

BEAT SCRAPBOOK

Gerald Nicosia

Introduction by Michael Schumacher

Coolgrove Press

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Anniversary Anthology, (Ed Coletti's) NO MONEY IN PO-
ETRY, The End Is the Beginning, Sick Fly, Specious Species,
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And the damp air of fall gets in my bones
And the smell of car exhausts rises and
Disappears in the low grey murk
Of Massachusetts heaven
I think of you Jack

Sometimes, when reading Nicosia's poetic scrapbook, you feel as if you are at a parade, standing curbside, watching familiar faces walk by, each poet a sparkle in a mosaic picturing a history that cannot be overlooked or forgotten. Lawrence Ferlinghetti appears in a tribute commemorating his hundredth birthday. Richard Brautigan, the quirky poet, novelist, and short fiction writer, is the focus of two poems contrasting his warmth and humor with his tragic, self-inflicted end. Jan Kerouac, recipient of the full treatment in another Nicosia book, shines in a light denied her in life. Her famous father, as one might expect, is depicted for his creative genius and deep sadness that couldn't be anesthetized by an army of boilermakers. There are poems constructed around Ted Joans' grocery list and George Dowden's lying, unnoticed, in Walt Whitman's bed.

But this is not a book with thoughts turned to only the famous or nearly famous Beats. Nicosia strides in and out of these pages, his personal entries, most notably of his relationship with his father, adding texture to his depictions of the Beats. There's an unsettling commentary on Death Row. Singer/songwriter Steve Goodman appears, unannounced yet totally appreciated, at Nicosia's front door. Years of memories, stripped down to minimalism, are stark sentinels, silhouetted against the backdrop of a consciousness now prepared to share them with strangers.

And we, as readers, are gifted with both familiarity and surprise.

—Michael Schumacher
Author of *Dharma Lion: A Biography of Allen Ginsberg*

THE ATOM BOMB OF GENIUS

For Gregory Corso (1930-2001)

Gregory, everyone's got a memorial poem
for you.

I remember how cutting you could be—
you called one of my girl-friends a “cunt”—
you told Micheline, “I’m smarter
than you are, Jack.”

“You’ve read more than me,”

Micheline said grudgingly,
taking the hit like a man.

Sometimes I wondered how so many people
could love you

as surely they did

but every so often just the sheer energy
you manifested

for days on end

with little sleep

would amaze me like the atom bomb

you wrote of so explosively

and I realized people had to acknowledge you

as a phenomenon of nature

if nothing else.

There will never be another Gregory Corso
or if there is,
he will spit on you,
the real Gregory Corso
to make way for himself
because the most outstanding thing about you
was your undaunted, unfazed,
unstoppable originality
it was what made you so mean
and terrible sometimes —
you couldn't let anything stand in the way
of your creativity
of creating a man/poet/
lover/child
messenger of the gods
like no one ever saw before
or since
and if we didn't love that,
you knew,
there was absolutely
no hope
for us.



THE BEAUTIES OF MY GENERATION

for Janine Pommy Vega (and with apologies to Stephen Spender)

I think continually of the beauties of my generation
naked rainbow-hued young bodies on the streets of San Francisco
or half a million unshorn children on the fields of Woodstock
unclothed in the rain, kissing
because it felt good, like pot, like acid,
like unmutated flesh and breaking the law,
like spelling FUCK at the top of your lungs because Country Joe,
that excellent-hearted gentleman,
asked you to.

“Why not?” quoth Dayton Allen
a decade earlier on the safe and civil *Steve Allen Show*
not knowing how absolutely
bananas gonzo buggy trippy zapped and zonked lit-up burnt-out
freaking raving mad we’d all go with a few deranged
cerebral molecules
and one of the cruelest, bloodiest wars in history
who could have dreamed it would have led to
Crosby Stills and Nash

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like handsome young lieutenants serenading the troops
of waywardness
for the sacred honor of “Judy Blue Eyes”?
I tell you I have seen sights that will last me a lifetime
the love so brilliant and hot it welded to my retinas
visions of giving and caring and goofing under the stars
while naming the constellations and rapping about
the hundred-and-one kama sutra ways to
leave the flesh behind
feed our heads and free ourselves
or of farmhouse nights drinking musty home-made wine
like grown-up children’s grape juice
and reciting poetry to each other
our own words that no one could touch
least of all the war machine, the government, the cocksuckers
who wanted it all bought and sold and rendered into lard to clog
the arteries of dying America and hasten the corpse
for the guaranteed thousand-percent profit
of the dozen biggest corporate undertakers
O Neil Young we all sure as hell were baptized in a
“Sea of Madness”
but we gave back more than we got
gave a whole nation new dreams, turned old men to children
and made old women glad, as the saying goes—

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gave the earth a fresh spin, though no one knew toward what—
you can bet your last Richie Havens record we didn't intend
Ronald Reagan playing cowboys and Indians with the
 idiot plan
of filling all those reservations
now that the oil's depleted
with Russkies and maybe Sandinistas too
like everyone else on this planet we were powerless against time,
but somewhere out in space all those light rays from the glitter
of Janis's jewelry and Cassady's flying hammer
and the blinding strobes and the psychedelic color shows
and Kesey's many flags
are still illuminating the gods and ghosts who've made it home free
to that astral playland
where dead gurus still listen to the Beatles chanting mantras
and Bobby Kennedy's blue eyes are as silent as his brother John's
 were laughing
and Jimmy Hendrix takes one last energetic leap
over the rainbow of eternity
in the form of a dancing dolphin.

