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Gender Performance in the Literature of the Female Beats

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Gillian Thomson,
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Abstract: In her article "Gender Performance in the Literature of the Female Beats" Gillian Thomson examines the re-negotiation of gender boundaries within Joyce Johnson's *Minor Characters* and Hettie Jones's *Drive* poems; secondary to this is how the male Beats demonstrate a more concrete, dichotomous version of such gender categories. Thomson intend to demonstrate how the women often write themselves into Beat history and how their revised performance of gender modifies the normative tropes regarding females within the Beat enclave. The theoretical backdrop focuses on how language not only records or expresses reality, but also shapes it. This is a decidedly poststructuralist reading of two excerpts of what could be called a minor literature; the women of the Beat generation appear as a subculture within a subculture. Thus, this is a project of reconstruction via the opening up of new subjective voices within this relatively obscure milieu of post-war poetics.

Gillian THOMSON

Gender Performance in the Literature of the Female Beats

In this article I analyze the performance of gender as espoused in the literature of the female Beats. It aims to demonstrate how the writers inscribed themselves into the Beat legacy from a unique perspective — the perspective of the marginalised feminine presence within the movement. If we perceive censorship as a mode which actively seeks to exclude some citizens (as opposed to passively legitimising boundaries of expression for all citizens), then we may suppose that "censorship is not primarily about speech, that it is exercised in the service of other kinds of social aims, and that the restriction of speech is instrumental to the achievements of other, often unstated, social and state goals" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 132). One such unstated goal is "the insistence that certain kinds of historical events only be narrated one way" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 132). In a way, the voice of the female Beat has been censored by historians, scholars and indeed the male Beat, perhaps to serve the larger goal of phallogocentrism. Thus, the purpose of this discussion is to assess how the post-structuralist conception of performative gender, an examination most often connected to the scholar Judith Butler, can be applied to literature of the female Beats.

For the female Beats, this gender performance appears time and time again as a necessary performance, a performance of survival. At times it also presents itself as a notable deviation from the normative performance of the female gender, if we consider the familiar trope of the 1950s woman sacrificing her own ambitions in lieu of a secure marriage and lifestyle centred on the family. Conversely, the female Beats (Diane di Prima and Janine Pommy Vega for example) left a secure home and family in search of a poetic Renaissance with an air of camaraderie. Of course, it would be naive to assume that this trope is an entirely accurate reflection of a woman in post-war America, as William H. Young and Nancy K. Young have observed in *The 1950s: American Popular Culture Throughout History* — by referring to statistical data they present a counter-attack to the televised imagery of the stay-at-home, domestic goddess, adorned with a pearl necklace. The statistical evidence they offer describes how, contrary to popular belief, there were actually more women in employment throughout the 1950s than in World War II, where the normative assumption suggests that after the war, the majority of female employees once again took their place in the home (Young and Young 11). Nonetheless, it is the most pervasive representation of 1950s women and even subtly infiltrates today's culture, which still pays tribute to the elegance and sophistication of this historical stereotype, evident in cultural texts ranging from Fairy Liquid adverts to the burlesque dancer Dita von Teese. Thus, my aim is not to present a fictitious, polarised boundary between what we might call the Squares and the Beats, or the female bohemian author versus the 1950s housewife, or even the female Beat author versus the male Beat author, as this is a gross over-generalisation of the much more complex situation at hand. Instead, I intend to deconstruct the boundary between these (superficially) opposing poles of American culture and demonstrate the overlap and mutual dependence which exists between the periphery and the mainstream as a means of gauging the specifically female contribution to the multi-dimensional and sometimes contradictory literary aesthetics of the Beat authors themselves.

Helen McNeil argues that "the Beats have never been seen as a movement engaging with women or responsive to feminist critique; even revisionist literary history has had little to say about gender and the Beats. To put it bluntly, everyone knows they were sexist, so why bother" (178). In response to this there is much to say about gender and the Beats, and a lot of this poses a challenge to the normative scholarly representation of Beat literature and culture. My analysis demonstrates a with textual examples to look at the Beats and decentralize this overplayed notion of rampant misogyny within the group. Consider, for example, Anne Waldman's perspective which undermines the general assumption that female authors during this time were malnourished — metaphorically — by their male counterparts: "I was treated extremely well by male literary 'elders.' I have studied and absorbed and benefited by the wisdom of their own writing and activity in the world. This friendship and support has been a real blessing. I hung out with them, worked with them, travelled with them with equal billing as a poet, and have never felt an ounce of condescension" (Waldman 289). Waldman declares that there was nothing underhand about the male treatment of the female literary figure and goes as far as to embellish the idea of the men as her mentors, absorbing their aesthetics as a benefit to her own

