



## Revolutionary Voices: Percy Bysshe Shelley and Allen Ginsber

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### Abstract

*The works of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Allen Ginsberg, two radical anti-establishment bards are united by the common roost of political and social revolution; this paper examines these inter-textual themes. This study seeks to determine whether and how a specific poetic technique - allusion -as employed by poets Shelley (in "The Masque of Anarchy" and "Ode to The West Wind") and Ginsberg ("Howl" and "America") can be regarded as a form of political subversion, such that, through an intense and sustained formal engagement with the substance of a society, one may resist, and ultimately seek to transform. Using inter-textuality, the study demonstrates common motifs and themes that reveal the lasting nature by which poetry can encapsulate radical thinking. The analysis contextualizes their poetry historically and culturally to illustrate how their poems engage with socio-political matters. The research elucidates how revolutionary ideologies in literature are cross-generational by showing the trans-historical nature of the poetic voice as a force of perpetual social revolution. This puts Shelley and Ginsberg back into the literary canon and reminds us of the way in which they have shaped current intellectual and practical social and political movements. Though one may have an explicit sense of how talented they are, this study presents the genius of their work in a more subdued fashion, and why their revolutionary discourse was so influential.*

### Keywords

The Masque of Anarchy, Ode to The West Wind, Howl, America, Inter-textuality, Social Revolution and Shelley and Ginsberg

### Background and Rationale

The romantic poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), and the beat generation poet, Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997), are two such poets who are also known for their radical and subversive ideas as reflected in their poetry. Shelley was a key figure in the Romantic Movement, and his work is indeed a work of political and social protest, his poetry. Many of his works deal with the theme of freedom, justice, and free will against the tyranny. For example, significant poems like "The Masque of Anarchy" and "Ode to the West Wind" express vision of radical spirit, immortally optimistic hope and become linked to his faith in the role of poetry to bring about political change (Pulos, 1980).

One of the influential figures of the Beat Generation, Allen Ginsberg wrote poetry in rebellion against and in reaction to the social and political status quo of post-World War II America. His revolutionary "Howl" is an angry denunciation of the repressive politics of the time and a reflection of the frustration counter-culture felt towards society in general (Raskin, 2004). His poetry commonly places him within the scope of the Beat Generation, according to the lead of his "Howl", which he denounced and signifies his work as American oddest against the nature and monetarism obscuring our national visit.

By studying Shelley and Ginsberg together, it is possible to trace the development of radical verse in two separate historical arenas The Romantic era (which focused on emotion, nature, and individualism) is said to have paved the way for the literary movements to come. Shelley was so

visionary and idealist in his romanticism, dedicating a deeper social change through art (Abrams, 1971).

The Beat Generation, on the other hand, was born in the mid-20th century in response to the materialism and conformity of post-war American society. Ginsberg and his peers rebelled against the social norms of their time to emphasize not only spontaneity, but also spirituality and a candid rendering of the human condition (Charters, 1992). In these inter-textual themes between Shelley and Ginsberg, we witness revolutionary ideals being recast to oppose the specific ills of each era.

A perfect example of this area would best be the theory of inter-textuality, which is defined as a theory in which the meaning of a text intersects with another text, quite an interesting way of broadening the spectrum when it comes analysing the works of Shelley and Ginsberg. This method allows us to see the themes that remain remarkably consistent across poets and between political/social revolutions, as well as those that change. The subject we can assume is the same: the concept of authority and freedom and where in the balance of those you can find true societal change in history, seen in a particular time, handled differently as if picked up and used again with new grace by a new man with a new set of circumstances fifty years later.

An exploration of how these poets are inter-textually connected can trace how literary movements affect one another, and how radical themes are carried over and re-imagined across time. This can be seen, for example, in Shelley's idealized hopes for social change preceding Ginsberg's more blunt, modern renderings of the ills of (then) current life (Frye, 1963). In examining these interrelations, we better understand the roles poetry plays as a force of revolutionary ideology and praxis over time.

This analysis of inter-textuality between the poetic works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Allen Ginsberg, offers an opportunity for multifaceted inquiry, showing poetry to be a medium that has (potentially) always fostered revolutionary responses. A century separates their performances, yet both emerge as significant briefings on the state of the contemporary world and the poet as a critic and visionary in this regard.

