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SEEKING VISIONARY: GINSBERG AND THE BEAT INFLUENCE ON PROGRESS

Mark Allen Howard

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

Department of English

Anett Jessop, Ph.D., Committee Chair

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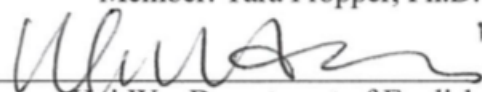
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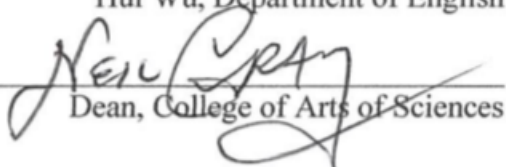
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I dedicate this thesis to my family (my father, Dan; my mother, Kerry; my brother, Luke; and my dog, Waffles), whose tremendous support and care have allowed me to be successful in my academic efforts.

I also dedicate this thesis to my closest friends (Dannika Blackhurst, Elizabeth Boshers, Collin Coleman, and Martin Walczak) that encouraged and challenged me to see and think beyond what I believed myself to be capable of as a human being.

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Seeking Visionary: Ginsberg and The Beat Influence on Progress

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Abstract

This thesis examines and reevaluates the impact of poet Allen Ginsberg and his Beat Generation counterparts on defining and portraying societal progress through countercultural literature and how they themselves may damage the impact of their works. Beat poets like Ginsberg may not act as the best representation of the counterculture due to unethical and immoral behaviors that take away from the credibility and impact of their work. In addition, the Beat Generation itself must be reevaluated for clarity in who should be associated with the original Beat writers as modern critics' use of the beat terminology has lumped in artists like Hunter S. Thompson and Bob Dylan as part of or derivative of the Beats. This thesis seeks to evaluate these issues in three parts: first by defining define a disenfranchised generation, the force that acts in opposition to their success, and the path to rectifying their issues; second by distinguishing the difference between Beats like Ginsberg, Gonzo writers like Thompson, and Beat affiliates like Dylan; and lastly by reevaluating how the Beats should be read in the modern era as separate from their works to maintain their efficacy in examining their place in literary and cultural history.

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Chapter 1

Together in Rockland: Societal Progression Through “America” and “Howl”

The divisiveness between mainstream and countercultural American society stems from an ideological difference of a model for sociopolitical values, economic principles, and national interests (Greene 6). As a result, those who are viewed as representing the nation’s society and culture continue to segregate themselves based on the scope of how conservative or progressive their values are (Chua). This schism is not new as, even at the nation’s inception, the choice to remain a British loyalist or assume the role of an American revolutionary finds a basis in social and cultural tribalism between the loyalists and revolutionaries. However, this age-old division is noteworthy as countercultural groups such as the Beat Generation have added arguments to analyzing the impact of the counterculture on the mainstream. Specifically, the discourse of Allen Ginsberg’s (1926-1997) poems, “Howl” (1955) and “America” (1956), provides literary insight into his view of contemporary divisions of U.S. society by bridging the gap between cultural and sociopolitical tribes of the 20th and 21st centuries. An analysis of Ginsberg’s poetry clarifies the necessity of an ideological consensus and movement amongst readership to drive the American national consciousness towards a more progressive culture so as to avoid a decline in societal progression (specifically in regards to economic and cultural freedoms) while also deemphasizing any one individual as an exemplar for representing any influential group. While “America” is a key poem for understanding the decline of American society as ideological, economic, and cultural divisions increase, its pairing with “Howl” aids in determining what precisely makes up the image of an America defined by the Beat Generation by identifying the

components of its society and the division it must overcome. This chapter serves to analyze the schema “Howl” offers for understanding Ginsberg’s view of the social and cultural divisions of his time and how they still apply to the current period as his writing sought to advance the countercultural traditions of defying the established expectations of society and culture and gathering in protest against oppression and stigmatization. Structurally speaking, Part I of “Howl” defines the creation and normalization of an in-group’s ideology through the “best minds” of America; Part II describes obstructive forces in the form of Moloch, Ginsberg’s representation of oppression, halting and impacting society’s progression; and Part III identifies a model for American society through Carl Solomon, who acts as the embodiment of who can enable and provide a possibility for change having been a victim of society’s oppression, and the potential for unity and progression within the utopic “Rockland.”

Even when compared to equally autobiographical and sociopolitically concerned poems such as “Plutonian Ode” (1978) or “Kaddish” (1961), “Howl” (1955) and “America” (1956) best represent Ginsberg’s voice and messages when analyzing the poet’s composition style and critical reception as they set the greatest precedent for both his skill and literary depth. The poems from Ginsberg’s earlier works (i.e. his *Empty Mirror* period, 1947-1951) mostly mirrored a style similar to the poetry of his father, Louis Ginsberg (1895-1976); such poems as “After All, What Else Is There To Say?” from this period did reveal early glimpses of his developing autobiographical style that he would utilize in poems like “Howl” (Schumacher 142). Furthermore, the poem “Hymn” featured a similar lineation to “Howl” in the poet’s choice to feature long lines of text that would be slightly indented to indicate that the words belonged to that particular line and should be read together. It was not until his resignation from a Madison

Avenue marketing agency that Ginsberg's efforts to achieve a new poetic voice resulted in *Howl and Other Poems*, which would serve two purposes: 1) acquiring a wider appreciation in the San Francisco literary scene and 2) poetically capturing the psychological impact of masturbation-induced visions of William Blake and the monstrous cityscapes surrounding him (Ginsberg and Portuges 106). Through this experiment with a more confessional voice compared to his previous works, Ginsberg found not only his niche as a Beat writer, but effectively distanced himself from his father's style of writing as they disagreed with each other's methods of composition and style (Braitman, Ginsberg, and Ginsberg 97-99). By embracing the influence of his urban environment and day-to-day experiences on his emotions and mental state as the essence of his writing process, Ginsberg argued he was able to unify his art and life into a singular form of expression that created a more honest and authentic representation of who he was as both an artist and individual (Schumacher 142). Moreover, the anti-capitalist and pro-Marxist/Communist influence of Ginsberg's mother, Naomi, appears to be much more influential for the poet as he was no doubt inspired by her ideological devotion to communism and position within the American Communist Party during his youth (Schumacher 2). Granted, the poet's newfound efforts and attitude were not without controversy as the contents of *Howl and Other Poems* were challenged in court over allegations of obscenity. The court ruling in favor of Ginsberg's work resulted in not only the exoneration of the distributors, poet, and poem, but an important expansion for American freedom of speech as the poem was determined to be socially important to the overall advancement of literature and art (Ginsberg *Howl Original Facsimile* 174).

When fellow Beats Michael McClure (1932-2020) and Gary Snyder (1930-), witnesses of Ginsberg's first reading of "Howl" at the Six Gallery, remarked that his performance was revolutionary not only for influencing their own creative interests, but for the poet's own stylistic evolution, it laid a foundation for what arguably should be identified as mainstream Beat poetry (Tytell 638). This distinction is why it is critically necessary to evaluate the content of "Howl" and "America" as both poems are indicative of the poet's life experiences and observations of friends (i.e. Carl Solomon, William S. Burroughs, etc.) as told in graphic, stream-of-consciousness poetic stylings because they identify and represent what Ginsberg viewed as the "best minds of a generation" and the state of America itself (Ginsberg "Howl" 1, 124-126). For these reasons, "Howl" and "America" are the best representations of Ginsberg's voice at that time during what he viewed as the "spiritual and cultural decline of [contemporary] America" (Schumacher 206, 218). However, the separation of the artist from his art is necessary to advance the study of the two poems—and, ultimately, the Beat poetic canon—due in part to Ginsberg's problematic persona that, according to critical opinion and his own questionable actions such as his endorsement of pro-pedophilia organizations, damages the strength of the works when viewed as representative of the author ("Howl" 1).

As an individual, Ginsberg was complex and, sometimes, paradoxical in his personal views on sexuality, politics, and religion. He declared himself to be everything from a "gay poet" in an intimate lifelong relationship with Peter Orlovsky to being a man that is "neither queer nor bisexual" and willing to "sleep with whoever [he wanted]" as he did with Helen Parker in 1950 during his attempt at heterosexuality (Aronowitz 2; Ginsberg "Howl" 36; Schumacher 168). Additionally, Ginsberg was raised studying Judaism, yet later took a vow of devotion to the

Buddhist faith in 1971; nevertheless, he continued to describe himself as a Jewish poet regardless of his other religious adherence (Pacernick 239; Schumacher 566). Furthermore, he was a politically active American citizen who advocated for freedom of speech, drug legalization, and decreased military involvement in Vietnam and Central America, but Ginsberg favored undemocratic styles of government such as anarchism and the communistic Cuban and Soviet models of government and economy (Schumacher 273, 657). Without biographical knowledge of the poet, the nuances and clarity of Ginsberg's writing are more ambiguous to the untrained reader because of his use of vague and somewhat contradictory ways of referring to real-life friends and figures he was writing about, which detracts from the autobiographical aspect of his writing. "Howl" is a prime example of this issue.

