

## THE SPIRITUAL IMAGINATION OF THE BEATS

*The Spiritual Imagination of the Beats* is the first comprehensive study to explore the role of esoteric, occult, alchemical, shamanistic, mystical and magical traditions in the work of eleven major Beat authors. The opening chapter discusses Kenneth Rexroth and Robert Duncan as predecessors and important influences on the spiritual orientation of the Beats. David Stephen Calonne draws comparisons throughout this book between various approaches individual Beat writers took regarding sacred experience – for example, William S. Burroughs registered significant objections to Buddhism, while Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac both devoted considerable time to studying Buddhist history and texts. This book also focuses on authors who have traditionally been neglected in Beat studies – Diane di Prima, Bob Kaufman, Philip Lamantia, and Philip Whalen. In addition, several understudied works such as Gregory Corso’s “The Geometric Poem” – inspired by Corso’s deep engagement with ancient Egyptian thought – are given close attention. Calonne introduces important themes from the history of heterodoxy – from Gnosticism, Manicheanism and Ismailism to Theosophy – and demonstrates how inextricably these ideas shaped the Beat literary imagination.

DAVID STEPHEN CALONNE is the author of *William S. Burroughs: My Real Work Is Being* (1983); *Bebop Buddhist Ecstasy: Burroughs’s Influence on Kerouac and the Beats* (2010) with an introduction by Lawrence Ferlinghetti; and literary biographies of Charles Bukowski and Henry Miller. He has also edited four volumes of fiction and essays by Bukowski for City Lights. Calonne has lectured at the European University in Florence, Columbia, Berkeley, Harvard, and Oxford and taught at the University of Texas, the University of Michigan, and the University of Chicago. He presently lives in Ann Arbor and teaches at Eastern Michigan University.

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*Eastern Michigan University*



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## *Acknowledgments*

*The Spiritual Imagination of the Beats* has been many years in the making. I was born in the 1950s and came of age during the 1960s and 1970s, and I realized after completing this book that in several ways it represents my effort to fathom those tumultuous decades in America as well as my own personal experiences with the counterculture in California during dramatic and sometimes euphoric times. My late parents, Pierre Calonne (1920–2015) and Mariam Galoostian (1917–2005), were dedicated to pacifism and leftist political thought: their aesthetic and philosophical values influenced me tremendously. While at the University of California at Los Angeles and later at the University of Texas at Austin, I read widely in the Beats as well as in world literature and had several inspiring teachers whom I would like to acknowledge here: in classical Armenian, Avedis Sanjian; in ancient Greek, David Packard and Peter Green; in music, Roy and Johana Harris; and in the history of modernism, Christopher Middleton. Later, while teaching seminars on the work of William Saroyan at the University of Michigan and the University of Chicago, I explored with my students the ways in which Saroyan influenced Jack Kerouac. In addition, over the past decade, I have edited several volumes of stories and essays by Charles Bukowski, who also admired Saroyan. I published a literary biography of Henry Miller, whose esoteric dimension had long fascinated me: gradually, I began to perceive connections between what for me had always seemed strangely neglected areas of American literary scholarship. I then developed and began teaching a course on the Beats at Eastern Michigan University and realized I had found my subject: their intense and continual religious quest fairly leapt out at me. My writing, teaching and research slowly coalesced into the framework for *The Spiritual Imagination of the Beats*. I want to thank my students at all these institutions, particularly Matt Zacharias at Michigan, who read portions of my draft. Ken Wachsberger – who is an authority on the underground magazines of the 1960s – also kindly examined an earlier version of this text. At Cambridge University Press,

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