creations. Waldman's declaration juxtaposes with Carolyn Cassady's main narrative praxis in *Off the Road*, which situates the female solely as a sexual commodity or outsider to the burgeoning creativity of the male Beats. Thus, it is evident that there are divergent perspectives on the relative status and appreciation of the women within the Beat and other overlapping avant-garde movements (the San Francisco Renaissance, the Duncan/Spicer circles, for example). Nonetheless, the fact remains that, encouraged by their male peers or not, the female authors have been catapulted into relative obscurity for reasons unknown and widely debated. Within the Beat generation itself, the three main writers who receive most critical attention are three men: Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Kerouac. Most biographical or encyclopaedic material tends to offer these names (with the occasional reference to Corso, Snyder, or Cassady) to define the key literary figures of the Beat movement. There is an abundance of critical monographs which focus on these three acknowledged authors — especially Kerouac, who is considered the founding figure of the movement — but a rarity of such monographs which focus on a single female author and one example is Jennie Skerl's analysis of Jane Bowles in *A Tawdry Place of Salvation: The Art of Jane Bowles.* As well as this, if one were to compare the circulation of the literary texts themselves, much female Beat authorship is out of print and notoriously difficult to find. For example, Joanne Kyger's and Jack Kyger's *Tapestry and the Web* is out of print, but perhaps more significant is the fact that her *Strange Big Moon: The Japan and India Journals 1960-1964*, which chronicle her experiences with male Beats Allen Ginsberg and her then-husband Gary Snyder, is more readily available. This suggests that readers of female Beat literature (as well as scholars), tend to read such pieces to find out more about the men or the women in their relationship to (or with) the men. Thus, the obscurity of these women can be explained not only by the notion of the boy gang so favoured (and indeed articulated in correspondence between Ginsberg and John Clellon Holmes) by the male Beats, but by the limitations imposed on these women by readers or scholars themselves.

By contrast, works such as Kerouac's *On The Road* and *A Coney Island of the Mind* by Lawrence Ferlinghetti (one of the best-selling poetry books ever published) and other texts penned by male Beats are thought of as seminal and a focal point of the movement, evident when we consider the new editions and versions in circulation; for example, the 50th anniversary or scroll editions of *On The Road* as well as a 50th anniversary edition of *A Coney Island of the Mind.* Thus, with this in mind, my discussion employs post-structuralist questions of gender performativity to engage with how these women create an identity for themselves within a movement which has typically excluded them. The position adopted is as varied as the diversity of styles existent within the female Beat literary framework. They sometimes re-write the male story from a feminine perspective, as is the case with Joanne Kyger's *Strange Big Moon*. On other occasions, they situate themselves more centrally within the movement by appropriating the behaviour of the male Beat and adopting a masculine perspective. Furthermore, at times they intentionally remain as observers, as is the case with Joyce Johnson in her text *Minor Characters*. Johnson perceives her spectator position as one which enables her to comment more objectively on the framework in which she has chosen to exist on the edge: "The role of observer has its advantages. You may play as much 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). Johnson's choice to exist on the periphery of the avant-garde (this particular example depicts Alex Greer and the people which gather around him, which include Elise Cowen, Johnson's Barnard classmate and one of Ginsberg's lovers) empowers her to remain detached and objective while also being included in what she calls "the community" (Johnson 83). Thus, contrary to the popularised trope of Beat women (in this particular instance I refer to both the authors and bystanders of the movement who participated in their dress, mannerisms and hang-outs, and perhaps would be more accurately, though derogatively, labelled "beatniks") as silent, ghostly apparitions dressed in black, coffee and cigarette in hand, Johnson suggests that she chooses to remain silent as a means of empowering herself to observe about the occurrences within the movement as opposed to becoming too attached or involved.