While "Footnote to Howl" explicitly names figures present in Ginsberg's life (i.e., Peter Orlovsky, Carl Solomon, Lucien Carr, Jack Kerouac, Herbert Huncke, Neal Cassady, and William S. Burroughs), the "who" of "Howl's" Part I is never explicitly defined, only identifying the people mentioned to be the "best minds" and their various attributes. In his annotated edition of "Howl," Ginsberg does provide evidence of who and what he is referencing in these lines, but these annotations are not available as part of the standard edition of the poem, leaving readers unaware of these autobiographical nuances without further research. Comparatively, the description of Moloch in Part II of "Howl" is more clearly defined as a force acting on those "best minds" with a mind of "pure machinery," "running money" for blood, "ten armies" for fingers, and ears made from "smoking tomb[s]" (Ginsberg "Howl" 83). While Ginsberg does give greater explanation to Moloch's presence in the poem as being the "commercial, mechanical heartless god" to whom Hebrews sacrificed their children as depicted in the Old Testament, the

description in the poem allows for a more generic and metaphorical interpretation of Moloch as an antagonistic force of excess acting on an urban environment (McIntyre and Ginsberg 210). The overall benefit from this detached and implicit perspective is the ability to approach the poem from a framework that allows the concept of the author to exist merely as a “construct of the reader” and enable a greater “interpretative space” for discussion (Wilson 343). As a consequence, the writing itself is under no obligation to associate itself with the writer now that the ideas are communicated exclusively from the page they are read on. In creating this distinction, both “Howl” and “America” are separate from the requirement of biographical details to create meaning and are now subject to broadened analytical opportunities for a modern study of poetry depicting societal change, identifying the intricacies of a generation and the forces acting in opposition to them, and distinguishing a model citizen and environment for change to occur.

To best understand “Howl,” though, one must first understand the environment created in “America” (1956), a survey of “the spiritual and cultural decline of America” (Schumacher 206). Here, the speaker asserts their position as America itself, all-encompassing, as “It occurs to [them] that [they] are America [and that they] are talking to [themselves] again” (Ginsberg “America” 45-46). In defining themselves as both place and people, the speaker provides the audience an authoritative view of someone who can speak to the nation’s composition and inhabitants as they secure their autonomy and hegemony while calling for an end to a “human war” of class, culture, and race (Ginsberg “America” 4). When compared to the United States’ thriving economy and technological advancements in 1956, the year of the poem’s composition, “America” the nation-speaker is prospering as well, having catalogued “national resources

[consisting of] two joints of marijuana,” “millions of genitals,” “an unpublishable private literature,” and twentyfive-thousand mental institutions" as evidence of the country's successfulness (Ginsberg 50; Greene 1). This prosperity is not long-lasting though as conflict has reduced "America" to nothing after having used everything it possessed to preserve itself, leaving it unable to stand its own mind, which the reader can infer to mean "America" itself (Ginsberg "America" 1, 3). Assumedly, this decline stems from the national conflict generated by the society-based "human war," begging the question of "when [America] will be angelic again" or if it ever truly was (Ginsberg "America" 8). Historically, 1950s' American society was at odds between jaded, non-conformist Beat counterculture and the affluent, approval-seeking "straight" mainstream society as a result of shifting societal expectations as the cultural appropriate roles of men and women blurred ever more as tradition came to be at odds with societal progression (Greene 3-5) This "America" also mirrored the 1950s' minority populations as "millions of [Americans] underprivileged who live in [their] flowerpots," who were still subject to racial discrimination, segregation, violence, and poverty as the Civil Rights Act of 1963 had yet to be guaranteed legally defined equality and equity between races (Ginsberg "America" 43; Greene 4). Although modern society has improved over the past seventy years, high incarceration rates, white supremacy-related terrorism, and police violence towards historical disenfranchised groups have persisted due in part to a lack of social and economic change. In similarity, the speaker of "America" notes that it is easier to decline commentary on issues like an ever-growing prison system and rely on distractions such as "Time Magazine" to run their intellectual and "emotional life" rather than progress society to a sustainable and equitable point by righting the wrongs of the past through action (Ginsberg

“America” 57). Ginsberg’s depiction of society becoming complacent helps to argue the necessity of sociocultural progression as the poem implies America’s underdeveloped understanding of itself and role within society. Arguably, this lack of comprehension could stem from “America” displacing any insecurity onto “them Russians and them Chinamen” in an accusatory and xenophobic fashion (Ginsberg “America” 65). One might argue that this displacement is tied to those who are ideologically aligned with American nationalism or jingoism and its opposition to anything remotely reminiscent of socialist/communist values on American soil. Thus, by blaming the counterculture or minority populations for corrupting the system for any perceived inferiority, this tribal approach diffuses the mainstream or prevalent group’s responsibility and need for corrective action. Additionally, it demonstrates Ginsberg’s argument for how the mainstream has failed to serve the disenfranchised or voiceless in the United States as “America” places emphasis on Russian and China being blamed for any perceived societal failures in “America.” Because “America[n]” society is in decline and America itself is unable to comprehend personal responsibility by choosing to focus on distractors like “Time Magazine” rather than adjust its issues, its misaligned priorities of stigmatizing those external un-American forces rather than reinvesting and reinventing its own internal operations demonstrate the impact of prejudice on society as a whole due to lack of understanding.

Moreover, the inaccuracy in blaming “them Russians and them Chinamen” for America’s ills relates to a lack of worldly education as both the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union have faced their own similar societal issues, both contemporarily and currently. Following the passage of the Marriage Law (1950), the Chinese government had intended to effectively

change its society and culture by “instilling the [legally assured] promise of equal rights for women in all aspects of life” and permitting divorce for women in arranged marriages, both of which theoretically enabled women of the 1950s to freely and consensually engage in social, political, and romantic matters in the same way their male counterparts were able to (Li 31-32). However, this progression proved to not to last as, due to a rapid increase in the rates of women being murdered or committing suicide, the Chinese government redefined its national goals away from the individual to attempt to regain “collective stability” by regulating divorce rates and advocating for women to shift into domestic roles or become housewives (Li 32). By shifting away from the new freedoms for women, the Chinese government faltered on their assurances and shifted the societal consciousness away from its progression. These problems have continued even in contemporary Chinese society as increasing mass surveillance, human rights violations, and censorship have limited political and social progression beyond the needs of the state (Roth). Considering this information, the fact that America could ever potentially blame Chinese interference in its development or decline is asinine for the same reason it cannot accept its own faults: the government is working too hard to limit its own potential to even begin to worry about limiting others.

The same comparison can be made between “America” and Russia during these time periods. Despite similar industrial and technological advances made to parallel their Western competitors following World II, Soviet society under the USSR was no stranger to infringing upon the rights of their citizens through “denunciations, deportations, interments..., torture, and execution” (Khanin 1198-1201; Weitz 283, 295). A modern Russian government under President Vladimir Putin has maintained an authoritarian system that provides legal protections and

flexibility for the elite and limited political representation for opposing parties and ideologies (Stiftung 3, 8). Any argument that the “power mad” Russians want to “eat [Americans] alive” is nonsensical as the concept of a “human war” in Chinese, Russian, and “American” society is a universal problem created by the individual governments of the nations resisting change regardless of how much decline is the result of a lack of progression (Ginsberg “America” 4, 64).

In spite of the fact that Part I of “Howl” is famous for its representation of what may arguably be the best minds in American society, a more accurate description is that it depicts the best representation of the average mind. Specifically, “Howl’s” opening declares that, when filtered through “God, drugs, sex, and absurdity,” the “pleasure and spontaneity” of the common life experience increases as it opposes seriousness and stagnation; this is made clear through the use of common “direct speech” that readily aligns with the thoughts and feelings of the average person who might lack any training in understanding and analyzing literature (Murmis 65; Wallenstein 549). Although one may argue from a modern perspective that forming an exemplar for what attributes make up the best interpretation of the average person is improbable due to subjectivity, “Howl” does not discuss the individual; rather, it focuses on an amalgamation of all available aspects of a collective society, which is emphasized through the collective “who” featured throughout the poem. Ginsberg’s original basis for the “who” of Part I of “Howl” is based on biographical references to the poet’s life, ranging from events he witnessed or actions he performed. For example, line seven of “Howl” describes someone “who [was] expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes on the windows of the skull,” a direct reference to Ginsberg’s time at Columbia College, where he would draw images of “male genitalia and skull and crossbones” and inscribe obscene phrases such as “Fuck The Jews” on his

window (Ginsberg *Howl Original Facsimile* 126). Furthermore, Line 37 is a reference to poet Hart Crane, “who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love” before ultimately disappearing “off the fantail of the Caribbean ship *Orizaba*” (Ginsberg “Howl”; Ginsberg *Howl Original Facsimile* 152). However, without discounting the poem’s critical history or relationship to the poet, limiting these lines to a purely biographical reference does a disservice to opportunities for a more comprehensive view of the poem at large.

When analyzing line seven from a non-biographical view, the imagery of being “expelled from the academies” as a result of “crazy & publishing obscene odes on the widows of the skull” should invoke some form of response from the reader because it creates a point for personal association or a source of alienation from the collective society (Ginsberg “Howl” 7). One potential interpretation of this line is that it is an opportunity to argue for the rebellious spirit present in the “who” by establishing a notion of countercultural rebellion against the established academia and academic figures, especially considering one is simply not expelled from academia without reason and one’s decision to purposely depict obscenity. However, this interpretation also speaks to the downside of interpreting each line from an individual perspective: each line has an infinite number of interpretations for an infinite number of solutions for how to accurately and adequately depict the “who”. Thus, the best opportunity for evaluating the collective “who” is to analyze themes depicted throughout the poem. Those “who bared their brains to Heaven... and saw Mohammedan angels” help begin an argument for religion within the collective (Ginsberg “Howl” 37). From religion, imagery of sexual interactions are formed as seraphim are described as engaging in oral sex and “blood & naked angel[s]” are seen piercing others with

their swords, which is likely an innuendo; however, there are also non-sexual references to St. John of the Cross, Golgotha, and the phrase *eli eli lamma lamma sabacthani*, a quotation from Psalms 22 (and Mark 15:34, where Jesus recites this whilst being crucified) (Ginsberg “Howl” 77). The use of drugs is also featured heavily throughout the poem with benzedrine, marijuana, narcotics, tobacco, opium, and metrazol named explicitly, each with their own negative implications regardless of recreational and/or therapeutic use.

