POETICS OF THE UNSPOKEN: THE HUMAN CRISIS IN THE POETRY OF W. H. AUDEN, PHILIP LARKIN, ROBERT LOWELL, AND ALLEN GINSBERG

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Abstract

This paper delves into the spirit of the 20th century as seen through the lens of the most renowned English and American poets, W. H. Auden, Philip Larkin, Robert Lowell, and Allen Ginsberg. It delves into the poetics of the unspoken; the poetry that tackles the human psyche and the concerns of a generation that no other poet would so explicitly talk about. The aim is to shed light on the human crisis from different perspectives: empathy, religion, the self, and America. What all writers have in common, however, is their faith and hope for a better future in which these pillars will be revalued. The upshot from all the poets at hand is that the human crisis will be surpassed only if we are gentle and kind to others, empathize with their pain, restore our faith, be true to ourselves and think outside the wallet of the capitalist society.

Keywords: *Poetics, Literature, Crisis, Society, Politics, Self*

1. INTRODUCTION

"The poets? The poets lie too much." – Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Living through the terrors of both world wars, the poets that suffered the aftermath of the conflicts could not have lied of the human and moral crisis that marked the previous century. Each one of them explored their own heart of darkness, and through their individual meditation, they touched upon the universal constituents of the human abstract.

The zeitgeist of the 20th century – an era when God was dead and Hitler was alive – was a sensitivity that took a similar shape in Europe and America. What was known as 'confessional poetry' in America mirrored the Existentialist philosophical inquiry in Europe; both of them being an attempt for redemption of a self-destructive humanity that violated all the practices it had preached. In his lecture in 1946 at Columbia University in New York, Albert Camus shared some reflections on a world in moral crisis:

> I have always believed that a nation is a cannibal for its traitors as well as for its heroes… It was perfectly useless to tell us "you must believe in God, or in Plato, or in Marx" precisely because we did not have that kind of faith. As for our society's traditional morality, it seems to us that it was what it has always been: a monstrous hypocrisy. Thus we lived in negation. (Camus, 1946)

And no wonder the poetry was rebellious, for it depicted individuals alienated from themselves, from society and from God. This paper delves into the poetics of the unspoken; the poetry that tackled the human psyche and humanity's concerns that no one would talk about. The aim is to shed light on the human crisis from different perspectives by interpreting the most anthologized poems from the bards of the 20th century. The poets at hand are W. H. Auden, Philip Larkin, Robert Lowell and Allen Ginsberg, respectively.

"Avoiding the first person, poets would find an object, a landscape, or an observed encounter that epitomized and clarified their feelings." (Baym, 2003:2640). Thus, the paper encompasses analysis of Auden's landscapes that portray empathy in crisis; then Larkin's church as an object that stands for religion in crisis; followed by Lowell's skunk that shows the crisis of the self; and finally, Ginsberg's America – a product of the capitalism and consumerism in crisis.

Each poet has a distinctive signature, both in content and in form, and shows the gradual shift from modernism to postmodernism. What they have in common is a kaleidoscopic eye that could see through the violence and turmoil of the time and still find a possibility for redemption and kindness. Without further ado, let us turn to the poetry during the wars - seemingly nihilistic, yet deep down philanthropic and humanitarian.

2. W. H. AUDEN: EMPATHY IN CRISIS

In his poetry, W. H. Auden shows an open distress over the European's ascendancy of fascism; his leitmotif is the lack of empathy in our endeavors, and his reflective poetry often talks of nature as our retreat, but also as a symbol of isolation. "Much of the early poetry is an attempt to break out of that sense of isolation, of being a 'stranger', a 'cut off'." (O'Neil & Reeves, 1992:34). All these elements that construct the Audenesque style will be further elaborated through interpreting two of his poems*:* *Musée des Beaux Arts* and *In Praise of Limestone*.

