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*“Purest meat” as it appears in the title of this work has been taken from A. Ginsberg’s poem “On Burroughs’ Work” (1954). The Spanish translation of the title of this work was elaborated by the author.

**For practical purposes, the original poems are included at the beginning of each analysis instead of being annexed at the end of this work and are not intended to be included in the final word count. Together, in their current format, they constitute 4.5 pages in length.

***This work follows the author-date citation guidelines as outlined in the CMOS 17th ed.

1. Introductory Remarks and Objectives of Study

The present work is dedicated to the study of Allen Ginsberg's early poetical production with the main objective of revealing that the works contained in his early period are, although not on the surface, permeated by a highly homoerotic discourse. In pursuit of this aim, a lexicographical study—a purely linguistic, word-by-word scrutinization—and a Deconstructionist analysis as proposed by Jacques Derrida will be applied. The intention of (re)analyzing the selected corpus of poems through a Deconstructionist approach has the main purpose of replacing and reasserting a nonhierarchical relation to the binary opposition of not-gay/gay, heterosexual/homosexual conceptually speaking. Hence, this study examines Ginsberg's commitment and role as an active political mediator while practicing his function as a poet in society.

In an attempt to avoid those pivotal works such as “Howl” (1956) and “Kaddish” (1959), which have been extensively studied and analyzed by critics and scholars since their publication, this study will focus on *Empty Mirror: Gates of Wrath* (1947-1952) as well as on *The Green Automobile* (1953-1954), works that have received much less critical and scholarly attention. Although any poem belonging to the aforementioned collections could have been selected for analysis, the ones chosen in this present work have been selected following a twofold criteria: that the poems present the poet's commitment to social and political issues serving as a *vox populi* and that they show the evolution of Ginsberg's creative process from an activist starting point to a more philosophical and self-reflective poetry. The poems selected are: “The Bricklayers' Lunch Hour” (1947), “Refrain” (1948), “A Western Ballad” (1948), “A Mad Gleam” (1949), “An Imaginary Rose in a Book” (1950), and “Crash” (1950) from the *Empty Mirror: Gates of Wrath* collection as well as “An Asphodel” (1953), “Green Valentine Blues” (1954), “In back of the real” (1954), and “On Burroughs' Work” (1954) from *The Green Automobile* collection.*

Due to the limited extension of the present work, a deeply Deconstructionist and lexicographical analysis will only be provided of five poems: three from *Empty Mirror: Gates of Wrath* (“The Bricklayers' Lunch Hour,” “Refrain,” and “A Mad Gleam”) and two poems from *The Green Automobile* (“An Asphodel” and “On Burroughs' Work”). The rest of the corpus will be dealt with in less depth, although following the same methodology. The poems that will be fully

*All poems by A. Ginsberg selected for analysis in this work are included in the anthology *Collected Poems 1947-1997* (2006). Therefore, all in-text citations that include page numbers for these poems correspond to this anthology, a full reference for which can be found in the bibliography.

analyzed, as already mentioned, will shed light on Ginsberg's role in society, together with his personal philosophical trajectory. This project will start with a biography of the poet as well as a brief explanation of his poetical evolution. A theoretical framework related to Gay Studies, its discourse, and Deconstructionism will be laid out before presenting the results of the literary analysis. Finally, a conclusion discussing the results found will be provided.

2. The Figure of Allen Ginsberg

Irwin Allen Ginsberg was born on June 3rd, 1926 in Newark, New Jersey. He was the second son of Louis and Naomi Ginsberg, two important figures in his life that would have a great influence on his future creativity. As Ariel states, "Ginsberg's political stances and his [...] poetry could be traced to the atmosphere and personalities he had encountered around him growing up" (2013, 53). His father was a schoolteacher and a modest lyric poet who helped his son from the earliest stages of Ginsberg's literary process. His mother, also a schoolteacher, was a Russian immigrant whose identification as a communist was passed on to Ginsberg from a young age. The boy's youth was not an easy one, as it was early on that he became aware of his homosexuality, something that neither his father nor the majority of society particularly approved of at the time. Moreover, Ginsberg's mother was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, a fact that would condition and disturb his mind for the rest of his life (Schumacher 2005, 117-118).

After completing his studies at Paterson's East Side High School in 1943, Ginsberg enrolled at Columbia University in New York City to become a labor lawyer. This year would be crucial for the poet because it was then that he met Lucien Carr, an older intellectual and a writer-to-be. Through Carr, Ginsberg also became acquainted with Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs, two men that "had an immediate impact on Ginsberg, Burroughs as an elder and mentor, Kerouac as a literary influence" (Schumacher 2005, 118). His ambitions to become a committed student of law faded away very soon, and he instead became drawn into the bohemian lifestyle, choosing to pursue writing poems for the university literary journal. In this way, Ginsberg and his new group of friends started a small intellectual circle where literary discussions were at the core of their meetings. However, the circle was shortly broken up after an event that would place the future founders of the Beat Generation in the spotlight. In 1944, after a night of excessive drinking, Carr fatally

stabbed David Kammerer, an older man enamored by Carr's apparent beauty (Schumacher 2005, 118).

In a sense, the murder also took Ginsberg's life. Not only was he friends with the people involved in the crime but he also tried to write an essay about it at university that was taken as an unacceptable offense and gave rise to Ginsberg's reputation as an "eccentric" (Schumacher 2005, 119). He was finally expelled from Columbia as *persona non grata* after inviting Kerouac to spend a night with him on campus. Shortly thereafter, in 1946, Ginsberg and Kerouac were introduced to a young Neal Cassady, a man who greatly attracted Ginsberg and whose sexual encounters would leave a lasting mark on Ginsberg's life. Indeed, this love affair would be so meaningful for the poet that it served as the inspiration for the poem "Many Loves" (1956), in which Ginsberg explicitly describes their sexual intercourse and the feelings that arose from it. Despite their frequent sexual encounters, however, their relationship was doomed from the very beginning, as it soon became apparent that Cassady, although bisexual, demonstrated a preference for women. The fact that Cassady was married to a teenage girl in Denver, Colorado provoked great anxiety and frustration in Ginsberg (Schumacher 2005, 119). In one of the letters that Ginsberg sent to Cassady in 1947, the Beat poet opened himself up: "I am lonely, Neal, alone, and always I am frightened. [...] I have been miserable without you [...] and now that you have altogether rejected me, what can I do, what can I do? [...] I pray—please Neal, my Neal, come back to me, don't waste me, don't leave me" (2008, 38).

Ginsberg's letter correspondences with his friends would play a huge part in his creative process. This would produce as a consequence a modernist poetic prose in which words were put together, as if they were an enumeration, in order to speak up against that corrupt behavior of society. Moreover, Arthur holds that "the use of letter writing during this period inspires a kind of poetry that both defies heteronormativity and exposes the tenuous ethics of mining poems for biographical verification [...]" creating in turn "an effect of privacy" (2010, 229). The collaborative process of creation and feedback into which Ginsberg was submerged was the result of a deep commitment to his own poetry that was in a continuous "tandem" (Arthur 2010, 229).

After this devastating period, Ginsberg decided to take a job on a ship bound for Africa. In a period marked by confusion and soul-searching, he became captivated by writers like William Blake. The influence of mystical poets and his fragile emotional state led Ginsberg to experience what he called "visions" in 1948, a fact that would preoccupy him, his friends, and his

acquaintances for the next decade. In these visions, the poet perceived the voice of Blake reciting “Ah! Sunflower” (1794). As Schumacher states, “Ginsberg was utterly convinced that he has arrived at a personal epiphany” (2005, 120), one that he took as “creative gifts, connecting him organically with the universe and with poetry” (Hadda 2008, 234).

Unfortunately, Ginsberg’s problems did not end upon his return to New York. In 1949, he was charged for being an accomplice to a burglary carried out by a Times Square hustler named Herbert Huncke, who used Ginsberg’s apartment as a warehouse for his stolen goods. Following an intervention by members of the Columbia University Faculty, Ginsberg was finally spared a prison sentence. Instead, he was admitted to a psychiatric hospital, which involved “an attempt by the doctors there to squelch his genius and suppress his homosexuality,” an experience, moreover, which turned out to be the main inspiration for the young Ginsberg to write “Howl,” “the work that [...] changed the face of American poetry” (Hadda 2008, 229). There he met Carl Solomon, in whom Ginsberg saw “[one of] the best minds of [his] generation destroyed by madness” (Ginsberg 2006, 134).

