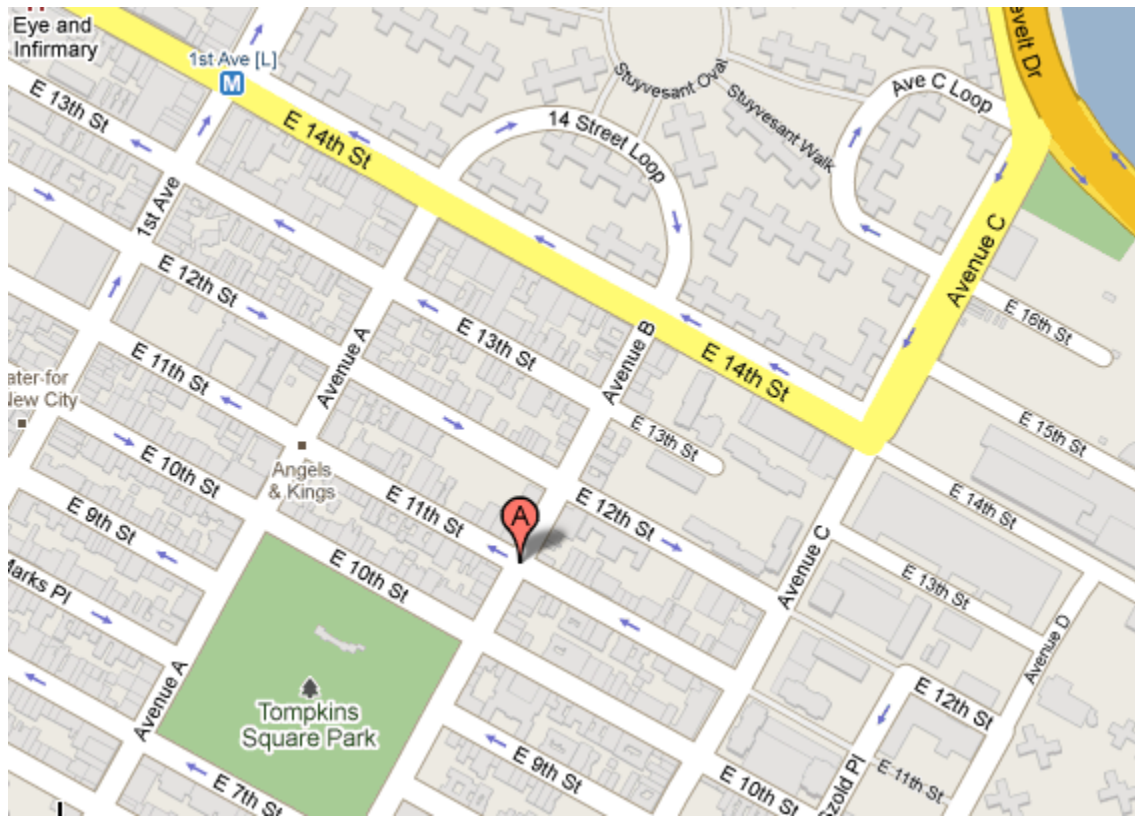


# Rent Glossary of Terms

## 11<sup>th</sup> Street and Avenue B



**CBGB's** – More properly CBGB & OMFUG, a club on Bowery Ave between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> streets. The following is taken from the website <http://www.cbgb.com>. It is a history written by Hilly Kristal, the founder of CBGB and OMFUG.

The question most often asked of me is, "What does CBGB stand for?" I reply, "It stands for the kind of music I intended to have, but not the kind that we became famous for: COUNTRY BLUEGRASS BLUES." The next question is always, "but what does OMFUG stand for?" and I say "That's more of what we do, It means OTHER MUSIC FOR UPLIFTING GORMANDIZERS." And what is a gormandizer? It's a voracious eater of, in this case, MUSIC. [...]

The obvious follow up question is often "is this your favorite kind of music?" No!!! I've always liked all kinds but half the radio stations all over the U.S. were playing country music, cool juke boxes were playing blues and bluegrass as well as folk and country. Also, a lot of my artist/writer friends were always going off to some fiddlers convention (bluegrass concert) or blues and folk festivals. So I thought it would be a whole lot of fun to have my own club with all this kind of music playing there. Unfortunately—or perhaps FORTUNATELY—things didn't work out quite the way I'd expected.

