

Alienation, Disintegration and Loss of Identity In Allen Ginsberg's Howl

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الاغتراب والتفكك وفقدان الهوية في قصيدة "الصراخ" للشاعر
Allen Ginsberg

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Abstract:-

Literature plays an important role in the reflection of a society's current situation and problems. One of the most important issues in this regard is war, the destructive effects of which have inspired so many masterpieces. One of these masterpieces is Howl by Allen Ginsberg which is a clear symbol of the beat generation. This paper attempts to study this component of poetry in order to see how it expresses the most pressing issues of our generation. Ginsberg refers to his poem as an "affirmation" of personal knowledge of "God, sex, drugs, and absurdity." Ginsberg's poetry mirrors the author's cynical and severe assessment of society, which is why Ginsberg refers to his poem as an "affirmation" of personal knowledge. Additionally, he asserted that the first section focuses on individual experiences. In addition, the second section explains and rejects the "Moloch" of society, which confounds and overpowers individual knowledge and causes humans to believe they do not reject their own sincere emotions. Part three shows kindness and understanding for the crazy Carl Solomon, who says his crazy behavior is a protest against Moloch.

Keywords: Allen Ginsberg, Beat Generation, Howl, Disintegration, Loss of Identity, Alienation.

المخلص:-

يلعب الأدب دوراً مهماً في انعكاس الوضع الحالي للمجتمع ومشاكله. ومن أهم القضايا في هذا الصدد الحرب، التي ألهمت آثارها المدمرة العديد من الروائع. واحدة من هذه التحف هي قصيدة "الصراخ" للشاعر Allen Ginsberg والتي تعد رمزاً واضحاً لجيل الإيقاع "Beat Generation". تحاول هذه الورقة دراسة هذا المكون من الشعر لمعرفة كيف يعبر عن أكثر القضايا إلحاحاً في جيلنا. يشير Ginsberg إلى قصيدته على أنها "تأكيد" للمعرفة الشخصية "بالله، والجنس، والمخدرات، والسخافة". يعكس شعر Ginsberg تقييم المؤلف الساخر والشديد للمجتمع، ولهذا السبب يشير Ginsberg إلى قصيدته على أنها "تأكيد" على المعرفة الشخصية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، أكد أن القسم الأول يركز على التجارب الفردية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يشرح القسم الثاني ويرفض المجتمع "Moloch" "النظام الفاسد"، الذي يربك المعرفة الفردية ويفوقها ويجعل البشر يعتقدون أنهم لا يرفضون مشاعرهم الصادقة. يُظهر الجزء الثالث اللطف والتفهم للمجنون Carl Solomon، الذي يقول إن سلوكه المجنون هو احتجاج على Moloch. "النظام الفاسد".

الكلمات المفتاحية: جيل البيت، الصراخ، التفكك، فقدان الهوية، الاغتراب.

Introduction

Irwin Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997) was a well-known American poet, theorist, and author. In the 1940s when he was studying in the college, his friendship with William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac began and led to the formation of the Beat Generation. He was strongly against such issues as militarism, materialism, and sexual repression; thus, he showed this antagonism through drugs, resentment of government, and directness towards Eastern religions (Ginsberg, 45) . Ginsberg was asked to leave the college in 1945 due to his poem "Butler Has No Balls," which referred to the college president Nicholas Murray Butler (Miles, 57). After his dismissal, he began living with Kerouac, Burroughs, and other Beat generation members. Ginsberg and his friends began experimenting with drugs and psychotherapy during this time. Ginsberg visited Neal Cassady in the fall of 1946 (Morgan, 2006, 81), who significantly influenced some of the events in Howl. The Beat generation refers to a social and literary movement in the United States that was sparked in the 1950s by disillusionment following World War II. The poets of this generation expressed their distancing from conservative viewpoints by adopting jazz musicians' attire, behavior, and language. They would also largely disregard social issues by supporting personal freedom, sanitization, and brightness tempted by drugs, jazz, sex, or the tenets of Zen Buddhism. Eric Mortenson once stated that the Beat generation was founded to evade social contracts:

“The Beats were a criticism of American complacency under the Ike-Nixon regime, an expression of new forms of prose, and poetry and an exploration of consciousness, which joined the dissent of existing Bohemias . . . to produce a distinct style of literature and living, based on disaffiliation, poverty, anarchic individualism and communal living. A relaxation of 'square' (puritan, middle-class, respectable) attitudes towards sex, drugs, religion and art became the opposing uniformity of 'beat'.”. (28)

What has made Ginsberg a famous poet is his poem "Howl" in which he condemned the negative effects of capitalism (De Grazia, 330-331). Ginsberg wrote that, "the poem itself is an act of sympathy, not rejection. In it I am leaping out of a preconceived notion of social 'values'" (As cited in Miles, 152). Beat poets were actually looking for

an authentic, unfettered style in order to utter their implication. Just like the romantic poets, they highly believed in spontaneous type of writing. Now, this paper intends to analyze this poem in order to see how it signifies the most important themes of the beat generation. The significance of this piece of poetry lies in the fact that along with William S. Burroughs' Naked Lunch (1959) and Jack Kerouac's On the Road (1957), Howl is among the most important instances of Beat literature, which could eventually result in publishing authorization in the United States (Morgan, 1988, 347).

Statement of the Problem

This research intends to analyze the role of such themes as loss of **identity**, **disintegration** and **alienation** in Allen Ginsberg's Howl. The researcher of the present study is going to probe into the issue how the Beat Generation was regarded as a societal measure during the 1950s at the end of WWII. It is also going to clarify this movement's strategy to manifest a group of writers and poets who disobeyed the public standards in order to reach freedom through some specific themes as loss of **identity** and loneliness.

Review of the Related Literature

As mentioned before, Ginsberg is one of the most pivotal figures of the beat generation, whose poetry has been the subject of many studies. However, there remains a gap regarding analyzing such issues as **identity**, **alienation**, and **disintegration** in this American poet's works, and the current research will fill this gap. Now, this part is going to provide the readers with a brief review of the related literature. Howl on Trial: The Battle for Free Expression (2006) is the title of a book by Peters and Morgan in which they have presented an introduction by publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Also, this volume provides its readers with correspondence by Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Kerouac, Gregory Corso, John Hollander, Richard Eberhart, and others' commentary on the poem's social implications. The second study mentioned here refers to Howl, Kaddish, and other poems (1956) by Ginsberg as the single most influential poetic work of the post-World War II era, with over 1,000,000 copies now in print. Also, in "Howling Masculinity: Queer Social Change in Allen Ginsberg's Poetry," Van Engen looks at Ginsberg's "Howl" and says that the characters in "Howl" break taboos on how sexuality is shown and

performed in public by staking out queer territory in a way that is both angry and happy.

Discussion

With the publication of Holmes' "This is the Beat Generation" in the New York Times in 1952, the beat generation publicly started its work. Ann Charters claimed that:

"John Clellon Holmes characterized the Beat Generation as a cultural revolution in progress, made by a post-World War II generation of disaffiliated young people coming of age into a Cold War world without spiritual values they could honor. Instead of obeying authority and conforming to traditional middle-class materialistic aspirations, these young people dealt as best they could with what Holmes called their "will to believe, even in the face of an inability to do so in conventional terms." (xxvii)

At the same time, Ginsberg "found a way to speak naturally in his poems under the influence of Jack Kerouac and William Carlos Williams" (Miles, 142). When he began working on Howl in 1954, "He began to write about his life, again using William Carlos Williams' triadic verse form, only with the lines extended out to his own long breath length – each line a single breath, like blowing an extended cadenza on a saxophone" (184). Ginsberg wrote the poem "using the rhythms of speech from the American street, black speech; phrasings overheard on street corners and in bars; and the rhythms of bebop and jazz, of sports commentators; and of the cool DJs on the all-night jazz programs. It had a new rhythm and used a new language (185). Also, the outlook that such poets as Ginsberg had towards their country was so exceptional that writers like Marcus Cunliffe have described it by saying: "To the extent that contemporary America is, in Alfred Kazin's phrase, 'a prig's paradise', a prosperous and lifeless civilization, Kerouac and his associates are making a genuine gesture of protest. They can be seen as the latest protesters in a long and worthy American tradition' (358).