What is significant about the discussion of drugs in Part I is that the use of substances translates to a greater issue that the collective “who” faces: addiction and its overall effect on society. For users of the stimulant benzedrine, thrill-seeking and irrational behavior are demonstrated as they “chained themselves to subways for the endless ride from Battery to holy Bronx... until the noise of wheels and children brought them down shuddering” (Ginsberg “Howl” 10). Consumers of tobacco are seen committing acts of self-harm “protesting the... haze of Capitalism” by “burning cigarette holes in their arms” (Ginsberg “Howl” 31). Additionally, the use of tobacco is paired with narcotics as a description of capitalism, which seeks to emphasize the addictive and seemingly requisite qualities of that system to keep society functioning and to avoid withdrawals. Marijuana users appear to have legal issues as they “got busted in their pubic beards through Laredo with a belt of marijuana” on their persons (Ginsberg “Howl” 9). Conversely, uses of metrazol are exclusively for therapeutic use to help aid against psychosis or madness as part of “psychotherapy [and] occupational therapy” as an alternative to an “instantaneous lobotomy” (Ginsberg “Howl” 66). Opium arguably has one of the more negative connotations in the poem as users are seen traversing the “snowbank docks waiting

for... a room full of steam-heat” after continuously walking all night to the point their shoes fill with blood (Ginsberg “Howl” 45).

According to American Addiction Centers, the likelihood of drug use and abuse is likely tied to mental illness and environmental factors such as peer/familial influences, community (dis)interest, and academic achievement (Thomas). Furthermore, as of 2017, it is estimated that over twenty million people, who are at least age 12, have required substance abuse treatment, yet only 19 percent (~3.8 million) of those individuals have received it (Thomas). What this reveals is that, in order to revamp a collective society’s dependence on substances, one must impact its cultural attitude towards drugs through changing society. Metaphorically, these drugs in the poem are also related to the vices that American socioeconomics appear to create and ultimately corrupt. If one was to describe the American economic system as a drug, it would closely mirror caffeine due to its legality, ease of access (usually incorporated in a liquid form), and availability. Because it is so easy to obtain and use with minor withdrawal effects, it is not considered a danger to the mainstream population. Although capitalism is seemingly part of the mainstream American way of life, the question of whether it is helping or hurting these individuals that take part in its system appears to be raised by the speaker. If day-to-day life in the current system is as impacted by this system/drugs as alleged, then it is arguable that the speaker describes their collective struggles as a way to highlight the dangers and call for a replacement as these drugs are related to the “who’s” apparent inability to avoid their dangerous and self-destructive tendencies brought out by the mainstream’s lack of prudence and their willingness to allow dangerous substances to remain an issue in their communities. Much of the problems the “who” faces legally, physically, and emotionally can be tied directly to these drugs’ impact on their lives

more so than anything else, which also explains why it is important to analyze the characteristics of the collective. Those represented in Part I of “Howl” are not infallible representations of humankind; they succumb to vice, self-harm, and excess; they engage in sexually promiscuous activities; they are imperfect and, therefore, the most accurate representations of a society in decline that is in need of some form of progress to improve their overall conditions.

To understand the force creating this decline, Part II of “Howl” allows the reader to isolate and describe the enemy of the “who” that is Moloch, a “sphinx of cement and aluminum [that] bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imaginations (Ginsberg “Howl” 79). Mentioned in the Old Testament, Moloch is a god “to which you sacrifice children” that was worshipped alongside other false idols by the Israelites (Mcintyre and Ginsberg 209). Ginsberg’s choice to use Moloch stemmed from his idea that Moloch’s role in a modern setting would be to devour the children of urban environments and, eventually, the world itself as technology became more advanced and invasive (Mcintyre and Ginsberg 210). Depicting Moloch as a sphinx indicates that it is an aging, if not ancient, structure propped up by society and celebrated as a false idol; its construction of cement and aluminum is equally noteworthy because cement arguably has a harder exterior and a denser consistency than aluminum, which is far more malleable. In other words, while the outside is difficult to pierce, the inside is flimsy, indicating a potential for an ideological shift. However, the fact this force has continued to break “open their skulls and [eat] up their brains and imagination” demonstrates that this shift has not occurred, and explains why “whole intellects [were] disgorged in total recall for seven days and nights,” leaving the collective “who” in a state of existing as “a consciousness without a body” (Ginsberg “Howl” 79, 87). Because Moloch is the dominant force over society, the fact society has

continued to allow it to reign over time begs the question of whether this servitude or worship was chosen. Although “They broke their backs lifting Moloch to Heaven,” the end result was that society became a “Mad generation... down on the rocks of Time!” (Ginsberg 89, 92). From a physical standpoint, humanity pales in comparison to Moloch’s composition as flesh and bone may have the complexity of machinery, but it lacks the individual strength Moloch possesses; ironically, that is also the key weakness of Moloch. Because Moloch is the individual embodiment of materialism and capitalistic society, the “who” stands apart from it because it is a union of the collective attributes of a society.

While one could make an argument for why Moloch is also a collective, considering its ideological and physical assembly makes up an environment of “skeleton treasuries,” “demonic industries,” and “spectral nations,” the main separation between Moloch and the “who” is that Moloch alone generates the sensations of “hallucinations,” “miracles,” and “ecstasies” as it is the entirety of their environment (Ginsberg “Howl” 88, 90). The “who” is a collection of individuals acting in unity. However, in Moloch’s singularity, it holds tremendous power as it does not require the same need of a collective energy or presence to fully demonstrate its capabilities; it can stand alone not only from its rigid, yet malleable constitution, but because its “name is the Mind” (Ginsberg “Howl” 85). The mind is a singular entity that holds dominion over the individual’s perception. If perception is reality, then Moloch’s will is whatever shape society will respond to because of its power to shake the people from their “natural ecstasy” (Ginsberg “Howl” 87). Thus, the essential point made during Part II is the necessity of recognizing the composition of adversity as a singular force operating within and against a collective consciousness. This leads to Part III, which seeks to depict a model for overcoming this adversity

in the image of Carl Solomon as well as depicting a model society that allows for overcoming the boundaries created by stagnating oppression.

As with previous biographical interpretations of Part III of Ginsberg's "Howl", it is without question that his concern over Solomon's admittance into Pilgrim State Hospital served as the initial inspiration for "Howl" and, upon the poem's completion, the resulting "catharsis [allowed Ginsberg to rise] above the self-pity that blocked his attempts to move forward in his life" as an individual and writer (Schumacher 260). With that being said, the more important aspect of Part III is the anaphoric "I'm with you in Rockland" as it serves a dual purpose: 1) to establish a connection between Solomon and the existing society and 2) providing reason for society to model itself towards this goal (Ginsberg "Howl" 94). Through Solomon, the collective is able to begin its foundation for development; by having a single force to rally behind, they can be collectively represented through a single force as the speaker anaphorically declares throughout all of Part III that "I'm with you in Rockland" (Ginsberg "Howl" 95). Through "Rockland," they provide themselves an idea of a place where such development can take shape. By affirming themselves through these reference points, they can overcome their imperfections, struggles, and individual components through unity and have a chance against Moloch's oppression. In doing so, the "who" shifts to "we" as "[they] are all greater writers on the same dreadful typewriter" in a place where "the faculties of [their] skulls no longer admit the worms of the senses" and they can "hug and kiss the United States under [their] bedsheets" (Ginsberg "Howl" 99, 101, 110). The benefit of sharing the "same dreadful typewriter" is a pragmatic one; individually, they would be writing their own stories of dread, but, as a collective, they write one nuanced representation of their society regardless of positivity or negativity (Ginsberg "Howl"

99). This unity is part of the reason there is a lack of “worms” - a metaphor for any unwanted and invasive danger - in the “skull,” or the collective mind rather, as it indicates the cessation or treatment of those vices and points of abuse that previously impacted and altered the collective mind and imagination (Ginsberg “Howl” 101). Unfortunately, by choosing to no longer admit the “worms of the senses,” this may deprive the senses themselves of the stimuli they were used to and, thus, negatively impact perception (Ginsberg “Howl” 101).

To better explain this deprivation, consider the effects of an unhealthy stimulus such as cocaine on a bodily function like dopamine production. Dopamine is necessary for “memory formation, movement and coordination abilities, and attention functions” and is naturally produced by the brain (American Addiction Centers Editorial Staff). When the body is artificially flooded with excess amounts of dopamine, the brain responds by decreasing its natural production and absorption of this neurotransmitter, creating a need for cocaine users to reintroduce excess dopamine through cocaine usage to avoid withdrawal symptoms (American Addiction Centers Editorial Staff). By shutting off the “worms” affecting the senses, the skull must now rely on its faculties, implied to be the skull’s instincts (Ginsberg “Howl” 101). However, if the instincts have had to previously rely on worms to function, then the instincts become unreliable because they lack the necessary energy, which means the skull will stagnate due to unreliable or non-existent stimuli. While some might argue this is an encouragement for continuing to embrace unhealthy stimuli, the other side of the issue is that it is equally dangerous for the mind to become overwhelmed by unreliable perception. That is why the instincts must be made pure through a collective effort and relationship; in other words, the collective “we” must all write on the “same dreadful typewriter” of experience if they have any chance to reach their

utopia of “Rockland” (Ginsberg “Howl” 110). Before the final relationship can be developed, the “we” must first overcome the “United States that coughs all night and won’t let [them] sleep,” which is arguably symbolic of a Moloch-dominated society (110). The cough is symbolic of a societal sickness, one that is capable of spreading and heavily infectious. The choice to individually come into physical contact with this illness is not advisable as there is no chance for herd immunity from sociopolitical or socioeconomic stagnation when the mainstream is not open to an alternative. If approaching this illness with a foundation and collective support though, the “we” has a better chance of overcoming this illness because they have already overcome the dangers of Moloch. Therefore, what is gained from Part III of “Howl” is the necessity to overcome negative environmental interference and promote unity by creating and operating within a tolerant society. By viewing “Howl” and “America” in unison, readers are ultimately provided with a solution to societal decline by promoting progressivism and collectivism in society.

