



Ethnicity and Gender in the Beat Generation: Jack Kerouac and the Other Woman

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Received: 24/04/2021. Accepted: 06/03/2022.

ABSTRACT

Pivoting around the contrast between Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) and Tim Z. Hernandez's *Mañana Means Heaven* (2013), this article reopens debates about ethnic appropriation and rhetorical control in the Beat Generation. More specifically, it sets out to investigate whether the textual strategies used in *Mañana Means Heaven* allow ethnic minorities to escape the discursive control exerted by *On the Road*. Keeping in mind that Hernandez's text acts as a counter-discursive text to Kerouac's representation of Bea Franco (aka "the Mexican girl") this article analyzes the different dialogues *Mañana Means Heaven* necessarily establishes with *On the Road*, which often include alliances as well as points of departure.

KEYWORDS: Jack Kerouac; Tim Hernandez; Bea Franco; "Mexican girl"; Ethnicity, Gender.

1. INTRODUCTION

"I couldn't imagine how the whole family managed to live in there. Flies flew over the sink. There were no screens, just like in the song. 'The window she is broken and the rain she is coming in'." (Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, 200)

"You actually buy all the *Mañana, mañana* junk? I mean, she ain't even Mexican, and every time I hear her voice pretending like she is with all that *caramba* and *ehs* and *ahs*, oh, it just makes me sick." (Tim Z. Hernandez, *Mañana Means Heaven*, 122)

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In 1947 Norma Deloris Egstrom, better known as Peggy Lee (1920-2002), co-wrote with Dave Barbour “Mañana (Is Soon Enough for Me),” a song that would become one of the singer’s biggest chart hits. Recorded and often performed with Lee’s faked Hispanic accent, the song describes a series of humorous scenes based on formulaic representations of Mexican people as poor, uneducated, and lazy. In a permanent state of procrastination, the speaker complains her “window she is broken and the rain is comin’ in,” but waits the storm out as she languidly realizes that in “a day or two the rain may go away / And we don’t need a window on such a sunny day.” Although Lee defended the good spirits behind her portrayal of the Mexican subject, many scholars have noted the historical prevalence of the negative stereotyping of Latinas/os in general “as lazy and lacking industry,” (Bender, 2003: 12) attributes also shared by the representation of other racial minorities in mass media. Much like Lee, Jack Kerouac’s protagonists—good-spirited as they may have been—reproduced most of these stereotypes in their encounters with racial and ethnic Others in novels such as *On the Road* (1957), *The Subterraneans* (1958), or *Tristessa* (1960) as many critics have noticedⁱ. Indeed, vulnerable to the simplistic stereotypes reproduced by the media, Kerouac’s narrator in *On the Road* resorts to the shallow if not downright racist ethnic markers provided by Lee’s “Mañana (Is Soon Enough for Me)” to describe the family home of Terryⁱⁱ, a.k.a. “the Mexican girl”: “[f]lies flew over the sink. There were no screens, just like in the song. ‘The window she is broken and the rain she is coming in’.” (200)

The intertextual reference to Lee’s song is picked up again by the protagonist in Tim Z. Hernandez’s *Mañana Means Heaven*ⁱⁱⁱ (2013), a parallel text where the novelist tracks down Bea Franco—the real person behind Kerouac’s Terry—and rewrites the twenty-odd pages in which Kerouac narrated Sal’s love affair with a Chicana laborer who was fleeing her abusive husband. Noticeably more attentive to the social and economic realities of many Mexican and Mexican American people, Bea confronts the fictionalized Jack when he stops flipping records in the jukebox at Peggy Lee’s hit. Directly questioning his bad taste and poor knowledge, she dismantles the artificial construction that Sal Paradise not only falls for, but actually uses to document his travels cross country.

Pivoting around the contrast between Kerouac’s *On the Road* and Hernandez’s *Mañana Means Heaven*, two novels separated by almost sixty years, this article reopens debates about ethnic appropriation and rhetorical control in the Beat Generation. More specifically, it sets out to investigate whether the textual strategies used in *Mañana Means Heaven* allow the ethnic Other to escape the discursive control exerted by *On the Road*. To do so and keeping in mind that Hernandez’s text acts as a counter-discursive text to Kerouac’s representation of Bea Franco, this article analyzes the different dialogues *Mañana Means Heaven* necessarily establishes with *On the Road*, which often include alliances as well as points of departure and that are inevitably colored by the theoretical and cultural gap that separates both novels. Ultimately, and in light of the marked revisionist impulse of Hernandez’s text, this article

considers whether the confluence of race and gender in *Mañana Means Heaven*, the “double jeopardy” (Wade-Gayles, 1984) so common in Kerouac’s encounters with the ethnic Other, destabilizes the prevailing mystifying and rather static portrayal of “the Mexican girl” or if, adversely, it ends up reproducing and therefore consolidating Bea’s textual subordination. In other words, is Hernandez’s Bea any less silenced than Kerouac’s Terry? Is she still reduced to the “the Mexican girl” of the Beat escapade from conformity? Or is she granted a voice? If so, whose voice?

2. RACIAL AND ETHNIC SUBJECTS IN KEROUAC

Much has been said regarding the Beats’ incorporation, assimilation and/or appropriation of different minorities groups. Quoting from both Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, A. Robert Lee has noted that “[l]ines like ‘Negro streets at dawn’ and ‘Wishing I were a Negro...a Denver Mexican...a poor overworked Jap,’ however contentiously, give Beat particularization to this changing awareness of American demography and its cultures.” (2017: 195) Indeed, however controversial, part of the Beats’ rejection of American culture of conformism had to do with either elevating the Other or temporarily turning into the Other^{iv}. This led most Beat writers and poets not just to look for the marginalized in America—as it happened in Norman Mailer’s (in)famous “The White Negro” (1957)—but also to cross the border in search for the ultimate “Fellahin” world, a clear connection to Oswald Spengler’s theories^v that has not escaped scholars’ eyes.^{vi}

Early criticism on racial and ethnic dialogues in Beat writing concentrated on the dismantling of this precise impulse. Martinez, whose criticism give Kerouac and his ilk little respite, notes how the Beats’ appropriation of Spenglerian theories allowed them to reinterpret places like Mexico as “a primitive and declining society [which] existed on the periphery of a fallen civilization, and waited for its eventual re-creation.” (1998: 34) This means that for the white men traveling, the fellahin world becomes the new frontier, a blank space to be colonized that grants them “the liberating effect of ethnic appropriation while retaining their status as Americans.” (1998: 45) This move, as the example of “The Mexican Girl” in *On the Road* shows, is not limited to life beyond the U.S. border, but also includes contact with the ethnic and racial minorities in North American soil. Perpetuating patterns of romantic primitivism, the Other is often decontextualized and reduced to a number of stereotypical qualities such as “the existential joy, wisdom, and nobility that comes from suffering and victimization.” (Panish, 1994: 107) Caricatures closer to Peggy Lee’s song than to full-fledged human beings with a history and a set of social and personal circumstances, stereotypical representations of the Other tend to favor immobility and stagnation, qualities more favorable to external control and appropriation^{vii}.

