Drew University

The Beat Poets
Of Popular Music

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PREFACE

Beatitude; n.: bliss' felicity; blessedness; saintliness;
exaltation; exaltedness; transcendence;
transfiguration; rapture; ecstasy; euphoria.
Ant. Despair, hopelessness, dolor.
- *The Random House Thesaurus*

We heard the Sermon on the Mount
And I knew it was too complex
It didn't amount to more than
What the broken glass reflects
- Bob Dylan "Up to Me"

There's a blaze of light in every word
It doesn't matter which you heard
The holy or the broken Hallelujah
- Leonard Cohen "Hallelujah"

Blessed, praised, honored, exalted,
extolled, glorified, adored, and lauded
be the name of the Holy Blessed One,
beyond all earthly words and songs of
blessing, praise, and comfort.
- *Kaddish*, the Jewish mourning prayer

INTRODUCTION

The social and political climate in the United States, and many other First World nations, underwent a significant transformation beginning in the late 1950s and continuing well into the 1970s. Significant numbers of women in the work-force and the first entire generation of American women raised with the right to vote, the Civil Rights movement, integration, the coming of age of the earliest Baby Boomers, all of these created a climate of expectation and rebellion. During this period, a group of writers emerged who would come to be known for exposing truths that previously might have been unacknowledged in literature, for turning a critical eye on not only society in general, but also on themselves. Their revelatory and confessional work was distinctly stark and plain-spoken, yet also wandered into the realms of Buddhist thought and philosophy. They called themselves The Beats.

Writer Jack Kerouac, widely considered to be the originator of the Beat writers' movement, was raised a Catholic, and his writing had a distinctly theosophical point of view, in that he described the world through the lens of a man of faith, yet a man who had known disappointments and was at least somewhat disillusioned with humankind in light of some kind of holy ideal.

Kerouac wrote, "I heard the holy silence in the church (I was the only one there, it was 5 p.m., dogs were barking outside, children yelling, the fall leaves, the candles were flickering alone just for me), the vision of the word Beat as being to mean 'beatific.'" (Wilson, p. 1)

His prose and point of view would go on to personify the core aesthetics of the Beat writers, were they poets, essayists, or novelists. Among their ranks were notable

writers including Richard Brautigan, Allen Ginsburg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti (who, although he denied the title Beat poet, was at the heart of the Beat movement, publishing and selling the work of the Beats, and his poetry can be easily compared to those other Beat poets), William S. Burroughs, Gregory Corso, Charles Bukowski, and songwriter Bob Dylan. Each had a unique voice, but all were extremely personal, raw, self-revelatory and confrontational.

While many readers might see some aspects of their work as bordering on the profane, specifically sexual references and a fascination some of these writers had with the less seemly elements in society, in fact, they were often attempts to see the holy in the profane, the beauty in things that are broken, lost, or neglected. Allen Ginsburg's open examination of his homosexuality, Kerouac's love affair with alcohol, these were taboo at the time of their writing. Ginsburg's poem *Kaddish*, a primal howl of the wounded following his mother's death, was actually called profane by a court and removed from shelves before a subsequent court ruling nullified the first one. That these writers had the audacity to defy traditionally accepted rules regarding content, particularly in poetry, often believed to be the province of seemingly lovely prose, rather than obscenity filled rages, created a visible crack in the veneer of literature, and in turn, it shone a light on the undercurrents in the shifting socio-cultural tides. To this day, much of their work remains startling in its severity, its raw nature, its combativeness. However, the Beats left a notable mark on many of the younger artists and writers who came of age as their work became more societally acknowledged.

Despite the shifts in cultural attitudes that arrived with the late 1970s and into the present, there were still artists who were not only influenced by the Beats, but in fact

created work that could be cited as actual Beat writing. Song-writers Leonard Cohen, Tom Waits and Warren Zevon all created bodies of work that not only mirror much of the Beat poets' writing style, but also the content, ideas, and very imagery of the earlier artists' works.

The work of these three men emphasizes the raw vulnerability of the human condition, and also used that approach to the brokenness intrinsic in human spirits, the darkness humans all face at some point in their lives, as a fulcrum on which to turn a critical eye. They all characterize the very nature of humanity in a lyrical manner that allows for a metaphoric mirror to show both the intrinsic tendencies toward what the faithful might call sin, as well as the opposing forces that keep humanity anchored in a place of light, of morals, of doing what many would call the right things. Not only does the poetry of Cohen's, Waits', and Zevon's lyrics reflect this fundamentally beatific sense of humanity, their chosen tonalities and rhythm signatures emphasize this. There are Beat poets hidden in plain sight, waiting to be acknowledged.

WHAT DRIVES BEAT WRITERS

The original Beat writing was characterized by the use of common language, what classicists might have called crude, vernacular. Certainly, slang, obscenity and blatant sexual references were not the stuff of the romantics or what could be called classical poets and writers like Shelley and Yeats. The Beats were to classical poetry what Wassily Kandinsky or Pablo Picasso were to Rembrandt van Rijn or Jan Vermeer; they shunned conventional modesty and nicety. In addition, the Beat writers examined the very richly colored world of physicality, of the true nature of death, of illness, of addiction, sex and sexual identity. They gave a jarringly pronounced voice to the people who were on the margins of society, the outcasts, the deviants, the marginalized.

"Their model in this was [poet Arthur] Rimbaud, and his bad boy theory of 'making the soul monstrous'. Beatness really began with a 19th century spit in the eye of the bourgeoisie," explained poet and literary critic Mike Ladd in his September 9. 2000, Lingua Franca Radio National broadcast entitled "The Language of the Beats."

He continued, "The sense changed from passive to active. You weren't rejected, you did the rejecting….There it is. 'Be-at,' a new word, shifting 'beat' from 'down and out' towards 'beatitude,' saintliness, and the holy fools and madmen of subways and bus shelters. The 'exhaustion' of the original meaning of 'beat' is now not a physical tiredness, but a mental world-weariness."

Numerous Beat writers found some inspiration, and the means to remain emotionally open and present in the face of things they found repugnant, through the study of Buddhism, and eastern philosophy colored much of their work. It is highly likely

this variety of spiritual enlightenment enabled these writers to be open to the very nature of suffering their work explored. They were “caught in a cycle of vices,” and “constantly sought some form of escape.” (Wills) “In the teachings of Buddhism... members of the Beat generation began to find some sanity. The big view, or Big Mind, of Buddhism—which suggested a horizonless space, a state of cosmic, all-encompassing awareness—proved a powerful antidote to the restrictive views espoused by the government, the literary establishment, and organized religion.” (Tonkinson) In order to sort out the world around them, a world that brought such unease to these writers, spirituality was means of examining the origins of vice, and the writing was a psychological means of both expunging guilt, and understanding its origins.

Far from being an isolated group of creative poets, novelists, essayists, and other artists who disappeared once the original Beat generation died off, there was, and still is, a successive movement, a group of creators who carry these ideals and attitudes forward into the present, and perhaps more will follow. While many people may have closed the metaphorical book on the Beats with the death of Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, Allen Ginsburg and William S. Burroughs, there have been many other people who have taken the ideas and ideals of this group, taken the poetic means of expression and rage at society’s inequalities, and embraced them. Certainly, the Beats opened the door to new ways of writing and making a poetic point, but when a poet also happens to be a musician, the means of self-expression expands exponentially. Tom Waits, Warren Zevon, and Leonard Cohen all saw this, and all brought the Beats into the 21st century.

The original Beats were at once completely at odds with the delicate sensibilities of the bourgeoisie, and at the same time, poetically self-conscious, aware of their own

and all of humanity's flaws, self-flagellating on behalf of the world around them. They shouted metaphoric obscenities at those who held themselves aloft in society, yet beat themselves up as representing these ideals as well. They engaged in the use of drugs, both to inspire creativity and to anaesthetize themselves against the aspects of society that pained them. It would be an understatement to say that Waits, Zevon and Cohen did so any less than the first wave of Beats did. From immersing themselves, as Zevon and Waits did for parts of their lives, in the culture of addiction, alcoholism, the dark, putrid underbelly of society, to seeking spiritual enlightenment through Buddhism or other means of hiding their private selves from the perverting light of fame or attention, as Cohen, and to a great extent Waits also did, these musical poets presented an ongoing, modern vanguard of the Beat movement.

Far from the romanticized, nearly lyrical descriptions of poverty created by a writer like Charles Dickens, both the original Beat writers and those who followed consciously poked at the ugly, shone a clear, untinted light on hardship, displayed the cruelties of living without. Their phrasing is ruthless and would have been at best hard to read for those with genteel Victorian or Georgian sensibilities. Like the era in which they came of editorial age, these writers were making the point that society had, in their opinions, up to the middle of the 20th Century, gotten it wrong. They repeatedly exhibited the editorial notion that people needed to look at these ugly, provocative things in order to rectify them and in order to understand one-another. When Ginsburg wrote, "America," saying:

> America I've given you all and now I'm nothing.
> America two dollars and twentyseven cents January 17, 1956.
> I can't stand my own mind.
> America when will we end the human war?

Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb.
I don’t feel good don’t bother me.
I won’t write my poem till I’m in my right mind.
America when will you be angelic?
When will you take off your clothes?
When will you look at yourself through the grave?
When will you be worthy of your million Trotskyites?
America why are your libraries full of tears?

He was lamenting a system he perceived as inescapably, horrendously unfair, unequal, and hopelessly fractured. His work is liberally peppered with what is commonly considered obscenity, even in the 21st Century. To the readers of the mid-20th century, it was shocking and even somehow threatening, that someone would opt to put graphically obscene language in such a refined thing as a poem, let alone blatantly question the power of the nation. Much in the same way, Warren Zevon’s “Mr Bad Example” is shocking to people for its blatant and direct look at moral corruption, spelled out in no unsparing terms.

I started as an altar boy working at the church
Learning all my holy moves doing some research
Which led me to a cash box labelled "Children's Fund"
I'd leave the change and tuck the bills inside my cummerbund
I got a part-time job at my father's carpet store
Laying tactless stripping and housewives by the score
I loaded up their furniture and took it to Spokane
Auctioned off every last Naugahyde divan
I'm very well acquainted with the seven deadly sins
I keep a busy schedule trying to fit them in
I'm proud to be a glutton and I don't have time for sloth
I'm greedy and I'm angry and I don't care who I cross

Calling attention to innately human flaws, the very kind people might prefer to ignore, is as Beat a writing approach as is using crude, blunt language. These composers embraced this as readily as they did the confrontational and direct literary approach of the prototypical Beats. This version of beatitude was a direct echo of what 18th century

British writer and artist Frances Reynolds described when she wrote her 1875 book *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Taste;* "The true sublime is a pinnacle of beatitude, bordering upon horror, deformity, madness!...It is the point of terror, of undetermined fear, of undetermined power!" (Wilson, p. 15)

Both the Beat writers and these modern musicians utilized that connection to the horror, the madness Reynolds described. Through the lens of that macabre point of view, the ability to identify with mankind as inherently flawed, and therefore understand the nature of transcendence was not only a feature, but a goal in their work. To these writers, all, the poetic voice was that of a prophet, a warning as well as a blessing, a prayer not for those lost, but for the living.

Writer Rob Sean Wilson described the motivation of the Beats as having been motivated by what "drives the questing self to high-holy and happy states of Beatitude or self possession when the writer as cultural-political activist and world-transformer feels empowered to act upon and communicate this vision of newness to the world." (Wilson, p. 2)

At its core, all Beat writing was meant for average people to read, and meant as a clarion call for a certain kind of social justice, an equalizing. Certainly, the fact that a significant percentage of the original Beats came from what might be called "good homes" or middle-America made it easier for them to feel a certain level of personal comfort while they made their points, and for their words to come from what might be considered a Bully Pulpit. However, people of the era, particularly the young, educated population were drawn to the kind of truths Beat writers exposed. Similarly, people who

are drawn to the music of Waits, Zevon and Cohen find a similar appeal to their often bleak, yet identifiable views of the world.

