

". . . this is in its way a good travel book which does give a vivid impression of the sweep and variety of the North American continent. We do share the exhilaration of the young at having so much space to move about in. . . . The people they meet on the road are also varied and amusing. . . ."

(Review of *On the Road* in *The Listener*, May 29, 1958)

Nihilism's Organization Man

Clancy Sigal

"Ah well"—Dean laughed—"now you're asking me impondrables—ahem! Here's a guy and everybody's there, right? Up to him to put down what's on everybody's mind. He starts the first chorus, then lines up his ideas, people, yeah, yeah, but get it, and then he rises to his fate and has to blow equal to it. All of a sudden somewhere in the middle of the chorus he *gets it*—everybody looks up and knows; they listen; he picks it up and carries. Time stops. He's filling empty space with the substance of our lives, confessions of his bellybottom strain, remembrance of ideas, rehashes of old blowing. He has to blow across bridges and come back and do it with such infinite feeling soul-exploratory for the tune of the moment that everybody knows it's not the tune that counts but IT—•" Dean could go no further; he was sweating telling about it.

(*On the Road*, p. 206)

NO use talking about Mr. Kerouac's grotesquerie as a novel. What it really is, a meditation, a hipster's threnody on the mortality of love, friends and the last frontier, a deadly stomping alto-saxophone of a book. A valuable document, if we but will, of the search for an attitude to meet the ruthless sea changes in American life, a Rosetta Stone of the Beat Generation.

(Nonetheless, we understood each other on other levels of madness.' P. 6.)

Ooble-o, this is the scene.

A boy named Sal Paradise, adrift in 1947, falls in with this mixed-up crew who have come back from the war, taken a good look around, seen what's coming and firmly declared, *ohne mich*, man, *ohne mich*. Now, led by a transcendent barbarian named Dean Moriarty, who is quite as lost but the most nearly a social outcast (which they are not), they hurl themselves from one town to another for the grandeur that can never be theirs, jumping all over the joint, looking, shouting (no slogans), pounding with their automotive fists at the borders of that great literary Whore-Mother, America, in a dreary, never-ending pursuit of no-down-payment salvation. Like existentialist carpenters blacklegging on some strike-bound building site (and with the bombasticity of the truly furtive), they tap the walls of the national soul, and are unable to bear the hollow silence, the silence of a frontier dead as a doornail. So they smoke tea, change girls more frequently than blown-out tires, talk up a storm and steal cars. Inevitably, this jumped-up game of highway Russian roulette decays and dwindles into emotional daisy-chaining (the boys are constantly looking for Dean Moriarty, who is looking for *his* father, and it's your guess who his father is looking for). Until, in a ferocious panic of insight, they burst through the lower part of the geographic guts, Holy Laredo, Holy Lhasa, to the nirvana of a hipsterized Mexico where the fellahin (and even the police) are cool, man, the most—because nobody in the car speaks Spanish and in America you can't get that poverty- and disease-ridden even if you try. Then, after suitable and ecstatic communion (IT!!) with the night moths of the smothering jungle, these angoisse-filled bop clochards abruptly split off, like molecules in an organism which has lost its function, to

become, perhaps, as bourgeoisified as us squares, to meet again in their 1960 Edsels to exchange the smoky memories of a lost, rapid youth, like the two old roues of that far, far better book on the same subject, *A Sentimental Education*.

("I'm hungry, I'm starving, let's eat right now!" and we'd rush off to *eat* . . . ' P. 10.)

That's it. No less, and a good deal more.

Okay, I know it's easy to knock these kids. Almost as easy, say, as for American publishers, book reviewers and other culture merchants to raise them as the New Baude-laires. Maybe all they need to straighten up and fly right is a good swift kick in the seat of the pants. Like Jimmy Porter or Tony Bolton.

It's tempting to think so. I've known Hip in the never-loving flesh. He's robbed me blind, cuckolded me and once knocked me down a flight of stairs at the New School for Social Research. I bear him no great love. But, I plead, like Willy Loman's wife, this man is *important*.

