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'A Kind of Singing in Me': A Critical Account of Women Writers of the Beat Generation

Katie Jennifer Stewart

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a critical account of women writers of the Beat generation. Writers such as Diane di Prima, Hettie Jones, Joanne Kyger, Joyce Johnson, Bonnie Bremser, and Janine Pommy Vega were part of the 1950s Beat literary culture and had social relationships with the more famous male Beat writers such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. To differing degrees the women writers have also been influenced by the aesthetics of the male writers, and since the 1950s their work has been contextualised alongside the men's in literary magazines, anthologies and more recent academic studies. But in such responses the women writers appear overshadowed by the male Beats, as 'minor characters', to quote the title of Joyce Johnson's memoir of the 1950s.

The issue of women's 'minority' forms the premise of this thesis, and I introduce the minority debate through reference to the Beat canon and the issue of revisionism in relation to the wider literary canon. I cite theoretical models such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's 'rhizome' and 'nomadology' to support my argument. In their spatial form and terminology, these models express movement, which is pertinent since physical movement characterises the lifestyles, texts and myths of the Beat writers. Deleuze and Guattari's theory can also express the destabilising which the notion of the woman writer brings to these images and myths.

I argue that instead of proposing women writers as Beat writers we look to their difference. By reading the women's texts in relation to various themes – literary influence, the literary bohemian world of the city, the parental generation, and body, sexuality, and the road – I suggest difference is expressed in their writing. But rather than positing a distinct 'gynocritical' tradition in the terms set out by Elaine Showalter (1979), I highlight the differences between the women writers.

By nature of its focus on little known texts and authors, and the critically-undeveloped area of Beat literature and culture, this thesis is part literary history, part cultural history, part biography, as well as offering close readings of the texts. The texts discussed in this thesis have not only received little critical attention, they have not been read and contextualised against each other. In this thesis I do so, taking the broad historical and literary overview that women of the Beat generation have not received, as either writers or subjects.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: 'Merely Being (T)here': Exposing the Critical Debate of 'Women of the Beat Generation'	30
Chapter 2: Community and Difference: Territories of The New American Poetry	62
Chapter 3: Daughters of the City: <i>Flânerie</i> and Other Inner Flights	115
Chapter 4: Beat Foreign Bodies: Immigrant Family History and 'Postmemory'	173
Chapter 5: Internal Journeys: Home, Domesticity and Embodied Subjects	209
Chapter 6: For Love on the Road	251
Conclusion	312
Bibliography	317

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Joyce Johnson and Jack Kerouac, 1957	33
Cover of Joyce Johnson's <i>Minor Characters</i>	35

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis began as a project of ‘rescuing’ a group of unknown and marginalised writers – ‘Women of the Beat generation’. In recent years this has been a growing area in the field of Beat generation studies, but the names of the individual women writers are usually unknown outside the specialised areas of Beat studies and various schools of avant-garde American poetry. But during the later stages of my research, I was faced with the recurring thought that perhaps they were not a ‘group’ at all. Such doubt could be defined by the following lines of questioning. Firstly, did their work and lives present enough similarity to bring them together? Secondly, what were their actual relations, both social and literary, to the ‘Beat’ generation – the very designation by which the group is constructed?

The word ‘Beat’ brings with it confusion and contradiction. So I present it as a historically-inflected term which did not signify in the late-1940s to mid-1960s period as it does for readers today. In the words of Lorna Sage, the Beat generation was a ‘media “fix”’ of the 1950s (1992: 116). The writers Jack Kerouac (1922-1969), Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997), William S. Burroughs (1914-1997), and Gregory Corso (1930-2001) became the names and faces of the Beat literary generation. As Michael Davidson states, the ‘public exposure’ they received, ‘turned them, as writers, into signs’ (1989: 31). This snapshot belies the disorder and nuances of a multidisciplinary cultural scene of the mid-twentieth century. The attempt to place order on chaos is evidenced in the confusing and conflicting definitions and redefinitions of ‘beat’ and the ‘Beat generation’ over the years, in relation not only to its members but to its

timeframe.¹ While acknowledging the origins and continuing allure of this reductive snapshot I will map out the wider literary-cultural domain, placing my women writers therein and offering alternative literary and cultural lineages.

Such revisionism has been a developing strand in Beat studies, with gender being a point of entry into the debate. Outside their status as ‘Beats’, gender is the common factor in the creation of ‘women of the Beat generation’. Keeping the question of their status as a group in mind, I now introduce each writer by providing brief biographical material, noting her major works, and placing her within the Beat generation by referencing her social and literary connections to its major figures.

¹ I follow the convention of academic and popular sources in capitalising ‘Beat’ when it appears in relation to the ‘Beat generation’ or a specific ‘Beat writer’. Of course, this capitalisation results in the tendency to take its meaning as read. The lower case verb ‘beat’ appears when its original slang usage is conveyed, that of an existential or physical state i.e. ‘dead beat’ or ‘beat-up’ (Charters 1992: xvii).

Part I: Biographical Introductions: The Fifties Girls

Most of the women writers discussed in this thesis were born in the mid-1930s and as young women of the 1950s were drawn to the bohemian enclaves of New York City and San Francisco, creating their own identities before these areas became identified with the Beat generation.² In several cases the male Beat writers would not be the first literary ‘fathers’ they took. But in this milieu they became aware of Beat writers and the landmarks of Beat, for example, the publication of Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl and Other Poems* (1956) and its censorship trial, the publication of Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957), and the appearance of the ‘beatnik’ phenomenon.³ They were familiar with Beat writers socially and had a positive reaction to Beat aesthetics while nurturing their own aesthetics. The women writers show both empathy and frustration with the presence of the Beats. The various freedoms which the male Beats helped to spread – going on the road, the practice of Buddhism and other Eastern religions, experimental writing techniques, drug experimentation, and relatively liberated sexualities – were adopted and rejected by these women to differing degrees.

² In Chapter Three I ground my writers’ ‘bohemianism’ in terms of historical bohemianism. But for the moment, we can understand ‘bohemian’ as the prevalent term before specific terms such as ‘Beat’, or the later ‘beatnik’, appeared.

³ It is generally agreed that the term ‘beatnik’ first appeared in popular discourse in the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s local interest column written by Herb Caen in April 1958. Caen wrote that ‘*Look Magazine*, preparing a picture spread on San Francisco’s Beat Generation (oh, no, not AGAIN!), hosted a party in a North Beach house for 50 Beatniks, and by the time word got around the sour grapevine over 250 bearded cats and kits were on hand, slopping up Mike Cowles’s free booze. They’re only Beat, y’know, when it comes to work’ (quoted Charters 1992: xxii). The Russian sounding suffix (after Sputnik) added a comic quality which debunked the seriousness of the Beat writer. Beatnik characters subsequently appeared in television shows and films. The term has traditionally stood in opposition to the purer term ‘Beat’, with beatniks regarded as ‘weekend’ bohemians influenced by popular culture. Yet in actuality the lines of demarcation are subject to slippage as individual writers accept, reject or perceive the arbitrariness of both labels. See Richard Rex’s ‘The Origin of Beatnik’ in *American Speech* 50.3/4 (1975): 329-331, and V.V. Kabakchi’s ‘On Sputniks, Beatniks, and Nogoodniks’ in *American Speech* 65.3 (1990): 275-278, for the lexical origins of the term. For a discussion of the beatnik’s social emergence see Barbara Ehrenreich’s *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (London: Pluto, 1983), pp. 52-67, Michael Davidson’s *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-century* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1989), pp. 61-62, James Campbell’s *This is the Beat Generation: New York, San Francisco, Paris* (London: Secker, 1999), pp. 245-271, and Clinton R. Starr’s ‘“I Want to Be with My Own Kind”: Individual Resistance and Collective Action’ in Skerl (2004): 41-54.

Diane di Prima (b. 1934) was born into an aspirational Brooklyn-based Italian American family, and received a privileged education which enabled her discovery of poetry, and resultant Keatsian vow to live as a poet when she was fourteen years old. She links her interest in poetry to her maternal grandfather, an anarchist scholar who had known Carlo Tresca.⁴ Her Italian heritage inspired her but conversely ethnic difference also operated in negative terms, for instance when her father reminded her to ‘not to expect too much’ at the elite Hunter College High School: ‘I want you to always remember that you’re Italian,’ he said (di Prima 2001a: 71). Retrospectively, she states her sense of coming from a ‘maddened people’ (73). She left the repressive atmosphere she found at Swarthmore College before completing a degree in physics, moving to Manhattan in 1953 in order to write. Di Prima created her own bohemian world populated by young students, painters, actors, and ballet dancers before she came into contact with the Beats. She was given a first edition of Ginsberg’s *Howl and Other Poems* in 1957 – ‘I think this might interest you’, she recalls being told – which sparked a correspondence with Ginsberg, and a later meeting with Kerouac and him (di Prima [1969] 1988: 126). Her correspondence with Lawrence Ferlinghetti, poet and founder of City Lights Books, led him to write in the introduction to her first book of poems *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward* (1958): ‘Here’s a sound not heard before. The voice is gritty. The eye turns. The heart is in it’ (Kirschenbaum 1987: 53). Di Prima was actively involved in the publication of her own books from the start, and also in the work of others through various collaborative projects: *The Floating Bear* (1961-1969) a ‘mimeographed newsletter’ she co-edited with LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), and her publishing companies Poets Press (founded 1964) and Eidolon Editions (founded 1972) (di Prima 1990: 198-9). Her activity also extended

⁴ Tresca, the ‘flamboyant Italian emigrant anarchist’, achieved fame in the United States, especially for his support of fellow anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti during their controversial trial for murder and subsequent execution in August 1927 (Quinn 2003: n.pag.).

to the theatre, with di Prima playwriting, acting in the New York Poets Theatre, and also stage-managing for The Living Theatre. After permanently relocating to the Bay Area in 1968, some highlights from di Prima's vast body of work (she has written twenty-eight books) include *Revolutionary Letters* (1968), a reflection of her involvement in the anti-Vietnam war movement; *Memoirs of a Beatnik* (1969), which exploited the sensational aspects of the beatnik for the erotic remit of its publisher Olympia Press; *Loba* (1978-1998), in which she appropriated feminine mythic archetypes for a feminist epic poetry; and *Recollections of My Life as a Woman: The New York Years* (2001), a painful yet exuberant memoir of the first three decades of her life. This text dominates the discussion in my Chapter Four because it provides so much historical detail of life growing up in an immigrant family in the post-war years. It describes an individual's life yet is representative of the experience of the 1950s girls who shared similar class backgrounds. I take the title of my thesis, 'A Kind of Singing in Me', from the text. After an unhappy period during which she had an abortion and a relationship ended, di Prima felt the 'life force' returning and a desire to return to her New York community of the early 1960s: 'I came after a while to waken again in the mornings with my heart intact. A kind of singing in me. Eager to join in the dance' (2001a: 239). The phrase 'kind of' appears in the title of di Prima's first book *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward* – a slight formalisation of the hipster slang contraction 'kinda'.⁵ Di Prima's phrase is pertinent to this thesis because it expresses the hipster attitude and encapsulates the tentativeness of the movement of my writers to literary and personal authority. Di Prima has been the most consistently promoted as a female Beat writer, and is given credence by Allen Ginsberg singling her out as 'a strong writer who could hold her own' and therefore those male Beats

⁵ There is resonance with the title of Miles Davis's album *Kind of Blue* (1959). Di Prima and many others of her generation were admirers of Davis.

‘would certainly work with her and recognize her’ (Peabody 1997: 1). Di Prima has been married twice and raised five children.

Hettie Jones (b. 1934) was a reader, editor, and typist of Beat literature before becoming a writer. Coming from a Jewish family who resided in Queens, New York, Jones escaped to a southern college to study drama before settling in Manhattan. Working at *The Partisan Review* enabled her access to literary contacts which propelled both the little magazine *Yugen* (1958-1962), which she founded and co-edited with her husband, the African American poet LeRoi Jones, and their Totem Press. Despite their home being a centre of literary activity in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Jones kept her early attempts at writing to herself. LeRoi Jones left his wife in 1965 in order to centre his life on the Black Arts Movement and changed his name to Amiri Baraka. From her subsequent life as a single working mother raising two mixed-race daughters, Jones emerged firstly as an editor and writer of children’s literature: *The Trees Stand Shining: Poetry of the North American Indians* (1971) and *Big Star Fallin’ Mama: Five Women in Black Music* (1974). Jones gave her first poetry reading in 1978, published her first chapbook, *Having Been Her* in 1981, and her body of published poetry, short stories, journalism, and educative works accumulated. The memoir *How I Became Hettie Jones* appeared in 1990, the text which most aligns her with the Beat community and its aesthetics, as do her collections of poetry, *Drive* (1998) and *All Told* (2003). Jones has taught creative writing in the American prison system and edited the collection of prison writing *Aliens at the Border* (1997). Awareness of racial, political, and social difference informs her work, and she specifically writes for a varied audience beyond a Beat readership. Jones feels such choices were involved in her being somewhat elided within the register of Beat generation writers, complaining that her name appeared

only as the ‘white wife, Hettie Cohen’ of LeRoi Jones in the volume of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* dedicated to Beat writers *The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar America* (1983), despite being ‘the author by then of a dozen books for children’ (Jones [1990] 1997: 234). Whether to put this erasure down to Jones having lost touch with ‘the male-dominated art world’ or because of her genre choices is uncertain (234).

Joanne Kyger (b. 1934) was born in Vallejo, California, and through her pointedly West Coast identity and poetics expands the territory of this discussion, throwing the stories of authors with eastern origins – such as di Prima and Jones – into relief. Kyger left the University of California, Santa Barbara, without completing her degree but quickly found new teachers after relocating to San Francisco’s bohemian North Beach district in 1957. There she was an active member of the network of young poets assembled around the local luminaries Robert Duncan (1919-1988) and Jack Spicer (1925-1965), who provided what fellow student David Meltzer refers to as a ‘generous and cranky pedagogy’ (Kyger 2002: xvii). Kyger’s gossipy record of the activities of this circle – the poetry readings and workshops, which took on both formal and informal shadings – was published as *The Dharma Committee* (1986). The naming of this subset of Zen students and Beat admirers within the Duncan/Spicer circle reflected Kyger’s liminal status at the time. She writes, ‘The invention of the Dharma Committee was in response to a need in myself to bridge the gap between our Spicer group and the world of the Beat writer, with all its attendant publicity. [Kerouac’s novel] *The Dharma Bums* had just been published. And although the Dharma Committee was a parody of the Boy Scout Zen guys, it was a flag waving attempt at attention’ (1986: n. pag). Kyger’s ‘Tapestry’ was published in Spicer’s *J* magazine in 1958 and her work appeared in ‘4 out of 13 issues’ of Stan

Persky's magazine *Open Space* which first appeared in 1964 (Russo 1999: n.pag.). She kept up correspondence with her friends in San Francisco while she lived in an expatriate community in Kyoto, Japan from 1960-1964 with her first husband the poet Gary Snyder (b. 1930), which included a period of travelling in India with Allen Ginsberg and his partner Peter Orlovsky (b. 1933). Grove Press would publish Kyger's first collection of poems, *The Tapestry and The Web* (1965), which staged the confluence of autobiographic material with the myth of Penelope, manifesting Kyger's distinctive, visually-arresting form in which fragmented and enjambed lines build a tapestry across the page. Kyger's writing diary from her time in Japan, *The Japan and India Journals, 1960-1964* (1981), showed the development of this style as she textualized her quotidian experience as a housewife, apprentice of Zen Buddhism and traveller. Returning to the States, Kyger resettled on the West Coast, then travelled in Europe with second husband Jack Boyce, spent a year in New York City from 1966-7, then moved to Bolinas, a coastal village north of San Francisco, at a time when other city dwellers were experimenting with rural living. The particularities of her location, while in Bolinas or on her travels to South America, informed Kyger's subsequent poetry volumes: *Joanne* (1970), *Desecheo Notebook* (1971), *Trip Out and Fall Back* (1974), *The Wonderful Focus of You* (1980), just a selection of over twenty poetry collections and chapbooks. Kyger has taught at the Naropa Institute, which further links her to the Beat lineage.⁶

The East Coast writer Joyce Johnson (b. 1935) exhibits an understated, cool urban aesthetic in her novels and memoirs – more contemplative than spontaneous, secular and sober in comparison to Kyger and di Prima's experimentation with

⁶ The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado was founded by Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman and various others in 1974. See Anne Waldman and Marilyn Webb's *Talking Poetics From Naropa Institute: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1978), 2 vols.

mythopoetic and psychedelic discourse. Johnson was born in New York to Jewish parents – an English father and an apparently overbearing American mother who pushed her daughter toward a career as a child performer on Broadway, and then as a composer of operettas, despite or evidently *because of* the family's modest social and economic standing during the Depression. These plans dissipated because the young Joyce was more interested in becoming a bohemian and nurtured an ambition to write. Like di Prima, Johnson attended Hunter College High School, and later Barnard College – the sister college of Columbia University – which was the setting for her first novel *Come and Join the Dance* (1962), published under her maiden name Joyce Glassman, and it stands as 'the first Beat generation novel by and about a woman', but received minimal attention at the time of its publication and today is out of print (Grace and Johnson 14).⁷ Based on Johnson's own experiences around the Barnard campus in the early 1950s, the novel depicts the heroine Susan Levitt's experiences between intentionally failing the final exam of her college career, losing her virginity, and leaving New York for Paris. The text is important through its creation of a female subjectivity influenced by Beat discourse, albeit obliquely, since Glassman does not name or define the Beat generation; by the transgressive moral discourse of European literature, since Johnson cites Susan losing her virginity as a Gidean-inspired gratuitous act; as well as an instinctive, if undefined, feminist impulse in the heroine's desire to author her own destiny (Grace and Johnson 2004: 190). Johnson has published two other novels, *Bad Connections* (1978) and *In the Night Café* (1989), but is most renowned for her Beat memoir *Minor Characters* (1983), the first

⁷ Ronna Johnson reports that Barbara Probst Solomon considered her novel *The Beat of Life* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1960) as the first Beat novel by a woman (2002: 75). The novel was praised by James Baldwin on its appearance and although not written by a Beat insider, as the women writers discussed in this thesis are, it would make an interesting comparative study. It was recently republished by Great Marsh Press (New York: 1999). Yet Ronna Johnson dismisses the novel as a Beat text, stating that in its 'defeat of female sexual autonomy and desire, *The Beat of Life* is not Beat', comparing it to the bestselling novel *Peyton Place*, by Grace Metalious (New York: Messner, 1956) (75).

revisionist memoir of the Beat period from a female perspective. It addresses her two-year relationship with Jack Kerouac in the late 1950s, but equally it is a narrative of a young woman finding 'Bohemia' and breaking with the parental home and its values. Johnson further aligned herself with the 'King of the Beats' in *Door Wide Open: A Beat Love Affair in Letters, 1957-1958* (2000), a record of their correspondence while Kerouac was on the road and Johnson stayed in New York. Through a retrospective commentary Johnson attains a privileged authorial position and is able to fill in the emotional and circumstantial detail missing from the letters.⁸

Johnson also contributes to the Beat generation through her career as an editor, starting out in the 1950s as a literary secretary but later working for William Morrow and The Dial Press among others. She edited Kerouac's novel *Visions of Cody* (1972), and believes her contribution to post-Beat countercultural politics was in editing books such as Abbie Hoffman's *Revolution for the Hell of It* (1968) and Ron Kovic's *Born on the Fourth of July* (1976). As well as magazine journalism, Johnson has pursued investigative journalism, publishing *What Lisa Knew: The Truth and Lies of the Steinberg Case* (1990). Johnson has taught creative writing since 1983 at Columbia University and other academic institutions. Her most recent work, *Missing Men* (2004), revisited the memoir form. It concentrated on her life history outside her relationship with Kerouac – her childhood, particularly the fraught mother-daughter relationship, and her marriages to the painters Jim Johnson and Peter Pinchbeck. Johnson wrote a stage version of *Door Wide Open* which was produced Off-Broadway in 2003 (Tallmer 2003) and she completed a screen adaptation of *Minor Characters* in the summer of 2005 after interest from filmmakers (Usborne 2006).

⁸ Kerouac's estate became accessible after the death of his third wife, and thus Johnson was able to obtain her own letters, which had been inaccessible during the composition of *Minor Characters*.

Bonnie Bremser is the name under which Brenda Frazer (b. 1939) published her early writing.⁹ Frazer was living alone in Washington D.C. when she met Ray Bremser (1934-1998) after a poetry reading in 1959 where he had performed on a bill with Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and LeRoi Jones.¹⁰ She had read Kerouac's *On the Road* and *The Subterraneans* while attending Sweet Briar College, but does not talk of making the connection to the visiting poets who so intrigued her. Marrying three weeks after they met, the couple moved to New York and frequented the literary circle based around LeRoi and Hettie Jones's *Yugen* magazine, but then fled to Mexico in 1961 with their daughter Rachel to escape Ray's possible imprisonment after a parole violation (Grace and Johnson 2004: 109). Frazer is primarily known for her text *Troia: Mexican Memoirs* (1969) (published in Britain in 1971 as *For Love of Ray*) which chronicles her life in Mexico in the early 1960s with Ray – their poverty, her work as a prostitute, and losing their daughter to adoption services in Texas. The text brought her brief celebrity in Beat literary circles in New York, but today is out of print. In 1970s the couple moved into Allen Ginsberg's farm in upstate New York, Cherry Valley farm, where Frazer organised experimental farming systems. After further training, Frazer pursued a career as a dairy farmer and as a soil scientist working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In recent interviews Frazer has talked of feeling disconnected from the Beat generation and its heritage (Grace and Johnson 2004: 109-130).

Unlike the writers introduced so far, Janine Pommy Vega (b. 1942) avoided college and instead saw her education in the Greenwich Village bohemian world she had sought out on weekends after reading Kerouac's *On the Road*. After making a

⁹ I follow the convention of using the name Brenda Frazer as set out by Knight (1996), Peabody (1997), Johnson and Grace (2002), Grace and Johnson (2004). But I use the name Bonnie Bremser in my discussion of her main work *For Love of Ray*.

¹⁰ The poetry reading and their subsequent meeting at a party is recounted by Bonnie Bremser in 'Poets and Odd Fellows' (Frazer 2001).

deal which allowed her mother to celebrate Pommy Vega being named valedictorian of her high school graduating class, she was free, although still a minor, to leave the working-class district of Union City, New Jersey to settle in the Village. There Pommy Vega became the girlfriend of Peter Orlovsky, but after not being invited on the men's trip to India in the early 1960s, she widened her social circle and met the Peruvian painter Fernando Vega. Her travels with Fernando to Israel, where they were married, Paris, and Ibiza were a source of inspiration for her poetry. Their time together, and Pommy Vega's grief after Fernando's drug-related death in 1965 were poeticized in *Poems to Fernando* (1968). Propelled by grief and the need to escape the drug culture of New York, Pommy Vega travelled west to California and later to South America. Her post-Peruvian travelling informed her second and third collections *Journal of a Hermit* (1974) and *Morning Passage* (1976). *Tracking the Serpent* (1997) describes the poet's pilgrimages since the 1980s – her searches for the mother goddess in sites of ancient worship in England and Ireland, and for the female element in Eastern religions. Pommy Vega has founded poetry workshops in prisons, teaching alongside Hettie Jones. The recent poetry volume, *Mad Dogs of Trieste* (2000), includes elegiac portraits of her various Beat friends – Herbert Huncke, Elise Cowen, Allen Ginsberg, Ray Bremser, and Brenda Frazer.

More Minor Characters

There are other writers who appear in this thesis to a lesser extent than those discussed above. The poet Lenore Kandel (b. 1932) was born on the East Coast, lived in Los Angeles while her father worked as a Hollywood scriptwriter, and later returned east to study at New York's New School for Social Research. After her first

poetry chapbooks were published in 1959, Kandel settled in San Francisco. She lived in the East-West House, a communal house ‘designed to introduce Asian customs and traditions to Westerners’ (where Joanne Kyger had also lived for a period in preparation for going to Japan) and dated the poet Lew Welch (Morgan 2003: 151). In Jack Kerouac’s novel *Big Sur* (1962), the character Romana Swartz is modelled on Kandel: ‘a big Rumanian monster beauty of some kind (I mean with big purple eyes and very tall and big but Mae West big) [...] but also intelligent, well read, writes poetry, is a Zen student, knows everything’ (Kerouac [1962] 2001: 65). Kandel read at the Berkeley Poetry Conference in 1965, but achieved wider fame after the publication of her slim volume of erotic poetry, *The Love Book* (1966), led to a censorship trial. Her next collection of poems *Word Alchemy* (1967) included a preface which justified her transgressive poetry: ‘When a poet censors his vision he no longer tells the truth as he sees it’ (vii). Kandel read her poetry at the Human Be-In in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park in 1967 alongside other speakers such as Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Timothy Leary and Jerry Rubin. Although she has stopped publishing her writing, Kandel participated in the ‘Women of the Beat Generation Panel’ at the San Francisco Book Festival in 1996 alongside Johnson, Jones and Carolyn Cassady, but interestingly, she withheld her contributions, describing herself as ‘willful’ (Charters 2001b: 615).

There is little concrete information known about Kay Johnson, who also published as Kaja Johnson. She resided in New Orleans, where she painted and produced mimeographed poetry pamphlets on her own New School Press. The editors of *The Outsider* magazine took an interest in her poetry, publishing her alongside a then unknown Charles Bukowski, who commented: ‘The girl is burning something good. She so admires Corso, but far outdoing Corso. But don’t tell her, for Christ’s

sake' (Johnson 1998: n.pag.). Johnson fulfilled her reputation as an admirer of Gregory Corso by following him to Europe in 1961, but was faced with apparent indifference on their eventual meeting. She lived in 'The Beat Hotel' in Paris, cropping up as a 'minor character' in Harold Chapman's photography book *The Beat Hotel* (1984) and Barry Miles's *The Beat Hotel: Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Corso in Paris, 1957-1963* (2000). From Paris she moved to Greece from where she corresponded with Lawrence Ferlinghetti of City Lights Books, who would eventually publish her collection of poetry *Human Songs* (1964). But her body of work outside of this out-of-print text remains scattered and uncollated, and Johnson has evidently disappeared off the literary and physical map. Peabody states that she was last known to be living in Greece (Peabody 1997: 227), while other reports suggest she was living in San Francisco (Johnson 1998: n.pag.).

Elise Cowen (1933-1962) has been portrayed in her friend Joyce Johnson's *Minor Characters* and in her former lover Allen Ginsberg's journals. In the amanuensis role, Cowen typed the manuscript of 'Kaddish', his poem for his mother. 'You haven't done with her, yet?' he recorded her asking him (Johnson 1994: 256). In her lifetime Cowen kept her poems hidden from friends, yet after her suicide a selection appeared in various little magazines and would be resurrected in Knight (1996) and Peabody (1997). However, a complete collection of the available poems has never been assembled.

Carolyn Cassady's (b. 1923) connection to the Beat generation stems from her marriage to Neal Cassady in 1948 and her later affair with Kerouac. After Kerouac's death in 1969, Doubleday Press invited Cassady to write a memoir, which would turn into a twenty year project, punctuated by legal problems from the Kerouac estate over the use of his letters. A fragment of Cassady's manuscript, *Heartbeat* was published

in 1976 and subsequently filmed.¹¹ Then the lengthier *Off the Road* appeared in 1990, which created a dialogue with Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Through the book Cassady intended to revise the myths that define both Kerouac and her late husband; myths which she believes stem from Kerouac's reconfiguration of Neal into the character of Dean Moriarty. Cassady survives as a 'witness' who into the twenty-first century continued to educate the public about the Beats she was intimately connected to.¹² *Off the Road* can be considered as a 'problem' text within Beat generation women studies: Richard Meltzer cannot decide whether the author is deluded or a 'bullshit artist' and Johnson and Grace (2002) exclude Cassady from their canon of Beat generation women. These reactions stem from the author's portrayal of her innocent, 'square' identity while in the midst of the socially and sexually transgressive Beat men, told in a conventional, teleological narrative which aims for the unity of the subject over its life history.¹³

Anne Waldman (b. 1945) grew up in a literary family in Greenwich Village and recalls the presence of Beat generation figures in her early life: Bob Dylan 'moseying around', and Gregory Corso, an 'idol' walking the streets: 'Like Rimbaud, he was the epitome of the "damned" poet, the poete maudit, and gorgeous' (Waldman 2001: 25). After graduating from Bennington College in 1966, Waldman began working at the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery in New York City which brought her into contact with the literary fathers she had first encountered in Donald Allen's *New American Poetry, 1945-1960* (1960). She is a facilitator of the

¹¹ See Carolyn Cassady's 'There Are No Words' in *The Unspeakable Visions of the Individual* 10 (1980): 121-125, for her reaction to watching a representation of her life being filmed in 1978. Cassady commented that the filmmakers were 'living in fantasyland' but was humbled that she was the subject of the film (124).

¹² Anne Waldman states that Beat generation women were 'present as the most observant and sober witnesses' (1996: xi). A typical testimonial by Cassady is 'Off the Road and on the Record' in *The Beats: A Documentary Volume, Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 237, ed. by Matt Theodo (Detroit: Gale, 2001), 149-153.

¹³ I develop my reading of this text in the following section on the Beat memoir.

poetry of others – founding the poetry magazine *Angel Hair* while still in college – and within this environment has developed her own writing. *Giant Night* (1968), her first volume of poetry was published by her press, Angel Hair Books. Waldman is primarily associated with the Beats and their legacy through co-founding the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at the Naropa Institute. Ginsberg announced his ‘spiritual marriage’ with Waldman while they visited Prague together in 1990, on the occasion of his return as the King of May (Waldman 2001: 256). Waldman takes Beat-derived influence – one example being the influence of Ginsberg’s incantatory, repetitive verse upon her ‘Fast Speaking Woman’ (1975) – and transforms it into her own feminist-inflected material in her ‘outrider’ tradition. Although younger than the women writers presented in this thesis, being immersed in the poetry scene of 1960s rather than the 1950s, Waldman has been actively involved in the promotion of these women writers in workshops and readings in the Naropa community and beyond, and through her editing work, for example, *The Beat Book* (1999).

Part II: The Textual Productions of Beat

According to Ronna C. Johnson, ‘to study women Beat writers has meant to track dispersed, uncollected, and sometimes unpublished sources, a body of work that in this disarray does not readily present itself as a coherent field of writing’ (Grace and Johnson 2004: 4). I now wish to track these textual resources and detail women’s contributions to, and transformations of, various generic formations.

Poetry Magazines

Poets such as Hettie Jones and Elise Cowen were the Emily Dickinsons of the Beat world, writing privately and not revealing their work to an audience. But others were publicly involved in poetry through both formal and informal public readings, and semi-private poetry meetings. A network of little magazines helped to publish women poets and was also a forum for women’s involvement as editors, typesetters, and distributors. These roles in the labour of poetry production seem a continuation of the amanuensis role which women took on during the Modernist literary era.¹⁴ George Butterick lists 235 periodicals which existed in the 1950s and 1960s which were ‘inspired by the Beat Generation’, a connection which perhaps should be taken in the loosest sense (Charters 1992: xxxiii). Hettie Jones co-founded *Yugen: a new consciousness in arts and letters* in 1958 with LeRoi Jones. Jones states that it ‘was Roi’s idea, but, as he’s written, I “went for it”’ (Jones [1990] 1997: 53). She continues: ‘Few magazines out of New York, to that date, had promised the new consciousness that everyone downtown agreed was just what the world needed’ (53-

¹⁴ See my Chapter One, note 20 for some sources on gender in relation to literary Modernism.

4). In fact, she felt her own consciousness raised ‘by the very act of press-typing each quarter-inch character of that *new consciousness in arts and letters*’ (54). Jones highlights her role in the physical existence of *Yugen*: ‘Piece by piece I put it all together, on my old kitchen table, with a triangle and T-square’; thereby conflating the production of the magazine with domesticity. But the intellectual decisions involved in content selection do not appear to have been her domain, and her secondary role is emphasised by LeRoi Jones being named as the editor, while the curiously genderless ‘H. Cohen Jones’ is named as the assistant editor (LeRoi Jones 1962: n.pag). The list of writers who appeared in this edition – William Burroughs, Gilbert Sorrentino, Ed Dorn, LeRoi Jones, Charles Olson, and Robert Creeley – does not include women. ‘If I hadn’t yet managed to speak for myself, here at least were these others’, Hettie Jones comments, foregrounding her silence yet also permitting others to speak for her (Jones 1997: 55).

Diane di Prima’s ‘literary newsletter’ *The Floating Bear* (1961-1969) was also co-edited with LeRoi Jones, but her description of their collaboration suggests the intellectual decisions were born out of a more equal process. ‘Roi and I met often and long, reading, picking, arranging sequences of material’, di Prima relates (2001a: 251-2). When their respective tastes differed they resorted to a process of cutting deals: ‘you can put that in, if I put this in’ (252). Yet despite this di Prima feels that, like Hettie Jones, she was left with the labour of material production:

I am thinking about and noticing how, though Roi and I coedited the *Bear*, and often it was he who got the credit for the whole thing, most of the actual physical work devolved upon me and those friends I could dig up to help me. Most of the time. I am sure this was also true for Hettie, for the Totem Press books, in fact, before things got too sticky between us, I often helped her and witnessed how it was she who typed the camera copy, proofed (most of the time) and pasted up (always), but it was Roi’s press, and in this he was not any

different from any other male artist of his day. It was just the natural division of labor / and credit. (253)

The Floating Bear included a number of contributions from women: variously, di Prima's own poems and reviews of modern dance, dance criticism by Yvonne Rainer, Sheri Martinelli's 'Duties of a Lady Female',¹⁵ and poems by Lenore Kandel and Janine Pommy Vega. The newsletter stated that it was 'distributed solely by mailing list' and the submission policy suggests potential contributors 'send mss. & inquiries' to the given address (di Prima and Jones 1961: n.pag.). Di Prima notes that the original mailing list had come from the address books of the editors, which highlights an exclusive scope that actually stretched across to the West Coast (2001: 253)

A glimpse at the New York-based *BlueBeat* magazine evidences women's inclusion rather than absence. Editors George Montgomery and Erik Kiviat include a variety of women contributors in the March 1964 edition, including Bonnie Bremsler, described by the editors as 'NJ jazz-fiend', Lynn Fisher, a 'NYC poetess', Lenore Kandel, 'SF belly dancer-poet', and Barbara Moraff of 'Vermont; [who had previously published] in FOUR YOUNG LADY POETS and BEAT COAST EAST', among others (1964: n.pag.). An introduction to this first edition of *BlueBeat* highlights that the relatively democratic nature of their venture was due to the fact that

¹⁵ 'Duties of a Lady Female' had originally appeared in Martinelli's *Anagogic & Paideumic Review* in 1959 and is reprinted in Peabody (1997), 154-158. Di Prima stayed with Martinelli when she went to visit Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington D.C. (see di Prima 2001a: 140-144). Martinelli, a painter, composed the 'simultaneously profeminist and antifeminist prose poem', according to Grace and Johnson, 'for Pound' (2004: 11). The poem can be compared to Mina Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' (1914), specifically through its suggestion of a radical female agency and its recommendation for women to take responsibility for their procreation and to control child-rearing. Martinelli states: 'Have or adopt children. They ARE the future. Raise them according to the female code. Let the male teach them what their bodies can do. You put the ideas into their minds' ([1959] 1997: 157). Loy's manifesto, inflected by the prevalent eugenicist discourse of the day, states: 'Every woman has a right to maternity—Every woman of superior intelligence should realize her race-responsibility, in producing children in adequate proportion to the unfit or degenerate members of her sex. [...] Woman must become more responsible for the child than man' (Loy [1914] 1997: 155). Further consideration of the Modernist poetics of each writer would make a fascinating comparative study.

‘a mimeo can experiment with new ideas and expose new poets because it can afford to fail’ (Congdon 1964: n.pag.).

Kay Johnson’s letters to Lawrence Ferlinghetti describe her experimentation with self-publishing in New Orleans: ‘Am having more fun with the mimeograph. [...] everyone should have one. better than television! next hope to go into PAPERFRONT novels. mimeographed’ (Johnson 1960-1968: n.pag).¹⁶ But she admitted to worrying not only about who would distribute these proposed mimeographed novels, but who would read them. With reference to an ‘Anthology of Local Poets’ she envisioned, she stated that ‘nobody wants to be included because I am not a real publisher, you know, I am only a human being with a borrowed mimeograph machine, and this is not much good to anybody’. Johnson wondered where she could find poets ‘who are alive and have a message and are willing to go mimeograph, non profit’. So despite the apparent democracy brought by inexpensive publishing, the 1960s poetry world remained a highly-charged, political terrain of insiders and outsiders.

Writing retrospectively, Lewis Warsh discusses the dominance of poetry by male authors in *Angel Hair* (1966-1978), the magazine he co-edited with Anne Waldman. Warsh refers to the absence of any ‘feminist or multicultural consciousness’, that there was ‘no conscious attempt to balance the number of male and female poets contributing to the magazine, no thought of raising the political level beyond the politics of the poetry world itself’ (Waldman and Warsh 2001: xxvi). He admits his own embarrassment at the ‘dearth’ of women poets in their magazine, and apologetically states: ‘To say that there were fewer women poets writing or that the most radical political groups at the time were sexist and homophobic is no excuse’

¹⁶ This particular letter from Kay Johnson to Lawrence Ferlinghetti is undated. Further quotations featured in this paragraph are from further undated letters from the same collection.

(xxvi). The little magazine format was often a platform for writers from which they would go on to publish individual poetry chapbooks or collections. Many of the poems appearing in anthologies cited in this thesis first appeared in the little magazines. Donald M. Allen, writing in the introduction to *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* states that the poetry he featured ‘has appeared only in a few little magazines, as broadsheets, pamphlets, and limited editions, or circulated in manuscript’ – testifying to its ‘newness’ (1960: xi). Yet editors such as Hettie Jones and Diane di Prima not only stress the importance of the end products as historical documents, but also the collaborative, and evidently gendered, process of production.

The Beat Novel

The novels Kay Johnson alluded to in her letters to Ferlinghetti evidently remain lost.¹⁷ It is Joyce Johnson who exists as the prime woman novelist of the Beat generation through *Come and Join the Dance* (1962). Johnson has stated that although she did not regard the novel she was writing as a ‘Beat novel’, in retrospect she accepts this label for her work as it defines ‘a certain unconventional bohemian attitude of the 1950s’ (Grace and Johnson 204: 189). *Dance* also continues the ficto-autobiographic mode of its Beat antecedents, *Go* (1952) by John Clellon Holmes, *Junky* (1953) by William Burroughs, as well as Kerouac’s novels. In the exposition of 1950s hipster consciousness it can also be compared to Chandler Brossard’s *Who Walk in Darkness* (1952) and George Mandel’s *Flee the Angry Strangers* (1952), the

¹⁷ The biographical note on the back cover of *Human Songs* refers to Johnson’s ‘several lovely lonely novels, none of which has been published, except for a fragment in City Lights’ *Journal for the Protection of All Beings*’ (San Francisco: City Lights, 1961) (Johnson 1964). This was ‘Proximity’, which would be reprinted in Peabody (1997), 80-83.

latter text being a narrative of a white girl who rejects her middle-class existence.¹⁸

Yet *Dance* ends on a positive note for the heroine Susan Levitt who escapes the torpor she felt her friend Kay Gorman (modelled on Elise Cowen) submerged in. As well as claiming Henry James as a model for her novel writing, Johnson speaks of the influence of André Gide's *The Counterfeiters* upon *Dance*. 'The idea of the gratuitous act,' Johnson states, influenced her conception of Levitt's intentionally setting out to lose her virginity (Grace and Johnson 2004: 190). This deliberate act resembles Esther Greenwood's similar move in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), a contemporaneous novel of American womanhood at odds with society and gender expectations.

Johnson's later novel *In the Night Café* (1989) is set in the early 1960s New York post-Beat milieu but due to its retrospective composition is not a Beat novel in the sense that *Dance* is. Likewise, Alix Kates Shulman's novel *Burning Questions* (1978) revisits the Beat moment, placing a Midwestern girl's movement to Greenwich Village within a larger narrative of the awakening of feminist consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s. The narrator's experience of the Greenwich Village beatnik world is ultimately damaging, and she does not retain links with its inhabitants on her path.

The Memoir

Although it mines autobiographic material – from 'Kaddish' (1961), Allen Ginsberg's lament to his late mother, to Jack Kerouac first-person novels which he collectively referred to as his 'Dulooz Legend' – Beat writing is conscious of its own status as literature. Spontaneity was regarded as a poetic process – which required daily practice and often drugs as a catalyst – rather than a mirror in which the self and

¹⁸ See Charters (2001: xxvi) for a discussion of these two texts in relation to Beat generation writing.

subject matter were one. Although inheritors of Romanticism, the Beats did not display the unified subjectivity in their autobiographically-based writings which Huck Gutman attributes to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, ‘the first Romantic’ (1988: 101).

Gutman states that Rousseau was ‘perhaps the first human being to insist upon his own singularity’, and his *Confessions* (1781) clearly illustrate not only the author’s conception of singularity but that his literary endeavour was at that point unique, thereby initiating ‘the modern secular confessional’ (100; 107). At the beginning of the text, Rousseau states:

I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent, and which, once complete, will have no imitator. My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray will be myself. [...] I am made unlike any one I have ever met; I will even venture to say I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different.
([1781] 1953: 17)

Rousseau’s Romanticism lay in his desire, in the ‘Age of Reason’, to divulge his emotions – ‘The true object of my confessions is to reveal my inner thoughts exactly in all the situations of my life’ (262). This representation of the narrative ‘I’ inaugurates a lineage of what appears today as the traditional autobiographical subject. I want to trace a division in the autobiographic mode between unified subjectivity and a subjectivity aware of what Shari Benstock refers to as its ‘gaps’: ‘gaps in time and space or between the individual and the social, but also a widening divergence between the manner and matter of its discourse’ (1988: 11). With reference to Lacanian terminology Benstock refers to an ‘inner seam’ dividing the conscious and the unconscious – ‘a space between “inside” and “outside” – it is the space of difference, the gap that the drive toward unity of self can never entirely

close. It is also the space of writing, which bears the marks and registers the alienating effects of the false symmetry of the mirror stage' (12).

Memoirs by women of the Beat generation highlight the gendered gaps in Beat discourse, and mine Benstock's 'seam' between inside and outside, self and other, received history and memory, foregrounding gaps in literary subjectivity and memory rather than papering over them in the pursuit of subjective unity. Accordingly, they are symptomatic of the re-emergence of women's life writing seen in recent years, and they also fuel the accompanying feminist-inspired critical speculation on the autobiographic mode.¹⁹ Certain memoirs were written in the revisionist mode, thereby providing a corrective effect upon Beat history. For example, Carolyn Cassady's *Off the Road* (1990) represents a comparatively mundane domestic life;²⁰ Joyce Johnson's *Minor Characters* (1983) describes her juggling the identity of the Beat chick with that of a respectable secretary; Hettie Jones's *How I Became Hettie Jones* (1990) presents the author's life as working mother and wife while she simultaneously maintained a literary magazine and press; Diane di Prima's *Recollections of My Life as a Woman* (2001) takes great pains to detail the author's childhood and the origins of her fraught relationship with her mother, before describing life as a 1950s Beat.

¹⁹ As well as Benstock's (1988) collection, see variously Jelinek (1980) and Smith (1987) for critical responses to women's life writing. Sage (1992), Gilmore (1994), and Miller (2002) are general critical studies of women's writing which refer to memoirs by women of the Beat generation. Grace (2002) also tackles such memoirs but comes in a collection dedicated solely to Beat's women authors.

²⁰ As noted in the biographical introduction to Carolyn Cassady, her text *Off the Road* is anomalous in the Beat generation women's memoir genre because of its attempt to manufacture a unified, and ultimately unbelievable, narrative 'I'. The shortcomings of the text highlight the successes of the other texts mentioned in this discussion. Benstock refers to formulations of the autobiographic mode, as espoused by Georges Gusdorf or James Olney, as positing 'a self called to witness (as an authority) to "his" own being' (1988: 19). Cassady's portrayals of her husband Neal Cassady, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg are illuminating factual writing – although at over four hundred pages it may test the most devout Beat reader – but writing as a 'witness' to her 'own being' the reader is left unconvinced. The narrative details her reasoning behind taking Neal repeatedly back into the family home after his bigamy, serial adultery, theft of her savings, and serving of a jail term. Cassady does not attempt to tie her self-confessed 'doormat' behaviour to the post-war ideology of the homemaker, but looks to Edgar Cayce's esoteric writings on reincarnation as an explanation. She does not confess to gaps in memory or motive, but portrays a young woman with the knowledge of the mature writer, in a teleological narrative which runs toward the resolution of self-redemption after Neal's death in 1967.

Other texts are not so preoccupied with correcting the historical record, and through their artistry expand the generic boundaries of the memoir form. Bonnie Bremser's *Troia [For Love of Ray]* (1969) countered the male road narrative in its portrayal of a female adventuress who was also a mother, and expressed the consequences of her risk-taking on her fractured psyche and abused body. Bremser's drug-fuelled creation of her textual persona blurs the boundaries of memoir as she poeticises her memories of the recent past. Although Diane di Prima's *Memoirs of a Beatnik* (1969) contains episodes of sexual fantasy in which reality is jettisoned, it also produces a quotidian aesthetic in its depiction of the more mundane aspects of beatnik life.

Virginia Woolf referred to traditional biography as presenting 'the lives of great men only', and asked: 'Is not anyone who has lived a life, and left a record of that life, worthy of biography—the failures as well as the successes, the humble as well as the illustrious? And what of greatness? And what smallness? He must revise our standards of merit and set up new heroes for our admiration' (1967b: 226-227). I suggest Woolf's musings can extend to the field of autobiography. In essays such as 'The Lives of the Obscure' she pondered such lives as they are represented in forgotten, dusty memoirs; in *A Room of One's Own* she referred to the 'infinitely obscure lives' of women which 'remain to be recorded' (1998: 116); in her diary she referred to the ideal of including the quotidian in her prose – 'several stray matters which I would exclude if I hesitated, but which are the diamonds in the dustheap' (Benstock 1988: 17). Throughout her oeuvre Woolf described the 'humble' and 'small' – considerations which texts by Beat generation women (and men) also manifest. In these texts there is often a tension between representing quotidian domesticities while also representing the 'great' literary lives of others, namely Beat men. In their awareness that their own histories dovetail with important literary

history, the memoirs are aware of the media-exploited myths of the Beat generation – acknowledging yet revising such fictions, as in the case of Johnson and Jones; or skilfully adapting them to create a fantastic narrative, in the case of Diane di Prima’s *Memoirs of a Beatnik*.

The Journal as Beat Practice

The journal occupies its own particular place in Beat generation literature. Using quotidian experience as source material for writing practice, the journal secures a place for writing as daily ritual. For the Beat writer it was a rehearsal space which allowed the testing of new ideas and forms, but also an exercise book which got the writer up to speed in order to write outside its pages, for example, in Jack Kerouac’s technique of ‘sketching’.²¹ A journal was a vital accoutrement for the mobile Beat writer.²² Joanne Kyger’s *Strange Big Moon: The Japan and India Journals, 1960-1964* (2000) used her daily experience of her time spent abroad as source material for an experimental writing diary. The text displays Kyger’s ‘attempt to investigate the stuff of writing’ as she asks: ‘Is this line any “good”? How does a poem begin and end. What’s a “voice”, a personal style. What’s the story?’ (Kyger [1981] 2000: xi). *Strange Big Moon* manages to ‘read like a novel’, as Anne Waldman points out, exhibiting a coherence of structure while being characteristically fragmented (Waldman 2000: vii). Its tapestried form shows its intertextual affinity with Kyger’s first collection of poems *The Tapestry and The Web* (1965); in fact, versions of these poems appear in the journal, and the figure of Penelope is already cropping up: ‘Is the

²¹ See Kerouac’s ‘Essentials of Spontaneous Prose’, *Evergreen Review* 2.5 (1958): 72-73.

²² See variously Allen Ginsberg’s *Indian Journals* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1970) and *Journals: Early Fifties, Early Sixties*, ed. Gordon Ball (New York: Grove, 1977), and Jack Kerouac’s *Windblown World: The Journals of Jack Kerouac, 1947-1954*, ed. Douglas G. Brinkley (New York: Viking, 2004).

woman who waits the woman who weaves?; ‘Network of names like weaving. Knowledge casts a net’ (Kyger 2000: 32, 39). With reference to entries made during her travels in India, Kyger describes an aesthetic born out of domestic necessity: ‘the journal written on the spot, was much preoccupied with keeping a budget and washing a black drip dry dress’ (xi). It therefore ‘was not very revealing as to the actual experiences of a journey’ and she refers the reader to Gary Snyder’s account of their travels, *Passage Through India* (1983) for ‘a very engaging description of the immense cultural and historical diversity of India’ (xi). The differing scopes of these twin narratives are suggestive of the different concerns of the journey, as experienced by a male or female traveller.

Kyger describes the uncanny feeling of revisiting ‘a forty years ago self’ in the journal’s pages, ‘cringing at the often cultivated bratty wilfulness carried as part of the personality equipment’ (xi). But on a positive note, she states: ‘Keeping a journal gives access to past times and lines that would have been gone forever. Triggers memory, that weird dimension carried around invisibly in the “mind”. Gives history back to you’ (xi). The women memoirists turn back to their journals to aid their literary recollections. In *Minor Characters* Joyce Johnson returns to her college journal from the mid-1950s, and Diane di Prima excerpts more recent journal entries in *Recollections of My Life as a Woman*. These historical documents work in a similar way to the letters to Helene Dorn that Hettie Jones incorporates into her memoir; these were the only writing Jones produced during the Beat era, and kept her ‘from sinking’ (Jones [1990] 1997: 184). Slippage between genres is characteristic of Beat writing, as a result of the autobiographic material it mines. Jack Kerouac’s staged antipathy for revising one’s writing – ‘Craft *is* craft’, he stated in ‘Essentials of Spontaneous Prose’ – has been discredited by critics who have examined the stages of

his writing process.²³ With the assistance of journals and letters, women writers imaginatively reconstruct their former lives.

After introducing the women writers, and the various genres they wrote in, we can move to the first chapter, which provides a more detailed discussion of the issue of ‘minority’ and women’s place in the Beat canon: it addresses issues of literary canonicity in relation to Beat writing, maps previous academic and critical work which has constructed the place of women writers of the Beat generation as an area, and cites some pertinent theoretical models from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, namely, the ‘rhizome’ and ‘nomadology’.

The development of the later chapters traces a rough trajectory of the woman writer’s identification with male literary ‘fathers’ to an understanding of the effect of gender upon her place within the literary community. Chapter Two explores themes of influence and lineage in the community, with literary fathers and peers being discussed. The third chapter poses the Beat ‘girl’ in her urban bohemian world with an ambivalently gendered subjectivity spawned by her male role models; yet by tracing precedents to her bohemianism from European modernisms we see her fashioning her own culture. Themes of memory and corporeality inform Chapter Four as the writers restage their fraught relationships with the parental generation, with the mother appearing as a powerful figure to be grappled with. My fifth chapter places emphasis on themes of the body and sexuality as it delineates the Beat girl’s movement into womanhood, when the writers were faced with domesticity and ‘mothering’ not merely their children, but Beat men also. Finally, in Chapter Six, writers and their personae go on the Beat road. Historically, the road has also offered

²³ See Tim Hunt’s *Kerouac’s Crooked Road* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1981).

women travellers the chance to escape the constraints of gender, but on the 1950s road domestic roles and tensions resurface.

CHAPTER ONE:

‘Merely Being (T)here’: Exposing the Critical Debate of ‘Women of the Beat Generation’

Part I: ‘A Minor Part of Their Act’

Periodically the young revive the Beat Generation. 1993 was the year of a Beat revival in downtown Manhattan where a wave of café poetry readings made the cover of *New York* magazine. In a Gap ad for khakis, I came upon Jack Kerouac posed on a warm September night outside a bar on MacDougal Street called the Kettle of Fish. Part of the original shot had been cropped away. In it, well out of the foreground, arms folded, dressed in black of course, with a look on her face that suggests waiting, you would have found an anonymous young woman. It was strange to know everything about that woman who wasn't there, strange to be alive and to be a legend's ghost.

– Joyce Johnson, *Minor Characters* (1983)¹

In the above passage Joyce Johnson sketches in her presence beside the Beat icon Jack Kerouac. This revisionism is characteristic of much recent writing by women of the Beat generation. Yet women remain shadowy presences within the Beat literary field – they ‘kind of’ fit in. The minor status which Johnson highlights echoes the ‘infinitely obscure lives’ which Virginia Woolf felt women to have, and recommended as a subject matter for their writing (1998: 116). In *Minor Characters* Johnson combines the ‘minor’ narrative of her own life growing up in the 1950s with the ‘major’ narrative of the life of Jack Kerouac. These narratives wind together as the couple begin a relationship in 1957, shortly before the publication of Kerouac's first successful novel *On the Road*. Allen Ginsberg had set them up on a blind date, with the ulterior motive of providing his friend Kerouac with a place to stay:

¹ Joyce Johnson, *Minor Characters: A Young Woman's Coming-of-Age in the Beat Orbit of Jack Kerouac* (London: Virago, 1994), p. xiii.

As our paths converge in Howard Johnson's, we're looking for different things. At thirty-four, Jack's worn down, the energy that had moved him to so many different places gone. He's suddenly waited too long. The check for *The Subterraneans* will never arrive; *On the Road* will never be published. Why not let Allen rescue him? [...] I see the blue, bruised eye of Kerouac and construe his melancholy as the look of a man needing love because I'm, among other things, twenty-one years old. I believe in the curative powers of love as the English believe in tea or the Catholics believe in the miracle of Lourdes. (1994: 128)

As the relationship deteriorates, Johnson unwinds the dual narratives,² ending the book with a portrait of her younger self:

I see the girl Joyce Glassman, twenty-two, with her hair hanging down below her shoulders, all in black like Masha in *The Seagull*—black stockings, black skirt, black sweater—but unlike Masha, she's not mourning for her life. How could she have been, with her seat at the table in the exact center of the universe, that midnight place where so much is converging, the only place in America that's alive? As a female, she's not quite part of this 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. (261-2)

New York's Beat world may have been 'the exact center of the universe' for Johnson, but retrospectively she highlights her peripheral status in this world. Although she occupies a 'seat at the table' she is 'sitting by' in the role of observer listening to the men's voices.³ Johnson dramatises her position by invoking a literary character –

² Johnson explains that while writing *Minor Characters* she was not reading other memoirs in preparation, but refers to its form stemming from the 'inherent problems' of the material; precisely, the telling of the Kerouac story being a necessary part of the telling of her own life: 'I hit upon the device of following him and following myself as two separate streams, that then converge ... then diverge at the end' (Grace and Johnson 2004: 188).

³ As the young Glassman sat by listening to the voices of the men 'rise and fall' perhaps she felt empathy with J. Alfred Prufrock who passively watched 'the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo' in Eliot's poem. This would make an interesting ironic appropriation of Modernist material. Johnson states that for her early-1950s generation of college students, the so-called 'Silent Generation' according to *Time* and *Life* magazines, the 'middle-aged line of T. S. Eliot's, "Do I dare to eat a peach?" had an especial poignancy' (1994: 49). *Minor Characters* also features Eliot's line from *The Waste Land*, 'HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME', as an epigraph (xi).

Masha, from Anton Chekhov's play *The Seagull* – a typical move in this very intertextual book.⁴

The title of the memoir was intended to be ironic: 'whereas we were considered minor characters within the Beat movement, as far as we were concerned, we were major characters in our own lives', Johnson states (1997: 17). There is ambivalence here – while being the major character of their own experience they are simultaneously eclipsed into minor significance in the larger cultural-literary narrative.⁵ Minority is a theme which runs beyond Johnson's text to inform the marketing strategies of its publishers. For example, the 1994 Anchor edition is subtitled, 'A Young Woman's Coming-of-Age in the Beat Orbit of Jack Kerouac', thereby positing the author as a mere satellite of the Beat author.

Johnson has described being 'cropped away' from the Gap advertisement which featured Kerouac. If we look at the original photograph, taken by Jerome Yulsman in 1957, we see Kerouac in the foreground of the night-time scene; his white shirt and face illuminated by flash photography as his eyes connect with the camera (see Figure 1). Johnson is positioned several feet behind Kerouac's right shoulder, dressed in dark clothing, smiling for the camera, but out of focus and mired in the red glow from the bar. Her position evokes the minor status highlighted in her memoir.

Due to her position on the sidelines, Gap was able to completely erase her presence and add the slogan 'Kerouac wore khakis' in her place. Another photograph from the same session was used on the cover of the 1999 Penguin edition of *Minor*

⁴ See pp. 140-141 for a development of the discussion of Masha.

⁵ Johnson finds symbolic evidence of this in Lucien Carr, early associate of the East Coast Beats, referring to Elise Cowen as both 'Eclipse' and 'Ellipse' when he met her at his New Year's Eve party in 1956 (1994: 125).

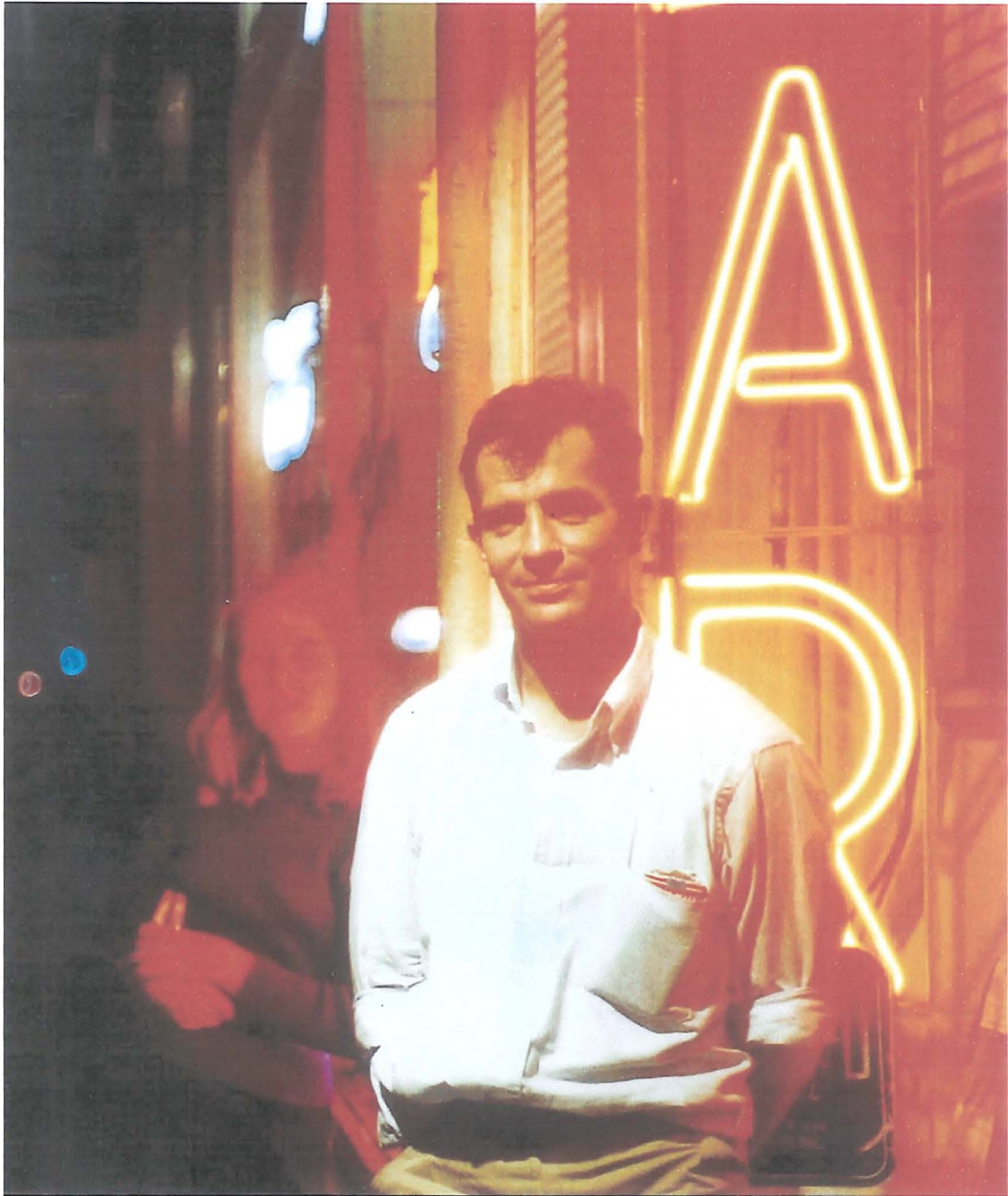


Figure 1: Joyce Johnson, Jack Kerouac, 1957

Photograph by Jerome Yulsman. From Steve Turner, *Angelheaded Hipster: A Life of Jack Kerouac* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), p. vi. Image used by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Characters (see Figure 2).⁶ This time Kerouac appears looking off to one side, with a grin on his face, not dominating the moment. Johnson's face is more distinct and she looks at Kerouac, which suggests a dialogue between the couple. Johnson appears as an active member of the situation rather than as an 'anonymous young woman', which is fitting for the cover of her memoir (Johnson 1994: xiii).

But the curious *mise en scène* of these photographs, in which Johnson is knowingly positioned in the background to accompany a shot of Kerouac the Beat writer, who dominates the foreground, does encapsulate the marginalised position of women within the received history of the Beat generation. Although the mature Johnson expresses understated shock at finding herself 'cropped away', the younger woman evidently did not force her way into the foreground next to Kerouac, but was resigned to her secondary status as 'an anonymous young woman' accompanying the famous writer.

In comparison, photographs of the male Beats display camaraderie as the subjects cavort and embrace each other. At the beginning of the first chapter of *Minor Characters* Johnson contemplates a 'snapshot' which was taken in Morningside Heights, near the Columbia University campus in 1944, and shows Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, and their friend Hal Chase (1994: 1). Kerouac's 'football-hero shoulders look enormous', his arms stretch over Chase and Ginsberg, and 'his fingertips reach Burroughs's shoulder' (1). While the others appear distracted or caught in a self-contemplative pose, Kerouac is 'the only one of them totally connected to the moment' (1). Johnson had apparently found the photograph in a biography of Kerouac, and she pictures herself as the mature, detached observer

⁶ Joyce Johnson. *Minor Characters: A Young Woman's Coming-of-Age in the Beat Orbit of Jack Kerouac* (New York: Penguin, 1999). This edition features the subtitle 'A Beat Memoir' on its cover, but its title page keeps the subtitle from 1994.

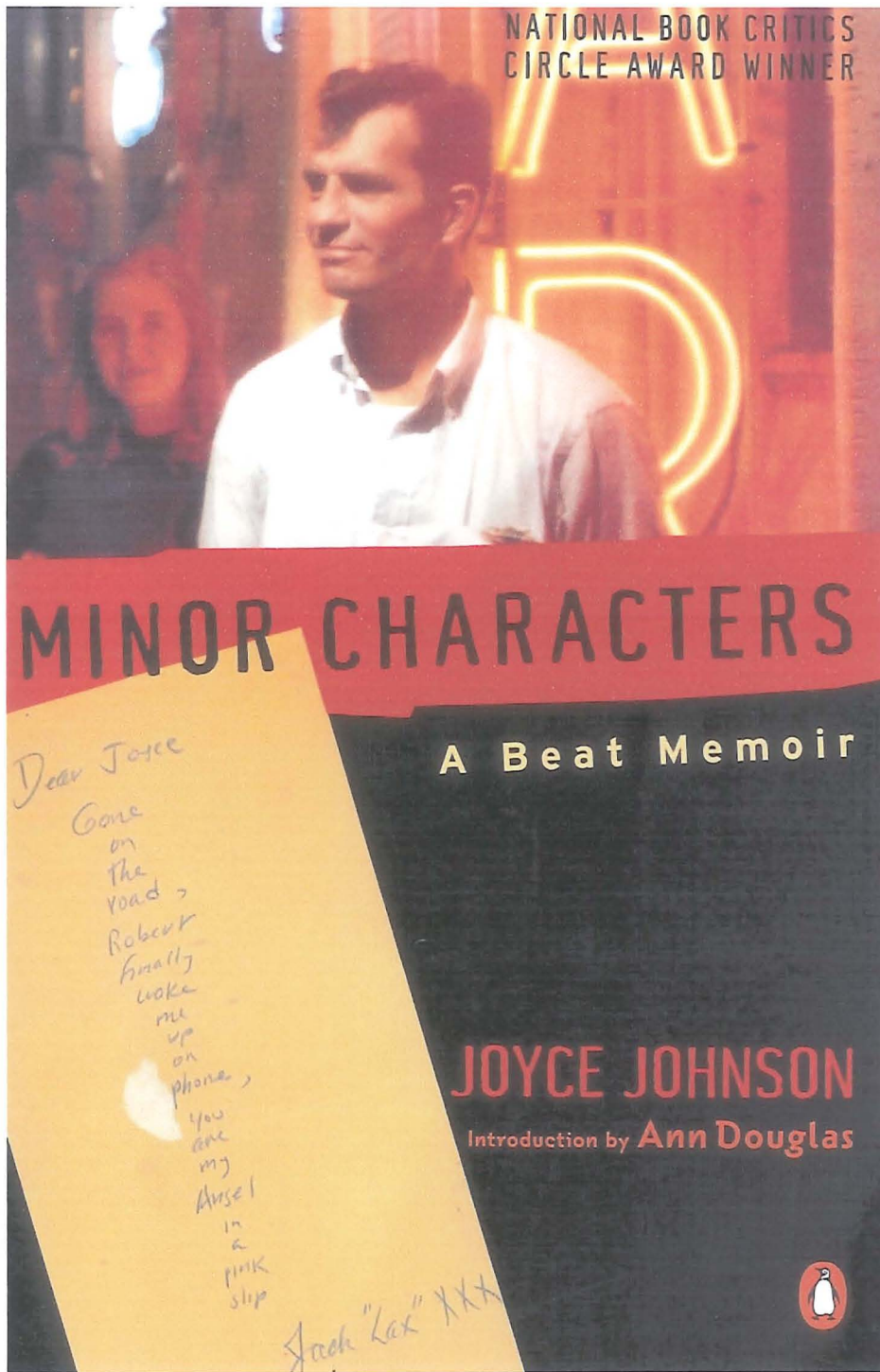


Figure 2: Cover of Joyce Johnson's *Minor Characters* (New York: Penguin, 1999). Image used by permission of the Irene Skolnick Literary Agency.

leafing through the book and finding her former name 'Joyce Glassman' in the index next to 'half a dozen page references, having to do with approximately one-twentieth of my life, 1957-59, when I used to have that name' (6).⁷ Leigh Gilmore has focused on this scene: 'by beginning her book with an interpretation of this photograph, Johnson simultaneously locates herself as both the writer of one book and the reader of another, for this particular photograph functions as a pivotal intertext' (1994: 8). In that particular Kerouac biography 'women are mainly absent or underrepresented to the point of unrecognizability' (8). The Kerouac biography exists metonymically for literary histories of the male Beats which take a hagiographic approach to their subjects.