Once Ginsberg left the psychiatric institute, he met William Carlos Williams and his poetic style began evolving once again. Shorter sentences started to be used, and prepositions seemed to become a very handy tool for expressing his misunderstood mind. In Quartermain’s words, “the value of such [...] language is that it can imply cause-and-effect relationships, but it does not state them: cause and effect are not to be assumed in or about the world of event; it is a world of immediacy” (1994, 1). This world of immediacy would very much become the personal sign of Ginsberg’s poetry. His understanding of life and his conception of poetry were merged into one and forged through the course events, placing his audience in a continuous and never ending innovative, visionary, and creative process whereby “*things happen*” (Quartermain 1994, 1).

It was this new friend who encouraged Ginsberg to publish a collection of his early works under the title *Empty Mirrors*, and soon his poetry began to take a new direction. Ginsberg spent the following years traveling around Mexico, which was paramount for more maturity in his thinking and poetry (Schumacher 2005, 121-122). Upon his return he visited Cassady, and they were caught by Cassady’s wife in bed together. In order to keep Ginsberg away from her husband, she literally drove the poet to the bohemian hotspot of San Francisco, where he would meet his lifelong lover, Peter Orlovsky. It was also in San Francisco that he would read the first part of

“Howl” at the 6 Gallery in 1955, a performance that was met with warm cheers of “go!” and “yes!” by his lifelong friend Kerouac (Schumacher 2005, 123).

Despite its success among a bohemian audience, “Howl” soon became the target of McCarthy-era censorship, and both Ginsberg and his publisher, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, found themselves on trial for obscenity. Though they were cleared of any criminal charges for the work, this controversy was reason enough for Ginsberg and Orlovsky to leave the United States and travel around Europe and eventually to Tangier, Morocco (Schumacher 2005, 124). Despite Ginsberg’s attempts to escape from his problems, his return to the United States was marked by the death of his mother, which would serve as the inspiration for one of the poet’s masterpieces, “Kaddish”. Although in this poem Ginsberg “confronts his anger at his mother's abstraction from life, her abandonment of him in madness, his disgust with her careless physical habits [...] his guilt about his treatment of her during her breakdowns,” it also serves as an open “declaration of love for Naomi Ginsberg” (Breslin 1977, 96).

The 1960s were a decade of spiritual experiences for Ginsberg. He traveled with Burroughs to South America in search of the hallucinogenic *ayahuasca* and upon his return took part in tests involving psychoactive psilocybin mushrooms. Being “at a critical juncture in his study of consciousness,” Ginsberg also traveled to India to meet the Dalai Lama, converted to Buddhism, and started lecturing at universities (Schumacher 2005, 125). Later, in the 1970s, he toured the world with a young Bob Dylan and was introduced to contemporary counter-culture icons like The Beatles. He spent the 1980s and the 1990s traveling, promoting his friends’ works, and doing his part to keep the Beat Generation alive. In this regard, Charter has stated that Ginsberg “brought the whole Beat Generation into being with the strength of his vision of himself and his friends as a new beginning –as a new generation. He wove the threads that kept them together [...]” (1986, 24).

However, in 1997 Ginsberg became weak and was hospitalized in New York, where doctors discovered an advanced state of liver cancer. He died on April 5th surrounded by friends and his lifelong lover, Orlovsky. He was cremated and a Buddhist funeral was held in his memory. Having had such a strong connection to social movements and political causes, Allen Ginsberg is remembered as one of the most influential poets of the 20th century. Although his writings are typically classified within the world of arts and humanities, the works he produced over the course of his life had a great impact on many other areas of society and culture including the sexual liberation movement, gender politics, the pro-drugs movement, and religious thinking. As

Schumacher's remarks become relevant in this regard, "Ginsberg's alignment with antiwar, free-speech, and gay liberation causes, brought him additional fame, placing him at the forefront of the tumultuous 1960s and making him as famous for his politics as he was for being a poet" (2005, 117).

3. Gay Discourse

3.1. The Phenomenon of Gay Studies

The liberation movements of the turbulent and rebellious 1960s and 1970s were in many ways a reaction against McCarthyism and its persecution of homosexuals for their supposed connection with communism (Savoy 2005, para. 1). These movements resulted in the awakening of a gay consciousness that empowered the gay community to fight against the white heteronormative society in pursuit of greater equality. It is this period that witnessed not only the publication of Ginsberg's early works but also the development of the new academic field of Gay Studies. The early works of these new scholarly and literary voices "were of tremendous importance in establishing a critical voice for a homosexual thematic in canonical literature" (Savoy 2005, para. 4), and therefore conferring the missing visibility that the community itself, although fighting for it by their own means, could not attain.

Sedgwick's (1992) publication of *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* marked the path for (re)searching literary works produced by men in order to (re)study their voices. In this search for apparently homosexual writers, other literary critics like Martin posited that Walt Whitman's work asserts "that all men are potentially homosexual" (1998, 83) and that homosexuality has always existed in society, while, at the same time, Whitman's poetry can be considered as "the self-conscious awareness of homosexuality as an identity" (1998, 51-52).

This identity that Martin points out must be found in the study of lexis, syntax, and pragmatics. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault used the term "reverse discourse" to label the speech used by the homosexual community for its own self-expression (1978, 101). This concept of "reverse discourse" would set the path for the future of post-structural gay studies as well as the research of, in Savoy's words, "the erotics of textual secrecy," by which he means that "for the truth of texts, like that of sex, requires a sophisticated hermeneutical approach to the domains that

harbor, and are organized around, the imperative of a fundamental secret” (2005, para. 9). This secrecy is closeted in the confidence that any homosexual author can choose to pass it on to his audience. As Miller explains, “the secret subject is always an open secret” (1988, 205) and that the audience themselves is being accomplice to “[a] secret [that] is known, [and that] we must persist [...] in guarding” (1988, 207).

3.2. Codified Homosexual Discourse

The *OED* defines code (v.) as “to prepare (a message) for transmission by putting it into code words”. Thus, a codified message necessarily needs words that function as a code in order to make the message be considered as such. The concept variously referred to as ‘Gayspeak,’ ‘Gay English,’ or ‘Gay Language’ has now been the target of study for many years, partly thanks to the creation of the Lavender Language Conference that helped the visibility of Gay Studies “achieve the level of [...] respectability that such studies currently enjoy” (Leap and Provencher 2011, 712). In this language conference many critics and scholars of the field have shed some light on the use of the language related to so-called “non-normative sexuality” (2011, 712).

Although defining and finding the common denominators of what makes ‘Gay Language’ itself a codified language has been a challenging task for scholars such as Leap, Sedgwick, and Butler, their contributions have helped explore the topic in depth. Burges, for instance, claims that the “homosexual world has its own language” (1949, 234), which Sonenschein explains can “reinforce group cohesiveness and reflect common interests, problems and needs of the population” (1969, 289), thus being able to serve “one’s identification as a member of the gay community” (Stanley 1974, 385).

The study of a gay vocabulary was a main focus of scholarship in the 1960s and 1970s, which according to Kulick has contributed to “see[ing...] vocabulary as [...] a matrix of affective, social and political relations and therefore constituting a linguistic code [...]” (2000, 258). Following the definition provided earlier by the *OED*, this linguistic codified corpus works to “prepare” that communication through “code words” in order to be able to express “transmission”. Likewise, Hayes identifies three functions of ‘Gay Language’: that it is a code in which secrecy is the ultimate purpose in order to protect identity; that within this secret code, the gay community can open up and express themselves within their own environment; and that it is a way to politicize

their social life (1981, 50-53). In this sense, as Jacobs claims, the “gay community have developed their own vocabulary or redefined existing words to express their unique experiences” (1996, 55). This redefinition of “existing words” that he points out mirrors “the unique experience of [...] gay men,” whose word choice hinges “on sexuality,” and therefore showing “the relative degree of comfort that gay community members have in discussing sexually related issues” (1996, 57).

