



The Holy Barbarians

Lawrence Lipton

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The beat world--holly in its search of self, barbarian in its total rejection of the so-called "civilised" standards of success and morality. Lawrence Lipton's fascinating book is one of the first complete, unbiased studies of the strange, important offshoot of society.

The Holy Barbarians Details

Date : Published 1962 by Grove Press (first published 1959)

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Author : Lawrence Lipton

Format : 318 pages

Genre :

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From Reader Review The Holy Barbarians for online ebook

Florencia says

This is a Rory book. I'm not ashamed to admit it.

I loved that show, and I found some good titles that eventually became awesome books. So, yes. It's a Rory book... Don't question my sources. (?)

September 27, 2013

Update

Oh, yes. *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life* will be released on November 25. Two days before my birthday.

Perfect gift!

Because, you know, it isn't just a show - it's a lifestyle.

July 31, 16

Update II

Yes, I watched the Gilmore Girls revival. I will keep my opinion to myself and continue to watch the original series.

Dec 29, 16

Melanie says

The best book i have read so far of this type. It's more explaining than just high rambling.

Megan says

Like hey man, those beatniks were groovy. If the planet Earth is like a tiny speck in the thumbnail of the universe, does that mean I could like have a tiny universe in my thumbnail? Blows my mind. You dig?

Heather says

I purchased this book for \$2 from an online Christian bookstore. Based on their other available selections I can only presume they had this in stock for the title and not the contents.

It is a hardback edition from 1959, black cover with lime green lettering. The pages are a comfortable color of weathered cream and the smell takes me back to my childhood, to our old library that is now a police station for offices only. Under the staircase in the back of the building was the children's room: a 10X10 floor-to-ceiling alcove with a small square table in the middle. It had one of the rolling ladders to push along

the wall to reach the upper shelves. I spent hours in that room delving Nancy Drew and perusing Island of the Dolphins.

I keep losing myself in these fond memories and having to start over paragraphs, and at times, whole pages.

As for the book review, I'm having a hard time finding shelves to file this under. It's weird. Like being in Jack Kerouac's high while he's passed out on the side of the road.

Karl Reinhard says

Based on annotations and highlighting of my nook version of this book, this was one of my best reads. Lipton does an excellent job of capturing in detail the beat generation and tracing similar movements, from his first hand experience, from the twenties, thirties and the immediately proceeding developments of the forties. The details of beat personalities, music, attitudes, religion were all insightful. All of this was new to me. His experiences with luminaries, such as Allen Ginsberg, were fascinating and made these people seem human. It was my first read of beat poetry. All in all, one of my favorites.

Jeff says

This is a 300+ page argument that the Beat Movement was as much political as it was a artistic. Lipton tries to draw a line from leftist movements of the 20s and 30s to the Beat Generation. It's a stretch. He takes the whole Beat Generation too seriously. So much so that's unintentionally humorous at times.

Mia says

Reading this book, I could see a lot of similarities with the Beatniks and the Millenial generation - but with a big difference being that in general, the Millenial doesn't live in a state of poverty by choice. With this point of view in mind, it was incredibly interesting to read about the sex, art, jazz and politics of the Beatniks. They were more than just poet reading jazz lovers, they were a movement away from societal norms that Lipton could write about so well because he was one of them.

M says

All in all a decent read. Obviously it is a bit dated, and some or rather, most of the pieces that felt like they are suppose to be shocking to the average reader, probably were quite shocking to the average reader when this books was released. Girls who sleep with boys before marriage and curse? Boys with beards? Not wanting to live the American Dream? The horror, the horror...

I also probably should have read this book sooner. I've had a copy for the better part of a decade, sitting on my to read shelf in every apartment I've lived in. Expectations get built up, although I don't really know what I was expecting.

Still hard to believe the dude who wrote this book is the dad of James Lipton.

Jen says

3.5 stars.

Dave says

I read this book in the late 70s, about 20 years after it was written. That was about 5 years after I spent some time in Los Angeles, hoping to experience the Beat subculture. I enjoyed and appreciated the book, largely because I had experienced a little of the Venice scene it describes. But it was already ancient history when I visited. The Beat concept had already been subsumed, for better or worse into the overall American Experience. I hope to reread it soon and, if I do, I'll expand my review and may revise my evaluation. In the meantime, anyone who thinks they may be interested should give it a shot; it was/is part of America.

Printable Tire says

Second attempt. Not as good as the first one, but it is shorter!