Johnson notes that images of the women of the Columbia group of Beats – Edie Parker (1923-1992), Kerouac's first wife, and Joan Vollmer (1924-1951), Burroughs's second wife – are absent from the book. In fact, at that point she had 'never seen pictures of them anywhere' (1994: 2). But she attempts to imaginatively sketch in the detail of the lives of these earlier minor characters she never knew, recreating their physical presences. Edie is 'cute in the way girls aren't cute any more,' a 'sweater girl in saddle shoes, her light brown hair in a pompadour,' who was fundamental in introducing Kerouac to the other Beats (3). An independent woman with a 'resourceful spirit,' she bails Kerouac out of jail with her parents' money, and has even had 'her own adventures' working as a longshoreman while he was at sea (9). Johnson sees something 'determinedly spunky in the way she confronts bizarre circumstances, trying on a life that doesn't fit her' (3). But Johnson surmises that ultimately Edie recognised that the male friends to whom she has introduced Kerouac would be more important in his life than her, something which Johnson can conjecture

⁷ Nancy M. Grace points to Dennis McNally's *Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, the Beat Generation, and America* (New York: Random House, 1979) as the text in question (2002: 177).

from her own experience with him: ‘That Jack, despite her dreams of marriage and “Oh, we’ll have our Bohemian period and then we’ll settle down and he’ll write his books and we’ll love each other forever,” is unpossessable’ (9). But by 1945, Edie ‘vanishes—at least from the literary histories’ (3).

Joan Vollmer’s apartment on 115th Street – ‘an early prototype of what a later generation called a pad’ – is presented as central to the constitution of the Beats (3). Edie had introduced Kerouac to her best friend Joan, and Kerouac, sensing an ‘affinity between Joan’s sharp, glittering wittiness’ with that of William Burroughs, had introduced Joan to Burroughs (1994: 3). This new crowd of people in Joan’s apartment became her ‘newly created family’ and Johnson imagines ‘there was now a never-ending magical intensity, brilliance refracting against brilliance’ (4). Joan stood at the centre, matching Burroughs ‘wit for wit’ and ‘holding her own’ in their literary discussions (3, 4). However, she also matched Burroughs in her growing appetite for Bensedrine, and after marrying, they moved to Texas and then to Mexico City to cater for their drug habits. Her death – ‘Ever hear the one about the man who played William Tell with his wife and missed?’ – remains ‘much more famous than she is’ and ‘part of the prehistory of the Beats’; a story Johnson remembers hearing around the Columbia campus in the early 1950s (5).⁸ Johnson surmises that if she had known Joan she ‘might have loved her’ (5). Her empathy with Joan Vollmer and Edie Parker demonstrates Johnson’s desire to imagine a community of her female peers, who have also been elided from the Beat record or who appear as mere fragments of the story. Nancy M. Grace calls Johnson’s story a ‘more successful variation’ on the lives which Edie and Joan tried to make (2002: 149). Grace believes that ‘creating her life through those of other women is central to Johnson’s aesthetics.’ Moreover, by ‘forging a kind

⁸ Biographers of William Burroughs have tended to underplay the role of Joan in his history. For example, see Ted Morgan’s *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs* (New York: Henry Holt, 1988).

of solidarity in both lived and imagined experience, Johnson suggests that the self can be known only by knowing/creating others' (149). Despite this feminist move, Edie and Joan still appear secondary, now facilitators rather than absences. To counter such positioning Johnson provides a textual portrait at the close of *Minor Characters* that mirrors but also counters the introductory snapshot of the Beat writers. Alongside 'the girl Joyce Glassman' dressed in black sitting at the Beat table, Johnson invokes the minor characters she did know: Elise Cowen, whose posthumously published poetry Johnson quotes from in the memoir, and Hettie Jones, whose poems were 'kept mute in boxes for too many years'; thereby giving up their 'silence' as she gives up her own (262).

Diane di Prima has also reflected upon the marginality of women within the fray of a characteristically competitive community of writers in the 1950s:

I saw these guys, myself and the others, as artists simply. All the striving was for and of the Work, and I loved them for it. I loved them at their best and beyond their best as fellow companions of the Road. My choice: to overlook their one-upmanship, their eternal need to be *right*. Or I took it in stride as not important. A minor part of their Act.

Was this denial?

(2001a: 107)

Di Prima's exceptionality as a woman is obvious to her retrospectively, but as a young writer she sought to play with the boys – performing what amounts to an act of 'drag', as will be discussed in the following chapter, in order to counter the notion that she could possibly be a 'minor part of their Act'.

The medium of Beat literature is suggestive of smallness – the 'little' magazines and small presses which remain obscure to this day. So, although I invoke the term 'minor', perhaps a dualistic model of major and minor Beat literature is inappropriate due to the unstable position of the Beat generation in the literary canon.

For example in 1983, on the occasion of the publication of *Minor Characters*, a *New York Times* reviewer misread Johnson's dual narratives when he stated that Kerouac emerges as 'the most memorable of the minor characters Mrs. Johnson writes about' (Lehmann-Haupt 1983: n.pag.). Evidently, perceptions of Beat literature are relative. Although Beat titles such as *Howl* and *On the Road* were in wide circulation in the late 1950s, in 'mainstream' publications such as *Life* and *Time* magazines the writing and lifestyles of Beat writers were attacked and dismissed.⁹ Lehmann-Haupt's misreading of the male Beats as minor characters is symptomatic of Beat literature's continued unstable place within American letters, despite the popular status of its icons.

The Beat canon is subject to constant revision as each new anthology of Beat writing or critical study appears.¹⁰ The interrogation of the Beat canon mirrors the questioning of the wider literary canon in terms of multiculturalism. Race, gender and sexuality have become points of entry into the debate with each area now commanding its own respective canon.¹¹ The process of 'rescuing' marginalised women writers and their texts in order to establish a distinct tradition is a 'gynocritical' project in the terms set out by Elaine Showalter in the late 1970s.¹²

⁹ See Norman Podhoretz's 'The Know-Nothing Bohemians' (*Partisan Review*, Spring 1958), Paul O'Neil's 'The Only Rebellion Around' (*Life*, 1959) and Robert Brustein's essay 'The Cult of Unthink' (*Horizon*, 1958).

¹⁰ See, for example, Anne Waldman's anthology *The Beat Book: Writings from the Beat Generation* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999). Recent critical titles include *The Beat Generation: A Gale Critical Companion*, ed. Lynn M. Zott (Farmington Hills: Gale, 2003), 3 vols, and Jennie Skerl's *Reconstructing the Beats* (New York: Palgrave, 2004).

¹¹ For discussions of the formation of the literary canon see Leslie Fiedler's *English Literature: Opening up the Canon – Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1979* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 1981), Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars* (New York: Oxford U P, 1992), Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt, 1994), Avrom Fleishman's *The Condition of English: Literary Studies in a Changing Culture* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998) and Frank Kermode's *Pleasure and Danger: The Aesthetics of Canon* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2004).

¹² See Elaine Showalter's 'Toward a Feminist Poetics' in *Women Writing About Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 25-36. 'Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture', Showalter states (1996: 102).

Before turning to ways of reading the concept of ‘women of the Beat generation’ other than in terms of minority, let us trace the emergence of women writers as subjects within the field of Beat literary and cultural studies.

The debate of feminist interventions to the canon can also be read in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale U P, 1979), Elaine Showalter's *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Routledge, 1985) and Lillian S. Robinson's *In the Canon's Mouth: Dispatches from the Culture Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1997).

Part II: The Critical Reception of Women Writers of the Beat Generation

To map out the field of Beat generation women we can refer to literary anthologies published by avant-garde, academic and mainstream presses, academic or popular articles and longer studies. Therein we hear competing stories which reflect the subjective, biased, and therefore political nature of representation.

Donald M. Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* (1960), featured a Beat generation section with writing by Kerouac, Ginsberg, Corso and Peter Orlovsky, as part of its wider grouping of American poetry.¹³ The four women (out of forty-four poets) included in the anthology, Denise Levertov (1923-1997), Helen Adam (1909-1992), Madeline Gleason (1903-1979) and Barbara Guest (1920-2006), are related only tangentially to the Beat writers in social terms. Their dates and places of birth exclude them from the focus of my discussion. But perhaps the work of some of the younger female poets addressed in this thesis could have belonged in Allen's fifth and final grouping in the anthology – poets 'who have been associated with and in some cases influenced by the leading writers of the preceding groups, but who have evolved their own original styles and new conceptions of poetry' (1960: xiii). Diane di Prima published within the timeframe of *The New American Poetry*, and could have fitted in there next to her literary collaborator and lover LeRoi Jones, and her friends John Wieners and Michael McClure. Di Prima addresses this situation in *Recollections of My Life as a Woman*, commenting on her exclusion:

¹³ The five groups presented are the Black Mountain group, the San Francisco Renaissance, the Beat Generation, the New York School, and a fifth looser grouping of younger poets influenced variously by the other schools. Allen foregrounds the inescapable arbitrariness to his editing process in *The New American Poetry* which delineated the groups according to factors such as aesthetic affiliation and geography, and he acknowledges that an individual poet may have allegiances to more than one group.

I had taken it as a matter of course when Donald Allen stopped in a doorway at a party at Roi's house, to tell me that he wouldn't be including my work in the *New American Poetry* anthology. Though the work I'd given him—'The Jungle', 'The Ballroom', 'The Party', was certainly strong enough; holds up even now. He had been, he told me in that doorway, requested by Hettie Jones to leave me out. Because of my ongoing affair with LeRoi. (2001a: 238)

Di Prima admits that she never verified the allegation, but felt that Allen 'could have had his own reasons for not wanting me in the book' (238). She saw a double standard whereby she 'would carry the guilt for the affair: LeRoi's poems could be included, but not mine. He was married, which made me, by implication, the home-breaker, the scarlet woman' (238).¹⁴

Although Joanne Kyger wrote and gave readings in the poetry circles of the San Francisco Renaissance in the late 1950s,¹⁵ she was according to Linda Russo, 'a little too late to establish some ground from which she could be swept up in the embrace of Donald Allen's *New American Poetry*' (1999: n. pag.). However, Allen would eventually publish Kyger's first collection *The Tapestry and The Web* in 1965.

¹⁴ But di Prima's poems would appear in the 1965 collection, *The Moderns: An Anthology of New Writing in America*, edited by LeRoi Jones (London: MacGibbon and Kee).

¹⁵ 'The San Francisco Renaissance' refers to a fruitful period in San Francisco's poetry scene during the mid-1950s to early 1960s. Retrospective commentaries have cited the poetry reading on October 7, 1955 at the Six Gallery at which Allen Ginsberg first read his celebrated poem 'Howl' as the 'inauguration' of the Renaissance (Charters 1992: 227). The event set the tone of the poetry reading as a new cultural event, although they had a history in the Bay Area's established poetry world, somewhat removed from the East Coast literary establishment. Other poets who read alongside Ginsberg were Philip Lamantia, Michael McClure, Philip Whalen, Gary Snyder, with anarchist writer Kenneth Rexroth as M.C., and Jack Kerouac present in the audience. (Kerouac would describe the event in *The Dharma Bums* (1958)). The significance which has been placed on the East Coast Beats' (Ginsberg and Kerouac) appearance on the West Coast as a catalyst for the local poetry community must be weighed against the existence of an already well-developed community with its own luminaries such as Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer (who had staged their own 'Berkeley Renaissance' in the 1940s) and Rexroth. This community had its own salons, workshops, presses, publications, academic support system and the San Francisco Poetry Center founded by Ruth Witt-Diamant in 1954. Michael Davidson refers to the loose nature of the community which was 'by no means unified' (1989: 3). Many in a community with its own divisions would turn against the more-celebrated Beats, their aesthetics and followers. On a terminological note, Davidson refers to the term 'renaissance' invoking both a 'return', seen in Duncan's looking back to the Romantic movement, and 'revival', seen in Rexroth's 'hope for a literary revival on the order of the one that occurred in Paris in the 1920s' and also William Everson's 'celebration of the bardic tradition' (xiv). Davidson stressed the self-consciousness of their self-naming, since 'for the American western poet, deprived of any culture at all, the use of a highfalutin' term like "Renaissance" for a scruffy, proletarian movement had just the right kind of humor attached to it' (xiv).

Allen's remit for inclusion in *The New American Poetry* was based on the poetry's capacity to project 'a total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse' (1960: xi). Linda Russo provides a feminist critique of representation within a volume which has 'taught poetry-readers for decades to recognize "the new"' (2000: n.pag.). Because women poets are a minority in the collection (Levertov is the only woman included in the closing 'Statements on Poetics' section in which fourteen men were given a platform), there appears 'a compulsion to disregard women writers when considering who composes "the new"' (2000).¹⁶ A later anthology which Allen co-edited with Robert Creeley, *The New Writing in the USA* (1967), contains two of Kyger's poems alongside work by Barbara Guest, Denise Levertov and thirty male writers. The editors eschewed the geographical and aesthetic grouping of the original anthology in favour of alphabetical sequencing. Reading Allen's anthologies it would seem, superficially, that the New American Poetry is a gender-free terrain. His choices appear not to be based on gender but on his personal tastes, the esteem a poet was held in by peers or the leaders of the scene, and by geography: 'Is Marie Ponsot of the Bay Area scene?' Allen wrote to Lawrence Ferlinghetti in 1956.¹⁷

It would not be until after the 1970s feminist intervention that editors would begin consciously to promote women writers in anthologies which covered the terrain of the Beat generation and the New American Poetry. The gynocritical impulse is evident in the work of the editor and academic Ann Charters. When editing the volume of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* dedicated to Beat writers, *The Beats*:

¹⁶ Russo gives an interesting reading of Levertov's subtle interrogation of 'sexist semantics' in her piece included in the 'Statements on Poetics' (2000: n.pag.). See Marjorie Perloff's 'Whose New American Poetry? Anthologizing in the Nineties', *Diacritics* 26.3/4 (1996): 104-123, and Alan Golding's "'The New American Poetry" Revisited, Again', *Contemporary Literature* 39.2 (1998): 180-211, for assessments of the politics of anthologising in relation to The New American Poetry.

¹⁷ Donald Allen. Letter to Lawrence Ferlinghetti, 29th December 1956. City Lights Books Records, BANC MSS 72/107 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. City Lights published Ponsot's poetry collection *True Minds* in 1956.

Literary Bohemians in Postwar America (1983), Charters was keen to include women writers. Charters was the first biographer of Jack Kerouac, publishing *Kerouac: A Biography* in 1973, and previously publishing a bibliography of his works in 1967. Charters included nine female voices within her selection: Bonnie Bremser, Carolyn Cassady, Diane di Prima, Lenore Kandel, Jan Kerouac (daughter of Jack), Joanne Kyger, Joanna McClure, Janine Pommy Vega, and Anne Waldman. The alphabetical sequencing of the volume allowed for an egalitarian representation of celebrated and lesser-known, male and female Beat writers.

The grounds for inclusion in Charters's later project *The Portable Beat Reader* (1992) were more select. Its trajectory followed and perpetuated what Charters saw as the 'canon' of Beat (Grace and Johnson 2004: 224); that is, the appearance of East Coast writers Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs, and their friends in New York City in the mid-1940s; the arrival of Kerouac's muse Neal Cassady from the West; the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance and the 'Howl' reading at the Six Gallery in 1955.¹⁸ It is not until the fourth section, entitled 'Other Fellow Travellers', that a woman writer is featured – Diane di Prima has five poems included, while Bonnie Bremser and Anne Waldman have a poem each. They are placed next to writers such as Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Bob Dylan, Frank O' Hara and Peter Orlovsky, and in her commentary Charters explains her decision to include voices 'who aligned themselves with the Beats' through social and publishing networks, or simply due to the term 'Beat' being used in the late 1950s and 1960s as a general term to denote any sign of bohemianism (1992: 331). In Part 5 Charters introduces the memoir's role in Beat literature, noting di Prima's *Memoirs of a Beatnik* (1969), but

¹⁸ But Charters is keen to highlight the specificity of the West Coast poets and their influence on Beat history, for example, the influence of Kenneth Rexroth's poem 'Thou Shalt Not Kill' upon Ginsberg's 'Howl'. Yet the differences and antagonisms of the anthologised San Francisco poets such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Michael McClure, and Gary Snyder are somewhat elided in their inclusion in a 'Beat' reader.

also stating that ‘most of the women writers told their personal stories in a straightforward manner and did not think of themselves as novelists’, citing Carolyn Cassady as an example (437). The example of the novelist Joyce Johnson certainly contradicts this statement. Johnson and Hettie Jones’s memoirs are excerpted, with such texts exploring ‘an awakening feminist consciousness’ (437). Through her editorial comments Charters discusses the question of women’s minority. In reference to Johnson’s *Minor Characters* she states: ‘Johnson intended her book to do more than document her love affair with Jack Kerouac. She wanted it to celebrate the lives of several anonymous women friends who wanted to be writers or artists but became instead the “minor characters” in the background of more famous people’ (476). Yet Charters contradicts this position in order to continue the Beat focus by excerpting a passage which dramatises the publication of *On the Road* and Kerouac’s subsequent fame from Johnson’s insider perspective. Women are most heavily represented in this section of the reader – they make up six out of the twelve contributors – but Charters notes that Beat literature was an autobiographically-based form, and so these women’s narratives appear as part of the larger Beat project. Di Prima’s work features in the next section which presents later work by Beat writers, thereby securing her presence as the most-represented woman writer in the anthology.

Despite the *Reader* attesting to women’s minority, Diane di Prima was actually a fundamental influence on Charters’s decision to concentrate on Beat scholarship after completing a doctorate in nineteenth century American literature. Charters has stated that when immersed in the world of Columbia University graduate studies, di Prima’s text *Dinners and Nightmares* (1961) – a portrait of a life ruled by poetry, passion, and poverty – led her into a dream world of bohemian life. It ‘projected a beatific vision of my life as I would have loved to live it in New York

City at the time', she states (2002: xi). Retrospectively, Charters could see that *Dinners and Nightmares* had allowed her to engage with a 'Beat book for the first time as a woman reader' (xi).

In *The Portable Beat Reader* Charters made a retrospective portrait of the same post-war new American poetry scene as Donald M. Allen did, but instead of being one facet of a connecting literary scene, the Beat generation was her premise and organising principle. But through her commentary Charters developed the debate about the presence of women writers in the Beat canon.

Rescuing women from secondary status was the mission of Brenda Knight in her defining biographical volume *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution* (1996). By establishing the categories of 'writer', 'artist', and 'muse' Knight proposed women's multifaceted contribution to the Beat generation. These women's presence is asserted by a multitude of photographs dating from the Beat period, which accompany biographical details about each woman, excerpts from writing, and bibliographies. With their subjects preserved in black and white graininess, wearing clothes which today inspire the retro fashion market, the cumulative effect of the series of striking images is to 'fix' an historical group of women to rival the much-photographed male Beats. The text introduces many relatively unknown writers and forgotten texts to new readers. However, Knight's book, along with Richard Peabody's *A Different Beat: Writings by Women of the Beat Generation* (1997) (a collection with a wider selection of writers than Knight, which keeps editorial comment to a minimum and does not include photographs) have been criticised by Russo as providing 'hasty genealogies' (2002: 203). Russo interrogates the very terms Knight and Peabody use:

A troubling patronym, ‘women of,’ it appropriates women into the project of Beat history-making. As in ‘Daughters of the Revolution,’ which is, after all, another way of saying ‘property of,’ as a sort of appendage, a ‘Mrs.’ Such a reading consequently accords with a particular conception of women as marginal, looking from the ‘outside’ in and thus appropriating materials and techniques – and hence the (Beat) identity – to be found there. In the case of the 1950s and 60s, women poets emerge either as diminutives of men, or, at best as merely (proto) feminists – disarticulated feminists without a movement – without *movement*, static and marginally affixed.
(Russo 2000: n. pag.)¹⁹

Russo feels that a ‘bitter admission’ must be made if the category ‘women of the Beat generation’ is to be posited – that these were writers ‘generated out of refusals and failed acknowledgements of women *as* writers, a result, in part, of a myopic tendency toward a specific manifestation of the poetic, a specific concept of genius’ (n.pag.). Rather than positing a model in which women will always be marginal, or even redundant, Russo suggests that we view ‘the production of women and women writers “of” that generation as gestures outward. Not directed back toward the literary circles that constituted the Beat movement’ (n.pag.). Therefore we should expand the context by which we read the women writers, looking ‘outward away from the identities “Beat” offered them [...] toward some yet unnameable horizon, a direction offered neither by the status quo nor the literary avant-garde’ (n.pag.). Yet the direction and terms of such a renaming remains unclear.

The Beat Book (1999) features work by Diane di Prima, Joanne Kyger, and Lenore Kandel, ‘important writers who also happen to be women’, according to its editor Anne Waldman (1999: xxii). Waldman expands the Beat canon by including the African American writers Amiri Baraka and Bob Kaufman, and those affiliated with other schools, namely John Wieners of the Black Mountain School. Gender, then, appears as but one controversy in the disputed territory of Beat.

¹⁹ Linda Russo, ‘Introduction: a context for reading Joanne Kyger’, *Jacket* 11 (2000), <<http://jacketmagazine.com/11/kyger-russo.html>>. This is an online source without pagination.

Ann Charters's later anthology, *Beat Down to Your Soul: What Was the Beat Generation?* (2001) was a response to *The Portable Beat Reader*. In contrast to the earlier text, its aim was to 'suggest the diversity of voices' of the period and after through its presentation of 'essays, reviews, poems, letters, and sketches' dating from the years 1948 to 2000 (Charters 2001a: xi). The alphabetical sequencing of its contributors destabilised the Beat triumvirate of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs, but this impulse was somewhat undermined by the use of a photograph of them on its cover (the same photograph Joyce Johnson contemplated at the start of *Minor Characters*). In addition to including the work of Beat-era women writers and some positive and negative responses to the Beat phenomenon from women contributors, Charters presented a transcript of the 'Women of the Beat Generation Panel' at the San Francisco Book Festival in 1996, which marked the occasion of the publication of Knight's anthology, and which Charters chaired. The panel discussion in which Carolyn Cassady, Joyce Johnson, Hettie Jones, Eileen Kaufman, and Joanna McClure took part revolved around issues such as their alleged 'victim' status and the labelling of themselves as Beats, among other gender-related issues (616).

Work by Ronna C. Johnson and Nancy M. Grace has grown out of Knight and Peabody's placing of 'women of the Beat generation' on the literary and cultural map. *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation* (2002) was a collection of text-based criticism by different scholars on individual women Beat writers. This was the first collection to give sustained and undivided academic attention to the area. Grace and Johnson's subsequent text *Breaking the Rule of Cool: Interviewing and Reading Women Beat Writers* (2004) provided a context for their earlier work through recent personal statements from the writers. Using the interview format let the Beat generation women's own voices and opinions be heard. While projecting the label

‘woman Beat writer’, the text provided an aesthetic platform which the male Beats had already been given, for example in George Plimpton’s collection of *Paris Review* interviews, *Beat Writers at Work* (1999). However the ‘witness’ role dealt to these women writers resurfaces, although here they are not just witnesses to Beat men but to their own writing and experience.

Grace and Johnson situate their project next to various other critical texts which recuperate women writers in specific literary movements, including Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), Shari Benstock’s *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940* (1986), Linda Kinnahan’s *Poetics of the Feminine: Authority and Literary Tradition in William Carlos Williams, Mina Loy, Denise Levertov, and Kathleen Fraser* (1994) and Ann Vickery’s *Leaving Lines of Gender: A Feminist Genealogy of Language Writing* (2000). The situation of women writers ‘of Modernism’ is comparable to women writers ‘of the Beat generation’, and, in addition to Benstock and Kinnahan, various other texts have highlighted the often ambivalent status of women authors in relation to Modernism, reframing it less as a fixed historical movement and more as an interplay of affinity and difference.²⁰

As well as this growing number of volumes giving their undivided attention to women of the Beat generation, a number of review articles and essays have contributed to establishing the field of Beat generation women. Notable examples are Helen McNeil’s ‘The Archaeology of Gender in the Beat Movement’ and Amy L. Friedman’s. “‘I Say My New Name’: Women Writers of the Beat Generation’ in

²⁰ See Carolyn Burke’s ‘Getting Spliced: Modernism and Sexual Difference’, *American Quarterly* 39.1 (1987): 98-121, Bonnie Kime Scott’s *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1990), Gabriele Griffin’s *Difference in View: Women and Modernism* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, Volume 1: *The War of the Words* (New Haven: Yale U P, 1988), Volume 2: *Sexchanges* (New Haven: Yale U P, 1989) and Volume 3: *Letters from the Front* (New Haven: Yale U P, 1994).

Robert A. Lee's *The Beat Generation Writers* (1996). Jennie Skerl's *Reconstructing the Beats* (2004) enacts a diversifying project, paying close critical attention to neglected female and African American male voices, and specifically featuring essays by individual scholars on ruth weiss²¹, Joanne Kyger, and Lenore Kandel.

Other responses have come from feminist critics who share an affinity with the female Beats through their coming-of-age in the Beat/beatnik era. For example, Alix Kates Shulman's 'The Beat Queens: Boho Chicks Stand By Their Men' (1989) was a disparaging review essay on memoirs by Beat generation women in which she portrayed the authors, with the exception of di Prima, as victims. This somewhat reductive argument is surprising since in her novel *Burning Questions* (1978), Shulman gave a sensitive portrait of a woman temporarily caught in the male-dominated scene of Beat-era Greenwich Village. The British critic Lorna Sage discussed Joyce Johnson's *Minor Characters* and the situation of Beat generation women in a more useful and sympathetic way in *Women in the House of Fiction: Post-War Women Novelists* (1992). Sage recounted her 1950s childhood and escape via rock 'n' roll and coffee bars in her own memoir *Bad Blood* (2001). Nancy K. Miller enhanced her discussion of women's life writing through autobiographical detail from her own life in *But Enough About Me* (2002). Reading the memoirs of Johnson, Jones and di Prima, Miller described the points of similarity and difference to her own youth in 1950s Greenwich Village. Elizabeth Wilson's *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (2003) discusses Johnson and Jones's memoirs in relation to historical bohemianism, with her own contemporaneous immersion in bohemian London portrayed in *Hallucinations: Life in the Postmodern City* (1988).

²¹ The German-born poet ruth weiss's (b. 1928) choice to use lower-case letters in her name stems from her 'rebellion' against what she regards as the 'law and order' expressed through the capitalization of nouns in the German language (Grace and Johnson 2004: 69).

Critics have attempted to define the Beat generation by providing handy sequential models. In her *Portable Beat Reader*, Charters posited two generations of Beat writers: firstly, those associated with the East Coast Beats, and secondly those ‘fellow travellers’ who were influenced by the breakthroughs of the first generation (1992: xxxiii). However, Johnson and Grace have constructed a model of three generations of Beat in which to fit their chosen women writers. The first generation were born contemporaneously with the first Beat writers, and include Helen Adam and Ruth Weiss. The writers on whom I primarily focus in this thesis come from Johnson and Grace’s second generation: those born in the 1930s and therefore a decade younger than the original Beat writers, who allegedly formed ‘a vanguard of the sixties women’s movement’ (Johnson and Grace 2002: 14). Yet I also detail the work of Janine Pommy Vega, and Anne Waldman to a lesser extent, who are classified by Johnson and Grace as a third generation – those who were drawn to the already public Beat literature, and who came of age in the ‘sixties counterculture’ (14). This three-tiered generational model places order on an arbitrary, contradictory body of writers with differing connections to Beat.

As if to support this contention of disorder, in her recent response to the Beat generation Regina Weinreich resurrected Gregory Corso’s observation from 1959: ‘The Beat Generation is no longer about poetry. The Beat Generation is now about everything’ (Charters 1992: 182).²² Weinreich believes Corso’s statement is now more pertinent than ever. In the late 1950s Beat writing had become inseparable from Beat lifestyle, and the Beat(nik) image had ‘melded with the cultural images at large’ such as the ‘hipster prototypes’ portrayed onscreen by Marlon Brando and James Dean

²² Regina Weinreich, ‘The Beat Generation is Now About Everything’, *College Literature* 27.1 (2000): 263-268. During the period, aided by the media fix, Beat writers such as Corso were positing the grand narrative of Beat while debunking ‘that stupid name’ (Charters 1992: 183; 182). The concerned piece by Corso, ‘Variations on a Generation’, first appeared in *Gemini* magazine.

(Weinreich 2004: 72). And more recently, in a *fin de siècle* turn to nostalgia, the Beat writers and their images reappeared in popular culture and in advertising campaigns.²³ The movement of Beat writers out of their original historical context – away from the ‘poetry’ – and the range of writers included under the banner, not to mention the indeterminacy of the term Beat, leads to a current expansive notion in which ‘the Beat Generation is now about everything’.

Weinreich included women writers in her account of Beat, noting the women’s proximity to the famous male Beat writers but suggested a gap in aesthetic achievements – they ‘are not known for the stylistic innovations that marked the writing of the seminal Beats’ – and their distance from the essential Beat story in their role as witnesses (89). In this portrait, women writers appear as another (minor) facet of a current expansive and inclusive definition of Beat. Surely this is too vague and general a context when we can reach toward a specific one which can take account of gender – in the words of the poet Joanne Kyger, the project can be one of ‘particularising people’s lives’ in the pursuit of reading their art (2002b). Rather than ‘rescuing’ the women writers from minor status in order to posit them as major ‘Beat’ writers – that is, positing a strict major/minor binary – I propose to look to their individual aesthetics and their specific connections to the Beat generation.

²³ Weinreich refers to images of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg being used in Gap advertising campaigns, and William S. Burroughs ‘endorsing Nike’, also noting Burroughs’s appearance on *Saturday Night Live* and cameo role in Gus Van Sant’s film *Drugstore Cowboy* (1989) (73).

Part III: 'Various Roads and Routes'

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of 'minor literature' resonates with the minor status of Beat generation women. However, as Marco Abel points out, Deleuze and Guattari were not making a case for 'identity politics' (2002: 228). Instead they regarded Beat culture and writing, specifically Kerouac's, as 'minoritarian' – it contained the potential to disrupt the dominant literary tradition.²⁴ Therefore I do not seek to propose Beat as a dominant literary paradigm against which to position the women's writing as 'minor', especially because of the unstable position of Beat literature in the literary canon. But other theoretical models of Deleuze and Guattari that express mobility and change are pertinent; namely the 'rhizome' and 'nomadology', which I now discuss, while making reference to various 'roads' of the Beat generation.

A metaphor which Diane di Prima invokes in *Recollections of My Life as a Woman* in order to describe her generation appears somewhat Deleuzean. In the 'early days' the story of Indra's net, a piece of Hindu mythology which originated in Heinrich Zimmer's *Philosophies of India*, circulated within her group (di Prima 2001: 106).²⁵ She recalls this image of Indra,

²⁴ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* [1975], trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991). For Deleuze and Guattari the writing of Franz Kafka, a Czechoslovakian Jew writing in German, was a prime example of minor literature through its destabilisation or disruption of the 'majoritarian' German language. Such writing exhibits 'a willed poverty, pushing deterritorialization to such an extreme that nothing remains but intensities' (19).

²⁵ Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, ed. Joseph Campbell (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1951). In the text Zimmer relates that Indra's net or 'Indrajāla' can mean 'conjuring, jugglery, magic trick; stratagem or trick in war' ([1951] 1969: 123). However no specific details of the story di Prima mentions can be found, suggesting di Prima may be misremembering the source of the story or is embellishing the details. Incidentally, the character of Indra and his daughter appear in August Strindberg's *A Dream Play* (1901).

the king of the gods, and the vast, indeed infinite net in which he sat. In every juncture of the net there was knotted a mirror, and every mirror reflected all other parts of the net.

Now the jewels, my peers and fellows, have fallen from the net. From Indra's net, in which we mirrored each other. (107)

She uses the image to convey the inter-connected nature of her former community in which people 'mirrored' each other. She provides an elegy for this distant community through the beauty of this shimmering, mobile structure. The young writers she meets in the 1990s speak of a 'lack of surround', of 'community' and 'continuity'; they lack the 'resonance' and 'reverberation' provided by Indra's net (107).

Likewise the 'rhizome', a key concept in Deleuze and Guattari's text *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), is able to describe the different trajectories of the Beat generation's various major and minor characters. Recalling imagery from horticulture, the sprawling horizontal rhizome exists in contrast to the hierarchic, teleological and vertical arborescent model. The rhizome is based on 'connection and heterogeneity', whereby 'any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be' (Deleuze and Guattari 2003: 7). It is a state of 'multiplicity' which 'changes in nature as it expands its connections' (8). As Deleuze and Guattari put it, the rhizome:

is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overfills. [...] When a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, undergoes a metamorphosis. Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature. (21)

The arbitrary, shifting 'lines of flight' connecting the rhizome resemble the mirroring in Indra's net. I extend di Prima's rhizomatic portrait of her youthful community to

portray the wider historical Beat community in which ‘lines of flight’ and possibilities of ‘becoming’ connect its different human and textual points.²⁶ As Beat generation studies develops, especially women’s place there, it is subject to shifting parameters of inclusion and exclusion, which the rhizome is able to account for.²⁷

Perhaps the key is to understand Beat as but one point of reference in the New American Poetry. Deleuze and Guattari invoke ‘beatnik’ culture as one point on the rhizome that was mid-twentieth-century American culture: ‘everything important that has happened or is happening takes the route of the American rhizome: the beatniks, the underground, bands and gangs, successive lateral offshoots in immediate connection with an outside’ (2003: 19). Although the rhizome is based on interconnection and sympathy, its multiplicity is characterised by difference and change. Difference produces ‘lines of flight’ – the ‘gangs’ and ‘offshoots.’ Yet America, its literature in particular, has at times held on to its connections with Europe, and we can think of the geographical and imaginary terrain mapped out by the American authors Henry James and T.S. Eliot. Deleuze and Guattari state that ‘the search for arborescence and the return to the Old World occur in the East [of the United States]’ (19). They give the example of Jack Kerouac ‘going off in search of his ancestors’ in Europe as being in the arborescent vein, involving ‘the search for roots’. But Deleuze and Guattari suggest that this search for European ancestry is atypical. Instead, their American rhizome is characterised by a westward trajectory:

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche’s notion of ‘becoming’ as opposed to ‘being’ was influential to Deleuze and Guattari. See also Deleuze’s *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. H. Tomlinson (London: Athlone, 1983).

²⁷ The model of Indra’s net also resembles Clifford Geertz’s notion of ‘consociates’, which Anne Waldman feels is applicable to the Beat generation (Knight 1996: xi). ‘A useful paradigm that touches on the interconnectedness of shared and experienced realities,’ Waldman states, it can describe a Beat generation in which lives ‘interwove and dovetailed with one another’, thus including its female participants (xi).

[T]here is the rhizomatic West, with its Indians without ancestry, its ever-receding limit, its shifting and displaced frontiers. There is a whole American 'map' in the West, where even the trees form rhizomes. America reversed the directions: it put its Orient in the West, as if it were precisely in America that the earth came full circle; its West is the edge of the East. (2003: 19)

Deleuze and Guattari refer to Leslie Fiedler's text *The Return of the Vanishing America* which describes specific American regions and their appearance in myth and literature.²⁸ According to Deleuze and Guattari, Fiedler's West 'played the role of a line of flight combining travel, hallucination, madness, the Indians, perceptive and mental experimentation, the shifting of frontiers, the rhizome (Ken Kesey and his "fog machine," the beat generation, etc.)' (2003: 520). Evidently, Deleuze and Guattari see the Beats as fundamental to authoring a specific post-war literary geography.

In Marco Abel's reading, Kerouac's travel is an example of Deleuzian movement.²⁹ According to Abel, the narrative of *On the Road* is characterised by 'the physical following and aesthetic mapping of the various roads and routes—or Deleuzian lines of flight' (2002: 230). Abel quotes the main character Sal Paradise's realisation that his original idea of crossing the United States on a pre-planned, linear trajectory was ill-conceived. Sal states: 'It was my dream that screwed up, the stupid hearthside idea that it would be wonderful to follow one great red line across America instead of trying various roads and routes' (Kerouac [1957] 1991: 13). Thus the characters create the American rhizome through their following of 'various roads and routes'.

²⁸ Leslie Fiedler, *The Return of the Vanishing America* (New York: Stein, 1968). Ezra Pound is placed alongside James and Eliot in Fiedler's category of East Coast writers who are focused toward Europe. Unlike those writers that Deleuze and Guattari specify who look west to the Orient – the 'West is the edge of the East' – Pound looked, with the traditional Western perspective, east toward the Orient.

²⁹ For another discussion of a specific Beat author in relation to the theories of Deleuze and Guattari, see Timothy S. Murphy's *Wising Up the Marks: The Amodern William Burroughs* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1997).

Yet a westward trajectory is encountered in the literary tradition of male adventure. For example, in *Love's Body* (1966), Norman O. Brown sees travel as an exercise in fraternity: 'Fraternity comes into being after the sons are expelled from the family; when they form their own club, in the wilderness, away from home, away from women. The brotherhood is a substitute family, a substitute woman—alma mater' (quoted in Lawrence 1994: 3). In language symptomatic of 1960s sexually-liberated masculine discourse, Brown continues: 'The wandering heroes are phallic heroes, in a permanent state of erection; pricking o'er the plain. The word coition represents genital sexuality as walking; but the converse is also true: all walking is phallic, all intercourse sexual' (3).³⁰ In psychoanalytic readings such as Brown's, travel becomes an Oedipal movement away from the household or *oikos*. Accordingly, the feminine reappears symbolically in the landscape, in a fixed and static position; as Karen Lawrence states, 'the female is mapped as a place on the itinerary of the male journey' (1994: 3).

Annette Kolodny's discussion of the westward trajectory of the colonisation of America by white settlers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in *The Lay of the Land* (1984) attests to such positioning. She states that 'the ruin of one paradise meant only that the pioneer proceeded further westward in pursuit of another' (Kolodny 1984: 154). This movement was propelled by a 'pastoral impulse' – 'the yearning to know and to respond to the landscape as feminine' (8). She reads the codifying of the landscape in maternal or even sexual terms in the literature and propaganda of the day, referring to writers such as James Fenimore Cooper turning to 'an imaginatively restructured past' and converting 'the pastoral possibility into the exclusive

³⁰ The liberation of language in both poetry and academic writing in the 1960s can be related to the Beats' use of slang and profanities. Along with the circulation of Beat poetry, there were high-profile censorship cases against Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* in 1957, the appearance of Michael McClure's *The Beard*, William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, and Lenore Kandel's *The Love Book*. See Chapter Five, Part I for a discussion of *The Love Book*.

prerogative of a single male figure, living out a highly eroticized and intimate relationship with a landscape at once suggestively sexual, but overwhelmingly maternal' (134). The pastoral impulse was 'both useful and socially adaptive' as 'it brought successive generations of immigrants to strange shores and then propelled them across a vast uncharted terrain' (147).

This coding informs the terms of Sal Paradise's optimistic romanticism as he began his first trip in *On the Road*: 'Somewhere along the line I knew there'd be girls, visions, everything; somewhere along the line the pearl would be handed to me' (Kerouac 1991: 11). Later on when Sal and Dean are driving to New Orleans he states: 'He and I suddenly saw the whole country like an oyster for us to open; and the pearl was there, the pearl was there' (138). Helen McNeil suggests:

The body of America is not penetrated by the Beat travellers, as by a pioneer or warrior. Instead it is lovingly criss-crossed as each new turn promises ecstasy. [...] Capacious and unfathomable, the continent can never be possessed because man is mortal and can't take every road at the same time. This means the nation's body can never control the traveller because it is always and everywhere his infinitely flexible setting, ready to respond to his every desire and whim. (1996: 188)

McNeil notes the shift in the metaphors of the sexually-charged adventurer, but it is clear she regards *On the Road* as existing in the objectifying tradition of the 'pastoral impulse'. Despite Kerouac's continued use of traditional eroticised metaphors of feminine landscape, a Deleuzian reading offers a different understanding of movement in the text. Marco Abel regards the text's mapping of 'various roads and routes' as negating the 'more vertical, hierarchical, goal-orientated [...] model of travelling', a model expressed in the 'pastoral impulse'. Likewise, Geoff Ward sees the travel in *On the Road* as expressing 'no heroic advance from sea to shining sea, but rather a series of broken and self-defeating loops; Kerouac's odyssey was in its

way a howl of defeat and estrangement as akin to the spirit of Poe as to Whitman' (1988: 99).³¹

Indeed, in the text epiphanies occur during movement rather than after arrival at a destination – 'my whole soul leaped to it the nearer we got to Frisco' (Kerouac 1991: 59). Each journey of the book appears to end in disillusionment or 'estrangement' and a need to move on. After the rush towards Denver, Sal states that 'everything seemed to be collapsing. [...] I was itching to get on to San Francisco' (56). Yet this city is described as 'the end of the continent', since there is no more land (177). In terms of American myth the frontier is closed. Dean believes 'the road must eventually lead to the whole world. Ain't nowhere else it can go – right?' (230). They travel south to Mexico. Sal states he 'couldn't imagine this trip. It was the most fabulous of all. It was no longer east-west, but magic *south*. [...] "Man, this will finally take us to IT!" said Dean with definite faith' (266). Yet that destination is also compromised when Sal becomes ill and is abandoned by Dean. Thus the road narrative can be viewed as rhizomatic rather than progressive and 'goal orientated'.

Deleuze and Guattari describe the movement of the nomad who follows 'customary paths' going from 'one point to another', these points being 'water points, dwelling points, assembly points' (380). But these points are of lesser importance than the paths which they determine, which is 'the reverse of what happens with the sedentary.' They continue: 'The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the intermezzo.' Through this description a map can be imagined, which by granting importance to the 'in-between',

³¹ See Ward's *The Writing of America: Literature and Cultural Identity from the Puritans to the Present* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002) for his positioning of the Beats in the American literary tradition.

creates a rhizome of swift passage along shifting, interconnected pathways. This nomadic movement resonates with that portrayed in *On the Road*. For Sal Paradise, ‘the road is life’, and movement on the road creates an ‘in-between’ space (Kerouac 1991: 211).

Yet nomadology privileges ‘speed’ over ‘movement’, with Deleuze and Guattari suggesting a qualitative distinction between the two terms:

[A] movement may be very fast, but that does not give it speed; a speed may be very slow, or even immobile, yet it is still speed. Movement is extensive; speed is intensive. Movement designates the relative character of a body considered as ‘one,’ and which goes from point to point; *speed, on the contrary, constitutes the absolute character of a body whose irreducible parts (atoms) occupy or fill a smooth space in the manner of a vortex*, with the possibility of springing up at any point. (It is therefore not surprising that reference has been made to spiritual voyages effected without relative movement, but in intensity, in one place: these are part of nomadism.) (381).

They privilege ‘spiritual voyages’ alongside speed; indeed *On the Road* featured a spiritual journey. It is the intensity of the journey that is important rather than the geographic area covered or the rate of travel. Therefore nomadology has the potential to articulate the many forms of travel encountered in Beat texts.³²

As well as spiritual journeys, the Beat generation prized internal or imaginative journeys. Thus the road becomes metaphoric. Joyce Johnson states that most of the women she knew ‘never got the chance to literally go on the road’, and instead their ‘road became the strange lives we were leading. We had actually *chosen* these difficult lives for good reasons”’ (1999: 48). By the same token, because of the

³² Responses to Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘nomadism’ and ‘deterritorialization’ include Rosi Braidotti’s *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia U P, 1994), Tim Cresswell’s ‘Imagining the Nomad: Mobility and the Postmodern Primitive’ in *Space and Social Theory: Interpreting Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed. Georges Benko and Ulf Strohmayer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 360-79, Iain Buchanan and Claire Colebrook’s *Deleuze and Feminist Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U P, 2000).

fact that she was well-travelled, Diane di Prima could state that: ‘The best travel has always been in the realm of the imagination’ (Grace and Johnson 2004: 106). Such journeys recur throughout this thesis.

When Joyce Johnson writes that ‘after knowing Kerouac, I had little faith in movement for its own sake’, I would suggest that she is misreading the literature and the life behind it (2004: 120). Such a notion mires Johnson in the major/minor debate which this chapter has introduced, as she suggests her experience to be qualitatively, perhaps essentially, different from the life of a male Beat writer. The larger lesson of *On the Road*, the trying of ‘various roads and routes’ which is demonstrated on a thematic level – and in the novel’s ‘minoritarian’, non-linear narrative style – provides a model that can accommodate the false starts and detours that mark the long lives of the women writers discussed in this thesis. Also, by her suggestion that Beat travel existed ‘for its own sake’, Johnson denies the possibility of travel being ‘performative’ in the terms set out by Judith Butler, existing as a part of Kerouac’s practise of the role of writer.³³ The notion of performativity with regard to the role of the writer is developed in the following chapter’s discussion of the gendering of the rhizomatic communities of the New American Poetry.

³³ See Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990). Butler quotes Friedrich Nietzsche’s argument in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1889), that ‘there is no “being” behind, doing, effecting, becoming: “the doer” is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything’ (quoted Butler 1990: 25). Thus, Butler writes: ‘There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’ (25). The women writers’ presentations of ‘performativity’ will become of increasing relevance in the course of this thesis, in particular their recollected notions of the ‘performances’ of girlhood.

CHAPTER TWO:

Community and Difference: Territories of the New American Poetry

Part I: Peers, Queers and Literary Fathers: The Boy Gang

Donald Allen portrayed the poets in *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* (1960) and his later reshuffling of the material, *The New Writing in the USA* (1967), as exhibiting a new kind of literary community marked by an awareness of their American difference. Prior to the emergence of this post-war generation, Allen saw little evidence of American identity:

The great writers of the American Renaissance and ever since have been truly native, but alas, reading through the bulk of lesser American writers, generation after generation, one comes to realize that they sound – more often than not – like immigrants or exiles or cultural remittance men, like expatriates or repatriates dwelling unhappily in the dismal villages and squalid cities, the inhospitable desert of the American land.
(1967: 10)

Allen's poets saw their 'industrial cities as becoming even more hideous and our small towns as drowning more hopelessly in hypocrisy and waste', but despite this, 'they see them as actualities, as the given (for better or worse), as place – the place where they live and work and form their own communities' (10). Two poles of place are invoked by Allen: he stresses the poets' relationship to the local or quotidian – 'to their own places, the actual conditions of their lives' – and to 'the West', which suggests movement and migration not only on national but on an international level (10). Indeed, this rhizomatic community of the New American Poetry, of which the Beats were but one faction, ebbed and flowed between its major centres of New York and San Francisco, in various states of permanence.

Saving the discussion of travel and migration to Chapter Six, I focus here on the local, on the social and creative relations between people in the literary community. The various subcultural characteristics of the community have been well documented, for example the white hipster's adoption of black styles of speech and dress;¹ the relationship of the literature to other cultural forms such as jazz music² and Abstract Expressionist painting;³ and the debate regarding the authenticity of 'Beats' in relation to the maligned 'beatniks'.⁴ But in this discussion of what amounts to a 'boy gang', I want firstly to examine the discernible masculinities of the community.

Ezra Pound, an earlier purveyor of the 'new' and one of the 'masters of the Modern Movement' cited by Allen as an antecedent of the New American Poetry, often relied on a traditional model of creativity: man as the active poet, and woman as the passive muse or amanuensis (Allen 1967: 9). These attitudes persisted even though Pound championed the experimental women writers H.D., Mina Loy, and Marianne Moore. Citing Pound's ideas, Peter Brooker states that '[m]an spurts up and

¹ See Anatole Broyard's rather academic piece, 'Portrait of a Hipster' in *Partisan Review* 15 (1948) p. 356-62, and Norman Mailer's controversial essay 'The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster' in *Dissent* (Summer 1957). These articles helped define the hipster type to an audience outside the underground.

² Some classic studies of the development, emergence and reception of jazz are Sidney Finkelstein's *Jazz: A People's Music* (New York: Citadel, 1948), Imamu Amiri Baraka's [LeRoi Jones] *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Morrow, 1963) and *Black Music* (New York: Morrow, 1967), and Frank Kofksy's *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music* (New York: Pathfinder, 1970). For a recent reading of jazz's influence on Beat writing see Richard Quinn's 'Jack Kerouac, Charlie Parker, and the Poetics of Beat Improvisation' in *Reconstructing the Beats*, ed. Jennie Skerl (New York: Palgrave, 2004), p. 151-167. For Diane di Prima's bohemian community in Fifties New York, jazz was, she states, 'the most important, happening art' ([1969] 1988: 93). The importance of jazz in their culture is also described in Joyce Johnson's (1983) and Hettie Jones's (1990) memoirs.

³ Lisa Phillips's *Beat Culture and the New America, 1950-1965* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995) explores the crosscurrents and exchanges between the writers and the practitioners of the various visual and plastic arts in Beat culture. Daniel Belgrad's *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998) interrogates the relationship between various post-war art forms which utilise a 'spontaneous' aesthetic, investigating the poetics of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Charles Olson alongside painting, music, and dance. Terence Diggory's 'What Abstract Art Means in *Pull My Daisy*' in Skerl (2004) p. 135-149 examines the personal and aesthetic intersections between the Beats and the New York art world, in relation to the production of the collaborative film *Pull My Daisy* (1959). Diane di Prima recalls that after the jazzmen, the painters dominated the New York scene – 'a big, hulking breed of hard-drinking men who spoke in oils and came on very paternal and sexy. They got their hands on a lot of loot and threw it around, and set a certain style for the late fifties, more moneyed and faster-moving. Proud' ([1969] 1988: 94).

⁴ See p. 3, note 3 for a list of resources on the 'beatnik' phenomenon.

is the inventor, associated with the “new gestures ... the wild shots ... the new upjut”, while woman is “the conservator, the inheritor of past gestures...not inventive, always the best disciple of any inventor” (2002: 41).⁵ Elsewhere Pound referred to the male phallus ‘charging head-on the female chaos’ (41).

In the literary practices of The New American Poetry, espoused by Jack Kerouac and Charles Olson, there appeared a similar androcentric slant to the terminology used and the very ‘embodied’ actual techniques. In ‘Essentials of Spontaneous Prose’ (1958) Kerouac described the ideal ‘mental state’ for the writer to occupy at the moment of writing:

If possible write ‘without consciousness’ in semitrance (as Yeats’ later ‘trance writing’) allowing subconscious to admit in own uninhibited interesting necessary and so ‘modern’ language what conscious art would censor, and write excitedly, swiftly, with writing-or-typing cramps, and in accordance (as with center to periphery) with laws of orgasm, Reich’s ‘beclouding of consciousness.’ *Come* from within, out—to relaxed and said. [*sic*] ([1958c] 1992: 58)

Ejaculation is the model for the expansive movement of language from the subconscious out to the page, and thus writing is coded as masculine. Daniel Belgrad argues that Kerouac ‘conceived of the body-mind as communicating through a physical field of energy’ (1998: 202). Unlike Pound’s occupation with anatomy and gender difference, perhaps Kerouac seems more concerned with ‘energy’ which can translate from writer to reader: ‘Blow as deep as you want—write as deeply, fish as far down as you want, satisfy yourself first, then reader cannot fail to receive

⁵ Pound’s ideas about the gendering of creativity were inspired by his reading of Remy de Gourmont’s *Physique de l’amour* (1904). See Pound’s ‘Introduction’ to his English translation of the text: *The Natural Philosophy of Love* (London: Quartet, 1992).

telepathic shock and meaning-excitement by same laws operating in his own human mind' (1992: 57).⁶

A precedent for Kerouac's embodied poetics is Olson's essay 'Projective Verse' (1950), a more theoretically dense and rigorous piece, which is both a description and demonstration of his aesthetic.⁷ It would become the leading essay in the 'Statements on Poetics' section of Allen's *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960*. Olson delineates an 'open field' aesthetic (the page is an 'open field' on which the typewriter scores the poem), which rejects previous 'closed' forms, in fact, 'form is never more than an extension of content', as Olson reports Robert Creeley stating ([1950] 1960: 387). The energy of the writing process is again described: 'A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader' (387). Some rules for this flow of kinetic energy in the poem are that 'one perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception' and that it travels from 'the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE' and from 'the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE' (387; 390). Olson regards the 'mind' as the 'brother' and the 'ear' as the 'sister', and in this interaction the masculine-coded mind is 'the drying force, the incest, the sharpener' (389). Michael Davidson sees the 'familiar metaphor of the male as generative principle operating on a passive female nature' (1995: 202).⁸

⁶ Also note Kerouac's repeated reference in the piece to writing being equivalent to the jazz musician's 'blowing' (1992: 57). The fact that Kerouac occasionally performed his poetry and prose with a jazz band evidences his sense of the poet as an instrument. Also compare Norman Mailer's understanding of jazz in 'The White Negro': 'in his music [the African American] gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream and despair of his orgasm. For jazz is orgasm' ([1957] 1972: 273).

⁷ Belgrad (1998) discusses Kerouac's 'Essentials of Spontaneous Prose' in relation to Olson's earlier 'Projective Verse'. Kerouac dismisses any influence from Olson, yet, 'despite some social frictions', Olson asserted that he shared with the Beats 'a common aesthetic that showed their thinking to be along the same lines' (Belgrad 1998: 201).

⁸ Davidson observes that the very terms of Black Mountain poetics, 'gesture', 'field', and 'action', derive from Abstract Expressionist painting, 'for which the heroic ideal of physicality serves as aesthetic as well as communal precedent' (1995: 198). As in the case of jazz, we can note the

Davidson finds Olson's repetitive use of the masculine pronoun 'extreme' even by the conventions of the day: 'There it is, brothers, sitting there, for USE' etc. (Olson 1960: 387). Davidson interrogates Olson's 'autocratic' pedagogic practice at Black Mountain College and thereafter, citing various testimonials from his female students stating that they were ignored or ejected from the class, thereby arguing that Olson's behaviour was an 'extension of projectivism—an attempt to literalize the power of male speech by refusing women any interlocutory relationship within it' (1995: 204-5).

Belgrad regards the Beats as sharing a belief in Olson's idea of 'proprioceptive immanence', which stated that the body was the 'unifying locus of transpersonal forces that together constituted the self' (1998: 201).⁹ This led to their 'common concern with prosody, understood as an element of communication governed by the body' (201). Despite the fact that the body in question was not neuter, but male, female writers have found these embodied literary techniques influential. Joanne Kyger recorded in her *Japan and India Journals, 1960-1964* that 'Projective Verse' 'hits me like a whallop' – a reaction that staged the flow of kinetic energy Olson intended the reader to receive (Kyger [1981] 2000: 60).¹⁰ Anne Waldman has spoken highly of Olson's 'notorious spontaneous rap and reading' at the Berkeley Poetry Conference in 1965 (2001: 27), and Hettie Jones turned her meeting with him in the 1960s into a short story in which her perceptions of Olson's grandeur, both his

interdisciplinary reference. Black Mountain College encouraged interdisciplinary study, with various painters, as well as choreographers, serving on the faculty alongside the poets.

⁹ See Olson's 'Proprioception' in his *Collected Prose*, ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997), p. 179-199. *Toward the Open Field: Poets on the Art of Poetry 1800-1950* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan U P, 2004), ed. Melissa Kwasney, collates essays and manifestos which anticipated Olson's open field poetics. It includes Ralph Waldo Emerson's 'The Poet' (1844), which is of interest for its connection to Kerouac's spontaneous poetics.

¹⁰ Although an admirer of Kerouac's writing, Kyger states that she was taught by poet John Wieners about spontaneity: 'that once words arrive on paper, they're sacred. You don't change them. If you make a "mistake," you can't erase it. There are no "mistakes"' (Kyger 2000b: n.pag.).

physical height and his reputation, are defused in a friendly exchange in her cramped kitchen (1997: 195-6).¹¹

I want to identify the social formations that nourished these male-defined aesthetics. The women writers presented in this thesis came to understand the masculine structuring of their community. In *Minor Characters* Joyce Johnson resurrects Allen Ginsberg's notion of the 'boy gang' (1994: 79). Johnson quotes from a journal entry of Ginsberg's in which he recorded the statement: 'The social organization which is most true of itself to the artist is the boy gang' (79).¹² Ginsberg added the thought, 'Not society's perfum'd marriage,' thereby signalling his aversion to society-sanctioned heterosexual monogamy, and by extension, to women as peers in his creative life. Diane di Prima describes a 'male cabal' which surrounded her: a 'determinedly male community of writers [...] self-satisfied, competitive, glorying in small acclaims' (2001a: 107). She invokes the venerable American frontiersman myth as she describes a 'stance' of 'high Noon on the streets of literary life', whereby Olson's statement of 'A Man Is What He Does' is comparable to John Wayne's 'There's a time a man has to do what he has to do.' When di Prima refers to her 'peers and fellows' in her invocation of Indra's net, there is a sense of her singularity as a woman artist since she makes no reference to her female peers (107).¹³

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's description of the 'continuum' of 'male homosocial desire' outlines the erotic potential in different forms of male togetherness, and can describe the community of the Beats and the New American Poetry (1994: 1). The

¹¹ Several women Language poets have acknowledged Olson's influence on their work. See Kathleen Fraser's *Translating the Unspeakable: Poetry and the Innovative Necessity* (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama Press, 2000).

¹² The statement originated from a dream of Ginsberg's – read in a 'dream letter' written by his friend, the writer John Clellon Holmes (79).

¹³ But as a counterpoint to the dearth of female artists, in *Recollections* and throughout her oeuvre, di Prima provides role models of female creativity and agency often from outside literature, some of whom will be addressed later in this chapter.

actual homosexual practices of William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, and the more ambivalent sexualities of Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac have been well-documented by their biographers.¹⁴ In an epigraph to his book of poems *The Fall of America* (1972), Allen Ginsberg quoted from Walt Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*. In the post-Civil War era, Whitman imagined the future of American literature to be informed by:

Intense and loving comradeship, the personal and passionate attachment of man to man – which, hard to define, underlines the lessons and ideals of the profound saviours of every land and age, and which seems to promise, when thoroughly develop'd, cultivated and recognized in manners and literature, the most substantial hope and safety of the future of these States.
(Whitman 2004: 449)

Whitman advocated the development of 'adhesive' love between men as opposed to 'amative' or heterosexual love which had previously governed literature, recommending that 'adhesive' love run outside of literature into everyday American life:

Many will say it is a dream, and will not follow my inference: but I confidently expect a time when there will be seen, running like a half-hid warp through all the myriad audible and visible worldly interests of America, threads of manly friendship, fond and loving, pure and sweet, strong and life-long, carried to degrees hitherto unknown, not only giving tone to individual character, and making it unprecedentedly emotional, muscular, heroic, and refined, but having the deepest relations to general politics.
(449)

Ginsberg's resurrection of these sentiments is significant.¹⁵ Graham Caveney suggests that we see Ginsberg's 'boy gang' in a lineage of what Hemingway refers to as 'men without women' (1999: 15). Leslie A. Fiedler mapped this lineage in *Love and Death*

¹⁴ See for example, Barry Miles's *William Burroughs: El Hombre Invisible* (London: Virgin, 1992) and *Allen Ginsberg: A Biography* (London: Virgin, 2002).

¹⁵ The spectre of Whitman had appeared in Ginsberg's earlier poem 'A Supermarket in California', featured in *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1956), pp. 29-30.

in the American Novel (1960), providing the examples of ‘Jay Gatsby and Nick Carraway, Ishmael and Queequeg, Huck Finn and Jim, Natty Bumbo and Chingachgook, the Lone Ranger and Tonto’ (Caveney 1999: 15).¹⁶ Caveney points to *On the Road*’s Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise as Beat’s main exemplars of this lineage. But Ginsberg takes this American homoeroticism, ‘at its word’, according to Caveney: ‘Melville, Twain, Hemingway et al were writing homoeroticism within a heterosexual framework. Ginsberg takes their subtexts and puts them on display – a kind of literary “outgoing,” as it were. Men without women suggests an absence – Ginsberg replaces it with his presence’ (16-17).

Referring more generally to the Beats as a group, Catharine R. Stimpson argues that their form of male friendship was ‘more diffuse’ than Whitman’s ‘adhesive’ and ‘amative’ binary (1983: 376). While acknowledging the reductiveness in her focus on just Burroughs, Ginsberg and Kerouac, Stimpson regards the homosexuality of Beat men as generally replicating the active/passive model which informed their heterosexual relations. ‘The physiology of the bodies that engage in heterosexual or homosexual acts may differ’, Stimpson writes, ‘but when the language that pictures these acts is the same, the distinction between sexualities dim’ (380). Stimpson regards Ginsberg’s homosexual discourse as based on the master/slave binary. In his poetry he could ‘pretend to be a torturer who lasciviously inspects naked culprits, but more often he plays bottom in his games’, citing his poem ‘Please Master’ from 1968 as an example of a submissive persona who is both ‘dog’ and ‘girl’ to his master (380-1). Stimpson suggests that the ‘boys’ that feature in Burroughs’s novels are comparable as commodified erotic objects to Kerouac’s expendable chicks and fellaheen women (383). These Beats show contempt for the

¹⁶ Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion, 1960).

‘fag’ whose camp concealment belies the honesty and ‘nakedness’ to which they subscribed. Stimpson quotes from Ginsberg’s description of an FBI agent he imagines to be following him, who is ‘worried that we’ll all escape, vanish, and he’ll lose his job & be fired by his intemperate boss a cruel Faggot named J. Edgar Hoover’ (378).¹⁷ Allen Hibbard recognizes Burroughs’s frequent ‘disdain’ for the fag or ‘feminized man’ (2004: 22). Citing Jamie Russell’s argument in *Queer Burroughs* (2001),¹⁸ Hibbard points out that in his quest for sexual freedom, Burroughs clung to a normative notion of ‘the masculine’, ultimately seeking ‘a narcissistic relationship in which each of the participants reflects the masculine status of the other’ (Hibbard: 23). In such novels as *The Wild Boys* (1971) and *Port of Saints* (1973), Burroughs provided, according to Russell: ‘a vision of a new, queer social order based on all-male (and all-gay) communes in which women and effeminate gay men have no place’ (23). Summing up Russell’s argument, Hibbard states that ‘Burroughs’s primary deficiency, it seems, lies in his inability to wriggle loose from essentialist notions of “male” and “female” that have been challenged by recent theorists, notably Judith Butler, who sees gender as being primarily performative and thus highly fluid’ (23).¹⁹ *On the Road* featured a scene with a ‘tall, thin fag’ giving a ride to Sal and Dean (Kerouac 1991: 206). The man ‘wore dark glasses and drove with extreme care; the car was what Dean called a “fag Plymouth”; it had no pickup and no real power. “Effeminate car!” whispered Dean in my ear’ (206). It seems that even the mighty American automobile was subject to emasculation.²⁰ Although difference occurred in

¹⁷ The source is Ginsberg’s *Airplane Dreams: Compositions From Journals* (Toronto: Anansi, 1968), p. 2.

¹⁸ Jamie Russell, *Queer Burroughs* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

¹⁹ See p. 61, note 33 for a reference to Butler.

²⁰ The published version of Kerouac’s *On the Road* featured a censoring of the sexual elements of Ginsberg and Cassady’s relationship which had appeared in an earlier version of the text. Kerouac’s self-censorship stands in contrast to the explicit homosexuality featured in Ginsberg and Burroughs’s work. Stimpson regards the veiling of homosexuality in Kerouac’s autobiographically-based oeuvre as symptomatic of his own sexual ambivalence. ‘Unable to present homosexuality clearly, unable to settle

the configurations of masculine and feminine in the work of these male Beat writers, it is extremely suggestive to consider that their sense of brotherhood was dependent on establishing a hierarchical notion of masculine and feminine, which excluded certain versions of the masculine such as ‘the fag’, and reified the feminine while often excluding actual women.

Panning out to the male writers of the New American Poetry again reveals more daring attitudes to male homosexuality. The poet John Wieners (1934-2002) appropriated derogatory labels of the feminized man such as ‘fairy’ in the *Hotel Wentley Poems* (1958),²¹ as he created what Michael Davidson refers to as a ‘community of difference’ occupied by ‘marginal types who inhabit alternative social spaces (the gay bar, the mental ward, the hustler’s street corner) vulnerable to official scrutiny’ (Davidson 1998: 274). ‘A Poem for Cocksuckers’ shows Wieners’s appropriation of terms of alterity and stages the slippage between them:

Well we can go
in the queer bars w /
our long hair reaching
down to the ground and
we can sing our songs
of love like the black mama
on the juke box, after all
what have we got left.

On our right the fairies

into heterosexuality cleanly’, he produced narrative and rhetorical strategies such as his novels’ ‘idealized and de-eroticized picture of Whitmanesque brotherhood’ (Stimpson 1983: 386).

²¹ John Wieners. *The Hotel Wentley Poems* (San Francisco: Auerhahn, 1958).

giggle in their lacquered
voices & blow
smoke in your eyes let them
it's a nigger's world
and we retain strength.

(Quoted in Davidson 1998: 275)

According to Davidson, the poet's appropriation of the negatively-defined term 'queer' into a positive sign of solidarity in the 1950s – before the gay rights movement – 'anticipates more recent theories of queer identity' (275). Also, by 'rearticulating queerness as blackness', Wieners mobilizes a community of difference who perform the identities of an 'other'. The speaker's singing along with the 'black mama / on the juke box' is an appropriation of African American feminine identity, and the performance of femininity – again, in Butler's articulation of the term – is also seen in the fairies' transvestism, suggested by their 'lacquered / voices'. Wieners's 'racial masquerade' (275), as Davidson puts it, seems a more complicated aesthetic move than the desires of *On the Road*'s Sal Paradise, who wandered in the 'Denver colored section, wishing [he] were a Negro' (Kerouac 1991: 180).²² Davidson considers the poetry of Wieners to be markedly different from his 'North Beach colleagues' Kerouac and Jack Spicer, in that Wieners 'chooses not to reconfigure homosexuality in heterosexual, macho terms' (1998: 276). By citing Spicer and Wieners, Davidson locates a San Francisco poetry community in which gay identities had a more historical basis.

