**Introduction**

**Background**

As Ginsberg remembered first hearing the word “beat”, the “original street usage” in Huncke’s\(^1\) speech meant “exhausted, at the bottom of the world, looking up or out, sleepless, wide-eyed, perceptive, rejected by society, on your own, streetwise.\(^2\)

Things went from bad to worse, and kept right on traveling. I was dead beat, trouble with the shorts: not penny one did I have, and I prowled around the town in the only suit I had to my name, a beat-up old tuxedo…\(^3\) (Mezz Mezzrow\(^4\), *Really the Blues*, 1946)

The Beatnik movement arose following the Second World War, and the Beatnik writers, or the Beats, thereby came to share a similar historical past. They lived in the tumultuous time that started with the dropping of the atomic bomb, later followed by the Cold War, and the Communist hysteria.\(^5\) American politics during the Cold War were conservative, and a vast majority of Americans regarded communism and the Soviet Union in particular, as posing real threats.\(^6\) The academic literary world was dominated by New Criticism, and therefore many future Beats felt it to be an environment where they could not fully express their own thoughts. This resulted in dropouts and a disbelief in higher academic studies. The Beats turned their backs on society, and began criticising the establishment on a political platform found outside of the established academic circles.\(^7\)

The Beats began as part of the New York Greenwich bohemia\(^8\), and the Times Square hipsters\(^9\). The Beats were a very diverse group of writers, but their rejection of conformity,

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\(^1\) Herbert Huncke (1915-1996) lived “on the road”, constantly on the move from one place to the other. Socialised with the lowest social classes, and was familiar with drug abuse. See James Campbell, *This is the Beat Generation*, Berkeley & Los Angeles 2001, p. 40 & http://www.beatmuseum.org/huncke/HerbertHuncke.html.


\(^3\) See Charters, 1992, p. xvii.

\(^4\) Mezz Mezzrow (1899-1972) was an American jazz musician from Chicago (http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/artists/a3aea435-d1fb-45ca-b38d-411335d4717f) 2012-03-12.


\(^8\) Greenwich Village is a part of New York City where many artists have lived through the years. For example: Bob Dylan wrote “Bolwin’ in the wind” in Greenwich Village, and the area was also a meeting point for the Beatnik movement. See http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/24/nyregion/bohemian-heart-of-greenwich-village-seeks-landmark-status.html.

\(^9\) A hipster is “a person who is unusually aware of and interested in new and unconventional patterns (as in jazz or fashion)”, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hipster.
and Cold War paranoia created common ground between them. They were opposed to homosexual bashing and sexual repression during a time when it was not safe to do so. Their stylistic, technical, and aesthetic approaches to writing varied. It would therefore be next to impossible to pin down an exact writing style that could be known as “truly Beat.” The Beatnik movement is often associated with three primary front figures: Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs. The movement got its first real breakthrough when Kerouac’s novel *On the Road* was published in 1957.

Most of the Beats who ended up forming the Beatnik canon were white men, but in more recent years there has been an upswing in rediscovering the works of the female Beats. However, there are few academic texts written about the female members of the Beatnik movement, and the works of male Beats have largely overshadowed the literary contribution of these women. The female Beats have been censored out of history not only by the male Beats but also by historians and scholars.

The typical Beat woman was supposed to wear all black, and to be passive and silent. They were expected to impersonate what it meant to be “cool”, which often resulted in the men assuming that they were unable to act. However, this widespread perception which circulated amongst the male Beats has not proven to be accurate. Many of the women involved in the Beatnik movement were writers in their own right. Furthermore, numerous writings of the female Beats anticipated the late 1960s feminist movement, also known as “the second-wave.” When the women took the step away from the norms and ideals of “ordinary society,” they were trying not to fall back into the same patterns that they had recently escaped from. The difficulties facing these women sometimes proved to be too many which resulted in that some refrained from expressing their talent, and others lived

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12 Jack Kerouac (1922-1969) was a French-Canadian author known for his novel *On the Road*. See http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0449616/.
13 Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) was an American poet known for his poem *Howl*. See http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0320091/.
14 William S. Burroughs (1914-1997) was an American writer known for his novel *Naked Lunch*. See http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0123221/.
15 Cook, Bruce, 1971, p. 67.
double lives, afraid of what would happen if they openly expressed their sexuality.\textsuperscript{19} In books written about the Beatnik movement, it is noticeable that women are barely mentioned, and generally only appear in terms of “girlfriend” or “wife.” Nevertheless, many women involved in the movement did write, and many of them can be labelled protofeminists.

\textit{Protofeminism}

The term “protofeminism” can have different meanings and connotations, and I am therefore going to present the reader of this essay with Johnson’s and Grace’s definition of the term in their book \textit{Girls who wore black}. This definition represents the way in which the term should be understood when discussing, primarily, \textit{Come and Join the Dance}.

While women Beat writers of the first and second generations predate the contemporary feminist movement, which came into being in the late 1960s, their representations of women as artist and themselves as members of the Beat generation return time and again to gender. There is among them a consistent articulation of feminist principles – a few even seem reluctant to pursue the ways in which gender can affect art or even deny that it can, even as they are cognizant of themselves as women writing. But taken as a whole, the members of the group displayed a persistent understanding of the importance of asserting themselves as women in the alternative communities in which they lived, and which denied them, during the fifties, and even to some extent today, value as artists specifically because of their sex. Their recognition of this condition exemplifies their protofeminist impulses.\textsuperscript{20}

It is important to mention that the female Beats “were feminists before the term was coined...”\textsuperscript{21} Furthermore, an additional example can be found when describing the life and actions of Marilyn Monroe. “A careful look at her life reveals that the dumb blonde stereotype is unfair; Marilyn actually enacted the proto-feminism of what several scholars have called the mid-century “transitional woman.”\textsuperscript{22}

[t]hus, in 1949, on the eve of the 1950s, the decade in which women were leaving the workplace and returning to the domestic sphere, Marilyn Monroe steadfastly refused to do so. On the contrary, as 1950 approached, she could be seen jogging through the service alleys in Beverly Hills each morning and lifting weights to preserve her figure—two activities, as Spoto

\textsuperscript{20} Johnson & Grace, 2002, p 13-14.
\textsuperscript{22} http://www.americanpopularculture.com/archive/film/marylin_feminism.htm
phrased it, “not commonly undertaken by woman in 1950.” She also enrolled in an evening course in world literature at UCLA which she attended in jeans—neither her college attendance nor her apparel were commonplace at that particular historical moment.\textsuperscript{23}

\textit{Joyce Johnson (née Glassman)}

Johnson was born in 1935 in New York City\textsuperscript{24} and grew up in a middle-class Jewish family as the daughter of two hardworking parents. They wanted their daughter to become a librettist and work in the music industry but Johnson did not share her parents’ view. She began rebelling against her parents at the age of thirteen, and when she failed to graduate from Barnard College a few years later; she decided to leave home, creating a rift between herself and her parents. Johnson met Jack Kerouac through her Barnard classmate Elsie Cowen.\textsuperscript{25} Elsie was at the time in a relationship with Allen Ginsberg, and she set them up on a blind date. Kerouac and Johnson started seeing each other and they were lovers from 1957 to 1958. It was during those two years that the Beatnik movement finally started reaching out to a wider audience.\textsuperscript{26} She has written about her experiences of the inner Beatnik circle in her autobiographical book \textit{Minor Characters}. Johnson also worked as a book editor and as a book reviewer.\textsuperscript{27}

\textit{Come and Join the Dance}

Johnson’s first novel \textit{Come and Join the Dance} was first published in 1962 under her maiden name Glassman.\textsuperscript{28} It tells the story of a young woman, Susan, during the week that begins with her writing her last university exam, and ends when she leaves for Paris. Other important characters include: Peter (he is a decade older than the rest of the characters, has been writing on his thesis the past five years, and is the owner of a car), Kay (Susan’s former class mate from college, she left the college without graduating, and is now trying to learn from life; she is involved with Peter), Anthony (eighteen years old, a friend of Peter’s), and Jerry (Susan’s college boyfriend). During the course of the novel, Susan joins “the other side” (the non-normative part of society). She falls short of graduating from college, deepens her