That first year was an exercise in persistence and a trial in patience. My determination to book only musicians who played their own music instead of copying others, was indomitable. ORIGINALITY (to me) WAS PRIME, TECHNIQUE TOOK SECOND PLACE.

The height of the Disco era brought an increasing dissatisfaction among rock musicians and their fans. The formula driven Disco music and the long drawn out solos and other complexities in much of the rock of the late sixties and early seventies encouraged a lot

## *Rent Glossary of Terms*

of disgruntled rock enthusiasts to seek the refreshing rhythms and sounds of simple (BACK TO BASICS) high energy rock and roll, which seemed to take shape right here at CBGB. We called this music "street rock" and later "PUNK"—"come as you are and do your own thing" rock and roll.

Since almost every one of the bands were relatively unknown, we did not give them a guarantee, but gave them most of the door monies to cover their expenses. CBGB kept the bar. Hopefully they would see the value of building a fan base. The more people that came and paid to see them the more they made. It was not until sometime in 1976 that the club started paying for itself.

Having a rock club on the Bowery, under a flop house (believe it or not), does have some advantages. (1) The rent is (was) reasonable (2) Most of our neighbors dressed worse than, or more weird than our rock and rollers (3) The surrounding buildings were mostly industrial and the people who did live close by, didn't seem to care too much about having a little rock and roll sound seeping into their lives. The disadvantages: within a two-block radius there were six flophouses holding about two thousand men, mostly derelicts. I would say most of them were either alcoholics, drug addicts, physically impaired or mentally unstable. Some of the men were veterans from the Vietnam war on government disability, and others were just lost in life or down on their luck. The streets were strewn with bodies of alcoholic derelicts sleeping it off after two or three drinks of adulterated wine reinforced with sugar. There were lots off muggers hanging around on the Bowery preying on the old or incapacitated men. When people were let out of jail or institutions they were very often housed in one of these flophouses by the city, so we had to deal with these crazies trying to come into the club.

Mostly, knives were the weapon of choice. By the time things improved around here, I had collected over three dozen knives and other assorted weapons. The muggers—or "jack rollers"—as they were called on the Bowery, were not as dangerous to ordinary people as they seemed. They were used to picking on the old men or others who were completely out of it like three sheets to the wind.

The Bowery was, to repeat, a drab ugly and unsavory place. But it was good enough for rock and rollers. The people who frequented CBGB didn't seem to mind staggering drunks and stepping over a few bodies.

1975 was drawing to a close. It was a remarkable year for CBGB, and for me personally. No one was getting rich, but who cared. We were all having a ball. It was certainly exciting, discovering new artists, finding new bands, spreading the word, trying to get them recording contracts.

After being involved with all kinds of music (in one way or another) for most of my life, I was just beginning to understand to what extent the recording companies were involved with an artists career and how much they controlled their success. It was the beginning of my love-hate relationship with the record industry (the powers that be).

I certainly didn't love every band that played CBGB's but I did love to encourage them to do their own thing, to challenge the establishment. I've always felt the stronger you are about yourself and your ideals, (in this case musical ideals) the more satisfying your success, hopefully, the more rewarding your future.

**The Pyramid Club** – Dance hall on Avenue A between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets.

## *Rent* Glossary of Terms

**December 24<sup>th</sup>** – The play ostensibly begins December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1995. The date is not necessarily notable for anything other than *Rent*. December 24<sup>th</sup> is Christmas Eve, a Christian holiday, but a time often associated in the United States with family gatherings and returns home. That is, people who have left home *return* home on Christmas Eve. *Rent* symbolically creates its new non-traditional family on this night.

**Fender Guitar** – Fender is a brand-name of electric guitars and basses. It is named for Leo Fender, who designed the first commercially successful solid-body electric guitar (incidentally called the Telecaster) around 1950.<sup>1</sup>

**Heroin Withdrawal** – The following is modified from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) press release on the drug: Heroin can be injected, smoked, or sniffed/snorted. Injection is the most efficient way to administer low-purity heroin. The availability of high-purity heroin, however, and the fear of infection by sharing needles has made snorting and smoking the drug more common. All forms of heroin administration are addictive.