(We arrived at Council Bluffs at dawn; I looked out. All winter I'd been reading of the great wagon parties that held council there before hitting the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails; and of course now it was only cute suburban cottages of one damn kind and another . . . ' P. 19.)

I say Hip is important because he is, God help us, our brother and our extension, yes even in merrie olde Englande, the absurd and dreadful O Dreamland! image of our reflected selves, the ourselves who will ever dare to look at the lives we lead and the futures that may not be ours, and instead of vomiting from the sheer nausea of despair decides to live yet a while longer, not as we do, but on the very outermost lip of psychic danger: our frightened little brother who tries to befriend the push-button death that awaits us all by fancying its other forms, to wheedle and seduce and neutralize from the modern prospect of death its most monstrous feature, *the bloody impersonalization of it all*.

("Where we going, man?" "I don't know but we gotta go."')

Who is this character, this cool disciple of H-bomb "Togetherness," this American hipster, I say is so fearfully important?

I repeat: us. Us, fragmented, mirrored, conforming with a high vengeance to the values we only nibble at, making a mad mansion out of the capitalist ethic we think we can use for timbering our frail little moral shanties. He is beat, beat down, unutterably confused, isolated in a sea of imposed togetherness, fighting in the only way he knows how, sometimes in the only way open to him, against that contemporary body of thought which makes morally legitimate the pressures of a rudderless, alienated society against the individual. Exhausted, Hip is, before he begins, in a world he never made.

* * *

Hip, in America, is the soldier of that sentimental nihilism which is always just above the surface of city life, the

bohemian waif in a San Francisco jazz cellar crying unshed tears into his weed while up on the bandstand Stan Getz laments the credulities of Lincoln Steffens's promise that the future worked and he had seen it, the creature of an inferior bohemia who is where he is because he couldn't stand where he was (all meanings accepted). Current anti-hero of American culture—Public Enemy Number One—Hip is the high culmination of some tangled trends that have been a long time coming in my native land. And now he's here. We made him, hipster. He's not very nice to look at. But neither are we.

(Then Omaha, and, by God, the first cowboy I saw, walking along the bleak walls of the wholesale meat warehouses in a ten-gallon hat and Texas boots, looked like any beat character of the brickwall dawns of the East except for the get-up.)

By his differences, ye shall know him from the *stilyagi*, the crushed Hundredth Flower, the Swedish *nibonicho*, the kids who they won't let read *Po Prostu* any more, and Jimmy Porter.

Here's Hip . . .

He's read a little. A dangerous little.

He is promiscuous in sex and religion, having faith in neither.

He has an urgent need to drag himself out of the line of fire by marrying early.

Hip on the move

It is impossible to imagine Hip not on the move, interiorly or otherwise. It is his only basic function. He deals in calculated irrationalism, gloats over the Marx brothers but sees W. C. Fields as blood of his blood, reveres oppresses minorities (the more primitive the better) as the coolest, goes to Negroes and Mexicans for redemption and heart's ease but seldom numbers his dark-skinned brothers as personal travelling companions, and is very, very weary without trying to explain why, on the assumption that we, having shared the world's vicissitudes with him, should know why, and if we don't, as Ella Fitzgerald once told the Columbia University professor who asked her for a definition of jazz, if you don't know by now, doc, I got no way of telling you. And Hip isn't kidding, either. He *hasn't* any way.

He has a lousy sex life, taking the orgasm out of its proper place and plastering it on *all* experience.

Though sympathizing with the underdog, he is not a social fighter. He hates explicitness. If he sees a burning KKK cross on a Negro's lawn, he will turn away with a shrug and say, "Well, man, that's the way it goes."

He has no political heroes, only martyrs, preferably those who were killed off before they had a chance to exercise (and thus abuse) power. Among the canonized: Luxemburg and Liebknecht, any old IWWer, Leon Trotsky and Charlie Parker.

Increasingly, as he possesses less of the real stuff, is shoved further and further from what C. Wright Mills calls the levers, he dreams impossible fantasies of power. He attaches himself to anything that will give this illusion of power. DON'T LET HIM GET NEAR OFFUTT AIR BASE AND THAT SMALL RED TELEPHONE.

