

## A Review of Individual and Social Madness in the Beats' Literature and Life

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### Abstract:

Madness is a crucial theme in the Beats' literature and life. This article distinguishes between individual and social madness and shows their influence on the Beats, using the ideas of Erich Fromm, Michel Foucault and many others and also using the Beats' own works and ideas. The focus is of course more on Burroughs, Ginsberg, and Kerouac. The Beats did not adjust themselves to society because they believed that American society was so irrational and mad that it brutally suppressed their individuality, repressed their natural desires, and forced them to consider themselves mad just because of lack of adjustment. As opposed to those who regard lack of adjustment as the cause of individual madness, there are others who enunciate that the individual is not to blame but society which is inattentive to individuals' potentialities and does not adjust itself to their needs and aspirations.

**Keywords:** Adjustment, individuality, madness, society, conformity

### Introduction

Because of their eccentricities, peculiarities, and unusual behaviour, the Beats were considered as madmen by the public and accordingly faced serious consequences of their actions: the reformatory (Neal Cassady as Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*), the insane asylum (Ginsberg), expulsion from academies (Ginsberg), public ridicule (Ginsberg, Burroughs, Kerouac), censorship (Ginsberg, Burroughs, Kerouac), and prison (Kerouac). It is reputed that William Blake, one of the Beats' great mentors, prided himself on having had visionary conversations with some of the most brilliant poets of the past such as Homer, Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, and "all the majestic shadows, grey but luminous, and superior to the common heights of men" (qtd. in Korteling, 1966: 91). It is famous too, that Blake and his wife while reading *Paradise Lost*, sat naked in their garden. They were not of course regarded as mad people but their problem with the public was that the Beats, as Tytell remarks, "wanted their Blake to dance naked in

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the public garden” (1976: 11) which did not in fact agree with the accepted social codes. To induce visions in themselves, the Beats consumed drugs, exceeded in criminal activities, and pursued sheer ecstasy that all this was like swimming against the strong current. Once Allen Ginsberg was in his room and heard William Blake’s voice reading *Ah! Sun-Flower*. Immediately he phoned his psychiatrist and told him that he wanted to see him because Blake was just in the room. The doctor shouted “You must be crazy” and hung up (qtd. in Simpson, 1979: 69). In *On the Road*, Ginsberg who appears as Carlo Marx has his visions and Kerouac has beautifully pointed out to them: “... he lived in Harlem in midsummer and at night woke up in his lonely room and heard “the great machine” descending from the sky; and when he walked on 12 5<sup>th</sup> Street “under water” with all the other fish. It was a riot of radiant ideas that had come to enlighten his brain” (1959: 130). During his very short stint in the navy, Kerouac was simply not capable of taking orders and one day he dropped his rifle and told anyone to go to hell and went to the library. After a series of psychiatric tests and claiming himself to be “old Samuel Johnson” (qtd. in Mckee, 2004: 41), he was diagnosed with schizophrenia and released from the navy. Burroughs takes the biscuit and his play of William Tell, attempting to shoot a glass from the top of his wife’s head, conducive to the death of his wife and his own escape from the law, is well-known. Or in 1940 Burroughs, an avowed homosexual, amputated his little finger with a pair of garden shears to win the affection of his lover Jack Anderson. All these and many other anomalies, contributed to the bad reputation of the Beats as madmen. In addition, starting a “revolution against everything in sight” (Sterritt, 2004: x), and also a new era in the current counterculture of the 1950s and ‘60s contributed to this reputation.

#### **Wisdom vs. Irrationality**

Madness has always been ironic in literature. In *King Lear*, the superficial king gains wisdom after he goes mad. In a conversation between Gloucester and King Lear, the King says: “What, art mad? A man may see how the world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears: see how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief. Hark, in thine ear: change places; and, handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?” Edgar who plays a madman but ironically is wise, hearing this conversation, recognizes basic wisdom in the King’s utterances: “O, matter and impertinency mix’d! /Reason in madness!” (Abrams, 2000: 1174–175). Foucault, interestingly, uses the word *folie* for madness; the French word for ‘folly’ which can, as opposed to the word ‘madness’, entail both meanings of the ‘wise idiocy’ of the Shakespearian fool and

'insanity' in the modern clinical sense. Foucault also argues that throughout history reason and madness have been estranged and separated from one another and especially in modern times madness is considered as psychopathology rather than folly and as a truth which has to be diagnosed and cured only by scientific disciplines (Downing, 2008: 23–24). Artaud, the French thinker, too, as Tytell discusses, condemned all psychiatry arguing that "most mental patients were gifted with superior insight and lucidity that allowed them to see through social shams" (1976: 95). In Buddhism, in which the Beats were very interested, Olmsted reports that the notion of the Divine Madman exists and the phrases 'Zen lunatic' and 'crazy wisdom' are recurrent (Elkholy, 2012: 184).

