultural repression. He continued to spread the message of new vision throughout the following years of beat generation's timeline. He was hugely influential in the psychedelics and peace movements involving rock music.

Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* was published in 1957. The story of the novel revolves around the life of Sal Paradise, his fictional alter ego. Sal's meeting with his friend Dean Moriarty results in the numerous trips across North and South America which gives them the opportunity to experience life like never before. Dean is a fictional alter-ego of Neal Cassady. Together, they travel America and try to connect with the people from different background. At the end of the novel, Sal finds himself alone just like the beginning of the novel; but he feels like he is not the same person anymore as he has learnt about the things in life that he could not achieve due to the restriction of the traditional lifestyle and barriers of the society ("Road").

Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" was published in 1956. In this poem Ginsberg talks about substance abuse, rejection of the beat writers and the life of homosexuals in the restricted society. He also created fictional stories to imitate the stories of his friends. Like most of Ginsberg's poem, "Howl" shows the style of breath-length poetry.

## Chapter 2: Social and Cultural Aspects

### 2.1 Reviving the American Dream and Romanticism

Jack Kerouac and many fellow beat writers' works can be regarded as the most individualistic and uncompromising of the romantic recrudescence after World War II- which is adequately demonstrated by brief comparative considerations of the work of Salinger, Purdy, Knowles, and Kesey.<sup>2</sup> With the rise of modernism, American romanticism was almost invisible from the pages of literature and all walks of American life. Beat writers were always eager to bring back the romanticism of American culture. They valued nature and believed in the old American dream that promised a life of freedom and happiness for every American regardless of race, ethnicity or any other background.

Walt Whitman, who emphasized on the importance of American dream and freedom after the end of the civil war, was a big influence in Jack Kerouac's life. Kerouac considered Whitman to be the most important poet of America. Just like Whitman, Kerouac wanted to bring change by communicating with the common people- the real America. This tendency was evident in Kerouac and other beat writers' literary creations, as they tried to create characters from all walks of life carrying different opinions and values. They also applied words and phrases used in common spoken language of various states of America rather than depending entirely on the pure literary format; an idea originally coined by Whitman. This allowed the beat writers to connect and express the hopes and dreams of the American people that exceeded the boundaries of reality: "Kerouac was not writing in the language of history, of course, but in the language of imagination; his creation of himself is a self-writ large in the Whitmanesque sense" (Weinreich). John Tytell, one of the few admirers of beat literature during its timeline, saw this optimistic side of the beat generation. According to him, they were "optimistically proclaiming

with egalitarian gusto the raw newness and velocity of self-renewing change in America while joyously admiring the potential of the common man” (Tytell).

Travelling was an important and hugely influential part of Beat generation. Many of the beat writings were based on the travelling of the writers. The most prime example is Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*:

We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind, and performing our one and noble function of the time, move. And we moved! We flashed past the mysterious white signs in the night somewhere in New Jersey that say SOUTH (with an arrow) and WEST (with an arrow) and took the south one. New Orleans! It burned in our brains. From the dirty snows of 'frostyfagtown New York,' as Dean called it, all the way to the greeneries and river smells of Old New Orleans at the washed-out bottom of America; then west (“Road” 121).

Beat writers believed that the travelling would give them the taste of nature and people from different culture. It was also a way to abandon the everyday life of an American that required 9 to 5 jobs and absolutely no freedom to practice freedom or imagination. Travelling was a way to escape this materialistic life and find inspirations to start a new journey in life. In *On the Road*, Sal and his companions cross borders after borders, each one waving at them with new hopes and dreams: “As we crossed the Colorado-Utah border I saw God in the sky in the form of huge gold sunburning clouds above the desert that seemed to point a finger at me and say, Pass here and go on, you're on the road to heaven” (“Road” 166). Kerouac on various occasions, called his journeys as a journey of “purity” that will get rid of all the dirt from the money-hungry society’s teachings (Bill 396).

Here, once again Walt Whitman's influence can be found in Beat, as both Whitman and Beat writers saw travelling as an invitation to self-discovery. Whitman on several occasions mentioned travelling as a way of finding out one's true identity as well as getting to know the vast land and diversity of America:

Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good-fortune,  
 Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,  
 Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms,  
 Strong and content I travel the open road (Whitman ll. 4-7).

