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SELF-NARRATIVES AND EDITORIAL MARKS: INVENTING HETTIE JONES

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In 1999, writer Hettie Jones published an essay titled "Babes in Boyland," in which she reflected on what it meant to be a woman during the 1950s' Beat movement in New York City:

> Sex of course—let's start with this and get it out of the way. Most, though not all, of the guys wanted us there for sex. And we ourselves were expecting it. . . .
>
> But you had to have more than sex to keep you in Boyland with your pride intact. You had to be brave and resourceful. It had to be worse where you came from. . . . You had to believe, as a woman, that stirring things up in general would eventually define a new life for you in particular. You had to believe in the transformative power of art, in the word, and you had to believe yourself part of that process. (52)

Jones offers us a glimpse—through a woman's eyes—into post–World War II New York bohemia. This was a world in which art forms such as abstract expressionist painting, bebop jazz, and Beat writing challenged mainstream American cultural beliefs. Bohemian artists were social marginals, both in the work they produced and in their lifestyle choices. They questioned traditional values and dominant cultural authority, experimented with sex and drugs, and challenged the limits to free expression. Offering women a break from traditional gender roles of the time seems as if it would have been a natural part of postwar bohemian ideology. Yet this was not the case; sexism, chauvinism, misogyny, and the exploitation of women frequently pervaded 1950s' bohemia (as they did in postwar American culture in general) and, thus,

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limited the acknowledgment of women like Jones as participants in the production of its art.

Jones is generally recognized as the ex-wife of poet Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) or as a "Beat woman" because of her affiliations with the postwar New York Beat scene (Watson 264).[1] Throughout this article, I examine the self-narrative writing that Jones has produced since the 1950s by focusing on her seemingly passive experiences in postwar New York's male-centered bohemian and literary worlds. These experiences—doing clerical work and copyediting for *Partisan Review* and typesetting issues of *Yugen*, the literary magazine she co-produced with her then-husband LeRoi Jones (Baraka)—fueled her later journey to self-discovery as a writer in her own right. Additionally, through her experiences as a white wife to an African-American man in the fifties and early sixties and as a white mother to two biracial children, she became conscious of her own whiteness. Drawing from interviews I conducted with Jones from 2002 to 2006, her 1990 memoir *How I Became Hettie Jones*, and select autobiographical poems and essays she has written, I explore how Jones has used self-narrative writing to assume control over how she is defined.[2]

[1] During their marriage, LeRoi Jones went by the name LeRoi Jones; in 1967 he changed it to Imamu Ameer Baraka, later shortening it to Amiri Baraka. To avoid confusion between their names, in this article I use "Jones" to signify Hettie Jones and "Baraka" when referring to LeRoi Jones.

Some of the literature that seeks to define a place for Beat women (as Jones has been labeled) in Beat history includes: Amy L. Friedman, "I Say My New Name: Women Writers of the Beat Generation," *The Beat Generation Writers*, ed. Robert A. Lee (London: Pluto, 1996), 200–216; Ronna C. Johnson and Nancy M. Grace, eds., *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2002) and *Breaking the Rule of Cool: Interviewing and Reading Women Beat Writers* (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2004); Brenda Knight, *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution* (Berkeley: Conari, 1996); Richard Peabody, *A Different Beat: Writings by Women of the Beat Generation* (San Francisco: High Risk, 1997); and Alix Kates Shulman, "Women Writers in the Beat Generation," *Moody Street Irregulars: A Jack Kerouac Newsletter* 29 (1994): 3–9. Jones reacts to the term *Beat women* in a 1999 essay. "Beware," she writes, "If you're going to suggest Beat Women, then you'll have to accept that redundancy, Beat Men" ("Babes" 54).

[2] I interviewed Jones by telephone on four occasions: 10 December 2002; 10 April 2003; 29 December 2003; and 3 January 2006. Unless otherwise noted, any reference to information taken from an interview with her comes from one of these sessions.

Hettie Jones and the Postwar "Boyland"

Before discussing Jones's writing and her relation to 1950s' bohemian New York, I want to outline a few definitions. Throughout this article, I use *postwar* to refer to the years following World War II, roughly 1945 to 1960. By *bohemia,* I am referring to the avant-garde art world generally associated in the United States with Greenwich Village in New York City. This area, which became the artistic and political cutting-edge of American society in the early 1900s, maintained that association throughout the century.[3] Though I understand that the *Beat Generation* is a term used to describe a specific group of American writers—including Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, and Gregory Corso—who came to prominence in the 1950s, I use *Beat* more broadly to refer to the subculture that they both inspired and wrote about.[4]

Rooted in and thriving upon a male community of artistic support, Beat bohemia (or "Boyland," as Jones has described it) was dissident, sexual, drug-induced, and perceived as misunderstood, dangerous, and cool.[5] According to Jones, the term *Beat* held strict gender connotations; in a December 2002 interview, she explained that although the word *Beat* could be used in descriptive form as an adjective, the noun *Beat* was reserved for men and understood as being a signifier for a certain type of male hipster. In other words, something or someone could be *Beat*, but only a man could be a *Beat*.