Madness in the Beats is no exception. In actuality, they achieved wisdom through madness. The wisdom that came from this madness was that there was 'no wisdom in American society' and they should have distanced themselves from it. According to Ginsberg, "madness was the Beat badge of honor in a world gone insane with bombs and dictators, terror and tyranny" (Raskin, 2004: 81). In *On the Road* this insanity has been shown:

We arrived in Washington at dawn. It was the day of Harry Truman's inauguration for his second term. Great displays of war might were lined along Pennsylvania Avenue as we rolled by in our battered boat. There were 6-295, PT boats, artillery, all kinds of war material that looked murderous in the snowy grass; ... Dean slowed down to look at it. He kept shaking his head in awe. "What are these people up to? ..." (Kerouac, 1959: 80).

Bull, Sal's friend in *On the Road* growls too, that "The bastards right now are only interested in seeing if they can blow up the world" (Kerouac, 1959: 90). In *Howl* America is an "armed madhouse" and a country of "madtowns", "visible madman doom", and "invincible madhouses" (Schumacher, 2015: 23). So there were two kinds of madness; good or creative madness and bad or self-destructive madness. In other words, there were "inspired crazy" and "unrelated crazy" (qtd. in Raskin, 2004: 152) and the Beats claimed to have enjoyed the former. It should be noted however that the Beats sometimes transcended the border between these two and destroyed themselves. Kerouac for example, so exceeded alcoholism that he destroyed his body and soul and died almost young when he was only 47 years old.

It is now axiomatic that the Beats contributed to the American counterculture of the 1950s and '60s to hereby fulminate against an evil society that was itself sick; a dominant corporate structure that suppressed individuality and human potentialities in favour of a neurotic

whole. They had realized that this society's madness was unrelated and self-destructive. So, their "retreatism" which "refers to the rejection of socially approved goals and means" (Delamater, 2006: 457), manifested itself in their madness. Solomon, a talented writer whom Ginsberg met in a mental hospital and inspired him to write his masterpiece *Howl*, was living proof to Ginsberg that "the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness" (Schumacher, 2015: 21). By madness, Ginsberg means society's merciless madness that forces the individual to consider himself mad if he refuses to dispense with his deepest senses or individuality and conform to the seemingly standard structure. Roszak submits this better: "As long as any man's moral sensibility squares with our world view, we are inclined to accept his conduct as quite sane and reasonable. But all the elegant rationalizing in the world will not convince us that someone who rejects our vision of reality is anything but mad or superstitiously irrational" (1969: 80). In other words, in American society of the 1950s and '60s, every individual dealt with an "either/or situation." Either the individual acquiesced in the structure and defined a role instead of a vocation or identity or "dropped out" (King, 1972: 103).

The Beats knew that American society was so sick, neurotic, repressive and oppressive that they braved out to transform the current consciousness and change the world the way they saw and understood its reality. In this society individual freedom was repudiated and trampled on, sexuality was repressed and in general, human needs were taken for granted. Whatever it was, it was not reason. In actuality, "Reason and Rational... pointed to the full achievement of individual potentialities (freedom) and the satisfaction of individual wants and needs (happiness)..." (King, 1972: 124). Ginsberg warned that this reason had become a "horrific tyrant" in America and "created the nuclear bomb which can destroy body, feeling, and imagination" (qtd. in Elkholy, 2012: 228). A society whose existence depends on and is maintained by the perennial menace of war is not rational. The capitalist system is entropic and paradoxical, it carries with it both productivity and destruction. In *On the Road* Sal and Dean travel to a faraway mountainous corner of Mexico. The Indians come to watch and beg:

All had their hands outstretched. They had come down from the back mountains and higher places to hold forth their hands for something they thought civilization could offer, and they never dreamed the sadness and the poor broken delusion of it. They didn't know that a bomb had come that could crack all our bridges and roads and reduce them to jumbles, and we would be as poor as they someday, and stretching out our hands in the same, same way (Kerouac, 1959: 172).

Foucault is severe in his strictures on this societal reason and contends that the reason has become the primary instrument of our domination whereas it was supposed to liberate us (Gutting, 2005: 76).

