

Mania: The Story of the Outraged and Outrageous Lives That Launched a Cultural Revolution

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By the time Lucien Carr stabbed David Kammerer to death on the banks of the Hudson River in August 1944, it was clear that the hard-partying teenage companion to Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassady, and William S. Burroughs might need to reevaluate his life. A two-year stint in a reformatory straightened out the wayward youth but did little to curb the wild ways of his friends.

Mania tells the story of this remarkable group—who strained against the conformity of postwar America, who experimented with drink, drugs, sex, jazz, and literature, and who yearned to be heard, to remake art and society in their own libertine image. What is more remarkable than the manic lives they led is that they succeeded—remaking their own generation and inspiring the ones that followed. From the breakthrough success of Kerouac's *On the Road* to the controversy of Ginsberg's *Howl* and Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, the counterculture was about to go mainstream for the first time, and America would never be the same again.

Based on more than eight years' writing and research, Ronald Collins and David Skover—authors of the highly acclaimed *The Trials of Lenny Bruce*—bring the stories of these artists, hipsters, hustlers, and maniacs to life in a dramatic, fast-paced, and often darkly comic narrative.

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William Bevill says

A very interesting and informative book, well researched, and exciting to read. I would recommend this to anyone interested in the movement and writings of authors in the late 40s/50s as well as the historical impact of the trial against City Lights Bookstore and Allen Ginsburg's poem "Howl" and the case of censorship and free speech stemming from it. The author particularly is interested in the world of Ginsburg and Kerouac as well as the side players in the "Beat" movement. There is little about William Burroughs here but he does focus on people like Lucien Carr, Herbert Huncke, and many of the bit players. There is a full appendix on the People Vs. Fellinghetti, exhaustive notes in the back, index, bibliography (as well as recommended books for further reading on these subjects).

Fascinating to read!

Zack says

<http://www.examiner.com/review/mania-...>

Siti Aishah says

It started off just like how 'Kill Your Darlings' did. I read four lines and my heart skipped. Then I started flipping the pages and before I knew it, I was hooked.

This book is the most informative Beatnik-Autobiography book I've read by far. As a person who watched Kill Your Darlings first, I naturally became very curious about what happened after the killing of David Kammerer -how life was for them after, if they ever became 'real writers', and how they led their lives. This book says all.

This book gives an in-depth to everything a Beat enthusiast wants to know. Of how Ginsberg battled with his muse (and eventually, the law with regards to Howl -obscene vs literary content), and love, how Kerouac fought for publication and his rights as a writer, how Burroughs struggled with drugs, writing, and even in love.

Edward Sullivan says

A lively, dramatic, engaging look at those wildly debauched non-conformists known as "the Beats," who

somehow managed to create some great literature in the midst of all of their self-destructive exploits.

Jack says

This book offers a complete history of the "Beat Generation". It is told through the lives and acts of the Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassady and others. This is captivating and important book dealing with Twentieth Century American culture.

Emmett says

What a fascinating, refreshing book. A biography and cultural account of the Beat generation and their peers, written with the pace and style of a thriller. It begins with Lucien Carr's murder of David Kammerer, follows Jack Kerouac's writing process and struggle to become a published author, Allen Ginsberg's development as a poet, William Burroughs' own escapades, but it also looks at the peripheral characters of the 'Beat story' that in turn give its main players a different perspective. (For instance, this book refines the heroic picture of Neal Cassidy in *On The Road* by devoting a section to details of his actual life - including the abandonment of his wife and child in pursuit of the itinerant lifestyle.) This is the first time I have ever read anything like it. It is an unconventional but perfect editorial choice, fully suited as a medium for the madcap, riotous, vaguely sensationalist lives of this literary circle whose members achieved fame in headline news. In some of the best chapters of this book, life is blended smoothly and skillfully with the literary pursuit, imbuing it with meaning. Allen Ginsberg's live reading of "Howl" at the 6 Gallery event - interspersed with the life events that inspired them, segments of his poetry are given poignancy, bringing the reader closer to understanding the incredible audience response it elicited. Some paltry amusements include Ginsberg and W.H. Auden trading insults, and the court proceedings during the obscenity trial of Ginsberg's poem which sound like as a pointed attempt at critical examination of the force of poetry and the purpose of bad language. (The seriousness of the prosecutors and the judges give it somewhat the quality of a farce.)

In conclusion: the characters in this unique literary period are quite mad and undoubtedly did terrible damage to themselves and others. However, they are also admirable in their own way, in attempting to redefine literary merit, or to forget about relying on it altogether in their pursuit of the force of the written and spoken word. This ambivalence is the mark of a exemplary biography of imperfect real people.

