

Howl, and Other Poems Study Guide

Howl, and Other Poems by Allen Ginsberg

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Howl for Carl Solomon - Introduction by William Carlos Williams

Howl for Carl Solomon - Introduction by William Carlos Williams Summary

Preliminary discussion of the poem:

William Carlos Williams talks of knowing Allen Ginsberg as a young poet in Paterson, New Jersey. He says Ginsberg was much disturbed by his encounters with life in the years after the end of World War I, as he lived in and about New York City. Williams says that Ginsberg has an ability to survive, travel, write and continually develop his art. He also says that HOWL is an arresting poem and indicates that Ginsberg has gone through hell in his life. He relates that Ginsberg met Carl Solomon and shared something with him that can only be described by the words written in HOWL. He says HOWL is a "howl of defeat." He says everyone is defeated in this life, but a man, "if he be a man" is not defeated, in the end.

Williams says that Allen Ginsberg has gone through the horrifying experiences described in HOWL but has come through them and shown the spirit of love survives. Williams says that this spirit of love survives if we have the wit, courage, faith, and the art to persist and persevere in life. Williams also says that Ginsberg has a belief in the art of poetry. Williams says that to read HOWL we have to brace ourselves as we're going through a type of hell in reading it.

Howl for Carl Solomon - Introduction by William Carlos Williams Analysis

William Carlos Williams, an American poet says that HOWL is a ride through hell itself. He says that it is a work that is about Ginsberg's life, and the wild experiences he went through. He basically says that Ginsberg is a survivor and a poet who constantly works to perfect his art. Williams says that Ginsberg holds back nothing from his life in this poem, that he embraces his life, the good and the bad, and displays it for all to see in HOWL. Williams shows the reader that Ginsberg is an example of how love can see a person through the depths of despair to a life of productivity - that there can be a peace that can come to one's life if he or she perseveres.



Howl

Howl Summary

I

Ginsberg describes seeing the intelligent, creative, and astute men and women of his generation destroyed by madness. This madness from their own life experiments, from the evils and contradictions in society around them, and from searching for happiness in places and people that do not bring happiness. He talks of rampant drug use in the search for happiness and of how drug use was used to deaden emotional and mental anguish, but only served to perpetuate it. Ginsberg also talks of those who tried to discuss solutions to society's problems, in the universities of the day, with those who taught that war was the answer. Ginsberg tells the reader that those of his generation sought peace and happiness through sex, booze, drugs. He says his generation confronted authorities and others of the establishment to promote their message of change and what a just society should be like. He talks of traveling and seeking jazz, sex and food.

Ginsberg also talks of how members of his generation criticized Capitalism and investigated and sometimes embraced Communist ideals. He further talks of how some worshiped the almighty dollar while others sought not to become part of the rat race. He talks of enjoying the life of the ordinary everyday street. Ginsberg relates his experiences of knowing some who tried to commit suicide, but ended up not succeeding and instead conformed to society and opened up antique stores. He also talks of those who lost their creative spark and became advertising writers on Madison Avenue. He says some lived the corporate life in their suits while still trying to do their creative writing—poetry and such. He says some became slaves to fashion, advertising, and commercial writing editors.

Ginsberg also talks, in Part I of HOWL of those who sought religion for peace of mind, or who traveled to other places to get away and find happiness. Ginsberg relates the experiences of those who ended up in mental institutions for treatments of their disorders.

II

The jumping off point for Ginsberg's thoughts in this poem is the word "Moloch." Ginsberg talks in Part II of modern post World Wars America eating up its best creative minds. He shows that money, oil, stone(architecture), electricity, banks and hydrogen bombs are what keeps America occupied and interested. He says all of this exists, while boys sob in armies and old men cry in parks. Ginsberg relates that America is war, government, industry and money, but lacks a soul. He describes America as skyscrapers, factories, antennas over towns and cities, and smokestacks. He says that cities and society are devouring their own, as people live unhappy lives.



III

Rockland, a mental institution, figures prominently in Part III. It is the structure on which the rest of this section is built. He is speaking directly to his friend Carl Solomon in this section. He says they are both writers on the same dreadful typewriter. He talks of Carl visiting Utica, New York, to enjoy physical relations with spinster women there. He talks of Carl's time in mental institutions and how shock treatment will not return Carl's soul to his body. He talks of how Carl plots socialist revolution against what he believes is fascism in America. Ginsberg talks of the love Carl and he have for America even though America is sick and does not allow Carl and he to sleep peacefully, because of their concerns for the state the country is in, and the direction it is headed.

