

**THE REPRESENTATION OF FREEDOM AND LOVE IN WALT WHITMAN'S AND
ALLEN GINSBERG'S POETRY**

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1. Introduction

One of the most important elements of poetry is love, which is also the most abstruse emotion of the world. Many poets, novelists and even philosophers have tried to give a clear definition of love, however, they mostly failed and could only embrace and showcase their own personal beliefs on the feeling. During the modern times of literary history people were still trying to put this completely abstract notion into words, many have failed again, mostly because they forgot to take into consideration that love is different. It varies for everyone who feels it: it can be idyllic, painful even boring, but there is one common thing: we all feel it. If everybody feels it, it should be free and without any unnecessary restrictions, however, during all the history of humanity there was a group of people, who had to face constant discrimination and hatred because of the gender of the person they loved. These people started a movement to have the same freedom of love during the '60s, this movement is known as the Gay Liberation. One of the greatest voices of the queer community was Allen Ginsberg, who rebelled against lots of things he thought should be changed, for example the general view on queer people. He fought to be seen and to be heard. Ginsberg's ideas on love and politics are closely related to Walt Whitman's dream-like state of America. This paper will focus on the relation between the two poets, and how the ideas of freedom and love are inseparable in Allen Ginsberg's poetry, which can be originated from Walt Whitman's influence on the Beat poet. Moreover it will focus on the social and political influences, which forced Allen Ginsberg to admit that Walt Whitman's ideas are not viable in America of the 20th century.

2. The representation of sexuality in Whitman's poetry

Walt Whitman is known for being one of the first openly homosexual poet who talked freely about his desires connected to the male body. His influence on the queer community and on society's attitude concerning its queer members is crucial because Whitman's effect was not only connected to poetry, but he openly discussed the topic of free love and sexual attraction towards his own gender in his studies and letters as well. Due to this way he earned an even greater platform where he could explain and explore his thoughts in more detail. Because of his style and the manner in which he spoke about intimate and sensitive topics such as arousal and sex, he constantly had to face criticism. This and the socially accepted connection between homosexuality and sexual disease could be the reasons why he never openly identified as a gay man, he used to refer to his male partners as comrades, and he truly believed that what he feels for the other man is only the feelings of a very passionate friendship. Whitman believed that

the human body is some kind of a poetic work of art, which can only become truly expressed through sexual acts. He gives voice to this thought in *Children of Adam*, in which he talks about sexual relations between men and women and makes some overwhelmingly obvious homosexual references as well.

As it was mentioned above, one of Whitman's most well-known characteristics was that he openly and freely talked about erotic feelings and scenarios. This is not different in the book known as *Children of Adam*. He uses lots of Christian elements, which work weirdly well with his eroticism. One of these elements is the fall of mankind, where Adam and Eve lost Paradise. However, from the title of the book it becomes obvious that in Whitman's mind the ones who truly lost Paradise were not Adam and Eve but Adam's children. He also made numerous remarks on the connection between sex and the needs of the body. From his poems it becomes obvious that he believed that sex will not affect the purity of the body, which could be considered a pretty controversial idea in his time. While Whitman believed that the body needs to be sexually satisfied and that this guides us on our way back to Paradise, he also put a lot of stress on the importance of the spiritual love. In a way it can be understood as his way of saying that a man can only live a fulfilled life when he finds the balance between the sexual and the emotional aspects of living. In his poem, "A Woman Waits for Me" he makes this belief vocal and he also makes remarks on his sexuality.

"A woman waits for me, she contains all, nothing is lacking,

Yet all were lacking if sex were lacking, or if the moisture of the

right man were lacking." (Whitman 1–3)

In the quoted part of the poem the speaker talks about the perfect woman, who – in his opinion – is worth nothing if the sex or the right man is missing from the picture. Talking about the right man, the speaker brings the word "moisture" in, which gives the whole statement an erotic atmosphere. According to the speaker sex contains every essential abstract or physical things that could be needed by a human being, it is everything and nothing at the same time. Engaging in sexual acts is some kind of a celestial thing for the speaker. It is something that the human brain cannot comprehend with, however, he thinks that its spiritual nature is the thing that we need to earn the feeling of fulfilment and to create a balance between the soul and the body.

“These are contain’d in sex as parts of itself and justifications of itself.” (Whitman, 11)

Enumeration is a reoccurring element in Whitman’s poetry. With this poetic tool he gives great emphasis to his statements, while he also helps the reader to understand both the importance of the thing he is writing of and the essence of the idea that is being talked about. In “A Woman Waits for Me” enumeration is used to emphasise the importance of sex and sexual behaviour in a human’s life. The poet uses quite powerful words to further emphasise the mentioned importance. In the second stanza along with the enumerations we can see that Whitman talks about sex as if it was the base of humanity, moreover society itself. It becomes clear that sex is the essence of everything in the eyes of the speaker. He thinks of it as the heart of the machine we know as life, and if there is a person who can understand all the aspects of sexual love then this person will be able to understand how the whole world and society works. The speaker also mentions that he likes people who can understand the importance of sex and that these people have such experience in life that they are not afraid to admit the delicious nature of their sexes without feeling ashamed by it. By stating this, the speaker strengthens the already clear statement that sex is one of the most natural acts in the world.

“Without shame the man I like knows and avows the deliciousness of
his sex,

Without shame the woman I like knows and avows hers.” (Whitman 12–14)

In the poem the aspect of reproduction got a great emphasis, the man calls out to his lover to create children who will create children, this way they can give life to the perfect society, where women are strong and athletic, independent and they are able to defend themselves, from this it becomes obvious that in Whitman’s thinking equality was the basis of a great and functioning society, in his mind women were just as valuable as men.

