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INTIMACY AND AUTONOMY:
TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN
WOMEN AND THE QUEST FOR SELF-
REALIZATION

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INTIMACY AND AUTONOMY: TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN WOMAN AND THE QUEST FOR
SELF-REALIZATION

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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INTIMACY AND AUTONOMY: TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN WOMEN
AND THE QUEST FOR SELF-REALIZATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Purdue University

by

Mary F. V. Barford

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

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December, 2015

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West Lafayette, Indiana

For my parents

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It is a rare joy to be able in some formal capacity to thank the people in your life that deserve your thanks. I finished this project as a 38 year-old single mother of two. My route toward completion was circuitous and along that twisty path I acquired many a debt of gratitude that I am happy to pay back if just slightly in these few pages.

First, I want to thank my phenomenal advisor, Dr. Susan Curtis. Dr. Curtis has been a mentor to me, not only as a scholar and a teacher, but ultimately as a human being. She carries all the accouterments of a great historian – curiosity, intelligence, perseverance, and an undeniable work ethic. My first moments in her class I knew immediately that she was the kind of historian that I wanted to be – engaged with ideas, innovative, and determined that our work be meaningful to the present. Beyond her intellectual gifts she is a person of tremendous openness and compassion. At every turn she was there as a force that both challenged and supported me.

I want to thank my two spectacular daughters, Sofia Rose and Johanna Florence. It is impossible to relate in words how much I love these two beings. So much of my effort is with the hopes of providing a life of opportunity for them as well as setting an example for them of all a woman can do. The many nights I spent writing instead of doing so many other things I hope that they will some day see was worth the effort in the

end. They were and always are both muse and motivation. They are the embodiment of delight and as Hettie Jones says of her daughters, I fall on my knees in front of them.

I have gained a great deal from many dear friendships in the past few years. My Lafayette ladies including Stacey Gable, Sasha Reel, Kate Sweeney, Sarah Casto, Kayla Carlson, Ashley Watson, Megan Wells, and Andrea Sullivan have always been places to turn for warmth or laughs or conversation that helped me through many a difficult time. I also want to thank the Miller/Van Gorder families for taking me in as one of your own and always making me and the girls feel like part of the family. I want to thank my friend, Chris Hanlon, for talking to me seriously and being hilarious and encouraging all at the same time. I also want to thank my friend, Siggy Zahner, who appeared one evening and made life so much better.

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learned so much from Dan about beauty, and about ideas, and even about pain. I miss him every day.

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The other members of my committee, Dr. Nancy Gabin, Dr. Ryan Schneider, and Dr. Yvonne Pitts are all faculty that I worked closely with at one point or another and from all of them I have benefitted enormously.

Lastly, but not the least this dissertation is wholly dedicated to my incredible parents. My Mom has been tremendously supportive of me as a mother and as a scholar. She supported this effort whole-heartedly and was willing to help in all manner of ways. Though she lives a few hours away she would come to visit bringing food and comfort and care for all of us. She would walk the dog and pick the girls up from school. She has been a kind of partner to me for all the years that I've been a single parent, supporting me in every way that she could manage from far away. My Dad passed away in 2010, but this project is his in every way as well. He planted all the seeds that manifest in any

success that I ever have in my life. My Dad loved and fought for the things that moved him – social justice, philosophy, the arts, and me. He listened to me from the time I was very little. Even though he was a Philosophy professor he took my ideas very seriously and his strength I try to access every day.

Writing this dissertation is without a doubt one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. It's so much more than a paper, it's an expression of myself and my capacities as a woman, the wake of which will reverberate on to my own daughters and hopefully to theirs as well. My Mom and Dad are the roots and the source of this whole experience and their love is alive in every word that I write. This dissertation is written in their honor.

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the effects of culturally managed gender expectations on intimate spaces. The study of these intimate spaces is rooted in the biographies of four relationships in the post-war period. Through exploration of these individual stories an understanding emerges of how monolithic cultural paradigms work for men and for women in very different ways. For purposes of archival availability and continuity, this dissertation focuses on a very specific group of people, namely women of great talent and ambition who were either married to or in a relationship with a man whose fame eclipsed her own. My question became how have women managed their own fulfillment within the limitations of a culture that so heavily promoted marriage and family as the only avenues for true feminine satisfaction. Furthermore, how did these women compromise or assert themselves in their quest for self-realization. Each relationship examined in this dissertation sheds light on a different aspect of the same cultural dilemma. The first couple examined is Joyce Johnson and Jack Kerouac. Joyce Johnson was a young writer herself when she met Kerouac, and was with him during his leap into fame after the publication of *On the Road*. This chapter explores the idea of privilege and the female attempt to find identity through connection to a man. The second chapter looks at Hettie

and LeRoi Jones. This chapter uncovers the complications of race in the post-war period and the way that cultural antagonisms can seep into otherwise neutral or even loving environments. Hettie and LeRoi Jones also shared two children and that aspect of intimacy is also developed in this chapter. The third chapter studies the relationship between Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock. Lee Krasner's work as an artist is often considered superior to her very famous husband, yet she has not garnered near the international renown that he has. The way that Lee Krasner managed her work as an artist in a sexist art milieu as well as the way that she managed her relationship with her husband demonstrates a tremendous fortitude in the face of great obstacles. The last chapter looks at the relationship between Etta Moten and Claude Barnett. Etta Moten is little known but achieved many important firsts – including the first African-American female to appear in a non-stereotypical role in a movie and the first African-American female to sing at the White House. She was also very active in everything from the Harlem Renaissance to the Civil Rights Movement. Her husband, Claude Barnett founded the Associated Negro Press, and worked actively within the United States government as well. Their story demonstrates the possibilities for a more equitable relationship and also serves as a window through which to view African-Americans who were active in shaping their culture in the 20th century.

PREFACE

A Note on the Use of First Names:

It is traditional in historical scholarship to use the surname when referring to someone in the past unless two people have the same surname, which calls for a distinction to be made, for example, Theodore, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. For this project, I have made a conscious decision to deviate from traditional use of last names for a few very purposeful reasons. First, in almost every chapter there is a deeper significance in the name itself. For instance, Jack Kerouac sometimes refers to himself as Jack and other times as Jean Luis, his French name. Without delving too deeply into psycho-analysis these names signify something different for Kerouac. Jean Louis is someone he protects, his inner more original self, someone Joyce is not allowed to know. Joyce herself talks about how immediately Jack Kerouac calls her “Joycey.” There is significance in this appropriation of her name; it means something to both of them. These subtleties are lost with the strict use of last names. LeRoi Jones consciously changes his name from Leroy to LeRoi and then to Imamu Amiri Baraka. To simply call him “Jones,” whitewashes the understanding of who he is as Leroy versus who he becomes as “Roi.” The transformation Hettie Jones undertakes in losing Hettie Cohen to become Hettie Jones while still remaining “Hettie” is central to her story. The whole point is that

her last name *cannot* define her. Lee Krasner first goes from Lena to Lenore to be less Jewish sounding and in homage to Edgar Allen Poe, showing her intellectual leaning and interests. Then as an artist she becomes more simply “Lee,” perhaps to gain more acceptance in a male dominated art world with a gender-neutral name. These changes are signifiers of emotional and psychological shifts, they are choices made with purpose. Furthermore, in writing a history that is meant to explore a new frontier of intimacy and emotion it is crucial to use the language of intimacy and emotion. The use of last names has a distancing affect. There is no direct correlation between objectivity on the part of the historian and use of last names; therefore, I have chosen to use first names purposefully to signify development in those that I am writing about as well as to maintain the integrity of the study of intimacy in relationships.

INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to bond with unruly teenagers I was given the task of teaching such noble works as *Julius Caesar*, I realized quite quickly that drastic measures needed to be taken. My first few weeks of teaching high school, most of my students cared neither for Shakespeare nor for me, and saw our class as either a naptime in the best case or in a less best case, a chance to display their comedic abilities, their artistic abilities (usually on desks or walls), or their more general ability to wreak havoc and create chaos in a classroom that I was initially unprepared to manage. Fortunately for me, I taught English and could see in my students' writing that there were very interesting and complex people behind the posturing they did to impress their peers. Soon I was on a mission to get to know the real students in my class, and writing became the vehicle through which we met each other. I borrowed money from my mother to buy 150 composition books for my 6 classes. No business in town would give me a deal, but buying the books was worth every penny. Through these student journals I came to know the young people in my class and through my responses to their writing they got to know me. It was the best classroom management tool possible. Once trust between us developed all our work came into focus and began to have meaning. And as an added bonus, I began to develop a dissertation topic that truly interested me for their sake, for my sake, and for the sake of future generations of young people.

For the most part I gave my students free reign in their journals, they just had to write. “Write about what’s on your mind today,” I would say. “Write about what interests you.” When collecting the journals, a clear and somewhat alarming pattern began to emerge. For the most part, the boys in my class wrote about any number of things: sports, parties, friends, family, personal histories, video games or plans for the near and far futures. For the girls, the topics can be narrowed down to one word: boys. Most of my girls wrote about boys: which boys they liked, which boys might like them, anxieties about sex and dating, questions about what to say to boys, or how to act with a boy in any number of situations. Many wrote agonizing entries going over the smallest minutia of exactly what was said and not said. For my lesbian students it was the same except change the gender of their object of desire. How was it that the boys’ interests were so varied and the girls’ were so narrow? Many of my female students played sports, were in the marching band, choir, or orchestra, worked on the newspaper, danced, and/or worked outside of school, but still at their root, their spiritual energy seemed to be consumed with attention or approval from boys. A few were already longing for engagements. Nothing seemed to buoy their spirits or deplete their self-esteem in quite the same way as boys. As a woman this saddened me. As a historian it interested me. Why is their fulfillment so dependent on male approval? What work has our culture done to promote this? Why is their prize the boy instead of the prize itself? What stories from the past can shed light on this rather dreary discrepancy?

The history of women desiring self-fulfillment (consciously or unconsciously) outside of marriage and motherhood (in other words, apart from men) is a complicated one. While unbelievable strides have been made legally, politically, and financially in

terms of independence for women, culturally women still struggle to separate how they see themselves from how men see them. Too often women compete with each other over attention from the opposite sex (usually through physical/sexual appeal), while men compete in business, sports, politics, and in all cultural arenas.¹ My questions became how have women (not necessarily feminists) with ambition, energy, creativity, and intelligence managed this oppressive and lasting cultural paradigm? How have women succeeded or failed at embracing both a desire for the rewards of marriage and motherhood with a desire for creative and intellectual output on their own terms. Marriage and motherhood cannot absolutely exclude a desire for a “self-life.” How have women fought for and managed access to both? Many women throughout the history of America have grappled with this question. It was imperative on me to narrow my subject matter by anchoring it to a specific time, and more importantly to the story of a few specific women.

There is an undeniably rich body of scholarship available on women’s movements from Abigail Adams admonishing her husband to “remember the ladies,” to Seneca Falls, to the iron jawed suffragettes, to the “problem with no name” and the creation of NOW.² My project seeks to uncover a more intimate space, and in turn a more nuanced history. Specifically, I wondered, how do women attracted to men of great talent and ambition, in relationships and marriages with these men, carve out space for their own spiritual and creative output. How have women with ambitions of their own managed their love for

¹ For an insightful discussion of this current dilemma see the documentary: *Miss-Representation*, directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom (2011; Los Angeles, CA: Girls Club Entertainment, 2012), DVD.

² For more information see: Betty Freidan, *The Feminine Mystique: 50th Anniversary Edition* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2013)., Sally McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women’s Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)., Nancy McLean, *The American Women’s Movement, 1945-2000: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston and New York: Bedford/ St. Martin’s, 2008).

“great men” and the work that they produce? Do these women automatically defer their own lives to that of their partner? Do they see the men’s work as so important that they find fulfillment as a support system? Or do they go insane from being on the sidelines? After all, is there any place where the “true” effect of a culturally monolithic gender expectation is more subtly and honestly played out than in a marriage or a partnership between two individuals? More discussion of a theoretical framework is addressed further on.

For my time frame I have chosen the post war period, 1945-1966 (loosely book ended by the advent of the National Organization for Women). I selected this period for a couple of important reasons. First, at no time in the 20th century were gender expectations more culturally managed or more anxious than at mid-century. The women I have chosen to write about lived, loved, and worked in a world rife with the tone and rhetoric of what a wife and a woman should be. I will talk about these women more specifically in the next few pages, the wives and girlfriends of “geniuses” who grappled with the blurred line of a widely proliferated expectation on one side and on the other side, the light of their own talent and ambition.

American Culture at Mid-Century

To lay some groundwork, post WWII America consciously fostered a culturally sanctioned trajectory for every woman/wife. That trajectory was to find a husband at a young age, make his home, bear his children, and act as a support system to him in all ways possible. Historian Stephanie Coontz describes the 1950s as a “profamily period”:

divorce rates were low, marriage was almost universally praised, and with the baby boom came an orientation in American society toward children along with family.³ At the end of the 1940s, trends characterizing the rest of the 20th century suddenly reversed, which leads many historians to characterize the 1950s as an “historical fluke.”

Post-war economic factors played a significant role in ushering in these changes in family life. America’s worldwide competitive advantage allowed for the expansion of middle-class positions, a rise in real wages, and a government/economy that could provide home loans, job training, cheap energy, and steady employment. For the first time in more than a hundred years the age for marriage and motherhood fell, fertility increased, and women’s degree of educational parity dropped. Coontz reports that the results of a 1955 marriage study reveal that less than 10 percent of Americans believed it was possible to be happy as an unmarried person. Men and women were encouraged to root their identities in familial and parental roles. Even Hollywood stars were “reworked” to reflect a commitment to marriage and family life. These changes obviously put constraints on men as well. By mid-century, the confusing message to men became conform at all costs, but don’t be just another man in a gray flannel suit either.⁴

Although many aspects of 1950s gender constructions were reminiscent of the Victorian era, there were also significant differences. Middle-class Victorian women relied on servants to do much, if not all of their housework. Despite the inventions of new timesaving domestic appliances, and the imperative to consume consume consume, women in the 1950s spent more time doing housework and childcare than before.

³ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

⁴ See Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Anchor Books Double Day, 1983).

Furthermore, this housework was understood culturally as *the* arena for women to express their individuality and femininity. The success of the 1950s family structure relied on the ability of women to subsume their own desires into those of their children and husband. It's no wonder that an enormous rise in the use of tranquilizers and alcohol existed alongside these expectations. Another cultural expectation that a middle-class woman had to contend with was the idea that she would be completely sexually available to her husband so that he could be happy at home, and perhaps in return he may fix a few things around the house. Interestingly, according to Coontz, working-class families were viewed not as suffering economic hardships, but as failures at maintaining harmonious gender roles.⁵

In the end, of course, post war family culture masked a wide-variety of problems. African-Americans in the south faced not only disenfranchisement and systematic segregation, but also widespread brutality. Elsewhere in the country, a large percentage of African-American mothers had to work outside the home. The poverty rate among African-Americans was disproportionate in both single and two-parent homes. Migrant workers that were pouring into the country during this period also frequently suffered inhuman deprivations. Also, Cold War sentiment created an environment of suspicion and disingenuous appearances. People were encouraged to mistrust each other and be wary of the communist-next-door. Furthermore, there was very little acknowledgement of sexual abuse. Cases of incest were brushed aside as delusional manifestations of a woman's own Oedipal desires. Moreover, women who wanted to get abortions were

⁵ See Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

commonly seen as mentally deranged. As Coontz quips, “Leave It To Beaver” was not a documentary.⁶

Also important was the expanding role of social science in the world of marriage and dating during this era. According to historian Beth Bailey, in the post war period a belief developed in the idea that social science could improve marriage. The popular media jumped aboard and profiled marriage courses and their leaders, reported on research findings, and employed marriage “experts.” Purdue University itself offered marriage courses out of its Marriage Department. These courses tended to be extremely popular and focused on a range of topics relating to both courtship and marriage. Paul Popenoe, a popular marriage-lecturer issued pamphlets with headings such as, “Are You Husband Hunting?”; “Why Don’t You Make Him Propose?”; and “How Do You Know It’s Love?” At Purdue, students were required to write a 5,000-word personal-history essay describing their attitudes toward sex and marriage. Then, two individual counseling sessions were administered to discuss problems. Much of the prescriptive material that comes out of the pseudo-scientific marriage education movement insinuates a very clinical approach to possibilities for success, at times even invoking the use of rubrics. These rubrics advised that inter-faith relationships had little chance for success, and inter-racial possibilities were unequivocally dismissed.⁷

To provide further texture to the landscape, specifically regarding gender prescriptions, there are multiple articles from widely read periodicals of the time that address the looming specter of dissatisfaction, suggesting nearly unanimously that any marital dissatisfaction is something for the wife to fix (or else). In an article titled “What

⁶ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 18.

⁷ Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

Makes Wives Dissatisfied?” a *Women’s Home Companion* staff writer cautions that, “The woman who becomes dissatisfied with her marriage becomes dissatisfied with her whole life. The husband who becomes dissatisfied can shrug it off,” emphasizing that relationships are everything to women and only something to a man.⁸ In an article written in 1954 by Mrs. Dale Carnegie for *The Coronet* she offers women these “uplifting” words,

We wives have to stand by as bodyguards, [while husbands do “necessary” and “fascinating” work] nurses, and morale-builders – gritting our teeth silently... We have none of the thrill of achievement that motivates our mates and makes them deaf, dumb, and blind to everything but the job in hand.⁹

Mrs. Carnegie also warns against being a meddling wife that could take her husband right off the payroll by “advising” or “interfering.”¹⁰ She ends this winsome piece with an anecdote about a woman whose epitaph on her grave reads, “She was so pleasant.” For Mrs. Carnegie that was the pinnacle of success for this woman. As she says, the dead woman no doubt “smiled at her husband’s return, had hot meals on the table, and laughed at her husband’s worn little jokes.”¹¹

Gender and American Culture before the Post War Period

Leading up to the post war period, a wide variety of experiences with intimacy, sexuality, marriage, family, and courtship were possible depending on class, region, and race. The early 19th century moves toward industrialism and mechanization had a great

⁸ Nancy Walker, *Women’s Magazines 194-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press* (Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 1998) 117.

⁹ Walker, *Women’s Magazines*, 126.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 132

impact on family and gender relations for middle-class whites. Between 1820 and 1860, as the country transitioned toward an industrial economy, men began to work more and more outside the home. This shift of production from home to factory created separate spheres and encouraged the pastoralization of housework.¹² In this new era, the notion of “True Womanhood” did not include wage earning and was in fact undermined by it. In turn, “home work” stripped of any economic value became the sphere of the woman, and economically valuable work outside the home became the public sphere of the man. The consequences of this separation powerfully affected the more intimate facets of middle-class life. John Demos in *Past, Present, and Personal* describes a sense of egalitarianism and possibility for material gain during this time; the cult of the self-made-man flourishes, while the role of women is defined in sharp contrast.¹³ Consequently, the family transitions to a place of refuge, a safe-haven away from the more brutal and competitive outside world. Middle-class women became responsible for that haven, and were expected to maintain a kind of moral perfection, self-restraint, and piety that defined their sphere, sometimes called the “cult of domesticity.” Coontz in *The Way We Never Were* argues that liberal politics and capitalist markets depended on the banishment of personal dependencies, social obligation, and love, to the private sphere and the home.¹⁴ The cult of the Self-Made Man then *required* the cult of the True Woman.

The moral elevation of women did in contradictory ways both empower and oppress. On the one hand, women had no access to political or economic power; their

¹² The term “pastoralization” comes from historian Jeanne Boydston in her book *Home & Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (NY: Oxford U Press, 1990). Boydston uses the term to refer to housework losing its association with productive labor.

¹³ John Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and the Life Course in American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

¹⁴ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 53.

roles were strictly defined and extremely limited. On the other hand, as historian Nancy Cott points out, the replacement of sexual with moral motives did favor women's self-respect and did also infer the possibility of a power to influence. Further, education no longer needed to be justified solely as a means to attracting a mate. Now women could claim an intellectual, spiritual, and moral purpose. The "passionlessness" often associated with Victorian sexual practice also speaks to this contradiction. By denying or repressing the natural desires of her body, she is also protecting herself from unwanted pregnancy and empowering herself as a respectable moral agent.¹⁵ From a modern perspective this may seem like a frustratingly small victory.

There were women in this period that did work for wages outside the home. They were primarily daughters and unmarried women of working-class backgrounds, sent to work in large cities. These women experienced an independence that loosened the control their parents' could wield over them, but were also required to navigate that independence alone and without protection. Historian Christine Stansell examines the relationship between working-class men and women in New York in her book, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1780-1860*. Here she explores the complicated way in which a burgeoning working-class consciousness improved the treatment of working-class women. Leftover from the 17th and 18th centuries was the idea of women as rife with passion, the daughters of Eve. This view of women's uncontrollable sexuality was an excuse used by men for their sexual exploitation of women; "she made me do it." Stansell argues that upper-class men in particular took liberties with young and vulnerable working-class women in the city. However, as working-class boys/men began

¹⁵ Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

to sense the widening gap between rich and poor, Broadway and the Bowery, employer and employee, it colored their perceptions of working-class women. Though their own masculine culture placed women on the sidelines, these men did develop a desire to protect working-class women from the predatory and exploitative sexual advances of upper-class men, or “aristos.” The Bowery boys developed a kind of working class paternalism that granted a larger degree of respect to the women that they ate oysters and went dancing with.¹⁶

Another pertinent subject from the 19th century is the relationship between commercial culture and gender relations. Stansell points out that in household and neighborhood settings, women built up a sense of sexual obligation over a long period of time and through a series of encounters. In the dance halls of New York, women were finding themselves sexually accountable for a round of beers and some oysters.* Her unsatisfying conclusion suggests the following: commercial culture’s assumption that women owed sexual favors in return for men’s generosity was still an improvement over the view that women were legitimate targets for sexual coercion solely by virtue of their gender. Too bad they could not buy their own oysters. From a modern perspective this is a strange victory.

Additionally in the early 19th century, the story of male/female intimacy for those suffering under the system of slavery in the antebellum period is layered with both ungodly brutality and harrowing resistance. Slaves did marry, though for a plethora of reasons these relationships were often under tremendous strain. First, it was ultimately up to the master who could and could not marry in the first place. And even if the master

¹⁶ Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1780-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

* These same questions appear again at the turn of the 20th century.

allowed it, which was usually only if it was to his own advantage for fertility reasons, there was never a guarantee that either spouse wouldn't be sold away somewhere else. Slave communities did have their own ideas of sexual and marital responsibilities with gender-specific expectations. These varied among different slave cultures, but the conditions under which slaves existed made adherence to any social rules difficult to maintain. How could a slave woman submit to a husband's desire for sexual exclusivity when her master is raping her? How can a slave man protect his wife and his family when he is perhaps on another plantation or risks beatings for all of them if he tries? Undoubtedly the system of slavery stressed and strained every aspect of family, intimacy and emotion for those who suffered under it.

The antebellum period is widely known as a period of vast experimentation with religious and communal living as well, including: Shakers, Mormons, Owenites, Fourierists, Brook Farm, and the Oneida colony in New York. Historian Alice Felt Tyler explains that J. H. Noyes, founder of the Oneida colony believed in the idea of perfectionism, and to that end created his theory of "complex marriage." Noyes held that community and family should be organized around religious inspiration. He strictly forbade "special love" between a man and woman, viewing it as destructive to the harmony of community life. Noyes also saw communal living as a way to alleviate the economic strain of individualistic pursuit. The Oneida colony, by many standards a success, flourished from 1846 to 1879.¹⁷

Perhaps most intriguing is Francis Wright's experiment with the Nashoba colony in Western Tennessee. Wright, a Scottish émigré and a favorite of the Marquis de

¹⁷ Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860* (University of Minnesota Press, 1944).

Lafayette, was deeply troubled by the system of slavery existing in the United States. Armed with extraordinary bravery, intellect and enthusiasm, Wright set out to do her part. With a hefty chunk of her own inherited fortune, Wright purchased approximately two thousand acres of land in Western Tennessee and brought several slaves to the colony to live and work with white colonists. Unfortunately, soon after Nashoba formed Wright and her sister became very ill and had to return to Europe to recover. When Wright came back to Nashoba in 1828 it was in ruins, ravaged by scandal, bad weather and ill planning. True to her purpose, Fanny Wright paid for all the freed slaves to voyage to Haiti where she saw to it that they were set up with a trade as well as a home. This is not to say that Wright envisioned the kind of interracial colony that we might imagine today. As historian Gail Bederman points out, while Francis Wright was ahead of her time in a variety of ways, her relationship with her “slaves” was not utopian by any means. The story of Nashoba is as fascinating as Wright herself.¹⁸

The antebellum period is ripe with forward-thinking individuals. It is the era of Margaret Fuller, and the first whisperings of modern feminism carried further by Elizabeth Stanton, Susan Anthony, and Lucretia Mott. The 1848 Seneca Falls convention, the first of its kind, called into question the political, legal, and economic limits placed on women. Though women’s suffrage was not to be realized for several more decades, significant movement was made; seeds were planted. It is no accident that Fredrick Douglass spoke at Seneca Falls, nor that many of the women involved were avid abolitionists. The abolitionist movement itself demanded reconsideration of the tenets of American democracy, of individual moral and religious commitments, and of the

¹⁸ For information on Francis Wright see: Gail Bederman, "Revisiting Nashoba: Slavery, Utopia, and Frances Wright in America, 1818-1826" *American Literary History* 17.3 (2005): 438-459. And Celia Morris, *Fanny Wright: Rebel in America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

legitimacy of the law. This was also the age of temperance crusades, of peace movements, and of educational reform.

Hugely important, it was also the age of the Transcendentalists. These writers and philosophers generated expansive notions of spirituality, of love, of self-reliance, and of friendship. It is important to note that 19th century public intellectuals were the celebrities of their day. Huge audiences would come to hear them speak. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the veritable “rock star” of the 19th century, followed closely by Frederick Douglass, addressed an audience at a woman’s rights convention on September 20, 1855 on the question of Woman. Although stating that if women desire the right to vote they should have it, the surrounding rhetoric is less satisfactory:

Plato said, Women are the same as men in faculty, only less in degree. But the general voice of mankind has agreed that they have their own strength; that women are strong by sentiment; that the same mental height which their husbands attain by toil, they attain by sympathy with their husbands. Man is the will, and Woman the sentiment. In this ship of humanity, Will is the rudder, and Sentiment the sail: when Woman affects to steer, the rudder is only a masked sail. When women engage in any art or trade, it is usually as a resource, not as a primary object. The life of the affections is primary to them, so that there is usually no employment or career which they will not with their own applause and that of society quit for a suitable marriage. And they give entirely to their affections, set their whole fortune on the die, lose themselves eagerly in the glory of their husbands and children.¹⁹

Emerson scholar, Len Gougeon relates that Emerson’s support of the women’s movement moved in a similar trajectory to that of his antislavery experience, from “troubled concern” to a reserved commitment to unambiguous support.²⁰ By 1869, in another address, Emerson finishes with “She asks for her half of the whole world; and to this she

¹⁹ The text for Emerson’s 1855 address called simply *Woman* can be found in a variety of his collected works.

²⁰ Len Gougeon, “Emerson and the Woman Question: The Evolution of his Thought” *The New England Quarterly* 71.4 (1998): 589.

is entitled.”²¹ Even within the confines of his previous address, he was still at the forefront of public thought on women’s rights.

The Late 19th/Early 20th Century

The period from roughly 1890 through the 1920s is widely identified as a great period of transformation in American history in general. The boom in industrialization, unprecedented immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe, and the massive influx of people into America’s cities are central tenets of this era. More recent scholarship has also identified this period as a vital turning point in the areas of courtship/dating, gender relations, and changes in family dynamics. The transition from Victorian culture (aforementioned) to modernism occurs in these years. The location of the rise of modernism is most often associated with New York City. Fundamental to this transition, as historian Kathy Peiss points out, is the shift from homosocial to heterosocial culture. Marked by separate spheres, Victorian culture fostered passionate same-sex friendships. A number of factors at this time put a strain on the separation of the spheres and birthed a cultural preoccupation with bonds between men and women, both social and emotional. The “New Woman” as opposed to the Victorian “True Woman” was independent, sexual, and modern.²²

A great deal of this new preoccupation with male/female relations took shape in entertainment venues such as nightclubs, dance halls, and amusement parks. Leisure

²¹ Ibid.

²² Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Temple University Press, 1986).

became of gigantic importance in working-class communities in New York, challenging (though not entirely overcoming) traditional cultural limitations and familial expectations. Couples found privacy in public, away from the scrutiny of their parents.²³

Echoing the work of Christine Stansell, though a century later, Beth Bailey in her study of courtship (*From Front Porch to Back Seat*) makes the important observation that once dating occurs outside the home, the values of the market come into play. The middle-class Victorian custom of “calling” placed courtship in the woman’s sphere, the home itself. Women chose who could come to call, and mothers oversaw the visits. As dating replaced calling, not only did the couples now meet outside the home, but also money became involved. This combination put men in control and prompted a baffling set of questions about exchange and expectation.

Middle and working-class African-Americans are also a major part of this story. Working to stem the tide of racism and segregation, middle-class blacks clung to notions of bourgeois respectability and strict criterion for female chastity. Working-class black women however, did engage in treating, often with white men. The complications of these arrangements are rife. For example, when black women accompanied white men to places like the Cotton Club, they were participating in the patronization of an

²³ Historians, Randy McBee and Lewis Erenberg explore the transformation toward modernism through specific cultural sites: McBee through dance halls, and Erenberg through cabaret. See Randy McBee, *Dance Hall Days: Intimacy and Leisure Among Working-Class Immigrants in the United States* (NYU Press, 2000). And Lewis Erenberg *Steppin’ Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Also John Kasson *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978) is a classic historical study on culture through a specific site. Kasson explains how Coney Island provided men and women unprecedented opportunities for unchaperoned trysts.

establishment that profited off of affirming white men's access to black women by excluding African-American men altogether.²⁴

Greenwich Village and "The Moderns"

Much of my story takes place in Greenwich Village and the lively communities of beat writers and abstract expressionist painters therein. Prior to this era Greenwich Village hosted another avante-guard community full of women who were consciously expanding the notions of womanhood, sexual expression, and art. From roughly 1913 – 1930 women such as Mina Loy, Djuana Barnes, Margaret Anderson, Jane Heap, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Mabel Dodge, and others willfully chose art, and their own expression over more traditional paths. Compared to the women in my period, these women were more determinedly feminist. Mina Loy actually began a feminist manifesto after being left by an Italian lover who thought women inferior, "Leave off looking to men to find out what you are *not*. Seek within yourselves to find out what you *are*. As conditions are at present you have the choice between Parasitism, Prostitution, or Negation."²⁵ And later in the manifesto Mina asserts, "Woman must destroy in herself the desire to be loved." For her, this was the only means to escaping the all-consuming desire for male affection or perhaps worse, a seat on the sidelines. After leaving two young children behind to move to bohemian Greenwich Village, Loy did fall in love again with a boxer/artist named Arthur Cravan. In a bizarre tale the two ended up wandering down to

²⁴ See Elizabeth Alice Clement *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

²⁵ Andrea Barnet, *All Night Party: The Women of Bohemian Greenwich Village and Harlem, 1913-1930* (New York: Algonquin Books, 2004), 27.

Mexico to avoid (his) military conscription. Living on oatmeal and coffee grounds they eventually spent the last of their money on a little sailboat. Mina sewed the sail on the beach, full with the baby they were now expecting. As Arthur pushed the small vessel out to sea to test it, he hopped aboard and drifted out into the ocean. Mina watched as the boat got smaller and smaller on the horizon, and Arthur Cravan was never to be seen again, presumably he died at sea. Loy spent many years attempting to recover from the pain of this loss. In 1930, feeling defeated by love, she tried to obliterate her need for it. To her, love had always diminished her ability to maintain the emotional authority she needed as an artist. Loy penned with melancholy caution, “Looking for love with all its catastrophes is a less risky experience than finding it.”²⁶

To the north in Harlem, women like Bessie Smith and Ethel Waters loomed large in the 1920s as well. Bessie Smith, illuminating through her voice the realism of experience for black women in a white man’s world sang of “low-down philandering lovers and no-good husbands, of poverty, loneliness, and physical abuse.”²⁷ Yet, her music also proud and defiant, with an unprecedented ability to be humorous and tragic in the same moment, also explodes in moments of lyrical freedom: “If I should get the feelin’, To dance upon the Ceiling, /Taint nobody’s business if I do.” Bessie Smith, a notorious fighter in her own right, suffered severe beatings from her husband, Jack; he was particularly angered if she drank rather than worked. Yet, in her song *Gimme a Pig Foot* she sings:

²⁶ Barnett, *All Night Party*, 54.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 165

'Gimme a pigfoot and a bottle of beer. Send me again. I don't care. I feel just like I wanna clown. Give the piano player a drink because he's bringing me down! He's gotta rhyme, yeah! When he stomps his feet. He sends me right off to sleep. Check all your razors and your guns. We gonna be arrested when the wagon comes. I wanna pigfoot and a bottle of beer. Send me cause I don't care. Blame me cause I don't care. Gimme a pigfoot and a bottle of beer. Send me again, I don't care. I feel just like I wanna clown. Give the piano player a drink because he's bringing me down. He's got rhyme, Yeah, when he stomps his feet. He sends me right off to sleep. Check all your razors and your guns. Do the Shim-Sham Shimmy 'til the rising sun. Give me a reaper and a gang of gin. Play me cause I'm in my sin. Blame me cause I'm full of gin.²⁸

Although Bessie rose higher in her profession than any black woman of her time she remained in an unmarked grave for thirty-three years after her death. It was not until 1970 that Janis Joplin finally paid for Bessie to have a headstone. Joplin's involvement speaks to the lasting admiration and influence Bessie's artistry had on generations of women singers to come.

Ethel Waters is also a monumental figure in the history of American entertainment. Her best-selling autobiography, first published in 1951 opens with, "I never was a child. I never was coddled, or liked, or understood by my family. I never felt I belonged. I was always an outsider."²⁹ Spanning much of the twentieth century, the undeniably compelling story of Waters' life fluctuates between mountain peaks of wild success and deep valleys of despair. Born of rape, and married herself by age 13, Waters had to struggle to survive, stealing to eat and working as a lookout for prostitutes in the streets of Philadelphia. Her impact on the jazz age is marked by the contradictions of gentility and toughness, refinement and feeling. Her powerful legacy tells the story of the pain of being alone, of being black in a white world, and of being a woman – the outsider, never belonging.

²⁸ <http://www.songlyrics.com/bessie-smith/gimme-a-pigfoot-lyrics/>

²⁹ Ethel Waters with Charles Samuels, *His Eye is on the Sparrow: An Autobiography of Ethel Waters* (Cambridge: De Capo Press, 1992) 1.

The stock market crash of 1929 put an abrupt end to much of the cultural momentum of the previous two decades. Without a public having money to spend on entertainment, everything from theaters, to publishing houses, to the recording industry became cinched at the belt by the uncertainty of the economy. The repeal of Prohibition in 1933 had a particularly devastating effect on nightclubs in Harlem, the very venues that supported women like Bessie Smith and Ethel Waters. Hemlines and hair lengths moseyed back downwards. Class issues as well as the onset of fascism became the dominant cultural preoccupations.³⁰ However, even as the tides of history ebb and flow there is no statute of limitations on injustice. If there are disparities in the fields of humanity the same longings will crop up again and again.

The modern women, the New Women, of bohemian Greenwich Village in the nineteen teens and twenties gave over their lives to artistic and intellectual pursuits. They deliberately sloughed off a pinched definition of womanhood and tried very willfully to widen the possibilities that that very definition could encompass. There are some

³⁰ Much of the emphasis on cultural hegemony comes from a tradition of Marxism that wonders “why no socialism?” Naturally then, cultural historians have concerned themselves with the intersections of labor and culture – particularly from this time period. Michael Denning’s book, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, analyzes vast amounts of cultural material to reveal the impact of working class culture on the dominant cultural institutions during the age of the CIO (1934-1948). Denning locates the center of the cultural front in and among the artists and intellectuals born and raised in immigrant and black working class neighborhoods in modern cities. Inspired by strikes, communist rhetoric, anti-fascism, and the CIO, (in other words, inspired by the idea of “labor”) the “laboring” of American culture came to encompass layers of meaning. Denning discovers the intersection of labor and culture in the growing number of working-class participants in cultural and artistic movements in America. He explains this phenomenon as a result of the expansion of mass culture. Working on two levels, the offspring of working-class parents not only grew up to labor in the culture industries, but also American workers themselves became the audience/consumers of that industry. Also included in this crossroads of labor and culture is labor’s newfound visibility and the championing of industrial democracy in the arts. Denning points to the period as the second American-Renaissance, born of struggle and storm, incomplete and unfinished. Yet, Denning argues, working-class culture was for this time a viable culture with a wide embrace. That wide influence made a huge impression on the men and women whose stories appear in the following pages.

similarities between these women and the women whose stories appear in the following pages, but there are also vast and important differences. The women whose lives appear in this dissertation were not nearly as consciously irreverent as the 1920s moderns. Their position as women seems almost accidental until time and again it came to mean something.

The Project at Hand

I first became interested in the lives of famous men's wives during a US History seminar. We were discussing John Brown and Fredrick Douglass, heroes of the abolitionist movement. I wondered: what was it like to be John Brown's wife? How did she react to his millennial determination and on a more practical level his absences? I wondered the same about Douglass. Soon I was reading biography after biography, trying to uncover any traces of the women the more traditional histories leave out. I read biographies and memoirs of everyone from Lydian Emerson to Johnny Cash's first wife. Eventually I found the women whose lives appear here.

For this particular study, three criteria needed to be met. The first required that each woman was a talented and ambitious woman in her own right. The second, that her husband or partner was a well-known historical figure whose career in terms of fame eclipsed her own. Most of the men who appear in the following pages are widely considered "geniuses." Lastly, it was important that their intimacy occurred at least for the most part during the post-war period.

This study is thus divided into four chapters, each telling the story of one woman loosely or closely associated with a movement including the Beat Movement, the Abstract Expressionist milieu, and the Civil Rights Movement. The first two chapters explore the lives of Joyce Johnson and Hettie Jones, both writers, and both affiliated with the Beat poets, a famously male-dominated group. Joyce Johnson, a girlfriend of Jack Kerouac, was with him before, during, and briefly after the publication of *On The Road* (1957), the seminal work that made Kerouac famous and thrust the Beat ethos into the national spotlight. At only 21 years of age to Kerouac's 34 when they met, Johnson's story is a rich account of what was sacrificed and gained as a woman, to be a part of a moment and a movement that celebrated *the experience of the moment*. The first night Johnson and Kerouac met she paid for his meal and then took him home. This in and of itself was an *acte gratuit*, a deliberate break with the established expectation. As Ann Douglas points out in her introduction to Johnson's memoir, the gratuitous act, the decisive break with established order was not glamorous for women at the time as it was for men. When Kerouac left Columbia in 1942 to hang out with the "Rimbauds and Verlaines of America on Times Square" his downward mobility was rebellious and even sexy. For Johnson to discard her place in society was much riskier. For her there were no models or cultural myths to replace the ones she was leaving behind. She was, in short, less protected.³¹

The Beat movement itself flew in the face of midcentury consensus culture in pursuit of "the heightened moment and intensity for its own sake."³² The term "Beat" originally came from the idea of being beat down, at the bottom, looking up at the stars or

³¹ Joyce Johnson, *Minor Characters: A Beat Memoir* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), xxv.

³² Johnson, *Minor Characters*, xiv.

also from the “beatitudes.”³³ John Clellon Holmes described “Beat” as meaning, “bottled eagerness for talk, for joy, for excitement, for sensation, for new truths, and for the release of buried worlds within.”³⁴ This particular ethos was attractive to both men and women; however, the male Beat writers themselves seemed to only find the true intensity they desired with each other. Beat poet Allen Ginsburg famously wrote, “the social organization which is most true of itself to the artist is the boy gang.”³⁵ The relationships then that the male Beat writers formed with each other, both intellectual and at times romantic (even sexual) seemed to provide the fertile ground for their imaginations and productivity. As Barbara Ehrenreich puts it, for the Beat men a commitment to a woman was ultimately uninteresting compared to the ecstatic possibilities of male adventure.³⁶

Paul Goodman writing about the Beats in *Growing Up Absurd* (1960) asks matter-of-factly, “What is in it for the women who accompany the Beats? The characteristic Beat culture, unlike the American standard of living, is essentially for men... Beats are not responsible husbands and fathers of children.”³⁷ Here he assumes unfortunately that “responsible husbands and fathers” are all that women are concerned with. Goodman extends his oppressive analysis by explaining that rebellion is linked to the desire to “make something of oneself.” For Goodman, self-justification is not necessary for girls because “she will have children, which is absolutely self-justifying.” In the post war period then, male rebellion was a form of politics, of critique, glorified in Hollywood by

³³ The eight beatitudes of Jesus include: Blessed are the poor in spirit, Blessed are they who mourn, Blessed are the meek, Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, Blessed are the merciful, Blessed are the pure of heart, Blessed are the peacemakers, Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, Gospel of St. [Matthew](#) 5:3-10

³⁴ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, xxv.

³⁵ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, xxiii.

³⁶ Ehrenreich, *Hearts of Men*, 52.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

the sultry James Dean and Marlon Brando, or in music with the rise Elvis Presley.

Female rebellion, on the other hand, was considered nothing short of pathological.³⁸

Kerouac himself insisted on a life and a lifestyle that didn't include the demands of parenthood; his art required freedom and spontaneity. He abandoned his only child and refused to pay child support for her. Kerouac's friend and inspiration Neal Cassady immortalized as Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*, also left his family time and again to follow the "road" ahead. In her memoir *Minor Characters* Joyce Johnson compares Jack's leaving of his only child to her own experience of having an illegal abortion and asks herself "Could I blame Jack more than I blamed myself?...For me, too, freedom and life seemed equivalent." However, as her writing makes clear, the adventures of men and women are different, as is their cost.³⁹

Further, Kerouac celebrated what he called the "fellaheen," the peasantry, or the "real" people including manual laborers, street people, prostitutes, migrant farm workers, and drifters. This required the ability to go *on the road* and out into the world— an experience unsafe and impossible for women. In 1951, an 18 year old Sylvia Plath penned in her journal her "consuming desire to mingle with road crews, sailors, and soldiers, barroom regulars- to be part of a scene, anonymous, listening, recording...to sleep in an open field, to travel west, to talk freely at night." She laments that she is not

³⁸ For an interesting and edifying book on women in popular culture I suggest Susan Douglas's *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 1994). Particularly the chapter titled "Why the Shirelles Mattered" is instructive to understanding how groups such as The Shirelles and The Ronettes eventually gave voice to female rebellion.

³⁹ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, xviii.

able to do these very Beat activities (though *On the Road* would not be published for six more years) because “I am girl, a female, always in danger of assault.”⁴⁰

The advent of the Beats certainly created anxieties for mainstream 1950s society as their philosophy rejected all socially sanctioned desires: from marriage to dishwashers. In his own words, Kerouac’s Beat heroes refused:

...the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming, all that crap they didn’t really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars, at least new fancy cars. Certain hair oils and deodorants and general junk you finally always see a week later in the garbage anyway, all of them imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume...⁴¹

As the media began noticing the Beats, who were at best a tiny minority, the image of the Beat soon transformed into the “beatnik” – made diminutive and suggesting a connection to Sputnik with the added Russian ending. The sensationalized creation of the beatnik bore only a farcical likeness to the real Beats, wearing sunglasses, a goatee and being unbearably hip. Both Beatnik and Beat shed light on the extreme post war paranoia over being “square.” In typical American fashion, it actually became critical for post war propaganda that the Beats existed as an anti-establishment cultural phenomenon. The Beats provided evidence that possibilities for freedom of expression and creative individualism existed in America, options utterly antithetical to the rigidity of the drab Communist countries. Thus ironically where the front door shut out the Beats the back door swung wide open - at least for the men.

⁴⁰ Sylvia Plath, *The Journals of Sylvia Plath* (New York: Ballantine, 1982). Ed. Ted Hughes and Frances McCullough

⁴¹ Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971) 77.

As stated previously, the Beats themselves were not even remotely similar to the cartoon-like characters that *Life* magazine portrayed.⁴² Instead, the *actual* Beat writers were *actual* intellectuals, well read and purposeful with their art. Through Johnson's writing we are able to see Kerouac as full of tenderness, humor, fear, and sadness. And further, through their letters to each other we are able to uncover an incredibly nuanced view of both of their struggles. Johnson makes clear that Kerouac's mother, Gabrielle Kerouac was the only omnipresent female in Kerouac's life. (The dominating mother theme appears again and again in the following pages). At some point, Kerouac accuses Joyce of "just wanting babies" with him, and while she denies it with some semblance of sincerity, there is also a palpable truth in his complaint. The poignancy of the communication radiates well beyond the individuals. Johnson clearly grasps Kerouac's artistic importance and willingly puts her own writing aside to be his companion while they are together. She immediately falls in love with Kerouac's "beauty and sensitivity, his playfulness and his forsakenness." Ann Douglas explains insightfully:

For a woman to idealize the male as the symbol and carrier of freedom can be to leave unquestioned the masculine prerogative to define and bestow meaning. To make men the signposts on the journey to oneself may entail what Johnson describes in *Minor Characters* as a 'fading of identity' when the male departs, casting the woman in a diminished, elegiac role. Given the unequal lots apportioned men and women for much of American history, however, the best available models for feminine self-assertion have sometimes been male, learning first hand how such men fall short can itself serve as a prerequisite for feminist consciousness.⁴³

After her break-up with Kerouac, Johnson extended the life of the Beat movement by becoming a Beat chronicler, Beat novelist in her own right, and the most important

⁴² For an in-depth explanation of the beatnik portrayal in *Life* magazine see Ehrenreich, *Hearts of Men*, 52-67.

⁴³ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, xvi.

biographer of Kerouac himself. Furthermore, Johnson as a publisher sought out many seminal works in American literature including LeRoi Jones' *Blues People* (1963), Harold Cruse's *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967), Albert Murray's *The Omni-Americans* (1970), Abbie Hoffman's *Revolution for the Hell of It* (1968), Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (1968), BH Friedmans' *Jackson Pollock* (1972), and Ron Kovic's *Born of the Fourth of July* (1976).

Hettie Jones, a friend of Johnson, and the wife of Beat intellectual LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka) had to leave her Jewish family for good when she married a black man. Ultimately, the complications of race ended up being too much for their marriage in a way that she never expected. In her memoir *How I Became Hettie Jones* (1990) Jones emphasizes how revolutionary it was at the time for a woman to leave home at all.

Expounding on this singular revolutionary act, Joyce Johnson, wrote:

Naturally, we fell in love with men who were rebels. We fell very quickly, believing they would take us along on their journeys and adventures. We did not expect to be rebels all by ourselves; we did not count on loneliness. Once we had found our male counterparts, we had too much blind faith to challenge the old male/female rules. We were very young and we were in over our heads. But we knew we had done something brave, practically historic. We were the ones who had dared to leave home.⁴⁴

When Hettie Jones left home her departure was final – she was officially an outcast for marrying outside of her race. Jones' own writing speaks to the lived dissonance of loving another person whose color is unnoticeable within the intimacy of a relationship yet vividly defiant and fraught with meaning outside of the relationship. Hettie's story is a vivid example of how a weighty cultural anxiety can bear itself down into the most private spheres.

⁴⁴ Ibid., xxxiii.

Jones' story is also important as a woman's search for identity. There were no models for her at the time of how to be white and raise black children. She was completely alone in this process without models or myths or even words to help her navigate the repudiation she experienced from all angles. She was unprepared, as we all are in a way, and her story speaks to the everyday endurance required of women who do something brave. LeRoi, becoming more politicized as the Black Power movement gained momentum, left Hettie as a single mother to their two daughters. Most of the women in this study chose not to have children for a variety of reasons. Hettie had two daughters with LeRoi and it was her life, not his, that became consumed with their care. That she was able to do any creative work at all is a testament to her indomitability.

The second part of this project deals with the abstract expressionists – an artistic movement that existed in much the same time and place as the Beats. The Cedar Tavern in Greenwich Village, though dingy and unremarkable aesthetically, became a hotbed of avante guard nightlife, hosting both the abstract expressionist artists and the Beats. Many of the Beat writers mingled with what later became the most famous painters of the 20th century.

Most of the abstract expressionist artists made their start in the 1930s, many supported by the WPA during the Great Depression. Sometimes referred to as The New York School, though not a formal association, these artists felt limited by the Regionalist and Social Realist styles that came out of the Depression. Heavily influenced by European modernism and the devastation of the war, these artists wanted to express a new art in a new style. After the abstract expressionist movement began to gain momentum it had tremendous international impact. So much so, that the center of the

western art world became completely reoriented from Paris to New York City. Most famous among the abstract expressionist painters are Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Arshile Gorky, and Mark Rothko. Art critic Harold Rosenberg described the advent of the abstract expressionists in the following way, “At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.”⁴⁵ Although the abstract expressionist movement is most closely associated with these widely renowned male painters, there were female painters involved as well.

Lee Krasner, wife of Jackson Pollock worked as an artist long before her association with her husband. Before their meeting she both exhibited more frequently than him and was better known in artistic circles. Lee, the daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants took a leap of her own in leaving home to become a painter. In 1926, at age 18 she enrolled in The Cooper Union to study art. By age 20 she was enrolled in the National Academy of Design. From 1935-1943 Lee worked for the WPA Federal Art Project and eventually began taking lessons from German painter Hans Hofmann (a man who became heavily influential in American art). It was not until 1942, that 33-year-old Krasner became involved with Jackson Pollock. During their courtship and eventual marriage (in 1945), her own work became overshadowed by his success as her life became consumed with his care. Krasner never enjoyed the international recognition or the limelight that Pollock eventually garnered; however, she did live her life purposefully and that purpose was always Art. From the moment Krasner first set foot in Pollock’s studio, she believed in his genius wholeheartedly and tirelessly promoted his work. Her

⁴⁵ Barbara Hess, *Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Taschen Books, 2005) back cover.

singular dedication was hugely significant to Jackson Pollock becoming *Jackson Pollock*. Gail Levin writes in her biography of the strong-willed Krasner, “Taking care of a man, especially one she viewed as destined to make art history, did not strike Krasner as too steep a price.”⁴⁶

Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock shared a notoriously tumultuous relationship. Their struggle was not so much with each other as with Pollock’s infamous drinking. Krasner’s life became overwhelmed with caring for her husband and his addiction. At the time, alcoholism was just beginning to be understood as a disease. While under the care of Dr. Edwin Heller, a local doctor in East Hampton where the couple moved partially to curb Jackson’s drinking, he was able to stay on the wagon. Dr. Heller, understanding alcoholism as a disease, cautioned Jackson that he would have to forgo all alcohol – that even the smallest amount would provoke excess. Dr. Heller also understood the role alcohol played in numbing anxieties. Before moving to East Hampton, Lee gave Jackson an ultimatum: marry me or I’m leaving. He did marry her and much of their life in East Hampton fostered a deep connection between the two as both artists and partners.

Lee and Jackson were never in competition where painting was concerned. Jackson supported Lee’s painting and sought out her sharp eye for commentary on his own work. Lee also learned much about her own craft from the incredible artistic breakthroughs that Jackson began to have in the late 1940s. She said, “Even if I hadn’t been married to him, I would have been influenced by his work as would any painter who

⁴⁶ Gail Levin, *Lee Krasner: A Biography* (New York: William Morrow/Harper Collins, 2011), 173.

is interested in the development of painting.”⁴⁷ When asked by Hans Hofmann about his relationship to nature, Jackson famously replied, “I am nature.”⁴⁸ In other words, the subject matter was no longer outside the artist, but an expression of the internal.

Pollock’s technique was also revolutionary. Working on large unstretched canvases on the floor of their barn, the painting was no longer a separate entity on canvas, but a part of the rhythm of the artist himself. According to the Museum of Modern Art, “Pollock believed his free and yet controlled application of paint had a connection to his inner being—his unconscious—which was in turn connected to larger forces outside the self.”⁴⁹ This approach was not only ground-breaking to the art world, but also to his wife who admittedly took three years to move away from the influence of Cubism toward the inner-expression of her own nature.

While their home life in East Hampton was at times harmonious, gardening, painting and enjoying nature; Jackson was also a man who required a great deal of care. Alma, the wife of Jackson’s brother Jay said about the painter that he “wanted his life to be free to paint. In order to do that, others had to do everything else. And he didn’t want to be helped; he wanted to be taken care of.”⁵⁰ This again, was a burden that Lee willingly chose to bear, for her love of him and of his offerings to the world. However, when Jackson wanted to have a child she said no. Taking care of him was enough. The art critic Clement Greenburg reflected on Krasner’s influence on Pollock, “Without her

⁴⁷ Interview with Lee Krasner from *Inside New York’s Art World*, 1978. Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFdE0bH9FRg>

⁴⁸ Museum of Modern Art, Jackson Pollock: http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=78386

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 173.

Jackson wouldn't have made it the way he did. She did everything. She had a great eye.”⁵¹

Of course, it wasn't only Jackson who benefitted in the relationship. Lee gained a great deal from her association with her husband beyond artistic inspiration. She gained the ability to paint unencumbered from the need to make a living. Many other artists' wives at the time were supporting their husbands financially. Jackson couldn't take that. As Lee put it, “His attitude was macho; he didn't want me to go out and work and support him. When his work began to sell a tiny little bit, we lived off that. I was able to keep painting that way, so I tried very hard to help him sell.”⁵² This was a very different attitude than that of the Beat writers who were more than willing to give over the role of breadwinner to the women in their lives.

Pollock's support of Krasner's painting did not translate into enthusiasm for her work in the art world in general. The prejudice that she faced was part of the wide spread sexism of the time. Speaking to Jackson's success out shadowing her own, “It wasn't [Jackson] who was stopping me, but the whole milieu in which we lived, and the way things were, which I accepted. Because as long as I could keep working, I was perfectly willing to go along with it, with irritation, with impatience. But it didn't interfere with my work, and that was the main thing.” She states, “My irritation, my anger and rage was with the entire situation, not with the family [Pollock].” Krasner continues, “Painting is a revelation, an act of love. There is no competition in it.”⁵³ Balancing her own

⁵¹ Ibid., 241

⁵² Ibid., 238

⁵³ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 240.

creative output with taking care of Jackson was enough, and Lee could not fight a one-woman battle against the male-dominated art world on top of that.