After riding high on Your Erroneous Zones and Doing Nothing, I had to read a book about incompetent, self-indulgent, elitist, hypocritical, vapid, shallow, histrionic, selfish, egotistical, ignorant beatniks. Everyone in this book talks like they came out of Beyond the Valley of the Dolls, and the author Lawrence Lipton (father of James Lipton, and if you want to understand why James is so pretentious and boorish, look no further than this book) records pseudo-objectively the everyday life of the beatnik, in a voice and style reminiscent of Gidget's father. Unfortunately I wasn't taking good notes on juicy passages until later in the book, but here's a random tidbit that expresses adequately the sort of language and conversation that goes on:

“...I couldn't make it with a bourgeois psychiatrist... He even helped me get over my resentment at being a woman. And that's why I don't really agree with Dan about monogamy, I mean for me. I mean, dig, I agree with Dan about being a poet and the need a poet has, his special need, and about being honest about it if it happens, and you need a change. But about monogamy, the whole idea in general, I find it stifling. Definitely. It dulls my sexual appetite (32).”

The Dan in question is Angel Dan Davies, who appears on and off in the book and reminds one of Matt Dillon from *Singles*, except Dan is presumably a real person and not some caricature of a cartoon copy.

I read a *Mad* magazine parody once called *Beatnik: The Magazine for Hipsters*, and it really hits the nail on the head. Never will you hear the term hipster used so admiringly, and never will you hear more spite against the world of the square, so much in fact (once every paragraph at least) that one can't help but think the hipster protests a little too much. There is much bongo drumming and pseudo-intellectual opining:

“Today Chuck Bennison is bearded and barefoot; he has shaken off John Barleycorn and taken on Mary Juana and burned al his grey flannel britches behind him. He still puts more body English into his jazz-

listening than the cool cats approve of, but he is learning. He is searching for the Self and finding God. 'I'll never forget the time Dan Davies came to my pad and wrote on the mirror: This is the face of God you see.' With this sense of holiness goes, of course, a feeling of separateness... We against the Others... 'They are the Others, the Squares. They don't dig jazz... They're not with it... They're putting on the heat again... They killed the story because it might lose them an advertiser... They rejected my book because it was controversial' (48)."

There is a childish rebellion at work among the beatniks, a cynical, egotistical revolt against the sameness of the world they see around them, and a retreat into a selfish world of crass desires and entitlement. None of the beatniks put anything truly positive forward: their poetry sucks and their insights are insignificant. The best among them, Kenneth Rexroth, looks like a child molester.

But it's hard to not enjoy a book where subject headings read "Holiness? Crazy, man! But you can flip your wig on it (79)" and paragraphs full of episodes like this: "One amateur I know found herself confronted one day with an ideological, if not a moral, problem. The supermarket where she sometimes shoplifted a quarter of a pound of butter- more as social protest when butter prices took a sudden jump than from any actual necessity- was being picketed by strikers. Out of sympathy with the striking union she went across the street to the little independent grocer and did her shoplifting there till the strike was over (155)."

Yet right around when the author starts using footnotes the book becomes boring, and reminiscent of the last book I read, *Doing Nothing*. Lawrence sets out to document the lives of the beatniks, what they do, what makes them cool and hip, and then deconstruct how they came to be, what they want, why they are different than what came before. In stark contrast to the hippie movement which would be the direct follower of the beatniks, beatniks were apathetic to political causes and cynical of humanity in general. They retaliated against the 20's youth movements, much as the slackers of the 90's revolted against the 60's, and invested in a life that (without there knowing or acknowledging it) was almost purely based on superficial pleasures, hedonistic sensations, and abstract me-ism. It was an elitist sect, but very proud and unabashedly elitist, much unlike the hipster of today, who would think it unhip to think in terms of hipness. To be a beatnik you had to hate the Squares, dig jazz music, wear the right clothes and have the right books on your shelf. It seems to be just as suffocating an environment as the Squares they so vehemently dislike. It is an alternative form of the same atmosphere, but like the Mall Punk of suburbia today, options were limited for the beatnik to escape this Us vs. Them duality. Beatniks were insecure and territorial: anything could shatter the hipster funland they created.

"Nobody paid any attention to the newcomer till Grant [a Square] tried to start up a conversation with Chris Nelson. Above the din, Angel's keen ear detected the accents of the square, and he laid aside his bongos long enough to get an earful of what the stranger was putting down. He didn't like it. When Don finished blowing his poem, Angel had a word with him in the kitchen and when they came back the whisper was passed around that if anybody was holding they had better not turn on till after the square could be gotten out of the pad. He might be a narcotics agent. Unaware of what was going on, Grant tried to engage in conversation- only to meet with stony silence. He had expected to find these cats cool, but not this way. After one last stammering, stuttering attempt he got out of there and walked the ocean front all the rest of the night talking to himself in a paroxysm of choking chagrin that more than once boiled over into tears (128)."

