

The Depiction of Women in Selected Works by Women Writers of the Beat Generation

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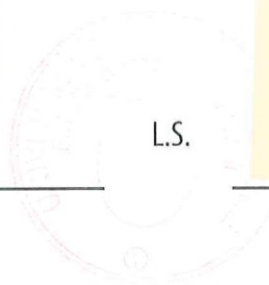
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ABSTRAKT

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat postavení žen v americké společnosti v období padesátých a šedesátých let dvacátého století a porovnat je s postavami v dílech vybraných autorek beatnické generace. Teoretická část definuje historické a kulturní pozadí a Beatnickou generaci. Praktická část analyzuje postavení žen v americké společnosti a hnutí beatníků v románu Joyce Johnson *Come and Join the Dance* (nevydáno v češtině). Dále je román porovnán s dílem autorky beatnické generace Diane di Primou a jejím dílem *Memoirs of the Beatnik* (Čas Beatníků).

Klíčová slova: Joyce Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, postavení žen, beatnická generace, americká literatura

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis aims to analyze women's roles in the American 1950s and 1960s society and compare them with female characters in selected works by women writers of the Beat Generation. The theoretical part defines historical and cultural background and the Beat Generation. The practical part analyses the novel by Joyce Johnson *Come and Join the Dance* and compares it with the general conditions for women in post-war America as well as within the Beat Generation. The novel is also compared with another work written by Beat Generation writer Diane di Prima, *Memoirs of the Beatnik*.

Keywords: Joyce Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, women roles, the Beat Generation, American literature

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I hereby declare that the print version of my bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

Female authors of the Beat Generation were neglected for many years. Since the 1990s those female authors have been drawing the attention of academics as well as feminist researchers. This thesis focuses on female writers engaged in the Beat Generation and how they dealt with the position of the women in the subcultural movement. It is crucial to observe the situation in post-war America in the 1950s and 1960s and define the roles of women. Many aspects influenced the position of women in American society and had an impact on the writers. The influence of mass media, consumer culture, family values, and the women's movement played a significant role within the creative process of Beat Generation women.

The theoretical part provides a necessary insight into the Beat Generation as well as the position of women in a patriarchal society. It explores the position of women and how the women roles developed during the Beat Generation's heyday. The economic growth after the Second World War provided American society with the resources and helped with the creation of the white middle class and their suburban communities. The marginalization of women caused the emergence of the women's movement that urged the equality in both the work and art-related acknowledgment of women.

The analysis part of the thesis connects topics from the theoretical part with the *Come and Join the Dance* by Joyce Johnson (1962). Attention is paid to the women's roles, more concretely how the male-dominated society influenced the existential freedom of women. The main aspect is the depiction of women, concretely the character of Susan. It indicates female subjectivity and the transformation of a conformist girl into a bohemian and, more importantly, how a naïve protagonist develops into a self-conscious individual. The analysis also explores typical Beat novel features in the novel and which aspects make it a true Beat Generation work. The last chapter is dedicated to another work from a well-known female representative Diane di Prima. It compares her real-life experiences described in *Memoirs of the Beatnik*, published in 1969, using common features in both works.

I. THEORY

1 THE BEAT GENERATION

The Beat Generation was a cultural movement in America that emerged in the 1940s and continued into the 1960s. The “Beats” were based mainly in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles. The movement was a countercultural phenomenon and formed an American cultural underground. The community gathered around literary figures such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs, who are considered to be the movement’s significant leaders and spokesmen. However, the whole society of Beatniks was formed by many writers, poets, painters and various artists.

The Beat Generation was a cultural revolution of unsatisfied post-World War II youth who were forming themselves in a world without any moral values they could support.¹ The movement was created out of bohemian communities and underground hipsters consisting of intellectuals, writers, philosophers, poets, musicians and painters of North Beach in San Francisco and Greenwich Village and Times Square in New York. The Beat cultural movement was based on this artistic diversity. The movement also gathered around the Black Mountain College, the San Francisco Renaissance and the New York school and took advantage of connections between the writers within the institutions and the Beats. Under the influence of shared publications, works, various creative techniques, visiting galleries, bars and private flats and experiencing sexual and drug freedom, the movement’s unique identity was created.²

1.1 Origin of the word “beat”

The word “beat” was introduced to a small group of friends that later became some of the most essential Beat writers by Times Square hustler and writer Herbert Huncke who took the slang term from Chicago jazz musicians, petty thieves, hustlers and carnies. Ted Morgan in his *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs* wrote “Huncke was a crucial figure, a sort of Virgilian guide to the lower depths, taking [the Beats] into a world that provided an alternative to the right-thinking banality [. . .] Huncke was the first hipster, who had been on the street since age twelve,[. . .] an antihero pointing the way to an embryonic counterculture, which would arise from this Time Square world

¹ Anne Charters, *The Penguin Book of the Beats* (London: Penguin, 1993), xvii-xx.

² Ronna C. Johnson, and Nancy Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 2-3.

of hustlers.”³ The word was first used to describe the condition of travelers living on the road, being worn-out and exhausted by living beyond the edge. Huncke passed the word on to Burroughs, who spread the term among Ginsberg and Kerouac. Ginsberg’s first interpretation of the term in Huncke’s “street” speech was that it meant “exhausted, sleepless, perceptive, on your own, rejected by society, streetwise.” The term “Beat Generation” was formed after the success of Kerouac’s first novel, *The Town and the City*, published in 1948.⁴ Although terms like “beat” and “beatnik” had become a pop culture phenomenon by the early 1960s, during this time the word “beat” was essential mainly to the early writers in this group for their self-definition. Kerouac made the term everlasting not only by naming the movement the Beat Generation but also by using various forms of the word “beat” frequently in his novels.⁵ Kerouac tried to clarify the meaning of the term “beat” in many of his interviews, essays and lectures. He expressed how the media misused the word by not interpreting its true meaning. In his essay “Origins of the Beat Generation,”⁶ from 1959, he emphasized the fact that the root of the word indicates the right meaning – be-at – like in words *beatitude*, or *beatific* which means “a state of utmost bliss.”⁷ Later, Kerouac defined the term as “the necessary beatness [*sic*] of darkness that proceeds opening up to light, egolessness [*sic*], giving room for religious illumination.”⁸

1.2 Beatniks

Malcolm Cowley indicates that the people gathered around the Beat movement did not in fact label themselves as “Beats.”⁹ The members could be said to share what the literary editor and critic Cowley described as their “own sense of life, something that might be defined as an intricate web of perceptions, judgments, feelings and aspirations.”¹⁰ The issue regarding the Beats is the categorization. It appears in connection with the identification of the Beat writers and how to concretize the Beat category precisely. From a

³ Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs* (New York: WW Norton & Co, 2012), 133.

⁴ Charters, *The Penguin Book of the Beats*, xvii-xix.

⁵ David Sterritt, *The Beats: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21.

⁶ Jack Kerouac, “Origins of the Beat Generation,” *Playboy*, vol. 6, no. 6 (June 1959).

⁷ “Beatitude,” Merriam-Webster, accessed April 28, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/beatitude>.

⁸ Allen Ginsberg, *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*, (New York: Grove Atlantic, 2017), section A Definition of the Beat Generation, <https://b-ok.cc/book/4816886/b6c252>.

⁹ “Malcolm Cowley,” Poetry Foundation, accessed January 27, 2019, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/malcolm-cowley>.

¹⁰ Charters, *The Penguin Book of the Beats*, xvi.

literary point of view, this categorization would depend on the style, aesthetic, shared philosophy and writing techniques. However, the literary methods used by the Beats varied widely.¹¹ According to Steve Watson, “the Beats identity has as much to do with literary aesthetics as with their collective biography.” This statement supports the assumption that the Beat Generation is not based on stylistic features rather than primarily based on biographical and cultural aspects.¹²

A classification of the Beat literary philosophy and aesthetics could be hard to define as each of the artists had their own style, technique and composition, although they might be said to be united in particular elements such as direct expression of thoughts, spontaneous composition, improvisation, stream of consciousness and their stance against censorship and rewriting their own texts, i.e. against the use of standard literary techniques of the day. The techniques, stylistics and utterance varied not only between male representatives but also among female writers.¹³ The Beat writers were united by sharing an attitude against conservative consumer society. The entire Beat movement was connected on many levels: spiritual, social, artistic, geographical and personal.¹⁴ Diane di Prima in her poem from 2010 *Keep the Beat*, expressed that the movement is not a generation, but it is a state of mind. The Beat Generation was an art community that brought together three generations of artists, non-conformist, writers and activists. The people aligned with the counterculture were loosely connected and did not form any official establishment.¹⁵ In fact, Ginsberg referred to the Beats simply as “the group of people we knew at the time.”¹⁶

In the late fifties, the term “beat” already lacked the specific connection with the countercultural movement as it started to be used as a general label for young people, also called “hipsters.” Eventually, at the point when the Beat Generation was included in dictionaries, it had become almost an obsolete cliché. By the mid-1960s the hippie movement had replaced the Beat Generation as the alternative consciousness of the US youth changed, with the new term of “counter-culture” used to describe this ever-growing

¹¹ Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, 2.

¹² Steven Watson, *The Birth of the Beat Generation: Visionaries, Rebels, and Hipsters* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995), 5.

¹³ Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, 2.

¹⁴ Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, 3.

¹⁵ Mary Paniccia Carden and Justin D. Neuman, *Women Writers of the Beat Era: Autobiography and Intertextuality* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018), 5, muse.jhu.edu/book/58297.