Howl Analysis

HOWL is a poem that is Ginsberg's cry of despair for his generation. Themes of LOVE, LOSS, SEARCHING FOR HAPPINESS, and IDEALISM are evident in this poem. Ginsberg shows the reader his personal search for love and happiness. He also shows the reader that he loves his country but feels it is sick and needs help. This poem shows the reader that love is something we crave as human beings, as well as peace of mind. He shows that we resort to many methods to achieve these things. We try to find them or dull the pain of not having these things through sex, drugs, drink, and schools of political or religious thought. Ginsberg shows the reader that he laments the loss of the bright minds of his generation who ended up dying, or ended up incapacitated by drug use, alcoholism, and madness. Ginsberg also shows the reader that a "political ideal" is what many of his generation sought and delved into communism to find it, as a broadside to capitalism. He shows the reader that many of his generation did not want to embrace the way of their parents - that money, industry, and the so called rat-race were not for them, that they sought something better. HOWL shows the reader the life experiments that Ginsberg involved himself in, from sexual promiscuity, drug use, and excessive drink, to experimenting with different political thought, all the while searching for love and contentment. The poem shows the devastating effects on his generation from these experimentations of his and others, and also the effect that society had on their psyches.



Footnote to Howl

Footnote to Howl Summary

Ginsberg says here that everyone is holy and that everything is holy. He says poems are holy, the individual is holy, the middle-class is holy. He even says the rebellious ones are holy. He also says the kindness of the soul is holy. He shows the reader here that he sees holiness in every aspect of life and society around him. He sees this even though he also sees the defects in society.

Footnote to Howl Analysis

HOWL, in the end, is a cry for help, and a cry for the kindness of the human soul to restore sanity, beauty, and promise to humankind. Ginsberg sees the holiness in life. He sees that humankind must look at the way it treats each other as human beings, as being the way out of the abyss of materialism, war and empty lives. HOWL is a howl for love, justice and peace.

A Supermarket in California

A Supermarket in California Summary

In this poem, Ginsberg shops in a supermarket and as he does, he thinks about the poet Walt Whitman. He talks of having a headache as he walked the side streets to the store. Ginsberg notices husbands, wives and babies in the supermarket. He also imagines seeing the Spanish poet and dramatist Garcia Lorca standing by the watermelon section of the store. Ginsberg also imagines seeing Walt Whitman in the meat section of the store. He imagines that Walt Whitman is eying grocery boys and asking them normal and absurd questions. Ginsberg imagines following Whitman through the store with an imaginary store detective following him. In his imagination, Ginsberg asks Whitman where they are going. He dreams of touching one of Whitman's books and further dreams of their adventure walking throughout the supermarket. He wonders if they will both wander the night streets lonely. Ginsberg wonders if they will stroll, dreaming of "lost America" all the way home. Ginsberg calls Whitman a father and a courage teacher. He asks what kind of America did Whitman experience, imagining him on a riverbank, after Charon (a ferryman of Hades in Greek mythology) ferried him across the river Lethe.

A Supermarket in California Analysis

The Theme of Yearning is evident in this poem. Ginsberg yearns for a better America in this poem. There is a sense that he feels that America has lost, or is losing its way in the post-World War II time of the 1950s. He also conveys to the reader his yearning for a fellow poet, Walt Whitman, who he considers a father figure and a teacher. The poem shows the reader Ginsberg's feelings of loneliness as he walks the supermarket aisles. The reader can sense his melancholy amidst the brightly colored fruit and vegetables of the supermarket in all its neon lighting.



Transcription of Organ Music

Transcription of Organ Music Summary

Ginsberg talks here of enjoying the simple, quiet beauty of a home, flowers, a garden, and the simple things in life. He also talks of the joy of a first sexual experience and the joy of poetry. He relates to the reader that he wants people to know that he has seen the presence of the Creator. He talks of the Creator giving him a sense of His presence, to satisfy Ginsberg's yearning for Him. Ginsberg shows in this poem that he is not rich financially, but sees the other riches he does have.

Transcription of Organ Music Analysis

The theme of this poem is GRATITUDE. Ginsberg shows here that a person can want for money and still be happy. He shows the reader, in this poem, that joy can be found in a simple home and nature. He also shows the reader a hint of his religious beliefs, as he acknowledges a Creator. Ginsberg yearns for this Creator and wants the world to know he has experienced his presence and that this is of utmost importance to him. This poem shows the reader that one can find happiness if one is grateful for what he or she does have.