He is tidy to preserve a small core of inner vitality, equally careful not to expend it lest it betray him. He is not an anarchist, not rebellious as we know the term, but basically submissive, clinically passive.

("Yow!" yelled Dean . . . "Have you dug that Mexican sun, Sal? It makes you high. Whoo! I want to get on and on—this road drives me\|")

Hip is capable of viciousness *without malice*. He will do anything in order to *feel*, in order to deepen his vicarious involvement with death. Savaged, he is, by historic irony:

both the subject and object of the American mania for youth, the victim of that moment when, for the first time since the wave of European immigration slackened, parents have the leisure to devote themselves to their children and are least competent to do so. In his more sensational form, the "juvenile delinquent," he dominates the American scene. Everything is done for him—except to give him a purpose.

He listens to bop to keep cool musically and goes on narcotics to keep cool sexually. He is the perfection of Puritanism. A Lutheran "inner immigrant" would recognize him on sight. He calls you "Man" and "Dad" not because he can't be bothered to remember your name, but because it is one of the stealthy ways he has of insisting on *relationship*.

He has been to high school and even to college, but all the way down the main line he is crudely unlettered, politically illiterate, culturally frigid, unread and unRed. He makes bad puns and screams with the unhappiest, least exultant laughter you ever heard. He loves you and would die for you and wouldn't hesitate to steal your wallet or your car. His long night of the soul began a bit too soon. He is the Organization Man of nihilism.

(They smiled. I pointed my finger at them and said, "If you keep this up you'll both go crazy, but let me know what happens as you go along".)

How did Hipster begin?

In the Beginning, there was the Negro, who never did have an alternative to coolness if he wanted to keep from blowing a fuse. The Negro came north. He began to read musical notes and political pamphlets, to develop a new second-generation type, not come to, but born in the big city and unawed by its warp: a Negro no longer capable of expressing what he felt about rotten wages and ratty housing through the music of Armstrong and Ory and Bessie Smith. A drier, better-educated, more erudite ghetto Negro, to whom certain promises had been made and reneged on, but unwilling to take that famous Leninist step backward: still trapped but growing.

He had a great need, this New Negro, to cut the cord to the old Bible-shouting days. To satisfy this need, he began to blend the sly, rich folkways of the terp forest and cotton plantation with the hard, mocking cynicism of the Harlem experience—and added a new element necessary for keeping his fuse intact: the enervated, uninvolved detachment of the white ofays.

Blasting jazz

I speak of "he" and I mean, above all, the Negro jazz musician, faithful archivist and blasting forerunner, the traditional Keeper of the Covenant and bearer of low and high tidings, the ravening genius who drew from himself and his people their experience and the way they think and talk about it: he codified it and modified it with the proper caricature of the white man's diffidence and, when the time was ripe, lay back to receive disciples.

("Ah," sighed Dean, "the end of Texas, the end of America, we don't know no more".)

After 1945, the time could not have been riper. Ripe to sickness with the undigested shifts in an anyway ambiguous class structure, bottomless with the mistrust of a Janus-faced economy based on a fantastically expanded productive machine (all dressed up with no place to go) tied to the built-in trauma of threat of depression: ripe with war-time family dislocations and a wave of fear and disappointment over Russia, and the slow strangulation of political revolt.

And, my God, how they came, those ofays, driven by nuclear guilts they absolutely refused to think about, high

on the asylum anxieties of a souped-up America blubbing in a world *it* made but without knowing why—literally *sent* out of that house on North Maple Street by the fierce, unbearable friction of the domestically doomed who had gone to the mat in a convulsive effort to find in marriage what could not be found in work or in the great big beyond the front door . . . of a Mother anonymously waylaid on the road to self-recognition and who thought she knew the name of the man, of a Father seeking refuge behind unpaid-four walls from a dodo's job only to find that here too he was losing command.

And so, when the middle-class waif was old enough to take one good look at what was going on inside his family, and co-ordinate what he saw, in some rough way, with what was happening, or about to happen, in the world-at-large, like on-target missiles arching to meet their fate, the lines on the graph of economics, philosophy and emotion met, fused and brought him forth in all his glory, Hipster.