A notable example of Ginsberg’s power over his audience occurred in 1979 when protestors carrying a soup pot attempted to start a riot and destroy the stage during a reading in Italy; rather than let violence and disruption ensue, Ginsberg simply asked the audience to sit down and “shut up” in order to continue the performance and allow for the protestors to be removed from the venue (Feldman and Ginsberg 151). Because of the fact that the entire audience obliged this request, it goes without saying that Ginsberg’s live audiences were incredibly receptive and suggestible. It is, for this exact reason, that framing Ginsberg as an individual representative of any progressive and/or countercultural movement is a disservice to that movement because of the likelihood that anyone questioning the motives of that movement and its followers would

assuredly have a negative outlook on that organization once they realized its main representative maintained questionable views on the subjects of pedophilia and child pornography. Ginsberg, who endorsed the North American Man Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) and denounced anti-child pornography laws, believed that he was fighting against the censorship of free speech and free thought through his stance. Schumacher's (1992) analysis of this belief attempts to support this fact:

Allen had broached the topic of sex with underaged gay boys, joking that he must be a pedophile because he found some youth physically attractive... In Allen's view, frank discussion could have the effect of alleviating sexual tension, whereas refusing to allow an exchange of ideas could only add to it. (851-852)

The issue with taking Ginsberg's commentary in jest or as part of artistic exploration is that Ginsberg himself appears to double down on his beliefs regarding underage sexual encounters, specifically in his article, "The Right to Depict Children in the Nude". Arguing against the stringency of child pornography and indecency laws, he argues that these laws limit artistic freedoms and appreciation as the legality of existing images could shift as a result of legislation (Ginsberg and Richey 42). In actuality, the laws protecting against sexual violence or depictions of adolescents engaging in sexual activities are not meant to censor free speech; as a reinforcement of morality, these laws are intended to protect children from being endangered or harmed on a physical and/or psychological level. As a result, this throws "Howl" and "America" both into a position to be critically evaluated as any sexual activity or reference being related to children. Although the sex acts depicted in "Howl" can be traced to an adult origin based on the historical evidence provided in the poem, this creates a dilemma within Ginsbergian criticism.

By taking away an association with Ginsberg and solely leaving the objectivity of the poems' content, it removes any question of illegality or immorality and leaves the poetry more open to interpretation as the subjectivity of the themes and literary merit will no longer bear a burden of association with pedophilia. With this being said, the question of how to remove the artist's persona from the art is a difficult proposition for many reasons.

First, because Ginsberg is not only a part of the Beat Generation, but the architect of the Beat manifesto and canonizer of the official Beat roster, this leads to an argument of who can replace him as part of the Beat pantheon. From that argument would lead to an even greater and unanswerable debate of what correct conglomeration of Beat poets/writers can be used to substitute and recreate the Beat and American literary landscape due to a lack of any objective, quantifiable method of determining this. Additionally, there is no way to erase the impact of Ginsberg from literary history or delete his name from his works as there is not any justifiable reason to do so because his printed work does not technically violate any laws beyond a question of personal taste and differing interpretations of morality. Rather, a potential option is to look at his poetry from a societal view as part of the collective literary experience. Because a collective interpretation beyond the author's thoughts and feelings adds to the nuance of the subject matter and art as a whole, readers can overcome this problem of the poet's less appropriate opinions. Some critics would argue that, by giving the reader's opinion the same critical weight as the author, this would defeat the purpose of giving the author any authority in the reception of their work because it would lack the same intent, purpose, and training of the author. Critics like Dunn would argue that, by taking away the performance aspect, this would limit the "transfer of energy" and the relationship of the body and the art that it comes from (75). However, critics

have already historically criticized Ginsberg's authority in his own work as overly indulgent and lacking self-control as a result of his presence within his writings without necessarily criticizing the writings themselves due to their ingenuity for the time.

For example, Lipton (1969) viewed Ginsberg's work as a breakthrough for the poetic voice overall, but disapproved of what he viewed to be an overt "self-love in his lack of self-editing" and lacking in its word choice, which left a product that felt "whiny" and "self-pitying" as an original composition (26-27). Conversely, Tytell (2015) views negative critiques of Ginsberg's poetry and voice as a severe oversight of the poet's depth as a writer in his references to religion, philosophy, and politics (646). Although both of these commentaries could be based on implications of personal taste, this criticism has been consistent throughout studies of Ginsberg in terms of negative personal criticism and positive evaluations of his poetry. Therefore, there is no question that the depth and complexity of the poem is there; the poet himself though is problematic because the association between Ginsberg and his poetry ultimately weakens the poetry due to a negative view of him. Granted, his poems do depict illegal and debased activities such as drug abuse and violence, but the analysis of Ginsberg's poetry separate from the poet reveals that these problems are solvable on a societal and literary level. Ginsberg himself though cannot be solved. Thus, having everyone's opinion carry equal weight works from a collective standpoint because, in addition to simultaneously entertaining and ignoring the author's presence, the audience can continue to embrace the work in a variation of the mass scale the work was intended for. Therefore, by not having the influence of the voice and the persona, the audience can read it on their own and have a greater opportunity for discussion that does not

have to reflect upon or directly parrot the poet, but still appreciate the words and content for what it is.

Overall, the discourse throughout “Howl” and “America” provides a literary insight into how the societal decline of America at large and how the collective population might overcome opposing forces like Moloch in order to achieve cultural progression. When viewed separately from the influence of Ginsberg, the poems define a rallying point for the oppressed to stand their ground against those opposing them and a plan of action to progress society through collective self-expression and understanding. However, Ginsberg himself is a flawed voice for a progressive or Beat ideology due to his questionable advocacy and positive outlook towards child pornography and pedophilia. As a result, Ginsberg’s poetry is best read in isolation from the author not only to avoid associations with immorality, but to further the opportunities for critical analysis. Although Ginsberg himself is forever tied to his poetry as its author, his poetry’s insight and commentary does not have to be exclusively tied to its author as the historical period and culture can be just as easily seen through the various allusions, metaphors, and rhetorical devices that do not require an association with its author.

Chapter 2

A Beat Aftershock: Establishing Distinction Between The Original Beats and Beat-Offshoots

According to Allen Ginsberg, the term “Beat” arose from the colloquial language of New York City’s Times Square area as a way of expressing one’s position in life as impoverished; the term “Beat Generation” came from a conversation between Jack Kerouac and John Clellon Holmes in either 1950 or 1951 as they discussed how to accurately characterize their own generation and its overall nature against other historical periods (Ginsberg “A Definition of The Beat Generation by Allen Ginsberg”). Although these terms have seen corruption by critics who use the term when broadly describing any countercultural writer who experimented with illegal substances and expressed themselves through taboo or controversial subject matters, there is a clear schema defined by Ginsberg himself for what constitutes an original Beat writer as opposed to someone who would be otherwise improperly classified: 1) their initial region of origin when they became affiliated with the writing scene, 2) their social inclusion into Beat social circles, and 3) their ideological similarity to the Beat writers. In establishing this criteria, one can identify an original Beat writer such as Ginsberg and compare them to others who may be incorrectly described as Beat or associated with them, such as Nobel Prize-winning singer/songwriter Bob Dylan or Gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson, in order to accurately portray their individual literary and cultural significance. As it currently stands, Dylan and Thompson’s influence on both the mainstream and counterculture should be regarded as equal, if not greater, to that of the Beats due to their ability to transcend media and mediums. Furthermore, performing an analysis of the three artists’ classification in their respective literary movements within the mainstream and counterculture ultimately reveals how the decline of 20th

century counterculture occurs when normalizing and popularizing art which was otherwise unknown.

When examining the common locations the original Beat writers came from, one can trace their shared spaces in New York City as a meeting point for many of the Beats (specifically Columbia University and both the Times Square and Greenwich Village areas) and San Francisco, California. Thompson, who was not an original Beat writer, supported this, noting that the Beats arrived from “New York” and that “San Francisco was only a stop on the big circuit: Tangier, Paris, Greenwich Village, Tokyo, and India” and stated they had no relation to the Hippies that some would lump them in with (“The ‘Hashbury’ Is The Capital of The Hippies” 405). However, only basing the location the original Beats came from would result in too broad a qualifier to narrow down a specific group of writers in order to judge who is or is not able to be a “Beat”. Thus, it is also important to consider who the original Beats themselves deemed to be part of the Beat Generation. Ginsberg specifically lists the following as those would have been classically associated with the original Beats: Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, Herbert Huncke, John Clellon Holmes, Philip Lamantia, Gregory Corso, Peter Orlovsky, Neal Cassady, Carl Solomon, Michael McClure, Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Jack Micheline, Ray Bremser, and Amiri Baraka (or LeRoi Jones) (Ginsberg “A Definition of The Beat Generation by Allen Ginsberg”). This was until a period around the late 1950s to 1960s, where the term was broadly expanded by critics to reflect a culturally significant literary and artistic movement beyond the initial historic period (Ginsberg “A Definition of The Beat Generation by Allen Ginsberg”). This expansion would aid in critical discussion that originally excluded many that would go on to be associated with Beats such as Anne Waldman, Joanne Kyger, and Joyce Johnson. However, the

original group designated by Ginsberg reveals that, in Ginsberg's definition, one must be male and, with the exception of Baraka, caucasian in order to be considered a Beat writer. Lastly, Ginsberg cites the following ideological beliefs shared amongst the original Beats that must be present in order to establish one as a Beat writer: 1) a belief in liberation for oppressed peoples (i.e. African Americans, LGBTQIA+, women, etc.), 2) opposition to forms of censorship, 3) support for drug decriminalization, 4) belief in music as a high artform, 5) ecological awareness and respect towards indigenous peoples and their land, 6) opposition to "the military-industrial machine civilization", and 7) a desire to avoid a cultural and social decline in the modern era (Ginsberg "A Definition of The Beat Generation by Allen Ginsberg"). In establishing those boundaries, one could technically stop there in deciphering who can be branded an original Beat amongst the post-Beats. However, this rubric is solely based on Ginsberg's definition, which some may call biased or narrow-minded due to its exclusivity. To demonstrate why this argument does and does not hold merit, consider both Bob Dylan and Hunter S. Thompson's association with Ginsberg in the context of this criteria.

