THE GIRL GANG: WOMEN WRITERS
OF THE NEW YORK CITY
BEAT COMMUNITY

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by
Tatum L. Petrich
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Examining Committee Members:

Miles Orvell, Committee Chair, English and American Studies
Sue-Im Lee, English
Eli C. Goldblatt, English
Laura Levitt, External Member, Religion and Women's Studies, Temple University

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ABSTRACT

The Girl Gang: Women Writers of the New York City Beat Community seeks to revise our understanding of the Beat community and literary tradition by critically engaging the lives and work of five women Beat writers: Diane di Prima, Joyce Johnson, Hettie Jones, Carol Bergé, and Mimi Albert. This dissertation argues that, from a position of marginality, these women developed as protofeminist writers, interrogating the traditional female gender role and constructing radical critiques of normative ideas in fiction and poetry in ways that resisted the male Beats' general subordination of women and that anticipated the feminist movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. A project of recovery and criticism, *The Girl Gang* provides literary biographies that explore how each writer's experience as a marginalized female writer within an otherwise countercultural community affected the development of her work; it also analyzes a range of works (published and unpublished texts from various genres, written from the early 1950s through the turn of the twenty-first century) in order to illustrate how each writer distinctively employs and revises mainstream and Beat literary and cultural conventions. The dissertation's critical analyses examine each writer's engagement in various literary, cultural, and social discourses, drawing attention to their incisive and provocative treatment of thematic issues that are central to the postwar countercultural critique of hegemonic norms—including fundamental Beat questions of identity, authenticity, and subjectivity—and that are developed through experimentation with literary conventions. Ultimately, *The Girl Gang* argues that the literary achievements of the New York City women Beats collectively reconceptualize the prevailing notion of the Beat community and canon.

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INTRODUCTION
REDEFINING THE IMAGE OF THE BEAT WRITER: WOMEN BEATS AND PROTOFEMINISM IN THE BEAT LITERARY COMMUNITY

> *The social organization which is most true of itself to the artist is the girl gang.* Why, everyone would agree, that's absolutely absurd!
>
> —Joyce Johnson, *Minor Characters*

When the Beats emerged in the late 1940s and 1950s, mainstream American literature was generally considered "traditionalist" and "academic." In contrast to representative writers of the period, such as poets T.S. Eliot and Richard Wilbur, and novelists Saul Bellow and John Updike, Beat writers experimented with literary form and subject as part of their overt condemnation of contemporary society's social and political values.[1] With the movement's defining and controversial publications in the mid- to late 1950s—Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956), Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), and William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959)—and the obscenity trial of *Howl* in 1957 as well as the ban of *Naked Lunch* in 1962, the Beats established themselves as antithetical to the mainstream's "academic" literary culture.[2] They were lauded and admired by young rebellious readers, yet criticized and even mocked by the mainstream media and leading intellectuals.

However unwittingly, Ginsberg and Kerouac (and Burroughs to a lesser extent) quickly became spokesmen for the Beat Generation, and this literary community and cultural movement as represented by these writers and their publications became synonymous with a decidedly male ethos. The image of *On the Road*'s Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, for example, escaping normative male expectations for work and marriage and instead pursuing "girls, visions, everything" on their own terms[3] became the epitome of what it meant to be "Beat." In this representative text and in the Beat

community itself, women were generally considered by the men as mere "experiences," or as Kerouac writes, as "girls [who] say nothing and wear black."[4] Many of the male Beats expected women to play the role of lover, housewife, mother, or secretary, and in fact, several of the women Beats were romantically involved with and helped support the men. As such, women Beats are often positioned in the background of prominent Beat texts—fictional and nonfictional—as well as in photographs, letters, and interviews documenting the period. However, many women Beats were also aspiring writers who set out, like the men, to radically redefine normative ideas through writing and through their involvement in various literary endeavors, such as the publication of small magazines.

Nevertheless, women Beat writers were subject to conservative postwar notions of the female role and were largely marginalized by their male counterparts accordingly. The attitude of the male Beats toward women writers is aptly expressed in a "dream letter" by John Clellon Holmes (recorded by Allen Ginsberg in 1954): "The social organization which is most true of itself to the artist is the boy gang."[5] The male Beats' assertion that the "true" organization of artists is a "boy gang" reflects their perpetuation of the dominant gender discourse of the period, and in light of this attitude, Beat women consistently faced gender-based discrimination—from male Beats as well as from the press, critics, and publishers—in their efforts to become writers.

Importantly, in the epigraph to this chapter, we see how female Beat writers resisted their subordination as women within the Beat community and their exclusion from the role of artist. The passage in the epigraph comes from Beat writer Joyce Johnson's 1983 memoir and represents her attempt to claim social status for female artists: "*The social organization which is most true of itself to the artist is the girl gang.*

Why, everyone would agree, that's absolutely absurd!"[6] In the italicized line, Johnson revises the passage by Holmes/Ginsberg quoted above, appropriating for female artists the recognition of male artists as defining the "true" social organization. The subsequent line in the epigraph, however, illustrates how her effort is ultimately undermined by society's general attitude toward the idea of the female artist as on par with the male artist; such a possibility, Johnson suggests, is considered "absolutely absurd!"[7] Significantly, despite the prolonged struggle of women Beats to overcome society's limited assumptions about female writers, the act of revision itself demonstrated in the epigraph—Johnson's attempt to speak for and claim status for the female artist by rewriting the quotation that epitomizes the male Beats' gender discrimination—signifies what Adrienne Rich referred to in 1971 as an act of "survival."[8] "Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched," Rich writes, "we cannot know ourselves."[9] Johnson's deliberate confrontation of the male Beats' attitude toward and treatment of the female artist, and her attempt to "refus[e] the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society" through writing signifies the fundamental achievement of women Beat writers.[10] They refused to be resigned to the margins of the Beat literary community and instead set out to develop their own voices as writers and their own critique of postwar society, including a critique of hegemonic—and countercultural—gender norms.

Much of their work, however, has been ignored by literary scholars due to the pervasive image of the Beat as an iconoclastic male figure. *The Girl Gang: Women Writers of the New York City Beat Community* addresses this limited attention to and the narrow portrayals of these writers as it examines the lives and works of five women Beat writers in New York City. I set out to redefine prevailing conceptions of the New York

City Beat literary community by arguing that Beat women played an integral role, not merely as support for the male Beats, but more significantly as female figures who sought to develop social and political status as artists within this largely male homosocial community. That the women writers were generally marginalized by the male Beats and did not foster a female literary community amongst themselves points to the complexity of their experiences within this context and underscores the particular significance of their individual efforts to pursue their literary endeavors while confronted with the limited expectations of their male counterparts. *The Girl Gang: Women Writers of the New York City Beat Community* examines these efforts through recovery and criticism. As a recovery project, this dissertation aims to provide more insight into these writers' lives and bodies of work than is currently available—these writers' literary accomplishments include major works of prose and poetry and illustrate a range of interests and a diversity of styles. As a work of criticism, this dissertation discusses women Beats as writers in their own right, providing readings of select texts in order to show how these writers employ and revise mainstream and Beat literary and cultural conventions and engage in questions of subjectivity, identity, and community in ways importantly shaped by the female experience.

Specifically, *The Girl Gang* focuses on the poetry of Diane di Prima and on the fiction of Joyce Johnson and Hettie Jones in the main chapters and on the fiction of Carol Bergé and Mimi Albert in the Epilogue, including unpublished texts and texts published from the late 1950s through the 1970s. At a time when most publications by Beat women are memoirs by sisters, wives, and girlfriends of prominent male Beat writers[11] and when publications about Beat women include studies of figures such as Neal Cassady's wife,

LuAnne Henderson, in order to provide further insight into Beat men's experiences,[12] this dissertation focuses on Beat women whose role in Beat history and literature exceeds their personal relationships with the men. Some of the writers I discuss here employ Beat literary techniques, while others generally use traditional literary conventions to write about Beat experiences. Regardless of their approach, this study reveals serious writers who, collectively, engage in discourses of subjectivity, the contemporary avant-garde, feminist geography, postmodernism, and interracialism, and in doing so, challenge and extend our understanding of their contributions to the Beat literary tradition. *The Girl Gang* draws attention to female Beats who were writing alongside Beat men—literally or figuratively—and whose work has distinctive and significant literary, cultural, social, and political implications.

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My study of the lives and work of women Beats is predicated on the role that community played in both the genesis and later development of these understudied women writers. It was within the countercultural community of the Beats that these women sought freedom from their stifling homes and conservative postwar society as well as inspiration for their independence and artistic interests. They endeavored to become writers, but, as mentioned above, within this bohemian community they faced the male Beats' perpetuation of the hegemonic female gender role.[13] Though the men in general dissented against the conventions of the mainstream, their critique of the male gender norm precluded attention to a critique of the women's.

In light of the male Beats' fundamentally conventional and discriminatory attitude toward women writers within this otherwise countercultural community, female Beat

writers faced a paradox. As nonconformists in their own right, women Beats were able to escape their families' restrictive expectations by living on their own amongst fellow bohemians within the New York City Beat community, but within this same social space, their work as writers was generally not encouraged nor fostered as part of the community's reaction against the mainstream.[14] That is, as I explore in more detail shortly, the women Beats were part of the Beat community in that they had friendships, romantic relationships, apartments, and jobs with male and female writers and artists—indeed, the women Beats often financially supported many of the male Beats and directly participated in the editing and publishing of Beat work while writing on their own—but they did not experience the sense of camaraderie or the support for their writing that the Beat men did. As a result, many Beat women wrote privately during this period, not sharing their work with other writers—male or female. Thus, the mutual support and collaboration that was a defining element of the male Beat writer's experience—and is a defining element of literary communities in general—was lacking for most female Beat writers, and as such, the very nature of community is especially complex for the women Beats.

In light of this complexity, this dissertation examines the women Beats' experiences as burgeoning writers within this context and the impact of these experiences on their writing and on the development of female subjectivity within their work. In order to contextualize this framework, I discuss the basic concept of the literary community as well as its role in American literary history before providing an overview of the development of the Beat literary community.

Individual literary communities can each be defined by their own particularities; indeed, each is shaped by its own historical, geographical, social, cultural, and political contexts. I use the term literary community broadly to refer to a group of writers committed to producing writing that reflects, not necessarily similar aesthetics, but common social and artistic values, and perhaps shared political and philosophical beliefs. These values and beliefs often take shape in the community as a reaction against an already established group or literary tradition, as in the case of the Beats writing in resistance to the academic tradition of the New Critics or of the modernists writing in reaction to the realists before them, for example. Such groups of writers are also often involved in related literary endeavors, including the founding of literary magazines, book presses, or publishing houses, as well as the organization of literary readings. Almost always, the most basic element of a literary community is the fostering of each other's work.

The central role that community has historically played for writers in the U.S. can be traced from the Knickerbocker group in New York City in the early 1800s, to the Concord group in Massachusetts in the 1840s and 1850s, to the Boston Brahmins in the 1870s and 1880s, to the Modernists in New York City and the "Robin's Egg Renaissance" in Chicago during the 1910s and 1920s, and to the Harlem Renaissance as well as to the literary renaissance in Santa Fe, both from the 1920s to the 1930s. Following such nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary communities were the several communities contemporary to the Beats during the 1950s and 1960s: the San Francisco Renaissance, the Black Mountain College school, and the New York School of Poets.

As one of the earliest American literary communities, the Concord group helps demonstrate the particular function of community for developing writers. In the mid-nineteenth century, writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman collaborated with each other and drew inspiration from their Concord setting—all of which enabled the production of what would come to define a new national literature. These writers—many of which are identified as Transcendentalists[15]—set out to establish an American literature distinct from the European literary tradition, and as Perry Miller argues, they did so in conjunction with a general resistance to conventional expectations for earning a living. Miller writes, "They turn[ed] their protest against what is customarily called the 'Protestant ethic': they refuse[d] to labor in a proper calling, conscientiously cultivate[d] the arts of leisure, and [strove] to avoid making money."[16] These writers rebelled against "the materialistic pressures of a business civilization" and fostered a community through which they could pursue their philosophical and artistic interests and develop various styles of literary expression.[17]

Histories of this literary group emphasize the intertwining of the writers' personal and literary lives, including various friendships, romantic relationships, and literary inspirations as well as similar political and philosophical beliefs shared amongst them. Together, this group of writers held "Conversations," published each other's works in literary magazines, and ultimately set out to develop a uniquely American literature. Importantly, regardless of their common interests and values and relatively similar approaches to writing, each writer is characterized by his or her distinctive writing style, such as Emerson's poetic prose, driven by his reliance on intuition, and Whitman's

organic and breath-driven poetry. This representative American literary community illustrates how such a community functions through the development of individual literary practices and aesthetics that are fostered simultaneously through shared attitudes toward the writers' social, cultural, and political contexts.

Additionally, the development of the Concord literary community reveals the particular significance of its geographical context—that is, the role that place fundamentally plays for literary communities. In the early formation of the Concord group, Emerson helped convince Alcott to move from Boston to Concord because, as scholar Susan Cheever explains, "It was in the quieter precincts of Concord, calmed by the rhythms of village life, that men could think important thoughts uninterrupted by others' opinions and obligations."[18] Though the Concord writers' attraction to the rural town of Concord presents an interesting contrast to the attraction of the Beats to city life (to be discussed below), this emphasis on the distinction between Concord and Boston—how the former could potentially allow for more intellectual and artistic creativity than the latter—nevertheless highlights the importance of place for the development of a literary community.

Another example that illustrates the function of place for literary communities is the group of writers in Taos, near Santa Fe, in the early 20th century. Writers such as Witter Bynner, Mary Austin, and Mabel Dodge [Luhan] were drawn to the "aesthetic trends developing around architecture in the city" as well as to "positive working conditions for artists there, [and] some aspects of weather, terrain, and [the] proximity of native peoples ["to their ancestral traditions"]."[19] Amidst these unique characteristics of the southwestern city, writers found an "artistic milieu and atmosphere of collegiality"

that helped foster a literary community.[20] Michael Davidson likewise emphasizes the particular landscape of San Francisco as having influenced the flourishing of writers in the postwar period. He cites "the city's undeniable physical beauty—its position at the edge of the continent, its hills, its quickly shifting weather patterns, and its wild seacoast" as features that worked in conjunction with its "underground culture" to ultimately become "[an] invariabl[e] central character" in the work of the San Francisco Renaissance poets.[21] Further, the actual shared spaces of the city, "the circles, salons, and bars," provided the opportunities for "artists [to] invent out of the earthly city a heavenly city of fulfilled potential."[22] These examples indicate that the role of place for artistic development within literary communities is central, and this will be evident in my study of the women writers of the New York City Beat community as well.

As for other American literary groups, community provided the Beats with an opportunity to develop a collective counterpart to the mainstream in its fostering of nontraditional artistic, spiritual, and philosophical expression. The countercultural nature of the Beat community can be traced back to the first group of American bohemians, which took shape in the early decades of the 1900s when avant-garde writers and artists in Greenwich Village set out to pursue possibilities for cultural transformation as the nation entered a new century. For these earlier bohemians and for the Beats, community provided a space within which individuals—particularly nonconformists and artists—could escape and critique the mainstream and its culturally-defined restrictive mandates. As Elizabeth Wilson argues, bohemianism is undeniably a "collective enterprise,"[23] one that offers an alternative space for those who intend to revolutionize society through art as well as those only somewhat committed to or productive in art.[24]

Ironically, the countercultural Beat community was initially formed on the campus of Columbia University in the early 1940s. The friendships between Columbia students Ginsberg, Kerouac, Lucien Carr, and Burroughs (a former graduate student), were based not only on a mutual interest in writing, but perhaps more distinctively, on a shared pursuit of what Ginsberg referred to as a "New Vision"—what Edward Foster describes as "a new way of understanding the world."[25] Ultimately, what brought these Beats together in this community—and the others that would follow—was a common attitude toward the artificiality of American society at the time. In the face of the country's growing "modernization and homogenization," the Beats sought "a new and authentic space" within which "[they could] found an identity on the bedrock of the naked self, free of compromising cultural and historical accretions, an Adamic desire for an experience of freedom, integrity, and authenticity generally unavailable within conventional culture."[26] Regardless of any individual differences in artistic practice, the Beats as a group were fundamentally drawn together by a fevered pursuit of the real and authentic—of a lived experience free from the constraints of societal constructs and defined by intimate contact with material reality. And although the New York City Beat community began with the friendships of young men, it also attracted young rebellious women, for whom an alternative community had the potential for supporting their own acts of nonconformity—such as dropping out of college, leaving home to live on their own, or immersing themselves in the avant-garde.[27] The experiences of the women within this community may have been quite different from those of their male counterparts, but the men's and women's fundamental attraction to New York City bohemia is largely indistinguishable.

As mentioned above, New York City itself played a key role in shaping the Beats' attempts to pursue an authentic experience. Ann Douglas explains that despite the "frightening American empire" growing in certain areas of post-WWII New York City, Beat writers found inspiration in neighborhoods that were "then visibly on a downward slide."[28] For the Beats, "the city's vitality lay in its subterranean life of creative decay, its status as a place, in Ginsberg's words, 'too vast to know, too/myriad windowed to govern.'"[29] Though the male Beats traveled all over the world—to Mexico, Tangiers, and Paris, for example—New York City was where they met and began to seek out an authentic American experience; it was where their formative years as writers would take shape, and it would become a central trope in much of their writing. The women Beats, on the other hand, did not go "on the road" in the same way the men did, and so they developed as women and as writers strictly within the city—moving out of their parents' homes, even if only a few blocks away, to explore the city as independent women. In was within New York City that Beat women came into their own; they held various jobs, raised children, and wrote and published their work in New York City. Thus, New York City was central to the development and writing of the Beats in general and of the women Beats in particular, and I explore this further as it more specifically applies to the individual writers throughout my discussions of their work.

While the New York City Beat community emerged as a collective response to what was perceived as the overwhelming and growing confinement of postwar America, it is notably marked by a wide range of aesthetic diversity among its individual writers. Indeed, no two Beat writers necessarily share the same aesthetic practices—not entirely unlike the Concord group discussed earlier. The variety of literary styles among the Beats

ranges from Kerouac's spontaneous prose method to Burroughs's cut-up method to Ginsberg's Whitmanesque breath line as well as to di Prima's vernacular poetics to Johnson's traditional prose style to Jones's postmodern narrative techniques. Regardless of this plurality, Beat scholars Ronna Johnson and Nancy Grace usefully argue that "What is distinctively Beat is the historical moment and social context in which its iconoclasms were practiced."[30] Overall, they continue, "Beat writers are united fundamentally by their challenges to conservative postwar consumer culture and by their formative mutual associations. … Social, artistic, personal, geographical links—literary camaraderie and life relations—underlie most writers' identification with Beat."[31] Despite the women Beats' lack of "literary camaraderie," this emphasis on various other unifying connections is the logic that underlies my study of the women Beats and their experiences within the Beat community.

It is important to note that although literary communities are often characterized by a plurality, by a diversity of ideas and literary practices, some women Beats reject being categorized as part of this literary community.[32] Ultimately, however, looking at the women Beats—and writers in general—within the context of a literary community, whether they self-identify as a part of the community or not, is useful in examining the myriad ways in which they individually and collectively experience common geographies, social spaces, cultural contexts, and artistic endeavors. The study of a literary community in these terms can reveal how each writer contributes to the particular "literary landscape" as well as what distinguishes the community from their predecessors or contemporaries.[33] Grace and Ronna Johnson argue for the importance of studying writers in the context of communities:

> It is the function of literary historians and critics to make sense of literature's evolutions and developments by recognizing and defining schools, movements, and writers' aesthetic tendencies. And particularly in the recovery of overlooked and negated writers, grouping the Beat movement's female practitioners effects their visibility as artists and makes their literary expressions legible… .[34]

Following in Grace and Johnson's claims about the function of studying writers within the context of a literary community, this dissertation is based on the argument that by studying Beat women within the context of the Beat literary community, not only do we gain access to writers otherwise absent from literary history, but also we see how their work revises and expands current understandings of the Beat community and its literary tradition.

The women Beats' marginalization within the Beat community as well as within Beat studies, though, presents a notable contrast to the general inclusion and recognition of female writers within several different American literary communities that precede the contemporary period. In many of the earlier communities, women writers were leading figures, integral to their community's literary achievements and various endeavors alongside their male counterparts. These include Fuller of the Transcendentalists; H.D., Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore, and Mina Loy of the modernists; Harriet Monroe of the Chicago literary renaissance; Jessie Fauset and Zora Neale Hurston of the Harlem Renaissance; and Dodge from the Santa Fe group. A survey of literary communities in the mid-twentieth century including the Beats, however, highlights the peripheral status of most women writers. Denise Levertov and M.C. Richards of the Black Mountain community; Barbara Guest of the New York School of Poets; Joanne Kyger, Helen Adam, and Lenore Kandel of the San Francisco Renaissance; and the New York City Beat writers I examine here—di Prima, Johnson, Jones, Bergé, and Albert—are almost

always secondary—if present at all—in discussions and histories of their respective literary communities.[35] Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan of Black Mountain; Frank O'Hara, John Ashberry, Kenneth Koch, and James Schuyler of the New York School; Jack Spicer, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Lew Welch, Philip Whalen, Gary Snyder, and Michael McClure of the San Francisco Renaissance; and Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Gregory Corso of the New York City Beats—these are the writers almost exclusively associated with these contemporary literary communities.

In his discussion of the inescapable politics of inclusion and exclusion within any literary community, Michael Davidson offers an explanation for this historical disparity. In reference to Shari Benstock's study of female modernists in Paris, he writes, "salons, circles, and sects became major forums for new aesthetic positions as well as supportive environments for women—heterosexual and lesbian—within masculinist culture."[36] For example, Natalie Barney's salon, Benstock explains, "operate[d] as a support group for lesbian women" who were "committed to producing serious art."[37] And from this woman-centered space, Barney led "a feminist effort that would eventually become an endeavor on behalf of lesbian literature and art."[38] In contrast to the availability of such support for female writers in the early twentieth century, Davidson continues,

> American bohemia of the 1950s lacked all but the most perfunctory recognition of women as artists. Without the supportive environment of either an underground salon network or a feminist movement, women writers of the 1950s and early 1960s defined themselves largely within the male 'circles.'[39]

Unlike many female modernist writers, for example, Beat women often wrote in isolation without the support of men or women around them, as noted earlier.

Scholars and writers alike provide various explanations for this tendency of contemporary literary communities to be predominantly defined and led by male writers. Ronna Johnson and Grace provide a useful summary:

> Beat has in common with its affiliated literary schools [Black Mountain College, the New York Poets, and the San Francisco Renaissance] and with the dominant culture from which all emerged unexamined assumptions of women's intellectual, creative, even sexual inferiority, and in particular, the supposition that women could neither originate nor help to advance the aesthetic and artistic breakthroughs and innovations that galvanized the schools.[40]

The general absence of women writers from the literary histories of these contemporary communities does not mean that there were not innovative women writers engaging in key issues of the period. Rather, as Ronna Johnson and Grace suggest, the marginalization of women writers within these communities themselves was a direct reflection of the period's cultural norms. There was a general lack of support from male writers, difficulties getting published as women writers, and the related decision to oftentimes keep their writing private until much later—and this has led to the elision from literary history of women Beats and other women writers from affiliated communities.

The complex relationship between the women Beats and the Beat literary community should not preclude attention to how they developed as writers despite these various tensions nor to how they created work with significant literary, cultural, social, and political implications from the margins. Indeed, *The Girl Gang* explores how precisely from this position, these women developed as protofeminist writers, often exploiting the paradoxical nature of the countercultural community to their own ends. As such, understanding the nature of literary communities broadly and of the Beat literary community in particular is central to this project. This dissertation examines the impact of the complexities of the Beat women's experiences within this community on their

writing—experiences that were stifling and problematic, as well as generative and inspiring. I examine a variety of connections and disparities between the work of several women Beats as a way to illustrate how each writer's individual experience within the Beat community takes shape in her writing and works in conjunction with other women Beats' work to collectively reconceptualize the prevailing notion of the Beat community as defined by male writers.

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Looking at the actual relationships of the various writers within the Beat community helps contextualize how the general differences between the male and female Beats' experiences take shape in their work. The sense of camaraderie that defines the male Beats' experiences within the literary community is represented by their various friendships and influences on each other as developing writers, all of which has been well documented by scholars and the writers themselves. Studies of the Beats including Bruce Cook's *The Beat Generation* (1971), John Tytell's *Naked Angels* (1976), Ann Charters's *Beats and Company* (1986), Edward Hasley Foster's *Understanding the Beats* (1992), Steve Watson's *The Birth of the Beat Generation* (1995), Matt Theado's *The Beats* (2001), and the more recent *Brother-Souls: John Clellon Holmes, Jack Kerouac, and the Beat Generation* by Ann Charters and Sam Charters (2010) provide detailed histories of the lives and literature of male Beat writers like Kerouac, Burroughs, Ginsberg, Corso, Snyder, Holmes, and Cassady—documenting their formative years as individuals and in relation to each other.[41] Certainly there were complexities within these various relationships, but of particular importance is the fact that the Beat men did not face the issue of whether or not they should or could support each other as writers because of their

gender. Instead, many male Beats unquestionably provided the encouragement and collaboration central to the development of their fellow Beat's work.[42]

In contrast, the female Beats' experiences as writers within the community are rarely characterized by such camaraderie—with each other or with the male Beats. The women's relationships with the men were primarily based on romantic relationships, such as Johnson and Kerouac's relationship in the late 1950s and Jones and LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka's marriage from 1958 to 1965.[43] As I address in more detail in Chapter Three, Jones kept her writing private for many years, even from her husband, who was becoming a well-respected writer of his own during their marriage. Johnson, on the other hand, shared some of her early work with Kerouac and claims he was encouraging, though the level of encouragement seems somewhat limited.[44] Grace explains that,

> Most of the women writers identify males who were sympathetic to their work. However, their story still asserts that the misogynist qualities of Beat bohemia did not encourage sisterly relationships to foster the women's art, did not mentor women artists into the group, and did not validate the women artists as part of the history of the movement.[45]

Though some of the women may have looked to the Beat men as role models—exemplifying through their lives and work the kind of self-defined search for authenticity and independence the women also sought[46]—the men did not play the role of supporter.[47]

Di Prima is an exception in this group of women; although she was romantically linked to Baraka,[48] she also forged working relationships with several male Beats at the time, including Baraka, Ginsberg, and Kerouac, as well as with writers of affiliated literary communities, such as Olson and O'Hara. Many scholars agree that di Prima more fiercely pursued her writing than some of the other women writers; for example, she published her work herself when she couldn't get it published otherwise. Di Prima's

relationship with Baraka strained her friendship with Jones, however, and although she and Johnson went to Hunter High School at the same time, they didn't know each other well. Interestingly, during their high school years, Johnson didn't know of other women writers or talk to other women about writing, but di Prima recalls sharing her work with fellow female poets at Hunter.[49] Also, Johnson and Jones were good friends (and remain friends today), but they did not share their work with each other during the Beat period, and Johnson was also close with another Beat writer, Elise Cowen, though they also rarely shared their writing with each other, if at all.

It is important to note that Jones and di Prima each contributed to the literary community through their work with Baraka on separate projects that supported and published the work of the writers around them.[50] During their marriage, Jones and Baraka founded a literary magazine, *Yugen*, and book press, *Totem Press*; di Prima and Baraka published the *Floating Bear* magazine together beginning in 1961. However, both women recall their major contributions to each endeavor being largely credited to Baraka.[51] Di Prima describes this realization matter-of-factly:

> Though Roi and I coedited the *Bear*, and often it was he who got the credit for the whole thing, most of the actual physical work devolved upon me and those friends I could dig up to help me. Most of the time. I am sure this was also true for Hettie, for the Totem Press books, in fact, before things got too sticky between us, I often helped her and witnessed how it was she who typed the camera copy, proofed (most of the time) and pasted up (always), but it was Roi's press, and in this he was not any different from any other male artist of his day. It was just the natural division of labor / and credit.[52]

As I described earlier, what is often characterized as the misogyny of the male Beats is generally attributed to the larger social and cultural contexts of the time, as di Prima suggests here. Nevertheless, these examples of the women's relationships with each other and with the male Beats begin to illustrate the complexities of their experiences as writers

within this literary community—especially in contrast to the personal and working relationships that existed between the men. The women Beats had relationships with the men as lovers and with each other as friends, but their role as writers was, with the noted exception of di Prima, secondary to their role as women.

The "boy gang" mentality of the Beat community is evident not only in the actual dynamics within the community, but also in how women figure into the fiction and poetry of the male Beats in limited ways, namely as "mothers, wives, sisters, lovers, virgins, whores, demons, or angels,"[53] which I explore in more detail in the main chapters. In various letters, interviews, and essays over the years, the male Beats likewise express a narrow view of women Beats. In July 1989, for example, Ginsberg writes,

> Yes, it's all right to blame the men for exploiting the women—or, I think the point is, the men didn't push the women literally or celebrate them. … But then, among the group of people we knew at the time, who were the writers of such power as Kerouac or Burroughs? Were there any? I don't think so.
>
> We're responsible for the lack of outstanding genius in the women we knew? Did we put them down or repress them? I don't think so. …
>
> Where there was a strong writer who could hold her own, like Diane di Prima, we would certainly work with her and recognize her.[54]

For Ginsberg, the marginalization of women Beat writers was due to their lack of talent. Indeed, as noted above, he had a working relationship with di Prima and perhaps encouraged her writing; he is also credited as having mentored Beat writer, Janine Pommy Vega.

Nevertheless, the basic perpetuation of the dominant gender discourse of the period within the Beat literary community led many women Beats to struggle as developing writers or to get their work published in ways most male Beats did not experience. As Ronna Johnson argues, "the men's tribal ethics of mutual support …

nurtured and helped to publish the minor poets Peter Orlovsky and Carl Solomon, but not Elise Cowen."[55] Despite Ginsberg and Cowen's friendship before her death in 1962, for example—they had also been lovers briefly in 1953—the poet deemed the work of Orlovsky (Ginsberg's lover and longtime partner) and Solomon (Ginsberg's friend to whom *Howl* is dedicated) more publishable than that of Cowen's.[56] Whether this is because of her status as a female poet, because of their previous romantic relationship, or because she simply was not as strong a writer as Orlovsky or Solomon is indeterminate. The point remains that the fundamental impetus of the Beat community to foster one another's work was strained when it came to the women, and the various extra-literary writings of the male Beats reveal their limited assumptions about women as a whole and about women writers, more specifically.[57]

For example, in a similar vein as the Ginsberg passage above, Kerouac somewhat blithely dismisses Beat women in a 1959 essay. In "Origins of the Beat Generation," Kerouac categorizes the Beats as either "cool" or "hot."[58] Women's inclusion here is limited to the "girls [who] say nothing and wear black"—not necessarily writers, but girls who belong to the "cool" hipsters.[59] And as Amy Friedman discusses, when Kerouac recommended writers for a Beat anthology in 1963, he included only four women; of these four, he described Barbara Moraff as "best girl poet" and di Prima, similar to Ginsberg's distinction noted above, as "other best girl poet."[60] The distinction Kerouac draws between male and female Beats in both sources ultimately perpetuates the traditional hierarchy between the two genders, and other male Beats express a similar attitude toward women. Upon rereading his first novel, *Go*, in 1976, Holmes questions in a new Introduction: "Can it really have been like that? Did we really resemble these

feverish young men, these centerless young women?"[61] In Holmes's recognition of the societal changes since he first wrote his novel (a 1952 rendering of the early Beat community), he points to—however inadvertently—his initially dismissive perception and representation of Beat women as "centerless."

As these examples illustrate, though the men acknowledge the presence of women within the Beat community, it is clear that they did not consider the women as equals. From the men's perspectives, the women were mainly there to play the same role expected of them outside of the counterculture—to provide domestic support (in the form of ironing or cooking, paying for rent, food, or bus trips, etc.) or to be girlfriends or lovers. That the women happened to be writers as well was secondary to the men—and that they might have had "such power as Kerouac or Burroughs" was even less likely.[62] Richard Peabody writes in his discussion of the women Beats' marginalization: "The male-defined misogynist social climate of the fifties and sixties [is] the primary culprit. Too many passive women accepted their assigned roles. Others devoted their time and energy to the men, or promoted the men instead of addressing their own work."[63] The different dynamics of the experiences of di Prima and other women Beat writers of the New York City community attest to the various complexities that Peabody points to here. Whereas Johnson strongly supported Kerouac's writing career—emotionally and financially—and struggled to find time for her own work, for example, di Prima simultaneously pursued her own writing career while helping to promote the work of others. Despite any such differences, though, women Beat writers were faced with and struggled to negotiate with the somewhat similarly confining role expected of them by the conservative mainstream and within the Beat community.

This dissertation argues that studying the women Beats as writers in their own right within the context of their experiences described here shows how their work revises the predominant representations of the female Beat in the literary and extra-literary writing of the male Beats. Further, when we include the lives and work of Beat women into Beat history, we are exposed to a broader, more inclusive narrative of the Beat literary community—one that is based on the very struggle of the women Beats to overcome their subordination or marginalization as women. Looking through a new lens into Beat history, we see daring work that addresses the very social structures that have led to the women Beats' elision. Accordingly, *The Girl Gang* sets out to show how women Beat writers make an undeniably important contribution to Beat literary history as well as to feminist history, contemporary literature, and postwar American history, more broadly.

***

Critical scholarship on the Beats emerged in the early 1980s when, as Jennie Skerl explains, "the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *On the Road* in 1982 marked the beginning of a Beat revival and an outpouring of biographies, memoirs, films, recordings, exhibitions, celebrations, and websites."[64] Although this surge in critical attention to the Beats eclipsed the negative attention they had received in the 1960s and 1970s by the mass media and academic critics,[65] many Beat scholars have since argued that much of this initial scholarship perpetuated the narrow image of the Beats as a white male community in its focus on writers like Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, Snyder, Ferlinghetti, and Corso. Significantly, Ann Charters included a range of writers in *The Portable Beat Reader* (1992), including non-white Beats and several women Beats. And in recent years, scholars have made concerted efforts to draw serious

critical attention to African American and Chicano male writers such as Bob Kaufman, Ted Joans, and Oscar Zeta Acosta, as well as to various women Beat writers from the New York City and San Francisco communities. Although the existing critical attention to Beat women remains significantly limited as attention to male Beats continues to thrive, it nevertheless reflects the important work of much feminist scholarship in its fundamental efforts to recover under-recognized women writers.

The publication of *Women of the Beat Generation* by Brenda Knight in 1996 and *A Different Beat* by Richard Peabody in 1997 established more substantial attempts to redefine the Beat literary culture as it is traditionally understood to be a "boy gang." Knight's and Peabody's anthologies unearthed and brought attention to the lives and work of many women Beats. Up until this time, women Beats appeared in Beat histories, biographies, or studies of male Beat writers and their work, but in these instances, the women are primarily mentioned within the context of their personal relationships with the men. And when their roles as writers are acknowledged in such texts, it is often only in passing—as secondary to the writing of the men or to their connections to the male Beats.[66] Thus, Knight's and Peabody's anthologies had a significant impact in Beat studies as they put these women's roles as writers front and center. Although these collections did not include critical discussions of the writing, they prompted such work.

Published the same year as *Women of the Beat Generation* and *A Different Beat*, Maria Damon's "Victors of Catastrophe: Beat Occlusions" (1996) presents a brief, yet compelling argument for critical attention to Beat women, and Amy Friedman's "'I say my new name': Women Writers of the Beat Generation" (1996) and "'Being here as hard as I could:' The Beat Generation Women Writers" (1998) began this very project. In the

first essay, Friedman discusses the work of Bonnie Bremser/Brenda Frazer,[67] di Prima, and Kyger; in the second, she provides a survey of several Beat women's work, such as Jones, di Prima, Johnson, Kyger, Kandel, Anne Waldman, and Joanna McClure. These two essays were undeniably crucial in providing initial attention to the literary value of the women Beats' work, but their task was considerable and the attention to some of the Beat women was delimiting as a result.

For instance, Johnson and Jones are identified as memoirists (in both Friedman's and Damon's essays), which precluded subsequent attention to both writers' fiction, other nonfiction, and poetry. In fact, while Johnson's and Jones's inclusion in Charters's *Beat Down to Your Soul* (2001) signifies important attention to the female Beat perspective (they are two of several women Beats included), their texts are excerpts from their memoirs of the Beat period, while the works of other Beat women, such as di Prima, Kyger, and McClure, include poetry.[68] This limited portrayal of Johnson's and Jones's status as Beat women writers problematically overshadows attention to, for example, Johnson's first novel, which depicts the development of female subjectivity in Beat bohemia, or Jones's early poetry or short stories, which similarly engage in important questions of hegemonic cultural norms of the Beat and post-Beat periods. This is not to diminish the significance of Johnson's and Jones's memoirs nor of such editorial efforts to include the voices and perspectives of women Beats alongside Beat men—certainly all of this is important work that has led to this dissertation.[69] But the narrow representation of some women Beats in such attempts to explore, as Charters's subtitle asks, "What Was the Beat Generation?", signifies the ways in which, even within efforts to broaden perspectives of Beat history, many Beat women are marginalized.

Ronna Johnson and Grace's *Girls Who Wore Black* (2002), a collection of essays entirely devoted to women Beat writers, was pivotal in expanding critical attention to women Beats. There had been a handful of single-author essays previously published in various journals,[70] but in its ten essays, *Girls Who Wore Black* offers sustained critical readings of the poetry, fiction, and memoirs of many women Beats, discussing unpublished work (as in the case of Elise Cowen) and bringing together writers from both coasts: Adam, di Prima, Johnson, Jones, Cowen, Frazer, Kyger, Pommy Vega, and Waldman. It is important to note that along with Grace's essay in *Girls Who Wore Black* on the various literary and cultural achievements of the memoirs by di Prima, Johnson, Jones, and Frazer, are essays on di Prima's poetry, Johnson's fiction, and Jones's poetry.[71] That is, *Girls Who Wore Black* as a whole simultaneously argues for the importance of the female Beat memoir beyond the scope of Beat history as well as for the importance of other literary contributions of these particular writers. Following in 2004, Skerl's *Reconstructing the Beats* includes three essays on Beat women, two of which were not the subject of essays in *Girls Who Wore Black* (Kandel and ruth weiss [sic]), and Grace and Ronna Johnson's *Breaking the Rule of Cool* (2004)—a follow-up to *Girls Who Wore Black*—provides an updated essay on the status of women in Beat history and scholarship alongside nine previously unpublished interviews with the female writers.

All of these recent publications represent significant strides in attention to Beat women over the last 20 years or so that promise to continue, and *The Girl Gang* is one such effort.[72] This survey of current scholarship on the women Beats also clarifies, though, that there is much to be done in the recovery and study of the dozens of women involved in the Beat movement and their multi-genre work that spans decades and

continues today. Indeed, many women Beat writers remain excluded from the relatively small body of existing scholarship. Regarding the writers who do receive attention, scholars tend to either treat several works by an individual writer at once, thus providing only cursory insight into each major work (as in the case of di Prima) or to focus on only one or two texts by an individual writer, thus overlooking the full scope of their literary achievements (as in the case of Johnson and Jones).

Also, there is debate about how to approach situating the work of the women Beats within the Beat literary tradition. Some scholars maintain that the women Beats should be considered on par with "the second tier of Beats" such as Michael McClure, Baraka, and Ferlinghetti (maintaining Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs as the most "important" Beat writers),[73] while others argue that a novel such as Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance* is "on par with renegade declarations of *On the Road* or "Howl" or *Naked Lunch*."[74] While such arguments point to the need to explore these distinctions further, they also suggest a delimiting framework for studying the women Beats—one that might potentially merely situate them in either of the two "tiers" of male Beats. It is my contention that doing so would overlook the ways in which the work of the female Beats is importantly shaped by their experiences as simultaneously a part of and marginalized within the male Beat literary community. *The Girl Gang* examines not only how the women Beats were doing work that should be considered as important as the work of their male counterparts, but also significantly, how Beat women confronted and revised the patriarchal assumptions that shaped the literature of both the contemporary mainstream and avant-garde from their paradoxical positions within and on the margins of the male-dominated literary community.

In scholars' attempts to begin to recover the work of and study the women Beats, they tend to isolate the work of each female Beat from that of another's, which precludes attention to the myriad ways in which each writer uniquely engages in similar themes or literary techniques, as well as how contrasts in the subjects or forms of each writer's work may enrich a reading of another's work and of the Beat community itself.[75] This approach to each individual writer and her work, then, essentially overlooks how studying the women Beats within the context of the Beat community can provide a clearer understanding of how they both individually and collectively responded to the literary, social, and cultural norms of the period—and how their works can mutually inform each other. This dissertation provides a corrective to these gaps.

The Girl Gang is a multiauthor study that critically engages an expanded canon of women Beats. This project sets out to continue the recovery work begun by Beat scholars by looking at texts that are overlooked in existing discussions of several women Beats (in the main chapters on di Prima, Johnson, and Jones), as well as by looking at writers who are absent in current scholarship (in the Epilogue on Bergé and Albert). In my attention to such texts and writers, I expand the discourse on the women Beats in multiple ways. First, this project aims to construct a revised narrative of the Beat literary community and tradition by focusing on writers and texts from the earlier to the later and post-Beat years, which provides a trajectory of the Beat movement as it takes shape over the course of several decades. Additionally, the texts examined throughout the dissertation represent multiple genres: poetry, the novel, the short story cycle, the novella, and the short story. This approach highlights the diversity of literary modes and the breadth of work among the women Beats.

Also importantly, threaded throughout the dissertation is explicit attention to the impact of the Beat literary community on the women Beats. *The Girl Gang* addresses how each writer's particular experience within the New York City Beat community as a developing female writer takes shape in her work, and how this helps us not only better understand the lives and work of these women and the function of community, but also the history of the New York City Beat community itself and the development of protofeminist work from within this context. Further, this study expands current critical attention to women Beats by putting the work of several writers in conversation with each other in more depth than is currently available. Specifically, I give explicit attention to the ways in which key Beat issues or questions of identity, subjectivity, community, authenticity, and the act of writing itself take shape in the work of the various writers studied here. In doing so, this project highlights the continuities, gaps, and disparities between the work of these writers in order to illustrate how, collectively, their work contributes to our understanding of literary communities in general and how, more specifically, it revises prevailing notions of the Beat community and its literary tradition as defined by the male Beats and a male ethos.

Lastly, *The Girl Gang* explores the writers' engagement in various literary, cultural, and social discourses, such as feminist geography, postmodernism, interracialism, and motherhood. This major aspect of my project illustrates precisely why extending the ways in which these writers are included in the Beat literary tradition and the contemporary literary tradition more broadly is vital. The work of Beat women broadens and complicates the current critical discourse of Beat writing. More than adding female voices to Beat history and literature, *The Girl Gang* draws attention to how the

female Beats' work addresses issues that are central to the contemporary countercultural critique of hegemonic norms and that are representative of the Beats' experimentation with innovative literary techniques. This dissertation's literary analyses provide multiple new ways to study women Beats' writing and highlights their incisive and provocative treatment of timely thematic issues—often in conjunction with nontraditional narrative forms or strategies. Ultimately, while this dissertation builds upon the existing scholarship on women Beat writers in its endeavor to revise prevalent notions of the Beats as a male literary tradition and to draw attention to Beat women as important writers, it also significantly expands the existing recovery work and extends the current critical discourse on Beat women in all of these ways.

In addition to its contribution to Beat studies, *The Girl Gang* calls attention to a group of writers whose work also contributes to and raises important questions for the fields of women's writing, feminist studies, and contemporary American literature, as well as for the study of literary communities. This dissertation reveals how female Beats use writing as a means to consciously construct and assert their voices as *female* writers—how they set out in reaction to patriarchal discourses "to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives" (in the words of Adrienne Rich).[76] I examine how these writers struggle to construct identities as women writers and endeavor to develop various modes of female subjectivity within their work. In all of these ways, this dissertation broadens and further develops studies of the women's literary tradition while simultaneously contributing to feminist scholarship in its continued recovery of elided female writers.[77]

Further, the breadth and diversity of the women Beats' individual and collective bodies of work point to multiple ways in which this dissertation can inform and enrich not only the field of women's literature, but also of contemporary American literature, more broadly. The analyses of how these writers engage in questions of genre, theme, and aesthetics as well as in various critical discourses undoubtedly raise new questions for thinking about, for example, the role of the novel, the colloquial, and the social space of the car in contemporary literature by both male and female writers. Indeed, within the individual chapters, I situate the primary texts and issues of my analyses within and against both Beat and non-Beat texts, which begins to illustrate how the dissertation can inform the field of contemporary American literature beyond the scope of Beat studies.[78]

The Girl Gang also intervenes in the important study of literary communities—of the mainstream and the avant-garde. The scholarship on American literary communities ranges from studies of the Knickerbocker group to those of the modernists and the Harlem Renaissance writers, and of the Language poets. The scope of this scholarship underscores the function of community for major American writers while highlighting the importance of these writers and their respective communities for the study of American literature from its earliest period to the contemporary period. The dynamics of the women Beats' coming-of-age experiences and the bodies of work that initially developed within the Beat community undoubtedly raise provocative questions about the nature and function of literary communities in general, as well as about the function of place, the role of gender, and the development of the avant-garde within this discourse. Integrating a study of the women writers from the New York City Beat community into

existing scholarship on literary communities would open up such studies in undeniably insightful and productive ways.

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In its attention to understudied women writers, this dissertation is fundamentally a feminist project, whose central purpose is to examine Beat women as writers in their own right. Specifically, I examine how each individual writer provides a different lens into the Beat community and its primary interests in issues of identity, authenticity, and storytelling as these issues are shaped by questions of gender. Threaded throughout the dissertation is a focus on how these writers develop a female subjectivity in response to their marginalization as women as well as in response to the typical depiction of women within male-authored Beat texts as sexual objects, or more broadly, as intellectually, biologically, or psychologically inferior and therefore unable (or unprivileged) to act as a subject.

My use of the term "subjectivity" throughout the dissertation refers to the process of developing one's consciousness. Whereas "identity" refers to one's sense of self as it is defined by categories such as race, gender, and religion, "subjectivity" refers to one's ability to act with agency and authority—to assert ownership over one's thoughts, decisions, and behaviors.[79] Defining "subjectivity" in this way follows with leading uses of the term in feminist and Beat scholarship. For example, for Ronna Johnson, subjectivity is signified through "an evolution from understanding to interpretation, from seeing to naming," and for feminist scholar Rita Felski, it is a "transformation of consciousness."[80] Further, subjectivity signifies an understanding of oneself in relation to others, to society, to the world. As Nick Mansfield explains, "The word 'self' does not

capture the sense of social and cultural entanglement that is implicit in the word 'subject': the way our immediate daily life is always already caught up in complex political, social and philosophical—that is, shared—concerns."[81] If we understand "subject" as something fundamentally and constantly developed in relation to others, we can understand the significance of the women Beats' development of subjectivity for their female speakers or characters in relation to post-WWII America, New York City, bohemia, and the Beats—in relation to a multitude of forces.

Understanding subjectivity in this way clarifies a key aspect of the term—that it is a process, not something that is fixed or achieved, or owned or exercised without further or ongoing transformation. Sally Robinson, for example, explains that subjectivity

> is an ongoing process of engagement in social and discursive practices, not some immanent kernel of identity that is expressed through that engagement. It is not constructed, once and for all, at some locatable point in the individual's history; rather, it is a continuous process of production and transformation. Subjectivity, like gender, is a 'doing,' rather than a being. Subjects are constituted, differentially, across complex and mobile discursive practices in historically specific ways that involve relations of subjectivity to sociality, to power and to knowledge.[82]

Subjectivity in my analysis is therefore used to identify the process[83] by which the female figures in the work of the women Beats begin to overcome whatever obstacles impede or diminish their ability to act as a subject.[84]

Nancy Miller's primary definition of feminist writing is useful for framing my analysis of the women Beats' work. According to Miller, feminist writing "articulates as and in a discourse of self-consciousness about woman's identity."[85] Felski offers a somewhat similarly broad but useful definition of feminist literature as "those texts that reveal a critical awareness of women's subordinate position and of gender as a problematic category, however this is expressed."[86] The women Beats were certainly

critical of their marginal position as women in the 1950s and 1960s; this is evident in their work in multiple ways, and is a useful lens into their texts. However, it is important to note that although the women Beats' work falls into the category of feminist literature, much of it was written prior to the women's movement that began in the late 1960s, and is therefore more accurately considered protofeminist. As Ronna Johnson and Grace argue, to characterize the Beat women as feminist would be anachronistic; in fact, the scholars clarify that the protofeminism of the women Beats was "fostered unintentionally."[87] Nevertheless, as Ronna Johnson and Grace write:

> members of the group display a persistent understanding of the importance of asserting themselves as women in the alternative communities in which they lived, and which denied them, during the fifties, and even to some extent today, value as artists specifically because of their gender. Their recognition of this condition exemplifies their protofeminist impulses.[88]

Drawing attention to the women Beats' protofeminism is of primary importance in *The Girl Gang* and will be discussed throughout the chapters accordingly.[89]

My study of the writing of the women Beats as protofeminist literature is not meant to perpetuate their distance from the work of the male Beats. In the same way that the men explore issues of identity and subjectivity specific to their gender, so too do the women, and this does not necessitate boundaries to be drawn between a male Beat and a female Beat literary tradition. Doing so would assume consistent similarities within and clear boundaries between the men's and women's texts, and this is not necessarily the case. As noted earlier, the diversity of Beat writing—among the men and women—points to one of the fundamental characteristics of a literary community. Specifically, my analysis is based on the claim that issues of gender largely motivate and shape the women Beats' engagement in questions of identity, subjectivity, race, sexuality, and language, as

well as in various narrative and poetic forms and techniques. The themes explored and the literary techniques used by the women Beats may not necessarily be unique—though some are—but the way in which these themes and techniques are employed to make claims about and through the female experience does highlight their uniqueness within the Beat context as well as their particular importance in the period preceding second wave feminism. Thus, this dissertation will illustrate that beginning with their critique of cultural and literary gender norms is one way in which to enter into the work of the women Beat writers and to understand their literary, cultural, social, and political achievements. Rather than establishing a female Beat literary tradition, *The Girl Gang* reveals the importance of the women Beats' work as well as the treatment, through both content and form, of various concerns shared with male Beats.[90]

In addition to the application of feminist theory, this project also draws on historicist methodologies evident in the basic components of the individual chapters. In the main chapters and epilogue, I situate select texts of each writer within her literary, cultural, and political contexts, as well as within the context of her formative years as a writer in the New York City Beat community and her larger body of work.

Situating the literary texts alongside and against literary predecessors and contemporaries and within the larger cultural and political contexts is based on the assumption that in order to understand the ways in which these writers revise literary and cultural norms, it is important to understand what these norms are and how they may have affected each writer's understanding of the issues their work explores. As Tony Trigilio aptly argues, unless we look at "the way that [women Beats'] work itself is imbricated in [their] cultural moment," we cannot fully understand these women as

writers.[91] To reiterate, "What is distinctively Beat is the historical moment and social context" out of which their writing emerged.[92] Thus, I highlight how these writers' texts connect to and diverge from relevant previous and contemporary literature as well as how they engage in issues significantly shaped by the historical context, such as interracialism, in order to draw attention to the various achievements and implications of their work.

This attention to the cultural context of the women Beats' work also includes a focus on the role of place, as noted earlier. Following in the attention to the function of place in studies of female modernists in Paris (Benstock), female modernists in New York City and Berlin (Miller), Beat poets in San Francisco (Davidson), and Language Poets in New York City, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. (Vickery), among others, this dissertation is rooted in the assumption that the women Beats' lives and work were shaped by New York City. As I examine in more detail in the chapters, the writers studied here were especially drawn to and came into their own as writers within New York City bohemia. Their writing engages both directly and indirectly in the culture of New York City, and as Cristanne Miller argues in the context of the modernist period, this highlights that "Many … writers were conscious of the relevance of location to writing."[93] Although my analysis of the literary works may include how New York City is explicitly treated, of primary importance to this dissertation is how New York City and New York City bohemia, more specifically, "enabl[e] and influenc[e] [the] writing" of Beat women.[94]

Further, situating the writers' select texts alongside their coming-of-age experiences within the Beat literary community and within their body of work employs a

methodology especially important for the study of Beat writers—male or female. Trigilio argues that "Reader reception of Beat writing depends on critical understanding of biography; if anything, the neoromantic impulse of most Beat writing demands that readers know something of the sovereign, expressivist self claimed behind each literary work."[95] However, the tendency to focus mainly on and to mythologize Beats' lives has overshadowed serious critical attention to much of their work, and so this attention to biography needs to be tempered—to be in the service of the writing, not in place of it. Indeed, Trigilio explains, "When literary commentary collapses [literature] into biography, as it often does with Beat writers … such scholarship is undertaken at considerable expense to the cultural work of the [texts] themselves."[96] Likewise, though, Trigilio continues, "it would be a disservice to argue that biography should be displaced entirely in favor of [the literature]."[97] The approach taken in *The Girl Gang* follows this argument: providing relatively concise literary biographies helps to highlight the writers' relevant personal experiences and the scope of their work that, together, effectively contextualizes and provides insight into the particular issues addressed in the texts examined in each chapter.

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As the diversity of the Beat literary community suggests, there are many women Beat writers to consider in a project of recovery and criticism such as this. Together, for example, Knight's and Peabody's anthologies include a total of about 50 women, with only 16 overlaps, and Peabody recognizes many other writers he considered including.[98] As noted earlier, this dissertation focuses on the work of Diane di Prima, Joyce Johnson, Hettie Jones, Carol Bergé, and Mimi Albert. Possible other writers to study here include Joanne Kyger, Lenore Kandel, Brigid Murnaghan, Margaret Randall, Janine Pommy

Vega, Sandra Hochman, Fran Landesman, Barbara Moraff, Bobbie Louise Hawkins, and Brenda Frazer, among many others. The criteria for inclusion or exclusion of women Beat writers are different for each scholar and editor, and what this fluidity indicates is that, as Ronna Johnson and Grace explain, "the canon of women Beat writers has not been definitively established, but is transitory and subjective."[99] Regarding *Girls Who Wore Black*, for example, the editors discuss that while Jane Bowles and Denise Levertov had foundational affiliations with or connections to the Beat community, they "proceeded to other movements [and thus] demarcate a Beat cusp [and] clarif[y] the way that Beat emerged contemporaneously with several other avant-garde literary communities."[100] As such, Bowles and Levertov are not the subject of essays included in *Girls Who Wore Black*.

Tim Hunt similarly comments on the fluidity of the canon of women Beats. He writes, "Joanne Kyger's ties to Gary Snyder and Ginsberg, her travels to Japan and India, mark her as Beat, yet her approach to writing, which owes little to Beat practice, developed as it did almost in spite of her involvement with the Beats."[101] Interestingly, Kyger is included in both *Girls Who Wore Black* and *Breaking the Rule of Cool*. Peabody, in his anthology, exercised a rather liberal rationale for inclusion of women Beats; he includes writers, such as Sandra Hochman, whose direct connection to the Beat community seems to be represented by an appearance in a photograph documenting the Beat scene with prominent Beat writers.[102] All of these different approaches to the category of Beat writers raise undeniably interesting questions about the nature of literary scholarship itself, but more to my point, they speak to the fundamental diversity of the lives and work of Beat women themselves.

My focus on di Prima, Johnson, Jones, Bergé, and Albert represents a selection of award-winning writers who, individually, contribute in important and distinctive ways to the Beat literary tradition, and who thus, collectively, create a dynamic narrative of Beat history. The first criterion for their inclusion is that although they didn't all remain in New York City after the Beat period, they were each born and came of age in New York City, and their formative years as writers took place within the New York City Beat community. Specifically, di Prima lived in New York City until relocating to San Francisco in the late 1960s, while Johnson and Jones still live and write in New York City today. Bergé lived in New York City until 1969 when she moved to Woodstock, NY and continued writing and editing before she moved all over the country for about a decade to teach. She finally relocated to Santa Fe in the 1980s until her death in 2006. And Albert lived in New York City until the 1980s or 1990s when she relocated to the Bay Area of California, where she continues to write.

