

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The Beat Collection

Barry Miles

Also by Barry Miles in Virgin Books

CHARLES BUKOWSKI

JACK KEROUAC: KING OF THE BEATS

GINSBERG: A BIOGRAPHY

WILLIAM BURROUGHS: EL HOMBRE INVISIBLE

THE BEAT COLLECTION

Edited by Barry Miles



This ebook is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form (including any digital form) other than this in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Epub ISBN: 9780753544761

Version 1.0

www.randomhouse.co.uk

First published in Great Britain in 2005 by Virgin Books
Virgin Books Ltd
Thames Wharf Studios
Rainville Road
London
W6 9HA

Copyright © Barry Miles 2005

The right of Barry Miles to be identified as the Editor of this Work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 1 85227 264 3

CONTENTS

Introduction

THE ORIGINAL BEATS: NEW YORK, 1944-53

Jack Kerouac

Home at Christmas

Jazz of the Beat Generation

Belief and Technique for Modern Prose

Essentials of Spontaneous Prose

(From) Railroad Earth

(From) Old Angel Midnight

William Burroughs

Twilight's Last Gleamings (With Kells Elvins)

(From) *Junky: Definitive Edition*, 2003

Roosevelt After Inauguration

(From) *Interzone*

International Zone

(From) *The Naked Lunch*

The Black Meat

Hospital (Benway)

Ordinary Men and Women

Allen Ginsberg

Pull My Daisy (with Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady)

Howl

Footnote To Howl

A Supermarket in California

Sunflower Sutra

America

Many Loves
To Aunt Rose
Kaddish

Herbert Huncke

Elsie John
Bill Burroughs
Bill Burroughs, Part II

Carl Solomon

Sex at 20 in America
Report from the Asylum

Neal Cassady

One Night in the Summer of 1945. . .
Letter to Jack Kerouac, 7 March 1947
Letter to Jack Kerouac, 3 July 1949
Adventures in Auto-Eroticism
Leaving L.A. by Train at Night, High. . .

John Clellon Holmes

(From) *Go*: Part One, Chapter 3

Gregory Corso

Italian Extravaganza
The Last Gangster
The Mad Yak
For Miles
Last Night I Drove a Car
Hair
Marriage
Bomb

Peter Orlovsky

Frist Poem

Second Poem
Creedmore State Mental Hospital Night Shift Look & Mop
Signature Change

THE SAN FRANCISCO SCENE: 1954-1957

Gary Snyder

Riprap
For a Far-Out Friend
(From) Myths and Texts: 17. The Text

Philip Whalen

Sourdough Mountain Lookout
Further Notice

Lew Welch

Chicago Poem
In Answer to a Question From P.W.
[I Saw Myself]
Wobbly Rock 1
(From) Taxi Suite
[I Know A Man's Supposed To Have His Hair Cut Short]

Michael McClure

From the Introduction to *Ghost Tantras*
Ghost Tantra 39
Ghost Tantra 51
A Garland
Mad Sonnet

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Loud Prayer
Underwear
Sometime During Eternity. . .
They were Putting up the Statue. . .

Constantly Risking Absurdity. . .
Autobiography
Dog
The World is a Beautiful Place. . .

John Wieners

Act #2
A Poem for the Old Man
A Poem for Cocksuckers
A Poem for Vipers
A Poem for Record Players

Bob Kaufman

Abomunist Manifesto
Notes Dis- and Re- Garding Abomunism
Further Notes
\$\$ Abomunus Craxioms \$\$
Still Further Notes Dis- and Re- Garding Abomunism
As Usual
War Memoir: Jazz, Don't Listen to it At Your Own Risk
Jazz Chick
Crootey Songo
Waiting

Lenore Kandel

First They Slaughtered the Angels

THE SECOND WAVE: NEW YORK 1958-60

Diane DiPrima

Thirteen Nightmares

LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka

In Memory of Radio

For Hettie
Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note
Black Dada Nihilismus

Frank O'Hara

A Step Away From Them
The Day Lady Died
Poem
Personal Poem
Why I Am Not a Painter

Alexander Trocchi

(From) *Cain's Book*

Ted Joans

The Truth
Uh Huh
Whiteyes on Black Thighs
They Forgot to Fast
Open Minded
Duke's Advice
Watermelon
My Bag
Natural
Jazz is My Religion
No More
The Nice Colored Man