This bogus rationality as a matter of fact, had strengthened itself in social institutions and thereby usurped rationality and freedom of individuals who had been caught and trapped in those institutions. Individuals had to completely adjust themselves to this social consciousness and dispense with all their personal illusions and experiences. As an alternative, the Beats strived to create a new consciousness, identity, or subjectivity through madness, induced mostly by mind-altering drugs, in such a way that madness had become a technique by which to extricate themselves from that old and evil consciousness. The goal of this madness or “true sanity” is identical with what Laing has mentioned: “the dissolution of the normal ego, that false self competently adjusted to our alienated social reality ... and the eventual re-establishment of a new kind of ego...” (qtd. in Roszak, 1969: 50). To be on your best behaviour in society, that is, to be normal, socially productive and respectable, and mentally healthy had actually nothing to do with individual subjectivity. This subjectivity was lost once and for all in American society and the Beats were really on the ball to resuscitate and reinforce it. In other words, individuals had been stripped of the concept ‘I’ by the society in which they lived. Then, it is not accidental that the Beats were anti-intellectualism and viewed the current rationality with revulsion and accordingly Kerouac once growled that “kill the intellectuals” (qtd. in Belgrad, 1998: 240). Norman Podhoretz who savagely criticized the Beats suggested that to oppose or endorse them had to do “with being for or against intelligence itself” (Creighton, 2007: 268). The minute point is that reason entails understanding and intelligence does manipulation and control. According to the Beats, it was not reason but intelligence that reined in American society and by the same token they took exception to the fact that society was all the time engaging in manipulating and controlling people and they were dead set against this detrimental manipulation or control. Precisely, it was for the same reason that Ginsberg was thrilled and fascinated by people like Herbert Huncke just because they were real people not intellectuals.

#### **Individual Adjustment**

Suffering or enjoying madness, the Beats could not adjust themselves to society. Psychologically speaking, those who suffer adjustment disorder cannot adapt, modify, or alter their collective patterns of behaviour so as to conform to the requirements of the society

in which they live. Some psychologists believe that individuals have to be able to adjust otherwise they will have a lot of problems because lack of adjustment mostly leads to depression and anxiety. LeVine for example, touches on the question of sanity and emphasizes that individuals simply “must subscribe to much of the consensual reality to avoid being outcast” (Gold, 1997: 120). When Adler speaks of a type of individual who is not socially adjusted, he in fact, means that they lead an unproductive life without any social interest. From this psychological point of view, those who adjust have energy and are courageous enough to face the problems and difficulties of life as they come along (Brett, 1997: 48–49). Ogbu, another psychologist, takes a structural-functional view of psychological phenomena to quantitatively and qualitatively increase and expand adaptive intellectual skills because these skills function to adapt the individual to the social structure (Ratner, 2008: 86–87). In *Desolation Angels*, Kerouac admits that he is really unfit for this modern American society: “I really look like an escaped mental patient with enough physical strength and innate dog-sense to manage outside an institution to feed myself and go from place to place in a world growing gradually narrower in its views about eccentricity every day” (1995: 255). Freud has got a special view of individual adjustment. He simply repudiates this impossible notion that man, only if in complete accord with his cultural environment, can he be truly himself and fully human. The reason for this impossibility according to Freud is that man in essence and by definition is “alienated” (King, 1972: 46). In actuality, man deserves to be repressed and alienated by society because by temperament, he demands unlimited and free gratification of his libidinal instinct or sexual aspirations and this in its own turn, is conducive to a strong tendency to aggression that “constitutes the most powerful obstacle to culture” (King: 57). At last, Freud reaches the conclusion that man and society repulse each other and concerning lack of adjustment “the trouble lies deep in man” (King: 46).

Swartz uses the idea of ‘liminality’ to expound on the Beats’ lack of adjustment. Liminality refers to the shaky ground between two stages in the development of a character. He exemplifies Sal, in *On the Road*, who belongs neither to the old, outgrown, or rejected reality nor the new consciousness or subjectivity that he is trying to establish (2001: 96). Sal in his liminal stage is ambivalent about his condition and has a doubtful and paradoxical cast of mind. On the one hand, he sometimes refers to Dean as “Saint” (Kerouac, 1959: 38, 121, and 194) or “Angel” (212, 263) and wants to follow him and on the other, he at some points decides that Dean is “Shrouded Traveler” (124), “Angel of Terror” (235), or “frightful Angel” (239). And eventually when in Mexico Sal

catches a fever and becomes very sick and laid up and Dean leaves him in the lurch, he comes to this conclusion that Dean is a “rat” (305) and no longer follows him. As a matter of fact, Sal flitters between two different worlds and this lack of concentration gives him a precarious position. He is trapped in an unknown territory, he has no relation with the social structure, and he has no identity. As a result, Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady, Sal and Dean respectively in *On the Road*, died tragically after many years of suffering. Swartz, by the same token, concludes that these people were not able to adjust because using drugs and alcohol, they strived to remain fixated in their liminal stage of life and refused to pass from this stage to a completely social life (2001: 96–97). Dean reiterates that their liminal situation is faultless: “Now dammit, look here, all of you, we all must admit that everything is fine and there’s no need in the world to worry, and in fact we should realize what it would mean to us to UNDERSTAND that we’re not REALLY worried about ANYTHING. Am I right?” (134).

