

684

THE WORLD OF THE BEAT GENERATION:

A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION

A Thesis

Submitted to

the Faculty of the Department of English
Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Raymond C. Koch

August 1959

Thesis
1959
K
c.2

Approved for the Major Department

Green - Dyck

Approved for the Graduate Council

James I. Boyer

262478¹

DATE PROCESSED

OCT 14 1961

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE WORLD OF THE BEAT	1
The Place	1
The People	18
The Sound	30
II. THE BEAT AND THE SQUARE	35
III. THE BEAT AND GOD	56
IV. THE BEAT AND BELLES-LETTRES	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY	88

Preface

Writing in 1954 of the literary future of America, Malcolm Cowley noted in the new writers of the time the beginnings of a rebellion which he felt held promise for the future. He found that the rebellion, like most movements in their early stages, lacked a "program" and lacked the leadership needed to give it force and direction. But he saw the new writers as "a new race of Americans, with a new relation to the state, a new picture of the world overseas, a new attitude toward love and the family." In general, he found that the group was forming new values, "even though they bewailed the lack of them." As they talked often about being "underground" and sometimes referred to themselves as "the beat generation," he felt it only natural that they should turn to an unpublished long narrative by novelist John Kerouac titled, On the Road, as the "best record of their lives." He found promise in "their realism about the world they lived in and their level-eyed candor," but he found reason to complain because "they weren't yet producing new works of literature."¹ This was 1954. Now, some five years later, Kerouac's novel has been published, the rebellion has assumed some form and direction within a world of its own, and the rebels have been

¹Malcolm Cowley, The Literary Situation (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), pp. 241-242.

dubbed officially "the Beat Generation."² But have they produced any "new works of literature"? Have they expressed their new sense of life through the media of literary communication: poetry, drama, the novel, the short story, the essay? Kerouac and other writers have published novels and short stories; the poets have produced and published, and, only recently, a biographer has sprung up in their midst. But Cowley's phrase, "new works of literature," seems to ask for something more than "publishing." It seems to request that these writers bring to their forms of expression the standards that have determined the merit of the recognized works of literature of our time, and that they work within these standards in their attempts to express their own particular vision of man and of his world. This study represents an attempt to determine whether after five years Cowley's complaint still is applicable. Certainly the Beat Generation has achieved a degree of recognition through the press, television, radio, and the movies that has not been given a literary movement since the Lost Generation of the Twenties. But this recognition seems more a product of the unusual attraction of the beat way of life, than an acknowledgment of their stature or of their contributions as artists.

²Clarence L. Barnhart (ed.), The American College Dictionary (New York: Random House, 1959), p. 107.

Thus, one must separate the fact from the fad and the fetish if he is to examine the writings of the beat. And this is the task of this critical investigation.

Of inestimable value to this study was the first published "biography" of the generation, Lawrence Lipton's The Holy Barbarians. Lipton, a poet-critic who is really a part of an older generation--that of the Twenties, has assumed the stature of father-confessor to the beats; his book is a thorough and partisan study of the generation, an insider's report on the world of the beat, its inhabitants, and their attempts at artistic expression.

The process of gathering a representative selection of the works of the beat presented some problems; this writer is indebted to the Grove Press of New York and the City Lights Book Shop in San Francisco for some of the works supplied, and to Mr. Richard Roahen of the Department of English, Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, who obtained materials--especially poetry--during a recent trip to the West Coast.

This writer must also acknowledge the guiding, criticizing, and often inspirational aid of Dr. Green D. Wyrick of the Department of English, Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, who directed this thesis; the editorial assistance of Mr. Jerry P. Leibman, also of the Department of English, Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia; and, finally, the understanding of my wife, whose sacrifice made this work

possible, and of my daughters, who will understand it all the better for not being able to read it.

Kansas State Teachers College
Emporia, Kansas
August 8, 1959

R.C.K.

CHAPTER I

THE WORLD OF THE BEAT

I. THE PLACE

Writers and rebellion are synonymous; they go together as naturally as subject and predicate. Writers have always been associated with revolt, whether in the sense of concrete political action as in Hungary or in a more purely literary and social sense. Every generation of writers has its over-turners, its idol breakers, its defiant ones.

These inovators sometimes fizzle into footnotes of literary history. But sometimes--"tremblingly alive all o'er," in Pope's phrase--they ignite or are ignited by a mood that comes to characterize an age. Such seems to be America's Beat Generation. At a time when much of literature seems directionless, their scattered but at least vigorous efforts have taken on the appearance of a movement. Critical attention has been almost indifferent; it has been neither entirely encouraging nor discouraging. Reviewers who have approached the material of the generation's writers as a matter of course have--in the main--noted its shortcomings but praised the effort. This comment is typical: "Surely the reception accorded Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, whose work combines an appearance of radicalism with a show of intense spirituality, testifies

to the hunger that has grown up on all sides for something extreme, fervent, affirmative, and sweeping. . . ."¹ Critics for whom the job of book reviewing is apart from the normal course of their affairs have made little effort to understand the generation; their remarks, hence, have been rash, often vituperative.

The underlying impulse of the rebellion appears to be keyed to a common wish to abandon a society seen as corrupted by its own civilization and to develop the responses of the self to basic humanity and primitive sensation.² This is hardly a new notion among rebel writers, but it has led some critics and innumerable newspaper writers to scramble every nonconformist, from Marlon Brando to the hot-rodder to the contemporary painter, in the Beat Generation. The movement is rather a literary grouping which has absorbed or at least overlaps the so-called San Francisco Renaissance³ in the arts. From the latter it takes one of its major poets, Allen Ginsberg, whose poem "Howl" was judged not obscene in San Francisco Municipal Court.⁴ From the East Coast it takes another leader,

¹Norman Podhoretz, "The New Nihilism and the Novel," Partisan Review, 25:577, Fall, 1958.

²Malcolm Cowley, The Literary Situation (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), pp. 241-242.

³Kenneth Rexroth, "San Francisco Letter," Evergreen Review, Vol. I, No. 2 (1957), 5.

⁴J. G. Fuller, "Trade Winds," Saturday Review, 40:5, October 5, 1957.

Jack Kerouac, a novelist who is credited with coining the phrase "Beat Generation."⁵ According to him, the generation "includes anyone from fifteen to fifty-five who digs everything, man." He elaborates: "We're not Bohemians, remember. Beat means beatitude, not beat up. You feel this. You feel it in a beat--in jazz--real cool jazz or a gutty rock number."⁶ Be that as it may, the state of spiritual nirvana which the proponents of the movement seek is found only after a search through what an uninitiated reader must consider highly unscriptural avenues.

An examination of these avenues--and hence the physical world of the beat--can be assumed to be the first and most logical step involved in any attempt to understand this generation. Such an examination if it is to be valid must take into consideration other than purely literary factors. One reads but little of the work of these writers before becoming aware of the essentially autobiographical nature of their fictional world; certainly their fiction has its counterpart in reality. To examine one is to examine both.

The world of the beat is a world of violent contrasts, of contradictions. Two predominant images are projected in this world: one, the image of the land, the big land with its overwhelming variety, raw and not yet humanized as Europe is

⁵Ibid., p. 6.

⁶Ibid.

by the hands of history and peasantry--"unstoried, unenhanced and artless," as Robert Frost puts it; it is a land that provides at once both a challenge and an escape for the beat writers; and the second, the image of the city, in its "magnitude, beauty and wonder,"⁷ and in the depths of its "subterranean darkness."⁸ The two images blend and form a world into which the beat can escape from their present place and problems. And yet each retains its particular demands upon the individual, each exacts its particular credentials before permitting entry, before becoming partner to escape.

The world of novelist Kerouac more completely embodies this concept of physical environment than does that of any of the other beat writers.

In his first-published novel, The Town and the City, Kerouac follows young Peter Martin through his developing years, his attempts to find some reason for life, for that which is "dizzy and wild in his heart." He allows him to pursue this vision of life into the hills that surround the New Hampshire town of Galloway, and there to look back on the town and conclude that "this. . .the mills with their long rows of windows all a-glow. . .the factory stacks rising higher than the church steeples. . .is not the true Galloway,"

⁷John Kerouac, The Town and the City (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950), p. 354.

⁸Jack Kerouac, The Subterraneans (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 5.

the meaning does not lie here. Instead he looks to "the invisible brooding landscape surrounding the town. . .the bright stars nodding close to a hillside where the old cemetery sleeps. . .the odor of loam and grass" and concludes that "it's a joy to know that life is life and death is death," and that "these are the things that make these people towns-people and not city people."⁹

Later in the novel as family circumstances require a move to New York, Peter Martin again questions "the excitement and mystery and sadness in his soul" and wonders why now "his own nature. . .is so vast, false, complex, shifting, treacherous, saddened by the mere sight of life."¹⁰ He questions the origin of the city, too, and concludes that only "something complete, and wise, and brutal too, had dreamed this world into existence, this world in which he wandered haunted."¹¹ But he finds no answer in the image of the city, or in his associations with "a strange trio: one was a hoodlum, one was a dope addict, and the third was a poet."¹² At the end of the novel he returns to Galloway for his father's funeral but can find nothing in "the dear voices of everybody he had known" and leaves, walking

⁹The Town and the City, pp. 3-5.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 360.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 364.

"alone in the rainy night. He was on the road again, traveling the continent westward, going off to further and further years, alone by the waters of life, alone. . . ."13

This is the early Kerouac; the same Kerouac and the same fictional world can be found in his latest published novels, Doctor Sax and Maggie Cassidy. Written apparently at the same time as The Town and the City, the two novels trace the boyhood and young manhood of Jack Duluoz through the boyhood world "of scorn, fear, sentimentality, barefootedness and gleeful obscenity"¹⁴ and into a world of "gray high school halls. . .the New Year's Eve dance. . .the necking on front porches. . .of Columbia University ahead."¹⁵ This is the same world in which critics found "emotional appeals in the 'lost, lost, lost' cadence of Thomas Wolfe," and also found the same "Wolfian lack of unity."¹⁶ While the beginnings of a beat world can be found here, this is decidedly not the world of the beat, the world which takes concrete form in Kerouac's novel, On the Road. These are, however, the beginnings and as such should be recognized.

¹³Ibid., p. 498.

¹⁴"Grooking in Lowell," Time, 73:106, May 18, 1959.

¹⁵Jack Kerouac, Maggie Cassidy (New York: Avon Book Division, The Hearst Corporation, 1959), pp. 31, 38, 183.

¹⁶Howard Mumford Jones, "Back to Merrimac," Saturday Review, 33:18, March 11, 1950.

The world of On the Road is a world in which the adolescent frustrations of Jack Duluoz and the compounded disillusionment of Peter Martin find adult embodiment in Sal Paradise; here, too, are the boyhood chums and girl friends of the earlier works, bringing with them not the wisdom, but rather the freedom that comes with age. The contrasts within the physical world are the same: the city assumes a new dimension as the characters become a part of a world of which they were formerly only spectators; the land is Whitmanesque, but in a frenetic, free-wheeling interpretation of the term.

The uniqueness of the work, however, is found in Kerouac's examination of the city, or rather, the city within the city, the haunts of the beat, the "pads." The scene as Lawrence Lipton sketches it in his The Holy Barbarians is typical:

The Scene: Itchy Dave Golden's pad. One of those slow-motion cool parties is in progress, with low-decible, cool West Coast jazz on the phonograph, everybody relaxed, saying little and seldom and low-keyed. You can sit for two hours on the floor, back propped against the wall, and as long as you keep your eyes closed most of the time nobody will violate your privacy. I couldn't guess how many are in the place. It is very dimly lighted by a few forty-watt bulbs subdued by almost opaque drawing-paper shades painted with oils in a somber key. Every foot of floor space is sleeping quarters, for that matter, for anyone who can't or won't go home or comes properly recommended from the pads of San Francisco or anywhere else in the country. Certain key pieces of knowledge or information will serve as credentials. The password is an easy familiarity with jazz and jive talk.¹⁷

¹⁷ Lawrence Lipton, The Holy Barbarians (New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1959), p. 115.

These pads are the watering places for Sal Paradise and his comrades; San Francisco and New York are the principal locales, but Denver, Chicago and New Orleans offer similar havens to those who are "on the road." Kerouac's image of the city is not restricted to the beat pads. The bars in the slum areas, the tenement districts of the cities, as well as the "negro streets"¹⁸ themselves are extensions of the pads. The "smoke-stacks, smoke railyards, red-brick buildings, and the distant downtown gray-stone buildings"¹⁹ are always a part of the backdrop but they seldom figure actively in the narrative.

If the physical world of the city is tailored to fit a limited picture of man's behavior, the image of the land is not. The narrator of the work is constantly fleeing from one city, and the problems of livelihood and love to another, and so are most of the other characters in the book; the land provides them with an area through which to flee, but can offer but little more than a rapidly fading backdrop for their flight, as they race "flying and hissing at incredible speeds across the groaning continent. . . ." ²⁰ The picture of Americana so presented is necessarily a chaotic one. The "much unseen" that

¹⁸Jack Kerouac, On the Road (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1957), p. 165.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 32.

²⁰Ibid., p. 193.

Whitman found a vital part of the life of the open road is realized but superficially by Paradise and his companions. Only when Paradise pauses at the beginning or at the end of one of the continental marathons does Kerouac allow him to contemplate upon the meaning of this action and give vent to the vague feelings of spiritual identity with nature that are characteristic of his fictional predecessors, Peter Martin and Jack Duluoz.

Critical reaction to the world presented in On the Road is varied. Carlos Baker finds Kerouac's American landscape "sad and blank," and notes that "this dizzy travelogue gives him (Paradise) little chance but to gobble a few verbal goof-balls and thumb a ride to the next town."²¹ Another sees in Kerouac's world a "Wolfelike love of the United States and a Whitmanesque weakness for cataloging nearly every experience."²² Herbert Gold, himself a practicing novelist, offers this somewhat unconventional critical appraisal of novel: "On the Road does nothing, thinks nothing, acts nothing, but manages to be a book after all." He finds Kerouac's world "frantic" and concludes, "and for that reason there is hope for Jack Kerouac."²³ A Commonweal critic finds that the image of the land presented

²¹Carlos Baker, "Itching Feet," Saturday Review, 40:33, September 7, 1957.