This idea of female silence speaks volumes when we consider the logocentric perception of speech as the preferred form of communication, being closer to the truth than the written word which falls prey to multitudinous interpretations which can completely elude or bypass the author's intentions. Thus, Johnson posits her own protest of silence by actively excluding herself from the movement, and relies on the reader to form their own assumptions. Of course, the text itself juxtaposes this idea

when we perceive its ultimate aim — it is Johnson's method of positioning herself at the centre of the Beat phenomenon, as it denotes Johnson's two-year relationship with Kerouac (1956-1957) at perhaps the peak of his career, when *On The Road* is about to be published and that will later establish Kerouac as an outlaw, an anti-hero in the style of James Dean in *Rebel without a Cause*. In this sense, then, *Minor Characters* appears to be a contradictory text; sometimes we get the impression that Johnson does not feel like she belongs to the counter-cultural group of Beat while on other occasions she wishes to re-write and include herself in the history from which she has been excluded. For example, Johnson considers a photograph of Kerouac with her in the background. She has been cut out of the photo: "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" (xxv). As well as denoting the advertising power of the anti-hero (Burroughs also did an advertisement for the sports brand Nike), this extract is the author's materialisation of the female presence in a literary world dominated by men. It also establishes Johnson's powerful connection to Kerouac in her nostalgic account of events — she remembers it as a "warm September night" and fills in the external details of the surroundings which encapsulate the photograph, resulting in a transition from feminine absence to presence. Note how she is in the background, dressed in black, almost fading into the shadows – thus, this photograph acts as a symbol for the larger discourse of the secondary status accorded to Johnson and other females within the Beat enclave. Furthermore, Johnson establishes the idea that the female identity; indeed, her own identity, is compromised by this historical omission of the female, as she appears as an anonymous young woman.

There are other examples throughout *Minor Characters*, however, when she suggests that her sense of self comes primarily outside of her role as Kerouac's girlfriend (and author in her own right), and indeed, in the years after the Beat phenomenon has come to the fore: "I look in the index of the book with the snapshot of Jack and Allen and the others, and there I find: *Joyce Glassman*. And half a dozen page references, having to do with approximately one-twentieth of my life, 1957-1959, when I used to have that name" (Johnson 6). In this instance, Johnson attempts to dissolve her ties to the Beat movement, citing it as a relatively inconsequential time in her life, suggesting that it has made little or no impact on her future projection of self. Note how detached the authorial voice is, almost as if Johnson perceives herself as a character, and not a real person, within the Beat narrative. This idea is reinforced by Johnson's endeavour to initially hide her bohemian circle of friends from her parents. Indeed, she lives something of a double life for a time, resulting in a conflicted identity: "Invisibility had become my unsatisfying resolution of the outside/inside problem. Moving back and forth between antithetical worlds separated by subway rides, I never fully was what I seemed or tried to be" (Johnson 41). At this point in the narrative of *Minor Characters*, Johnson has not yet encountered the Beat writers or met Kerouac. Instead, this aspect of her life chronicles her subway journeys to The Village with her friend Maria in her early teens. It is at this point that Johnson begins to move away from the expectations of her parents and carve out a new identity for herself. However, unlike some of the other women (Diane di Prima, for example), Johnson's quest for female independence is a transformation which is never convincingly complete. In other words, Johnson is a young, middle-class girl who finds herself immersed in a culture which at times we are led to believe she is never completely at ease in. Indeed, before leaving for college she becomes completely disillusioned with the bohemian lifestyle she has been involved in, and resolves to form a new identity that is more collegiate than bohemian.

Johnson's gender performance fluctuates between two normatively polarised milieus — that of the collegiate, which can be loosely interpreted as "Square," and that of the bohemian which roughly denotes "Beat." In this sense, then, Johnson deconstructs this polarisation and perceives her own performance, the doing of the female gender, as a consistently fluctuating position, eluding binarised identification of Square or Beat, collegiate or bohemian. Thus, Johnson neither denaturalizes nor subverts the norm, a position which Judith Butler would encourage us to see as something of an unproductive pursuit resulting in an unintended reidealization of the norm (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 129). Instead, Johnson moves from one performative extreme to the other, evident when we consider her superficially Square aspirations for her forthcoming life at Barnard College: "My idea of the life that

would await me in college was a composite of images from three main sources: the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Mademoiselle* magazine, and the campus department of Lord and Taylor" (47). The image presented here suggests that Johnson hopes her college life will be glamorous, sophisticated and superficially independent. *Mademoiselle* magazine published short stories by noted authors such as Truman Capote and Tennessee Williams. Sylvia Plath was a guest editor at the magazine in the summer of 1953 and indeed her experience of this became the inspiration for her eschewed autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*. However, *Mademoiselle* was more renowned for its fashion editorials and relationship advice columns than its literary prowess. Thus, as a budding collegiate attempting to deceive her academic peers by wearing strings of pearls and cashmere sweaters, Johnson hopes her life at Barnard will be worlds away from the less glamorous vision of bare apartments and sexual debauchery she has left behind. The collage of imagery offered in this example is in sharp contrast to the Beat lifestyle. Instead, Johnson's vision of life in college is a bourgeoisie portrait of Johnson's Square alter-ego, simulating a deviation from the perhaps more radical Beat vision of rucksack wanderers and spontaneous adventure (this is an over-generalisation, of course). Thus, Johnson possesses a powerful awareness of how she performs her gender and how there are multiple permutations and combinations which can alter her performance. This particular example signifies a move away from alterity and a return to the normative. However, whether simulating the norm or re-embarking along the path of deviation (a path which itself is never fully detached from the norm), Johnson's performance intentionally remains incomplete. She is never fully Beat or Square (and indeed, even reducing her performance to these two poles oversimplifies things); she instead exists as a mutating and ever-evolving hybrid of the two.