Ray Bremser

Backyards and deviations

Jack Micheline

Let's Sing a Song
River of Red Wine
Jenny Lee

Night City
South Street Pier
Poet of the Streets

Biographical Notes On Writers

Acknowledgements and Copyrights

INTRODUCTION

The Beats used to call Times Square 'The Big Room'. Not for them the quiet tree-lined streets of Greenwich Village - that came later - but in 1944-5, it had to be Times Square: the centre of the universe, a 24-hour meeting place where servicemen and prostitutes, tourists and hustlers, cops and reporters gathered in the glaring neon for the latest news of the war. It was the energy centre of New York with its all-night cafeterias, late-night bars, cigar stores, newsstands, honking traffic and the endlessly flashing, moving neon, brighter than day.

The core Beats - Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg - and their close friends, Lucien Carr, Joan Vollmer and Edie Parker, first met in the two months after Christmas 1943. All but Burroughs were attending or had just left Columbia University and they lived near the campus on the edge of West Harlem. Burroughs was older, born in 1914, and had studied at Harvard and at medical school in Vienna before the war. It was through him that they met Herbert Huncke, a Times Square junkie, male prostitute and thief, with whom Burroughs shared an interest in crime and morphine. Burroughs had studied anthropology at Harvard, and he applied this to his approach to Times Square, leading his friends on a systematic study of the bars and 24-hour cafeterias on Broadway and 7th Avenue, noting the differences in clientele, intrigued by the low-life. The Beats were young, middle-class kids, torn by the petty restrictive rules of Columbia, the mindless anarchy of war, and the puritan values of the country at large. They felt alienated from the establishment and spent much of their time in the West End Bar, across from the main gate to Columbia, or in the Angle Bar on Times Square, trying to formulate a 'New

Vision', as they called it, to make sense of the world as they found it.

They might have been any group of disaffected students, confused by the uncertainties of wartime and its challenge to established values, but of the core group, all three became well-known writers, known collectively as The Beat Generation. The ending of the war increased their belief that a new set of values was needed: how could life continue as before after the horrific revelations of the concentration camps and the complicity of ordinary German people, and the dropping of the atomic bomb, callously annihilating the innocent civilian population of two large Japanese cities? Clearly madness reigned under the cover of bourgeois respectability. To them, the denizens of Times Square – the junkies and prostitutes, the hustlers and thieves, the con-men, homosexuals, transvestites and outcasts engaged in their daily struggle for survival – were more real, closer to real human values, more in touch with human emotions and feelings than the uptight citizens behind their white picket fences and in the corridors of power.

The group expanded and changed; Neal Cassady, a young car thief from Denver who burned with an intense energy and enthusiasm for life and experience, was added to the circle, bringing with him wives and girlfriends and a connection to Colorado. Ginsberg met the young poet Gregory Corso shortly after he was released from jail in 1950 and he became another core member, featuring in Kerouac's books and Ginsberg's poetry. John Clellon Holmes, then trying to make it as a writer in New York, joined in their activities and later wrote about it. But they were not yet a group, they had no label.

In the end the defining word came from Herbert Huncke: 'When I said I was *beat* I was *beat*, man, I was tired, exhausted, worn out. That's what I meant.' It was Times Square hipster slang, probably originating with black musicians. The others took it up from him. In 1948, Jack

Kerouac and John Clellon Holmes were sitting, talking about Gertrude Stein, Hemingway and the Lost Generation, and Holmes asked Kerouac how he thought their generation might be classified in the future. What word might characterise the young people of their circle; their wariness, their suspicion of authority, their sense of helplessness in the face of the hydrogen bomb and the heated rhetoric of the warmongers, their interest in jazz and willingness to experiment? Kerouac was particularly drawn to the young hipsters of the Times Square area whom he thought best expressed their collective attitude: 'Being right down to it, to ourselves, because we *really* know where we are - and a weariness with all the forms, all the conventions of the world . . . it's something like that. So I guess you might say we're a *beat* generation.' Holmes caught it immediately, 'That's it!' he said. He later defined it much as Huncke had done, to mean dead beat, worn out, the view from the bottom where everything is etched with a sharp clarity; what Holmes later called being 'at the bottom of your personality, looking up.'