#### **Research Objectives**

- To analyze how Percy Bysshe Shelley and Allen Ginsberg use their poetry to challenge political and social norms.
- To identify and explore the inter-textual themes of revolution present in the works of Shelley and Ginsberg.
- To compare and contrast the poetic techniques and styles of Shelley and Ginsberg, and assess how these contribute to their revolutionary messages.

#### **Research Questions**

- How do Shelley and Ginsberg use poetry to challenge political and social norms?
- What inter-textual themes of revolution can be identified in their works?
- How do their poetic techniques and styles contribute to their revolutionary messages?

#### **Research Statement**

Shelley and Ginsberg, through their respective works, use poetry as a medium to challenge authority, advocate for social change, and inspire revolutionary thought, employing distinct yet inter-connected themes and techniques.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The relationship between literature and society is of course one of the classic concerns of academic enquiry. Poets such as Percy Bysshe Shelley and Allen Ginsberg have used their poetry to confront the injustices of their time, and have made a lasting impact on the poetic and social landscape. Through such similar revolutionary ambitions and through such use of poetry as vehicle for social critique and reform, the Beat Generation poets and the Romantic poets seek to popularize their ideas.

But even though volumes have been published on each poet separately, no fully comparative study exists, until Andy Markovits and Alexander Stein have decided to explore the inter-textual links between Shelley and Ginsberg. Particularly, it should analyse how their unique poetic techniques and styles merge to create the revolutionary messages contained in their works with accompanying themes of revolution and social change. An understanding of these connections offers valuable insights into how revolutionary ideas in literature are connected across time, and how the persistent force of poetry.

### **Significance of the Study**

Its significance lies in providing us with a greater grasp of why and how poetry is a timeless force, capable of inciting and effecting social and political transformation; setting the verse of Percy Bysshe Shelley alongside that of Allen Ginsberg in a consideration of inter-textual links. This research looks at how two major poets who lived in different historical eras transformed literary norms by challenging political and social issues, revealing not only the persistence of revolution as a category of thought in literature, but also the potential of poetic expression for transformation. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of their poetic techniques and styles serves to deepen our appreciation of what each master brings to be as an artist, and helps us to learn from one another across the rich tapestry of literary movements over time. Thus it adds to the literary canon a bridge between Romantic and Beat Generation poetics, and brings articulation to amoebic ideas and practices, showing them to have historical foundation and contemporary application in the way that literature can act as critique to social norms and as a way for enacting social change.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Overview of Shelley's Revolutionary Themes**

##### **Shelley's Political and Social Themes**

Percy Bysshe Shelley was known for his revolutionary zeal, which he expressed in both his life and poetry. His work has been the subject of scholarly examinations of political and social discourse, as his radical philosophy too was frequently well ahead of the times. The poetry which Shelley wrote reflects his fiery zeal in the cause of liberty, justice, and equality. The main theme is the abuse of political power, and the fight of the powerless and the marginalized citizens (Cameron, 1974).

Directly relating to historical events like the British government's 1819 massacre of peaceful protestors in "*The Masque of Anarchy*" by Shelley. This poem is one of the most well-known of political protest poetry, with its appeals for civil disobedience and another world. Latter-day scholarship, illustrated by Wasserman 1971, may delve into the allegorical and personification techniques Shelley uses to dramatize the struggle between tyranny and freedom.

Additionally, "*Ode to the West Wind*" has been taken to be a symbol of a major evolutionary transformation. The natural world becomes political, as Shelley assigns meaning to the west wind - one of renewal, one of change. Critics such as Abrams (1971) have pointed out the double nature of the poem, as a personal lament and as a political statement, part of Shelley's belief in individual and political freedom being inextricably linked.

##### **Shelley's Revolutionary Poetry**

Critics of Shelley revolutionary poetry have many times concentrated their attention on his idealism and visionary imagination. According to Bloom (1986), the poetry of Shelley is marked by a prophetic quality of redemption, in which he looks forward to a society liberated from domination. This visionary quality is linked to his use of myth and symbolism through which he articulates his radical notions in a way that is more universal and timeless.