As it is mentioned above, Whitman’s style consisted of the detailed description of explicit matters and the desires of one’s body, in his poem “Spontaneous Me” he describes these things just perfectly. The poem starts by emphasizing the connection between man and nature. This strong alliance like connection between nature and men is inspired by the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson. The forementioned relation can be understood as Whitman trying to say that every human action is an act of nature therefore it truly is natural, no matter what. The appearance of

nature can also strengthen the style in which this poem is written: nature is unpredictable, just like the topics appearing throughout the lines, which actually is predicted in the title as well. “Spontaneous Me” really is what the title suggests: we can see a piece of Whitman’s mind, how it worked and how his thoughts flowed, and this process was rather spontaneous. According to Harry R. Warfel the poem presents multiple aspects of one giant subject, which is procreation. This way the spontaneity, the purity, the necessity, the lawfulness and the naturalness of procreation are covered in the poem, which turns this poem into an astonishing example of how colourful Whitman’s style could get: Whitman created a whole new way of poetic expression. He somehow managed to put a piece of himself into each and every one of his writings, while he managed to reach an almost perfect state of generalisation. (Warfel 190) Due to the perfectly generalised speaker the reader has a greater opportunity to relate to the statements of the poem, therefore the controversy of them becomes less visible to the reader, while it also gives the feeling of naturality and necessity to the act of procreation. As it was mentioned before the main theme of the poem is procreation, which according to the poet, is endless and is to be considered the most noble, and the purest thing that a human can do to reach the feeling of fulfilment. (Warfel 191)

“The great chastity of paternity, to match the great chastity of maternity,

The oath of procreation I have sworn, my Adamic and fresh daughters,

The greed that eats me day and night with hungry gnaw, till I saturate

what shall produce boys to fill my place when I am through...” (Whitman 69–72)

The act itself is placed within a frame of a day: it starts with the “mounting sun”, goes through the “soft afternoon airs” and finishes “deep at night”, these metaphors all become clear with the last line of the poem, where the speaker dismisses the sexual encounter, these metaphors are to represent the stages of a man’s life: from his youth to the elderly years of his life, procreation is a deed that he has to do throughout his whole life. This idea is presented through some of the most erotic and explicit pictures, which are written in a marvellous manner with the assistance of different poetic tools.

“The curious roamer the hand roaming all over the body, the bashful

withdrawing of flesh where the fingers soothingly pause and

edge themselves...” (Whitman 45–47)

These explicit contents are to be considered a reoccurring thing in Whitman’s poetry, and the careless and joyful manner in which he described them, along with witty and blunt style turned him into one of the most important persons of American literature in the 19th century. His oeuvre is remarkable due to his unique style of speech and his straightforwardness on quite sensitive topics, such as sexual desires, discrimination towards different groups, and his own sexuality. The same themes are present in his poem, “Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand” in which he describes the difficulties of a relationship, while examining the idea of identity. The titular line of the poem starts with a generalisation, and the idea of being held - this can be interpreted in two different ways: it could be understood as being held as a hostage in a hopeless situation from which the speaker cannot escape, however, it could also be understood as being held by a loved one, or in a romantic way. The third line of the stanza strengthens the second interpretation, but with the word “warning” a darker atmosphere spreads over the supposedly delightful picture, therefore the line between the two interpretations is fading away creating an ambivalent mixture of feelings. This ambiguity stays present throughout the whole poem: in the first half the speaker demands full submission from the other person, even though he cannot promise or give anything in return.

“The way is suspicious, the result uncertain, perhaps destructive,

You would have to give up all else, I alone would expect to be your sole and

exclusive standard...” (Whitman 7–8)

In Whitman’s poetry enumerations are quite common, it is the same in the case of “Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand”. As the speaker gives voice to the nature of the demanded relationship, it becomes clear that he is making a list of every possible negative component of their love, he does all this while making sure that he presents everything from the other person’s perspective, making it obvious that the speaker has nothing to lose here. However, as the enumeration continues the word “release” appears, which shows that even though he has nothing to lose, he cannot come out in a worse-than-before position, still he is pleading for something to happen, he cannot stand the immobile situation they are stuck in, therefore the nature of this release is just as uncertain as their relationship. After a long argument against the relationship the speaker starts talking about what could happen if his lover stays by

his side. He starts to present the bright side of their story, yet it ends just as suddenly as it started. Ahead of the description of the amative love there is a part in which the speaker talks about the possible social effects of their romance.

“Or else by stealth in some wood for trial...” (Whitman 13)

With the word “stealth” Whitman creates a kind of anxious atmosphere, that spreads through the remaining of the poem and as he proceeds this anxious, dark feeling becomes much stronger. Due to this uncertain and tense ambience the affair or even the whole relation pairs with the feeling of sin. This odd pairing will result in an interpretation that adapts to the social norms of the 19th century – the somewhat pure love of two men turns into a sorrowful secret that must not become publicly known. As Allen Ginsberg points out in his “Gay Sunshine Interview”, the presented love is the same that Whitman described in his *Democratic Vistas*, where the love between two men is shown as an intense and passionate comradeship, the same idea makes an appearance in the poem: he identifies himself as the comrade and the new husband, whereas the image of marriage makes a strong contrast with the social views on homosexuality (Ginsberg 394). Whitman lived in a society, where talking about the sexual aspects of love was to be considered a highly controversial thing and because he talked freely not only on this topic but on the topic of homosexuality, he had to face harsh criticism. Despite all this he still had multiple people’s support and admiration, which serves as an explanation for the sudden twist in the poem: the lover turns into the unified mass of his followers. As the loving and longing relationship slowly turns into a metaphorical one it becomes clear that the poet is unsure about the strength and effect of his own work, he is unsure about the importance of his legacy, which was already quite powerful and colourful during his life. However, we cannot forget the fact that his idealism got an even greater value after his death: Walt Whitman’s legacy consists of both his poems and his ideologies which were inherited by the next generations of America’s greatest writers. The movement, known as the Beat Generation, gave great significance to Whitman’s ideas and opinion on the issues of the United States, his influence was particularly crucial on Allen Ginsberg’s life and work.

