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*For Frank*

## **Cast of Characters**

ACTOR 1, ALLEN GINSBERG

ACTOR 2, JACK KEROUAC, RUSSEL WOODS, DAVID KIRK

ACTOR 3, NEAL CASSADY, LUTHER NICHOLS

ACTOR 4, LUCIEN CARR, HANRAHAN, EUGENE,  
SCHORER

ACTOR 5, JAKE EHRLICH, LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI,  
HUNCKE

ACTOR 6, RALPH MCINTOSH, LOUIS GINSBERG,  
BURROUGHS

ACTOR 7, CARL SOLOMON, NAOMI GINSBERG, CORSO,  
TZARA

The Actors also play a variety of other characters including reporters, court officials, mental patients, etc.

## **Setting**

The playing space might resemble a coffee house or some such gathering place, set up for an informal poetry reading. Basically a blank stage and a couple of chairs, a bench, different levels—nothing fancy. All props and costume pieces are kept on stage for the play's duration, the actors using them as the need arises. In the original production, two hat racks, on which the actors hung their various costume pieces, flanked the playing area.

## **Production Notes**

The play is intended to be performed by a group of seven young male actors, each playing several different characters. However, it is certainly possible to increase the size of the cast at the director's discretion, simply by re-dividing the roles accordingly. The action of the play is non-linear and quite presentational. It is, for lack of a better term, a "docu-drama." The techniques employed here are based on some theories of Bertolt Brecht and a form of theatre which has most recently been explored by Moises Kaufman and the Tectonic Theatre Project. This play is indebted to both men and is an attempt to further explore these ideas.

Music and rhythm are absolutely essential to the play and should be the driving force. At the very least, one or two of the actors should have good percussion skills and, if possible, several others should be able to play various instruments. At times, the play should resemble an impromptu jam session, with the actors using whatever materials are handy to create music—from hand-clapping and foot-stamping to bongos, acoustic guitar, tambourine, harmonica, wood blocks and perhaps a violin (as was used with great effect in the original production). Think of it as a musical where the director and actors compose the score together.

The play is based on historical events and does include excerpts from actual letters, journals, and trial transcripts. Liberty has been taken in the dialogue throughout, and the words spoken by the characters should not, unless specifically stated, be considered their actual words. In some cases, their words are merely based in historical fact. In the case of Ginsberg's poetry, however, the words are all his.

## Acknowledgments

The world premiere of *beat* was presented by Jug o' Wine Productions and S.D. Wagner at the 2002 New York International Fringe Festival, under the direction of the author. The production received two Fringe Excellence Awards for Best Direction and Best Ensemble Performance. The original cast and crew were as follows:

ACTOR 1, GINSBERG, OTHERS ..... Dan Pintauro  
ACTOR 2, KEROUAC, OTHERS ..... Ezra Nanes  
ACTOR 3, CASSADY, OTHERS ..... John Jeffrey Martin  
ACTOR 4, CARR, OTHERS ..... Todd Kovner  
ACTOR 5, EHRLICH, OTHERS ..... Andrew Cruse  
ACTOR 6, MCINTOSH, OTHERS ..... Geoffrey Molloy  
ACTOR 7, SOLOMON, OTHERS ..... Glenn Peters  
  
Stage Manager ..... Christina Huschle  
Production/Technical Manager ..... Kit Ingui  
Casting Director ..... Paul Davis

Excerpts from *Howl and Other Poems*: Copyright © 1955 by Allen Ginsberg

Excerpts from *Kaddish*: Copyright © 1959 by Allen Ginsberg

“The artist does not create for the artist, he creates for the people, and we will see to it that henceforth the people will be called in to judge its art.”

—Adolf Hitler

“Well, man, I may be in the middle of all this shit, but I certainly don’t want any part of it...”

—Jack Kerouac

# **beat.**

## **a play on words**

**by Kelly Groves**

**based on the life and writings  
of Allen Ginsberg and the Beat Generation**

### **Prologue**

*(A coffee house—present day.)*

*(The actors come on stage and set up. They will be playing the Beat poets: Jack Kerouac, Neal Cassady, William Burroughs and company, all actors in their twenties and thirties: a wild and raucous bunch, very tribe-like and expressive, both physically and verbally. Think “Hair” meets “Dead Poets Society.” They will play various other roles as needed. The actor playing Allen Ginsberg comes forward. He is a tall, lanky figure somewhere in his mid-twenties. He holds a notebook and a pair of scissors in his hands.)*

**ACTOR 1.** We found this in the Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscripts Library: *(He shows the notebook)* “Being the Notebook of Allen Ginsberg: Now from the Cracked and Bleeding Heart, Triumphantly I Fashion Art.”

**TZARA.** *(TZARA leaps up on a chair. He speaks in an exaggerated French accent. Applause. Drum roll.)* Ladies and gentlemen. I know you have come here today to hear explanations...

**ACTOR 1.** A Surrealist Rally. 1922.

**TZARA.** You explain to me why you exist. You haven’t the faintest idea. You will say: I exist to make my children happy. You will say: I exist because God wills. This is a fairy tale for children!

**ACTOR 1.** Tristan Tzara. From his “Lecture on Dadaism.”

**TZARA.** You will NEVER be able to tell me why you exist because you will never understand that life is a pun!

**ACTOR 1.** Tristan Tzara once proposed to create a poem on the spot by pulling words randomly out of a hat.

*(Drum roll.)*

**TZARA.** *(He produces a large top hat:)* Poetry is for Everyone!

**ACTOR 1.** He said.

*(The boys react incredulously.)*

A riot ensued and the theatre was destroyed.

**ACTOR 2.** Beat!

*(The boys continue ad-libbing on their drums and various percussion instruments, a highly charged emotional rhythm that crescendos throughout the scene.)*

**ACTOR 3.** As in, “man, I’m beat.”

**ACTOR 4.** Subterranean.

**ACTOR 5.** Jazz.

**ACTOR 1.** In 1959, Brion Gysin, painter and writer, cut newspaper articles into sections and rearranged the sections at random.

**ACTOR 6.** Can you dig it?

**ACTOR 2.** Crazy, man.

**ACTOR 3.** Beat.

**ACTOR 1.** He showed these immediately to his friend, William S. Burroughs.

**ACTOR 6.** “A project for disastrous success.”

**ACTOR 7.** Hip without being slick.

**ACTOR 4.** Intelligent without being corny.

**ACTOR 2.** Those without money and without a place to stay.

**ACTOR 5.** Beat.

**ACTOR 1.** Their work resulted in quite coherent and meaningful prose.

**ACTOR 4.** Exhausted.

**ACTOR 6.** At the bottom of the world.

**ACTOR 7.** Tired of living before one has started *living*.

**ACTOR 3.** Looking up or out.

**ACTOR 6.** Sleepless.

**ACTOR 2.** Wide-eyed.

**ACTOR 4.** Perceptive.

**ACTOR 7.** Rejected by society.

**ACTOR 5.** Street-wise.

**ACTOR 3.** Beat.

**ACTOR 1.** You cannot will spontaneity. But you can introduce the unpredictable spontaneous factor with a pair of scissors.

**ACTOR 4.** Like the Lost Generation.

**ACTOR 2.** This is really a “beat” generation.

**ACTOR 7.** You’ve got it, man.

**ACTOR 4.** Beat?

**ACTOR 5.** Is that like “beatnik”?

**ACTOR 3.** Hey, who you callin’ “beatnik”?

**ACTOR 6.** Beat it!

**ACTOR 2.** Beat this!

**ACTOR 4.** Beat off!

**ACTOR 3.** Everyone I know is kind of furtive, kind of—

**ALL.** Beat.

**ACTOR 3.** Dig it.

**ACTOR 1.** (*Opening the notebook:*) This is from *Howl*: I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked...

**ACTOR 4.** Beat.

**ACTOR 5.** Beatific.

**ACTOR 3.** Beatitude.

**ACTOR 1.** Jack Kerouac:

**ACTOR 2.** We seek to find new phrases; we try hard, we writhe and twist and blow; every now and then a clear harmonic cry gives suggestions of a tune, a thought, that will someday be the only tune and thought in the world and which will raise men's souls to joy!

**ACTOR 6.** Beat embraces boisterous experimentation.

**ACTOR 1.** Gregory Corso:

**ACTOR 7.** Spontaneity, bop, jumps, beats, cool measures, and the main content:

**ALL.** Soul...

**ACTOR 3.** An inquisitiveness into the nature of consciousness.

**ACTOR 6.** An acquaintance with Eastern thought.

**ACTOR 2.** Beat.

**ACTOR 5.** Marijuana.

**ACTOR 7.** Mushrooms.

**ACTOR 4.** LSD.

**ACTOR 2.** Beat.

**ACTOR 1.** Neal Cassady:

**ACTOR 3.** Man, wow, there's so many things to do, so many things to write! How to even begin to get it all down and without modified restraints and all hung up on like literary inhibitions and grammatical fears...

**ACTOR 6.** That's right man, now you're talkin'.

**ALL.** Beat.

**ACTOR 1.** Allen Ginsberg: *(He turns a page in the notebook)* I thought I wouldn't write a poem, but just write what I wanted to without fear, let my imagination go and scribble magic lines from my real mind—sum up my life.

**ACTOR 6.** Art is Beat.

**ACTOR 2.** Art is spiritual liberation.

**ACTOR 3.** Gay liberation.

**ACTOR 7.** Women's liberation.

**ACTOR 1.** LeRoi Jones:

**ACTOR 5.** The Black Artist's role in America is to aid in the destruction of America as he knows it. His role is to report and reflect so precisely the nature of the society, and of himself in that society, that other men will be moved by the exactness of his rendering and, if they are black men, grow strong through this moving, having seen their own strength, and weakness; and if they are white men, tremble, curse, and go mad, because they will be drenched with the filth of their own evil.

**ACTOR 6.** Right on!

**ACTOR 4.** It's a tolerant non-theistic view.

**ACTOR 2.** A cosmic anti-fascism.

**ACTOR 3.** A peaceable non-violent approach to politics!

**ACTOR 1.** It's beat.

**ACTOR 7.** It's multiculturalism, man.

**ACTOR 5.** The Black Artist must draw out of his soul the correct image of the world. He must use this image to band his brothers and sisters together in common understanding of the nature of the world (and the nature of America) and the nature of the human soul!

**ACTOR 1.** (*Reading from the notebook:*) It's a poem about my life, my experiences. It is a howl of anger, of frustration, of pain. It is me, it is the people I know.

**ACTOR 3.** Beat.

**ACTOR 2.** A formal desperation which has become a rebellion against all political and literary forms.

**ACTOR 1.** William S. Burroughs:

**ACTOR 6.** There is a crack in the mass consciousness of America...

**ACTOR 7.** America is having a nervous breakdown!

**ACTOR 6.** There is a sudden emergence of insight into a vast national subconscious netherworld filled with nerve gases, universal death, bombs, malevolent bureaucracies, secret police systems, drugs that open the door to God, ships leaving earth, unknown chemical terrors, evil dreams at hand...

**ALL.** America is having a nervous breakdown!!

*(ACTOR 7 screams. Silence.)*

**ACTOR 1.** Poetry is the record of individual insights into the secret soul of the individual.

**ACTOR 3.** Beat.

*(Drums resume.)*

**ACTOR 5.** There's further realization we can destroy the human residence on the planet if we don't trust and exercise our better natures.

**ACTOR 6.** Thus, an end to the nineteenth-century Marxist-Capitalist myth of progress with expansionist imperial rivalry!

**ACTOR 4.** The end of secrecy and paranoia!

**ACTOR 3.** A more realistic approach to drug laws!

**ACTOR 7.** Decriminalize!

**ACTOR 6.** Medicalize!

**ACTOR 3.** Grass should be transformed into an asset for the failing family farm as an alternative to plastic consciousness.

**ALL.** Yeah...

**ACTOR 1.** Beat!

**ACTOR 4.** To fuck with the right-wing denial of reality!

**ACTOR 5.** To escape and transcend its repressive laws!

**ACTOR 7.** Its incipient police state!

**ACTOR 2.** Sexual prudery.

**ACTOR 3.** Art censorship.

**ACTOR 1.** Fundamentalist

**ACTOR 6.** Monotheist

**ACTOR 5.** Televangelist

**ACTOR 4.** Quasi-fascist

**ACTOR 1.** Wrath, racism, and homophobia!

**ALL.** Go! Right on! You know it! Dig it! Etc.

*(The pace becomes a fury.)*

**ACTOR 6.** We demand more art!

**ACTOR 4.** We cry for appreciation of Eros!

**ACTOR 2.** For sexual joy, man!

**ACTOR 7.** For love!

**ACTOR 3.** For meditation!

**ACTOR 5.** For peace!

**ACTOR 1.** Beat!

*(Overlapping now.)*

**ACTOR 3.** Prophets!

**ACTOR 5.** Outlaws!

**ACTOR 4.** Misfits!

**ACTOR 3.** Anarchists!

**ACTOR 6.** Pacifists!

**ACTOR 7.** Drug addicts!

**ACTOR 1.** Homosexuals!

**ACTOR 3.** Bisexuals!

**ACTOR 2.** Cultural activists!

**ACTOR 5.** Blacks!

**ACTOR 2.** Black sheep!

**ACTOR 4.** Lovers!

**ACTOR 6.** Thinkers!

**ACTOR 7.** Spiritual Seekers!

**ALL.** Beat!!

*(The drums stop abruptly. Silence. ACTOR 1 regards the audience.)*

**ACTOR 1.** This is, more or less, the story of this poem.

*(He holds up a copy of "Howl.")*

Ready boys?

*(Sounds of a busy courtroom: gavels, reporters, etc.)*

## ACT I

**ACTOR 1.** San Francisco, California. August 22, 1957.

**ACTOR 2.** The People of the State of California versus Lawrence Ferlinghetti. The Honorable Clayton W. Horn presiding.

