

Abstract

Abeer Refky

Impact of the Context of the City on the Genesis of Allen Ginsberg's Poetry

This analytical study was meant to show that the Beat poet Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) was a poet of the city who was defying all the social and political restrictions the American society underwent. The aim of the study was twofold: First, it illustrated that certain artistic and social factors played a significant role in establishing the urban context for the Beat poets who were the descendants of the first second generation of American immigrants. Cities became a destination for those seeking an artistic, social and sexual lifestyle different from their working class backgrounds. Cities also provided the structural environments that fostered creativity and free expression as well as the urbanisation of literature. Furthermore, rebelling against all traditions was associated with travelling, gaining freedom and independence through running away and exploring the world. Secondly, this paper represented the Beat movement's experimentation with the English language in a very revolutionary way by declaring limitless freedom in all written work. This was reflected in Ginsberg's poem "Howl" (1956), which lamented the loss of natural innocence in the context of the city and was the cause of a famous obscenity trial in 1957. Within the context of the city, Ginsberg explored the ugly face of America represented by drug-addicts, drifters, prostitutes, and swindlers. Ginsberg's words represented a revolution in poetic diction and presaged a new era in writing poetry. Foul language and slang prevailed throughout the work, as well as graphic descriptions of sex, drug abuse and hallucinatory visions. "Howl" was deemed a howl of anger and disgust against the 1950s mechanistic civilisation which killed the spirit of mankind. Finally, Ginsberg believed that body and soul, the spiritual and the physical had to be reconciled within the context of the city.