

Cultural Daily

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“Dirty Hippie Lit” Triumphs Today

Levi Asher · Thursday, October 20th, 2011

I often hear people complain about “dirty hippies”. Well, cleanliness is a virtue. But I’ve never understood why anybody would hate hippies. Is it that their exuberance is embarrassing? I like hippies, and I also like several writers identified with the post-Beat/hippie literary tradition of the 1960s and 1970s, many of whom are still active (or being remembered) today.

1. Johnny Depp is the star of a new film based on Hunter S. Thompson’s novel of sin and excitement in Puerto Rico, *The Rum Diary*. Haven’t seen it yet, but early indications are encouraging.

2. The late-career writings of the once-acclaimed novelist Ken Kesey were scant and unimpressive, but I recently [wondered](#) if this only indicated that Kesey had lost interest in the book format, and if there might be more substance to Kesey’s later collectivist theatrical experiments than is commonly thought. Mike Egan’s new book *Ken Kesey and Storytelling as Collaborative Ritual* asks the same question, examining group works like the play Twister with a Jungian point of a view and a fresh eye.

3. Karen Lillis has written a memoir, *Bagging the Beats at Midnight*, about her years as a bookseller at the endangered St. Mark’s Bookshop (which remains one of the best places in New York City, and I hope it will never go away). Bagging the Beats includes chapters with titles like “Susan Sontag Wants The Manager & Richard Hell Wants the Bathroom Key”.

4. *Beatitude* is an unusual novel by Larry Closs about two young men’s search for the meaning of Beat literature during the 1990s. The heroes of the novel pore over the Jack Kerouac scrolls in the New York Public Library, have a piquant encounter with elderly Allen Ginsberg, and struggle with the epic dimensions of their own changing friendship. This novel reminds me very much of my own travels in post-Beat New York City during the 1990s. Here’s the [author’s website](#).

5. Indefatigable Beat/Buddhist poet Anne Waldman has spent twenty years composing an epic poem, a postmodern spin on classical creation mythology. I’d be lying if I told you I read the entire 720-page verse play now published in a single thick volume as *The Iovis Trilogy: Colors in the Mechanism of Concealment*. But I am impressed that it exists, and I like looking at it.

6. Empty Mirror Books calls out: [Ted Joans lives!](#)

7. A new site devoted to [Charles Plymell](#), Zap Comix founder, jazz poet, Beat novelist, proud dirty

hippie forever.

8. Flannery O'Connor [did not care for the Beat Generation](#).
9. Loren Glass has written a two-part profile of Grove Books/Evergreen Review publisher [Barney Rosset](#).
10. Swinging London happenor Barry Miles, once a groovy literary Austin Powers of his day, has written a new book called [In the Seventies: Adventures in the Counterculture](#).
11. I'll be very excited to read the first major biography of author Kurt Vonnegut, *And So It Goes*, which will hit the streets in early November. Biographer Charles Shields has been [blogging the biographical process](#).
12. Bruce Jay Friedman, a hot writer on the scene in the 1960s and 1970s (and, more quietly, since), has published a memoir of his literary career, [Lucky Bruce](#).
13. Joseph Heller's daughter Erica Heller has written a memoir too: [Yossarian Slept Here: When Joseph Heller Was Dad, the Aphorp Was Home, and Life Was a Catch-22](#).
14. [More Notes of a Dirty Old Man](#) collects some of the early Charles Bukowski tabloid writings that were left out of his signature collection *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*.
15. [Kenneth Patchen: A Centennial Selection](#) is edited by Jonathan Clark.
16. Some Beat historians protest: [Shig Murao is in danger of being written out of the history of City Lights and the San Francisco Beat era](#).
17. A new play based on the autobiographical poem *Kaddish* by Allen Ginsberg has been [staged in New York City](#).
18. [The Wars of Love and other Poems](#) is by latter-day Beatnik Charles Upton, who explains the book here:

When Jack Gilbert, some time in the 1970's in San Francisco, asked his poetry class, "Who here aspires to write a masterpiece?", not one hand was raised. I, on the other hand, wanted to do just that; after reading Blake's Prophetic Books for the first time, as a naive youth, I said to myself: "Wow! I'd like to write one of those!" So I tried my best; it took me thirty-three years.

The idol of "street language" that entered my art in the 1970's was of no interest to me; I wanted to write in a dense, heightened, magical, poetic language such as ear of cabbie or bar-fly had never heard. I respect those poets who, like my mentor Lew Welch, can bring high poetic diction and "the common speech of the Tribe" seamlessly together; in many ways I like that kind of poetry better than I do my own. But I was given to write in a certain style, to fill in a certain blank square on the map of the English language, and so I complied. The Muse assigns styles as God assigns fates, and thus—to paraphrase the Hindu scriptures—"it is better to write one's own poetry, no matter how poorly, than to try and write somebody else's, no matter how well."

19. David Foster Wallace was more or less a dirty hippie postmodernist (though he probably hated

hippies too) back in the 90s when he was hanging around with [Jeffrey Eugenides](#), [Mary Karr](#) and [Jonathan Franzen](#). Speaking of Eugenides — everybody's talking about his new novel, *The Marriage Plot*. Has anybody read it yet?

20. From those dirty hippies over at Reality Sandwich: [Occupation Poetry](#).

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