**ACTOR 1.** Some of what you will hear tonight has been collected from “Howl of the Censor,” which was edited by Jake Ehrlich, from the original court documents. For the purposes of our play, a bit of poetic license has been employed. But for you purists, not to worry, it’s all based completely on historical fact.

**ACTOR 4.** Please rise.

*(Gavels. The boys move about setting up the courtroom. Some will play witnesses, lawyers, and other court officials as the need arises—others watch and comment on the action.)*

**JUDGE.** This court will come to order.

*(Gavels. Everyone sits.)*

**EHRlich.** Your Honor—

**ACTOR 1.** Jake W. Ehrlich, American Civil Liberties Union. Counsel for the Defense.

**EHRlich.** The Defendant is charged with violation of Section 311, which provides, and I quote: “Every person who willfully and lewdly,” and I skip to subdivision three of that section, “writes, composes, stereotypes, prints, publishes, sells, distributes, keeps for sale, or exhibits any obscene or indecent writing, paper, or book, et-cetera.” Your Honor, the defense moves the Court for judgment that the publication is one, not obscene, and two, that the defendant be found not guilty. We are prepared to argue for such judgment.

**JUDGE.** Let the record show the Defense has entered a plea of Not Guilty.

*(Gavel.)*

**ACTOR 1.** Ralph McIntosh, the Assistant District Attorney of the State of California. Counsel for the Prosecution.

**MCINTOSH.** Your Honor, the Defendant is charged with publishing and peddling obscene, lewd, salacious, and overtly sexual

“literature”—primarily, a small volume entitled *Howl and Other Poems* by Allen Ginsberg—a book which we will prove to Your Honor poses a significant threat to our community—not to mention our impressionable children, of whom we should have the utmost concern. Therefore by obscene, I mean to say material that has no value, that concerns itself with a single purpose: to arouse, to titillate, and otherwise to corrupt. (*He picks up a copy of “Howl.”*) Expletives. Filth. Four-Letter Words. Deviant sexual behavior. Drug use. The denial and mockery of Religion. Your Honor, this volume is not only obscene, but it attempts to undermine the moral foundation on which this great country was built. When the framers of our Constitution—and I only get into this now knowing full well my esteemed colleague for the Defense’s penchant for twisting the First Amendment to serve his—

**EHRlich.** Objection, Your Honor! Motion to have that stricken from the record.

**JUDGE.** Sustained.

**MCINTOSH.** But our founding fathers, Your Honor, in granting the freedoms we hold so dear—the freedoms of speech and of the press chiefly among them—could not have imagined that their words would be so manipulated and stretched to include the obscenity and the anarchy and the blatant disregard for ethics and morality that we will find in this *Howl and Other Poems*.

(*Gavel.*)

**ACTOR 1.** The first witness.

(*Gavel.*)

**ACTOR 4.** The court calls Officer Russel Woods.

**MCINTOSH.** You are a police officer in the city of San Francisco?

**WOODS.** Yes, sir.

**MCINTOSH.** Calling your attention to May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1957, did you have occasion to go to the premises located at 261 Columbus Avenue, here in San Francisco?

**WOODS.** Yes, sir.

**MCINTOSH.** And what kind of premises are those?

**WOODS.** That's the City Lights Bookshop, a bookstore.

**MCINTOSH.** And did you do anything there?

**WOODS.** Yes, sir. I purchased a copy of a book entitled, *Howl and Other Poems* by Allen Ginsberg.

**MCINTOSH.** All right. (*Holds up a copy.*) Is this the book?

**WOODS.** Yes, sir.

**MCINTOSH.** I see. I'll ask that the book be offered in evidence at this time.

**ACTOR 1.** (*As the book is handed over:*) *Howl and Other Poems*. For Carl Solomon.

**ACTOR 7.** Hold back the edges of your gowns, ladies, we are going through hell!

*(The boys all react with elongated cries and yells. Gavel.)*

**ACTOR 1.** (*Holding up a magazine:*) *Life Magazine*. September 9, 1957:

**ACTOR 4.** The literary climate of San Francisco, salubrious for a century to such writers as Mark Twain, Frank Norris, and Jack London, has been still more hospitable in the last few years to a noisy, resurgent group of poets. But a fortnight ago it turned murky. Chief reason was the arrest by municipal police of Lawrence Ferlinghetti, owner of the City Lights Pocket Bookshop and poetical pillar of the San Francisco spondee and trochee set. He was charged with selling obscene literature, principally a book called *Howl and Other Poems* by Allen Ginsberg.

**ACTOR 1.** Jake Ehrlich. This is his opening statement for the Defense.

**EHRLICH.** I assume Your Honor has read the book. The question then arises as to whether Your Honor will determine if this book is or is not obscene.

**ACTOR 6 / LOUIS.** A letter to Allen Ginsberg from his father Louis:

Dear Allen,

I am gratified about your new manuscript. It's a wild rhapsodic, explosive outpouring with good figures of speech flashing by in its volcanic rushing. I predict that it will make a name for you. You may wake up some morning and find yourself famous. I do hope so. I still insist, however, there is no need for dirty, ugly words, as they will entangle you unnecessarily in trouble. Try to cut them out. Love, Louis.

**EHRlich.** The question also is whether the community will be affected by it. Now, I have looked at Mr. McIntosh's copy. He has underscored some words. In fact, with all due respect, he seems rather like an adolescent schoolboy hoarding a worn paperback of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* with all the good parts underlined—

**JUDGE.** (*Gavels. Cutting him off:*) All right, all right. Mr. Ehrlich, let's try to stick to the issues, please.

(*Gavel.*)

**ACTOR 4.** The first edition of *Howl*, Number Four in the Pocket Poets Series, was printed in England, passed through customs without incident, and was published at the City Lights Bookshop in the fall of 1956.

**ACTOR 1 / ALLEN.** A letter from Allen Ginsberg to his father Louis.

Dear Louis,

I am almost ready to tackle the U.S. Government out of sheer self-delight. There really is a great stupid conspiracy of unconscious negative inertia to keep people from expressing themselves.

**ACTOR 4.** The second printing was stopped by Customs on March 25, 1957. Section 305 of the Tariff Act of 1930 was cited. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported:

**ACTOR 2.** Collector of Customs Chester MacPhee continued his campaign to keep what he considers obscene literature away from the children of the Bay Area. He confiscated 520 copies of a paper-bound volume of poetry entitled *Howl and Other Poems*.

**ACTOR 3.** The words and the sense of the writing is obscene!

**ACTOR 2.** The Collector of Customs exclaimed.

**ACTOR 3.** You wouldn't want your children coming across it.

**EHRlich.** And now referring to a very important case in California, Your Honor, Bates versus Newman. In that case the Plaintiff was suing a doctor whom he had retained to perform an operation on him commonly known as circumcision. As a result of the operation, the Plaintiff alleged certain injuries. The case was tried before a jury and was finally decided by the Appellate Court. In that decision the following paragraph appears: "Examination of the patient shows complete healing and the patient has more shaft exposed than he ever had available for intercourse before the surgery. Whether his personal anatomical confirmation will permit the insertion of his penis for intercourse is a doubtful matter to me." Now, is it against the laws of decency for our District Court of Appeals to write of the sexual organ and the sexual act? Was our State and its People destroyed? The discussion of sex and fornication directly is not considered by our Appellate Court to be outside the realm of decency. The trial jury did not consider the subject indecent. Then how in the name of everything that's holy to the law itself can this poem create the questionable moral furor steamed up by this arrest?

**ALLEN.** (*To LOUIS:*) I was reading Henry Miller's banned book *Tropic of Cancer*, which actually is a great classic. I never heard of it at Columbia with anything but deprecatory dismissal comments. He and Genet are such frank, hip writers that the open expression of their perceptions and real beliefs are a threat to society. The wonder is that literature does have so much power.

**EHRlich.** Isn't that what this case is all about, Your Honor?

**ALLEN.** Love, your son, Allen.

**EHRlich.** You must read the book as a whole. Is it intended to be lewd and lascivious and licentious, and is it intended to create sex desires—lascivious sex desires? Is it going to destroy the community? If Your Honor says you want opinion evidence, I am prepared at this time to make an offer of proof.

(*Gavel.*)

**ACTOR 7 / NAOMI.** Pilgrim State Hospital, New York. A letter to Allen Ginsberg from his mother, Naomi. (NAOMI *speaks with a slight Russian accent:*)

Dear Allen,

Received your poetry. It seemed to me that your wording was a little too hard. Do tell me what your father thinks of it. You know you have to have a job to get married. I wish you did have a good job. What did you specialize in when you went to college? Don't take chances with your life. I wish you to get married. Do you like farming? It's as good a job as any. I am glad you are having your poetry published. With love and good news,  
Naomi.

**ACTOR 2.** From "Horn on Howl," by Lawrence Ferlinghetti:

**FERLINGHETTI.** Allen, listen. The San Francisco Collector of Customs deserves a word of thanks for seizing *Howl*. We're famous, Allen! It would have taken the critics years to accomplish what the good collector did in a day, merely by calling your book obscene. I expect the first printing to sell out by the end of the month.

**ALLEN.** That's great, Larry.

**FERLINGHETTI.** The *Life* article on September 9<sup>th</sup> with your picture is causing the national distributor to take two or three hundred copies a week.

**ALLEN.** And if the court decides against us?

**FERLINGHETTI.** We've got the ACLU.

**ALLEN.** But this is local law. Does that give these police complete discretion to decide what's obscene?

**FERLINGHETTI.** There is always compromise, Allen.

**ALLEN.** But arrest and formal charges have been filed already.

**FERLINGHETTI.** It's about justifying your work as literature. Leave the morality to the police to—

**ALLEN.** Aw, fuck their morality, Larry.

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**FERLINGHETTI.** Allen. We're talking about the deletion of a handful of words—

**ALLEN.** It's not about fuck or cunt or shit or cock. It's about this mindless soulless bigoted police force waving majority and morality in our faces. These people whose delicate American sensibilities are undermined—

**FERLINGHETTI.** Allen—

**ALLEN.** It's really about cocksucking, Larry! Why do we have to dress it up as something else? What really bothers them is not my choice of adjectives or phraseology, but Freedom, man. That's what's really threatening—not my poetry. America is on the verge of some kind of major literary, artistic, and political renaissance. I just... I refuse to have our culture...plasticized. We've got to fight, Larry.

**FERLINGHETTI.** *(Pause:)* Let's fight, then.

**ALLEN.** I'll do whatever I can to help you.

*(Gavel.)*

**EHRlich.** Your Honor, I have before me on the letterhead of the University of California, the Department of English—

**MCINTOSH.** I object.

**JUDGE.** What is that you are going to read from, Mr. Ehrlich?

**EHRlich.** It is a statement made by Professor Mark Schorer dealing with literature, dealing with the reviews of this book, his reading of the book—

**MCINTOSH.** The law is all against you, Mr. Ehrlich.

**EHRlich.** I certainly don't understand it that way.

**MCINTOSH.** It is critics deciding an ultimate point of law.

**EHRlich.** It is a matter of discretion with the court, as I understand it, Mr. McIntosh. The court either may or may not take opinion evidence. Your Honor?

**JUDGE.** Well, owing to the nature of this case, I think I will have to permit your evidence, Mr. Ehrlich. You may proceed.

*(Gavels.)*

**ALLEN.** New York in the '40s. Well, the main scene where everybody met, started around Christmas of '43.

**JACK.** *(With fervor as the boys react:)* And they danced down the street like dingedodies...

**ACTOR 7.** From *On the Road*, by Jack Kerouac.

**ALLEN.** We all started exploring Eighth Avenue from 59<sup>th</sup> Street down to 42<sup>nd</sup> and the Times Square area.

**JACK.** ...and I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones that never yawn or say a commonplace thing but burn, burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars.

**ALLEN.** It was an all-night population of hustlers and junkies—and we were just sort of wanderers—street wanderers—intelligent Melvillean street wanderers of the night.

**LUCIEN.** I met Allen in the winter of 1943.

**JACK.** When Lucien Carr first introduced me to Ginsberg, he was this sixteen-year-old freshman—a kind of ninety-pound New Jersey intellectual.

**BURROUGHS.** I first met Jack up at Columbia.

**LUCIEN.** William Burroughs had just come up from St. Louis at that time.

**BURROUGHS.** I was looking into going to sea and Kerouac told me about getting papers and all that kind of thing. Allen introduced me to Kerouac.

**ALLEN.** A friend of ours from Denver, Hal Chase, told us about Neal Cassady.

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**NEAL.** Hal Chase had been telling me all about his friends at Columbia.

**JACK.** Back West, Neal'd spent a third of his time in the poolhall, a third in jail, and a third in the public library.

**NEAL.** As soon as I beat from the reformatory, I jumped the first Greyhound to New York.

**HUNCKE.** I met Bill Burroughs looking for morphine.

**BURROUGHS.** I was looking to score some junk when I met Herbert Huncke—he was this spaced-out hep cat lurking the darker corners of Times Square.

**HUNCKE.** We were all hooked on junk at the time.

**CORSO.** I met Huncke at some bar in Times Square, trying to lift my wallet.

**ALLEN.** Gregory Corso tried to pick me up at a lesbian bar in Greenwich Village.

**CORSO.** When I met Jack and Allen and the others they seemed to me to be clearly the most interesting people I had ever met.