The later critics of Beat literature saw Kerouac's travelling in life and literature as the continuation of Walt Whitman's journey to open road (Larson).

## **2.2 Religion and Spirituality**

The writers and poets of beat generation did not believe in institutionalization of religions. They thought that most of the leaders of these institutes and followers did not do justice to their own faiths; instead they emphasized on the rules and regulation and control on people's lives and mind. Beat writers wanted to oppose this situation. When Puritans wanted to establish their "humble" way of life and oppressed anyone who did not want to follow this American Puritanism and showed hypocrisy in the society with the influence of power and wealth, writers like Nathan Hawthorne chose literature to show their protest against the norms of the religious activities and the society. They were not against the path of God; they were against the wrongful use of religious faith and sentiment that restricted people's life and mind. Similarly, Jack Kerouac and the beat writers wanted to use their literary creations to rebel against the religious stigmas: "For the crucifix I speak out, for the Star of Israel I speak out, for the divinest

man who ever lived who was German (Bach) I speak out, for sweet Mohammed I speak out, for Buddha I speak out, for Lao-tse and Chuang-tse I speak out" ("Origins").

Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" is one of the most influential and controversial publications of Beat literature. Published in 1956, this poem talked about many things in life that was considered "scandalous" in the 1950s crude American society. The most talked about element of this poem was the description of homosexuality. This ultimately resulted in an obscenity trial just after the publishing of the poem; which was disputed a year later as the poem was decided as not an obscenity (Bill). However, the continuation of calling out the poem as "devil's words" and "howl against civilization" was still going on. Ginsberg, like other beat writers had to come forward defending his creation: "'Howl' is an 'Affirmation' by individual experience of God, sex, drugs, absurdity... The poems are religious and I meant them to be" ("Original Draft").

Beat writers were drawn towards the spirituality of Eastern faiths. Kerouac in particular, who was influenced by his friends to follow the path of Zen and Buddhism, talked about the impact spirituality in many of his writings. In *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity*, Kerouac talked about his take on Buddhist philosophy, which includes nature, meditation and spirituality. Unlike most religious publications, Kerouac reflects both the fullness and emptiness of faith. At the same time, he highlights on the fact that religious guidelines should not restrict people's minds; it should open them: "Roaring dreams take place in a perfectly silent mind. Now that we know this, throw the raft away" ("Golden Eternity"). Beat writers wanted to rebel against the mandatory applications of religious sentiment into personal lives. Kerouac over and over emphasized on the freedom of the mind and saw the religious books as guidelines which will depend on each individual's interpretation and personal ability: "When you've understood this

scripture, throw it away. If you can't understand this scripture, throw it away. I insist on your freedom ("Golden Eternity")

*The Dharma Bums* is another important novel in Beat literature. The novel is highly influenced by Kerouac's interest in Zen Buddhism in his real life. In the novel, the characters search for spirituality in the form of art and life as they try to make amends between faith and everyday life. *The Dharma Bums* also emphasized on humanity, which is overlooked from the society for the sake of class, social position and politics. The practice of helping others has been highlighted in this novel and showing kindness has been compared to worshipping God- a sentiment that is very common in most established religions: "One man practicing kindness in the wilderness is worth all the temples this world pulls" ("Dharma Bums"). The novel also talks about the presence of the Creator, among his creations, especially in the nature. The characters of the novel go through this realization which reflects the teachings of Buddhism that emphasizes on being close to nature: "Down on the lake rosy reflections of celestial vapor appeared, and I said, "God, I love you" and looked to the sky and really meant it. "I have fallen in love with you, God. Take care of us all, one way or the other." To the children and the innocent it's all the same ("Dharma Bums").