A crucial point should be made here. The Beats knew that although diversity or pluralism was a characteristic of American society, all cultural groups acted within the confines of a capitalist system surrounded by so high stone walls that it was almost impossible to set oneself free from it. Ginsberg sadly confesses that “there is no escape and that America will simply continue to torment those who refuse to conform” (Foster, 1992: 102). In modernity, Foucault enunciates, only in art and literature the voice of unreason, untrammelled by psychopathological discourse which is part of the establishment, may be heard (Downing, 2008: 27). Liminality could be seen in the Beats’ real life. In the fight against capitalism in real life it is the Beats who are defeated: consulting psychiatrists, Burroughs and Ginsberg made several attempts to cure themselves and Kerouac repeatedly went back to his mother who was a representative of American society. In compensation, the Beats in their works vicariously created really mad characters, like Dean Moriarty in *On the Road* and Bull Lee in *Naked Lunch*, who in their fight against society never ever compromised or gave up. In their liminal stages of their lives between social reason and individual unreason or madness, the Beats most of the time ignored or evaded rather than fight the power imposed upon them by society. But at least, they did “Wake up in Moloch!” (Schumacher, 2015: 23) and recognized the evil discourse and if they were not able to defeat it, they would create potential characters who fought to their dying day.

Another psychologist DiRenzo goes further than all this and argues that if individuals are not capable of adjusting themselves to society

their very humanity will be in jeopardy and they will change into savages or nonhumans. He regards

socialization as the process by which a Homo sapiens becomes human. People become human only by becoming human for their time and place. It is common for people to regard those who act radically different from what they believe is appropriate as less than human, as "savages." Behaviors that distinguish humans from nonhumans are also patterned for their particular society. *So* this process that fits individuals for their organizational environment is essential for their very humanity (Gold, 1997: 145).

Socialization, however, is the process by which people are made to behave in a way that is acceptable in society against which the Beats strongly rebelled. This lack of humanity is seen in *On the Road* when amidst one of those liminal doubts and confusions, Sal identifies himself with garbage:

attendants of the theater converged with their night's total of swept-up rubbish and created a huge dusty pile that reached to my nose as I snored head down--till they almost swept me away too. This was reported to me by Dean, who was watching from ten seats behind. All the cigarette butts, the bottles, the matchbooks, the come and the gone were swept up in this pile. Had they taken me with it, Dean would never have seen me again. He would have had to roam the entire United States and look in every garbage pail from coast to coast before he found me embryonically convoluted among the rubbishes of my life, his life, and the life of everybody concerned and not concerned. What would I have said to him from my rubbish womb? "Don't bother me, man, I'm happy where I am. You lost me one night in Detroit in August nineteen forty-nine. What right have you to come and disturb my reverie in this pukish can?" In 1942 I was the star in one of the filthiest dramas of all time. I was a seaman, and went to the Imperial Cafe on Scollay Square in Boston to drink; I drank sixty glasses of beer and retired to the toilet, where I wrapped myself around the toilet bowl and went to sleep. During the night at least a hundred seamen and assorted civilians came in and cast their sentient debouchments on me till I was unrecognizably caked (Kerouac, 1959: 246-247).

It should be noted here that the establishment forces individuals to adjust, socialize and conform as much as possible and in the process without assuming any responsibility for itself, produces feelings of 'guilt' in every individual who, for whatever reason, does not manage it. Roszak reports that in 1968, the BBC produced a documentary study of the British NHS (National Health Service). This study suggested that the NHS would see to it that its psychiatric facilities would take on the job of, on the one hand, certifying the normal and on the other, of adjusting the abnormal to the exacting demands of modern society (1969: 20). Marcuse goes even further than this and objects that the result of this process is "not adjustment but *mimesis*: an immediate identification of the individual with his society and, through it, with the society as a



whole” (2007: 12). Marcuse continues to contend that as a result of this forceful adjustment, ‘inner freedom’, that is, the private space in which an individual may become and remain ‘himself’, is whittled down and loses its meaning and reality (12). In *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, the Big Nurse patently reveals the purpose of the establishment: “You men are in this hospital,” she would say like she was repeating it for the hundredth time, “because of your proven inability to adjust to society...” (Kesey, 1962: 167). The establishment rewards the individual who adjusts and socializes and punishes the one who refuses to do that:

Please understand: We do not impose certain rules and restrictions on you without a great deal of thought about their therapeutic value. A good many of you are in here because you could not adjust to the rules of society in the Outside World, because you refused to face up to them, because you tried to circumvent them and avoid them. At some time – perhaps in your childhood – you may have been allowed to get away with flouting the rules of society. When you broke a rule you knew it. You wanted to be dealt with, *needed* it, but the punishment did not come. That foolish lenience on the part of your parents may have been the germ that grew into your present illness. I tell you this hoping you will understand that it is *entirely* for your own good that we enforce discipline and order (Kesey, 1962: 199–200).

The establishment, in actuality, to maintain the social status quo, names and manages as ‘madness’ any psychological damage and distress caused by social inequalities (Mills, 2005: 102). In brief, the establishment’s principle message has always been that “You must adjust... This is the legend imprinted in every schoolbook, the invisible message on every blackboard” and the Beats’ counter message was that “break out of the cage...” (qtd. in Skirl, 2004: 15).

### **Unhealthy Society**

When Allen Ginsberg asked William Carlos Williams to write an introduction to his collection of short poems *Empty Mirror*, Williams was already nationally famous. In 1952, when America was struggling with communism in Korea and McCarthyism was reining in, the authorities were hunting communists throughout the country. The FBI had already begun to keep a file on Williams as a subversive since the Great Depression and World War II. In 1953, a year after he wrote the introduction to Ginsberg’s collection, Williams was appointed as a Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress. Accusing Williams of being sympathetic to communism according to some of his poems and essays, the FBI prevented him from taking up the post. In the same year Williams went to Hillside Hospital for depression. This story reinforced Ginsberg’s idea that America’s madness was responsible for the

destruction of the best minds of his generation, as he wrote in *Howl*. So, something was wrong with American society. Nicosia reports that Ginsberg believed that those in power were insane and that society was bound to destroy itself (1983: 141). As opposed to those who held the individual responsible for his madness if he was not able to adjust, many others including the Beats postulated that American society itself suffered from collective psychosis or neurosis and the symptoms that they enumerated for the disease were: the cold war and the threat of atomic annihilation; conformity, compliance, and obedience of the masses; materialism and consumerism; unbridled technological advances and militarism, etc. Russel Jacoby, a psychologist, instead of 'collective psychosis', uses 'madness of the whole' and speaking about critical psychology, submits that "it must not forget the madness of the whole and ideologically flaunt the virtues of a human existence that is today inhuman. It must aid the victims — the lost, the beaten, the hopeless ..." (qtd. in Saleebey, 2001: 233). Saleebey argues that "we do not honor or deploy the wisdom and capacities of individuals" when we explain and explain away social problems through individual fault (239). Marcuse reiterates that "the state becomes a reality only when it corresponds to the given potentialities of men and permits their full development" (1955: 11). Especially if the conflict is between a 'genius' and his public, Hegel declares, it is the public that is to blame (Bell, 1978: 130).

Sal in *On the Road* becomes disillusioned with America. The American Dream promises everything but delivers nothing. America is monotonous and no longer innocent; it lacks adventure, excitement, equal opportunity and instead is replete with hypocrisy and emptiness. Sal cannot find any pure meaning and value in this country. Burroughs mentions the same idea in *Naked Lunch*: "America is not a young land: it is old and dirty and evil before the settlers, before the Indians. The evil is there waiting" (1959: 13). Sal silently defends Dean against others who blame him for his madness because he knows that Dean is a victim or scapegoat driven mad by society: "This was not true; I knew better and I could have told them all. I didn't see any sense in trying it. I longed to go and put my arm around Dean and say, Now look here, all of you, remember just one thing: this guy has his troubles too, and another thing, he never complains..." (Kerouac, 1959: 195). Sal witnesses America's madness here in *On the Road*:

Suddenly I found myself on Times Square. I had traveled eight thousand miles around the American continent and I was back on Times Square; and right in the middle of a rush hour, too, seeing with my innocent road-eyes the absolute madness and fantastic hoorair of New York with its millions and millions hustling forever for

a buck among themselves, the mad dream--grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City (Kerouac, 1959: 107–108).

In *Visions of Cody*, Kerouac decides that “I realized either I was crazy or the world was crazy: and I picked on the world. And of course I was right” (qtd. in Holladay and Holton, 2009: 155). In *America* Ginsberg addresses the ‘insane’ America: “I’m sick of your insane demands/... America stop pushing I know what I’m doing” (Schumacher, 2015: 28–29).