**HUNCKE.** Lucien Carr used to hang out at the West End Bar every night.

**LUCIEN.** That's where we'd get our Benzedrine.

**HUNCKE.** Allen and Kerouac and Burroughs having these crazy intellectual discussions of the soul.

**BURROUGHS.** "The greatest curse of mankind is literacy."

**LUCIEN.** That's what Burroughs believed. I was never much interested in writing myself. But Jack...

**ALLEN.** Jack wasn't just interested in writing, I mean, whatever else Jack was doing, he had to write.

**JACK.** This was probably all around December of '46.

**NEAL.** Yeah. New York in the '40s, man. They were wild, good times. And we were there, digging it all.

*(Gavels.)*

**ALLEN.** My first semester at Columbia was an adventure.

*(Gavels.)*

**ACTOR 2.** The court calls Mr. Luther Nichols.

**EHRlich.** Mr. Nichols, please tell the court your occupation.

**NICHOLS.** I am a book reviewer for the *San Francisco Examiner*.

**EHRlich.** And as a result of your experience in book reviewing, have you formed an opinion as to the literary value of *Howl and Other Poems* by Allen Ginsberg?

**NICHOLS.** I have.

**EHRlich.** And what is your opinion?

**NICHOLS.** My opinion is that Mr. Ginsberg is expressing his personal views of a segment of life that he has experienced. It's colored by exposure to jazz, to Columbia University, to a liberal and bohemian education.

*(Columbia University, mid-1940s. LUCIEN CARR comes forward. One of the actors plays the guitar under the following scene.)*

**ACTOR 7.** The first meeting of Allen Ginsberg and Lucien Carr, as recounted in *Ginsberg—A Biography* by Barry Miles.

**ALLEN.** I heard the music.

**LUCIEN.** Do you like it?

**ALLEN.** I thought it might be the Brahms' Clarinet Quintet.

**LUCIEN.** Well, well. A little oasis in this wasteland. Have a drink.

*(He offers ALLEN some wine from a jug.)*

**ALLEN.** Lucien Carr was the most angelic kid I ever saw—blonde hair, pale and hollow of cheek as though "he drank the wind and took a mess of shadows for his meat."

**LUCIEN.** Yeats.

**ALLEN.** Yeah. *(A little laugh. Pause.)* My father's kind of a poet.

**LUCIEN.** Is that so?

**ALLEN.** Flowery verse, mostly. A bit academic.

**LUCIEN.** And you?

**ALLEN.** Me? I'm, well, I'm in the English Department. But I might go into law. I mean, I always sort of saw myself as, I don't know, a lawyer. The working classes, you know? Anyway, my brother's in law.

*(LUCIEN laughs.)*

These books. Are they all yours?

**LUCIEN.** You bet.

**ALLEN.** Fantastic.

**EHRlich.** And as to the format in which Mr. Ginsberg has done this work, do you believe that his method adds to its literary value?

**NICHOLS.** I do. As a matter of fact, I think in a way he is employing the jazz phraseology here and, may I say, I think he is also using the words he has heard in his life and in his various experiences.

**EHRlich.** Thank you. You may take the witness now.

*(Gavel.)*

*(LUCIEN tosses a book to ALLEN.)*

**LUCIEN.** Try this.

**ALLEN.** *A Season in Hell?*

**LUCIEN.** *A Season in Hell.* Rimbaud.

**ALLEN.** *(Reading from the book:)* "Once, if I remember well, my life was a banquet where all hearts opened and all wines flowed..."

**LUCIEN.** *(To the audience:)* He was just this eager young kid who wanted to know everything about books and art but who knew nothing about the serious things in life such as wenching and drinking.

**ALLEN.** Have you, um, read all these?

**LUCIEN.** Here.

*(He takes the Rimbaud from ALLEN and turns to a new page.)*

“The poet shall take for his own the outcast’s sob  
The convict’s hatred, the despairing madman’s cries.  
His scourging rays of love shall make the women throb  
His stanzas bound and sing: Look, bandits, there she lies!”

*(ALLEN is smitten. LUCIEN tosses him the book.)*

A labor lawyer, huh? You’ve never worked a day in your life, have you?

*(Pause. They both laugh.)*

*(To the audience:)* He had never traveled. I don’t think he’d even been out of Jersey. He’d never had any relationship—outside of his family, that is.

**ACTOR 7 / NAOMI.** A letter from his mother, Naomi Ginsberg.

Dearest Allen, you must get me out of here...

**ALLEN.** *(To LUCIEN:)* I don’t know where I’m going, really. My parents each demand that I accept their versions of reality—two completely opposite views of the world.

**ACTOR 6 / LOUIS.** A letter from his father, Louis Ginsberg.

Dear Allen,

I find myself in a constant state of worry. Quite frankly, I distrust you. You’re all wet, Allen. You simply have little experience in life.

**NAOMI.** I still have the wire on my head. The doctors know about it. They are cutting the flesh and bone. They are giving me teeth-ache.

**LOUIS.** Where is your former fine zeal for a liberal progressive democratic society?

**ALLEN.** Since their divorce, I’ve been forced into being the recipient of her confessions and delusional emotions.

**NAOMI.** How I want you to know that I want to get out and cook for you and laugh and sing the rest of my life.

**LOUIS.** Your sophistry—for that is what it is—is a series of half-truths, verbal cleverness, and dangerous ideas expressed in specious and dextrous verbiage.

**ALLEN.** I didn't think I was confused, but really, I have a kind of split mind. Who am I supposed to trust?

**NAOMI.** They've found kerosene in my system here. These things make me delirious.

**LOUIS.** P.S. What about a psychiatrist?

**ALLEN.** It's left me in a kind of neutral limbo.

**NAOMI.** Write to me. Hurry. Love, your Mother,  
Naomi.

**LOUIS.** Don't think you've heard the last from me.  
Louis.

**LUCIEN.** "Life," my friend, "is the farce we all must lead." You think you've got problems?

*(He hands ALLEN a wrinkled piece of paper from out of his pocket.)*

**ACTOR 7 / KAMMERER.** A telegram from David Kammerer to Lucien Carr, Columbia University.

My darling boy,  
Have just arrived in the city. Stop. Please call at 48 Morton Street  
ASAP. Stop.

**LUCIEN.** *(To the audience:)* The only thing Allen did seem to know a lot about was madness, which, I suppose, gave him a natural affinity with eccentrics and the rejects of society.

**KAMMERER.** Must see you. Stop. Love, David. Stop.

**ALLEN.** Who's David?

**LUCIEN.** Oh, he's been playing Verlaine to my Rimbaud. *(He holds his fingers in the shape of a gun and points at ALLEN:)* Bang! He's been following me all over the country.

**ALLEN.** Why?

**LUCIEN.** I suppose he's in love with me.

**ALLEN.** He's... ? You're... ?

**LUCIEN.** No, not me. David's the queer. Haven't you ever met a fairy before?

**ALLEN.** Sure. I... No.

**LUCIEN.** Well, don't worry. There's plenty more where he came from.

*(Gavel.)*

**ACTOR 2.** The cross-examination of Luther Nichols.

*(Gavel.)*

**MCINTOSH.** Mr. Nichols, are you familiar with the San Francisco Renaissance?

**NICHOLS.** Yes.

**MCINTOSH.** Have you read books in that vein, or from that group?

**NICHOLS.** I have read very recently Jack Kerouac's book, *On the Road*, which is a prose representation, I think, of this same segment of the American population.

**LUCIEN.** *(To ALLEN:)* Come on. I have someone I think you should meet.

**ALLEN.** 1944, 115<sup>th</sup> Street. New York City.

**LUCIEN.** I had promised Allen a meeting with Jack Kerouac—a merchant seaman and ex-Columbia football player.

**JACK.** October 1944. Dear Allen,  
“Let you not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments—  
love is not love which alters when it altercation finds— O no! It is  
an ever fixèd lark... ”

**ALLEN.** Shakespeare.

**LUCIEN.** They dug each other right away.

**JACK.** I find in you a kindred absorption with identity, dramatic meaning, classic unity, and immortality: you pace the stage, yet sit

in the boxes and watch. You seek identity in the midst of indistinguishable chaos, in sprawling, nameless reality.

**ALLEN.** He was extraordinarily sensitive, very intelligent, very shrewd, and very compassionate most of all. He was also physically beautiful. More perfect than Marlon Brando or James Dean. The football player who could form complete sentences.

**JACK.** I've been telling everyone about you, man, and your marvelous vision of life. I like you...as a man and as a poet, and I intend to be your brother for as long as I live.

**ALLEN.** I fell instantly in love with him.

**JACK.** I have been writing in prodigious amounts. I am writing three novels at this very minute, and keeping a large diary to boot! And reading—I have been reading like a madman. I intend to do this sort of thing all my life. A line from my diary: "We are all sealed in our own little melancholy atmospheres, like planets, and revolving around the sun, our common but distant desire." Not so good, perhaps, but if you steal it, I'll kill you.

**ALLEN.** I just knew he would accept my soul with all its worries and dark woes and heartaches and mad understandings of morality, 'cause it was the same thing he had.

*(ALLEN sits down next to JACK. JACK strips his shirt off as he lies down.)*

Jack used to stay over in my dorm when he had no place else to go.

**JACK.** I'm thinking of shipping out again, Allen. I gotta do something. Anyway, I can't hang around here forever. I'm too young to get stuck. Or to settle. *(Pause.)* I don't know.

**ALLEN.** Huh. *(Pause.)* I feel like that all the time.

**JACK.** Ya do?

**ALLEN.** Sure. Like there's this huge gap that's separating me from everyone else.

**JACK.** *(Pause:)* Yeah.

**ALLEN.** *(Pause:)* I have this dream a lot where I'm standing outside of someone else's house—it doesn't matter who—and I'm looking into their big picture window—and inside there's this family—laughing, eating dinner, talking, ya know? But there I am, always, stuck on the other side. In the cold. Just looking in. And I always have the strangest feeling that, I don't know, I just kinda wish one of them would notice me and maybe invite me inside.

**JACK.** I usta lie in my backyard and look up into the night trying to get my mind around... I mean, feeling so small, ya know? And this wave of...emptiness would just come rushing over me. A helplessness. Like I was suddenly utterly and completely alone. Lost out there in the stars. I guess that sounds pretty funny.

**ALLEN.** No. *(Long pause.)* Jack...have you ever been in love?

**JACK.** Why?

**ALLEN.** Do you think that you can spend your whole life searching for someone—someone that you...someone that...makes you not alone anymore?

**JACK.** I don't know. Maybe.

**ALLEN.** I... It's just that... Jack. *(Pause.)* Jack, you know I'm really in love with Lucien, don't you? *(Pause.)* And—I'm really in love with you. I really want to sleep with you.

*(JACK makes an audible groan.)*

I remember his groan. It wasn't rejection. It was a groan of dismay. He didn't want to make it with me. We lay there all night. I was in torment, until eight A.M. when the front door of my room flew open, and there was the Assistant Dean of Student-Faculty Relationships.

*(The boys all gasp. JACK struggles to put his clothes back on.)*

**ACTOR 6.** Mr. Ginsberg! I hope you realize the enormity of what you've done! The privilege of residence at Columbia has been withdrawn from you! You are hereby suspended from this university!

**ALLEN.** But the thing that rang in my ears was...

**ALLEN / ACTOR 6.** Mr. Ginsberg! I hope you realize the enormity of what you've done!

**ALLEN.** Because I hadn't done anything! I wanted to. I lay there longing all night!

*(Music. ACTOR 7—CARL SOLOMON—is wearing a straight-jacket, straps hanging from his arms. He scoops up a large top hat that is filled to the brim with little slips of paper.)*

**SOLOMON.** I'm late! I'm late! For a very important date!

**ACTOR 6.** The Sixth Floor Ward of the Columbia Presbyterian Psychiatric Institute.

**ACTOR 5.** Lucien Carr:

**LUCIEN.** I had no idea Allen was into homosexuality. I thought he was just a shy little boy. I don't think anybody, myself, or Kerouac, was aware of it as anything more than just hero worship.

**ACTOR 1.** *(Reading from "Howl":)* Who threw potato salad at CCNY lecturers on Dadaism and subsequently presented themselves on the granite steps of the madhouse with shaven heads and harlequin speech of suicide, demanding instantaneous lobotomy...

**SOLOMON.** Who are you?

**ALLEN.** Um, hello.

**SOLOMON.** You must be new here.

**ALLEN.** Yes.

**SOLOMON.** Another lost and repentant mystic.

**ALLEN.** What?

**SOLOMON.** I've no time for idle chatter. I really must run now. I'm terribly late, you know.

**ALLEN.** Wait!

*(SOLOMON turns to face him.)*

I... What are you in for?

**SOLOMON.** Baby, it's the madhouse. It's not what you're in for, it's that you're in at all. *(Pause. Very English:)* Have you read Shakespeare?

**ALLEN.** What?

**SOLOMON.** Oh, some man I once dated. Smashing wordsmith. Ruddy awful in the sack.

**ALLEN.** You— ?

**SOLOMON.** A Priest, a Rabbi, and a Chilean Sea Bass walk into... No, that's not right.

**ALLEN.** But I don't want to go among mad—

**SOLOMON.** Shhhh!

*(He covers ALLEN's mouth with his hand.)*

Shakespeare. Sonnet 29.

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes  
I all alone bewep my outcast state  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries  
And look upon myself and curse my fate  
Wishing me like to one more rich in...hope.  
Hope.

*(He regards ALLEN for a moment, and then exits in a hurry, muttering:)*

Dada Dada Dada Dada Dada Dada Dada Dada Dada Dada...

**ALLEN.** Wait! Come back! I didn't... *(Pause. Dryly:)* My, people come and go so quickly here.

**ACTOR 2 / JACK.** A letter from Jack Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg.

Dear Allen,

I've been facing my nature full in the face and the result is a purge. You understand, I'm sure. Remember that the earlier part of my life has always been spent in an atmosphere vigorously and directly opposed to this. It automatically repels me, thereby causing a great deal of remorse and disgust. My whole waking nature tells me that this sort of thing is not in my line.

**ACTOR 3.** Lucien Carr:

**LUCIEN.** This is not the way to go. This is a sorry, lonely life, Allen. Pull yourself together, man.

**ACTOR 1 / ALLEN.** Allen writes from Columbia Presbyterian Psychiatric Ward:

What a terrible future. I am twenty-three, the year of the Iron Birthday, the gate of darkness. What to do? I am ill, or so they tell me. I have become spiritually or practically impotent in my madness this last month. I suddenly realize that my head is severed from my body.

