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**The Beat Generation in Mid 20th Century North America:
Conception of a New Social and Artistic Identity**

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Acquisition of a Magister
Degree in American Literature.**

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Academic Year: 2014-2015

Dedication

I dedicate this work first to my dear parents Yahia and Saleha, my grandmother Mimi and twin sister Hassiba whose constant presence and permanent love have truly guided me all along this experience; to my uncle Allel, my aunts Zouzou and Latifa, and all my cousins who have always believed in me.

Special dedication goes to my best friend Sihem who has assisted me from the very beginning, and thanks to whom I became acquainted with the Beat Generation. And finally, I dedicate it to all my friends whom I salute for their presence either from near or far.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Allah the almighty who granted me the strength and good will necessary for the accomplishment of this humble work. Then, I would like to thank all my teachers, especially my supervisor Leila MOULFI for her generosity, modesty and all her valuable advices whitout which I would not have been able to arrive at this point of my academic route.

Résumé

La *Beat Generation* qui est un mouvement social et littéraire créé par de jeunes artistes Américains après la seconde guerre mondiale a toujours équivalu à un sens de rébellion et anticonformisme. Bien que ces aspects révèlent potentiellement une envie ardente de transgresser l'ordre établi d'après guerre, cette étude a pour objectif de proposer une nouvelle approche, fondée sur une analyse des convictions les plus intimes qui ont sérieusement mené les Beats à rejeter les Etats Unis. Le mouvement Beat a évidemment été engendré par différents climats et évènements qui ont fortement marqué la seconde moitié du 20^{ème} siècle. Par conséquent, une partie de cette étude se basera sur *On the Road* de Jack Kerouac, *Howl* d'Allen Ginsberg et *Junky* de William S. Burroughs pour soulever la relation problématique qui existe entre le mode de vie alternatif Beat et la loyauté propre à l'égard de l'Amérique. Simultanément, une autre quête tentera d'expliquer comment leur usage d'un style d'écriture authentique et indiscipliné à la fois a pu soutenir leur philosophie morale et humaine tout en rappelant que cette dernière a pour longtemps été reprochée par les critiques académiques de l'Amérique d'après-guerre.

Abstract

The Beat Generation, being a social and literary movement led by young male artists in mid 20th Century North America, has often been synonymous with rebellion and non-conformity. Those principal traits, while they could be construed as a manifest desire to breach the fixed postwar social and literary code, may be interpreted differently. The present research paper will endeavor to offer this opportunity by approaching the Beats from a new angle, based on an analysis of the inner motifs behind their rejection of mainstream American society and literature, and thus through each of *On the Road*, *Howl* and *Junky*, written respectively by Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs. The post-war multiple climates as well as many events have historically given birth to the Beat movement. Therefore, whether the Beats' new social identity is a sign of Americanism or anti-Americanism will be enquired. Likewise, the present study will attempt to disclose how the Beat writers intended to convey their supposedly moral concerns through authentic yet very unconventional modes of writing.

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Introduction

It is generally known and agreed on that most of the countries' national identities are usually detected in reference to the cultural heritage that they often acquire through history. By cultural heritage we mean any work of art -literature, in this study case- proper to some country that contains or stocks revealing aspects about what makes its population distinct from the others and how those aspects act on the individual in the mean time.

American identity has always been marked by American history, more particularly the war. In fact, the changes brought about by the Second World War have truly affected the Americans' way of conceiving and continuing to conceive their identity until the intervening emergence of a certain social and artistic movement whose questioning impact on the youth has deeply and meaningfully shattered the historical and cultural legacy of the entire American population: the Beat Generation.

Founded long before it became publicized in the 1950's, the Beat Generation is what a literary man would call a set of minds bearing the fruit of perpetual disillusionment and anger at a sick postwar American society; what a politician would call a group of menacing corrupt troublemakers likely to perturb a newly sound and prosperous society if not halted; what a religious man would call an unethical self-indulgent clique versed in strictly wrong attitudes (like drugs and homosexuality, among other practices later known to be typically Beat), and what a historian would call actors of a revolutionary mission aimed at overturning the normal state of conformity imposed by the government upon society in probably a suffocating manner.

As the perceptions diverge, a more or less objective definition would consist of saying that the Beat Generation is above all a label, used for the first time in 1948 by Jack Kerouac, the leading figure of the movement, to pinpoint not even a generation in the proper sense of the term, but a bunch of four to five New Yorkers who had spent a great part of their young age in the wartime without having one day the possibility of enjoying a true state of eternal peace and freedom in their lives. And it is allegedly this kind of deprivation, along with a repressively sustained hope to change things, whose need to be qualified inspired the recourse to the word "beat". First used by Herbert Huncke Kerouac's friend, in slang, to be 'beat' means to be utterly defeated and helpless.

Out of disappointment, the Beats had decided to form a literary and social circle in the margin of American mainstream society where they would allow themselves to live and write in any way that would disrespect the U.S authority's formal standards. What provoked those friends' sense of rebellion and challenge was a common feeling of becoming totally unable to identify with their native community after the Second World War. This unsuitability is presumably due to the fact that the social values, which they believed have long and so worthily represented the American essence like democracy and freedom, gave

way to new ones like materialism and selfishness, especially after the rise of consumer culture drawn from capitalism and the burgeoning technology that started to vigorously mark the second half of the twentieth century.

Nonetheless, the Beat members were visibly and actively the only detractors of such a transformation considered by the mass as an economic growth and social improvement (the mass being the middle class population who did not have to worry as much about their jobs and families as they did during the war). In other words, the Beats are the first American citizens to have noticed that their 'new' society which, though financially safer and morally sounder, was not as healthy as it appeared to be, at least not spiritually. Thereupon, it is to inform that the strongest drive which ignited the Beat writers and incited them to turn their backs against their country in the first place is well indeed spirituality. The Beats could no longer feed their inner selves in a country that all it promoted was the pursuit of money and all it offered was material happiness.

On one hand, the post-war United States became finally apt to provide its citizens with all sorts of worldly comfort, which was at that time the ultimate goal and preoccupation of veterans. Yet, on the other hand, it completely lacked the necessary conditions for developing and preserving a good moral and humanistic philosophy that was believed by the Beat writers to be a very essential element of the American identity.

Not only desirous to better their society, the Beats were also before anything else a group of young sad male writers who were obviously unhappy with the classic and traditional literary environment that was dominating the world of American literature known by its stifling academic restrictions and censorship during and after the war. In fact, the Western Civilization was of no match with the Beats' new vision which was, in part, to reinsert Ralph Waldo Emerson's Transcendentalist beliefs in the American minds like spontaneity, self-trust and more importantly, individualism, especially after modernism has swept up the American cultural landscape with a considerable and unfortunate price: the loss of innocence, communication and love for nature.

Notably, the Beat writers are known for having planted the grains of counterculture in the United States. The decades that followed witnessed assorted movements and artists admittedly owing their success to the Beats' influence, such as The Doors, Bob Dylan or Cyberpunk culture.

Before going public, the Beats used art to experiment life; they expressed themselves through writing and various modes of escape from reality while they were constantly aware of how difficult it was to change it. Among those modes was the illicit use of drugs, buddhism, alternative sexuality, jazz music, vagrancy ...etc.

Of course, such attitudes brought the Beats shameful contempt amid most of their counterparts to whom it was too unacceptable to neither compromise, nor even try to understand. For fear of its epidemic effect among the younger generation, the government and media had spent much energy into vilifying the

Beats and concealing their true purpose -which was inherently pacific-. However, this was of no dismay to the Beats who had maintained their retreat from the American reality while still confirming their rejection of the American identity.

The Beat generation is believed to be the offspring of historical occurrences that have significantly changed 20th century North-America. As it happens, the event assumed to have engendered the surfacing of this movement is World War II. Therefore, and in order to deepen the reader's perspective on the subject matter, it would be injudicious to approach the social and literary aspects of the Beat Generation without elaborating first on the larger context it had sprung from.

Being at the heart of the Beat cause, it may also attract the reader's curiosity about knowing what it is precisely about the American identity that made the Beats unwilling to accept it, and what kind of identity was supposed to fit their new vision in American society as well as in American literature.

In the first chapter, we will expose the different atmospheres that reigned in mid 20th C North America: from religion, politics, economy, society to arts, and thus before moving to describe the general events that led to the emergence of the Beat movement. Although it appears to be loosely linked to the subject of literature, it is to remind that a considerable part of the Beats' lives and the experiences they underwent after the war is significantly portrayed in their works. Thus, knowing thoroughly the circumstances that defined the postwar era remains crucial for the continuation of this study. What will follow depends on grand scale on the contextual knowledge of the Beats' background.

In the second chapter, there will be a narrowing of the research field, i.e. we will discuss the conception of the Beat's social identity by focusing only on Jack Kerouac (1922-1969), Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) and William S. Burroughs (1914-1997) -the three major Beat figures who have contributed highly and often in a complementary way to the rebellious making of a new social identity-, and thus through each of *On the Road*, *Howl* and *Junky*, respectively. In this light, we will raise the issue regarding their alternative lifestyle in relation to the very notion of Americanism. To put it more clearly, we will enquire whether the newly adopted social behaviors and values depicted in the aforementioned pieces reveal a sense of Americanism, or on the contrary, anti-Americanism on the Beats' behalf.

In the third and last chapter, the enquiry will continue but in the artistic direction. That is, we will keep focus on the same writers, but it will be leaned on their individual functions more as American writers than citizens. In addition, we will not necessarily make reference only to *On the Road*, *Howl* and *Junky*. Recourse to further works will be made though not emphatically. The Beats' identity quest was not only social, but also literary. From here, we will question the paradoxical link between their authentic yet very unconventional modus operandi of writing with their inherently human and moral philosophy which, for many critics, happened to obscure their pacific mission and objectives.

What is essentially to be linked to the notion of being Beat is not the manifest and shallow image attributed by the media. Rather, one should dive deeper into the larger context if one wishes to found a

proper judgment (open-mindedness required). Subsequently, the Beats' withdrawal from the margin of mainstream society and literature is not related to being American as much as to the fact of living in America per se, more precisely postwar America. Therefore, the rebellion and nonconformity exhibited in Beat society would be anti-postwar-American whereas those expressed in the writing of Beat literature would be mere attempts to morally fix postwar America.

CHAPTER ONE

Post-war America and the Beat Generation:
A Parallel Revolution

General Introduction:

The Beat Generation did not rise to prominence out of nowhere; it was evidently sparked by a set of brutal changes which, at the religious, political, economic, social and cultural level, have dramatically turned the American nation upside down. In fact, all are encompassed within the revolutionary range of modernism having developed swiftly after World War II. Hence, it proved very convenient for the US government and the citizens themselves to start celebrating the war victory in ways that were likely to raise higher their living standards, and help them realize whatever was previously impossible to realize.

Understandably, those changes represented no choice for the Americans but to adopt a totally new and different lifestyle which, to a further degree, required even to adopt new values, on both the humanistic and moralistic planes. This growing necessity to change for the sake of progress was indeed a disturbing idea for the Beats who, long before becoming assuredly beat, saw in this post-war trend a kind of vicious nature that promised no good service to the country's fundamental ethos. Sadly though, modernism was already becoming a concept too solidified and a new reality too appreciated to be reversed overnight.

I. 1. The Consequences of World War 2 and Mid 20th C North America:

I. 1. A) Religion: God, Self and Sin:

It is an immutable fact that America has always been a welcoming nation of multiple religions since the dawn of its creation. By the 20th century, the U.S held a various and diverse number of religions, but the major ones were Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism.

Among Protestants, there were three divergent groups of moral thinkers: Evangelicals, Moderates and Genteel. Evangelicals, self-suppressed, intimate that humans, sinful in nature, are not allowed to enjoy the pleasures of life, should submit to God's will and are condemned to lead an austere attitude in the hope of reaching ultimate salvation (Carnes 312). Moderates are rather self-controlled in a sense that, unlike Evangelicals, they do not totally hold their selves back from pleasure, but they simultaneously avoid excess and make efforts of restriction to hopefully attain some "grace" (312). Genteel, on the other hand, are completely self-indulgent, i.e. they neither believe in the gravity of sin, nor do they give any importance to attending church or asking for God's mercy.

Catholics were divided into Devout, Observant and Selective. Devout Catholics were known for their everyday Mass attendance and weekly sin confession. Those identifying with the Observant type went to church once a week and confessed yearly. Finally, the Selective Catholics practiced only occasionally and scarcely confessed.

Judaism also knew three different directions: Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. Orthodox Jews were earnestly concerned about God and the Torah. Conservatives shared the Orthodox God's law abiding, but did not care much about traditional practices. As to Reform Jews, they minded neither the Torah nor God, being more modernist and individualistic than traditionalist and strictly obedient.

Belonging to none of the above-mentioned categories, there were some Americans who did not have any religion at all; all they worshipped was their 'self' (312). Not having a religion, though, did not mean not being a good human being, according to Carnes. The difference lied within a simple question of motif, i.e. a religious man acts for the after-life while a non-religious man acts for the meaning of life per se. Yet, at the ideological level, there was an important division between Moral Rightists- who advocate absolutism- and Moral Leftists- who advocate relativism-. Although in America it was generally known that one is free to choose their own religion, they had to stick to a definite moral and political conduct, especially after the Second World War (314).

On one hand, the American Rightists supported conformity, righteousness and scruple. Drawn from absolutism, their conception was based on the theory that moral values are fixed, unchangeable and should be detached from any human perception. Hence, they had a very critical and adverse opinion about those who did not support the Right and, according to them, followed the opposite direction of God. To Moral Rightists, family is the linchpin of society. Therefore, individuality had to be placed under family, the state and community in their priority list (314).

On the other hand, the Left was quite a bit of a humanistic and challenging nature in that it is connected to relativism, a theory that values a less absolute and more personal view on moral conduct. Leftists stood against any law that strictly punishes a human being for a misdeed. Not only do they believe that a human being is inherently good and does not deserve unjust treatment; they also assume that, instead of regulating the citizens' attitudes, the authority's severity would only prevent them from fully using their potential of humanity like reason and love (314).

As regards sex, the Leftists' perception contained all but ethical standpoints, promoting more sexual freedom and being content with the simple pleasure it provides (314). In fact, Left advocates developed a progressive way of thinking (315). Their opinion about evil was that it did not lie within the individual; rather, it operated through oppressive social organizations like fascism, segregations or the bourgeoisie (315).

Leaning on the ideology of Enlightenment and 20th Century liberal religion, the Leftists' biggest attempt was to make the notion of guilt and sin less attributive to individuals than to the socio-cultural environment created by their religious leaders to which it did not please much. People of a traditionalist mindset had no faith in the Left's aspiration to have a better a world (315).

Notably, the central subjects of disagreement between the moral right and left were about "*existence, nature and the consequence of lust*" (316). Anything else could be discussed and led to negotiations and ultimate solutions like the cultural differences or political issues. Sin remained the only dispute that kept the right and left minds apart. (316)

However, as modernism represented a virtual elimination of the traditional in favor of a rather secular fashion of thought, religion had lesser authority and power over Americans' daily lives, and social conduct was becoming more assertive than ever before. After it had been right-centered, the religious position of post-war America deviated towards a more lenient tendency, which was not expected among Catholics. Although there was a considerable number of American Catholics after the war, catholic faith did not seem strong enough to maintain sexual behavior in check.

