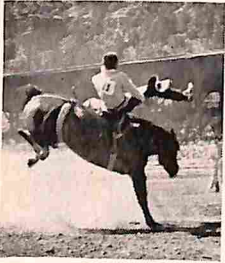


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LIFE BOOK REVIEW

Nothing Like Age To Beat a Beatnik

NOTHING MORE TO DECLARE

by John Clellon Holmes (E. P. Dutton & Co.) \$4.95

That quaintly old-fashioned phenomenon, the Beat Generation, has now had its semiofficial biography written by John Clellon Holmes, a middle-aging ex-Beat and author of *The Horn*, perhaps—small praise—the best jazz novel ever published.

At times, *Nothing More To Declare* is nearly as perfervid as its subject—a montage of frantic hipsters making frantic scenes. Holmes's essays, at their freest form, read as if they had been scribbled by guttering candlelight on the margins of a long and hectic party. But by his own excesses, he has caught the peculiar Zen-bop-and-bongos tempo of the Beats, just as they, in their way, captured the rhythms of the 1950s.

A 10-year party, Holmes recalls, was the favorite Beat dream: "The doors would always be open, the lights would never go out, the music would always play." It is only giving history a slight surrealistic twist to say that the Beats got their wish. What a marathon of a party the Beat decade was!

Here, exploding firecrackers in an ashtray, broods Beat Poet Laureate Allen Ginsberg, wistfully aspiring to be "everyone's Monster, the thing they can't bear to face" but looking rather like a cross between "an inquisitive dormouse" and "the caricature of a guru"—Chaplin playing Gandhi. At the party's storm center, openly charming, guilefully naive, basks the author of the Beat Bible (*On the Road*)—everyone's good-looking younger brother, Jack Kerouac. On a fringe, carefully arranging smashups between incompatible personalities, Jay Landesman, editor of *Neurotica*, operates—in black shirt, yellow tie, and desert boots. In a desperate corner, behind a walrus mustache, lurks Gershon Legman, the "St. Jerome of the Bronx," who collects erotica the way monks collected holy bones.

With the languid power of a truant and moves on: through Spanish Harlem and Birdland, in and out of apartments that are facsimiles of Von Sternberg sets, flitting briefly under the skin-greening fluorescents of window cafeterias.

"We gotta get

Strong on energy, weak on vision, the party rolls outward, onward: to Big Sur, to Mexico, to the Ganges, with a curious American timidity in its heart. Over the horizon around that next bend, the good news is sure he will stumble upon his own his vision, his "kick in the eye" as when he sits down at the typewriter he trusts that the rhythmic the keys will carry him to where All Will Happen.

Most parties hit that inevitable moment when they peak out and bubbles begin to go flat in the air. Some kind of invisible balloons deflate. Things return to earth, like men and begin to think about tomorrow. What gives Holmes his historical substance—what makes him more than just recording a party to a cultural binge—is that he can unwind a party as well as witness

He knows the 3 a.m. panic in the heart of the hipster, swinging the proposition "I feel, therefore I am"—and feeling less and less; plugging himself with new pleasures (and pains) to see if he is still there; playing, like Mailer, of "the comedy of new circuits," of LSD and electro-stimulation of the brain.

At last, the party that has lasted so long just sort of broke up. Perhaps it was the day enough like Holmes, caught themselves in it was Handel's world. Perhaps it was Charlie Mingus'. Perhaps it was sheer middle age—the detour of a hedonist's hang-up.

Holmes himself is now 40 and of the excessive loyalties to his temporaries which come from knowing that the young are now just his enemy. His very harshest judgment on the Beats reads: "game-playing style-enamoured . . . too factually continually aware." It may be a fair comment on his book about the Beats in their peculiar innocence did not know; that they forgive its clumsiness!—is just long to be strung on a chain of

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