**JACK.** Until I find a way to unleash my inner-life in an art method, nothing about me will be clear. It reminds me of a remark Lucien once made to me. He said:

**LUCIEN.** You never seem to give yourself away completely, but of course, dark-haired people are so mysterious.

**JACK.** From now on, I think I'll begin to deliberately mystify everyone. That will be a novelty.

Write soon,  
Jack.

**ALLEN.** I have been wrathful all my life, angry against my father and all others. I think always that I am about to put an end to my life. I am terrified of my own mind. In the hospital I hope to be cured. I dream of incomprehensible love and belief. I am not going to go mad.

**ACTOR 7 / NAOMI.** Naomi Ginsberg writes to her son from Pilgrim State Hospital:

Dearest Allen,

The wire is still in my head and the sunshine is trying to help me. It has a wire department, but the wire that's outside of my head the sun doesn't touch. It is connected with the inside of me. If I were home I could be out in the sunshine. It doesn't cost anything. Drop me a line. When are you getting a regular sweetheart?

With love,  
Naomi.

**ALLEN.** (*Writing in his notebook:*) Pilgrim State's Rockland's and Greystone's foetid halls, bickering with the echoes of the soul, rocking and rolling in the midnight solitude dolmen-realms of love, dream of life a nightmare, bodies turned to stone as heavy as the moon.

**ACTOR 7 / NAOMI.** Dear Allen,  
I am taking shock treatment and it seems to help me—at least I am feeling better than I did. I sleep better and eat with more appetite. For the love of Jesus I do not know how I got this sickness. It is up to you to find out.

Your loving mother,  
Naomi.

P.S. To have visitors here is a godsend. Believe me, I keep your letters in my bosom.

**ALLEN.** I was trying urgently to break through and explain once and for all what I felt like. I wanted sympathy. I wanted someone to hug me and to sleep with me.

**NAOMI.** Allen, please take me out!

**JACK.** It's the last barrier, Allen. I've always felt uneasy about your queerness.

**NAOMI.** Do you want my heart to bleed?!

**LUCIEN.** It's a sorry, lonely life, Allen.

**NAOMI.** ALLEN!

**ALL.** (*Variously:*) ALLEN!!

**ALLEN.** (*Over the screams:*) Electricity hydrotherapy occupational therapy ping pong and amnesia...

(*Gavel.*)

Times Square, New York City, New York. 1947. Very Pre-Disney.

(*Gavel. The boys set the mood.*)

**MCINTOSH.** Do you understand this following sentence? I don't have to read it. You can read it.

**JUDGE.** You'd better read it for the record.

**MCINTOSH.** (*Truly repulsed:*) All right. “Who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love.”

**ALLEN.** Dear Jack,

My doctors have agreed to release me, on the conditions that I find a job and a girl, and try to fit into “normal” society—whatever that is. I think a turning point has been reached in that I am no longer going to have homosexual affairs. My will is free enough now. I wish I could meet a really gone sweet girl who could love me.

*(ALLEN is wandering among the depravity. A PROSTITUTE beckons to him.)*

**ACTOR 4.** Hey sailor, lookin’ for a date?

**ALLEN.** Why is everything so hard?

*(Others call out and some touch him. ALLEN is uneasy, yet curious.)*

**EHRlich.** Your Honor, he can go through this book line by line and it is just going to be a waste of time and not relevant to the question that’s before the court, namely: is the book as a whole obscene?

**MCINTOSH.** I am asking him about that sentence, Your Honor. “Who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love.” Now, you understand, of course, what “blew” and “blown” mean?

*(Split scene. During the following, one of the boys—ACTOR 3—forces ALLEN on his knees. With his back to the audience, he gives him a blow job. On the other side, LUCIEN and KAMMERER.)*

**ACTOR 5.** *The New York Times*, August 17, 1944. Columbia Student Kills Friend And Sinks Body In The Hudson River.

**NICHOLS.** Well, I think they have several meanings.

**MCINTOSH.** What meaning do you attribute to the words in this paragraph?

*(LUCIEN and KAMMERER begin to struggle. KAMMERER is making advances at LUCIEN.)*

**LUCIEN.** Stop.

**ACTOR 5.** The fantastic story of a homicide, first revealed to the authorities by the voluntary confession of a nineteen-year old Columbia sophomore, was converted yesterday from a nightmarish fantasy into a horrible reality by the discovery of the bound and stabbed body of the victim in the murky waters of the Hudson River.

**LUCIEN.** Stop!

**NICHOLS.** I think you can attribute all of those meanings to the words in this context. I think it can, at one level, mean they were vagabonds, that they were blown about by natural and literal winds. On the other hand, it perhaps does have a sexual connotation.

**MCINTOSH.** In reference to oral copulation, right?

**NICHOLS.** Yes, possibly.

**LUCIEN.** Stop.

**ACTOR 5.** The accused murderer, Lucien Carr, is said to have been well acquainted with his victim, David Kammerer, thirty years old and a known homosexual. Reportedly, Kammerer had followed Mr. Carr east after several incidents involving unwelcome sexual advances, beginning with their initial acquaintance in St. Louis, where Mr. Kammerer had been the leader of Mr. Carr's Cub Scout Troop. It is unclear as of this writing whether or not Mr. Carr was under the influence of drugs, but one thing in the young man's story remains consistent: his act was one of self-defense.

**LUCIEN.** Stop!!

*(The boy—ACTOR 3—comes. LUCIEN pulls out a pocketknife and stabs KAMMERER in the stomach. ACTOR 3 punches ALLEN in the mouth. ALLEN is left in a pile on the ground. KAMMERER is dead. LUCIEN stands over him in shock.)*

**ACTOR 5.** Jack Kerouac:

**JACK.** Served the faggot right.

*(Gavel.)*

**MCINTOSH.** Now, going down a little further, “who sweetened the snatches of a million girls trembling in the sunset, and were red eyed in the morning but prepared to sweeten the snatch of the sunrise, flashing buttocks under barns and naked in the lake.” Now is that word “snatches” in there, is that relevant to Mr. Ginsberg’s literary character?

**NICHOLS.** Yes, I think it is. I think he is trying to convey an idea of fertility there, among other things, and this is his choice of language to convey that idea.

*(Gavel.)*

**LUCIEN.** Bill! Bill!

*(Runs over to BURROUGHS, blood covering his hands.)*

I’ve done it. I’ve finally done it. Jesus Christ, he’s dead.

**ACTOR 2.** William S. Burroughs:

**BURROUGHS.** “Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?”

**LUCIEN.** What am I going to do? I’ll get the hot seat.

**BURROUGHS.** Don’t be absurd. Get a good lawyer. Turn yourself in. You’ll get off for sure.

*(Gavel.)*

**ACTOR 2.** Enter Neal Cassady.

*(NEAL helps ALLEN off the floor. Their eyes meet.)*

**ACTOR 7.** Soul-poet, outlaw, American cowboy, and Beat Hero.

**ACTOR 4.** Neal Cassady arrived in New York in the fall of 1946.

**NEAL.** Howdy, boys.

**ACTOR 7.** Jack Kerouac:

**JACK.** My first impression was of a young Gene Autry. Trim, thin-hipped, blue-eyed—a sideburned hero of the snowy West.

**MCINTOSH.** All right. Next one. “Who went out whoring through Colorado in myriad stolen night cars”—and I don’t understand that

next—then an “N” period and a “C” period, comma—‘Secret hero of these poems, cocksman and Adonis of Denver... ’”

**NEAL.** Oh-ho! Where art thou, beertender? Frosty brews for my new brothers here! Let us discuss the darker reaches of our tormented, truly demented, and soon to be fermented... *(He takes a gulp of beer)* ...souls. Aaahhh. Oh most happy tricksters, having spent many months holed up in the pen, I’ve been driving like mad I tell you and goin’ sincerely outta my head. I have heard stories of your fair city—the gleaming madness of this heaven-hell in which I now find myself, stripped of my earthly possessions, such as they were, and now, laying myself at your feet—anticipatory and prostrate—in short, my brothers, I’ve come to ask you to show me how to write.

*(Pause. The boys stare at NEAL.)*

**JACK.** Hot damn.

**ACTOR 7.** From *On the Road*, by Jack Kerouac:

**JACK.** The whole mad swirl of everything that was to come began then; it would mix up all my friends and all I had left of my family in a big dust cloud over the American night.

**MCINTOSH.** “Joy to the memory of his innumerable lays of girls in empty lots and diner backyards, moviehouses, rickety rows on mountaintops in caves or with gaunt waitresses in familiar roadside lonely petticoat upliftings and especially secret gas station-” um...”solipsisms of johns, and hometown alleys too.” It’s a little hard to read, Your Honor, because there are no commas in the spots where you expect them to be. Now, are these words relevant to the literary value of Mr. Ginsberg’s poetry: “cocksman,” about the “lays of girls in empty lots”?

**JACK.** Now, a tremendous thing happened when Neal met Allen. They took to each other at the drop of a hat. Two piercing eyes glancing into two piercing eyes. I was a lout compared. I couldn’t keep up with them.

**ACTOR 7.** From “Many Loves,” a poem by Allen Ginsberg, written in 1956:

NEAL. Draw near me.

(ALLEN and NEAL slowly begin to explore each other's bodies.)

ALLEN. I lay with my hair intermixed with his. He asked me:

NEAL. What shall we do now?

ALLEN. I made my first mistake, and made him then and there my master. I bowed my head and took up his hard-on and held it, feeling it throb and pressing my own at his knee and breathing and showing him I needed him—I needed his cock for my dreams of insatiety and lone love.

NEAL. Dear Jack,

ACTOR 7. A letter from Neal Cassady:

NEAL. M'boy. You beauty. I feel like Proust—you must indulge me. (*Rapidly:*) One's mind carries at all times the pressure of its own existence, and remembers previous eyeball views to recall what its previous life has been and feeding on this stuff, carries a heavy understanding of things it is capable of knowing and this knowing is blocked from coming out, because while one's mind carried one's life's past constantly, it also carried before it all day the world which comes in through the eyeball.

JACK. Allen, my God, have you seen this? He's fucking mad. He's a goddamned genius! Oh, these are the sweet dark things that make writing what it is!

ACTOR 1 / ALLEN. January 21, 1947. Ginsberg writes:

Having spent a wild weekend in sexual drama with Cassady, I am left washed up on the shore of my despair again. It is after such pleasure that I get full knowledge of what I have closed myself off from.

ACTOR 2 / JACK. Kerouac writes:

Dear Neal,

Just a word now, about your wonderful 13,000-word letter. I thought it ranked among the best things ever written in America. Have no fear, there are others who will dig this besides me. You

must and will go on at all costs. Write only what kicks you and keeps you overtime awake from sheer mad joy.

**NEAL.** Dear Allen,

I love all sex. Yes, all, all sex. Anyway I can get it. I need it, I want it, shall have it—now. I wanta fuck! In despair I cry out, “Allen, Allen, will you let me splatter my come at you?”

*(Gavel.)*

**MCINTOSH.** Do you understand what these paragraphs are trying to say?

**NICHOLS.** Not explicitly. I would say he’s attempting to show the lack of inhibition of the persons he’s talking of, the members of his group, you might say.

**MCINTOSH.** Group of what?

**NICHOLS.** Of the younger liberals. The post-World War Two generation. Those who were perhaps somewhat displaced by the chaos of war and didn’t immediately settle down.

**ALLEN.** In those years at Columbia we really did have something going. It was a rebellious group, I suppose, of which there are many on campuses, but it was one that was really dedicated to a “New Vision.”

**JACK.** My dear proprietress! Brews for my buddies, if you please!

**ALLEN.** This is the West End Bar in New York City.

**JACK.** Art, to be truly “art,” must be social. It must serve some basic purpose.

**LUCIEN.** Art is self-ultimate.

**HUNCKE.** If someone carves a walking stick, is that Art?

**ALLEN.** What if he carved it, put it on the moon, and no one ever saw it? Would that be Art?

**LUCIEN.** You’re saying art needs an audience to exist?

**ACTOR 1.** William S. Burroughs:

**BURROUGHS.** That's the stupidest question I ever heard of. It depends on how you want to define the word "Art." Words don't have built-in definitions. If you want to define this as Art, then you define it as Art. If you don't want to use that word for that situation, then you don't. But to argue whether the thing is art or not is obviously a confusion in terms.

**ALLEN.** Since Art is merely and ultimately self-expressive, I conclude that the fullest art, the most individual, uninfluenced, unrepressed, uninhibited expression of Art is true expression and the true Art!

**ACTOR 7.** Dig it.

**JACK.** Right on.

**LUCIEN.** It's practically impossible to define.

**JACK.** Maybe it was just a term we sold ourselves.

**ALL.** The New Vision.

**JACK.** I'll drink to that.

*(They all toast.)*

**MCINTOSH.** Mr. Nichols, do you think Mr. Ginsberg's work will survive the test of time?

**NICHOLS.** I have no way of knowing.

**ALLEN.** We were trying to look at the world in a new light, trying to look at the world in a way that would give it some meaning!

**ACTOR 2 / JACK.** From "The Origins of the Beat Generation" by Jack Kerouac:

I prophesy that the Beat Generation is going to be the most sensitive generation in the history of America and therefore it can't help but do good. Whatever wrong comes will come out of evil interference.

**NICHOLS.** Here I think the best possibility now in *Howl's* survival is for its value as a bit of literary history. It may go down in history as a stepping-stone along the way to greater or lesser liberality in the permitting of poems of its type of expression.

**MCINTOSH.** That depends on the way his Honor rules.

**JACK.** If there is any quality that I have noticed more strongly than anything else in this generation, it is the spirit of non-interference with the lives of others.

