



Howling the Elegy: Madness and Counterpublic Mourning in Ginsberg's Long-Form Poems

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Article History: Submitted: 5 April 2026; Reviewed: 15 May 2026; Revised: 27 May 2026

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/ojes.v17i1.97248>

Abstract

This paper explores counterpublic in mourning, madness, and memory as the triad themes in “Kaddish” and “Howl” by Allen Ginsberg. The close reading of “Kaddish” constructs memory as broken recursive process shaped by his mother’s loss, while “Howl” expands his private anguish into a public dissent against the institutionalized madness and social repression. The analysis of the selected parts of the poems foregrounds their move away from elegiac tradition and hooks on the Beat countercultural context which draws on counterpublics concept of Michel Warner, and genre theory. It also moves beyond the existing political and biographical Ginsbergian scholarship to further the textual interpretation with psychoanalytic and postmodern theoretical frameworks to demonstrate how Ginsberg repositions elegy as a hybrid mode of personal mourning and collective critique. Doing so, it argues that Ginsberg takes madness as a poetic strategy as a part of Beatnik movement to resist the American mainstream epistemology. His “creative insanity,” includes sexuality, and drug experience which disrupts normative

boundaries between sanity and disorder that helps redefine elegy as an open-ended, performative discourse. It offers a nuanced reading of Beat poetics and elegiac form by resurfacing Ginsberg’s outlining of mourning as the poetic spaces of cultural and ideological contestation beyond classical elegy. It further suggests that such a framework can be an extended model to study modern and postmodern elegy that mingles personal grief with broader socio-political critique.

Keywords: Beat poetry, counterculture, elegy, madness, mourning

Introduction: Beyond Elegiac Closure

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness... yacketayakking screaming vomiting whispering facts and memories... who lit cigarettes in boxcars racketing through snow... (*Howl* 9-11).

Robert Hass while writing about *Howl* fifty years after its publication, observes the epigrammatic depth of its opening lines (51). Seventy years later, it retains the poetic aura when critics review; an entire generation “destroyed by madness,”

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to critique American existing culture and *episteme*. To talk to *Kaddish* written after the death of Naomi, his mother, Allen Ginsberg shifts to a mere intimate register of mourning; "Strange now to think of you, gone without corsets & eyes, while I walk on the sunny pavement of Greenwich Village" (3). Whereas *Howl* opens with collective devastation, *Kaddish* begins with personal grief which situates madness and loss within a familial sphere and beyond. To read them together, the traditional elegiac poetic realm expands where madness emerges as a byproduct of a social condition which functions as a private inheritance to mark a diverted form of counterpublic mourning.

The paper aims to investigate resistance and solidarity outside dominant cultural narratives in Ginsberg's long poems. His poems embody the attributes of counter culture, therefore, they provide spaces of exemplifying Michel Warner's concept of the counterpublic; alternative discursive arenas in which marginalized voices contest the social exclusion. Contemporary studies of the Beat poets, like Steven Watson often emphasize biography and cultural history, particularly substance use and sexuality while giving less attention to how Ginsberg redefines elegy. Given that elegy is "shifting... [with] roots in its classical origins. The word derives from the Greek *elegos*... the subject matter could be anything from politics to love" (Kennedy 3). In consonance with elegy's shifting nature that Ginsberg adopts to response to loss of his mother and he reaches out it in seeking the position of minority. However, this promise has come under scrutiny in twentieth-century poetics, where the very possibility of resolving loss or grief is called into question. Modern elegies consequently resist reconciliation and they underscore unresolved attachment, expose instances of state-sanctioned violence, while registering psychic disturbance, and struggle to accept and memorialize death. To Karen

Weisman, elegy re-emerges as a poetic genre that embodies not only personal grief, religion, but also cultural memory. It is, therefore, only a poetic form of lament but also a critical lens through which one can explore how different cultures negotiate memory and resistance. The article reads Ginsberg's elegiac works converging them with counterpublic discourse. The poem, "*Howl*" outlines madness as a generational elegy to show the misery of marginalized outsiders. It also functions as the spirit of the Beat Generation by embracing nonconformity and raw bursts of creativity which often rises out of deep personal struggles (Kim 71). Reviewing the Beatnik lineage, Kim underpins the transformative power of "creative madness" (Weine 11) to access the deeper truths about society and existence. By the same token "*Kaddish*" reframes personal grief as a counterpublic act of critique. Put together, these poems demonstrate how elegy can function not only as private lament but also as a public mode of dissent; counterpublic, to defy American 1950s McCarthyism; closure culture that marginalizes and arrests without proper reason.