3. Whitman's ideal America through Ginsberg's "A Supermarket in California"

In the twentieth century the World was in chaos, America did not differ from the rest of the World either, however during this period of time two utterly important literary groups emerged, embracing the generational trauma caused by witnessing the vicious nature of war and by the faulted and discriminating society of the US. The first group, known as the Lost Generation, consisted of America's most well-known writers, such as Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner and many others. They were the ones witnessing the effects of the Great War. According to Malcolm Cowley these first-hand experiences and the social and economic consequences of the age are to be considered the dawn of the Lost Generation (Cowley 57). The things they had to face, and the things they had lost during their youth, such as the possibility for a stable home and a sufficient life, left them disillusioned. This disillusionment can be observed both in their works and in their way of living, their irresponsible, but ritualistic lifestyle served as some type of remedy, a way of escape from the horrors they had to survive. John Clellon Holmes, a member of the following great generation described the lifestyle of the Lost Generation in the following way: "The Lost Generation was discovered in a roadster, laughing hysterically because nothing meant anything anymore." (Holmes 2). From this description it becomes obvious that they became the Lost Generation because of the cruel and meaningless happenings of their surroundings, they lost their beliefs, their future along with their previously followed morals (Cowley 57). They started a kind of rebellion against the world, they destroyed idols and ideals, burned them to ashes and created this excessively self-destructive way of living, which slowly became a norm for the next generations: using drugs, alcohol and lechery morphed into acts of curiosity from being the exhibition of disillusionment (Holmes 3).

The aftershock of the World Wars and of the Great Depression was still lingering in the lives of many when the Beats rose from the ashes of the Lost Generation. The Beat Generation was engulfed by Whitman's ideas and tried to achieve his idyllic America. This idyllic America consisted of the freedom of writing and the freedom of love. Both Whitman and the members of the Beat believed that love, be it platonic or romantic, should be free and celebrated. Due to this train of thoughts they had to face strong discrimination, mainly because they refused to limit themselves to one strict sexual orientation, furthermore they talked about their homosexual relationships and affairs without any restrictions. As Catherine R. Stimpson explains in her work, "The Beat Generation And The Trials Of Homosexual Liberation" the Beats believed

that sex was just another method for deepening their brotherlike bonds and that it could be simply platonic. This idea originates from Whitman's concept which says that there are two types of feelings: adhesive and amative (Stimpson 367). Adhesive feelings are the ones with which you can strengthen the relationship but keep it platonic, while amative feelings are the romantic ones. The affairs happening between the members of the Beat were based on the concept of adhesive feelings (Stimpson 376). As it was mentioned before Walt Whitman's idyllic America consists of the freedom of love and writing, both elements were quite important in the life of the Beats, and they were fighting to achieve Whitman's dreams and to create a world in which they can love whoever they want to without being judged, and in which they could have the freedom to write about their experiences without being censored or banned. The experiences they wrote about and the way they worded them were often considered to be vulgar and the beats often had to face some serious and strong criticism for overstepping the boundaries created in literature. Whitman's connection to the Beats become obvious since society often tried to silence writers when it came to talking about sexuality, however it is still an important part in the process of development as a poet or a novelist. The strongest effect of his ideals can be seen in Allen Ginsberg's poetry, the link between the poets is undeniable.

According to Dara Barnat and her work, "‘Women and Poets See the Truth Arrive’: Muriel Rukeyser and Walt Whitman", Ginsberg embraces Whitman's style and echoes his long lines, anaphors, catalogues, views on America, and his homoeroticism (Barnat 95). From this it becomes apparent that Ginsberg looked at Whitman as a guide or almost like a father figure in his career. This can be seen in his poem, "A Supermarket in California", where the speaker follows Whitman's lead through the aisles of the supermarket when he refers to the poet as his father.

"Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher [...]" (Ginsberg 23).

Here the word "father" can mean two things, father as in 'male parent' and as in 'a priest', however, the fact that Ginsberg chose to follow Whitman's ideals through his life fits both of the interpretations. The poem written in free verse has three stanzas in which the poet explores different themes such as imagination and reality. When the speaker enters the supermarket – while thinking of Whitman – he finds himself face to face with the picture-perfect American lifestyle but later on as he begins his expedition through the aisles, he notices Walt Whitman, amongst the absurdly depicted families. The speaker exists in two different worlds: one imaginary where he meets Whitman and Lorca, and the real world. The speaker sees and talks

to the long-dead poet; however, he stays in touch with reality through the whole journey. The hints made for this parallel world system are often symbolic and have different interpretations as well, for example when Whitman asks his questions, we cannot decide whether he is talking to the speaker or to something from another reality that the members of the speaker's world cannot see.

“I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber, poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys.