Religion in post-war America started to become more and more isolated from the government's control, for there was only faith without true commitment in religion. This dwindling faith among Americans was apparently caused by the secular acts carried out by intellectuals with the drive of humanism, which was firmly condemned by those holding the beliefs of conservatism. In fact, it is to know

that the latter did not operate only in the religious domain. For instance, people could agree with the same political views but not with the same religious ones.

II. 1. B) Politics: Conservatism, McCarthyism, and Anti-communism:

Although the Second World War had affirmatively ended, the American forties were for longer to be driven by a strong political upheaval known as the “Cold War”. Launched around 1946, the Cold War represented an arm-wrestling conflict the United States and former Soviet Union took in a fervent attempt to impose their opposite ideologies on the world, each hoping to gain the highest status of ‘global superpower’. (Gray 217)

Being its first enemy at the time, Russia was becoming America’s major preoccupation and top priority to study in its brinkmanship plans. After WWII, a nascent feeling of anti-communism grew among Americans siding with the Left Joseph McCarthy, a very influential senator in the Truman administration. Hitherto, McCarthy is considered the grittiest political figure for having taken the most extremist and ruthless actions in fighting communism, and thus spreading hatred to Russia all over America. What made McCarthyism so appealing is actually its populism, i.e. its standing for ordinary people who got eluded by modern life and its contempt for the elite who called such policy “the resurgence of an irrational, emotional, paranoid style of politics that dated back to the populists of the 1890’s” (412). Furthermore, McCarthy’s excessive morality is believed to have killed America’s spirit of pure democratic negotiation.

Between 1945 and 1955, anti-communism was uprightly hovering in the political arena. In fact, it was so omnipresent that it eventually became the national mood of the decade. American Mainstream politics projected the country’s riddance from communism in a total and absolute manner. Therefore, all possible avenues were explored to sow Americanism as deeply and permanently as possible, and to erase any visible track of communism from the American soil. Such avenues were representative via institutions like the FBI and US Military Intelligence agencies (207).

Under such circumstances, loyalty to America had to be proved, very hard. Worse, politicians of either side took the problem of anti-communism so seriously and cautiously that even mere workers who went on strike demanding the sustainment of their jobs or wages were suspected and immediately categorized on the ‘communistic’ list.

There was also a huge racial tension going on between whites and blacks. Equality, African-Americans’ utmost aspiration at the time, was soon translated into an ardent political engagement¹ which, alongside the growing number of Black immigrants, helped provoke a massive need to change the “long standing laws and customs predicated on myths of black inferiority”(Carnes 202). Yet, segregation was still

¹ Civil Rights Movement : The national effort made by black people and their supporters in the 1950s and 1960s to eliminate segregation and gain equal rights

prevailing in the South, and the White man's attitude, Mark C. Carnes added, was no different from that of a Nazi German or imperial Japanese (202). It can be said, then, that the situation the American citizens were living during that particular era was devoid of all the democratic ideals America was believed apt to defend back in the earlier centuries.

Among reactions to such courses belonging to mainstream politics was the emergence of radical thinking. In addition to communism, radicalism² was another political standpoint the American government did not support, at all. Furthermore, being pro-communist or simply not sharing the popular and central political views could easily cost one's life in postwar America (208). The intensity of anti-communism resulted in exaggerated and often extra-legal sanctions that paralyzed life in various domains. As a matter of fact, many Leftist Americans decided to turn rightward during the Cold War, for it was very risky and delicate provided that many individuals had lost their careers unfairly because of radicalism (220). Even after having been strictly liberal and oppositional, they had to abandon their political views and favor anti-communism, only to demonstrate their patriotism and confirm support for their nation.

Still planning to eradicate communism, the intentions behind the Cold War included the continuation of the New Deal reforms promoted first in the 1930's by Franklin D. Roosevelt in view to improving the social and economic conditions of the United States (209).

Helped by the Wagner Act (signed in 1935), the Union movement took size with a well-defined priority: to keep workers' wages and private health insurance untouched. The Union acted through strikes and protests but apparently in the sole aim of fulfilling individual and selfish economic benefits (210). Consequently, those strikes received a harsh political response that jeopardized Labor's cause and increased the legitimacy of the Right (210). After the Union's radical sedition unveiled their communistic sympathies and had the movement denounced, it seemed safer and more reasonable for the Americans to simply shift towards the Right. A shift towards the Right, though, required the adoption of middle-class values; ultimately, it meant the embracement of Conservatism. Believed to be the only gateway towards national security, the latter gained a widespread public acceptance than ever before -a few years after the war - although between Left and Right, it was still not very simple to know which party was the most convenient.

Now, with the creation of the Atomic Bomb, the United States had reached a 'better' position to assume its capability of handling international affairs, and believed it would acquire a firmer initiative in limiting Soviet expansion -knowing that communism was continuing to spread throughout the Eastern regions of Europe-. However, despite the U.S government's determination to 'save' communist-victim countries and establish democracy abroad, its policing role was seemingly not bearing much fruit domestically. (421)

² Radicalism : political policies that advocate more sweeping political, economic, or social change than that traditionally supported by the mainstream political parties

To an obvious extent, the American political leaders focused more on building a global civilization, i.e. marketing American values and ideals in other countries rather than trying to mother them and create social balance in their own. Besides, it seemed that the war for democracy and national security only wasted and rendered those even further away from being accomplished.

As though the tension and anxiety created by the Communist-phobia was not exacerbating enough, nuclear weaponry was another more significant danger that was badly disrupting the Americans' stability, and had potentially ended the beginning of a 'quieter' life after the war.

Generally, WWII did not affect severely American democracy, but it did bring about some undesirable regulations that touched civil right liberties and accessed an unprecedented state of militarism (403). Briefly, it can be argued that the war was similar to a coin with extremely two opposite sides: It recognizably offered a great number of new jobs and other types of opportunities to all Americans, yet this was only the heads. The tails offered nothing but a restriction of personal freedoms, which is of no little import to Americans who traditionally view freedom as the pivot of their identity.

I. 1. C) Economy: Industry, Technology and the Environment:

The late Twentieth Century in America was not characterized only by its political issues; changes in the economic tide have also taken part in contributing to a distinctively and exceptionally modern nation.

Right after the war, capitalism had been adopted as America's central plan within its economic and business prospects. With the goal of change and progress still fixed in sight, the American government treated its financial operating system based on more flexible and liberal grounds, though offering a legislatively 'controlled' autonomy to individuals wishing to run their own businesses, advocating investment strategies and promoting diversity of goods production through the precept of globalization.

Undeniably, it is industrial power and technological sophistication that helped the United States win the Second World War through (Carnes 325). In the 1950's, Americans were very proud of belonging to the most powerful country in such terms. As time went by, their well-being seemed to have become essentially contingent upon the industrial and technological sustained developments. Furthermore, given that production was being boosted by the swelling number of birthrates between 1945 and 1964, optimism spread all over the country and guaranteed a more promising future than during the Depression years of the 1930's. (325)

However, not all Americans believed in progress, at least not of this kind. There was evidently a revolution in science, which has de facto brought positive transitions. Yet, it is not to neglect that such a revolution did require an abusive exploitation of nature.

In the years following the war, two ideological tendencies have come to divide the American population: There were some –called the New Alchemists- who approved the services of technology, believing it could offer a better life and even find solutions to environmental issues. And there were others-called the Conservationists- who simply opposed the rise of consumerism and the reliance on science to be happy or have a 'cleaner' world. Perceptively, technology has always been at odds with the environment. As a result, Americans' ideal of progress seemed to have put their lives into an ironically more vulnerable situation.

Clearly, it lied within every citizen's awareness that nuclear power was submitting the earth to a huge risk of loss in both human and material resources (Hiroshima and Nagasaki). It was also salient that industry and technology have produced less satisfactory than disappointing outcomes, which impacted heavily on the world's life durability. The efforts put forward by the military-industrial complex³ to achieve

³ **military and industry as political influence:** the military and the defense industries considered as a combined influence on US foreign and economic policy

a better status quo turned out to be not very much worthy, for they all converged into one direction: sacrificing nature and polluting air, the one and only source of survival.

It is more important, Vogt -an environmental advocate- believed, to base one's life on what can make it last (natural resources), than on what can destroy it (industrial exploitation) (326). Noticing a tragic shift from abundance to scarcity, Conservationists held adverse criticism about science and technology, lamenting the consumers' ignorance that the real war was "between industrial technology and the environment" (326). Yet, these men possessed no concrete solution or ecological alternative to the problem of such advancement.

Despite some responsive voices to their environment-sensitizing cause by 1945, the Conservationist movement was soon to be impeded by "Western Ranchers and extractive industries" (326).

In any way, the post-war economic momentum and Americans' enthusiasm towards a larger prosperity had factually conducted them to much larger issues which, instead of reaching a higher living standard, have created a strikingly precarious one.

Attempts to reconcile those economically-triggered issues and compensate for the environmental gaps detrimental to the Americans' quality of life gave rise to suburbia (329). The latter provided a more natural and less technology-affected life. Yet again, moving to the suburbs was only to devour what was left of the American wild lands. Overpopulation, known more commonly as the 'baby boom' (1945-1964) was another problem that worried the Americans not the least after the war.

In spite of the apparent life mediocrity post-war America was falling into, it seemed never convincing enough to put a decisive limit on industrial growth and the considered-by-many inauspicious improvements of technology. In fact, when the U.S has just begun to change economically, Americans were so enthralled by consumerism that the latter completely diverted their awareness about the bad luck their future was about to undergo. Far from being the majority, some Americans were not in favor of this new culture that all have recklessly embraced out of greed and short-term needs. As human beings, they might certainly be wrong to support more technological than environmental projects.

In very few words, we can sum up that industrial power and technology have promised Americans a better life in any way that would make it worse, and yet they have accepted it.

I. 1. D) Society: Conformity, Middle-class and Consumerism:

Fostered by the centralization of the economic and political systems, the loss of democracy is what many socialists judged as being the biggest stake America has ever played with in a war. Centralization or concentration of power -among the Cold war consequences- implied that the government knows better than the people what is good for the people. Such an authoritarian form of power had simply trampled the citizens' need of expression by restricting any domain that allowed public communication which, in democratic terms, was completely irrelevant.

In the absence of federal structure, democracy was flagrantly less operational than in previous time. In addition, individuals had practically lost their significance when the only task the American constitution managed to realize after the war was to build a straight middle-class society where obedient and civil people would follow unquestionably the government's orders and live merely as told (in metaphorically the same manner we direct cattle). Giving way to such a duped ineffective mass, the individual's opinion had no likelihood of being heard or, 'worse', put into action (413).

Yet, all these conditions the American man was living after WWII seemed to provide no stimulus to react against the dominant establishment under which he enjoyed less civil liberties⁴, practiced no real democracy and all he was dictated was conformity without advantage. (413)

In fact, conformity was so pervasive a habit that it ended up being the identifying culture of post-war American mainstream daily life. From conformity we infer that individuals were no longer able to pursue freely their own ambitions or act upon their personal ideals. Moreover, their social behavior was remotely controlled by the rigid and strict handles of the American policymaking device. It is to remind, though, that such approaches were initially carried out as an engagement against communist threats. Now, the post-war political leaders appeared to be acting in the aim of exerting a Draconian influence on every aspect of the Americans' lives, even on their ideologies (414).

What they failed, or succeeded –it depends on the intention or degree of ethical concern-, was to give individuals the chance to think freely, creatively and resolutely. Concretely enough, the social position of the American man was invariably kept in check by the political, economic and cultural harnesses.

Under the presidency of Modern Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower (1952-1960), the 1950's knew an explosive availability of countless types of goods that decidedly every American could afford after WWII; television sets, fancy houses, nice cars and any 'valuable' object of a luxurious nature represented the Americans' utmost need and desire of the decade. The American man was so satisfied by consumerism that his life and social identity would noticeably become disappointing and meaningless without material

⁴ **rights to freedom:** the basic rights guaranteed to individual citizens by law, e.g. freedom of speech and action

commodities. Such a fact has, indeed, homogenized the American society and annihilated the social class differences, i.e. all pertained to middle-class. Even workers who were constantly angry at their employers had ceased their protests given the increasing salaries and lots of other benefits they started to enjoy in the wake of the economic boom (186).

Famously known as “The Tranquilized Fifties”, it seemed that the decade’s trauma caused by the Second World War was being healed by consumption. Now, all kinds of material leisure served to allay American’s anxiety about post-war times (214).

The fact that America was not touched by the destructive effects of the war helped boost its position of global power. Eventually, it became the economic savior of European countries whose resources were severely damaged during WWII. Paradoxically, the United States had the smallest number of population and the largest degree of consumption in the world. However, entering such a state of abundance was likely to produce long-term repercussions if Americans’ consciousness continued to flow in the current of blind and immoral pleasure egocentrically appropriated as Modern culture.

Of course, it can be explained that such mores were only part of the Western authority’s strategic plan to control and dominate the rest of the world. Likewise, an unusual collaboration was forged between academics and politicians in the purpose of regulating the American society (knowledge + power). The participation of multiple field services like sociology, economics, science and even psychology was requested to promote nationalism and ensure the country’s stability (415). The Government was financially and politically supporting the different research areas in its attempt to gain foreign and domestic control of the Cold war.

Such effort was also gathered for the application and expansion of modernism which necessitated the citizens’ will to make a revolutionary step off tradition and opt for development as a vital change, especially in the rural areas where progress was rarely seen and new security demands could hardly be met (416). Scaring and promising at the same time, modernism was being desperately approved and welcomed by the middle-class citizens who could no longer live without its assistance.

Note worthily though, America’s intervention in the Vietnam War, for instance, had provoked a vast amount of incongruous events that were marked by extreme violence. Hence, America’s unanimous mission to help settle modernism and democracy in other countries began to be suspiciously doubted.

Left-wing Liberal Intellectuals critically assumed that American politics underhandedly sought to obtain public consent and reduce aversion risk by controlling all domains (418). Logically, these intellectuals wished for a more cooperative and permissive America that accepts the ideological differences.

Indeed, there is much to meditate upon the concept of free speech and individual freedom which became very controversial in the periods preceding and succeeding the war. The US politicians, more

particularly moral Conservatives⁵, feared any kind of social outbursts from the citizens. Not wishing their diplomatic and military ends to be hindered by their whims and worries, creating a middle-class, consumer and conformist society appeared to be the only and most efficient remedy they could use to prevent any attempt of protest or revolt among individuals (215).

⁵ Conservatism: **right-wing political viewpoint**: a right-of-centre political philosophy based on a tendency to support gradual rather than abrupt change and to preserve the status quo.

I. **1. E) The Postwar Art: Anti-Tradition, Formalism and Poetry:**

As conformity succeeded in repressing Americans' social uncertainty deeper in the abyss of their collective consciousness, a whole society was being anaesthetized with false and short-term serenity. Yet, Gray worriedly asserted, "the calm society is the one most susceptible to sudden, radical fits of panic" (Gray 216). Accordingly, such concern had already begun to be translated into movies and written pieces. Yet, in spite of having distinct approaches, the majority of artists in this period addressed the post-war problems in the least political manner possible.