Holmes used the term in a 1952 piece in the *New York Times* headlined 'This is the Beat Generation' and the phrase caught on; journalists are always looking for shorthand labels and this was a good angle, rather like Juvenile Delinquents. In 1958, after the Russians had launched the world's first artificial satellite, *Sputnik*, the phrase was further refined in an article about the bohemian community living in the North Beach area of San Francisco by *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Herb Caen who combined the two threats to American society and called them Beatniks. (A decade later he was also credited with coining the term Hippie.)

Kerouac saw it as having a more saintly meaning, defining it as 'beatitude', something stemming from his Catholicism, but he also identified a belief in spontaneity, of being right here in the present and acting on the impulse,

unconstrained by conventions and morality. In one of the best known quotes from *On The Road*, Kerouac wrote: '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 like fabulous yellow Roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centrelight pop and everybody goes "Awww!" ' As far as society was concerned Kerouac and his friends really *were* mad, and certifiably so.

Of the core group of Kerouac, Burroughs and Ginsberg, Burroughs was the first to be deemed crazy. After attempts to join the navy and the fledgling CIA, Burroughs found himself in 1940 living in the Hotel Taft in New York City, playing out the endgame of an unhappy love affair with a part-time prostitute named Jack Anderson. After being evicted when hotel security found them in bed together, Burroughs moved to Anderson's Greenwich Village rooming house, but the walls were thin and through them he could hear Anderson entertaining male clients and partying with women friends. Engulfed by loneliness, distracted by lacklove and Anderson's indifference, Burroughs bought a pair of poultry shears and, mirroring Van Gogh's desperate plea for attention, he cut off the last joint of the little finger of his left hand. Whereas Van Gogh presented his ear to a horror-struck prostitute, Burroughs took his severed finger to his psychoanalyst and found himself, a few hours later, in Bellevue where he was diagnosed as a paranoid-schizophrenic. His father flew in from St. Louis and transferred him to the private Payne-Whitney clinic where he remained for a month before being taken to St. Louis and the care of his worried parents.

Jack Kerouac had hoped to join the war as a pilot in the Navy Air Force V-12 programme but when he took the examination in March 1943 he failed, and was sent instead to undergo basic training at boot camp in Newport, Rhode

Island. Kerouac's eagerness for experience and action did not mix well with the regimentation and regulations of military life. One rule he found particularly objectionable was the prohibition on smoking before breakfast. He had only been in the navy three weeks when he appeared at morning parade with a cigarette dangling defiantly between his lips. The sergeant major inspecting the troops smacked it out of his mouth. Jack's reaction was to haul off and punch him. He lay down his rifle and made his way to the library where the military police arrested him. Jack later summed up the event: 'I was in the navy, but I was discharged after two months. Schizoid personality. They gave me a rifle and they sent me marching out on the drill field, right turn, left turn, and I said, "Aw, I don't want to do this," and I went to the library and I started to read.'

The military psychiatrist asked about his emotional life and paid close attention when he said that he was more attached to his male friends, both spiritually and emotionally, than to his girlfriends. Asked if he was the centre of attention in any group, Jack unhesitatingly said yes and explained that he dedicated his life to having experiences in order to write about them, 'sacrificing myself on the altar of art.' It came as no surprise when they diagnosed him as schizophrenic; suffering from *dementia praecox* as it was called in those days. In May 1943 he was given an honourable discharge for having an 'indifferent character'. He was not a coward - as a merchant marine he was soon to brave the German submarines waiting in the cold waters of the North Atlantic - it was the military discipline that he could not accept.

Allen Ginsberg, the youngest of the group, was not pronounced mad until 1949. Of all the Beats, it was Ginsberg in particular who romanticised Herbert Huncke as some sort of saintly fallen angel, even though Huncke had stolen \$200-worth of valuable books when Allen had allowed him to stay in an apartment he was flat-sitting for a friend.