Sunflower Sutra

Sunflower Sutra Summary

In this poem Ginsberg talks of he and Jack Kerouac sitting on a dock and looking up at a railroad yard. Jack points out a large dead sunflower sitting on a pile of sawdust. Ginsberg is mesmerized by this sunflower. He sees the glory that was once this sunflower. He sees, in this dry, decaying sunflower, a beauty it once had. He asks the dead sunflower when did it decide it was the specter and shade of a once powerful American locomotive. In this poem, Ginsberg also likens human beings to beautiful golden sunflowers.

Sunflower Sutra Analysis

The theme of this poem is BEAUTY and LOSS OF POWER. Ginsberg sees the beauty in this regal sunflower, even as it decays in an industrial setting. He sees that it lost its beauty and power as a flower due to the industry around it. Ginsberg alludes to the reader that he believes America was once a powerful locomotive. He says that the dead sunflower symbolizes a decaying America, one that is losing its power. The reader senses that Ginsberg yearns for his country to regain its glory and power - which is what makes the country strong and beautiful like a healthy sunflower. Ginsberg shows the reader in this poem that he values the beauty of human beings and their potential as well.

America

America Summary

In this poem, Ginsberg talks to his country, America. He tells America that he is broke. He says that he abhors the atom bomb. He asks America when will it be worthy of the Trotskyites who live within the country. He says the country's industry is overwhelming him. He says he has not read a newspaper for months, that he used to be a communist, and that he smokes marijuana. He says he drinks, does not enjoy physical passion with anyone when he does so, and feels there is trouble brewing in the land. He laments about what America did to his Uncle Max when he came over from Russia. He makes a sarcastic comment that Time Magazine has too much influence in American culture, even though he reads it all the time. During his talk with his country, Ginsberg realizes he is America.

He talks of wanting to make changes in society and says his ambition is to be President. He talks of political issues. He also reminisces about communist party meetings his mother took him to as a boy and how they talked about "the workers." Ginsberg talks about tensions that are developing with Russia and China. At the end, Ginsberg says he does not want to join the army or work in a factory.

America Analysis

Ginsberg is having a crisis of conscience about his country and his place in it in this poem. The reader can sense that he feels America is not the ideal country he sees in his mind's eye. He does admit, though, that he is America; in other words, the country is only the sum of its citizens. Themes of longing for a Utopian society are evident in this poem. However, the reader senses too that Ginsberg is unsure of what social-political configuration will provide the best society. He says he used to be a communist while at the same time nostalgic for the communist party meetings his mother took him to where the working person was honored. The reader senses that Ginsberg is concerned about his financial condition, the growing geo-political tensions in the world, and the media and industry that hold much influence in America.



In the Baggage Room at Greyhound

In the Baggage Room at Greyhound Summary

I

Ginsberg talks about being in the depths of the Greyhound Bus Terminal. He is a baggage clerk and he sees around him examples of all types of humanity waiting for the Los Angeles Express. He sees throngs of poor people going from city to city on buses to see their loved ones. He talks of the loft where all the baggage is kept in old racks. He says the suitcases housed there are "full of tragedy rocking back and forth waiting to be opened."

II

Here Ginsberg talks of Spade, who pushes a cart loaded with luggage and carries a long hook which he uses to pull luggage down from the racks.

III

In this section Ginsberg talks about seeing all the luggage and parcel/container racks in a new way, the night before he quit his job with Greyhound. He says each item being shipped contains something different, and are going to many different cities. He says these racks were created to keep people together, as they house the luggage, etc. that people will take with them on bus rides back home, where their hearts are, and where goodbyes were once said.

IV

Ginsberg talks of his last night working at Greyhound and loading his last bus. He says one last package sits alone on a rack. He says the wages he earned here were too low. He also says he is a communist, and also says he suffered much in this job.

In the Baggage Room at Greyhound Analysis

Ginsberg's theme for this poem is TRANSCIENCE. He suggests to the reader that the Greyhound Terminal symbolizes people always moving from place to place with their belongings maybe to new locations and new lives. Even his job is transient as he is leaving his baggage clerk position at Greyhound. The reader senses that life is transient, time passes, and humankind's struggles continue daily. This is evidenced as he talks of low wages, and the poor waiting to take bus rides from city to city. He also talks of how there are always tearful goodbyes at bus terminals - as people see loved ones come and go.



