Letter from the Editor

We are pleased to present the second issue of the *Journal of Beat Studies*, which includes a special section on Beat writers and Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. Since its founding in 1974 by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche as the Naropa Institute, which included under its auspices the renowned Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics co-founded by Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman that same year, Naropa has played a central role in the nurturing and dissemination of Beat as well as outrider poetics, in addition to serving as a focal point for the presence of Buddhism in the United States.

The history of Beat writers and literature and Naropa is in some respects a contested history,especially that sequence of events that has become known as the "Great Naropa Poetry Wars" of 1975. In 1973 Trungpa Rinpoche inaugurated the Vajradhatu Seminary, an annual three-month retreat for selected advanced students that included intensive meditation practices; during the seventies, Trungpa conducted six Seminaries in the northern continental U. S.[1] The "Great Naropa Poetry Wars" erupted at the seminary that was held in fall, 1975, in Snowmass, Colorado, some four hours west of Boulder. Trungpa presided, but neither Ginsberg nor Waldman was present. The poet W.S. Merwin, interested in expanding his Buddhist training, and his then-partner the poet Dana Naone attended the seminary. On Halloween, a party was given to celebrate the end of the second and the beginning of the intense third and final stage of the seminary. Merwin and Naone attended but did not stay. Summoned by Trungpa, they refused to return, and were confronted in their apartment by other seminary students who, acting for Trungpa, met their resistance by assaulting them and abducting them to the party, where, against their wills, they were stripped naked at Trungpa's order, and humiliated. These facts are not in dispute. This shocking event circulated through published writings in the aftermath and in Buddhist communities, and has reverberated in the record of Beat poetry and poetics.[2]

As this account suggests, Trungpa himself was an extremely provocative and divisive personality. According to the Shambhala website, Vidyadhara Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939-1987) was the 11th descendent in the line of Trungpa tülkus, important teachers of the Kagyü lineage, one of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Chögyam Trungpa fled Tibet in 1959, eventually moving to England, where he studied at Oxford University, and then to the United States. In 1970, he established his first North American meditation center, Tail of the Tiger (now called Karmê-Chöling), in Barnet, Vermont. Trungpa's Shambhala

teachings, a Tantric practice, are often called "crazy wisdom"; these teachings strive to incorporate rather than eschew desire as the neophyte journeys toward enlightenment. Trungpa was also known as a womanizer and an alcoholic, attended at all times by a personal "vajra guard"of young, muscular Buddhist students in blue blazers (Clark 20). The "Great Naropa Poetry Wars," constituted from word of the assaults on Merwin and Naone at Snowmass in 1975, and from the heated published responses to it, have tainted Trungpa's legacy for some, even in light of the "crazy wisdom" teachings that included the erotic in spiritual strivings and that had strong appeal to Beatassociated writers and their students. For Kenneth Rexroth, "Chogyam Trungpa has unquestionably done more harm to Buddhism in the United States than any man living" (Clark, backcover). For Allen Ginsberg, who declined to indict his teacher Trungpa or to disavow him or his conduct at Snowmass, it was a sore subject to discuss: "I don't want to open up some terrible *yaargh*...about Trungpa," he said in an interview (Clark 58), and reported that "What Trungpa finally said to me about the Merwin thing was, 'This is an opportunity to turn poison into nectar'" (Clark 52). These positions, and many more on both sides exemplifying the chronic contingencies and ambiguities of the event's fragile contemporaneous records have ever since haunted Naropa and Beat poetry's relation to Buddhism through the lama Trungpa Rinpoche.

John Whalen-Bridge's interview with Anne Waldman explores the origins of the Naropa Institute (later Naropa University), including Waldman's reactions to the "Poetry Wars," her thoughts on Trungpa's approach to Tantric Buddhism, his impact on people such as Joni Mitchell who sought him out for spiritual guidance, the outrider mission of Naropa in the early twenty-first century, and Waldman's thoughts about the future of Buddhisms in the United States. "Trungpa, Naropa, and the Outrider Road: An Interview with Anne Waldman" is an authentic conversation between two individuals highly versed in the history and practice of Buddhism and poetics.