At first glance, both Thompson and Dylan could find shared roots with the original Beats, fit the description of a caucasian male, draw arguable ties to Beat figures - specifically Ginsberg - as well as through the broad context of the movement, and share most, if not, the same beliefs. From 1957 to 1962, Thompson did attempt, but fail, to attend Columbia University while trying to find consistent work in New York-based newspapers before migrating to the West Coast, eventually finding success in journalism, meeting Ginsberg in 1966, and publishing his first non-fiction work, *Hells Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs* (1967) (Dilawar). Likewise, Dylan would first meet Ginsberg in 1963 at a New York book store,

offering him an opportunity to accompany him on tour; Ginsberg would decline, but the two would eventually write and record music together, the more notable effort being “Vomit Express” (Wardle). These meetings would both be well after notable Beat works such as *Go*, *Naked Lunch*, and *Howl and Other Poems* were published. Therefore, the argument of either Thompson or Dylan being Beat writers would not be chronologically feasible in addition to the fact both men were younger than the Beats (i.e. Ginsberg was born in 1926 whereas Thompson and Dylan were born 1937 and 1941 respectively). Additionally, both Thompson and Dylan were reading Beat works before making their own impacts on literary history, making their works Beat-derivative or post-Beat rather than Beat-original. Granted, the individual efforts of Dylan and Thompson to advocate for political and social issues they felt strongly about is not at question as Dylan’s protest songs like “The Death of Emmett Till,” “Political World,” and “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll” demonstrate his belief in the need for a more socially equitable culture as well as Thompson’s efforts to raise awareness and ensure protections for constitutional rights.

However, Thompson would go on to reject any labelling of him or his works as Beat, noting that his “involvement was tangential at best” and that the “beatnik is no longer a social lion in San Francisco, but a social leper; as a matter of fact, it looked for a while as if they had all left” the San Francisco area by the time the term and movement had gained any real popularity (Thompson “How The Beatniks Were Social Lions” 417). This is not to say Thompson denied the impact of the Beats as he believed they deserved “a definite place in our history,” but regarded “most of it [as] dated and irrelevant (“How The Beatniks Were Social Lions” 418). Thompson’s admiration for the original Beats, specifically Kerouac and Burroughs’ work, has been noted by critics and by Thompson himself; furthermore, the relationship between himself

and Ginsberg had a crucial impact on his developing writing style and philosophy as Ginsberg is featured in two of his non-fiction works, taking a minor, yet significant role in his first book, *Hell's Angels*. When Thompson found himself embedded with the Hell's Angels, a motorcycle gang founded in Fontina, California, documenting a gathering on a property owned by Ken Kesey, both he and Ginsberg were briefly detained by law enforcement, who actually interviewed Ginsberg about how long it took him to grow a beard as Ginsberg hummed a "Near Eastern raga" (242). Ginsberg makes a final appearance towards the end of the book, imploring the Angels not to attack an anti-Vietnam War protest. Despite Ginsberg being the exact opposite of what the Angels' philosophy entailed (i.e. "anti-Communist", devout American jingoist etc"), Thompson noted that the Angels did respect his "unnerving frankness" and his relationship with Kesey as they felt that he was "otherworldly" and "the straightest sonofabitch" (258).

Additionally, in *Hells Angels*, Thompson included one of Ginsberg's poems, "To The Angels", which Thompson felt to be a speech and protest attempting to dissuade hostility as they noted that the purpose of the protest was because the protesters did not "want the country to drift into the habit of blind violence & unconscious cruelty & egoism NOT COMMUNICATION - with outside world or lonely minorities in America" (260). The Angels ended up not attacking, which may have been due in part to Ginsberg's appeals (264-265). Additionally, Thompson's inclusion of Ginsberg's "To The Angels" speaks to the tradition of protest that both Thompson and Beats engaged in to help further progressive and pacifist agendas such as anti-Vietnam War initiatives like The National Mobilization Committee to End The War in Vietnam.

Unlike the relationship between Dylan and Thompson, based mostly in admiration and shared pleasantries (for example, during Thompson's funeral, his ashes were shot out of a cannon

as “Mr. Tambourine Man” played in the background), the relationship between Ginsberg and Dylan is clear as Dylan claimed to have not begun writing poetry until after high school, gravitating towards Beat poets like Ginsberg and Gary Snyder as influences (Wardle). For Dylan, who regarded Ginsberg as a mentor and collaborator, the label of Beat is a bit more difficult to disregard as a song like “Subterranean Homesick Blues” would be described as Beat-esque with lyrical references to drugs and an apparent opposition to corruption and law enforcement (Marsquee 144). However, there are other bands and musicians that do not carry this burden of mislabeling. For example, Ginsberg’s poem “Hadda Be Playing On The Jukebox” would be performed by rap metal band Rage Against The Machine and Ginsberg would also record “The Ballad of the Skeletons” with Beatles bassist Paul McCartney and composer Philip Glass; none are labeled by critics as being Beat writers or musicians. As a result, it would not be accurate to base the inclusion of Dylan in the original Beat camp or even post-Beat on his relationship with Ginsberg or their occasional overlap of subject matter.

Regardless of labelling, both Thompson and Dylan carry their own cultural weight and impact without the labelling of Beat. Thompson created Gonzo journalism, a surrealist style of autobiographical writing that he based “on William Faulkner’s idea that the best fiction is far more true than any kind of journalism,” requiring “the talents of a master journalist, the eye of an artist/photographer and the heavy balls of an actor” (Thompson “Jacket Copy For Fear & Loathing In Las Vegas: A Savage Journey Into The Heart of The American Dream” 114). The best known example of this, the aforementioned *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, would ironically be regarded by him as as a failure in his own artform because he planned to “record everything in a notebook and send it in for publication unedited”, but he ended up “imposing an

essentially fictional framework” to it (Thompson 114-115). Bob Dylan’s music also bore a significant impact on music composition and history with his unique blend of folk, country, and rock and roll music overlaid with lyricism that spoke to national issues socially and culturally, such as civil rights infringements and the overreach of government and military in domestic and foreign affairs. Because both men created their own cult of personality through their unique appeals to listeners and readers, they were able to transcend the traditional formats of their respective mediums: for example, Dylan’s ability to put his art and creativity through the radio waves for syndication in addition to live appearances, print sales of his poetry and lyrics, and record sales allowed for his music and, therefore, his ideology to be consumed by the public easily and effortlessly. As of September 8th, 2021, Dylan’s songs “Knockin’ On Heaven’s Door” and “Like A Rolling Stone” have received nearly four hundred and sixty million listens alone on the Spotify music app since its launch in 2008. Likewise, Thompson’s *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* has been in publication since 1971. In 2005, when Thompson died from suicide by gunshot, a spokesperson from his publishing house said that they published on average between sixty to seventy thousand copies of the book per year previous to his death, which saw a spike in sales and interest (The Associated Press). That means that, if one took a median publication figure of sixty-five thousand copies and each of them were sold, that would still be 1.4 million copies since just 2005, not counting any preceding sales and publishing since the original book publication or the original syndication in *Rolling Stone*. In addition to his book sales, Thompson lives on in recordings of his various talk show appearances and interviews easily accessible via YouTube (for example, a 1978 BBC documentary of interviews of him and collaborator Ralph Steadman has over two million views) and in Uncle Duke, a caricature of him, featured in the

comic strip *Doonesbury*. Most recently, his work and persona have been featured as the main topic of discussion during an 2019 episode of *The Joe Rogan Experience*, a podcast with over 11 million YouTube subscribers hosted by controversial podcaster/comedian Joe Rogan, where Timothy Denevi, author of *Freak Kingdom: Hunter S. Thompson's Manic Ten-Year Crusade Against American Fascism*, was the main guest.

As a result, whether original Beat or not, all three of the artists demonstrate a wide-reaching appeal across culture and medium through their originality and unique approach to their fields. Moreover, their continued successes speak to the reach of the overall Beat-based aesthetic because, although critics and observers can debate an artist's Beatness, the progressive and liberal values featured in the works of each of the three artists appear to help maintain their individual appeal to an ever-growing audience in an ever-polarizing political climate. With this being said, it makes sense that art would be the perfect foundation for promoting progressive ideas because the appreciation of the ideas the art is built around is part of the communal experience of live performance and readings. Music is meant to be performed for someone and to be appreciated. Books and collections of writing are written with the intention of being read or, in Ginsberg's case, to be performed. When people absorb that information and share it, it not only spreads the information (regardless of a positive or negative evaluation as communication still indicates a spread), but the shared experience helps to create a mainstream awareness of an alternative or countercultural viewpoint that aids in creating an equality of information and viewpoint.

Should the art and its artist not be provided an opportunity to enter into the mainstream conversation, then this rejection of the mainstream provides a chance for the counterculture to

absorb it as part of their philosophy and conventions. The only problem in approaching the mainstream versus countercultural sponsorship of an artist and their works is that the co-opting of any one genre, figure, or idea cannot solely exist in either the mainstream or counterculture exclusively. When critics and consumers argue that a Gonzo writer like Thompson is a Beat writer, this assumes that Thompson also shares both the positive and negative implications of what constitutes the Beat image (i.e. politically driven, drug using, and prone to violent or sexual crimes or ideology). This makes sense to an extent because, while both Thompson and Ginsberg did have problematic opinions, questionable ethics, and shared a similar ideology as noted previously, there is a different methodology in their forms of expression. For example, the use of mythopoeic and hyperbolic writing is very similar between Thompson and Ginsberg.