²² See James Baldwin's critique of Kerouac's appropriation of African American identity, 'The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy', *Esquire* (May 1961): 102-106.

Having identified some of the formations of masculinity and male homosexuality in the culture, we can now turn to women's experiences of being among openly gay male poets.²³ Joanne Kyger has spoken of her apprenticeship to poetry in meetings led by Spicer and Robert Duncan. The informal 'Sunday Meetings' were located in the compact North Beach poetry scene of the late 1950s, and provided tangible, regular opportunities for Kyger to develop her poetic voice in company. Linda Russo quotes Kyger's description of the first time she read at the Sunday Meetings:

I had been hesitantly writing the past nine months, simple pieces, childhood memories. The reading was at Ebbe Borregaard's the Sunday afternoon I read. I remember James Broughton was there and, when I finished reading, said, 'Wonderful.' Spicer said, 'What are your plans for poetry?' Harold Dull said 'Shh, leave her alone.' One of the most important initiations I ever had . . . I had attained a 'voice.' (Russo 1999: n.pag.)

In bars such as The Place and Gino & Carlo's, Spicer 'conducted an ongoing seminar while people played pool and pinball' (Davidson 1983: 513). This bar-based literary culture was a part of Spicer's vision of a local arts scene. Spicer's *J* magazine and Stan Persky's *Open Space*, which would feature Kyger's early poems, had a 'permissive and accessible submission acceptance policy': both were compiled from submissions left in boxes in local bars, providing a platform for the concrete realisation of her 'voice' (Russo 1999: n.pag.).

Kyger admits that being around predominantly gay male poets allowed friendship and avoided any 'confusion' that sexual relations may have brought (Grace and Johnson 2004: 141). Ellingham and Killian give the reasons for the lack of woman poets within the group as being 'partly financial, since the women who were

²³ My use of the term 'openly gay' is relative, since these were pre-Stonewall times.

likely to contribute were busy supporting their men' (1998: 117). They quote Dora Geissler, who attended the Sunday Meetings at Joe and Carolyn Dunn's apartment, as she recalls the atmosphere of being a woman among gay men:

I didn't read anything at Joe Dunn's. I was Harold [Dull]'s woman. It was sort of like—There wasn't room for me to write, too. There were women in the group, but only Joanne [Kyger] did any writing. Nemi [Frost] went to the poetry meetings, too, but she wasn't a writer. It was the group that went. Joanne and Nemi and I were very good friends. [...] We all enjoyed the company of gay men, probably for similar reasons. For me, coming to San Francisco and meeting gay men was a wonderful experience, because I had just been through that season in my life where you're seen as a sex object, and in Seattle, I would try to talk to people and think they were interested in my mind, and they just wanted to get in my pants? That was always so disappointing to me, and then when I met gay men in San Francisco, and realized, "They're interested in my ideas," I was just overjoyed! I knew my gay friends enjoyed my company for me alone, not as someone to fuck. That was a very comfortable place for me to be then. Feminism really hadn't been invented then to any extent, and most women were uninteresting to me. They would talk about the house, and clothes, and I was never interested in makeup, clothes, the things that they talked about that didn't interest me. The world of ideas and poetry and politics that gay friends would talk to me about, why, that's where I felt at home. (117)

Although Joanne Kyger had social and sexual connections to the male Beats – primarily through her marriage to Gary Snyder in the early 1960s – it could be suggested that her immersion in the North Beach poetry scene dominated by gay men gave her a relatively safe place in which to develop her voice and attain 'a sense of herself as a poet among poets' (Russo 1999: n. pag.). The poet Diane Wakoski encountered Jack Spicer at a reading she gave at the San Francisco Poetry Center:

Perhaps because I was the only woman listed on the program, I was put in the middle of the program. What I remember is that Jack Spicer became a very noisy member of the audience (part of what he was valued for, I later found out), making sure each poet knew which poems were appreciated and which were rejected or ignored. And of course what I remember after this almost forty years is that he cheered and stamped and whistled when I read some of my poems. Clearly, I was chosen; I was the best. That's what I felt. That I had

debuted into the literary world and been chosen. Jack Spicer was the king-maker, the chooser, Plato's Philosopher King.
(Ellingham and Killian 1998: 141)

Wakoski regards this as an important formative experience, but at a later poetry meeting she attended she was 'dismissed as quickly and as thoroughly as I had been accepted' when her opinions about another poet were 'clobbered' by Spicer (142). This is perhaps the incident which Joanne Kyger remembers when she recounts how Wakoski came to a meeting and cried in response to a comment from Spicer: 'I thought, oh, she's just not strong enough to put up with these people! You couldn't be thin-skinned!' (Grace and Johnson 2004: 142).

The English poet Denise Levertov was also tested in this environment, at a party at Mill Valley arranged in honour of her first visit to San Francisco in January 1958. At the event, Spicer read his poem 'For Joe'²⁴ which drew up a barricade between homosexual males and women through an apparently misogynistic attack on female anatomy:

People who don't like the smell of faggot vomit
Will never understand why men don't like women
Won't see why those never to be forgotten thighs
Of Helen (say) will move us into screams of laughter.
Parody (what we don't want) is the whole thing.
Don't deliver us any mail today, mailman.
Send us no letters. The female genital organ is
hideous. We

²⁴ 'For Joe' would feature in Spicer's posthumously published volume *Admonitions* (New York: Adventures in Poetry, 1974).

Do not want to be moved.
Forgive us. Give us
A single example of the face that nature is imperfect.
Men ought to love men
(And do)
As the man said
It's
Rosemary for remembrance.
(Quoted in Ellingham and Killian 1998: 124)

Davidson (1989), Knight (1996), as well as Ellingham and Killian (1998) have responded to this incident. Davidson sees Spicer's decision to read the poem as 'a way of verifying the loyalty of community members and at the same time excluding those who would enter from without', namely Levertov (1989: 173). At the time Levertov was associated with the Black Mountain poets, such as Charles Olson and Robert Creeley, towards whom Spicer often felt antipathy. Ellingham and Killian note that the contrary Spicer had previously written publicly of his admiration of Levertov's poetry (1998: 124). They regard 'For Joe' as a parody in coded hermetic terms through which Spicer attacked his gay male associates, namely Robert Duncan's 'exploitation' of Helen Adam, who was also being honoured alongside Levertov that evening (1998: 125). Levertov responded publicly with the poem 'Hypocrite Women' published in *O Taste and See* (1962)²⁵ which made explicit reference to the incident:

²⁵ Denise Levertov, *O Taste and See* (New York: New Directions, 1962).

And if at Mill Valley perched in the trees
the sweet rain drifting through western air
a white sweating bull of a poet told us

our cunts are ugly—why didn't we
admit we thought so too? (And
what shame? They are not for the eye!)

No, they are dark and wrinkled and hairy,
caves of the Moon.

(Quoted in Davidson 1989: 172-3)

She held up 'hypocrite women' who collude with men through feeling shame towards their own bodies. Through appropriating taboo slang for female genitalia – 'our cunts are ugly' – Levertov summoned the power of the language to 'best Jack Spicer on his own ground' (Knight 1996: 209). Yet as a counterpoint, the image of female genitalia is then re-covered – 'they are not for the eye' – and hidden away. Levertov later explained that 'their *function* is not visual anyway, so why should they be [pretty]' (Ellingham and Killian 1998: 126).

It could be argued that only on certain terms could any poet, male or female, exist in the circle Joanne Kyger joined, due to its well-developed sense of itself and its local and aesthetic boundaries.²⁶ But Diane di Prima has also described what she regards as the gendered terms of acceptance she received from these poetic

²⁶ Ellingham and Killian's excellent biography of Spicer and his world, *Poet Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan U P, 1998) attests to his squabbling with several poets, male and female alike, but also to his long-term friendships with women.

luminaries.²⁷ Even though she had featured Robert Duncan's writing in *The Floating Bear*, when she met him on her first trip to the West Coast in 1961, di Prima reports that when having breakfast with him at Michael and Joanne McClure's house, he ignored her presence. It was only when she let down her long hair in order to brush it that Duncan paid attention to di Prima, breaking off in the midst of a sentence to state in one breath: 'You-have-the-most-beautiful-hair-I've-ever-seen-will-you-come-to-lunch?' (2001: 261). The invitation to lunch was sparked by his sudden interest in her as an aesthetic object, 'not anything I said or thought, and certainly not what I wrote' (261). She assumes that Duncan wanted to show off her 'pre-Raphaelite' hair and 'maybe my Italian nose' to his partner, the painter Jess. She concludes: 'I had hung out with enough gay men in New York to get the picture.' Her poem 'Coscia's: November 1963' is subtitled a 'Letter to John Wieners' and it addresses her desire to be recognized by (gay) male poets on her own terms:

I expect a certain amount of
respect
yes I do
as you do
(don't like to be called "girlie")
a certain amount of deference
stopping to listen
when I pronounce

²⁷ Ellingham and Killian note that Spicer was generally wary of poets from other parts of the United States. When Spicer first heard about Diane di Prima, whose work Kenneth Rexroth had been advocating, he did not believe she existed; her name, for instance, 'was too preposterous to be real. She was to be referred to only by her initials; thereafter they joked about the imaginary, chimerical "DDP"—a Fata Morgana of the East' (Ellingham and Killian: 1998: 169). Perhaps her anomaly as a female Beat poet also gave weight to her non-existence.

an opinion.

(di Prima 1990: 43)

Di Prima imagines a visit to a department store with Wieners to look at costume jewellery. Wieners appears as a degenerate aristocrat ‘in Boston rags’ (43); his ‘long, definéd, filthy / highclass fingers / close’ over the jewellery as he steals it – ‘another brooch / nestles beneath your dirty handkerchief’ (44). Having left the momentary glamour of the store and returned to a squalid urban scene, the speaker asks: ‘What more tiara now, for you or I?’ (44). Gender appears to be a performance, since a sign of femininity – the tiara – can be appropriated (or stolen) by either gay male poet or female poet. Perhaps di Prima is reflecting the gender slippage in the personae of Wieners’s poetry. Yet, despite this apparent democracy, di Prima demands respect, ‘a certain amount of deference’.

The poets of the San Francisco Renaissance provided other discourses of masculinity, and the Spicer/Duncan circle with its informal poetry meetings and workshops nurtured women poets such as Kyger and Helen Adam, even though it did not provide a home for Denise Levertov. By comparison, the sexual ambivalence and bisexuality of many male Beats complicated their relations to the aspiring female writers they knew, as Joyce Johnson’s and Elise Cowen’s life stories testify. Also the mobility of Beats such as Kerouac and Ginsberg meant that they were simply not present as teachers for these women. Although Ginsberg would later engage in official teaching work, he kept his early tutoring projects for his male lovers and friends, such as Neal Cassady and Peter Orlovsky. In reference to the marriage vow taken with Orlovksy in 1955, Ginsberg outlined the tenets of their union in his journal: ‘you be master in bed, and I be master in book’ (Miles 2002: 178).

To conclude this section on women's experience of the boy gang, with its implicit homosociality and at times overt misogyny, we can turn to Diane di Prima's anecdote about being one of the many of LeRoi Jones's lovers. Ultimately di Prima felt that when love between men 'really clicked', there was 'no way to compete against it' (2001: 221). During their relationship di Prima knew that Jones had various other lovers in addition to his wife Hettie, whom she assumed to be both male and female. She describes a party she threw with another female lover of Jones's, on the occasion of an unnamed male poet's return to California. Di Prima believed that this male poet had been attracted to Jones. Another female lover of Jones's was in attendance, bringing a 'wonderful gourmet salad'. The women 'behaved impeccably' to each other: 'Maybe because we each knew how much we hurt. We were united too in a secret glee that the poet was leaving. Somehow we all sensed what I for one knew for sure: how much more threatening this young man potentially was to each of us than we were to each other' (221). The Beat sexual liberation appears to have had its rules and hierarchies.

Part II: Images of Female Minority in the Beat Mirror

Kerouac's writing is an inextricable mixture of so-called fact and fiction that calls both into question. It is generally assumed by his readers that he is talking about actual events and actual people. In the sense that his characters do have counterparts—that Neal Cassady, Allen Ginsberg, Carolyn Cassady existed—this is true. But once written into his books, they are fair game. He can equip me with a trust fund I never had, and depict Neal as a compulsive talker. I have driven for eight hours with Neal Cassady, in the course of which neither of us said a word.

When I protested to Jack that he had endowed me with a nonexistent trust fund and married me a White Russian countess, he replied mysteriously that I would understand it all by and by. Did he mean that his fiction would produce somehow a magic trust fund and evoke a slinky countess with a fur coat down to her Russian boots? I think not. He meant that I would come to understand that fiction is more enduring than fact, and that history books are full of it. And readers are convinced that everything in his books actually happened in so-called real life exactly as he describes it.

As time passes and eyewitnesses die off, it becomes more and more difficult to determine what really happened and what Jack invented or pieced together—because his inventions are usually composites.

– William S. Burroughs, 'Heart Beat: Fifties Heroes as Soap Opera' (1980)²⁸

Michael Davidson has observed that the history of the Beat period, 'far from being an objective report, often seems like another chapter from one of Jack Kerouac's novels' (1989: 2). The particular semi-autobiographical nature of much Beat literature that Burroughs regarded as shaping an audience's perceptions, has no doubt also influenced the official histories and biographies of Beat. It seems that 'you cannot separate the representation from the reality', as Lorna Sage noted in her poststructuralist reading of *Minor Characters* (1992: 117). It is worthwhile then to examine the images of women and femininity promulgated in the writing of male Beats. The emergence of women writers of the Beat literary movement is ultimately mixed up with the images of women circulating at the time. As well as briefly

²⁸ William S. Burroughs, 'Heart Beat: Fifties Heroes as Soap Opera', *Rolling Stone* 309 (1980). Rpt. in *The Rolling Stone Book of the Beats: The Beat Generation and American Culture*, ed. Holly George-Warren (New York: Hyperion, 1999), pp. 159-162 (161).

outlining some female images favoured by the men, namely the mother, the chick, and the fellaheen woman, I point to women's responses to such images.

Joyce Johnson refers to books which 'serve as mirrors in which one catches reflections of oneself', highlighting the experience of women readers of Beat, but also subtly referencing the motif of the photograph that recurs in her memoir (1994: 71). Adrienne Rich, another 1950s woman and later an originator of feminist poetics and politics, points to the history of mirror images that women readers and prospective writers, of her generation and beyond, encountered in men's writing:

She goes to poetry or fiction looking for *her* way of being in the world, since she too has been putting words and images together; she is looking eagerly for guides, maps, possibilities; and over and over in the 'words' masculine persuasive force' of literature she comes up against something that negates everything she is about: she meets the images of Woman in books written by men. She finds a terror and a dream, she finds a beautiful pale face, she finds La Belle Dame Sans Merci, she finds Juliet or Tess or Salomé, but precisely what she does not find is that absorbed, drudging, puzzled, sometimes inspired creature, herself, who sits at a desk trying to put words together.
([1971] 1993: 171)

This Woolfian argument would later be developed by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their influential *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979).²⁹

The obstacle of the mirror certainly appears to be in place in the writing of the male Beats. Johnson discusses the peculiar situation for women such as herself, who knew the male writers socially and romantically, and therefore were liable to appear in the writing. Johnson's alter-ego, 'Alyce Newman', appeared in Kerouac's novel *Desolation Angels* (1965): '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' (Kerouac

²⁹ In *A Room of One's Own* (1929) Woolf had articulated the obstacles for the apprentice woman writer.

[1965] 1995: 323). Commenting on this passage, Johnson asks: ‘Where am I in all those funny categories?’ (1994: 128). Similarly, ‘I took the skin of corpses’ is a poem by Elise Cowen describing the speaker’s figurative unease with her identity as a woman and as a poet, which is equated as a literal discomfort in her own skin. The poem stages the speaker’s ‘borrowing’ of the identity of others:

I borrowed heads of corpses
To do my reading by
I found my name on every page
And every word a lie.
(Peabody 1997: 29)

She found the representation of herself in the writing of others to be a distortion. The poem illustrates what Gilbert and Gubar define as an ‘anxiety of authorship’ in relation to Beat writing – a term which derived from Harold Bloom’s analysis of the male writer’s ‘anxiety of influence’, his Oedipal struggle with his literary fathers (2000: 49).³⁰ In a gynocritical argument which stresses women’s difference from men, Gilbert and Gubar state that the female writer cannot experience this struggle in the same way as her ‘male counterpart would, for the simple reason that she must confront precursors who are almost exclusively male, and therefore significantly different from her’ (48). They continue:

Not only do these precursors incarnate patriarchal authority (as our discussion of the metaphor of literary paternity argued), they attempt to enclose her in definitions of her person and her potential which, by reducing her to extreme stereotypes (angel, monster) drastically conflict with her own sense of self—

³⁰ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford U P, 1973).

that is, of her subjectivity, her autonomy, her creativity. On the one hand, therefore, the woman writer's male precursors symbolize authority; on the other hand, despite their authority, they fail to define the ways in which she experiences her own identity as a writer. (48)

The woman writer's 'anxiety of authorship', which Gilbert and Gubar argue is not only experienced by nineteenth century writers such as Jane Austen, the Brontës, and Emily Dickinson, but inherited by twentieth century writers such as Sylvia Plath, is also traceable to our Beat generation women writers. Gilbert and Gubar summarise the 'anxiety' in the following terms:

Thus the loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessors coupled with her need for sisterly precursors and successors, her urgent sense of her need for a female audience together with her fear of the antagonism of male readers, her culturally conditioned timidity about self-dramatization, her dread of the patriarchal authority of art, her anxiety about the impropriety of female invention—all these phenomena of "inferiorization" mark the woman writer's struggle for artistic self-definition and differentiate her efforts at self-creation from those of her male counterpart. (50)

In reference to Cowen's poem, Tony Trigilio argues that she is suggesting that 'when the body is territorialized the imagination follows suit' (2002: 134). The speaker finds the images of women produced by others, namely male writers, to be lies. Trigilio suggests that the 'recycled bodies of others' encountered in the poem are a metaphor for literary 'originality' – 'a continuous tradition excavated for a revisionary future' (134). The last stanza of the poem seems to prefigure Cowen's future literary status:

When I become a spirit
(I'll have to wait for life)
I'll sell my deadly body

To the student doctor's knife.

(29)

Read forty years after her death, Cowen's literary status is based on a few anthologised poems which have yet to be collated into a single volume. Her presence as a figure in the poetry and letters of Ginsberg, and the memoirs of Joyce Johnson and Leo Skir,³¹ overshadows her own voice. Cowen's very mediated posthumous literary identity, or 'body', is now available to the critic's 'knife'.³²

The Great Mother

An image of femininity which the male Beat writers addressed was the mother. In the wider American discourse of the post-war years 'Mom' was a scapegoat. As Betty Friedan writes, under the 'Freudian microscope' of cultural debate:

It was suddenly discovered that the mother could be blamed for almost everything. In every case history of a troubled child; alcoholic, suicidal, schizophrenic, psychopathic, neurotic adult; impotent, homosexual male; frigid, promiscuous female; ulcerous, asthmatic, and otherwise disturbed American, could be found a mother. A frustrated, repressed, disturbed, martyred, never satisfied, unhappy woman. A demanding, nagging, shrewish wife. A rejecting, overprotecting, dominating mother.
([1963] 1992: 165-6)

³¹ See Skir's 'Elise Cowen: A Brief Memoir of the Fifties' in Knight (1996), 143-158.

³² See Elisabeth Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1992) for an examination of the appropriation of death in relation to women's writing. Bronfen notes that in Sylvia Plath's and Anne Sexton's poetry, death exists as 'an autonomous act of self-fashioning' (401). They too interrogate the mediated images of women and perhaps, as with Cowen's poetry, 'feminine death is the creative resurrection of the represented woman' (401).

Several books contributed to this diagnosis, including Philip Wylie's bestseller *Generation of Vipers* (1942),³³ a 'tirade', according to Jacqueline Rose, against the 'failure' of America (Rose 1991: 165). Wylie named the concept of 'Momism', presenting 'the image of a deadly middle-class American female' who is responsible for the emasculation of the American male and for 'the collapse of the culture' (166). Despite the removal of the vicious book by the Voice of America from its overseas libraries in the 1950s as a more 'apple pie' image of 'Mom' was cultivated, the figure of the mother in popular American discourse remained a fraught one (166).³⁴

Despite critiques which see the Beats in flight from female domesticity, Eugenia Kaledin regards Kerouac as 'restoring "Mom" to a position of respect' (1984: 8). Biographically speaking, Kerouac's mother 'Mémère' 'plays an important role in the background of his life on the road'. In the previous chapter of this thesis I noted the metaphors through which Kerouac's *On the Road* coded the American continent as a maternal body.³⁵ In 'Kaddish', Ginsberg's lament for his late mother Naomi, the maternal body is, according to Helen McNeil, 'disgusting and alluring': 'the mad, ugly, frightening and dead Naomi remains horribly dead, but also becomes the archetypal mother and a sacrifice, ultimately one of the six million' (1996: 192).³⁶ As the speaker in the poem Ginsberg is indeed disgusted, but at times also protective of his mother, occupying the role of son, carer, would-be lover, but most importantly, as

³³ Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* [1942] (New York: Rinehart, 1946). Another example of this kind of literature is Edward A. Strecker's *Their Mothers' Sons: The Psychiatrist Examines an American Problem* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1946).

³⁴ The damaging effects of overbearing mothers on their sons were being proposed, but Friedan relates that the effects on their daughters were being neglected, even though, she implies, the daughters of these emotionally stunted mothers would continue the proposed cycle ([1963] 1992: 179). In Chapter Four I focus upon my women writers' fraught relationships with their mothers. In their later autobiographical writings issues which remained private in the 1950s began to surface.

³⁵ See p. 57.

³⁶ In Chapter Four I develop my reading of 'Kaddish' in relation to women writers' treatment of their mothers and their immigrant family heritage.

a witness to Naomi.³⁷ In ‘Howl’ the maternal body appears as the castrating ‘one eyed shrew that winks out of the womb’, one of the ‘three old shrews of fate’ which entices ‘loveboys’ away (the others being ‘the one eyed shrew of the heterosexual dollar’ and ‘the one eyed shrew that does nothing but / sit on her ass and snip the intellectual golden / threads of the craftsman’s loom’) (Ginsberg [1956] 1997: 14). The mother reappears in the poem with an overwhelming Oedipal finality: ‘with mother finally *****’ (19) (asterisks in the original). In ‘Praise for Sick Women’, a poem from Snyder’s first volume of poetry *Riprap* (1959),³⁸ the poet apparently sympathises with women who live in primitive societies where menstruation is regarded as a state of sickness. Snyder presents a state of ‘hell’ resulting from ‘the change of the moon’: ‘In a bark shack / Crouched from sun, five days, / Blood dripping through crusted thighs’ (quoted Charters 1992: 292). According to Michael Davidson, ‘in the name of primitive imagination’ the poem ‘critically reinscribes those patriarchal and tribal values in the modern era’ (1989: 177). For example, the poem begins by invoking naturalist views of the ‘female’:

The female is fertile, and discipline

(contra naturam) only

confuses her

Who has, head held sideways

Arm out softly, touching,

³⁷ The poem refutes Paul O’Neil’s allegation, in one of the first negative popular responses to the Beat writers, that the Beats were against ‘Mom’: ‘Individual Beats [...] have raised their voices against virtually every aspect of current American society: Mom, Dad, Politics, Marriage, the Savings Bank, Organized Religion, Literary Elegance, Law, the Ivy League Suit and Higher Education, to say nothing of the Automatic Dishwasher, the Cellophane-wrapped Soda Cracker, the Split-Level House and the clean, or peace-provoking, H-bomb’ ([1959] 2001: 425).

³⁸ Gary Snyder, *Riprap* (Kyoto: Origin, 1959).

A difficult dance to do, but not in mind.

(Charters 1992: 291)

‘The female’ is tied to nature through her fertility, and her ‘dance’ does not involve ‘mind’ – the statements of Pound noted earlier resonate here. Davidson points out that historically these ‘myths’ have been used to both ‘praise’ and ‘censure’ women. He sees Snyder working in this poem in a ‘romantic masculine tradition’ which presented a ‘feminized natural landscape’ (177).³⁹ Diane di Prima claims a Romantic lineage through her regard for Keats and Shelley, and as Davidson points out, shares Snyder’s ‘ethnological and mythological interests’ (177). She responds to Snyder in her poem ‘The Practice of Magical Evocation’ from 1958, which uses the opening of Snyder’s poem as an epigraph, but in its first lines asserts the presence of a woman author: ‘I am a woman and my poems / are woman’s’ (di Prima 1990: 20). She turns Snyder’s point that, ‘the female is fertile,’ into the notion that ‘the female is ductile’ (20). Through the layering of anatomical images di Prima presents the feminine as entirely passive and a body ‘assailed’ which will ‘bring forth men children only’ (20). There is irony in this, Davidson suggests, and ‘the more Di Prima asserts woman’s passivity, the less we believe her and thus recognize her ability to use rhetoric to her own advantage’ (178).⁴⁰ Davidson refers to di Prima’s appropriation of patriarchal language in her form of ‘magical evocation’ as an example of Adrienne Rich’s notion of ‘revision’, a response to the false images of women found in the literary mirror (178). For Rich the act of ‘re-vision’, of ‘looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of

³⁹ Davidson quotes Margaret Homans’s point that this Romantic conceit was ‘the necessary complement to [the male poet’s] imaginative project, the grounding of an imagination so powerful that it risks abstraction without her’ (177). See Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte, and Emily Dickinson*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1980.

⁴⁰ Davidson’s is one instance of the variations in the presentation of Diane di Prima’s name. My presentation follows that which appears in di Prima’s books.

entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history; it is an act of survival’ (Rich 1993: 167). Di Prima’s naming of herself as a woman writer producing women’s poems goes against the notion of a universal, apparently genderless poetic ‘I’ which Rich notes was in currency at the time. As Davidson notes, di Prima’s ironic ‘re-visioning’ in the late 1950s precedes the 1970s feminist revisionist strategies which Rich named.

In *Minor Characters* Joyce Johnson interprets Kerouac’s equation of women with nature. During their relationship she would wonder if he could ever include a woman on his journeys:

Whenever I tried to raise the question, he’d stop me by saying that what I really wanted were babies. That was all women wanted and what I wanted too, even though I said I didn’t. Even more than I wanted to be a great woman writer. I wanted to bring life into the world, become a link in the long chain of suffering and death. I said of course I wanted babies someday, but not for a long time, not now. Wisely, sadly, Jack shook his head. (1994: 136)

In *Desolation Angels* (1965), shortly before the appearance of Alyce Newman, Kerouac’s narrator Jack Duluoz had explained his understanding of ‘the essential teaching of Buddha’ as being ‘No More Rebirth’ (1995: 296). The narrator explains that although sex with women is ‘by far the sweetest gift on earth’, it unfortunately leads to birth (296). For ‘every little sweet lump of baby born that women croon over, is one vast rotten meat burning slow worms in graves of this earth’ (296). Johnson highlights Kerouac’s ‘awful metaphysical linking of sex, birth, the grave’, but is ultimately able to forgive his ‘woman-hatred’ (1994: 133). Lorna Sage is rather more unforgiving, interpreting Kerouac’s attitude as a mixture of ‘vulgar Freudianism’ and Buddhism: ‘Women are by definition unchanging, the enemies and the measure of change. Nature rules them (what they say doesn’t count)’ (1992: 118).

Barbara Ehrenreich reads the male Beats' attitudes to women and 'the feminine' in sociological terms, locating them alongside the 'gray flannel rebel' who resisted the corporation and the 'playboy' who resisted marriage and suburbia (1983: 52). In a commentary on the Beats, she uses an epigraph from Kerouac's novel *The Dharma Bums* (1958): "'Pretty girls make graves,'" was my saying...' (52). But Ehrenreich uses this epigraph to illustrate Beat misogyny without elaborating on its context. If we turn to the novel itself, Kerouac's narrator Ray Smith looks back on his earnest devotion to Buddhism in the mid-1950s in a somewhat self-mocking manner. After those early days of 'practicing my religious devotions almost to perfection' he has since become 'a little hypocritical about my lip-service and a little tired and cynical' (Kerouac 1994: 8). Smith relates that his religious practice had involved 'an entire year of celibacy based on my feeling that lust was the direct cause of birth which was the direct cause of suffering and death and I had really no lie come to a point where I regarded lust as offensive and even cruel' (27). Hence his adoption of the saying 'Pretty girls make graves'.

Reading Beat literature too literally, without taking account of characters and personae means that criticism can indeed seem 'like another chapter from one of Jack Kerouac's novels' (Davidson 1989: 2). In her memoir Johnson uses Kerouac's novels to read the breakdown of their relationship, but she finds that life and art do not match each other. Yet Johnson also realises that 'you cannot separate the representation from the reality' (Sage 1992: 117).

The Chick

Helen McNeil notes the stereotyped female characters that exist as foils to the male trajectory of *On the Road*.⁴¹ In the novel's quest for unfettered sexual expression, embodied in the character of Dean Moriarty, women are necessarily freely available. Thus McNeil credits the Beats with inserting the 'chick category' into gender discourse, 'the attractive, young, sexually available and above all silent ("dumb") female' (1996: 189). Alix Kates Shulman comments on the abundance of anonymous chicks in Beat literature: 'Here a chick, there a chick, everywhere a chick-chick' (1989: 18). It is certainly the case that the covers of early editions of Beat novels featured pictures of alluring 'chicks' typically dressed in black, and as popular culture spread the Beat story, the makers of beatnik exploitation films concocted sensational stories featuring 'chicks'.⁴²

In his essay 'The Origins of the Beat Generation' (1959), Kerouac pictured the silent 'chick' as he defined the differences between 'cool' and 'hot' hipsters who take inspiration from 'cool' and 'hot' styles of jazz. 'The "cool" today is your bearded laconic sage, or schlerm, before a hardly touched beer in a beatnik dive, whose speech is low and unfriendly, whose girls say nothing and wear black' ([1959] 1998: 61).⁴³ Although Kerouac's cool hipster male was also 'laconic', and a variety of female characters appeared in his novels whose speech was appreciated rather than presented

⁴¹ McNeil supports her argument by referring to a female editor at Viking Press, the first publisher of *On the Road*, who commented in an internal memo with regard to the female characters in the novel: 'almost none of them are real' (1996: 185). In comparison, the male characters were 'very well drawn'.

⁴² See Henry Cabot Beck's article 'From Beat to Beatnik' in George-Warren (1999), 95-105, for a discussion of films influenced by Beat style and also the more outrageous beatnik exploitation genre. The piece makes reference to such titles as *The Subterraneans* (1960) (based on Kerouac's novel of the same name), *The Beat Generation* (1959), and *Greenwich Village Story* (1963).

⁴³ Kerouac's use of the term 'beatnik' here is in accordance with the usage which proliferated into the 1960s as a catch-all term for non-conformist youth, which would eventually be replaced by 'hippie'. With further reference to terminology, Ann Charters points out that the terms 'beat' and 'hip' were 'often used interchangeably' in the mid-1950s (1992: 581).

as empty talk, the silent chick is a cultural touchstone for the Beat era.⁴⁴ Ronna C. Johnson and Nancy M. Grace's texts' *Girls Who Wore Black* (2002) and *Breaking the Rule of Cool* (2004) pick up on this image and the authors describe the limiting effects of what Diane di Prima refers to as the 'rule of Cool'. For di Prima, 'our code, our eternal, tiresome rule of Cool', which set the way 1950s hipsters behaved and interacted with each other, placed limitations on personal relationships (1988: 94).⁴⁵ For Johnson and Grace, the rule of cool 'duplicated female powerlessness and objectification, the gendered silence under the reign of which the majority of women in the 1950s suffered politically and socially' (2002: 7). They note the political silence which Beat generation women shared with 'mainstream' American women, but I would argue that Beat generation women's movement out of restrictive family environments and experimentation with alternative social roles such as breadwinner, editor or artist were political choices.

But in what ways do the experiences of our writers testify to the silence of the chick? Joyce Johnson describes being born into what *Time* magazine named as the Silent Generation in 1951, but for women like her who found themselves within the Beat generation there appeared to be a double meaning to silence.⁴⁶ Firstly, the social silence of the cool chicks which Johnson admitted to in her description of 'sitting by . . . as the voices of the men [...] passionately rise and fall', a situation which also

⁴⁴ See, for example, the character Mardou Fox in *The Subterraneans* whose speech is faithfully created by Kerouac, although she is the only female member of a 'very quiet' group of cool hipsters (Kerouac [1960] 1995: 13).

⁴⁵ See also di Prima's retrospective diagnosis 'Cool' in *RE/Search 2* (1981).

⁴⁶ Ann Douglas quotes *Time*'s reference to the 'oldest young generation in the world' (1999a: xxii-xxiii). Douglas defines this generation: 'Apathetic if well-intentioned, its members believed that all the frontiers were closed; heroic achievement and personal adventure were impossible in the age of the big corporation and the national security state. Yet, *Time* added, they were not happy with their own acquiescence; they had impossible dreams, as one young man put it, of doing "the things I really want to do"' (xxiii). Also see Dan Wakefield's *New York in the Fifties* (Boston: Houghton, 1992) for an autobiographically-informed sociological perspective on the 'Silent Generation'. Bestsellers of the 1950s such as David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd: The Study of the Changing American Character* (Garden City: Anchor, 1953), William H. Whyte Jr.'s *The Organization Man* (Garden City: Anchor, 1956) and Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: McKay, 1957) analysed America's alleged group mentality.

appears to be related to individual personality; secondly, the silencing of themselves as writers – a self-imposed silencing which was sustained, if not partly created, by attitudes in both Beat bohemia and wider society as to what constituted a female writer. In *How I Became Hettie Jones* (1990), the author stresses her social gregariousness and her role in the poetry scene centred on *Yugen* magazine. But her attempts at writing were mostly delegated to the waste paper basket during the Beat period. In the late 1950s North Beach poetry scene Joanne Kyger may have been unsure of her place – Linda Russo reports Kyger’s shyness about reading her work at the ‘Sunday Meetings’ she attended in 1957; but she worked toward this goal after hearing it was felt that, ‘Some people are treating these meetings just like a party’ (Ellingham and Killian 1998: 111). But by 1971, in her *Desecheo Notebook*, she stated ‘I am a writer and a talker’, showing confidence in shaping her words in both social and textual space, and also where these two spaces meet, in the role of poet-performer (Kyger 2002: 110). It seems that it was not until the late 1960s that these women found their full confidence, which is certainly the case with Hettie Jones. The silent chick in black image is countered by the ‘outrider’ role which Anne Waldman adopted and is evident in her long poem *Fast Speaking Woman* (1975). Waldman describes an early reading in which she realised a different ‘voice’ awaited her. Placing the reading at St. Mark’s Church-in-the-Bowery in New York c.1966, she recalls:

I was nervous. I was seated at a wooden table. I wore a yellow and blue striped dress and my head was bent over my ‘works,’ hair probably in my face. I remember hearing my young woman—more like a girl—voice and thinking, ‘This isn’t the real voice.’ The real voice was deep inside in my hara—and it was a deeper, more seasoned and musical voice—an ageless voice. I realized I would eventually have to find the words to match it—the words would have to grow up to the voice and its wisdom. The poet’s path. It’s not that I had to

‘find my voice’—it was already there waiting for me. I’d just begun to recognize it. It had always been there trying to wake me up.
(Waldman 2001: 108-9)

In establishing the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University in 1974, Waldman would consciously follow and venerate an ‘outrider’ lineage of poetry, a lineage ‘outside the academic mainstream’ which is ‘more experimental, risky, oppositional’, and takes as its antecedents the Modernists Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and Gertrude Stein (1966). The outrider tradition exists as a touchstone for the discussion of women of the Beat generation that can counter the ‘chick’ image. It was a lineage Waldman investigated in order to fulfil the potential of her ‘real voice’.

The Fellaheen

An adjunct to the chick category in Kerouac’s discourse is the ‘fellaheen’ woman: the character of Teri the Mexican girl in *On the Road*, and the title character of his novel *Tristessa* (1960), a Mexican whore.⁴⁷ McNeil notes that these women are ‘[e]ven safer’ than the chick because they have ‘few expectations’ and are ‘lower on the social scale than even [*On the Road*’s] automotive hoboes Sal and Dean’; the fellaheen ‘does not speak English, or only barely’ (189). There is a touch of Lawrentian primitivism in Kerouac’s fellaheen, and Catharine Stimpson writes, ‘If a chick were black, Chicana, Native American, or Mexican, her grooving and swinging were all the more mythic because she was displaying a “primitive” force that all those

⁴⁷ Angela Carter was perhaps aware of Kerouac’s heroine and the gender ambivalence of the male Beat writers when she named the transsexual character ‘Tristessa’ in her novel *The Passion of New Eve* (London: Gollancz, 1977).

in flight from bourgeois society so wishfully craved' (1983: 379). Another point of reference is Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*.⁴⁸ Manuel Luis Martinez explains the influence of Spengler on the Beat imagination. In the text Spengler

posited a land of marginalized peoples, living on the edge of history and waiting for an apocalyptic moment. He called these people the 'fellaheen,' and the Beats used this historiography to construct Mexico as the site of a new frontier. Although their reading of Spengler remained cursory, Burroughs, Ginsberg, and Kerouac appropriated the idea of the fellaheen as a teleological justification for their adventurism. In their interpretation, the people of Mexico lived in a primitive and declining society, existed on the periphery of a fallen civilization, and waited for its eventual re-creation. (Martinez 1998: 34)

Martinez examines the underlying imperialist assumptions in the Beats' treatment of the fellaheen 'other' as a commodity. Traces of the fellaheen can be seen in the character Mardou Fox from *The Subterraneans* (1958), who although a North Beach-based intellectual hipster, had a 'Negro mother' and an 'unknown Cherokee-halfbreed' hobo father' (Kerouac [1960] 1995: 25). Yet Jonathan Paul Eburne suggests that in repeated scenes the white narrator 'asks himself if the reason for his attraction to [Fox] is, conversely, *because* of her race, because of her exotic otherness', with the narrator self-consciously interrogating the narrative structures he builds to contain racial and gender difference (1997: 78).⁴⁹

After having explored the images that women could see in the Beat mirror, I turn to the possibilities for, and inhibitors of, female community in the 1950s.

⁴⁸ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Knopf, 1922), 2 vols.

⁴⁹ See also Robert Holton's 'Kerouac Among the Fellahin: *On the Road* to the Postmodern', *Modern Fiction Studies* 41 (1995): 265-283, for a discussion of Kerouac's positioning of race.

Part III: The Girl Gang

In *Minor Characters*, Joyce Johnson takes Beat men to task for their sustained belief in the boy gang. To test the terms of the gendering of the Beat generation, Johnson imagines an equivalent: ‘*The social organization which is most true of itself to the artist is the girl gang. Why, everyone would agree, that’s absolutely absurd!*’ (1994: 81) (emphasis in original). Performing the voice of the pre-second wave feminism consensus, Johnson judges the concept of the girl gang to be ‘absurd’. Although women banded together during the first and second waves of twentieth century feminism, as a decade, the 1950s stands unmarked by American feminist agitation and the writers themselves highlight their former blindness to gender difference.⁵⁰ Diane di Prima admits that she was somewhat blinded to the ‘male cabal’ which surrounded her and Hettie Jones speaks with similar emphasis when queried about the role of gender in her experience of the Beat scene (di Prima 2001a: 107). Jones states ‘I think women were not even aware of how locked into their sex roles they were at the time. [...] Not until the women’s movement in the late sixties and early seventies did any of us see what we could have been doing’ (1997: 15). Joanne Kyger feels that the ‘same kind of feminist identity’ did not exist in the mid-1950s as does now (Grace and Johnson 2004: 141). ‘I think it’s something that has evolved. At that point, it wasn’t yet of interest. Most women that I went to school with in Santa Barbara were not interested in what I was interested in,’ Kyger continues. Another factor inhibiting female literary community was that the writers did not often share their work with each other prior to publication. They give reasons such as there being a lack of other

⁵⁰ See Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* [1963] (London: Penguin, 1992) for an influential early second-wave feminist perspective on women’s social and political status in the 1950s, and Joanne Meyerowitz’s *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple U P, 1994) for an insightful overview of American women’s position during that decade which registers the presence of non-white ethnic groups and non-heterosexual experience.

women writers in their immediate environment to share with, or feeling inhibited about showing their work to each other.⁵¹ Jones admits to hiding her work, and Joyce Johnson links Elise Cowen's similar habit of poetic privacy to her belief she was 'a *mediocre*', seemingly having adopted this as part of her image, as Johnson remembers Cowen pronouncing the word 'in an odd hollow French way' (1999: 44) (emphasis in original). Speaking about her middle-class experience of the 1950s, Adrienne Rich states: 'I have a sense that women didn't talk to each other much in the fifties—not about their secret emptinesses, their frustrations' ([1971] 1993: 173).⁵²

Both Johnson and Jones state that when the women's movement emerged in the late 1960s, they were somewhat 'out of step', as Johnson phrases it, with its concerns since they had already overcome many of these issues in their lives (Grace and Johnson 2004: 189). For example, they had both raised children as single working mothers and Jones had raised mixed-race children as a white mother. Johnson expresses empathy with the abortion rights movement, and in *Minor Characters* she details her own illegal abortion in the 1950s, presenting pre-marital sex as a dangerous game of 'Russian roulette' for young women: 'Life was considered sacred. But independence could be punishable by death.' (1994: xiv, 107). Joanne Kyger's sense of female community stemmed from the women's groups she attended in the early 1970s in Bolinas, California. Many poets had left San Francisco to experiment with the back-to-nature living of Bolinas and had started families. The women of this community, Kyger relates, were 'very strong and very independent and thought they

⁵¹ The relationship between Hettie Jones and Diane di Prima discerned through their respective texts *How I Became Hettie Jones* (1990) and *Recollections of My Life as a Woman* (2001) suggests that the entanglements of Beat love could prohibit female friendship. Jones was married to LeRoi Jones when their friend di Prima began an affair with him.

⁵² This silence could be read as a facet of the silent 'chick'. Alix Kates Shulman stressed the heroine's lack of female friends in the Beat-styled domains presented in *Burning Questions*. This situation could be read as a resurfacing of the private world Woolf portrayed women locked into in *A Room of One's Own* (1929).

could raise their own children [on their own terms]', and they organised 'women's groups' which Kyger attended (Grace and Johnson 2004: 143).

Joyce Johnson claims that second-wave feminism was important in literary terms, in the sense that she was able to see that her own story was of value, as were the stories of other minor characters, which led her to write her memoir in the early 1980s (Grace and Johnson 2004: 188). Similarly, Jones states that after reading Carolyn Heilbrun's *Writing a Woman's Life*, she was able to consider a woman's life as appropriate subject matter: 'I don't necessarily like that book—but anyway, it's because at first I didn't think the subject [of writing a woman's life] was hip. But then I realized it was hip!' (173).⁵³ She downplays her awareness of the feminists Shulamith Firestone and Gloria Steinem, but recalls meeting the activist and writer Alix Kates Shulman. '[T]here were so many different worlds of writers in New York that even though she was probably the same age as I, our paths never crossed [prior to their meeting]', Jones explains (170).

Beat generation women's relationship to second-wave feminism is complex. With differing levels of consciousness of gender, many had been writing their own personal takes on a woman's life since they began to write. These lives had a presence and a prescience which a younger generation of feminists did not immediately appreciate. Hettie Jones states:

A lot of young women at the time had no concept of the fact that prior to the women's movement there were any women who had removed themselves from general cultural expectations, during the fifties especially. [In *How I Became Hettie Jones*] I really wanted to show that we had started the whole process, that not enough attention had been paid to the fact that we were here and we had made changes in women's lives. A lot of the people who began the women's movement had some vague idea that we had been out here, although they didn't attribute any real advances to us. They were getting their own

⁵³ Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine, 1988).

apartments and taking off their bras without realizing that there were women who left home as we did and suffered for it. (Grace and Johnson 2004: 159)

Yet, ironically, it was the messages of the women's movement which helped some, such as Johnson and Jones, narrate their own lives later on.

Although friendships between women could nurture and support, in the 1950s and early 1960s women in the Beat milieu did not seek to establish a distinct female literary or social community. They explored their identity and creativity *within* the culture of the New American Poetry in proximity to Beat men, far-removed from the often fraught and restrictive familial world they had fled. Joyce Johnson has stated that: 'We couldn't take on the task of transforming relationships between men and women because it took such an overwhelming amount of effort to come as far as we had; our most consuming struggle was the break with the mores of our parents' generation' (1999: 48). Yet in their work they tackled relationships between men and women and through the very act of writing they transformed female roles within the Beat world. Johnson refers to the 'transitional' quality of Beat generation women, they were a 'bridge to the next generation' (1994: xv).⁵⁴

But Ann Charters complicates matters by rejecting Beat generation women as 'precursors' to feminism, because 'the ones who were precursors to feminism just wouldn't have been attracted to these guys' (Grace and Johnson 2004: 225). Instead, she points to Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich, women writers of the 1950s who are perhaps the official immediate precursors to 1960s feminism. Charters finds Rich's example worthy because she has led the feminist literary movement in every decade since the 1960s, being ultimately more 'radical' than the male Beats (223). Similarly, Plath's *Ariel* showed Charters that a woman writer could rebel against 'conventional

⁵⁴ Compare Virginia Woolf's leitmotif of the 'bridge' in *Three Guineas* (1938): 'in imagination perhaps we can see the educated man's daughter, as she issues from the shadow of the private house, and stands on the bridge which lies between the old world and the new' (Woolf: 1998, 172).

women's lives' but she 'didn't have to do it as a Beat' (222).⁵⁵ But although Beat generation women would not figure in the official lineages of feminism, by recovering their work today we can see that their writing in the Beat period explores issues of sexuality, the body, and freedom; themes which feminists would explore in the following decades.

So where does the image of the girl gang belong in this discussion? Joyce Johnson introduces it in *Minor Characters* but, instead of simply rejecting it as an 'absurd' image, it resurfaces in her presentation of a community of Beat generation women, such as Jones, Cowen, and by extension, Joan Vollmer Burroughs and Edie Parker Kerouac (1994: 81).⁵⁶ Lorna Sage speculates about Johnson's deployment of the girl gang image, noting that 'Johnson's writing is tense with the strain of not simply opposing a "liberated" female culture to the old "boy gang"' (1992: 121). Johnson's feminism is 'as much about loneliness as solidarity' and she is 'too conscious of the past injustice of having been typecast to want to lose her characters to a cause' (121).

The 'girl gang' carries weight as a term in parallel cultural discourse. Feminist theorists have made a case for girls' involvement in youth subcultures. Studying the literature on subcultures, Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber (1976) found scant attention paid to girls' presence and contributions. They find Sheila Rowbotham's synopsis of women's marginality appropriate to the situation:

It is as if everything that relates only to us comes out in footnotes to the main text, as worthy of the odd reference. We come on the agenda somewhere between 'Youth' and 'Any Other Business'. We encounter ourselves in men's cultures as 'by the way' and peripheral. According to all the reflections we are not really there. (McRobbie and Garber 1976: 209)

⁵⁵ While the first edition of *Ariel* appeared in Britain in 1965 (London: Faber), the first American edition of *Ariel* appeared in 1966 (New York: Harper).

⁵⁶ See pp. 36-38 of this thesis.

The concern with girls' 'peripheral' status in subcultural studies resonates with the minor status of women in Beat studies.⁵⁷ McRobbie and Garber concentrate on the presence of young women in the motorbike, mod and hippy subcultures. But they also look for the 'alternative ways of organising their cultural life' that girls exhibit, citing 'teenybopper' culture as creating exclusively female space (219). Ultimately, they agree with Jules Henry's description from 1963 of the formations of American teenage life:

As they grow towards adolescence, girls do not need groups, as a matter of fact for many of the things they do, more than two would be an obstacle. Boys flock; girls seldom get together in groups above four whereas for boys a group of four is almost useless. Boys are dependent on masculine solidarity within a relatively large group. In boys' groups the emphasis is on masculine unity; in girls' cliques the purpose is to shut out other girls.
(Quoted in McRobbie and Garber 1976: 221-2)

They add that 'girl culture, from our preliminary investigation, is so well insulated as to operate to effectively exclude not only other "undesirable" girls – but also boys, adults, teachers and researchers' (222). This suggests that the gang model is irrevocably male and therefore inappropriate for a discussion of female subjects.

Yet girl gangs did exist in 1950s American culture, as part of the growing delinquent youth culture with which the Beats were associated in the media and which became the object of sociological investigation. Ann Douglas describes historical girl gangs who existed outside official feminism but heralded the existence of female delinquency as a discourse in post-war American society. Douglas notes that 'girl

⁵⁷ Some subcultural investigations which focus on male youth to the detriment of female participants are Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System* (London: Gollancz, 1961) and Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979). *The Subcultures Reader* ed. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (London: Routledge, 1997), and *The Post-Subcultures Reader* ed. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzeirl (Oxford: Berg, 2003) redress the balance by making reference to women's subcultural presence.

gang' was 'a popular new term in the press' and she provides a portrait of the emergence of these gangs and press reaction to the phenomenon:

On October 29, 1951, half a decade before the publication of *Howl* and *On the Road*, *Time* ran a story on three middle-class white teenage girls who had robbed a family for whom one of them was baby-sitting and escaped from their suburban Boston homes to New York. There they went on a shopping spree and toured the nightclubs, picking up men on the way. They planned to buy a car and head to Mexico, but the police apprehended them first. On December 6, 1954, *Newsweek* reported a 'girl gang' whose members dressed like their boyfriends, in leather jackets and tight black jeans; another gang overpowered their more ladylike peers and cut off their hair. In March 1954, teachers described the all-female Walton High in the Bronx to *Time* as a 'powder keg' where girls were arming themselves with knives. 'Nice Girls Can Be Delinquent,' the *Woman's Home Companion* headlined a story of 1955. (1999: xxiii)

Evidently the press sensationalized reports, just as they did to stories of male delinquents, and as they would do to the Beats in the late 1950s through the figure of the beatnik. Yet Diane di Prima experienced the reality of female violence during her early teenage years in Brooklyn. Gender segregation existed at her grammar school, St. Mary Star of the Sea, and so boys' and girls' only 'concourse' was on the streets (2001: 66). Di Prima describes 'dark evenings in dead-end alleys, uncertain threats. Knife fights I witnessed from the fourth grade up: girls fighting with knives for the "love" of indifferent Irish altar boys. Chill greetings, snide and all-knowing, a hideous, childish sophistication' (66). This female youth violence was territorial and came from the working-class streets. But in her recollections of her later attendance at the elite, all-girl Hunter High School, di Prima posits a literary girl gang that is momentarily 'true of itself to the artist', and therefore more in keeping with Johnson's suggestion of a girl gang as a counterpart to the boy gang.

'The Branded' were di Prima's group of 'young maverick women' whose privileged education introduced them to the world of art, classical music, poetry and

philosophy against a background of the ‘pressure cooker’ of adolescence (2001a: 74, 73). They shared troubled family backgrounds in the ‘dark period between World War II and the Korean War’ and so they ‘clung to the safety we made together within the circle of our mutual sight’ (74). Di Prima uses territorial and militaristic language in her depiction of the group: their ‘fierce love of comrades’ and ‘mutualities of Cause’ although their cause was ‘less than half defined’ (73).

Although she does not refer to ‘The Branded’, Joyce Johnson attended Hunter High School at the same time as di Prima, and she remembers the school as a ‘rather grim’ institution where ‘bright girls were rigorously educated in ironic preparation for limited futures’ (1999: 42). Johnson notes the absence of any men on the premises, with the exception of ‘the aged elevator operator.’ Despite, or perhaps because of, the ‘conventlike precincts’ there were ‘adolescent non-conformists’: ‘Red-diaper babies who marched in May Day parades, lesbians who were having affairs with their teachers.’ Johnson remembers di Prima running the school literary magazine *Argus* along with Audre Lorde, another member of The Branded, in which Johnson’s writing would first be published.⁵⁸

The Branded outnumber Jules Henry’s estimation of the limited number of members in girl gangs. They had the exclusive, hermetic quality typical of any gang, apparently produced by their confinement in the school. This confinement, their specific tastes in literature, and their family situations fashioned a girl gang which would serve as a foundation for di Prima’s literary career – her first audience in which to experiment with her identity, her training in society removed from her restricted family life. Di Prima’s presentation of The Branded allows her to validate her early initiation into the world of art and ideas that preceded her development into a

⁵⁸ Di Prima would later publish Audre Lorde’s first collection of poetry *The First Cities* (New York: Poets Press, 1968).

bohemian-styled writer. In its romantic and youthful self-definition, *The Branded* resembles the group of young New York Beats – Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs – when they congregated on the Columbia University campus in the early 1940s and spoke of a Rimbaud-derived ‘New Vision’.⁵⁹

I return to the figure of the ‘girl’ and her bohemianism in the following chapter, but will now examine the gynocritical notion of female lineage.

⁵⁹ Barry Miles refers to ‘The New Vision’ as ‘the genesis of the philosophy of the Beat Generation’ (2002: 45). Group member Lucien Carr’s definition highlights the young men’s attempts at defining themselves as bohemian artists: ‘It was trying to look at the world in a way that gave it some meaning. Trying to find values . . . that were valid. And it was through Jack and Allen, principally, that it was going to be done’ (45).

Part IV: 'Lost Literary Matrilineages'

For we think back through our mothers if we are women.

– Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929)⁶⁰

By looking to literary history prior to the 1950s Beat generation, we can see evidence of women's presence and their configurations of community. Aspiring women writers of the 1950s may not have had access to the following histories, but they can be read as what Gilbert and Gubar refer to as 'lost literary matrilineage[s]' (2000: 53). The writers have talked about living in a world dominated by the 'boy gang', in which visible and dedicated female artists were scarce. Ann Douglas states that once the woman Beat had discarded the 'traditional garb' of femininity by moving into Beat space, 'unlike the male, [she] had at hand no garments of cultural myth to don in its place' (1999a: xxv). So who were available to them as teachers and role models, actual or vicarious?

Joyce Johnson writes of like-minded young women having 'no usable models' for their lives: 'We did not want to be our mothers or our spinster schoolteachers or the hard-boiled career women depicted on the screen' (1994: xiv). Part of Johnson's disengagement from authority figures stemmed from the fact that her inquisitiveness about sexuality was denied by her elders. She was not attracted or inspired by the Dean of Barnard College Millicent McIntosh's 'austere, rather militaristic brand of feminism', showing that traces of early twentieth century feminism *could* be discerned in the 1950s (1999: 44). A former Waves commander McIntosh 'inveighed against promiscuity and sexual experimentation': 'Women were to remain chaste until marriage, and if they had an occupation, no allowances were to be made for any

⁶⁰ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1998), p. 99.

special needs they might have at work' (44). Johnson reminds us that 1950s Beat generation women sought and staged a sexual revolution, albeit a clandestine one in comparison to 1960s 'free love'. Because they aspired to sexual freedom, McIntosh was not a usable model.

Despite Johnson's use of the collective 'we' in her dismissal, there were female schoolteachers at Hunter High School who inspired the young Diane di Prima: 'Women teachers of all kinds modelled a plethora of ways of being women' (di Prima 2001a: 73). She presents her former teachers in a romantic light: 'the dark intensities of our English classes' with Miriam Burstein who was as 'beautiful as her name', and Allie Lewis, 'the actress turned Shakespeare teacher' (73). Mrs. Robbins, the history teacher 'who sent us by ones and twos into the libraries and progressive research institutions'; the biology teacher, Ruth Lilienthal, who decorated her classroom walls with huge black and white prints of 'stamens, stems, cells', and who later 'went to Japan to study Zen' (73).⁶¹

Johnson stresses the fact that 'no one taught us how to be women artists or writers' (1994: xiv). Girls like Johnson did not find Virginia Woolf's example 'relevant' due to her being born into 'literature, connections and wealth', her inherited family income providing her with that room of her own (xiv). This is unfortunate since in *A Room of One's Own* Woolf maps out, often through empathetic speculation, the history of women's attempts to write. It could be taken as a guidebook for the novice woman writer, outlining the gender-specific material hindrances and ideological fears which inhibit women's literary production. Jacqueline Rose writes with reference to another woman writer of the 1950s, Sylvia

⁶¹ The feminist literary critic Nancy K. Miller, another former pupil of Hunter High, is slightly suspicious of di Prima's romantic memories of the teachers that she too recalls. 'I can't help feeling that you'd have to have been an Italian girl to find beauty in [the name Miriam Burstein]', wryly comments the Jewish American critic (Miller 2002: 20).

Plath, that a room of one's own, the 'now classic feminist demand of the woman writer', was not enough (1991: 118). Plath wanted 'the expansion of a world crucially located outside' (118). Writing in her journal in 1951, Plath described her

consuming desire to mingle with road crews, sailors and soldiers, bar room regulars – to be part of a scene, anonymous [sic], listening, recording – all is spoiled by the fact that I am a girl, a female always in danger of assault and battery. My consuming interest in men and their lives is often misconstrued as a desire to seduce them, or as an invitation to intimacy. Yes, God, I want to talk to everybody I can as deeply as I can. I want to be able to sleep in an open field, to travel west, to walk freely at night.
(Plath 2000: 77).

Plath felt that her gender precluded the anonymity that 'would allow her to watch, listen to and record, but also join in, the conversation of the men' (Rose 1991: 118). In this instance, Rose judges writing to be 'man-talk' for Plath, what is referred to in other parts of the journals as 'Plot', people 'growing: banging into each other and into circumstances', 'big, blasting dangerous' love (118).

An episode from *Minor Characters* provides insight into writing being regarded by women as 'man-talk'. At Barnard College, 'Professor X' was the creative writing teacher, 'a Melville and Hawthorne expert'; a man who Johnson remembers asking his 'girl students' in 1953 how many of them wanted to be writers (1994: 80). When every hand is raised he takes pleasure in telling them: 'first of all, if you were going to be 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' (81).⁶²

⁶² In her feminist analysis of pervasive patriarchal attitudes to women's writing, Dale Spender includes anecdotal evidence provided by women academics. Susan Koppelman recalls being part of a creative writing class at Barnard c.1958 who were told by the famous male teacher that their talent was wasted, because they were 'girls who can never have the kinds of experiences that catalyze talent into genius' (Spender 1989: 200). Koppelman relates that the experiences he believed them to be missing out on were 'war, whoring, the good fellowship of men reeling drunk down dark mean city streets, and the hunt' – the kinds of experience depicted by a writer such as Hemingway (200). But interestingly, Koppelman reveals that she listened to another ex-Barnard student, the writer Erica Jong, tell 'the same story, almost word for word' at an MLA forum in the mid-1970s. 'I assumed her teacher had been my

In Johnson's culture there was no knowledge of actually transient women writers such as Jean Rhys either, that 'earlier runaway from respectability' whom she romantically imagines as 'dangerously adrift in the Parisian bohemia of the 1920s' (xv). Johnson suggests that they might have 'identified with Rhys's lack of confidence in her writing' had they known about her, and 'found a warning to take to heart in the corrosive passivity of her relationships with men' (xv). Rhys would remain largely unknown in the early years of her writing life, with her books having gone out of print by the Second World War. Yet she was to be rediscovered on the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), her re-visioning of the *Jane Eyre* tale.⁶³ In his preface to Rhys's first collection of short stories, *The Left Bank* (1927), Ford Madox Ford writes of the author's intimacy with the Left Banks of the world: 'Miss Rhys does not, I believe, know Greenwich Village, but so many of its products are to be found on the Left Bank of Paris that she may be said to know its products' (Rhys 1976: 148).⁶⁴ If we align Rhys's world with the Greenwich Village of thirty years later which Johnson inhabited, we see the common ground in what Ford refers to as Rhys's 'passion for stating the case of the underdog,' her 'bias of admiration for its midinettes and of sympathy for its lawbreakers' (148). Yet Johnson attests to the elision of Modernist writers from the curriculum at Hunter High School. She remembers her English teacher's contempt for grammatical peculiarities such as 'sentence fragments', which meant that: 'For all we know, Joyce, Stein, Woolf have never been born. [...] Effect is something we girls have no right to' (Johnson 1994:

teacher but to check it out I asked her in private after her talk. "No." she told me, "it wasn't Professor X; it was Professor Y". I began to wonder then if it *wasn't* a genuine conspiracy.' (200). With Johnson's additional testimony it seems such a 'conspiracy' was in place. Note both Johnson's and Koppelman's use of the humorously generic appellation 'Professor X'.

⁶³ See p. 49 for my comparison of women of the Beat generation with the more developed literary field of women writers of Modernism.

⁶⁴ Rhys had an affair with Madox Ford, using the experience as source material for her novel *Quartet* (originally *Postures* (Chatto and Windus: 1928)).

35). Although she does not acknowledge the experimental, modernist-inflected prose works of Jane Bowles, Johnson notes that seeing a performance of Bowles's play *In the Summer House* (1953) allowed her to consider the theme of relationships between mothers and daughters as 'worthwhile material' (Grace and Johnson 2004: 200).⁶⁵ Johnson would publish 'The End of the Beach,' a short story based on a holiday with her mother, in Barnard College's literary magazine. She recalls that the play had 'opened up to me the way I knew I wanted to write' (Johnson 2004: 108).

Growing up in a literary family, Anne Waldman's search as a teenage novice writer in the 1960s for 'creative female comrades and role models among both elders and peers' proved to be more fruitful (Knight 1996: ix). She found Gertrude Stein and H.D., 'brilliant writers who chose to be exiles from the social pressures of their own cultures and were able to manage their creative lives abroad' and Marianne Moore, a 'quirky intellectual with a disciplined mind whose most intense relationship was with her mother' (ix). Writing in her foreword to Knight's *Women of the Beat Generation*, Waldman regards these literary lives as being so different from the women she actually knew, who 'like many of the women represented and conjured in [Knight's] pages—were more troubled characters—driven, desperate, fighting against the constraints of culture, family, education and often dwelling in the twilight of a "great" man's personality or career' (ix).

In *Recollections of My Life as a Woman* Diane di Prima creates a female community from outside literary culture, in the absence of a culture of contemporary

⁶⁵ Although falling outside the category of Beat, having more of a precedence in the 'polished, modernist, mocking-and-despairing line of Katherine Mansfield, Djuna Barnes and the young Jean Rhys' as Lorna Sage argues, the American expatriate Jane Bowles (1917-1973) had social connections to Burroughs and Ginsberg through their visits to Tangiers, where she lived with her husband, the writer Paul Bowles (2000: x). Knight (1996) includes Bowles among her selection of the literary antecedents of women of the Beat generation.

female writers to nurture her. She describes the difference she felt, as a female writer, from her female contemporaries, using the third person to dramatise her singularity:

Among her peers, her immediate friends, there were no women with her certainty. No women writers who were *artists first*, who held to their work as to their very souls. There were writers and would-be writers among the women, but they held other, alien priorities, assumptions. The assumption that Art (always the capital A) was compatible with comfort, a nice house in the suburbs; all this poverty and struggle was a kind of a trial period, something you passed through on your way to better things. (Like going to medical school.) The assumption that there truly *were* better things.

Those women were present and articulate, and friendship with them was possible, though bewildering. Led to enmeshment in the 'eight worldly concerns': gain and loss, pleasure and pain, praise and blame, fame and obscurity. Those eight obsessions could cloud the artist's mind, and though she didn't know them by name, she already knew that about them. (2001: 223)

Yet di Prima found affinity with artists from other disciplines, for example the women painters on her 'periphery of vision', and she names Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell, Helen Frankenthaler, Elaine de Kooning (224). They had 'carved out some kind of precarious independence' and 'defined themselves by themselves and by their work' (224). She imagines 'the struggles of their shaky hearts' and saw herself 'mirrored in them' (224). Di Prima also 'saw/heard herself' in the women blues singers Sara Martin, Trixie Smith, and Ida Cox. Their song lyrics and biographies seemed to provide a different model of the artist than any model 'propagated in the art world': 'That the work is a part of the life, and you have leave to stop it, become a hobo, a mother, disappear, get sick, strung out, and you have leave to go back to it, and maybe you'll be as good as you were before. Maybe you'll be even better' (224). She paraphrases the female voice of inspirational 'blues tales': 'Then I stopped singing, worked in the mill for a while. Oh, about twelve, maybe twenty years. Then Mr. Whiteman So-and-So came looking for me and I made another record' (224) Di Prima

elaborates on the meaning of these blues singers, their music and their biographies. As a woman they gave her a 'sense of absolute self-reliance': 'Whatever came down, you could do it on your own' (Grace and Johnson 2004: 99). The blues women make a contrasting model of the artist to the women writers cited above who regarded their bohemian period as a platform to a better life determined by comfort rather than 'Art'. Although both models are marked by obscurity, the blues women model is based on a cyclical return to art rather than upward mobility. Di Prima's empathy with African American art is also striking, and develops the more habitual Beat appropriation of black slang which marked her early texts, *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward* (1958) and *Dinners and Nightmares* (1961).

The older women poets of The San Francisco Renaissance can be viewed as literary mothers of Beat generation women. The life histories of Helen Adam and Madeline Gleason, who were both featured in Donald M. Allen's *The New American Poetry*, highlight a time prior to the emergence of the Beat generation when gender roles appear not to be so regimented. Both were embraced by Brenda Knight (1996) as 'precursors' to women of the Beat generation. Knight notes that after leaving her hometown in North Dakota, Gleason (1903-1979), travelled across the country in the late 1920s as 'a singer and comic in a travelling minstrel show' before settling in San Francisco in 1935 (29). Gleason published her first book *Poems* in 1944,⁶⁶ founded the San Francisco Poetry Guild, and along with poets Robert Duncan and James Broughton created San Francisco's first Festival of Contemporary Poetry in 1947, a highly successful event which attracted both local and East Coast poets. Through fostering poetic community outside of academia such work can be regarded as a foundation for the celebrated Beat poetry readings of the 1950s and 1960s. Gleason

⁶⁶ Madeline Gleason, *Poems* (San Francisco: Grabhorn, 1944).

was perceived by her peers as embodying the Irish myths of her background – the poet Ruth Weiss refers to her ‘Irish mystic and mystery’ (Grace and Johnson 2004: 74). Gleason was gay, and mixed socially and collaborated with male and female poets alike.