²²"The Ganser Syndrome," Time, 70:120, September 16, 1957.

²³Herbert Gold, "Hip, Cool, Beat, and Frantic," Nation, 185:349-55, November 16, 1957.

in On the Road "reminds one of . . . Whitman sounding his barbaric yawp that spanned a continent."²⁴

The Subterraneans, Kerouac's attempt at a prose-poem, moves about an impressionistic image of the subterranean city which flows spontaneously, if sporadically, from the love-starved-crazed mind of itinerant writer Leo Perceived, who--the reader is told on the last page of the novel--is writing the book as a wake in memory of an ill-starred love affair with Negro-American Indian Mardou Fox. Perceived's world is one of indirection which depends for orientation upon a somewhat shakily handled Joycean combination of stream-of-consciousness and symbol. Kerouac begins his examination of the odd concords of inner and outer, of past and present, of particular and general, with Perceived's desire ". . . just to start at the beginning and let the truth seep out, that's what I'll do."²⁵

In the subterranean world of Perceived's mind, night never completely gives away to the harsh, clinical light of day; the night is "dark, soft, tentacled, waiting. . ." and the day a "noise. . . sneaking in through the gray window, a gray doomsday," that awakens Perceived "from the scream of beermares" and reveals to him "the restless sheets of the nightbefore excitement."²⁶

²⁴Thomas F. Curley, "Myth Into Novel," Commonweal, 66:595, September 13, 1957.

²⁵The Subterraneans, p. 1.

²⁶Ibid., p. 17.

The point of orientation from which Percepiéd's mental forays begin and at which they end is a beat pad located in a 20-family tenement which carries the unlikely name of "Heavenly Lane," the "famous Heavenly Lane where they'd all at one time or another the bat subterraneans lived."²⁷ The scene often moves to the neighboring bars, to the "Red Drum" and the jazz of Charlie Parker, when Percepiéd feels "that excitement of softnight San Francisco bop in the air but all in the cool sweet unexerting Beach--so we in fact ran. . . down the white street under lamps, ran, jumped, showed off, had fun--felt gleeful and something was throbbing. . . ."²⁸

The image of the land intrudes only when Percepiéd tires of "the clash of the streets beyond the window's bare soft sill,"²⁹ and thinks of Mexico as a haven for his love, or of the past and Mardou's Indian ancestors:

'But they were the inhabitants of this land and under these huge skies they were the worriers and keepers and protectors of wives in whole nations gathered around tents--now the rail that runs over their forefather's bones leads them onward pointing into infinity, wraiths of humanity treading lightly the surface of the ground so deeply suppurated with the stock of their suffering you only have to dig a foot down to find a baby's hand.--The hotshot passenger train with grashing diesel balls by, brown, brown, the Indians just look up--I see them vanishing like spots--'³⁰

²⁷Ibid., p. 15.

²⁸Ibid., p. 12.

²⁹Ibid., p. 20.

³⁰Ibid.

But his only overt attempt to escape the subterranean world follows his final rift from Mardou when he wanders through an abandoned South San Francisco railyard and stops and cries

in the railyard sitting on an old piece of iron under the new moon and on the side of the old Southern Pacific tracks, cried because not only had I cast off Mardou whom now I was not so sure I wanted to cast off but the die'd been thrown, feeling too her empathetic tears across the night and the final horror of both of us round-eyed realizing we part--but seeing suddenly not in the face of the moon but somewhere in the sky as I looked up and hoped to figure, the face of my mother--remembering it in fact from a haunted nap just after supper that same restless unable-to-stay-in-a-chair or on-earth day--.³¹

Critical opinion of the subterranean world ranges from that of a Time reviewer who picks up Kerouac's comment that "I wrote this book in three full-moon nights," and retorts: ". . .it reads that way." He tags Kerouac "a kind of latrine laureate of Hobohemia" and notes that here is a world revealed "in vivid if not always lurid gushes and rushes."³² Another hesitantly offers, "perhaps reluctantly we must acknowledge an occasional astonishingly fine poetic run of words; however, they lose their effectiveness in their surroundings." The surroundings this critic finds quite like the world of Henry Miller--whom he terms "Kerouac's literary granddaddy-o." The similarities he calls "numerous, striking, odious, and boring."³³

³¹Ibid., p. 103.

³²"The Blazing and the Beat," Time, 71:104, February 24, 1958.

³³Don Pinck, "Digging the San Franciscans," New Republic, 138:20, March 3, 1958.

The criticism of Kenneth Rexroth, who has been called the literary guardian and elder statesman of the generation, is like that of a father chastising an errant son; he finds the novel

. . . sentimental, naive, pretentious and full of a shocking lack of understanding of the world it describes. Since this is presumably the world of the author's own life, this is a pretty serious indictment. And yet it is not a bad book.³⁴

Rexroth offers the opinion that the critical brickbats that have been showered upon Kerouac and his fictional world have come largely from critics who "can accept Kerouac as a social problem," but "cannot see him as an artist."³⁵

The Dharma Bums has been generally accepted as the most easily digestible of Kerouac's novels, the world he presents herein the most clearly recognizable. This reaction is not difficult to understand. The novel represents a repudiation--physical and philosophical--by writer Ray Smith--and presumably by Kerouac--of the world of the beat, the subterranean world, for the world of virgin forest and pike-topped mountains.

The repudiation is a gradual one. It begins when Smith "hops a freight" out of Los Angeles, bound for the beat haunts of San Francisco and encounters "a thin old little bum" whose

³⁴Kenneth Rexroth, "Reviews," The San Francisco Chronicle, February 16, 1958, p. 23.

³⁵Ibid.

readings from "a tiny slip of paper containing a prayer by Saint Teresa announcing that after her death she will return to earth by showering it with roses from heaven, forever, for all living creatures"³⁶ suggest a kinship to poet Smith's developing philosophy of Zen Buddhism. After a period of time spent in the beat pads and bars, Smith and others with the same aspirations leave the city, gradually divesting themselves of the physical characteristics of the beat, the clothing, the beard, and finally--somewhat reluctantly--the alcohol and marijuana.

But the image of the land offers ample compensation for the loss; the same ebullience is present, but the stimulant is quite different:

A beautiful morning--red pristine shafts of sunlight coming in over the hill and slanting down into the cold trees like cathedral light, and the mists rising to meet the sun, and all the way around the giant secret roar of tumbling creeks probably with films of ice in the pools. Great fishing country. Pretty soon I was yelling 'Yodelayhee' myself.³⁷

Reaction to Kerouac's image of the land and its philosophical implications can be traced from the generally favorable comments of critics who had seen some promise in Kerouac to the somewhat outraged disapproval of the beat world. Lawrence Lipton presents

³⁶Jack Kerouac, The Dharma Bums (New York: The Viking Press, 1958), p. 3-5.

³⁷Ibid., p. 49-50.

the best view of the "rucksack revolution." He finds Kerouac's picture "misleading" and goes on to comment:

It is made explicit again and again that the altar under the tall pines is bigger and better than the cathedral, and this is quite true, but the general impression left with the reader is that the holy barbarian is a twentieth-century Thoreau. This is true only of a small segment of the beat generation. The vast majority of them live in the cities and are trying to solve³⁸ their problems within the framework of urban life.³⁸

His conclusion: "There is too much of Hallelujah I'm a Buddha! Hallelujah I'm a Bodhisattva! in The Dharma Bums."³⁹

Atlantic critic Phoebe Adams finds the world of The Dharma Bums "full of sparkling descriptions of landscape and weather, light falling through trees, the smell of snow, the motions of animals," and notes that "it offers a better alternative to the gray flannel suit than the prisoner's uniform."⁴⁰ Of Kerouac's world, one critic has this to say: "Kerouac can see the panorama of American land- and cityscapes in broad, bright flashes and can say what he sees." And of his fictional methods: "It's prose is pure American of the sort William Carlos Williams has been asking for all these years; its philosophy, its anti-organization-man-ism is a precious and also radically American stand."⁴¹

³⁸Lipton, op. cit., pp. 251-252.

³⁹Ibid., p. 252.

⁴⁰Phoebe Adams, "Reader's Choice," The Atlantic, 202:89, October, 1958.

⁴¹Dorothy Nyren, "New Books Appraised," Library Journal, 83:2441, September 15, 1958.

Critic William Bittner notes that "the book offers a refreshing view of how to be a Thoreau in the second half of the twentieth century," and observes that "for the first time in a Kerouac novel the narrator seems to be outgrowing his Bohemian friends." He also passes some judgment on his associates: "Fuddy-duddy critics will find new immoral details upon which to center their lack of understanding."⁴²

While Kerouac seems the authentic, literate voice of the generation, such a movement must by its very nature catch up in its trappings a host of minor writers whose espousal to the world of the beat is merely one of convenience and whose contributions--if any--are of dubious value. Such seems the case of Clellon Holmes whose novels, Go and The Horn, serve as chronicles of the lives of a group of New York "intellectuals" who "yearn for life to be easy, magic, full of love,"⁴³ or who search through music, jazz, for the "isolated originality" that dwells within each.⁴⁴ When life proves difficult, objective and loveless--and it seems impossible that they ever can be "naked on a plain"--their measure out their disillusionment in empty liquor bottles, empty hypodermic syringes, and empty sexual

⁴²William Bittner, "The Yabyum Set," Saturday Review, 41:36, October 11, 1958.

⁴³Clellon Holmes, Go (New York: Ace Books, A. A. Wyn, Inc., 1952), pp. 122-123.

⁴⁴Clellon Holmes, The Horn (New York: Crest Books, Fawcett World Library, 1959), p. 11.

trysts, all against a backdrop lacking color, depth, and life. Holmes's fictional world and his interpretation of the term "beat" are examined by one reviewer: "'A beat generation,' philosophizes Paul Hobbes toward the end. We hope he is not right. But the adjective seems useful. This is a beat novel."⁴⁵ Another comments: "You're supposed to see these characters as spiritually impoverished tragic figures. Spiritually impoverished they certainly are, but their tragedy eludes me."⁴⁶

Others whose voices are but variations on the theme include Chandler Brossard, a department editor of Look magazine who writes of the generation from the point of view of an outsider;⁴⁷ Antole Broyard, a Reporter staffer who along with Holmes attended the New School for Social Research;⁴⁸ R. V. Cassill, a product of the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop whose short stories have reflected a concern for "bohemians, the odd-ball characters, the bearded eccentrics holed up in grimy tenements and cold water flats";⁴⁹ and George Mandel, also a New School classmate of Holmes

⁴⁵Frederic Morton, "This is the Beat Generation," The New York Herald Tribune Book Reviews, October 12, 1952, p. 33.

⁴⁶Edward J. Fitzgerald, "Be-bop and Blues," Saturday Review, 35:37, October 11, 1952.

⁴⁷Gene Feldman and Max Gartenberg (eds.), The Beat Generation and The Angry Young Men (New York: The Citadel Press, 1958), p. 379.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 380.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 34, 380.

and Broyard, whose unique contribution to the literature of this group rests on the merits of his attempt to dramatize the thesis that the only salvation for the beat, the defeated, is a return to "the primary, known emotions in a natural setting."⁵⁰ His opus, "The Beckoning Sea," concludes with a scene of copulation set against a background of storm-tossed, crashing surf and piercing, withering hail in which the female partner "never once lowered the violet parasol that hovered in ludicrous defense between the elemental onslaught and the finality of their contact."⁵¹

II. THE PEOPLE

Everyone with a beard, a sweater and a disreputable air is eligible for the public image of the beat character, but there is much more to this inhabitant of the world of the beat. Placed as he is within the limits of a dualistic physical environment, he reacts accordingly; when a part of the world of the city, he revels in the close contact with others of his kind and shares in their excesses, their escapes, and, ultimately, their disillusionment; when a part of the image of the land, he enjoys the benefits, physical and spiritual, that come of this kinship with nature: the sense of animal vitality and freedom,

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 48, 382.

⁵¹George Mandel, "The Beckoning Sea," Feldman and Gartenberg, op. cit., p. 54.

the sense of order, the sense of meaning of life and cognizance of death.

The characters who inhabit the fictional world of Kerouac's novels fit easily into this pattern. While they are products of a world that is given form only by implication, they reveal themselves and their generation by their actions within the limits of the world of the beat. Some would fit neatly into the pigeonhole offered by a Nation critic:

I am aware of the existence of a small but articulate fraction of the young who glory in their non-adjustment; who prefer, given the difficulty of maintaining a loyal opposition within the framework of our society, to dramatize themselves as outlaws; whose triad of predilections consists of homosexuality, dope and jazz; whose preference is for a literature based on the anti-literary; and who model their improvisations on the writings of Rimbaud, Celine, Whitman, Pound, and William Carlos Williams. . . .⁵²

Others, like the characters of The Dharma Bums, have, in a sense, made a "separate peace."

Kerouac's protagonists--beginning with Peter Martin of The Town and the City, and including Jack Duluoz of Doctor Sax and Maggie Cassidy, Sal Paradise of On the Road, Leo Percepied of The Subterraneans, and Ray Smith of The Dharma Bums--all share a common concern: self-exploration, of perceiving the self in terms of its connection with immediate experience. While this self-exploration is a vital part of the adolescent-to-adult

⁵²Carlos Baker, "The Careful Young Men," Nation, 184:199, March 9, 1957.

development of Peter Martin and Jack Duluo, it becomes an addiction for Sal Paradise, an obsession for Leo Percepied and a religious pursuit for Ray Smith. For each, then, individuals and places are simply means whereby he can trace his own shadow and plumb his own nature. All of his contacts are immediate and intense. He has no future which rests on a connection with some person or group, as he frequently carries with him an acquaintance with some past or present disillusionment that resulted from such a connection. He is a practitioner of Rexroth's "art of disaffiliation."⁵³ Critic Eugene Burdick defines this search for self as he finds its characteristics in On the Road:

One searches for the bright and glowing experience, the knowledge of inner self. One fights against 'getting hung up'--on family obligations or silly political creeds or Squaresville. One hungers for experience: jazz and marijuana and sex are ways of getting it. And so is the blind expenditure of energy, the willingness to live fast and hard and to know what the rewards and punishments are--and still to burn away at it.⁵⁴

Sal Paradise speaks of his pursuit as "shambling after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me."⁵⁵ And the people who interest Paradise are

⁵³Lipton, op. cit., pp. 149-150.