Warner defines a counterpublic as a subaltern "public space" (24) or the "public that from the outset was a reading public" who later became "the abstract counterpart of public authority" (47). To simply put, Warner's understanding of public is the counterpublic who creates oppositional or alternative discourse while remaining in tension with the regime. Although Ginsberg's poems are celebrated as groundbreaking Beat texts, their uncommon content, style and tropes situate them within counterpublic. Nonetheless critics have raised concerns about their aesthetics and cultural framing. Among the critics, Richard Eberhart explores *Howl* for its "redemptive energy," (146) considering on its free verse and raw imagery as a revitalization of American poetry. There are opinions of Ginsbergian critics who

often group *Howl* and *Kaddish* as the prophetic interventions while Tony Trigilio remains cautious enough of these poems' similarities and differences. He contends that *Kaddish* revises the prophetic mode of *Howl* by introducing skepticism toward authority and engaging to psychiatric as well as anti-psychiatric discourses. His reading somehow draws on Warner. Likewise, Jason Shinder emphasizes their differences, noting that *Kaddish* inaugurates a more revisionary, anti-logocentric poetics within Ginsberg's canon which corresponds to Warner's counterpublic culture that mainstream culture overrides.

While making scholarly receptions on Ginsberg and the Beat Generation, scholars like James Breslin, who explores the poems' development, though criticism often still isolates them. Nancy M Grace centers her reading on Beat studies whose work discusses the difficulties and tendencies in Beat criticism. Meantime, Jonah Raskin associates *Howl* with the Beat culture in *American Scream*. On the other hand, Barry Miles hooks on a textual and biographical scholarship on Ginsberg. In this way, critics often treat *Howl* and *Kaddish* in isolation; the former as a collective protest and the other as a personal lament. The lacuna this article intends to fill in is the less explored section how these two poems jointly articulate a distinctly Beat form of elegy that goes beyond genre studies while significantly embodying the protest culture of the time. Therefore, focused on Ginsberg reimagination of elegy by framing madness both as a social condition and as a familial inheritance, and how such reframing acts as mode of counterpublic mourning that challenges dominant cultural narratives. The search of value of the marginalized lives in relation to Warner's counterpublic view that privileges nonconformity in Ginsberg's poems which helps challenge the social understanding of sanity and normalcy. In sum, the transforming of mourning and madness from a stigmatized pathology into

a dignified, even redemptive condition, brings novelty of this article.

Methodology: Melancholic Counterpublics

This paper makes a close reading of selected stanzas in both poems. While doing so, it reconsiders the poetic elements; anaphora, structure, prose like line length, apostrophe, and typographic pause. Along with them, it exploratively analyzes the recurrent imagery of psychiatric institutionalization, maternal embodiment, and racial othering imbibing critical lens from Freud's neurosis, Foucault's subjectification, and Warner's counterpublic. In so doing, it remaps how mourning and madness in his poems go beyond the generic boundary of elegy and become the strategic tool to form counterculture of marginal community.

To probe madness as counterpolitics and as a form of elegiac howling, the study draws on four theoretical frameworks. Genre theory, particularly, developed in David Kennedy's *Elegy* and Peter M. Sacks's *The English Elegy* which provides the foundational insight to understand elegy's formal conventions and its orientation toward consolation. With this, Jahan Ramazani's *Poetry of Mourning* extends this framework into the modern period, showing how twentieth-century elegists resist rather than achieve resolution, and how psychoanalytic categories become necessary supplements to formal genre analysis.

On the other hand, Freud distinguishes between mourning and melancholia in "Mourning and Melancholia" which offers a psychoanalytic framework through which the study reads Ginsberg's refusal of teleological grief. Freud's formulation, "Both melancholia and mourning are triggered by the same thing—that is, by loss," and, "in mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia, it is the ego" (246) are treated not as a binary but as a productive tension

that Ginsberg's poems both inhabit and extend. The distinction between mourning and melancholia in Freud's reading provides an interpretive tool to look into Ginsberg's *Kaddish*, which not only stages deep maternal loss as a psychic exploration but also refuses the cultural and generic closure. It indicates an emerging tension between the speaker's ego and an elites' worldly emptiness. From the same plane, "Howl," expands this tension to collective grief. Madness, in "Howl," becomes a kind of counterpublic howling that signifies a refusal of exclusionary norms of 1950s America. These poems jointly embrace and push Freudian framework further; instead of treating unresolved grief as pathology, they turn it into a poetics of resistance. To simply put, in these poems, mourning is both personal and shared across a community which transgresses the generic boundary of elegy.