A more sympathetic view has stressed Kerouac’s position as a Franco-American, using examples of the emphasis the author places on his own ethnic identity and its influence on the

encounter with the racial and ethnic Other in his novels. As a case in point, the second item in the “Author’s Introduction” to *Lonesome Traveler* (1960)—Kerouac’s collection of travel writing sketches—is no other than his nationality: “Franco-American”^{viii} (1). Kerouac then might have been aware that, as Trudeau notes, “an authenticated acceptance into the ‘white’ mainstream was not easily granted to the French-Canadians streaming into the Northeast at the turn of the century” (159) so that, in a way—as he would later write in *On the Road* and Hernandez would echo in *Mañana Means Heaven*—he was not really white. Embodying an “off-white” identity (Melehy, 2012: 42) Kerouac’s protagonists may indeed genuinely wish to identify with racially different subjects. Rooted in the novelist’s own sense of exile, this reading places Kerouac’s linguistic experimentation in his road novels as a way of establishing new cultural connections, which ultimately show the diversity of America and challenge static notions of identity. In contrast to the previous critiques, which may fall short of considering the specific context in which *On the Road* was written, as well as the stylistic narrative strategies Kerouac adopted in its writing, Melehy situates the novel as “an exercise in a poetics of exile—the result of cultural displacement that becomes the quest for the many cultural displacements that constitute the United States.” (2016: 51-52)

As a counter-text to not only a famous novel but, in particular, a very well researched episode in it, Hernandez’s rewriting of the “Mexican girl” establishes varied points of connections with these and other—at times contradicting—discourses. From the vantage point of the decades that separate the novels, which include cultural changes as well as the development of theoretical discourses which affect the reading of the literary texts, what follows situates Hernandez’s *Mañana Means Heaven* in play with Kerouac’s *On the Road* to see whether or not the tension created between the two texts sheds light onto the imperialistic/colonist versus the sympathetic/authentic view of racial and ethnic minorities. Focusing on the representation of Bea as well as Jack’s relationship with her and with what she represents, the article concentrates on different, but interrelated, aspects such as the revisionist impulse, the representation of the *campo* life, and the contestation of the myth of immobility to review Kerouac’s as well as Hernandez’s appropriation of Terry/Bea.

3. MAÑANA MEANS HEAVEN MEETS ON THE ROAD

3.1. The Fuller-fledged Character

When Hernandez re-read the passage about “the Mexican Girl” in *On the Road*, it soon dawned on him that what the reader was getting was not Bea, but Sal’s experience of her. The scarce four sentences Kerouac uses in his novel to summarize Bea’s story support this argument:

Her story was this: she had a husband and a child. The husband beat her so she left him, back at Selma south of Fresno, and was going to L.A. to live with her sister awhile. She left her little

son with her family, who were grape-pickers and lived in a shack in the vineyards. She had nothing to do but brood. (184)

This condensed version of Bea's life suffices in Kerouac's narrative, but to the novelist raised in the San Joaquin Valley of Central California it fails to present an authentic picture of a life closer to him than Kerouac. It is with this premise that Hernandez reconstructs and expands Terry's story, building his novel with the clear reference point of Kerouac's text. In the tradition of fictional rewritings, *Mañana Means Heaven* necessarily establishes its dependence and its departures from the hypotext^{ix}—in Genette's terms—that acts as its source narrative. Dependent on a well-known cultural central text, Hernandez's novel sits comfortably with theories of fictional rewritings, as long as "it consists of a particularized and conscientious attachment to a single textual precedent, such that its departures from the original must be measured in terms of its dependence upon it." (Connor, 1994: 80) In addition, elevating and expanding a rather peripheral character from *On the Road*—and one that could be said to be doubly silenced in the patriarchal canon by her race and gender—Hernandez's text similarly functions as well-known revisionist texts such as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), or Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). For Widdowson, these types of text may "be seen as 'writing back[wards]', a kind of mirror-writing in which inverted images depict a very different reality to that authoritatively represented by the received tradition." (2006: 501) This looking-back from the margin, which "differs markedly from a view from the center," (Widdowson, 2006: 501) was a distinctly political stance in Adrienne Rich's influential conceptualization of "re-vision," by which the revision of old narratives as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (1972: 18) is seen as a collective need. In this light, one could assume that *Mañana Means Heaven* would include sufficient departures from Kerouac's text and that, to a certain extent, there would be a corrective element in the dialogues created between the two novels. Indeed, starting with the simplest of things, such as setting the color of Bea's eyes straight—green and not blue as Kerouac writes in *On the Road*—Hernandez's novel's part documented but ultimately fictional style sets up to retell a specific moment of history, counteracting, although partially reproducing, the dominant discourse of Kerouac's text. Nevertheless, this corrective stance also problematizes the fictionalized approach adopted by Kerouac as it simplifies the creative impulse and linguistic play of *On the Road* and runs the risk of mistaking Sal Paradise—the protagonist of a work of fiction—with Jack Kerouac—the novelist who may or may not align with his characters' ethical or moral stands and whose use of naïveté in the depiction of characters may be taken at face value.