Helen Adam (1909-1992) was born in Scotland, establishing herself as a child poetic prodigy in Britain (although she would look back on her early work as ‘dreadful doggerel’), before leaving Scotland in 1932 to work as a journalist in London (Prevallet 2002: 36).⁶⁷ After travelling to the United States with her mother and sister for a family wedding in 1939, they were stranded there when World War II began. The women worked in New York City, and then moved to San Francisco in 1949. There Adam became involved in the poetry circle around Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer, existing as a ‘medium’ for the male poets, not merely because of her tarot readings, but due to her adoption of traditional ballad forms through which she utilised Scottish and American idioms to darkly comic, feminist effect (Davidson 1989: 180).⁶⁸ After Adam’s ‘insistence that genuine magic lies trapped within the old forms, waiting to escape’, Spicer would turn to the ballad form himself (Ellingham and Killian 1998: 60). Adam attended Spicer’s series of poetry workshops in 1957, the ‘Magic Workshop’, and Robert Duncan’s simultaneous group ‘The Maidens’. Ellingham and Killian regard both groups as the respective male poets’ reactions to the ‘Beat explosion’ (1998: 92). Gleason was also a Maiden, along with Duncan and his artist partner Jess Collins, and the poets Eve Triem and James Broughton. The

⁶⁷ Early works by Helen Douglas Adam are *The Elfin Pedlar and Tales Told by Pixy Pool* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923) and *Charms and Dreams from the Elfin Pedlar’s Pack* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924).

⁶⁸ Adam’s mature works include *The Queen o’ Crow Castle* (San Francisco: White Rabbit, 1958), *Ballads* (New York: Acadia, 1964) and *Counting Out Rhyme* (New York: Interim, 1972). Adding to her otherworldly persona, Adam actually sang her ballads. Examples of this can be heard at the Naropa Poetics Audio Archives (www.archive.org/details/naropa), revealing her genteel yet unsettling heteroglot voice. Adam is also known for the dramatic work *San Francisco’s Burning: A Ballad Opera* (San Francisco: Oannes Press, 1964). *Fire-Brackled Bones: Selected Poems and Collages of Helen Adam*, edited by Kristin Prevallet is forthcoming (Orono, MI: The National Poetry Foundation).

poets met for picnics, read their poems, dressed up, acted out plays, and were photographed in ‘*commedia dell’arte* postures’ (Ellingham and Killian 1998: 92). From today’s perspective The Maidens can be understood as an ‘interesting experiment in cultural subversion, combating the rigid gender stereotypes of the 1950s by exaggerated use of costume, fairy tale, high camp, role-playing, sexual ambiguity, and whimsy’ (93). Before feminist and queer studies established such critical terms, The Maidens were performing and troubling gender.

The poet ruth weiss recalls Helen Adam being ‘given more respect’ by the poetic authorities in San Francisco in the 1950s because of her age (Grace and Johnson 2004: 73). It seems Adam and Gleason found opportunities for support and collaboration in the poetic community of younger gay men which Joanne Kyger would also be nourished by.⁶⁹ Yet, as highlighted in my previous chapter’s discussion of Jack Spicer’s ‘For Joe’, a poem which perhaps alluded to Robert Duncan’s exploitation of Adam, she existed as a muse – a seemingly authentic embodiment of Old World myth and folklore. In support of this point, I refer to Duncan’s description of Adam as the ‘team-godmother’ of ‘the boys’ team in Poetry’ (Davidson 1989: 176, 175).

But as well as being highly regarded by male writers of the San Francisco Renaissance and Beat generation, Adam’s example has been acknowledged by ruth weiss, who remembers her ‘wild witchy voice’ (Grace and Johnson 2004: 75); Joanne Kyger, who describes Adam as a ‘big deal’, and believes that Adam ‘was of the tradition of magic’ (Kyger 2005: n. pag.); and Anne Waldman (Grace and Johnson 2004: 277). Adam and Gleason, older poets of the New American Poetry, form a

⁶⁹ Another woman fundamental to San Francisco’s poetic community was Ruth Witt-Diamant, a professor of literature and ‘flamboyant’ personality, who founded the Poetry Center at San Francisco State College in 1953 (Ellingham and Killian 1998: 53). Ellingham and Killian refer to Witt-Diamant as ‘the most powerful figure in the postwar poetry world of San Francisco’ (1998: 53).

‘maternal lineage’ for the younger women of the Beat generation. Their biographies tell of early travel, which also distinguishes them from the 1950s women whose lives were relatively geographically-fixed. In *Missing Men* Joyce Johnson presents her discovery of her mother’s secret history of travelling across the United States in the Depression years. This was a surprise to her since as a young woman of the 1950s Johnson felt the ideological effects of gender working to preclude travel. In Chapter Six I will outline the history of the female hoboes of the Depression who exist as another ‘lost matrilineage’, alongside the flappers such as Johnson’s mother and the literary women of Modernism.

Virginia Woolf wrote that women ‘think back through our mothers’, but for women writing in the 1950s and early 1960s, before the twentieth century’s second wave of feminism, the idea of a female creative lineage seemed untenable (1998: 99). In the following chapter I dwell on the ‘girl’, to discuss the ambiguously-gendered bohemian self-fashioning that marked the early lives of Beat generation women.

CHAPTER THREE:

Daughters of the City: *Flânerie* and Other Inner Flights

Part I: The Girl and Her Literary Ambitions

Following on from the theme of literary fathers and mothers developed in the previous chapter, I now concentrate on Beat generation women as daughters of such lineages. I turn to the figure of the ‘girl’ because the authors refer back to their childhoods as the time when they became interested in writing and when their initial ideas about ‘bohemianism’ were born.¹ These girls were nourished by urban habitats, and later in this chapter I will place them within literary and cultural discourses of the city.

In *Minor Characters* the term ‘girl’ is deployed ironically, showing Joyce Johnson’s awareness of the young woman as a site of ideological construction. ‘Effect is something us girls have no right to’, Johnson writes, adopting the voice of her English teacher at Hunter College High School (1994: 35). She recalls performing square dances in gym class, ‘in which we take turns “being the boy,” the fast girls with good figures roll their gym bloomers high on their thighs and tuck the elastics under their underpants’ (35). Johnson reads the author John Clellon Holmes’s character key to his *roman à clef* Beat novel *Go* (1952), noting that in his narrative schema ‘the “girls” are variously “amalgams of several types; “accurate to the young

¹ For various academic analyses of the ‘girl’ see Lesley Johnson’s *The Modern Girl: Girlhood and Growing Up* (Buckingham: Open U P, 1993), Susan J. Douglas’s *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 1994), Valerie Walkerdine’s *Daddy’s Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture* (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1997) and Valerie Walkerdine et al, *Growing Up Girl: Psychological Explorations of Gender and Class* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

women of the time”; “a type rather than an individual” (79).² Firstly, the ‘girl’ is the young female who is authored and contained by education, dress, and literary decorum. But secondly, before second-wave feminists questioned its usage, the ‘girl’ was a popular term, used without irony to address adult women – a usage which Holmes, ever a man of the 1950s, follows.³ In *Recollections of My Life as a Woman* the young Diane di Prima becomes fascinated with boyhood. She longs to be a ‘girl-man’, to efface her body, and eschews the gender codes of dress by wearing masculine clothes (2001a: 70). Her sexed body may be inevitable but she understands there is fluidity to gender.

In a different reading of girlhood, Deleuze and Guattari see the girl occupying a liminal space. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) they state with regard to the ‘girl’:

She is an abstract line, or a line of flight. Thus girls do not belong to an age group, sex, order, or kingdom: they slip in everywhere, between orders, acts, ages, sexes; they produce *n* molecular sexes on the line of flight in relation to the dualism machines they cross right through.
(Deleuze and Guattari 2003: 277)

For Deleuze and Guattari a binary notion of the sexes is a ‘dualism machine’. But girlhood is a state which exists in-between: ‘The only way to get outside of dualisms is to be-between, to pass between, the intermezzo’ (277). Girls illustrate what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as ‘becoming-woman’, a flow or process characterised by movement, ‘not imitating or assuming the female form, but emitting particles that enter the relation of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity, of a microfemininity’ (275). They reject the static term ‘woman’ since it is the lower clause in the binary organisation of the sexes. Deleuze and Guattari provide examples

² John Clellon Holmes, *Go* (New York: Ace, 1952). Johnson had evidently been studying the preface to the 1977 republication of the novel (Mamaroneck, NY: P. P. Appel).

³ Invoking the constrictions on women’s roles in the era, Helen McNeil asks whether all women in the 1950s were ‘either girls or mothers’ (1996: 181).

of the girl as Joan of Arc, the Russian terrorist girl – ‘the girl with the bomb, guardian of dynamite’ (277) – and Penthesilea, queen of the Amazons, ‘the last queen of the girls’ (278). They refer to the girl as a ‘fugitive being’ (281). The women writers’ recollections of their girlhoods evidence the dynamic status of being in some ways ‘between’ genders.

The vows to poetry many of the women writers took at an early age illustrate their early ideas about the role of the writer. Diane di Prima pins her discovery of poetry on John Keats, whom she had encountered via Somerset Maugham’s (a ‘hack novelist’ according to her English teacher) quoting Keats’s line ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’ (di Prima 2001a: 77). Like ‘a hound on the scent’ she made her way to the poetry section of Brooklyn’s public library. She states that ‘[g]irls weren’t allowed out much’, but she was allowed to go to the library by herself (di Prima 2001c: 227).⁴ In her private world of the library, she located the source, Keats’s ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ (1820):

There I stayed, hovering like a hummingbird, or coming back over and over for the same flowers. Vibes.

Keats, Shelley, Byron, mostly. Shakespeare’s sonnets. Later Millay’s ‘Renaissance’ and a few of the British women. A tone of passionate urgency I craved. (di Prima 2001a: 77)

Previously di Prima had been reading novels and the classic Western philosophers Plato, Schopenhauer, Spinoza, but after discovering Keats she saw the limitations of philosophy since ‘poetry could hold all the contradictions’ (2001c: 228). The discovery of Keats’s letters fuelled her new interest in poetry, and alongside her ‘tribe of friends’, The Branded, who would gather each morning before their classes to read

⁴ Di Prima describes the ‘double message’ typical of the times, whereby children were not allowed in the library’s ‘adult section’ – where her reading materials were located – but if she took the books to the counter there they would be issued (di Prima 2001c: 227).

out their new poems, the young di Prima 'claimed and reclaimed poetry' (2001a: 77). Staging her resultant vow to poetry she pictures her younger self watching the sky over Brooklyn, at what she rather archaically refers to as 'gloaming' (77). Thinking of the 'striving of Keats, his early death', she realised that she could live a life 'within a Vision' (77). She is somehow aware that the vision will provide what she will later translate as 'the shape of a Life' (78). Sensing that 'struggles' will be a part of this life, she stages her remarkable precocity:

The things I now leave behind (I am fourteen). Simple comforts of the regular human world, sentimentalized for a moment into a worth, a worthiness they didn't usually have for me even then. But now I am leaving them behind, never having had them. Now I am leaving them, perhaps for good. Leaving the quiet unquestioned living and dying, the simple one-love-and-marriage, children, material pleasures, easy securities. I am leaving the houses I will never own. Dishwashers. Carpets. Dull respect of dull neighbours. None of this matters really, I have already seen it all for the prison it is, but for that one moment it matters tremendously. (78)

She imagines that she spoke her thoughts 'aloud': 'To Keats or to the heavens? I hold a Vow in my heart' (78). These lines by Keats become her mantra: 'I am certain of nothing, but the Holiness of the Heart's Affections and the Truth of the Imagination.'⁵ She writes on the covers of her notebooks the Latin, 'Nulla dies sine linea': 'No day without a line.' Her sense of poetic ambition appears based on the image Keats cultivated in his letters, but also his lasting image as a doomed Romantic poet.

As opposed to her relation with Keats being an antagonistic struggle in Harold Bloom's terms, he is both a teacher and a muse to her. Di Prima states: 'I fell totally completely passionately endlessly eternally in love with John Keats' (1978: 15). Prior to her discovery of Keats she had 'crushes' on Schopenhauer and Spinoza (2001c: 227). So di Prima's relationship to Keats can be read as a schoolgirl 'crush'. But the

⁵ From Keats's letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22nd November 1817 (Keats 1970: 36-39).

gendering of the relationship is interesting. As well as her choosing a role model who was young when he died, thus eternally youthful, di Prima values his fluid sense of poetic identity, his sense of the selfless poet:

As to the poetical Character, (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself—it has no self—it is every thing and nothing—It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosop[h]er, delights the camelion Poet. [...] A poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity. (Keats 1970: 157)

At this early stage in her poetic career, Keats provided a formulation of dynamic poetic identity which could be read as androgynous.⁶ It would be later in di Prima's life that she became aware of gender difference in relation to the poetic vocation. When she decided to become pregnant (her first child was born in 1957), she 'conjured the presence' of Keats, 'the "feel" of him', in order to get his advice:

He told me I was taking a terrible risk. That I might lose Poetry forever by giving another being a claim on my life. He told me if I did this thing, he could no longer promise to come when I summoned him. [...] He told me, as he often had before, that it was hard enough for a woman. That women didn't do it right, the art thing, we wanted too much of the human world besides. (2001: 164)

Keats was not a poetic mentor who could connect to di Prima's female life. As we saw in the previous chapter, it would be later in her life when she would discover female antecedents.

⁶ She discusses this particular letter in her 'Keats/and Light' (1975) lecture, in her later life seeing a resemblance between Keats's selflessness or 'openness' and Buddhist thought. His 'constantly harping on that openness, that negative capability, that letting it come *through* you. Leaving behind opinion and judgement—the first requirement for tuning the instrument in poetry, and in meditation' (di Prima 1978: 27).

Hettie Jones begins her memoir *How I Became Hettie Jones* with an example which shows a determinist view of her journey into writing. Not a vow to poetry as such, she describes her six-year-old self at summer camp, lying on a mountainside with her hands in the air ‘pretending to weave the clouds’ ([1990] 1997: 5). That morning she had been taught to weave a basket and this new task had seemed ‘the very shape of my pleasure in doing, or making’ (5). This pleasure, she states, ‘surpassed my love for my family’ and by beginning the text with this scene she sends herself on a path which makes her later status as a writer appear destined, rather than circumstantial (6). The act of weaving implicitly refers to the view of women’s writing as ‘the voice of the shuttle’, and anticipates the female domestic mode she adopts for her poetry and prose.⁷

In the autobiographically-based chapter ‘Seeds of Travel’, in *Tracking the Serpent* (1997), Janine Pommy Vega writes of transcendental moments in her childhood which revealed both her emergent aesthetic sense and her expanding sense of place. At the age of nine, she first accompanied her father on his early morning milk delivery round. She recalls the sun rising: ‘After hours of frozen darkness, the red gold light streaming down the street and flooding the inside of our truck was like a miracle. My father smiled and put down the visor. I was so struck by the beauty I couldn’t speak’ (1997: 1-2). A few years later, while accompanying her father again, she observed an old woman standing in a front yard while her dog played in the fallen leaves. The scene could have been from ‘a fairy tale about an ancient happy woman’ (2). Years later she asked her father about this woman, but he could not remember her or the street, adding a mysterious quality to the memory. At that moment Pommy Vega had seen ‘something that sang inside me’. Both incidents, the old woman and

⁷ For a feminist analysis of the image of weaving see Patricia Klindienst’s ‘The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours’, *The Stanford Literature Review* 1 (1984): 25-53. Chapter Five of this thesis discusses the role of domestic, particularly African American, arts in reference to Jones’s memoir and poetry.

the sunrise, had ‘intimated that there was a wider, more thrilling and profound reality outside the bounds of my ordinary life’ (2).

By presenting their early commitment to artistic vocations – in the form of non-verbal yearnings toward art in the case of Jones and Pommy Vega – these women present writing as a calling which through their own agency they were able to fulfil.⁸ Yet their long lives dispel the ‘early death’ model of the Romantic poet. The early visions which cemented their lives as writers can be compared to the incident Allen Ginsberg described; that when reading some poems by William Blake in 1948 he had heard an ‘apparitional voice’ and believed it to be the voice of Blake (Plimpton 1999: 56). Ginsberg would relate this moment as an awakening which influenced his life as a poet: ‘my first thought was this was what I was born for, and second thought, never forget – never forget, never renege, never deny’ (57). Such dramatic enactments embody the visionary, Romantic tradition which di Prima and Ginsberg claim through their affiliations with Keats and Blake.⁹

More than just taking male literary role models, the young di Prima acted out fantasies of being a boy. Staying with her aunt and uncle allowed her distance from an unhappy parental home, and she describes ‘making up strange secret fantasies of

⁸ Anne Waldman also describes an early vow to poetry in dramatic, quasi-religious terms, but with an emphasis on her place in the community rather than as an isolated poet: ‘I took a vow early on to never give up on poetry or on the poetic community—to serve as a votary to this high and rebellious art’ (Waldman 2001a: 107).

⁹ The Romantic lineage which the Beats followed has been taken as read rather than fully explicated, and demands further study in order to map its dimensions. Tytell (1976) provides a useful discussion of the Ginsberg-Blake connection and proposes Walt Whitman as the American link to the visionary, Romantic mode. As well as di Prima’s essay ‘Light/and Keats’ (1975) giving an insight into the influence of Keats on her work, her play *Whale Honey* (1962) is an oblique meditation on the *ménage à trois* of Shelley, Mary Shelley and Byron, pulling out themes of pregnancy, abortion and the oblivion of the sea. Random surrealist-inspired images are used by di Prima to uneasy effect:

MARY: I had wrapped the small fetus, angular, in tinfoil
and placed it on a stool beside the bed.
I waited, I no longer tore at the sheets. (III, ii) [di Prima 1991: 132]

See Ellingham and Killian (1998) for a discussion of the neo-romanticism of Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan’s Berkeley Renaissance of the 1940s.

slavery and escape with my young cousins, acting them out for weeks in the backyards of Queens', reading *Penguin Island* or *Cyrano de Bergerac* with her uncle, and falling in love with one of his fencing students (di Prima 2001a: 75). By a later summer she had graduated from family gardens to roaming the streets with her friend Pia as 'pirates':

We had the run of the city: Sheepshead Bay to the Cloisters. Coney Island. It was all ours, and after classes at Washington Irving we would rearrange ourselves in the girls' bathroom, standing before the tall mirrors they had so kindly provided. Wide belts and jeans. Blouses with wide, flowing sleeves. Then we would set out, wild for the streets. The summer smells. (82)

Acting out a pirate fantasy, di Prima and her other friends in *The Branded* felt the freedom of the city.¹⁰ They were: 'Learning the turf, defining (marking) it. Stopping wherever we pleased for coffee. Notebooks and pens always with us' (83).

Since these were literary-based fantasies, we can refer to Simone de Beauvoir's discussion of the world with which the young female reader was presented in books:

Children's books, mythology, stories, tales, all reflect the myths born of the pride and the desires of men; thus it is that through the eyes of men the little girl discovers the world and reads therein her destiny. [...] In novels of adventure it is the boys who take a trip around the world, who travel as sailors on ships, who lived in the jungle on breadfruit. All important events take place through the agency of men. ([1949] 1993: 303; 304)

¹⁰ This slightly covert movement (underlined by their adopting 'disguises') outside the domain of the family neighbourhood appears privileged for the time, since the Wayward Minor Laws passed in 1944 and 1945 could restrict the behaviour and movements of young adults between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one. Ann Douglas related that anyone 'who associated with "dissolute persons," who was "disobedient to the reasonable and lawful commands of parents," or who "desert[ed] his or her home" fell within the province of the Wayward Minor Court' (1999a: xxiv). Di Prima also remembers the parents of a female friend threatening to call the police because they discovered their daughter's homosexual relationship; which could also be a police matter in the 1950s (2001c: 229).

Writing in the years when di Prima was growing up, de Beauvoir argues that such representation leads young girls to accede to their second-class existence. In fact, many would like to 'belong to the privileged caste', and in support de Beauvoir refers to research by Havelock Ellis and Karl Pipal; the latter's work finding that out of twenty-two girls surveyed, nineteen wanted to be boys, giving the following reasons as to why:

Boys are better off, they do not have to suffer as women do. ...My mother would love me more. ...A boy does more interesting work. ...A boy has more aptitude for studies. ...I would have fun scaring girls. ...I would no longer be afraid of boys. ...They are freer. ...Boys' games are more fun. ...They are not bothered by their clothes. (311)

This gives a context to girls' identification with male figures, especially identification with larger-than-life figures such as the pirate of romance novels: 'Because she is a woman, the little girl knows that she is forbidden the sea and the polar regions, a thousand adventures, a thousand joys: she was born on the wrong side of the line' (313).¹¹ The findings also highlight that gender is a 'performance' the girl can act out: 'I would have fun scaring girls'. Acting out 'boyhood' the Deleuzean girl cuts across the demarcation of binary gender.

Stating, 'I longed to be a boy: pirate, bandit, outcast', di Prima pathologises this identification with male figures by linking it to an unease with her developing female body (2001: 54). Living in an unstable family environment, di Prima felt her body to be a cause and target of her parents' rage and therefore its manipulation was a method of protection. After her mother's anger at discovering di Prima had worn make-up to a school dance, the daughter's effacement is described thus:

¹¹ For a revisionist discussion of the romance genre and its female readers see Janice A. Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984).

After that night I hid my sexuality from myself. My changing body became the enemy, I hated it with a passion. Spent innumerable hours staring at my breasts, trying to keep them from growing any bigger. Imagining myself flat-chested, tall and lean. A boy's girl-body. No breasts, and narrow hips, tight ass, but no penis either. I wanted all protuberances gone. Anything that stuck out seemed so vulnerable. Like the parts of myself uncovered in the crib. Exposed to the tiger. (69)

She traces the fear she felt in her parents' house back to her infancy. The ideal appearance she sought was far-removed from her 'thick red hair' and 'Italian figure':

This girl-man I longed to grow into had straight black hair. It hung to her shoulders, smooth, no curls, no frizzy places. No freckles either, pale, flat, white skin and green eyes. A look many of us tried to emulate later, in the 50s. In how many fantasies was it already growing? (70)

She suggests the unadorned, slightly-androgynous Juliette Gréco-styled look adopted by women Beats and beatniks was rooted in a teenage unease with the body. Di Prima never wanted to actually be a man, whom for the most part she held in 'contempt and dread', but to be 'a girl in a flat and streamlined body' (70). Di Prima's treatment by her parents will be returned to in Chapter Four, but now I want to read the writers' earliest texts, published in the 1950s, for signs of girlish ambiguity, their 'anxiety of authorship' as they grapple with impossible literary fathers or perhaps even experiment with matrilineages.

In her earliest published poems, di Prima, the young New York hipster, is able to treat her teenage Keatsian ambition with ironic disdain, as here in the 1950s poem 'Three Laments':

Alas

I believe

I might have become

a great writer
but
the chairs
in the library
were too hard
(1990: 15)

It is as if she is disinherit her classical education because now love and experience are what matters: ‘So here I am the coolest in New York / what dont swing I dont push’ (15). The influence of the ‘rule of Cool’ which pervaded her bohemian world is evident in her attitude to personal relationships when she states that keeping ‘the upper hand’ is causing her to ‘lose the circulation / in one arm’ (15). She also recreates the patterns of everyday hipster slang, which is a characteristic of both her texts *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward* (1958) and *Dinners and Nightmares* (1961). Di Prima has talked of the influence of Ernest Hemingway’s writing on the sparseness of her early poetry, Henri Matisse’s line drawings (‘there was not only dimensionality but color . . . a hint of color to the eye from those black-and-white line drawings. I wanted to know how much information you could give with how few words, just like the lines in a Matisse drawing’), and Pound’s admonitions in his *ABC of Reading*¹² (2001c: 230). But we can also read the brevity of her line and diction as an aloof or ‘cool’ response to those who would wrestle the ‘upper hand’ from her.

As well as grappling with the code of ‘coolness’, she questions the chick role, as is illustrated in her prose poem ‘The Quarrel’ from *Dinners and Nightmares*. A man named Mark sits drawing in an apartment, oblivious that the female speaker is

¹² Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New Haven: Yale U P, 1934).

resenting the fact that domestic chores are infringing on her creative activities: ‘Just because I happen to be the chick I thought’ (1998: 74). She tells him she is ‘bugged’ but the rest of her complaint is kept inside her head:

I got up and went into the kitchen to do the dishes. And shit I thought I probably won’t bother again. But I’ll get bugged and not bother to tell you and after a while everything will be awful and I’ll never say anything because it’s so fucking uncool to talk about it. (74)

The lack of traditional punctuation in di Prima’s lines makes it unclear what is being thought and what is being said. The notion of the male artist is questioned when Mark yells at her from the living room, ‘It says here Picasso produces fourteen hours a day’, while ironically she stands at the sink (74).¹³ In the poem ‘The Poet’ the posturing of the men in her circle is highlighted by the example of a male poet: ‘All over the world he said the children are weeping. I weep with all the children in the world’ ([1961] 1998: 76-77). Yet his empathetic dialogue is played out against a scene of a man (a ‘cat’) assaulting a woman (‘his chick’) in the street, which ‘the poet’ passively observes (76). In this early material there appears a crisis with male peers and the male-defined bohemian subculture which di Prima moved in. Attitudes and rules are grappled with, as if in an echo of the struggle with literary fathers which Gilbert and Gubar diagnosed. Di Prima wonders how she can be a productive writer in this environment.

In two stories by di Prima dated 1955, ‘Tale for a Unicorn’ and ‘The Trouble with Unicorns’, mythical figures such as unicorns and trolls live alongside poets. We

¹³ This domestic scene anticipates the theme of Chapter Five of this thesis.

are told that both unicorns and poets belong to the ‘myth kingdom’, as opposed to the ‘animal kingdom’: ‘All the creatures in the myth kingdom can see each other even when they are invisible to other species and this makes them very attached to each other’ (1998: 145). The particular poet in ‘Tale for a Unicorn’ is di Prima’s alter-ego: ‘a very nice poet, and she made coffee, and ate little pills, and always welcomed unicorns and other mythical creatures, as a poet should’ (145). She has written the story as an apology to her male ‘unicorn’ friend, because of an argument which stemmed from a ‘Kink’ in her brain (145). They make a journey in a car, ‘riding from the Land of Safety, which they called Home, to the ancient Land of Adventure, which had been laid waste in the long war between the animal and myth kingdoms, and which still bore the archaic name of Greenwich Village’ (146). In such early writings di Prima created a hermetic, literary yet domestic world populated by bohemian types, fantastic figures such as unicorns and trolls, and cockroaches and cats (both feline and human male). It is a specifically gendered bohemian rebellion. At times the pressure of being both a poet and a ‘chick’ are evident, yet childlike escape is found in the female poet playing with androgynous, fantastical unicorns. Playing with unicorns she can become androgynous too because art is the issue as opposed to gender.¹⁴

‘The Maze’ was one of Joanne Kyger’s first published poems, written in 1958 and later opening Kyger’s first poetry volume *The Tapestry and The Web* (1965). Kyger employs motifs and characters from *The Odyssey*, to which she would refer as ‘the oldest story I know’ (Kyger 2000b: n. pag). Various scenes of reconstructed myth and the speaker’s personal history are juxtaposed in the poem. The opening image of a ‘dead bird on the sidewalk / his neck uncovered / and prehistoric’ points to the past’s ability to enter the writer’s present (Kyger 2002: 1). The speaker, who can be

¹⁴ Di Prima’s *Freddie Poems* (Point Reyes: Eidolon: 1974) features poems dedicated to her deceased friend and roommate, the dancer Fred Herko. These poems, some dating from the late 1950s, give another perspective on her scene with gay male friends.

inferred as female ('my hair was bound'), crouches with others in a curtained domestic interior while a threatening male figure stalks outside (1). The man could potentially be the later-named 'Ulysses' while the speaker could be Penelope (3). After a shift in place, time or perhaps even persona, the speaker enters an actual maze in Williamsburg, Virginia:

my uncle

pointed out the Maze

which grew

in the dead

governor's garden

delighted

I went to it

and stood

poised

inside the

precise

entrance

(Kyger 2002: 2)

In addition to its location being associated with the forefathers of America, the maze is owned by a patriarchal authority figure, the dead governor, and the speaker is led there by another one, her uncle. There a Homeric scene is depicted, with Penelope ‘singing high / melodies / from the center of a / cobweb shawl’ (3). The daily weaving and subsequent unravelling of her cloth kept the chaste Penelope’s suitors at bay and propelled her husband Odysseus’s adventures. The trope of the domestic art of weaving as a metaphor for women’s storytelling was presented in Homer, but before this trope became celebrated and interrogated by feminist critics, Kyger had not only found a literary matrilineage in Penelope but incorporated the notion of weaving into the form of her poetry.¹⁵ For instance, Linda Russo refers to *The Tapestry and The Web* as ‘a web of aberrant threads’ (2002: 179). ‘The Maze’ also alludes to Arachne, another mythic weaver, in its depiction of Penelope’s increasingly violent, ‘demented’ behaviour:

She
tortures
the curtains of the window
shreds them
like some
insane insect

¹⁵ Although the notion of weaving as storytelling is found in Homer, and Penelope is also represented by James Joyce in *Ulysses* (1922), Kyger’s interrogation predates academic feminist revisions of myth. In addition to the previously cited Klindienst essay, see the prior essay, Geoffrey Hartman’s ‘The Voice of the Shuttle: Language from the Point of View of Literature’ in *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958-1970* (New Haven: Yale U P, 1970), 337-353, Alicia Ostriker’s ‘Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking’ in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 8.1 (1982): 69-80, and Kathryn Sullivan Kruger’s *Weaving the Word: The Metaphorics of Weaving and Female Textual Production* (London: Associated University Presses, 2001).

212). Rimbaud was the first ‘white negro’ and the Beats took up his recommendation for the derangement of the senses.¹⁷ Damon refers to the ‘winsome and poignant’ girlishness of Pommy Vega which stems from an infatuation with her husband Fernando that continued after his death.¹⁸ Composed while in her early twenties, the poems at times appropriate ‘tropes of high chivalry’ in the manner of the neo-romantic poet Robert Duncan, Damon points out (213). Therefore the voice can be said to be playing with masculine language to portray the ardent lover, as in this poem written in 1965 during Pommy Vega’s travels through Europe:

early in my life a root was
grafted with a wild branch
White roses grew, & this is my love for you.

now if you take the branch away
the root will come away also:
for they are of one piece
& the bush is blooming.

(Pommy-Vega 1968: 17)

At other times, the female poet projects a more passive voice where the speaker is rescued and confesses to her youthful ‘awkwardness’:

¹⁷ James Campbell notes that after the death of Rimbaud, Verlaine referred to him as ‘the white Negro, the splendidly civilized, carelessly civilizing savage’ (1999: 1). See Norman Mailer’s essay ‘The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster’ (1957).

¹⁸ Damon argues that Pommy Vega’s appearance in a photograph on the back cover of *Poems to Fernando* confirms the girlish gender-liminality of her persona, listing the poet’s ‘requisite black turtleneck’ and ‘dark-colored man’s cap’ which highlights her ‘ingenue-gamine appeal’ (2002: 215).

we have gone down to the early grasses
shining silver
you have seen my awkwardness
& bowed down your head also,
you have come and fetched me from the sea of strangers
where the moon shines rarely upon the waters
(10)

In a reversal of the over-determined trope of the male poet and the female muse – these young women may well have been familiar with Robert Graves’s pronouncement that ‘woman is not a poet; she is either a Muse or she is nothing’ – Pommy Vega takes Fernando as her muse (Graves [1948] 1999: 437).¹⁹

Joyce Glassman’s *Come and Join the Dance* (1962),²⁰ which she began writing in the mid-1950s for a novel writing workshop at the New School for Social Research in New York, shows the heroine’s struggle with the rules of bohemian life, and with literary fathers from Herman Melville to the Beat writers. At the opening of the text, Susan Levitt²¹ sits contemplating the ‘Melville question’ in the final exam of her college career (1962: 3). With considerable irony, Glassman writes: ‘There were sixty-three girls in the gymnasium. They were all on Melville. Susan wondered what Melville would have thought of sixty-three girls concentrating on him at once’ (3). In

¹⁹ But Graves adds: ‘This is not to say that a woman should refrain from writing poems; only, that she should write as a woman, not as if she were an honorary man. [...] It is the imitation of male poetry that causes the false ring in the work of almost all woman poets. A woman who concerns herself with poetry should, I believe, either be a silent Muse and inspire the poets by her womanly presence, as Queen Elizabeth and the Countess of Derby did, or she should be the Muse in a complete sense: she should be in turn Arianrhod, Blodeuwedd and the Old Sow of Maenawr Penardd who eats her farrow and should write in each of these capacities with antique authority. She should be the visible moon: impartial, loving, severe, wise’ (437-8).

²⁰ Joyce Johnson’s first novel was published under her maiden name, Glassman.

²¹ Glassman is perhaps making an allusion to the Long Island suburb of Levittown, a name synonymous with post-World War Two suburban residential development. We are told that Levitt comes from the Long Island suburb of Cedarhurst.

a comment on the canon of literary fathers and its demarcations, Glassman states that, ‘Elizabethan Shakespeare, Pre-Romantic Blake, Classical Pope, Romantic Keats— they had all been caught, pinned, labeled and laid dead upon the paper’ (4). The atrophy which Glassman felt was synonymous with college life is expressed in the fact that after Susan had exhaustively repeated the word ‘Melville’ to herself, ‘the name had decomposed’ (3). Because of her general life situation, Susan ‘had become frozen into a deadly laziness. If she moved she would shatter like glass’ (3). Escape from the torpor of the Silent Generation propels the plot of the novel, as the heroine transgresses not merely academic life (‘The wall that ran around the college was flimsy, easily destroyed’), but also the laws of girlhood: ‘At twelve o’ clock, a heavy black line would be drawn and freedom would happen to her; there would be a life without examinations, no more childhood’ (5; 4). Such laws of female decorum advocated the preservation of virginity, another boundary which Susan actively sets out to destroy.

The Beat generation or its writers are not specifically named or delineated in the text, but there are two Beat-styled male characters in the text whose example is ultimately rejected by Susan. Eighteen-year-old Anthony Leone is a poet, whom she sleeps with in order to lose her virginity – what she refers to as ‘an experiment’ – and Peter, an older graduate student with a *de rigueur* Beat automobile, a black 1938 Packard, whom she sleeps with and then promptly leaves in order to make her way to Paris (93). Therefore I would argue that Ronna C. Johnson’s reading of the text perhaps places too much emphasis on it as a ‘Beat novel’; in this reading, Susan is ‘a Beat subject who, like Beat men, rejects the numerous oppressive overdeterminations of postwar establishment culture’ (Johnson 2002: 71). Yet Johnson argues convincingly about several Beat motifs which Glassman interrogates: the typically

Beat theme of ‘dropping out’, which is ‘a more complicated move for postwar women, who have been marginalized in or excluded from the institutions only males are privileged to join and scorn’ (77); and also the novel’s theme of sexual freedom, which Johnson regards as its embracing of ‘a Beat (male) sexual ethos’ (87). But Glassman successfully appropriates the sexual quest to her own ends, in authoring female ‘subjectivity’ (92).²²

Although Glassman deals with Beat narratives, she is also grounding her novel in other literary contexts. *Come and Join the Dance* introduces the theme of escape to an imagined Parisian Bohemia. Paris is the destination of Susan at the close of the text, after the heroine renounces her relationships in New York. In *Minor Characters* Johnson recalls her intentions with the novel: ‘Just like me, my heroine would have an affair with the Alex character and end up alone. But in my fictional rearrangement of life, it was she who was going to leave him after their one and only night together. I rewarded her with a trip to Paris’ (1994: 117).²³ Unlike the Paris of her literary hero Henry James,²⁴ however, Glassman’s Paris is an absence, remaining distant and ultimately deferred:

In ten more days Susan would be on a ship. She was going to Paris. Six months ago she had cashed in the bonds her grandmother had left in her name and made her reservations—it had seemed the thing to do. ‘Isn’t it incredible!’ she would cry when she talked about it. ‘Incredible’ was one of her favorite words. So was ‘strange.’ [...] [A] great deal of what she saw around her was also ‘strange,’ and she knew that after she had sailed on the incredible ship to Paris, she would find that Paris was incredible, too. (Glassman 1962: 7)

²² Glassman’s novel can be seen as pointing toward later Women’s Movement novels which were firmly entrenched in the discourse of liberated female sexuality, such as Erica Jong’s *Fear of Flying* (New York: Holt, 1973).

²³ The characters of Alex in *Minor Characters* and Peter in *Come and Join the Dance* are identified by Johnson as being inspired by the Barnard instructor Donald Cook (Kerouac and Johnson 2000: 75).

²⁴ Henry James is Johnson’s talisman of difference against the Beats. She recalls that when she had told Kerouac that James was her favourite writer, ‘he made a face, and said he figured I had all the wrong models, but maybe I could be a great writer anyway’ (1994: 129). Johnson refers to James’s influence in making her realise that it was ‘what was underneath the action that I wanted to write about, which is what Henry James did superbly’ (Grace and Johnson 2004: 188).

Susan is in a state of psychological flight during the short period the narrative represents, but she simultaneously remains geographically stationary. The destination of Paris is imminent but always deferred, so she exists in a liminal state: ‘Perhaps if she lived anywhere at all now it was with them—she and her trunks sitting in the corridor, waiting out a week that had not been accounted for’ (8). It is both her *raison d’être* – ‘She wondered what habits she would develop in Paris’ – and excuse, as when her boyfriend Jerry tells her he loves her, and Susan does not know how to respond honestly, she considers lying – ‘after all, I’m going away, she thought’ (13; 9). The novel closes with the sentence, ‘And then she went’; however her destination is never represented (176).

Instead of Susan merely dropping out of the bohemian world that existed on the fringes of the college campus, she is being propelled to another bohemia, Paris – the ultimate ‘bohemian’ destination in that its construction was based on impressions from literary and cultural myth. Elizabeth Wilson argues that ‘Bohemia was above all a quest, less an identity than a search for identity, less a location than a utopia’ (2003: 11). Setting the scene in early nineteenth century Europe with the inevitabilities of capitalism having changed the role of the artist, Wilson states that ‘from the start this was a myth created in literature and art, often when these artists fixed their own transient circumstances as permanent or archetypal examples of how an artist *ought* to live. Bohemia, therefore, could never be separated from its literary and visual representation’ (6). It is an ‘impossibility’, often being posited as an ideal lost in the past, as in Malcolm Cowley’s comment about Greenwich Village, ‘Bohemia is always yesterday’ (Wilson 2003: 9).²⁵

²⁵ Malcolm Cowley had been an editor of Kerouac’s *On the Road*. See Adam Gussow’s ‘Bohemia Revisited: Malcolm Cowley, Jack Kerouac, and *On the Road*’, *Georgia Review* 38 (1984): 291-311, for an investigation of the collaborative editing process of the novel.

Through reference to their earliest writing, I have discussed the ways in which the young writer positioned herself in relation to what Gilbert and Gubar refer to as the 'Palaces of Art and Houses of Fiction' authored by men (2000: xi). I now continue the discussion of the French influence on young Americans in the 1950s, in order to elaborate my discussion of the bohemianism of my writers.

Part II: Franco-American Literary and Cultural Alliances

With regard to role models, the female author that young Joyce Johnson appeared most impressed with was Françoise Sagan, whose first novel *Bonjour Tristesse* had appeared in the States in 1955 and whose ‘schoolgirl face’ consequently seemed to be staring out of ‘every magazine and newspaper’ (1994: 104). This ‘envious vision’ was on account of the fact that Sagan had ‘taken possession of her fame with great aplomb, living it up the way young male writers were supposed to. She had a predilection for very fast driving in expensive sports cars; she dashed from literary parties to weekends at chateaux’ (104).²⁶ Johnson’s desire to transgress literary decorum when writing *Come and Join the Dance* was not only influenced by the Beat writing she had read, but surely was influenced by Sagan since the latter was the only female writer Johnson acknowledges reading at the time who dealt explicitly with sexuality (148). Johnson states:

As a writer, I would live life to the hilt as my unacceptable self, just as Jack and Allen had done. I would make it my business to write about young women quite different from the ones portrayed weekly in the pages of *The New Yorker*. I would write about furnished rooms and sex. Sex had to be approached critically, I thought. I would not succumb to the ladylike stratagem of shimmering my way toward discreet fadeouts. I’d decided this even before meeting Jack or reading *Howl*. The writing itself seemed to lead me into it. Sometimes I’d stop and feel scared and think ‘Can I really say this?’; then I’d think ‘Yes I can’ and go on. (148)

²⁶ Paul Webster and Nicholas Powell note that despite Sagan’s ‘Press-created image of a reckless teenager driving fast cars in her bare feet’, the author was politically sympathetic to Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir and ‘her rebellion against her rich middle-class Parisian family was inspired by existentialism’ (1984: 211). Sagan has commented on the scandal that marked the publication of *Bonjour Tristesse*: ‘I suppose I told the story of a young girl who slept with a boy without becoming pregnant and without feeling unhappy afterwards. The book was judged immoral because, at the time, lovemaking was a sin. Now it is different. Lovemaking is compulsory’ (211).

Commenting on Sagan's treatment of sexuality, Johnson states that 'Americans forgave her amorality because she was French' (104). This American perception of the French hints at a fascination which actually worked reciprocally.

Johnson posits the 'predecessors' of Beat women as the young women at the turn of the nineteenth century who sat alone in the Cluny Museum in Paris, making small drawings of the flowers in the Unicorn tapestries, whose presence Rainer Maria Rilke described in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (Johnson 1994: xiii):

They find themselves before these tapestries and forget themselves a little. They have always felt that this existed, a subdued life like this, of leisurely gestures never quite explained; and they remember dimly that for a time they even believed this life would be their own. But then they quickly bring out a sketchbook and begin to draw, whatever it may be: one of the flowers or a little, happy animal. Exactly what, they have been informed, would not matter. And it really does not matter. Only to draw that is the main thing; for with this intent they one day left home, rather violently. They are of good family. But when they lift their arms as they sketch, it appears that their dress has not been fastened at the back or at any rate not entirely. There are a couple of buttons that can't be reached. For when the dress was made there had not yet been any question of their suddenly going away alone. In the family there is always someone for such buttons. But here, good heavens, who is going to bother about it in so large a city? Unless perhaps one has a friend; but buttoning each other's dresses. That is ridiculous and reminds one of the family, of which one does not want to be reminded. (Rilke [1910] 1992: 117-118)

Rilke provides Johnson with a template for bohemian women with creative aspirations. From the French middle class, these 'vulnerable, penniless, slightly dishevelled girls' bring romantic connotations, although as Johnson interprets it, for Rilke it is a 'foregone conclusion' that they will not succeed in their artistic endeavours (1994: xiv). Johnson makes a link to her own generation existing half a century and two world wars later, across the Atlantic, who 'once again left home rather violently'. These 1950s girls also came from 'nice families' who 'could never understand why the daughters they had raised so carefully suddenly chose precarious

lives.’ These parents expected a daughter to stay under their roof until her marriage, possibly working for ‘a year or so as a secretary’ which enabled her to get ‘a little taste of the world [. . .] but not too much’ (xiv)

We can develop the discussion of French cultural and literary influence by referring to the Beat girl-woman’s following and creation of fashion; and how, in particular, literary culture can influence dress. Johnson re-imagines her voice as the young teenager who made Sunday afternoon trips to Greenwich Village, who longed to ‘turn myself into a Bohemian’ but lacked the *de rigueur* bohemian clothing (1994: 31). This is part of a larger picture of her inadequacy, feeling like an under-confident child instead of a blossoming young woman: ‘My outside doesn’t reflect my inside, so no one knows who I really am’ (28). She recalls the belts in a shop called the Sorcerer’s Apprentice:

One laces up the front like the girdle of Lena the Goosegirl; the other fastens dramatically with a spiral made of brass about the size of a saucer. Such a belt—aside from enhancing your appearance, which I was sure it would immeasurably—is a badge, a sign of membership in the ranks of the unconventional. (31)

By wearing such a belt the ‘way is smoothed’ and her continuing ‘problem of outside matching inside is so beautifully resolved by this simple means, which only costs money’ (32). Johnson admits: ‘I’d have been humiliated if anyone had told me that the desire to possess these items was, within a different context, like the desire to possess a certain kind of baseball jacket’, highlighting her status as a consumer as opposed to a bohemian rebel (32). However, Angela McRobbie refers to the ‘early 1970s orthodoxy’ in feminist studies which ‘saw women as slaves to consumerism’ (1997: 192). McRobbie highlights the pleasures and creativity involved in shopping in the second-hand market. She refers to the 1950s girls who

looked for ways of by-passing the world of ready-made clothing. In the rummage sales of New York, for example, “beat” girls and women bought up the fur coats, satin dresses and silk blouses of the 1930s and 1940s middle classes. Worn in the mid 1950s, these issued a strong sexual challenge to the spick and span gingham-clad domesticity of the moment. (196)

This argument informs my suggestion that Beat girls were responsible for their own ‘self-fashioning’, making performative acts which disrupted their secondary status.²⁷

When she enrolled at Barnard College, Johnson experimented with a more sophisticated, ‘collegiate’ image because she did not want to be ‘perceived as odd’ (47). The theme of novel reading again surfaces because ‘the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald’ had informed this collegiate vision, along with *Mademoiselle* magazine and ‘the campus department of Lord and Taylor’ (47).²⁸ She describes the ‘Gatsbyism’ of the period where one might encounter ‘aloof debutanteish [girls] with Frenchified nicknames like “Folie” or “Bichette,” always enigmatically just back from Paris’ (59). Her boyfriend Alex regarded himself more of a Dick Diver than a Gatsby, Johnson informs us; and with Elise Cowen she would read Fitzgerald’s *Tender Is the Night*, imagining Alex on a similar path into obscurity as the character of Diver. The Jazz Age offered the nearest image of transgression and decadence prior to the appearance of the Beats. In fact, Johnson recalls that the 1920s seemed ‘almost touchable’ because you could still find flapper dresses in your mother’s closet (xiii).

When Johnson presented her twenty-two year old self, sitting by at the Beat table ‘while the voices of the men rise and fall’ she was dressed ‘all in black like Masha in *The Seagull* – black stockings, black skirt, black sweater’ with ‘her hair hanging down below her shoulders’ (261). The young Johnson not only resembles

²⁷ See Stephen Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) for his positing of the ‘self-fashioning’ of the subject. Greenblatt examined the shaping of the Early Modern courtier by linked cultural, legal and literary forces.

²⁸ Incidentally, Sylvia Plath won a competition to work for *Mademoiselle* magazine in 1952 for her short story ‘Sunday at the Mintons’.

Masha from Anton Chekhov's play through her clothing; both texts also feature tales of a girl's unrequited love for a male artist (the Kerouac narrative in *Minor Characters*). Masha's gloom and resignation, reflected in her funereal daywear, is due to her love for Konstantin. Any further reasons stemming from life on a provincial Russian estate at the end of the nineteenth century are left for speculation. She chooses to marry a different man and have a child, yet is aware that abiding by society's rules will not safeguard her from the unexplainable, arbitrary nature of human emotion and experience. Masha declares herself, 'resident in this world for reasons unknown', prefiguring the feelings of Johnson's Silent Generation (Chekhov 1988: 93). She plans to rid herself of love by moving her family to another town: 'I shall tear it out of my heart by the roots' (108). Despite her self-awareness, her consuming feelings are symbolised in her clothes and a physical torpor; limping her exit she states 'My leg's gone to sleep' (81). She may resemble the walking dead – 'I feel as though I'd been born a long, long time ago; I'm dragging my life behind me like a dress with an endless train' – but she will not live as a victim of delusions (78).

Masha's black clothes were a manifestation of despondency but in Johnson's world they signify belonging. Girls in black populate the cafés, bars and streets of Johnson's text – in the manner of Kerouac's girls who 'say nothing and wear black' – but in comparison Masha is relatively isolated (Kerouac [1959] 1998: 61). French 'existentialist' style can be posited as a link between these two instances. A youth cult formed around the Saint-Germain-des-Prés area of Paris after the Second World War, that identified with the philosophies and lifestyles of writers and philosophers, including Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir – those with liberating ideas to contrast with the values of a restrictive parental generation in the stasis of post-war

mourning.²⁹ The French youth congregated to the sound of American jazz, as Americans would in turn respond to French culture. During the wartime occupation American big band jazz had been adopted by the Parisian ‘Zazou’ youth movement. This music was ‘offensive to both Vichy and the Nazis more because it was black than because it was American’ and ‘Le Swing’ was ‘a secret activity with dances held in cellar bars’ (Webster and Powell 1984: 95). The ‘Zazous’ dressed in a distinctive manner: ‘The boys gummed down their excessively long hair with salad oil and wore long jackets and tight trousers. The girls dressed badly in cheap skin coats, rolled neck pullovers, skirts held together by safety pins and laddered stockings. For both sexes, an ugly, unpolished pair of shoes was essential while the universal recognition sign was a rolled-up umbrella which was never opened even when it rained’ (96).³⁰ After the war the memory of the Vichy government’s ban on jazz was ‘fresh’ in young people’s minds, and so thus it was adopted by the existentialist subculture. The ‘Club Saint-Germain’ became the ‘principal European stopover’ for American bebop musicians such as Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and Count Basie (117).³¹

Articles depicting this Saint-Germain scene appeared in American magazines, including *Life* magazine in 1947, illustrated by ‘black and white photographs of groups of young people “discussing philosophy” in the smoke-filled cellar of Le

²⁹ Paul Webster and Nicholas Powell state that: ‘For the young, crossing to the Left Bank was often an act of revolt, a choice between parents and Sartre, between discipline and “existentialism”’ (1984: 95).

³⁰ Elizabeth Wilson notes that an equivalent youth movement actually occurred in Nazi Germany, with young men and women from mainly middle-class backgrounds shunning the Nazi Youth movement and calling themselves ‘*Swingjugend* or Edelweiss Pirates’ (2003: 172). Wilson states: ‘They gathered in semi-clandestine groups, first in Hamburg, then in other cities, to listen to the “decadent Jewish” music of the American jazz giants, and adopted a style of dress to express their defiance. The boys “gained credibility from long hair, often reaching down to the jacket collar ... Mostly they wore long, often checked English sports jackets, shoes with thick light crepe soles, showy scarves, homburg hats, an umbrella over the arm ... Girls favoured a long, overflowing hairstyle. Their eyebrows were pencilled, they wore lipstick and their nails were lacquered”’. Apparently, some of these youths developed from ‘sartorial defiance to terrorism’, with a group of Edelweiss Pirates being executed for assassinating the Mayor of Hamburg (178).

³¹ Jean-Paul Sartre’s interest in African American culture, however, was focused on the writer Richard Wright, whose novel *Black Boy* was serialised in Sartre’s *Les Temps Modernes*. After coming to Paris at Sartre’s behest, Wright became a mentor for other African American exiles such as James Baldwin.

Tabou to the background of jazz and poetry readings or sitting on pavements waiting for the dawn'; these photographs were 'a simplistic summary of a whole post-war generation as it struggled out of adolescent contradictions' (97-8). Jack Kerouac makes an explicit link between the first late-1940s Beat heroes, those 'characters of a special spirituality who didn't gang up but were solitary Bartlebies staring out the dead wall window of our civilization', and the French: 'The same thing was almost going on in the postwar France of Sartre and Genet and what's more we knew about it' ([1958b] 1998: 47).³²

Elizabeth Wilson quotes from Simone de Beauvoir's description of Juliette Gréco in *Force of Circumstance* (1963): 'she wore the new "Existentialist" uniform. The musicians from the various *caves* and their fans had been down to the *Côte d'Azur* during the summer and brought back the new fashion imported from Capri— itself originally inspired by the Fascist tradition—of black sweaters, black shirts and black trousers' (1985: 186). Although de Beauvoir cites a Fascist influence, the wearing of black 'had long been one signal of anti-bourgeois revolt', according to Wilson: 'it was the combined influence of the dandies and the Romantics that made of black a resonant statement of dissent' (1985: 186). Gréco, at first a 'groupie' within the Sartre-de Beauvoir entourage, became a singer and actress in the 1950s, and was as Paul Webster and Nicholas Powell put it, an 'image of the indestructible life-force of French youth as it emerged from its wartime chrysalis' (1984: 94; 91). After the war, continued clothes rationing and poverty was the main reason for the simple dress of existentialist youth. Gréco used surplus army materials, such as field-grey and parachute silk to make clothes before settling on tartan trousers: 'the aim was to shock outsiders and be immediately recognisable' (96). Traditional codes of feminine

³² 'Bartleby' was the hero in Herman Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street* (1853).

adornment and detail are disrupted, as by Zazou girls, through ‘ugly’ or masculine features, and reports in the Parisian press highlighted the fact that existentialist girls refused to wear make-up (99).

While singing at ‘Le Rose Rouge’ nightclub, Gréco changed her style from ‘a carelessly-dressed teenager’ into her characteristic, more formalised look; typically a ‘simple black dress, a Balmain model picked up in the sales which she altered by cutting off the gold satin train’ (161). Wilson recognises that the Gréco black-clad look, completed by pale complexion, dark hair, and kohled eyes was a reworking of the ‘established tradition’ of the music hall and cabaret chanteuses such as Édith Piaf; yet her image was shocking because of its informality and simplicity (2003: 172). According to Webster and Powell, Gréco ‘came to represent the physical manifestation of De Beauvoir’s call for female independence in *Le Deuxième Sexe* with its statement that freedom of sexual choice was a crucial part of a women’s liberation’ (159). One of the earliest performers to use obvious sexual references in her songs (with lyrics penned by Sartre and other writers), her art appeared to resemble her life.³³ Gréco would be known to ‘bohemian’ audiences through Jean Cocteau’s film *Orphée* (1949), but it was Audrey Hepburn who played the ‘left bank’ parts in the 1950s – most notably *Funny Face* (1957) – her ‘gamine looks, short black hair, doe eyes and ballerina slippers translated an ersatz existentialism into film’ (187).³⁴

³³ In an analogy to the Hettie and LeRoi Jones relationship, Gréco had a passionate affair with Miles Davis after they met during his first visit to Paris in 1949, and in a recent interview claims that Davis did not want her to face the hostility as a white woman married to a black man. After one incident in New York, she relates that Davis said to her: ‘I don’t ever want to see you again here, in a country where this kind of relationship is impossible’. Gréco realised her trip to meet him in the States had been a ‘terrible mistake’: ‘In America his color was made blatantly obvious to me, whereas in Paris I didn’t even notice he was black’ <<http://arts.guardian.co.uk/features/story/0,,1782525,00.html>> [Accessed 12 January 2007].

³⁴ Henry Cabot Beck outlines *Funny Face* as follows: ‘The film featured Audrey Hepburn as a clerk in a “sinister” Village bookstore called Embryo Concepts, whose dream is to travel to Paris to join the bearded, black-clad “empatheticals,” who inhabit the subterranea of the Left Bank, staring dreamily at

The identification of American girls with French icons Simone de Beauvoir, Juliette Gréco and Françoise Sagan appears as a trend of the 1950s. De Beauvoir's fame extended outside France, and Lorna Sage recalls as a teenager in the 1950s being intrigued by the fact that de Beauvoir lived in a hotel: 'This single fact seemed to imply all the rest: domesticity spurned, never cooking supper for Sartre, living on ideas. She was the woman writer as intellectual, for her the business of writing was public, shared and out of doors (she wrote in cafes)' (1992: viii).³⁵ A similar fascination existed for the literary critic Rachel M. Brownstein, who comically describes the life she fantasised about while a student at Barnard College in 1956:

Ideally, one would be Simone de Beauvoir, smoking with Sartre at the Deux Magots, making an eccentric domestic arrangement that was secondary to important things and in their service. One would be poised, brilliant, equipped with a past, above the fray, beyond it, foreign not domestic. (And ideally Sartre would look like Albert Camus.) (1984: 18)

The appeal of 'living on ideas' means that one is exempt from the ties of conventional femininity. Instead of living with 1950s restrictions on a woman's body, the image was of 'transcendence' rather than 'immanence' – philosophical terms appropriated by de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. They can live out lives in the public sphere, in cafés and hotels, eschewing notions of middle-class female indoor life. In these public

the clouds in their Pernod. Here, Hollywood was already having a go at parodying the burgeoning bohemia. "We're not inhibited by outmoded social conventions," she tells fashion photographer Dick Avery (Fred Astaire), as she commences to dance with abandon in the center of her dingy French hangout, dressed head to toe in black' (1999: 97). Interestingly, another Gap advertisement, this time from Summer 2006 for the 'The Skinny Black Pant', features footage of Hepburn's dance from *Funny Face*.

³⁵ Another British perspective, this time from the early 1960s, comes from the singer Marianne Faithfull's autobiography, *Faithfull*, in which she highlights the lasting influence of existentialist culture: 'The names of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, Céline, Camus and Kafka were in the air. I repeated their ineffable names like a catechism. I devoured papers for every scrap of hipness and outrage I could find. Articles about Brigitte Bardot and Juliette Gréco – she was the big Existentialist icon. I tried my best to look like her, I used to wear white lipstick, but it didn't really work if you were blonde. I wanted to smoke Gauloises, drink black coffee and talk about absurdity and maquillage with wicked women and doomed young men. I tried to understand Sartre and Camus and Kafka, but I liked Céline and Simone de Beauvoir. (I had actually read *The Second Sex*)' (1995: 20).

places others serve them, shunning the notion of unpaid female servitude taught to girls in their family home to prepare them for the role of wife and mother.

Brownstein's mother warned her against becoming the intellectual type:

Too many books and ideas interfered with the ability to manage. And while a scholarly melancholy, a moodiness, a fuzziness about reality, was attractive in men, it was not only unappetizing but downright dangerous in a woman. For who would take care of feeding and clothing and housing her? (23)

This apparent autonomy and distance from women's traditional roles was the attraction in the first place.

Brownstein's *Becoming A Heroine: Reading About Women in Novels* (1984) and Nancy K. Miller's *But Enough About Me: Why We Read Other People's Lives* (2002) are studies of life writing which adopt a personal mode by detailing the authors' own experiences as middle-class college girls living in Manhattan in the 1950s; girls who dressed in black and aspired to lives led by existentialist values. They provide an insight into the way longings based around European images inflected American youth culture. Miller pictures '[a]ll these girls draped in black, waiting. Looking back, I suddenly feel close to these girls dying from love, or wishing to; the frustration, or the madness of not knowing what to do with their ambition and anger' (2002: 6). Miller transforms the traditional notion of wearing of black in the mourning period into mourning for unfulfilled dreams and potential.

Brownstein's and Miller's texts connect the female Beat writers to their contemporaries – girls of the 1950s who followed academic paths, becoming feminist literary critics in the 1970s. Miller reckons it 'would seem impossible to have come to intellectual consciousness between 1957 and 1967 without reading the Beats and hearing about the obscenity trials, though I can't honestly say I remember either from

the time'; thereby showing that identification with existentialism did not necessarily mean an identification with Beat culture (61). Miller notes that in the 1950s 'New York, especially Greenwich Village, was home to an astonishing number of ambitious young people seduced by the same dream' (4). Several years behind Johnson and Diane di Prima at Hunter College High School, she theorizes a 'what-if' situation to explore converging worlds: 'Now if I had only gone to Barnard six years earlier, would I have run into Jack Kerouac instead of my Columbia boyfriend? Hung out with Ginsberg and the Beats? Written a famous memoir? How much more exciting life might have been, if only', she ponders (5). Miller admits the allure of nostalgia but qualifies the closeness she feels with the recollected experiences of Johnson and Hettie Jones: 'It's kind of like prescription drugs: she's the brand name, you're the generic' (5). In contrast, she admits to feeling somewhat alienated when reading Diane di Prima's *Recollections of My Life as a Woman*, giving the reason as 'the combination of Beatness (that turns New Age)' and the 'reproductive compulsion' evident in the text (19). Through this reading of other memoirs Miller encourages us to see memoir writing as a collective act: that, firstly, 'the subjects of life writing [...] are as much others as ourselves', and secondly, that 'reading the lives of other people with whom we do *not* identify has as much to tell us (if not more) about our lives as the lives with which we do' (xv).

Brownstein describes the fashion for existentialist culture amongst girls in the 1950s. The Byronic hero surfaces as an archetype in the college campus world which Brownstein describes, showing her central theme of novel-reading as an influence upon girls' self-perceptions as they become the romantic heroines of their own lives. He is encountered on the familiar quest to find 'Mr Right':

Heathcliff, in 1956, was as he always had been, dark and indefinably dissolute, angry and sullen; he drank Scotch and smoked a little reefer, when he could get it, and hung out with Negroes and homosexuals in the West End Bar. Sexually, he meant business. He was a writer. What you would be was his woman. You could get up in the morning, after going to bed with him in his apartment, and you would be able to say, like Cathy, "I am Heathcliff." No; you would write it, and then everyone else would say, "She is Heathcliff." If there was paper in the house. If he would let you get out of bed. If there was a bed. [...] Sullen at your side, he would nod to drunks and junkies, wild-haired girls collecting for their abortions, spaced-out math majors who slept all day and ate hamburgers at Riker's at night. Heathcliff's ex-girlfriend was a tormented wraith who murmured incomplete sentences in a breathless voice and never got anything in on time; her parents were divorced. She had trouble ordering lunch, made you feel big and hungry and garishly clear in the mind, too definite and grammatical. You wanted to be able to say, "I am Heathcliff's girlfriend," that was it. Or maybe, "I am Heathcliff's ex-girlfriend," having got initiation all over with. (Brownstein 1984: 18-19)

This narrative resonates with the plot of Glassman's *Come and Join the Dance*, or the experiences recounted in *Minor Characters*. Evidently, the Beats were able to articulate the feelings of an increasing number of disengaged people, who sought affirmation of their uncertain identities in Greenwich Village, the road west or an imaginary Left Bank. Dream destinations provided an escape from suburban lives. Brownstein states, 'We talked laughingly, fearfully, about how it would be in ten years, when the boys would have been changed by their flannel suits and we by our kitchens, by diapers' (16).³⁶ Of course in Greenwich Village bohemia, domestic scenes were being played out too, as the memoirs discussed in this thesis attest.

However Brownstein's premise is that she did not want to get married. Who wants to be 'lovely and engaged'? (17) She identifies herself with Antigone the Greek heroine who refuses marriage, or with the actress who plays the role in a college production. She 'looked intense and distraught and very private as she rushed to and

³⁶ Hettie Jones refers to 'Marjorie Morningstar' syndrome, named after Herman Wouk's eponymous novel (New York: Doubleday, 1955), which lurked like a phantom at the back of their minds. The plot of the novel involved a Jewish girl's experimentation with a career as an actress, before retiring to suburban life. The speaker in Jones's poem 'The Woman in the Green Car' remembers 'having an argument with him, her boyfriend, he said / when you grow up you'll go live in Mamaroneck / with Marjorie Morningstar / and she couldn't envision it' (1998: 13).

from her classes' and 'wore black clothes just like mine.' Her dress and demeanour sets the actress apart, as an existentialist who 'knew life involved being *engagée*, involved in ultimate moral issues.' Brownstein assumed the black clad look as a costume so that the wrong boy would not assume she was a good girl, suitable for the suburbs. It 'seemed most honest to pretend to be anonymous. [...] The man who recognized me would prove it, I figured, by seeing through my cloud' (15). For Brownstein the look created a veil over her true self and she became an image. She was aware of the connotations it brought, reasoning that it would be easy to 'disabuse Lotharios of the notion that I was morbid and suffering.'

Brownstein posits *Wuthering Heights* as a definitive narrative of her youth, and Nancy K. Miller states that books held a particular value for her generation that seems to have been lost to subsequent generations with their immersion in visual and virtual media. For example, she states that 'we were the last generation to get our ideas, if not information about sex from books rather than movies' (62). Banned books – she names D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* – were 'key to the zeitgeist' (61). Miller describes her peers being raised on a 1950s diet of high and lowbrow reading, from Wallace Stevens to *Seventeen* magazine.³⁷ These were girls 'avid for transgression' who would 'try to make their lives resemble the books or at least to look for a different kind of life and world after reading them' (61).

Miller surpassed the mere longing of her peers – also Joyce Glassman's character Susan Levitt – and made it to Paris in the late 1950s. It was a dream born of literature, and as an American student of French literature her perceptions did not gel

³⁷ Sylvia Plath's journals and letters show that she too was a reader both of high and low culture, and that she tailored her writing to publish in both these formats. Jacqueline Rose offers a sustained commentary on this debate, referring to Plath writing 'at the point of tension' between 'pleasure/danger, your fault/my fault, high/low culture – without resolution or dissipation of what produces the clash between the two' (191: 10).

with reality.³⁸ She plays with the idea of herself as the innocent abroad, under the influence of a dream. When her male tutor made a pass at her, mirroring the seductions of *Dangerous Liaisons*, the text they are discussing, she is ‘nonplussed’ having failed to make the connection between life and art. (29). ‘I try to imagine that in the *Liaisons*’s cast of characters I’m the sophisticated Madame de Merteuil, not the ingenue Cécile, even though I feel a lot more like a schoolgirl than a libertine.’ She describes the path that seemed laid out for her: ‘I was slated to get an M.A. and teach high school French, unless, of course—my mother’s fifties fantasy for me—I married very well and got to be a woman of leisure who spoke French only in Europe’ (Miller 1995: 22).

Returning specifically to the black clothes of American youth, there were also undercurrents of influence from within American culture. Wini Breines has interpreted the ‘racial meanings’ behind the ‘adult culture’s dualism of light and dark’ (1994: 399). Whiteness was coded as the norm and ideal across American society, evident in pastel-coloured clothing, light-coloured, tidy hair, accompanied by good, clean personal hygiene. This all-American ideal dominated the cultural spectrum not only in ‘beauty standards’ but in ‘mainstream movies, television, magazines, and advertising’ (400). In contrast, darkness was coded as negative and seen in the black leather of real life ‘hoods’ and on-screen delinquents, the dark clothes of black-clad beatniks with their unruly, long hair, and poor personal hygiene, their alleged filthiness being another shading of darkness (399). Such delinquents sometimes ‘were dark’ due to immigrant backgrounds (399).

³⁸ Miller’s vision of Paris also stemmed from film, since she tells us that in New York she ‘saw only foreign movies in black and white’ (52). Simultaneously, unbeknownst to Miller, Jean-Luc Godard was filming *A Bout de Souffle* (1959), in which Jean Seberg was the young American in Paris. With Seberg selling the *New York Herald Tribune* on the street with the newspaper’s name emblazoned on her t-shirt, Godard provided another image of the French-American reciprocal exchange, a vibrant image showing the confidence of the United States as an economic and cultural world power.