Along with Freud's idea of melancholia, this study tailors to Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002) to draw a political and rhetorical framework to read Ginsberg's performative texts with a clear social purpose of resistance. Unlike Habermas, Warner argues that public space is an illusion that unknowingly excludes the minority voices. *Counterpublics*, to Warner, are the platforms where ordinary people circulate their discourse without copying the elites' version. In ways, counterpublics as retaliating force can actually transform social reality. This concern resonates in the poems because they recount the alternative spaces where queer, bohemian, and grieving voices can find new possibilities without reproducing dominant norms. The poetic lines from "Howl" recount; "who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy, / who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love" (2) and "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" (7), the queer and insane voices to tease the uncaring public culture. In "Kaddish" too, Ginsberg forms a mourning space after the clinical rejection of his mother's illness. In her illness, rather he explores holiness in the raw, physical deprivation; "The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy! The nose is holy! The tongue and cock and hand and asshole holy! /Everything is holy! everybody's holy! everywhere is holy! every day is in eternity! Everyman's an angel!" (9). As these poems generate a counter-voice that reshapes postmodern American poetry into a space of both resistance and mourning that traditional elegy never imagines. Doing so, they challenge mainstream expectations of language, sexuality, and spirituality, and open up a poetic arena where marginalized experiences are not only expressed but revalued as central to cultural transformation.

Finally, Michel Foucault's conceptualization of exclusionary, and domesticating aspect of public spaces in *Madness and Civilization* wherein he extends the logic of confinement or social exclusion to broader institutions. He discusses how disciplinary power permeates social structures like, school and prison to mention a few. He also highlights how confinement or exclusion transform madness into an object of observation, separating it from shared human experience. He adds, "During the classical period, madness was shown, but on the other side of bars; if present, it was at a distance, under the eyes of a reason that no longer felt any relation to it, and that would not compromise itself by too close a resemblance. Madness had become a thing to look at" (70). In this way, by underscoring the hegemonial nature of public space, both Warner and Foucault inform the reading of institutional confinement and exclusion as a structure that the Beat poems, especially of

Ginsberg archive and resist.

Critical Receptions: Beating Elegies

Ginsberg's major long poems have developed several overlapping trajectories in academia. Biographical and cultural historical approaches as illustrated by Jonah Raskin's "American Scream: Ginsberg's *Howl* and the Making of the Beat Generation" (2004), situate the poems within the countercultural milieu of 1950s San Francisco and New York, emphasizing their documentary function as records of a specific social moment. Raskin's work provides rich archival detail about the composition and reception of "Howl," including the legal obscenity trial, though it tends to subordinate formal analysis to biographical reconstruction. Building idea on Raskin, Korean scholar, Kim highlights how Ginsberg successfully stages the Beat Generation's ethos while celebrating creativity and non-conformity at the time of maternal bereavement.

Furthermore, Sacks *The English Elegy* traces the elegiac form's movement from classical origins through Spenser to Yeats while emphasizing the consolatory attribute as the genre's defining teleology. He acknowledges the limits of this account, "what happens to elegy after Yeats and what bearing the English tradition has on the American variant" (299). The paper takes Sack's American variation of elegy for granted because it helps explore Ginsberg's motif of debunking the convention. Likewise, Ramazani's *Poetry of Mourning* analyzes that twentieth-century elegists systematically "attack convention" and resist the transformation of grief into consolation (3) that corresponds to American countercultural variants of the genre which Ginsberg employs in his long poems.

Following the new versioned elegy in American poetry, Max Cavitch extends the genre's genealogy into the American tradition, arguing that elegies are as much about the living left behind as they are about

the dead. Cavitch also links Ginsberg with Whitman's lineage particularly invokes Whitman in "A Supermarket in California" and whose catalogic, breath-driven poetics bear the visible marks of *Leaves of Grass*. Ginsberg's critic, Hass also analyzes some of the most formally attentive readings of Ginsberg's long poems, arguing for their place within the pastoral elegiac tradition while acknowledging the disruption of elegiac conventions.

While perusing Warner's concept of counterpublic with its own idiom, modes of sociability and speech that show there are multiple public spheres which dominant culture stigmatizes. Nancy Fraser like scholar reads Warner as a major revisionist of Habermas's public-sphere model because the latter emphasizes the circulation of dominant norms rather than fostering rational-critical debate. Indeed, this reading refutes, "The public sphere is similar to the "one and indivisible" society (Habermas 56) because it not only serves the bourgeoisie ideology better, to Fraser, Habermas also "bourgeois masculinist" (62). Fraser's work can be a complementary of Warner's notion to show how publics are multiple and contested. Warner counts counterpublics as discursive sites where marginalized voices can circulate outside the mainstream structures. Warner resonates in Ginsberg's poems because they outline spaces of dissent by challenging conventional norms of language, heteronormative sexuality, and spirituality.