**ALLEN.** It is through literature that all this can be done.

**LUCIEN.** And it was through Jack and Neal and Allen, principally, that it was going to be done.

**JACK.** This is the dream of the Beat Generation.

**ALLEN.** I prefer this New Vision in terms of Art.

**LUCIEN.** Boys, I think we may just have something here!

**JACK.** I believe, I smugly cling to the belief, that Art is the potential ultimate. Out of humankind materials of Art, I tell myself, our New Vision springs.

**HUNCKE.** Go, man, go!

**MCINTOSH.** The witness may step down.

**ACTOR 7.** Neal Cassady:

**NEAL.** I will show you this country, my boys. There is a world out there just waiting to be discovered. Girls, visions, everything!

**JACK.** Here's my new theory. Live more and write more. Work. Write. Live.

**JACK / NEAL / ALLEN.** Work. Write. Live!

**ACTOR 7.** This Court is in recess.

*(Gavels.)*

**NEAL.** C'mon boys!

**ALL.** Work! Write! Live!

*(Music. The boys leap up with a battle cry. They now become newspapermen, advertising their headlines.)*

**ACTOR 1.** The Howl of the Censor!

**ACTOR 3.** Ginsberg Poem Trial Continues!

**ACTOR 2.** Big Day For Bards at Bay!

**ACTOR 6.** Local Poet to Face Obscenity Charge!

**ACTOR 4.** Jake “Never Plead Guilty” Ehrlich To Battle Censorship!

**ACTOR 5.** The Cops Don’t Allow No Renaissance Here!

**ACTOR 7.** Read all about it!

**ACTOR 1.** The preparations for the continuation of the trial produced a certain amount of concern in both legal and literary circles. From Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s “Horn on Howl”:

**FERLINGHETTI.** Fahrenheit 451, the temperature at which books burn has been determined to be the prevailing temperature in San Francisco. Thus begins one of the most irresponsible and callous police actions to be perpetrated west of the Rockies.

**ACTOR 1.** Captain William Hanrahan, chief of the department’s Juvenile Authority Bureau, announced:

**HANRAHAN.** We will await the outcome of this case before we go ahead with other books.

*(The boys begin to toss books into a large pile.)*

**ACTOR 1.** He did not reveal what books he had in mind, but he made it clear he had quite a list.

**ACTOR 5.** *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain.

**ACTOR 7.** D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.

**ACTOR 1.** When Captain Hanrahan was asked what standards he used to judge a book, his reply was brief:

**HANRAHAN.** When I say filthy, I don’t mean suggestive, I mean filthy words that are very vulgar.

**ACTOR 2.** Voltaire, *Candide*.

**ACTOR 6.** Balzac.

**ACTOR 5.** Maupassant.

**ACTOR 7.** Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*.

**ACTOR 1.** He was also asked whether he was planning to send his men out to confiscate the Bible.

**HANRAHAN.** Of course not! Let me tell you though, what King Solomon was doing with those women wouldn't be tolerated in San Francisco!

**ACTOR 5.** James Joyce, *Ulysses*.

**ACTOR 7.** *Don Quixote*, Cervantes.

**ACTOR 3.** Sigmund Freud.

**ACTOR 2.** Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*.

**ACTOR 4.** E.M. Forster.

**ACTOR 7.** Oscar Wilde.

**ACTOR 1.** The critics, of course, had their own opinions.

**ACTOR 6.** It is only fair to Allen Ginsberg to remark on the utter lack of decorum of any kind in his dreadful little volume. I believe that the title of his long poem, *Howl*, is meant to be a noun, but I can't help taking it as an imperative. The poem continues, sponging on one's toleration for pages and pages.

John Hollander, *The Partisan Review*.

**ACTOR 5.** Shelley.

**ACTOR 2.** Remarque.

**ACTOR 4.** Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*.

**ACTOR 7.** We have had hurling attacks on civilization before. We have not had this particular variety of anguished anathema-hurling in which the poet's revulsion is expressed with the single-minded frenzy of a raving madwoman.

M.L. Rosenthal, *The Nation*.

**ACTOR 2.** Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

**ACTOR 5.** *Gulliver's Travels*.

**ACTOR 3.** It turns out on close inspection that all the San Francisco group has in common is the conviction that any form of rebellion

against American culture is admirable, and they seem to regard homosexuality, jazz, dope addiction, and vagrancy as outstanding examples of such rebellion.

Norman Podhoretz, *The New Republic*.

**ACTOR 6.** Goethe, *Faust*.

**ACTOR 7.** *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

**ACTOR 2.** Molière, *Tartuffe*.

**ACTOR 4.** *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

**ACTOR 5.** *Naked Lunch*, William S. Burroughs.

**ALL.** (Except ACTOR 1) *Howl and Other Poems* by Allen Ginsberg.

**ACTOR 5.** (As a reporter:) Mr. Ginsberg, would you care to comment?

**ALLEN.** You know, it's incredible to me that after centuries of criticism there is still complete incompetence to evaluate and recognize anything new—nothing but this lame sociological bullshit! Conceptions of literature have been changing for half a century already, yet I have to listen to these people giving me doublethink gobbledygook about why I don't write poems with form, construction, or something charming and carefully made. And these jerks are drooling on about how I express every degradation but the one humane one: Loneliness. I mean, some completely inaccurate irrelevant piece of journalism!

**ALL.** "This here incoherent Ginsberg refuses to admit he's lonely."

**ALLEN.** Bullshit! I am lonely! I. Am. Lonely. All right? So don't tell me what I am and don't tell me what I am not. That's why I write, you fucks! To fight back the despair and the huge waves of emptiness and the, the...NOTHING I feel all the fucking time! Does that make me humane? Am I an Artist now?! I'm sick of these creeps bugging the scene, man. My scene, America's scene. Jesuschrist, we only live once, why do we have to put up with this ambitious vanity? You know, not one yet, not ONE in all the colleges, magazines, book pages has said anything real, has even got the fucking point! Not ONE! And this is the product of the schools of the richest na-

tion of the earth? This is the Intelligentsia that's supposed to run the world? I got only one thing to say: FUCK ALL OF YOU!!

*(Gavels.)*

**ACTOR 7.** This court is in session.

**EHRlich.** The Defense calls Professor Mark Schorer. State your name, place of residence, and occupation for the court, please.

**SCHORER.** Mark Schorer. Berkeley, California. I am a published author as well as professor of English and Chairman of Graduate Studies in English at the University of California.

**EHRlich.** Do you have an opinion as to the literary value of *Howl and Other Poems* by Allen Ginsberg?

**SCHORER.** I think that *Howl*, like any work of literature, attempts and intends to make a significant comment on or interpretation of the human experience as the author knows it.

**EHRlich.** After reading *Howl*, can you say that the author has, by the use of specific words or otherwise, accomplished the purpose which he set out to accomplish?

**SCHORER.** I think he succeeds, yes.

**EHRlich.** Thank you. No more questions, Your Honor.

**JUDGE.** Mr. McIntosh, you may take the witness.

**MCINTOSH.** Thank you, Your Honor. Now, Mr. Schorer, would you say that *Howl* has literary merit?

**SCHORER.** Yes.

**MCINTOSH.** And I assume you understand the whole thing, is that right?

**SCHORER.** I would hope so.

**MCINTOSH.** Well, let's get into some of this. Will you open to page 133?

**SCHORER.** Yes.

**MCINTOSH.** About the third line down, do you understand what “angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night” means?

**SCHORER.** Sir, you can’t translate poetry into prose. That’s why it’s poetry.

**MCINTOSH.** What are “angelheaded hipsters”?

**SCHORER.** That’s a figurative statement. Poetry is a heightened form of language. I’m not sure I can translate it into any literal form, nor, I’m sure, can anyone in the room translate the opening part of this poem into rational prose. A sonnet of Shakespeare’s cannot be translated into rational prose without becoming—

**MCINTOSH.** Sir, are there any of these paragraphs which you can translate for us so I can understand them?

**SCHORER.** I can only put it in my language, which is not the language of the poet.

**MCINTOSH.** “With dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and endless balls.” What does that mean?

*(Pause.)*

**JUDGE.** Answer the question, please, Mr. Schorer.

**SCHORER.** Well... There are uprooted people wandering around the United States...

**NEAL.** *(Leaping up:)* We few, we happy few, we band of brothers, for he that steals this car with me today shall be my brother! Whad-dya say, Jack?

**JACK.** Where to, old man?

**NEAL.** That, my friend, is not the point. Look out there. Magnificent. It’s the journey itself. The road, man. The road is life.

*(They mime hopping into a car.)*

**SCHORER.** Dreaming, drugged—that’s clear isn’t it? Even their waking hours like nightmares...

**NEAL.** I’ve got just the chickie for you, my man. Hold on to your hats!

**SCHORER.** Loaded with liquor and enjoying, I take it, a variety of indiscriminate sexual experience.

**NEAL / JACK.** Yee-haaaw! California, here we come!

**ACTOR 1 / ALLEN.** (*Opening his notebook:*) February 23. Ginsberg writes:

I will try to think on those sexual positions with Neal which would please me. Try his laying me. Try breast to breast. Try 69. Coming both at once.

**ACTOR 7.** From the Book of Leviticus, 22<sup>nd</sup> Chapter:

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying:

**ACTOR 5.** (*A la Southern Baptist preacher:*) Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the Lord your God.

**ACTOR 3 / NEAL.** A letter to Ginsberg from Neal Cassady:

Dear Allen,

I need you, man, I need you now more than ever.

**ALLEN.** Try sitting on his chest and making him blow me. Also, a good massage.

**ACTOR 7.** Verse 13:

**ACTOR 5.** If a man lie with mankind as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

**NEAL.** Every day I need you more and more. Let us find true awareness by realizing that each of us is depending on the other for fulfillment.

**ALLEN.** Wrestling. Whipping? Do I have the guts?

**MCINTOSH.** Let's take page 135, fifth line up: "Who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy." What does that mean?

**SCHORER.** I don't know how anybody can answer that.

**ALLEN.** I want some real hip sex.

**ACTOR 5.** So sayeth the shepherd...

**ALL.** So sayeth the flock.

**NEAL.** Love, Neal.

**MCINTOSH.** I would like to know, sir, what is meant by that line.

**SCHORER.** Well, the essence of the poem is the impression of a world in which all sexuality is confused and corrupted.

**ALLEN.** Dear Neal,

You have to know that I've never felt anything close to what I feel when I'm with you. I can't work. I can't concentrate. All I think about is you—touching me, holding me, consuming me. Those big bear arms protecting me from my despair and from myself. This is how it is. Somehow, it doesn't matter anymore. I love you entirely, irrationally, completely. I think I am going mad again.

**ACTOR 7 / NAOMI.** A letter from Naomi Ginsberg:

Dear Allen,

I am asking you most deeply to take me out of this hospital before it is too late. I have underlined "most" and "deeply" to impress it upon your mind. God's informers came to my bed and God, himself, I saw in the sky. The voices claim I do not need the wireless on my head. I told the doctor to take it off, but so far he hasn't. "How can you go home with a wire on your head?" I have been here over five years. Take me from this place. It is peculiar. Oblige.

Naomi Ginsberg.

**MCINTOSH.** So then you do agree, sir, that these words of Mr. Ginsberg indicate a corrupt sexual act?

**SCHORER.** They are part of the essence of the picture which the author is trying to portray.

**MCINTOSH.** Are some of these words necessary to the "literary value" of the piece of poetry? For example, going down to the second line in the "Footnote to Howl."

**ALLEN.** (*Drums. The boys join ALLEN in a kind of ritualistic dance. Chants of "Holy" throughout.*) Holy! Holy! Holy! The world is holy!

The soul is holy! The skin is holy! The nose is holy! The tongue and the cock and hand and asshole holy!

**SCHORER.** I think he is saying every part of human life is holy.

**ALLEN.** Everything is holy! Everybody's holy! The bum's as holy as the seraphim! The madman is holy as you my soul are holy!

**SCHORER.** And he's not the first one who said it. William Blake, a great poet, said it in the eighteenth century. "All that lives is holy."

**ALLEN.** The typewriter is holy the poem is holy the voice is holy the healers are holy the ecstasy is holy! Holy Peter holy Allen holy Solomon holy Lucien holy Kerouac holy Huncke holy Burroughs holy Cassady holy the unknown bugged and suffering beggars holy the hideous human angels!

**SCHORER.** It's human. It's very much the essence of this poet's view of life.

**ALLEN.** Holy my mother in the insane asylum! Holy the cocks of the grandfathers in Kansas! Holy the groaning saxophone! Holy the bop apocalypse! Holy the jazzbands marijuana hipsters peace and junk and drums! (*Building to an orgasmic conclusion:*) Holy forgiveness! mercy! charity! faith! Holy! Ours! bodies! suffering! magnanimity! Holy the supernatural extra brilliant kindness of the soul!

*(The boys have collapsed after their dance. ACTOR 1 remains standing in the middle. He then delivers the following line:)*

This court is in recess until next week when we shall reconvene at 10 A.M.

*(Gavels.)*

**ALLEN.** Six Poets at Six Gallery. (*Holds up invitation:*) Remarkable collection of angels on one stage reading their poetry. No charge, small collection for wine. Charming event. 8 P.M., Friday night.

*(The boys set up the Six Gallery reading—much wine, excitement, and noise. Someone plays the guitar. The drums accompany.)*

**ACTOR 7.** From *The New York Times Book Review*, 1956:

Hundreds from about sixteen to thirty may show up and engage in an enthusiastic, freewheeling celebration of poetry. The audience

participates, shouting and stamping, interrupting and applauding. Poetry here has become a tangible social force, moving and unifying its auditors.