Bohemian women like Jones were fixed at a very complicated site during the 1950s. Their support of and relationship with the cultural avant-garde was significant in their (later) development as artists; yet, their connection to it often worked against them. Men, the self-deemed creators of postwar bohemian art, constituted its inner circle; women were generally considered unable to produce this art and were relegated to the periphery. They were also associated with the domestic sphere. This reflection of the mainstream ideology towards women did not dissolve in postwar bohemian philosophy; as such, the domestic, marriage, and family were all elements aligned with women and ultimately rebelled against to construct Beat's hipness. The *hip* vs. *square* binary that is frequently invoked in Beat discourse in this sense acquires a gendered dimension. Hip was cool, it was Beat; it was anti-establishment, anti-authority, anti-mainstream. Square, then, was everything against which Beat rebelled. This construction placed bohemian women like Jones in a marginalized space—they were supporters of Beat, allowed to be a (silent) part of the scene, but because they were women, they also symbolized parts of society to rebel against.[6] Thus, they fell out of the range of Beat's hipness and instead constructed its borders.

Despite Boyland's sexism and male-centeredness, women were drawn to it by their desire to live free of social expectations and embrace its expressionistic, artistic lifestyle.[7] This was why Jones ended up in the Village in the 1950s. She writes, "I never had 'normal' fifties plans—they seemed preposterous" (*How* 26). And although they were not encouraged by and often felt obliged to put aside their artistic aspirations to support the men in their lives,

[3]An ideology that defines "success as personal self-expression, artistic achievement, and political transformation," that welcomes nonconformists and renegades of convention, the bohemianism of Greenwich Village has fostered many of the major American intellectual movements—"socialism, feminism, pacifism, gay liberation, Marxism, Freudianism, avant-garde fiction and poetry and theater, cubism, abstract expressionism, the anti-war movement and the counterculture of the sixties," according to Ross Wetzsteon (8, ix). While the concept of bohemianism at times may be closely linked to that of the avant-garde, I would like to point out that they are distinct terms: one need not be a bohemian to put forth experimental works or innovative ideas, as avant-garde thinkers, artists, and writers have done.

[4]Beat scenes existed across the United States, most notably in New York and San Francisco, where a number of the figures of the San Francisco Renaissance (Gary Snyder, Kenneth Rexroth, Philip Whalen, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, to name a few) became connected with Ginsberg, Kerouac, and other New York Beats. However, since Jones's encounters with Beat during the postwar years were concentrated in New York, this article focuses primarily on the New York aspect of 1950s' Beat culture.

[5]Susan Fraiman cites the Beats as "most responsible for putting 'cool' on the map" and defines this coolness as "a self-conscious and in many ways productive nonconformity; an appeal to African American and working-class men as embodiments of an authentic, renegade masculinity; an air of cool-tempered autonomy; an investment in male homosociality; and a careless if not hostile attitude toward women . . ." (xv).

[6]Helen McNeil suggests that "much of the Beat rebellion against authority displaced male power on to the maternal / domestic; blaming the woman for what she did not and could not control," and contends that for men seeking to rebel during the postwar years, "woman is located in the discursive formation of threat" (192).

[7]For more on the appeal of 1950s' alternative cultures to young, white middle-class women in particular, see Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (1992; Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001).

bohemian women did write.[8] They wrote when time allowed—during lunch breaks at work, at kitchen tables in the evening after children had been put to bed. While a few of these women (Diane di Prima, for example) were accepted as writers by their male counterparts, many more generally lacked the support and self-confidence to establish themselves as artists on the same playing field as men. Some tacitly hid their work in boxes under their beds as Jones did. She tells readers of her memoir that only one of the poems she produced during this time survives (48). Of course, Beat was not the only literary movement taking place during the decade, and women such as Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Elizabeth Bishop, and Adrienne Rich published works of literary merit in the 1950s as women had been doing for years before. However, a woman's ability to be taken seriously as a writer was not indicative of the Beat scene. The Beats had expectations of women, but writing was not one of them.

Many bohemian women did not acknowledge the inequalities and gender roles that had restrained them within Boyland, nor did they recognize their position in its history until after the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Ruth Rosen writes that these women "lived in a dual culture, experiencing life as women but learning to interpret the world as men. They read critiques of the dominant culture through men's eyes, learned to view society's failures through men's needs, and avoided acting like the nagging domestic women free-spirited men condemned" (324). She contends that what bohemian women lacked was "a feminist awareness of their own situation" (334). And many of these women—including Jones—agree. In her 1983 memoir, *Minor Characters*, Joyce Johnson, a postwar bohemian and friend of Jones, offers the following reflection of her younger self:

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

[8]In addition to Jones, other women writers who affiliated with the Beats include Elise Cowan, Diane di Prima, Joyce Johnson, Joanne Kyger, Janine Pommy Vega, Diane Wakoski, Anne Waldman, and Ruth Weiss, to name but a few.

> part of this convergence. A fact she ignores, sitting by in her excitement as the voices of men, always the men, passionately rise and fall and their beer glasses collect and the smoke of their cigarettes rises toward the ceiling and the dead culture is surely being wakened. Merely being here, she tells herself, is enough. (261–262)

Jones, too, speaks to this silent presence. In a 2002 interview, she agreed with Johnson's assessment, "It was enough to be included in the exciting atmosphere [of the scene]."