The close bond that the gay community creates through language is likewise reflected, according to Goodwin, in humor. He posits that humor “offers a means of insulting the people [...] stigmatizing gays [...]” (1989, 15). Humor is frequently recognized in the use of metaphors and hyperboles, codes that can be identified within the closely bonded community. These elements, along with the use of their own vocabulary or redefined existing words form a complex linguistic network that sometimes seems to be inconclusive. However, Jacobs states that “those who are skilled with such verbal artistry,” an attribute that Ginsberg shares without any doubt, “are highly valued within the community” and therefore “are provided with an opportunity to achieve high status within the community, shielded from the indignities encountered on a day-to-day basis outside” (1996, 62).

4. Theoretical Framework & Methodology

4.1. Use of Lexicographical Sources

This study makes use of a variety of lexicographical sources in order to de-codify the homosexual discourse found in Ginsberg’s early works. Referring to Samuel Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language*, first published in 1755, DeMaria writes that “as an encyclopedic work of quotations, the *Dictionary* both records a history of knowledge and is itself an important event in that history” (2007, 14). However, in order to be able to accurately examine the question of homosexual discourse, the most historical lexicographical source used in this study is the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which in the words of Levinson “has gone on to become the premiere document of the English language, a ‘living document’ that has been growing and changing for over 150 years” (2011, 461).

As it was first developed in the Victorian Age, one of the primary dilemmas faced by James Murry, the first editor of the *OED*, was that of deciding which words should or should not be

included. As Levinson explains, “contemporary opinion of that time forced Murray to omit certain sexual words and coarse colloquial expressions” (2011, 465). Nevertheless, as society became more tolerant, dictionaries became more inclusive. In the 20th century, Wentworth and Flexner (1975) published the *Dictionary of American Slang*, a lexicographical endeavor that sought to record how language was being used in popular culture. Though it was controversial for its inclusion of obscene meanings of certain words, the advent of the internet resulted in mass proliferation of lexicographical material, making dictionaries virtually accessible to anyone with a computer. The *Urban Dictionary*, one of the earliest online lexicographical sources, not only became easily accessible but allowed readers to make their own contributions, encouraging users from different geographic and cultural backgrounds to contribute and spread the development of English slang. Finally, specialized lexicographical sources such as Baker’s (2002) *Fantabulosa: A Dictionary of Polari and Gay Slang* became dedicated to recording the English language specifically as it was used within certain cultural groups, in this case the homosexual community.

4.2. Deconstruction

The French philosopher Derrida coined the post-structural concept of Deconstruction that would soon become an umbrella term associated with many other fields of study like politics, law, science, and literary criticism, among others. The concept and definition of Deconstruction have been discussed and studied since it was first proposed, resulting in a complex conceptualization today. Towards such a definition, Royle explores in detail the entry offered by the *Chambers Dictionary*: “a method of critical analysis applied esp. to literary texts, which, questioning the ability of language to represent reality adequately, asserts that no text can have a fixed and stable meaning, and that readers must eradicate all philosophical or other assumptions when approaching a text”. On the other hand, Royle argues that “this definition seems [...] awful beyond words” and that it implies that “[D]econstruction is ridiculous” (2000, 1-2). Royle agrees more with the definition proposed by the *OED*, “Philos. and Lit. Theory. A strategy of critical analysis associated with the French philosopher Jacques Derrida [...] directed towards exposing unquestioned metaphysical assumptions and internal contradictions in philosophical and literary language,” yet he also states the following: “the *OED* gets things just as wrong as *Chambers* does, because what

all of these dictionary definitions fail to register is that [D]econstruction is not restricted to so-called ‘philosophy and literary theory’” (2000, 7).

Despite the debate over what is or is not an adequate definition of Deconstruction, the purpose of the Derridean term is “to reveal logical or rhetorical incompatibilities between the explicit and implicit planes of discourse in a text,” as well as “to demonstrate by means of a range of critical techniques how these incompatibilities are disguised and assimilated by the text” (Kneale 2005, para. 1). The revelation of incompatibilities and their assimilation within the text that Kneale refers to is very much in line with Royle’s argument that Deconstruction “has to do with identity and experience in general” (2000, 7). By assimilating the differences that exist in any text, the text itself will reveal its own camouflaged “identity,” in Kneale’s words, while “[D]econstruction always reveals difference within unity” (2005, para. 4).

It is this “concept of difference [that] is crucial to Derrida,” argues Kneale (2005, para. 3). For Derrida, achieving the needed difference is key to detect a binary opposition within a text (in the scope of this work the opposition of heterosexual/homosexual). Then, it is necessary to reverse the hierarchy imposed by the binary opposition (which in this work will be to find the lexicographical homoerotic words within Ginsberg’s poetic discourse), and later to replace and reassert the two terms of the original opposition in order to show their new nonhierarchical connection of difference (which in the context of this work means stating that the difference Ginsberg was pursuing was indeed the lack of hierarchies in society defined by sexual orientation) (Kneale 2005, para. 1).

5. Analysis of Selected Poems

5.1. “The Bricklayer’s Lunch Hour”

Two bricklayers are setting the walls
of a cellar in a new dug out patch
of dirt behind an old house of wood
with brown gables grown over with ivy
on a shady street in Denver. It is noon
and one of them wanders off. The young
subordinate bricklayer sits idly for
a few minutes after eating a sandwich
and throwing away the paper bag. He

has on dungarees and is bare above
the waist; he has yellow hair and wears
a smudged but still bright red cap
on his head. He sits idly on top
of the wall on a ladder that is leaned
up between his spread thighs, his head
bent down, gazing uninterestedly at
the paper bag on the grass. He draws
his hand across his breast, and then
slowly rubs his knuckles across the
side of his chin, and rocks to and fro
on the wall. A small cat walks to him
along the top of the wall. He picks
it up, takes off his cap, and puts it
over the kitten's body for a moment.
Meanwhile it is darkening as if to rain
and the wind on top of the trees in the
street comes through almost harshly.

This first composition chosen for analysis, following extensive research in lexicographical sources, would seem to constitute a key example of how homoerotic discourse may be seen to constitute a full, simultaneously palimpsestic presence at the base of mainline poetic description and narrative. For example, here the title heralds how the description of an everyday scene also provides access to a mysterious and select environment. The lunch hour, apart from being the break that workers have in order to eat, is defined by the *Urban Dictionary* as “a blow-job [...that] can be either given or received” (as in the phrase “to give/get lunch”). In this sense, therefore, the environment is described here through a hidden homoerotic language, establishing in turn a selective social circle.

A traditional reading provides the reader with a portrait, ekphrastically and sociologically speaking, of two male workers (fixing a rooftop in this case), while a deeper lexicographical reading of the composition gives rise to a (homo)sexual reading. The prototypical gay observer, the voice of the poem, enters into a fetishistic, sexualized space in the form of a reverie that is “worked upon” in metapoetic terms. Disguised words like “walls” (line 1), “wood” (line 3), and “shady” (line 5) are key ingredients in order to prove this point. The term “wall,” etymologically speaking, according to the *OED* means “the belly;” “wood,” (as in the phrase “to go to the woods”) according to the same source, implies “los[ing] your social status;” while the term “shady” is linked

to the activity of prostitution. Moreover, in even more vulgar terms, a “brick” may be associated with excrement.

After these findings, what seems to be suggested is that these two bricklayers are looking for or hunting men bellies (see “set” in *OED*) in a dark place where there are beds made of leather and excrements. This place (symbolized by the “house,” the “[whore]house”) is on the margins of society, a place, since it is made of “wood,” where bourgeois social status and reputations can become undermined. Likewise, the reference to “gables” functions as a phallic symbol, while this “house,” as social-sexual space, is located on a “shady” street, in a zone of prostitution. Interestingly, the poetic-voice-as-real-author, i.e. the autobiographical Ginsberg, locates this house in Denver, Colorado, the place where Cassady lived when he rejected Ginsberg’s love. Thus, homosexual and autobiographical vividness are embedded subliminally within the text. The growing strength of the gay community, besides its growing sense of social and ideological frustration, is suggested by the use of the sadomasochistic-related term “subordinate”.