⁵⁴Eugene Burdick, "The Innocent Nihilists Adrift in Squaresville," The Reporter, 18:32, April 3, 1958.

⁵⁵On the Road, p. 9.

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 centerlight pop and everybody goes "Awww!"⁵⁶

This vision is personified in Dean Moriarty, a character for whom Paradise functions as "a beat Boswell to a jiving Johnson."⁵⁷ Moriarty's search for a drunken father, who had abandoned him after exerting considerable formative influence upon his young life, becomes Paradise's search. And Moriarty becomes the central figure of the novel, with Paradise as chronicler of his actions. The reader's picture of Moriarty takes form through a series of brief sketches:

. . .when Dean grew up he began hanging around the Glenarm pool-halls; he set a Denver record for stealing cars and went to the reformatory. From the age of eleven to seventeen he was usually in reform school. His specialty was stealing cars, gunning for girls coming out of high school in the afternoon, driving them out to the mountains, making them, and coming back to sleep in any available hotel bathtub in town.⁵⁸

Paradise speaks of Moriarty's intelligence as "formal and shining and complete, without. . .tedious intellectualness." And his "criminality" is "a wild yea-saying overburst of American joy;

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Edmund Fuller, Man in Modern Fiction (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 149.

⁵⁸On the Road, p. 34.

it was Western, the west wind, an ode from the Plains, something new, long prophesied, long a-coming."⁵⁹

When Paradise questions the end of their pursuit--"You mean we'll end up old bums?"--Moriarty answers:

"Why not, man? Of course we will if we want to, and all that. There's no harm ending that way. You spend a whole life of non-interference with the wishes of others, including politicians and the rich, and nobody bothers you and you cut along and make it your own way. . . .What's your road, man?--holyboy road, madman road, rainbow road, guppy road, any road. It's an anywhere road for anybody anyhow. Where body how?"⁶⁰

Paradise concludes that "there was nothing clear about the things he said, but what he meant to say was somehow made pure and clear."⁶¹ The reader might question Paradise's reasoning, but he would find the answer in Paradise's worship of the character in whom he sees a "strange, ragged, W. C. Fields saintliness,"⁶² which becomes almost Christlike as Moriarty is seen

. . .standing in front of everybody, ragged and broken and idiotic, right under the lightbulbs, his bony mad face covered with sweat and throbbing veins, saying, "yes, yes, yes," as though tremendous revelations were pouring into him all the time now, and I am convinced they were, and the others suspected

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 11.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 205-206.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 100.

⁶²Ibid.

as much and were frightened. He was BEAT--the root,
the soul of Beatific.⁶³

And then the definition: "That's what Dean was, the HOLY
GOOF."⁶⁴

Critic Edmund Fuller sees these fictional creations and
their assorted companions as the ultimate in "hipster togeth-
erness" and finds them bound by the theory that "the family
that kicks together sticks together." His conclusion: "On
the Road is Kerouac's Hell. Dante once took us on a tour
through Hell. The difference is, that Dante knew where he
was--Kerouac doesn't."⁶⁵

Critic Gold adds:

Kerouac has appointed himself prose celebrant to
a pack of unleashed zazous who like to describe them-
selves as Zen Hipsters--poets, pushers and panhandlers,
musicians, male hustlers and a few marginal aesthetes
seeking new marginal distinctions.⁶⁶

After a period of zealously performing "our one and noble
function of the time, move," and tasting of the delicacies--
sexual and alcoholic--of Mexico, "the magic land at the end of
the road,"⁶⁷ Paradise, Moriarty and their companions part only
to return as the subterraneans in Kerouac's next novel. They
are characterized as

⁶³Ibid., p. 161.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 160.

⁶⁵Fuller, op. cit., pp. 152-154.

⁶⁶Gold, op. cit., p. 349.

⁶⁷On the Road, p. 225.

hip without being slick, they are intelligent without being corny, they are intellectual as hell and know all about Pound without being pretentious or talking too much about it, they are very quiet, they are very Christlike.⁶⁸

Moriarty becomes Julien Alexander, "the angel of the subterraneans," a character who "certainly is Christlike. . . unshaved thin youthful quiet strange almost an. . .apocalyptic angel or saint of the subterraneans."⁶⁹ Paradise becomes Leo Percepiéd, "an unself-confident man, at the same time. . .an egomaniac," who is "crudely malely sexual" and has "lecherous and so on propensities."⁷⁰ Alexander is but a minor part of this narrative, as Percepiéd and his insatiable search for self in the subtleties of the sex act with Mardou Fox become one central, controlling force in the narrative. His ultimate disillusionment with love, the sex act, and the self he discovered in the relationship leaves him ripe for the spiritual rejuvenation that Ray Smith, Kerouac's protagonist in The Dharma Bums, undergoes.

Life for Smith and his companion Japhy Ryder, "a student of everything Oriental,"⁷¹ is a tacit renunciation of everything subterranean--the "smoking pot and talking about Pound

⁶⁸The Subterraneans, p. 1.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 2.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 1-3.

⁷¹The Dharma Bums, p. 9.

and peote,"⁷² the sex spent and mis-spent, and the alcohol. After a period of purgation, the two are able to open themselves to the "Buddhaland splendor"⁷³ of the mountains about them and to contemplate anew the implications of life and self. Critic Adams offers this comment:

Ray and Japhy are reminiscent of the garrulous comrades of On the Road, their friends are too often designed to prove a point, and the women are ornamental cartoons. What is successful is Mr. Kerouac's evocation of a state of mind in these fellows, a humorous rebelliousness, a polite refusal to bother with trivialities, a genuine kindness toward the world they have repudiated.⁷⁴

Her conclusion: "Their attitude is convincing when their actions are not, and goes far to persuade the reader that these self-elected bodhisattvas are not pursuing a contemptible ideal."⁷⁵

Only when the impossibility of maintaining a permanent separate peace occurs to Smith and Ryder does a bit of the disillusionment of earlier Kerouacian characters become apparent:

Now comes the sadness of coming back to cities and I've grown two months older and there's all that humanity of bars and burlesque shows and gritty

⁷²The Subterraneans, p. 4.

⁷³The Dharma Bums, p. 236.

⁷⁴Adams, op. cit., p. 90.

⁷⁵Ibid.

love, all upsidedown in the void God bless them,
 but Japhy you and me forever know, O ever youth-
 ful, O ever weeping.⁷⁶

And Smith has this recourse: "I have fallen in love with you, God. Take care of us all, one way or the other." And the last of Kerouac's protagonists turns and goes "on down the trail back to this world."⁷⁷

The women of the beat are interesting--if often only "ornamental cartoons." They come from varied backgrounds and their place within the world of the beat is vaguely defined at best. Lipton's case history approach to these women is valuable in that it serves as an aid to an understanding of their fictional counterparts. Lipton examines several women whom he considers typical of the "women of the beat generation pads." There is Gilda Lewis, whom he casts in the role of the gypsy heroine, a woman who shows a "willingness to suffer for her man, to put up with violent fluctuations of fortune, to shield him from the law, at the risk of her life, and, if need be, her honor." At twenty-seven, Gilda has run through three husbands and several lovers, "all of them heroes in the tradition of the gypsy romance, but a kind of gypsy that the novelists of the nineteenth century never dreamed of." Her attraction to the beat:

"Those LIGHT HOUSEKEEPING signs you see everywhere, that's for me. The lighter the better. And better

⁷⁶The Dharma Bums, p. 244.

⁷⁷Ibid.

than that, a good car--well, one that doesn't break down too often--out on the open road and going somewhere. Preferably with someone, away. It doesn't matter much where to as long as it's away."⁷⁸

And there is Diana Wakefield who accepts menial household tasks, "all for the privilege of living in an atmosphere of art, any art," and feeling herself "part of the creative act."⁷⁹ And Rhonda Tower, who is trying to find herself and make her own scene: ". . .to make it with me a cat has to bring something to the scene, something that promises, at least, to lead to love."⁸⁰ And finally, Sherry McCall who made the switch "from the veteran's housing shack-ups" to the beat pads, which "weren't so different, as far as she could see, from the bohemians of the matchstick and tar paper apartments of veteran's housing and their informal, freewheeling domestic relations."⁸¹

These women, like the fictional creations of the beat novels, live and act according to the dictates of the environment in which they find themselves, or of the men with whom they become involved. Most of them are sexually available, or, as Lipton puts it, "freewheeling chicks with no cover charge."⁸²

⁷⁸Lipton, op. cit., p. 95.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 102.

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 106-107.

⁸²Ibid., p. 20.

Kerouac's women are, in the main, as passive as the creatures Lipton describes. They may be like Camille and Marylou, who share--unknowingly--the same husband: Dean Moriarty of On the Road, or like Teresa, "the cutest little Mexican girl," who provides a sexual diversion for Sal Paradise and whose first words are "I love love."⁸³ Paradise comments: "You could have all your Peaches and Bettys and Marylous and Ritas and Camilles and Inezes in this world; this was my girl and my kind of girlsoul, and I told her that."⁸⁴ He leaves her sometime later and says, "Well, lackadaddy, I was on the road again."⁸⁵ Or they may be like the inhabitants of the Mexican house of prostitution who "were great girls" with whom life "was like a long, spectral Arabian dream in the afternoon in another life--Ali Baba and the alleys and the courtesans."⁸⁶

The most completely developed feminine character in Kerouac's novels is Mardou Fox of The Subterraneans, whose face, when first seen by Leo Percepied, prompts the remark, "By God, I've got to get involved with that little woman."⁸⁷

⁸³On the Road, p. 69.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 70.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 85.

⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 236-237.

⁸⁷The Subterraneans, p. 2.

She becomes the embodiment of the ideal sexual partner in Perceived's eyes, and the dimension she assumes within the structure of the novel is determined almost solely by her actions within the bedroom of his mind. The sexual act becomes a ritual and the cathartic effect of orgasm an ecstatic religious experience. In the interim Perceived comments on Mardou's heritage

. . .she had no belief and had had no place to get it from--Negro mother dead for birth of her--unknown Cherokee-halfbreed father a hobo who's come throwing torn shoes across gray plains of fall in black sombrero and pink scarf squatting by hotdog fires casting Tokay empties into the night "Yas Calexico!"⁸⁸

and reads to her from Don Quixote, Reich's The Function of Orgasm, Faulkner's Spotted Horses, and Finnegan's Wake.

Women are few in The Dharma Bums and the only one of consequence is "a pretty girl" named Princess, who is "very beautiful and only twenty" and is the female partner of Japhy Ryder in a Buddhist rite called "yabyum," in which the participants divest themselves of all clothing and sit down cross-legged on pillows on the floor, facing one another in silent contemplation. As Japhy describes it, yabyum

. . .is what they do in the temples of Tibet. It's a holy ceremony, it's done just like this in front of chanting priests. People pray and recite Om Mani Padme Hum, which means Amen the Thunderbolt in the Dark Void. I'm the thunderbolt and Princess is the dark void, you see.⁸⁹

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 16.

⁸⁹The Dharma Bums, pp. 28-29.

The lack of women in the novel may be explained by narrator Ray Smith who has just gone through an entire year of celibacy based on his "feeling that lust was the direct cause of birth which was the direct cause of suffering and death and I had really no lie come to the point where I regarded lust as offensive and even cruel."⁹⁰ Thus, apart from yabyum, women have no place in this novel.

Other characters who move about the fringes of the beat world, sometimes appearing in fictional guise, are the homosexuals, the small-time hoodlums, and the heroin addicts. Lipton sees them as naturally a part of the world: "If beatville is heaven, it is easier for a hood, a junkie or a homosexual to get into it than a banker, a professor or a Cub Scout den mother."⁹¹ To the beat, the withdrawal from society of these assorted figures is the ultimate withdrawal, and thus they are tolerated, and even welcomed into the inner sanctum. As one beat put it: "Like nobody can belong to an illegal sex man, and be a square. He's the beatest of the beat."⁹²

III. THE SOUND

Another characteristic peculiar to the world of the beat is found in the language of the beat writers, which draws on

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 29.

⁹¹Lipton, op. cit., pp. 133-134.

⁹²Ibid., p. 136.

their interest in jazz, Zen Buddhism, the underworld, and on a rather ill-digested knowledge of literature and psychology. Kerouac's prose, with its run-on sentences, pell-mell rhythms, and general air of improvisation, has been described as "bop prosody."⁹³ Kerouac's position is this:

I simply got sick and tired of the conventional English sentence which seemed to me so ironbound in its rules, so inadmissible with reference to the actual format of my mind as I had learned to probe it in the modern spirit of Freud and Jung, that I couldn't express myself through that form any more.⁹⁴

Critic Robert Brustein calls "their extremely limited language" a "coterie argot designed to exclude the common run of 'squares' who don't 'dig' their message." The result is "an exercise in noncommunication which forces one to take the artist's 'higher vision' on faith alone."⁹⁵

Lipton once told an interviewing reporter:

Our literature has reached a point where it is merely a projection of the English classroom--so perfect, so polished it is suitable only for mausoleums and museums. The beatniks are reacting against this academic competence primarily by making a shocking use of language. It's been done before and it will be done again.⁹⁶

⁹³Robert Brustein, "The Cult of Unthink," Horizon, 1:43, September, 1958.

⁹⁴Jack Kerouac, "The Last Word," Escapade, 3:72, June, 1959.

⁹⁵Brustein, op. cit., pp. 40 and 44.

⁹⁶Carolyn Anspacher, "A Beatnik Who Couldn't Beat Success," The San Francisco Chronicle, June 24, 1959, p. 5.