Musée des Beaux Arts is an ekphrastic poem – it depicts the narrative of a painting, namely Brueghel's Icarus that is exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels, the same painting that inspired William Carlos Williams to write *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. The poem depicts a rather peculiar – less dramatic – portrayal of the mythological story of Daedalus and Icarus, contrasting to the one we are used to. Icarus is the son of Daedalus, the cunning craftsman of the ancient legend, and his fall is nonchalantly depicted in the corner of the painting, as it is in Auden's poem.

The poem can roughly be divided into two parts (one stanza each): the first one dealing with suffering as a phenomenon that exists both in people and in nature but it consists of different levels of awareness; and the second part delivering the message that only the ones that have gone through suffering are most aware of it. The poem is written in neutral, objective, journalistic and carefully chosen language; it is unaesthetic, almost like a colloquial speech written in free verse (in run-on lines) that only adds to the irony. His focus is on the theme of human suffering and the universal indifference to human misfortune, which was a major theme during modernism.

To begin with, the first stanza of *Musée des Beaux Arts* presents a hierarchy of awareness of suffering than begins with dogs, then children (for they are naïve and may be exposed to suffering but lack full awareness of it). Third are the 'old Masters', i.e. the aged men that had gone through many unfortunate events in life and, finally – the artists (poets), on top of the pyramid, a true epitome of suffering. Then, unexpectedly, at the beginning of part two (the second stanza) we meet Icarus: an archetypal symbol of the exuberant need and thirst for freedom. But both the rich and the poor show the same lack of empathy towards his tragic end. It seems that Auden is not interested in redemp-tion but in the human indifference towards other people's suffering.

> "… and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
>
> Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
>
> Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on." (Auden & Mendelson, 1979:79)

The landscape seems idyllic, which is precisely Auden's point: by expressing it simply, succinctly, and leisurely, he intensifies the horror of universal apathy. The goal of such ordinary phrases is to highlight the banality of suffering.

> Auden is able to tap his reader's feeling of guilt, to sound as though he were excavating buried sources of shame and anxiety; to sound, too, as though he were compensating for vulnerable feelings of his own with a tone of harsh authority. The poet is both an aloof judge and a secret sharer. (O'Neil & Reeves, 1992:146)

On top of that, the non-verbal signifiers like tone, voice and enjambment are but a few of the techniques that compose the Audenesque style. Stylistic and technical achievement, engagement with moral and political issues and the relationship between human beings and the anonymous, impersonal world of nature – these are layers of his transformative poetry between the wars.

What adds to the irony in the second stanza is the usage of *may* and *might*, and the contrasting image they create. At first, Auden mentions that 'the ploughman may have heard the splash' of Icarus falling into the sea - *may* implies low probability in contrast to must in: 'the… ship must have seen something amazing… had somewhere to go and sailed calmly on'. Must as a modal verb indicates high probability, yet the ship did not seem to be perturbed by such a peculiar image of 'a boy falling out of the sky'; hence the gradation of irony towards the end of the poem. (Auden, 1979:79).

In Praise of Limestone does not express the same amount of indifference as much as it resonates the mode of estrangement by presenting an image of a man alienated both from himself and from nature. It is a reflective poem, intimate in tone, and full of humility and tenderness. The landscape is inspired by Auden's native Yorkshire and it is an allegory of the Mediterranean civilization and the human body – which make the poem topographical. There is a calm but intimate and knowing contrast between people and nature throughout the poem, filled with musical sensibility and melody.

> That is why, I suppose,
>
> The best and the worst never stayed here long but sought
>
> Immoderate soils where the beauty was not so external,
>
> The light less public and the meaning of life
>
> Something more than a mad camp. (Auden & Mendelson, 1979:184)

From this excerpt, we could see that there is something about being human that deeply seeks to matter, to become more than scientific nature, more than an animal instinct or mere habit: and that is to be creative. Thus the poem seems to alter irony towards civilization but sincerity towards nature. There is a rather different, stark, distressing tension evolving between stone-cold nature and human efforts to do something larger than life and death. One would say that Auden is an anti-romantic, a poet of analytical clarity who sought for order, for universal patterns of existence.