Unfortunately, Jackson Pollock's drinking got the better of him and he died in 1956 in a one-car crash badly injuring his mistress and killing her friend. The two young women stayed with Pollock while Lee traveled through Europe. At the time, Jackson's drinking was sending him down a dark road (literally and figuratively). Before leaving for Europe, Lee issued Jackson an ultimatum regarding his infidelity – he was to choose between his wife and his mistress – a question left unanswered. The story of Pollock and Krasner provides an example of how both compromise and struggle between two individuals, one introverted, wildly talented, sweet, gentle, and deeply troubled (Jackson), the other charismatic, capable, strong-willed, and intelligent (Lee) existed within the environment of the deeply macho post war 40s and 50s. Further, the interplay between their lives and the works of art they produced is a fascinating way of “reading” the psychological life of both painters. The incredible richness of their story comes to life in Chapter 3.

Krasner and Elaine de Kooning, also a painter and the wife of renowned artist Willem de Kooning (Bill), often competed with each other through the promotion of their husband's work rather than their own.⁵⁴ Though Elaine does not appear here in her own chapter, her story is still useful as an added layer of texture. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning were in fierce contest for the distinction of being America's greatest living painter, though Pollock remained in the

⁵⁴ Oddly, Jackson Pollock's mistress, Ruth Kligman, who was badly injured in the accident that killed him, became the mistress of Willem de Kooning shortly after Pollock's death. After de Kooning eventually left Kligman, she became the mistress of Franz Kline, another very famous abstract expressionist painter. Kligman is also a painter.

foreground until his untimely death. The marriage of Elaine Fried and Willem de Kooning was nothing if not turbulent, plagued with rampant alcoholism and infidelity on both sides. Nevertheless, the two remained married through it all including the birth of Bill's child out of wedlock and a two decade long separation.

By all accounts, Elaine Fried, born in Brooklyn, was a ravishing beauty with a willful and independent joie de vivre. She wanted to be a painter. Elaine first approached Bill as a student desirous of learning from a master at the vanguard of an exciting new artistic movement. After meeting her, Bill was taken with Elaine's beauty and the two soon became lovers – some think it was the first time Bill had ever fallen in love. Elaine was not a conventional woman, and the aspects of her personality that made her magnetic to men also made her difficult. Problems soon crept in for the two, particularly after they were married and moved in together. Elaine had no interest in the typical wifely duties of cooking and keeping house. She wanted to do whatever she wanted to do - and she wanted Bill to pay for it. To prefer absolute freedom to the safety of a conventional married life made Elaine an anomaly to say the least. Still, there were some aspects of being Mrs. de Kooning that Elaine took very seriously. Elaine worked extensively behind the scenes to promote her husband's achievement as an artist. She used her beauty, her sexuality, and her flirtatious nature to interest art critics and gallery owners in his work. Also, Elaine wrote for ARTnews magazine, a platform from which she could further advance notions of Bill's genius along with others in her rich circle of friends. Though their bond was undeniable, neither Elaine nor Bill was suited to live with the other. Soon Bill paid for Elaine to have her own studio space and their lives became a dance of separation and togetherness. The extent to which both Elaine and Bill were

unfaithful to each other makes the fact that they were married seem an absurdity. By some accounts the couple fostered a kind of competition for more lovers as they both spiraled into intense alcoholism. Bill eventually fathered a daughter with another woman, while Elaine notoriously had multiple abortions. Yet, through all of this the two remained connected through their undeniable passion for painting. When asked much later in life, after Bill and Elaine reconciled following two decades of separation, what it was like to live in the shadow of her husband's success Elaine replied, "I lived in his light."⁵⁵

It is important to note that Elaine de Kooning was not only a force in gaining recognition for her widely renowned husband, she was also an artistic force in her own right. In 1962, Elaine painted a commissioned portrait of John F. Kennedy that still hangs today. She also painted portraits of such notable persons as George Bernard Shaw. Furthermore, Elaine held many prestigious teaching posts including appointments at Yale, Carnegie-Mellon, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Georgia, Bard College, the Cooper Union and the Parsons School of Fine Art in New York. There are differing opinions as to whether Elaine suffered or benefitted as an artist from taking the last name of her husband. Some believe that she suffered, never being seen fully in her own right, but always as the wife of the genius, Willem de Kooning. Others believe that she benefitted tremendously by having a way in – including Bill himself who sometimes felt extreme frustration with what he saw as her politicking and social climbing. In the end, her work speaks for itself, and it was Elaine de Kooning who put the paint on the canvas. The story of this couple supports the old adage that "the truth is stranger than

⁵⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/12/elaine-de-kooning-birthday_n_2857575.html

fiction.” After an unbelievably tumultuous life together and apart, Elaine and Bill came together at last in the mid 1970s after two full decades apart. Bill’s health was declining rapidly due to his struggle with alcoholism. Elaine nursed him back to health and the two remained together until her death and his descent into Alzheimer’s.⁵⁶

The last section of this book deals with a different kind of story, an African-American woman who transitioned from entertainer to activist. Etta Moten, born in 1901, and dying in 2004, lived through and was a dynamic participant in everything from the Harlem Renaissance to the Civil Rights Movement and beyond. Moten, raised in Texas, married very young and gave birth to three daughters. This marriage ended after six years. Moten then moved to Lawrence, KS leaving her three daughters in the care of her parents. There she attended the University of Kansas, studied voice and drama, and graduated with a B.F.A. in 1931. These were all daring moves for an African-American woman at the time. After college, Etta moved to New York City where she eventually went on to become one of the most influential cultural icons in African-American history (and one of the least written about). Her career began in an all-black musical revue written by Zora Neale Hurston. In 1933, she made her film debut in *The Gold Diggers*. Playing a widowed housewife, Moten was the first African-American to appear on screen in a non-stereotypical role. Her vocal talents won over audiences across the U.S. and in 1934 Eleanor Roosevelt requested that Moten come and sing for Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s birthday party at the White House. Thus, she claimed another first as the first African-American invited to sing at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. Etta soon became touted far and wide as the “New Negro Woman.” Moten continued as a celebrated performer for

⁵⁶ Most of this information comes from two sources: Lee Hall, *Elaine and Bill: Portrait of a Marriage* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1993). Also Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan, *de Kooning: An American Master* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2006).

many years and is perhaps most well known for her role as Bess in George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, a role that Gershwin created with her in mind.

Also in 1934, Etta Moten married Claude Barnett, the entrepreneur, founder and director of the Associated Negro Press. Leaving behind most of her artistic as her voice aged, Moten soon played an enormous role in African-American civic affairs, particularly those concerning women. Along with Claude, Etta Moten supported and became active in African independence movements. She interviewed Martin Luther King, Jr. in Ghana and made numerous other trips all over the African continent in a multitude of capacities, often as a representative of the United States government. Moten received numerous honors and awards during her lifetime including no less than seven honorary degrees, while continuing to maintain her status as a cultural icon and the idol of many African – American entertainers that came after her, including Lena Horne, Harry Belafonte, and Halle Berry.

Claude Barnett, born in Florida in 1889, moved to Mattoon, Illinois at nine months old to live with his maternal grandmother. He graduated from the Tuskegee Institute in 1906, and for the rest of his life held the philosophies of his friend and mentor, Booker T. Washington close to his heart. After graduating, Barnett moved to Chicago where he worked as a postal clerk and advertising salesman. During this time he started a small mail order business selling photographs of famous Black Americans. Along with a few others he started the Kashmir Chemical Company, marketing cosmetics and other beauty products. It was through these experiences that Barnett noticed a need for real substantive news relevant to the black community. In 1919, he started the Associated Negro Press (ANP). By 1935, the ANP serviced over 200 subscribers both in

the United States and worldwide. During WWII, Barnett pressured the United States government to accredit black journalists as war correspondents. He was also deeply concerned with the living conditions of black tenant farmers. Barnett served on the board of directors at Tuskegee until 1965, as well as for numerous other organizations, including the Red Cross and Provident Hospital in Chicago. By the late 1940s, Barnett, considered a celebrity by many black people around the world, was awarded a doctorate of humanities from Tuskegee. In 1951, the president of Haiti presented him with the Chevalier Order of Honor and Merit, and in 1952 Liberian President William V.S. Tubman bestowed the honorary title, "Commander of the Order of Star of Africa." Barnett died in 1967 at his home in Chicago.

It is often argued by historians that the story of American culture, and American life as a whole is inextricably linked to the dialectic and hard-fought synthesis of African-American culture and thought with America's European roots. So often, and justifiably so, that story is one of oppression and resistance. What is interesting and important about studying Etta Moten and Claude Barnett is that they are cultural forerunners, celebrities, and eventually become accepted institutions in American life. Claude Barnett remained a Republican throughout his life, and even worked as a consultant for the Secretary of Agriculture on behalf of black tenant farmers. Throughout Barnett's life he was an avid proponent for African-American opportunity, but he also became part of an elite group. Historian Adam Green in his remarkable book, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940–1955* considers Barnett to be central to the *creation* of black culture, and contends quite convincingly that Chicago was the center of this particular postwar historical narrative. Green's thesis revolves around the idea that African-

Americans have long been agents in the production of their own culture rather than simply casualties or pawns in an endless story of resistance.⁵⁷ Thus, Etta Moten as an African-American cultural and civic icon, and Claude Barnett as forerunner in the creation of black culture provide a fascinating way of looking at 20th century American culture from a completely new perspective – both as cultural fore-runners and as an original black power couple.

Relevant Studies by Other Historians

By writing about two individuals together their stories are undeniably enriched. This project examines not only the public and sometimes celebrity personae of each person, but delves into the personal as equally valuable windows of understanding. It is very difficult for historians to access a person's more intimate experiences. By writing the biography of a human relationship, precisely those nuanced matters become accessible. Furthermore, studying these relationships enriches our understanding of feminism itself. It is in the subtlety of daily interaction that we are able to really uncover how cultural forces work. In a way, it is easy to march in the street, but how does a woman manage the fine line of doing the dishes or not; which battles does she pick within the quotidian details? How do small daily acts and everyday decisions translate into accommodation of or rebellion against a sexist paradigm?

This type of study is not unprecedented. In an article titled, "Feminism, Men, and Modern Love" historian Ellen Kay Trimberger examines the love relationships of three

⁵⁷ Adam Green *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

men and their preoccupation and ultimate failure to redefine the scope of possibility for gender relations and marriage.⁵⁸ The three men: Max Eastman, Floyd Dell, and Hutchins Hapgood were all heavily influenced by the writing of Swedish essayist, Ellen Key. Key dismissed the Victorian notion of separate spheres in favor of an ideal that lovers should achieve mutual sexual satisfaction along with an intimacy in social interests and inner thoughts. For all three of the men examined in Trimberger's piece (she also edited a book of the writings of Hapgood and his wife Neith Boyce with a stellar and very thoughtful introduction) love relationships were central to their own autobiographies, essays, and novels. What Trimberger uncovers is fascinating. In an attempt to achieve both a psychological and sexual bond in marriage, all three men end up with a male-centered interpretation of feminism that at its core turned into a desire for the adulation of their own egos. All three men chose for their first wives (Hapgood has the only lasting relationship) women who were intellectual, talented, independent, and/or feminists. These men desired someone to "both talk to and kiss."⁵⁹

Eastman, a committed feminist in his early years, made nationwide tours as a popular speaker for suffrage. He first married, Ida Rauh, a socialist (Emma Goldman was a serious figure in Greenwich Village at the time as well) feminist, actress, and artist. Eastman and Rauh were able to consummate their marriage, but Eastman soon found himself sexually attracted to much younger women, women that did not necessarily inspire him intellectually and flew against his ideal. Because the ideal of intimacy required that Eastman tell Rauh of his feelings, their marriage became very troubled

⁵⁸ Ellen Kay Trimberger "Feminism, Men, and Modern Love" in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* Ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 131-152.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 134

when his interests turned into all out affairs. Eventually Max left Ida calling her his “friend and slender-bodied mother.” (Again, the mother theme is omnipresent in nearly all of these stories). Eastman’s next marriage with the beautiful actress Florence Deshon ended in tragedy. Their intense on again and off again relationship, sprinkled with affairs on both sides (she left Charlie Chaplin for Eastman only to have him flee immediately) finally ended when Florence committed suicide. Trimberger emphasizes Eastman’s consistent self-involvement providing his self-satisfied conclusion to the whole situation: “Florence’s death had liberated me to myself.”⁶⁰ In his third marriage, Eastman finally found his match. Eliena Krylenko, the sister of Lenin’s first Minister of Justice, a dancer, painter, poet, and linguist who also loved to cook, keep house, and garden. Trimberger writes that Krylenko made no demands on Eastman and dedicated herself to his welfare. Eastman told his Russian wife of his past wives, “Those loves were not helpful to my work, to my egotism, which is the real force in me. With you it is just the opposite. You gave my self to me as I never possessed it before.”⁶¹ There is no concern for him of what he provides for her. Furthermore, Eastman writes, “There was so large an admixture of the all-giving mother in Eliena’s *love for me* (emphasis my own)- she stood so firmly and without visible effort by our compact of independence- that I felt free to be adolescently romantic about other girls I liked.”⁶² Early in their relationship Eliena’s promise to Eastman was to be, “anything you want me to be – sister, sweetheart, secretary, slave – I’ll be your mother if that is what you want.” Eliena continued to pursue art, but only as a hobby.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 145

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Floyd Dell also married a woman he found to be an intellectual and emotional companion; however, she did not also engage him sexually. Soon, he too was having affairs. Dell wrote:

My private life became a bewildered and inconsistent one. I fell in love, and very seriously; and my wife, however hurt, was kind and generous, and willing to end our marriage. It was I who refused to give up our marriage, and after desperate attempts to eat my cake and have it upon one theory or another, I gave up my love affairs to keep my marriage- only, against my will to fall in love with another girl, and give up that love; and then with a third, giving her up in turn.⁶³

Dell and his wife eventually separated. After a myriad of affairs including serious relationships with photographer, Marjorie Jones, and iconic American poet Edna St. Vincent Millay, Dell began to completely reverse his previous thinking about the importance of shared intellectual or artistic interests:

I felt quite sure now that I did not want to be married to a girl artist. I wanted to be married to a girl who would not put her career before children- or even before me, hideously reactionary as the thought would have seemed a few years ago. One artist in the family, I was convinced, was enough.⁶⁴

Soon Dell married a young Midwesterner, B. Marie Gage and retired into a suburban family life – a huge departure from his active involvement with leftist journalism and the intellectual and artistic community of Greenwich Village. Gage too, had been a socialist and feminist, marching as a suffragist at University of Wisconsin and even being arrested, tried and acquitted for pacifist organizing in California during WWI. After marrying Dell at twenty-three, she abandoned her political work to settle down and become a housewife and mother.

Most pertinent to this paper is Trimberger's examination and analysis of the marriage between Hutchins Hapgood and Neith Boyce. *Both* Hapgood and Boyce were

⁶³ Ibid.,139

⁶⁴ Ibid.,147

writers that ruminated and then wrote extensively on relationships and marriage, specifically their own. This dual-writing provides a highly nuanced and balanced picture of their lives as intellectuals and artists in the newly modern world.

Hutchins Hapgood (1869-1944), similar to the Beats several decades later, was interested and wrote about people outside of America's mainstream, people he encountered in "the ghetto, the saloons, the ethnic restaurants and among immigrants, radicals, prostitutes, and ex-convicts."⁶⁵ He describes feeling most alive among these people and published several sympathetic human-interest stories about them. Later in life he published two autobiographies, *The Story of a Lover* (1919) and *A Victorian in the Modern World* (1939).⁶⁶ These books dealt explicitly with his relationship with Boyce. She too, though primarily a novelist and playwright, wrote autobiographically within her fictionalized work. Boyce, desiring to offer more realistic representations of modern life, dealt extensively with marriages and relationships. Often her stories, though dealing with conflict, never resolve in either the romantic or tragic denouement that is so common.

Neith Boyce (1872-1951), aloof, independent, introverted, and beautiful worked as the only woman reporter on the *Commercial Advertiser*. At age twenty-seven, she moved out of her family home into a hotel in Washington Square. Even as a teenager, Neith preferred the idea of a career and independence over marriage. Yet, she fell in love with "Hutch," and he with her. The two were married in 1899 with the understanding that she would retain both her name and her writing career. Over the course of their marriage, the couple had four children and both pursued intellectual careers, as well as

⁶⁵ Ellen Kay Trimberger *Intimate Warriors: Portraits of a Modern Marriage, 1899-1944* (New York: Feminist Press, 1991).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 8

being founding members of the Prophetstown Players. To the outside world, they seemed to embody the modern ideal of love, but their own writing tells a more complicated story.

Hapgood was not a feminist activist in the same vein as Eastman or Dell. He was, however, very interested in a relationship that could combine love and sex with intellectual companionship. Hutch, charming and outgoing, soon had affairs outside the marriage. His desire for complete intimacy with Neith caused him to discuss all of his affairs at length with her, and further, encourage her to experiment with other men as well. "To have her know other men intimately was with me a genuine desire. I saw in this one of the conditions of greater social relations between her and me, of a richer material for conversation and for a common life together."⁶⁷ Not surprisingly, when this desire was put into practice, Hapgood was not so open-minded. At some point, in response to the pain she felt at Hutch's continued affairs, she contemplated an affair of her own with one of his old college friends. The distress that this caused Hapgood led Neith to eventually break off the relationship with the other man and in turn, have a nervous breakdown. During her recovery, Hutch tended to her devotedly and she began to reveal more of her actual pain than she ever had before. His response indicates ambivalence about whether or not the level of intimacy he had always sought after was truly a prize: "She talked to me as if to her own soul. Never can I forget the terrible, the utter frankness of it. I had longed so for expression from her – longed our life together, but when it came under those circumstances, it was painful indeed."⁶⁸ Trimberger's assessment explains that what Hapgood actually desired from Boyce was an increased

⁶⁷ Ellen Kay Trimberger, "Feminism, Men, and Modern Love," 139.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 139

interest *in him*, not the revelation of her own deep feelings (aka intimacy), particularly if such feelings were critical.⁶⁹

In Hapgood's autobiographical *Story of a Lover*, Neith is presented as strong, yet aloof, cold, and unemotional. Trimberger relates that in this book, as well as in Hutch's letters to his wife from this time, complaints and criticisms of her failure to meet his needs abound. No doubt, the lack of parental attention and affection in Boyce's childhood led her to become more independent and emotionally self-reliant than most women of her time. However, Trimberger also points out that Boyce's letters to Hutch reveal a woman who cared deeply for him, rarely criticized him, and seemed afraid of losing his love. "If his book demonstrates his overpowering ego, her letters evidence an increasing negation of self."⁷⁰

In a play called *Enemies*, written jointly (Boyce writing the wife's lines and Hapgood, the husband's) Neith wrote for her very authentic character:

You, on account of your love for me, have tyrannized over me, bothered me, badgered me, nagged me, for fifteen years. You have interfered with me, taken my time and strength, and prevented me from accomplishing great works for the good of humanity. You have crushed my soul, which longs for serenity and peace, with your perpetual complaining... You have wanted to treat our relation, and me, as clay, and model it into the form you saw in your imagination.⁷¹

Neith also tried with great courage to adapt to Hutch's views on sexuality, though suffering tremendously in the process. In a letter to him in 1907 she writes:

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 141

I have an abiding love for you- the deepest thing in me. But in a way I hate your interest in sex, because I suffered from it. I assure you that I can never think of your physical passions for other women without pain-even though my reason doesn't find fault with you. But it's instinct and it hurts. The whole thing is sad and terrible, yet we all joke about it every day.⁷²

Writing to him again in 1916 she admits that her own aloofness, which became Hapgood's constant criticism of her, was a self-protective response to that pain. After the tragic death of their oldest son, Hapgood ceased his affairs with other women, but in so doing lost his passion for life. He wrote, "Here I am in at middle life living with the one woman I want to live with, hopeful for my fine children, interested in a work I have chosen and which was not forced on me, rich in friends, in good health... and yet, in spite of all passionately unsatisfied."⁷³ Neith Boyce became more of a maternal figure to him and the two stayed together until Hapgood's death in 1944.⁷⁴

Thus, to restate, studying relationships allows the historian to perceive how the snake of cultural paradigm and expectation, all part of an historical moment can slither between two people in spite of themselves. Furthermore, it allows the reverse as well. Through the story of a single relationship we can see how foundations were set for what was to come. The girlfriends or wives of the Beats and the abstract expressionists were living their lives without the benefit of a program to follow, just as the modern women were. They were not part of a movement. They had nowhere to look for information on

⁷² Ibid., 143

⁷³ Ibid., 140

⁷⁴ For a compelling look at the infamous marriage of Sylvia Plath to Ted Hughes see Diane Middlebrook *Her Husband: Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003). In a little known epilogue to Plath's tragic suicide, Ted Hughes' next wife, Assia Wevill also killed herself four years later along with the four-year-old daughter she had with Hughes. Also, the story of Sophia Peabody and Nathaniel Hawthorne provides an interesting look into a dynamic marriage from the nineteenth century. One in which, again, Sophia is overshadowed by history's devotion to her husband. I also think that looking into the lives of Harper Lee, Flannery O'Connor, Anne Sexton, and Adrienne Rich provide evidence of the difficulty of being a creative woman in a relationship during the post war period. Lee and O'Connor famously never married, while Sexton and Rich lived through troubled relationships themselves.

how they were feeling or living. In this way they were path setters - not consciously feminist, yet laying the groundwork for feminist movements that we know now were just around the corner. These women left home, lived life on their own terms, valued ideals of art and freedom, fell in love, succeeded and failed, and as Hettie Jones emphasizes – took off their girdles (the precursor to taking off bras).

Theoretical Framework and Justification

The use of biography I find particularly effective in exploring cultural phenomena. Culture can be an exciting arena for contests of power, and is often the place where historians can unearth the voices, expressions, and experiences of otherwise marginalized individuals and groups. Studying cultural output can help identify and unpack the presence of psychological forces, such as anxiety, or fear, or pride, or ego, and attempt to decipher what these inner dilemmas meant in a changing world, how they are created, and their outward consequences. The concept of cultural hegemony is taken from Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci and describes the ability of a dominant group to make their culture the norm in a culturally diverse society, thus reinforcing their power in the economic and political spheres. In other words, there is already a dominant culture in place that individuals and groups are either accommodating, or resisting, or both. Historian Jackson Lears in his article, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities” elaborates upon the ways in which this concept is useful for

historians.⁷⁵ First, Lears makes the point that cultural hegemony provides the opportunity for cultural historians to connect ideas to the complexities of historical change without reducing them to secondary phenomena. Also, I find critical value in the notion of “contradictory consciousness.” That accommodation and resistance can exist logically side-by-side, and that sometimes, rational identification with aspects of the dominant culture can undermine challenges to it, is a very useful framework even for overcoming such oversimplifications as mainstream cultural consensus. Thus, while an historian like Richard Hofstadter can identify the powerful absorptive capacity of mainstream culture, another historian can identify the real and vigorous challenges to the mainstream that may never have amounted to much at all in the big picture. This amorphous and sometimes ambivalent, silent and sometimes vigorous dialectic is critical to understanding power in the cultural arena, both in the public and the private spheres. Lears also points out that Gramsci’s notion of cultural hegemony was not a case of brainwashing, but rather a way of managing public discourse such that some tools for thinking about experience are readily available while other are suppressed. This was certainly the case in the post war period.

This leads into the centrality of language and meaning in understanding experience or even possibilities. How words are used is not accidental, but is instead a significant part of the way in which dominant cultural forces maintain power. One of the most interesting and useful parts of Lears’ discussion is the interplay between public and private. Are institutions such as family and marriage, mediating institutions, escapes, or the hotbeds of counter-hegemonic resistance itself? This question is central to this

⁷⁵ T.J. Jackson Lears “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities” *The American Historical Review* 90.3 (June, 1985), 567-593.

dissertation. Further, Lears insists that private needs have public consequences, something he explores at length in his book, *No Place of Grace*.⁷⁶ And to further play along with the dialectic by reversing the question, how does culture shape definitions of self-interest? Culturally speaking then, where is the line between private and public?

It's meaningful to explain that biography is in no way confined to its subject matter. By writing biography, the historian is called to use "the facts" of a single person's life (or in this case double) to explore exactly what those facts say about a broader American past. In other words, the history is not just the background to the individual life; rather the individual life helps us to understand a larger historical process and to enrich our understanding of that process.⁷⁷ Biography is, in a sense then, seeing through the life. The people who appear in the following pages were a part of so much; their stories provide incredibly valuable insight, adding texture, challenging and enriching our sometimes rigid understanding of gender relationships in the post war period, and more generally who we are today.

⁷⁶ T.J. Jackson Lears *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁷⁷ See David Brion Davis "Recent Directions in American Cultural History" *American Historical Review* (February, 1968).

JOYCE JOHNSON AND JACK KEROUAC

“Pain or love or danger makes you real again” – Jack Kerouac

Just after New Year’s Day, 1957, 21-year-old Joyce Glassman¹ stood in her friend’s kitchen when Allen Ginsberg unexpectedly handed her the phone. “I’m Jack,” said the voice on the other end. “Allen tells me you’re very nice. Would you like to come down to Howard Johnson’s on Eighth Street? I’ll be sitting at the counter. I have black hair and I’ll be wearing a red and black shirt.”² That is where the story of Joyce Glassman and Jack Kerouac begins.

All stories have a beginning, but beginnings always contain what has come before and are thus only part of a continuum whose origins only priests and physicists dare to imagine. Going back one step, it’s important for our purposes to understand why Joyce Glassman was in that particular kitchen, whose kitchen it was, and how both caller and receiver came to that moment.

The kitchen belonged to a young friend of Joyce’s, Elise Cowen, Elise *Nada* Cowen. Nada means nothing, a name strangely suggestive of both Elise’s power and her

¹ At the time Joyce Johnson met Jack Kerouac she was Joyce Glassman. She did not become Joyce Johnson until her marriage to James Johnson, which occurred after her relationship with Kerouac. Joyce Johnson is well-respected memoirist, editor, teacher, and novelist. Joyce Glassman is the neophyte who appears in this analysis. When referring to the young woman I use Glassman. When I refer to her as a writer, I use Johnson.

² Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 128.

humility. Many great philosophers throughout the ages including Plato and Emerson understood the existence of opposing forces, not as good and evil, or beautiful and ugly, but as good and the absence of good, or beautiful and the absence of beauty. Viewing the world in this way allows the absence, or the nothing to be crucial and even generative to the presence of all that actually *is*. Elise's existence in many ways creates the story of this chapter. She is the relief that brought to bear much of what became possible for Joyce Glassman. Understanding something about Elise is imperative to this story as well as to the gender specific experiences within it.

As a child, Elise Cowen was the pride and joy of her middle-class Jewish household. She was intelligent and importantly for a girl, beautiful. Then, at age 13, something changing and catastrophic occurred. Elise invited some of her junior high friends over to her home and decided to make brownies. After the brownies had baked for a while she opened the oven and it exploded in her face, singeing off her eyebrows and hair. This event devastated not only Elise, but also her father, who agonized over the loss of his daughter's beauty. Furthermore, adolescence brought weight, acne, and anger from her father that his precious daughter was being replaced with a brooding teenager who took no care with her appearance.³

The weight that Elise gained corresponded to the weight of not being what her father wanted. At age sixteen, she slept with a boy after months of adolescent wondering and increasing physical contact. The boy immediately rejected Elise after the f(act), his concern being that they would get too involved. Joyce Johnson writes in reference to Elise's experience,

³ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 55.

I'd learned myself by the age of sixteen that just as girls guarded their virginity, boys guarded something less tangible which they called Themselves. They seemed to believe they had a mission in life, from which they could easily be deflected by being exposed to too much emotion.⁴

This statement encapsulates a great deal of information about how Joyce's relationship with Jack Kerouac would eventually play out. If the woman has her body to offer in the system of exchange, and the man has Himself, what happens then when the body is offered? What is left in the system of exchange? Can the woman also become a Herself? How? In many ways, Elise Cowen was the brave forerunner for Johnson. Elise, with very few models of how to be Herself, bore the weight of new experiences in ways that sometimes left Johnson protected.

Both girls attended Barnard College, where they met. Both became involved with a young married philosophy professor named Alex Greer.⁵ Elise was first. Elise took care of Alex, cleaning his apartment and caring for his young son even when Alex went out with other women. When Elise left for a summer, Joyce became involved with Alex, going so far as to introduce him to her parents, who were none too pleased with this married gentile who already had a child. Joyce had her own doubts about Alex as well. She began a fictionalized story about their romance that was never finished:

Jane loves Michael and believes in him. It is she, more than anyone, who can make him feel that he is "God." She has assumed the responsibility for the more humdrum aspects of his life, and is actually playing the role of a mother to him, although she feels it is the other way around.⁶

⁴ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 56.

⁵ In her memoir, Joyce Johnson refers to the real man named Donald Cook as Alex Greer.

⁶ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 87.

This fictionalized passage speaks with honesty to the exchange that was taking place between professor and student. Her role was to both mother and to make him feel “that he is God.”

Sleeping with a married professor was not Joyce’s first rebellious act. As a young teenager, Johnson would sneak down to Greenwich Village on Sundays to witness and hesitantly attempt to be a part of an awakening scene, so different from the middle-class existence her parents had worked so hard to procure. In order to be home on time, she would have to tear herself away around 6:15 in the evening, tunneling towards the weeklong dullness of an ordinary life. She describes the feeling of exiting the excitement: “As the seconds bleed from the minutes, I’m in an odd state of heightened longing and anxiety. I feel much the same in later years whenever I part from a man I love. The anxiety is not so much over leaving as over an impending fading of identity.”⁷

This “fading of identity” is the strumming of the same chord my young female high school students seem to experience when they are left without the attention of a boy. My purpose here is to unpack that emotion, that lingering cultural anguish. By viewing Joyce Johnson’s experiences as emblematic of a lasting cultural phenomenon which keeps women from a “self-identity,” insight is gained both into the reach and impact of the cultural matrices of her time, as well as those forces that are still at play in the present day.

In the spring of 1953, it was Elise who met Allen Ginsberg at a party in Alex Greer’s apartment. Physically speaking, Elise and Allen were matched as though siblings: dark hair, black-rimmed glasses, and large brown eyes. The two arranged to go

⁷ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 32.

on a date and found that beyond their physical similarities, there existed between them an “instant knowing.” Allen accepted Elise. He was, after all, no stranger to eccentricities in women. Allen’s own mother, the once beautiful and gifted Naomi, suffered a mental illness for which she was in and out of institutions, given electric shock treatments and lobotomized. Some years later in a journal, Ginsberg wrote, “I’ve always been attracted to intellectual madwomen.”⁸ Here he included Elise, one of only a few times she appears in any of his letters or journals.

Allen, on the other hand, became Elise’s entire world- an eternity in another person. The night of their first date he took her around to many of the up and coming Greenwich Village haunts where she wondered at the other girls sitting quietly in the San Remo bar. “The women here, Elise notices, are all beautiful and have such remarkable cool that they never, never say a word; they are presences merely. But she herself is tormented by speechlessness.”⁹ Elise came to view Allen as her “intercessor.” He turned into the ever-sought-after Acceptance for which she longed as well as a guide and infinite revelation, someone who seemingly understood and could soothe the agony of feeling different and alone.¹⁰

Soon after their meeting, Allen Ginsberg departed for Mexico then San Francisco, a man on the brink of coming into his own as a cultural force. As he crossed from Mexico into the United States he wrote in his journal, “Enter U. S. alone naked with

⁸ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 76.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁰ Both Allen and Elise were seeing analysts at the time- Allen’s thought that sleeping with Elise was good for Allen, a move away from homosexuality, while Elise’s therapist thought it was bad for her, another experience of devaluation indicating a lack of self-respect.

knapsack, watch, camera, poem, beard.”¹¹ In San Francisco, Allen fell in love with eighteen-year-old Peter Orlovsky and gave up all attempts to be straight sexually or to hold a straight job. He found his own voice in the writing of *Howl*, and broke permanently with literary tradition, firmly establishing himself in the history of American poetry and letters. It was a full three years after their date that the *New York Times Book Review* published an article on the reading of *Howl*, birthing the San Francisco Renaissance. On the Sunday it came out, Elise poured over the article and dreamed of going West. During his absence, she held firmly to Allen’s image, even taking a female lover to somehow be closer to him - imagining a kind of symbiosis of homosexuality could bring them closer.

Finally, in November 1956, on a bitter cold afternoon Allen returned to New York, his star on the rise, and though he intended to stay for only a couple of months, he also intended to make New York his. Along with Allen in this Finland Station-esque arrival was his lover Peter Orlovsky, Peter’s brother Lafcadio, and Jack Kerouac. They had nowhere to stay; Allen phoned Elise. Later that night Allen and Peter moved in to Elise’s apartment. In four small tenement rooms in Yorkville thus lived Elise, her girlfriend, Allen, and his boyfriend. By numerous accounts that apartment became a magical place. Allen’s energy on fire at the head of his revolution, he swept up people, ideas, writings, and excluded no one from the warm steady beam of his attention. Elise remained deeply in love with Allen, bustling about the apartment doing whatever chores she imagined could be helpful to him.¹²

¹¹ Bill Morgan, *The Works of Allen Ginsberg, 1941-1944: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), 393.

¹² Elise is often mentioned in Ginsberg biographies for either being an example of a heterosexual sexual encounter or for typing his poem, *Kaddish*.

While Allen and Peter were living with Elise, Jack Kerouac roomed with the two Helens.¹³ Earlier in the year (1956) he had stayed alone in a lookout cabin for 63 days on Desolation Peak, a mountain in the state of Washington. Here, at age 34, he attempted to confront the Void. Jack's experiences up to that point had led him to a deepening interest in the spiritual teachings of Buddhism. The Dharma, the nothingness and the Oneness all appealed to Kerouac as a philosophy as well as an antidote to much of his own suffering. In his characteristic charming and brilliant way he made Buddhism his own and called himself a Zen lunatic. In a letter to his first wife, Edie Parker, soon after this trip to Desolation Peak he wrote the following:

“The world you see is just a movie in your mind.

Rocks don't see it.

Bless and sit down.

Forgive and forget.

Practice kindness all day to everybody

and you will realize you're already

in heaven now.

That's the story.

That's the message.

Nobody understands it, nobody listens,

they're all running around like chickens with

heads cut off. I will try to teach it but it will

be in vain, s'why I'll

¹³ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 125. -- The two Helens were Midwestern girls who lived together and resembled each other slightly. Kerouac became involved with one of them. During his brief stay, she became increasingly wary of his unpredictable and ultimately irresponsible behavior. He left NY over Christmas to escape her anger and hitchhiked down to North Carolina to take refuge with his mother. Helen Weaver, the Helen that Kerouac was involved with wrote a memoir of her experience with him as well (that she dedicated to “the other Helen”: Helen Weaver, *The Awakener: A Memoir of Kerouac and the Fifties* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2009).

end up in a shack
 praying and being
 cool and singing
 by my woodstove
 making pancakes."¹⁴

By the time Jack came down from Desolation Peak and began his decent into San Francisco to be part of the burgeoning poetic Renaissance, he had already written eleven novels - only one was published called *The Town and the City*. Allen planned to list them all in the dedication to the upcoming City Lights edition of *Howl* with the addition that ““All these books will be published in heaven.”¹⁵

Jack Kerouac was also twice divorced by late 1956 when he arrived with Allen in New York City. The details of his life up to that moment (and beyond) are very well documented in numerous biographies and even in his own novels.¹⁶ To give a brief overview, Kerouac, of French Canadian heritage, was born and raised in Lowell, Massachusetts. He began writing in journals at the age of 14 and was known for his unbelievable memory. Jack’s memory was so keen that his nickname as a boy in Lowell was “Memory Babe.” After high school, Jack won a football scholarship to Columbia University and left Lowell for New York. It was here in 1944, that Jack met his “boy gang,” the extraordinary group of independent-minded young writers including Ginsberg, William Burroughs, and Lucien Carr. Together these young men shared literature,

¹⁴ See Jack Kerouac, *The Portable Jack Kerouac* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2007). This passage from Kerouac’s letter is reproduced in numerous places.

¹⁵ Allen Ginsberg with intro by William Carlos Williams, *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Pocket Poets, Number 4, 2001).

¹⁶ For biographies see Gerald Nicosia, *Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), Ann Charters, *Kerouac: A Biography* (New York: St. Martins Griffin, 1994), and Joyce Johnson, *The Voice is All: The Lonely Victory of Jack Kerouac* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013).

critiqued each other's work, explored together, and experimented with drugs and sex. They eventually became the cast of characters that appear in so many of Kerouac's novels. Kerouac acknowledged the tremendous influence, both spiritual and intellectual, that he shared with his friends. There existed a vigorous attraction between them, constant stimulation, and endless vibrant conversation.

The best talker of all was Neal Cassady. Cassady, an autodidact, grew up on the streets of Denver, in and out of reform schools mostly for car theft. He became the muse and inspiration for many of Jack's most famous books. Cassady's verbal acumen thrilled the young Jack Kerouac. The famous and often quoted passage from *On the Road* where Kerouac states:

the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars,

perfectly describes Neal Cassady, "Dean Moriarity" in *On the Road*.¹⁷ Neal Cassady also possessed powerful sexual magnetism as well as limitless physical energy. Furthermore, Neal, being completely different from the university-educated members of Jack's boy group, reminded Jack of his friends in Lowell. Ultimately, it was Neal who inspired Jack to leave the East and set out on the road with him in 1947.¹⁸ The trips they took together between 1947 and 1950 led to what became the seminal novel in American literature, *On the Road*. Part of the importance of Kerouac's most well-known book is its subject

¹⁷ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin, 1998).

¹⁸ When Neal went On the Road with Jack he left behind a wife and children. His wife, Carolyn Cassady wrote a memoir of her own. See Carolyn Cassady, *Off the Road: Twenty Years with Neal Cassady, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg* (New York: Overlook Press, 2008). Neal Cassady's first wife, Luanne Henderson, also wrote an account of her adventures on the road and its aftermath. See Gerald Nicosia with Anne Marie Santos, *One and Only: The Untold Story of On The Road and LuAnne Henderson, the Woman Who Started Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady on Their Journey* (Berkeley CA: Viva Editions, 2013).

matter: postwar America seen from the perspective of young men who chose to opt out and explore the underbelly of life, to give up on what was expected and to say good-bye.

When Kerouac and Cassady were apart they would write long letters to each other, Jack encouraged Neal to write everything, be free and hold nothing back. Cassady took his friend's advice and wrote what is now known as the "Joan Anderson Letter." The letter is a 13,000-word effort composed on Benzedrine, in which Cassady relays in vivid detail his relationship with a woman named Joan Anderson.¹⁹ Five days later, Kerouac responded in kind. Finding unprecedented freedom in the truth, Kerouac sat down to write his own "full confession" to Cassady. In it he announces, "I hereby renounce all prose." This was Kerouac's turning point, his breakthrough, and the discovery of his voice. "The voice is all," Kerouac wrote. He would make great sacrifices for it.

For nearly a decade prior to 1957 (when Joyce met Jack) he had traveled nearly constantly, crashing anywhere, hopping trains, and hitching rides.²⁰ After finishing *On the Road*, Jack abruptly left his (second) pregnant wife, telling her to get an abortion. He had no place of his own save wherever his mother, Gabrielle Kerouac, lived. He would return to "Memere" to type his books, store his journals and letters, and recuperate. Jack's mother was the constant in his life, a woman who would take care of him, and incidentally the only woman he actually ever took *on the road*.

¹⁹ This letter was recently discovered – see Katy Steinmetz, "Long Lost Letter that Inspired *On the Road* Found in Oakland," in *Time Magazine* (Dec. 2, 2014).

²⁰ In an Huffington Post article written by Joyce Johnson she relays the story of Jack's mother's horror at reading a story in her morning newspaper in 1947 about abandoned children in Italy who were living in caves, searching the countryside for food and having sex and babies as young as 13. Jack's mother wanted the Pope to step in. After their conversation, Jack wrote in his notebook, "I want to go there." Joyce Johnson, "How the Beat Generation Got Away from Kerouac," *Huffington Post* (December 11, 2012) - article found at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joycejohnson/how-the-beat-generation-g_b_1958500.html

Servicing his “wild prose” required Jack to court exhilaration relentlessly. The constant seeking of heightened experience was exhausting and required more and more energy to sustain as he got older. Furthermore, writing as prolifically as Kerouac did is a monumental task both physically and spiritually. At times he wrote more than 8,000 words per day for days on end. Joyce Johnson writes in her introduction to a later edition of Kerouac’s *Desolation Angels* that Jack wrote as a defense against feelings of emptiness and despair that would overcome him when life was calm or standing still.²¹ More than any physical discomfort, Kerouac could not bear ennui. Standing still brought to bear the weight of death and suffering, no doubt a result at least in part of the untimely passing of his older brother Gerard when Kerouac was a young boy. Increasing use of alcohol and drugs, used to provoke life-momentum made Jack become angry and bitter, a sad contrast to his gentle nature. At times he felt that “loss and tedium” would drive him insane, turning to romantic ideals of a quiet life with his mother for refuge. These weighty psychological and spiritual sources of agony were what led him to Buddhism. With great insight into the roots of Jack’s despair, William Burroughs’s warned him, “A man who uses Buddhism or any other instrument to remove love from his being in order to avoid suffering, has committed, in my mind, a sacrilege comparable to castration.”²² Just before going up to Desolation Peak Jack wrote to Neal Cassady, “That nothin’ means nothin’ is the saddest thing I know.”²³

Jack’s sixty-three days on the mountain in the summer of 1956, shortly before he met Joyce Glassman, was a deliberate adventure in confronting what was inside of him.

²¹ Joyce Johnson, introduction to *Desolation Angels*, by Jack Kerouac, viii. New York City: Riverhead Books, 1995.

²² *Ibid.*, xv.

²³ *Ibid.*

As an unknown writer, he still had the courage, freedom, and imagination to be wherever the road led him, but as history would eventually make clear, the bulk of his great work was behind him. In turn, the devastating fame that made him JACK KEROUAC lay just ahead.

Joyce Glassman's life up until this point was not void of adventure either, though hers were of a much different sort than Jack's. Rather than experiencing the freedom of the road, her foray into freedom was that of a young woman leaving home. Joyce's relationship with Alex Greer precipitated both a break with her family as well as with mid-century feminine norms. On Independence Day, 1955, at the age of 19, Joyce moved into an apartment of her own. The significance of a woman leaving home in the 1950s was primarily weighted with anxieties surrounding her sexuality. Johnson describes it this way:

Everyone knew in the 1950s why a girl from a nice family left home. The meaning of her theft of herself from her parents was clear to all – as well as what she'd be up to in that room of her own... The crime of sex was like guilt by association – not visible to the eye of the outsider, but an act that could be rather easily conjectured. Consequences would make it manifest.²⁴

By her own account, Joyce Glassman did leave home in 1955 because of sex. She wanted to enjoy sexual freedom with Alex Greer. Alex, she felt was the concrete embodiment of an abstract desire for freedom, a desire that percolated in many at the time and was the harbinger of the explosion of sexual liberation that was to come a decade later. Still in the 50s, however, it would be difficult to overstate the bravery that it took for a woman to leave home and live alone, something Elise had already managed.

²⁴ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 102.

Unlike Elise, Joyce believed that living alone would only be a temporary arrangement, just until she and Alex got married. In her nineteen-year-old mind, she would show Alex how different she was, how independent, how sexually transformed, and that would woo him towards commitment.²⁵ Not surprisingly, given his track record, Alex was not wooed and Joyce began to spend more and more nights alone in her apartment not feeling homesick, but rather “uninhabited” – like a garment that Alex hung back on the rack.²⁶ Soon, Alex fell for another young Barnard student named Bobbie. The vicious agony that Joyce felt in the wake of Alex’s abandonment convinced her, as the end of many first loves do, that she would always be alone and would never love anyone the way she loved him.

Just two months after Alex’s departure, and in the aftermath of her misery, Joyce missed her period. She was pregnant, but not by Alex, instead with a boy she cared nothing for – the act itself being little more than a mistaken turn at the end of a long evening. Being twenty years old, and having cut herself off from her family, she saw abortion as the only possible option. Abortions were illegal in the 1950s, only being available for a physically healthy woman through the recommendation of a therapist in order to preserve her mental health. Abortion was also serious business in those days, as it is today, and these sorts of “therapeutic abortions” were very difficult to come by. After acquiring a therapist, Joyce was told that he “wouldn’t even try” to help her get what she saw as her only possible choice.²⁷

²⁵ Sexuality too was a way for a woman to mirror a man’s greatness, whether she was sincere or not.

²⁶ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 103.

²⁷ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 107.

Through underground channels of women in the know, Joyce was able to find a doctor willing to perform an illegal abortion. She asked Alex if he would accompany her, not wanting to go alone. Alex told her that he would go, but only if she would have a drink with him... *and* Bobbie. This arrangement was untenable. Joyce ended up going to the doctor's office with a young man whose fetish was to arrange and take young women to get abortions. The doctor was gruff and angry. It was something to be survived – a woman's adventure.²⁸

Joyce, unlike most young woman her age, was expected and encouraged by her mother to make her own way financially in the world. Mrs. Glassman dreamed of Joyce becoming a composer of musicals, and rigorously groomed her child in the theater. Mrs. Glassman also confided in Joyce too intimately the disappointment she felt in her marriage. Joyce resented this confidence as well as the vicarious pressure her mother placed on her, forcing Joyce to be a kind of savior from the dullness of her own married existence. As soon as Joyce began creative writing classes at Barnard she realized that she felt a way about expression through words that she never felt about music. Equally devastating to her mother as moving away from home was moving away from her mother's dreams for her.

At Barnard, Joyce enrolled in a writing class with "Professor X." "How many of you girls want to be writers?" he asked on the first day of class. Flurries of hands eventually rose after initial hesitation. After Professor X scans the room, knowing he is in a room full of creative writing majors he said piercingly and with a sardonic smile, "Well, I'm sorry to see this. Very sorry. Because first of all, if you were going to be

²⁸ Ibid., 109-110.

writers, you wouldn't be enrolled in this class. You couldn't even be enrolled in school. You'd be hopping freight trains riding through America."²⁹ Slowly all the hands came down. How was a young woman to manage that?

Joyce Glassman did not officially graduate from Barnard; she lacked one physical education credit upon departure. In spite of this deficiency, she was still able to get a job in publishing. When Joyce left home, she left earning fifty dollars a week – only slightly less than one needed to get by. However, Joyce's new boss, Naomi Burton took an interest in her writing and encouraged her to enroll in a novel writing workshop at the New School for Social Research with Hiram Haydn.³⁰ In the novel Joyce began to write she included characters based both on Elise and Alex. In turning Alex into a character she was able to take away his power to hurt her.³¹

By 1956, she had a slightly better paying job at another literary agency and moved into a new apartment. Things were okay. So far she had survived the adventures of leaving home. She was working by day, writing by night, and enjoying the company of new arrivals into the Village including Allen and Peter. There was only one person she kept hearing about and hoped very much to meet.³² That person was Jack Kerouac.

John Clellon Holmes, credited with writing the first Beat novel in 1952 titled *Go*, wrote about the characters percolating and coming into their own during this time. The

²⁹ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 81.

³⁰ Naomi Burton later became famous for publishing the works of Thomas Merton.

³¹ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 103.

³² *Ibid.*, 104.

famous names, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassady, Herbert Huncke, Lucien Carr, all appear in his novel, the author being more of an observer. In 1977, in the preface to a new edition he wrote, “Did we really resemble these feverish young men, the centerless young women, awkwardly reaching out for love, for hope, for comprehension of their lives and times?” Further into the preface he matches each of the male characters in his novel to the original person, whereas the girls are “amalgams of several people,” “accurate to the young women of the time,” “a type rather than an individual.”³³ These girls are not memorable. If a writer, or a human for that matter is only interesting or memorable, or substantive, or even alive based on access to experience and adventure, where does that leave those with limited access?

When the phone call came Joyce attended to her eye shadow and quickly left to go and meet Jack Kerouac at the Howard Johnson’s on Eighth Street. The man in the black and red shirt. The man she had heard so much about. The “bad” man who had caused a scene at the literary agency, and whose tattered book she had read surreptitiously at work. The man whose beauty radiated out of the few photos she had seen of him. At last they would meet!

As Joyce entered the Howard Johnson’s she saw Jack’s black and red lumberjack shirt, his black hair, his brown skin, and his penetrating blue eyes. To her Jack seemed to be the only person in color, vibrant. “Jack?” Years later she wondered why Allen had

³³ John Clellon Holmes, *Go* (New York: P.P. Appel, 1977).

arranged this meeting. Putting two and two together it is pretty clear that Joyce was a young woman with a relatively hip outlook, a job/some money, and even more importantly an apartment. The adventuresome writers and intellectuals of the Beat Generation were often dependent on women to work and provide life's daily necessities of food and shelter. They had dropped out of the traditional masculine role of provider. After ordering coffee Jack looked glum. He couldn't pay for it. He was waiting for a check from his publisher. Joyce paid for their coffee and bought Jack food as well, frankfurters and beans. It made her feel competent and womanly.³⁴

In the Howard Johnson's, Jack charmed Joyce. He made funny faces and she melted into his sad and penetrating beauty. At 21 years old, Joyce construed Jack's melancholy as that of someone needing love. Later, in *Desolation Angels*, Jack described his own take on their meeting,

But it was the beginning of perhaps the best love affair I ever had because Alyce [Joyce] was an interesting young person, a Jewess, elegant middleclass sad and looking for something – She looked Polish as hell, with the peasant's legs, the bare low bottom, the torque of hair (blond) and the sad understanding eyes. In fact she sorta fell in love with me. But that was only because I really didn't impose on her. When I asked her for bacon and eggs and applesauce at two in the morning, she did it gladly, because I asked it sincerely.³⁵

This passage is interesting because Kerouac writes that he did *not* impose on her and then continues by saying that she made food for him at two in the morning (while she was working full time as a secretary at a literary agency). It is not an imposition though because alas, he is *sincere*.

³⁴ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 127-129.

³⁵ Kerouac, *Desolation Angels*, 328. Jack's books are based on true to life events, though altered at times. Alyce is Joyce. Kerouac biographer, Ann Charters writes that *Desolation Angels* is the most true to life of all of Kerouac's novels, taken the most directly from his journals.

As they finished up at the Howard Johnson's Jack asked Joyce where she lived and then "why don't you let me stay at your place?"³⁶ Joyce answered coolly, "If you wish." In her memoir Johnson writes that she answered the question as if it were of no great consequence and as if she had no wishes of her own.³⁷ Immediately after meeting him then, Joyce Glassman was suddenly living with Jack Kerouac. He had no place else to go. As they walked towards her apartment he put his arm around her, calling her "Joycey" and dangled his hand down over her breast.³⁸ That was the way men walked in Mexico, he told her. "Someday when you go there, you'll see that for yourself."³⁹

Jack told Joyce about his time on Desolation Peak. "I wish I was there now. I should've stayed up there."⁴⁰ Johnson records that this statement made her feel both sad for him and completely cancelled out, a recurring sentiment. She talked to him about her aspirations as a writer. A prescient sign in the subway advertising an airline invited "FLY NOW PAY LATER." Joyce joked that it would be a good title for a novel. *Pay me the Penny After* would be a bit better thought Jack. When the two made it back to Joyce's apartment he did not ask to see her budding manuscript, instead he pulled her against him and kissed her before the lights were even turned on. Jack expressed surprise that she kissed him back. "The trouble is" Jack said as they came up for air, "I don't like blondes." Joyce responded, "Well, in that case I'll just dye my hair."⁴¹

³⁶ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 129.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ I have noticed a strange pattern in men "renaming" women. Emerson renamed his wife Lydia, Lydian because he found the double vowel unappealing. Johnson says that "Joycey" was a nickname she had as child, but had not been called that since. Is it endearing or reductive?

³⁹ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 130.

⁴⁰ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 128.

⁴¹ Ibid., 131.

Jack officially moved in the next day, bringing along his very few belongings. Joyce found these minimal essentials “heartbreakingly attractive.”⁴² Most of his belongings were notebooks. The business of living together became smooth very quickly. Jack called the two of them “buddies,” which made Joyce feel both proud and disappointed. She found herself longing to be dark – dark haired, mysterious, foreign, one of the fellaheen he was so drawn too, a woman that made him crazy, a woman that was more than “buddy.” Joyce saw herself in contrast as unprimeval, of the city, as everyday as bacon and eggs. In spite of these sometimes disappointing reflections on herself, she felt that living with Jack made her world “charmed” and ultimately “transformed.”⁴³ She imagined herself lying out in the open just as Jack had so many nights on his trips across the country. She imagined that feeling her own warmth against the cool night air would provide proof of her own existence.

One night Jack called Joyce from the Village to say he had a reunion with Helen Weaver and she shouldn't wait up for him. Fuming and heartbroken Joyce attempted to track him down at a bar called the White Horse. When she couldn't find him she found Helen's number and called her apartment trembling. When Jack got on the phone Joyce gave him an ultimatum: come meet her at the bar in 15 minutes or it was good-bye for good. He was surprised how fast she'd gotten downtown and surprised that she'd come to get him back. Jack came to the White Horse to meet Joyce and sang in the cab on the way back to her apartment. Later, reading *Desolation Angels* Joyce learned that Jack was

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 133.

proud on the cab ride home as they “flashed by oceangoing vessels docked at the North River pier.”⁴⁴ He would soon be moving on anyway.

