

## Jane Bowles as Proto-Beat:

### *Two Serious Ladies on the Cusp of Two (or More) Movements*

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The temporal and aesthetic boundaries of any artistic movement are by definition porous and full of overlaps. Such is the case with the Beat writers who demarcate an important cusp between Modern and post-Modern sensibilities. Nestled, or better yet stationed, at an early stage of this crossover is the couple, Jane and Paul Bowles, ex-patriate artists, known as much for their bohemian lives in the United States, Europe, and Morocco, as for their work.

Paul Bowles' held to the existential belief that individuality is "a flimsy myth and the universe [...] bleakly indifferent to the human plight" (Gentile 47). Jane Bowles' work approached life's quandries from the inside out: the individual and her plight facing society's precariousness, oblivious to its possible indifference. Like many first generation Beat writers, Jane Bowles was born right after World War One and grew up in a world influenced by the horrors and defeats of the Great War. She "exemplified the characteristic stylistic liminality of early Beat writing, even as [her] work ultimately diverged from it" (Grace and Johnson 8).

And indeed, a number of elements reflect the Bowleses convergence with the Beat 'gestalt', but simultaneously numerous components in Jane's writing and life reveal significant differences with it as well. One: as a couple the Bowleses were known to be devoted to one another, thoroughly involved in each other's aesthetic and intellectual creativity, who nevertheless led separate sexual lives. Their bi-sexuality, and their fluid sexual mores, linked them both to certain Modernists, like the Bloomsbury group most famously, and to many of the Beats for whom bisexuality was a *cri de guerre* in the battle against conservative conformity. Paul Bowles dealt with homosexuality in only one of his stories, "Pages from Cold Point," whereas Jane chose to highlight the sexual and emotional passion women can feel for one another in a number of her works.

Two: Paul Bowles is the more famous of the two writers. That this as a result of patriarchal privilege seems beyond doubt. The great success of his novel *The Sheltering Sky* when it was published in 1949, casting as it did the existential challenges of white Americans in exotic, developing (Third) world settings, highlights the kinds of texts the world was willing to celebrate when penned by a man, versus a kind of knee-jerk rejection to a similar text of debauchery and lives lived at the extreme when authored by a woman. The irony, not lost upon Jane and Paul and their friends, is stressed in the ways in which *The Sheltering Sky's* Kit and Port resemble Paul and Jane. Paul remodeled their lives into narrative and was applauded. Jane put down on paper some of the more peculiar aspects of their lives and most critics and readers were perturbed.

According to James Kraft, Jane Bowles is "simply, stylistically and thematically too eccentric to appeal to a larger public. She obviously relishes taking her special viewpoint and expressing it in an oddity of style" (273). Maybe, though many literary movements are rife with eccentric writing by men. And is not 'oddity' an odd way to describe experimental fiction? I would argue that it is not Jane Bowles' original style that is off-putting and 'odd,' but rather the centrality of female sexual and spiritual subjectivity in her work. It is no accident that these existential themes are linked in her work since both reach down into the bowels of a human being and express in a way that resists mediation and mitigation, an individual's most profound relationship with her/himself. Appearing in Jane Bowles' work before the publication of the canonical Beat writers, one can read the appearance of the spiritual and the body sexual as a shepherding in of these concerns which in later years would become central and dear to many of the Beat writers.

Three: the irony of Paul's success was compounded by the fact that Paul worked closely with Jane on the editing of her 1943 novel, *Two Serious Ladies*. This process inspired his appetite for prose composition. Until then he wrote poetry and music. And whereas *Two Serious Ladies* was published to mixed reviews, more perplexed than laudatory, *The Sheltering Sky* was instantly hailed as a masterpiece by many. In a *New York Times* review Tennessee Williams wrote:

*The Sheltering Sky* is an allegory of the spiritual adventure of the fully conscious person into modern experience... I suspect that a good many people will read this book and be enthralled by it without once suspecting that it contains a mirror of what is most terrifying and cryptic within the Sahara of moral nihilism, into which the race of man now seems to be wandering blindly. (December 4, 1949)

Paul was henceforth seen as one of the important post-World War Two American writers. He went on to write many more books, stories, essays, and much music.