Later, Judith Halberstam extends Warner's framework to study queer cultural practices that refrains counterpublics through performative disruption. Halberstam's queer intake also helps to dissect Ginsberg's poems because they enter into the zone of sexual taboo and homosexuality. In response to the counterpublic orientation of the poems, Ibrahim Ali Murad situates the Beats within the turbulence of mid-twentieth-century America. He explores the resistance in Ginsberg for non-conformity, Cold War

anxieties, and institutional repression that invokes the undercurrent of Beat movement's political and cultural stakes. The theorists provide critical tools to reread "Howl" and "Kaddish" to read Ginsberg's howling mourning and madness as the strategic tools of resistance both within and beyond Beatnik artifacts that bring taboos, pervert, abnormal, and cultural exclusion into the open.

Turning to the psychiatric dimensions of the poems, David Pozen's analysis of the Metrazol and hydrotherapy passage in "Howl" identifies Ginsberg's ironic juxtaposition of aggressive treatment with trivial amusement as a critique of Foucauldian disciplinary control (55). Likewise, Trigilio's review of Raskin draws attention to the formal distinctiveness of Ginsberg's breath-taking poetics in relation to Charles Olson's projective verse, noting that the "one speech-breath-thought poetics" (106) marks a significant departure from Ginsberg's earlier journals.

Given to the racial limits of the Beat formation, Norman Mailer's *The White Negro* (1957) makes explicit what Ginsberg's poems keep implicit: that Beat countercultural identity was substantially constructed through white identification with Black cultural forms, suffering, and marginality. The falling out of Amiri Baraka with the Beat poets, and the deliberate political significance of his renaming from LeRoi Jones, has been noted in Beat scholarship but rarely subjected to the notable elegiac analysis at the backdrop of Warner's counterpublic. It demands the relationship between Beat poetics and improvisation have been observed but not adequately theorized in relation to the racial and cultural economy that Ginsberg's poems inhabit.

In essence, the scholarly receptions bring together "Howl" and "Kaddish" function as hybrid Beat elegies, where madness and mourning are both personal and communal acts which embrace Warner's counterpublic

discourse; an alternative domains where poetic expression challenges the prevailing cultural narrative. The scholarships, in particular, highlight genre theory, bibliographic study, Freudian melancholia in understanding elegy as a formal construct and cultural repositories of the Beat social formation. However, there has not yet been an examination of "Howl" and "Kaddish" together as examples of a distinctively Beat elegiac mode that contest the high culture. This study, therefore, analyzes Ginsberg's poems through the mosaic lenses of Warner, Foucault, and Freud, extending their insights to explore the poems' formal and political strategies within counterpublic theory, while critiquing their racial limitations in the same framework. In doing so, it aims to address a critical gap in scholarship by situating Ginsberg's poems at the intersection of psychoanalysis, counterpublics theory, and racial critique beyond genre studies.

Beyond Melancholic Inheritance in "Kaddish"

"Strange now to think of you," Ginsberg writes of his mother Naomi in "Kaddish," a five-part lament, "gone... while I walk on the sunny pavement of Greenwich Village" (7). The speaker is physically located in downtown Manhattan but inwardly displaced—he has been, the poem tells us, "up all night, talking, reading the Kaddish aloud" (7), the "Kaddish" being the Jewish prayer for the dead. With the music of Ray Charles and Shelley's "Adonais" in mind, Ginsberg mourns his mother in a litany of images; "50 years ago, little girl—from Russia, eating the first poisonous tomatoes of America-frightened..." (7). The little girl marked by early distress is Naomi whose bearing of telltale signs of schizophrenia from the outset also alludes to Eve's biblical fear after she ate the apple. To simply put, Naomi as a young immigrant 'Russian girl' steps into America with high hope of abundance but immediately after tasting tomato, perhaps American culture,

feels toxic. The "tomatoes" are supposed to be fresh, nourishing, and emblematic of abundance in the new land. Instead, they sting-like Eve's biting into fruit that ruined her happiness. It also refers to Naomi's fall from innocence and guilt of living in America.

