



MANSOURA UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF LETRES

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POETS**

BY

Dr. Amany Magdy Mohammed Rabee

Lecturer of English Literature

Faculty of Arts - Suez University

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Abstract

This paper offers a thorough and comprehensive exploration of the role of women poets within the Beat Generation. Historically speaking, the Beat Generation was a group of writers who criticized and rejected the main-stream values of the fifties. They were the first to revolt against the traditional conformity of the fifties. By experimenting with personal liberty, drug use, and unconventional sexuality, the Beat Generation defied the prevailing social norms of 1950s America. The Beat Generation literary canon was male-centered, with female writers marginalized and under recognized, relegating their contributions. Despite their prominence, female figures were often viewed as isolated and unheard outsiders, excluded from the Beat mainstream. By examining Diana di Prima (1934-2020), this paper highlights the pivotal role she played in giving voice to the marginalized and silenced women of the Beat Generation. The paper further offers a close textual analysis of Di Prima's *Loba*, examining how she empowered women, amplified their voices, and asserted their roles as active participants in the Beat movement and community.

Keywords: The Beat Generation, Beat women, Women's poetry, Diane di Prima, *Loba*, Motherhood.

ملخص البحث:

يستكشف هذا البحث بشكل شامل و دقيق دور الشاعرات في حركة جيل البيت. من الناحية التاريخية، جيل البيت هي مجموعة من الكتاب الذين انتقدوا ورفضوا القيم السائدة في الخمسينيات. لقد كانوا أول من ثاروا ضد المطابقة التقليدية للخمسينيات. تحدى جيل البيت الأعراف الاجتماعية السائدة في أمريكا في الخمسينيات من خلال تجربة الحرية الشخصية، وتعاطي المخدرات، والجنس. كانت هذه الحركة الأدبية تتمحور حول الرجال، مع تهميش الكاتبات وعدم الاعتراف بهن، مما أدى إلى تهميش مساهماتهن. على الرغم من بروزها، غالبًا ما كان يُنظر إلى الشخصيات النسائية على أنها دخيلة معزولة وغير مسموعة، ومستعبدة من تيار البيت السائد. من خلال دراسة ديانا دي بريما (1934-2020)، يبسط هذا البحث الضوء على الدور المحوري الذي لعبته في إعطاء صوت للنساء المهمشات من جيل البيت. يقدم البحث أيضًا تحليلًا نصيًا للمجموعة الشعرية لوبا لدي بريما، ويفحص كيفية تمكينها للنساء، والتأكيد على أدوارهن كمشاركات نشطات في حركة *Beat* والمجتمع.

Introduction:

The Beat Generation is a group of young American poets and writers that emerged in the 1950s. They challenged, questioned and denied the values of the Post-World War II society. The social and political circumstances of the American society molded the Beat Generation's consciousness. The difficulties they faced in their society were the roots of their rebellion.

Historically speaking, the word "Beat" was used after WWII; it is a slang term that means down or exhausted. John Clellon Holmes states in his *This is the Beat Generation* that :
The origins of the word beat are obscure, but the meaning is only clear to most Americans. More than the feeling of weariness, it implies the feeling of having been used, of being raw. It involves a sort of nakedness of the mind. (223)

The Beat poets were seen as the new rebels of that time. They called themselves "Beats" as they felt beaten and defeated by their society. The Beat "see the traditional values as deadening awareness, brutalizing feeling, and distorting the responses of the individual, therefore they celebrate a new moral and ethical position intended to salvage human dignity" (Holladay 157). They were fascinated with the beat of jazz music. The Beat Generation embraced experimentation with drugs, unconventional sexuality, embarked on extensive travels across America, and sought spiritual enlightenment through Buddhism and other Eastern philosophies.