¹⁶ Richard Peabody, *A Different Beat: Writings by Women of the Beat Generation* (London: High Risk Books, 1997), 1.

group of dissenters (see below). The development of this American subculture was influenced by the progressing civil rights movement, the women's movement and mainly the anti-war movement.¹⁷

1.3 Historical Background

The as yet unnamed Beat Generation had been flourishing since 1944 when Burroughs, Kerouac and Ginsberg were introduced to each other thanks to their mutual friends. It can be said that the Beat Generation was active until 1967, when it blended with and faded into the hippie movement.¹⁸ It is necessary to show what America was like in the late 1940s and 1950s to understand the values and lifestyle of the Beats.

The period after the Second World War has witnessed many changes in American society. In the years 1945-1960, the US population increased by more than 30 percent. Also, the numbers of rural communities dropped to less than half by the end of the 1950s. This 15-year-period also meant a shift in the non-white population, which increased by 41 percent.¹⁹ These fluctuations were caused by the middle-class, which was getting bigger and richer at that time. As a result of this growth, the middle-class started leaving cities and towns for the suburbs. However, this also meant people were moving out from the countryside to cities. Hand in hand with those realities came a division within the society and the building-up of new communities.²⁰ The morals in the United States changed at that time, and usual behavioral patterns were disturbed. The youth experimented with the traditional social mores, including divorce, non-married cohabitation, multiple and same-sex relationships, and the empowerment of youth and women was often subject to debate.²¹

America was economically flourishing, and thanks to the profits from the arms industry during WWII, this had a tangible impact on the middle-class Americans. With the help of federal assistance and loan programs like the G.I. Bill, young veterans returning from the war were able to attend university and other training programs, which helped them find

¹⁷ Charters, *The Penguin Book of the Beats*, xxi-xxii.

¹⁸ Kurt Hemmer, *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2007), x.

¹⁹ Robert H. Bremner and Gary W. Reichard, *Reshaping American: Society and Institutions 1945-1960* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), x.

²⁰ Gina Misiroglu and James Miller, *American Countercultures: An Encyclopedia of Nonconformists, Alternative Lifestyles, and Radical Ideas in U.S. History* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2013), chap. Ingrained in the Counterculture, <https://b-ok.cc/book/2479130/2d00d8>.

²¹ Theresa Richardson, *The Rise of Youth Counter Culture after World War II and the Popularization of Historical Knowledge: Then and Now* (Muncie: Ball State University, 2012).

better paying employment and to establish their own businesses. The prosperity enabled them to construct suburbs with fine schools, new houses, neighborhood parks, and safer communities than that of the inner cities. Thanks to commercial propaganda, consumers in the suburbs became more focused on material comfort rather on the political situation. There is no doubt about the importance of the Cold War ideology and the anti-communist climate having an impact on national development. However, Americans were exposed to many new formats of life at that time that they had not ever experienced before. The 1950s and 1960s were the beginning of decades of political expectations and statements which were filtered by mass media in various ways.²² The black and white Fascist-democratic view of global politics of the World War II era were replaced by the black and white communist-capitalist geopolitical constructs of the Cold War which remained in place until the “color revolutions” in communist countries started occurring in 1989.²³

1.4 Suburban Society

The post-war era created many possibilities for young adults, even though they were being affected by what war had brought, whether it was hardship or new opportunities or a mixture of both. The number of earlier marriages of young adults was increasing in the fifties mainly because of the good conditions provided by the economy and assurance from the State. Another aspect supporting this fact was the assumption of women staying at home after marriage.²⁴ Contrary to the war era, which for the first time, brought many women into the labor force, the post-war era released them from their jobs and offered them to the men returning from the war.²⁵ After the war, almost 9 million veterans took advantage of the opportunities provided by the G. I. Bill, which benefited veterans via low-interest mortgages, granted stipends for college education and unemployment compensation in years 1944 to 1949. Thanks to the G. I. Bill, nearly \$4 billion were handed out and undoubtedly helped to develop the suburban areas.²⁶

²² Martin Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2007), 2-3.

²³ Abel Polese and Donnacha Ó Beacháin, “The Color Revolution Virus and Authoritarian Antidotes: Political Protest and Regime Counterattacks in Post-Communist Spaces,” no. 19 (April 2011) 111-132. 10.3200/DEMO.19.2.111-132.

²⁴ Bremner and Reichard, *Reshaping American: Society and Institutions 1945-1960*, 5-6.

²⁵ Bremner and Reichard, *Reshaping American: Society and Institutions 1945-1960*, 35.

²⁶ “G.I. Bill,” History, last modified June 7, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/gi-bill>.

The expansion of the suburbs and reconstruction of the urban areas provided young families with housing and a healthy environment to raise children in.²⁷ This departure of the white middle-class from urban areas that were predominantly inhabited by minorities is called White Flight.²⁸ The creation of a greatly expanded highway system connecting metropolitan areas with each other and with surrounding suburbs along with the prosperity which created possibilities in the construction of new housing was another factor causing the American middle-class to leave the cities for suburban areas, which provided the security and privacy to lead the highly valued family life. The suburbs provided families with space they could not find or afford in the urban areas. It offered a space for all consumer goods like cars, outdoor furniture, and other products.²⁹ The significant number of children born in years the 1946-1964 are called Baby Boomers.³⁰ The American economy had to feed, house, clothe, and educate the Boomers to satisfy all their needs. The buying power of the Baby Boomers had an unquestionable impact on the American economy and led to overconsumption. The stable situation on the market caused the government to open up home loans and support for education; therefore, the number of people with a higher education was increasing. Although the Baby Boomers had the advantage of experiencing more years in school and college than their predecessors, their lifelong experience with the media was stronger. The buying behavior and demands of the Baby Boomers were not taught to them by their parents. It was the influence of the mass media that had a primary impact on the purchases made by Boomers, although they were partly inspired by their peer group.³¹

However, between 1948 and 1958, the number of working women nearly doubled. By the end of the 1960s, almost a third of married women were employed. For women, having a paid job not only helped them to achieve a higher social status and recognition by the broader public, but it also brought them the privilege of being able to afford material possessions without depending on men to buy them.

²⁷ Bremner and Reichard, *Reshaping American: Society and Institutions 1945-1960*, 17.

²⁸ "White Flight," Merriam-Webster, accessed April 12, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/white%20flight>.

²⁹ Alan Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2014), 699.

³⁰ "Baby Boomer," Merriam-Webster, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/baby%20boomer>.

³¹ Bremner and Reichard, *Reshaping American: Society and Institutions 1945-1960*, 13.

1.5 Mainstream American Culture

Generally, the term “culture” refers to the set of values, beliefs, attitudes and practices that define a social group, institution, or organization.³² However, the term can stand for national identity as well. The so-called American Dream was considered as a part of the American Identity at that time. Nevertheless, the pursuit of this “American Dream” myth might be understood as a fancy term for acquiring social status, recognition and wealth.³³

Even though a version of the concept of the American Dream was known in the United States even in colonial times, where the new land was a place for new opportunities, the phrase was first used in 1931 by James Truslow Adams in his *The Epic of America*. He described the United States as a land where everybody gets the same opportunities, and all individuals can improve their lives based on their abilities and achievements. The concept transformed during the post-war era. The American Dream was not only a dream to immigrants looking for a better place to live, but it became a goal for all average American citizens.

However, the reality was different from the dream, and many obstacles like discrimination based on gender, race, or a class appeared along the way of achieving the American Dream. Jack Kerouac described some of these reality difficulties in his novel *On the Road* (1957). Even though the story does not focus on the pursuit of the American Dream, Kerouac describes the travels of the main characters across the United States and Mexico while they are searching for an unachievable “IT.”³⁴ Harold Bloom, in his 1959 book *The American Dream*, describes how “IT” “could signify various desires and wishes, from the Buddhist nirvana to a muse to inspire poetry, writing, and bebop.” Dean Moriarty, one of the main characters from *On the Road* (1957), actually acknowledges and explains “IT” as: “That last thing is what cannot get, Carlo. Nobody can get to that last thing. We keep on living in hopes of catching it once for all.”³⁵ According to Bloom, the idea of the American Dream in the *On the Road* for hard-working, ordinary people and marginal society representatives is “simply the ability to survive from day to day, but they are happy and content with their life.” The Beats were involved in a rebellion against the traditional

³² Joseph B. McFadden, *Understanding Media, and Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Libraries, 2016), 5.

³³ Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s*, 12.

³⁴ Harold Bloom, *The American Dream* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 161-69.

³⁵ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (London: Penguin, 2000), 44.

mainstream American Dream, the pursuit of material possessions.³⁶ For them, “IT” represented “the mad dream – grabbing, taking, sighing, dying, so that they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City.”³⁷

1.5.1 Mass Media Influence

The prevalence of the mass media spread in the fifties. The United States was introduced to a new media channel: television. In the mid-fifties, two-thirds of American families owned a TV. Being surrounded by the promotion of the nuclear family on the TV and in the magazines, many Americans reckoned that the typical family consisted of a father, a mother managing the children, and the household. The usual American household possessed a car, a house in the suburbs and a television.³⁸

Radio broadcasting, newspapers and magazines were still steady sources of information; however, by the end of the 50s, they had been replaced by TV. The advertising of new fashion trends and products broadcasted on television supported the consumer purchasing power. The TV programs provided the American public with the image of the middle-class predominantly white family from the suburbs.³⁹ This image of the nuclear family was shown in popular sitcoms and programs like *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, a show that embodied the American values of the middle class in the 1950s and 1960s, *Leave It to Beaver*, a typical 1950s suburban situation comedy,⁴⁰ and *Father Knows Best*, where women were portrayed as housewives and mothers serving their husbands and children. On the other hand, a very popular situation comedy *I Love Lucy*, even though it showed women in conventional roles, also idealized and mocked the domestic lifestyle at the same time.⁴¹

The prevalence of the mass media increased the ability of the middle class to access knowledge and information, even though the content was limited. The growth of advertisements in the post-war era significantly influenced the cultural taste of American

³⁶ Bloom, *The American Dream*, 161-69.