Intravenous users typically experience the rush within 7 to 8 seconds after injection, while intramuscular injection produces a slower onset of this euphoric feeling, taking 5 to 8 minutes. When heroin is sniffed or smoked, the peak effects of the drug are usually felt within 10 to 15 minutes. In addition to the initial feeling of euphoria, the short-term effects of heroin include a warm flushing of the skin, dry mouth, and heavy extremities.

Withdrawal, which in regular users may occur as early as a few hours after the last administration, produces drug craving, restlessness, muscle and bone pain, insomnia, diarrhea and vomiting, cold flashes with goose bumps (“cold turkey”), kicking movements (“kicking the habit”), and other symptoms. Major withdrawal symptoms peak between 48 and 72 hours after the last dose and subside after about a week. Sudden withdrawal by heavily dependent users who are in poor health is occasionally fatal, although heroin withdrawal is considered less dangerous than alcohol or barbiturate withdrawal.

Heroin is an illegal, highly addictive drug. It is both the most abused and the most rapidly acting of the opiates. Heroin is processed from morphine, a naturally occurring substance extracted from the seed pod of certain varieties of poppy plants. It is typically sold as a white or brownish powder or as the black sticky substance known on the streets as “black tar heroin.” Although purer heroin is becoming more common, most street heroin is cut with other drugs or with substances such as sugar, starch, powdered milk, or quinine. Street heroin can also be cut with strychnine, fentanyl or other poisons. Because heroin users do not know the actual strength of the drug or its true contents, they are at risk of overdose or death. Heroin also poses special problems because of the transmission of HIV and other diseases that can occur from sharing needles or other injection equipment.

**Hot plate** – electric appliance used in lieu of a stove or microwave or other larger food-cooking device.

**C'est la vie** – French. “That’s life” or “oh well”.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.fender.com/news/index.php?display\\_article=359](http://www.fender.com/news/index.php?display_article=359)

## Rent Glossary of Terms

**“Chestnuts roasting”** – opening words of “The Christmas Song,” the classic holiday tune composed by Bob Wells and Mel Tormé. The song was first recorded by the King Cole Trio in 1946. Unlike many of the other Christmas songs quoted in *Rent*, Collins sings the opening to this one with the correct tune *and* the correct lyrics. The correct opening of the song is:

*Chestnuts roasting on an open fire  
Jack Frost nipping at your nose  
Yuletide carols being sung by a choir  
And folks dressed up like Eskimos*

**Golden** – Complete, good to go, all paid up.<sup>2</sup>

**Amigos** – Spanish for “friends”; in common use in English.

**Musetta’s Theme from *La Bohème*** – a recurring musical theme in *Rent*. In *La Bohème*, Musetta’s waltz appears in Act II along with Musetta herself. Musetta, who is Marcello’s ex-lover, attempts to make Marcello jealous by flirting with an older government official.

**Breadline** – any line of people waiting to receive food or other goods distributed by a government or charitable organization. Breadlines were common in New York City during the Great Depression, but any line of people for, say, a soup kitchen is also a breadline.

**Digital delay** – I don’t understand digital sampling at all. I’ve tried. But the point here is that there is an element in the sound processing that needs to be delayed and it can be delayed through what is called a *digital delay line*. The digital delay line has blown up on Joanne.

**Trick** – “Trick or treat” is an old expression used by children (and others) on Halloween. The child threatens a “trick” or small prank on the house if she does not receive a treat (a sweet, game, or other bit of fun). Collins’ reference is, however, a pun. A *trick* for Collins is a prostitute’s patron or john. Collins is saying that sometimes he needs to perform sexual acts to make money for food.

**Collins’ coat** – in *Rent* Collins’ coat is stolen and then Angel and he go shopping for a replacement. In *La Bohème*, Colline’s big aria begins “Vecchia zimarra,” in which Colline sings about selling his coat to buy firewood or medicine for the ailing Mimì.

**Life Support meeting** – the organization is fictional but is based on local HIV/AIDS support groups such as the Seattle AIDS Support Group or the Friends for Life Society.

**Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)** – Pandemic first reported in the summer of 1981. The disease now affects over 33 million people worldwide. The disease was initially referred to in the press as Gay-related Immune Deficiency (GRID). AIDS is caused by a virus called The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Currently it can be

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<sup>2</sup> Modified from [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com)

## Rent Glossary of Terms

treated and contained but not cured. For many people contracting HIV/AIDS, the disease is still a death sentence.

**Flush** – to be *flush* is to have lots of money.<sup>3</sup>

**AZT** - Azidothymidine, a retroviral medication used to combat HIV. Common side effects of AZT include nausea, headache, changes in body fat, and discoloration of fingernails and toenails.

**Cat Scratch Club** – the club is an invention of *Rent*'s author.

**Spike Lee** – Legendary New Yorker and filmmaker whose first film *She's Gotta Have It* was given the prestigious "Award of Youth" at the Cannes Film Festival in 1986 and won "Best First Feature" at the 1987 Independent Spirit Awards. Lee's films include *Malcolm X*, *She Hate Me*, *25th Hour*, *Bamboozled*, *The Original Kings of Comedy*, *Jungle Fever*, *School Daze*, and *Do the Right Thing*, which was robbed of the Best Picture Oscar in 1990 by the considerably less complicated and much more benign *Driving Miss Daisy*.

**They call me Mimi** – the last lines of "Light My Candle" are a direct reference to *La Bohème*. In the opera, Mimi's first aria begins "Sì. Mi chiamamo Mimi..." or *Yes, they call me Mimi*. Rodolfo's first aria in *La Bohème* is "Che gelida manina" literally *What a cold hand!* Roger's lyrics obviously reference this, as well.



**Life Café** – coffee shop in the East Village at the corner of 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Avenue B. The Life Café opened in 1981 and was frequented by Larson as he composed *Rent*. The photograph at right shows the Café's co-owner Kathy Life with some of *Rent*'s Original Broadway Cast.

**Pound Ridge** – resort and golf club north of New York City, nearer to Connecticut.

**Doc Martens** – hideous boots stereotypically worn by 1990s lesbians. Nowadays the stereotypes of lesbian footwear lean toward Birkenstocks.

**Parthenon** – ancient Greek (Athenian) temple built in the fifth century B.C., considered one of the world's most important cultural monuments.

**Bustelo** – a brand of coffee in New York City (and now Miami and other places as well.)



<sup>3</sup> Modified from [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com)

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**Marlboro** – a brand of cigarettes.

**Captain Crunch** – a brand of children’s cereal.

**Stoli** – short for Stolichnaya, a Russian brand of vodka produced in Moscow.

**Oh holy night** – Famous Christmas hymn with music composed in 1847 by Adolphe Adam. Collins, Mark, and Roger sing the phrase “Oh holy night” to the correct tune and then continue Adam’s melody with “Struck gold at MIT.” The tune was originally written for a poem (in French) by Placide Cappeau. The popular English version is by John Sullivan Dwight and reads as follows:

*Oh, holy night!  
The stars are brightly shining,  
It is the night  
Of our dear Savior’s birth*

**MIT** – the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a private research institution founded in 1861. MIT has a stellar reputation; the school focuses on scientific and technical research.

**New York University (NYU)** – a private research university in New York City. NYU is located in Greenwich village very near to where *Rent* takes place. It is bounded on the South by Houston Street.

**Alphabet City** – neighborhood on the lower east side of Manhattan where *Rent* takes place. The most easterly avenue north of Alphabet City is 1st Ave. In Alphabet City, however, the avenues begin to be designated by letters: Avenues A, B, C, and D.

**Avant-garde** – The phrase is a military term which literally means *advanced guard* or *at the front of the lines*. In this context, to be a member of the avant-garde is to be part of a group of artists who are working as the most innovative in their fields.

**Angel Dumott Schunard** – Angel’s surname is a direct reference to the character Schaunard, Colline’s love-interest in *La Bohème*.

**Akita** – a gorgeous breed of dog imported from Japan.



**Evita** – Eva Perón, first lady of Argentina from 1946 until her death in 1952. Immortalized in the musical by the highly overrated Andrew Lloyd Webber. *Don’t cry for me, Argentina*.