However, what also enriches the homoerotic nature of the poem is the perception of the color symbolism associated with the bricklayer’s physical depiction. “[D]ungarees,” according to the *OED*, are blue overalls. “[B]lue,” which the *Dictionary of Polari* links to the phrase “blue balls,” suggests the need for sexual intercourse after being stimulated sexually for a long period of time. Thus, Ginsberg’s personal or autobiographical urges coincide with those of the “bricklayers”. Moreover, the reference to the color “yellow,” with regard to the bricklayer’s hair, not only activates the autobiographical dimension of Ginsberg’s “jealousy” (*OED*) toward Cassady but also the sexual phenomenon of “golden showers,” that is, the sexual practice where people urinate over other people’s bodies. Likewise, the color of the bricklayer’s hair is symbolically enhanced by the reference to the “red cap on his head,” a suggestive allusion to the tip of the penis, which, in codified homoerotic discourse, implies the use of condoms that are stained with blood (*OED*), representing simultaneously passion and anger.

The homoerotic sexual epitome is very visual and explicit after a conscious study of the lexicographic. This idea is portrayed in the following lines: “He draws/ his hand across his breast, and then/ slowly rubs his knuckles across the side of his chin, and rocks to and fro/ on the wall” (2006, 12). Three key words stand out in that latter sense: “rub[],” “knuckle[],” and “rock[]”. According to the *OED*, “rub” means “to masturbate;” “knuckles,” according to *Urban Dictionary*, refer to the male genitalia; while the term “rocks” refers to “testicles” (*OED*).

It would seem, then, that within the framework of the ekphrastic search for poetic vividness, the reverie taking place in the observer or poetic voice's mind's eye involves public masturbation by two men, together with the enjoyment of the one on top (in contrast to the "subordinate" one), who is rubbing his testicles across the belly of the other man. As an act of celebration, the use of the soft and smooth alliteration associated with the voiceless alveolar sibilant /s/ functions as a further manifestation of pleasure in the form of universal freedom, which is also suggested by the description of open-air sex that is being provided here.

5.2. "Refrain"

The air is dark, the night is sad,
I lie sleepless and I groan.
Nobody cares when a man goes mad:
He is sorry, God is glad.
Shadow changes into bone.

Every shadow has a name;
When I think of mine I moan,
I hear rumors of such fame.
Not for pride, but only shame,
Shadow changes into bone.

When I blush I weep for joy,
And laughter drops from me like a stone:
The aging laughter of the boy
To see the ageless dead so coy.
Shadow changes into bone.

In terms of the composition's title, two nuances are worth mentioning: in the first place, and according to the *OED*, "refrain" means "an utterance [...] often repeated; (now) spec. a repeated comment or complaint". This is indeed relevant since the poem itself can serve both as a piece of song to be sung but also as a complaint or a yearning for homosexual contact. Secondly, another definition of the word from the same source is "to keep the nature or identity of (a person or thing) secret; to disguise". Therefore, what this simple and highly codified title is suggesting, paradoxically, is an un-"disguis[ing]," that is, a declarative vindication of an eroticized homosexuality as forming part of natural instinct which, moreover, is perpetual and constant. The extent of the intense nature of this vindicatory, as well as personally relevant, experience transforms

the poem into one which also belongs to the exemplary tradition and, as such, potentially acquires paradigmatic status within the homosexual community. Likewise, in metaliterary terms, the poetic voice never ceases to be that of a poet even for a nano-second, while, simultaneously, the figure of the homosexual human being lives for, and through, what and who he is. Thus, also, the two conditions of being homosexual and poet are naturally and inevitably inseparable: “shadow” and “bone,” the real and the yearning for the real become fused.

Following a traditional interpretation, the autobiographical, confessional discourse that manifests itself almost seems to be of a spiritual nature. Nevertheless, following a semantic or even, at times, etymological scrutinization of the text, what this new and derived face of the text confirms is a deep (homo)eroticized discourse, in which the “refrain” stands for a sort of mantra which reveals the psychological and spiritual dimension of a prototypical member of the gay community. Thus, the “I” speaks for a collective. Therefore, this returns to and supports the conception of the poem as a paradoxical mantra that represents a yearning for homosexual fulfillment, i.e. for “shadow” to become “bone,” while, at the same time, projecting an inevitable sense of fulfillment never being achieved in a complete sense.

In the first stanza, apart from setting an enigmatic tone, the word choice is majestically collected. In consequence, the earlier personifications of the “air” and the “night” are quite revealing. According to the *OED*, the “air,” etymologically from Anglo-Norman and Old French, used to mean “[...] violence, force [...]” while “dark” is linked, according to the *Dictionary of Polari*, to the concept of a “dark room”. This finding is worth highlighting since further research from the *OED* reveals that “[a] dark room or house was formerly considered a proper place of confinement for a madman; hence to keep (a person) dark, to keep him confined in a dark room”. This seems to indicate that madmen, i.e. homosexuals, tend to gather in such “dark room(s)” where violent and force-related environments prevail. This triggers the idea of sadomasochism (SM), a habit that was very much associated with homosexuals and was considered as a sort of psychopathy in the straight community (i.e. non-homosexual people). Moreover, the terms “night” and “dark” are associated with the term “sad” which may be sensed as functioning as a pun: “Sad[-omasochism]”. At the same time, the *OED* provides an entry in which this cognate, diachronically speaking, is seen to carry the following meaning: “[...] a general expression of censure, depreciation, or regret. Originally: exceptionally bad, deplorable, shameful [...]”. It is as though homosexuals were and are obliged to carry this historical burden of homosexuality’s inevitable

links with that which is the “deplorable” or “shameful” space of the dark room of sadomasochism. In that sense, the poem becomes an example of the negative capability of a text to acquire a vindicatory status.* The implication is that the gay community can overcome traditional cliché-based stigma. Thus, SM need not be conceived of in negative terms, while any “man,” supposedly “mad” is, rather, living an uninhibited existence as a “[n]obody,” i.e. as one who cannot be easily defined, as a free spirit.

In other words, what seems to be clear in the first stanza is a strong personification of “the gay” aesthetic through the references to the body as well as the practice of SM sex (“dark room”). Equally interesting is the fact that God is being described as “glad”. This very word, in one of its definitions as revealed by the *OED*, means “gay, fashionable”. While God represents the plenitude of homosexual liberty, also identifiable with “laughter of the boy” as an expression of unchained plenitude, the human homosexual, surrounded by a hostile, cliché-based society, has been “aging” during the process of discovery of a kind of innate dissatisfaction within each gay man. This is the same sensation that the negative capability that characterizes the poem, in vindicatory terms, is aiming to dissipate through its exemplary nature. For this reason, the new generations, represented by the figure of the “boy,” recognize that past generations of homosexuals have also been “coy” and, thus, never fully at ease with their nature. However, the term “laughter” confirms that the poem is functioning in terms of the projection of the *esprit de corps* and *joie de vivre* of the gay community.

In the second and third stanzas, there are two important nuances that need special attention. The first one is the word “name”. Although this word seems to be quite a common word, it is important to highlight here. The *OED* points out, as one of its obsolete meanings: “by name, by nature and variants: used to indicate that a person or thing is aptly named, the name matching some quality, behaviour, etc.”. What is of weight here is the word “nature” within the framework of the so-called nature-nurture argument, i.e. whether there is such a thing as a homosexual gene (nature) or whether homosexuality is generated by societal factors (nurture) (Sedgwick 1991, 40-44). This duality is also emphasized by the use of “moan” contrasted with “shame”. “[M]oan[ing], according to the *OED* is any sound produced by humankind or animals in order to express pleasure or pain

*The phenomenon of “negative capability,” as coined by Keats (Preminger and Brogan 1993, 824-825) becomes relevant, theoretically speaking, in the case of the de-codification of Ginsberg’s early poetry, given that the factor of poetic creativity that characterizes such verse emerges out of a hyper-naturalistic, SM milieu which is thus creatively poetic on its own homoerotic terms, and yet is worthy of the name of art.

while “shame” is purely created by humankind, and as the *OED* points out, is especially related to the loss of a woman’s honor. This seems to support the archaic conception of how women, children, and homosexuals are all the same, and therefore can all be defined by the same set of supposed weaknesses. Given the point of evolution of social thinking reached in the second decade of the new millennium, the poem acquires the status of a historical (the composition is dated 1948) example of a text that is valuable as a result of the negative capability it projects. In terms of its own kind of discursive frankness, the text functions as a criticism of society, as well as a celebration, as in the case of “The Bricklayer’s Lunch Hour,” of a wild and free nature.