("Sal," he cried, clutching my arm, "just look at this old town. Think how it was a hundred—what the hell, only eighty, sixty years ago; they had opera!" "Yeah," I said . . . "but *they're* here." "The bastards," he cursed.)

Still a disciple, white Hipster came to sit at the feet of those who had already perfected an attitude to meet the new death.

And it was all there, waiting for him, the full panoply and paraphernalia of beatness, bop and weed, cool cars and colder women, right down to the gestures and dialogue, supplied by courtesy of Warner Bros. (*They* don't let you do much of anything for yourself these days, they even try to tell you how to *move* and *talk*.) Hollywood gave Hip what he wanted: a glorious Doppelganger. In Brando and Dean, Hip found a model of what he really felt: hatred of

authority, fierce suspicion of thought, exaggerated pleasure in the simple things that could not hurt him, a detached attitude toward those that could, self-pity and bravery extricably entwined, and in the last analysis a whimpering desire to be let alone and be allowed to re-engage in the childhood joys which had never (he said) betrayed him.

But Hip knew *they* would never let him. And so he prepared for them with his zip guns and heroin needles and lop-sided shrugs and curt refusals to sign petitions for the Rosenbergs or anyone else (except Sacco and Vanzetti, but alas) and his crazy voting patterns and, when all else failed, his Chuck Starkweathers, our all-American Chuck Starkweathers who, when *they* wouldn't leave him alone with his beloved comic magazines, went out and shot eleven people, technically, I suppose, all innocent.

Thus stealing from a traduced and commercialized version of himself (as he always does), Hip, outfitted with the accoutrements of defiant resignation, the whine and mutter and shuffle, was ready to face the world. *Them*. Stanislavski had found a home in that house on North Maple Street, Kansas City, because nobody else could. And then that home was shifted over the Rockies to that still unravished bride of fog and General Strike, San Francisco, the capital of Beat, the most European of our cities. When we Americans search for a lost heritage we don't do it by halves.

(The Indians didn't know that a bomb had come that could crack all our bridges and roads and reduce them to jumbles, and we would be as poor as they someday, and stretching out our hands in the same, same way.)

* * *

Form up and count off, Hip's army.

Right up there in front, trampling out the marching songs of Hip's confederacy, is the musical vanguard, the cool musicians, white and Negro, the true philosophers of the movement, constantly stating, variegating and progressing the theme.

Hipster hangers-on, the multitudes of American teenagers too timid to actually get on the habit or swipe a vehicle but who bend the knee to those who speak in their name by paying good money for the Presley recordings and Dean necrophilia, this is the rank-and-file of Hip's army.

Students, writers and assorted full-time bohemians compose the officer class. Artists and apologists, a young intelligentsia torn between the fruits of rebellion against enemies they cannot see and the tortures of conformity to values of whose alternatives they are unaware. A little honour, a little truth, is all they ask. And what they get is not love but a stone—a Truman who harbours "no qualms" about pressing the button on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Slansky swinging at the end of a rope while his wife applauds in the court room, suburbia where the turn-over rate is an annual 35 per cent. A man's got to have something to hold on to doesn't he? The Dodgers aren't even in Brooklyn any longer.

(We were on the roof of America and all we could do was yell, I guess—across the night, eastward over the Plains, where somewhere an old man with white hair was probably walking toward us with the Word, and would arrive any minute and make us silent.)

The storm troopers of hiptserdom are the "Wild Ones," the leather-jacketed duckass-haircutted Main Street teddy boys on their unmuffled Harley-Davidsons, the Negro, white and Puerto Rican street gangs, each month providing a new Horst Wessel, last month it was Charlie Starkweather, this month Luis Alvarez, next month, don't worry, one will come along.

Finally, of course, bringing up the rear are those we know best, the upper Bohemians. The Ivy League culture cultures,

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the quadrangle virgins and publishing house helots and Business School alumni who don't mind dipping their pinkies in the luscious hot waters of hipsterism if it supplies them with a proper (and vicarious) bohemian "past." Inmates and soon-to-be inmates of exurbia, these undergrad technicians of the Establishment haven't the faintest desire to gamble the uncertainty of their mortgaged, split-level tail-fin futures against the certitudes of hipsterdom, but they're always willing to go along for the ride—provided they can keep their hands on the door handle. (I do not mean to put down these people. Like us, they cannot live by bread alone. Anyway, every army needs its camp followers.)