Lipton appends a glossary of beat terminology to his The Holy Barbarians containing some six dozen terms that are common to the beat parlance, terms which one finds interspersed throughout the prose as well as in the poetry of the beat.⁹⁷

Just as peculiarities of language form an appendage to the world of the beat, so too does the sound of jazz belong to the complete picture. It is present in varying degrees in almost all beat prose and in some of the poetry. In the actual world it has become a partner with poetry in what Rexroth terms a new art form, reading poetry to jazz.⁹⁸ To the larger body of the beat, jazz is a kind of central ordering discipline. As critic Burdick sees it, "Jazz has form, a kind of architectonic necessity, but it is also plastic enough to allow the individual to mold it, to express himself." And he concludes: "Within the necessities of jazz, the essential bones of the art, a person can still express frenzy, individuality, protest, anger."⁹⁹

Norman Mailer has offered the view that jazz allows the beat to express ". . .the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream and despair of his orgasm."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷Lipton, op. cit., pp. 315-318.

⁹⁸Kenneth Rexroth, "San Francisco Letter," op. cit., pp. 13-14.

⁹⁹Burdick, op. cit., p. 32.

¹⁰⁰Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," Feldman and Gartenberg, op. cit., p. 346.

Perhaps Itchy Dave Golden speaking from The Holy Barbarians best defines the importance of jazz to the world of the beat:

Like that's the scene, man. I'm a network. I'm a moving network of nerve endings. And jazz music gives forms to my mind, forms in sound, and I feel it's better than any psychoanalyst, because art is a healer, that's a part of its function, it's a connected universe, just like the words we formed out of the grunts and hollers, it organizes my universe for me—that's healing, integrating, communicating.¹⁰¹

Lipton acknowledges the therapeutic value of jazz and notes that "This is not the first time a generation of the American youth has turned to jazz as a therapeutic. It happened in the Twenties, too, and the squares were scared out of their wits."¹⁰²

Novelist Holmes in Go defines the place of jazz in the beat way of life:

In this modern jazz, they heard something rebel and nameless that spoke for them, and their lives knew a gospel for the first time. It was more than a music; it became an attitude toward life, a way of walking, a language and a costume; and these introverted kids (emotional outcasts of a war they had been too young to join, or in which they had lost their innocence), who had never belonged anywhere before, now felt somewhere at last.¹⁰³

And jazz rounds out the world of the beat. No doubt there are "other voices, other rooms," but those chosen here seem to

¹⁰¹Lipton, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁰²Ibid., pp. 207-208.

¹⁰³Go, p. 131.

present an adequate interpretation of a world that cannot be ignored, cannot be dismissed--the world of the beat.

CHAPTER II

THE BEAT AND THE SQUARE

The Beat Generation has been variously described as a generation of rebels without a cause, or rebels who "know what they are against, if not exactly what they are for."¹ In search of a cause, sociologists have plumbed the depths of the subterranean world for an explanation for this phenomena that could be expressed in the terminology of their discipline. Finding none, some have concocted an elaborate scheme which attempts to prove that this generation and its world are simply over-aged extensions of the world of the juvenile delinquent, their "cause" a simple outgrowth of an earlier distaste for parental, religious, educational, and civil authority. For lack of what they would consider a coherent statement of social position or social judgment by the beat writers, literary critics have, in the main, accepted this explanation with little modification. Beat biographer Lipton acknowledges a relationship, but adds, "The beat and the juvenile delinquent are only kissin' cousins." His explanation:

They have the same enemies, which is the slender thread that sometimes unites them in temporary

¹William Bittner, "Kilroy Is Here: Young Writers of Today," New Republic, 138:17, February 10, 1958.

alliance. Both are outlaws, speak a private language and put down the squares, but in beat circles the J. D. is regarded as a square,² a hip square in some things, but still a square.

Lipton suggests that the search for motivation must go back beyond the juvenile delinquent, back to the literature of the Twenties because the Beat Generation "finds a kinship there. . . in the spirit of revolt"³ of the time. He sees the passive nature of the protest of the earlier group much like that of the beat of today. And certainly there is some justification for Lipton's proposal. The literature of the Twenties, taken as a whole, is permeated with a sense of antagonism toward contemporary society, particularly as that society manifested qualities considered to be "bourgeois." True, most of the creators of this literature did not use the term "bourgeois" in its specifically Marxian sense, but loosely, as a synonym for "Philistine," one whose obsession with money made him impervious to the demands of art; and the beat are less subtle. The "Philistine" of today is the "Moneytheist,"⁴ who supports his position by "buying brains rather than encouraging the intellectual to think straight and speak out plainly."⁵ But beyond recognition and tabulation of the ills of society, the writers of the Twenties--like the beat of today--did very little.

²Lipton, The Holy Barbarians, p. 138.

³Ibid., p. 282.

⁴Ibid., p. 148.

⁵Ibid.

Rather than to battle, they chose to make their individual escapes to Greenwich Village, to Paris--to the Left Bank and/or the Left Wing. With the beat the escape is less dramatic in a geographical sense--the beat pads of San Francisco's North Beach, Denver's Larimer Street, Chicago's South Side, and Lipton's Venice West provide adequate havens for the disaffiliates. But the escape nonetheless represents a tacit denial of a way of life, and as such has meaning which needs definition. And it is to the prose and especially to the poetry of the generation that one must turn to give dimension to this definition.

Lipton points out that the beat have a way of making their "own reality by repeating things often enough among themselves,"⁶ which accounts for the essential mythic quality of their withdrawal and of their world. While this "reality" then is essentially a state of mind, rather than a state of being, their recognition of the real world, the outside world, is expressed in a more concrete manner. The world of the beat exists as an antithesis of the outer world, the "world of the square." If the world of the beat has any dimension, it receives it in an antithetical manner. Thus, it is in the crux of the opposition between the worlds that social judgment must be found.

The basis of the world of the square as the beats see it is hypocrisy, and they find its manifestations in the traditions

⁶Ibid., p. 214.

and institutions that have formed this world, be they social, economic, political, educational or intellectual. Behind hypocrisy as its creator and sustainer, the beat see the "class-exploiting" money machine.⁷ Critic Bittner points out that the beat

. . .know they cannot overthrow the mechanical tyranny, for it has come about only because it provides comfort, security and plenty, and demands only surrender of the individuality that most people did not know they had anyway.⁸

He recognizes the passive nature of the revolt and notes that the beat "attempt. . .to investigate the problems involved in remaining civilized in. . .a society organized into excessive conformity."⁹

Beginning at the very basis of society, the family, the social protest of the beat spreads to include the larger social institutions which demand conformity. The basic family union can only be "square" to the beat because it demands a mutual fidelity between two normally adjusted persons living a conventional life. And both partners are "squares," for to the beat the square is by definition

. . .the unreleased, the rigid, the rectilinear. He is always busy, he is always in a bind. He never lets himself alone. He never lets himself "go," so that he is never "gone," in the swinging sense of jazz. In the dance of life he remains the wallflower.¹⁰

⁷Ibid., p. 293.

⁸Bittner, op. cit., p. 18.

⁹Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁰Lipton, op. cit., p. 169.

They are also sexually incapable of "making the scene" because advertising, the mouthpiece of mechanized society, has "demoralized" them. It has, as Rexroth phrases it, approached the young married couple, "which is the object of almost all advertising," with copy "pitched to stir up insatiable sexual discontent. It provides pictures of women who never existed." The resulting disillusionment with sex in marriage leaves the husband "discontented all the time," and therefore "fit material for exploitation."¹¹ The idea of domesticity is a "shuck" to the beat for it "has the same effect on sex that it has on animals. It makes both tame and awkward."¹² And awkwardness, according to poet Gregory Corso, is a block to "coolness,"¹³ the "coolness" that Marcou Fox and Leo Percepied of The Subterraneans find in the sexual relationship, which becomes for them--as for most beats--a symbolic act of revolution against the all-enveloping and passionless conformism of the society of the square.

The other circumstances of family living, the "rat race" as Lipton describes it,¹⁴ are equally abhorrent to the beat.

¹¹Ibid. (From Lawrence Lipton's tape-recorded interview with Kenneth Rexroth), p. 296.

¹²Ibid., p. 157.

¹³Ibid. (From Lawrence Lipton's tape-recorded interview with Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso), p. 132.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 149.

The job-to-television-to-supermarket-to-television-to-bed-to-job pattern of living appeals not to the beat, for whom the supermarket is a place for "shopping for images. . .of Walt Whitman. . .poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys," a place for poet Ginsberg to toy with an "odyssey in the supermarket and feel absurd,"¹⁵ and television is a device "designed to arouse the most perverse, sadistic, acquisitive drives,"¹⁶ and the steady job is an infringement upon the beat's "right to goof."¹⁷

Economic exploitation is a vital part of "the social lie."¹⁸ Lipton speaks of "Henry's Luce's 'permanent revolution' --the New Capitalism, the People's Capitalism and Prosperity Unlimited," beneath which "lies the ugly fact of an economy geared to war production, a design, not for living, but for death."¹⁹ And Rexroth's definition of the "social lie" underscores this idea:

Since all society is organized in the interest of exploiting classes and since if men knew this they would cease to work and society would fall apart, it

¹⁵Allen Ginsberg, "A Supermarket In California," Howl and Other Poems (San Francisco: The Pocket Poets Series, City Lights Books, 1956), p. 23.

¹⁶Lipton, op. cit., p. 295.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 142.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 293.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 150.

has always been necessary, at least since the urban revolutions, for societies to be governed ideologically by a system of fraud.²⁰

Novelist Mandel describes the commercial scene as ". . . animal against animal. . . everybody's mouth going with words like priests and kings and congressmen with words and no understanding. . . You can keep reality. Work is for slaves; I'm free."²¹

Another protest against "moneytheism" is voiced by poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who, with Ginsberg and Corso, is a caustic analyst of the contemporary scene. As the social satirist of the beat, he is second to none. In his poem, "Dog," he sees a dog as the only truly free agent within the "square" society, free to "see reality" and to tell about it.²² His most pointed satire occurs within the poem "Christ Climbed Down," of which the following is an excerpt:

Christ climbed down
from His bare Tree
this year
and ran away to where
no intrepid Bible salesmen
covered the territory
in two-tone cadillacs
and where no Sears Roebuck creches
complete with plastic babe in manger

²⁰Ibid., p. 293.

²¹George Mandel, Flee the Angry Strangers (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1952), p. 63.

²²Lawrence Ferlinghetti, "Dog," A Coney Island of the Mind (New York: New Directions Books, 1958), p. 67.

a mixture of pity and contempt. Their view of the situation:

Political solutions? "What are they but election tactics, lies, deceptions, trickery, mass manipulations? All parties use the same tricks, so what choice is there between them?" Democracy? "It's just a big shuck, the biggest shuck of all. The only equality there can be is equality between equals."²⁷

Their reaction to the political scene ranges from that of a beat facing the draft who threatens ". . .to go to Washington and bash in Parson Dulles' head with a Gideon Bible,"²⁸ but is reminded that he is a pacifist so cannot do so, to the biting satire of Ferlinghetti's "Tentative Description of a Dinner Given to Promote the Impeachment of President Eisenhower." The Ferlinghetti piece pictures an America inundated by a "strange rain" of atomic fallout that "would never stop," and governed by a "President deep in the heart/of Georgia while deep in the heart of South America the/President's left-hand men was proving all the world loves/an American." The poet describes a growing awareness of their plight on the part of a complacent public which finally results in a rush to a testimonial dinner for the President. Even "those who had not left/their TV sets long enough to notice the weather in seven years/now came swimming thru the rain holding their testimonials." Included in the rush are Noah, "in his own Ark," and peddlers "selling hotdogs and rubber American Flags and waving petitions/proclaiming it

²⁷Lipton, op. cit., p. 49.

²⁸Ibid., p. 112.

Unamerican to play golf on the same holy days/that clean bombs are set off." After everyone is seated and "waiting for the symbolic mushroom soup to be served," the President enters, takes one look around and says: "We Resign." Ferlinghetti's credo speaks of the President variously as "the Great Soldier," the "Great Conciliator, who had become the Great Compromiser who had become the Great Fence Sitter," and the President who "was unable/to hear the underprivileged natives of the world shouting/ No Contamination Without Representation in the strange rain from which there was no escape--except Peace."²⁹

An America to whom the poet says, "I've given you all and now I'm nothing..." is the country which poet Ginsberg celebrates in his "holy litany," titled "America." It is a country whose emotional life is "run by Time Magazine," and whose political martyrs (Tom Mooney, Sacco and Vanzetti, the Scottsboro boys) are touted for a type of sainthood by the poet who, disillusioned, questions: "America this is the impression I get from looking in the television set./America is this correct?"³⁰

As the beats see themselves as pacifists, it is not unusual that they should find a common cause with scientists who speak out against atomic testing, nor is it surprising that their

²⁹ Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Tentative Description of a Dinner Given to Promote the Impeachment of President Eisenhower (San Francisco: Golden Mountain Press, 1958).

³⁰ Ginsberg, "America," op. cit., p. 31.

most violent attacks on the political and the military should be directed at the cold war and the atomic weapon balance of power which prevents active warfare. The beat poets concur with Rexroth's modernization of a time-honored poetic theme: that against the impending atomic ruin of the world, there is only one defense--the creative act.³¹ The poet has always been the most sensitive register of contemporary sensibility, and it is this modern predicament in particular that has proved a cause, or at least a rallying point for the poets of the beat. The most direct statement has been that of Gregory Corso who in his poem "Bomb" attempts to categorize and evaluate the innumerable phases and aspects of death that have plagued man since the caveman's "bumpy club of One Million B.C." took the first life. His lengthy post-mortem concluded, the poet awaits, even anxiously anticipates, the coming of the ultimate bomb:

O Bomb I love you
 I want to kiss your clank eat your boom
 You are a paean an acme of scream
 a lyric hat of Mister Thunder
 O resound thy tanky knees
 BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM³²

Corso treats a similar theme in the poem "Power," a treatise on the use and misuse of power, which "is not to be dropped from a

³¹Kenneth Rexroth, "Disengagement: The Art of the Beat Generation," New World Writing No. 11 (New York: New American Library of American Literature, 1957), p. 30.