It was six weeks that Jack Kerouac lived with Joyce Glassman before he was once again on the move, leaving New York to join William Burroughs in Tangier. In those six weeks Joyce began to know Jack. She would listen to him talk about his travels in vivid word pictures that he painted for her. She wondered if he could ever include a woman on his journeys. At times she was brave enough to ask. Jack would stop this line of questioning by saying that all Joyce really wanted was babies. In his mind that was all that every woman wanted and therefore all that Joyce wanted too. His discussion of the subject became more serious when he would lament that even more than she wanted to be a great woman writer she wanted to bring life into the world and become a link in the long chain of suffering and death. When Joyce responded that she did want babies *some day*, but not for a long time, Jack would wisely and sadly shake his head.⁴⁵ He never told Joyce the full story of his relationship with his first wife, Edie Parker who had had an abortion through forced labor at five months when Jack had shipped out for Greenland, leaving her behind.

One day he did show Joyce a picture he had in his wallet of a little girl. When Joyce remarked that the five-year-old looked like Jack he balked. “Well, she’s not my daughter, I don’t care who she looks like. I know who’s her father.”⁴⁶ This was the child of his second marriage to Joan Haverty, a child he denied his whole life, living in

⁴⁴ Kerouac, *Desolation Angels*, 329.

⁴⁵ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 136.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

constant terror of having to pay child support. He still put the photograph carefully back in his wallet.

Joyce thoughtfully considered the child she had aborted rather than given up for adoption. She wondered how one could live not knowing their own child. She wondered if she could blame Jack more than she blamed herself and then decided that it was not as much a question of blame as terrible loss and sorrow. She wrote, “For me, too, freedom and life seemed equivalent.”⁴⁷

In *Desolation Angels* Jack wrote his own views on sexual love and its consequences:

I’m a regular fool in pale houses enslaved to lust for women who hate me, they lay their bartering flesh all over the divans, it’s one fleshpot – insanity all of it, I should foreswear and chew em all out and go hit the clean rail – I wake up glad to find myself saved in the wilderness mountains – For that lumpy roll of flesh with the juicy hole I’d sit through eternities of horror in gray rooms illuminated by a gray sun, with cops and alimoners at the door and the jail beyond? – It’s a bleeding comedy – The Great Wise Stages of pathetic understanding elude me when it comes to harems – Harem-scarem, it’s all in heaven now – bless their bleeting hearts – Some lambs are female, some angels have womanwings, it’s all mothers in the end and forgive me for my sardony – excuse me for my rut. (Hor hor hor)⁴⁸

Jack often expressed a philosophical fear of women. For him the power to bring new life was also the power to cause inevitable suffering and death. The convoluted relationship he had with his own mother lasted until the end of his life. She provided financially for him by working tirelessly in a shoe factory before his novels were published. That, along with their shared grief at the death of his brother Gerard bonded them for life. And lastly, my own insight, that his mother provided some of the accouterments of partnership: food and a clean house without any demand on his sexual exclusivity. She was a caretaker

⁴⁷ Ibid., 137.

⁴⁸ Kerouac, *Desolation Angels*, 46.

that still allowed for freedom. Joan Haverty pursued Jack legally for child support and this was perhaps his greatest fear, the fear of being forced to work a menial job to support a child that he didn't want, to lose the freedom to write.

Kerouac kissed Joyce in the doorway of her apartment and told her go to back to sleep. "We'll meet again," he said as he left for Tangier.⁴⁹

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the subtleties of gender relations within relationships, to unpack and uncover not laws or political movements, or marches in the street but shades of communication that exist in and out of love and in between human beings in daily interactions. Joyce Glassman so far has paid for dinner and invited Jack to live with her. She's taken over cooking for him just the way he likes and offered to make food that reminds him of his mother's cooking in Lowell. She's even offered to dye her hair to his please him, whether she would go through with it or not. She's been sensitive to his sadness and magnetized toward his presence. She's worked for the apartment they live in and she's offered the comforts and delights of her body. She too expresses her delight in the way his arms feel around her, and the way his heartbeat sounds when she lays on his chest. She loves his stories and his idiosyncrasies. She has most certainly fallen in love with him, and is already battling herself to not get too attached. Was Jack Kerouac a magnetic charismatic man? There is no question. His

⁴⁹ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 139.

looks have been described as “movie star,” he has insisted on himself throughout his life, which is always brave because it hurts people and sometimes makes you appear to be a “bad person.” Palpable in his letters as well as in descriptions of him is a deep sensitivity. There is no doubt that Jack Kerouac was a force. Joyce describes her new life with him as being “charmed” and “transformed.” Is that not the presence of love? The degree of devotion the women in this dissertation show men, is the real ruminating question. Is the undercurrent of the bargain, sometimes blatant and sometimes subtle – eggs and bacon and a “juicy hole” for a seat at the table of life?

French philosopher, Albert Camus once said famously, “To know oneself, one should assert oneself.” Greek giant Aristotle said, “Self-knowledge is the beginning of all knowledge.” Without actual access to the experiences and opportunities to assert and to know oneself, to develop the “Themselves” that men protect, then women can only be hangers on. They can only be supporters to the real work of life. Their only hope can be to meet a man that has had these experiences and opportunities and live vicariously enriched lives. This is why Joyce expresses a “fading of identity” whenever the man she is with leaves. True freedom was not accessible to Joyce the way it was to Jack, and in important ways it still isn’t. As legendary mythologist Joseph Campbell pointed out in his classic interview with Bill Moyers, “People say that what we’re all seeking is a meaning for life. I don’t think that’s what we’re really seeking. I think that what we’re seeking is an experience of being alive.”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Interviewer: Bill Moyers, Interviewee: Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (PBS, June 21-25, 1988).

After Jack left for Tangier, Joyce and Jack began a correspondence that allowed them to become friends beyond being lovers. What Joyce did not want to admit to herself as a young woman was that love was very threatening to Jack. A friendship was much more durable. During the time they were apart, Joyce would help Jack by taking care of various tasks for him – sending newspaper clippings, or running errands that needed to be run on her side of the earth. Occasionally lines from his letters would take her aback or hurt her, or often not express the things she so hoped to hear. Other times his letters transported her to new worlds or told of his impending return, which was the best news of all.

In the introduction to a book of her and Jack's collected letters, Joyce speaks of the strange experience of receiving a box of Xeroxed letters from the Kerouac estate – the letters that she had written to Jack over forty years prior. Jack meticulously saved all of his correspondence. When he would return to his mother's house, as he always did, he would carefully file all of his communication.⁵¹ Joyce said of being confronted with her 21 year old self: "The letters reminded me how tough she [21-year-old Joyce] had to pretend to be in order to stay afloat, how orphaned she sometimes felt, and how badly she'd wanted the commitment from Kerouac she had resolved never to ask for."⁵² However, for all that he withheld, Joyce is careful to point out all that he gave in these letters as well. In her estimation he had written to her as an equal, a person strong enough to take the truth. Furthermore, he recognized the writer in her and encouraged her in her literary efforts. The ambivalent statement he often made to Joyce, "Do what

⁵¹ Due to legal issues within the Kerouac estate, it was forty years before Joyce was able to use his words or have access to her own.

⁵² Joyce Johnson, *Door Wide Open: A Beat Love Affair in Letters, 1957-1958* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001) xxv.

you want...Always do what you want,” was frustrating for obvious reasons, but Joyce also recognized that she was never boxed in by him, something she considers rare even in Bohemian circles at the time. When speaking of Jack’s inability to remain faithful to any woman except his mother, Joyce writes tellingly years later:

No wonder the times we actually spent with each other always felt very fraught. My problem was that I deeply loved him; I wanted him, needed him, in all the embarrassingly conventional ways, a truth I worked hard to conceal. During each of his absences any glint of romantic feeling in his brotherly letters would reignite my hopes. Yet I always knew that Jack and I would never be “together” in the way other couples were. For the odd kind of relationship we were having, there were no models to go by, only what my own intuition told me – that I would have to learn to live like Jack did, moment by moment (or at least fake it when my own needs felt overwhelming); that if I ever asked for more, he’d be gone.⁵³

Joyce had no models for how to live the way Jack lived or means to understand just how one goes about doing whatever they want as a woman. The suggestion that she do so existed as a very uneasy liberation. For women the possibilities seemed unclear and very much uncharted. Perhaps she wanted the “experience of being alive” that Jack represented more than she actually wanted him, but there was no language for her to express that, not yet.

Jack quickly burnt out on being in Tangier with William Burroughs; he would habitually flee in new directions, searching for something increasingly difficult to find. Instead, he headed to Paris and to London to research his Breton ancestry. In the meantime, Joyce acquired a job as the editorial secretary to John Farrar at Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. The editor-in-chief was Robert Giroux. Giroux had agreed to publish *On the Road* years earlier if Jack would have agreed to some editorial changes to the wild scroll that he had exuberantly brought into Giroux’s office six years prior. Jack declared

⁵³ Ibid., xviii.

that not one word would ever be changed and left in a huff. With the passage of time all was forgiven on both sides and the two felt a warm regard for each other. Just as Joyce began this new job she got a letter from Jack that he would be back in New York and seeing her before the 4th of July. With this news Joyce's mind suddenly went into a whirl. Would Jack stay with her? For how long? If he left would he take her with him? She knew she would leave her life behind in a heartbeat to go with him if he would ask. Joyce did not have to wait until July, or even June to see Jack. He sent a telegram to her in early May after she had not heard from him in weeks, "SAILING TODAY ON NIEUW AMSTERDAM. OKAY TO STAY WITH YOU? JACK" Joyce ran to the phone to send word to Jack on the ship. "DOOR WIDE OPEN" she eagerly dispatched.⁵⁴

The feelings of happiness and exuberance that Joyce felt at the prospect of Jack's return were soon squelched. He came back because he missed America, but it was his mother's kitchen that he missed, not Joyce's. Jack's return would be but for a few days. Joyce cried in the bathroom after hearing of his imminent departure. While Jack traveled in Tangier and in Europe Joyce had worried over losing him to another woman, a sensual Tristesse or a dark fellaheen beauty. It was hard for Joyce to believe that the real woman she would always lose Jack to was his mother. "I really like you though, Joycey," he said unhelpfully.⁵⁵

Jack's plan was to pick up Gabrielle (Memere) in Orlando and move her (on a Greyhound bus) to Berkeley. Sensing Joyce's distress at his plans Jack offered, "You should get yourself a little husband."⁵⁶ Joyce, of course, didn't want that. She wanted

⁵⁴ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 151.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 153

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 154

Life, just as Jack did, and he was both her carrier and catalyst. In the whirl of the moment Joyce asked: “What if I came to San Francisco?”⁵⁷ Jack responded, “Do what you want, Joycey. Always do what you want.”⁵⁸ What Joyce admitted to only herself was that she wanted to be wanted, by him. Joyce wondered if Jack’s leaving her in place was a kind of loving. Two days later Jack left for Florida and Joyce made plans to join him before too long in San Francisco. She immediately, and without hesitation, sold her belongings and gave up her apartment to save money, showing a total commitment to her new plan. The adventure seeking young Joyce also talked Elise Cowen in to going to California with her. After all, Allen would not be returning to New York until next spring.

Unbeknownst to either Joyce or Elise, only one of them would ever make it out to San Francisco, and neither decision was made under ideal circumstances. One day near the end of June, Elise found a notice in her pay envelope. She had been fired without explanation. On Monday, Elise defiantly returned to work and sat down to type as usual. Everyone stared. A man in the office came over to her and said discreetly, “Miss Cowen, you know you’re through here. Why don’t you leave like a good girl?” Elise replied, “I want to know why I’ve been fired.” There were more demands that she leave to which Elise continued to reply, “I want to know the reason.” She was a human being, just like her boss and her dignity demanded that she be addressed directly. As the situation heightened Elise sat like Bartleby the Scrivener endlessly saying: “I want a reason or explanation.” Rather than the boss, it was the police who came, three of them. They pried her loose from her typewriter, knocking her glasses to the floor. They dragged her

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

out of the office building as she cried one last time “I want to know the reason!” In the elevator the police punched her in the stomach. Elise called her father from the station. “This will kill your mother,” he said. The next evening she left on a Greyhound bus for San Francisco.⁵⁹

In spite of her preparations and excitement, Joyce never made it to San Francisco because Jack Kerouac tired of the place before she was able to make it there. In a letter warning her against coming, Jack complained of a conservative way of life and what he called the Total Police Authority. Jack went on to say that he would likely end up in Mexico. But of course, she should still come if she wants. Not hearing from him again for weeks, Joyce began to doubt her plans to leave New York. Complicating her intentions even further, her city was coming alive again with all kinds of new artists and intellectuals flooding in. Of particular interest to Joyce were the Black Mountain poets and artists who created nightly stimulation and inspiration. New York began to dazzle around her, palpably at the center of the universe. Joyce even began seeing a young artist, Fielding Dawson, pupil of Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning and later a well-known writer of short stories. She penned later of her time with “Fee:”

If I weren't in love with Jack and maybe going away, I might be tempted to become Fee's "old lady," straighten him out a little, clean up the studio, contribute to the rent, have a baby or two, become one of those weary, quiet, self-sacrificing, widely respected women brought by their men to the Cedar on occasional Saturday nights in their limp thrift shop dresses made interesting with beads. Even a very young woman can achieve old ladyhood, become the mainstay of someone else's self-destructive genius.⁶⁰

Also that July, Joyce received two momentous pieces of news. First, she was called down to the offices of Random House for a meeting with Hiram Haydn. There in

⁵⁹ This story of Elise's appears in Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 163-164.

⁶⁰ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 170.

his office he offered to publish her novel based on the first fifty pages she had submitted to him. Thus Joyce Glassman had a publisher at the age of twenty-one as well as a hefty advance of five hundred dollars. She was bowled over at the news, wondering at how seemingly lucky it was. “It felt as if a whole necessary sequence had somehow been omitted – the genteel indifference and scorn of editors, years of near starvation and struggle like Jack’s,” the new author puzzled.⁶¹ Then, the next day at work, Robert Giroux called Joyce into his office and offered her a promotion from secretary to editorial assistant. It was a great honor. He also offered that someday she could be an editor herself. Luck like this was not to be turned down and so the freshly anointed editorial assistant accepted the job in a daze, realizing that it meant she had given up on meeting Jack Kerouac in California.⁶²

As fate would have it, coming back to her room that very evening she finally found a letter from Jack. The letter was not mailed from San Francisco, but from Orlando where he explained that he had returned Memere to a more comfortable life, and also that he was leaving for Mexico the next morning, “So, sweet Joycey, decide what you wanta do- if you care to join me in Mexico City in September or so, come on down, you can buy a Greyhound ticket straight thru from N.Y. to Mexico City,”⁶³ wrote Jack. In spite of her promotion and her feeling that New York was the center of the universe, Joyce wrote back immediately: “Dear Jack, Yes, yes, I will come to Mexico!”⁶⁴ The next morning Joyce told Mr. Giroux that she would be leaving her job in August to go be in Mexico with Jack Kerouac. A passage from her “acceptance letter” to Jack is revealing:

⁶¹ Ibid., 172.

⁶² Ibid., 173.

⁶³ Johnson, *Door Wide Open*, 40.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 41.

It's funny the way you and Allen and Peter came to town this winter and shook us all up. Just think – we [Joyce and Elise] had been here all our lives, and now suddenly Elise is in Frisco, [Sheila] in Paris, and I'm going to Mexico – most peculiar... You don't know what narrow lives girls have, how few real adventures there are for them; misadventures, yes, like abortions and little men following them in subways, but seldom anything like seeing ships at night. So that's why we've all taken off like this, and that's also part of why I love you.⁶⁵

The next letter from Jack was warm and inviting; he had not yet received her letter accepting his offer to come to Mexico. Jack continued to entice Joyce with vivid and romantic descriptions of Mexico. "...we'll do our writing and cash our checks in big American banks & eat hot soup at market stalls & float on rafts of flowers & dance the rumba in mad joints with 10 cent beers."⁶⁶ More importantly he expressed what Joyce considered at the time "real" feelings: "I am lonesome for yr. (sic) friendship and love, so try to come down...we'll be 2 young American writers on a Famous Lark that will be mentioned in our biographies – I'll be waiting for your answer,"⁶⁷ Jack wrote lovingly. How could Joyce refuse? Casting her lot on the side of love and adventure seemed an effortless decision.⁶⁸

Switch the 5 and the 7, and you will have the year that Joyce, now Johnson finally made it to Mexico; it was not 1957, but rather 1975 when she traveled just across the border into Tijuana. What she saw was not Jack's Mexico described so vividly in several of his books. A week before the date on Joyce's plane ticket in 1957, Jack left Mexico City returning to Orlando and to Memere. Just before he left he wrote to her, "I don't"

⁶⁵ Johnson, *Door Wide Open*, 42.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 173.

want you to be confused, this latest change of mind I can't help."⁶⁹ Joyce writes forty years later that the trips she didn't take in 1957 have always haunted her.⁷⁰ She remained a secretary for years to come.

On the Road was finally published on September 5, 1957. Joyce mailed Jack thirty dollars of her book money so that he could afford a bus ticket from Orlando back to New York. The day before his arrival her phone started ringing. "Was Jack Kerouac there yet?" He had written to Joyce that he could hardly wait to hold her in his arms. The afternoon of September 4th she awaited him anxiously, staring out the window until he appeared, his black hair and a Hawaiian shirt as blue as his eyes. She ran down the stairs to meet him.⁷¹

The next morning, Jack and Joyce went out to a newsstand at midnight to read the forthcoming review of *On the Road*. Gilbert Millstein's *New York Times* Review of *On the Road* would make Jack Kerouac famous over night:

On the Road is the second novel by Jack Kerouac, and its publication is a historic occasion insofar as the exposure of an authentic work of art is of any great moment ... [It is] the most beautifully executed, the clearest and most important utterance yet made by the generation Kerouac himself named years ago as "beat," and whose principal avatar he is.⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid., 179.

⁷⁰ Johnson, *Door Wide Open*, 60.

⁷¹ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 180.

⁷² Gilbert Millstein, "Books of the Times," *New York Times* (September 5, 1957) found at <https://www.nytimes.com/books/97/09/07/home/kerouac-roadglowing.html>

The two poured over the review with surprise and delight, then went back to Joyce's apartment to sleep. Jack woke up from obscurity into fame as his editor at Viking came running up the stairs with a case of champagne, and the phone began to ring off the hook.

It is difficult to imagine having toiled for ten years in relative obscurity, having nothing but piles of rejection slips and empty pockets to show for a complete devotion to an art form and a voice, and then to suddenly have the world clamoring at your doorstep ready to celebrate you or eat you alive, or both. It is not hard to fathom the pressure Jack must have felt in living up to being *the* avatar of his generation, especially given that he liked to escape and that at his core he was shy, comfortably inhabiting the role of observer. Jack Kerouac was not Neal Cassidy/Dean Moriarity, the hero of *On the Road*, but that is the man that people wanted to interview and see in the numerous appearances he was suddenly being offered. Furthermore, admiration is not the only child of fame, there is also the ugly stepchild of endless criticism⁷³ – as well as the enduring question for any artist: was I understood?

During the next few months, Joyce became a complete support to Jack as he navigated a territory more foreign to him than Mexico, and as he used drink more and more to “become” Jack Kerouac, famous author/King of the Beats.⁷⁴ Soon enough, the media turned the Beats into the beatniks, a cheesy derivative for suburban couples to

⁷³ Truman Capote famously quipped insultingly that *On the Road* was not writing, but rather typing.

⁷⁴ Kerouac's descent into alcoholism is well documented in the biographies enumerated on previous pages.

stomach – a creation Jack wanted no part of. As Jack suffered his fame my thoughts turn to Joyce, and for this paper to all women in her position: is it more of a spiritual agony to be misunderstood or to have nothing about you deemed worthy of understanding?

In the upheaval that fame brought to Jack's life and to Joyce's as well there are certain poignant moments of loss that particularly stand out. For Jack, he was asked one night on a talk show called *Nightbeat* by host John Wingate, "Tell me, Jack, just exactly what you're looking for." Jack answered, having drunk just enough wine to make the appearance possible (which was quite a bit), "I'm waiting for God to show me His face."⁷⁵ This answer, so intimate, too intimate, exposed Jack in a way that left him unprotected. For the next two days he barely spoke.

For Joyce, her full time job became taking care of Jack as women threw themselves at him and he became more and more dependent on alcohol. Of course, she put her own work on her own novel aside as she tended to Jack's celebrity. Joyce never wrote when Jack was around, he was too encompassing. Nevertheless, in the midst of all the commotion suddenly thrust upon her, Joyce did attempt to keep a journal. One entry is particularly poignant:

⁷⁵ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 190.

At five o'clock in the morning of these endless nights a kind of panic comes over me...I do not know why this is. When I was younger and had to be home on time to find my father getting out of bed to peer at his watch with a flashlight, I wanted to stay up forever and see the dawn and have 6 a.m. coffee in cafeterias with lean, sharp-faced boys in corduroy jackets and walk back through all the streets of the city and collapse exhausted on someone's couch in a room where six people lay on the rug as if slain...but now I insist in tones of outrage that it is time to go home even though I do not really want to go there and will probably not be able to sleep- but have only chosen sounds to make, which mean, 'Look at me. Let me know that you know I'm here.'⁷⁶

"Look at me. Let me know that you know I'm here."

Joyce's own book money was almost gone; she would soon return to work as a secretary. As for Jack, he would return to Orlando, to Memere, within just a few weeks of his arrival in New York. Over the next few months, Joyce and Jack would correspond sporadically, but faithfully. In Florida with Memere, and away from the hullabaloo in New York, Jack's liveliness returned. He worked on a play as well as a novel and several poems. Joyce struggled to work on her novel while having to labor full time as a secretary.⁷⁷

Watching other young Bohemian couples like her new friends, LeRoi and Hettie Jones, Joyce longed to be anchored to someone as well. This longing though, was reserved for Jack Kerouac, and something she must silence and conceal from him. Instead of revealing her deep love for him she wrote lively letters pretending that all was a bit different than it really was. Jack read her swallowed affection between the lines and carefully cautioned her away, though somewhere in every letter he complained of being lonely. When Joyce daringly offered to come to Orlando for a visit, she seemed to cross

⁷⁶ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 193.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 204-205.

some mysterious line with Jack. It was a month before he sent a letter saying no. Noticeable to Joyce, he signed the letter with his French-Canadian birth name, Jean Louis. Jean Louis, son of Gabrielle, was someone she would never be permitted to know. Jean-Louis was the “Himself” that must be protected. Jack did not send a letter again until he wrote to tell her of his imminent voyage back to New York. He would be staying with a friend, Henri Cru and not with Joyce. His letter stated:

I’m coming to New York for the gentle sweetlys of sun-arc in December and I’ll see you. I’m going to live with Henri because I want to sleep while he works all day and I want to be in the Village...and I don’t want to importune you and further because I told you I’m an Armenian and I don’t wanta get married till I’m 69 and have 69 gentle grandninnies. Please don’t be mad at me. I wanta be alone, Greta Garbo.⁷⁸

Joyce’s response foretells the feeling of fading she was beginning to have:

I’ve read and reread you letter...what’s happening, sweetie? ...I do understand that you need to be alone, and yet not alone too- I think. But none of that stuff about “importuning,” please. I love you and it makes me very happy to be with you, to fry your particular eggs simply because they’re your eggs – whether I’m your girl, your mistress, your friend, or whatever – those are all words anyway.⁷⁹

She goes on, straining to sound casual and upbeat, mentioning as well what a big, clean apartment she now has. What Joyce found out forty years later when Kerouac’s letters were finally released from the grip of his ex-wife’s estate was that Jack was trying to get back with Helen Weaver during this time, distancing himself from Joyce in every way.

Kerouac returned to New York, as promised, for an engagement at the Village Vanguard- he could not pass up the money offered him to read sections from his book while a jazz band played in the background. Joyce did not hear from Jack when he came

⁷⁸ Johnson, *Door Wide Open*, 106.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

back to New York and tried not to cry on Second Avenue when she saw the posters going up regarding his Vanguard gig. Her friend Hettie told her, “Harden your heart.”⁸⁰

One day Jack called to invite her to the show offering to leave her name at the door. Joyce went alone and felt pained to see the drunken debacle on stage. Recording her experience after the show, Johnson wrote: “He hadn’t seen me at my back table. I started walking forward. I was going to thank him for inviting me and use all my strength to walk to the exit and go home by myself...I loved him, but it didn’t mean a thing to him, really.”⁸¹

Even though a girl appeared that was clearly with Jack, he begged Joyce to take him with her. All of Hettie’s advice forgotten, Joyce kissed him on the mouth, got him out of there that night, and soon he moved back in with her. Jack described it in a letter to Allen Ginsberg, “Broke up with Joyce because I wanted to try big sexy brunettes then suddenly saw evil of world and realized Joyce was my angel sister and came back to her.”⁸² Joyce described it as a war between pity, love, and anger.

The two spent a week holed up in Joyce’s apartment with the phone off the hook. Jack needed time to recuperate, both he and Joyce sensing the weight of the Void pressing in on him. In a few days their old closeness returned. Jack even took Joyce to the movies like “normal American couples were supposed to,” he said.⁸³ Yet, a week later he returned to Orlando to be with Memere. Joyce described those last two weeks as the best days of their entire relationship.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 220.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁸² Johnson, *Door Wide Open*, 115.

⁸³ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 224.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

There are details of the next few months that are important to the story of Jack and Joyce, but this last leaving signified the end. As Joyce put it, “Once Jack installed Memere on Long Island, he would never be as tender with me again.”⁸⁵ There is the heart-wrenchingly awkward scene of Joyce helping Jack to pick out the house on Long Island where he would move with Memere (rather than her). The real estate agent, not realizing that Jack would be moving in with his mother instead of Joyce, showed a room to them in the house saying delightfully, “and here’s the nursery!” Joyce wondered if Jack was aware of this painful irony, but he didn’t seem to be. He bought the house immediately and couldn’t wait to call Orlando with the good news.⁸⁶

The only time that Jack Kerouac addressed the unconventional devotion he felt toward Memere was in his book, *The Subterraneans*, which, though written in 1953, was published in the spring of 1958. He gave Joyce one of the first bound copies that Grove Press sent him. The main character, Leo Percepied, is Jack himself. He writes of Leo, “This is the story of an unselfconfident man, at the same time an egomaniac.” The character Mardou Fox is the real life fellaheen beauty, Irene May, a woman whose dark magnificence and tough intelligence were so compelling that it sent Jack/Leo into a state of torment. “Leo,” Mardou Fox is permitted to say in the book, “I don’t think it’s good for you to live with your mother always.”⁸⁷ It makes no difference in the story that even Leo knows she is right. “The weight of my need to go home, my neurotic fears, hangover, horrors.”⁸⁸ Memere was her son’s only home, his place of escape without

⁸⁵ Johnson, *Door Wide Open*, 116.

⁸⁶ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 248.

⁸⁷ Jack Kerouac, *The Subterraneans*, (New York: Grove Press, 1994) 227.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

demand. In this book about lost love, Jack had given himself the name of his father, his mother's husband.⁸⁹

One night in early March, during the trip to New York when Jack secured the house for himself and Memere in Long Island, a gang of hoodlums viciously beat him up in the wee hours of the morning. There was a marked change in Jack after this cruel event. New York became an evil place where everyone from hoodlums in the street to journalists to old friends seemed bent on destroying him, something Memere had always told him was true. Joyce noticed a clear distancing after the beating.⁹⁰

Ever hopeful, "Joycey" asked Jack if she could come out to Long Island to meet Memere, realizing that that was her only hope in remaining close to Jack. He agreed, but only with a few curt words on a penny postcard. In late May, Joyce Glassman headed for Northport, Long Island to meet the apocryphal Memere. The young secretary tried to dress in a way that would please Jack's mother, brought a loaf of pumpernickel, and followed Jack's instructions taking a variety of busses and trains to arrive at the house. The visit was a total debacle. Memere proved inhospitable, repeatedly asking Joyce when she was leaving. The way Joyce did dishes Memere found wasteful, and all the while Jack drank to near oblivion. Furthermore, a group of teenagers arrived wanting Jack to join them on a trip to the beach, and he went along. Joyce had no time alone with him, and he clearly did not care. Furthermore, unbeknownst to Joyce, and according to a

⁸⁹ Interestingly, Jack took Joyce to visit Irene May, the real Mardou Fox. After reading *The Subterraneans*, Joyce was deeply jealous of the intense emotion a woman like Irene was able to evoke from Jack. At the time of the visit, in 1958, Irene was a single mother with a young baby living in a tenement, trying hard to manage for the two of them with whatever odd typing jobs she could find. The juxtaposition of a woman working as hard as she could to make ends meet while raising a child on her own contrasted greatly with Jack's emotional need to make peace with her – the last thing on her mind. The publishing of his book was nothing more than another hassle for her. He wanted to stay with her that night, but she would have none of it; Joyce humiliated, dragged him home.

⁹⁰ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 245.

letter he wrote to Philip Whalen in early June, he was sleeping with many other women in Northport at the time.⁹¹

Becoming increasingly desperate and lonely, Joyce ventured out on a trip to visit her cousin Dorothy in suburban Maryland. Riding back on the Greyhound Joyce realized that in spite of all her ambitious plans for transcontinental travel this was the “road” adventure she’d ended up with. In a letter dated June 16th, 1958, Joyce, straying from the forced jauntiness of most of her correspondence with Jack, begins to reveal to him the truth of her loneliness:

Dear Jack, How nice to find a letter from you – even though filled with anger (justifiable) at Viking, N.Y., phones, etc...Listen, Memory Babe, yes I want to see you when you come in and hope you’ll stay overnight and we’ll make love and all that jazz...it’s awful expecting you all week (like last week) and not even hearing from you that you can’t see me. That’s just not kind. Ah, but I do want to see you- I really miss you like crazy sometimes...One thing – to bring up a dull subject- if you had a wife who was somewhat worldly, she might act as a kind of buffer for you (wives of writers often do that); if she loved you, she’d certainly let you take to the woods whenever you wanted to; she might also like being left alone now and then herself. Women are really just as great and as human as men, although different...⁹²

In her own analysis of this letter, forty years later, Johnson is sure that in spite of Memere or the drinking, that she would have married Jack had he asked, and tried to hang on. “Wasn’t that how you proved yourself- by taking on a difficult love and enduring somehow?” she asks. “If you were a woman, wasn’t your “road” the man you gave yourself to?”⁹³

Also in early spring, Elise Cowen returned to New York. Joyce had not heard from Elise in months, nor did she have an address to write her in San Francisco. In early

⁹¹ Johnson, *Door Wide Open*, 150.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 153.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 154.

March, Elise called her friend, Leo Skir, asking for a loan to make the journey back. Elise appeared thin and quiet when she returned. She told Joyce of the late term abortion she had had in California. It was very difficult to get a psychiatric abortion in California, but it had been her only choice. She had no money and no option to do it any other way. Elise had gone around from doctor to doctor, sitting on benches in various waiting rooms hoping for help from someone. She had finally convinced the psychiatric staff at the Cedars of Lebanon that she was on the brink of suicide. “Maybe it wasn’t such an act,” she told Joyce. All of her going around took four months, much too long for a simple D and C. Elise kept from Joyce that she was given a hysterotomy, wanting to protect Joyce from the full details of her suffering.⁹⁴

In a letter from mid-August Jack responded in his way to Joyce’s yearnings/questions/loneliness:

Joyce, when I come to NY this Fall I hope you won’t get mad at me if I fiddle around with other girlfriends a little, I don’t wanta be “Steadies” with anybody, now if this hurts you why? – does Allen get mad when I go visit Joe Blow instead of him? Don’t OWN me, just be my nice little blonde friend and don’t be sad because I’m a confirmed bachelor and hermit. Hard to talk about this, I guess you’re sore all over again...For instance, Robert says he saw you with another boy in the park and it made me GLAD for you, not jealous. So remember. In fact your salvation is within yourself, in your own essence of mind, it is not to be gotten grasping at external people like me. You know it too, Buddha. JeanLouis⁹⁵

“Nice little blonde friend” strikes me as particularly demeaning. However, to say that your salvation is within yourself is undoubtedly the truth, and a hard truth at that. The

⁹⁴ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 236-237.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 161.

access to that salvation has to do with the knowing of the self through the assertion of the self. If society's culture places conditions on that knowing, or places the consequences at too high a price, then for women the means to that salvation become unavailable. Jack's words are the truth, but there is no cultural apparatus in place to facilitate or to *applaud* that journey for women in the way that there is for men. The supposedly self-justifying journey of motherhood is an extraordinary journey, but it is not the journey of the Self.

Joyce Glassman and Jack Kerouac officially broke up outside an Italian Restaurant in the fall of 1958. Having spent much time with Robert and Mary Frank, the two were dining with them along with an artist friend of Mary's named Dodie Miller. Dodie and Jack began a conspicuous flirtation as the drinks began to flow, discovering they were "soul mates," and were clearly headed towards a tumble into bed when Joyce reached her absolute breaking point. She made Jack come outside the restaurant and shouted that he was "nothing but a bag of wind." He shouted back, "Unrequited love's a bore!"⁹⁶ With that the two went their separate ways. Joyce checked to see if he looked back, but he didn't.

Wisely and presciently Elise Cowen had told Joyce after her disastrous trip to Northport that she might have to touch bottom before she could let go of Jack Kerouac. After that visit Jack had written to Joyce, "please don't come out here anymore," for it disturbed the "tender routines" of an old lady.⁹⁷ Elise also advised Joyce that even if she never got back together with Jack, years later she would look back and be very glad she

⁹⁶ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 253.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 250.

had known him. Elise encouraged Joyce that she could always make something else happen. “So try not to be too sad, Glassmangirl.”⁹⁸

Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky set sail for India on March 23, 1961, shortly after Elise finished typing the manuscript for his poem *Kaddish*, a lengthy rumination on Allen’s mother, Naomi Ginsberg. After Allen left this time, Elise began spinning in a downward cycle using dangerously mind-stretching drugs and hopping from place to place carrying only a few shopping bags for personal belongings. She ended up in Bellevue and then in Hillside Mental Hospital. Finally in February of 1962, Elise Cowen took her own life, jumping from the window of her parents’ living room. One of her last poems provided a clue to those who considered her a friend:

No love
 No compassion
 No intelligence
 No humility
 Twenty-seven years is enough ...
 Let me out now please-
 -Please let me in⁹⁹

Allen arranged for a few of Elise’s poems to be published posthumously in the *City Lights Journal*. He added a note about her, written with Lucien Carr: “...The poems, they’re awkward. But it’s a special kind of awkward that comes when someone is direct

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 258.

and (if there is an honest) honest. And the beauty of the written lines that she could see and I could see but neither of us could see in her...¹⁰⁰

The same year Elise Cowen free fell to her death, Joyce Glassman finally published the novel she had put aside for so long in order to be available to Jack Kerouac, both young women breaking the unbearable silence expected of them. Writing about herself in a reflective tone, Joyce Johnson forty years later, published novelist, author, and Beat chronicler muses:

As a female, she's not quite part of the convergence. A fact she ignores, sitting by in her excitement as the voices of the men, always the men, passionately rise and fall and their beer glasses collect and the smoke of their cigarettes rises toward the ceiling and the dead culture is surely being wakened. Merely being here, she tells herself, is enough. What I [Joyce] refuse to relinquish is her expectancy.

It's only her silence that I wish finally to give up – and Elise's silence...and the poems Hettie kept mute in boxes for too many years...¹⁰¹

Joyce went on to un-silence herself further by publishing several memoirs and novels, as well as editing and publishing a number of seminal books in American literature including *Coming of Age in Mississippi* and *Born on the Fourth of July*. She also wrote a biography of Kerouac titled *The Voice is All*. In the novel she began before meeting Jack and finished after their breakup, Joyce turns the Beat narrative upside down by placing the female character as subject rather than a mute mirror, merely reflecting the grandiosity of the male adventurer. Using the Kerouackian method of including real life characters she writes-in herself, Elise, and Alex Greer. Unlike other Beat books, in *Come and Join the Dance* it is the female who uses sex as the *acte gratuit*. In the book it is Joyce who leaves Alex after only one sexual encounter, taking away his power to hurt

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 259.

¹⁰¹ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 262.

her. Furthermore, she rewards “Susan” (the character based on herself) by sending her on the road, a trip to Paris at the conclusion of the novel. However, unlike Kerouac’s novels, Joyce’s female subject does not have to pay the penalties that the real –life characters did have to pay for dropping out of mainstream gender codes. In her novel, there are no abortions, Elise/Kay does not attempt suicide, and there is no fading of the female identity with the loss of a man.¹⁰²

The ubiquitous silencing in the real-life story of the young Beat women (and women in general) is not a vanquished dragon of the past. It remains of the utmost importance to evaluate this phenomenon in our culture because silence is akin to a lack of existence. In a recent *New York Times* article (January, 2015) titled, “Speaking While Female,” journalists Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant explore why it is that women stay silent at work. They open with the following:

YEARS ago, while producing the hit TV series “The Shield,” Glen Mazzara noticed that two young female writers were quiet during story meetings. He pulled them aside and encouraged them to speak up more.

Watch what happens when we do, they replied.

Almost every time they started to speak, they were interrupted or shot down before finishing their pitch. When one had a good idea, a male writer would jump in and run with it before she could complete her thought.

Sadly, their experience is not unusual.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Joyce Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance* (New York: Open Road Press, 1961). For an excellent analysis of *Come and Join the Dance* as a proto-feminist and Beat narrative see Ronna C. Johnson “And then she Went” in *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*.

¹⁰³ Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant, “Speaking While Female,” *New York Times* (January 12, 2015). found at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/opinion/sunday/speaking-while-female.html>

The article continues to enumerate the multitude of arenas in which the same phenomena occurs. Men who spoke up more were consistently viewed by their superiors as helpful, while for women there was no perceived benefit even when their suggestions brought markedly increased revenue. Furthermore, women who do speak up are actually routinely given significantly lower performance reviews, making the message even clearer. “As this and other research shows, women who worry that talking “too much” will cause them to be disliked are not paranoid; they are often right.”¹⁰⁴

The yearning that young Beat women felt in the 1950s was the same yearning that Kerouac and Ginsberg gave powerful voice to amidst the dull conventionality of mid-century consensus culture. However, evident from the *New York Times* article as well as from the journals of my young students, an expectation of silence still exists for girls and for women, as well as numerous ways in which women still see themselves as needing to hook their identity to that of a man, to mirror someone else’s greatness, and to be content with a voiceless seat at the table. It often seems for women that the love of a man is all encompassing, while for a man it is a part of a whole, the whole being Himself. Stories like Joyce Johnson’s expose this discrepancy and force us as teachers, parents, and scholars to allow women to speak that they may access the Herself that is both Life and salvation.

In 1964, Jack Kerouac called Joyce (now Johnson) from somewhere in America in a state of drunken loneliness. Joyce’s first husband had just died in a motorcycle

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

accident. “You never wanted anything but a little ol’ pea soup,” Jack lamented. This was not true, of course, but Joyce still cried after he hung up.¹⁰⁵

“What was it all about?” Joyce’s companion asked her after seeing the film Jack made with Robert Frank titled *Pull My Daisy*. “I think it was all about the right to remain children,” Joyce answered.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 261.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

HETTIE JONES AND LEROI JONES

“The impulse to create begins- often terribly and fearfully- in a tunnel of silence. Every real poem is the breaking of an existing silence.” – Adrienne Rich

“It’s nice to be different,” Hettie Cohen’s mother used to say to her child growing up.¹ What Hettie’s mother could not have imagined is the breadth of difference that her daughter would eventually embrace, and how it would be that difference that shaped Hettie, challenged her, and *became* her. Nice would not be the word for it; brave would have been more apt.

The story of Hettie Jones² provides new angles and dimensions from which to explore the recurring themes of this dissertation. Both marriage and motherhood appear here as essential elements of Hettie’s story. Perhaps most unique, however, are the ways in which Hettie’s relationship and eventual marriage to LeRoi Jones (poet/playwright/intellectual/activist) bring to bear an essential tension of the post war period – the question of race, of *skin*. Mixed race couples at midcentury were extremely rare, and heavily frowned upon in the mainstream.³ It was not until 1967, two years after

¹ Hettie Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1990) 89.

² Hettie Cohen became Hettie Jones after marrying LeRoi Jones in 1958.

³ Beth Bailey points out in *From Front Porch to Back Seat* that mixed race marriage was unequivocally condemned in marriage courses at Purdue University. Sammy Davis Jr. provides another interesting case study in mixed race marriage. See Sammy Davis Jr. and Jane and Burt Boyer, *Yes I Can: The Story of Sammy Davis Jr.* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012).

Hettie and LeRoi divorced, that the Supreme Court outlawed anti-miscegenation laws.⁴ Hettie's Jewishness and LeRoi's Blackness informed their personal interactions in ways both expected and unexpected, those dynamics unfold in the pages that follow. The interweaving of gender codes and racial expectation within this relationship and outside of it make for a very specific window of opportunity through which to view this period of history. Towering over these two young lovers are the two monumental specters of oppressive gender paradigms and red-hot race tensions. Inevitably these specters insert themselves into Hettie and LeRoi's most tender and intimate spaces.

As a young girl, Hettie heard the warnings of her generation: men had no use for an outspoken woman, security and upward mobility were possible if a young lady could learn silence. These warnings meant little to her. From a young age, she knew that unlike the women in her own family she was going to “*become* – something, anything, whatever that meant.”⁵

Hettie Cohen came from Laurelton, Queens by way of Brooklyn. In Laurelton there were no Blacks, no Hispanics, and no Italians. There were only some Anglos and some Irish who “couldn't afford to move away from the Jews.”⁶ She went to school with the children of these Anglos, but was never invited into their homes. The culture in 1940s and 1950s America established a firm protocol of non-mixing. Hettie's upwardly

⁴ For information on the landmark Supreme Court case that outlawed anti-miscegenation laws see Peter Wallenstein, *Race, Sex, and the Freedom to Marry: Loving vs. Virginia* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Landmark Law Cases in American Society, 2014).

⁵ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 10.

⁶ *Ibid*, 8.

mobile parents did not speak of their own histories in Yiddish or in English. Their histories, originating in Russia or Poland and then Brooklyn seemed something to forget, as if poverty made one underserving of a past. Her future husband, LeRoi Jones said this of Hettie's adolescence,

Nellie [Hettie] had something of an inferiority complex. First, she'd been out in Long Island under the heavy sun of gentile suburbia, trying to grow and having to relate to whatever the dominant image and peer pressure was for the Jewish middle-class yearning for American middle-classdom...The black middle class suffers that same kind of malady, a lack of self-esteem caused by the great nation chauvinism that is so much a part of American life.⁷

Hettie on her quest to *become*, chose to go to college at an all-girls school in Virginia where she studied drama. After graduation, and en route to graduate school at Columbia, Hettie and her college friend, Linda stopped in Richmond, Virginia, to work selling electric fans for a summer. One afternoon standing alone on a dirt road outside of Richmond, Hettie came across a young black girl, seven or eight years old. The little girl asked Hettie what she was doing carrying an electric fan around in the heat. "I'm selling them," said Hettie. The little girl replied, "Oh, come to *my* house" and with that, thrust her tiny hand into Hettie's.⁸ Looking down, Hettie noticed it was the first time she had ever held a black person's hand. She describes it as "dry, dusty, sweet, and so fragile." "Skin," she thought.⁹ Little could Hettie have imagined that her own daughters would have just such hands. She wrote:

It's strange now to consider what that hand may have meant. As an outsider Jew I could have tried for white, aspired to the liberal intellectual, potentially conservative Western tradition. But I never was drawn to that history, and with so little specific to call my own I felt free to choose. Maybe all the small brown hands I've held since then are descended from hers.¹⁰

⁷ Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (Chicago, Illinois: Lawrence Hill Books, 1997) 213.

⁸ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 14.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

In New York, school was not as educational as Life. Through a teacher of Linda's, the two young ladies began hanging out at jazz gigs where Hettie met the trumpet player of the Red Onion Jazz Band, Dick Hadlock. Dick offered Hettie part-time work at the *Record Changer*, a magazine he had recently purchased with ties to "traditional" and "Dixieland" jazz. It only paid a dollar an hour, but "it might be fun," he said.¹¹ Dick proved to be a great boss. He was fair and generous, a little older and more experienced, exuding a love of history and music. "Come downtown," he told her, "you'll like the Village."¹²

Also a part of the Red Onion Band was a handsome younger man that Hettie went to bed with, the banjo player. One evening the banjo player took Hettie in an MG to meet his parents in Albany. "You can sleep with the Jew but never marry her," his father told him.¹³ This angered Hettie and eventually ended the relationship.

The young Miss Cohen soon took Dick Hadlock up on his offer and moved to the Village to work at the *Record Changer*, a publication targeting collectors of jazz records. Along with lists of collections for sale, the magazine also included essays, reviews, and interviews. The conversations around jazz music often had to do with race. Hettie later recalled her young impressions:

...this long romance with "Negro life," or "way of life," troubled me. After the shacks I'd seen in the South I refused to link hard life with art; at least I wasn't convinced that the latter required the former. To me the hard part was simply to jump the wall, to do the thing at all. I was having trouble – my poems were awful, I thought.¹⁴

¹¹ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 17.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, 16.

¹⁴ Ibid, 23.

Soon Dick hired another young person to work at the *Record Changer* as Shipping Manager. That young person was LeRoi Jones, pronounced with a short *e* as in elementary. The short *e* placed emphasis on the second half, Roi. That's what he said to call him, Roi Jones.

LeRoi Jones, born Everett Leroy Jones came from Newark, New Jersey. He was the son of two middle-class parents, Anna Lois and Coyette Leroy Jones. Anna Lois was a social worker for the Newark Housing Authority. "Coyt," LeRoi's father, was a postman who eventually became a postal supervisor and was also a champion bowler. His trophies adorned their living room. Anna Lois had trophies of her own, though hers were not displayed. She had once been the second fastest woman in the world. She had also been to both Tuskegee and Fisk University. Their son, Leroy graduated with honors in 1951 from Barringer High School in Newark. His next step awaited with a scholarship to Rutgers University. In 1952, Leroy changed his name to the frenchified, LeRoi and transferred to Howard University in Washington D. C. studying primarily philosophy and religion. After a couple of years at Howard, LeRoi flunked out and joined the U.S. Air Force eventually attaining the rank of sergeant. By 1957, he was dishonorably discharged from the service for reading what was thought to be communist literature. What he read was the *Partisan Review*, the leading intellectual journal of the 1930s and

1940s. With this turn of events, LeRoi moved to Greenwich Village, bringing with him a passion for jazz, and for the avant-garde poets coming out of New York at the time.¹⁵

Roi and Hettie worked together at the *Record Changer* as Shipping Manager and Subscription Manager for a few months simply enjoying each other's company and conversation before things took a romantic turn. One blistering hot July evening the two were working late. Hettie mentioned to Roi that she had a watermelon back at home, a treat that sounded like a refreshing and delicious contrast to the hot summer evening. Roi concurred that watermelon sounded like just the thing, and the two headed towards Hettie's apartment, an uncharted road ahead.

After a long night of reading Shakespeare and eating watermelon, Hettie left the next morning for the Newport Jazz Festival, her mind abuzz with the happenings of the previous evening. That year, 1957, the festival included Miles Davis, Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, and Mahalia Jackson. In the distant glow of the magical sounds wafting through the air and into her ears, Hettie sat, far away from the bandstand at a table selling magazines and contemplated this sudden change in her feelings toward Roi. It felt new and momentous, but what of their differences? Hettie wrote in her journal that night at Newport "How will Laurelton take this?"¹⁶

Strangely it was Hettie's own handmade clothes that ultimately convinced her of her own sincere desire to face whatever might come of a relationship with LeRoi. In contrast to a well-dressed woman Hettie rode home with from Newport, she noticed her own clothes, a demure brown sundress and handmade sandals. These clothes meant something to her, that she was creating herself, Herself. She thought of her friendship

¹⁵ Amiri Baraka ed. William J. Harris, *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2000) xvii-xxxiii.

¹⁶ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 31.

with LeRoi, how for him she “wasn’t a fantasy, unbalanced, and encased, but a woman who’d begun to make her own self up.”¹⁷ He knew she was weird, and she knew that he was a man whose hopes she respected. “We could handle anything,” she thought in the fuzzy haze of new love.¹⁸

Clothing is no small matter to Hettie’s story or to the history of women in general.¹⁹ While Hettie’s mother was not adept in the kitchen (Hettie writes extensively about learning to cook), she was a capable tailor and she taught Hettie sewing skills that would serve her again and again. Part of Hettie’s self-expression manifested through her attire, creativity often born from necessity and a lack of funds. This bohemian dress and individual style was a way for Hettie to define herself as well as position herself against the expectations of her time. In LeRoi’s autobiography written years later he speaks to her sartorial expressiveness:

...Nellie [Hettie] was funny. I’d seen her one night dressed in black, leotards and top, from head to foot. She was so little she reminded me of a mouse. But she had been jumping up and down talking to someone, the scooter guy, and it knocked me out. She seemed so antic and clownish. [Hettie] said she had wanted to be a clown. She liked circuses and show biz. She liked making people laugh, with her little hopping walk and neat Mary Washington clothes, combined with instant bohemian getups.²⁰

The recurring theme of Hettie’s self being articulated through her clothing is multi-layered. It serves her not only on a practical level, but also as a means of self-assertion.

¹⁷ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 32.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See Ellen Melinkoff, *What We Wore: An Offbeat Social History of Women’s Clothing, 1950-1980* (New York: William Morrow, 1984).

²⁰ Baraka, *Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 211.

She may make maternity clothes because her old clothes are too tight, but in doing so she is literally releasing herself from the confines of traditional femininity. In an interview done in 1999 with Professor Nancy M. Grace, Hettie Jones reflects on the statement she and other bohemian women made with their clothing:

Young women today don't have any idea of the discomfort...that to take off your girdle was a radical move- first came the girdle and then came the bra- but to take off your girdle! Ah! To be able to think and walk and move without feeling blistered all the time. To acknowledge that you have an *ass*. And to wear pants! ...Again, the idea that one could move freely. And taking off high-heeled shoes. I took off my high heels and threw them in the sewer one day when I first came to New York, and then I took to wearing very weird-looking old lady's shoes that I got in the orthopedic shoe store. They were so different...But they were comfortable. And another thing- to stop carrying that little pocket book – But instead to wear a shoulder bag and to have your hands free.²¹

It is important in this statement that Hettie includes the word “think.” That to be released from the heavily constructed Western designs of set-in sleeves and darted breasts and high heels allowed for *thought*. Acknowledgment that clothes can represent a connection between the physical and the psychological is important. Women are so often valued for their ability to please physically, that to take dress into one's own hands can be a meaningful act of rebellion. Unfortunately, this act can sometimes become reactionary rather than empowering. When young girls dress provocatively to rebel against their parents or other normative expectations, they are sometimes sadly playing into the hand of an overly sexualized marketing schema that is equally limiting and self-effacing.

For Hettie, her clothes and her expression through clothes became an interesting source of tension between herself and LeRoi as their relationship developed. When Hettie began to sew again she was quickly seduced by “the fabric, the eye-hand thrill, the color and shape and texture that are also the terms of music,” yet she also wondered if

²¹ Nancy M. Grace and Ronna C. Johnson, *Breaking the Rule of Cool: Interviewing and Reading Women Beat Writers* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1993) 160,161.

sewing was just another excuse to put off writing.²² LeRoi too wondered why he never heard from Hettie through the written word. (Nevermind that she was cooking, cleaning, working and taking care of two babies.) He liked her inventive clothes, he was even proud of them, “weird chick,” he would say to his friends with a peppering of pride in his voice. But where was her tongue? This was part of his expectation. It was important to him. “I/love you/& you hide yourself/in the shadows,” he wrote.²³ Accessing the time and energy to write was still too far away, but I’m getting ahead of myself.

Hettie and LeRoi began to date one another soon after Hettie returned from the Newport Jazz Festival. Both describe themselves as naïve as to how the color division would work in a relationship. “For those who still don’t believe it, race disappears in the house – in the bathroom, under the covers, in the bedbugs in your common mattress, in the morning sleep in your eyes,” wrote Hettie years later.²⁴ For her they were nothing more than the two of them together. Roi took it casually at first too. After all, Greenwich Village in the late 1950s created a new world for all kinds of people, a sort of bastion for what would later be called, New Bohemia, the same place Joyce Johnson described as the center of the universe.²⁵

²² Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 84.

²³ *Ibid*, 86.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 36.

²⁵ For an informative documentary on New York in the 1950s see *New York in the 50s*, directed by Betsey Blakenbaker (2001, First Run Features) documentary on Netflix.

Going to the Five Spot (a Village jazz haunt) was historically different from whites taking a train to Harlem. Even though jazz was the music being played at the small venue, it was a new place for everyone. Hettie described it as follows:

Downtown was everyone's new place. The cafes were hosting new poetry, there were new abstract expressionist paintings in a row of storefront galleries on East Tenth Street, new plays in new nook-and-cranny theaters...The jazz clubs were there among all of this. And all of us there – black and white – were strangers at first.²⁶

This mutual strangeness had a leveling effect, as everyone was both outsider and insider by way of simply being present. That summer Norman Mailer published his essay, "The White Negro."²⁷ In the somewhat insulated world of Greenwich Village, Hettie and Roi could show up places without much ado even though there were very few other interracial couples at the time. However, outside of the Village, a vastly different world existed, thirty states still enforced anti-miscegenation laws. Beyond the Village, opposition to interracial coupling was pervasive, severe, far-reaching and violent.

One day walking in the early evening on Bleeker Street arm in arm, Hettie and Roi were jeered at and catcalled. It took Hettie a few moments to realize that the commotion was over them. She turned around, her instinct told her to fight or to preach, but Roi grabbed her and pulled back with urgency. "Keep walking," he told her, "just keep walking."²⁸ She only later realized that had they been outside of New York City Roi could have been hurt, or even *killed* for their romance.²⁹ This experience gave Hettie pause. To live like this, with Roi, she would have to defer to his judgment. She also wondered about remaining Jewish in this new territory she had begun to navigate.

²⁶ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 34.

²⁷ Norman Mailer, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster," *Dissent* 4(3):276-93, Summer 1957, pp. 285-86.

²⁸ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 37.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 36.