Elise Cowen is an example of another possible New York City Beat writer to include in this project, but she primarily wrote poetry, and the bodies of work of the five writers I study here include a range of genres—a second criterion for my choices. Their versatility exemplifies their breadth as writers and enables me to draw comparisons between their work and a wide selection of other contemporary writers' work, as well as to explore the ways in which their experiences within the Beat community take shape in distinct genres.

Further, my focus on these particular five writers provides a look into each of the three generations of women Beats—a useful structure established by Ronna Johnson and Grace. In the three-generational breakdown, Bergé falls into the first generation, which

includes the writers born in the 1910s and 1920s, such as Adam, weiss, Madeline Gleason, and Sheri Martinelli. These writers were contemporaneous with the three core male Beats (Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs) and faced the societal conditions and postwar changes as well as the stifling influence of the "academic and traditional literary models" simultaneous with the men.[103] Born in the 1930s, the second generation of women Beats, including di Prima, Johnson, and Jones, along with Cowen, Kandel and others, was "directly influenced by seminal works" of the core male Beats and "faced male Beat obliviousness to and/or prejudices against their capacities as writers and rebels." Ronna Johnson further highlights one of the key distinctions between the first two generations of Beat women: "The women writers of the second Beat generation were usually not so obviously sidelined as those in the first, but they were nevertheless discounted through presumptions of their inferiority." Bergé's status as a Beat writer in contrast to that of di Prima's, Johnson's, and Jones's—Bergé is much less visible in Beat studies—begins to confirm this distinction, and I address this further within the dissertation.

Albert represents the third generation of women Beats, accompanied by Waldman and Pommy Vega, all born in the 1940s. Interestingly, Albert is not included in Ronna Johnson and Grace's survey, perhaps because, unlike Waldman and Pommy Vega, she was not "included in Beat bohemia and literary circles from the start."[104] Pommy Vega had close working relationships with several male Beats, including Herbert Huncke, Orlovsky, and Ginsberg, as did Waldman with Ginsberg, O'Hara and others of the New York School. Albert's affiliations with the Beat community itself are less well-documented and presumably less substantial than those of the other writers included in

this study, and while Pommy Vega and Waldman "looked to living Beat generation writers for influence and inspiration," Albert looked to the Beat period and culture "for influence and inspiration"—not necessarily its writers, at least not through personal connections. Ultimately, I include writers from each of the three generations of female Beats in order to construct a more textured and inclusive narrative of Beat history that draws on these generational differences as one way to illustrate how each writer distinctively revises and expands our understanding of the Beat literary community.

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Di Prima, Johnson, Jones, Bergé, and Albert had vastly different experiences as Beat writers, including different degrees of involvement within the community itself, and this is reflected in the structure of the dissertation. The three main chapters focus on di Prima, Johnson, and Jones—three women Beats who knew each other and were, in various ways, part of each other's lives and experiences as women writers in the male-dominated literary community. More than others, di Prima, Johnson, and Jones appear consistently in Beat anthologies and in existing scholarship on the female Beats—perhaps because their connections to the prominent male Beats initially helped draw attention to their writing. In the main chapters, I expand the current scholarly attention to each of these three writers, illustrating how their experiences within the Beat community reflect the contemporary cultural, social, and political contexts in markedly different ways. These three chapters are chronologically ordered by the composition dates of the particular texts I examine, ranging from the 1950s to the turn of the twenty-first century.

Of the five writers I study here, di Prima's body of work is the largest (comprising about 30 books of poetry, fiction, and memoir), and she is the subject of more critical

discussions than the others. This is perhaps not surprising in light of her status as a "strong writer" among the men during the Beat period itself.[105] However, the existing scholarship on di Prima is still relatively scant; she is included in the multiauthor essays described earlier and is otherwise the subject of approximately seven single-author essays. That her experience as a female writer within the Beat literary community was generally inclusive takes shape in her writing in interesting ways, and juxtaposing the ways in which her work differs significantly from that of Johnson and Jones illustrates the remarkable dynamics of the Beat community itself.

In Chapter One, I read di Prima's first book of poetry, *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward* alongside a collection of unpublished poetry from her college years in order to trace the development of her poetics as it was largely shaped by the contrast between her suburban social space in college and the urban, avant-garde Beat community of New York City. This contrast is most notably represented through her use of hip slang, and this poetic style highlights two key achievements: her resistance to the predominant academic style of poetry of the time, which situates her alongside poets such as Ginsberg and Olson, and her revision of the representation of women in the work of these and other male avant-garde contemporaries.

Employing M.A.K. Halliday's theory of antilanguages, my analysis demonstrates how di Prima uses the slang of the bohemian community to redefine and substantiate the identity of the bohemian figure as well as to develop a subjectivity for the female bohemian in particular—a move predating the feminist poetry of the 1960s. Chapter One explores how di Prima resists and revises the commonly objectified or victimized depictions of female figures within the work of her male contemporaries. She gives voice

to female experiences of love, sex, and motherhood—unabashedly portraying the emotions and experiences of desire, jealousy, hostility, and independence that are often subdued or silenced in postwar poetry. Through a reading of her first published poetry within the context of her earlier unpublished poetry and the work of her contemporaries, Chapter One draws attention to how di Prima challenges poetic conventions of the time while bringing uniquely female experiences to the fore with authenticity and honesty.

That Johnson and Jones are largely regarded by scholars as the girlfriend and wife of prominent Beat writers, respectively, and that their bodies of work are notably smaller than di Prima's raises important questions about their consistent inclusion in various Beat anthologies over the years and the focus on their work in much of the current scholarship on women Beats. As I mentioned earlier, when their work is included in Beat anthologies, it is almost exclusively each writer's memoir that is excerpted and used to represent their literary accomplishments.[106] Likewise, though Friedman and Damon include Johnson and Jones in their foundational critical essays described earlier, they refer to both writers only as memoirists. As such, it can be argued that much of the attention that both Johnson and Jones have received over the last few decades is due, not necessarily to their individual literary achievements, but to the insight they and their memoirs provide into the lives of Kerouac and Baraka. Both are strong and versatile writers in their own right, however, and have considerable oeuvres that also include fiction (Johnson and Jones) and poetry (Jones). Currently, only a total of three critical essays begin to look at these accomplishments, and Chapters Two and Three set out to address this critical neglect.

To date, there is only one attempt to broaden readers' understanding of Johnson's literary contributions beyond her 1983 memoir, which include several novels, non-Beat memoirs, and nonfiction texts. In Chapter Two, I continue the work begun by Ronna Johnson in her reading of Johnson's first novel, *Come and Join the Dance* (1962). I examine how in *Come and Join the Dance*, Johnson develops a model of female subjectivity that directly challenges the depiction of female protagonists in male- and female-authored Beat and non-Beat contemporary novels. My reading reveals how Johnson not only revises the way in which women are portrayed by her contemporaries, but also how she does this by transgressing the discourse of traditionally gendered social spaces. By engaging in the tropes of the home, the streets, and the car, Johnson destabilizes the hegemonic norms of public and private spaces.

My analysis of her first novel is advanced through the lens of feminist geography, which frames my reading of the "paradoxical spaces" Johnson creates in her revision of the public/private dichotomy.[107] Using the social spaces of the home and the car to do so is especially significant, I argue, in light of the historical and cultural associations of each space. Johnson challenges the association of women in the 1950s with the domestic space of the home; she suggests that the home is a stifling and oppressive space for women—anticipating the female malaise explored in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. Further, she appropriates the American image of the car as a quintessentially male space, as a symbol of freedom and of the male Beat pursuit of an authentic American experience to which women were denied. My analysis shows how Johnson uses the car as a space within which her female protagonist asserts her subjectivity through sexual agency. Interestingly, though, my discussion in Chapter Two highlights how Johnson

resists the centrality that di Prima gives to sexual agency in her depiction of female subjectivity. Further, whereas New York City bohemia is a fundamentally positive space, one that is supportive and fosters individuality in di Prima's early poetry, in Johnson's first novel, the New York City bohemian community is depicted as oppressive and dysfunctional. In all of these ways, I draw attention to the complex and distinctive literary achievements of each writer.

What makes Jones unique among many women Beats is that she kept her writing life private during the Beat years and did not start publishing until the 1970s. However, since then, Jones has published in a range of genres including short fiction, poetry, essays, and young adult literature, but her work remains largely absent from critical attention. In Chapter Three, I examine a short story cycle that is currently unpublished, *In Care of Worth Auto Parts*, in order to illustrate Jones's engagement with the gender and racial politics of the 1960s and the literary and cultural context of postmodernism in the 1970s and 1980s. Drawing on her personal experiences in the Beat community, Jones focuses on the figure of the white interracial mother, disrupting hegemonic, hierarchical racial and gender norms and giving voice to this racially-defined figure, whose perspective in literary texts is often overshadowed by the figure of the interracial child.

My analysis illustrates how Jones employs various postmodernist techniques to portray the experience of the interracial mother as subject to a "social gaze" that fractures and destabilizes her sense of self.[108] The genre of *In Care of Worth Auto Parts* itself is especially significant in the treatment of this complex experience. The short story cycle is defined by its dual structure of independence and interdependence: it includes stories that can be read autonomously, but that only fully make meaning when read in conjunction

with one another. My analysis of *In Care of Worth Auto Parts* demonstrates how Jones uses this unique structure to reflect and embody the gradual development of the interracial mother's subjectivity in the face of others' racial discrimination, and to stylistically perform its themes of unity and disunity. Of particular importance is how Jones explicitly considers the intertwining of race and gender, which is treated only implicitly in the other writers' texts examined here.

Whereas the main chapters build on the current critical attention to di Prima, Johnson, and Jones, the Epilogue integrates two women Beat writers, who are almost exclusively absent from critical studies, into the discourse on women Beats. Although Bergé and Albert appear in some Beat texts, such as Peabody's anthology, there are currently no published critical studies of their work. Albert is mentioned in a somewhat obscure article on the women Beats by Jim Burns in 1993, but is otherwise absent from scholarly discussions of the Beats, and although Bergé is recognized for her inclusion in LeRoi Jones's *Four Young Lady Poets* (1962) and for her role in the oral poetry scene of the 1960s, she is hardly, if at all, recognized for her prolific body of work that she began publishing in the early 1960s. In the Epilogue, then, I discuss the lives and work of Bergé and Albert in order to begin the important task of expanding attention to women Beats who, though currently overlooked in Beat studies, nevertheless challenge and contribute to our understanding of the Beat literary tradition in significant ways.

Specifically, the Epilogue examines select texts from each writer, employing the critical framework established here. I explore how the work of Bergé and Albert, like that of di Prima, Johnson, and Jones, simultaneously engages in and diverges from fundamental Beat themes in ways importantly shaped by a critique of the period's social

and cultural norms. First, I examine Bergé's novella, "In Motion," with particular attention to how she treats questions of identity, subjectivity, and authenticity from a distinctively non-Beat setting—from the upper east side of Manhattan. I examine how Bergé embeds her critique of the normative female gender role within a larger critique of the postwar ideal of upward mobility and how she diverges from patterns in much women Beats' work through her development of a female subjectivity that is mutually constitutive instead of defined as an autonomous process. Next, I discuss Albert's short story, "The Small Singer," with attention to how the writer uses this particular genre to embody the text's depiction of the female protagonist's gradually diminishing sense of empowerment and subjectivity. Unlike the other female characters or speakers examined throughout the dissertation, Albert's protagonist is not defined by the role of lover, wife, or mother—nor does she struggle under the pressure to eventually accept the latter two roles as they are traditionally defined. Rather, Albert depicts the life of a singer as largely defined by her artistry, and Albert uses the singer's voice to symbolize the potential for her ability to develop and maintain independence and subjectivity as a woman. Albert's portrayal of female subjectivity, however, diverges from those provided in the other texts included in my study, which highlights one of the important distinctions of Albert's work.

In part, I have chosen to focus specifically on Bergé and Albert because they meet the same criteria for my selection of the writers included in the main chapters. Like di Prima, Johnson, and Jones, Bergé and Albert are each award-winning writers who were born and came of age in New York City and whose bodies of work include a range of literary genres. In light of these general similarities, the Epilogue continues to develop a

cohesive narrative of women writers of the New York City Beat literary community. That is, the final portion of my study further demonstrates the distinctive literary achievements of female Beats whose individual experiences as women on the margins of the largely male homosocial New York City Beat community shaped their work in important ways.

In order to extend the narrative of women Beat writers, however, I have also chosen to include Bergé and Albert for the ways in which they each diverge from the relative similarities between di Prima, Johnson, and Jones and thus represent a broader spectrum of female Beats. As noted above, Bergé and Albert remain on the periphery of Beat studies—relative to the others that I include in this study, that is—as do many other women Beats, such as Frazer, Kandel, Hochman, and weiss. Further, neither Bergé nor Albert was romantically involved with any of the prominent male Beat writers (nor does either have a published memoir that explores such relationships), and as such, they represent the many women Beat writers who remain peripheral within Beat studies in part because they lack the personal affiliations with male Beats that may have initially helped bring the existing critical attention to those who did have such relationships. Attention to the lives and work of writers such as Bergé and Albert emphasizes that it is not only Beat women who were closely connected to Beat men who deserve to be regularly included in the community's literary history. My discussion of Bergé and Albert illustrates what is to be gained by entering such unrecognized writers into this important literary and cultural discourse.

Additionally, as noted earlier, Bergé and Albert are from the first and third generations of the Beat period, respectively. They each represent very different Beat histories as shaped in part by their generational differences, which also distinguishes

them from di Prima, Johnson, and Jones (from the second generation of women Beats). Specifically, Bergé directly participated in the New York City poetry scene as a young writer, and her work engages in Beat themes and aesthetics, but generally only indirectly describes or addresses the Beat scene itself in her work. In contrast, Albert's involvement in the Beat community was more tangential than Bergé's, and she did not start publishing until the late 1960s, but the Beat scene itself is an explicit and central focus in her writing, particularly in her two novels. In light of these differences, the Epilogue provides insight into these writers' respective generations and the role that each writer's distinct historical context played in the development of her work.

Overall, the inclusion of Bergé and Albert in the Epilogue challenges available frameworks for establishing the canon of women Beats as it repositions Albert and Bergé from the periphery to the center of women Beat studies. Indeed, the Epilogue illustrates how situating such marginalized writers alongside the more recognizable women Beat writers can expand our understanding of the various continuities, gaps, and disparities between women Beats. The Epilogue concludes the dissertation by exemplifying the ways in which attention to a wide range of women Beat writers can raise new questions for understanding how these writers individually and collectively contribute to and reconceptualize our understanding of the Beat community and its literary tradition.

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The Girl Gang: Women Writers of the New York City Beat Community ultimately illustrates how the lives and work of women Beat writers provide a continuous, yet multifaceted view of the New York City Beat community. It argues that women played an integral role in this undeniably important literary and cultural movement as writers in

their own right. This study expands the current canon of women Beats in its effort to redefine current conceptions of the Beat community as a "boy gang" and to critically engage the protofeminist work of writers who remain marginal within Beat studies as well as within the studies of women's writing and contemporary fiction and poetry, more broadly. This dissertation creates a new, more inclusive Beat narrative by looking at both relatively well-known and marginalized female Beats and at texts that are published, out of print, or unpublished, from a range of genres, as well as from the early and later years of the Beat period. *The Girl Gang* shows how women Beats engage in key literary and cultural discourses as they resist and rewrite representations of the female figure. Through its study of five women Beat writers, this project highlights, in Johnson's words, how a "girl gang" of writers can indeed exemplify the role of the artist, and more importantly, significantly contribute to and redefine the notion of the Beat writer.

NOTES

1. I address the status of Eliot's writing as both "academic" and nontraditional in Chapter One. (See chap. 1, note 99.)

2. Ann Charters identifies the period between 1956 and 1968 as when the Beat movement "flourished." Foreword to *The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar America* (Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Co., 1983), xii.

3. Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 11.

4. Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1983), 171; Kerouac, "The Origins of the Beat Generation" (San Francisco, CA: Grey Fox Press, 2001), 61.

5. Qtd. in Joyce Johnson, *Minor Characters* (Boston, MA: Houghton, 1983), 79.

6. Johnson, *Minor*, 81 (emphasis in original).

7. *Minor*, 81.

8. Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1979), 35.

9. Rich, 35.

10. Rich, 35.

11. Women Beat writers continue to publish, but these publications are less frequent and perhaps less visible or noted than the others I refer to here—precisely because of the tendency to view women Beats as lovers or sisters rather than as writers and to assume that their work is most valuable for its insight into the Beat men's lives. These recent memoirs include Joan Haverty Kerouac's *Nobody's Wife* (2000), Carolyn Cassady's *Off the Road* (reprinted in 2007), Edie Kerouac-Parker's *You'll Be Okay* (2007), Elizabeth Von Vogt's *681 Lexington Ave* (2008), and Helen Weaver's *The Awakener* (2009).

12. See Gerald Nicosia, *One and Only: The Untold Story of* On the Road *and of LuAnne Henderson, the Woman Who Started Jack and Neal on Their Journey* (2011).

This isn't to suggest that scholars are not otherwise furthering the recovery or criticism of women Beat writers, but the frequency of such publications has slowed down since the first wave of recovery in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which I discuss further shortly.

13. My use of the term "bohemian" throughout the dissertation refers to the larger countercultural community of artists, including musicians, dancers, performers, and painters, that also includes the Beat writers, who were generally associated with, if not

directly involved with artists of this larger group in a personal or artistic capacity. When referring specifically to the Beats, I vary between "Beat community" and "Beat literary community" depending on the context and need for emphasis. In general, "Beat community" refers to the group of men and women who collectively resisted mainstream standards in postwar New York City—with the exception of the men's acceptance and perpetuation of the normative female gender role—and that often worked together on various texts or literary projects, in some cases lived together, and spent time in the same social spaces.

14. Susan Suleiman, as discussed by Elizabeth Frost, refers to this paradoxical position of such women writers as a "'double margin.'" (Qtd. in Frost, *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry* [Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003], xviii.) Frost explains, "Along with their male counterparts, [women] are at the edge of the mainstream culture from which they emerge… . But often they also remain on the fringes of the very groups that seek sexual and psychic liberation." *The Feminist Avant-Garde*, xviii.

15. Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman were not Transcendentalists, but they were a part of this broader Concord literary community nonetheless. Also, the Concord community is especially relevant to a discussion of the Beats as the Transcendentalists are considered one of the Beats' major American influences, both philosophically and aesthetically. Tim Hunt, for example, describes how the Beats saw the Transcendentalists "as precursors … who offered a way to think of literature as a way to move beyond the quotidian and contingent." ("Many Drummers, a Single Dance?," *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, ed. Ronna C. Johnson and Nancy M. Grace [New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002], 256.) And Jennie Skerl writes, "Like their American precursors, the Transcendentalists, [the Beats] fashioned a role as poet-prophets who sought a spiritual alternative to the relentless materialist drive of industrial capitalism." (*Reconstructing the Beats* [New York; Houndmills, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004], 2.) Also, see Bradley Stiles's *Emerson's Contemporaries and Kerouac's Crowd: A Problem of Self-Location* for more on the connections between the Transcendentalists and the Beats.

16. Perry Miller, *The American Transcendentalists, Their Prose and Poetry* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957), x.

17. Miller, x.

18. Susan Cheever, *American Bloomsbury: Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry David Thoreau: Their Lives, Their Loves, Their Work* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 8.

19. Henry Jack Tobias, *Santa Fe: A Modern History, 1880-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 85.

20. Tobias, 86.

21. Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 7-8, 11, 7.

22. Davidson, 16.

23. Elizabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 2.

24. Christine Stansell writes in her discussion of the development of American bohemianism in Greenwich Village in the 1890s, "When they imagined bohemia, turn-of-the-century Americans called up an imagery of art, hedonism, and dissent from bourgeois life that originated in Paris in the 1830s." She continues, emphasizing the social or communal and countercultural nature of bohemia: "By midcentury the word had acquired a wider meaning, as an enclave of rebels and impoverished artists." (*American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* [New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000], 17.) And as Marty Jezer explains, bohemianism is fundamentally developed "out of the requirements of creative work," and thus the bohemia of the post-WWII period was defined by the need for community. (*The Dark Ages: Life in the United States, 1945-1960* [Boston: South End Press, 1982], 264.) See Chapters One and Two for more on this.

25. Edward H. Foster, *Understanding the Beats* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 5.

26. Robert Holton, "'The Sordid Hipsters of America': Beat Culture and the Folds of Heterogeneity," *Reconstructing the Beats*, 11, 17, 17.

27. Throughout the dissertation, I use the term "avant-garde" (somewhat similar to Donald Allen's term "New American") to refer to the various countercultural artists of the postwar period, including not only the Beats, but others such as Black Mountain and New York School poets. My use of the term follows in Frost's definition of the "avant-garde": "any artistic practice that combines radical new forms with radical politics or utopian vision." (*The Feminist Avant-Garde*, xiv.) This usage is also consistent with frequent descriptions in Beat scholarship of the Beats as an avant-garde group. See Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black*, for example.

28. Ann Douglas, "The City Where the Beats Were Moved to Howl," *The Rolling Stone Book of the Beats: The Beat Generation and American Culture*, ed. Holly George-Warren (New York: Hyperion, 1999), 6.

29. Douglas, "The City," 7.

30. Ronna Johnson and Nancy Grace, "Visions and Revisions of the Beat Generation," *Girls Who Wore Black*, 2. From this point forward, all references to Ronna Johnson in the body of the text will include her full name in order to distinguish between her and Joyce Johnson.

31. Johnson and Grace, “Visions,” 3.

32. This rejection of or resistance to one’s categorization in a particular literary group is not unique within the Beat community. For more on this issue from the perspectives of the writers themselves, see Ann Charters’s *Beat Down to Your Soul* as well as Grace and Johnson’s *Breaking the Rule of Cool*.

33. Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank, 1900-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 26.

34. Grace and Johnson, *Breaking the Rule of Cool: Interviewing and Reading Women Beat Writers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), x.

35. Frost notes other contemporary poetic groups, including Vorticism, the Black Arts, and the Language poets, within which the women poets have not been “visible spokespeople, theorists, or anthologized representatives.” *The Feminist Avant-Garde*, xviii.

36. Davidson, 174.

37. Benstock, 11, 10.

38. Benstock, 15.

39. Davidson, 174.

40. Johnson and Grace, “Visions,” 4.

41. See also collections of correspondence, such as *Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: The Letters* (2010).

42. The nature of the Beat literary community as a “boy gang” has been well established in studies of the Beats as well as in various histories of the period, such as Barbara Ehrenreich’s *The Hearts of Men* and David Halberstams’s *The Fifties*.

43. In discussions of Jones and Baraka as a couple, most scholars refer to Jones by her maiden name, Cohen, and to Baraka as Jones (Cohen didn’t become Jones until 1958, and Jones didn’t become Baraka until 1967, after their divorce—first Imamu Amiri Baraka, then the Imamu was dropped in 1974). However, to remain consistent with my use of Hettie Jones as her authorial name and to prevent confusion between her and her husband during the course of their marriage, I refer to Hettie as Jones and to LeRoi as Baraka.

44. In Chapter Two, I discuss how the aspect of their relationship as it was shaped in part by their shared work as writers is often overlooked, but it is nevertheless important

to note here that although Johnson did share her concerns about her writing, Kerouac's feedback or advice was often superficial. See Johnson and Kerouac's *Door Wide Open*.

45. Grace, "Interviewing Women Beat Writers," *Breaking*, 51.

46. See Rachel Blau DuPlessis's "Manifests" and "Manhood and Its Poetic Projects" for more on the way in which women Beat writers were inspired by the male Beats, despite their general exclusion from the men's lives and work.

47. This is the case regarding the women's literary pursuits as well as their actual living conditions. As Jennie Skerl points out, Beat women could be argued to have sustained the Beat community themselves as the primary "wage-earners." ("Mid-Century Bohemia Redefined: Portraits by Beat Women" presented at the MLA Conference in December 2009.) The women held regular jobs and pursued their writing during their other time. Further, it was their apartments that housed the community itself. See Ehrenreich for more on the male Beats' rebellion against the bread-winner role, and see various Beat histories for details regarding the women's apartments as the center of the Beats' activities.

48. They had an affair on and off for several years during his marriage to Jones and had a child together in 1962.

49. See Johnson and Kerouac's *Door Wide Open* and di Prima's *Recollections of My Life as a Woman*.

50. Johnson played an integral role in getting Kerouac's *Visions of Cody* published in 1973 after his death, but this was not a collaboration in the same sense as Jones/Baraka's and di Prima/Baraka's discussed here.

51. See Jones's *How I Became Hettie Jones* and *di Prima's Recollections*.

52. Di Prima, *Recollections of My Life as a Woman: The New York Years: A Memoir* (New York: Viking, 2001), 253.

53. Grace, "Snapshots, Sand Paintings, and Celluloid: Formal Considerations in the Life Writing of Women Writers from the Beat Generation," *Girls Who Wore Black*, 143.

54. Ginsberg qtd. in *A Different Beat: Writings by Women of the Beat Generation*, ed. Richard Peabody (New York: High Risk Books, 1997), 1.

55. R. Johnson, "Mapping Women Writers of the Beat Generation," *Breaking*, 6.

56. Tony Trigilio is currently editing a collection of Cowen's poetry to publish.

57. See Davidson and Ehrenreich for more on the fundamental male homosocial nature of the Beats.

58. Kerouac, "Origins," 61.

59. "Origins," 61.

60. Kerouac qtd. in Amy Friedman, "'I say my new name': Women Writers of the Beat Generation," *The Beat Generation Writers*, ed. A. Robert Lee (London: Pluto Press, 1996), 203.

61. John Clellon Holmes, *Go* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1988), xvii.

62. Ginsberg qtd. in Peabody, 1.

63. Peabody, 3.

64. Skerl, *Reconstructing*, 1.

65. Writer Norman Podhoretz, for example, attacked what he called "The Know-Nothing Bohemians" in a 1958 issue of *Partisan Review*. (In 1957, Podhoretz published "A Howl of Protest in San Francisco" in *The New Republic*, which was then expanded into "The Know-Nothing Bohemians.") Comparing the Beats to the previous American bohemianism of the 1920s, which Podhoretz describes as having "ideals [of] intelligence, cultivation, [and] spiritual refinement," he claims that the 1950s bohemianism "is another kettle of fish altogether": "It is hostile to civilization; it worships primitivism, instinct, energy, 'blood.' To the extent that it has intellectual interests at all, they run to mystical doctrines, irrationalist philosophies, and left-wing Reichianism. The only art the new Bohemians have any use for is jazz, mainly of the cool variety." ("The Know-Nothing Bohemians," *Beat Down to Your Soul: What Was the Beat Generation?*, ed. Ann Charters [New York: Penguin Books, 2001], 484.) For Podhoretz and others such as John Ciardi, Diana Trilling, and Irving Howe, the Beats were anti-intellectuals, "miserable children," who merely put on a "front of disreputableness and rebellion." (Trilling, "The Other Night at Columbia: A Report from the Academy," *Beat Down to Your Soul*, 573.) These contemporary bohemians, such critics claimed, were interested only in superficially protesting against society and were certainly not capable of expanding the American literary tradition with their writing. (See John Ciardi's "Epitaph for the Dead Beats" originally published in *Saturday Review* in February 1960, Diana Trilling's "The Other Night at Columbia" originally published in *Partisan Review* 26 in the spring of 1959, and Irving Howe's "Mass Society and Modern Fiction," also published in *Partisan Review* 26.) The Maynard G. Krebs character of *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* (a popular television show that ran from 1959 to 1963) represents a more light-hearted version of this response to the Beats—though nonetheless disparaging. Krebs was the typical bohemian stereotype, speaking in Beat slang like, "chick," "beat," and "dig," and providing a stark contrast to the titular character in his general silliness and aversion to

work. Also, Krebs had a goatee and looked shabby in general, further playing into the bohemian stereotype as sloppy and anti-intellectual.

66. See, for example, Charters's *Beats and Company*, Foster's *Understanding the Beats*, and Steve Watson's *The Birth of the Beat Generation*. One notable exception to this is Davidson's discussion in *The San Francisco Renaissance* of the poetry of Helen Adam, Joanne Kyger, and Judy Grahn in his study of the (mostly male) Beat poets on the west coast.

67. References to Bonnie Bremser/Brenda Frazer fluctuate from the use of her married name (Bremser) to that of her maiden name (Frazer); for consistency, I use Frazer throughout the dissertation.

68. Johnson's and Jones's texts included in Holly George-Warren's *The Rolling Stone Book of the Beats* were also nonfiction recollections of the Beat period, essentially updated versions of memoir excerpts, but the entire collection was nonfiction essays documenting and commenting on the period—in contrast to Charters's literary anthology.

69. Hunt makes a useful argument for the importance of the women Beats' memoirs: "The remembering and reconstructing and imaginative probing in works such as *How I Became Hettie Jones* are context for understanding how writing got done in this period and thereby help us understand the broader cultural negotiation of Beat that was not only the process of producing literary texts but also the process of creating literary communities and trying to leverage cultural change through those texts and communities." "Many Drummers," 253.

70. For example, see Blossom Kirschenbaum's "Diane di Prima: Extending la Famiglia" and Linda Russo's "On Seeing Poetic Production: The Case of Hettie Jones."

71. As I discuss further in Chapter Three, Barrett Watten's essay on Jones discusses her memoir as well as her first book of poetry.

72. Graduate students and established scholars alike regularly present conference papers on Beat women such as Johnson, di Prima, Cowen, and Frazer.

73. Cornel Bonca, "The Women Who Stayed Home From the Orgy," rev. of *Women of the Beat Generation*, by Brenda Knight and *A Different Beat*, by Richard Peabody, *College Literature* 27:1 (2000): 259.

74. R. Johnson, "'And Then She Went': Beat Departures and Feminine Transgressions in Joyce Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance*," *Girls Who Wore Black*, 70.

75. As discussed earlier, there are multiauthor essays on the women Beats, but, for example, the essays by Amy Friedman function more like surveys intended to introduce the female Beats as writers and briefly discuss exemplary works from their oeuvres without exploring comparisons or contrasts in depth. Nancy Grace's "Snapshots"

also looks at the work of multiple women Beats at once and provides an important comparison of the memoirs of four writers, but its focus only on the memoirs has itself been delimiting for several of these writers, as mentioned earlier.

76. Rich, 43.

77. The connections between my project and the field of women's writing stem from the groundbreaking work of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who in constructing a canon of female writers in the 1970s, identified patterns within the work of women writers, including efforts to consciously develop an identity as "*women* writers" as well as to, conversely, "[insist] on the genderlessness of the artist's mind." Sandra M. Gilbert, *Rereading Women: Thirty Years of Exploring Our Literary Traditions* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 31, 36.

78. See Fred W. McDarrah and Timothy S. McDarrah's *Kerouac and Friends* for the use of "non-Beat" in reference to poet Frank O'Hara of the New York School; my use of the term is similar, but more broadly as an alternative to "mainstream."

79. See Susan Friedman's *Mappings* for a discussion of "identity" as simultaneously constructed by difference and sameness. She explains how identity "involves the perception of common qualities" with others and, at the same time, "requires a perception of difference from others in order for the recognition of sameness to come into play." *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 75.

80. R. Johnson, "'And Then She Went,'" 86; Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 53.

81. Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 2-3.

82. Sally Robinson, *Engendering the Subject: Gender and Self-Representation in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 11-12.

83. For more on subjectivity as a process and fundamentally affected by various forces outside of the self, see critics such as Linda Kinnahan, who draws on the work of Diana Fuss, Teresa De Lauretis, and Mary Gentile in *Poetics of the Feminine* and Rachel DuPlessis, who draws on the work of Julia Kristeva in *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry, 1908-1934*.

84. As I discuss further in Chapter Three, it is important to note that the women Beats I examine here primarily engage in issues of a white, middle-class subjectivity. Although they were marginalized because of their status as female writers, these Beat women nevertheless garnered some privileges due to their race and class—not unlike

many of the male Beats—and this is reflected in their work as it is often uncritical of hegemonic racial norms or treats them only implicitly.

85. Nancy K. Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 8.

86. Felski, 14.

87. Johnson and Grace, "Visions," 9.

88. "Visions," 13-14.

89. The chronological basis of this distinction of the women Beats as protofeminists and not feminists is slightly complicated when addressing those of their texts that were written during or after the feminist movement (such as the work of Jones discussed in Chapter Three). But to remain consistent with the rationale provided by Beat scholars and employed throughout the dissertation, I use the "proto" qualifier in each case.

90. As DuPlessis notes in her study of contemporary women's writing as feminist in its revisions of (male) literary conventions, "One cannot claim complete exclusivity, as if no male novelist or poet had ever invented anything like … postromantic strategies. … The point does not have to be exclusive to be studied: For reasons that can be linked to their gender position, women writers formulate a critique of heterosexual romance." (*Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985], xi.) Robinson makes a similar argument in her study of contemporary women writers and their treatment of women's self-representation. She writes, "To argue for a specificity of women's writing does not necessarily entail a reading of women's texts in isolation from men's texts, the canon, or hegemonic representations of Woman, the feminine, and so on." (*Engendering the Subject*, 16.) Likewise, my reading of the women Beats' work as feminist literature is not meant to exclude the possibility of male writers engaging in similar formal techniques or themes.

91. Trigilio, "Who Writes? Reading Elise Cowen's Poetry," *Girls Who Wore Black*, 123.

92. Johnson and Grace, "Visions," 2.

93. Cristanne Miller, *Cultures of Modernism: Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, & Else Lasker-Schüler: Gender and Literary Community in New York and Berlin* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 2-3.

94. C. Miller, 3.

95. Trigilio, 121.

96. Trigilio, 121.

97. Trigilio, 121.

98. Whereas Peabody includes only writers, Knight's anthology also includes "Muses" (such as Joan Vollmer Adams and Edie Parker Kerouac) and "Artists" (Jay DeFeo and Joan Brown).

99. Johnson and Grace, "Visions," 11. There is similar debate regarding the male Beats as well. See, for example, Foster's *Understanding the Beats*, Tytell's *Naked Angel*, Cook's *The Beat Generation*, and Watson's *The Birth of the Beat Generation*.

100. "Visions," 12-13.

101. Hunt, 254.

102. Interestingly, Carol Bergé dedicates a poem to Hochman, but the nature of their relationship is unclear. See "Fragment (A Gift)" in *From a Soft Angle*.

103. R. Johnson, "Mapping," 8. ("Mapping" in *Breaking the Rule of Cool* is an updated version of Johnson and Grace's co-authored "Visions" in *Girls Who Wore Black*.) The subsequent quotations in this paragraph are also from "Mapping": 15, 18.

104. Both quotations in this paragraph are from R. Johnson, "Mapping," 18.

105. Ginsberg qtd. in Peabody, 1.

106. This is the case in Charters's *The Portable Beat Reader* and Peabody's anthology; Knight includes an excerpt from Jones's memoir as well as one story and a few poems.

107. Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 140.

108. R. Johnson, "'You're Putting Me On': Jack Kerouac and the Postmodern Emergence," *The Beat Generation: Critical Essays*, ed. Kostas Myrsiades (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 47.

CHAPTER 1
"SO HERE I AM THE COOLEST IN NEW YORK": HIP SLANG AND THE FEMALE BOHEMIAN IN DIANE DI PRIMA'S *THIS KIND OF BIRD FLIES BACKWARD*

I. Introduction

In *The Beats*, one of the first anthologies of Beat literature published in 1960, writer and editor Seymour Krim introduced Diane di Prima as "one of the very few ultra-swinging girl writers on the scene."[1] Included in this collection of "the most vital and controversial writers on the American scene" was only one other female writer, Brigid Murnaghan, described simply as "a fine upright beat lady."[2] As Ann Charters notes, di Prima "didn't play the role she was supposed to"—that of the silent woman in black.[3] And as mentioned in the Introduction, Allen Ginsberg himself noted di Prima's distinction among other women writers: "Where there was a strong writer who could hold her own, like Diane di Prima, we would certainly work with her and recognize her."[4] It is unarguable that this recognition of di Prima during the Beat period itself has contributed to the fact that she is still the most renowned of the women Beats.

This distinction of di Prima among other women Beat writers can be attributed to her initiative and dedication to developing as a writer as well as to the quality of her writing itself. Di Prima's role as a writer was primary for her; she sacrificed the financial stability that she may have acquired with a standard office job for the pursuit of her artistry. Prompted by the publication of *Howl*, she initiated a correspondence with City Lights publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti about her own writing, and from there developed friendships with various writers of the Beat and closely associated literary communities, including Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Frank O'Hara, and Charles Olson. Like such male writers of the avant-garde, di Prima experimented in her writing with language, form, and

genre, and in 1958, she self-published her first book of poetry with the help of various friends and printers. Since that time, di Prima has produced a prolific body of work that continues today to draw attention by both writers and critics.

Di Prima's oeuvre is remarkably varied in terms of genre and style. It represents the evolution of an artist whose work was shaped by a range of experiences that includes her involvement in the Beat community of the 1950s and 1960s and in the civil rights and women's rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as her practice of Zen Buddhism and her study of mythology. The progression of her work corresponds with her earliest experiences on the east coast, mostly in New York City but also in upstate NY in the mid- to late 1960s, and later on the west coast, particularly San Francisco, where she moved in 1968.

Comprised of more than 30 books, including poetry, prose, and memoirs, her body of work includes: *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward* (1958), a collection of approximately 50 poems; *Dinners & Nightmares* (1961), a combination of poetry, short prose, conversations, and other literary forms that "revel in the domestic squalor and luxury" of New York City bohemia;[5] the politically-charged, performance-based poetry of *Revolutionary Letters* (1971); and the prose poems of *The Calculus of Variation* (1972). The 16-part poem, *Loba* (published between 1973 and 1998) is considered seminal in its "visionary exploration of woman as wolf goddess."[6] And perhaps the most popular of di Prima's work is *Memoirs of a Beatnik*, published in 1969. Described by di Prima as a "potboiler" and by Ronna Johnson as "soft-core porno for hire," *Memoirs* is based on di Prima's re-imaginings of New York City that are "enhanced" by her fictional descriptions of "MORE SEX" encouraged by the publishers—a distinct mixing of

memoir and tantalizing fiction that helps explain the attention it receives.[7] Di Prima more recently published a memoir true to the nonfictional promise of its genre, *Recollections of My Life as a Woman: The New York Years* (2001). *Recollections* provides an engaging detailed account of her first 30 years as she grew up and made her way through the early New York City bohemian arts culture, establishing herself as a poet, playwright, and publisher. This more recent memoir also highlights her work as co-founder and editor of ground-breaking literary magazines such as *The Floating Bear*, as founder of The Poets Press, and as co-founder of the New York Poets Theatre. Throughout her prolific literary career, di Prima has received numerous awards and honors, including poetry grants from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1973 and 1979, the Award for Lifetime Achievement in Poetry from the National Poetry Association in 1993, the 2005 Fred Cody Award for Lifetime Achievement, and most recently, in 2009, di Prima was named San Francisco's fifth Poet Laureate.

In this chapter, I read di Prima's first book of poetry, *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward* (1958), in conjunction with a collection of unpublished poetry as I trace how the development of her poetics was shaped by her shift from a suburban social space in college to the urban, avant-garde Beat community in New York City. Specifically, I examine how this shift led to a poetics marked by the use of hipster slang and the expression of female subjectivity.[8] My analysis demonstrates how di Prima uses the slang of the bohemian community to define and substantiate the identity of the bohemian—male or female—as well as to develop a subjectivity for the female bohemian in particular.[9] I situate an unpublished collection of di Prima's poetry alongside one of her relatively understudied books in order to reveal the importance of hip slang for the

development of di Prima's poetics through which she portrays the New York City bohemian culture and the female bohemian in important ways.

Specifically, I argue that di Prima speaks overtly for the bohemian experience, using slang to embody one of the primary distinctions between the bohemian community and the mainstream. Writing openly about themes such as individualism, love, and death through this defining characteristic of the Beats, di Prima gives voice and validation to the experiences of the bohemian. That is, she expresses and celebrates this figure's subjectivity through the hipster slang that represents one of the countercultural community's reactions against the mainstream. Also importantly, this chapter draws attention to how di Prima uses slang to speak specifically for the female bohemian. She develops a subjectivity for this figure who was marginalized and objectified by mainstream gender norms and even within the countercultural work of contemporary male poets, such as Ginsberg and Olson. As my analysis illustrates more specifically, in *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward*, not only does di Prima include women in the bohemian community's critique of society's norms, but also she resists and revises the commonly objectified or victimized depictions of female figures as well as notions of romantic love and female sexuality as they were derisively perceived and represented by many mainstream and avant-garde male writers at the time. Through the use of Beat slang, considered inferior and vulgar by traditional literary standards, she boldly and unapologetically expresses female experiences of love, sex, and motherhood—experiences that are often silenced, suppressed, or distorted in postwar poetry.

As noted in the Introduction, di Prima's oeuvre receives more critical attention than those of most other female Beat writers. Current single-author studies on di Prima

include Anthony Libby's "Diane Di Prima: 'Nothing is Lost: It Shines in Our Eyes,'" in which Libby traces the evolution of her revolutionary poetics, and Timothy Gray's "'The Place Where Your Nature Meets Mine': Diane Di Prima in the West," a study of how experiences in various western parts of the country inflect her writing. Also, Roseanne Giannini Quinn's "'The Willingness to Speak': Diane Di Prima and an Italian American Feminist Body Politics" and Anthony Lioi's "Real Presence: The Numina in Italian American Poetry" each examine how di Prima's Italian heritage takes shape in her work.[10]

The particular areas of di Prima's work that I focus on here, the development and practice of a slang and protofeminist poetics, are also present in various discussions of her work. Amy Friedman, for example, in "'I say my new name': Women Writers of the Beat Generation," argues how "di Prima eviscerates the myth of female domesticity" in the "Thirteen Nightmares" of *Dinners & Nightmares* and how she "superimposes the experiences of female creativity and fertility, and of motherhood" in poems written in the 1950s, such as "Song for Baby-O, Unborn," "Lullaby," and "Jeanne Poems."[11] Michael Davidson and Alicia Suskin Ostriker likewise address di Prima's attention to the topic of female identity throughout her work.[12] Further, within existing scholarship, as well as in various interviews, scholars consistently acknowledge and inquire about di Prima's experimental use of hip slang. In his attention to di Prima's mixing of opposites throughout her work, for example, Libby briefly addresses the appearance of Beat slang in the poetry of *Dinners & Nightmares*. The scope of Libby's essay, though, prevents a more sustained analysis of this aspect of her work. In fact, the use of slang within her work is more extensively addressed by di Prima herself, as she frequently discusses her

own understanding of the motivation for and effect of slang within her work in various published interviews.[13]

The existing discussions of both of these aspects of di Prima's work raise important issues about her work's cultural, social, political, and racial implications, but overall, they are limited either to a cursory critical analysis within a broader discussion or to the author's own descriptions in interviews. My reading of *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward* in conjunction with her unpublished college poetry provides a more sustained look at the development of di Prima's slang and protofeminist poetics in order to effectively understand the significance of her experience within the New York City Beat community and how this largely affected her experimentation with language, style, and gender politics. This chapter will highlight the function of community for di Prima's poetics, draw attention to di Prima's first book in new and important ways, and demonstrate her unique contribution to the Beat literary tradition as well as to the contemporary avant-garde and feminist studies.

II. The Development of a Beat Poetics

Di Prima's development as a Beat poet can be traced back to her shift from academia to the culturally-vibrant bohemian community of New York City. As a student at Swarthmore College, di Prima was reading traditional, formal poetry and struggling to write within these conventions. Within the countercultural community of New York City, di Prima developed a critical perspective toward academia, its poetic tradition, and the mainstream in general that then led to her experimental poetics.

Di Prima was born in Brooklyn in 1934, and her earliest poetry found in handwritten notebooks is dated at age six.[14] Though she had been writing for several

years, at age 14, di Prima realized her desire to "be poet [*sic*]."[15] When she read novelist Somerset Maugham's reference to a Keats quotation ("Beauty is truth, truth beauty" from "Ode on a Grecian Urn"), she was inspired to seek out Keats's letters, which then significantly shaped her ideas about poetry and strongly influenced her commitment to the arts.[16] In particular, di Prima explains that Keats's theory of the imagination had a profound impact on her, helping her realize that "if you could imagine anything clearly enough, and tell it precisely enough, … you could bring it about."[17] Likewise, Keats's concept of Negative Capability influenced di Prima's sense of how, as a poet, she could write freely, "not pursuing any viewpoint" deliberately through her work, but rather "letting [poetry] come *through* you. Leaving behind opinion and judgment."[18] Immersing herself in Keats's letters, di Prima continued to write poetry, but her brief stint at college from the Fall of 1951 to the end of 1952 would prove to be a rather difficult experience for her and inhibit her poetic development as she recalls in her 2001 memoir, *Recollections of My Life as a Woman*.

Di Prima characterizes Swarthmore College as having a "cold intellect," which made her feel "buried alive"—as an environment where she could "smell the ultimate poverty of spirit."[19] She attended the private liberal arts college in the Philadelphia suburbs because her parents thought a relatively small college not too far from their Brooklyn home would be most suitable. At age 17, she initially welcomed the opportunity to be away from her home and family but soon discovered college as a place "cut off from the world" that made her feel lost.[20] She describes constantly trying to write at Swarthmore but ultimately being unable to produce: "This is the only place I have ever been where it is next to impossible to write a poem."[21] She was studying the classics such

as Chaucer and Shakespeare in her English classes, and found her professors to be “tired [and] cynical.” Though she had access to outdoor space unavailable at home in Brooklyn and took part in conventional college activities such as attending football games, dating, and drinking beer, di Prima describes the environment at Swarthmore as “dreary”—perhaps a combination of the tiresome approach to studying literature by her “jaded” professors and her superficial attempts to fit in and take part in the “normal” college experience.

Di Prima’s overwhelming desire to go “No day without a line” set her apart from most other students on campus. She attempted to spend some of her time privately, but found that the girls around her worried about such “odd” behavior. She explains,

> I frequently shut my door, lock it sometimes, play music, write, and daydream. Sometimes when I open it, I find people waiting outside. … They always say that they are worried. So unusual is it to lock one’s door that sometimes they wonder if I killed myself. I hate it. Feel invaded. Hate being spied on.

Some of di Prima’s new friends did share her artistic interests (a group that she describes as “all maverick”), but they began dropping out by the second year. Wanting to live as a student and poet on her own terms, di Prima began to see that her “hunger for truth [was] turning into rage.” Her individual interests and values set her apart from most others, and as her friends in similar circumstances began leaving, the suburban college setting left her feeling isolated and dispirited. In Manhattan for winter break in 1952, di Prima became overwhelmed with what New York City had to offer, particularly in contrast to that of the college environment:

> I am again in New York. It is a relief to be here: the energy, the noise of the City. Even the crudeness—loud voices on streets and in restaurants—is a blessing. Nothing here is muffled or polite. It is huge and unruly and jostling for space. I find it exhilarating.[22]

Having completed only three semesters, she dropped out of Swarthmore at the end of 1952 and moved to Manhattan—a place that could nurture rather than stifle her independent and artistic spirit.

Di Prima was intensely drawn to the life of New York City from a young age. As she describes in her memoir, her grandfather would take her out at night when she could absorb "the lights, the noises" and "smells of mystery" that captivated her. As a young woman, di Prima and her friends "felt safe and at home" in the city. And upon leaving Swarthmore, it was in New York City that she, along with fellow artists, be it a "writer, dancer, painter, musician, actor, photographer, sculptor, you name it" sought to live and create.[23] In a vivid passage from *Memoirs of a Beatnik*, di Prima describes her all-encompassing "love affair" with New York City as:

> an overwhelming love of the alleys and warehouses, of the strange cemetery downtown at Trinity Church, of Wall Street in the dead of night, Cathedral Parkway on Sunday afternoons, of the Chrysler building gleaming like fabled towers in the October sun, the incredible prana and energy in the air, stirring a creativity that seemed to spring from the fiery core of the planet and burst like a thousand boiling volcanoes in the music and painting, the dancing and the poetry of this magic city.[24]

Though di Prima would eventually realize that "New York City was not *the* center, but *one* center" after taking several trips to different parts of the west of the country beginning in 1961, New York City provided di Prima with the culturally- and creatively-stimulating life she sought as a young bohemian.[25]

Once she moved to the Lower East Side of Manhattan in early 1953, di Prima promptly immersed herself in the burgeoning arts scene around her. She had experienced firsthand at Swarthmore the deadening impact of the academic establishment and of mainstream conformity in general, and the bohemian community in New York City

provided a space within which her critical perspective on academia and literary conventions could be developed and supported. She and her fellow "outlaw artist renunciants" positioned themselves deliberately on the margins of the mainstream so as to escape the growing materialism and "get-ahead thrust of America 1950"—and they did so collectively.[26] Distancing oneself from the mainstream at this time certainly did not entail individual isolation. On the contrary, with other artists similarly seeking refuge from the steadily "progressing" post-WWII society—manifested in what they perceived to be the mainstream's threatening conformity and homogeneity—di Prima found a community of various artists who strongly believed in the importance of fostering personal creativity and individual freedom.[27]

As I discuss in more detail later, an essential part of such a countercultural community is the use of language as a means for its members to embody and express their nonconformity. The use of Beat slang that reflects this particular community's cultural and social rebellion appears in di Prima's first book of poetry and continued to evolve throughout her body of work—becoming one of the defining characteristics of her poetics. *Dinners & Nightmares*, for example, which contains much of the poetry first published in *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward*, also contains new material, in which di Prima extends her use of slang to several other genres, such as short prose and what she calls Conversations.[28] In one of the Conversations, "The Quarrel," di Prima describes the female speaker's anger and resentment toward her lover, Mark, for his sexist assumption that she should do the dishes because she's a woman and he has more important things to do. Capturing the hegemonic hierarchical relationship between men and women even within this bohemian setting, di Prima describes the speaker thinking to herself: "I

probably have just as fucking much work to do as you do. … I am just as lazy as you. … Just because I happen to be a chick I thought."[29] But the speaker suppresses her anger and doesn't actually say any of this to Mark "because it's so fucking uncool to talk about it."[30] In this text's themes of what Ostriker aptly refers to as "masculine self-love and feminine self-suppression hipster-style,"[31] di Prima's use of slang is simplistic and cliché, using words such as "chick" and "uncool." Nevertheless, in conjunction with the use of profanity, this use of slang depicts the female bohemian's frustrated response to a struggle that is itself clichéd. That is, the male bohemian perpetuates the same gender-based behavior responsible for marginalizing women within the mainstream. And in this way, di Prima's particular use of clichéd slang evenly reflects the situation to which the female bohemian responds.

In subsequent poetry, such as that published in *The New Handbook of Heaven* (1962), *Earthsong* (1968), and *Loba*, di Prima's use of slang is combined with a more experimental use of space on the page as well as with her adoption of Ezra Pound's abbreviations, such as wd, yr, cdnt.[32] A poem such as *Earthsong*'s "The Passionate Hipster to His Chick" exemplifies di Prima's use of slang and humor as she presents a contemporary version of Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love":

> Come live with me and be my love
> And we will all the pleasures prove
> That railroad flat or hot-rod wheel
> Or tea-pads 3 AM conceal.
>
> And we will sit upon the floor
> And watch the junkies bolt the door
> By one cool trumpeter whose beat
> Tells real bad tales for the elite.
>
> And I will make a bed of coats
> And dig with you the gonest notes.

> You'll get a leather cap and jacket
> I know a cat that's in the racket
>
> …
>
> I know a bunch that really blows
> From Friday night till Sunday goes
> If all these kickes thy minde may move
> Then live with me, and be my love.

Writing in the same form as the Renaissance poet and using Marlowe's opening and closing lines, di Prima quite humorously replaces, for example, Marlowe's shepherd's offer to share with his love the experience of "Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks" and to hand make "A gown made of the finest wool" with her hipster's offer to "watch the junkies bolt the door" and give his "chick" a stolen "leather cap and jacket"—all while "digging the gonest notes." Also, Marlowe's "delights" are substituted with di Prima's "kickes" in the penultimate line (a spelling itself symbolizing di Prima's playful revision of Marlowe's "literary" language). In this particular example, di Prima overtly responds to the formal poetic tradition of the Renaissance, which is represented in the contemporary period by the academic poetry of writers such as Robert Lowell and Richard Wilbur.[33] In her slang revision of this classic "literary" poem, di Prima deliberately mocks the traditional.[34] And it is precisely this playful use of slang that di Prima incorporates throughout her work in various ways—all of which functions to represent her interpretations of the New York City bohemian community experience.

It is important to note that once di Prima left the New York City bohemian scene and settled on the West coast, the appearance of slang within her poetry decreased. Timothy Gray points out that in conjunction with di Prima's move from "the harsher style of the New York scene" to the West and its "ecological and mystical paradigms," her

"diction and tone [veer] away from hipster irony."[35] Nevertheless, in a poem written in the 1960s such as "A Spell for Felicia, That She Come Away," di Prima's depiction of a "chick" trapped in domestic burdens is powerfully expressed through the hipster slang that characterizes her earliest work.[36] Di Prima also moves back and forth between hipster slang and more elevated poetic diction throughout *Loba*, an epic poem in which she "rewrites Western religious history, its central narratives and characters, to refigure God and the soul in the form of a sister."[37] Given the hip slang's roots within the New York City bohemian scene, it is not surprising that its prevalence decreases throughout di Prima's later work; as her context and subject matter evolves, so does her poetic style. Indeed, the evolution of her use of slang throughout her body of work helps demonstrate the progression of di Prima as a poet over 50+ years.

III. The Colloquial and Slang in American Poetry

Between 1953 and 1957, di Prima wrote the poetry that would be published in *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward*. Like many of her contemporaries, such as Olson, O'Hara, Robert Creeley, Joanna McClure, Joanne Kyger, and Carol Bergé, di Prima followed in the tradition of Walt Whitman in the use of the colloquial. Whitman, along with other key American literary figures such as Washington Irving and Mark Twain, championed the value and the literary use of slang. In "Slang in America" published in 1888, for example, Whitman argues that slang is the root of the American language, that which "produces poets and poems."[38] He argues, "Slang not only brings the first feeders of [Language], but is afterward the start of fancy, imagination and humor, breathing into its nostrils the breath of life."[39] As Louis Untermeyer describes, Whitman was one of the first American writers to favor "the richness and vigor of the casual word" at the expense

of "the polite language of the pulpit and the lifeless rhetoric of its libraries."[40] In an effort to develop a uniquely American literature that would draw on the subtle differences between American speech and the English literary language, Whitman elevated the language of the masses through his writing, blurring the boundary between formal or "literary" language and the colloquial.[41]

This colloquial tradition strongly influenced modernist poets such as William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound, and for contemporary avant-garde poets, this literary style signified their "reaction against the serious, ironic, ostentatiously well made lyric that dominated the post-war poetry scene."[42] As James Smethurst describes, one of the key factors that characterized di Prima and other contemporary poets was the "shared concern with establishing an authentic American diction that was both popular and literary, both self-parodic and self-celebratory, and often saturated with the vocabulary, the usages, and the accents of mass culture."[43] Like their literary predecessors, the avant-garde poets of the 1950s were inspired to cultivate poetry that used concrete particulars and everyday objects for its subject and the "vocabulary drawn from up-to-date American speech" and "the cadences of contemporary American life" for its language and rhythm.[44]

The opening lines from O'Hara's "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul" (1961) represent the post-WWII poet's deliberate use of "non-literary" language:

> It is 12:10 in New York and I am wondering
> if I will finish this in time to meet Norman for lunch
> ah lunch! I think I am going crazy
> what with my terrible hangover and the weekend coming up[45]

As illustrated here, the work of many "New American" poets (in the words of Donald Allen) reflected a direct resistance to the willfully complex, symbolist, opaque poetry practiced by T.S. Eliot and other formalists.[46] Considered to be impersonal and objective,

the academic poetry of New Critics and the New York Intellectuals provided the model against which di Prima and other poets in New York City, along with those of contemporaneous communities, such as the Black Mountain and San Francisco poets, would work.[47]

Di Prima and other Beat writers, such as Ginsberg, however, infused their poetry not only broadly with the colloquial, but also specifically with the slang used by the New York City bohemian community. For example, in Love Poem #2 from *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward*, di Prima writes,

> Remember you
> long as sodomy, sure as the black taste
> of morning
> timeless as folded to no love backwards
> lips and the arch ache swinging from back to
> thighs clued in for crazy cool
> and endless not enough.
> Not yet.