At 8 a.m. one snowy morning, Huncke appeared once more at Allen's door having been released from Riker's Island ten days before and having lived on the streets for ten days on a diet of Benzedrine and coffee. He was semi-delirious and suicidal, his shoes were soaking wet, his feet bloody: 'Who walked all night with their shoes filled with blood on the snowbank docks waiting for a door in the East River to open . . .' as Ginsberg later wrote in 'Howl'. Allen invited him in, bathed his feet, and slowly coaxed him back to life. Taking advantage of Ginsberg's passivity, Huncke began to take over the apartment, rearranging the furniture, installing two of his underworld friends, Jack Melody and Vicki Russell, as room-mates and filling the rooms with stolen goods, so that eventually Allen had to sleep on the couch and keep his clothes and possessions in his desk as Huncke had appropriated his dresser.

Dimly realising that this could only end badly, Ginsberg decided to remove all incriminating papers from the flat and on April 22, 1949 he asked to be driven to his brother's house in Queens to store them. But it was a stolen car and filled with stolen clothes. When Jack Melody made a wrong way turn into a one-way street in Queens, a police prowl car signalled for him to stop. Instead he floored the accelerator and Ginsberg found himself in a high-speed car chase. After six blocks the car hit the curb and turned over twice coming to rest upside down with Allen inside, his glasses broken, clutching his journals. 'I had a complete, final, and awful sense of what I might call Divine Wrath,' he wrote.

While Huncke was returned to Riker's Island, two of Ginsberg's Columbia University professors, Lionel Trilling and Mark Van Doren, pulled enough strings for him to be sent to the Columbia Presbyterian Psychiatric Institute where he spent eight months being taught how to be normal, heterosexual, and to fit into American consumer society. While there he met fellow patient Carl Solomon, to whom 'Howl' is dedicated. To Allen, it was Carl, Neal

Cassady and his other friends, 'the best minds of my generation' who had all been driven mad by American society which was then at its most complacent, conformist and regimented.

Though America had the world's highest standard of living, the actual quality of life was poor. Millions of Americans had moved to the soulless suburbs where they lived in virtually identical stucco boxes with sexless twin beds and picture windows to show off their spotless lives. The men commuted each day and wore their hair in crew cuts like convicts, Prussian Military Academy style, while their bored wives devoted their time to home-making. Wife swapping parties and alcoholism were rife. These were the days of rabid anticommunism, of the House of un-American Activities and the McCarthy witch-hunts, when large numbers of Americans were brainwashed into believing that it was somehow patriotic to buy a new model car each year; 'What's good for General Motors is good for America' the slogan went. It was a society based on runaway consumerism, where people thought what *Time-Life* and the church told them to think; a society based on fear, where people built bomb shelters and worried that the Russian hordes would invade at any moment. It was a society based on lies.

The Beats identified the sickness in society, the refusal to see reality. *Naked Lunch*, according to Burroughs, was when you finally saw what was *really* on the end of the fork. Ginsberg showed how the authoritarian system ground down the individual, distorting their emotions and psyches to fit into conformist, consuming society. He identified 'the madman bum and angel' who escaped, injured, flawed, but still mentally alive, and proclaimed their sainthood. Kerouac reinvigorated the reader, showing what freedom could mean, should mean, proposing challenges, excitement, kicks! He was the biggest threat of all.

Naturally the Beats were not the only ones to challenge the appalling state America had arrived at but they proved to be the most visible targets. Their rejection of the American Dream provoked intemperate fury from both church and state; the former because the Beats were opposed to censorship, rejected traditional puritan American family values, and believed instead in free love and free-ranging eroticism. For the latter, J. Edgar Hoover over at the FBI, saw them as a direct threat to society, classifying them along with 'eggheads' and 'commies' as one of the three main threats to the American way of life.

The original trio of madmen fanned out to spread the word and by the mid-fifties all of the original group had dispersed: Burroughs first to Mexico City, then to Tangier; Neal Cassady and Allen Ginsberg to San Francisco, where Ginsberg energised an existing poetry scene into what became known as the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance. Here he encountered Lawrence Ferlinghetti, whose City Lights Bookshop provided a centre for the local poets and whose company was to publish Ginsberg's first book, *Howl and Other Poems*. Ginsberg met poets Gary Snyder, Lew Welch and Philip Whalen who had all been room-mates at Reed College, and introduced them to Jack Kerouac who, as usual, was flitting between his friends. Together with Michael McClure, another key member of the group who wrote memorably about the scene in his book *Scratching the Beat Surface*, this group of poets introduced ecological issues into the Beat consciousness which had previously been essentially urban in character. McClure, along with Snyder and Whalen, read at the legendary Six Gallery when Ginsberg performed 'Howl' in public for the first time. A community developed in North Beach, traces of which exist even today; a certain atmosphere in the old Italian coffee shops, old Beat characters still propping up the bar at Vesuvio's next door to City Lights Bookshop or at Specs across the street.