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} See Joyce Johnson, \textit{Bad Connections}, London 1978, title page.
\textsuperscript{25} Elsie Cowen (1933-1962) who grew up on Long Island was a female Beatnik poet, see Knight, 1996, p 141.
\textsuperscript{26} See Knight, 1996, p. 167-169.
\textsuperscript{27} See Joyce Johnson, \textit{In the Night Café}, London 1989, inside of cover.
\textsuperscript{28} See Joyce Glassman, \textit{Come and join the dance}, New York 1962, title page.
relationships with the “outsiders”, and also loses her virginity. The story portrays Susan’s difficulties fitting in; she cannot picture herself being the typical college girl with whom she goes to class. She takes unnecessary risks, does not follow the unwritten rules, and acts in a non-confirmative manner. The story is set before the Beatnik movement became a widespread cultural phenomenon.29

Bad Connections

Johnson’s second novel Bad Connections was first published in 1978.30 It is the story of a single mother, Molly, and her life from the day she decides to leave her husband. Her long term lover, Conrad, quickly becomes an important part of her life. The seemingly unsurpassable problem is that Conrad has another woman in his life, Roberta, and he is constantly moving between the two, unable to make a permanent decision. Molly also meets Malcolm, an Ivy League graduate who works in a prison teaching English. After a lot of turns back and forth, Molly decides to leave both men behind, and live solely with her son, Matthew. The novel tells the story of complicated relationships, of ordinary society mixing with the external part of the normative community. The progressive academic, represented by Conrad, is put next to feminism, bohemia, and other things which can be regarded as commonplace.

In the Night Café

The latest novel written by Johnson, In the Night Café, was published in 1989.31 The story centres around Joanna who retells her life story, starting in the middle, moving backwards, and then back to her current point in time. The main character, Joanna, in her twenties, meets a married man, Tom, who is already a father of two children, and after he gets his divorce they marry. He is an abstract painter struggling to make ends meet, and it is Joanna’s typing job that provides an income. When Tom later dies in a motorcycle accident, she decides to go to Paris where she starts taking photographs of the bums and bohemia and falls pregnant. She marries the father of the child, Mikel, and moves back to New York, later in the story Mikel leaves her, and she has to raise their son by herself. Nicky, her son, gets diagnosed with cancer, and the story finishes telling us of their experiences in the hospital.

31 See Johnson, 1989, publication page.
Methodology

Now I wish to undertake a comparative study of Joyce Johnson’s novels, *Come and Join the Dance*, *Bad Connections*, and *In the Night Café*. The position of the female in the Beatnik movement will be used and explained in order to understand the Beat women’s social conditions, and how they shine through in Johnson’s novels. By addressing the ideals and conventions of the time as well as the role the women played within the movement it will be elucidated how the Beats have influenced Johnson’s choice of topic, and the way the narratives are formed. This paper will focus on the conditions of the Beatnik women as well as on the conditions of women who turned their backs on normative society. The female Beats were only a small amount of all the women who did, during the 1950s and ‘60s, step out of the traditional house-wife role. Many women started working after the Second World War, earning their own living, and thereby they removed themselves from the widespread ideals of how a woman was supposed to behave.\(^{32}\) This essay will primarily discuss how the women act in the novels and in actual society, how they are treated when acting, and how they react themselves. Other aspects that will be discussed include which steps the women took in order to reposition themselves outside of the social ideals, sexual liberation, and how they are displayed in the novels. The position that the women had within the Beatnik circle will be discussed, and protofeminist tendencies will be addressed. The thought of an independent woman, and how she fits into the social order, is something that plays an important part when analysing Johnson’s novels.

This essay is divided into five chapters “Conformity, bohemia and education”, “Joining the others – taking the crucial step”, “Sexual experiences – losing your virginity, rape and the aspect of having multiple sexual partners”, “Beatnik themes and tendencies” and “Complicated relationships, subjectivity and feminism”. These chapters will be followed by a short conclusion. The essay’s disposition has been arranged in this way in order to enable to reader to get a deepened insight into the different aspects of the novels.

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Questions

What happened when the women left the ideals of commonplace society?

In what way do the novels mirror the thoughts and ideals in society?

How do the characters handle their outside position, and what brought them to step over to the nonconforming part of society?

How are feminist and protofeminist tendencies portrayed in the novels?

In what way is the Beatnik culture represented in Johnson’s novels?

Previous research

As stated earlier little has been written about the female Beats. A few anthologies have been published in more recent years, including Johnson and Grace’s *Girls who wore black* (2002), Knight’s *Women of the Beat Generation* (1996), and Peabody’s *A different beat, writings by women of the beat generation* (1997). In addition to this, there are a few articles written on the subject such as McNeil’s “The Archaeology of Gender in the Beat Movement” (1996) and Thomson’s “Gender Performance in the Literature of the Female Beats” (2011).
Conformity, bohemia and education

In the 1950’s the televised image of woman portrayed her as being a “stay at home goddess, adorned with a pearl necklace.” This image was under attack by many contemporary women, and when looking at the lives of the female Beats, this often means distancing themselves from the common marriage institution which centred around a traditional family life, and deciding not to sacrifice their own ambitions. The fact is that the number of married women in employment rose gradually in the US during the 1950s, but it never returned to its wartime peak. However, more women were in employment after the Second World War than during, thereby disproving the common belief that most women returned to their place in the home after the war had ended.

Women of the fifties in particular were supposed to conform like Jell-O to a mold. There was only one option: to be a housewife or a mother. For the women profiled here (In Knight’s Women of the Beat Generation), being a Beat was far more attractive than staying chained to a brand-new kitchen appliance. For the most part, the liberal arts education these young women were give created a natural predilection for art and poetry, for living a life of creativity instead of confining [...] Nothing could be more romantic than joining this chorus of individuality and freedom, leaving behind boredom, safety, and conformity.

As the quote states, the women who became Beats were trying to avoid being moulded in the same way as every other woman. They did not want to be trapped, pretending to be the perfect housewife for the rest of their lives, instead they wanted to be able to express their own creativity, thereby leaving behind the conforming ideals of their time. After the Second World War secondary education became more accessible, especially for white women something which helped female writers to emerge into the bohemia. Several of Johnson’s characters come in contact with education at some point during the course of the novel. Most noteworthy is Susan in Come Join the Dance because she is the only one actively attending higher education in any of the three novels. She has a very torn attitude towards going to college; she feels obliged to get her degree; but she does not feel that she fits into

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33 Thomson, 2011, p. 2.
35 See Thomson, 2011, p 2. Note that the number of women in employment was higher than during the war throughout the 1950s.
36 Knight, 1996, p 3.
the educational system. Susan wants to make her parents proud, but she cannot associate herself with the other girls in her class. It is obvious that she is very talented and intelligent, but she cannot fully enjoy her education. Susan’s experience of the learning climate can be viewed in relation to the character Roberta in *Bad Connection*. The reader never gets to know Roberta’s thoughts and experiences from her own perspective as they are always being retold through Molly, but what we do get to know is that Roberta is attending evening classes that Conrad (her lover) wants her to attend, so that he can continue his relationship with Molly without Roberta knowing of it.