On a quasi-daily basis, American society was visibly blackening and tarnishing with the increasing restlessness caused by nuclear horror during the late 1950's (217). Soon enough, once the political anesthesia's effect had shrunk, dissident voices began to be potently heard in music as well as in literature: Rock and Roll, represented typically by Elvis Presley, was an audacious form of expression that insinuated resistance to the authority (217). In literature, too, awareness was raised higher than ever before. Through *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger, mainstream modern life was no longer to be embraced because of its alienating state of abundance and worthless conformity (218). Of course, such a rebellious attitude was seen as a challenging reaction that seriously threatened the long held 'civilized standards'.

World War II is by far considered as the most powerful historical factor in having revolutionized mid 20th Century American art in general and literature in particular. Traditional writing had simply become a less suitable mode for depicting post-war events; many American writers felt a drive towards more subjectivity and originality. (Vanspankeren 79)

The American artists who had already witnessed the ugly scenes of the war have produced poetry of a quite stark content, i.e. their poems could be seen as both a historical document and a mirror of personal experience, which gives the reader a privileged opportunity to revisit history from the writer's retrospective angle (220). Poets like Randall Jarrell were awe-hit and disgusted by the rigid patterns the process of social development was operating with during the post-war years.

In order to be transparent, Wilbur thought, the contemporary poem had to denounce the dark side of "modern life" (222). To that end, he however believed poets should stick to "an elaborate formal structure" by recommending traditional writing. The latter seemingly enabled poets to add "precision" and a "sense of control" to their work (222). Yet, Wilbur suggested if tradition provides a poem with such qualities, it does deprive it of the "nuances of feeling" required to liven up the core of the poem (222). Still, American poetry had not yet been dispensed from formalism.

Under a conspicuously audacious tone, writing was seen more like an experience (231). Likewise, post-war poetry has witnessed a need to disengage from formalism. Poets like Adrienne Rich strove to set

their poems on free verse and use personal subconscious drives in the aim of discussing more authentically the experiences of their inner lives shaped by history, i.e. the events they underwent.

American poetry, as Gray explains, “incorporates the conscious and the subconscious levels, intimate confession and the historical imagination...” (Gray 231). Indeed, there was a considerable rejection of formal stylistics. Mostly though, the purpose was to attain a more confessional voice, not necessarily to break totally from tradition. Still remaining formalist, the American writers of the time were feeling merely “an inclination towards a more open and idiomatic poetry” (233).

Before the Beats, there were other poets who were tempted by transgressing formal structures and experiencing freer verses like the confessionals, among whom Schwartz. Although sharing the same critical view vis-à-vis the world, the previous generation writers had never fully rid their writing from traditional norms. Furthermore, formalism was still revered by many poets to an extent that led them to assume writing otherwise was directly to be judged banal and of very poor quality.

I. 2. How the Beat Generation Came into Being:

Seemingly, all those great changes that started to revolutionize each of the political, economic, social and artistic lives of mid-20th C North America had caused the Beat friends a strong sense of disillusionment and antagonism. Clearly, it is out of this anger that they chose to start their own revolution, engaging on the pursuit of a different lifestyle and identity. Apparently, it is the same anger that would change the rest of their lives and solidify their friendship. (Charters 4)

Before discussing the Beat Generation as a recognized social and literary movement, it is essential to reveal the major events that have significantly forged the influential counterculture of the Beat Generation, and had ultimately welded the Beat identity.

In fact, a great share of knowledge about the early Beat history is owed to John Clellon Holmes, an American contemporary writer and old friend of Jack Kerouac who had witnessed –from the very beginning to the very ending- the whole Beat scene. That is why Holmes is considered as a major figure and key-contributor in popularizing the Beat movement.

I. 2. A) The Early Beat Days: Jack Kerouac and Clellon Holmes:

Jack Kerouac and John Clellon Holmes were both in their 20's during their first encounter⁶. Each was positively impressed by the other. During the same year, Holmes would also become Ginsberg's close friend.

Kerouac's first literary work was published in 1950, well before Holmes's. However, Holmes is recognized as being the most devoted writer who had spent his most time and energy trying to define the Beats' goals and purposes. The phrase "Beat Generation" would be enunciated by Kerouac only after various conversations with him in 1948. (Charters 5)

In fact, without Holmes' presence in Kerouac's life and the paramount role he had played in making such an exhaustive portrayal of the early Beat life, the latter wouldn't have come to our knowledge in such a valuable amount. Arguably, all of the Beats were expecting a better life after the war. Hence, when events like the Cold War followed, they fell into a deep state of anomie, and all their hopes for stability gave way to utter chaos (7)

Kerouac and Holmes shared the same New England roots, and they were both aware of their incompatibility with the New England environment and value system (12). Also, both of them were shaped by their childhood, which had considerably determined their careers as writers and more importantly, their place in and vision of their new society (14). Although they had the same passion for writing and the same ambition of making it their source of living, the difference between Holmes and Kerouac's writings is that Holmes had a more inclusive view, i.e. he treated his personal issues drawing comparison with the wider issues of his society which he considered himself part of. As to Kerouac, he showed a rather introverted position in that he treated issues that concerned only him and his surroundings (15). Holmes had an instable life, constantly moving, never living in a final home. Such a fact is included in his writing as a very important theme "leaving home", "hitting the road" and "going on journeys" (21)

Kerouac's interest in writing began very early in his life. At high school, his classmates mocked him when they learnt he wanted to be a writer (22). It was a priest who encouraged him to keep his ambition alive though he alternately prodded and warned him about eventual deceptions⁷. It remains unclear, though, and inconspicuous why Kerouac and the other Beat writers needed or wanted to jot down the details of their lives and translate events into words and stories (25).

New York is considered as an emblematic city of the initial phase of the Beat movement, i.e. it is in New York City where the original Beat members –still teenagers- knew each other for the first time (26). A football scholarship brought Kerouac to Columbia College in 1940 (27). His first publication was of a

⁶ The first meeting of Jack Kerouac and John Clellon Holmes took place at a party in the 4th of July 1948, New York City (Charters 4).

⁷ The first to have totally encouraged him was Sebastian Sampas, a member of an association called "The Young Prometheans"

fictional piece in the school literary magazine. His first writing was about sports and Jazz (first discovered in Harlem through a friend, Simon Wyse) (27). After his injury, he left his Columbia scholarship and left home at the resentment of his parents. Although he went back home in 1941 and found a job as a sports reporter in Lowell, he still never got on well with his father. Therefore, he decided to join the Merchant Marine to later gain back NYC in 1942, at the age of 20. In 1943, he spent months in the U.S Navy but failed to behave in the training. Consequently, he was released in June 1943 after his submission to psychiatric tests showed he was schizophrenic.

It was in an apartment rent by Jack and Edie Parker, his first wife, in December 1943 in Manhattan that the first gathering of the earliest Beat friends occurred (31). Edie introduced her friend Lucien Carr to Kerouac, who, in turn, introduced him to Allen Ginsberg, a Columbia student at the time. William Burroughs, a drug addict at the time, would also join the group (32).

Among the Beat group, Kerouac was seemingly the most enthusiastic about writing; his aspiration to write the best American novel sprang from his earliest youth (33). His career as a writer was self-built, and his literary vision was personally and empirically conceived. Robert Creeley assumed that it is the absence of clear traditional and social terms to define him that actually defines him (33).

In August 1944, Lucien Carr stabs David Kemmerer as a self-defense from an apparent homosexual abuse, and throws the body in the Hudson River. Called for help, Kerouac and Burroughs finish the crime and would later be arrested. Burroughs was released on bail, but Kerouac was to spend nine days in prison after Edie's parents paid the bail on condition that he marries her. Everything would change afterwards; Kerouac was living uncomfortably under the shelter of his wife's family. But as soon as he got on his feet, he decided to leave Edie for a life on the sea, to later reach NYC and settle again with Ginsberg in 1944.

Soon after 1945, each of the early Beat members knew a particular period of isolation. After having lived months away from each other, they would reunite and spend a whole year together indulging in alcohol and drugs- none of them working- (35)

When his father died in May 1946, Kerouac started to immerse himself in writing, determinedly set on producing his first novel *The Town and the City* as an attempt to make up for the deception he caused to his parents by being a failure (55). It was a year ago when he wrote *And the Hippos were Boiled in their Tanks* in collaboration with Burroughs, a depiction of the criminal experience of Kemmerer's murder.

It is in the summer of 1947 that adventure began for Kerouac. Heading to San Francisco, he launched his road trip across the country as an attempt to join Ginsberg and Neal Cassady –later to become his muse- in Denver (55). This period he spent hitchhiking would greatly appear in his successful novel *On the Road*.

During the Cold War turmoil and increasing pressure yielded by anti-communism in the USA, the Beat friends agreed with none of the political ideologies of the decade. In 1948, they supported neither communism nor capitalism. Hence, it is inescapably that they chose to follow the radical path (57).

Disenchanted, all of the Beats shared a common faith in the power of words to change the world. And what is believed to have spurred further their radical stance is Existentialism, a French philosophical creed led by Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus in the twenties. Such an ideological movement incites individuals to act on the conviction that they always possess choice in improving their lives and creating their own possibilities (57). Indeed, Existentialism promoted a less physical than moral revolution against the injustices of the war (58). In contradiction with all mainstream beliefs, rebellion was to be seen as a rather dignified and morally-driven plan of action.

“Camus had argued for a spiritual dimension to human experience that had nothing to do with orthodox religions of any kind” (58). Indeed, Camus’ conception of rebellion and individual initiative in changing the course of history gave Holmes and the other Beats a solid ground on which to build their new vision that would hopefully allay their disillusionment (58).

Holmes’ perception of life was drastically altered by Kerouac and Ginsberg’s attitudes and convictions (83). Ginsberg was described by Holmes as being a very energetic and modest man with incessantly passionate talks (84). What impressed Holmes most about Kerouac is that his writing -although lacking a logical connection between the different ideas of the content that weren’t even complete- carried a kind of “sentimentality” that Holmes often self-consciously refused to render in his own writing (86); He was obviously more reserved than Kerouac.

As another sign of rebellion, the Beats were curiously interested in open sexual relationships, without any boundaries of marital commitment. To test such a liberal condition, they went to night parties and orgies almost regularly (96). During their conversations, they talked about literature, sexuality and jazz at the same time, as if it were one subject (97).

Yet, despite having the same feeling of outrage and defiance, Holmes began to doubt the worthiness of his friends’ new attitude, and would even consider it pointless, assuming that Kerouac and Ginsberg “deny society because society denies them” (97). At times, he defended them; at others, he frankly criticized their rejection of society. Through his writing, he tried hard to rationalize the Beat cause and refer it to analogously well-founded ones:

...It is not bohemianism and there is little or no overtly intellectual character to it. It is an honest “what the hell” attitude, the result of the sexual sterility which has become America in the last forty years, the social vacuum and the psychological upheaval (still confined only to the underside). These people are questing. When among them you feel what Dostoevsky must have felt mixing with the dregs of Russia during his imprisonment in Siberia: you feel at once horrified and intrigued, because these people are living “reality” at the

pressure-point, thinking (even the ignorant ones) upon pregnant questions the rest of us are too secure to know about. They are testing themselves (albeit unknowingly) in the crucible, trying to discover (equally unconsciously) what is right and what is wrong (Charters 97)

I. 2. B) The Meaning of “Beat Generation”:

During a late night talk, Holmes insistently asked Kerouac to figure out a name for their new group, a term to identify their state of simultaneous tiredness and ecstasy. Kerouac’s answer was reported in Holmes’ journal depicting that particular night:

...I kept goading Jack to characterize this new attitude, and one evening as he described the way the young hipsters of Times Square walked down the street—watchful, catlike, inquisitive, close to the buildings, in the street but not of it—I interrupted him to say that I thought we all walked like that, but what was the peculiar quality of mind behind it? “It’s a kind of furtiveness,” he said. “Like we were a generation of furtives. You know—with an inner knowledge there’s no use flaunting on that level, the level of the ‘public,’ a kind of beatness—I mean, right down to it, to ourselves, because we all really know where we are—and a weariness with all the forms, all the conventions of the world. . . . It’s something like that. So I guess you might say we’re a beat generation,” and he laughed a conspiratorial, the Shadow knows kind of laugh at his own words and at the look on my face. (Charters 98)

In an instant way, Holmes was struck by Kerouac’s perhaps subconscious allusion to the Lost Generation of the 1920’s that represents a similar group of American writers who previously felt the same kind of disillusionment and anger at post-war America.

Kerouac’s initial use of the word “beat”, which is of a slang type -originally African-American-, was an attribution to the street and anyone gone overwhelmed by societal surroundings. Both Kerouac and

Holmes believed that “America was locked into what they considered the country’s sexual and drug hypocrisies, all the while denying the threat of atomic annihilation” (99).

Holmes argued that there were a lot of deep meanings hidden behind the various uses of the term “beat”. According to him, “beat” contains a strong denotation of rebellion, a quest idealizing a spiritual existence that would end their state of ‘beatness’. He even happened to call his conversations with Kerouac “spiritual journeys” (99).

The Beats were irritated by what they viewed as people drinking in bars talking pretentiously about literary subjects they knew very little about. All these exasperating realities seemed to have thrust them into the ‘underground’ world, for they apparently saw no reason staying on the shallow meaningless surface of mainstream America. Later, Kerouac and his friends would discover the debauchery milieu of Times Square through William Burroughs’ friend Herbert Huncke, a drug dealer and occasional thief.

First used to describe the unsatisfactory aspects of postwar American society, the phrase ‘Beat Generation’ referred, above all, to “their small group of close friends and to the attitudes they expounded over their endless nights of sexual boasting and alcohol-fueled argument” (100). After it had been only social, Kerouac, Holmes and Ginsberg are the first writers to have opened the literary inauguration of the Beat movement and finally given it artistic evidence.

However, not all Americans held the same opinion about the Beats. Some saw it as a positive and optimistic movement, promoting great moral ideals. Others saw it as being too self-indulgent, bringing waste and social instability. Nevertheless, the Beats seemed to enjoy a very important human quality: they were always in search for a better life, and they never gave up keeping their eyes open. For them, the problem of modern life was before anything else spiritual.

General Conclusion:

The aforementioned conditions have saliently defined every aspect of the American life after the Second World War. In fact, they are so logically connected that they practically represent the chronological process of the Beats' gradual retreat from the mainstream center. From McCarthy's anti-communism that led to conservatism throughout capitalism, the burgeoning technology and state of abundance that opened the Americans' greed for mass consumption until the stifling conformity that was only established to reduce the aversion risk and minimize the atomic bomb worries.

On the whole, one can surmise that to be a member of the Beat Generation meant to empathize with the oppressed and social misfits, to discard mainstream thoughts and values, and to reject every aspect of the postwar American way of life.

CHAPTER TWO

The Beats' New Social Identity:
Pro-American or Anti-American?

General Introduction:

Seen by the masses as indecent and morally unacceptable, the attitudes that were adopted by the Beats as elements of their new social identity are the result of various sources of inspiration. In fact, the Beat Generation was constructed with national influences like Transcendentalism that was very supportive of the instinct and individualism as a tool to rely on for reaching a divine state of humanity. In Romanticism, they explored their sensitivity and love for nature that disregarded materialism, found support for their rejection of tradition and confirmed their reliance on intuition. Jazz was their favorite music; they enjoyed it so much that they went further to translate it into writing, using spontaneity and improvisation.