Indeed, and despite several instances of direct confrontation with Kerouac's text—such as Bea's straight condemnation of the reference to Peggy Lee's song—Hernandez's rewriting of Kerouac's representation of Terry is not as sententious or accusatory as one might have initially anticipated. Quite the contrary and informed by the body of scholarship on the novel,

Hernandez's reworking of *On the Road* often blurs author/character divisions, bridging the gap between the naïve protagonist of Kerouac's novel with the author in his situated cultural background. For instance, while Terry's position in *On the Road* is sketched out in no more than four sentences, in *Mañana Means Heaven* the fictionalized Jack is portrayed as genuinely interested in learning Bea's story. This approach sits well with amiable readings than tend to highlight Kerouac's own ethnic position as a Franco-American writer, trying to diminish the white-American-meets-dark-Other divide^x. An example of this view is Michael Amundsen (2015), who links Kerouac's prose, with its vitality and attention to detail, to the work of "anthropologists who seek epistemological openness based on experience and an absence of abstraction." (32) Much to Bea's surprise, who had never thought of her life as literary material, Jack puts on Amundsen's autoethnographic shoes in Hernandez's reconstruction of the story, carrying an almost journalistic inquiring that not only shows his interest in her, but also seems to grant Bea a new way of "seeing" herself:

He wanted to hear "her story," as he put it. No one had ever asked her for her story before. And put that way, she thought, she might've gone the rest of her life without ever knowing she had a story in the first place. (54)

Bea's obliviousness to the value of her own story might be caused by her double exclusionary status as a woman and ethnic subject, central elements in Hernandez's novel that only bear limited relevance in *On the Road*. As if aware of the power structures that operate in *On the Road*, Hernandez's novel grants Bea narrative authority while still placing the fictionalized Jack in the position of the powerful ethnographer. Simply put, in *Mañana Means Heaven* it is still Jack, in a sense, who authorizes the literary and historical relevance of Bea's story. Nevertheless, within the hypertextual play between *writer* and *written*, between subject and object, Hernandez allows Bea, who is undoubtably still being written by someone else, to express a self-awareness that she lacks or at least remains superficial in Kerouac's rendition of her.^{xi} This move is visible not just in the evidently greater attention Hernandez's pays to the now-protagonist Bea, but also in the way she singles out Jack's depiction of her in his writings. Not long after they start their relationship, and upon noticing Jack's constant notetaking, Bea ponders over the impact his words have on her own representation in history:

But if you write something in one of your books about me, shouldn't I get to see it? I mean, what if someone a hundred years from now sees it? They could think all sorts of stuff about me going by what you say, couldn't they? (95)

Bea's questions speak directly to the power imbalance in their relationship; Jack—as a white man traveling—is the one able to make his words stand for the truth. Bea, on the contrary, becomes an inanimate object in his literary re-invention of history. Voiceless—ergo

powerless—she is fundamentally reduced to his words. *Mañana Means Heaven*, even if primarily fictional and written by a third person, aims at redressing this imbalance, by providing an alternative view of history from the point of view of the less empowered subject^{xii}. Nevertheless, Hernandez’s revisitation of “the Mexican girl” inevitably highlights the perpetuation of the power structures that have kept the real-life Bea Franco trapped in third-party textual representations, either as Terry or as Bea.

One of the first strategies employed by Hernandez to establish *Mañana Means Heaven*’s departures from Kerouac’s text, and to free Bea from a character in it, is to empower the fictionalized Bea Franco by providing her with a fuller personality rooted in a set of historical, political, and personal circumstances. While Kerouac allows Sal fleeting moments of recognition of Terry’s vulnerable position as a Mexican young woman traveling alone, condemning laughs and stares of the passing cars while they try to hitchhike, Terry remains rather superficial in Sal’s first-person account, acting more as a static entity than a full-fledged human being. Far from the “girl reduced to poor circumstances” (190) who Sal feels momentarily obliged to take care of, Hernandez distances Bea from the damsel-in-distress trope, believing that the real Bea Franco was “someone who, when she was young, was making choices in which she stepped out of the traditional Latina role.” (Hernandez qtd. in Sánchez, 2013) Once again, the confluence of gender and ethnicity establish the main differences between the two novels, impacting more deeply the portrayal of Bea as well as her relationship with Jack in Hernandez’s text.

The effort to depict Bea as a more authentic character in *Mañana Means Heaven* counters the simplification and naiveté necessary in *On the Road* to allow Sal to appropriate—or even consume—Terry. This appropriation, as denounced by Martinez (1998 and 2003), is enacted on Terry’s gender and ethnicity. That is to say, Terry is used as a woman, becoming the cool chick of the male Beat escapade, as well as the ethnic Other, the blank space that allows the temporary flight from the dissatisfying white, middle-class American way of life. More than these two rather unappealing positions, Hernandez depicts Bea as a strong-willed woman who defies the patriarchal power her abusive husband and authoritarian father exert. In addition, in contrast to the fleeting moment of recognition in Kerouac’s rendition of Terry, Hernandez provides a much more complex image of the intersections of gender and race as lived and experienced by a young woman. This is most visible in the representation of Bea’s father, who is depicted as a strict, domineering man who personifies an outdated, patriarchal order. Through Bea’s father, Hernandez not only complicates Sal’s vision of Mexicans, but also introduces issues of racism and assimilation within ethnic minorities. This can be seen in the resentment the father—who repeatedly claims his Mexican origins—feels towards his more-assimilated-into-American-culture family, whom he disdainfully calls “pochos.”^{xiii} In addition, the perpetuation of chauvinist morals leads him to boycott every attempt Bea makes at leaving her husband by repeatedly telling him of her whereabouts. He calls his daughter a “callejera,”^{xiv} (116) and accuses her of doing nothing but “andar de zorra,”^{xv} (116) a

misogynist discourse that is in the novel further complicated by racist innuendos—“[b]ack in Irapuato” Bea remembers, “she’d heard him use that word to describe the Indian girls, especially the younger ones who let their boyfriends grope them in public.” (116) Though failing to see the complexity of such sexist overtones, Sal momentarily falls prey to similar prejudice in *On the Road* soon after meeting Terry. Indeed, just a few minutes after having proclaimed Terry his “kind of girlsoul,” (184) a true Fellahin soul he can connect with, he refashions her as “a common little hustler who worked the buses for a guy’s buck,” (185) now a threat to his masculinity and overall good-spirited ethnographic approach to life.