Hettie Jones's Self-Narrative Writing

Avant-garde writing, poetry in particular, produced during the Beat era had a dramatic impact on the writing Jones would publish years later. In a December 2003 interview, when asked whom she considered major influences on her writing, she responded by listing the names of numerous postwar avant-garde writers, including Charles Olson, Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Phillip Whalen, Gregory Corso, and Denise Levertov. She cites Donald Allen's 1960 anthology, *The New American Poetry: 1945–1960*, as "the book that changed my life." Recounting her first encounter with this anthology, she recalls the powerful effect it had on her: "[it] convinced me, finally, that here was a process I could, and would, join as a writer." She continues, "I would write poems, I vowed, and eventually I did" ("The Book").

Many of the writers that Jones cites as influences acknowledged their writing as a celebration of independent creativity and non-conformity, and as a way to incite social change. Acknowledging art as an agent of change—this idea resonated with Jones beyond the decade of the 1950s. For her, the process of writing became a transformative experience: a journey for self-reflection, self-growth, and self-definition. Though her publications began in the mid-1970s with children's and young adult literature, I am most interested in the body of self-narrative writing she has produced, beginning with her 1990 memoir, *How I Became Hettie Jones*.

I acknowledge self-narrative writing as a writer's process of understanding her sense of personal and cultural identity based on construction of memories; thus, when discussing Jones's writing as self-narrative, I am referring to the personal/psychological

processes involved in self-identity and meaning-making.[9] By acknowledging her texts as self-narrative, I am not defining them as texts that use a constructive format or sequence of events to tell a story; rather, I acknowledge them as works that give their creator insight into her understanding of self-identity—of constructing her story out of the relationships between memory and experience. In this way, the process of writing is as significant as the finished product. Here, I would like to remind readers that we must consider both memories and experience not as facts or truths but as contingent and subject to contexts. As Joan W. Scott explains, "[i]t is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience" (25–26). Self-narrative writers must be aware of the multiple discourses that have shaped their experiences, or as Jones stated in a January 2006 interview, one must acknowledge oneself "as a person in a context."

As readers, we must engage self-narrative texts as complex sites of information and practices. We must understand that self-narrative writing is not authentic; it is representation. Jones's written self is not an essential or pure form of her actual self; it is the product of construction. We must keep in mind that a self-narrative text offers one point-of-view: that of its writer. As such, we must consider that self-narratives can be one-sided and resist looking to them simply for factual history or historical record. To do so, we must "adjust our expectations of the truth told in self-referential narrative," as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson advise, and acknowledge autobiographical truth as an "intersubjective

[9]The work of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson has greatly informed my approach to analyzing life writing. In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, they define autobiographical, or life narrative, writing as "a historically situated practice of self-representation" (14). They explain, "In such texts, narrators selectively engaged their lived experience through personal storytelling. Located in specific times and places, they are at the same time in dialogue with the personal processes and archives of memory" (14). For more on self-narrative, experience, and autobiographical writing by women, see Jeanne Braham, *Crucial Conversations: Interpreting Contemporary American Literary Autobiographies by Women*, Athene Ser., eds. Gloria Bowles, Renate Klein, and Janice Raymond (New York: Teachers College, 1995); Helen M. Buss, *Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women*, Life Writing Ser., ed. Marlene Kadar (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2002); Trinh T. Min-Ha, *Woman, Narrative, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989); Ulric Neisser and Robyn Fivush, *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative* (1994; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008); and Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds., *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1998).

exchange" between the self-narrative writer and reader "aimed at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of a life" (13). We are then able to move beyond reading to assess or establish historical accuracy and can instead focus on what the writer seeks to communicate to us and the creative processes she uses to do so.

I identify Jones's 1990 memoir as her first self-narrative text, as it marks the point when Jones began telling the story of Hettie Jones the way she wanted it told. Since its publication, she has produced three poetry collections in the self-narrative style: *Drive* (1998), *All Told* (2003), and *Doing 70* (2007). She is currently completing a second memoir.[10] In her poetry and prose writing, she explores the mundane and the everyday and locates within them hope and positivity. Through writing, she reflects on the journey of always moving forward on a road not clearly marked. She playfully alludes to such actions in the names of two of her three poetry books (*Drive* and *Doing 70*), and explores the themes of transformation and transportation in many of the poems within them. In this way, she celebrates being "on the road" like Kerouac, but rather than using the road as a means of driving through America to challenge its social norms and expectations, Jones's road serves more for internal meditation and reflection. Her writing is personal; as she describes in her poem, "Two for the Proofreader's Lunch":

> [Writing] truly begins in the dark.
> You start from nowhere, from blood.
> You're never sure you'll get there
> but you hope. (70)

Decades after Beat's heyday, she now possesses "a feminist analysis of [her] own condition" (Rosen 334); by the time she started self-narrative writing, she was able to acknowledge postwar bohemia's limitations based on gender and the ways in which these very limitations helped shape the writer she had become. For Jones, self-narrative writing provides an opportunity to reflect on her past and consider her present self.

In *How I Became Hettie Jones*, Jones transcends simply telling the story of a woman in 1950s' bohemian New York; she traces the

[10]For a synopsis of the first chapter of her forthcoming memoir, see Hettie Jones, "Love H.: A Correspondence," *Hanging Loose* 95 (2009): 49–57.

evolution of an artist who emerges from it. Deborah Thompson suggests that in Jones's writing, continual modes and establishments of identity distinguish a larger issue: "the belief that identity is not a matter of 'being,' but of 'becoming,'" contending that, for Jones, "[i]dentity is always in process" (85). That process of always becoming is a central issue of *How I Became Hettie Jones*. Jones's choice of title for her memoir relays this idea. By shifting her story between past and present tense narration, Jones acknowledges her past as something that is always with her. Yet she must move forward through it. The outcome of this journey is her emergence and self-identification as a writer.