Erich Fromm, the social psychologist and philosopher, in his seminal book *The Sane Society* strongly criticizes those psychiatrists and psychologists who refuse to entertain the idea that society as a whole could be insane and instead the number of unadjusted individuals is the only factor that can convince them of the existence of the problems of mental health in society (2002: 6). According to Fromm “consensual validation” is a deceptive concept; the fact that most of people share certain ideas and feelings proves the validity of them and this is the “phenomenon of *socially patterned* defect” (14–15). Ginsberg in *Kaddish* refers to this social defect as “(sanity a trick of agreement)” (Schumacher, 2015: 31). Perhaps the following quotation is the gist of Fromm’s idea:

mental health cannot be defined in terms of the "adjustment" of the individual to his society, but, on the contrary, that it must be *defined* in terms of the adjustment of society to the *needs* of man, of its role in furthering or hindering the development of mental health ... A healthy society furthers man's capacity to love his fellow men, to work creatively, to develop his reason and objectivity, to have a sense of self which is based on the experience of his own productive powers. An unhealthy society is one which creates mutual hostility, distrust, which transforms man into an instrument of use and exploitation for others, which deprives him of a sense of self, except inasmuch as he submits to others or becomes an automaton (70).

Marcuse has the same idea and believes that the rational progress of history is due to a relentless struggle to adapt the world to the potentialities of mankind (1955: 10). Society frustrates the natural desires of individuals; it makes them fully conform and changes human beings who are, by temperament, creative and productive, into automatons. King whose idea corresponds to Marcuse and Fromm’s, likens the process of growing up in America to “a frustrated and unsatisfactory orgasm” (1972: 103). Also, criticizing psychotherapy as an agent of the establishment, Adorno asserts that in adjusting to the mad whole the patient becomes really sick (Auestad, 2015: 189).

As mentioned in the above quotation, Fromm in his ideas accords great importance to ‘love’; if man seeks for integrity and simultaneously

a sense of individuality and needs to unite himself with the world, the only way to acquire all this is to love and this kind of love, according to Fromm, should be inclusive: the experience of solidarity with fellow creatures and the love for oneself (2002: 30). So, the crucial question is whether American society ‘furthers man's capacity to love his fellow men’ as Fromm demands and the answer, considering the Beats’ life and literature, is no. The Beats’ misogyny, their treatment of women as mere sexual objects, their narcissism, and their psychopathic attitudes are all notorious. It is reputed that Ginsberg abhorred women, Kerouac rejected his own daughter, and Burroughs killed his wife and was a racist. Dean in *On the Road* is blatantly psychopathic and his narcissistic relations to three women simultaneously are also notorious. Of course, for all this the capitalist society with its materialism, militarism, consumerism, and merciless market economy, must be blamed. Therefore, George Lukacs is true when he blames capitalism for ‘brutalization of feeling’: “This brutalization of feeling manifests itself in literature to an ever increasing extent, most clearly of all in the description and portrayal of love, where the physical-sexual side gains growing ascendancy over the passion itself” (1989: 194).

Fromm digs up the roots of this brutalization. European countries, Fromm claims, in the nineteenth century had an exploitative and hoarding attitude that caused human suffering and lack of respect for the dignity of man. Accordingly, they started to exploit Africa and Asia and even their own working classes ruthlessly. For this planned exploitation, they did not need feelings but brutality and so full sway was given to brutality and feelings were kept in abeyance. In other words, feelings as taboos in society were repressed and its most obvious symptom was the repression of sex and all that was natural in the body which of course, Fromm concludes, resulted in various forms of neurotic pathology and madness of individuals (2002: 97). To Dean “sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life” (Kerouac, 1959: 4) and Ginsberg in *Howl* refers to this sexual repression: “Moloch in whom I am a consciousness without a body” (Schumacher, 2015: 23). This kind of mere genital love in the Beats is not, however, what Fromm demands. In fact, it is a telltale clue that the Beats had become trapped in the capitalist system from which they claimed to have escaped. The brutalization of feeling has another corollary which is alienation of man from himself and others and is perhaps the main cause of madness in a capitalist system. Fromm, etymologically, says that the word ‘alienation’ was used in the past to denote an insane person. ‘Aliene’ in French and ‘alienado’ in Spanish are older words for the psychotic and

‘alienist’ is still used in English for the doctor who cares for the insane (2002: 117).