I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?” (Ginsberg 8–11)

Robert P. Weeks explains that Ginsberg not only adopted Whitman's enumeration and personalised it to fit his own witty way, he also used his poetry to refer to the problems both him and the other poet had to face during their lives (Weeks 442). Both in the 19th and 20th century - and even today - social and political intolerance based on race, religion, gender, or sexuality was a huge problem so when the poets became the first queer voices while destroying any boundaries around their poetry, as a result of the uncensored and blunt manner they voiced their opinions on sensitive topics they had to face a lot of discrimination; for example, Emily Dickinson was advised not to read Whitman's works because of the explicit sexual contents (Barnat 110). Despite the discrimination, both Ginsberg and the remaining members of the Beat Generation had been fighting to be heard and to preach about Whitman's views on love, they became the voice of the queer community during the second half of the 20th century (Stimpson 374). The poem invokes both Walt Whitman and Garcia Lorca, both of the invoked poets symbolise displacement in the text: while Whitman walks through the aisles like a ghost asking strange questions, Lorca's presence seems odd even to the speaker.

“[...] and you, Garcia Lorca, what were you doing down by the watermelons?” (Ginsberg 5–7)

The speaker questions Lorca's appearance near the mentioned fruits, it confuses even him, however he never questions the presence of the long-dead Whitman. He quickly leaves Lorca alone but the fact that he is mentioned is still important because it strengthens the feeling of isolation which is present in the whole poem. Moreover, since Lorca also was a homosexual, Ginsberg can use his appearance to invoke Whitman's legacy, as it gives a solid ground to fully

conjure Whitman's ghost, while strengthening the portrayed social injustice towards different groups of the society (Mabrey 85).

There are quite a few symbols referring to the American way of living as well, however these quickly turn into a judgmental opinion from the poet. Ginsberg uses different techniques and themes to create an extremely powerful criticism on America to which he also uses bathetic humour, which became one of the main characteristics of the works created by the Beat Generation (Vogel 389). In "A Supermarket in California" Ginsberg questions the existence and even the possibility of the America in which he believed for so long and which was a creation of Whitman's mind. As the speaker starts his night time journey through the moon-lit streets towards the supermarket he starts with asking what thoughts he has of Whitman, which could be interpreted as the prologue of his uncertainties about the so-deeply-loved ideas. As the speaker reaches the neon-lit aisles of the supermarket he must face the socially accepted ideals of America, and he must watch as these ideals all fail one after another. He sees the oddly placed members of families, the strange placement of the husbands, wives and babies can be explained through the setting of the poem: the husbands are the only ones who are there as customers, while the wives and the babies are there as products waiting for the customer to pick them.

"What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families shopping at night! Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the avocados, babies in the tomatoes! [...]" (Ginsberg 5–6)

With this understanding it becomes clear that in the eyes of Ginsberg the American family model had failed. Using the supermarket as the setting of the poem can portray the fall of the modern and conventional lifestyle. Ginsberg pushes further with his doubts when he asks Whitman about his America. With this, he shows his uncertainty about the poet's loving America, he also pairs his questions with the symbols of death from the Greek mythology. That way he strengthens not just the uncertain atmosphere but the infeasible existence of this idea (Vogel 390). With the presence of death, the end of the journey and the appearance of the blue automobiles the comedic atmosphere that was lingering through the whole poem dissolves completely but before that, the speaker's doubts deepen when he admits that he feels absurd while touching Whitman's book, it can be interpreted as Ginsberg getting more and more uncertain about the possible existence of Whitman's lost America of love to the point where he starts treating it as a part of the imaginary world:

“Will we walk all night through solitary streets? The trees add shade to shade, lights out in the houses, we'll both be lonely.

Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love past blue automobiles in driveways, home to our silent cottage?” (Ginsberg 19–22).

Despite all the problems he noticed in America, Ginsberg truly believed in Whitman’s loving democracy which can be established once both the artistic and the personal freedoms are achieved, but he gave up on trying to be the ideal poet from Whitman’s perspective in the post-war America (Vogel 390). He still believed that a peaceful life for all can only be achieved through Whitman’s ideals because only when compassion and sensitivity can dominate will the country be an authentic democracy (Vogel 391).

4. The destruction of Whitman’s dream: Ginsberg’s harsh America

In the 20th century the whole world was in chaos: the shocking effects of the greatest wars ever witnessed by human eyes, left people contemplating whether life is worth living or not. This did not differ in the sphere of literature either. Moreover poets, novelists and even just literature consumers felt this depressing state of emptiness even more than the big mass, they felt it up to a level where the overwhelming feeling of helplessness made them lose faith in everything. This is quite visible on the work and lifestyle of the Beat Generation: drug abuse, licentious sex life, and the general, all-pervading depression and disorientation. (Rehlaender 3) The perfect example for this is Allen Ginsberg. In his early works we can see how Whitman’s ideas of the loving democracy affected his way of thinking, however after witnessing the horrors of war as a member of the newly formed movement, known as the Beat Generation, he slowly started to discard the deeply loved idea, which basically completely disappeared at the point where he published his poem, “Howl”. This poem is considered to be his lifework, in which we can see the disillusioned poet’s scream for help which is filled with rage. The speaker is surrounded by the madness of the century, which according to him destroys everything that comes in touch with it, his loved ones not being an exception, they can't escape the madness either. This unavoidable and quite hard situation created such a fierce rage in him which

combined with his witty and sarcastic style created the most beautiful and disdainful piece of literature of the American history. Ginsberg dedicated this poem to Carl Solomon, a friend of his, who ended up in a mental hospital, his mother struggled with her mental health a lot as well: his loved ones had been doomed by the madness of America. The poem starts by – in a way – calling this madness out, while pointing at the fact that it is targeting the greatest thinkers of the generation.