For di Prima, the colloquial is highly contextualized—using words and phrases (such as "swinging" and "crazy cool") derived from and evoking rhythms akin to the 1940s and 1950s bebop scene. And in this particular example, di Prima's use of slang has a sharpness, a vividness, generally lacking in the relatively plain colloquial of O'Hara's poem. Somewhat similarly, Ginsberg's use of slang is characterized by an intensity and richness of language. In *Howl*, for instance, Ginsberg describes how the "best minds of [his] generation" were

> a lost battalion of platonic conversationalists jumping down the stoops off fire
>   escapes off windowsills off Empire State out of the moon,
> yacketayakking screaming vomiting whispering facts and memories and
>   anecdotes and eyeball kicks and shocks of hospitals and jails and wars[48]

As Jonah Raskin explains, Ginsberg "released a torrent of words, images, emotions, and experiences," writing "with verbal pyrotechnics, rhetorical flourishes, and dramatic phrases."[49] In effect, Raskin argues, "Reading [*Howl*] yields a feeling of intoxication. The words produce an electrical charge that is exhilarating."[50] Ginsberg's use of slang is notably original, often defying common usage, and this has largely defined Ginsberg's strength as a poet.

In contrast to the overt intensity of Ginsberg's poetics, di Prima's slang poetics is generally more subtle and minimalist—fluctuating in her representative first book of poetry from the less frequent but more textured use of slang, such as in the Love Poem quoted above, to the more frequent literal use of slang and the appearance of some clichéd slang such as "cool," "dig," and "flip." The quotation in the title of this chapter, for example, "So here I am the coolest in New York," illustrates di Prima's use of the simple and commonplace phrase "the coolest" as well as the considerable sparseness of her poetic line to express the bravado of the Beat writer.[51] Such stylistic distinctions between Ginsberg's and di Prima's use of slang may suggest that di Prima's poetics is less bold or effective than Ginsberg's. In fact, it could be argued that, at least superficially, her style affirms mainstream critiques of the Beats as anti-intellectuals, claims that the use of hipster slang indicates a "simple inability to express anything in words," as critic Norman Podhoretz argued in the late 1950s.[52] However, this is not the case.

The style of di Prima's slang poetics signifies her endeavor to self-consciously construct and portray the identity and voice of the Beat or bohemian figure. Writing poetry in a style that is, as Seymour Krim described in 1960, "honest [and] terse," di

Prima asserts and expresses a Beat stance with purity and authenticity, using the language spoken on the margins of society as a means of communicating truths from this outsider perspective.[53] She uses Beat slang as it is spoken in its basic form as a means to validate and substantiate the experience of the bohemian. While Ginsberg reacts against the formal and considerably dense quality of traditionalist poetry in a Whitmanesque style, di Prima does so in a minimalist style—like that of Williams—infusing her poetry with "the vocabulary, the usages, and the accents" of her fellow nonconformists in a manner that is unadorned.[54]

Within a discussion of how the Beats' language developed through the "absorption of the vocabularies of marginalized cultures and subcultures that had developed distinctive dialects," Robert Holton argues that there is more to the use of jargon than what it might represent superficially.[55] In the words of M.M. Bakhtin, "language is conceived as ideologically saturated, language [is] a world view."[56] It is my contention that di Prima's slang poetics embodies this notion of language as representative of a "world view" as it represents her confrontation and revision of the traditional in multiple ways. Her slang poetics resists and revises the traditional as it is represented by the poetic use of "literary" language, by the marginalization of the Beat or nonconformist in general, as well as by the subordination of women in society and literature. Thus, the boldness or intensity of her poetics lies, not necessarily in the actual slang itself—though sometimes this is the case—but in her efforts to express the bohemian experience with honesty and authenticity, as well as to speak directly for the female bohemian—all while using Beat slang.[57] Importantly, as noted earlier, this latter achievement stands in distinct contrast to much of the work of di Prima's male Beat and

non-Beat contemporaries, including *Howl* and its almost exclusive focus on the experiences of Ginsberg's fellow "underground men."[58] The motivation behind such efforts is also highlighted when the slang poetics of *This Kind* is situated alongside di Prima's earlier college poetry, as this reveals a deliberate shift from a more sophisticated to a more seemingly simplistic use of language that is nevertheless powerful and provocative.

IV. Di Prima's Slang and Protofeminist Poetics

Slang and Individualism in This Kind of Bird Flies Backward

A brief overview of the overall style of *This Kind* is useful to contextualize my more focused discussion of its slang. Like Williams, Pound, and H.D. before her, di Prima's early poetics can be described as "on a thin diet"[59]—seeking precision and directness through minimalism and a use of the vernacular rather than presenting extraneous description and abstract symbolism through "literary" language. As such, throughout *This Kind*, the poetry is concise, using language sparingly, but effectively. The appearance of slang fluctuates throughout the book—more prominent in some poems than in others. Overall, this first book of di Prima's poetry reads as casual, playful, energetic, and self-assured. In notably short lines, ranging from monosyllabic lines to the less frequent length of 10 or 12 syllables, there is an immediacy to this poetry; most of the poems are fast-paced and unrhymed, at times staccato-like, expressing an overall informality and spontaneity. Also, there is an almost exclusive use of the lowercase throughout *This Kind*, contrasted only infrequently, such as in this first of three playful "Riffs" in all capitalized letters:

> SO BABE
> WHO SEZ

IT'S COOL
TO CUT
JUST CAUSE
THE HOUSE BURNED DOWN?

The capitalization here clearly evokes a sense of urgency, and the first five lines of two syllables each read with a well-defined beat, evoking its own rhythm as a bebop piece might—an effect suggested by the title of this short series itself, "Riffs."

Following this capitalized poem is the second "Riff" below, which in almost all lowercase and with wider spacing reads much more casually, at a slower pace that virtually embodies the very directions the speaker gives:

walk easy

hang loose

stay cool

just once

I dare you

As in this poem, the majority of poetry of *This Kind* lacks end punctuation, contributing to the casualness or informality of the speaker as well as to the open-endedness of the poem. In the third and final "Riff," di Prima poses a question without a question mark:

what happens on the day
the sky
doesn't
fall

Di Prima reverses the typical form of the idiomatic exclamation that the sky is falling here. In conjunction with her resistance to standard capitalization and punctuation, the idiomatic reversal embodies the poetic experimentation and nonconformity that represents the bohemian experience itself.

Further, the pacing of the poetry throughout *This Kind* is most effectively achieved through the combination of di Prima's experimentation with capitalization, punctuation, and lineation. Specifically, the staccato-like rhythm of many of the poems in *This Kind* is often achieved through di Prima's playfulness with enjambment, similar to Williams' lineation in a poem such as "The Red Wheelbarrow" as well as in the work of his poetic admirer, Robert Creeley.[60] Incorporating similarly unconventional line breaks in her poetry, di Prima fragments her poems in unexpected ways, at times emphasizing particular words and images. Overall, this helps her achieve a playful, though sometimes choppy pace that may defy readers' expectations—creating unexpected pauses and, in doing so, actually propelling the reader forward.

Although the following poem lacks the slang more strongly illustrated in the preceding poems, each stanza of "The Window" demonstrates di Prima's use of enjambment in conjunction with the absence of punctuation and sentence- or line-based capitalization that blurs sentence boundaries and achieves a moderate halting effect.[61] Here is the poem in its entirety:

> you are my bread
> and the hairline
> noise
> of my bones
> you are almost
> the sea
>
> you are not stone
> or molten sound
> I think
> you have no hands
>
> this kind of bird flies backward
> and this love
> breaks on a windowpane
> where no light talks

this is not time
for crossing tongues
(the sand here
never shifts)

I think
tomorrow
turned you with his toe
and you will
shine
and shine
unspent and underground

That each stanza begins with an end-stopped line and then proceeds with enjambed lines embodies di Prima's undoing of poetic convention as the poem progresses. The isolation of a word like "noise" in the first stanza gives it particular emphasis as its own line, creating a pause at this insult of the addressee, who is described in this way as a nuisance for the speaker, trivial and bothersome. Somewhat similarly, the enjambment of the final four lines of the poem creates suspense as the speaker first hints to the addressee: "and you will," then teases with the one-word line, "shine," teases again with the repetition of "and shine," then concludes with the final defeat: "unspent and underground."

Examining the style of *This Kind* in these ways brings into focus how di Prima uses Beat slang as well as the colloquial, more broadly, to represent the nonconformity and express the agency of the bohemian. For example, most of the end-stopped lines of "The Window": "you are my bread," "you are not stone," "I think," "you have no hands," and "this kind of bird flies backward" illustrate how di Prima speaks for the bohemian from a position of agency. At times, this is illustrated through a contrast between an enjambment like "you are almost / the sea" and the end-stopped "I think," which is, significantly, the only line to appear twice in the poem. The "you" in this poem has no

hands, has lost the ability to feel or touch or reach out on its own. In contrast, the speaker's presence is asserted clearly and strongly and demands the reader's attention accordingly in a line such as "I think."

As this analysis suggests, threaded throughout *This Kind* is the theme of the importance and celebration of individualism that is expressed through the speaker's confrontation of an outside force attempting to objectify or inhibit the speaker, somehow threatening the speaker's independence and subjectivity. "The Window," notably the first poem of *This Kind*, presents di Prima's speaker as having overtaken a previously overpowering or oppressive force, aptly representing di Prima's effort to assert the voice and agency of the bohemian. Having overpowered an omnipresent force, the speaker accepts and embraces that she is different from others. She thrives on her uniqueness: "this kind of bird flies backward / and this love / breaks on a windowpane / where no light talks." The speaker no longer feels pressured to "fly" in the same direction that others do. It is the "you" of this poem that is doomed to "shine / and shine / unspent and underground." In this way, di Prima presents an image of the bohemian as strong and independent.

The lack of standard capitalization exemplified in "The Window" also helps convey the collection's theme of self-assertion and agency. Di Prima's consistent adherence to the capitalization of "I" within *This Kind* represents not her adherence to poetic convention—as evident in the variety of experimental uses of language, form, and mechanics—but rather her deliberate assertion of the presence and agency of the "I" for which she speaks. What seems to be her acceptance of convention works in conjunction with the unconventional practices of di Prima's poetics to embody the very nature of

bohemia itself: not an outright rejection of all that is considered conventional, but rather a lifestyle defined by oneself rather than by others or the "norm." Of ultimate importance in bohemia and in di Prima's poetry is one's ability to decide for him or herself—to resist conformity. Di Prima's consistent use of the capitalized "I" exemplifies the confidence with which the bohemian speaks as a nonconformist.

The second poem of the collection continues the first poem's assertion and celebration of those who are considered different or those who "fly backward"—in this case, the unicorns:

> notice to all
> land offices:
> Investigate
> New
> Holdings
>
> it is rumored
> that the unicorns
> have staked
> a large
> claim
> in the Rocky Mountains

Di Prima uses the simplistic metaphor of the unicorns—a symbol of the unique, of the nonconformist—to describe the individual strength generated by the solidarity of all of the unicorns. This image of the unicorn reappears in "Tale for a Unicorn" in *Dinners and Nightmares*, in which di Prima writes that "poets and unicorns … belong to the myth kingdom" in which they can "see each other even when they are invisible to other species and this makes them very attached to each other."[62] Indeed, no longer hiding or living in the outskirts, beyond the center of things, "the unicorns" in this poem are staking their claim in the land, representing di Prima's effort to substantiate the image of the bohemian.

And in the third poem of the collection, the final line is a direct and playful example of a stereotypical slang expression of the bohemian:

> I don't forget things
> fast enough, I sing
> last summer's ballads
> winter long
>
> like that's uncool

In the last line that is positioned apart from the preceding stanza, di Prima marks her poetic style with a hip bravado that maintains the tone of self-assertion established in the preceding two poems. In this short poem, di Prima represents another instance of going against the grain; she mocks the idea that a minor deviation from the norm could set someone apart from the crowd and lead to the dismissal of someone who might "sing / last summer's ballads / winter long" as "uncool." And in doing so with the poem's final line that presents a play on the bohemian's use of slang, di Prima writes in a language that Smethurst describes as simultaneously "self-parodic" and "self-celebratory."

These representative poems of *This Kind* illustrate the overall poetics of the collection, including di Prima's use of the colloquial mixed with hip slang such as "babe" and the casual and phonetic "sez," as well as phrases such as "hang loose" and "stay cool." I suggested earlier that the simplistic or seemingly dated style of this slang may appear to confirm the critique of the Beats as anti-intellectual by the mainstream media or academic critics at the time. For many of these critics, the Beats' "know-nothing[ness]" was represented in their literary use of hip slang.[63] More recently, in one of the critical studies of di Prima's work, Libby argues in a cursory discussion of her poetic slang that "her use of hip slang, such as 'cool,' 'dig,' 'pad,' and 'chick,' … does not wear well."[64] That is, Libby argues, di Prima's use of "self-consciously in-group jargon troubles the

surface of the poems" unlike "the less specifically marked colloquial language [that] is an effective counterbalance to the ancient high style of romantic utterance."[65] In light of such arguments, it is my contention that di Prima's particular use of Beat slang—self-consciously cliché at times—signifies her reaction against critiques of the Beats as uncultured and as artificial or ineffectual nonconformists[66] and highlights her efforts to speak for the Beats' fundamental resistance to mainstream values in a way that frequently takes shape through a playful irony. That is, she uses slang that might be considered "primitive" with self-awareness[67]—as a means to express the agency of the Beat figure and to reinforce the Beats' countercultural critique of mainstream values and conventions that, in large part, is developed through the use of hipster slang itself. Indeed, from the start of *This Kind*, her slang poetics works in conjunction with her experimentation with conventions of verse form, lineation, punctuation, and capitalization to speak for the bohemian as a clearly identified "I"—an individual uninhibited by others' resistance to difference.

An Earlier Poetics of Tradition and Struggle

The emphasis on the nonconformity and individualism of the bohemian that takes place through the slang poetics of *This Kind* is further highlighted when situated alongside and against the poetry that di Prima wrote during her years at college.[68] Notably, this earlier poetry is relatively traditional in its formal diction and style; it reflects di Prima's study of poetry at the time, including the British Romantics and Shakespeare. Also important to note is that the poetry of her college period is distinct from the previously-discussed poetry of *This Kind* in that it speaks from a position of struggle rather than of confidence or strength in the face of conformity. This examination

of di Prima's earlier unpublished poetry reveals an original and often striking use of language and imagery that is especially significant in light of what I described above as a seemingly simplistic use of slang and imagery in *This Kind*. That di Prima's developing poetics shifted from a more overt level of sophistication to a more informal, unadorned, and minimalist style underscores the deliberateness with which her latter "anti-intellectual" poetics was composed.

The following poem, dated October 1951, illustrates di Prima's practice of poetic convention in the poetry from her college period:

> Return not twice where Ethel goes
> In youth and dance and song
> When summer berries burst their skins
> And summer grass is long
>
> But come you back when grass is dry
> And white bones reach like trees
> And grave upon your heart in pain
> What Ethel never sees.

Several aspects of this poem are particularly distinctive when compared to the poetry of *This Kind*. Perhaps foremost is the use of the rhyme scheme called common measure, in which the lines alternate from iambic tetrameter to iambic trimeter with an ABCB rhyme scheme. Such standard form was used by Emily Dickinson as well as British Romantics Williams Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Other notable formalities of this poem include the diction itself, closer in style to that of the academic poetry of the time; the colloquial is absent here, as is the fundamental casualness or energy of di Prima's slang poetics of *This Kind*. With the conventional diction throughout the poem and the inverted syntax in lines one and five, the poem evokes a formal tone. And the use of capitalization

and end punctuation further characterizes the overall use of convention here and highlights the contrast to the poetry of *This Kind*.

Similarly, in the following poem, dated 1952, di Prima uses the half measure ABAB rhyme scheme, maintained through the use of a contraction in line seven:

> Now I turn from dust and stone
> Where the broken things suffice
> Tossing like a driftwood bone
> In a sea of splintered ice.
>
> Now from rain I turn to rest
> Quite alone prepare to sleep.
> Cold. The fiercer way's the best.
> Lad, a restless bed I keep.

In its traditional form and standard diction, the poem avoids local references, seeming timeless and placeless—a notable contrast to the locality of slang. And not unlike the previous poem's imagery of deterioration resulting from the passing of time, this poem represents what will be an eternal struggle as the speaker faces death with resistance, implied by the "splintered" ice, the "restless" sleep, and the "cold" of this final rest that is given particular emphasis in its one word sentence. As these two poems exemplify, di Prima's college-period poetry contrasts with the poetry of *This Kind* not only in its use of formal convention, but also in its theme of the struggle to survive, to maintain one's sense of self and individuality.

Throughout the poetry of this short period, the use of regular meter and rhyme scheme is less consistent than the use of formal or elevated diction, standard line capitalization, punctuation, and the themes of isolation, despair, and struggle, all of which works together to express a markedly serious tone. Specifically, thematic variations of the inability to maintain one's individuality are expressed through a poetic voice that is often

immobile or struggling in darkness or blindness under some threatening or oppressive force. The theme of struggle in these poems points up the important shift in di Prima's poetry represented by *This Kind*'s emphasis on the acceptance and celebration of one's individuality.

In another example of this darker college-period poetry, di Prima writes,

> I have been taken apart and marked
> And now, though I walk with many
> None can touch me.
> The mark of the brand is deep
> Salve will not heal it
> Nor will the crimson be quieted.
> Angry and searing it eats thru the flesh
> The pain is chill at my marrow.

The speaker suffers at the hands of difference, of being "marked" by something outside of herself, and as such, cannot meaningfully connect to anyone around her. Rather, she breathes through the pain and is subject to endure in this way for time to come. In its free verse form, this poem stylistically performs the very chaos and uncontrollability of the speaker's situation. And while this poem illustrates a higher level of sophistication than the previous examples in their restricted use of traditional form, it also heightens the contrast between the style and theme of this earlier poetry and that of *This Kind*.

Additionally, throughout her college-period poetry, di Prima frequently uses images of threatening or dangerous elements to evoke feelings of suffocation or paralysis for her speakers. In "Receive what comes," for example, an "oil green lake" "swallow[s] all," making any individual hopes, desires, or questions meaningless. And there is "the fluid / And it is thick, like syrup" that causes "Strengthlessness" and the speaker's plea for others to "Stand / Walk / Try / Before you die of it" in "Strengthlessness, weak at the hands." The imagery used in these poems to depict themes of intense struggle and

oppression works in conjunction with the use of formal diction, mechanics, and poetic structure described above to express the theme of isolation and struggle throughout this poetry.

This earlier collection of poetry uses language such as “redundant ones,” “exiles,” or “the lost ones” to refer to those who were outcast and suffering because of their individualism. In contrast, the poetry of *This Kind* uses relatively cliché language such as “bird,” “unicorn,” and “the coolest” to emphasize the acceptance and celebration of individualism and difference that di Prima highlights through her use of Beat slang. As I noted earlier, she uses Beat slang in such a manner—seemingly simplistic and unoriginal, yet pure and authentic—in order to underscore the function of Beat slang in a “self-parodic” fashion.[69] Another primary distinction between the two sets of poems is the lighter, self-possessed poetic voice that characterizes the poetry of *This Kind*—a voice expressed through the use of slang and various other unconventional formal practices. In a final illustration of this contrast, di Prima contemplates struggle and fear in the following, dated January 1952:

> God give me strength
> I am afraid of pain
> Death, though it comes but once is a terrible thing
> But pain cannot be borne
> It comes too many times.

Included in *This Kind*, di Prima writes the following:

> there’s one or two dominions
> I’d give death
> rather than have this other thing
> corrosion
> sit pretty there

Not afraid to face death or the pain that accompanies it, di Prima's speaker in this latter poem is willing to concede to death if it means the end of "corrosion" that pretends to "sit pretty" around her.

This comparison between di Prima's two early collections of poems demonstrates that along with di Prima's use of slang and experimentation with various other poetic conventions, her poetic voice transformed from more formal and fearful to more casual and bold. The poetry di Prima produced during her time at college is dark in tone and theme and restricted in form and language, whereas the poetry produced within the New York City bohemian community is lighter and playful in tone, more self-assured in theme, and unrestricted by form or language. As noted above, these two sets of poems are also distinguished by the former's sophisticated use of language and imagery in contrast to the latter's frequent use of dated or simplistic slang and imagery that might suggest a dullness or lack of quality, especially when situated alongside the slang poetics of a contemporary like Ginsberg. These contrasts, however, highlight the way in which di Prima's particular use of language and style in *This Kind* works in conjunction with the poems' thematic emphasis on an unwavering celebration of an authentic American experience that is achieved through resistance to constraining traditions and expectations—including the use of "literary" or academic language.

This development of di Prima's avant-garde poetics took shape within the context of the New York City bohemian community. Unlike the rigid and formal environment of Swarthmore, the bohemian community in New York City represented a space within which nonconformists could thrive as individuals in light of the absence of the mainstream threat of conformity. In its anti-establishment, anti-academic perspective, the

bohemian community provided the space within which di Prima could move away from tradition and toward a more personal expression of creativity—and it is this emphasis on individualism and authenticity that I argue di Prima's first book of poetry embodies. As described earlier, di Prima considers her development as an artist to have truly begun when she moved to New York City. As my analysis illustrates, simultaneous with di Prima's departure from the polite, orderly, prescribed social and cultural context of college, was her departure from the similarly formal and disciplined poetic tradition, and her move toward a slang poetics through which she could move away from struggle and insecurity to express agency as a bohemian.

The Female Bohemian

What makes di Prima's poetics in *This Kind* especially important is her use of slang in a consciously "female" way. Significantly, di Prima gives voice to and develops a subjectivity for the objectified and marginalized figure of the female bohemian. This is particularly important given how even contemporary avant-garde poets like Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and John Wieners continue to perpetuate the inferiority and marginalization of the female gender through their poetry, however unwittingly.[70] In "Praise for Sick Women," for example, Gary Snyder seems to sympathize with the female experience of menstruation, as he compares this "sickness" to "hell" as women are "In a bark shack / Crouched from sun, five days, / Blood dripping through crusted thighs."[71] Yet, he simultaneously and uncritically maintains that women's physical "fertility" precludes any mental "fertility." He writes,

> The female is fertile, and discipline
> (contra naturam) only
>   confuses her
> Who has, head held sideways

Arm out softly, touching,
A difficult dance to do, but not in mind.[72]

Routinely subject to this "sickness," then, women are "wounded," left only to "[Dream] of long-legged dancing in light," Snyder suggests.[73]

In contrast to such portrayals of women in which their intellectual, emotional, and physical capacities are limited by their biology, di Prima's portrayal of the female experience reveals women's participation in the bohemian community's critique of dominant gender discourse and provides representations of love and sexuality from a female perspective. In doing so, she revises the notions of women as innately distinct from men intellectually, as unconditionally content in or even naturally desiring the role of wife and/or mother, and as "silent."[74] In these ways, di Prima addresses the female malaise that would soon receive national attention with the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963—indeed, this remarkable aspect of *This Kind* highlights di Prima's work as protofeminist. Di Prima expresses authenticity and honesty in her poems overtly on love and sex, such as the grittiness and hostility or anger often experienced by women who were consistently faced with others' expectations of submissiveness or passivity. In doing so, di Prima exposes aspects of the female experience traditionally expected to remain private and unspoken.[75]

What is especially notable about her work is that she does this while using the same style of hip slang that I examined earlier. Not only does her particular style of slang poetics in the context of female identity and subjectivity reflect the female Beat experience with boldness and bravado, but also it largely relies on clichéd slang as a means to confront and subvert the subordination or objectification of women that has itself become trite. Further, di Prima was able to integrate women's experiences into her

poetry that, in general, speaks for the bohemian community as a whole—rather than merely reversing the traditional hierarchical gender binary. While contemporary male poets tend to exclude women or narrowly represent them in their writing, men are not absent from nor necessarily subordinated within di Prima's descriptions of bohemia. That is, for di Prima, making women visible does not necessarily entail making men invisible or marginal.

The title of *This Kind*'s Love Poems series itself signifies di Prima's resistance to dominant conventions and portrayals of women at the time, as within this series, she starkly disrupts traditional notions of love and of expectations for women's roles in romantic relationships.[76] The thirteen Love Poems are written in similar language and style to the other poems of the collection, and using the slang of the bohemian community, di Prima provides candid portrayals of the female bohemian's romantic and sexual experiences. The Love Poems describe the female speaker's various reactions to relationships or lovers throughout which she attempts to express and maintain a position of being "cool" and in control of her own experiences and relationships. Throughout these poems, the speaker describes extremely intimate knowledge and ownership of her own and her lovers' bodies, as well as sexual experimentation and assertiveness—all of which reverses the passivity and relative silence of women that normative gender roles assume.

The first poem in this series begins abruptly with a violent expression of rage, which functions to quite startlingly raise questions about how the "love" of the series title is defined or by whom:

> I hope
> you go thru hell

tonight
beloved.
I hope
you choke to death
on lumps of stars
and by your bed a window
with frost
and moon on frost and
you want to scream
and can't
because
your woman is (I hope)
right there
asleep.

Baby I hope you never close your eyes
so two of us
can pick up on
this dawn.

Di Prima uses a markedly strong tone to express the female speaker's feelings of jealousy and anger, then concludes more softly as the speaker speaks calmly and expresses her desire that ultimately generates the jealousy. The speaker shifts from being scorned to wanting to have sex with the man that scorned her, and in this way, she exhibits a sexual freedom and desire for sexual satisfaction traditionally suppressed in poetry of the time. In what may seem to perpetuate the stereotypical image of the woman as dependent upon the man, helpless in her overwhelming desire and his commitment to another, this poem makes no attempt to hide the speaker's desire for her lover. Rather, di Prima enables her female speaker to express the jealously she experiences honestly—acknowledging the grittiness involved in such relationships rather than hiding or denying it.

In subsequent poems, di Prima positions the female speaker as sexually assertive and open about her lack of inhibitions with her body and that of her lovers. One example

is the second Love Poem (quoted earlier) that includes some of di Prima's most energetic use of slang:

> Remember you
> long as sodomy, sure as the black taste
> of morning
> timeless as folded to no love backwards
> lips and the arch ache swinging from back to
> thighs clued in for crazy cool
> and endless not enough.
> Not yet.

The intensity of the language and imagery here matches the intensity of the sexual experience itself—a combination of sensuality and aggressiveness. In the language such as "timeless" and "not enough," and particularly in the final line of the poem ("Not yet."), the speaker expresses her insatiableness in this sexual experience—surely unexpected from a woman at this time. The speaker's strong physical desire is further depicted through the use of enjambment, as di Prima places particular emphasis on the lover's lips and thighs. In these ways, di Prima resists the tendency by her contemporaries to obscure the physicality and sensuality of the female sexual experience and instead puts such descriptions at the fore.

In the sixth Love Poem, di Prima reverses the typical gender roles of heterosexual relationships; anticipating rejection by her lover, the woman takes control of the situation:

> In case you put me down I put you down
> already, doll
> I know the games you play.
>
> In case you put me down I got it figured
> how there are better mouths than yours
> more swinging bodies
> wilder scenes than this.

In case you put me down it won't help much.

Notably, the speaker here appropriates a man's use of "doll" to refer to a woman—a term implicitly carrying with it the suggestion of a woman as an object or toy to be played with. Di Prima appropriates this term for her female speaker and in doing so exemplifies the subjectivity of her female speaker, no longer an object to be condescended to or rejected. Burt Kimmelman aptly describes the use of slang in this poem: "This is the language of jazz and communal living and it is most of all the proclamation of freedom in an alternative life style—all built into the word 'swinging.'"[77] In the same way that di Prima uses slang in her poetry as a resistance to academic poetry, she uses it to redefine the role of the female bohemian—giving her a freedom and subjectivity denied in the mainstream and by many men of the counterculture.

Di Prima continues this air of sexual bravado in the 10th and 11th Love Poems:

10

no babe
we'd never
swing together but
the syncopation
would be something wild

11

you are not quite
the air I breathe
thank god.

so go.

In this latter poem, di Prima's speaker is especially confrontational. With concise directness, she severs any potential dependence upon another for survival, expressing a strength and independence which is emphasized in the poem's final imperative line of

dismissal. As illustrated here and in previous examples above, di Prima represents the female bohemian in the Love Poems series as someone in control, often in the dominant position of a relationship. Rather than being objectified and limited in her ability to engage in "wild" sexual experiences, the female bohemian in this series expresses a subjectivity, strong sexual desire, and assertiveness that the traditionally hierarchical male/female relationship denies or suppresses.

In conjunction with the somewhat overpowering bravado illustrated in the Love Poems series, the two "Pomes for Bret" later in *This Kind* strike an effective balance between the aggressiveness described above and a calmer level of contentment.[78] The first of these two poems is similar to the confrontational tone of the first Love Poem, including lines such as "You'd better watch your step / deari-o. / I seen your tricks / and babe / I've got my eye / on you." But the second poem expresses a revelation of sorts:

> You know
> it's good
> for once
> not to be dug
> because I know so much
> or I'm so cool
> or any
> o-help reasons
>
> it's nice
> to run a pad
> where both of us
> are cool enough
> to know we're both
> uncool

By the end of the poem, the speaker backs away from her superficial attempt to portray confidence in the face of rejection. Instead, she accepts the circumstance and tempers what began as an aggressive attack on the "mister with [his] I-Hate-You love poems."

Unafraid to portray the complexities that accompany traditionally-romanticized relationships, di Prima represents the female bohemian experience in the Love Poems series and here in Pomes for Bret as one characterized by sexual curiosity, assertiveness, bravado, and intimacy, as well as insight and satisfaction. And to do so, she uses the hip slang of bohemia (such as "swinging," "wild," "dug," "cool," "pad," and "deari-o") to overtly represent and speak for the female bohemian experience. Without the use of slang in poems such as these, the ability to portray this lifestyle that is a deliberate alternative to the mainstream would be lost. Speaking directly for the representative female bohemian and her participation in the countercultural confrontation and revision of gender norms, di Prima uses hipster slang to redefine what is largely accepted as the passive position of women.

Di Prima's revision of traditional conceptions of women defined by normative gender codes continues throughout other poems in *This Kind*, particularly through the theme of motherhood. In "Requiem," for example, di Prima explores the struggles and pain that frequently accompany motherhood, representing the complexity of this female experience often romanticized in portrayals of women as mothers. Di Prima writes:

> I think
> you'll find
> a coffin
> not so good
> Baby-O.
> They strap you in
> pretty tight
>
> I hear
> it's cold
> and worms and things
> are there for selfish reasons
>
> I think

you'll want
to turn
onto your side
your hair
won't like
to stay in place
forever
and your hands
won't like it
crossed
like that

I think
your lips
won't like it
by themselves

Notably less energetic than many of the other poems of *This Kind*, "Requiem" revises the traditional image of the mother as naturally emotional or sentimental. Faced with the death of her baby, the speaker laments her lack of control to provide any real comfort. She responds to this tragic circumstance in a seemingly detached or disconnected tone, focusing on the superficial and unable to express any degree of love or loss.[79]

Somewhat similarly, in "For Babio, Unborn," the speaker poses questions to her body that complicate the notion that women innately become mothers and therefore, without question understand "whose flesh / has crossed my will" or "whose hands / broke ground / for that thrusting head." As Amy Friedman points out, in this poem, di Prima "focuses on poetic gifts she has to offer her child over material ones."[80] Di Prima writes:

Sweetheart
when you break thru
you'll find
a poet here
not quite what one would choose.

I won't promise
you'll never go hungry
or that you won't be sad

on this gutted
breaking
globe

but I can show you
baby
enough to love
to break your heart
forever

Di Prima's speaker identifies first as a poet and second as a mother, acknowledging that this isn't necessarily "what one would choose." As such, di Prima suggests how her speaker's identity as a poet willingly compromises her ability to provide for a baby, materially and psychologically, as the conventional role of mother as domestic provider would prescribe. Constrained by her unfixed or meager income as a poet, the speaker has only her experiences with and capacity to love to comfort her child. In contrast to the bravado expressed in the Love Poems series, here the tone is one of confusion and slight sadness or guilt. In this way, di Prima challenges the notion that women instinctively or willingly identify as mothers and do so at the cost of anything else, perhaps especially at the cost of identifying as a poet or an artist.

Significantly, di Prima's protofeminist representations of women exemplified in this analysis of poems such as "Requiem," "For Babio, Unborn," "Pomes for Bret," and the Love Poems counter representations of women even in the work of other Beat poets like Ginsberg, as mentioned earlier. In the example of *Howl*, it is important to note that "the best minds" that Ginsberg speaks for are almost exclusively limited to male writers and artists. This is implied in various references, such as one to the struggling writers who "were dragged off the roof waving genitals and manuscripts." Rarely were women of the bohemian community acknowledged as writers at this time—and that they would

be described as "waving genitals" seems similarly unlikely. More importantly, the female figures that appear in *Howl* illustrate precisely what di Prima confronts and revises in *This Kind*. For example, Ginsberg describes the "angelheaded hipsters":

> who lost their loveboys to the three old shrews of fate the one eyed shrew of the heterosexual dollar the one eyed shrew that winks out of the womb and the one eyed shrew that does nothing but sit on her ass and snip the intellectual golden threads of the craftsman's loom

In this first explicit inclusion of women in the poem, they appear derisively as "shrews": one defined by an association between sex and money, one defined by her biological imperative as a mother, and the third defined by doing nothing except deliberately impeding intellectual creativity. In the subsequent line, the female figure is merely second in a list of objects present during copulation:

> who copulated ecstatic and insatiate with a bottle of beer a sweetheart a package of cigarettes a candle and fell off the bed, and continued along the floor and down the hall and ended fainting on the wall with a vision of ultimate cunt and come eluding the last gyzym of consciousness

No more valuable than beer or cigarettes, the "sweetheart" is merely a moment in the men's process of reaching sexual climax. Other females appear in the poem similar to this last passage, in nameless, faceless references to objects of male sexual satisfaction: these descriptions include "the snatches of a million girls," "innumerable lays of girls" and "gaunt waitresses in familiar roadside lonely petticoat upliftings."[81]

Ultimately, this survey of the appearance and function of women in Ginsberg's seminal poem illustrates that, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues, "While male figures in 'Howl' have many activities and outlets…, the female figures are far less particularized, and they essentially have no heads."[82] Further, DuPlessis argues, the poem "actively, sometimes disdainfully suggests that females are part of the forces of containment. …

Female figures in 'Howl' are offered a narrow band of reviled or pitied emotion, without capacity for transformation." The representations of female figures in this avant-garde text are limited to sexual objects or to figures that are intellectually repressive or limited. And the ways in which women figure into Ginsberg's poem are not unlike the work of other contemporary male poets such as Olson and Creeley of the Black Mountain school.[83]

Di Prima's revision of mainstream and countercultural portrayals of women is also particularly interesting in light of her personal recollections that complicate what has now been well-established as the consistent marginalization of women within the New York City Beat community. Interestingly, she attests to being unaware of the impact her gender had on her life as a writer during this period. In a 1984 interview with Anne Waldman, for example, di Prima explains:

> It's only more recently I've come to spend any time realizing or thinking about the fact that if the body of work I had done by '63 when *The New Hand Book of Heaven* was out and *The Calculus of Variation* was finished had been done by any of the male writers on that scene at that point, who were my close friends, I think the acknowledgement that a body of work was in progress would have been much greater.[84]

In her memoir, di Prima further explains that "There truly was this male cabal: self-satisfied, competitive, glorying in small acclaims. … But I never saw it then."[85] On the contrary, di Prima considered the various struggles she endured to be shared by most artists at the time. She continues with Waldman:

> In those days, I was just expecting trouble all around, so it never occurred to me. … I didn't distinguish which of these things is happening because I'm a woman, which of these things is happening because that's just the way the world is, and there was a lot of that's just how the world is, don't forget, in the air in the '50s, too. We all expected the worst.[86]

Di Prima's own sense of inclusion in the Beat community in the 1950s is undeniably important for an inclusive history of the period. But more to my point, although she may not have considered herself marginalized or objectified as a woman within the New York City bohemian community, my analysis of gender and sexuality within *This Kind* illustrates how di Prima asserts the presence of the female bohemian in revisionary ways. Specifically, she uses the language of the bohemian community—at once subtle and bold—to develop a female subjectivity and to include women in the community's critique of mainstream social and cultural norms.

Literary and Racial Boundaries

Di Prima's slang and protofeminist poetics is complicated by issues regarding the use of slang as a means of communication between those who are a part of the bohemian community and those who are not, as well as by issues of race in light of the Beat community's slang roots in the black vernacular. Exploring these complexities entailed in the literary use of slang further highlights important implications of di Prima's deliberate use of a "non-literary" language to speak for the bohemian.

As noted earlier, slang, as the term has come to be shaped, refers not only in general to colloquial speech, but more specifically to a particular code of communication between members of a community. In the 19th century, Washington Irving described the use of slang as representing "superiority over the uninitiated."[87] And written over a century later, but nevertheless emphasizing the same point, Norman Mailer describes slang, or "the language of Hip," as "a special language … that … cannot really be taught—if one shares none of the experiences … then it seems merely arch or vulgar or

irritating."[88] Indeed, the use of slang carries with it an "insider" status inaccessible to "outsiders."

Exploring this key aspect of slang further, linguist M.A.K. Halliday, within a larger discussion of what he calls antilanguages, explains how members of an alternative community of some sort, or what he refers to as an antisociety, develop an antilanguage as "a mode of resistance" to the outsider or mainstream society.[89] It is the community's antilanguage, Halliday argues, that "provides the means of maintaining identity in the face of its threatened destruction" or in the face of pressure that exists by virtue of the very resistance to the mainstream upon which the antisociety is based. Therefore, the development of this antilanguage relies upon the "closed communication" of the antisociety's members. Further, it is formed by a partial "relexicalization"—the substitution of some standard words for new words that "are central to the activities of the subculture and that set it off most sharply from the established society." In fact, Halliday emphasizes that "it is … not the *distance* between the two realities [or languages] but the *tension* between them that is significant." Therefore, the ways in which slang is used by members of communities to communicate specifically with each other as well as to construct or maintain the identity of the community and its members as somehow resistant to the "norm" are two essential factors of its development and use—and this highlights precisely the purpose that I argue the poetic use of slang serves for di Prima.[90]

In light of the boundaries that exist between those within a community who use slang and those outside of the community, though, the literary use of slang raises issues regarding the relationship between the writer and reader. As critic Gary Dyer discusses,

through the use of slang in literary texts, writers “poin[t] out and dramatiz[e] the role of codes in communities to which [they] belon[g].”[91] Dyer maintains that the literary use of slang is not meant to invite nor enable readers that are not members of these communities to understand or access them. On the contrary, Dyer argues that this use of slang serves to “emphasize difference: to deny that there is some ‘we’ that can be appealed to easily, to deny that there is some unproblematic ‘you’ that the poet can address, to deny that there is only one ‘I’ that speaks.” For Dyer, this suggests that the use of slang in a literary text “is as likely to reflect constraint as to reflect freedom”—that “it actually indicates only that [the writer] is free to allude to the inhibitions that shape speech and writing.”

Complicating this argument about the effect of slang for readers, critic Brita Lindberg-Seyersted claims that the literary use of slang actually functions to “lessen the distance between [text] and reader, for it is hard not to be affected by [the use of informal language], whether pleasantly or unpleasantly.”[92] For example, in her reading of Sylvia Plath’s later poetry, Lindberg-Seyersted argues that Plath’s use of “speech-like language” creates a “voice [that is] speaking to us [as] one we can hear in our daily lives; it may even be our own.”[93] Richard Bridgman makes a similar claim to Lindberg-Seyersted in his broader discussion of the colloquial tradition in American prose when he asserts that “the reader’s mind is more than normally engaged by the actual structure of the vernacular word. … Vernacular tricks with language arouse various responses in the reader.”[94] Neither Lindberg-Seyersted nor Bridgman argues that, in direct contrast to Dyer’s position, literary slang categorically enables readers or outsiders insight or access into the writer’s community. More accurately, they suggest that the literary use of slang may affect readers in a stronger manner than traditional literary language might—

blurring the very boundaries that Dyer insists are reinforced through the literary use of slang.

As my analysis illustrates, di Prima uses the slang of the bohemian community to represent what distinguishes this community as an alternative to the mainstream and to express the agency of the male or female bohemian while also developing a subjectivity for the female figure. Following with Halliday's theory of antilanguages, then, di Prima's deliberate use of slang in her poetics serves to redefine, validate, and sustain the identity of the "insiders"—the bohemian community—and to do so as an act of resistance to the "outsiders"—the mainstream community. As such, her efforts to use the language of the bohemian community as a means to celebrate the bohemian's agency and to construct an image of the female bohemian as a subject inevitably entail the perpetuation of the already existing boundaries between the bohemians, the "insiders," and the mainstream, the "outsiders."[95] What is at stake for di Prima isn't whether or how "outside" readers might respond to her representation of the bohemian; rather, at stake for di Prima is what she considers an authentic portrayal of the bohemian. In her efforts to create such a portrayal, di Prima speaks directly to and for her fellow "insiders."

Whereas Dyer suggests that such differences between insiders and outsiders marked and maintained by the literary use of slang reflect pressure or constraint on the writer, for di Prima the poetic use of slang represents not constraint but liberation. The poetry of *This Kind* represents di Prima's deliberate choice to work outside of the traditional boundaries of academic poetry, which strictly adheres to the use of "literary" language. It also represents her liberation of the female bohemian either from absence altogether or from being portrayed in various problematic ways by male writers of both

the academy and the avant-garde. As a result of these choices, di Prima is able to celebrate the development and use of experimental poetics in direct resistance to the mainstream and to enable the female bohemian to speak for herself from a position of subjectivity.

This liberation, though, raises important questions in light of the fact that the slang of the bohemian community that di Prima uses in these ways is rooted in the black vernacular and bebop culture of the 1940s and 1950s. Examples of the hip slang within *This Kind* include: words such as cool, uncool, broad, doll, dig, pad, flip, swinging, syncopation, and jam; the "-o" added to various names and words; and phrases such as "hang loose," "zigzag beat," and "stay cool." Regarding such language, Nancy Grace and Ronna Johnson, in a brief introduction to an interview published in 2004, point to the fact that much of di Prima's early poetry, particularly that of her first two books, "unabashedly speak[s] the hipster argot that drew on the black vernacular."[96] Because the slang words and phrases that appear in *This Kind* indeed derive from the black vernacular of the period, they carry important implications when used by a white writer, especially when used as a means of constructing and expressing subjectivity.

One particular poem of *This Kind* presents the Beat community's slang roots in the bebop culture more strikingly than the other poems in the collection. The following poem not only integrates a more exaggerated version of the slang of the bebop scene than we have seen in previous examples from *This Kind*, but it also depicts the bebop scene itself with strong imagery. The poem is part of the In Memoriam series of *This Kind* and is dated August 1955:

> Damn you ghostface sounding quietus now,
> I thought we'd dig a coupla sets in hell.

Won't say I didn't love you dad back when
long hands and dirty tore a breathless
blue good morning blues guitar and that
junkriding face went coolly wild.

You know the games swing wide in hell
there's riffs behind my teeth could keep
you flying. But now it's small fun digging
long gone songs while you play square
games never out of bounds.

Like man don't flip, I'm hip you cooled
this scene. But you can hock the jazz
guitar, in limbo they play ballads.

In this lamentation, di Prima maintains the hip bravado expressed throughout the collection. She also deliberately creates an overt tension between the "wild" bebop scene and its "square" counterpart, a tension developed through the exaggerated use of slang. In this poem, we see the slang included throughout *This Kind*, such as "flip," "cool," and "dig," as in "Like man don't flip, I'm hip you cooled / this scene." But we also see a more inventive and original use of slang here, as in "breathless blue good morning" and "junkriding face went coolly wild," which creates more depth and distinction in the imagery of the poem while still emphasizing the function of "non-literary" language for di Prima's poetics in general.

The bebop tradition in which this slang is rooted is defined by its experimentation with music: the resistance to well-defined form, structure, and style, and the liberation that comes with improvisation and spontaneity—all in an effort to "diverg[e] from the fundamental conventions of popular [swing and big band] music."[97] It is thus not merely the language of bebop, but more precisely the culture itself that provided an inspiring model for poets such as di Prima, who were looking for an alternative to mainstream society and poetry. As such, in expressing feelings of loss over the passing of a friend

directly part of and representative of this cultural scene, di Prima intensifies the contrast that exists between the mainstream and the counterculture. She reinforces the boundaries between these two communities while expressing the solemn experience of the speaker through the imagery and language of bebop.

In light of the boundaries between the mainstream and the bohemian "antisociety" that are underscored throughout the poetry of *This Kind*, and especially in this poem, it is important to note that entailed in perpetuating these divisions is the impetus to blur racial boundaries. That is, di Prima's use of slang that derives from the black vernacular—her use of this "antilanguage"—represents a distance or tension between the Beat counterculture and the mainstream that is partly founded on the fundamental desire of the Beat community to erase traditional racial boundaries. In its function as an alternative to the "norm," the Beat community resisted the racial divisions and hierarchies perpetuated in mainstream 1950s society. Following in this basic desire to develop a countercultural community not defined by race as well as to develop aesthetic forms and practices that reflect an intermingling of racialized art forms, di Prima does not set out to construct nor perpetuate racial differences. Instead, in her endeavor to develop a critique of the mainstream through an authentic portrayal of the bohemian community throughout *This Kind*, di Prima highlights how this community is itself defined by the blurring of racial and social hierarchies traditionally upheld in the mainstream.

That di Prima's use of slang signifies the bohemian's attraction to the style and language of the bebop culture, however, suggests that her poetics is also fundamentally representative of the desire of a white artist to appropriate some form of black culture—of the romanticization of the black culture—despite her beliefs, values, or desires.[98] Di

Prima's slang poetics is complicated by the issues of race inextricably linked to this "non-literary" language; she may use hip slang to express the subjectivity of the bohemian and to challenge the marginalization and objectification of women within this countercultural community, but, ultimately, she is unable to transcend the racial implications bound up in this very language. It is important to acknowledge that scholars have frequently critiqued the white Beat writer's attraction to and treatment of non-white racial figures, cultures, and discourses, and similar critiques appear within discussions of white non-Beat contemporary writers as well as of white modernist poets.

As I described earlier, di Prima's and her avant-garde contemporaries' use of slang or the colloquial can be traced to the championing and use of the colloquial from Whitman to the modernists, and the motivation of di Prima and others is notably similar to the white modernist poet's use of black dialect. As Michael North discusses in *The Dialect of Modernism*, dialect of the modernist period provided an alternative to the mainstream, authoritative "literary" language that was shaped by "printing, education, and 'elocution masters'"; it represented an act of rebellion in its "purity" and authenticity.[99] During this period of the early 20th century, North explains, white writers appropriated the language of black culture as a means to blur the boundaries between the literary and nonliterary—to challenge and undermine the privileged status of the former. However, while dialect represented a natural language, speech free from "'the artificialities of civilization'" for white writers, it represented a language that was suffocating and oppressing for black writers.[100] As North argues, white poets' use of dialect made it virtually impossible for black writers to use the very language derived from their heritages.[101] In a similar vein, DuPlessis argues that white modernist writers

who sought to resist the authoritative standard language were simultaneously "resisting coequal citizenship with blacks."[102] In other words, however inadvertently, such writers maintained a hierarchical relationship between the races through their appropriation of black dialect to enact poetic liberation. As a result of such complexities bound up in this use of language, North characterizes the modernist period as one of "confused white attempts to understand, absorb, emulate, or dismiss black language and culture."[103] Applying a similar argument to the white Beat writer's use of slang in the post-WWII period points to an important paradox.[104]

While white writers like di Prima and Ginsberg used slang that derived from black culture to achieve and express an authenticity that they believed was unattainable through academic literary language, black writers like LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka and Bob Kaufman also used the language of bebop in their work that, though not exclusively, often addressed racial politics of the period. This suggests that white Beat writers' use of slang did not necessarily prohibit or complicate its racially- and politically-charged use by black Beat writers. However, widening the context outside the scope of Beat writers, it is important to note that the period of di Prima's and Ginsberg's early work overlapped with that of the burgeoning civil rights movement, and in this context, the very language that represented poetic liberation for these writers was also the language that black figures like Malcolm X had to abandon in favor of standard English as a means to gain respect and authority in the pursuit of racial equality.[105] In the case of Malcolm X, he found that his writing in the vernacular of his community was inarticulate and inappropriate for his interest in issues of racial equality and black nationalism. He needed to learn and use standard English in order for his voice to be heard—in order to fight

against the racial discrimination and inequities faced by the black community. In this way, we see that the language of authenticity and liberation for white Beat poets was also the language that inhibited many black figures during the civil rights era. And the ineffectual use of dialect for blacks was itself a product of the social, cultural, and political authority of whites—an authority signified through the privilege of poets like di Prima and Ginsberg to shift between standard English and black dialect in their own literary and cultural endeavors.[106]

Thus, in the same way that the inclusion of women within the bohemian community did not preclude the perpetuation of hegemonic gender codes in the community as well as in its male-authored literature, the white bohemian's attraction to black culture and attempts to integrate it into the interracial bohemian community likewise could not automatically erase the racial implications of a white writer's use of the slang rooted in black culture. My analysis of *This Kind*, particularly in contrast to di Prima's earlier poetry, illustrates how she uses slang to substantiate the identity and subjectivity of the figure of the bohemian, but examining the relationship between language and race points to the complexity of this poetics and indicates that the liberation di Prima exercised through experimentation with language, style, and gender politics is inevitably constrained by the fundamental relationship between language and race. This should not, however, diminish the significance of di Prima's poetics as illustrated throughout the chapter, but rather point to the various complexities tied to the use of language and di Prima's attempt to subvert hegemonic gender and racial inequities.

V. Conclusion

Like her contemporaries Olson and Ginsberg, di Prima's poetics took a dramatic turn in the early 1950s from its relatively traditional or academic style in the school of what Baraka described as "bullshit school poetry" to what more closely resembles the unconventional, minimalist poetry of ordinary speech in the vein of Williams and Pound.[107] For Olson, the shift toward a new poetics that was put forth in his 1950 manifesto, "Projective Verse," symbolized his independence as a poet, as he came to believe in "the poem as a 'field' of action rather than a sequential ordering of materials."[108] For Ginsberg, it was Williams himself who inspired the younger poet to be free of traditional verse and the use of abstract symbolism and to instead find his poetic voice in "the real language," the "'actual talk rhythms' of the everyday world."[109] For di Prima, as she recalls in her recent memoir, leaving the academy by dropping out of Swarthmore College in late 1952 and immersing herself in the Beat avant-garde community on the Lower East Side of New York City became the turning point that would shape the progression of her poetics for more than 50 years. The juxtaposition of her college-period poetry and that of *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward* illustrates how using the colloquial in general and the hip slang of the New York City bohemian community in particular provided a way for di Prima to express the agency of the bohemian figure and to develop a subjectivity for the female bohemian.

Di Prima's first book of poetry exemplifies how a female writer, not unlike the better known male writers, was experimenting with the poetic tradition in innovative ways and was challenging the hegemonic gender codes of the period. Setting her apart from her male contemporaries, however, *This Kind* also demonstrates how a female poet

managed to revise notions of the female bohemian by using slang to speak from a position of agency. With her first book of poetry, di Prima represents not just a woman writing from within this community, but a woman writing from within this community with a language and about experiences considered artificial or vulgar.

Using the hip slang of the bohemian community that Ginsberg also uses in *Howl*, but using it in a markedly different style and to a significantly different end, di Prima addresses the complex relationship between the counterculture and the mainstream in terms of literature, identity, gender, and community. Throughout *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward*, di Prima resists the formal poetry of the academy and instead uses hip slang to celebrate what helped define the bohemian community as alternative, and she resists the subordination and objectification of women within both the mainstream and countercultural communities and instead puts women's experiences with love and sex at the forefront. In this way, di Prima challenges familiar notions about what is considered literary and about who and what defines this bohemian community.

Examining di Prima's early contribution to Beat literature, especially in contrast to her earlier unpublished poetry, helps to shape our understanding of what the New York City Beat community meant for its various members. This community provided a space within which di Prima's critical perspective toward the mainstream and traditional poetics could be developed. Rather than prompting struggles with isolation, confusion, and insecurities in the face of conformity and homogeneity, the 1950s New York City bohemian community engendered di Prima's individualism and personal creativity—in ways that strongly differ from the experiences of many of her fellow women Beat writers, as I address in the forthcoming chapters. As this analysis of *This Kind* suggests, that the

community distinguished itself from the mainstream and from the traditional poetry of the academy through its use of hipster slang provided an important way for di Prima to assert the individualism and agency of the bohemian and to develop a subjectivity for the female bohemian. Writing in Beat slang provided di Prima a means to speak directly to and for her fellow artists.

Importantly, looking closely at *This Kind* expands our understanding of the women Beat writers as protofeminists. The resistance to the traditional female gender role is quite remarkably addressed by di Prima in this 1958 publication. Di Prima anticipates the issue of female malaise in the broader post-WWII society, which would later lead to the second-wave feminist movement. And in portraying the various complexities of womanhood as they are experienced with the bohemian community, she also undermines the perpetuation of mainstream gender codes by her male contemporaries. With *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward*, di Prima demonstrates what it was like to write as a woman in the 1950s, and ultimately, what distinguishes di Prima from her contemporaries is her use of Beat slang to substantiate the figure of the bohemian—male *and* female—through a poetic style that was relatively unique and liberating. Whereas di Prima's first book of poetry illustrates her reaction against the academic and androcentric poetics of the postwar period, Joyce Johnson's first novel reveals her resistance to and revision of the restrictive patterns of female characterizations in the contemporary novel, and this is the subject of Chapter Two.

NOTES

1. Seymour Krim, *The Beats* (New York: Fawcett, 1960), 78.

2. Krim, front cover, 214.

3. Charters, *Beats and Company: A Portrait of a Literary Generation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986), 4.

4. Ginsberg qtd. in Peabody, 1.

5. R. Johnson, "Mapping," 4.

6. *Breaking*, 85. *Loba* was published in increments as each new part was written; the current 16 parts were first published cumulatively in 1998.

7. Di Prima, *Memoirs of a Beatnik* (New York: Olympia Press, 1969), 192; R. Johnson, "Diane di Prima's Anarchist Heritage and Revolutionary Letters 1971-2007: Global Radical Chic," MLA Conference Paper (December 2009); di Prima, *Memoirs*, 193.

8. Whereas "colloquial" or "vernacular" refers more generally to spoken language, my use of the term "slang" follows from its definition as a particular mode of communication between members of a countercultural community (to be discussed in more detail later). I sometimes refer to the slang of the 1950s New York City bohemian community as "hipster" or "hip" slang, which is defined by its distinction from the language of the mainstream, the academy, the "square." Slang in this context is recognizable as such in its use of language derived from the 1940s and 1950s bebop scene, such as "cool" or "dig." (There are more complex variations of slang that I address throughout the chapter.)

9. As I noted in the Introduction, my use of the term "bohemian" instead of "Beat" in certain contexts throughout the dissertation is meant to distinguish between the larger New York City community of artists and the specific group of Beat writers within this community. Both terms refer to groups of both men and women, despite the lack of support or camaraderie regarding the women's work as writers.

10. See Mary Paniccia Carden, Maria Farland, and Blossom Kirschenbaum for additional essays on di Prima's work.

11. A. Friedman, "'I say,'" 204. Also appearing in later publications, "Song for Baby-O, Unborn" and "Lullaby" were originally published in *This Kind* (the former as "For Babio, Unborn").