It was Conrad who had radicalized her, encouraged her to go to graduate school, to overcome the sense of intellectual inferiority that her disastrous marriage to a self-absorbed experimental filmmaker had left her with. Gradually he had been rebuilding her shattered sense of herself.\(^\text{38}\)

The general impression when reading this quote would probably be that Conrad is trying to help Roberta. However, it is possible to claim that he is only pretending to help her rebuild her scattered self; Roberta can never really break free from Conrad’s presence. I get the feeling that Roberta is only doing what Conrad wants her to do, because she is held under his influence. The reader only ever hears of Roberta’s fate through Conrad retelling how she acts, and it would therefore be possible to doubt his narrative, because he is unlikely to comprehend the full meaning of his own actions. Conrad might think that he is trying to help Roberta, but even when she tries to break free she always ends up coming back to him. Molly is the one that eventually is strong enough to remove herself from Conrad’s influence but Roberta does not seem to be able to do the same. Both Molly and Roberta are portrayed as women who are capable of taking care of themselves. The only difference is that Roberta never goes through the same process that enables Molly’s independence and ability to live without feeling the need of grown man in her life. Molly realises that she can stand on her own two feet, but Roberta remains under the restrains of the ideals of ordinary society. To a certain extent, Roberta complies with the multiplied gender codes, and this is what hinders her from taking the leap that will enable complete independence. She might appear to have more say and more power over her and Conrad’s relationship (they do, for example, live

together on a more permanent basis), but she is the one that cannot rewrite the gender codes, and she is therefore permanently stuck in a subordinate position.

In the 1950s, the American women leaving the roles they had been brought up with expected to find a different, less constrained society amongst the bohemia. The women joining the bohemia wanted to find a place where they could express their thoughts and ideas more freely. However, this may have been true for male individuals joining the group, but unfortunately for the women, the female gender codes multiplied, and they thereby followed the women from one position to the other. The 1950s gender codes managed to reach all parts of social life, including the bohemia, and the Beats. When stating that the traditional, stale gender codes followed the women when they decided to join the Beats, it is also important to remember that the male members of the movement therefore still viewed the female Beats as “women” in the traditional sense. The male Beats therefore treated the women as they would have been treated before joining the movement. As mentioned in the introduction, the women were supposed to wear black and play a passive, silent part. They were to “mirror the cool,” and thereby maximising the “coolness” of the Beatnik movement. This “condition” has been described by Kerouac:

As Kerouac goes on to insist, “most Beat Generation artists belong to the hot school.” In this defining scenario, Beat cannot even be applied to women: they are figured to be so “cool” as to be barely there, and they do not figure at all in his account of Beat artists. […] Kerouac’s “girls” who “say nothing and wear black” are accessories for cool hipster men, indispensable to the scene, but meant to be unseen and unheard as they render their essential but subsidiary functions. In Kerouac’s schema, literary Beat is “hot” – vivacious – and active, gendered male; cultural Beat is “cool” – inert – and passive, gendered female.

Kerouac’s opinion seems to fit into the typical male idea of gendered activeness and passiveness, dividing the two sexes. The men are the ones that act, whilst the women are meant to stand by their sides, enhancing the “cool”, and thereby indulging in their own passiveness. His view coincides with the earlier description of the women’s assigned place in ordinary society, and it therefore provides an excellent insight into how the women were seen within the movement itself. The women are seen by many of the men as “accessories”,

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with an important function in upholding the Beat image, but they are, according to the men, not very significant to the movement’s literary production. The women might have inspired the men in their writing, but the “Beat Code of Cool” seemed to undermine the women’s “literary voice” and “endorse the men’s indifference to their works.” 43 The quote below presents a view of the Beatnik movement as a whole.

Ginsberg saw the Beat generation literary movement as “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”. 44

Ginsberg counted only two women to the group of working friends, Diane di Prima and Joanne Kyger 45, and when reading the quotes, one is likely to assume that the women did not play a major role in the males’ perception of the movement. They might have been there physically, but they were not very influential intellectually or creatively. The gender codes flourishing in the normative society were hard to escape from, and even if the women managed to break free from the first set of norms, they soon found themselves surrounded by a new set of unwritten rules. Thomson has addressed how the female Beats connected the movement with the mainstream society.

Therefore, the silence and passivity typically attributed to the female in the Beat movement connects the countercultural to the mainstream in a less polarised, more overlapping and mutually dependent structure. 46

The different groups depend upon each other and none can be excluded. I believe that there can be no airtight compartments where groups of people could live without being influenced by other groups around them, and this would apply to the Beatnik movement as well as to any other cultural movement. Thomson discusses Johnson’s view of the movement, based on what she can draw from Johnson’s autobiographical book Minor Characters 47. Johnson claims to be observing and not fully a member of the movement, but at the same time she positions herself “at the centre of the Beat phenomenon.” 48 Johnson cannot be seen as fully

45 Ibid.
47 Minor Characters was first published in 1983 by Harvill in London. See http://libris.kb.se/bib/4460022 for more information.
Beat or fully compliant with the norms of ordinary society\textsuperscript{49} as she is instead an “ever-evolving hybrid of the two.”\textsuperscript{50}

**Joining “the others” – taking the crucial step**

That was the week the plasterers came early in the morning. [...] They wanted to know if my mother was home, having the innocent misconception that all young unmarried women in apartments were daughters. I tried to explain that I was my mother. They seemed puzzled, but they came in.\textsuperscript{51}

In all of Johnson’s novels there is a reoccurring theme of the confusion associated with a woman living on her own without a husband or family members. The quote represents the unfamiliarity connected with the young unmarried woman living in her own flat and providing for herself. The break away from commonplace social structures, often results in the normative society’s inability to adapt and understand the new way of living. Johnson’s character, Joanna, in *In the Night Café* has to deal with this puzzlement on a regular basis.

I’d say, No, I didn’t want a regular job. It was because of the acting – I always had to leave an opening for it – but also I was afraid, afraid offices would get me and I wouldn’t be free anymore. I’d somehow be stuck in a role I’d never meant to choose, an office girl who wore nylons all through the hot weather and a dictation pad on her knee, when I wanted so much more for myself, when my real life hadn’t even started.\textsuperscript{52}

Joanna is scared that she would lose herself to the office, that she would be stuck playing this role that she has not chosen, before her life has even begun. She has realised that she wants so much more. When reading Johnson’s earliest work, *Come and Join the Dance*, the reader gets an excellent example of how the crossing passes. The novel tells us about the main character, Susan, and her slow, but gradual, removal from the social structures she has grown up with. A similar progress can also be seen in *Bad Connections*, when Molly, the main female character, breaks free from the traditional female gender codes, thereby creating a new, modified, role. Johnson’s novels portray parents that are unable to understand their daughter’s life choices, as well as being worried and angry while trying to accept them. The

\textsuperscript{49} Thomson, 2011, p 5.
\textsuperscript{50} See Thomson, 2011, p 4-5.
\textsuperscript{51} Johnson, 1989, p 55.
\textsuperscript{52} Johnson, 1989, p 78.
family members are confused or upset because their daughters decided to do something without their approval.

My mother’s (Joanna’s) explanations for my lack of success in the theater changed from month to month. I didn’t have the clothes, the right hair, know the right people; I was too retiring in my personality to put myself forward. All these failings in her view were correctable. She would happily bend the world for me. All I had to do was to put myself back in her hands. 53

“I’m listening,” he (Susan’s father) said. “I can’t make any sense out of what you say. But I’m listening.” “Do I (Susan) have to make sense?” “You did something foolish. Everyone does foolish things.” We haven’t been alone in a long time, she thought; we haven’t even had a conversation. This is the first conversation we’ve had in years. “Talk to me Susie. Don’t make me play guessing games.” She was suddenly afraid she was going to cry. “Dad...” “Am I your enemy?” She shook her head because she couldn’t speak. Her face was burning, burning... 54

Joanna’s mother is under the impression that her daughter has simply handed over all the decision making to her and success will be lurking just around the corner. All that is wrong can be easily corrected; only her appearance needs to be changed. Throughout In the Night Café, Joanna’s mother seems to be determined to make something of her daughter, but what she might really be doing is trying to create what she perceives as the perfect human. However, she is thereby disregarding the wants and needs of her daughter. Joanna does not want to become an actress and spend her life dedicated to a life on stage, and she eventually finds her passion in photography. Susan’s parents, on the other hand, react slightly differently. Her father is the one she can talk to, the one that may understand what she is going through, but they decide not to talk about it as to not disturb Susan’s mother. The family decides to go out and celebrate Susan’s graduation even though she did not graduate. Desperately are they trying to uphold a happy facade.

