

Poetry Group Report by Annie Clouston

March's Poetry Group focussed on **American Beat Poets**. I think we all had a few prejudices and misconceptions... stream of conscious blah, rebellious iconoclasts, a sort of early arty BratPack of the Greenwich village etc... However, two hours later we had all, probably revised our ideas, because we found some gems.

"Beat poetry evolved during the 1940s in both New York City and on the West Coast, although San Francisco became the heart of the movement in the early 1950s. The end of World War II left poets like Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Gregory Corso questioning mainstream politics and culture." (www.poets.org)

Possibly the most controversial and acclaimed poem of the generation is Allen Ginsberg's **Howl**, which begins:

*I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by
madness, starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at
dawn looking for an angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient
heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the
machinery of night . . .*

The Beat Poets were not exclusively male. Diane di Prima was a popular choice of members, and in some ways (perhaps exacerbated by gender) was more shocking to US society (this was also the era of McCarthyism) for her bold and sexualised imagery. Her poem **The Quarrel** is difficult to find even today, and it was censored in the States. Here is her touching **An Exercise in Love**:

My friend wears my scarf at his waist
I give him moonstones
He gives me shell & seaweeds
He comes from a distant city & I meet him
We will plant eggplants & celery together
He weaves me cloth

Many have brought the gifts
I use for his pleasure
silk, & green hills
& heron the color of dawn

My friend walks soft as a weaving on the wind
He backlights my dreams
He has built altars beside my bed
I awake in the smell of his hair & cannot remember
his name, or my own.

Diane di Prima, "An Exercise in Love" from *Pieces of a Song*. Copyright © 1990 by Diane di Prima. Reprinted by permission of City Lights Books.

Our next meeting is devoted to the works of R S Thomas. If anyone would like to join our group or receive a copy of any of our poetry files, please email annie@cloustons.uk.