The poem constructs mourning not as narrative but as accumulation of grief. Ginsberg recalls his mother's "education, marriage, nervous breakdown, operation" (8) and poses in Part I an existential question, "What is this life?" (8), that deconstructs elegy's usual trajectory toward meaning. The bodily imagery that follows, ranging from phallic to scatological, makes the poem difficult to read with conventional affect, precisely because it refuses conventional sentiment when he uses the apostrophe:

O Russian faced, woman on the grass,
your long black hair is crowned with
flowers, the mandolin is on your knees

Communist beauty, sit here married in
the summer among daisies, promised
happiness at hand (Kaddish 29)

Ginsberg's voluptuous and disturbing prosaic poetry further speculates about a possible incestuous encounter with the aging Naomi, where the speaker considers approaching her:

One time I thought she was trying to
make me come lay... on bed that filled
most of the room, dress up round her
hips... ragged long lips between her
legs-What, even, smell of asshole? ...

Seemed perhaps a good idea to try...

Perhaps-that way. Would she care? She
needs a lover. (Kaddish 24)

The narrator's mind moves here between revulsion and fascination, melancholic attachment stripped to bones. The subject-object boundary dissolves: who should the reader mourn—the son or the mother? The maternal body becomes at once origin and threat, where societal taboos erase letting the border of *Eros* and *Thanatos* criss-cross. Ginsberg's confrontations with sexuality, incest desire and taboo dramatize Naomi's

schizophrenia and his own tormented mind. Regina Marler also examines "Kaddish" taking reference of bodily memory, madness, and repressed, however, expressed desire within the relationship of mother-son. The erotic description on behalf of Ginsberg's radical refusal to sanitize mourning in genre theory. Marler's intake infuses with Foucault's nuance of abnormality put in spectacle which Ginsberg exploits here while braking the existing sexual taboo. Likewise, Eric L. Haralson calls it a poetic expression of homoerotic desire. Moreover, the grotesque detail matters to the poem's honesty, collapsing sacred elegy into profane memory which calls for counter culture of elegy. Conversely, Rosenthal counts as a part of confessional poetry. Rosenthal in *Our Life* titled his review of *Howl* "Poet of the New Violence," saying that "we have not had this particular variety of anguished anathema-hurling in which the poet's revulsion is expressed with the single-minded frenzy of a raving madman," (qtd. in Hartman 50) however a creative artist.

In addition, Raskin notes that poets of this period "mythologized the vagina and the womb as dark, deadly places" (33), and the poem's drive to "know the Monster of the Beginning Womb" ("Kaddish" 24) illustrates precisely this mythologizing. After the passage on possible incest, the poem breaks into prolonged Kaddish prayer-incantatory Hebrew phrases praising God-juxtaposing the sacred and the bodily in a move that does not merely shock but challenges elegy's underlying assumptions and echoes Warner's counterpublic.

Traditional elegy idealizes the lost figure through abstraction or symbolic elevation. In contrast, Ginsberg insists on grotesque materiality in which Naomi appears as a "sweating, bugle-eyed, fat" figure, "screaming for a blood transfusion" (14), her body marked by surgical scars, abortions, and psychiatric abuse. Through this accumulation the poem generates a

psychic breakage, presenting Naomi as an assemblage substance of wounds, and symptoms. The maternal figure also bleeds into "Howl," appearing as a spectral presence in two key moments: first in the reference to mental institutions' "foetid halls" and then in Ginsberg's declaration from Rockland, "where you imitate the shade of my mother" (24). The lost mother appears not as an idealized figure but as a haunting. Aligning with this, Diana Fuss also reframes elegy through psychoanalysis, emphasizing how the dead persist as material and psychic presences rather than idealized abstractions.

Recursive Time in Projective Verse

In this part, the analysis orients to foreground Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia and the concept of recursive time in relation to Part IV of "Kaddish" which begins with a litany of farewells-to the Communist Party, to Hitler, and to Naomi herself-that produces what might be called recursive time. The apostrophic invocation in the poem merges the present with the past:

O mother
what have I left out
O mother
what have I forgotten
O mother
Farewell
with a long black shoe
farewell...
with six dark hairs on the wen of your
breast
farewell with your old dress ... black
beard around the vagina (Kaddish 34)

In this apostrophic stanza where Ginsberg addresses his mother echoes Freud's concept of melancholia as a recursive self-consuming temporal loop, O mother what have I left out," and again "O mother what have I forgotten" refer to his real pain which is indistinguishable from Afro-Americans' archival panic and the mainstream normativity. Critics such as Fuss hooks on the temporal overlap and

haunting recurrence, where the dead persist across time rather than being resolved. Admittedly, this situation resembles with Freud's distinction between melancholia and mourning; where in mourning the world becomes poor and empty, in melancholia "it is the ego" that empties (246), which turns inward to become both mourner and mourned. Rather than treating emotion as content alone, Ginsberg's critic, Louis Simpson finds it in poets like Ginsberg, Sylvia Plath, and Robert Lowell a tendency where emotion structures form itself where poetic rhythm becomes driven by psychological intensity.