Earlier poems: An Asphodel

Earlier poems: An Asphodel Summary

In this particular poem, which Ginsberg wrote in the Fall of 1953, he talks of desire. He compares desire to an asphodel, a beautiful flower. He says we cannot change desire just as we cannot change the visible reality of a flower. He talks of lying in a living room drunk, naked, and dreaming of satiating his desires. In the end, he says that while he has desires he needs fulfilled, tonight he only has himself, as he is alone. He has no one to give to and to enjoy.

Earlier poems: An Asphodel Analysis

Ginsberg seeks to show the reader that desire is a powerful force. We seek to satisfy our desires but often cannot. He shows how desire is powerful and we cannot ignore its power. He further explains that we are sometimes alone with our thoughts, when we would rather have a physical connection with another person.



Earlier poems: Song

Earlier poems: Song Summary

Ginsberg starts his poem by saying that the weight we carry through life is love. He says we cannot deny its power. He says we dream about love and we think consciously about love. We also imagine love and anguish over it until it manifests itself in relationships with human beings we grow to love. Love is something inherent in humankind's heart according to Ginsberg.

He relates to the reader that love can tire us, that it is a burden in life. However, he further adds that we must take love for what it is, enjoy it, and find rest in it. Ginsberg continues by telling the reader that one cannot rest without love and cannot truly sleep without love in his or her dream-thoughts. No matter what else we concern ourselves with in life, in the end the most important thing is seeking love, according to the poet. He says love will show itself and not let itself be ignored. Ginsberg elates that we must give love and give love without expecting return. In the end, the poem is a cry for the love of a mother - where every human began.

Earlier poems: Song Analysis

The theme of this poem is Love. Ginsberg seeks to show the reader the complexities of love. He explains to the reader how giving and receiving love is a great responsibility that weighs on a person. In essence, Ginsberg relates how love is, or at least should be, at the heart of every facet of life. He shows how it is part of our awake and sleeping moments. Ginsberg speaks of yearning for a mother's love and he seems to hint to the reader that the quest for a real true love begins at birth and never ends.



Earlier poems: Wild Orphan

Earlier poems: Wild Orphan Summary

In this poem Ginsberg gives us the story of a young boy who is out on a walk with his mother. They walk by a railroad and a river. The boy imagines riding in cars, and there is the implication in the first verse that his father was a hot rod enthusiast.

Ginsberg relates that the boy is lonely and lives in Tarrytown where he doesn't see fancy cars, but only people who live vacant lives. The boy is a dreamer and imagines a better home life. Ginsberg asks, in the poem, if the boy will have hallucinations of a family life that was once better - will he remember past happy times that were once a part of his family life.

Ginsberg further relates that it is rare when the boy experiences that happiness now. The boy is nostalgic for a family that is reunited. He only has the memories of a happier time. Ginsberg talks of innocent victims of family strife. He ponders whether the seeking of peace and solace through sex, religion and a search for love.

The poem ends with Ginsberg telling the reader that the boy's father is grieving in a flophouse a thousand miles away, oblivious to the fact that the boy will head his way in search of him. There is the sense that the boy's journey to find his father is beginning.

Earlier poems: Wild Orphan Analysis

Themes of Family Love, Separation, and Yearning for Reconciliation and Renewed Love, are prevalent in this poem. Ginsberg shows us a boy who longs for his parents to reconcile so the happy times that are only memories can return. The boy is nostalgic for these memories to become a reality once again. Ginsberg shows the reader the devastating effects of marital discord on children. He also shows how a young boy can yearn for his father and eventually seek him out. He shows the reader how the boy finds comfort in a dream world where everything is right and the family is together; there is no separation and no emotional void in his life. Ginsberg shows that a thousand miles is nothing to a boy who desires to find a lost father.



Earlier poems: In Back of the Real

Earlier poems: In Back of the Real Summary

In this poem, Ginsberg speaks of sitting in a railroad yard in San Jose, California in 1954. He sees a flower, which sits on a highway by the switchman's shack. The dried out lifeless form of the yellow flower is what catches his eye. This causes him to contemplate the flower and the mechanics of industry and modern civilization around him.

Ginsberg sees this dried out flower, as a flower, yes, but also a representation of industry's effect on the environment around it. The flower sacrificed itself and Ginsberg compares its spiked corolla to Jesus' crown of thorns. Ginsberg ends the poem saying this flower has hope within it - it is the flower of the world and represents holding onto natural beauty.

Earlier poems: In Back of the Real Analysis

Themes of Loss and Sacrifice and eventual Hope are at play in this poem.