Beat generation did not glorify the road to spirituality as something consisting of only the brightness of relief and happiness, they were always careful about noting the darkness that it came with. Seeing the world and its people in its core somehow result in emptiness and heartbreak, but within this darkness there is a sense of life at the end of the dark tunnel:

Stare deep into the world before you as if it were the void: innumerable holy ghosts, buddhies, and savior gods there hide, smiling. All the atoms emitting light inside wavehood, there is no personal separation of any of it. A hummingbird can come into a



house and a hawk will not: so rest and be assured. While looking for the light, you may suddenly be devoured by the darkness and find the true light (“Golden Eternity”).

### **2.3 Jazz**

John Clellon Holmes, who wrote the first Beat novel *Go*, talked about the impact of Jazz in Beat generation in that same novel: “In this modern jazz, they heard something rebel and nameless that spoke for them, and their lives knew a gospel for the first time. It was more than a music; it became an attitude toward life, a way of walking, a language and a costume; and these introverted kids... now felt somewhere at last” (Holmes).<sup>3</sup> Jazz music was a source of endless inspiration for the beat writers- both in literature and lifestyle.

Jazz was a unique form of music for its unconventional beats and rhythm. Beat writers use the same technique of beat in their creations; especially Kerouac’s spontaneity and rhythm can easily be synchronized with the beat of jazz. Kerouac spent many days and nights in the jazz joints and clubs with the fellow writers and companion, dancing to the beat of the music. His admiration for this genre of music is often noticed in his writings. He even brings up his favorite artists, such as: Charlie Parker, Thelonius Monk, and Dizzy Gillespie. In a 1968 interview, Ginsberg talks about Jazz and its influence on Kerouac’s writing: “Yeah. Kerouac learned his line from--directly from Charlie Parker, and Gillespie, and Monk. He was listening in '43 to Symphony Sid and listening to "Night in Tunisia" and all the Bird-flight-noted things which he then adapted to prose line”.Ginsberg himself used the rhythm and meters of jazz notes instead of traditional European writing style: “I could see that [Ginsberg] was picking up the language and rhythm of jazz, that he wasn't following the European tradition” (Joans). “Howl” was massively influenced by jazz saxophonists Lester Young and Charlie Parker. While writing *On the Road*, Kerouac mentions Jazz as the source of happiness: “I don’t care what anybody says... but I’m

pulled out of my shoes by wild, I like Saturday night in the shack to be crazy, I like the tenor to be woman-mad, I like things to GO and rock and be flipped, I want to be stoned if I'm going to be stoned at all, I like to be grassed by a back-alley music..." ("Windblown World"). The merging of slow and fast tempo in one single track symbolizes the dual directions of life, a common reflection that is highlighted by the beat writers:

Jazz served as the ultimate point of reference, even though, or perhaps even because, few among them played it. From it they adopted the mythos of the brooding, tortured, solitary artist, performing with others but always alone. They talked the talk of jazz, built communal rites around using the jazzman's drugs, and worshipped the dead jazz musicians most fervently. The musician whose music was fatal represented pure spontaneity (Maynard).

Kerouac also compared the name "beat" to the beat of jazz: "beatitude, not beat up. You feel this. You feel it in a beat, in jazz real cool jazz" ("Windblown World").

## **2.4 Diversity**

One of the most notable things of the beat writers was their engagement with people from different background. Kerouac and other beat writers' love for travelling across America and go through the roads of South America involved to seek opportunity to connect with the people from different race, ethnicity, cultural and religious and background.

I have talked about the influence of jazz music in the life and philosophy of beat writers. Jazz musicians at that time were mostly African Americans; which was one of the biggest reasons why this genre of music was not being recognized by the society. Beat writers, despite being white Americans, broke the barriers of race and got in touch with the jazz musicians. This

connection proves that America can shine at its fullest when all the people can connect with each other and live in harmony.