For a time, Johnson performs successfully her gender in acquiescence with constructions of refined collegiate. However, when she encounters Elise Cowen for the first time, Cowen immediately sees through the constructive, performative veil: "I did not want to know Elise Cowen, who clearly was *not* collegiate and whom I could tell at a glance was even beyond the effort of trying. She introduced herself in such a low voice I had to ask her to repeat her name. But her eyes insisted, 'I *do* know you. We *have* been to the same places. And isn't it ridiculous for us to be *here*?' And all the while, in my plaid and lamb's wool, I'd hoped I blended in so perfectly" (51). Although Johnson may have assumed temporarily the dress code and behaviour of a sophisticated Barnard student, Cowen voyeuristically perceives this conscious attention to performance and simulation. On the other hand, Cowen herself is "beyond the effort of trying" which firmly establishes Cowen as the Other in terms of disillusionment regarding her appearance, suggesting that she should try to act out this performance. The authorial tone insists that Cowen's gender performance is excessively polarised, and does not possess the adaptable, chameleon-like qualities of Johnson's. In other words, Johnson incites the reader to conjecture that Cowen's identification with only one aspect of gender performance has actually created a ghostly, self-conscious apparition with a fragmented sense of self — Cowen's introverted, painfully self-aware communication testifies to this. Thus, Johnson admonishes the idea that conjoining the normatively polarised (loosely recognized as Beat versus Square), as opposed to valuing one set of constructive modes over the other, will result in a more fluid and liberating (to a degree) representation of gender performance. Furthermore, Cowen's uncompromising inscription of what we might call Beat constructions encapsulates Butler's observation that "the discourse of freedom in which one makes the claim of emancipation suppresses the very energies it purports to unleash" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 136). In other words, Cowen's incessant loyalty to Beat performativity, contrary to emancipating her in terms of gender, actually leads to a more powerful suppression than if she were to present herself as an open text, willing to engage simultaneously with normatively dichotomised modes of performance. Note what Johnson calls the "bleak prophecy" of Cowen's middle name, "Nada," as an additional justification of this argument: "Literally it means Nothing — Nothing and Nothingness," Elise said with a certain melancholy pride (54). Johnson's representation of Cowen's identity, her appropriation and translation of gender constructs, are all forged in a repressive simulation of what she perceives to be Beat tropes. Thus, Cowen may claim emancipation from the mainstream norms of the Square, the collegiate, the bourgeoisie, but, as Judith Butler suggests, such claims do little but uphold and reify the norms from which we persuade ourselves we are emancipated. To suggest freedom from the normative ingratiates the power of such a construction to hinder our freedom and calls into question the authenticity of this emancipation. Furthermore, to insist we are free or emancipated enters

into a discourse of freedom, which in itself forms part of the larger discursive framework which imprisons us in the first place. Therefore, Cowen's outright rejection of the dress and behavioural codes of the Barnard collegiate female is presented to us as an inert, lethargic performance, resistant to modification or renewal. Conversely, Johnson's gender performance is like the swing of a pendulum, never resting in one place, but reverberating and continuously changing.