In the late 1950s, for the first time, the points of view of so many who had been overtly ignored or marginalized were the focus, not an interesting aside spoken of with amused, indulgent sidelong glances. Oscar Wilde's homosexuality was the stuff of gossip, Allen Ginsburg's the stuff of a raging shout that said, in essence, "I will not be marginalized, I am alive, look at me!" These bold declarations lent a voice to the previously voiceless.

However, the work of all of these Beats are not all cries to the heavens, or screams of outrage. Despite the attempt to reach some sort of beatitude, some level of personal spiritual uplift, there exists in their work a decided aesthetic of loss, of despair, a reality-check that also informs much of their work.

There are numerous underlying ideas explored by the Beat writers and these musicians as a group, but several stand out as foundational. The Beats' work was designed to call out their own culture and society for the rose-tinted glasses average people used as emotional blinders, in order to overlook and candy-coat the faults in the world. As such, these writers set out to look directly at the ugly, the intense, the painful and rotten things that surround us, and to do so with words that left no doubt to their intent. They not only saw that the world was full of corruption, of ruin (of all sorts), and of sorrow, but that these things also had a certain kind of beauty, even as a result of the very decomposition that they embodied. Thus, they strove to portray the beauty that exists in brokenness and decay. As Danish existentialist philosopher, theologian, poet,

social critic and religious author Søren Kierkegaard wrote in his essay “The Thorn in the Flesh,” “that suffering and this beatitude correspond to one another.”

The Beats wanted to bring the readers of their work into the private spaces their words created, to force them to see the way light fell on something damaged, to know that in loss comes redemption, to understand that when something breaks, it may be an end, but it is also a beginning. To Ferlinghetti, Ginsburg, Bukowski, and their peers, it was the very fragility of a moment that lent it poignancy. The sense of time’s fleeting nature was part of its poignancy, and what made all of it - the good, the bad, and the ugly - precious.

Charles Bukowski’s poem “a nice day” (Bukowski,p. 93*)* lays out his conviction that death, decay, and loss are an inevitable part of life, and one he felt innately.

> **a nice day** (excerpt)
> I can feel doom like
> something under the sheets with bristles
> that stinks and moves
> toward me

Bukowski, whose work is not without optimism, often used images that seem dark and despairing, yet balanced these with equally sublime moments of that beatific transcendence. Even the ominous was infused with images of hope, of the intersection between decay and ripening. In that same poem, he wrote:

> I do notice though the sun is shining
> that the flowers are pulled up on their strings
> and I on mine

The poet's realization that the world on the periphery of his thoughts has glimpses of things flourishing and growing is what makes the poem reach for the multi-layered experience, transcend the morose and grieving, to arrive at hope.

Because of the brutality of their chosen topics, the Beat writers tended to use language that was similarly unforgiving and unsympathetic. It was the province of Romantic poets to describe loss in sentimental language, to glorify it in the verbal equivalent of a weeping angel statue shrouded in convincingly soft-looking granite veils. The Beats took a much more direct approach, wanting to scrape off decades of sentimentality in poetics. A corpse was referred to as such, and the painful sorrow of the mourners painted in hard, uncompromising language.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti wrote in "The Green Street Mortuary Marching Band,"

> And now you see all the relatives behind the
> closed glass windows of the long black cars and
> Their faces are all shiny like they
> been weeping with washcloths and
> all super serious
> like as if the bottom has just dropped out of
> their private markets and
> there's the widow all in weeds and the sister with the bent frame and the mad brother who never got through school and Uncle Louie with the wig and there they all are assembled together and facing each other for maybe the first time in a long time but their masks and public faces are all in place as they face outward behind the traveling corpse up ahead and oompah oompah goes the band very slow with the trombones and the tuba and the trumpets and the big bass drum and the corpse hears nothing or everything and it's a glorious day in old North Beach if only he could have lived to see it only we wouldn't have had the band who half an hour later can be seen struggling back silent along the sidewalks looking like hungover brokendown Irish bartenders dying for a drink or a last hurrah

Contrastingly, when Robert Frost, a contemporary of the Beats who worked in a more traditional verse style, wrote of death, in the classical poetic fashion, that event was veiled in metaphors and beautiful imagery.

Nothing Gold Can Stay
Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

Frost compared the fleeting changing of gold to green of leaves to the cycles of human life. For Ferlinghetti, no such niceties sufficed to paint a linguistic image of the sight of a mortuary band leading a cortege of mourners through a city street teeming with living people, his representation of life and death in one poem. The deceased man is described plainly, in the most unsubtle terms, the mourners are as clear to the imagination as though the reader stood beside the poet on this occasion. No references of nature distort or diffuse the pain of the facts. Yet there is a certain poignancy in the description, the reference to the band as independent of the job they do, as well as earlier mention of the streets through which this parade winds ("all the cafe sitters at the sidewalk cafe tables sit talking and laughing") that sets it in a space at once somber yet lovely. There, then, is the way the Beat writer manages to include the lovely amid that terrible, lonely, somber moment; beauty in brokenness.

Leonard Cohen's work looks at mortality in as lyrical a manner as Frost, but without the softening ornamentation, his take on the subject as direct as Ferlinghetti's. He writes with "a religious, humanistic approach to the predicaments of the present. His own prophetic sense relates to impending social and political collapse, as seen in his song "The Future" ("I've seen the future, brother: it is murder")...[yet he finds] optimism even

in imperfection, urging for perseverance and faith, despite the brokenness of everything around us." (Cohen, S) In part because his father died when he was still a pre-teen, his poetry and lyrics frequently reflected this awareness, as in his song "You Want It Darker;" If you are the dealer, let me out of the game / If you are the healer, I'm broken and lame / If thine is the glory, mine must be the shame / You want it darker...*Hineni, hineni* [Hebrew for "I'm ready, Lord"]."

Many of the Beat writers described death not as a thing of which to be afraid or to romanticize, but rather an inevitability worth examining. Allen Ginsburg wrote so often of death that it almost seems a preoccupation, but in fact is a simple equation; where there is life, there will also be death. He also added a healthy dose of sexuality to his work, and it could be stated with a comparable equation, that where there is life, there is a probability of physical sexual intimacy, and a certainty of death. In "The Names," he wrote:

> Time comes spirit weakens and goes blank apartments shuffled through and forgotten
> The dead in their cenotaphs locomotive high schools & African cities and smalltown motorcycle graves
> O America what saints given vision are shrouded in junk their elegy a nameless hoodlum elegance leaning against deaths military garage

Ginsburg paid close attention to his generation's seeming Achilles' heel, as the illicit use of drugs appeared to keep pace with the flag-draped coffins returning from Vietnam. In his work, sex and drug use were the panacea that allowed Americans some small respite from the collapse of the peace that had followed the end of World War II. In *Poems All Over the Place* (p. 12) "The Names" continues with:

> Charming ladies' man oft for a purpose I heard great cat Shakespearean sex
> first poet suicide I knew sat on park benches watched despair his forehead star
> my elder asked serious advice, gentle man! international queer pride broken to

pre-death cigarette gun fright
Love a young blond demon of broken army Nemesis his own mad cock for the kid's sardonic ass
his dream mouthful of white prick trembling in his head — woke a bullet in his side days later by Passaic
last moments gasping stricken blood under stars coughing intestines & lighted highways cars flowing past his eyes into the dark

Joe Army's beauty forgotten that night, pain cops nightmare, drunken AWOL through Detroit
phonecalls angels backrooms & courtmartial lawyers trains a kaleidoscope of instant change

Despite the seeming despair present in so much of his work, Ginsburg's frenetic prose also peels back the ugliness at times, in its midst, to offer moments of raw beauty. Despite the poem's overarching images of the downfall of so many the poet knows and loves, he offers that glimpse of redemption, of beatitude, in the phrase "a kaleidoscope of instant change." Life, his words offer, has lapses from the inevitability of death, of decay and turpitude, and in fact can transcend misery with wonder. A parallel can be seen in the work of most of his contemporaries, and in the works of the three musicians as well.

Like Ginsburg's works, Bukowski's poem "side of the sun" is a portrait of horror tempered by exaltation. It examines a bullfight. Despite the inevitability of the death of the bull, still manages to find the nobility of the animal, a victim of the people, who are ultimately shown as the truly brutal species, rather than the animal whose demise they clamor to watch. The awful spectacle that intrigues the humans is the flaw, the crack in the surface of so-called civilization.

the bulls are grand as the side of the sun
and although they kill them for the stale crowds,
it is the bull that burns the fire,
and although there are cowardly bulls as
there are cowardly matadors and cowardly men,
generally the bull stands pure

and dies pure
untouched by symbols or cliques or false loves,
and when they drag him out
nothing has died
something has passed
and the eventual stench
is the world.

In Bukowski's stark observation, the bulls are "grand...pure...untouched." His sharp critical view is of the means by which the crowd derives entertainment from the death of the bull. This point of view reflected the societal upheaval of the civil rights movement, when a close examination of the historical American practice of slavery and oppression for the benefit of wealthy white landowners was being held up to a bright, critical light. It is easy to understand the impetus for Bukowski and his fellow Beat writers to see cultural shortcomings clearly. Yet in the poem, despite the terrible spectacle of humanity's blood-lust, there stands a shining moment of beauty, the bull "grand as the side of the sun." This exemplifies the direct interaction of the profoundly beautiful with the unthinkably awful. A defining trait in Beat writing is that the source of the horror is, more often than not, humanity.

When sexuality is the obvious topic at the forefront of an individual work, the Beats' and the musicians' language can be explicit, but is still as much about the human condition of entropy, of the species' gradual decline into disorder, as it is about sex, lust or love. Sex is often portrayed as an act of rebellion, presented as a blatant indulgence in living before the unavoidability of death. Even the naive sexual dream is rendered as the antithesis of the ruin inherent in human existence, as in Ferlinghetti's "She loved to look at flowers:"

She loved to look at flowers
smell fruit

And the leaves had the look of loving

But halfass drunken sailors
staggered thru her sleep
scattering semen
over the virgin landscape

At a certain age
her heart put about
searching the lost shores

And heard the green birds singing
from the other side of silence

Ferlinghetti's depiction of the woman, her erotic nocturnal imaginings, preface her search of the *lost shores* (perhaps years past in her life), which leads her beyond silence. This silence, taken in consideration of his general body of work, is likely a representation of death, the *green birds* the moment of something more than simple life and death. In this way, the dreams are her rebellion, an affirmation of her living.

As arguably the most provocative, linguistically confrontational poet of the Beat writers, Ginsburg was much more overtly inflammatory in his prose, and his embrace of portraying the sexual as an act of subversion was a near-constant in his work. In the poem "Thoughts on a Breath," he wrote:

Massive metal bars about, monster machines
    eat us, Controlled by army
    Copes, the Secret Police, our own thoughts!
Punishment! Punish me! Punish me! we scream
in our hearts, cocks spurting alone
in our fists!

Certainly, the use of the language and imagery is intentionally jarring, the image stark, yet its purpose, as with much of what Ginsburg wrote, is to shock the sensibilities of the reader into looking at the context as much as the explicit act implied. The brutality

of his choice of phrasing is a declaration of life, of rebellion. In the face of what he portrays as the unavoidable control by forces bigger than the individual the very act of masturbation is subversive.

Leonard Cohen's reference to sexuality in his song "Hallelujah" is not only explicit, but also exalts the act to a spiritual one, imparting the union with Beatification when he writes "remember when I moved in you / The holy dove was moving too / And every breath we drew was Hallelujah." Hallelujah," or "praise God," breathed in, or out, as a gasp, a cry, the ecstatic and orgasmic cry of the exalted moment of beatitude. This is at once a very physical, mortal, intimate moment, and a melding with the divine.

Bukowski's "yes yes" is only just slightly less outrageous by contrast with classical poetic language. This poem, a close examination of his ideas about inspiration, assigns attributes and intent to God during the work of creating the world.

