

“What Thoughts I Have of You Tonight, Walt Whitman”

Continuity and Innovation in Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl”

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Abstract:

In his essay “The Poet,” Emerson called for the poet who would sing the burgeoning nation of the United States of America. The answer to his request far exceeded all his expectations in the form of a ground-breaking volume of poems where Walt Whitman sang not only a nation, but the people who inhabited it as the people incarnated the values, struggles, dreams and disappointments that formed the living tissue of America. In *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman also expressed his dream of the birth of a race of poet-priests who, through time and space, would guide their fellow men and women as compassionate and empathetic brethren (Whitman, “Preface” ll. 752-765). In time, this request would be answered, and generations of poets would sing the lives of the men and women that made America, in search of a more human, close and empathetic form of being and living. One of these writers was Allen Ginsberg who, in “Howl,” translated the core of the experience of the men and women of his generation into a heart-felt and wrenching cry for humanity in a society marked by “uncompassionate [...] war rules” (Ginsberg, *The Best Minds* 29). This essay aims to bring to light a few instances wherein this continuity is patent, while pointing out the profound humanistic desires that moved both Whitman and Ginsberg to place themselves, through their words, by the side of each and every individual who walks this earth.

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Introduction

Poetry, as a form of expression, surpasses the real or fabricated boundaries of time, space, culture and lifestyle. Within the American context, the great call made by Ralph Waldo Emerson for the advent of a poet who would sing America and its peoples kept resonating far beyond its immediate socio-temporal context. According to Professor Karen Karbiener, this response began with Walt Whitman, and continued across time and space, resounding from outstanding poets such as William Carlos Williams, Allen Ginsberg, and even Bob Dylan (54-92). In this sense, the poets who have answered to this great call have been influenced by each other, have responded to each other, and have tried, additionally, to offer a contribution to the specific context of their time in an original and creative manner. Thus, they have left their personal imprint in an ever-changing world in need of meaning, connection, and humanity.

An avid reader of Whitman, whose “poems serve as candid models for [his] own verse,” Allen Ginsberg can be seen as a further link in this chain of individuals who voiced the concerns, desires and yearnings of the common people of their time (Ginsberg, “Whitman’s Influence” 333). A member of a countercultural group of individuals referred to as the Beat Generation, Ginsberg was not without controversy. However, the great dimension of his creative genius comes across throughout his life and work as a revolutionary stance on art, humanism and openness in an America marked by the paranoia of Cold War. This is particularly patent in his poem “Howl,” a semi-autobiographical poem which, nonetheless, encompasses the experiences of many men and women of his time, as “the personal communicates the universal” (Karbiener 71). In effect, the post-war world of abundance represented by the American Dream narrative had a darker side of massification and artificiality that led to a deep dissatisfaction among certain sectors of society (Shi and Tindall 1265-78). The ensuing search for a deeper meaning for the events that were taking place, as well as for the recovery of a sense of individual importance and weight on a broader social level, can thus be compared to that experienced by transcendentalists such as Emerson or

Whitman. It can therefore be said that, when composing “Howl,” Ginsberg was not merely set on reproducing the patterns of poetry which he inherited from Whitman, but also in updating them to his own specific context. Through the use of relevant terminology, rhythm and imagery, wherein both he and his contemporaries could recognize themselves and the world they inhabited, Ginsberg was able to successfully craft a meaningful poetic work “which [reflected] the flux of modern life” (William Carlos Williams qtd. in Ginsberg, *The Best Minds* 358).