*(The poetry reading begins, sotto voce.)*

**ACTOR 1.** From “Scratching the Beat Surface” by Michael McClure: In the fall of 1955, a group of six unknown poets in San Francisco, in a moment of drunken enthusiasm, decided to defy the system of academic poetry, official reviews, New York publishing machinery, national sobriety, and generally accepted standards to good taste, by giving a free reading of their poetry in a rundown second-rate experimental art gallery in the Negro section of San Francisco.

**ACTOR 4.** The Six Gallery reading was open to the world and the world was welcome. There were poets and anarchists and Stalinists and professors and painters and bohemians and visionaries and idealists and grinning cynics.

**ACTOR 6.** This was no ordinary poetry reading. They got drunk. The audience got drunk. All that was missing was the orgy!

**ACTOR 1.** There were about a hundred and fifty people crowded into the room that night. Jack Kerouac later wrote in *The Dharma Bums*:

**JACK.** *(Picking up a bottle of red wine and pouring for everyone as he talks:)* It was a great night, an historic night in more ways than one. I followed the whole gang of howling poets to the reading at the Six Gallery that night, which was, among other important things, the birth of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance.

**ACTOR 2.** Neal Cassady:

**NEAL.** We had gone beyond the point of no return. And we were ready for it, man. None of us wanted to go back to the intellectual void, to the spiritual drabness, to the America without poetry. We wanted to make it new and we wanted to invent it. We wanted voice and we wanted vision.

**ACTOR 1.** After hearing Allen read *Howl* for the first time, Lawrence Ferlinghetti immediately sat down at his typewriter and composed a telegram that he sent to Ginsberg. The message para-

phrased one that Ralph Waldo Emerson had sent to Walt Whitman upon receiving a copy of the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

**ACTOR 4.** Please welcome next, Allen Ginsberg.

*(Applause. Drums crescendo underneath.)*

**ACTOR 5 / FERLINGHETTI.** The telegram to Ginsberg read:

I greet you at the beginning of a great career. When do I get the manuscript?

**ACTOR 6.** A letter to Allen Ginsberg from the State of New York, Department of Mental Hygiene, Pilgrim State Hospital. November 14, 1947.

*(As he laces ACTOR 7 into his straightjacket:)*

Dear Sir:

Please be advised that your mother, Mrs. Naomi Ginsberg, was seen in consultation with the Assistant Director and it was decided that her mental condition is serious enough to warrant a prefrontal lobotomy. You may discuss this problem with the doctor in charge of the case of your mother on the next visiting day. In the meantime, we are enclosing a permit for the operation which you should sign and return to us.

Very truly yours,

Harry J. Worthing, M.D.

Senior Director

**NEAL.** In America tonight, a new forceful stir of young poets have taken it upon themselves, with angelic clarions in hand, to announce their discontent, their hope, their final wondrous unimaginable dream.

**SOLOMON.** *(He is fully laced up in the straightjacket now:)*

Dear Allen,

My profound thanks for the sentiments expressed in *Howl*. An excellent piece of writing and just to my taste.

Your friend,

Carl.

**ALLEN.** *(Pause:)* *Howl*. For Carl Solomon. Part One. I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness...

*(The sudden sound of electric shock.)*

**SOLOMON.** *(A piercing scream:)* AAAAALLLLEN!!!

*(Lights out.)*

***End of Act I***



## ACT II

*(Lights up. SOLOMON is still laced in the straightjacket exactly as at the end of Act I. He is singing. It is an absurdly melancholy ballad, but it is invested with absolute earnestness.)*

**SOLOMON.** I went to the forest to look for a sign  
Fortune to tell and thoughts to resign  
My Green Valentine, My Green Valentine  
What did I know of my Green Valentine?

*(He continues to sing under the following.)*

**ACTOR 1.** *(Holding up the notebook:)* “Being the Notebook of Allen Ginsberg: Now from the Cracked and Bleeding Heart, Triumphantly I Fashion Art.” Continued.

*(He opens to the middle of the notebook and slowly begins cutting the pages into tiny pieces.)*

Anyone with a pair of scissors can write poetry. Whether or not others will accept it as such, is, of course, an entirely different matter.

**ACTOR 2 / JACK.** From *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac:

The whole mad swirl of everything that was to come began then. It would mix up all my friends and all I had left of my family in a big dust cloud over the American night.

**ACTOR 1.** When Pandora opened the box into which each of the Gods had placed some horror, out flew disaster, plague, jealousy, hatred, sorrow, and every other terror now known to man. But after Pandora clapped the lid shut, apparently, they say, something was left behind. Hope.

*(He pauses to listen as SOLOMON continues to sing.)*

**JACK.** We rushed down the street together, digging everything in the early way we had, which later became so much sadder and perceptive and blank.

**ACTOR 1.** Some think that Hope was the only good that Pandora’s Box held. Huh... Hope. Mankind’s sole comfort in his misfortune and despair.

**JACK.** And I was a writer. And I could hear a new call and see a new horizon, and believe it at my young age. *(Pause.)* I was a writer.

**ACTOR 1.** I think Hope is the most terrible of all. Because Hope makes every terror possible. Without Hope there would be no Despair.

*(SOLOMON has finished his song. ACTOR 1 looks at him for a moment.)*

Cut us up. You never know what you may find.

*(At this, he holds the notebook upside down and a flurry of paper scraps covers the stage.)*

**ACTOR 4.** The State of California versus Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Judge Clayton W. Horn, presiding. This court is now in session.

*(Gavels.)*

**JUDGE.** Mr. McIntosh, you may continue your cross-examination. Professor Schorer, would you please resume your place on the stand?

**MCINTOSH.** Thank you, Your Honor. Now, Mr. Schorer, did you, in addition to *Howl*, did you also read a poem entitled “America”?

**SCHORER.** Yes.

**MCINTOSH.** In “America,” do you see a word there, a four-letter word?

**SCHORER.** What word are you referring to?

**MCINTOSH.** I will read down to the line. “America I’ve given you all and now I’m nothing.”

*(ALLEN takes over the poem. Drums.)*

**ALLEN.** America two dollars and twenty-seven cents January 17, 1956.

I can’t stand my own mind.

America when will we end the human war?

**ALLEN/MCINTOSH.** Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb.

**ALLEN.** I don’t feel good, don’t bother me.

**MCINTOSH.** Now, the word in there, that four-letter word, is that relevant to the literary merit of Mr. Ginsberg's work?

**SCHORER.** Well, Mr. Ginsberg is trying to—

**MCINTOSH.** Will you just answer my question?

**SCHORER.** I am trying to answer. Mr. Ginsberg is trying to say as powerfully as he can or trying to express his indignation at certain things he sees taking place in the world today.

**ALLEN.** (*The boys hoist up a tattered Russian flag behind ALLEN:*)

I smoke marijuana every chance I get.

I sit in my house for days on end and stare at the roses in the closet.

When I go to Chinatown I get drunk and never get laid.

My mind is made up there's going to be trouble.

You should have seen me reading Marx.

My psychoanalyst thinks I'm perfectly right.

I won't say the Lord's Prayer.

I have mystical visions and cosmic vibrations.

America I still haven't told you what you did to Uncle Max after he came over from Russia.

**SCHORER.** He's sick to the point of saying this. He doesn't want to temper it by saying it any less softly.

**ALLEN.** I'm addressing you.

Are you going to let your emotional life be run by Time Magazine?

I'm obsessed by Time Magazine.

I read it every week.

It's always telling me about responsibility. Businessmen are serious.

Movie producers are serious. Everybody's serious but me. It occurs to me that I am America.

**SCHORER.** He's angry, and when you're angry you sometimes do use words of this sort.

**ALLEN.** (*The boys hum "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" under the following:*)

America when will you be angelic?

When will you take off your clothes?

When will you look at yourself through the grave?

When will you be worthy of your million Trotskyites?  
 America why are your libraries full of tears?  
 America when will you send your eggs to India?  
 I'm sick of your insane demands.

**SCHORER.** I would say yes, it's relevant. It's keeping with the wrath he feels, with the language that he has used throughout most of these poems.

**ALLEN.** America stop pushing I know what I'm doing.

**SCHORER.** And yes, I would say it was relevant to the literary value of the work.

**ALLEN.** America this is quite serious.

America this is the impression I get from looking in the television set.

America is this correct?

I'd better get right down to the job.

It's true I don't want to join the army or turn lathes in precision factories; I'm nearsighted and psychopathic anyway.

**MCINTOSH.** That's all with this witness, Your Honor.

**ALLEN.** America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel!

*(The boys cheer. Gavel.)*

**MCINTOSH.** The prosecution would like to call Mr. David Kirk. Mr. Kirk, what is your business or occupation at present?

**KIRK.** I am an Assistant professor of English at the University of San Francisco.

**MCINTOSH.** Now, at my request, have you looked at People's One in evidence, *Howl and Other Poems* by Allen Ginsberg?

**KIRK.** I have.

**MCINTOSH.** And have you formed an opinion, sir, as to whether or not that publication has any literary value?

**KIRK.** It's my opinion that if it has any literary value, it is negligible.

**MCINTOSH.** Negligible. Can you explain to us, Mr. Kirk, how you arrived at that opinion?

**KIRK.** A great literary work, or even a fairly great literary work, would obviously be exceedingly successful in form, but this poem is really just a weak imitation of a form that was used eighty to ninety years ago by Walt Whitman.

*(NEAL lights a joint and passes it around.)*

**MCINTOSH.** Do you recall the title of that poem?

**KIRK.** *Leaves of Grass.*

**ACTOR 1.** Pardon the drug use. But what can I say? It's historically accurate.

**ACTOR 7 / NAOMI.** A letter to Allen Ginsberg from his mother, Naomi:

Dear Allen,  
I hope this reaches you.

**KIRK.** Literary value could also reside in theme. The statement of the theme of the poem was relatively clear, but it has little validity, and therefore the theme has a negative value—no value at all.

**NAOMI.** I hope you are behaving well. Don't go in for too much drink and other things that are not good for you.

**KIRK.** The third basis of objective criticism would be the—well, for lack of a better term, I would call opportunity. The poet or the writer and his time and the problems of the time, should have some kind of significant interaction. This poem is apparently dedicated to a long dead movement, "Dadaism," and, therefore, the opportunity is long past for any significant literary contribution of this poem.

*(ACTOR 1 begins to shoot up, tying a tourniquet around his arm, etc.)*

**NAOMI.** I wish I was out of here and home at the time you were young; then I would be young. I'm in the prime of life now. I hope you are not taking drugs as suggested by your poetry. That would hurt me. Don't go in for ridiculous things.

With love,

Naomi.

**MCINTOSH.** All right. No further questions.

*(Gavels.)*

**ACTOR 1.** Injections of methamphetamine. *(He jabs a needle into his arm.)* Morphine. Heroin. They were playing the blues and Neal was reciting Shelley.

**NEAL.** Why linger, why turn back, why shrink my heart?  
Thy hopes are gone before: from all things here  
They have departed: thou shouldst now depart!  
A light is past from the revolving year,  
And man, and woman, and what is still dear  
Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither.

*(He continues to recite as ACTOR 1 speaks.)*

**ACTOR 1.** *(Overlapping with NEAL:)* Ladies and gentlemen, don't try this at home. I don't know, I guess the end will justify the means. I just *tell* the story, you know?

**NEAL.** *(Overlapping with ACTOR 1:)*  
The soft sky smiles, the low wind whispers near:  
'Tis Adonais calls! oh, hasten thither,  
No more let life divide what Death can join together.

**ACTOR 1 / ALLEN.** What follows is from *Ginsberg—A Biography*, by Barry Miles.

*(Referring to NAOMI:)* She was a terrible sight. Her grotesque sagging body, varicosed, nude, and doomed. Wandering through the maze of sterilized hallways. Singing.

*(One of the boys undoes the arm straps on ACTOR 7's straightjacket as he leads him forward. The other boys will act as patients in the madhouse.)*

This place stank. Disinfectant, vomit, piss, people incontinent. My mother would be led in among the other patients who were also receiving visitors.

*(ALLEN sits across from NAOMI.)*

**NAOMI.** I don't want to put you in any danger. They're listening to everything we say.

**ALLEN.** Who?

**NAOMI.** The wires are in this ceiling. I can hear them crackling. They are reporting everything we say to President Roosevelt.

**ALLEN.** There are no wires, mother.

**NAOMI.** *(A furious whisper:)* They are inside the ceiling! I can hear them talking. They call me names, Allen. They say I am a bad woman. They call me whore.

**ALLEN.** *(To the audience:)* I sat across from her, trying to comfort her, my eyes filling with tears.

**NAOMI.** Did Louis send you? Don't tell Louis where I am! He'll send spies to watch me. He might poison me. The only reason he lets me live is that he used to love me. Buba wanted me dead years ago. *(She looks around.)* She's paid the doctors to give me shocks. *(Suddenly:)* The bitch! Old grandma! *(Urgently, secretly:)* Last week I saw her, dressed in pants like an old man, with a sack on her back, climbing up the brick side of the apartment. She stood on the fire escape with poison germs to throw on me. Maybe Louis is helping her! He's under her power!

**ALLEN.** Grandma can't even walk.

**NAOMI.** Allen, you don't understand. It's... Ever since those sticks up my back. They did something to me in there. They poisoned me. They, they, they want to see me dead. Those three big sticks, Allen. Three. Big. Sticks.

**ALLEN.** *(To the audience:)* I tried to understand. I even felt for the sticks she said the doctors had planted in her shoulder.

**NAOMI.** The wires!

*(She grabs her head suddenly and begins tearing at her hair.)*

I'm not a bad girl! Don't murder me! I raised two children!

*(She is looking around frantically. ALLEN is trying to calm her.)*

That's him!

*(She jumps up and flies toward “the window.”)*

He’s the one! Go away, you rotten thing!!