Implicit in the coding of darkness is the threat of the non-white, ethnic other. Breines explains that: 'Difference was supposed to be invisible in postwar America. In this version, America was a welcoming melting pot into which everyone could and would be incorporated. Erasing one's difference, assimilating, was a sign of Americanness. And assimilation meant passing for white' (400). She points to the invisibility of African-Americans in 'the mass media', quoting Michelle Wallace's statement that she 'grew up watching a television on which I rarely saw a black face, reading Archie and Veronica comics, Oz and Nancy Drew stories and *Seventeen* magazine, in which "race" was unmentionable' (400; 401). For white American youths, wearing black meant 'being unable to attain, or rejecting, prevailing values and standards of attractiveness, being an outsider' (401). Race then, is a narrative that runs through Beat discourse, and the notion of 'foreign bodies' returns in Chapter Four. But next, I give a reading of the historical bohemianism of the urban world in order to situate the experience of Beat girls.

Part III: Traditions and Revisions of the Poetic Habitation of the City

Doreen Massey categorises cities as a ‘the intersections of multiple narratives’ (Brooker 2002: 1). Reading Massey, Peter Brooker stresses the storied nature of city existence, and regards ‘the “imaginary” and the “actual” as existing in a constitutive dialogue’ (2002: 1). New York City and San Francisco were the settings for the creation of bohemian and Beat identities; but as we have seen, Paris loomed large as an imagined realm for American bohemian girls of the 1950s. Identities were formed on the interstices between actual lived experience in the urban world and imaginary or symbolic, especially literary, worlds. I turn now to look at some earlier traditions of the poetic habitation of the city in order to place my women writers on the literary-cultural map, as daughters of the city.

Paris exists as a key location in the literary history of the urban world. The poetic habitation of the modern, Western city was described by the Parisian poet Charles Baudelaire, and his example remains a touchstone for aesthetic articulations of urban experience. Baudelaire was fascinated by the city crowd, influenced by both his own experience of the mid-nineteenth century Parisian streets, and in another Franco-American alliance, his reading and subsequent translations of Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories. Baudelaire presents his wandering ‘painter of modern life’, at home within the crowd:

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up home in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world – such are a few of the slightest

pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. (2001: 9)

The crowd is characterised as both ‘fugitive’ and ‘infinite’ and there is further paradox in that the subject appears within yet separate from the crowd, he is ‘at home’ and yet ‘hidden’. Since the mid-1980s this *flâneur* has been investigated as a ‘key figure in the critical literature of modernity and urbanization’, as critics revisit Baudelaire and also Walter Benjamin’s writing on cities, especially his *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* and the vast, unfinished study *The Arcades Project* – the nineteenth-century arcades being the province of the *flâneur*, with their curious meeting of outdoor and indoor, public and private realms (Wilson 1995: 632). As Elizabeth Wilson puts it, the Parisian *flâneur* ‘did not care about the pomp of the “official”, public city being created by Napoleon III and Baron Haussmann; it was the trivial, fragmented aspects of street life that appealed to him’ (1991: 5).³⁹ He ‘relished the kaleidoscope of urban public life and had created from it a new aesthetic, perceiving a novel kind of beauty in streets, factories and urban blight’ (5). Indeed, Baudelaire’s poetry describes encounters with beggars and whores – the underside of official public life. The *flâneur* could be an artist who recorded his impressions of the new city in his work, or crucially, he was not occupied with the pursuit of art, because his life *was* his art – read as an art of ‘being’ rather than as passive observation. These two facets of the *flâneur* bring together two models of poetic habitation which are pertinent to this discussion: firstly, that of the writer who is inspired by the urban world, and secondly, that of the self-fashioning urban individual whose lifestyle is his art. Both models resonate with the experience of the Beat generation women discussed so far in this chapter.

³⁹ Although, ironically, Haussmann’s wide and open boulevards facilitated the *flâneur*’s movement within and observation of the crowd.

The liminality of the *flâneur* strikes a chord with Joyce Johnson's presentation in *Minor Characters* of the dual life she lived as a teenager, moving between her parents' house and her temporary home in Greenwich Village cafés and amongst the folk singers in Washington Square. Johnson describes herself in the Waldorf Cafeteria, hanging out 'around the edges of the crowded tables, listening, looking, not really participating' (1994: 39). If she did not succeed in satisfying social connection, she can at least feel 'lonely within a camaraderie of loneliness' (27). 'Invisibility', Johnson continues, was the 'unsatisfying resolution of the outside/inside problem', in which she found herself moving between two 'antithetical worlds separated by subway rides' (41). But she found herself feeling neither truly *of* the parental nor the bohemian world: 'I never fully was what I seemed or tried to be.' The liminal space of girlhood which Johnson articulates here is reflected in the liminal space she inhabits between two worlds. The observer motif recurs later in a journal entry written when she was an eighteen year old college student in Professor X's writing class: 'The role of observer has its advantages. You may play as much of a part in the group as you wish, but when you are drawn in a little too tightly, you can always say, "Well after all, I'm just an observer," and step back into safety again' (84). The observer motif recurs when she describes meeting her first husband Jim Johnson, who noticed her at a party in the early 1960s and asked, 'Why do you hang back?' (40) By then this was a 'habit' of 'hanging around and back at the same time' (41). Also, as discussed before, she closes *Minor Characters* with a portrait of her former self 'sitting by' at the Beat table (262). Johnson's emphasis is upon the uneasy nature of her relation to the public world; a relation expressed in terms of distance and observation which enables a comparison to the *flâneur*. Yet as a girl-woman of the 1950s, the young Johnson's status differed politically from the independent male *flâneur*.

The notion of gender confounds the suggestion of the female subject as a *flâneur*. Some cultural critics have asked whether a '*flâneuse*' can be posited.⁴⁰ Elizabeth Wilson has discussed the presence of women in nineteenth century cities, pointing out that along with the birth of the great industrial-age city, the home to the *flâneur*, appeared the birth of influential gendered readings of the city which marginalised women. Women's presence in the crowd itself was questioned, and Wilson quotes from theoretician Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd*: 'Crowds are like the sphinx of ancient fable: it is necessary to arrive at a solution of the problems offered by their psychology or to resign ourselves to being devoured by them' (1991: 7).⁴¹ At the centre of this 'urban labyrinth' was not the male Minotaur but the female Sphinx, the 'strangling one' (7). The disorder inherent in the industrial city appears codified in feminine terms, and there Andreas Huyssen sees a general trend: 'The fear of the masses in this [late nineteenth century] age of declining liberalism is always a fear of women, a fear of nature out of control, fear of the unconscious, of sexuality, of the loss of identity and stable ego boundaries in the mass' (1986: 52). The French Revolutions of 1789 and 1848 remained in the public mind and were influential in this discourse of 'crowd psychology', as was women's involvement in these revolutionary masses (Parsons 2000: 44). Gabriel Tarde's 'On Communication and Social Influence', recalls those events and castigates any instance of women assembled in

⁴⁰ For the debate of the female *flâneur* see Janet Wolff's 'The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity', *Theory, Culture and Society* 2.3 (1985); Susan Buck Morss's 'The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering', *New German Critique* 39 (1986): 99-140; Griselda Pollock's 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity' in *Vision and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 50-90; Elizabeth Wilson's 'The Invisible Flâneur', *New Left Review* 191 (1992): 90-110; Sally Munt's 'The Lesbian Flâneur' in *Mapping Desire*, ed. David Bell (London: Routledge, 1995), 114-125; Anke Gleber's 'Female Flânerie and the Symphony of the City' in *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. Katharina von Ankum (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997), 67-88; and Deborah Parsons's *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2000).

⁴¹ Gustave Le Bon's *La Psychologie des Foules* (1895) was translated into English as *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* in 1896.

the streets as ‘always appalling in their extraordinary excitability and ferocity’ (Parsons 2000: 45).⁴²

Of course, women did make up a large proportion of the nineteenth century urban crowd, as Baudelaire’s poetry attests – he registers according to Deborah Parsons, ‘a common and constant female presence in the city’ (2000: 28). Parsons points to women’s presence in cities as New Women, shoppers, working girls, spinsters and more threateningly, in the ‘organized groups of the suffrage or strike crowds’ (44). Beyond the consternation of male theorists noted above, Wilson details the ‘moralizing and regulatory discourses’ which addressed women’s presence in nineteenth century cities and resulted in the controlling and ordering of urban space (1995: 639). Hence areas of the historical city were legislated as men’s space: for example, gentleman’s clubs, cafés, public houses. In Paris women were banned from the top decks of buses (635), attesting to the restriction of women’s ‘visual possession of the city’ (637).

This visual restriction is important, especially with regard to the women writers of the Beat generation, and Janet Wolff’s thesis on the ‘invisible *flâneuse*’ foregrounds women’s visual experience of the city, reflecting the overriding scopic nature of *flânerie* itself. If women stay indoors then *flânerie* is limited. The development of the bourgeois suburb saw the large-scale movement of middle-class women away from the great urban centres. Wolff points to women’s confinement to the private sphere, which negated possibilities for female *flânerie*, hence the invisible *flâneuse*. Wolff’s contention is that women and their private sphere were excluded from the classic accounts of modernity which gave birth to the *flâneur*. She discounts the shopper as a possibility for female *flânerie*:

⁴² See Gabriel Tarde’s *On Communication and Social Influence: Selected Papers* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1969).

although consumerism is a central aspect of modernity, and moreover mediated the public/private division, the peculiar characteristics of ‘the modern’ which I have been considering – the fleeting, anonymous encounter and the purposeless strolling – do not apply to shopping, or to women’s activities either as public signs of their husband’s wealth or as consumers (Wolff 1992: 153).

It is odd that Wolff regards the pursuit of shopping as incongruous to *flânerie*, when the shopping arcades were for Benjamin an important modern domain and a habitat for the *flâneur*. Rachel Bowlby (1985) has investigated the new department stores of the 1850s and 1860s as a site of female *flânerie*. Wilson (1995) points to a more fluid definition of *flânerie* and a less severe demarcation of public and private than that which Wolff posits. For one thing, working-class women have enjoyed greater freedom in the city as they navigated between home, work and shops.⁴³ Wilson states that many working-class women had ‘no “private sphere” to be confined to’ and therefore they ‘thronged the streets—this was one of the major threats to bourgeois order—and to read the journalism of the mid and late nineteenth-century is to be struck by their *presence* rather than their absence’ (1995: 643). This resonates with Le Bon and Tarde’s unease with women’s congregating on the streets.

We have seen women’s presence in cities tied to their economic value, and prostitutes can be said to have been the ultimate ‘public’ women. Historically, authorities have attempted to curtail the anonymity of the unattended, public woman. In nineteenth century Paris attempts were made to control prostitution by registration.

⁴³ Henry James provides several heroines who inhabit the city streets. The heroine of *In the Cage* (1898) is a working-class girl who works as a telegraphist in a post office in Mayfair, where she is privy to the personal communications of the upper class – ‘It had occurred to her early in her position [...] she should know a great many persons without their recognising her acquaintance’ (James [1898] 2002: 1). Although confined in the telegraphist’s wire cage, she has freedom of movement walking at lunchtime and on the journey home after work. But James’s suggestion is that her *flânerie* takes place in her imagination, as she vicariously steps into the glamorous lives she is privy to. Deborah Parsons (2000) reads the *flânerie* of James’s characters, Millicent Henning in *The Princess Cassimassima* (1886) and Maria Gostrey in *The Ambassadors* (1903). Of the modernist women writers discussed earlier as predecessors of Beat generation women authors, Virginia Woolf produced both male and female *flâneurs* in her urban fiction, and Jean Rhys’s rootless *demi-mondaines* occupy a special position.

Wilson states that: 'Prostitutes and prostitution recur continually in the discussion of urban life, until it almost seems as though to be a woman – an individual, not a part of a family or kin group – in the city, is to become a prostitute – a public woman' (1991: 8). The male regulatory voice speculated 'whether every woman in the new, disordered world of the city – the public sphere of pavements, cafés and theatres – was not a public woman and *thus* a prostitute. The very presence of unattended—unowned—women constituted a threat both to male power and to male frailty' (Wilson 1995: 632).

When Beat generation women left the family home it constituted their sexualisation in the eyes of society, as they became public, 'unattended' women. Their bohemian lives existed in contrast to those of their suspicious neighbours, the longstanding immigrant populations that resided in Manhattan's Lower East Side. In *Minor Characters*, Johnson recalls the alcoholic superintendent of one particular apartment she rented who would pound on her door in the middle of the night demanding to be let in 'to fix the plumbing', while his wife called her 'Kurva', a Polish word for whore (1994: 209). Their suspicions were increased when they discovered the 'crazy girl in Apartment 3 was one of those beatniks' and 'she lived with men' (233). Johnson relates that: 'They were authorities on Beatniks, even if they didn't know a thing about Jack Kerouac or *On the Road*. Beatniks meant sex and filth and communism right in their neighbourhood, and all respectability robbed from them forever, if they weren't careful' (233). The association of promiscuity with the beatnik image of the popular press adds to their resentment of Johnson. Johnson states that: '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' (102).⁴⁴

In *Memoirs of a Beatnik* Diane di Prima restages a similar reaction from her new neighbours. On entering and leaving her building she 'ran the gauntlet of the small, suspicious eyes of literally hundreds of Polish, Ukrainian, and Hungarian women, who could not tell what I was doing in their midst, but did not like it, did not like it at all' (di Prima [1969] 1988: 54). She describes passing a bar, 'where I daily experienced the scrutiny and catcalls of the lewd, sex-starved men who belonged to the aforementioned narrow-eyed women. Proposals were there made to me, desperations held out, hopes whispered, that were somehow lower and more loathsome than anything I have encountered anywhere since' (54). Unlike Johnson, she does not get labelled as a beatnik and face its stigma of promiscuity since this was in the early 1950s, before the birth of that label. Living in a different apartment later on, she would go to a local yard and was given free firewood; the men there were happy to help: 'No one in those days had heard of beatniks or hippies' (97).

Another more naïve – but telling – misunderstanding of the unattended public woman occurs to the character Joanna Gold in Johnson's *In the Night Café*, set in the early 1960s, when she is mistaken for the daughter of the house rather than the householder by 'two seventy-year-old Ukrainians' who came to fix her ceiling (1989: 55). Johnson writes: 'They wanted to know if my mother was home, having the innocent misconception that all young unmarried women in apartments were daughters. I tried to explain that *I* was my mother.' These assumptions attest to Helen McNeil's point that a female in the 1950s was perceived as being either a 'girl' or a 'mother' (1996: 181).

⁴⁴ Here Johnson echoes the title of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929).

Part IV: The Beats as Contemporaries of the Situationists

The theme of movement around the city also appeared in the work of the Situationists, European contemporaries of the Beats whose writings were published in the journal *Internationale Situationniste* (1958-1969). Guy Debord's description of the *dérive* shows a marked difference to the earlier *flânerie*. In 'Theory of the Dérive' Debord explains the practice:

Among the various situationist methods is the *dérive* [literally: 'drifting'], a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances. The *dérive* entails playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects; which completely distinguishes it from the classical notions of the journey and the stroll.

In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. (1958: 50)

The *dérive* stands in contrast to *flânerie* in that the former stresses speed and deliberate movement, rather than the leisured, often aimless movement of *flânerie* with its intention of observing others for solely aesthetic effect. 'Psychogeography' involves a radicalisation of geography, a reordering of the urban world around emotional rather than administrative axes. The *dérive* is a method for drawing up real or imaginary maps which are alternative to political maps and which mark out the 'sudden change of ambiance in a street within the space of a few meters; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the path of least resistance which is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the physical contour of the ground); the appealing or repelling character of certain places' (Debord 1955: 6).

In *Recollections of My Life as a Woman* Diane di Prima describes ‘Swinging’, a pursuit which involved connecting with her friends in early 1950s New York, which bears a distinct resemblance to the psychogeographic project. Di Prima relates:

We had these routes, these stopping points through the city, the midtown city, and it was inevitable since so many of us took them that we would run into each other along the way or at various hangouts. We would sometimes go out, just go out with no particular aim, set out with the thought of maybe writing for a while at the Library, and go where our instinct, our telepathy, our inclinations took us. We would find each other in various ways, have various adventures without preplanning, without telephones. We called this Swinging.

In our own private lingo, Swinging was being at the right place at the right time to run into the right people for the right adventure, or when all the people you were wishing could see it wound up at the Garbo flick at MOMA together. Swinging was setting out with a dime and running into the person you loaned five dollars to last year, and that person has money now and has been wondering where to find you. On the days when nothing worked like that, you would tend to go home early and hole up, figuring either you were out of sync or the world was. (2001a: 138)

‘Swinging’ features movement geared toward social connection amongst a specific group of friends. Likewise the *dérive* involves groups of people drifting together, but this is toward the political ends of the disruption of the city ‘spectacle’.⁴⁵ Di Prima’s group were connected by their subcultural identity and they separated themselves from wider society, staying in a restricted locale with various established routes and hang-outs. Similarly, the *dérive* involves travelling along routes enabled or rather encouraged by the city’s geography: ‘cities have a psychogeographical relief, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones’ (Debord 1958: 50). These specific routes and hang-outs of di

⁴⁵ Earlier in the century, the Surrealists had also been interested in the notion of chance encounters. See Louis Aragon’s *Le Paysan de Paris* (Paris: Gallimard, 1926) and André Breton’s *Nadja* (Paris: Gallimard, 1928). Michael Sheringham’s *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2006) discusses and compares both Surrealist and Situationist techniques. Debord would structure his critique of the ‘spectacle’ into *La Société du Spectacle* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1967).

Prima's group could be placed upon a psychogeographic map which would revise the geopolitical map of Manhattan through pinpointing sites of emotional meaning to those individuals. Another comparison is the psychic nature of both 'Swinging' and the *dérive*. Di Prima states that her group never made too much of the psychic element of Swinging, they were 'a bit afraid of that level of things perhaps, or else it was one of those things you felt you didn't have to talk about, couldn't talk about without being uncool' (2001a: 138-9). Debord stresses the psychic and emotional connection between *dérivers* and in the choice of the route of the *dérive*.

Sadie Plant has examined the concept of the *dérive* or 'drifting' as it weaves from the Situationists into the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. The events of May 1968 form the connection, although the role of the Situationists in this 'extraordinary revolutionary moment' has been contested, notably by the Situationists themselves (Plant 1992: 93-4). But Plant states that through 'the vocabulary, the tactics, and the aims expressed in the events, situationist theory seemed to come into its own barely a decade after the movement's inception' (94). Plant traces a 'line of imaginative dissent to which Dada, surrealism, the situationists, and the activists of 1968' belong; a line which 'continually reappears in the poststructuralist and desiring philosophies of the 1970s' (111). In their critique of psychoanalytic theory, *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari state that 'A schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst's couch' ([1972] 2004: 2). Their 'nomadology' and 'lines of flight' provide terms for the drift of ideas across the grand narratives of psychoanalysis, philosophy and political science.⁴⁶ Summing up the figure of the 'nomad' as it appears in the work of Nietzsche, the Dadaists, the Surrealists, the Situationists and the post-structuralists, Plant states:

⁴⁶ See pp.53-61 of this thesis for an earlier discussion of these terms.

The nomad bears a disruptive power and raises the spectre of individuals, social groups, and forms of action which derive their strength from their very elusiveness. The outlaw, the mad, and the disenfranchised; the unemployed, the dispossessed, and all those whose desires and behaviour are refused by the conventions of the established order, begin to constitute an unidentifiable class, threatening not because of the place it assumes within capitalist society, but by virtue of its refusal of any place. (125)

But the common ground between the Situationists and the Beats has not been adequately addressed. Ken Knabb sees a connection between the groups in their aiming toward the 'self-superseding of art' (1999: n. pag.). He states that the Situationists contended that 'no further possibility remained for art' and that their response was to 'supersede art, bring creativity into everyday life.' He feels the Beats 'inherited the same situation' although he seems to suggest they lacked the political background and purpose of the Situationists. However, Knabb attests to the Beat movement also involving this 'merging art into everyday life'. He suggests that in Beat thinking, 'you might still write poems or songs, but there was a sense that this was simply part of your adventure, part of your life.' These thoughts accord with my suggestion that for women of the Beat generation, the perception of oneself as an artist or a bohemian was fundamental.

Although Knabb sees the Beats and later hippies as relatively unaware of the 'considerations' of the Situationists, their social connections must be noted; a connection which illustrates the rhizomatic sense of the Beat generation (1999: n. pag.). The Scottish-born writer Alexander Trocchi connects the groups, working with the Situationists in Paris and relocating to New York in 1956, where at one point he would share an apartment with Elise Cowen, Janine Pommy Vega and Herbert Huncke.⁴⁷ Trocchi is connected socially and artistically to William Burroughs, and

⁴⁷ See Huncke's *Guilty of Everything: The Autobiography of Herbert Huncke* (New York: Paragon House, 1990).

Timothy S. Murphy has traced these connections, positing Trocchi's essay 'Invisible Resurrection of a Million Minds' as an attempt 'to establish an alliance between two distinct but overlapping modes of cultural resistance' (2004: 31).⁴⁸ Trocchi was keen on linking Situationist *dérives* to 'happenings', which Murphy suggests was partly to blame for his excommunication from the Situationist International by Debord. 'Happenings' – interdisciplinary art productions of the 1960s – were born out of the same bohemian milieu of which the Beats were a part.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Trocchi's essay appears in *Invisible Resurrection of a Million Minds: A Trocchi Reader*, ed. Andrew Murray Scott (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), 177-191.

⁴⁹ Perhaps another comparative reading might examine the alleged dominating presence of Guy Debord against that of the leading Beat men.

Part V: 'The Bohemian Stage': Liminal Spaces of the Beat City

At the close of this spatially themed chapter I want to focus on the types of places the city provided to nurture the Beat girl's bohemianism. The debate about the *flâneuse* shows that women did occupy public spaces of the nineteenth century city, for instance, department stores, tearooms or cafés, and hotels – places which merge the division between public and private spheres. The places which I have been picturing Beat girls in, such as cafés, restaurants, bars, boutiques, bookshops, theatres, galleries, and public parks, are liminal because they are public places which also exist as a 'home' of sorts. Henri Lefebvre conceptualised space through his 'perceived-conceived-lived triad' (1991: 40). Perceived space describes 'everyday social life and commonsensical perception', while conceived space is the 'theoretical' space of 'cartographers, urban planners or property speculators', and lastly, lived space is the realm of the 'imagination' (Hubbard 2004: 210). Lived space or 'representational spaces', according to Lefebvre embodies 'complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art' (1991: 33). Therefore lived space constitutes the realm of creative imaginations; it 'overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects' (39). While also pertaining to everyday social life, the places inhabited by Beat girls fall into this third category because they are symbolic sites which capture imaginations and facilitate 'self-fashioning'.

Elizabeth Wilson describes such sites as constituting the 'bohemian stage', with the café existing in its own right as a historical home of bohemians (2003: 28). Places such as cafés, with their melding of private and public, as well as being places of social connection, let the Beat girl become a public, unattended female far removed

from domesticity and family, as was noted earlier in reference to Simone de Beauvoir. A place, perhaps, in which to 'be lonely within a camaraderie of loneliness', to quote Joyce Johnson's description of the places she was drawn to as an aspiring bohemian (1994: 27). 'To participate in café life was, however, more than a matter of alleviating loneliness, for it was by participating in the social institution of café life that the lonely artist *became* a bohemian', Wilson relates (34). De Beauvoir's description of café life in Paris between the wars appears romantically simple, and prefigures the freedoms held sacred by female Beats. In *The Prime of Life* de Beauvoir states:

I was free to come and go as I pleased. I could get home with the milk, read in bed all night, sleep till midday, shut myself up for forty-eight hours at a stretch, or go out on the spur of the moment. My lunch was a bowl of borsch at Dominique's, and for supper I took a cup of hot chocolate at La Coupole. (1984: 12)

For de Beauvoir the public space of the café was a site for her creative, intellectual and social life, providing as Wilson states, 'a role and a setting which de-emphasised her position as merely the partner of a well-known male writer. [It provided] a stage on which she could appear in her own right' (1991: 63-4).

Hettie Jones recalls that the first time she met Joyce Johnson they had gone to a café. After that, 'besides coffee we'd had knishes, and blintzes, and mushroom barley soup and potato pancakes, and any number of other treats in the B&H, Ratner's, Rappaport's, the Second avenue Deli, and every other Lower East Side landmark' (Jones 1997: 81). The warmth of the place and company, and the diversity of immigrant foods are conveyed. This sampling of immigrant culture is important for these daughters who ran away from what they regarded as a culturally-bland, assimilated parental culture. Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance* includes scenes set in cafés and *Minor Characters* describes her early entry into Greenwich Village café

life. Her blind date with Kerouac took place in the downmarket Howard Johnson's diner, the kind celebrated in his novels perhaps: 'capturing the precise coloration of the light, the density of steam on the windows in winter, the white, thick chipped crockery, the aroma of eggs and potatoes fried in grease' (Johnson 1994: 39).

Walter Benjamin notes the pleasure taken in the inaction that he found characteristic of café life: 'that passion for waiting, without which one cannot thoroughly appreciate the charm of a café' ([1928] 1979: 311). We can refer to the familiar view of the city as a site of fragmentation. Elizabeth Wilson states: 'The fragmentary and incomplete nature of urban experience generates its melancholy: a sense of nostalgia, of loss for lives never known, of experiences that can only be guessed at' (2001a: 86). Years later Joyce Johnson learned, "Why, *everybody* went to the Waldorf!" (39).

This *everybody*, of whom I'd been quite unconscious, makes the Waldorf sound like the Deux Magots of Eighth Street: e. e. cummings, W. H. Auden, Maxwell Bodenheim, Delmore Schwartz. Painters like Hans Hoffman, Jackson Pollock, and Franz Kline. Obscure younger people, too, like Allen Ginsberg, who moved downtown to the Lower East Side before he followed Jack's route westward in pursuit of Neal Cassady.⁵⁰ (39)

This speaks of the multiple realities that reside in public space, of our subjective private experiences within the public world. There is tension between a world that enables a sense of identity, of belonging, and the ease with which the young Johnson fell into anonymous spaces of female invisibility. In addition Johnson's voice as a mature memoirist, often tinged with nostalgia, stages another level of distance from events.

⁵⁰ Johnson's favoured café is linked by its name, the irony of which she registers, to the Waldorf-Astoria, home to earlier literary luminaries such as Dorothy Parker. See Ann Douglas's *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (London: Picador, 1996) for views on earlier flowerings of New York literary Bohemia.

Johnson's novel *In the Night Café* (1989) and memoir *Missing Men* (2004) both narrate versions of her meeting her first husband Jim Johnson. The novel fictionalises events, with the story of Tom Murphy being narrated by her alter-ego Joanna Gold, whereas the same episodes are described from a first-person autobiographical perspective in the memoir. In the novel after Murphy has approached Gold at a party and promptly disappeared, she leaves to sit by herself in Rappaport's, an all-night restaurant (Johnson 1989: 53).⁵¹ Sitting by the window she describes: 'The wet glass was like a black pool. I could see my transparent self in it marooned behind all the baked goods and occasional ghosts passing through me on the other side, swimming by under umbrellas or with Sunday newspapers above their heads' (54). Gold sits watching the rain for an hour and in retrospect reveals the prescient nature of her waiting: 'it seems that I was waiting, that I even knew who one of the ghosts would be, as if I were somehow dreaming my own life.' The man from the party walks by in the rain and pauses by the lights of the restaurant, unaware he was being watched by Gold. *Missing Men* revisits their meeting and Johnson describes the various instances when Jim Johnson kept 'cropping up in [her] path' and she would 'glimpse him from various distances, close and far', among these instances the moment in Rappaport's: 'I saw him go straight past, close enough to touch but on the other side of the glass' (2004: 118).

In *The Arcades Project* Walter Benjamin interprets the 'profusion' of windowpanes and mirrors in cafés, how they function to 'make the inside brighter and to give all the tiny nooks and crannies, into which Parisian taverns separate, a pleasing amplitude' (2003: 537). Benjamin continues:

⁵¹ Vincent Van Gogh said of his painting *The Night Café* (1888): 'I have tried to show the café as a place where one can destroy oneself, go mad or commit a crime' (quoted Wilson 2003: 34). See *The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), p. 399. The allusion to Van Gogh in the title of Johnson's novel is deliberate since, in addition to an epigraph, Johnson makes several references to Van Gogh's letters in the novel.

The way mirrors bring the open expanse, the streets, into the café—this, too, belongs to the interweaving of spaces, to the spectacle by which the flâneur is ineluctably drawn. ‘During the day, often sober; in the evening, more buoyant, when the gas flames glow. The art of the dazzling illusion is here developed to perfection. The most commonplace tavern is dedicated to deceiving the eye. Through mirrors extending along walls, and reflecting rows of merchandise right and left, these establishments all obtain an artificial expansion, a fantastical magnitude, by lamplight.’ [...] Thus, precisely with the approach of night, distant horizons bright as day open up throughout the city. (2003: 537)

With their confusion of ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ reflective surfaces turn the café into a dreamlike realm.⁵² Johnson’s heroine in *In the Night Café*, experiences this atmosphere as she sits watching the ‘ghosts’ outside the café windows.

The couple’s near-meetings express what Benjamin would regard as a very modern, urban form of love. Baudelaire’s sonnet ‘À une passante’ describes the fleeting, ‘fugitive’ nature of connection that pervades the urban world as a male speaker has a brief unspoken encounter with a woman he passes on the street, experiencing a moment of instant attraction. The speaker registers the woman’s interest in him and it is the particular bustling and noisy urban setting – ‘La rue assourdissante’ – from which she emerges, that produces their ambiguous and very modern attraction:

Un éclair . . . puis la nuit! – Fugitive beauté
 Dont le regard m’a fait soudainement renaître,
 Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l’éternité?
 (Baudelaire 1997: 242)⁵³

⁵² Another reference from the visual arts, Edouard Manet’s painting ‘Le Bar aux Folies-Bergère’ (1882), conveys the visual fragmentation of urban interiors.

⁵³ Translated by Walter Martin as:

Lightning – gone dark! Slipping away from me,
 Beauty that offered *life* in one quick glance –
 Life seen no more, before Eternity?
 (Baudelaire 1997: 243).

According to Benjamin, the particular setting creates ‘a love which eludes the poet’: ‘The delight of the city-dweller is not so much love at first sight as love at last sight’ (1997: 45). In *The Arcades Project* Benjamin quotes Albert Thibaudet’s sentiment that ‘À une passante’ could only have been inspired ‘in the milieu of a great capital, where human beings live together as strangers to one another and yet as travelers on the same journey’ (2003: 252). In *the Night Café* describes a similar connection between the inhabitants of Manhattan. The heroine states:

We used to read our getting together backward, the way you read certain accidents that in retrospect seem meant to have happened. We’d examine all the elements, conjecturing how different the outcome might have been if one or two had been subtracted—if I’d stayed home that Saturday night, if his friend Ron Gorchov hadn’t given him Verta’s address. (118)

Johnson plays with the fatality of lovers seemingly destined to meet despite the capricious nature of connection in the city in which people, like Baudelaire and his *passante*, are thrown together only briefly, and then just as swiftly separated. She relates Jim Johnson’s ‘theory’ that when he was a ‘nineteen-year-old sailor, roaming Times Square’ and she was a ‘little girl with long braids’ walking with her mother from her work as a child stage performer, their paths were bound to have crossed in the crowds: “‘I’d have noticed *you*,” he said’ (119).

Other ‘homes’ to the Beat generation such as the Cedar Bar, and the Five Spot, a jazz club, make appearances in the various texts by the New York-based women writers. For instance, in *How I Became Hettie Jones*, the Five Spot and the Cedar exist as ‘symbolic vessels of memory holding the materiality of [Jones’s] story/life,’ according to Nancy M. Grace (2002: 154). Venues were often multifunctional, with bars hosting theatre productions or poetry readings. Diane di Prima perceived that ‘theatre could happen anywhere, that all kinds of things were theatre’ (2001: 146). It

is simply a ‘manipulation of space and bodies in space’ which led ‘a vast opening of the space of the mind’ (146). This attests to the symbolic function of the urban spaces frequented by Beat girls; when Lefebvre’s ‘perceived’ space becomes infused with moments of ‘lived’ space (1991: 40). The bohemian stage also existed for Joanne Kyger in San Francisco in the late 1950s.⁵⁴ In fact the symbolic value she found in the North Beach district was so concentrated that she restricted her urban world to only a few blocks. Nemi Frost, Kyger’s childhood friend with whom she moved to San Francisco, recalls:

We couldn’t stand to be away from North Beach [...] or each other. We couldn’t go through the tunnel[s—Broadway and Stockton, which divided North Beach from the rest of San Francisco]. ...And we just raced to get back. It was home. It was where everything was happening.
(Ellingham and Killian 1998: 100)

Ellingham and Killian define the neighbourhood as ‘a small world—three or four blocks, like a toy city dropped at the edge of a larger metropolis’ (100). In the journals of *The Dharma Committee*, Kyger describes the territories and factions of this world:

Afterwards, Spicer, Duncan, Ebbe, George Stanley, Joe Dunn & I walked thru the Broadway tunnel to The Place--Spicer on the Anti-Beatnik Book of the Month side, and Joe, Robert Duncan and I forming a new faction--The Dharma Committee. (1986: n. pag.)

⁵⁴ San Francisco offered a contrasting urban experience to New York. For New Yorkers like di Prima it offered ‘a model of the shining city’ when she first saw it in 1961 (2001: 260). Joyce Johnson felt its unique glamour after reading a *Mademoiselle* article on the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance in 1956: ‘city of poets and accessible by Greyhound bus, whose hilly streets in our imaginations took on a perpetual golden haze. I thought about San Francisco the way I’d thought about the Village when I was thirteen, before I ever went there’ (1994: 117-8). Texts such as Lenore Kandel’s *Word Alchemy* (1967), Joanne Kyger’s *The Dharma Committee* (1986) and Carolyn Cassady’s *Off the Road* (1990) reflect the city’s unique appeal during the Beat period. The work of visual artists such as Fran Herndon, Joan Brown and Jay de Feo is also reflective of the San Francisco milieu. Knight (1996) provides an account of Brown and de Feo as women artists of the Beat generation, while Ellingham and Killian (1998) outline Herndon’s career and collaborations with Jack Spicer.

In the manner of Situationist maps, the emotional value of sites determines their inclusion on our own cognitive maps of our environments.

I have introduced the girl as a subject fashioned by various literary and cultural forces, placed her within a historical urban bohemianism, and highlighted her various precedents and contemporaries. By invoking city spaces as ‘homes’ for Beat girls I lead on to the contrasting notions of home found in the following chapters. The next chapter examines the girl as she appears in di Prima’s *Recollections of My Life as a Woman* and other autobiographical texts in order to examine themes of the parental home and immigrant family histories.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Beat Foreign Bodies: Immigrant Family History and 'Postmemory'

Part I: 'The Body is Pain': Family Life

This chapter will discuss the parental generation that women writers disowned, and were often disowned by, when they remade their home within the Beat generation bohemian world. Many of the parents were first-generation Americans, and portrayed in the memoirs of their daughters, they appear bent on integration into American life and the disavowal of their immigrant heritage. As will become increasingly evident, the fraught mother-daughter relationship is central, with the mother becoming what Joyce Johnson refers to as a 'negative muse' (2004: 109).¹ As well as history being a theme in this chapter, the body also becomes prominent, owing to the material and domestic nature of family life. Of course, the mother is usually the first body the daughter connects with. Starting with the writings of Johnson then, I will trace the sketches and representations of family life as they appear in writing by selected Beat generation women, in order to show the development of the family theme.

In *Come and Join the Dance* the parents of Susan Levitt are described by the heroine as 'small', 'two faded children', and the character has already fled their home (Glassman 1962: 124). When her thoughts return to their house she perceives its mundane, self-contained middle-class routine: 'She had imagined her mother coming in as usual to set the glasses of tomato juice on the table, her father putting down his newspaper to draw the blinds, the two of them sealed up inside their house in their bedroom slippers and their well-worn silence' (122).

¹ See p. 109 for a reference to Johnson's short story 'The End of the Beach', which reveals her mother to be a subject of her earliest writing.

The family scene becomes more detailed in *Minor Characters*, with Johnson portraying a home in which all passions have been contained. She ‘painfully’ recalls the living room in their apartment: the ‘red couch with a green slip cover’; the ‘Oriental rug, bought just before the Depression [which] gets vacuumed every day’; ‘the table with curved bow legs—used only for important family occasions—is in the style known as French provincial’; the Chinese lamp placed on the table ‘its silk shade covered with cellophane’ (13). There is a baby grand piano on which sits a portrait of her parents during their engagement, her mother looking very much like the concert singer she wished to, but never became. An oil painting of the young Joyce hangs above the piano, showing what Johnson ironically refers to as ‘the golden era of my career as a daughter’ (14). Johnson recalls her mother Rosalind Glassman’s vicarious ambition for Joyce’s success as a ‘great woman composer,’ a path which precluded marriage, at least until ‘after I’ve written several operettas’ (15). For Johnson, in this private space of the parental home:

There’s a terrible poignancy in this room of gratifications deferred, the tensions of gentility. It’s as if all these objects—the piano, the rug, the portrait—are held in uneasy captivity, hostages to aspiration. If the slipcovers ever come off, if the heavy drapes are drawn aside letting in the daylight, everything that has been so carefully preserved will be seen to have become frayed and faded away. (14)

Johnson concludes that: ‘You could just as well have gone to hell with yourself and enjoyed all that naked upholstery from the start.’ The stultifying parental world appears enshrined in that particular room. In the apartment ‘voices were never raised’ and at night ‘nothing stirs from their bedroom, where the door is always left open’ (18; 19).

This apparent sexlessness is matched by her mother's unwillingness to address her daughter's sexual development. Johnson highlights the parameters of parental protection as she recalls the term 'Down Below' being used by her mother as a euphemism for unspeakable female anatomy and also for the wilder regions of the park across from their apartment that Joyce was banned from (7). In accordance with this stratification of her daughter's body, Joyce's first period was 'the body's natural way of getting rid of bad blood' and 'nothing you have to worry about' (16).² Remembering life with her mother, Johnson states: 'There seemed so little truth in our relationship that I felt orphaned' (68).³

How I Became Hettie Jones portrays a similar distance from the mother.

Jones's mother Lottie Cohen was 'always good for a hug', but would disconnect from the embrace if her 'passionate' daughter continued it for too long, and unwrap her daughter's arms, calling her a 'musher' (1997: 7). Like Johnson's, Jones's mother also kept a distance from discussing issues of menstruation and sex with her daughter: 'What we did together was shop', Jones writes (7). However Jones felt 'kin' to her father's 'soul, his broader humor and bodily ease' (7). She was drawn to his positive, embodied physicality: he was 'a short, barrelly, dark-skinned man named Oscar, who boasted a jaunty grace—he did Charlie Chaplin's wobbly walk and any dance from the two-step to the rhumba' (7). Although she empathises with his physicality and his spirit of adventure, he scorns her early intellectual pursuits, telling her she 'won't find

² 'Bad blood' becomes shorthand for the immigrant inheritances passed down to the writers, which Part II of this chapter will explore. See Lorna Sage's successful memoir, *Bad Blood* (London: Forth Estate, 2000), which also explored female sexuality and family heritage.

³ Nancy Friday's *My Mother, My Self: A Daughter's Search for Identity* (New York: Delacorte, 1977) was a popular second-wave feminist text which diagnosed and dissected the seemingly pervasive conflict in the mother-daughter relationship from a psychoanalytic perspective. For the development of this debate see variously Nancy J. Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Motherhood: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1978), Marianne Hirsch's *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989) and Madelon Sprengnether's 'Generational Differences: Reliving Mother-Daughter Conflicts' in *Changing Subjects: The Making of Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn (London: Routledge, 1993), 201-208.

life' in books: although 'joined at the heart, [we] were separated at the head' (8).

Oscar Cohen appears as a more embodied subject than the mother, and was an early role model for Jones.

These daughters ultimately rejected their mothers' denial of sexual bodies.⁴

Ann Douglas reads the parental control of the teenage female body and its sexuality in the context of the Cold War, citing the 'specialized and arcane rules [which] governed teenage sexual life, turning the female body into a not-so-sovereign state as hotly contested as the satellites of Eastern Europe' (1999: xxii).⁵ I shall refer to this distancing of the body passed down by the parental generation of the women Beats as 'disembodiment'.

Diane di Prima's *Recollections of My Life as a Woman* presents an extreme case of a daughter's disembodiment at the hands of violent parents. It was the first of the memoirs by a Beat-affiliated author to give such sustained focus to this area, particularly the mother-daughter relationship.⁶ These facts warrant the text's predominance in this chapter. By comparison, in di Prima's early writings the representations of the family are scarce and undeveloped. In the prose piece 'Memories of Childhood' from *Dinners and Nightmares* (1961), a male child sees a giant man, a 'Big Tall Man', holding a hydrogen bomb over his family's house (di Prima 1998: 55). The home appears conventional, with a 'ma', 'Pa' and 'Grandpa'.

⁴ See pp. 217-223 of this thesis for a discussion of the 1950s Beat generation as a sexual revolution pre-empting the 1960s revolution in sexual manners.

⁵ For an insight into the ways in which popular culture shaped girlhood body image see Kelly Schrum's "'Teena Means Business': Teenage Girls' Culture and 'Seventeen' Magazine, 1944-1950' in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Culture*, ed. Sherrie A. Innes (New York: New York U P, 1998), 134-163, and *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945* (New York: Palgrave, 2004). Schrum provides a more corporeal reading of the teenage girl culture debate cited in note 1 of my previous chapter.

⁶ Also see Joyce Johnson's *Missing Men: A Memoir* (2004). See my Introduction, pp. 22-25 for references to the memoir form and the recent emergence of its theory. For discussions of family-themed memoirs see Leigh Gilmore's *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U P, 2001), Alex Zwerdling's 'Mastering the Memoir: Woolf and the Family Legacy', *Modernism/Modernity* 10.1 (2003): 165-188, and Gillian Whitlock's 'Disciplining the Child: Recent Academic Memoirs', *A/B: Auto/Biography Studies* 19.1-2 (2004): 46-58.

The boy's friend 'Dick' lives next door and is also able to see the man. Yet the son's protestations are ignored: his father states, 'there's no such thing as an H bomb you know son and there's no man out there'; and his grandfather replies that, 'god will never let it happen' (54, 55). In this humorous but unsettling Cold War parable the nuclear threat is looming, but society is oblivious. But more importantly, for this chapter's argument, there is no autobiographical basis to this piece of writing by di Prima. Elsewhere in *Dinners and Nightmares*, di Prima remembers returning from Manhattan to Brooklyn for family meals. The house would be teeming with Italian American relatives, and they would eat all day, dance to phonograph records, and sing around the piano. The older relatives would typically ask the di Prima character when she would be returning to the college she had dropped out of, but would ignore the blue jeans she was wearing, unlike her mother who would 'have taken me upstairs first thing to put on a dress, one of her dresses or the ones I'd left home, and I would say no, the hell with it and we'd go down again and join the others' (33) The experience was 'mostly [...] good and not unpleasant', but territories are demarcated when she remembers leaving to 'go back to my part of the world' (34).

'For Fred-O (2)', a lyric poem dated 1959 from di Prima's *Freddie Poems* (1974), introduces more intimate autobiographical experience, with di Prima suggesting that she and her friend Fred Herko both suffered at the hands of violent fathers:

the worst is what they did to your 16

& my

and all that firstlove

what I mean is dying's not so bad
as coming home late
and your father
angry
(1974: n. pag).

In the semi-fictional erotic narrative *Memoirs of a Beatnik* (1969) di Prima's persona describes her large Italian American family: 'My grandparents could not read or write; my parents, with grim determination, had put themselves through college and become "professional people"' (1988: 35). Family 'feasts and festivals' were 'hearty peasant affairs' at which her various aunts commented in Italian 'on my good and bad points as a future breeding animal'; however this was done 'in a spirit of utter kindness and delight' (35). In contrast, the dysfunctional family in the text, within which incest occurs, belongs to her college friend Tomi: an 'Anglo European family' which as Nancy M. Grace describes, 'while claiming to be idealistically nuclear and upper class, is sexually deviant, self-destructive, and sadomasochistic, and draws di Prima into their perversions' (2002: 163). The father, Serge, was 'a florid Latin type' who 'drank emotionally, spent too much money' and was 'despairingly' in love with his 'frigid' wife (di Prima 1988: 34). His attempted rape of the di Prima character is the premise for one of the book's sex scenes.

Representation of the family becomes more developed in di Prima's later poetry, for example the poem 'Backyard' (1975) looks back to 1940s Brooklyn, picturing a solitary young girl at home in a garden where 'angels turned into honeysuckle & poured nectar into my mouth' and she 'french-kissed the roses in the rain' (1990: 114). But the incipient sexuality of the girl is denied in the Italian

American neighbourhood. Although eroticism and passion are present in the cultural heritage – the ‘naked plaster women bent eternally white over birdbaths’ and ‘the phonograph too creaked Caruso come down from the skies’ – the inhabitants, paradoxically, never ‘opened their venetian blinds’ and their lawns were ‘eternally parched beneath red gloomy sunsets’ (114). Symbolically, ‘the plaster saints in the yard never looked at the naked women / in the birdbath’. But within the backyard there are darker forces, ‘demons’, who ‘tossed me a knife to kill my father in the stark simplicity / of the sky’. The father is once again held up as a culprit, but the girl’s anger is displaced onto her poetry – ‘my fingers / tore poems into little pieces & watched the sky’.

There are two undated poems dedicated to her father, Francis di Prima, in her second collection of selected poems, *Pieces of a Song* (1990). Discerning from the chronological sequence of the book, ‘To My Father’ appears to have been written in the early 1970s. The biographical note in the book states that di Prima’s father died in 1969, yet the poet’s painful relation to the sinister addressee disavows an elegiac tone. Rather, he has appeared to the poet in her dreams, in the garden or on his doorstep. He is ‘the fierce wind, the intolerable force’ that ‘almost broke’ the poet (1990: 93). Details of the history of their relationship are included: that the father ‘forced my young body into awkward and proper clothes’, ‘spoke of his standing in the community’, and ‘had preferred my death / to the birth of my oldest daughter’ (93). Alluding to an uncomfortable physical relationship, the poet reasons that ‘men’s touch is still a little absurd to me / because you trembled when you touched me’ (93). The later poem ‘To My Father—2’ revisits and extrapolates these themes from a more distant vantage point. The poet is able to judge that her father was ‘dying of grief the moment I saw you’, pointing to the theme of immigrant grief at being split from the

Old World (149). Di Prima is also able to acknowledge a meeting point between the warring father and daughter: ‘there was a slight chink / thru which we cd signal each other’, she writes with characteristic Poundian brevity (149).

Recollections of My Life as a Woman narrates the experience of being a daughter of first-generation Italian Americans bent on upward mobility and assimilation into American society. Home life is characterised by restriction and regulation of the child, which is ultimately experienced as pain and disembodiment. Di Prima figures her relationship with her mother as negatively marked from its inception, returning to her birth, which apparently caused Emma di Prima near-fatal medical complications. She states: ‘from the time I was very small I had heard from her sisters that she had “nearly died” having me’ (2001a: 22). Until the end of Emma’s life the emotional responses of mother and daughter to these events remained unspoken. Di Prima acknowledges her own feelings of guilt and her mother’s continued resentment by relating the conversation in which Emma told di Prima that it was in fact a problem with an ovarian cyst that caused the complications. With ‘vast relief’ di Prima asks: ‘Oh, then it was something you already had. My birth didn’t “cause” it’ (22). She describes her eighty-one-year-old mother responding with ‘fury’: ‘It *was* because of the birth that I got sick. That is what *brought* it on’. The events of the birth seem to di Prima fundamental to her relationship with her mother, evident in the way the episode is placed within the narrative of her interrogation of their fraught relationship. Di Prima’s memory of being nursed by Emma is ‘painful and double’, with ‘the breast held out like a weapon, a shield or wall between us [...] the body withdrawn and rigid’ (23). Emma’s body is held at a distance and becomes a site of physical distress. Di Prima relates how the effects of the birth complications extended to her father, creating a wedge between husband and wife, and implicitly also between

father and daughter. She surmises that her father, who had just started working as a lawyer, would have stayed with his own parents being unable to ‘cook, or clean, or care for himself’ and that Emma and her daughter’s return must have been a ‘shock’ (23) for him: ‘It seems like too many changes for too few weeks. The shortening days, the anxiety in the air. My mother and father strangers to each other. Frightened off by the birth and her subsequent retreat’ (23-4).

For di Prima the ‘determined perfection’ which characterised their lives was ‘a form of terrorism: a device of the totalitarian state’ (28). It is the body which takes the burden of the tension and inherent cruelty of this superficially cheerful life. Di Prima details the daily cleaning and grooming of daughter by mother as daily abuse. She describes Emma as a ‘methodical hurter’ (10), and recounts how she ‘scrubbed me in the bath till my skin was raw,’ (33); ‘dresses stiff with starch that rubbed holes into my neck, my waist’; ‘things that dug into the flesh: underwear elastic, the too-high back of patent leather shoes’; the ‘great, heavy combs with “unbreakable” stamped across the top’ (34) that Emma would boast she broke on her daughter’s thick, curly hair, ‘pulling handfuls out daily’; ‘the constant pain of hair pulled too tight, held into place with hairpins, the aching scalp. Headaches, they said, from “the weight of the hair”, but didn’t offer to cut it.’ Di Prima’s skin was the ‘interface’ between herself and her mother (38). Accordingly, her skin was ‘always red. From scrubbing, from battering, from starch, from shame’ (38). The child’s body is indeed a contested site and the mother’s scrubbing of her child’s skin can be read as a metaphor of the immigrant’s desire to scrub clean the signs of racial difference, and its attendant traces of impoverished and troubled histories – a ‘whitening’ in the terms set out by Wini Breines.⁷

⁷ See pp. 150-151 of this thesis for reference to Breines (1994).

Near the end of Emma’s life, in the course of interviewing her for the purposes of ‘family history’, di Prima found evidence of a ‘breakdown’ in which to ground her mother’s mania (28). The episode appeared to occur during Emma’s college years. But Emma underplays the episode: ‘I guess I went out of my head and said strange things. One day I said things that weren’t right, that didn’t make any sense and the next day I woke up in a darkened room with the curtains drawn’ (29). Since Emma refuses to give further details, it remains ‘a bottomless pit, a [sic] endless sequence of question marks’ (29). Di Prima’s life writing project appears as a questioning, but it registers further unanswered questions. Such occurrences can be read as examples of the narrative ‘gaps’ Shari Benstock attributes to the memoir form (1988: 11).⁸ This evidence of Emma’s mental trouble recasts the family relationships and especially the mother-daughter relationship. It is the ‘backstage of that bright and cheerful life’ (29).⁹

Di Prima also details her father’s violence. Her mother used platitudes that support him as an omnipotent authority figure, as if belittling her own power over the

⁸ See pp. 23-24.

⁹ Kay Johnson’s poem ‘Song of the Suicide’s Daughter’ from *Human Songs* (1964) also invokes an evidently mad mother. The daughter ponders her inheritance: ‘The cord of the Venetian blind / hangs in the window / like a noose, for me’ (1964: 15). The maternal grandmother is also invoked, suggesting a lineage of trauma because her body was found in a river: ‘Did she fall, or did she jump? / I used to rub her legs / to take the pain out’ (15). Lenore Kandel’s poem ‘Telephone from a Madhouse’ from *Word Alchemy* (1967) would fit nicely in this discussion of mad mothers, yet it is unclear if the incarcerated woman who summons the speaker is a relative (a mother?) or a friend:

[...] the voice lies waiting	
tangled in soiled bedclothes her	old woman slow
feral eyes break at me	shuffle walking
among the tears the	up and down
darkened room she	the hall
leans up stares at	all the time
me arrowing my soul	all the time
(1967: 66)	

The column to the right of the page interrupts the poetic narrative which had previously clung to the left margin. The image of an old woman heard shuffling outside the door, or perhaps spied through an open door, offers a counterpoint to the dialogue between visitor and inmate. But if read in a linear fashion rather than as two separate stanzas, then the inmate could be an old woman: ‘her old woman slow / feral eyes break at me’.

young di Prima. For instance, di Prima recalls ‘*being sent to my room by my mother, to wait for my father to come home to beat me for something*’ (10).¹⁰ Or Emma would say: ‘“*Your father is a very gentle man, (or a very patient man), but when he loses his temper he has a heavy hand*”. Or “*but when you try him, he loses his temper*”’ (11). Her father felt that if di Prima tried to protect herself during a beating it meant ‘*you were “raising your hand to him*”’ (10). Such platitudes are familiar expressions of twentieth-century familial corporal punishment. Although resigned from Italian American ‘politics’ her father is known as a figure of ‘integrity’ in the community, trusted to keeping his mouth shut (53). In the outside world he ‘moved bowed and with fear’ and was relatively powerless, but paradoxically, ‘at home he had power, unrestrained’ (53). Di Prima acknowledges the underside of surface appearances, with domestic power relations being the obverse of power on the streets.¹¹

Di Prima sums up her resultant attitude to the body: ‘The body is pain. Is known from the inside out, has no exterior. Is pain, grief, discomfort, imploded anger. Containable or not, is the defining characteristic. Can it be borne?’ (33). Because of such treatment of the body, di Prima wonders at the possibilities for the birthing of subjectivity.

Elizabeth Grosz has discussed the inscription of body surfaces, the ways in which the body is ‘marked by the history and specificity of its existence’ (1994:

¹⁰ All the italicized quotations from di Prima’s text that follow in this chapter are in accordance with her original emphasis.

¹¹ The sexual abuse hinted at in di Prima’s ‘To My Father’ poems recurs in *Recollections*. Di Prima offers only partial memories of such abuse – another instance of Benstock’s narrative ‘gaps’. Elaine Scarry states that ‘physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is heard’ (1985: 4). Due to pain’s resistance to articulation in words or even thought itself, its existence in memory is consequently compromised; therefore di Prima’s memory of her childhood is compromised. Di Prima felt incestuous desire to be a characteristic of the Italian American familial group; there were ‘weird sexual innuendos always in the air’ (2001a: 53). In *Interrogating Incest: Feminism, Foucault and the Law* (London: Routledge, 1993), Vikki Bell states that incest ‘reveals the gendered power dynamics of the society in which we exist’ (3). This argument suggests that incestuous relations are reflective of the power relations in a patriarchal society, reflecting di Prima’s own beliefs about the Italian American community she grew up in.

142).¹² Grosz follows Alphonso Lingus's discussion of the scarification of the 'primitive body' (140).¹³ For Grosz, the inscription of bodies is 'no less permanent or more removable than tattooing or epidermic or muscular lesions, although they may be less readily observed or directly readable' (141). Grosz argues that in Western societies the body is marked through the legitimated 'violence' of 'social institutions of correction and training, prisons, juvenile homes, hospitals, [and] psychiatric institutions', which keep the body 'confined, constrained, supervised, and regimented.'¹⁴ In addition there are the 'less openly violent' but 'no less coercive' (141) corporeal inscriptions generated through our belonging to specific 'socially significant groups' according to gender, race, nation, culture (142). Corporeal inscription such as dress, hair-styling, make-up, posture, diet, and the practice of exercise regimes or sports available to the body in its urban, suburban or rural location, 'make the flesh into a particular type of body' (142). For this particular discussion, these are Italian American and Jewish American female bodies from the

¹² The Möbius strip is invoked by Grosz to show 'the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another. The model also provides a way of problematizing and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of the one into the other, the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside' (1994: xii). Grosz uses the phrase 'lived body' in her discussion, in order to suggest a meeting of body and mind: 'the ways in which the body must be psychically constituted in order for the subject to acquire a sense of its place in the world and in connection with others' (xii). I wish to convey this sense of melding interiority and exteriority in my discussion.

¹³ Grosz cites Lingus's chapter 'Savages' in his book *Excesses: Eros and Culture* (New York: State University of New York, 1984).

¹⁴ Grosz's argument is clearly influenced by the writings of Michel Foucault, who discussed the operations of power that govern the body. Foucault states that 'nothing is more material, physical, corporal than the exercise of power' (1980: 57-8). He refers to the 'heavy, ponderous, meticulous and constant [...] investment of the body by power' that characterised the 'formidable disciplinary regimes' of various institutions from the eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century: 'schools, hospitals, barracks, factories, cities, lodgings, families' (58). Foucault famously examined various closed institutions: the asylum in *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique: Folie et déraison [Madness and Civilization]* (Paris: Plon, 1961), the hospital in *Naissance de la Clinique [The Birth of the Clinic]* (Paris: PUF, 1963), and the prison in *Surveiller et Punir [Discipline and Punishment]* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975). It is in this latter text that Foucault discusses the 'new political anatomy' of eighteenth century Europe; a disciplining of the body that involved a 'policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour' (1991: 138). Referring to his analysis of the framework of control, we can make an analogy to the discipline of the daughter's body through the regulation of cleanliness, dress, and posture.

rising lower-middle classes which, at the macrocosmic level, are being assimilated into post-war, capitalistic American society, and at the microcosmic level, are affected by the operations of the familial-class group.

The painful and violent inscriptions of the body of the daughter by her parents, its inscription as a 'lived body' with the concurrent emotional or psychic scarring, can be read in various ways. Di Prima addresses the specificity of female experience – 'life as a woman' – as does Grosz, working toward the theory that male and female bodies are subject to a 'differential production' of corporeality (Grosz 1994: 144).¹⁵ Through the writing of *Recollections* di Prima wished to 'understand what messages I got about being a woman' (2001a: 26-7). She questions: 'How to do it. Or get through. Or bear it' (27). The message she received from Emma was that a woman's life was one of endurance and suffering. Di Prima recalls as a small child being burned in the kitchen and being told by her mother:

*Women had to learn to bear more pain than men. That was just how they were made. Women [...] had periods, had babies; even in cooking and cleaning they got hurt more. I would, she assured me, get used to it. My fingers would get callused, and pots and fire wouldn't hurt as they did now. I looked forward to this armor as a good thing, she described it as a blessing.*¹⁶ (2001: 26)

¹⁵ Yet this focus is absent from Foucault's analysis of the corporeal nature of power relations within an institution. Grosz states that 'until his last writings, the concept of the body that he utilized is a "neutral," sexually indifferent, and thus abstract body. Implicitly, or without adequately acknowledging it, Foucault talks only about the male body' (1994: 157). Grosz advocates the reconsideration of Foucault's argument with regard to gender because, to take one example, 'the treatment of prisoners is especially clearly sexually linked—the kinds of punishment received, the kinds of crimes committed, the kinds of judgements (and what it is that is judged) are clearly different for the two sexes in ways that he does not explain' (157).

¹⁶ Gillian A. Bendelow and Simon J. Williams have studied beliefs about the perceived differing abilities of male and female subjects for tolerating pain, finding that most people believe women to have an innate ability to 'cope' with pain better than men; with the experience of childbirth, the 'ultimate pain' as one male interviewee stated, often being given as a reason why women 'cope' better (1998: 204). They state: 'The view was repeatedly expressed by both women and men that the combination of female biology and the reproductive role served to equip girls and women with a "natural" capacity to endure pain, not only physically, but also emotionally' (205). The article discusses perceptions of pain rather than the physiological experience of pain.

Although in the di Prima household women were ‘embodied’ in the sense that they submitted to biological destiny, di Prima presents Emma’s ‘disembodiment’. Di Prima imagines a scene that suggests her mother’s repression: ‘Mom undressing for bed in a closet every night of her married life, getting into bed in her nightgown’ (33). She even believes such bedtime rituals could have been at her father’s insistence, imagining her parents estranged from each other’s bodies. She considers that ‘perhaps they never looked at each other naked,’ and therefore how could she herself ‘know what a body was, my body?’ (34).¹⁷

After gender, another point of consideration in the corporeal inscription of the daughter is class – Emma’s aspirations to an ideal of middle-class propriety with its attendant well-groomed children. Di Prima presents the autonomy of the child being negated by the image of ‘determined perfection’ (28). She pictures the children’s Sunday best: ‘spring coats’, with di Prima in a ‘skimpy dress’ and her brother in ‘short pants’ (34). Di Prima views these ‘trappings from the Brooklyn department stores,’ being both beyond the family’s financial reach and unpractical on a cold, windy Easter Sunday. She recalls her mother enthusiastically observing from the window of their house as they walked down the street, presenting the image of ‘two “nicely dressed” Americanly dressed (or so she thought) children’ (34). The background of the street produced an image which froze the family in space and time, and ‘anchored us all to America, to Brooklyn-before-the-War’ (34). Through its

¹⁷ A particular incident highlights Emma’s lack of self-worth and respect for her own and her family’s bodies, their very flesh. When di Prima is an adult struggling to support her young family, Emma encourages her to take part in paid cosmetic testing that she has already signed up for. The work involved the application of a cream to each arm, then going to a laboratory for testing wherein di Prima is shocked to find that ‘a small round *deep* piece of flesh was cut from each arm’ (2001: 35). Di Prima relates her ‘horror’ in the realisation that her mother suggested she take part, believing di Prima would be grateful for the money; that ‘the body was commodity, not person.’ She is shocked at Emma’s ‘*acquiescence* in being degraded so’ (36).

constructed, photograph-like stasis, the image she has constructed allows Emma a sense of identity and security.

Di Prima recounts being told by admiring adult onlookers that she ‘looked nice’ and she deconstructs the phrase to highlight the emptiness of the desired image and its attendant denial of the self:

there was nothing intrinsic about it, it had nothing to do with your body, your face, your hair. As who you were had nothing to do with your mind, your perceptions. You Look Nice meant that somehow the right things had been done to you to effect a certain image (which you, yourself, could never quite perceive, and therefore could never duplicate). At issue was, how long you could hold it all in place: the sock cuffs, the locks of hair. How much you could breathe or move and still contain it. (33)

As well as giving an indictment of her mother’s painful shaping of her daughter, di Prima shows antipathy toward the images of propriety that were dependent upon the constraint and painful styling of the body. Her experimentations with bohemian styles of dress and image after she leaves the family home express this eschewal of Emma’s treatment of the body. As a child she was able to see that ‘*the poorest of the great aunts lived better than we did. Were more loved and loving, lived in more beautiful homes (their altars, and pictures)*’ (42-3).¹⁸ Johnson’s and Jones’s memoirs delineate a similar distrust of images of middle-class propriety, and the Beat generation as a whole felt the weight of the paternal generation as it extended throughout society. Their reinvention of community as ‘family’, informal dress and style, and adoption of the *poète maudit* role, can be read against the parental culture.

¹⁸ We can compare Virginia Woolf’s recommendation for the woman writer’s ‘Killing the Angel in the House’ (1979: 60).

Ultimately factors like gender and class are bound together in their effects upon the body of the child.¹⁹ Another context that marks the child in di Prima's text is the extended Italian American familial community, and for a thorough understanding of this institution it is necessary to dig a little deeper, by turning to the experiences of the grandparental generation.

¹⁹ In their Foucauldian argument Breines and Gordon advocate the need to balance the individual's actions against the social background in their sociological analysis of the operations of power in the family. They state:

To understand any act of family violence requires looking at its overall contexts and patterns, but simultaneously searching for specific meanings. Closely connected to this need for specificity is the importance of qualitative, as well as quantitative, forms of insight. This includes looking at the participants' self-understanding. It also involves the integration of psychological and cultural analyses into behavioural descriptions of intimate relationships, whether between children and parents or between adults. No act of violence is simply the pitting of one individual against another; each contains deep cultural and psychological meanings. At the same time, no act of violence is merely the expression of a social problem (or a culture) such as poverty or unemployment or male dominance; each is also the personal act of a unique individual. (1983: 530)

For this discussion it is vital to balance the individual's actions against the social background, as Breines and Gordon advocate.

Part II: 'The Splitting of a Tribe': History and Postmemory

The life histories of a grandparental generation born in Europe provide our writers with what Marianne Hirsch refers to as 'postmemory', the memory belonging to 'the child of survivors' (1997: 22).²⁰ It is 'distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection', and its 'connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation' (22). Hirsch cites the 'postmemory' of children of Holocaust survivors, and for Beat generation writers the sense of trauma passed down could be connected not only to the Holocaust, but to the processes of immigration and assimilation into American life. Although they were immersed in their own bohemian worlds, the men and women of the Beat generation would turn at different points in their writing to their family histories.

Part of the project of the 'New American Poetry' defined by Donald Allen, was to find a new America. This America would be found in the writers looking back to the neglected or secret histories, which could be literary, cultural or familial. Allen states that '[William Carlos] Williams (*In the American Grain*) was one of the first to reveal to them the rich lodes of American history, of the actual conditions of the American experience' (1967: 10).²¹ As noted in Chapter Two, Allen was dismissive of the 'huge bulk' of American writers who sound 'like immigrants or exiles or cultural remittance men, like expatriates or repatriates dwelling unhappily in the dismal villages and squalid cities, the inhospitable desert of the American land' (10).²² By 'rescuing' Pound, Williams and Whitman, the New American Poetry defined its

²⁰ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1997).

²¹ William Carlos Williams, *In the American Grain* (New York: Boni, 1925).

²² See also p. 62 of this thesis.

literary lineages. By citing figures such as jazz musicians and hobos, who had been previously ignored in American discourse, it defined its cultural lineages, thus presenting a new 'America'. Family members belong amongst these secret heroes too, for example, Jack Kerouac's French-Canadian grandfather Jean-Baptiste Kerouac, who in the 1880s 'used to go out on the porch in big thunderstorms and swing his kerosene lamp at the lightning and yell "Go ahead, go, if you're more powerful than I am strike me and put the light out"' (Kerouac [1959] 1998: 57). For Kerouac this man was an antecedent of an America 'invested with wild selfbelieving individuality' which 'had begun to disappear around the end of World War II with so many great guys dead' (59). Or there was Allen Ginsberg's troubled Russian émigré mother Naomi, the subject of his long poem 'Kaddish', to which I turn later.

For the slightly-younger women writers, it is a grandparent who existed as a bridge to the old country, for example, Diane di Prima's Italian anarchist grandfather Domenico Mallozzi, and Joyce Johnson's grandfather Samuel Rosenberg, a man with literary aspirations whose poverty in the New World contributed to his suicide. 'Postmemory' is accidentally discovered – perhaps overheard by the child behind the kitchen door or unearthed in documents kept hidden in an attic – and the writers take painful pleasure in returning to these secret sites of conflict.