12. See Davidson's *The San Francisco Renaissance* and Alicia Suskin Ostriker's *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (London: The Women's Press, 1987).

13. For example, see Anne Waldman's 1984 interview, published in Arthur and Kit Knight's *The Beat Road*; Tim Kindberg's 1997 interview, "The Movement of the Mind" published in *Magma*; and Tony Moffeit's 2002 interview, published in Grace and Johnson's *Breaking*.

14. This is included in the Diane di Prima Papers (Box 4) at the Syracuse University Library, Special Collections Research Center.

15. Di Prima, *Recollections*, 78.

16. *Recollections*, 77.

17. Di Prima, "Light/and Keats," *Talking Poetics from Naropa Institute: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics*, vol. 1., ed. Anne Waldman and Marilyn Webb (Boulder: Shambhala, 1978), 18.

18. Di Prima, "Light/and Keats," 20, 27. In a letter dated December 22, 1817, Keats describes his theory of Negative Capability: "The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth. … several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." Qtd. in di Prima, "Light/and Keats," 19.

19. Di Prima, *Recollections*, 93, 92, 92.

20. *Recollections*, 91.

21. This and the subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from *Recollections*, 89.

22. The quotations in this paragraph are from Di Prima, *Recollections*: 78, 88, 90, 92, 96.

23. This and the preceding quotations in this paragraph are from the same source as above: 13, 85, 101.

24. Di Prima, *Memoirs*, 133.

25. Di Prima, *Recollections*, 283 (emphasis in original).

26. *Recollections*, 101.

27. The distinction of di Prima among most other women Beat writers is important to reiterate here. Her own sense of inclusion and the male Beats' recognition of her work at the time undoubtedly contribute to her particular depiction of the bohemian

experience throughout her work. This matter becomes more complex regarding her assertion of female subjectivity, however, and I address this in more detail shortly.

28. Most of the new material included in *Dinners & Nightmares* was written between the publication of *This Kind* in 1958 and *Dinners* in 1961, with the exception, for example, of the *Thirteen Nightmares*, which was written in 1955.

29. Di Prima, *Dinners & Nightmares* (New York: Corinth, 1961), 74.

30. *Dinners*, 74.

31. Ostriker, 129.

32. Di Prima's experiments with poetic space are perhaps reflective of Olson's theory of projective verse which emphasized that "form is never more than the extension of content." (*Collected Prose*, ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997], 240). As such, the poem is considered "a verbal action" rather than a "sequence of images" determined by form. Burton Hatlen qtd. in Edward Foster, *Understanding the Black Mountain Poets* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 45.

33. Interestingly, after exposure to the Beat poets in San Francisco, Lowell's poetic style changed from what he describes as "distant, symbol-ridden, and willfully difficult" to the open and straightforward style of the Beats. Qtd. in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 5th ed, vol. 2, ed. Nina Baym (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 2524.

34. Like "The Passionate Hipster to His Chick," the In Memoriam Series in *This Kind* exemplifies di Prima's confrontation of and resistance to mainstream or standard poetic conventions—revised through the playful use of slang that, to various degrees, rewrites classic, traditional poems. The In Memoriam series represents a contemporary version of Alfred Tennyson's poem of the same name. For example, she includes more colloquial variations of various phrases or images present in Tennyson's poem: Tennyson's "friend of mine" becomes "brother of mine" and his "white-faced halls" becomes "the whitebellied monster." Further, Tennyson's "Thy voice is on the rolling air; / I hear thee where the waters run; / Thou standest in the rising sun, / And in the settling thou art fair" takes an unconventional shape in one of the poems of this series, dated May 29, 1951. Di Prima writes, "… Now in a world of sense / a world of fear you are my guerdon, and when / my gestures large for space throw living out of / focus and the quest screams fearless in the / ending night, it is I remember you who never / were and always are, for you are rain by now / and wind and all the nights of my life black and / young and yes my lad I love you first and truest."

35. Timothy Gray, "'The Place Where Your Nature Meets Mine': Diane di Prima in the West," *Journal x: A Journal in Culture and Criticism* 8, no. 1 (2003): 7. Gray defines "the West" for di Prima as defined by "a series of encounters in places as diverse

as San Francisco, Wyoming, New Mexico, and even upstate New York (one of America's first frontiers)" that began in the 1960s. "'The Place,'" 5.

36. "A Spell for Felicia, That She Come Away" is in *Selected Poems, 1956-1975*.

37. Anthony Lioi, "Real Presence: The Numina in Italian American Poetry," *MELUS* 34, no. 2 (2009): 148.

38. Walt Whitman, "Slang in America," *Completed Poetry and Collected Prose* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1982), 1166.

39. Whitman, 1170.

40. Louis Untermeyer qtd. in Eric Partridge, *Slang, Today and Yesterday* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1934), 324.

41. Richard Bridgman, *The Colloquial Style in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 8.

42. Mark Ford, ed. *The New York Poets: An Anthology* (Manchester, Great Britain: Carcanet, 2004), xiii.

43. James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 37.

44. Baym, 1215-1216.

45. Frank O'Hara qtd. in Ford, 39.

46. The Beats themselves spoke to this contrast to Eliot and the establishment poetry of the academy, such as Ginsberg in his mock-letter to Eliot in 1949 and John Clellon Holmes in his 1981 essay, "Unscrewing the Locks: The Beat Poets." Importantly, however, despite this self-avowed distinction, scholars have drawn useful connections between the poetics and theories of Eliot and the Beats, specifically regarding Ginsberg and Burroughs. See John Tytell's "The Beat Generation and the Continuing American Revolution," Jonah Raskin's *American Scream*, and Raj Chandarlapaty's *The Beat Generation and Counterculture*, for example.

47. See Chapter One of Smethurst's *The Black Arts Movement* for a more detailed discussion of what he refers to as the "alliance between the New York Intellectuals and the New Critics," which is represented by their generally similar literary aesthetic, despite important political differences between the two groups. *The Black Arts Movement*, 31.

48. Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1996), 9, 11.

49. Raskin, *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg's* Howl *and the Making of the Beat Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 171-172.

50. Raskin, 225.

51. The quotation is from "Three Laments" in *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward* (New York: Totem Press, 1958), 19.

52. Podhoretz, 489.

53. Krim, 78.

54. Smethurst, 37.

55. Holton, 24. Specifically, the slang of the Beats took shape by drawing on the language not only of the jazz and bebop culture, but also of non-white, lower class Americans, and of what Holton refers to as "the anomic"—that is, "the diversity of maladjusted individuals existing beyond—or perhaps beneath—the reach of conformity." Included in this category is what Holton describes as "a variety of eccentrics: drug addicts and transient carnies, homosexuals and fringe artists, criminals and visionaries, misfits of all kinds." Holton, 23.

56. M.M. Bakhtin qtd. in Holton, 25.

57. Significantly, within the context of her poems that overtly treat the female experience, di Prima's minimalist style anticipates what Suzanne Juhasz calls the "first feminist rhetoric" of the feminist movement beginning in the late 1960s. Juhasz describes the work of feminist poets such as Rich, Lucille Clifton, Kathleen Fraser, and Susan Griffin as marked by a rhetoric "of direct statement; of literally—and with minimal complexity—naming the components of a woman's life and thereby making those things, emotions, and ideas valid…; of the accompanying honesty, personalness [sic], immediacy, and accessibility." ("Transformations in Feminist Poetry," *Frontiers* 4, no. 1 [1979]: 29.) Certainly, this characterization, much of which is evident in the poems I discuss below, emphasizes the ways in which di Prima's work anticipates the work of feminist writers. That di Prima's minimalist style of honest and authentic expression is used throughout her body of poetry of this period, however—not just within the work that overtly seeks to validate the female experience—speaks to my reading of her dual expression of agency and subjectivity in *This Kind*—that of the female bohemian and of the bohemian in general, male or female.

58. Raskin, 133. Elise Cowen is the exception to Ginsberg's reference to his male contemporaries in *Howl*, such as Kerouac, Burroughs, and Cassady.

59. Richard Ellmann, ed., *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973), 371.

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60. See, for example, Creeley's "Language" in *The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley, 1945-1975*.

61. Though untitled when originally published in *This Kind*, "The Window" appears with this title in di Prima's *Selected Poems 1956-1976*.

62. Di Prima, *Dinners*, 145.

63. Podhoretz.

64. Anthony Libby, "Diane Di Prima: 'Nothing is Lost: It Shines in Our Eyes,'" *Girls Who Wore Black*, 53.

65. Libby, 53.

66. See the Introduction for more on this characterization (note 65.).

67. Podhoretz, 484.

68. Though di Prima describes having written only one poem at Swarthmore, a collection of her unpublished poetry dated through 1952 indicates that she was indeed writing during this period. See the collection of Early Poems (1940-1952) in the Diane di Prima Papers at the Syracuse University Library, Special Collections Research Center (Box 4), from which all of the poems from this period discussed in this section come. In addition to writing poetry at college, di Prima published one short story, "The Ethic of Sidney McCosh" in the Swarthmore College Magazine, *The Dodd*, in the Spring of 1952.

69. Smethurst, 37.

70. In "Manhood and Its Poetic Projects," DuPlessis discusses how in their efforts to "bring 'masculinity' and normative male expectations up to scrutiny," New American male poets of the 1950s, including Beats and Black Mountain poets, "implicitly or explicitly reject the possibility of making a bilateral gender critique." In their "desire to alter male possibility," di Prima's male contemporaries produced texts within which "often enough, female figures were recast as normative, centrist, [and] controlling." DuPlessis notes, though, that this exclusion of women from the male poets' critique of hegemonic norms "was unconscious, perhaps somewhat conscious; it was unthinking or half-thought; it was uncritical, and perhaps sometimes deliberate; it was innocent, and sometimes maliciously motivated." Regardless of motivation, however, DuPlessis ultimately helps illustrate how "this peripheral cohort" of 1950s male countercultural poets "participates in centrist thinking" regarding female gender codes. Her essay specifically discusses the work of Ginsberg, Olson, and Creeley to support this argument. ("Manhood," 3-4.) See also poems by Gregory Corso, such as "Marriage," and John Wieners, such as "Feminine Soliloquy," and the prose of various New American male writers.

71. Gary Snyder qtd. in Charters's *The Portable Beat Reader* (New York: Viking, 1992), 292.

72. Snyder, in Charters, *Portable*, 291.

73. Snyder, 292.

74. This refers to the passage in Kerouac's "Origins of the Beat Generation," in which he epitomizes the male Beat's expectations for women to be silent and in the background; he describes female Beats as "girls [who] say nothing and wear black." "Origins," 61.

75. Di Prima is not the only contemporary female avant-garde poet to write directly about women's experiences; however, her work examined here is unique in its use of the slang of the bohemian community to revise both mainstream and countercultural depictions of women—and to do so in the late 1950s. For other female poets writing in the colloquial and addressing issues of gender, see for example Carol Bergé's *From a Soft Angle*, including poetry written in the 1960s and Joanne Kyger's *The Tapestry and the Web*, published in 1964.

76. When some of the Love Poems from *This Kind* were republished in *Dinners & Nightmares*, the series was titled "More or Less Love Poems."

77. Burt Kimmelman, "From Black Mountain College to St. Mark's Church: The Cityscape Poetics of Blackburn, di Prima, and Oppenheimer," *Rain Taxi* (Spring 2002).

78. Though "pome" can refer to a simple rhyme, when republished in *Dinners & Nightmares*, these poems are renamed with the correct spelling as "Poems for Bret."

79. Although "Baby-O" may be a slang term for men as well, di Prima frequently uses this term throughout her treatment of motherhood. In addition to "Requiem" and "For Babio, Unborn" from *This Kind*, see others such as "Lullaby" and the "Jeanne Poems." Also, see A. Friedman and Ostriker for further discussions of di Prima's treatment of motherhood throughout her work, which include her use of "Baby-O" as I suggest here.

80. A. Friedman, "'I say,'" 204. Friedman's discussion is within the context of the poem's reprint as "Song for Baby-O Unborn" in di Prima's *Selected Poems*.

81. The quotations in this paragraph are from Ginsberg's *Howl*: 13, 9, 14, 14, 14-15.

82. This and the subsequent quotation are from DuPlessis's "Manhood": 8, 9.

83. The poets of the Black Mountain school, closely associated with the Beats, are sometimes distinguished from the contemporary New York School of Poetry by their

“machismo.” Daniel Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 24.

84. Di Prima, “An Interview,” 29.

85. Di Prima, *Recollections*, 107.

86. Di Prima, “An Interview,” 29.

87. Washington Irving qtd. in Gary Dyer, “Thieves, Boxers, Sodomites, Poets: Being Flash to Byron’s *Don Juan*,” *PMLA* 116, no. 3 (2001): 574.

88. Norman Mailer, “The White Negro,” *Advertisements for Myself* (New York: Putnam, 1959), 348.

89. M.A.K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (Baltimore: University Park Press, 1978), 164. The subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from the same text: 168, 166, 165, 171 (emphasis in original).

90. See Holton, pgs. 24-25 for more on the function of a countercultural community’s use of language.

91. This and the following two quotations are from Dyer, 574.

92. Brita Lindberg-Seyersted, “‘Bad’ Language Can Be Good: Slang and Other Expressions of Extreme Informality in Sylvia Plath’s Poetry,” *English Studies* 78, no. 1 (1997): 31.

93. Lindberg-Seyersted, 19, 31. For Lindberg-Seyersted, the slang in Plath’s poetry is not the same hipster slang I examine in di Prima’s work, but expressions such as “keeping in cahoots”—American slang more broadly.

94. Bridgman, 25.

95. Although this boundary issue is attributed to the use of slang in its fundamental function as an alternative to the mainstream, it is important to note that the demarcation between “insiders” and “outsiders” perpetuated by the literary use of slang is not unlike the boundaries that the poets associated with New Criticism enforced between themselves and those outside of the academic poetry establishment. Through their exclusive use of the formal, elite language of the academy, such poets excluded New American poets from their conception of the American literary tradition; the latter were considered to be non-academic or anti-intellectual by virtue of their literary use of the colloquial. In fact, this division between the academic and non-academic poets was confirmed in the 1957 anthology, *New Poets of England and America*, which only included poets associated with the academy such as Ted Hughes, Philip Larkin, W.S.

Merwin, Louis Simpson, and Anne Sexton. Edited by Donald Allen, *The New American Poetry* published in 1960, though, represented a response to the previous anthology's exclusivity and included the most recognizable poets affiliated with the Beats, the Black Mountain school, the San Francisco Renaissance, and the New York School.

96. Grace and Johnson, *Breaking*, 84.

97. Holton, 22.

98. See Chapter Three for further discussion of the Beats' attraction to black culture.

99. Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 19. An example is from Williams's *Spring and All* (poem XVII): "Our orchestra / is the cat's nuts— / Banjo jazz / with a nickelplated / amplifier to / soothe / the savage beast— / Get the rhythm / That sheet stuff / 's a lot a cheese. / Man / gimme the key / and lemme loose— / I make 'em crazy / with my harmonies— / Shoot it Jimmy / Nobody / Nobody else / but me— / They can't copy it." *Spring*, 216.

North's inclusion of Eliot in this context refers specifically to the Modernist period, including his letters and works such as *The Waste Land*, *Sweeney Agonistes*, and "Mélange Adultère de Tout." It was in the post-WWII period that Eliot's ideas about and approach to writing poetry shifted to the more formal poetics encouraged by the academy—the poetics that helped shape New Criticism and against which many contemporary poets reacted. In this later poetics, Eliot "insist[ed] on the preservation of poetic diction," arguing in 1947 that "'If every generation of poets made it their task to bring poetic diction up to date with the spoken language, poetry would fail in one of its most important obligations.'" Raskin, 85; Eliot qtd. in Raskin, 85.

100. North, 21.

101. James Weldon Johnson asserted in 1931 that "'the passing of traditional dialect as a medium for Negro poets is complete.'" (Qtd. in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the 'Racial' Self* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1987], 178.) North affirms this claim in his discussion of how when black writers subsequently "attempted to renew dialect writing by freeing it from the clichés Johnson criticized, fashionable white usage of the same language stood in their way as a disabling example." (North, 11.) However, Claude McKay's dialect poetry represents one of a few exceptions as he used dialect in a deliberate effort to maintain the identity and culture of his Jamaican heritage, reinforcing cultural differences. As Wayne Cooper explains, in contrast to Paul Laurence Dunbar's use of dialect that was "inherited from the whites who had forged it to perpetuate the stereotype of Negro inferiority," McKay's dialect represented an effort "to utilize the language of his people in portraying their life and thought." The dialect of McKay's poetry was comprised of "West African words, phrases, syntax and rhythm, as well as a treasury of African folk tales"—a dialect that

"assured [the] survival" of Jamaicans in the face of British colonization. *The Dialect Poetry of Claude McKay* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972).

102. DuPlessis, "'Darken Your Speech': Racialized Cultural Work of Modernist Poets," *Reading Race in American Poetry: "An Area of Act,"* ed. Aldon Lynn Nielsen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 47.

103. North, 141. Such attempts include not only the use of dialect, but also the use and exploitation of common racial stereotypes. Also, interestingly, despite the racial boundaries argued to have been maintained through this tradition, Gates points out that there was at least one successful attempt in the white modernist use of dialect. Gates argues that in *Sweeney Agonistes*, Eliot "uses ridiculous yet sublime language and a portrayal often approaching caricature"; he "has made the American vulgar tongue contain the rhythms and idiom common to its slang uses at the time. Yet it is expressive of more serious, almost deadly double entendres and puns." (*Figures*, 289.) And, for Gates, such success with dialect is only otherwise evident in some of the work of black modernist poets such as Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, and Paul Laurence Dunbar.

104. Aldon Lynn Nielsen addresses the appearance of dialect and of racial discourse more broadly in the work of contemporary poets. He argues, through examples like Robert Duncan, Frank O'Hara, Lew Welch, and John Wieners, that not unlike the modernists, contemporary white poets were, as Charles Bernstein describes, "trapped in a racist ventriloquism." ("Poetics of the Americas," *Reading Race in American Poetry: "An Area of Act,"* ed. Aldon Lynn Nielsen [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000], 129.) Nielsen cites "Comportment" by Lew Welch, for example: "Think Jew / Dance nigger / Dress and drive Oakie." (Qtd. in Nielsen, *Reading Race: White American Poets* [Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988], 157.) The racial discourse in poems such as this one, according to Nielsen, signifies an "identification with an idealized and romanticized sense of blackness" and does so not through the use of actual dialect or slang, but in reference to the culture from which this derives. (This and the following two quotations are from Nielsen, *Reading Race: White*, 157.) Nielsen explains, "Poets like Welch and John Wieners accept many of the white assertions about blackness as being adequate referential descriptions and then want those same descriptions to apply to themselves. They want to become 'niggers,' to step into the image structure of the farthest outsider." Indeed, similar versions of this desire often take shape in the exoticism of racial others in contemporary poetry. In "The Poet in the Attic," O'Hara writes, "And as Nubian niggers rub / their bellies against his open lips / he fashions a constrictor / out of a dead feather boa." As Nielsen describes, O'Hara "wants to kiss this representative of the otherness or primitivism, to fondle it in the privacy of his imagination's attic." (*Reading Race: White*, 156.) Suggested by this reading of the racial discourse in the work of di Prima's contemporaries and by the motivation behind and effect of the use of dialect in white-authored modernist poetry as North argues, two issues are at stake in the white poet's use of racial language or discourse: the construction or perpetuation of racial boundaries and the blurring or erasing of racial boundaries, achieved by the romanticization or appropriation of experiences of blackness.

105. See Malcolm X's description of his "homemade education" in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), 174.

106. See Chapter Three for further discussion of race and Beat literature, including white privilege and racial discourse.

107. Baraka qtd. in Kane, 4.

108. Foster, *Understanding the Black Mountain Poets*, 74.

109. Ginsberg qtd. in Raskin, 102.

CHAPTER 2
"THE OUTLAWS WERE ABOUT TO WELCOME ANOTHER MEMBER": FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY AND (UN)GENDERED SOCIAL SPACE IN JOYCE JOHNSON'S *COME AND JOIN THE DANCE*

I. Introduction

Joyce Johnson (née Glassman) was an aspiring writer in the late 1950s when she moved out of her parents' home to live on her own. Determined to support herself financially, Johnson's job as a secretary took precedence over her literary pursuits—as did her two-year love affair with Jack Kerouac, which began in 1957. Though she did manage to write a novel during this period—the first female-authored Beat novel, *Come and Join the Dance*, published in 1962—Johnson is most commonly identified either as Kerouac's girlfriend when *On the Road* was published and he instantly became a Beat icon or as a Beat chronicler or memoirist, attributed to her 1983 memoir, *Minor Characters: A Young Woman's Coming-of-Age in the Beat Orbit of Jack Kerouac*. Indeed, she is often referred to as the young woman who paid Kerouac's way to New York City "so he'd be in the city when *On the Road* officially came out" and who always gave him a place to stay when he would return to the city for brief visits.[1]

After publishing her first novel in the early 1960s, Johnson transitioned from being a secretary at literary agencies to an editor. Though this became her primary source of income for many years, she also continued to pursue her writing career. Her body of work spans several decades and genres, and two publications have received esteemed literary awards. After *Come and Join the Dance*, Johnson published two more novels, two memoirs, a collection of letters, and a documentary nonfiction book—and she continues to write today. Notably, *Minor Characters* won the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the penultimate chapter of her 1989 novel *In the Night Café*, "The

Children's Wing," won the O. Henry Award first prize. Nevertheless, because of her relationship to Kerouac and the relatively sporadic publication of her books (an average of eight years between each novel and memoir) Johnson's contributions to the Beat literary tradition remain largely overlooked.

Even though Johnson asserted her independence when she left her family as a single young woman to free herself from conservative constraints, her competing roles within the Beat community—as writer, girlfriend, and secretary—prevented her from more directly challenging normative gender roles within this context. The title of her memoir, *Minor Characters*, aptly describes the secondary role that Johnson considers herself and many women of the New York City Beat community—including Kerouac's first wife, Edie Parker, William Burroughs's wife, Joan Vollmer, and young writers Elise Cowen and Hettie Jones—to have played during the late 1940s and 1950s. As has been well-established, Johnson and these other "minor characters" were generally expected by the male Beats "to sit quietly and listen, to laugh a lot, be sympathetic, and make sure there was something to eat, … to do the dishes and go to bed occasionally."[2] However "minor" Johnson characterizes her role at this time, her commitment to her financial independence and to her writing career challenges how neatly she fits in to this image of the ideal female Beat and points to the complicated nature of her experience within the Beat community. Accordingly, this chapter examines how Johnson's multifaceted experience during this period affected her writing.

Specifically, this chapter situates *Come and Join the Dance* within two equally important contexts: the mainstream and the Beat literary traditions. Johnson began writing her first novel in the mid-1950s, and at this time, Beat and non-Beat

contemporary fiction tended to depict women in two limited ways. They were represented as subordinate to or objectified by men, or as suffering from madness or depression, often linked to the desire to be an artist. This chapter examines how Johnson disrupts these restrictive patterns in her first novel by confronting the hegemonic gender codes from which they derive and developing a prescient model of independent female subjectivity. As the first female-authored Beat novel, *Come and Join the Dance* is significantly distinguished in its representation of early feminist imperatives.[3]

My analysis illustrates how the novel's depiction of female subjectivity—defined as "the individual's significance in a cultural or theoretical sense"[4]—is achieved by Johnson's reshaping of traditional gender relations within public and private spaces. Johnson creates what feminist geographer Gillian Rose calls "paradoxical spaces"—"space[s] through which to unsettle and displace key assumptions underlying predominant ways of thinking about and experiencing gender."[5] In doing so, she engages not only in the normative gender discourse of the period of the novel's composition in important ways, but also in the discourse of what is now identified as feminist geography—rooted in the importance of the relationship between gender and space.

This chapter also explores how *Come and Join the Dance* significantly diverges from the portrayals of female subjectivity and the New York City bohemian community represented in female- and male-authored Beat texts. While *Come and Join the Dance* shares an important achievement with di Prima's work in its resistance to the normative female role, it also interestingly complicates the model of female subjectivity represented in di Prima's work.[6] *Come and Join the Dance* subtly critiques the viability of this bohemian female subjectivity through the protagonist's ambivalence toward her

psychological and sexual liberation. As shown in Chapter One's analysis of *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward*, di Prima consistently depicts female subjectivity of the bohemian community through sexual assertiveness and bravado. This centrality of sexual agency for female subjectivity is undermined in *Come and Join the Dance* by the way in which Johnson's protagonist, Susan, is psychologically and physically unfulfilled by her self-initiated sexual experiences, as well as by the subtle identity crises she faces throughout the novel. In this critique of di Prima's version of female subjectivity, Johnson creates a unique and provocative model that raises questions about burgeoning efforts within the Beat community to revise the traditional female gender role in the 1950s.

Further, whereas for di Prima and other Beat writers such as Kerouac, the New York City bohemian community is depicted as a fundamentally positive, supportive, or valuable space that fosters the development of subjectivity, this chapter illustrates how the New York City bohemian community within *Come and Join the Dance* is represented as ultimately dysfunctional. In the novel, New York City bohemia is unable to provide an effective alternative to the conservative mainstream for Susan and her friends, and this culminates in the defeat or hopelessness of the novel's bohemian characters as well as in Susan's departure for Paris at the end of the novel.

The one major critical study of this otherwise overlooked novel, Ronna Johnson's "'And Then She Went': Beat Departures and Feminine Transgressions in Joyce Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance*," treats the novel's development of female subjectivity in undeniably important ways (which I discuss in more detail throughout the chapter). My analysis complicates and extends this existing scholarship with attention to how the novel's female subjectivity is predicated on the relationship between gender and

space, as well as to several ways in which the novel challenges key elements of female- and male-authored Beat literature that are outside of the scope of Ronna Johnson's essay. This chapter highlights Johnson's heretofore unrecognized contributions to the Beat literary tradition and challenges Johnson's status as a "minor character," positioning her alongside di Prima as a significant Beat writer in her own right.

II. The First Female Beat Novelist

Many of Johnson's experiences that are fictionalized in her novels or documented in her memoirs reflect an ongoing struggle not uncommon for a woman coming of age in New York City during the post-WWII period: the struggle between the conservative world of her family and the countercultural world of bohemia. From a young teenager to an adult, Johnson's identity fluctuated from what she would describe as a "good girl" to an "outlaw" with a temporary "collegiate" period in between.[7] The gender-based expectations for Johnson—those of her family and of the male Beats—strongly affected her ability to develop a sense of self as she evolved through these various phases of her life. As such, the issue of gender as it shaped her identity and her understanding of what it meant to be either a "good girl" or a bohemian would come to be one the primary issues explored in her writing. New York City itself plays a significant role in her life and writing as well, as Manhattan was the site of her development as a college student and a bohemian, the site of her professional career as a writer and editor, as well as the setting of her body of work.

Johnson was born Joyce Alice Glassman in Brooklyn in 1935. Her father, Daniel Glassman, was considered by her family to be unambitious—never seeking anything beyond what he originally considered a temporary job as an auditor for the Metropolitan

Tobacco Company—a job that he held for 35 years until his death in 1960. Her mother, Rosalind Rosenberg (later Ross), perhaps overcompensated for the lack of drive in Johnson's father as well as for her own disappointment in abandoning her dream to become a singer for marriage and motherhood (she worked as a housekeeper when Johnson was growing up). Dreaming that her daughter would become a famous composer or actor and singer, Johnson's mother introduced her to acting and the piano at a young age. Johnson became a child actor around age eight, beginning as a dancer in *Bobino* and an acting understudy for *I Remember Mama*; at age 12, she even composed a full-length musical comedy. But as she describes in her memoirs, *Minor Characters* (1983) and *Missing Men* (2004), during these years on stage and at the piano, Johnson felt like an imposter. Despite her mother's fierce ambitiousness, Johnson wasn't drawn to acting or composing; her exposure to the arts at such a young age attracted her to writing instead, and her affinity for the literary arts grew as she explored New York City beyond the Broadway theater.

In her family's second home in Queens and later in their apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, Johnson grew up with what she calls a "cultural loneliness."[8] The furniture, music, fashion, and values seemed old-fashioned, representative of her parents' efforts to achieve and maintain an image of having only "the finer things," and as such, her home was stifling. She recalls painfully her parents' living room and "the tensions of gentility" that pervaded the atmosphere: "It's as if all these objects—the piano, the rug, the portrait—are held in uneasy captivity, hostages to aspiration." Johnson explains that she "was to be guarded [by her mother] from the contaminations of everything 'popular'—chewing gum, soda pop, comic books, the Bobbsey Twins, [and]

Frank Sinatra." Faced with such prohibitions by her mother, Johnson recalls childhood experiences of rebelliousness that would perhaps shape her later, more overt and substantial resistance to conservatism.

For example, she recalls being excited by the thrill of danger when she would accompany her father on his routine gambling rounds—kept secret by both Johnson and her father from her mother. She describes feeling "thrilled to be invited into" her father's "faintly illicit" routine that "seem[ed] tinged with glamour." And upon her first visit to the Washington Square section of Greenwich Village at age 13, Johnson would begin more consciously and regularly rebelling against what she considered her parents' conservative restrictions. With her friend Maria, Johnson took public transportation every Sunday down to Washington Square—pretending to go to the movies or to be doing homework—where she experienced "Real Life" in its stark contrast to the conservative culture of her home, her neighborhood, and her school.[9]

In downtown Manhattan, Johnson was exposed to bohemia and its "interesting grownups who had no visible means of support: artists, poets, communists and anarchists, guitar-pickers, jailbirds, scavengers." For the next few years, she spent time in quintessential bohemian hangouts such as the Waldorf Cafeteria and the Art Center, learning about the world outside of her "genteel" home; she was introduced to Jung's theories, Existentialism, abstract expressionism, *The Partisan Review*, and the existence of current racial and social injustices. But after some time of trying to manage her "long[ing] to turn [her]self into a Bohemian" with her good girl image at home—of "moving back and forth between antithetical worlds"—Johnson surrendered this "double life," decided to be a "collegiate," and entered Barnard College at age 16 in 1951.[10]

Not unlike di Prima's college experience at Swarthmore, Johnson explains that at Barnard, "tradition reigned supreme." As a child, Johnson read classics such as *Ivanhoe*, *Little Women*, *Little Men*, *Black Beauty,* and *The Last of the Mohicans*, and at college, she continued to study canonical literature such as the Romantic poets and Shakespeare. Still drawn to the unconventional and unable to subdue her rebellious impulses, though, Johnson left Barnard in 1954 without graduating; she was one course shy of meeting the requirements (and this is the experience that becomes the basis of *Come and Join the Dance*). Ultimately uncomfortable in her deliberate attempt to be a "collegiate" and determined to fulfill her "abstract desire to be 'free,'" Johnson left college and enacted a more controversial rebellion for a young, middle-class woman: she moved out of her parents' home and into her own apartment a few blocks away in 1955 at the age of 19.[11] The quotation in this chapter's title, "The outlaws were about to welcome another member," refers to the implications of Susan's decision in *Come and Join the Dance* to lose her virginity to a boy she barely knows—yet it fittingly speaks to Johnson's decision to begin living on her own.[12] The quotation captures the invigorating combination of fear, anticipation, and excitement that Susan feels as she sheds her "good girl" persona and becomes an "outlaw." Like Susan, Johnson acted on her irrepressible desire for something unfamiliar and exhilarating, and her ensuing experience with the Beats would come to shape her life as a woman and a writer.

The New York City bohemian community provided the opportunities for living the kind of culturally-vibrant life Johnson yearned for and for escaping the conservative expectations of her family who, like the larger mainstream society at the time, disapproved of her desire to be a young woman living and working on her own. Johnson

began working as a secretary in order to support herself, but the time outside of her job was what she considered her "real life" when she would write.[13] Johnson had first started writing around age eight. She wrote in a variety of genres, including a play that she also directed and starred in when it was performed by her fourth-grade class, *Patience's Christmas*, as well as poetry and monologues, compiled in what her aunt entitled *The Book of Joyce Alice Glassman by Her Aunt Leona Ross*. Later, she wrote for her high school and college literary magazines, and soon after living on her own, she began writing what would become her first novel.

Though influenced by some of the canonical writers she had studied, such as Henry James, around the time that she left her parents and began her life as an independent young woman, Johnson also broke away from her traditional literary studies.[14] She identifies, for example, Jane Bowles and Carson McCullers as two particularly influential contemporary women writers. Johnson attributes the motivation to value what she might not have otherwise considered "literary" material such as that "about mothers and daughters" to the drama of Bowles, and McCullers's tendency to critique normative ideas of gender, sexuality, and identity is not difficult to identify in Johnson's own writing.[15] Although the style of Johnson's writing isn't experimental in the way that much work by both male and female Beats is, this chapter illustrates how the subject matter and the thematic development of Johnson's work reflects her move away from convention.

Each of Johnson's three novels, *Come and Join the Dance* (1962, under Glassman), *Bad Connections* (1978) and *In the Night Café* (1989), is set within bohemian New York City in the 1950s or 1960s, and is based on real-life experiences from various

periods in her life. This trilogy is marked by Johnson's restrained prose style in the vein of Ernest Hemingway; she writes with conciseness and efficiency, avoiding elaborate metaphors or abstract language. Her style often evokes a sense of urgency, detachment, and at times an alienation reflective of the novels' post-war contexts. It is through this writing style that Johnson comments on and critiques women's gender roles—whether of the mainstream or of the nascent feminist movement.

Come and Join the Dance, which I examine in more detail shortly, fictionalizes Johnson's final days at college, taking place over the course of ten days. Susan Levitt, a 20-year-old white, middle-class college student, slowly begins withdrawing from her "good girl" persona and gravitating toward a community of what she considers bohemian "outlaws" in search of a more authentic life.[16] She enacts various kinds of rebellion, including cutting so many physical education classes that she cannot graduate on time, as well as initiating nonmarital sexual experiences and taking a solitary trip to Paris at the end of the novel. In the tradition of Henry James and his attention to what Nancy Grace describes as "the psychological dimension of experience," *Come and Join the Dance* uses a third-person narrative perspective to explore the psychological element of Susan's experiences.[17] Also, having read the 1925 French novel, *The Counterfeiters*, by André Gide, in which taboo homosexuality and sexual experiences are made explicit, Johnson was inspired to explore the female gratuitous sexual act, which distinguishes *Come and Join the Dance* from contemporaneous fiction.

The development and critique of female subjectivity that Johnson expresses through her subtle and witty prose style of *Come and Join the Dance* is further explored in her subsequent novels. As my analysis of her first novel in the following sections

suggests, women's efforts to resist gender norms and to instead develop an individual sense of self becomes the central theme of Johnson's fictional work—and the roots of this theme are evident in her two memoirs as well.

Johnson's second novel, *Bad Connections*, is an astute and at times melodramatic retrospective of Molly Held's romantic and sexual relationships intertwined with unexpected motherhood in the age of the Sexual Revolution. Not entirely unlike Susan from *Come and Join the Dance*, Molly contemplates her true sense of self, as she is caught up in the societal changes achieved by the feminist movement of the late 1960s and the subsequent new pressures to be financially and sexually independent. With incisive humor and irony, Johnson depicts Molly's ambivalence toward the feminist movement as Molly confronts the "female malaise" that this "new cultural phenomenon" created.[18] For instance, once she frees herself from a loveless and abusive marriage, Molly feels more restricted and confined by her relationships with various lovers than she had before.

Addressing the complexities of women's roles after the second-wave feminist movement, Johnson's second novel extends the critique of female subjectivity and liberation begun in *Come and Join the Dance*. But unlike her first novel, in *Bad Connections*, Johnson moves away from the consistent use of third-person perspective and instead adopts a less conventional shifting between first- and third-person narrative perspectives. Doing so enables Johnson to move in and out of focus, embodying the very nature of instability and the struggle for clarity or insight that Molly herself experiences throughout the novel.

In the Night Café was also influenced by the feminist movement, expressing an ambivalence that simultaneously celebrates the various freedoms afforded women while condemning the unspoken restrictions or expectations bound up in these new freedoms. In *In the Night Café*, Johnson fictionalizes the experience of losing her first husband to a tragic motorcycle accident.[19] Johnson's third novel tells the story of Joanna Gold, a photographer who reflects on her marriage as she tries to understand how the relationship has helped shape her sense of self. Not unlike the female protagonists of Johnson's first two novels, Joanna struggles with her identity, looking to her memories with her husband to help her make sense of particular experiences and sometimes pretending to be someone she's not in an effort to seem more interesting.

In between her second and third novels, Johnson published her best known literary work, her memoir *Minor Characters*. Documenting the pivotal period of the Beats in New York City between 1945 and 1959, *Minor Characters* begins briefly with Johnson's childhood and then details her experiences with the New York City bohemian community, focusing in particular on her friendship with Barnard classmate and Beat poet Elise Cowen and on her relationship with Kerouac from 1957-1959, whom Johnson met through Cowen's friendship with Allen Ginsberg. The memoir concludes with Cowen's suicide in 1962 and Johnson's subsequent reflections on the 1960s. With a focus on this critical period in Johnson's life, *Minor Characters*, draws parallels between the publication of quintessential male Beat texts and the authors' corresponding rising popularity with the various experiences and struggles—literary and otherwise—of Johnson and other female Beats, namely Cowen and Hettie Jones.

Though the memoir is recognized as the first text to bring attention to these women who were otherwise overlooked in Beat accounts, *Minor Characters* is perhaps more often credited as providing "the best portrait we have of Kerouac, revealing in fuller detail the Kerouac those who love his books encounter."[20] The memoir opens with Johnson's reflection on a popular photo of male Beats in an unidentified book; the photo is of Hal Chase, Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Kerouac. Johnson reimagines the scene of the photograph, filling in some blanks based on what she's since learned first-hand and otherwise; she then finds her name in the book's index, and uses this snapshot and her inclusion in the historical moment it captures to frame her recollections of her young adult life in New York City. Johnson employs this unique narrative structure throughout the memoir, constructing "simultaneities"[21]—moments of potential overlap (in time, place, or experience) between her life and Kerouac's—to provide insight into her own experiences and their larger context.

The importance for Johnson of her short-lived love affair with Kerouac is further highlighted in her edited collection of letters between the two writers, *Door Wide Open* (2000). This publication reveals a part of Kerouac's life previously undocumented, and it shares their intimate dialogue about each other's writing, especially about Johnson's struggles as an early writer. The book shows how Johnson struggled to focus, to find the time to write while supporting herself, and to be pleased with her progress and her work. Several letters suggest that receiving encouragement from Kerouac was particularly important for Johnson's progress as a writer. Though she had to negotiate between her innate desire to revise her writing and Kerouac's insistence on minimal (if any) revisions,

her annotations of the letters emphasize the importance of his support in light of the general isolation she felt as a woman writer during the late 1950s.[22]

Johnson's latest book, a memoir published in 2004, *Missing Men*, also focuses on pivotal relationships from throughout her life. In *Missing Men*, Johnson tells her mother's story along with her own, and explores her relationships with her father, her first husband, James Johnson, and her second husband, Peter Pinchbeck. Johnson's body of work also includes a nonfiction book published in 1990, *What Lisa Knew: The Truths and Lies of the Steinberg Case*. In this text, Johnson "mingles autobiography, reportage, the Gothic novel, and docudrama" as she recounts the famous murder of six-year-old Lisa Steinberg and the subsequent trial of the girl's illegally adoptive father, Joel Steinberg.[23] In her examination of the trial and the events leading up to the murder, Johnson offers her own condemnation of Steinberg and his lover, Hedda Nussbaum.

In addition to her work as a novelist and memoirist, Johnson established herself as an editor and regular writer for various magazines and newspapers. With her initial work experience as a secretary at literary agencies, Johnson advanced to the position of editor, and she has worked at various publishing houses over the decades, including Farrar, Strauss, and Cudahy, William Morrow, the Dial Press, and McGraw-Hill. Notably, she edited many New Left books of the 1960s and early 1970s, including LeRoi Jones's *Blue People* (1963) and Abbie Hoffman's *Revolution for the Hell of It* (1968), and she edited and helped get published the complete version of Kerouac's *Visions of Cody* in 1973. Johnson has also written critical essays, continues to write book reviews for the *New York Times*, and is currently working on a biography of Kerouac in which she examines his development as an artist through the lens of his French-Canadian background and

bilingualism. This overview of Johnson's sustained career as a writer suggests that although it was initially difficult to find the time and focus to write, Johnson successfully overcame any such obstacles and has produced a body of work within which gender discourse, the counterculture, and New York City are all integral factors.

As noted earlier, Johnson appears in various histories of the Beat period and in Kerouac biographies, but in most of these instances, she is more often given attention as Kerouac's girlfriend and Beat chronicler than as a writer in her own right. Critical scholarship on her work is almost exclusively limited to discussions of *Minor Characters,* and when the memoir is excerpted for Beat anthologies, it is almost always passages directly about Kerouac that are chosen to represent Johnson's contribution to Beat history.[24] Subsequently, Johnson's place in Beat literary history has been largely established as a memoirist. This is the case even within criticism that seeks to revise Beat history as male-dominated. In "Victors of Catastrophe: Beat Occlusions," for example, Maria Damon notes the "considerable poetic oeuvres" of women Beats such as di Prima, Joanne Kyger, and Janine Pommy Vega, but minimizes the literary accomplishments of Johnson as she categorizes her as one of "the memoirists of the era" along with Carolyn Cassady, Brenda Frazer, and Hettie Jones. [25] Amy Friedman's 1996 "'I say my new name': Women Writers of the Beat Generation" introduces Johnson as a novelist, but then also identifies and focuses on her role as a Beat memoirist. And in her 1998 "'Being here as hard as I could:' The Beat Generation Women Writers," Friedman refers to Johnson only as a memoirist.[26]

This approach to Johnson's work draws attention to the ways in which she and other women Beat memoirists "crystalize and transform extra-literary prohibitions

against women to invent an alternative, woman-centered discourse of Beat generation dissent" through life writing.[27] Scholars argue that the women Beats' use of the memoir has helped "reterritorializ[e] them in the Beat community and literary canon from which they have been elided."[28] However, this narrow focus on Johnson's work, in particular, precludes attention to her work as a novelist, and the two aspects of her literary career should not be mutually exclusive. Looking at Johnson's larger body of work reveals how she resisted the assumption that in order to be visible and to "figure [oneself] as subjec[t]," she must write in a genre not used by the male Beats[29]—a genre thus considered subordinate to that of fiction or poetry.[30] Instead of establishing herself as a writer outside of the genres dominated by the male Beats, beginning with *Come and Join the Dance*, Johnson engaged in writing practices also used by her male counterparts. In her novels, Johnson used basic fiction techniques in order to "write [her] Beat [tale]"[31]—not unlike Beats such as Kerouac and Burroughs. Though she didn't experiment with language or structure in the way that these novelists did, her use of the fiction genre is nevertheless significant. Therefore, focusing on her first novel, this chapter sets out to expand our understanding of Johnson's accomplishments as a writer—to reveal the literary, cultural, and social achievements of her work as a novelist that extend the current attention to her work as a memoirist.

As I mentioned earlier, the relatively limited scholarship on Johnson that is focused on her first memoir is currently accompanied only by one critical essay on *Come and Join the Dance*.[32] In "'And Then She Went': Beat Departures and Feminine Transgressions in Joyce Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance*," Ronna Johnson argues that Johnson's first novel should be considered "a Beat urtext" alongside the "renegade

declarations of *On the Road* or ‘Howl’ or *Naked Lunch*.”[33] This argument is based on what Ronna Johnson importantly shows is the development of female subjectivity within *Come and Join the Dance*. She examines how the novel “both adopts and refutes Beat conventions” practiced by male Beat writers and in doing so “enact[s] an oscillating subvert/install maneuver” used in postmodern critical discourse.[34] Ultimately, my analysis of *Come and Join the Dance* continues the work begun by Ronna Johnson and provides new ways in which to understand Johnson’s model of female subjectivity as it is developed through a reshaping of the private/public dichotomy and as it challenges common representations of women, men, sexuality, New York City, and the bohemian community within both male- and female-authored Beat texts.

III. The Female Character in the Contemporary Novel

Though it wouldn’t be published until 1962, Johnson began *Come and Join the Dance* in 1956, drawing on a piece she had written for a writing workshop at Barnard. *Come and Join the Dance* is an important novel through which Johnson simultaneously develops her critical stance toward traditional expectations for women present in society and literature of the time, as well as her skepticism of the role that sexual agency might play in such a critique. A brief overview of *Come and Join the Dance* within the context of contemporary novels highlights the significance of these achievements.

Set in the mid-1950s, *Come and Join the Dance* tells the story of 20-year-old Susan Levitt and her journey toward self-understanding and female subjectivity. At an unnamed women’s college in New York City, Susan is divided between the opposing forces of the conservative mainstream—represented by her parents, college, and society in general—and a community of what she considers bohemian outlaws—represented by

Kay, Peter, and Anthony. The story takes place over the course of ten days, during which Susan takes her final college exam, breaks up with her boyfriend, Jerry, a representative "square" character, and spends time with her bohemian friends. The turning point of the novel is when Susan loses her virginity to Anthony in a deliberate act to initiate herself into the community of bohemians. She then participates in her college graduation even though she has skipped so many gym classes that she cannot officially graduate until she makes up the necessary credits over the summer. The novel concludes shortly after the night of graduation, when Susan goes to bed with Peter and then embarks on a trip to Paris.

Susan's attraction to the "mysterious underground brotherhood" inhabited by Kay, Peter, and Anthony is the driving force of the novel as Susan propels herself into their world as a kind of refuge from the world of her parents and school.[35] Kay has been living in the Southwick Arms Hotel since dropping out of college three months earlier. Susan admires Kay's self-defined freedom and feels it is time to make a similar change in her own life. One way in which she attempts to do so is by having "gratuitous" sex with Anthony. Described by Susan's schoolmates as "a campus bum," Anthony is 18 years old and was recently "expelled from college for bringing a girl up to his room." Anthony recently reached a breaking point at his parochial high school and experienced what Johnson describes as "a delinquency of books and violence." He felt trapped by traditional literature, such as Dickens and Sir Walter Scott, and instead felt empowered to write his own poetry after reading the likes of Thomas Wolfe, Arthur Rimbaud, and D.H. Lawrence. Susan's ultimate attraction, however, is to the divorced Peter, whose interest in taking aimless drives in his 1938 Packard over finishing his Master's thesis has earned

him the reputation of a "perpetual student" at age 30. By the end of the novel, Susan acts on this attraction, sleeping with Peter the morning she is to set sail for Paris. After initially escaping college to experience life as a bohemian, Susan ultimately escapes both the New York City mainstream and bohemian communities in her departure for Paris.

Come and Join the Dance is the first female-authored Beat novel and the first contemporary novel to feature a female protagonist who seeks independence and sexual liberation on her own terms. In providing for Susan an escape from the confines of society—an escape that results from her own decision-making and leaves her free to explore the world how she chooses—the novel reaches beyond what was available for most young, white, middle-class women within the boundaries of both mainstream society and the bohemian community within 1950s New York City.

In contemporary Beat novels, such as Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) and John Clellon Holmes's *Go* (1952), women do not play a major role (indeed, Beat novels are largely autobiographical). Rather, female characters are consistently in the background: silent, submissive, and/or objects of the men's physical desires. For example, two women in *On the Road* are consistently manipulated by the novel's hero, Dean Moriarty, and his seemingly insatiable sexual appetite. Sal explains, "Dean is balling Marylou at the hotel … . At one sharp he rushes from Marylou to Camille—of course neither one of them knows what's going on—and bangs her once … . Then he comes out with me … Then at six he goes back to Marylou." Further, Dean later asks Sal to "work Marylou," presumably because "he wanted to see what Marylou was like with another man." For Dean, women are sexual objects and are subject to his self-serving "schedule." In another example, Galatea Dunkel, the wife of one of Sal and Dean's fellow travelers, is promptly

“[given] the slip” by her husband and Dean while on the road because she was not meeting their expectations; she “kept complaining that she was tired and wanted to sleep in a motel.” Galatea’s “complaints” seemed to confirm for the men that women did not have the capacity—physical or otherwise—to go “on the road” with them.[36]

In Holmes’s *Go*, the female characters are generally positioned alongside the male characters in their shared existential despair—a balance absent in *On the Road*. Nevertheless, many of the novel’s female characters are still subject to the same limitations exemplified in Kerouac’s text. Both Christine and Kathryn, for example, have affairs outside of their unhappy marriages, but the former is left devastated when Gene stops communicating with her after their affair, and the latter is distraught after her own brief affair when she finds letters that her husband, Paul, has been writing to his mistress for the past three years. Further, in some ways, both Kathryn and Paul feel trapped within their marriage and in their lives in general, but Kathryn in particular struggles to manage working during the day to support herself and Paul, an aspiring novelist, who wants to go out on the town with his friends at night. These few examples of female figures within *Go* and *On the Road* illustrate that the marginalization most women experienced in the Beat community is in fact mirrored in male-authored Beat novels.

Not surprisingly, the female protagonists of non-Beat male-authored novels of the period play similar roles—even though they are not secondary characters. The eponymous character of Herman Wouk’s 1955 novel, *Marjorie Morningstar*, for example, initially pursues her dream to be an actress and something other than a “good girl.”[37] She soon realizes, though, that, in fact, she wants to settle down in the suburbs and be a wife and mother—meeting her parents’ conservative expectations after all. In a

relatively more traditional portrayal, the wife of Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955), Betsy Rath, is a stay-at-home mother of three. Though she feels betrayed upon learning of her husband's affair when he was away in the war, she ultimately supports his decision to financially provide for the son of his extramarital relationship. In this way, Wilson portrays Betsy as trapped not only within the confines of her marriage, but also within the confines of her sense of duty as a wife as this role has been culturally defined.

It is important to note that within female-authored novels of the time, female characters are likewise marginal, objectified by men, limited to the domestic role, and/or suffering from mental illness or instability—in general, subject to a subordinate role and to various gender-based oppressions. In Shirley Jackson's *Hangsaman* (1951), for example, the female protagonist, Natalie Waite, is a college student struggling to avoid a future like her mother who is "trapped in a kitchen" as well as struggling against her overbearing and authoritative father, who attempts to control every aspect of her life.[38] Unable to overcome this oppression, Natalie becomes schizophrenic. Published three years later, Harriette Simpson Arnow's *The Dollmaker* (1954) tells the story of Gertie Nevels, whose desire to become a sculptor is made impossible by her financial obligation to her increasingly impoverished family.

Grace Metalious's *Peyton Place* (1956) daringly made young women's sexual desires and exploits explicit in her melodramatic novel; however, the female characters are nevertheless limited to the role of wife or mother, ill-fated to suicide or madness, or subject to an abortion or exile from town as a result of their sexual adventurousness.[39] And Barbara Probst Solomon's *The Beat of Life* (1960), though it explores female

restlessness in 1950s New York City, concludes with the female protagonist's suicide after her "therapeutic abortion."[40] In fact, upon learning she would have to claim to be suicidal in order to get a doctor's approval for the procedure, Natasha protests, "'But I'd never commit suicide.'"[41] In an ironic turn of events, Natasha does commit suicide—a denouement that situates Solomon's novel alongside others in which women are ultimately victim to the various oppressions that surround them.

This brief survey brings into focus how *Come and Join the Dance* astutely disrupts the patterns demonstrated in these representative contemporary novels—of the Beat and mainstream literary traditions. Susan is not confined to the kitchen or the bedroom; nor is she subject to a fate of madness or death. Rather, Susan acts on her rebellious impulses, explores her sexuality, and chooses her own fate, which at the end of the novel, begins with a trip abroad. In *Come and Join the Dance*, Johnson creates a female protagonist who may be confronted with society's limited expectations for women, but who is able to overcome them.

In light of the novel's transgressive portrayals of female agency, rebellion, and sexuality, it is perhaps not surprising that *Come and Join the Dance* received mixed reviews at the time of its publication. As Ann Douglas explains, some of the "disapproving" reviews were due in part to the novel's intervention in the period's "debate about troubled female adolescents."[42] Readers, like those at *Time*, who "thought the silent generation's most serious problem was its young women," certainly would not have embraced Johnson's depiction of Susan's and Kay's rebelliousness.[43] *New York Times* reviewer Gerald Walker, on the other hand, praised "the depth and the deftness" with which Johnson treats Susan's various acts of rebellion.[44] Further, he asserted that the

novel is “artful and unaffected” as it “reminds us that youth is … . a period of becoming whose essence is flux: the lostness or wildness [that others criticize] are merely way-stations along this road of change.”[45] Notably, Walker’s appraisals were echoed by Kerouac, who provided a decidedly laudatory endorsement of Johnson’s first novel; in *Door Wide Open*, Johnson recalls that Kerouac “gave [editor] Hiram Haydn an extravagant blurb for the publication of … *Come and Join the Dance*: ‘The best woman writer in America.’”[46] It is of course reasonable to argue that Kerouac’s intimate relationship with Johnson influenced what might seem to be his overstated endorsement of the novel. Nevertheless, his enthusiastic approval of *Come and Join the Dance* has since been echoed by Beat scholars, who argue that the novel “claims the seminal status of comparable texts” including major works by Kerouac and other male Beats.[47] It is likewise my contention that the unconventional and controversial elements of *Come and Join the Dance*—its daring revisions of literary and social norms—are what define it as an undeniably important novel.

IV. Female Subjectivity in *Come and Join the Dance*

Possibilities for Resistance in Paradoxical Spaces

Female subjectivity within the novel is represented by both Susan and Kay in various ways. Overall, for both women, rebelling against the rules of their families, schools, and tradition represents how they come into their own, deliberately resisting the norm and instead making decisions that reflect their own desires and needs. Kay, for example, has dropped out of college and is described as being sexually active, something that not only marks her general nonconformist behavior, but also that is linked to what seems to be her strong sense of self. In a scene in which Kay is naked in front of Susan,

Susan thinks to herself: “Kay wasn’t a virgin. Perhaps once you had irrevocably gone to bed with a man, you took your body for granted—you knew, which was different than knowing *about*.”[48] As Ronna Johnson emphasizes in her discussion of the novel, female subjectivity is demonstrated throughout the novel through the female characters’ agency and assertiveness, especially regarding their bodies and sexuality—through their resistance to being treated as objects by men and their “negotiations for the sexual satisfaction that authenticates female subjectivity.”[49] Both Kay and Susan make decisions about who to sleep with and under what conditions to do so—factors which challenge the 1950s expectation that women were to have sex only after marriage and only with their husbands. Their rejection of this and other prescriptive standards, as Ronna Johnson argues, represents a bold model of female subjectivity.[50]

Through Susan, subjectivity is also represented by the novel’s opening act of walking out on her college exam without completing it, as well as by her decisions to stop picking up her campus mail, to hand in term papers late, and to cut a considerable amount of physical education classes—so many, in fact, that, as noted earlier, Susan cannot graduate. Additionally, as the novel proceeds, Susan stands up and then breaks up with her boyfriend, stops returning library books, decides to have sex with relative acquaintances, and in the conclusion, leaves for a trip to Paris by herself regardless of her parents’ wishes for her to stay in New York City.

All of these acts of nonconformity—some more substantial than others—represent Susan’s subjectivity and agency, her willful choices that defy the behavioral standards for a young, middle-class female student. Resistant to the traditional expectation that she will behave as a “good girl” and inevitably become a wife and

mother, Susan exerts her subjectivity as she realizes that she has been experiencing life according to others' rules. Now nearing the end of her college career and facing an unknown future, Susan undergoes a "transformation of consciousness" from object to subject.[51] In focusing her novel on this development of female subjectivity, Johnson revises the narrative patterns in contemporary novels that perpetuate the subordination or oppression of female characters, and she does so through a transgression of a similarly restrictive gendered association of social spaces. More specifically, the development of female subjectivity within *Come and Join the Dance* is achieved through a reshaping of the traditional public/private dichotomy.