**ALLEN.** Mother!

*(They struggle.)*

**NAOMI.** Help! Louis! Fascists! Death! Liars!

*(She screams. The other patients have become distressed, screaming and running about. Chaos. ALLEN finally succeeds in restoring order.)*

Allen... Why have you done this to me? *(Her attention is diverted.)* I’m hot. Oh, I’ve gotten so fat. I used to have such a beautiful figure before I went to the hospital. *(Suddenly very serious, pleading. Her first moment of true clarity:)* I’m begging you to take me out of here.

**ALLEN.** *(Pause)* I...can’t.

**NAOMI.** I AM YOUR MOTHER!!!

*(Pause. ALLEN motions to one of the boys to lead her away.)*

You’re not Allen...

**ALLEN.** I didn’t go to the funeral.

**EUGENE.** A letter from Eugene Ginsberg.

Dear Allen,

**ALLEN.** My brother and father provided a vivid description of the service instead.

**EUGENE.** I guess it was the smallest funeral on record. *(Music—a violin solo, perhaps.)* She was quite recognizable. Her face was perhaps a little sad, though.

**LOUIS.** June 20, 1956. A letter from Louis Ginsberg.

Dear Allen,

We were driven out to Long Island to Hempstead where the funeral services were held briefly, a sexton murmuring prayers in Hebrew.

**EUGENE.** The Rabbi refused to say Kaddish without a minyon present. There were only seven mourners. Father stood blinded by tears.

**LOUIS.** As Naomi's casket was lowered, the sexton prayed again. The pathos and tragedy of her well-meaning life, the constant struggles within her, the flashes of our happy early moments together... Well, Naomi is now at peace at last. We are much nearer and dearer, as you say. You and Eugene are a part of her and me, and she will always be a part of me.

*(ACTOR 5 begins to slowly recite the Kaddish, and continues in counterpoint with ALLEN, building in intensity.)*

**EUGENE.** *(Overlapping with ACTOR 5:)* As I saw her coffin lowered into the hospitable earth, I thought that now she would at last have peace and rest...

**ALLEN.** *(Overlapping with ACTOR 5:)* Strange now to think of you, gone without corsets and eyes while I walk on the sunny pavement of Greenwich Village downtown Manhattan, clear winter noon, and I've been up all night. The rhythm, the rhythm—and your memory in my head three years after. It leaps about me, as I go out and walk the street, look back over my shoulder, Seventh Avenue the battlements of window office buildings shouldering each other high under a cloud—or down the Avenue to the South as I walk toward the Lower East Side where you walked 50 years ago. Little girl from Russia, the struggling in the crowds of Orchard Street toward education marriage nervous breakdown, operation, teaching school and learning to be mad in a dream what is this life?

**ACTOR 5.**

Yisgadal ve'yiskadash sh'mey rabo,  
 B'olmo deevro chiroosey  
 Ve'yamlich malchusey,  
 Bechayeychon, uv'yomechon,  
 Uv'chayey d'chol beys yisroel,  
 Ba'agolo uv'izman koriv, ve'imru:  
 Omain. Yehey sh'mey rabo m'vorach  
 L'olam ulolmey olmayoh  
 Yisborach, ve'yishtabach, ve'yispoar, ve'yisromam,  
 Ve'yisnasey, ve'yis'hadar, ve'yisalleh,  
 Ve'yisallol sh'mey dekadsho  
 Berich hoo le'eylo min kol birchoso ve'shiriso...

**LOUIS.** Be at peace Allen, because she is at last at peace.

**ALLEN.** *(As the Kaddish continues:)*

Oh mother what have I left out?

Oh mother what have I forgotten?

Oh mother farewell.

Farewell with your old dress and long black beard around the vagina.

Farewell with your sagging belly

with your fear of Hitler

with your eyes

with your eyes of Russia

with your eyes pissing in the park

with your eyes of America taking a fall

with your eyes of Czechoslovakia attacked by robots

with your eyes of the killer grandma you see on the horizon from the fire escape

with your eyes running naked out of the apartment screaming into the hall

with your eyes being led away by policemen to an ambulance

with your eyes strapped down on the operating table

with your eyes of shock

with your eyes of lobotomy

with your eyes of divorce

with your eyes of stroke

with your eyes alone

**ACTOR 5.** Oseh sholom bimromov

**ALLEN.** with your eyes

**ACTOR 5.** hu ya-aseh sholom

**ALLEN.** with your eyes

**ACTOR 5.** olenu v'al col Yisroel

**ALLEN.** with your death full of flowers

**ACTOR 5.** V'imru omain.

**ALL.** V'imru omain.

**ALLEN.** *(Pause:)* V'imru omain.

*(Long pause. ACTOR 3 hands ACTOR 1 the notebook.)*

**ACTOR 3 / NEAL.** A letter from Neal Cassady.

Dear Allen,

I don't know how much I can be satisfied to love you.

**ALLEN.** When it rains, it pours.

**NEAL.** I mean bodily.

**ALLEN.** Shit.

**NEAL.** You know, I somehow dislike pricks and men, and before you, I had consciously forced myself to be homosexual. Now, I'm not sure whether with you I was not just forcing myself unconsciously. You meant so much to me, I feel as if I've been forcing a desire for you bodily as a compensation to you for all you've given me.

**ALLEN.** Oh God.

*(He starts to rip pages out of the notebook and crumple them up.)*

**NEAL.** I guess I was never really attracted to you in the first place.

**ALLEN / ACTOR 1.** Shit. I am so lonely, Neal. I am so alone. I'm always frightened of... I need someone to love me and kiss me and... Godammit, Neal, I am miserable without you. What am I supposed to do now, huh? What am I supposed to do now?!

*(He throws the notebook. The pages scatter in every direction.)*

**NEAL!!**

*(The other actors throw stacks of pages in the air as they all begin to speak at once. The stage is littered with paper. ACTOR 1 is trying desperately to reassemble the notebook.)*

**ACTOR 5.** Who scribbled all night rocking and rolling over lofty incantations—

**ACTOR 2.** Dear Allen—

**ACTOR 1.** Shit, I'm sorry.

**ACTOR 6.** Exhausted, at the bottom of the world.

**ACTOR 1.** Shit, shit, shit.

*(He tries to put things back in order. He rummages through the pages on the floor, trying to reassemble the notebook.)*

**ACTOR 7.** In the dark night of the soul—

**ACTOR 5.** Marijuana—

**ACTOR 3.** A formal desperation—

**ACTOR 2.** You must read the book as a whole—

**ACTOR 4.** It was a tragic custard pie comedy—

**ACTOR 6.** Mr. Ginsberg, do you realize the enormity of what you've done?

**ACTOR 5.** In reference to oral copulation, right?

**ACTOR 3.** You must take me out of here, Allen—

**ACTOR 6.** Who howled on their knees—

**ACTOR 7.** America, I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel—

**ACTOR 2.** How do you define literary merit?

**ACTOR 4.** I bowed my head and took up his hard-on—

**ACTOR 6.** The best method of censorship is by the people for the people—

**ACTOR 5.** O starry spangled shock of mercy—

**ACTOR 7.** Would you want your children reading this?

**ALL.** It's a sorry, lonely life Allen!

**ACTOR 1.** *(ACTOR 1 lets out a sustained cry as he slams the notebook shut. Long pause. He slowly pulls a single page out of the book and reads it to the audience:)* Ginsberg Trial Enters Final Days.

**ACTOR 7.** *(As a reporter:)* Today in Judge Horn's court, the Prosecution's crucial witness is scheduled to appear. According to *The San Francisco Examiner*, the case is hinged on this all-important testimony.

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**ACTOR 3.** (*As a reporter:*) Hundreds of protesters have crowded onto the steps of the Municipal Court Building this morning—shouting, stamping, even singing for their rights.

**ACTOR 7.** It seems the whole country has its eyes on San Francisco today, awaiting with bated breath for a conclusion to this most heated of moral debates.

(*Gavel.*)

**ACTOR 1.** The cross-examination of David Kirk by Jake Ehrlich. A tragicomedy courtroom drama on lofty themes in one act.

(*Gavel.*)

**EHRlich.** So, Mr. Kirk, you have done some studying of literature, I take it?

**KIRK.** Yes.

**EHRlich.** I see. Now, you have set out three bases which you use as guides in your evaluation of poetic works, is that right?

**KIRK.** Yes, my objective bases.

**EHRlich.** Are your three guides accepted as rules by men who are critics of poetry? Or are they just your bases?

**KIRK.** They are fairly standard rules.

**EHRlich.** I see. Some accept it and some do not.

**KIRK.** I suppose so.

**EHRlich.** Did I understand you to say that Ginsberg used the Walt Whitman style?

**KIRK.** The form, the form of the book “Leaves of Grass.”

**EHRlich.** And because of Ginsberg’s using that format, it is your opinion that the poem *Howl* has no literary value or merit, is that right?

**KIRK.** That is correct. Great literature always creates its own form for each significant occasion.

**EHRlich.** Have you ever imitated anything Mr. Kirk?

**KIRK.** Of course I have. Every student in trying to form his own style obviously begins on a basis of imitation, not just of one writer, but of many writers.

**EHRlich.** Well then, in your opinion, Mr. Kirk, it is good to imitate, isn't it?

**KIRK.** As a student exercise, yes. But it does not create literature.

**EHRlich.** Who did Walt Whitman copy?

**KIRK.** To my knowledge, no one.

**EHRlich.** You don't know, then, isn't that your answer, you don't know?

**KIRK.** (*Grudgingly:*) I suppose so.

**EHRlich.** Fine. I understand your next signpost to be that the idea of *Howl* is clear, but has little validity. Do I quote you correctly?

**KIRK.** That is the general conclusion, yes, in theme. The idea of *Howl* is clear in theme.

**EHRlich.** What is the idea of Ginsberg in *Howl*?

**KIRK.** Well, he celebrates the unfortunate life of—I can't remember the man's name... Solomon. The unfortunate life of the man Solomon, who is a drifter of Dadaist persuasion.

**ACTOR 1.** A Dadaist Manifesto. As presented by Carl Solomon of the New York State Psychiatric Institute. With apologies to Tristan Tzara.

**SOLOMON.** (*Applause as SOLOMON leaps up on a chair:*) Ladies and Gentlemen, I say unto you, Art is not the most precious manifestation of Life. Life is far more interesting.

**EHRlich.** A "drifter of Dadaist persuasion." Does that portrayal have any validity?

**KIRK.** Not as literature, no.

**SOLOMON.** Dada tries to find out what words mean before using them, from the point of view not of grammar, but of *representation*. What are Beautiful, Good, Art, Freedom? Words that have a differ-

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ent meaning for every individual. It is diversity that makes life interesting!

**ALL.** Dada!

**EHRlich.** So when Ginsberg condemns this existence which has soured and engulfed Solomon, that is a valid description of what Ginsberg feels, is that right, sir?

**KIRK.** I am sorry, but I didn't identify any condemnation. I found only sympathy.

**EHRlich.** Well, fine. Let's put it your way. This "sympathy" which Ginsberg shows for Solomon, would you say it is honestly portrayed as Ginsberg saw it?

**KIRK.** As an individual writer, yes.

**SOLOMON.** Dada! An abolition of logic which is the dance of those impotent to create!

**ALL.** Dada!

**EHRlich.** What impression do you have of the end of the third portion of *Howl*? What is your understanding of it?

**KIRK.** Well, the poet seems to be expressing the usual Dadaist line that everything is created for man's despair and everything must be forgotten and destroyed, and that Solomon's life apparently had this kind of rhythm. Therefore, there is some validity of theme, you see, in that area.

**SOLOMON.** Dada! Every object, all objects, sentiments, obscurities, apparitions and the precise clash of parallel lines are weapons for the fight!

**ALL.** Dada!

**EHRlich.** Then, as you say, there is validity of theme there?

**KIRK.** As a Dadaist statement, yes.

**EHRlich.** Well, I don't care what qualifications you put on it, but there is some validity to Ginsberg's theme isn't there, whether you personally approve of it or not?

**KIRK.** Well, I'm afraid that I have got my tongue tripped up here. This "clarity"—I should have said clarity instead of validity.

**EHRlich.** But you have been using the term "validity" the whole time you have been on the stand.

**SOLOMON.** Dada! To divest one's church of every useless cumbersome accessory! To spit out disagreeable ideas like a luminous waterfall with the extreme satisfaction that it doesn't matter in the least. LIFE! FREEDOM! DADA!

**SOLOMON.** Like everything in life... *(Pause.)* Dada is useless.

**EHRlich.** Mr. Kirk, have you read *The Holy Bible*?

**KIRK.** I have.

**EHRlich.** You and I don't know who wrote "Job" do we?

**KIRK.** I am sure I didn't.

**EHRlich.** Have you read "Job"?

**KIRK.** I have.

**EHRlich.** Isn't "Job" crying the very same cry as Ginsberg's *Howl*?

**KIRK.** Not at all.

**EHRlich.** Well, isn't it a fact that other writers have condemned life and its application to mankind as well as Ginsberg?

**KIRK.** I suppose. I don't know of any individual example at this moment.

**EHRlich.** May I suggest "Job" to you, Mr. Kirk?

**KIRK.** Yes.

**EHRlich.** And would you agree with me, sir, that "Job" does condemn life?

**KIRK.** Not to the same end that the Dadaist does, no.

**EHRlich.** Well, let's leave the Dadaist out. Let's just stick with "Job" and *Howl* for the moment. Doesn't "Job" condemn the position of man's fortune on earth?

**MCINTOSH.** I will object to any comparison with *The Bible*, Your Honor, as to what Job said.

**JUDGE.** I presume Counsel is going to show that “Job” does cover the same theme in somewhat the same way.

**EHRlich.** That is correct.

**JUDGE.** I overrule the objection.

**EHRlich.** Mr. Kirk, I am quoting from *The Holy Bible* and I must assume that these are the words of Job:

**ALLEN / EHRlich.** (EHRlich begins to read from “Job.” ALLEN will eventually take over the passage:) When shall I arrive and the night begone? And I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome. My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and are spent without hope. Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. I would not live always, let me alone; for my days are vanity. I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of man? Why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am a burden to myself? And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity? For now I shall sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.”