Poetry for the Modern Man: From Whitman to Ginsberg

A New Race of American Poets

The history of the ongoing poetic dialogue which has been taking place over the last one-hundred and fifty years was boosted by an essay written by Ralph Waldo Emerson. “The Poet” was perceived as a nation-wide call for a poet who would sing America and its peoples. At the same time, this poet was to open the path for a future stream of followers who would interpret the eternal “cadences [of] that region where the air is music,” the music of a timeless art, [...] for poetry was all written before time,” and it is the place of the true poet to transcribe this immortal harmony and turn it into “the songs of the nations” (Emerson, “The Poet” 322-24). America, with its landscapes and its peoples was, for Emerson, a great poem in need of transcription, so to speak, in need of revitalization and assurance, in a time where the optimism of territorial and urban expansion went hand in hand with the uncertainty of unknown challenges and an unclear future (Shi and Tindall 556). Therefore, more than ever, the presence of someone who would see and sing the beauty of America in all its forms, as an expression of the divine presence in the life and environment of the burgeoning nation, became extremely necessary. In Emerson’s words, “beauty, in its largest and profoundest sense, is one expression for the universe. God [or the transcendental signifier] is the all fair. Truth, and goodness, and beauty, are but different faces of the same All” (Emerson, “Nature” 14). In that sense, the new American Bard who was to embody the fullness of his calling as a poet for the new and confident America, would possess quasi-universal features. In effect, the assertion of his country and fellow citizens would not only be circumscribed to the physical boundaries of geographical limits but would encompass the entire universe. It was this cosmic calling that led Whitman to a boil (Trowbridge).

A journalist by profession at the time when Emerson’s essay saw the light of day, Whitman had been a follower of the man he referred to as his master, as well as of the publications of the circle to which Emerson belonged, the Transcendentalists. A seeker of

meaning in a world torn by the pharisaic morals of his time, Whitman thus used his poetic voice to elevate the downtrodden and proclaim the collective humanity of all individuals, regardless of class, gender and occupation. The tenor of Whitman's response to Emerson, as well as the form which it would eventually take is beautifully described in his "Preface" to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the first edition of his collection of poems. Alluding to the new revolution in poetry, Whitman referred to the rising of a new race of poets, stating that "through the divinity of themselves shall the kosmos and the new breed of poets be interpreters of men and women and of all events and things. They shall find their inspiration in real objects today [...]" (Whitman, "Preface" ll. 758-761). The new poets emerging from among the people would then translate the world and its places and events to the men and women of the present time. Thus, the universal and eternal harmony to which Emerson refers to in "The Poet" could be translated and disseminated through time and space by the pen of the sensitive listeners whose outstanding gifts would allow them to make eternity accessible in time (322). Moreover, the importance of finding inspiration in their contemporaneous environment leads poets to the notion that any time is a worthy time, wherein the hue of the All which Emerson refers to in "Nature" remains accessible to all individuals (14). The transcendent remains, in this manner, present in the immanence of everyday life, and attainable in terms that the man and woman of every spatial-temporal context are able to grasp and command.

The Importance of Words

An attribute of the poet that Emerson idealizes is the meaningful and symbolic use of language, for "every word was once a poem [and] every new relation is a new word" (Emerson, "The Poet" 327). He goes on to state:

Thought makes everything fit for use. The thought of an omniscient man would embrace words and images excluded from polite conversation. What would be base, or even obscene, to the obscene, becomes illustrious, spoken in a new connection of thought. (Emerson, "The Poet" 327)

With these words, Emerson is giving way to a revolution in the style of poetic composition, as the possibility of making poetry from everyday events, with the underlying significance of converting every aspect of life into something sublime did, in time, lead to forms of expression of which he himself would have not necessarily approved. An example of this is seen when he asked and almost ordered Whitman to tone down his sexually charged language and imagery by removing "the objectionable passages," as these were not acceptable to the polite society of the time (Kaplan 249). Nevertheless, it was Whitman's explicit purpose to shock his audience into the realization that all dimensions of human nature are beautiful and divine, despite what the best minds of his time defended as morally correct or acceptable (Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* 54-91).

This progressive tendency to a growing use of realistic language reached an important turn in the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, whose leap into fame occurred through the reading and subsequent publication of his poem "Howl." Following in the steps of the poets who had preceded him, Ginsberg strived for the creation of a form of poetry which, in the words of William Carlos Williams, would "reflect the flux of modern life" (qtd. in Ginsberg, *The Best Minds* 358). In this sense, Ginsberg also incarnates the stream of poets called for by Emerson, as he possesses the required qualities to "use forms according to life, and not according to the forms" themselves. The true poet then recognizes that "we are symbols and inhabit symbols," which leads him to create and recreate language according to his specific context (Emerson, "The Poet" 328-329). This is visible in Ginsberg's use of evocative and fast-paced imagery in

“Howl.” Ginsberg kept in mind the Aristotelian notion of metaphor as “the apt relationship of dissimilars,” as he

began figuring that the more opposite the words, the more amazing the flash in the mind. The mind will create a flash just like a lightning flash between two poles. [Therefore], the more contradictory the two poles, the more explosive and inclusive the mental flash to bind them together. (Ginsberg, *The Best Minds* 391)

Hence the rapid succession of images in the verses of “Howl,” designed to create a gap in the reader’s mind, which he or she then “has to fill in [...] by connecting them” (Ginsberg, *The Best Minds* 389).