“I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo
in the machinery of night [...]” (Ginsberg 1–4)

According to Jonah Raskin the base ideas of the poem came from his experiences and memories gained by his relationship to his parents. Ginsberg’s mother, Naomi Ginsberg was to be considered as the greatest influence in the life of the poet: no lover, nor trauma could surpass the mark that he got from his mother. She and his father, hand in hand were able to make him feel so terrible and irrelevant, which forced him to learn how to survive in an environment that made him feel kind of worthless, while also reminding him of his own worth. (Raskin 25–26) The above mentioned basic ideas are stated in the first few lines of the poem, the madness presented by the opening line of the poem is illustrated through the next few lines, in which the appearance of such words as “hysterical”, or “dragging” makes the reader associate the people ruined by insanity to some kind of a monster. The mentioned picture dissolves once the celestial pictures appear, which are engraved into the poem, and they are among the main elements of it. However, the first part of the poem represents the way of living of Ginsberg’s generation: the intellectual and sexual hunger, the use of all kinds of substances and the overall feeling of madness, which makes the person really careless. The connection between the Beat and the first part becomes clear when the speaker mentions jazz and drugs.

“[...] who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the
supernatural

darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,

who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels staggering
on tenement roofs illuminated,

who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas and
Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war [...]” (Ginsberg 6 – 12)

With this he strengthens the idea claimed by the first line, which is that the conformist and chaotic America turns even the greatest, most brilliant people of the 20th century into madman, who are only interested in the enjoyments of life. While depicting the excessive way of living carried out by a generation of great writers, he also starts looking into the topic of the Cold War, sexuality, and the unjust way of the society. These topics are explored in a very passionate yet really sarcastic tone. Ginsberg makes remarks on their style of writing, which differs from their predecessors in so many ways. The Beat Generation is known for their explicit and almost obscene way of detailing, which is a highlighted idea of the poem, “Howl”, he gives a really great summary for the generation, summoning Burroughs, Kerouac and even Cassady in the poem, which could be considered as the program of the beat movement.

“who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes on the
windows of the skull [...]” (Ginsberg 13–14)

Alongside with the depiction of the Beat Generation, Ginsberg embraces and tries to represent the people of the US who, under any other circumstances, would not be represented by a writer due to not being able to fit into the picture demanded by the American Dream, or due to not being a poetry worthy individual, because they cannot show or create the elements of the standard beauty. However, in this poem they have gained a platform, on which a man is screaming for their rights, and for their benefits. But if we dive into the meaning of the poetic language of Allen Ginsberg it becomes clear that he admired the junkies and madmen of his time, even more, he thought that they are better than anyone else who is able to meet the expectations of the society. This would explain the rhythm of the poem and the title as well: howl is usually associated with an animalistic sound; the title is supported both by the rhythm and the form of the poem. Poetry in general is a composed and perfection-oriented form of writing, while in the case of “Howl” poetry is the tool of a scream for help, or a scream of dissatisfaction. Further investigating the form of the poem, it becomes obvious that the rhythm mirrors the anger of the speaker: the repetition and even just the sounds generated by the words give the whole poem an overall feeling of aggression and aggravation.

“who wandered around and around at midnight in the railroad yard wondering where to go, and went, leaving no broken hearts,

who lit cigarettes in boxcars boxcars boxcars racketing through snow toward lonesome farms in grandfather night,

who studied Plotinus Poe St. John of the Cross telepathy and bop kabbalah because the cosmos instinctively vibrated at their feet in Kansas [...]” (Ginsberg 42–47)

In these few lines we can see the controversy depicted by Ginsberg and the line drawn between the intellectual part of the population and the ones he admired the most, the lowest cast of the civilization, such as junkies, homeless people and basically anyone else who couldn't fit into the framework expected by society.

The phenomenon of being an outcast can be seen in Allen Ginsberg's poem, “America”. In this poem the poet expresses his feelings towards the country, and the Cold War which was happening during his life. In the poem we can still see some connections to Whitman's “America”, however Walt Whitman's “America” was almost the complete opposite of the dystrophic America of Ginsberg. According to Whitman America is the cradle of equality and love. He incorporated all this in a really short and powerful poem, which describes his expected form of democracy in the United States. His love towards his country becomes clear just by the adjectives he used to characterize the beloved country, with these really positive adjectives he suggests that America in the 19th century was a utopian world where everybody was equal, free and in harmony with nature.

“Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich,

Perennial with the Earth, with Freedom, Law and Love, [...]” (Whitman 3–4)

The poet brings the word “Mother” in to the poem, with which he strengthens the already strong parental, guardian role of the US. He also noted that the United States of America is the perfect example of the loving democracy and is the land of freedom and equality, while the appearance of the word “time” in the given context suggests that this utopian world will never change and it should never change, it also suggests that the nature of the country, and that the forementioned nature of the country is just as constant as the unchangeable characteristics of time.

“A grand, sane, towering, seated Mother,

Chair’d in the adamant of Time.” (Whitman 5–6)

However, from Ginsberg’s point of view we can see as this loving and gentle parental role of the country starts to crumble away. As it is mentioned before Ginsberg started out as a true believer of Whitman’s ideas, however every single one of his greatest works suggests that he went through the toughest kind of disillusionment, while he deep down still tried to believe that one day Whitman’s dream of the loving democracy can become reality. This is obviously one of the main elements of his poem, “America”, in which we can see the inner conflict of the poet caused by the beloved idea and the harsh reality. This conflict is mainly presented through the endlessly sarcastic tone of the speaker with which he created an overall feeling of uncertainty. This way Ginsberg makes the reader think that he already gave up on the possibility of the forementioned idea to blossom. While Whitman talked about America as the birthplace of equality and freedom, Ginsberg starts to blame the country for everything, while also highlighting the resemblance between him and the United States, which kind of makes the previously so certain anger a bit more ambiguous, however it stays clear that he puts a pretty big amount of blame on the country: the speaker talks not so fondly about his country when it comes to wars, this might be because Ginsberg had to live through the Cold War, which followed the Second World War. The constant presence of wars made living uncertain, while it also caused a huge amount of pain to the soul of the poet: the meaningless killing, the economic consequences of the bloodshed and the effects it had on the people close to the poet made him turn against the concept of war.