The breath-driven long-lines with the use of em dashes and blurring poetry and prose, allows memories to surface in rapid succession. The plethora of Naomi's images linked with her childhood, paranoid youth, and physical decline coexist in the same rhythmic pattern do not bring narrative cohesion but show a free-floating imagination that counters the convention of poetry. This shows to read Ginsberg's work merely as an archive of the Beat Generation misses its true power as a sharp, deliberate strike against the exclusionary cultural norms in USA. This inward projectile trajectory makes "Kaddish" different from Olson's outward projective verse model; transmission of breath-energy from poet to reader. However, Ginsberg digs deep into the past in such a way, before it finally reaches out to pull the reader in. Because of this, Naomi's paranoia transforms into something more than just mental illness. Her traumatic experiences hold the testimony of historical injustice which cannot vilify her hallucinations as a baseless vision, rather they resonate with the climate of surveillance and repression, echoing lines such as "Enemies approach—what poisons? Tape recorders? FBI?" (*Howl* 14). The staging of Naomi's hallucinatory visions compels one to simply think as being mere symptoms of sickness and become woven into the poem's political texture, blur the

line between private anguish and public anxiety. By bringing her madness within this broader cultural context, Ginsberg purportedly turns a personal elegy into a sharp critique of institutional power.

Cosmic Mourning and the Elegiac Holiness

Ginsberg declares himself a “Buddhist Jew” and a “worshipper of sacred heart of Jesus Christ” (Rotando 22). Rotando terms *Howl* a “proto-Buddhist experiment” (23) not because it cites doctrine, but because it dramatizes the central Buddhist insight into suffering (*dukkha*) and the compassionate witnessing of that suffering. The poem’s catalog of madness, addiction, and repression mirrors the Buddhist recognition that suffering is universal. Delving into the consumer culture, a source of universal suffering which Ginsberg calls a beast “Moloch” in “Howl.” In Part II, Ginsberg’s refrain “Moloch!” transforms personal loss into systemic lament: “Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies!” (17). Ginsberg, further, bemoans against the overarching capitalist individual culture that he finds as anti-spiritual, anti-life giving or-sustaining, evil, politically corrupt, metallic in essence, rather than flesh: “Moloch the crossbone soulless jail-house and Congress of sorrows!.../Moloch the stunned governments!” (17). In essence, *Howl* is a cry of grief that transcends generations. By the same token Rotando’s reading concludes how its lamentation is more than despair—a cosmic mourning that becomes a signpost toward awareness. “Howl” externalizes grief as a scream against industrial-capitalist destruction. Critic Trigilio also in Ginsberg’s Buddhist Poetics brings forward the Buddhist informed reading of Ginsberg. Trigilio assays how Ginsberg’s poetics are shaped by Buddhist practice: meditation, mantra, compassion, and the transformation of grief into spiritual awareness. In short,

his reading affirms elegiac holiness and nonconformity in Ginsberg’s artifacts.

With this the concluding section of “Kaddish” expands grief into a register that further destabilizes resolution. Ginsberg’s final prayer for the dead, “Lord Lord Lord caw caw caw Lord” (36), juxtaposes divine invocation with animal noise, disrupting the Kaddish’s theological equilibrium. Here, the mourner’s voice replicates the bird’s cry, “caw caw” to refer to freedom that the “Lord” holds. The ecological and cosmic allusions of cawing of crows and lord in “Kaddish” relocates grief into a wider continuum that happen everywhere and from which God can save humanity. In this way, Ginsberg expands her death and structural exclusion as a global politics. The speaker’s earlier anxiety, “O mother what have I left out” (34), still resonates outward which moves into a field of interconnectedness. This is how, Ginsberg’s elegy transgresses the boundaries of human grief by resurfacing it on a larger continuum where memory, voice, and nature intermingle. A related invocatory structure appears in “Footnote to Howl,” where the repetition of “Holy!” fifteen times in rapid succession announces a totalizing vision—“Everything is holy! Everybody’s holy!” (27)—that merges cosmic mourning with ecstatic overflow, breaking from rather than supplementing the elegiac intensity of “Howl.”