³⁷ Kerouac, *On the Road*, 96.

³⁸ McFadden, *Understanding Media, and Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, 12-13.

³⁹ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People*, 688.

⁴⁰ Robert J. Thompson and Steve Allen, “Television in the United States,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed March 27, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/art/television-in-the-United-States>.

⁴¹ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People*, 688.

citizens. Due to a vague definition of what culture was at that time, the mass media tended to instruct the public taste.⁴² In the 1950s, there was no clear way how to define contemporary culture. The whole new pop culture was being created mainly by the younger generation in order to distance themselves from their parents and their lifestyle. Meanwhile, although the youth was embracing the individuality within themselves, the older generation was living according to conventional beliefs and life values. Especially young people started to distance themselves from proprietary living and trying to fulfill their parents' expectations. Countercultures emerged as a disagreement with mainstream society. The underground culture that was represented by the Beat Generation influenced a part of the middle-class youth; teenagers were rebelling against their parents, engaging in sexual activity without commitments mainly thanks to access to birth-control devices and indulging a fascination with traveling, cars, and motorcycles.⁴³ The people of various countercultures wanted to give their lives deeper meaning that could not be found in a fancy house in the suburbs nor by purchasing a new car. The concept of counterculture is dealt with in more detail below.

However, the mass media also worked as a channel for government capitalist propaganda. Hand in hand with what was broadcast comes to the fact that once the Beats received the attention of the mass media, it initiated the end for the underground, unedited and pure Beat generation. Beats represented the unpredictable. They were to remain shocking and immediate, but the mass media negated that through pampering. With that said, the marginalization of writing women engaged in the movement preserved the nature of what it meant to be a genuinely underground Beat.⁴⁴

1.5.1 Counterculture

As a response to changes in economic, political, and ethnical levels, countercultures started to appear in the US society. Cambridge dictionary defines *counterculture* as: "a way of life and a set of ideas that are completely different from those accepted by most of society, or

⁴² Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s*, 13-15.

⁴³ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People*, 692.

⁴⁴ Brenda Knight, *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution* (Scotts Valley: CreateSpace, 2010), 5.

the group of people who live this way.”⁴⁵ The term, which came into prominence in the U.S. after the Beat Generation was replaced by the “Generation of Love” of the Hippies, mainly signified American youth protesting against capitalism, foreign policy and American hegemonic thinking. The young generation believed that challenging the materialism and mainstream culture would provoke the way people think and would embrace the political change.

The general idea behind countercultures dealt with a reversal in thinking. With the pursuit of the inner self and discovering their purpose and fighting the materialist world, countercultures tried to leave artificial objects behind. They stressed a new way of reasoning, an alternative consciousness; however, these countercultures did not provide their followers with strict rules and a prescribed way of living. Countercultures served as a space for experimentation. They emphasized freedom and an open-minded vision of life. They aimed to abandon the mainstream society and culture, which was served to Americans via mass media.⁴⁶

Even though there were no rules for people who claim themselves as a part of some counterculture movement, there were many countercultures in the 1950s and mainly 1960s cultural scene. The Beats themselves were a counterculture, revolting against American society, living without rules. The movement was the first to vocalize a dissatisfaction with American conformity and materialism society throughout their art. Hypothetically, the Beats broke the silence and found the voice that inspired many people at that time.⁴⁷ They actively commented on the situation surrounding American hegemony, concretely by reacting to class issues, conformity, the consumerist society, mass media dominance, and sexual morals. They responded to the ethnic and sexual diversity by cooperating actively with writers from racial and sexual minorities.⁴⁸

The Beat Generation developed from a group of friends into the transnationally known literary phenomenon. Their experimental creations often related to their personal experience

⁴⁵ “Counter-culture,” Cambridge Dictionary, accessed December 15, 2019.

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/counter-culture>.

⁴⁶ Misiroglu and Miller, *American Countercultures: An Encyclopedia of Nonconformists, Alternative Lifestyles, and Radical Ideas in U.S. History*, chap. Ingrained in the Counterculture.

⁴⁷ Knight, *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution*, 3.

⁴⁸ Nancy M. Grace and Jennie Skerl, eds. *The Transnational Beat Generation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4.

with drugs, spirituality and various sexual relations distinguished the Beat from the rest of the American society. The movement was a bohemian community influenced by jazz and drugs with many writers and artists that happened to be associated with the category in various ways. The media stereotyped image of the “beatnik” was based on black-clothed, bebop jazz listening, bearded dropouts gathering in the urban areas and wandering from town to town. The television, film and other media canonization and commodification of youth protest was repeated a decade or so later with the hippie generation, in which psychedelic rock then replaced bebop jazz as the music of choice for the “dissenters” from mainstream culture.

In the late 1960s, when two of the leading personas representing the Beat Generation Kerouac and Cassady passed away, the movement was already fading away. However, many of the Beats kept the spirit of the Beat Generation and evolved into a new level movement, including figures like poet and activist Ed Sanders, songwriter and singer Bob Dylan and writer Ken Kesey. The hippies, another significant American counterculture, similarly to the Beats, expressed their rejection of the values accepted by the mainstream society. The hippie movement developed into a political protest, deprecating the progressing Vietnam War, emphasizing peace and taking part in the race-related protests supporting minorities. The television stereotyped image of the dirty, long-haired, drug-taking, pacifist hippie listening to loud rock music, talking in crazy slang and wearing wild clothes served to dilute and ridicule the anti-war political message of serious protesters.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Misiroglu and Miller, *American Countercultures: An Encyclopedia of Nonconformists, Alternative Lifestyles, and Radical Ideas in U.S. History*, chap. Beat Generation.

2 WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE POSTWAR ERA

“A good wife always knows her place,” as it was stated in a magazine called *Housekeeping Monthly* from 1955.⁵⁰ At that time, the American social culture was entirely based on the family. The family male and female roles were defined and distinguished by tradition and stereotypes: marriage was an extremely powerful institution at that time. The organized, secure and prospering family was an excellent foundation for a country convalescing from war times.

On account of the war period, a significant number of women were encouraged to do the work in factories to support industrial production. However, many women that were already employed and actively working acknowledged that they were capable of having a ‘men’s job’ and earning more money for these kinds of positions. Nevertheless, after the war, women were constrained to make job positions available for returning men after military service. It was perceived as a patriotic duty to do so. This job shift was supported by the government campaign spread by mass media and encouraged women to adopt the housewife lifestyle again. The housewife role in 1950s America was strongly endorsed by magazines like *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies’ Home Newspaper* dedicated to domestic duties and family life. TV programs showed images of women who were perfect, fulfilling the traditional roles of mother and wife using the newest appliances. The commercials were promoting a modern electric vacuum cleaner, a woman cooking dinner for her family in a machine equipped kitchen. It was both an exhibition of the housewife ideology and consumerism. Any modification to the standard division between a man and a female, which went hand in hand with the ideology of the nuclear family, could make the economy and the society unbalanced. The consumerism and nuclear families provided the economy with both workers and buyers at the same time, which was beneficial to the US economy.⁵¹

The fifties witnessed many girls dropping out from higher education because they found themselves a husband, or they were afraid that higher education would be a barrier to finding one. The average age to get married was twenty and was still dropping and many

⁵⁰ “How to Be a Good Wife,” Snopes, accessed December 15, 2019, <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/how-to-be-a-good-wife/>.

⁵¹ Bremner and Reichard, *Reshaping American: Society and Institutions 1945-1960*, 34-36.

girls were engaged by the age of seventeen.⁵² At this time, many educated and capable women chose to stay at home and become a perfect housewife for their psychological fulfillment as well as to fulfill an expected societal role. A study performed by the University of California in Los Angeles, published in 1978, discusses the social standing of a housewife. In the 1970s, the role of housewife was officially acknowledged as an occupation. The study proves that the social status of the housewife is evaluated by her husband's job position, while the social status of employed women is no longer dependent on this. The outcomes also have shown that being a housewife had more prestige than women employed at blue-collar jobs.

Nevertheless, white-collar positions that required more in-depth training and experience like managerial and official positions or jobs regarding arts provide women with higher community prestige. Even though being a housewife was not a paid job, women who stayed at home provided their families with the services worth many thousands of dollars. In fact, housewives had very strong consumer buying power. The vast portion of the advertisement focused precisely on stay-at-home women. Thanks to Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which introduced the phenomenon of the "emptiness" of a housewife's life. The study acknowledges that being a full-time housewife became "a luxury option," especially in working-class households where the husband earns too little to support the family comfortably."⁵³

2.1 Suburban Housewife

Frieden claims that the ideology of the "ideal housewife" spread all around them, created "the golden cage" where they had all the goods and services available. However, this limited their self-development, limited their individuality, and isolated them from the world outside their family. The women's role was to be a mother and a wife and to accomplish having a "perfect family." Nevertheless, achieving the image that was frequently thrown at them was basically impossible. As a result, this pursuit evoked the "housewife" identity crisis. A generation of women realizing that merely being a housewife was not fulfilling their life expectations. An increasing number of women were searching for their new role in society to escape the frustration caused by an imposed

⁵² Betty Frieden, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), chap. 1, <https://b-ok.cc/book/2224759/ac1428>.

