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The Writings That Shocked America Out of the 1950s

Queer Beats

How the Beats Turned America On to Sex

Edited by Regina Marler

Blasting through the crew cuts and conformism of their day, the Beat writers were queer in the fullest sense of the word: their fluid sexuality challenged all sexual and romantic conventions. Most shocking of their unconventional attitudes was their embrace of same-sex eroticism. At a time when gay people were considered mentally ill or criminal, the Beats celebrated spontaneity and freedom in thought, word, and action. Their highest value was nakedness — even before Allen Ginsberg stripped bare at a poetry reading to silence a heckler. They would try anything once, then write about it. Well-publicized censorship battles brought the Beats into the public eye — and revolutionized the way Americans thought and wrote about sex. By 1960, J. Edgar Hoover would declare the Beats one of the greatest threats to the nation.

Queer Beats: How the Beats Turned America On to Sex traces, for the first time, the queer pulse that throbs throughout the Beats' writings — from William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* and Allen Ginsberg's wistful, boy-loving sex poems to Jack Kerouac's confession in a letter to Neal Cassady that — despite erotic encounters with Ginsberg and Gore Vidal — "Posterity will laugh at me if it thinks I was queer."

Includes fiction, letters, and poetry by Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, Diane di Prima, Harold Norse, Herbert Huncke, Elise Cowen, Gore Vidal, Norman Mailer, and others, plus a previously unpublished memoir by John Giorno.

About the editor:

Regina Marler writes for the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, *New York Observer*, and *The Advocate*. The author of *Bloomsbury Pie: The Making of the Bloomsbury Boom* and the editor of *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, she lives a Beat life in San Francisco.

Advance praise for Queer Beats:

"An essential addition to the Beat oeuvre. Regina Marler's passionate and informed scholarship infuses the entire book. *Queer Beats* is one of those rare books that takes familiar material and is able to give the reader a fresh look at the Beats."

— Paul Yamazaki, City Lights Books

Regina Marler's previous books:

Bloomsbury Pie:

"Regina Marler judiciously surveys the outpouring of books, articles and exhibitions that have turned the Bloomsbury group into an enduring object of excessive emotion, be that love or scorn. Marler...shows canny judgment...."

— *New York Times Book Review*

Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell:

"A fascinating treat: Shop talk of a serious fulfilled artist; a mélange of provocative gossip; a moving, revelatory, deeply contradictory self-portrait."

— *San Francisco Chronicle*

"Expertly edited.... One is as conscious of the pain of a liberated woman's life as of its pleasures." — *New York Times Book Review*

"[T]his engrossing, witty volume...is a vivid self-portrait." — *The New Yorker*

Queer Beats

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