

The Blake Vision in Ginsberg

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Abstract

Allen Ginsberg was influenced by Blake's ideas which subsequently guided him in his new poetic formation. Liberation of both mind and body was the sole concern of both Blake and Ginsberg. Since human woes lies in human consciousness, in this context, Blake influenced much in Ginsberg's career suggesting a change in public consciousness. Ginsberg relentlessly fought to create an awareness on the people, warned them against perverted consciousness as designed by the state and society. Both poets are complimentary to each other in their declared vow. Ginsberg wanted to illuminate the mankind and Blake will never withdraw from mental flight to serve the society. Both Ginsberg and Blake subscribed to the view that purity in human consciousness would lead to uncover the 'mask' that covers the society and truth shall ultimately prevail over everything. The Blake influence is therefore important in major poetic formation for Ginsberg that serves the cause of humanity.

Keywords Self-Expression Technique, Intensified Perception, Visual Realisation, Holiness, Open Form.

Introduction

Allen Ginsberg made his debut to many poets of his generation. Blake's poetry was one of them. Blake's concept of openness in his poetry influenced Ginsberg to a large extent. Blake also insisted on self expression "When thought is closed in caves/ then love will show its roots in deepest hell" [Blake 1966 152]. The creative energy would be utilized in violence, if the poet would have no self expression. The poet had to shun inhibition and repression, Blake thought. In the same line, Ginsberg followed the self-expression technique as opposed to reason and intellectualisation of the creative energy. Ginsberg's confession in his poetry were all reflection of his self-expression.

Objective of study

The paper studies the influence of William Blake on Allen Ginsberg in his basic poetic formations. It also shows how Blake guided Ginsberg to advance writing poetry of protest to change public consciousness in order to bring changes in society and politics of his time.

Review of Literature

Blake's protests were mainly based on sexual liberation. Blake thought sex can elevate man to a new vision: "Men are admitted into heaven, not because they have curbed and governed their passions, or have no passions, but because they cultivated their understanding" [Blake 154]. Blake had made a shocking revelation that free sexuality is morally sound. In his journal, Ginsberg once wrote after reading one of Blake's poems "meaning, Eden is imagination" that the body's five senses are expressions of soul, the body doesn't exist, soul does, my love for Peter therefore doesn't sin against my body" (311). Ginsberg justified his homosexuality on this ground.

Main Text

The protest literature of Ginsberg derived much from Blake whose wrath and extremity were important poetic components. Blake, in the second poem of "the Memorable Fancies" voiced through Isaiah "the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God" (153). The role of rebellion and extremity were highlighted in the poem through characters like Isaiah and Ezekiel emphasising on their simple living which guided their perception of God. Blake strongly believed that truth is possible only through a revolting soul that is engaged in extremity of things. Extremity brings transformation of the society

by way of a transformation of the consciousness. Such a transformation tends to seek intensified perception inviting varieties of queer experiences for which institutional control shouldn't be an impediment on its way. "if the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is Infinite /for man has closed himself up till he sees all things through the chinks of his cavern"(154). Ginsberg followed up Blake's concept of intensified perception and made the cleansing of such perceptions to open up the hidden truth, for which he approached literature from the perspective of protest and resistance. Following Blake, he ignored the mechanical and the materialistic perception of life to a spiritual upliftment of man. Literature was the mode of such communication. His life was based on the ecstatic experiences from drugs to sex, from politics to mantra-chanting to resolve all major issues intensifying such perception and initiating rebellion to avoid social restrictions.

Ginsberg's Blake visions served to his major poetic formation. In the year 1948 when Ginsberg was alone in his Harlem Flat he continued to read Blake's "Ah! Sunflower". He thought, voice of Blake was inspiring by reading it. This brought him to visual realization; something of a new transformation. On the street nearby Ginsberg's flat; an old building changed his perception totally. He gazed at the chronicles of the house and observed:

.....Where I looked evidences of a living hand, even in the bricks, in the arrangement of each brick. Some hands had placed them there — that some hand placed the whole universe in front of me.... On that God was in front of my eyes— existence itself was God. (Clark 38)

Ginsberg saw everything in a new light in heightened consciousness. Before this, he had never come across such luminous experiences that had led to create awareness of the infinite, the oversoul. With a series of such occult experiences, he could find in ordinary thing extraordinary experiences. The reality is combined with the sublime meaning of holiness injected into it. In Columbia University campus he came across Blake's "the human abstract" and experienced the higher consciousness once again. He looked at the people and the clerk and saw in them an extraordinary spiritual presence. He thought people would have it but due to their prefixed attachment to every experience, they couldn't have it. They repressed their feelings as they were made so by the convention of the social and political setting. Ginsberg thought he would attack the people's perception of the material world and suggest them to have the heightened awareness of spiritual potentialities within. Blake's vision was reflected in many of his poems (1948-49). 'A very Dove', 'Do we understand each other?', The voice of Rock, A Western Ballad, on reading Blake's the 'Sick Rose'. Poems like 'HOWL' and 'Kaddish' had allusions to such visions.

Ginsberg spoke to an interviewer "Almost everything I have done since (the Blake visions) has these moments as its motif" (Lucien-Smith 6). A decade after he expressed "the voice of Blake... is the voice I have now." (Ginsberg 71). Blake's vision inspired him to seek new visions in every experience which ultimately changed his lifestyle. His Bohemian lifestyle irritated the traditional moralists as it opposed the status-quo and approved principles. All such transformations were possible due to his Blake visions and the writings were influenced accordingly. Theodore Roszak rightly said:

Having once experienced the visionary powers, Ginsberg found himself driven to reach beyond literary expression to a total lifestyle. More than a poet, he became, for the disaffected young of America and much of Europe, the vagabond proselytizer whose poems are but a subsidiary way of publicizing the new consciousness he embodies and the techniques for its cultivation.(128-9)

Conclusion

In transferring his new ideas originated through his visionary power he led a queer lifestyle and adopted a new techniques of converting (Proselytizing) these ideas through communication. He therefore rejected traditional poetics and innovated a new set through poetics of protest. It was a Protest, not of the accepted views, prefixed ideas, 'but also the Protest within the Poetry which led him to develop 'an open form'. Such a poetic technique made the genre of his poetry more 'chaotic' than an 'ordered format'. The protest poetry of Ginsberg made use of strange technique of expression that represented the 'disorder' of the society of his time suggesting an alternative.

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