It is unquestionable that in 1950s America, "the ideology that associates men with the public realm and women with the private" dominated.[52] It was within the private space of the home that women were expected to find meaning and through which to define and identify themselves. The extent of this ideology in practice is evident in Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which addresses its previously unspoken consequences faced by many women at the time. Even in bohemia in the 1950s, it was difficult for women to have access to and situate themselves within, rather than on the margins of public spaces where men could dissent against mainstream America—such as "on the road." As noted earlier, the female Beats were largely expected by the male Beats to fit in to one of the following roles: "mothers, wives, sisters, lovers, virgins, whores, demons, or angels"—most, if not all of which are defined by the domesticity of the private space.[53] Further, as Nancy Duncan clarifies, "most men move between public and private spaces and spheres with more legitimacy and physical safety … than most women," which fundamentally supports the sense of entrapment associated with women's location in the

private space during the 1950s.[54] As Susan asserts her subjectivity through the course of the novel, she destabilizes and transgresses this traditionally gendered spatial dichotomy. Significantly, Johnson displaces the mainstream and bohemian locus of power between men and women in both public and private spaces through the construction of "paradoxical space[s]."[55]

Within the discourse of feminist geography, space is one way in which feminists "can acknowledge the difference of others" as they define spaces "which [do] not replicate the exclusions of the Same [masculine] and the Other [feminine]."[56] What makes spaces paradoxical within this discourse, Rose explains, is that what "would be mutually exclusive if charted on a two-dimensional map—centre and margin, inside and outside—are occupied simultaneously" as an act of opposition to hegemonic or oppressive norms.[57] She argues further that a paradoxical space is a space that represents the effort "to acknowledge both the power of hegemonic discourses and to insist on the possibility of resistance."[58] Within the paradoxical spaces that Johnson constructs in her novel, the gendered dichotomy of private/public is challenged as Susan resists what she experiences as oppression within the patriarchal hegemony, representing what Rose calls "[a] strateg[y] of subversion."[59] As the following analysis shows, it is in public spaces, specifically the New York City streets and the car, where Susan develops and asserts subjectivity, and it is in private spaces, such as the home, where she lacks subjectivity, where she becomes motionless and disconnected from her sense of self—compromising her ability to act as subject.

The Streets

Johnson first challenges the gendered spatial discourse in the beginning of the novel when, after walking out on her exam, Susan stands up her boyfriend, Jerry, and

goes wandering aimlessly around what she's identified as her six-block New York City radius. She finds herself watching a solitary man walking aimlessly in front of her, and she's drawn to him. She eventually recognizes this man as Peter, who she's met several times through Kay. She runs up to catch him, loudly calls his name, and, as Johnson describes, practically startles Peter "out of sleep."[60] Susan's approach is quite powerful here as this becomes the first time she and Peter are alone together—an encounter that prompts Susan's sexual interest in Peter and leads her to eventually seduce him. She and Peter agree to visit the College Inn for coffee, and here, Susan, already having initiated their meeting, now becomes the "provider" as she buys him coffee and pays for the music on the jukebox. She also then continues to walk the New York City streets with Peter "paying off his debts" with her money.[61]

Throughout this scene, Susan is in the dominant position and, as such, reverses normative gender roles. Within the context of 1950s bohemia, however, Susan in the role of the financial supporter may not initially be considered unusual. In fact, male Beats are often described as deliberately rejecting "the family wage system," as "refus[ing] to undertake the support of women."[62] In fact, Douglas describes how, during Johnson's relationship with Kerouac, Johnson experienced "the perverse but real pleasures of buying [Kerouac] dinner or lending him money."[63] In contrast to this real-life bohemian relationship, however, Susan's role as temporary financial supporter for Peter in the novel is followed by her sexual seduction and ultimate rejection of Peter. As such, Johnson allows Susan to play into the male bohemian fantasy of having a woman support him (the role Peter's parents usually play as they regularly send him checks), yet Susan does so not within the private space of the home where the family finances are traditionally

handled, but rather in various public spaces throughout the city. In this first example of paradoxical spaces in the novel, it is within two public spaces of the city, the street and the coffee shop, that Johnson enables Susan to develop and assert her subjectivity.

The role of the streets in this context is particularly notable given that the street is frequently the key signifier of the public space, distinguished from the private through the role of the body.[64] Phil Hubbard explains,

> One of the central props of [the social etiquette of the streets] is the idea that there are certain activities deemed acceptable in private but wholly inappropriate and ill mannered when performed on the streets. .... The common denominator in these proscriptions [of public activities in the urban West] is that these activities involve a transgression of the boundaries of the body[, such as spitting or defecating].[65]

Though Susan's behavior on the streets is not tied to something physically "crossing the threshold of [her] body" through such acts to which Hubbard refers, the positioning of her behavior as a subject on the streets illustrates Johnson's critique of the general association of female agency as limited to the privacy of the home.[66]

Susan's act of approaching Peter in this early scene signifies the frequent sense of power or exhilaration that she experiences on the New York City streets. Having initially perceived her six-block radius around campus as overwhelmed by a disappointing "grayness," Susan determines to make New York City hers, and over time, "the streets had since taken on color, had slowly accumulated layers of significance."[67] Walking around these streets, Susan gradually comes to see herself more clearly in New York City, to the point at which she "discovered that she could stand still on the street if she wanted to, that aimlessness could have its own legality." In fact, it is also on the New York City streets that Susan later breaks up with Jerry. With cars and people rushing around her as she shocks Jerry with her decision, Susan feels as though she and Jerry are

the only stable beings at this moment. She finds her grounding on the streets, has built the strength for such a confrontation, and triumphs over the many mirror reflections of herself that she initially tried to avoid. Walking the city streets, more intimately learning about herself within this public space, Susan makes a connection to her sense of self so that walking aimlessly, meeting with Peter, and breaking up with Jerry become defining moments of power and freedom.

The Car

When Susan decides to initiate herself into the community of outlaws by losing her virginity with Anthony in what she describes as "a gratuitous act of sex," Johnson transforms Peter's car into a paradoxical space. In a car ride with Peter, Kay, and Anthony, Susan initially feels exhilarated and free from any worries or responsibilities, but she's soon confronted with the realization that she's not quite like the others, she's too much of a "good girl." As they drive through an epitome of the typical conformist family lifestyle in Washington Heights—"through endless streets of blond brick apartment houses … and women wheeling baby carriages home from the supermarkets"—Peter says to Susan, "You be a good girl, Susan, and they might let you live up here." In response to her immediate cry of frustration, "'I don't want to be a good girl!'", Peter assures Susan to her dismay that "'That's your particular fate.'" In a subsequent move she considers "safer" than succumbing to this supposedly pre-destined life of a good girl, Susan then daringly matches Anthony's somewhat playful attempt to come on to her. He asks why she doesn't adopt him, saying "If you do, you'll have to sleep with me." She admits to her virginity and ends up telling Anthony she'll meet him the following day—presumably to sleep with him. Anthony keeps the game going, asking

why not now—why wait until tomorrow, why don't they meet this afternoon? To everyone's surprise, at the next red light, Susan suddenly gets out of the car. Even Anthony is caught off guard—he doesn't think Susan would take his teasing seriously. Susan asserts, "'Let's go downtown.' … 'Aren't you coming downtown, Anthony?'" As Anthony figures out what to do—he's no longer leading the game—Susan waits on the street for him. Acquiring Peter's apartment key, Anthony finally exits the car as well, Peter and Kay drive off, and Susan thinks to herself, "I'm doing it, I'm doing it."[68]

Susan initially decides to accept the outlaws' invitation to go for a ride because she "wanted to be set in motion too, to run mindlessly and not feel too much." In the car, she, Anthony, and Kay cannot help but be reminded of the freedom afforded to Peter through his car as "he always kept the back seat littered with the fragmentary preparations for a journey." And although Johnson initially explains that "They were all in [Peter's] power that afternoon; he had made the car their only reality," Susan quite promptly takes control of her reality as she makes the aggressive move with Anthony and shocks all three friends with her behavior.[69] Susan may not be driving the car, able to control where they go or how fast they move, but rather than remain powerless at Peter's position in the driver's seat and at what he claims is her "conservative" fate, Susan asserts her subjectivity and takes control of the situation. In doing so, she stops the car, puts Peter in the position to wait for her, and leads Anthony to the bedroom.

Later in the novel, Susan acts even more assertively in a car when she seduces Peter. After Peter's car breaks down and he sells it for an infuriating five dollars, Susan and Peter take a taxi home. In the absence of any initiation on his part, Susan reaches for Peter in the taxi and decides not to go to her dorm, but to go home with him instead.

Johnson writes, "[She] couldn't bear not touching him. She was no longer afraid. She turned to Peter and put her arms around him, led him close to her." In a car that belongs to neither of them, after experiencing Peter's loss of what epitomizes his identity (he considers his car "the place where he really lived—he only inhabited his apartment"), Susan again acts as a subject and exerts sexual agency.[70] She physically moves closer to Peter, comes on to him in the car, and initiates the change of destination for the driver. In doing so, Susan portrays the same sense of power and subjectivity here as she did earlier in Peter's car and on the streets. Further, and as Ronna Johnson highlights, Peter is stripped of his "male power" in this scene through the demise of his car; Susan is the "sexual aggressor" "at the cost of male mobility and the viability of the road tale" epitomized in *On the Road*.[71] Johnson revises the traditional gendered association of the car as depicted by Kerouac. She transfers the power typically possessed by the man with the car and embodied in his freedom "to disappear for a few days"[72]—as Peter has become accustomed to—to Susan as she does not hesitate to act on Peter's vulnerability here and, subsequent to the loss of his "male power," seduces him.

The access to public spaces that cars offer apply to both men and women, but the association of cars with male freedom and identity is one that has long pervaded American popular myth and literary history. In her study of the car in women's fiction, Deborah Clarke argues for connections between this popular myth, its consistent representation in American literature, and the actual car industry in which "women still report being patronized by car sales personnel and intimidated by auto mechanics."[73] Significantly, in this archetypal masculine space in American literature and society, Susan, in the first scene with Anthony, boldly reacts to the threat of her future as defined

by outside forces rather than by herself, and then, in the later scene with Peter, acts on their sexual attraction and uses her physicality to become sexual actor and agent. Through Susan's behavior in these two key scenes, Johnson challenges both the celebratory and negative aspects of the car as represented in the quintessential Beat text itself, *On the Road*.

While the image of the car in *On the Road* epitomizes the freedom and power afforded men and denied women and provides the means through which Sal can escape convention and conformity, it also "embodies a negative side."[74] Roger N. Casey explains: "there is a gradual festering disillusionment with road culture and automobility" as well as "a disenchantment prevalent in Sal's growing awareness of Dean's instability" throughout *On the Road*.[75] Like Susan, Sal isn't actually the driver of the car during his journeys back and forth across the country, but for Sal this means that "he is unable to control America": he "[does] nothing to claim it, change it, or even interact with it."[76] In Johnson's depiction of the car as a paradoxical space in the two scenes described above, Susan quite deliberately—in acts of outright resistance to her perceived oppression and passivity—seizes the power that Anthony assumes to exert when he begins teasing Susan at the start of their drive and that Peter feels in his car as the driver. In contrast to Sal's behavior, rather than willingly submit to what the others perceive is her fate as a "square" or to feminine passivity in general, Susan redefines the nature of this masculine space.

The Bedroom

The significance of Susan's actions in public (and masculine) spaces is further highlighted when contrasted with her lack of subjectivity within private spaces. For example, at Peter's apartment in an early scene with Anthony, Anthony tells Susan that

he was about to kiss her before she left his side on the couch. As she now stands at the window looking out, she waits for him to approach her and initiate a kiss. When he remains where he is, Susan attributes his reluctance to be aggressive to his timidity or immaturity and doesn't make a move herself—a stark contrast to her behavior in the car shortly afterwards. Somewhat similarly, when in her dorm room, Susan is overwhelmed with stillness and inaction—she becomes lazy and sleeps to overcome feelings of entrapment. Also, during a conversation in Kay's room about her interest in drawing, Susan begins to feel that "she and Kay were shouting to each other across space, like people on long-distance phone calls shouting uselessly."[77] The feelings of stability, strength, or clarity that Susan experiences in public spaces disintegrate here in Kay's room. Precisely, Kay's room, Peter's apartment, Susan's own dorm room, her bedroom in her parents' house—all are spaces within which Susan feels stifled and immobile. On the city streets, though, Susan is time and time again, invigorated and active.

More striking examples of Susan's lack of subjectivity within a private space are her experiences in Peter's bedroom—first with Anthony and then with Peter. Despite her behavior on the streets and in the car, Susan is not the physical aggressor in the bedroom. Having exited the car to Anthony's surprise, once Susan is inside the apartment with Anthony, she is reluctant to move forward and feels paralyzed to enter the bedroom where Anthony waits for her. Sitting on the couch, she has to "concentrat[e] fiercely on the impossible act of standing and manag[ing] to uncurl her legs." The sexual experience itself is even characterized by a lack of physical feeling on Susan's part. Johnson writes,

> There was not even much pain—a vague feeling of something inside her, moving. … His body drove at hers over and over again. Her legs were cramped. … She would have to tell him he was too heavy, complain that the sheets were wet.

Her attempt to do so is silenced by Anthony, though, who then ends things abruptly as his "terribly thin" body drapes over hers. Susan feels "embarrass[ed]. She had always imagined a rape, an overwhelming of herself, the victim, never that she would be left with a starved, spent child."[78] Instead of having an extraordinary physical experience for her first time, Susan's loss of virginity is characterized by a disconnect from her own body. We see this before she moves into the bedroom, when she feels paralyzed, during intercourse, when her legs cramp and she can't reposition herself comfortably, and after intercourse, when Anthony's body is on top of hers and she lies unfulfilled. The very ability for Susan to assert herself that we see in the public spaces of the car and the streets dissipates in the private space of the bedroom.

This is also illustrated when Susan sleeps with Peter several days later in the same place she slept with Anthony. In fact, the two experiences are not that different—most notably because Peter, too, fails to bring Susan to orgasm. As with Anthony, Susan is not assertive in the bedroom, and her body and mind are left unfulfilled after sleeping with Peter. However, with Peter, Susan's physical experience is slightly more intense than with Anthony. Johnson describes the scene after Susan and Peter have had sex, when Susan begins thinking about her trip to Paris that same afternoon and begins to feel the pressure of time as she realizes she needs to pick up her suitcases and catch her train. Before she leaves, though, she recalls that "there had been a rightness when his body had entered hers … and then there had come a time when she had felt herself becoming flooded with light, and she had floated up, up—toward something she had almost reached."[79] Though she initiates their sexual encounter in the taxi, once in the bedroom

itself, Susan is unable to communicate with Peter or to even maneuver herself in such a way to achieve the orgasm she had almost reached.

In one way of reading these two sex scenes, Johnson complicates the traditional notion of the private or domestic as primarily female through Susan's utter lack of physicality, embodiment, and subjectivity in the apartment. This strategy is undermined, however, in light of the paradox that has come to define mainstream notions of the home—that patriarchal authority extends itself from the public space to the private space of the home through sexual relationships, in spite of the home as gendered feminine.[80] Referring to the work of Marilyn Frye, Rose explains that "in the bedroom [a woman] has no authority to speak independently. There she is not to speak her mind, but to be eloquent only with her body, for his pleasure."[81] In these scenes, then, Johnson seems to actually perpetuate this paradox, rather than complicate it—allowing Anthony and Peter to play the normative masculine role in the bedroom, being in control and silencing Susan during the respective sexual experiences. However, two key aspects of both scenes complicate this possibility. First, that Anthony and Peter fail to bring Susan to orgasm and ultimately leave her unfulfilled and even disappointed diminishes the full sense of dominance for which the above paradox allows. Second, in denying or withholding from Susan the subjectivity she develops in public spaces, Johnson transforms the bedroom into a paradoxical space within which the image of the sexually assertive female bohemian is undermined.

Female Beats generally resisted the traditional expectation of a woman's passivity in a sexual relationship. Ronna Johnson explains that "they performed the socially mandated roles of mother, wife, lover, but with bohemian sexual freedom."[82] This

characteristic of the female Beat is evident in both male- and female-authored Beat literature. Male Beats often describe the women with whom they have sexual encounters as uninhibited: for example, in *On the Road*, Sal describes how outside of a gas station, "Incidentally, a very beautiful Colorado girl shook me that cream; she was all smiles too"; in a letter to Kerouac, Neal Cassady tells of a brief affair with Cherry Mary, who didn't remain a virgin long after they met: "I ripped into her like a maniac and she loved it."[83] Female Beats also share similar characterizations—but with a key distinction. In the men's accounts, women are seen as objects, fleeting "experiences" in the lives of the men with no real voice or sustained function in the men's lives. In the women's accounts of similar behavior, the power is redistributed to the women as they are the agents of their sexual behavior, deciding on their own with whom to sleep and under what conditions.

This is evident, for example, in di Prima's *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward* as my analysis in Chapter One demonstrates. In this collection of di Prima's early poetry, women are consistently defined by a sexual bravado, celebrating their sexual freedom and emphasizing their sexual assertiveness and connection to one's body. Additionally, in di Prima's *Memoirs of a Beatnik,* di Prima's semi-fictionalized depiction of herself "is a self who finds joy and liberation in sex" and engages in various sexually-explicit acts with men and women.[84] Similarly, as mentioned earlier, in *Come and Join the Dance*, Kay represents this sexually assertive female bohemian. Kay has become comfortable enough with her body to be in her apartment naked in front of Susan—a move Susan attributes to the fact that Kay has certainly been sexually active.

Susan recognizes in Kay's nonchalant physical behavior a "knowing" of one's body that Susan yearns for and is unable to experience when losing her virginity with

Anthony and when sleeping with Peter. Not able to connect to her body through physical aggression or fulfillment in the bedroom, Susan relinquishes the subjectivity that she asserts in public spaces and in doing so challenges the common depiction of the bohemian female as sexually confident, assertive, or experimental. In contrasting Susan's behavior in public and private spaces in these ways, Johnson daringly destabilizes the traditional relationship between gender and space as well as mainstream and bohemian notions of female subjectivity.

The Ambivalence of Susan's Subjectivity:
A Critique of Bohemian Female Liberation

Simultaneous with Johnson's condemnation of hegemonic gender norms and their relationship to the traditional spatial dichotomy is her subtle critique of the bohemian image of female subjectivity, represented largely through sexual agency as described above. Susan's subjectivity is marked by an ambivalence throughout the novel that raises interesting questions about the viability of female agency and subjectivity as it is defined within the bohemian community. In constructing a portrayal of female subjectivity that is ambivalent toward the primacy of sexual agency, Johnson deepens our understanding of the literature of the women Beats and of protofeminism more broadly as she expresses a skepticism of how female sexual agency seems central to other women Beats' efforts to revise the normative gender discourse.

That both Anthony and Peter fail to bring Susan to orgasm is a key element of the novel that helps illustrate the ambivalence that characterizes Susan's subjectivity. After their respective experiences in the bedroom with Susan, both men acknowledge their failures. Anthony expresses utter frustration at the situation, grabbing Susan's shoulders and shouting, "'Next time it'll be better. Next time I'll make you come!'" Peter is calmer,

acknowledging to Susan, "'I didn't even make you come—I wanted to do that.'" In her response to each, Susan experiences brief moments of strength: she daringly tells Anthony that "'It had nothing to do with you. It was an experiment'"; she takes more care to assuage Peter's frustration, telling him "'I knew what it *meant*.'" In these responses and her subsequent dismissal of each man's offer to take her out, Susan attempts to hide and essentially escape her true feelings of disappointment. Underneath the surface of Susan's bravado here is an effort to subdue what is unquestionably disappointing for her after having initiated these two sexual experiences and having expected something much more satisfying. After the experience with Anthony, for example, Johnson describes Susan's confusion and disappointment: "Where was the moment when everything became luminous and the earth shook? She would remember being bored and not knowing what time it was." And though she experienced more physical pleasure with Peter, Susan nevertheless lies to him when she says, "'It was good anyway.'"[85] Susan's ambivalence is thus rooted in her undeniable disappointment in asserting herself sexually and then finding such anti-conservative behavior anti-climactic.

In her essay on *Come and Join the Dance*, Ronna Johnson argues that Susan's physical and emotional disappointment that results from her sexual experiences with Anthony and Peter represents Johnson's revision of "the 1950s Freudian discourse which blamed women for sexual failures that were overdetermined by masculinist social norms." She asserts that in the male lovers' inabilities to satisfy Susan sexually, Johnson depicts "male failure" and "male self-doubt rarely voiced by male Beat writers." Ultimately, Ronna Johnson concludes that in Susan's moments of clarity or strength following each sexual experience, Johnson privileges the "satisfaction of perspective

[over] sexual gratification."[86] It is unquestionable that Johnson notably undermines the male sexual prowess so often celebrated in male-authored Beat texts. However, I argue that in consistently highlighting the inability of Susan to feel sexually satisfied—despite her obligatory claims of contentment to Anthony and Peter—Johnson also importantly questions the presumed satisfaction that sexual freedom provided women and therefore the nature of female subjectivity as it is defined within bohemia.

In Chapter One, my analysis of di Prima's *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward* pointed to a connection between the development of female subjectivity and women's sexual agency. A crucial aspect of di Prima's revision of women's passivity and objectivity is the bohemian woman's overt acknowledgment and celebration of sexual agency—in contrast to contemporary literary representations of women as unwittingly silent, passive, or submissive regarding romantic or sexual relationships. Whereas di Prima fairly consistently emphasizes the sexual satisfaction associated with the assertion of female subjectivity, Johnson mildly, yet powerfully, critiques this. Though Susan acts rebellious in many ways, it is sexual experimentation and assertiveness that she understands will allow her entrance into the bohemian community—that will enable her to come into her own, like Kay has, and no longer "[be] only a member of the audience."[87] However, that her self-initiated "gratuitous" sexual experiences lead to physical and emotional disappointment, cause a sense of confusion and frustration, and provoke what amounts to a superficial bravado challenges the self-assuredness with which di Prima characterizes the sexually-liberated female bohemian. In questioning the actual psychological and physical satisfaction of the sexual freedom entailed in female bohemians' revisions of the traditional female gender role, Johnson complicates the

possibility for a seamless transition for women from object to subject. Susan assumes that sexual agency will be fulfilling and enable her to feel connected to her body and sense of self as she sees in Kay; however, when this is not realized, her subjectivity becomes troubled.

The ambivalence of Susan's subjectivity is illustrated in multiple ways. When Susan is initially playing the role she's "supposed" to, such as taking her final college exam, she is restless and experiences a moment of disembodiment. Johnson writes, "She had watched, far off, the smooth running of her mind, and had thought, I am doing that, but could not really believe it," which leads to her feeling "frozen into a deadly laziness." Likewise, even in her acts of rebelliousness, Susan doesn't feel composed or real, but rather lost or nonexistent. When looking in the mirror after walking out on her exam and standing up Jerry, for example, Susan experiences a disconnect: "There were so many mirrors on Broadway. Her image floated ahead of her like a balloon, hovering in the windshields of cars, appearing transparent, ghostlike."[88] Susan sees an image of herself that represents a distance from or a disappearance of her sense of self.

This fractured sense of self is also often manifested in a restlessness, a desire to be where she isn't. For example, when sitting in the coffee shop with Anthony, Susan is drawn to the street. She even notices and reflects upon her fundamental unease with wherever she may be at a given moment. Johnson writes,

> Sitting in Schulte's with Anthony she could not take her eyes off the street. And yet it was funny, she thought—if she had been outside at that moment, she would have been staring in, at the tables, the people, probably at Anthony; so in a way you never ended up seeing the place where you really were at all.

This anxiety or discomfort that Susan feels periodically leads her to make what she calls "gestures"—moves that she thinks represent to others something more meaningful than

what she truly feels. This includes using words such as "incredible" or "strange" because she thinks doing so projects an image of detachment, "which was more sophisticated than being innocent."[89] This tendency to perform along with Susan's moments of disembodiment point to the fundamental instability of her sense of self, even when asserting subjectivity.

All of these examples show that even once Susan begins "taking certain risks" and acting with agency, she struggles with the implications of this independence—of "taking care of [her]self." What she yearns is for something to happen *to* her—something to add "urgency" to her life.[90] And when she resigns herself to provoke such experiences when it seems she has no other option—namely through her sexual assertiveness—she is left disappointed and disconnected from herself and those around her.

Thus, as Susan attempts to resist her tendency to be passive and instead acts on the bohemian model of female subjectivity as exemplified by Kay and represented in the work of di Prima, she experiences mild identity crises that take shape in moments of disembodiment, pretense, or restlessness during which her sense of self is lost or confused. Through this multifaceted and ambivalent depiction of Susan's female subjectivity, Johnson reveals perhaps heretofore unrecognized or unspoken concerns associated with the promise of female liberation. She suggests that for female subjectivity to be viable, it must not be primarily defined by sexuality. When it is, as Susan's experiences demonstrate, women may inadvertently perpetuate the way in which men are traditionally dominant and women are relatively powerless in sexual situations. Though Johnson does complicate this via the inability of the male characters to bring Susan to orgasm, that Susan is herself unable to exercise the power in the bedroom necessary to

fulfill her own needs—or to even let Peter or Anthony know the true severity of her disappointment—signifies the lack of authentic liberation that such sexual behavior may actually yield. In portraying this potential outcome of the bohemian model of female subjectivity, Johnson adds an important dimension to our understanding of how sexuality functions for the development of subjectivity, and how women Beats conceived of the approach to and the impact of resisting traditional gender roles. She provides an undeniably important contribution to the discourse of female subjectivity as it takes shape in the protofeminism of the 1950s.

Subjectivity and the New York City Bohemian Community: Susan's Trip to Paris

The importance of how Johnson's depiction of female subjectivity within *Come and Join the Dance* complicates the model portrayed in di Prima's poetry is further highlighted when read in conjunction with Johnson's revision of the function of the New York City bohemian community as well. Specifically, *Come and Join the Dance* undermines the reciprocal relationship between the city and subjectivity mediated by one's participation in a bohemian or countercultural community—a relationship depicted in Beat texts such as di Prima's *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward* and Kerouac's *On the Road*. Examining this aspect of the novel further reveals the myriad ways in which Johnson's first novel helps redefine the Beat literary tradition and our understanding of the Beat community and its effect on various writers.

Elizabeth Grosz argues in "Bodies-Cities" that the relationship between the body and the city is mutually constitutive and allows for subjectivity to take shape. As neither the body nor the city is fully formed independently, it is within and through the

relationship with each other that both bodies and cities are perpetually defined. Grosz clarifies, though, that the reciprocation between the body and the city is not equally balanced; she suggests instead "a fundamentally dis-unified series of systems and interconnections, a series of disparate flows, energies, events or entities, and spaces, brought together or drawn apart in more or less temporary alignments."[91] And it is this mutually constitutive relationship, however imbalanced, Grosz argues, that is the basis for the development of subjectivity. She explains that

> Cities establish lateral, contingent, short- or long-term connections between individuals and social groups, and more or less stable divisions, such as those constituting domestic and generational distinctions. These spaces, divisions, and interconnections are the roles and means by which bodies are individuated to become subjects. .... This means that the city must be seen as the most immediately concrete locus for the production and circulation of power.[92]

Grosz clarifies the particular function of the city as an integral part of the process of subjectivity, and this brings into focus the fundamental relationship between the bohemian, community, and the city.

As noted in the Introduction, there is an historical link between bohemia and community. Writer and historian Marty Jezer explains:

> After a day alone at a typewriter or in front of a canvas, there is a need to unwind and relax with convivial company and to share and challenge each other's ideas. Hence an informal communalism and the famous bar scenes of the 1950s and the incessant party going.[93]

Despite the general marginalization of women within contemporary bohemian or avant-garde communities, Jezer suggests that crucial to bohemianism is a community that provides a social space within which members can escape the mainstream and its culturally-defined restrictive mandates and can share and further develop similar ideas, values, and interests.

Further, bohemian communities are almost always formed in a city. Elizabeth Wilson, for example, links the development of the bohemian in the nineteenth century to the growth of the city:

> An essential precondition for the emergence of the bohemian was the expansion of urban society. …. [City life] provided an escape from the responsibilities of the family, and made possible the formation of new groups and friendships based on interests and work rather than on kinship.[94]

Studies of more modern versions of bohemia continue to emphasize this particular attraction of the bohemian to the city in contrast to the countryside. For example, Christine Stansell emphasizes the city's "easy sociability" provided by its "compactness," "the plethora of cafés and saloons," and "the twists and turns of the streets."[95] Likewise, Raymond Williams describes the city as a

> kind of open, complex and mobile society, [within which] small groups in any form of divergence or dissent could find some kind of foothold, in ways that would not have been possible if the artists and thinkers composing them had been scattered in more traditional, closed societies.[96]

Indeed, as noted earlier, the cultural geography of New York City played an important role for the Beat community, and *On the Road* helps illustrate this relationship.

Although women were marginalized in the image of the bohemian community depicted in *On the Road*, its importance and its connection to New York City are nevertheless key aspects of Sal Paradise's search of "the pearl." Kerouac writes, "LA is the loneliest and most brutal of American cities; New York gets god-awful cold in the winter but there's a feeling of wacky comradeship somewhere in some streets." This passage draws attention to the undeniable magnetism of New York City—the place Sal calls "the great and final city of America"—and the importance of camaraderie or community and its particular presence in New York City. New York City is the initial

setting of the novel and is the ultimate destination for Sal as he moves from city to city across the country. And an integral part of this journey is the community of "mad ones," "intellectuals," and "slinking criminals" as Sal refers to its unofficial and often-changing members.[97] Likewise, the development of individualism and nonconformity is the primary aspect of the mixed-gender bohemian community that di Prima underscores in her first book of poetry; and New York City was indeed central to this experience. In contrast to the creatively-stifling suburb of di Prima's college experience, New York City represented a space within which avant-garde artists and like-minded nonconformists could collectively develop and nurture their interests.

Johnson interestingly revises this Beat discourse of the role of the city and bohemian community in the construction of subjectivity—male or female—through Susan's ultimate rejection of the New York City bohemian community at the end of the novel. In contrast to works by di Prima and Kerouac, in *Come and Join the Dance*, Johnson suggests a rethinking of what these key Beat elements actually offer. In the novel's conclusion, Susan chooses to explore Paris as a temporary escape from New York City, and she does so alone.

Susan's desire to go to Paris by herself is unquestionably motivated by what she begins to see as the dysfunction of the bohemian community. As the novel progresses, Susan realizes how the outlaws she once admired are actually falling apart. Susan is initially attracted to Kay, Peter, and Anthony because of their self-claimed freedoms: Kay has freed herself from college and from her parents and their rigid expectations; Peter has freed himself from the burden of being financially independent and from being a steady student tied to deadlines or goals; and Anthony has freed himself from the rules of

college, now living away from home and writing poetry outside the conventions of traditional or academic literature. In general, as Kay explains to Susan, each bohemian's "work" is "living… Just living"—on their own terms. Though Susan may realize that "[n]othing was happening at all" in her friends' lives, she still initially feels that when she isn't with them, "Everything was happening without her."[98] This changes, though, when this bohemian community fails to deliver what Susan had perceived as its promise of camaraderie based on a shared resistance to conformity.

The more time Susan spends with these bohemians, the more clearly she begins to realize the level of dysfunction that accompanies their outlaw lifestyles. Kay, for example, initially hopes that if she is to become a failure in her new countercultural lifestyle, that she will be a "magnificent" one; by the end of the novel, however, she has dismally accepted what she perceives to be her "mediocrity." Underneath the façade of Kay's contentedness and strong sense of self linked in part to her sexual independence lingers an anger and disappointment in her life. Susan observes, for example, how Kay's "face was very tired, as if she knew too much," and Susan notes the despondency with which Kay tells Susan that "'Everybody uses everybody. That's the way it is.'"[99] Peter, though free in theory from work and school, is still dependent upon his parents' financial support, and in this way, is still bound to the constraints defined by others—a reality that he often tries to escape by taking aimless drives in his car.

The growing hopelessness and deterioration of these characters culminates at the end of *Come and Join the Dance*, on the day of Susan's graduation. Kay would have also graduated the same day had she not dropped out of college, and when Susan finds her at the bar, Kay is hopelessly drunk and depressed. Whether over her regret at dropping out

of school or her jealousy of what seems to be Peter's interest in Susan (as Kay had previously slept with him casually, as part of her sexual independence), it is clear that in this final scene, Kay struggles to accept the choices she's made. Susan and Peter have to escort her home and put her to bed, and it's at this time that Susan reaches a new understanding of Kay's living space.

Having initially envied Kay's hotel room as representing "the *real* world," Susan soon begins to feel emptiness in this room, that rather than enabling Kay's self-defined freedom, the room in fact merely contains "the debris of Kay's life, the pictures that Kay had tacked on the green wallpaper that she would not have chosen herself." Within what Susan had once considered the epitome of bohemian freedom and independence, Susan experiences her final sense of entrapment in this private space: "The room was suddenly much too bright—she could see its sadness too well. This was a room she never could have lived in." The equivalent of Kay's room at the Southwick Arms Hotel for Peter—his Packard—similarly deteriorates by the end of the novel. After taking Susan for a drive, Peter's beloved car breaks down, and the emasculation he experiences when failing to satisfy Susan sexually later the next morning is foreshadowed when he is forced to face the car's worthlessness and abandon it. No dealer will pay him for it (his highest offer is a five dollar courtesy payment), and so he wrecks it with a hammer before giving it up entirely. Peter's behavior in this scene reveals his frustration with and lack of control over his life as an outlaw. And after they sleep together, the novel concludes with Susan's final assertion of subjectivity: "'You know,' [Peter] said, 'you must never regret any thing.' 'I know,' [Susan] said. And then she went."[100] Responding to her realization that

this community would only further stifle her, Susan makes another escape—this time not from the mainstream, but from her bohemian friends and New York City.

Susan realizes that the freedom she and her friends sought in New York City away from school and family is not attainable here. She witnesses the growing defeat of her friends as they wander in and out of various bohemian hangouts and as they live in their New York City apartments that "had been assembled defiantly" and were perhaps after all "rooms in the same endless apartment … furnished with the massive, imperishable castoffs that parents whose children had left home gave to the Salvation Army."[101] The city that Susan originally thought would allow and perhaps further nurture her resistance to confining social conventions in fact turns out to disappoint her. Simultaneous with Susan's rethinking of her former admiration of her bohemian friends, then, is her consideration of what Paris may offer that New York City may not.

Though somewhat ambivalent about her impending trip to Paris throughout the course of the novel, Susan gradually comes to terms with experiencing a new city. Her parents "didn't really want her to go [to Paris]" and "were somehow able to reassure themselves by imagining a humdrum existence for her even there."[102] Regardless of their reservations, Susan cashes in her bonds for her trip. As for so many other Americans during the post-WWII period, especially the creative or nonconformist, Paris potentially provides Susan the opportunity to "breathe more freely" without being subject to "French mores and prejudices" as a foreigner.[103] Johnson provides Susan an international experience with the opportunity to "over[come] obstacles to independence and self-fulfillment" that she experiences in New York City.[104]

Rather than include any part of Susan's trip to Paris in the narrative itself, Johnson enacts a narrative strategy that Rachel Blau DuPlessis refers to as "writing beyond the ending."[105] In employing an open-ended conclusion in *Come and Join the Dance*, Johnson further revises patterns in contemporary Beat and non-Beat fiction. In her critical study of 20th-century women writers, DuPlessis argues that narrative strategies such as an open-ended conclusion—what Lisa Hogeland refers to as "a kind of textual feminism"[106]—"produc[e] a narrative that denies or reconstructs seductive patterns of feeling that are culturally mandated, internally policed, hegemonically poised."[107] Johnson's ending of the novel with Susan's departure for Paris challenges the conclusions common in contemporary novels, such as "the ending in death and … the ending in marriage, once obligatory goals for the female protagonist" that act "as closure of historical movement and therefore as the end of development."[108] Concluding the novel with an undefined future for Susan as she continues her journey of self-development, Johnson revises, broadly, the traditional Bildungsroman regarding its resolution of the protagonist's development, and more specifically, the concluding patterns for women within mainstream contemporary novels as noted above. More interesting, the ending of *Come and Join the Dance* also signifies Johnson's resistance to literary patterns within Beat novels.

Precisely because Susan feels that the bohemian community in New York City has failed to satisfy her, she makes change happen for herself—she asserts control, refusing to resign herself to do as others expect. This is quite different from the ending of Kerouac's *On the Road*. Casey argues that in the conclusion of *On the Road*, "The car and the system of possibility it represents recede and fail [Sal]."[109] Casey continues,

emphasizing "that Kerouac's travels in *On the Road* 'end in a tired acceptance of an unchanged self and society.'"[110] Whereas *On the Road* closes with Sal's final return to New York City in a state of disappointment and disillusionment, *Come and Join the Dance* concludes with the continuation of Susan's development, with her hopefulness toward a future that she sets out to experience on her own terms.

The conclusion's open-endedness enacts a significant narrative strategy that challenges standard endings in contemporary fiction. Further, Susan's solitary departure for Paris undermines the privileging that both New York City and the bohemian community receive in Beat discourse and thus implicitly questions the value of these Beat elements for the development of subjectivity. In this way, Johnson revises the mutually-constitutive relationship between New York City, the bohemia community, and subjectivity. New York City bohemia may have provided the opportunity for Susan to initially develop subjectivity, but as we see, she does this only through a revision of the traditional gendered association of public and private spaces. Once Susan confronts the true "mediocrity" of the community of outlaws in New York City, she sets out to make "a fresh start, a clean break" in another city.[111]

V. Conclusion

Come and Join the Dance undoubtedly signifies important ways in which Johnson destabilizes and revises various patterns in mainstream and Beat literature of the period. Whereas both male and female contemporary novelists tend to limit representations of women to the home or to tragic fates, or more simply to the bedroom as sexual objects, Johnson portrays a female protagonist who not only develops subjectivity, but more interestingly, does so in traditionally masculine spaces. Throughout the novel, Johnson

suggests that it is the subordination of women to a secondary role in conjunction with the positioning of this role within the private space of the home that is ultimately oppressive for women. As such, Johnson frames her revision of the normative gender discourse within a reshaping of the restrictive gendered public/private spatial dichotomy. In doing so, Johnson provides a model of female subjectivity that was absent in contemporary fiction and that speaks to the entrapment so many women were experiencing in the post-WWII period.

Though the work of Diane di Prima represents a similar effort to Johnson's—and both writers' work is unquestionably significant in this way—for di Prima, a fundamental element entailed in challenging the oppressive hegemonic female role is sexual agency. For Johnson, this association of sexuality with subjectivity is inadequate. Certainly, Johnson engages in a similarly important resistance to female subordination and objectivity; however, Johnson also questions the impact of di Prima's particular approach to redefining gender discourse. As suggested by Susan's sexual and psychological dissatisfaction with her nonmarital sexual adventurousness and her subsequent experiences of disembodiment and confusion, Johnson challenges the ways in which defining female subjectivity through sexuality can compromise authentic female liberation. As suggested by Susan's ambivalence toward her experiences and by her trip to Paris at the end of the novel, female subjectivity must exceed the limits of sexuality and instead be developed through various acts of agency that do not necessarily perpetuate, however inadvertently, male dominance and female subordination in the bedroom. Ultimately, Susan's departure for Paris illustrates her resistance to the conventional expectations for her as a white, middle-class woman as well as to the New

York City bohemian expectations for her as a woman acting as a subject. For Susan, her subjectivity will continue to take shape on her own terms—outside of the New York City mainstream and bohemian communities.

In addition to challenging this Beat discourse of subjectivity, the city, and the bohemian community, Johnson's achievements exemplified in *Come and Join the Dance* also challenge the assumption that the only way for women Beats to write themselves into the Beat literary tradition is through the genre of memoir. As demonstrated through this analysis of her first novel, Johnson challenges discourses of gender and sexuality, space, and community through a depiction of female subjectivity that is simultaneously protofeminist and skeptical of the way in which bohemian protofeminism makes sexual agency a primary factor. Importantly, she does this in the genre of fiction—engaging in its fundamental elements as do her male Beat contemporaries. This is illustrated, for example, in her adaptation of James's psychological realism and of Hemingway's canonical prose style, as described earlier. Notably, she also complicates traditional approaches to the genre by undermining the typical resolution reached in standard coming-of-age novels, and, more interesting, by revising the role that the female protagonist and archetypical literary tropes, such as that of the car, play in contemporary fiction.

Expanding our attention to Johnson's body of work in all of these ways highlights her valuable contributions to the Beat literary tradition and significantly extends our understanding of women Beat writers. Whereas Chapter One explored the connection between di Prima's generative experience within the Beat community and her corresponding emphasis on individualism and the development of female subjectivity

within this context in her early poetry, this chapter examines the ways in which Johnson's somewhat more complicated experience in the same context manifested in her writing accordingly. My analysis shows that although Johnson's status as a Beat writer is largely defined by her relationship with Kerouac and by her Beat memoir, her work as a writer has many significant cultural, literary, and social implications that should no longer be ignored. Looking closely at how Johnson's complex experience within the New York City Beat community affected her writing brings to our attention an important writer who dared to challenge mainstream norms and literary practices, as well as various discourses present in male- and female-authored Beat literature. As such, this examination of *Come and Join the Dance* demonstrates how multifaceted each writer's experience within the Beat community was and thus, the myriad ways in which each writer's body of work can contribute to our understanding of this pivotal period in American literature and society. The next chapter continues this endeavor through a study of Hettie Jones. I examine how Jones engages in the hegemonic discourses of race and gender and in the literary and cultural context of postmodernism through the trope of the interracial mother, and how she opens up the discourse of Beat writers in general and of women Beat writers in particular in these distinctive and important ways.

NOTES

1. Charters, *Kerouac: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 302.

2. Charters, *Beats and Company*, 74.

3. See the Introduction for my discussion of the women Beats as protofeminists, which follows with the use of this term in current Beat scholarship. Specifically regarding *Come and Join the Dance*, R. Johnson argues: "Its instantiation of women as Beat subjects anticipates, but does not equal in promise or achievement, the second-wave feminisms emerging in the late sixties and the early seventies. Despite the novel's emphasis on white female subjectivity, it makes no claim to address directly the emancipation of women; its corrective discourses are written in a Beat key rather than with the rhetoric that would be familiar from later women's movements." "'And Then She Went': Beat Departures and Feminine Transgressions in Joyce Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance*," *Girls Who Wore Black*, 70.

4. R. Johnson, "'And Then,'" 77.

5. Liz Bondi and Joyce Davidson, "Situating Gender," *A Companion to Feminist Geography*, ed. Lise Nelson and Joni Seager (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 20. Consistent with the use of the term "space" within feminist geography (see Nancy Duncan, Phil Hubbard, and Linda McDowell, for example), I distinguish between "space" and "place" per Michel de Certeau's distinction, as described by Tovi Fenster: "Space is place made meaningful. …. [The] everyday act of walking in the city [for example] is what marks territorialization and appropriation and the meanings given to a space. … De Certeau actually defines the process in which a sense of belonging is established, a process of transformation of a place, which becomes a space of accumulated attachment and sentiments by means of everyday practices. Belonging and attachment are built here on the base of accumulated knowledge, memory, and intimate corporal experiences of everyday walking." "Gender and the City: The Different Formations of Belonging," *A Companion to Feminist Geography*, 243.

6. In highlighting similarities and differences between di Prima's poetry and Johnson's novel, my intention is not to blur genre differences but rather to draw on relevant thematic comparisons between the two writers.

7. See *Minor Characters* for Johnson's use of "collegiate" in this context; the terms "good girl" and "outlaw" as I use them here and throughout the chapter come from Johnson's fictional characterization of herself and of other characters within *Come and Join the Dance*.

8. Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 20. The subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from the same text: 18, 14, 21.

Until otherwise noted, the quotations in the next few paragraphs are from *Minor*, and for readability, the corresponding note is provided after the final quotation of each respective paragraph.

9. *Minor,* 11, 30.

10. *Minor,* 39, 18, 31, 41, 47, 47.

11. *Minor,* 48, 102, 58.

12. *Come and Join the Dance* (New York: Atheneum Press, 1962), 85.

13. *Minor,* 148.

14. "In the Night Café," interview by Grace, *Breaking*, 188. Though antithetical to the Beat writing aesthetic, James provided Johnson a model for exploring what she describes as "what was underneath the action" and helped inspire her to write prose. "In," 188.

15. Johnson, "In," 200.

16. Though Johnson doesn't use the term "bohemian" in the novel, her use of "outlaw" implies a meaning similar to "bohemian." In the context of the novel, the "outlaw" characters are not criminals by any means, but share a general rebelliousness against the conservative mainstream as well as artistic interests (Kay is an artist and Anthony a poet). The protagonist's use of "outlaw" to describe these characters reflects her own perception of the significance of their choices to live on the margins of society. My discussion of the novel shows how the two terms ("bohemian" and "outlaw") overlap, and, as such, I use them interchangeably.

17. Grace and Johnson, *Breaking*, 182.

18. Johnson, *Bad Connections* (New York: Putnam, 1978), 51.

19. Johnson originally began writing *In the Night Café* in the early 1960s promptly following the real-life experience of her husband's death, but she abandoned it for some time when she remarried, had a child, and worked as an editor. She then went back to it after having written and published *Bad Connections* and *Minor Characters* in the meantime.

20. Douglas, introduction to *Minor Characters*, xxvii.

21. Johnson, *Minor*, 8.

22. This more detailed documentation of Johnson and Kerouac's relationship in *Door Wide Open* than that of *Minor Characters* reveals that their relationship was not just romantic or sexual, but also based on their shared experiences as writers. In a letter dated mid-October 1957, for example, Kerouac writes, "Write. Get your novel done, dont [sic] worry about whether it's good or bad, just do it ... it's written in the stars, you have no Power over the Stars any moren [sic] I do. The Already Stars." Likewise, in mid-August 1958, he writes, "Your prose is probably not as bad as you think. … But if you

feel such remorse about yr [sic] prose somehow that sounds good to me, as if you were really doing good. Your trouble is probably the same I'm having with Memory Babe, boredom with the story." His letters during this two-year period are consistently supportive in this way, and Johnson emphasizes that "Except for Jack's continued encouragement, I felt very alone with my work." Nevertheless, this aspect of their relationship—their mutual respect as artists—is often overshadowed by her role as his lover and as his source of support—financially or domestically (ironing and cooking for him, for example). *Door Wide Open*, 77-78, 158, 68.

23. Catherine R. Stimpson, rev. of *What Lisa Knew: The Truths and Lies of the Steinberg Case*, by Joyce Johnson, *Entertainment Weekly* May 18, 1990.

24. Of the following four such anthologies, Peabody's is the only one in which the excerpt is not about Kerouac: Charters' *Beat Down to Your Soul*, Knight's *Women of the Beat Generation*, Charters' *The Portable Beat Reader*, and Peabody's *A Different Beat*.

25. Maria Damon, "Victors of Catastrophe: Beat Occlusions," *Beat Culture and the New America: 1950-1965*, ed. Lisa Phillips (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1996), 146. Damon refers to Frazer as Bonnie Bremser. It is also worth noting that Carolyn Cassady is a painter, whose only publication is indeed a Beat memoir: *Off the Road: Twenty Years With Cassady, Kerouac and Ginsberg* (1990). Though also a poet, Frazer remains best known for her memoir, *Troia: Mexican Memoirs* (1969), which tells the story of her relationship with Beat poet Ray Bremser. See Chapter Three for my discussion of Jones as a writer beyond the scope of her 1990 memoir, *How I Became Hettie Jones*.

26. See also Helen McNeil's "The Archaeology of Gender in the Beat Movement" and Grace's "Snapshots."

27. R. Johnson, "Mapping," 33.

28. "Mapping," 34.

29. "Mapping," 33.

30. Several male Beats have since written in the memoir/autobiography genre, including Ed Sanders's *Tales of Beatnik Glory* (1975) and Neal Cassady's *The First Third* (published posthumously in 1971).

31. "Mapping," 33.

32. This is with the recent exception of Katie Mills's two-page discussion of *Come and Join the Dance* in *The Road Story and the Rebel*, in which Mills argues that the novel "serves as a crucial bridge between Kerouac's road stories and those by women that will come in the next generation." *The Road Story and the Rebel: Moving Through Film, Fiction, and Television* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), 55.

33. R. Johnson, "'And Then,'" 70.

34. "'And Then,'" 73.

35. Johnson, *Come*, 62. The quotations in the rest of the paragraph are from *Come* as well: 56, 53, 54, 60, 21.

36. The quotations in this paragraph are all from *On the Road*: 42-43, 131, 42, 111-112, 111.

37. Herman Wouk, *Marjorie Morningstar* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 173.

38. Elaine Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers: Celebrating American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 408.

39. See Halberstam for a discussion of how *Peyton Place* "was a book before its time" regarding the representation of women. (*The Fifties*, [New York: Random House, 1993], 581.) Halberstam also recognizes, referring to Kenneth Davis, that despite the forward-thinking characterization of women within the novel, they "'were far from the perfect exemplars of the shining new woman that eventually followed with the onset of the feminist movement.'" Qtd. in Halberstam, 580.

40. Barbara Probst Solomon, *The Beat of Life* (New York: Great Marsh Press, 1960), 118.

41. Solomon, 118.

42. Douglas, introduction, xxiv.

43. Douglas, introduction, xxiii.

44. Gerald Walker, "Fugitive from Girlhood," rev. of *Come and Join the Dance*, *New York Times* Jan. 28, 1962: 217.

45. Walker, 217.

46. Johnson and Kerouac, *Door*, 172.

47. Grace and Johnson, *Breaking,* 181.

48. Johnson, *Come*, 46 (emphasis in original).

49. R. Johnson, "'And Then,'" 73.

50. In the next section, I address Susan's rejection of this association between subjectivity and sexual agency as it signifies Johnson's critique of the bohemian representation of female subjectivity.

51. Felski, 53.

52. Phil Hubbard, "Women Outdoors: Destabilizing the Public/Private Dichotomy," *A Companion to Feminist Geography,* 322. As Rose explains, this ideological construct "depend[s] on a white middle-class conception of domesticity." (*Feminism*, 125.) Also, see Nancy Duncan for a more general discussion of how "both private and public spaces are heterogeneous and not all space is clearly private or public." "Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces," *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 129.

53. Grace, "Snapshots," 143.

54. Duncan, 129. Duncan notes here that "most men" in this context generally excludes homosexual men.

55. Rose, 140. The positioning of power that I argue Johnson disrupts is of course not unique to the public/private dichotomy. Drawing on Foucault, Duncan reminds us that inherent in any personal relationship is a relationship of power: "It is a statement of fact that personal relationships are also power relationships and that everyone is implicated in the production and reproduction of power relations." "Renegotiating," 135.

56. Rose, 137. See Rose, pg. 4, for a discussion of geography as fundamentally "masculinist" and the subsequent gendered association of the "Same" and "Other."

57. Rose, 140.

58. Rose, 155.

59. Rose, 154.

60. Johnson, *Come*, 17.

61. *Come*, 23.

62. Ehrenreich, 53.

63. Douglas, introduction, xv.

64. See Hubbard and Duncan for more on the role of the street in discussing the public/private dichotomy.

65. Hubbard, 322.

66. Hubbard, 322. Susan's sexual aggression on the streets is of course considerably mild in contrast to sex workers for whom sexuality is at the forefront of their behavior on the streets.

67. Johnson, *Come*, 13, 14. The subsequent quotation in this paragraph is from the same text: 25.

Unless otherwise noted, the quotations in the next few paragraphs are from *Come* as well, and for readability, the corresponding note is provided after the final quotation of each respective paragraph. I will use this pattern as necessary throughout the remainder of the chapter.

68. *Come*, 56, 75, 75, 75, 77, 77, 78, 78.

69. *Come*, 70, 73, 73.

70. *Come*, 172, 73.

71. R. Johnson, "'And Then,'" 91.

72. *Come*, 19.

73. Deborah Clarke, D*riving Women: Fiction and Automobile Culture in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 1.

74. Roger N. Casey, *Textual Vehicles: The Automobile in American Literature* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 113.

75. Casey, 113.

76. Casey, 114.

77. *Come*, 116.

78. *Come*, 83, 87, 88.

79. *Come*, 174.

80. Duncan, 131.

81. Rose, 142.

82. R. Johnson, "Mapping," 26.

83. Kerouac, *On the Road*, 36-37; Cassady, "'Joan Anderson' letter to Jack Kerouac," *The Portable Beat Reader*, 202.

84. Grace, "Snapshots," 165.

85. *Come*, 93, 175, 93, 175, 90, 175.

86. The quotations in this paragraph are from R. Johnson, "'And Then'": 88, 88, 91.

87. *Come*, 47.

88. *Come*, 4, 3, 10.

89. *Come*, 61, 5, 7.

90. *Come*, 14, 115, 14.

91. Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies-Cities," *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina and Jennifer Bloomer (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 248.

92. Grosz, 250.

93. Jezer, 264-265.

94. E. Wilson, 28.

95. Stansell, 43.

96. Raymond Williams, "The Metropolis and the Emergence of Modernism," *Unreal City: Urban Experience in Modern European Literature and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 21.

97. The quotations in this paragraph are from Kerouac, *On the Road*: 11, 85, 246, 8, 10, 10.

98. *Come*, 52-53, 106.

99. *Come*, 48, 117, 71.

100. *Come*, 43 (emphasis in original), 156, 156, 176.

101. *Come*, 51.

102. *Come*, 139.

103. Benstock, 78.

104. Benstock, 90.

105. DuPlessis, *Writing*, 5.

106. Lisa Marie Hogeland, *Feminism and Its Fictions: The Consciousness-Raising Novel and the Women's Liberation Movement* (Phila, PA: University of PA Press, 1998), xvii.

107. DuPlessis, *Writing*, 5.

108. DuPlessis, *Writing*, 142, 178.

109. Casey, 114.

110. Casey, 114.

111. *Come*, 63.

CHAPTER 3
"THE OBJECT OF EVERYONE'S ATTENTION": INTERRACIAL MOTHERHOOD AND THE POSTMODERNIST DILEMMA IN HETTIE JONES'S *IN CARE OF WORTH AUTO PARTS*

I. Introduction

A key factor that sets Hettie Jones apart from Diane di Prima, Joyce Johnson, and other women Beat writers is that, aside from a few poems and essays published in her college literary magazine between 1953 and 1955, Jones did not publish any writing until the early 1970s. Jones explains that she lacked confidence in and was ashamed of what little writing she struggled to produce during the Beat period—writing that she considered "not only bad but worthless."[1] Instead of more actively pursuing her own writing during this time, then, Jones worked as a subscriptions manager for the jazz magazine, *Record Changer*, and then the *Partisan Review*, where she was also managing editor, before taking a more prominent role as co-editor and co-publisher of her and her husband's (LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka) literary magazine, *Yugen*, in 1958, and poetry and book press, Totem Press, in 1959.[2] These experiences helped immerse Jones in the growing literary and cultural scenes of New York City in the 1950s and 1960s, which unquestionably helped influence her growth as a writer on her own terms and in her own time.[3]

Jones began publishing her work in the 1970s, gave her first public reading in 1978, and has since produced a body of work that includes poetry, short fiction, non-fiction essays, stories and books for children and young adults, as well as edited collections of prison writing. However, not unlike the impact that Johnson's relationship with Kerouac has had on her literary reputation, Jones's relationship with Baraka has limited scholarly attention to her work. Like Johnson, Jones is often referred to as a

memoirist; her multi-genre body of work is generally overshadowed by her 1990 memoir, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, in which her relationship with Baraka and the role that this played in her development as a woman and writer are central.[4] Jones's experiences in the Beat community as an aspiring writer and as the wife and mother of an interracial family do indeed provide an insightful angle from which to read her work; however, in an effort to draw attention to her literary accomplishments outside of the scope of her memoir, this chapter examines an unpublished short story cycle through which Jones interestingly engages in Beat and postmodernist discourses in a genre otherwise absent from the Beat literary tradition.