> when God created love He didn't help most
> when God created dogs He didn't help dogs
> when God created plants that was average
> when God created hate we had a standard utility
> when God created me He created me
> When God created the monkey He was asleep
> When He created the giraffe He was drunk
> when He created narcotics He was high
> and when He created suicide He was low
>
> when He created you lying in bed
> He knew what He was doing
> He was drunk and He was high
> and He created the mountains and the sea and fire
> at the same time
> He made some mistakes
> but when He created you lying in bed
> He came all over His Blessed Universe

Bukowski's choice of language spins a theosophical ideal of God, imposing on the entity what might be considered decidedly human frailty, and judges God as being

capable of mistakes. Then he concluded with the final, decidedly sexual line to bring home the message that the “you” in the poem is both a flesh-and-blood person who the poet sees as divine, and also an at least partial denial of the ideal mystical God, stating, instead, that this entity has created this person via the most human, earthly act of orgasm. In a way, this poem exemplifies the Beat focus on beauty in brokenness, sexual ecstasy resulting in transformation and wonder, the sacred inherent in the profane, the ultimate act of rebellion in life.

THE BEATS BEYOND THE BEATS

Nancy J. Peters co-owned Northern Lights Bookstore with Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and served as publisher on numerous Beat writers' books. She has written fairly extensively on the Beats. In the book *Reclaiming San Francisco,* (Brook, p. 42) she wrote, "With no set allegiances to political parties or agendas, the beats were important as exemplars of creative resistance."

There are some poets who stand out in their not-necessarily intentional dedication to this ideal. The bold disinclination to capitulate to the niceties of classical writing, coupled with confrontational and non-traditional language choices, and topics that are common in the Beat writers' works not only unified the original Beats as a school of writing, but also inspired and buoyed writers who came on their heels. These writers also used music to underscore their messages as certainly as their words did. Like the Beats, these songwriters' work examines those core ideas of loss, sorrow, the beauty inherent in brokenness and decay, and the junction of sacred and profane. It looks hard at the way humanity ruins and falls to ruin, the way people hurt themselves and one another, physically, psychically, and culturally, and the way they put the pieces back together. Their work does this, like the Beats' work, combatively, defiantly, and with painful detail and at times, discomfiting language. Their ideas are only emphasized by the addition of tonal and melodic themes as their poetic compositions become music.

At times the very melodic or vocal approaches are significant in creating that defiance, the unease with which a certain song makes its point. Dissonance in ideas is mirrored in musical dissonance. Sometimes, the composition of the music stands in

intentional and staggering opposition to the poetry of a song; there is something unnerving in a song that has an essentially waltzing, bright sound placed as a scaffold around lyrics about sorrow, death or loss or decay.

The notion of songwriters as Beat writers is not entirely new, as Jack Kerouac was known to write song lyrics (Maher, pg. 413), and the Beats as a group embraced a young Bob Dylan as one of their circle. Like his poetic contemporaries, Dylan wrote stark, confrontational words that defied middle-American ideals and values, that examined the outsiders and dispossessed, and called attention to the marginalized segments of society. His language pointed fingers at the political powers-that-were, and questioned prevailing social authority at the time.

When Bob Dylan wrote "Like A Rolling Stone," the majority of his recording company contemporaries were writing lyrics made of teenaged declarations of love, beach ballads, and catchy pop tunes. Dylan's approach, like that of his Beat contemporaries, lambasted creative conventions. His cynical look at bourgeois lives was, for many, a shocking revelation as he sang:

> Once upon a time you dressed so fine
> Threw the bums a dime in your prime, didn't you?
> People call say 'beware doll, you're bound to fall'
> You thought they were all kidding you
> You used to laugh about
> Everybody that was hanging out
> Now you don't talk so loud
> Now you don't seem so proud
> About having to be scrounging your next meal

Dylan's open mockery and derision of the prevailing sociological ideals stood in stark contrast to most of the era's popular music, his warnings to middle-America (those who "dressed so fine" and "threw the bums a dime") that they were destined to fall a

sharp contrast to the carefree surf music of the Beach Boys and clean-cut teen romanticism of newly minted pop of acts like Chad and Jeremy.

Composers Tom Waits, Warren Zevon and Leonard Cohen can be easily identified with the Beat writers who were at the height of their variety of celebrity while these songwriters were first coming into their own as creators. All three created work about unsettling realities like poverty, drug abuse, sexuality, and the inevitability of death. Their words reflect a certain kind of dark humor and irony in the fallibility and foibles that make humans human. Like that of the Beat writers, the work of all three are exemplified by an ironic head-tilt of linguistic phrasing and are keen on mocking the prevailing norms and cultures in which they lived.

In addition to their prose and poetry, all three created musical compositions designed to draw in the listener, to create a desire on the part of the audience to hear a song's words, to want to know more, rather than to just see its value as entertainment. A minor key is unsettling, a discordant melodic phrase alarming, to most audiences. Where many of their contemporary popular songwriters were content to have a memorable hook and radio hit, none of these three men ever seemed too concerned with the game of mass popularity. As a result their bodies of work often overlap into art for the sake of art, rather than art for the sake of commerce. They make social statements. In this way, they are very like the Beat writers.

All three of these creators wrote songs that tell tales of despair, of personal trauma, or terrible misfortune and events. At times, these songs echo their poetic language in sorrowful melodies, but just as often, the music stands in stark opposition to the bleak images conveyed by the words. A song with lyrics that tell of sorrow set against

a major key that spills, lovely, into the ear is one that is jarring, yet comforting. In that, it is like the work of the Beats, who framed up commonplace loss with the holy, the beatific. In that very act, the songwriters create that contrast, the opposition of beauty standing hand-in-hand with the weak, the lost, the broken and decaying. It is at once uncomfortable and seductive.

TOM WAITS

Thomas Alan Waits, known professionally as Tom Waits, was born in California in 1949, and grew up in what most would call a middle-class household, with a Spanish teacher father and a mother who made the home her focus. (Hoskyns, pp. 2-28)

His work as a performer has garnered him a faithful following, but his own recordings have never met with world-wide popular radio success, though his songs have been covered by many other performers including Bruce Springsteen ("Jersey Girl"), Rod Stewart ("Downtown Train"), and The Eagles ("Ol' 55"). This lack of commercial radio success is in part to the growling gravel timbre of Waits' very distinctive voice, and in part to the challenge in his lyrics, often as inaccessible as an Allen Ginsburg or Charles Bukowski poem.

On Waits' own website (www.tomwaits.com), the songwriter cites his influences, and the first three on the list are Jack Kerouac, Charles Bukowski, and Bob Dylan. About Bukowski, Waits said, "Charles Bukowski is probably one of the most colorful and most important writers of modern fiction, poetry, and prose in contemporary literature right now. I'd say he's at the vanguard in my book; he just levels me." (Maher, pg. 24) Referring to his interest in these other writers, he says, on his website. "Most of the things you absorb you will ultimately secrete." Once a reader has read work by the Beats and understands his sense of their writing, that parallel is clearly recognizable in Waits' writing.

Waits, however, does not call himself a poet, calling the word "dangerous...most people when they hear the word 'poetry' think of being chained to a school desk, memorizing 'Ode on a Grecian Urn...I call what I'm doing improvisational adventure or

an inebriational travelogue, and all of a sudden it takes on a whole new form and meaning." He added that he'd call himself a "storyteller. Everybody has their own idea of what poetry is, and of who's a poet. I think that Charles Bukowski is a poet - and I think that most will agree to that." (Maher, p.47)

Among the original San Francisco Beat poets, many of them created prose works that, like Waits' writing, are storytelling as much as what some might call high literature. While Waits' particularly cites Bukowski as inspiration, a direct connection can also be made between Waits' manner of spinning a scene for the listener/reader, and that of Beat writer Richard Brautigan, who wrote "The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth's Beer Bottles." (Brautigan, p. 34)

> ...We took the bottles to a grocery store and were paid a penny for small bottles and two cents for large ones. On almost any day we could be seen pushing our baby buggy along the highway looking for beer bottles.

Brautigan's imagery is as clear to the reader as Waits' is in his song "Looking for the Heart of Saturday Night," when he writes:

> Well, you gassed her up, behind the wheel
> With your arm around your sweet one in your Oldsmobile
> Barreling down the boulevard

There is no ambiguity in description. A story is clearly unfolding, detail oriented and specific. Waits uses language as plain spoken as one might imagine the narrator of the story to actually be. So does Brautigan. Clarity is the first order of business for both.

Like Bukowski's, his most oft cited Beat writer inspiration, Waits' settings are commonplace, familiar, ungrand; they are places anyone might go, or at times, places most people might choose to avoid, populated as they are by addicts, drunks, the

hopeless, the forlorn, the forgotten, the dispossessed. These are odes to the people on the periphery, to the most fundamentally physical of human experiences - birth, loss, death, sex, addiction, sorrow, decay. On one hand hopeful and the other despondent, both Bukoswki's and Waits' words offer an up-close examination of unsettling topics, but do so with a sympathetic and compassionate point of view. "We, too," they seem to say, "could easily be just like this. There but for the grace of God..." Paean or cautionary tale, or a combination of both, these works speak to one another.

Both writer and composer seem to look at the intimate with a clear, non-judgmental eye, citing things at once familiar and perhaps off-putting to most people. It is not particularly commonplace for people to desire close contact with addicts, with individuals in the depths of despair to the point of dereliction. Yet both Bukowski and Waits are poignantly aware of these sectors of society, and write with both an understanding and empathy in consideration of the dispossessed, at times verging on the intimate.

In 1985, Waits released the album *Rain Dogs*, the album title an ode to the "soul-scarred urban environment he was so much a part of" in New York City. He explained that the title refers to New York City's homeless population, "people who live outdoors. You know how after the rain, you see all these dogs that seem lost, wandering around. The rain washes away all their scent, all their direction. So all the people on the album are knit together by some corporeal way of sharing pain and discomfort." (Maher, p. 157)

A clear connection can be drawn between the song "Time," from that album, and Bukowski's poem "the house." From the writers' points of view, the deep empathy between the narrative voice and the human subjects of the works, the basic, somewhat

gritty language used to paint the verbal images, and the stark, almost brutal reality they exhibit, these works are tied together. Waits' song, written in a major key and melodically as stark as the words, is simple, gentle, somewhat sorrowful; his rumbling gravel baritone voice as soft as it is jarring, invoking a kind of mournful lullaby through what could be called a sweet melody.

Time (excerpt)
Well the smart money's on Harlow
And the moon is in the street
The shadow boys are breaking all the laws
And you're east of East St. Louis
And the wind is making speeches
And the rain sounds like a round of applause
Napoleon is weeping in the Carnival saloon
His invisible fiance is in the mirror
The band is going home
It's raining hammers, it's raining nails
Yes, it's true, there's nothin' left for him down here

And it's Time Time Time
And it's Time Time Time
And it's Time Time Time
That you love
And it's Time Time Time

And they all pretend they're Orphans
And their memory's like a train
You can see it getting smaller as it pulls away
And the things you can't remember
Tell the things you can't forget that
History puts a saint in every dream

Well she said she'd stick around
Until the bandages came off
But these mamas boys just don't know when to quit
And Matilda asks the sailors are those dreams
Or are those prayers?'
So just close your eyes, son
And this won't hurt a bit

And it's Time Time Time
And it's Time Time Time

And it's Time Time Time
That you love
And it's Time Time Time

A soldier stands in a bar bathroom, weeping at a face damaged by war, aware that the life to which he has returned holds nothing for him. His fiancé has left after promises to stay, and he has lost his emotional compass. In the midst of a tale of loss, Waits embeds glimpses of beauty, phrases of hope, “The rain sounds like a round of applause.” He adds that despite this sadness, time is on this man’s side; “It’s time that you love.” The hope is the surrounding for the loss and sorrow, as surely as the young man can only see the sadness. This is the moment of beauty in brokenness, the chance at divinity, forgiveness, beatitude. The image of the train pulling away, the interaction between memories, all of these are stated in the most simple, haunting way, and yet are beautiful, poignant. The mention of bandages coming off, the idea of pain being staved off by a brief closing of eyes, these are everyday pains, or maybe something darker. Yet at its core, the song holds out that glimpse of redemption, “time.”