The composition’s use of codified language again contributes to the synthesis of the vindictory and the celebratory that characterizes the poem. In the third stanza, for example, the term that acquires relevance is “stone,” which, according to the *Urban Dictionary*, means “testicles or balls”. This very word is linked with the phenomenon of “laughter”. Apart from literally meaning a “crying out,” it also refers to the eggs that any female bird lays before incubating (*OED*). This *joie de vivre*, the potential for rebirth, in an apparently melancholic poem, is also reinforced by the “mantra”: “Shadow changes into bone” (2006, 19). Shadows, as analyzed in the “The Bricklayers’ Lunch Hour,” mean a gay man adopting a codified, and, thus, vindictory discourse while the reference to “bone” (as in the phrase “to get a bone”) refers to an erection of the penis as indicated in the *OED*. Thus, an apparently meditative, melancholic poem is transformed into a celebratory *mantra*.

5.3. “A Mad Gleam”

Go back to Egypt and the Greeks,
Where the Wizard understood
The spectre haunted where man seeks
And spoke to ghosts that stood in blood.

Go back, go back to the old legend;
The soul remembers, and is true:
What has been most and least imagined,
No other, there is nothing new.

The giant Phantom is ascending
Toward its coronation, gowned
With music unheard, but unending:
Follow the flower to the ground.

In terms of this composition's voiced content, the traditional poetic format of a reverie is homoeroticized. In terms of the composition's title, this same kind of transformational process seems to provide the reader with access to the imaginative details that make up the equivalent of "a twinkling of an eye," a brief moment of thought or experience, as transformed into "the giving of the glad eye" to someone as an action in which erotic desire is transmitted. Likewise, the use of the term "[m]ad" in the poem's title underlines the intensity of the reverie that the poem is describing in detail, while the poem develops as a slow-motion account of the instant's contents. In basic terms, the *Urban Dictionary* confirms how the instant of desire constituted by the poem *per se* may prototypically be seen as the sped-up "mad-sex" version of the sex act itself.

The phrase "[g]o back to Egypt and the Greeks" constitutes the powerful beginning of this daydream vision. The adverb "back," that accompanies "go," acquires codified relevance within vindictory-celebratory homosexual verse. The *Dictionary of Polari* offers the expression "back room" meaning a "dark room," as indicated above. This Deconstructed reading, thus suggests a return to ancient times when homosexuality was treated as something natural. Moreover, worth pointing out here is whether the term "back" may be considered a pun on the term "bag," meaning a promiscuous person (*Dictionary of Polari*). Likewise, the terms "Egypt" and "Greek" also acquire vindictory relevance here. In this sense, the *Urban Dictionary* projects how "Egypt" means "defiance and bravery" while "Greek," according to the *Dictionary of Polari*, is defined as a euphemism for "anal intercourse". Thus, the implication that becomes subliminally insistent is that homosexual lovemaking needs to be projected aggressively.

The constant presence of a codified, suggestive discourse with vindictory implications becomes a ceaseless, constant presence in the texts being studied. Thus, the erotic value of the verb "go back" as mantra underlines how history itself becomes homosexualized. In this same sense, coexistent with abstract, metaphysical terms, such as "soul," is the subliminal sexual pun on the term "legend" ([leg] + end). Therefore, the informal expression, "third leg," used by young males to refer to their penises, emerges, as confirmed by the *Urban Dictionary*. In archetypal terms the "true [...] end" of existence, the "soul" of existence, would become symbolized by the phallus, while the sexual pun generated by the reference to "[]member" in the verb "remember[]" reinforces this idea. It is as if the male genitalia were being worshipped in terms of a cult action. The mantra-like last line of the second stanza, given its phonological configuration, reinforces the phenomenon

of being mesmerized by the phallus in a pan-historical cultural act: “No other, there is nothing new” (2006, 24).

Whether the three-stanza format may be a subliminal allusion, numerologically speaking, to the phenomenon of the “Holy Trinity” can only be tentatively posed here. On the other hand, everything seems to indicate that the “son(s),” within that same configuration, may be interpreted as the homosexual people of the mid-20th century, while the “Holy Spirit” is the already-mentioned “soul” that “remembers”. Moreover, all these elements seem to converge upon the archetypal figure of “God,” i.e. the penis that creates that new religion. In this latter sense, a climax is reached in the third stanza. Here, words like “giant,” “coronation,” and “flower” need to be addressed. “Giant,” according to the *OED* and the mythological tradition, was the son of Earth and Uranus and was described as having an “enormous stature and strength”. This acceptance seems to fit with the archetypal context of the poem, but further research confirms the presence of the discourse’s erotic milieu. The *Urban Dictionary* defines “Giant” as “the word that men use to describe their penis”. The fact that this “giant Phantom,” as phallus, is “ascending” seems to suggest that an erection is underway and, moreover, is evolving “towards its coronation,” toward the point of ejaculation. As a process, and in a deeply homoerotic sense, the term “unending,” keeping in mind how “[end]” may be interpreted as a reference to anus, portrays how the erection-ejaculation process is taking place within the anal tract.

Hence, the poem reinforces the already-mentioned concept of homosexuality as “nothing new” (2006, 24), as having been expressed physically in a historically natural way. The symbolism associated with the term “flower” also becomes homoerotically charged: “Follow the flower to the ground” (2006, 24). The symbolic use of the term “flowers” has been a constant in Western culture in association with the beauty of young men (Haggerty 2000, 513), and especially in ancient Greece and Rome, where the adoration of adolescent boys by old men was openly accepted, and even encouraged (see the analysis of “An Asphodel” below). Interestingly, “ground” is defined by the *Dictionary of Polari* as “a list of rules [...] setting out the boundaries of a relationship, especially relating to sex [...]”. So, by bringing both terms into semantic contact the poem seems to be motivated by its vision of the indoctrination of young boys in how to follow the rules of gay sex so that homosexual practices and beliefs will become historically and “unending[ly]” perpetuated (2006, 24).

5.4. “An Asphodel”

O dear sweet rosy
unattainable desire
...how sad, no way
to change the mad
cultivated asphodel, the
visible reality ...

and skin's appalling
petals—how inspired
to be so lying in the living
room drunk naked
and dreaming, in the absence
of electricity...
over and over eating the low root
of the asphodel,
gray fate...

rolling in generation
on the flowery couch
as on a bank in Arden—
my only rose tonite's the treat
of my own nudity.

The title of this poem, in terms of its word choice, generates a series of perspectives, while the celebration of a potentially intense, homoerotic, physical act, described ludically, is what the composition seems to represent. Within the tradition of the Cavalier verse of the 17th century, that ludic quality emerges in how, as the poem's closing lines indicate, the anal rose is being celebrated in terms of how the poetic voice can only play with, and finger, his own, without being able to play with another man's: “my only rose tonite's the treat/ of my own nudity” (2006, 96).

Yet, the celebration of the anal flower, together with its sphincter muscle and its “petal”-like wrinkles, as though it were that of a lover, continues imaginatively in this poetic piece. In this same sense, derivatively speaking, the fact that the *OED* defines the flower of the title as a “[...] lilaceous plant with very handsome flowers [...],” and given how the *Urban Dictionary* defines the term “lily” as a keynote female figure upon whom all attention is centered, it is the anal entry point that is likewise given center-stage status in this ludically, homoerotically lyrical composition. This same centering of attention, comically relevant in terms of the anus as the focal point of the gay lover's anatomy, is detectable in the pun on “[]pall[]” within the term “appalling”: “skin's

appalling/ petals” (2006, 96). Thus, as keynote figures of eroticized beauty and presence, a “pall,” as a pun on the prototypical male name “Paul,” and a “lily,” hermaphroditically speaking, as reflected in the *Urban Dictionary*, become synonymous and, thus, homosexually relevant.

In this same hermaphroditically-based sense, what also becomes detectable is the presence of a pun on the wording of the poem’s title, “An [Ass]phodel,” where a suggestive reference to the anus is foregrounded. This idea is made more intense by how, in a sexually hermaphroditic sense, the term “phode” is defined by the *Urban Dictionary* as “a vagina that is wider than it is deep”. Within this anatomical context, it is the tonguing of the anal sphincter that is being celebrated: “over and over eating the low root/ of the asphodel” (2006, 96), even though what becomes comically highlighted is that the actual act of tonguing, or licking, is physically impossible, given how the poetic voice, fingering his own anal rose, finds himself alone, as already mentioned.