After the success of 'Howl', Ginsberg, accompanied by his new lover Peter Orlovsky, returned to New York where a home-grown poetry scene had also emerged, parallel to, rather than part of, the Beat Generation. Known as the New York School, it centred on John Ashbery and Kenneth Koch but also included Frank O'Hara, who spanned the two groups. This was a brief stop-off for Ginsberg who was on his way to join Burroughs in Tangier. Jack Kerouac got there first and had already typed part of Burroughs' *The Naked Lunch* before Ginsberg and Orlovsky arrived. By 1958, Ginsberg, Gregory Corso and William Burroughs were all living in the Beat Hotel in Paris, the last great communal activity by this group of writers. It was here that Burroughs finished *The Naked Lunch*, Ginsberg began 'Kaddish' and Corso wrote 'Bomb' and most of his other poems included here.

The Beats not only questioned society's norms, but challenged existing literary forms: they were advocates of free verse at a time when even this was seen as a daring departure; they wrote about subject matter that few people had dared to describe before, and were the subjects of numerous obscenity cases because of it; they experimented with the very nature of fiction and of literature, including tape-recording transcriptions, bits of ad copy, strange words not in the dictionary, slang and obscenities never before seen in poetry or prose. Back in New York, Greenwich Village, always a centre of bohemian and artistic activity, was now filled with Beatniks; both genuine and weekend. The old Italian coffee shops around Bleecker and MacDougal began to feature poetry readings and the bars were filled with abstract expressionist painters and poets and with writers working on the newly started *Village Voice* newspaper. For every poet like Diane DiPrima and LeRoi Jones there was a weekender who donned a beret, sandals and a French Breton fisherman's sweater, picked up a pair of bongos and headed off to the cafes off Bleecker and MacDougal. Many were students at New York University,

which has its campus in the middle of the Village, and others were simply getting in on the act. Beatniks became good copy for the newspapers and tourists began to visit the area to look at them. Photographer Fred McDarrah and poet Ted Joans took advantage of the media interest to launch a tongue-in-cheek organisation called Rent-a-Beatnik, where impoverished poets would show up at society parties and read their poetry or play bongos. There were books of cartoons, spoofs in *Mad* magazine, and a lot of young people who arrived in the Village simply because they aspired to the free lifestyle that was promised, much as hippies arrived in San Francisco a decade later. The Beats of course continued right on through the sixties and seventies and many of the younger ones are still living; however we have concentrated here on the first energetic flowering, the youthful good humour and fresh insight of these remarkable writers.

Barry Miles 2005

THE ORIGINAL BEATS: NEW YORK
1944-53

JACK KEROUAC

1922-1969

HOME AT CHRISTMAS

IT'S A SUNDAY AFTERNOON in New England just three days before Christmas—Ma's making the roast in the kitchen range, also tapioca pudding so when Sister Nin comes in from outdoors with the shovel she's been wielding in the blizzard there are cold waves of snowy air mixing with the heat steams of tapioca over the stove and in my mouth I can taste whipped cream cold from the icebox on the hot pudding tonight.

While Ma cooks she also sits at the round kitchen table reading the *Boston American*—Pa's in the parlor playing the Gospel Singers of Sunday cigar-smoke funnies time—I'm getting ready to take my big blizzard walk into the Massachusetts Shroud begins just down the end of dirt road Phebe Avenue, I'm rummaging in the closet for my hockey stick which will be my walking-stick and feeling-stick to find where puddles and creeklets have disappeared under two feet of snow this day.

"Where you goin'?"

"Take my walk."