Beat novels and poems extensively show the mingling of people from different part of the society. *On the Road* shows the adventures of Sal and describes how he got out of his frustration by meeting people from all walks of life. The novel starts with Sal being an all American college boy whose life is limited within the borders of a traditional middle class society and its values. As the novel progresses, Sal's character also starts to develop as he comes out of his shell and joins Dean in the journey through the heartlands of America. From enjoying large festivals to dancing and singing in the jazz clubs, it did not just involve sex and drinking, it helped Sal to experience life as it is without being judgmental and superficial. His exploration also improves his imagination and inspires him to be creative. His times spent in Mexico fascinated him with the simple living of the people, as well as inspired him with the presence of "freedom" and magical atmosphere. Kerouac's writing did not showed Mexico as "the other", but it showed it as a land of wonderful spirit and liveliness that has always been ignored by the first world society: "We would be mistaken to assume that the momentum of Sal and Dean's "magic" transcendence were built upon colonialist imaginations... Dean Moriarty established Mexico's "magic" as special, setting him and Sal apart from generations of American "imperialists"" (Chandarlapaty 162).

The union of jazz musicians and beat generation was a huge step towards the process of America's coming out of its racial stigma. It helped the people of white community to understand the struggle of black community; as a result many white Americans got involved in the protests for civil rights for African Americans.

## 2.5 Drugs

Allen Ginsberg's quoted French poet and adventurer in his journal explain influence of drugs in his creative process and life in general: "The poet becomes a seer through a long, immense, and reasoned derangement of all the senses. All shapes of love, suffering, madness. He searches himself; he exhausts all poisons in himself, to keep only the quintessences..."; this somehow sums up beat generation's involvement with drugs to facilitate the discovery of new hopes that will help them to become great writers (Charters xi). Beat writers would often take the help of drugs to have the "Zen" experience in order to connect with the Eastern beliefs and spirituality. They felt like it was a way to escape the material culture of capitalist America.

Jack Kerouac's experiences with drugs can be witnessed through the marijuana-infused dreams of Sal in *On the Road*:

I was so high I had to lean my head back on the seat; the bouncing of the car sent shivers of ecstasy through me. The mere thought of looking out the window at Mexico - which was now something else in my mind - was like recoiling from some gloriously riddled glittering treasure-box that you're afraid to look at because of your eyes, they bend inward, the riches and the treasures are too much to take all at once. I gulped. I saw streams of gold pouring through the sky and right across the tattered roof of the poor old car, right across my eyeballs and indeed right inside them; it was everywhere... For a long time I lost consciousness in my lower mind of what we were doing and only came around sometime later when I looked up from fire and silence like waking from sleep to the world, or waking from void to a dream... ("Road" 259)

This void was very much necessary for the beat writers as they wanted to clear up their mind from the hypocrisy of American society and move on with the new vision of life.

Beat generation's experiments with drugs later lead to the era of psychedelic which inspired an entire generation to create art, literature and music by experimenting drugs and connecting imagination with real life.

## **2.6 Sexuality**

Beat generation spent their lives in ways that were completely different from traditional American lifestyle. Sexual freedom was one of the most striking parts of that alternative lifestyle. In 1940s and 1950s America, sex was still very much a subject of taboo and any kind of experiment with it would result in massive backlash and criticism from the society.

Beat generation writers spent their time with drugs, alcohol and sex; and they made no attempts to hide their way of life. As a result, the writers and their literary creations took the blame of being "vulgar", "anarchists" and "devils". Despite all the criticism, beat writers continued to lead their way of life by rejecting the old norms and establishing the importance of freedom. They did not want to "break" anyone's faith; they wanted to break free from the cages of the society.

In beat novels and poems, sexual identity has been emphasized as a part of the characters' personality. In *On the Road*, one of Sal's first impression on Dean was: "Dean had dispatched the occupant of the apartment to the kitchen, probably to make coffee, while he proceeded with his love problems, for to him sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life, although he had to sweat and curse to make a living and so on" ("Road" 4). Details about Dean's sexual life did not put Sal in any uncomfortable position, because just like Dean, Sal also did not see sex as a dirty act. He saw it as a form of expression and a very natural act.