For Jones-as-writer, the memoir functions as a site of personal memory, as the means of telling her own story, of restructuring her own identity. In her memoir, she revisits the years of her life when she was romantically involved with Baraka. The story follows Jones through the couple's marriage in 1958 and ends shortly after their divorce in 1965. She tells readers little about her life before moving to New York or what happens to her after the marriage ends. In this way, her memoir presents what some acknowledge as a *typical* woman's narrative—the story of a woman's life as it begins with and is situated around a man. I argue that although the years 1958 to 1965 were the years of their marriage, this period is actually much more: it represents a phase of Jones's life in which she was attaining artistic consciousness. Her divorce, which takes place near the book's end, is a rebirth rather than an ending—a renewal that makes room for the emergence of Jones's artistic self, free to operate of her own choice.

The existentialist notion that *becoming* is continually a part of one's life is a theme throughout Jones's work. It is through the process of writing her memoir that Jones is empowered to publish her poetry. Jones published her first poetry collection, *Drive*, at age 64. As Nancy M. Grace suggests, "Most striking is Jones's claim that it is life writing itself, the act of writing and the artifact of that act, that furnishes the opportunity for self-knowledge. An important element of this process is her own emergence as a poet" (157). Similar to her memoir, her poetry is autobiographical. "If you really want to know me," she stated in a December 2002 telephone interview, "Read my poetry."

Like the postwar Beats, Jones composes poems in free-verse form. Like the Beats, she claims an affinity to music—particularly jazz (*How* 33–36). Like the poems of the Beat writers, Jones's poems focus on the personal, everyday aspects of life. However, as reviewer David Kaufman writes, "To call them 'Beat' does not do them justice." Her poems exist beyond the [male] Beat world of the 1950s. In her poems, we do not encounter accounts of drug experimentation or of random sexual escapades. Nor do we find a libertine, onanistic approach to writing. Her poetry is not produced by young cavalier men out to change the world with their words but instead comes from a mature woman with many years lived experience lending themselves for inspiration and reflection. Kaufman describes Jones's writing:

> Her poetry mixes the everyday diction of William Carlos Williams with a capacious Zen openness. It tends to move swiftly from a concrete present to moments of glancing insight. Her poems start with mundane, very urban occurrences (getting towed, calling the plumber, meeting an acquaintance from the neighborhood in the street), only to end with expressions of unexpected joy.

In addition, practiced revision is a writing characteristic that separates Jones from Beat writing.[11] She carefully constructs her texts and extensively revises them. According to Jones, revision is as important, if not more so, than writing. "Writing is rewriting," she attested in a January 2006 interview, acknowledging that to be a writer, one must also be an editor. As a self-narrative writer, editorial acts are crucial to Jones. She finds agency through the process of editing—her own work or that of others. As an editor, she assumes a powerful role in controlling the formation of text, and, ultimately, the way readers encounter it. Her attention to the editorial process is rooted in the 1950s; in particular, it can be traced back to an apartment on Morton Street, out of which she

[11] Created out of stream-of-consciousness, Beat poems were spontaneous, with looser, more syncopated rhythms similar to those heard in everyday speech and in bebop jazz. Many Beat writers sought to apply the principal idea of playing bop—improvisation—to writing poetry and prose. Ginsberg created lines of poetry to fit the length of his breath in a way similar to bop musician Charlie Parker playing a riff on his saxophone. Kerouac also used an on-the-spot approach to writing and rarely revised his texts. He gives readers of his "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" this advice: "Never afterthink to 'improve' or defray impressions, as, the best writing is always the most painful personal wrung-out tossed from cradle warm protective mind—tap from yourself the song of yourself, . . . spontaneous, 'confessional' interesting, because not 'crafted'" (58).

and Baraka ran Totem Press and *Yugen*, their publishing company and literary magazine.

Yugen and Partisan Review

Considered unacceptable by the mainstream literary establishment of the postwar era, bohemian writers developed novel ways to exchange ideas and art. Some held live performances such as poetry readings; others, like Jones and Baraka, started their own publication venues. *Yugen* and Totem Press offered vehicles for avant-garde poets and artists to present their work. Eight issues of *Yugen* appeared between 1958 and 1961, each as colorful and diverse as the individual artists presented within their pages. Charles Olson, Allen Ginsberg, Diane di Prima, William Carlos Williams, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and Baraka himself all contributed to the journal, as did many others. Jones, whose poetry never appeared in the journal, contributed in a different way. She describes:

> Put together on the kitchen table. And indeed I did the typing. In those pre-computer days, on a rickety, erratic IBM. . . . Centering Michael McClure's capitalized verses, organizing Hubert Selby's dense prose into justified lines. Besides typing I also handled "press type"—peel-off display lettering you could buy on a sheet and then lay onto an original photo offset. *Yugen* was subtitled *a new consciousness in arts and letters*, and . . . my consciousness was definitely raised by press-typing—and squaring over a makeshift light box—every letter of those words. ("Babes" 51)

The literary magazine was constructed from beginning to end in the couple's kitchen with Jones handling most of its production. As typesetter and editor, Jones determined the layout and format of others' words. Through working with text she created a space for herself within it. She became part of the process, part of the creation, later realizing that the result of all her "late-night cutting, pasting, aligning, and retyping" was a lesson in artistic connection and feeling: "what comes from reading things over and over, taking apart and putting together, the heart of the matter, the way it feels" (*How* 75).