"Be careful don't fall in the ice—You're goin' to your Pine Brook?—Oh you're crazy you!" (exasperation)

I start out, down the porch steps, overshoes, woolcap, coat, corduroy pants, mittens—There are Christmas wreaths in all the windows of sweet Phebe—No sign of G.J. or Billy with the kids sliding on the park slope, no sign of them on their porch except G.J.'s sister in her coat all wrapped communing with the plicking fall of vast snows in a silence of her own, girl-like, watching it pile on the porch rail, the little rills, sadnesses, mysteries—She waves—I plod down off

our Sisshoveled walk into Mrs. Quinn's unshoveled walk where the going is deep, profound, happy—No shoveled walks all the way to Billy's where bigbrother sixfoot Jack has worked, in muffler with pink cheeks and white teeth, laughing—Black birds in the black cherry tree, and in the new snow breadcrumbs, bird tweak tracks, a little dot of kitty yellow, a star blob of plopsnow ball against Old MacArthur's wreathy front door—O the clean porches of New England in the holy dry snow that's drifting across new painted planks to pile in corners over rubber doormats, sleds, overshoes—The steam in the windows, the frost, the faces looking out—And over the sandbank now and down on semi-snow-plowed Phebe comes the great fwoosh of hard stormwind from the river cracking leafless shrubs in stick-unison, throwing swirls of coldsifted power, pure, the freezing freshness everywhere, the sand frozen solid underneath—

Down at the end of Phebe I'm in the middle of the road now preparing my big Arab strides for the real business of crossing miles of field and forest to my wanted Brook which in summer's a rendezvous of swimmers crossing gold and greenleaf day, bees of bugs, hay, haze, but now the gigantic Snow King has laid his drape upon the world, locked it in new silence, all you hear is the profound higher-than-human-ear screaming of snow radios bedazzling and electrifying the air like orgones and spermatazoas in a Universe Dance—They start black specks from heaven, swirl to avoid my gaze, fall white and ploppy on my nose—I turn my face up to the sweet soft kiss of Heaven—My feet are getting cold, I hurry on—Always with a smile of my numb cheeks and pinked lips I think (remembering movies) how really comfortable it would be to lie down and go to sleep in the soft thick snow, head rested—I plod, the hockey stick trails after—I go through the sandbank draw and rise to survey the sand field bordered on the other side by a cut of earth with saplings and boulders—I cluck up my horse and

off we gallop in a snowbound Westerner to the scene, deep, the sand field is all milky creamy waves of smooth level snow, my blasphemous impertinence tracks make a sad plod in the smoothness—I jump up the cut, stand to survey further vast fields stretching a mile to the wall of pines, the forest of Pine Brook in the unbelievable riot murk beyond, the momentous swing of other swirlstorms.

One last look at Phebe, turning, I see the sweet rooftops of life, of man, of mother and father and children, my heart aches to go back home, I see the dear smokewhip of chimneys, the innocent fall of snow from roofs, the bedangled icicles, the little piteous fences outlined in all that numb null white, the tracks of people, the gleeful steplets of humans twinkling and twittering across the snow and already again over the sandbank ridge a great pall of wind and snow sweeping to fill holes with soft new outline—The mystery—Tears in my eyes from cold and wonder I turn and strike across the plain—The grief of birch that's bent and wintering, the strange mist—Far off the white story frame house in the pine woods stands proud, families are in there furing, living—

The left field of our baseball field is lost—Where the spring bubbles from short right I can see just snow and just one hint of blackening snow where waters below have formed a slush and darking ice—Behind me now I can see my footsteps in silence and sadness of white distance filling, forming, growing vaguer, returning to the macrocosmos of even snow from the microcosmos of my striving—and far back of that and now by distance seeable where before by nearness not, the vague unbelievable hardly-discernible caped gray smoke stacks of the mills across the river and the dim smoke urging to rise from their warm Dickensian interiors of grime, labor, personal involvements among dye vats to the universe of the blizzard oversweeping all—

I reach the end of the plain, go up the wagon path past the backstop homeplate pines, the rocks, past the Greek