Four: Jane Bowles never wrote another book after *Two Serious Ladies*. She wrote a play, *The Summer House*, in 1947, and had a number of short stories published over the next decade. It was not a simple case of being eclipsed by her now famous writer husband, or the result of a noxious rivalry between them. By all accounts Jane and Paul remained emotionally, intellectually and artistically supportive and essential to each other until she died from the lingering effects of stroke in a convent hospital in Malaga, Spain in 1973. Jane's lack of output after her novel's poor reception was a result of many factors, not least of which was her fear of being further misunderstood, heightened as it was over the passing years by a sense of alienation not only from the literary world and not only from North Africa, but from herself, uprooted as she felt herself to be living so far away from home. Isolated in Morocco, living through a foreign filter, Jane Bowles was practically silenced by displacement, which is of course contrary to the lore of the ex-pat living in a creative rush on distant shores. Bowles felt somewhat untethered by living abroad in such an alien culture, one that she once described as her prison. For Bowles residing inside what Foucault called a heterotopia led to paralysis, exposed her profound alienation from herself.

Five: though on more than on occasion Paul Bowles protested that neither he nor Jane was part of the Beat generation of writers, this did not stop the Beats from thinking otherwise. As Norman Mailer said: "Paul Bowles opened the world of Hip. He let in the murder, the drugs, the incest, the death of the Square... the call of the orgy, the end of civilization" (Dillon 139). Burroughs pilgrimaged to Tangier in 1954. Ginsberg and Kerouac followed in 1957. Together they helped type and arrange the scattered pages of *Naked Lunch* into publishable order. In Paul they saw a literary paterfamilias, a man who lived on the road as it were, who lived his values. The Beats were drawn to the "spirit of outlaw literati that [the Bowleses] created" in "Tangier [...] a place where no rules applied" (Knight, 20). Paul seemed to like these boisterous Americans well enough for them to become good friends. Jane, on the other hand, found them unbearable. Millicent Dillon, Jane Bowles' biographer, recounts an anecdote whereby Ginsberg called the house to speak to Paul. When Jane told him Paul was not home, Ginsberg told her he was a 'bop poet' and asked her if she believed in God. She told him she would not discuss such a subject on the phone and hung up (347).

Which makes one inclined to accept Paul's protest that he and Jane were not Beats. Jane did not even like the few that she knew. Many critics, among them Ann Charters, do not include the Bowleses work in the Beat oeuvre. Yet Jane's writing can be identified as being on the cusp of two or more movements, with her formal Modernist concerns, and the kinds of form-blasting eccentricities that the Beats lived for and exemplified – both in their lives and literature.

## **Seriousness and Rebellion**

One can argue that unintentionally, Jane Bowles' work became a model from which later Beat-identified women writers could draw inspiration, full as it was with counter-culture rebelliousness, bohemian female protagonists, freedom-seeking journeys, and emotional and sexual affectations. Bowles' women are nonconformist, peripatetic, bisexual, smashers of convention, willing and eager to strip themselves of bourgeois luxuries and assumptions, keen to live off the grid as 'bums'. They drink carelessly, move casually into unapologetic and transgressive hetero- and bi-sexual partnering, and suffer the highs and lows of their maverick choices, as would male characters. Celebrating the insight that they are already lost, they seek freedom and meaning in nomadism and exotic experiences, both in the U.S. and abroad. They drift in and out of love and geographical locations, anchored by the idea that unconventional experience foments liberating self-realization, or as a number of her characters like to call it: salvation.

Which links her in yet another significant way to some of the Beats, particularly Kerouac. Despite his numerous television and radio appearances and his literary readings in commercial venues, when Kerouac protested the commodification of the Beat spirit, he stressed the spiritual dimension of the hobo existence. For Kerouac a Beat was "one who discovers joy ('beatific') through suffering ('beat') (Schwartz 118). Like Bowles, the physical and internal journey involves going out of one's self, propelling the body into various locales and modes, in order to touch the soul. Both Kerouac's and Bowles' figures are modern day mendicants holding their bowl-shaped hearts in their hands as they wait for experience to refine their spirits and wash away a sense of sin. Works by Ginsburg and Corso, and particularly by Snyder, also are concerned with the soul's spiritual journey. Sex, drugs, alcohol, bee-bop and later folk music and an



immersion in nature, are all part of the stimulants that invite the barriers of consciousness to become porous. And when this occurs, spiritual insight is gleaned.