Hernandez’s inclusion of the complex interconnections between race and gender in his character description of Bea Franco, as well as his decision to downplay Sal’s early prejudice against Terry, puts forward a view that is much more nuanced than some critics have allowed. García-Robles, for instance, has drawn attention to Kerouac’s ignorance of the complexity of racial and ethnic discourses, noting how the author obliterated cultural and racist nuances, believing “any dark-skinned Mexican, whether purely indigenous or mestizo, was Indian.” (2014: 39) Putting forward a much more subtle reconciliation of the characterization in *On the Road*—where the protagonist’s naiveté might be intended as a literary device to challenge, rather than reproduce, stereotypes—with the perceived racist and reductionist innuendos of Kerouac’s prose, Hernandez expands rather than condemns the cues that allow us to read past the surface of the text and into a situated and contextualized writing of the novel. That is to say, Hernandez’s revision highlights the need to treat Kerouac’s fictional work, as Brendon Nicholls has noted, with “healthy skepticism.” (2003: 525) For instance, while Kerouac’s protagonist fails to explicitly identify the racist and misogynistic discourses that lie behind the otherwise properly acknowledged “foolish paranoid idea” (185) that situates Terry as a threat for him—a trope reproduced in other novels such as *Tristessa* and *The Subterraneans*—Hernandez’s reconstruction of the story situates the young novelist in the multiplex world of gender and ethnicity. In order to allow room in his novel to develop these interconnections, Hernandez presents a more nuanced version of Jack that is complemented by a much greater emphasis on the social and historical context of Bea Franco’s life. This can be seen, as the next section shows, in Hernandez’s treatment of the peasant life and in the denunciation of Bea’s limited mobility.

3.2. Campo Life: The Ethnic Costume

“They thought I was a Mexican, of course; and I am.” (*On the Road* 198)

Sal Paradise’s appropriation of Terry’s ethnicity in *On the Road*, which culminates in his temporary “Mexican” transformation while picking cotton with her and her child, has been a sensitive topic of debate among scholars for decades. Ranging from interpretations that view Sal’s position as a self-marginalizing strategy, a kind of “defensive resistance to systemic forces” (Martínez, 1998: 49) in the United States, as “another path toward social marginality,”

(Ligairi, 2009: 146) as an example of his lack of class consciousness (Bill 406), and as “celebration of American cultural life,” (Amundsen, 2015: 35) the views reflect the tension that exists in the scholarship on the Beats’ attitudes when traveling and encountering racial and ethnic subjects. While for Kerouac, however close he might have felt to ethnic minorities due to his own French-Canadian origins, the peasant life of Chicanos and Mexican immigrants remained distant, Hernandez claims a kind of blood-line connection to the land that acted as the scenario of Sal and Terry’s love affair. Descendent of migrant farm workers eventually settling in the San Joaquin Valley, Hernandez decided to write the story of Bea Franco—for whom he had been unsuccessfully looking for some time—“rooted in what little [he] knew, but mostly, in how well [he] knew it.” (220) Inspired by the San Joaquin Valley landscape, he builds on the geographical and cultural link that connects him to the real Bea Franco he rebuilds and revisits from Kerouac’s text. This connection is further developed in the afterword where the novelist, as if underlining his credentials or right to the story, justifies his decision to rewrite that particular episode of *On the Road*:

I eyed the landscape, the dilapidated siding of the winery and the sprawling grapevines and gnarled fig trees. It was a familiar portrait, one I’d grown up with and knew well. In the distance the same tired palm trees and sagging fences loomed. The same hunk of land my own family had labored on for three generations. (220)

This move distances Hernandez’s novel, at least at first sight, from a tourist position in which the frequent socio-economic advantage of the writers is complemented with techniques of rhetorical control of the texts they produce. Building from an almost genealogical connection to Bea’s story, *Mañana Means Heaven* shows a greater focus on the social and economic reality of its characters, an issue which establishes manifest points of departures from *On the Road* while it also acknowledges—mostly through the sympathetic depiction of Jack—the need to properly contextualize Kerouac’s text and position as an author creating a rather gullible character. Still, the wavy and blurry lines used by Kerouac’s protagonist to oscillate between his identity as a powerful white man or a (self)marginalized Other, become much more clear-cut in Hernandez’s novel, where rigid white versus non-white power structures are established from the beginning. Unable to appropriate changing identities like Sal does in *On the Road*—where he is allowed to sigh “like an old Negro cottonpicker” (197) or happily include himself in a “we Mexicans” (198) statement—Bea sees the world through lenses that are notoriously two-colored. In *Mañana Means Heaven* one of Bea’s early memories includes “Mexicanos with proud faces and humble rags” (7) waiting in a train station for “golden moustaches” (8)—American Immigration officers—to call out their names. Opening the novel, this memory conveys a clear-cut division supported by color lines that will impact the rest of the novel; right from the beginning, Mexicans have “sun-burnt foreheads”

(7) and “mahogany faces” (8) with “brown faces,” (7) “brown children,” (8) while the Immigration officers are described as having “golden tufts of hay” (7) for moustaches.

Even if Bea is described in *Mañana Means Heaven* as being able to pass for white—“With those green eyes y tan blanquita, parece hija de la Joan Crawford”^{xvi} (22)—in *On the Road*, Sal isolates Terry’s ethnicity as a defining feature in the very first sentence which introduces her as “the cutest little Mexican girl in slacks.” (183) In Hernandez’s text rather than completely subverting this apparently image-deep description, Bea’s ethnicity is confounded with a more complex image of the subordinated position of Mexicans regardless of the color of their skin or their level of assimilation into American culture. As Bea’s mother sententiously declares, “it don’t matter, Mexican or pocha or not, estamos igual de jodidos”^{xvii} (22)—an assertion that runs as a transient recognition in *On the Road* but a gradual realization in Hernandez’s novel. This example anticipates the techniques used in *Mañana Means Heaven* to counter and expand, rather than oppose, Kerouac’s representation of Terry. As a counter-discourse to the dominant representation of “the Mexican girl,” Hernandez’s novel aligns with revisionist texts such as Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* by employing strategies which “involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified ‘local’.” (Tiffin, 1995: 98) These counter-discursive strategies, which in Hernandez’s case are often subtle and subtextual, offer new points of entrance into Kerouac’s representation of ethnic difference, and are clearly informed by previous critical readings of the novel. What can we, then, learn from *Mañana Means Heaven*’s revision of *On the Road*? Does the actualization of the debate shed light onto the textual representation of the ethnic subject? And where does Bea, as a doubly marginalized character, stand in relationship to such discursive representations of her? Some of these questions can be resolved through an analysis of the way in which both novels address the representation of ethnicity through the depiction of the peasant life. This foregrounds Hernandez’s counter-discursive strategies in the positioning of the two novels in different spectrums of the idealized and abstract versus the authentic and concrete, while still using his revision of the story to somehow reconcile criticism on Kerouac’s approach.