Emma di Prima's understanding of the body's habituation to pain appears as a perversion of the plenitude and harmonious gender division that di Prima found in the household of her Italian maternal grandmother Antoinette Mallozzi. The image of Antoinette opens *Recollections* and she is presented as an idealised mother figure in opposition to Emma. Di Prima describes sitting at her grandmother's knee, while the older woman said her rosary: 'She smelled of lemons and olive oil, garlic and waxes and mysterious herbs. I loved to touch her skin' (2001a: 1). The house was pervaded

by the presence of the old, Mediterranean world: its 'dark and mellow light, almost as if there were fire and kerosene lamps'; dark rooms with 'light filtering [...] through paper shades and lace curtains, and falling then on dark heavy furniture (mahogany and walnut) and onto floors and surfaces yellowed with many layers of lemon oil' (1). This intimate and sensuous scene can be read as the true maternal embrace displaced from Emma to Antoinette. Di Prima describes the co-existence of these disparate worlds as 'a schizophrenia of sorts. Two worlds so different that even at this distance they don't seem to be part of the same life' (22). After their extended stay in hospital mother and newborn baby returned to Antoinette's house in the Bronx, and di Prima imagines that it was 'in Antoinette's arms that I first tasted safety. The smell of her body even then was the smell of home' (22-3). Antoinette provided the first model of femininity for di Prima – 'my earliest sense of what it means to be a woman was learned from my grandmother [...] at her knee' (1). The old Mediterranean world is glimpsed through sensations from nature – woods, oils, herbs – and such proximity to the natural world colours this model of motherhood. Through their work of cleaning the house and preparing food, the lives of the women di Prima describes here are based on catering to the physical needs of the family. She learnt that women were 'the very basis and ground of human life. Babies are born and raised, the food is cooked. The world is cleaned and mended and kept in order' (3).²³

In this representation of an early childhood memory the light 'fell as if on old oil paintings,' and the house's 'subtle air of mystery' was underlined by its sepia portraits of Emma Goldman and Dante (1).²⁴ Art and intellectual or political ideas were the domain of di Prima's grandfather, with the portraits symbolising his world.

²³ Di Prima retains aspects of this traditional, domestic model in her writing's celebration of reproduction and motherhood, a point which will be addressed in my following chapter.

²⁴ Although she is named after the anarchist 'Red Emma', ironically, di Prima's mother appears as a symbol of conformity.

Domenico Mallozzi was an atheist and anarchist, who was a tailor by trade but later assisted in a pharmacy, leading di Prima to imagine him as an ‘alchemist’ (15). Men existed outside the continuity and practicality of the women’s world; they are unpredictable, exciting, willing to ‘*throw everything over for an ideal*’ (2), and therefore able to bring ‘something more than we already had or knew, into our lives’ (3). Di Prima describes the men’s ‘specialness and relative uselessness’ in relation to the women’s world she knew, and she learned to see them as a ‘luxury’ (2; 3).²⁵

Domenico is figured as the ideal father figure, in the place of di Prima’s father. Domenico’s impractical and cerebral masculinity may appear opposed to Antoinette’s practical femininity grounded in the body, however, his body is also a source of comfort and pleasure. The author relates that ‘the sight and feel of soft, dry wrinkled skin was associated with the sight and feel of love. Of those who had the time to listen, to tell a story’ (3). Storytelling becomes a sensuous, embodied act as she describes sitting on Domenico’s lap listening to his stories, ‘sometimes *facing the wall* together as if to shut out distractions’ (9). She remembers ‘certain corners’ they would go for their ‘exchanges’ where they would not be disturbed by ‘the grownups’: “‘Leave the child alone. . . . Come on, Diane, your mother (or whoever) wants you. . . . Pop is a little crazy” (an aside, an undertone)’ (9). They would share ‘forbidden cups of espresso, heavily sweetened’ and he would read her Dante or teach her some Italian, the language forbidden her by her parents (7). He would conjure images of the Old World, describing ‘the olive groves in the south’ until the child ‘saw them blowing silver-green in the wind’ (7). He promised to take her there ‘after the war’

²⁵ Bendelow and Williams note the traditional gendered distinction between private and public domains, that ‘women are intrinsically linked with the family, which is the location of bodily and “lower” functions, whereas men are more readily associated with cultural, mental and “higher” processes of the public world and paid work’ (1998: 205). The model of her grandparents di Prima presents certainly attests to this distinction.

although he would die before the war ended, leaving di Prima with postmemory, since she grew up ‘nostalgic for a land I’d never seen’ (7).

Di Prima presents a pivotal moment when Domenico confesses to her his uncertainty and despair with the world: ‘Someday you are going to go out at night and look at the stars and will wonder how they got there. Then you’ll study like I studied, and you’ll suffer like I suffered, and *in the end you’ll find nothing*’ (9). Despite being a small child she felt with a ‘child’s certitude’ that there was no truth to this nothingness, or rather ‘the despair that accompanied the word [‘nothing’] had no truth’. She was being ‘recruited’ into ‘a world larger than life’ and she wished to ‘go forward, with him into the darkness. The struggle for Truth. Only, for me, the darkness held no despair’ (9-10). Di Prima posits this exchange with her grandfather as initiating her quest toward poetry. Then and there she made a ‘vow’ to ‘make meaning in the world [...] for him, for myself. The dark was luminous, of that I was certain’ (10). Provocatively, di Prima regards their exchange of secrets and knowledge as the model for her lovers to come: ‘Without further touch or words, we shaped the prototype, the pattern for all my deepest loves to come. Always this despair, this hope, this luminous dark. The conspiracy between us was complete’ (10).

As well as providing a sense of their Italian heritage and bequeathing his passion for knowledge and poetry, Domenico is valued for showing her a political consciousness grounded in love. In ‘April Fool Birthday Poem for Grandpa’ (1971) di Prima presents the childhood memory of watching her grandfather address the crowd at a political rally: ‘me listening in / spring Bronx dusk, breathing stars, so glorious / to me your white hair, your height your fierce / blue eyes, rare among italians’ (1971: 3). In this speech he asserted ‘love’: ‘the love you told us had to come or we / die’. This love is the connection between the two contexts of the poem: Domenico’s

anarchism during the inter-war years, and by extension his ‘ilk, for Carlo Tresca, / for Sacco and Vanzetti’, and the political protests of the New Left in the late 1960s in which di Prima was involved (3).²⁶ Writing the poem ‘in the gathering madness’ she feels this same love: ‘I embrace / strangers on the street, filled with their love and / mine’; she listens as ‘young men with light in their faces / at my table, talking love, talking revolution / which is love, spelled backwards, how you would love us all, would thunder your anarchist wisdom / at us’ (3).²⁷ Both scenes in the poem are linked across time by radical politics and the shadow of war. Di Prima suggests that this love her grandfather espoused is an alternative path to violence. She effectively adjusts her lineage, to bypass her own parents, and claim a lineage of radical Romanticism through her grandfather; a move typical of a self-styling Beat generation author.

Anthony Libby places the di Prima of *Revolutionary Letters* in the context of late 1960s radical politics, stating that the text

dramatizes the dichotomy between love and revolution, often speaking out of emotions far from love. [...] It is of its time in the best and worst of ways, sometimes revealing what seems from certain contemporary perspectives not just inclinations that are no longer fashionable on the left, but reactionary and destructive tendencies. Yet those counterprogressive attitudes form part of a

²⁶ Di Prima worked with the Diggers in San Francisco in the late 1960s, ‘distributing free food’ (1990: 199). Her book *Revolutionary Letters* (1971), of which the first poem ‘April Birthday Poem’ is a prefatory frame, divulges her involvement with the anti-war movement.

²⁷ The poem sets up an intertextual dialogue with the poem ‘In Memory of Radio’ by her lover LeRoi Jones, which features in his *Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note* (New York: Totem/Corinth, 1961):

& Love is an evil word.
 Turn it backwards/see, see what I mean?
 An evol word. & besides
 who understands it?
 I certainly wouldn’t like to go out on that kind of limb.
 (Charters 1992: 340)

Di Prima’s allusion to Jones’s reversal of the word ‘love’ as ‘evol’ (‘evil’) adds a sinister undercurrent to her revolution, while also creating a poetic dialogue with Jones.

stream of thought leading to the gentler (on the whole) progressive attitudes of today. (2002: 57)

Despite invoking her grandfather's recommendation for 'love' at the start of the text, Prima's revolution is often a violent one here, with some examples being: 'SMASH THE MEDIA, I said, / AND BURN THE SCHOOLS'; 'the vortex of political creation is the vortex of flesh destruction' (1971: 21; 22) (capitals in original). These examples appear out of context, but Libby argues that anger is a consistent strand in di Prima's work, noting the blending of 'love and anger' in the 1950s poetry, and its apogee in *Revolutionary Letters* (50). From the 1970s onwards, her poetry is often grounded in the Buddhist contemplative mode, although *Loba* (1971-1978) equates the wolf-goddess protagonist with various destructive figures from myth, such as Kali. The origins of anger are explored in *Recollections*, with the idealised state of the safe grandparental world disrupted by the violence and anger of the parents; a shift mirroring the movement from Italy to America.²⁸

Di Prima presents her parents as troubled people, and their abuse of their daughter is contextualised with regard to the troubles of the divided Italian American community.²⁹ Firstly, di Prima's surrounding familial world is split in two: Mallozzis and di Primas. Emma's class consciousness and disdain toward her husband's allegedly inferior side of the family – 'these matters were discussed only by my

²⁸ In 'Light/and Keats' di Prima explains her readings of Gnosticism, which suggest that the material world is 'a hideous monstrosity, it's a prison, a trap, the only thing we can do here is get out of here as fast as we can' (1978: 30). She describes herself as an 'escapee' from a Europe in which such heretical ideas were persecuted by the Christian Church: 'I feel that particular tradition is my tradition, and that the information I have to receive comes through the study of these forms' (32). In *Recollections* di Prima imagines the 'secret Gnosticism of Dante, of my grandfather, who so claimed the here and now in his politics, passed through the hysteria and grief of my mother, and arrived as the message "this world is intolerable". Translated by me, age two or three, to "This world is not real. Does not take precedence"; thereby she grounds her life as an artist, an investigator of 'other worlds', in the family (2001a: 37-8).

²⁹ Blossom S. Kirschenbaum's 'Diane di Prima: Extending La Famiglia' in *MELUS* 14.3-4 (1987): 53-67 and Roseanne Giannini Quinn's "'The Willingness to Speak": Diane di Prima and Italian American Feminist Body Politics' in *MELUS* 28.3 (2003): 175-193 examine di Prima's various publications against the context of her Italian American background.

mother and her sisters, and usually in Neapolitan' – is viewed by di Prima as contributing to her father's rage (2001: 45-6). Di Prima hints at the racism in her mother's pride over her father having the blue eyes of a 'northern' Italian (46). She sees her own father's role as an 'apologist and rescuer of his father; his brothers and sisters. To feel them a handicap, and care for them as duty. Straining to please his wife and her sisters. Caught between' (48). She sensed the deep-seated notion: 'His genes not okay.' Di Prima describes a constant state of war:

For me [the war] is everywhere: the War between my parents, the War between myself and the entity they are, the War between all the family and what I have gathered is a hostile world. My father goes out into it and returns discouraged. There is War upon war in my world, and they are all muted, hushed—my parents never argue. (18)

She conflates the various wars at home with the war in Europe, 'some vast global entity', which existed as a larger manifestation of the trouble she felt as a child (18). Before the United States entered the war the events in Europe appeared to the young di Prima as a distant threat to the 'homeland.' Di Prima relates that the Second World War was a primary cause of the fear and division within the community. Overhearing her parents' hushed conversation in secret Italian she senses the fear in her father's voice as he states '*We can't get out of it now*' and in her mother's 'whimper of agreement' (18). Her memory is of her parents as 'helpless, cowed people' who 'don't know how to survive,' (18) and she states that the 'sense of confidence I feel with my grandparents never returns with my parents' (19). Her parents' reaction can be read as symptomatic of their status as first-generation Italian Americans: at a loss in the country they have been born in, split between the Old World and the new American world.

With the war nearing, the family of her paternal grandfather's brother decide to 'go home,' to return to Sicily (20). However her grandfather's family chose to stay and therefore 'the family was being "divided"'. Di Prima recalls being taken down to the docks, the 'air was rich with the soft sound of Sicilian' (21). This is a tangible division and retrospectively di Prima gives this 'splitting of a tribe' the significance of a 'Mediterranean, or North African ritual' that collectively 'we had all engaged in many times before.' Di Prima speculates on the North African roots of her father's Sicilian family, suggesting a commonality of those peoples from lands on the Mediterranean Sea. Looking at a picture of her father's mother she states that her grandmother 'had the soft face and large, round eyes of an Arab woman' (11). Elsewhere she describes a dream of the funeral of an uncle which takes place in 'an ancient church in Sicily' (15). She believes the church to be actually 'like a mosque' and there is Arabic music playing. She states: 'In the dream, it is very important for me to understand how "Arabic" my people are (the Sicilian side of the family). It will help me to understand my life' (16). Di Prima stages the familiar Beat preoccupation with darkness as difference. Di Prima's speculative perception of her Arabic roots appears more intuitive and visceral than the male Beat writers' more detached interest in the 'fellaheen'.³⁰

When the United States joined World War Two, there was fear amongst di Prima's family that, as Italian Americans, they would have to fight against 'their own people' (21). Her father's alienation with regard to America and his loyalty to Italy is

³⁰ The daughter's identification with an historical 'other' was staged in Sylvia Plath's poem 'Daddy' from *Ariel* (London: Faber, 1965). Plath famously, and controversially, speculated on Jewish roots, using her imagined identity as a Jewess to posit victimization against an omnipotent and sadistic father-figure who is coded as a Nazi. Further identification with a Holocaust victim is seen in 'Lady Lazarus' from the same collection. Plath's father Otto Plath was a German immigrant, and her mother Aurelia Schober Plath had Austrian immigrant parents, but Jacqueline Rose suggests the reader avoid literal interpretations of such poems: 'The point is surely not to try and establish whether Plath was part Jewish or not. The fact of her being Jewish could not *legitimate* the identification – it is, after all, precisely offered as an identification – any more than the image of her father as a Nazi which now follows can be invalidated by reference to Otto Plath' (1992: 229).

expressed when he announces, *'Well, we lost,'* after the atomic bomb was dropped (50).

Di Prima further elucidates her family's position as Italian Americans. She relates an inherited 'immigrant fear' was grounded in the supposition: 'Anything could happen to you anytime, and mostly it wouldn't be good' (42). Di Prima tells a family story which illuminates the real isolation that characterised many immigrant communities in New York City in the early twentieth century, involving Antoinette Mallozzi getting lost while shopping in the Bronx neighbourhood she had known for twenty years. Apparently a shoemaker's sign in the shape of 'a woman's boot' had marked the place where she turned to get home (42). When it was unexpectedly removed, Antoinette 'wandered for hours, till Domenico finally found her, not all that far from her house' (42). Without knowledge of the street layout beyond her closed locale, perhaps unable to read the English language street names, the Italian woman is potentially in danger. This family story told to the children points to the origins of immigrant fear and at the same time actively perpetuates fear down the generations.³¹ Emma's 'real hysteria' which occurred if her children or husband were late coming home, and other fears can be related to living through the war: 'Will I wake at night and hear "them" outside my door, arresting, killing my returning love?' (42). Di Prima describes the 'suspicion and mistrust' with which her parents faced the outside world as the 'immigrant syndrome turned to paranoia' (38).

By detailing the experiences of 'The Branded', her high school 'girl gang', di Prima provides a context for a pervasive immigrant trauma. Di Prima recounts: 'we came from a maddened people. [...] Our parents, destroyed by depression, war, fear, greed. By being immigrants in a land of conformity. Turned on us daily, we had only

³¹ Yet the story also highlights the generational difference between the ill-equipped grandmother and her granddaughter's eventual possession of New York's streets as a young woman in the 1950s.

each other' (73-4). In comparison, di Prima's troubled family life was 'no stranger than anyone else's' (72). Detailing the group, di Prima describes Carol Swidorski: 'Polish and odder than I was' (72); Sylvia, who left school 'to live on a kibbutz with her lover'; Gloria, 'whose father (she told us) was a murderer from Spain'; Susan 'who also came from a one parent family. Day after day, she came to school with tales of being terrorized or beaten'; Gaby from Berlin, whose stepfather was a 'Freudian analyst'; Bobi, 'skinny, Lithuanian and poor, with a kind of fierce slum energy' (73); Renée, 'an Armenian who cried almost all the time'; and finally Audre Lorde, later the celebrated poet: 'Black and fierce, and in those days often unreadable. She kept us guessing with her eyes and her silence.' Listing her friends di Prima catalogues their diversity of racial origins and the cultural eccentricity of an unassimilated parental generation, whose daughters bore the brunt of their madness and indeed became physically and emotionally 'branded'.

There is no comparable sustained physical violence mentioned in Joyce Johnson's and Hettie Jones's memoirs. But both authors relate the emotional results of disconnection from Jewish roots as their families assimilated into America. Jones states: 'The milk/meat rule was all that remained of the kosher laws. My parents only spoke Yiddish to hide things. Even in English they rarely referred to a past. Their families had come from Poland, or was it Russia, they weren't sure' (1997: 9). Brooklyn, where the family lived before moving out to the more affluent (but less racially diverse) Laurelton, Queens, was 'nothing to speak of either, as if poverty rendered you undeserving of history' (9). This upward mobility draws lines across New York City and Jones magnified such divisions through her move to live independently on the Lower East Side. This revived uncomfortable memories for her

family because it held ‘some secret old New York [...]. Laurelton never spoke of that place, just as they never would see my return to it’ (9).

Jones inherited the dark looks of her father Oscar Cohen, marking her difference within white America. Her already-fractured sense of Jewishness suffered tangible dislocation due to the splitting from her family when she married an African American man. She knew Judaism would not accommodate her desires and choices. Jones recalls her last visit to Laurelton before her marriage to attend a service on Yom Kippur in order to make confession. She chose to confess ‘the sin of breaking off the yoke, [...] for being someone these people could not influence, or hold’ (62). She restages her sentiment that, ‘Everything I want is outside’ (62). When she became pregnant her rabbi told her that her child’s race would not matter to him as long as it was a Jew, but Jones admits she did not believe him. She considers her place in the wider American world and her choices: ‘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’ (14). Growing up she knew that America was ‘the only place in the world where Jews weren’t dead’ but admits she ‘didn’t *feel* American’ (35). To the young Jones, American culture was the ‘Top 40s, and the Grand Ole Opry on the radio, the *goyische* Mozart and Chopin I played’ (35). She enjoyed singing Hebrew at synagogue, pushing ‘those ancient, non-Western tones’ through her nose. Jones admits her ambition was to be a cantor or ‘*chazen*’, although girls were prohibited from this role until 1987. Her parents, who attended synagogue only once a year, referred to their daughter as ‘*rebbitzen*’ meaning ‘rabbi’s wife’, due to her adolescent fervour for Judaism which embarrassed them. Because of her experience of

estrangement as an outsider Jew in the white American world, she admits that the binary of 'black/white' became a 'slippery division' (34).

Similarly, Johnson shows the splitting off of her own family from their orthodox Jewish relatives:

We were gentle people, genteel, Gentile almost—unlike my mother's cousins who still lived in Flatbush, whom we'd sometimes see on Jewish holidays, traveling out there on the subway with boxes of cake. They were loud, unrefined, yelling good-naturedly or fiercely across the mountains of heavy food on the table, always putting more on your plate than you could possibly eat, crowding out the specter of leaner days. (1994: 18)

Johnson subtly invokes the ghosts of the Holocaust while highlighting the shame of immigrant poverty as a factor in this conscious dislocation from familial roots.

Johnson's orthodox relatives in Flatbush appear at ease in their bodies. They 'ate' and 'accumulated flesh, became thick of arm and thigh, produced chubby, red-cheeked, nearsighted children who studied Hebrew after school—dutiful sons, daughters who would learn the facts of life in the marital bed at an early age' (18). Although Johnson does not covet the particular biological destiny of the cousins, she senses the acknowledgement and acceptance of physicality in this world from which her mother 'had struggled to escape' (18). When Johnson moved to the Lower East Side this wilful downward mobility was found incomprehensible by her mother: these were the very 'streets my grandparents had struggled so hard to stay out of' (208).

An incident in Johnson's early career highlights her distance from Jewish lore. When she applied for a job at a publishing company, she was rejected immediately, and told to look for employment in other fields. 'Had there been a spot on the white gloves I wore only to job interviews? Had my chignon started to slip?', wondered Johnson (147). It was much later when she realised she had probably been

disqualified because of her Jewish surname 'Glassman'. Her mother would have realised what had occurred immediately, she guesses, 'but she had educated me too well into forgetfulness of being Jewish' (148).

Johnson's second memoir, *Missing Men*, narrates Johnson's discovery of the painful details of her Jewish heritage. After her grandmother had died and 'the wall around the past briefly became permeable', Johnson's aunt showed her a photograph of her grandfather Samuel Rosenberg, a 'poet and scholar, the descendant of a long line of eminent rabbis in Warsaw' who had sailed to America with his wife and youngest children in the 1890s (2004: 5). Up until that point, the sixteen-year old Johnson had been told that her grandfather had died when he was thirty-seven years old, of some unmentioned illness. But her aunt reveals the truth, that after injuring his hands in a factory and been unemployed for a while, he had committed suicide. Her aunt admonishes, 'Don't tell your mother I told you' (5). The skills for which Rosenberg had been regarded as a 'promising young man in Warsaw had no negotiable value' in New York, 'a world in which he could not find his bearings' (9). Johnson includes family photographs throughout *Missing Men*: recovered photographs of Rosenberg, her parents, aunts, and as the text develops into the next two sections, photographs of both of Johnson's husbands. For Hirsch, photographs are the 'medium connecting first- and second-generation remembrance, memory and postmemory'; they are 'leftovers, the fragmentary sources and building blocks, shot through with holes'³² [...] affirm[ing] the past's existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbridgeable distance' (1997: 23).

This distance is repeatedly shown by Johnson, for example, when she found a photograph of a man she believed to be her great-grandfather among her late mother's

³² Hirsch is borrowing this expression from Henri Raczymow's piece 'Memory Shot Through With Holes', *Yale French Studies* 85 (1994): 98-105.

belongings. He appeared 'a reflective, spiritual-looking person', but Johnson writes with poignancy: 'I'll never know his name. There's no one alive who remembers it' (8). The past was eroded early on when Samuel Rosenberg's widow and children changed their name from 'Rosenberg' to the anglicized 'Ross' (11). Johnson regards her mother's pursuit of voice training as her 'sole bearable connection to the cultured, artistic father she scarcely remembered, the one thing she had from Samuel Rosenberg in the way of a birthright'; and she passed this on through her vicarious pushing of Johnson's early career as a child actress, 'not as a gift but as an obligation to be lived out, on her terms' (4). The author describes her own efforts at 'resurrecting' her grandfather, searching for him in 'exiles, in artists who could not find acceptance, in the rage and sadness of these men that would make me fall in love with them and ultimately leave me alone again with my freedom' (11). The earlier text *Minor Characters* is put into perspective, as the journey which takes the woman writer into the Beat generation appears retrospectively to have its origins in her familial heritage.

Family history, with its pain and poverty is a source of shame for the assimilated parental generation in the respective memoirs by Johnson, Jones, and di Prima. Conceding to American middle-class order and propriety meant the disavowal of not just a more embodied familial history, but European cultural difference. The Jewish link can be made to Allen Ginsberg's family history, which he appropriates for his long poem 'Kaddish' (1961). As a counterpoint to our discussion, the poem articulates the experience of being the son of a 'mad' Russian Jewish immigrant mother. Relatively speaking, it would be much later on in their writing careers that women writers would give sustained interrogations of family history.

'Kaddish' was provoked by Naomi Ginsberg's (1894-1956) death, and stands as an imaginative offering of the traditional Kaddish prayer which was not read at

Naomi's funeral because a '*minyan*', a quorum of ten Jewish men, was not present (Miles 2002: 203). Ginsberg was on the West Coast at the time of her death, and thus themes of guilt, grief and remembrance inform the poem. As a piece of family history it describes Naomi's shifting mental states over the years – repeated breakdowns and paranoia concerning persecution from Hitler or her family members acting on his behalf. Naomi had moved to the United States as a child with her family in 1905 from Vitebsk in Russia's Jewish Pale (4-5). The first pogroms had begun in the territory that year and Vitebsk itself would later be razed by the Nazis. This sense of various trajectories of anti-Semitic persecution gives a context to 'Kaddish', along with Naomi's incongruity as a Communist Party member in the New World. In 'Part IV' of the poem the sense of breakdown and dislocation is staged on the mother's body, with successive images building up with the cumulative effect of a litany:

with your sagging belly

with your fear of Hitler

with your mouth of bad short stories

with your fingers of rotten mandolins

with your arms of fat Paterson porches

with your belly of strikes and smokestacks

with your chin of Trotsky and the Spanish War

with your voice singing for the decaying overbroken workers

with your nose of bad lay with your nose of the smell of the pickles

of Newark

with your eyes

with your eyes of Russia

(Ginsberg [1961] 1992: 97)

In his invocation of his mother's body, Naomi's body parts are identified with various geographic locales which have been sites of conflict, trauma, and brutality – Spain, 'false China', 'starving India' (97). In this way the terrain of the mother's body spans several continents, a distance reflecting her movement from her roots in Russia to later life in America. Like the familiar role of Beat generation women, Naomi is a witness, with the various international political events her 'eyes' have seen being a testament to her egalitarian concerns. Ginsberg's lament for Naomi's lost radical politics resonates with di Prima's 'April Fool Birthday Poem for Grandpa.' As in di Prima's work, in 'Kaddish' the personal remains political as Ginsberg juxtaposes international political events with Naomi's personal history by picturing her sister Elanor, her early sexual experiences, and her poverty. Scenes of mundane, everyday life in Paterson and Newark appear alongside those international sites of trauma. Naomi has 'eyes of America taking a fall' and America's decline is juxtaposed with her own physical and mental fragmentation:

with your eyes being led away by policemen to an ambulance

with your eyes strapped down on the operating table

with your eyes with the pancreas removed

with your eyes of appendix operation

with your eyes of abortion

with your eyes of ovaries removed

with your eyes of shock

with your eyes of lobotomy

with your eyes of divorce

with your eyes of stroke

(97-8)

Ginsberg presents the body of the immigrant woman as metaphorically representative of the political and geographic dislocation of the twentieth century. Alicia Suskin Ostriker gives a reading of Ginsberg's earlier poem 'Howl' (1956) which provocatively suggests that the poet records 'in veiled fashion, the humiliation and crippling of a population of immigrants to shores that promised hope and produced despair' (2003: 104).³³ In most critical readings the exploits of the poem's 'angelheaded hipsters' are viewed as firmly entrenched in the Beat subculture (Ginsberg 1997: 9). Ostriker quotes Allen Grossman's statement that this subculture 'takes the place of the real ethnic and political subcultures which in the past succored and gave identity to the outcast by forming a community of outcasts' (116). Ostriker points to a 'mere generation of partial American assimilation' between the Beats and

³³ Ann Charters points to a previously unacknowledged literary influence for 'Howl' in Kenneth Rexroth's poem 'Thou Shalt Not Kill: A Memorial for Dylan Thomas' [1953] from *In Defense of the Earth* (Norfolk: New Directions, 1956). The poem contextualises Thomas's death from alcoholism with other lost writers:

How many stopped writing at thirty?
How many went to work for Time?
How many died of prefrontal
Lobotomies in the Communist Party?
How many are lost in the back wards
Of provincial madhouses?
How many on the advice of
Their psychoanalysts, decided
A business career was best after all?
How many are hopeless alcoholics?
(Charters 1992: 238-9)

By naming various writers such as Vachel Lindsay, Lola Ridge, Elinor Wylie, Sara Teasdale, Maxwell Bodenheim, many of whom were political radicals like Rexroth himself, the poet provided further secret heroes for the community of younger poets, who included the Beats, around him.

‘the Jews of Europe’ (104). The isolated, orphaned bodies of ‘Howl’ are conflated with the foreign bodies of the parental (and grandparental) generation – they are reconnected to their blood lineages. Ostriker describes Naomi as the hidden presence in ‘Howl’ who is exposed in ‘Kaddish’: ‘what is expressed in “Kaddish” is repressed but powerfully latent in “Howl”—so much so that one may also feel the son’s voice to be that of the mother. Does he speak for her, or is she speaking through him?’ (117).³⁴ Yet Ginsberg’s poem stages his discomfort with the ‘drag’ process: the poem not only portrays the dislocation of the maternal body, it also stages its dissection – with Naomi’s body parts being littered across the page. Love is mixed with disgust, especially at the mother’s aging, traumatised body. A remedy for this is to imagine her youth, as a ‘Communist beauty’ in a photograph-like image of order: ‘O Russian faced, woman on the grass, your long black hair / is crowned with flowers, the mandolin is on your knees’; ‘O beautiful Garbo of my Karma’ (93).³⁵

Unlike the slightly younger women writers Ginsberg does not have an amnesiac parental generation to bypass, but through his mother is able to connect directly to a European immigrant lineage with its associations of radical politics. His poem ‘America’ (1956) is a self-conscious monologue addressed to the nation, in which the speaker invokes his intersecting lineages, both familial and political: ‘America I feel sentimental about the Wobblies / America I used to be a communist when I was a kid I’m not sorry’ (1997: 40). The Italian anarchists ‘Sacco & Vanzetti’ are invoked, putting di Prima’s later reference to them in ‘April Fool Birthday Poem for Grandpa’ into context. Ginsberg’s prior reference appears more sophisticated than

³⁴ For another comparison of these poems see Tony Trigilio’s “‘Strange Voices Anew’: Rethinking the Politics of Matter and Spirit in Ginsberg’s *Kaddish*”, *American Literature* 71.4 (1999): 773-795. Trigilio notes the later poem’s ‘recovery of a female principle of divinity from the male comradeship of *Howl*’ (773).

³⁵ Yet Kate McLoughlin’s ‘Dead Prayer?: The Liturgical and Literary Kaddish’, *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 25 (2006): 4-25, regards the poem as embodying rather than dismembering the mother, in a move of post-Holocaust remembrance.

di Prima's, since he is implicating himself in his nation's capitalism, comparing his 'strophes' to Henry Ford's 'automobiles' (42), and stating 'It occurs to me that I am America / I am talking to myself again' (41). In comparison, di Prima's namedropping of Italian anarchists appears mired in the polarities of late 1960s revolutionary politics.

In this chapter I have suggested that far from making made a clean break with the family as they remade their homes within a like-minded Beat-bohemian community, our writers were still rooted in the their familial contexts.³⁶ These ghostly familial presences gradually emerged in the writings. The figure of 'Mom' looms large for both male and female Beat generation writers, but in the case of women writers at least, this relationship was not fully addressed until the later memoir work, often written after the parents had died. The past comes to hold meanings that were previously unknown, and lineages dating back to a Europe of conflict and painful departures are mined in the writing. 'Postmemory' is claimed and grandmothers and grandfathers – Antoinette and Domenico Mallozzi, Samuel Rosenberg – become valued for their warmth, compassion, and intellectual or creative pursuits, while their trauma in the new American world is commemorated. Memoir writing becomes an act of love as mothers and fathers are ultimately redeemed in di Prima's *Recollections* and Johnson's *Missing Men*.

³⁶ For another discussion of Beat foreign bodies see Maria Damon's chapter of the African American/Jewish poet Bob Kaufman in *The Dark End of the Street: Margins in American Vanguard Poetry* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993), 32-76.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Internal Journeys: Home, Domesticity and Embodied Subjects

Part I: 'Discovering Together the Life of the Body'

Before turning to the journeys Beat generation women made over American land and beyond its borders in the final chapter of this thesis, I want to elaborate upon the notion of internal journeys. It has already been stated by Joyce Johnson that Beat women's roads 'became the strange lives we were leading' (1999: 48); Diane di Prima has stated that the 'best travel has always been in the realm of the imagination' (Grace and Johnson 2004: 106); and Hettie Jones has stated in reference to her leaving her parents and the Jewish church: 'this is America . . . sometimes you have to go on the road' (1997: 62). In comparison to the 'disembodied' states associated with the parental home, Beat generation bohemia provided opportunities for reclaiming, or rather discovering, their bodies. In this first part of the chapter I illustrate how physical expression through clothing, dance and sexuality enabled this process. The experience of motherhood was often a part of the journey, and so I then relate the various meaning of mothering – being a mother to one's children and being a mother to the literary community.

The painful, restrictive clothing which the mother forced the child into in the 1940s was discussed in the previous chapter. Typical women's fashions of the 1950s also produced painful bodies, as Hettie Jones recalls: 'You can't imagine what it was like to be a woman and be all trussed up in underwear, garter belts, girdles, stockings and high-heeled shoes. The formality of life was so different then' (1997: 14). Jones makes a feminist point, linking restrictive dress to the constraint of thought: 'Because

of the physical discomfort, one couldn't speak one's mind' (14). To stop wearing a girdle in the 1950s, which she did, was a 'radical move' which presaged second-wave feminists' gesture: 'first came the girdle and then came the bra' (Grace and Johnson 2004: 160). She remembers the pleasure in being able to 'think and walk and move without feeling blistered all the time'. To acknowledge that you could have an *ass*' (160) (emphasis in original). Also, wearing trousers was liberating and she recalls that in her college in the 1950s wearing them was banned, and so as drama students they were issued 'garage mechanic uniforms'. Jones saw high-heeled shoes as another problem and after moving to New York she 'threw them in the sewer' and took to wearing 'very weird-looking old lady's shoes from an orthopaedic shoe store' (160).

The liberation of the body from pain-inducing garments is one of the narrative strands of *How I Became Hettie Jones*. Jones tells of reclaiming her grandmother's sewing machine and making her own clothes. In search for clothes to accommodate her changing body shape while pregnant, she found a pattern and made 'two sensible jumpers' ([1990] 1997: 84). However she soon discarded the pattern, 'as if throwing away the score', and began to 'improvise' designs:

the lovely bravado of anti-clothing! And how simple to cut and fold large pieces, as in kimonos and djellabahs, the easy shapes found outside Western culture. You couldn't buy patterns then for 'unconstructed' women's garments without set-in sleeves to restrict the arm and darts to shape – and reveal – the breast. But once you release the shoulder, and allow the breast its natural room, you make way for the next step, that of taking off the hard, restrictive bra (soon, soon). (84)

Jones fondly recalls making clothes that fitted yet brought attention to her pregnancy, for example, a shirt of white corduroy: 'On the fabric there were two wide stripes, black intertwined links, running from hem to shoulder up the back and down the front; in between the belly poked, as if cradled in suspenders' (84).

Instead of wearing the traditional black stockings of Beat bohemia referenced in Chapter Three, Jones recalls discovering ‘dirt-defying, indestructible’ tights, made for dancers and available ‘only in black, purchased from Goldin Dance Supply (46). They ‘freed’ her from ‘fragile nylon stockings and the cold, unreliable, metal clips of a garter belt’. By making her own clothes in strange ‘inventive’ designs and bold colours, Jones superseded the traditional black-clad look – a look which was at first appealing because of its simplicity, but quickly became a uniform (85). In addition to expressing individuality, Jones suggests her choices were governed by practicality, cheapness and ease of movement.¹

As has been noted, Beat and beatnik women appropriated clothes made for dancers, such as black tights and leotards, for everyday wear. Nancy K. Miller, a follower of bohemian fashion in the 1950s, although not a Beat, states simply: ‘Modern dance was the thing in the 1950s. To look like a dancer was to have the look’ (2002: 23).² Although Beat women adopted the modern dance look, more importantly, they relate that training in modern dance enabled, not just pleasure, but a change in their use and perception of the body.

Jones recalls sitting on the sidelines at a baseball game along with the other ‘wives’ and ‘women artists’, watching the men out on the field (1997: 101). Never again to ‘play’ with the men, the women were ‘expected to lose the bodies we’d used as children, expected, eventually, to grow up and get into our girdles’ (101). But studying dance, which was a ‘permitted’ activity for the wives of artists, was one way to use her body; it taught her how to ‘stand’, Jones states.

¹ Yet Jones reasons that perhaps her interest in her sewing machine was simply ‘another excuse to put off writing’, a creative pursuit that ‘plagued me less, and, as Djuna Barnes reminded: “One hides behind the hat with which one bows to the world”’ (1997: 84).

² Modern dance’s main figurehead was Martha Graham (1894-1991), whose ‘contract and release’ technique worked in opposition to classical ballet. See Graham’s *Blood Memory: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) and Julia L. Foulkes’s *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2002).

Bonnie Bremser notes that she too had ‘always been inclined to the dance’, and had attended classes when she first moved to New York (c. 1959), so she did not mind having to wear a black leotard while working in a beatnik-themed bar, Café Bizarre (Frazer 2000: n. pag.). Dance provides more content in Diane di Prima’s *Recollections*. Di Prima was told by her mother she ‘moved clumsily’ so avoided joining in at school dances (2001a: 68). Absorbed in the world of books as a teenager she came across material on modern dance, learning its various ‘schools’ and memorising ‘lineages of dancers’ (151). She refers to this discovery as ‘one of those “windows” that sometimes opened in those years’ (150). After locating the ‘New Dance Group’, di Prima began a study of dance which would last for over a decade, taking her ‘through three pregnancies, returning after three births’ (155). She had been so absorbed in the sedentary life of reading that ‘at fifteen I couldn’t straighten my knees in front of me when I sat on the floor’ (151). Although classes were ‘painful’ and often ‘humiliating’ she kept going back: ‘And so I moved for the first time into a conscious relationship with my body. I learned I had limits that I could work with. And my body was grateful; it liked to move’ (151). Her ambition to be a professional dancer appears as an obsession when she states that she broke an ankle doing ‘*tours jetés*’ while ‘taking a dance class an hour after I sold a pint of blood to pay for it’ (153).

Di Prima’s discovery of her physical being and its limits is presented as a victory against the constriction and punishment of her young body by her parents.³ She states that ‘not having been able to play actively as a kid made my first dance classes a matter of reclaiming the body’ (2001c: 229). She contextualises dance as liberation of the body shared by a generation with childhood memories of

³ For a context to di Prima’s presentation of her body’s memory of childhood abuse, see Wilhelm Reich’s notion of body armouring in his *Character Analysis* (New York: Orgone Institute, 1949).

schoolmates with polio, ‘in braces, trailing withered legs’; those who saw a ‘president in a wheelchair’, and who witnessed ‘the paralyzing realities of war’ (2001a: 152). The dance classes of the 1950s were ‘packed’ with people who ‘were discovering together the life of the body’ (152).

Attending both traditional ballet and experimental dance recitals, di Prima describes being able to ‘see’ the movements of the figures by ‘knowing’ it in her body, ‘the subtleties of movement, ineffable tiny embellishments of line, the reaching like flame’:

I sat in the dark, night after night, in theatre after theatre. Reading the movements, the music, sometimes the words. I hungered, I strained after meaning, seeking to make some sense of our lives, our deaths. Dance was a ritual religion I had found. I held on tight with my eyes, sought to memorize each movement, keep it forever. (156)

Di Prima became able to ‘read’ movement as she read literature.⁴ Her interest in dance existed alongside her interest in theatre, as it flourished off-Broadway in the mid-1950s. Watching performances of Genet, Ionesco, and Cocteau’s plays, in tiny performance spaces, often ‘in the round’, di Prima perceived that ‘theatre could happen anywhere, that all kinds of things were theatre’, an insight corresponding to the experimental approach of Black Mountain College which filtered down to the later ‘Happenings’ (146).⁵ Theatre is defined by di Prima as simply a ‘manipulation of space and bodies in space’ which ‘led to a vast opening of the space of the mind’ (146). Showing her penchant for romantic primitivism she refers to theatre as the ‘[e]nactment of a mystery rite’ (146). Venues were often multifunctional, with bars

⁴ For some of di Prima’s critical commentary on dance see ‘Movement and Tableau in the Dance’ in *Carolina Quarterly* 8.1 (195?): 20-25, and ‘A Concert of Dance – Judson Memorial Church, Friday, 6 July 1962’ in *The Floating Bear* 21 (1962).

⁵ See RosaLee Goldberg’s *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001) for a history of Black Mountain College’s interdisciplinary experiments, the new dance, and Happenings (121-151).

serving as theatres, and she refers to performances as ‘Great single forms sculpted by actress, dancer, musician, singer’ (146).

Di Prima studied dance and ‘Zen creativity’ under James Waring⁶ of the Judson Dance Theatre and also worked as a stage-manager and assistant-director for him at the Living Theatre, both homes of avant-garde performance (Banes 1993: 26).⁷ She co-founded the New York Poets Theatre in 1961, which ‘produced four seasons of one-act plays by poets, with fine-arts sets by New York and West Coast painters’ (di Prima 1990: 198). Her own plays were performed there, including *The Discontent of the Russian Prince*,⁸ a one-act play in which she played the female lead character, and *Murder Cake*,⁹ another one-act play in which she played the part of ‘Emma’.¹⁰

Di Prima describes her plays as having ‘no plot, or stage directions—they are “word scores” for a director to do with as s/he wills’ (2001a: 376). Disappointingly the plays show no awareness of the perception of bodies in space which she describes in *Recollections*. Instead they appear as literary texts.¹¹ ‘Monuments’ took the form of

⁶ James Waring (1922-1975) was born in San Francisco, studying improvisation with Anna Halprin there before moving to New York in the late 1940s, where he was a dancer, choreographer, and teacher. See Leslie Satin’s ‘James Waring and the Judson Dance Theater: Influences, Intersections, and Divergences’ in Sally Banes’s *Reinventing Dance in the 1960s: Everything Was Possible* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2003), 51-80.

⁷ See variously Norman James’s ‘The Living Theatre: Its Use of the Stage’ in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 29.4 (1971): 475-483, Julian Beck’s *Theandric: Julian Beck’s Last Notebooks* (Chur: Harwood, 1992), and John Tytell’s *The Living Theater: Art, Exile, and Outrage* (New York: Grove, 1995).

⁸ In *Recollections* di Prima describes her performance with Fred Herko in *The Discontent of the Russian Prince*, a play ‘about getting up in the morning’ which they staged at the Off-Bowery Theatre in 1961: ‘I tromped about the stage with tousled hair and in dumpy pajamas, and scolded Freddie, who sadly embraced his image in a mirror. In which I pulled blackened wet sheets off and on a clothesline, and sat on the stage with Freddie while we brushed our teeth together, dipping our brushes in a glass of water which slowly turned green’ (2001: 276; 278).

⁹ Al Carmines wrote in reference to the 1963 production of *Murder Cake* at the Judson Poets Theatre that James Waring, ‘was an exquisite director: room was found for the small gesture which he loved so much. The poetry of Miss di Prima’s words found its perfect counterpart in Jimmy’s direction and clarification. The characters posed on a sea of words, and they were serene or compassionate as the text called for’ (Banes 2003: 58).

¹⁰ ‘Emma’ has a stream-of-consciousness monologue in the play, but the character bears no obvious reference to di Prima’s mother, who shares the name.

¹¹ In support of this point, di Prima dissociates herself from Beat poetry readings, stressing the textuality of her poetry over its performative qualities: ‘My experience of the whole thing was not an experience of the public arena much. I would read if people asked, and friends were doing it [...] but

various monologues, with di Prima writing in the play's prefatory notes: 'Each of these monologues was written to be performed by the person to whom it is dedicated. The monologues are modular: any three or more can make up an evening; the "narrative" depends on the choice, and the ordering of the sequence' (di Prima 1968: 73). Friends who were addressed included James Waring and Fred Herko, and di Prima also wrote a monologue for herself. In these collage-based monologues emphasis was on the poetry rather than on performance. Yet di Prima's authoritative use of chance in the sequencing of each production resembles the early 1950s interventions of the Black Mountain College-affiliated composer John Cage and choreographer Merce Cunningham.¹² Sally Banes notes that in this early-1960s New York, a poet was often 'an engaged citizen of the arts community—writing plays and criticism of all the arts as well as poems, publishing works by colleagues, and sitting in the audience as often as on the stage'; this is true not only of di Prima, but of her poet-playwright colleagues Frank O'Hara and LeRoi Jones (1993: 26).

Hettie Jones notes that she and Joyce Johnson acted in a production of Ursule Molinaro's *The Contest* at the Judson Poets Theatre in 1962. Jones played Ariadne and Johnson played Antigone in a play which asked of its six Greek heroines: 'Is fate guilty of your suffering or did you bring tears upon yourselves' ([1990] 1997: 155). Jones reports a reviewer of the performance responding to this question by stating: 'This is stirring only if one is interested in these antique ladies, which I am not particularly' (155). Despite Johnson's roots in the theatre as a child actress and

the heart of it for me was making my first book and editing *The Floating Bear*. It was always the word on paper and getting it out, much more than it was performance per se. Performance was the theater. We had the theater' (2001c: 231). Evidently di Prima regarded the performance of her very poetic plays to be a collaborative effort.

¹² See Goldberg (2001), pp. 123-127.

Jones's college degree in drama, neither woman was involved in the theatre to the extent di Prima was.¹³

Working concurrently to the Beats, the choreographer Anna Halprin transformed the representation of the body in performance space. Halprin was trained in New York but relocated to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1945 where her Dance Workshop would flourish in the 1960s. This geography was important and Janice Ross states that unlike Merce Cunningham who protested against 'many of the tenets of Martha Graham's expressionist dance, in which "every movement had a meaning," Halprin initiated her artistic divergence from the New York dance establishment through a geographical separation that eventually led into an aesthetic one' (2003: 25). Ross relates that the performer was treated as an individual with emphasis placed on their spontaneity and instinctive movement. Halprin 'questioned dance gestures that weren't generated by the performers themselves': 'In these works one performed oneself, oftentimes in speech as well as movement, rather than subordinating one's identity to a silent choreographic persona devised by Halprin' (37, 40). The dance and theatre referenced so far has valued everyday actions and movements. Goldberg traces the view of 'dance as a way of life, that uses everyday activities such as walking, eating, bathing and touching' not only to Futurism and Dada, but to dance pioneers such as Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Rudolf von Laban and Mary Wigman (2001: 139). Halprin would emphasise the everyday human body in her dance *Parades and Changes* (1965) in a variety of 'task-orientated movements' such as 'carrying forty wine bottles onto the stage, pouring water from one can into another, [and] changing clothes' (Goldberg 2001: 140). Through her parading of the nude body Halprin can be

¹³ Jones reports that Joyce Johnson also played the part of a cowgirl in Joel Oppenheimer's 'spoof western' *The Great American Desert*, part of the first bill at the Judson Poets Theatre.

contextualised beside other West Coast artists who operated in this transgressive domain such as Ginsberg, and as we will see, female poets such as Lenore Kandel.

Diane di Prima states that dance, ‘more than any lover, gave me to myself in those days. Gave me to the life of the body’ (2001a: 156). However she suggests that with the awareness of movement brought about by the study of dance, there occurred ‘an inevitable interest in sex’ (152). Joyce Johnson is emphatic that the reasons for moving out of the parental home were sexual: ‘Real Life was sexual’, she states ([1983] 1994: 30). Johnson defines the Beat generation as a sexual revolution for women such as herself, who at fifteen ‘probably knew less [about sex] than today’s average eight-year-old’ (1999: 42). She continues: ‘Until I entered Barnard College in 1951 and took a freshman orientation course called Modern Living, I did not have a very clear idea of how babies were born, nor did many of my classmates’ (42). Putting this ‘enforced innocence’ into perspective, she adds that only six years later, she would meet Jack Kerouac (42). Johnson quotes a journal entry written by her contemporary Sylvia Plath in 1951, sensing that Plath ‘voiced the despair and frustration that many rebellious young women felt’ (43). Plath wrote:

Looking at myself, in the past years, I have come to the conclusion that I *must*, have a passionate physical relationship with someone – or combat the great sex urge in me by drastic means. I chose the former answer. I also admitted that I am obligated in a way to my family and to society (damn society anyway) to follow certain absurd and traditional customs – for my own security, they tell me. I must therefore confine the major part of my life to one human being of the opposite sex. (Plath 2000: 99)

These desires led Plath on her own path, but also led women to Beat generation bohemia. Like Plath, Hettie Jones saw the hypocrisy of 1950s society and she counts sex as a central reason for women’s presence in the male-dominated Beat world, at least from the Beat men’s perspective:

Most, though not all, of the guys wanted us there for sex. And we ourselves were expecting it. Like some young women in every generation, some of us did have sex in the Fifties. You could have sex anywhere then—basement, backseat, haystack—as long as you remained silent about it, didn't live as if it were part of your life and didn't get caught or pregnant. With the Beats, though, we had escaped to a place where women could admit, or at least take for granted, their desires. Sort of. Sometimes. (1999: 51)

Tentative desires were staged by Joyce Glassman in written form in *Come and Join the Dance*'s depiction of 'furnished rooms and sex' (Johnson 1994: 148). However, Lenore Kandel's poetry book *The Love Book* (1966) stands out not only for its startling language and sexual subject matter, but for the public reaction to it – its confiscation and trial, alongside Michael McClure's play *The Beard*,¹⁴ for obscenity in 1966.¹⁵ A reporter from the *San Francisco Chronicle* informed his readers that within the text, 'Miss Kandel uses five vivid Anglo-Saxon underground words a total of 27 times' (Bess 1966: 24). Kandel's repeated use of 'fuck', 'cunt', 'cock', and various other neologisms such as 'suckfucking', within the slim volume's two poems was unprecedented in American poetry (1966: 3-4).¹⁶ Kandel presents a picture of multifarious desire that breaks down the physical, temporal and gendered boundaries between herself, her nameless male lover, and God, with this fluidity mirrored in the poetic lines. The publisher classifies the volume as 'holy/erotic poems', and Kandel's contention was that the poems 'deal with physical love and the invocation, recognition, and acceptance of the divinity in man through the medium of physical love' (Kandel 1966: n. pag.; Kandel 1967: vi).¹⁷ The poems assert the divine in the sexual – 'my GOD the worship that it is to fuck!'; 'sacred the beautiful fuck' – but

¹⁴ Michael McClure, *The Beard* (New York: Grove, 1965).

¹⁵ *The Love Book* would be republished by San Francisco's Superstition Street Press in 2003.

¹⁶ The first poem is entitled 'God/Love Poem'; the second poem 'To Fuck with Love' consists of 'Phase I', 'Phase II', and 'Phase III'. The ambiguity of the title of the reverent poem., 'To Fuck with Love', seems unintentional.

¹⁷ The merging of spiritual and sexual discourse is symbolised in the cover image of *The Love Book*, which the publisher informs is taken from 'a Tibetan scroll depicting the Adi Buddha (The Root Buddha) and his Shakti in yab-yum position, symbolizing the union of the male-female principles of the universe' (Kandel 1966: n. pag.).

Kandel also creates a new psychedelic-tinged language of worship.¹⁸ The poem ‘To Fuck With Love’ stages jouissance as repetition which creates rhythm in undulating long lines: ‘I am the god-animal, the mindless cuntdeity the hegod-animal / is over me, through me’ (4) These are often punctuated by fragments – ‘we TOUCHED!’ – adding tension and drama, and countering the rhythm (5).

Lenore Kandel’s transgressive poetry takes Joyce Glassman’s investment in sexual content to an extreme conclusion in the free zone of late 1960s Haight-Ashbury hippie culture.¹⁹ Although transgressive in its explicitness *The Love Book* stayed within a heterosexual framework and portrayed scenes with a single partner. Staying in a San Francisco literary context, di Prima’s *Memoirs of a Beatnik* (1969) infuses the West Coast hippy sensibility into sketches of life in New York in the 1950s. In the monologue she wrote for herself as part of her play *Monuments*, di Prima questioned if she would ever ‘sit in a bay window in San Francisco, looking at the rain, and writing another novel’ ([1968] 1991: 85). Di Prima informs us in an Afterword, dated 1987, that she found herself in a bay window writing *Memoirs*, ostensibly, for ready cash from Olympia Press. ‘Clearly the twenty-odd large and assorted small humans who graced the halls, balconies and bannisters of my pad had to eat’, she writes ([1969] 1988: 137). *Memoirs* is an exposé of the beatnik lifestyle at a time when ‘Beat’ or ‘beatnik’ was being replaced by the term ‘hippy’. Olympia readers would have been aware of associations of the beatnik figure, and di Prima

¹⁸ See Ronna C. Johnson’s ‘*The Love Book*: Psychedelic Poetics, Cosmic Erotica, and Sexual Politics in the Mid-sixties Counterculture’ in *Reconstructing the Beats*, ed. Jennie Skerl (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 89-104, for reference to the poetry’s psychedelic qualities in the context of the hippie counterculture.

¹⁹ Johnson attests that the 1950s Beat generation was a sexual revolution pre-empting the 1960s revolution in sexual manners. She describes the effects of Kerouac’s novel *On the Road* on thousands of women readers. It was a ‘prophecy, bringing the news of the oncoming, unstoppable sexual revolution—the revolution that would precede and ultimately pave the way for women’s liberation’ (1999: 46). Joan Didion’s collection of essays *Slouching Toward Bethlehem* (New York: Dell, 1968) examines the sexual politics of the Haight-Ashbury counterculture. See also Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines, ‘*Takin’ It To The Streets*’: *A Sixties Reader* (New York: Oxford U P, 1995).

mines the alleged promiscuity of the beatnik 'chick' in order to fulfil the publisher's erotic remit.²⁰ Yet it is also an autobiographically-based story of the artist's movement from isolation to community.

Picturing herself writing the book in San Francisco – she had actually been met at the airport by Lenore Kandel – di Prima sets up the different atmospheres of the East and West Coast. The celebration of bodies in *Memoirs* appears characteristic of the sexually liberal scene di Prima entered on the West Coast, and there is a plenitude and warmth present which is missing from her earlier New York writing, for example, the 1950s poetry and *Dinners and Nightmares* with their Imagist-derived brevity and precision. The rhythms of *Memoirs* speak of a consciousness in tune with the cycles of nature. The narrator is referred to as both 'Diane' and 'di Prima' by the other characters, but we must understand the narrator as a persona of the author. The first chapter contains the narrator's initiation into adulthood as she loses her virginity: 'Afterward there was blood on his cock, and when I could move again I licked it off, swallowing my childhood, entering the world of the living' (15). The 'natural teenage urge to get on the phone and chatter it all away' with a friend is disallowed as another sexual opportunity with another lover arises, her childhood existence forever in the past (17). When she admits to her familiar 'longing to be a pirate', to be 'tall and slim and hard, and not a girl at all', the quest narrative or picaresque is invoked (17). But rather than a tale of innocence to experience, she casts herself as aware, ready to take what her exploits place before her. Although the character experiments with an androgynous appearance and imagines herself as an ambiguously gendered adventurer, her body and its path through the text is a female one.

²⁰ See John De St Jorre's *The Good Ship Venus: The Erotic Voyages of the Olympia Press* (London: Pimlico, 1995) for a discussion of the readership of Olympia Press and its Traveler's Companion Series, the series in which *Memoirs* first appeared.

The chapters are defined by the progression of the year's seasons – from 'February', 'April', 'City Spring', 'Country Spring', 'Summer' to a final chapter titled 'We Set Out' which looks ahead to the future. Desire is not separated from reproduction and di Prima discusses birth control in the text. Contraception is rejected as an unnatural disruption to desire, and a section entitled 'Fuck the Pill: A Digression' written in the voice of the late 1960s author rather than the 1950s beatnik persona, lectures 1960s women who suppose themselves newly liberated by the Pill. Recalling the options on offer in the 1950s: using a diaphragm means 'starting all over again, of somehow *working up* to the passion we had set so easily and naturally going in the first place' (75); the pill 'condemns you, who have avoided pregnancy, to live in a perpetual state of early pregnancy: woozy, and nauseous, and likely to burst into tears' and ironically, 'cuts down on the sex drive' (76); the IUD causes the body to exist in 'a general state of tension.' Instead of contraception, she advocates simply 'having babies' (76). It frees the body and the mind from the stress of contraception.²¹ Her answer to how to support the child is: 'get welfare, quit working, stay home, stay stoned, and fuck.' Although part of an erotic novel, her realist digression on childbirth versus contraception depends on adequate state welfare and also social connection in order to avoid isolation.²²

The text closes in appropriate symbolic terms with the character's first pregnancy. In fact her body is in accord with phases of the moon: 'And when the full moon shone on the fire-escape again, I didn't get my period as I should have. And the moon waned, my breasts grew and became sore, and I knew I was pregnant' (134).

²¹ Di Prima adds a postscript to the 1988 edition advocating safe sex in the post-HIV and AIDS world, yet maintaining that 'having a kid can be a great celebration of life' (74).

²² Daniel Pinchbeck's 'Children of the Beats' contains testimonials from various sons and daughters, including di Prima's daughter Tara Marlowe, who provides a counterpoint to the kind of fantasy reproductive narrative contained in *Memoirs*. Referring to the narcissism of the Beats, Marlowe states that she regards the generation 'as kind of like a brilliant child [...]. They did whatever they wanted' (Pinchbeck [1995] 2001: 473). Pinchbeck is Joyce Johnson's son.

The city is in harmony with the natural world, with the moonlight on the fire-escape serving as a sign, a merging of the urban with feminine fertility myth. A new era of life also appears on a geographic level, as she packs up her belongings to move to a 'new adventure' (134).

Di Prima succeeds in synthesising gratuitous sex into her textual themes: heterosexual, female and male homosexuality, incest, group sex. A chapter titled 'Organs and Orgasms: An Appreciation', relates a time she lived alone and gave a key to each of her lovers. She is visited every night and this frequency creates a rhythm of succeeding arrivals and departures. She celebrates the idiosyncrasies of the six men: 'Everyone came in differently, everyone took me on a different trip; it was like six mythologies, six different worlds' (115). There is fluidity in the narration of the repeating visits, mirroring both the descriptions of the waves of the narrator's sexual pleasure and the text's theme of natural cycles.

Di Prima's later poetry, particularly *Loba*, Parts I-VIII (1973-1978), would develop themes of the erotic and the sacred, as Kandel did in *The Love Book*. Kay Johnson's poems and prose also mines such themes, although without such transgressive diction. The poem 'In Heaven, It's Publicly Intimate' from *Human Songs* (1964) proclaims:

Ah, my sex, and ah, my soul,
you rich delicious
openings,
to whom can I give you?
You blaze alone

in a hot room.

(17)

She invokes a 'publicly intimate' heaven where distinctions collapse and which is populated by 'Angels' who 'unite while walking. / Where you saw two, it is one' (17). 'Angels' were, of course, a familiar Beat image, through Allen Ginsberg's Blakean inheritance.²³ Other poems address a Christian God directly, and as in Kandel's poetry, the beloved merges with the divine: 'God's also that gone lover / on whom we meditate', writes Johnson in 'The Absent Lover' (18). Johnson creates a unique poetics of devotion. Beat love appears as a spiritual love. 'Proximity' (1961) is a prose piece which values tactile sensuality more than sexuality. It castigates the genital consciousness of Freud and advocates a universal love or 'proximity' between souls which can be shared by all humanity rather than being confined in monogamy.

The sexual organs have a different kind of love all by themselves. But the love simply of the skin for another skin, of one bodily warmth for another warmth, of the contact of one being for the contact of another being, this is a spiritual sensuality . . . which does not *seek* to consummate itself, by the use of the sexual organs, which is satisfied innocently and fully and completely, simply by the sharing of warmth, by the skin contact, by the kiss, by moisture. (Johnson [1961] 1997: 83)²⁴

The anatomisation of love in this erotic writing is markedly different from di Prima's and Kandel's, yet they all share an honesty and daring with regard to their sexual subject matter.²⁵ Love is a part of the internal journeys of women writers of the Beat generation, whether it is divine as in the above writers or secular in the case of a

²³ See John Tytell's *Naked Angels: Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs* (New York: Grove, 1976).

²⁴ See Wilhelm Reich's various works on sexuality and orgone theory, including *The Sexual Revolution* (New York: Orgone Institute, 1948), for a context to Johnson's work.

²⁵ For other examples of writing which tackles the erotic and the divine, see Elise Cowen's poetry in Peabody (1997) and Knight (1996), and the more obtuse, humorous poetry of Rochelle Owens which features in *Four Lady Poets* (New York: Totem/Corinth, 1962).

writer like Joyce Johnson. The love between mother and child is often presented by those writers who produced reproductive narratives as a more stable connection than their fluctuating relations with men.

Part II: 'Bohemia, Momma'

In *Recollections* Diane di Prima sets the record straight about a Beat myth propagated by Robert Creeley of which she was the subject. In Creeley's story dating back to the late 1950s, told in a documentary about the Beats, di Prima opts to stay at Allen Ginsberg's apartment for an orgy with various West Coast poets instead of returning home to relieve her babysitter. In actuality, di Prima explains, the evening had involved intense literary discussion and when she had announced her intention of returning home the men protested: 'Jack Kerouac raised himself up on one elbow on the linoleum and announced in a stentorian voice: "DI PRIMA, UNLESS YOU FORGET ABOUT YOUR BABYSITTER, YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO BE A WRITER"' (2001a: 202) (capitals in original). Di Prima considered his statement, 'and allowed that at least part of me thought he was right', but went home. She believes that Creeley's version was confusing the orgy scene at the end of *Memoirs of a Beatnik*, or 'the eternal Beat Orgy that will live forever in the minds of all guys who were around for the second half of the twentieth century' (202). Summing up her failure as a Beat myth, and her preference for the role of mother, friend and indeed poet she states:

Now what I find so destructive, and so telling, about Creeley's version is: *that if I had, as he put it, so 'charmingly' opted to stay for the orgy, there would be no poems*. That is, the person who would have left a friend hanging who had done her a favor, also wouldn't have stuck through thick and thin to the business of making poems. It is the same discipline throughout—what Pound called 'a "man" [read "woman"] standing by [her] Word'. (202)

The anecdote illustrates how motherhood changed her life as a writer, but also how motherhood changed people's attitudes to her. A similar tale is paraphrased by Cornel Bonca:

On a recent broadcast of a radio documentary about Beat women, one woman reminisced about an orgy that she had wanted to attend in her early days of beathood. But who, she wondered to a friend, will take care of the children during the orgy? 'If you have to ask that question,' her friend responded, 'what are you doing going to an orgy?' Exactly. Of course, the women were forced to ask the question because the men wouldn't. The men, who after all fathered those children, were too busy glorifying Bacchus. This was the 1950s, even for the beats, and women's work didn't stop at the orgy den's door. (2000: 258)

Bonca is perhaps, like Creeley, buying into 'the eternal Beat Orgy' a little, but his story again highlights the contrasting responsibilities mothers faced in those days in comparison to Beat men. As an unmarried mother in the 1950s di Prima felt that 'no man could ever "have" a child, they simply did not know how, did not know what it meant. In those days, and in that time, I was sadly right' (2001a: 157).

Di Prima describes the changes in her lifestyle after Jeanne was born, in particular in her life as an artist:

I was coming for the first time up against the limits of my own energy—how much I could actually do in a given day. I was finding it harder to be available to work and play, to love and friendship, to Jeanne, at any and all hours. There were—for the first time since I left my parents' house behind me—constraints. And with the constraints came the need, nay, even the demand, that everything—love affairs, writings, friendships, escapades—be more intense. Be richer and fuller. Instead of that lovely randomness, cool diversity, rambling quality, of our earliest years. (191)

The studied ambivalence to gender that characterised di Prima's early days was compromised and ultimately she would change her concept of art. She expresses her new concerns in the statement: 'The requirements of our life is the form of our art'

(226). She stresses that ‘requirements’ are singular not plural, that they are ‘a monolithic unsorted bundle of demands’ (227), and perceiving a universality states that ‘in many ways’ women artists’ lives are ‘one and the same life’ (226). *How I Became Hettie Jones* portrays a working mother’s journey into writing – a journey marked by delay and a lack of productivity. Lines were drawn between her life and that of her writer husband during her first pregnancy: ‘I suddenly saw how his life would be so different from mine from now on’ ([1990] 1997: 86). Similarly, in *Missing Men* Joyce Johnson writes: ‘Sometimes I felt almost dizzy wondering how I’d handle all the arrangements for the baby. I thought about everything I’d have to do, as if Peter [Pinchbeck, her second husband] wouldn’t be there’ (2004: 223).

Pregnancy was another way in which the writers’ relationships to their bodies changed. Finding a breathing exercise in a book on natural childbirth,²⁶ Jones recognises it as the ‘diaphragmatic breathing’ she remembered from a college physical education class.

I remembered the day I’d learned the breathing, the sunny room, the hardwood floor, the classful of women taught by a woman, who had simply called it a “relaxation technique.” Never hinted at—*why?*—was this possibility for its future use. Without [her friend] Rena’s help I might not have made the connection. It seemed as if the very life of our bodies was hidden. *By whom?* (1997: 83)

So pregnancy is a discovery of the body. And motherhood allowed the ‘rediscovery of language’ (106). Her first daughter Kellie was born in 1959, and Jones saw her own inquisitiveness about language mirrored in her daughter.

²⁶ The book is identified by Jones as Grantly Dick Read’s *Childbirth Without Fear: The Principles and Practice of Natural Childbirth* (New York: Harper, 1944).

With her round face and dark eyes and open, direct, equable gaze, she looked like Roi (and even more like his mother), and maybe it was because she didn't resemble me that I marvelled at how *like* me she was, how female and how conscious in that little body. The way I'd been in mine and never told. I wanted to give her every word. (106)

Jones also questions the existent laws of 1950s Western motherhood such as drugged childbirth which rendered the experience into painless oblivion, having to hide in toilets in order to breastfeed, and the preponderance of bulky, unwieldy baby carriages. The text, like Diane di Prima's *Recollections*, describes Jones's attempt to fully experience motherhood as an embodied subject. Motherhood is presented as a positive state of being and Jones recalls seeing a prototype of a Barbie doll in a shop window in the late 1950s that was dressed in black tights like the black tights she and her friend Helene Dorn were wearing at the time. 'Bohemia, mamma', Dorn exclaimed, affirming their identities as trendsetters, but also using the word 'mamma' as an address to her friend, who was also a mother to the new breed (130).