Waits’ song follows the emotional path Bukowski took when he wrote “the house.”

the house (excerpt)
they have been building this house
for a month, and soon it will have
its people...sleeping, eating,
loving, moving around,
but somehow
now
it is not right,
there seems a madness,
men walk on its top with nails in their mouths
and I read about Castro and Cuba,
and at night I walk by
and the ribs of the house show

and inside I can see cats walking
the way cats walk,
and then a boy rides by on a bicycle,
and still the house is not done
and in the morning the men
will be back
walking around on the house
with their hammers,
and it seems people should not build houses anymore,
it seems people should stop working
and sit in small rooms
on second floors
under electric lights without shades;
it seems there is a lot to forget
and a lot not to do
and in drugstores, markets, bars
the people are tired, they do not want
to move, and I stand there at night
and look through this house and the
house does not **want** to be built;
through its sides I can see the purple hills
and the first lights of evening,
and it is cold
and I button my coat
and I stand there looking through the house
and the cats stop and look at me
until I am embarrassed
and move North up the sidewalk
where I will buy
cigarettes and beer
and return to my room.

Both authors seem somewhat detached from the telling of their tale, despite the fact that Bukowski uses the first person in his work. This poem, "the house" is one long sentence, a moment of carefully recalling an experience, a thought with as much backstory as possible. Waits, too, is telling the listener/reader his thoughts on a moment, on the life of the people in his tale, yet also keeps an emotional distance. The only giveaways to both men's feelings on the subjects from the non-narrative lines, from the

adjectives they choose to depict the surrounding scenes or the descriptions of the appearance of things beyond the subjects of the stories.

The overarching point of view of each work is melancholy, redolent with loss and regret. Yet it also proposes the notion that the world's fluidity, the very progression of sunrises and sunsets offers optimism in the midst of the mourning. Waits' gentle song, an auditory rocking chair pace, stands in contrast to the soldier's sorrow looking into the mirror at his damaged face.

Bukowski's peripheral details include the cats, creatures with no particular place in either the story or its subject, yet who ignore the fact that a house is being built while casually strolling through the frame of the structure, "walking the way cats walk," encountering the author as he stops to look at the skeletal building. The very choice of words gives the reader a clear look at these creatures, and imposes a certain peacefulness, because in the midst of the upheaval, there are these graceful images of the languid stride of the cats. Like Waits' lyric, "and the moon is on the street," in the midst of some sort of emotional and physical disruption, this is a spot of tranquility, a pause for the reader's mind. Waits' choice to set his song in a gentle sigh of music also keeps the audience at a safe emotional distance from the sorrows his song conveys, much as Bukowski's narrator going on with his life, collecting his "cigarettes and beer" before returning to his starting place.

In his earliest work, Waits, who has also acted in several movies (from bigger budget to smaller, independent films), made a study of the underbelly of society, of bars and poverty, and addicts. Seeming to choose to be a societal method actor, he worked to

inhabit the world about which he wrote. By the 1980s he had found his voice as a troubadour of the more varied world.

In 1986, Waits recorded the album *Swordfishtrombones*, a collection that included the song entitled “In the Neighborhood.” Like Ferlinghetti’s “Green Street Mortuary Marching Band,” this work is essentially a street scene, capturing a moment in time. Although there is no marching band in the lyrics, a funeral is one of the events mentioned in the song. Waits uses his instrumentation to invoke a funereally walked pace, its andante tempo is a depressingly plodding step narrated through a lower-class neighborhood, despite it being written in a major key. It has a waltzing feel that, if played just a bit faster, without the lyrics, could be a merry-go-round melody, or a calliope tune. In deep contrast, the lyrics are somber, austere. The lyrics put the listener in a neighborhood that has seen better times.

In The Neighborhood (excerpt)

Well, Friday's a funeral and Saturday's a bride
And Sey's got a pistol on the register side
And the goddam delivery trucks, they make too much noise
And we don't get our butter delivered no more

In the neighborhood
In the neighborhood
In the neighborhood

Well, Big Mambo's kickin' his old grey hound
And the kids can't get ice cream, cause the market burned down
And the newspaper sleeping bags blow down the lane
And that goddam flatbed's got me pinned in again

Waits said of the song, the final on the first side of the long-play vinyl record, “It has that Salvation Army feel. I was trying to bring the music outdoors with a tuba, trombone, trumpets, snare, cymbals, and an accordion, so it had that feeling of a

Felliniesque-type of a marching band going down a dirt road and with a glockenspiel to give it a feeling of a kind of demented little parade band." (Maher, p. 133)

Wait's song inspires similar images of a normal street, a normal day, normal people going about the business of living, set against the markers of sorrow, the tune of a funeral band, to those invoked by the words of Ferlinghetti's poem,

> ...oompah oompah goes the band
> very slow with the trombones and the tuba and the trumpets and the
> big bass drum and the corpse hears nothing or everything and it's a
> glorious day in old North Beach if only he could have lived
> to see it only we wouldn't have had the band who half an hour later
> can be seen struggling back silent along the sidewalks looking like
> hungover brokendown Irish bartenders dying for a drink or a last
> Hurrah

In a way, both are obituaries for America, a way of life captured in a moment of continual decay, despite the bright shine off the smooth surfaces. If you look closely, both writers seem to say, you can see the cracks in the veneer, the place the decay gets in. So not only are there echoes of Bukowski's work in Waits', but the generalized ethos of the Beats resounds in his compositions.

On *The Black Rider*, a conceptual homage to German composer Kurt Weill, Waits included the song "No One Knows I'm Gone." Unlike many of his works that juxtapose gentle, optimistic musical phrases with darker lyrics, this song is written in E-minor, a dark, somber-sounding key. The pace is still a gentle one, slow and contemplative, but because of the tonality in the music, it is also intrinsically sad-sounding, mournful. However, the lyrics, while a reflection on life continuing beyond the death of the narrator, are in this song the moment of hope, of promise.

> **No One Knows I'm Gone**
>
> Hell above and heaven below

All the trees are gone
The rain makes such a lovely sound

To those who are six feet under ground
The leaves will bury every year
And no one knows I'm gone

Live me golden tell me dark
Hide from Graveyard John
But the moon is full here every night
And I can bathe here in his light
The leaves will bury every year
And no one knows I'm gone

Though Waits is writing here of the inevitability of death, he is also writing about the promise of the planet's tilt and rotation ultimately bringing about new life.

"The rain makes such a lovely sound," and "the leaves will bury every year" offer certainty of the life above the grave operating on a continuum, and though it is a funeral image he paints with his language and melody, it is not grim, just factual. As often in Waits' catalog, his lyrical style is at odds with the message he brings. His baritone voice seems to come to terms with the inevitability of death, the song resolves quietly, without fanfare, which seems to highlight the song's point; all human life comes and goes with a momentary ripple on the surface of the planet, essentially unnoticed.

A similar idea comes across to the reader in Bukowski's poem "for the mercy mongers."

for the money mongers

it is justified
all dying is justified
all killing all death all
passing.

and a flower
passes through the armies

and like a small boy
bragging,
lifts
up its
color.

In much the same manner as Waits does in “No One Knows I’m Gone,” Bukowski makes clear the notion that lives start and end, and all people are equal in that manner. He also writes about the cycles of nature being as real and continual as the lives of humans are short, by contrast. Again, the two writers echo in the stark simplicity of their emotional points of view, and the poetic beauty imbued by their choices of language within the simplicity and clarity of idea. In analysis, the parallel between the two men as writers, and the way in which Bukowski’s work influenced Waits’ is laid plain in these works.

WARREN ZEVON

Like Tom Waits, Warren William Zevon was born in California and came of creative age as the Beats were finding their creative footing in American counterculture. Zevon's parents, again like Waits, divorced when he was young and his father became a sporadic figure in his life. Once more like Waits, Zevon spent much of his young adult life indulging in an unhealthy dance with substance abuse (Iglesias) from which he finally recovered in 1983. (Valania) While there is no evidence Zevon ever stated that he was influenced by Beat writers, his use of music and lyrical literacy exhibits clear parallels. His acute observations about humanity coupled with the hyper-literate use of language, and a tendency to creative introversion make the similarities between his work, and in particular, that of Jack Kerouac and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, nearly inevitable to those familiar with the latter's work. Like Kerouac, he was prone to the kind of over-indulgence in alcohol that was also a focus of Tom Waits' earlier work, and it was reflected in his song-writing.

Early in Zevon's career, before he had achieved the modest commercial success as a recording artist that was to come with the release of the album Excitable Boy in 1978, his song-writing was already strongly observant of the world in which he lived, and infused with acerbic humor. Despite his tendency to write in rhyme and with a defined rhythm, unlike the Beat poets, his lyrics were just as likely to be self-critical as looking outward, and his reflectiveness was as confessional in nature, as trenchant, and as honest as Ferlinghetti's.

In 1969, Zevon recorded his first, eponymous album, which included the song "Desperados Under the Eaves," a song about alcoholism and chemical dependency. The

narrator in this song is both at home in the feeling of desperation and despair, and accepting of the situation.

Desperados Under the Eaves

I was sitting in the Hollywood Hawaiian Hotel
I was staring in my empty coffee cup
I was thinking that the gypsy wasn't lyin'
All the salty margaritas in Los Angeles
I'm gonna drink 'em up

And if California slides into the ocean
Like the mystics and statistics say it will
I predict this motel will be standing until I pay my bill

Don't the sun look angry through the trees?
Don't the trees look like crucified thieves
Don't you feel like Desperados under the eaves
Heaven help the one who leaves

The lyrics "I predict this motel will be standing until I pay my bill" is classic Zevon fare, invoking the cynical idea that commerce will win out over human lives. Meanwhile, the "trees look like crucified thieves," a somber reflection on the actual mood of the narrator. The word *desperado* is Spanish for "a desperately reckless person," and the mood of this song's lyrics, its poetry, is a tale of desperation. The song is musically slow, a thoughtful ode to the slow, unavoidable passage of time. Backed at times by not only Zevon's keyboard and a guitar and drums, but also classical strings, the chorus of the composition swings into a gentle rocking two-step rhythm, and Zevon's voice stands in contrast to a backing vocal chorus, all of it at once sorrowful and celebratory. It is an ode to survival.

Zevon's means of creating this world of despairing, ironic reflection is mirrored in Ferlinghetti's poem "Christ Climbed Down," a work "conceived specifically for jazz

accompaniment," according to his notes on *A Coney Island of the Mind*. (Ferlinghetti, p.48) While Ferlinghetti's work invokes a certain level of cynicism about religion, under close examination it can be seen to be a questioning of the absolutes of belief of all kinds, with the same removed cynicism of Zevon's lyrics. It also celebrates the hope intrinsic in the act of procreation at the heart of Christian mythology.

Christ Climbed Down (excerpt)

Christ climbed down
from His bare Tree
this year
and softly stole away into
some anonymous Mary's womb again
where in the darkest night
of everybody's anonymous soul
He awaits again
an unimaginable
and impossibly
Immaculate Reconception
the very craziest
of Second Comings

Ferlinghetti's wry look at the very precepts informing Christianity is similar in nature to the narrator's point of view in "Desperados Under the Eaves" in that he is not only focusing on the foibles of human experience, but also on the ways in which people superimpose faith and spirituality on top of the commonplace. The sacred is profane and the profane, sacred; there is inherent in brokenness, beauty.

When Zevon wrote "The Indifference of Heaven" (*Mutineer*, 1995, Giant Records), he was nearly seven years from his 2002 diagnosis with inoperable pleural mesothelioma, the disease which took his life in 2003. Yet the work exhibited his dedication to his own sobriety and feelings of mortality. As such, a lot of the writing responds to the passage of time and those things humans cannot control, while at once

also reflecting a certain peace with these ideas, and a realization of the beauty that surrounds all of the moments slipping by, all of the mistakes and disappointments he has experienced.