The Beats' social mores were also shaped by foreign tendencies. French surrealism helped them develop their interest in the people who benefited less from the American system. To surrealists, true beauty was found in the bottom. That is why simplicity is a recurrent feature in Beat literature. Existentialism, another French movement- as aforementioned -, is known for being very disapproving of the fact that people's lives had to be defined by social norms. This is what apparently fueled the Beats' need for disengagement. Finally, Eastern religion was a crucial source of inspiration the Beats had probably taken the most seriously, for it contains key-elements of their new philosophy like spirituality and metaphysics which were considered as the driving force leading to pacific and humanistic change. Belonging to Oriental ideology, Eastern religion advocates principles that are evidently absent in the Western one. Therefore, it was only through Eastern religion that they hoped to find answers to their questions about the nature of being and existence.

Holmes believed that "*the Beat Generation includes rebellious young people throughout the United States...and they have no consciousness that what they are doing is anything more serious than personally rejecting what they can't accept about American society*" (Charter 220). Each of Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs had conceived and communicated a new society through *On the Road*, *Howl* and *Junky*, respectively. From these major Beat pieces -which describe the situation of America after WWII-, we are going to extract the aspects that represent the new lifestyle these writers had individually chosen over the mainstream one. Simultaneously, we will reveal whether these aspects come for or against the very essence of Americanism⁸ (247).

⁸ Americanism: Loyalty to the United States: strong affection or support for the United States.

II. 1. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* :

During a celebration of the 20th anniversary of *On the Road*'s publication, Holmes expressed his feelings about Jack Kerouac and earnestly stated,

This anniversary conference is to urge Americans to take Kerouac seriously, because his message is important. Jack's gone. I'll never see him again. It's not personal. His life is all in his books. They are a connection, like all literature. You are connected to Kerouac through his books. As a great writer, he's achieved a post-human voice (Charters 390).

Published in 1957 -seven years after it had been written-, *On the Road* depicts indeed strong denotations of a radical turning point in the American notion of identity and perception of ideal society that predominated the postwar era and decades to come. In fact, through this novel, Jack Kerouac succeeded in making all his concerns tangible by the 'other' Americans who adopted unquestionably the postwar mainstream lifestyle. As to reach further their awareness, Kerouac fictionalized real life adventures that marked his youth at an age of culminating uncertainty and disorientation, among which taking the road and joining Neal Cassady in the hope of discovering the 'spiritually purer' rest of America.

"Kerouac..., in the 1950's...broke free and prophetically dreamed a future world of young people wearing Levi's and being cut loose from all the crumbling conventions" (15), George Condo wrote in an introduction of *Jack Kerouac Book of Sketches* to highlight Kerouac's impossibility to accept the social and moral changes that were imposed on him through conformity, consumption, censorship and other mediums that probably only served to control the different sides of American society and ultimately meet political ends.

The resounding reaction that echoed Kerouac's utmost denial of the new identity his fellow-citizens had already embraced is saliently framed around Dean Moriarty -inspired from his friend and muse Neal Cassady-, the most striking character in the novel who emblemizes the highest beat figure in America.

II. I. A) Neal Cassady: The New American Citizen:

“The glamour attached to Neal and his friends is irresistible to someone like Jack and he sees them as the apotheosis of everything that life should be...I will have to admit they are interesting and tremendously easy to like”, John Clellon Holmes reflected his impressions about Neal Cassady in one of his journal notes. (Charters 105)

For Kerouac and his friends, Neal Cassady symbolized the ideal Beat man since he was constantly in a good shape, laughing, looking for kicks, homeless, driving everyday for long trips across the country and never tired for meditating or asking questions about life. Moreover, Cassady did not seem to abide by any social or moral law. Believed to be an Existentialist, his behavior was totally liberated. Even when he committed a wrongdoing, he quickly moved on without showing any sign of regret (105).

From the very first pages of *On the Road*, Dean Moriarty is already seen as “a side burned hero of the snowy west” (*On the Road* 4). As introduced by Jack Kerouac or Sal Paradise -the narrator of the novel-, Dean was a very enthusiastic American young man who enjoyed a great deal of energy in his everyday life. The latter was especially marked by sex, “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” (4) In this passage, Kerouac shows the sacred position sex had in the lives of the Beat crowd; there was always time for sex, even while financially struggling to survive. Therefore, Dean was disliked and perceived by everybody else as an awkward madman. Sal was the only person who saw him with interest and curiosity because he represented to him something rare, crazy and confusing enough to chase. Sal was the only one who understood and believed in him, justifying that

He was simply a youth tremendously excited in life, and though he was a con-man, he was only conning because he wanted so much to live and to get involved with people who would otherwise pay no attention to him. He was conning me...and he knew I knew...but I didn't care and we got along fine...like heartbreaking new friends.(5)

Dean's unrighteous attitudes are explained by Sal as the result of mere ecstasy towards life.

Wishing to be writer, Dean was afraid the strict rules of American literature would hinder or slow his momentum of writing, which is clarified in a dialogue between him and Sal, ““Man, wow, there's so many things to do, so many things to write! How to even begin to get it all down and without modified restraints and all hung-up on like literary inhibitions and grammatical fears...”” (5). Apparently, Kerouac disapproved of conventional writing as he doubted its suitability for someone he greatly appreciated.

Furthermore, what Dean said and thought was “holy” to Sal. About his sympathy for Dean, Kerouac adds a quite rhythmic description of the kind of men he-Sal- admires and considers of true life qualities:

... 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 everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes “AWWW!” (6).

Despite their mind differences, Sal and Dean shared a deep spiritual yearning for a new life. The following passage reflects Sal’s comparison between his place in the American society and his friends’: “*Besides, all my New York friends were in the negative, nightmare position of putting down society and giving their tired bookish or political or psychoanalytical reasons, but Dean just raced in society, eager for bread and love; he didn’t care one way or the other...*” (7). Visibly, Dean’s social position was more positive, simplistic, optimistic and even quite primitive unlike his friends’ -by allusion the other Americans- who were too concerned with complicated criticism about theirs.

As disapproving of America as the novel might appear to suggest, Sal Paradise seemed to believe in the Promised Land -that is why he engaged on the road-. But the only Promised Land to him was Denver, the West (12). Reaching the Far West represented to Sal and Dean “*the end of doubt*” (117); it was in the West that they hoped to resolve their spiritual quest. As they moved west, Sal barely recognized himself, for he was away from home; everything around him seemed and sounded unfamiliar. Yet, he still kept riding even though he felt like “*some stranger, and my whole life was a haunted life, the life of a ghost, I was halfway across America, at the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future, and maybe that’s why it happened right there and then, that strange red afternoon.*” (12)

Another striking fact in the novel is that Dean was looking for his father, which may well symbolize his search for his identity. And his failure to find him only confirms his impossibility to know who he is. Dean had no place in his family. Uprooted, he was neither welcome, nor believed in although according to Sal, he “*had the tremendous energy of a new kind of American saint...*” (25) This shrewdly reveals Kerouac’s notion of the new mid 20th C American man. In other terms, the true American saint is the one disregarded by most people, misunderstood and ditched in the bottom of society, an “*underground monster[s]*” (25). The narrator of *On the Road* views Dean in an unusually and even absurdly positive way. As all considered him as “*a moron and a fool*”, Sal tried to prove them all wrong. (30) More particularly, what Sal found likeable about Dean is that he could allow himself to be an individual in his company, which may embody the whole Beat spirit and epitomize the cause of the Beat Generation. (31)

To stress more on his rejection of American society, Kerouac returns to criticize the Americans' attitudes in their sexual relationships, asserting that they are improper and not involving any spirituality to value such a human instant: "*Boys and girls in America have such a sad time together, sophistication demands that they submit to sex immediately without proper preliminary talk. Not courting talk – real straight talk about souls, for life is holy and every moment is precious.*" (36). Furthermore, in one of the passages, Sal put the American flag upside down while on a night guard duty. This act may point to his side of anti-Americanism, or at least his lack of respect for his country (41). Nevertheless, and despite the suggestive presence of rebellion in his tone, Sal reluctantly accepted conformity, convinced that "*Law and order's got to be kept*" (42). Moreover, Sal's decision to take the road was not aimless. Surprisingly enough, he wished the end of his journey would finally satisfy his need for stability. The following passage pointedly proves it: "*I want to marry a girl*", I told them, "*so I can rest my soul with her till we both get old. This can't go on all the time – all this franticness and jumping around. We've got to go someplace, find something*" (69). This evidently highlights his spiritual quest to "find something", "to rest his soul". Seemingly, Kerouac maintains that a Beat man pictures his future the same way a middle-class American does, which might allay suspicions about his anti-Americanism. Nonetheless, Kerouac believed in the spiritual rather than material path to reach true stability.

As regards religion, *On the Road* indicates the presence of faith in the Beats' souls. However, their notion of faith and perception of God seem more personalized than the other Americans', especially Dean's. As narrated by Sal, Dean was "*tremendously excited about everything he saw, everything he talked about, every detail of every moment that passed. He was out of his mind with real belief. "And of course now no one can tell us that there is no God. We've passed through all forms. You remember, Sal, when I first came to New York and I wanted Chad King to teach me about Nietzsche. You see how long ago? Everything is fine, God exists, we know time..."*" (71) As Dean assumed all his acts, be it good or bad, we can say that his crazy and frantic attitudes were only the result of his intense belief in God. More distinctively, Sal mentions mysticism about Dean as becoming his new voice, which proves the Beats' rejection of rational thought and thus, their deviation from the mainstream system of religious belief.

Kerouac, being already a catholic, had a very biblical notion of the world, and the road was considered by him as holy since, in one of the passages, he referred to his road trip as a "*pilgrimage on foot on the dark roads around America*" (176). Sal and Dean's road trip has indeed a deep religious significance, not only spiritual. But probably, what religion and spirituality shared according to Kerouac is the holiness with which every human being should feel concerned in life. Also, his vision of God is very suggestive in the novel, more particularly when Sal "*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"*" (106). Explicitly, Sal saw the American desert as a divine space where he could speak to God. According to him, heaven lies away from people and the buildings, away from the city.

Believing in Satan, which is metaphorically referred to in the novel as a "*snake*", Sal intimated that:

A saint called Doctor Sax will destroy it with secret herbs which he is at this very moment cooking up in his underground shack somewhere in America. It may also be disclosed that the snake is just a husk of doves; when the snake dies great clouds of seminal-gray doves will flutter out and bring tidings of peace around the world.”” (100).

Of course, this makes clear allusions to the moral mission of the Beats, a group of misunderstood innocents who acted only for the sake of the world peace.

However, true peace, in Sal’s opinion, was not possible to achieve with the rulings of Western civilization, especially when, driving on the road, they reached Mexico and discovered the Indian land and people who, Sal observed, “*were unmistakably Indians and were not all like the Pedros and Panchos of silly civilized American lore...they were not fools, they were not clowns; they were great Indians and they were the source of mankind and the fathers of it.*” (162) True enough, Kerouac seemed to cherish the indigenous Indian man who, unlike the other Indians having lost their purity in the American cities, still enjoyed an authentic and dignified character. He also paid tribute of the land to the Indians, adding that it was unfairly taken away from them by the Americans. Explicitly not proud of being an American citizen, Kerouac expressed the deception the Western civilization could bring and the high expectations it could break since all it really offered was a bomb likely to destroy their lives and bring them down to the same level as these ‘uncivilized primitive’ Indians. (172)

To a further extent, Sal’s deception was so intense that he virtually refused to be a white,

wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the] white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night...strolling in the dark mysterious streets. I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a “white man” disillusioned. All my life I’d had white ambitions; that was why I’d abandoned a good woman like Terry in the San Joaquin Valley” (105).

Indeed, the whole perception of the Beat identity is offered through this key-passage which exemplifies Kerouac's rejection of his own self. To be a white did neither make him happy, nor give him the kind of life he wanted.

Luckily though, the road seemed worth taking as Sal and Dean were very satisfied by the "magic" they had found at the end of it (160). In Mexico, out of the American soil, they were "*entering a new and unknown phase of things*" -a new and very pleasant dimension of the world-. The Beats felt a unique appreciation and understanding for that land that "*other Americans haven't done before us – they were here, weren't they? The Mexican war. Cutting across here with cannon*" (160).

However, it remains uncertain whether Kerouac was purely pro or anti American. Although Gary Nelson believes that "*On the Road* is a novel of great patriotism and profound love for America and beat (beatific) Americans", it seemed that his state of 'beatness' had only the chance to be eased in the desert.

II. 2. Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*:

In the 1950's, there was virtual absence of any literary reflection of the striking and traumatizing events of the war. In fact, American literature contained no depiction of the American man's social and psychic condition that was deeply affected by the Second World War's horrifying violence –regarding American art's responsibility to document events of such an importance like the atomic bombing of Japan which tragically marked the second half of the 20th Century. (Mercer 1)

Instead of tackling subjects directly related to violence and horror, writing was oriented towards another kind of issues like conformity and corporatism⁹. In effect, some postwar American writers seemed worried more by the consequences than by the circumstances of the war. Among these writers was Allen Ginsberg whose three-part poem *Howl and Other Poems* gained a nationwide recognition for the decisive role it played in overturning the standards of American poetry and lightening the conservative stiffness that had long guided the Americans' social perception of poetry, in both form and content.

Thanks to *Howl*, first read in public by Ginsberg at the Six Gallery in San Francisco, 1956, the Beat Generation became of a higher reputation and drew a noisier public attention than ever before. And thus, just a little while after the poem's publication in Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books caused a scandalous police arrest of the store owner, and led *Howl* to trial in 1957. The poem supposedly carried obscene material and had no literary merit. Fortunately, the court's decision cleared Ginsberg's name, and the judge who released *Howl* from censorship had made a very important statement declaring that it was not the poem that should have been seen as obscene, for it only reflected the declining values of postwar society. Therefore, he believed it was society that should be called obscene, qualifying the poem of “*redeeming social value*” (Charters 257). Indeed, the trial is regarded as a very important event in the history of Beat literature as it factually ended the tension of censorship that was very sharpened during the “McCarthy era” (257)

⁹ **Corporatism** : a system of running a state using the power of organizations such as businesses and trade unions that act, or claim to act, for large numbers of people

III. 2. A) Howling for “Who”:

The wave of fame that followed had changed the Beats' lives and even their individual characters. Allen Ginsberg, Holmes noticed in his journal, “*has become what we can only call in these faithless times “a saint”- that is, a man speaking directly to the broken soul of his age because he speaks directly about his own*” (Charters 363)

As Modernism was turning America into a one-dimensional society where everyone had the same lifestyle, same taste and same views, individual identity had flagrantly ceased to exist (Outline of American Literature Revised Edition 61). Written as a reaction to such a fact, *Howl* is seen as a prediction of the Americans' eventual identity. As Sherry Lutz Zivley added, “it was about what we were going to become” (Zivley 2).

Noteworthy, *Howl* starts with a very negative and pessimistic tone. From the author's perspective, “*the best minds of [his] generation*”- referring to Carl Solomon, a writer he'd met at a psychiatric institute and to whom the poem is dedicated- were “*destroyed by madness*” (*Howl* 1),- madness by allusion the fruit of postwar changes-. As a matter of fact, the content of *Howl* is crudely transparent as if to spare the reader the trouble of decoding ambiguity; that is what must have driven it into the obscenity trial.