Thompson's obituary for U.S. President Richard M. Nixon personifies Nixon as a Nazi-like "political monster straight out of Grendel" that poisoned American waters and guaranteed his successor, President Gerald Ford, a reservation in Hell for pardoning Nixon ("He Was A Crook"). Ginsberg's "Birdbrain!" describes a "Birdbrain" as a politician who "runs the World," engaging in human trafficking, and committing acts of war and genocide all in the name of capitalism and nationalism (1, 23, 28). However, the Beat writing style is much more anaphoric as opposed to the surrealistic Gonzo writing style as fifty-one of the fifty-six lines of Ginsberg's "Birdbrain" begin with the word "Birdbrain". Granted, a caveat to this distinction is mostly because of the amount of Beat writing that is exclusively poetry when compared to the predominantly prose format of Gonzo writing. However, it is important to remember that Beats and Gonzo writers are not culturally equivalent because, although both share an autobiographical basis, the foundation of Gonzo is in journalism whereas Beat writing is in poetry or fiction.

Additionally, one cannot simply declare any one concept off-limits to society without creating a false narrative of intellectual or ideological ownership. Any argument for why a Beat writer is less credible or important than a Gonzo writer creates a false narrative as to how their impact on literature and culture ranks amongst other important literary movements when examining historical impact. As a result, this is where ideological splintering results, which creates a new method for approaching the ideas and creating expanded patterns of thought and analysis while still finding a foundation in the original ideology. This is also one of the reasons that equating Beats with Gonzo is problematic because that would also lump Dylan in with the Gonzo journalism style of writing, which is not apparent in his writing style. Although songs like “Masters of War” speak to the impact of politicians and the military industrial complex on society at large and songs like “The Times They Are a-Changing” discuss the shift in culture, Dylan does not write about requiring drugs or alcohol to write, function, or even exist as an artist as a major theme in his music in comparison to the others. Conversely, unlike Thompson, who sought to enter into local politics as sheriff of Pitkin County, Colorado, Dylan never made an effort to enter into politics; instead, his political efforts existed within the realm of his art, advocating and bringing awareness to corruption, police brutality and violence, civil rights, and so on. Although it is debatable as to which method is more effective, the indisputable point is that the audiences of Dylan and Thompson are put in a place where they can pick apart their philosophies if they so choose in addition to showing appreciation for their craft by investing in their art by creating an artistic conversation between the reader/listener and their works.

Critically understudied is the downside of pushing Thompson and Dylan into mainstream criticism is the influence that popular opinion of their idiosyncrasies has on the merit of their

works. For example, Dylan's voice has often been the subject of controversy due in part to its raspy and unmusical timbre, yet the quality of his lyrics is arguably the redeeming factor of his music. A study of Dylan's voice from 1960 to 1966 by Michael Daley describes it as "speech-like" with "nasal" tones and "sliding pitches" that carried a strong sense of antagonism in the way he pronounced words that some critics would describe as "dismissive", "affronting", or like he was "spitting out venom" (85). The people who are unwilling to listen to Dylan's music likely would not purchase his printed lyrics as the already negative association would create a bias towards anything related to the artist, regardless of the substance of its content. However, with ten Grammy Award wins, thirty-nine nominations, and a Lifetime Achievement award, his music and, thus, voice does have an audience and is appreciated even when compared to more melodic or pleasing voices. One might object to this idea of his awards being for his music and not his words themselves, but the presentation of the words is not of concern as they are still being consumed by the listener either way. Comparatively, Thompson had an issue with being parodied as Uncle Duke in *Doonesbury* as a drug-addicted, gun-toting, incoherent alcoholic that he only fueled, if not, aided in perpetrating as part of his publicly comical/satirical persona despite a continued interest in his readership. During a 1977 lecture at University of Colorado Boulder, Thompson noted that, wherever he went, "that goddamn comic strip constantly pops up" and "robs [him] of a very valuable human part of [his] life" as "nobody wants to grow up and be a cartoon character ("Hunter S. Thompson - UC Auditorium, Boulder, CO 11/01/1977." 16:59 - 17:51). Given other legal issues that Thompson had, such as sexual assault allegations on top of his characterization by others, those opposed to his lifestyle choices or his persona could compare him to his parodying as validation for their own biases.

Notwithstanding issues with his public perception, Thompson clearly still generates interest as noted in his aforementioned book sales and for his tremendous appetite for illicit substances like cocaine and LSD.

An important distinction though is the longevity of Dylan as a public figure and as a living human being when compared to both Thompson and Ginsberg. While Dylan stands out from both Ginsberg and Thompson with his position in the mainstream, not only is Dylan a Nobel Laureate for his contributions to music and literature, he is also a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his impact on the arts and society. It is worth noting though that it would be unfair to judge Dylan's artistic output in comparison to the finite amount of material that exists for the two deceased writers. As a result, any concept of a superior writer based on accolades alone would be inappropriate as Dylan has released ten studio albums and only continued to expand on his reach and creativity since Ginsberg's death in 1997 and Thompson's suicide in 2005. Without the potential for unreleased materials to be put into the public's hands, it is difficult to compare any modern output that Dylan has had because there have not been any new works by Thompson or Ginsberg to compare.

This does create a somewhat paradoxical position for the appeal of the works of the original Beats in the mainstream versus their counterculture appeal as the original Beats are mostly deceased. Because critics' research reinvigorates interest in the Beats and ultimately brings these artists into mainstream awareness, the argument that the Beats are exclusively countercultural cannot stand as they continue to gain popular momentum. One might argue that the nostalgic aspect of artists like Thompson, Ginsberg, and Dylan keeps the original spirit of a countercultural movement alive in early fans and admirers, but that leaves the newer observers in

question as to where their place in the cultural mix is as the counterculture lacks any definable age or recordable method of calculating the initial moment of awareness for such fans.

Regardless of reception, though, the impact of progressivism on modern artistic expression is clearly seen in both the original Beat writers and their post-Beat or Beat-derivative counterparts, whose works continue to attract interest and opportunities for academic criticism and popular enjoyment. While creating a distinction between the two literary styles is necessary to avoid mischaracterization (i.e. Gonzo versus Beat), both genres and their respective writers should not be burdened with unnecessary assumptions of the other's merit when compared to one another. To mislabel an artist with an inaccurate genre is a disservice to artists like Dylan, Thompson, and Ginsberg and their groundbreaking styles of expression and unique literary voices.

Chapter 3

Modeling Future Reading of The Beat Generation

Over the course of the cultural and literary evolution of the 1950s to the current day, critics like John Tytell and Michael Schumacher will still argue that Allen Ginsberg's poetry and, ultimately, the works of the Beat Generation appear to be aligned with an ethos of cultural progressivism and the promotion of a collective liberation that ensures individuality, the right to free and unfettered expression, and hope for a future that provides a greater acceptance for all people and their personal freedom (637). This choice by critics and the Beat reader, however, should not excuse any question as to whether or not the Beat writers themselves carry the same level of standards as the original Beats' ties to acts of murder (by William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac), the action of and promotion of pedophilia (by Allen Ginsberg), and open discrimination (by Amiri Baraka) make their stance appear paradoxical and inauthentic. Although it may not be evident to the uninformed reader, it is critical to reconsider the works of the Beat Generation as separate from the Beat writers as their involvement in immoral and illegal activities tarnishes their works' impact on forging a more open-minded reader through exposure to countercultural expression. Through establishing a Jungian framework to interpret the archetype of the original Beats within the context of an American mythos, a recategorizing and separation of the Beats from their works will lift any burden of immorality from their art while also cautioning readers and critics against ideological extremism, inaccurate politicalization, and unnecessary ostracism.

Because Jung's emphasis on archetypal analysis does aid in a literary evaluation of writers and their work, a critical focus on how the Beats and their approach to portraying society

allows for an understanding of how they assume roles such as the archetypal Father to their audience. As to why Carl Jung's psychological perspective is productive to interpret the Beats over other psychological perspectives, such as that of Sigmund Freud, one must consider the impact of the archetype, the collective, and the rejection of the idea that one's past and future are not equally important in describing their overall life experience. Unlike Freud, Jung did not entertain the same significant notion of Oedipal desire or "infantile sexuality" or libido that Freud did; rather, Jung took the foundation of exploring the psyche and the lived experiences of the individual and used it as a way to explore the idea of the individual consciousness and a collective unconscious within the context of archetypes to help explain human desire and behavior (McLeod). From Jung's archetypes, there are three central archetypal roles to characterize the Beat works and their authors: the Persona, the Shadow, and the Self. The works of the Beats fall into a combined representation of the Persona, which is the "outward face we present to the world" that masks the "real self," and the byproduct of the Shadow, the "source of both our creative and destructive energies" (McLeod). Through self-expression, the inner feelings of the Beat writers become "accessible to conscious reflection through spontaneous symbolic representations of subjective states" that can be transcribed and communicated to the audience through art (Jones 412). The Beat writer can be represented through the Persona, the Shadow, and the Self, or the unifying force of all elements within the psyche that pushes the individual towards self-actualization (McLeod). The ability to receive and respond to feedback does provide the ability for the Self to be utilized and developed because it is part of the human life experience.

As for the readership of the Beats, there lies a separate archetypal relationship between the Beat works acting as the Father, or the intellectual authority that displays order, wisdom, and strength, to the readers acting as the Child, or those working towards self-actualization and the process of becoming an individual through exposure to nature and the world (Segal 84; Kushner). To the uninitiated readers and writers, the Beats and their writing provide an accessible and entertaining way to interpret the culture and society through the Beats' eyes via the content and subject of their works, which has been often described as countercultural or progressive. Both Ginsberg's "Howl" and Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, for example, have withstood the various legal challenges they have faced for obscenity and lack of literary merit to ultimately be described as works of "enormous scope and relevance" in creative writing and "masterpiece[s] of experimental fiction" (Tytell 646; Wilson 98). With subject matter ranging from drug abuse, explicit detail of sexual experiences, violence, and mental illness, both works stood out from the assumed decency of the mainstream as a challenge to what was acceptable to depict as part of the human experience. Both Ginsberg and Burroughs' depictions, graphic or not, reflect the unspoken aspects of the individual in a state of decline or disenfranchisement and are yet protected by law and cultural interest and awareness for their impact. By reading the works of the Beats, the Child is initiated into the grittier, transgressive aspects of society as a supplement to their own observations as both entertainment and a warning against taking the path of Ginsberg or Burroughs' characters. However, it should be noted that this model exclusively speaks to the works themselves. The Beat writers are much more difficult to archetypically categorize because of contradictions between their works and their behavior.