³²Gregory Corso, Bomb (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1958).

plane," but is to belong to the populace: "You are power, beautiful people."³³ This same misuse of power produces poet Robert Duncan's "This Place, Rumored To Have Been Sodom. . ." which now is a wasteland symbolic of man's atomic dissipation. Duncan writes, "It was measured by the Lord and found wanting."³⁴ Another poet, Jack Spicer, in his "Berkeley in Time of Plague" sees man victim of an atomic plague which

. . .took us, laughed and repropotioned us,
Swelled us to dizzy, unaccustomed size.
We died prodigiously; it hurt a while
But left a certain quiet in our eyes.³⁵

Contemporary American education, a current whipping boy of the press and the politicians, does not escape the chastisement of the beat. Elderstatesmen Rexroth and Lipton are the most outspoken in their criticism, while the poets and novelists take occasional snipes at the system as a matter of course.

Lipton's stand:

Our whole system of education is conceived to make squares out of us, to make us fit for the society in which we live. Dis-education and re-education is designed to make us unfit for the society so that we are able to stand outside of it and view it with eyes unclouded by the smog of propaganda and the all-pervading pressures of social hypocrisy. The artists of the beat

³³Gregory Corso, "Power," Gasoline, pp. 8-9.

³⁴Robert Duncan, "This Place, Rumored To Have Been Sodom . . .," Evergreen Review, Vol. I, No. 2, p. 21.

³⁵Jack Spicer, "Berkeley in Time of Plague," Evergreen Review, Vol. I, No. 2, p. 52.

...nothing but grooming schools for the middle-class non-identity which usually finds its perfect expression on the outskirts of the campus in rows of well-to-do houses with lawns and television sets in each living room with everybody looking at the same thing and thinking the same thing at the same time. . . .³⁷

Rexroth explains the San Francisco Renaissance as a direct protest of the writer against "the world of poet-professors, Southern Colonels and ex-Left Social Facists. . .Brooks Brothers Boys who got an overdose of T. S. Eliot at some Ivy League fog factory," against "the deliberately painfully intellectual fiction which appears in literary quarterlies. . . ," against an entire educational system which "is in a conspiracy to make poetry as unpalatable as possible." He finds poetry misused by "everybody. . .from the seventh grade teacher who rolls her eyes and chants H. D. to the seven types of ambiguity factories, grinding out little Donnes and Hopkinses with hayseeds in their hair." But he also notes that some American poetry has managed to squeeze "between the interstices of academic hoax" which breed "the class magazines and the quarterlies. . .filled with poets as alike as two bad pennies." As perpetrators of this

³⁶Lipton, op. cit., pp. 254-255.

³⁷The Dharma Bums, p. 39.

"academic hoax," Rexroth names "Ranson, Tate, and Co., and . . . Randall Jarrell," who produce ". . . not just counterfeit" writers, but ". . . counterfeits of counterfeits" on which one can "dimly discern . . . the lineaments of Mr. Eliot and I. A. Richards."³⁸

Both Lipton and Rexroth join in attacking the narrow, confining intellectual atmosphere which they see present in colleges and universities across the country. With Kerouac they speak disdainfully of writers' workshops, of the "awkward, well-meaning efforts of . . . Ciardi and Bread Loaf writers"³⁹ who "can't swing with that beat because they are too conscious of every word they put on paper:

you can't dance freely if you have to watch your step. The security of academic life can become as addictive as heroin and harder to kick. Besides, there are too many eyes looking in at the mating with the Muse, cramping the creative act.⁴⁰

Lipton speaks of "the Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate-John Crowe Ranson Axis" as "nowhere" as far as the beat are concerned, and notes that the feeling seems to be mutual:

Like the Poll Tax Dixiecrats in Congress who hold all the key chairmanships, this Confederate Bund has bottled up everything that comes out of the beat writing camp and, in the publications they

³⁸Rexroth, "Disengagement: The Art of the Beat Generation," pp. 37-38.

³⁹The Dharma Bums, p. 46.

⁴⁰Lipton, op. cit., pp. 233-234.

control, nothing of the kind is ever reported out of committee.⁴¹

As the most striking antithesis that they can offer to "smothering academism," both Rexroth and Lipton call forth Ginsberg's "Howl." The poem first came to Lipton's attention when a representative for a London publisher who had serious misgivings about printing it asked for Lipton's opinion. Lipton wrote to the publisher--John Sankey of Villiers Press, telling him that if he "never printed anything but "Howl" it would probably be the only thing he would ever be remembered for."⁴² Sankey printed it, Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books published it, and San Francisco authorities immediately banned its sale on the grounds that the work was "lewd and obscene," and arrested publisher Ferlinghetti on a misdemeanor charge. They jailed the publisher-poet who commented that "the battle for literary freedom will be won and the case for honest literature strengthened";⁴³ Rexroth voiced surprise:

The Ginsberg trial is a freak anomaly--the city people have been cordial to the creative imagination ever since the days of the Gold Rush. There is no cultural provincialism among the San Francisco group. They came from other parts of the country. . .to find a close contact with life. . .and a responsive audience from all classes of people.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 234.

⁴²Ibid., p. 247.

⁴³J. G. Fuller, "Trade Winds," Saturday Review, 40:5-7, October 5, 1957.

His conclusion: "It's a case of provincial stupidity. . . ." ⁴⁴

After a court battle in which a number of literary personalities defended the poem as a significant comment on human experience, Judge Clayton W. Horn declared "Howl" to be not obscene and found Ferlinghetti not guilty of a misdemeanor for having sold the book. In his decision, Judge Horn wrote:

Life is not encased in one formula whereby everyone acts the same or conforms to a particular pattern. No two persons think alike. We are all made from the same mould, but in different patterns. Would there be any freedom of press or speech if one must reduce his vocabulary to vapid innocuous euphemism? An author should be real in treating his subject and be allowed to express his thoughts and ideas in his own words. Words are not obscene in themselves; an author's intent must be given full consideration. "Good taste" and conventional mores are not binding upon a writer who wishes to comment persuasively upon sections of society where such restraints are not recognized. . . . For material to be obscene in California it must present a clear and present danger of inciting to anti-social or immoral action. ⁴⁵

While the court test caused Ginsberg's poem to receive more attention than it would have received normally, there is little reason for doubting that the poem more completely embodies the crux of the beat social protest than does any other single work the generation has produced. Ginsberg projects the reader into a world of insensitivity, of complacent ignorance, of religious and political hypocrisy, of calculated violence, and there

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁵"New Test for Obscenity," Nation, 185:314, November 9, 1957.

reveals to him the plight of the artistic sensibility trying to make itself and its message be heard, trying to exist in a world which refuses to see, to feel, to hear, to know. It is Ginsberg who sees

. . .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,
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat
up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-
water flats floating across the tops of cities
contemplating jazz. . . .⁴⁶

And it is Ginsberg who asks, "What sphinx of cement and aluminum
bashed open their skulls/and ate up their brains and imagination?"⁴⁷

One of the artist-martyrs of the poem, Carl Solomon, to whom Ginsberg dedicates the piece and of whom William Carlos Williams writes in his preface to the collection: "On the way he (Ginsberg) met a man named Carl Colomon with whom he shared among the teeth and excrement of this life something that cannot be described but in the words he has used to describe it,"⁴⁸ committed himself on his 21st birthday to Rockland State mental institution after sharing the artistic experience with Ginsberg. His reason: "Now that I have come of age, I wish to be

⁴⁶Ginsberg, "Howl," op. cit., p. 9.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 17.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 7.

electrocuted."⁴⁹ Instead he was given insulin and shock treatment and released nine months later as cured. His "Report from the Asylum" is a record of his experience.⁵⁰ As insanity is the ultimate withdrawal from the world of the square--more insulating than heroin, marijuana, liquor or sex--Solomon has assumed a position as one of the idols of the generation and is often mentioned in other writings of the beat.

Thrust upon the literary scene with such judicial fanfare, Ginsberg's work received more than the passing critical attention apparently given most beat poetry. M. L. Rosenthal, writing in the Nation, calls the title piece and another poem in the collection, "America," "sustained shrieks of frantic defiance." He terms Ginsberg's method "anguished anathema hurling. . . in which the poet's revulsion is expressed with the single-minded frenzy of a raving madwoman." He finds the poem's major power in

. . . the fury of the soul-injured lover or child, and its dynamic lies in the way it spews up undigested the elementary need for freedom of sympathy, for generous exploration of thought, for the open response of man to man so long repressed by the smooth machinery of intellectual distortion.⁵¹

⁴⁹Cornelia Newton, "Where the Beats Meet--," The American Weekly, July 26, 1959, p. 10.

⁵⁰Carl Solomon, "Report from the Asylum," Feldman and Gartenberg, op. cit., pp. 153-163.

⁵¹M. L. Rosenthal, "Poet of the New Violence," Nation, 184:162, February 23, 1957.

Rosenthal recognizes the "impact of Whitman, Williams and Fearing" in the work and concludes that Ginsberg ". . . has brought a terrible psychological reality to the surface with enough originality to blast American verse a hair's-breadth forward in the process."⁵²

A Poetry critic finds the literary merit of the piece "irrelevant," so confines himself to what he terms a "description of the work." He sees it as "a celebration of the intellectual outlaw--that highbrow cousin of the black jacket, switch-blade-toting street-fighter." He concludes that Howl is "a very shaggy book, the shaggiest I've ever seen."⁵³

Rexroth notes that Howl is much more than the "most sensational book of poetry of 1957." He sees it as an indictment of the critics themselves: "Nothing goes to show how square the squares are so much as the favorable reviews they've given it." And: "Howl is the confession of faith of the generation that is going to be running the world in 1965 and 1975--if it's still there to run." His technical criticism of the poet:

. . . purely technically, Ginsberg is one of the most remarkable versifiers in America. He is almost alone in his generation in his ability to make powerful poetry of the inherent rhythms of our speech, to push forward the conquests of a few of the earliest poems of Sandburg and William Carlos Williams. This is more skillful than all the cornbelt Donnes laid end to end.⁵⁴

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³F. Eckman, "Neither Tame Nor Fleecy," Poetry, 40:391-393, September, 1957.

⁵⁴Kenneth Rexroth, "San Francisco Letter," pp. 11-12.

Rexroth's prediction: ". . .if he keeps going, Ginsberg will be the first genuinely popular, genuine poet in over a generation--and he is already considerably the superior of predecessors like Lindsay and Sandburg."⁵⁵

Both Rexroth and Lipton view the poetry of the beats as the most authentic expression of their world and as the only force that can withstand, in Lipton's words, "pressure of the social order. . .to turn literature into advertising."⁵⁶ And interestingly enough, they are not looking for converts to their cause. Rexroth fears an invasion from the world of the square which could result in a watering-down of the efforts of the beat. His own particular interest in the poetry-jazz presentations prompts him to comment:

I hope the faddist elements of this new medium will die away. The ignorant and the pretentious, the sockless hipster out for a fast buck or a few drinks from a village bistro, will soon exhaust their welcome with the public; and the field will be left clear for serious poets and musicians who mean business.⁵⁷

Lipton notes that the squares have discovered beatville and are "beginning to sniff and nibble around the edges." The exploitation of the beat by Hollywood and the national press is seen as typical of the world of the square. Lipton finds the beat world threatened by "refugees from witch hunts and

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 12.

⁵⁶Lipton, op. cit., p. 295.

⁵⁷Kenneth Rexroth, "Jazz Poetry," Nation, 186:283, March 29, 1958.

loyalty oaths, or the university squares, lured by reports of a Renaissance, hoping that some of the creative energy. . . might rub off on them,"⁵⁸ and by a parade of weekday office and factory workers, "Sunday refugees from the rat race, panting for a little music and poetry in their lives, hoping to meet 'the one' who will lift them out of the quiet desperation in which they move."⁵⁹

And this very attraction of the square for the world of the beat stands as an unconscious indictment of the world of the square, an indictment that exists as more positive evidence than the prose and the poetry of the beat that all is not right within the world of the square.

⁵⁸Lipton, op. cit., pp. 126-127.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 18.

CHAPTER III

THE BEAT AND GOD

The existence of a fictional world presupposes the existence of a controlling, ordering force which gives form, dimension and meaning to the actions of the fictional characters who are a part of this world. Without this force the fictional world of an author is a facade and his characters move in a pantomime without significance, without a beginning, a middle or an end; action itself is of no consequence, as there is nothing against which to measure its significance. This controlling force has been called variously the author's moral position, his moral code, his image of man; the specific term is of minor importance, but the general implication of this guiding force embodies one of the most important facets of the creative act. The writer cannot be wholly coherent, as artist, unless he possesses a wholly coherent view of man to inform, illuminate, and integrate his work. For orientation the writer may turn to the traditional Christian concept of man as a created being who inhabits an orderly universe, is morally responsible for his actions, is seen as inherently imperfect and dependent upon his Creator for perfection; if he ignores this dependancy and seeks perfection through self, the resulting distortion of pride frequently brings about his fall. He is, however, a redeemable creature, and as such cannot be said to be

deterministically fixed or controlled. Or the writer may-- using the traditional Christian view of man as a point of departure--cast his fictional world within the limits of any one of the other philosophical systems that offer a coherent view of man. Or, dissatisfied with the limitations of such systems, he may establish his own. But whatever his decision, he must offer a representative system that will give his fictional world definition, his characters authenticity, and his action meaning. This system may be embodied in a statement of moral standards as succinct as that of Ernest Hemingway: "what is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after." Or it may be less completely defined and less consistently expressed and still exist within a vague framework of a system, as seems to be the case with the Beat Generation writers, for whom man's relationship to God, to his universe, and to his fellow man still represents a problem that is yet to be solved with a concrete statement of philosophical position. It is this search for a philosophy in a world which offers no satisfactory philosophical statement for its own time that is a vital part of the writings of the beat.