In contrast to Jones's experience, having children somewhat restored the relationship between di Prima and her parents. There was her mother's first 'clandestine visit' to the hospital:

Nothing, not even the iniquity of her daughter could keep Emma away from a baby—especially not her first grandchild. And so my mother and father were soon reconciled to the event in their different ways and to different degrees. I think to Emma the circumstances around Jeanne's birth soon became irrelevant, but to Dick they were, and remained, an open wound.
(di Prima 2001a: 172; 178)

Jones found a deeper maternal lineage in the Jones family than in her own. When LeRoi Jones's parents accepted Hettie into their family an attachment was made that lasted beyond her eventual divorce and estrangement from him. She would address them as 'Mama and Daddy' and they became surrogate parents (1997: 92). Anna Lois

Jones replaced Hettie's own mother guiding her daughter-in-law through pregnancy and the raising of her daughters. Jones recognised the heritage that Kellie, and by extension Jones herself, had been given: 'Only the Joneses, welcoming me, offered my daughter a history—images, peers, cousins—and [...] I knew she was their baby too' (93). She recalls Kellie later stating: 'You know, Mommy, your lap is fine. But you ought to sit on *Gramma!*' Gramma Jones's lap suggests an alternate lineage for Jones, based on compassion and community, and an enjoyment in bodily proximity. It is an embodied heritage which Jones first signposts in her description of her college in the South.

Jones chose to study at the all-female Mary Washington College in Virginia because she wanted to 'cloister' herself, 'away from the usual expectations' she felt as a young woman, in order that she '*become—something, anything*' (10).²⁷ As the only Jew there her difference became clear. She describes an alien culture where: 'Jesus seemed to be everywhere. I had to learn to put down my knife when I ate, to pour and hand tea. These were the people of white gloves and horse breeds, who had patterns of culture officially, including formal dinners and vespers' (12). The signification of 'black' and 'white' in mainstream American culture in the 1950s discussed by Wini Breines can be read into Jones's story.²⁸ Jones recalls being asked with 'a kind of tense awe' if she were Puerto Rican. One of the few black people she encountered in college was a maid who 'seemed to understand' Jones's position. She appeared empathetic as Jones remembers that she 'smiled when she saw me coming, and showed me how to handle the tucks in my blouses' (12). As part of her Southern education Jones is familiarised with the deep-seated American racial division she had

²⁷ She also had an offer from the women's college Vassar, but states: 'I had some vague suspicion that Vassar might make me a snob, and the South was cheaper and farther from home' (1997: 10).

²⁸ See pp. 150-151.

not been fully conscious of in Laurelton, but which would later play a role in her life as a wife and mother.

Jones describes an incident that completed her Southern education. After leaving college Jones and her friend, 'hillbilly' Linda, took a job selling electric fans on the hot Virginia roads (13). They met two black women and Jones listened as they talked with Linda about their skin. Together these southerners were so deeply familiar with skin colour as demarcation that they were able to share a joke about it. Linda jokes with Millie, one of the women, about the latter's 'tan', 'as if the concept of blackness itself were vastly comedic', Jones reflects (13-14). The sparkle in Linda's eyes told of 'skin' as 'a dirty, secret' that the Yankee Jones had been let in on (14). Later, when Jones was alone in the 'oppressive' heat, a little black girl appeared on the roadside (14). She enjoined Jones to come to her house, thrusting her hand into Jones's hand. The author admits she had never before held the hand of a black person: 'It was dry, dusty, sweet, and so fragile, and dark as I was from that southern sun it wasn't that different from mine' (14). Jones ponders that perhaps 'all the small brown hands I've held since then are descended from hers.' This was the inauguration of the alternate lineage that would nurture her, enacted through her marriage to LeRoi and the 'small brown hands' of their daughters.

When she pictured the young Hettie Cohen lying on a mountainside at summer camp 'pretending to weave the clouds' in the air, Jones the mature author set her child self on a creative path (5). This act of weaving relates to the discourse of African American domestic arts. Alice Walker's essay 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens' (1974) situated the heritage of African American women in the creative acts of their

female ancestors: gardening, quilt-making and storytelling.²⁹ These arts did not rely on knowledge of written language and utilized whatever materials were to hand, in the manner of bricolage. Jones's invocation of a weaving girl in a text which deals explicitly with race and which empathises with African American experience resonates with Walker's description of the domestic crafts of black women. Jones taps into the domestic heritage which she inherited through her daughters, but redeploys it in her own particular way.

As a white mother to black daughters, Jones found herself in a place outside the black/white binary. Although both her friend Joyce Johnson and her husband LeRoi had made the trip to work in the book publishing district, after becoming a mother Jones found it difficult to be in 'whites-only groups' (202).

In a midtown office by himself, Roi could only be himself. In a similar situation, without him or the children, I felt misrepresented, minus a crucial dimension, and seeing race prejudice everywhere, shocking and painful. Other whites in black families speak of this; Diana Powell, who sometimes baby-sat for me, later married actor-director Douglas Turner-Ward and is herself the mother of two black children. She calls it feeling 'disguised in your own skin.' (202)

Jones describes an incident in which her mother-in-law connects Jones to an African American community. Accompanying Anna Lois Jones on her rounds as a supervisor for a housing authority in Newark, Jones met a community of women, mostly working mothers, who became a 'home' to sustain her as a working mother at the head of a single-parent household:

Right away they let me know that assuming their burden was foolish: 'Why *this?*' they said, pinching Kellie. 'Wasn't being Jewish bad enough?' But then

²⁹ See also Paule Marshall's 'The Making of a Writer: From the Poets in the Kitchen' (1983) in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, (New York: Norton, 1997), 2072-9.

they would wink and haul me into the kitchen. I had to rest my feet, hand over that *baby*, and have a little potato salad, honey. They fed me kind acceptance at first, then praise and love and laughs and I stuffed myself full. (108)

Jones's identity as a mother is integral to her movement into writing and development of a domestic poetics. On the journey depicted in *How I Became Hettie Jones* identity remains dependent on community. Female community, in particular, appears as a developing strand of Jones's life and exists when connection to men has failed, or appears as a lineage to look back to. The poems collected in *Drive* (1998), some of which are included in the memoir and date back to the early 1960s, illustrate this strand, for example, the poem 'For My Daughters':

They call each other
man or bro
until they hug
and their hands
pat pat
the sister hands
pat pat
oh
pat my bro
pat my sister
see we tender
women
live
on

(Jones 1998: 79)

Jones describes a female lineage based on free and ‘tender’ physical expression and communication through a casual vernacular idiom. Connection to people through the role of mother is a fundamental part of the poetics which Jones developed. In a poem titled ‘All the Beautiful Days’ addressed to her mother-in-law, Jones looks back as a daughter to this woman while simultaneously speaking for her own daughters:

circling the marshes of life and death

while we call you

and call you

and call you

once again

back to us

(16)

A poem called ‘Aftertune’ survives from the 1960s, written when Jones was twenty-seven years old, and is also included in *How I Became Hettie Jones*. In it she imagines her old age when she is a ‘crone in the marshes singing / and singing / and singing’ (1998: 104). Although the mother imagines losing her fertility and becoming a crone, the song remains a possibility for embodied connection.

Part III: Domestic Expressions: 'The Meaning of a Household Life'

Before developing my discussion of Hettie Jones's domestic poetics and those of other Beat generation women writers, I foreground the 'beatnik' debate and propose that these women leaven their domesticity with a 'beatnik' disregard for convention and propriety. James Campbell noted that when Beat became beatnik, '[t]he suffix waved an unwashed hand in the direction of beardedness, hoboism, non-patriotism, and, the ultimate, communism' (1999: 245). Although the term's Russian-derived suffix added a politically-subversive quality, emphasis was placed on the beatnik's aversion to personal hygiene, work, and the rewards of consumer society, casting the beatnik as idle, and paradoxically, quite unlikely to spark revolution. Although Campbell sees the beatnik as characteristically 'bearded', female beatnik 'chicks' were also represented. The implications of beatnik 'filthiness' in relation to gender are of interest.

Barbara Ehrenreich describes a photo-feature from *Life* magazine in 1959 which included a photograph of 'the well-equipped pad' complete with a family of beatniks – who were actually 'paid models' from Greenwich Village (1983: 62). The scene is 1950s domesticity gone wrong, gone beatnik, but still featuring consumer products such as an 'Italian wine bottle', 'ill-tended plant', guitar, and jazz records. The male beatnik is accompanied by his 'Beat chick dressed in black' and their 'Beat baby, who has gone to sleep on floor after playing with beer cans'. There is the suggestion of deviance with the negligent parents, yet they enjoy consumables just like the *Life* readership.³⁰ We will see that in their accounts the women writers often

³⁰ Ehrenreich suggests that the stereotyping of the 'beatnik' existed to appease the 'square' reader of *Life*: 'The beatnik was not only a spectacle, half repellent and half exotic, he was also, even to his media creators, an imagined spectator—a vantage point from which everything normal became itself exotic or repellent. Within the beatnik—and essential to the beatnik as a stereotype—was the

display a pride in the griminess or disarray of their homes. Beatnik ‘filthiness’ can be read as a masochistic reaction against the parental generation’s habit of ‘scrubbing clean’ and the wider, ‘whitened’ American culture.

The scene from *Life* magazine affected the disorder and shabbiness of the beatnik image, but the accompanying article, Paul O’Neil’s ‘The Only Rebellion Around’ describes the ‘pad-sharing chicks’ in actuality as being ‘few and far between’ (2001: 437). Most ‘chicks’, O’Neil states, ‘who are willing to support a whiskery male are often middle-aged and fat’ (438). Although this was not the case with regard to the women subjects of this thesis, the ‘North Beach maxim’ which O’Neil reports – ‘the mature bohemian is one whose woman works *full time*’ – does attest to their experiences (438).

Ann Charters refers to a description by *The Village Voice* staff writer ‘Flavia’, in November 1957 of the Greenwich Village ‘chick’ that reiterates this notion of female servility, and which deserves to be quoted at length:

The present ‘chick’ is keeper of the Pad. By definition, she has her own apartment, a job or income of some sort, and is ready to house and feed her males on short notice. The intellectual variety comes equipped with some college background and a rigid set of rules: she will have no truck with professional men; finds sensitive manual workers O.K., and saves her soul for the creative crew who are beating their brains out ‘because everything’s so beautiful, wild, mad, and gone.’

Though her manner of living gives no clues, this ‘chick’ is a girl with marriage on her mind. ...Like so many other Villagers, the ‘chick’ works in fields connected with the arts—preferably ones in which she can meet itinerant actors, artists, or writers whose marital suitability depends on the amount of success, notoriety, or potential talent they have to offer. In return, the ‘chick’ accepts the role of housekeeper, mistress, and nurse. While her ‘hip’ lad is around, she will be a faithful drudge, an earnest listener, and often his sole economic support. From the moment she gets back to the Pad until she leaves for work the following day, she’s demonstrating what a great wife she’d be. She understands all—and what’s more, she’s younger, prettier, and

perception of the ‘square’—and it was the square, as much as his imagined antithesis, who was fascinated’ (1983: 63-4).

stronger than his mother. Accordingly, where could he find a better mate, she thinks. [...] [U]ntil economic fatigue or psychoanalysis sets in, the 'chick' in her Pad will remain 'nowhere.' But save your sympathy—she's just where she wants to be. (Charters 2001: 613-4)

Although Charters notes that 'Flavia' was being 'facetious', the description superficially resembles life as described by some women of the Beat generation (2001: 614). Just like the suburban wives of the time, Beat chicks attended faithfully to their men. The main difference from the 1950s suburban ideal was that this chick was also the breadwinner. In *How I Became Hettie Jones*, Jones expresses her resentment at being the sole earner who enabled her husband's full-time commitment to writing from which he received only intermittent payment. At the time the consensus was that 'no *decent* woman opened her legs to a man who couldn't support her', but Jones states that her pride was still located in her husband rather than in herself – a pride which she would later question (1997: 178). But Joyce Johnson describes a strange pride in taking part in this role reversal, at least on her first date with Kerouac when she paid for his meal: 'I've never bought a man dinner before. It makes me feel very competent and womanly' (1994: 127). This financial support is one way in which Joyce Glassman steps out of girlhood and into womanhood – ironically, by occupying the man's traditional role. These keepers of the Pad – the home which Beat men left on their various geographical and creative flights – were mothers not only to their children, but also to the Beat community as they gave up their homes to various long and short-term visitors.

In *How I Became Hettie Jones* the motif of 'home' is used as a structuring device. The memoir's chapters are placed into sections which locate Jones and her family in their various apartments: 'Morton Street', 'Twentieth Street', 'Fourteenth Street' and 'Cooper Square'. Home is a concept which Jones regards as having a

particular place in women's lives. On contemplating writing a memoir, she found that her memories 'fell into those patterns associated with place' (Grace and Johnson 2004: 162). She intended to write 'a woman's book', so she explored the concept of home with the belief that men had a different relationship with the concept, they 'would not focus on their homes' in their writing as much as women did (162). In a reversal of the familiar Beat road narrative Jones centres her subjects around the home, as Carolyn Cassady did in *Off the Road* (1990). Aware that home was a well-worn motif in women's literature – Jones thought 'people are going to think this is corny' – she deployed it in the text to work on a variety of levels. Although Jones details the materiality of home – the improvised and second-hand furniture and furnishings which were far from the middle-class ideal she was raised to expect – she extends its meaning beyond the physical place itself to represent the family who were gathered there: husband LeRoi Jones, and daughters Kellie and Lisa, and the community of writers and friends assembled round them in the production of their magazine *Yugen* and their Totem Press.

A conceit of the text is the loss of certain objects with each move and the gaining of certain objects on entering a new apartment. This becomes symbolic, as Jones's loss of her typewriter encapsulates her inability to be like the productive writers she was surrounded by. But in the move from Fourteenth Street to Cooper Square, Jones recalls that she brought along various objects – gas heaters, the toilet, stove, and kitchen sink. This sink, an emblem of domesticity, momentarily links both past and present in the narrative: 'tonight, at the dishes, though twice her age I can see that person I was at twenty-seven, bathing in her kitchen sink, with all of downtown at her back, and the morning sun ablaze in the poverty trees' (164).

Jones recalls a time before the gentrification of the East Village, when her own home was marked by a racial and social diversity which could not be defined by the institutional American definitions of the day. A census taker had arrived at her door, ‘heralding the sixties,’ and been unsettled by the family scene that met him:

At the table, glasses half off his nose, pale bearded Joel [Oppenheimer] was folded into a chair with a book; beyond, in the front room, Roi was in his socks reading the *Times*, and A.B. [Spellman], in shirttails and wrinkled khakis, was napping on the couch. Each was easily a man at home. [...] Suddenly Kellie, as if determined to be counted, began to scoot toward him in her walker. (105)

The census form had asked for details of any family member being of ‘mixed origin,’ with the example ‘part-Hawaiian’ being given in an apparent denial of what Americans referred to as ‘the Negro problem’ (106). The census taker’s arrival may have heralded the 1960s, but he and his inadequate categorisations are unprepared for a decade in which black and white race relations would be magnified in the civil rights struggles and Black Power movement. These outside political events would affect Jones’s home directly with her husband leaving her in 1965 to live in Harlem.

Race, then, is another factor in Jones’s figuration of the motif of home. Home ‘seemed like the place to locate not only my life but the literary life and also because of the business of race, [it was] where things came together in terms of race,’ Jones states (Grace and Johnson 2004: 162). Although on the streets she and LeRoi are under threat of attack – she recalls they were one of the few mixed-race couples in Greenwich Village at the time – Jones attests to the visible demarcations of race being forgotten within the intimacy of the family: ‘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’ (1997: 36).

Barrett Watten encourages us to read the intertextual relationship between *How I Became Hettie Jones* (1990) and Amiri Baraka's *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (1984), with each text providing a different model of the writer and a different set of poetics. According to Watten, Jones's text is informed by 'lack' – an unproductivity as a writer during the Beat period despite her involvement in the appearance and circulation of other people's poetry; whereas Baraka's concept of the writer is subject to change as he moves from the aesthetics of the Beat scene to the politics of black nationalism, 'augmented' as Hettie Jones states, by the stability of male subjectivity (Watten 2002: 112; Jones 1997: 65). At this time the theatre, rather than poetry books, would be critical for Baraka as a medium of political art based on action.

But conversely Watten understands Hettie Jones's poetics to be grounded in the 'everyday' – the embodied poetics of jazz, the 'projective verse' of *The New American Poetry*,³¹ and her experience of family and home. Watten argues that Baraka's version of agency, places under erasure the kinds of material culture that are recuperated in Hettie's memoir' (114). William Carlos Williams's maxim 'No ideas but in things', according to Watten 'is not a basis for black liberationist poetics' because 'its transcendental address must take material circumstances as a negated point of departure' (114).³²

Williams was the major antecedent, beside Ezra Pound, for the *New American Poetry*. Jones believed she could never match the use of 'sophisticated metaphor' in the writing of the female poets Denise Levertov and Barbara Guest whom she otherwise admired (148). Instead she wished to write like Williams, 'with tones and

³¹ See pp. 65-66 for my discussion of the embodied poetics presented in Charles Olson's essay 'Projective Verse'.

³² Yet the previously cited domestic poetics of Alice Walker would reclaim 'material circumstances' as a basis for art.

repetitions, a kind of melody line', a language which appeared to be equivalent to Miles Davis's 'pretty, ambivalent tones' (148). The poets of Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* provided Jones with a model of everyday imagery in art. When the anthology appeared in 1960 she was 'pleased by the familiar names and the poems that had appeared first in *Yugen*' – the familiar names and poems of her family (116). Her name did not appear there in an authorial role, but it did appear in the poetry of LeRoi Jones featured there.³³ She describes taking inspiration from the opening lines of the first poem in the anthology, Charles Olson's poem of 1949, 'The Kingfishers': 'What does not change / is the will to change' (116). This mirrors an epigraph Jones uses elsewhere in her memoir, taken from Jane Bowles's novel *Two Serious Ladies*: 'The idea . . . is to change first of our own volition and according to our own inner promptings before they impose completely arbitrary changes on us' (3). Both quotations emphasise change and self-control, but Bowles' statement speaks particularly of women's experience.³⁴

Jones feels connected to the New American Poetry not only through her name appearing in LeRoi Jones' poetry, but also through her involvement in the material production of the poetry as an editor and typesetter. When LeRoi fixed a poem by Ron Loewinsohn, 'The Thing Made Real', to the window above her kitchen sink in Twentieth Street, the material poem invaded her domestic life: 'The poems *were* our lives' she states (72). Jones attests to the fact that the opening lines – 'The thing made real by / a sudden twist of the mind' – brings the act of creativity to the reader. The poem ended with the image of a 'White Rhinoceros', a 'pure & beautiful' image of

³³ See LeRoi Jones's 'For Hettie' in Allen (1960), p. 358.

³⁴ *Two Serious Ladies* (New York: Knopf, 1943) features the eschewal of traditional domesticity and feminine roles by its protagonists: Christina Goering leaves her moneyed existence in order to frequent the bars of a provincial island, and there entertain a number of different men; Mrs Copperfield goes on honeymoon to Panama but spends most of her time socialising with local prostitutes rather than with her husband. This drifting motif will become pertinent in the next chapter of this thesis.

‘absurdity’, as Loewinsohn describes.³⁵ Jones was able to ‘read those words at all hours, in all strained lights, always to see that rhinoceros snorting towards me’. It became an instance of poetry improving the quality of life, of *her* life – poetry which Jones felt connected to since the poem featured in Loewinsohn’s *Watermelons* (1959), the first book issued by the Jones’s Totem Press, and would reappear in Donald Allen’s anthology. LeRoi Jones, who put the ‘animal over my sink’, becomes complicit in ‘domestic expression’ – acts which involve ‘putting your heart on the wall’ (72-3). Her use of the collective pronoun when describing the poems as ‘our lives’ shows literature to be a collaborative act; yet perhaps this notion sits uneasily against the individual egos at work within *The New American Poetry*.³⁶

Jones ascribes her emergence as a writer to her correspondence with her friend Helene Dorn – ‘I owe it to Dear Helene, my fellow tailor (and eventual sculptor), that I ever left the Singer and took up the pen’ – and includes excerpts from these letters in the text (131).³⁷ She transposes Emerson’s call to write ‘the meaning of a household life’ to her situation as an aspiring poet:

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. Its only allure was need, and need was just a swamp behind the hothouse of desire—how could you want what you had to have? I could only record my time, and send it on. (182)

Jones compares her situation to that described by the Russian poet Marina Tsvetayeva who complained to her journal about her domestic life: ‘I am always in the presence of others, from 7 in the morning till 10 at night, and by 10 at night I am so

³⁵ Referring to its ‘absurdity’, Jones provides an unstated connection of the image to another source, Eugène Ionesco’s *Rhinocéros* (1959), a play of *Le Théâtre de l’absurde*.

³⁶ See pp. 41-43 for my discussion of the politics of anthologies.

³⁷ Helen Helmers Dorn, the wife of poet Edward Dorn.

exhausted—what feeling can there be?’ (183).³⁸ Jones knew that to write required ‘feeling’, ‘strength’, as well as ‘time’. Her emergence as a writer of children’s literature, and as a poet and memoirist is a ‘becoming’ centred on a relational identity.

Jones’s version of her story finally appeared in the 1990s, at a point when domestic and economic stability allowed literary production. By contrast, di Prima’s *Dinners and Nightmares* (1961) is an early text in which she exorcised the demons of cleanliness and household propriety passed down by her mother, taking pride in the various strange dinners she concocted – a dish named ‘menstrual pudding’ and dinners consisting entirely of Oreo cookies (1998: 17). As we have seen, in *Memoirs of a Beatnik* di Prima presents all the sexual sordidness of the beatnik stereotype and she also depicts its uncleanness. Di Prima references Puccini’s *La Bohème* as an inspiration for her bohemian living, and her persona in the text manages to resemble both Rodolphe the poet, and Mimi the mistress and domestic caretaker.³⁹ She is the head of her communal ‘Pad’, which includes being the cook, the collector of firewood, and the breadwinner in her various part-time jobs. The first one up in the morning, she would go to collect firewood from a nearby yard, dressed in her androgynous uniform – ‘Levis and sweatshirt’, ‘crew-cut’, ‘black army-surplus boots’, ‘motorcycle jacket’ – before returning to the pad and being an ambiguous mother figure: ‘Coffee made and oatmeal bubbling, I would stand in the front room and loudly and obnoxiously announce breakfast to the snoring, blanket-clutching household, and the day would begin’ ([1969] 1988: 98-9). Blossom S. Kirschenbaum states that it was Diane di Prima’s ‘stance’, ‘to live as though the revolution had already been accomplished – to separate sex from marriage and marriage from childrearing, and to improvise a quasi-familial supportive network’ (1987: 64). There

³⁸ Virginia Woolf voiced similar concerns in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929).

³⁹ See Henri Murger’s *The Bohemians of the Latin Quarter* (*Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*), (London: Vizetelly, 1888), the text which the opera was based on.

is irony and reversal in her deployment of the mother figure, it being a far cry from the 1950s homemaker with her appetite for consumer products.

The conflation of dirt and sex in the beatnik image is embodied in di Prima's relations with Dirty John, one of her favourite lovers, the only one at the time who 'really came from the downtown scene' (121). She describes how Dirty John 'earned his name', since 'in the winter he never bathed at all, never even changed his clothes.' She moves into a 'pad' vacated by Dirty John and takes masochistic pleasure in detailing its conditions: 'The john was in the hall, was unspeakably dirty, and could not be cleaned no matter what, because it was only one flight up and therefore used by every bum in the neighbourhood who was sober enough to make it up the stairs. [...]' It was a lovely pad, one of the best I ever had' (96). When more people move into her pad, an opened-out studio couch in the only room with heating during winter becomes a communal bed: 'it was too cold for any of us to preserve the slightest desire for privacy or solitude' (105). Someone would stay up and tend the fire at night, and 'it was a good feeling to settle down for the night with a full wood box and a book, keeping watch while the rest of the "family" slept snug and content'. Just as Elizabeth Wilson states of the original Rodolphe, di Prima's beatnik bohemians were 'characterized by poverty and innocence rather than being in any sense *hommes damnés*' (2003: 58).

This romanticizing of the Beat life, outside the obvious exaggeration of its sexual life, is again apparent when she describes a sojourn in the country. When the narrator accepted a ride to the country she encountered a scene which prefigured the gatherings of hippie youth seen in the 1960s: 'We arrived after dark somewhere on a hill not far from the Hudson. A hill full of bonfires, soft sounds of guitars. Hard to say how many people, maybe about two hundred, scattered in small groups over the

landscape' (67). The smell of pot is carried on the breeze and 'everyone huddled in two and threes in their jeans under Indian blankets, afghans, open sleeping bags' (67). This segues into a rural idyll in which she lived in a farmhouse belonging to her lover's father. The father, Big Bill who was a 'thirties Red, and a staunch believer in "free love"', her lover Billy, and her friend from New York, Little John, comprise her makeshift family as her rural retreat continues (71). As Anthony Libby observes, di Prima 'manages to turn the Beat chick into a sort of super-hausfrau' in this episode as she ministers to the domestic, and at times, sexual needs of three men (2002: 56). 'I lost myself in my new-found woman's role, the position defined and revealed by my sex: the baking and mending, the mothering and fucking, the girls' parts in the plays—and I was content' (di Prima [1969] 1988: 79). She is both mother and lover to the men. But she uses the polygamous scene to begin a tangential tirade against the confines of the norm of heterosexual monogamy:

I have since found that it is usually a good thing to be the woman of many men at once, or to be one of many women on one man's scene, or to be one of many women in a household with many men, and the scene between all of you shifting and ambiguous. What is not good, what is claustrophobic and deadening, is the regular one-to-one relationship. OK for a weekend, or a month in the mountains, but not OK for a long-time thing, not OK once you have both told yourselves that this is to be the form of your lives. (77-8)

In the relatively enclosed space of the rural farmhouse with the limited community, di Prima's persona is not afforded the Keatsian ambivalence of her more dynamic and gender-bending urban personae. Yet by setting the episode in the mid-1950s, di Prima gives a foretaste of the rural lifestyle she would experiment with in the 1960s and 1970s, in this way linking the Beat period to the hippie period.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Symptomatic of her time and place, di Prima would live in an ashram in Monroe, New York, and live at Timothy Leary's 'experimental community' at Millbrook, New York, before settling permanently on the West Coast in 1968 (di Prima 1990: 199).

Di Prima adopts different models of 'family' and welcomes the experimental sexualities that come with communal life, which can be seen as a reflection of her Romantic models.⁴¹ The turn to nature is a characteristic strand of Beat discourse, and during the late 1960s writers of the Beat generation who had previously cherished their urban enclaves took part in a general exodus. This was related to a wider trend, which I suggest, the Beats helped to instigate. Barry Miles writes:

As the 1960s drew to a close, there was a great movement within the youth counter-culture to leave the cities and establish communes. In the country, they could grow organic vegetables, build tepees or geodesic domes, live in whatever sexual combinations they favoured, have children and be free from the pressure of police, drug addicts, rape and street crime, which had begun to plague the hippie enclaves in the cities. (Miles 2002: 407)

Miles places Allen Ginsberg within this trend through his move to Cherry Valley Farm in upstate New York in 1968, made with the purpose of allowing his partner Peter Orlovsky to quit a drug habit. Ginsberg's decision had been influenced by Gary Snyder's setting up home on land which they owned in the Sierra Nevadas. Snyder's relationship to the region was imaginatively related in Kerouac's novel *The Dharma Bums* through the character of 'Japhy Ryder'. Snyder's long-established affinity with nature is expressed in his own early 'bear shit on the trail' poetry,⁴² as fellow West Coast poet Michael McClure refers to it, and illustrates a strand of influence in Beat writing which was handed down to the late 1960s youth counterculture (McClure

⁴¹ In her play *Whale Honey* (1962) di Prima explores the erotic triangulation of P. B. Shelley, Mary Shelley, and Lord Byron. In *Between Men* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994) Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick probes the significance of the love triangle, and the previously unacknowledged bonding of the male participants.

⁴² Snyder's early poems of this type feature in his first volume of poems, *Riprap* (1959). See also p. 87 of this thesis.

1999: 36). The Beat desire to leave the city and go to nature acted out an American tradition well established by the Transcendentalists.⁴³

The devotion to nature and emphasis on community seen in various branches of Buddhism and other Eastern religions encouraged the Beat generation's experimentation with rural living. Joanne Kyger regards the location of the West Coast poetic community as allowing a specific relation to nature.⁴⁴ She speaks from within 'North Coast, Pacific Rim, ocean culture' and regards it as 'seasonally defined', more 'laid back' and less 'aggressive' than the East Coast, in general having a 'different rhythm' (Grace and Johnson 2004: 151). After travelling in Japan and India, Kyger left San Francisco for the small town of Bolinas in Marin County, which provided rural isolation while also creating new versions of community. She describes the logistics of the move:

It was part of the whole scene of the '60s to get out of the city and go live in the country. [Jack Boyce, Kyger's second husband] had inherited some money and wanted to buy some land and build a house. So we looked a lot up and down the coast for places to start. Bolinas at that time was still very small, 500 people, a small little town that had been established in the last century. My friend Bill Brown was living there, who edited *Coyote's Journal* with Jim Koller during the '60s so I kept visiting him. You could buy 40 acres and homestead it yourself, and build up a whole life, but I realized I needed more than one other person. It was hard to know how to live there; there weren't any jobs – but it *was* part of the 'dropping out.' There weren't a lot of houses then; subsequently some got built, until there was a water moratorium. But it felt like people were really intense ... just great. (Kyger 2000b: n.pag.)

⁴³ See Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1854) with its particular sense of the individual's relation to nature.

⁴⁴ Communal living had a history on the West Coast, with bohemian retreats appearing at the turn of the nineteenth century in various places such as Carmel. Elizabeth Wilson notes that some of these retreats were influenced by England's Arts and Crafts Movement and she discusses the place of women artists in such communities (1991: 78). As an aside, Wilson finds the utopian message preached by William Morris in *News from Nowhere* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1891), a figure who influenced such back-to-nature living, to be 'a retreat from modernity and a nostalgia for patriarchalism' (9). See also Kevin Starr's *Americans and the Californian Dream 1850-1915* (New York: Oxford U P, 1973).

Subsequently the poets Robert Creeley and Bobbie Louise Hawkins and the editor Donald Allen moved there, as well as some New York School poets such as Ted Berrigan, establishing a ‘highly charged’ rural literary community (2000b: n.pag.). In this locale, Kyger produced a specific domestic poetics of place, evident in collections such as *Joanne* (1970) and *The Wonderful Focus of You* (1980). Although home is transplanted from the city to the country, patterns of domesticity surface and roles such as the maternal provider take on new earthly tones as we saw in di Prima’s example. Kyger’s poem ‘Tuesday, October 28, 1969, Bolinas’ self-consciously references her life as a rural drop-out in an idealistic manner. The speaker describes ‘a beautiful golden day’ where next to her a ‘fat cat lies down / dozing’ in a reflection of her own self-contented and languorous state, which she deliberately exposes with hyperbolic inversion: ‘I could use a little rest too / I only slept 11 hours last night’ (Kyger 2002: 78).⁴⁵ She outlines the quotidian tasks she has accomplished that day in her house and in her garden:

wrote some letters, swept the floor,
planted 2 rows of onions, snow peas
And now I am looking forward
to washing my hair.
(78)

The subject appears absolutely content in the solitude which country living engenders. Kyger’s tone is conversational and comic, as she enjoys the measured pace of her life. Michael Davidson observes that although Kyger’s work manifests a ‘respectful’ and

⁴⁵ All further quotations from Joanne Kyger’s poems are also taken from her volume *As Ever: Selected Poems*, ed. Michael Rothenberg (New York: Penguin, 2002).

even ‘celebratory’ relationship to nature, the poet ‘avoids the more bardic invocations of the natural world associated with her Beat compatriots’ (1989: 188).

Although Kyger’s voice can express solitary self-sufficiency it also finds a place co-existent with the outside world, as illustrated in a fragment from *Joanne* (1970):

what I wanted to say

was in the broad

sweeping

form of being there

I am walking up the path

I come home and wash my hair

I am bereft

I dissolve quickly

I am everybody

(101)

Kyger’s lyrical ‘I’ becomes dissolved in its pursuit of occupying the moment, of observing and ‘being there’. In contrast to Walt Whitman’s ‘Song of Myself’ which addresses eternity, famously stating ‘I am large, I contain multitudes’ (Whitman 2004: 66), Kyger’s voice addresses the particular moment. Davidson compares Kyger’s poetry to that of her ‘bosom pal’ Philip Whalen, through its form which ‘often seems

taken directly from the notebook page, each line registering a quick glance or momentary observation' (Waldman 2000: viii; Davidson 1989: 188).

Another poem from *Joanne* describes a domestic scene:

Breakfast. He assured me
orange juice, toast & coffee.
Just the way I like it. I flang
the cawfee cup to de floor. After
three times it split into a million
pieces.
(93)

It is unclear who the thoughts and reported speech in the poem belong to, but the line 'I flang / the cawfee cup to de floor' carefully captures, according to Davidson, a 'specific tone of voice' (1989: 188). The destruction of the coffee cup signals domestic tension, and separation of female from male in the house is portrayed since a female speaker is 'worried about the / small supply of dope in the other room' (93). In the other room, two men named 'Lewis and Tom', presumably artists, are 'busy / collaborating' while a record is played (93). In Kyger's domestic disorder, the female homemaker worries about the supply of drugs for the men:

I wonder why he
doesn't exchange some of
the mescaline for dope. Give Tom
some of the dope.

But separation between the female speaker and the two men remains, as the voice reasons, 'I wouldn't go there, into their /minds. I'm here, ain't I' (93). The closing image is of the woman's view in a mirror of 'pine branches nodding nodding / in the blue California sun', the outside natural world seen in reverse in the speaker's, possibly drug-hazed, consciousness in which speech is slowed down and a coffee cup can shatter into a million pieces.

Although the lives discussed in this chapter may have stayed rooted in place, journeys are possible: a changing relationship to one's body and sexuality, changing roles in a family or community, which became reflected in the movement into writing. Domesticity and the 'everyday' influenced the form and content of the writings. Thus home appears not as a place to abandon, but conversely, as a place as complex and valuable as the road, the theme of the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER SIX:

For Love on the Road

Part I: Door Wide Open: Movement and Stasis

In place of travel on the traditional road of Beat writers and their adherents, it has been asserted that the Beat generation's women travelled an alternate road of 'strange' and 'difficult lives' (Johnson 1999: 48). This is the argument of writers such as Joyce Johnson and Hettie Jones, who were committed to their lives in New York City during the Beat years, and also Diane di Prima, a well-travelled writer who favoured a rich inner life. Before exploring various literary representations of Beat women's experience of actual travel, let us consider some reactions to the unknown road that their male partners travelled.

Johnson does admit her former desire to follow Kerouac on the Beat road during their relationship. *Door Wide Open: A Beat Love Affair in Letters, 1957-1958* (2000) charts Johnson's rising hopes and desires in response to Kerouac's invitation to meet him on the road, and her subsequent disappointment as he lets her down. In her retrospective commentary accompanying their letters Johnson recounts her youthful self-blame over not being as spontaneous as Kerouac, for being tied to the commitments of her job and apartment in New York, which she refers to as her safety net:

It was embarrassing to be moving so slowly when Jack seemed so eager to have me with him, but although I longed to be in San Francisco, I was too innately cautious to go on the road impetuously and find myself in a situation where I lacked the resources to be self-sufficient. Would Jack really be there waiting, I could not help wondering, when I got off the Greyhound bus on the other side of the continent? (Kerouac and Johnson 2000: 27)

Another letter to Kerouac, dated July 26 1957, provides a picture of her mindset with regard to her impending road travel. Her excitement is evident but she also confesses her trepidation by recalling an earlier episode when they explored the Brooklyn docks together, a territory she would not normally have visited without him.

It's funny the way you and Allen and Peter came to town this winter and shook us all up. Just think—we had been here all our lives, and now suddenly Elise is in Frisco, [Sheila] in Paris, and I'm going to Mexico—most peculiar. [...] But then I remember walking with you at night through the Brooklyn docks and seeing the white steam rising from the ships against the black sky and how beautiful it was and I'd never seen it before—imagine!—but if I'd walked through it with anyone else, I wouldn't have seen it either, because I wouldn't have felt safe in what my mother would categorically call 'a bad neighbourhood,' I would have been thinking 'Where's the subway?' and missed everything. But with you—I felt as though nothing could touch me, and if anything happened, the Hell with it. 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. (42)

The ideological effects of gender are evident as young Johnson understands that her exclusion was based on the impositions of her family and wider society rather than reality. The fear of 'bad neighbourhoods' is handed down by the mother, yet both real threat and ideological fears comes into play when analysing the relationship between women in relation to the road. Earlier we heard Sylvia Plath's ambitions to 'mingle with road crews' and 'travel west'¹ – very representative sentiments of women of the 1950s who felt impeded by gendered ideology.

In his letters Kerouac paints Johnson a glowing portrait of Mexico City, suggesting she should rather go where everything is 'new & foreign & strange', as opposed to 'silly Frisco' which in comparison is more expensive and just an extension of the scene in New York (44). He asserts that the experience will help the novel she

¹ See p. 107.

is working on: ‘Come on, we’ll be 2 young American writers on a Famous Lark that will be mentioned in our biographies’, he writes, invoking a couple of Lost Generation writers in exile perhaps (45).² The same events are more briefly narrated in *Minor Characters*, and Johnson states that Kerouac ‘generously recognized’ the ‘hungry writer’ in herself that she ‘hadn’t learned to put first’ (Johnson 1994: 178). In *Door Wide Open* she admits that the trips which she never made in the summer of 1957 have ‘always haunted’ her (60). Johnson suspects with hindsight that the trips ‘would have tested me profoundly, altered the future course of my life in unknown ways’. She continues: ‘I still regret that I couldn’t move faster than Jack Kerouac could change his mind, that I never saw Jack’s Mexico, never underwent the “educational” experience he offered—even with all its risks’ (60). Johnson envisions two portraits of their lives together in Mexico. The first is a dreamlike scenario in which they ‘take a bus out to the countryside and rent a thick-walled cottage the color of a flowerpot, where each day we peacefully work on our books and make love’ (60). When September comes and *On the Road* is published, Kerouac, the suddenly famous author, is hidden away with her in their Mexican cottage, disdaining the carnivorous New York literary world. But then Johnson presents ‘a more realistic scenario’:

As the weeks pass in our quiet cottage, Jack’s mood unaccountably darkens. He talks about feeling bored and gets dangerously silent; soon he’s going out to the local bars, stumbling home with drunken strangers who scare me. When his publisher insists that he has to come to New York, he promises to be gone only a few weeks—how can he deprive himself of the experience of being the most famous writer in America? But he forgets to return. When I walk alone through the village, people stare at me and call me la Gringa; at night teenage boys rattle the door and knock on my window. I wait for Jack until almost all my money is gone. Then I hitchhike back to New York and write an entirely different novel. (61)

² The novel would of course be published as *Come and Join the Dance* (1962).

In this second scenario when she is alone in Mexico the atmosphere is marked by the reappearance of insinuations of physical threat.

Johnson suggests that had she gone through these latter experiences – including the opening of her horizons as she experienced a new culture outside 1950s America as well as abandonment, fear, and despair – that she would have written an entirely different novel from *Come and Join the Dance*. But although that novel describes female subjectivity instead, it contains an episode which plays with the road motif. Susan Levitt departs from New York City and sets off into the American night at the side of her Beat-styled hero, Peter:

She was sitting in the front seat of the car next to Peter, watching the car's lights whiten the darkness ahead of them, always the same whiteness to drive into and everything dark beyond it, the shapes of trees, houses, to be felt rather than seen. [...] She was travelling fast, she was riding through the center of night—she was with Peter, next to him, and yet alone. The car was making the same machine-gun sound she had heard four days ago. Sometimes it would stall, sometimes it rushed forward violently—but she had no sense of danger. Peter began to drive even faster. She leaned back against the seat and shut her eyes. She could feel the speed now as if it were a force inside her.
(Glassman 1962: 159)

There is unease lurking on Susan and Peter's road. While seated next to Peter, Susan feels her own solitude and separation. Moreover, their journey north is cut short as the car is badly in need of repair, threatening to break down, and so they lose their very access to the road. They drive back to New York where Peter has to humiliatingly sell the car to a scrap dealer. According to Ronna C. Johnson, 'the novel appropriates and then sabotages the traditional road tale', and furthermore with the demise of Peter's car, the 'debilitated machine signifies the decline of male power' (2002: 90). Susan contemplates Peter's existence without his beloved vehicle, which had represented and actualised his freedom. Glassman states: 'She was thinking about

how it would be for Peter now, how he would wake up in his apartment at noon each day and find that more dust had settled overnight, how he would go out for breakfast because there weren't any clean cups, how he would drift up and down Broadway until he was tired enough to sleep again' (1962: 162). Domesticity looms because he is confined to his apartment, and instead of the highway he is faced with the surrounding streets. There is an ironic role reversal as Peter achieves what Ronna C. Johnson refers to as the 'feminine condition', which is significant since in Beat terms, 'the male escape from civilization, is predicated on having women and domesticity to leave' (2002: 90; 89).³ The momentum and speed that Susan picks up as she is travelling in Peter's car – 'She could feel the speed now as if it were a force inside her' – is transferred to her travel across the Atlantic, since she is poised toward Paris at the close of the novel.⁴

Johnson's own travels to Europe, to Paris and London, are described in *Missing Men*, and she admits that she did not see San Francisco until the early 1970s and of never having gone to Mexico City (Kerouac and Johnson 2000: 61). Throughout her work Johnson reiterates the importance of New York City as the pivotal centre of her life, stating retrospectively in *Door Wide Open* that although she, 'wouldn't admit it to Jack or even to myself, it would have been hard to tear myself away. [...] It was not the moment to be in Mexico' (52).

³ It is inadequate to suggest that the male Beats occupied a reified masculine position. Their economic dependence on women and their fluid sexualities are both factors which position them against normative 1950s heterosexual masculinity. As suggested in Chapter Two, Beat generation masculinities existed on a continuum. For example, the poet Robert Duncan 'pointed to his long and deep-rooted domestic situation with the collage artist Jess as something that marked him as non-Beat. To be a domestic poet, he claimed, was to be something other than what Beat meant—nomadic, transient, unattached' (Damon 2002: 214) (Damon is paraphrasing Richard Cándida Smith's argument in *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995)). In support of this Joanne Kyger has spoken of Duncan's 'romance of the household' (2000a: n.pag.).

⁴ A fuller account of the theme could discuss Hettie Jones's 'theft' of the car image in her poetry collection *Drive* (New York: Hanging Loose, 1998), with titles such as 'The Woman in the Green Car' and 'Ode to My Car'.

The title *Door Wide Open* suggests a home permanently ready to receive or send the traveller. In Carolyn Cassady's memoir *Off the Road: My Years with Cassady, Kerouac, and Ginsberg* (1990) the road is an absence.⁵ In reference to the text Cassady has stated: 'Kerouac had fictionalized his adventures with Neal "on the road," and I wrote about what was really happening behind the scenes or between the trips and their attitudes and involvements with home and family life, just as Jack had done with their single male escapades' (2001: 151). With Neal Cassady frequently absent, she was left as the sole breadwinner to her family of three children in their various homes situated in often semi-rural isolation.

Cassady presents her former self as stationary – others circle around her, visiting and then deserting. She states that it was 'evident that wanderlust was tugging at Neal again and the Mexican sun at Jack, and in me the seed of dread began to sprout' (197). With Neal frequently absent, her life was 'a lonely round of housework and children, my sanity saved only by their need of me and the lovely environment surrounding me' (260). Yet the portrayal of this lonely life is slight, as Cassady concentrates the narrative on the interruptions by the visiting Beat men. Unlike *Minor Characters*, the text does not give an account of the narrator's life outside the sphere of Beat men, ultimately confirming its status as a secondary text about Beat men, rather than being about a Beat woman.

Thus, by default, Cassady's text encapsulates the ideology of 1950s matrimonial order. Home is not an occasion for poetry, as it was found to be in my previous chapter. But Cassady seems to be a writer by default rather than by wilful intent, as our other Beat generation women writers are. As a homemaker she provided a stable haven for her Beat men to return to after their time on the road. Gender

⁵ See pp. 14-15 and p. 24 for previous references to the author and text.

division with regard to household responsibilities reflected the American post-war norm there. Part of her revisionist intent was to describe Neal's attempts at balancing a road life with being the male head of a household who earned a living through working on the railroad, yet it is clear that Cassady herself was the mainstay of the family.

Like Joyce Johnson, Cassady admits to having a desire to go on the road, and when Kerouac invited her to join him in Mexico in 1952, she similarly missed the opportunity and berated herself: 'You complain about being confined, and when you get a chance to break out, you won't take it. [...] Oh, why was I so afraid of life?' (201). She reasons that she would never leave the children solely in Neal's care but also admits that 'the idea of setting out alone on that journey was too much' (202). *Off the Road* shows travel to be dependent upon and co-existent with stasis, yet lacks the aesthetic power found in other explorations of home life.

Part II: Becoming Penelope

In her modern weaving of mythic materials, *The Tapestry and The Web* (1965), Joanne Kyger invokes the figure of Penelope, the keeper of the 'oikos'.⁶ Although the poems were mostly written in Japan in the early 1960s, with Kyger ostensibly 'on the road' with Gary Snyder, domesticity resurfaces. Michael Davidson notes that the name 'Penelope' means 'with a web over her face', and in *The Odyssey* she is both a real and metaphorical weaver since she is also a storyteller (1989: 189). The domestic sphere of women's traditional quotidian work, such as weaving, is celebrated and enacted in Kyger's poems. Linda Russo has discussed the ways in which the fragmentation of Kyger's verse is suggestive of weaving, stating that 'as if in a direct line from Sappho, *The Tapestry and The Web* appears to be a collection of fragments' (2002: 179). But these fragments do not add up to a whole; they are 'a web of aberrant threads' which 'assert a new mode of poetic authority that diverges markedly from masculinist conceptions of the role of poet as maker' (179). Quoting from a poem entitled 'Tapestry', Russo refers to Kyger's 'Dealing with the detail / on the fragment of the fifth / Tapestry' which allows the search 'for bigger & better things' (Kyger 2002: 19). By focusing on the small detail, the fragment allows the poet to create a larger poetic truth; yet the whole remains more than the sum of its parts. Most of the poems are untitled, but 'Tapestry' exists with two other poems of the same title dispersed in the collection, in which Kyger handles the very substance of weaving.

⁶ Karen Lawrence refers to the 'oikos' (1994: 3). Linda Russo (2002) posits H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* as a poetic precedent for Kyger's appropriation of myth and identifies Alice Notley's *The Descent of Alette* (1996) as an antecedent. Indeed Notley (1996) has written of the influence of Kyger. Anne Waldman's epic work *Iovis* is another antecedent. Waldman has spoken of Kyger as an influence in her work and places herself alongside Kyger, Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, Diane di Prima, Notley, and others who have 'drawn on strategies of cultural investigation' and 'worked with "fragment", epic, open field composition'; practices which she links to the influence of Modernist progenitors such as Pound and H.D. (Waldman 2001: 145).

The speaker viewing a tapestry is almost subsumed inside it and is able to observe the details, both physical and emotional, of the living tapestried scene – the maid is turned toward ‘the sound of the / huntsman’s horn’ which signals the capture of a unicorn (19). Her hair is ‘uncombed’ and her ‘hand / raised up in a lackadaisical gesture / meaning all’s well’. But then a final detail appears in a second, separate stanza – another fragment – in which the speaker discerns the maid’s ‘Puffeyes and the broken turned nose’, which alludes to violence between the characters in the scene (19). The second poem entitled ‘Tapestry’ records that

the eye
is drawn
to the Bold
DESIGN—the
.Border.
.California flowers.
nothing promised that isn’t shown.

Implements:

shell
stone
.Peacock.

(8)

As well as describing a tapestry, this statement seems to announce Kyger's constructed, deliberate, and daring poetics, drawing our attention to her bold design. Her view for the quotidian detail is acknowledged in that there is 'nothing promised that isn't shown.' The poet promises to present every detail she feels relevant to her art, which includes the quotidian and domestic – 'California flowers' – as well as the 'shell', 'stone', and 'Peacock' which as well as being everyday objects also possess a mythic, timeless quality and so differ from the more historically and geographically-specific flowers. In their detailing of the very stuff of tapestry and of poetry, the 'Tapestry' poems are a microcosmic presentation of the process of the larger collection.

Penelope's very worthy daily task of weaving is mocked and undone through Kyger's suggestion that history has lied and the chaste Penelope was actually occupied with men. Kyger picks up a piece of apocrypha, most probably from Robert Graves's *The Greek Myths*⁷ as Russo points out, which states that: 'Some deny that Penelope remained faithful to Odysseus. They accuse her of companying with Amphinomus of Dulichium, or with all the suitors in turn, and say that the fruit of this union was the monster god Pan' (Russo 2002: 188). As Kyger puts it:

Somewhere you can find reference to the fact that PAN was the
son of PENELOPE

Either as the result of a *god*

or as a result of ALL of the suitors

who hung around while Odysseus was abroad.

(9)

⁷ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1955).

Russo relates that in *The Odyssey* Pan's role was 'downplayed' whereas Kyger affords the chaotic force of Pan much significance (188). A poem titled '12.29 & 30 (Pan as the son of Penelope)' further speculates upon Penelope's chastity and the figure of Pan.

Refresh my thoughts of Penelope again.

Just HOW

solitary was her wait?

I notice Someone got to her that

barrel chested he-goat prancing
around w/ his reed pipes

is no fantasy of small talk.

More the result of BIG talk

and the absence of her husband.

(10)

Chaos has entered the house, symbolically appearing in the form of Pan. He is a 'cock-eyed lecherous offspring' and an 'impudent monster' (10; 11). Penelope has given birth to a chaotic and monstrous force which threatens the domestic scene. Indeed, on Odysseus's return Pan runs away:

He was acres away by then I suppose in the sunlight leching

at some round breasted sheep

girl.

the cock crowing at dawn never had bigger thoughts than he did
about waking up the world.

(11)

Kyger positions herself as a reader of myth who questions errors she believes have persisted over the centuries, staging womanly experience and intuition which often comes across in a gossipy tone – ‘Just HOW / solitary was her wait?’. Despite this she does not position herself as an authority on myth. For example:

Some thing keeps escaping me. Something
about the landing of the husband’s boat upon the shore.

She did not run up and embrace him as I recall.

He came upon her at the house & killed the suitors.

I choose to think of her waiting for him.

concocting his adventures bringing
the misfortunes to him
—she must have had her hands full.

(10-11)

Several overlapping narratives appear and Kyger cannot quite locate truth. Just as she does not trust the concrete facts of myth, she cannot create certainties and the facts

often escape her. For example, in another poem Kyger watches someone weaving and tries to recall 'the woman who sits at her loom / What was her name? the goddess I mean / —not that mortal one' (13). It is as if she has rejected Penelope as a figure of authority, and instead Kyger identifies with the image of a goddess who weaves. In this particular poem which we are told was composed in the spring of 1960 in Kyoto, the speaker describes her 'waiting again / what for' (13). She states: 'I am no picker from the sea of its riches', instead identifying with a weaver. A poem titled 'Waiting' captures a similar tone:

over the lilacs won't he come home
to at least rest tonight, I want to see
the round car safe in the driveway, cinders
and the moon over head
(30)

This poem's temporally fixed modern scene is evidenced by a returning car as opposed to a boat. Yet the invocation of the feminine symbol of the moon links it to the ancient and mythic scenes found elsewhere in the sequence. Russo states that 'through the figure of Penelope, Kyger's own life could be seen and worked upon a mythic frame' and that she 'us[ed] poems as a structure in which to observe her situation as an American poet/wife abroad at a distance that provided some perspective on the difficulties and dissatisfactions associated with her roles' (187). Another poem set in Japan presents a detail of her life as a wife abroad:

It is lonely
I must draw water from the well 75 buckets for the bath
I mix a drink—gin, fizz water, lemon juice, a spoonful
of strawberry jam
And place it in a champagne glass—it is hard work
to make the bath
And my winter clothes are dusty and should be put away
In storage.
(15)

In her description of the lonely and laborious process of gathering water for a bath in her Japanese home, Kyger aligns herself with a housewife or servant. Yet this chore is juxtaposed with the task of making an elaborate drink served in a champagne glass, which acts as an image of superfluous luxury to lighten the solitary domestic scene. By juxtaposing various domestic scenes – informed by classical myth or her contemporary experience – Kyger explored the feminine tradition of waiting. By employing the concept of weaving in her sequence of poems – exposing the fragments of her narrative – Kyger creates a feminine poetics of a ‘bold design’ which were born out of her own domestic stasis. Kyger’s experience differs from the Beat women who stayed on American soil. It is ironic that these poems addressing waiting were written when Kyger had travelled over the Pacific in a boat to study Buddhism alongside Snyder in Japan. In the later discussion of *Strange Big Moon*, Kyger’s experiences as a female traveller and her frustrations as a wife will be elaborated.

Before that we can interrogate women’s experience of the traditional American road. What were the particular differences that a female travelling body

experienced on the road? In order to discuss this I examine some antecedents which assert the presence rather than the absence of women's travel on the American road.

Part III: Female Hoboes and Travel during the Depression

The movement of the maternal generation in the 1920s and 1930s which was referenced in Chapter Two – the travels of poets Helen Adam, Madeline Gleason and Joyce Johnson’s mother Rosalind – stands in contrast to the generation of young women of the 1950s.⁸ The parental generation of the Beats lived through the Depression, a period which saw the large-scale uprooting of Americans as they took to the road in search of work.⁹ By positing the female hobo lineage in particular, we recognize secret histories of radical politics and feminism which disavow the notion of progressive social change. Therefore we can gain insight into the changing status of female subjects.¹⁰

In *On the Road*, Dean Moriarty recounts his childhood as a hobo:

One time I rode a freight from New Mexico clear to LA—I was eleven years old, lost my father at a siding, we were all in a hobo jungle, I was with a man called Big Red, my father was out drunk in a boxcar—it started to roll—Big Red and I missed it—I didn’t see my father for months. I rode a long freight all the way to California, really flying, first-class freight, a desert Zipper. All the way I rode over the couplings—you can imagine how dangerous, I was

⁸ See pp. 111-114.

⁹ The Great Depression began in 1929 as a result of the Wall Street Crash and ended over a decade later with full employment and booming industries after the United States entered World War II. Morison et al report that by 1933, ‘in a country of some 120 million people, probably more than 40 million were either unemployed or members of a family in which the main breadwinner was out of work’ (1983: 595).

¹⁰ In addition to Helen Adam and Madeline Gleason, the life history of jazz poet Ruth Weiss also tells of early travel. Born in Germany in 1928 and arriving in the United States in the late 1930s, Weiss regularly hitchhiked around the States in the 1950s. She links the ease with which she travelled around the country to her experience in Europe after the war where she briefly returned with her parents:

I did it [hitchhiking] in Germany, and of course being an American, the only vehicles were the American ones. They always picked me up, the soldiers! I didn’t have any problems. I wore my saddle shoes and jeans, and they knew I was American. Then in Switzerland, I had practically no money. So what did I do? Because I liked to move, I got on the road and put my thumb out. I went to Geneva and I went to Brussels and later I went with a friend to Paris. We didn’t have any money; we hitchhiked. (Grace and Johnson 2004: 78)

When she returned to the States hitchhiking ‘seemed the most natural thing to do’ (78).

only a kid, I didn't know—clutching a loaf of bread under one arm and the other hooked around the brake bar.¹¹ (Kerouac 1991: 140)

But the female Beats also acknowledged the hobo lineage. Bonnie Bremser sources the term Beat as 'a leftover from the thirties and forties Depression years, of the wandering vagrant' (Grace and Johnson 120). Bremser regards Kerouac's 'romanticization' of Herbert Huncke's 'carnie term' as symptomatic of 'the tone of the time' – it was 'an offspring of [the] anarchy and bohemianism that went before'.¹² Bremser relates that she was well-read in these discourses during her youth. Diane di Prima heard of the hobo heritage at folk concerts in Greenwich Village's Washington Square Park in the early 1950s:

These folk songs were a huge part of our education. Of our coming to know the world. They gave to city-bound creatures like myself their first taste of the West, of what those spaces might be like, the flavor of life and death under those skies. There were songs of the mines, of factories and farms and of the sea. Songs of immigration, indentured labor, court intrigue and betrayal. The underground railroad, in all its incarnations. Songs of riding the rails. There was many a song of a hanging or a jailbreak. (2001a: 113)

Joyce Johnson notes the incongruity of the hobo lifestyle in the post-war period. She describes Kerouac's first westbound trip across the country in 1947, which served as material for *On the Road* and so provided a context for the large-scale cross-country movement of young people in the early 1960s. Johnson states:

¹¹ Regarding the etymology of the term 'hobo', Jessie Ryon Lucke states 'Dictionaries have proposed a variety of etymologies for the word *hobo*. Partridge's *Dictionary of the Underworld* offers the best available summary of them. He lists *ho[meward] bo[ound]*, *ho[mo] bo[nus]*, *hoe boy*, *hautboy*, and finally *Ho! beau!* which he considers the correct source' (1972: 303). For a discussion of the hobo in both American culture and literature see John D. Seeyle's 'The American Tramp: A Version of the Picaresque', *American Quarterly* 15.4 (1963): 535-553, Frederick Feied's *No Pie in the Sky: The Hobo as American Cultural Hero in the Works of Jack London, John Dos Passos, and Jack Kerouac* (New York: Citadel, 1964), and Todd DePastino's *Citizen Hobo: How A Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003).

¹² In 'The Origins of the Beat Generation' (1959), Kerouac describes meeting Huncke around Times Square in 1944: 'Huncke appeared to us and said "I'm beat" with radiant light shining out of his despairing eyes . . . a word perhaps brought from some midwest carnival or junk cafeteria' (1998: 60).

But in 1947, to be a college-educated hitchhiker was to be anachronistic. The Depression decade, when millions of the hungry, homeless, and unemployed had roamed the U.S. landscape, hopped freights, slept in open fields, was still grimly, unnostalgically alive in people's memories. Status and security had been so recently won and still seemed tenuously held. People did not walk the highways unless the cars they drove – preferably the latest models – had flats or ran out of gas. In Council Bluffs, where great wagon trains had gathered in the nineteenth century, Jack came upon a depressing vista of 'cute cottages of one damn kind and another.' In Cheyenne, he found Wild West Week being celebrated by 'fat businessmen in boots and ten-gallon hats,' in whose eyes it would have been an act of incomprehensible perversity for a young man to become deliberately classless if he had other options; in another few years, they would see it as positively un-American. (1994: 24)

This interpretation sets the increasingly homogenised 1950s late-capitalist world against an earlier age it tried to forget. Kerouac's invocation of a particular American age was ironically viewed as being un-American. Directly accessing the American land through roaming, sleeping in open fields, and engaging with its inhabitants (the very acts which Sylvia Plath dreamed of in 1951) appeared increasingly suspicious. Adrienne Rich has stated that a 'blanketing snow had begun to drift over the radical history of the United States' in the 1950s (1987: 221). Rich felt her country still 'stuck fast [...] in the deep freeze of history' forty years later: 'Any United States citizen alive today has been saturated with Cold War rhetoric, the horrors of communism, the betrayals of socialism, the warning that any collective restructuring of society spells the end of personal freedom' (220). The populist and collective politics associated with an age of social and economic-levelling may have been somewhat buried by the 1950s, but its culture and spirit were discovered and registered by male and female authors alike.

I wish to posit the female hobo whose travels were motivated by both economics and adventure as a lineage for Beat generation women. To introduce the theme we can refer to Joyce Johnson's *Missing Men*, which details her mother's travels as an unmarried woman across the American continent in the years leading up

to the Depression. Rosalind Ross was the youngest of three unmarried sisters, and the family's hopes lay in her finding a successful husband. Therefore her road travel can be viewed as economically-motivated. Johnson writes of her mother:

She was not only considerably younger but the one who had been born in America, the one with blond hair, blue eyes, and a delicate, sweet-faced prettiness for which she got a lot of attention. She had the kind of refined air that went with her new American name and might lead to an excellent marriage.¹³ (2004 12-13)

Firstly Rosalind is sent by a great-aunt to singing lessons, described as 'the accomplishment of a cultured girl', which 'would give her an effective way of standing out at social gatherings, when young people clustered around the piano to hear a little Schubert' (15). Johnson suggests Great-Aunt Marcia was unaware such a 'Victorian notion' was outmoded, at a time when young people were instead turning to the 'Charleston and the Bunny Hop' (15). Johnson details the particular situation of the sisters, for whom the Jazz Age seemed to have passed by, with time stopping when their father had died. Her aunts Anna and Leona were not expected to leave home, but to support their mother. They were referred to as 'the girls', Johnson notes, 'even when their hair turned gray' (16). Their particular childlike state is elaborated, it being noted that 'for most of her adult life, Anna shared a bedroom with her mother'. Their lives speak of the same condition Johnson defines her father's life by – a quotation from Thoreau – 'The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation' (Johnson 1994: 20). Residing in Mapleton, a semi-rural suburb of New York, Johnson describes their state: 'For unescorted culture-hungry women of slender means, nighttime

¹³ Chapter Four discussed the Rosenberg family's troubles in America, the death of Samuel Rosenberg, and their resultant adoption of the name Ross. See pp. 202-203.

Manhattan, with its theatres and concert halls and liveliness, was both a subway ride and an infinity away—a focus of longings impossible to fulfil’ (19).

On Great-Aunt Marcia’s suggestion, Rosalind is shipped out to ‘prosperous relatives’ who ‘would see that the pretty little thing met the right people’ (15). Rosalind is sent by train to Vancouver, Shreveport, and then Dallas, to be ‘shown off in various outfits at luncheons and parties’ (16). But Rosalind does not quite fit in and returns to Mapleton with nothing to show for her travels, ‘no name of a potential suitor, let alone an engagement ring’ (20). Johnson imagines the trip:

She had seen a lot of the continent through dusty train windows, had been taken to Hollywood and Yellowstone Park as well as innumerable parties where her home-sewn dresses looked distinctly dowdy compared to the chiffons and georgettes of southern belles and where boys who clearly weren’t Jewish had looked her over and asked her to do the two-step. On those grounds she could keep assuring everyone she was having a wonderful time, but she must have been uneasily aware that most of her enjoyment was coming from the sheer novelty of the trip. (19-20)

However, she is sent back on a second trip, ‘desperately anxious to find some permanent means of escape’, after growing increasingly aware of ‘the ennui and isolation of her sisters’ (22). The letters from Anna and Leona to their younger sister out on the road, which Johnson quotes from, speak of their vicarious interest in Rosalind’s exploits. Leona writes: ‘I hope there will be a letter from you when I get home tonight [...] for that is our latest diversion, and we are delighted that you are enjoying everything to the utmost. In fact, it is as if we had the same experience. Auntie is pleased beyond all measure. Every time a letter arrives, we have several sessions, one with the family, another with Auntie, and we discuss the pros and cons of the situation’ (23). Johnson relates that Anna never once complains about sending Rosalind money and postal orders. There was the twenty-five dollars she sent so that

‘Rosalind could buy herself a hat the minute she reached Dallas’, and the other promised items on their way: ‘stockings, two pairs of white kid gloves, and an instruction book for the mandolin’ (22). The accompanying letter from Anna recommends to Rosalind: ‘Enjoy yourself all you can [...] while you are in the swim. Don’t worry about what you will do later. The future will take care of itself’ (22). Interpreting this advice, Johnson believes Anna ‘seemed to know how driven Rosalind must feel under the weight of everyone’s expectations, how badly she needed permission to just take life as it came’ (22).

Yet Rosalind’s experiences appeared to ‘energize’ her older sisters and consequently, the more adventurous Leona was able to ‘envision a trip out west with her friend Elizabeth’ (24). Johnson records her letter to Rosalind: ‘We are going to sling our knapsacks on our backs and scour the U.S. for adventure. Ma is willing, and Auntie urges it. It all depends upon finances’ (24). But Rosalind’s own travels across the continent did not ultimately produce a husband, and she would eventually meet Johnson’s father, Daniel Glassman, at a summer camp in 1929. Rosalind left Texas at the end of her second trip with a case of ‘the grippe’, which Johnson believes could have been depression, ‘a sense of terrible anticlimax’ (25). On her return to New York she wrote to the friends in Dallas she had not had the chance to say goodbye to. Among her mother’s papers Johnson found drafts of a letter to a man called Fred, whom she believes her mother fell in love with. Johnson relates her mother’s hesitant sentences to Fred, which expose her attempt to appear happy about being home: ‘New York is so rushing, such a contrast to Dallas—can hardly realize I am only back a week. Saw the “Chauve Souris” and “Rain,” which is considered the finest play of the season’ (26). Rosalind’s last sentence, ‘may have seemed a bit too revealing’: ““The spring isn’t here yet,” my mother writes as if suddenly the weather up north is no

longer promising, “and I am very restless” (26). This restlessness is evidenced by a note and some photographs which show that Rosalind returned to Dallas one last time, to perform in the chorus of *Rosemarie*, ‘an operetta touring the state’ (27). Johnson states that Rosalind ‘was on the road’, possibly without the support or approval of her family (27). The photographs, some of which are reprinted in the text, show that Rosalind was ‘thoroughly enjoying being on her own’ (27). Pictured in the company of a female friend and two men, one of whom Johnson conjectures was Fred, Johnson relates their exploits:

In one shot, the foursome are visiting a ranch where my mother has been induced to perform a tentative arabesque atop a gatepost; in another, my mother is powdering her nose in front of a Mexican cantina after they’ve crossed the border in a dust-caked Ford. Her escort is handsome and attentive and very blond. He sits so close to her that his suntanned arm brushes against hers—she doesn’t dare look at him. She takes a photo of him astride a dark horse back with her to Mapleton. (27-8)

But this part of Rosalind’s life would be soon over – ‘her show-business escapade, the long train trips south, the voice lessons, the chances’ (28). Johnson concludes: ‘The girl who ran off to sing in Texas was not the mother I knew’ (28). Rosalind may have been sent on the road for economic motives – to find a suitable husband, but she returned to Dallas for adventure, and very possibly for love.