(In that moment, too, Dean looked so exactly like Franklin Delano Roosevelt—some delusion in my eyes and floating brain—that I drew up in my seat and gasped with amazement.)

So there they are. The phonies, soreheads, tyro sadists, kicks-at-any-price boys, with their hoity-toity shock-the-bourgeoisie antics and Evergreen Reviews, their Daddyism without content or tradition or purpose or courage. Setting them up like this, it's easy, isn't it, to put them down?

And some good men have. A case in point.

'Dissent'

The American quarterly, *Dissent*, recently (winter '58) carried an enterprising controversy based on a provocative and serious apologia of the hipster by Norman Mailer, the novelist. In his original set-piece, Mailer posited the hipster as a "white Negro." But, in a subsequent dialogue principally with the French writer, Jean Malaquais, Mailer then went on to defend Mr. Hip as a flanking attacker on the exploitative character of our productive relations where frontal assault (to Mailer) failed.

"It may well be," Mailer writes,

that the rise of the hipster represents the first wind of a second revolution in this century, moving not forward toward action and more rational equitable distribution, but backward toward being and the secrets of human energy, not forward to the collectivity which was totalitarian in the proof but backward to the nihilism of creative adventurers . . .

From vindication Mailer ascends to a rather terrifying exculpation.

The essence of (Hip's) expression, his faith if you will, is that the real desire to make a better world exists at the heart of our instinct . . . that man is therefore roughly more good than evil, that beneath his violence there is finally love and the nuances of justice, and that the removal therefore of all social restraints while it would open us to an era of incomparable individual violence would still spare us the collective violence of rational totalitarian liquidations . . . and would—and here is the difference—by expending the violence directly, open the possibility of working with that human creativity which is violence's opposite.

Spare us by coshing us? Perhaps. But, with all due respect, I doubt it.

It is a measure of the bitter predicament of the socialist, humanitarian writer in America that, now that all else—for him, for Hip and do we exclude ourselves?—has failed, he must needs fall back upon this hoary, this dangerous invocation of nothingness to furnish some feeble ray of hope in a hopelessly languid landscape. A nothingness which Mailer must know has political as well as personal consequences. Spare us "the violence of totalitarian liquidations"—or simply take us a step closer to it?

("Man, he's the end! You see, if you go like him all the time you'll finally get it." "Get what?" "IT. IT!".')

Jean Malaquais, who has had personal experience of nihilism in jack boots, is sceptical of this enthusiastic view of Hip. Nauseated by the wretched sterility of Hip, Malaquais rounds off on Mailer for investing the hipster with virtues old-time Marxists once ascribed to the proletariat. To him,

Hip is, pure and simple, the American lumpen, a frustrated conformist—but a conformist in reverse.

Now if man's fate is to live with death (writes Malaquais), how does the hipster manage to divorce himself from society since he does accept "the terms of death"? If the terms are death, and if he accepts the terms—nay, if he so to speak naturalizes the terms generally prevailing for his private use, why he conforms nice and clean, he is at the *avant-garde* of conformity. . . . "Death you want?" says Hip to society. "Good, death there'll be!" And there he goes, the small entrepreneur in death competing with industrial death.

For what it's worth, my own view falls somewhere between Mailer's compassion (without the mystical sanctification) and Malaquais's warning (without the sneering) that Hip "makes excellent conformists and the best of potential hangmen for 'order's' sake." Hip cannot be hosannahed as the new Teacher of Righteousness simply because he has so starkly declared himself *out*, nor dismissed as a mere boot-camp lumpen just because we don't like the way *he* swings. Hip is too mercurial and complex. All I can humbly suggest at this distance of 3,000 miles, is that we keep a weather eye on Hip as a study in ourselves given enough rope.