In the first part of *Howl*, Ginsberg describes Carl and his like-minded Beat friends as “*starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix...*” (1).. We can discern from this line that the “negro streets” represented a refuge from the white streets. Probably looking for a come back to previous times, the “best minds” of Ginsberg's “generation” seemed to be escaping their white identity out of despair at postwar society –by using drugs-, especially when the latter had no empathy for minority groups and made no efforts to encourage divergent opinion (Impey 1). Being of political bearings, *Howl* may incarnate a clear invitation to non-conformity and even anti-Americanism. The poem's title is, in itself, a connotation of inherent ‘howl’ of anger at the government, an outcry of painful dislocation and social incompatibility. In fact, several lines conspicuously point to Ginsberg's sense of anti-Americanism, among which “*who burned cigarette holes in their arms protesting the narcotic tobacco haze of Capitalism, who distributed Supercommunist pamphlets in Union Square weeping and undressing...*” –although such a form of protest seemed to be affecting only themselves- (Impey 6). Through “*who let themselves be ... in the ... by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy*”¹⁰ (2), the author is audaciously and vulgarly attacking the American moral standards by linking happiness and adding a religious association to homosexual intercourse. As the latter was not yet tolerated in the late 1950's, it made him feel marginalized and thus drove him into creating a whole universe where he could behave as a free self-assertive man.

¹⁰ I intentionally used the ellipsis in this line to omit two obscene words although mentioning them would have highlighted better the author's defiance towards postwar America.

In contrast with *On the Road*, *Howl* depicts a loss of faith and total rejection of America in that there is no attempt of compromise with the new social conventions. Moreover, the stance of the poet is similar to that of an ardent opponent and enemy, which is clarified in “*who bit detectives in the neck and shrieked with delight in policecars for committing no crime but their own wild cooking pederasty and intoxication...*”(2)

“Who” most of the lines begin with refers to what Ginsberg considered as individual members of a counterculture. Portrayed as “*hungry and lonesome*”(2), they were always looking for something unconventional to relieve them from the postwar trauma like “*jazz or sex or soup*”.(2) Likewise, “Who” stands for oppressed and ostracised artists like him whose freedom of expression and power of choice had been disagreeably removed by the U.S. government.

More noticeably, it seems that the identity quest could become very tragic in the midst of a horrifyingly urban environment, i.e. whoever tried to build a social individual identity was mercilessly demeaned and cast into oblivion by the American reality. For Ginsberg, those “*who jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge this actually happened and walked away unknown and forgotten into the ghostly daze of Chinatown soup alleyways & firetrucks ...*” (4) illustrate that those who sought to be themselves in postwar America ended up either alone or dead in desperation.

Closely related to identity, madness is strongly present among the most recurrent themes ever discussed in *Howl*. The latter, Ginsberg believed, was a condition provoked by the interminable modern hectic changes. As put in one of the lines, his friends usually committed ridiculous and senseless acts like “[*singing out*] of their windows in despair, [*falling out*] of the subway window, [*jumping in*] the filthy Passaic, [*leaping on*] negroes, [*crying*] all over the street, [*dancing*] on broken wineglasses barefoot smashed phonograph records of nostalgic European 1930s...”(4) In Ginsberg’s eyes, those unreasonable attitudes were only a sign of unsuitability as they also helped recognize the Americans who were not content with their new society. Yet, in a sick capitalist society, it looked like it is the sound that is seen as mad. What Ginsberg particularly reproaches for damaging the sanity of the human mind is the mass media, pointed out in “*who demanded sanity trials accusing the radio of hypnotism & were left with their insanity & their hands & a hung jury...*” (4). When sent to the mental hospital for robbery, Ginsberg stated in an interview that he spent much time wondering who was really sick and who was really sound -whether the doctors or patients-. Seemingly, the postwar age was so difficult for him and the Beats to cope with that it affected them mentally.

Acting against mainstream expectations was regarded by the American government as a form of transgression since homogeneity was a fundamental aspect that was absolutely to define the American population at the time (Impey 2). Thereupon, the second part of *Howl* is a key indicator of Ginsberg’s extreme irritation. Its lines convey a very destructive image of the American social and political institutions to which he metaphorically attributed the repetitive adjective “Moloch”. Drawn from the author’s Jewish upbringing, Moloch is traditionally “a Semitic deity to whom children were sacrificed” (Encarta 2007). It is

also defined as “somebody or something that requires a costly and painful sacrifice”(Encarta 2007), which is a clear insinuation to the evil suppression of individual identity in exchange for a uniformly collective one –marked by capitalist profit-. The following lines permit the reader to understand the author’s point through his apparently very forthcoming attitude about his vision of America:

Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo! Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb!

Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is electricity and banks! Moloch whose poverty is the specter of genius!

Moloch who entered my soul early! Moloch in whom I am a consciousness without a body! Moloch who frightened me out of my natural ecstasy! Moloch whom I abandon! Wake up in Moloch! Light streaming out of the sky!

(Ginsberg, 6)

Unlike part one; there isn’t any name of place or person referring directly to America in part two. Oliver Impey assumed that it is due to Ginsberg’s willingness to showcase a feeling of anonymity (Impey 3). ‘Moloch’, as Impey added, “is symbolic of the individual’s identity being consumed by the capitalist machine” (Impey 4), which gives us another reason to believe in Ginsberg’s intransigent condemnation of America when we further consider the utterly critical and exclusively negative description it is given in the poem.

Once again, what had understandably made the poet’s burden of living in America heavier is his homosexuality. The latter is exposed in *Howl* as not only a weapon of rebellion and provocation to fight back the conservative force of civil intolerance, but also as a poetic celebration of free self-expression that Ginsberg could afford to manifest only in writing. Indeed, sexual identity in post-war society was very polemic to approach bearing in mind that it had to remain consistent with mainstream norms. And having a gay identity, Phillip.L Hammack underlined, was as much threatening to the American government as being communist (Hammack 25).

When deprived of the possibility and freedom of being different, one can only revolt in this context to save individuality from extinction. And to Ginsberg, the most appropriate way of doing so was through a total devotion to illegal practices like criminality and drug use, portrayed mostly in part one in “*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*” (1). Because what jeopardized the Beats’ identity quest was the government, the one that defines what is legal and what is illegal (Impey 6).

Not all the members of the Beat Generation were homosexual, but with social liberation as the most common aspiration in mind, Ginsberg defended not only his right to be gay, but also his friends' diverse views on their own personalities (Impey 6). Moreover, as evidently as it seems to be presented, homosexuality is surprisingly not the most important aspect Ginsberg wished to see frequent in the American life. In fact, *Howl* is more a promotion of frankness, honesty and above all, acceptance of otherness, which the government and many Americans were afraid of.

Despite Ginsberg and his friends' rebellious attitudes displayed in part one, and the reactionary attack addressed to the oppressive Moloch that constricted the development of their social, sexual and political beliefs in part two, the promotion of individual identity ends up apparently unsuccessful in part three (Impey 7). The latter is saliently marked by the refrain "*Carl Solomon! I'm with you in Rockland*"¹¹ (6). Here, the poet demonstrates his empathy and support for his friend with whom he felt intimately linked. Meanwhile, he shows that resisting the American system in order to be an individual can only conduct to a madhouse. But to Ginsberg, madness is not an illness. In a magazine interview, he referred it to Zen Buddhism, believing it was "*wild wisdom, or crazy wisdom, crazy in the sense of wild, unlimited, unbounded...*" (Ginsberg, *When Worlds Collide*). Yet, in lines like "*I'm with you in Rockland where you bang on the catatonic piano the soul is innocent and immortal it should never die ungodly in an armed madhouse / I'm with you in Rockland where fifty more shocks will never return your soul to its body again from its pilgrimage to a cross in the void*" (Ginsberg, 7) we notice that such a liberating pattern of thought catalyzed many sorts of inhuman treatment which artists like Solomon had received in the mental institution.

In the end, Ginsberg's ultimate wish was only to make *Howl* "an emotional time bomb that would continue exploding in U.S. consciousness in case our military-industrial-nationalistic complex solidified into a repressive police bureaucracy" (Ginsberg, xii) (Impey 8). Apparently, it seemed impossible for him to reach a proper individual fulfillment as he noticed both rebellion and conformity led to a life of madness, and were of no help to those attempting to build a different identity from that imposed by mainstream postwar America.

¹¹ Rockland is the name of a mental hospital in the U.S.

II. 3. William. S. Burroughs' Junky:

Given that *On the Road* and *Howl* had already presented Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg' share of criticism about the social pressure of post-war America like the moral suffocation caused by the various taboos and conformity that limited personal freedom, William. S. Burroughs went quite further with *Junky*¹² in a sense that he exclusively submits the reader to a total immersion in the underground world of drug addicts. Ginsberg wrote in the novel's introduction that the editor who helped publish *Junky* "*felt that we (us guys, Bill, Jack, Myself) didn't care, as he did, about the real Paranoia of such publishing...it took bravery on his part to put out "this type of thing", a book on Junk*" (Ginsberg)

Nineteen fifty-three was one of the 'hottest' years of anticommunism that roughly intensified during the McCarthy era. As previously mentioned, the latter was knowingly marked by a very rigid and severe political atmosphere that inevitably rebounded on the social one. The same year knew the publication of *Junky*. By the time it was released, the U.S government was already highly preoccupied by chasing and eliminating any media material that promoted indecent values, particularly drug use. More notably, drug users and pro-communists were as a-matter-of-fact put in the same level of threat to national security. Precautionary, drug addicts were very much surveyed in society, i.e. uttering the simple word of 'tea' could cause trouble and eventual arrest. That is why, in the 1950's, junk use was very expensive, and demanded a great deal of time, patience and caution, above all.

Belonging to the slang vocabulary, a junky -or junkie- is "a drug addict, especially somebody addicted to heroin" (Encarta 2007) Bill Lee, the narrator of the novel, describes thoroughly and at length the universe of junk addicts, bringing stories of his friends and situations of health problems caused by drug abuse; even death is mentioned. It is, as Nathaniel Rich clarifies, a tour guide to the drug community of "*dealers, users, thieves, and con artists*", which is not likely to be very pleasant for a middle-class American reader. (Rich)

¹² *Junky* is a semi-autobiographical novel that narrates the author's everyday life as a drug addict.

II. 3. A) Addicted to Be:

Because the subject -- in medias res -- was considered so outré, Burroughs was asked to contribute a preface explaining that he was from distinguished family background-- anonymously William Lee -- and giving some hint how some supposedly normal citizen could arrive at being a dope fiend, to soften the blow for readers, censors, reviewers, police, critical eyes in walls & publishers' rows, god knows who. Carl wrote a worried introduction pretending to be the voice of sanity introducing the book on the part of the publisher. (Ginsberg)

In fact, William Burroughs was the eldest and certainly the most educated among the members of the Beat Generation; *Junky* is a typical reflection of his educational background. Having studied medicine in Vienna for six months, he visibly borrows a scientific-like tone when explaining for instance the effects of a certain drug substance. Perhaps his intention was to look like an objective doctor or to be taken more seriously by the American readers in order to arouse their sympathy as it wasn't very welcome to discuss drugs in such a stifling conservative climate.

Burroughs' feeling of discomfort with his life in America begins to be manifested right in the prologue. In an attempt of justifying and rationalizing his considerable inclination towards drugs, Burroughs explains how he had trouble sleeping at night as a child because of persistent nightmares about a given “*supernatural horror*”, and how he later learnt that opium¹³ “*brings sweet dreams, and I said: “I will smoke opium when I grow up”*” (Burroughs, prologue). With ‘supernatural horror’ we may only envisage his reference to the advent of modernism having frighteningly changed the social landscape of America. As an enlargement of his dissatisfaction, he talks about a certain autobiography that he read, recalling that “*the author claimed to have spent a good part of his life in jail. It sounded good to me compared with the dullness of a Mid-west suburb where all contact with life was shut out*”. We may simply regard this passage as a clear sign of the author's inability to enjoy post-war society and his impossibility to live the way it suited him.

The alternative lifestyle that Burroughs had chosen to adopt over the mainstream one was characterized, well understandably, by vandalistic acts like “*break[ing] into houses and walk[ing] around without taking anything.*” (Burroughs, prologue) Being already of a rich family, money was far from being his ultimate concern. The only time he felt in a real necessity of money, he asserts in the prologue, was when he “*came in contact with junk, became an addict*” (Burroughs, prologue) Thereupon, Burroughs continues his prologue with an exhaustive report of the different stages a newly addict undergoes in the debut of his junk experience, insisting that to be a junky has never been a matter of choice or a deliberate act. “*You*

¹³ Opium: addictive drug that contains several highly addictive narcotic alkaloid substances such as morphine and codeine.

become a narcotics addict because you do not have strong motivations in any other direction...You don't decide to be an addict. One morning you wake up sick and you're an addict." (Burroughs, prologue)

However, there surely must be a good reason why he resorted to drug use and not something else. The author's notion of addiction seems quite ambiguous as he started using junk during the Second World War - evidently not a suitable context for his social evolution-. Moreover, seeing that he wasn't yet personally accomplished despite his graduation from university, which he called "*a fake English setup taken over by the graduates of fake English public schools*", Burroughs seemed to have no opportune field other than junk to work out his self-realization in post-war America.

After having widened his experience with the various drug substances, Burroughs admits how both the enjoyable and unpleasant sides of junk helped him structure his vision of life, which adds an important scope to the role of junk, perhaps even giving it a spiritual dimension: "*Junk is not, like alcohol or weed, a means to increased enjoyment of life. Junk is not a kick. It is a way of life*". (Burroughs, prologue)

In the beginning of *Junky*, Burroughs seems well in favor of drugs, explaining their effects and arguing for their supposedly positive impact on health especially when, in the 1940's, drug use was labeled by the American legislation as harmful and crime-related. Therefore, as a sign of rebellion and attempt of proving it wrong, Burroughs defines biologically and from his own experience weed as "*positively not habit-forming. You can smoke weed for years and you will experience no discomfort if your supply is suddenly cut off...I have smoked weed myself off and on for fifteen years and never missed it when I ran out*" (Burroughs, 31). Furthermore, the narrator extends his questioning of the American law makers' credibility, providing the fact that tobacco or alcohol -which is legal-, is apparently more addictive and has more noxious effects than weed. The latter, in the author's knowledge, "*does not harm the general health. In fact, most users claim it gives you an appetite and acts as a tonic to the system...Everyday, crimes are committed by drunks who would not have committed the crime sober*" (31)

Although factual enough and scientifically verifiable, Burroughs's argumentation is far from being only objective. In fact, many critics believe the primary focus of the novel is most importantly a challenge to the law from a personal standpoint. Notably, the author's main intention behind his portrayal of the junk and criminal's life in postwar society would not be to seek or evoke the reader's sympathy for outlaws, but instead, to offer -from his own perspective- a new and probably even more critical vision on the true nature of the American legislative system: "*The State legislators drew up a law making it a crime to be a drug addict. They did not specify where or what they meant by drug addict.*"(95) The majority of characters in *Junky*, including the narrator himself, seem to rather prefer being more controlled and shaped by the force of drugs than by that of the law. The very fact that Burroughs had made his first morphine injection in 1945 is very symbolic and suggestive of his defiance to postwar America. Hereunder, we may have the right to view Burroughs as anti-American, at least from a moral and conventional point of view.

