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Beat to Death:

The Beat Generation's Impact on Neal Cassady

The Beat Generation is one of the most influential movements in American literature. The lives of these writers are just as fascinating as their stories and poetry. The most important members and contributors were writer Jack Kerouac, poet Allen Ginsberg, and their best friend, lover, and muse Neal Cassady. These three men, as well as others along the way, would redefine the roles of men in a post-World War II America as well as create a new image for the country. Arguably, it was Cassady who was the catalyst for this movement, but he hardly wrote a word. He came to New York from Denver, where his past was fabricated and unbelievable, to have Kerouac teach him how to write. Cassady, the conman, wanted to learn from Kerouac and then from Ginsberg. He was immortalized in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* as Dean Moriarty, the rebel from Denver, who always chose adventure over responsibility. Allen Ginsberg wrote him as a "secret hero" in his most famous poem "Howl" (Ginsberg 136). Both Kerouac and Ginsberg idolized Cassady but for different reasons. Cassady himself is an enigma, his entire life story a fabrication. He grew up on the streets of Denver, stealing cars and hustling. He was also an altar boy and a father of three, and even tried his hand at writing with his unfinished autobiography *The First Third*. With the help of Kerouac, he managed to make his life into what would later be the embodiment of the Beat Generation. Kerouac made him seem far more adventurous than Cassady perhaps really wanted to be. Ginsberg, on the other hand, drew upon Cassady's

sex life in his poetry, focusing on Cassady as a sex symbol. Both interpretations took a heavy toll on Cassady as he attempted to keep up with the demands of those who had read *On the Road* and “Howl.” For the rest of his life he would try to uphold the standards imposed on him by his friends and the youth of generations to come. The impact of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Cassady can be seen in every aspect of the writers’ lives. The standards they set for Cassady became the standards they themselves had to live up to and die by.

Kerouac and Cassady

Hal Chase, a friend of Kerouac’s, talked constantly about the legend of Cassady, a man he knew from Denver. It seemed everyone who knew Cassady was eager to talk about him. Cassady’s wife Carolyn first heard about Neal from friend Bill Thomson: “He’d tell me all these wild stories and great escapades that he and this other guy, Neal Cassady, had done, only he took most of the credit for himself. But I still was beginning to think this Cassady guy was pretty fantastic” (Gifford and Lee 107). Carolyn was not the only one captivated by her soon-to-be husband. Kerouac also found Cassady compelling. Kerouac was fascinated with the stories he had heard about Cassady and the stories Cassady told himself. Kerouac described him as “some long-lost brother; the sight of his suffering bony face with the long sideburns and his straining muscular sweating neck made me remember my boyhood” (Watson 83). Perhaps the stories of Cassady’s youth were what attracted Kerouac. Even Ginsberg felt that connection, saying when “Neal came in, in ’46, there was a lot of recollection of childhood adventure-fantasy” (Gifford and Lee 47). Kerouac’s own childhood was less than ideal. His older brother Gerard was very sick and died young. His family, especially his mother, mourned the loss of Gerard greatly. Gerard had been seen as the most wonderful and precious boy in their entire neighborhood. He had a special connection with their Catholic faith and everyone, including the nuns of their church, considered the young boy a saint. Kerouac especially saw his brother as such. The family kept his portrait in the house, remembering the young boy as a martyr. Even at four years old Kerouac saw the impact his older brother had on his

family (Watson 21). Kerouac lived his childhood in solitude and grew up to be a quiet, unhappy man. He lived with his mother in New York City after moving from his hometown of Lowell, Massachusetts. He wrote his first novel *The Town and the City* while living in the apartment with his mother. Then Cassady came to town.

