

The Familiar Presence

Allen Ginsberg

1970

Editors' Note: The trial of the Chicago Conspiracy 7 is a trial of one consciousness by another. On December 11, Allen Ginsberg, poet and man of the planet, came to Julius Hoffman's courtroom to speak in behalf of Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, and the Yippie Festival of Life that fell before police clubs in Lincoln Park and on Michigan Avenue last August at the Democratic Convention.

The following is an abridged transcript of Allen's testimony. It testifies to a meeting between an ancient life-force struggling to be born again and a decaying America that cannot understand anything we believe in—from Black Panthers to white magic.

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Allen described the chanting on the shores of Lake Michigan, the gassing of the ministers in Lincoln Park, and Dave Dellinger's attempts to secure peace on Michigan Avenue on Wednesday.

Federal Prosecutor Thomas Foran spent ten minutes establishing Allen's connection to the Yippies as chief "religious experimenter." He made some veiled remarks about Allen kissing Abbie and Tim Leary's "religious experiences," and then had Allen recite the following poem:

THE NIGHT-APPLE

Last night I dreamed
Of one I loved
for seven long years
but I saw no face
only the familiar
presence of the body;
sweat skin eyes
feces urine sperm
saliva all one
odor and mortal taste.

Q. (by Foran) Could you explain to the jury what the religious significance of that poem is?

A. (by Ginsberg) If you would take a wet dream as a religious experience, I could. It is a description of a wet dream, sir.

(Foran asks for a recitation of "In Society")

A. Yes, I will read it. "In Society"

I walked into the cocktail party
room and found three or four queers
talking together in queertalk
I tried to be friendly but heard
myself talking to one in hiptalk...
I ate a sandwich of pure meat; an

enormous sandwich of human flesh,
I noticed, while I was chewing on it
it also included a dirty asshole...

Q. Can you explain the religious significance of that poetry?

A. Actually, yes.

Q. Would you explain it to the jury?

A. Yes, one of the major yogas or yoking—yoga means yoke—is bringing together the conscious mind with the unconscious mind and in an examination of dream states in an attempt to recollect dream states no matter how difficult they are, no matter how repulsive they are, even if they include hysteria, sandwiches of human flesh, which include dirty assholes, because these are universal images that come in everybody's dreams.

The attempt in yoga is to enlarge consciousness, to be conscious that one's own consciousness will include everything which occurs within the body and the mind.

(Allen recites "Love Poem on Theme by Whitman," which is about the voice of the poem sharing a bride and groom's wedding night.)

Q. Would you explain the religious significance of that poem?

A. As part of our nature, as part of our human nature, we have many loves, many of which are suppressed, many of which are denied, many of which we deny to ourselves. He said that the reclaiming of those loves and the becoming aware of those loves was the only way that this nation could save itself and become a democratic and spiritual republic.

He said that unless there were an infusion of feeling, or tenderness, of fearlessness, of spirituality, of natural sexuality, of natural delight in each other's bodies into the hardened materialistic, cynical, life-denying, clearly competitive, afraid, scared, armored bodies, there would be no chance for spiritual democracy to take root in America and he defined that tenderness between the citizens as in his words an adhesiveness, a natural tenderness flowing between all citizens, not only men and women, but also a tenderness between men and men as part of our democratic heritage, part of the adhesiveness which would make the democracy function; that men could work together not as competitive beasts, but as tender lovers and fellows.

So he projected from his own desire and from his own unconscious a sexual urge which he felt was normal to the unconscious of most people, though forbidden for the most part to take part.

"I will go into the bedroom silently and lie down
Between the bridegroom and the bride."

Walt Whitman is one of my spiritual teachers and I am following him in the poem, taking off from a line of his own and projecting my own actual unconscious feelings of which I don't have shame, sir, which I feel are basically charming actually.

Allen is asked by Defense Attorney Leonard Weinglass to recite "Howl." He does so with all the emotion of an old testament prophet threatening sinners and standing with the oppressed. The jury is transfixed by the words, the energy, the waving arms and bobbing head of the wonderful madman before them. When he recites the lines:

Moloch. Moloch. Nightmare of Moloch.

Moloch the loveless.

Moloch the heavy judger of man.

Ginsberg points an accusing finger at Hoffman.

The judge shrinks from the eternal judgement like Sauron the evil wizard in Lord of the Rings. The scene is one of Old Testament fervor.

The judge manages to resume his composure, but not before everyone in the stilled courtroom hears the lines:

Moloch the cross-boned soulless jailhouse

And congress of sorrows,

Moloch whose buildings are judgement.

Moloch the vast stone of war.

Moloch the stunned government.

Allen continues, climbing higher with each incantation. He reels off 1000 words, and suddenly drops off—"That is fragmentary."

MR. WEINGLASS: I have nothing further.

THE COURT: Within the limits of that examination, I will permit further examination.

MR. FORAN: No thanks.

THE COURT: Nothing. You may go, sir.

THE WITNESS: Thank you.

Abbie Hoffman cries and joins the defendants and half the court when they rise in tribute as Ginsberg leaves.

Defendant Lee Weiner leaves the courtroom to thank Allen for appearing.

Defendant John Froines tells everyone how he has been "profoundly moved."

And Thomas Foran whispers to his assistant as Allen heads for the elevator, bowing and chanting his way through a crowded hallway. Foran is overheard as he mutters, "That goddamned fag."

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