Kerouac, the beaten guru writer of the group, defined the Beat Generation as: “a swing group of new American boys intent on life” (Charter 300). It is worth noting that this definition is convenient because “boys” were the ones placed in the Beat movement. The Beats rejected conventional values like marriage, family and traditional jobs. Few women were open to that kind of change in the American values. Also, most women who tried to break with these values found themselves pregnant with a child of a man who did not believe in marriage and believed in roaming. So they gave up their literary work to find a job to support their children. Women found that "Their search for freedom and authenticity confronted them directly with the realities of the postwar sexual and gender order" (Anderson 254).

The Beat women had a secondary position and their role was reduced into wives or girlfriends willing to endure their husbands' artistic careers. Holmes exposed the male dominance in the Beat movement, saying:

The chronicles of the Beat Generation have been almost exclusively written by men. The restless search for those illuminations of spirit via the senses that characterized the Beat has been mostly depicted from the vantage point of young men of the 1940's and 50's (i)

The Beat Movement started with a group of men, and that overshadowed the influence of women writers. Roseanne Giannini Quinn stated in the opening of her articles on Diane di Prima that "The Beat literary movement can safely be described as masculinist"(19). Women were still seen as inferior to men and received a little credit. Joyce Johnson described the Beat women in her memoirs of the 1950s as "minor characters" (5). By examining the Beat Generation Canon, putting gender and sexuality in consideration, it is clear that there is a narrow representation of female experience in their work. Johnson and Grace stated that female Beats continued to fight a two-front war against the "forces of social constructions in both the Beat and establishment culture" (8). Women of the Beat Generation shared silence with "mainstream" American women in the 50th. This silencing was partly created by the attitudes in the Beat Movement and society towards female writers. Hettie Jones speaks of the role of gender in her experience in the Beat scene: "I really wanted to show that we had started the whole process, that not enough attention had been paid to the fact that we were here and we had made changes in women's lives" (Grace and Johnson 159).

Beat women embraced many of the core Beat Generation beliefs. They rejected materialistic American culture and its stifling conformity, seeking excitement and authenticity instead. They experimented with their identities through writing, public reading, and community involvement. By sharing their thoughts and experiences openly, Beat women aimed to redefine themselves and connect with others on a deep level. But in the mainstream Beat literary scene, women were often relegated to a passive, silent role, serving as mere accessories to the male Beat image. This stereotype aligns with Jack Kerouac's definition women who were supposed to "say nothing and wear black" (Grace and Johnson 1).

Right from the beginning, the Beat Generation was mostly about men. But a strong and determined woman, Diane di Prima, was also writing poetry and her poetry deals with the themes of love, women's rights and alternative ways of living for women. Di Prima is one of the revolutionary and visionary female figures of the Beat Generation. Diane Di Prima (1934–

2020), who George Butterick wrote about saying: "Di Prima is the writer [among women of her generation] who by her life and work most embodies the definable patterns of the Beat Generation" (149).

She was a mother of five children from different fathers. Despite the five children, she was able to live the roaming life of the Beats; travelling the country, avoiding traditional jobs and supporting her family with teaching and poetry reading. This bohemian lifestyle that lacks conformity and disregarded rules was a perfect fit with di Prima's direction in life and influenced her way of writing. Despite all the difficulties she faced as a female writer, She was able to adventure her way across the states, mother her children on the road and she was one of the "most productive Beat writer" (Charter 107). She published more than 40 books of poetry and prose. Her writings are very personal reflection of her experience as a woman. She used satire, parody and meditative style to reflect on men and women communication and to show women's feeling of alienation.

Di Prima emerged as a pioneering voice, representing the feminine perspective within the Beat Generation and her work paved the way for other women writers by giving voice to the feminine experience within the Beat movement. She offered a uniquely feminine perspective on bohemian life, motherhood, and love. But because of her gender she is not one of Kerouac's "new American boys". Di Prima criticized the American mainstream while establishing her identity as a female poet in a male dominated literary canon.