As far as language is concerned, Ginsberg additionally sought to tear down the barriers between life and art, once and for all, by means of approximating poetic language to everyday language, similar to that used in familiar conversation. With that in mind, he drew upon colloquialisms, reference to his personal experiences, and reflection upon his reality and that of the people in his circle of friends. Through this combination of references, he aimed at the desired actualization of the American poetic tendency of meditating on its immediate socio-historical context. In this sense, Ginsberg followed in the steps of Whitman, whereby he openly demonstrated an acceptance of the world around him, in all its glory and imperfections. Like Whitman, Ginsberg was not afraid to “[descend] into an underworld of darkness, suffering, isolation, and then [ascend] into spiritual knowledge, blessedness, achieved vision, and a sense of union with humanity and God [or the ultimate transcendental signifier]” (Karbiener 72). It is this essential “vision of possibility and hope” that approximates Whitman and Ginsberg (Karbiener 72), while it appears as a proof of their attempt to eliminate the distances between art and life and, in this manner, create a more

compassionate environment in a society marked by “uncompassionate [...] war rules” (Ginsberg, *The Best Minds* 29).

Music and Meaning

Another important factor which influenced the poetry of both Whitman and Ginsberg is music. Despite their different tastes, which depended on the temporal, historical and social contexts that both authors frequented, the rhythms of the music of their preference had a considerable weight in shaping both authors’ poetic production. Whitman, by all accounts, was familiar with different genres of music from an early age, particularly due to the influence of his mother, Louisa Van Velsor Whitman (Strassburg). Later in life, while living in New York, Whitman became familiar with Opera, gradually developing a taste for “the dramatic overtures, the passionate cantabile arias, the eloquent sobbing recitatives, [which he would go on to say] were among the shaping forces of his free-verse style poetry” (Strassburg). Nevertheless, the determining factor behind his preference for Opera might have been other than its specific stylistic musical arrangement. According to David S. Reynolds, in the antebellum period there was yet no distinction made “between high, popular, and middlebrow culture [something that went on] to solidify [...] after the Civil War, when America became institutionalized” (*Walt Whitman’s America* 155). For that reason, the different styles of music coexisted and influenced each other in a dynamic “interpenetration of different modes and styles” (Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America* 156). It was this interaction that Whitman wished to maintain alive in his poetry, opening it to the presence of people from all walks of life and portraying their existence in his verse. Moreover, the open space of the theater, despite minor differences between seating arrangements, became far more equalizing once the audiences engaged with the performers. It was at these times that the external contrasts became “erased by the noisy enthusiasm shared by all during performances,” and all men became brethren (Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America* 157).

Ginsberg's musical inspiration came from a different source. Familiar with a diverse range of musical production, Ginsberg was especially influenced by jazz. The rhythms of a typically African-American form of music, to which Ginsberg was exposed during his outings to Harlem with his beatnik friends, made a deep impact in the style of his generation (Ginsberg, *The Best Minds* 31-42). The temporal simultaneity of "the notion of variable speech in poetics" professed by William Carlos Williams with the same type of work that saxophonists and trumpeters were doing in jazz music is astounding. In a similar manner to what occurred in Whitman's time, music and other forms of art influence and re-create each other. According to Ginsberg, "the saxophone echoed the breath of speech and it was as if it was speaking in accents of conversation or excited rhapsodic talk" (Ginsberg, *The Best Minds* 36). Thus, the musicians, whose existence was taking place on the streets, carried their environment into the sonority that they were creating. In the case of poetry, this led to the development of "a close parallel between the music and the poetics" in a recreation of "the humor of actual speech phrasing," which influenced both the form, rhythm and contents of the literary work that originated in Ginsberg's immediate context (Ginsberg, *The Best Minds* 36-37).