> 'I am the solitude that asks and promises nothing;
>
> That is how I shall set you free. There is no love;
>
> There are only the various envies, all of them sad.' (Auden & Mendelson, 1979:184)

By comparing the poem's dissolving landscapes and protean nostalgia with Nietzsche's nihilism, it is easy to conclude that *In Praise of Limestone* is a sympathetic satire that elaborates human's efforts to escape; a mode of escapism that seemed the only way out at that time. It is, indeed, the first postmodern pastoral with a seemingly joyful title. Auden uses suffering and techniques of poetic resistance to create an impeccable balance between reasonable excess and required reality.

With a lexical range and a humanitarian context, Auden also manages to highlight various loopholes in the economic paraphernalia of any country. At times when the world was faced with a pitiless depression, Auden succeeded in restoring confidence, reflected as much by style as by content, that reality is within the reach of our understanding, and that it could be studied like a map, or seen in a time framework as an inexorable historical development.

3. PHILIP LARKIN: RELIGION IN CRISIS

After the outcome of WWII, the belief in God weakened tremendously and men and women slowly turned towards the secular. And this was, of course, reflected in the poetry of the time as well. Influenced by W. H. Auden, W. B. Yeats and Thomas Hardy, the poetry of Philip Larking revolves around themes of alienation and religion in crisis and encapsulates symbols full of irony which reveal that there is no place for God in the 20th century. In this paper, his stream of thought will be analyzed by focusing on two of his poems*: Church Going* and *The Whitsun Weddings* respectively.

Church Going is written in a colloquial language and it is rather narrative in tone. It is decasyllabic in lines, and the rhyme pattern *ababcadcd* makes it a variation of the Spenserian stanza. The poem

expresses the great dilemma of each person: to justify their existence, yet the narrator contemplates on this essential question with ironic observations and a healthy dose of skepticism. We can sense that he is alienated both from the church and from society throughout the poem. For instance, he is not very knowledgeable regarding the objects in the church, and by saying 'Brewed God' instead of 'Good God' we can sense his irony towards God and the church as institutions. Not to mention that he donated an Irish sixpence that has no value in England whatsoever.

'But superstition like belief must die', and thus the church becomes a symbol of man's sincere search for the ultimate meaning of life outside this 'unlucky place', i.e. the church (Larkin, 2013:13). Even though the narrator's skepticism towards religion and his mockery of the 'Christmas-addict' world continue in the next stanza, there is a twist in the last two stanzas.

> Bored uninformed knowing the ghostly silt
>
> Dispersed yet tending to this cross of ground
>
> Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt
>
> So long and equably what since it found
>
> Only in separation—marriage and birth
>
> And death and thoughts of these—for which was built
>
> This special shell? (Larkin, 2013:13)

The first two adjectives in the excerpt allude to the narrator's personality but as much as they continue the same sensibility from the beginning of the poem, suddenly there is a new light shed on the church as a symbol and a metaphor. It is shown as an institution where separation is celebrated, namely three types of separation: marriage (the separation of a child from its family), birth (the separation of the offspring from the mother) and death (a separation from this world). For these reasons, the church will remain a place that would never become obsolete since it is a place where our destiny is made. These are the needs that must still be met in a secular world; even in an age that lacks religious faith, people need to affirm the special significance of some events such as birth, marriage and death.

Speaking of marriage, *The Whitsun Weddings* celebrates the meaninglessness of marriage until the narrator changes his mind. It would be an overstatement to say that what he had was an epiphany but, still, we can sense the gradual decrease of his cynicism towards the end. The poem is a train journey that contemplates on marriage as a phenomenon and when it comes to form, it is a kind of shortened sonnet, the quatrain is Shakespearean, the sestet Petrarchan. It is classical in technique: there is accuracy, brevity, balance of image and revelation, but the style is all his own.