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. 55

53 Johnson, 1989, p 79, my brackets.
55 Glassman, 1962, p 139.
Susan knows that her parents will never fully be able to take part in her life as she has moved too far away from them. She has changed too much for her parents to fully understand and accept her new identity. They think she is going to graduate in a few months and that everything will resolve itself, not realising that she will never be the daughter they always imagined having; Susan keeps playing her false part. She is pretending on behalf of her parents, and they are trying to believe that what they see is their real daughter because they are unwilling to accept who she has become. It does not, however, matter how much she has changed, because at this point in the novel she still somewhat cares about how people perceive her, fearing what will be facing her when she walks further along her new path, not knowing where it will take her.

Why couldn’t she laugh? Why had everything become so unbearably significant? — these pastel girls with the sunlight falling on them coming to get their orchids, their perfect, pleased children’s smiles, the engagement rings protecting them. It was miraculous that they existed, the other pastel girls who had been lazier, a little more indifferent, who watched and applauded, were also miraculous. They too would always graduate; they would be safe.  

Those who graduate are safe. Those who play by the unwritten set of rules are also safe. Those who leave the safety zone are unsafe, Susan being one of them. She is one of the people who no longer plays by the given rules, which makes her feel insecure. Susan looks at the girls graduating, and even the girls who might be less bright are still going to be out of harm’s way. They will go on leading the life they always pictured for themselves. Susan wonders why everything needs to be so significant (see quote above), and why she cannot simply fit in and be like everyone else. She is different, something changed, and she cannot go back to blissful ignorance. Susan also said once:

Life was simpler for people like Jerry (“normal” boyfriend); 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.  

The characters are pondering why they are heading the way they are heading, but they are unable to prevent the gradual removal from society. There is a feeling of powerlessness, as if the characters are only being dragged along, not realising before it is too late what is about

57 Glassman, 1962, p 32, my brackets.
to happen. Joanna in *In the Night Café* is the character that seems to be most at ease with her identity from the start of the novel, but she is looking back on her life from a future perspective, and not going through the process in a straight line. It is almost as if the characters do not care what happens to them, as they do not know where they belong. Alienation would be the best word that can be used to describe it; the characters cannot connect with their own time, and instead they try to make the best of the situation. Susan’s friend, Kay, left college when there was only one semester left, and she is now figuring out what she is to do with her life. Meanwhile, Susan is cutting PE classes, without really knowing why, and that is the reason why she later cannot graduate from college. All these small, seemingly insignificant details end up being the things that push the characters closer and closer to removing themselves from ordinary society. Kay knows that she does not fit in, but she does not know what else she should be doing with her life, and that indecisiveness is what starts the unstoppable downwards spiral that will lead to Kay’s destruction.

There is a sense of insecurity in all three novels; the characters do not seem to know what they want to do, or where they fit in. The women drift around; they are part of both the common and the outside sphere, and their identity is not written in stone. Susan tells us about her own inability to fit in, and she is most aware of her shortcomings. Ronna C. Johnson describes it as: “Afflicted with non-thereness, Susan is disembodied, disengaged, dissociated, even from herself.” It is almost a feeling of gloom, as if she wanted to be able to fit in, but is simply not able to. As the process of leaving their old lives behind unfolds, the characters in Johnson’s novels go through different stages. However, they are all inexorably drawn to, or unable to avoid, taking the necessary steps in order to cross over to what can be seen as a marginal state in the outskirts of society. Even though the characters’ journeys are unique, thereby differing from one another, they are all going through a process which will, eventually, enable them to stand on their own two feet. An important aspect that should not be forgotten is that all three main female characters end up alone, for different reasons, but this common thread cannot be a coincidence.

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Sexual liberation and experiences – losing your virginity, rape, and the aspect of having multiple sexual partners

When the women left the traditional housewife mould they joined a new lifestyle that existed outside of marital bonds, and were therefore able to have more than one sexual partner. This new way of living could result in serious side effects, as complete sexual liberation is proven difficult when you cannot properly protect yourself. The 1950’s was a time when contraceptives were not easily obtainable, leaving the women without means of proper protection both from sexually transmitted diseases and from pregnancy in a time when abortion was illegal. In addition to insufficient protective measures, the lack of contraceptives also impeded the equality process, making it tougher for women to be fully independent. When comparing Johnson’s novels there are certain factors that seem to change from her earliest novel to her last.

Susan in Come and Join the Dance is a virgin at the beginning of the story, but she expresses her malcontent with graduating from college still retaining her virginity. She could have slept with her boyfriend, but she kept on putting it off. It is not until she intermingles with the outsiders of the story that she can definitely break away from the path her life was supposed to have taken (if she would have followed convention) and lose her virginity to a member of the outside group (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. [...] Her legs were cramped. She hadn’t thought it would take so long. [...] All at once, when she despaired of it ever being over, he cried out, almost as if he were in pain. Perhaps something had gone wrong. She felt him shuddering against her and he sounded as if he were crying. Not knowing what to do. She put her arms around him. He was terribly thin. [...] It was embarrassing. She had always imagined a rape, an overwhelming of herself, the victim, never that she should be left with a starved, spent child and the guilty sense of her own heaviness. “Are you all right?” she asked helplessly.

59 The pill was introduced in America in 1957 as a drug used in the treatment of gynecological disorders, but many women started using it for its contraceptive abilities. For more information see http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/pill/peopleevents/e_searle.html.
60 See Johnson, 2002, p 87.
Susan’s first sexual experience was not enjoyable as she was hoping for it to end as soon as possible, and the whole experience was rather embarrassing. She had always imagined the act as being closer to a rape, the man being the one “taking” her and controlling the event. She is instead left not knowing what to say or how to act. Susan is at this stage acting more independently than she even realises herself. She is the one initiating the whole thing, taking the necessary steps toward making him take her virginity, offering it to him, and she is later the one that has to comfort him. Later on near the end of the story she is the one that seduces Peter. Peter is ten years older than her and is also the lover of Susan’s best friend Kay. This time things turn out better:

But when his mouth was on her mouth there had been a rightness about it, a rightness when his body had entered hers . . . and then there had come a moment when she had felt herself becoming flooded with light, and she had floted up, up—to toward something she had almost reached. 62

Susan almost reaches orgasm this time, experiencing a feeling of renewed hope, but both men fail to bring her to orgasm. Ronna C. Johnson states in her article “And then she went” that “desirable and desirous men are not necessarily competent lovers....” 63

During 1950's America the women were often the ones who were blamed for sexual failure. 64 This theme can also be found in Johnson’s second novel, Bad Connections, when Molly describes her husband’s views on her sexual performance.

She was clumsy and stiff – not at all, she supposes, like the limber girls of the bars, with their yoga and tai chi classes, their expertise in the fifty erotic positions, their yin and their yang. Tonight he is very angry with her because her legs are too short. That is the reason they have been having such difficulties. 65

Molly’s husband considers all their sexual difficulties to be Molly’s fault; she is the one to be blamed, while he has never anything to do with it. Her legs are simply too short and that cannot be fixed. He replicates his behaviour when he calls her, after she has left him, to accuse her of giving him “the clap.” 66 It later turns out that he gave it to her, and when he

64 See Johnson, 2002, p 88.
66 Slang term referring to gonorrhea, see http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=return-of-the-clap.
manages to apologise, she takes it as a personal victory. Molly is the only character to get a sexually transmitted disease, even if her closest friend in the book tells her that she has had loads. Molly is also the only character to get raped. When she visits a friend in San Francisco, spends one evening alone in the house and has just gone to bed when a man breaks in.