Fromm also emphasizes the dichotomy between difference and conformity in society. He avers that “virtue is to be adjusted and to be like the rest. Vice, to be different” (153). He believes that lack of conformity is usually punished by disapproving words like ‘neurotic’ (155). Emily Dickinson says almost the same in *Much Madness*:

Much Madness is divinest sense—  
 To a discerning Eye—  
 Much sense—the starkest Madness—  
 ‘Tis the Majority  
 In this, as All, prevail—  
 Assent—and you are sane—  
 Demur—you’re straightway dangerous—  
 And handled with a chain— (Foerster 759).

This dominant society that distinguishes between social character, without a free will, and individual character, willful and different from others, is actually a deviant society that is “unconscious that it exhibited its repression in social sadism” (Tytell, 1976: 88). If society was unconscious, instead, the Beats were conscious of American society’s defect and their dichotomy was obverse because, as Sal famously reiterates in *On the Road*, they preferred the different ones: “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 ...” (Kerouac, 1959: 6). Kesey’s narrator is also aware of the society’s evil imperfection: “I’ve heard that theory of the Therapeutic Community enough times... how society... decides who’s sane and who isn’t, so you got to measure up” (1962: 49).

Michel Foucault is interested in and defends madness as a discourse against the current discourses of society. He knows that a psychotic is dangerous and must be cured but he is “against a perception of madness that admits no meaningful alternatives to our standards of normality and puts all belief and behaviour that seriously deviate from these standards outside the pale” (Gutting, 2005: 71). For instance, their “expression of natural ecstasy”, once Ginsberg said was considered mad in America (qtd. in Raskin, 2004: 185). It is reputed that at the beginning of his career, Foucault was attracted to and studied a neglected, unsuccessful, and marginal writer, Raymond Roussel who had been classed as mentally ill by society. As a matter of fact, Roussel like the Beats, strived to think and write outside the discursive constraints of society and in doing so, as Foucault argues, one would be

considered as mad or incomprehensible by others (Mills, 2005: 57). It stands to reason that Foucault like the Beats blames society for individuals' madness. In one of his studies, like Fromm, he accentuates 'alienation' as the main cause of producing madness. Social contradictions determined by class struggle, wars, economic conditions and exploitation, in Foucault's account, cause alienation and then, to set in motion a chain of events, "alienation causes defenses, defenses cause brain malfunction, and brain malfunction causes abnormal behavior"; so, "it is not because one is ill that one is alienated, but insofar as one is alienated that one is ill" (1987: xxvi). Moloch, declares Ginsberg, is responsible for all this: "Moloch the vast stone of war! Moloch the stunned governments!... Moloch whose blood is running money! ... Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is electricity and banks!... Moloch!... spectral nations! invincible madhouses" (Schumacher, 2015: 23)! Burroughs, too, lampoons "Naked Mr. America" whose structures are all based on money and shouts: "My asshole confounds the Louvre! I fart ambrosia and shit pure gold turds! My cock spurts off diamonds in the morning sunlight" (1959: 41)!

Speaking of madness, Foucault distinguishes between three periods: the Renaissance, the Classical Age by which he means roughly the seventeenth and a large part of the eighteenth century, and finally the modern period. The major shift in treatment of madness, however, happened in the second period or Classical Age when madmen were confined or imprisoned in "enormous houses of confinement" by Tuke and Pinel for example, as people who subjected madmen to the regime of this confinement; and madness "was to reduce to silence" (1965: 38). In this period it was also crystalized that the madman was not governed by reason but by his passions or corporeal desires "... the fundamental role of passion, citing it as a more constant, more persistent, and somehow more deserved cause of madness" (85). Noticeably, changing consciousness into the unconscious or free play of the unconscious (id) was one of the mottoes of the Beats. They basically repudiated the reason that had led to the repression of natural feelings, the threat of atomic annihilation, and the diminution of individuality. In fact, they used madness as a technique by which to extricate themselves from the oppression of American capitalist system. Kerouac once wrote: "I really will go mad and that's what I half hope for" (qtd. in Raskin, 2004: 83). Ginsberg felt the same (Raskin, 83). He was also convinced that out of his individual insanity he would discover more truths about America's social insanity (Raskin, 119). Tytell reports that madness helped the Beats stay privately sane (1976: 11). And above all:

We define neurosis as the defensive activities of normal individuals against abnormal environments ... We give space to the description of the neuroses with which human beings defend themselves from an intolerable reality. But it is with this reality that we are primarily concerned. It is our purpose to implement the realization on the part of people that they live in a neurotic culture and that it is making neurotics out of them ... (qtd. in Belgrad, 1998: 232).