Loss is conveyed by the wasting away of the yellow flower. To Ginsberg it is something that was once beautiful as it flourished in its natural environment.

Sacrifice is conveyed by the flower lying dead on the hard asphalt. Ginsberg compares its lifeless form and spiked corolla to Jesus' crown of thorns, which he wore during his sacrificial death.

Hope is conveyed at the end of the poem when Ginsberg says this flower is the "flower of the World." There is the sense that Ginsberg sees the flower representing natural beauty amidst a harsh industrial environment.



Characters

Allen Ginsberg appears in All poems

Allen Ginsberg is the poet who relates his life to us in these poems. He is a man who has experienced more than many people have or would even want to experience. Ginsberg relates his own and others sexual experiences, and experimentations with all kinds of drugs and alcohol. He talks of his religious thoughts and also his political beliefs and ideas.

We see a Ginsberg in search of love and peace of mind in this poem. We see a Ginsberg who has an argument with the American establishment of the time. We also see a Ginsberg who believes America needs to set itself on a new course that isn't based on the pursuit of money. He seems to condemn industry, high finance, the Madison Avenue mentality, and the development of the hydrogen bomb. He abhors war and poverty. The reader can see a man who traveled the world and met all sorts of people in different environments.

Ginsberg was a man who saw friends he loved go through the horror of mental illness. He is a man who surrendered himself to excess when it came to sex, alcohol and drugs but lived to survive all of that and pursue his art. We see a Ginsberg dedicated to the art and craft of poetry. We also see a Ginsberg who loves his country and the inherent beauty of it and its people, despite its flaws.

Jack Kerouac appears in Footnote to Howl, Sunflower Sutra

Jack Kerouac was a writer and friend of Allen Ginsberg. He is a character insofar as Ginsberg mentions him in the poems. He says that Kerouac is holy in the poem "Footnote to Howl." He speaks of Jack Kerouac pointing out the dead sunflower to him in the poem Sunflower Sutra. We sense that Jack Kerouac thinks the same thoughts as Ginsberg does and is a soulmate of his. Kerouac was a "Beat Writer" as was Ginsberg. He was an American writer. "Beat Writers" were a group of certain American writers in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They went against the grain of the time and were non-traditional or non-conformists. Jack Kerouac's famous literary work was "On the Road."

William Carlos Williams appears in Introduction to Howl

William Carlos Williams introduces the reader to "Howl and other Poems." He was an American poet and he knew Allen Ginsberg, when Ginsberg was younger in New Jersey. He says Ginsberg disturbed him, when he knew him as a younger person, and he was surprised to see him survive and write as compelling and shocking a work as



Howl. In the Introduction we see a well-spoken poet in Williams. We see a man who respects artistry in others and we see that he is a friend of Ginsberg's still, and a great supporter of his poetic efforts. This introduction shows us a Williams who sees it fit to warn the reader that they will go through hell themselves in the reading of this shocking work. Williams knew the 1950s was not ready for a poem of this complexity and audacity.

Walt Whitman appears in A Supermarket in California

Walt Whitman is the famous poet who wrote the extensive work "Leaves of Grass." He is seen as part of Ginsberg's imaginations in this poem. We see that Ginsberg respects this great writer and sees him as a father figure. We see that Whitman, to Ginsberg, is a courage-teacher.

Carl Solomon appears in Howl

Ginsberg calls Carl Solomon a fellow writer. The reader sees that Carl Solomon is undergoing treatments for his mental problems and has received shock treatments. We see Ginsberg say that Carl Solomon accuses his doctors of insanity.

William Burroughs appears in Footnote to Howl, America

William Burroughs was a writer, and considered one of the "Beat Writers." His famous work is "Naked Lunch." His name is just mentioned in these poems. He is called holy by Ginsberg in "Footnote to Howl." In "America," Ginsberg just mentions that Burroughs is in Tangiers and he doesn't think he will come back.

Uncle Max appears in America

Allen Ginsberg's uncle from Russia.

Tom Mooney appears in America

Description

Sacco & Vanzetti appears in America

Description



Scottsboro boys appears in America

Description

Momma appears in America

Ginsberg's mother who took him to Communist Cell meetings.

Scott Nearing appears in America

Old man named in America seen at Communist Cell meetings.

Mother Bloor appears in America

Woman named in America seen at Communist Cell meetings.

Israel Amter appears in America

Man named in America seen at Communist Cell meetings.

Spade appears in In the Baggage Room at Greyhound

Operating Clerk at Greyhound.

Sam appears in In the Baggage Room at Greyhound

Worker at Greyhound.