⁵³ Linda Burzotta Nilson, "The Social Standing of a Housewife," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 40, no. 3 (1978): 546, doi:10.2307/350934.

ideology. Betty Frieden called this phenomenon “The Problem That Has No Name.” By the end of 1970s, the working and younger generation of women connected being only a housewife with lower social prestige.⁵⁴

To eliminate this issue of unsatisfied housewives, a discussion about education appeared. The problem with education was that the more educated a woman was, and with the number of educated women increasing, the less happy they were with their domestic wife role. Many educators involved in the discussion sympathized with the idea of an educated housewife, so the women should be educated, but the knowledge-focused mainly on how to excel in the housewife role. The suggestions were to introduce high-school workshops and college education that would consist of a discussion about home management and realistic simulations of what a domestic life might bring and how to adjust to it. Some educators even came up with a drastic suggestion to ban women from four-year universities and an education they do not need as a housewife and create more opportunities for men.⁵⁵

Middle-class men typically had a job in the city and lived in the suburbs, which naturally distanced women from work opportunities. This isolation from work affected a lot of middle-class women. Moreover, many husbands did not want their wives to be employed because they found it demeaning. In the cases where a household could afford it, women willingly stayed at home. The trend of a housewife and mainly being a mother was supported by publications like *Baby and Child Care* from Dr. Benjamin Spock (published in 1946), which emphasized the opinion that stay-at-home mothers brought up more disciplined and healthier children.⁵⁶

However, between 1948 and 1958, the number of working women nearly doubled. By the end of the 1960s, almost a third of married women were employed.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the way to achieve high social status was still “marrying well.” It is also necessary to emphasize the influence of the women’s movement, which had an impact on the perception of the housewife role on young women and probably men as well. A social study by the

⁵⁴ Nilson, “The Social Standing of a Housewife,” 546.

⁵⁵ Frieden, *The Feminine Mystique*, chap. 1.

⁵⁶ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People*, 687-688.

⁵⁷ Bremner and Reichard, *Reshaping American: Society and Institutions 1945-1960*, 6.

University of California already mentioned earlier claims that “employment horizons are certainly wider for many young women. However, younger people can afford to entertain more options and might be rebelling against the traditional value of the housewife.”⁵⁸

The former Beat poet Diane di Prima is an excellent example of a challenge to the conventional role of a housewife. She was dedicated to becoming a mother, whether she had a husband or not. She experienced both heterosexual and homosexual relationships and was open to so-called free love, with the father of her second daughter being the writer Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s. Di Prima has raised five children and has been divorced twice. She expressed her strong feelings about motherhood in many of her works, e. g. *Brass Furnace Going Out: Song after an Abortion* (1960). Di Prima, now 85 years old, claims that even female artists feel the need for a domestic life and has expressed her own struggles about combining family life with art production.⁵⁹

2.2 Feminism

The roots of early women’s movements in America go back to the 18th century. In the West, feminism, in its beginnings, brought the idea of the equality of middle-class women with middle-class men. As the ideology developed, it was not only embraced by middle-class women but also women from the upper and working class. The ideas spread challenged women’s liberality and individuality.⁶⁰ First-wave feminism covers women's activism from the mid-nineteenth century until 1920. It brought women the right to vote, as well as access to many job positions and the right to own property. Similarly, to the second-wave feminism, first-wave feminists tried to challenge the patriarchy of the society.⁶¹ While first-wave feminism raised more political concerns and civil equality, second-wave focused more on the family construct, sexual liberation and body issues, such as the legalization of abortion, birth-control pills, violence against women and emphasized the independence of the female individual.⁶²

⁵⁸ Nilson, “The Social Standing of a Housewife,” 546.

⁵⁹ Hemmer, *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, 71.

⁶⁰ Bremner and Reichard, *Reshaping American: Society and Institutions 1945-1960*, 39-40.

⁶¹ Nasrullah Mambrol, “First Wave Feminism,” *Literary Theory and Criticism*, accessed March 28, 2020, <https://literariness.org/2017/10/27/first-wave-feminism>.

⁶² Margaret Walters, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 137.

Second-wave feminism, also known in the US as the Women's Liberation Movement, flourished between the 1960s and 1980s. The work from Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex*, published in 1949, is an essential piece for the emerging women's movement. It deals with the ideology of so-called "gendering" and describes a gender as a social construct and its difference to biological sex.⁶³ The context for the development of the women's movement was the political activism of the civil rights and anti-war movements in that period. Second-wave feminism focused on the issues of sexuality more than any women's movement before. The social construct which had a significant impact on thinking was the distinction between biological sex and gender. Second-wave feminists challenged the idea of the perfect women imposed by traditional gender roles taught to young girls. Feminist writers like Betty Frieden and Germaine Greer described the stereotype and urged women to test it.⁶⁴ Some of the activists focused on the oppressed position of women; they discussed the patriarchy and marked it as the main reason for male power over female power. According to Simone de Beauvoir, the author of *The Second Sex* (1949), women should challenge the gender construct in the society. They should define themselves through the career, sexual liberation and education. Even though women made the decisions, de Beauvoir claimed they were most likely based on how her man defined her and not acting based on her true nature.⁶⁵

Betty Frieden, in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), expresses the criticism of the ideal housewife and her fulfillment through this role. In her influential book, she denounces how women should discover their identity via their marriage and motherhood. As an outcome of this stereotype, she points out the crisis of the housewife, how women lost their individuality, became frustrated and dissatisfied with their lives.⁶⁶ Joining the Beat subcultural movement offered those women an escape from the silent roles. However, the structure of the movement itself functioned based on the mainstream gender roles of male dominance and female subordination.⁶⁷

⁶³ Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary History* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 75.

⁶⁴ Lucy Mangan, *The Feminism Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained* (London: DK, 2019), chap. The Personal is Political.

⁶⁵ Mangan, *The Feminism Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained*, chap. The Roots of Oppression.

⁶⁶ Frieden, *The Feminine Mystique*, chap. 1.

⁶⁷ Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, 7.

Nevertheless, many of the female Beats made themselves heard. As Alix Kates Schulman mentions in her work *Burning Questions*, women connected to the Beat Generation were those who went “from Silent to Beat to Revolutionary.” Schulman, a radical feminist herself and a companion on Beat travel, claimed that the Beat Generation women were a protofeminism vanguard.⁶⁸ Beat women actively expressed their exclusion and therefore helped to identify the problem of female oppression. Based on the coincidence of Beat female authors revolting against the system which prescribed the roles for women, women writers were openly sharing their experience as an excluded individuals from the society as well as oppressed authors and women taking part in the subcultural movement at the same time as the reinvigoration of the women’s movement. It is possible to connect these occurrences and assume that Beat women initiated the feminist actions and helped to pave the road of self-awareness within the women’s movement and to find a voice to combat the silence.

The Beat Generation consisted of many women, some of them writing privately, some of them publicly. Nevertheless, female Beat writers continued to work on themselves without being properly acknowledged. They were part of the community, however, marginalized by literal or historical criticism. In the book *Girls Who Wore Black* (2002) by Ronna C. Johnson and Nancy M. Grace, the term “women’s bohemian protofeminism” is used. The authors claim that: “Beat women's version of American individuality was a revolt for personal freedom enacted by and in their writing. This revolt led to a body of woman-centered Beat literature that anticipated second-wave feminism.”⁶⁹

2.3 Women in Art

Even though the women’s art experienced an attenuation during the war era, in the late 1960s, the interest in women’s art increased. Works by female writers were published by major publishing houses and in magazines mainly about women in art like the *Feminist Art Journal* and *Woman’s Art Journal*. This interest was supported primarily by art groups in 1969 like *Women Artist Revolution (WAR)*, *Soho 20* and also institutions like the *Feminist Art Institute* in New York and *Women’s Building* in Los Angeles. The rebirth of women’s art in the 1960s has its roots and predecessor in the 1860s when the *Ladies’ Art Association* was formed in New York and followed by many others like *Woman’s Art*

⁶⁸ Alix Kates Schulman, *Burning Questions* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1990), 8.

⁶⁹ Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, 9-11.

Club and Art Worker's Club in New York as well, Philadelphia-based Plastic Club or Sketch Club in San Francisco. These organizations aimed for better representation of female artists in museums and wanted to raise the attention paid to women's art.⁷⁰

In 1971 art historian Linda Nochlin published an essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in which she argues that many female artists had been omitted from art history not because of a lack of talent but rather on account of exclusion from the male-dominated art community. Five years later, Nochlin co-worked on the first international exhibition *Women Artists: 1550-1950* in Los Angeles. Regarding the housewife phenomenon, artist Martha Rosler created the video *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975)⁷¹, where she mocks the American cook and cooking show host Julia Child⁷² and late-night cooking shows commercials on TV, which were common at that time to emphasize domestic oppression by parodying the presentation of the appliances with a certain level of aggression.⁷³ Throughout the 1960s, a new kind of "feminist" art developed. The inspiration came from within as many themes worked with the female body and the realities of a woman's life.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Julie Graham, "American Women Artists' Groups: 1867-1930," *Woman's Art Journal* 1, no. 1 (1980): 7-12, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1358011>.

⁷¹ Mangan, *The Feminism Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained*, chap. "Feminist Art."

⁷² "Julia Child," National Women's History Museum, accessed April 28, 2020, www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/julia-child.

⁷³ "Martha Rosler - Semiotics of the Kitchen - West Coast Video Art – MOCAtv," YouTube, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDUDzSDA8q0>.

⁷⁴ Mangan, *The Feminism Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained*, chap. Feminist Art.