This deceptive appearance of emancipation versus the actual reality of a more deeply embedded imprisonment can be applied to the legacy of the female Beats on a larger scale — they claim their emancipation from the repressive society in which they attempted to embody freedom only to find themselves subjected to new forms of power and suppression within the Beat subculture. This subjectification of the feminine occurs in John Clellon Holmes's novel *Go* (sometimes credited as the first Beat novel). In *Minor Characters*, Johnson recounts her own reading of the novel and responds to Holmes' representation of female characters, where they most often appear as compositions of several people, fragmented and vague: "they were mere anonymous passengers on the big Greyhound bus of experience. Lacking centers, how could they burn with the fever that infected his young men? What they did, I guess, was fill up the seats" (Johnson 79). Similar to Kerouac's portrayal of women in *On The Road*, Holmes silences the female and designates them as passive seat-fillers, shadowy imitations of the feverish, insightful men. This reinforces the idea that Beat women, in an attempt to emancipate themselves from gender norms within their larger society, found themselves immersed in new discursive norms within the Beat subculture which silenced them. This silencing is significant if we consider that recognition derives primarily through verbalised communication, the *logos*. As Butler observes, "the terms that facilitate recognition are themselves conventional, the effects and instruments of a social ritual that decide, often through exclusion and violence, the linguistic conditions of survivable subjects" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 5). Thus, the Beats are merely an alternate configuration of the larger social ritual which fails to recognise the feminine through the conventional appropriation of violence and exclusion. In other words, although consistently hailed as a marked deviation from culture, a countercultural assemblage, the Beats (both male and female) entered into this larger discursive framework of failing to recognise the Other. Therefore, the silence and passivity typically attributed to the female in the Beat movement connects the countercultural to the mainstream in a less polarised, more overlapping and mutually dependent structure. Furthermore, Butler asserts that "silence is the performative effect of a certain kind of speech, where that speech is an address that has as its object the deauthorization of the speech of the one to whom the speech act is addressed" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 137). In regards to the Beats, then, the object of this speech is the deauthorization and exclusion of the female voice in favour of a predominantly male literary group. The resultant silence of the female, then, is the conventional performative effect of this. Thus, by giving them a voice, we give the female Beats new authority and modes of resistance to the origins of the speech which initially silenced them.

With this general thematic recurrence of an unabashedly mobile existence between polar opposites, whether they be masculine/feminine or Beat/Square, we perceive a pattern in the texts which admonish the idea that one does not necessarily have to cling to one aspect of gender or its performance, but can choose different threads or different discursive gender modes to achieve a re-inscribed feminine subjectivity. With this in mind, Hettie Jones's *Drive poems* will now be briefly examined to see if her own appropriation, and perhaps modification, of gender codes echoes the textual evidence offered so far. The collection of poems adopts a common theoretical thread; metaphorical allusions to mobility and being in motion, which reverberates with the idea of a gender performance which never rests fully on one pole. Jones adheres to the idea of an amalgamated gender, a performance composed of many parts, in the following lines: "I have always been at the same time / woman enough to be moved to tears / and man enough / to drive my car in any direction" (11). Men, for Jones, represent spontaneity, while women represent compassion and empathy. Her performance of her gender, however, encompasses these varying traits. Jones combines the masculine and feminine in a way which denotes the multiplicitous and constructed nature of gender — she chooses to adopt the traits which (as she perceives) are not usually associated with the feminine. Additionally, she puts forward a feminine perspective of the male Beat road trip, the adventures and "kicks" found on the open road, which suggests that Jones incites an inclusion of the female into the foreground of Beat culture. Thus, she re-inscribes the feminine into a space which is usually thought to be dominated by men. Jones

enlarges her theoretical speculations to pursue an ideal of a unified group of women writers. The imagery put forward is strikingly reminiscent of King Arthur and his round table of wise men, who were the principle decision-makers in the kingdom: "Take me / surely to where I am now, in this perfectly / rounded silence, at this table of women, / writing" (17). It is the silence which is "rounded" but Jones manages to create a kind of cyclic whirlwind which derides the standard tropes of women as silent chicks — they are not silent because they have nothing worthwhile to say. Instead, their silence is owing to their preoccupation with capturing through words their own experiences and perspectives. These experiences, because the women are all gathered around a table, not only creates an air of camaraderie and community, but also suggests a unified concern with perhaps rewriting their history, from a feminine as opposed to a masculine position. Thus, Jones asserts that there is something which needs re-written; that language in its present state is omitting something about women's experience and is part of the ideological standard which appropriates the idea of the Other to regulate and normalise what it means to be a woman. It is evident, then, that Jones advocates a mitigation of these fundamental precepts as a means of undermining a restrictive gender performance.