Joe appears in In the Baggage Room at Greyhound

Counter worker at Greyhound.

Angel appears in In the Baggage Room at Greyhound

Mentioned in the poem - possibly a Greyhound employee.

Mother appears in Wild Orphan

Mother who took her boy for a walk in the poem.



Boy appears in Wild Orphan

Boy who yearns for his father who is not part of his life anymore.

Father appears in Wild Orphan

The father who lives a thousand miles away in a flophouse.

Jesus appears in In back of the real

Jesus Christ of the Bible, Son of God.



Objects/Places

PEYOTE appears in Howl- I

A type of drug.

BENZEDRINE appears in Howl- I

A pharmaceutical drug.

BROOKLYN BRIDGE appears in Howl- I

Famous bridge in New York City.

DUNGAREES appears in Howl- I

Blue jeans.

LOS ALAMOS appears in Howl -1

A city New Mexico.

OPIUM appears in Howl -1

An addictive drug.

BOWERY appears in Howl -1

A New York City district.

HARPSICHORDS appears in Howl -1

A keyboard instrument .

GOLGOTHA appears in Howl -1

The hill where the crucifixion of Jesus Christ took place.



ALCATRAZ appears in **Howl -1**

Island in San Francisco Bay.

ROCKLAND appears in **Howl -3**

The name that Ginsberg gave to the mental institution where he met Carl Solomon who was a patient there.

UTICA appears in **Howl -3**

City in New York State.

TANGIERS appears in **Footnote to Howl**

City in Morocco.

LETHE appears in **A Supermarket in California**

A river in Greek mythology.

PALLET appears in **Transcription of Organ Music**

A skid made of wood.

PHONOGRAPH appears in **Transcription of Organ Music**

A record player.

TROTSKYITES appears in **America**

Leon Trotsky was one of the leaders of the October Revolution in Russia that brought the Bolsheviks to power. Trotskyites are followers of his beliefs.

GARBANZOS appears in **America**

Beans also known as chickpea.



FORT BRAGG appears in **In the Baggage Room at Greyhound**

U.S. military post in North Carolina.

CALISTOGA appears in **In the Baggage Room at Greyhound**

City in California.

TARRYTOWN appears in **Wild Orphan**

A village New York state.

Themes

Love

In essence, the entire collection "Howl and other Poems" is about a search for Love. In the main poem of the collection "Howl," Ginsberg talks of his search for connections, and the search of others he knew or encountered, and their search for connections to people. Often times the search for love was sought in multiple sex partners. Lack of love and peace of mind led to drug abuse, alcoholism, and destructive behavior. Ginsberg writes the poem "Howl" for Carl Solomon, someone he met while he was in a mental institution for a short time. The reader can sense Ginsberg's love for this person and concern for him. We see Ginsberg's love for God and how he seeks to be in his presence, in the poem "Transcription of Organ Music." The entire poem "Song" is about love.

We see the love for his fellow Beat Writers in the poem "Footnote to Howl." He mentions the writers Kerouac, Burroughs, Cassady. He speaks of them lovingly here. We see Ginsberg's love for the poet Walt Whitman in "A Supermarket In California." We see his love for his mother in the poem "America" as he reminisces about times spent with her. We also see Ginsberg's love of nature in "Sunflower Sutra," and "In back of the real." We see a boy's love for his lost father in the short poem "Wild Orphan." The reader senses as he or she reads this collection that true love would solve many of the problems humankind encounters in the world. If people always had a genuine outgoing concern for one another's best interests, there would be no need to seek solace in other forms of behavior that can cause one to go down wrong life paths.

Love permeates this book, even though the writing is often times shocking and audacious.

Justice/Injustice

In the poems "Howl" and "America," and "In The Baggage Room At Greyhound," we see Ginsberg allude to wanting justice in the world. The reader can see Ginsberg's calls for just treatment of those who do not always agree with established political and moral thought in society. In these poems, he speaks out for those whom he feels are the oppressed in society. He talks of the university students manhandled for their differing views and dissenting actions. He speaks of the poor huddled in waiting lines at the Greyhound bus station. He also talks of the downtrodden working-class and his search for justice for them through investigating the communist party in the belief they would help the working person. The reader senses that Ginsberg feels capitalism is doing an injustice to workers, although it does allow them freedom to work where and when they want. Ginsberg even shows that he feels society and its industry not doing justice to nature - as evidenced by the destroyed sunflower in "Sunflower Sutra" and the dead flower in "In back of the real."