Both Roi and Hettie tried in their different ways to take a step back as the relationship moved to the next level of seriousness, of actually “going together,” as Roi put it.³⁰ But Hettie was in love and that became a certainty. For Roi, the “interracial thing” was something he began to understand both in the context of the broader society and within himself. He experienced the stares from the people on the street, but also felt an ambivalence toward other people’s views: “I didn’t give much of a shit what anybody, not no white people anyway, thought about our hookup.”³¹ At the same time, writing several decades later, Roi (now Amiri Baraka) distances himself from any real passion for Hettie. He writes:

For one thing, now it was certain that there was a relationship, whatever it was. It existed. Not only did we know each other, but we related to each other. We liked talking to each other, apparently. Maybe we liked sleeping with each other, but there was never any passion.³²

It is impossible to know if the passion he claims to have missed is true of the man in 1957 or the man writing reflectively several decades later. There are quite a few points in his autobiography that emphasize this lack of passion. But what exactly does that word even mean? Desire? Hunger? Lust? Is Love something different?

Hettie, on the other hand, most certainly felt a passion for Roi, her certainty enhanced by the ease with which his family welcomed her. Roi took Hettie to Newark to meet his family early on. He needed a haircut and his father was his barber. The trip, a great success, included a softball game with Roi’s old high school friends. Pitching left-handed, Hettie struck someone out; Roi beamed with pride. That night as she lay in bed she considered her own pride in the man who lay beside her:

³⁰ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 212.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 215.

³² *Ibid.*

I was proud of him too – his quirky intelligence, his good humor, his stride. He was the first man I'd ever met who never failed to engage me. He was funny. He was even-tempered, easy, kind, responsible, and everyone else liked him too- I thought he was such a good *catch!*³³

Continuing to ponder this new amour, Hettie ruminated on her own family:

How I would have liked to show him [Roi] off, to bring him out one Sunday on the railroad, to a Laurelton that might have shared my pleasure in him. But all I had to offer was this self of mine, in its alienation, behind me the burden of closed minds. There was a sad, dull fact to this, with ridiculous ironies. Because if I was the one who kept watermelon, it was Roi who loved a good sour pickle.³⁴

The bridge to Hettie's family was not one the young couple needed to cross yet. For the time being they remained insulated in the bubble that was Greenwich Village in the late 1950s.

Before too much longer the *Record Changer* began to lose money, and the dollar an hour soon became too little to live on. Hettie was fortunate and found a job as the subscription manager at the *Partisan Review* working under the legendary William Phillips. She and Roi laughed that the *Partisan Review* was the exact magazine that Roi had been thrown out of the army for reading.³⁵ The world felt like Hettie's oyster. At the *Partisan Review*, Hettie was surrounded with an immense amount of literary and artistic

³³ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 41.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Founded in 1934, *Partisan Review* magazine was one of the most significant cultural literary journals in the U.S. Throughout its 69-year history (with a brief interregnum from November 1936 to Nov. 1937), *Partisan Review* editors and contributors have viewed critically both liberal and conservative agendas. Apart from an early connection to the Communist Party, it has eschewed party affiliation. *Partisan Review* is valued for its legendary editors, William Phillips, Philip Rahv (two of its founding editors), and Edith Kurzweil. They provided a forum to publish creative essays, commentary, book reviews, and book excerpts by such writers as Hannah Arendt, James Baldwin, Samuel Beckett, Allen Ginsberg, Franz Kafka, Doris Lessing, George Orwell, Marge Piercy, Jean-Paul Sartre, Roger Shattuck, Susan Sontag, William Styron, Lionel Trilling, and Robert Penn Warren. The entire list of editors and writers is a virtual who's-who of the cultural and literary world: <http://hgar-pub1.bu.edu/web/partisan-review>

material to sift through. In this way, she began a second education through her job. However, as she ingested all of the high-minded intellectual criticism that her editors so admired she wondered again and again, where am I in all of this?³⁶

Also at the beginning of their courtship, Hettie and Roi began to mix with the poetic and artistic milieu of their Village compatriots. Public readings were becoming common. Allen Ginsberg had recently read *Howl* in San Francisco and was tried for obscenity. Roi, greatly inspired by the poem, somehow got Allen's address in Paris and wrote to him on a piece of toilet paper asking if he was "for real." Allen was pleased with this question and responded back on another piece of toilet paper that he was, though he was tired of being Allen Ginsberg.³⁷

The couple soon met the poets, Gregory Corso, Diane di Prima and Frank O'Hara. Roi was asked to read his own work as well. He delivered, writing and speaking what he knew from a fresh point of view. Onstage Hettie called him, "clear, musical, and tough."³⁸

In the midst of this exciting time, as in all good times, there were some shadows of trouble lurking in the corners. The yin and the yang, the thesis and antithesis, the natural balance, the Compensation, are inescapable realities of life – pushing us always forward. One thing troubling Hettie in the midst of her new love and edifying job was her own writing, her own voice. Most of her attempts at poetry ended up in the trash, and

³⁶ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 44.

³⁷ Baraka, *Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 220.

³⁸ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 48.

at open readings she always remained in the audience, cheering others. Everyone else seemed so much better.³⁹

Also foreboding, one day she showed up at the *Record Changer* to hear Roi on the phone pretending to be someone else. “Yes, I’m well aware that he’s a Negro, but he’s been a fine employee. He hasn’t stolen anything, if that’s what you mean,” Roi said into the phone.⁴⁰ A record collector Roi had seen about a job, called the *Record Changer* to ask for a recommendation. Dick wasn’t in, so in an attempt to get hired Roi pretended to be someone other than himself. “We’d be glad to vouch,” said Roi pleasantly, but Hettie noticed his jaw muscles jumped repeatedly, a look she would come to know.⁴¹

Before too long Hettie became pregnant, something she had never given any thought to in the past. Her first instinct told her that there was no way that she could have this baby. First, she was not finished raising herself. Second, there was some trepidation at the thought of raising a biracial child. Could a white mother raise them? Roi was hurt by Hettie’s decision to have an abortion. He thought that it was only his child that she didn’t want, but the decision was hers. Hettie made an appointment with a doctor in Pennsylvania through a friend. Coming back on the bus to New York she resolved to deeply consider her own feelings about having biracial children in a world that she believed would be hostile toward them. Hettie also resolved to reassure Roi that he was the one she loved.⁴²

The couple’s first surrogate “baby” took the form of a magazine. *Yugen, A New Consciousness in Arts and Letters*, was Roi’s brainchild, but Hettie jumped on board.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 52.

Roi knew all the young poets and writers. Work came in. Allen Ginsberg sent four small poems for the first issue and told LeRoi and Hettie about people like Philip Whalen, Gary Snyder, and William Burroughs. Whalen sent work immediately. As for Hettie, Baraka writes later: “Nellie [Hettie] went for the idea. She thought it was a good thing to do. She’d type the manuscripts on our electric typewriter we rented when she took in typing.”⁴³ Indeed, Hettie threw herself into this work, believing in it wholeheartedly. The name, *Yugen*, comes from a concept in Japanese aesthetics that means “mysterious” and “deep,” something that is the most subtle and the most profound, the beauty of human suffering. It was agreed that the new consciousness alive and awake in New York at the time needed a vehicle for dissemination. Hettie pieced *Yugen 1* together on her kitchen table with a triangle and a T-square, 24-pages, neat and serious looking. A distributor that Hettie knew from the *Partisan* helped to place the publication as far away as Midwest campus libraries. Hettie and Roi solicited ads, and kept careful accounts. The *Village Voice* announced a “New Quarterly on the Stands.” Without Hettie’s skill the magazine could never have been published. The couple threw their first party to celebrate.⁴⁴

The party went down in an empty loft for which the proprietors had not paid the electric bill. Halfway through the festivities the electricity shut off. Hettie and Roi rushed to the local bodega for candles. For hours afterward in the darkness of the party, the two young lovers lost track of each other. Long past midnight they finally came face to face again. Hettie described their encounter this way:

⁴³ Baraka, *Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 220.

⁴⁴ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 55

Something flashed in his eyes, a passion- not only of love but recognition, to which my whole being responded. We fell together and seized each other, as if we'd been apart for months. As if this happy bash of people were only another thing we could do, another result of our easy collusion, another love knot... We were both twenty-three years old. I thought there'd be no stopping us.⁴⁵

Here Hettie writes that what she saw flash in LeRoi's eyes was exactly passion, the passion of love and of recognition.

In another publishing coup, the spring 1958 issue of the *Partisan Review* included an article called "The Know Nothing Bohemians," by Norman Podhoretz. It amounted to a trashing of *On the Road* and the whole Beat Generation.⁴⁶ Hettie and Roi found the article disturbing as it referred to "dispossessed urban groups (Negroes, bums, whores)" and accused the Beat gang of destroying America's literary future. Hettie approached her editors at the *Partisan* with a proposition: let LeRoi write a letter of rebuttal. Roi rose to the challenge and wrote an excellent letter that was published in the next issue: THE BEAT GENERATION, AN EXCHANGE, appeared in all caps in a box on the cover with LeRoi Jones's name dead center. On the inside was Hettie's name, Advertising and Circulation Manager.⁴⁷

In the following months, a couple of events propelled Hettie toward a watershed of life changing events. One afternoon on a beach in Long Island Hettie saw a little black boy with a white mother. Watching him play with his family caused Hettie to decipher her feelings about having a biracial child in a new way. She saw her hesitation as putting into question nothing but her own capability, and she suddenly felt strongly that parenting a black child was something that she not only could do, but wanted to do. "The little boy

⁴⁵ Ibid, 56.

⁴⁶ Norman Podhoretz, "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," *Partisan Review* 25:305-11, Spring 1958, pp. 307-8, 313-15.

⁴⁷ *The Partisan Review*, Volume XXV, Number 3 (Summer, 1958).

rolled his beach ball to me, and I rolled it back, and the problem rolled out on the tide,” recalled Hettie.⁴⁸ In August, Hettie flew to Boston to visit an old college friend who had just given birth to her second child. Visiting this baby also had a profound impact on Hettie. She didn’t think about how the decision to have a child would affect her own ambitions, she simply held the baby and fell for it. With ease Hettie became careless about her birth control and was soon pregnant again.

“I guess we’ll have to get married, then,” said LeRoi with a sly smile when told the news.⁴⁹ Writing years later, Baraka records that he blurted out this proposal without having inspected it:

When she repeated the word [married], I could hear it more clearly. What I said had opened a trap door into our deeper feelings. Married? To whom? For what? Forever? I felt a little pushed, more than a little uncertain, but I couldn’t think of anything else to say. What? Go get another abortion for chrissakes!!? What was terrifying deep down was that I felt nothing really. There was no passion. It was quiet and rational. Our words back and forth. There were smiles. Nellie [Hettie] looked at me smiling, half-smiling, uncertain. She didn’t know what to do either. What kind of life would this be? How long would this last? Who was this, anyway?...what was so crushing, yet pulsing on the subtlest of emotional wires, was that I had a responsibility, I was expected to do something. I couldn’t just walk away. And no, there was still no real passion.⁵⁰

The two got married in a Buddhist Temple to mitigate the middle-class-ness of the whole affair; it was October 13, 1958. Hettie described herself at the time as “the happiest and best-loved woman in New York.”⁵¹ LeRoi’s description is clearly more circumspect even though it was Hettie who would now lose her family and her past for marrying across race lines. In trading Hettie Cohen for Hettie Jones, Hettie had to say good-bye to all that was connected to the former.

⁴⁸ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 60.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 61.

⁵⁰ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 217.

⁵¹ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 62.

When the new Mrs. Jones met with her father it was the stuff of nightmares, and demonstrates just how horrific the idea of interracial marriage was for most Americans at the time. Hettie's father screamed and pleaded with her to get a divorce and have an abortion. He offered to run away with her to Mexico where a divorce and an abortion could be more private. Hettie felt ashamed, not of her marriage or her pregnancy, but that she had no way to comfort her father. When Hettie left without agreeing to a divorce or an abortion she was informed that she was now dead to her father and instructed never to call home again.⁵²

Soon after, friends of the newlyweds, George and Dolly Stade, agreed to split rent on a shared apartment.⁵³ The Stades had stood up at Hettie and Roi's unconventional wedding. The new apartment was much more spacious. After all, *Yugen* needed room, as well as the couple's newest project, Totem Press. Totem would publish small books of poetry by various new writers. Hettie and Roi's friends would also be partners in the press venture. All plans were made for the two couples to move in together, deposits paid. Then suddenly the Stades backed out. It turned out that Dolly's father had given his daughter money to *not* live with Hettie and Roi as soon as he found out they were an interracial couple. Dolly's father suspected that by virtue of Roi being black his daughter would be in danger of getting raped.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid, 63.

⁵³ George Stade was a poet himself who was published in *Yugen*. He later became the head of the English Department at Columbia College and a reviewer for the *New York Times Book Review* as well as a successful novelist.

⁵⁴ Baraka, *Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 224.

Reflecting on Hettie at the time of their marriage, Baraka writes:

She had had to come to terms with the marriage in her own way. I can only guess what whites who think they belong in the mainstream of U.S. – American Dream-society think when they find out for some reason (in this case an exploding black penis) that they will not be allowed in that stream. She had that quality that marks survivors, a dogged will that haunted her twinkling eyes. A strength to her laughter that made it richer. Yet for these reasons a kind of lonely atmosphere accompanied her no matter how she tried to mount it or quiet it.⁵⁵

This passage in Baraka's autobiography strikes me as a moving portrait of a young Hettie. She is like an acorn. All that she needs to be the oak tree she will one day become is inside of her already.

In Hettie's own reflection on what marriage to Roi meant she is more judicious about what was gained and lost for both of them. She writes of Roi, "He would remain, like any man of any race, exactly as he was, augmented."⁵⁶ For her, she had lost her past to share his. Hettie jumped for the sake of love without any safety nets to catch her.

Culturally, we often think of a man as losing something to marriage, whether we call it his independence or his freedom, sexual or financial. When women are not allowed true independence or freedom in the same way it makes marriage an unbalanced proposition. Here Hettie considers Roi augmented by having a wife, which is an honest analysis. Men's sexual freedom in the post war period remained intact even when married. Extra marital affairs were commonplace. And as a bohemian, LeRoi was not

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 65.

stressed financially by having a wife and child. Hettie was the one with the steady job, and it was she who would take care of the children as well. She supported him in every way possible from her work on the magazine to making meals at home. Yet it was she who was sustained by his love as well as her hopes for the future.

In the modern era, women have access to financial freedom that was unthinkable sixty years ago. However, many of our cultural norms have remained stagnant. Traditionally it was the man who proposed marriage when *he* was ready, while the woman hoped and dreamed of becoming worthy enough to be a bride.⁵⁷ To this day, it is very rare for a woman to propose to a man when *she* is ready. Also, we never hear talk of little boys dreaming of their wedding day the way we do little girls. The propaganda of coupledness is almost entirely aimed at women.

In this vein, there remains a tremendous amount of cultural pressure placed on women to land a husband, or at least a boyfriend. A single woman is still someone to pity no matter how successful she is in her work or her life in general. Often she is not only pitied but suspect, something must be wrong with her. This is not the case for a single man. Single men are often celebrated for being autonomous and living the bachelor life with implied possibilities for fun and freedom that marriage might squash. This puts a tremendous amount of pressure and anxiety on women (as seen in the journals of my young students) and manifests especially in a yearning to be sexually attractive. For men there is cultural pressure in other arenas, but remaining a bachelor (especially if you're having lots of sex with different women) is nothing to be ashamed of. Think of

⁵⁷ See Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were* and Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

George Clooney and the media's obsession with his desirability as an older single man. On the other hand, Jennifer Aniston was consistently written about with tones of pity and anxiety. Will she ever find someone? Will she ever have a baby?⁵⁸

Moreover, 64% of children are now being born outside of marriage, nearly half of these raised by a single mother. These children are commonly the most impoverished, which leads to a national question of how to champion the plight of impoverished children and their mothers.⁵⁹ This is a crucial issue that deserves attention both from society at large and from feminists. The demands of home and childcare are enormous, and still fall primarily at the feet of women, who in this country languish amidst very limited support from governmental or societal structures. This is the case all the way from the poorest un- and underemployed women to those in higher education who still desire a balance in career and family life. Hettie's story is ultimately a celebration of all that a woman can do under any circumstances if she is brave enough, patient enough, and strong enough, but not every woman on every day can be Hettie Jones. Freshly married she had no idea yet of the challenges that lay just ahead.

Despite the Stades dropping out of their promised living arrangement, the newlyweds moved in to the apartment on Twentieth Street anyway. At their new place, Hettie and Roi began to host a whirlwind of parties. In short time they became the center

⁵⁸ For an interesting discussion on relationships in the 1960s see Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: A Celebration of its Liberties and an Invitation to Discipline* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1965).

⁵⁹ Slate Article found here:

http://www.slate.com/articles/business/moneybox/2014/06/for_millennials_out_of_wedlock_child_birth_is_the_norm_now_what.html

of a growing group of stimulating and eclectic writers and artists. In the midst of this milieu Hettie met some women who became a kind of makeshift family for her since she was no longer able to be a part of her own family. One of the most significant of these relationships was with Rena Renquist, who was the wife of poet Joel Oppenheimer at the time. Rena was already a mother of two small boys. She had left her home in North Carolina at the age of 18 to hitchhike to Black Mountain and be a part of the group of poets and artists that resided there- Black Mountain was “a hotbed for avant-garde art, an experiment in community, home not only to writers but also composers, choreographers, painters, and sculptors.”⁶⁰ At Black Mountain, Rena fell in love with Joel, a man that her middle-class Catholic family vehemently disapproved of. He was bearded, Jewish, a Yankee and a poet! The day Rena left home to be married her mother stood in the doorway threatening to commit suicide. A priest was called, but Rena still managed to slip away. Rena was an artist’s wife, but she held on to her own life as well and tried to encourage other women to do the same. Rena also worked, like most artists’ wives, even though at midcentury working mothers were very rare. In all of these ways Rena became a much-needed mentor for Hettie in navigating a man’s world as a woman, or a woman’s world outside of the norm. Characterizing Hettie’s place in their group of friends Roi wrote years later:

She [Hettie] liked the weekend bashes we had because it cast her in another light. We were, in some respects, at the center of a particular grouping of folks...[Hettie] had not been such a popular kid, she’d told me many times. She was unpretty, she’d said, in a pretty world. Unglamorous in a world ruled by glamour. So she loved the attention that even such a modest circle as our drunken, adulterous poets provided.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 82. For more information on Black Mountain see Vincent Katz, *Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013). Many people of the poets and artist in Greenwich Village at this time were transplants from Black Mountain.

⁶¹ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 231.

For Hettie it was the accomplishment that these connections fostered that moved her, in particular her connection to Roi himself. She writes of an evening spent assembling

Yugen:

Spoon in hand I glance at my husband the host, who doesn't cook. But he does clean up these parties: his specialty is mopping the floor. Meanwhile he's standing back to survey the scene. In the parlor Max and Fee are setting out stacks of pages that seem huge to me, at least a night's work. But I'm sure the job will be done, and carefully, and Roi is too. Accomplishment is the virtue of our life together.⁶²

In spite of their mutual accomplishment, Roi became frustrated that Hettie wasn't writing as he was. The poetry he wrote, as any honest person's would, held moments of personal failure as well as failure between himself and Hettie. One evening he woke her up. "Everyone is talking about me," he said. And then added "and my wife."⁶³ He'd been to the Cedar Tavern where Hettie couldn't be because she was very pregnant and very tired. In that moment she felt a distancing, a realization that with the birth of their child, their lives would diverge and instead of an encircling of family she felt a flood of regret. She turned away from him and faced the wall.

Soon after Hettie and LeRoi were apart for the first time due to an invitation from Allen Ginsberg. A carful of poets were going to go visit Charles Olson in Gloucester, Massachusetts.⁶⁴ Before leaving Roi hugged Hettie tight and clung. At five in the morning he called from Massachusetts. "I was just thinking about you," he said. Roi's sister was visiting Hettie and slept just inches away; Hettie could not say much. She says of that phone call:

⁶² Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 76.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶⁴ Charles Olson was an extremely influential American Poet who referred to himself not as a poet or writer, but as "an archeologist of morning."

I wanted to tell him I understood. I would have liked to tell him that I'd always been with him, solid since the beginning, and that the rest was all language – glow, shift, fire or ice, depending- not the root core calm I knew we shared. And that as for me, he'd have to be patient, I was swollen silence, struggling for words.⁶⁵

What Roi did recognize in Hettie he wrote about also – a firm belief that she could do anything she set her mind to. He wrote:

*My wife is left-handed
which implies a fierce de-
termination. A complete other
wordliness. IT'S WEIRD, BABY.
The way some folks
Are always trying to be
Different. A sin & a shame.*

*But then, she's been a bohemian
all of her life...black stockings
refusing to take orders. I sit
patiently, trying to tell her
whats right. TAKE THAT DAMM
PENCIL OUTTA THAT HAND. YOU'RE
RITING BACKWARDS. & such. But
to no avail. & it shows
in her work. Left-handed coffee,
Left-handed eggs; when she comes
in at night...it's her left hand
offered for me to kiss. Damm.*

*& now her belly droops over the seat.
They say it's a child. But
I ain't quite so sure.⁶⁶*

One spring afternoon, Hettie walked across Greenwich Avenue with her friend, Joyce Johnson. Wearing a red-flowered maternity dress that she'd just sewn in her own sewing machine, Hettie laughed as a truck driver leaned out his window and shouted, “Hey, little momma!”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 87.

⁶⁶ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 217-218.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Kellie Elisabeth was born to Hettie and Roi ten days after her due date; Roi rushed home from a speaking engagement in Pennsylvania. Several representatives of America's new consciousness including Joel Oppenheimer and Joyce Johnson took Hettie to the hospital that night and stood stricken as the expectant mother was wheeled away on a gurney. Ever full of levity and courage, it was Hettie who reassured *them* and blew kisses to her friends as she rolled down the hallway to have her first child.⁶⁸

Parenthood is very often an overwhelming experience. The extremes of love and delight coupled with sleep deprivation and an entire re-orientation of life and consciousness occur simultaneously. Hettie experienced all of this: volcanic love along with astonishment at the amount of time, goo, and stuff involved with parenting.⁶⁹ While Kellie was an infant, Roi worked in midtown and Hettie came face to face with the unexpected isolation that full time childcare can create. In a moment of loneliness and mild desperation Hettie decided to walk Kellie to Washington Square where she knew some other mothers she could talk to. It was roughly a mile-long walk and she only had a bulky carriage to make the journey. At some point in the voyage Kellie awoke crying and hungry. The only option for a place to nurse her was the filthy and neglected public restrooms at the nearby park. Breast-feeding was not allowed in public. Just when Hettie herself felt like screaming, Fielding Dawson dashed out of a nearby bar. "Fee" (the short-lived boyfriend of Joyce Glassman) beckoned Hettie into the bar where he and Franz Kline watched a baseball game. All afternoon she found company with the two Black Mountain artists. Before leaving, Hettie took Kellie into the Ladies' room to nurse

⁶⁸ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 89-92.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

again. The rather nasty bathroom smelled like a latrine. She whispered to Kellie laughingly, “Hey baby, we’re in the outhouse.”⁷⁰ Kellie, leaning back from her mother’s breast laughed too. At this Hettie burst into a flood of tears that wouldn’t stop as she rocked Kellie back and forth in the forsaken bathroom. Hettie cried “because mothering her I’d neglected the self to whom I’d always been kind; I’d put myself in the outhouse. And now I had her with me too, and the way back seemed far and the directions obscure.”⁷¹

The desire to balance the self with motherhood was extremely difficult at mid-century and was unequivocally an endeavor *not* supported by the culture at large. The expectation was (and in many ways still is) that to be consumed with the care of the child is natural and ultimately fulfilling for a woman. In fact, to desire something for one’s self beyond motherhood for a woman was considered selfish and unnatural.⁷²

Roi’s life, on the other hand, remained full and driven by the far-reaching interests that kept him on the move. He became good friends with Frank O’Hara, the assistant curator for the Museum of Modern Art. Frank was urbane, incisive, sophisticated, and extremely knowledgeable. His sophistication worked in great contrast to Hettie’s playpen clutter and milky shoulder. Working during the day as a technical writer, Roi would bring home his pay and invariably go out again, leaving Hettie to tend to Kellie day and night. One evening as Roi prepared to leave with Frank, Hettie threw her arms around her husband and proclaimed, “Don’t be late!” Frank immediately

⁷⁰ Ibid., 96.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² See Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, as well as Barbara Ehrenreich, *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Expert’s Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1978). See also Thomas Mailer, *Dr. Spock* (New York: Basic Books, 2003). Dr. Spock’s advice played a major role in how American parents understood parenting beginning with the first publication of his book on childcare in 1946.

stiffened and Hettie guiltily quipped, “How’s that for a line.” Frank replied with amazement, “I though you were *serious*.”⁷³

When Hettie left the *Partisan Review* to have Kellie, she had given her job to Joyce Glassman/Johnson. When Roi learned of this he became very upset that Hettie hadn’t given the job to him. Hettie had not even thought of it as it entailed a great deal of clerical work. In a fury Roi snapped, “I can do anything you can do. You’d be nothing without me.”⁷⁴ While no one wants remembered what is said during a fight with a loved one, it signaled something to Hettie. It was not surprising to her then, when she found out that Roi was having an affair with the poet Diane Di Prima, a woman Hettie admired and was friends with. Affairs in their bohemian circle were not uncommon. Hettie recalls that there were as many affairs as marriages. The pleasure principle was highly valued, but it still cut Hettie deeply. Roi wrote how Hettie and Diane were very different women. To Roi, Hettie represented more of a middle class way of being while Diane he considered an arc-bohemian on the fringes of society, “a creature after and of the Arts.”⁷⁵ Addressing the culture of their bohemian community he wrote of the affair, “...in that life of hedonism, all that finally matters is the pleasure one gets from something or someone, little else, everything else recedes into the background.”⁷⁶

⁷³ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 98.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 239.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 240.

& Love is an evil word.

Turn it backwards/see what I mean?

An evol word. & besides

who understands it

I certainly wouldn't want to go out on that kind of limb.⁷⁷

- LeRoi Jones

Sitting on the sidelines while some of the downtown male artists played softball, Hettie regretted that women were not allowed to play, were expected to lose the way a child uses her body and grow up into the restrictiveness of girdles. To mitigate this loss, she and Rena began to take dance lessons. Hettie excelled in dance class and it renewed in her a sense that she could seek for herself in the world. She and Rena would go out to the Cedar Tavern after class. Willem de Kooning offered Hettie a rose once. Men flirted with her, and she eventually went home with one. His name was Mike Kanemitsu.

Roi began to resent Hettie's dance classes. He didn't like that she got dressed up. He started to come home late so that she would miss them. One evening after Roi went out to be with Diane, Hettie left the baby with a sitter and went over to Mike's apartment. Around two in the morning Roi popped up from Diane's bed and told her that he should get home given the late hour. Diane, in the know about Hettie and Mike, said to Roi, "Suppose I told you you didn't have to go back now, that [Hettie] is not there?"⁷⁸ After being informed as to what Diane meant, Roi sprung up in a rage. Writing years later LeRoi/Baraka admits, "Ah, the injuries of spirit the male chauvinist must endure, doing his thing, but certainly in no way ready for the woman to do hers. I threw on my clothes.

⁷⁷ LeRoi Jones, "In Memory of Radio," found in Baraka, *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. William J. Harris (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991) 10-11.

⁷⁸ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 240.

[Diane] is protesting...I was on the street in a few minutes, sprinting almost all the way.”⁷⁹ Roi made it back home in a flash and realized that Diane was right; Hettie was nowhere to be found. In another flash Roi’s mental prowess served him as he scrolled through not only people Hettie may be with, but where they lived. He found her at Mike’s at about three a.m. Roi stood outside pounding frantically at the door. When the door opened, Roi grabbed Hettie, his face contorted, enraged, and he began to drag her out. “Let’s be civilized about this, Roi,” said Mike. Roi responded with, “Cut the bullshit motherfucker, I’m not a civilized man!”⁸⁰

Roi and Hettie left Mike’s and walked home through Chelsea’s deserted streets, all the while Roi yelling at Hettie that she was a whore and a bitch. Hettie protested, mostly reminding him about Diane. When they reached the door of their home he proclaimed as loud as he could that he had never slept with Diane. When the two finally made it home, Roi began smashing plates and overturning chairs. Hettie recalls realizing that what he wanted to do was hit *her*. She yelled at him to quiet down or wake the baby. As the sun began to peek over the horizon she dared him, “Go ahead, hit me, go ahead,” and to her surprise he did, forcing her head into the wall with a thump. After the shock, a shock that they shared, the two went down slow and held each other for about thirty minutes. There they were, two twenty-five year old kids, their baby daughter asleep in the next room, all three in the midst of a lot of commotion. Where is the race in that scene?⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ This particular incident occurs in three separate accounts: Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 103-104, Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 240-241, and Baraka, “Going Down Slow,” *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* – his hypocritical response to Hettie’s affair.

Throughout the late 1950s the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum in America with landmark historical events such as *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and the incredible fortitude of the Little Rock Nine. In 1960, Roi and Hettie were given a small TV, something someone leaving the city left for them. Television for them as for many in America became something very powerful. Suddenly the injustices suffered by Blacks in America were streaming right into people's living rooms uncensored. Hettie and Roi watched day after day as students sat in at lunch counters in Nashville, students younger than them. Hideously hateful whites poured sugar in their hair, smeared ketchup and mustard on their well-groomed clothes, and jeered at them. Hettie remembers seeing a young girl swallowing hard with fear sitting at a lunch counter while a vicious crowd mugged for the camera. Just at that moment Roi's father brought Kellie home. Hettie scooped up her daughter and held her close; such risks were unimagined. Whatever stares she got for being with Roi she could handle, but the fear Hettie felt for her daughter existed as a new and terrifying territory. Roi sat glued to the TV, jaws clenched with anger.⁸²

As a tribute to Fidel Castro, Totem Press published a pamphlet titled *JAN 1st 1959: Fidel Castro*. The publication included poems by Kerouac, Oppenheimer, and Roi himself. Hettie set it up and Fee Dawson did the cover. News of the pamphlet reached the cultural arm of Cuba's new government, and in the summer of 1960 Roi was invited

⁸² Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 109.

to the island along with a group of African-American artists and scholars to have a look around and spread the word back in the U.S. The agrarian reform that Castro had implemented was already making the US government uneasy. Roi agreed to go without hesitation and describes the experience as a turning point in his life.⁸³

Traveling around Cuba, Roi met other writers, ministers, and intellectuals. He met Fidel Castro and listened to his powerful orations. Fidel encouraged Roi to take his impressions back to the United States. Perhaps most emotionally charged for Roi was riding around with other intellectuals his age. The young revolutionaries shouting “Viva Mexico!” “Viva Brazil!” “Viva Argentina!” assaulted Roi for his pronouncement that he was not political. Roi was taken on thoroughly and forcefully for what these young intellectuals saw as the bourgeois individualism of only caring about his art. He was assailed for twelve or fourteen hours on a train around Cuba. In his words:

I could fight back with what I knew of my own seeming disagreement with my U.S. peers, how I did have sensitivity to what was going on. But that seemed puny in the face of what I’d already seen in Cuba and in the faces of these young Latino activists and intellectuals, already politicized, for whom Cuba was the first payoff of a world they had already envisioned and were already working for...As much hot hatred as I could summon for the U.S., its white supremacy, its exploitation, its psychological torture of schizophrenic slaves like myself, I now had to bear the final indignity – which made my teeth grate violently, even in reflection – the indignity and humiliation of defending its ideology, which I was doing in the name of Art. Jesus Christ!⁸⁴

Whatever growing kernel of social consciousness Roi had was fertilized mightily by his visit to Cuba. When Roi returned to New York he immediately put all of his energy into an essay titled “Cuba Libre” which was published in the *Evergreen Review* and eventually won the Longview Award for journalism. Hettie knew that the streets of

⁸³ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 245.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 245.

Newark came into focus for Roi when he heard the accusations of the Latin American revolutionaries on the train in Cuba.⁸⁵

Back on the home front, Roi and Hettie stood facing each other, tense and churning with the age-old conflict over money and who is going to pay the rent. Roi lost his job as a technical writer when he left for Cuba and now Hettie's job at the *Partisan Review* was in jeopardy as well. The magazine's editors, tired of Hettie's erratic work schedule, asked for either a full time commitment or a resignation. Interestingly, deep down Roi and Hettie wanted the same: for Hettie to work. Roi, as a writer, and public intellectual was hot and getting hotter. Everything was on his horizon except maybe money. For Roi, though it gave him more control over "his" household, a job was ultimately slave work, an infringement on his freedom to truly work. For Hettie it was the opposite. She writes, "To one of us a job is a slave, to the other it's a guarantee of freedom. And it's his male pride, with all that this entails, against my freedom to take it or leave it. He has lots of ways to make his side up, but I can only lose once. And I won't."⁸⁶ A nanny was hired, and it was Hettie who went to work.

The difference between what work meant for a man and what work meant for a woman is an imperative distinction to make. What was considered wage slavery for a man was an avenue toward freedom for a woman.⁸⁷ As Hettie says, Roi had the ability to

⁸⁵ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 114.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁸⁷ For contemporary commentary on the oppressiveness of work in a corporate America where all of the imagined workers are men see David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing*

“make his side up.” Being dependent on his wife financially did not translate for Roi into a loss of options, a loss of self, or a loss of his ability to do the work that really meant something to him. Just the opposite, being dependent on his wife financially gave him total freedom to be himself. If the man was working, there was a completely different set of expectations for how the woman would spend her time. Roi and Hettie hired a nanny because *Hettie* was going to work. However, when Roi worked full time it was Hettie who provided the childcare, kept the home, worked to layout his publications, and worked sporadically at the *Partisan Review* when time would permit. Hettie would go to work to preserve a sliver of her independence, which would in turn require her to again put her real work aside.

Not surprisingly, it was a woman friend of Hettie’s who helped her to find her voice and break the anguished silence that plagued her. Coming home one day in the evening with a grocery bag, Hettie found a group gathered in her apartment. This was far from uncommon, but on this particular evening two fair strangers stood out among the usual suspects. These two tall strangers were Edward Dorn and his wife, Helene. Ed, a poet, had been a student at Black Mountain and the couple now lived in Santa Fe. Ed wrote fluently of the West, with the insight of having grown up on a Midwestern farm. He and Roi had been corresponding. It was Helene who reached to take the grocery bag as Hettie struggled out of her poncho. She inquired immediately about the poncho as well. Had Hettie made it? Helene reached to touch the fabric as soon as Hettie admitted that she had. Ed then held the lapels of his jacket and said proudly that Helene had made

American Character (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), William Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1957), and Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2002), originally published in 1955.

his jacket, displaying the perfect hand-finished lining. Roi inspected the jacket, commenting that he too would like such a fine jacket, and everyone laughed mostly because they all knew that Hettie did enough for him as it was.⁸⁸

In Ed's jacket, Hettie recognized a finer hand than her own, but in Helene she recognized a friend. It was significant for Hettie that she and Helene became friends through their work as tailors, rather than simply as wives. The two women became very close in a short period of time. From Santa Fe the Dorns moved to Pocatello, Idaho, where Ed taught at a small state college. In this time Helene and Hettie began an intense and meaningful correspondence. Hettie wrote whatever came to mind, her silence broken, and the things that were not written she found equally important.

There was a faith between myself and Helene; we knew that what was incomplete still compelled us, and hid the same shame at having abandoned it. Abandoned is not the word though; there's an old kitchen way to say what we did: you bury your talent in a napkin.⁸⁹

Hettie found herself absorbed with writing to Helene, composing letters for hours, trying to put words on paper that could speak. "Something in language went now, where nothing else could go. So I owe it to Dear Helene, my fellow tailor, that I ever left the Singer and took up the pen."⁹⁰

After Hettie became pregnant with their second child, her relationship with Roi took a turn for the worse. He was unalarmed by the pregnancy, his parents were excited

⁸⁸ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 128.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

at the news, and Hettie's mother again wept. Soon fighting and fatigue began to take over Hettie and Roi's relationship. Roi left early in the morning and returned late at night from either bars or other women's apartments. There was one woman in particular from Great Neck, Long Island that he was seeing often, along with Diane Di Prima, and others. Hettie lost her tolerance for these liaisons and began to feel her "self" shrinking as her belly grew larger. One evening in a flood of tears she expressed her deep hurt at the existence of the other women and told Roi of her unhappiness. It felt better to unburden herself, but a day later he decided to move out. "Why must you?," Hettie asked Roi when he returned the next day. "[Miss Great Neck, Long Island] is a beautiful woman," he answered. This answer, a devastating punch to the gut, led Hettie to shriek "I'm beautiful too! You said so yourself! I'm beautiful too!"⁹¹

Over the next few months Roi came over daily to pick up his mail and even tried to get Hettie into bed. It was his embarrassment when she refused. Hettie was working uptown at the *Partisan Review* and paying the nanny to mind Kellie during the day. In June, Roi brought her his first book, hot off the press and dedicated to her. It only made her feel worse.

On August 15, 1961, in the heat of that summer, Roi and Hettie's second daughter was born, Lisa Victoria Chapman Jones. In the wailing moments of new life Lisa's mother comforted her. "It's okay," Hettie told her infant daughter. "Now that you're here it'll all be much better, I'm sure, don't cry, it's okay, I promise."⁹² Hettie and her new baby had been through a rough time together; they could speak as friends. Roi moved

⁹¹ Ibid., 138.

⁹² Ibid., 141.

back in with his family. “Why?” he wonders in his later autobiography. “Perhaps a sense of family, a feeling of being somehow insecure living ‘by myself’ or whatever.”⁹³

On a rainy afternoon in late fall, on the corner of Fourteenth and First, Hettie found herself in a precarious situation. Amidst the hurrying people, Hettie carried a precious convoy that quickly became a traffic dilemma. With one arm she pushed a carriage, carrying the most prized cargo of her two daughters, one the tiny infant Lisa, and the other two-year old Kellie. With her other arm she pulled a shopping cart full of clean laundry. Along this trek of balance and bravery, a brand clean sheet fell from the teetering pile and began to get mucky in the gutter below. She could not let go of the carriage. It was a collapsible carriage and tended to do so when not tended. Lisa began to cry. Kellie’s shoes dangled precariously close to her sister’s head. The sheet fell more and more into the muck. Hettie could not let go of the living cargo to rescue the sheet. It became to her the symbol of a wasted effort. She could no longer put it on her bed that night, and the thought of the wasted quarter for the dryer passed through her mind in a wave of disgust and disappointment. Nevertheless, Hettie decided to try with a ballet like grace to rescue the fallen sheet and re-make her effort worthwhile. Just then under her own outstretched arm the veined and spotted arm of an elderly woman appeared. The old lady snatched the sheet, brushed off the muck, flipped it onto the stack of clothes and in a feat of strength jammed the stack of laundry into the cart and hauled the whole thing back

⁹³ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 249.

onto the sidewalk. The elderly woman wore an old blue coat with military buttons and had white hair in a thick rope on top of a lovely Irish face. Hettie tried to thank her over and over, but there was something else on the old lady's mind. "The men they don't know about this," she said. "They don't know and they don't care to know, them with their lives, their damned lives." And with that she left.⁹⁴

Hettie knew what was missing, and what the elderly lady on the street meant. With Lisa's birth she was finished working for the *Partisan*, she was finished bearing children, she was growing her hair out, Totem Press had eleven titles to its name, *Yugen 7* was out, she was running the business end of her endeavors with Roi, but all of it felt like serving others. That night, re-convicted of her voice and her purpose and her ability, Hettie began a book for children. The book remained unfinished for ten years. She lost the manuscript. It was a false start. She described her own thoughts as "being tangled for lack of time" like the long hair that she grew out but then twisted up carelessly.⁹⁵ The Russian poet Marina Tsvetayeva describing her own silence came close to Hettie's reason when she wrote: "It's precisely for feeling that one needs time, and not for thought."⁹⁶ From these days Hettie has one poem representative of a future she saw for herself and could never disappoint:

⁹⁴ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 145-146.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 149.

⁹⁶ Lily Feiler, *Marina Tsvetaeva: The Double Beat of Heaven and Hell* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 187.

*I've been alive since thirty-four
and I've sung every song
since before the War*

*Will the press of this music
warp my soul
till I'm wrinkled and gnarled
and old and small-*

*A crone in the marshes
singing and singing*

*A crone in the marshes singing
and singing*

*and singing
and singing
and singing
and singing
and singing⁹⁷*

Things with Roi were currently pretty good. Joyce Johnson who worked now for William Morrow hooked him up with an editor who commissioned a book about the Blues: a critical study of the music, its history, and the lives of the people who made it. Roi was thrilled with the task and took it up with his typical vigor.⁹⁸ When the ceiling collapsed in the kitchen of their apartment on Fourteenth Street Roi called the city inspector. “It could have hurt my *family*,” Roi said as Hettie savored the word coming out of his mouth. When she was happy she heard love in the word.⁹⁹

For Hettie’s benefit, Joyce invited her to act in a play at the Judson Poets Theater. All of the characters were familiar Greek heroines who grappled with the question: Is fate guilty of bringing suffering or do human beings bring suffering upon themselves? Hettie

⁹⁷ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 150.

⁹⁸ LeRoi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999).

⁹⁹ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 152.

brought her daughters to the evening rehearsals. A male reviewer wrote, “This is stirring only if one is interested in these antique ladies, which I am not particularly.”¹⁰⁰ Roi shared this opinion and attended neither of the two performances. In truth, Roi was having a fling with a new girl in town. “I’ve failed you again,” he would sometimes say. Hettie too felt that she had failed him, some expectation he had of her. Is this the human condition? All they could do was to keep trying, and they did.¹⁰¹

Soon the couple had to move to a new apartment on Cooper Square, and while it was getting fixed-up Hettie stayed in Newark with the little girls at Roi’s parents’ house. Roi stayed with Fielding Dawson, working on the apartment by day and writing by night. Once a week she came to the city to visit him, like dating all over again. During these brief visits Hettie and Roi would fall into each other’s arms, relishing what they missed during the week. And returning to Newark, Hettie also felt the joy of reuniting with her children. “These marvelous children,” she wrote. “I fall on my knees in front of them.”¹⁰² It was in writing to Helene during this time that she made peace with Roi’s extramarital liaisons:

[His latest affair] didn’t last long. Then he was sorry again. Poor Roi, He should never be a cocksman because he’s directly out of the Baptist tradition and suffers more guilt and shame than anyone I know. As he did last spring and as I suppose he’ll do again... So I figure, being myself near to twenty-eight years old, and getting wiser every year let him.¹⁰³

For all that Hettie lost by way of family when she married Roi, she gained a tremendous amount in becoming a daughter-in-law to Roi’s mother, Anna Lois, who taught her to cook and loved her steady through everything. Friendships with black

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 155.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 160.

¹⁰² Ibid., 167.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

women sustained and buoyed Hettie as well. In their new apartment, Hettie often visited a neighbor, Dorothy White whose husband had been in the Air Force with Roi. Hettie felt a likeness in Dorothy. Dorothy in turn admired Hettie's self-sufficiency, which reminded her, she said, of her own people. Dorothy exuded self-confidence. Through her, Hettie entered a world of contemporary black women, who because of the prevailing racism and sexism of the day were all in for a hard time, but who always met their challenges eye to eye. In the coming days, Roi was badly beaten up by a group of racist bar patrons outside of McSorley's on Seventh Street. And crucial to 1962, a new and substantial Muslim leader named Malcolm X debated civil rights leader, Bayard Rustin about the notion of separation versus integration.¹⁰⁴

Another neighbor of Hettie and Roi's was the playwright Aishah Rahman. She lived with a poet named Bobb Hamilton and helped him to raise his two children. After the children were settled in school, Aishah moved to Washington D.C. and cleaned hotel rooms to afford her tuition at Howard. From there she moved on to a Masters Degree, a child of her own, a multitude of her own productions, and a professorship at Brown University. Catching up with Ms. Rahman years later Hettie listened to her explain what she'd been saving. "You didn't see how *down* I was," Rahman said to Hettie pointing to her building, "because you were always up *there*."¹⁰⁵ The meaning behind this statement Hettie understood immediately. Women didn't talk about what was really going on *inside*. Joyce, for example, never mentioned that she had stopped writing after the publication of her first novel. Hettie kept her own sporadic poems to herself. In an interview much later, for the book, *Breaking the Rule of Cool*, Beat poet Janine Pommy

¹⁰⁴ For insight into Malcolm X's ideas and life see the classic work, Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X As Told to Alex Haley* (Ballantine Books; Reissue Edition, 1992).

¹⁰⁵ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 180.

Vega reveals that although both were writing neither she nor her roommate Elise Cowen showed each other their work or even spoke of it! She states:

[Elise] did not show me hers (poems), kept a notebook, was private about it. The fact that we did not, as roommates, share what today's young women might take for granted I think speaks for an era when what women were going through in terms of their own chosen art seemed unimportant next to the art of the men.¹⁰⁶

In retrospect, Hettie Jones finds a shame in this silence and asks- "how *could* we?"¹⁰⁷

The answer to this question begins to be discovered in an interview with Joyce Johnson.

Johnson explains the way her own writing stopped after her first novel,

I felt very alone in what I was doing. Then right after the book was published, I met James Johnson, whom I married. And he had a lot of problems, and I was very caught up in all of that. And my life with him was so intense. I think it was probably impossible for me to work when I was with anyone. I needed to be alone to write. And then after he was killed- we'd been married for a year, and he was killed in a motorcycle accident. – I wanted to write about him...but I didn't go on with it. I met another man, Peter Pinchbeck. I got involved with him, we had a child, I was working. I was so tired. I had this small child; there was a babysitter who came during the day, but then I'd sort of stagger home from work, take care of the child, make the dinner, and do the dishes, and my husband would go off to the artists' bar, and I would just practically black out. There was just no possibility, no space in my life for any work of my own.¹⁰⁸

A hundred years prior, Emerson called on scholars (women themselves?) to write "the meaning of a household life."¹⁰⁹ Hettie found that noble goal elusive. Her explanation rings similar to Joyce Johnson's:

I didn't mind my household life. I just couldn't do a damn thing with it. How did it translate to words, this holding pattern of call and response, clean and dirty, sick, well, asleep, awake. It's only allure was need, and need was just a swamp behind the hothouse of desire.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Nancy Grace and Ronna Johnson, ed., *Breaking the Rule of Cool*, 245.

¹⁰⁷ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 180.

¹⁰⁸ Grace and Johnson, ed., *Breaking the Rule of Cool*, 201. Joyce Johnson wrote her next two novels after she left her second marriage.

¹⁰⁹ In his essay, "The American Scholar," Emerson calls for: "the literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life."

¹¹⁰ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 182.

After work and childcare and husband care there is no energy to go anywhere that makes further demands on feeling. What Hettie could manage were letters to Helene, which both recorded her observations and kept her afloat. In a feeling of tenderness for herself

Hettie wrote this poem:

*On the bus
from Newark to New York
the baby pukes
into the fox collar
of her only coat*

*She wipes the collar
and the baby's soft face
then takes her toddler
by the hand
and heads for the subway*

*where the toddler
sleeps
at her knee
and she
 herself
stares
out the window
over the head
of the sleeping baby
She is twenty-seven
and very tired*

*Let me always
support her
 Having been her
befriend her¹¹¹*

¹¹¹ Ibid., 186.

Though living in the same apartment on Cooper Square, Roi's life was very different from his wife's. Writing *Blues People* was thrilling for Roi and much of the music he imbibed around the Village became as much a part of his own radicalization as Cuba and the coming of Malcolm X. Roi, writing as Baraka years later stated, "It is no coincidence that people always associate John Coltrane and Malcolm X, they are harbingers and reflectors of the same life development."¹¹² The Five Spot, very near Hettie and Roi's loft on Cooper Square became the center of the jazz world. Roi listened closely while "Trane" came into his own.

...he'd play sometimes chorus after chorus, taking the music apart before our ears, splintering the chords and sounding each note, resounding it, playing it backwards and upside down, trying to get to something else. And we heard our own search and travails, our own reaching for new definition. Trane was our flag.¹¹³

Deeply significant for Roi, as the early 1960s progressed, was news of the student sit-ins as well as the emergence of SNCC. He heard the cries of "Freedom" become augmented to "Freedom Now!" His circle of friends became blacker and he began to disconnect from the mostly white downtown crowd.¹¹⁴

In 1961, the CIA assassinated Patrice Lumumba less than seven months after the Congolese achieved independence from Belgium.¹¹⁵ Roi marched outside the UN in protest. Hettie was required by police to sit aside because she had a child with her. This sidelining of her interest and energy because of the carriage she pushed was a huge

¹¹² Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 259.

¹¹³ Ibid., 260. The Chicago poet, David Moore aka Amos Mor wrote a beautiful poem about John Coltrane called, "The Coming of John."

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 261.

¹¹⁵ For information on Lumumba see Emmanuel Gerard and Bruce Kuklick, *Death in the Congo: Murdering Patrice Lumumba* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015) and Jamie Hickner, "History Will One Day Have It's Say": Patrice Lumumba and the Black Freedom Movement (PhD diss., Purdue University, 2012).

disappointment for Hettie. The protest became violent and Roi was arrested. In light of this event and after, Roi began to meet young black intellectuals connected to the Black Liberation Movement. At the protest he had marched with Mae Mallory and Calvin Hicks. Heavily interested in the international politics of the time, Roi was also reading widely, everything from Frantz Fanon to Antonio Gramsci.¹¹⁶

The death of John F. Kennedy in 1963 was a blow to those with an emerging black consciousness as well. Roi's close friend, the black artist Bob Thompson wept uncontrollably at the news.¹¹⁷ The Kennedy's represented something positive to most of the Greenwich Village crowd. "They bought paintings from us," was a repeated line at the Cedar Tavern. Elaine de Kooning was even commissioned to do John F. Kennedy's portraits; one hangs to this day in the Truman Library. Roi himself wrote a poem for Jackie Kennedy. He writes with amusement years later as Amiri Baraka "I was trying to move to a revolutionary position, but I was still ready to weep for Jaqueline Bouvier Kennedy!"¹¹⁸

In spite of his sorrow over the death of Kennedy (who was in actuality a luke warm supporter of civil rights), Roi came to identify with the words and philosophies of the young Malcolm X. Malcolm X's class analysis after Selma, his sharp analogy of the difference between the House Slave and the Field Slave cut into Roi as did the killing of the four young girls at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama in September of 1963. Malcolm X's assessment that racists could not be reached through the language of peace and love (a reference to Martin Luther King Jr.'s strategy of non-

¹¹⁶ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 267.

¹¹⁷ Bob Thompson was an African-American painter known for his bold and colorful canvases, sometimes considered part of the abstract expressionist movement. He was very prolific as well, producing over 1,000 works in an eight-year career.

¹¹⁸ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 273.

violence) rang true to Roi and many of his new associates. Malcolm's insights and intelligence also thrilled Roi as did the profound experience of feeling that something inside had been given voice to. Black friends in Roi's circle began to ask each other about staying or going if a new Black Nation were to form. "Would you go or would you stay?" became the conflict. Another question came up frequently in light of these new political and social horizons, "How do we *act*?"¹¹⁹ For Roi, the answer came in going beyond poetry to the dramatic form, to literature with action inscribed in it. He began to write plays.

Roi became involved in a playwright's workshop initiated by Edward Albee. One night he stayed up the whole night and wrote his debut, *The Dutchman*. The play takes place on a subway and is a confrontation between an older white bohemian woman and a young naïve black intellectual who she has been tormenting. The white woman kills the black man, but not before he has had a chance to speak his mind.¹²⁰ At the first workshop performance at the Van Dam Theater the audience responded with a standing ovation. Cicely Tyson shouted, "Author, author!" Roi overwhelmed, sat grinning. Soon after, the play began a commercial run at the Cherry Lane Theater. The play created both outrage and wide praise; en sum, it was significant.¹²¹ Roi could tell from the reviews he read the morning after the opening that although mixed, something "explosive" had gone down and that his life would change. Additionally, the play won the *Village Voice* Obie Award for Best Play in 1964 and *Newsweek* called it, "the most impressive work by an American

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 274.

¹²⁰ Baraka, *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, 76.

¹²¹ In February of 1964 Roi went to go see *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, by James Baldwin. He calls it one of the great theater experiences of his life. In his autobiography, Amiri Baraka writes that he believes the play alienated the mostly white critics of the time, but for him it created elation and he felt "raised up off the ground by this powerful play."

playwright in the last few years.”¹²² For Hettie the buzz over the play meant the relief of some money coming in from royalties. In real terms, the play meant that things eased up around the house for a bit.¹²³

Prior to the play opening, Hettie went through some very difficult times with her husband. Most notably, Hettie one day came buggy to buggy with Diane Di Prima and her new baby. Diane and Roi had a publication they put out together called *Floating Bear*. *Floating Bear* formed to give artist’s work quick turn around for publication and was very well regarded. Furthermore, Hettie and Roi’s Totem Press published Diane’s first book of poems in 1958. Hettie respected Diane as a writer. Face to face on the street however, peering into Diane’s carriage she saw a baby that looked a lot like LeRoi! Roi denied the child at first, but eventually acknowledged that she had been conceived during Hettie and Roi’s separation the previous year. This news was incredibly painful for Hettie. Roi, writing as Baraka later remembers that Hettie cried, “How could you?!” It was a good question, he admits, and he wondered himself. To add insult to all the injury, Diane soon moved with the baby, Dominique, two doors down from Hettie and Roi on Cooper Square.¹²⁴

During those in-between days, Hettie operated in a cloud of servitude and self-pity, but still enjoyed occasional moments of light. For example, the afternoon of Lisa’s first birthday, Hettie maneuvering the children plus a large cake in a sweat-induced haze ran into Ornette Coleman coming around the corner. He smiled broadly at her and said, “Hey Man.” In moments like these Hettie felt a kind of redemption. In spite of her

¹²² Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 207.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 190-191.

different life and in spite of her doubts she believed herself *a man* amongst men.¹²⁵ Also as always, her friendships with the other women who had made different choices, women whose lives were illegitimate in the broader culture buoyed her. She says of all of them, “We thought of ourselves as free because of the risks we’d taken, though we weren’t free at all. In any case what had emancipation to do with endurance?”¹²⁶ A further sense of alienation plagued Hettie in these heady times concerning her own racial identity. In whites-only groups Hettie felt deeply mis-represented. Seeing racial prejudice everywhere became shocking and painful. She felt “disguised in her own skin.”¹²⁷

As stated earlier, the success of Roi’s play eased home life for Hettie. Both children were in daycare, there was money coming in, and although she had finally actually become what she had resisted, a secretary (to Roi), she liked working for him. They had weathered a lot together and were now home enjoying their own roost. It was in this time that Roi wrote his last poem to Hettie, and with some time to inspect her own feelings she began to find her own voice as well albeit privately and with hesitation. The last poem she wrote to Roi while they were still together, but never showed him, speaks to her desire for his closeness and security. She asks for his attention to their home, and to her; undoubtedly Hettie felt him moving away.