Cassady was everything Kerouac wanted to be. Cassady seemed to fill a void in Kerouac's life left by his brother's death. He was fascinated with the stories Cassady told and his life was more interesting than that of Kerouac's. His childhood alone was more than anything Kerouac could imagine. When the two first became friends, "Neal was not at that point to Jack the sort of mythic figure he became later. Jack was all excited by Neal—by his energy, by his ability to function, and so forth" (Gifford and Lee 124). Kerouac had been a shy and quiet person who lived very much in his head. He filled his childhood with imaginary friends until he made real ones in the late 1940s at Columbia University. While Kerouac was reserved, coming from a very traditional lower-middle-class family, "Neal reached out for whatever he wanted, whether it was a girl or a car. He was unburdened by doubts about motive or method. He bragged that he had his first girl when he was nine and stole his first car when he was fourteen" (Gifford and Lee 83–84). This "bragging" caught Kerouac's interest. The wild childhood of Cassady, a childhood about which the world may never know the entire truth, was fascinating to the introverted Kerouac.

Cassady was a conman. Every relationship he entered into, whether it be friendship or romantic, he wanted something in return. He had been conning and hustling to survive in the streets of Denver. He was seen as a user and a nuisance to some. He was always borrowing money from people, sleeping in their apartments, asking for rides and meals. A lot of people from different generations saw that quality personified in him and in the Beat Generation. The Beats romanticized the vagabond ideals because they had come from Cassady himself. Poet John Clellon Holmes described Cassady's artistry: "Neal...was not a cruel con man. He wasn't just making a score with you, he needed something to go on to the next moment, and you could come with him if you wanted to. I never felt hustled

by Neal. I must have given him twenty-five bucks over the years, which was just chicken feed, but he always returned more than that—in good feelings and in energy and discovery” (Gifford and Lee 125). Cassady was a good man. He wanted desperately to be liked by everyone and do the right thing. He always paid everyone back for the things they gave him. He was always nice to everyone, he “never put anyone down” (Gifford and Lee 125). He had a real authenticity to him and always wanted everyone to be happy. He was legitimately interested in everything people had to say.

Kerouac lived vicariously through Cassady. Cassady’s stories of adventure made him feel inferior. He had lived a cautionary life for so many years and now there was this man who was breaking all the rules. Kerouac hung onto every word Cassady said. He took the letters Cassady had sent him from across the United States and they inspired him to write *On the Road* (Gifford and Lee 85). This novel would be starkly different from his first novel, *The Town and the City*, which dealt with traditional issues of family. *On the Road* would be a liberation for Kerouac who would have to abandon his mother’s side and finally get some experience of his own. Cassady was his catalyst for living and Kerouac became successful by writing about him. Not only was his content based on Cassady, but his revolutionary free-verse, spontaneous prose was inspired by him. Cassady’s son John discussed his father’s influence: “Jack wrote like Neal talked because Neal had such a love of life and so much energy Jack would just sit there and write down some of the passages when Neal was driving. He wouldn’t write it verbatim, of course, but I think he really documented my dad well” (*Love Always, Carolyn*). *On the Road* focused on the escapades of Cassady, Kerouac calling him “Dean Moriarty” in the published version. He wanted to write about Cassady, who gave him more than enough material. The two of them spent their lives making up new stories about the creation of Cassady; Cassady’s own creations were published posthumously in his autobiography. Dean Moriarty was a new American hero, or an anti-hero, as he embodied all the non-typical values of a new and disillusioned era. Clellon Holmes thought “‘Dean Moriarty’ became the sort of image or metaphor that he did...because people were

feeling that way” (Gifford and Lee 126). He was quickly becoming a figure in literature that others (besides Kerouac) could live through vicariously. They could read the stories of a man who chose adventure over responsibility and who left the real world behind. Kerouac would go on to describe Cassady as an “American Saint” not only in his writings but as a constant adjective for his best friend (Kerouac 141). Even Ginsberg could see the correlation in Cassady: “Don’t you remember how you made me stop trembling in shame and drew me to you? Don’t you know what I felt then, as if you were a saint...?” (Watson 84). Many times Kerouac’s Catholic background affects his descriptions of Neal. He refers to him as “holy Neal” and puts him on a pedestal of being pure and good, rather than Ginsberg’s view of Cassady as a sex symbol. Cassady had replaced the role of his saintly brother, saying, “What is all the holy feeling I have for holy Neal, maybe he’s my brother at that; it was you first said we were Blood brothers, remember?” (Watson 83). The fictitious life of Cassady soon dominated his real one. Everyone was seeing him as more than just a poor, Catholic American boy. They wanted him to be so many things that validated the crazy and exaggerated stories. The pressure to live up to these standards would eventually ruin his life and ultimately lead to his untimely death.

