

ESTÍBALIZ ENCARNACIÓN-PINEDO. *BEAT
MYTHS IN LITERATURE: REVISIONIST
STRATEGIES IN BEAT WOMEN*. ROUTLEDGE,
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There is a growing interest in the work of female Beat writers in the field of American Studies in Spain. Increasingly, it is noticeable how scholars and translators aim to give Spanish readers unprecedented access to their works. Annalisa Mari Pegrum's *Beat attitude: antología de mujeres poetas de la generación beat* (2015) or *Quita tu cuello degollado de mi cuchillo* (2021), which was the first anthology in Spanish of Diane di Prima's writing, are clear examples of this. Estíbaliz Encarnación-Pinedo, who is currently an assistant professor at the Department of English Studies at the University of Murcia and a Board member of the European Beat Studies Network has been studying gender and feminism in postwar American poetry, as can be illustrated in recent publications like "Ethnicity and Gender in the Beat Generation: Jack Kerouac and the Other Woman" (2022). In *Beat Myths in Literature: Revisionist Strategies in Beat Women* (2023), Encarnación-Pinedo has brought readers closer to the works of Joanne Kyger, Diane di Prima, Anne Waldman and others, drawing special attention to their revision of ancient myths through insightful and detailed readings. As stated in the first chapter, "The Art of Looking Back" from a revisionist studies perspective, the re-writing of the mythical texts by Beat female writers aims to redefine women's position in society as well as trace the path to gender equality in any artistic movement.

Chapter 2, entitled "Joanne Kyger and the Subversion of Discourse," discusses the passive role commonly attributed to women preceding the second-wave feminism that began in the early 1960s in

the US. Female characters have been defined through their relationship with a man, as in the case of Penelope in Homer's *Odyssey*. Nevertheless, Kyger, highly influenced by second-wave feminism, adopted revisionist and appropriative strategies to place the focus on her as the central character. Without losing track of the original version, the American writer revisited the myth portraying Penelope not as the conventional wife who would wait for Ulysses eternally but as a woman fully aware of her lack of freedom and directly questioning her as a symbol of chastity, presenting in *Tapestry* (1965) an alternative scenario in which Ulysses' wife has been "more fueled by Eros" (Kyger 79).

The analysis of Diane di Prima's revisionist techniques opens the third section, in which Encarnación-Pinedo finds a resemblance between Kyger's Penelope and *Loba* (1973) as both authors criticize the subordination of female experience in patriarchal societies. Moreover, di Prima adeptly depicted the multifaceted nature of women, with a particular emphasis on female sexuality. The ineffable representation of *Loba* is the awakening of feminist empowerment rising against heteronormative control. This idea is clearly illustrated in one of the poems, "AUTOR DE," in which the protagonist reveals the possibilities they have if stepping out of the female traditional roles. According to Encarnación-Pinedo, under no circumstances might *Loba* be considered an escape but a handbook full of tools to fight against conventions and social inequality.

Chapter 4, entitled "Anne Waldman and the Scope of Jove" delves into the poet's conviction that words and literature might be conceived as powerful tools to dismantle outdated concepts. Despite her depiction of Penelope as a victim of patriarchal subordination voicing Ulysses' wife's feelings, Kyger followed the masculine Homeric narrative while di Prima, in *Loba*, denounces subordination of the female body by narrating different patriarchal manifestations. Through her gendered lenses, Waldman also highlighted how inclusive a liberal discourse could become by including narratives protagonized by unrepresented groups such as black men, homosexuals or children.

In fact, Waldman's *Iovis* considered men as supporters and allies who played a crucial role in causing a real impact on patriarchal mechanisms. Though embracing the collaboration between both sexes, *Iovis* severely condemned those who claimed power over people, especially women, by adopting a "colonist" attitude. Waldman elaborated on this belief in her third book *Eternal War* which revisited

the damaging consequences of the Vietnam War throughout her poem “DARK ARCANA: AFTERIMAGE OR GLOW.” In the section “WAR CRIME,” Waldman dismantled the fallacy of a justified war in the Asian country supporting her ideas with the memories of her father, who had been a military veteran.

While the three previous chapters analyze Kyger, di Prima and Waldman’s poetic contributions, Encarnación-Pinedo turns to memoirs in “Memoir and the Beat Chick” and “Memoir and Writing (the) Beat,” chapters 5 and 6 respectively, in order to investigate the revisionist strategies through which authors like Joyce Johnson or Hettie Jones, among others, challenge dominant narratives that sought to reduce female experiences to the traditional stereotypes. In the first place, these self-portraits explored the relationship between the authors and their female bodies. There is a consensus among the Beat women that openly discussing their sexuality and rejecting the notion of their bodies as mere objects of male desire posed challenges, even amidst the era’s sexual liberation movements. Most of the time, these manifestations led to social exclusion as these writers had not followed the “acceptable pretexts of marriage and college education” (118).

Not only did they question the conventions attributed to the female body but also the perpetuation of gender roles through marriage. Beat women, like Joyce Johnson, vindicated women’s right to occupy positions generally attributed to men. In *Minor Characters* (1983), Johnson proclaimed herself as the bread-winner in the relationship as she economically supported one of the pioneers of the Beat Generation: Jack Kerouac. Another worth-mentioning testimony that Encarnación-Pinedo analyzes might be Carolyn Cassady’s *Heartbeat* (1976) and *Off the Road* (1990) in which she recounts her polyamorous relationship with Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac. The three prominent Beat figures blurred the limitations of the traditional conception of marriage. Nevertheless, Carolyn Cassady’s disappointment can be noticeable as the occasional reversal of genders did not compensate for the little acknowledgement of her intellect, particularly from Neal Cassady. When it comes to motherhood, Encarnación-Pinedo successfully compiles illustrating testimonies to provide different perspectives. In the subsection “Beatnik Motherhood: Myths and Realities”, on one hand, one might be amazed by Joan Haverty’s firm choice to raise her child as a single mother turning a blind eye to Kerouac’s persuasive arguments in favor of abortion, as

explained in *Nobody's Wife* (2000). On the other hand, Joyce Johnson found abortion the best way to ensure her literary career.

Beat Myths in Literature: Revisionist Strategies in Beat Women is an example of the important role played by gender studies and feminist revisions in rescuing these less known or even silenced groups of Beat women writers. In the final section of this volume, Encarnación-Pinedo elaborates on how some of the poets studied tended to use writing as a powerful tool to challenge the patriarchal system. This is illustrated in works such as *The Tapestry and the Web*, *Loba* or *Iovis*. Meanwhile, other authors wrote memoirs to raise their voice against gender inequality within the artistic milieu of the period refusing to be, in the words of Diane di Prima, “a minor part of their [male writers] Act” (*Recollections* 107) or, according to Joan Haverty, an imprisoned spider whose gift for writing has been neglected by social constraints.

Although *Beat Myths in Literature: Revisionist Strategies in Beat Women* serves as an invaluable resource for those already familiar with the Beat movement, its specialized focus may pose challenges for readers unacquainted with Beat literature. This is particularly regrettable given the book's aim to introduce and celebrate the contributions of women Beat writers making their creations accessible to a broader audience. Nonetheless, this volume does a superb job portraying Beat women as a generation who fought for a more unbiased future and debunked the patriarchy through the most liberating creative tool: words.

WORKS CITED

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