Jane Bowles, in her novel, *Two Serious Ladies*, takes seriously this business of spiritual stretching, of creating characters whose "active inner [lives]" (1) busy themselves with "mental struggles – generally of a religious nature" (4). Written from 1938-1943, and published when the men of the future Beat generation attended and cut classes at Columbia University, her novel details the physical, psychological and spiritual journeys of two women, friends of the same generation, New Yorkers of means, who set out to define freedom and sexual self-expression for themselves.

There is an odd mixture of tone and plot in this book. On the one hand, as the title immediately indicates, the intention here is serious – as a goal of the author and as the trajectory of the characters' lives. On the other, a sense of the absurd is also evident. In a 1999 interview Paul Bowles observed how young authors are not interested in producing serious work. He quoted Susan Sontag to endorse this view: "'Seriousness has less prestige now'" (Plimpton, 192). But back in the 1940s Jane Bowles took her seriousness, and her absurdity, seriously.

In "Camp Cataract", a short story published in 1949, there are similar themes of women breaking out of domestic molds, of women eyeing the open road, of seeking meaning and transcendence in the company of other women. Harriet, a middle aged woman who has escaped her family by spending a recuperative summer in a camp in the woods hours from the city, proclaims quite disingenuously:

I despise anything that smacks of a bohemian dash for freedom; I know that this has nothing to do with the more serious things in life.... I'm sure there are hundreds of serious people who kick over their traces and jump into the gutter; but I'm too shallow for anything like that. (362)

In a prolonged monologue that follows, in which one is certainly invited to note that the lady doth protest too much, Harriet says: "There is something intensively repulsive to me about unmarried women setting out on their own" (363). Yet she concludes this speech to the camp's cook, with whom she is developing a cozy female friendship, by outlining her strategy: "Escape is unladylike, habit isn't" (363). She intends to make a habit of coming to Camp Cataract in the summer, a giant step away from the city, and "then from there at some later date," she says, "I can start making my sallies into the world almost unnoticed" (363).

Unlike the two protagonists of *Two Serious Ladies*, Harriet is not serious enough to plow forward in the world and seize experience. She is timid, she is cowed by convention, and seeks subterfuge and artifice to realize her intentions. And for all that, though she claims she is not forthright – as one who sallies forth without self-consciousness – she is in fact quite serious in her determination to put miles between herself and the sisters in the city who cloister her need for independence.

## Daring-Do

A disconnect between characters and their words, between acts and feelings, invites a parodic reading in this particular story, as well as in *Two Serious Ladies* and in Bowles' other works. Appetite is expressed without passion, almost without the body. It is cerebral. And therefore it is in the *language* of the female body that Bowles is most clearly seen as *not* being a Beat. She shows herself as a woman of an earlier generation who alludes to the body and its pleasures, who uses metaphor to render orgasm, whose women live together as 'spinsters' or unmarried women, Boston marriages as they were once called. Devoted passionately to one another, yet they never lay a hand on one another, at least not openly in the writing. Sex is inferred from the jealousy, the possessiveness, from a sense of the irrational. This writing is totally unlike the blow by blow descriptions of sexual encounters and orgies one can read in Diane di Prima's later Beat memoirs, for example.

Miss Christina Goering and Mrs. Frieda Copperfield, the protagonists of *Two Serious Ladies*, highlight Jane Bowles' concern with randomness, with spontaneity, with an emphasis on experience over thought, salvation through living, putting oneself out on a limb, and the blatant defiance of convention as the path to greater enlightenment. This novel, more than her later works, establishes Bowles as a proto-Beat writer, a proto-Beat *woman* writer, who on the one hand allows her female characters to be as peripatetic as men, but who also shows them plagued by dread and doubts, anxieties and fears that threaten to dampen their spirit and keep them home. Harriet in "Camp Cataract" has a plan, she has a scheme, but whether she has the wherewithal to move beyond the boundaries of the contained camp is not at all clear. She may be more talk than action. She may not leave home or the camp after all.

Which, of course, is where society tells her – and other women --- that they belong. As Joyce Johnson reflects in her memoir, *Minor Characters*, seeing the men, Jack

and Neal and Allen and Peter and Bill, set out on journeys, encouraged the women to do the same. But somehow excuses and legitimate logistical reasons cropped up not to. And when someone, like her good friend Elise Cowen did set out, she was privy to the nastier sides of life, the vulnerabilities, inclusive of violence, that haunt women who travel the world alone.