The tradition of Renaissance and Restoration verse in which sexual organs and flower symbolism become fused cannot be ignored as a factor of contextualization in any approach to this composition. “To Daffodills,” by the English poet Robert Herrick may be cited in this regard (Rhys 1908). What may be considered as a hermaphroditic fusion of the female vagina and male anal sphincter is underlined from the outset: “O dear sweet rosy/ unattainable desire” (2006, 96). Likewise, the circular character of the interjection “O” may be said to constitute a graphic/graphemic pun, while, as indicated above with regard to the potentially punned identity of “Lily” and “Paul” as names, the poem projects the erotic content in a highly vivid way, reflected here through the use of the epithet “[R]osy”.

Historically speaking, the following is stated in the *Encyclopedia of Gay History*: “Floral imagery has also been used in heterosexual and homosexual erotica to metaphorize the body” (Haggerty 2000, 515). Although the symbol of the rose has traditionally been linked to the female genitalia, “[in] gay pornography, the anus is commonly compared to a flower, often a rosebud” (Haggerty 2000, 515). In this same vein, the term “unattainable” in the poem also acquires relevance within the context of the poem as a whole since, as underlined in the *Urban Dictionary*, the term refers to someone “who has a small penis [...]”. The desire for gay sex (i.e. anal sex) with someone who possesses “a small penis” becomes thwarted: “(how) sad, (no way)” (2006, 96). Thus, the frustration experienced by the solitary protagonist of “An Asphodel” is compounded further by this contextualization based on more than one form of erotic limitation.

Also worthy of mention here is the use made of the terms “change” and “mad” in the opening stanza. The *Dictionary of Polari* highlights the acceptance of “change” as “to have sex for the first time”. Applied to Ginsberg’s poem, the fusion of the concepts of anticipation (in first-time lovemaking) and frustration, in the case of this poem per se, constitute the way in which the intensity of what is being experienced is underlined. Likewise, the *Urban Dictionary* proposes a suggestive definition for “mad” by highlighting its use as an acronym that stands for “Masturbation Addiction Disorder”. Thus, what emerges as lover’s “mad(ness)” in this poem by Ginsberg is the inevitability of the masturbatory “[de]flower[ing]” of the poetic voice’s anal rose-bud via the use of his own finger or fingers.

It may also be possible to gauge the extent of the intensity of the frustration associated with solitary anal masturbation being vividly represented in the poem by bringing to the fore the sadomasochistic act of literally peeling the skin off the anal sphincter wrinkles: “skin’s appalling / petals” (2006, 96). Relevant here is the highlighting by the *OED* of how “skin” carries the meaning of “sexual intercourse” in U.S. slang. Moreover, the masturbatory fantasy occupies a discursive zone that also implies a context based on a state of inebriation: “[...] in the living/ room drunk naked” (2006, 96). Meanwhile, in metapoetic terms, the reference to “living” again activates the creatively-based phenomenon of “negative capability” whereby the frustration associated with the absence of interactive sexual action is compensated for by the description of the action associated with quasi-sadomasochistic masturbatory pleasure: “and dreaming, in the absence/ of electricity.../ over and over eating the low root/ of the asphodel,/ gray fate...” (2006, 96).

What cannot be ignored is how darkness, as the “absence/ of electricity...” recalls the dark-room of sadomasochistic activities, while the term “electricity” becomes relevant in this same sense. What acquires relevance, therefore, is the related definition found in the *Dictionary of Polari* for “electricity” as the equivalent of “electroplay” which is defined as “the use of electrical devices during S&M roleplay for sexual stimulation”.

Given that the slang meaning of “root” is “penis” in American English, as recorded in the *OED*, the anus and the penis become fused in this gay sexual fantasy, while the reference to “gray fate...,” which may include a pun on the term “gray” as “g[ay],” seems to point to how the frustrated fantasy, which has been reduced to a solo anal masturbatory event, also constitutes an example of exemplary and advice discourse. As an instance of *carpe diem*, the young gay reader is warned, therefore, that solitary sexual activity is what awaits the aged gay. Thus, the term “treat,”

within a solo scenario, ceases to mean, as indicated in the *Urban Dictionary*, “a sexual favour for your partner,” while the phrase “rolling in generation” in the final stanza (2006, 96), rather than alluding to the sexual act involving a young man and an older man, becomes understandable as a wry, sardonic statement of the inevitable course of human existence.

5.5. “On Burroughs’ Work”

The method must be purest meat
and no symbolic dressing,
actual visions & actual prisons
as seen then and now.

Prisons and visions presented
with rare descriptions
corresponding exactly to those
of Alcatraz and Rose.

A naked lunch is natural to us,
we eat reality sandwiches.
But allegories are so much lettuce.
Don’t hide the madness.

In metaliterary terms, in this case involving the promotion of a literary work—William S. Burroughs’ Beat Generation novel *Naked Lunch* (1959)—within another literary work—this poem by Ginsberg—this composition projects itself as a celebratory work of art that transforms words into discursive units that actually constitute the linguistic equivalent of the phenomenon of “impact,” phenomenologically speaking, symbolized in the phrase “purest meat”. In that sense, as though in an artistic feat involving ekphrasis, the poem constitutes the equivalent of one of Burroughs’ psychedelic, kaleidoscopic, ultra-naturalistic, surrealistic prose-bytes that form part of his 1959 novel, he himself being a lifelong friend and a lover of Ginsberg’s. Likewise, sexually speaking, as will be indicated later, the equivalent of such aesthetically-based terms would be “orgiastic”. Thus, in formal terms, what the poem represents is a reading experience that turns the reader into a voyeur, while what is being viewed (see the phrase “actual vision[.]” in the poem) pornographically is the equivalent of one of the slides in a sequence that is peered at in a 19th century arcade slide-show machine. Moreover, the salacious character of the scenes being pored over in a lecherous way is confirmed by how the *OED* equates the term “[w]ork,” as mentioned in

the poem's title, with, as U.S. slang, "illicit or criminal activity". At the same time, the term is also defined as "[...] everything needed, desired, or expected".

Thus, the poem, as an ekphrastic, metaliterary equivalent of a Burroughs-like "reality sandwich" of "purest meat" may also be conceived of as a vivid pornographic experience involving homosexual intercourse (2006, 122). Thus, the phrase "[p]risons and visions" always makes the reader become aware of how the poem potentially represents a slide-show, voyeuristic experience in which, in each case, a slide scene involves peering into the interior of a prison cell and then moving on to the next cell (2006, 122). In this same sense, the fact that the term "vision" is defined by the *OED* as "[t]he action of seeing with the bodily eye," implies that the already-mentioned phenomenon of impact is what the aesthetic-pornographic experience of reading the poem consists of, once its status as an example of ekphrasis is taken into account. Consequently, the traditional definition of "vision," also offered by the *OED*, also acquires relevance: "[a] person, scene, etc., of unusual beauty".

The reference to the "prison[]" context in this composition may be said to enrich the poem's homosexual milieu through the addition of a further erotic frisson related to the term "prison gay," as defined by the *Urban Dictionary*: "[a]n allegedly straight person resorting to homosexuality due to an ineptitude with women; [a]n allegedly straight person resorting to homosexuality while incarcerated". Thus, in keeping with the traditions of gay militancy, the poem is a no-holds-barred type of composition that may even be considered as forming part of the advertisement discursive tradition. It is that which is strictly homosexual that is being celebrated here, together with glaring hyper-naturalism, typical of Burroughs' art, that is capable of representing it. Whether this out-and-out kind of representational phenomenon becomes identifiable with sado-masochistic homosexual practices is not the most important factor to be kept in mind, whereas homosexual sex *per se* is what acquires real relevance in this militantly celebratory composition. Thus, both artistically and sexually speaking, it is homosexual essentialism that is highlighted: "The method must be purest meat/ and no symbolic dressing" (2006, 122). Naturalistic impact is what is aimed at, therefore, while keeping in mind that reference, included in the *Dictionary of Polari*, to "purest meat" as a way of talking about "an extremely large penis" becomes relevant. What also becomes noteworthy, in terms of this aforementioned homosexual essentialism, is how such a sexual organ is not linked with the concept of "sperm" (and, by implication, with fertility), as suggested by how

the term “dressing,” as indicated in the *Urban Dictionary*, is homosexual slang for precisely that same term.