The work of William Carlos Williams had a great influence on Ginsberg's creative process, inasmuch as the former's notions of poetic composition were also strongly influenced by jazz music. In terms of rhythm, "it was Williams's opinion that "the iamb is not the normal measure of American speech." For that reason, "the foot has to be expanded and contracted in terms of actual speech. The key to modern poetry is measure, which must reflect the flux of modern life. For man and poet must keep pace with modern life" (qtd. in Ginsberg, *The Best Minds* 358). Moreover, in the search to adapt to everyday speech patterns and wording, Williams believed that the appropriate way to measure verse was in the function of the speaker's breath. Hence the expression "'breath stop' [that is] you halt the line at the end of the breath or use the breath as the measure of the verse line" (Ginsberg, *The Best Minds*

382). In that sense, the verse would work in a similar manner as the form in which “a funny long sentence breath ending in ‘moop’ was manifested through the saxophone breath” (Ginsberg, *The Best Minds* 36). In the following pages, I will propose possible connections between excerpts of Whitman’s poems, such as “Song of Myself,” “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” and “The Sleepers,” with excerpts of Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl.” In so doing, the continuity and innovations brought about by Ginsberg will appear as further signs of hope in a society marked by rampant technical and scientific innovation, and characterized by consumerism, along with a growing distance between the individuals who comprise it.

“Howl”: Where Ginsberg and Whitman Intersect

“Howl” was written between 1955 and 1956, a time of profound changes in American society at large. According to Shi and Tindall, after the Second World War, America moved steadily into a time of progress and abundance, characterized by consumerism and the revival of the cult of domesticity. Contrasting with that internal prosperity was an increasing paranoia about anything Soviet or Communist, at a time when exalting Americanness went hand in hand with repressing anything that would remotely undermine the American lifestyle. Scientific and technological progress allowed for the advancement of the country as a world power, at the same time that it opened the path for the creation of a hereto unknown comfortable standard of living, which would become easily accessible to the masses. The advent of television, the creation of suburbia, the wide availability of restaurant chains, take-out food, house appliances and personal transportation defined the newly achieved prosperity of a society on the rise, where anything seemed possible and attainable. This was the American Dream, and consumerism was its motto. At the same time, this very consumerism was the embodiment, albeit to a certain extent, of the cult of allegiance due to the unstoppable machinery that fed into the nation’s ever-growing power, both inside and outside of its borders. Progress notwithstanding, not everyone was pleased with the direction things were taking. Among the cluster of the discontented were the members of the Beat generation, a group of artists whose ideological position often clashed with the hyper-idealized and shallow society of the time (Shi and Tindall 1217-1280). In effect, behind the picture-perfect middle-class prosperity of mainstream propaganda, “the best minds of [an entire generation were being] destroyed by madness, starving, hysterical, naked” (Ginsberg, “Howl” l.1). What is more, they were running after any form of alienating experience to draw them out of their bodies and into the ecstasy of a world beyond their own, where the chastising and oppressing mind mentioned in “Howl,” with its programmed responses would no longer have power over them.

Strangers Sharing Spaces

Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" appears the anthem of a new America, in a time characterized by a deeply conservative and massifying ideology. It is a song on the list of songs called forth by Emerson, however different the context and country that it sings, for the glorious days seem to have given place to more somber realities, as the bucolic landscapes and the optimism of a burgeoning nation gave way to a more settled and stratified society ("The Poet" 338-341). In this sense, it can also be said that "Howl" appeared as a "direct response" to Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" (Karbiener 69). If the connection is not obvious at first, mainly due to the type of imagery that Ginsberg uses, and the overall pessimistic tone of the poem, "Howl" does depict its time and is, indeed, vested of "redeeming social importance" (Judge Clayton W. Horn qtd. in Ginsberg, *Howl: Original Draft*, 176). Perhaps the point where these works intersect more clearly is the reference to human suffering and growing distance between people who populate similar spaces yet are internally far apart.

The same leitmotif is present more clearly in Whitman's poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," wherein the solitude of the inhabitant of the growing urban conglomerate becomes a stranger to his or her fellow men and women, while fear and suspicion constitute the essence of human relations. Hence the fall into desperation and madness referred to by Ginsberg who, writing at a hundred-year distance, depicts the evolution of Whitman's New York, describing the ordeals of the descendants of Whitman's contemporaries. The following excerpt of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" seems to illustrate this reality:

The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself disintegrated,

every one disintegrated yet part of the scheme, [...]. //

.....

[I] Saw many I loved in the street or ferry-boat or public

assembly, yet never told them a word,

Lived the same life with the rest, [...]