Tony Trigilio's essay, titled "'On a Confrontation at a Buddhist Seminary': Naropa, Guru Devotion, and a Poetics of Resistance," focuses the critical lens to investigate the "Poetry Wars" through the perspective of guru devotion. The essay illuminates the ways in which Naropa's influence on Beat poetics draws from two contradictory categories of understanding: the neo-Romanticist urgency of the unfettered imagination and, in contrast, the obedience and containment required by guru devotion, one of the core doctrinal principles of Vajrayana Buddhism, the mode of Buddhism that Trungpa taught and practiced. The essay historicizes thetension between theory and practice as a way of understanding the complex forces that bothenable and vex Beat oppositional writing. Trigilio also discusses a selection of Ginsberg's poems that reflect the Snowmass incident, to explore how it dramatizes the gap between Beat oppositional poetics and the spiritual urgency

that authorized this same poetics.

This issue also features "The Miraculous and Mucilaginous Paste Pot: Extra-Illustration and Plagiary in the Burroughs Legacy" by Davis Schneiderman. A cross-disciplinary perspective on William S. Burroughs's cutup method, Schneiderman's essay charts the connections between an early user-based textual strategy known as extra-illustration and the cutups practice of William S. Burroughs. Extra-illustration dates from the late eighteenth century through the early twentieth century, and this essay offers the work of John Mansir Wing of the Newberry Library in Chicago as a specific exemplar whose practice aligns with that of Burroughs. The essay is accompanied by images from Burroughs early cutup work and Wing's.

"Did Beatniks Kill John F. Kennedy?" by Rob Johnson is a cultural and historical discussion of the ways in which the pejorative term "beatnik" became central to the search for John F. Kennedy's assassin and in the 1964 Warren Commission report's now highly suspect conclusion about who killed Kennedy. Johnson's essay draws on passages from the Warren Commission report and extensive research in local Dallas publications. The political aspects of profiling the assassin as a "beatnik" figure are viewed through Texas "beat" writer Bud Shrake's 1972 novel *Strange Peaches*, set in Dallas and Fort Worth at the time of the assassination. The dramatic center of Johnson's essay considers The Cellar, a Fort Worth "beatnik" nightclub where, it has been shown, Secret Service agents drank and caroused the night before the day of the assassination. The essay concludes with a review of some Beat writers' reactions to the assassination, including those of William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Gregory Corso.

In this issue, we are joined by Fiona Paton of SUNY New Paltz, who has begun to edit the Review Section.

This issue features reviews of four diverse Beat-focused texts. Joyce Johnson's unauthorized biography, *The Voice is All: The Lonely Victory of Jack Kerouac*, is reviewed by Paton. *Postliterary America: From Bagel Shop Jazz to Micropoetries* by Maria Damon is reviewed by Terence Diggory. Cary Nelson provides a review of The Library of America edition of *Kerouac's Collected Poems*, edited by Mariléne Phipps-Kettlewell. *Rub Out the Words: The Letters of William S. Burroughs 1959-1974*, edited by Bill Morgan, is reviewed by Jennie Skerl. The section concludes with a review by Nancy Grace, a co-editor of this journal, of *The Philosophy of the Beats*, edited by Sharin N. Elkholy. Grace's review entails an extended discussion of the field of Beat Studies through the lenses of philosophical and interdisciplinary theory.

Our next issue, slated for Spring 2014, will have a special focus on literary activity in the Cambridge-Boston area in the mid-1950s and the emergence of nascent Beat poetics under fledgling New York School and Black Mountain influences, and even Harvard University. For future issues, we envision a focus

on Lawrence Ferlinghetti and City Lights Press, and an inquiry into interactions and interrelations between Beat poets and poetics and L.A.N.G.U.A.G.E. arts and artists. We are fortunate to have you our readers in these explorations and inquiries.

Onward!

Ronna C. Johnson and Nancy M. Grace

Notes

[1]. Tom Clark, 1980. *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars*. Santa Barbara., CA: Cadmus Editions, 17.

[2]. As we write this Letter, the New York *Times* reports that the renowned Buddhist teacher, Joshua Sasaki, who was known as the teacher of Leonard Cohen, the poet and songwriter, is being investigated by an independent council of Buddhist leaders for claims that he "groped and sexually harassed female students for decades, taking advantage of their loyalty to a famously charismatic roshi, or master." "In the council's report on January 11," the *Times* recounts, the authors wrote of "Sasaki asking women to show him their breasts, as part of 'answering' a koan...or to demonstrate 'non-attachment."' Members of the witnessing council interviewed for this article noted that while "people in Japan have some skepticism about priests," "in the United States many proponents have a 'devotion to the guru or teacher in a way that could repress our common sense and emotional intelligence."' Sasaki is 105 years old. See "Zen Groups Distressed by Accusations Against Teacher" by Mark Oppenheimer and Ian Lovett. New York *Times*, 12 February 2013. A13 and A20.