Kerouac’s *On the Road* is his most famous work of fiction. It is hard to say the entire work is fiction because it was a document of his seven-year journey across the United States. It follows Dean Moriarty, the Cassady character, as he darts back and forth leading many lives, searching for the truth about his father and his past, “the portrait of a man racing to make up for any and all lost time” (Gifford and Lee 87). People were captivated by Cassady and found an outlet in him much like the one Kerouac had found. The entire novel is an homage to Cassady, perhaps even a hagiography of the “American Saint.” His life and adventures were documented and studied by later generations longing to find solace from a disenchanting American culture.

The opening lines of *On the Road* set the relationship between narrator and main character: “I first met Neal not long after my father died...I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won’t bother to talk about except that it really had something to do with

my father's death and my awful feeling that everything was dead" (Kerouac 109). Cassidy in a sense saved Kerouac and filled a void from the death of his father. From the first mention of Cassidy, the reader assumes the entire novel will further the idea that the narrator sees Cassidy as his savior. Cassidy has done an amazing deed and will spend the rest of the novel and his life fulfilling his role as the savior and redeemer character. He has resurrected Kerouac from his feelings of death and despair and opened a new chapter in his life, a sort of a rebirth: "With the coming of Neal there really began for me that part of my life that you would call my life on the road" (Kerouac 109). The word "coming" evokes a biblical feel, as though Cassidy has been delivered like an angel to help Kerouac through the dark time in his life. Immediately it is clear that Cassidy will always be a hero. The first five pages tell of Cassidy's life in the rambling fashion for which Kerouac would soon be famous. His observations enhance the reader's view of Cassidy. The first interjection he makes is a confession of love: "Nonetheless I loved him for his madness" (Kerouac 111). He describes the importance of madness a few pages later, saying "the only people that interest me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones that never yawn or say a commonplace thing... but burn, burn like roman candles across the night" (Kerouac 113). Kerouac likens madness to the most important quality he can find in anyone and Cassidy is the epitome. As the novel progresses, it is obvious that Cassidy never sleeps and is always saying something fascinating; he truly burns like a roman candle with his immense, mad energy.

Early in the book Kerouac describes Cassidy as "simply... tremendously excited with life, and though he was a con-man he was only conning because he wanted so much to live and also to get involved with people that would otherwise pay no attention to him" (Kerouac 112). This is the great summation of Cassidy. The holy conman, that crazy, dumb saint that wanted so much from every part of life, would take what he wanted at the drop of a hat regardless of the consequences just because he wanted to be liked. This is his fatal flaw, as wanting to be liked forced him to keep up people's *On-the-*

Road-altered ideas of what he should be. Kerouac was willing to overlook any sort of deception. Kerouac makes a bold statement that will forever explain his bias towards Cassady: “He was conning me, so-called, and I knew it, and he knew I knew (this had been the basis of our relation) but I didn’t care and we got along fine” (Kerouac 112). Kerouac knew Cassady was a delinquent. He was aware of the lifestyle Cassady had acquired in his youth. He did not attempt to change him and he enjoyed the Cassady that had come from the pool halls of Denver. Over the years, Cassady would ask for money from not only Kerouac but even his mother, he would abandon Kerouac in San Francisco and continue traveling without him. But Kerouac was always dragging behind after his idol like a teenager following a rock band across the country.

Later, Kerouac again writes of feelings of despair. He had reached a level of ecstasy that he had strived for in his life, which ended in a vacuum of fear, feeling as though he was “hurrying to a plank where all the Angels dove off and flew into infinity. This was the state of my mind. I thought I was going to die the very next moment” (Kerouac 274). His fears were crippling him after a moment of elation. His attack of panic ended and “that was the way Neal found me when he finally decided I was worth saving” (Kerouac 274). He holds his entire worth in the eyes of Cassady. It was Cassady who decided whether Kerouac lived or died. Cassady is his guardian angel, keeping watch over him and letting him live his life to its limits. Here it is clear that Kerouac dedicates his existence to Cassady’s compassion and love. Cassady is the only one who can ever save him. He must always be at Cassady’s side, or have him at arm’s length. He is his security blanket and the only one who can make things right.