3 WOMEN BEATS

The Beat Generation is stereotypically linked with three literary figures, namely Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac. However, this conception of the Beats is incomplete and marginalizes many women who were involved in forming Beat aesthetics and cultural reforms. This elimination of women who played a particular role in the Beat Generation might cause an incomplete perception of the Beat literary and artistic movement.⁷⁵

The Beats consisted of many talented women, some of whom have not received even the slightest attention. These women rejected the life of a good housewife and the happiness that was promised to come with it. Turning away from conformity, not having a husband, being a single mother, or bringing up biracial children, mainly being an artist with many male friends and having no stable background, was strongly condemned and considered rebellious.⁷⁶ The lack of attention dedicated to women writers of the Beat Generation has been challenged in the anthologies published about the female Beat authors since the 1990s. Collections like 2010's *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution* by Brenda Knight have encouraged greater discussions and more academic studies and helped to emphasize the value of their literary contribution of these women and provide insight into the subcultural movement.⁷⁷

Ginsberg said that the movement was “a group of friends who had worked together on poetry, prose and cultural conscience from the mid-forties until the term became popular nationally in the late fifties.”⁷⁸ He mentioned many of his working male friends but acknowledged only two writing women; Diane di Prima and Joanne Kyger. In the *Sunday Camera Magazine*, Ginsberg in 1989 stated:

I think the point is, the men didn't push the women literally or celebrate them [...] But then, among the group of people we knew at the time, who were the women writers such power as Kerouac or

⁷⁵ Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, 1-2.

⁷⁶ Knight, *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution*, 2-6.

⁷⁷ Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, 11.

⁷⁸ Anne Waldman, *The Beat Book: Poems and Fiction from the Beat Generation* (Boulder: Shambhala Press, 1996), xiv.

Burroughs? Were there any? I don't think so. Were we responsible for the lack of outstanding genius in the women we knew? Did we put them down or repress them? I don't think so.⁷⁹

Ginsberg claimed that if there were more noteworthy women writers like Diane di Prima, it was without a doubt that other Beat writers would recognize and cooperate with them.⁸⁰ This attitude towards women engaged in the movements reflects the perfunctory acknowledgment of female artists.⁸¹ Hettie Jones, who was also a female writer involved with the Beat Generation, in her *How I Became Hettie Jones*, a Beat memoir, published in 1990, stated:

We shared what was most important to us: common assumption about our uncommon lives. We lived outside, as if. As if we were men? As if we were newer, freer versions of ourselves? There have always been women like us. Poverty, and self-support is enough dominion.⁸²

During its heyday, the Beat Generation was never presented or viewed as a movement with the active participation of women writers. Even today, the most notable writers receiving major attention are male writers: Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs. The women in the movement freed themselves from the society that attempted to create only one specific role for women and left the gender norms that had been set by the American society; however, they bound themselves into a community that made them inferior in a different way. The dominance of males placed the Beat women into the position of silent and passive companions.⁸³

Most women engaged in the movement remained uninvolved, fulfilling the roles of girlfriends and wives as is described in *Minor Characters* by Joyce Johnson. Except for Diane di Prima, who actively pursued her goal to become an acknowledged poet, her contemporaries who had relationships with the Beats, besides writing, raised the children, went to work to support the family and did not receive much attention and focused mainly on memoirs.⁸⁴ Female Beats were the "chicks" who wore black, but at the same time, they were women who tried to challenge the double stereotype of the age: being a devoted wife

⁷⁹ Maura Devereux, "Allen Ginsberg: Were we responsible for the lack of outstanding genius in the women we knew?" *Sunday Camera Magazine*, (July 30, 1989): 7.

⁸⁰ Peabody, *A Different Beat: Writings by Women of the Beat Generation*, 1.

⁸¹ Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, 5.

⁸² Hettie Jones, *How I became Hettie Jones* (New York: Dutton, 1990), 81.

⁸³ Gillian Thomson, "Gender Performance in the Literature of the Female Beats," *Comparative Literature and Culture* vol. 13, (March 2011): 2-3, West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss1>.

⁸⁴ Charters, *The Penguin Book of the Beats*, xxxiii.

or being a bohemian girl. Ronna C. Johnson stated that “subjectivity was not an outcome intended for women, who, by both mainstream and Beat notions of gender, were regarded as ineligible for it by of their presumed – and naturalized – inferiority, their essentialized condition as objects.”⁸⁵

Many female writers connected to the movement were producing even after most of the Beats had stopped being productive. A lot of these female writers produced literary works that ended up being published; however, many of these works are not being considered as Beat movement writings although, the authors considered themselves as a part of the Beat Generation. Beat women brought women-centered topics discussing their own sexuality, individuality, and domestic themes, which, together with Beat masculinism, adjusted and broadened what was truly essential to the Beats.⁸⁶

3.1 Joyce Johnson

Joyce Johnson, also known as Joyce Glassmann, published her first novel *Come and Join the Dance* in 1962 when she was 26. Not only is she a writer, but she also worked as an editor and educator. Her most famous piece is her memoir published in 1983 *Minor Characters: The Romantic Odyssey of a Woman in the Beat Generation*, in which the author describes her relations with Beat hipsters and her love affair with Jack Kerouac but also, she writes about her beginnings as a writer. The first publishing of her novel *Come and Join the Dance* was initially issued under her birth name of Joyce Glassman; however, all the work accomplished afterward, such as novels, prose fiction, memoirs and journalist works, are by her married name Joyce Johnson. The assumption is that the author distinguishes between two personalities: the first presenting a single young woman writing her first literary piece while experiencing bohemian life with the subcultural Beat movement in New York and trying to accomplish and deserve her position in the men’s world, whether it was workwise or among her Beatnik fellows. The second personality represents the woman the author has become: a publishing writer, teacher and editor.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Nancy M. Grace and Ronna C. Johnson, *Breaking the Rule of Cool: Interviewing and Reading Women Beat Writers*, (Jackson: The UP of Mississippi, 2004), 21.

⁸⁶ Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, 11.

⁸⁷ Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, 69-70.

Johnson was raised by her mother, Rosalind Ross, who immigrated with her Jewish family from Poland and her father, Daniel Glassman, a Jew from London. Thanks to her mother, Johnson became a child actor and she also attended piano and composition lessons. While studying at Barnard College, Johnson stopped playing and confessed to her mother that she was done fulfilling someone else's dream. Johnson quit college in 1954, missing just one course to get her degree. She took jobs in publishing and focused on her goal to educate herself in becoming a novelist. Thanks to her friend, the young poet Elise Cowen, Johnson was introduced to Allen Ginsberg and this opened the door for her into the subcultural world of the Beat Generation. Thanks to Ginsberg, Johnson was set up on a blind date with Jack Kerouac, which led to a two-year relationship. Johnson was a partner to Kerouac during the publication of *On the Road* in 1957, which brought him the attention of the media which Kerouac was not prepared for. Their relationship lasted until late 1958. Thanks to the encouragement Johnson received from Kerouac she published her first novel *Come and Join the Dance*⁸⁸ that is analyzed in more detail as a primary work of this thesis.

3.2 Diane di Prima

Probably the most famous representative of writing women among her male companions within the Beat Generation, Diane di Prima received the attention not only for her *Memoirs of a Beatnik* published in 1969 but for other literary contributions of hers. She dedicated her life to literary creation. By the end of the 1950s, di Prima was part of the Beat Generation. The story of her life is all about freedom and the bohemian lifestyle.⁸⁹

Di Prima grew up in a working-class Catholic Italian family in Brooklyn. She was greatly influenced by her grandfather, a freethinker and an anarchist, Domenico Mallozzi. It was her grandfather who instilled a love for music, literature and art in her. Di Prima began writing at an early age and by the age of 14, she already knew she was becoming a poet. She studied physics at Swarth College; however, she decided to drop out in 1953 and moved to Greenwich Village and dedicated her life to poetry. The year 1953 was crucial for di Prima as she established a relationship with the modernist poet Ezra Pound who had

⁸⁸ Hemmer, *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, 158-59.

⁸⁹ Hemmer, *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, 70.

an unquestionable influence on her work.⁹⁰ Pound and di Prima corresponded together and shared their work with each other. The letters provided di Prima with Pound's feedback on her work that transformed into the intellectual base for the 1960's subculture.⁹¹ She took various jobs so she could financially support herself to develop as a poet. She worked in the bookstores, worked as a model and assisted Hettie Jones and LeRoi Jones with the publishing of their Totem Press label, where she published her first poetry collection *This Kind of Bird Flies Backwards* in 1958.

Even though di Prima is one of the leading voices of women in the Beat Generation movement, she was also part of the modernist movement. After the Beat Generation transformed into the Hippie Generation di Prima took her children on the road, and she became a part of the Driggers.⁹² The Diggers was a group consisting of political activists and anarchists who emphasized the transformation of the American consciousness in order to be less dependent on the leaders and institutions which made decisions about them. They preached that only to live without imposed rules is only true freedom.⁹³ She was a part of many countercultural movements, which all played a role in her literary production.

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Diane di Prima's 1969 *Memoirs of the Beatnik* is compared to the selected aspects of Joyce Johnson's novel from 1962 *Come and Join the Dance* in chapter 5.

⁹⁰ Knight, *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution*, 123-24.

⁹¹ Tres Pittman, "Beat writer Diane di Prima recites poetry, speaks to her generation's influence," *Gender News* (February 11, 2014), <https://gender.stanford.edu/news-publications/gender-news/beat-writer-diane-di-prima-recites-poetry-speaks-her-generation-s>.

⁹² Hemmer, *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, 70-72.

⁹³ Immanuel Ness, *Encyclopedia of American Social Movements* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 1022.

⁹⁴ Hemmer, *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, 70-72.