farm on the left now stilled from Cretan ripple olive peace of summers to frost squat Winter—The top of the hill, the view of the woods, the descent into the woods—The pond at the bottom of the hill, the star beneath the ice in the bottom of the pond, the ice skaters thronging by, an old La Salle with a mattress in the back clonking by and sloshing in the snowplow's flat—I circle the pond, the houses, the French Canadian *paisans* are stomping their feet on still-screened porches, Christmas trees on their backs—Merry Christmas zings in the air—It darkens, dusk's about to come, I've got to hurry, the first heartbreaking Christmas light comes on red and blue in a little farm window across the locked pond—My nose snuffles, my hands the back of em are like thronged red leather—Off the road and into the country path, the fear of shrouded woods ahead—No more houses now, just bushes and pines and boulders and occasional clearings, occasional woodpiles beautifully wreathed with a snow crown—The jump over the little property wire fence, the old tree base where black rocks of Indian Summer kid fires show stark dark through iced snowtops, remnant pieces of charred wood, the pine fronds gray as dead birds—Somewhere above, the coalblack crow is yawking, cr-a-a-a-ck, c-r-a-a-ck, I see the flop of raven twit limbs battering onward through treetop twigs of aerial white to a hole in the heart of the forest, to the central pine and pain of my aching desire, the real Christmas is hiding somewhere from me and it is still, it is holy, it is dark, it is insane, the crow broods there, some Nativity darker than Christianity, with Wise Men from underground, a Virgin Mary of the ice and snow, a Joseph of the trees, a Jesus like a star—a Bethlehem of pinecones, rocks, snakes—Stonewalls, eyes—

But dark gray is the nightfall reality now, I plow my hockey stick in front of me, sometimes it sinks three feet in culverts, holes—I jump and stagger and grind—Now a solid wall of pine is overhead, through the dark skinny limbs I can see loured gloomy night is overshadowing the blizzard's white

shadow—Darker, deeper, the forest densens like a room—Numbbuzzing silences ring my ears, I pause to listen, I hear stars—I hear one dog, one farmer-door slam a mile away—I hear a hoot of sledders, a keen shrill of little girl—I hear the tick of snowflake on snow, on limb—Ice is forming on my eyebrows—I come haunting, emerging from the forest, go down the hill to the brook, the stonewall has crystal icing in the heavy winter dim—Black bleak lines in the sky—my mouth is awed open, vapors puff out, it's stopped snowing and I've begun to sense a blue scene in the new night—Soon I see one star above—I reach the brook, it flows under jagged ice caps black as ink, gurgly, silver at the ice rim, cold steaming between blanketwhite banks to its destinations and rivers down—I follow in the gloom—Our diving board's all white, alone, unsupple, stiffwooded in wintertime—Our trapeze hangs looping, dull, iceroped—

“Aaaaa!” I yell in the one-room world—My stick penetrates no bottom, I've found a traphole, I walk around cautiously, follow the river bank—Suddenly there's an orange feeling in the air, the sun somewhere has pirouetted protruding limbs into the mass of brass and iron blizzards, silver's being rouged by the blast-works of the real hidden tropic sky—An Arabian Nights blue spreads blue-icing in the West, the Evestar sparks and shivers in the blanket, one lank icicle suddenly stabs from its center to the earth, dissolves—Cold. No more snowfalls, now the faint howl winds of the New England bring Alaskan shivers from the other hill, down my collar—

I leave the black brook, see the first and last touch of orange on the deepwaters, I know it's beautiful now and everything is good, I hurry back to my city—The path follows the brook, turns off in tangled tragic brushwood, goes deep across a cornfield—I hurry in a semi circling road back across my pond jumping path to the top of Moody Street where again the snowplow's work is piled in double rumps each side, my liberated feet moving in snowshoe flopping

jingling gladness—There stands the white Colonial house, on the iron lawn the Christmas-glittering spruce, the noble snowy porch, fresh beginnings of a cocktail party inside—I've reached the top of the hill overlooking all Lowell.

And there she is in the keen blue winternight, be-starred above, the round brown sadface of the City Hall clock in her granite tower a mile and a half away, the speechless throat of throbbing red neons against distant redbrick of bowling alleys, business, Squares, Chinese restaurants—the giant river scything white and black around, from wilderness of hoar to wilderness of hoar and sea—The thunder and the rumble everywhere in the roundaround horizon phantom night, the distant snake of a hundred-car freight (Boston & Maine), the clean snow smoke in the new snow plain, the red glow of the locomotive's boilers, the distant two-long-one-short-one-long howl at a countryroad crossing, the lone wee caboose at the rear drawn to other worlds, to deeper night—The blue mill eternity windows, sighing froth of falls, reflections of the city actual sad in river's ice—And the one long thoroughfare Moody Street from my feet ribboning clear down Pawtucketville suburb and over the river and down the dense fantastic humaned Little Canada to the downtown thrill—Clear. Cold. Immortal.

