

English 348

August 28, 2009

A Response to Allen Ginsberg's "Howl"

The structure of Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl" is peculiar in that, despite its length, it consists of a single run-on sentence. However, the poem also avoids overlength by using a common refrain, "who," which divides the poem into somewhat fragmented lines that can be read with a single unit of breath. This free-verse structure enhances the poem's content by giving it a somewhat delirious tempo; its apparent lack of meter or rhythm characterizes the Beats he describes, for they too refused to follow any preconceived notion of social values or fit within the orthodoxy of their times. They were "the best minds of [his] generation," although they experienced life in a way that few men would dare, and many of them suffered for it. The poem catalogues this struggle against the social conservatism that ultimately lead to poverty, coldness, hunger, art, and enlightenment. However, the poem avoids the negativity and cliché that inevitably comes from tales of the rejected by celebrating the chaos that the Beats bring to their lives and to the suffocating normalcy of their generation. It doesn't attempt to offer any constructive social reform, but by depicting the natural human yearning for psychological exploration and experience, it offers a constructive reform of individual human values.

Good

Yes

A-  
Excellent response