The novel finishes with the crazy trips with Cassady. They went across the United States and Mexico, creating pacts and cementing their friendship. Nothing bad ever happens when the two are together. It is a beautiful story of post-war America, a country that will never be seen again. It shows a picturesque country that has been created by Cassady, a picture that would not have been created without his insistence and without Kerouac’s insight. The novel ends as it begins, thinking of Cassady, “...and nobody, just nobody knows

what's going to happen to anyone besides the forlorn rags of growing old, I think of Neal Cassady, I even think of Old Neal Cassady the father we never found, I think of Neal Cassady, I think of Neal Cassady" (Kerouac 408). The reader cannot get away from Cassady. And neither can Kerouac.

Ginsberg and Cassady

At Columbia University, Ginsberg met Lucien Carr, the first man to catch his affection. Ginsberg was attracted to the beautiful Carr for his looks and intellect. Before entering Columbia, Ginsberg's sexuality had been kept quiet. He always had strong feelings towards men, but in the early part of the 20th century, it was not something to embrace. Hiding his sexuality caused him stress and once he got to Columbia and away from his family, he began to feel comfortable expressing his sexuality. Carr was the first person he met who challenged the types of people who had surrounded him growing up. Carr had been kicked out of many prep schools and universities before ending up at Columbia. He was highly intelligent and was the first person Ginsberg met who influenced him to pursue poetry rather than law (Miles 33–37). Carr was a poet, sensitive and open. To Ginsberg, he was wildly fascinating. However, Carr was caught in a love triangle with long-time admirer David Kammerer. In 1944, Carr stabbed Kammerer to death and dumped his body in the Hudson River (Miles 45–47). Before Carr went to prison, he introduced Ginsberg to his then-girlfriend's friend's boyfriend, Jack Kerouac.

Kerouac briefly attended Columbia University. He was an athlete going to Columbia on a football scholarship after spending an extra year at prep school to prepare him for the university's academics. Kerouac fought constantly with his coach and then injured his leg. He was failing his courses and was asked to leave. He then joined the Navy as a merchant marine. It was between trips that he met Ginsberg (Miles 42). After their first meeting, Ginsberg recalled how he "remembered being awed by him because [he]'d never met a big jock who was sensitive and intelligent about poetry" (Miles 42). He found him physically attractive as well. Kerouac was tall and athletic with very masculine features. Ginsberg liked his

brooding “Québécois moodiness” and found him “extraordinarily sensitive, very intelligent, very shrewd and very compassionate... toward the awkward kid. He was gruff but inquisitive” (Miles 42). Like Carr, Kerouac had found interest in Ginsberg. For most of his life, Ginsberg had been shown very little affection, so when these men showed interest in him, he took to them immediately. The two started spending time together and had long conversations about existential ideas and poetry. They had very similar thought processes. Kerouac was glad to have found someone who thought the same way he did (Miles 43). Kerouac left for the Merchant Marines but returned quickly after an incident with a man with whom he was sailing. Too embarrassed to tell his family that he had returned, he stayed with Ginsberg. It was then that Ginsberg told Kerouac he was homosexual and confessed his affections for Kerouac. He felt very safe and comfortable with Kerouac because of his tolerance and forward ideas. He knew Kerouac would “accept [his] soul with all its throbbing and sweetness and worries and dark woes and sorrows... cause that was the same thing he had” (Miles 51). Ginsberg also admitted that he wanted to sleep with him. Kerouac groaned; it would be another year and a half until the two had any sexual encounters (Miles 51). Between Carr and Kerouac, it is easy to see the type of man to whom Ginsberg was attracted. Both men were handsome and interested in Ginsberg. Their intellect and their unconventional ideas attracted Ginsberg and he would forever be infatuated with similar minds. It is easy to see the traits Ginsberg admired and he would find them all in Cassady.