The search of the beat begins with an implicit denial of the traditional Christian concept of man and of the established religions that support this concept. They see established religion as no longer the uncontested center and ruler of man's

life and the church no longer the final and unquestioned home and asylum of his being. For this negation the beat offer what they consider a decline of religion resulting from the increasing pressure of the materialistic world to explain away man's individuality, to make him a reasoning creature in a rational universe; the indictment of the established religions follows, as the beat see them adopting the rational view of man and thus denying the very existence of the irrational elements of human nature. The resulting image of man is the image of a social creature performing competently his own particular social function and thus becoming identified with this function; the rest of his being is allowed to subsist as best it can--usually to be forgotten by both the materialistic society and its partner, organized religion.

Poet Ginsberg speaks of this decline of religion and its results:

The promise of America has gone down the drain. . . . Individualism has been betrayed. And the individual has been humiliated.

The poets and writers will ultimately have to be priests--sexy, illuminated priests who will stand up and be counted and take the responsibility for spiritual guidance in this country.¹

Lipton writes that the beat "see themselves as outlaws from the Church, something like the first Christians who also lived in

¹Ward Cannel, "Can a Beatnik Remain a Beatnik Wearing Brooks Brothers Shirt?" The Ventura (Calif.) County Star-Free Press, June 30, 1959, p. 7.

pads of a sort, in the slum quarters of slaves and outcasts, and were hunted down by the officialdom." He notes that the beat view "organized church worship and ceremonial of every sort" as religion emasculated, religion lacking "the properties of a proper narcotic." He adds:

Everything narcotic or hypnotic has been squeezed out of it, along with the sex, the poetry, the art, till there is nothing left in it but watered-down weak tea for wine and the sweepings of the chaff for what may once have been the living bread of the spirit.²

Lipton writes of the spiritual search of the beat as not a search for "peace of mind or positive thinking or reconciliation with tradition or the Church," but as rather something "deeper in the human psyche" and "farther back and farther out than any church of our time has to offer." It is, he concludes, "all part of what Carl Jung has called modern man in search of a soul."³

While this beat search for a soul is normally conducted outside of organized religion it sometimes returns--perhaps for orientation--to the folds of a religious belief, that of the Catholic Church. As Rexroth notes:

There are few organized systems of social attitudes and values which stand outside, really outside, the all corrupting influences of our predatory civilization. In America, at least, there is only one which functions on any large scale and with any effectiveness. This of course is Roman Catholicism. Not the stultifying monkey see monkey do Americanism of the slothful urban backwoods

²Lipton, The Holy Barbarians, pp. 160-161.

³Ibid., p. 160.

middle-class parish. . .but the Church of saints and philosophers--of the worker priest movement and the French personalists.⁴

And Rexroth concludes that it is only to be expected that "of those who reject the Social Lie, many today would turn towards Catholicism." He adds that "if you have to 'belong to something bigger than yourself' it is one of the few possibilities and, with a little mental gymnastics, can be made quite bearable." But he notes that there is no reason why, "if one is strong enough to stand alone," a person cannot ask "meaningful questions" independently.⁵ Of those writers who "return" to Catholicism, Rexroth lists beat novelist Kerouac and poets William Everson, presently a Dominican lay brother whom Rexroth terms "the finest Catholic poet writing today; Philip Lamantia, whose poetry is called "illuminated, ecstatic, with the mystic's intense autonomy" by Rexroth; and Ferlinghetti, in whose poetry Rexroth notes that "it is possible to 'disaffiliate,' disengage oneself from the Social Lie and still be good tempered about it." This he terms Ferlinghetti's "special talent."⁶ Lipton supports this link with Catholicism. He notes that not a few among the beat "have had the experience of going back to the Church in their search for the numinous, but they have always come back to the anthropologists," who, Lipton observes, "occupy among the beat

⁴Rexroth, "San Francisco Letter," p. 8.

⁵Ibid., pp. 10-11.

⁶Ibid., pp. 8-13.

today much the same position that the writings of Freud did among the Secessionists of the Twenties."⁷

The search of the beat for a coherent philosophical statement can best be traced in all its variations, its tangents, and its contradictions through the works of novelist Kerouac, for it is Kerouac's fictional world that best embodies the essentially mythic character of the world of the beat. Any myth alive in a fact-smothered era is of interest, and this quality of the beat certainly has not escaped public notice. Like the Fitzgerald myth of the Twenties which had its hero in Gatsby-like parties and dunkings in the fountain at Union Square, the myth of the beat is one of contrast and contradiction and can scarcely be dismissed with the public image of the beat--beard, bare feet, marijuana, sex, jazz and juvenilia. One must look behind this image.

The world of the early Kerouac is a world ordered by the traditional Christian concept of man, but it is also a world in which the early protagonists, Peter Martin and Jack Duluoz, begin to experience an awareness of the emphasis on material values and of the inhumanity of the world around them. This awareness marks the beginning of the search of Kerouac's characters to find an order of morality and a possibility of love within the world. Both Martin and Duluoz are deeply

⁷Lipton, op. cit., p. 162.

repulsed by things that are "phony" about their world--and the phoniness is in every instance the substitution of pretense for things which seem to them of value. They are, in the course of their individual search, repulsed and frightened, not by what people do to them, but rather by what people do to each other and to themselves.

Peter Martin finds that there is only pretense, and therefore lack of love, in his first contact with the opposite sex, in the adult worship of the prep football hero, in the world of business, of education, of law, in the curiosity of those who attend his father's funeral, and finally in his concept of God. His first contact with a "higher being" comes as a matter of course in his early Catholic education and this early vision of God remains until an older brother on vacation from Harvard asks him:

"Isn't it true that all they told you when you were a kid turned out to be a lot of crap? They told you about God as soon as you had Santa Claus in doubt or before, someone did. Yet you ought to know by now there's no Godliness anywhere, and there certainly is no God to comfort and watch over us. Maybe you might even, in the sophistication of modern times. . . be forced to admit there must be a devil even in spite of the fact there is no God. Certainly the brutality on all sides is evident, all the Godliness must be hiding out somewhere."

Thus begins the early doubt that develops--like that of Jack Dulocz--into a disillusionment which in turn leads to the

⁸The Town and the City, p. 157.

search for values that takes Kerouac and his characters on the road.

It is Kerouac's novel, On the Road, that gives body to the beat myth and a semblance of form to the search of the beat for philosophic identity. It has been called--and perhaps accurately--the "bible of the beat generation" by book-jacket advertising, for it embraces the major portion of the canon of beat doctrine and ritual. It might be more accurate to term On the Road the Old Testament of the beat for herein appear the prophets of a movement which continues in The Subterraneans and The Dharma Bums.

The world of On the Road is one of movement. It is a world in which the Christian concept of man vanishes to be replaced by a concept of man as his own god, his own judge; he is his own universe and his actions become the ritual of his way of life. No standard for judging the morality or immorality of action exists within this concept of man; therefore, the action itself has no meaning beyond the moment, the timeless instant for which it exists. To paraphrase Hemingway, what is moral is that which supplies "kicks" for the beat, and what is immoral--or "square"--is action devoid of "kicks." Any action, then, which is conventional and moral within the Christian concept becomes quite the opposite for the beat. The quest of the beat becomes a search for sensation which can be realized only when it is culminated by that sensation which allows one to

"go out of himself," to transcend his physical nature, and assume a mystic, visionary nature climaxed by the beatific vision--the vision of God. As there is no specific, established method for approaching this state of nirvana, the search of the beat becomes an intensive exploration of the subtleties of sensation--thus the addiction to stimulating liquors and drugs, to sex, to the far out wail of the jazz man's horn.

The origin of this object of the beat search--the beatific vision--is interesting and somewhat paradoxical when one considers the avenues of approach used by the beat. Kerouac writes of the almost immediate public popularity of the generation he characterized in On the Road, and says that he was not completely aware of the interpretation he now applies to the word "beat" until "people began to call themselves beatniks, beats, jazzniks, bopniks, bugniks" and he realized that he was being called the "avatar" of all of this. He explains the "vision" that resulted in the word's present connotation:

Yet it was as a Catholic, it was not at the insistence of any of these "niks" and certainly not with their approval either, that I went one afternoon to the church of my childhood (one of them), Ste. Jeanne d'Arc in Lowell, Mass., and suddenly with tears in my eyes and had a vision of what I must have really meant with "Beat" anyhow when I heard the holy silence in the church (I was the only one in there, it was five P.M., dogs were barking outside, children yelling, the fall leaves, the candles were flickering alone just for me), the vision of the word Beat as being to mean beatific. . .There's the priest preaching on Sunday morning, all of a sudden through a side

door of the church comes a group of Beat Generation characters in strapped raincoats like the I.R.A. coming in silently to "dig" the religion. . . I knew it then.⁹

In On the Road, the beatific vision comes in the varied guises of the jazz man whose "magic horn" produces an other-worldly sound which makes Dean Moriarty "oblivious to everything else in the world,"¹⁰ of blind jazz pianist George Shearing--"Sal, God has arrived."--who "played innumerable choruses with amazing chords that mounted higher and higher till the sweat splashed all over the piano and everybody listened in awe and fright,"¹¹ of the "great girls" in the Mexican house of prostitution, "this strange Arabian paradise we had finally found at the end of the hard, hard road,"¹² of the proprietress of a "fish-'n-chips joint" on San Francisco's Market Street who becomes for Sal Paradise, who is "out of (his) mind with hunger and bitterness," a reincarnation of his "mother of about two hundred years ago," and stimulates a vision which results in

. . . the point of ecstasy that I always wanted to reach, which was the complete step across chronological time into timeless shadows, and wonderment in the bleakness of the mortal realm, and the

⁹Jack Kerouac, "The Origins of the Beat Generation," Playboy, 6:42, June, 1959.

¹⁰On the Road, p. 166.

¹¹Ibid., p. 199.

¹²Ibid., p. 238.

sensation of death kicking at my heels to move on, with a phantom dogging its own heels, and myself hurrying to a plank where all the angels dove off and flew into the holy void of uncreated emptiness.
 . . .¹³

This is the beatific vision.

A beat in Lipton's work describes the search for this vision as the culmination of the beat ritual:

" . . . how else was one to experience the numinous enlightenment . . . nirvana . . . satori . . . except by going far out? . . . the irrational . . . wasn't that the whole idea? . . . and how could you know in these other ways of knowing unless you explored your unconscious . . . disassociated . . . broke up, and through, and beyond . . . far out . . . through pain . . . through sex . . . through pot . . . Beneze-drive . . . anything . . . everything? . . . since the whole idea was to experience holiness . . . the beatific vision . . . orgastic release . . . the crucifixion of the flesh . . . "¹⁴

Lipton writes of the importance of ritual for the beat, notes that this "sacramentalizing and socializing of the crises of life" by the beat fills a void created by the lack of such basic rituals in our time. "The churchmen," he continues, "see no lack of ritual. They have it packaged and priced for mass consumption, in spiritual emporiums that come more and more to resemble department stores where every day is Christmas." The general public, then, he concludes, goes to church but comes away from sermons and services "without being transformed.

¹³Ibid., p. 143.

¹⁴Lipton, op. cit., p. 81.

They are still hungry and searching for ritual cleansing and spiritual illumination." Their only alternative, according to Lipton, is "to look elsewhere, outside the churches, for signs of an American mythos and a mass ritual."¹⁵ This is beat have done, and their every action becomes in this sense a ritual of their way of life. The "cleansing and spiritual illumination" they find in "the beat of jazz, the heart beat, the beat in the beatific vision."¹⁶

Another requisite necessary for those who wish to approach this vision is self-imposed poverty. Kerouac's characters reject the rewards of the steady job to go on the road, to drive "cross-country seventy-two hours to find out if I had a vision or you had a vision or he had a vision to find out eternity,"¹⁷ as Ginsberg describes it in Howl. Both Rexroth and Lipton write of the importance of this poverty. Rexroth notes that the particular circumstances into which one might be born are not of importance to this philosophy; rather, he writes, "the thing that is important is the detachment from one's own possessions and the lack of covetousness of the possessions of others."¹⁸ This lack of covetousness Lipton finds at the heart of the

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 164.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 167.

¹⁷ Ginsberg, "Howl," op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁸ Lipton, op. cit., p. 55

beat; as the beat "loves everybody" and has no attachment to things material, he is not capable of acts of violence. He would write a poem about them. This desire for a life of poverty causes the beat, Lipton notes, to seek "a neighborhood where the poor live, the poor who are resigned to their poverty," as the best environment in which to live "the life." Their poverty Lipton sees as "a cardinal principle which the beat share with the bohemians of the past."¹⁹

The saints of the beat who appear or are mentioned in On the Road are jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker, jazz pianist George Shearing, and poet Dylan Thomas. As projections of the beat myth who offered the creative act as the "only defense against the ruin of the world,"²⁰ to quote Rexroth, they are seen as gods of the beat movement, as they seem to have embodied the beatific vision, and are set up as objects of emulation. For both Parker and Thomas the pursuit of creativity led to the same disastrous end, death resulting from extreme physical dissipation. Shearing's blindness served to separate him from his physical self and from the "ruin of the world." It was not necessary for him to employ sex, liquor or drugs in an attempt to "go out of himself," to transcend his physical nature, and become a visionary for the beat through his music. "Bird" Parker's search for the vision is the subject of beat poet Stuart Z. Perkoff's poem "Bird":

¹⁹Ibid., p. 59.