Still others, like Roe (1988), have stressed the importance of Shelley's involvement in current political discussions. Roe, on the other hand, stresses that Shelley is actually a poet out of history, where notions such as the French Revolution and the advent of industry and democratic reform are manifest textually in his verse. In this way, my contextual approach seeks to situate Shelley's poetry at the nexus of literature that is both definitively of its time and of lasting revolutionary interest.

#### **Ginsberg's Revolutionary Themes**

##### **Ginsberg's Political and Social Activism through Poetry**

Allen Ginsberg — associated out of the Beat Generation and well beyond it — is certainly at heart an activist-poet. In its evocation of what Ginsberg called “those Holy Goofballs”—the quest for a beat (an on-the-road journey of hope turned bikerama), for a solace in jazz and junkie-chic, for a group grope in promiscuous confraternities of music and sick chic—the poem was a critical piece of literature from the ethos of the Beats, and a howl against the conditions in post-World War II America. In particular, “Howl” has been cast under a microscope by scholars as a rallying cry of the Beat Generation striving for freedom from the moral and social imperatives of American society (Miles, 1989).

Ginsberg shocked the American literati with his frank, graphic depiction of madness, sex, and the outsider experience in general in "Howl," a poem that broke boundaries in American cultural history and literary culture. The poets Raskin (2004), for example, have praised the potency, the

burning passion, and the merciless scouring of hypocrisies and injustices of twenty-first-century America that the poem contains. Ginsberg not only captured the spirit of the Beat Generation, but of the 1960s, period,” said Raskin.

Ginsberg also involved himself in several social and political causes, Ginsberg: A Biography walking the walk in the same way he talked the talk. His commitment to social justice and personal freedom was represented throughout his investments in civil rights, the anti-Vietnam War protests and LGBTQ rights. In America, Ginsberg was cutting right to the heart of the political and social atmosphere with his frustrations but definitely showing the possibility of change at the same time. As Charters (1992) observes, this poem is a powerful example of Ginsberg’s unique way of blending personal experience and political protest, making it a work of protest literature not just appropriate but also political in the most intimate way.

The strength of Ginsberg’s vision suggests that the performative dimension of his activism was secondary only to its collectivity. Events in which he took part - such as the 1965 Berkeley Poetry Conference and the seminal 1967 Human Be-In - demonstrated his conviction in the role of poetry as a force for social transformation and mass awareness (Morgan 1995).

### **Ginsberg’s Contributions to the Beat Generation**

Ginsberg’s contributions to the Beat Generation are often seen through the lens of his stylistic innovations and thematic boldness. The Beat movement, characterized by its rejection of conventional norms and embrace of spontaneity, spirituality, and personal liberation, found a quintessential expression in Ginsberg’s work. His use of free verse, influenced by Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams, broke away from traditional poetic forms, allowing for a more natural and fluid expression of thought and emotion (Charters, 1992).

Ginsberg has also been lauded for his unapologetic exploration of taboo themes and his defiance of social mores. His unorthodox treatment of homosexuality, mental health, and drug use opened a path for these issues to be viewed with much less cynicism in literature and culture. Ginsberg is consequently often cited as a poet who helped to anatomize the themes of American poetry in a way that resonated with different cultural changes of the 1960s (Miles, 1989).

This integration with Eastern spiritual techniques, particularly Buddhism, represented a significant break with the Western literary practice and tradition of the time, and greatly influenced the way the works written in the Beat Generation were later perceived. Academics such as Tytell (1976) have pointed out how this influence can be observed in his latter material which is charged with themes of contemplation, enlightenment and the pervasiveness of everything. This spiritualistic influence gave depth to the poetry of Ginsberg, and also mirrored the counterculture movement at large, and its exploration of alternate paths towards knowing and being.