(As to Hip's potency for political thuggery, I think a better case could be made out for the "normal" teenager anywhere below the Mason-Dixon. But, in honesty, I don't really know about Hip's fascist potential. I hope nobody ever tries him.)

(I wasn't frightened at all that night; it was perfectly legitimate to go 110 and talk and have all the Nebraska towns—Ogallala, Gothenburg, Kearney, Grand Island, Columbus—unreel with dreamlike rapidity as we roared ahead and talked.)

Now, when we try using *On the Road*, or most other art works of bop, as a literary isotope to locate at first hand the spontaneous culture of the hipster (and therefore, a good deal more than hipster), immediately we run into difficulties. For one thing, the writing is both too artful and too puerile, too self-consciously Whitmanesque-modern, to permit our genuinely eavesdropping. For another, the author, Kerouac, is too sophisticated by half: he goes out of his way to fuzz up the social setting. No "realistic" nonsense here; in fact, no real people at all, simply a motorized abstraction of Hip blown up to quasi-epic Mike Fink proportions, and distilled by a clever young writer into one crudified, gigantic Attitude which, like its best-selling mirror opposite, Cozzens's *By Love Possessed*, falsifies everything about life except itself, and is, therefore, fair game for—no, not the literary critic—the sociologist.

(We were all delighted, and we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function of the time, *move*.)

Finally, a reminder that more, and better, Hip novels have been written—but without touching much of a public nerve (which *On the Road* obviously has). To do that, several things had to happen first. Most important, *the elimination from the American scene of the moral vocation*. To clear the field, as it were, of anything Hip might call his own. This done, almost any novel would have sufficed. And while I mean Mr. Kerouac no dishonour, it was his that came along. (A single proof of what may appear to be a vulgar Plekhanovian thesis is that *On the Road* is written about a distinctly unrepresentative brigade of the hipster army. Though the author all but conceals it, Sal Paradise, Dean and Remi and all the other jack-balling wanderers are over-age and reflect an older, more "conservative" and probably obsolescent hipster condition. In all likelihood, they would be disqualified today for membership in Coolest Cats Anonymous on grounds of being too frantic.)

But since most facets of hipsterism have the same societal matrix—a successfully industrialized, morally apathetic, emotionally numb, "welfarised" state—almost any of its creations, whether between book covers, iron bars or handle bars, bears the authentic stamp of the world. And *On the Road* does possess the advantage of clearly exposing, if tediously coxcombing, the compulsive cravings and shattered dream-images of Hip. Granted, Hip represents only an infinitesimal minority of the youth population of America. But the attitudes of which he is embodiment and apotheosis are shared, to one degree or another, by millions of young and not so young Americans, and go a long way to explain otherwise inexplicable behaviour. It's no good saying, "Oh well, the Yanks are like that. *On the Road*, read without that insular snigger so typical of English literary critics, says why.

(At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver colored section, wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered me was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night. . . .)

Dreiser -thundered to keep the "American dream" un-sullied. Wolfe suspected it was too late. Kerouac *knows* it.

Authors with their pants down

The style of *On the Road* pretty much gives the game away: a heavy, embarrassing admixture of Salinger's vulnerable-boyism, Algren's grim colloquial beatness and the spare horror of Nathaniel West, with just enough Wolfe-Whitman to give elbow room for that requisite America-yahooing without which no ambitious young author would be caught with his pants down. Salinger, Algren and West, the nay-sayers. Kerouac has a cool eye for antecedents.

(The magnificent car made the wind roar; it made the plains unfold like a roll of paper; it cast hot tar from itself with deference—an imperial boat.)

Salinger's prep school sad sacks set off almost exactly the same kind of shock of recognition in young American readers as Hemingway's men-at-arms once did, and in the contrasting archetypes of Jake-Lt. Henry and Holden Caulfield we have a certain truth, beauty and all we need to know about what happened in America between 1925 and 1945, including the almost vertiginous shift from older to younger people. In twenty years grace under fire lost its braggadocio, its social elan, in favour of the more private whimper.

("Where we going, man?" "I don't know but we gotta go".)