This scene, told in total earnestness, reminds one of Bob Dylan's *Ballad of a Thin Man*, and in fact that song could've been based on this book. It's important to note that while this story seems to portray the beatniks in a negative light, that isn't actually the case. We are dealing with a society so pretentious and full of themselves that they cannot let anything stand in their way or ruin their buzz. Here is the author, Lawrence Lipton, speculating after a poetry reading he gave at a Square establishment:

“Wrong poem, wrong people, wrong place. Some poems require study before hearing and Rainbow [his poem] is one of them. Although there are parts that are clear enough at first hearing, the structure and many of the metaphors and allusions require study before they yield their full meaning. The voice, the sound, does add a dimension to the meaning, but not until the other dimensions are already present in the mind of the listener. This is not true of all poems but it is true of a poem of any length or complexity (202).”

Portrait of a person who has eliminated all erroneous zones? Perhaps, but there is much too much hatred of the Squares, too much labeling and identifying and organizing and categorizing of what is and isn’t cool for the beatnik to end up anywhere but as a consumer subset worshipping superficialities.

If Jack Kerouac is the Jesus Christ of the Beat religion, and Allen Ginsberg John the Baptist or some other prophet, the beatniks are some long forgotten sect (or, if you are anti-religious, all of Christianity) that has warped and twisted the ideas of its originators into a calling and philosophy of ritualistic adherence and hate. My view of Jack Kerouac was never phased by this book: I don’t remember Jack Kerouac ever using the term Square, and his childish loving of every situation is a relief after the serious pursuit of hedonism of the beatniks. I also gained new respect for Allen Ginsberg, who comes off beautiful in his rare appearances in this book and answers the age-old question of what to do when you’re performing a “far-out” poetry reading and some drunk square is hassling you: you take all your clothes off and pester the square to do the same until he backs off.

The beatniks were wrapped up too much in their own worthless pursuits. The beatniks were too afraid to open themselves up, much like the youth culture of now. They were cynical and believed everything to be phony and regimented and Square, yet they yearned for an authentic experience, for something “holy.” Their own insecurities, their own spiteful projections onto the world, their own adherence to a bible of cool lead to their downfall. When all you do is self-deconstruct and criticize and scrutinize, you leave no room for creation. You become swallowed up in the Ego, and not even your own ego, but the ego of a collective Hipster Consciousness, which inevitably leads to a counter-consumer youth culture of no indefinite value. As a historical document, this book is great, but as a book of a way of life, it is a dead end.

Glossary [from back of book]:

Joint- a place, a penis, a marijuana cigarette, preferably a combination of all three.

Later- When you’re ready to leave the pad you cut out and say, “Later.”

Like- The theory of relativity applied to reality. “Like that’s your reality, man.”

Make- To act, as in “make the scene.” To “make it” may be said of anything that succeeds, whether a dental appointment or a crazy chick.

Nowhere- If you’re not with it, you’re nowhere (see With it).

Square- Conformist, Organization Ma, solid citizen, anyone who doesn’t swing and isn’t with it. Also called Creep and Cornball. Man, if you still don’t dig me, you’ll never be anything but-

Terrell Neuage says

I read this book when I was in about 7th grade age 14. I realised then and there - 1961; that this was the life for me. I left home a couple of years later and started my life via Greenwich Village and Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco. And a good life it has been. In other words probably the most influential book I read as a teenager.

Olav says

Loved it from start to finish.

The book reinforced my already positive perspective and added so much more on top of that.

The beat generations spirit will stick to me eternally and I'm sure, will eventually consume me, for the better or worse but always in a way that will leave me with no regrets in the knowledge that I acted out of my own requests of will and wants and love.

Very informative and definitely a must read for any beat-admirer. Would recommend reading a few other books of the beat writers though, since it does add to the experience if you actually recognize the names he's referencing (plus he doesn't give background info on the already established figures in that time).

5/5- worth (re-)read.

(other things I loved, more specific)

I had read tropic of cancer prior to this and was absolutely sure Henry Miller must've been a huge influence on the beat's and having this reinforced by this book was absolutely thrilling.

Cool - a word that got a completely new definition for me. It says so much more in the way that it doesn't say anything, specifically. Only cats who hanged with the beats in that time could properly feel what cool is and when you try to define it; it loses its entire meaning.

Knowing and accepting this, we beat enthusiast can come to terms that the term has taken a false turn and reinterpret it back again in the spirit of the free and zealous, the beat and zen, the cool.

(if the word ever changed meanings at all, neglecting the squares view of the word).

Jim Crocker says

This was one of the strangest and most amazing books I've ever read. Probably changed the course of my life.

Jeremy Garber says

A fascinating participant-observer study of the Beat Generation by a slightly older participant. An excellent illustration of qualitative research written well, Lipton lives and works among these radical dropouts and collects their stories to group them into a mosaic of the alternative lifestyle. Rejection of the capitalist myth, the importance of jazz to alternative consciousness, marijuana as communal bonding agent, and alternative sexuality - Lipton tells it all with detail but with an intelligent eye to the bigger picture, situating the movement in the constant surges of youth rebellion in the early twentieth century. I don't know if I would have wanted to be a beatnik, but after reading Lipton's work, I bet they sure would have been interesting to hang out with.