Also integral to his legacy was the support system Ginsberg offered the Beats and successive generations of poets. His long history of collaboration with other Beat writers Jack Kerouac and other, William S. Burroughs and his role as mentor to younger poets such as Bob Dylan and Patti Smith from this circle is a testament to his conviction that an imaginative, nurturing literary community is absolutely essential for the poetic voice (Morgan, 1995)

### **Inter-Textual Studies**

#### **Inter-Textual Connections between Poets from Different Eras**

It is a framework for a study of inter-textual relationships amongst poets existing in different epochs. For one thing, Kristeva (1986) coined the term inter-textuality, asserting that every text is criss-crossed by a net of references to and transformations of other materials. It began using this method to study how poets of the past compare to one another, seeking such shared conversations and impacts that endure to today.

These discursive evolutions suggest that inter-textual relations between Romantic and Modernists which occur may be trans-historical as well, attributable to shared themes of resistance and change cross-cutting literary forms (Riddell 1990). Likewise, the Beats and their Beat poetry have been described in romanticist terms in their attempts to evoke a great unifying myth that would bind all people, places, and times, despite the ultra-modern manner in which they attempted to express their ideas (Tytell, 1976).

#### **Inter-Textuality in Poetry**

Analyses of inter-textuality in poetry are typically done through theoretical frameworks derived from Structural and Post-Structural theoreticians. Texts have many layers of meaning, and are held together

by the other texts that are related to it (Barthes 1977). Going from here allows an investigation of how Shelley and Ginsberg - of different times, society, and culture - form part of a long history of literature about revolutions or social circumstances.

With such frameworks, researchers can comb for particular inter-textual referents, thematic parallels, and stylistic echoes resonating between Shelley and Ginsberg. Their juxtaposition not only gives an added depth to the separately fully meaningful text of each poet but also allows the revelation of wider characteristics and process of continuity and change in a tradition of revolutionary poetry.

In short, the revolutionary aspects and contributions that Allen Ginsberg made to the Beat Generation are rich and far-reaching. His confessional, political, and spiritual poetry encouraged social non-conformity and transformed a generation. Only by viewing Ginsberg through this kaleidoscope of lenses can scholars achieve a fuller understanding of his legacy to American letters and culture.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This research employed a qualitative, comparative literary analysis methodology to explore the inter-textual themes of political and social revolution in the writings of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Allen Ginsberg. Intending to reveal the means by which these poets engage revolutionary thought, this study situates particular poems and thematic elements within the poems.

#### **Data Collection**

##### **1. Primary Texts**

- **Percy Bysshe Shelly:** The notable poems "*The Masque of Anarchy*" and "*Ode to the West Wind*" are selected as a Primary source. These poems are chosen for their direct address of political and social themes of upheaval.
- **Allen Ginsberg:** Notable poems are "*Howl*" and "*America*." They are selected for their searing, unrelenting criticism of the culture formed and practiced in America today and in their total embrace of Ginsberg's poetic and political commitment.

##### **2. Secondary Sources**

- Scholarly articles, books, and critical essays on Shelley and Ginsberg's works and their historical and cultural contexts.
- Theoretical frameworks on inter-textuality and revolutionary literature, including works by Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, and other relevant theorists.

### **Analytical Framework**

#### **1. Textual Analysis**

- Close reading of the selected poems to identify and analyze key themes, symbols, and rhetorical strategies.
- Examination of the language, form, and stylistic features used by Shelley and Ginsberg to convey their revolutionary messages.

#### **2. Comparative Analysis**

- Identification of thematic parallels and divergences between Shelley and Ginsberg's works.
- Analysis of how each poet's historical and cultural context influences their approach to revolutionary themes.
- Exploration of inter-textual connections, such as shared motifs, symbols, and rhetorical strategies.

#### **3. Contextual Analysis**

- Examination of the historical, political, and social contexts in which Shelley and Ginsberg wrote their poems.
- Analysis of the influence of contemporary events and movements on their poetic expressions of revolution.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

#### **Analysis of Inter-Textual Themes: Percy Bysshe Shelley and Allen Ginsberg**

##### **Political Revolution**

##### **Shelley's Political Themes**

Through his radical political views, Percy Bysshe Shelley made his works, especially a lot of his poetry, preached for liberty and justice. His poems such as "*The Masque of Anarchy*," written in the

wake of the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 when government forces managed to kill peaceful protestors, are illustrative. Shelley utilizes allegory and personification to express his disdain for despotism and his belief in the virtue of peaceful resistance in this poem. He makes England an individual that suffers and sees the only answer an uprising against the oppressors (Cameron, 1974).