“America when will we end the human war?

Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb.” (Ginsberg 4–5)

He starts the whole poem with stating that he became nothing and everything he used to be became the property of America. This statement could be understood in two ways: firstly, the speaker has lost everything on a spiritual level, including his sanity and his intellectuality, this loss is clearly a main element of the poem. Even though the second line supports the other possible interpretation, where the loss is mainly material. With this Ginsberg gave a back story to the speaker and put him into the role of the penniless poet, who has nothing to lose anymore, therefore he is willing to speak up against the horrors of the century, while naming the possible

creator of the misery, which is none other than America. By stating the amount of money he has, he presents the financial instability of the time period, which can be the reason behind the statement of the next line, the appearance of madness.

“America I’ve given you all and now I’m nothing.

America two dollars and twentyseven cents January 17, 1956.

I can’t stand my own mind.” (Ginsberg 1–3)

There are multiple signs pointing towards the mental state of the poet, with this he kind of became one with the class he admired the most: them who were willing to embrace their own madness. The speaker embraces the madness that surrounds him and makes it his own, this is one of the presented forms of him becoming one with the country, which is drowning in madness, capitalism, and self-interest. However, we can see that his decreasing mental state caused by the terrors of the world, started to affect his approach towards poetry and writing, the speaker states that he is not in his right mind to write, and he will not write anything until this state starts to change for the better. This unmotivated attitude and his sarcastic, yet still attentive tone created one of the greatest love-hate relationships between a man and his motherland. This kind of relationship is represented by the controversy of hopelessness and hope, these are both present in the poem. Ginsberg hated how America was in his own time, he hated to see the war, the poverty, and the suffering in general, however he still had some hopes when it came to the country, he still wanted to believe that Whitman’s idyllic America can become reality one day and he took upon the role of a preacher. As a preacher he wanted to make Americans understand that the country in the current condition will not bring anything but agony and depression to them, while he also wanted to get his peers to do something that will help to change and reach the dreamy loving democracy. This disillusionment in connection to America started at a very early stage of his poetry, long before he published *Howl and other poems*, however it reached its climax once he visited Mexico. Before Mexico he already gave up on Whitman’s ideas, he started to be more open towards other poets’ views, such as T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, William Butler Yeats, and Rimbaud. (Raskin, 119) Mexico was a turning point for him when it came to his relationship with Whitman’s ideas. According to Jonah Raskin the moment when Ginsberg started to turn towards Whitman again was when he got familiar with García Lorca’s poetry during his time in Mexico, as an effect of Lorca’s “Ode to Walt Whitman” Ginsberg started to look at the old poet in a completely different, but once again in a somewhat admiring way.

(Ruskin, 119) The way he asks America when it will become angelic could be a reference to the question Whitman asked in “A Supermarket in California”, here the presence of the celestial sphere could be the last string of hope he has for his country and for the viability of Whitman’s idea of the loving democracy. However, the next question modifies the truly celestial nature and gives it a feeling of humanity. The presence of nakedness could be the way with which Ginsberg connected America to the people, showcasing that it is still not a matter of belief that the picture-perfect democracy can exist in the states, but a matter of action. This sentence also brings in the question of sexuality and intimacy, while being naked there is nothing that covers up our imperfection, this might be true to the country as well: if it takes off its “clothes” it will become so vulnerable and yet so true for the people looking at it.

“America when will you be angelic?

When will you take off your clothes?

When will you look at yourself through the grave?

When will you be worthy of your million Trotskyites?” (Ginsberg 8–11)

With the next thought he brings the picture of death into the poem, he ask the other party of the conversation a seemingly weird question, which refers to their death, however if we look at it from the perspective where a poet and his country are having a quite heated, but still one sided conversation about all of the things that could, will or already have gone wrong in the country it can be viewed in a whole new light. This way this part of the poem becomes vital, due to the possible and anticipated fall of the country and its ideas, which may be due to the seas of communists in a capitalist society, or at least according to Ginsberg there was a million of them. This interpretation might become a bit unrealistic due to the appearance of the word “worthy”, which leads to the question if America really is based on capitalism or was it secretly a communist country fighting against communists? In this context communism not necessarily means the ideology, but the demonised American version of communism. America created a satanic figure during the Cold War, which was called a communist, they blamed everything bad that was happening on it and provoked a whole nation to hate people who considered themselves as a believer of communism. This explanation is supported by the mention of Trotskyites, which is a group of people, who believed in the ideas of Leon Trotsky. Trotsky believed that socialism can only be achieved if the working class of all nation rose up and fought

against the ruling class. This way Trotsky's idea, which would have a great impact on the society of the US, and the demonised picture of both Russians and communists in general became the perfect tool to manipulate Americans.