²⁰Rexroth, "Disengagement: The Art of the Beat Generation," p. 30.

frenetic dancer
 weaving out of the darkness between
 the buildings
 blowing high & screaming in. . . .

they relaxed him at Camarillo
 sent him out
 but he did not cool. . .

what about that horror, man?
 what about that pain?
 what about that cat, like all the time
 trying to do himself in, lushing,
 hyping, insaneing, no sleep
 no eat just blow blow blow
 farther and farther out tearing finger from hand,
 from skull, sound from throat, leaving bleeding ^{eye}
 chunks of Bird caught in the teeth of many
 sessions.

what about that? . . .
 but he'd been there, man
 & he blew
 & he flew, man
 like
 high ²¹

As Lipton notes, jazz music is both a therapeutic and a sacred ritual for the beat, thus the beat adulation of the musicians whose music has the effect of liberating them from their inhibitions and offering them a mystic vision. That jazz is considered "profane" in some circles of contemporary Western society, Lipton adds, "makes it no less sacred" to the beat, who follow it to "its own temples, back-alley temples and hide-away shrines" which Lipton sees as "not unlike the nocturnal woodland worship which has always marked the outlawed religions." The combination of the disaffiliated beat and disaffiliated

²¹Stuart Z. Perkoff, "Bird," The Holy Barbarians, p. 83.

jazz produces what Lipton terms "a mystique of jazz,"²² perhaps best celebrated by poet Ginsberg:

Holy the groaning saxophone! Holy the bop apocalypse!
 Holy the jazzbands marijuna hipsters peace and
 junk and drums!²³

Another stage in the development of the beat philosophy is examined in Kerouac's novel, The Subterraneans. Leo Percepted and Mardou Fox seek the beatific vision through the sexual relationship and occasionally find a reasonable facsimile thereof through a process Normal Mailer describes as "not love as the search for a mate, but love as the search for an orgasm more apocalyptic than the one which preceded it."²⁴ The novel becomes the diary of a sensual search for the vision of God whom Mailer sees as

. . .that God which every hipster believes is located in the senses of his body, that trapped, mutilated and nonetheless megalomaniacal God who is It, who is energy, life, sex, force. . .not the God of the churches but the unachievable whisper of mystery within the sex, the paradise of limitless energy and perception just beyond the next wave of the next orgasm.²⁵

And the search results in frustration and disillusionment, as the truly apocalyptic orgasm often remains, as Mailer notes, "as remote as the Holy Grail."²⁶

²²Lipton, op. cit., p. 212.

²³Ginsberg, "Footnote to Howl," op. cit., p. 21.

²⁴Mailer, "The White Negro," Feldman and Gartenberg, op. cit., p. 352.

²⁵Ibid., p. 356.

²⁶Ibid., p. 352.

The final stage in the development of the beat philosophy is presented in Kerouac's novel, The Dharma Bums, which represents in many ways a negation of the external manifestations of beat ritual that are a part of the earlier novels, On the Road and The Subterraneans. Although occasional references to Zen Buddhism occur in the earlier novels, the Zen doctrine is not given extensive consideration by the beat of these works; the introduction of the beat to the way of Zen remains for Ray Smith and Japhy Ryder of The Dharma Bums. But it seems that the beat do not especially welcome this introduction. Lipton notes that the novel indicates that Kerouac is selling out to "the so-called 'good writing' standards of conventional criticism," and finds Kerouac's "almost benign" treatment of the "squares" who appear in the novel a misrepresentation of the beat code. Nor, he adds, are any of the beat

. . .likely to give more than lip service to Kerouac's notion that "the only decent activity left in the world" is to "pray for all living creatures." It is a very superficial notion based on a misunderstanding of the Zen practice of "sitting quietly, doing nothing." The prayer of intercession, whether for man or beast, is no part of it. Who is any man to intercede for anyone or anything?

His conclusion:

The Zen elements in the novel stick out like so many unassimilated lumps. When he has succeeded in making Zen more a part of his experience Kerouac will be able to handle such material more naturally--in the lives

of his characters rather than as intermittent sermons and hallelujahs.²⁷

But it would seem that Lipton himself is less than qualified to comment authoritatively on anyone's handling of Zen Buddhism. His own infrequent references to the philosophy seldom venture far from Alan W. Watts's standard textbook on the subject, The Way of Zen. When a "well-educated woman" of Lipton's acquaintance in an episode in The Holy Barbarians questions some phase of the doctrine, Lipton turns to Watts's work and reads verbatim.²⁸ And when other Zen matters require explanation or clarification, Watts, not Lipton, supplies the answers.²⁹

Even the most naive of readers would not have failed to make a similar observation of Kerouac's handling of the Zen elements within the novel, for it becomes obvious early in the work that neither the author nor his characters have more than a superficial knowledge of what is decidedly a difficult philosophy to master, one requiring a lifetime of dedication from its aspirants. Kerouac's acquaintance with Zen came, no doubt, from his associations with beat poet Gary Snyder--who appears thinly disguised in the novel as Japhy Ryder--with whom he worked as a logger and forester. Snyder, who studied Chinese at the

²⁷Lipton, op. cit., pp. 251-252.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 165-166.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 167-169, 237-238.

the University of California at Berkeley, is at present in Kyoto, Japan, taking formal training in Zen Buddhism.³⁰

But Kerouac's attempt to assimilate the Zen doctrine into the way of the beat does illustrate some of the essential likenesses between the two. The emphasis of the beat upon the timelessness of experience as well as the importance of introspection, contemplation of one's inner self, are points vital also to the Zen Buddhist. And the attainment of the beatific vision as the result of a meditative purgation of the physical self--as is illustrated in The Dharma Bums--would fit easily into the way of Zen. But the jazz, the sex, the liquor and the euphoric drugs of the beat would have no place in the world of Zen, just as they have no function in Kerouac's The Dharma Bums.

And thus the search of the beat for a coherent view of man appears to have run its course and the late Kerouac appears only to have changed but little, philosophically, from the early Kerouac. He is decidedly somewhat the worse for wear after a period on the road, with the subterreneans, and over the mountain tops with the Dharma bums, but he is still essentially a romantic, now with visions of Buddheland splendor in his eyes. His view of man--and that of the other beat writers--still lacks coherent definition, though it could with

³⁰Evergreen Review, Vol. I., No. 2, p. 160.

little manipulation be cast within the bounds of existentialism, the philosophy that philosopher William Barrett has termed "the philosophy of the atomic age."³¹ Certainly the themes which Barrett finds in existentialism--"the alienation and strangeness of man in his world; the contradictoriness, feebleness, and contingency of human existence; the central and overwhelming reality of time for man who has lost his anchorage in the eternal"³²--are the themes which obsess the beat. And yet the beat have made no conscious attempt at espousal with the existentialists. Critics in search of a convenient pigeonhole have on occasion called them "American Existentialists," as opposed to or in accordance with their particular interpretations of Jean-Paul Sartre and the French Existentialists. But still the beat search continues. To what end? Rexroth adds this concluding note--his answer:

I believe that most of an entire generation will go to ruin--the ruin of Celine, Artaud, Rimbaud, voluntarily, even enthusiastically. What will happen afterwards I don't know, but for the next ten years or so we are going to have to cope with the youth we, my generation, put through the atom smasher. Social disengagement, artistic integrity, voluntary poverty--these are powerful virtues and may pull them through, but they are not the virtues we tried to inculcate--rather they are the exact opposite.³³

³¹William Barrett, Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1958), p. 57.

³²Ibid., p. 56.

³³Rexroth, "Disengagement: The Art of the Beat Generation," p. 41.

And Rexroth would have the Beat Generation writers become literary martyrs of the Atomic Age. Such a pat prediction might easily explain away any rational attempt to determine the artistic competence of the group, but one must go beyond the mere statement to establish social disengagement and voluntary poverty as compatible partners to artistic integrity. Such is the task of the final chapter of this study.

CHAPTER IV

THE BEAT AND BELLES-LETTRES

While only time and its perspective can offer final judgment of the literary accomplishments of the Beat Generation poets and novelists, some conclusions as to the merit of their writings can be offered at this time. The structure of the fictional world within which the beat have placed their creations has been examined; the characters themselves have been subjected to scrutiny; the social and philosophical implications of the world of the beat have been presented for analysis: it appears then that the time is ripe for a reckoning. Have the beat contributed anything of value to the art of the novel? To poetry? To the understanding of that highly individual process: the creative act? Only their work--free from the fetish of their way of life, the beards, sandals, conga drums, coffeehouses, sexual inhibitions, liquor, drugs, disaffiliation--can testify to their artistic integrity. A tacit denial of the critical standards of one's own time does not automatically place one's work outside the realm of criticism; nor does the fact that a writer is "sick and tired of the conventional English sentence"¹ necessarily elevate his improvi-

¹Jack Kerouac, "The Last Word," Escapade, 3:72, June, 1959.

sations to the level of art. If a writer's work is to stand as a representative attempt at expressing one's vision of one's own time, it must also submit to the standards set for determining the worth of creative endeavour at this same time. Writers and rebellion may go hand in hand, but rebellion and artistic competence are not necessarily synonymous. A writer's worth as an artist cannot rest upon the merits of his rebellion, but rather upon his ability to express the essential values of this rebellion within the exacting restraints of a literary art form. It is within these tenets, and these tenets alone, that the artistic worth of the Beat Generation writers can be determined.

Beat biographer Lipton begins his discussion of the beat prose writers by noting that beat prose is not as highly developed as is the poetry of the group. This prose, he says, "is only in its beginnings." After discarding Clellon Holmes, Antole Broyard, and R.V. Cassill as workers within the beat world whose "style remains largely conventional," he moves to novelist Kerouac who "has only scratched the surface (of) . . . the lifeways of the beat generation." His personal grievances with Kerouac's inconsistent treatment of the beat take up the major portion of the essay, but he finally discovers what he considers Kerouac's strength as a writer. This he sees in Kerouac's handling of a prose-poetry combination in his writings. He also notes this same trend in beat poetry: "Free

verse can now be seen as a step in that direction and, from the other direction (prose), the writings of James Joyce." He speaks out then for this combination as the "contemporary idiom" that "will bring the word once more back to life," and adds that only the artist with "an original mind, a great gift and a knowledge of his craft" can master this idiom. And Kerouac, he implies, has these requisites.² While it would be difficult to argue that the first two are not Kerouac's, one can easily approach Kerouac--and the beat prose writers --by denying that he has the third.

"Knowledge of his craft" implies that the writer as novelist brings to his work a sense of order, direction, and purpose which when exercised within the dramatic or narrative framework of the novel will produce a recognizable work of fiction. It also implies a precision of motive, a cultivation of taste, and a sense of style: elements Henry James found a necessary part of the art of the novelist. If these elements are present in Kerouac, they are glossed over by the apparent naivete with which he approaches his responsibility as a writer. Only his first published novel, The Town and the City, contains any evidence that Kerouac is aware of a craft of fiction. While a rambling, often sentimental piece, the novel does reveal a Kerouac who is making a conscious effort to construct scene,

²Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians*, pp. 250-254.

to reveal character by action as well as implication, to offer a significant insight into the human condition by his manipulation of these elements. Everything that has appeared since seems a repudiation of the technique of the first novel.

On the Road is a novel of movement, not action. Action as the embodiment of significant acts and gestures within the framework of a controlled, dramatic scene is not a part of this work. Movement prompted solely by a boredom with present setting or circumstance carries the piece from its beginning to its conclusion, which is less a recognizable conclusion to a significant dramatic exploration of the human condition than it is a simple halting of movement by the author at his convenience. The usual nostalgia of the setting sun predicting the coming of night is employed by Kerouac to placate readers who may have expected more. But there is no ending to this novel, because there is no beginning, or middle, to warrant a conclusion. Characterization is given more attention in this work, but here, too, it seems that Kerouac fails. He never seems quite sure whether the story is that of narrator Sal Paradise or that of Dean Moriarty, who is given far more definition than Kerouac by implication gives his narrator. It is Moriarty--whose obsession with life would seem to offer more fruitful investigation than the opulent emotional reactions of Paradise, who is just along for the ride--who is cast

aside in favor of Paradise, who is, after all, Kerouac's fictional alter ego. Perhaps Moriarty will receive better treatment in the yet unpublished Visions of Neal which, Kerouac notes, "won't be published for 20 years," as "the world isn't ready for it."³ One wonders if Kerouac is predicting a depreciation of moral or of literary standards which, it seems, must precede publication of this opus.

The Subterraneans, as Kerouac's attempt to adapt the Joycean devices of interior monologue, stream of consciousness, the cinematic montage, the free, lyric, punning language, to the "Seven Streams of Swiftmess"⁴ which he substitutes for craft and revision, seems only to indicate that Kerouac is not Joyce and that typing is not writing. The novel is Kerouac's argument against what he terms the "laborious and dreary lying called craft and revision by writers," and this is his thesis:

Shame seems to be the key to repression in writing as well as in psychological malady. If you don't stick to what you first thought, and to the words the thought brought, what's the sense of foisting your little lies on others?⁵

And this is his practice. He wrote On the Road on a continuous scroll of mechanical drawing paper, typed single-spaced

³Jerome Beatty, Jr., "Trade Winds," Saturday Review, 40:6, September 28, 1957.

⁴Kerouac, "The Last Word," Escapade, 4:72, October, 1959.

⁵Kerouac, "The Last Word," Escapade, 3:72, June, 1959.

without paragraph indentations, so he would not have to interrupt the spontaneous streams of thought to insert single sheets of paper.⁶ He has duplicated this method in his other novels, with similar results. But if Kerouac wishes to emulate Joyce, he must adopt more than mere technique; he must accept the responsibilities that such a technique demands of a writer--control and an awareness of the limits implied by his choice of the novel as a fictional vehicle--if he is to produce more than an imitation of Joyce, which is of little value when one can turn to the mastery of the original and find the artist, not the imitator.

The Dharma Bums represents not only Kerouac's repudiation of the ways of the world of the beat, but also, in many respects, his best novel. He has--perhaps unconsciously--adhered to a cohesive pattern of development that substitutes a degree of scenic structure, plot and character development for the free-flowing improvisation of the earlier works. His characters are provided with a recognizable goal and their attempts to reach this goal are given some meaning, through evaluation, by the author. The essential weakness of the work lies in the undigested Dharma philosophy which imbues the entire work with a pretentiousness that undermines any authority Kerouac

⁶J. G. Fuller, "Trade Winds," Saturday Review, 40:6, October 5, 1957.

might have brought to the work and any authenticity it might otherwise possess.