She is doing what he wants. She is just lying there in silence, waiting, flat out. He can see that she is obedient, but he keeps warning her, senselessly, not to make a sound. “Don’t hurt me,” she says. “Don’t make a sound, don’t make a sound, don’t move.” Her legs are trembling because of his fear. What would he do if she were to make a sound? Would his hands close around her throat? Is there a knife hidden beneath his jacket? [...] She is lying just as he left her, legs still dangling down. Standing up, zipping himself, he moves back into the darkness of Tessa’s room, walking slowly across the rug, disappearing through the open window into the night. It takes her a while to realize that her belly is very cold and that her life will go on and on. On and on. 67

Molly is surprisingly unaffected by the incident, she does not even try to fight back, and her friend later tells her that she would have acted completely differently. There is a feeling of subordination, that she is only bending her will to accommodate the superior sex, but it could also tell us that Molly has not yet reached the point when she will see herself equal to men. Her passiveness is striking. She is scared because he is scared; she is lying there without moving, doing as he says. When he leaves, Molly remains in the same position; it is as if she does not care enough about what is going on in the world around her. She has created a distance from her own life and it takes her some time to realise that her body is still there, sullied, but that does not matter, because her life will continue. Susan imagined that losing her virginity would be something close to rape, and the surprising thing is that Molly reacts in a similar way to what Susan picture herself reacting, allowing the man to overpower the woman without questioning and letting him be the one that gets to make the calls regarding the woman’s body. Molly is in a way complying with this thought when she abstains from fighting back. She is scared that he will harm her, but she never found out if he would hurt her before it was too late. She is awfully calm about it, during and afterwards, as if she just does not care enough about what happens to her. She emits a feeling of distance from her own life.

I was twenty-six. I don’t think I’ve ever felt older. In three years I’d had fourteen lovers. The count may even have been higher. There were the serious ones who took months of your life and all the transitional ones in between when you were trying to recover. 68

Joanna lives a sexually liberated life; she cannot even recall exactly how many men she has slept with in the past three years. She has more serious relationships sometimes, but nothing seems to remain constant until she meets her future husband, Tom. In In the Night Café the reader gets to hear about the first abortion, although it is only mentioned briefly. Joanna, like Molly, is involved in a more serious relationship for a longer period of time, but because Come and Join the Dance only discusses a week in a life of a twenty year old, there is no possibility of knowing what will happen to Susan after she leaves to go to Paris. Bad Connections and In the Night Café offer a more thorough portrayal of two women’s struggle in 1960’s America (there are no dates specifically telling us when Bad Connections was supposed to take place, but it can only be assumed that it is set during the same time frame as In the Night Café). All three novels are set during the same time period in US history, and each offers different perspectives on similar matters, the difference being how old the characters are when they are depicted.

Beatnik themes and tendencies

Contrary to the men, the women often wrote alone, and not as a part of a bigger group. 69 However, there were a few groups, or movements, in which the women could both give and receive feedback. One such group was allegedly known as the San Francisco Renaissance. 70 Furthermore, the women did, in contrast to the men, edit and rewrite their texts, and they frequently used more traditional and less innovative narrative approaches. Having said this, it should also be stated that the women were all being influenced by the thoughts and ideas circulating within and around the movement at the time. 72 It has even been pointed out that

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68 Johnson, 1989, p 47.
69 See Johnson & Grace, 2002, p 17.
70 The San Francisco Renaissance is the name given to a movement that emerged in the San Francisco Bay Area after the Second World War, and this was one of the movements which later sprung the Beats. For more information see http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmID/5671.
71 See Knight, 1996, p 5.
72 See Johnson & Grace, 2002, p 16.
the work of female Beats, who emerged around the time of, or soon after the men, contain extra Beat references, which bring additional variation to the Beatnik tradition.  

Waldman declares that there was nothing underhand about the male treatment of the female literary figure and goes as far as to embellish the idea of the men as her mentors, absorbing their aesthetics as a benefit to her own creations. Waldman’s declaration juxtaposes with Carolyn Cassady’s main narrative praxis in Off the Road, which situates the female solely as a sexual commodity or outsider to the burgeoning creativity of the male Beats.

Anne Waldman makes it clear that she did not feel underappreciated by the men, and considered herself being treated as an equal. Carolyn Cassady on the other hand has a completely different standpoint; she feels underappreciated and her experience is that the men only view her as a sex object. It can therefore be claimed that the female Beats all had their own perception of the movement and how they were being treated by the men. Waldman’s perception seems to be overly enthusiastic and too positive to convey the women’s actual position. It would be safe to assume that the female Beats were situated somewhere in between these two extremes. It should be mentioned that Waldman was born in the 1940s and it is therefore likely that she did not shared the same social and historical experiences as the women born in the 1930s. It is also possible to assume that because Waldman became a part of the movement at a later stage, the gender codes could have been altered.

There was a generation gap within the Beatnik movement, as many of the women in the movement were a decade younger than the Beat men. For example, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac were both born in the 1920s, but many of the women in their friend circle were born in the 1930s, including Hettie Jones, Diana di Prima and Joyce Johnson. Some of this can be seen in Johnson’s novels, they are packed with Beatnik themes and references.

At thirty-five I was still a romantic, still waiting for an opportunity to go “on the road,” at least figuratively. [...] Still, I owe to Conrad a brief trip across the border into Mexico, as well as my

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75 Carolyn Cassady (1923-) is an American author, she was the wife of Jack Kerouac’s friend Neil Cassady, for more information see http://www.nndb.com/people/147/000028063/.
first night—believe it or not—in what he assured me was a prototypical motel, which was even, located off a freeway a few miles outside L.A.  

“’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.’”

Molly in *Bad Connections* gets to experience both San Francisco and Mexico, two places that were frequently visited by the male Beats. They also visit a “prototypical motel”, which is a clear allusion to narratives such as Kerouac’s *On the Road* (the novel’s title is even mentioned in the quote), where the main characters spend a lot of time travelling around America. There is a scene in *On the Road* in which Sal, the main character, takes Terry, a girl he picked up on a bus, to a motel. Terry later becomes his mistress, until he leaves her alone with her baby to continue his journey. When Tom in *In the Night Café* buys a motorcycle Joanna thinks:

I’d never wanted to be one with the road, but Tom said I was going to love it. “We have to have wheels,” he kept telling me, as if that was the only thing we lacked so far. “You’re looking at our freedom, kiddo.”

Tom has finally gotten wheels, which means that he can move again. Joanna is not at all as excited, but she still rides around on the motorcycle. Tom goes through a slow decline, and he eventually perishes with his motorcycle in a crash that can be read as suicide rather than death by accident. Many of the characters in Johnson’s novels are travelling “on the road”, but for most of them the journey is only a temporary fix that does not, in the end, help them lead a sustainable life.

Johnson’s narratives portray a similar journey but from a female perspective. In *Come and Join the Dance* the typical male Beatnik hero is represented by Peter. He is broke because he has spent all money on gasoline for his car. Peter’s car is a safe haven, a place where all the worries of everyday life simply vanish, leaving its travellers peaceful and joyful. It is not until they step out of the car that reality hits them, and all their needs and demands reappear. The car eventually breaks down, leaving Peter motionless and stripping him of his mobility.

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Ronna C. Johnson believes that Johnson is not going to let him have a new car; because he is not the one who is supposed to be able to continue forward, the journeying is left to Susan. She continues by stating that when Johnson uses the “on the road” narrative form, but giving a woman the leading role, she changes the narrative condition, altering the way the story works.\(^{80}\) Even if the women could go on the road with the men, they could never fill the role of the typical “buddy.”\(^{81}\) The women in Johnson’s novels are all travelling “on the road” but they are not doing it in the same grand way as the men. They are not rushing across the continent, seeing new things, meeting new people. Ronna C. Johnson instead claims they are going through a much more intimate, personal journey, leading toward a deeper understanding of themselves, and that the women are on a different road, leading towards a different destination. The male and the female paths keep intermingling with one another, and Johnson cleverly hinders the men from keeping the same pace as they used to, thereby forcing them to leave some space for the women.\(^{82}\) When putting a female character in the centre of attention, Johnson restrains the Beatnik narrative used by the men, and is instead creating a new space to fit her story.