The Indifference Of Heaven (excerpt)

Time marches on
Time stands still
Time on my hands
Time to kill
Blood on my hands
And my hands in the till
Down at the 7-11
Gentle rain
Falls on me
All life folds back
Into the sea
We contemplate eternity
Beneath the vast indifference of heaven

The past seems realer than the present to me now
I've got memories to last me
When the sky is gray
The way it is today
I remember the times when I was happy

Same old sun
Same old moon
It's the same old story
Same old tune
They all say
Someday soon
My sins will all be forgiven
Gentle rain
Falls on me
All life folds back
Into the sea
We contemplate eternity
Beneath the vast indifference of heaven

They say "Everything's all right"
They say "Better days are near"
They tell us "These are the good times"
But they don't live around here

Billy and Christie don't--
Bruce and Patti don't--
They don't live around here

Zevon's mentions of popular culture icons, rock musicians Billy (Joel) and Bruce (Springsteen) and their wives is a gentle jab, a metaphoric wink at common presumptions that famous people make great efforts to remove themselves from the world of pain and sorrow, and can avoid this by nature of that fame, while at the same time, Zevon himself, a well-known musician by that time, is writing about those feelings. His reflections on the passage of time are as real as those of any person who has lived long enough to find wry humor in the ease with which he or she can invoke the past, as easily as they can invoke yesterday. The song is a gentle sing-song of a melody, written in a major key and sounding up-beat despite the somewhat gloomy lyrics. Zevon's classic direct delivery, free of vocal frills and largely devoid of vibrato, presents the poem as auditory fact, a simple and clear message about existence.

In "I Am Waiting," Ferlinghetti manages to take a similar look, complete with acerbic humor, at the passage of time, although unlike Zevon's authorial self, he is not particularly sorrowful about the prospect, simply reflective.

I Am Waiting

I am waiting
to get some intimations
of immortality
by recollecting my early childhood
and I am waiting
for the green mornings to come again
youth's dumb green fields come back again
and I am waiting
for some strains of unpremeditated art
to shake my typewriter
and I am waiting to write
the great indelible poem

and I am waiting
For the long careless rapture
and I am perpetually waiting
for the fleeing lovers on the Grecian Urn
to catch each other up at last
and embrace
and I am awaiting
perpetually and forever
a renaissance of wonder

Much as Zevon invokes other musicians, Ferlinghetti invokes John Keats' "Ode On a Grecian Urn," making the subject of the Keats poem part of his poetic self's longing. Like Zevon's narrator, his is full of memories, examining them and looking back wistfully, aware of the passage of time, yet unruffled, simply attentive. Ferlinghetti's "careless rapture" is Zevon's "gentle rain;" both offer redemption, a benediction, beauty in the midst of inevitable decay, the seed in the dying plant.

Warren Zevon's lyrical approach, perfect for his usually deadpan, flourish-free vocal delivery, displays a sensitivity to the foibles of human beings, and focuses on all different aspects of society, from horror movie themes and psychopaths ("Werewolves of London," "Excitable Boy;" *Excitable Boy*), to political upheaval ("Veracruz," *Excitable Boy*), addiction, loss and even his own death ("Keep Me In Your Heart;" *The Wind*). Although the latter is a serious reflection on the fact that, by the time he wrote the song, he was in the last months of his life, his song "Things To Do in Denver When You're Dead" (*Mr. Bad Example*) is a satirical examination of the cost of fame. He refers, among others, to his frequent musical collaborator, Waddy Wachtel a guitarist and composer who played in Zevon's live band, as well as on several of his records.

Throughout the years, Zevon performed in Colorado frequently. In this song, the "death" to which he refers is the time between performances, the nether world when a musician is on the road, but not inhabiting his role playing "live."

Things To Do In Denver When You're Dead

I was working on a steak the other day
And I saw Waddy in the Rattlesnake Cafe
Dressed in black, tossing back a shot of rye
Finding things to do in Denver when you die

You won't need a cab to find a priest
Maybe you should find a place to stay
Some place where they never change the sheets
And you just roll around Denver all day

LeRoy says there's something you should know
Not everybody has a place to go
And home is just a place to hang your head
And dream of things to do in Denver when you're dead

Ferlinghetti's "With Beckett" (Peters) details a dream that unfolds much the same way as Zevon's memory of the encounter at a restaurant. In this scenario, the poet encounters Irish writer Samuel Beckett in a Paris park on a rainy day. Like Zevon's song, the writer shares a moment with the other man, and inferences are made to those places in between the acts of creating and performing that are common for playwrights, musicians, and poets.

With Beckett

I dreamt I saw Samuel Beckett last night
walking through the little park
behind the dark brooding hulk
of the cathedral of Notre Dame
where the leaves of the *marronniers*
quivered in the rain
He was wearing a worn tweed coat
with collar turned up

> And I imagined he had just come
> From the Théâtre de la Poche
> where they had just played in French
> the thousandth performance of "Waiting for Godot"
> And he sat down on a wet bench
> and he pretended to cry as he laughed
> and he pretended to laugh as he cried
>
> And I was with him sitting there
> under the chestnut trees
> *mon semblable mon frère!*

The final reference Ferlinghetti makes in this work is to Charles Beaudelaire's poem, "Au hypocrite lecteur," or "To the Reader." and translates in English to "my twin, my brother." In examination of Beaudelaire's work, it is clear that Ferlinghetti and Zevon are both pointing out the double edged sword that is the creative life, as well as the more generalized comparison between those shining moments of life (the performances or acts of creation for a writer, artist, or musician) when one feels truly alive, and the moments of idling, of a lack of inspiration – boredom; the brokenness. The final stanza of Beaudelaire's poem makes this abundantly clear:

> Boredom! He smokes his hookah, while he dreams
> Of gibbets, weeping tears he cannot smother.
> You know this dainty monster, too, it seems —
> Hypocrite reader! — You! — My twin! — My brother!

Ferlinghetti also invokes the tears of writer Beckett, and as with the Zevon song, the reader is left not knowing how much of the imagined encounter has roots in reality. Unlike many of his rock and roll peers, Warren Zevon was and is considered a storyteller, as were the Beats, his style so confessional it can be difficult to determine where the generally private songwriter ended and his made-up characters began.

Music journalist Hadley Freeman wrote in an article for *theguardian.com*, "When trying to describe a musician's style, the usual tactic is to compare him to other

musicians. But when it comes to Zevon, because his music is so highly literate and based on storytelling, the more apt comparisons are with writers." Freeman continued, "Hunter S. Thompson was another literary friend and there were definite overlaps of sensibility between the two men: their unforgiving satire, their hard-living, their occasionally incomprehensible dark humour." Writer and so-called Gonzo Journalist Hunter S. Thompson came of literary age alongside the Beats, and like them, featured feverish imagery amidst confessional and at times accusatory language. The harsh light of personal truth turned on society was a catalyst for all of these architects of ideas via wordplay.

Despite his greatest claim to fame being arguably the darkly humorous "Werewolves of London" and "Excitable Boy," Zevon was at his poetic best when he wrote ballads and odes to mistakes. These bleakly autobiographical and introspective works were incredibly revealing, and like the work of Ferlinghetti, Bukowski and Ginsburg, his words have the ability to bring the reader into his world, and like Waits as well, sometimes that world is disappointing. In the worlds of all of these writers, the universe can be dark, full of loss, disappointing, even as it is filled with moments of revelation and beatitude.

Zevon died at 56-years-old, and in the year leading to his death became, understandably, darkly reflective, and at the same time, his work also continued to reflect his wry and sardonic way of seeing the world. Although he did not know he was sick when he released the album *Life'll Kill Ya* in 2000, the title song reflected his generally humorous and satirical truthfulness. The follow-up album was titled *My Ride's Here*, released three months before his diagnosis, and the title song's lyrics refer to a hearse.

The final lines are a punchy reflection on death, and in typical fashion, offer humor even in darkness:

My Ride's Here

I was staying at the Westin
I was playing to a draw
When in walked Charlton Heston
With the Tablets of the Law
He said, "It's still the Greatest Story"
I said, "Man I'd like to stay
But I'm bound for glory
I'm on my way
My ride's here..."

In an interview three months after Zevon's diagnosis, writer David Fricke wrote "Since his diagnosis, Zevon has been writing and recording what he knows will be his last album. He jokes about racing against the clock ('Do they still put out EPs?') and quotes another friend, crime novelist Carl Hiaasen: 'Carl believes you can't die in the middle of a project.'" (Fricke) Always a provocateur, Zevon used his final recording as a way of offering closure and messages for those he left behind. These works were no less jarring than so many compositions written when he was young.

Twelve days prior to his death, Warren Zevon's album *The Wind* was released. The composition "Keep Me In Your Heart," which uses the same opening falling shadow imagery as his 1987 work "The Heartache" (*Sentimental Hygiene*) is a sad and resolved reflection on his own mortality, and yet, like so much Beat imagery, is full of beauty despite the sorrow, and a certain transcendence, beatitude.

Keep Me In Your Heart

Shadows are falling and I'm running out of breath
Keep me in your heart for awhile
If I leave you it doesn't mean I love you any less
Keep me in your heart for awhile

When you get up in the morning and you see that crazy sun
Keep me in your heart for awhile
There's a train leaving nightly called when all is said and done
Keep me in your heart for awhile

Sometimes when you're doing simple things around the house
Maybe you'll think of me and smile
You know I'm tied to you like the buttons on your blouse
Keep me in your heart for awhile
Hold me in your thoughts, take me to your dreams
Touch me as I fall into view
When the winter comes keep the fires lit
And I will be right next to you
Engine driver's headed north to Pleasant Stream
Keep me in your heart for awhile
These wheels keep turning but they're running out of steam
Keep me in your heart for awhile

Much of this song, which is written in a major, bright key and sung gently, peacefully, so that if the lyrics were not so somber, it might pass for a lullaby or dance, is a fond farewell to the people Zevon loved, wrapped carefully in beautiful language, reflective and hopeful despite its sadness. Eerily prescient, the song written 16 years earlier presages this farewell, both in mood, key, and tone. Again, it is a composition both sorrowful and filled with redemption seen in the willingness to take chances, to love and be loved.

The Heartache (excerpt)

And the heartache
The risk you run
The chance you take
When you love someone
And the sorrow
For the lonely one
When the heartache comes
And the darkness falls
And the rain comes down
In the midst of spring
There's a sadness in the heart of things

Lawrence Ferlinghetti is still alive at 101-years-old. Examining his work, it is possible to find similar echoes of the perils and gifts inherent in the willingness to love, to take a chance on intimacy. His works “Underwear” (Peters, p. 56) and “Surreal Migrations” (Peters, p. 126) were written 40 years apart, but echo one another.

Underwear (excerpt)

Do not go naked into that good night
And in the meantime
keep calm and warm and dry
No use stirring ourselves up prematurely
‘over Nothing’
Move forward with dignity
hand in vest
Don’t get emotional
And death shall have no dominion
There’s plenty of time my darling
Are we not still young and easy
Don’t shout

Surreal Migrations (excerpt)

Is love still burning
        Do lovers alone wear sunlight?
Dica darling
                tell me tell me
Love lie with me
                beyond the sea
The quays black with voyagers
A crowd flows over london Bridge
Hurry up please
Lady Liberty with flaming torch
stands upon her little island
Having dropper her French accent
Don’t give me your homeless
Jetliners land
without folding their wings
in a dense fog the foghorns
still are sounding
At Ambrose light the great ships

still grope through it
Dica darling
A crowd flows over Brooklyn Bridge
Hey taxi!

In both of these poems, Ferlinghetti examines the manner in which we are at best isolated, tiny islands in a sea of ongoing time and space, simply tiny specks in a sea of life. He reflects on the flow of the world around him, asks for redemption, and like Zevon, paints a colorful world that continues, utterly heedless of his presence. The moment of redemption is the moment of unimportance beyond the mortal coil, while living people choose, consciously, to continue to love and embrace.