## Rent Glossary of Terms

**Thelma and Louise** – characters played, respectively, by Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon in the 1991 Ridley Scott film *Thelma & Louise*. The women are being chased by the police (Harvey Keitel, to be specific). Near the end of the film, Thelma and Louise commit suicide by driving their car off of a cliff. The film, however, ends poetically, not with the car crashing into the rocks below but flying through the air as though it might never fall.

**Gracie Mews** – a 35-story apartment building on the Upper East Side of Manhattan (80th St between 1st Ave and York Ave). Gracie Mews has a canopied entrance, a doorman, a concierge, a driveway, a garage, a sun deck, a health club, many balconies, a recreation room, and lush sidewalk landscaping. It also has a two-story white marble entrance surround and a nice lobby. Many of the apartments on higher floors have excellent views. Rent for a two-bedroom apartment at the Gracie Mews is currently \$3,600 - \$5,500 per month.

**Mercurochrome** – antiseptic for the treatment of cuts.

**“Joy to the World”** – an extremely popular Christmas carol. The music is by nineteenth-century US American composer Lowell Mason, and is allegedly based on a tune by G. F. Handel. The music, however, post-dates the lyrics. The lyrics are by hymn-writer Isaac Watts who was born in England in the late seventeenth century. The first verse of “Joy to the World” is as follows:

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come.  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let every heart prepare him room,  
And heaven and nature sing,  
And heaven and nature sing,  
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.*

**Westport, New York** – a town overlooking Lake Champlain in upstate New York. Birthplace of the Adirondack Chair and other furniture for relaxed well-moneyed people.

**Re-zone** – Zoning is land regulation done by cities to make sure that some areas are residential, some are open for businesses. Cities and states restrict certain businesses from coming into areas; they can also regulate how high buildings may be constructed, among many other things.

**Tent city** – a tent city is an impromptu group of dwellings set up using tents, often by displaced peoples such as currently in Darfur, but also by groups of homeless people in various areas in the United States.

***It's a Wonderful Life*** – classic Christmas film from 1946 directed by Frank Capra and starring James Stewart. The film is not really about Christmas *per se*, but became a Christmas classic when it accidentally lapsed into the public domain and began to be broadcast on television annually during the December holiday season. *It's a Wonderful Life* stresses the importance of sacrificing for others, loving one's family, the importance of the choices we make in life, the power of the small town, and the value of a home.

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**Prozac** – Need a pick-me-up? Prozac is an extremely popular anti-depressant. It is used to treat major depression as well as obsessive-compulsive disorder and other disorders. That should cheer you up.

**The samples won't delay** – See “digital delay” above.

**T cells** – white blood cells known as lymphocytes which work as antibodies to fight pathogens in the blood, including HIV/AIDS. The *T* stands for *thymus*, which is where T cells are created.

**Smack** – heroin

**Feliz navidad** – Spanish for “Merry Christmas.” There is a famous song entitled “Feliz Navidad,” as well, the lyrics of which simply repeat the phrase numerous times followed by the words “I wanna wish you Merry Christmas / From the bottom of my heart.”

**Ted Koppel** – Hugely famous USAmerican broadcast journalist famous for ABC *Nightline*. Koppel was on *Nightline* for twenty-five years, including the period of time in which *Rent* is set..

**Heidegger** – Martin Heidegger was a German philosopher (1889-1976) who wrote, most famously *Being and Time (Sein und Zeit)* (1927), which asks us to reassess what we mean when we say that something *is*. In other words: *what does it mean to BE?*

**Tumbleweeds** – dried plants that blow in the desert wind. Tumbleweeds tend to be symbols both of the Old (Wild) West as well as deserts and deserted areas in general.

**Prairie dogs** – rodents associated with the desert. Prairie dogs are not dogs at all, of course. They are known for their large colonies of tunnels, sociable nature, and large families. Also called land beavers and whistle pigs.



**Moat** – a ditch dug around a castle that is filled with water or briars or other deterrents. The moat can be traversed by the lowering of the drawbridge, but is designed to keep spies and other enemies out of the castle.