II. ANALYSIS OF WORKS BY WOMEN BEAT WRITERS

4 *COME AND JOIN THE DANCE* (1962)

This part of the thesis is dedicated to an analysis of Joyce Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance* from 1962. Even though Joyce Johnson's most famous piece is *Minor Characters: The Romantic Odyssey of a Woman in the Beat Generation*, which describes her beginnings as a writer, her romantic relationship with Jack Kerouac, and an experience with the countercultural movement, her novel *Come and Join the Dance* was the first literary work about a Beat woman which was published by a female Beat author. The novel is currently out of print. Ronna C. Johnson categorized *Come and Join the Dance* as a true Beat novel by stating "It recounts the emergence of the individual as a counterforce in conformist post-war America; its distinction is to see the white female as that individual, as a Beat subject who, like Beat men, rejects the numerous oppressive over determinations of post-war establishment culture." Johnson emphasized the construction of female subjectivity throughout the novel and tried to master the self-expression from her female perspective. Johnson wrote the novel in her early 20s and the assumption is that it was inspired by her own life and experiences with the emerging Beat Generation before the movement was acknowledged by the wider public.⁹⁵

4.1 Female Perspective

The protagonist of the book is a twenty-year-old student Susan Levitt. The story is situated in 1955, seven days before she is supposed to graduate from an unnamed women's college. Susan's journey is told by a third-person narrator. She realizes that she is tired of the life she has. She has never pursued her dreams, and she has lived according to social standards. The intense feeling of alienation compelled her to leave the college, break up with the ideal boy she could have married, and seek a road of her own she could travel along. Her existential crisis leads to her self-discovery: "People have no right to exist if they're replaceable."⁹⁶

4.1.1 Women's Roles

The social conventions in the 1950s were clear. The emphasis on a family life prepared the following scenario for women: to have a good life and be secure meant to find a husband and become a housewife taking care of her man and children. Many women pursued the dream; however, there were women who did not shared this opinion about family life.

⁹⁵ Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, 70-71.

⁹⁶ Joyce Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance* (New York: Open Road Media, 2014), 7, <https://b-ok.cc/book/3781876/e5bfb3>.

They wanted to pursue their own careers and dreams. Johnson implies this scenario for Susan as well. If Susan would finish college and continue to date Jerry, her Columbian boyfriend, she would probably have a chance for a prospective marriage and might become a secured wife: “The terrifying thing about Jerry was that he was someone she could marry – she could marry him and never have to go alone to Paris – he was only waiting for a signal.”⁹⁷

In *Come and Join the Dance*, Susan experiences the feeling of insubstantiality; she feels like she does not belong among her college classmates. What Susan is experiencing can be compared to what Betty Frieden called “female malaise”⁹⁸ even though she never fulfilled the social convention. Johnson reveals Susan’s dual subjectivity and second-guessing of her own identity:

Somehow she never quite expected anyone to have thoughts about her – it was rather frightening to discover that you existed behind your own back. What did other see when they looked at her? She would try to study her face as though it belonged to someone else. . . . But her face cheated her. It had a way of rearranging itself when she looked into mirrors, as though it were giving a performance.⁹⁹

Besides leaving to get married and have children, it was a massive step for a post-war woman to leave a higher education after she had earned a place at university. In an interview for *The Guardian* newspaper from 2007, Johnson herself stated: “In my day, if you went to college, that was considered good; you acquired some culture that would make you a more interesting and valuable wife. But the idea was that you would marry rather quickly.”¹⁰⁰ After many years' women were finally allowed into educational institutions, which were primally dedicated to males, even Ivy League institutions like Yale and Princeton, which opened their doors to women in 1969.¹⁰¹ Johnson describes the transformation of Susan, a college girl that becomes a bohemian dropout. After all, Susan was the first one in her family to have a chance at a higher education: “She was also to have been the one who would graduate from college.”¹⁰² However, this step of dropping out of college was very complicated in reality. Even for the middle-class women, though

⁹⁷ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 8.

⁹⁸ Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, 77.

⁹⁹ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 10.

¹⁰⁰ Laura Barton, “I never met anyone else like Jack Kerouac,” *The Guardian*, October 12, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/oct/12/fiction.jackkerouac>.

¹⁰¹ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People*, 746.

¹⁰² Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 123.

privileged by race and social status, education and economic stability was not a matter of course.¹⁰³ Even to Susan, it seemed unbelievable not to go to school: “Well, in a way, I never went to college at all. I was just putting in time at a place that was school because I’d always gone to school. I was afraid of it ending, I guess.”¹⁰⁴

Susan keeps pretending she is going to graduate. She still cares about her parents and tries to show them the daughter they always wanted Susan to be. The reality is she could never be the daughter they dreamed of; she changed too much for them to understand her.

She listened to them, smiling, nodding occasionally, trying to oblige them, to be the daughter they should have had, docile, innocent, respectful—the Paris lies had already begun, she thought. Truth was an impossibility. They were her mother and father, and they would never, never know who she was, how she lived. Her silence must have disturbed them—every now and then she caught a frightened look in their eyes.¹⁰⁵

When Susan’s parents discover that their daughter acted without their approval, they were upset and disappointed. Susan’s father is closer to her than her mother. He tries to understand what his daughter is going through, but she distanced herself from them too much: “They were doing this because this was what they thought she wanted.”¹⁰⁶ As a paradox to this Beat rebellion against the college as an institution, Susan goes against Simone de Beauvoir’s opinion that women should acquire a higher education in order to escape from the male influence and subordination and observe their own identity.¹⁰⁷

Even though Susan removes the traditional idea about the roles of women that she has been raised with from her life, in the conversation with Peter, he reminds her of where she comes from – a Long Island suburb. She refuses a domestic life in order to overcome the boredom that scared her so much:

“You be a good girl, Susan, and they might let you live up here. You could have a living room with wall-to-wall carpeting and a dishwasher machine.”

“I don’t want to be a good girl!”

“Too bad. That’s your particular fate.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, 82.

¹⁰⁴ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 115.

¹⁰⁵ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 139.

¹⁰⁶ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 142.

¹⁰⁷ Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, 83.

¹⁰⁸ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 75.

4.1.2 Sexual Liberation

The counterculture movements also brought a new perspective on the sexual life. Having sexual freedom in the sense of having multiple sexual partners, experiencing homosexual relationships and even taking part in group intercourse was all part of the underground experience. Sexual experiences, more intimate descriptions of them, and the author's perception; that is where Johnson's work differs from the male Beat Generation works. Johnson challenges the male self-serving, sexual experience, putting men in the position of "minor characters." In *Come and Join the Dance*, Susan takes advantage of a man (Anthony) to lose her virginity as she stated that graduating as a virgin would be "against all her principles."¹⁰⁹ Susan could lose her virginity to her college boyfriend Jerry; however, she probably never really wanted to. She was putting it off, maybe in anticipation for someone special. In the book, Susan has a promiscuous reputation: "Probably very few people thought she was still virgin. No one know how much she lied, how skillful she had become in making adjustments to reality: inferences, suggestions, a few dark strokes, a laugh she had learned from someone."¹¹⁰

Nobody pressures Susan to give up her virginity; she decides to lose it herself. She might be acting out of insecurity, but she just wants to get over it. She chooses an 18-year-old Anthony: "There was not even much pain—a vague feeling of something inside her, moving. This was what going to bed with a man must be like."¹¹¹ Susan consciously takes the lead. She initiated the whole act of losing her virginity to Anthony, and in the end, he is the one who needs to be comforted. She did not expect it to take so much time and hoped it would end as soon as possible. After all, the whole situation felt embarrassing. Johnson created a character that was provocative, adventurous and mainly had her own voice.

In *On the Road* Kerouac describes the sexual intercourse of Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty with so-called "chicks" on many pages, with for example Sal taking credit for proving the "little girl, simple and true and tremendously frightened of sex. I told her it was beautiful. I wanted to prove this to her."¹¹² In contrast, Johnson expresses the sexual experience from a female point of view. When Susan sleeps with her second sexual

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 46.

¹¹⁰ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 63.

¹¹¹ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 87.

¹¹² Kerouac, *On the Road*, 51.

partner, she almost reaches an orgasm, which brings her a new hope to the future relations. However, Johnson describes how both of males disappointed Susan and did not satisfy her. This could be a feminist aspect in the book, mainly because in the 1950s, it was women who were mostly accused of sexual failure. Johnson provides a female perspective on sex and draws readers' attention to women's pleasure. In a novel published by a woman in the USA in 1962, this was groundbreaking. Johnson, in 2007, said for *The Guardian*:

I wanted to write the real way that the girls I knew were living. And it was at a time that there was all this incredible anxiety about having sex, that was the great breakthrough and adventure for a girl - if you could dare to have sex outside your marriage. And so it was about a girl who was in her last week in college and feels that nothing real has ever happened to her, and she decides to lose her virginity. In the 1950s, young women did not write those books.¹¹³

4.2 Truly Beat

The categorization of *Come and Join the Dance* as indeed a Beat novel is thanks to the agreement on mutual topics Johnson shared with her male as well as female Beat Generation writers. The typical Beat character in *Come and Join the Dance* is represented by Peter, who is a decade older than Susan:

"Listen, Susan," he said, "I'm completely broke. I can't even pay for your coffee. Does that matter?"
"Oh, I can pay for everything," she found herself saying. "My check probably came yesterday, but I haven't been back to the apartment yet. I spent all my money on gasoline."¹¹⁴

Peter's car is the essence of his character. He spends all his money on it because it provides a safe space for the traveler. The car represents freedom, carefreeness and joy, when it breaks down, his world is changed. Susan's friend Kay, who already dropped out of college half a year before she was supposed to graduate, also has features typical for the Beat character.

Even though the character of Peter represents features of a Beat male of the period, the novel deals with other features that were common for the writers associated with the Beat Generation. As mentioned in the first chapter, the Beat Generation authors were more likely to be identified as the Beats by their shared opinion on the conformist society, controlled culture and the American system as such.

¹¹³ Barton, "I never met anyone else like Jack Kerouac."

¹¹⁴ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 19.