As it is mentioned before he starts talking about the things that can or have already gone wrong in the United States, for example from the next line we can see that he's talking about literature and when he brings the word tears into the poem it shows that he thinks that literature is based on misery in America, among other things. It is clear that Ginsberg did not agree with anything that the government did during the period of the Cold War, the mentioning of India is the first open reference that he made to the war. Due to India being in a strong and strategic relationship with the Soviet Union, it turned into the enemy of the United States. Ginsberg reflected on this in a – once again – very ambiguous way. This forced the interpretation of the word eggs to divide into two separated, but still similar perceptions. They could be understood as a gift to lure India into forming a union with them, and at the same time in a way where the eggs serve as a reference to weapons or to an army.

“America why are your libraries full of tears?

America when will you send your eggs to India?” (Ginsberg 11–13)

As the poem develops, the interrogation slowly turns into a confession, where the poet admits such thing as him being a communist back in his childhood, the fact that he possesses marijuana or he would use marijuana every time he had the chance, however after a kind of rushed confession he once again addresses the country, he once again starts by asking a question from it. The way the speaker starts talking here has the feeling of mumbling, which is, once again, a sign of madness. After making a reference to madness he gets to the conclusion of him being one with the country, therefore he takes upon the blame he put on America, he does all this in a really sarcastic tone, which dispossess of everything that the mass of Americans believed in, such as capitalism, the nationalist view in the Cold War and the overall power and resources of their country.

“I haven't got a chinaman's chance.

I'd better consider my national resources.

My national resources consist of two joints of marijuana millions of genitals an

unpublishable private literature that jetplanes 1400 miles an hour and
twentyfive-thousand mental institutions.” (Ginsberg 52–56)

As the mumbling continues the madness grows stronger. The speaker starts to get kind of disoriented and confesses lots of nonsenses, for example he starts talking about his childhood experience with the communist Jewish community, to which his mother introduced him. Here the word angelic reappears, however it is not a possibility as in the case of the US but appears as the current reality. This could mean that the speaker considered this community to be better than his current experience with the country. This makes it obvious that the speaker thinks that the community, which was introduced to him in the past is far above his country. Despite all this America still has a chance to become angelic and despite all the rage and hatred there is still love in the speaker towards his mother land and he would still like to save it and to do this he is willing to take over the control and lead the country and its people towards a better future, here the appearance of queer can refer to the fact that back in 1956 it was thought to be considered outrageous that a queer man could have control over the fate of the land of freedom, however the speaker is not willing to give himself up, but he is willing to help the country to really be worthy of the name: the land of freedom.

“It’s true I don’t want to join the Army or turn lathes in precision parts factories,

I’m nearsighted and psychopathic anyway.

America I’m putting my queer shoulder to the wheel.” (Ginsberg 90–92)

5. The representation of homosexual love in Ginsberg’s poetry

Ginsberg is one of the most famous openly queer poets of the 20th century, while also being one of the founding members of the Beat Movement along with some other great figures such as William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac. The three of them were inseparable, with great new ideas and lots of narcotics. Even though there was an already strong tie between the three men, the tie between Ginsberg and Kerouac was a really intense and forceful one. According to Catherine R. Stimpson there was more to the two men’s relationship than purely platonic friendship: they occasionally slept together, which is not an odd thing among the members of

the Beat, due to their pure faith in Whitman's ideas on love. (Stimpson 374) Also they went through lots of things together and whenever Ginsberg needed someone to listen Kerouac was there. Ginsberg viewed Kerouac as a kind of father figure, and the closest thing that a man can have to a real friend, however, it is clear that the poet felt more towards his dear friend than simply platonic love and admiration. These feelings are described in his poem "Why is God Love, Jack?". From the title we can assume that the poem will be somewhat philosophical, questioning everything that could be questioned, however, reading the poem it seems that the only thing that is being questioned is the nature of the love Ginsberg had towards Kerouac.

The poet gives the reader a very detailed description of his arousal and sexual acts connected to his dear friend, Jack Kerouac. It is somewhat clear that all the happenings in the poem are only erotic fantasies for which the poet feels some kind of a guilt, however the text still has a not worded way of describing a man who is currently masturbating to the fantasies in his head, or at least getting aroused by them.

"Because my heart
sinks below my navel
because I have an
old airy belly
filled with soft
sighing, and [...]" (Ginsberg 5–10)

Using vivid visual descriptions is a really important characteristic of Ginsberg, that makes reading his poems to be easier to understand, however it really turns erotic descriptions into pictures, along with his rhythm this poem turns into a master piece. Even though the poem could be understood in a purely erotic way, where a man has homosexual fantasies of one of his closest friends, it is much more than that. Taking a look at the title it becomes clear that the poem is about to question everything. By questioning the basic belief of Christianity, which says that God in fact equals with the idea of love, and he should be the only one who we love and believe in without any questions, Ginsberg still started to question whether he is love or not and wanted to receive the answer for it from his dearly loved friend and mentor. As the speaker

proceeds with his fantasies the poem turns into a description of his own state giving some physical information of his own body, such as his age, his weight and the fact that he is losing his hair, however he also notes down that he still is a believer and an admirer of Walt Whitman, doing all this is a way, which makes the speaker look like someone who is proud of all this, then it quickly switches up and the poet wraps the poem up by admitting that it is a confession of an “ashamed desire”.