Of course Rosalind Ross was not a hobo, but her motives for travel are among those featured in Ben L. Reitman’s narrative of the life of a female hobo, *Boxcar Bertha: An Autobiography* (1937). Reitman’s Moll Flanders-esque narrative both poeticises and politicises such a life. Bertha ‘Boxcar’ Thompson was born at the side of railroad tracks and her travels as an adult lead into the Depression. The text presents a spectrum of women travellers, what Judy Long refers to as ‘thumbnail sketches’ – from contemporary hoboes to old-fashioned tramps; from political

agitators to women who went on the road to find better clothes (1999: 77). By considering *Boxcar Bertha*, we explore the lineage, relatively forgotten and unrecorded, of 'the sisters of the road'. Speaking in the mid-1930s, Bertha lists her female peers:

I heard Harry Hopkins, relief administrator, speak this year. He says that now we have 6,800 transient women in the country. This count is taken from the government shelters and transient bureaus. There must be twice that many actually unattached and hitch-hiking and riding freights and walking about the country. That would make 13,600 women, "sisters of the road," as the men call us. No wonder people are writing books about us! (Reitman 1988: 9)

Bertha came from a line of hoboes and grew up in hobo camps and co-operative colonies frequented by itinerants. She recollects her earliest memories of life in a hobo camp by the side of railway tracks: 'My first playhouse was a box car. Conductors in freight yards used to let me ride in their cabooses. Before I was twelve I had ridden in a box car to the next division and back' (7). Bertha describes her unconventional education:

There weren't many dolls or toys in my life but plenty of excitement. [...] I learned my first spelling from the names on the box cars. What early geography I knew I learned by asking the men about the towns and cities, the names of which were chalked on the cars. I learned numbers by counting the cars on long freights. (9)

Reitman provides an epistemological consideration of the hobo, showing how Bertha has been truly fashioned by the railroad. The railroad functions in the text as an 'infrastructure' facilitating the movement of hoboes and connecting the various sites of importance to them – hobo camps, hobo colleges, boarding houses, and other government or philanthropic aid agencies (Long 1999: 77). These sites move the plot forward as Bertha travels through them.

Roger A. Bruns describes the railway network which appeared at the end of the nineteenth century: ‘bringing with it not only mobility but romance and legend. The wail of the soot-belching locomotives touched the nerve of restlessness in many Americans, stimulating visions of new places and new fortunes’ (2001: 6). Reitman had actually lived the hobo life and so was writing from direct experience, albeit across gender lines. Reitman’s text was originally published as *Sister of the Road: The Autobiography of Box-Car Bertha as Told to Dr. Ben Reitman* in 1937. In this title our attention is brought to one of what Judy Long refers to as the ‘enigmas’ of the text (1999: 79). The narrative has apparently been ‘told to’ Reitman – Bertha’s ‘forceful first-person account’ having ‘passed through the hands of an invisible narrator’ (79). Long treats the text as a sociological life history of an actual individual named Bertha, but Bruns treats the text as entirely Reitman’s production based on his first-hand experience of female hoboes. We can look to his particular experiences in relation to his adoption of a woman’s perspective in the writing of his hobo chronicle.

Reitman was born in 1879, growing up in Chicago’s red-light district and this proximity to prostitutes enabled a particular perspective: ‘It did not appear to me [...] that these girls were vicious or immoral. They were kind, jolly, sympathetic, generous—human’ (Bruns 2001: 4). Reitman had gone on the road at the age of twelve, but at the start of the twentieth century to go on the road meant to go on the rails. By illegally riding in boxcars, or on top of the carriages, or on platforms they constructed below the carriages, Reitman and other hoboes travelled around North America. Through patronage Reitman was able to go to medical school, and would set up practice in Chicago where he treated ‘underworld types and down-and-outs [...] prostitutes, pimps, dope addicts, and sexual perverts’ (16). His practise of medicine was interspersed with further travelling, often overseas to Europe. Throughout his life

he was involved with the anarchist and free love politics of ‘hobohemia’.¹⁴ He was Emma Goldman’s lover, travelling companion and business manager;¹⁵ he gave lectures about birth control and sexual health; he advocated the rights of hoboes, migratory workers, the unemployed, and street people, setting up Chicago’s Hobo College which educated such people as to their rights and opportunities. Reitman had previously published *The Second Oldest Profession* (1931), a survey of pimps, well-received in some sectors of the Chicago sociological research field. Evidently this varied and unique life contributed to his narration of the life of a female hobo – a very unique text – which it is easy to mistake as an authentic document from the mouth of an historic subject, rather than a document by a man writing as a woman.

Boxcar Bertha’s world is populated with men with an interest in women’s rights. Bertha’s grandfather, Moses Thompson, was an abolitionist and later, ‘one of the earliest workers for the emancipation of women’ who published a ‘little paper, *The Women’s Emancipator*, advocating votes for women and freedom from marriage’ (Reitman 1988: 11). Another character, Herman Baginsky, was a ‘believer in free love and was trying to write a book on love,’ and one of many men who played an important role in the character’s early development when she was growing up in a pacifist co-operative colony. Bertha relates Baginsky’s beliefs: ‘When women learn the technique of love and become economically independent, and understand birth control, they will be free. [...] Marriage is slavery for a woman. Children are born by accident’ (21). This milieu of men’s active engagement with women’s rights stands in contrast to the world presented by the female Beats.

¹⁴ Hobohemia was the name for the district frequented by hoboes in American cities, another name being ‘skid row’. See Frank O. Beck’s *Hobohemia: Emma Goldman, Lucy Parsons, Ben Reitman and Other Agitators and Outsiders in 1920s/30s Chicago* (Rindge: Smith, 1956).

¹⁵ Reitman’s ties to early twentieth century radical politics and the free love movement emphasise the connections I have made between Beat generation women and this era. For example, Emma Goldman was noted in Chapter Four as a figure of influence in Diane di Prima’s heritage.

Kathy Acker discusses men's involvement in women's rights in the context of the text. 'Feminism equals free love. Or does it?' Acker asks (1988: viii). She notes that Bertha's attitude to 'free love' – the free expression of sexuality outside the confines of marriage, and reproduction outside marriage – changes when she meets her estranged father for the first time.¹⁶ A sober, bookish man, Bertha's father Walker C. Smith had been 'an active free-thought and eugenic propagandist' when her mother met him, but now ran a radical bookstore in New York (Reitman 1988: 11). When Bertha finds him, he lives there with two other men, one with whom he shares a female lover called Emma, who has visited every Sunday morning for twenty years. Bertha questions Smith as to why he has never contacted her or her mother. He answers that 'all men are your fathers and your brothers', and 'all children will be your sons and daughters' (126). Bertha understands that he and his friends were 'dreamers': 'They believed that they could write books that would remedy all the wrongs of the world. They would not let anything disturb them. They seemed to regard sex as purely a physical function. Neither father nor Morton seemed to feel any sense of possessiveness about Emma, nor any jealousy' (127). Bertha leaves their company, stating: 'I could not accept his complete lack of a sense of responsibility toward his women and his offspring, or his complete impersonality' (131). Reitman examines the discourse of responsibility and freedom from both men and women's perspectives, acknowledging the compromises women make because of ties to family, and also their desire for freedom – themes which surface in relation to the Beat

¹⁶ Acker provides an analogy from Emma Goldman's autobiography *Living My Life* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1930): 'Goldman describes her meeting with a brewer from Cincinnati. The unnamed man tells Emma that he's heard that she's "the greatest champion of free love" in the United States. Since he, too, believes in free love, would she, please, make love with him? Though he's a married man with grown children, he knows she believes in free love. This "... respectable pillar of society," Goldman muses, "to whom free love is only a means for clandestine affairs ... A sense of futility came over me and of dismal isolation"' (Acker 1988: xi). The sexual politics of free love appears to be mean different things for men and women here, as it did in the case of Beat and hippie culture.

generation. Bertha's unexpected pregnancy and decision to leave the child dramatises such conflicts: 'already I was restless and finding the call of the road stronger than that of my child—just as my father had before me' (237). So Bertha leaves her daughter with her mother, to attend a Women Hoboes' Convention in New York, and then stays away working and travelling for eight years. At the end of the text Bertha ceases her travelling in order to bring up her child. She explains:

For years I had told myself that I didn't want to be tied down, that I wanted to keep myself free to help others, to uplift the mass of struggling humanity. And I knew now that I had been rationalizing my need to be a mother, dissipating it over the face of the earth when its primary satisfaction lay within reach of my own arms. (279)

For a text which has celebrated unrestricted movement, the ending appears as a compromise, what Long refers to as a reversal of her 'priorities for public and private life' (1999: 79). However Bruns states that these words did not belong to Boxcar Bertha, but to Reitman – 'From the aging hobo warrior, through the words of a woman, this was a deeply personal confession' (Bruns 2001: 263). According to Bruns's account, Reitman experienced these feelings himself after a life on the road in which he abandoned various wives and children.

This information colours our understanding of Bertha as a female subject from the pen of a male author. Bruns's observation that 'there was much of Ben Reitman in Box-Car Bertha,' relates to Bertha being, according to Long, 'an anomalous subject' in terms of gender (Bruns 2001: 263; Long 1999: 75). Bruns questions the veracity of the story, calling it 'an absorbing if implausible tale' (262). He continues by stating that Bertha could have been based on a real-life woman that Reitman encountered on the road, but 'if Bertha was, indeed, one of that legion, Ben made her almost

mythical' (Bruns 263). This suggests that as a character Bertha maybe a compendium of different people and their experiences.

Bertha goes through a variety of experiences while on the road, what Acker refers to as her project of 'dangerous journalism' (1988: ix). She works as a professional thief in a gang of 'grifters', as a prostitute in a brothel, she goes to prison, works in a homeless shelter, and becomes a mother. Bertha tries out these various identities, understanding those around her by investigating their lifestyles. Bertha puts her beliefs in free love on hold in order to submit to Bill, her pimp, and gain an empirical understanding of prostitution – 'to learn why women let their feelings make slaves of them' (Reitman 1988: 169). Karen Lawrence notes the historical equation of women's movement with promiscuity – from the 'Strange / desire of wandering' of Milton's Eve which results in the biblical couple being 'shamed, naked, miserable', to the name of 'respectable' nineteenth century traveller Mrs Trollope being historically tainted (1994: 15, 16).¹⁷

Early on in the narrative Bertha qualifies the reasons women go on the road:

I've decided that the most frequent reasons they leave is economic and that they usually come from broken or from poverty-stricken homes. They want to escape from reality, to get away from misery and unpleasant surroundings. Others are driven out by an inability to find expression at home, or maybe because of parental discipline. Some hobo their way about to far away relatives, or go to seek romance. The dullness of a small town or a farm, made worse by long spells of the same kind of weather, may start them off. Or some want better clothes. But others are just seized by wanderlust. The rich can become globe-trotters, but those who have no money become hobo. Some of the women I knew way back there in Aberdeen fell into this class, I guess. And I did, too, when I first took the road, wanting freedom and adventure such

¹⁷ As we saw in Chapter Three of this thesis, women's historical movement around the city has also brought associations of promiscuity. Other critical explorations of women's travel include Shirley Foster's *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and Their Writings* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), Sara Mills's *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991) and Mary Suzanne Schriber's *Writing Home: American Women Abroad 1830-1920* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1997).

as they had, with maybe a few of the other things thrown in. But I never wanted to leave home because home wasn't exciting. (16-7)

Evidently the road offers an escape – a release from identity, from societal roles, or a chance to disappear. Moreover, it provides women with a chance to be something they are not. Reitman explores women's motivations for travel in an appendix which purports to be information Bertha collected while working in a social statistics office. This anatomising of the female hobo is illuminating, engaging, and at times tongue-in-cheek, defining trends and conditions of travelling women in the 1930s, whether they can be verified as authentic or not. Rosalind Ross's initial travelling, encouraged by Great-Aunt Marcia, can be placed under Bertha's diagnosis of 'Other Factors as to Why Women Wander' in the classification of 'Romance—to find lovers and a husband' (285). Her travel could also be expressed as the 'desire to better condition', which appears in the appendix within the 'economic' group of the 'Group Classification of Occupations of Wandering Women. Legitimate' (286). But her later return to Texas to be a chorus girl opens up her travel to a whole new variety of factors, fitting into Bertha's suggestions, beyond economical factors, as to why women wander – 'To escape from reality, to get away from poverty, misery and unpleasant surroundings'; 'To seek freedom from parental and family discipline'; 'Inability to find expression at home'; 'Hatred of farm, burg or city'; and 'Freedom and adventure' (284-5). From these factors we see that there were factors beyond economics, which set women on the road. The similarities between Rosalind's particular experience and Bertha's statistics point to the significance of those findings.

By considering the theme of hobo dress we can bring together two lines of flight in *Boxcar Bertha* – firstly, to go on the road for escape or adventure, and secondly, to go on the road for economic reasons. By referencing dress we are

returning to a consistent strand in this thesis. Cited in the text's appendix amongst the 'Other Factors as To Why Women Wander' is the reasoning: 'To get new and better clothes. Silk stockings! Oh, what tragedies have taken place for thy sake!' (285).

Perhaps this is not such a fanciful notion. During the Depression movement on the road promised prosperity and offered the chance to find the new and exotic. Also, dress is a demarcation of gender, therefore its manipulation is a further way to confuse, lose or affirm gendered identity. The escape from rigid gender roles afforded by the hobo road is paralleled with Reitman's gender confusion through his adoption of a woman's voice.

Wearing men's clothes is common among the sisters of the road featured in Boxcar Bertha's autobiography. This early twentieth century transvestism may be for comfort and ease, to escape the confines of traditionally-restrictive women's clothing.¹⁸ Bertha recollects her earliest memories of life in a hobo camp by the side of railway tracks: 'We girls dressed just like the boys, mostly in hand-me-down overalls' (10). Bertha remembers one of the first female hoboes she encountered: 'I saw one (in dusty black sweater and striped overalls) flip a freight that had stopped at our switch to take on an empty, and ride the rods right out of our camp, waving to mother in our doorway and to the gang who held up their shovels in astonishment' (14). According to Acker, this is a crucial moment in which Bertha 'loses a virginity' as she encounters someone who 'represents freedom' (1988: viii). Bertha observes another woman who travelled with a group of men and they treated her 'as if she were

¹⁸ For references to the transvestism of historical women travellers see Joan Haslip's *Lady Hester Stanhope* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1945), a biography of the English aristocrat Stanhope (1776-1839) who travelled to the Middle East, eventually settling there. On a comparative note, Stanhope's physician and companion, Charles Meryon, published three volumes each of *Memoirs of the Lady Hester Stanhope* (1845) and *Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope* (1846). The Swiss-born writer Isabelle Eberhardt (1877-1904) travelled in North Africa and also adopted male dress, later converting to Islam; see *The Nomad: The Diaries of Isabelle Eberhardt*, trans. Nina de Voogd (Chichester: Summersdale, 2002).

a man', yet she wore 'skirts' (14). The young Bertha does not assume any paradox. She learns that either masculine or feminine attire is acceptable for women, and that being female does not necessarily restrict freedom of the self or affect the judgement of others. Bertha notes that in those days there were fewer women on the road, the majority of them being political agitators (16). When she is living in a co-operative colony, the radical women who pass through have a profound effect upon the young Bertha. She describes Agnes, who came from Vassar; Ray, who was from 'a group of garment workers'; and Mamie, whose father was 'an active socialist in Pittsburgh' (23). In addition, we are told that all three women wore trousers. Evidently this is for practical reasons as it enables their unusual travelling style:

They didn't have time to ride freights or to hitch-hike, and from New York to Little Rock they had decked a Pullman on the fastest passenger train, climbing up on top while it waited in the station, and, after it started, sprawling on their stomachs and bracing themselves with their hands over the sides, with only the little ventilator shutters between their legs keeping them from flying off into space. (23-4)

Another female hobo from Bertha's childhood wore male clothing, but 'dressed up in a red blouse for her talk to the group in the evening' (24). Clothes become adapted to the wearer's attitude to the work at hand. To the female speaker a boldly colourful yet 'feminine' blouse suits her political work, as her 'masculine' attire suits her travelling. Her clothes become a uniform to suit her work.¹⁹

Bertha learns that women hoboes regard their bodies as what Acker refers to as their 'working capital', alluding to the recurrent theme of prostitution (1988: ix).

The first hoboes Bertha meets who chose to hitchhike as opposed to travelling by rail

¹⁹ Compare with Joan Riviere's 'Womanliness as a Masquerade', *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1929), which observes that female intellectuals perform femininity in order to appease their male audience, thereby laying the foundations for Judith Butler's notion of 'performativity'.

‘explained that alone they could get rides in cars easier than if they were with men, and that food and shelter and a little money now and then came easier that way’ (16). As an adult Bertha experiences this process for herself, at times feeling uneasy about deploying her body; for example, when she becomes a whore she experiences trepidation as she remembers her family’s feminist legacy. Her mother had told Bertha before she set off on the road aged sixteen to remember that ‘a woman’s character, her value to the world, and her love for man is not in her hips, but in her heart and head’ (31).

Clothes also function as disguise, concealing our true motivations and more pressing interests. Bertha describes how a female hobo let her nursing qualification finance her travelling:

The only thing she carried with her on the road was a conservative looking dress which she could put on when she wanted to register for a job. She’d stay on a case, or a couple of cases, until she got a little money again, and then she’d pack the good dress away and go out on the road in trousers, hitch-hiking. (70-1)

This hobo’s dress fits her role-playing purposes perfectly. Adopting roles appears common among sisters of the road. Bertha admits, ‘how they managed without money on the road always fascinated me. [...] Some were typists, some file clerks, and carried with them recommendations from companies they had worked for’ (70).

While describing her work with the grifters, Bertha invokes criminal imagery in her description of her outfit as a ‘front’ (193). This is apt as she has taken money from Bill her pimp – ‘I had a roll of over three hundred dollars in a safety deposit vault. With this I got my self a new front, a smart black traveling dress and a hat to match’. She has tricked Bill and her description plays with notions of a woman on the run. Affording a seat on a train rather than in a boxcar, her outfit is a second skin – ‘My

body, inside my sleek traveling dress, felt good to me' – and befits her similarly swift, yet unaccustomedly luxurious movement (193). Yet even when travelling in boxcars, Bertha preferred female attire. When the teenage Bertha and her younger sister first go on the road they wore 'light woolen dresses, new coats' (31). Their mother, herself an experienced traveller, had packed their 'grip' – 'an extra dress apiece, extra shoes, underwear, stockings'.

Yet a self-appointed 'Queen of the Hoboes' named Lizzie Davis, is cynical about dressing in a feminine manner on the road. She believes that 'when it comes to hitch-hiking, there's nothing to it. Anybody with a skirt on can hitch-hike' (61). To Lizzie dress becomes a ruse, a way the female sex can sell itself. A skirt acts metonymically for a woman as a purely physical sex function. This denies any escape from gender roles; or perhaps this critical perspective is too naïve, and ignores the possibility of female hoboes 'performing', consciously selling their image to hopeful men in order to get by on the road. The duality inherent in choosing to wear feminine attire is perhaps what drives the transvestism of a character named State Street Blondie – 'My favourite recreation is to dress in men's clothes and to shoot pool. [...] I often dress in men's clothes when I am out hustling. Most of the time I was hoboing I dressed in men's clothes. When dressed as a boy they think I am about twenty-one years old. I am twenty-nine now' (267). She can escape the complications of delineated gender.

The 'sisters of the road' are extremely aware of the ramifications of female and male attire—the opportunities that each allow on the road. The theme of clothing brings together various fundamental concepts – gender, the body, economics, and freedom. Reitman unashamedly deals with issues of the female body – love, sex, sexual disease, abortion, pregnancy, childbirth – but from a rather detached

perspective. By examining first-person narratives by Beat generation women we can explore the visceral, embodied perspectives of travelling subjects.

Part IV: *For Love of Ray*

Steve Clark notes the growing number of female travel writers from the nineteenth century onwards. As well as being professional writers, missionaries, and nurses, these women were often the ‘accompanying wife’ (Clark 1999: 19). Naturally, the Beat women writers were often to be found in this role, as the title of this chapter suggests. Rather than downgrading this role, let us consider its specificities of movement, freedom and responsibility through a discussion of Bonnie Bremser’s *For Love of Ray* (1969).

The text chronicles Bremser’s life in Mexico in the early 1960s, with her husband, the poet Ray Bremser. We have heard of Joyce Johnson’s bleak vision of herself as ‘La Gringa’ alone in Mexico, and Bremser develops similar feelings into an autobiographical narrative of existential despair. In Mexico Ray had set up his wife as a prostitute in order to support the family and Bonnie continued to ‘hustle’ after Ray was sent to jail over the border. But Bremser eventually left her daughter, Rachel, with relatives in Mexico while she went back to the States. The text had an unusual process of composition. Bremser has stated that it was ‘not conceived as a book’ (Grace and Johnson 2004: 113). Instead, the text originates from a series of letters Bremser wrote to Ray while he was in prison. She would write a daily two-page letter to him detailing their lives in Mexico the previous year as a means of communicating the difficulties they had experienced. While living as a self-confessed ‘recluse’, the act of writing each morning formed a ‘little ritual routine’ for Bremser: ‘And then the rest of the day I spent all of the time reconstructing in my mind, going over things, and feeling things evolve about what I would write the next day’ (118). Ray Bremser and an editor, Michael Perkins, later prepared the letters into a narrative for its

eventual publication, appearing as *Troia: Mexican Memoirs* in the United States in 1969 and *For Love of Ray* in Britain in 1971. The narrative is coloured by Bremser's guilt over her prostitution and the loss of Rachel, as she attempts to justify her actions to Ray, whom she feels both love and anger toward. An explanatory, emotive tone dominates the text, with the ongoing events evidently still rocking Bremser's mind as she wrote.²⁰

Bremser states that another factor contributing to the tone of the narrative was the fact that in this period she had stopped using heroin: 'much of the anger and energy in it probably comes from my biological or physiological make-up at that point' (123). Bremser describes the 'enhanced' nature of 'literary experiences' in the Beat period (116). But she attributes this not just to drugs because love, poetry, and music all 'transcended everyday ordinary relationships for us' (117). She describes the writing of *For Love of Ray* as 'therapy', a way of identifying 'truth':

If I rhapsodized a little bit that was just because I had all this poetic background to tell me that transcending was what you wanted to achieve in writing. Kerouac was doing that at the time; everybody was doing it. Marijuana was taking us to other levels. You need to be moving to other levels all the time. (121)

Bremser admits her debt to *On the Road*; in fact she frankly describes 'copying' Kerouac's style.

It was copying, but it's different from sitting down and copybook copying. It's more like what you hear changes the way you think and the way you speak, and so that's what it was like. Even now, the way he [Kerouac] fits words together—the sweetness of it, the way things expand when you look at it. If I

²⁰ Compare the author Dominique Aury's reference to the writing of her erotic novel *The Story of O*, published under the pseudonym Pauline Réage: 'C'était une lettre d'amour', John de St Jorre reports her stating; it was 'une entreprise de séduction' written to her lover when she thought he was going to abandon her (1994: 231, 211). Likewise, Bremser's text includes many sensual scenes, possibly written for Ray's titillation.

try to keep those things in mind, if I try to keep the transcendent quality in mind when I'm writing, which I have a really hard time doing now, but then I was able to do it. (115)

Kerouac's spontaneous prose style is apparent in Bremser's flowing, at times effusive prose style which portrays the rush of events unfolding as they fled to Mexico and the accompanying heightened emotion of being in a strange land in difficult circumstances.

Bremser's representation of Mexico accords with Kerouac's through her regard for her environment, with the sensuality of images of Mexican life and landscape at first fulfilling their dreams. Travelling through the countryside, it 'begins to seem almost a peaceful Arcadia' (Bremser 1971: 16). She describes the beauty of the rural districts: 'Orizaba hangs on the side of a hill, all overgrown with gardenias, water ducts, canals and abundance of green in such lushness as I have never seen before, and keep twisting your head this way and that because you can hardly believe that such beauties exist all at once to your eye' (141). Just as Kerouac took pleasure in listing the names of American towns that he sped through on his road, the names of Mexican rural villages have an incantatory quality in Bremser's hands: 'Huatla. You learn to say these names, learn to say them passing through; approach a town and there is the rumor of its name, and when you are through it you have learned it, and it is usually beautiful too' (119). But Bremser is aware of the illusory nature of Mexico's appeal, which her husband the Beat poet is more willing to believe. Bremser comments that 'Ray was perhaps responding to the illusion of everything being beautiful. He was always ahead of me in that respect' (18). With subtle irony Bremser stages a role reversal, with Ray falling for the picturesque in place of the picaresque. In fact, despite the author's regard for Ray as the pivot around which the text turned,

in relation to Bremser's writing process he is a static presence due to his incarceration. Bremser remembers:

I had Ray captive on the inside of jail. He wasn't doing any of the bad stuff that he'd been doing before, you know. He was there. And I always knew where to reach him. I didn't have to wait for him to come home at night. (Grace and Johnson 2004: 123)

This constitutes a role reversal as Bremser has freedom of movement whereas Ray's Beat lifestyle has been suspended.²¹ Because Ray is held 'captive', there appears a modern inversion of a chivalric romance tale, with Bremser as the active agent who laments the separations of love. However, Ray's incarceration gives her a chance to be alone in her 'own space' for the first time, which she regards as 'woman's pattern', a pattern of 'breaking out' (123).

In *For Love of Ray* the everyday domestic realities of being a wife and mother halt Bremser's belief in the pastoral impulse, and here we see the influence of gender roles:

I stand at the door with Rachel looking out: Mexican children collect on the sidewalk to stare. In Mexico the sidewalk is a part of the house to be washed every morning with the tile floors—how to be myself in such a different place? Put it all in a sieve and squash your personality through into a new diversified you—the process will take about four months. I would almost jump this gap for my own sake, sweep the floor, wash the diapers, go to the store to be repeatedly embarrassed by people who obviously do not want to have anything to do with you ('let the *Gringa* go first'). I point at three hot sausages and some black and white cookies and run quickly home. Next time I try to get Ray to go but he won't. We keep a constant watch on N and B [their hosts in Veracruz]; better try to cop a few pesos so we can all three eat. My head is threatened by the hopelessness of trying to keep alive under these conditions. Hang on! Where is my romance—where is the total image? (1971: 23)

²¹ Compare the discussion on p. 254 of Glassman's *Come and Join the Dance*, when the Beat hero Peter loses his car and achieves a similar static condition.

The fantasy of Mexico is in question due to the material circumstances of her life. She tries to carry on as she felt was expected of an easy-going Beat chick: 'I am constantly with the baby on my lap, broken hearted at every spell of crying, the frustration of not being a very good mother really—trying to groove, trying to groove under the circumstances' (13).

When she reluctantly becomes a prostitute she takes up another gendered role. Ray is her pimp and Bonnie presents her reservations on the first day of her new work, describing 'the afternoon headache, trying to get out of it, and pleading with Ray, who answers me reasonably with our broke and hungry situation—so I go, walk, how did I make it through the streets with my shame and everyone staring at my outrageous outfit' (33). She weighs up how her work appears to both herself and Ray, stating: 'I am going to have trouble with how to call this hustling, usually say go out and get some money, try to be discreet and not mention the sex, or any love coincidental relation in terming it for that would be too hard on our marriage' (31). But Bremser attains a more pragmatic attitude: 'Get on with it, Bonnie, you are a member of the great club and must grow to like it' (35). Bremser writes of becoming more assured in the role of prostitute, more confident in projecting the image. For example, she describes identifying with the heroine while reading the Marquis de Sade's *Juliette*, 'a story of a whore, like me' (57).²² She wears a 'blue French woolly beret of existential streetwalk all the way from Hoboken', affirming her identity as a

²² *The Story of Juliette or, Vice Amply Rewarded*, the first English language translation of de Sade's text, was published by Olympia Press in Paris in 1958. An extract from *Juliette* was published in *Selected Writings of de Sade* (New York: Lancer, 1953). Bremser describes 'sneaking out all the sexual literature' from her college library, as opposed to the prescribed reading lists (Grace and Johnson 2004: 116). After meeting Ray she was heavily influenced by his literary tastes: 'Ray had been the librarian at the jail, and he was able to order everything that he wanted, so he was really well read. He read a lot of Rilke and Ginsberg. He knew all the poets. And I was just following along. He told me about Rimbaud and he told me about Baudelaire, so that was the way I learned' (114). Bremser then describes abandoning this outside reading as she became absorbed with Ray, only reading and hearing his work, which she also typed. At the time of the interview in 1999, Bremser talked of revisiting the texts she never read while at college, and of her indebtedness as a mature author to Melville and Genet.

prostitute of American bohemian origins (65).²³ Later on she states that her ‘gig was real ladylike now’ (181). This perception is of course mediated by Ray and she describes his response to her after she has visited him in jail: ‘He has told me with no hesitation that I am a whore, emphatically, he loves my whoriness—so fuck!’ (55). Yet at other times she is less exuberant about her work, for example she states: ‘It has no rewards for me, I am alone, lonely, bugged, feeling more and more unloved, as if each trick I turn is a negative score on the happiness list’ (145).

As noted earlier, Boxcar Bertha’s perspective on prostitution was based on empirical experience. As a result of her work Bremser becomes aware of her position within a capitalist world. Contemplating the way her life has gone, their poverty and criminal existences she asks: ‘For isn’t capitalism the big steal in reality? And anything I could even do would never counterbalance it? I would live a life of crime freely if it fits me’ (53). Bremser has stated that she saw the publication of her text as a ‘revolutionary thing’ that allowed her to triumph her former profession: ‘I felt righteous about being a prostitute. I felt like what I was doing was more honest than free love’ (Grace and Johnson 2004: 129; 130). The prostitute, a common motif in relation to women on the road, is turned into a positive figure.

Grace and Johnson cite the text’s championing of the prostitute and representations of sexuality as being ‘protofeminist’ (111). *For Love of Ray* is a ‘critique of hipster marriage’ in which the author highlights ‘Beat’s confluence with establishment sexual politics’ (112). They state that Bremser’s ‘story embodies the materiality of marriage observed by Charlotte Perkins Gilman a century ago; that the married woman, viewed economically, differs very little from the prostitute: both

²³ Samolar states that the suggestion that the word hobo ‘comes from the derisive use of the name “Hoboken” [in New Jersey]’ should be discounted (1927: 386).

exchange sexual service for material support'.²⁴ Grace and Johnson continue that the 'narrative suggests that for women Beats who would avail themselves of the sexual freedom usually accorded only to men, the road is not synonymous with sexual "kicks" but with exploitation and degradation' (112). Through her road experience Bremser achieves a Beat condition in Kerouac's original sense of the word, as a beaten-down street person who reaches transcendence. Like Kerouac, she expressed this state in writing.

²⁴ See Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1898).

Part V: Strange Big Moon

Shortly after arriving in Japan, interrupting a bout of culture shock, Gary asked me, “Do you want to study Zen and lose your ego?” I was utterly shocked: “What! After all this struggle to attain one?”

– Joanne Kyger, *Strange Big Moon: The Japan and India Journals: 1960-1964*²⁵

The above episode begins Kyger’s introduction to the 1981 edition of her book *Strange Big Moon*, and invokes two journeys: the first is Gary Snyder’s approximation of his own reasons for coming to Japan which Kyger admits she did share; the second reveals Kyger’s troubling of this spiritual quest motif through subtle comedy, as she registers the parallel but incongruous path she was already set on. *Strange Big Moon* is a story of this second path, and through its consideration we can continue the discussion of women on the road.

Kyger remembers her former uncertainty with regard to a concept such as the ‘spiritual quest’ (Grace and Johnson 2004: 152). She states: ‘I didn’t even know what [religion] was! I didn’t know what the self was! I didn’t know anything. And in Japan, at first seeing all these dark Buddhas—was that part of religion? Did you have to be a Christian or a Buddhist? (152). At the beginning of the *Strange Big Moon* Kyger records her feelings with regard to her impending arrival:

I decide to stay only a short time in Japan and not marry. I don’t know what in god’s name I am doing or *why* most of the time.

²⁵ Kyger (2000), p. xii.

The thought of the public baths petrifies me.

(2000: 3)²⁶

However, after getting off the boat, Kyger was in for what she retrospectively refers to as a ‘few struggles’ (xii). Ruth Fuller Sasaki, the American founder of the First Zen Institute in Kyoto, abbess, and sponsor of Snyder and later Kyger, requested that the couple marry immediately. Her letter to Snyder reads: ‘These are certain fixed social customs that the Institute expects its members to respect’ (xii). The text therefore can be seen to continue our ‘accompanying wife’ theme, and we can read the author’s ambivalent representation of Snyder.

Kyger felt tentative regarding her arrival in Japan, but while still in San Francisco she recorded an aesthetic proclamation: ‘Confession merely enables you to go on acting like a coward, behavior does not change. As if self awareness then condones further actions of the same sort’ (1). This distaste for the confessional mode, a norm of journal writing, sets the terms of the text. An early example of rejecting the confessional form surrounds the appearance, or rather than lack of appearance, of Snyder in the text. Her first journal entry written in Japan, states simply:

Married at American Consulate’s office in Kobe.

Reading about parachute jumping in America.

My name is changed.

(7)

²⁶ Due to the nature of Kyger’s experimental poeticization of the prose form in her journal, I have chosen, where applicable, to follow the format I have been using for quoting poetry.

This distant and controlled voice's only betrayal of emotion is through the poetic juxtaposition of the image of a parachute jump – a potentially life-changing, disruptive experience marked by a vertiginous quality. The administrative nature of the union is recorded since she notes the site of the ceremony and her name change, rather than its emotional significance. The final line in the entry, 'My name is changed', is followed by blank page which provides a space for rumination upon the significance of her name change.

After Kyger noting that a reporter came to the house a week later to cover their marriage, Snyder appears by name a few days later. She perceives his expectations toward a partner: 'He expects me to be whole heartedly here and participate without reservation'; also his faults: 'I don't mind Gary getting bossy within reason only it scares me when it gets out of hand, then he has no concern of another's reality or awareness of it' (8). We hear her difficulties in adjusting to her new home: 'It is difficult being here such a short time to be left alone for 13 hours at a stretch for 3 days out of the week' (10). She feels that Snyder is guiding her Zen apprenticeship: 'I *refuse* to be forced into sitting until I freely choose to do so. [...] He seems to have plans for me, although he claims no—and I *will not* fit into them.' Kyger's feelings appear to gel in the statement: 'I wish I weren't married at all I feel trapped.' In an objective correlative of her (or Snyder's) mood she adds: 'At the Yase Zoo all the animals seem incredibly bad tempered.'

Snyder becomes a somewhat reified presence in the narrative, which can be read as Kyger's urge to avoid confessional writing. Perhaps she did not wish to dwell on the extreme emotions which her marriage provoked. In the introduction to the 1981 edition, after reporting Snyder's reaction to the emergence of the text – 'It sometimes seems like a chronicle of food and drink—were we really that sociable?' – Kyger

talks of ‘lots of stories [being] left untold’ (xii). She could be accounting for the details of their relationship, and her reasoning for returning to the States alone after four years of marriage. At the end of the book with the circumstances unexplained, Snyder resurfaces in a letter he wrote to Kyger which she quotes from. It is a letter marking the end of a love relationship when tempers are frayed, in the form of a list of cruel criticisms of his wife:

Someday you ought to really try:
to sew up the hole in the shikibuton
to learn Japanese. Or give up planning to live in Japan.
(269)

He reappears in dream form while she is on her return boat journey: ‘Wake up saying I HATE you to Gary in my dream’ (279). The dream image exists as objective correlative to waking reality. Yet he also appears in Kyger’s transcription of a letter she wrote to him from the boat. This has a cheerful tone while she recounts the events of the journey and the peculiarities of the other passengers. However, it is marked by finality: ‘Listen whizball eyes don’t read this so fast. It’s the last letter I am writing you’ (275).

In *Strange Big Moon* there is a conscious development of the separation between the physical journey and the text. Rather than relying on mimetic representation, the journal form would allow Kyger to experiment – she calls it her ‘working/writing book’ (Grace and Johnson 2004: 146). Its style seems to embody the disciplined, precise, sometimes stark Japanese religious practice, arts, and lifestyles

she observed in Japan.²⁷ Kyger states that there occurred minimal editing from the original journals, and in general that she tries to avoid revision (Grace and Johnson 2004: 146, 139). In this light, the discipline and precision of her writing practice is evident.

Within the narrative Kyger presents lists of given and received birthday presents, poems which would later appear in *The Tapestry and The Web*, occasional letters, dreams, alongside her quotidian observations and thoughts which have the ability to take on poetic form. For example, the ceremonial welcoming of guests at a dance recital in India, is presented in this imagistic, delicately sensuous picture:

Upon entering the concert:

Sandalwood cream on the hand
Rose water shaken on the hand
& sugar crystal to put in the mouth

(162)

In the narrative Kyger avoids complete sentences which follow grammatical rules, thus creating a perfect form in which to present her sometimes random, and seemingly incongruous, impressionistic thoughts. She avoids teleological narration of the day's events and the need to describe every detail. Instead, the fragments work cumulatively in the larger narrative to present the reader with a life inseparable from poetic practice, despite her own feelings of inadequacy as an apprentice poet. The fragmented style allows for the expression of the disorder she felt while living in

²⁷ Anne Waldman links the text to the ancient tradition of diary-based Japanese texts: *Lady Nijo's Diary*, *The Pillow-Book* of Sei Shonagon and Basho's *Oku no Hosomichi* (Waldman 2000: vii).

Japan. Like her vision of Penelope, expressed in *The Tapestry and The Web*, she is a weaver of ‘a web of aberrant threads’ (Russo 2002: 179).

We can return to the earlier notion of two journeys: that of Snyder’s predefined spiritual quest which is only a distant rumour in *Strange Big Moon*, and Kyger’s parallel journey of disarray, tentativeness, and practical expediency which created the text. Another possibility of what Kyger meant by the ‘stories left untold’ would posit these stories as the potential grand narrative of an American woman travelling in Japan and India; the narrative which would allow Kyger to ‘study Zen and lose [her] ego’, as Snyder suggested.²⁸ She apologetically states that her record of their trip to India is not in this vein: ‘In India, the journal written on the spot, was much preoccupied with keeping a budget and washing a black drip dry dress, and is therefore not very revealing as to the actual experiences of a journey’ (xi). Tellingly, yet generously, she refers her reader to Snyder’s account of the time, *Passage Through India*, for another side of the story.

Strange Big Moon is a record of living rather than planning, after the few expectations the author had – of staying unmarried and retaining the freedoms of her American life – were quickly quashed. It is not a complaint portraying the pursuit of Zen Buddhism being compromised by the demands of domestic duty, but a text in which Kyger was able to reverse polarities and produce a narrative which speaks of the underside of the Beat spiritual quest, in a form which in its own strange mimesis reproduces the disorder, expediencies, and fleeting pleasures of her quotidian life.

²⁸ For another Western woman’s reading of Japanese culture, see Angela Carter’s ‘Oriental Romances’ collected in *Nothing Sacred: Selected Writing* (London: Virago, 2000), pp. 27-57. Carter travelled to Japan in 1969, a decade after Kyger.

Part VI: Searching for Sacred Space

Janine Pommy Vega's *Poems to Fernando* (1968) could also be read in the 'accompanying wife' mode, although Fernando Vega was not a Beat figure, and as we shall see the poet manages to transcend the dualism of prescribed marriage roles.²⁹ Moreover, due to his death, the text is marked by his absence and what R'lene H. Dahlberg refers to as the 'birth' of Pommy Vega as a poet (1983: 522). Bonnie Bremser's emergent sense of self and the emotional propulsion of her narrative elevate it, in a transcendent Kerouacian sense, from being a tale of despair. But in comparison to Bremser's bleak narrative, Pommy Vega's collection of poems is buoyed by a love for her late husband which becomes equated with an expansive spiritual love, as Fernando and Pommy Vega's God become interchangeable.

The text is comprised of three parts: the poems in Part I were written in Jerusalem, Paris, and Ibiza when Fernando was alive, Part II's poems were written during Pommy Vega's travels through Europe and back to America after Fernando's death in 1965, and the third section of 'Other Poems' does not specifically address Fernando but deals with Pommy Vega's coming to terms 'with life' (Dahlberg 1983: 522). Most of the poems are dated and so we can discern that they are chronologically sequenced. In Part II Fernando is an absent (but omnipresent) figure propelling her on the road. He is her muse, a positive figure in the text who guides the traveller and ultimately effects creativity.

²⁹ Fernando Vega, a painter, has not been identified with the Beats. Pommy Vega illustrates his distance from her Beat friends by relating a particular episode in which she had shown some early poems to Allen Ginsberg. Coming home to their New York apartment in tears, she paraphrases Fernando's advice: "You know who he is, and you know who you are, and I don't understand what the tears are about. That's his opinion, that's all it is." Because he [Fernando] was clear about who he was. He wasn't starting out as a painter; he was a painter' (Grace and Johnson 2004: 236). Previously Pommy Vega had lived with Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, but through the above description we get a sense that she had a new domestic base marked by more positive opinion and support.

Retrospectively, Pommy Vega has stated that her ‘mourning’ of Fernando involved ‘running from place to place looking for him’ (Grace and Johnson 2004: 235). She travelled ‘through the French Alps, through Geneva, through . . . of course he wasn’t anywhere’. The perpetuation of the state of being ‘wildly in love’ is reflected in the poems, as is her drug experiences (235). Pommy Vega describes *Poems to Fernando*’s ‘sincere desire to get to the heart and depth and extent, furthest extent, of everything. To encompass it, to understand it fully and totally’ (236). This process, she suggests, was one of the reasons for the drug experimentation amongst her peers. Like Bremser, Pommy Vega speaks of a general interrogation of the limits of consciousness, a journey that can be powered by writing, extreme emotions such as love or grief, by drugs, or as she has found in later life, in certain Buddhist-related religious practices.

At the time of writing *Poems to Fernando*, Pommy Vega could be identified as a ‘renegade Christian who didn’t go to church but believed in Christ and the existence of angels’ (Pommy Vega 1997: 4). She described the biblical influence on the collection, that it was a male god whom she was addressing (Grace and Johnson 2004: 249). In the first poem in Part II of the text, although Pommy Vega names her addressee as ‘Lord’, there is a sense that this god is simultaneously Fernando, one of several examples of what Damon detects as ‘slippages’ whereby the everyday ‘you’ turns into the celestial ‘thee’ (Damon 2002: 215). In what the reader may regard as an address to Fernando, Pommy Vega states: ‘For my love with you is deep as the space between stars’ (Pommy-Vega 1968: 15). Yet there is a growing sense of the omniscience of this ‘you’ – ‘*you know all this*’ – before the poet directly refers to ‘weeping before thee, Lord / this crying up alone’ (16). At the end of the poem she is able to forgive God:

you have taken him from me & the pain

runs/ deep as my life

/ & I bless you.

(16)

Her pain will accompany her on her travels. An untitled travelling poem, which was written in the 'french alps', suggests that departures (and the brevity of such human connection on the road) serves to appease her loss: 'Everytime a departure, another / eye not seen again, to make it easier' (22). Although he is gone, and she feels the weight of solitude, Fernando exists as a travelling companion:

Riding this broken road away, more alone

than even the beginning, when you were

Gone. Suddenly. & I clung to you, sending

messages direct to your heart

where we *are* one

& you must receive

these goodmornings to the clouds

this oneminded unrelenting reach to you

(22)

Her travel involves an 'unrelenting reach' to Fernando; she is moving to escape from or to transcend grief. She asks 'Why is it I travel this road, this stark of sky [...] & go down over snows to a train / I don't care about' (23). The unwelcoming alpine

landscape does not provide relief; in fact, relief in the outside world is obscured from her view:

It is written on the wall of the mountain

though I have not seen it:

I Love You Fernando.

(22)

Pommy Vega realises that the movement away from grief is itself a journey she is undertaking:

Still alive, & yet to learn, or I would not

be here still

penetrating pain itself to find you, uncover

what must be true

that you are not here and I must know

who is half my life & deep

as the blood runs in me. . .

(23)

Any resurrection from pain will come from inside rather than the outer, natural landscape. Questioning her particular journey she asks:

What length of days before I lay down

& the sorrow is turned upon itself,

that its depth be the source of joy

and I rise, unsevered?

(23)

The feeling of severance is echoed in a poem written in Paris on ‘new year’s eve 65/66’ (21). The poet is removed from the street celebrations, which appear distant yet menacing: a ‘riot of horns & the / muffled shouts / like a stadium in the next town’. Against the ‘chaos in the streets’ there is a juxtaposition of the oneness of the couple, with the word ‘one’ working as a refrain in the poem:

One month three weeks since I saw you last

& strained back to see you again, O your face!

one year over & how many more

before I am joined with you

soul to soul & whole again?

(21)

Damon compares Pommy Vega’s predicament to the states Ginsberg described in ‘Howl’ and ‘Kaddish’, with difference, however, residing in the poet’s gender: ‘Penniless, rootless, and now unattached to a male (such attachment being the sine qua non of American 1950s to 1960s female condition), her challenge is to turn this Hell—of marginal social location and its attendant emotional and material instability—into heavenly meaning, a marriage of Heaven and Hell’ (2002: 215). But Damon does not see the poet’s dependence upon the husband in negative terms, as a reinforcement of the American female condition. Instead she regards the poet’s

spiritual focus as a position which grants subjectivity, and places Pommy Vega in a female lineage of 'Christian mysticism' which extends to Teresa of Avila, Dame Julian of Norwich, later American female antinomians such as Anne Hutchison, and also nineteenth century spiritualists (221). Damon states: 'one can speculate that what mystical experience has to offer is strong, seemingly unmediated access to one's own experience—not filtered through received authoritarian texts or authority figures and experienced in private' (222). This subjective, private experience offers an alternative to the vicarious lives prescribed for women of living through their male partners.

Although *Poems to Fernando* establishes Pommy Vega as a solitary traveller, Damon points out that in the text 'travel is only free and inspired insofar as it is tethered in a spiritualized love relationship between a couple' (214). Despite this, Pommy Vega's work details her experiences as a solitary traveller in literal terms, with an unrelenting passion for the next adventure. She does not follow the American solitary pioneer model, nor does she travel with the Beat boy gang.³⁰ I want to explore this figurative attachment during travel, by looking to a later text, *Tracking the Serpent* (1997), in order to examine how Pommy Vega's travelling subject again transcends the solitary traveller motif and the various strategies she employs to debunk stereotyped notions of travel.

Poems to Fernando featured a male god, whereas *Tracking the Serpent* is inspired by a female god. The discovery of the possibility of a female divine presence apparently changed Pommy Vega's poetic voice, enabling her to adopt an assured, unqualifiedly female voice. She mentions that in her early work (specifically *Journal*

³⁰ Pommy Vega has noted her disappointment when she was not included in Ginsberg and Orlovsky's trip to India in the early-1960s. Instead, they told her to stay in New York and attend to Peter's emotionally-disturbed brother. Years later when she asked Ginsberg about the episode she reports that he replied: 'You know, I was just being a real shithead. I was being really self-involved' (Grace and Johnson 2004: 253). The other side of this is related in Joanne Kyger's *Strange Big Moon*, when Kyger and Snyder meet up with Ginsberg and Orlovsky in India. In the text Kyger noted the pretensions she saw in Ginsberg's search for enlightenment.

of a Hermit and the revised version *Journal of a Hermit &*) the poetic voice was gendered 'he' (Grace and Johnson 2004: 250). Pommy Vega relates this to the fact that up to that point she had male teachers. In 1970 her reading about the 'Holy Mother' changed her perspective: 'A whole sterile land became rained upon' (251).³¹ 'Seeds of Travel', the first chapter in *Tracking the Serpent*, acts as a preface to the prose volume and outlines how her female voice came to reflect a female presence which she felt in nature.³² Here Pommy Vega outlines her relationship to travel so far. In the period of *Poems to Fernando* she appears to travel relatively blind, but admits to a more focused 'sense of pilgrimage' emerging on a trip to Hawaii in 1967 (Pommy Vega 1997: 9). She lived by a stream, a new experience as previously she had 'never lived outside of cities, so close to nature':

The smell of the mud and wet vegetation and the constant trickling of water became like the welcome of home. I learned how to cry into the stream and let the grief go. I read the moving colors on the surface of the water at different hours, in different weathers. I became a connoisseur of dappled light. I bathed several times a day, standing knee deep in the current, and poured pailfuls of water down my back and over my head. It made me whole. (9)

Of course, such 'back to nature' thinking was typical of the time, as we saw in the previous chapter. Pommy Vega posits the above experience as an early example of a feeling she came to know: 'to arrive open to a place, and let its energy seep through and inform my being' (9). The journey and the traveller are subsumed to the destination itself: 'If a certain place is calling, let's go there' (9). Referencing the text's following four chapters, I want to describe the differing connection of the traveller to the 'energy' of each place she passes through.

³¹ Pommy Vega details her reading: 'Ramakrishna's wife [Sarada Devi] is called the Holy Mother. There's a picture of the Holy Mother in the story about her life. That was the first time that anybody had mentioned to me that god is *her*. *She* is god. She is here. Ramakrishna was devoted to Kali, and the whole thing just blew open my mind' (Grace and Johnson 2004: 251).

³² See pp. 120-121 for a reference to Pommy Vega's early visions.

It is important to note at this point that Pommy Vega does not regard the narrator of the text as a textual representation of herself. She was not writing memoir or autobiography, since ‘the person involved in that story is being used as a character’ (Grace and Johnson 2004: 252). The journey described in the chapter titled ‘Threading the Maze’ was precipitated by a car crash in May 1982 which left Pommy Vega in need of both physical and spiritual healing. During convalescence she read Michael Dames’ *The Silbury Treasure: The Great Goddess Rediscovered* which prompted her trip that summer to European sites of ancient Goddess worship: ‘Silbury, Glastonbury, Avebury, the high hills of Ireland, and Chartres Cathedral in France’ (Pommy Vega 1997: 14).

Pommy Vega finds the Goddess made manifest in sites such as womb-like hills, wells, gardens, and in symbols such as the dragon. She is disappointed to find that Westminster Abbey appears dedicated to ‘the winning of wars, male dominance, and the privilege of the upper classes’: ‘Many Georges slew many dragons, and every one of them was the Goddess’ (14). According to Paul Zweig’s Oedipal reading of travel, such images appear in adventure tales as obstacles the hero must overcome.³³ They constitute a return of the repressed, symbolising the mother’s body: ‘the caves and dragons encountered on the journey as essentially feminine survivals of great mother religions, the hero somehow enacting patriarchy’s overthrow of matriarchal power’ (Lawrence 1994: 5). Pommy Vega is aware of the gendered cultural meanings of such archetypes, and her narrative displays the heroine’s wish to envelop oneself in the Goddess, taking succour.

This awareness is reflected in her questioning of the terms of travel.

³³ See Paul Zweig, *The Adventurer: The Fate of Adventure in the Western World* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1974).

After a German man she meets asks to accompany her up Silbury Hill, she rejects the solitary traveller motif: 'I'd always envisioned going alone. It hadn't occurred to me to bring anyone else, but a pilgrimage is open-ended: if I were in charge, what good would it be?' (26). When she makes love with the man on top of the hill, we see that Pommy Vega's journey of healing involves a celebration of desire. On her trip to Ireland she identifies with Maeve, 'the wild goddess of war' who 'required the intimate company of countless kings and heroes, at least thirty lovers a day' (31). Pommy Vega's persona finds sexuality a way to reclaim the body; the German man is the first of several strangers in the sexual thread which runs through the text until she is 'nonplussed' by her mountain guide in the Andes who refuses her: 'Clearly he did not need to act out the attraction he felt by making love' (105). The writer mocks her heroine's single-minded confidence in the form her quest should take.

Maria Damon asks whether through her childlessness and resultant space for the 'cultivation of nomadic solitude', Pommy Vega resembles the male Beats more than other female Beats (2002: 222). We may add the relative sexual freedom of her nomadic condition to these terms of comparison. Pommy Vega describes the sexual thread in the text:

She's going out, and she's having these experiences because she's looking for something, and everything else is peripheral. Any guy that comes up is somebody that she fucks because at that time, that's what's happening. And then she goes on. There are places where she stops and gets involved. But the involvement is a reckoning back to how one uses oneself and the involvement, and how she's dealt with that through the years. [...] And yes, the male characters that come into the story are rather peripheral, just as in a male's adventure story the females would be peripheral.
(Grace and Johnson 2004: 251)

Pommy Vega created a liberated female traveller to rival the sexually-potent Beat heroes.³⁴ Pommy Vega is aware of the gendering of the adventure narrative, but she allows her heroine to stop and become involved, just as Boxcar Bertha did, thereby promoting connectivity. The third chapter 'Atalaya' sees the heroine travel to the Amazon jungle, somewhat reluctantly since after spending time there before she had fled 'in fear of being sucked in and buried alive' (Pommy Vega 1997: 52). Her stay there is marked by delay – firstly waiting on her host Lena, who is up river, and then after a brief trip to Lima, on her return she has to wait for David, her new lover. The height of her desire is reached in this chapter, set in the heady atmosphere of the jungle, which in a typical move is coded as feminine. David tells her she must get to know the Mother's face here as well. Despite her fears, she admits that the real reason for her travel there was 'to dive into the pulsating energy of the jungle, and claim it as my own' (64). They both take the hallucinogenic plant preparation *yage*, which was used to cure illnesses or particular 'mental, emotional, or spiritual' problems (78).³⁵ It sends Pommy Vega on a trip in which she experiences the jungle in feminine terms: 'A female presence was everywhere—in the leaves, the trunks of trees, the drops of water—fecund, pulsing, green and dark' (80).

Time takes on new meanings in the jungle or *selva*, and she finds she has to reorder her priorities. Waiting on David she states: 'I had a caring attentive lover and I was trying to fit us into a time frame. I was not taking it one day at a time, like a journey into the unknown dark—the *selva dura* alive with possibilities' (68). Perhaps this sense of physical place – coded as feminine – taking over the traveller is equivalent to the suspension of Odysseus's journey during his sojourn with Calypso

³⁴ Grace and Johnson refer to the author's use of 'post-sexual-revolution free sexuality' in order to 'refit' the road tale (2004: 234).

³⁵ Compare the search for the drug in William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg's *The Yage Letters* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1963).

on the beach. Lawrence notes Zweig's reference to Odysseus being 'kalypsoed' (from '*kaluptein*': 'to hide') (1994: 5). In these terms, the episode can be viewed as a fascinating reappropriation of negatively-styled female mythic space in positive terms. Pommy Vega is kalypsoed in the 'womblike oblivion' of the jungle. She speaks of the heroine peeling off of 'layers' – layers of self shed through the following of desire and immersion in the environment (Grace and Johnson 2004: 252).

The later chapters continue the search for female space and manifestation of the Goddess. Pommy Vega continues to question masculinised terms of travel. The chapter 'Cordillera Blanca' introduces Pommy Vega as a mountain climber on a trek through the Andes. Her trek is not solitary due to the political conditions in Peru's mountain territories which make it expedient for outsiders to be accompanied. Therefore her group consists of a mountain guide, a burro and its owners. Pommy Vega presents her dependency upon local wit and knowledge, as she recognises both her differences and commonalities with her companions. (Her perceived equality with Eusebio the mountain guide is cruelly mocked when he declines her sexual advances). Moreover, the path she takes is not informed by objectifying or masterly concepts such as conquering or scaling the mountains: 'Our whole journey would consist of climbing up one long *quebrada*, over the pass between two peaks and down the other side; then around and up again over the next pass, and so forth—threading the Cordillera Blanca through some of Peru's highest mountains' (91). But after a landslide their original 'thread' has to be adjusted: 'Skirting the hills through unfrequented lands might prove a lot more strenuous than the trail, but might also yield more wild life (113). The act of 'skirting' is opposed to the more masterly scaling of land. At the end of their thread, Pommy Vega waits while her guides climb

to a summit. She understands their desire to be ‘closer to God’ but waits at the ‘taulli’: ‘the bowl beyond the pass: there was nothing to scale, no goal to reach. I was happy to sit in the scent of blue flowers and watch the cows below’ (130).

Daily washing in mountain streams acts as leitmotif here and the following chapter ‘The Old Way’, set in the Himalayas, following on from the initiation of this ritual in her Hawaiian stream. It is both a cleansing and renewal for Pommy Vega:

If, as Thoreau says, the walker owns everything she surveys, I especially owned the rivers. At the end of each day I sought out water to wash my clothes and the salt from my body. Wash in the river once, and it is yours, say the Nepalis. Going in, I belonged to the river, and the river to me; I didn’t care that I had to stay clothed. I was the green and white flowing water, I was the flat rock to pound the clothes. The water was my private domain, a space without people, where I watched the bugs come out and shadows fall.
(156-7)

Despite citing two traditions of ‘owning’ nature, Pommy Vega has a reciprocal relation to nature. She is an embodied traveller, who fashions a journey which both appropriates and subverts masculinised terms. She places trust in and seeks female archetypes, while also creating a new travelling mythology.

In the last chapter, after being perturbed by the subdued, controlled nature of the women she saw in Kathmandu, Pommy Vega is determined in her quest to find evidence of interplay of the Hindu masculine and feminine divine elements – Shiva and Shakti. She is focused on searching for the female presence, which she regards as being eclipsed by the veneration of male deities.

The Nepalese greeting ‘*Namaste*’ becomes a motif in the chapter: ‘Holding your hands together, you touched the index fingers to your forehead, a little above the space between your eyes, and saluted the spirit that dwelt inside whomever you addressed’ (137). The greeting will work as a ‘bridge and passport’ to the local

people, but also to the landscape: it is emblematic of her reverence for the mountains (137). Crossing the Thorung La pass between two mountains, Pommy Vega and her guide are caught in a snow blizzard. Having lost the trail and with avalanches sounding close by, she visualises the land in mythic terms:

I pictured the mountains on either side as two fierce deities, Khatung Kang and Yakawa Kang, jealously guarding their domain. What was I doing there? The upper regions of the earth did not belong to human beings, but to others who did not welcome strangers. They were meant to be crossed over quickly, with respect. (172)

In her mind she ‘*namaste*’d’ to the mountains, and to Párvati the goddess of mountains, ‘the blue skinned *dakini*, who danced on top of mountains. May her power over the place remain absolute’ (173). Despite coming face to face with its destructive elements, Pommy Vega is determined to maintain a reciprocal, while reverential relation, with a feminine-coded nature. She had found that Shakti, the female divine element, was present in ‘everything in creation’: ‘the mountains and the devotion of the people and their kindness to a stranger, who was also Her. She was the flow of thought and the words one uses to describe her bounty. She was the energy breaking through for necessary change’ (188).

The final image in the text is Pommy Vega back in Kathmandu ready to board her plane home adorned in gifts she had received: glass bracelets from a market woman, a *tika* on her forehead and a garland of marigolds from her mountain guide. She states that she felt ‘dressed for a wedding’ and the implication is that she is marrying herself; or rather, she has attained a level of peace and autonomy through her travel (191).

The tinkling of the bracelets recalls to her a striking, sensuous woman she had seen selling oranges in a courtyard outside a temple. For Pommy Vega this woman

had embodied the role of pleasure in ancient religion, and she acknowledges that ‘temple women of the Old Way had not been prostitutes, but priestesses of power and understanding’ (142). Pommy Vega feels a relation to this state, figuring herself as ‘like a priestess or a prostitute, whose first site of pilgrimage was the body, and whose secret office resided in the temple she carried around’ (190). Again the prostitute motif appears on the road, which Pommy Vega claims as an image for her own embodied status as a traveller; a move characteristic of her pro-sex feminist politics.

Pommy Vega portrays her later travel as a resolution of the paths she began earlier in her life. She attests to the relatedness of the solitary traveller – to the travellers she meets on the road, the local population, and to the land itself. She rejects the ‘pastoral impulse’ and the related ‘masculine’ metaphors of objectifying, conquering, and penetrating, instead re-immersing her travelling subject in a landscape often coded in ‘feminine’ metaphoric terms. At the close of this chapter it is fitting to be discussing a later text which takes the Beat quest narrative into territory informed by post-Beat sensibilities and feminist politics. In the conclusion to this thesis I review my argument from the present day vantage point, noting how the women writers of the Beat generation have grown beyond that moment and how they situate it in terms of their lives and literary careers.

CONCLUSION

I'm a forty-seven-year-old woman with a permanent sense of impermanence. If time were like a passage of music, you could keep going back to it till you got it right.

– Joyce Johnson, *Minor Characters*¹

Although it nostalgically recreates the Beat era with cinematic verisimilitude, Johnson's *Minor Characters* cannot be classed as a Beat text. In the above passage Johnson shows she experiences a different sense of time from that of more 'Beat' subjects Jack Kerouac and Elise Cowen. In the photograph she pondered at the start of the text, Kerouac was 'totally connected to the moment'; and discerning from the postcards Cowen sent to Johnson on her road trip west in the late 1950s, Cowen too was living in the moment: "'Barreling thru Colorado," said the last one, a picture of Rabbit Ears Pass, U.S. 40, altitude 9680 feet' (Johnson 1994: 252). Johnson's desire to return to the past speaks of Nietzsche's 'eternal recurrence' and through such a desire Johnson acquiesces in her own marginality: 'But has it become my own madness not to have outgrown those years when the door first swung open on a world I never managed to explore as completely as I longed to?' Johnson questions at the end of her book, believing that her experience was qualitatively different from the quintessential 'Beat'.²

Kerouac knew the Beat moment was over, and in the novel *Big Sur* (1962) he could write about the blurring of representation and reality: 'all over America highschool and college kids thinking "Jack Duluoiz is 26 years old and on the road all the time hitch hiking" while there I am almost 40 years old, bored and jaded in a

¹ Johnson (1994), p. 262.

² See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: with a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge, U P). Nietzsche writes of the horrors of eternal recurrence, the 'heaviest weight' (194).

roomette bunk crashin across that Salt Flat' (2001: 3). But in *Minor Characters* there is a lonely, unsettling distance between Joyce Johnson leafing through photographs and reading old postcards, and the young Joyce Glassman she so vividly recaptures.

Perhaps the best writing referenced in this thesis, although it may mine autobiographical material, is connected to its own moment: Joanne Kyger's aesthetic rendering of the moment in her *Strange Big Moon: The Japan and India Journals: 1960-1964* (1981) and her various volumes of open-field poetry; Diane di Prima's concise sketches of her hermetically-sealed New York bohemian world in *Dinners and Nightmares* (1961) and her sensual, lyrical recasting of this time in the later *Memoirs of a Beatnik* (1969); Johnson's novel *In the Night Café* (1989), with the fictive process allowing the author imaginative freedom from the representation of history, and therefore a more seamless movement between periods of time.

In this thesis I have not been positing such texts as Beat texts, because I have been arguing that woman writers were not able to occupy the role of Beat writer in the way that the men did. Later writing by the women authors shows that time has focused the separation from the male Beat writers. Joanne Kyger's poetry often 'namedrops' and a poem from her *Just Space: Poems 1979-1989* (1991) provides a retrospective portrait of some of her poetic influences:

You know when you write poetry you find
the architecture of your lineage your teachers
like Robert Duncan for me gave me some glue for the heart
Beats which gave confidence
and competition

to the Images of Perfection

(Kyger 2000: n.pag.)

The 'Beats' appear somewhat visually separated, sitting at the left-hand border of the poem – Kyger does not wish to state that she herself is a Beat. However they are a 'lineage', they gave her 'confidence' and provided 'competition'. But through the enjambment of the third and fourth lines, the Beats are placed in the phrase 'heart Beats', which signifies not only a tender, loving connection but a physical, visceral one.³ The connection is more immediate when the poem is spoken, with the embodied voice illustrating the connection. Yet she calls attention to her independence, perhaps more wary of the stigmatization of the term than with any specific Beats.

Hettie Jones made a similar move when she stated that 'the Beats *looked* okay to me', picturing them in her memoir as a 'small but provocative literary group', together at 'the squeezed-up, wobbly tables' of a jazz café ([1990] 1997: 46; 45). Jones thereby signals her co-existence in the bohemian world of jazz and poetry which the Beats simultaneously occupied. Indeed, elsewhere Jones has stated that term 'Beat writer' is inappropriate for women such as herself, but accepts being part of a 'Beat generation' (Charters 2001b: 622-623).

Diane di Prima's 'No Problem Party Poem' provides a rhizomatic picture in which Beat names are dropped alongside more obscure names. In this social poem, the refrain 'no problem' is a levelling device:

Marilyn vomiting in planter box no problem

Phoebe renouncing love no problem

³ See Carolyn Cassady's first account of life with the Beats, *Heart Beat* (Berkeley: Creative Arts, 1976).

Lewis renouncing Phoebe no problem

[...]

boxes of empty beer cans & wine bottles no problem

thousands of Styrofoam cups no problem

Gregory Corso no problem

Allen Ginsberg no problem

Diane di Prima no problem

Anne Waldman's veins no problem

Dick Gallup's birthday no problem

Joanne Kyger's peyote & rum no problem

(1990: 117)

Anonymous friends with only first names – Marilyn, Phoebe, and Lewis – coexist with celebrities such as Ginsberg and those less-celebrated writers of the community such as Kyger, who are afforded their full names.

The women writers presented in this thesis note the arbitrariness of labels, yet show an awareness of the Beats as cultural signs which the publishing industry and media still invests in. There is attachment to old friends and lovers – ‘heart Beats’ – but caution is exercised. For now they remain ‘women writers of the Beat generation’ rather than actual ‘Beat writers’, and I have argued that the adoption of the latter term would be ahistorical. Since the term ‘New American Poetry’ has little currency within the academy and the publishing industry, the term ‘Beat’ persists. Yet *The New American Poetry* offers a wider, more fruitful terrain in which to place the writers discussed in this thesis.

Therefore the question of women writers of the Beat generation remains open and characteristically ambivalent. The various textual sources remain often uncollated and out of print. By providing a broad historical and cultural background to the writing, revisiting known texts and pointing to lost texts, this thesis has attempted to refocus our understanding of an obscure but distinct field, which due to its proximity to the Beat tradition is susceptible to stereotyping and reductionism. The questionable status of women's writing – its minor status – due to divergences in the lifestyles, productivity, literary styles or genre choices of the women writers in comparison to the men, also fashions our perceptions of the legitimacy of the field. I hope to have shown that the girlfriends' narratives are valid, that the Beat moment was one of many valuable intersections in their lives. As for the gynocritical debate, we have seen that because of the relatively regimented gender roles in the 1950s, these women had different experiences of the family home, urban Bohemias, the road and the body than their male peers did. But we have also seen that gender is performance with both male and female writers adopting various masks, and consequently there is no singular 'masculine' or 'feminine' Beat voice. In the developing research let us hope that such questions of difference are acknowledged rather than smoothed over in a bid to build a marketable literary product.

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