As demonstrated in Chapters One and Two, each writer's particular experience within the Beat literary community uniquely informed her writing. For both di Prima and Johnson, the objectification and marginalization of women within the mainstream and Beat communities and literatures resulted in distinctive and complex representations of female subjectivity in their work. In this chapter, I examine how Jones's short story cycle, *In Care of Worth Auto Parts: Stories at the Intersection*, is shaped by her personal experiences as a developing writer in the Beat community and as the white wife of a black man who left her in 1965 because of racial differences.[5] The well-known Baraka left his marriage and the interracial Beat community because he wanted to authenticate his growing beliefs in black nationalism and to pursue his political leadership in the black community. My analysis of *In Care of Worth Auto Parts* demonstrates how Jones destabilizes the hegemonic and hierarchical racial and gender categories that motivated this racially-driven rupture. Specifically, it focuses on how the text is informed by two important cultural contexts: the racial politics of the 1960s and the postmodernism of the

1970s and 1980s. These two contexts mutually inform *In Care of Worth Auto Parts*, respectively, through the trope of the interracial mother—a figure who was particularly affected by the intertwining racial and gender politics of the post-civil rights period—and through the fragmentation and shifting of identities, various metanarrative techniques, and the use of magical realism.[6]

During the mid- to late 1960s when the civil rights movement for racial equality and integration gave way to black nationalism and racial segregation, a white mother of interracial children was positioned ambiguously between white and black communities, and in particular, between the vastly different experiences of the white and non-white intraracial mother.[7] The racially privileged status of a white woman was significantly diminished for a white mother of interracial children, and she was simultaneously subject to the struggles of "survival, power, and identity" so often experienced by non-white mothers in American society as well.[8] A white mother of interracial children was thus situated on the margins of both racialized communities and subject to a "social gaze"[9]; as Jones writes in this chapter title's quotation, the figure of the interracial mother was in fact often "The object of everyone's attention."[10] A result of the ambiguity surrounding and the tension toward interracialism, this "social gaze" objectified the interracial mother, and her identity would become destabilized and fragmented; her subjectivity would be diminished. Throughout *In Care of Worth Auto Parts*, Jones explores this fracturing of the self and subsequent efforts by the figure of the interracial mother to develop subjectivity. Examining how all of this takes shape throughout the text, this chapter argues that Jones undermines the essentialist gender and racial categories upheld in prominent Beat fiction. Specifically, I explore how Jones interestingly reconfigures the

Beat quest for an authentic American experience and “individual truth”[11] and engages in the discourse of protofeminism[12] through the use of narrative techniques and a genre that work together to reflect and embody the postmodern experience of the interracial mother.[13]

The short story cycle is distinct from other genres in its reliance on the “interrelationship [between individual parts] [to create] the coherent whole text.”[14] This genre has been used by classic writers such as Giovanni Boccaccio and Geoffrey Chaucer, as well as American modernist writers such as Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway. Its use by contemporary women writers to explore the issue of the subject’s fragmentation and fluidity that has come to define postmodernism is most relevant to my reading of Jones’s text. Literary critic Karen Weekes explains that particularly “in the wake of the 1960s and the second wave of the women’s rights movement,” “the structure of [this genre] replicate[d] the complex structure of women’s identities” and “reflects attempts to connect these fragments in a meaningful way.”[15] Weekes cites Lorrie Moore’s *Anagrams* (1986), for example, in which the protagonist, Benna Carpenter, seeks to unify her various roles of widow, singer, professor, and mother that pull her in competing directions and “manifest themselves in a fractured identity.” Through the structure of “an evolving sequence of narratives,” characters such as Benna “shor[e] ‘up their own fragmented identities’ while the cyclical structure uses the same accretionary method to unite the fragments of stories into a meaningful whole.” This analysis of Moore’s novel aptly illustrates how the short story cycle is strategically used by contemporary women writers to achieve a parallel between structure and theme.

Jones uses the genre of the short story cycle in similar ways, illustrated through the structural parallel of the shifting identities of the female narrator-protagonist, Lizzy, who struggles to develop a unified sense of self amidst her various roles of an interracial mother, a woman in her own right, and a storyteller. But Jones also notably employs the short story cycle to explore the intersections between gender and race as they were especially fraught in the post-civil rights era. The structure of *In Care of Worth Auto Parts* informs the text's themes and concerns: the unity and disunity that simultaneously exist between the stories—at once independent of and dependent upon the structure of the narrative cycle—are also explored thematically as the tension between unity and disunity exists between races and is experienced by the racialized mother in particular.[16]

Throughout *In Care of Worth Auto Parts*, Lizzy, a white mother of three interracial daughters, and close friend Zulima, a black woman with an interracial son, share stories and experiences that have affected their identities as interracial mothers. Through these central characters, Jones uses the structure of the short story cycle to highlight the importance of developing not only a female subjectivity that represents a response to the general subordination or oppression of women in post-WWII society—as di Prima and Johnson address in their work—but also, more specifically, a maternal subjectivity that confronts the ways in which patriarchal motherhood "regulates and restrains" mothers and their mothering.[17] Within *In Care of Worth Auto Parts*, Lizzy's effort to develop a maternal subjectivity as an interracial mother represents her struggle toward "empowered" motherhood, an experience in which the mother can claim the "agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy denied to [her] in patriarchal motherhood" as well as by the racial tensions of the period.[18] As such, Jones's work

importantly draws attention to a particular experience of female subjectivity that is affected by the multifaceted context of gender and race politics from the post-civil rights period on. In doing so, Jones challenges the representation of race and gender in male-authored Beat novels and extends how the issue of female subjectivity figures into the work of women Beat writers.

In all of these ways, Jones makes a unique contribution to our study of the Beats. Looking at her unpublished short story cycle not only expands current scholarly attention to her body of work, but also reveals her efforts to examine what is at stake in the Beat search for authenticity in a genre that is unique within the Beat literary tradition. In her exploration of fundamental Beat questions of identity and subjectivity through the discourse of postmodernism and from the perspective of the racialized mother, Jones establishes herself as an important Beat writer whose writing is indeed far from "worthless."[19]

II. The Literary Community, Marriage, and Becoming a Writer

Jones's gradual development as a writer was undoubtedly shaped by multiple formative experiences. Her work as a drama major in college, her jobs at various magazines, and her involvement in the New York City Beat community all contributed in unique ways to her understanding of her role as a female writer within a largely male-dominated literary community and as the white wife of a prominent writer and literary and cultural critic. Similar to di Prima's and Johnson's experiences, New York City exposed Jones to a multitude of perspectives on gender and race as well as on the function and purpose of literature. Her diverse body of work reflects the impact of such

perspectives and experiences, and reveals a versatile writer who explores a range of important issues.

Life at College and in New York City

Jones was born Hettie Cohen in Queens in 1934. From a young age, she felt the lure of Manhattan when she and her family would travel from their home through Manhattan to visit family.[20] She describes feeling a sense of urgency in Manhattan, an intriguing mysteriousness about the Manhattan streets that, as a young girl, she hoped to experience and explore firsthand. Before moving to Manhattan on her own, though, Jones attended Mary Washington College, the woman's college of the University of Virginia, between 1951 and 1955. As Jones explains in her memoir, *How I Became Hettie Jones,* this school appealed to her parents because it was cheaper than others in the city, and it appealed to Jones because of its distance from home. She was motivated to escape home in Queens because, as she writes, "Unlike any woman in my family … I was going to *become*—something, anything, whatever that meant. To accomplish this I felt the need to cloister myself for a while, away from the usual expectations."[21] As a means to begin exploring life outside of the relatively conservative neighborhood of Laurelton, Jones left for college at age seventeen. Like other women Beats, Jones claims to have "never had 'normal' fifties plans," and with her venture to college, she hoped to begin her process of "becoming"—though what she would "become" had yet to be determined.

Similar to di Prima's accounts of feeling different from most students around her at college, Jones recalls describing herself in an interview for the school newspaper as a "mutation." She was reluctant to become a "suburban matron"—the role expected for so many women in the 1950s—and so she gave herself "an odd" haircut and wore "Girl

Scout oxfords that seemed … the perfect signal of a new, sexy but surefooted woman." Jones's individuality may have made her feel like a "mutation," but she was an active student at college nonetheless, particularly in the arts. She majored in drama and performed in several plays and musicals, such as George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* and Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, and at least one of her own plays, "Café Au Lait," was performed at school as well. The title of her thesis, "The Poet in the Theater," signifies her overlapping interests in the theater and literature, and in the hopes of eventually "writ[ing] the plays of [Federico García] Lorca," Jones began developing her writing skills through poetry and short prose that was published in the college's literary magazine, the *Epaulet*.[22] These short pieces include the poem, "Essay on Man—Modernized Slightly," which appeared in the May 1953 issue and is Jones's witty response to Alexander Pope's "Essay on Man," as well as a collection of humorous observations on the college campus, "Grazing the Grounds…With the Beneficent Burro," and two more poems published in the spring of 1955. As noted earlier, these short works would be the only of Jones's to be published for some time; however, they reveal the early development of Jones's playful poetic style marked by her witty and unabashed critique of her immediate context.

After graduating college, Jones moved to Manhattan. She did postgraduate work at Columbia University and worked in the Center for Mass Communication before it lost its funding. She then began working at the jazz magazine, *Record Changer*, and, as noted earlier, after this she worked at the *Partisan Review*. These jobs would become formative experiences for Jones, especially in light of her realization after college that her education was perhaps just beginning—that she had been "barely educated [at college], with great

intellectual gaps where everyone else had stored movements and cultures."[23] Now in Manhattan and at the *Partisan Review*, Jones was immersed in the literary and cultural scenes and exposed to the work of a variety of writers and critics—all of which would influence her own writing that she pursued privately during this period.

There weren't many books in Jones's home when she was growing up, and her father once told her, "You won't find life there [in books]." At the *Partisan Review* years later, Jones found herself surrounded by "literary quarterlies, international journals, *Dissent, Midstream, Hudson, Poetry, Kenyon, Encounter,* the London *Times*—and books, books! An ocean of words and opinion surrounded [her]."[24] Contrary to her father's admonition, Jones considered all of this literature to be her "present education." *Partisan* was a leading literary and intellectual journal that published the literary avant-garde alongside its political counterpart, American radicalism. In the center of the literary scene, Jones was reading a variety of writers, including New Critics (at which she and other Beats "balked," Beat poets such as Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso, African American writers such as Ralph Ellison, contemporary poets such as Denise Levertov and Frank O'Hara, as well as criticism by Delmore Schwartz and others. During this time, Jones also read the work of "academic" writers, such as Mark Strand and John Hollander, but she clarifies that she did so perhaps "not as carefully" as the avant-garde literature to which she was more drawn. With such a wealth of literature at her fingertips, Jones was able to gain insight into others' interpretations and depictions of "these Cold War fifties."[25] And as she continued her "education" at *Partisan*, she found herself in the middle of the Beat literary community.

Jones met Baraka at the *Record Changer* in 1957,[26] and together they frequented Beat "hangouts" such as Jazz on the Wagon and the Cedar Tavern.[27] They went to poetry readings and met Corso, di Prima, O'Hara, and others including Black Mountain poets. In an effort to help promote and disseminate the work of such writers, in the late 1950s, Jones and Baraka started their own magazine, *Yugen*, and press, Totem Press.[28] They soon became what fellow Beat writer Brenda Frazer describes as "the mother and father of the literary scene at that time," hosting parties and housing the production of their publications.[29] The subtitle of *Yugen*, "a new consciousness in arts and letters," aptly describes the flourishing New York City literary scene that their publications helped to develop. They published a myriad of writers including Baraka himself, Jack Kerouac, Corso, Ginsberg, Basil King, Joel Oppenheimer, Fielding Dawson, Robert Creeley, John Wieners, Charles Olson, Gary Snyder, Frazer, Michael McClure, and William Burroughs. Jones explains that though she didn't include any of her own work alongside these others, she found solace in the publication of those around her: "If I hadn't yet managed to speak for myself, here at least were these others."[30] From such close contact with these writers and their texts, Jones would have access to a range of writing styles that helped show her what kind of writer she did and did not want to be.

Though Jones lacked confidence in her ability as a writer and refrained from publishing during the 1950s and 1960s, she did find a certain sense of creative freedom or empowerment from letter writing to her friend Helene Dorn.[31] She describes finding herself somewhat awakened by this process: "Having been absorbed for hours with trying to *tell*, I'd be conscious suddenly, and almost surprised to see the dark shapes of the poverty trees at the window. Something in language went, now, where nothing else could

go." Jones considered letter writing different from other prose because, as she explains in her memoir, she could write "long, detailed, continued accounts, and sen[d] them with bargain remnants from the bins at Paterson Silks. I said whatever came to mind."[32] The informal and private nature of letter writing was clearly distinguished for Jones from the writing she considered more fit for publication, and it is perhaps through this genre that Jones, consciously or not, developed as a writer.

Jones claims that "nothing but [her] own voice held [her] hostage" during the Beat years, but her status as a woman and her relationship with Baraka seem to have, to a notable degree, affected her ability to consider herself a writer and to write publicly within a predominantly male writing scene. For example, in *How I Became Hettie Jones*, she describes how Baraka would write poems about "moments of personal failures between [them]," which included his disappointment in her silence as a writer; she also describes being intimidated by his writing as he "wrote the truth" so seemingly effortlessly.[33] In fact, in a 1999 interview, Jones describes that her perfectionism set her apart from other writers around her, most notably Baraka. She explains,

> I really work on my things and I didn't understand, because LeRoi was so adept, he would pull a poem out of the typewriter and come running and show it to me, it was perfect. But my poems had to be revised because they're not perfect when they come out.[34]

This necessity of revision and drive for perfectionism is useful in understanding Jones's insecurities as a poet and why letter writing became her primary writing outlet during these years.

Further, though she played a prominent role in the production of *Yugen* and Totem Press—her connections at the *Partisan Review* helped get *Yugen* distributed, and she physically assembled the magazine before they could afford for this to be done

professionally—she recalls that Baraka placed his name on the magazine front and center, while she "had become the 'Advertising and Circulation Manager'" on the masthead inside. And as Baraka emerged as a leading poet and critic during their years together, his increasing popularity would come to overshadow her. She would soon become the silent woman merely seated next to him in interviews, the woman referred to in reviews of his work not as an editor or publisher, but rather as "his white wife, the former Hettie Cohen."[35] So not only was Jones faced with personal insecurities about her poetry in a literary scene largely dominated by male writers, but also her husband's role in the literary community had implications for her development as a writer.

An Interracial Beat Marriage

Unquestionably affected by the historical and social contexts during which they were married (between 1958 and 1965), the relationship between Jones and Baraka is complex. In her memoir, Jones provides her perspective on their marriage, emphasizing how "race disappear[ed] in the house"[36]—how, for her, the racial differences that characterized their marriage as taboo for so many people around them vanished in the privacy of their relationship.[37] In an effort to understand how Jones's ideas about interracialism and the role of race in her marriage to Baraka shape *In Care of Worth Auto Parts*, I briefly examine multiple ways in which to understand the dynamics of and contexts surrounding their relationship.

When Jones and Baraka got married in 1958, anti-miscegenation laws still existed in more than half of the country, and her family strongly disapproved. In fact, her parents essentially cut her off from contact for years to come. Their marriage was one of only a

few interracial relationships in downtown Manhattan at the time, and Jones describes being "unsettl[ed]" by others' perceptions of their marriage as a "blackman/ whitewoman couple" because, for her, "black/white was … a slippery division." She recalls, "It was a joke to us, that we were anything more than just the two of us together." The cultural scene around her seemed to resist the culturally-defined racial categories and hierarchies of the mainstream. Her experience with the burgeoning jazz scene played a particular role in this perception. It introduced her to a new language, "a music [she] could trust"—largely because it brought people together in a shared, powerful sensory experience. For Jones, the jazz scene was a relatively uncomplicated interracial culture, defined and shared by "all of us there—black and white—[who] were strangers at first." Despite claims that "only blacks had figured out" jazz, Jones didn't hear the difference between white or black musicians, and she recalls everyone at the Five Spot, "trying to laugh off the fifties"—that there were no racially-based distinctions in bohemia's response to "the pall of the Cold War, the nuclear fallout."[38] Jones was invigorated by the interracial makeup of the jazz scene, and this parallels with her sense of the absence or inconsequential nature of racial differences within the context of her marriage.[39]

Jones's perception of the "slippery" nature of racial identities in the late 1950s and 1960s can be traced back to her own understanding of her Jewish ethnicity as a young woman. She came from a Jewish family and community in Queens, but she describes always feeling like "an outsider Jew." At a Hillel meeting, for example, Jones recalls that "all [she] saw … were people unlike [her]." Additionally, she describes thinking about her developing identity as a young woman and considering that she "could have tried for white, aspired to the liberal intellectual, potentially conservative Western

tradition. But [she] never was drawn to that history."[40] As Deborah Thompson explains, "there was a vast whitening of Jewish ethnicity" during this period, but for Jones, "the shift in American Jewish identity from dark Semitic other to assimilated white standard didn't fit."[41] Similar to her experience of feeling different from her female classmates at college, Jones felt marginalized within her own ethnic group and, more importantly, that the nature of this ethnic identity was fluid. That is, she did not feel innately connected to her Jewish ethnicity, but rather that this was somewhat of a superficial identity marker.

Undoubtedly, this is useful in understanding what might be considered her romanticism of the status of interracial relationships during this period. For Jones, as her memoir suggests, one's racial or ethnic identity, though defined by one's heritage, is not necessarily reflective of one's actual sense of self nor is it stable. The status of her Jewish ethnicity had shifted from dark "other" to white "standard," and this "slipperiness" undermined the fixed nature of ethnic or racial identities upon which socially-constructed identity categories—and racial discrimination—rely. As such, the racial differences within her interracial marriage to Baraka that others perceived as problematic were relatively nonexistent for her.

What essentially amounts to colorblindness in the context of her interracial marriage, however, is more complicated than Jones's account suggests. In fact, it is possible to interpret Jones's attraction to Baraka in terms similar to what has been criticized as the exoticism of blacks by white male Beats. Jones's attraction to Baraka can be seen as her attempt to reject society's expectations for her as a white (Jewish) woman, to "[break] with 'the nuclear family, white house, and picket fence.'"[42] As historian Renee C. Romano argues, "For the women of the Beat crowd, an attraction to black men

and culture could be a form of rebellion against the strict gender-role expectations of the 1950s. … Becoming involved with a black man ensured that [Jones] would not end up in suburban Westchester."[43] In this way, Jones's perception of her interracial marriage as transcending racial differences represents a critical paradox: on the one hand, we see her advocacy and practice of racial integration beginning in the pre-Civil Rights period, and on the other hand, we see her—perhaps inadvertent—exoticism or exploitation of the black race as her marriage to Baraka signifies a rejection of the mainstream and its expectations for her as a white woman.

Interestingly, however, Romano explains that Jones's account of the role of race within her marriage was not altogether unusual during this period. She explains, "Most [interracial couples] minimized the role that race played in their relationships in an effort to present themselves as legitimate and respectable." She continues,

> By highlighting the ways in which their marriages were like any other, interracial couples made a radical statement about race in postwar America, challenging the widely accepted belief that race defined people and that the gulf separating blacks and whites was too vast to cross.[44]

Accordingly, Jones's marriage to Baraka and her efforts to downplay their racial differences may significantly represent a consciously radical act. To this point, it is important to note that even within the bohemian community, Jones and Baraka experienced racial discrimination, such as catcalls when walking down the street together. Jones also describes having witnessed "shocking and painful" race prejudice when without her husband or children in "whites-only groups."[45] As Jon Panish explains, interracial couples in bohemia "were plagued by many of the same unequal power dynamics that troubled … other social and cultural interactions."[46] Thus, in the face of such discrimination and as a result of having felt distanced from her own Jewish

ethnicity, Jones perhaps willfully overlooked her and Baraka's racial differences as a means of rebellion and survival—including the survival of their children—not as an act of exoticism or the romanticization of black culture. And as my analysis will show, these very issues of identity and survival take shape in the narrative and structure of *In Care of Worth Auto Parts* in multiple interesting ways.

In the mid-1960s, as the Civil Rights movement gave way to the Black Power movement and its cultural offshoot, the Black Arts movement (in which Baraka played a primary role),[47] Jones's attempts to transcend or ignore her and Baraka's racial differences were ultimately defeated. As Andrew Epstein explains, Baraka "was pressured by the increasingly urgent racial politics of the time to reconsider and rediscover his connection to African-American culture."[48] As a result, in 1965, he abruptly left his interracial family and community in downtown Manhattan for Harlem and then Newark, NJ and "became a spokesman for black cultural nationalism and a militant political organizer and leader."[49] Although their marriage had been strained by tensions related to their shared interests in writing and editing, as well as by Baraka's affair with di Prima,[50] it is clear that Baraka's racial politics—his desire to authenticate his involvement in the black community—was the primary reason for their divorce. Being married to a white woman compromised Baraka's leadership in the Black Arts movement.[51] Subsequently, their personal relationship became quite distanced, but Jones maintained a close relationship with Baraka's family, who was devoted to Jones and Baraka's two children.[52] Outside of this black community, though, Jones's alienation from her family continued—perhaps to a lesser degree—and she would continue to face discrimination as a white mother of biracial children. Ultimately, with the destruction of

their marriage, Jones had to face issues she had previously attempted to avoid. Confronting her identity as an interracial mother in the aftermath of the divorce led Jones to a clarity about her sense of self that ultimately gave her the strength to come into her own as a writer. Just a few years after the divorce, Jones began publishing her work, which directly explores these inextricably linked issues of gender and race.

Jones's Body of Work

Jones's first publications were texts for children and young adults, including *The Trees Stand Shining* (1971), an edited collection of Native American poems, and *Big Star Fallin' Mama: Five Women in Black Music* (1974), a biography of Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Mahalia Jackson, Billie Holiday, and Aretha Franklin. She published several young adult novels during the 1970s and into the 1980s as well, such as *Forever Young, Forever Free* (1976) and *I Hate to Talk About Your Mother* (1980). The former novel tells the story of young Jannie and Tsepo, who attempt to overcome various obstacles in an effort to maintain their friendship across the color line. The latter novel also explores themes of race as well as those of gender, class, and sexuality in its story of Alicia Prince's experiences as an adolescent. These earliest publications indicate Jones's attention to key issues that take shape throughout her multi-genre body of work.

In 1981, Jones published her first collection of poetry and prose in the chapbook *Having Been Her*. In addition to publishing poetry in various periodicals and anthologies over the years, she has since published three books of poetry: *Drive* (1997), *All Told* (2003), and *Doing 70* (2007). Notably, *Drive* won the Poetry Society of America's 1999 Norma Farber First Book Award. From her start as a poet, Jones admired the work of William Carlos Williams, Levertov, O'Hara, and Barbara Guest, but Charles Olson's

theory of projective verse has perhaps had the strongest influence on her poetry—particularly as she saw its influence on Baraka's writing. Jones explains that "[the idea] that one thought leads to another, that you don't have to have an initial idea that you follow all the way through … That … you learn your own breath [through this process]" is especially appealing.[53] Nancy Grace explains that in the vein of Olson's theory, "Jones uses the page to experiment with long prose and tight haiku-like lines as well as alphabetical and anaphoric catalogues."[54] As Grace suggests, Jones's poetry is marked by a fluidity and an adventurousness in form and style. What remains consistent throughout her work is the strength of the poet's voice and the honest treatment of her subjects, whether family, romance, or writing.

Jones has yet to publish a collection of her short fiction, but she began publishing short stories individually in various journals and anthologies in the 1970s. *Having Been Her* includes the stories "The X-Ray Technician" and "The Indian Party," and over the last few decades, several other stories have been published in various publications, such as "How She Beat the Bogeyman" in the *Village Voice* (1988), "How She Recognized Her Last Fling When She Found It" and "Enough of This" in *Frontiers* (1993), and "His Future Career" in *Global City Review* (2000). Like that of many Beat writers, Jones's fiction is largely autobiographical, and as such, her New York City bohemian experiences during the 1950s and 1960s are frequently the subject of her short fiction. This isn't to suggest a limited focus in her stories, though; texts such as "How She Beat the Bogeyman," for example, go back to Jones's childhood as she explores various experiences with beauty, loss, and strength that helped shape her sense of self. Interestingly, Jones has described her short stories as "morality tales"—that she is "a

preacher at heart."[55] For Jones, as my analysis of *In Care of Worth Auto Parts* will show, using writing as a means to share the lessons she herself has learned throughout her life is of primary importance.

As suggested earlier, the issue of women's subjectivity is central to much of Jones's writing. Grace notes that "a theme repeated almost ritualistically throughout [Jones's] work is the need of a woman to claim her own agency."[56] In the poem, "She," for example, Jones describes the titular woman's attempt to find the psychological and sexual satisfaction she desires as she "is getting over divorce."[57] Aroused by the touch of a farm boy, "She drives him to a place where no one can / see them under the stars. … Sweet Jesus, she pulls him down." Exerting control and sexual agency, the woman seizes the fulfillment for which she longs. Further, that she does so outdoors in an open and natural space, where "the grass is high, / wet with rank summer" represents her rejection of the domestic/indoor/private space long associated with such an encounter. In this depiction of sexual agency and female assertiveness outside of the home, Jones's poem addresses issues of vital importance in the post-second-wave women's movement era and connects with the work of di Prima and Johnson in significant ways, namely through the emphasis on female subjectivity, as well as the destabilization of the traditionally gendered spatial dichotomy.

Jones makes a distinction between this attention to gender in her poetry and her focus on race in her fiction. She explains in an interview, "Gender issues find their way into poems but not race. But I do deal with it in my stories. Perhaps because I'm angrier and therefore less immediately articulate about race issues and I need the space that prose offers to tell the stories that race imposes."[58] In a poem such as "The man in this house,"

though, Jones cannot escape the question of race. Short and simplistic, this poem describes the sheer and overwhelming joy that the speaker experiences as she admires "[t]he man in this house" and the "aura of bright blue [that] surrounds his brown body."[59] "If I speak," she writes, "a hundred doves will fly from my mouth / and fill his small house with their flight." Celebrating the speaker's happiness and desire for her black lover, this poem treats the theme of interracial love that dominates much of Jones's short fiction. Though a survey of her poetry indicates that race is more frequently the subject of her short fiction, there are several poems such as this one that illustrate the thread of gender and race throughout her prose and poetry.

Jones's body of work includes not only children's and young adult literature, poetry, and short fiction, but also collaborations such as the memoir with Rita Marley, *No Woman, No Cry: My Life with Bob Marley,* and *From Midnight to Dawn: The Last Tracks of the Underground Railroad* with Jacqueline L. Tobin. Additionally, from 1989 to 2002, Jones led a writing workshop at the New York State Correctional Facility for Women at Bedford Hills and has published collections of the writers' work in *More In Than Out* (1992) and *Aliens At The Border* (1997). In 1999, along with fellow Beat poet and Prison Writing Committee member Janine Pommy Vega, Jones also published *Words, Walls, Wire: How to Start a Writing Workshop in a Prison.*

Despite this range of Jones's work, most critical attention is to her memoir, *How I Became Hettie Jones* (1990). The memoir is set within the New York City Beat community, the jazz culture of the time, the Civil Rights movement, and the beginning of the Black Power movement. As such, it provides useful insight into the Beat period and its surrounding contexts while it reveals Jones's struggle within this literary community

to actually become a writer. In her essay on women Beats' memoirs, Grace highlights how "Jones uses the memoir to pick at the question of whether she is a writer, and if so, what kind."[60] Grace insightfully explores how Jones creates a "mosaic effect" throughout the memoir—how "she constructs the copresence of three temporalities: the self of memory, the self of artful creation, and the self of material reality."[61] The memoir, Grace shows, is thus successful not only for providing a new perspective on the Beat community, but also for its aesthetic achievements.

Deborah Thompson's "Keeping Up with the Joneses: The Naming of Racial Identities in the Autobiographical Writings of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Hettie Jones, and Lisa Jones" likewise focuses on Jones's memoir, particularly on the function of naming. In her essay, Thompson reads *How I Became Hettie Jones* alongside the autobiographies of Jones's husband and daughter "in order to historicize white American identity shifts relative to shifts in African American and biracial American identities."[62] This scholarship by Grace and Thompson is undoubtedly important in drawing attention to Jones as a writer in her own right and, more specifically, in situating her memoir within larger discussions of the genre of life writing as well as of the history of race in post-war American culture. Poet and critic Barrett Watten, however, notably expands—if only minimally—this focus on Jones's memoir in "What I See in *How I Became Hettie Jones*."

Watten argues that Jones's memoir is "an exemplary account of the relation of poetry to knowledge" as he examines "the divergence of the possibility of poetry as material practice."[63] In order to do so, Watten extends his focus on Jones's work from her memoir to her first book of poetry, arguing that "another dimension of the becoming of

Hettie Jones … is the publication of *Drive*." In his brief yet insightful analysis of her poetry, Watten illustrates how *Drive* embodies "a poetics of transformative particularity": "she writes of everyday details—of cars, lovers, relatives, and kids—but these are framed … in terms of a poetics of identification and solidarity with women in other patriarchal contexts." In this essay, Watten importantly traces the appearance of issues such as identity and gender within more of Jones's body of work than her memoir, and in doing so, he provides several ways to approach her various literary achievements. Following in this direction, I extend critical attention beyond Jones's memoir, and my focus on the inextricable link between race and gender in her short story cycle follows in these scholars' attention to how Jones's experiences as a developing writer within the Beat community and as a white woman in an interracial marriage affected her writing.

III. The Representation of Race in Beat Fiction and Memoir

In order to understand Jones's particular revision of and contribution to the Beat discourses of gender and race, it is important to more fully examine how race figures into the Beat community and its prominent fiction.[64] The Beat movement is broadly defined by a resistance to mainstream society's growing homogeneity and by a desire to create a heterogeneous space within which writers or artists of any racial or ethnic background, social class, even criminal background, could escape the mainstream. Despite the interracial makeup of the community itself, as Jennie Skerl notes, "the reified canon of white male authors obscures the African American and other ethnic presences in Beat history," including writers such as Ted Joans and Bob Kaufman.[65] Subsequently, in discussions that refer to the Beat community as a white literary community—and in fact, reflective of the fundamental impetus for racial and ethnic heterogeneity within the

community—the Beats are characterized by their attraction to and appropriation of non-European-American cultures, particularly the African American culture, which manifests itself in Beat literature in various ways.

As Norman Mailer argues in "The White Negro" (1957), in the face of society's "murderous" nature as demonstrated by the war, "the [white] American existentialist—the hipster" set out (in contrast to "the Square") "to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, [and] to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self."[66] African American culture was the model for this response to post-WWII society, because, according to Mailer, "the Negro … has been living on the margin between totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries."[67] Not unlike the lives of criminals and drug users to which the Beats were also drawn, African Americans were situated on the outskirts of mainstream society and were thus appealing to the Beats who saw this marginality as "a benefit to their spiritual development."[68] As Steve Wilson argues, "[Kerouac] and other Beats believed that Black culture revered ["the intense moment … and intuition"] because a life lived outside an Anglo worldview … ensured Blacks would stay in touch with a certain essential humanness Anglos had lost."[69] The desire to experience the lives of African Americans (or other types of marginalized "others") largely took shape in Beat literature through, as Robert Holton describes, "the appropriation of language … [and] the valorization of jazz, especially bebop."[70]

This appropriation of African American culture by the Beats is exemplified in Kerouac's formal experimentation with spontaneous prose—his rejection of the process of revision and his celebration of improvisation. Kerouac's explanation of the

composition of *The Subterraneans* in his 1957 essay, "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," makes direct connections between jazz music and the "essentials" of his formal endeavor. For instance, he compares his use of "the vigorous space dash" to mark "rhetorical breathing" rather than the use of periods for the separation of sentences to how a "jazz musician draw[s] breath between outblown phrases."[71] Though representative passages from his body of work are too long to cite here, Regina Weinreich points to the language, phrasing, and rhythm throughout Kerouac's writing to demonstrate how his "literary structures are motivated by the same impulses as the structures of jazz riffs."[72] As this example suggests, African American music provided a way for Beat writers to work outside of the boundaries of realism that were considered inadequate for addressing issues arising in the post-WWII era and to instead follow their impulses toward performativity and spontaneity.

The complexities and consequences of the Beats' attraction to and appropriation of black culture are perhaps more evident in the prevalent representations of non-European-American identities and cultures in Beat literature than in their formal experimentation. In their efforts to resist the period's growing modernization and homogeneity, to preserve their own white male individuality in the face of a threatening "domestic/conformist absorption of the self/individual," the core Beat fiction writers (Kerouac and Burroughs) consistently, though to varying degrees and for various purposes, appropriate marginalized identities throughout their work, most often black and Mexican, and in doing so, engage in racial practices of primitivism, exoticism, and essentialism.[73] For example, in Kerouac's *On the Road*, Sal Paradise recalls,

> wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me… . I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor

> overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a 'white man' disillusioned. … I was only myself…wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America.[74]

In this oft-quoted passage, Kerouac reveals a limited understanding of or an unwillingness to confront the actual conditions of African Americans' lives during the post-WWII period when this was written and takes place. He overlooks the socially-constructed racial discrimination, subordination, and inequality to which African Americans were subject and instead perceives them as "happy" and "ecstatic"—a projection of his own image of the racial other that enables or validates such a fantasy.

Additionally, Grace draws our attention to *Maggie Cassidy*, *The Subterraneans*, and *Tristessa*, in which Kerouac's "engagement with the Africanist presence fuels the project of self-construction" through the way in which he "conflate[s] racial categories so that [his] creation of dark characters … encodes a subtext of 'otherness' that speaks of the black experience as well as that of other marginalized groups."[75] Though Grace emphasizes how race functions throughout these three texts to provide Kerouac with an "allegory of [his] own condition as a marginalized male, a masculine hybrid," it is nevertheless important to note how Kerouac collapses racial and ethnic differences into one "other" identity category that is set in contrast to white identity, and that his depiction of such characters is ultimately self-serving—as in *On the Road*.[76] Likewise, Martinez argues that, evident in *The Yage Letters*, Burroughs was attracted to "the world of the fellaheen [as it provided] a passage into an alternate existence in which the white male can experience difference and its liberating side effects, without having to give up the privilege of whiteness."[77] At issue in such examples of white writers' appropriations of

black culture is the very freedom of writers like Kerouac and Burroughs to adopt and adapt other cultures' traditions for their own purposes.

This pattern of white Beat prose writers' appropriations of racial or ethnic others is also evident in Brenda Frazer's *Troia: Mexican Memoirs*. For example, Frazer describes the impact of her relationship with the Mexican "policewoman procuress" referred to as "J" in the memoir, with whom Frazer communicates through "gibberish" as "neither of [them] understands the other's spoken idiom."[78] She writes, "I know that I am as much Mexican as I am New Yorker or even spade, Negro, Veracruzana, I have undergone the metamorphosis completely and my heart is warm and happy."[79] In an interview with Grace, Frazer explains how her experience as a prostitute in Mexico led her to this "metamorphosis": she describes identifying a "darkness in [her]self" with the people in Mexico's "open[ness] to their poverty [or] to the oppression of being down-trodden."[80] Though Frazer's characterization of racial or ethnic others in Mexico acknowledges what she sees as their cultural, political, or economic suffering, it nevertheless demonstrates the freedom of Frazer as a white woman to, in Kerouac's language, "exchange worlds" with racial or ethnic others and to appropriate their culturally-based identities.[81]

All of these examples represent white privilege exercised by Beat writers—male and female. Regarding the Beat practice of white privilege, John Cooley explains that "Many blacks were forced by birth and racial identity to a desperate way of life," while the hipster, or Beat, "chose to embrace" this life and "could always return to the mainstream of white life if driven to do so."[82] Interestingly, Holton points out that many readers overlook the degree to which this white privilege leads to problematic

representations of racial or ethnic others—representations that are "ignorant of the actual living conditions [of these others]."[83] Instead, Holton argues, readers "[respond] positively to such images of heterogeneity." That some readers perceive such depictions in Beat literature as acceptable portrayals of racially marked figures and cultures while others consider them a form of racism (e.g., primitivism or exoticism) illustrates the paradox of the Beat community itself that manifests in much of its white-authored literature: the simultaneous rejection and perpetuation of hegemonic racial norms. Amor Kohli explains that "Although the bohemian environment was certainly much more progressive in its views of race relations than was mainstream America, many in that atmosphere were still unable, unwilling, or simply unprepared to comprehend the stories of black people in America."[84] Therefore, although these Beat representations of racial or ethnic others do depict an American experience that is defined by a mixing of cultural traditions or experiences, they nevertheless perpetuate what Toni Morrison reveals to be a pattern of much white-authored American literature throughout the 19th and 20th centuries: the use of "Africanist presences or characters or narrative or idiom" as a "mediating force" through which to develop a "quintessential [white] American identity."[85] Martinez emphasizes the self-serving nature of the Beats' appropriation of racial and ethnic others by clarifying that this "identification with downtrodden ethnic peoples has been misread as a direct attack on middle-class, Anglo conformism. It is rather a maneuver useful for the Beats' own purposes."[86] He argues,

> When their vicarious empathy for ethnicized liminality encounters an actual civil rights movement for racial liberation, the individualism based on freedom of personal movement finds its antithesis in a political movement based in a communion of shared values and community of shared identity.

In his analysis of Beat writers' appropriations of racial or ethnic others through their lives and work, Martinez highlights how, often depicted through essentialism, primitivism, or exoticism, racial or ethnic others function as exploitable objects through which many Beat writers attempt to develop and maintain their own individual autonomy and subjectivity when it serves them best and does not compromise their own needs.

In addition to this treatment of race within the Beat community and Beat literature, it is important to acknowledge the work of the Black Arts movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s that also undoubtedly informed Jones's understanding of race and gender as she set out to address these issues in *In Care of Worth Auto Parts*. Strategically similar to the work of many Beat writers, the writing of the Black Arts movement relied on distinctions between races—on the separation of "the Black aesthetic" from "the white thing," "white ideas," and "white ways of looking at the world"—in its endeavor to represent and express pride in the black experience.[87] In both poetry and prose, the literature of this movement focused on the lives and the historical, cultural, and political experiences of African Americans. The poetry, in particular, used the African American vernacular and its use in various African American cultural forms such as sermons and music to embody and emphasize the authentic African American experience. Overall, in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, artists of the Black Arts movement set out to express a renewed sense of pride in the African American culture.

Also important, the Black Arts movement, somewhat similar to the Beat movement in this way, limited the role of women in its endeavors. As James Smethurst discusses in his study of the Black Arts movement, "caricatured versions of [the Black Power movement and the Black Arts movement] as fundamentally and unusually sexist

distort them and the legacy of black women (and some men) in those movements."[88] However, Smethurst also helps clarify that evident in "the relegation of women to a supporting role in Umbra" (a poetry workshop for young black writers) and the prevalence of women's struggles against "male supremacy" in the BAM, the movement was "in the mainstream of downtown bohemia in terms of gender roles rather than following some black nationalist imperative."[89] Despite the prominence of several female writers of the Blacks Arts movement, such as Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, and Gwendolyn Brooks, and their attention to women's issues in their work, the general misogyny of many of the movement's male leaders overshadowed, if not subordinated, many black women who were interested in like-minded cultural and political changes. This undoubtedly resembles the perpetuation of the traditional female gender role within the Beat literary community.

This overview of how race and gender figure into the literary and cultural movements preceding the composition of *In Care of Worth Auto Parts* draws attention to the uniqueness and importance of Jones's treatment of race and gender in her text. Many white Beat writers romanticized or appropriated non-white figures or cultures as a means to escape what they perceived as stifling or oppressive white privilege, and writers of the Black Arts movement sought to cultivate a literary tradition defined only by African American cultures and experiences, which entailed the exclusion of any "white ideas" or cultural practices. Significantly, Jones disrupts the tendency of these Beat and Black Arts writers to romanticize, appropriate, exploit, subordinate, or exclude the racial "other" and to marginalize women. In *In Care of Worth Auto Parts*, she examines what is at stake in perpetuating hegemonic socially-constructed race and gender norms, and in doing so, she

brings attention to the figure of the interracial mother whose complex experience during the post-Civil Rights era is reflected through the formal structure of the short story cycle.

IV. *In Care of Worth Auto Parts*: Interracialism and Postmodernism

The composition of *In Care of Worth Auto Parts: Stories at the Intersection* spans from the early 1970s to the early 2000s, and in its current manuscript form, the text includes twenty-one stories—half of which have been published autonomously—and fifteen vignettes. The vignettes function as metanarratives in which the primary narrator-protagonist, Lizzy, contextualizes the upcoming story or stories and reflects on the process of storytelling itself to her friend, Zulima, who is at times the protagonist of a few of Lizzy's stories. As noted earlier, two of the stories, "The X-Ray Technician" and "The Indian Party," were first published in Jones's chapbook, *Having Been Her*, in 1981, and nine others have since been published in journals such as *IKON* and *Ploughshares*, as well as in anthologies such as *Women of the Beat Generation* and *Bearing Life*.[90]

Archived correspondence indicates that Jones first attempted to publish a volume of these stories in 1981, but it was rejected, according to the publisher, because "it seem[ed] premature to think yet of … publishing a volume of the stories."[91] Within the next decade, Jones experimented with linking the stories together—with what is now the short story cycle—and she received a grant from the Money for Women/Barbara Deming Memorial Fund in 1992 to continue pursuing the project in its new form. However, in 1999, the manuscript was rejected by Curbstone Press, who urged Jones to reshape the content into novel form, reassuring the author that "this work has the makings of being an exceptional novel."[92] In my recent conversation with the author, Jones explained that, despite the publisher's suggestion, she wasn't interested in writing a novel and eventually

"ditched" the manuscript because she was no longer confident in her attempt to link her stories together as a short story cycle.[93]

Whether referred to as a short story cycle, a short story sequence, a composite novel, a short story composite, or a story book, the genre of *In Care of Worth Auto Parts* is a collection of stories, each of which has self-contained character and plot development and can therefore potentially be read autonomously, but that are linked together in a variety of ways—such as a narrative thread, one or more characters, the setting, or vignettes—and in this way, work as multiple parts of a larger whole.[94] In fact, although the stories can be read autonomously, writers use this genre in order to convey a larger meaning to be achieved only when the stories are read as part of a coherent whole. Rocio G. Davis explains: "The term 'short story cycle' implies a structural theme for the working out of an idea, characters, or themes, even a circular disposition in which the constituent narratives are simultaneously independent and interdependent."[95] Referring to Forrest Ingram's study of several short story cycles, Roxanne Harde explains that the genre is "dependen[t] on 'dynamic patterns of RECURRENCE and DEVELOPMENT.'"[96] Nineteenth- and twentieth-century American examples include Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs,* Hemingway's *In Our Time,* Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. With *In Care of Worth Auto Parts*, Jones joins this list and provides a stylistically and thematically unique short story cycle rooted in the Beat pursuit of an authentic American experience.

The stories and vignettes of *In Care of Worth Auto Parts* are told from the turn of the twenty-first century as the narrator looks back at her life beginning in her twenties or

thirties in 1960s New York City bohemia. As noted earlier, Jones's fiction is autobiographical, and as such, the stories are based on Jones's relationship with Baraka and center on Lizzy's and Zulima's particular experiences as interracial mothers. Further, the New York City arts culture serves as the backdrop, and so the stories include characters who are painters, musicians, actors, and writers. Jones began writing the stories of *In Care* just a short time after the 1967 Supreme Court decision to repeal anti-miscegenation laws nationally. The text is initially set in this post-Civil Rights era when interracial marriages were officially legal, but such couples were still subject to racial discrimination from both white and black communities, and the cycle traces the evolution of this taboo over subsequent decades. Each of the stories of *In Care* is rich with portrayals of the experience of racialized motherhood, but I focus on the stories of the cycle in which the trope of the interracial mother and the use of postmodernist narrative techniques figure through Lizzy most prominently and interestingly: "Enough of This," "Disintegration," "No Visible Means of Support," "Minor Surgery," and "Full Circle." Looking at the first and last stories in addition to a few in between, my analysis addresses the cyclical movement of the text to highlight the various ways in which the particularities of the genre itself contribute to the stories' thematic development.

"Enough of This"

"Enough of This" is the first story of *In Care*, in which Jones succinctly establishes the text's primary topic of racial discord as it is experienced broadly by blacks and whites and, more specifically, by the interracial mother. From the first-person perspective of Lizzy, Jones describes one particular evening in the 1960s shared by Lizzy, her soon-to-be ex-husband and rising trumpet star, Elliott, his friend, the "'incendiary' playwright" Nathan, and Nathan's girlfriend, Moonlight Sonata.[97] Both are

interracial couples, and the story centers on a night when they attended a party thrown by a "hip" producer in New York City—they had likely been invited because of Nathan's current popularity as a playwright and Elliott's status as the "new star" according to a poll by the jazz magazine, *Downbeat*.[98] During the course of the party, Lizzy reflects on the different dynamics between the two couples as well as on the character of Moonlight, a white woman who stands out with her red, curly hair and her bold personality to match. The most interesting aspect of the party involves Moonlight as she is mistreated by the host. Overall, the story draws attention to the sense of isolation that interracial mothers experience as well as to the perpetual tension surrounding interracial relationships.

Race is thematized from the start as the story begins with Lizzy's distinction between the ease with which Nathan, a black man, "[uses] [Moonlight's] whiteness" to help the group get a cab for the party, whereas Elliott "never did that" with Lizzy—"[her] being white was never his tactic, he got [their] lofts and [their] cabs." Not unlike Jones and Baraka's relationship described earlier, Jones suggests here that Elliott made a conscious effort to resist whatever discrimination he might face as a black man and not to take advantage of whatever privileges to which he might have access due to Lizzy's whiteness. The way in which Lizzy describes this distinction between their and Nathan and Moonlight's relationship also suggests her own sense of pride in her and Elliott's mutual understanding that although they are an interracial couple, they do not define their relationship by race. However, Lizzy is ultimately unable to escape others' racial discrimination and the subsequent isolation she faces as a mother of biracial children. She subtly notes, "In those years, having few examples, [Moonlight and I] were concerned about raising our interracial children but settled for trying to feed and clothe them."[99] In

this brief passage, Lizzy points to the absence of models she and Moonlight had to follow in their unique motherhood experiences. Additionally, the very issue of being able to provide for and support their children becomes a primary struggle that Lizzy continues to deal with throughout the decades and stories to follow.

In the somewhat abrupt conclusion of the story, Lizzy recalls a particularly memorable moment from the party—the moment after which Jones titled the story. Seeing Moonlight talking to one of the black waiters working at the party, the producer approaches Moonlight from behind, "put[s] his hands under her elbows and lift[s] her up and out, as though casting her into flight. … 'That'll be enough of *this*,' he said." Lizzy then laments in the concluding lines that although "Moonlight has gone … Nathan died young [and] Elliott and I are divorced[,] I'm still … watching America make more of *this*, more of us."[100] The producer's race is unidentified, but his reaction to Moonlight in conjunction with Lizzy's comment that this type of behavior still occurs about four decades later, emphasizes the continual resistance toward interracial relationships from within both white and black communities. The story's conclusion highlights how the motivation behind this incident in which Moonlight and the waiter are treated like objects and humiliated for apparently crossing what the producer considered the line between racial and class boundaries is still existent and problematic at the turn of the century.[101] Despite the changes in the individual characters' lives since this incident in the 1960s, there has been a lack of progress regarding the taboo of interracialism. Lizzy is "still watching" people's unease with interracialism decades later.

Further, Lizzy's use of "us" in the final line ("I'm still … watching America make more of *this*, more of us") is especially significant as she draws attention to what Ronna

Johnson refers to as the “social gaze” to which she and Moonlight are subject as white mothers of biracial children—alongside their respective partners.[102] As racialized mothers, Lizzy and Moonlight are subject to discrimination, objectification, and marginalization, and we see this more clearly in the stories that follow. Importantly, Nathan’s and Elliott’s prominent status within the cultural scene suggests that they are not necessarily victim to racial discrimination solely as black men. Rather, Lizzy’s comment suggests that all four individuals are subject to discriminatory behavior precisely because of their interracial relationships—or, as portrayed in Moonlight’s experience at the producer’s party, because of their attempt to transcend or ignore hegemonic racial boundaries.

In initially portraying these complex experiences of interracialism and interracial motherhood in the cycle’s first story, “Enough of This,” Jones begins to disrupt the hierarchical categories of race that essentialist differences between experiences of whites and non-whites assume. We begin to see how the issue of interracialism itself redefines what it means to be both a white woman and a black man in the post-civil rights period. At stake for the former is any previous unearned privileges she had as a white person and for the latter, whatever degree of racial equality the civil rights movement helped achieve. These issues are taken up further in the cycle’s next vignette and subsequent story, as is the issue of shifting and multiple identities.

From Lena to Lizzy

In the vignette that follows “Enough of This,” Lizzy explains that “Lizzy” is a nickname, that she had previously changed her name from Lena “for the less ethnically challenging LeAnne, then quickly lost that for Liz, plain and simple, Lizzy to be cute.”[103]

The process of these name changes has implications for Lizzy's understanding of her own ethnic identity as she attempts to erase what she perceives as marked Jewish connotations of Lena. Lizzy deliberately chooses a name that she feels is more neutral, less ethnically marked. Her name changing is clearly tied to what I described earlier as Jones's own sense of marginalization as a Jew and her unease with unwittingly identifying with this ethnic identity from which she feels innately disconnected. As such, these name changes establish the fundamental struggles that Lizzy faces throughout *In Care* regarding ethnic and racial identities and her attempt to develop subjectivity as a racialized mother in the face of others' assumptions about racial and ethnic identities and their presumed fixity and hierarchical relationships to one another. As the short story cycle proceeds, Jones expands upon this postmodern literary device of name changing and the shifting of identities, and as suggested in "Enough of This" and explored further in the subsequent story, "Disintegration," Lizzy's particular struggles with her identity and subjectivity are rooted in the taboo of interracial motherhood.[104]

"Disintegration"

The second story of *In Care*, "Disintegration," continues to provide an interesting rendering of Jones and Baraka's relationship as well as of Jones's experience as a mother after the divorce, and the story also depicts the postmodern experience in general—symbolized by the renaming and shifting of identities. The title itself signals the societal changes represented in Jones and Baraka's divorce, and thus in Lizzy and Elliott's split. Set against the rise of black nationalism and the corresponding rupture between races, Lizzy narrates "Disintegration" in the first person, beginning in the summer of 1967 after Elliott left her, and then jumping to 1969 when Lizzy is forced to seek welfare because

she can no longer provide for her children on her own. Because of Elliott's fame, Lizzy worries that she won't qualify for financial assistance; the welfare worker sympathizes with this situation, though, and allows her to apply under a fake name, one that is not legally connected to her ex-husband. Using the name Nelly, Lizzy qualifies for welfare, and the story then focuses on the complex dynamics of this experience of shifting identities.[105]

The "disintegration" of the title is represented in the breakup of two of Lizzy's important relationships, first with Elliott and next with her friend, Betty. Lizzy never directly explains why Elliott left her, but various moments throughout the story suggest the growing animosity she feels toward him, likely rooted in her feelings of abandonment. Describing how she and Elliott don't see eye to eye on how to raise their children, especially after their divorce, Lizzy mentions, "Elliott calls from somewhere. Which could be anywhere, since now he's everywhere, in sandals and flowing cloth." References such as this suggest that Elliott has left his family to pursue his jazz career, which has taken him all over the world, and this provides a fair fictional parallel for Baraka's actual departure from Jones to pursue his political leadership role in the black community. Also, Elliott is on the cover of *Time* with what Lizzy considers a "furious face"—a portrayal reflective of the serious demeanor and dedication with which Elliott/Baraka pursued his respective commitment to jazz/black nationalism—perhaps at the cost of his family's well-being.[106] Further, Jones's allusion to Elliott in traditional African garb is certainly derisive, representative of the resentment Lizzy/Jones experienced as a white woman left for the black community. Despite his success, Elliott

is clearly not helping to provide for their children, which requires Lizzy to apply for welfare.

The separation between Lizzy and Elliott is coupled in "Disintegration" with the temporary separation of friends, Lizzy and Betty. Betty is a black woman and the sister of Nathan, who appeared in "Enough of This." The two women had been good friends for many years, but around the same time Elliott left, so did Betty. Lizzy never specifies that Betty left their neighborhood to be in an all-black community or to pursue beliefs in black power; rather she reveals more broadly in the subsequent vignette that during the 1970s when they didn't see much of each other, "Betty married, divorced, and changed her name to Zulima." That Betty, like LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka, changes her name to one that is more ethnically marked, demonstrates the prevalence of black race pride during this period and presents a notable contrast to Lizzy's attempt to escape the ethnic connotations of her given name, Lena. And Zulima's return to the New York City bohemian neighborhood coincides with the decline of the Black Power and Black Arts movements in the mid-1970s, further suggesting the motivation behind her departure. Overall, through the temporary separation of Lizzy and Betty/Zulima and the split between Lizzy and Elliott, Jones draws attention to the commonality of such racial segregation in society during what Lizzy aptly refers to as "Dis-Integration time."[107]

The racial politics that motivate Lizzy's various experiences of "dis-integration" are also responsible for her frequent encounters with racial discrimination as an interracial mother throughout the story. For example, the girlfriend of the welfare worker in Lizzy's home "gapes" when one of Lizzy's daughters enters the room and jumps onto her mother's lap. Lizzy explains, "She has never seen the likes of us," and this stranger's

response to Lizzy with her children is not uncommon. A toll collector has a similar reaction to Lizzy with "several children of color" in her car, and when in the hospital for surgery, a medical insurance investigator initially explains to Lizzy that she doesn't qualify for welfare because she "look[s] intelligent" and "[has] been a teacher." However, once the investigator notices the picture of Lizzy's children, Lizzy "must not be what [she seems]. 'Stay on welfare and go to school,' [the investigator] says, relenting. 'Make something of yourself.'"[108] Seemingly innocuous, such reactions represent the interracial and intraracial tensions that gradually diminish Lizzy's sense of self and subjectivity as she is continually objectified as an interracial mother and struggles to fulfill her fundamental responsibility as a parent to provide for her children.

In each of these instances, Lizzy is subject to a "social gaze," and in emphasizing how Lizzy is scrutinized by these onlookers and "reconstituted as [a racialized] object," Jones—continuing from "Enough of This"—destabilizes the normative racial and gender hierarchies perpetuated in Beat literature in multiple ways.[109] Specifically, by frequently subjecting Lizzy to what Ronna Johnson refers to as a "punitive gaze," Jones highlights her objectification and marginalization, which presents a notable contrast to the seeming stability of a black figure like Elliott.[110] Lizzy is characterized in "Disintegration"—and throughout *In Care*—as a white person subject to racial discrimination and marginalization. This is contrary to the position of white privilege from which Frazer, Kerouac, and Burroughs speak about nonwhite figures. It is Elliott who is seemingly free from the racial struggles that Lizzy suffers. He is a black man living in the mainstream of society, not on the margins—not as a racial "other" romanticizing a liminality typically portrayed in texts such as *On the Road* or the *Yage Letters*. In Frazer's memoir and in the

fiction of Kerouac and Burroughs, it is the white figure who typically exercises racial privilege and exoticizes or objectifies the racial other. Here, Jones disrupts and essentially reverses this pattern of white privilege and nonwhite discrimination, marginalization, or objectification.

Also, without Elliott present, Lizzy takes on the traditional role of both mother and father; she is responsible not only for maintaining the domestic space and for bringing up her children, but also for financially providing for her children—the role generally assumed by the father in traditional patriarchy. In this way, Jones uses the unique experience of the figure of the interracial mother to complicate the traditional gender hierarchy perpetuated in most male-authored Beat texts as well.