**Murget Case** – on the original cast recording, Fredi Walker pronounces this name in the French fashion (i.e. merzei). This is not a reference to any historical legal case, but perhaps a friendly nod in the direction of French novelist Henri Murger (whose name is pronounced identically to the original cast recording). Murger is most famous for his series of short stories entitled *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*, on which, of course, Puccini’s opera and Larson’s musical are based.



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**Newt's Lesbian Sister** – Candace Gingrich, the half-sister of Republican leader and former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Newt Gingrich. Candace Gingrich was pushed into the political limelight in 1995 when Newt was elected as House Speaker. Candace was working as an activist and lobbyist to get the U.S. Congress to preserve AIDS programs. For more, refer to [this 1995 article](#) from the *New York Times*.<sup>4</sup>

**Yule log** – a large log burned at Christmastime (Yuletide) in old European traditions.

**Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer** – popular Christmastime figure. “Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer” became a popular Christmas song in the 1940s, and later became a very popular stop-animation television Christmas special in the mid 1960s. The soloist in *Rent* sings the opening line of “Rudolph” to the correct melody (composed by Jewish-American songwriter Johnny Marks). In the Rudolph story, Rudolph is ostracized from reindeer society because he has a red nose that lights up and this scares the other reindeer. During a Christmas blizzard, however, Santa Claus finds that if he puts Rudolph at the head of his eight tiny reindeer, he can more easily guide through the dense snowfall and get all of the Christmas presents to the children on time. The people in *Rent* are more likely referencing their own noses, which are red from the cold in St. Mark’s Place.



**Forty-fives** – slang for a Colt .45 pistol.

**No room at the Holiday Inn** – reference to the Baby Jesus. See Luke 2:7 – “And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.” The characters update the phrase so that it refers to both the motel chain Holiday Inn and the Oscar-winning 1942 film *Holiday Inn* with Bing Crosby, Fred Astaire, and Marjorie Reynolds.

**I’m dreaming of a white, right Christmas** – reference to Irving Berlin’s hit song “White Christmas” from the 1942 film *Holiday Inn* (see above). The lyrics nostalgically recall Christmases spent in the snow from the point of view of someone spending a Christmas in Los Angeles or another place where it does not snow. The correct lyrics of the song are as follows:

*I'm dreaming of a white Christmas  
Just like the ones I used to know  
Where the treetops glisten,  
And children listen  
To hear sleigh bells in the snow*

*I'm dreaming of a white Christmas*

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<sup>4</sup> [www.nytimes.com/1995/03/06/us/speaker-s-sister-now-speaking-out.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1995/03/06/us/speaker-s-sister-now-speaking-out.html)

## *Rent* Glossary of Terms

*With every Christmas card I write  
May your days be merry and bright  
And may all your Christmases be white*

The police officers in *Rent* change the lyrics to say that they are dreaming of a “white, right Christmas” which is a clear commentary on the racist equation “White is right.”

**D** – slang for crystal methamphetamine, a colorless, odorless form of d-methamphetamine, a powerful and highly addictive synthetic stimulant. Crystal methamphetamine typically resembles small fragments of glass or shiny blue-white rocks of various sizes. Like powdered methamphetamine (another form of d-methamphetamine), crystal methamphetamine is used because of the long-lasting euphoric effects it produces. Crystal methamphetamine, however, typically has a higher purity level and may produce even longer-lasting and more intense physiological effects than the powdered form of the drug. Crystal methamphetamine typically is smoked using glass pipes similar to pipes used to smoke crack cocaine. Crystal methamphetamine also may be injected. A user who smokes or injects the drug immediately experiences an intense sensation followed by a high that may last twelve hours or more.<sup>5</sup>

**C** – slang for crack cocaine, a highly addictive and powerful stimulant that is derived from powdered cocaine using a simple conversion process. Crack emerged as a drug of abuse in the mid-1980s. It is used because it produces an immediate high and because it is easy and inexpensive to produce—rendering it readily available and affordable. Crack typically is available as rocks. Crack rocks are white (or off-white) and vary in size and shape. Crack is nearly always smoked. Smoking crack cocaine delivers large quantities of the drug to the lungs, producing an immediate and intense euphoric effect.<sup>6</sup>