Di Prima was able to deconstruct the traditional image of women. In her book "Recollections of My Life as a woman", she wrote that Kerouac once said to her: "Di Prima, unless you forget about your babysitter, you're never going to be a writer"(202). Diane di Prima faced the challenge of gaining the acceptance of her male peers because of her gender. Di Prima described her surrounding literary community as a "determinedly male community of writers [...] self-satisfied, competitive, glorying in small acclaims" (107). In a competitive community of boys, di Prima wanted to secure herself a place. She wrote about her desire to be recognized by her peers in her poem "Coscia's: Letters to John Wieners":

I expect a certain amount of
respect
Yes I do
as you do
(don't like to be called "girlie")
a certain amount of deference
stopping to listen
when I pronounce
an opinion
(di Prima 1990: 43)

Di Prima reflected upon the marginality of women within the male-dominated community of the Beat writers saying:

I love them at their best and beyond their best as fellow companions of the road. My choice: to overlook their one-upmanship, their eternal need to be right. Or I took it in stride as not important. A minor part of their Act.
Was this denial? (2002: 107).

She was preoccupied with the silencing of women's voices. In her poem "For Cameron" included in *Loba*, she asks: " How was woman broken?/ Falling out of attention./ Wiping gnarled fingers on a faded house-dress./ Lying down in the puddle beside the broken jug./ Where was the slack, the loss/ of early fierceness?/ How did we come to be contained/ in rooms?" (152).

Di Prima published more than 40 books. Her poetry collections include *This Kind of Bird Flies Backwards* (1958), the long poem *Loba* (1978, expanded 1998), and *Pieces of a Song: Selected Poems* (2001). She is also the author of the short story collection *Dinners and Nightmares* (1960), the semi-autobiographical *Memoirs of a Beatnik* (1968), and the memoir *Recollections of My Life as a Woman: The New York Years* (2001).

Di Prima published her epic book-length poem *Loba* over a 15 year period. She was able to create a woman centered epic composed of more than two hundred short poems. Di Prima uses *Loba* to recall and recreate myths surrounding powerful women and connect them to modern women. Di Prima employs the shape-shifting *Loba*, a powerful wolf-woman archetype, to encapsulate the multifaceted nature of womanhood and create a collective female experience through poetry. Di Prima wanted women to identify the various personalities within themselves through presenting *Loba's* process of transformation.

Di Prima sought to redefine feminine power by demonstrating its capacity for both tenderness and wrath. This explains her choice of *Loba*, as wolves are very frightening hunting predators. In his *Divine Comedy*, Dante states that a she-wolf is " perverse and vicious, her craving belly is never satisfied, / still hungering food the more she eats" (70). Di Prima used the image of a wolf to show different aspects of womanhood through poetry, *Loba* "encapsulates the varied images, experiences and myths of womanhood"(Gould 285).

Loba represents both di Prima's personal struggle for recognition in a male-dominated literary landscape and the collective experiences of women seeking to be heard.

Loba, di Prima's epic poem that began in 1971, shows di Prima as one who has survived the struggling essence of a woman writer and who is thus prepared to examine the universal experience of a multilayered female life-principle. (Lawlor 85) The different images of *Loba* represent the female experience, while patriarchy and social conventions are represented as opposing force against *Loba's* power. Di Prima created a harmonious relationship between the roles of women by linking these voiceless women to her powerful *Loba*. Di Prima's *Loba* is rebellion against the core of western culture offering visionary alternatives.

Di Prima has "a distinctive style of her own, modulating with determination, generosity, and self-awareness" (Foster 191). In *Loba*, she uses confessional style combined with spiritual artistry which represent the traditional form of poetry writing associated with both male and female Beat poets. Di Prima's fusion of personal, spiritual, and physical elements challenges the dominant male literary tradition, creating a space for women to articulate their authentic experiences in their own language.

Steven Watson identifies the Beats literary style as "... a manifestation of personal content and open forms, in verse and prose" (5). *Loba's* poetic form shares the Beat tradition of extended lines that creates a stanza. The poems are filled with exclamations. Throughout *Loba*, di Prima juxtaposes hipster slang with sophisticated poetic language. The poems are

characterized by the use of capitalized words, lower-case letters when upper-case letters would typically be used, and the shortened forms of words like "yr, &". These techniques are experimentations to establish a new and open form of poetry.