Just as Keats never loses sense in the summer odes, Larkin never propels any sweetness without much sorrow. His cynicism is softened only by his skepticism that only on rare occasions admired any expression of new possibility. Still, for all his meanness, there is also profane wit and melancholy born from his willingness to look at life as it is. *The Whitsun Weddings* contains such details, both mocking and melancholic, like in the following excerpts:

> Success so huge and wholly farcical
>
> The women shared
>
> The secret like a happy funeral; (Larkin, 2013:88)

> Just long enough to settle hats and say
>
> I nearly died
>
> A dozen marriages got under way. (Larkin, 2013:88)

The first excerpt emphasizes the particular poignancy of marriage for women – they appear most affected by weddings. Yet there is a shift from the detached, cynical non-participant in the 'parodies of fashion' and rituals; recognizing and appreciating them bring a deeper understanding of the world (Larkin, 2013:88). Albeit the narrator found the predictability and uniformity of weddings absurd at the beginning, he ironically recognized the importance of tradition, especially in the last two verses of the poem; as if the 'arrow-shower' is that of Cupid, pointing at his direction.

With all these elements at hand, it is easy to conclude that Larkin truly is a Movement poet: he ignored the usage of free verse, used exact patterns and modernized the Spenserian nine-line stanza. His poetry is rooted in contemporary issues; he deals with the rising pessimism, disillusion, apathy and alienation that marked the sensibility during the wars. He is the break between the modernists and postmodernists.

4. ROBERT LOWELL: THE SELF IN CRISIS

Among all human crisis mentioned in this paper, probably the most critical and consequential is the identity crisis, i.e. the crisis of the Self, which was largely an after-math of the wars. There was a significant need to confess the deepest of feelings and to ask for redemption, hence the Confessional Poetry that emerged between the late 50s and early 60s.

> The Confessional poets may be simply a group of writers whose own sense of self was so tenuous as to make it impossible for them to take it for granted; this affords them a more sophisticated awareness of identity at a time of crisis in identity when individual and communal are commonplace, an awareness of pain and humiliation at a time in which the possibility of human dignity has been critically challenged. (Malkoff, 1973:31)

Such is the poetry of Robert Lowell, who in his poems is in search of salvation, in attempt to liberate the Self from the social, historical religious and cultural contexts that estrange us from our true self. For the purpose of this paper, interpretations of three of his poems are encompassed: *Skunk Hour, For the Union Dead* and *Night Sweat*, respectively. The analysis covers the confessional overtone of each poem since "as its name implies, confessional poetry springs from the need to confess. Each poem is in one way a declaration of dependence. Or of guilt. Or of anguish and suffering." (Phillips, 1973:8)

Skunk Hour is a confessional poem that depicts a man at a moment of crisis. It is pessimistic and depressing in tone and highly symmetrical in structure. The first two stanzas are devoted to a matriarchal figure, the next two contemplate about a society in crisis, and then the following two are related to an individual (i.e. the poet) in crisis. Finally, the last two stanzas present a society led by an alternative matriarchal figure that becomes a potential resolution to Lowell's dilemma. Religious anxieties are surfacing as Lowell tries to fuse the personal and historic past into a single dilemma of the Self. "What is essential to the poem, it seems to me, are the contrasts Lowell establishes between the worlds of yesterday and today, the natural and the unnatural, the rich and the poor, the sick and the well." (Phillips, 1973:41). The aim is to create a sense of life being examined over and over again in search of salvation.

Much of the poetic effect is achieved through the end-rhymes and internal rhymes as well as by the economy and denseness of the poem. Skunk Hour is "anti-structural and anti-elegant in mode, the confessional poem is also anti-establishment in content. Alienation is a recurring theme." (Phillips, 1973:13). It is a poem framed by matriarchal images, built around an analogy between art and voyeurism.