This practice provided Jones with revision and line-editing experience that extended into the editing procedures she now

utilizes in her writing. Through working with text sentence by sentence, word by word, to make it clearer and more polished, Jones views her early editorial work as invaluable to her writing; in a January 2006 interview, she declared it "an excellent way to learn how to edit"—how to consolidate, manipulate, and revise while still maintaining the essence, the core of a work.

To launch *Yugen*, Jones drew on magazine expertise she had gained from working at other New York–based journals, such as the *Record Changer* and *Partisan Review*. She was the subscription manager for the *Record Changer*, a jazz magazine where she first met Baraka, until 1957 when she went to work for the intellectual journal, *Partisan Review*. Hired as subscription manager by *Partisan*'s editor William Phillips, Jones's responsibilities soon expanded to include office management and copyediting—the latter introduced to her by the journal's co-editor Phillip Rahv. Not only did she begin to practice this skill, but the 23-year-old also found herself suddenly immersed in a stimulating environment of political and literary ideas. She describes, "An ocean of words and opinion surrounded me like the jiffy bag fuzz I'd scatter each morning in my rush to open the mail" (*How* 43–44).

Jones's employment outside of the home was not unusual in Beat bohemia; many bohemian women assumed the traditional male domestic roles of breadwinner and provider, working full-time to support their families especially since bohemian men often regarded holding a job as a social constraint and a hindrance to their artistic integrity.[12] As Baraka wrote in a 1961 poem, ". . . It's impos- / sible to be an artist and a bread / winner at the same time" ("Hymn" 7). Jones found this shift in expectations and responsibilities to be a welcome opportunity. Although in her memoir she attests to the financial frustrations of being the sole wage-earner for her family, she never expresses being upset that

[12]Although the mainstream ideal of the American woman took the form of the happy [white] housewife and mother who cared for her husband and children while maintaining an orderly and loving home, many fifties' women worked outside of the home. For more regarding postwar women in the workforce, see Susan M. Hartmann, "Women's Employment and the Domestic Ideal in the Early Cold War Years," *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple, 1994), 84–100; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1988; New York: Basic, 1996); Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic, 1992); and Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History* (New York: Harper, 1993).

she had to work outside the home (*How* 114, 204–205). Instead, she found a sense of independence through employment. "To one of us a job is a slave," Jones writes, "to the other it's a guarantee of freedom" (*How* 123).

However, straddling the line between full-time employment and living a bohemian existence proved difficult. As Jones's friend Joyce Johnson has written, "Office life and real life had to be kept separate. . . . On weekday mornings, you locked the door on your unacceptable self; you let it out again after five" (148). Daily Jones left bohemia for her office job—the same type of job considered square by many of her male Beat counterparts. "All the Beats found it funny that I worked for the *Partisan* titans," Jones states in her memoir (48). However, she would often take books and magazines home from the *Partisan* office to share with Baraka and their friends, and soon dialogues and exchanges between emerging avant-garde and traditional writers began to form.

One of particular note occurred in 1958. *Partisan* had published Norman Podhoretz's "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," a scathing book review of Kerouac's *On the Road.* Podhoretz scorned Kerouac and the Beats, equating them to delinquents and gang members, and argued that they would cause the demise of American literature. "Almost everyone I knew was disturbed by the essay," Jones recalls in her memoir, and she approached Phillips about it, promising him a "really good" rebuttal (56). Doubtful but not disinterested, Phillips read the letter that Jones provided. Written by Baraka (as LeRoi Jones), its author defended the innovative style, language, and spirit of Beat writing, and declared that emerging writers "must resort to violence in literature . . . to shake us out of the woeful literary sterility which characterized the '40s" (472). As Jones attests, Phillips immediately recognized Baraka's talent for writing (*How* 57). The letter, which would become Baraka's first published piece, appeared in the following issue of *Partisan*, and works by other voices of the postwar avant-garde—such as Frank O'Hara, Denise Levertov, and Allen Ginsberg—soon followed.[13]

[13]For more on *Partisan Review* and its relationship to the postwar avant-garde, see: Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World* (London: Oxford UP, 1987); Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1991); William Phillips, *A Partisan View: Five Decades of the Politics of Literature* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2004); and David Laskin, *Partisans: Marriage, Politics, and Betrayal among the New York Intellectuals* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001). Laskin's book is particularly noteworthy for his attention to the role of women within the *Partisan* circle, contending that these women believed in their individual intellectual power but often felt obliged to maintain traditional gender roles by setting aside their aspirations to support and care for the men in their lives.

Because of Jones's connections at *Partisan, Yugen* found its way to college libraries nationwide, taking with it the words and ideas of many of the young bohemian writers. She describes, "Despite its far-out focus and its few little offset pages stapled at the spine, despite the fact it looked nothing like *Partisan* or *Kenyon* or even *Dissent*," *Yugen* was distributed along with copies of *Partisan* to "midwest campuses and into West Coast bookstores" ("Babes" 52). Though she was not yet publishing her own work, she knew she wanted to write and recognized that her experiences working with other writers, learning how the publishing world worked, and honing her editing skills would eventually contribute to the development of her own writing.