In this sense, therefore, from a metaliterary perspective, what is being projected in this poem, dated 1954, is the stark fact of the inevitable impact-laden presence of homosexual discourse on the social and cultural scene. Relevant here is the use of the term “method” as it appears in the first stanza, given that it implies a concerted strategy on the part of gay militancy. Also relevant is the *OED* definition of this same term: “[t]he order and arrangement in a particular discourse or literary composition; an author's design or plan”. Just as “method[-acting]” transformed the theatrical history of the mid-20th century, so impact-laden verbal discourse can transform the artistic tradition of letters so as to make it more radically inclusive. This same historical pace-change, as a real phenomenon, is sensed as being present in the use of the phrase “seen then and now” in the first stanza. Meanwhile, the implication here is that homosexual essentialism needs to be understood as a perennial presence throughout human history.

The repetition of “visions” and “prisons” both in the first opening stanza as in the second one is relevant as well. While the word vision is defined, among all their acceptations as either “a person seen in a dream or trance” or as “a person, scene, etc., of unusual beauty” (*OED*), prison is defined as “[...] deprivation of personal liberty”. These two ideas combined propose that the beauty of homosexuality or the dream of being one is not free; it has always been kept hidden as a secret. Nevertheless, in Burroughs’ work homosexuality is presented and it is done so “with rare descriptions”. Although at first sight the adjective “rare” seems to refer both to the homosexual practices and community as being odd, or weird, the *OED* confirms that it is “[...] lightly cooked; underdone”. In other words, this could be redefined as being raw, which in turn goes back to the opening lines of “purest meat”. Therefore, being or dreaming about being homosexual, even though it seems to be a secret, is free and natural to any human being.

Other terms employed in the poem reinforce its impact-laden, homoerotic character which, at certain moments, implies the aggressive transformation of traditional symbolism, as occurs in the case of the term “Alcatraz” (the mythic prison in San Francisco Bay) which, as a word, the *OED* points out is definable as “[in Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking areas:] a pelican; esp. the brown pelican, *Pelecanus occidentalis*”. Cirlot also refers to this same symbol thus: “[a]n aquatic bird which, as legend has it, loved its young so dearly that it nourished them with its own blood, pecking open its breast to this end. It is one of the best-known allegories of Christ” (Cirlot 2001,

251-252). In the case of Ginsberg's transgressive poem, from a sacrilegious perspective, blood and sacrifice become codified in a celebratory way via SM practices. Moreover, the wider context for the links between bird imagery and sexual activity is provided by Haggerty's *Encyclopedia of Gay History*, where references to classical mythology are made: "[D]isguised as an eagle, Zeus abducted the boy Ganymede. Ganymede was sometimes depicted riding on a cock, implying a link between the bird and pederasty or sodomy... The symbol of bird(s), hence, remains a euphemism for sexual intercourse [...]" (2000, 515). In the case of Ginsberg's poem, the sexual link via material related to bird symbolism, keeping in mind the beak's association with the phallus, is made through how the term "sandwich" can be doubly interpreted. The *OED* makes reference to how this same term defines a "sea-bird, a black, grey, and white tern, *Sterna sandvicensis*". At the same time, the term "sandwich," according to the *Urban Dictionary*, carries the meaning of "[a] sexual situation involving three people [...]". Noteworthy here is how the classification of the word "tern" in Latin even becomes etymologically eloquent in terms sadomasochistic and vice-ridden suggestiveness.

Finally, as far as this poem is concerned, the verb "eat," according to the *Dictionary of American Slang* means "...to perform a cunnilingus or fellatio on a person [...]," and contributes to the complex, baroque nature of the trio-based sexual encounter being described, celebrated, and thrust upon the reader with forceful impact, as though it were on par in complexity with a Burroughs-like vignette in *The Naked Lunch*. Thus, in metaliterary terms, again keeping in mind the poem's title, the intertextual presence of Burroughs is clearly and forcefully (and even sadomasochistically) at "work" throughout the poem. The final proof of this is the codified use made of the term "lettuce" which, according to the *OED*, carries as one of its slang meanings the idea of "money". Whether the complex sex-act being projected in the poem is also cash-based may be relevant, but only as a further hypothetical factor that contributes to the composition's Burroughs-like complexity in aesthetic terms, a complexity which, as already indicated is celebrated throughout as a verbal act of unrestrained, gay "madness" (see the poem's closing line). Moreover, the final confirmation of the dynamic nature of this poetic-sexual phenomenon entitled "On Burroughs' Work" emerges if the expression "gay lettuce" is taken into account and which is defined thus by the *Urban Dictionary*: "the term given to someone when they fall for a trap without knowing they are a trap". The state of affairs being described becomes even more mesmerizing if that same dictionary's definition of the term "trap" is "a crossdresser, usually a fictional character

in an *anime*, who dresses up in the opposite gender's clothing to trick people into thinking that they're the opposite gender". Such definitions contribute even further to the entangled multiplicity that characterizes the aesthetics of this highly sexualized and highly vindictory composition that seems to operate within the advertisement tradition: "Don't hide the madness[!]" (2006, 122).

5.6. "A Western Ballad," "In back of the real," "An Imaginary Rose in a Book," "Green Valentine Blues," and "Crash"

"A Western Ballad"

When I died, love, when I died
my heart was broken in your care;
I never suffered love so fair
as now I suffer and abide
when I died, love, when I died.

When I died, love, when I died
I wearied in an endless maze
that men have walked for centuries,
as endless as the gate was wide
when I died, love, when I died.

When I died, love, when I died
there was a war in the upper air:
all that happens, happens there;
there was an angel by my side
when I died, love, when I died

What most fascinates the reader of this apparently traditional, lyrical cowboy ballad is how its codified transformation gives rise to a highly sexualized and homosexualized poetic composition. The use of dictionaries in this study, as a methodological tool of analysis by which to bring to the fore the subliminal, yet powerfully present, vindictory and celebratory homosexual discourse that forms the basis of these poems being dealt with, becomes a key factor in any de-codification of this composition.

To begin with the term "[b]all[ad]," which forms part of the poem's title, constitutes a semi-pun, given that the word contains the idea of "testicle," as underlined in the *Dictionary of American Slang*. The sexual action that is unfolding, literally as the poem develops, has to do with a situation in which, in terms of that same kind of action, dominance and submission play a role. As far as SM

is concerned, words like “abide,” “gate,” and “angel” acquire relevance. Hence, “abide,” according to the *OED*, is defined as “to await submissively [...]” on one hand, and, on the other hand, according to the *Urban Dictionary* as “to follow rules”. As far as the word “gate” is concerned, one of its acceptations, according to the *OED*, is that of “the mouth,” while at the same time, the term “gate” constitutes an example of a blend involving the terms “gay” and “date” (*Urban Dictionary*). With regard to the word “angel,” its definition appears in the *Dictionary of American Slang* as “a homosexual, esp. one who plays the male role and supports or frequently buy gifts for his partner”. Moreover, this definition becomes enriched if the *Dictionary of Polari* definition of the expression “angel food” is taken into account: “a gay man in the U.S. Air Force”.