'My mind is not right' is the slogan of the poem, the innermost part of Lowell's personality, the psyche of a society in which "…the holocaust without became a metaphor of the holocaust within." (Malkoff, 1973:31). The narrator is questioning his sanity in the form of a confession, a monologue, a stream of consciousness in which we can find traces of the deterioration of western civilization, and the disintegration of the poet's sense of self. This is especially evident in the following excerpt:

> I myself am hell;
>
> nobody's here—

only skunks, that search

in the moonlight for a bite to eat. (Lowell et al., 2007:33)

The first verse of the excerpt is an allusion to Milton: "Which way I fly in Hell, myself am Hell" (Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*), and it is a precursor of the skunk as the main symbol in the poem. The skunks, however, manifest power rather than privilege. They are shown as outsiders and rebels that have taken over the city at night; a filthy animal enjoying life, having the mental strength to live on, unlike the narrator's persona.

To continue, *For the Union Dead* also confesses the Self in crisis and the deterioration of our civilization for it contemplates the decline of human civilization in which the new city offers a new savagery in the name of technological progress. This theme is also present in Allen Ginsberg's poetry, which will soon be discussed. As for the confessional mood of the poem, it "is less a revelation of intimate personal detail than it is an attempt to redefine human identity. It is, in fact, curious how few readers have noticed how impersonal Confessional poetry is." (Malkoff, 1973:29). Impersonal in a sense that it is not related to a specific sensitivity (or period), rather it is timeless and universal.

The poem contemplates the legacy of the Civil War and the theme of noble self-sacrifice; it is a lamentation of the heroic idealism in contemporary America and technological infringement. We can sense this from the very beginning of the poem: "The old South Boston Aquarium stands / in a Sahara of snow now." (Lowell et al., 2007:57). Sahara stands as a symbol of a place devoid of feelings; like a wasteland, Lowell has found perfect images of emptiness and desolation in what was once a place of life-giving joy. Without warning, a mechanical and destructive world is replacing the traditional and Puritan one in the lines: "…Puritan pumpkin colored girders braces the tingling Statehouse" (Lowell et al., 2007:57).

Until the end of the poem, Lowell continues to collide the past, present and future by masterfully linking private turmoil to public disturbances. This is elaborated in Colonel Shaw's destiny that gives the poem a public and private intensity. As if the slogan of 2nd wave feminism could gain a new nuance in an utterly different context when applied to the poem: 'the personal is political'.

Lastly, I will briefly refer to *Night Sweat*, a poem that meditates on the pain of ageing, of slowly feeling the fire and passion flickering out. It is a sentimental poem in which we can trace the narrator's longing for creativity that has slowly dried up through life.

Always inside me is the child who died,

Always inside me is his will to die –

One universe, one body… (Lowell et al., 2007:62)

I see my flash and bedding washed with light,

My child exploding into dynamite (Lowell et al., 2007:62)

The whole poem is like an echo, a confession of a man that has not met his expectations and is now regretful of his failure. "All confessional art, whether poetry or not, is a means of killing the beasts which are within us, those dreadful dragons of dreams and experiences that must be hunted down, cornered, and exposed in order to be destroyed." (Phillips, 1973:2)

5. ALLEN GINSBERG: AMERICA IN CRISIS

"It's funny; they named

Mars after the God of War.

Have a look at Earth."

– Benedict Smith, *Haiku to Mars*

There are "… many writers who have preconceived ideas about what literature is supposed to be, and their ideas seem to exclude that which makes them most charming in private conversation." (Clark, 1966). But then you also have the Beats. The Beats are a rebellious generation with an ambition that surpassed literature; often related to the hippie movement. Despite Allen Ginsberg, who is in the focus of this paper, the constellation of the Beats consists of Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Lucien Carr and Henry Miller, among others. Even though their poetics seems void, their naked, radical and uncompromising poetry sends an ear-piercing howl as a criticism towards consumerist America. "The Beats reinvented the confessional mode for our time with an urgency and passion that shocked their contemporaries." (Tytell, 1986:34). This paper focuses on two such poems by Allen Ginsberg, *Howl* and *America*.