Barry Wightman says

If you're into the Beats, you're gonna dig this book. You know who you are. It's a fast moving survey of all those crazy cats and their long-suffering chicks - Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, Cassidy et al. For the authors, Ronald Collins and David Skover, it's a labor love. More soon. Look for a full review of Mania in the Washington Independent Review of Books in the weeks ahead. Meanwhile, check WIROB out: <http://www.washingtonindependentreview.com> and @WIROBooks

Tara says

Lively group biography of the Beats that traces the relationships, antics, and influences that bound them together.

Rabbit {Paint me like one of your 19th century gothic heroines!} says

Disclaimer: This ARC was given to me for free in exchange for an honest review from Netgalley.

This was a very informative book about these writers. I feel like now I can read their books and understand them better.

Laura says

As Douglas Adams didn't say, David Eames Kammerer was just this guy, you know?

He was just this guy, and Lucien Carr killed him. Lucien Carr killed him and tried to sink his dead body in the Hudson River. They were romantically entangled in a web that included Alan Ginsberg, Bill Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, and many other people who left less obvious ripples in our cultural landscape. Carr went to Burrough's house that night, and not liking his advice, turned to Kerouac. Carr killed Kammerer, whose image I found on the interwebs here, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/29873672....>

The book opens with Kammerer's dead body. His name comes later. After Carr's and Allen Ginsberg's and Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs's names. Carr pled to manslaughter and served two years. Lived a long life afterwards.

Allen Ginsberg's just this guy, you know? He dedicated the first printing of Howl to Carr. Carr objected, wanting "a certain anonymity in life." (228). Ginsberg obliged. He seems to have been a nice guy.

My husband met Ginsberg once, at Gasworks Park, after protesting the first Iraq war. Drank with him and stayed up into the wee hours. I'm inclined to like Ginsberg. Seems to have been on the right side of history. This book made me like him a bit more, though I do not know what to make of the fact he loved men who killed people they cared for.

(My husband also met Douglas Adams, not far from there. I could be jealous).

Ginsberg's just this guy who signed off on his mother's lobotomy, who chanted "OM" at the 1968 Chicago Convention, and who wrote this poem, Howl. I like bits of it. Bits of it have not aged well, in much the same way, and for much the same reasons Lovecraft has not aged well. But in both, there's a hook that still gets me. I saw the best minds of a generation destroyed by madness. I saw the mountains of madness rise out of the deep. Both wrote about humanity's changing relationship with the universe; one exploring the terror; the other exploring the way we could do it better.

Jack Kerouac's also just this guy, you know? I didn't like his book, On The Road, the only book of his I've read. Its virtues were overwhelmed by its misogyny and narcissism. Through this book, I now know he was

insecure, rigid, jealous and willing to use people as a means to an end as well. Nothing I read in Mania makes me like Kerouac better. He was a jerk to Ginsberg on national television. Don't remember him killing anyone, though, so there's that.

And, of course, Bill Burroughs' is just this guy, you know? This guy who killed his wife in a fit of hubris and effectively beat the rap because of his social class. Like Carr. Hurm. Nothing I read in Mania made me like him better either. I find it darkly funny that Naked Lunch (a book I am proud to have said I read every word of though I did not like it much) was the last text-only novel to be declared obscene by an American court. (337).

These men, and some others whose books I have not read, were part of a loose pack of friends, lovers, and rivals who together created or at least archived the beginning of the "beat" generation. Collins and Skover got access to a great deal of information about these men when they were researching their Lenny Bruce book. This book came out of that project. It gave them an opportunity to explore how this handful of loosely intertwined (some nights, tightly intertwined, snort snort) authors came to write texts that provoked a legal reaction that changed First Amendment jurisprudence.

They also challenged the poetic tradition. I think my favorite part of this book was a confrontation between Ginsberg and W. H. Auden (author of the brilliant September 1, 1939 poem that The Daisy ad riffed on, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDTBns...>, and a bit of a gay misogynist himself) on an Italian island during the Howl trial. (282). It did not go well. Don't know if it was a Freudian struggle between generations or just two people who didn't get on, but it feels kinda right that they did not like one another.

I had some anxiety reading this book. David Skover was my constitutional law professor and is my friend. Reading books written by friends is full of fraught. The climax of this book is a First Amendment case, where censorship went down and freedom triumphed. I've worked on First Amendment cases where censorship won. I feel funny about that. I helped do publicity for the symposium on this book. Video available here: <http://www.law.seattleu.edu/multimedi....> Many of my friends are name-checked in the back. One even played AV boy for the event.

So I am even less of a transparent eyeball than usual for this one. But that said, this is a fascinating book about sex, death, madness, law, and censorship. And Allen Ginsberg. Who's just this guy, you know? Who, as Neil Gaiman sort of said, lived a life that was, like any other, unlike any other. I'm glad he did.

Katrina McCollough says

It's been a long time coming but I finally finished this and I wish I hadn't waited so long. Great read! I've read only On the Road, and Howl but this gave me such a greater appreciation for an entire generation I knew nothing about.