*My dearest darling
will you take out
the garbage, the fish heads
the cats
wouldn't eat*

*the children are sleeping
I cannot hear them breathing*

¹²⁵ Ibid., 189.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 193.

¹²⁷ Hettie attributes this phrasing to her sometimes baby-sitter Diana Powell, who was also a white woman with black children and a black husband.

*Will you be my friend
and protector from all evil*

*the dead fish
take them away*

*please*¹²⁸

In his own autobiography, Roi writing as Baraka confirms Hettie's sense of his distance after the success of the play. He writes, "...there was some kind of slow drift by me away from [Hettie]. For the past period, liaisons I had with other women had grown less frequent, but now, from no open or conscious plan I put forward, the women I began to see were black."¹²⁹ Furthermore, the adulation of celebrity can be distancing in itself. Hettie was reluctant to love Roi "out loud," in part because so many did and they had nothing to lose.¹³⁰

With the success of *Blues People* and the *Dutchman*, Roi was invited to Monterey, California, for a writer's conference in which he was the cause célèbre of the event. After it was over Roi spent a couple of days in Oakland with a new black love interest. He also met Bobby Seale who came to get his copy of *Blues People* autographed by LeRoi. When Roi talked to Hettie on the phone she pleaded with him, "Why are you still there? Come back. You should come back, now." She recognized that something was awry, the distance was growing, and Roi heard the notes of desperation in her voice.¹³¹ When Roi came home he continued to immerse himself into a blacker circle

¹²⁸ Ibid., 209.

¹²⁹ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 280.

¹³⁰ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 209.

¹³¹ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 281.

of friends. He too could sense a growing void between himself and Hettie that had never existed before: “a darkness into which words disappeared.”¹³²

The Jones family plus Ed and Helene Dorn and their children moved to Buffalo in the summer of 1964, historically known as Freedom Summer.¹³³ Ed and Roi were hired to teach a summer term at the State University. That summer Hettie recognized that Roi thought of himself more and more as his widening audiences thought of him, not as a writer, but as an activist. In late July, Harlem rioted, and Roi flew immediately to join. For Roi the rebellion in Harlem was “like proof that the tickling inside our heads had a real source and was not subjective.” He understood it as a making manifest of what Malcolm X had said, what James Baldwin had said, and what he himself had said in *Dutchman*. His rhetoric began to intensify. Roi, writing as Baraka years later, recalls a public verbal exchange at an event held at the Village Gate. There were questions from the audience; a woman asked with earnestness if any whites could help? He replied, “You can help by dying. You are a cancer. You can help the world’s people with your death.” Another audience member mentioned Goodman and Schwermer, two young white men who were murdered in Mississippi (along with a black man, James Chaney) during Freedom Summer by Klansman in police uniforms. Roi responded by saying, “I have my own history of death and submission. We have our own dead to mourn. Those white boys were only seeking to assuage their own leaking consciences.”¹³⁴ In his autobiography Baraka is careful to admit that he no longer sees these situations the way he did in 1964. He writes that the sacrifice of all three of these men is a noble and

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ For more information on Freedom Summer see Bruce Watson, *The Savage Summer of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy* (New York: Penguin Books; Reprint Edition, 2011).

¹³⁴ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 285.

important thing and also admits that they were on the front lines doing more than he was at the time! However, these realizations came later and the process of his awakening, his “breaking out from the shell” was full as he puts it, of struggle, snarling, and cussing out white folks.¹³⁵

In the seven years that Hettie and Roi had been together she watched as black Americans let loose what would later be called “black rage.” People began to say that it was hypocritical for Roi to be married to a white woman; some went so far as to say he was laying with the devil. At first this had been precisely Roi’s point, that a black man should be free as any man to live his life and to love whomever he chose. But now the tragic world around them knocked at their door and demanded to come in. One night Roi was headed to D.C. He writes that it was to see his friend Marion play his first big gig with his own jazz group. Hettie writes that it was because *Dutchman* was being performed at Howard University’s homecoming weekend. Either way, both accounts agree that Roi did not want Hettie to come with him. Roi had to admit to Hettie that he did not want her to come. “Why?” asked Hettie. The answer shattered her, “I’m black, [Hettie]. I’m black and you’re,” Roi trailed off. “White. I can’t do this, [Hettie], I’m black.”¹³⁶ Roi almost covered his face so he did not have to see the look in Hettie’s eye, the deep hurt. “But you’re not talking about *us*,” Hettie said quietly.¹³⁷

Roi left for D.C. Hettie didn’t know what to do so she went to a party rather than sit alone in their apartment. That night while she was out, Roi called every two hours. He’d had a change of heart. By his own account he felt that he had done wrong to leave

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 288.

¹³⁷ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 218.

Hettie that way. He called again and again and began to feel trapped in the hotel building in D. C., unable to get back home and cut off from the woman he had lived with for nearly seven years. Roi felt nervous and confused, and after the set went back to his hotel room to brood over what he had said to Hettie. He called again, no answer.¹³⁸

When Roi's drink ran out he decided to go down the hall to where the after party was happening. Within moments of his arrival at the party he met Vashti, a gorgeous black woman with a wicked sense of humor. Roi and Vashti spent the rest of the evening together and though she lived in D.C., she soon moved to New York to be with Roi. As Hettie understood it, eventually Vashti would provide the image Roi thought he needed to keep going. Roi returned to New York and to Hettie on uncertain terms, still seeing Vashti as well. Writing later as Baraka he recalls his struggle as a father feeling both "a deep love and a sense of pressing responsibility" for his two daughters who were both walking age now. Roi felt caught between two worlds and told this to Hettie, weeping.¹³⁹

Roi's first full-length play was now finished. Titled, *The Slave*, Roi and Hettie read it aloud one night, alone. Hettie called it "Roi's Nightmare," the white female character is the black male character's *ex*-wife. The play is set in the future, where Walker Vessels, leader of the blacks has come to confront his *ex*-wife, Grace, and her professor-husband, Vessels' former literary buddy. Vessels kills the husband, Grace is killed by a bomb, and Vessels survives to tell the tale in a flashback. Grace and Vessels' children are offstage and likely die as well. It is the love between Grace and Vessels that provides the play's tension. In the beginning she calls him a "nigger-murderer" and he

¹³⁸ Ibid., 219, and Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 288.

¹³⁹ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 289.

asks, “how long have you been saving that up?”¹⁴⁰ Baraka calls the play’s tensions “so close to our real lives, so full of that living image.”¹⁴¹

Hettie was unable to attend any of the play’s rehearsals as she was home with two cases of her children’s chicken pox. Opening night caught her unprepared for what she witnessed. The last sounds of the play are the children screaming as the house is bombed. The lead actress who played Grace gave Hettie a marble black and white heart with a card that read, “Thank you for Grace.”¹⁴² Afterward, Hettie went to the ladies room and burst into tears.¹⁴³

Meanwhile, Vashti had moved to New York and was staying with a girlfriend. Vashti began to meet various people in the Black Arts crowd. She and Roi would meet frequently, talk at length, laugh, and make love. Writing about this time later, Baraka describes:

Vashti became part of our crowd, speeding with me through those nights of uncertainty. I came to feel more and more for her. It was like we were at the outset of a great adventure, the deepest part of which we picked up just by watching each other laugh. There was so much love in our eyes. Plus, we felt we were snatching that love from out of some dying white shit. Vashti never talked bad bout [Hettie], but she would look at me, sometimes, with her hands on her hips...when the subject came up. There was nothing left for me at Cooper Square now but memories and little girls. But I felt back up against the wall.¹⁴⁴

On February 21, 1965, a Sunday, Roi, Hettie, and their two girls were at the Eighth Street Bookstore to celebrate its new opening. Vashti was there too, along with some others in Roi’s core circle of black friends. This group stood discreetly separate

¹⁴⁰ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 219.

¹⁴¹ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 288.

¹⁴² Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 220.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, 292.

from his family. Suddenly, Leroy McLucas burst into the bookstore weeping, “Malcolm is dead! Malcolm is dead! Malcolm’s been killed!” Roi was stunned, feeling shot himself. He huddled in with his black comrades, his family outside the circle. What was to be done?¹⁴⁵

In a few days Roi had packed his belongings and gone uptown. Little Kellie picked up on the scent of her father’s departure and said to him, “you can’t go anywhere. You’re one of the funny things.” But Roi still left. “I was gone. A bunch of us, really, had gone, up to Harlem. Seeking revolution!”¹⁴⁶

At the time of Malcolm’s death there continued a reign of terror in the South that eventually forced the Voting Rights Act. Hettie addresses that time with poignancy:

In the course of this struggle there occurred what seemed both a desperate attempt at love, and also the beginning of a clear mistrust between blacks and whites in the civil rights movement. The United States still lived on assumptions: when blacks died the country was shocked; when whites died, it mourned.¹⁴⁷

All during the spring of 1965 Roi would come back to Hettie and to his old home to change his clothes, check his mail, and “make sorrowful love.”¹⁴⁸ “Do you think I want to leave my home?” he asked Hettie once when she caught him caressing Lisa in her crib.¹⁴⁹ For Hettie her place felt so complicated. She believed in the same values as Roi and couldn’t bear the guilt he felt at being with her. Hettie wanted a more equitable world for her daughters as much as Roi did. Finally one day he arrived and asked for a divorce. Vashti had rumored that they would be married. “I will never divorce you,”

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 293.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 294.

¹⁴⁷ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 223.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 223.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Hettie told him.¹⁵⁰ To add insult to injury their circumstance became the talk of downtown. The weight of other people's pity was unbearable to Hettie. She felt battered. "It would have been easier to die," Hettie wrote to Helene, "except for the kids."¹⁵¹

Hettie found solace in Newark, where her only family, Roi's family, still loved her. Hettie told "Gramma," Anna Lois that Roi was in Mexico divorcing her. "Well, I'm not divorcing you," said Roi's mother without skipping a beat. Everyone thought Roi would come back, and on occasion he did. Hettie would sleep with him, her ex-husband, though he wouldn't talk. "Maybe someday you and Vashti and I will all live together," he said one winter night. "No Roi, I don't think so," Hettie said back.¹⁵²

Eventually Roi moved back to Newark, no longer with Vashti. The last time Hettie spoke to him was on his parent's porch in the spring of 1966. She asked him what it was he had really wanted in those times, had he wanted to come home? Roi only replied that he was confused, and Hettie noticed no sorrow or apology in his look. He had not given her any money for months.¹⁵³

By the next year Roi was remarried to his second wife. His new collection of essays, titled *Home*, seemed to Hettie a refutation that he had ever existed outside of Newark. He would not speak to Hettie or send money; she was only to communicate

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 225.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 227.

¹⁵² Ibid., 228.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 230.

with him through his parents. He did not call his children, they were driven to see him by emissaries. In time LeRoi Jones changed his name to Amiri Baraka and someone told Hettie of a newspaper article in which he denied her existence. “I think I’m going to be alright,” Hettie wrote to Helene with plenty of doubt.¹⁵⁴

But like a spiritual gladiator imbued with a force of nature, Hettie *was* alright. She raised her two daughters on her own to be extraordinary women. Kellie Jones is an art history professor at Columbia University, graduating in 1999 with a PhD from Yale University. Her book, *Eye Minded*, includes essays from both her mother and her father.¹⁵⁵ Lisa Jones graduated with an MFA from Yale University as well, and as a writer and journalist wrote a column for the *Village Voice* for 15 years. Her book, *Bulletproof Diva*, a collection of her columns, is an exceptionally insightful book on topics ranging from race, to gender, to style.¹⁵⁶ Lisa has worked closely with director, Spike Lee on the companion books to all of his films among a variety of other projects. Last but not least, Hettie herself finally became a poet and the author of several wonderful children’s books. She helped to design and direct a large after-school program in all the Lower East Side settlement houses where her own children had been in day care. She wrote evaluations for Head Start programs and after-school programs modeled after her own. Her stories began to appear in textbooks, and her fifth and favorite book was named one of 1974’s best young adult books by the New York Public Library. She dedicated it to Anna Lois and Coyt Leroy Jones who true to their word never divorced Hettie or their grandchildren.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁵⁵ Kellie Jones, *EyeMinded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2011).

¹⁵⁶ Lisa Jones, *Bulletproof Diva: Tales of Race, Sex, and Hair* (New York: Anchor Books, 1997).

Hettie also tried dating other men, but none lasted. One spring morning in 1969, she was having a quiet cup of coffee in her car outside the Mobilization for Youth building having just learned the previous afternoon that her job would end. A young couple passed her, wrapped in each other's arms, and through her open window she experienced even the smell of their love. All at once she felt certain she would never marry again. In that moment a sudden and completely unexpected wave of liberation arose in her, a knot of regret left her chest and she felt great joy: "I was thirty-five years old and no longer needed what women were taught to live for!" Reflecting on the loss of her father and then her husband Hettie writes, "Both these men, Cohen and Jones, first loved me for myself, and then discarded me when that self no longer fit their daughter/wife image. If I hadn't been myself all along I might have been left next to nothing." With much grace she adds, "Still, while they loved me they sometimes saw in me more than I did, and for those times I owe them."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, 216.

**** Ras Baraka, one of Amiri Baraka's sons with his second wife is now the mayor of Newark. His daughter with Diane di Prima, Dominique, is an Emmy-Award winning TV host in Los Angeles.

LEE KRASNER AND JACKSON POLLOCK

*Were I called on to define, very briefly, the term Art, I should call it 'the reproduction of what the Senses perceive in Nature through the veil of the soul.' The mere imitation, however accurate, of what is in Nature, entitles no man to the sacred name of 'Artist.' –
Edgar Allen Poe*

In 1956, the year of her husband's death, Lee Krasner painted a picture titled *Three in Two*. Krasner's biographer, Gail Levin, supposes that the third figure between the two might represent Ruth Kligman, the young woman who Jackson Pollock began an affair with in the last year of his life.¹ Undoubtedly there existed a third party bound up in the love affair and eventual marriage of Krasner and Pollock. Some might argue that Jackson's alcoholism was the ubiquitous and looming third party, but more significant than Kligman or alcohol was for both of them the existence and experience of Art.

Although both Lee and Jackson dedicated their lives to painting, it was Jackson who came to be considered a world historical genius. What is unknown is whether Jackson Pollock would ever have risen in the way that he did without his connection to Lee Krasner. And further, would Lee have become a more celebrated artist were it not for the restriction of being a woman in a male-dominated artistic milieu? Did her relationship with Jackson Pollock detract from her ability to flourish as a painter or did he inspire her and push her to new levels of self-discovery and artistic invention? What did

¹ Gail Levin, *Lee Krasner: A Biography* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), insert between 226-227, 319.

she give up and what did she gain through her association with the greatest American painter? Were the stakes different for him? This chapter seeks to answer these questions, and to explore the relationship of these two artists through both the artwork produced and in the context of their time.

I have chosen in this chapter to devote several pages to painting a picture of who Lee Krasner was *before she met* Jackson Pollock. A broader sense of her background is necessary here more than it has been in previous chapters. One reason for additional context is that Lee was a mature woman when she met her husband, already in her mid-thirties and already having had a long-term love affair. Moreover, her work as an artist has long suffered as a mere footnote to her husband's widely celebrated work. This is not to say that Pollock is unworthy of his celebrity. His canvases are rhythmic, active, haunting, and sublime, everything they are hailed as being. However, as an historian, I believe it is critically important to show that Lee had her own rich history as an artist completely separate from her association with her husband. When they met she was as an artist both more widely known and more accomplished than he. Lee's fierce independence and unflappability, her persistence and sturdy attitude, along with her deep commitment to Art were all in place before she ever walked into his studio on a fateful day in 1941. Also, by giving her a background, her vulnerabilities come into relief. She is able to be the complex woman that she was when she finally met Pollock, and an understanding of her choices is greatly enriched.

Lena Krassner was born on October 27, 1908, just nine months and two weeks after her parents reunited at long last in America. Her father, Joseph had arrived in America in September 1905, the rest of his family (wife, Anna and four children) did not arrive until January 1908. The Krassners traveled to the United States for the same reasons that many millions of other immigrants did, to escape a troubled homeland and with the hope of making a better life in a new land. The Krassner family emigrated from Tsarist Russia, specifically from Shpikov, a shtetl in what is now central Ukraine.² At the time of their departure, Jews in Shpikov lived in terror of the rampant anti-semitism and pogroms that terrorized Russia at the time. Shpikov was part of the Pale of Settlement, an area that the Russian Imperial Government restricted for Jews. In 1903, a horrific pogrom occurred in the town of Kishinev, in southern Russia. *The New York Times* reported:

There was a well laid-out plan for the general massacre of Jews on the day following the Orthodox Easter...The mob was led by priests, and the general cry, "Kill the Jews," was taken up all over the city. The Jews were taken wholly unaware and were slaughtered like sheep. The dead number 120 and the injured about 500. The scenes of horror attending this massacre are beyond description. Babes were literally torn to pieces by the frenzied and bloodthirsty mob. The local police made no attempt to check the reign of terror. At sunset the streets were piled with corpses and wounded. Those who could make their escape fled in terror, and the city is now practically deserted of Jews.³

Many Jews fled to America in response to the Kishinev pogrom, the Krassner family included. However, American response to the large influx of Jews was not particularly welcoming. Controversy over issues of race, largely prompted by an incredible influx of eastern and southern European immigrants pervaded American discourse. Teddy

² Shtetls were small Jewish towns with large Jewish populations in Central and Eastern Europe that existed before the Holocaust.

³ "Jewish Massacre Denounced," *New York Times*, April 28, 1903, 6.

Roosevelt was even criticized for asking well-known African-American intellectual and educator, Booker T. Washington to the White House for lunch.⁴

Some Jews in America, lit with the idea of freedom, promoted socialist revolution. They saw a commitment to social justice as a moral commandment of their religion. These radicals, in tandem with an underground labor movement praised women as comrades and intellectual equals. This was a sharp departure from the traditional Jewish men who seemed misogynistic to many women. In sum, it was an enormous struggle for Jewish immigrants, like many immigrants at the time, to find employment, educate their children, and maintain a decent standard of living.⁵ The mixing of old and new worlds created sharp contrasts, dissonance and rough adjustments.

The Krassner's moved into the Brownsville neighborhood of Brooklyn. Brownsville, from the 1880s to the 1950s, was known as being a largely Jewish and politically radical section of the borough. The birth of Lena Krassner provided the Krassner family with the first child who was by law immediately a citizen of the United States. She joined a family of three older sisters, Ides(also known as Ida, who later changed her name to Edith), Esther (later changed her name to Estelle), Rose (also called Rosie), and a brother Isak (also known as Isadore or Izzy, later changed his name to Irving). Lena's father Joseph practiced Orthodox Judaism. In the Orthodox tradition, the most prestigious life for a man was the life of a religious scholar. Women were barred from the scholarly life, and were expected to facilitate their husbands by providing support both in the home and as breadwinners. This allowed their husbands the time for complete devotion to study. Life in the New World greatly reduced the ability for any

⁴ See Deborah Davis, *Guest of Honor: Booker T. Washington, Theodore Roosevelt and the White House Dinner that Shocked a Nation* (New York: Atria Books, 2013).

⁵ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 14-16.

family to accomplish this traditional ideal, but the arrangement itself speaks to the Old World value placed on men over women.

The seeds of Lena Krassner's independence were sown during her childhood in Brownsville. For one, she very much enjoyed the tales her father wove for his children in the evenings. Though Lee described him later in life as "remote," her father was greatly loved by his children, particularly for his story telling. Of great interest to Lena was her father's story of an old aunt who was said to have come from the city to the shtetl in the forest on the occasion of Joseph's wedding to Lena's mother. The aunt was so important a presence that the bridal couple gave up their bed to her. Known as tough and indomitable and having out lived four husbands, the aunt became for Lena a picture of how she herself would like to be. Also from childhood, Lee remembered saying the Hebrew Morning Prayer though she did not understand the words she was reciting. In what she later described as a "shattering experience" Lena finally read the translation. Though the prayer is a beautiful meditation, the closing of it changes for women. For a male the ending reads "Thank You, O Lord, for creating me in Your image." For a female the prayer closes with "Thank You, O Lord, for creating me as You saw fit."⁶

Lena's parents, Joseph and Anna brought many of their Old World traditions with them to the New. Secularism and modern American life were kept at bay in favor of the familiarity of their Orthodox Jewish customs, including the favoring of sons over daughters. The maintenance of old ways was not difficult in Brownsville where the Krassners were nearly completely surrounded by other impoverished Jewish immigrants. Ancient customs pervaded daily life. Lee recalled on numerous occasions the resentment

⁶ Oral history interview with Lee Krasner, interviewed by Dolores Holmes, 1972, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

she felt at being required to go upstairs in a segregated area of the synagogue.⁷ In one interview much later, Lee stated of her trouble, “The beginnings were there in the synagogue, and I am told to go upstairs, I have never swallowed it to date.”⁸

In 1910, at the age of thirty, Lena’s mother gave birth to her seventh and last child, a girl named Ruth. According to Gail Levin, the birth of Ruth displaced Lena from her role as beloved baby. Lena now began to distinguish herself by her wit and strong intelligence, qualities that were not particularly valued in Jewish girls (or any girls for that matter). Ruth, considered quite adorable by all, fell into an intense rivalry with Lena as they vied for attention from their older siblings and parents.

New York in the early 20th century was a city rife with social movements from anarchism to communism. Women’s activism also became important in the immigrant communities. Women led rent strikes, and in 1909 a garment strike. Also, the women’s suffrage movement gained a great deal of support from Jewish immigrants in the nineteen teens. Krasner herself developed a strong sense of social justice both from the traditions of her parents’ religion and from the radicalized environment of New York City in the early 20th century. Young Lena Krassner also developed in these years an inclination toward independence. Bearing witness to the drudgery her mother and older sisters endured in caring for a household, Lena decided on a creative life, a career outside of the home, and a desire to be economically self-sufficient.⁹

After graduating from P.S. 72 in 1922, Lena began calling herself “Lenore.” This name change marks the advent of her move toward autonomy. The ethnic sounding

⁷ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 22.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

“Lena” was very common among Russians at the time, while “Lenore” was markedly American and had a more distinct ring to it. Moreover, Lee Krasner spoke years later of the “enormous effect” the works of Edgar Allen Poe had on her as a teen.¹⁰ Poe wrote an entire gothic poem titled “Lenore” (1831). It is also the featured name of his most famous poem “The Raven” (1845). Curiously there is a short story of Poe’s that has a sort of prescient ring to it. “The Oval Portrait” is about an artist who was wild and passionate about his work. The artist’s wife suffered tremendously at the hands of her self-involved husband. The wife, however, masked her suffering and smiled uncomplainingly because she saw that her husband (who had great renown) took a “burning pleasure in his task.” Eventually, while painting her portrait the artist grew wild with the labor of his work. When finished the manic painter cried out at last “This is indeed *Life* itself!” He then “turned suddenly to regard his beloved:- She was *dead!*”¹¹ Of course, there is no possible way that the young Lenore Krasner decided to model her life after this story, but at the same time there is little doubt that the romance of the single-minded pursuit of beauty coupled with dramatic gothic martyrdom made an impression on her.¹²

Lenore’s brother Irving also introduced her to Maurice Maeterlink as well as the great Russian novelists. Along with Poe, Maeterlink’s book, *On Emerson and Other Essays*, made a lasting impression on her. Emerson’s focus on the internal life, the centrality of the self, and the experience of Nature would stay with Lee her whole life.

One of her first major paintings she titled after the first line of Emerson’s essay,

¹⁰ Lee Krasner, interviewed by Barbara Cavaliere, 1978, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, roll 3774, found in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 32.

¹¹ Edgar Allan Poe, “The Oval Portrait,” 1850, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/POE/oval.html>

¹² Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 32.

“Circles.” Along with Irving, Lenore also read the German philosophers Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, drawing her further into secular belief. These influences shaped Lenore’s vision for herself. In an interview with art critic Barbara Rose in 1972, Lee stated “I don’t know where the word A-R-T came from, but by the time I was thirteen, I knew I wanted to be a painter.”¹³

After a few glitches Lenore entered Washington Irving High School in Manhattan. Washington Irving (originally the only girls’ high school in New York) advertised an industrial arts course for girls. In spite of the long commute, Lenore desperately wanted to attend. The curriculum at Washington Irving was not necessarily interested in cultivating the visual arts as the pursuit of beauty; instead the school intended to prepare its young pupils for work, particularly in the flourishing garment industry. Nonetheless, its list of courses provided at least some of what Lenore sought now that she was determined to become an artist. Interestingly, at Washington Irving, Lenore excelled in all of her subjects *except* art. Even when her art teacher confided that he was only passing her because of her excellence in other subjects Lenore was completely unfazed. She had already developed a confidence and unflappability that would carry her well beyond the doors of Washington Irving High School.¹⁴

Upon graduation, Lenore gained entrance to the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, which she entered in February of 1926. The Cooper Union’s mission was to enable “young women, who expect to be dependent on their exertions for gaining a livelihood, to obtain, free of cost, a training that will fit them for

¹³ Lee Krasner, interviewed by Barbara Rose, 1972, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, roll 3774.

¹⁴ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 39.

useful activity in art work of one form or another.”¹⁵ The Cooper Union as well as Washington Irving served as only a part of Lenore Krasner’s education during the 1920s. It is crucial to remember that along with her courses in drawing, Lenore was in Manhattan smack in the middle of the Jazz Age. Manhattan and Brooklyn were worlds apart during the roaring decade, one provincial and the other a hotbed of modernity. In Manhattan Lenore explored the Metropolitan Museum of Art, experiencing for the first time works by the great masters. She also learned to dance and cut her hair short. Soon enough she traded in Brooklyn for the bohemian hub of Greenwich Village.

It is in the Cooper Union student newspaper in 1927 that Lenore first appears as “Lee.” By 1930 Lenore made the switch to Lee official according to the U.S. Federal Census for that year. Lee’s change toward a more gender-neutral name is seen by some as a calculated move toward gender anonymity in anticipation of an extremely sexist art world. Biographer, Gail Levin challenges this assumption by pointing out that Lee was in an all girls cohort (the Cooper Union divided its students by gender) when the name first appears. We will never know exactly why Lee changed her name for a second time, but she comes across in her work and in her life as such a determined and forward-thinking individual that it would not be surprising if she changed her name to garner whatever advantage she could. Furthermore, Lee still used “Lenore” later in her life for non art-related endeavors such as the selling of a phonograph in 1939. This could point to the fact that Lee was her “artist name.”

¹⁵ Catalogue for the Cooper Union, 1926-1927.

Being a young woman in the era of the New Woman undoubtedly had a tremendous impact on Lee. She developed a model's figure, slender, but voluptuous. It appears that she was also unencumbered with traditional sexual mores. Jewish culture does not deny the pleasures of the body (for married couples) the way a religion like Catholicism does. Furthermore, many of the women living in Greenwich Village at the time were sexually uninhibited. Lee fielded criticism throughout her life for being ugly, but there are several references by those around her to her undeniable physical appeal, and as those of some sophistication can attest to: intelligence, charm, and authenticity are often much more alluring than classical features.

In 1928, when Lee was just twenty years old she asserted herself in two critical ways. First, when her older sister Rose died suddenly of appendicitis she left behind a husband and two children. In the Old World Jewish tradition, the next oldest sister was supposed to marry her widowed brother-in-law and raise the children. Lee flatly refused to do so. Though she was a loving and doting aunt (throughout her life) Lee insisted on her own destiny. Subsequently, the responsibility then fell to her younger sister, Ruth.¹⁶ Also, in 1928 Lee made the decision to apply to the National Academy of Design. She was accepted in September for a tuition-free seven-month term. This is the first time Lee attended school with both men and women.¹⁷

At the National Academy Lee met and became close friends with the Mirsky sisters, Eda and Kitty. Eda was a stand out at the academy, but Lee witnessed the frustration that accompanied her success. The teachers at the academy would prod the

¹⁶ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 50. Ruth seemed to carry a lifelong grudge against Lee for this turn of events. In a talk given by Levin she discusses the misfortune of other biographers conferring with Ruth about Lee since the younger sister clearly had an axe to grind and often paints Lee in a negative light.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

boys saying, “Better watch out for the Mirsky girl – she’ll win the Prix de Rome,” which was the important travel scholarship. But they never awarded the scholarship to girls and Eda Mirsky was well aware of that. Mirsky was instead awarded two bronze medals. These awards infuriated Mirsky because she saw them for what they were – mere tokens rather than real money prizes. Well aware that she was denied based on her gender Eda wondered why the teachers tormented her by saying to the boys that they had better watch out. Eda Mirsky was in fact so infuriated by the blatant sexism she experienced that years later she discouraged her daughter, the now famous author Erica Jong, from pursuing a career in the visual arts.¹⁸

Lee’s tenure at the National Academy is defined by both accomplishment and rebellion. A note on one of her record cards states that she, “insists upon having her own way despite School Rules.” At one point Lee was even suspended along with Eda Mirsky for “painting figures without permission.” Lee had learned that anyone who wanted to paint still life fish had to do so in the basement where it was cooler and the fish were slower to rot. The rules, however, did not allow women to go down to the basement. Lee explained later:

That was the first time I had experienced real separation as an artist, and it infuriated me. You’re not being allowed to paint a... fish because you’re a woman. It reminded me of being in the synagogue and being told to go up not downstairs. That kind of thing still riles me, and it still comes up.¹⁹

Obviously, Lee chose to buck the rule and headed to the basement with Eda.²⁰

Lee also met her first love at the National Academy. Igor Pantuhoff came from a white Russian family; his father was a high-ranking military official with close ties to the

¹⁸ Gail Levin interview with Erica Jong, February 3, 2010, in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 57. See also Erica Jong, *Fear of Fifty: A Midlife Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

¹⁹ Eleanor Munro, *Originals: American Women Artists* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1979) 107.

²⁰ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 68-69.

Tsar. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Colonel Pantuhoff and his family suffered tremendously before making their way to America in October of 1922. Igor studied a full year at the Academy before Lee arrived. To Lee, Igor was a paragon of sophistication and style, a grand departure from her own humble Russian roots. To others in the Academy he was known for being handsome, talented, and flirtatious. A classmate of theirs, Esther Slobodkina, writes in her autobiography of Igor and Lee, “Half the girls in school, including Kitty and Eda Mirsky, hung around him,” she wrote. “His particular lady of the time was the extremely ugly, elegantly stylized Lee Krasner. She had a huge nose, pendulous lips, bleached hair in a long, slick bob, and a dazzlingly beautiful luminously white body.”²¹ Lee, smitten with Igor, allowed him to style her and present her in glamorous clothing that he chose. The two began a long-lasting and formative relationship. Upon Igor’s return from Europe after being awarded a travel prize himself, the two moved in together and were considered by many to be married even though they were not formally so. The idea of a companionate marriage without the legal attachment was trendy at the time, and Lee considered herself a modern woman.²² Many friends of theirs remarked on the couple’s sexual charge.²³ Igor enjoyed Lee’s self-assurance and picked out colored stockings to show off her legs.²⁴

The inaugural show of the Museum of Modern Art on November 8, 1929 made a huge impression on Lee along with many other art students. There she witnessed for the

²¹ Esphyr Slobodkina, *Notes of a Biographer* (Great Neck: N.Y.: Urquart-Slobodkina, Inc., 1976-1983) vol. 2, 283, in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 62-63.

²² For information on the attitudes toward sexuality in this period see Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996), Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2010), and Stanley Coben, *Rebellion Against Victorianism: The Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1991).

²³ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 81.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

first time the techniques of Cezanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Seurat. The show influenced her work immediately as she had already begun to move away from academic notions of style encouraged at the National Academy.²⁵ In the fall of 1931, Lee was also able to view the Matisse retrospective. Her love for Matisse would stay with her the rest of her life.

In spite of Lee's achievements and growing inspiration, things began to change drastically in America under the looming specter of the Great Depression. With poverty and joblessness everywhere, Lee left the Academy and enrolled at the City College of New York with the purpose of earning a teaching certificate. She also became a cocktail waitress at Sam Johnson's, a bohemian nightclub and café where she earned better tips for being intelligent among the more learned patrons. Eventually the Artist's Union formed to address the plight of impoverished and unemployed artists. Pressure from the Artist's Union in combination with a myriad of other forces converged to persuade the government to fund patronage programs for artists as part of the New Deal's Works Progress Administration. President Roosevelt believed that Americans needed jobs beyond direct relief in order to maintain dignity. In a radio address from the White House he remarked:

The Federal Arts Project of the Works Progress Administration is a practical relief project which also emphasizes the best tradition of the democratic spirit. The WPA artist, in rendering his own impression of things, speaks also for the spirit of his fellow countryman everywhere. I think the WPA artist exemplifies with great force the essential place which the arts have in a democratic society such as ours.²⁶

²⁵ Barbara Rose, *Lee Krasner: A Retrospective* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1983) 16.

²⁶ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, radio address from the White House on May 10, 1939, as printed in the *Herald Tribune* on May 11, 1939, in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 87.

Both Lee and Igor started working for the WPA at its inception. Igor, having garnered much acclaim at the Academy received the coveted assignment of easel projects, which allowed him to work within his own aesthetic, a world away from the more common assignment of mural painting. Although Lee in her own work held tightly to her developing modernist vision, she was required for the WPA to produce whatever was asked of her. A critic asked her later in life if the WPA had any affect on her own style and she responded:

To a degree it did, as the work that was called for didn't quite line up with what I was interested in. On the WPA an order for work – murals, easel paintings- was to be placed in public buildings. Someone from the public buildings had to designate what kind of art they wanted. Needless to say it moved a little away from my own interest in art. Nevertheless, its validity I would never deny. It kept a group of painters alive through a very difficult period.²⁷

Lee greatly appreciated not only the income, but the camaraderie afforded by the WPA. Artists involved were required to meet once a week. In spite of its positives, New Deal support for the artists sometimes felt precarious. This required a readiness to picket, and these political rallies also united artists around the city. Although layoffs were fairly commonplace, in reflecting on these projects Lee stated, “There was no discrimination against women that I was aware of in the WPA.”²⁸ Lee became very active in the Artist’s Union, chairing many meetings and eventually serving on the executive board. Lee never joined the Communist Party though it was closely affiliated with the Artist’s Union, and many other artists and writers at the time were politically (by today’s standards) very radical. It is difficult to overstate the political fervor of the 1930s, largely influenced not only by the Great Depression but also by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (1936-

²⁷ Lee Krasner, interviewed by Andrew Forge, 1965, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 3774.

²⁸ Munro, *Originals: American Women Artists*, 108.

1939). Lee encapsulates the feeling of that time in an interview later, “In the Artists Union days, Spain was an issue...Fellow artists went to Spain. You put things on the line.”²⁹ The Spanish painter, Pablo Picasso received the highest reverence from the artistic community in New York. Speaking about the lively conversations taking place in the artistic communities in the 1930s Lee later quipped, “You didn’t get a seat at the table unless you thought Picasso was a god.”³⁰ He dominated the imaginations of artists around the world and addressed them directly in the wake of the Spanish Civil War saying, “artists who love and work with spiritual values cannot and should not remain indifferent to a conflict in which the highest values of humanity and civilization are at stake.”³¹

Though Picasso’s *Guernica* would later make a deep and indelible impression on Lee, as did the noble sacrifices made by other artists, she took no interest in turning her own art into a form of political protest. “I, for one, didn’t feel my art had to reflect my political point of view. I didn’t feel like I was purifying the world at all. No, I was just going about my business and my business seemed to be in the direction of abstraction.”³² Lee’s political activism centered more directly on the value of artists in a progressive society. That artists should not lose their funding through the WPA and be cast aside into the poverty and perils of a treacherous economy was the crusade that she willingly

²⁹ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 111.

³⁰ Barbara Rose, Outtakes for “Lee Krasner: The Long View,” film, 1978, based on interviews on August 29, 1977, by Gail Levin and others during 1977, in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 115.

³¹ *New York Times*, December 18, 1937, 22. See also Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front* as discussed in the Introduction.

³² Rose, *Lee Krasner*, 37.

engaged with during the 1930s. Lee Krasner was fired and rehired, protested and jailed multiple times during this decade of economic upheaval.³³

Outside of Lee's work at the WPA and the political activity that coincided with it, Lee continued to develop as a painter.³⁴ She enrolled in courses at the Hans Hofmann School of Art due to a desire to work from models again. Lillian Olinsey worked as the school's registrar at the time of Lee's arrival. Olinsey remembered Lee distinctly as breezing into the school with a portfolio of her work. She found both Lee and her black and white figure drawings "unusually dynamic." "Here was a very original talent," Olinsey recollected. "I was thoroughly convinced about Lee...this quality of energy, her power of articulation...so vital. She was just unique."³⁵ Lee's appearance also made a lasting impression on Olinsey who recalled her dressed in a black blouse, black tight skirt, black net stockings, and high-heeled shoes. "She had an animal magnetism, an energy, a kind of arrogance that commands...an energy that makes the waves happen."³⁶

Hofmann both accepted Lee into his school and offered her a scholarship. However, Lee's relationship with Hofmann got off to a rocky start. First, Lee could not understand the instruction that Hofmann offered due to his thick German accent. Second, it was his practice to rip apart his student's work at times, reorienting the space entirely. Hofmann would also make his own marks on his pupil's work or erase whole sections. In spite of these initial difficulties, Lee ultimately learned a great deal from the German

³³ When artists were rounded up roughly (including the women) and arrested during these demonstrations they would give fictitious names before appearing in night court. As a fellow demonstrator Serge Trubach recounts, "Everybody from Cezanne to Michelangelo was arrested. Rubens was there, and Bruegel...Turner, everybody..." Lee often chose either Mary Cassat or Rosa Bonheur. Even Picasso appeared in court several times! Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 119.

³⁴ For an in-depth explanation of how her painting evolves see Rose, *Lee Krasner*.

³⁵ Lillian Olinsey Kiesler, oral history interview, Archives of American Art, 1990.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

artist. For example, Hofmann was a leader in teaching the tenets of Cubism, explaining to his students that, “the illusion of space, depth, and movement can be achieved on flat canvas even in abstract art by using color principles and abstract shapes.”³⁷ In ripping Lee’s canvas he was demonstrating her need for a theory of modern art in which one did not merely work from the center but considered all four sides of the composition. Lee gained a great deal from Hofmann. She remarked later at the lasting impression his enthusiasm for painting made on her as well as his seriousness and commitment to his craft.³⁸ Even though she sometimes saw Hofmann as rigid in his insistence on working from the model (what was in front of you) she valued his experience and that he introduced her to a wide array of modernist painters including Piet Mondrian. Furthermore, Lee credited Hofmann later in life as the first person who said encouraging things to her about her own work. However, there was a caveat to his praise, “This is so good you would not know it was by a woman,” exclaimed Hofmann to his young student.³⁹ Later Hofmann remembered Lee as being one of the best students he had ever had.⁴⁰

As her skill and sensibilities as an artist developed, Lee’s relationship to Igor began to crumble. The two had dated for nearly a decade, and while Igor was much loved by Lee’s family, his own family refused to meet Lee because she was Jewish. The constant uncertainty of work along with Igor’s inability to live within his means also put tremendous strain on their relationship. Furthermore, the couple began to grow apart artistically, Lee’s interest in modernism growing more intense as Igor’s waned. Lastly,

³⁷ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 123.

³⁸ Lee Krasner, interviewed by Barbara Rose, July 31, 1966.

³⁹ Lee Krasner told this story many times in many different interviews.

⁴⁰ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 129.

Igor's notorious womanizing along with his excessive drinking strained the bonds of their togetherness to the breaking point. One October day in 1939, Igor left New York abruptly, only leaving Lee a short note to explain his absence. He was headed to Florida to see his parents. By November Igor had not returned, and Lee moved to a new and cheaper apartment where she enlisted a friend to paint these words from Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell* on her studio wall:

*"To whom shall I hire myself out? What beast must one adore? What holy image attack?
What hearts shall I break? What lie must I maintain? In what blood must I walk?"*⁴¹

By late November Igor made the break definitive, telling Lee that he would not be returning to New York but was headed to Texas where he hoped to find work. When Igor first left for Florida his intention was to return to the city, but it is likely that the influence of his parents helped steer him away from his longtime partner. Igor's sudden and total departure left Lee bereft, as evidenced by her visceral response to Rimbaud's forceful lines. The couple's togetherness of ten years shared a similarity to marriage that could not be denied. Most friends in their circles assumed that the two were in fact married. As Gail Levin writes, "socially this was tantamount to a divorce."⁴²

In the wake of her newfound aloneness, Lee became involved with the American Abstract Artists, an organization that several of her friends were involved with. In conjunction with this group she picketed the Museum of Modern Art on April 15, 1940, for not showing any of their abstract art. Lee saw a kind of dialectic between the artists and the museum. The Museum of Modern Art was something that artist both struggled against and depended on. She stated in an interview in 1977,

⁴¹ Arthur Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell: Un Saison en Enfer*, translated by Delmore Schwartz (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1939) 27.

⁴² Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 140.

You attack it [the museum] for everything, but finally it's the source you have to make peace with. There are always problems between the artists and an institution. Maybe that's healthy. You need the dichotomy – artists/museum, individual/society – for the individual to be able to breathe."⁴³

Lee acknowledged the giants at the time were Picasso and Matisse, also Leger, the Paris School being the most vital at the time. In spite of some qualms with the AAA's exclusivity and some concern about its provincialism, ultimately Lee happily met with the group once a week. The primary purpose of the AAA was to put on a show once a year, and Lee was able to participate in the June 1940 show. The *New York Post* made fun of the show in its advertisement stating, "American Abstract Artists, the national organization of adherents to squares, circles, and unchecked flourishes, are holding...their fourth exhibition." The journalist listed Lenore Krasner as a participant, her first published notice as a professional.⁴⁴

Meanwhile Lee busily worked on finishing other artists' mural designs for the WPA and longed to create and execute a design of her own. The chance finally came in 1941 when her sketch for an abstract mural for the radio station WNYC was accepted and commissioned. However, before she could actually create the mural, Lee was taken away from the WPA project in order to help the war effort. Propaganda posters and designs for camouflage were now of more critical importance than abstractions for walls.⁴⁵

To buoy her spirits, Lee had the great pleasure of getting to know one of her artistic idols, Piet Mondrian. Mondrian fled Europe, along with many other European

⁴³ Lee Krasner, interviewed by Carter Ratcliffe, August 7, 1977, *Art in America*, September – October, 1977.

⁴⁴ Jerome Klein, "American Abstract," *New York Post*, June 8, 1940, a review of the show.

⁴⁵ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 148.

modernists, after the outbreak of World War II. Not long after Hitler gained power in Germany, Mondrian discovered that he was on Hitler's list of those who made "*entartete Kunst*" or degenerate art. Fleeing first from Paris to London, it was not until a bomb exploded in the building next to his studio in London that Mondrian finally made the voyage to America. Mondrian loved jazz, and came to love Boogie-Woogie after moving to New York. He graciously accepted an invitation from the AAA to join their organization. Fellow émigré Leger also accepted an invitation and a reception was duly thrown in their honor. It was at this reception that Lee first met her European idols. In the fifth exhibition of the AAA, Lee now showed her work alongside two European masters.

Recalling her experiences during this time Lee remembered, "Mondrian I saw on many occasions. We were both mad for jazz, and we used to go to jazz spots together."⁴⁶ Mondrian too expressed to a friend that "I have never enjoyed life so much as here [New York]."⁴⁷ Lee also remembered walking with Mondrian through the exhibit in which they both were showing, "he had a few comments about every painting. As we approached my work, I became very nervous. He said, 'You have a very strong inner rhythm. Never lose it.'"⁴⁸ These words stayed with Lee for the rest of her life.

One day, toward the end of 1941, Lee was walking near her apartment when she ran into a friend from the WPA. Her friend was walking with another gentleman whom he introduced as John Graham. Graham immediately recognized Lee as an artist due to the speckled paint on her pants and asked if he could see some of her work. She agreed.

⁴⁶ Lee Krasner, interview by Barbara Rose, March 1972, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, roll 3774.

⁴⁷ Virginia Pitts Rembert, "Mondrian, America, and American Painting," doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1970, vii.

⁴⁸ Lee Krasner, interview by Barbara Rose, 1972.

Graham was also an artist who traveled between New York and Paris, dealing in African art and bringing many of the ideas of European modernism to America. Graham carried a sophistication with him, evident in his book, *Systems and Dialectics of Art* (1937). Many artists read his book and his articles with great admiration and regard. After Graham's visit to Lee's apartment he sent her a postcard offering her a spot in an uptown gallery show of French and American paintings. The invitation thrilled Krasner because she would be showing alongside Matisse, Braque, and Picasso. The Americans in the show, besides Lee included Stuart Davis, Walt Kuhn, Virginia Diaz, H. Levitt Purdy, Pat Collins, Willem De Kooning, David Burliuk, and Jackson Pollock.⁴⁹

In 1989, Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith published an enormous biography of Jackson Pollock, in turn winning the Pulitzer Prize for their effort.⁵⁰ The book is nearly 1,000 pages long and contains endless detail about the painter. For the purposes of this paper it is not necessary to give as much space to Jackson's biography before he met Lee as it is to give hers. For one, his biography is more widely known, and more widely studied. Second, and crucial to this project is that Jackson changed very little after becoming involved with Lee. It was necessary to establish who Lee was in order to draw a distinct contrast between who she was when she met Jackson Pollock and who she became after falling in love with him. Establishing who Lee was prior to meeting her husband creates a broader space for understanding her choices and actions,

⁴⁹ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 164-65.

⁵⁰ Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (Aiken, S.C.: Woodward/White, 1989).

giving them both greater dimension and a more weighted significance. Jackson in many ways, though not in all ways, remained at his core unaffected by his relationship with Lee. Things changed around him, but he stayed the center of his own universe. In contrast, Jackson became the center of Lee's universe. The two depended on each other in equal parts, but in totally different ways.

Paul Jackson Pollock was born in Cody, Wyoming, in 1912, the youngest of five brothers. Jackson's mother, Stella McClure grew up bearing a tremendous amount of responsibility as the oldest child on a frontier farm in Western Iowa. She developed a hard shell early on, characterized by an intense emotional reserve. When Stella's parents finally moved into town (Tingley, Iowa) young Stella was thrilled not only because her chores lessened, but because she was able to join the Ladies' Social Club. The club members met for weekly discussions on a wide range of topics from Raphael to Lord Byron. Stella craved access to a more genteel life. As an older woman, Stella told one of her daughters-in-law, "When I was young I wanted to study art but I never was able to."⁵¹

Jackson's father, LeRoy, was literally given away by his own father at the tender of age of three to another couple, the Pollocks, just after the death of LeRoy's mother. Alexander McCoy, LeRoy's biological father, took his two older children and moved to Missouri, never contacting his youngest son again. LeRoy grew up to be solitary and introspective, as well as very sensitive. When he graduated from high school, an unusual

⁵¹ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 20-21.

feat for a farm boy in that area, he was darkly handsome and carried a desire to see the world. Sometime during high school he decided to go by Roy. Throughout his life, Roy Pollock had a passion for left-leaning populist causes and worked primarily as a farmer and surveyor.⁵²

The Pollocks (Jackson's brother Sande would eventually revert back to his father's original last name of McCoy) left Cody when Jackson was just eleven months old. By the time Jackson turned nine, his parent's marriage had disintegrated and his father left the family, though he mailed weekly checks without fail. Along with the absence of his father, Jackson's childhood is characterized by an extraordinary amount of movement. Always seeking something better, Stella moved her sons around relentlessly. This constant coming and going gradually took a toll on all five boys. The "something better" that Stella sought was driven by her desire for the finer things in life. She especially cultivated a sense of style in her oldest son, Charles. Early on Charles took an interest in art. He drew, took painting lessons, and cut out illustrations from magazines. Jackson's mother told the *Des Moines Register* after her son's death, "When Jackson was a little boy and was asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, he'd always say, 'I want to be an artist like brother Charles.'" ⁵³

As the youngest, Jackson desperately sought attention from his mother, who often made an unpleasant impression on other people. She was considered "despotic, cold-hearted, taciturn, and unapproachable." She was also known for being incredibly strong-willed.⁵⁴ Jackson often engaged in needful childlike behavior to garner attention from

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 64.

⁵⁴ Ines Janet Engelmann, *Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner* (Munich: Prestel Publishing, 2007) 14.

Stella, yet she treated him with the same “hovering detachment” that she did her other sons. According to his biographers, her reticence confirmed in Jackson a vague but powerful feeling that he had disappointed her.⁵⁵

At the age of 16, after zig-zagging around the West, Jackson settled in Los Angeles where he was able to attend Manual Arts High School. Here he met Frederick John de St. Vrain Schwankovsky, a painter and illustrator who began teaching Jackson the rudiments of painting and drawing. Schwankovsky encouraged his students to “expand their consciousness” and to paint their dreams. His practice held the promise that one didn’t have to be a skilled draftsman to be an artist. Schwankovsky also introduced Jackson to Theosophy. Raised without ritual as the son of ambivalent Presbyterians, Jackson was drawn to the teachings of Jiddu Krishnamurti, the leader of the theosophists and a personal friend of Schwankovsky. In spite of the impression made on Jackson by Schwankovsky he never graduated from Manual Arts. In 1930, Jackson Pollock moved to New York to study art, following in the footsteps of the oldest brother he idolized, Charles.⁵⁶

Prior to moving to New York Jackson had begun to exhibit the painful tendencies that would plague him throughout his life. He would cycle through social withdrawal and depression, often uncomfortably silent with those around him. On the other hand he could also be wild, crass, and violent. Jackson began to experiment with alcohol at the age of 15, and had a notably lower tolerance than his brothers. Doctors would later

⁵⁵ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 69.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 154.

describe it as a “chemical vulnerability.”⁵⁷ Jackson soon turned to alcohol to assuage feelings that tormented him.

In New York, Jackson studied with Charles’ teacher, Thomas Hart Benton. Benton, a Regionalist artist had no interest in avante-guard modernist work, in fact he reviled it. Benton’s intention through his painting was to glorify the Midwest and the American way of life. He wanted a pure American aesthetic, belonging to the dominant art scene at the time. With Benton, Jackson studied life-drawing, painting, and composition for two and a half years. In this time, Benton became a father figure to Jackson and embraced him as more than a favorite student. An intense bond developed between the two. Benton was infamous as a “badboy” for his profanity, vulgarity, misogyny, and his drunkenness. He was also famous for his ambition, his work and his quintessential “manliness.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, Benton understood that the press needed not just art, but a *story about art*, and he willingly provided it as Jackson would years later. Jackson would claim later in life that Benton’s influence on his art was important primarily as something to react against. In truth, Jackson’s muscular gestures and his all-over technique, along with his artistic discipline are all arguably remnants of his formative years under Benton’s wing.

Like many struggling artists during the Depression, Jackson eventually began working for the WPA. This work, which required only that he submit a painting every month or so, provided a small regular salary. In the summer of 1936, Mexican muralist David Siqueiros opened his “Laboratory of Modern Techniques in Art.” Here Jackson

⁵⁷ Ibid, 117.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 170.

was able to first experiment with unconventional materials and techniques--techniques he would later become famous for. Jackson's association with Siqueiros was short lived however, as the Mexican artist left for Spain later that year to fight in the Spanish Civil War.⁵⁹

In New York, Jackson lived primarily with either his brother Charles and his wife, or his brother Sande and his wife. His brothers felt responsible for him, but their wives were often strained by having Jackson in their midst. Charles Pollock's wife Elizabeth relates, "Jackson was a taker, not a giver, who rarely--the truth is I remember no incident at all--proffered a helping hand either in the flesh or in the spirit...Outside he could be very charming and lovely in his manners, but once he was in our house, he was sulky and lazy."⁶⁰ One fateful afternoon after drinking some whiskey, Jackson became very aggressive with a guest of his brother Frank's wife, Marie. The guest's name was Rose. Marie grew uncomfortable with the rough way that Jackson was manhandling Rose, pushing her and pawing at her. Marie had little experience at the time with Jackson's alcohol induced mood swings and was taken aback that the young, sweet Jackson was acting so aggressively. Marie grabbed Jackson to try to pull him away from Rose. In an instant Jackson grabbed the ax from beside the wood stove and held it over Marie's head. "You're a nice girl, Marie...I would hate to have to chop your head off." After a few moments of alarming silence he wielded the ax down into one of Charles' paintings hanging on the wall. The blow split the canvas in two and lodged the ax in the wall behind. It was one of Charles' best paintings and one that he had actually managed to sell. Charles told Jackson to find another place to live. Soon Jackson moved in with his

⁵⁹ Engelmann, *Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner*, 18.

⁶⁰ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 215.

brother Frank. When one brother grew fed up with caring for him, another would step in, all in a pact to protect him. Brother Sande lived with and cared for Jackson for years, it was only when Sande married that the living situation was truly put to the test.⁶¹

In 1937, Jackson began psychiatric treatment for alcoholism. In 1938, he was hospitalized for four months in the wake of a breakdown – a drastic attempt at self-obliteration. For four days Jackson wandered the streets of the Bowery drinking around the clock, passing out in gutters filled with other men’s urine, being nudged awake by police only to begin drinking again. On the fourth day, filthy, violent, sick and incoherent he was finally taken to Bellevue Hospital, and then eventually to the New York Hospital at White Plains for treatment.⁶²

Jackson’s stay at White Plains was not successful in that he returned to drinking very quickly following his release. The artist was able to charm his doctors into an early discharge, forgoing treatment that could have been crucial to his long-term recovery. Jackson’s biographers say of the doctors at White Plains that they were “the first of many who were distracted by his art or beguiled by the voyeuristic pleasures of treating an artist.”⁶³ Arloie, Sande’s wife, remembered that Jackson did attempt to quit drinking after his four months at White Plains, but the temptation was far too much for him to overcome. What therapy offered Jackson in the coming years was a view into the philosophies of Carl Jung, philosophies that deeply impacted his artistic development. Jung believed that underneath consciousness there is a collective unconscious shared by all humanity. The collective unconscious, which is inclusive of all cultures across time,

⁶¹ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 214.