Doctor Sax and Maggie Cassidy, both published in the wake of the popularity of Kerouac's "beat" novels, offer little more than a rehashing of the material offered in The Town and the City, only now the author has eliminated all sense of order and restraint and has cast the world of his youth in the subjective incoherencies of his prose-poetry style. The deficiencies of plot, scene structure and characterization are all here, as are the tangled sentences, the incoherent word order and lack of punctuation. While one does not destroy either Norris or Dreiser by pointing out their bad grammar and their false rhetoric, one can do so to Kerouac, for these inconsistencies are the basis, not the by-products, of his fictional method.

Critic John Ciardi in a review of Maggie Cassidy offers some sound criticism of Kerouac's method and rather neatly punctures the Kerouacian myth. He finds it "mistaken seriousness to treat this stuff as if it could be asked to respond to the criteria of serious writing." What he finds instead is "Kerouac's breathless interest in Kerouac." The total premise of Kerouac's writing he sees embodied in the quote, "Oh, my God it happened to me: every sacred, formless irrelevance is out of my own loving memory of myself." Ciardi's estimate of Kerouac's worth is applicable to the majority of his writing:

Fiction has been made of slighter materials than these when a writer has gone to work on it, but Kerouac has no interest in writing, if by writing one means the art of shaping experience into a form that releases the experience to a reader. Kerouac prefers merely to assert. There is nothing in this book that might reasonably be called a scene: scenes must be paced and structured, and pace and structure are not available to the slap-sprawl school. There is no action here. Kerouac would have done well to remember Hemingway's warning to Marlene Dietrich, "never (to) confuse motion with action." Here, as everywhere in Kerouac's writing, there is more jerky motion and less action than one may find in any twentieth-century book I know of. There is not even anything that might pass as characterization, and perish the thought that there should be any development of character.⁷

If one is to find a contribution to contemporary letters by the Beat Generation, he must not pause here, for Kerouac is at best a writer in search of a form. Until he finds or develops one out of his autobiographical irrelevancies or, better, casts his fictional world within the restrictions of conventional forms, his stature as a writer and his contributions to the novel as an art form must be termed minor.

Lipton turns--and accurately--to the poets of the beat as the "vanguard" of their literary movement,⁸ for it seems that if the beat are to make a significant contribution, it will quite possibly come in the guise of poetry. Poetry enjoys in America at the present time little popularity and normally finds itself relegated to the jingling column in the daily newspaper in its Metcalfian guise, to the odd pages in magazines as

⁷John Ciardi, "In Loving Memory of Myself," Saturday Review, 42:22-23, July 22, 1959.

space-filler, to the "little" magazines and their "littler" circulation. The poet himself is viewed as something quite apart from the public image of the American male; he sees himself characterized as a not-quite-a-man, a pale, scholarly, limp-tendoned creature whose job is certainly not a man's job. The poet has fared poorly in this day of four-minute milers, muscled behemoths, seven-foot basketball stars and other physical testimonials to the potency of the American male. And his poetry has suffered as well, for his audience has become increasingly limited and his poetry has reflected this lack of audience, as no longer could it be said that the poet was speaking to or for a people who were aware of his message. If the beat poets are remembered for nothing else, they will be recognized as the group which has done much to wipe out this public image of the impotent poet and to return poetry to its status as an effective vehicle of artistic expression in our time.

The outward trappings of the beat movement brought the San Francisco Renaissance and its poets before the public eye. And many, no doubt, were surprised by what they found. The poetry of the beat reveals a sense of direction and of form not found in beat prose. These poets have taken that which is unpoetic in their time and made it poetic. They show a genuine interest in their time and an awareness of the responsibility of the poet to his time. They have managed to capture

the idiom of their disaffiliated brethren and to express it in their poetry. They are alive, they are writing, and they have an audience, which is more than can be said for the state of poetry in general at this mid-century mark.

Poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti is the most polished of the beat poets, and stands with Allen Ginsberg as the most typical of their group. Ferlinghetti, a Ph.D.,⁹ writes his poems to be read aloud, for, he says, "the printing press has made poetry so silent that we've forgotten the power of poetry as 'oral messages.' The sound of the streetsinger and the Salvation Army speaker is not to be scorned. . . ." ¹⁰ And this seems to be the emphasis in the poetry of Ginsberg, Corso, Duncan, Perkoff and most other beat poets. They are striving for the oral quality that both Lipton and Rexroth hold as essential to poetry. Out of this emphasis have come the poetry-jazz presentations which may serve to gain an even wider audience for their poetry. While the general quality of the work of the beat poets is uneven and at times of dubious value, the very fact that they are producing poetry in what seems to be an essentially unpoetic age must be given credit. Although,

⁹"Big Day for Bards at Bay," Life, 43:105, September 9, 1957.

¹⁰Lawrence Ferlinghetti, A Coney Island of the Kind, p. 98.

like the prose writers, they occasionally celebrate the aimless escape from society through the mediums of sex, liquor, and drugs, their work in the main represents an attempt to face and to grapple with the problems of existence in the contemporary world within the limits of their art form. This is more than can be said of Kerouac and the beat novelists. The fact remains that the beat poets, whether concerned with their individual world, with the state of the nation, with the atomic bomb, with the exploration of feeling, or with God, seem guided by a certain sense of responsibility as poets that is lacking in the work of the novelists. It is perhaps that the poets are more aware of their predecessors, of Whitman, Mallarme, Poe, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Yeats, Eliot, Pound, Jeffers, Crane, Cummings, Fearing, Thomas, as Lipton lists them,¹¹ than are the prose writers, who name James Joyce, Henry Miller, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway (his early short stories in particular), Sherwood Anderson, Louis-Ferdinand Celine, William Faulkner, Andre Gide, Franz Kafka, D. H. Lawrence, Theodore Dreiser, and John Dos Passos as their prose ancestors,¹² but do not seem to have been able to learn anything of the craft of fiction from them. It may be here that the heart of the pretension of the beat disaffiliation can be found. The beat make frequent allusion to these antecedents

¹¹Lipton, op. cit., p. 231.

¹²Ibid., p. 232.

in their writings, but the allusions consist only of name, or title. Nowhere do the beat express any understanding of the writings of these men, nor do they discuss the social, moral, philosophical or artistic successes, failures, attitudes or contributions of these writers. Their names are passed about in a show of intellectuality while their books remain shelved, unread. Kerouac speaks in The Subterraneans of reading Faulkner's Spotted Horses, Cervantes' Don Quixote, and Joyce's Finnegan's Wake, but nowhere in the work does he give any evidence of having taken anything more than the titles from these men; the reader is only certain that he has read Reich's The Function of Orgasm, as it seems the guiding force within the work. If the beat are more than name-droppers supreme, the majority of their work fails to show it. If the measure of artistic worth of a poem or a novel is determined by the number of literary allusions found therein, every undergraduate English major with access to master plots would be a successful writer. This, happily, is not the case.

It seems then that if the beat are going to do more than fizzle into the footnotes of literary history, they are going to have to do more than disaffiliate. They are going to have to offer tangible literary evidence in support of their beliefs, and to offer it in a form that will reveal their knowledge and acceptance of the craft and revision that have produced what is significant in literature today.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS

- Barnhart, Clarence L. (ed.). The American College Dictionary. New York: Random House, 1959.
- Barrett, William. Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy. New York: Doubleday and Company, 1958.
- Corso, Gregory. Bomb. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1958.
- _____. Gasoline. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1958.
- Feldman, Gene, and Gartenberg, Max (eds.). The Beat Generation and The Angry Young Men. New York: The Citadel Press, 1958.
- Ferlinghetti, Lawrence. A Coney Island of the Mind. New York: New Directions Books, 1958.
- _____. Pictures of the Gone World. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1955.
- _____. Tentative Description of a Dinner Given To Promote the Impeachment of President Eisenhower. San Francisco: Golden Mountain Press, 1958.
- Fuller, Edmund. Man in Modern Fiction. New York: Random House, 1958.
- Ginsberg, Allen. Howl and Other Poems. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1956.
- Holmes, Clellon. Go. New York: Ace Books, A.A. Wyn, Inc., 1952.
- _____. The Horn. New York: Fawcett World Library, 1958.
- Hopper, Stanley Romaine. Spiritual Problems in Contemporary Literature. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957.
- Kerouac, Jack. Doctor Sax. New York: Grove Press, 1959.
- _____. Maggie Cassidy. New York: Avon Book Division, The Hearst Corporation, 1959.

- _____. On the Road. New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1957.
- _____. The Dharma Bums. New York: The Viking Press, 1958.
- _____. The Subterraneans. New York: Grove Press, 1958.
- _____. The Town and the City. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950.
- Lipton, Lawrence. The Holy Barbarians. New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1959.
- Mandel, George. Flee the Angry Strangers. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1952.
- Waats, Alan W. The Way of Zen. New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1957.

B. PERIODICALS

- Adams, Phoebe. "Reader's Choice," The Atlantic, 202:89-90, October, 1958.
- Baker, Carlos. "The Careful Young Men," Nation, 184:199, March 9, 1957.
- _____. "Itching Feet," Saturday Review, 40:33, September 7, 1957.
- Baker, George. "Avante Garde at the Golden Gate," Saturday Review, 40:10, August 3, 1957.
- Beatty, Jerome. "Trade Winds," Saturday Review, 40:4, September 28, 1957.
- "Big Day for Bards at Bay," Life, 43:105-8, September 9, 1957.
- Bittner, William. "Kilroy is Here, Young Writers of Today," New Republic, 138:17-18, February 10, 1958.
- _____. "The Yabyum Set," Saturday Review, 41:36, October 11, 1958.
- "Blazing and the Beat," Time, 71:104, February 24, 1958.

- Brustein, Robert. "The Cult of Unthink," Horizon, 1:38-44, September, 1958.
- Burdick, Eugene. "The Innocent Nihilists Adrift in Squaresville," The Reporter, 18:30-33, April 3, 1958.
- Ciardi, John. "In Loving Memory of Myself," Saturday Review, 42:22-23, July 25, 1959.
- Curley, Thomas F. "Myth Into Novel," Commonweal, 66:595, September 13, 1957.
- Duncan, Robert. "This Place, Rumored To Have Been Sodom . . .," Evergreen Review, 1:21, Summer, 1957.
- Eckman, F. "Neither Tame Nor Fleecy," Poetry, 40:386-397, September, 1957.
- Fitzgerald, Edward J. "Be-bop and Blues," Saturday Review, 35:37, October 11, 1952.
- Fuller, J. G. "Trade Winds," Saturday Review, 40:5-7, October 5, 1957.
- Gleason, Ralph. "Kerouac's Beat Generation," Saturday Review, 41:75, January 11, 1958.
- Gold, Herbert. "Hip, Cool, Beat, and Frantic," Nation, 185:349-55, November 16, 1957.
- "Grooking in Lowell," Time, 73:105-6, May 18, 1959.
- Jacobson, D. "America's Angry Young Men: How Rebellious Are the San Francisco Rebels?" Commentary, 24:475-9, December, 1957.
- Jones, Howard Mumford. "Back to Merrimac," Saturday Review, 33:18, March 11, 1950.
- Kerouac, Jack. "October in the Railroad Earth," Evergreen Review, 1:117-136, Summer, 1957.
- _____. "The Last Word," Escapade, 3:72, June, 1959.
- _____. "The Last Word," Escapade, 4:72, October, 1959.
- _____. "The Origins of the Beat Generation," Playboy, 6:31-32, June, 1959.

- _____. "To Harpo Marx," Playboy, 6:44, July, 1959.
- Krim, S. "King of the Beats," Commonweal, 69:159-60, January 2, 1959.
- Murchland, B. G. "Literature of Despair," Commonweal, 67:527-30, February 21, 1958.
- "New San Franciscans," Harper's Magazine, 216:21-2, January, 1958.
- "New Test for Obscenity," Nation, 185:314, November 9, 1957.
- Nyren, Dorothy, "New Books Appraised," Library Journal, 83:2441, September 15, 1958.
- Pearlman, David. "How Captain Hanrohan Made Howl a Best Seller," Reporter, 17:37-9, December 12, 1957.
- Pinck, Don. "Digging the San Franciscans," New Republic, 138:20, March 3, 1958.
- Podhoretz, Norman, "The New Nihilism and the Novel," Partisan Review, 25:576-90, Fall, 1958.
- Rexroth, Kenneth. "Disengagement: The Art of the Beat Generation," New World Writing, 11:28-41, May, 1957.
- _____. "Jazz Poetry," Nation, 186:282-3, March 29, 1958.
- _____. "San Francisco Letter," Evergreen Review, 1:5-14, Summer, 1957.
- _____. "San Francisco's Mature Bohemians," Nation, 184:159-62, February 23, 1957.
- Spicer, Jack. "Berkeley in Time of Plague," Evergreen Review, 1:52, Summer, 1957.
- Rosenthal, M.L. "Poet of the New Violence," Nation, 184:162, February 23, 1957.
- Ross, B. "California's Young Writers, Angry and Otherwise," Literary Journal, 83: 1850-4, June 15, 1958.
- "The Ganser Syndrome," Time, 70:120, September 16, 1957.

C. ESSAYS AND ARTICLES IN COLLECTIONS

Mailer, Norman. "The White Negro," The Beat Generation and The Angry Young Men, Gene Feldman and Max Gartenberg, editors. New York: The Citadel Press, 1958. Pp. 342-62.

D. NEWSPAPERS

Anspacher, Carolyn. "A Beatnik Who Couldn't Beat Success," The San Francisco Chronicle, June 24, 1959, p. 5.

Cannel, Ward. "Can a Beatnik Remain a Beatnik Wearing Brooks Brothers Shirt?" The Ventura (Calif.) County Star-Free Press, June 30, 1959, p. 7.

Morton, Fredric. "This is the Beat Generation," The New York Herald Tribune Book Reviews, October 12, 1952, p. 33.

Newton, Cornelia. "Where the Beats Meet--," The American Weekly, July 26, 1959, pp. 8-11.

Rexroth, Kenneth. "Reviews," The San Francisco Chronicle, February 16, 1958, p. 23.