As a habit takes hold, other interests lose importance to the user. Life telescopes down to junk, one fix and looking forward to the next, "stashes" and "scripts," "spikes" and "droppers." The addict himself often feels that he is leading a normal life and that junk is incidental. He does not realize that he is just going through the motions in his non-junk activities. It is not until his supply is cut off that he realizes what junk means to him. (35)

By the time Burroughs started to develop drug dependence, junk became a primordial aspect of his new social identity. The novel is full of slang terms like "croaker", "cat" or "tea head", everything related to the universe of drug addicts. However, the daily life of a junky wasn't very easy to lead during the postwar period. The narrator reports how he and his friends were constantly chased by the police and how they always struggled to find a doctor who would write a prescription for them to get the substance. At times, it was really impossible to find a supply. Hence, Bill decided to quit the habit. Yet again, when he went to hospital in the hope of getting cure to his addiction, it didn't help him, and his situation only aggravated: "*Even with the sedative, I did not sleep that night. Next day I was worse. I couldn't eat anything, and it was an effort for me to move around.*" (83) As a consequence, he never stayed clean long enough before he took back again drugs. What had also pushed him to resume his practice is the terrible situation of boredom he found himself in when he was off junk. Apparently, he had no joy in the kind of life mainstream America had offered him although he had already a family.

Nonetheless, Burroughs explains that if drug addicts use junk, it is not generally for pleasure, but in order to avoid junk sickness, which is, in Rich's words, "*like a hangover mixed with burning alive and a parasitic infestation*"(Rich), especially after having caught the first habit. However, despite availability of cures for junk addiction, Bill was never determined or willing enough to totally get rid of his drug dependence. In fact, it seemed a better option for him to stay a junky and suffer from the agony its lack provoked rather than to follow an uninteresting and monotonous pattern of life like the middle-class Americans did. In Bill's opinion, the experience one can draw from using drugs is powerfully enriching and thus, worth living and risking.

As Rich so wisely put it, "it is better to be a junkie than to end up what Burroughs might have been, had he followed in his family's line." From this we may trace a very tight link between junk and identity. Although only semi-autobiographical, Burroughs makes it clear enough that junk represented a crucial aspect of his personality by précising that "*junk is not a kick; it is a way of life*", an illegal, thus anti-American way of life. Moreover, given his physical dependence on junk to keep him going, Bill was naturally too distracted and had no time to build a social life in accordance with the mainstream norms like working or having a family. Although he had a wife and children, they are rarely mentioned in the novel, and his junk friends and dealers became his only social entourage.

However, there came many times where he attempted to stop using drugs for good because he encountered various cases of excess that led him on the verge of death, but in vain. “*Once a junky, always a junky. You can stop using junk, but you are never off after the first habit*” (135). This is a statement that explicitly reveals Burroughs’ conviction with his drug addiction and ultimately, his acceptance of his destiny as a junky. Interestingly though, Bill confesses that his deep wish was to completely purify his body from addiction if he was able to do so, only he “*did not have the drive. It gave me a terrible feeling of helplessness to watch myself break every schedule I set up as though I did not have control over my actions*” (144). So, apparently, Burroughs’ whole conception of life and eventually his own character had irrevocably been fostered by his junk addiction along with its both positive and negative sides.

Just like Kerouac, Burroughs had also experienced the need to move in the different places of America when he felt lost or bored. It is in the south, precisely in New Orleans, that Bill’s anti-middle-class American life reached its highest point. His devotion to the most disparaged acts by postwar society like homosexuality, crimes and drug peddling had caused him a big arrest. While awaiting trial, apprehending prison and believing in his innocence, Bill decided to escape his country for Mexico. It was the only place where he had the possibility and freedom to pursue his drug addiction safely and at his leisure.

Superficially, we can see *Junky* as a simple novel that portrays the author’s deep journey into the abyss of addiction, from the day he caught his first habit throughout the days he tried to stop until the day he quit America in the aim of keeping up his addiction in a freer, cheaper and better way. Yet, the fact that Bill fled the U.S in search for a better drug in Mexico only confirms his refusal to give up his addiction although he could have been able to choose given his awareness about the dangerous inconveniences of junk addiction and his latent intention to discourage drug use in his narration, which leads us to conclude that junk was the only ‘society’ he identified himself in. And such a society officially does not exist in postwar America.

General Conclusion:

The general statement that could be made out of this tri-observation of the Beats' social identity through all of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* and William S. Burroughs' *Junky* is that each of these writers had taken on his identity quest on the very soil of America. The end of the quest, however, is uncommon, if not paradoxical.

On one hand, Kerouac and Burroughs did not show extreme feelings of hatred towards America, but they had seemingly both found refuge beyond the American borders, in Mexico where they experienced the uppermost level of social liberation. On the other hand, while Ginsberg seemed relatively the most revolted and anti-American among his counterparts, he never really overstepped the American frontier.

Nevertheless, such conclusion does not dismiss the fact that all of them defied the postwar American system, and contributed in planting the seeds of counterculture in mid 20th Century North America, all the while individually.

CHAPTER THREE

The Beats' New Artistic Identity: Moral Concerns
through Immoral Writing

General Introduction:

The Beats were unable to identify with postwar America not only as citizens, but also as writers. Owing a great part of their inspiration to Emerson and Whitman, the advocates of a new, open-minded and fresh 19th C American literature¹⁴, the Beats were against the idea of writing upon the standards of classicism, tradition and formalism promoted by the New Criticism¹⁵ -a predominant literary creed at the time-, which leads us to consider Beat literature as the incarnation of an important attempt of renewing the old and previously existing essence of American literature.

As a result of such a daring initiative, the publication of unique masterpieces like *On the Road*, *Howl* and *Junky* during a period like mid Twentieth Century have succeeded in bringing about dilemma and a controversial need for division in literary criticism; It was either totally defended or utterly disapproved (Bartlett, intro). In fact, what constitutes the Beat's writing style, aesthetics, technique, form and content...etc is so extravagant that it was subject to various academic attacks. Thus, the Beat movement became undermined and negatively perceived from both a social and artistic point of view.

Notwithstanding, Beat literature remains worth studying and analyzing, for it offers an unprecedented insight into the writer's spontaneous, unambiguous and authentic approach of communication -especially when biographical material is overly present in the majority of the Beat pieces-. Furthermore, to ensure the conveyance of their message, the Beats chose not to address their audience with academically accepted writing norms. Thereupon, and still focusing on Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs, we are left to discuss the features each of them has brought to Beat literature. Simultaneously, we will question the intentions behind their use of unconventional writing methods in following their identity quest and transmitting their supposedly moral and human concerns to the American society and the world.

¹⁴ 19th C American literature is based on the individual's instinct and free expression of emotions without following any kind of literary conventions.

¹⁵ New Criticism : a movement between 1930 and 1970 in the study of literature, especially poetry, that examined its structure, imagery, and ambiguities, rather than its historical setting or the author's intent.

III. 1. The Rebellious Rise of Beat Literature:

Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs are the three American citizens and writers who are the most recognized for the undeniable role they have played in changing the social and literary beliefs so dearly held by the Americans before the end of WWII. (Bartlett, intro 3) Although considered as members of the same literary circle and actors of the same social movement, it has never been easy to establish a precise and common bond between them and the other beats. In fact, they are so unrelated that it remains intriguing how they could be labeled as part of the same group. Politically, for instance, they had very different standpoints from each other.

However, it becomes obvious that the only element that strongly linked Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs together is their spiritual concerns and, as Bartlett observed, “a similarity of life-attitude and aesthetic direction in each other” (Bartlett 6). And the lack of spirituality is only what made them push back American society –all the while individually-. Indeed, the Beats’ spiritual, yet distinct convictions were not reflected only through their social behaviors, but also in their literary works and writing styles. In order to grasp the significance of the Beat Generation as a literary movement, one shall consult the production that still weighs on today’s American literary ideology. But if John Clellon Holmes wondered, “*did they make any difference?*” an affirmative answer is probably not unanimous.

As of the 1950’s, the Beat literary movement was flowering between New York and San Francisco. To undo the deception inflicted on by the American post-war life, the Beats had no way out than experimentation, going through “streets, bars, pods, bop, drugs, hipsters, sexual breakthroughs, and urgings towards any unknown” (Bartlett 7). In parallel, to write using pre-war norms sounded illogical, irrelevant and even absurd to the Beats. “*What did a sonnet really have to do with Hiroshima, Charlie Parker upheavings in the spirits?...Could 17th Century meter and rhyme contain the syncopated accelerations of the actual reality of blaring radios and jackhammers and pavement-crowds and bomb reverberations?*” (7)

So here, the whole structure of American writing was put in question by the Beats as it was believed not to be corresponding with the larger socio-political context. As Charles Olson, writing about Eliot’s classicism, clarified, “*rather remain silent than cheat the language*” (7). Yet, evidently, writing otherwise was not acceptable. Thus, the American writers and poets who decided not to follow the mainstream literary path found difficulty in getting published, which led to the emergence of “a gradual budding of small presses and now-and-again little magazines” (8). Such is among the first starting points from which Beat literature came to prominence.

Post-war American writers like the Beats were living in circumstances that put the development of a proper artistic identity at a disadvantage, which is an understandable motif for their withdrawal from “the official literature” (8). What is also understandable is the unwelcoming and contemptuous reaction produced by “the media and the academy” whereby the Beats were identified as “know-nothing Bohemians” or “only

rebellion around” (9). Apparently, their artistic image and writing principles were disapproved and very much insulted. Ironically though, all those attempts to kill the Beat literary grain that was about to grow -like the poisoning media defamation and censorship strokes- only helped it flourish quicker than it would have otherwise. True enough; the successful birth of Beat literature is partly due to the academy and media’s intention to destroy it. The obscenity trial of *Howl* is a vivid example.

The aforementioned sources of inspiration that shaped the Beats’ social attitudes had also helped them foster their literary beliefs and principles, among which existentialism that irrigated more deeply and metaphysically their sense of freedom, and Zen Buddhism that illuminated their thoughts and opened up their minds towards a larger scope of literary possibilities, and harmonized their contact with reality (10).

It is clear, then, that the Beats’ aspiration in writing was to innovate, certainly, but more importantly to make “a reconnection of broken circuits, insisting that body, mind and soul are enmeshed” (10) As Bartlett assumed, “they were affirming older continuities against contemporary relativism”. As a consequence, they were called “nihilists, obscurantists, dope and sex fiends, and corrupters of literary values”. It is to remind that not only American literature, but the whole upcoming generation was radically affected by such an influential extravagance like that of Beat literature.

Knowing that the creation of the latter would not have been fully successful without the individual contributions and brilliancies of Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs, we are to explore some of their several literary initiatives and new specificities that later came to mark 20th C American writing.

III. 2. Jack Kerouac’s Prosody: Manifesto for a New Writing Process:

Labeled as “The King of Beats”, Jack Kerouac is knowingly the most influential and inspirational writer among the Beat prominent figures mid 20th C North America has ever known. The reason that makes him so is that the artistic contributions he has brought to American writing are totally new and original. Besides, such contributions were used to incorporate and reflect the author’s whole spiritual quest. (Grace 27)

In fact, there are many important features about Kerouac's writing methods and concepts that differentiate him from the other American writers, and are peculiar enough to give him a separate artistic identity.

III. 2. A) Style: From Spontaneity to Holiness:

In the "*Essentials of Spontaneous Prose*", published in 1957, Kerouac expounded his literary vision and conception of his identity as a writer through specific and clearly stated instructions:

Not "selectivity" of expression but following free deviation (association) of mind into limitless blow-on-subject sea of thought, swimming in sea of English with no discipline other than rhythms of rhetorical exhalation and expostulated statement, [. . .] satisfy yourself first, then reader cannot fail to receive telepathic shock and meaning-excitement by same laws operating in his own mind. (Portable 484)

From here we can possibly discern the initial goals and principles Kerouac began to attribute to the concept of writing per se, which is visibly ruled by spontaneity and a kind of nonchalance vis-à-vis conventional writing that hadn't occurred to any other American writer to manifest before him. Likewise, Kerouac had a very different notion of writer-reader relationship, believing that the reader will appreciate what the writer provides only when the latter favors self-satisfaction first.

In contradiction with the traditional conception of art, Kerouac's was based on the belief that spontaneity is the most efficient 'method' to convey "the truest artistic emotions and ideas" (Grace, 28). Following such a direction, Kerouac aspired to reconstitute the creed of Romanticism, leaving the reader's unconscious mind the task of receiving the message intuitively. According to Nancy Grace, the exclusive importance that Kerouac gave to the author (himself) over the reader does not indicate, unlike logical expectations, Kerouac's self-centeredness, but rather his love for "human nature itself, which operates by laws transcending cultural codification." (28) Moreover, she assumes that Kerouac's intention behind this inclination was to meet "Wordsworth's belief that all good writing is the production of powerful feelings" (28), not to mention also his attempt to relate his writing philosophy with Emerson's.

Above all, Kerouac's choice of spontaneity as his writing method is most importantly justified by his wish to resemble the holiness that defines the language of a Christian speech. From a religious and moral point of view, such is manifestly not an inadmissible intention. Yet, writing spontaneously was still unwelcome among the academic norms of American literature (28).

What is believed to have stimulated more Kerouac into the search for a new artistic identity is a letter written to him in December 1950 by Neal Cassady, the same person who revolutionized his social life in *On the Road*. Known as the “*Cherry Mary*”, Neal Cassady’s aimless but honestly composed prose was regarded by Kerouac as:

A moment in lit. history when I received that thing & only sweet wife & I read it & I knew. Ah man it’s great...I wait for you to send me the entire thing in disorderly chronological order anytime you say and anytime it comes, because I’ve just got to read every word you’ve got to say and take it all in. If that ain’t life nothing ain’t. (226)(Jr.)

Indeed, Neal’s academically rambled letter was an illuminating revelation and a decisive transition in Kerouac’s whole literary path which, according to Grace, was marked by the ultimate desire to find holiness. Grace goes further into comparing “Kerouac’s conception of style and artistic mission” with “the creation story of Jesus Christ as the messiah, thus reconfiguring that savior as the writer who founds a new American Renaissance of religion and literature” (29).

III. 2. B) Form: Between Babble and Jazz:

Among the most essential arguments that explain Kerouac’s recourse to spontaneous prose is his insistence about the presence of his first language as an impacting factor on his writing process; for he believed it would give a primal quality to the form of his literature. Concerning the latter, Kerouac’s notion was strikingly and interestingly organic. He assumed that the writer, especially the poet, is able to consciously and innately structure form before even becoming a poet, i.e. without needing the knowledge of literary rules. Referring this kind of poets to Shakespeare, Kerouac asserted that “*Shakespeare heard sound first, then the words were there in his QUICK HEAD*” (Blonde 88).