Further, Jones destabilizes the hegemonic and hierarchical racial categories often perpetuated in Beat texts by portraying Lizzy's struggles with what I described earlier as the characteristic themes of non-white motherhood: "survival, power, and identity."[111] Lizzy's application for welfare itself signifies her struggle to ensure the survival of her children. Lizzy also struggles to survive in the face of the "social gaze" that often pushes her to retreat into her own seemingly isolated experience, which has been severed from any larger community. The struggle for power is illustrated in Lizzy's attempt to transcend the effects of the discrimination she faces by internalizing her frustration and relying on the strength of her overall commitment to her role as a mother to help her achieve the authority, authenticity, and agency to which she is entitled. And Lizzy's struggle with identity is manifested in how she unwillingly becomes hyper-aware of her position as a "nontraditional" mother and attempts to develop a subjectivity in the face of the racial discrimination that gradually deteriorates her sense of self.[112] In all of these

ways, Lizzy experiences racial discrimination not typically associated with white mothers but rather with racial or ethnic minority mothers. As these struggles for "survival, power, and identity" illustrate, though, Lizzy's racial discrimination is not near the degree of racial oppression suffered by minorities whose discrimination is not linked only to their role as mothers. In this multifaceted and ambiguous characterization as a "nontraditional" racialized mother, then, Jones continues to undermine essentialist racial categories, blurring the boundaries between white and nonwhite motherhood and therefore redefining what these racially-defined categories mean.

The experience of Lizzy's name change to Nelly in order to qualify for welfare because Elliott does not help support their children perhaps most interestingly represents Lizzy's struggle for subjectivity as a white woman and mother as it simultaneously represents Jones's engagement in the postmodern discourse of shifting or multiple identities. In fact, the storyline in which Lizzy experiences an identity crisis once she changes her name and pretends to be Nelly illustrates what Ronna Johnson refers to as "the postmodern destabilization of identity and narrative."[113] As Lizzy describes her experience as "Nelly," her narrative position itself shifts from first to third person, representing the destabilization and fluidity of her identity as well as of her narrative role.

As the narrator of "Disintegration," Lizzy describes herself as Nelly in the third person—shifting between "I" and "she"—which suggests her attempt at the time of the experience to maintain a distance between her true identity and her made-up identity—thus preserving the former. This shift in narrative perspective illustrates a splitting of Lizzy's identity into two parts—each part reliant upon the other—Lizzy on Nelly for financial stability, and Nelly on Lizzy to maintain the pretense. Under the name Nelly,

Lizzy goes about her life as normal: she shops for groceries, cashes checks, and even goes to the hospital for emergency surgery. However, Lizzy gradually has trouble distinguishing between her real identity and her fake identity. She begins to experience "a slow collapse of [herself]," to feel that her "world has ended. And Nelly's has begun." When she realizes the danger of continuing to pretend to be Nelly, Lizzy discards the fake identity and tries to provide for her family on her own. But, in doing so, she faces the fear of how to adequately recover the "cherished Lizzy Thompson, [who was] like a little sister young and tragically dead." Lizzy's sense of self had already been so troubled by the abandonment of her black husband and by the racial hostility she encounters as an interracial mother that her efforts to preserve her identity as Lizzy when she pretended to be Nelly were futile. She may have exercised clarity and strength in recognizing the consequences of shifting identities, but she then has to revive herself as Lizzy from being "tragically dead."[114] And this struggle to reclaim her identity as Lizzy and to develop a subjectivity as a woman and a mother continues to progress throughout the cycle's stories.

Importantly, the tension between unity and disunity portrayed in the relationship between Lizzy and Nelly is mirrored in a similar tension within the structure of *In Care* itself. The themes developed in "Disintegration"—namely, the struggles of the "nontraditional" mother, the disruption of hegemonic racial and gender hierarchies, and the postmodern condition of multiple or fragmented identities—rely upon this story's connection to the other stories and vignettes within *In Care* to achieve full meaning. Only when situated within Lizzy's collective experiences as an interracial mother over the years and through the short story cycle are the social, cultural, and political implications

of Lizzy's experiences in "Disintegration" substantiated. Lizzy's experience as Nelly in "Disintegration" is reflected in the fragmented structure of *In Care*, and in this way, Jones is able to more effectively draw attention to the various and complex consequences of the perpetuation of essentialist racial categories and the hierarchical relationships and discrimination these categories foster.

"No Visible Means of Support"

In "No Visible Means of Support," the following story of *In Care*, Jones continues to explore the issue of maternal subjectivity thematically as well as through metanarrative techniques that perform the fracturing and shifting of identities that we first see in "Disintegration"—namely, through the shifting of the narrative perspective from first to third person. In this story that is set in the early to mid-1970s, Lizzy is still struggling to support her children, especially after she loses her job at a literary agency for "Black Militant" beliefs that somehow negatively influenced her ideas on "a book about hunger for children."[115] After losing her job, Lizzy immediately worries about how to pay for rent, food, and laundry. Her middle daughter, ten years old here, has even sought a job to make some money, walking a younger child home from school.[116] Throughout the story, Jones juxtaposes Lizzy's inability to support her children financially with her efforts to support them emotionally and psychologically as they face various obstacles, many of which are a result of their interracial background. This is illustrated in the central conflict of the story when Lizzy is called to meet with her daughter's junior high school sewing teacher and is faced with the teacher's presumptions about her racial identity.

The teacher calls Lizzy in to discuss whether or not the African print fabric that her daughter has brought to class will be easily hemmed because the pattern itself may make it difficult to measure accurately. The middle daughter is dark skinned and is described as having a "high wide Afro" and an ankh around her neck, and Jones suggests that this is why the teacher assumes that her mother is black.[117] Thus, as Lizzy has come to expect, the teacher, upon seeing her, does a "doubletake, ahem, the eyes jumping around." She seems nervous and surprised, having expected, perhaps, "someone not only black but *unskilled*"—both characterizations that are overturned upon sight of Lizzy's white skin and her confident offer to simply help her daughter sew with the African print.[118]

Like the examples in "Disintegration," Lizzy is the object of the teacher's gaze as a racially-marked mother, and the teacher's reaction to Lizzy forces her to be acutely conscious of her identity and her racial differences from her daughter. Though strong when facing the teacher's ignorant behavior, when she exits the classroom, "Lizzy weeps that all she can do to defend her children is *be white*." Lizzy is frustrated not only that the teacher assumed she would be black, but also that the teacher assumes that a black mother would be "unskilled"—unable to actually help use the African print fabric, and perhaps unable to stand up for her daughter and her interest in maintaining her ties to her African heritage. Further, rather than seeing Lizzy and her daughter as a black mother and child, as she assumed, the teacher sees them—to her own surprise—as a white mother and a biracial child—as something so startling, she cannot muster anything other than a weak response to Lizzy's offer to help her daughter sew: "Oh well, then…," she manages to say. The daughter had initially come home from school "in a crying rage"

because of her teacher's response to her fabric. Now, Lizzy's compassion as a mother for her daughter is overshadowed by the way in which her whiteness is reason enough for the teacher to change her mind. All Lizzy has to do is show up, "be white," and the teacher no longer takes issue with the African fabric.[119] Drawing attention to Lizzy's feelings of sadness and helplessness in this situation, Jones critiques the white privilege that Lizzy unwittingly exercises in her confrontation with the teacher. Rather than being identified as her daughter's white mother, Lizzy wants to be treated simply as a mother, regardless of her race or her racial differences from her daughter. She wants to assert a subjectivity that will not be undermined by others' assumptions about her identity or role as a mother.

Importantly, in the very beginning of the story, Lizzy explains that she "had come to think of [her]self" in the third person—as "she." Throughout the course of the story, she suggests that this shifting sense of self is a result of constantly being objectified and marginalized by others as an interracial mother. After initially acknowledging her narrative shift from "I" to "she," Lizzy writes, "One or two things about *her*. I answered to my legal name, of course, but who was Lizzy Thompson? People saw black or white, one thing or another; all *I* saw was cross-reference. Mostly, every which way I turned I was *her*.[120] Through this metanarrative technique, Lizzy draws attention to the instability and fragmentation of her identity and to the cause of this situation: others' inabilities to see beyond the racial differences between her and her children, such as the sewing teacher. As exemplified in her similar prior encounters with various people who misjudge and objectify her as a white mother of biracial children, it is the contrast between what Lizzy herself sees and what others see that leads to this fracturing of her identity and her

shift in narrative perspective—all of which symbolizes her fundamental lack of subjectivity.

More specifically, in describing her perception of herself as "cross-reference" rather than as either black or white, Lizzy reflects on her inability to define herself according to others' categories and thus on her inability to avoid being scrutinized and judged. For Lizzy, her experience as an interracial mother invalidates, but is limited by, the socially-constructed categories of white or black motherhood. Lizzy feels naturally tied to her children in such a way that she does not necessarily want to be identified as belonging to the white community because that identity carries with it assumptions about her life and her family. Conversely, although her experiences overlap with those of nonwhite mothers, as a white woman, she also obviously does not identify as a black woman either. As such, Lizzy suffers with what she describes as her sense of "cross-reference." This ambiguous sense of identity and her marginalization within any context troubles Lizzy's subjectivity. Though she determines to provide for her children in any way she can, because she is constantly confronted by others' attempts to define her—and is therefore subject to the objectification and marginalization this leads to—she struggles to assert a subjectivity that will let her claim authority and authenticity as a white mother of interracial children in this post-civil rights period of racial segregation. And it is precisely this struggle that provokes her to shift her narrative perspective from first to third person, symbolizing what I referred to earlier as "the postmodern destabilization of identity and narrative."[121]

Through this metanarrative technique, Jones draws attention to Lizzy's role as a storyteller, and in doing so, continues to demonstrate the function of the genre of the

short story cycle to embody her particular experience throughout the development of the text. Reflective of Jones's experience as a writer, Lizzy attempts to discover herself through the process of narrating her own experiences, and she makes this explicit in "No Visible Means of Support" as she identifies herself as the story's primary character, as a "she" that is "the growing *I*."[122] Lizzy is unable to speak of herself as a clearly distinguished "I" after the culmination of various experiences with racial discrimination described in this and previous stories. Through the genre of the short story cycle, then, which deliberately links these various experiences together and illustrates their continued impact on Lizzy, Lizzy uses her role as a storyteller to help this "I" come into being. Lizzy thus "us[es] writing as a means to create a semblance of order and meaning in [her life]."[123] In these ways, "No Visible Means of Support" further illustrates the significance of Jones's experimentation with the short story cycle genre and continues to demonstrate the ways in which the text simultaneously engages with the historical context of interracialism as taboo and the cultural context of postmodernism in order to explore the issue of maternal subjectivity as experienced by the interracial mother.

It is important to note that its focus in this way on maternal subjectivity situates *In Care* within the larger tradition of maternal literature that emerged in the post-second-wave feminist movement.[124] However, *In Care* is nevertheless distinguished within the discourse of maternal subjectivity by its focus on the figure of the "nontraditional" mother—the mother who does not fit into the culturally-determined role of white or black motherhood.[125] The socially-constructed binary of white and non-white motherhood that positions the interracial mother somewhere in the middle of these two communities likewise takes shape in narratives of the "textual mother."[126] For example, explaining

how black motherhood is often explored in twentieth-century prose in ways distinct from white motherhood, Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly clarify that whereas “white women *may* have experienced a need to sever themselves from their mothers—to disidentify with them … Black women in discriminatory societies *necessarily* ‘struggle to affirm the value of their lives: race, class and gender oppression intensify their need to uncover a strong matrilineal heritage.’”[127] Thus, in Jones’s focus on the white mother of interracial children, she explores the struggle for maternal subjectivity as it takes shape outside of this dichotomy of racialized motherhood, and in doing so, she not only revises the representation of race and gender in much Beat literature, but also expands attention to the figure of the mother within the larger literary tradition of “textual mothers.”

“Minor Surgery”

Lizzy’s use of the third-person narrative perspective in “No Visible Means of Support” is continued in “Minor Surgery” and the stories in between them. This story—about a third of the way through the cycle—is set in 1983. The title of this story is a play on the irony of such an expression to refer to and significantly downplay the stigma of abortion. Lizzy accompanies her middle daughter to have this “minor surgery,” and throughout the day, Lizzy reflects on her own two abortions in the past. In “Minor Surgery,” Jones extends her focus on the experience of the interracial mother depicted in the previous stories of my analysis as she explores an experience that is not necessarily unique for a woman in an interracial family, but rather one that transcends racial differences. Further, Jones situates this important issue alongside a unique confrontation that Lizzy has with a white woman about being a parent to interracial children, and in juxtaposing these two situations, Jones thematizes racial equality and integration in new

ways. Lizzy's struggle for maternal subjectivity that we saw foregrounded in "Disintegration" and "No Visible Means of Support" is de-emphasized here in order to illustrate the potential for racial equality and integration to abate the isolation and fragmentation experienced by the interracial mother.

Much of the narrative of "Minor Surgery" describes Lizzy and her daughter as they wait for the doctor to arrive and listen to the nurse, Mrs. Weinberg, in the meantime. The nurse talks to all of the patients—including Lizzy's biracial daughter, a Japanese woman, and a white woman—about issues such as birth control options and future pregnancies. During this time and when her daughter is having her surgery, Lizzy is lost in her thoughts as she reflects on her abortions in the pre-Roe vs. Wade era. She recalls, for example, the courage it took for young women such as herself to have gone for an abortion when it was illegal—often alone without anyone for support and to an isolated place "where the authorities wouldn't' find [the doctor]." She remembers when there were "women who marched, and testified, and died" for the legal right that young women today are able to take advantage of and, often, with someone to accompany and support them without as much risk—physical or otherwise. One recollection is particularly moving as Lizzy currently watches each patient exit the operating room to recover in the waiting area:

> Images of pain crowded Lizzy's mind. Images of fear. Of hemorrhaging on street corners, of the time the nurse's tube had taken two weeks to do its job. And before *Roe*, the doctor's mill in the suburbs of the legal state, where the waiting and recovery room had so few beds that most of those recovering had to lie on the floor. … Their clothing had been taken except for dresses and blouses, and so those who'd worn pants were naked below the waist.

In this passage, Jones rather strikingly depicts the differences between her and her daughter's experiences, as her daughter has only mild pain and recovers relatively

comfortably in the bed with her mother beside her. And even though her daughter makes it through her surgery with no complications, Lizzy can't help but reflect with noted despondence and frustration on the reality that "the lives of all women … still [depend] on a house of cards that could any day, come tumbling, tumbling down." Lizzy is

> tired of being always indignant about foams that didn't work and were despicable … and the tasty jelly and rubber baby buggy bumpers that for some women spoiled all pleasure, every ability to work that thing. She went on, raving in her mind, at the pill with its fake pregnancy followed hard by embolism, the IUD of babies and untreatable infection.[128]

In emphasizing this inner rage that Lizzy feels toward women's limited options for birth control and the all too common need for abortions as a result of contraceptives' failures, Jones shifts the focus—if only temporarily—from Lizzy's frustration when confronted with problems based on others' resistance to or rejection of her interracial family to a situation shared by women of any color and not defined by race.[129]

The focus on this important woman's issue that transcends racial differences is coupled in "Minor Surgery" with another incident that somewhat similarly blurs racial boundaries. Initially, Lizzy is once again the object of a "social gaze" when Nurse Weinberg noticeably stares at the sight of Lizzy and her daughter at the clinic, clearly surprised to see this mother-daughter combination together. Jones explains that in response to this loaded stare, "Lizzy fixed her with the patient cold eye she assumed to deal with people's confusion when confronted with herself plus child or children, who were all different shades." Though Nurse Weinberg glosses over her initial confusion and instead emphasizes "how much it means to [her] to see a mother here with her daughter," she raises her voice for the other patients to hear, and soon Lizzy finds herself "the object of everyone's attention."[130]

In previous stories, such unsolicited attention drawn to Lizzy because of the racial differences from her daughter results in the fragmentation of Lizzy's sense of self and her subsequent use of third-person narration, as the gaze of others objectifies her and reinforces the ambiguity of her societal position. Interestingly, in "Minor Surgery," the nurse's focus on Lizzy and her daughter has a much different impact because the nurse's attention to Lizzy's race actually stems from the nurse's own personal situation. Her son has married a Haitian woman, and the nurse looks to Lizzy for advice about having a biracial grandchild. Although the nurse comes across as presumptuous in her assumption that Lizzy can or should speak to any such interracial situation, Jones uses this as an opportunity for Lizzy and Nurse Weinberg to express their innate willingness to love their children and grandchildren unconditionally—no matter their race. The final line, spoken by Lizzy's daughter, "'Thank you for being my mom,'" is a somewhat trite conclusion, but it nevertheless emphasizes the unconditional love shared between mother and daughter that Lizzy hopes will define Nurse Weinberg's relationship with her grandchild-to-be as well.[131] In the story's focus on the shared female experience of abortion across racial boundaries and in this conclusion, then, "Minor Surgery" continues the cycle's advocacy of racial integration as well as what is here the implicit erasure of hierarchical boundaries between blacks and whites. Lizzy's use of the third-person narrative perspective in this story continues to represent the negative impact that racial discrimination can have as it has led to a confused and fragmented sense of self that Lizzy hopes to better understand through the act of storytelling itself.

"Full Circle"

In the final story of *In Care*, "Full Circle," Jones presents the culmination of the corresponding thematic issues and structural elements developed throughout the short story cycle. The longest story in the cycle, "Full Circle" is also the most complex as it uses the mode of magical realism to address the "postmodern destabilization of identity and narrative" explored throughout the cycle's previous stories.[132] A "particular strain" of postmodernism, magical realism "can be used to explore the realities of characters or communities who are outside of the objective mainstream of our culture."[133] Magical realist texts often do so by "depict[ing] the real world of people whose reality is different from ours," and in doing so, they "de-center privileged discourses and disrupt what may have previously been taken as 'logical' or 'normal.'"[134] Though Jones's experimentation with this literary mode only subtly engages with these objectives, she interestingly does so in order to further emphasize the socially-constructed categories responsible for the positioning of the interracial mother as an outsider.

Stylistically, "Full Circle" employs this literary mode as it breaks down the boundaries between the story itself and the metanarrative vignettes that throughout the rest of *In Care* have been consistently formally separated from one another by page breaks and by the completion of each respective story before the next vignette. In this final story, Jones uses only paragraph breaks and bold font to mark the distinctions and thus enables Lizzy, in the first-person, to shift back and forth between the story she tells and her conversations with good friend Zulima, introduced earlier as the black mother of a biracial son, about the story and the process of storytelling itself. As such, the metanarrative techniques illustrated in previous stories of the cycle are more explicit and

have a stronger impact in this final story, as Jones's deliberate construction of the narrative of "Full Circle" is revealed as part of the story itself. The story's plot development—intertwined with the structural development—also represents Jones's use of magical realism.

Lizzy actually narrates multiple stories within "Full Circle"—stories that are connected to each other through the passing down of a belt she once owned. She is prompted to tell the stories by a recent visit to a thrift store where she is convinced she saw that same plastic seashell belt for sale. "Full Circle" begins in 1957 and gradually progresses to the present day. Lizzy begins the story describing how when they were still married, Lizzy and Elliott had visited a leatherstore where Lizzy traded in her plastic seashell belt for another belt made by Al, the leatherman, who ran the store. Al, a white man, had put her belt on the street with the garbage, and a passerby, Vince, also white, then picked it up and coincidentally wandered into the same bar Al was in down the street. The belt caught Al's eye, and this prompted their meeting, which soon evolved into a long-term romantic relationship.

At this point in the narrative, Lizzy is no longer involved as a character in the story; she steps outside of the text and is simply the narrator of Al's experiences. The narrative picks up in the summer of 1967, when Al has a brief affair with a black woman named Vera, which leads to the birth of their biracial daughter, Sunshine. Al doesn't learn about Sunshine until she is five years old, when Vera leaves her with him after suddenly showing up at his store, and Vera then virtually disappears from their lives. After Vince and Al adopt Sunshine in 1972, they pass the seashell belt on to her, but it is misplaced sometime later.

Lizzy's narration then jumps to a scene in which Sunshine, in her mid-twenties, is in Zulima's office (her profession is unidentified) and is talking to Zulima about her biological and adoptive fathers, Al and Vince. Lizzy suddenly re-inserts herself back into the story as a character, appearing alongside Sunshine in Zulima's office and tells Zulima in response to her strong feelings of connection to Sunshine, "Think *daughter*." Then, in a twist that interestingly complicates the story, Lizzy describes how Zulima reveals herself as Sunshine's actual mother. Zulima says to Sunshine, "'By now Vera would appear to you as a total stranger'"—as Sunshine hadn't seen Vera since she was a child. Sunshine replies that she and her fathers "had a story about that," and Zulima clarifies: "'Well, you're in it.'" Then, in the concluding scene, Sunshine is at the thrift store with both Lizzy and Zulima looking for the seashell belt, and to Lizzy's dismay, the belt is no longer there. Sunshine "says kindly, 'Do we *need* the belt now that it's come full circle?'"[135] Indeed, the belt is no longer worth chasing now that it has effectively brought the estranged mother and daughter—Zulima and Sunshine—into one another's lives through Lizzy's intervention in the story.

As noted above, magical realism is often developed through the portrayal of a narrator's or character's reality that seems counter to objective reality. In this case, the renaming of Vera—the shifting of identities from Vera to Zulima as Sunshine's mother—was revealed through the insertion of Lizzy as a character in the latter story of which she is not otherwise a part. As such, this shift in identity invites readers to reconsider the causal relationship between Lizzy's early encounter with Al and Sunshine's presence in Zulima's office years later. Whereas it initially seems that Lizzy tells the story of Al, Vince, and Sunshine as an offshoot of tracing the whereabouts of her belt, we learn that

her intention is twofold. First, in order to "make these stories *good*, so everyone'd want to be in them" and thus include Zulima as a character, and, second, in order to emphasize the various experiences of "nontraditional" motherhood, Lizzy disrupts the linear plot development and transforms the character of Vera into Zulima. The previous instances of shifting or multiple identities in earlier stories reflected Lizzy's various struggles to develop a maternal subjectivity as an interracial mother and were treated explicitly by Lizzy—such as her description of taking on the identity of Nelly to collect welfare in "Disintegration" or her deliberate shift from "I" to "she" as the narrative voice beginning in "No Visible Means of Support." In contrast, in "Full Circle," Lizzy shifts the character of Vera into Zulima without explicitly highlighting her narrative intent, requiring her audience to temporarily suspend disbelief and to accept what otherwise seems counter to reality. Further, Zulima's immediate willingness, as both Lizzy's listener and character, to "run with" Lizzy's renaming of Vera to Zulima in the story works in conjunction with the "swollen … parental pride" Zulima feels toward Sunshine to represent the strong sense of self she has as an interracial mother.[136] This notably contrasts with the struggle for a stable identity and subjectivity that Lizzy often experiences as the protagonist in her own stories.

Changing Vera into Zulima and inserting herself into the scene with Zulima and Sunshine at the end of the narrative enables Lizzy to construct a parallel between the development of her subjectivity as a storyteller and Zulima's development as an interracial mother. Jones intertwines the metanarrative element of the text with the thematic development of maternal subjectivity through the mode of magical realism as this allows Lizzy to construct a reality that invites readers to "compassionately

experience the world as many of our fellow human beings see it."[137] That is, it allows Lizzy/Jones to revise the ways in which characters like Lizzy and Zulima are so often scrutinized, condemned, objectified, or discriminated against by others as "nontraditional" mothers.

In light of this multi-layered story, it is important to clarify several points. First, in terms of understanding how this story's new characters fit in to the cycle's theme of interracial relationships and racialized motherhood, it is necessary to reiterate that Al is white, and that despite the initial description of Vince as white, he is later described as "colored" due to his Italian Dominican heritage and looks.[138] Vera/Zulima is black, and Sunshine is biracial. Second, it is important to acknowledge that as the story shifts from Lizzy's initial experience at the thrift store with Elliott to Al's story with his lover, husband, and child, Jones shifts the role of the protagonist from Lizzy as the interracial mother to Al as an interracial father then finally to Zulima as an interracial mother (now of both her biracial son, Malcolm, mentioned earlier, and of Sunshine). Further, though Al fathered Sunshine with Vera/Zulima, Jones's focus is on his relationship with Vince as lovers and as the adoptive fathers of Sunshine, indicating another shift in Jones's text from a heterosexual to homosexual relationship.

In advancing the narrative of "Full Circle" and *In Care* in these multiple ways, Jones uses the final story of the text to signify the breaking down of barriers that she thematically explores throughout the course of the cycle. By erasing the boundaries between the stories and the vignettes and combining them within "Full Circle," Jones "self-consciously expos[es] the way her [text] is constructed [and thus] expose[s] the way interracial relationships are constructed."[139] That is, what Jones ultimately accomplishes

in “Full Circle,” and therefore throughout the whole of *In Care*, is to emphasize life’s fundamental interconnectedness—to highlight the importance of transcending the boundaries between different cultures, races, genders, or sexualities that essentialist ideologies perpetuate and of achieving unity as a result. Doing so, “Full Circle” suggests, can allow for the development of subjectivity and a stable sense of self—represented not only through the plot points I have highlighted, but also through the fact that Lizzy tells the various stories of “Full Circle” through the first-person perspective. Her various roles of woman, mother, and storyteller that had been fragmented and shifting throughout the previous stories and decades have finally been unified and have thus enabled Lizzy to shift back to the narrative perspective of “I.” If the various socially-constructed boundaries described above are perpetuated, the text suggests, figures such as the interracial mother would continue to struggle to develop a subjectivity in the face of discrimination against her “nontraditional” position, and to overcome a fragmented and troubled sense of self, represented in Lizzy’s previous use of the third-person perspective.

By engaging in magical realism, a literary mode used to “problematize present-day disjunctive realities,” Jones extends the text’s earlier engagement with the postmodern discourse of identity fragmentation and destabilization.[140] Having gradually progressed from an unstable sense of self that shifted from Lizzy to Nelly as well as from “I” to “she,” Lizzy fully comes into her own as a storyteller here. She narrates from the first-person perspective and interestingly shapes a story that creatively captures the attention of her audience by bridging the gap between what is assumed to be real and what is assumed to be fantasy—particularly through the revelation that Zulima is Sunshine’s mother. In the end, Lizzy’s coming into her own as a storyteller signifies the

development of her subjectivity. In this culmination of the thematic and formal elements of the whole cycle, Jones uses the genre of the short story cycle to destabilize the hegemonic and hierarchical categories of race and gender and to portray the progression from disjunction and fragmentation to unity.

The "Happy Ending"

In depicting what may be described as a "happy ending" in "Full Circle"—the uniting of the biracial daughter, Sunshine, with her black mother, Zulima, and Lizzy's development of subjectivity as an interracial mother and storyteller signified in her use of the first person—*In Care* may be scrutinized for perpetuating "the integration illusion"—what Suzanne Jones describes as "images of racial integration served up ubiquitously by whites in power."[141] As Leonard Steinhorn and Barbara Diggs-Brown argue, although desegregation "is a necessary precondition for integration," the two are not the same.[142] Desegregation refers to "the elimination of discriminatory laws and barriers to full participation in American life." Actual racial integration, Steinhorn and Diggs-Brown argue, "is about the realm of life governed by behavior and choice, not by statutes and institutions" and "is built on a universal acceptance of people as individuals." That is, blacks and whites may indeed live next to each other or work together, but this does not necessarily depict integration, which is more accurately described as when "blacks and whites would choose to live side by side, socialize with ease, see each other with peers, recommend each other for jobs" and so forth. In this definition, racial integration relies on both "color-blind[ness] and color-conscious[ness]"—on one person evaluating another based on character, not on skin color, as well as on each person having a mutual respect of one another's cultural background, history, and practices.

Drawing on Suzanne Jones's argument about how to effectively evaluate happy endings in interracial literature and distinguish between "the integration illusion" and actual racial integration, I argue that *In Care* does not merely suggest that racial integration and equality—or maternal subjectivity for that matter—can be achieved easily or effortlessly, nor defined by whites as a categorically privileged race. Rather, as illustrated throughout the corresponding progression of the structure of the short story cycle and of Lizzy's initially fractured and troubled sense of self and lack of subjectivity, Jones uses Lizzy's unique experience as a white mother of biracial children to portray the gradual and complex evolution of race relations in America following from the post-civil rights era. More specifically, she concludes with a "happy ending" that does not carelessly perpetuate "the integration illusion." Jones "suggest[s] that solutions are not simple," and she shows "how intricately conflict [is experienced] and how believably conflict is resolved."[143] It is over the course of four decades and many different struggles and obstacles that Lizzy's development and experience of authority, agency, and authenticity take place. Circling back to the ending of the cycle's first story, "Enough of This," it is important to reiterate that in the beginning of *In Care*, Jones highlights the ever-present racial discrimination that Lizzy still witnesses at the turn of the twenty-first century. Even though Lizzy has a "happy ending" in "Full Circle," this is relative to her multiple complicated experiences with discrimination over the course of many years; it is not to suggest the absence of racial discrimination in the twenty-first century, but rather Lizzy's individual ability to overcome its effects.

V. Conclusion

An anonymous reader for Curbstone Press in 1999 claimed that the primary reason the *In Care of Worth Auto Parts* manuscript was not yet suitable for publication was the lack of “details of the setting, the deep, revelatory contemporaneous details of the people, and the exposing details of the politics and art of the period”—overall, “the raw stuff” necessary “to tell this crucially important story.”[144] The reader’s criticism of *In Care* is fairly accurate; some of the characters and context of the text are underdeveloped. For example, in Jones’s focus on the narrative of the interracial experience from the perspective of the white mother, she deprives the protagonist’s children of sufficient characterization that could help readers better understand the mother’s own situation and struggles. Additionally, there are a few minor inconsistencies between the stories—though these seem reflective of the status of the manuscript as unfinished—such as the description of the secondary character, Nathan, as a playwright in the first story but as a painter in subsequent stories.

Regardless of any such weaknesses, my analysis illustrates that with *In Care of Worth Auto Parts*, Jones significantly redefines our understanding of the fundamental Beat pursuit of an authentic American experience in several important ways. Drawing on her personal and complex experiences within the Beat community, Jones disrupts and challenges the pattern of developing a white subjectivity at the expense of the romanticization, subordination, exoticism, or primitivism of nonwhites often portrayed in male- and female-authored Beat texts. That is, Jones undermines the essentialist gender and racial categories upheld in prominent Beat fiction and redefines the Beat quest for individual truth. Responding to the separation between whites and blacks and the

marginalization of women in Beat literature and in the post-civil rights period with the rise of the Black Power and Black Arts movements, Jones draws attention to the multifaceted problems that such racial and gender segregation or discrimination can have. She simultaneously emphasizes the possibilities for and the importance of racial integration and equality as well as female subjectivity.

It is through the figure of the interracial mother that Jones addresses various complexities of racial and gender politics beginning in the mid-1960s. She destabilizes the traditional gender and racial dichotomies between whites and nonwhites and between men and women commonly exploited in Beat texts by focusing on a figure whose very experience as a white mother of biracial children, in the case of Lizzy, undermines the stability or rigidity of these dichotomies. The ambiguity of the interracial mother's position in between racial communities enables Jones to portray white characters whose identities are troubled and fragmented and black characters whose identities are well-defined and strong. In challenging hegemonic racial hierarchies in this way, Jones not only revises the representation of race in Beat literature, but also shifts the attention onto a female figure often marginalized in both the Beat and maternal literary traditions.

Drawing attention to the interracial mother and her experiences beginning in 1960s New York City bohemia puts Jones's writing in dialogue with that of di Prima and Johnson in interesting ways. Although *In Care* is initially set in the same general context as di Prima's *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward* and Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance*, a key element of di Prima's and Johnson's work—the New York City bohemian community—plays a notably less prominent role in Jones's short story cycle. As my analysis shows, Jones's text spans from the 1960s to the turn of the twenty-first century,

and her emphasis over the course of these four decades is on the ambiguous positioning of the interracial mother between white and black communities rather than within the New York City Beat community. As I explained earlier, to varying degrees, the Beat community simultaneously resisted and perpetuated hegemonic racial and gender norms, and began to dissolve in the late 1960s. Thus, rather than limit her analysis of racial and gender politics to the context of the Beat community, Jones uses this site as the initial context through which to establish the nature of racial- and gender-based tensions that she then explores more broadly as a way to highlight the implications of their very pervasiveness in society.

Also importantly, whereas di Prima and Johnson seek to develop a subjectivity for women in general and for the female bohemian more specifically, this chapter argues that Jones seeks to develop a female subjectivity specific to the experience of the mother—and of the nontraditional or racialized mother in particular—which illustrates how Jones distinctively engages in the women Beats' discourse of protofeminism. Chapter Two demonstrated how Johnson's treatment of female subjectivity both engaged in and revised that in di Prima's work; this chapter illustrates how Jones's focus on maternal subjectivity further extends the ways in which both di Prima and Johnson explore the development of female subjectivity. This isn't to overlook how some of di Prima's early poetry draws much-needed attention to the female perspective of the experience of motherhood. Rather, this is to highlight how, for Jones, this experience is inextricably and explicitly linked to issues of race.

Significantly, Jones explores essential Beat questions of identity and authenticity by engaging in the discourse of postmodernism. As this chapter illustrates, the

postmodern experience of the interracial mother is embodied through the genre of the short story cycle, the thematic treatment of multiple, shifting identities, and the use of metanarrative techniques. In all of these ways, Jones illustrates the fundamental fragmentation and self-reflexivity that defines postmodernism. Further, in using the unique structure of the short story cycle to stylistically perform the experiences of disunity and unity, Jones concludes *In Care* with a "happy ending" that also interestingly disrupts the defining fragmentation and ambivalence of much postmodernist fiction.

All of these accomplishments demonstrate that despite any shortcomings of Jones's short story cycle, *In Care of Worth Auto Parts* significantly expands our understanding of Jones's contributions to the Beat literary tradition. More than a memoirist, Jones is a versatile writer who examines issues of race and gender in ways heretofore absent within the Beat tradition. Although Jones's development as a writer was more tentative and gradual than other women Beats, it is clear that her formative experiences within the Beat community shaped her work as a writer in unquestionably important ways. Reading her work alongside that of di Prima's and Johnson's illustrates each writer's uniqueness and highlights the many ways in which they redefine the literary history of the Beats. In the Epilogue that follows, I add Carol Bergé and Mimi Albert to this discussion, shifting them from the margins to the center of the discourse on women Beats.

NOTES

1. H. Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones, A Memoir* (New York: Dutton, 1990), 24.

2. For consistency, I refer to Hettie Jones as Jones and to LeRoi Jones as Baraka.

3. As discussed in the Introduction, several women Beats writers did not begin writing, writing publicly, or publishing until after the Beat period. As such, many readings of women Beats' work examine texts written after this literary movement that are, nevertheless, fundamentally rooted in implicit or explicit connections to the Beat period through the treatment of quintessential Beat concerns or the practice of Beat aesthetics. See Charters for more on the continuation of Beat literature in the 1970s and 1980s.

4. For example, see Damon and A. Friedman.

5. This connection between each writer's experience and the degree to which this experience shapes her work is not meant to suggest that race is not an issue in the work of di Prima or Johnson. The distinction here is that while race figures into di Prima's and Johnson's work in the development of a white female subjectivity, it is not an explicit focus for them. More specifically, di Prima's poetic use of slang in *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward* was bound up in the language's roots in the black vernacular and was simultaneously representative of the Beat endeavor to blur racial boundaries, but this aspect of her poetics is only implicitly expressed as she seeks primarily to represent the individualism of the bohemian and the subjectivity of the female bohemian. For Johnson, the gendered dichotomy of private and public space was implicitly rooted in the context of a white, middle-class identity that likewise defined the female subjectivity that she constructed throughout *Come and Join the Dance*, but race was not treated overtly in the novel. Jones's principal focus on the intersections between race and gender in her writing therefore extends the ways in which race is generally treated in much women Beats' work.

6. Emphasizing the relationship between gender and race as it affects the figure of the mother in particular, Laura Doyle argues that "hierarchies of race and gender *require* one another as co-originating and co-dependent forms of oppression rather than merely parallel, compounded, or intersecting forms; and … these co-dependent structures of race and sex converge especially on the mother, who reproduces racial boundaries in her function as subservient procreator." *Bordering on the Body: The Racial Matrix of Modern Fiction and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 21.

7. Throughout the chapter, I draw on Elaine Tuttle Hansen's use of the term "nontraditional" to describe this particular experience of motherhood in which the mother is marginalized due to racial differences from her children. In *Mother Without Child: Contemporary Fiction and the Crisis of Motherhood*, Hansen identifies various other types of "nontraditional" mothers, including lesbian mothers, mothers without custody of their children, slave mothers, etc. *Mother*, 9-10.

8. Patricia Hill Collins, "Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood," *Representations of Motherhood*, ed. Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey, and Meryle Kaplan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 61. Collins explains, "The importance of working for the physical survival of children and community, the dialectical nature of power and powerlessness in structuring mothering patterns, and the significance of self-definition in constructing individual and collective racial identity comprise three core themes characterizing the experiences of Native American, African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American women." "Shifting," 61.

9. R. Johnson, "'You're Putting Me On,'" 47.

10. H. Jones, *In Care of Worth Auto Parts*, n.d., Hettie Jones Papers, Box 24, Folder 1, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York, 68.

11. Johnson and Grace connect the Beats' emphasis on "individual truth" to a fundamentally "masculinist Emersonian" impulse, and I apply this phrasing of "individual truth" to my analysis of Jones's work accordingly. "Visions," 10.

12. As noted in the Introduction, Jones's work might more accurately be considered feminist in light of the fact that she did not begin writing much of it (including *In Care*) until the 1970s. However, I refer to Jones's treatment of female subjectivity within this text as protofeminist in keeping with the consistent characterization of women Beats as such in current Beat scholarship. This is not to overlook the importance of how the text is shaped by its composition beginning in the post-civil rights period and the early feminist movement but rather to reflect the fundamental distinction in "promise" and style between the work of many of the women Beats and that of feminist writers such as Adrienne Rich. See R. Johnson, "'And Then,'" 70.

13. For more on the Beats and postmodernism, see R. Johnson's "Mapping Women Writers of the Beat Generation" and "'You're putting me on:' Jack Kerouac and the Postmodern Emergence," Tony Trigilio's "'Will You Please Stop Playing with the Mantra?': The Embodied Poetics of Ginsberg's Later Career," and Erik Mortenson's *Capturing the Beat Moment: Cultural Politics and the Poetics of Presence*, as well as various discussions of the work of William Burroughs.

14. Farrell O'Gorman, "The Things They Carried as Composite Novel," *War, Literature, and the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities* 10.2 (1998): 294.

15. Karen Weekes, "Postmodernism in Women's Short Story Cycles: Lorrie Moore's *Anagrams*," *The Postmodern Short Story: Forms and Issues* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 95, 96. The subsequent quotations in this paragraph are also from this text: 97, 103, 104.

16. Doyle explains that the figure of "the racialized mother" is one for whom "the boundaries of race or ethnicity crucially constitute [her] importance." (*Bordering*, 3-4). I

use this term accordingly when referring broadly to the experience of motherhood as significantly shaped in any way by the mother's race or that of her children. I use the term "interracial mother" when referring more specifically to the particular experience of a cross-racial relationship between mother and child.

17. Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly, ed., *Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2010), 17.

18. Podnieks and O'Reilly, 18.

19. Jones, *How I Became*, 24.

20. Though Queens and Manhattan are both a part of New York City proper, my general references to the Beat community as a New York City community refer specifically to Manhattan. Here I mark the distinction to prevent confusion with Queens.

21. Jones, *How I Became*, 10. The subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from the same text: 26, 10.

Unless otherwise noted, the quotations in the next few paragraphs are from *How I Became* as well, and for readability, the corresponding note is provided after the final quotation of each respective paragraph.

22. *How I Became*, 13, 26, 13, 13.

23. *How I Became*, 44.

24. This representative list of contemporary journals indicates the range of ideas to which Jones was exposed. For example, the *Kenyon Review* fostered the ideas and poets of the New Criticism, while *Dissent* was (and continues to be) "a magazine of the Left," a "radical" departure from the traditionalism pervading the literary scene at the time. *Dissent*, Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, 2008, Web.

25. *How I Became*, 8, 43-44, 45, 44, 163, 27.

26. Baraka was applying for the position of Shipping Manager.

27. *How I Became*, 144.

28. "Yugen" is a Japanese term defined as: "The subtle and the profound. Yugen is at the core of the appreciation of beauty and art in Japan. It values the power to evoke, rather that the ability to state directly. The principle of Yugen shows that real beauty exists when, through its suggestiveness, only a few words, or few brush strokes, can suggest what has not been said or shown, and hence awaken many inner thoughts and feelings." Jonathan P. Walsh, "Japan - from Asahi to Zen," *Melmoth the Wanderer* (Jonathan P. Walsh, 1998), Web.

29. Brenda Frazer, "Artista," interview by Grace, *Breaking*, 125.

30. *How I Became*, 55.

31. Helene Dorn was the wife of Black Mountain poet Ed Dorn. Per my personal telephone interview with Jones on Feb. 14, 2011, she is currently working on publishing a collection of their correspondence.

32. *How I Became*, 130-131, 130.

33. *How I Became*, 234, 85, 99.

34. Jones, "Drive," interview by Grace, *Breaking*, 168.

35. *How I Became*, 57, 217.

36. *How I Became*, 36. As before, unless otherwise noted, the quotations in the next few paragraphs are from *How I Became*, noted after the final quotation of each respective paragraph.

37. See Renee Romano's discussion of how interracial relationships, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, "make clear the tenuous nature of the boundary between what is traditionally considered 'public' and what is traditionally considered 'private.'" *Race Mixing: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 9.

38. *How I Became*, 35, 35, 34, 36, 36, 34, 35, 34, 34.

39. It is important to note that Jones is not alone in her optimistic account of the state of interracial relationships during this time and at the Five Spot in particular. Jon Panish cites similar accounts by historian Terry Miller, musician David Amram, and writer Dan Wakefield. In response to such accounts, however, Panish argues that "the dawn of harmonious interracial relations in the Village … never came close to realization. Despite the optimistic rhetoric and high expectations, the achievement of an integrated Village community occurred only in relatively superficial interpersonal relationships and myth." (*The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture* [Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997], 27.) I discuss how this is illustrated in Beat literature in the next section.

40. *How I Became*, 14, 17, 14.

41. Deborah Thompson, "Keeping Up with the Joneses: The Naming of Racial Identities in the Autobiographical Writings of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Hettie Jones, and Lisa Jones," *College Literature* 29.1 (Winter 2002): 91.

42. Romano, 115.

43. Romano, 115-116.

44. Romano, 110, 143.

45. *How I Became*, 14, 202.

46. Panish, 32.

47. Smethurst notes that in addition to his literary and cultural contributions, Baraka "coin[ed] … the term that came to designate the [Black Arts] movement." (*Black Arts*, 100.) Andrew Epstein likewise credits Baraka for having founded the movement. See *Beautiful Enemies: Friendship and Postwar American Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 13.

48. Epstein, 168.

49. Epstein, 168.

50. See *How I Became Hettie Jones* as well as di Prima's *Recollections of My Life as a Woman* for each woman's account of the relationship between di Prima and Baraka, including the details of di Prima and Baraka's child.

51. See Baraka's autobiography for more on this, as well as his autobiographical play, *The Slave* (under LeRoi Jones), which depicts the ambivalence with which Baraka struggled surrounding his decision to leave Jones.

52. See Romano for a discussion of how Baraka's racially-driven departure from his family and community was not uncommon for black leaders at the time, as well as of the tendency of white partners in interracial families to assimilate into black communities.

53. Jones, "Drive," 164.

54. Grace qtd. in Jones, "Drive," 157.

55. Jones, "Drive," 164.

56. Grace qtd. in Jones, "Drive," 157.

57. Jones, *Drive* (New York: Hanging Loose Press, 1997), 14. The subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from the same page.

58. "Drive," 165-166.

59. This and the next quotation are from *Drive*, 28.

60. Grace, "Snapshots," 157.

61. "Snapshots," 153.

62. Thompson, 84.

63. Barrett Watten, "What I See in *How I Became Hettie Jones*," *Girls Who Wore Black*, 84. The subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from the same source: 114.

64. See Chapter One for a discussion of how race figures into Beat poetry, and see Chapters One and Two for discussions of the representation of gender and of female roles, in particular, in Beat literature.

65. Skerl, *Reconstructing*, 4. Panish argues that despite the presence of both white and black artists in the Beat community, "the Village community—including its social, political, cultural, and economic dimensions—remained predominantly separate and unequal during [this] period." *The Color of Jazz*, 27.

66. Mailer, "The White Negro," 338, 339, 339. It is important to note that Mailer's text has been criticized for its "profound lack of understanding of the 'mind' of the racial other." Manuel Luis Martinez, *Countering the Counterculture: Rereading Postwar American Dissent from Jack Kerouac to Tomás Rivera* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 84.

67. Mailer, 340.

68. Steve Wilson, "The Author as Spiritual Pilgrim: The Search for Authenticity in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and *The Subterraneans*," *The Beat Generation: Critical Essays*, 78.

69. S. Wilson, 78-79. For additional discussions of European Americans' attraction to African American culture, see Panish and Wini Breines.

70. Holton, 22.

71. Kerouac, "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," *Good Blonde & Others* (San Francisco, CA: Grey Fox Press, 2001), 69.

72. Regina Weinreich, *Kerouac's Spontaneous Poetics: A Study of the Fiction* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1987), 8.

73. Martinez, 77.

74. Kerouac, *On the Road*, 180.

75. Grace, "A White Man in Love: A Study of Race, Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in Jack Kerouac's *Maggie Cassidy, The Subterraneans,* and *Tristessa*," *The Beat Generation: Critical Essays*, 95, 94.

76. "White Man in Love," 94.

77. Martinez, 64-65. "Fellaheen" is a term derived from German historian Oswald Spengler, referring to "'the peasantry, 'everlasting' and historyless … the primitive people, surviving when the form of the nation passed away again.'" (Qtd. in John Lardas, *The Bop Apocalypse: The Religious Visions of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001], 118.) According to Lardas, "For each Beat [Kerouac, Burroughs, and Ginsberg], those despised and rejected people without status qualifications or socially desirable characteristics represented the essence of America." (*Bop Apocalypse*, 118.) As such, fellaheen functions in the same vein as the racial, ethnic, and social "other" that the Beats were fundamentally drawn to, as a broader term that theoretically includes Mailer's image of the African American figure that the Beats sought to appropriate.

78. Frazer, *Troia: Mexican Memoirs* (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2007), 39.

79. Frazer, *Troia*, 39.

80. Frazer, "Artista," 124.

81. Kerouac, *On the Road*, 180.

82. John R. Cooley, *Savages and Naturals: Black Portraits by White Writers in Modern American Literature* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1982), 143.

83. Holton, 22. The subsequent quotation is from the same page.

84. Amor Kohli, "Black Skins, Beat Masks: Bob Kaufman and the Blackness of Jazz," *Reconstructing the Beats*, 107. In a similar vein, Panish criticizes scholars who attempt to temper the implications of the Beats' exercising of white privilege. He cites Wini Breines, for example, who claims, "'Young people and bohemians in the fifties were learning about white culture by appreciating black culture; if they were racist in their objectifications … they were also drawn to it respectfully.'" (Qtd. in Panish, 18.) In response to such accounts, Panish argues that "If we understand 'respect' to connote not only esteem but also the kind of deference that prevents one from interfering with the object of esteem, then we cannot say the white youth and outsiders respected African American culture. It was precisely because these Euro Americans stood in superior social and political position vis-à-vis African American culture that they could appropriate or exploit these resources." *Color of Jazz*, 18.

85. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 46, 46, 44. This overlaps with my analysis of race in the context of di Prima's (and other white writers') use of black dialect or slang in their poetry. For additional studies of white American writers' appropriations of racial or ethnic cultures within both poetry and prose of the 19th and 20th centuries, see John Cooley's *Savages and Naturals: Black Portraits by White Writers in Modern American*

Literature, Renée Curry's *White Women Writing White: H.D., Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath, and Whiteness*, Rachel DuPlessis's "'Darken Your Speech': Racialized Cultural Work of Modernist Poets," Aldon Nielsen's *Reading Race: White American Poets and the Racial Discourse in the Twentieth Century*, and Jean Radford's "Race and Ethnicity in White Women's Modernist Literature."

86. Martinez, 28. The subsequent quotation is from the same page.

87. Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement," *The Drama Review: TDR* 12:4 (Summer, 1968): 30.

88. Smethurst, 87.

89. Smethurst, 86.

90. After its first series from 1966 to 1969, which published writers such as Fielding Dawson, Jerome Rothenberg, Grace Paley, and Diane Wakoski, *IKON* was reincarnated in 1982 with a focus on women artists. The issues that include Jones's stories (1982/1983, 1984, and 1986) also include works by writers such as Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, Adrienne Rich, Sonia Sanchez, Margaret Randall, and Meena Alexander.

Ploughshares boasts that "Many of today's most respected writers had their first or early work published in *Ploughshares*," and such writers and guest editors include Tim O'Brien, Robert Pinsky, Jayne Anne Phillips, Rosellen Brown, Raymond Carver, and Tobias Wolff. *Ploughshares* (Ploughshares, 2010), Web.

91. Sally Arteseros, letter to Hettie Jones, March 30, 1981, Hettie Jones Papers, Box 24, Folder 2, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

92. Sandy (no last name, from Curbstone Press), letter to Hettie Jones, November 10, 1999, Hettie Jones Papers, Box 24, Folder 2, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

93. As she explained to me in our telephone interview on Feb. 14, 2011, Jones is working on publishing some of these stories in a collection entitled *Race Tracks*.

94. For a discussion of the genre's various identifiers, see Roxanne Harde, "Teaching Women's Story Books: Genre and Gender Politics in Lives of Girls and Women," *Eureka Studies in Teaching Short Fiction* 6.2 (2006): 54-61.

95. Rocio G. Davis, "Oral Narrative as Short Story Cycle: Forging Community in Edwidge Danticat's 'Krik? Krak!'" *MELUS* 26:2 (Summer, 2001): 65-66.

96. Harde, 57.

97. Jones, “Enough of This,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 13.2 (Winter 1993): 98. “Enough of This” was missing from the archived manuscript of *In Care*, and so my citations in this discussion refer to the page numbers of its published version in *Frontiers*.

The quotations in the next few paragraphs are from this source and are noted after the final quotation of each respective paragraph.

98. “Enough,” 98, 98.

99. “Enough,” 97, 98.

100. All of the quotations in this paragraph are from pg. 100.

101. Social class is inevitably linked to issues of race in incidents such as this one but is outside of the scope of my analysis.

102. R. Johnson, “‘You’re Putting Me On,’” 47.

103. Jones, *In Care*, 11.

104. Regarding my earlier review of scholarship on Jones’s work, note the overlap between my focus on multiple identities and naming in *In Care* with Grace’s attention to the multiplicity of Jones’s representation of herself and Thompson’s attention to the function of naming within her memoir. This overlap in analyses highlights the various ways in which these thematic and formal elements take shape throughout Jones’s body of work.

105. Jones’s choice of “Nelly” is worth noting. In Baraka’s 1984 autobiography, he used “Nellie Kohn” to refer to Jones (with her maiden name, Cohen). In my conversation with Jones, she recalls deliberately using “Nelly” here “out of spite”—that she was “trying to distance [herself] from how [she] felt about being disappeared.” This is implied within the context of this story, when Lizzy describes how, as Nelly, she felt “a slow collapse of herself” and “decide[s] to call it ‘getting Nellied.’” (*In Care*, 19.) It is interesting to note how she is indirectly indicting Baraka here for essentially erasing her from his life.

106. *In Care*, 19, 22. As before, unless otherwise noted, the quotations in this section of the chapter are from the *In Care* manuscript, cited after the final quotation of each respective paragraph. I will use this pattern as necessary throughout the remainder of the chapter.

107. *In Care*, 24, 15.

108. *In Care*, 16, 16, 15, 17, 17.

109. R. Johnson, “‘You’re Putting Me On,’” 46.

110. "'You're Putting Me On,'" 48.

111. Collins, 61.

112. To reiterate, my use of the term "nontraditional" here follows from Hansen to refer to a figure such as Lizzy who doesn't belong to either the white or black community by virtue of her interracial motherhood.

113. R. Johnson, "'You're Putting Me On,'" 51.

114. *In Care*, 19, 20, 23, 23.

115. *In Care*, 29, 27.

116. That Jones does not name Lizzy's daughters is particularly interesting in light of the fact that an anonymous reviewer of the manuscript identified this as one of the missing elements of the text that he/she would like to know (and thinks readers should know) more about. (Hettie Jones Papers, Box 24, Folder 2, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.) In response to this suggestion, Jones explained to a publisher (in a letter to Victoria—no last name—presumably at Curbstone Press dated September 21, 2000) that although she considered cutting out the other daughters—who are mentioned only once or twice in passing—and including only the middle daughter "with a proper name," she then took the advice of her own daughter not to do so. Jones explains in the letter, "She said that 'the middle daughter,' generically, is someone who is often overlooked, or left out, and to focus on her as that would be inclusive rather than dismissive. But then she has not read the ms as a whole. So I am entirely open to suggestion re this." (Jones, Letter.) This suggests, of course, that perhaps had Jones not abandoned the manuscript, she may have ended up naming this or all three daughters in the narrative. Nevertheless, in its current form, the absence of names for her children highlights Jones's attempt to focus primarily on the figure of the mother.

117. Though not exclusively symbolic for African American culture, the ankh is often used to represent "Afro-centrism and Black pride." *The Ankh: Key of Life* (San Francisco, CA: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2007), 47.

118. All of the quotations in this paragraph are from *In Care*, 31 (emphasis in original).

119. Same as previous note.

120. *In Care*, 27, 28 (emphasis in original).

121. R. Johnson, "'You're Putting Me On,'" 51.

122. *In Care*, 29 (emphasis in original).

123. Madeleine Sorapure, "Paul Auster," *Postmodernism: The Key Figures* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 23-24.

124. As Podnieks and O'Reilly discuss, following in large part from Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976), "mothers are significantly prominent" in "postmodernist plots of the 1970s and 1980s," representing a "shift from the daughter-centric stories … that [had] … dominated maternal traditions." *Textual Mothers*, 9, 9, 2.

125. Jones's text also notably shifts the focus of much interracial literature from the mixed-race figure to the white figure of interracial relationships.

126. The phrase "textual mother" is from the title of Podnieks and O'Reilly's book.

127. Podnieks and O'Reilly, 10 (emphasis added).

128. *In Care*, 72, 71-72, 76, 80, 77.

129. This isn't to suggest that Jones (or I) overlooks how class differences may complicate the ability for any woman to get an abortion; however, as noted earlier, this is outside of the scope of my discussion.

130. *In Care*, 68, 68.

131. *In Care*, 80.

132. R. Johnson, "'You're Putting Me On,'" 51.

133. Theo L. D'Haen, "Magical Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centers," *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 194; Bruce Holland Rogers, "What Is Magical Realism, Really?," *Writing-World* (Moira Allen, Inc., 2002), Web.

134. Rogers; Thomas Crisp, "From Romance to Magical Realism: Limits and Possibilities in Gay Adolescent Fiction," *Children's Literature in Education: An International Quarterly* 40.4 (2009): 340.

135. *In Care*, 219 (emphasis in original), 221, 221, 222.

136. *In Care*, 214 (emphasis in original), 220, 221.

137. Rogers.

138. *In Care*, 215.

139. Suzanne W. Jones, *Race Mixing: Southern Fiction Since the Sixties* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 96.

140. Jasmina Murad, *Magical Realism in Toni Morrison's Beloved and Ana Castillo's So Far From God* (Norderstedt, Germany: Druck and Bindung, 2006), 3.

141. S. Jones, 15, 12.

142. Leonard Steinhorn and Barbara Diggs-Brown, ed., *By the Color of Our Skin: The Illusion of Integration and the Reality of Race* (New York: Dutton, 1999), 5. The subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from the same source: 5, 5, 6, 6, 5.

143. S. Jones, 15, 14.

144. Rev. of *In Care of Worth Auto Parts*, Hettie Jones Papers, Box 24, Folder 2, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

EPILOGUE
"WE ARE MEMBERS OF THAT ANOMALOUS GROUP OF THE 50S": CAROL BERGÉ AND MIMI ALBERT

The preceding chapters have argued that the achievements of Diane di Prima, Joyce Johnson, and Hettie Jones extend beyond their few texts that currently receive scholarly attention, namely their autobiographical works. Attention to how each writer's experience within the Beat literary community takes shape in select texts reveals daring protofeminist work that explores central Beat themes through the lens of the female perspective and, importantly, develops varied models of female subjectivity that are otherwise absent in Beat literature. Through challenging cultural norms and experimenting with formal literary conventions, these writers significantly revise our understanding of female writers of the Beat movement and of its history and literary tradition more broadly. Extending current scholarly attention to the lives and work of these three writers, though, is only part of the recovery of women Beat writers.