The age gap existing within the Beatnik movement is portrayed in *Come and Join the Dance*, by means of the age difference between Peter and Susan who are born a decade apart. There are also several characters that could have been taken straight out of Beatnik movement and that are portrayed as fictional characters in Johnson’s novels. Many of the characters clearly do not fit in, and many of the characters are not firmly positioned in an ordinary role. Peter and Malcolm could be different versions of Kerouac, and Conrad could be based on Burroughs. Conrad is also an interesting character that could be seen as a link between the Beatnik movement and Johnson’s novels. He is a left-wing lawyer, and that would link him to the many male Beats who questioned the conservative values in society.\(^{83}\) Like Burroughs, Conrad has a university degree,\(^{84}\) but he does not seem to share Burroughs’, and many of the other male Beats, view on how rewarding it can be learning from life, and from the experiences one can get outside the formal education system.\(^{85}\) However, even if

\(^{81}\) See Johnson, 2002, p 89.
\(^{82}\) Ibid.
\(^{83}\) Cook, 1994, p 10.
\(^{84}\) See Watson, 1995, p 13.
\(^{85}\) See Watson, 1995, p 56 for an example: Burroughs and is approach to drug usage.
Johnson were inspired by the people she had met, it would be close to impossible to pin down every single character and say who they were in the real movement, as a biographical reading is difficult and often proven faulty. It should also be mentioned that all three novels are set in New York, the city where the Beats came into existence.

However, even if one can see some resemblance between the actual Beats and the characters in Johnson’s novels, it would be almost impossible to claim that Johnson bases her entire literary production on her own experiences or on her own life. Johnson has clearly drawn inspiration from her own life, and she has been influenced by the Beats’ thoughts and ideas, but the novels are to no extent biographical. All three novels would fit nicely in the Beatnik literary canon. They address to a great extent the same topics and the same ideas. They have the matching cultural settings, with the separation from the ideals of ordinary society running as a common thread through all of them. There are of course important dissimilarities, but most of them can be explained when the novels and their content are placed in the correct social time period. If there is such a thing as a female Beats, and it stands to reason that there is, then the Beat literary canon needs to acknowledge and invite the works of the other half of the movement. As Brenda Knight puts it:

> In many ways, women of the Beat were cut from the same cloth as the men: fearless, angry, high risk, too smart, restless, highly irregular. They took chances, made mistakes, made poetry, made love, made history.\(^86\)

**Complicated relationships, subjectivity and feminism**

When Molly in *Bad Connections* walks out on her husband, taking her son with her, she almost immediately finds herself drawn into a new relationship that follows similar patterns. Conrad, her former lover, is a radical lawyer who travels all across the US. He is the centre of attention, and is portrayed as very charming and intelligent. However, Molly seems to be constantly aware of the fact she is the passenger and not the driver; she is the one who takes care of him, but not the one leading the way.

> She rushes to the kitchen eager to nourish him. “Just something light,” he sighs, sinking down onto one of her rickety kitchen chairs, and ends up eating all of her leftovers... \(^87\)

\(^{86}\) Knight, 1996, p 3.
Conrad stops by sometimes, always in the evenings, and he is very reluctant to stay during the day. This is due to the fact that he is involved with two women at the same time, Molly and Roberta. At first Roberta is clueless of what is going on, but when Molly gets gonorrhoea Conrad is forced to tell her that he is involved with another woman. Conrad cannot chose between the two women, which makes Molly more and more annoyed. “How dare he ask if I was going to be in? Wasn’t I almost always in, there at his convenience? Didn’t he know just exactly where I was? But that was going to change, I thought wildly, that was going to change.”

Slowly, but steadily, Molly breaks free from Conrad. She realises that she cannot stay up waiting for the phone to ring. Molly gets an invite from a friend to go to her place for Thanksgiving dinner. There are only women invited, and she is having a great time, but she feels as if though she needs to get home early to be there in case Conrad might come running; he never does come, however. Many of the women have to make similar sacrifices in order to make their relationships work.

“I was learning to be very good at waiting. Great at it, in fact. It was like riding on the buddy seat one of my many accomplishments. Waiting things out. That was how I was going to save you.”

Joanna is waiting around, hoping that things will eventually sort themselves out that Tom will be able to get out of his destructive spiral. Tom is going through a tough divorce; he left his children and wife behind in Florida and went to New York. He misses his son, but when he spontaneously shows up in Florida to see them, he only makes things worse. Tom wants Joanna to ride on the motorcycle with him; she learns to appreciate it, but she can never be fully content. Joanna is the primary bread-winner, providing for Tom and herself; she holds down a nine-to-five job -- something which she so adamantly was trying to resist -- and she realises that she does not find it to be that terrible. After Tom’s death she leaves for Paris, gets pregnant, and goes back to America to try to live with the father/her new husband Mikel. They later realise that the relationship is not functioning properly, and they separate. One very important thing that comes out of Joanna’s time in Paris is that she finds her new profession, photography, which combines her artistic inclination with a way to earn money. It would be possible to claim that Joanna is the character that manages to unite the

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artistic with the ordinary, thereby creating a hybrid between the mainstream and the periphery. Furthermore, this combination could be seen as the last step in the progression, making the two spheres meet and create a sustainable way of life.

Molly expresses a lot of thoughts in the narrative, explaining how she imagines the relation between the sexes and the position of women.

There is such a thin line or women between adventure and misadventure. It is still hard for us to be heroes in the active, external sense of, say, climbing mountains, hopping freights. We tend to be heroes of our own imaginations. I am as much idiot as heroine, perhaps more former than the latter – an educated dope, as my mother would say, having earned her right to pass judgement by her investing in my tuition. Nonetheless, I like to remember how invincible I felt as I left my own life.\(^{90}\)

Molly is aware of how difficult it is for a woman to be active, to participate in activities seen as male, but if one cannot be the hero to other people, one can be one’s own hero. Molly’s mother was the one who made sure that her daughter obtained a degree, enabling her to provide for herself, an important step in reaching personal independence. Johnson’s novels are packed with feminism, however intentional or unintentional it may be. It stands to reason that \textit{Bad Connections} is the novel which has the most outspoken feminist agenda. There are passages in which the narrative explicitly mentions feminism and the character’s thoughts and ideas.

Feminists have only brought into the open a view of men that women have shared secretly all along. The truth is that we expect them to be frail creatures, rather than the reverse. And we excuse behavior in our men we would never permit ourselves or pardon in others of our kind. \textit{That} is our peculiar double standard. We think of it as love.\(^{91}\)

Since \textit{Bad Connections} was published after the second wave, it is safe to claim that it is feminist tendencies are very much intended from Johnson’s side. Molly sees feminism as a secret that has finally been brought into the open. It is the same view that women have had for years on the double standards that run far back into history. The way the women have justified this double standard is by imagining it being love, and when categorised as love, bad behaviour on men’s part is suddenly acceptable. Women expect men to be frail creatures that they will have to look after because they are the only ones that are capable enough to

\(^{90}\) Johnson, 1978, p 39. \\
do it. However, when Molly expresses this thought in the beginning of the novel, she has yet to embark on her long journey that will eventually lead to her realising that she does not need to take care of a man, she only has to take care of herself.

If *Bad Connections* is a feminist novel, then *In the Night Café* is the story of Joanna’s life being retold from a future point in time. The narrator is simply retelling Joanna’s story, trying to make us understand what she has gone through, leading up to her leaving all men except her son behind. *In the Night Café* is a novel with a much more subtle feminist message; it is not right there in the reader’s face, and it is not supposed to be. Joanna decides to part from men after her husband dies and she later finds herself in a relationship with a man she does not love. It should be made clear that Joanna has already crossed the line and joined “the others” before the reader makes her acquaintance and she thereby proves that she can fend for herself. Nevertheless, it is not before the story progresses that she is finally able to take the final step toward living the life of a single mother. This, however, is more of a general progression rather than a conscious decision. The sense of moving slowly toward a future that the characters were not originally aware of is a theme that runs throughout the novels.