Because of what the Beat writers, original or derivative, claim to have represented through their works, it is arguable that their impact on culture and literature has influenced American society and the laws that govern them as can be seen through current laws and policies. In both “Howl” and “America”, Ginsberg creates a vision of a united people with a clear foundation for what constitutes American (in the Beat collective narrative) and Un-American (outside the Beat collective narrative) values. In Ginsberg’s estimation, someone who would fall in line with the Beat narrative and their values must support a sociocultural liberation, promote music as art and awareness for the environment and indigenous populations, resist censorship, “the military-industrial machine civilization,” and the decline of a rational society, and favor the decriminalization of drugs (Ginsberg “A Definition of The Beat Generation by Allen Ginsberg”). As modeled by Ginsberg’s “Howl,” one can find this liberation and freedom by rejecting the “soulless jailhouse” of economic and social disparity of the industrial Moloch (82). In terms of actual government action, positive environmental practices and recommendations have aided in creating cleaner air and water and limiting harmful emissions due in part to the inception of agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970. Sociocultural liberation has occurred through legal action with the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and court decisions such as *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), providing legal protections and guarantees to historically disenfranchised groups. As of 2021, forty-six out of fifty states have some form of legal marijuana or decriminalization policy in place. It is inarguable that progress has been made, no doubt due in part to the will of the people sensitive to culture and society with a vested interest in the progression of their country. Using the Beat works as a reference for where inspiration for this progress may have come from would make

sense as the Beats themselves would argue for the rights of the individual to live in a safe and accepting environment with free thought and expression, but the question of claiming the Beat writers as individuals were equally responsible is a false equivalency. The reason for this claim is due to a misunderstanding of what constitutes the designation of mainstream (or “the prevailing trend of opinion, fashion, society, etc.”) and counterculture (or “the rejection of established social values and practices”) (“mainstream, n. and adj.”; “counter-culture, n.”).

When the Beat Generation was initially described by Kerouac, Holmes and Ginsberg collectively, they sought to describe a time period (1940s-1950s) that had a voiceless community that was “sleepless, wide-eyed, perceptive, rejected by society,” “at the bottom of the world,” and lacked representation (Ginsberg “Allen Ginsberg’s Definition of The Beat Generation”). Through the Beat works, the original Beat writers described and provided a voice for this population that was ultimately consumed by both the counterculture and the mainstream. Michael Warner notes that the “social totality” of readership fits into the concept of a “public”, which can be addressed from a more global perspective in speaking to all readers in the same way or to a more catered individual perspective (49). However, in promoting Beat works like *Howl and Other Poems* or *On The Road*, one cannot solely describe anything that originates from the Beat perspective as countercultural because the mainstream interest and prevailing study have pushed the content of their works into the mainstream based on the public’s interest in the Beat philosophy and artistic appeal. When the Beat Generation was primarily associated with the counterculture, it was because they were the ones who rebelled against the mainstream consensus on issues like what constitutes acceptable forms of expression or lifestyle. Nevertheless, attempting to adequately assign the works of the Beats to any one camp is almost

self-defeating because, as a newer ideology gains momentum and works itself into mainstream progressive thought, this newer ideal introduces another aspect into the counterculture and, as a result, shuffles the entire scope of any given issue into what can now or cannot now be considered Beat. This speaks to the power of media in forming connections between strangers as newcomers to the Beat readership add to the already-existing literary conversations (Warner 55-56). As a result, it seems as if everyone is participating in the now-mainstream belief because they must agree to participate in the experiment of judging what is or is not desirable from a societal or cultural standpoint. Therefore, the counterculture exists in those who agree to not participate and argue against the experiment, which is why it is also necessary to separate the Beat philosophy and works from the exclusively countercultural label in order to continue its study and understanding. Likewise, modern critics should reassess the Beats and their politics in addition to their actions in light of recent cultural movements such as the #MeToo movement and the rise of far-right extremist groups.

Without question, Ginsberg would have undergone great scrutiny for his endorsement of NAMBLA (North American Man Boy Love Association), an organization that promotes inappropriate homosexual relationships between men and male children under the age of consent, and articles such as “The Right to Depict Children in the Nude,” which criticized measures against child pornography. In his poem, “Lack Love,” the speaker describes the lustful thoughts of thinking about a boy who knowingly rejects their love as they fantasize about a sexual encounter (Ginsberg “Lack Love” 28). Because the informed Beat audience would be aware of the autobiographical nature of Ginsberg’s writing, the audience can assume the poem is a personal perspective based on his interests or from a personal recounting of a similar, if not

exact, event. Even if Ginsberg the person is removed from the context of the poem, the poem still remains about sex with an underage male. Additionally, other literary figures would corroborate Ginsberg's interest in young boys to be fact. Poet Anne Waldman (1945-) notes in her poem, "Notes On Sitting Beside A Noble Corpse - Light Breeze Stirring The Curtains, Blue - Faint Tremor Of His Blue Shroud" that, in death, Ginsberg will no longer be able to tell an "awk[w]ard teen boy" that "he's sexy" (5). Moreover, Andrea Dworkin (1946-2005) would note that, based on conversations she had with Ginsberg, he was "exceptionally aggressive" regarding his right to have sex with children "and his constant pursuit of underage boys (43). Furthermore, even those affiliated with the Beat Generation or Beat-influenced like Hunter S. Thompson were accused of sex-based crimes as Thompson was alleged to have sexually assaulted Gail Palmer-Slater. Although Thompson was later acquitted of all accusations, his volatile behavior and abusive treatment of young women, as noted by his biographer, E. Jean Carroll, and others, have left Thompson's view of women in question; his widow, Anita Thompson, would defend her late husband as a generous and loyal person to his friends and colleagues, "especially women," whom she claimed he worked best around (Morain; Wenzel).

Conversely though, William S. Burroughs, who was a victim of molestation at the age of four, was noted to feel anxiety towards sexuality and was believed to have excluded depictions of oral sex in his writing as a result of his experience (Schjeldahl; Miller). With this being said, Burroughs' attitude towards murder is a separate issue as both his shooting of his wife, Joan Vollmer, and his involvement in the killing of David Kammerer carried a significant impact on his reception and his personal life. After being arrested as a material witness alongside Jack Kerouac and the perpetrator, Lucien Carr, another influential figure amongst the Beats, for the

murder of Kammerer, the events would go on to inspire the 2013 film *Kill Your Darlings* and a novel jointly authored by both Burroughs and Kerouac entitled *And The Hippos Were Boiled In Their Tanks*. Although Carr was the aggressor in the incident, Kerouac was willing to help obscure the evidence and Burroughs chose to give Carr the opportunity to confess on his own accord rather than report him to the police after he confessed the killing to Burroughs (Miller 6; Polchin). Additionally, Burroughs' killing of Vollmer during an spontaneous enactment of their "William Tell Act " has left critics of Burroughs divided. Schjeldahl, for example, notes Burroughs' culpability in the death of Vollmer in his concealment of the events and his fleeing from the justice of the Mexican courts that ultimately convicted him of manslaughter *in absentia* to a two-year sentence; however, he also cites Burroughs' superstitious beliefs and temporary belief in Scientology as part of Burroughs' belief that an "Ugly Spirit" had possessed his body, which he believed gave him the power to exorcise his demons through writing ("The Outlaw: The Extraordinary Life of William S. Burroughs"). This "Ugly Spirit" perspective has also been cited by Barry Miles, Burroughs' biographer, and Jorge García-Robles, who Schjeldahl criticizes for his "appalling consolation" of Burroughs becoming a writer through Vollmer's ascension to the role of "sainted martyr to literature" ("The Outlaw: The Extraordinary Life of William S. Burroughs"). As to whether or not the shooting was intentional or accidental, the fact of the matter is that Burroughs concealed the truth of the incident and was ultimately convicted of manslaughter. Although the killing may have been accidental, the notion that Vollmer was killed as a result of extraordinary circumstances like spiritual possession is highly unlikely.

As much as literary critics laud the original Beats for their contribution to the literary canon, it is interesting that there is not a greater condemnation of the original Beats or their various

off-shoots for their various crimes and deplorable behavior. One reason for this might be due to the fact the public does not posthumously “cancel” important figures for depravity; rather, only influential, living people are targets of so-called “cancel culture.” This is not to say that posthumous ostracism does not occur, but it does stand out. For example, the aforementioned theories of Jung have come into question over time as it has been disputed as to whether or not Jung was sympathetic towards the Nazi regime. Schonel and Peck analyzed Jung’s essay, “Wotan”, which sought to characterize the mania of Hitler’s regime during World War II and its impact on the German people as part of an archetypal fury brought on by the wind god, Wotan (103). The authors note that Jung’s essay appears to shift the notion of a national feeling and energy brought on by the policies of Hitler as the result of a spiritual possession; Hitler, being possessed by Wotan, was not capable of reason and neither were the people following him (Schonel and Peck 103). Schonel and Peck reject this notion as it was not the wind god in control of the people, but Hitler himself, questioning exactly where Jung’s sympathies fell at the time (103). They do go on to state Jung would gradually gain an increasingly negative view of the Nazis over time, but still call for further evaluation of Jung within the historical record (Schonel and Peck 104). However, the field of analytical psychology that Jung is associated with has helped to further the field of psychology and the practice of psychoanalysis. This would ultimately beg the question that, if Jung truly was a Nazi sympathizer, then would not the resulting advancements in psychology that cite his work also be branded as post-Nazi due to the ambiguity of Jung’s allegiance? The answer to this question is problematic as the question itself is a logical fallacy; while potentially misguided in its seeming defense of the German war machine and the genocide it propagated, the argument Jung puts forth does appear in line with

his method of psychologically characterizing people and their beliefs through an archetypal framework. However, this still does not excuse the actions of the Nazis nor any deflection of their responsibility that Jung would provide. As a result, the only potential exoneration of his psychological advancements is to remove the political and personal burden that Jung's persona has on his work by disregarding Jung the person as part of the theories. This separation of art from artist ultimately relates back to the actions and beliefs of the Beats versus the merit of their artistic expressions.