"Ave", the first poem in di Prima's *Loba*, is a call for female unity and solidarity: "O Lost moon sisters"(3). Di Prima opens her book by saluting suffering and voiceless women. Her representation of women is created by forming different images that extend from daily life situations to mystical representation of female power. Here the poet addresses all the women wandering around the world:

jaywalking do you wander
spitting do you wander
mumbling and crying do you wander
aged and talking to yourselves
with roving eyes do you wander
hot for quick love do you sander
weeping your dead (3)

The poet uses parallelism to create rhythm and to emphasize the sense of belonging.

Di Prima speaks of the internal conflict women experience when forced to choose between their personal aspirations: " you are armed/ you drive chariots/ you tower above me", and the roles designated to them by society: " you are small/ you cower on hillsides/ out of the winds"(4). Di Prima presents examples of female experience such as abortion, motherhood, drug addiction, gender violence and others that are typically associated with the definition of womanhood. Di Prima argues that these typical images contradict the mystical representation of women manifested in nature:

you are the hills, the shape and color of mesa
you are the tent, the lodge of skins, the hogan
the buffalo robes, the quilt, the knitted afghan
you are the cauldron and the evening star
you rise over the sea, you ride the dark (5)

Di Prima concludes her poem by identifying with the women she describes as "my mirror image and my sisters" and thus aligning herself with their shared experiences:

I am you
and I must become you
I have been you
and I must become you
I am always you
I must become you (6)

Motherhood is a part of the poet's identity and a core experience explored in *Loba*. "On the surface the 1950s seemed to suggest a decade of glorification of motherhood, but in fact mothering was so denigrated that women who gave their serious energies to it for any period of time were considered unfit to do anything else" (Kaldin 48). For di Prima, motherhood was a central aspect of life, encompassing duty, responsibility, and desire. In line with Beat philosophy, she believed that "one cannot separate one's life as an artist from other duties, responsibilities, and desires"(Hemmer 71). She travelled all around the country reading

poetry with her children. Di Prima used her reevaluation of her life to challenge the readers to "view the Beat Generation through an oppositional, revisionary lens" (Carden 34).

In *Loba*, Di Prima explicitly represented motherhood in various poems. For example, "LOBA IN CHILDBED," that describes childbirth as a physical and spiritual empowering experience:

she
screamed, for him, for herself, she
tried to open, to widen tunnel, the rock
inside her tried to crack, to chip away
bright spirit hammered at it w/ his
soft foamy head (30)

The poem portrays labor as a shared physical effort involving both *Loba* and her baby. Labor is described as something she does, not just goes through. The mother's pain is portrayed in terms like: "she cried out / bursting from the heart / of the devastated / mandala / skull boat grew wings / she fluttered / thru amniotic seas to draw him on" (30).

In her poem "The *Loba* Sings to her Cub", which celebrates female reproduction, di Prima represented the harmony between nature, mother and child through portraying the active role of each during childbirth:

O my mole, sudden & perfect
golden gopher tunneling
to light, o separate(d)
strands of our breath! (33)

In these lines the baby becomes an animal trying to find his way out of his mother. As for *Loba*, she reveals the dual nature of women who are capable of both nurturing and savage impulses. *Loba* welcomes her child with a body designed to do so: "you lie warm, wet on the / soggy pelt of my / hollowed / belly, my / bones curve up / to embrace you" (33). The image of childbirth in this poem presents the connection between childbirth and the female body. In "The *Loba* Sings to her Cub" childbirth is a powerful, active process that contrasts the conventional medical model often portrays labor as a medical condition or illness, rather than a natural physiological process. The 'hollowed belly' of the *Loba* suggests that motherhood is essential to her identity and well-being, and that she feels incomplete without a child in her life. Through a maternal animalistic persona, Di Prima constructs a familiar image of nurturing womanhood, only to disrupt this stereotype with underlying currents of wild, sexual desire.