**X** – slang for ecstasy or MDMA. Ecstasy is a synthetic, psychoactive drug that is chemically similar to the stimulant methamphetamine and the hallucinogen mescaline. MDMA produces feelings of increased energy euphoria, emotional warmth, and distortions in time perception and tactile experiences. MDMA is taken orally, usually as a capsule or tablet. It was initially popular among Caucasian adolescents and young adults in the nightclub scene or at weekend-long dance parties known as raves.<sup>7</sup>

**Horse** – heroin (see “Heroin Withdrawal” above).

**Jugie Boogie Boy** – crack cocaine (see “C” above).

**Blow** – cocaine (see “C” above).

**L.L.Bean** – high-end outerwear clothing company based in Maine

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<sup>5</sup> From the National Drug Intelligence Center

<sup>6</sup> From the National Drug Intelligence Center

<sup>7</sup> From the National Institute on Drug Abuse

## *Rent* Glossary of Terms

**Geoffrey Beene** – US American fashion house. Their showroom is located on 57th street in New York City between 5th and 6th Avenues, just south of Central Park.

**Burberry** – British fashion house whose clothing is sold at Saks Fifth Avenue in New York City.

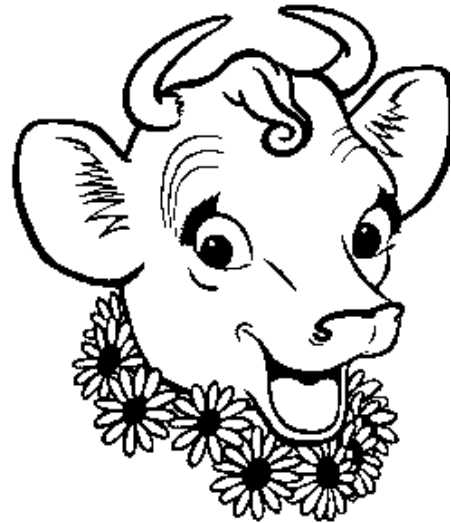
**Gram** – a measurement of weight roughly equivalent to the weight of the cap of a ball-point pen. In *Rent*, a gram is, of course, a gram of heroin.

**Tuckahoe** – town in Westchester County, New York located approximately 35 minutes away from New York City by train.

**Steuben Glass** – maker of fine glassware gifts: barware, stemware, paperweights, etc. To give you an idea of how much this stuff costs, their catalog boasts a section entitled “Gifts under \$500”. Some of their engraved bowls cost as much as \$2500 or \$3000.

**Snow** – frozen white stuff, obviously, but also slang for cocaine.<sup>8</sup>

**Elsie** – the cow in Cyberland shares her name with the mascot of the Borden Company. Elsie promotes products for the Dairy Farmers of America.  
*Fun fact:* Elsie’s husband Elmer is the mascot on every bottle of Elmer’s glue.



**Diet coke** – “Just for the taste of it!” Diet coke is one of the most popular soft drinks in the United States. It was first introduced in 1982 and each can contains 1.3 calories. It tastes nothing like original Coca-cola, if you ask me, but people seem to love it.

**Yellow rental truck / fertilizer / fuel oil** – reference to the April 19, 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing, a terrorist attack on the Alfred P. Murrah Federal building which killed 168 people and injured nearly 700. The perpetrator of the attack, Timothy McVeigh, packed a yellow Ryder rental truck with ammonium nitrate fertilizer and Nitromethane fuel oil, he then detonated the entire truck bomb.

**Mickey Mouse** – if you don’t know who this is, you are either not alive at all or have traveled through time from the mid-nineteenth century and are reading this document long after *Rent* itself has been forgotten by history.