⁶² *Ibid*, 314.

⁶³ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 320.

finds expression in mythology, in archetypes, and in works of art. Pollock began to turn inward for a source of expression, and in turn his art began to change. Writing to their older brother Charles, Sande described Jackson's new approach: "he has thrown off the yoke of Benton completely, and is doing work which is creative in the most genuine sense of the word."⁶⁴

Sande sustained Jackson emotionally for many years, but in the early spring of 1941 Arloie announced that she was expecting a baby. Sande had made a time-consuming commitment to Jackson's welfare for seven years. Furthermore, he bore much of Jackson's distress alone. Their mother, Stella, had moved back to Tingley, Iowa, to care for her own mother. As Stella's mother's condition worsened, Stella began to test the waters for a new place to live. Charles suggested New York, as two of her sons lived there. In a barely veiled letter of panic, Sande revealed to Charles the seriousness of Jackson's condition: the hospitalization, the treatment, the discovery of "neurosis" and "depressive mania," as well as "self-destruction." He continued with all that he had so long held back, "Since part of [Jackson's] trouble lies in his childhood relationship with his Mother in particular and family in general, it would be extremely trying and might be disastrous for him to see her at this time."⁶⁵ With the announcement of his baby on the way, Sande could no longer shoulder the burden of his younger brother. Other people needed him now too, namely his wife and child.

Jackson's support system was in danger of dissolving as quickly as the WPA work dissolved. Anxieties over communists in the ranks made already stuttering Federal work take a turn towards extinction. In the closing months of 1941 a couple of events

⁶⁴ Engelmann, *Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner*, 20.

⁶⁵ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 364.

kept Jackson from heading face-first into a crisis. The first was an essay he read by John Graham on Primitive Art and Picasso, in the *Magazine of Art* (1937). In it Graham, similar to Jung, described the universality of certain symbols – signs that appear in both tribal work and Western work, like Picasso. This article made such an impression on Jackson that he sought Graham out. Their meeting led to Jackson's invitation to show in Graham's upcoming exhibition. Here he would hang his pictures side-by-side with Picasso and Matisse, and unbeknownst to him, his future wife. The second event that changed the course of Jackson's life was the arrival of Lee Krasner at his studio door.

The story of Lee's arrival to Jackson's studio is a story that Lee delighted in telling for decades to come. Seeing Jackson's name on the list of American painters in the John Graham show, Lee was taken aback. Considering herself extremely well-versed in the who's who of American abstract artists, she was surprised to see a name that she did not recognize. Lee began to ask around about the mysterious Jackson Pollock. Eventually at a gallery opening, Lee ran into a friend that she knew from working on WPA mural projects, Lou Bunce. Bunce knew Jackson, having gone with him to see a Miró exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in 1941. Bunce disclosed to Lee that Jackson lived just around the corner from her own studio. Lee lived on 9th Street between Broadway and University, and Jackson lived on 8th Street between Broadway and University. Lee soon took it upon herself to meet the unknown Pollock, bounding up the five flights of stairs toward his studio. Jackson's brother Sande appeared in the hallway

of the top floor and pointed Lee in the direction of Jackson's studio. She knocked on the door and was invited in by a handsome, rugged looking man a few years her junior.⁶⁶

In Lee's account, upon entering Jackson's studio she was immediately bowled over by Jackson's work. She felt "wild enthusiasm," she was "moved," "overwhelmed," "blasted," "stunned." She "felt the presence of a living force that [she] had not witnessed before." In a moment of elation she thought, "*My God, there it is.*" Lee compared her reaction to "the same sort of thing I responded to in Matisse, in Picasso, in Mondrian."⁶⁷ In the account Lee provided to *Time* magazine in 1958, she said, "I lunged right over and when I saw his paintings I almost died. They bowled me over. Then I met him, and that was it."⁶⁸

Jackson Pollock's biographers, Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, take issue with Lee's story. In their account Lee climbed the steps to Jackson's studio knowing exactly who he was. According to them she "had probably marked Jackson as a possible lover long before she came to his door."⁶⁹ In their version it was not the paintings that Lee was taken with, but rather with Jackson himself. They quote an acquaintance of Jackson's from his Benton days, Axel Horn, as saying,

She was having plenty of problems finding a man and that's how she gravitated to Jack. She was not a handsome woman, but she had a great deal of aggressiveness and she came on strong with men. My impression was that most men, like me, were rather repelled by her.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Lee's story of their "first" meeting appears in numerous interviews.

⁶⁷ Various interviews including Munro, as well as Lee Krasner interviewed by Barbara Lee Diamonstein, 1977, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, roll 3774, available on YouTube at <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/POE/oval.html>, see also Lee Krasner, interviewed by Cindy Nemser, "The Indomitable Lee Krasner," *Feminist Art Journal*, Spring, 1975, IV, 6.

⁶⁸ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 168.

⁶⁹ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 393.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

The Pollock biographers continue by suggesting that Lee was concerned that no man would ever marry her and that she would end up an old maid. According to their source, “She had picked Jackson out of the crowd once and had kept an eye on him ever since. The [John Graham] show provided the perfect opportunity for a second try.”⁷¹

It is true that Lee and Jackson had met once before, at an Artist’s Union dance in 1936. They even danced together briefly, but Jackson was intoxicated and stepped all over Lee’s feet. Nothing came of the exchange. Lee claimed later that when she saw Jackson at his studio she did recognize him from five years earlier, but it is extremely unlikely that she had designs on him during that time. There is no doubt that Lee enjoyed the magic of the story that she told and retold for years about meeting Pollock in his studio. A friend of both Lee and Jackson’s, B.H. Friedman, recorded in his journal that Lee asked him to suppress the story of her first meeting with Pollock because on the dance floor the only words Jackson uttered were, “Do you like to fuck?”⁷² One can easily see why Lee preferred that particular exchange be left in the past.

Naifeh and Smith not only discount Lee’s supposed intention in going to Jackson’s studio, they also discredit her story of how Jackson’s paintings affected her. Again using Axel Horn as a source, Jackson’s biographers claim that Jackson’s work could not have made much of an impression when Lee came to his studio that day, as his art was still unformed.⁷³ They continue to refute Lee’s claim by suggesting that Lee was only impressed with the possibility of Jackson as a boyfriend. According to friends of Lee’s, she did not even mention that Jackson was an artist, only confiding in them that

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 103.

⁷³ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 394.

she had met someone she liked very much. Also citing letters to her long-time friend, George Mercer, Lee calls Jackson “magnificent” and “indescribable,” yet does not specifically mention his paintings. The biographer’s last argument is that a month passed before Lee invited her friend, Mercedes Matter (another artist) to Jackson’s studio to “honestly assess his work.” Their claim is that it was Mercedes who spotted his paintings as being exceptional and then Lee joined in. Naifeh and Smith close their argument with this statement from an unnamed friend, “When they first came together, it was not because she recognized any innate ability in him, it was because he was there and available.”⁷⁴

This refutation of Lee’s experience by Jackson’s biographers I find flimsy and a bit hostile. First, while there is no doubt that Lee did meet Jackson very briefly in 1936, a fact that she admits, it is not impossible that five years later she would not connect the name to that particular person or fleeting event. To argue that she was instead carrying a torch for him for five years seems to stretch the lines of possibility. Furthermore, using Axel Horn as a source is tenuous at best. He is known only as someone Jackson knew when working with Benton years earlier. There is no way that Horn could be privy to what motivated Lee Krasner at the time. Furthermore, there are a multitude of references to Lee’s appearance in the Pollock biography. Horn’s argument is that she gravitated to Jackson because she was desperate, aggressive and ugly. Many men were away at war in 1941, and an eligible man was somewhat of a rarity. It is even very possible that Lee was concerned about being an aging single woman, but to discount her entire experience because of her appearance is unfair. That Lee spoke to her friends of Jackson and not his

⁷⁴ Ibid., 395.

paintings does not provide convincing evidence that the paintings made no impression on her. Lee could very well have fallen in love with the whole package. Lastly, the argument that Jackson's work was too unformed to make an impression does not make sense in the context of Mercedes Matter being impressed with it just one month later when Lee took her to Jackson's studio. It was impressive enough for John Graham to include it in his show, and thus it is highly probable that Lee too was moved by it just as she claims to have been. Lee definitely delighted in telling the story of the momentous meeting in the studio, and it is likely that she sometimes left out details that made the story less dramatic, but it is not convincing to argue that his artwork was not a factor for her that evening. Lee's belief in Pollock's genius never wavered from that moment on.

That same evening, Lee invited Jackson to visit her own studio. Jackson arrived a couple of weeks later. When asked if he wanted coffee, Jackson agreed only to be shocked when Lee put her coat on. "You don't think I make it here?" asked Lee in her modern way.⁷⁵ Jackson was taken aback, as he was still the son of Stella Pollock who took great pride in her culinary acumen. Jackson and Lee's first official "date" brought the couple to the John Graham show in which they were both participants. Lee had visited Jackson's studio several times in between, becoming more and more enamored with him. Jackson warmed to Lee as well; she exuded confidence and control, qualities that Jackson saw would benefit him.

Pollock's biographers make clear (to the point of absurdity) that Lee was physically unattractive in the traditional sense. They include that one of Jackson's friends said she looked "like a goat," and then in the footnotes to that comment have

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 395.

“name withheld by request” and no subsequent explanation.⁷⁶ (Including that “someone” said she looks like an animal strikes me as particularly unnecessary.) In turn, Naifeh and Smith do credit her with a “sensual body” and an “eager sexuality.” Continuing in this vein they write, “she had big, firm, pneumatic breasts that would create a sensation among [Jackson’s] brothers.”⁷⁷ Interestingly the quote from Jackson’s brother Frank that this is derived from is a response he made when asked why many of the Pollock brothers married Jewish women. Frank responded that it was because, “[Jews] tend to be intelligent and educated and big-breasted.”⁷⁸ I am unconvinced that this comment warrants the assumption that Lee’s breasts caused a sensation among his brothers. Only later do Jackson’s biographers credit her talent as an artist, as a passing reason for Jackson’s interest in her.

What is likely is that Jackson felt a sense of security with Lee. “He had found a mommy,” Elizabeth Pollock remarked.⁷⁹ Jackson and Lee began to see each other more frequently. One evening in January of 1942, the new couple walked back from John Graham’s apartment with him when a man approached and embraced Graham warmly. Graham introduced the man as Fredrick Kiesler and then turning to Jackson announced, “And *this*, is Jackson Pollock, *the greatest painter in America*.”⁸⁰ The exclamation thrilled Lee to the core. Soon she and Jackson became in Lee’s words “meshed.” Describing the growing connection to her new beau, Lee said, “We knew that we had

⁷⁶ Ibid., 857.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 396.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 857.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 395.

⁸⁰ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 187.

something to give each other, some answer to each of our particular kinds of loneliness.”⁸¹

Lee began to introduce Jackson to some of her friends. Many in her Hofmann circle were confused by Lee’s excitement over this new love interest, especially in comparison to the more colorful figure that was Igor. Jackson sometimes gave the impression of being quiet to the point of mental deficiency. Lee’s friend, May Rosenberg remembers her first impression of Jackson as a silent man in dungarees, whom May thought was either deaf or “half-witted.” She assumed Lee was kindly giving him little jobs to do around the studio. It wasn’t until her next visit that May learned this was actually Jackson Pollock.⁸² Others in Lee’s circle, notably Herbert Matter, appreciated Jackson’s quiet strength.

In a remarkable meeting, Lee courageously introduced Jackson to her teacher and friend, Hans Hofmann. The older Hofmann climbed the five flights of stairs to arrive at Jackson’s studio. Hofmann, like Mondrian, had a fastidiousness about him, favoring order and cleanliness in his surroundings. Jackson’s studio was chronically and astoundingly messy. Hofmann saw no models or still lifes in Jackson’s studio and asked Pollock, “Do you work from nature?” Pollock famously responded, “I am nature.” Being the teacher that he was, Hofmann warned Pollock of the danger he faced, “You don’t work from nature, you work from heart. That’s no good. You will repeat yourself.” Jackson was not interested in Hofmann’s theories and the meeting ended in a stalemate.⁸³

⁸¹ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 396.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 399.

⁸³ Lee Krasner, interviewed by Barbara Cavaliere, American Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This discovery that “I am nature” would be the foundation of Pollock’s artistic breakthrough.

While Lee and Jackson’s relationship received tepid reviews from some of her friends, the opposite was true with the Pollock family. Jackson’s clan greeted the relationship with great joy and relief. Sande’s wife, Arloie, found Lee to be, “a very straightforward kind of woman. She inspired confidence: in us, and in Jackson.”⁸⁴ Arloie had good reason to be hopeful, having lived with Jackson and his moods for six years she had had enough. In early 1942, it was at her insistence that Jackson began spending most nights with Lee at her studio. Describing this period Lee recounts her growing attachment to Jackson,

I was terribly drawn to Jackson, and I fell in love with him—physically, mentally—in every sense of the word. I had a conviction when I met Jackson that he had something important to say. When we began going together, my own work became irrelevant. He was not easy. But at the beginning he was accepting of my encouragement, attention, and love.⁸⁵

It is interesting and speaks to the questions asked in this dissertation that Lee, within just a few months of knowing Jackson, already finds her own work irrelevant in the face of the love she felt for Jackson Pollock. As established in the first section of this chapter, Lee had dedicated her life to being an artist for the past twenty years, giving up all the securities of a conventional life. Yet now, she willingly cast her own work aside.

The anticipation of a visit from Stella Pollock sent Jackson on an incredible binge in May, 1942. After drinking for days, he ended up at Bellevue, a hospital that had established a dedicated unit for alcoholics as early as 1892. Lee was alerted to the situation by Sande, who appeared at Lee’s door wondering if Jackson had slept over the

⁸⁴ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 399.

⁸⁵ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 190.

night before. When informed that he was at Bellevue, Lee headed there with Sande at his request. Sande was quite worried, not so much about Jackson, but that their mother, Stella, had just arrived in the city and the situation with Jackson needed to be kept from her. Lee took Jackson home to her studio and fed him milk and eggs to help prepare him for dinner with his mother that night. Later in the evening, Lee met Stella for the first time. Lee was immediately impressed with the incredible spread of food that Stella prepared. Lee told Jackson, “you’re off your rocker, she’s sweet, nice,” referring to her own impressions of his mother.⁸⁶ It would take Lee more time to appreciate the subtle but monstrous problems between Jackson and his mother, just how she dominated her youngest son. At the time Lee did not even connect the drinking binge with Stella’s arrival. It is also telling that Jackson’s binge and arrival at Bellevue did not seem to faze Lee at all.

Another friend of Jackson’s who visited while Stella was in New York experienced the tension between mother and son more palpably. Ethel Baziotes came to dinner one evening and recalls,

Coming up the stairs, we could hear music so loud that everything was vibrating. That was a danger signal right there. [Jackson] was very strange that night. You felt that anything you said might lead to something. Stella was wearing something dark. She was a handsome woman, but you couldn’t read her at all. She was like an American Indian woman. She sat like statuary the entire evening and didn’t move once, but she followed everything. The relationship between her and Jackson was very taut. Everything was understood between them without talking. She followed him perfectly and he followed her. It was like two cats sitting near each other. They had nothing to do with one another, but there was an energy going back and forth all the same...All during dinner, I kept thinking of what Willa Cather said about the family being the enemy of art.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 191.

⁸⁷ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 401. (no citation of source for this quote).

Stella stayed in New York for three months, but mother and son (Jackson) never slept under the same roof. Every night one or the other lodged at Lee's apartment. Jackson's mother was to be shielded from her troubled youngest son at all costs. While in New York, Stella wanted to meet Lee and Jackson's artist friends. Later, when Jackson became famous she reveled in his success. It amounted to a confirmation in her mind that all of her travels out West in search of a better, more cultured life had finally born fruit.

That fall, Sande moved with his wife and child to Connecticut to take a defense industry job, which allowed him to avoid military service.⁸⁸ It was then that Lee moved in permanently with Jackson, giving up her own studio. Jackson was now officially in her care. Charles' wife Elizabeth said of the arrangement, "Jackson was narcissistic, totally in love with Jackson; that's why he had to be mothered. Lee struck me as extremely capable and domineering; I knew immediately why Jackson was with her."⁸⁹ After moving in with Jackson, Lee became completely absorbed with his needs almost overnight. According to friend, Fritz Bultman, "[Lee] totally negated herself...It was such a shock that a woman so strong could subordinate herself to that extent."⁹⁰ Soon, the woman who couldn't even make a cup of coffee in her apartment was running a household as well as June Cleaver ever did. Lee bought groceries, washed clothes, kept house, and even ran personal errands for Jackson such as shopping for family presents. If Jackson couldn't do much for himself, Lee more than made up for his lack. In a very short time Lee went from bare cabinets to collecting recipes, planning menus, and baking.

⁸⁸ Jackson had a 4-F status due to his psychiatric issues that made him unfit for service.

⁸⁹ William L. White, *Slaying the Dragon: The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America* (Bloomington, Ill: Chestnut Health Systems/Lighthouse Institute, 1998), 198.

⁹⁰ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 401.

She prepared elaborate meals for the two of them in the style of Stella Pollock herself. Lee also began taking over Jackson's correspondence, writing to his relatives, making his phone calls, and representing his thoughts. May Rosenberg remembers, "[Lee] was always saying, 'Pollock thinks this, Pollock thinks that.'"⁹¹

Having Lee to care for him immediately benefited Jackson; one of his most productive phases now began. Through Robert Motherwell, Pollock received an invitation to take part in a show of collages put on by Peggy Guggenheim. Guggenheim, the niece of Solomon Guggenheim opened her own gallery on October 20, 1942 calling it, *Art of This Century*. Peggy wanted her gallery to be noticed and so she commissioned a unique interior design by Fredrick Kiesler. She also published a catalogue *Art of This Century*, which included a preface by Mondrian and André Breton to highlight her connection to both abstract and Surrealist art. Though her father, Benjamin Guggenheim, died in the sinking of the *Titanic* when Peggy was just fourteen years old, she discovered the avant-garde on her own while working in a radical bookstore in Greenwich Village run by her cousin, Harold Loeb.⁹²

Pollock was then invited by Guggenheim to submit his paintings to a jury for the Spring Salon for Young Artists. Although Lee was not quite thirty-five (the cut-off for "young artists") she did not submit. The jury included Jimmy Ernst (son of artist Max Ernst and Peggy's current husband), Mondrian, Marcel Duchamp, James Johnson Sweeney, Howard Putzel, James Soby, and Peggy Guggenheim herself. Guggenheim originally paid no attention to Jackson or his work, but Mondrian found it "exciting and

⁹¹ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 402.

⁹² Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 198.

unusual,” noting its originality.⁹³ Upon hearing Mondrian’s assessment along with Howard Putzel’s approbation Guggenheim made a date to visit Jackson’s studio.

Peggy arrived at Lee and Jackson’s apartment on June 23, 1943. Lee and Jackson were running late, and caught Peggy exiting their building just as they reached the door. In a slight to Lee, Peggy first lashed out at Jackson for being late, and then went on, “I came into the place, the doors were open, and I see a lot of paintings, L.K., L.K. I didn’t come to look at L.K.’s paintings. Who is L.K.?”⁹⁴ Lee added that Peggy knew “damn well” who L.K. was.⁹⁵ Eventually the heiress agreed to re-climb the stairs and see Jackson’s work. Viewing Jackson’s painting in his presence she warmed to them, and to him.⁹⁶ The review of the spring salon stated that Pollock’s canvas left the exhibition jury, “starry-eyed.”⁹⁷ Because Lee knew that Mondrian was one of the jurors, she was thrilled with this assessment, confirmation of the belief she held in Jackson’s rising star. Jackson Pollock’s fortunes were indisputably shifting.

By July, Peggy offered Jackson a contract. She scheduled a show for him in November, commissioned a mural-size painting for the entrance hall of her own residence, and agreed to pay him a monthly stipend for a year with a settlement at the end of the year. To have a true patron was a tremendous benefit for Jackson, and allowed him to leave the job he had as a janitor at the Museum of Non-Objective Painting.⁹⁸

⁹³ Ibid, 201.

⁹⁴ Cindy Nemser, *Art Talk: Conversations with 12 Women Artists* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1975) 88.

⁹⁵ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 201.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Jean Connolly Novak, “Art: Spring Salon for Young Artists,” *The Nation*, 156, no. 22 (May 9, 1943), 786.

⁹⁸ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 202.

Lee helped to generate more attention for Jackson by introducing him to Sidney Janis. Sidney Janis had helped to arrange the New York showing of *Guernica* and was now working on a book, *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*, which would be published in 1944. Through Hans Hoffman, Janis was put in touch with Lee and included a painting of hers in the book along with work by Mercedes Carles (later Mercedes Matter), Ray Eames, Stuart Davis, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, and Hofmann himself among others. In the book Lee lists her birth year as 1911, shaving three years off of her true age. Janis, interested in meeting some of Hofmann's students, contacted Lee to arrange a meeting. During his visit with her she introduced him to Jackson's work. Janis described Jackson as, "a dour-looking fellow, who didn't say one word during my entire visit...He let Lee do all of the talking."⁹⁹ In spite of his silence, Janis responded deeply to Jackson's work and included his painting, *The She-Wolf*, in the book honoring it with a color plate. Only Hofmann's work was also shown in color in an earlier section of the book. Jackson, whose being resonated through visual expression and not with words, offered this laconic explanation of his own painting for Janis' book, "*She-Wolf* came into existence because I had to paint it, to attempt explanation of the inexplicable, could only destroy it."¹⁰⁰ Jackson's work impressed Janis so much that he recommended it to the Museum of Modern Art for purchase. The museum in turn bought the painting for \$600.¹⁰¹ Tellingly, Janis's message to Pollock expresses his admiration for the artist and then states, "L.K. is to phone when you feel like visiting me. Best to you

⁹⁹ John Gruen, *The Party's Over Now* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 230.

¹⁰⁰ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 205.

¹⁰¹ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 205. Sidney Janis served on the Advisory Committee of the Museum of Modern Art at the time.

both.”¹⁰² Lee was now the voice for Jackson Pollock, as well as his cheerleader, guardian, and secretary.

While Jackson’s star was rising, Lee’s career screeched to a halt. After moving in with Jackson she ceased painting all together. In these early days of their togetherness there was only one painter in the Eighth Street apartment and it was Jackson. Lee’s friend May Rosenberg theorized that “Her paintings had driven Igor away,” and that, “she was careful that same thing didn’t happen to her again with Jackson.”¹⁰³ Hans Hofmann later recalled that Lee, “gave in all the time [to Jackson]. She was very feminine.”¹⁰⁴ Ines Engelmann writes in her book that after the Graham show Krasner “disappeared behind the ‘genius’ Pollock. She became ‘Pollock’s girl.’” Continuing Engelmann asks the question: “...[Lee] did so of her own accord, but why? She was a young artist with good contacts.”¹⁰⁵ This is a fascinating question.

With Lee there was a total devotion to Jackson and to his work that belied the independent woman she had vigorously fought to become. Why the sudden and total reorientation towards homemaking and taking care of a man? In my estimation her choices resulted from a culmination of factors. First, she was in love, and love is a powerful drug. In April, 1943, Lee applied to the City of New York to correct her birth certificate. The certificate had originally been issued as “Lena Kreisner.” Lee petitioned to have it changed to “Lenore Krasner.” The reason for her attention to this matter likely has to do with a desire to marry, emphasizing her seriousness about Jackson.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 402.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 404.

¹⁰⁵ Engelmann, *Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner*, 21.

Correspondingly, the cultural pressure on a woman in her early thirties to marry was very intense at that time (and still is).¹⁰⁶

By Lee's own account she fell madly in love with Jackson Pollock, the man, as well as Jackson Pollock, the artist. Lee absolutely recognized in Pollock's art something worth sacrificing for, something beyond an individual, and something that she wanted to be close to. Lee often spoke in interviews of the profound effect Pollock had on her work and on her consciousness as an artist. After living with him for awhile, Lee wrote to her friend Mercedes Matter, "I'm painting and nothing happens its [sic] maddening." She continued to complain to her friend, "I showed Janis my last three paintings- He said they were to [sic] much Pollocks."¹⁰⁷ Lee wrestled with this dilemma for nearly three years. She explained later, "I was trying to move away from the principles of Cubism, which I had pretty thoroughly by now, and I was trying to understand what Pollock was talking about. It didn't happen quickly or easily. It was a major transition."¹⁰⁸

To be absolutely clear, the Pollock revelation was that the artist does not paint what is outside of him/herself. Jackson's paintings at the time reveal his internal life. There is no seeking of correct form, there are no attempts to interpret a model; he simply expresses himself. The ability to control while letting go is something Jackson did naturally. Jackson's work overpowers the viewer with emotional content. His exposure to Jungian analysis as well as his interest in native cultures allowed him to work from the

¹⁰⁶ In another suspect citation, Naifeh and Smith use B.H. Friedman's *fictionalized* account of Jackson and Lee's relationship as a source for claiming that Lee worried about becoming an old maid prior to meeting Jackson. They quote her as saying to a friend on the eve of meeting Pollock that she was "an old maid, a fucking old maid." Because Friedman used details from their actual lives it is possible that this was true, but much more likely something Friedman made up to enhance his story, and definitely not usable as a credible source.

¹⁰⁷ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 205.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Cannell, "An Interview with Lee Krasner," *Arts Magazine* (New York, September 1984) 87.

subconscious. From Surrealism he learned to embrace the use of accident. Pollock could assimilate the conflicting styles of both Cubism and Surrealism and in turn he created something entirely new. Jackson's art truly expresses the depths of his being on canvas, a quality that was not academic, but instinctual. This kind of working process required a state of being and a self-knowledge rather than a technical aptitude.¹⁰⁹

For Lee, this catastrophic new orientation that her husband's work presented was very difficult to absorb, and caused nearly three years of halted work. Thus, it was not so much that she quit painting because she fell in love, but more accurately that the revelation of Jackson Pollock himself created a total period of transition, both domestically and artistically. Lee spoke of this time in an interview stating,

I went through a kind of black-out period or a painting of nothing but gray building up, because the big transition there is that up to that point, and including Hofmann, I had worked from nature...as I had worked so-called, from nature, that is, I am here and Nature is out there, whether it be in the form of a woman or an apple of anything else, the concept was broken.¹¹⁰

Even though as an artist Lee saw Jackson as "riddled with doubt," she also acknowledged, "no one knew as much about himself as Jackson did. He knew what he was about."¹¹¹ In order to produce the kind of authentic work that Jackson Pollock created knowledge of the self was an imperative. This is the same self that Jack Kerouac religiously protected. If one believes that the "self" is the source of all, as a Transcendentalist would, there is a great power in it. In my estimation, men are

¹⁰⁹ Many artists that I spoke with while working on this chapter insisted to me that Lee Krasner is actually a better painter than Jackson Pollock. In their estimation Jackson's contribution is that he initiated this break through in modern art. However, in analyzing the paintings themselves, Lee's canvases, at least to these artists, are richer and much more proficient artistically.

¹¹⁰ Lee Krasner, interviewed by Dorothy Seckler, November 2, 1964, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

¹¹¹ Lee Krasner quoted from 1969 interview in John Gruen, *The Party's Over* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 232-233.

celebrated if they are able to cultivate that as a source of power, while women are taught to *connect to* that in another. Cultivate and protect vs. Nurture (in another) and Connect. Authenticity is what everyone responds to in any form of expression. Again, the freedom to go out on a limb, to find one's self is a kind of adventure that has different repercussions for men and women.

Jackson's first solo show opened at Art of This Century as planned, November 8, 1943. James Johnson Sweeney, curator of the department of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art since 1935, wrote in the catalogue "Pollock's talent is volcanic. It has fire. It is undisciplined." Sweeney continued, "What we need is more young men who paint from inner impulsion without an ear to what the critic or spectator may feel – painters who will risk spoiling a canvas to say something in their own way. Pollock is one."¹¹²

Life was going along well for the couple. In spite of Lee's difficulty breaking through her gray canvases she felt supported by her husband. She reflected on this era of their relationship by saying, "Jackson had a delightful sense of humor, and when I'd rant and rave about someone being a son of a bitch, he'd calm me down considerably. When I bellyached about my work, he'd say "Stay with it." Lee relished the continuing dialogue the two shared about their work as well, "...he always wanted me to see what he was doing, he was always asking my reaction."¹¹³ Jackson himself was thrilled with the success of his first show. Also, he felt relieved by the stipend he was receiving from Peggy Guggenheim, though he realized quickly that the \$150.00 a month did not square

¹¹² James Johnson Sweeney, introduction, *Jackson Pollock*, Art of This Century, November 8-29, 1943.

¹¹³ Grace Glueck, "Scenes from a Marriage: Krasner and Pollock," *Art News*, December 1981, 60.

perfectly with the bills. When he asked Peggy for an increase she replied, “Tell Lee to go get a job.” Lee recalled, “Pollock would not accept that solution and she never dared mention it again.”¹¹⁴

In the summer of 1944, Jackson and Lee stayed out in Provincetown on Cape Cod where they spent many days on the beach, and entertained several guests that passed through. One of their guests, Hans Hofmann himself wrote to Mercedes Matter of his visit, “...neither Lee nor Jackson worked. They have been every day on the beach-well-who can blame them-he worked so hard for a long time and Lee was exhausted I think from being his wife.” Similar to her relationship with Igor, even though she was not married, people assumed differently. Hofmann continues telling Mercedes of Jackson’s behavior while drinking, “he offends everyone in his surroundings-the end is always a collapse.” And lastly Hofmann laments Jackson’s alcoholism for the couple’s present and future,

I feel sorry for such constitution because in the end it must be of tragic consequences. Jackson is highly sensitive, he is a wonderful artist, he is in reality good-natured, but his companionship is hard to stand when he is off the normal. Lee will have a hard time with him, but she stays with him and I respect her for this.¹¹⁵

To say Jackson’s drinking was problematic is to grossly understate the matter. When Jackson drank he would disappear, sometimes for days on end. During these binges Jackson would act without regard for himself in the least, let alone Lee. Yet now it was Lee’s name he would call out when he fell facedown on a bar counter slipping into unconsciousness; it used to be Sande’s. Even local bartenders refused to allow him entry

¹¹⁴ Nemser, *Art Talk: Conversations with 12 Women Artists*, 88. – Interesting to note that it is a woman, Peggy Guggenheim, who is financially supporting Jackson. Thus, he has one woman supporting him emotionally and another supporting him financially.

¹¹⁵ Hans Hoffman to Mercedes Matter, letter of October 14, 1944 quoted in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 214-215.

after too many horrifying drunken displays. Lee was left to either worry at home or wander the streets in search of Jackson, attempting to beckon him home. “Every time Jackson disappeared,” their friend Rueben Kadish remembered, “Lee would get frantic and start making excuses, looking for someone to blame. She would pace around the apartment saying, ‘Jackson will be here any minute.’”¹¹⁶ Peggy Guggenheim wrote of Jackson, “My relationship with Pollock was purely that of artist and patron, and Lee was the intermediary. Pollock himself was rather difficult; he drank too much and became so unpleasant, one might say devilish, on these occasions.”¹¹⁷ Lastly Lee said of Jackson’s demon, “The drinking was something we faced all the time...No one was more conscious about it than he was. Jackson tried everything to stop drinking- medical treatments, analysis, chemistry, everything available.”¹¹⁸ Despite the torment that she went through as his partner, Lee is gracious in offering that the alcohol abuse tormented Jackson the most profoundly.

On a hot day in March 1945, Jackson’s second show opened at *Art of The Century*, including the giant mural Peggy Guggenheim had commissioned for her residence. Writing for the *Nation*, art critic Clement Greenburg offered this stunning review of the exhibit, “Jackson Pollock’s one-man show establishes him, in my opinion, as the strongest painter of his generation and perhaps the greatest one to appear since Miró.” Greenburg continues without equivocating, “I cannot find strong enough words of praise.”¹¹⁹ Greenburg calls Pollock the answer to Cubism as well as the answer to the

¹¹⁶ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 491.

¹¹⁷ Peggy Guggenheim, *Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict* (New York: Universe Books, 1979), in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 226.

¹¹⁸ Engelmann, *Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner*, 31.

¹¹⁹ Clement Greenberg, *Nation*, cited in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 496.

question haunting American art for a decade, “Is there art after Picasso?”¹²⁰ There is an argument to be made that with this review Greenburg attempted to cement himself as the preeminent avant-garde art critic. He defends against naysayers in his piece by stating that all original art is ugly at first, that what matters is originality. The determination of originality required something beyond the average eye. For the generation of American artists that Lee Krasner was a part of, trained in imitation of widely accepted masters, Greenburg turned their worldview upside down, placing Jackson, the complete original, on top.¹²¹

Unfortunately Greenburg’s praise did nothing to abate Jackson’s tortuous self-doubt. High praise did not yet translate into high sales, something other artists around him were beginning to enjoy. Furthermore, the summer heat seemed to bring Jackson’s anxieties to a boiling point. As touched upon in the story of Jack Kerouac, there is something about success that devastates certain constitutions by conversely exacerbating their insecurities. Lee became desperate to get Jackson out of the city as soon as possible.

In August, Lee and Jackson were able to join Barbara and Reuben Kadish on a trip out to Long Island, where the Kadishs were looking to purchase a home. The couple stayed at a place called Louse Point and enjoyed a relaxing six-week vacation. Bicycle trips, clamming expeditions, and long afternoons on the beach were all diversions that lessened Jackson’s temptation to drink. It turned into an idyllic summer away from the stress of the city...at least for Jackson. For Lee, the vacation was not quite so lovely. Not able to drive and being quite shaky on a bike, Lee spent most of the trip house-bound

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

with Barbara Kadish cooking, talking, and tending to the Kadish's children – not exactly Lee's cup of tea. Walks along the beach were mostly shared between Jackson and Reuben. Furthermore, the two men drank nearly every day, which left Lee in a constant state of unrest. However, the trip did seem to reverse Jackson's decline, and though he often drank with Reuben, he would stay on the porch at Louse Point, no car and no bars around the corner to tempt him further. Lee at least knew where Jackson was. Lee realized that away from the city she was relieved from the anxiety-filled nights of wondering when and if Jackson might come home. This gave her an idea.¹²²

Upon returning to New York, Lee suggested to Jackson that they spend the winter on Long Island. During their time on Louse Point, Lee had looked into some winter rentals. Jackson refused, but within a week of suffering the city's noise and heat he suddenly declared that they should move to Long Island year-round. "I wanted to get away from the wear and tear," remembered Jackson about the move. "Besides, I had an underneath confidence that I could begin to live on my painting."¹²³ The couple stayed with Harold and May Rosenberg while searching for a house.¹²⁴

With a plan in place to move to a small town, Lee issued Jackson Pollock an ultimatum. In her words, "Jackson and I had been living together for three years, and I gave him an ultimatum--either we get married or we split."¹²⁵ Lee later attributed her desire for marriage to the loss of her father in late 1944. Pollock agreed on the spot, his only condition that they get married in a church rather than merely apply at city hall for a

¹²² Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 500-501.

¹²³ Berton Roueche, "Talk of the Town: Unframed Space," *The New Yorker*, August 5, 1960, 16.

¹²⁴ The Rosenbergs had just purchased a house on Neck Path in Springs, Long Island.

¹²⁵ Grace Gluek, "Scenes from a Marriage: Krasner and Pollock," *Art News*, December 1981, 60.

license. In his words, “I’m not a dog; I won’t go get a license.”¹²⁶ Not surprisingly it was left for Lee to make the arrangements and find the church. There was significant difficulty in locating a church that would allow for marriage between a Jew and Jackson’s vague Protestantism. Finally a minister at a Dutch Reformed church agreed to marry them. Lee wanted May Rosenberg and Peggy Guggenheim to stand as witnesses, but Peggy declined saying, “Aren’t you already married enough?”¹²⁷ So, the janitor at the church stepped up as the second witness. “It was a beautiful ceremony,” May Rosenberg remembered. “The minister spoke about...beauties in faith...It was a lovely simple ceremony. Quite wonderful. Then we left, and I took them to breakfast or brunch.”¹²⁸

Lee moved very swiftly in securing the couple a house in Springs. It was an old house with a view out the back over Accabonac Creek. The price for the house was \$5,000. It could be rented for \$40 per month with an option to buy as long as there was a \$2,000 down payment. Lee had three months to raise the money. She turned to their benefactor, Peggy Guggenheim. Peggy wrote years later,

Lee was so dedicated to Pollock that when I was sick in bed, she came every morning to try to persuade me to lend them two thousand dollars to buy a home on Long Island. She thought if Pollock could get out of New York, he would stop drinking. Though I did not see how I could produce any extra funds, I finally agreed to do so as it was the only way to get rid of Lee.¹²⁹

The move to Springs was an adventure for the newlyweds. They arrived in November in the midst of a giant nor’easter. At first they had no inside toilet, bathtub, or hot water. War rationing was still in progress, which meant just one bucket of coal at a time; it was frigid during the night. Furthermore, the house was packed full with the

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Lee Krasner, interviewed by Barbara Novak, unpublished, 1979, in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 232.

¹²⁸ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 232.

¹²⁹ Guggenheim, *Out of This Century*, 108.

belongings of the previous owners. It took the couple about a year to get settled. After clearing the house out, they painted the rooms white, and Lee left a few pieces of Victorian furniture about. They decorated with their paintings, dried flowers, pumpkins, shells, and unusual stones. Jackson tore down a wall on the top floor to make a proper studio, which would be his. Jackson and Lee enjoyed gardening, baking, exploring, gathering clams, and working on their new house together. “The country is wonderful,” Jackson wrote to friends.¹³⁰ They acquired a boat and a goat to keep the grass trimmed.

Pollock’s biographers, Naifeh and Smith, make a point in their book to villify Lee as an antisocial witch during this time. They make note of several attempts Jackson made to invite friends to visit, just to have Lee turn them away. They also mention how she always stayed aloof from townspeople in Springs, while Jackson was much more friendly and open. To me, her actions are completely understandable in the context of all she was dealing with with Jackson’s alcoholism. Company led to drinking, and she would inevitably be the one to have to pick up the pieces. Furthermore, it was imperative for their finances that Jackson work, something he wanted to do as well. If he became caught up in drinking and socializing she knew that he would not be productive. Lee was holding together something very fragile and should not be cast in a negative light for protecting the new environment she had worked hard to provide for her husband and for herself. By criticizing Lee in her capacity as caretaker, Naifeh and Smith essentially dismiss the work she was doing as insignificant. In truth, what she was doing in caring for Jackson Pollock was actually the very difficult work of providing him domestic security.

¹³⁰ Engelmann, *Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner*, 36.

There was one person that Lee would allow to come and visit them in Springs, and that was Jackson's mother, Stella. The newlyweds still wrestled all the time with Jackson's drinking bouts as well as the torment that drove him to those dark places. Lee hoped that the move to Springs would completely stop Pollock from drinking, but he still spiraled from time to time. Lee used the distractions of home projects and gardening, but it was not enough. Near the end of the year, 1945, Lee became worried that Jackson would not be prepared for his show in April, and also worried about the increasing number of nights he was spending at a local bar. Lee made arrangements for Stella to visit in January. Stella was the only one with the power to subdue her youngest son. By all accounts, her mere presence had a hypnotic effect on Jackson.¹³¹ Though he came home drunk and delirious the night before (Jackson always drank in anticipation of his mother's visits) he was still there the next day to greet Stella's train when it arrived at the station.

One event that stands out from Stella's visit to Springs is Jackson exploding into a rage when he noticed that Lee was wearing a bit of rouge on her way out to lunch with Stella and May Rosenberg. He shouted, "No wife of mine is going to wear makeup!" And Lee shouted back, "But your mother uses rouge!" May Rosenberg remembered that Jackson became violent, coming very near to striking Lee. His mother sat watching while May sat frozen. Finally, Stella stepped in saying, "Sit down, Jackson." She then confessed to her son that she did wear rouge. He protested like a hurt child, "But you never used to." Stella went on to explain that she wore rouge for Jackson's sake. "When your father died," Stella explained, "my eyes were swollen and I looked terrible. I didn't

¹³¹ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 511.

want you boys to see me like that. I knew you would be frightened. I only did it for my boys.” At that point, according to May, Stella’s eyes welled with tears as she whispered, “It was a sacrifice for *you*.” While Lee and May stood speechless, Jackson immediately became calm. He sat next to his mother, put his head on her shoulder, and swayed back and forth with her like a mother and her baby.¹³² Stella’s visit had just the effect that Lee hoped for. She soothed Jackson and he began to paint again for the first time since the move. For the first year, as everything was getting cleaned out, Jackson used the upstairs bedroom to paint in. He produced eleven oils and eight temperas for the April show.

Another visitor during Jackson and Lee’s early days on Long Island made for a memorable evening. The artist, Robert Motherwell, lived in East Hampton for a season when the Pollocks first moved to Springs. During that time, Motherwell considered buying a property across the road from the new homeowners. Visiting the couple one evening after plenty of drinks Motherwell stated, “I’m going to be the best-known artist in America” to which Lee quipped, “I’d be very lucky to live opposite the best-known artist in America and be married to the best.”¹³³ This remark speaks to both Lee Krasner’s wit and her devotion to her husband.

In the summer of 1946, the Pollocks undertook a major renovation project that would in turn lead to incredible breakthroughs in Jackson’s art. The house in Springs came with a barn at the back. The structure sat in an awkward spot between the house and the harbor, the location rendering it useless as a studio. On top of that, the barn blocked the view from the house to the water. The couple, with the help of a couple of neighbors set out to move the entire structure up toward the house and over out of the line

¹³² Ibid., 512.

¹³³ B.H. Friedman journal entry in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 236.

of sight. After some trials with the actual move and some efforts at renovation (including unpacking the barn, which was full of old iron farm equipment) Jackson moved into his new studio. This allowed Lee to move her studio out of the living room and into an upstairs bedroom.

Lee dedicated immense energy to making sure Jackson could focus on painting. She justified it this way, “Even if I hadn’t been married to [Pollock], I would have been influenced by his work as would any painter who is interested in the development of painting. Pollock and I had a mutual respect for each other’s work.”¹³⁴ It is essential to note that Jackson’s work represented the couple’s best hope for sales. Lee reflected later,

For me, it was quite enough to continue working, and his success, once he began to sell, gave us an income of sorts and made me ever so grateful because, unlike wives of other artists who had to go out and support them, I could continue painting myself.¹³⁵

In regard to her dependence on Pollock financially Lee said this,

Jackson was totally determined to live from the sale of his paintings. He made a real issue of it. Other painters in his circle-Tony Smith, Barney Newman, Adolph Gottlieb-were all supported by their wives, but he couldn’t take that. His attitude was macho; he didn’t want me to go out and work and support him. When his work began to sell a tiny bit, we lived off that. I was able to keep painting that way, so I tried very hard to help him sell.¹³⁶

Lee repeats in several interviews her gratitude for the ability to work on her art. She understood the prejudice she had to deal with as being outside the home to a larger extent than she felt it with her husband. “It wasn’t Jackson who was stopping me, but the whole milieu in which we lived, and the way things were, which I accepted.” She continued,

¹³⁴ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 238.

¹³⁵ Barbara Delatiner, “Lee Krasner: Beyond Pollock,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1981.

¹³⁶ Gluek, “Scenes from a Marriage,” 60.

“Because as long as I could keep working, I was perfectly willing to go along with it, with irritation, with impatience. But it didn’t interfere with my work, and that was the main thing.”¹³⁷ In response to questions of feeling competitive with her husband she made it clear, “Painting is a revelation, an act of love. There is no competitiveness in it. As a painter I can’t experience it any other way.”¹³⁸ During this time, her own images began to emerge from the gray slabs she had faced for nearly three years. The move to the upstairs bedroom offered a new beginning for her.

Also in the summer of 1946, the couple entertained the art critic, Clement Greenburg. Jackson and Lee treated Greenburg with great respect as his influence carried substantial weight. Greenburg’s praise of Jackson had been crucial in buoying the artist’s career thus far. Despite Greenburg’s unfaltering support of Jackson, the two were not close personally. The visit gave Lee a chance to work her own kind of magic. Lee stayed up late, as was Greenburg’s habit, talking with him into the wee hours of the morning. Greenburg relished these evening conversations with Lee, later acknowledging, “[Lee] was damn significant for me. I was learning from her all the time.” He continued by saying, “Without her Jackson wouldn’t have made it the way he did. She did everything. She had a great eye.”¹³⁹ Jackson too, tried his best to relate to Greenburg. He listened carefully to Greenburg’s ideas about his paintings, understanding the sway that the critic held. When viewing some of Jackson’s new work in the new studio, Greenburg responded most positively to those works that were most abstract. Jackson took note. The rest of the summer and fall he pursued the path encouraged by Greenburg. Imagery

¹³⁷ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 240.

¹³⁸ Lee Krasner to Louise Elliott Rago, “We Interview Lee Krasner,” *School Arts*, 60, September, 1960, 32.

¹³⁹ Clement Greenburg to Florence Rubinfeld, interview 2-16-90 in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 241.

began to disappear completely; his brush strokes ignored the edges of the canvas.

Working in his new barn-studio and following the advice of Greenburg, Jackson gained tremendous momentum as an artist. So much so, that he uncharacteristically completed the work necessary for his last solo show at Art of This Century by November when the show would not officially open until January 1947.

Jackson and Lee spent Thanksgiving with Jackson's family, but cut the holiday short as Jackson was terribly anxious to return to Springs and continue working. Lee couldn't believe that even with his show packed off to New York, Jackson still headed out to his studio every morning in frigid winter weather to work. Everyday he would put on all the clothes he had and catch what he could of the morning light before his hands became numb with cold. In those frosty morning hours Jackson Pollock was producing work that would forever alter the course of Western art. He was developing the first of his drip paintings.¹⁴⁰

Lee, too, painted during this time and began to develop a series called *Little Images*. Inspired by her husband, she worked more from instinct than previously.

Engelmann writes of this series of roughly 40 paintings,

Krasner developed an all-over style that has no equivalent with Pollock and is typical of her different character and her old fondness for Cubism. [Paintings] are reminiscent of tablets from a strange sanctuary. In the form a level square, the painting is strictly organized. Even if the vertical and horizontal lines are not joined, they still recall a grid in which squares, rectangles, zigzags, and chevrons interlock. Besides free forms, marks recalling the Greek and Roman alphabets appear. They nevertheless remain enigmatic, their meaning hidden- just like the Hebrew that Krasner studied as a child but soon forgot how to write.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 532.

¹⁴¹ Engelmann, *Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner*, 38.

Not all were able to see Lee's work as independent from her husband. One critic wrote unfairly, "In some wives we see a tendency to 'tidy up' their husbands' styles. Lee Krasner takes her husband's pictures and modifies his impetuous lines into small, neat squares and triangles."¹⁴² Yikes! As a wife just doing some tidying up is not at all how Lee Krasner viewed herself as an artist. She was determined to go her own way.

Jackson and Lee enjoyed a circle of local friends and seemed to be profiting tremendously from their move to the country. That spring they planted a fruitful garden, Stella herself praising her son's cantaloupes and their "wonderful flavor." Jackson's mother also sent Lee an apron, a gesture encouraging her daughter-in-law's culinary efforts. Lee later recalled of this time, "There was a side to the marriage that was cozy, domestic, and very fulfilling."¹⁴³

Perhaps the combination of domestic stability and regained artistic vigor prompted Jackson to tell Lee he wanted to start a family. Lee flatly refused. For her, Pollock was enough of a child. Neither psychologically nor economically did Lee have any more to give to another helpless human. May Rosenberg recalled, "She said she wouldn't have a child by him... *ever*." Living under the constant specter of Jackson's drinking along with what would now be considered a distinct mental illness was already a full plate for Lee. Her refusal, however, threw Jackson for a loop and he "went berserk," according to Rosenberg. Jackson had traditional impulses; for him children went along with being married. He began to worry that Lee had tricked him. However, in due time, Jackson accepted Lee's decision indicating that at least on some level he understood her point of view. The incident did make an impression on Lee though. She began to worry

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 248.

that Jackson might leave her to start a family with someone else; insecurities crept in. While Lee's refusal to have a baby with Jackson may have left her feeling some anxiety, it also reveals that she was in control of her decisions. Lee was not so enamored with her husband, nor so willing to accommodate him that she would become a mother just to please him.¹⁴⁴ It is possible, as some argue, that a child would have helped to balance Jackson's temperament and could have taught him to assume some responsibility for others. This seems unlikely, and was not a gamble Lee Krasner was willing to take.

The spring following Jackson's last solo show at Art of This Century, Peggy Guggenheim closed her gallery and moved to Venice. Guggenheim arranged for Betty Parsons (another woman) to show Pollock's work until his contract ran out. Jackson began honing his drip techniques in preparation for the show. Increasingly, and then exclusively Jackson moved paint across his canvas using paint-saturated tools such as sticks or dried brushes, never actually touching the painting itself. Jackson said of his technique,

I hardly ever stretch my canvas before painting. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall of the floor, I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be in the painting. This is akin to the method of the Indian sand painters of the West. I continue to get further away from the usual painter's tools such as easel, palette, brushes, etc. I prefer sticks, trowels, knives, and dripping fluid paint, or a heavy impasto with sand, broken glass, and other foreign matter added.¹⁴⁵

Jackson was not the only one working diligently during this time. As fall turned to winter, Lee began working on a new project, partially from necessity. Jackson and Lee were only able financially to heat one floor of their house at a time, therefore as winter

¹⁴⁴ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 551.

¹⁴⁵ Kirk Venedoe, "Comet: Jackson Pollock's Life and Work," in *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 48.

set in she began creating mosaic tables downstairs in the back parlor. Her upstairs studio was too chilly, and downstairs provided no privacy to paint so she turned her artistic inspiration to these two mosaics. Lee used shells, pebbles, broken glass, keys, coins, and bits of costume jewelry in the table inlay. For the frame she used two old iron rims of wagon wheels found in the old barn. Lee eventually showed her tables at the Bertha Schaefer Gallery in a show billed as a collaboration between artists, architects, and interior designers for the purpose of creating ideas for inspired modern designs. For the first time, Lee's work was specifically singled out in the press as outstanding.¹⁴⁶ Unfortunately, to celebrate Lee's success, Betty Schaefer invited Lee and Jackson to dinner at her elegant antique-filled home. At dinner, Jackson downed an excessive amount of wine. When Schaefer reached to take the third bottle from him, Jackson exploded in a rage, "What does an old lady like you do for sex?" he screamed. Jackson then began to demolish whichever of Schaefer's antiques were in reach. By the time the prim fifty-year-old Schaefer called the police, Jackson was passed out.¹⁴⁷

Pollock's first show at the Parson's Gallery opened on January 10, 1948 to mixed reviews. Greenburg, of course, celebrated Jackson's new work while other critics reacted with reservation to his incredibly innovative yet strikingly abstract canvases. Jackson's work solicited a disparate combination of both confusion and excitement. A young aspiring artist at the time, Grace Hartigan recalled, "We had just seen the first drip show of Pollock. We were fascinated. I'd seen it, I think, fifteen times."¹⁴⁸ Unfortunately the

¹⁴⁶ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 253-255.

¹⁴⁷ Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 571.

¹⁴⁸ Grace Hartigan, interviewed by Gail Levin, 3-30-2007, in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 250.

enthusiasm of some did not translate into sales and by spring 1948, the Pollocks were again in deep trouble financially. James Johnson Sweeney was able to secure some financial assistance for Pollock so the couple would not starve.¹⁴⁹

To keep Jackson from languishing, Lee loaded the spring and summer weekends with houseguests. When guests came, Lee would spend most of her time in the kitchen, mimicking Stella Pollock by creating lavish all-American meals including pot roasts and gravy, stuffing, potatoes and salad. According to several houseguests from this period, Lee ran the household. She directed and Jackson went along. Directing the house for Lee meant creating a world that served Jackson's artistic needs, minimizing his worry to maximize his output. Lee would teach visitors how to approach her husband, "ask him this way, say this, say that," remembered her sister years later also commenting, "She was usually right." Jackson created and Lee made it possible for him to create. Another guest Patty Southgate said of women in Lee's position, "That was what we thought we had to do in those days-be nurturing. It was machoism, all right, but for turning out a Hemingway or a Pollock, it was well worth the candle."¹⁵⁰

Other summer guests included Elaine and Willem de Kooning. Lee vehemently disapproved of Elaine Fried taking her husband's name. To Lee it seemed a thinly veiled attempt at getting a leg up in the art world. In spite of all the name changing in her own life, Lee Krasner never became Lee Pollock. After their visit with the Pollocks, like so many other guests, Elaine and Bill decided to move to the area. In the coming years an intense rivalry would ensue.

¹⁴⁹ Levin, Lee Krasner, 251.

¹⁵⁰ Ruth Stein and Patty Southgate in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 549.

Another set of visitors that caused some turmoil were the Matters, Mercedes, Lee's old friend, and her husband, Herbert Matter. Mercedes and Herbert rented a house near the Pollocks along with a German couple, Vita and Gustave Petersen. The two men were only around on the weekends as they both worked in the city during the week. Mercedes was well-known for her remarkable beauty as well as for her promiscuity if inspired by the right person. Vita recalled that Mercedes was attracted to Jackson and admired his work. Petersen, too, found Jackson, "adorable, gentle, poetic, a nice and kind person when not drinking."¹⁵¹ The attention that Pollock paid to these two women was painful for Lee at the time. Friend, Fritz Bultman says of the two summer visitors, "Vita and Mercedes were glorious, gorgeous young women."¹⁵² Jackson enjoyed their company and seemed to also be flattered by Lee's jealousy. The tables turned when Igor Pantuhoff visited Springs on his way to someplace else. Though Igor was only passing through for a couple of days, Jackson became overwhelmed with jealousy and his mood blackened. Jackson began drinking and eventually had to be separated from Igor after lunging to fight with him on a walk with other friends.¹⁵³

Jackson's second show at Betty Parson's gallery proved successful. His sales were up and he renewed his contract with Parsons from the end of June, 1949 to run through January 1, 1952. Between Jackson's second and third shows at Parson's he and Lee showed together in the Sidney Janis Gallery's exhibition "Husband and Wife." The show included eight other artist couples, including the de Koonings. The *New York Times* critic Stuart Preston had this to say,

¹⁵¹ Vita Petersen, interviewed by Gail Levin in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 252.