.....

Play'd the part [...],

.....

The same old role, the role that is what we make it [...]. (ll. 6, 80-84)

Whitman offers a deeply meaningful depiction of the anonymity that individuals experience among the crowds, along with the monotonous and dehumanizing rhythms of urban life.

Albeit in an exponentially greater manner, and under different forms, this is still very much a reality in Ginsberg's New York. In effect, the mechanical rhythms and dehumanizing massification are still present in the lives of the "best minds of [Ginsberg's] generation", whose existence takes place in an America marked by strict conservatism and paranoia, where all men are potential enemies and need to be kept under control by the government and its multiple secret agencies ("Howl" l.1). Or, in case the controlling machine fails, numbed into an idyllic bourgeois existence where they slave away their dreams and aspirations for the sake of the almighty dollar and the commodities that it can offer.

Solidarity in Times of Change

Despite the bleak picture that "Howl" offers of the social context wherefrom it emerged, the poem was not meant as a judgement or a "rejection," or even a social critique (Ginsberg qtd. in Morgan 218). To Ginsberg, "Howl" should appear as a sign of hope, the embrace of a flawed reality, the cry for solidarity, "compassion and [...] sympathy," in a society governed by "war rules" that were "uncompassionate" in essence. (Ginsberg, *The Best Minds* 29). What is more, it was Ginsberg's aim to express his "feelings of [...] identification with the rejected, mystical, individual even 'mad'" (Ginsberg qtd. in Morgan 218). "Howl" was then thought as a moment or a generator of a deep communion between individuals whose lives evolved in

parallel, without ever intersecting with each other, and in so doing create the notion of a common humanity and a sense of union. “Howl” then continues and expands the legacy of Whitman’s poetic work, wherein the proclamation of the sacredness of the bond which human beings share is stronger than the external differences that separate them. It is in part three of “Howl” where this desire for communion appears in all its strength, as the poetic persona identifies himself with Carl Solomon, accompanying him through the various external and internal stages of his stay in the imaginary “Rockland.” This place actually stood for the “Pilgrim State, the same hospital where Naomi [Ginsberg’s mother] was being treated” (Morgan 200). Ginsberg not only witnesses Solomon’s experiences, but he also becomes one with him. This impulse constitutes an echo of Whitman’s experience of unity in “The Sleepers,” where he states that “I dream in my dreams all the dreams of the other dreamers, / And I become the other dreamers” (l. 30). In establishing this symbiotic connection, Ginsberg aligns himself, once again, with the downtrodden of his time, the most stigmatized members of his and, perhaps, of all societies, that is, those who suffer from any form of mental illness. This is an issue that has a deep echo in Ginsberg’s personal experience as his mother suffered from severe mental illness and he himself was committed to a mental facility (Morgan 13, 114). It was, in effect, during that time of his life, that he met Carl Solomon. Therefore, this identification goes beyond the external solidarity for an unknown phenomenon and crosses into the realm of the personal, as Ginsberg is describing something that he suffered firsthand. Solomon additionally comes to symbolize Naomi, whose condition made a deep impact in Ginsberg’s life and perception of himself and of the world around him (Morgan 13-35).

Similar notions of solidarity and identification with society’s outcasts are present in the following excerpt of “Song of Myself,” wherein Whitman identifies with the suffering of his contemporaries:

I am the man, I suffer’d, I was there. //

.....
 I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself

become the wounded person, //

.....

I seize the descending man and raise him with resistless will,

O despairer, here is my neck,

By God, you shall not go down! hang your whole weight upon me.

(ll. 830, 844, 1011-1013)

In regard to the notion of madness, it is worth making a parenthesis to refer to part two of “Howl,” the Moloch section. Moloch is mentioned in the Bible, both in the Old and the New Testaments, and is associated with rather ominous connotations, as his name refers to “a Canaanite deity associated [...] with the practice of child sacrifice” (“Moloch”). This pagan ritual, adopted by the Jews, was performed in the valley of Gehenna, a place believed to be the gateway to hell, which was later converted into a dumping site for all types of debris from Jerusalem, from common trash to the dead bodies of convicts (“Gehenna”). It is interesting to note that it was in the valley of the Gehenna, also referred to as the valley of Ben-Hinnom, where Judas Iscariot committed suicide after betraying Jesus. Therefore, the reference to Moloch in part two of “Howl” appears as a symbol for all the negative forces which undermine human existence in all its stages. According to Ginsberg’s choice of imagery while referring to Moloch in the second part of “Howl,” this mythical monster that he creates may very well symbolize the oppressive forces at work in his America, which suppress “the expression of natural ecstasy, and when there is no social form for expression, the person gets confused and thinks he really is mad and then does go off his rocker” (qtd. in Morgan 218). The collective straight-jacket of utopian prosperity where all people are forced into a stereotypical existence, whereby the mass production of homes, cars, and clothing, as well as