Ginsberg also shows he feels there is injustice done to mental patients in institutions, that the pain they are feeling is often not dealt with properly. The reader can see that much of the book is a cry for justice for those marginalized in society. Ginsberg even hints that injustices were done to his Uncle when he came over to America from Russia.

Loss of Innocence

Ginsberg touches on Loss of Innocence in this collection of poems. There is the loss of innocence shown in "Howl" as he explores how people try to make a way for themselves in the world as they mature, and lose their sexual innocence through diverse experimentation. There is the loss of innocence as people come to realize their governments and other authorities are not always right and can actually punish them for dissenting. This loss of innocence comes when a person no longer looks up to these institutions with awe and reverence. There is loss of innocence when one sees the reality of war. Ginsberg shows this loss of innocence as he talks of ending the human war and as he tells America, he does not agree with their use of and continued development of the atom bomb.

Ginsberg also gives the reader a sense that he feels America has lost its innocence as a nation. Ginsberg suggests America does not care about justice, equality, and compassion because they are too busy pursuing money. He seems to condemn big industry, governments, academic institutions, and banking. The reader can see that, to Ginsberg, the Land of Opportunity has a tarnished reputation.

Separation

Ginsberg conveys to the reader a sense of separation from people and things in this collection. He shows that man is becoming separated from his natural environment as society makes technological advances and increases its industry. He shows this in the decrepit industrial areas of town where industry is encroaching on natural habitats and killing off plant life. He also shows separation by relating the story of the boy who misses his father, who sits in some flophouse a thousand miles away, in the poem "Wild Orphan." He also shows separation in the sense that those with different, political, and moral beliefs are shunted aside oftentimes or subdued by those in authority in society. Ginsberg also shows how people become separated from those they love when they are forced to seek employment elsewhere. He shows this in the Greyhound station where loved ones say goodbye to one another, separating because of work, school, or other commitments elsewhere. He shows, in the poem "In The Baggage Room At Greyhound," how he longs to go back home to where the original separation from his loved ones began.



Style

Point of View

The Point of View of this collection of poems is first person. The one exception is the poem "Wild Orphan" where he uses a third-person viewpoint. In all the other poems, Ginsberg is speaking directly to us in the "I." He is not holding back from us his deepest thoughts and beliefs. His point of view is emphatic and passionate and unrestrained. In fact, his point of view can shock the reader very much. This is especially true in the title piece "Howl." This is the perfect point of view for the book as we come to know Ginsberg intimately through this viewpoint. We see the agonies he went through in his life, the endless experimentations in sex, drugs, alcohol, and religious and political thought. This first person point of view brings us as close as possible to the events and actions he was a part of in his travels. We need this point of view to show us the reality of his life; we need to be inside his head to know his thoughts and reasoning's.

If Ginsberg's words were in third person for "Howl," the poem would lack power and its ability to raise eyebrows. It's a poem that really opens up Ginsberg's life to us as he experienced it. The reader, through reading the entire poem in the first-person point of view will well agree with William Carlos Williams in his introduction when he said you would go through hell reading "Howl." The first person of this poem makes it sizzle.

Setting

The setting of "Howl and Other Poems" is basically California, although Ginsberg does take us on a ride through the cities of America and around the world through his musings in the poems and primarily in "Howl." In general, the setting of the poem is America. More specifically Ginsberg wrote most of the poems while in San Francisco, San Jose, Berkeley, and New York. However, the settings he talks about in the works span America and even international places such as Tangiers, Turkey, Mexico, the Caribbean, Canada, China, Russia, and France. He relates names of cities as he talks of his travels or the travels of those he knows. These settings are integral to the work as we see the experiences Ginsberg and his friends involved themselves in exotic and not so exotic locations. The various locales give a worldly feel to the book. The reader senses that Ginsberg learned a lot from his travels and this travel helped shape him as a person. Mentioning all these different cities and countries lets the reader know that Ginsberg has a broad world view based on first-hand knowledge.

Language and Meaning

The language of the poems is very informal and in a way, stream-of-consciousness in feel, although this work was well thought out. The language includes swearing and slang and American idioms. The language is language that one would use in a conversation while driving in a car with friends and espousing ideas and opinions. The



writing is not formal classical poetics. It is free verse writing of a heightened nature, which makes its direct style very powerful. Sentences run on and into one another, without a break, in the title poem "Howl," which gives it a great forward momentum. The reader can sense Ginsberg's passion, angst, and strong opinions, in the way the showcase poem blazes forward unrelenting. The words shock, but also provoke thought and questions. The meaning of the words is whatever you can gain from everyday speech, from a man who seeks to tell you what he sees life is, and what it is doing to him. Some of the words allow you to relate to some things he speaks of, others cause you to disagree totally with him. However, it is the straight-forward way he uses words that make their message clear whether you agree with the sentiment they convey or not.