I start home down the middle of the plowed street, joyous cries on all sides of sliding kids, the run, the thap of feet, the slap of the sled down, the crumpy ride of the runners over nostalgic snow, rock scrapes, sparks like stars—The scarved bundled gleechildren of New England screeching, the black and white fantasy of their turmoil—Sister Marie is yelling irritably at her brother Ray down the level ice wood of the tenement “Yes, I'm going, yes I'm going. I told you a hundred times!” The wash hangs stiff and frozen, long underwear stands by itself hanged, brown porchlights are on where the mother is packing the frozen wash in fragrant piles—Little tiny nameless infant bundled-to-the-ears sits brooding in the snow like Shakespeare's bird, the wreathed

window's golden with Christmas behind him, he's looking and wondering: "Where was I born and what is my name? Roland Lambert? Roland Lambert? Who is that, Roland Lambert? Who are you Roland? Hello Mister that passes—" I wave my hand, my footsteps squeak and squidge in the tightpacked snow—I come down deeper in the joy of people.

Past Mr. Vernon, the white houses, the spruce, the lost parochial white yard of night, the concrete wall, the first grocery store—Screams, snow slush, traffic ahead of me—Oilstove heat rushes down dim hallways, out the raw door—There's Al Roberts throwing a snowball at Joe Plouffe, another one, crazy crisscrossing snowballs, hoots, whoopees —The boys are ducking into the brown scarred door of the club for a brew—There's Jim with his Christmas tree, his rubbers are too low, the snow spills into his shoes, against his silk socks, he yells: "Last damn time I'm gonna buy a Christmas tree!" Mrs. T. is yelling to Mrs. H. across the wash rope of the court: "What time ya goin?"—Doors slam, buses ball by, cars race motors in drifts sending blue exhaust in the blue purity—Keen. That same star shudders exploding on the roof of the church where candles flicker—There go the old ladies of the parish to their evening vespers, bundled in black coats, white faced, gray brushed-back hair, their poor little fragile hands hidden in muffs of indoor prayer—Golden light spills from Blezan's store onto the scuffled sidewalk where the gang stands wrangling, I go in to buy my Old Nick and Clark's, browse at my usual comic books and pulp magazines—The wood stove is red hot in the back, there's the smell of heated overshoes, snow wet floors, infolded night, smoke—I hurry down Gershom, past the snowball fights, the yoo-hoos, the proud adults in big coats bundling off to social evenings, adjusting scarves, opening garage doors, guffawing—The rosy faced girls are hurrying to the bus, the show, the dance—Sad is the long fence of the long yard and the great high white frozen tree where the sick boy lives—I see him in the window, watching

—Little narrow Sarah Avenue hasn't got a window that's not red or green or blue, not one sidewalk unmusical with shovels—Wearily I come to the corner, turn up Phebe, my three mile circle's complete, come to my house on slow wet sodden feet, glad—

Everything is saved. There's heat and warm joy in my house. I linger at the window looking in. My heart breaks to see they're moving so slowly, with such dear innocence within, they don't realize time and death will catch them—not now. Ma moves to lift the pot with such a bemused and serious hardly-knowing goodness and sadness—My father's huge still presence, his thighs in the chair, the absent-minded darkin-thought face, so wordless, unexplainable, sad—My sister bending over her adolescent fingernails so preoccupied, ravenously attentive in the dream—When I open the door they look up blandly, with blue eyes—I stand facing them all red-faced and frozen—

“Well—it's about time! You missed your supper!—The roast is in the oven, it's not as hot any more—Your mashed potatoes are almost cold—Sit down, crazy!”

I sit at the sparking table in the bright warm light, ready. She brings me a big helping, glass of milk, bread, butter, tapioca pudding with whipped cream.

“When you're finished eating we're going to go get the Christmas tree and put it up, ah?”

“Yes!”

“Eat, honey, after your big walk you must be hungry.”

That night in bed I can still see the great bulging star white as ice beating in the dark field of heaven among the lesser glittering arrays, I can see its reflection in an icicle that depends from an eave above my window, I can hear my winter apple tree cracking black limbs in frost, see the Milky Way all far and cold and cragdeep in Time—I smell the softcoal heat of the furnace in the cellar—Soon dawn, the rosy spread over pure snowfields, the witless winter bird