Alienation and Disintegration in Howl

Howl reflects the most important issues of that time. Ginsberg's Howl features the modern person's alienation due to the new industrial developments, which contrasts with his imagination.

Thus, Howl shows loneliness, and Ginsberg always believed this theme was highly significant in his poem. R. C. Johnson says that Ginsberg's poem is a perfect example of the postmodern theme of "fragmentation of the self and the decentering of the individual as subject" (34). It is evident in the first part, which starts with an assertion of the subject, "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked" (1). Svonkin believed that this removal of the centered identity permitted Ginsberg to employ an "alternative, radically fragmented series of subaltern identities or a syncretic identity constructed out of various marginal spiritualities and cultural forms" (170). Howl is separated into three parts divided by blank lines... Every part also focuses on a different feature of the same issue, but they are joined. The first segment asks the question "who?", the second "what and why?" and the last part presents an affirmation of cohesion to his friend Salomon, to whom he dedicated Howl. Through the first line of the first part, the speaker tells us that he has been an observer of the devastation of "the best minds" of his generation. The rest of the section is a thorough account of these people. Most lines start with the word "who," followed by a verb. These are people "who did this, who did that," etc. Readers will discover that these "best minds" were not upper-class individuals but drug users, world travelers, musicians, political rebels, and poets. The second section asks, "What?", signifying what ruined the best minds of his generation. In this part, Ginsberg answers Moloch. In the Hebrew Bible, Moloch was an idolatrous god to whom children were sacrificed by throwing them into the fire. For Ginsberg, Moloch is related to war, government, capitalism, and most of culture. The third section, the final part, addresses Carl Solomon as Ginsberg's close friend from the Columbia Presbyterian Psychiatric Institute. The speaker refers to this hospital by the name of "Rockland." The central question of this section is "Where?", used by the utterer to question Solomon's existence in this institute. The poem finishes with an image from the speaker's imaginings, in which Solomon is walking from New York to the speaker's "cottage," where they will meet up again. One of the reasons why alienation plays an essential role in this play is due to the influence of Blake and the Romantics on Ginsberg's poetry, which is especially ostensible in the themes of insanity and capitalism. Ginsberg became the voice of people who felt disconnected from and left society because of its

superiority, prejudice, industrialism, and greed. Thus, this sense of alienation and disintegration after the war, as some key themes seen in Howl, leads to the poem's link with the modernist literary tradition of the 20th century (Iglesias, 45-46). The reason why Ginsberg was highly obsessed with capitalism can be traced back to the fact that the decade after World War II has been frequently defined as one of the most affluent financial periods in the country. America was so prosperous that it could pave the way for the employment of about 12 million veterans. Other good points in this era involved high incomes, bigger households, better schools, and more cars and facilities. Therefore, Americans in the 1950s could hopefully follow the American Dream (Lindop, 61). The relationship between Moloch and capitalism should be noted that Moloch is the epitome of unease; in modern poetry such as Howl, this term embodies an entity that needs a great detriment. For Ginsberg, Moloch represented the capitalist society (Dunsky, 12). In addition, time seems to be a complex theme for Ginsberg because it is a symbol of his loneliness, revulsion, and fretfulness: "who threw their watches off the roof to cast their ballot for Eternity outside of Time, and alarm clocks fell on their heads every day for the next decade, who cut their wrists three times successively unsuccessfully, gave up and were forced to open antique shops where they thought they were growing old and cried." (16). As already mentioned, the 1950s, the time of the beat generation's establishment, witnessed the influence of reconstruction and technology in everyday life. Lindop stated that World War II brought the United States out of the depression, and the 1950s caused most Americans to enjoy material wealth. The business also appeared to provide them with a good life, with all its real and representative symbols of prosperity. Still, loneliness was the utmost theme (58). However, these technological innovations, along with the confusion of the war, caused widespread hesitation and uncertainty about human beings' progress. Many people were influenced to believe that after the extraordinary ferocity of the war, society would experience chaos and purposelessness. Regarding the issue of disintegration, which led to the poet's alienation, this study refers to Haidee Kruger, who indicated that "Beat poetry resists the traditional definition or metanarrative of the self as ego or fixed point of identity, primarily defined by its capacity to reason" (29). Howl subverts the individual in post-war America:

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"who broke down crying in white gymnasiums, naked and trembling."