When they make that one decision that puts them outside of the ideals of the normative society they also put themselves in a position that seems to end with them living on their own. Molly and Joanna are both left living as single mothers with their sons. Joanna and Tom’s and Molly and Malcolm’s relationships are the closest any of the characters come to obtaining an equal relationship. However, there are a few things that make the relationships open to scrutiny and when applying feminism their gender roles might be seen as too conforming. Molly considers the possibility of marrying Malcolm, but she never thinks of bringing it up herself. In Joanna and Tom’s case, Joanna is the one that is spending time in the kitchen cooking, and Tom is the one experiencing violent emotions. Violence can be regarded as something that is most often associated with masculinity and Tom does at one point beat up the housing inspector out of sheer frustration. In *Come and Join the Dance* the reader never gets the chance to find out what happens to Susan, but when scrutinising her act of making sure that she loses her virginity, she is later speaks to Anthony saying:

“I’m not your fault!” “Thanks!” “It has nothing to do with you. It was an experiment.” She had an astonished moment of triumph – she had never been more honest with anyone. “It was an experiment,” she repeated, “that’s all.” Everything in the kitchen was rattling. He seemed to be trying to pull the
refrigerator down. Suddenly the ice tray came loose in Antony’s hands. He turned slowly and confronted Susan holding it. There was blood running down his fingers – his eyes accused her.\textsuperscript{92}

It was only an experiment. It had nothing to do with him; it was not his fault. When Susan tells him this he cannot handle it at all, he feels emasculated, and Susan’s attempt at comforting him turns out to be one of the most independent things she has ever done. Susan revokes the gender roles, claiming a new role for herself. What Susan does is most likely unconscious on her part, but she clearly crosses a gender boundary. Her progression is fast and this is how Peter describes her in the beginning of the novel:

“You know, Susan, I’ve never heard you say anything before. You come to my parties with Kay, you sit on the sofa, you listen to someone very dutifully, and every now and then you tell a story or a little joke – and that’s all.” She laughed painfully. His description was accurate.\textsuperscript{93}

Susan realises that his description is accurate, but it painful for her to accept it as true. She is moving away from her earlier self, and looking back embarrasses her. What makes \textit{Come and Join the Dance} a protofeminist novel is that Susan is not aware of the fact that she is expressing feminist behaviour. Susan is not aware that she is taking the upper hand; she is only following her instincts but without being able to label her actions. The novel was published before the late ‘60s feminist movement, which could also help suggest that the novel is pointing toward what is to come, not what has already happened, whilst Johnson’s later novels show a clear development that spans across more time.

Many of the real life women who joined the bohemia tried to find a place where they could be themselves, but they did not also try and re-codify the gender codes.\textsuperscript{94} This subsequently led to that the women ended up in the same inferior position that they had recently removed themselves from. Numerous female Beats wrote feminist literature that helped spark the feminist movement.\textsuperscript{95} However, it would be safe to say that they were not trying to express a feminist agenda, but instead trying to explain what they were going through. Susan is not hinting toward a feminist message as Molly does; she is only expressing herself without labelling it. Her independence has been offered to her due to recent changes in society that led to enabling her to go to college, to move out of her parents’ home, and to

\textsuperscript{92} Glassman, 1962, p 93-94.
\textsuperscript{93} Glassman, 1962, p 20.
\textsuperscript{94} See Johnson & Grace, 2002, p 8.
\textsuperscript{95} See Johnson & Grace, 2002, p 7.
experience living by herself. Susan makes her own decisions and is paving the way for the feminist movement, but she cannot be said to be a feminist; she is rather portraying feminist ideals. In comparison with Johnson’s later novels, *Come and Join the Dance* is a good example of a protofeminist novel, while *Bad Connections* and *In the Night Café* can be labelled as feminist literature. It should nonetheless not be forgotten that feminism is only one of many themes running through the novels.

They (the women) were neither fundamentally countercultural not advocates of the mainstream. Instead, they attempted to exist as a sort of performative pendulum; fluctuating between these two poles as a mode of remaining advocates of an open, fluid gender. 96

Johnson’s novels are not to be put in one corner. They are instead to be seen as narratives discussing both parts including the in-between. Gender is not a fixed form; it cannot be defined in simple terms, if it can even be defined, and Johnson’s characters are not hindered by ordinary convention. The novels all show feminist tendencies, and when reading them it would be really difficult not to notice how the characters are trapped in their gender roles, but still manage to break free. However, because they all leave the men behind, they all show that they find it difficult living in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex. It seems hard to believe that these instances are just exceptions, but that would conclusively mean that Johnson is trying to send out a message. When Susan repositions herself to claim the male role, she also claims her own subjectivity. 97 It is almost as if the characters remove themselves too far away, and become so self-sufficient that they do not longer need a man. It could also be that the women move too rapidly thereby preventing the men from keeping up. The women overtake the male role so quickly that they can no longer operate within the mode of a conventional relationship. Before the code has been rewritten no new relationships can function. The men are being hindered not only by the cleverly written narrative, but also by the changes in society.

97 See Johnson, 2002, p 86.
Conclusion

Joyce Johnson’s novels largely address the same themes, but the narratives are separated by time. There is a clear progression from the first to the last novel, and as they were published nearly four decades apart that might not come as much of a surprise. The main difference between the novels I would claim to be the introduction of feminism as an actual concept. When protofeminism became feminism it was possible to write novels that had an apparent feminist agenda, and I would claim that Bad Connections is a novel with such a message.

Molly can discuss feminism and give her own view on the concept, something which Susan would never be able to do because she is not aware that there is such a concept to be discussed. Susan is only acting from her own personal outlook and is not backing it up using theory to support her ideas. The feminism is sometimes so striking in Bad Connections that it would be almost impossible for an alert reader to miss it, however it would be much harder to find it in In the Night Café. Johnson’s later novel, I feel, is more the story of a woman’s fate rather than an attempt to convey feminist ideals. Come and Join the Dance could easily be read as a novel that incorporates a lot of feminism by a modern reader living in the twenty-first-century, but they are only capable of doing so because the term has been coined.

There are several traits in the novels that can only be explained by looking at when in time the novel are supposed to be set. What started with the signing of the peace treaty after the Second World War was followed by the restructuring of a society that was divided according to gender. Women started to break free from the role that had been moulded for them; they accessed higher education, and they started seeking employment. The Beats would not have been able to exist if it were not for the changes that occurred in society, changes that they were trying to speed up. In trying to remove themselves from the ideals that they felt hindered by, the women repositioned themselves attempting to create a new identity. This removal has been addressed in more detail in previous chapters, however it is important to remember that the women were only trying to escape and not to rewrite the gender code. They were thereby left facing the same gendered ideals that they had just removed themselves from, thus, even if they had more sexual and financial freedom, they were still not the men’s equals. Johnson portrays her characters as able to act, but at first they are all
hindered by the men and the social settings they find themselves surrounded by, and they will have to find their own route toward something which is only theirs. They will have to go on finding their own path before they can be free from the male influence. Johnson’s narratives have been cleverly designed to puncture the male journey, thereby creating some space for the female traveller. The female journey on the road is much more introvert and personal. It is not about moving across a continent, it is about finding one’s own path to avoid social subordination. The women are experiencing something more intimate, something that is truly theirs.

