

Chelsea Stripe  
Ph.D. Candidate  
American Studies Program  
Purdue University  
127 Heavilon Hall  
West Lafayette, IN 47907  
419-203-6370  
cstripe@purdue.edu

### Columbia University Library Research Award: A Report on My Findings

Over the summer of 2013, in Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript archives, I conducted dissertation research made possible through funding by the Columbia University Library Research Award. This archival research focused on collections relating to the Beat Generation in order to advance my dissertation, "Roads of Rebellion: Cultural Contributions by Women of the Beat Generation." I sought not only primary documents pertaining to the subjects of my dissertation—the female Beats, but also I positioned the archives themselves as a cultural site, determining how their organization might shape or reflect contemporary understandings of the women of the Beat Generation. While in the archives, then, my agenda was twofold: First, I would investigate collections belonging to women of the Beat Generation for a greater understanding of biographical and historical context and for primary source material. Then, I would look for the presence or absence of female Beats within collections belonging to their male Beat counterparts for a picture of how the archives may be replicated in or modeled after current scholarship, where attention to women of the Beat Generation often depends on a relationship to certain men.

According to the first part of this agenda, I consulted the Hettie Jones Papers and Joanne Kyger Papers, as both women are primary figures in my current project. Of significance, among the Hettie Jones Papers, 1895-2009, I found evidence of Jones's work on the little magazine *Yūgen*, manuscripts of her own poetry, letters, and speeches in which she reflects on her time as a Beat. The Joanne Kyger Papers contain letters, manuscripts of her poetry, postcards, and miscellaneous art. Ultimately, these discoveries will figure into my dissertation as records of the experiences both women had during the 1950s and 1960s.

In addition to those collections, I also investigated a number of collections belonging to men who associated with the Beat Generation. While collections such as the Philip Whalen papers did not contain documents directly pertinent to my research, several others did contain materials that will be useful to my dissertation and to future work on the female Beats. I succeeded in finding materials related to the women of the Beat Generation housed in these collections, in the form of writing by women of the Beat Generation and writing about women of the Beat Generation. I have outlined these findings below:

- Peter Orlovsky Papers, 1954-1971: Contained in these papers is a letter written by Joyce Johnson, one of my primary dissertation subjects, describing events that she later relates in her memoir *Minor Characters*. In addition, a letter from Orlovsky to Janine Pommy Vega reflects his profeminist ideas about the word "chick." These findings exemplify gender dynamics between male and female Beats.

- Herbert E. Huncke Papers, 1946-1973: Huncke's collection included several letters to female Beats and Beat associates. Of particular interest, letters to Elise Cowen and correspondence reflecting on her death provide detail about a figure and situation that lacks published information. Although Cowen is not one of my dissertation subjects, her life and death often has been used as a symbol of the difficulties faced by female Beats.
- Allen Ginsberg Papers, 1943-1991: This large collection holds letters from Joan Vollmer, one of my primary dissertation subjects. Little has been written about Vollmer outside of her relationship to Burroughs. Her writing to Ginsberg helps situate her as a Beat subject, rather than merely a companion to Burroughs. Ginsberg's papers also contained letters from Carolyn Cassady and Edie Parker, which further establish the women as part of the Beat circle and can indicate the gender dynamics of the group.
- Gregory Corso Papers, 1949-1996: Like the others, Corso's papers contained letters with female Beat associates. Of interest to my research on Beat little magazines, Corso's collection also included letters pertaining to the little magazine *El Corno Emplumado*.

In addition to the papers of specific figures, I also investigated more general collections. The Beat Poets and Poetry Papers comprised little of use to my work on the women of the Beat Generation. However, the Kulcher Foundation Records—a little magazine featuring some of the Beats and others of the larger artistic community—turned up some interesting findings: First, *Kulcher* serves as an important record of an avant-garde little magazine under female editorship. Moreover, the collection also revealed that Hettie Jones edited *Poems Now*, an anthology of contemporary poetry and the first book published by Kulcher Press. The Kulcher Foundation Records also included some of Jones's editorial work, as well. Ultimately, these discoveries contribute to understandings of women's roles in publishing the work of the era's avant-garde.

In the end, these findings will work their way as primary sources into my dissertation and will also help confirm my understanding of the Beat Generation in cultural memory and in scholarship. Specifically, just as female Beats often earn attention only insofar as they were involved with particular male Beats, the preservation of their primary documents within the collections of men reinforces that dynamic. At the same time, however, the archives as a cultural site suggest that recorded history and lived history may be at odds: The men and women of the Beat Generation worked closely together and women served as more than secondary figures in the Beat circle. Primarily, gender dynamics among the Beats remains a significant aspect to understanding the movement, further impetus for archival research such as mine.