Before the machinery of other skeletons,

who bit detectives in the neck and shrieked with delight in police cars for

committing no crime other than their own wild cooking pederasty intoxication,

who howled on their knees in the subway and were dragged off the roof.

waving genitals and manuscripts". (Kruger, 33-35)

Loss of Identity in Howl

In his poem Howl, Ginsberg criticized 1950s American capitalism, which resulted in extensive middle-class growth. Ginsberg wrote this piece of poetry to show his discontent with the existing social norms. According to Iglesias Rivas, Howl is regarded as "the voice of a generation" and "the poem that changed America" (3). Along with a sense of alienation and disintegration, the struggle to find purpose and identity in a fluctuating world was among the most vital themes of that time. Such themes also characterize modern literature as a loss because this movement excluded orthodox certainties. John Tytell has talked about how people and society are not connected at this time and said:

"[John Clellon] Holmes offered the image of a broken circuit to suggest the lack of connection to the immediate present felt by members of his generation. It was as dangerous a condition as a hot electrical wire discharging energy randomly into the universe without a proper destination. The philosophical cause wasn't so much the horrible fact of war, but the emergence of new postwar values that saw man as a victim of circumstances and didn't give him control over his own life; the illusion of free will, the spark that lit up the American character, had been suddenly put out" (Stiles, 66).

Howl is considered a long poem in the tradition of Allen Ginsberg, which shows the poet's fury and anguish against a disparaging society. This poetic piece is regarded as "an angry, sexually explicit poem" and is "considered by many to be a revolutionary event in

American poetry" (Iglesias, 15). John Tytell has also asserted that Allen Ginsberg thought of himself as one of the pioneers of a young, disobedient generation that was madly struggling to proclaim its individualism and make a change in the "asphyxiating apathy of the fifties" (10). This group was also called the "generation of identity" (Medovoi, 217). The reason is that this group's primary function was to search for an identity to be defined and distinguished from their prototypes. It can be stated that the poem is about a search for identity. Ginsberg chiefly talks about his pursuit of acquaintances that he knew or met. It is the lack of individuality that leads to drug use, alcoholism, and bad manners. Ginsberg likened the heartless America that should be blamed for suppressing its populace to Moloch. The contrast between Moloch and American society signifies that all of the tribulations in America are depriving young people of their true individuality. "Moloch, in whom I sit lonely! Moloch, of whom I have visions of angels! Crazy in Moloch! In Moloch, there's a cocksucker! Lacklove and manless in Moloch! " (19-20). George-Warren has also noted that "Ginsberg and Kerouac made personality the center and subject of their work." In the Fifties, when the voice of personality seemed so endangered by the anonymity of sameness, the Beats discovered a natural counter for the silence of the day in a new sense of self, a renaissance of the romantic impulse to combat unbelievably superior forces. (62).

Conclusion:-

The current research analyzed Ginsberg's Howl and tried to provide the readers with a clear manifestation of such themes as alienation, disintegration, and loss of identity in this poem. To achieve this goal, there was a short introduction to the beat generation and Allen Ginsberg as one of the most important figures of this generation. It was mentioned that this group was chiefly distinguished by its opposition to conventional beliefs and post-war America; this study also attempted to show this group's dissatisfaction with the new changes and destructive effects of the war through poetry. Thus, some of their most important themes were discussed, such as alienation, disintegration, and the search for a new identity that is all signified in Howl. The writer also mentioned that the Beats' hunt for societal identity required them to invade authorized limitations in the pursuit of

individual freedom, and this was the reason for their loneliness and disconnection from social standards.

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