In this case, Foucault had an affinity with the beats and had really understood that the social reason which was to liberate people had become a means of their oppression and domination (Gutting, 2005: 76).

Foucault retells the story that Tuke related about a chained madman whom he received at the *Retreat*. As soon as he arrived, his chains were removed because the keeper let him know that he did not want to use the means of coercion against him as long as the madman behaved as expected. So, the madman promised to restrain himself and whenever he behaved badly the keeper reminded him of coercion and punishment. "Here fear is addressed to the invalid directly, not by instruments but in speech" (1965: 246). The Big Nurse in Kesey's novel "recognizes this fear and knows how to put it to use... you boys be good boys and cooperate with the staff policy which is engineered for your *cure*, or you'll end up over on *that* side" (1962: 18). From now on, the madman is 'guilty' as a madman and "must feel morally responsible for everything within him that may disturb morality and society, and must hold no one but himself responsible for the punishment he receives" (Foucault, 1965: 246). As a result, constraint is abolished; the insane is liberated; but 'fear', 'responsibility', and 'guilt' are inculcated in the madman. So, Foucault defined madness "by the external dimension of exclusion and punishment and by the internal dimension of moral assignation and guilt" (1987: xxxii). Interestingly, Dr. Benway in *Naked Lunch* uses Tuke's method:

"I deplore brutality", he said. "It's not efficient. On the other hand, prolonged mistreatment, short of physical violence, gives rise, when skillfully applied, to anxiety and a feeling of special guilt ... The subject must not realize that the mistreatment is a deliberate attack of an anti-human enemy on his personal identity. He must be made to feel that he deserves any treatment he receives because there is something (never specified) horribly wrong with him ..." (Burroughs, 1959: 17).

In another excerpt, Dr. Benway summons Carl Peterson, a journalist, to the Ministry of Mental Hygiene. In this centre, they recognize and try to cure those individuals who are sexually deviant. At the request of the doctor, Carl undergoes a medical examination; it is negative and found that Carl is not deviant. But Dr. Benway who has been keeping a file on Carl and has been keeping him under constant surveillance since he was doing his military service, shows him some

photos of women who were actually drag queens with whom he had sexual relationships during his military service. Carl admits and confesses. Because in some stages of his life, Carl had not adjusted to society, the establishment tortures him by feelings of guilt. Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise in *On the Road* however conscious of this discourse, reject the responsibility. Dean: “All my jail-problems are pretty straight now. As far as I know I shall never be in jail again. The rest is not my fault” (Kerouac, 1959: 71). “It’s not my fault! It’s not my fault!” Sal says, “Nothing in this lousy world is my fault, don’t you see that” (123)?

### Conclusion

The Beats seem to agree with Lyotard who celebrates “the differentiation of all discourses” and accuses capitalism of destroying differentiation and instead, bringing about false integration of discourses (Veaser, 1989: 5). They really panicked at the mechanical consciousness, bogus rationality, and social conformity that the capitalist establishment was going to impose on every individual. They could not envisage a country in which everybody thought and did the same and so, wished to have their own unique consciousness, visions, illusions, and in general ‘inner freedom’. They were fed up with ‘organization man’ devoid of individuality and subjectivity and with a bland America whose people ran a mundane bourgeois life, “a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume” as Kerouac growls in *The Dharma Bums* (1958:78). The Beats, as Ginsberg once suggested, lived in “a prison and concentration camp” (Raskin, 2004: 92) called America that operated a rampant panopticism, techniques of coercion, control, and surveillance, to make certain that every individual adjusted to society and therefore was not a menace to the establishment. This strong discourse tended to hide or marginalize the different individual and wholly deny his consciousness or subjectivity and attribute the defects in society to his lack of adjustment. Facing this discourse, the Beats had to produce a counter discourse to, instead of sameness and social consciousness, bring about ‘difference’ and individual consciousness because it is natural that “as people feel threatened by standardization, they search out and cultivate differences” (qtd. in Saleebey, 2001: 56). As a matter of fact, to serve this purpose, the Beats created and used a lot of techniques such as: movement, spontaneity, nakedness of mind, homosexuality, addiction, and madness. Social experiences, having had by everybody, did not absorb them because it completely ignored their individuality without which they could not really live as human beings but as robots; they needed first-hand

personal experiences to create and enjoy their own reality rather than admit the given reality of the time and to the establishment, personal experience was the same madness. It is not accidental that Kerouac in *On the Road* goes the extra mile for gaining such experiences: “I shambled after as I’ve been doing all my life after people who interest me, because 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...” (1959: 6), by which he means it is impossible to gain first-hand experience if one is not mad and novel reality is never produced if one capitulates to social reality.

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