Amiri Baraka is a prime example of why this distinction is necessary as his alleged antisemitism and homophobia tarnish the legacy of his work as well as his uniqueness in the original Beat canon as the only African-American member and a former Poet Laureate of New Jersey. Once labeled "the world's greatest living poet" by Maya Angelou, his critically acclaimed works, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* and *Digging: The African American Soul of American Classical Music*, helped to define a need for racial equality and equity in a culturally and racially divided nation through his trailblazing uniqueness and importance in African American studies (Woodard 3, 7). However, critics were divided on Baraka's views and place within the literary community. While Arnold Rampersad viewed him to be among a "pantheon of genre-changing African-American writers... [such as] Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, and Zora Neale Hurston", Stanley Crouch labeled Baraka's body of work to be "an incoherent mix of racism, anti-Semitism, [and] homophobia" (Fox). In 1965, Baraka stated his belief that most "American white men are trained to be fags" as "their faces are weak and blank" (Watts 332). Moreover, he argued that African-Americans "should want to rob the white man of everything he has" (Watts 332). Although he claimed to have been caught up in the hysteria of

the times and had since adopted a more peaceful and progressive mindset through Marxism, Baraka also would go on to make even further damaging and antisemitic claims in his 2002 poem, “Someone Blew Up America?”, dubiously claiming Israeli involvement and coordination in the attacks (Erskine). As a result, Baraka’s work ultimately suffers in literary esteem due to its connection with Baraka himself. When viewed in isolation, though, his work does not automatically bear the burden of being labeled explicitly racist, homophobic, or antisemitic. This argument, however, should not be misconstrued with the policing of thought or personal belief.

People are entitled to their own beliefs through free speech protections as part of their inner humanity and expression of individuality. One might argue critically on the notion of proper thoughts versus improper thoughts, but this notion is illogical as it is based solely on personal taste and dispositions, which are immeasurable in a meaningful and quantifiable way and, in fact, only further an ideological divide. Rather, a call to separate the author from their work allows any critical observer the opportunity to judge the person’s art solely based on its content and provides the opportunity to see the work in an unbiased way without the encumbering of problematic ideologues. Although some may argue that there is no separation of the art from the artist as they are one in the same, one must consider the foundation that art comes from. Schilz argues that art is designed to be engaged with, offering the observer the ability to “share experiences, examine cultural myths, and develop insights” through community (25). Even though the composition of art itself is incredibly specific to the individual and unique to their perspective as part of their self-expression, art is ultimately made with the intention of display and communal experience. Although the act of appreciation may be made privately, the reporting of a shared experience between observers carries a far greater impact through the fostering of

community than the internalization of the experience (Schiliz 25). Moreover, this diversity of opinions not only limits close-mindedness in regards to art , but ensures the opportunity to let people learn and practice how to withstand and grow from criticism when disagreement occurs. However, the communal experience can result in a political reading and interpretation of the authors, especially in the modern era when political polarization and tribalism have become commonplace on a societal level.

When the Beat Generation was originally growing in notoriety, contemporary criticism regarded them as a group of apolitical, existentialist hipsters, yet this is a crucial misunderstanding of the original Beats (Burdick 554). Ginsberg's commitment to equality, pacifism, and free speech could be described as being aligned to liberalism and progressivism; in contrast, Kerouac's disinterest in liberal counterculture and protesting stand out with his "nostalgia for the working-class diligence of his parents... and the Republican Party values that underpinned it" (Lee 32). Furthermore, Burroughs appeared to lean towards "libertarian-anarchist" views, arguing for "organized and armed citizenry" against "global power-systems" and "the controlling matrix of authority" (Lee 32). Although the original ideals of the Beat Generation would arguably fall under a lens of progressive or liberal thought, not all Beats identified with one school of thought or political party as noted by Lee, who argues any Beat ideology should be viewed "outside [of] Democratic or Republican party affiliation" (33). Conversely, literary critic Lee Siegel draws a comparison between the right-wing Tea Party Movement and the Beat Generation in their shared "attacks on government authority, celebrations of radical individualism, inflammatory rhetoric," and how the original Beat writers should not be viewed as left-wing or liberal due to their contempt for the failures of

contemporary power structures of liberals to live up to their “social obligation[s]” (“The Beat Generation and the Tea Party”). Regardless of whether the Beats should or should not bear a political label, critics should avoid viewing Beats within the context of any binary political ideology because the exclusivity could result in a limited evolution of Beat studies and further the polarization of history and culture within the notion of left-wing and right-wing politics. As a result, it is advisable to avoid assigning the original Beats to any one political party to avoid misrepresentation. It is unavoidable though to not politicize the Beats’ works regardless of how desirable an apolitical reading of Beat literature may be without intentionally disregarding much of the substance of their collective works.

Thus, in further and future study of the original writers of the Beat Generation, it is essential to promote the separation of the writers from the works to avoid any subjective association of immorality in critical evaluations of the Beats as their works and vice versa. Because Beat representatives like Ginsberg and Baraka maintained problematic views or, in the case of Burroughs, committed egregious actions, crucial works like *Howl and Other Poems* and *Naked Lunch* should be allowed to speak for themselves without being inhibited by any distortion of their merit that the authors might cause. The documenting of the impact Beat literature had during the 1950s and 60s on artistic expression through influencing artists and promoting and reinforcing protections for freedom of speech is well noted, but the critical consensus on whether or not the depravity the Beats themselves bring to their work creates a distraction to the caliber of their content. This argument should not be interpreted as an apologist point of view in an attempt to cleanse the cultural record by choosing to not acknowledge the wrongs committed by the Beat Generation, but rather as an opportunity for critical revision and new evaluation in light

of a call for separation. Ultimately, the question should not be whether or not the Beats and their works are able to withstand a test of their liberalism or conservatism, but how much more impactful their works are as a momentum to the progress of society and culture when uninhibited by the author.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Engaging with the works of the original Beat Generation offers readers and critics an opportunity to see a portrait of the countercultural elements of American society during a specific and crucial historical moment for disenfranchised Americans as well as giving a literary voice to a socially alienated people through works now lauded for their groundbreaking scope and significance regarding freedom of speech laws. However, in revealing the ugliness of their culture, the Beats also opened themselves up for scrutiny on a literary-critical and biographical level; by revealing their own issues (personal, legal, etc.), the Beat writers open up their works to be subjected to an interpretation of the works as representative or allegorical of their problems. For instance, Ginsberg's commentary supporting pro-pedophile organizations and condemning measures against child pornography damages the reputation of his poetry, which withstood legal challenges in 1957 to its controversial content that depicted the harsh realities of a contemporary America mired with disenfranchisement, substance abuse, and rampant government and economic disparity. As argued throughout this thesis, the works of the Beats must be read independent of their writers to preserve any notion of credibility. Moreover, this perspective views art as separate from the artist, especially in the context of the public versus private persona that may be misconstrued as being synonymous with one another.

As global culture continues to evolve alongside an increasingly interactive social media culture, the role of the writer's words and content becomes more and more entwined with their unique personalities and idiosyncrasies, leading to a greater difficulty for readers and critics to effectively separate the two when evaluating the works. This issue was clear with Beat-derivative

writers like Hunter S. Thompson, whose equally wild public and private personas are difficult to differentiate between based on the surreal and extreme content he wrote about. As a result of this conundrum, further studies of the Beat Generation and their derivatives should divert their focus from the current standard of review of the writers and how their lives influenced their works and pay closer attention to the works themselves without making the novelty of the writer's personality attached to the evaluations. Rather, critics should focusing their interpretations in the context of the historical period and the issues that were predominant during that time to demonstrate the impact of the Beats on a sociocultural level.

Additionally, the labeling of Beat writers with either the mainstream or the counterculture should either be reevaluated to better reflect the inclusion of those who are affiliated with the Beats or exclusively canonize those that Ginsberg named as the true Beat Generation and rectify any issue of who should or should not be included as part of the Beat Generation. In doing so, this takes any undue burden of characterization away from those who might have known or written similarly to the Beats but not taken part in any of the various unethical or illegal practices that many of the original Beats were known to do. However, this may be an impractical solution as the Beat readership that continues to celebrate the Beat Generation's work is self-sustaining, self-organized, and ever-growing; furthermore, those who identify themselves as existing within the mainstream or the counterculture that deem works as "beat" ultimately dictate the narrative as they would also control and manipulate the discourse within their community (Warner 50).

The issue of the Beats also extends to other literary movements or groups as culture becomes more and more fragmented by ideological and sociopolitical divides to avoid newer works receiving unnecessary stigma solely on the backs of their authors and the public's opinion

of them. This also relieves a society-wide frustration with popular figures who may stoke controversy by taking creative or personal risks with opinions or subject matter that goes against the mainstream consensus. In doing so, the art itself is provided an opportunity to allow for readers and critics to have a better chance at an unbiased perspective on its merit as opposed to it being a representative or extension of an author who is out of the popular favor. This ultimately will still permit readers and critics to criticize the authors, but prevent works of artistic and cultural importance from being blacklisted or censored based on undo popular opinion.

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