Collective Madness and Counterpublic Lament in “Howl”

Ginsberg dedicates the poem to Carl Solomon whom he had met in the mental institution. Their meeting indexes that madness becomes a shared domain of speaking together, for those who were silenced by authority. To Ginsberg, madness becomes an instrument to be vocal against repression. In addition, the catalogue of Part I of “Howl” accumulates toward its own foreclosure. The wandering “best minds” are restless, unable to fit within what Foucault calls the “physical and moral constraint of

confinement" (45). They appear as "angel-headed hipsters" who "burn for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of the night" (Ginsberg 9). Hass describes them as "mourners, violent seekers of transcendence" (324), and their choral mourning is enacted through the poem's catalogues. The anaphoric "who" produces a cumulative rhythm that assembles individual suffering into a shared narrative.

The pattern especially, lexicon used in "Howl" redraws the political shift. The "who" clause that repeats initially grants agency to the "best minds." However, when the poem further unfolds, they slide into passivity which calls for Foucauldian sense of confinement. The poetic socially displaced people who wander through Houston, jazz clubs, and "negro streets at dawn" (9), across rivers and rooftop show the physical vulnerability and the cultural breakdown index of America. Further, the sexual figures such as the "saintly motorcyclists" and "blond & naked angels" (13) further evoke moments of transcendence through erotic encounter. Yet, these moments collapse into loss and alienation to show cultural collapse of the society. In Ginsberg's poetics, erotic desire of the minority is vulnerable because it seeks (momentary) liberation, however, the fragile bodies bear social repression. The sexually perverted narrative openly heteronormative silence. By the same token, the trial description brings freedom of expression into the light of legal frame which is a part of counterpublic.

Toward the end of the litany in Part I, Ginsberg presents a series of images drawn from 1950s psychiatric treatment. Carl Solomon is subjected to the "concrete void of insulin Metrazol electricity hydrotherapy psychotherapy occupational therapy pingpong & amnesia" (Ginsberg 18). The deliberate refusal of punctuation enables Ginsberg to juxtapose aggressive psychiatric interventions with the trivial amusement of

table tennis. As Pozen observes, "ironically, all of the zealous, invasive treatment methods of modern medicine resolve into the child's game of ping-pong" (55)-the stereotypical amusement allowed to hospital patients.

Part II introduces Moloch as the dominant public sphere: "Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is running money!" (21). Critics have often interpreted this as a critique of the capitalist economy, but the figure is more "variegated as a symbol" (Trigilio 111) than a simple beast to be slain. In the poem's most startling move, the distinction between exterior and interior collapses: Moloch becomes the poet and the poet becomes Moloch-"Moloch whom I abandon! Wake up in Moloch!" (22)-opening into a unified consciousness. As Hass observes, Ginsberg turns in the Moloch section to denunciation before reconnecting to his art, and at the poem's end Carl Solomon "shows up at his door, as if emerged from the sea" (234). This elegiac return breaks conventional form: the dead turn back to the poet.

While dealing with "Kaddish," Ginsberg constructs precisely the kind of counterpublics envisioned by Warner. Ginsberg stages grief, the marginalized voices and taboo experiences by spotlighting them against the dominant cultural silences. By recounting Naomi's schizophrenia: her paranoia, institutionalization, and psychic collapse, Ginsberg breaks the silence associated with taboo and illness like mental illness, and transforms private suffering into a shared discourse of vulnerable life. In "your Communism -'Paranoia' into hospitals" ("Kaddish" 36), Ginsberg illustrates his mother's mental disorder who was a Russian immigrant suffering in America where democracy resides in principle. Further the immigrant imagery, underpinned by Vendler as "immigrant elegy" (15), such as "Little girl-from Russia, eating the first poisonous tomatoes of America," resists the myth of America

as pure opportunity that foregrounds immigrants' disillusionment and alienation. The visual and gustatory image, "eating the poisonous tomatoes" underpins a mocking jab against the mainstream claim of American democracy. It rather undercuts American promises by visualizing a system that harms marginalized communities who are bound to consume the venomous foodstuff to sustain in America. Another, equally disturbing is Ginsberg's memory of his mother, Naomi who is not a woman but an aching woman pining for intimacy with her son in a society there is a color-line rift. By bringing this incest image into the poem, he breaks the usual boundaries of elegy, where sexuality and desire hold no room. In this way, "*Kaddish*," tinges with the body, memory, and emotional vulnerability. Ginsberg's "kaddish" differs from the traditional Jewish Kaddish because he creates a secular space while grief howling with a view that grief emerges when the God and authority are unkind. Yet, when he cries out, "Blessed be Death on us All!" to bring his pain into public notice as a part of counterculture. The way he expresses his grief, draws on a raw display of the Beat commitment to openness. These elements make "*Kaddish*," a powerful counterpublic text that gives spaces to madness, immigrant suffering, incest, taboo, and secular mourning while challenging dominant social and cultural norms.