When Zevon wrote,

And the rain comes down
In the midst of spring
There's a sadness in the heart of things

he echoed that preeminent theme of loss and brokenness, despite the immeasurable beauty surrounding those somber notes. Spring represents hope, newness, continuity, and yet in Zevon's poetic world, there is a sadness at its heart, inevitable. In his book *Love's Body*, writer Norman O. Brown said of Jack Kerouac's "The Belief and Techniques of Modern Writing," "admit the void: accept loss forever...Wisdom is mourning; blessed are they that mourn." (Wilson, p. 118) This is the essence of that which ties the works of the Beats directly to Tom Waits, Leonard Cohen, and Warren Zevon. Zevon's lyrics reveal that he could admit the void. He both delighted in the springs, but saw that sadness at its heart.

LEONARD COHEN

While passing out his "Celestial Homework" reading list at the Naropa Institute in the summer of 1977, poet Allen Ginsburg said "Poetry is the realization of the magnificence of the actual." (Wilson, p. 85) With his examination of the world around him, Cohen brought his personal "actual" into clear focus that resonates with those who opt to interact with his creations of song and lyric.

Leonard Norman Cohen, the late Canadian poet and songwriter, was born in Montreal, in 1934. He grew up in an orthodox Jewish family, and was the grandson of two Jewish scholars. (Reynolds, pp. 1-9)

Cohen cited as early influences poets and writers William Butler Yeats, Walt Whitman, and Henry Miller, all writers who examined their worlds with clarity and specificity. The emotionally steeped influence of the Beats is also evident in Cohen's work, however, as the themes of loneliness, emotional dispossession, and the sense of deeply profound beauty inherent in suffering pervade his words. When Cohen moved to New York in 1956 for a brief tenure studying literature at Columbia University, he began frequenting the performance forums in Greenwich Village, where he attended "at least one reading by Kerouac," an event which "would be of immediate if temporary influence on Cohen." (Reynolds, p. 19) He also had several encounters with Allen Ginsburg over the course of his career. (Reynolds, p. 33) Clearly, the work of the Beats left an impression on the young writer.

Perhaps most significant to his development as a songwriter was Bob Dylan. By the time Cohen moved back to New York City, after living on the Greek island of Hydra for a few years, Dylan had become more than a quirky hiccup in the conventional music

scene, and “had now transcended, in establishment terms, his notoriety as a goofily powerful and eccentric young songwriter, singer and poet and was now being recognised as a figurehead of a powerful new demographic...that was rapidly metamorphosing its underground into an over ground.” (Reynolds, pp. 58-9) Cohen found in this shift an opportunity for his voice to be heard. At the time, he said, sarcastically comparing himself to Dylan, “I have a terrible voice...I’m very small, emaciated, with the residue of acne. And I’m demonstrably Jewish (Dylan is not). The only thing I have going against me is I play the guitar too well.”

While attaining his bachelor's degree at McGill University in Montreal, he engaged heavily in writing and was the recipient of literary awards and accolades. (Simmons, p. 12) He found his brief foray into graduate school unfulfilling, as he described it, "passion without flesh, love without climax." (Nadel, p. 51) At the beginning of his post collegiate career, he sought out a livelihood as a poet and writer. His target was, he wrote to a publisher, “inner-directed adolescents, lovers in all degrees of anguish, disappointed Platonists, pornography-peepers, hair-handed monks and Popists.” (Remnick) Clearly, he wanted to reach the same readers as the Beats, with his similar message.

By the mid-1960s he began setting his songs to music. His first album, *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, was released by Columbia Records in 1967.

Like Waits and Zevon, Leonard Cohen had a singular vocal style, a balance of singing and talking, his sonorous bass often as much an instrument as a tool of conveying lyrics. His songs tend to be slow and cautious, even the ones that give a generous nod to the joyful Klezmer music of Eastern European Jews, something with which he became

familiar while growing up in an Orthodox Jewish family, the grandson of Talmudic writer, Rabbi Solomon Klonitsky-Kline. (Interview, ABC Australia, “The Midday Show With Ray Martin.” Interviewed by Ray Martin. Sydney, May 24, 1985) (Gilmore, Mikal, “Leonard Cohen: Remembering the Life and Legacy of the Poet of Brokenness.” *Rolling Stone,* November 30, 2016)

In Cohen’s later recordings, his voice became a measured rumble demanding attention from the listener. A prayerful, contemplative man, Cohen spent time living as a monk, seeking a source of inner quiet through the practice of Buddhism because of the constant depression in his life, while maintaining his spiritual connectedness to Judaism. ‘Even as a practicing Buddhist, Cohen never stopped thinking of himself as a Jew, telling an interviewer, “I’m not looking for new religion. I’m quite happy with the old one, with Judaism.”’ (Sales, Ben, “Leonard Cohen's 5 Most Jewish Songs,” haaretz.com, 2016) It would seem that Cohen embodied what Kerouac meant when he said, “Beat doesn’t mean tired, or bushed, so much as it means *beato,* Italian for beatific: to be in a state of beatitude...trying to love all life...practicing endurance, kindness, cultivating joy of heart. How can this be done in our mad, modern world of multiplicities and millions? By practicing a little solitude, going off by yourself once in a while to store up that most precious of golds: the vibrations of sincerity.” (Kerouac, p.56)

Although he recognized his depression, Cohen used it as a source of inspiration, rather than a reason to distance himself from his creative drive. ‘“Depression has often been the general background of my daily life,” Cohen told me. “My feeling is that whatever I did was in spite of that, not because of it. It wasn’t the depression that was the engine of my work. . . . That was just the sea I swam in.”’ (Gilmore) Writer and music

journalist Harvey Kubernik described a conversation he had with Cohen saying, “We spoke off record – of poetry. Allen Ginsburg, Lewis Furey, Peter Orlovsky. And at one point I broke off and asked him: ‘Why are your songs so bleak, Leonard?’ In reply he quoted Ezra Pound: ‘My betrayals are as fresh as yesterday.’” Kubernik added, “Here was a man who had a grasp of the human condition.” (Reynold, pp. 126-7)

In his song “Dance me to the Edge of Love,” (*Various Positions*) Cohen’s lyrics are at once romantic and sorrowful, and somehow fatigued. The song, full of references to the Holocaust, is an ode to the interpersonal relationship from the relationship’s start to its end, in whatever form that end takes (be it death or some other parting), the “edge of love.”

In an interview with Allan Showalter, long-time Cohen blogger, who originated the website cohencentric.com (since closed), Cohen said “this is a song that arose from a photograph that I saw when I was a child of some people in striped pajamas prison uniforms with violins playing beside a smoke stack and the smoke was made out of gypsies and children, and this song arose out of that photograph “Dance Me To The End Of Love.” He added, “That came from just hearing or reading or knowing that in the death camps, beside the crematoria, in certain of the death camps, a string quartet was pressed into performance while this horror was going on, those were the people whose fate was this horror also. And they would be playing classical music while their fellow prisoners were being killed and burnt. So, that music, ‘Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin,’ meaning the beauty there of being the consummation of life, the end of this existence and of the passionate element in that consummation. But, it is the same language that we use for surrender to the beloved, so that the song — it’s not important

that anybody knows the genesis of it, because if the language comes from that passionate resource, it will be able to embrace all passionate activity."

Melodically echoing eastern European Jewish folk music, the poem is wound through with gentle, musical sighs of sadness imbued by its key of G minor, yet gracefully holds on to a hope promised by love. In Cohen's poetic romantic world, the notion of joy is instantly accompanied by sadness, simply because it is destined to be finite. Love, the joy, is in a constant and intimate dance with "the end."

Dance Me to the Edge of Love

Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin
Dance me through the panic till I'm gathered safely in
Lift me like an olive branch and be my homeward dove
Dance me to the end of love

Oh, let me see your beauty when the witnesses are gone
Let me feel you moving like they do in Babylon
Show me slowly what I only know the limits of
Dance me to the end of love
Dance me to the end of love

Dance me to the wedding now, dance me on and on
Dance me very tenderly and dance me very long
We're both of us beneath our love, we're both of us above
Dance me to the end of love
Dance me to the end of love

Dance me to the children who are asking to be born
Dance me through the curtains that our kisses have outworn
Raise a tent of shelter now, though every thread is torn
Dance me to the end of love

Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin
Dance me through the panic till I'm gathered safely in
Touch me with your naked hand or touch me with your glove
Dance me to the end of love
Dance me to the end of love

At once sensual and sorrowful this song is an ode to the eternal connection between people, and the temporary nature of life and love. The phrase “Dance me through the curtains that our kisses have outworn” at once invokes a love that withstands all pressures, yet the use of the word “outworn” hints at something about to be lost, something ending. When he wrote, “Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin, dance me through the panic till I'm gathered safely in,” the lyric made direct reference to the musicians playing in the concentration camps, and then to the emotional safety sought in relationships with other people.

In “Who To Be Kind To,” Allen Ginsburg wrote about the same conflict, that between the wonder of love in the face of inevitable sorrow. (Ginsburg, Allen, *Collected Poems, 1947-1980.* New York, Harper & Row, 1984)

Who To Be Kind To (excerpt)

Be kind to your self who weeps under
the Moscow moon and hide your bliss hairs
under raincoat and suede Levi’s–
For this is the joy to be born, the kindness
received thru strange eyeglasses on
a bus thru Kensington,
the finger touch of the Londoner on your thumb,
that borrows light from your cigarette,
the morning smile at Newcastle Central
station, when longhair Tom blond husband
greets the bearded stranger of telephones–
the boom boom that bounces in the joyful
bowels as the Liverpool Minstrels of
CavernSink
raise up their joyful voices and guitars…

...Bicycle chain and machine gun, fear sneer
& smell cold logic of the Dream Bomb
have come to Saigon, Johannesburg
Dominica City, Phnom Penh, Pentagon
Paris and Lhasa–
Be kind to the universe of Self that

trembles and shudders and thrills
in XX Century,
that opens its eyes and belly and breast
chained with flesh to feel
the myriad flowers of bliss
that I Am to Thee–
A dream! a Dream! I don't want to be alone!
I want to know that I am loved!
I want the orgy of our flesh, orgy
of all eyes happy, orgy of the soul
kissing and blessing its mortal-grown
body...

...And be kind to the poor soul that cries in
a crack of the pavement because he
has no body–
Prayers to the ghosts and demons, the
lackloves of Capitals & Congresses
who make sadistic noises
on the radio–
Statue destroyers & tank captains, unhappy
murderers in Mekong & Stanleyville,
That a new kind of man has come to his bliss
to end the cold war he has borne
against his own kind flesh
since the days of the snake.

In Ginsburg's poem, "the joy to be born, the kindness received thru strange eyeglasses on a bus thru Kensington," and "the myriad flowers of bliss that I Am to Thee" are in direct juxtaposition to the "machine gun, fear sneer & smell cold logic of the Dream Bomb have come to Saigon, Johannesburg Dominica City, Phnom Penh" and "the ghosts and demons, the lackloves of Capitals & Congresses who make sadistic noises on the radio– Statue destroyers & tank captains, unhappy murderers in Mekong & Stanleyville." The latter references to war are, to Ginsburg, the devastation of the Holocaust for Cohen. However, both manage to carry forward a sense of fighting against despair with their verses. Again, this is a poetic choice to look at brokenness in direct relationship to beauty. Like the notion that without dark, nobody would appreciate light,

so these wordsmiths inform their despair with joy. The active choice to embrace both ends of the spectrum of the human condition offers salvation in the works of both.

Perhaps Cohen's most famous work is the ubiquitous "Hallelujah." (*Various Positions*) Hundreds of artists have covered this iconic, spiritual song, in a myriad of languages. From pop stars to the Israeli Defense Force band, its haunting melody and chorus, the origin of which is a two-word phrase, not one word. The first part, *hallelu*, is the masculine plural form of the Hebrew verb *hillel*, which means "praise." The second word, the Hebrew *yah*, is shortened from *yahweh*, meaning "God." However, "hallelujah" means more than simply "praise Yah." The word hallel in Hebrew means a joyous praise in song, to boast in God.