Sexual freedom was not accepted in the 1940s and 1950s America. Especially, for women, it was even more complicated. In the post-World War II era, women were being pressured to go back to the cocoons of household to adapt to the old life of “Puritanism” instead of American freedom. In *On the Road*, Kerouac brings out the hypocrisy of society by showing the sexuality of women and the reaction from others. Marylou, who was a love interest of Dean, and briefly for Sal, showed that misogynist part of the society. While Dean continued to live his life of adventure and spontaneity and called himself spiritual; his comment on Marylou’s similar lifestyle was completely different. As Marylou left for Denver, Dean response to that was by calling her a “whore!” (“Road 5). Kerouac tried to show that, within the struggle for freedom, sexuality was still more complicated for women than men. It also symbolizes the position of female members of the beat generation. While some of the beat writers were being recognized even for a briefest moment, female authors were completely dismissed by the society. Diana Di Prima talks about these struggles in her creation *Memoirs of a Beatnik*.

During beat generation’s timeline, homosexuality was not anyway accepted in American society; but it came up frequently through the characters’ lives in various novels and poems. Beat generation’s one of the biggest figures- Allen Ginsberg was an openly gay person.

Representation of people various sexual orientations lead the way for the acceptance of homosexuality in American culture and society.

In the beginning of “Howl”, Allen Ginsberg writes:

who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes on  
the windows of the skull,  
who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their money in  
wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through the wall,

who got busted in their pubic beards returning through Laredo with a belt of  
 marijuana for New York,  
 who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise Alley, death, or  
 purgatoried their torsos night after night  
 with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and endless  
 balls,  
 incomparable blind streets of shuddering cloud and lightning in the mind leaping  
 toward poles of Canada & Paterson, illuminating all the motionless world of Time  
 between, ("Howl" ll. 12-23).

These lines symbolize Ginsberg's own life of being rejected by the scholars and academics for being a beat writer. At the same time it shows how the life of a homosexual person was in the 1950s America. Fear of being exposed to society and then the ultimate rejection from the society resulted in the life of drugs, alcohol and sex. However, Ginsberg did not sound apologetic about this life. He declared that it was the life they were in, no matter how they ended up there, it was their life now.

Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* portrays gay characters in the storyline. Carlo Marx, who is the fictional alter ego of Allen Ginsberg, is shown as a very enthusiastic writer who likes to be out of the limelight all the time. He accompanies Dean and Sal in various trips, but he still keeps himself calm and tries to analyze the situation by himself. His weakness for Dean was only noticed by Sal. Carlo's quiet personality is completely opposite from the "fag" whom Dean and Sal come across in a hotel. This particular character was expressive about his sexual life and did not seem to hide his desire to spend the night with Sal and Dean. This is how *On the Road* portrays the lives of two gay men and shows how their lives are just as diverse like others.

### Chapter 3: Decline of Beat Generation

From the beginning, Beat Generation had faced endless criticism and backlash for their literature and lifestyle; and most of it was directed towards the writers' personal life and views:

From the pages of *Life* and *Partisan Review*, contemporary scholars have inherited two key interpretive lines that I want to call into question here: first, the tendency to view the beat movement rather narrowly as a literary or cultural impulse; and second, the inclination to judge this impulse negatively, as a revolt against rather than a protest for something (Prothero 205).

During the beat's timeline, *Life* magazine compared the beats with communists and anarchists. In 1958's "Partisan Review", a review of Kerouac's *On the Road*, Norman Podhoretz grouped Beat generation with Nazis and Hell's Angels: "The Bohemianism of the 1950s is hostile to civilization; it worships primitivism, instinct, energy, blood... This is a revolt of the spiritually underprivileged and the crippled of soul". It seemed like, the critics were unable to view the true purpose of beat literature, which was to confront the traditional views and move past them to follow the new vision with spontaneity and open-mind; instead, the vocal critics only extracted the struggle of the journey: "Where is the 'affirmation of life' in all this? Where is the spontaneity and vitality? It sounds more like an affirmation of death to me" (Podhoretz).

Except for the early days of handful of beat writings, beat generation was almost ridiculed by the critics and academics. Moreover, the attempt to dismiss the literature by putting negative connotation on the poets' and authors' personal lives sucked the life out of the beat writers.

All these negativity was a big reason that caused the fall of one and only group beat writers. The same writers who wanted to drown the despair of the world, which they were able to do to some extent by their writings and the following; could not survive to drown themselves in



the process. Allen Ginsberg, who was the one of the most popular and perhaps the longest-running representative of the generation, talked about the personal and career tragedies of his fellow writers in "Howl": "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, / starving hysterical naked," ("Howl"ll. 1-2).