By Kerouac's (our) time, the sense of injury is completely retroactive, the rebellion now totally personal. Hip, as psychic gun, is aimed squarely, frankly between the eyes of society, no fooling around this time. The fear of life which in Hemingway was translated into bravado, in Salinger to a kind of sceptical *cri-di-coeur*, is in Kerouac reduced to its ultimate: boredom. Sheer, dribbling, vicious boredom. Boredom, self-hating and lonely, to disguise the sense of injury and deprivation blocked of any rational come-back. Boredom, as shield. To what end? Toward, given America, what other? The guarding of the sacred cojones when hemmed in by a social apparatus which sometimes seems, from Hip's point of view, little more than a sovereign exercise in chopping of same.

(With frantic Dean I was rushing through the world without a chance to see it.)

That's why they *have* to keep on the move. Each town they stay in for more than a few hours becomes a stifling cage. Maybe, they lie to themselves, over the next state line it won't be. But it always is. And so they move on again, Sal and Dean and Remi, roaring down that old Highway 66, fed by the crazy whine of burning out tires and the spark of hope that somewhere, anywhere, it may be better. But no. The romance of the place names may beckon like a junkie's vision, but when they get there it's always the same dead-end story. Neon-lit loneliness, Americans just as confused as they. But they cannot admit, on pain of losing what sanity they still retain, the defeat of their young dreams. So, once again, they must jump into their stolen Caddie or shaved-down Mercury—and go, man, go.

Where? Nowhere. Everywhere.

(It was with a great deal of silly relief that these people let us off the car at the corner of 27th and Federal. Our battered suitcases were piled on the sidewalk again; we had longer ways to go. But no matter, the road is life.)

Why? Because, like any Organization Man whose wife puts *Bon Ami* on the picture window so the neighbours won't see the furniture hasn't arrived yet, the cage has been internalized. The very act of escape is augury that it is *too late* to flee, too late to shake off the leeches: it is this which is the hipsters' fatal irony. They carry the plague with them. All their attitudes—towards women, especially—are not anti- what they have come from, but dialectical extensions of those self-same attitudes and values. What else is their promiscuous and joyless fornication but a parody of the sexual switch-back of the average American home; what is habitual car-stealing and miscellaneous thievery (psycho-

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To The Business Manager Janet Hase
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analyses aside for the moment) but a franker playing out of the Protestant-cum-Business ethic; what is narcotics habit but the more honest version of addiction to "I Love Lucy," "Superman" and Norman Vincent Peale? No half-way measures for these boys. (As I said, when we Americans go on the hunt for our stolen heritage, we aren't pikers.)

Once, just for a moment back there, probably during or just after the war, there was an interregnum of hope that they might escape their phoney fates. The boys in *On the Road* are just old enough to remember the 'Thirties, F.D.R.'s fireside chats and Gen. MacArthur's ebullient telegrams to the Red Army, to have partaken (as I think some must have) in the dying but not yet dead radical cause, to have believed in some sort of bright promise. The Cold War shot that promise dead in its tracks.

By the Left, Right turn

On the Left, the New-Square-Fair Deal liberals scattered in the face of the enemy, C.I.O. idealism degenerated into fat-cattism, the Communist Party generously assisted in digging its own grave. It only needed Korea and the 20th Congress to finish the job. The organized movement of men of goodwill (let's not quibble over percentages) crumbled. And with it, the spirits of millions of Americans. And when the moral failure of the Soviet Union became nakedly apparent, a very great number of people, not excluding a wide assortment of conservatives, who had taken a sort of surreptitious hope and instruction from its existence, in their heart of hearts, had *had* it. They were *gone*.

(' "All I hope, Dean, is some day we'll be able to live on the same street with our families and get to be a couple of old-timers together".')

If only there had been something to fight *against*. But no.

On the Right, the isolationists and pro-fascists put on the Halloween mask of "internationalism," Bilbo and Rankin died and went to hell, even Nixon buried his stiletto in the back garden for future use.

The villains had gone underground, leaving behind them only a thin spoor of statistics. And who, after all, is interested in statistics? Certainly not Hip. You and me? Maybe.