Because of a certain narrow understanding or maybe simply a limited examination of the lyrics, coupled with the term hallelujah's origins, many people believe this is a religious song, particularly when taken into consideration with Cohen's strong Jewish faith. However, upon close examination of the song, it is anything but religious, although it is certainly prayerful. This being said, it is a shattered prayer offered by a shattered voice, at once crying praise and a cry of unutterable pain, often the result of lost faith or lost love. It is a veritable primal scream of beauty woven throughout with brokenness. While there is direct reference to two individual Old Testament stories in the second verse, the overarching theme of the song is that of a relationship, sexual in nature, between two people.

Verse two of "Hallelujah" features the words:

> Your faith was strong but you needed proof
> You saw her bathing on the roof
> Her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you
> She tied you to a kitchen chair

She broke your throne and she cut your hair
And from your lips she drew the Hallelujah

The verse recounts the story of David seeing Batsheva, his future wife, bathing on a rooftop, and ends with imagery of her tying him down and cutting his hair — an allusion to Samson and Delilah. (Sales)

However, a few bars later, Cohen wrote the very explicitly sexual:

There was a time you let me know
What's really going on below
But now you never show it to me, do you?
And remember when I moved in you
The holy dove was moving too
And every breath we drew was Hallelujah

To this poet, plainly, love and the physical expression thereof was a holy act, a spiritual consummation. Ginsburg's work is also riddled with explicit sexual references, certainly, but not to elicit shock and therefore gain the attention of the reader, but to reinforce the spiritual connectedness he felt essential as part of the spiritual existence of all people. In his poem "On Illness," (Ginsburg, Allen, *Poems All Over the Place*, Cherry Valley Editions, Maryland, 1978, P. 29) he wrote:

Lord Heart, heal my right temple bang'd soft pain the
bookshelf
rising to fuck Peter embrac'd naked on the big wooden couch
mattress sheeted blanketed
My broken leg, Lord Heart Heal crooked bone above stiff
ankle, straight tibia tender sore
Lord Heart, more near, lax abdomen muscle, nausea hiatus
hernia
That I never eat too much Lord Heart eat Lord's parts sick
with solar plexus pain,
deep breath your airy body tingling empty pleasur'd skin
kissed cock surrender'd rising buttock entering yr
Lord Heart -

The “Lord Heart” he writes of is his own self, and the poem is a mantra of sorts, a prayer to the weakness of the human body, yet worshipping the capacity of a frail body to love, to engage in acts of love. It can be seen to be as much about the frailties of emotions that the poet is essentially praying to his body to accommodate the vagaries of the emotions, to heal the body from any shortfalls that might disallow it from expressing feelings via sexual intimacy. There is a place in the center of love, Ginsburg seems to say, that is weak and fragile, and in need of protection and healing, the decay and beauty that run hand-in-hand in the human experience.

In “On Illness,” there is, as in “Hallelujah,” a sense of loss, and of the ultimate state of isolation every person faces in silent reflection.

Cohen’s song, when taken in its entirety, is a confession, a near-apology for the errors endemic in human foibles, an admission that when it comes to love, no person is perfect. Yet because of its pace, that of a somber walk, the near reverential chord progression (referenced in the lyrics themselves; “it goes like this, the fourth, the fifth, the minor drop, the major lift”) of the verses, the self-reference to Cohen in comparison with the Jewish King David, who was known in the Old Testament as “David the sweet singer,” (chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/520477/jewish/The-Story-of-King-David-in-the-Bible) As the ‘“baffled king composing “Hallelujah,”’ the song is prayerful, full of emotion and a sense of profound holiness.

Hallelujah

Now I've heard there was a secret chord
That David played, and it pleased the Lord
But you don't really care for music, do you?

It goes like this, the fourth, the fifth
The minor fall, the major lift
The baffled king composing "Hallelujah"
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Your faith was strong but you needed proof
You saw her bathing on the roof
Her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you
She tied you to a kitchen chair
She broke your throne and she cut your hair
And from your lips she drew the Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Baby I have been here before
I know this room, I've walked this floor
I used to live alone before I knew you
I've seen your flag on the marble arch
Love is not a victory march
It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

There was a time you let me know
What's really going on below
But now you never show it to me, do you?
And remember when I moved in you
The holy dove was moving too
And every breath we drew was Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

You say I took the name in vain
I don't even know the name
But if I did, well really, what's it to you?
There's a blaze of light in every word
It doesn't matter which you heard
The holy or the broken Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Maybe there's a God above
But all I've ever learned from love
Was how to shoot at somebody who outdrew you
And it's not a cry that you hear at night

It's not somebody who's seen the light
It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

I did my best, it wasn't much
I couldn't feel, so I tried to touch
I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you
And even though it all went wrong
I'll stand before the Lord of Song
With nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

By the time the song comes to the lyrics, “There's a blaze of light in every word, it doesn't matter which you heard, the holy or the broken Hallelujah,” it is made clear this songwriter understands that place where the divine and profane meet, where the holy and the broken stand as one entity, the beauty in decay. Yet this song is far from the only one in Cohen’s library that showcases his sense of observing an intersection, a space where his familiarity with the human condition has become acutely tuned into the way love and pain run together, the tender spot which is made vulnerable every time humans choose to love.

In his song “Anthem,” (*The Future,* 1992 Sony/ATV Music) he writes:

Anthem (excerpt)

The birds they sang
At the break of day
Start again
I heard them say
Don't dwell on what
Has passed away
Or what is yet to be...

We asked for signs
The signs were sent
The birth betrayed

The marriage spent
Yeah the widowhood
Of every government
Signs for all to see
I can't run no more
With that lawless crowd
While the killers in high places
Say their prayers out loud
But they've summoned, they've summoned up
A thundercloud
And they're going to hear from me

...Every heart to love will come
But like a refugee

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything (there is a crack in everything)
That's how the light gets in
Ring the bells that still can ring (ring the bells that still can ring)
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything (there is a crack in everything)
That's how the light gets in

Much like Allen Ginsburg's poem "Howl," (Ginsburg, Allen, *Howl and Other Poems*, City Lights, San Francisco, 1956) this song's lyrics are a cry of outrage (if subdued by the nature of the song and Cohen's mournful delivery - the lyrics are as powerful in their content as if he were shouting) and sorrow at the shortcomings of humanity. "While the killers in high places / Say their prayers out loud," they have enraged the people, and "summoned up / A thundercloud / And they're going to hear from me." Cohen's "killers in high places" are the world leaders so quick to order armies of ordinary people into peril, saying "their prayers" to shield them from repercussions. When he refers to the "widowhood of every government," Cohen is reflecting the world around him, as when he says "We asked for signs / The signs were sent /The birth

betrayed / The marriage spent.” The birth is the origin of the nation, the marriage, the initial optimism of every republic.

Likewise, “Howl” is a primal scream, a shriek of agony written in the midst of tremendous societal upheaval, a defense of the preservation of personal freedom. The poem, written in very long lines in a form reminiscent of Walt Whitman, is long enough to be considered an epic poem, with three sections, and 112 lines, and was removed from bookstores with the claim from law enforcement that it was obscene, due to its graphic references to sex and drug use. A subsequent trial led to the determination that it was not obscene when California State Superior Court Judge Clayton Horn said the work had "redeeming social importance." (Hyde, Lewis, *Horn on Howl*, Hyde (ed.). University of Michigan Press, 1984 pp. 42–53)

In the poem, Ginsburg rails against the modern, the new, the Vietnam War, the draft, the repression and subjugation of societal outliers. At the same time, the poem is also a celebration and recognition of those people.

Howl (excerpt)

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical
naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry
dynamo in the machinery of night,
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,
who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels
staggering on tenement roofs illuminated,
who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas

and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war…

who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise Alley, death, or purgatoried their torsos night after night
with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and endless balls,
incomparable blind streets of shuddering cloud and lightning in the mind leaping toward poles of Canada & Paterson, illuminating all the motionless world of Time between,
Peyote solidities of halls, backyard green tree cemetery dawns, wine drunkenness over the rooftops, storefront boroughs of teahead joyride neon blinking traffic light, sun and moon and tree vibrations in the roaring winter dusks of Brooklyn, ashcan rantings and kind king light of mind,
who chained themselves to subways for the endless ride from Battery to holy Bronx on benzedrine until the noise of wheels and children brought them down shuddering mouth-wracked and battered bleak of brain all drained of brilliance in the drear light of Zoo...

Ginsburg's poem, much like Cohen's song, is an ode to the failure of the system to keep its promise of perfection, of fulfillment, of a bright future, to the people of the nation. While Cohen's "birds" are a message of trying not to "dwell on that," in Ginsburg's reckoning, solace is found in escapism via drugs and sex and a certain obliteration of self, the "Peyote solidities" and "wine drunkenness," the "endless ride from Battery to holy Bronx on benzedrine." There is evidence of the brokenness all around, yet in both odes, there is that moment of revelation, the hope, the beauty that rises to the surface.

In the third segment of "Howl," Ginsburg writes,

I'm with you in Rockland
where we wake up electrified out of the coma by our own souls' airplanes
roaring over the roof they've come to drop angelic bombs the hospital illuminates
itself imaginary walls collapse O skinny legions run outside O starry-spangled shock of mercy the eternal war is here O victory forget your underwear we're free

Ginsburg's "imaginary walls" fled by "skinny legions" as they "run outside" is the triumph of the human spirit, the declaration of freedom that withstands despair and finds beauty, much as Cohen's "crack in everything," lets in "the light" of joy and beauty and resilience. The cracks may look like damage, like decay, but in fact, they are the very

thing that permits the entry of wonder and beatification. In an interview with Paul Carroll, referring his writing "Howl," Ginsburg, who was, like Cohen, a practitioner of Buddhism, (Nisker) said, "What I didn't anticipate was that there were so many companions of the Holy Spirit in America -– or that *everybody* is really inhabited by the Holy Spirit. By Holy Spirit I mean the recognition of a common self in all of us and our acceptance of the fact that we're all the same one." This echoes the foundation of Ginsberg's work, the notion that one's individual thoughts and experiences resonated among the masses. (Schumacher)

This idea finds its match in Cohen's work when he writes "Every heart to love will come But like a refugee;" that yearning to love is the Holy Spirit to which Ginsburg referred, the experience that resonates among the masses. They share a basic belief that despite the terrors inherent in life, the urge to love eventually prevails; again, from brokenness, beauty.

Ginsburg wrote the poem "Kaddish" upon the death of his mother, Naomi Ginsburg. The *Kaddish* is the memorial prayer Jews say on anniversaries of a death, an exaltation of God to serve as succor for those who remain behind, calling to God as "the Holy Blessed One, beyond all earthly words and songs of blessing, praise, and comfort." Ginsburg's poem is more a biography of sorts, through glass tinged by remorse and loss, but nonetheless celebratory.

Kaddish (excerpt)

Strange now to think of you, gone without corsets & eyes, while I walk on the Sunny pavement of Greenwich Village.
downtown Manhattan, clear winter noon, and I've been up all night, talking, talking, reading the Kaddish aloud, listening to Ray Charles blues shout blind on the phonograph
the rhythm the rhythm—and your memory in my head three years after—And

read Adonais' last triumphant stanzas aloud—wept, realizing how we suffer—
And how Death is that remedy all singers dream of, sing, remember, prophesy as
in the Hebrew Anthem, or the Buddhist Book of Answers—and my own imagination of a withered leaf—at dawn—
Dreaming back thru life, Your time—and mine accelerating toward Apocalypse,
the final moment—the flower burning in the Day—and what comes after,
looking back on the mind itself that saw an American city
a flash away, and the great dream of Me or China, or you and a phantom Russia,
or a crumpled bed that never existed—
like a poem in the dark—escaped back to Oblivion—
No more to say, and nothing to weep for but the Beings in the Dream, trapped in its disappearance,
sighing, screaming with it, buying and selling pieces of phantom, worshipping
each other,
worshipping the God included in it all—longing or inevitability?—while it lasts,
a Vision—anything more?