Despite the attention and energy she devoted to *Yugen*, Jones' contributions were generally considered secondary to and less significant than those of her husband.[14] Yet Jones found agency in her behind-the-scenes work. Her presentation of the unlikely outlet for self-empowerment that she discovered in mundane tasks is a theme she explores in her poem, "Homage to Frank O'Hara's Personal Poem." She recounts her experience as a young typesetter:

Over and over the mind returns
to the bent shoulders of the young woman
who types, over and over, the poem
until it is perfectly placed
on the page, the name
of her husband, the name

of her lover
the guilty thrill
of juxtaposition as

[14]As Uma Narayan explains, "Women have often been excluded from prestigious areas of human activity (for example, politics or science) and this has often made these activities seem clearly 'male.' In areas where women were not excluded (for example, subsistence work), their contribution has been misrepresented as secondary and inferior to that of men" (256).

each gives
to the poet
what he keeps
in his pocket

in her arms she holds them
over and over (73)[15]

Here she revisits her role secondary to Baraka in the production of *Yugen* as the typesetter of the magazine while she relives the experience of preparing Frank O'Hara's "Personal Poem" for publication in it. O'Hara's poem mentions the names "LeRoi" and "Mike Kanemitsu," the first her husband, the second a man with whom Jones had an affair (O'Hara 156–157; Watten 115). What is significant in her poem is "the way that Jones takes as given an alienated experience—of herself not only as typesetter but as wife and lover—as material for transformative agency" (Watten 115). This poem shares with O'Hara's the desire to display the significance of the everyday, and through her poem, Jones transforms the behind-the-scenes, monotonous experience of the typesetter into the story of a burgeoning poet. In her poem, she situates herself *in* O'Hara's poem: she is in control of name placement, of word lay-out, and through the act of deconstructing and reconstructing O'Hara's poem, she assigns a new, personal meaning to it.

She does something similar with her poem, "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" (the name of which is taken from a story by Delmore Schwartz, originally published in 1937 in *Partisan Review*'s inaugural issue).[16] Jones's poem, published in 2003, appears in four parts, each reflecting on a different childhood memory. In the last, she revisits the summer when she was nineteen years old and working at a private camp on Adirondack Lake making theater costumes. We find Jones assuming another job conventionally acknowledged as women's work—sewing. Rather

[15]Reprinted from *Drive* © 1998 by Hettie Jones, by permission of Hanging Loose Press.

[16]Schwartz's story was the reason for Jones's first encounter with *Partisan*; she recalls seeking out his work as a college student and ending up with a copy of the journal for the first time. When working at *Partisan* in the 1950s, she met him and told him this. According to Jones, Schwartz promised her a poem for *Yugen*, and she acknowledges him as the first of his generation to want his work to appear alongside that of the emerging bohemian writers (*How* 57).

than hinder her, when reflecting on the experience years later, she acknowledges the empowerment she found within it. She ends the poem:

In troubled water I learned
to trouble the water
In stitch after tedious stitch
I found stroke after furious stroke (19)

Again, the mundane (in this case, sewing) has become a site of action for Jones, and through her use of the word "stroke"—a word that also connotes the use of a typewriter—she alludes to her future work as an editor, typesetter, and writer, collapsing various life experiences to shed light on their common ground.

Hettie Jones and Whiteness

One of the most direct steps that a single, white middle-class woman could take to escape fifties' mainstream culture was to move into her own apartment. To make the choice to live on her own, leaving the safety and security of her parents' home was a bold move. As Joyce Johnson states in her memoir, it led to presumptions about what "she'd be up to in that room of her own" (102). Living in their own apartments with no supervising forces to monitor guests' visits, women were able to live active sexual lives. And they were able to have visitors—male or female, black or white—at any time.

Shortly after moving to New York, Jones met Baraka. They married in 1958 and had two daughters. Since bohemian New York provided an environment for and encouraged outsider status, the opportunity for white women to freely select and maintain relations with black men was more available within bohemia than within mainstream American society. Even so, the number of interracial couples in the Village was small; Jones cites only a half-dozen in Greenwich Village in the late 1950s and reminds readers that in 1950, thirty states still had miscegenation laws (*How* 36).

Jones's and Baraka's relationship presents a unique case study of a very turbulent point in the history of American race relations. Stemming from bohemian ideologies at a time during which the

Civil Rights Movement was gaining national momentum, Jones's and Baraka's marriage was situated at the crossroads of race and counterculture. At the beginning of their relationship, Jones's acknowledgment of race was innocent: "[R]ace disappears in the house," she writes, "[I]n the bathroom, under the covers, in the bedbugs in your common mattress, in the morning sleep in your eyes" (*How* 36).