¹⁵² Fritz Bultman in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 568.

¹⁵³ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 253.

On the whole the husbands are the more adventurous, giving ideas their heads, whereas the wives are apt to hold them back by the short reins of the particular scheme of design or color on which they are based. This is noticeably true of the Jackson Pollock as opposed to Lee Krasner's conglomeration of little forms that are both fastened and divided by a honeycomb of white line. In exactly the same relationship are Willem and Elaine de Kooning.¹⁵⁴

Lee's painting is clearly influenced by her husband, but the execution is original to her, and really very different from the style of her husband.

Jackson's biggest press came with a full spread in *Life Magazine*. The August 8, 1949 issue of *Life* featured Jackson standing next to his painting, *Summertime*, looking cool and rebellious with a cigarette hanging from his mouth. The article's headline asks, "JACKSON POLLOCK Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?"¹⁵⁵ In a documentary about Pollock, Dorothy Seiberling, the former staffer for *Life* who wrote the article, recounts that the magazine received an unprecedented number of letters after the article was published, most of them negative. Out of an estimated 500 she recounts that only 20 were favorable. The mainstream response seemed to be that any preschooler, monkey, or accidental garage accident could make paintings equivalent to Pollock's. Whatever the typical American thought, Jackson Pollock was now a household name far beyond the confines of the New York art world. Why he was given this great boost to his career is a bit more complicated than simply his raw talent.

In the post-war period Art became a subject of mass culture in America, prompted by the lack of an American cultural presence that matched its presence on other fronts. In some ways Jackson was the right painter at the right time from the right country. He was

¹⁵⁴ Stuart Preston, "By Husband and Wife," *New York Times*, September 25, 1949, X9.

¹⁵⁵ Arnold Newman, "Jackson Pollock: Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?" *Life Magazine*, August 8, 1949.

boldly American, having been born in Cody, Wyoming, a quintessential Western city. Many of the other artists in his circle were immigrants, not even American citizens. Pollock's art also represented a rawness, vastness, and ambition that appealed to American sensibilities. Furthermore, on a personal level Jackson's voice and mannerisms were macho, manly, and Western – he could be cultivated as a rogue, a cowboy painter.

No one supported Jackson's rising celebrity more than Lee. She truly believed that he was the greatest painter since Picasso. Lee had always had ambition for herself, but in a world extremely prejudiced against women painters there had to be a strong temptation for Lee to realize her ambition through a man who could actually be successful. Lee encouraged Jackson, cared for him, supported him, and created an environment in which he could work with limited worry or distraction. It is largely due to this care, perhaps because of it, that Jackson was able to develop the techniques that garnered this level of recognition.

Another support to Jackson during this time was Dr. Edwin H. Heller, a local general practitioner in East Hampton. It was Dr. Heller who was finally able to get Jackson to stop drinking, prompting the artist's most prolific period of work. Dr. Heller understood that Jackson needed to forgo *all* alcohol. Even the smallest amount can lead to excess for an alcoholic. Dr. Heller also recognized the role alcohol played in numbing Jackson's threatening feelings and inner torment. Jackson did not reveal anything specific Dr. Heller's did or said to keep him on the wagon. Pollock only said of the doctor that he was, "an honest man" and that he could "believe in him."¹⁵⁶ Stella Pollock delighted in her son's sobriety writing to Charles, "Jack and Lee were here and we had a

¹⁵⁶ Francis V. O'Connor and Eugene V. Thaw, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), vol.4, 243.

very nice Christmas..and there was no drinking. We were all so happy. Jack has been going to a Dr. in Hampton...Hope he will stay with it. He says he wants to quit and went to the Dr. on his own.” She continues with Dr. Heller’s advice in mind, “The Dr. told him he would have to leave it alone. Everything wine to beer for they were poison to him.”¹⁵⁷ In 1950, Jackson produced more than fifty paintings; many would become his most celebrated. The year Lee had moved in with Jackson, 1942, he had produced only 8.

Over the summer, at the opening of a show in East Hampton, Jackson met Hans Namuth, a young German-born photographer. Namuth recognized Jackson as the most famous of the contemporary New York artists, and asked for the opportunity to photograph him while he painted. Jackson had been photographed before, for *Life Magazine* and for other articles since, but in these photos he always simulated working. Jackson had never actually allowed a photographer into his space during the act itself. Lee thought that the project would benefit Pollock’s stature and convinced Jackson that it was a good idea in spite of his own misgivings. Namuth had this to say of the experience:

There was complete silence...Pollock looked at the painting. Then, unexpectedly, he picked up can and paintbrush and started to move around the canvas...His movements, slow at first, gradually become faster and more dance-like as he flung black, white, and rust colored paint onto the canvas...My photography session lasted as long as he kept painting, perhaps half an hour. In all that time, Pollock did not stop. How long could one keep up that level of physical activity? Finally he said, ‘This is it.’¹⁵⁸

Namuth was so fascinated with Pollock’s process that he wanted to share it in a more accessible format – he wanted to film it. With Lee’s encouragement, Jackson agreed and a date was set.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Pepe Karmel, “Pollock at Work: The Films and Photographs of Hans Namuth,” in *Jackson Pollock: Key Interviews, Articles, and Reviews* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002), 89.

More attention focused on the couple after an article in the *New Yorker* came out August 5, 1950. "The Talk of the Town," featured an interview with Jackson and Lee. In the article, Lee assumes the air of a domestic goddess, leaning over the stove making currant jelly. The feature does mention that Lee is also an artist, but represents her more vividly in her role as a stereotypical homemaker. Even though Lee was by now an excellent cook and enjoyed cooking, she understood that presenting herself as a typical housewife was important to making Jackson seem less threatening to a wider audience. Jackson told the interviewer of his early childhood near Cody, Wyoming. Lee carefully added, "Jackson's work is full of the West. That's what gives it that feeling of spaciousness. It's what makes it so American." This comment signals Lee's marketing strategy. She made sure to solidify Jackson's position as *the preeminent American painter*, adding to the aura created in the *Life* magazine piece. In the interview, the couple seemed happy, enjoying the sales of Jackson's paintings and life in the country. Toward the end of the article Jackson explained his paintings as without beginning or end. Looking for another angle, Lee added, "That's exactly what Jackson's work is...sort of unframed space." *Unframed Space* became the title for the feature.¹⁵⁹

On November 20th, 1950 *Time Magazine* published an article called, "Chaos, Damn It!" The article suggested that Jackson's work was the result of a ritual imbued with disorder and accident. Jackson never touched alcohol when he worked and was extremely distressed at the suggestion that he was somehow not in control of his art. There were even rumors that the work he produced was nothing more than the delirium of a drunken man. With Lee's help he quickly wired a telegram to *Time* saying: "NO

¹⁵⁹ Berton Roueche, "Unframed Space," *The New Yorker* (August 5, 1950), 16.

CHAOS DAMN IT. DAMNED BUSY PAINTING.”¹⁶⁰ Another time he stated, “I can control the flow of paint, there is no accident...”¹⁶¹ Jackson was extremely upset about the piece in *Time* and began to feel attacked.

Toward the end of November, 1950, Hans Namuth began the project of filming Jackson at work. They could not film inside of Jackson’s studio due to space limitations. Namuth persuaded Jackson to move outside. In order to really get a sense of Jackson’s expression, Namuth decided to film under Jackson, asking him to paint on a piece of glass while the cameras, looked upward at him. In this way, the camera shares the view from the canvas itself. It was a cold and windy Saturday following Thanksgiving when the film was finished. It was also the day that Jackson snapped.

Lee, inside the house, prepared an elaborate dinner party for ten guests. The filming finished late. Jackson stormed into the house from the icy cold, immediately pulling a bottle of whiskey from under the sink and filling two large glasses. His nearly two years of sobriety under Dr. Heller ended in an instant. It did not help that Dr. Heller himself had been killed six months earlier in a car wreck. His trusted physician’s death devastated Jackson, as he had been the only doctor to ever succeed in keeping Jackson sober. Later that evening Jackson began to scream at Namuth insisting, “I am not a phony!” and in turn calling Namuth one. Suddenly, Jackson turned the entire dining table over, destroying all twelve roast beef dinners that Lee had prepared. Ever unflappable, Lee calmly responded by saying, “Coffee will be served in the living room.”¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ *Time Magazine*, November 20, 1950, in O’Connor and Thaw, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 253.

¹⁶¹ Ellen Landau, *Jackson Pollock* (Harry N. Abrams, 2010), 152.

¹⁶² This particular story is cited in a multitude of sources.

There are many factors that contributed to Jackson Pollock's unraveling. Clearly, the death of Dr. Heller was significant. But there was something in particular about the filming of the documentary that caused Jackson to snap that day. It would be difficult to overemphasize the significance of the *Life* magazine article in catapulting Jackson towards fame, but to become famous was to also become exposed. Jackson enjoyed the praise tremendously, and he knew what celebrity could do for him, but it also laid him open to intense criticism and even more daunting, expectation. The film project was tedious. There was a significant amount of rearrangement and repetition. The finished product boosted Jackson's reputation in the world, but privately it unnerved him. In spite of all of his short-comings, Jackson Pollock had a tremendous amount of artistic integrity. He was not a fake. Perhaps the *performance* of painting, rather than the spiritual act of painting itself felt inauthentic to him as he suffered the process of being filmed. Jackson says in the film itself, "It doesn't matter how the paint is being put on as long as something is being said."¹⁶³ Perhaps he felt the voyeuristic process of filming muted his expression. Jackson Pollock, like Jack Kerouac, had no apparatus to handle the glaring headlights of fame. Dr. Heller's death, the Namuth film, and the *Time* article that trivialized his work as chaos, created a perfect storm to throw Jackson off the wagon. There was more bad news to come.

Soon after overturning the dinner table onto the laps of his dinner guests, Jackson's fourth solo show with Betty Parsons opened on November 28, remaining up until December 16, 1950. Pollock showed thirty-two works, many of which are now considered his best. The show, however, was a disaster. Sales were extremely low

¹⁶³ *Jackson Pollock: Love and Death on Long Island*, directed by Teresa Griffiths (1999; BBC documentary).

offering great irony given that most of the paintings are now in collections at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, and the Museum of Modern Art, worth hundreds of millions of dollars. One of the few sales from the show went to Jackson's friend Alfonso Ossorio, who bought *Lavender Mist* for \$1,500. Beyond the issue with sales, the show also garnered mixed reviews. While some reviews were very positive, Jackson could not help but ingest the ambivalent responses from many of the more notable publications. Lee would soon have her hands full. "As Jackson's fame grew, he became more and more tortured. My help, assistance, and encouragement seemed insufficient. His feelings towards me became somewhat ambiguous," Lee recalled of Jackson's descent into fame.¹⁶⁴ Jackson himself worried that he was more famous as a personality than as an artist. Speaking about fame he said, "...that shit isn't for a man. People don't look at you the same, and they're right. You're not your own you anymore- maybe more, maybe less. But whatever the hell you are after that, you're not your you."¹⁶⁵

While the show continued at the Parson's Gallery and for some time after, Lee and Jackson stayed in New York, anxiously awaiting news of sales and also so that Jackson could see a new therapist. In January of 1951, Jackson wrote to his friend Alfonso Ossorio, "I really hit an all time low- with depression and drinking- NYC is brutal...Last year I thought at last I'm above water from her on in- but things don't work that easily I guess."¹⁶⁶ Jackson's drunken behavior was so offensive that Lee and Jackson's social circle began to wither as well. Many were bowled over by Lee's

¹⁶⁴ Gruen, *The Party's Over Now*, 232-233.

¹⁶⁵ Landau, *Jackson Pollock*, 262.

¹⁶⁶ Grace Hartigan, interview by Gail Levin, 3-30-2007, in Gail Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 270.

devotion even under such trying circumstances. Fellow Hofmann student, Linda Lindeberg commented that Lee, “was like [Jackson’s] left hand and though she lived with an alcoholic, never, never did I hear her say anything against Jackson.”¹⁶⁷

Possibly in an effort to acknowledge Lee’s value to him Pollock signed a will on March 9, 1951 leaving everything to his wife. If Lee died first, everything was to go to Jackson’s brother, Sande – his two most consistent caretakers. In a gesture of support, Jackson persuaded Betty Parsons to show Lee’s work in her gallery. “Lee has produced her best pictures yet – they have a freshness and a power to them that she didn’t get before-I think it will be a good show,” said Pollock in a letter to a friend.¹⁶⁸ This was Lee’s first solo show, and it ran for a month beginning on October 15, 1951. The show did not generate sales nor did it solicit much beyond fairly tepid reviews. Lee was disappointed. It is possible that the massive publicity of Pollock’s shows set up an unrealistic expectation for what was typical, especially for a woman painter in 1951.¹⁶⁹ Could it have been lost on Lee that Clement Greenburg did not review her show? After all, it was Lee who introduced Greenburg to avant-garde art, to Hofmann, and to many of the ideas that he then molded into his own approach to aesthetics. Greenburg did review Jackson’s fifth show at Parson’s later that fall writing now for the *Partisan Review* he effused of, “achieved and monumental works of art, beyond accomplishedness, facility or taste.” Continuing, “If Pollock were a Frenchman, people would already be calling him ‘maitre’ and speculating in his pictures.” Greenburg announced Pollock as “the best

¹⁶⁷ Linda Lindberg quoted in Cindy Nemser, “The Indomitable Lee Krasner,” 7, in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 271.

¹⁶⁸ Jackson Pollock to Alfonso Ossorio, quoted in Lee Krasner to Cindy Nemser, “A Conversation with Lee Krasner,” *Arts Magazine*, April 1973, 44.

¹⁶⁹ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 275.

painter of the whole generation.”¹⁷⁰ In spite of Greenburg’s praise Pollock’s sales remained very low, prompting him to leave Parson’s and sign a contract with Sidney Janis.

This was a very difficult period for Lee and Jackson as a married couple, their bond was pushed to the breaking point. Jackson was trying a variety of doctors and treatments to stem the tide of his overwhelming urge to drink, but he seemed to be losing the battle. Lee took care of Jackson for years, yet in this period she began to lose herself, slipping into what would now be termed “co-dependency.” At some points in their life together the relationship was mutually beneficial, but under the growing strain of Jackson’s downward spiral, Lee’s health began to deteriorate. She suffered from colitis and other very painful stress-induced digestive problems. The burden of trying to keep Jackson from drinking became just as destructive as the drinking itself. As Lee’s biographer states, “[Jackson’s] needs, which may have initially appealed to her wish to be maternal, had by now become suffocating.”¹⁷¹

Pollock, as he suffered more and more began focusing his anger toward Lee. He felt tremendous bitterness that she refused to have children with him. In order to get back at his wife or provoke her, Jackson would flirt with other women publicly, in front of Lee. Jackson purposefully chose women that were younger than Lee and more conventionally attractive, including her old friend Mercedes Matter. Mercedes, though married to Herbert Matter, was having an affair with art critic Harold Rosenberg (who was also married, to May Rosenberg). Clement Greenberg, Jackson’s staunch supporter

¹⁷⁰ Clement Greenberg, “Art Chronicle: Feeling is All,” *Partisan Review*, January 1952. Drawing another parallel I think it is interesting that Greenburg titles his piece, “Feeling is All” – it was Jack Kerouac who said “The Voice is All.”

¹⁷¹ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 277.

was competing with Rosenberg to be the greatest art critic of their time. Rosenberg saw that he could diminish Greenburg by criticizing Pollock, and promoting Willem de Kooning. Rosenberg was also having an affair with Elaine de Kooning who used her sexuality to promote her husband's work. Mercedes was jealous of Elaine and thus would use Pollock to provoke jealousy in Rosenberg, who would then write negatively about him. Elaine was also sleeping with Thomas Hess, a powerful art critic at *Art News*. All in all, the tangled interests of the art critics caused a great deal of stress for Jackson and Lee. Jackson was hurt by many of the innuendos Harold Rosenberg made about Jackson's work, suggesting slyly that it had no audience and was not wanted.¹⁷² Also distressing was Rosenberg's clear support of de Kooning. Lee, of course, must have been hurt by Jackson's attentions to other women; however, she maintained her singular focus on helping Pollock to get ahead.¹⁷³

Lee arranged Jackson's first show at the Janis gallery, lasting from November 10-29, 1952. Janis asked Lee if she thought that the market was too saturated with Pollock's work. Lee replied, "Sidney, the surface hasn't even been scratched," a prescient statement that shows her continued belief in Pollock's genius and legacy.¹⁷⁴ Jackson showed twelve paintings, mostly old ones and sales were not good. By now, Pollock could not access the same vigor for work that he had in 1949 and 1950. His celebrity seemed to be crushing him. Soon he slipped into an even deeper crisis. By some miracle, or deep seeded instinct for survival, Lee arose from the darkness of her husband's depression. She rallied from the lackluster reviews of her Parson's show by

¹⁷² Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News*, December 1952.

¹⁷³ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 283.

¹⁷⁴ Sidney Janis quoted in Gruen, *The Party's Over Now*, 247.

destroying much of the work she had done for it. Lee also tore down many of the drawings that hung in her studio, and in an act of catharsis destroyed them as well. A few weeks later, Lee picked up the pieces of her torn up work and began to make collages in a form of clarification and of growth. Lee's own artistic output grew exponentially as she found her medium – a combination of paint and collage made from her old recycled paintings, a style she used extensively until 1956. Lee's work became her life raft.¹⁷⁵

In the summer of 1953, Jackson worked to try and paint again and produced a few major canvases in the face of great depression and self-doubt. But by mid-October he was more dysfunctional than ever. There were so few paintings that for the first time in a decade he was unable to put together a solo show at all in 1953. Janis had to postpone Jackson's next show until February, 1954. In this show, Jackson showed ten paintings. In 1954 and 1955 he produced only four, they were to be his last. Because Pollock's contract with Sidney Janis required a show every November this caused a problem. Without new work available what could be done to honor the contract? Lee and Sidney eventually persuaded Jackson to agree to a retrospective. In turn, Jackson's earlier paintings became highly sought after, a product of his celebrity and the buzz surrounding him. He was famous and wealthy, but in the worst shape of his life. The pressure was too much.¹⁷⁶

A new neighbor of Jackson and Lee's in Springs recognized that Lee was in a desperate situation. Patsy Southgate felt strongly about helping Lee and decided to teach her to drive. Driving had long been seen as a way for women to boost their confidence. For teenagers as well, the car meant liberation from being trapped in the house. Now Lee

¹⁷⁵ Englemann, *Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner*, 66.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

could go shopping, see friends, or be on her own; she had a way to escape the darkness of her existence with Jackson. Needless to say, this only fueled Jackson's insecurities.¹⁷⁷

Clement Greenberg also made note of how Lee's illness changed her. In 1955 she was still recovering from a severe attack of colitis from the year before. Greenberg related,

Before Lee got sick she was pretty intense; always talking about art. What do we think of this? What do we think of that?...Now Lee, I'd always had respect for. She was formidable; made of steel. And so competent at everything...Then when she was soft after her colitis, she didn't give a shit anymore, for a while. It was delightful that she didn't give a shit about what she thought about art. That was all off, she thought about life...Jackson couldn't stand it. I'll go on record here. That's when he began to turn on her.¹⁷⁸

Greenberg remembers his visit to the Pollocks in 1955 this way, "That summer they were fighting all the time and I'd be there... Well, I thought, 'Why don't you get out?' ...She [Lee] had this drunkard husband on her hands. I don't like calling Jackson a drunkard, but that's what he was." Greenberg spelled out the tragedy with a final statement, "He was the most radical alcoholic I ever met, and I met plenty."¹⁷⁹

As Lee's nephew Ronald Stein saw it,

Lee had been madly in love with Jackson, just like the way a young girl worships a hero: as a man, as an artist, as an image. The difficulty started when her physical and mental powers gradually began to deteriorate and she became less and less capable. Alcohol turned their love into hardship and pain...He might have been a genius, but he was also a common drunk.¹⁸⁰

Lee refused to give up. On the advice of Greenberg she sought out a new therapist for Jackson and for herself.

¹⁷⁷ Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 292-293.

¹⁷⁸ Clement Greenberg, "Jackson Pollock" quoted in Florence Rubinfeld, *Clement Greenberg: A Life* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 195.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Ronald Stein in Englemann, *Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner*, 74.

Lee soon entered therapy with a bizarre doctor named Leonard Siegel, who was influenced by the teachings of Harry Stack Sullivan.¹⁸¹ Part of Siegel's therapy, influenced by "Sullivanianism" encouraged the breaking of bonds with family members and close friends. Siegel saw mental illness as relating to the necessity of solving interpersonal problems that caused anxiety. Ironically, it was Siegel who became dependent on Lee, seeking *her* out for comfort. Lee's friend, Cile Downs, remembered that "Siegel, like Jackson, wanted Lee to coddle him."¹⁸² Downs also remarked that Siegel was one of the Sullivanians who "believed that therapists should sleep with their patients." Siegel became so dependent on Lee that she eventually had to give up on him as her therapist.¹⁸³

Jackson's new therapy proved even less helpful. Pollock began seeing Ralph Klein in New York City in the fall of 1955. Klein, also a proponent of the Sullivanian methods for psychoanalysis, did great harm to Jackson. Klein did not accept Jackson's dependence on alcohol as a problem. A friend of Jackson's concerned about his nutrition phoned Klein who in turn assured Jackson's friend that beer was very nutritious. Furthermore, the group of psychoanalysts that Klein belonged to believed that they were the seedlings in a new society that would promote complete freedom and personal fulfillment. Klein also saw interpersonal relationships as harmful and he encouraged Jackson to break all ties. Monogamy was unacceptable; Klein encouraged Jackson to have affairs and to fulfill his desire to have a child. According to Lee, Dr. Klein had even

¹⁸¹ For more information on Sullivan see Helen Swick Perry, *Psychiatrist of America: Harry Stack Sullivan* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1982).

¹⁸² Cile Downs interview with Gail Levin, 2010, in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 296.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 296.

told Jackson that it was all right for him to drink and drive. Eventually the New York State Board of Regents forced Klein to give up his license. Gail Levin writes,

Many considered the Sullivanian Institute to be a cult because it was said to permit sexual relationships between licensed psychologists and their patients, to foster the use of controlled substances, to promote the destruction of family relationships, and to commit other violations of professional standards.¹⁸⁴

Unfortunately none of this occurred before Jackson was heavily influenced by his sessions with Klein. Lee later spoke of being in a perpetual state of crisis at this time with Pollock.¹⁸⁵ She was living with a powder keg.

In 1955, Jackson told his homeopath, Dr. Hubbard, that he had not painted for a year and half because he wondered if he was saying anything. Meanwhile in a strange twist, his reputation continued to soar. In May of 1956, the Museum of Modern Art told Pollock that he would be featured in a solo show of twenty-five works. He was easily the most famous artist in America. In an interview that June Pollock said, "Painting is a state of being...Painting is self-discovery. Every good artist paints what he is."¹⁸⁶ Yet, Jackson was silent.

Lee finally reached her breaking point when Jackson began to have an affair openly and blatantly with a much younger woman. While attending his therapy sessions in New York, Jackson would go to the Cedar Bar where all the artists gathered. Audrey Flack, a young painter at the time went to the Cedar Bar alone one evening in the hopes of meeting her artistic heroes: Pollock, de Kooning, and Franz Kline. Flack did meet Pollock at the bar and describes how he tried to "grab me, physically grab me-pulled my

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Jackson Pollock, interview by Selden Rodman, 1956 in Selden Rodman, *Conversations with Artists* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1957) 275.

behind-and burped in my face...He was so sick, the idea of kissing him- it would be like kissing a derelict on the Bowery.”¹⁸⁷ Flack was so disgusted that she never went to the Cedar Bar again. Not long after her ordeal, however, she met Ruth Kligman. Kligman had just moved to New York City from New Jersey, was stunningly beautiful and had a libidinal desire to meet famous painters. She asked Flack who was important in the art world and Flack replied, “Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, or Bill de Kooning.”¹⁸⁸ Kligman went right to the bar with the intention of meeting Pollock. By all accounts Ruth Kligman was extremely physically attractive, having “an Elizabeth Taylor aspect.” Jackson was smitten, having always suffered from sexual insecurities.

Kligman wrote a bizarre memoir of her affair with Jackson titled, *Love Affair: A Memoir of Jackson Pollock*.¹⁸⁹ In it she writes about insisting that Jackson was married and that she should move on with her life, but that Jackson would not allow it. Probably accurately Jackson would say, “My analyst says the opposite. That we’re good for each other. I told him all about you, and he encouraged me.” She also writes that Jackson would ask about her family history and tell her that he planned to marry her and fantasized about having a child. These sorts of expressions are consistent with the behavior Klein would promote in his patients. Jackson was aroused by Ruth and would parade her in front of his friends on the beach. According to Patsy Southgate (the Pollock’s neighbor), “we talked a lot about Ruth and we talked a lot about Lee; he was very excited about Ruth and terribly afraid of Lee, desperately afraid of Lee...He viewed

¹⁸⁷ Audrey Flack, interview by Gail Levin, September 4, 2010, in Levin, Lee Krasner, 306.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ruth Kligman, *Love Affair: A Memoir of Jackson Pollock* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1999).

the whole thing as an amazing adventure; he wondered if he could pull it off with Lee...Like a little boy, his dream was to have both.”¹⁹⁰

This situation was completely intolerable for Lee, particularly when Jackson and Ruth spent the night in his studio with Lee asleep in the house next door. As she had before they got married, Lee gave Jackson an ultimatum. This time it was either her or Ruth. Lee was leaving for Europe in three days for several weeks and gave Jackson that time to think over his decision. It was Lee’s first trip to Europe.

With Lee gone, Jackson moved Ruth immediately into the house, but it was not the blissful honeymoon that either of them may have hoped for. Jackson missed Lee and was rude to Ruth, occasionally slapping her. About their sexual relationship Kligman wrote,

His sexuality was stronger than my needs, and I didn’t know any longer what I felt. It was good, but I couldn’t feel what he did. Somehow when he was the aggressor I lost my feelings. His lust overpowered me. His was a life struggle, and mine a proof of my femininity.¹⁹¹

After just a few weeks together Ruth described their pretend married life as less than idyllic,

Gloom pervaded our lives. We stopped talking about it, but it hung in our space like a heavy gas...My landscape turned gray, my horizon became sad. I felt weak all the time. He was horrendously miserable, his moods blackened every day, his nights were fits of agony.¹⁹²

When Lee left for Europe in July it was meant to be a trial separation, but Jackson and Lee were so entwined that it was upsetting for both. On July 21, 1956, Lee wrote to Jackson from Paris:

¹⁹⁰ Jeffrey Potter, *To a Violent Grave: An oral Biography of Jackson Pollock* (Wainscott, N.Y.: Pushcart Press, 1985), 230-231.

¹⁹¹ Kligman, *Love Affair*, 149.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 163.

I'm staying at the hotel Quai Voltaire, Paris, until Sat. the 28 then going to the South of France to visit with the Gimpel's [sic] and I hope to get to Venice about the early part of August- it all seems like a dream. The Jenkins, Paul & Esther, were very kind, in fact I don't think I'd have had a chance without them. Thursday nite [sic] ended up in a Latin quarter dive, with Betty Parsons, David, who works at Sidney's, Helen Frankenthaler, the Jenkins, Sidney Geist & I don't remember who else, all dancing like mad. Went to the flea market with John Graham yesterday- saw all the left-bank galleries, met Druin and several other dealers. Am going to do the right-bank galleries next week. I entered the Louvre which is just across the Seine outside my balcony which opens on it. About the Louvre I can say anything. It is overwhelming- beyond belief. I miss you and wish you were sharing this with me. The roses [that Jackson sent her] were the most beautiful deep red. Kiss Gyp and Ahab [their dogs] for me. It would be wonderful to get a note from you. Love Lee-The painting her is unbelievably bad (How are you Jackson?)¹⁹³

On August 11th, Clement Greenberg telephoned Lee in Paris to tell her that Jackson was dead.

In a drunken stupor, Jackson had crashed his car into a clump of trees and flipped it over. In the car with him, Ruth Kligman survived the accident. Tragically, an innocent friend of hers, Edith Metzger, was also killed in the accident. Jackson was forty-four years old. Lee was now a widow at forty-seven.

In a book titled, *Lee Krasner: A Retrospective*, art historian and critic Barbara Rose writes,

As long as Pollock was alive, Krasner could not afford to enter the world of trancelike "otherness" in which he operated when he painted. Her feet at least, had to be securely planted on the ground...No matter how turbulent or agitated her imagery becomes, her images are always securely anchored to the top and bottom edges of her canvas, the explosive movement contained within the frame.¹⁹⁴

After Jackson's death Lee Krasner rallied both emotionally and artistically. She went on to have a vibrant career as an artist, both enhanced and made difficult by her association

¹⁹³ O'Connor and Thaw, *Jackson Pollock Catalogue Raisonné*, 276. Also reproduced in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 309.

¹⁹⁴ Rose, *Lee Krasner*, 98.

with Pollock. In some ways his death gave her the freedom to be creative, no longer dominated by his overwhelming needs. While Pollock was alive Lee devoted herself to the practical matters of daily life, just as her mother had done before her. Some wondered if Lee had been born just a few decades later if she would have tolerated so much from Jackson. Barbara Rose maintained that had Lee and Jackson lived during the advent of feminism, perhaps she would have “dumped the genius.” To this Lee responded, “I think I would do the same, identical thing all over again in the presence of talent like that, but it takes that kind of talent to move me. Anything else is for the birds.”¹⁹⁵ Lee Krasner always felt a true reverence for the beauty and power she witnessed in her husband’s paintings.

After Jackson’s death, Lee singlehandedly managed, by slowly letting go of them over time, to drive up the prices of her late husband’s work and in turn the work of the other abstract expressionists in their circle. In a 1965 article in *Esquire* magazine on “The Art Establishment,” Harold Rosenberg wrote, “It is hard to think of anyone in the Establishment who exceeds the widow [Lee] in the number of powers concentrated in the hands of a single person.”¹⁹⁶ Many believed this to be a savvy business move on her part, after all, she died a multimillionaire. However, it is more likely that her slow parting with Jackson’s paintings had to do with her deep love for her husband and her steadfast devotion to his work. After his death she said, “The marriage couldn’t have been more

¹⁹⁵ Barbara Rose, *Krasner/Pollock: A Working Relationship* (New York: Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University, 1981).

¹⁹⁶ Harold Rosenberg, “The Art Establishment,” *Esquire Magazine* (January 1965), 43.

rough, sure it was rough. Big deal. I was in love with Pollock and he was in love with me. He gave an enormous amount, Pollock. Of course, he took too.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Lee Krasner, quoted in Amei Wallach, “Lee Krasner, Angry Artist,” *Newsday*, November 12, 1973, in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 315.

ETTA MOTEN AND CLAUDE BARNETT

“So since I'm still here livin',
I guess I will live on.
I could've died for love—
But for livin' I was born.” -- Langston Hughes

“ To seek love as a quest for the true self liberates.” – bell hooks

Etta Moten Barnett's life spanned the entire twentieth century. She lived to be 102 years old, passing not long ago in 2004. In those 102 years Etta lived an extraordinarily full life. She evolved gracefully with the passage of time, able to incarnate herself again and again to suit the ever-changing roles she inhabited. Etta's life can be characterized as combining elements of fortitude, elegance, and original thinking. Before the age of 23, Etta found herself in the difficult position of being a divorced single mother to three young daughters. Due to the lack of opportunities for African-American women in the early 20th century, this life-circumstance could have derailed her entirely. She had not yet finished high school and now faced substantial responsibility. Yet remarkably, by the time Etta died she had acquired a dizzying list of awards and accomplishments including several honorary degrees and important “firsts.”

As Etta's story unfolds in the following pages it becomes clear how it differs from the previous chapters, not only because she faced the dual challenges of being African-American and a woman (during both Jim and Jane Crow), and not only because she faced her future as a single mother, but because her support systems were different and that was an essential element to her success.

Etta Moten was born in Weimar, Texas, on November 5, 1901, the only child of Freeman and Ida Norman Moten. Freeman served as an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) minister. His vigorous sermons made a deep impression on the young Etta as did his teachings from the pulpit. Etta's mother sang in the choir and encouraged her daughter to sing too, fashioning a box covered in cretonne and flowers for Etta to stand on while she singing. Etta had a big alto voice that came to life in the church choir at an early age. According to Etta it was "not the sort of voice you would expect from a child." Because of these experiences singing with her mother she became comfortable performing and acquired a sense of confidence in her own abilities, as well as a maturity beyond her years.¹

Due to Freeman's career as a minister, the Motens moved often, all throughout Texas and eventually for a stint in California. It is clear time and again that Etta's parents took great care with their daughter's education – wanting her to have the best that they could provide. In fourth and fifth grade, Etta attended Paul Quinn College in Waco, Texas, an A.M.E school her father graduated from as a theologian. At Paul Quinn Etta sang with the school chorus and earned a scholarship at ten years old. When she returned home from school in the summers, Etta taught her own Sunday school class to even

¹ Ann Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett: A Kansas City Tribute* (Unknown publisher: 1997).

younger students. In an interview done with Etta through the Black Women Oral History Project at the Schlesinger Library, Etta described the importance of her time at Paul Quinn as giving her a “taste of the honey,” in other words a desire for learning. She also credits Paul Quinn with giving her a background in classical music to compliment her versatility in the realm of spirituals.²

Also worthy of mention from Etta’s formative years are her experiences with grandparents as well as her exposure to a variety of cultures. Etta considered her mother’s family to be matriarchal, her maternal grandmother’s background being Choctaw Indian. Her mother’s was a small family in rural Texas. In contrast, Etta experienced her father’s side of the family as being patriarchal. Her paternal grandfather had a large farm and a family of fourteen children borne by two (consecutive) wives. Due to the constant movement of the Moten family Etta was exposed early on to a variety of cultures in and around Texas in the first decades of the twentieth century. “I learned Spanish by rote from our Mexican-American neighbors,” remembered Etta. She also recalled “Dutch” suppers at her grandmother’s house learned from the German families in their community.³

After Etta spent two years at Paul Quinn, the Motens moved to Los Angeles in 1914. Here Etta for the first time had white teachers at the public schools she attended. Even though she had lived in a segregated Jim Crow south in Texas, Etta claims that segregation never particularly bothered her. As a young girl she saw it as the only world she had ever known. Etta stated in a 1985 interview:

² “Interview with Etta Moten Barnett,” in *Black Women Oral History Project*, ed. Ruth Edmonds Hill, 137-233 (Westport: Meckler, 1991), 2: 145.

³ Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 4.

...although I knew that you drank out of segregated fountains...you just didn't want any water, so you drank your water at home, you know. And you went into the "for colored" section when you went up to get in the railroad station to go on the train. But we just went there and went in time to get on the train, you know. You just accommodated yourself to that, like all the grown people did around you.⁴

Etta continued by stating that no changes in cultural environments ever fazed her, but she does admit to feeling very happy the first time she arrived in Brazil and saw that everybody was brown. Perhaps mitigating any discomfort or otherness Etta may have felt as a child was her father's deep and abiding commitment to race pride. She said of him:

That word [race pride] was used a lot during my day, and Papa was very much of a race- pride man. He preached it all the time; he lectured it. I can remember on the 19th of June was always a big day in Texas. The 19th of June was the day on which emancipation was celebrated. It was emancipation in Texas because the crops were laid by on the 19th of June...the Negroes of Texas celebrated with great barbeques and great parties and great picnics, union picnics with the Sunday schools of all denominations...Papa was a great speaker, and then they would bring speakers from out of town, Roscoe Conklin Simmons would come down from Chicago. Booker T. Washington would come, Fredrick Douglass, way back, before I...while I was a little girl...But those were the good days, you know, that you had these orators come and speak about the history of the Negro and that sort of thing.⁵

Etta's pride in both her family and her race served as a constant and guiding force for her throughout her life, the seeds of which were sown at a very young age in a community that celebrated its own power and history.

After just two years in California, Freeman Moten transferred again, this time to Kansas City as a residing elder. Etta was fourteen at the time the family made the move from California to Missouri. Rev. Moten would stay in this area until his death in 1953. Upon arriving in Kansas City, the Motens bought a house at 25th and Michigan. Their new neighborhood stood adjacent to the famous jazz clubs and honky-tonks at 18th and

⁴ Hill, "Interview with Etta Moten Barnett." 149.

⁵ Ibid, 150.

Vine. The 18th and Vine district is famous for being a cradle of jazz music, especially in the 1930s and 1940s as well as being the historic center of African-American culture in the area. The musical dynamism of 18th and Vine would be significant in integrating black music into mainstream American culture.⁶

The move to Kansas City provided Etta with a fortuitous educational opportunity. As usual, Etta's education earned top billing in her family's list of priorities. The question was never would Etta go to school, but when and where.⁷ In 1916, she was able to enroll in Western University at Quindaro, Kansas. Western was likely the earliest black school west of the Mississippi and the best black musical training center in the Midwest during the early 1900s through the 1920s. For young black ladies, education of this quality was not easy to find in a safe environment. Fisk University, founded in 1866 in Nashville, Tennessee, a historically black college, was one such institution. Fisk made its name in music through concerts and tours by the Fisk Jubilee Singers.⁸ Also Howard University in Washington D. C. offered music classes and developed a strong music program at the turn of the century. Western University at Quindaro was the outgrowth of an old Freedmen's school founded in 1862. In the 1850s and 1860s, Quindaro Bend, six miles upstream on the Missouri River from what would become Kansas City provided a natural concealed harbor for slaves escaping Missouri. The farmer, Abelard Guthrie who owned the land in the vicinity had a wife named Quindaro who was a Wyandotte

⁶ Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 5. See also Frank Driggs, *Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Be-Bop—A History* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁷ Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 6.

⁸ For an excellent resource on the Fisk Jubilee Singers see Andrew Ward, *Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), and Bernice Johnson Reagon, *We'll Understand it Better By and By: Pioneering African American Gospel Composers* (The Wade in the Water Series, Smithsonian Institutions Scholarly Press, 1992).

Indian.⁹ He and his wife helped slaves to safety along the Underground Railroad. In 1861, Kansas entered the Union as a free state, but most citizens of Kansas were not free of racial prejudice and refused integration in public education. A local landowner and Presbyterian minister, Eben Blanchley, organized classes in his home with the intention to teach ex-slave's children and by September, 1862 a school was in operation in an old brewery building converted into a classroom. In 1865, the Quindaro Freedmen's School was incorporated and registered. Blanchely stated his vision for the school, "To secure the advantages of the higher culture in all departments and professions to the colored races, pure and mixed."¹⁰ State support was withdrawn in 1873 due to a plague of grasshoppers that caused extensive crop damage in Kansas. The school revived in 1881 due to interest from the AME church. The land was deeded over, and it was renamed Western University. Like most early black colleges, it was essentially an elementary and secondary school.¹¹

Western University entered its next period of evolution in 1896 when William Tecumseh Vernon, a young AME minister, became its president. Vernon placed himself firmly in the camp of Booker T. Washington emphasizing the necessity for vocational/trade education for African-American youth. Although Vernon believed in the philosophies put into action by Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee, his vision encompassed even more. Vernon's motto "head, heart, and hands for the home" represented by 4 H's on a four leaf clover with a W in the center later became the emblem for the 4-H clubs across America. Vernon both expanded and developed the

⁹ The name Quindaro fittingly means "bundle of sticks" or "in union there is strength."

¹⁰ Register of Deeds Office, Wyandotte County, Book 1, 523.

¹¹ Helen Walker-Hill "Western University at Quindaro, Kansas (1865-1943) and Its Legacy of Pioneering Musical Women" in *Black Music Research Journal* vol.26, No. 1 (Spring, 2006) 7-37.

curriculum and the faculty throughout the school in order to facilitate the highest and most well rounded education possible for the students at Western. In this spirit, in 1903 Vernon added a music department with Robert G. Jackson at its head.¹²

The school, largely self-sustaining, printed and published sheet music composed by its students as one avenue to generate income. Western concerned itself largely with the uplift of the race, a sentiment and call felt by many middle-class African-Americans elsewhere in the United States.¹³ The ideals of racial uplift were particularly cultivated in Western's female contingency – with a focus on respectability, refinement, competency, and responsibility. Female students were closely monitored and adhered to a strict dress code as well. Smoking, drinking, and dancing were unequivocally prohibited, while church attendance was mandatory. As Helen Walker-Hill states in her article on Western:

For black women everywhere, the effort to disprove the stereotype commonly accepted among whites of slovenly, immoral ignorance resulted in behavioral standards far above those required of white women. It is no accident that while dozens of ragtime pieces were written and published by white women, none written by black women have been found.¹⁴

For Etta, Western provided her a sense of history, the education she craved, and the ability to hone her already impressive musical skills.¹⁵

Etta recalled the impact that Western's history had on her, "John Brown had been on that ground," she said. "He led some black soldiers across that river and we could see from the girls' dormitory the wilderness and we knew that history was there." John

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Walker-Hill, "Western University at Quindaro," 13.

¹⁵ Ibid., see also Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

Brown's legendary battles in bleeding Kansas made a huge impact on the African-American community in the 1850s, and his powerful presence was still fresh in the hearts and minds of black students at Western a half a century later. Etta was thrilled to be on what she considered hallowed ground.¹⁶

Also exciting for Etta was her summer job traveling the Circuit Chautauqua with the Jackson Jubilee Singers – a group modeled after the Fisk Jubilee Singers and under the tutelage of Robert G. Jackson. This served as Etta's first professional experience. The Circuit Chautauqua provided travelling lectures and entertainment to small cities and towns, mainly rural areas many who did not yet have access to radio. As described by the University of Iowa libraries special collection's website:

To its supporters [The Circuit Chautauqua] meant a chance for the community to gather for three to seven days to enjoy a course of lectures on a variety of subjects. Audiences also saw classic plays and Broadway hits and heard a variety of music from Metropolitan Opera stars to glee clubs. Many saw their first movies in the Circuit tents. Most important, the Circuit Chautauqua experience was critical in stimulating thought and discussion on important political, social and cultural issues of the day. As with the early lyceum movements and Chautauqua assemblies, the goal of the Circuit Chautauquas was to offer challenging, informational, and inspirational stimulation to rural and small-town America.¹⁷

Music was always a crucial element in the circuit. During these summers, Etta would travel with the Jubilee singers for ten to twelve weeks covering sometimes four or five states. Also according to the University of Iowa libraries, there were many Jubilee singing companies that appeared on the circuit based on the original group from Fisk University. For the largely white audiences these spirituals and singing groups demonstrated a very different way of seeing African Americans in performance than

¹⁶ Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 6. For a well-written and comprehensive biography of John Brown see David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slaver, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).

¹⁷ <http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/sc/tc/>

minstrelsy offered.¹⁸ This was how Etta paid for her own education. The niece of Robert Jackson, Dorothy Hodge Johnson remembered Etta during her years with the Jackson Jubilee Singers and recalled the groups' lively concerts of popular music and spirituals, including shouts. Her uncle wanted the music to remain lively.¹⁹

Also at Western, Etta worked as head waitress in the dining hall, serving the teacher's table, which was considered a prestigious job at the time. This job led to a life-changing encounter in Etta's life, the meeting of her first husband. Etta recalled how they met:

We [the students and faculty at Western] shared the dining room with military personnel. We ate at one time, they ate at another, they cleaned up the kitchen and the dishes and we, students and teachers, did ours. As head waitress in charge of the dining room, I also kept count of things ordered in the kitchen. The chef, Mr. Landor, sent me to the Academic Department where the head of the Business Department gave me assistance in keeping the books. There was this young good-looking Second Lieutenant, Curtis Brooks. Things got very interesting between the two of us, looking over a shoulder, touching. Things began to happen without words, you know.²⁰

It was not long until the prospect of marriage arose. Etta knew that her father would not be pleased if she eloped. According to Etta, Freeman said explicitly to his daughter, "Never run away. Never elope. Let me know." The young couple asked Freeman's permission and he gave it to them, marrying the two soon after. Etta's father felt concern that his daughter had not yet graduated high school, but Curtis Brooks was moving to Oklahoma to go into business, and being young and in love, Etta did not want to be left behind. Even though it was her senior year, Etta left school as Mrs. Curtis Brooks.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Dorothy Hodge Johnson in Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 7.

²⁰ Etta Moten Barnett in Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 8.

There is very little information in Etta's archive or in interviews about her six-year marriage to Lt. Brooks. What is known is that the newlyweds moved to Langston, Oklahoma, where the handsome and well-dressed Brooks went to work. Etta said of her first husband's job, "He opened a very fine store in Okmulgee, Oklahoma. He wasn't an Indian but he helped many of the Indians there." According to Etta, Oklahoma enjoyed great prosperity during this time. Of her marriage Etta stated years later in her demure way, "As soon as we were married things happened and we got to the real marriage stage. We had four children in seven years [one child died in infancy]."²¹ In another interview Etta stated simply, "It didn't gel."²² Etta remembered being naïve and unschooled in birth control methods reflecting years later, "How do you know anything about birth control? You don't know, so you had them as fast as they'd come."²³ Another time she explained, "...He said every time he hung his trousers on the bedpost I got pregnant. He was quite a ladies' man, which led to divorce."²⁴ To divorce in this era was highly unconventional even though the divorce rate did spike after WWI.²⁵

Etta took her children and moved back to Kansas City to her parents' home. For a couple of weeks she took a job selling silk underwear door-to-door, but Etta very quickly discovered that pounding the pavement in the hot Kansas City sun was not how she wanted to spend the rest of her life. Etta wanted to complete her high school education in the hopes of attaining more meaningful work. In a gesture of understanding and support, her father offered to care for the children full-time so that Etta could return to school.

²¹ Etta Moten Barnett in Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 8.

²² Hill, "Interview with Etta Moten Barnett," 152.

²³ *Ibid.*, 153.

²⁴ Etta Moten Barnett in Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 9.

²⁵ For an informative look at the changing attitudes toward divorce between 1880 and 1920 see Elaine Tyler May, *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

During Etta's final year at Western, Antoinette Jackson (the wife of R.G. Jackson), who was also a member of the Jackson Jubilee Singers came to Etta and suggested that she continue her education at University of Kansas. Antoinette said to her young friend, "Oh girl, you look so old. People are wearing bobbed hair and you're not stylish anymore. You've got to go where there are some young people."²⁶ Etta resisted the idea at first. Six years of having babies and washing diapers made enrollment in a four-year college seems like a distant fantasy, but Antoinette persisted. Antoinette herself had enrolled at University of Kansas just forty miles away from Kansas City in Lawrence. She encouraged Etta, and again Etta's parents agreed to care for the three little girls while Etta went to University.²⁷ It is not difficult to imagine how drastically Etta's options would have shrunk were her parents not so willingly supportive.

Etta soon entered the University of Kansas School of Fine Arts with a major in Voice and a minor in Speech. She made the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, which became a source of pride for her, as they were the top academically of all the fraternities and sororities on campus. Because Etta entered as an older student she served as a house-mother at the sorority. On weekends Etta returned to Kansas City to visit her family. Every Sunday she taught Sunday school at Bethel AME church near her parents' home and directed the choir.²⁸

One difficulty in researching a woman like Etta Moten is that all of the transitions throughout her life appear to be graceful. She does not offer any sense of anguish or turmoil in making decisions or completing lofty goals. Etta's archive keeps the

²⁶ Hill, "Interview with Etta Moten Barnett," 153, and Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

researcher at arm's length, revealing very little intimate or personal information. It is up to the researcher then, to fill in the blanks wherever possible and to imagine the bravery that it must have taken for Etta to leave her children in order to make a better life for them. Opportunities, while vital to success, also require the individual to rise to the occasion. Was Etta excited? Nervous? Apprehensive? Confident? The answers to these questions Etta does not reveal, but it is clear that her parents had confidence in her and that had to count for a lot. She did disclose to one interviewer, however that "When you go to college on your own you know what you're going for and you attend to business," making it clear that whatever feelings she had about her decision she was determined to toe the line.²⁹

At University of Kansas Etta faced the same discrimination that most other African-Americans faced in higher education. Of the 6,000 students enrolled at KU at the time, there were only 150 students who were black. The school held a discriminatory policy stating that black students were not allowed to use the campus swimming pool. This was an issue for African-American physical education majors for whom swimming appeared as a requirement to graduate. Etta, among others, complained to the Chancellor and the rule was changed.³⁰

Etta paid her way through University by directing the church choir in Kansas City, acting as house-mother in the sorority house, and by continuing to travel with the Jubilee Singers and R.G. Jackson in the summers. Etta also had a radio show in Lawrence through the WREN station where she garnered a significant following. In spite of this demanding schedule Etta participated in a musical comedy her junior year at KU.

²⁹ Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9

“K.U. had an all-Negro play, a comedy, and I was in it,” recalled Etta. Because she was in the Voice Department the directors included a song for Etta to sing called “Look Down that Lonesome Road.” According to Etta, “It was the talk on campus.”³¹ Etta’s senior recital in 1931, garnered the burgeoning singer even more attention. The local paper reported:

Before one of the largest audiences ever to attend a senior recital at the University of Kansas, Etta Moten, contralto, presented a program of song last evening at the K. U. auditorium in a manner that won for her an outstanding success. Fully 1,000 listeners were present, nicely filling the main auditorium floor and with a large number in the balcony. A large attendance from Kansas City was present where Miss Moten has made herself known by previous concert and recital appearances... With a pleasing personality and excellent stage presence, coupled with a contralto voice of real beauty excellently trained, she went through the exacting program with the ease of a professional artist.³²

Etta sang in Italian, German, French, and English. The large attendance for Etta’s recital was partially due to the popularity of Etta’s radio show where she would sing spirituals as well as popular songs of the time with a quartet to accompany her. The show aired once or twice a week with a fairly wide-reaching signal. After the triumph of her senior recital, the Dean of the School of Fine Arts, Donald Swarthout, called Etta to his office and encouraged her to go to New York to try her luck at a career in singing and acting.³³ This was just the push Etta needed to take yet another leap. Etta’s parents and three daughters attended her graduation ceremony that spring, her youngest daughter now seven.

Before leaving for New York the summer after her graduation from KU, Etta secured a teaching job at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. For her this

³¹ Ibid.

³² The local paper is not specified in Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 10.

³³ Dean Donald Swarthout was the longest tenured Dean in the School of Music at KU, serving from 1923 to 1950. The recital hall at KU is named after him. He also served as president of the Music Teachers National Association for many years.

contract served as an insurance policy for the Fall semester in case New York ended up being a bust. Fortuitously, a white classmate of Etta's whom she sat next to in French class hailed from the windy city of Chicago; the girl's father wrote to Etta and invited her to stay with the family on her way to New York. Though she does not mention it specifically, Etta's parents appear to have agreed to continue to care for her daughters, allowing Etta to travel to New York and pursue her career as a singer.³⁴ A clue as to Etta's state of mind is reflected in a comment recorded decades later when she said, "Everybody I know is in [the theater] for a purpose – and it's generally economic. In my case it was my daughters. I want to take care of them and give them a good education. And I have done it."³⁵ Though whether or not she felt anguish in leaving her children is not known, it is clear here that she made the choices she made with them in mind.

Upon arrival in Chicago that summer, Etta contacted Mr. Helsom, the father of her former classmate. Mr. Helsom worked as a fundraiser for Provident Hospital, the first black-owned and operated hospital in America. Mr. Helsom was very solicitous in introducing Etta to various people, suggesting that he believed in her talent. These people included the head of the National Association of Negro Musicians as well as the head of the Associated Negro Press, Mr. Claude Barnett. Claude Barnett served on the board of trustees at Provident Hospital. Being the head of the Associated Negro Press piqued Claude's interest in a potentially up and coming African-American singer. He was always on the look out for someone appealing to interview for his wire service.

³⁴ Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 10. In her interview in 1985 with Ruth Edmonds Hill, Etta says that the girl was her classmate in Italian class rather than French.

³⁵ Moten quoted in "Porgy and Bess' Star Doubles As Wife and Mother," undated, Box 427, Folder 3, Claude A. Barnett Papers. She later states, "And I've done it," reflecting pride in her achievements as a mother.

The two, Etta and Claude, made an appointment to meet in his office for an interview.³⁶ It was 1931.

Claude Barnett was born in Sanford, Florida, in 1889. His parents, William and Celena Anderson Barnett lived in Florida only temporarily. Claude's father worked in hotels, traveling south in the winter, and in the summers as far north as Minnesota. Nine months after Claude's birth, the Barnetts moved to Illinois, perhaps seeking a more permanent residence for their son. However, due to the nature of hotel work, Claude's father continued to earn his living away from home. It seems that Claude's father was not a particularly influential figure in his son's life. William and Celena's marriage disintegrated, and William died before the turn of the century. In the autobiography that Claude Barnett began before he passed away in 1967, titled "Fly out of Darkness," he mentions his father only to say that he worked in hotels and could speak Spanish. Lawrence D. Hogan, an historian of the Associated Negro Press and in turn Claude Barnett, suggests that William Barnett's contact with Cuban hotel workers in Florida was likely the reason for his fluency in Spanish.³⁷

It was Claude's mother and her family who are credited as being major influences in Claude's life. Celena Anderson Barnett's family lived in Mattoon, Illinois, in Coles County. Prior to moving to Mattoon in the 1870s, the Andersons had lived in Lost Creek Township in Indiana. Before Lost Creek, the Andersons traced their history even further back to free blacks who worked as sharecroppers in North Carolina. In the draft of Claude's autobiography he attributes the move to Lost Creek as being prompted by

³⁶ Hill, "Interview with Etta Moten Barnett," 157.