But the women in *Two Serious Ladies* are indeed serious and Bowles unleashes them. We see them in South and Central America – in towns and jungles and on oceans. We see them in woods on the edges of North American cities and towns. We see them in the urban jungle of strange men's arms and beds. But we see their fears as well. Even if they do venture forth, like Johnson observed, they do not strike out on the road full of verve and confidence and know-how like the men do. When they leave the comforts of home, they express trepidation: "I am going on a trip," Frieda Copperfield says to her friend at a cocktail party. "Wait until I tell you about it. It's terrible" (15). At that moment Christina Goering hasn't a clue that she too is about to step off the gang plank and drop into the ocean of new experiences. She says – possibly creating the very prompt she has been waiting for to overcome her own multiple fears and hesitations --- "I would go anyway" (18). And so it is not an enormous surprise when later that evening she leaves the party with Arnold, a man she has just met. She is taking her own advice, it seems, staring down anxieties and fears, and like Frieda Copperfield, she is not afraid to acknowledge her "miscellany of phobias, including agoraphobia, claustrophobia, xenophobia, and fear of menacing men." And when in spite of them both women "dare to relinquish the security of home and familiar relationships and release or launch themselves into the unknown but beckoning future" (Gentile 47), they are discovered, and discover themselves, as being as courageous as they are neurotic.

And the following morning after fleeing the emotional mess of Arnold's house -- his father courts her, his mother accuses her of harlotry and adultery, Arnold cowers silently from cowardice and shame – Christina declares to her live-in companion Miss Lucy Gamelon:

In order for me to work out my own little idea of salvation I really believe it is necessary for me to live in some more tawdry place and particularly in some place where I was not born. (28)

A taste of the derelict and daring-do has propelled Goering to gear herself up to a) leave her ancestral home and b) venture out of doors during the day but especially at night, something she is utterly unaccustomed to. She is both preaching to herself and

warning Gamelon who is horrified that her partner is about to sully their nest with radical notions concerning property, the body, sin and the soul.

### Three Movements

Like a classical symphony *Two Serious Ladies* is written in three movements. The first and last sections focus on Miss Christina Goering and her journeys into the local world beyond her ancestral home. The middle section, the minuet, follows her friend, Mrs. Frieda Copperfield, as she discovers her sense of volition in the jungle and brothels of colonial Panama.

The novel begins with a five and a half page introduction -- the opening sonata -- to Christina Goering by summarizing her family's affluent background and focusing tightly on a childhood scene whereby she covets her sister's close friend with whom she plays a naughty game of sin and salvation. "It's not for fun that we play it," Christina tells Mary as she leads her to the creek at the back of the house, "but because it's necessary to play it" (6). This line is repeated in the last movement of the novel when the adult Christina decides to venture forth from the house, alone, and at night, and again explains: "It is not for fun that I am going, but because it is necessary to do so" (124). It is because she is serious.

As a child the necessity of the game entails covering young Mary with mud and then washing her and her sins off with cold water from the creek. As an adult, the game of sin and salvation also entails muddying followed by a cleansing baptism. Only the novel ends before this denouement. Christina covers herself with the mud of alcohol and sexual frivolity, convinced that "only the experience of the profane can lead to salvation" (Lakritz 217), but she is not cleansed afterwards with insight, or satisfaction, or a sense of certainty.

The story's moves are abrupt. In one sentence the game of sin and salvation with Mary is over, and in the next, without any visual marker, Christina is in the contemporary moment of the story, at the cocktail party where she is about to see Mrs. Copperfield, the trigger, and meet Arnold, the second catalyst of the evening heralding her life change. Here insights unwind slowly, an adagio section. After a few late night hours in Arnold's house, she decides she must sell her own house and move to an island off the mainland. She must separate herself from civilization, and live modestly in the woods.

The second movement of the novel, the minuet, tells of Frieda Copperfield's experience in Panama. Prompted by her love for a Panamanian prostitute named Pacifica, Copperfield dares to defy her husband's wishes and to strike out on her own. She sends him to continue the travel adventure without her and remains with Pacifica with whom she can experience the female embrace and an oceanic experience of oneness. For Copperfield sin and salvation are all rolled into one.