Countering the manifest rhetorical control exerted by Kerouac in his representation of “the Mexican girl” through the first-person narration of Sal, Hernandez’s text subverts this position by letting Bea be repository as well as analytical mind of the linguistic markers that separate her and Jack. Seeing well beyond Peggy Lee’s “*caramba* and *ehs* and *ahs*” (122) in *Mañana Means Heaven*—markers that were used by Sal to position Terry and her family in the unchanging terrain of economic hardship and spiritual easiness—Bea first feels attracted to the self-assured and confident way with which the novelist talked which she compares with the voices she hears at the *campo*:

[I]t was the kind of talk she'd only heard in movies or on the radio, never at the campo. People at the campo only concerned themselves with words like trabajo or raids, and the ubiquitous Dios. Dios aprieta pero no ahorca—God tightens the noose but he doesn't choke you. It might as well have been the official slogan of all campesinos.^{xviii} (30)

Jack's language, then, is placed in opposition to not only Bea's, but also the people she is surrounded with. Quite evidently, this contrast stems not so much from the accent, or lexical choice, but from the radically different experience it represents. In Hernandez's text, while Jack is able to get himself an education and to travel around the country in search of adventure, Bea and the rest of farmworkers see their language impregnated by the pressing needs of their immediate lives; their economic problems, their necessity to work, and their situation as illegal workers with the constant fear of being deported in a police raid, as the main elements that shape their language. Speaking from a clear vantage position in *On the Road*, Sal benefits from an intermittent self-marginalized position that allows him, on the one hand, to freely choose to be part of Terry's reality—as when he fantasizes with the idea of living in a tent a picking cotton for a living—or, on the other, to decide to be alienated from their reality by documenting how Terry “jabbered with her brethren asking for jobs.” (191) This ambivalent position, attained through rhetorical strategies that situate Sal both inside and outside Terry's ethnic reality, often lead in *On the Road* to descriptions of peasant life that represent a rather superficial and idealized version of reality that, while they may have been intended to expose the naiveté of its protagonist, in worst cases have been read as examples of ethnic and cultural appropriation (see Brigham, 2015). Picking cotton in Bakersfield, Sal famously notes “it was beautiful kneeling and hiding in that earth: if I felt like resting I did, with my face on the pillow of brown moist earth. Birds sang an accompaniment. I thought I had found my life's work.” (197) Seen through highly romantic lenses, as Richardson has noted, “Sal's pastoral eye is hardly the eye of a migrant worker, whose felt relation to the cotton field is probably more economic in character than literary and romantic.” (2001: 223) As part of the counter-discursive strategy followed by Hernandez's revision of the hegemonic text that *On the Road* represents, *Mañana Means Heaven* does not so much rewrite or correct, but exposes through reproduction Sal's idealism, ultimately expanding the cues that are left necessarily superficial in Sal's first-person account. Taking advantage of the omniscient narrator in *Mañana Means Heaven*, which allows the novelist to include a myriad of voices in his novel, Hernandez expands Sal's idealism and naiveté to expose its flaws more openly. Failing to see the reality behind Bea's yearning for a better future, Jack keeps misjudging what he sees as the categorical or defining Mexican way of life. Even when the marginalized subject speaks and exposes their situation, as both Bea and her brother repeatedly do, Jack continues to filter through highly idealized lenses: “I know plenty of city folks who'd kill for a little bit of quiet like this. A little room to stretch your legs. Buy your own chunk of land, set things on fire when you want.” (120) Continuing with the counter-discursive pattern of reproduction and expansion, *Mañana*

Means Heaven duplicates most of the romantic traits attributed to the peasant life included in *On the Road* only to include subtextual departures from the latter often caused simply by shifting the focus of attention onto Bea and her family.

For example, the early romanticism which prompts Sal to initially value his *campo* job because of its simplicity and connection to the earth—which is echoed in Hernandez’s novel and which in *On the Road* causes Sal to declare that it was “so much better than washing dishes on South Main street” (197)—vanishes as we learn about both Sal’s and Jack’s inadequateness and the actual harsh conditions of the job. Both novels do this, of course, to very different degrees. What remains brief moments of recognition in *On the Road*—what Richardson has called “crises of faith” (2001: 227) that may or may not be picked up by the reader—become much more developed themes in Hernandez’s novel. Indeed, far from the dreamy scenario of Sal’s first encounter with the campo, for Bea “the valley was nothing but a cruel tierra of initiation. Returning to the great San Joaquin meant a backache that would last as long as people still found an excuse for cotton.” (23) The inherent danger of this dream, first denounced by James Baldwin in the essay “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy” (1961)—where he describes Sal’s longing for an alternative identity as “offensive nonsense [...that] does not refer to a reality, but to a dream” (278)—has led to criticism that sees Sal’s infiltration in the Mexican way of life in the larger narrative of *On the Road* as a mere temporary transition, another one of his kicks, his adventures along the road. Once the romantic dream is fulfilled, the illusion breaks and the narrative demands the mobile character to resume his adventure. No longer needing to identify with the ethnic subject, Sal goes back to his advantageous position, the one which allows him to declare that he was “through with [his] chores in the cottonfield,” as he “could feel the pull of [his] own life calling [him] back,” (199) something that Terry, as the woman being written and the real Chicana laborer, was simply not able to do.