This concept of a more fluid construction of gender is reproduced when Jones voices the adaptations that are made when one is without a masculine presence: "but now it's on me / I switch roles, I fix / the roof, I have to / love myself / the way I never did / before" (30). The speaker in the verse cites the added responsibility that derives from the appropriation of both masculine and feminine cultural constructions. This responsibility is not only found in the menial, practical tasks of everyday life, but it also involves a degree of independence and the ability to find definition and a sense of identity outside of being involved with a man. Thus, Jones suggests that the feminine sense of identity may be repressed by the domination of the male, and it only becomes renewed in times of confident self-reliance. Jones was married to LeRoi Jones, who later became known as Amiri Baraka. Baraka was a figure who was very much in the limelight for his involvement in the Black Arts movement as well as his strong ties to the Beats. Similar to Johnson's postulation that women were minor characters, then, and Kyger's elucidation of the mentor/protégée binary opposition, here we have a similar representation which partially fulfils the historical predilection of the identity of the female Beat as a referential offshoot of the autonomous identity of the male. Jones does not remain fixed to this notion, however, and in the following example she remodels the autonomous male as an upheaval of normative gender discourses: "hold my image he says / prove my existence he says / sometime I'll be real" (36). Contrary to the ghostly image of the female as a kind of non-presence, a holographic simulation of the real, Jones posits the male in a similar way which detaches the masculine from the normative, preferential status according to bilateral, dialectical tropes. Thus, she revises the prevailing western concepts of the superior status of the masculine and materialises the masculine as a simulated copy of the real; an intangible entity, who needs proof of his existence. Jones, then, substantiates the claim that in order to dismantle and refigure (to a degree) the precepts which guide the performance of the female gender, we must dissociate and distort the normative as a means of attempting to undo and reassign such norms.

Jones does not only commandeer a protestation against the inhibitions of gender performance by undermining the prevalence and authority of the masculine; there are examples which reclaim and revise the feminine as a means of balancing the dichotomous scales, so to speak. Consider the following example where the female speaker escapes the restrictions of her life via the unconscious realm: "That night she dreams / a doorway out of / the flowered walls / of her ordinary life. / She sees herself in a larger, / darker, louder place / her body ecstatic / her thoughts like wild vines" (70). Note firstly the significant instance of enjambment connecting the first and second lines of the stanza: the speaker does not simply dream about a doorway; the running on line suggests that the dream is also the actual doorway. Therefore, Jones deconstructs the binary between the conscious and the unconscious world and suggests that dreams can provide tangible visions. Furthermore, this vision encompasses another deconstructive element; note how the speakers thoughts are "like wild vines," which blurs the boundary between the mind and the body, two signifiers which are, as previously insinuated, situated as polar opposites. Note also how the constructions which guide the waking life of the female speaker become distorted symbols in her dream ("the flowered walls of her ordinary life"), casting them as illusory elements where they are usually perceived as the real, or the tangible. Consequentially, then, Jones suggests that the real, or the tangible, is just as illusory as the dream; therefore, she demonstrates an awareness of the constructed nature of things. This example specifically denotes

the constructed nature of gender — the flowery walls are built around the life of the female, and appear as a symbol of the discourses which are, similarly, inscribed on the body of a woman and perpetuate a cyclic repetition of monitoring and censoring which guide her repetitious gender performance. From this, then, we perceive Jones' insurrection against the prison-life discourses which perseveringly take hold of our actions and assert a strenuous and continuous materialisation of normative gender standards.

In conclusion, my analysis of the preceding examples demonstrates a multi-dimensional appropriation and reconfiguration of standardising performative tropes in the literature of the female Beats. If we consider the idea of language as a performance with effects (Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 7), it can be argued that, in their attempted modification of language, female Beats administer a challenge to the performance of their gender and, as a result, adapt the effects of this performance. If a subject becomes a subject by entering the normativity of language, then in some important ways, these rules precede and orchestrate the very formation of the subject (Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 135). In this way, then, if, as the female Beat authors have asserted, we commit an attack on the norms which constitute our status as a subject, there remains the possibility that we may re-constitute ourselves. Of course, we remain aware of the framework within with this reconstitution takes place; how we can never vehemently abolish neither the influence of the original orchestrating ideologies, nor reconstitute ourselves without the looming presence of politics, sexual or other. However, the female Beats realised this general dystopian narrative of never really being "free" or outside the realm of the norm (even when attempting to deviate because these deviations themselves are part of the larger ideological stratum), and, instead of submitting to the norms in a quiet way, they tried their best to achieve as much freedom as possible. Thus, although we could naively suggest that these women were pioneering radicals with no ties to the mainstream, it would perhaps be more useful to understand them in terms of being neither/nor; a sort of adaptation of Waldman's idiom "both both." They were neither fundamentally countercultural nor advocates of the mainstream. Instead, they attempted to exist as a sort of performative pendulum; fluctuating between these two poles as a mode of remaining advocates of an open, fluid gender.

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