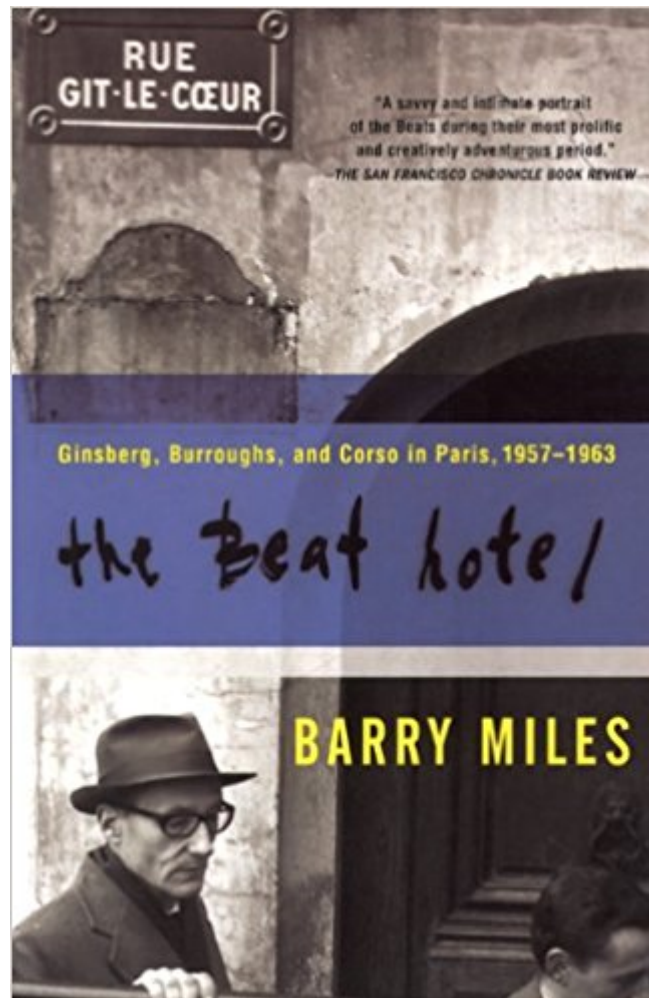




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The Beat Hotel: Ginsberg, Burroughs & Corso In Paris, 1957-1963



Synopsis

The Beat Hotel is a delightful chronicle of a remarkable moment in American literary history. From the Howl obscenity trial to the invention of the cut-up technique, Barry Miles's extraordinary narrative chronicles the feast of ideas that was Paris, where the Beats took awestruck audiences with Duchamp and Celine, and where some of their most important work came to fruition--Ginsberg's "Kaddish" and "To Aunt Rose"; Corso's The Happy Birthday of Death; and Burroughs's Naked Lunch. Based on firsthand accounts from diaries, letters, and many original interviews, The Beat Hotel is an intimate look at an era of spirit, dreams, and genius.

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Grove Press; Reprint edition (July 10, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802138179

ISBN-13: 978-0802138170

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (14 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,318,085 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #92 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Movements & Periods > Beat Generation #824 inÂ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > France #7666 inÂ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Authors

Customer Reviews

This book is an important, often funny, illuminating look at an extraordinary period in the history of popular culture. It will be enjoyed by anyone with even the slimmest interest in the history of western literature, art and the moral evolution of western man in the waning years of the second millennium. The squalid Paris rooming house at rue-Git-Le-Coeur didn't have a name. It was just an address to which, because of its arts friendly management and cheap rent, luminaries of the "beat movement" lived and labored between 1957 and 1963. In this book, which takes as its title the colloquial name for Madame Rachou's establishment, Barry Miles continues his informal history of the Beats which, in addition to this offering includes biographies of Burroughs, Ginsberg, and Kerouac. Burroughs and Ginsberg, along with Gregory Corso and Brion Gysin form the fulcrum on which this history turns. If there are any doubts as to the absolute madness of these people, their exuberant embrace

of drugs, their extravagant pursuit of sex in all of its variety, their tireless devotion to literature and to each other, this book should lay them to rest. The matter-of-fact description of life at The Beat Hotel is perhaps the greatest strength of this book. There is no question that the sensational and lurid descriptions of the Beats that were fodder for the popular press in the late 50's and early 60's were in no way exaggerations. The depiction of "beatniks" as decadent, impoverished, culturally alienated, drug maniacs seems, after reading this book to be a rather tepid underestimate of just how extreme these cultural icons actually were. But Mr.

This book is an exploration of the American beat movement during a time period in which most of its major representatives, (with the exception of Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder) were in Paris at a cheap, nameless hotel located at Rue Git-Le-Coeur, and managed by one Madame Rachon. The hotel was cheap and unsanitary. As long as the guests paid their bills, Madame Rachon allowed them a broad range of freedom in their eccentric lifestyles. The beat hotel was home to the beats as well as to various artists, models, and other bohemians before it closed in 1963. The book includes wonderful biographical pictures of Allen Ginsberg, his lover Peter Orlovsky, Gregory Corso, William S. Burroughs, Brion Gysin (whose name was unfamiliar to me), and others who stayed at the beat hotel. There is detailed documentation on the activities of each during their stay in the beat hotel with some thought given to why each of these people are important and worth knowing something about. I found the discussion of the day to day life in the hotel the most rewarding part of the book together with a discussion of the relationships of the beats, and other guests, to Olympia Press, which published many of them together with many forgettable works of pornography at that time available only with difficulty in the United States. The book invites reflection on the nature of the beat movement and of the broader movement of bohemianism as it developed in the 19th Century. What were the beats looking for? They were full of unconventional, shocking behavior, particularly in the abuse of drugs and sex as these are documented graphically in the book. They were also serious, had a dedication to literature, a willingness to explore and to come to terms with themselves, a desire for change.

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