Suddenly there was nobody to cheer, nobody to boo. A sunless day of the locust descended on all who had eyes to see in America. The power elite had it made.

Accidents occurred. Joe McCarthy. A natural. What happened? Suddenly a nation of St. George's could be counted on the fingers of one hand. The moral guide-lines, fraying slowly over the years, had snapped.

I wish I could reproduce a Herblock cartoon of those days. It depicted a snarling, neanderthal McCarthy, bloody meat cleaver in hand, belligerently confronting the nation's chief executive. At the side of the President's clean unspattered business suit hung a military scabbard. He had had enough. Eisenhower, the Nicest Guy of All, Our Father who art on the 16th hole, was finally angry. "Take care, sir!" he warned. And from his scabbard he flourished—a feather.

Big Daddy had failed us.

(On a recent world tour, Marlon Brando was received in Filipino barrios by teenage kids hanging from trees shouting a line of dialogue from the film, *Rebel Without Cause*. They said: "Why don't you *stand up* for me, dad?" Readers are free to draw international conclusions.)

No papa, no mama, no hero and no villain, Hip doesn't have very much to go by. He becomes rather confused.

And very, very angry. Sometimes, as in the poems of Allen Ginsberg or Kenneth Rexroth, literary Hip directs this fury at having lost a light to live by at the traditional rebel targets. "Who killed Cock Robin? (Dylan Thomas), *You* did in your goddam Brooks Brothers suits."

But more often, Hip legitimises himself as a member of the "Silent Generation" by lashing out at himself to get at the world.

Young Hip, of the Korean generation, flies blind on his motorbike, playing out his infantile let's-play-house repressions with detailed and unparalleled brutality.

Older Hip, like Kerouac's boys, immolates himself in all America.

What's in it?

Both elevate flashing sense-data to a kind of religion-on-the-move, a silly little boy's religion it's true, but not without its own peculiar beauty in the accumulated act. Hungry young men conniving at their own suicide at 100 m.p.h. is, after all, the exquisite symbol of the sickness of American life.

(' "You know, I'm beginning to like this smell," said Stan. "I can't smell myself any more." "It's a strange, good smell," said Dean.')

You takes your choice

Last week I had a letter from a friend in America, a former scientist (maths and physics), age 35, who has a job in a large corporation, with salary, perks and prospects better than anything you or I are liable to fall into in our lifetimes. My friend lives in a nice house in a nice suburb. I quote:

The (name of family) ship is having rudder trouble. Can't decide whether to go east or west. . . . I just read a Faulkner short story called "Old Man" . . . A young, very earnest, convict is sent out in a skiff to rescue a woman. She turns out to be pregnant. Currents are such that he can't get back. All sorts of trouble. Whirling around on various rivers, ponds, etc., for days and days. . . . When he tries to land the skiff the soldiers shoot at him because they think he is an escaped convict. When it is all over he gets ten years more sentence for supposedly trying to escape. . . . The facts are simple: I like my job and do not wish to leave it. On the other hand, I believe I must leave it within two years because of a lack of long range security. . . . My wife is incapable of existing without "The Plan." I can't provide "The Plan" . . . I like big business. It is very interesting. If I had to do it over I would have studied finance and gone to Harvard. It seems to me that the only way today of obtaining enough leisure (remember my two infants) to pursue the worthwhile things in life—I'm not sure just what they are at the moment—is to make lots of money . . .

Also last week, I heard a Communist journalist, just back from Russia, say that the easiest way to get a laugh in any Moscow university classroom is to stand up and, without comment, declaim a slogan of the 1917 revolution.

You pays your money and you takes your choice.

(It was no longer east-west, but magic *south*. . . . "Man, this will finally take us to IT!" said Dean with definite faith . . .')

Don't laugh. The laugh may be on you if Jimmy Porter ever buys a car.

What's it all in aid of? Ask teddy boy. He knows.

Ask Nye Bevan. At Brighton he confirmed 100,000 teddy boys in their vocation.

So I have news for the front bench of the Labour Party. They may sneak in the back door at the next General Election by not talking socialism. But if they do I give a fair and fraternal warning. They'd better start building more and bigger Borstals. They'll be needing them.