...Myself, anyhow, maybe as old as the universe—and I guess that dies with
us—enough to cancel all that comes—What came is gone forever every time—
That's good! That leaves it open for no regret—no fear radiators, lacklove, torture
Even toothache in the end—
Though while it comes it is a lion that eats the soul—and the lamb, the soul, in
us, alas, offering itself in sacrifice to change's fierce hunger—hair and teeth—and the roar of bonepain, skull bare, break rib, rot-skin, braintricked Implacability.
Ai! ai! we do worse! We are in a fix! And you're out, Death let you out, Death had
the Mercy, you're done with your century, done with God, done with the path thru it—Done with yourself at last—Pure—Back to the Babe dark before your Father, before us all—before the world—
There, rest. No more suffering for you. I know where you've gone, it's good.

...Blessed be He who builds Heaven in Darkness! Blessed Blessed Blessed be He!
Blessed be He! Blessed be Death on us All!

When compared to the actual prayer known as the Kaddish, which includes the line “May the One who creates harmony on high, bring peace to us,” it is possible to make a simple connection between the final lines of Ginsburg’s poem and the prayer. The sentence “Blessed be he who builds Heaven in Darkness" can be seen as the resolution Ginsburg seeks, his release from the sorrow of losing his mother, coming from “the One who creates harmony on high.” To find a correlation in one of Leonard Cohen’s songs is not hard. It is present in numerous of his works, including that “crack in everything;” the light that gets in could well be considered to be “the One,” or “he who builds Heaven in Darkness.” A strong argument can be made that despite the spirituality present in both “Anthem” and “Hallelujah,” however, his song “You Want it Darker” comes from a place of both worship, and equal measures of anger and despair, an understandable emotional plane for a writer who has addressed the specter of the Holocaust in other works. This can be likened to Ginsburg’s use of “Adonai,” the sacred Hebrew name of God which is not supposed to be used outside of religious services or actual prayer.

You Want It Darker

If you are the dealer, I'm out of the game
If you are the healer, it means I'm broken and lame
If thine is the glory then mine must be the shame
You want it darker
We kill the flame

Magnified, sanctified, be thy holy name
Vilified, crucified, in the human frame
A million candles burning for the help that never came
You want it darker
Hineni, hineni
I'm ready, my lord

There's a lover in the story
But the story's still the same

There's a lullaby for suffering
And a paradox to blame
But it's written in the scriptures
And it's not some idle claim
You want it darker
We kill the flame

They're lining up the prisoners
And the guards are taking aim
I struggled with some demons
They were middle class and tame
I didn't know I had permission to murder and to maim
You want it darker
Hineni, hineni
I'm ready, my lord

Magnified, sanctified, be thy holy name
Vilified, crucified, in the human frame
A million candles burning for the love that never came
You want it darker
We kill the flame

If you are the dealer, let me out of the game
If you are the healer, I'm broken and lame
If thine is the glory, mine must be the shame
You want it darker
Hineni, hineni
Hineni, hineni
I'm ready, my lord

The word *hineni* is Hebrew for "here I am." This is the response Abraham gives when God calls on him to sacrifice his son Isaac in the Torah, as well as the name of a prayer of humility, addressed to God, chanted by the cantor on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. The song was released on Cohen's 82nd birthday. Backing vocals on the recorded version of the song feature Gideon Zelermyer, the cantor from the Shamaar Hashomayim synagogue Cohen attended in Montreal. (Friedman)

The lyrics, "Magnified, sanctified be thy holy name, Vilified, crucified in the human frame, A million candles burning for a help that never came, You want it darker,

we kill the flame," which echoes and reflects the language of the Kaddish; "Exalted and hallowed be God's great name, in the world which God created, according to plan. May God's majesty be revealed in the days of our lifetime and the life of all Israel — speedily, imminently,Amen." Given Cohen's background, this cannot be presumed a coincidence. His cynicism and dark sensibilities imply that no matter how much humans reach for the divine, they will still find a way to destroy themselves and one another, and "kill the flame." On the other hand, both Cohen and Ginsburg, who also descended from Russian Jewish immigrants, were aware that in every synagogue, there is a flame (or in some contemporary temples, a lightbulb) that burns constantly, the Ner Tamid, or Eternal Light, the name of which is derived from a verse in Exodus. (chabad.org) The Ner Tamid also represents the eternal presence of the divine, and the invocation of God via prayer. Cohen's lyrical vilification and crucifixion are condemnation of humans, the million candles burning are flames extinguished, holy or otherwise. The flame he mentions being killed, however, is the spark of the divine in humanity, not the "magnified, sanctified" entity prefacing the flame. This is his version of God, in contrast to the acts of humans, and remains, in Cohen's world, present, as he says, "hineni, I'm ready." Opening with a somber, Gregorian-esque chant by a group of male voices, who continue to sing in the background, this song is spoken by Cohen whose usually gravelly bass is particularly sobering when he speaks at the song's somber pace. It has a haunting sound, and Cohen's somber statement "I'm ready my lord" is particularly sobering given how close to his death the song was recorded. And yet, it is not morbid, but vaguely optimistic because of that same claim. Zelermyer's prayerful chant adds to the sense of the holy the song conveys. Something at once sorrowful and hopeful comes across.

“There's a lover in the story / But the story's still the same / There's a lullaby for suffering / And a paradox to blame / But it's written in the scriptures / And it's not some idle claim” Leonard Cohen wrote, just a few short months before his death. To him, the story was almost over, and yet he still saw the “lullaby for suffering,” and a world in which there was a healer for the “broken and lame.” Or, as Ginsburg wrote, “Blessed be He who builds Heaven in Darkness! Blessed Blessed Blessed be He! Blessed be He! Blessed be Death on us All!” For both Ginsburg and Cohen, the end was not the end, the dark was not without light, there was a certain grace with every tear.

That beauty could even exist in a world in which there did not also occur the opposite, contrasting dark, sorrow, decay or despair was never something either considered, nor did Charles Bukowski, Warren Zevon, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, or does Tom Waits; none of their work would exist if they did not have clear faith in the paradigm; without night, no day. Without dark, no light. Without struggle, no wonder, no joy. There is always, for these men, the knowledge that at its most shattered, there exists in the world wondrous, astounding beauty, if one simply knows how to see. Like the strong and at times antagonistic poetic voices of Bukowski, Ferlinghetti and Ginsburg, these three singers are possessed of unconventional voices, and their lyrics, disclosing deeply human flaws and sorrows, also offer glimpses of hope and redemption; beatification.

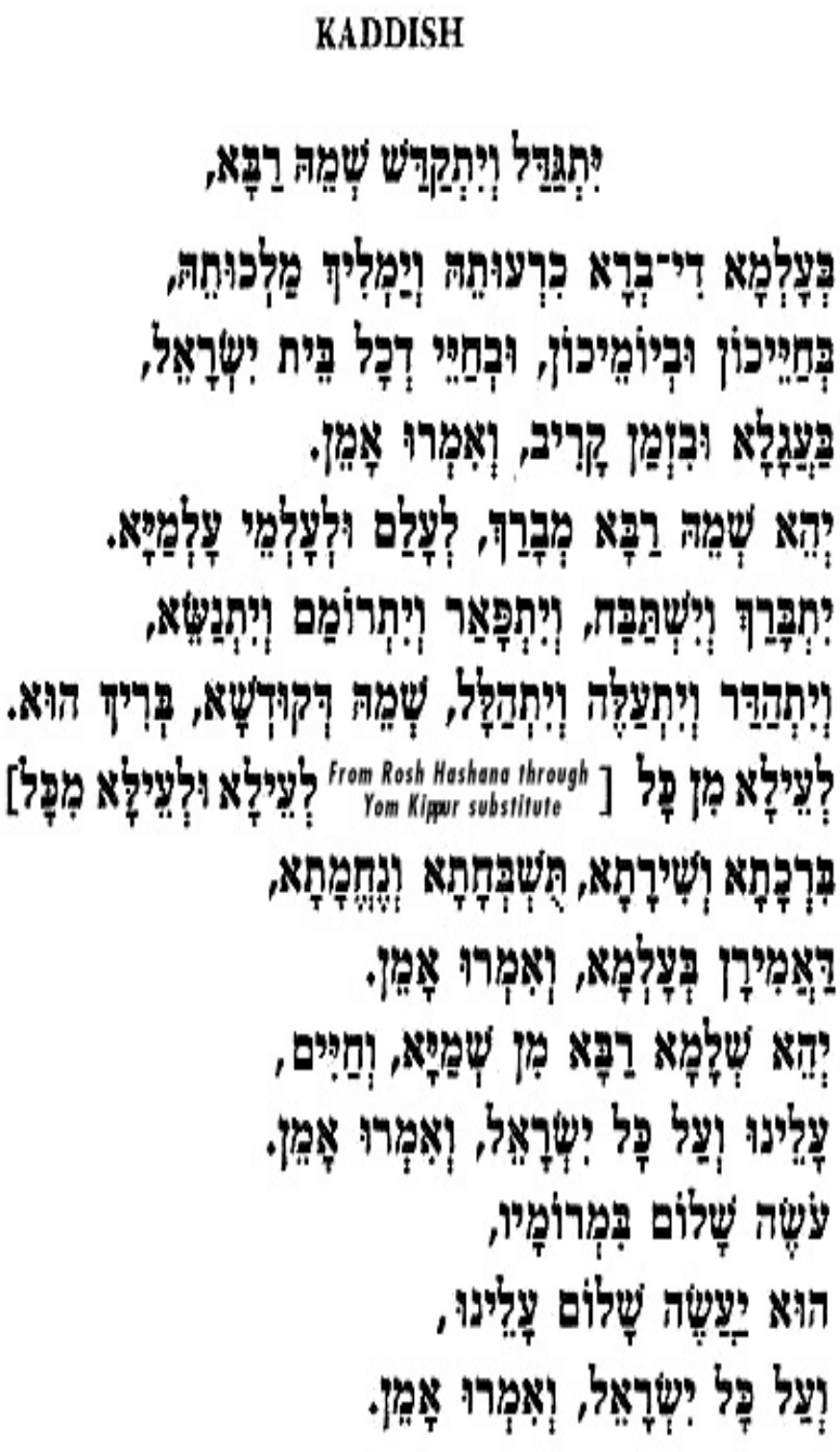
Appendix

Kaddish

Exalted and hallowed be
God's great name
in the world which God
created, according to
plan.
May God's majesty be
revealed in the days of
our lifetime
and the life of all Israel
— speedily, imminently,
To which we say: Amen.

Blessed be God's great
name to all eternity.
Blessed, praised,
honored, exalted,
extolled, glorified,
adored, and lauded
be the name of the Holy
Blessed One,
beyond all earthly words
and songs of blessing,
praise, and comfort.
To which we say: Amen.

May there be abundant
peace from heaven, and
life, for us and all Israel.
To which we say: Amen.
May the One who
creates harmony on high,
bring peace to us and to
all Israel.
To which we say: Amen.



KADDISH

יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא,

בְּעָלְמָא דִּי־בְרָא כִרְעוּתֵהּ וְיַמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתֵהּ,
בְּחַיֵּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן, וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל,
בַּעֲגָלָא וּבִזְמַן קָרִיב, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.
יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ, לְעָלַם וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמַיָּא.
יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח, וְיִתְפָּאַר וְיִתְרוֹמַם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא,
וְיִתְהַדַּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל, שְׁמֵהּ דְקוּדְשָׁא, בְּרִיךְ הוּא.
לְעֵלָּא מִן כָּל [From Rosh Hashana through Yom Kippur substitute לְעֵילָּא וּלְעֵילָּא מִכָּל]
בִּרְכָתָא וְשִׁירָתָא, תֻּשְׁבְּחָתָא וְנֶחֱמָתָא,
דַּאֲמִירָן בְּעָלְמָא, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.
יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא, וְחַיִּים,
עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.
עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בִּמְרוֹמָיו,
הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ,
וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.

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