Noted earlier, the canon of women Beats is subjective and fluid. Despite this open-endedness, within the existing critical work on women Beats there is attention primarily to only a handful of writers. As a result, many female Beat writers remain absent from Beat studies. The goal of this epilogue is to establish a more expansive canon of women Beats as it explores how lesser known female Beats also importantly engage in fundamental Beat issues. Specifically, this epilogue introduces Carol Bergé and Mimi Albert into Beat literary studies by providing an overview of their lives and work and discussing a representative text from each writer within the critical framework established in the preceding chapters. I set out to enter these currently understudied writers into Beat scholarship by exploring the continuities and disparities between their

work as well as between theirs and the work of the more recognizable Beat women. In doing so, this epilogue provides a more comprehensive narrative of Beat literary history and demonstrates the importance of including these and other currently understudied women writers into Beat studies.

As explained in the Introduction, I have chosen to include Bergé and Albert here not only because they each contribute to our understanding of Beat literature and history in important and distinctive ways, but also in light of their differences from the writers included in Chapters One through Three. That is, although Bergé's and Albert's participation in the New York City Beat literary community overlapped with that of di Prima, Johnson, and Jones in various ways, the latter three writers were more intimately connected to one another as well as to prominent male Beats. This major biographical difference may largely contribute to the distinction between the current literary status of di Prima, Johnson, and Jones and that of Bergé and Albert. Indeed, Bergé and Albert represent many other women Beats who may also have been relatively less directly involved in the Beat community or who were not romantically linked to prominent Beat men—but are nevertheless valuable figures in this literary community. My inclusion of Bergé and Albert endeavors to broaden our current understanding of the women Beats by extending critical attention beyond those few writers who more frequently appear in existing scholarship—perhaps because of their personal and working relationships with one another and with Beat men. This epilogue presents Bergé and Albert as undeniably important writers in their own right and as representative of a broader spectrum of women Beats who remain unrecognized.

The title of this epilogue comes from Albert's novel, *Skirts*, and is useful in signaling that despite the current status of Bergé and Albert on the periphery of Beat studies, these two writers were indeed involved in the Beat literary community and have contributed to it through their lives and work in important ways. In the context of Albert's novel, initially set in late 1961, 21-year old Helene Elphrick is reflecting on her and her friends' "misfit" status.[1] In the passage quoted in my epilogue title, "We are members of that anomalous group of the 50s,"[2] Helene asserts that despite any former associations with "conventional" peers or behaviors, she and her friends in fact don't fit in to the "norm." They find themselves rejecting the "proper trappings of a New York virgin in the 1950s"; they skip prom in order to be "on 'the scene.'"[3] They cut school and quit work in order to immerse themselves in the arts scene, hanging out at the Cedar Tavern and the Five Spot, getting to know various artists and writers who "create, [who] pull new things out of themselves and let them breathe."[4] In the terms used to describe the Beats, Helene and friends find themselves drawn to those who seek—and they are themselves in pursuit of—an authentic experience primarily through art, or in general through a rejection of mainstream culture and values. Though their families or peers may have yet to recognize their "misfit" status, Helene and friends quite clearly see themselves as part of the postwar countercultural community. It is my contention that this same level of recognition applies to Bergé and Albert—they were likewise part of the Beat community and should no longer be elided from its history.

The inclusion of Bergé and Albert in this study broadens our understanding not only of the women Beats, but also of the Beat community more broadly. Calling attention to the work of Bergé and Albert allows us to gain more insight into how women Beats

developed as writers within a literary community and historical context that generally subordinated women to the role of wife, lover, or mother. This expanded Beat narrative illustrates how the work of Bergé and Albert resists and revises literary and cultural conventions in unique ways, further exemplifying the important protofeminist work of the women Beats.

Carol Bergé

Carol Bergé (née Peppis) was born in Manhattan in 1928 and published over 20 books, including poetry, novels, short stories, and nonfiction, between the early 1960s and her death in 2006. She wrote her first story at age eight and her first poem at age fourteen; before publishing her writing, Bergé worked as a journalist and editorial assistant in the 1950s. She attended (without graduating) NYU, Columbia University, and The New School, studying literary arts and production, social science, and the fine arts. During her time at NYU, she had poems published in the NYU-based *Lines & Letters*. Her first poetry chapbook, *The Vulnerable Island*, was published in 1964 and was followed by two more chapbooks, *Poems Made of Skin* (1968) and *Circles, as in the Eye* (1969). In 1964, Bergé also published her first nonfiction text, *The Vancouver Report: A Report and Discussion of the Poetry Seminar at the University of British Columbia*. These publications were followed by several books of poetry, including *An American Romance* (1969), *From a Soft Angle* (1971), and *A Song, A Chant* (1978). Bergé's first work of fiction, *The Unfolding (Part 1)*, was published in 1969, and contains two short stories that were then included in a larger collection of short stories and novellas, *A Couple Called Moebius: Eleven Sensual Stories* (1972). She subsequently published several novellas, including *Hanging Tough* (1974), experimental fiction, such as *Food &*

Love (1974) and *Watch Out for Children* (1975), and several more books through the early 1990s, such as *Acts of Love: An American Novel* (1973), *Fierce Metronome: The One-Page Novels* (1981), and *Zebras; or, Contour Lines* (1991).

Bergé received various literary awards throughout her writing career: the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation fellowship in 1964, a grant in fiction from the New York State Council on the Arts in 1974, and a National Endowment fellowship for creative writing, with which she published a collection of short stories, *Timepieces*, in 1977. In addition to writing, Bergé was an editor for various publishing houses, the founder and sole editor of an international avant-garde literary magazine, *Center*, from 1970 to 1984, as well as a teacher at several universities. Her diversity as an artist is further evident in her more recent pursuit of her lifelong interest in antiques, opening Blue Gate Art and Antiques in Santa Fe and publishing *ANTICS: For Everyone Who Loves Antiques… "A Book of Ours"* in 2005, a year before her death.

Bergé's inclusion in LeRoi Jones's *Four Young Lady Poets* in 1962 helped establish her as a burgeoning New York City poet and indicates her recognition by male avant-garde writers at the time—not unlike di Prima's status among Ginsberg and others.[5] Bergé played a prominent role in the 1960s New York City poetry scene: she was one of the original organizers of the reading series at Les Deux Mégots café (starting in 1961) and played an active role in the readings at Le Metro café (starting in 1963). Both cafés were predecessors to the prolific St. Marks Poetry Project (starting in 1966) and hosted readings by Beat poets such as di Prima, Lenore Kandell, Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, and John Wieners, Black Mountain poets such as Paul Blackburn and Joel Oppenheimer, and New York School Poets such as Ron Padgett and Ted Berrigan.[6]

Undoubtedly, Bergé played an integral role in the development of this distinguished American poetry community.[7]

In addition to her role as organizer in the Lower East Side poetry scene, Bergé contributed to this community of avant-garde poets and its influence on subsequent cultural forms and practices through her work as a documentarian. *The Vancouver Report* (1964) documents the pivotal three-week seminar at the University of British Columbia led by innovative New American poets, such as Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan. She subsequently published *A Chronograph of the Poets* in 1965, and *Light Years: An Anthology on Sociocultural Happenings* (*Multimedia in the East Village, 1960-1966)* was published posthumously in 2009. For this latter book, Bergé edited a collection of memoirs by various poets, novelists, and playwrights, who developed as writers alongside visual and performing artists of the New York City downtown scene and created an innovative and influential arts community. As she writes in the Introduction,

> the memoirs illustrate how these writers took poetry off the page, how they developed the heady amalgam multimedia. Voices and words were thrust into perspectives where the body and the space around it became extensions of poetry; this is what made the Light Years poets different from others of its era: taking skills into the realms of audio and visual experimentation, and exercising freedom to reconstitute academic learning so as to create new arts.

Bergé sets out to highlight not only the uniqueness of this group of artists, but also its impact on later generations. She argues, "[The] chapters [in *Light Years*] intimate how the avant-garde becomes classical and is incorporated into culture, with innovative performances and adventurous objets d'art forming a basis for a mainstream of the future."[8] Bergé's work as a documentarian attests to her contribution to this important piece of American literary and cultural history, and participating in this arts scene in New

York City was a vital part of her own development as a writer. Through her involvement in this community, Bergé developed ideas about and approaches to writing that would take shape throughout her literary career.

Despite Bergé's active role within the 1960s poetry scene, her work remains largely overshadowed by attention to her male counterparts. As with other women Beat writers, Bergé was subject to marginalization as a woman writer even by her avant-garde contemporaries. Within the particular context of the Lower East Side poetic community, poet and editor Ed Sanders illustrates what he considered, as described by Daniel Kane, "the link between nontraditional sexual mores and oral poetry" at Les Deux Mégots café.[9] In what reads as an advertisement for upcoming poetry readings published in his mimeograph, *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*, Sanders writes:

> Carol Bergé: Sweet poetess whom the entire Editorial Board, you may know, would just love to fuck. Known to lurk about the Les Deux Mégots Coffee House on Mondays, Wednesdays, & Thursdays.
>
> Mary Mayo: fur burger supreme. Poetess. Hustles at the Les Deux Mégots on Mondays & Wednesdays.[10]

However satirical such references to female poets were intended to be,[11] the sexual objectification of Bergé and Mayo in these passages is not unlike the misogynist representation of women in male-authored Beat poetry and fiction described in previous chapters and similarly undermines the status of such female poets. This treatment of Bergé and Mayo as sex objects shows the obstacles such female writers confronted and worked to challenge through their writing. Bergé may have been a leader and active participant in the avant-garde poetry scene, but her role as a woman unquestionably affected her experiences as a writer and her status in literary history. As mentioned earlier, there are no critical studies of Bergé's work at this time, yet she was a prolific

writer with a multi-genre body of work, which signifies her versatility and reveals valuable contributions to the literary tradition of women Beats, specifically, and to Beat literature and history, more broadly.

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In this epilogue, I examine Bergé's novella, "In Motion." Written in 1965 and published in her 1972 collection of short fiction, *A Couple Called Moebius*, "In Motion" illustrates Bergé's critical stance toward postwar social and cultural norms, undoubtedly shaped by her experiences as a female writer in the Beat and contemporary avant-garde arts communities. My analysis of this novella focuses on how Bergé, like di Prima, Johnson, and Jones, critiques the mainstream's "modernization" and its subsequent "homogenization" as well as postwar hegemonic gender norms.[12] My analysis also highlights how Bergé diverges from these other writers' approaches through, for example, non-bohemian characters and settings and a unique take on female subjectivity as it is developed through a mutually constitutive relationship, rather than as an autonomous process. Further, looking closely at one of Bergé's novellas—the fourth genre examined in *The Girl Gang*—highlights the genre diversity of the women Beats.

As critic William Giraldi argues, "an expert novella combines the best of a short story with the best of a novel."[13] That is, the novella generally focuses on a small number of characters and a single situation or theme—like a short story—but it does so in considerable depth—like a novel—without losing focus on its movement toward the conclusion. "In Motion" demonstrates how Bergé skillfully uses the genre of the novella as she tells the story of a couple, Louise and Len, over the course of a pivotal two-year period in their lives. Giraldi asserts that it is "difficult to get a novella to span more than a

month" because "development and change take time," but in this novella's fourteen sections, Bergé provides insight into key moments in the characters' lives that enable readers to understand the motivation behind and the impact of some of their most life-defining choices and experiences over a two-year period.[14] She also includes excerpts of stories that Louise and Len have written themselves, which provides a textured narrative perspective and structure that is not precluded by the relatively short length or limited depth of the novella, and she does so without losing focus on the continuity of the story. Though any number of Bergé's texts would fit into a discussion of her contributions to the Beat literary tradition, "In Motion" illustrates Bergé's accomplishments as a writer while importantly drawing attention to the diversity—in character, setting, theme, and genre—of the work of the women Beats.

"In Motion" takes place in the early 1960s. Louise was nineteen years old when she met Len, who was about twenty years older and a public relations businessman. The text is primarily set in Manhattan; however, unlike the other texts examined throughout this dissertation, "In Motion" is not set in the downtown Beat scene or in bohemian culture in general. Rather, Bergé explores fundamental Beat themes of identity and authenticity from an upper class setting. Louise and Len represent a mainstream couple on the upper east side of Manhattan who attempt to embrace the postwar societal and economic advancements that the Beats argued would strip people of their individuality and freedom. In depicting the impact of society's changes on such non-Beat characters, Bergé provides a different perspective than that of di Prima and Jones[15] and exposes how this period was experienced by the very demographic against which the Beats rebelled.

The nature of Louise and Len's experiences themselves ultimately validate the motivation behind the Beats' rejection of mainstream values.

Specifically, from the beginning of the novella, we see how Louise and Len struggle as a couple and as individuals in the postwar context. On one level, we see them struggle between an attempt to live as a typical mainstream couple of the 1960s—with Len at work on Madison Avenue and Louise at home minding the maid—and the couple's growing feelings of entrapment in this life that is motivated by materialism and a desire for upward mobility. Both characters have an innate passion for the arts (he writes poetry and fiction and she yearns to paint—like key figures in the works of di Prima, Johnson, and Jones), but these pursuits are suppressed by the couple's attempts to play the roles society expects of them. The majority of Len's time is spent working at a job that he finds creatively stifling but that enables him to provide an affluent lifestyle for him and Louise, and Louise dutifully fills her time shopping and tending to their home. As the novella begins, they are beginning to realize that this is not a life of their own choosing, but rather a life they think they are supposed to lead.

Embedded within this larger critique of the postwar ideal of social mobility is Bergé's critique of the dominant gender discourse of the period. Through much of the text, Louise struggles against her assigned subordinate role as a woman, which is perpetuated by her husband, who continually treats her as something in his control, as one of his possessions. In fact, the oppression that Louise suffers culminates when she intentionally overdoses on a bottle of sleeping pills midway through the text. After she recovers from this pivotal experience, however, Louise and Len seek therapy and endeavor to improve their marriage and their lives in general. At the end of the text, they

have left New York City and are living happily on a farm in France, expecting their first child—an ending that intervenes in Beat discourses in various important ways.

The characterization of Louise and Len and the complex dynamic between them help illustrate the oppressive female gender norm that Bergé sets out to critique throughout the text. Notably, Louise is different from the female characters developed in the work of the other women Beats studied in this dissertation; for example, she comes from a wealthy family and attended finishing-school in Maine. Her attraction to "sex and pot" might align her with the typical female bohemian in her resistance to conventional "good girl" behavior, but Louise's representative act of rebellion against her conservative parents is interestingly different from a typical female Beat's assertion of independence from her parents often represented through dropping out of school or acquiring an office job.[16] In contrast, having told her parents she was attending another finishing-school, Louise, for a short time, worked as a Playboy Bunny.

Louise was used to gaining attention because of her looks—she was "brilliantly fair, tall, long-legged"—and so, perhaps her experience as a Playboy Bunny illustrates her attempt to use her sexuality as a means to provide for herself, to exploit the way in which men tend to objectify her for her own gain.[17] The lack of subjectivity that she exhibits in her subsequent relationship with Len, though, suggests that her role as a Bunny was not necessarily an act of transgression, but rather indicative of her inability to challenge how she is generally expected to be subordinate to and a sex object for men. Throughout much of their relationship, Louise passively accepts Len's authoritative position. Despite her desire to paint and the consistent boredom or restfulness she endures, she plays the role Len expects of her.

Len's tendency to objectify Louise and treat her as a possession can perhaps be traced to his experience growing up with his family in poverty, an upbringing that—in conjunction with society's pressures for the man to be the "breadwinner" of the family—drives his fierce pursuit of wealth and upward mobility. Whereas male Beats sought an authentic connection to the world that was fundamentally defined by a rejection of the consumerist culture and life on Madison Avenue, Len immersed himself in this lifestyle, accumulating expensive things and surrounding himself, for example, in a "forty-five foot living room, with its mild alabaster and marble statues."[18] But not unlike the Beat men's marginalization or subordination of women, Len essentially considers Louise another object of beauty that he has acquired, an object to be molded in his hands, despite his awareness of and even respect for her intellect.

In fact, it is important to note that while Len feels that his responsibilities as a businessman take him away from his interest in writing, it is Len himself that impedes Louise's desire to paint. When he learns that Louise wants to paint, he decides that this is not "pertinent." Bergé writes, "He guessed she'd get over that"—through her preoccupation and presumed fulfillment with their life together at home, traveling, mingling with friends, etc. Len's overall attitude toward Louise is effectively expressed in the following passage: "He thought of himself as Europe and of Louise as America, magnificent of itself but waiting to be colonized, civilised [sic]; full of natural beauty and natural resources, but unable to put them to use."[19] This dynamic between Len and Louise epitomizes a traditional hierarchical heterosexual relationship marked by Len's authoritative position and Louise's disempowerment. Louise's growing unease with and ultimate rejection of this gendered dichotomy, though, signifies Bergé's gradual critique

of the mainstream—and Beat—gender norms, which culminates in the development of Louise's subjectivity.

The development of female subjectivity in "In Motion" can be explored through a few key aspects of the text—the role of writing, the turning point in Louise and Len's relationship, and the ending of the text—each of which engages with the work of di Prima, Johnson, and Jones in interesting ways. For example, similar to how Lizzy's role as a storyteller in Jones's *In Care of Worth Auto Parts* becomes part of her development of subjectivity—how Jones intertwines the thematic and structural elements of the text—Bergé integrates the act of writing into her text and uses this as a means to develop and then challenge the traditional hierarchical relationship between Louise and Len. Specifically, both Louise and Len write stories as part of the narrative of "In Motion";[20] it is through the act of writing that they initially express and explore their otherwise latent or suppressed feelings about the various oppressive forces around them. This narrative element of "In Motion" thus provides deeper insight into each character than the third-person narrative perspective of the rest of the novella and demonstrates how the act of writing is itself a means for understanding and examining one's social, cultural, and political contexts—as Bergé herself exemplifies through the composition of "In Motion." Interestingly, the contrasts that Bergé creates between Louise's and Len's individual stories perpetuate Len's authoritative position and Louise's passivity and struggles as a woman. Ultimately, however, this element of "In Motion" intensifies Bergé's critique of the dominant gender discourse of the postwar period as the novella ends with a letter that Louise has written to her sister in which she asserts her voice and emphasizes her newly-developing subjectivity.

In the one story that Louise writes within the narrative of "In Motion," women are victim to a tragic fate at the hands of the men around them, and the men are then able to continue living their lives unaffected by the absence of women. Louise's story envisions women as defined strictly by their sexuality and as dangerous and dispensable as a result; men are depicted as authoritative and powerful, and as the only ones deemed worthy or safe to survive. The first of the two stories that Len writes, on the other hand, situates the main male and female characters in a shared struggle against the oppressive "majority group" around them; they are not alone in their tragic fate, nor subject to their fate by virtue of their genders. And in Len's second story, the male narrator laments the loss of his beloved wife, emphasizing how their relationship contributed to his life's fulfillment, as he now celebrates the "purity" of his life in solitude.[21] Somewhat similar to his first story, Len focuses on the shared experiences between his male and female characters as well as on the surviving husband's invigorating sense of autonomy rather than on a sense of isolation or danger that he may experience without his wife or simply because of his gender.

These contrasts between the stories written by Louise and Len function as manifestations of their own positioning within normative hierarchical gender roles; Louise's story expresses her understanding of women's oppression as they are treated as inherently subordinate to men, and Len's stories suggest that, generally, a man's gender has no bearing on his situation or on his ability to overcome obstacles. However, this traditional gendered dynamic is transgressed as the narrative of "In Motion"—and the relationship between Louise and Len—progresses. In the turning point of the novella, which takes place not long after Louise writes her story described above, Len finally

recognizes the severity of Louise's oppression as a woman when he discovers that she has overdosed on sleeping pills. Notably, Bergé develops this storyline simultaneous with the composition of Len's first story in which a man and woman are equally oppressed by mainstream society. In constructing these two stories at the same time, Bergé suggests that Len's seemingly unintentional treatment of Louise as an object—as innately inferior to him and limited to the domestic role—and his inability to see how this gendered role affects her, has willed her behavior. While he writes his story, she experiences ultimate despair, deliberately taking sleeping pills as a means to permanently escape the particular oppression she suffers as a woman.

The seriousness of this situation leads Len to reconsider how he treats Louise, and after she recovers, the couple works together to more openly express their concerns and to help each other overcome their individual and shared struggles. They end up leaving New York City and their life of luxury behind, settling in France on a farm, and expecting their first child. After Louise survives her suicide attempt and confronts the various aspects of her life that are causing her to suffer, she reaches a sense of clarity and self-assuredness that has eluded her up until this point. She realizes that deciding things for oneself is worth losing the security that a person may have—a security that may in fact be superficial and meaningless. She says to Len, "Seems to me there's more pain in trying to stay far in than in coming out and making a choice." Importantly, her awakening and developing subjectivity motivate Len to examine his own life and the way in which he had devalued her and attempted to define her. She helps him see that they don't honestly know one another because neither is being true to him or herself, and she helps him realize how detrimental his treatment of her is to her well-being—that in fact she

isn't merely his to be handled or controlled. She says, for example, "Part of what I have to learn is to talk back and keep myself talking back, not [being] quiet and taking all the punishment." Rather than trivialize or dismiss her concerns as he may have done previously, Len now understands that, together, they can transform their lives, and in doing so, they enact Bergé's final critique of postwar mainstream values. They mutually decide to sell their belongings and seek a life in which they can be true to themselves, a life that is authentic and meaningful, not measured by material things or economic or social gain—nor defined by hegemonic gender norms. They both endeavor to pursue their artistic interests; they bring his typewriter and her painting supplies, and are "ready to work with the minimal comforts of the house" in rural France.[22]

Significantly, at the end of the novella, Louise feels as though she has been "reborn"; she has begun to assert subjectivity and agency—to experience life on her own terms. In contrast to the suppression of her voice up until this point, it is Louise's voice that concludes the text, reading a letter she has written to her sister that describes her new fulfilling life marked by an authenticity that had previously been out of reach. For example, she writes,

> I *see* Len now, and he sees me, and it is good. No more of moving in a trance, moving through life by rote; everything we do feels right, and you can't imagine how marvelous this is to me. … Before, I thought there was a system, or plan, to account for every move or action of any of us. I still think this is somehow true, but now I see how the earth itself, the *nature* of the earth, and we as animals on the earth, are part of it. … Here, we drop the masks or façades we must give to the world, and they ease and disappear.[23]

In contrast to the lack of voice, authority, and clarity that Louise had earlier, especially compared to Len, this letter signifies a renewed sense of insight and clarity that embodies Louise's transformation from object to subject. She "sees" things clearly now and has a

deeper understanding of the damage that her and Len's pretense was having on her sense of self. That the novella concludes with Louise's voice reading her own letter illustrates this process of coming into her own—that she is not subject to the same tragic fate as the female characters in the story she wrote earlier. Notably, this assertion and emphasis of Louise's voice at the end of "In Motion" resembles the consistency with which di Prima depicts the strength and agency of her female speakers in *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward*, as well as Lizzy's coming into her own at the end of *In Care*—each indicative of the women Beats' protofeminist desires.

Also significant is the similarity between this ending of "In Motion" and that of Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance*—namely, each text's revision of the typical male Beat "road narrative." Bergé, like Johnson, rejects the confining postwar experience and the typical "9-5 job in an office or factory" and does so from the female perspective and through an escape from New York City. Louise laments life in the United States where people have a "loss of sight which seems almost willful."[24] However, situated alongside *Come and Join the Dance* and Johnson's resistance to the traditional "obligatory goals for the female protagonist" as described in Chapter Two, the ending of "In Motion" may seem rather conventional in its resolution.[25] Johnson's conclusion challenges the traditional ending of the Bildungsroman as well as of the mainstream contemporary novel, in which the female protagonist is usually positioned within the confines of the culturally-defined restrictive female gender role. On the contrary, Louise's final role as a wife and mother seems to perpetuate the narrative strategies of traditional "patriarchal fictional forms" rooted in the hierarchical ideologies of androcentric culture.[26] However, I argue that Louise's role as a wife and mother at the end of the text is a role that is

stimulating and invigorating, not confining nor oppressive; it is a role marked by the development and expression of Louise's subjectivity and voice. And this particular focus on the impact of Louise's upcoming motherhood on her subjectivity importantly overlaps with di Prima's attention to the various complexities of this female experience in *This Kind* as well as with Jones's focus on Lizzy's and Zulima's experiences as mothers in *In Care*, as examined in Chapters One and Three, respectively.

Throughout the course of the text, Louise is trapped in the role that society has defined for her—that of a wife and potential mother subject to the authority of her husband and his perpetuation of the hierarchical gender binary, and her voice is both suppressed and troubled. At the end of the text, though, Louise has overcome this oppression and finally asserts an agency and authority that was previously absent or overshadowed by Len. Her voice overtakes the dominance and authority of Len's voice as she describes the overwhelming fulfillment she is able to experience as a woman in her own right, a woman who has achieved clarity, who now has a say in her marriage and feels inspired by the child growing inside of her. Motherhood is not a biological imperative that may provide a superficial solution to her feelings of loneliness (as suggested earlier in the novella), but rather an enriching experience that helps her further understand who she is as a woman.

That Louise does not seek independence in the same way Susan does at the end of *Come and Join the Dance* does not diminish the significance of Louise's development of subjectivity. Bergé's intertwining of Louise and Len at the end of "In Motion" interestingly challenges the ways in which Johnson, di Prima, and Jones each—in her own way—emphasizes the development of female subjectivity as represented by an

autonomous "I"; for Bergé, female subjectivity can be expressed as part of a "we." As Louise explains in her letter to her sister, her life in France has not been perfect and is still shaped by "old angers and anguishes." But, Louise and Len ultimately work through such issues and successfully "clea[r] the air, and [get] … through [other] of those official-type ideas which [don't] belong to [them] at all." The will that she and Len share to escape societal pressures "to impress, to win, [and] to gobble up" has led them to a place in which they "accent each other" and "complement each other." They now "can work well together" and each mutually contributes to their new lifestyle, signifying the respect each has for the other.[27] Together, Louise and Len reject society's confining expectations and define their lives on their own terms.

This emphasis on Louise's development of female subjectivity as largely shaped by her relationship with Len reflects the theme of the collection in which "In Motion" is included, as suggested by its title: *A Couple Called Moebius.* The Moebius strip signifies that there is no beginning or end to the connections forged through one's relationships—no way to completely separate oneself from the impact that another's life has on one's own. But rather than consider this intertwining of people's lives as inhibitive or detrimental to female subjectivity, Bergé portrays it as generative and valuable. For her, the development of female subjectivity is defined by the assertion of a woman's agency and choice, which does not necessarily entail separation from others. Louise is no longer positioned in her marriage to Len by his control or his domination; she has redefined the nature of their relationship and consciously reshaped her role in relation to him. Bergé's critiques of mainstream norms come to fruition as Louise acts as a woman in her own right in a lifestyle that is not defined by materialism. The subjectivity Louise exhibits at

the end of “In Motion” reflects her confrontation of that which was objectifying and inhibiting her sense of self. Both Louise and Len are being true to themselves, and what they seek is not burdened by societal pressures—or by one another.

Not all of Bergé’s texts examine the lives of members of the upper class in New York City or of New York City bohemia, for that matter; in fact, the settings of the stories collected in *A Couple Called Moebius* range from that of “In Motion” to the rural setting of “The Farm Woman” to the Mexican island setting of “The Water Ceremony,” for example. What remains consistent throughout her work, though, is the confrontation of mainstream social and cultural norms that in various ways stifle or oppress individual development. As illustrated in “In Motion,” of particular importance for Bergé is the development of female subjectivity, which represents her rejection of the period’s hegemonic female gender role. This, in conjunction with her treatment of the larger issues of individualism and authenticity in the postwar period, highlights the importance of including Bergé in the Beat literary tradition, as well as her distinctive contribution to the female Beat discourse of protofeminism. As noted earlier, it is clear that Bergé played a key role in the 1960s poetic community, and this brief look at one of her texts demonstrates what is to be gained by entering currently unrecognized writers such as Bergé and Albert into Beat literary studies—to understand their importance beyond their role in Beat history.

Mimi Albert

Though born over a decade after Bergé, Albert’s experiences as a young female writer take shape in her work in ways that significantly overlap with and diverge from those of Bergé and other women Beat writers. Mimi Albert was born Anna Cohen in

Brooklyn in 1940.[28] Albert's adoptive parents were "closet artists," and under their influence, she grew up with a love for the arts, attending her first opera at age six and taking music, art, singing, acting, and dance lessons as a young child.[29] After a handful of experiences as a young actor (first on the radio, then in an off-Broadway play), Albert set out to pursue her interest in writing. Although she flunked out of City College, she then studied anthropology and philosophy at Hunter College and finally earned her M.F.A. in writing from Columbia University in 1968 or 1969,[30] where she studied under Edward Dahlberg and Richard Elman.[31] Albert has since published novels, short stories, poetry, essays, and excerpts from a memoir.

While working toward her degree, Albert published a short story in *The Transatlantic Review*, and her thesis later became her first novel, *The Second Story Man*, published in 1975. While she worked on developing her thesis into a novel, Albert had stories published in various literary journals and presses. In 1975, the same year that *The Second Story Man* was published, Albert's first collection of short stories and poems, *The Small Singer*, was also published, notably by Shameless Hussy Press, the first American feminist press. Albert would soon write a memoir based on her year living in India, *Go to Calcutta*, and though this project remains unpublished as a whole, Albert has had several pieces of her memoir published in various collections, including the anthology *Lips Unsealed*. She began teaching writing at various colleges and universities as she continued publishing short stories, such as "Some Human Beings" (1987). Her next novel, *Skirts*, was published in 1994, and she has continued to publish short stories, including "Crone Dance" (2001) and "This Is What It Is To Go Blind" (2007).

Albert has received several writing grants and awards throughout her career, including a New York Council on the Arts grant for fiction, a Yaddo Foundation grant for fiction, a PEN/National Endowment of the Arts award for short fiction, and the Los Angeles PEN U.S.A. Award for best California story. Her body of work is marked by incisive attention to the act of rebellion, and, more specifically, to women's resistance to cultural norms explored through a variety of themes including desire, domesticity, motherhood, marriage, divorce, and the body. Like the prose of Johnson and Bergé, Albert's work mainly can be described as Beat in subject and theme rather than in style or form.[32] That is, whereas di Prima and Jones experimented with formal literary conventions as many male Beats did, Albert's work "tell[s] [stories] about Beat, but not necessarily … in Beat style."[33] Albert's novels, for example, are comparative to Johnson's novels not only in their portrayal of the New York City bohemian scene of the 1950s and early 1960s, but also in Albert's prose style, which is similarly marked by a general adherence to convention and is in the vein of Ernest Hemingway in its succinctness and emotional restraint. Albert more frequently than Johnson uses the first-person narrative perspective in her novels, though, and through this, achieves a confessional-like quality that simultaneously expresses the strength and vulnerability of her narrator-protagonists.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, whereas the individual experiences of the other writers I study in *The Girl Gang* within the Beat literary community are relatively well-documented within Beat history, Albert's affiliations with the Beat community itself are more ambiguous. Her inclusion in Jim Burns's 1993 "Beat Women" and Richard Peabody's 1997's *A Different Beat* speak to how her experiences living and writing in

New York City bohemia during the 1950s and 1960s and how much of her writing itself indeed overlap with the experiences and writing of the more well-established Beat writers, but it is unclear to what degree she knew other Beat writers, male or female. Although she moved around Manhattan several times over the Beat period, she identifies the Lower East Side as the "scene of [her] teenage escapades," and she immersed herself in the New York City arts scene during and after the Beat period.[34] Further, having her work published by Shameless Hussy Press in the late 1960s and early 1970s put her in contact with female writers associated with the San Francisco Beat community and the area's burgeoning feminist literary movement. Although the press was located on the west coast, Albert formed literary friendships with contemporary poets including Alta and Judy Grahn, which undoubtedly helped shape her experiences as a young writer.[35]

Albert's involvement in the New York City Beat literary community may have been more tangential than that of the other women Beats I discuss throughout the dissertation, but the New York City Beat scene is central to much of her work, and she engages in the Beat discourses of identity, authenticity, and the New York City bohemian community and, more specifically, in the female Beat discourse of protofeminism in important ways. What makes Albert's work particularly unique within a study of the women Beats is her attention to the dark underside of New York City bohemia—the stark poverty, criminality, and drug use more often treated by male Beats—as well as her depiction of the inability for individual women to successfully overcome the oppressive female gender norm of the postwar period. This latter aspect of her writing works in conjunction with her effectual development of female subjectivity to illustrate a complicated and multi-faceted protofeminism throughout her body of work.

In her two novels, *The Second Story Man* and *Skirts*, for example, Albert develops female characters who leave home to seek independence and autonomy outside of the constraints of mainstream social norms. Within each respective novel, these young women have various experiences with the world of drugs and crime, which lead to very different conclusions for each novel's female characters, especially regarding their desire for and development of female subjectivity. At the end of *The Second Story Man*, Mary is unable to overcome her drug addiction and suffers with various degrading jobs, which make her feel like an object, "a machine" and "a human sacrifice," while barely helping her support herself financially.[36] Anna, however, emerges at the end of the novel with a strong sense of self. She resists being victimized by dangerous temptations around her, and even tries to save Mary from her self-destruction. Anna is able to see that she can only depend on her own choices, and she walks away from Mary—not to return home to her family, but to continue developing her subjectivity as an independent young woman defining her life on her own terms. Somewhat similarly, in *Skirts*, Ruth is found robbed and naked two days after she was beaten to death attempting to deal drugs for the bohemian Zalman, while Helene forces herself to withdraw from her drug addiction and takes back control of her life. She frees herself from the grip she previously allowed Zalman and his lifestyle to have over her. She gets a job and plans to move to Chicago to enter a Ph.D. program in archeology, and the novel ends with her "on [her] way."[37]

Albert's novels express a critical stance toward the period's hegemonic female role likewise developed in the work of other women Beats. Perhaps more importantly, through the contrasting experiences of each novel's respective characters, Albert depicts two possible fates for the female nonconformist, and in doing so, draws attention to the

complexities of the period's protofeminism. Though we see other female characters in the works of di Prima, Johnson, Jones, and Bergé struggle to various degrees with poverty and oppression as they attempt to develop subjectivity, Albert's portrayals of female drug addicts and petty thieves reveal a side of bohemia more often described by male Beat writers and therefore more likely presumed to be outside of the female bohemian experience. In the same way that the other women Beat writers studied here redefine the male-dominated Beat literary tradition by appropriating, for example, the road narrative or sexual agency for the female bohemian, Albert examines the Beat subculture of drugs and criminals as experienced by women. That their involvement with drugs and crime may complicate the desire for subjectivity or may lead to material or psychological poverty or death reflects the authenticity and uniqueness with which Albert depicts the female bohemian experience. These novels are only a small part of Albert's body of work, though, and her literary accomplishments, like Bergé's, continue to be overlooked within Beat studies. In an effort to show in more depth how Albert's work can broaden our understanding of the Beat community and add to the Beat narrative in significant ways, I focus my attention here on one of Albert's short stories, which continues to highlight the generic and thematic diversity of the women Beats' work.

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"The Small Singer" was first published in 1968 and later published in Albert's first collection of short poetry and fiction of the same name. While other women Beats such as di Prima and Johnson largely wrote in and revised the conventions associated with genres used by male Beats (the poem and the novel, respectively), Albert, like Jones and Bergé, experimented with a genre largely neglected by the male Beats.[38] In this

representative short story that is a mere two and a half pages, Albert provides an intimate look at the female protagonist's struggles to find what she "really want[s]."[39] Through economical precision, Albert describes her protagonist's experiences as a young woman, a singer, a teacher, and finally, an older woman looking back on her earlier choices. Albert portrays one woman's struggle to be independent and to lead a meaningful life amid various forces that continually thwart her ability to do so.

Developing this story through the genre of the short story—and in only two and a half pages—Albert demonstrates remarkable control as a writer. Like his argument regarding the relation between narrative time and textual space within the novella, Giraldi argues that "It is difficult to get an effective short story to span more than a week."[40] Albert is able to span several years in "The Small Singer," however, as she seamlessly moves her narrative lens in and out of focus, moving from close attention to specific representative moments in this unnamed woman's life to more general descriptions of experiences that span many years altogether. Through the course of the story, the singer comes to realize that there is only limited time and opportunities to live one's life the way she desires, and Albert uses the genre of the short story to embody this theme in a concise narrative structure. That is, the size of "The Small Singer" reflects the singer's empowerment and subjectivity that have been shrunken or diminished over the course of several years.

Written in the 1960s, "The Small Singer" is set in an unidentified city (universal in its representativeness), and although it is not set in the bohemian scene as some of Albert's other work described above, this story treats quintessential Beat questions of identity, individualism, and authenticity from the female perspective. As many of the

female figures in the work of the other women Beat writers studied in *The Girl Gang*, Albert's protagonist is an artist, as the title suggests. Notably, she is not a wife or mother, nor is she defined by a sexual relationship to a man. She is introduced as a woman in her own right, seemingly free from the domestic role which so many women during this period are expected to fill. The story begins after the woman's final singing performance and establishes her reputation as "the singer" as well as her growing frustration with the city around her as it is characterized by "cracked pavements," "bad air," "people beating one another up," and "lines and lines of cars waiting for what they cannot get."[41] This image of the city sets the tone of the story as it symbolizes the growing deterioration of society in general. The singer's personal experiences parallel this gradual decline as what had been her source of confidence and strength—her voice—now "has gone away" inexplicably. As a result, the singer finds herself without money; because her voice is no longer of the quality to sing in commercials and she is "too shy to take off all her clothes" as a nightclub singer, she becomes a singing teacher.[42]

By the end of the story, the singer "has become old" and her life has become empty. She no longer sings, teaches, nor hears from any of her old friends, and she is left wondering to herself, "'Why did I ever become a singer? What did I really want?'"[43] Like the other texts examined throughout this study, "The Small Singer" portrays a woman's attempt to develop her own sense of self and assert agency while facing various obstacles rooted in cultural constructs of the postwar period. Significantly, though, as the conclusion of this short story suggests, unlike the other texts I have examined, "The Small Singer" does not conclude with the assertion of female subjectivity. This particular

aspect of the text draws attention to its uniqueness within and contribution to the discourse of the women Beats' protofeminism.

Throughout the story, the woman's experiences are marked by a tension that is rooted in her role as a singer. Her voice symbolizes the potential for her independence and subjectivity as a woman, but this potential is consistently stifled as she struggles to use her voice to express herself and to make a living in the arts, which presumably values individual expression over material gain. The power that the singer's voice initially gives her is evident in moments when she stands up for herself against men who objectify her; she quite daringly responds to the "injustice" enacted by strange men on the street who "tell her what they would like to do to her eyes and fingers, her nostrils, her big toe and her cunt." In response, she shouts things like, "'Pigs! Go fuck yourselves! Go put it in your mother's twat!'" Through such a reply, the singer appropriates the obscene sexual innuendos spoken by men and uses similarly vulgar language to express her anger and assert her sense of power. She rejects the cultural assumption that she is voiceless or powerless as a woman alone on the street, subject to the men's crude desires, and this resistance to being sexualized or objectified reflects the protofeminism of the women Beats. Importantly, it is Albert's protagonist's singing that brings her such strength in these situations: "This [would happen] because she was a singer, because her own voice, swelling out of her diaphragm, filled her up and gave her courage to respond with violence, with rage." The woman knows she is one of only a "few women [who] can lam into a man like that," and this behavior certainly highlights the strength her voice can provide her—how her voice symbolizes her potential subjectivity as a woman.[44]

However, such moments are fleeting, and more frequently than not, the singer struggles to express herself. For example, Albert writes, “Walking alone over the cracked pavements through the city she feels sometimes that her throat is about to swell up and crack with the swelling of the song she has inside her and yet cannot sing.” In moments like these, the singer’s ability to communicate is stifled, seemingly out of her control. She lacks the strength and agency illustrated when she defends herself against male catcallers. Once she loses her singing voice, her sense of self and her subjectivity begin to wane. Because she is known throughout the city as “the singer” and is often confronted with people’s limited notion of who she is, the woman becomes dependent upon her voice as her only means of communication, fulfillment, and financial support. She believes that once her voice goes away and she can no longer sing, “there is nothing else.” And when her voice is gone, she starts to envision apocalyptic images. The city that was initially characterized by “bad air,” violence, and failed attempts to fulfill one’s needs is now marked by “buildings collaps[ing] [and] streets explod[ing].” The parallel between the loss of the singer’s voice and the final destruction of the city signifies her forthcoming struggles to develop an identity on her own terms and experience an authentic connection to the world around her.

Specifically, when she becomes a singing teacher, she is confronted with more troubling realities that ultimately contribute to her final experiences of emptiness and powerlessness. For instance, her sense of value as a teacher is diminished as multitudes of students enroll in the school at which she teaches. More and more students want to become singers, but rather than signifying a growing desire for individuality through the development and refinement of one’s voice, this actually represents the growing desire

for upward mobility and the increasing conformity of the period. The students want to circumvent the curriculum requirements and skip courses so that they can move ahead faster; they are in pursuit of fame rather than education. In fact, the superficiality of the students' experiences is illustrated by the characterization of the city as "being polluted and destroyed by noise"—the noise of the students who continue to enroll despite what they acknowledge is their lack of interest in music.[45] This situation speaks to the inauthenticity and meaninglessness of the mainstream pursuit of material things and of upward mobility that is also treated by Bergé in "In Motion."

In the same way that Louise and Len superficially pursue the accumulation of the finer things in Bergé's novella, the students in "The Small Singer" do not seem genuinely interested in what might be gained from learning to improve and share one's voice with others, from expressing oneself artistically. Rather, they want to achieve high grades with little effort. However, the curriculum itself, the teacher learns, makes most students' attempts at success basically worthless as there are 23 courses in total, and "only one out of three hundred students can qualify for [the final course], and afterwards there's nothing left for them to do but graduate."[46] This detail signifies Albert's critique of such stultifying values. The superficial pursuit of success is futile, Albert suggests, and this teaching experience thus contributes to the protagonist's inability to develop an authentic sense of self.

As the teacher, this woman is helpless within the guidelines of the program. She goes through the motions with her students, and the way in which Albert describes the woman's actual teaching reflects the monotony and emptiness of the experience. Albert writes, "She listens to the songs. Tone and modulation. Harmony and scales. She begins

to teach them all to write their own songs. She teaches them about images. Metaphors. Similes. Authenticity of feeling. 'What are you singing about?' she asks again and again." The teacher recognizes that her students are not truly invested in their work, and the frustration she faces is illustrated here. Interestingly, the struggles that the singer faces as a woman and a singer without a voice are captured in the first line of a song that one female student has written: "They buried her and they laughed."[47] This is the only line of the song that Albert provides, and in its isolation, it underscores the misogynistic treatment of women during this period as well as society's general apathy toward others. This line epitomizes the oppressive circumstances of Albert's title character.

The loss of her sense of self, which began with the loss of her voice and its potential to express her sense of agency and subjectivity, is perpetuated as her friendships with members of the singing community vanish. When her old singing friends call her on the phone, "she can barely hear them"—perhaps because they, too, have lost their voices and are struggling to express themselves.[48] Whether as a singer, a teacher, or a friend, the protagonist is isolated in the city. Like Susan in Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance*, this woman does not fit in to the various communities around her, but rather than leave the city as a symbol of her subjectivity as Susan does, Albert's singer remains in the city as she continues to grow old, eventually unable to practice singing, to teach singing, and to communicate with her friends.

Although the singer's attempts to be independent, to assert her voice, and to defend herself when objectified and mistreated signify Albert's challenge to the gender discourse of the period—similar to how Susan seduces Peter in *Come and Join the Dance* or how Louise redefines the notion of motherhood in "In Motion"—Albert does not

conclude her story with her protagonist's assertion of female subjectivity. Unlike the female figures in the other texts examined throughout *The Girl Gang*, Albert's singer is unable to overcome the various oppressive factors in society. The men that catcall women on the streets, the young people who relentlessly pursue upward mobility, the loss of individualism they represent, and the institutions that ineffectually "educate" this youth—all of these societal elements stifle the woman's voice and her ability to develop subjectivity.

Despite the singer's assertion of subjectivity illustrated in her refusal to be dependent on a man for financial support and to be objectified and sexualized on the street, she is left wondering "'Why did I ever become a singer? What did I really want?'" However, rather than conclude the story with this sense of confusion and lack of clarity, Albert adds the final line: "But most of the time, she knows."[49] This subtle, yet suggestive line—emphatic as it constitutes its own paragraph—points to the singer's awareness of the possibility of overcoming the various oppressions that she faces. She realizes that through singing she might have been able to express herself freely and powerfully—that she may have been able to support herself as a single woman through a profession that is based upon the expression of the female voice and thus challenges the traditional suppression of the female voice in the 1950s and 1960s as well as the conventional positioning of the woman in the home. This awareness, however subdued or undeveloped, complements the woman's previous acts of rebellion against sexual objectification and the traditional female gender role, and in this way, gestures toward the protofeminism of the women Beats.

However, somewhat similar to Johnson's treatment of female sexual agency in her first novel, the ending of "The Small Singer" represents Albert's ambivalence toward the development of female subjectivity underlying the protofeminism of this period. Through the story's tentative depiction of female subjectivity, Albert draws necessary attention to the struggles entailed in women's attempts to challenge the hegemonic discourse of the postwar period. Her female protagonist is stunted—as the title suggests—by the oppressive social and cultural norms around her that inevitably complicate such feminist endeavors. Notably, however, Albert does not subject her protagonist to the tragic fate of so many female protagonists in contemporary fiction; the woman, though alone and no longer a singer, is not victim to sickness or suicide, nor is she confined to marriage or any traditional domestic or sexualized role.[50] Rather, Albert argues for the necessity of challenging constricting hegemonic norms and points to the complexities involved in such a daring endeavor.

As suggested in this reading of "The Small Singer" and in the overview of Albert's novels provided earlier, confronting and challenging the normative female gender role is a consistent theme throughout Albert's work. Although the New York City bohemian scene plays a central role in Albert's treatment of this issue in *The Second Story Man* and *Skirts*, in light of the acute concision of "The Small Singer," Albert uses an unnamed city as the representative context for her title character's attempts to develop and express her empowerment as a young single woman. For Albert, as for the other women Beat writers included in this study, the issue of female subjectivity is of critical importance as it undoubtedly shaped the writers' own experiences as female artists in the New York City Beat community. Albert may be the least recognizable of the five writers

I discuss throughout the dissertation, but it is clear that her absence within Beat histories should not preclude attention to her role as a Beat writer whose work has social and cultural implications. By including both Bergé and Albert in the study of women Beat writers, we see how writers of the first and third generations of women Beats extend our understanding of the Beat community in important ways: exploring, for example, how the mainstream's thrust toward materialism and social mobility affected those outside of the middle class and the bohemian community. Indeed, that each of the five writers I examine may have had a different relationship with the male Beats, their work, and their perpetuation of the mainstream female gender norm based in part on their generational differences helps illustrate the importance of broadening the canon of women Beats to develop a more inclusive and expansive Beat narrative.

Conclusion

With its focus on this currently understudied yet undeniably rich part of Beat history and culture, *The Girl Gang* reconceptualizes the Beat community as indelibly shaped by its female members. This dissertation shifts our focus from how Beat women helped shape the lives and work of Beat men to how they also developed as writers in their own right in ways that critically engage the hegemonic norms of postwar America. As part of the New York City Beat community, the women Beats were not only lovers, wives, and co-editors, they were also writers themselves who most notably contributed to the Beat community by resisting traditional and academic literary conventions as the male Beats did, while also simultaneously challenging the dominant social and cultural discourses of which even the male Beats were uncritical. Women Beat writers thus deepened the community's development of its countercultural impulses—and this is

evident not only through memoirs written after the Beat period. These writers produced poetry and fiction beginning in the 1950s and 1960s that reexamined female identities in ways that would later define the feminist movement, and this dissertation begins to delve into this significant body of work.

Women Beats consciously engaged in what Adrienne Rich describes as a "radical critique of literature," and *The Girl Gang* illuminates how five women writers from the New York City Beat community each uniquely problematized, appropriated, and revised social and cultural conventions present in the literary works not only of their male predecessors and non-Beat contemporaries, but also in the works of many of their female predecessors and contemporaries as well as of their male Beat counterparts.[51] Rather than perpetuate the typical absence, silence, objectification, or tragic fate of women within their works, female Beat writers transgressed the dominant gender discourse of the 1950s and 1960s and set out to include women in the Beat community's critique of society's hegemonic norms, primarily through the portrayal of female subjectivity.

In Diane di Prima's *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward*, the development of female subjectivity is achieved through complex representations of female experiences of love, sexuality, and motherhood—all of which is depicted through the literary use of hip slang. In Joyce Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance*, this entails destabilizing and reshaping the traditionally gendered dichotomy of public and private spaces while simultaneously disrupting the standard Bildungsroman resolution and the typical conclusion for the female protagonist in the contemporary novel. In Hettie Jones's *In Care of Worth Auto Parts*, female subjectivity takes shape as a maternal subjectivity through the trope of the interracial mother as well as through the use of a genre and various literary techniques

that embody this figure's postmodern experience. In Carol Bergé's "In Motion," female subjectivity is developed through a mutually constitutive relationship and through the reclaiming and redefining of the traditionally compulsory and oftentimes confining role of wife and mother. And in Mimi Albert's "The Small Singer," female subjectivity is expressed through independence and the assertion of one's voice, but is also portrayed as a complicated and sometimes ineffectual experience.

In these unique ways, each of the writers discussed here expresses a protofeminism that undoubtedly alters our understanding of the Beat community and that significantly anticipates the feminist movement that began in the late 1960s. Ultimately, *The Girl Gang* demonstrates how the intertwining of the cultural geography of New York City with the gender politics of the period took shape in the Beat literary community in both stifling and inspiring ways, and how the work of women Beat writers raises new and important questions for the fields of Beat studies, feminist studies, women's writing, and contemporary American literature.

NOTES

1. Mimi Albert, *Skirts: A Novel* (New York: Baskerville Publishers, 1994), 71.

2. *Skirts*, 71.

3. *Skirts*, 70, 4.

4. *Skirts*, 119.

5. Kane explains that *Four Young Lady Poets* was a key exception "to the dearth of published women poets in the early part of the 1960s." (*All Poets Welcome*, 253.) The three other writers included were Barbara Moraff, Rochelle Owens, and Diane Wakoski.

6. See Kane for more on this history.

7. As suggested in this brief overview, the poetic community described here was one part of the larger New York City Beat literary community.

8. Carol Bergé, *Light Years: An Anthology on Sociocultural Happenings (Multimedia in the East Village, 1960-1966)* (New York: Spuyten Duyvil, 2009). The excerpts quoted in this paragraph are from carolberge.com.

9. Kane, 65.

10. Sanders qtd. in Kane, 65.

11. See Kane for more on Sanders and his use of satire as a way to challenge what were considered sexual taboos at the time (64-73).

12. Holton, 11.

13. William Giraldi, "The Novella's Long Life," *Southern Review* 44.4 (2008): 795.

14. Giraldi, 796.

15. Unlike di Prima's female bohemian figures who embrace the impoverished life of the artist and Jones's Lizzy who applies for welfare as she struggles to support her children, Johnson's Susan is perhaps closer in social class to Bergé's characters in this context. Susan comes from a middle-class family, and part of her fundamental struggle in *Come and Join the Dance* is to negotiate between the life her parents expect of her as an educated, middle-class woman and the life of bohemia to which she is drawn.

16. Carol Bergé, "In Motion," *A Couple Called Moebius* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), 72.

Unless otherwise noted, the quotations in this section of the epilogue are from "In Motion," and for readability, the corresponding note is provided after the final quotation of each respective paragraph.

17. "In Motion," 72. Historically, *Playboy* has been the subject of feminist critique for its objectification of women in the service of what Ehrenreich describes as "something approaching a coherent program for the male rebellion [during the 1960s]: a critique of marriage, a strategy for liberation … and a utopian vision." (*The Hearts of Men*, 50.) (This critique was perhaps most notably initiated by Gloria Steinem's investigative experience as a Playboy Bunny.) However, more recently, critics have begun to challenge this somewhat narrow view of the magazine and its various manifestations by arguing that the role of the Playmate (or Bunny) provided women with "the potential for empowerment by directly engaging female sexuality." Carrie Pitzulo argues, for example, that "The Playmates were undoubtedly a product of the relatively conservative postwar era, but compared to the cultural terrain around them they contradicted the notion that the only place for women's desire was in the matrimonial bed." *Bachelors and Bunnies: The Sexual Politics of Playboy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 36, 39.

18. "In Motion," 71.

19. The quotations in this paragraph are from pg. 91.

20. As noted earlier, the novella is broken into fourteen sections, and as the narrative progresses in a linear fashion, a few of these sections are comprised of stories Louise and Len each write separately.

21. "In Motion," 99, 107.

22. "In Motion," 114, 115, 118.

23. "In Motion," 117, 122.

24. "In Motion," 126, 124.

25. DuPlessis, *Writing*, 142.

26. Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, ed., *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 3.

27. "In Motion," 124, 124, 123, 123.

28. When adopted at six-months old, Cohen's name was changed to Mimi Ginsberg; Albert is her married name.

29. Albert, "Changeling," *Contemporary Authors Online* (Detroit: Gale, 2011).

30. Albert was one of the first students to earn an M.F.A. in writing from Columbia.

31. Albert refers to Dahlberg as "'the father of the Beats' because of his influence on poet Robert Creeley and some of Creeley's peers." ("Changeling.") Dahlberg briefly taught at Black Mountain College before Charles Olson took his place, and Creeley refers to Dahlberg as his "elder American friend and mentor." ("A Reminiscence," *Gravesiana: The Journal of the Robert Graves Society* 3.1 [2007]: 21.) Dahlberg is also one of "the male sources of Olson's key precepts" identified in Olson's "Projective Verse." Andrew Mossin, "'In Thicket': Charles Olson, Frances Boldereff, Robert Creeley and the Crisis of Masculinity at Mid-Century," *Journal of Modern Literature* 28.4 Poetry, Poetics, and Social Discourses (2005): 21.

32. Bergé's poetry is similar to di Prima's in its resistance to poetic convention, evident, for example, in her use of the colloquial and hip slang.

33. Grace, "Snapshots," 144.

34. Albert, "Changeling."

35. Alta (Gerrey) founded the Shameless Hussy Press in 1968, and Grahn established the Women's Press Collective in 1969.

36. Albert, *The Second Story Man* (New York: Fiction Collective, 1975), 79, 95.

37. Albert, *Skirts*, 259.

38. Most male Beats wrote poetry or novels; a few exceptions include Kerouac's *Atop an Underwood*, a posthumously published collection of early short stories, and two Kerouac novellas, *Tristessa* and *The Subterraneans*.

39. Albert, "The Small Singer," *The Small Singer* (San Lorenzo, Cali: Shameless Hussy Press, 1975), 3.

40. Giraldi, 796.

41. "The Small Singer," 1. Unless otherwise noted, the quotations in this section of the epilogue are from "The Small Singer," and for readability, the corresponding note is provided after the final quotation of each respective paragraph.

42. "The Small Singer," 1, 2.

43. The quotations in this paragraph are from pg. 3.

44. The quotations in this paragraph are from pg. 1.

45. "The Small Singer," 2.

46. “The Small Singer,” 2.

47. “The Small Singer,” 2, 3.

48. “The Small Singer,” 3.

49. The quotations in this paragraph are from pg. 3.

50. See Chapter Two for my discussion of the typical treatment of female protagonists in contemporary fiction.

51. Rich, 35.

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