With such volatile identity transformations, it is not surprising that some critics have read Kerouac’s identification with ethnic minorities as fake and transitory, or as Ronna C. Johnson put it, “gratuitous and superficial.” (2012: 63) As if an appetizer, Sal consumes the bohemian experience Terry provides before continuing with the road trip that ends in Mexico, the ultimate fellahin world. Just as a country comes to represent access to a mythical authenticity, in this interpretation Terry is not a woman going through a specific moment of her life, but rather a site, an image Sal goes through, or rather feeds on. Clearly informed by these readings, but without necessarily rejecting or adhering to them, Hernandez constructs the counter-discursive version of Bea by doubling up or turning the mirror against Kerouac’s representation of Terry. As a case in point, the consumption language Sal uses in *On the Road* to describe Terry—“Her breasts stuck out straight; her little thighs looked delicious,” (182) “I gloated over her” (184)—soon become imbued with the ethnic markers Sal needs her to carry to provide the fellahin experience:

In a reverent and sweet little silence she took all her clothes off and slipped her tiny body into the sheets with me. It was brown as grapes. I bit her poor belly where a Caesarian scar reached clear to her button. Her hips were so narrow she couldn't bear a child without getting gashed open. Her legs were little sticks. (186)

Not seeing her, but only the misery and poverty she represents, Terry becomes a piece of the land Sal wants to get a hold of, revealing, as Martínez notes, “a misogynistic and neo-imperialist framework that undermines much of its acclaimed subversiveness.” (1998: 46) Other critics have read such passages with a more sympathetic eye, drawing attention to the fact that “Kerouac’s fiction attempts to map his marginal identity—as a member of a French-Canadian ethnic minority—onto the American landscape by masking him in the racial attributes of African Americans, Mexicans, and Native Americans.” (Nicholls, 2003: 525) Nevertheless, Hernandez chooses to duplicate the neo-imperialist discourse when he mirrors the words Kerouac uses to describe Sal and Terry’s first sexual encounter:

He strained his eyes to get a good look at the landscape of her small frame. Her blue-bronze body arched, and the tiny rows of ribs sprawled like his own piece of fellaheen country, with its vast and fertile complexities, plains and valleys, peaks and ripples.^{xix} (46)

In the larger scheme of *Mañana Means Heaven*, a fictional rewriting of a famous novel largely told from the point of view of the least empowered character, it may come somewhat as a surprise that the author would allow the fictional Jack to take charge of the narration so prominently. Unabashedly reproducing the metaphor of body as land, Bea is in this extract not only a site of wonder for the young novelist, but also a site of colonization. In this particular reworking of Kerouac’s text, and even though Hernandez often fuses Kerouac the author with Sal the character to allow a more sympathetic view, we are not presented with the revision of the complex work of an author who was “unable to resolve either the dissonance between the period’s rhetorics of ethnicity and class (by which, because he was white, he was in the cultural and social mainstream) or his sense of marginality—his sense that he was alien and an outsider.” (Hunt, 1981: xxvi) Rather, by reproducing and even amplifying Sal’s inevitably limited and biased depiction of Terry, we come face to face with the naive character who fails to see the oversimplification of his understanding of the confluence of race and gender. The explicit reference to Spenglerian theories—by now common tropes in scholarly debates on the Beats—further exposes Bea’s reduction to an image, and her transformation into the myth of the return to native, simple, ways of life or as a token of the marginalized that would act as the seed of the next cycle. Mimicking Sal’s description of Terry’s body, Hernandez’s exposes her status as an object to be conquered in Kerouac’s narrative.

This not seeing Terry herself but seeing only the landscape, or the romanticized idea of her poverty and suffering is not just limited to *On the Road* but can also be extrapolated to other encounters with female ethnic others in Kerouac's work, such as *Tristessa* and *The Subterraneans*. Speaking of the latter, Jon Panish has noted how, instead of seeing Mardou for what she is, Leo Percepied sees in "the African American woman as a Negro goddess, an Indian princess, an Aztec, or Greek, or Egyptian mask; the specific historical locale does not matter, what does is only that she is exotic, alien, distant figure." (1994: 118) Quite similarly, Sal never really sees Terry in *On the Road*, but accommodates a representation of her to fit his needs. Quickly morphing in the eyes of the narrator, Terry is the damsel in distress that elevates him to the status of the American hero; the prostitute who takes advantage of his naiveté and represents a threat to his masculinity; the Chicano marginal laborer who can grant him access to the fellahin world; and ultimately the poor woman he leaves behind who cannot and will not follow him back home. Solidified into these immobile images, Terry remains still while Sal consumes the various experiences she opens up for him.

Mañana Means Heaven, in so far as it reproduces Kerouac's main interpretation of Terry in *On the Road*, does not free Bea from this reading, nor does Hernandez move towards a rewriting that would allow to see the appropriation of Spengler as "a way of both venerating people on the margins of their late capitalist society and justifying their own attempts to join them." (Stevenson, 2020: 71) What Hernandez's novel does, however, is use reproduction and amplification not so much to criticize Kerouac's portrayal of the ethnically different woman—as the previous reading would suggest—but to highlight the shortcomings of Kerouac's protagonists in explicitly acknowledging their use and abuse of exoticized characters such as Terry and Mardou. While these shortcomings remain understated in Kerouac's first-person narration—as when he warns readers at the beginning of *The Subterraneans* that this is the story of "an unselfconfident man, at the same time an egomaniac" (2001: 3)—Hernandez's omniscient narrative style allows for the possibility of further stressing this imbalance by including the less-mediated voices of marginal characters that do not need to speak through a first-person narrator. To further emphasize these shortcomings, Hernandez revisits one particular version of the story without necessarily acknowledging the revisions Kerouac did for the version published by Viking—which already offers slight modifications from the scroll version—or the Paris Review version of "The Mexican Girl" which, as Tim Hunt has noted, include a version of Sal that "is either more explicitly aware of the implications of his dalliance with Terry of more willing to confess his awareness to the reader." (2014:84)

In any case, through these revisionist techniques Hernandez's novel challenges other implicit—and not so implicit—assumptions derived from Kerouac's text. A major example of this includes the sense of static existence often attributed by Kerouac and the Beats to ethnic others, a lack motion which affects not just space but also time. In *On the Road* Terry, her brother and by extension all Mexican laborers float in a state of permanent procrastination

rooted in the stereotype of the *mañana* culture. Fitting Sal's restricted vision, Terry, just as Kerouac writes in *Lonesome Traveler* upon entering Mexico, exhumes "this fellaheen feeling about life, that timeless gaiety of people not involved in great cultural and civilization issues." (2018: 21) It is in this context that the emblem "mañana means heaven," which Hernandez appropriates and subverts from Kerouac's novel, serves as counter-discourse to the physical and temporal immobility attributed to ethnic subjects in Sal's stereotypical narration. First articulated by Terry's brother and a mutual friend, *mañana* becomes in *On the Road* a word imbued with magical procrastination that allows the characters to eternally postpone and frustrate all opportunities to find jobs and finally make a living. Buying and deliberately applying stereotypes long reinforced by popular culture artifacts such as Peggy Lee's song, Kerouac removes all sense of responsibility from Sal's mind during his stay at the *campo*, allowing him to wallow in the temporary uncertainty and misery Terry and her brother personify. So indebted is he to the *mañana* philosophy, that he whimsically states that it is "a lovely word and one that probably means heaven." (195) To counterpoint the gullibility that Kerouac provides Sal with in order to allow him "to reflect with such amused charm at what he considers the quaint *mañana* culture of the Mexican-American workers," (Richardson, 2001: 227) Hernandez uses his narrative to endow the phrase with a much more complex meaning, once again expanding and challenging the limitations of Kerouac's narration.