"*Howl* combined apocalyptic criticism of the dull, prosperous Eisenhower years with exuberant celebration of an emerging counterculture." (Baum, 2003:2863). It is the Bible of the Beat generation, a manifesto, a cry against pitiless America, against censure, against bureaucracy, against capitalism. In 112 verses, *Howl* talks of religion, mythology, drugs and sex – of all human sins for which even Dante's circles in hell would not suffice. "There is no holding back, no repression because of time or circumstance, no polite restraint or euphemism", like in "go fuck yourself with your atom bomb." (Tytell, 1986:213).

The tone varies from gentle to arrogant, from lyric to epic; and "the rhythm of the long line is also an animal cry. (Clark, 1966). Although the leitmotif of the poem (especially in the first part) may be pinned down to dictatorship, dread and death, there is still a sense of hope for a better future of a humanity that has suffered but redeemed at the end. It is worth mentioning that Howl does not preach nihilism, neither it is utterly negative. The poem might sound cynical and impudent but it is only because it is written with a postmodern pen; it is a product of the anarchy movements in America.

If the first part of the poem is a universal longing for escape from oppression and a sociopolitical critique on consumerism, the second part identifies the roots of human misery embodied in Moloch. Moloch is a Philistine got to whom first-born children are sacrificed, yet in the poem, he takes the form of governments, bureaucracies, materialism and technology.

> Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable dollars! Children screaming under the stairways! Boys sobbing in armies! Old men weeping in the parks!
>
> Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch! Moloch the heavy judger of men!
>
> Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! Moloch whose buildings are judgment! Moloch the vast stone of war! Moloch the stunned governments! (Ginsberg, 2007:38)
>
> Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is electricity and banks! Moloch whose poverty is the specter of genius! Moloch whose fate is a cloud of sexless hydrogen! Moloch whose name is the Mind! (Ginsberg, 2007:38)

Written in a stream of consciousness literary format, the excerpt exhibits the "loss of identity and confrontation with nonhuman universe as the main problem, and in a sense whether or not man had to evolve and change, and perhaps become nonhuman too." (Clark, 1966). It is a reflection of an alert poet that tried to enliven and illuminate the western civilization.

With the publication of *Howl* in 1956, Ginsberg has created a synthesis between the East and the West, between poetry and philosophy; and created a new vision of poetry, after that of Blake. It is easy to trace influences from William Carlos Williams' modernism, William Blake and John Keats' romanticism, Walt Whitman's transcendentalism and Charlie Parker's saxophone. Throughout his poems, Ginsberg is constantly flirting with Buddhism and finds peace in the Eastern traditions of nirvana and Hinduism. "You can experience a whole gamut of possibilities of universes, including the final possibility that there is none." (Clark, 1966)

> [Poem]
>
> The world's an illusion
>
> Everybody dies the day after they graduate High School. (Ginsberg, 2006:106)

And just as the world is an illusion, so is *America*. America is a result of political and racial unrest and resistance against communism. It is a howl for a fallen America with strong correlations with jazz. In it, Ginsberg criticizes the conformity and materialism and condemned America's corporate culture. Ignorance, obsession, cruelty – these seem to be the three main pillars of the country. Not to mention that it is the only country in the world to use an atom bomb on a human population.

From the very first line, we can sense Walt Whitman's habit of directly addressing his country but in a more ironic, even parodic fashion. We could point to an intertextual allusion to Robert Lowell's narrator in *Skunk Hour* whose state of mind echoes Ginsberg's third verse 'I can't stand my own mind'. "The poem is the place where occasions are exhausted, where opportunities are used up." (Howard, 1969:147). It stands for all the things Ginsberg used to believe in: justice, tolerance, freedom and acceptance. Line 17 - 'Your machinery is too much for me' – reveals machinery as a leitmotif, primarily brought up in *Howl*, in reference to artificial pleasures and the war of the modern world. "What most Americans call democracy is conceived as almost totalitarian in the eyes of Moloch's victims." (Devos, 2014:34).