Beneath the lyrical beauty of Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* is also political speech. The west wind is a mighty natural energy, representing the dynamism, hope of a political revolution for Shelley through which the old systems would be wiped out and a period of freedom and justice introduces (Wasserman, 1971). The heavy presence of natural symbols in Shelley, and the political views they express, indicate his sense of nature as involving and enveloping human and natural forces.

### **Ginsberg's Political Themes**

The opening lines of Allen Ginsberg's "*Howl*" are directly pointing towards the degrading and dehumanizing elements of contemporary American society. For example, institutional oppression, the loss of individual freedoms thanks to technology shackling us to work, and the destructive power of materialism, but all told in a language which has become somewhat obtuse over the past years. In his raw, unadulterated language, Ginsberg penned the collective frustration of a generation who was fed up with and had lost faith in the American Dream (Raskin, 2004). The poem is fragmented, free verse, anarchic, mirroring the disorder and oppression of the society it condemns.

In America, Ginsberg speaks directly to the country using a conversational style that is both personal and political. Dylan takes on the personification of consumerism, political paranoia and social inequality as being self-serving and dividing a call for the return to more human and democratic values (Charters, 1992). The humour and satire Ginsberg uses in this poem is a testament to his uncanny ability to address heavy political topics in a way that resonates and is easy to follow.

### **Comparative Analysis**

Shelley and Ginsberg write their poetry to criticize political repression, and to also make an effort to change the thinking and acting of the people however, the way that each of them wrote was very different. His deployment of allegory and natural imagery means that Shelley is largely shaping his political messages in a way that defies the particular circumstances of his time, giving them a timeless and universal aspect to them; on the other hand, Ginsberg's use of the solitarily direct, confessional voice in his poetry has an immediacy and immediacy of analysis of the contemporary world. These differences notwithstanding, both poets have used poetry as a means of social and political protest.

### **Social Revolution**

#### **Shelley's Social Themes**

Shelley looks outward towards the larger social currents in his own poetry, promising justice, equality, and a fuller range of human rights. Half a century before Marx and Engels, Shelley dreamed in "*Queen Mab*" of a world without class divisions where mankind lives in balance with nature. Blom (1986) would describe this poem as one of resistance to the social and economic forces of oppression that ensures inequality and pain and an articulation of an alternative vision of what a just society should look like.

Shelley rewrites the myth of Prometheus in *Prometheus Unbound* as a celebration of the capacity of humanity to resist and to overthrow oppression and tyranny. The poem celebrates the indomitable human spirit to fight odds and to make a better world. His belief in the possibility of social change through joint enterprise clearly mirrors Shelley's own radical engagement with the issues of day to day life (ROE 1988).

#### **Ginsberg's Social Themes**

Just as important, much of Ginsberg's poetry concentrates on social justice as it relates to underprivileged and oppressed groups who sought social change. His poem "*Howl*" tells the story of the disenfranchised and the oppressed by mainstream culture, from mental illnesses to the unconventional. In portraying these individuals, Ginsberg goes beyond the comfort zone of most Americans and speaks to social norms (Miles, 1989).

So, in "*Kaddish*," Ginsberg writes about those personal things but he writes about them at a moment when the whole of society seems to break down (indeed he says society experiences a nervous breakdown in the poem). The title's arrogance is richly earned — the poem is deeply personal — because personal and social (i.e., political) are one; together they grip and strangle like serpents. Another example of his innovative style was Ginsberg's inspiration to critique the social, through personal experiences (Raskin, 2004).

### **Comparative Analysis**

Both Shelley and Ginsberg use their poetry to fight for social reform and confront societal oppression. Although Shelley is much more visionary and idealistic and Ginsburg is less veracious and more personal, we get that kind of commitment on the part of both the poets to point out the inequalities of their society and strive to build a fairer world. Their work demonstrates a belief in the radical potential of poetry to provoke social change by confronting the present societal norm.