From the minute Ginsberg saw Cassady, he was in love. They met at mutual friend Vicki Russell’s apartment when Kerouac stopped by with Cassady who was in town with his sixteen-year-old wife LuAnne. The men had come to buy marijuana and Ginsberg, already high, was captivated by him (Watson 83). This first meeting was a huge event in the Beat Movement, documented in *On the Road*: “A tremendous thing happened when Neal met...Allen Ginsberg. Two keen minds that they are they took to each other at the drop of a hat. Two piercing eyes glanced into two piercing eyes...the holy con-man and the great sorrowful poetic con-man that is Allen

Ginsberg. From that moment on I saw very little of Neal...I couldn't keep up with them" (Kerouac 112). Cassady was quite a man. He had every quality that Ginsberg wanted. First of all, Cassady was handsome. Barry Miles, friend and biographer of Ginsberg, described Cassady as "neatly dressed, muscular and athletic with a broken Roman nose and a wide, clear-eyed Western smile. He looked a lot like Kerouac" (Miles 80). Both Kerouac and Cassady looked like the epitome of American men, but, like Carr, Cassady had a history. While Carr came from a family of wealth and private schools, Cassady came from almost nothing. For the majority of his childhood he lived in a Denver flop house with his alcoholic father. He grew up hustling pool, conning people, skipping school, and traveling the country. It was local philanthropist Justin Brierly who saw the intellectual potential in Cassady. He attempted to mold Cassady, as he had done with many other young men, into an upstanding gentleman. His plan did not pan out as Cassady left Denver with a friend named Hal Chase. Cassady had heard about Kerouac from Chase and he wanted desperately to meet him and learn to write from him. Cassady was a man full of stories and a "tremendous energy and enthusiasm, in addition to his physical beauty, [that] attracted both Allen and Jack to him. He was another sensitive football player. For Allen, it was like meeting another Kerouac. His early conversations with Neal, in fact, were much like his early talks with Jack" (Miles 81). Ginsberg had met a copy of Kerouac, but only Cassady had the reckless energy that Ginsberg found fascinating. Cassady, in his quest to be an intellectual, found interest in Ginsberg. As with his other infatuations, the smallest amount of affection and attention caused Ginsberg to fall desperately in love.

The first sexual encounter between Cassady and Ginsberg left a resounding impact on his life and poetry. After a night with friends, Cassady, Ginsberg, and Kerouac walked home. They decided it was too late for Kerouac and Ginsberg to go home so the two stayed with Cassady in the apartment that he was sharing with a friend. Ginsberg and Cassady shared a cot. He was nervous about being close to someone with whom he was infatuated. Cassady sensed his nervousness and embraced him, telling Ginsberg to "Draw near me"

(Miles 82). That night the two had sex. Kerouac was there and the event was also documented in *On the Road*: “Allen was queer in those days...[the] former boyhood hustler...wanting dearly to learn how to write poetry like Allen, the first thing you know he was attacking Allen with a great amorous soul such as only a conman can have... I mused and said to myself ‘Hmm, now something’s started’” (Kerouac 113). Here is another instance where Cassady the conman shows his face. He had embarked on a relationship with Ginsberg while in the throes of a marriage and courtship with two other women. Cassady had hustled men in Denver, but never identified himself as a homosexual. He was giving Ginsberg what he wanted, sex, so that Cassady could get what he wanted, to be taught to write. It was almost the same con he was working with Kerouac. Regardless of intent, the event thoroughly boosted Ginsberg’s self esteem and he became more comfortable with himself. Cassady was the first person to accept his advances immediately. Long after Ginsberg’s love confession to Kerouac, the two did have sex, although begrudgingly and unromantically in alleyways. This gave Ginsberg a higher opinion of Cassady; he saw him as a lover rather than just a friend. Over the next two weeks, their relationship overcame Ginsberg. In his journals, he wrote of his fantasies with Neal and of how completely in love he was. Most of his previous sexual encounters were unsuccessful; now that he was enjoying sex, he did not want it to end. But the struggles of having an affair with a married man took a heavy toll on him. He knew it could not last; in a letter from Cassady on March 30, 1947, he said, “I say I fear, for I really don’t know how much I can be satisfied to love you, I mean bodily, you know I, somehow, dislike pricks & men & before you, had consciously forced myself to be homosexual, now I am not sure whether with you I was not just forcing myself unconsciously, that is to say, any falsity on my part was all physical, in fact, any disturbance in our affair was because of this” (Gifford 11). At the time, Cassady was splitting up his time between his wife LuAnne (as he was trying to divorce her), his girlfriend (and future wife) Carolyn, and Ginsberg. Carolyn wrote how Cassady tried so desperately to keep everyone happy and that he “tried to juggle several relationships simultaneously and felt it advisable to keep them