As for Kerouac’s own case, his composition of sound was drawn from various elements of his social background. The most important one is obviously jazz music, which he saw as “some kind of ancient sound from the preconscious past of where he was trying to trace his roots way back to pre-Christian Brittany” (55) (30). In fact, Kerouac’s spontaneous method was hugely inspired by the quality of improvisation mastered by famous artists like Charlie Parker or Lenny Tristano (30). In *Mexico City Blues*, a poem described by Allen Ginsberg as “a spontaneous bop prosody and original classic literature”, he makes it quite clear in the very note:

*I want to be considered a jazz poet
blowing a long blues in an afternoon jam
session on Sunday. I take 242 choruses;
my ideas vary and sometimes roll from
chorus to chorus or from halfway through
a chorus to halfway into the next.*

While applying his intuitive conception of sound to his form theory, Jack determinedly believed that sound, which is linked to parole is too distinct and even more significant than word meaning, which is linked to langue. In a way, Kerouac focused more on the use of sound than the communication of meaning during his writing process because he aimed at bringing an infantile value to the core of his work. He even chose to identify the method of his word selection as *babble*, “the definition of varying from meaningless chatter to a continuous murmuring sound like flowing water” (30). Here’s an example:

*Aw rust rust rust rust die die die pipe pipe ash ash die die ding dong ding ding
ding rust cob die pipe ass rust die words-- I'd as rather be permiganted in
Rusty's moonlight Rork as be perderated in this bile arta panataler where ack
the orshy rosh crowshes my tired idiot hand 0 Lawd I is coming to you'd soon's
you's ready's as can readies by Mazatlan heroes point out Mexicos & all ye
rhythmic bay fishermen don't hang fish eye soppo in my Ramadam give--
dgarette Sop of Arab Squat—*

Evidently, Kerouac used babble as a vital tool for the construction of his form in the hope of reflecting the very original source from where language is first produced, i.e. from the subconscious mind, which adds purity and a kind of wisdom to the author’s writing intention (31). As Jack himself clearly assumed, “words ‘come from the Holy Ghost’ first in the form of babble which suddenly by its sound indicates the word truly intended” (*Portable* 487) (31)

Despite the skepticism expressed by some critics like Regina Weinreich about the validity of Kerouac’s immature language, it remains clearly understood that if Kerouac wished to associate both babble and Jazz with Literature –two separate concepts- into one universe, his own artistic universe, the latter is easily tangible through his capacity to add “this musical quality” to American literature. So, the fact that Kerouac prioritized the sound of the word over its meaning in his literary production only reveals what Clark Coolidge called “the result of the artist’s desire to include everything in a poem or prose piece” (48:49) (31).

III. 2. C) Narrative: Sketching and Auto fiction:

Along with spontaneity, sketching was a very particular technique Kerouac applied while building imagery. The principle was to make his literary descriptions be felt just like photographs or more precisely snapshots, i.e. instead of using a camera to capture a fugitive daily moment, Kerouac used vague words that came directly from his memory about a certain place or event, and just jotted them down to create what he called “sketching”. (31). According to him, ordinary life was as worth a literary portrayal as anything else that was treated by other ‘conventional’ writers of his time. The sketching technique is visibly manifested through the following passage, an extract from *Book of Dreams*:

In a dismal studio room in New York my whole family Ma Pa & Nin and I have taken up quarters and "all got jobs" and here it's night, one dim light burning, we're conversing but it's a weird conversation...I'm rolling a stick of tea and talking right at them some wild excited inanities (born of T) they dont even listen to, rather they're discussing me solemnish and my father gets up and says "He's not worried about marijuana? Eh?" and he comes over to my side - I see him coming and I go blind, darkness takes the place of the entire scene, nevertheless now I feel his touch on my arm. (Book of Dreams, 226)

Indeed, reporting personal life events seemed a very crucial task for Kerouac to render in his literary productions. Being the son of a printer, the environment he grew in had strongly contributed in fostering the vision that he had in linking between his life and literature. And it is for the same reason that Kerouac used to rather type instead of write. Such a unique practice ended up defining him as a creative and one-of-his-kind American writer; *On the Road* is, above all, a long draft taped on one long roller paper. (32)

Yet, if memory was Kerouac’s best source of literary creation, it was not always as efficient as he expected it to be. In *The Legend of Duluoz*, Jack admits a certain flaw in memory. When he resorted to old photographs, along with diaries and journals, he quickly noticed a big difference between the past and the present (33). Moreover, the image of the past could often become a romanticized version of the present. Therefore, and in spite of Kerouac’s determination in depicting only the reality of his life experiences in his books, imagination would easily gain its place among his most indispensable literary tools. But as Grace argued, it was less by necessity than a mere change of interest, i.e. the purely autobiographical genre was not genuine enough for Kerouac to subscribe his literary works to.

By enlarging his perspective from the first person to an “omniscient persona”, to borrow Grace’s words, Kerouac had somehow intertwined reality and fiction during his process of storytelling -reality in the autobiographical sense and fiction in that he only used false names for real individuals-. Not all his life was portrayed, but only what he judged the most important and worth telling parts¹⁶ (34).

Known as auto fiction, the latter process that blends between memory and imagination had, indeed, provided Kerouac with a distinct trait, and had also granted him a certain authority and freedom as an individual and authentic American writer (35). But most importantly, it was of a great help to him during his identity quest. Stefano Maffina argues that using auto fiction seems to have served Kerouac’s need for free self-expression during his narration process, especially on the subconscious level. In other words, if Kerouac resorted to fiction, more particularly to the possibility it offers in attributing different names to the narrator and writer, it was as a mere attempt for him “to avoid self-censorship” (Maffina 191).

Ann Douglas wrote in the *New York Times Book Review* that “Kerouac’s work represents the most extensive experiment in language and literary form undertaken by an American writer of his generation”. Indeed, Kerouac’s sole aim was to build his own poetics, stylistics and narrative material, not only for the sake of authenticity and individuality, but also out of a conviction that the academically and socially predicated language was not appropriate, as James Jones underlined, for sending “a version of reality to enact experience and emotions in language” (32)

¹⁶ Such is another feature dismissed from the definition of autobiography.

III. 3. Allen Ginsberg's New Vision on American Poetry:

"In our day poetry is the last remaining messenger from Heaven" (Ginsberg 57). While he had already been a formalist and conventional writer, Allen Ginsberg's anger at postwar changes seemed convincing enough for him to deviate from the mainstream literary path and attempt to follow his own -often considering himself as a prophet-.

It is in the company of individuals like Jack Kerouac, Neal Cassady and William Burroughs along with his participation in the Beat movement that Ginsberg's artistic sense attained a most flourishing level, and had subsequently led to the emergence of new visions that he would later define as the assets of his new literary concept.

III. 3. A) The Political Rage, *Howl* and Friendship:

Being the most politically animated among his counterparts, Ginsberg had always blamed the government for provoking circumstances that were a menace to literary independence, more particularly the Cold War. This constant belief in the malevolence of the American system gave him a conspiratorial spirit that would later become his strongest drive in writing his non-conformist poetry, especially *Howl*. One of its readers admitted, "It bounded us together and gave us a sense of identity as members of a new generation that had come of age in the wake of World War II and the atomic bomb." (Raskin, xi)

In fact, Ginsberg engaged in writing underground and obscene poetry because he believed the conventional and intellectual writers of the time were only serving the C.I.A.'s project "*to keep a lid on genuine creativity*" (Raskin xii). After efforts of social conformity and academic integrity, Ginsberg was quickly attracted to the informality and rebellion of "the wild young Barbarians and the savages" (Raskin 47). While he had been a former student at Columbia University, Allen asserted that his social and artistic vision was truly fostered and taught from "down-and-out people on the street", his friends and the people who are very much idolized as high Beat figures.

Note worthily, friendship was given a huge importance in Ginsberg's process of literary maturation. In fact, his relationship with Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs is very fundamental to know in order to understand Ginsberg's work, both thematically and rhetorically. The first -maybe symbolic- reason is that the friendship that tied up Ginsberg with Kerouac and Burroughs is what triggered the birth of the Beat Generation as a social and literary movement in the very first place. Secondly, these three friends shared the same "dreams and ambitions", had gone through the same experiences during WWII, which made it special and very influential on Ginsberg's own artistic identity, to an extent that everything they lived together was

translated on paper through “letters, novels and poems”. To borrow Jonah Raskin’s words, *Howl* is “perhaps the quintessential twentieth-century American poem to celebrate male comradeship and male bonding in the spirit of Walt Whitman and Herman Melville” (xxii)

Joanne Kyger stated that Ginsberg was known by his “freedom of language, political honesty, and a spontaneous mind” (xvii). Consequently, if *Howl* was subject to many critical and moral condemnations for the too open language it exhibited, Ginsberg immediately felt it sprang from “the right-wing climate of the country” (xv). Yet, he explained that his intention was never to offend or shock the readers; his only concern was to reflect “*candor, accurate candor, total candor*” in his poems ¹⁷(xv).

Ginsberg was morally concerned with the dangers emerging from the American status quo and so angry at the middle-class Americans who were too naïve to realize the situation that the only way he figured to wake them up was to write a shocking poem, in both form and content (Raskin 121). Yet, after having been severely criticized and disparaged by reviewers, Ginsberg was unnerved by such a misunderstanding on their behalf, insisting that “*After all, we’re protest novelists; we’re not Martians in disguise trying to poison the minds with anti-earth propaganda*” (Raskin 207). If William Everson believed *Howl* was obscene, he also believed that it was this obscene quality that helped touch American poetry and “precipitate a new concept of the poem” (215)

Yet, while embarking on his own literary voyage and choosing experimentation instead of formality as his guiding torch, Ginsberg found himself deprived of the best literary prizes that he could have won if he wrote academically approved poetry. However, Ginsberg wasn’t willing to abandon the voyage, and would even go further to accomplish his identity as an individual and self-fulfilled American poet.

III. 3. B) Self-Contradiction as an Avant-garde Linguistic Attitude :

In building his own poetics, Ginsberg was deeply inspired by Walt Whitman and William Butler Yeats’ quote, “Out of quarrels with others we make rhetoric, out of quarrels with ourselves we make poetry”. Indeed, Ginsberg was greatly self-centered during his writing activity, for he believed it helped “free the self-doubt generated by a society in which everyone’s conniving and manipulating” (Ginsberg, xvi)

Accordingly, many elements participated in Ginsberg’s process of self-realization as an individual American poet. Raskin clarified that if Ginsberg excelled in writing his own poetry, it is due to his devotion to and determination in bringing out the unfortunate changes that were damaging the social, moral and human values of his country from his own troubling state of mind, with the care of resolving both the problems of society and his own person.

¹⁷ Seemingly, spontaneity was as crucial for Allen Ginsberg to render in his literature as it was for Jack Kerouac.

To that end, Ginsberg adopted the very particular tendency of mixing between “a language of the everyday and of Judgment Day- a language of the mundane and the apocalyptic” (Raskin xxi). It seems that such an embodiment of “mixed obscenities with sacred oaths” (Raskin 225) as one linguistic entity may reflect the poet’s intention to include both homage to his formal predecessors and a celebration of the street life. The latter gesture reached the appreciation of the different social layers of readers -from intellectuals to hipsters, which is a paradoxical yet very unique and innovative linguistic attitude ever manifested in mid-20th C American writing.

What may appear even more paradoxical and surprising, though, is T.S Eliot’s influence on Ginsberg’s writing concept. Indeed, Ginsberg was sufficiently inspired by Eliot’s traditional theory in shaping his own anti-traditional one –borrowed from Whitman-. Probably following Eliot’s statement that “Tradition... cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor” (40), Ginsberg strove hard to dissociate himself from his poet father whose impact on him is almost inextricable as he could never totally rid his poetry from it.

All the while, Ginsberg’s poetry was marked by long prose-like lines, just like Whitman’s, which leads us to question Ginsberg’s originality and keep searching for the distinct trait that made his individuality stand out. Yet again, what separates the two poets are their visions of the world. Ginsberg’s was much darker and more pessimistic, especially about American democracy.

It seems that Ginsberg’s linguistic structure was done in accordance with his own life, which –in itself- was contradictory: “the sacred and the profane, the prophetic and the self-promoting” (xxv). Granted, following Eliot and Whitman’s lead simultaneously seems contradictory, but it is to recognize, as Raskin puts it, that “it was part of Ginsberg’s genius as a poet that he could borrow from both Eliot and Whitman, fusing them to make something new” (25). Despite his instinctive disapproval of established ideas about poets and poetry, Ginsberg remained grateful for his literary ancestors’ permanent and undoable influence on him as an American poet (85).

Beside the richness brought by the influence of great writers like Eliot and Whitman to energize Ginsberg’s identity quest, his stay in San Francisco- where he performed *Howl* for the first time- is also believed to have played a pivotal part in nourishing his artistic growth, more notably by its mind openness and freedom (xxii). His experience at the Six Gallery enlightened him very much in that he found like-minded poets who, altogether, shared the same discontent with academic poetry, “with its emphasis on ambiguity, irony, symbolism, and formalism” (Raskin, 16). Being all spiritually driven, Ginsberg and the Six Gallery poets strove hard to establish a kind of “poetry Renaissance” (16).

III. 3. C) Obscene Imagery and Madness as Therapy :

Surely, Allen and the Beat writers aspired to create another ‘American Renaissance’, but theirs did not carry as much faith as did the 19th C American Renaissance led by Whitman and Emerson, among others. In fact, Ginsberg assumed that denouncing the dark reality of post-war America through undisciplined language was the most patriotic and democratic act to reflect the loss of democracy. (Raskin 23)

Not to neglect the importance of Allen’s other works, but *Howl* is generally seen by the majority of critics and reviewers as the most emblematic representation of his utmost fulfillment as an audacious, innovative and authentic American poet. Since Ginsberg himself considered it as an experiment with form, Raskin adds that it is to *Howl* that Ginsberg must owe his literary self-accomplishment, by précising that “*Howl* made Allen Ginsberg. The poem created the poet”. (Raskin 18)

By the 1950’s, obscure symbolism would dominate Ginsberg’s writing. After several experimentations with drugs, sex and Buddhism, Ginsberg seemed gradually unable to distinguish between his social and artistic identity. As a matter of fact, the imagery present in his poems is often a reflection of his own repressed homosexuality. The repression and secrecy of the latter inspired him to create strong literary symbolism about his own sexual obsessions, among which the ‘phallus’, described by Ginsberg as “*the embodiment of creative power*”. (57)

What is understandably reproachable about Ginsberg’s language is this sexual denotation his poetry communicates. It is nearly “pornographic” and full of “unprotected speech”, as though to render Ginsberg’s aim of transgressing all the limits of American obscenities and breaking some taboos by depicting homosexual relationships in his poems (145). Thus, Ginsberg remarkably deviated from the traditional habit of focusing only on man and woman as a central theme; the heroes of his poetry were drug addicts, thieves and criminals, and the dominating language was merely the language these characters used. Moreover, *Howl* was more to be performed in public than to be read in private. It was fashioned like a structured scream.

Among Ginsberg’s other unconventional literary initiatives was a practice that consists of making phrases from very different words -such as “apple-cart”, “blood-bath” or “suitcase-bingo”- in the aim of creating a totally new and original view of the world. As unusual and absurd as it may sound, such a technique proved quite fruitful since in *Howl*, he created the strongest and most compelling imagery related to the apocalyptic bomb that was about to end the world, by simply using the phrase “Hydrogen Jukebox”. The combination of those apparently unrelated words turned out to make a very tight link between the hydrogen bomb and the jukebox-like “infernal machine that seems perfect for an age of mechanization and mass destruction” (Raskin, 160). Ginsberg affirmed that a reader of *Howl* may need only to understand the Cold War and its impact on the individual psyche to be able to interpret accurately the whole text. (182)

Ginsberg's ambition as a writer was to create a movement drawn by "the death of square morality", the "belief in creativity" and "the rise of a second religiousness" (86). These principles which composed his new vision were essentially guided by a sense of madness that was respected more than any other literary rule predicated by American literature at the time. Words like "mad", "naked", "obscure", and "wild", Raskin argued, were used more as "a kind of incantation or mantra" (118). In fact, it was almost unacceptable for Ginsberg to imagine himself being a poet without being mad, for it was very decisive in shaping his life as well as his poetry. Most importantly, madness had seemingly acted as a therapy for Ginsberg that conducted to the discovery of truth about himself and society. As Raskin so astutely synthesized, "by following his own muse he found his own voice and by expressing his own madness he disclosed much of the madness of America" (Raskin, 230)

By the time *Howl* was published, America of the late 1950's was already witnessing a cultural breakout. Undoubtedly, Ginsberg's steps into the world of American poetry have shaken the very grounds of American civilization. Just as Marlon Brando and James Dean changed its cinema, and just as Elvis Presley changed its music, Allen Ginsberg has indeed changed its poetry.