4.2.1 Longing for Adventure

Hitting the road is not only a typical Beat literary feature for the Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise from Kerouac's *On the Road*. It was a real-life situation for many from the Beat Generation. Experiencing different kinds of jobs without any intention of a career while being on the road, moving from town to town was not the reality only for Kerouac or Cassady but also for women like Diane di Prima. While traveling within the United States, many of the Beats experienced traveling beyond American borders. Nancy M. Grace and Jennie Skerl in their book from 2012 *The Transnational Beat Generation* stated that many authors "including Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg,[...] Joanne Kyger, Philip Whalen, Janine Pommy Vega, and Anne Waldman – characterized a method for fusing life as art and vice versa."¹¹⁵ In *Come and Join the Dance*, Susan wants to go on an adventure to Paris: "Perhaps Paris would be big enough to get lost in."¹¹⁶

While Susan experiences the emptiness from her conformist life at the beginning of the novel, she is attracted to the dropout, beat-like community. Nevertheless, in the end, Susan walks out of Peter's apartment, out of the group of bohemians, and leaves for her own adventure to Paris: "And then she went."¹¹⁷ At this point in the novel, Susan becomes the hero of her narrative. She takes over the story when she refuses to be just a bohemian "chick." With this, Johnson emphasized the female subjectivity; Susan was no longer a passenger on someone else's life road or a spectator of a life that had already been planned for her by parents. Susan disturbs the silent role that the male-dominated society and counterculture assigned to her.¹¹⁸

4.2.2 The Theme of Boredom

The novel is based on the idea of the transformation of a college girl who is trying to connect with herself. Susan realizes she is not satisfied with the passive life she has lived so far. She feels that "[s]he had become frozen into deadly laziness. If she moved she would shatter like glass."¹¹⁹ She wants to experience the life of wild girls who dared to challenge the gender codes. In the novel's opening, Susan is taking her last examination

¹¹⁵ Grace and Skerl, eds. *The Transnational Beat Generation*, 1.

¹¹⁶ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 12.

¹¹⁷ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 176.

¹¹⁸ Johnson and Grace, *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, 92.

¹¹⁹ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 1.

reflecting on how the end of the school means that: “freedom would happen to her; there would be a life without examinations, no more childhood.”¹²⁰

Susan decides to challenge this stereotypical life that has not brought her satisfaction. In fact, Susan expresses her fear of boredom. multiple times though out the novel. This fear made her passive in her own decisions about her life; she became “only blank, a spectator of herself, immensely bored.” It considered not only her college experience, which she perceived as a vicious circle where “the faces were the same semester after semester after semester, the same things were said, thought, done,”¹²¹ but also her relationship with her boyfriend Jerry. The character of Jerry represents the passive attitude Susan wants to distance from:

Life was simpler for people like Jerry; they said what they meant, and they walked into strange places as themselves and said it, not wanting to be anyone else. They would always be tourists, carrying their cameras to cathedrals, staring at the natives with delight and open curiosity, half-blind perhaps, but doggedly proud of their own identities. They were probably quite comfortable that way—they did not see the world as a magnificent party to which they had not been invited.¹²²

Johnson ponders Beat existentialism through the complex narrative voice of free indirect discourse, in which it is not clear who is actually telling the story, i.e., are these the thoughts of the character or a third-person narrator?¹²³

What if you lived your life entirely without urgency?[. . .]the hours that weren't accounted for – you spend waiting for something to happen to you; when you were particularly desperate you went out looking for it,[. . .]but something had made her [Susan] want the feeling of living a little close to the edge; perhaps she had chosen to feel frightened rather than feel nothing at all.¹²⁴

In the beginning, Susan's character represents a conformist female, a replaceable part of the society. Throughout the story, Susan develops into an alternative character that has a voice, desire, opinion; she is rebellious, a free-spirited protagonist. Susan goes on this journey to discover her individuality: “She was herself. She wanted to be saved from boredom even for a few hours.”¹²⁵ In a sense, Susan is pursuing her own American Dream.

¹²⁰ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 4.

¹²¹ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 7.

¹²² Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 31.

¹²³ “Free indirect discourse,” The Literary Encyclopedia, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=444>.

¹²⁴ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 13.

¹²⁵ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 70.

After she refused the American Dream that was propagated by mainstream culture, she starts pursuing the mad dream, the unachievable “IT” (see chapter 1.5).

4.2.3 Rebellion

Rebelling against the values of the mainstream society is the core of the Beat Generation. Their disagreement with social conformity in speech, dress and behavior, and their alternative approach to the regimented mainstream consumer life, i. e. a safe boring life in the suburbs, made them who they were. The Beat Generation represented an often more cynical cultural protest as opposed to the more overtly political activity of their successors the Hippies a decade or so later. The core of the rebellion of the Beats was in the nonconformist way they decided to live, an attitude which was often described in their prose and poetry as well as shown in their experimentation with form in their writing and other art. Throughout their art, the Beats expressed their refusal with the society. The cultural underground provided in enclaves within big cities such as New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles, where anyone could freely express themselves, whether it was their opinions or through their art. Nevertheless, this valuation of freedom often applied only to the male part of the subcultural movement within pre-coded gender roles, so females were still rather considered as a black-dressed, passive, and silent accessory.

Johnson expressed the oppression of the mainstream culture when Susan debated with Kay about failing a class at the college: “Yes, I hated college, the whole idea of college—listening sheep!”¹²⁶ She also wanted to free herself from the institution, where she lost herself, her individuality. The dropping out of an institution like college is a typically Beat feature. Joyce Johnson herself dropped out of college when she was nineteen. Releasing herself from the college, Susan no longer serves the institution. For her, the graduation means obedience and represents the emptiness among many other girls with no identity: “She was being counted off and subtracted. [...] Susan wondered if everyone was actually going to do this – it seemed a terrible indignity. But at least it didn’t apply to her.”¹²⁷

When Susan leaves the college, she rebels against her parents and their expectations: “You’ve just thrown your education away. You had to go to a fancy college! We’ve always

¹²⁶ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 115.

¹²⁷ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 103.

given you everything you wanted [. . .] This should have been the happiest day of my life!”¹²⁸ This whole idea of dropping out is truly a Beat theme. By leaving the institutional servitude, rejecting the social structure, and escaping the dominant culture, the Beat Generation tried to achieve and restore the existential freedom they lacked in the social establishment. As a typical Beat protagonist, Susan gets to the point when she realizes she can be “anything” she wants.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 125.

¹²⁹ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 22.

5 COMPARISON

This chapter of the thesis will briefly compare the depiction of the female and the Beat Generation related topics in the *Come and Join the Dance* from 1962 with another female Beat writer – Diane di Prima in order to support the classification of the Johnson’s novel as a Beat work as well as female-subjectivity related work.

5.1 Memoirs of a Beatnik

Though not the same in the genre, Diane di Prima’s *Memoirs of a Beatnik* published in 1969 offers an outlook from different point of view on some mutual topics in the analysis. It covers di Prima’s real-life experience with the Beat Generation and free love from 1953 until 1956. The work mainly deals with her relationships and love life.¹³⁰ *Memoirs of a Beatnik* paints a picture of the beginning of a societal sexual revolution that the Beat Generation had already experienced a decade or so before the “Summer of Love” of 1967. By that time, the Beat Generation was already fading into the Hippie movement which was more vociferous in promoting free love in the mass culture.¹³¹

5.1.1 Female Subjectivity

Even though di Prima started her writing career long before she met the Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, *Memoirs of a Beatnik* depicts how the involvement with the Beat Generation shaped her to become one of the essential female representatives of the Beat Generation and how she openly discussed their aesthetics and the inter-relationship politics from the female perspective in the male-dominated counterculture. Throughout the memoir, di Prima argues about the “Rule of Cool,” which puts women in the position of the hip and cool “girls [who] say nothing and wear black,” as Kerouac stated in his 1959 “Origins of the Beat Generation.”¹³² Moreover, it tries to challenge the position for women in art to have the same freedom in creation as men. As Hemmer claims, Di Prima, a feminist herself, expressed the critique of the “angel/whore image of women that characterizes much Beat literature authored by men.”¹³³

¹³⁰ Carden and Neuman, *Women Writers of the Beat Era: Autobiography and Intertextuality*, 38.

¹³¹ Misiroglu and Miller, *American Countercultures: An Encyclopedia of Nonconformists, Alternative Lifestyles, and Radical Ideas in U.S. History*, chap. Ingrained in the Counterculture.

¹³² Kerouac, “Origins of the Beat Generation.”

¹³³ Hemmer, *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, 206-07.

5.1.2 Women's Roles

Throughout her memoirs, di Prima puts herself in the dominant position. The way she describes all the sexual relations paints a picture of di Prima as in control of the situation. This is true to an extent even in the passage where she describes an incident which she was sexually assaulted, a situation which she could not prevent herself from, saying: “all the time thinking unbelievably that this was rape, that I was about to be raped,” she ended up commenting on the situation with a certain coolness: “Then all the heavy sorrow in me turned into some crazed impersonal desire that cried out for appeasement.”¹³⁴

Di Prima also finds herself in the position of what can be called an alternative housewife when she moves from New York. She is living with two farmers and runs their household:

“I really dug being woman to the three men, cleaning and mending and cooking for them. Looking back on it now, I think it was because they were all working so hard that they came home relaxed and easy, pleased with the food, pleased with the house, delighted to have a chick around it at all.”¹³⁵

Even in this seemingly domestic position, it is only di Prima's decision to stay with the men: “I lost myself in my newfound women'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.”¹³⁶ Her own consciousness and will is present in every passage of the book. After some time with the farmers, di Prima abruptly decides to go back to New York. She was missing the busy life in the city and the adventure and without sentiment leaves the domestic role behind: “a restlessness stirred in me for the quick combat and hard living of the city, for the play and the strife and the inexhaustible human interchange that was New York to me then.”¹³⁷ She has simply had the experience of putting herself in the position of a housewife as it would have been any other role: “It was a different life from any that I had known before.”¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Diane di Prima, *Memoirs of the Beatnik* (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 1969), 67, <https://b-ok.cc/book/3875228/4b5bad>.