Counterpublic Elegy Formation

"Howl" performance at the Six Gallery adds to a benchmark to blur the boundary between poet and audience, grand narrative and small stories. This public display makes real what Warner's conceptualized counterpublics as spaces of "friction against the dominant public" (120). The poem treats mourning as a shared, discursive experience in which madness becomes a basis for belonging. The recurring words and structures give a momentum to this by transforming individual's elegiac

experience into repeatable public speech.

Further, working grammatically as a relative pronoun, "who" marks a hailing device reaching out to the multitude strangers. Part II apostrophizes Moloch as the dominant public sphere, defining the counterpublic against it. Part III shifts to the intimate second person-"I'm with you in Rockland"-scaling from collective catalogue to individual solidarity. Warner notes that counterpublics "aspire to recreate themselves as a public and in doing so find themselves in conflict not only with the dominant social group but with the norms that constitute the dominant culture as public" (112). The Beats achieve precisely this, though as Warner also reminds us, "counterpublics are publics, too" (113), and the Beats eventually become institutionalized as one. Corresponding to it, Simson alludes to Ginsberg who "in 'Howl,' would argue for the superiority of those whom the law condemned. They were the ones who dared to live their ideas, to experiment, though they were punished for it -in contrast to the people who only knew about life through books" (52). Ginsberg's contention carries the nuance of Warner's counterpublics that retains the voice of dissenter.

However, the counterpublic lament is largely white and male: the Six Gallery lineup of Ginsberg, Lamantia, McClure, Snyder, and Whalen consisting entirely of white American men. The dominant public sphere in 1955 America was also constituted by racial exclusion, and colored Americans formed counterpublics under conditions of violent oppression-not merely social stigmatization of homo sexuality and addicts. The Beatnik counterpublic is therefore a chosen marginality, a subculture rather than a counterculture. The same year Ginsberg performed at the Six Gallery, Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old African-American boy, was lynched in Mississippi. He is never elegized by Ginsberg, neither he has any place in these poems, and his

absence is itself a form of exclusion that the poems do not acknowledge.

On the other hand, the bond between Beatnik breath poetics and bebop (jazz) requires careful articulation. Ginsberg's "eli eli lamma lamma sabacthani saxophone cry" ("Howl" 6) builds on the eroding energy of jazz musicians such as Charlie Parker and Lester Young, and the "angelheaded hipsters" (9) are partly defined through their relationship to Black music and Black urban space. Mailer's *The White Negro* makes explicit what Ginsberg's poem keeps Beat countercultural identity which is constructed through white people's stylized identification with Blackness. The exposure of Beatnik suffering, its art, its marginality is the icon of counterpublic. When Ginsberg refuses to extend to Black poets the same solidarity he offers Solomon-"I'm with you in Rockland"-he reproduces within the counterpublic the same exclusions that define the dominant public sphere.

What "Howl" and "Kaddish" ultimately achieve is neither resolution nor refusal but a form of sustained inhabitation of loss. The poem ends not with consolation but with a prayer dissolving into animal sound, "Lord Lord Lord caw caw caw Lord" ("Howl" 36), Ginsberg singing his "Kaddish" song, extolling God and the crow in the same tonal register, while Naomi is long dead and the "best minds" are time and again "destroyed by madness" (9) in postwar America. The elegy howls on questioning the social order.

Countercultural Elegies

This paper reads "Howl" and "Kaddish" by challenging Hass's assertion that elegy incorporates death into a resolved poetic order. The critical examination of these poems beyond genre reading of loss and grief in relation with psycho-social critique, and Warner's counterpublic theory shows that Ginsberg reframes postwar American elegy into an open-ended, processual mode in which mourning also howls the structural injustice. Instead of confining grief within

the elegiac genre, these poems utilize loss as a tool to go against societal closure. Both "Kaddish" and "Howl" deal mourning as a deeply personal and collective public outcry that tailors them to counterpublic. The reading of these poems show how loss can be put into public forum to challenge the structural injustice. It further leads counterpublic framework to study Ginsberg's elegy beyond the genre. In so doing, Ginsberg's poetics remains racially narrow, implicitly biased against the regime while exploring the structural exclusions. In sum, both poems redraw genre boundary to establish elegy as a resilient, and open to contest the institutionalizing of marginal community. Building on this analysis, future research can explore what lies beyond the reach of the mournful counterpublic poem. After all, no elegiac poem engages in the kind of resistant poetics which Ginsberg cultivates.

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