III. 4. William S. Burroughs' Paranoid Literary Universe:

If William Burroughs is included among the most shining and seminal Beat artists who revolutionized mid 20th C writing like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, it is due to the outstanding position he occupied as an individual writer and the new literary ideas he so brilliantly –although unintentionally- managed to insert in the American canon.

Indeed, many new methods were initiated by William Burroughs that later became primordial characteristics of his new artistic identity. Furthermore, his most ingenious and unheard of writing techniques and concepts are known to have redefined the 20th C American novel.

III. 4. A) Pre-matured Fiction and the Power of Secrecy:

Although William Burroughs became widely known only by the late 1950's, his loose -yet significant- presence at the heart of the Beat Generation came, not as a result of his innovative works, but first as a literary figure whose notoriety started from his fictional appearance as a mysterious character in many of the Beats' masterpieces.

In fact, Burroughs' works were published well after Kerouac and Ginsberg's through which he was already introduced several times as "a legendary persona of the Beats by the Beats" (Harris 2). Oliver Harris notes that his artistic career actually began in his friends' novels, especially in Jack Kerouac's *The Town and the City* –published in 1950- where he is represented as a "malicious-looking smile" which, according to Harris, "is at once sinister and comic, intensely material and weirdly spectral" (Skerl 204).

It seems that Burroughs' entire reputation became fixedly centered on this particular definition since, before even he got published, he was already given the image of "the shadowy unknown genius" (Harris, 2) Thus, his prematurely developed identity as a writer had inevitably gained the quality of fiction, for he was first known to the public as an imaginary person. So, while reading his texts, the perception of his real identity is affected by the fictional image inculcated by his friends' works. So deeply inculcated, indeed, that it affected Burroughs' own conception of his writing methodology. Being the victim of "Beat mythmaking and fictionalized biography" complicated –if not impeded- his own advancement as an individual artist (Harris 3).

Probably as a sign of surrender, Burroughs' ghostly image fashioned by Kerouac and Ginsberg would incite him to engage in writing fiction himself. Moreover, it was only after reading his mythologized

version that he could write his own books like *Nova Express*. Likewise, he would borrow features from his friends' works in the making of his own literary personae (Harris, 5). What certainly gave birth to his talent as a fiction writer and ultimately forged his artistic identity is this shadowy and mysterious aspect. In other words, he was an absent, yet very present figure in Beat literature.

What is understandably particular in Burroughs' fiction is his adoption of secrecy as a form of control and a way to undo any knowledge of the past to start anew. To that end, Burroughs made use of interesting devices in his plot composition, by focusing on form as a way to obscure the content's meaning. Arguably, Burroughs' enigmatic productions as a tentative of control are due to his previous submission to control itself (Harris, 22). In fact, his disdain of power started early in his life. Being the son of publicly and economically powerful parents, Harris assumed that "his life as addict, homosexual, and writer literalized that undesired inheritance with a perverse vengeance" (Harris, 30).

The only way to fight back such power was obviously through the manifestation of secrecy and hidden knowledge. As Burroughs himself clearly put it, "Oh I will publish but always hold back the essential ingredient" (27). Yet, the essential ingredient, in my opinion, would be nothing but Burroughs' own difference which, in itself, is fascinating and powerful. And if his texts remain critically difficult to analyze, it goes back to the very paradoxality he so shrewdly succeeded in creating in his works.

III. 4. B) Junk Addiction and Homosexuality as a Moral Agent:

In *Junky*, Burroughs' descriptions reveal that his drug addiction did not dominate only his life, but also his writing. If Burroughs decided to write about his junk addiction, it was not as much a reported fact as an insinuation of his conviction about man's dependence and weakness under the power of modern life. In effect, he believed that everyone was addicted to something in the postwar era like technology. Furthermore, this kind of dependence was regarded as a "human virus" whose impacts, in Burroughs' words, were "poverty, hatred, war, police-criminals, bureaucracy, insanity..." (Naked Lunch, 141) Consequently, the nature of the plot, characters and themes in *Junky* was only designed in view of communicating such a reality –by transposing his junk environment into the seemingly more addictive one which is modern society-

To Helle Cecilie Håkonsen, Burroughs is "the literary outlaw that doesn't play by the rules; the gentleman 'junkie' that rejects the idea of the nuclear family and political surveillance during McCarthy's propaganda; the anarchist that wants to dismantle the national borders" (Håkonsen 21). Indeed, the quality of Burroughs' writing is exclusively countercultural in that both form and content are virtually addressed to

underground criminals and junkies. Yet, Burroughs' biggest attempt, despite critics' assumptions that it lacked relevance to moral standards, was to make his novel "an educative warning against the horrors of addiction" (22) Nevertheless, it remains a visibly drug-promoting work, and the content is so absurd and abject that readers often fail to grasp his moralistic side.

Remarkably though, the fact that Burroughs describes at length the experience of drug addiction from an addict's point of view, and tries to analyze and solve the problem of addiction from the same point of view is a significant allusion to the presence of objectivity on the author's behalf. As Helle argued, "an example of this is how the junkie-dealer relationship has been satirized as a critique of capitalism and an allegory for control" (22). So here, the junk addict is merely a device; a simple metaphorical and analogical personification of the modern man as "a helpless spider in the system" (23).

Yet, as writing conventionally meant to be submissive to the institutions' control, Burroughs' alternative use of repulsive and underground language made the issue of morality difficult to interpret in his works. The terminology that Burroughs employs in *Junky* is almost unavailable in dictionaries. Pertaining to 'jive-talk' or the "fugitive glossary" as he calls them, the words he used are etymologically invalid. However, Helle tried to define it as "a combination of slang derived from jazz music, hipsters, addicts and criminals with an emphasis on temporality" (28)

Apparently, the "jive-talk" did not seem to serve Burroughs' writing purposes only by its ambiguous quality, by its semantic instability too, i.e. the meaning of the words, such as "pigeon" (to depict an informer), can change anytime according to the period and place. It is as though the author wished his texts to be understood only by the members of counterculture. Included in the latter, homosexuals are also frequently present in Burroughs' novels, especially in *Queer*. Knowing in advance the moral atmosphere of the 1950's, Burroughs created homosexual characters, not to manifest a rebellious attitude, but more strikingly to point to the problem of culturally-conditioned and rigidly stereotyped classification.

"I was a homosexual. I thought of the painted, simpering female impersonators I had seen in a Baltimore night club. Could it be possible that I was one of those subhuman things?" (*Queer* 17) As a narrator, Burroughs vigorously attacked the fixed notion of identity. More importantly, he strictly accused the language fashioned mischievously by the socio-political organizations for shaping and influencing the conception of our own identities and "contextualization of the being" (30). Therefore, his ultimate target became less the modern environment than the body of language itself.

III. 4. C) Cut-up and the War against the Word:

Interestingly, Burroughs, had the very particularity of enjoying a paranoid-spirited mind that operated both on his social and artistic behavior. Following his counterparts' tradition of experimentation, Burroughs cultivated the extravagant enterprise of taking language as a vast, open, personal and lawless area that he could explore by using his own laws in adaptation to his own complex thoughts and critical perception of the social and political reality by which he was surrounded after WWII. Often, he would verge on the limits of exaggeration during his method conception. The latter embodied most famously his audacious use of cut-up.

Developed in collaboration with Brion Gysin, a visual artist and friend of his, in technical terms, cut-up is most commonly defined as an activity that requires literally cutting a page of a written text into four pieces of paper, then reassembling them randomly to give it a new stylistic and semantic dimension. So the whole would form a meaningless and decomposed language. Synne Genzmer explained that "cut-up was the analogue tool that enabled a linguistic expansion beyond the capacities of the mind" (Head 31). As the word indicates, cut-up is drawn from the literal cutting of a scissor that Burroughs, acting as a linguistic transcendentalist, hoped to apply *'by simply free associating at the type-writer...instead of...working with scissors and all those pieces of paper'* (Burroughs01).

As pointless as it seems to be, the cut-up practice happened, indeed, to demolish the straightness of narrative structure and traditional modus operandi of writing per se.. Burroughs' purpose in creating such a muddled mass was to untie the word from a definite and clear-cut significant, and thus render the whole text open to a wide range of possible interpretations. By so doing, he "releases the word from its attachment to the norm of coherence and meaning" ,i.e. writing becomes a mechanical act, and the word becomes functionally visual, like an open image or a dream (33). "*What is a dream?*", Burroughs reflected, but "*a certain juxtaposition of word and image*" (*The Third Mind*, 178) (35)

More importantly, Burroughs used the cut-up as a linguistic strategy to reduce –if not eliminate- the preconceived power of the word -using word itself-, especially that exerted by the media. With the same strategy, the author becomes exempt from any responsibility likely to be charged against him as he is no longer in control of what comes out from the technique. Thus, Burroughs could easily continue his war against the word. The latter, with its grammatical restrictions, was viewed by Burroughs as a dangerously efficient tool of control along with the image -which eventually makes it the worst enemy of man- (Brien 131). To a further extent, the word was a virus likely to disable the individual's intellectual capacity of perceiving reality as it is.

The word as virus was supposedly infiltrated through information and image produced by the media's various instruments of communication. "Illusion is a revolutionary weapon". To fight back illusion was to create another kind of illusion. (Head 33) Understandably, Burroughs used the media's own product

as a counter-attack, such as cutting-up a text from a newspaper article in order to give it a new form and distort its original content (Head 34).

However, Burroughs' literary revolution was addressed more saliently to Logos, the word of God whose notoriety, he argued, was more imprisoning than liberating for the individual in a sense that it supposedly triggered ideological conflicts that divided the world through the word. That is why Burroughs' purpose in writing was to dismantle the 'explosive' system of language. And it is only through the cut-up - an anti-grammatical weapon- that he wished to escape its manipulation although perhaps only utopically.

Burroughs intended to use writing as a platform where he could expose and tackle all his concerns which, as paradoxical as they were, couldn't be reflected by any better medium than "displacements and juxtapositions" most commonly present in his *Nova* Trilogy (Håkonsen 5). In the latter, Burroughs denounces the evil force of the media referred to as "The Nova Conspiracy" that acts in the sole aim of controlling the individual's identity through language ; Cut-up, according to Helle, symbolized these very "fragmentations of identity" (5-6).

Being unconventional and non-academic, the cut-up as a literary experimentation represents Burroughs' highest level ever reached in terms of artistic creativity. Nevertheless, morality remained clearly Burroughs' ultimate concern as he solely expressed in *Paris review* in 1965 that "*All my work is directed against those who are bent, through stupidity or design, on blowing up the planet...like the advertising people...I'm concerned with the precise manipulation of word and image to create an action not to go out and buy a coca-cola, but to create an alteration in the reader's consciousness*". (Raskin, 113)

General Conclusion:

From the above chapter, we have been able to extract the most important features that define each of Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs' writings. As the latter features also represent the founding elements of the Beat new artistic identity, it can be outlined that what really mattered to these American writers is to accomplish a purely human and moralistic quest through the medium of literature, even if it meant employing the most disparaged literary tools.

Also, what is specifically worth noting is that their often-invisible morality turned out to be a very good drive since; factually, they have succeeded in establishing an ever-lasting literary legacy that has later gained the academics' recognition. However, they must surely have wished their ends to be met at that particular era when a positive response was needed the most.

Conclusion

Did the Second World War not take place there would have been no such thing like postwar America. Therefore, the predominant climate would not have been unfavorable enough to trigger any sense of rebellion that would incite the few Americans who were Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs to create what is known as the Beat Generation. Although they are not the only founders, their social and literary contributions remain the most influential on today's American culture. "*If he (Jack Kerouac) hadn't written On the Road, the Doors never would have existed*" Ray Manzarek, the keyboardist of *The Doors*, had once admitted.

It is worth noting that the Beats' friendship - marked by a deep common spirituality- had also played a pivotal part in solidifying their movement and helping accomplish their identity quest although individually. Thereupon, we may argue that to attribute a fixed notion to the new social and artistic Beat identity would be wrong. In spite of being labeled as members of the same movement and generation, the Beats were above all individual citizens and writers. They had certainly all rejected the postwar American system, the values of modern society and the rules of American literature. Yet, each did in his own manner. Besides, they did not necessarily always agree on everything. The simple fact that they succeeded in shaking both the social and literary grounds of mid-20th C America is due not only to their common spirituality, but also to their very different approaches and visions on both American society and literature.

As regards American society, many of the Beats' attitudes were quite bohemian in nature. As we could notice in *On the Road*, *Howl* and *Junky*, leaving home, taking incessantly the road, seeking relief in drugs and homosexual pleasure, and having sympathy for criminal outlaws may be interpreted as a definition of the Beats' provocatively rebellious lifestyle. Nevertheless, as John Clellon Holmes explained in his 1952 New York Times magazine article *This is the Beat Generation*, their unlawful acts were mere attempts to righteousness (Holmes 1). As the war is deemed responsible for nourishing the Beats' countercultural spirit, Holmes maintained that living at the extreme was the only way through which they could survive. The Beats wanted true peace and freedom, not the "cold peace" that is realized only at the cost of so many human lives. Nevertheless, if they acted illegally, Holmes added, it was "out of curiosity, not disillusionment" (2)

One might conclude that being Beat does not necessarily mean being anti-American, for such non-conformist behaviors were adopted by those young Americans only to escape the 'square' postwar American society, not to affect or disrupt it. Following Holmes' observation, even the mainstream middle-class Americans did not totally accept society, holding the assumption that they conformed only to be safe and a

have a stable life. Deep inside, they did not really adhere to its mores. So, Americanism is not to be used as a clear-cut aspect to qualify the Beat Generation as a whole; Individuality and spirituality remain most relevantly the key-notion in any attempt of accurately identifying the core of the Beat social movement.

It is not to neglect that the Beat Generation was, before anything else, a “war of ideas”, a symptom of the war. Their social behavior was driven by the principle of experimentation, so was their writing. Each of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs managed to produce their own literary concepts and writing styles which were extravagantly creative on the one hand and flagrantly improvisational, anti-intellectual, and obscene on the other. The third chapter has hopefully shed the light on the very motifs that invigorated their inclination towards the challenging of the academic and traditional established creed of American literature. It seems that the Beat writers did not rebel through writing just to rebel; they were animated with great moral concerns that they believed would not have been successfully communicated via conventional writing norms.

The global outcome of this study is a significant proof that the strength of the Beats’ humanistic and moralistic worries about the dangers of political restriction, the infectious consumer culture, the evil force of the media, the social conformity likely to suppress individual identity and all the unfortunate changes that hit and are probably continuing to hit our world seemed to precede their nationalistic pride and any sense of conformity, be it social or artistic.

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