However, racial invisibility did not extend outside their home. In the streets beyond their Greenwich Village neighborhood, the couple encountered catcalls and glares from strangers. Race may have played a role in determining the couple's employment options. It is possible that more job opportunities were available to Jones, though a woman, because she was white than would have been to Baraka, as an African-American man. In her memoir, Jones recounts a story in which she recalls Baraka impersonating his white employer over the telephone to allay the concerns of a potential new boss about hiring a black man. Jones recalls overhearing Baraka: "'Yes, I'm well aware that he's a Negro, but he's been a fine employee. He hasn't stolen anything, if that's what you mean'" (qtd. in *How* 48). Though Jones reports they made light of the incident after the call ended, she also states that "it brought home how suspect he was [to others], simply by being his confident self" (48). Even Jones's parents viewed the interracial relationship with contempt; upon learning of the young couple's marriage, they all but disowned her. Yet she stood behind her marriage and family; after becoming pregnant and deciding that she would raise biracial children, she began to recognize her own whiteness and the ways in which she was socially privileged because of it.[17]

Some critics suggest that Jones's awareness of whiteness is something that stems from her Jewishness. As Thompson states, although there was "relatively little shift in white American identity as compared to other U.S. racial and / or ethnic identities" during the postwar years, "there was a vast whitening of Jewish ethnicity"

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[17]For more on gender, interracial marriage and family, see Renee C. Romano, *Race Mixing: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003); Randall Kennedy, "Interracial Intimacy," *Atlantic Monthly* 290.5 (2002): 103+; and Hilary Harris, "Failing 'White Woman': Interrogating the Performance of Respectability," *Theater Journal* (2000) 52.2: 183–209.

(92). However, it is possible that Jones did not identify with this whitening of Jewish identity. In her memoir Jones describes herself as an "outsider Jew" and attests that she struggled in her Jewish identity as she contemplated getting involved with Baraka romantically at the onset of their relationship: "Mostly I was haunted by the problem of remaining a Jew, but I didn't know how to reinvent a Jewish woman who wasn't a Jewish wife. 'I think I am losing my Jewishness,' I wrote in my journal, and then, 'Grr . . . what is that?'" (*How* 14, 37). In this way, perhaps she has more in common with Delmore Schwartz than just *Partisan Review*—in their writing, both express feeling conflicted between their desires to live modern lives and aspire toward new opportunities, while trying to retain, or come to terms with, their Jewish identities. Jones may have "felt other to white non-Jews," and this early disaffiliation extended through her experience with interracial marriage and motherhood: "The feeling of otherness no longer stems, in her mind, from her Jewishness, but from being in a different relation to people of color, and having a different sensitivity to racism, than the mainstream white hegemony" (Thompson 92).

The awareness of race in general and whiteness in particular is a prominent theme throughout Jones's writing. Despite the couple's early belief that their racial differences would not matter, not long after their marriage, race began to play a major role in their relationship. As Baraka's involvement with the Black Arts Movement increased, he became more estranged from his white wife, and eventually decided to leave Jones and their children. As Randall Kennedy notes, "[Baraka's] deep internal tensions, his ambition to become a black leader, and the growing sense in many black communities that no purported leader could be trusted who talked black but slept white" may have played a role in this distancing (106).[18] Additionally, Baraka's decision to leave his family may also have resulted from the pressure he felt to be both a husband and father as well as an artist, the stress of

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[18]Kennedy describes the social atmosphere of the time: "By the late 1960s, with the repudiation of anti-miscegenation and Jim Crow laws, increasing numbers of black felt emboldened to openly oppose mixed marriages. We Shall Overcome was giving way to Black Power: improving the image of blacks in the minds of whites seemed less important than cultivating a deeper allegiance to racial solidarity. To blacks, interracial intimacy compromised that allegiance" (105).

bohemian poverty, and the infidelities and affairs of both Jones and Baraka. (Baraka, while married to Jones, also had a child with another white woman, Diane di Prima.) Despite all of these possible reasons, Jones recalls that when she asked her husband why he was leaving, his answer was simply, "Because you're white" (*How* 218). Soon after their separation, he severed communication with Jones.

Jones appears a few times in Baraka's writing after their separation. In his 1966 poem, "For Tom Postell, Dead Black Poet," she is referred to as "a fat jew girl" (153), and in his 1984 book, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka*, she is negatively portrayed by the character Nellie Kohn. Such attacks mark an interesting shift in Baraka's writing, who, in 1961, had warmly dedicated one of his first poetry collections, *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note*, and a number of the poems in it, to her. My intention is not to focus on the derogatory image of Jones that is created in Baraka's texts; what I find much more provocative is the way in which she responds through her poetry. Though barred from verbal communication with him, she addresses him through writing. In "A Nebula of Noteworthy Nellies," a poem which Jones dedicates to two women—one of whom is described as "the Nellie character in a recent literary work"—Jones reclaims the name Nellie by calling the reader's attention to various strong and inspirational women throughout history who have shared it (88). She also traces the name as a derivative from "Helen, that beauty / who caused such havoc" and from there identifies the close word relationship between Helen and *heleane*, which she defines as "a word describing a planetary aura / named by sailors for their patron saint: / St. Elmo's fire" (88). Jones ends the poem on a transformative, dynamic note:

> and when two electrical conductors meet
> the air is ionized, changed
> in a coronal discharge
> called St. Elmo's fire
> So burn on burn on burn on Nellie (88)

It is the strength, the power, and the fire that Jones celebrates in this poem. Nellie, the character persona assigned to Jones by Baraka, is empowered by Jones herself. She revives the name by bringing different meaning to it, by transforming the profane into the sacred. Thus, Jones-as-writer assumes control over Jones-as-subject, and within the final line of the poem, the poet becomes her own inspiring and driving force.