Even if the novels are set in a different decade, that does not mean that time has surpassed them, they are still very much relevant to a contemporary reader. The Beatnik culture might be a cultural phenomenon of the past but the novels are yet firmly positioned in the present. Johnson represents a sense of duplicity. She is, I claim, a part of the Beatnik movement, but she is also a writer that addressed different themes, such as feminism. Just as the Beatnik movement was very diverse, so were the works of the female Beats and Johnson is not an exception. She has one foot in the Beatnik movement, but she is also involved in ordinary society, and that is something which shines through in her novels. The characters are part of the working world, they are earning their own money, but that does not mean that they will not marry. Joanna marries, Molly has been married, and Susan has a fairly typical middle-class boyfriend. The characters remove themselves from the ideals of society at the time, but they still linger in the sphere they have left behind. Tom’s brother and his wife in In the Night Café represent a typical middleclass family and whenever they visit them, they remember what they have moved away from. They can also never truly escape the scorn that representatives of normative society reveal when they come in contact with one another. The women in Johnson’s novels are becoming increasingly independent and when they end up living with no men at all they prove that they can be fully self sufficient. They can take care of themselves. Sexual liberation is part of it, and it is represented in the novels, both in positive and in negative terms. Johnson contests that a less fulfilling sexual experience is to be blamed on the woman, leaving the man with no responsibility whatsoever. Johnson shows the sexual act from a female perspective, and by doing so, she demonstrates that man is not a without blame, and that a satisfying sexual experience is something which can only be obtained for parts if the responsibility is shared. When the
women in the novels left the men, they chose not to be involved. I believe that the characters left the men in order to portray how difficult it is living in an unequal relationship. The main female characters went through an inner development that was too rapid for the men to keep up with or comprehend what they were going through. Equality cannot be found that quickly. The Beatnik movement criticised the society and the educational environment from an outside position. Johnson’s characters present us with a similar view and position by their inability to fit in and their actions. They are trying to leave, just as the men did, the ideals of normative society, and they are trying to change what they perceive to be faulty. The female Beats cannot express their thoughts freely, and they will have to reposition themselves in order to do so. The female Beats have not received much attention from the academic world, but they played an important part in the Beatnik movement, and I believe that their writing really deserves full recognition. They should no longer be seen as someone’s wife or girlfriend. Instead they should be seen as the writers they were.

Johnson’s three novels represent very well the terms on which women lived during the 1950s and ‘60s. They are witty, full of character, and they give the reader a firsthand insight into problems faced in a relationship. They are the stories of three women, three lives, and one city. They combine the ordinary with the new conditions, picturing three women who are all on their own personal journeys toward finding who they really are meant to be. Johnson gives the women the voice they were lacking.
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The American Museum of Beat Art,


Pictures on front cover:


Pictures in the appendix


Appendix - Other female Beat writers

Hettie Jones (née Cohen) was born in Newark in 1934, and grew up as the daughter of a Jewish couple living on Long Island. Hettie felt from an early age that she was different from her parents, and she knew that she had to leave in order to become herself. After she graduated from college, she moved to New York City, and it was there she later met her future husband, LeRoi Jones 98 (or Amiri Baraka, as he later started calling himself), a young black poet. 99 Hettie Jones’ family members were “appalled” 100 when their daughter married LeRoi, thus entering an interracial marriage. Even if the Greenwich Village was an accepting environment, there were no more than a few interracial couples. Hettie and LeRoi Jones played an important role within the Beatnik movement; they founded a small newspaper (Yugen), and hosted informal salons which served as a meeting point for the Beats. When the couple split during the 1960’s, Hettie continued her literary and activist life, whilst raising two daughters. Her memoir How I Became Hettie Jones was published in 1990. 101

WOMEN IN BLACK

Patterns in the dust of different kinds of shoe soles black on black we sway like grain, like the woman besides me, the scar of the burning she escaped

100 Watson, 1995, p 267.
When she turns to me
smiling, the scar is a path, slick
in the gathering dark Half the world
is ours to take.¹⁰²

Joanne Kyger (1934-) published her first poem in the news magazine of Naples elementary school when she was only five years old.¹⁰³ Later in life she became associated with San Francisco Renaissance, she also studied psychology and literature at University of California, Santa Barbara. Kyger moved to San Francisco in 1957, and she was for some time married to the poet Gary Snyder¹⁰⁴.¹⁰⁵ She is “Influenced by her study of Zen Buddhism as well as the Black Mountain School and San Francisco poets, Kyger’s work is mindful of daily events and the northern California landscape; her poems frequently use form and shape as organic outgrowths of their subject matter.”¹⁰⁶ She was like many of the Beats influenced by Buddhism, a philosophy that suited them as it rejected 1950s materialism.¹⁰⁷

what I wanted to say

was in the broad

sweeping

from of being there

I am walking up the path

¹⁰² http://forward.com/articles/10979/beat-this-/
¹⁰³ Knight, 1996, p 197.
¹⁰⁴ Gary Snyder (1930-) is an American poet and novelist, for more information see http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/167.
¹⁰⁷ See Knight, 1996, p 199.
I come home and wash my hair

I am bereft

I dissolve quickly

I am everybody\textsuperscript{108}

\textbf{Diane di Prima} (1934–) was raised in Brooklyn and started writing poetry when she was only seven years old. di Prima became friends with the “new bohemians” before the Beatnik movement became known, and in 1953 “she started what was to be a very influential relationship with Ezra Pound”\textsuperscript{109}. Diane di Prima had an appropriate number of Beatnik qualities and she has been referred to as the “archetypal Beat woman”\textsuperscript{110}.

...absolute independence, wide sexual experiences from mid-teens on, familiarity with drugs, the Village jazz, and bohemian style. And she resolutely pursued literature as her vocation; after flirting with the idea to becoming a theoretical physicist, she decided at the age of fourteen that she would live the life of a poet.\textsuperscript{111}

di Prima met Ginsberg and Kerouac in 1957 in New York. She helped publish Hettie and LeRoi Jones’ newspaper, and she was also LeRoi’s lover, and gave birth to his daughter.\textsuperscript{112} Diane di Prima was a woman “on the move”, so to speak, and during the latter half of the 60’s she travelled across America in a Volkswagen bus, with her children, giving poetry readings. She has spent time teaching poetry and writing, and she helped found the New College of California in San Francisco in 1980. It is not surprising that di Prima has been given a place beside the Beat men.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{108} As quoted by Knight, 1996, p 202.
\textsuperscript{109} Knight, 1996, 2000, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{110} Watson, 1995, p 270.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{112} Knight, 1996, 2000, p 125 and Watson, 1995, p 270.
\textsuperscript{113} Knight, 1996, 2000, p 126-128.
THE COLORS OF BRICK

For Michael Mc Clure

what I used to like about poems:

They dont up & go

like theatre.

my mistake.

the rains are heavy & the sun
doesnt preserve the fruit, either.

what I used to like about poems: the words

staying still.

wine peaches that they dont grow anymore

at least not in the east

bursting & slightly rotten taste

best.

if the line carries over, does that make

us see?

the earth is slippery w/rot, the words

slide out of place;

to be able to see it; to be able
to say it

is nothing; but the process

the bloody process

Anne Waldman (1945- ) arrived on the Beatnik scene quiet late, but she still managed to make a significant impression. She grew up with two artistic parents in New York’s Greenwich Village, and that was something which profoundly shaped her both as a poet and as a woman. Waldman became part of the second generation Beat, she was influenced by jazz, and her interest in Buddhism created a link to the older Beats.\footnote{See Knight, 1996, p 287-288.}

She was also the co-founder of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. Waldman has written more than 42 books, and some of her work influenced the women’s movement.\footnote{See http://www.poetspath.com/waldman.html and Knight, 1996, p 288.} Waldman poetic goal has been understood as “She delves deeply into the masculine soul and its sources of energy. Her goal: to speak against, about, around and through the all-pervasive forces of Western patriarchy and its many manifestations.”\footnote{http://www.poetspath.com/waldman.html.}

Excerpt from “Fast speaking woman”

I’m the woman stirring the soup pot

The woman who makes circles

with her arm

stirring, singing this song about the

Woman-Who-Does-Things

many actions complete themselves

& repeat

she does this
I’m the woman who does these things

many actions carry words

I say them, woman-who-signifies

I light the fire

I sit like a Buddha

I feed the animals outside the door

I blow out the lamp\textsuperscript{118}

If anyone would be interested in watching Waldman reading one of her poems, follow this link: \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bc_kY6zd6E0&feature=related}

\textsuperscript{118} As quoted by Knight, 1996, p 291-292.