Beat Generation finally started to receive a kind of academic following at the beginning of the 1990s, which was way past the end of Beat generation:

For the beat generation of the 1940s and 1950s, dissertation time is here.

Magazine and newspaper critics have gotten in their jabs. Now scholars are starting to analyze the literature and legacy of the beat writers. In the last few years biographers have lined up to interpret the lives of Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs, and publishers have rushed into print a host of beat journals, letters, memoirs, and anthologies (Prothero 205).

## Conclusion

Beat generation's short lived timeline is not a sign of failure as within this short period of time, beat generation has given the world wonderful literary creations and endless inspirations to be driven in life.

One of the biggest effects of beat generation is "Psychedelia"- a subculture that has been developed through the experiments of psychedelic drugs and appreciating art and life through the realization of life extracted from the experiences. Beat generation established the basis for the following psychedelic culture and its evolution until the present time (Ruiz).

Psychedelic experience is dependent on the use and experience of drugs and the most prominent element is Lysergic acid diethylamide, otherwise known as LSD. The first recorded LSD experiment was done and experienced by Swiss scientist Albert Hofmann ("Psychedelic Studies"). Soon the drug reached the hands of many psychologists, psychiatrists, philosophers and writers- including beat writers. Beat writers like Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs started to take "trips" of drugs that would take them into the world colorful and abstract imagination. Their experiments inspired others to do the same which ultimately resulted in the creation of psychedelia.

With the help of beat generation psychedelic culture helped to define and inspire numerous social and cultural movements regarding art, gender, sexuality, freedom, peace, environment, veganism and much more. The most important element of psychedelics was its music which inspired musicians like Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and even the members of the Beatles- who are the most prominent and influential artists who shaped the genre of rock music and popularized it throughout the world. While talking about the influence of beat generation, Bob Dylan said: "I came out of the wilderness and just naturally fell in with the Beat

scene, the bohemian, Be Bop crowd, it was all pretty much connected,...It was Jack Kerouac, Ginsberg, Corso, Ferlinghetti ... I got in at the tail end of that and it was magic ... it had just as big an impact on me as Elvis Presley” in a 1985 interview (Wilentz).

Beat generation’s original intension, which was to create a new vision in order to move past the life of despair, was continued by later movements. The hippies followed the ideology to become more eco-friendly and free-spirited by ignoring the traditional norms of the society as well as the fast rising capitalist society. This phenomenon turned into more political during the Vietnam War. People showed a sense of rebellion against the government who were forcing the people to join the brutal war which many saw as an unnecessary display of power and bloodshed. 1969’s rock music festival "An Aquarian Exposition: 3 Days of Peace & Music" at the Woodstock saw the biggest turnout of this revolution (“Rolling”). Similarly in 1971, “Concert for Bangladesh” was held in Madison Square Garden to raise fund for the Bangladeshi refugees who were being ignored by the rest of the world during the Liberation War. On November 1971, Allen Ginsberg wrote the poem “September on Jessor Road” while visiting the refugee camps, to describe the nightmare of the war.

Decline of beat literature was no way a failure; in this paper I tried to show that true success of beat generation and its literature lies within the evolution and flourishing of various cultural and social movement. My aim in the paper is to show that in a way, beat literature continued to spread their message about finding the true meaning of life with exploration and searching for aesthetic pleasure. As an admirer of rock music, I tried to trace back to root of its inspiration and found beat literature as the true leader of this form music and many other forms of art and subcultures. In a world full of conflicts, beat literature can be a great source of inspiration to move past the conflict and hatred.

End Notes

1. Extracted from Ann Charters' "Introduction" to Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*.

2. Extracted from *JACK KEROUAC: Prophet of the New Romanticism* by Robert A. Hipkiss. Published by The Regents Press of Kansas.

3. John Clellon Holmes was a beat writer and poet who wrote *Go*; which is considered to be first Beat novel. It was published in 1952. The characters in the in this novel is based on the author and his close friends Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and Neal Cassady.

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