Structure

"Howl and Other Poems" consists of an introduction by the poet William Carlos Williams that introduces Allen Ginsberg to the reader, tells a little about his life, and then warns the reader about what he or she is to encounter in the book.

The next part of the book is the title poem "Howl" and this poem is in three parts. The next section is called "Footnote to Howl" which is a conclusion to the first section of the collection.

The next section of the book is five individual poems, each individually titled. The last section of the book is a section called "Earlier Poems." This section consists of four poems, three of which are relatively short.

The book is constructed so that "Howl" is the main part of the book, situated at the front, with the shorter poems afterward. This main part is the driving force of the book. The five poems after "Footnote to Howl" are more varied in tone, although equally passionate. The final four "Earlier Poems" are more lyrical and sentimental in tone.



Quotes

"I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked."

Howl, Part I, Pg. 9

"Who wandered around and around at midnight in the railroad yard wondering where to go, and went, leaving no broken hearts."

Howl, Part I, Pg. 11

"Who lounged hungry and lonesome through Houston seeking jazz or sex or soup, and followed the brilliant Spaniard to converse about America and Eternity, a hopeless task, and so took ship to Africa."

Howl, Part I, Pg. 12

"Who burned cigarette holes in their arms protesting the narcotic tobacco haze of Capitalism."

Howl, Part I, Pg. 13

"Who were burned alive in their innocent flannel suits on Madison Avenue amid blasts of leaden verse."

Howl, Part I, pg. 16

"Who drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out if I had a vision or you had a vision or he had a vision to find out Eternity."

Howl, Part I, Pg. 17

"Who fell on their knees in hopeless cathedrals praying for each other's salvation and light and breasts, until the soul illuminated its hair for a second."

Howl, Part I, Pg. 18

"Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is electricity and banks! Moloch whose poverty is the specter of genius! Moloch whose fate is a cloud of sexless hydrogen! Moloch whose name is the Mind!"

Howl, Part II, Pg. 22

"I'm with you in Rockland

where fifty more shocks will never return your soul to its body again from its pilgrimage to a cross in the void."

Howl, Part III, Pg. 25

"Holy the supernatural extra brilliant intelligent kindness of the soul!"

Footnote to Howl, pg.28



"Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love past blue automobiles in driveways,
home to our silent cottage?"

A Supermarket in California, pg. 30

"And the Creator gave me a shot of his presence to gratify my wish, so as not to cheat
me of my yearning for him."

Transcription of Organ Music, pg. 34

"Poor dead flower? when did you forget you were a flower? when did you look at your
skin and decide you were an impotent dirty old locomotive? the ghost of a locomotive?
the specter and shade of a once powerful mad American locomotive?"

Sunflower Sutra, pg. 37

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

America, pg.40

"The wage they pay us is too low to live on. Tragedy reduced to numbers."

In the Baggage Room at Greyhound, pg. 47

"The weight of the world is love."

Song, pg. 50

"And the father grieves in flophouse complexities of memory a thousand miles away,
unknowing of the unexpected youthful stranger bumming toward his door."

Wid Orphan, pg. 55

"This is the flower of the World."

In back of the real, pg. 57



Topics for Discussion

Who is William Carlos Williams and what is the significance of his words serving as the introduction to *Howl and Other Poems*?

How does the moral and cultural landscape of the new millennium affect your view of the moral and cultural landscape of the 1950s (when this poem was written)? Can you relate to any aspects of that era at all, and what Ginsberg was trying to get at in his work?

Do you consider the title poem *Howl* 'obscene' as some did at that time, or not obscene at all?

Do you believe the title poem *Howl* has "redeeming social significance?"

Who is the person, Walt Whitman, in the poem "A Supermarket in California" and why is he an important person to Allen Ginsberg?

Who is Jack Kerouac in the poem "Sunflower Sutra" and what relationship did he have with Allen Ginsberg?

Why was the communist movement a refuge sought by some in the 1950s in America? What were their beliefs and why did they never gain a foothold in the country?

What societal and political problems in America caused Ginsberg to question his country and lament the direction it was heading?

How has "*Howl and Other Poems*" influenced poetics and culture in America?