The significance of named identity is a theme evident throughout Jones's self-narrative writing. In her memoir, she traces the evolution of her name from her maiden name of Hettie Cohen to her married name, Hettie Jones. In between, she is all of H. Cohen-Jones, the name ascribed to her by her husband on the cover of *Yugen*; LeRoi Jones's "white wife, the former Hettie Cohen"; and Mrs. Hettie Jones (Jones, *How* 168, 217, 232). As the memoir ends, she is content that, despite the multiple name changes, she is always Hettie, the one name that has remained constant throughout her life. Grace explains, "[Jones] surmises that she remains a name, Hettie, the one signifier that has stood constant throughout, elegant in its relative isolation from patrilineal ownership, centering all the others" (159).[19] Although some might question Jones keeping her ex-husband's last name, a name that he rejected as a slave name, for her it is not an issue. She is comfortable with the name; "Jones" has been her name for the eight years of their marriage and has been the name by which she has begun to acknowledge her artistic self. It is the name she shares with her daughters, Kellie and Lisa, as well as the surname of Baraka's family, of which she remained very much a part despite the divorce.[20]

As her relationship with her children and Baraka's family grew through the 1950s and 1960s, so too, did her cognizance of race. Jones acknowledges race as a structuring social force and through writing, she seeks to bring awareness to whiteness. In articles, such as "Mama's White," which she co-wrote with her daughter Lisa in 1994, Jones identifies herself as a white mother

[19]Jones explores the significance of the name "Hettie" in *For Four Hetties* (New York: Ikon, 1995). Each of the four poems included in this chapbook centers on a woman also named Hettie. Though from different time and places, all are linked through the name they share.

[20]Jones credits her relationship with Baraka's family—particularly her longtime friendship with his mother, Anna Lois Jones—as an important influence in both her and her daughters' lives. After her parents nearly abandoned her, Baraka's family became Hettie and her daughters' sole familial support, a bond that lasted throughout Jones's marriage and after its dissolution.

of two black children. Shortly after her children were born, Jones recognized that racism was something that "had to be expected" in their daily lives, and encouraged them, as they grew up, to embrace being black (Jones and Jones). She recounts numerous experiences tainted by racial discrimination, such as the stares of others while shopping, remarks made during parent-teacher conferences, and being denied housing because they were an interracial family (*How* 211, 106–107). As a single, white mother of two black children, Jones states, "I worried about my growing daughters' mental health and physical safety in a world I could see would be harsher to them than to me" (Jones and Jones). Acknowledging herself as a racialized subject, Jones is aware of her whiteness as well as the often unspoken privileges that accompany it. "I haven't forgotten . . . that walking down the street alone I've got White all over my face. Even with the thumping heart of my anger, without my children I'm anonymously White. In all-White rooms, I'm part of the crowd" (Jones and Jones). Jones claims that although society may acknowledge her as white, she does not define herself in this way. She settles on "White—but not quite" and offers this explanation: "If White remains how I'm seen, what's changed, what I mean by 'not quite White,' is how I see" (Jones and Jones). Jones is very critical of this position and through her writing continually draws attention to white privilege and its racist side effects. For her, the act of writing offers a venue to engage in a discussion about race, to expose racism, and to encourage others to do the same.

Conclusion

For Jones, the decade of the 1950s was a period of artistic incubation. Like most women of the postwar avant-garde, she lived amidst an American literary renaissance. As a woman, she was not encouraged to write its literature; however, she still drew influence and insight from its energy. Throughout her experiences within and beyond the postwar years, Jones has navigated between binaries—black / white, male / female, hip / square, writer / editor. These perspectives have informed the way she sees the world around her and the texts she creates.

Women like Jones became the providers for their households by taking on full-time jobs to support their boyfriends, husbands, and children. Daily they left the hip world of Beat bohemia for a square office or department store job, only to return at night, cook dinner, and put children to bed. They asserted themselves as sexual beings, in itself a bold move in the fifties prior to the wide availability of birth control, and chose partners regardless of race or sex. They devoted themselves to the art of the avant-garde, acknowledging its transformative power, and saw themselves as part of the process, believing, as Jones has attested, "that stirring things up in general would eventually define a new life for you in particular" ("Babes" 52). And for Hettie Jones, eventually it did. Like many other bohemian women, she witnessed the revolutionary power of art from the sidelines, and through her lifestyle choices she broke barriers that would benefit future generations of women.

As a self-narrative writer, Jones continually explores herself as a subject though personal experience and memory. Smith and Watson state, "Life narrative . . . might best be approached as a moving target, a set of ever-shifting self-referential practices that engage the past in order to reflect on identity in the present" (3). Jones' texts function as such targets. Writing and identity are intertwined processes for Jones, and the self is an ever-evolving artist. Her vehicle for her journey is self-narrative writing; through it, she is able to address her past experiences, and she is in charge of defining herself as Hettie Jones. As a self-narrative writer, Jones discovers and asserts her own identity, an identity that has been repeatedly defined by modes of power beyond her control. By examining Jones's self-narrative writing, we may begin to deconstruct the Hettie Jones that has been constituted by scholars of Beat history, as well as the Hettie Jones that has been defined through her relationship to her ex-husband. Once we break these frameworks, we encounter Hettie Jones on her terms.

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