The *Loba*'s character suggests a matriarchal worldview, challenging patriarchal dominance in domestic and public life. In " Dream: The *Loba* Reveals Herself", *Loba* embodies a multifaceted feminine archetype, combining mystical, protective, and maternal qualities:

Protectress
great mystic beast of European forest.
green warrior woman, towering.
kind watchdog I cd
leave the children with

Mother & sister.

Myself (68)

Loba is the guardian of the forest, she aligns the feminine with the natural world. At the same time, she assumes a protective role for the speaker's children. This authoritative figure, a "warrior woman," subverts the traditional image of the helpless, delicate female.

Di Prima starts her poem "The Loba Addresses The Goddess" with a complain " Is it not in yr service that I wear myself out?" (134). Di Pima criticizes the traditional designed role of women. Thomsen argues that, with her poetry, di Prima "proposes new forms of signification by reconsidering the body, female sexuality, and normative gender roles" (1-2).

Di Prima believes that God knows that women are being used by men so she reminds God that mothers are "running ragged among these hills, driving children" (134). She aims to highlight the traditional roles assigned to women. She explains that mothers "... wear exhaustion like a painted robe" (134), she believes that mothers are given tiresome tasks as a present. She points out that all women, " I & my sisters" (134), share the same fate of wasting their lives at home " wresting the goods from the niggardly" (134), facing the pressure of traditions and poverty.

Di Prima rejects the societal stereotype of women as weak, a construct perpetuated by male-dominated culture:

that when we stand naked in the circle of lamps
 (beside the small water, in the inner grove)
 we show
 no blemish, but also no superfluous beauty.
 It had burned off in watches of the night.
 O Nut, O mantle of stars, we catch at you
 lean mournful
 ragged triumphant
 shaggy as grass
 our skins ache of emergence / dark o' the moon (134)

The poet argues that feminine beauty is blemished by men as they spoil women's lives and waste their time. Di Prima suggests that romance can be manipulated by men to exert control over women in relationships. Women are affected by romanticism, they experience a mood of persuasion by "mantle of stars" but unwillingly they face the consequences that lead to a " ragged triumphant" end by themselves.

Di Prima's poetry challenges conventional perceptions of femininity, disrupting traditional norms surrounding gender roles. Her Loba defies the patriarchal dominance prevalent in within both the Beat movement and broader society. Through her work, di Prima aims to deconstruct the entrenched belief in male superiority and female inferiority, challanging readers to reconsider women's place in society. Simultaneously, her poetry deals with the core themes of the Beat Generation.

Conclusion:

To conclude, The women of the Beat Generation published their work alongside the men's, but they were concealed by the stereotypical image of the beatnik girls who say nothing. Female writers of the Beat Generation were largely overlooked and

underappreciated, their contributions overshadowed by their male counterparts. Despite this marginalization, Diane di Prima was able to prove herself as a prominent figure among Beat writers, challenging the male-dominated literary canon.

This research shows how di Prima's voice fits into the Beat Generation while highlighting her resistance to the male-dominated literary canon that often silences women's voices. Di Prima embodies the Beat personality through her independence, unconventional sexuality, drug use, and bohemian lifestyle. Di Prima writes in raw street language without polishing or revising. Her work is an example of the Beat's aesthetic rejection of the boundaries between poetry and personal experience. Di Prima presented the theme of the rejection of the traditional gender roles, aligning her work with the Beat rejection of 1950s American conformity.

Diane di Prima is a leading feminist voice of the Beat Generation. Her *Loba*, a collection of over 200 poems, explores the female experience and identity. Di Prima, through *Loba*, exposes the often-overlooked free and natural aspects of womanhood. Di Prima's *Loba* seeks to liberate women from societal oppression and marginalization. A close examination of *Loba* illuminates Di Prima's role within the Beat movement and her unique contribution to the literary landscape.

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