

EDITORIAL

They have called us the beat generation. Our deities are Dylan, Charlie, Jimmy, and Zen. We dig them. And don't think that "dig" is a phony word, for it's not. It's just our way of putting a word back into the language, a word that got lost somewhere in man's frantic rush to apartment dwelling. "Digging" is feeling something in the guts. It's sexual, and religious, and untranslatable all at the same time. This is if it's used right, and using it right is all feeling and no logic.

We have heard all the tired voices, the Lockian insistence, the Kantian affirmation, the Nietzschean dynamics—but the world has too many geniuses and too few saints. Examples, not instruction, are our first concern. But then the examples are dreams too, just as all knowledge is a dream of that final irresistible moment—that moment when all light is fuzzy, and we "know." There is only that moment out of time, that moment which is 186,000 miles per second, which stops us and makes us beat. We can feel the tired ear and night-faded face on time's flesh—cold cheek pressed to warm bosom.

Knowing is not limited to calculated guessing, but becomes real as an ambulance wail in the empty alleys of the night, real as a new-warm morning's damp sunrise was once real to a little boy leaving home's radio-excitement and trudging across the park to Poplar Street and school. And we don't have to know with drugs or alcohol, but we can know by poetry or speed, or music (Oh particularly music—that prime minister of the arts) or even by just being so tired from moving and talking, running and laughing, that dawn finds us lying on our backs "explaining" to new-found friends, telling them how we want to find God so badly that we'll ride the rails or grab lifts with truckies until we either look Him in the face or freeze to death trying to understand.

But this beat generation cannot be limited to its more colorful *avant garde* or its other fringe, the psychopathic criminal; rather, it should be extended to encompass whole areas of a new reality looked to be much of today's younger generation. It is often not a pretty thing, for it is something which even those involved are not conditioned—either culturally or psychologically, to accept. This reality leads to

an exciting truth, a greater knowledge of man's essentially spiritual nature; but many are poorly prepared—particularly the less well educated and the more traditionally raised—for this revelation

Despite the flounderings of *Time*, *Esquire*, and others to describe its adherents as knighterrants, crusaders pursuing their "holy grail," the beat generation is often conspicuously lacking in positivism. In the beginning it is not so much wanting to know, as feeling that one can never know anything for sure, and realizing this even more than have other cynical generations. We are not even sure that there is nothing—no God, no cosmological absolute, no physical laws, no emotional reality. We feel between everything and part of nothing. We have seen so much "no" that we are sick of the whole thing. It has been cheap plastics, and tin, and phony consumer goods so long (not only in our environment, but in our heredity, too) that many want to forget the whole business. We want to get man away from graphs and charts and group statistics, make him a man again and keep him honest. If nothing else, we know that we want to preserve puny man's immemorial privilege of being able to escape—"to rise above all this jazz."

The group has its real thinkers, its quiet creators, and fervent prophets; but there is likewise a cruel element in it—essentially a segment having only contempt, a subtle sneer, for a society which gives it nothing to believe in, or rather in which it categorically refuses to look for anything in the way of belief. The famous twins—love and hate—are equally represented here. This is the side that nothing can really hurt, the side that can laugh at and love the world at the same time. This is the girl who begins a letter, "I'm just a slut and I know it. I'm no good to myself and I'm no good to society." But all the time she is mothering a whole clan of those more lost in nihilism and passion than she. It's the boy leaving Columbia to take an apartment in Harlem, giving everything to "understand"; it's the little Jew listening to jazz or poetry in a village club, trying to live life with one breath; it's the happy triumvirate on their way to Mexico, where living is cheap, to write and to fall in love with color; and it's even the young Chicago jazzman-student going to Africa, seeking the bloodless revolution.

But we are not all so funny, so goliardic. Less pleasant scenes are equally frequent. There was the girl who, lying drunk on a hard couch after a weekend that had stretched into a year, an infinity of alcohol, could only say, "It used to be funny, didn't it; it used to be such a lark." Another girl—something out of *Seventeen*—took nine

sleeping pills and woke up violently ill, all because the discordance had become too much for her, the moments of escape too beautiful, but too short—too short to bear waiting for the next.

Some have said that this is a basically religious movement, that is at its roots ennobling, heroic search. In a sense it is, but when does searching become hopeless? Perhaps man was not constructed for searching, but should have naturally the things for which he searches. A peace of mind should come at a certain point in life as easily as it did to the old Brahmin who, when the years of farming and raising a family were over, turned naturally to the contemplative life. Is it at all possible to find this true shantit by hunting feverishly for solitary moments of relief?

The West moved in one direction a long time ago, and the East moved in another. Now a slow reunion—a union forming, as Schweitzer put it, "that synthesis of east and west which will produce a more perfect and more powerful form of thought which will conquer the hearts of individuals and compel whole peoples to acknowledge its sway"—is being predicted by the beat generation. Indeed in all its depravity this generation is prophetic, and the pallid distorted faces of its members may be the sweaty masques in the kleig lights of a future scene. But this attempted splicing of philosophies is bound to be painful, and may well be impossible. There is mental and physical agony, mental agony and wrecked bodies dedicated to a few moments of knowing, a few moments of knowing that knowing one moment is knowing all moments—W. B., C. D.

In the Winter, 1958 issue of THE COLLEGE PUBLISHER, sponsored by Pi Delta Epsilon, National Honorary Journalism Fraternity, EXILE was awarded second place in the national magazine contest. The award was in the category of school enrollment from 1200 to 2500 students.

In this issue the editors of EXILE are proud to publish "In the Wake" by Lewis Clarke. This story has been awarded the semi-annual EXILE-Denison Bookstore Creative Writing Prize.