“Not refusing this

38 yr. 145 lb. head

arms & feet of meat

Nor one single Whitmanic

toenail contemn

nor hair prophetic banish

to remorseless Hell,

Because wrapped with machinery

I confess my ashamed desire.” (Ginsberg 36–44)

It is obvious that Walt Whitman still had a great effect on the poet, both in the case of poetry and when it came down to their way of thinking. Whitman’s effect is quite visible on Ginsberg’s poems, however in case of “Love Poem on Theme by Whitman” it is visible without even reading the poem. Here Ginsberg used the same form of free-verse as Whitman, which consists of long lines and no rhymes. In the poem he describes how the speaker engages in a sexual act with a man and his wife. This could be understood as a clear reference to Ginsberg’s fantasies in connection with Neal Cassady and his wife, Carolyn Cassady. He described these fantasies in a similar style as Whitman did in *Children of Adam*, where he used erotic pictures quite freely, Ginsberg did almost the same, but he used a much more obscene and obvious vocabulary to describe sex itself. As it is already mentioned in the portrayed act there are three people: Ginsberg, Cassady and Cassady’s wife, Carolyn. In the fantasy all this happens in an idyllic way, there are no negative feelings such as jealousy or guilt, only pleasure caused by and for

the others in the bed. (Raskin 149) The poem starts by the speaker entering the room, with which he kind of distracts himself from the married couple, their marriage is also stated by naming them as “bridegroom” and “bride”, so in a way by distancing himself he strengthens the connection between the other two, however by entering their bedroom he kind of invades their relationship and becomes a part of it, and by placing his body between the two something like a separation starts, which actually is somewhat present throughout the whole text.

“I’ll go into the bedroom silently and lie down between the
bridegroom and the bride [...]” (Ginsberg 1–2)

Along with the separation and caused distance between the parties of the marriage there is some kind of guilt as well, the covered eyes are the perfect reference to this, it obviously is a type of coping mechanism, where the person who does this is trying to hide from the world. Despite this during the act itself the parties become open towards each other and it is clear that they have a deeper connection based on trust, this way the whole process of lovemaking can become a kind of pure yet passionate experience. The speaker puts great emphasis on the eyes, with which he presents the creation of trust between the parties, at first the eyes are covered, however as they start touching each other the eyes become open and welcoming, along with this the eyes are considered to be the gateway to the soul of a person, which makes the appearance of trust even stronger. Even though the whole poem starts by stating that there are three of them, the separation grows when the speaker notes that the wife is crying for forgiveness, while the groom’s eyes are full of tears of joy and passion. Suggesting that the bride is only a passive participant, while the two men are working on satisfying the other.

“[...] and the bride cry for forgiveness, and the groom be covered with
tears of passion and compassion, [...]” (Ginsberg 20–21)

Ginsberg usually put a lot of stress on homoeroticism and the cooperation of two bodies during sex, however he could not let go of the idea of the pure and romantic aspect of love either. He had three great loves in his life, one of them was Neal Cassady, to whom he wrote poems like “Love Poem on Theme by Whitman” or “Song”, the second one was Jack Kerouac, his mentor and really close friend, and lastly Peter Orlovsky, a former citizen of New York. (Raskin 150)

“My first love Neal Cassady

He ran away from me

Second love Kerouac

He began to drink, alack

Peter the third

took Speed quite long [...]” (Ginsberg 6–11)

In Orlovsky Ginsberg found a love that lasted up to his death bed, and in which he finally found peace of some sort, he informed Kerouac about this in his poem, “Malest Confici Tuo Catullo”, which is more like a short letter, where he is filled with a childish joy, and he states that he finally is happy. However, his happiness is quick to turn into worry, he is scared that Kerouac will be angry at him for having multiple lovers, and that he will find him somewhat disgusting for his questionable number of lovers.

“[...] Ah don’t think I’m sickening.

You’re angry at me. For all of my lovers?” (Ginsberg 6–7)

Despite all this he, for the first time in his life, enjoyed being freely homosexual, and was finally completely confident in his sexuality, the title strengthens this uninhibited form of happiness, due to the appearance of Catullus, who was the poet of lust and love back in Roman times. (Ruskin 150) This kind of love inspired him to create such amazing poems dedicated to Orlovsky as “Message”, where he admits that he loves the poet, and he holds every single memory they have together really close to his heart. The poem is about pure and balanced love, where the speaker finally can feel at ease and like he had found his home, however it is mixed with the despair caused by being away from the object of his love, which in this case is Peter Orlovsky.

“It is too long that I’ve been alone

It is too long that I've sat up in bed

Without anyone to touch on the knee

I want love I want you with me now [...]" (Ginsberg 12–15)

He first wrote this poem during his time in Paris, where he had to be apart from his love for months. Their love was caring and sweet, however it is clear that Ginsberg was never able to completely let go of the love he felt for Cassady or Kerouac. This is obvious from the fact that he was still writing about them, even when he was with Orlovsky. During his relationship with Peter Orlovsky he wrote less and less about Cassady and Kerouac, however, after discovering the news of their death there was a rise in the number of love poems dedicated to the two writers. These poems were not as lustful anymore, they were not about sexual desires but they were nostalgic and showcased the poet's grief.

6. Conclusion

Taking all these factors into consideration it is clear that Whitman's influence of Allen Ginsberg was a lifelong one. Even though the Beat poet often got disillusioned by the world that surrounded him, he always found a way back to his poetic father figure. Allen Ginsberg and Walt Whitman did not have the same experience in the world or in the United States, but they still believed in the same dream. Whitman saw as black people gained rights and freedom and the social injustice started to lessen. Meanwhile Ginsberg had to face the consequences of wars and madness up to a level, where he was not even sure whether he is sane or not. However, despite all the different experiences the two poets had during their life, they truly believed that love is above all the misery and is the only way to reach complete freedom, and both of them were willing to make a difference with their words just so they could help the creation of the loving democracy, where everyone is free to love and can enjoy equal judiciary and social treatment.

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