First of all, the phrase is in the novel heavily ingrained within the social and economic factors of a population with a high rate of unemployment and debt who console themselves with the possibility of finding a solution, or catching a break, *mañana*. Far from the laid-back character Sal needs them to be to access his fellahin experience, Bea and her brothers repeatedly question Jack's simplification and mystification of their situation. While picking cotton, for instance, Sal's romanticized vision is replaced with a much more authentic gaze that sees not the happy-go-lucky laborer of his imagination, but how "each man, woman, and child squinted beneath sun-chafed cheekbones the color of wet adobe, and they had a permanent look of terror on their faces as they work." (128) In addition, the subversion of the *mañana* paradigm in Hernandez's text not only questions the temporal wallowing of Sal's representation of ethnic minority others but also, and especially after the phrase is appropriated by Bea, the appropriation of *mañana* problematizes the alleged immobility of the ethnic and gendered subject. Indeed, the phrase acquires a much deeper meaning, deviating more clearly from Kerouac's novel, when uttered by Bea herself, especially after the couple separate with the promise of reuniting in New York. Not surprisingly, it is in this moment, when Hernandez's text follows Bea beyond Kerouac's rendition of her, that the novelist manages to fully expose Sal's lack of consideration of the double jeopardy of ethnic and gender constrains she was subjected to. Carefree and pretty much untouched by the socio-economic pressures Hernandez's documents in his novel, Terry in *On the Road* is left behind without ever exposing the gender dynamics which regulate travel and freedom of movement in patriarchal societies. Even if in *On the Road* it is supposedly mutually agreed that the couple would be reunited in

New York, Sal admits they “both knew she wouldn’t make it somehow.” (201) What Kerouac’s first-person narration omits are the circumstances that allowed his protagonist to travel, but forced someone like Terry to stay behind. Although there is a brief moment of recognition with the cars full of “little highschool punks” (190) episode while Terry and Sal are trying to get a ride, and where Terry’s position as not only a woman but a woman of color are interpreted as a disadvantage to her freedom of movement, Sal never really questions this issue, returning quickly to his naive gaiety and gladly accepting the fact that she will not meet him in New York.

Expanding Kerouac’s text to counter the static representation of Terry, Hernandez’s revisitation of the “Mexican girl” questions the stagnation and deceptively inactivity of Bea once “freed” from the storyline offered by *On the Road*. In addition, *Mañana Means Heaven* complicates the double bind of ethnicity and gender by placing a stronger emphasis in the narrative on Bea’s motherhood. As a mother of two young children, Bea’s moves are constantly restricted in *Mañana Means Heaven* to the logistics of moving away with them as well as the hardship of leaving them behind. Indeed, while the notoriously carefree Sal promptly puts an end to their love affair in *On the Road* with a “Well lackadaddy, I was on the road again,” (201) Hernandez’s counter-text shows how Bea continues to take care of her children and work to save money to go west, plans that are postponed not because of any inherent laziness rooted in the *mañana* culture, but because of the illness of her oldest son and the mounting pressure to return home. Making it as far as Denver—where she was supposed to meet Jack before he shipped out with the Merchant Marines—*Mañana Means Heaven*’s subtle yet most successful departure from Kerouac’s original rendition of Terry has Bea rewriting the *mañana* stereotype by herself taking the road, working to make an independent living for her and her children and finding a new meaning without Jack in her resolution to come back home. In this context, the act of returning home deviates from Terry’s inability to escape in *On the Road* by making Bea’s return to her children and domesticity her destination, not just a result of a love affair gone wrong. With Jack being now only “a vague image, a mere shadow” (196) in her mind, Bea takes a train back home absorbed in the complex memory of her father smiling while being deported to Irapuato when she was young. Having now changed the circumstances that lead her back home in Hernandez’s text—or that keep her at home in Kerouac’s—Bea endows the word *mañana* with a new meaning; one that is no longer set in what Jack represents and in the possibility of continuing their relationship in New York, but one that offers her and her children “a possibility, a promise of things to come.” (189) This path, as *Mañana Means Heaven* shows, is not only outside Kerouac’s fleeting rendition of her, but might also necessarily escape Hernandez’s text as well.

4. CONCLUSION: THE ELUSIVE MEXICAN GIRL

As Hernandez has noted in interviews, rather than providing a whole new perspective on the story of the “Mexican girl,” he “wanted Bea’s story to work on the same ‘playing field’ and utilize the same ‘set of rules’” (qtd. in Markovich, 2013) as Kerouac’s narrative. Hence, following and expanding the main plot line sketched in *On the Road*, *Mañana Means Heaven* reproduces, in order to expose and unravel, the same reductionist idealism with which Kerouac had his protagonist describe Terry as an ethnic subject. By endowing the story with a much more developed historical and social context, and by expanding it beyond the original storyline, Hernandez manages to complicate and problematize many of the issues that arise from Sal’s rather naive vision of Mexicans. Still, Hernandez’s counter-discursive text, while liberating Terry to some extent from the either simplistic or imperialist relationship established by the first-person narration of *On the Road*—which relies on its narrator’s stereotypical and romanticized views—cannot help to establish yet another domineering bond with Bea Franco.