The idea of a hunk of a military airman links in with the allusion that is made to Emily Dickinson’s lyrical poem “XC” in which the following lines are found: “That the acorn there/ Is the egg of forests/ For the upper air!” (2003, 149). So that the homosexualized discourse transmitted by Ginsberg’s early lyrics can be fully appreciated, in the first place, the fact that major writers such as Burroughs and Dickinson are absorbed into them becomes significant in metaliterary terms. The comparison can be made in how the Romantics and the Modernists would have used the figure of Shakespeare so as to provide a kind of seal of approval on their creative innovations. What is worth pointing out here, in the case of this poem by Ginsberg, is not only the local codified value of the term “acorn” as a reference to “testicle,” in the hypothetical case of “XC” having been composed by the Beat poet, but the fact that, in general terms, the lyrical mode’s complete homo/SM-sexualization should be conceived of as actual lyrical discourse. This kind of sexualized love is indeed the homosexual equivalent of traditional romantic love. Even though the reference to the “upper air” may be codified as the representation of the gay “bottom” or passive lover lying on his back with his legs spread open awaiting the entry of the “active top’s” penis does not mean that this ceases to be an example of love discourse in which terms such as “d[ying]” may be included. In other words, this poem does indeed constitute an example of a love poem, i.e. a profoundly homosexualized love lyric.*

With regard to the final four poems selected for this study—“In back of the real,” “An Imaginary Rose in a Book,” “Green Valentine Blues,” and “Crash”—while keeping in mind what has already been stated, using Deconstructionism and codification as a point of reference, it is the

*As a consequence of limitations of space, other codified terms such as “broken,” “wearied,” “wide,” “war,” and “air” would need to be analyzed elsewhere.

ongoing simultaneity, involving lyrical-descriptive discourse, on the one hand, and homoerotic discourse, on the other, which characterizes the discursive *joie de vivre* of Ginsberg's early works. In other words, the mere possibility of generating homoerotic thoughts and sensations, with no taboos being present, constitutes an experience of liberation for the prototypical homosexual poetic voice.

"In back of the real"

railroad yard in San Jose
I wandered desolate
in front of a tank factory
and sat on a bench
near the switchman's shack.

A flower lay on the hay on
the asphalt highway
—the dread hay flower
I thought—It had a
brittle black stem and
corolla of yellowish dirty
spikes like Jesus' inchlong
crown, and a soiled
dry center cotton tuft
like a used shaving brush
that's been lying under
the garage for a year.

Yellow, yellow flower, and
flower of industry,
tough spiky ugly flower,
flower nonetheless,
with the form of the great yellow
Rose in your brain!
This is the flower of the World

Even in the case of seemingly melancholy verse, the Keatsian mechanism of negative capability is activated and the creative act of discursive homosexualization emerges in metaliterary terms. That triumphant note is struck in the final composition of the four poems being referred to here, entitled "In back of the real" (1954), given that the whole poem constitutes a conceit, i.e. a major, quasi-visual celebration, iconically speaking, centered upon the symbol of the "yellow rose," an allusion to Blake's lyrical celebration of the sunflower (1794). The linking of the flower

concerned with the male anus cannot be ignored: “[W]ith the form of the great yellow/ Rose in your brain!/ This is the flower of the World” (2006, 121). Given the ironic reference to “brain,” another subliminally eroticized, as well as ironic, representation of the anus sphincter emerges, so that ideology and lyricism are again fused. Likewise, the flower concerned, being a “tough spiky ugly flower,” underlines how *joie de vivre* and rough sex of the SM kind can become synonymous.

“An Imaginary Rose in a Book”

Oh dry old rose of God,
that with such bleak perfume
changed images to blood
and body to a tomb,

what fragrance you have lost,
and are now withered mere
crimson myth of dust
and recollection sere

of an unfading garden
whereof the myriad life
and all that flock in blossom,
none other met the knife.

In the end, even the melancholy lyrical composition entitled “An Imaginary Rose in a Book” (1950), the first of the four poems being dealt with here, may be perceived in terms of its transmission of a sense of dignity associated with an aging homosexual voice, which, is likewise associated with a physically wizened and wrinkled anal sphincter: “[A]nd now withered mere/ crimson myth of dust/ and recollection sere...” (2006, 57). The latter word may allude to Milton’s pastoral elegy, *Lycidas* (1638), as does the term “flock” in the penultimate line. The aged yet highly experienced, once-active homosexual, nevertheless, will die, so it seems, like a tragic, dignified, and heroic representative of his collective, almost like a martyr for the homosexual cause: “none other met the knife” (2006, 57).

“Green Valentine Blues”

I went in the forest to look for a sign
Fortune to tell and thought to refine;
My green valentine, my green valentine,

What do I know of my green valentine?

I found a strange wild leaf on a vine
Shaped like a heart and as green as was mine,
My green valentine, my green valentine,
How did I use my green valentine?

Bodies I've known and visions I've seen,
Leaves that I gathered as I gather this green
Valentine, valentine, valentine, valentine;
Thus did I use my green valentine.

Madhouse and jailhouses where I shined
Empty apartment beds where I pined,
O desolate rooms! My green valentine,
Where is the heart in which you were outlined?

Souls and nights and dollars and wine,
Old love and remembrance—I resign
All cities, all jazz, all echoes of Time,
But what shall I do with my green valentine?

Much have I seen, and much am I blind,
But none other than I has a leaf of this kind.
here shall I send you, to what knowing mind,
My green valentine, my green valentine?

Yesterday's love, tomorrow's more fine?
All tonight's sadness in your design.
What does this mean, my green valentine?
Regret, O regret, my green valentine.

The melancholy blues lyric, entitled “Green Valentine Blues” (1954) generates a sense of hope, as symbolized by the color green, via the mechanism of negative capability, given that the voice of the poem is ruminating, as in the previous poem, on behalf of the gay collective who, in the end, are all aware of how the constant mixture of hope, on the one hand, and a sense of resignation, on the other, ennoble the collective. This mixture, in turn, endows its members with a sense of dignity: “Where shall I send you, to what knowing mind,/ My green valentine, my green valentine?” (2006, 104).

“Crash”

There is more to Fury
Than men imagine
Who drive a pallid jury
On a pale engine.

In a spinning plane,
A false machine,
The pilot drops in flame
From the unseen.

It is in this same ennobling sense that the poem “Crash” (1950) functions as a tribute, and thus needs to be read as such, since it projects the heart-breaking image of the numerous, anonymous homosexuals who, throughout history, have died unheard of, never having ‘come out’: “The pilot drops in flame/ From the unseen” (2006, 57). So it is that these final four poems, rather than dynamic celebrations of homosexual physical prowess and daring, may be considered unprepossessing celebrations of the profound historical essentialism of this human collective.

5. Conclusions

The main focus of this work, as stated in the introductory remarks, has been to investigate how Ginsberg’s commitment, not only to the literary tradition but also to a more socio-political legacy, has transcended through history until the present day. Upon reviewing the literature pertinent to Beat Generation poetry and Allen Ginsberg in particular, which is extensive in both scope and size, it has been difficult to find studies related to gayness in what has been labeled in this work as the pre-“Howl” period. This gap in the literature has been the main reason for the aim to dig deeper into Ginsberg’s codified gay discourse in order to (re)open the debate about the underlying presence of homosexual language that, through Deconstructive scrutiny, reveals itself in even the Beat poet’s earliest works.

In this attempt to discuss the underlying message of Ginsberg’s early works, the most challenging aspect has been to Deconstruct and reveal a clear and solid voice that was unknown and under cover for the majority of his contemporaries. This binary opposition of not-gay/gay self-voices, on the one hand, has been quite a demanding task since every word that forms the corpus had to be studied, not only from a literal or non-literal acceptance, but also from a phonological—

and even from an aesthetical—perspective in order to ‘flip’ the rooted hierarchy of heterosexuality/homosexuality. On the other hand, the wide social exchanges, and therefore influences, that the poet had during his lifetime, as well as the deep knowledge of and respect possessed for the English literary tradition had to be taken into account.

In terms of the results found after a scrutiny of the lexis, at least insofar as has been possible given the limitations of this work, a poetic crying out has been taken out of the ‘closet’. This crying out sheds light on the gay discourse that was codified but nevertheless, according to this work, present in even the earliest stages of Ginsberg’s poetry. However, since the inevitable restrictions of the present work allow for only a limited selection of poems to be analyzed, a more comprehensive analysis of Ginsberg’s early works would be necessary to produce more definitive results.

Born out of what his generation considered to be a mad and disruptive mind, the early poetical production of Allen Ginsberg is still, after decades, at the forefront to speak up against an oppressive-minded society. Much like the timeless legacy of Bob Dylan, today considered one of the greatest singer-poets that emerged from the Beat Generation, the poetry of Allen Ginsberg has and will continue to outlive him for generations to come. Today, more than two decades after his death, Ginsberg’s silent voice is still blowing across borders, sending an international message for all to hear: “Don’t hide the madness”.*

*Quote taken from the final line of the poem “On Burroughs’ Work”.

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