**EHRlich.** In theme, where is “Job” different from Ginsberg’s third portion of *Howl*?

**ALLEN.** Carl Solomon!

**ALL.** Carl Solomon!

(The boys lift SOLOMON up on a chair and help him into his straightjacket.)

**ALLEN.** I’m with you in Rockland  
where you’re madder than I am

**ALL.** (Drums begin:) I’m with you in Rockland!

**ALLEN.** Where you must feel very strange

**ALL.** I'm with you in Rockland!

**ALLEN.** Where you imitate the shade of my mother

**KIRK.** There seems no resemblance at all, just a vast difference.

**EHRlich.** In your mind there is no resemblance, but I am talking about the words.

**KIRK.** In words there is no resemblance.

**ALLEN.** Where we are great writers on the same dreadful typewriter

**ALL.** I'm with you in Rockland

**EHRlich.** None?

**KIRK.** No resemblance, neither in style nor in theme nor in opportunity.

**EHRlich.** In other words, you think, Mr. Kirk, that the thinking of all men must go through the same funnel, is that it?

**KIRK.** I don't understand.

**ALLEN.** Where you scream in a straitjacket that you're losing the game of the actual Ping-Pong of the abyss

**ALL.** I'm with you in Rockland!

**ALLEN.** Where you bang on the catatonic piano the soul is innocent and immortal it should never die ungodly in an armed madhouse.

**ALL.** I'm with you in Rockland!

**EHRlich.** Isn't "Job" condemning the futility of life as Ginsberg condemns the futility of life?

**ALLEN.** Where you accuse your doctors of insanity and plot the Hebrew socialist revolution against the fascist national Golgotha

**ALL.** I'm with you in Rockland...

*(The boys continue to repeat this through to the end.)*

**KIRK.** Not at all. “Job” may be condemning the suffering of his own life, but he is not condemning anything that’s being talked about in *Howl*.

**ALLEN.** Where you will split the heavens of Long Island and resurrect your living human Jesus from the superhuman tomb

**ALL.** I’m with you in Rockland!

**ALLEN.** Where there are twenty-five thousand mad comrades all together singing the final stanzas of the Internationale.

**SOLOMON.** (*Singing:*) “Oh-ho say, can you see... ”

**ALLEN.** Where we hug and kiss the United States under our bed-sheets the United States that coughs all night and won’t let us sleep. Where we wake up electrified out of the coma by our own souls’ airplanes roaring over the roof they’ve come to drop angelic bombs the hospital illuminates itself imaginary walls collapse O skinny legions run outside O starry spangled shock of mercy the eternal war is here O victory forget your underwear we’re free!

(*A cry from the boys.*)

**EHRlich.** (*Exasperated:*) Isn’t “Job” the same type of condemnation that Ginsberg seems to make in *Howl*?

**KIRK.** No. There is no condemnation clearly stated in the poem, but he does identify sympathy with the Dadaist aim.

**EHRlich.** And what is the Dadaist aim, for goodness sake? Let’s get that into the record.

**SOLOMON.** Poetry is for everyone! Everyone, I say! Dada!

**KIRK.** Well, as a literary movement about 1918 to 1921, this group of French writers decided that the world was in such a mess that the only hope for the world was to destroy all memory of everything that men had ever accomplished through history, and then on that basis perhaps a fresh start towards a better world might be made.

**SOLOMON.** Accept nothing! Trust no one! Ridicule everything!

**KIRK.** That is a generalization of the Dadaist theme.

**SOLOMON.** Ladies and gentlemen. Now I will attempt, before your very eyes, to pull a poem out of my hat!

*(He produces a top hat. The boys gasp—shock and surprise.)*

Impossible you say? Hah! Shakespeare. Sonnet 29.

*(He reaches into his hat. Drum roll. He pulls out a white rabbit.)*

Shit. Wrong!

*(All smiles.)*

I will now proceed to pull a poem out of my hat.

*(Drum roll. He fishes around in his hat and this time he pulls out a small bottle with a little note attached.)*

Drink Me?!

*(He tosses the bottle over his shoulder.)*

Shakespeare! Sonnet 29, Goddammit! “When in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes!” Words, words, words!

*(Suspenseful pause. Drum roll. He reaches ceremoniously into the hat and begins to pull out little slips of paper.)*

Eyes. Disgrace. And. Hope. When. Fortune? No!! That’s not right!

*(He gives up and goes to put the hat on his head. As he does so, a torrent of words rains down upon him. He gives a yelp. The boys applaud wildly.)*

**EHRlich.** You don’t believe in that philosophy, do you?

**KIRK.** Not at all. It has been dead since about 1922.

**EHRlich.** That does not necessarily mean that a person who does think that is wrong, does it?

**KIRK.** No, but it does not create literature.

**EHRlich.** Well, what *does* create literature, Mr. Kirk?

**KIRK.** I’d have to return to my three bases for objective criticism: form, theme, and opportunity.

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**EHRlich.** When you say “opportunity,” what exactly do you mean in relation to the subject matter here?

**KIRK.** It means the correlation of the poet and his ideas with his time and with all times. If it is a great piece of literature, it continues to have validity and it continues to have a message.

**EHRlich.** Do you think that Ginsberg in his time had the “opportunity” to observe life and write about it?

**KIRK.** A small segment, yes.

**EHRlich.** But this is the segment that he is writing about, isn't it?

**KIRK.** One thing—

**EHRlich.** Answer that, sir, yes or no, please.

**KIRK.** I am confused.

**EHRlich.** This is the segment he is writing about, isn't that right, sir?

**KIRK.** Here is where the confusion comes in: I believe the experiences are meant to be Solomon's, isn't that right?

**EHRlich.** Well, Ginsberg may be writing it about Solomon; but it is his own observations.

**KIRK.** Well, I am unable to know whether Ginsberg has an acquaintance with Solomon. That is beyond my knowledge.

**EHRlich.** Do you evaluate a work by knowing whether the writer knew the person he is talking about?

**KIRK.** Absolutely.

**EHRlich.** In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, was Jay Gatsby a personal friend of the author?

**MCINTOSH.** Objection! Immaterial.

**JUDGE.** I will hear counsel's line of questioning. Overruled.

**EHRlich.** Was Jay Gatsby a personal friend of the author?

**KIRK.** I don't think so, no.

**EHRlich.** Well, would you say that “The Great Gatsby” is one of the great outstanding works of literature?

**KIRK.** That is correct.

**EHRlich.** But you don’t know—

**KIRK.** I am certain Jay Gatsby never lived as an individual, if that’s what you’re driving at.

**EHRlich.** Are you certain that Solomon lived?

**KIRK.** No.

**EHRlich.** Then you don’t know, do you?

**KIRK.** Not at all.

**EHRlich.** So your former answer that you couldn’t answer my question as to whether Ginsberg was properly describing Solomon’s life is that you don’t know whether Ginsberg knew Solomon and therefore you couldn’t tell whether he was properly describing it or not! By the way, have you ever read Voltaire?

**KIRK.** I have read one work, *Candide*.

**EHRlich.** What’s your opinion of *Candide*?

**KIRK.** As literature? It is great literature.

**EHRlich.** He copied Walt Whitman’s style, is that right?

**KIRK.** Not Voltaire, no.

**EHRlich.** Then whose style did Voltaire copy?

**KIRK.** To my knowledge, no one. But I do not know enough about French forms and French stylists to answer that question with any degree of certainty. I have read the work only in translation.

**EHRlich.** So it is possible, Mr. Kirk, that Voltaire may have copied another author’s style of which you, personally, are unaware? Then there would be some validity to style copying to which you originally referred?

**KIRK.** I suppose.

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**EHRlich.** Now would you say that Voltaire had the idea of *Candide* as a clear-cut idea?

**KIRK.** That's not my recollection of it, no. It took some reflection to get an approximation of the idea.

**EHRlich.** Well, did you feel that there was any validity in the nature and character of his work?

**KIRK.** That's the memory I have of *Candide*, yes.

**EHRlich.** Well, if you had difficulty in understanding what Voltaire's idea was, how did you come to the conclusion that it had validity?

**KIRK.** Upon the basis of reflection.

**EHRlich.** What was your reflection?

**KIRK.** I am afraid it's been ten or twelve years since I read this. My identification of a valid theme did not come immediately upon reading *Candide*, only upon reflection.

**EHRlich.** How long have you reflected on *Howl*?

**KIRK.** I believe two weeks.

**EHRlich.** Two weeks?

**KIRK.** Two weeks. However, I made up my mind after five minutes.

**EHRlich.** But you reflected for a long, long time on Voltaire's *Candide*?

**KIRK.** Exactly. A great work of literature frequently conveys all kinds of challenges.

**EHRlich.** Well, do you believe that if you reflected for another ten years on *Howl* that you might change your opinion?

**KIRK.** I am quite certain I would not.

**EHRlich.** You are quite certain today that you would not change your mind in the next ten years, is that right sir?

**KIRK.** That is correct.

**EHRlich.** (*Brief pause:*) That is all.

**JUDGE.** The witness may step down. Mr. McIntosh, you may call your next witness.

**MCINTOSH.** The People rest, Your Honor.

**JUDGE.** All right. Let the record show that both sides have rested.

*(Gavel.)*

**ACTOR 1.** Six Poets at Six Gallery. San Francisco, California, 1955.

*(The boys set up the Six Gallery reading, mirroring the end of Act I.)*

From *The San Francisco Chronicle*:

Both sides presented their closing arguments to Judge Clayton Horn and a courtroom packed with an audience that offered the most fantastic collection of beards, turtlenecked shirts, and Italian hairdos ever to grace the grimy precincts of the Hall of Justice. Assistant District Attorney Ralph McIntosh spoke first for the Prosecution, saying:

**MCINTOSH.** It's funny in our law. We are allowed to use experts to testify as to literary merit, but we are not allowed to bring in, we will say, the average man to testify that when he read this book he didn't understand it, didn't know what it was all about; perhaps it's over his head. Now, I have read it; I don't understand it very well. In fact, looking it all over, I think it's a lot of sensitive bullshit, to use the language of Mr. Ginsberg. How far are we going to go to license obscene language? Are we going to advocate drug use? Shall we promote homosexuality and glorify promiscuity? The newspapers and the television and the radio don't broadcast smut. Why? Because the consumption is for the average reader. And, Your Honor, that is the one we are trying to protect here.

**ACTOR 1.** Next, Jacob Ehrlich, speaking for the Defense, rose calmly and addressed the court.

**EHRlich.** In this case much has been made by the Prosecution concerning the use of the four-letter word. I, for one, see nothing wrong with the word. There are those who, when they read, attribute everything wrong and improper to what they read because mentally they want it to be that way. You do not think common,

lewd, or lascivious thoughts just because you have read something in a book, unless it is your mental purpose to do so. A word is not a crystal—transparent and unchanged. It is the skin of a living thought and may vary greatly in color and content according to the circumstances and the time in which it is used. What prurient interest is Ginsberg generating with his cry of pain? This man is at the end of his road. He is crying out in the wilderness. Nobody is listening. Your Honor can't feel that anguished cry nor can I. We cannot understand it. We have never lived his life. We do not know what Ginsberg's mind was saying at the moment he wrote these lines because we haven't experienced hunger; we haven't reached the bottom of the pit. And who can say what a man would say or do in any given set of circumstances?

**ACTOR 4.** Next, please welcome Allen Ginsberg, with *Howl*.

*(Applause.)*

**ALLEN.** *Howl*. For Carl Solomon. Part One.

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness,  
starving hysterical naked,  
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for  
an angry fix,  
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection  
to the starry dynamo  
in the machinery of night,  
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking  
in the supernatural darkness of cold water flats floating across the  
tops of cities contemplating jazz—

**JACK.** Go!

*(EHRLICH interrupts here. The two realities begin to merge. ALLEN watches EHRLICH as if his speech were a performance at the Six Gallery. The boys, led by JACK, react, taking part with cries of approval, "go," etc. The drums accompany and lead to an all-out jam session by the end.)*

**EHRLICH.** And he keeps describing what is going on. He keeps talking about what he sees. He sees endless subways from the Battery to the Bronx, benzedrine, noise of wheels—

**ALLEN.** Battered bleak of brain all drained of brilliance—

**EHRlich.** A lost battalion of platonic conversationalists—

**ALLEN.** Yacketayakking screaming vomiting whispering facts and memories and anecdotes—

**EHRlich.** Whole intellects disgorged in total recall—

**ALLEN.** Who balled in the morning in the evenings in rosegardens and the grass of public parks and cemeteries scattering their semen freely to whomever come who may—

**EHRlich.** He continues, describing the man who studied philosophy:

**ALLEN.** Who studied Plotinus Poe St. John of the Cross telepathy and bop Kaballa—

**EHRlich.** Who lounged hungry and loathsome through Houston seeking jazz or sex or soup—

**ALLEN.** Who copulated ecstatic and insatiate with a bottle of beer a sweetheart a package of cigarettes a candle and fell off the bed, and continued along the floor and down the hall and ended up fainting on the wall with a vision of ultimate cunt and come and eluding the last gyzm of consciousness—

**EHRlich.** Seeking, seeking, seeking always, broken down, crying, everything is wrong with him, they do everything Solomon is doing, everything he ought not to do. He goes on through Colorado—

**ALLEN.** Who journeyed to Denver, who died in Denver, who came back to Denver and waited in vain. Who watched over Denver and brooded and loned in Denver—

**EHRlich.** (*With finality:*) Your Honor!

(*Drums end. Silence. All eyes on EHRlich.*)

What shall I quote to convey the thought that great works and classics of literature are at first condemned by those who see destruction in everything they cannot understand and find pornographic skeletons in every closet? I point out that Voltaire's *Candide* was originally condemned as obscene because it dealt with sex. But even

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