¹³⁵ Di Prima, *Memoirs of the Beatnik*, 95.

¹³⁶ Di Prima, *Memoirs of the Beatnik*, 105.

¹³⁷ Di Prima, *Memoirs of the Beatnik*, 116.

¹³⁸ Di Prima, *Memoirs of the Beatnik*, 115.

In contrast to Susan from Johnson's novel *Come and Join the Dance*, di Prima in her memoir takes the opportunity to become a housewife, even though it is just for a short period. Diane di Prima is able to take a detached view of the domestic role of woman, whereas Susan's total escape from the traditional position of women was probably based on her experience of growing up enclosed within "pink walls" of "her mother's house."¹³⁹

5.1.3 Sexual Liberation

The central aspect that will be compared with Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance* is the position of a woman in the relationships. *Memoirs of a Beatnik* opening comments on how di Prima lost her virginity. At the age of seventeen, by "swallowing my childhood," she is "entering the world of the living."¹⁴⁰ Similarly to Susan, losing her virginity brought di Prima this kind of new freedom, the access into a new world. Nevertheless, di Prima acknowledges the pleasure arising from the intercourse: "My own desire became more urgent,"¹⁴¹ apart from Susan, who awaited the "moment when everything became luminous and the earth shook," which did not happen.¹⁴² After all, di Prima comes to the realization: "Here I was and, I thought wryly, this is only the first of many strange apartments I'll be waking up."¹⁴³ This statement also supports the self-consciousness factor. Despite di Prima's significant sexual activity, she is the one who is "cool" about it. She never refers to the male characters by the first name only, rejecting to refer to them as complete individuals. She decides when she wants to be with them and when she wants to leave.¹⁴⁴

5.1.4 Rebellion

Di Prima also drops out of college, at the age of 18, in order to move in with Tomi, a guy she is in love with. Another aspect that can be seen in *Come and Join the Dance*: they both leave the secure position of a college student and decide to observe the advantages of living in the city: "me out of the safe, closed world of "school" and into the hectic life of

¹³⁹ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 52.

¹⁴⁰ Di Prima, *Memoirs of the Beatnik*, 15.

¹⁴¹ Di Prima, *Memoirs of the Beatnik*, 4.

¹⁴² Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 90.

¹⁴³ Di Prima, *Memoirs of the Beatnik*, 2.

¹⁴⁴ Hemmer, *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, 207.

the city, where we had as yet found no haven, no place in which to shape our own life form.”¹⁴⁵

Considering Susan’s trip to Paris, in this part di Prima expresses the uncertainty about the big step out of her comfort zone, that would mean that she would lose the stability in her life. Susan, in *Come and Join the Dance*, also expresses the doubt she has about the trip into the unknown: “I don’t even know whether I want to go away. It’s just an idea.”¹⁴⁶ Later di Prima in her *Recollection of My Life as a Woman* from 2001, remembers that she felt comfortable dropping out of school, leaving family and financial security behind in order to get involved in the bohemian underground. Even though she went against her parents’ expectations, leaving the world she was raised in di Prima acknowledged that the spiritual world full of energy where she could fully dedicate her life to becoming a poet.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Di Prima, *Memoirs of the Beatnik*, 45.

¹⁴⁶ Johnson, *Come and Join the Dance*, 47.

¹⁴⁷ Carden and Neuman, *Women Writers of the Beat Era: Autobiography and Intertextuality*, 50.

CONCLUSION

The thesis has analyzed how the American social establishment in the 1950s influenced the positions of women in society. The novel describes the transformation of a regular white middle-class female into a bohemian individual and shows her struggles along this spiritual journey.

The theoretical part of the thesis has observed certain features that influenced the development of the post-war American society. Economic growth, the new highway system and other infrastructure, as well as political and social interventions caused a massive movement of the white middle class into the suburbs. After WW2, the average age of couples getting married dropped, and thanks to earlier marriages, a significant number of babies, known as Baby Boomers, were born. Thanks to the prevalence of the mass media, the propagation of the nuclear family within their own suburban home was ubiquitous. The mass media emphasized the importance of the family with clearly defined positions for men, women and children, increasingly separated from extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. The media also emphasized the nuclear family unit's contribution to the stability of the American social system. The propagation of gender codes was delivered through magazines, newspapers and other publications, as well as TV programs, films, and advertisements. Men were pictured as breadwinners, supporting the family financially, and women were pictured as housewives who would look after their husband's wellbeing, bring up the children, and take care of the household. The determination of women roles was embedded into girls by the educational system, which aimed to teach them that they should know their place as a housewife, so girls studied about the domestic tasks and how to maintain their household. The population of women in the workforce consisted largely of secretaries, teachers and nurses, and even this employment was commonly seen as temporary until the woman found a husband and became a full-time housewife and mother.

It took courage for women to break out from these stereotypes during the 1950's and 1960's. Based on the research done for this thesis, many publications about the Beat Generation still deal only with the male artists. Although the Beat men tried to free themselves from the norms of the conformist society, inside the movement, the patriarchal gender codes were still valid. The movement also consisted of many female writers who

had been marginalized over the years. The Beat Generation emerged as a group of friends who had a similar outlook on life and rejected the societal standards. They formed an urban subcultural movement as a protest to conformity. People involved in the Beat counter-cultural movement broke free from the stereotypical perception of the life “ordinary” people came to know from the mass media and tried to achieve it. The Beat experimented with drugs and relationships while listening to bebop jazz and making art.

Throughout the years that the Beat Generation flourished, many women experienced what Betty Frieden described in her *Feminine Mystique*, which was published in 1963. The phenomena of the unsatisfied housewife caused many women to return to work in order to find the purpose of their life that will fulfill it. However, many women were basically forced to find a job in order to maintain the standard of living they adopted on account of the economic growth and consumerism. Many women involved in the Beat Generation movement rejected the whole idea of the housewife and the whole social establishment. Women Beats like Joyce Johnson, Diane di Prima, and Elise Cowen were born and raised in middle-class families. Nevertheless, they decided to become dropouts and join the bohemian underground. However, the insight into the Beat Generation structure has shown that in spite of this, women who joined the counterculture movement in order to express their rejection of the patriarchal society were still overlooked with no regards to their artistic contribution to the movement.

If we assume that the Beat Generation was the first to contribute art as a protest to the American post-war social establishment, the women of the Beat Generation were the first to vocalize and emphasize the struggles of women in the society. They left a secured position in the society that was prepared for them in order to find freedom. Nevertheless, men saw women just as their “chicks” who would be silent, wear black, and take part in their experimenting with their sexuality and drugs. The attempts to break the silence of women within the counter-cultural movement and beyond but also to find a voice in females as such, led many women in the Beat Generation to produce their own art. Even though much of it had never been acknowledged by academia or the reading public, during the 2000’s writers like Ann Charters, Joyce Johnson, Hettie Jones, and mainly Diane di Prima slowly began to receive credit for their contribution to Beat literature and literature in general.

Joyce Johnson's first novel *Come and Join the Dance*, published in 1962, offers an insight into the life of the young college girl that Johnson herself was. The novel describes the journey of middle-class-raised Susan, who decides to drop out the college, which at the time was a huge and complicated step even for women coming from higher social circles. She is bored with her life as it is and wants to live hers freely and get the most out of it. By leaving college ten days before graduation and breaking up with her marriage-material boyfriend Jerry, Susan expresses a protest against the life as it was already planned for her. Throughout the story, she dates three boys, engage in sexual relations with two of them and loses her virginity to Anthony. All these facts go hand in hand with the Beat ideology; although this time, the story is delivered from the female point of view. Susan is the initiator of everything happening in her life. The dominancy typical for men and the male protagonist is, in this case, led and told by a woman. After all, Susan decides that neither the family life destined for her nor the bohemian underground does not suit her and brought her the freedom. As another typical feature for the Beats, Susan decides to go on the road and leave for Paris to continue her pursuit of existential freedom.

Joyce Johnson published the first novel considered as a truly Beat work written by and about a woman. It provides a fresh, rebellious, and alternative journey of a middle-class girl that transforms into a female individual with voice and self. The novel covers various topics that are common to Beat Generation works; however, it is delivered from the subjective female point of view. Based on the real-life experience with the Beat counterculture movement, *Memoirs of the Beatnik* supports the statement that Joyce Johnson's *Come and Join the Dance* is a truly Beat novel. Not only do both works share common topics such as the first sexual experience, dropping out of college, self-awareness, and liberation but they also share similar opinions on those issues.

Both Diane di Prima and Joyce Johnson later in their lives ended up teaching in higher-education institutions and having children. They both ended up involved in the institutional society that they had abandoned during the Beat Generation heyday. Probably thanks to her dedication and ambitions within the publishing world, Diane di Prima is still one of the most famous female writers of the Beat Generation.

Joyce Johnson ended up publishing mostly memoirs about her relationship with Kerouac and never became as well-known as di Prima. Still, Joyce Johnson's *Come and Join the*

Dance, although, published in 1962 and out of print, deals with the issues for women that are topical even today. The fact that such an early novel – released a decade or so before “women’s lib” became a topic for discussion in mass media – deals so candidly with issues such as women’s sexual liberation and pleasure as well as unorthodox career, educational and other life choices for women makes the work an important subject for study as well as enjoyable to read almost half a century after its publication.

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