³⁷ Lawrence D. Hogan, *A Black National New Service: The Associated Negro Press and Claude Barnett, 1919-1945* (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 1984), 39.

patrollers, “paddy rollers” who threatened the livelihood of the free blacks in the area.³⁸

According to Etta, Claude’s family traveled by covered wagon from North Carolina to Lost Creek around 1835.³⁹ Lost Creek contained a population of freemen and escaped slaves who established a farming community in western Indiana near what is now Terre Haute. Celena, a native of Lost Creek, imbibed its tradition of freedom and striving for advancement.⁴⁰

The Anderson family moved to Mattoon in the early 1870s, possibly as early as 1869. Celena’s father, Jacob, was hired to teach in the community’s first public school for African-Americans.⁴¹ According to Hogan, Claude’s grandparents were very proud people whose example he cherished.⁴² Taxes in Mattoon at the time were assessed by wards, and Mary Anderson, Celena’s mother, was told by the assessor that she would have to pay a special tax since she sent her children to the white school closer to her home. When Mrs. Anderson refused to pay “the city fathers closed the Negro school and threw her husband out of a job.”⁴³ Jacob Anderson found his next employment at the Essex House, a hotel in Mattoon that stood at the intersection of two major rail lines. The Essex House Hotel housed Abraham Lincoln before his debate with Stephen Douglas in nearby Charleston in 1858. It was also the place where U.S. Grant rallied Illinois volunteers to send to the Civil War battlefields. Later Jacob acquired two barbershops

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Hill, “Interview with Etta Moten Barnett.” 180.

⁴⁰ For further details on communities such as Lost Creek see Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana* (Indianapolis, IN 1957) 31-55. And for further information on Lost Creek see Robert Barrow and Lawrence Hogan, “Black Family Life in Nineteenth Century Indiana: The ‘Promised Land’ of Lost Creek,” paper presented at Generations: The Family in American Life, Indianapolis, IN, March 27, 1982. Hogan, *A Black National News Service*, 39 and 52.

⁴¹ Hogan, *A Black National New Service*, 39.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Claude Barnett, “Fly Out of Darkness” p. 2 in Hogan, *A Black National New Service*, 39.

that served white patrons. An uncle of Claude's and son-in-law to Jacob, George Jesse, whom Claude mentions as a special influence was grandmaster of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Lodge of Masons. The Masons were known to promote the ideal of cooperation in business. Claude himself joined the Masons at some point in his life and remained a member for most of his life.⁴⁴

Claude's mother Celena was the third of five daughters. Etta describes her as a "wonderful woman."⁴⁵ Celena had an inquisitive mind. Well-read herself, she would chose to work for families that had libraries so that Claude could have access to their books. Her inquisitiveness led Celena to try a variety of religions including faiths as esoteric as the Rosicrucians. She held a desire to understand the world around her, and a desire that her only son might have the opportunity to go on to pursue excellence. Eventually, Celena moved with Claude to Chicago into the home of one of her sisters, who also helped to raise the boy. She took a job working for Richard Warren Sears, the founder of Sears, Roebuck, and Company in his home, a choice that would make a lasting impression on her son, Claude.

In considering his own influences, Claude Barnett ranked Mr. Sears as *the* man (outside of the men in his mother's family) who affected his development the most profoundly. At an "impressionable age" Claude went to work for Mr. Sears at his home in Chicago. Claude recalled of that experience, "I was houseboy and general factotum...My principal job was serving breakfast to Mr. Sears. I admired him tremendously and he not only talked quite intimately with me but used to give me tickets

⁴⁴ Hogan, *A Black National New Service*, 40.

⁴⁵ Hill, "Interview with Etta Moten Barnett," 181.

to the theater and concerts.”⁴⁶ Etta claimed many decades later that Claude “patterned his life after [Mr. Sears].”⁴⁷ To illustrate this impact Etta speaks anecdotally of Claude ordering his syrup straight from Vermont because Mr. Sears used to send to Vermont to get his syrup.⁴⁸ It is not difficult to imagine the grand impression Mr. Sears would have made on a young Claude Barnett given the business magnate’s immense affluence in tandem with the sincere interest he took in the boy. Even after Claude left the Sears household for college he worked summers in the grocery department at the Sears store in Chicago, proud of his role as “the only colored employee who was not a janitor.”⁴⁹

Also according to Etta, it was Mr. Sears who suggested that Claude attend the Tuskegee Institute, Booker T. Washington’s school in Alabama. Etta told an interviewer in 1985,

Mr. Sears told [Claude’s] mother that it was time for [Claude] to know something about his own people. So [Mr. Sears] had read about this Booker T. Washington and that school that he had in Tuskegee. In fact, she ought to send him there. So they sent him to Tuskegee as a young boy.⁵⁰

The time Claude spent at the Tuskegee Institute provided an internal compass and a way of viewing the world that would stay with him the rest of his life. “No institution,” Claude wrote later, “has exerted so profound an influence on my life as Tuskegee Institute.”⁵¹

Many scholars have chronicled the oppositional viewpoints held by Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

⁴⁶ “Fly Out of Darkness,” p.1, Claude A. Barnett Papers, 406.

⁴⁷ Hill, “Interview with Etta Moten Barnett.” 181.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “Fly Out of Darkness,” p.1 Claude A. Barnett Papers, 406.

⁵⁰ Hill, “Interview with Etta Moten Barnett,” 182.

⁵¹ Claude Barnett, quoted in Hogan, *A Black National New Service*, 41.

regarding the advancement of the African-American race in the United States. By the early twentieth century, these two men were the most influential black thinkers in the country. Though they agreed on some points such as the value of education and the critical importance of moving the race forward, they were in conflict over how to achieve those goals, partially due to their backgrounds. DuBois was born in the north, attended some of the best schools in the country and became the first African-American to earn a PhD, from Harvard University in 1895. Through his graduate study DuBois developed expansive ideas, even traveling to Berlin to study with Max Weber. Prior to graduate school, DuBois encountered the open bigotry and repression of the Jim Crow South for the first time while attending Fisk University. This experience made a deep and lasting impression on him, and he returned to his studies in the north with nothing less than equal rights for African-Americans as his ultimate and sustaining goal. Booker T. Washington, in contrast, was born a slave. Self-educated, his approach to white people differed greatly from his rival, DuBois. While DuBois favored civil rights and political enfranchisement, Washington placed more emphasis on economic development and the importance of black owned businesses. Washington's pragmatism is often criticized as being accommodationist and ultimately supporting the ethos of Jim Crow, a form of second-class citizenship that left the racial power structure intact. DuBois saw the need for agitation and a grasp for power that would ultimately sow the seeds of the Civil Rights Movement in America.

Washington's idea that in pursuing business success a black entrepreneur could both realize economic gain *and* earn the respect of white Americans who counted was realized in that he himself gained the support of many white Americans that mattered,

including Andrew Carnegie and Teddy Roosevelt. Thus for Washington and his followers, personal business accomplishments became a service to the black race as a whole. Claude Barnett wrote of the reverence he felt for Booker T. Washington as a young student at Tuskegee,

It was there [Tuskegee] as a boy I virtually sat at the feet of Booker T. Washington and drank in the magic of his strength, his vision, his matchless wisdom. Dr. Washington's Sunday night talks were highlights of my week and it was with an almost abnormal eagerness that I waited for these inspiring visits with genius in the hushed beauty of the old chapel.⁵²

According to Lawrence Hogan, Claude served as Washington's office boy while at Tuskegee and was singled out by the principal as someone deserving of special attention.⁵³

After graduating from Tuskegee, Claude set out to put into practice the philosophies of his mentor, Booker T. Washington. Part of the Tuskegee's aim was to promote among its students a sense of realism about the opportunities available to them. This sometimes meant a lowering of expectations with the idea of preparing the road for future generations. As Claude himself would later explain, "convinced that a colored boy of twenty didn't stand a chance of fulfilling his dream of becoming an engineer, I settled for a Post Office job which carried with it a surprising amount of status."⁵⁴

Work at the post office exposed the inquisitive and energetic young Claude to the advertising side of journalism as he sorted through thousands of newspapers, magazines, and circulars. The pictures and the advertisements in particular captured his interest. In 1913, at an exposition that commemorated the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Hogan, *Black National News Service*, 41.

⁵⁴ "Fly Out of Darkness," chapter 1 p. 5, Claude A. Barnett papers, 406.

Claude discovered an opportunity to sell portraits of famous blacks similar to those he had seen at his work. The success of this venture encouraged him to set up a mail-order business in black portraits. Demonstrating the pluck fostered at an institution like Tuskegee, Claude began to purchase whatever small space in newspapers his funds would allow. He also designed brochures to spark interest in his new business. This success gave Claude the momentum to try selling advertising space for black newspapers and magazines. Soon the ambitious young man was working nights as a postal clerk, selling pictures of famous blacks during the day, as well as contracting space to agencies in Chicago and to space-buyers in other parts of the country. By 1916, Claude, spurred on by the success of Madame C.J. Walker decided to organize the Kashmir Chemical Company. His new company would produce and distribute cosmetics. Kashmir enjoyed remarkable success in an already jam-packed field, which Claude attributed to his use of beautiful black women in advertising. According to Claude, his results were such that cosmetic advertising as a whole switched to this more positive approach first put forth by Kashmir.⁵⁵

In the fall of 1918, the results of working both night and day caught up to Claude as he neared the edge of physical exhaustion. Advised by his doctor to rest, Claude set out on a leisurely trip to the west coast to visit his mother and stepfather who had moved to Elsinore, California. As per usual, Claude took his enterprising spirit along with him. As he traveled, Claude worked out an arrangement with the *Chicago Defender* to serve as a circulation and advertising agent. As he worked his way out west, he stopped in small towns, appointed agents, and did promotional work. This arrangement gave Claude

⁵⁵ "Fly Out of Darkness," in Hogan, *Black National New Service*, 44.

many pleasurable contacts as well as offering opportunities to promote Kashmir products. Of great importance as well was Claude's ability to gain an insider's view into the operation of the *Chicago Defender*, which was at the time the greatest newspaper black journalism had ever known.⁵⁶

This trip proved extremely enlightening for Claude. He realized the financial potential of association with a national paper of the *Defender's* status. Three black-owned oil companies contracted with him for full-page advertisements. His commission became so large that he "disdained the physical labor involved in carrying around the bulky case of pictures and the relatively heavy bag of Kashmir products."⁵⁷ Most notably, Claude saw firsthand how influential and important the *Defender* was to the vast number of African-Americans who read it. In his own words Claude relates,

I talked with news agents and stood at their stands to watch the people who came on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays to buy the paper. I talked with these people and found that they felt the publication was a sort of beacon of hope pointing the way to a new day...They regarded the man who directed the destinies of it as a man who was not afraid to tell white people what he thought of them.⁵⁸

These experiences ignited in Claude a spark of inspiration as well as a resolve to become a part of what seemed a world of opportunities. As he visited editors across the country, Claude noted the frustration they experienced in attempting to get news from other regions. At times editors were put in the awkward position of waiting for the *Defender* to come out in order to rewrite what appeared in its pages. This led Claude to imagine a news service that could respond to this need. He hoped that the larger black papers would support an effort to expand news-gathering capabilities and in turn provide

⁵⁶ Hogan, *Black National New Service*, 44.

⁵⁷ Claude A. Barnett, quoted in Hogan, *Black National New Service*, 45.

⁵⁸ Barnett, ANP Proposal for the Improvement of Negro Life in America, "A Program for Adult Education for Negroes," Claude A. Barnett papers, 328.

readership with news that was much broader geographically. By the end of Claude Barnett's sojourn to California he completed "plans for a press service to feed news to papers across the country." It would be modeled after the Associated Press. Claude began to contact editors and arrange for participation across the country.

Claude initially hoped to partner with the *Chicago Defender*; in exchange for "financial midwifing" Barnett promised that large numbers of black papers would subscribe once the service established itself. Each member would then gather and transmit news on a regular basis from its region. Robert Abbott, the founder of the incredibly successful *Defender*, refused Claude's offer. This proved a substantial blow to Claude as he saw the potential benefits all blacks could gain from a cooperative news service, but it was dependent on participation. Claude appealed for financial backing from his own Kashmir Chemical Company. Claude did not need a large sum, as he expected to secure further financial support through the weekly fees of member papers. The board of directors at Kashmir did provide financial backing and in 1919 Claude Barnett established the Associated Negro Press, the first black news service.⁵⁹

Although in the beginning Claude's goal was to meet the professional needs of participating clients, he kept alive the hope of something larger and more meaningful.

After only one year, Claude wrote of the ANP that,

...with its world-wide service, is the starting point of the future of Race Journalism. It is a clear-cut demonstration of what the race is achieving in its general relation to the progress which is everywhere manifest among the peoples in all sections of the earth...It places within the reach of our newspapers...the expert results of an efficient newsgathering organization that scours the world for race news.

⁵⁹ Hogan, *Black National News Service*, 48.

This grand vision may not have actually been realized yet, but it was certainly alive in Claude Barnett's spirit and ambition. For Claude, the ANP was always meant to emulate the ideals of Tuskegee. It was to be a financially profitable venture that would also uplift and advance the African-American race. Within several years, the ANP would front its own reporters in major U.S. cities and abroad, and during the 1930s would weather the ravages of the Great Depression. By WW II the ANP would serve approximately 200 black papers in the U.S. and abroad. When Claude Barnett met Etta Moten in 1931, the ANP was 12 years old and well established if not financially lucrative.⁶⁰

Historian Adam Green in his book, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955*, views Barnett as something of an historical anachronism. While the twentieth century trajectory for African-Americans rises toward the struggle for civil rights, full political enfranchisement, and a move away from dependency, Claude's life harkens back in many ways to the more traditional approach learned from his days at Tuskegee. Claude remained throughout his life a Lincoln Republican; this allegiance was complicated only slightly by his affinity for the race progressivism ushered in by the New Deal. Green identifies Claude as Tuskegee's most exemplary graduate of the twentieth century.⁶¹ Supporting this estimation, Claude called his installation in 1932 as school trustee, the first alumnus to be honored in this way, his "signal achievement."⁶² According to Green, for most scholars Claude "has proved awkward" due to his status as a representative of residual values rather than a beacon of a new age.

⁶⁰ Throughout its long history the ANP rarely broke even, sometimes running annual deficits approaching the thousands.

⁶¹ Interestingly Claude graduated with a degree in steam-fitting. Etta joked later that he couldn't even turn on the radiator in their house. Clearly the real education was not the technical one.

⁶² Claude A. Barnett quoted in Green, *Selling the Race*, 94.

Yet, it can also be argued that it was Claude Barnett's moderation that allowed him to establish himself in such a key role. As Green states,

The singular scope of the ANP – the most ambitious black press institution in the country before the advent of Johnson Publishing – assured its solicitation by a range of parties, including industrialists, labor activists, the State Department, diplomatic offices, composers, writers, actors, conservative educators, left activists, inveterate nationalists, and unrepentant assimilators.⁶³

Claude's comfort with the "clientage" premise for race relations led him to continually come up against the line between accommodation and complicity.⁶⁴ In spite of this client/broker style of race politics, Claude was also fluent in the language of black dissent and well respected among many in those circles as well. Ultimately as Linda Evans at the Chicago Historical Society describes it,

The ANP was the largest and longest-lived news service to supply black newspapers in the United States with news of interest to black citizens, opinion columns, reviews of books, movies, and records, and occasionally poetry, cartoons, and photographs. The ANP provided its member newspapers with professionally written, detailed coverage of activities within black communities across the country and the latest news about national trends and events. It thereby helped create a national black culture and increased black awareness of national news. It also provided a national forum for black leaders, helped set professional standards of news writing for the black press, aided many small black newspapers to survive, and enabled black journalists to gain reporting experience.⁶⁵

It is likely that due to the attention his business required Claude Barnett had not had much time to consider the merits of wife and family. By the 1930s not only did Claude run the ANP, he also served as president of the board at Provident Hospital, and as director of the Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company, the first black owned and

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁶⁴ Clientage refers to people who are under the protection of others. In this context it explains how African American writers, performers, journalists, musicians, etc. can get financial and social support from white sponsors, who then consider their African American friends as "clients" who look to them for protection and advancement.

⁶⁵ Claude A. Barnett papers, 1918-1967. Descriptive Inventory for the Collection at Chicago History Museum, Research Center. by Linda J. Evans, 2014.

operated insurance company in the northern United States. It is not difficult to imagine that the arrival of Etta Moten, passing through Chicago on her way to New York, reminded the now 42-year-old Claude that there was more to life than work.

The first meeting between Etta Moten and Claude Barnett actually occurred the evening before their scheduled appointment. Etta's friend's father (Mr. Helsom) learned of a dance being given by the National Association of Negro Musicians and arranged for Claude to be Etta's escort for the evening. Claude picked up the young singer, walking from 35th to 41st street where she was staying. The two strolled along together talking and getting to know one another. Etta recalled in an interview decades later one very important message she related to Claude that night, "Well," Etta made a point to explain to Claude, "I'm really not interested in anything but my career and my children. I am not thinking of marriage at all."⁶⁶ She admits that Claude mentioned no such thing in their first encounter and chuckles as she deemed her comment as coming "out of the clear blue sky."⁶⁷ Nonetheless, it *is* clear from this comment what Etta had on her mind as she headed east, and it was not another marriage. Maybe she made this proclamation to Claude because she sensed some interest from him or maybe she was simply reminding herself to stay focused.

The next day Etta met Claude at his office for their official appointment. "Mr. Barnett was a peculiar kind of man," Etta told an interviewer later. "I never knew him to go to others; he always had people come to him. Even then my ego was 'if you want to talk to me, why should I come to you' but anyway I did go."⁶⁸ Etta differs here slightly

⁶⁶Hill, "Interview with Etta Moten Barnett," 158.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Etta Moten Barnett quoted in Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 12.

from the women in previous chapters. She made clear to Claude (the evening before) that her focus was children and career, which indicates that Etta had already made an internal decision to put her own life, and those of her children, before any outside relationships. Etta determined that she could and would prioritize her own abilities and values. Then, this follow up statement indicates that not only did she decide what she wanted to do, but she carried with her a confidence that she could do it. What Etta calls ego is just as much a willingness to centralize her own life and purpose. This is corroborated by her description of what occurred in Claude's office when they met. Etta recalled, "The next day I was to go to his office. The first thing he asked me was, 'What makes you think you'll do well in New York?'" Etta then replied with confidence, "Because I think I'm good." "Go to New York,' [Claude] said, and gave me a handful of letters of introduction to the Negro newspapers there."⁶⁹ These opening scenes to their relationship set the stage for a continuation of mutual respect and support. Etta headed to New York City the next morning, letters in hand.

In New York, Etta met and stayed a couple of weeks with Eva Jessye. After catching buzz of Etta's senior recital at KU it was Eva Jessye who extended the invitation to come to New York and sing in her choir. Eva Jessye, also a graduate of Western University, worked at varying times as a poet, journalist, singer, composer, and musical director for both stage and for films. She became famous as the choir director for the original *Porgy and Bess* and is also credited as the first black woman to receive international distinction for such work. Through her creative, collaborative, and professional exertions her productions gave many artists their first break. Etta Moten was

⁶⁹ Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 12.

one of these people. In a description of her arrival at Penn Station where the renowned Eva Jessye met her, Etta paints a romantic picture of taking the A train to 8th Avenue and 145th Street, the sunlight beaming down into Harlem.⁷⁰ It's easy to imagine the excitement Etta must have felt as this new world opened up to her. All the way from Kansas, Etta Moten had arrived in New York City with the Harlem Renaissance in full swing.

Etta's first concert with The Eva Jessye Singers proved a smashing success. Soon Etta called and asked her father to cancel her contract to teach; she was staying in New York City. Presumably at this point her parents and her daughters were used to their arrangement in Kansas City, though this would be the first time that their mother was very far away and would not be able to visit on weekends. Again, there is very little information on the emotional content of these decisions. Eva Jessye introduced Etta to numerous people in the city. After the first concert Etta participated in, someone asked Eva Jessye if she knew of a singer who could sing songs like Ruth Etting, popular, ballad-type songs. Eva recommended the newly transplanted Etta Moten. In the coming days, Etta headed to her first theater in New York for casting.⁷¹

At the theater, Etta discovered the deep desire held by many African-Americans to make it to Broadway. Many participants in this show were famous in the black community, people with long and accomplished careers. In spite of these achievements, prejudice and discrimination had prevented access to the most famous street in New

⁷⁰ Etta Moten Barnett Papers [Box 3, Folder 8], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

⁷¹ Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 12.

York.⁷² This particular show was a revue being put together by an Englishman and heading to Broadway. Through her participation Etta got to know Zora Neale Hurston, who wrote some of the skits. Other participants included Jackie Mabley, later known as Moms Mabley, Tim Moore, and Dusty Fletcher. In the orchestra was Ben Webster, historically recognized as one of the three most important jazz saxophonists, later a cohort of Duke Ellington. Also, William Grant Still, a violinist and composer who eventually would be awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship. All of these people rehearsed diligently hoping to get their chance on Broadway. The producers cast Etta in this show, called *Fast and Furious*, alongside Billy Daniels. Etta could not believe that her first show found her in the same company as these great performers on their way to Broadway.⁷³

Unfortunately *Fast and Furious* did not last long on Broadway. “We went on fast and came off furiously,” Etta quipped in an interview. However, during one of the very few performances of *Fast and Furious*, Etta managed to solicit yet another opportunity. Someone very impressed with Etta’s performance in *Fast and Furious* invited her to audition for another show called *Zombie*. Etta got the part due to her ability to speak French as the story took place in Haiti and required a realistic French patois. The show ran two months on Broadway and then contracted to go on the road toward Hollywood.

During these first few months in New York, Etta kept in regular contact with Claude Barnett. Every experience she had she described to him through letters. When she went to Lewisohn Stadium and saw the great Hall Johnson conduct his magnificent

⁷² For an in-depth study of Ridgley Torrence’s staging of *Three Plays for a Negro Theatre*, the first dramatic production featuring an all black cast on Broadway see Susan Curtis, *The First Black Actors on the Great White Way* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001).

⁷³ Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 13, and Hill, “Interview with Etta Moten Barnett,” 159.

choir she wrote to Claude about it.⁷⁴ Claude then published her review. “This is the kind of thing he did,” remembered Etta later, “When I’d write him a letter that he said was interesting, he’d publish it.”⁷⁵ This process and exchange of writing and publishing shows the value Claude placed on Etta as an arbiter of taste and sophistication.

As the *Zombie* show traveled westward it stopped in Chicago. It was during this visit that Claude and Etta became even closer. In Etta’s words, “I had a Stage Door Johnny, every night [Claude] came to take me home...I changed my mind about the marriage business. We got to talking marriage, and I had an understanding that one day we would.”⁷⁶ When Etta left for California, Claude gave her another handful of letters to take with.⁷⁷ *Zombie* did not succeed in California, but the trip resulted in yet another break in Etta’s upward moving career.

While in California her phone rang one day and it was the renowned actor, Clarence Muse. Muse said to Etta, “Claude Barnett has told me you were out here. I want to see you. Furthermore, can you sing ‘St. Louis Blues?’”⁷⁸ Etta said “yes” without hesitation though she had never tried singing the blues before. To never say “no” was the show business advice she had received along the way. Furthermore her own father gave her this counsel, “Anybody who can sing a spiritual can sing the blues, because it’s all in what you’re thinking about.”⁷⁹ When Clarence Muse brought Etta to the sound stage to audition in front of Leo Forbstein and Warner Brothers, her thoughts elicited just the

⁷⁴ Hall Johnson was an African-American composer and arranger who elevated the African-American spiritual to an art form, comparable in its musical sophistication to the compositions of European Classical composers.

⁷⁵ Hill, “Interview with Etta Moten Barnett,” 158.

⁷⁶ Hill, “Interview with Etta Moten Barnett,” 160.

⁷⁷ Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 13.

⁷⁸ Hill, “Interview with Etta Moten Barnett,” 160.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

right feeling and she personified the blues. Etta hoped to get a part in a movie, but instead was given a part to sing “Saint Louis Blues” in the background while another actress, Barbara Stanwyck, appeared on screen.

This kind of work became a bittersweet way of performing for Etta. There are several movies where Etta’s voice can be heard, but she is never seen and worse, she is not credited. Still, Etta earned a living in Hollywood for a time doing such work. She stated in an interview, “they scarcely told you where your voice was going to be used, almost like a blood bank. You don’t know where it’s going to go...But you kept doing that. You did that a lot, dubbing your voice for others.”⁸⁰ Soon, however, the winds shifted and Etta’s chance to actually appear onscreen came fully to fruition causing a splash and helping Etta to make history.

In his bid for the presidential election in 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt promised to “remember the forgotten man.” The soldiers who had fought in WWI were now standing in bread lines as the Great Depression ravished the country. “The Forgotten Man” became the subject of a segment in a Busby Berkeley movie called *The Gold Diggers of 1933* starring Dick Powell and Joan Blondell. Berkeley, known for his spectacular musical productions, directed the film to appear in various segments. Etta auditioned to sing “Remember My Forgotten Man,” and got the chance to appear on screen singing this ode to America’s forgotten men. This appearance rocketed Etta toward instant fame in the African-American community.

⁸⁰ Etta often used the word “you” in reference to herself, an old-fashioned form of reference. Ibid.

The black newspapers around the country celebrated Etta's appearance because she was the first black woman to *ever* appear in a movie and not play a mammy or a maid or someone with a menial job. She appeared instead as an attractive war widow. Etta described her own success as follows,

So the Black newspapers that Claude sent...it was syndicated, the criticisms and so forth. And when it was shown, *The Gold Diggers of 1933*, this segment caused Negroes to line up in front of those theaters, where it was showed all through the South and all through the south side of Chicago, all through Central Avenue in Los Angeles, all up and down 7th Avenue in New York and downtown at the Palace Theater. Around the corner, they were, you see, because the Negro newspapers had said, 'This is our new star. This is our star.' It was a small part comparatively, except the voice did go all the way through. But you got several glimpses of me there...It was almost pathetic to have such a small part, and so grateful for the stereotype to be broken, that the Negro people were grateful for that. They patronized that picture. They took their children to see it.⁸¹

At her 100th birthday celebration, the legendary Harry Belafonte spoke to the impact of this movie, "[Etta] gave Black people an opportunity to look at themselves on the big screen as something beautiful when all that was there before spoke to our degradation. In her we found another dimension to being Black in our time."⁸² No one felt more pride in Etta than her parents, but even their viewing of the film spoke to the insidious racism of the time.

The Gold Diggers of 1933 came to Kansas City in July, 1933 and showed at the Newman Theater, an all white movie house. The African-American newspaper in Kansas City called *The Call* reported on the event,

⁸¹ Hill, "Interview with Etta Moten Barnett," 162.

⁸² Associated Press, "Etta Moten Barnett, noted Black Actress, Singer, Dies" (January 4, 2004).

...learning of their daughter's part in the picture, the Reverend Moten called the manager of the Newman. 'My daughter is in that picture, mister,' he told the theater man, 'and we've just got to see it.' After remarking that Negroes were not customarily admitted to the Newman, the manager relented and agreed to admit Miss Moten's family. The Reverend Moten said that they were treated nicely during their visit to the theater. He was enthusiastic about Miss Moten's part in it, and in this he was fully justified not only because he is her parent, and naturally proud of her success, but because the major critics have applauded Miss Moten's work in no uncertain fashion.⁸³

Many black newspapers at the time, including *The Call*, sought to present African-Americans in ways that altered conventional images. These newspapers understood that uplifting images, differing enormously from the often-perpetrated degrading stereotypes, could also change the way many African-Americans saw themselves. For *The Gold Diggers of 1933*, Etta still did not receive screen credit. Her name spread only by word of mouth throughout the African-American community, facilitated greatly by the efforts of Claude Barnett.

Soon Etta appeared in another movie, titled *Flying Down to Rio*, starring Dolores Del Rio among others. This film is famous for being the first time that Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers appeared together. In the movie, Etta performed a song called "The Carioca," which was then nominated for an Academy Award. She wore the costume of a woman from Bahia in Northern Brazil with a basket of fruit in her hair (years before Carmen Miranda). Finally, with *Flying Down to Rio*, Etta received screen credit for her part.⁸⁴ With her success in both *Gold Diggers* and *Flying Down to Rio*, Etta became so popular in the African-American community that she was often given top billing in black neighborhoods when the film showed. Their response to her newest success rang similar

⁸³ *The Call* quoted in Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 13.

⁸⁴ "The Carioca" from *Flying Down to Rio* is available for viewing on YouTube and is quite spectacular.

to *Gold Diggers*. Etta's interviewer, Ruth Edmonds Hill said of Etta's movie success, "I mean it just gave people a sense of their own worth. I suppose, that was part of it, to have someone up there that they could see doing something that was beautiful, something that was artistic, and then again, just to be able to do it."⁸⁵ Of her experience filming, Etta made a point in her interviews of stating that the movie sets were integrated and friendlier towards African-Americans than other environments around the country. According to Etta there often existed a camaraderie on set between the actors regardless of color. She and Ginger Rogers remained friends up until Ms. Rogers' death in 1995. Both movies gave Etta the prominence that earned her a place on the lecture circuit. She began to give lecture-concerts and talk to students about her formula for success, which included fifty percent preparation, twenty-five percent initiative, and twenty-five percent contacts.⁸⁶ Etta's interest in lecturing and encouraging young people would stay with her for the rest of her life. She is widely known around Chicago not for her Hollywood celebrity, but for being a presence in the schools.

Etta Moten is thus credited with being the first African-American woman to appear on film in a dignified role. This would not be her only "first." In 1934, she broke boundaries once again. While traveling and making appearances with *Flying Down to Rio*, Etta journeyed to Washington D.C. One evening at the theater in Washington, she received a hand-delivered note from Eleanor Roosevelt inviting her to sing at the White House. According to an acquaintance of Etta's whose husband was FDR's valet, FDR loved the song, "Remember My Forgotten Man," and would often request to be taken down to the screening room to view the scene. Etta was to come for FDR's birthday

⁸⁵ Hill, "Interview with Etta Moten Barnett," 167.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

celebration the next evening, January 30th. Thrilled with the invitation, Etta prepared a thirty-minute concert that included some spirituals along with “Remember My Forgotten Man.” The next evening she arrived at the White House and described it as follows,

My accompanist and I went up there, and went upstairs to the residence part, the second floor, a small living room...with a piano in it. [FDR] came, was rolled in with his long cigarette, and blinking with his pince-nez glasses, and saying hello, and joking and carrying on. There was Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor, who did the sculptured heads of the three presidents, and Mrs. Vincent Astor..., and the Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace... He came in, that’s all that was there. So I talked about Eva Jessye and the spirituals. I sang some of her spirituals...⁸⁷

When Etta left the White House the press awaited her outside. She had just attended FDR’s birthday party as the first black woman ever to sing at the White House. The February 9, 1934, issue of the *Kansas City Call* reported:

President and Mrs. Franklin Delano Roosevelt broke another precedent Wednesday evening when, for the first time, a young colored woman was invited to sing at the White House. Miss Etta Moten, Kansas City, the young contralto whose rise to radio, film, and stage worlds has been little short of phenomenal was the guest artist at an intimate dinner given by President and Mrs. Roosevelt for a circle of friends. Her presentation included, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” and “My Forgotten Man.” For Mrs. Roosevelt she performed “A City Called Heaven,” and her program ended with “River Stay’ Way From My Door.”⁸⁸

The Associated Negro Press continued to circulate stories about her success in Washington for several weeks.

Of the whole experience of fame, Etta stated, “The Negro people made me their star.”⁸⁹

After her extraordinary experience in Washington D.C., Etta headed down to Richmond and then to Norfolk to perform alongside her movie at the black theaters in

⁸⁷Ibid., 176.

⁸⁸ *The Call*, February 9th, 1934.

⁸⁹ Hill, “Interview with Etta Moten Barnett,” 168.

those cities. In Norfolk, the telephone rang one day and it was Claude Barnett. Claude was staying at the home of Dr. Robert Russa Moton, the president of Tuskegee at the time, at his summer home in Capahosic, Virginia. Claude invited Etta to join him for the weekend to talk over their wedding plans. Etta made the trip and the group ended up going out for a fishing expedition along the York River. When Dr. Moton had Etta alone he inquired as to how the relationship with Claude was coming along. Etta replied that they had plans to marry in August. Dr. Moton thought August sounded too far away and suggested that the two get married the next day right there in Virginia. They did! Etta called it a “very romantic thing.” Humorously she appeared in the papers for catching twenty-six fish – the couple had not yet announced their surprise nuptials.⁹⁰ Etta, and her daughters Sue, Gladys and Etta Vee soon moved to Claude’s home in Chicago. Claude adopted the girls and they changed their name to Barnett when they came of age. In Etta Vee’s wedding announcement years later in the April 3, 1952, issue of *Jet Magazine*, she lists Claude Barnett as her father.⁹¹ Again, there is little information put forth by Etta about how her daughters transitioned from the life they knew in Kansas City with their grandparents to living with their mother and Claude in Chicago. Etta only mentions that Etta Vee finished high school in Chicago at Hyde Park High School while the other two finished high school in Kansas City.⁹² She does mention that later in life her middle daughter, Gladys, cut herself off from the rest of the family when she was in her forties and suffered illness and “some bad marriages.”⁹³

⁹⁰ Ibid., 179.

⁹¹ In this issue of *Jet Magazine* (April 3, 1952), Etta Vee’s wedding is called “the most lavish society wedding of the week.” Her grandfather, Reverend Moten married the couple.

⁹² Hill, “Interview with Etta Moten Barnett,” 188.

⁹³ Ibid.

Even when Claude and Etta began their married life together, Etta continued to be on-the-go. She traveled to Brazil and Argentina with *Flying Down to Rio*. She continued to do lecture and concert tours across the country as well as hosting radio shows for months at a time. Etta's concerts were serious musical affairs. She performed Bach, Handel, and "Negro" spirituals. For an encore she often sang "The Carioca" or other songs from her movies. Sometimes Etta would add variety, singing all African-American composers or all spirituals. Often she would talk about the composers and the history of black music. She considered her performances both educational and artistic.

In their interview for the Black Women Oral History Project, Ruth Edmonds Hill asks Etta, "...do you feel that [Claude] was particularly sensitive to women's needs just in a general sense, or was his sensitivity and concern for you as a person? Do you think that allowed him to let you just go on with your career?"⁹⁴ This question leaves something to be desired, but Etta's answer reveals more about her relationship to Claude that is important. She responded, "I think he was sensitive to women's needs. I know that he wanted me to go on with my career, because that was understood before we married."⁹⁵ As an historian researching Etta Moten I would have given my left pinky for Ruth Hill to follow up with a question about how that understanding came to pass. Did Etta insist on her career? Were the terms negotiated? Did Claude volunteer to care for the children while Etta traveled so extensively? The extent to which Claude promoted Etta through the Associated Negro Press leads one to believe that he felt a great deal of pride in her accomplishments. Therefore, it is *likely* that he encouraged and supported

⁹⁴ Ibid., 179.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

her to continue with her career. There is certainly no evidence that he ever took issue with her long absences. Furthermore, Claude himself utilized his skills to her benefit. As Etta recalled in the interview later, "...[Claude] began to know how to book me and that sort of thing, and to write letters and to write publicity material, and make brochures and that sort of thing. He really became my manager then in booking me for concerts and lecture-concerts."⁹⁶ She continued in her interview by celebrating the way that Claude supported other women in his life as well, particularly the female correspondents that worked for the Associated Negro Press. Claude fought for Alice Dunnigan to be able to sit in the press gallery at the White House, the first black woman to gain this sort of accreditation. Dunnigan served as bureau chief of the Associated Negro Press for fourteen years, beginning in 1947. She was known for never shying away from asking hard-hitting questions about race.⁹⁷

In spite of Etta's numerous achievements, her signature performance still hovered on the horizon. In 1935, George Gershwin held auditions in his New York City apartment for his now famous opera, *Porgy and Bess*.⁹⁸ Gershwin wanted to write a great folk-opera, and for his leading lady he imagined someone just like Etta Moten. Etta's look and temperament suited the part as the great composer envisaged it. Unfortunately, Etta's contralto vocal range did not suit the soprano part that Gershwin wrote. Etta did not get the role.⁹⁹ Though in a fortunate turn of events for Etta, in 1942 the part was rewritten and Etta played the leading role of "Bess," the part for which she would become most

⁹⁶ Ibid., 80.

⁹⁷ Alice Dunnigan, *Alone a top a Hill: The Autobiography of Alice Dunnigan: Pioneer of the National Black Press* (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

⁹⁸ See Stewart F. Lane, *Black Broadway: African-Americans on the Great White Way* (Square One Publishers, 2015)

⁹⁹ Though Etta did not get the part of "Bess," Eva Jessye was hired to direct the music for the opera.

famous. The revival show, significantly shortened in length (the original spanned over four hours), played on the Great White Way for many months at the Majestic Theater. After it finally closed on Broadway, the popular show then toured all over the country for nearly three years.

The *Porgy and Bess* tour was not without highlights. For one, Etta's performance garnered rave reviews. Lloyd Lewis of the *Chicago Daily News* wrote,

When Etta Moten sang "Ave Maria" at the memorial for George M. Cohan at the Erlanger Theater last week, your critic blinked, swallowed a couple or times and wondered... what happened to make Miss Moten seem great, whereas in her star role in *Porgy and Bess* at the Studebaker Theatre, she had merely been excellent.¹⁰⁰

These rave reviews were only the beginning. While passing through Kansas in 1943, Etta performed songs from *Porgy and Bess* with some other members of the Broadway cast. The performance took place at her alma mater, the University of Kansas, where she was the guest of honor at a special reception. At this event, the president of the University bestowed upon Etta the honor of a Citation of Merit, their university's equivalent of an honorary degree. Lastly it is important to mention that during Etta's tenure at the Majestic Theater, Claude relocated to New York to be with his wife. Furthermore, during her tour as she put it, "I'm meeting my husband, just like we're lovers. We meet each other and have a rendezvous, wherever I was."¹⁰¹ Because Claude at this time served as a special assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture, he did some traveling of his own with Dr. Fredrick D. Patterson to see the Agricultural Adjustment Administration

¹⁰⁰ Lloyd Lewis quoted in Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 23.

¹⁰¹ Hill, "Interview with Etta Moten Barnett," 174.

work.¹⁰² Though he still ran the Associated Negro Press, he could travel on his own schedule. Claude clearly made seeing his wife a priority.

The strain of singing a soprano part did take its toll on Etta's voice and in 1947 she underwent an operation to remove a cyst from her throat. That same year, Claude and Etta embarked on a life-changing voyage to Africa. This trip ended up being one of many trips that the couple would take to Africa in the next several years. In the 1947 trip, Etta did concerts for the Red Cross in Nigeria and on the Gold Coast. In their travels the Barnetts represented Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson on official trips spanning Liberia and the Ivory Coast, Tunisia, Libya, Ethiopia, Uganda and the Cameroons. In 1957, Etta and Claude attended Ghana's liberation festivities, where Etta interviewed Martin Luther King, Jr. as he gained inspiration from liberation movement across the ocean.

Over time, the Barnetts started an import-export company. During their travels in Africa they began to compile what was to become one of the largest and finest privately owned collections of African artifacts in the world. In Etta's archive there is a letter from Langston Hughes to the *Chicago Defender* dated March 3, 1951, in which Hughes celebrates a store that Etta set up in Harlem called the Afro-Arts Bazaar. Etta, Ida Cullen (the wife of Countee Cullen), and Estelle Massay Osborne established their own business to sell African arts and fine crafts in New York City. Hughes praises the store for being well designed, and having an appealing storefront and style. He takes issue with other businesses in Harlem that took a more lackadaisical approach to their appearance and did

¹⁰² Dr. Patterson served as the third president of Tuskegee, holding both a Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine from Iowa State and PhD from Cornell University. He founded the United Negro College Fund among a lifetime of other achievements.

not offer the same sense of professionalism that Etta's store did. Hughes comments that several of the black businesses in the area do not even have change for customers, which he sees as a minimal prerequisite for conducting appropriate commercial transactions. Etta and her business partners are held up as women who take pride in what they do.¹⁰³ Along with her travels Etta continued to both lecture and perform inside the United States as well as quite extensively abroad. She gave her last formal recital in Denmark in 1952.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, Etta brought her interest in Africa to local schools believing that understanding more about Africa and the magnificence of African culture and history could foster a sense of pride in young black students who were primarily taught their history from the point of view of oppression and tyranny on this continent.

Though Etta achieved extraordinary things (and more is yet to come) she was not immune to the degrading environment of racism that pervaded the United States in these decades. Discrimination, however, was not a topic that Etta preferred to discuss. In a 1986 interview for the *Kansas Alumni Magazine* she stated when asked about racial bias, "For things that are unpleasant I have a very short memory...I've had so many friends to help me see that I was in the right place at the right time that my life hasn't seemed like hardship. I've always enjoyed what I was doing."¹⁰⁵ In other interviews Etta speaks often of how far African-Americans have come. Nonetheless, in the interview with Ruth Edmonds Hill she does speak specifically of one incident that unnerved her significantly. This incident took place in Pocatello, Idaho while Etta toured with *Porgy and Bess*. The hotel in Pocatello would not allow Etta to stay overnight in their establishment;

¹⁰³ Hughes to *Chicago Defender*, Etta Moten Barnett Papers [Box 6, Folder 72], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library

¹⁰⁴ "Barnett, Etta Moten." *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. 2005. *Encyclopedia.com*. (October 6, 2015).

¹⁰⁵ Valerie Mindel, *Kansas Alumni Magazine* in Vernon, *Etta Moten Barnett*, 20.

meanwhile all the stagehands and wardrobe mistresses were taking their keys and heading to rooms because they were white. As the star of the show she felt profoundly embarrassed and humiliated. Not allowed to room at the hotel, Etta slept at a stranger's house instead. She describes her lodgings as being very cold, sleeping on a couch all night. In Etta's words, "It tore me up."¹⁰⁶ She left the role to her understudy that night, one of the few times. In seeing many of Etta's concert posters it is impossible not to notice that many include lines promising reserved sections for white spectators.

In a *Chicago Tribune* article in 2004, Etta is quoted as saying of Claude, "We had a wonderful marriage, a legal love-affair."¹⁰⁷ This assessment of her relationship differs significantly from the other love affairs that appear in previous chapters. Claude and Etta converged, but both staid their own course as well. Etta did not give up Herself to support Claude, and he did not give up Himself to support her, yet they succeeded in supporting each other. They are in many ways the first black power couple – foreshadowing what the media would later make of couples like Beyoncé and Jay-Z. Part of their mutuality and convergence resulted from belief in a common project, which was the uplift of the African-American race in the United States. Both Claude, from his days at Tuskegee, and Etta, for her daughters and her family carried with them a sense of pride and purpose.

In the *American Studies* journal Fall/Winter 2009, there is an excellent article by Megan E. Williams in which she delves into the representations of both Etta Moten and

¹⁰⁶ Hill, "Interview with Etta Moten Barnett," 192.

¹⁰⁷ Jon Anderson, "Pioneer Barnett remembered for artistic spirit, 'sense of joy,'" *Chicago Tribune* (February 3, 2004).

Lena Horne in the *Kansas City Call* between 1941 and 1945.¹⁰⁸ *The Call* focused on Etta Moten as not only a hometown gal, but more importantly as a representative of both black female and black middle-class respectability.¹⁰⁹ Their writers hoped to present Lena Horne as only one in a bevy of talented black female entertainers, thus their focus on Etta intensified during this period.¹¹⁰ The editor of *The Call*, Chester Franklin, believed that “the performance of certain values, including regard for education, family, appearance, deportment, piety, and hard work” more than income determined a person’s class. Etta proved a worthy representative of these ideals. *The Call* celebrated not only her role as an entertainer, but also her roles as mother, wife, and daughter to a pastor. Her divorce is never mentioned.¹¹¹ Etta, “embodied both the autonomous, mobile woman and the successful, family woman; unlike many African-American women, who “remained territorially confined by the domestic requirement of family building.” *The Call* also stressed the success of Etta’s daughters; two attended Talledega College and pursued graduate studies at the University of Chicago.¹¹²

All of these characteristics stressed in *The Call* line up squarely with the values that Claude Barnett imbibed as a young man at the feet of Booker T. Washington. Both Etta and Claude Barnett embodied something for each other, something to be proud of.

¹⁰⁸ Megan E. Williams, “Lena Not the Only One”: Representations of Lena Horne and Etta Moten in the *Kansas City Call*, 1941-1945,” *American Studies*, 50:3/4 (Fall/Winter 2009): 49-67.

¹⁰⁹ Walter White, Executive Secretary of the NAACP adopted the “Double V” slogan that appeared during this time – fighting injustice abroad in WWII and racism at home. White saw the derogatory representations of African-Americans in the entertainment industry as part of the battle on the home front.

¹¹⁰ Horne, sixteen years younger than Etta, always credited her as being a mentor and inspiration. Horne spoke of her father’s love of Etta as well.

¹¹¹ In one speech that Etta gave later in life she referred to herself as a “widow” upon her first arrival to New York City. This small fib is no doubt a calculated attempt to resist the common assumption that African-American families were chronically disorganized.

¹¹² Williams, “Lena not the Only One,” 49-67.

Claude's presence in Etta's life never appears as a limiting force. Rather, from the moment they met he acted as a facilitator and enthusiastic cheerleader. The activist side of their partnership came into full bloom as Etta's singing career waned. After Claude's death in 1967, Etta continued to work for the uplift of African-Americans and women for the rest of her long life. When asked about Claude's influence on her, Etta described it this way,

He was a man of few words. He wrote, but he did not talk out much. When he did talk, it was about facts and about historical things that he had lived through...this was a great wealth of knowledge that he had about things and people, that made the news service so interesting...He was religious in a way that was deeper...He did not have a philosophy about life like I did, that you can vocalize, you see verbalize, but he must have had one, because he lived a good life and he was a good man. When I would see him, [he] would calm [me]. We complemented each other just like that. He liked my enthusiasm, but he could just sit quietly and enjoy it...and I would become calm if I were agitated...he was a great influence on me.¹¹³

To sit in Etta's archive and read the speeches and lectures she gave later in life, there is a profound sense of an original thinker, of a woman who knew herself and trusted her own ideas. Many of her thoughts ring true in the present day. She advocated in no uncertain terms for black women, for children, and for justice in housing and education. She is insightful, knowledgeable, and well spoken. Etta said in one of her interviews that Claude was always with her even after he died. His influence on her is evident, but his support of her is even more apparent. In his speech at her 100th birthday celebration, *Ebony Magazine* editor, Lerone Bennett, said of Etta,

¹¹³ Hill, "Interview with Etta Moten Barnett," 201-202.

It is that paradox, it is that miracle that we celebrate in Chicago today, the paradox and the miracle of a Black woman, born in a society that dissed Blacks and women, who defeated her enemies with their own weapons and rose to the top by sheer toughness of spirit, thereby fulfilling the Scriptures which say: *She is who last shall be first*. Let there be no mistake on that point. For the woman we celebrate is the real thing. A liberated woman before liberated womanhood was defined, a Black superstar before Black superstardom was invented, an Africanist before the historians discovered the name, she is an American original, and a South Side original. A singer, actress, activist – indomitable, irrepressible, unforgettable- she is the rarest of all race, the race of great creators.¹¹⁴

Etta's list of lecture invitations, honorary degrees, as well as social and civic organization memberships would take an entire page. Suffice to say, Etta remained as Lerone Bennett stated, indomitable all the way to 102 years old, even wearing high heels until she turned 95. Etta's daughter, Sue Ish Barnett, wrote in a press statement after her mother's death:

After 100 years there are still too many people who don't know Etta. People who don't know what guts it must have taken to leave a husband with three children...to go back to school...to embark on a show business career alone...and to turn a blind eye to the overt racism and discrimination of the day and not be deterred. People who don't know all of the racial barriers she knocked down without even trying. People who don't know the standard she set for feminists and power couples more than a generation before such words would become part of the American vernacular. People who don't know what an example she is for us all in staying active and growing old gracefully.¹¹⁵

Recently Michelle Obama spoke before a group of college aged young women for Glamour Magazine's "The Power of an Educated Girl" event at the Apollo Theater in

¹¹⁴ Lerone Bennett, Jr. "Remarks of Lerone Bennett onf 100th Birthday Celebration of Etta Moten Barnett" November, 11, 2001, Etta Moten Barnett Papers, [Box 1, Folder 1], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

¹¹⁵ This quote appears in many of Etta Moten's obituaries found in the Etta Moten Barnett Papers [Box 1, Folder 5], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library

New York City. The first lady said to the crowd of girls “without education I would not be where I am today, the wife of the President of the United States!” The comment felt cringe-worthy, as Michelle’s own personal accomplishments are standouts on their own. Continuing the discussion, actress Charlize Theron stated, “There is nothing sexier than a smart woman.” Even at an event targeted toward encouraging young women to pursue education there still seemed to be an emphasis placed on being appealing to others.¹¹⁶

As bell hooks’ quote states at the beginning of this chapter, “To seek love as a quest for the true self liberates.”¹¹⁷ This message, this river that flows throughout time and across continents from the Transcendentalists to ancient Hindu Vedas to the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, is that Life originates in the ability to locate the Self, and to bring that Self forth. In that realization, every individual is connected. Young girls are told by an aggressive cultural paradigm that they are not worthy of a Self beyond their bodies. This is evidenced in the young Joyce Johnson, who willingly gives everything over to the faint possibility of a life with Jack Kerouac. In Lee Krasner we see an older and more savvy woman who recognizes the rampant inequalities in the art world, and uses her powers to promote her husband who then becomes a world-famous artist. In Hettie Jones there resides a force of nature, of fortitude and perseverance that finally finds her voice and her self only after she has to painfully let go of a love that she desired fully. At last, in Etta Moten, there is the story of a woman who lovingly and proudly puts herself at the center of her own life, not in a selfish way, but in a way that affirmed life.

¹¹⁶ See <http://www.instyle.com/news/michelle-obama-charlize-theron-girls-education-speech>

¹¹⁷ bell hooks, *Communion: The Female Search for Love* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), xviii.

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- X, Malcolm and Alex Haley. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X As Told to Alex Haley*. New York: Ballantine Books, Reissue Edition, 1992.
- Zeitj, Joshua. *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity and the Women Who Made America Modern*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007.
- Zinn, Howard. *A People’s History of the United States: 1492- Present*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

Manuscript Collections:

Claude A. Barnett Papers (Chicago History Museum) 1918-1967.

Etta Moten Barnett Papers, Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of African-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

VITA

VITA

Mary F. V. Barford, PhD

EDUCATION

Purdue University August 2007 to December 2015
 Doctor of Philosophy
 Major Field: US History – Women’s history
 Gender studies, African-American history,
 Cultural and Intellectual History
 Minor Field: Latin American History

Eastern Illinois University August 2004 to May 2006
 Master of the Arts:
 History

Eastern Illinois University May 2002 to December 2003
 Bachelor of Science:
 Educational Studies - Curriculum and Instruction
 with Teacher Certification

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign September 1996 to January 2000
 Bachelor of Arts:
 Philosophy

University of Granada, Granada, Spain August 1995 to May 1996
 Centro de Lenguas Modernas
 Cursos Hispánicos

WORK EXPERIENCE

English and History Teacher August 2013 – May 2015
 Jefferson High School, Lafayette, Indiana

- ◆ Taught courses in English and Social Studies
- ◆ Collaborated with other teachers and parents in my cohort to provide the best educational experience possible
- ◆ Worked to build trusting relationships with students
- ◆ Dedicated myself to engaging with state curriculum mandates in innovative and energetic ways

Graduate Instructor May 2010 to August 2011
 Purdue University, History Department Lafayette, IN

- ◆ Designed and implemented my own course for the American History Survey, 1877 to the present
- ◆ Lectured on a variety of topics in American History including extensive attention to cultural history
- ◆ Created my own syllabus, assignments, PowerPoint presentations, and class activities
- ◆ Earned consistently positive evaluations from students

Graduate Teaching Assistant August 2007 to May 2010
 Purdue University, History Department August 2004 to May 2006
 Eastern Illinois University, History Department

- ◆ Acquired the skills necessary to run my own University course
- ◆ Assisted in course preparation, presentation, grading, and tutoring
- ◆ Lectured on specific topics of expertise to supplement course content
- ◆ Collaborated with professors and other graduate students to facilitate a lively and productive educational environment

Research Associate August 2000 to July 2001
 Center for Economic and Policy Research Washington D.C.

- ◆ Managed all administrative tasks including payroll, taxes, benefits, governmental status, bills, web services
- ◆ Trained interns and supervised internship program
- ◆ Maintained and expanded website, www.cepr.net
- ◆ Edited papers, speeches, and research projects
- ◆ Coordinated listserves

Violin Teacher August 1998 to January 2000
 Conservatory of Central Illinois August 2002 to May 2003
 Champaign, IL

- ◆ Taught private and group lessons to 25 violin students
- ◆ Organized quarterly recitals
- ◆ Facilitated confidence and fun with music among students of all ages

RELATED ACTIVITIES

Editor, *Historia*, nationally recognized student history journal
 Presented at numerous conferences – available upon request
 Two published book reviews – available upon request

AWARDS

Ross Fellowship, College of Liberal Arts, Purdue University
 Graduate Assistantship, History Department, Purdue University
 Graduate Assistantship, History Department, Eastern Illinois University
 Recipient of the William's Travel Award, 2006, Graduate School, Eastern Illinois University
 Recipient of the Coleman Scholarship, 2005-2006
 Recipient of the Lavern Hamand Graduate Writing Award
 Recipient of the Women's Studies Department Graduate Writing Award
 Recipient of the Leften Stavrianos World History Award
 Admission to Phi Alpha Theta, History Honors Society
 Graduation with Departmental Distinction in Philosophy, University of Illinois
 Dean's List, University of Illinois, Eastern Illinois University

SERVICE

Tutored Spanish speakers in English at "Amigos" – Newman Center, Charleston Illinois
 G.E.D. tutoring for jail inmates – Cole County Jail, Charleston, Illinois
 Volunteer teacher, Lafayette School Corporation – taught history in the elementary schools where it was not part of the state curriculum

SOFTWARE EXPERIENCE

Microsoft Office including: Microsoft Word, Excel, Powerpoint, and Access
Purdue University Banner, myPurdue, and Blackboard, ArcMap 10 GIS
Classroom Smartboard Proficiency

LANGUAGES

Spanish