While the shift from a first-person account to an omniscient narrator already provided the novelist with tools to expand and counter Sal’s necessarily limited viewpoint, Hernandez’s revision of the “Mexican girl” is also influenced by the context provided by the preface “The Last Interview” and the afterword “Finding Bea Franco,” two paratexts that problematize and further fictionalize the novelist’s own appropriation of Kerouac’s rendition of Terry. Narrating bits and pieces of the author’s search for the real person behind Kerouac’s “Mexican girl,” these pages allow the fictional Bea Franco to escape both Kerouac’s and Hernandez’s renditions, ultimately highlighting the discursive and rhetorical authority exerted by both novels. Hidden in the still fictionalized room of these pages, Bea faces and parries the numerous questions and inquiries the novelist has regarding details about her life around the time of her affair with Jack Kerouac. Mimicking, expanding, diverting and ultimately deauthorizing both Kerouac’s depiction of Terry as well as his own version of Bea, Hernandez muses in these pages about Bea’s elusiveness and ultimate rejection of her fictionalized self. Confronted with a picture of Jack Kerouac, Bea hesitates before excusing her poor eyesight to finally discharge a rotund: “No, I’ve never seen him before in my life.” (227) Bad memory, bad eyes, or her simple resistance to being written all over again, maybe tomorrow, *mañana*, the “Mexican girl” may tell us her story.

NOTES

ⁱ See Panish 1994, Martínez 1998 and 2003, Richardson 2001 and Mikelli 2010.

ⁱⁱ Even though in the original scroll Kerouac uses Bea and not Terry, for simplicity's sake in this article I use Terry and Sal when referring to Kerouac's *On the Road* and Bea and Jack when referring to Hernández's *Mañana Means Heaven*.

ⁱⁱⁱ I would like to warmly thank Mario T. García for drawing my attention towards Hernández's work and for encouraging me to pursue this line of research.

^{iv} Todd F. Tietchen writes that "the Beat reaction against postwar middle-class and consumerist culture in the United States might actually, in a sense, be read as a rejection of whiteness in favor of an alternative intercultural imaginary viewed as antithetical to the continuance of social dominance and imperium into the Cold War era." (217-218)

^v Spengler's influence on the Beats revolves around the reading of *The Decline of the West* (1923), where he refers to "fellaheen" to describe the peoples who precede and follow the organization of civilization, remaining outside of it. Kerouac, as scholars such as Melehy have noted (2012), adapts this term to include his own family history and a sense of kinship with colonized populations. As Tietchen has also noted (2017), while "Spengler identified the fellaheen with the eventual dissipation of Western civilizations as the result of the historical rise of what he viewed as lesser, equatorial peoples, Kerouac at times hoped to align his experiences of American marginality with Spengler's inhabitants of the planetary margins." (216)

^{vi} See, for instance, Manuel Luis Martínez's "With Imperious Eye" (1998), or Jorge García-Robles's *At the End of the Road: Jack Kerouac in Mexico* (English translation, 2014).

^{vii} Echeverry has read this lack of cultural awareness as instances of a completely "absent reflection about cultural otherness" (450, my translation) that does not improve once the racial and ethnic Other is encountered. To Echeverry, past Rio Grande, there is no *anthropologizing* intention in *On the Road*, no culture to discover (451), a problematic issue that extends to other works by Kerouac. In *The Subterraneans*, for instance, when Mardou does not want Leo to hold her arm in the street and he sees "her Negro fear of American society" (58), he quite clearly does not "see" what he reduces to "her little-girl like fear so cute, so edible" (58). Much to Leo's dismay, "[a]s much as he would like to decenter whiteness and replace it with blackness [...] he remains a white male seeing other from this standpoint." (Grace 52)

^{viii} For studies on the impact of Kerouac's Franco-American heritage see Skinazi's "Through Roots and Routes: On the Road's Portrayal of an Outsider's Journey into the Meaning of America" (2009), Jackson's "French Friends, American Allies: Ethnic Dynamics in the Writing of Jack Kerouac" (2013).

^{ix} The hypotext can be understood as an earlier text that serves as a subsequent piece of literature—its hypertext. Hypertextuality, in Genette's own words, is "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of a commentary." (1997: 5)

^x As Lee writes, "[n]o doubt an author baptized Jean-Louis Lebris de Kerouac of Québécois-Catholic – and, however distant, of Mohawk lineage – and raised a joul-speaker in foundationally Protestant Lowell, Massachusetts, would inherit a special sensitivity to ethnicity and race." (197)

^{xi} For a study of the representation of female speech in Kerouac's novels, especially when produced by ethnic female others, see Mikelli's "A Postcolonial Beat: Projections of Race and Gender in Jack Kerouac's *The Subterraneans*" (2010), where the author analyzes moments of female representation.

^{xii} Hernández's interest in voicing unheard stories is also evident in his latest novel *All They Will Call You* (2017), where he recounts the stories of the twenty-eight braceros who died in the plane crash in Diablo Range and whose bodies were placed in a mass grave at Holy Cross Cemetery in Fresno, California, with their grave marked only as "Mexican Nationals".

^{xiii} Pocho/a refers to Americanized Mexicans living in the USA.

^{xiv} Pejorative term to refer to someone who is always out.

^{xv} "being a slut" (my translation).

^{xvi} "With those green eyes and so white, she looks like Joan Crawford's daughter" (my translation). The reference to Joan Crawford inevitably leads the Kerouac reader to the "Joan Rawshanks in the Fog" section in *Visions of Cody*, where Kerouac sketches his walking around Russian Hill when he happens

upon a film crew filming a movie with Joan Crawford in a moment that David Sterritt describes as a “stream-of-consciousness fantasy—actually a fantasy-within-a-fantasy, in a novel of vast and mirrored complexity”. (1998: 92) In the context of a novel full of intertextual references the link to Joan Crawford in *Mañana Means Heaven* offers yet another playful route to Kerouac’s work.

^{xvii} “it don’t matter, Mexican or pocha or not, we are equally fucked” (my translation).

^{xviii} “Trabajo” means “work”.

^{xix} Hernandez’s language here is reminiscent of not just Kerouac’s *On the Road*, but also the story “The Railroad Earth” included in *Lonesome Traveler*—a collection of short pieces linked by the common theme of traveling. In this story, which recounts his impressions while working as a student brakeman on the Southern Pacific Railroad in California, the fast images evoked by what the narrator sees include a description of grape fields with “beautiful little Carmelita O’Jose [...] with her brown breasts inside cashmere sweater bouncing ever so slightly even with Maidenform bra and her brown feet in thonged sandals also brown, and her dark eyes with pools in em of you wonder what mad meaning” (2018: 67).

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