separate and secret from one another” (Gifford iv). Kerouac and Ginsberg created different roles for Cassady who tried very hard to uphold his friends’ ideals.

Ginsberg treated Cassady like a god. In his mind, Cassady was the first man he could truly confide in and the first man to accept him. Ginsberg had made a list: “Whom I love most in the world, in this order: Neal, Eugene, Jack, Bill—I should die for these—Lucien, Joan, Huncke, Neal” (Watson 52). He listed Neal before his brother Eugene and before Jack, too. He loved him so much that he put him on the list twice. His immense adoration for Cassady was a hindrance in Cassady’s life. While Ginsberg set standards for Cassady, his poetry flourished. He wrote two poems, one of them explicitly about Cassady and one calling attention in just one stanza but casting him as a legend. Because of this, Cassady struggled to live a life of his own, and always felt like he had to uphold these immense roles.

Ginsberg’s most famous poem is “Howl.” This poem can be seen as the embodiment of the rebellion and disillusionment of the post-World War II generation. Ginsberg examines the effect drugs had on the men of his generation, how poverty and the changing economic status of America was doing a great disservice to its youth. The poem was written very much from his own experiences. He saw the returning soldiers moving up in the world, the emergence of a new middle class, and an America that was trying desperately to be the most powerful country in the world. As America ignored the cries for help, Ginsberg saw the consequences of this changing country. He wrote of a new disenchanting America whose hero was Neal Cassady.

The poem deals with a new type of sex. In this time, sex was not seen as something done for recreation. With the new ideals of the middle class, monogamy and procreation were the most important values. But here there is someone “who sweetened the snatches of a million girls trembling in the sunset, and were red eyed in the morning but prepared to sweeten the snatch of the sunrise, flashing buttocks under barns and naked in the lake” (Ginsberg 136). According to Ginsberg, someone who could sleep with so many girls was seen as a hero, as someone who conquered this vast amount of women. This man has done his heroic duty of pleasuring a million

women and still had time to keep going until the next day, laboring on for the good of the sunrise. The phrase “sweetened the snatches of a million women” is especially positive. By using the term “sweetened” it shows this man has had sex with these women in a special way, as though they were making love rather than having a premarital sexual encounter between strangers. The hero being “red eyed in the morning but prepared to sweeten the snatch of the sunrise” gives him the quality of a soldier “prepared” to carry out his duties no matter the costs. In the next stanza, this hero’s quest continues: “who went out whoring through Colorado in myriad stolen night-cars, N.C., secret hero of these poems, cocksman and Adonis of Denver—joy to the memory of his innumerable lays of girls in empty lots & diner backyards, moviehouses’ rickety roadside lonely petticoat upliftings & especially secret gas-station solipsisms of johns, & hometown alleys too” (Ginsberg 136). N.C. is Neal Cassady, some editions of “Howl” stating his name in full. Just mentioning Colorado and stolen cars is enough information to put Cassady’s name into the initials. In this stanza, Ginsberg has built up Cassady to epic proportions. “Cocksman and Adonis of Denver” is quite a daunting title. The list of various places of sexual encounters is long and nontraditional. With his stolen car and nighttime cruising, Cassady is seen as very cool and rebellious, perhaps drawing on Kerouac’s version of him. His attraction is magnetic as “innumerable” girls have given into his flattery and charm and have slept with him in cars and in movie theaters. In ten lines of poetry, just a small percentage of the final poem, Ginsberg has created exceedingly high expectations for Cassady.