In the third and last section of the novel, the allegro movement, the plot speeds up and Christina puts her plan into action. She sells off her home and for a lady of means becomes a loose version of a vagabond as she moves into a rented bungalow not fit for much living. She begins to venture out at night on her own. She takes a train from the woods to the shore and from there she takes a ferry to the mainland where there is a town with bars and people. "Her trips have moral freight when and because she travels alone, and the moral freight she is interested in is sin: excursion as transgression" (Lakritz 215). She attaches herself to a 'bum,' which is how her first lover Andy identifies himself. This suits Christina for she wants to experience herself with a Beat-like *weltanschauung*, a free-spirit which is the essence of Being itself (Knight 2). Yet when Andy begins to exhibit signs of conventional behavior she leaves him. She needs to remain on the edge of decency, flirting with the derelict, with deviance, testing not only the limits of her system, but society's. How many bohemian high jinks can she throw its way before there is a price to pay?

Ben, the man she sets her sights on after Andy, frightens her no end, which is why she feels compelled to be with him. There are intimations of his being a gangster. Not surprisingly he thinks she is a prostitute, seeing that they meet in a bar, and she is a woman alone who wants him to buy her a drink. She does not take moral offense at his misidentification, but does not like being taken for what she is not. "I certainly never thought I looked like a prostitute merely because I had red hair; perhaps like a derelict or an escaped lunatic" (185). Bums, derelicts, lunatics, these are Jane Bowles' people. These are also the people of the Beats.

At the novel's end, though Frieda Copperfield is on the verge of a genuine nervous breakdown, and Christina Goering is caught in mid-flight, neither seems bothered by their unsatisfying finales. Kraft claims:

To have moved into a position of vision makes them 'serious,' and to be serious is to matter, for no other reason than that. Two serious ladies are such because they take the search for themselves, seriously, passionately. (276)

Yet as their second meeting develops, the women express antipathy for the changes they identify in each other. Christina comments that Frieda is suffering too much for the so-called freedom of being with Pacifica. And Copperfield shoots back:

'True enough,' said Mrs. Copperfield bringing her fist down on the table and looking very mean. 'I have gone to pieces, which is a thing I've wanted to do for years. I know I am as guilty as I can be, but I have my happiness, which I guard like a wolf, and I have authority now and a certain amount of daring, which, if you remember correctly, I never had before.' (197)

Even Goering, "a modern amoralist, detached from the social codes that seem to weaken her friend Mrs. Copperfield" is taken slightly aback. It is as if she sees a vision of herself at a future moment when she too will have gone too far. Yet she leaves this meeting to rendez-vous with frightening Ben, "profoundly committed to a vision of experience [...], one that brings her into contact with people and life always on the cusp of change" (Lakritz 213).

## **Exposures and Erasures**

I must admit that I pause in front of both Miss Christina Goering's and Mrs. Frieda Copperfield's sense of class privilege. Both women are wealthy and use their money prolifically throughout the novel to buy what they want -- including companions. The freedom and irresponsibility they seek is sponsored by family trusts. They exhibit a certain sense of entitlement, especially alarming in Mrs. Copperfield's relationship with Pacifica, where the emphasis on her dark skin echoes Kerouac's attraction to 'primitive fellaheen women.' There is more than a hint of Orientalism here, especially when the dark exotic lover is simultaneously a source of delirious pleasure and sin.

In addition, Christina Goering's disdain for money is noted by Andy 'the bum' who barely has any. He finds her attitude offensive and she does not seem to understand at all what he means. Her "denial of property is consistent with her rejection of propriety, the proper, the middle ground that Americans hold on to with such avidity" (Lakritz 226). When other characters speak about Marxism and class struggle Christina seems oblivious to the import of their words. She and Mrs. Copperfield are rich ladies who are 'slumming it' in order to find themselves in these exotic – lower class and derelict – locales. This is problematic to say the least.

They are *not* the working class characters of the Beats, nor are they members of ethnic minorities. It may not be a coincidence that Bowles -- like Ginsberg, Joyce Johnson, Elise Cowen, Corso, di Prima, Kerouac, and many other key Beat figures -- belongs to one of America's ethnic minorities. Diane di Prima's working class Italian roots inform her rebellion. Middle class Hettie Jones and Joyce Johnson are keenly aware of how being Jewish sets them apart from the greater canvas of White Protestant America. And in almost all biographical descriptions of Jane Bowles, her Jewishness is one of the first things mentioned. Similarly, Bowles called herself that "crippled Jewish girl" (Dillon 286), and used Yiddish in letters to Paul. But in her work there is no hint of ethnicity, unlike Kerouac's *Sal Paradise* whose minority background makes him "drawn to the mythology of the country he strives to be a part of" (Skinazi 87). Bowles' women read as Christians with their infatuation with sin, salvation, and baptism. They read as Christian branded with sex and sin. They read as Christian when they choose exile over home, not suffering the real diaspora and ghettos of history.