The poem is not only politically radical but also blasphemous. By saying 'I won't say the Lord's Prayers' in a country that is mainly Christian in religion is pure blasphemy. But there is a sudden shift, like a flash, in line 45 that says 'It occurs to me that I am America.' The narrator (i.e. Ginsberg) realizes that he, too, is part of the system that he so openly despises, and all that is left to him is to cry for help. 'Help.' It is the shortest, yet the strongest sentence – the essential message of the poem and its summary. It is a cry for a collective effort to revalue the system and alter the cultural perception that threatens the integrity and identity of a nation.

> Dark America! Toward whom I close my eyes for prophecy,
>
> and bend my speaking heart!
>
> Betrayed! Betrayed! (Ginsberg, 2006:128)

As harsh and raw as it may sound, *America* does not end on such a bleak note as the original draft does (the excerpt above). Still, it is an accusation against the US, its governments and citizens. There are also numerous references to leftist and anarchist political movements and figures that serve as a satirical attack on the American paranoia and psychological disillusionment. Finally, when it comes to form, as Ginsberg himself has said in *The Paris Review*:

> And the hypocrisy of literature has been ... you know like there's supposed to be formal literature, which is supposed to be different from—in subject, in diction and even in organization, from our quotidian inspired lives… Of course the distinctions between prose and poetry are broken down anyway. (Clark, 1966)

The literary form is probably the biggest trap that makes Ginsberg's poems difficult to digest. Each verse does not carry a meaning by itself and to search for thematic ideas on a verse level would be ineffective in the end. This is because the meaning is thematic, it is unitary and between the lines. This is what truly gives Ginsberg "... a sense of being self-prophetic master of the universe." (Ginsberg, 2007:41)

6. CONCLUSION

There is much left to write about the poets discussed in this paper, as their poetry does truly inspire to create something beautiful. Each one of them successfully created different lens through which we took a glimpse at the same thing – ourselves, in crisis.

W. H. Auden's poems teach a lot about suffering and the lack of empathy towards other people's misfortunes. He stands as a reminder of the human condition to contemplate on both personal and political choices, the tyranny of our time and the absurdity of the modern world. Philip Larkin preached that religion is in crisis and that or faith in God is illusive, yet he also writes about faith in our innermost selves. His poetry radiates the sense of sacredness that has been long forgotten during the wars. Robert Lowell's poems are as relevant as in the time of their creation; his disturbing voice calls for social change, especially at a time when radical rights are the voice of America. The political message in his poems is intimate and distinctly disturbing and impossible to ignore. And finally, Allen Ginsberg created an apocalyptic twist in the stream of thought - he experimented, innovated, improvised, and caught the spirit of the time, of America in a time of crisis.

What all writers have in common, however, is their faith and hope for a better humanity in which everything will be revalued. They all fight for a world in which empathy and progress will prosper, and where the machinery will not fuel capitalism and the consumerist mind, just as in Charlie Chaplin's speech in *The Great Dictator*:

> Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has made us cynical. Our cleverness, hard and unkind. We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery we need humanity… Don't give yourselves to these unnatural men - machine men - with machine mind and machine hearts! You are not machines! (Chaplin, 1940)

The upshot from all the poets at hand is that the human crisis will be surpassed only if we are gentle and kind to others, empathize with their pain, restore our faith, be true to ourselves and think outside the wallet of the capitalist society. And there is no better way to end this essay than with Ginsberg's verse in Howl:

"Holy the supernatural extra brilliant intelligent kindness of the soul!" (Ginsberg 2006:45)

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