The poem “Many Loves” was written ten years after Ginsberg and Cassady’s first sexual encounter. The opening line says, “Neal Cassady was my animal: he brought me to my knees” (Ginsberg 164). Even after ten years, he still thinks of Cassady as something he had no hope to truly be. He describes Cassady as superhuman, his “great arm like a king’s”, his “pectorals of steel” (Ginsberg 164, 165). His use of hyperbole shows Cassady as this mythical creature, something of legend. Ginsberg fell for Cassady initially due to his handsomeness and his fascinating past fabricated by Cassady and Kerouac. In “Howl” he evoked much of Cassady’s

past in a heroic context. “Many Loves” is a much more sentimental and personal poem written about a single night in their history. Even though this poem discusses the extremely intimate night the two shared, Ginsberg incorporates Cassady’s past. He describes Cassady through the stories of his childhood and the life he led that had been fabricated and exaggerated for years. He describes Cassady’s body “rounded in animal fucking and bodily nights over nurses and schoolgirls” (Ginsberg 165). The person he is now is only because of the countless sexual encounters he has claimed to have and all the women who have thrown themselves at Cassady’s feet and begged him to sleep with them. He spends many lines describing Cassady’s “ass of long solitudes in stolen cars, and solitudes on curbs, musing fist in cheek...of a thousand farewells, ass of youth, youth’s lovers... of mystery and night! ass of gymnasiums and muscular pants...of high schools and masturbation ass of lone delight, ass of mankind so beautiful and hollow, dowry of Mind and Angels” (Ginsberg 165). He evokes the same events of Cassady’s past as in “Howl,” the stolen cars and “innumerable lays.” He muses to Cassady’s ass, describing it as it came to him, formed by the stories created by Cassady and Kerouac. He says Cassady’s ass has been created by angels, perhaps referring to Kerouac’s writing. This is how Ginsberg saw Cassady in his skewed image of the man he had fallen in love with. It is even more interesting that Ginsberg still felt this ten years later. In that time, Ginsberg had moved on, taken up with Peter Orlovsky (Ginsberg’s life-long partner) and became a successful poet. It can be said that Ginsberg’s poetry was versatile enough to have survived without the Beat influence. The same cannot be said about Kerouac’s novels. Ginsberg put Cassady on a pedestal that night they met in 1947 and nothing Cassady could do would ever get him down.

Kerouac wrote himself into a grave. His adoration for Cassady and his need to tell the world about his friend killed him. He became a hopeless alcoholic and died of cirrhosis of the liver at forty-two years old. Cassady died a year earlier, found naked on railroad tracks in Mexico. At hearing the news of his best friend’s death, Kerouac refused to believe it. He would never accept the death of Cassady because he had been a hero, the legend of *On the Road* as well

as nearly every other book Kerouac published. There was another reason Cassady could not die. He was a saint, an angel that had helped Kerouac get over the roughest times in his life. Kerouac spent his entire career defending and creating the Cassady everyone had come to see as the anti-hero in American literature. Dean Moriarty could never die. Ginsberg mourned the loss of his best friend and lover and always remembered him as the “cocksman and Adonis of Denver” because Cassady’s freedom of sexuality gave Ginsberg enough confidence to live his life how he had wanted, without fear of romantic rejection. Cassady not only saved Kerouac, but Ginsberg as well. While Kerouac wanted to honor him as a saint, Ginsberg wanted him to be a sex symbol. Both ideals took a toll on Cassady who felt obligated to live up to them. His best friends ultimately killed him. The Beat Generation came at the cost of many lives, first the murder of David Kammerer in 1944 and ultimately Cassady in 1968 followed by Kerouac in 1969. The world will forever read the books and poems dedicated to Cassady. People will always remember the Beats. While the impact can still be felt in the 21st century, it will always be heaviest on those three men, Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Cassady.

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