More real-life ironies abound. Paul Bowles takes his Jewish wife Jane to Tangiers where they live in the Muslim Arab quarter known as the *medina*. They set up home in another culture, another language, and in an atmosphere of alcohol and hashish. Paul thrives in this bohemian atmosphere far from the noise of the United States. But Jane feels disconnected. She says, "I love Tangier. But like a dying person" (Craig), and claims that this is why she cannot write much. Does her need for home damn her and set her apart from the men? Is this lack of literary output one of the reasons she is not as known as she might have been? Is a traditional feminine position contrasting the road versus home problematic from a feminist point of view? "[Gertrude] Stein once remarked to [Paul] Bowles, 'If you were typical, it would be the end of civilization. You're a manufactured savage'" (Plimpton 181). Do women represent civilization and the hearth? The anchoring ballast to the road?

Diane di Palma's *Memoirs of a Beatnik* ends not with her setting out on a literal road to find herself, but in anticipation of her baby's birth, a turning inwards, and a setting out on a domestic journey that opens up new parts of the self. When talking about sex, Erik Mortenson notes that

... female Beat writers' conceptions of orgasm stress immanence, not transcendence. While care must be taken to avoid the scepter of essentialism, Beat women craft a notion of orgasm less concerned with jettisoning the body than with getting back into it. (13)

What is true for the sexual pleasure of orgasm is equally true for the profound physical experience of mothering, which includes gestation, birthing, and suckling.

But Jane Auer Bowles and her characters never had children. She never wanted to bring children into a world rife with suffering. And while she ventured out into the street with first one, and then another significant female companion, she never ventured far. Not from the homes she created with Paul, and never from Paul, emotionally. When the Beats came knocking on the Bowleses' door in Tangiers, it was the men who came seeking 'the man'. For all the resistance to normative patriarchy, "the avant-garde has been a male-dominated phenomenon which, for all its transgressions of bourgeois norms and revolutionary formal experiments, has subordinated women (Skerly 263).

One cannot not discuss bi-sexuality when discussing Jane Bowles' work. As Mary Knopf writes: Bowles "constructs a panoply of female desires in order to rebel against traditional concepts of female independence, identity and binary sexuality" (145). Monogamy is challenged as married Frieda Copperfield ventures into new fields with women lovers. And Christina Goering, who remains emotionally involved with Lucy Gamelon and continues to support her economically, seeks insight into herself via a series of male sexual partners. Not straight, not homosexual or bi-sexual, not monogamous by default, these two serious ladies are indeed serious about what today might be called their queerness.

Indeed Bowles may have seen herself as a freak for her devotion to the journey, to her rejection of traditional domesticity, which also included most dramatically her native soil and culture. Drawing from her life, she created characters that might be seen as "the embodiment of erotic and aesthetic power", which is how Bombaci claims freaks are often seen in modern literature (5). This may be an appropriate definition for Bowles' oeuvre overall, concerned as it is with women on the margins: their approach to themselves, their vision of themselves in the rough and gritty world, their relationships to men and to women, emotionally and romantically, and their determination "to do what [they] wanted to do" (107) even if it does not make them happy. Happiness is beside the point. Serious spiritual and physical movement and development is. A courting of sin as the antidote to sin -- exactly the kind of absurdist paradox that Ginsberg celebrated in "Howl". Truman Capote called it: a "controlled compassion [...]"



that has at its heart, and as its heart, the subtlest comprehension of eccentricity and human apartness" (ix).

Erik Mortenson claims that "Beat women writers are a crucial link between the first-wave feminism of the 1920s and a second-wave feminism that began in the late 1960s" (113). The women writers who pre-dated the Beats, call them late-Modernists, Existentialists, anxious nomads, motherless children, queer, mad, or proto-post Modern, with their brazen lurch into female agency and ambisexuality, helped deliver the Beat women a literary materfamilias that gave them greater permission to launch themselves into world with a sense of their own political, intellectual, and sexual power. Jane Bowles' life, her work, her unconventional and committed marriage – and her serious ladies – both on the page and off – both in the United States and on other continents – sat on the cusp of this revolution. Bowles helped created a blueprint for the rabble-rousing, form-breaking, convention-resisting literary women to come.

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