the uniformization of a given lifestyle supposedly generated a golden oasis of happiness was, indeed, seen by Ginsberg as the truly demonic force which annuls the possibility of individual expression. In that sense, “Moloch whose mind is pure machinery [and] whose blood is running money” is a soulless contraption that devours everything and everyone within its reach, leaving behind a legacy of destruction and solitude (Ginsberg, “Howl” l. 82). The result is the illusion of material prosperity as the only possible source of happiness, along with an existential solitude which touches the lines of hysteria due to the sacrifice of one’s identity, dreams, feelings; in a word, all that makes people truly human, to a relentless and impersonal machine of progress that works for the benefit of a selected few.

“Everything is Holy!” (“Footnote to Howl” 142)

Ginsberg, like Whitman, chooses to maintain an optimistic view on the world and the people who inhabit it. Far from sinking under the pressure of a world that seems to suffocate the expansive impulses of the rising stars who inhabit it, or drown in the pessimism and collective scrutiny which characterizes his immediate environment, Ginsberg opts to believe in the people around him. Thus, he closes the sequence of desperate cries that constitute “Howl” with a section that affirms the sanctity of creation, the beauty of mankind and of each and every individual human being. What is more, he exalts the truly human deep-rooted virtues which are encompassed in “the supernatural extra brilliant intelligent kindness of the soul” (Ginsberg, “Footnote to Howl” 142). In this manner, Ginsberg fulfills his program of spreading an ideology of solidarity and compassion in a world divided by “uncompassionate [...] rules [which, even at their best,] are applied abusively,” rendering them clearly obsolete (Ginsberg, *The Best Minds* 29).

Hence the need to sing the toils of an America which, despite the unprecedented technological and economic progress, forces its youth into a vertigo of drugs and alienation in the search for a deeper meaning of a reality that they are unable to fit into, or that simply has

no space for them. In this sense, Ginsberg once more approximates his poetic work to that of Whitman who, despite the deep social rifts of his time, still looked onto the human condition with optimism and hope. This is patent in the following verses of “The Sleepers,” wherein the people whom the poetic persona visits in his disembodied sleep appear equaled in essence:

I swear they are all beautiful,
 Every one that sleeps is beautiful, [...], //

 The soul is always beautiful,
 The universe is duly in order, [...], //

 The sleepers are very beautiful as they lie unclothed,
 They flow hand in hand over the whole earth from east to west
 as they lie unclothed, [...]. (ll. 144, 154, 160-1)

The poet, whoever he is, whenever and wherever he lives on this earth, appears as a seeker and translator of beauty, someone who unites the fragments of the present with the stability of the eternal. These are the main features of the poet dreamt by Emerson, and incarnated by Whitman and Ginsberg, as beacons of hope and compassion who represented and inspired the societies of their times.

Conclusion

A builder of bridges between the transcendent and the immanent, the poet has the extraordinary capacity to unite the different aspects of reality while asserting “the predominance of the soul” (Emerson, “Nature” 30). In so doing, he or she takes on an irreplaceable social function, acting as a collective conscience that manifests itself through words that are shaped by the world where they are formed, at the same time that they configure the people and the society where they are sown. This is the case of individuals such as Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg, whose poetic work both reflected and acted upon their immediate spatial-temporal context, while being a part of a broader dialogue within the American literary scene which continues to this day. Poets to their core, while sharing common views and methods, they were both successful in creating relevant forms of expression wherein both their contemporaries as well as the successive generations are able to recognize themselves. In that sense, Whitman’s and Ginsberg’s words, composed in time and space, cross these barriers and become truly immortal and universal, as “the melodies of the poet ascend and leap and pierce into the deeps of infinite time” (Emerson, “The Poet” 330).

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