### **Analysis of Ginsberg's Critiques of Governmental Authority, Capitalism, and Social Conformity**

His poetry is one long evisceration of governmental authority, capitalism, and social conformity, just as it is a near-constant dirge about the death of family, friends, and the creative power of love. In "Howl," he reveals the harmful impact of both of these forces on both the individual and society. The industrial civilization, with its image of Moloch symbolizing the greed of capital, skilfully depicts the loss of human beings on modern economic and political levels. In another sense, Moloch is an all-devouring monster that demands human ideals and freedoms with the explicit purpose of advancing industry and the economy. Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Money is running bloody Moloch! From a similar angle, the lines of Howl, "Who smashed their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?" (Ginsberg, 1964), hint that Dracula tracks Ginsberg's belief that capitalism turns members of the proletariat into "anti-individuals," thereby reducing them to nothing more than integral components of the industrial machine (Zerbe, 2004).

The charge Ginsberg levels also describes the homogenizing social process that suppresses the growth of the individual and their gift. In "America", he responds to the cultural and political forces that try to enforce homogeneity and keep people marching in line. Ginsberg expresses his frustration with the societal pressures that impede an individual's freedom and expression through the directed tone of the poem. Lines like "America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel" (Ginsberg, 1956) emphasize his resistance against these pressures of conformism and his plea for a kind of world that was brighter and more welcoming.

### **Comparative Study of Methods of Confronting and Undermining Authority**

Shelley and Ginsberg are the studious and prankster archetypes of how to subvert and challenge authority through poetry, but where Shelley writes for the public, from the high horse, Ginsberg becomes the rebel and writes for the individual. While Shelley uses allegory, myth, and symbolic language to criticize institutional power, Ginsberg operates with direct, visceral imagery and a conversational tone. Both poets want to reveal the injustices that people in power are perpetuating, and make their readers want to fight back and stand up in face of these forces.

This use of allegory and personification, exemplified in "The Masque of Anarchy," dramatizes the battle between tyranny and freedom, offering a strong sense of right and wrong to the reader. The symbolic use of the elements of the natural world by Shelley (such as in "Ode to the West Wind"), indeed, infuses his poetry with elements of potentiality and hope that echo, it could be said, the once-slumbering springs of Bexhill (at least in a symbolic sense), suggesting that oppression, like early morning haze, will eventually be negated by approaching sunshine.

### **Conclusion**

#### **Summary of Findings**

Methodologically speaking, this research has analyzed the inter-textual themes of political and social revolution in the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Allen Ginsberg. On comparative analysis, the following key themes came out. In their writings, both poets speak out against oppressive political systems and stand for social justice and human rights. Instead of Shelley's allegory, symbolism, and myth as seen in poems like "The Masque of Anarchy" and "Ode to the West Wind," Ginsberg was direct, raw, and conversational as in "Howl" and "America." Even if their styles are disparate and they are separated by different historical periods, the two poets have one thing in common; they are strongly committed to making poetry a revolutionary tool of anti-establishment and anti-oppression.

#### **Implications**

Shelley and Ginsberg thereby illustrate one of the broader implications of their revolutionary poetry for contemporary social and political movements. These works illustrated the ability of poetry not only to respond to social problems, but to provoke action. The Shelley poems, with their idealistic portrait of aesthetic activism, and the Ginsberg poem, with its visceral criticism of such anesthetization demonstrate two extreme representations in the range of ideas surrounding art and

activism. In an age when our social and political challenges continue to transform, the lasting impact of Shelley and Ginsberg as revolutionary poets is a testimony to the power of artistic expression to galvanize and provoke a constituency for positive change to produce a brighter, fairer, society.

#### **Future Research**

Future study may build on the inter-textual relationships among poets across generations, moving past Shelley and Ginsberg to larger figures of the Western literary tradition. Comparative studies of the way that revolutionary themes are reimagined and appropriated through different literary movements, from Romantics to Modernisms and other development. Moreover, studying modern poets, inspired by Shelley and Ginsberg could help in understanding how revolutionary poetry is still relevant and changing. Within the wider frame of revolutionary literature, examining these inter-textual relationships could enhance our grasp of the dialectical process at work between poetry and social transformation.

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