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<sup>8</sup> See [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com)

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**Cat / fiddle / spoon** – Maureen has created wordplay with a famous Mother Goose nursery rhyme entitled “The Cat and the Fiddle” also called “Hi Diddle Diddle”. The original goes as follows:

*Hey diddle diddle  
The cat and the fiddle  
The cow jumped over the moon  
The little dog laughed to see such sport  
And the dish ran away with the spoon*

**Blur** – a nobody: just a blur from a car window.

**Bohemia** – There is, of course, an actual place called Bohemia, but this is not the place to which Benny refers. Bohemia is a metaphoric locale that is the home of the Bohemian movement. Bohemianism is the practice of a lifestyle deemed “unconventional,” it involves the company of like-minded people, involving musical, artistic or literary pursuits, with few permanent ties. Bohemians can be wanderers, adventurers or vagabonds. The term *bohemian*, of French origin, was first used in the English language in the nineteenth century to describe the non-traditional lifestyles of marginalized and impoverished artists, writers, journalists, musicians, and actors in major European cities. Bohemians were associated with unorthodox or anti-establishment political or social viewpoints, which were often expressed through free love, frugality, and/or voluntary poverty.

The term was made particularly famous through Henri Murger’s short-story collection *Scènes de la Vie Bohème*, which later formed the basis for Giacomo Puccini’s (Italian) opera *La Bohème*, which, of course, later formed the basis for *Rent*.

Act two of *La Bohème* very closely approximates this final scene in act one of *Rent*.

**Calcutta** – An enormous city in West Bengal, India. Calcutta is a booming economic and urban center, struggling with all of the usual problems with which booming urban centers struggle: a huge influx of unskilled laborers, congestion, poverty, pollution, and very difficult living conditions. Calcutta is also home to the Calcutta Stock Exchange. When Benny refers to Calcutta, he simultaneously calls up images of trade, bartering, and marketplaces, as well as images of poverty and filth—which should make us think of Scene 21 “Christmas Bells”, with all of its street vendors, intimidation, and exploitation.

**Dies irae / dies illa** – Latin. “Day of wrath. Day of Mourning.” The phrases are featured in every requiem mass and represent the Day of Judgment. Collins and Roger mourn the death of Bohemia with an appropriately mocking requiem mass.

**Kyrie eleison** – Greek. “Christ, have mercy.” This phrase also features in numerous Christian liturgies. It has the same use in *Rent* as the *dies irae* chant above: mocking the alleged death of Bohemia.

**Yitgadal v’yitkadash** – Hebrew. “Magnified and sanctified.” *Yitgadal v’yitkadash* is the first line of the Kaddish, the Hebrew prayer for the dead.

## *Rent* Glossary of Terms

**La vie bohème** – see “Bohemia” above.

**Fruits** – a fruit is a gay man. The term is generally considered derogatory. Here it is used affirmatively.

**Absolut** – a brand of vodka.

**Choice** – in the landmark 1973 case *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court of the United States upheld the right of a woman to choose whether or not she wished to take a pregnancy to full term. The young people in *Rent* are pro-Choice.

**Village Voice** – the free weekly alternative New York City newspaper. The *Voice* is known for following the downtown arts scene, reviewing performance art, and for its sex advice columns and occasional adult content.

**Miso soup** – Japanese appetizer. The soup consists of a stock into which is mixed softened miso paste and various other ingredients—usually tofu, seaweed and scallions. No spoon is used. The ingredients of the soup are eaten with chopsticks and the broth is drunk directly from the bowl.

**Curry vindaloo** – a chicken or lamb Indian curry dish. Usually served with potatoes.

**Huevos rancheros** – a Mexican breakfast: eggs (*huevos*) cooked with salsa and served with some kind of starch: rice, beans, *tortillas* – sometimes all three.

**Maya Angelou** – (1928-2014) US American poet whose work is controversial and extremely popular. Her 1969 memoir *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* was nominated for a National Book Award. She famously read her poem “On the Pulse of the Morning” at the 1993 inauguration of President Bill Clinton. The poem ends as follows:

*Do not be wedded forever  
To fear, yoked eternally  
To brutishness.*

*The horizon leans forward,  
Offering you space to place new steps of change.  
Here, on the pulse of this fine day  
You may have the courage  
To look up and out and upon me, the  
Rock, the River, the Tree, your country.*

*No less to Midas than the mendicant.*

*No less to you now than the mastodon then.*

*Here on the pulse of this new day  
You may have the grace to look up and out*

## Rent Glossary of Terms

*And into your sister's eyes, and into  
Your brother's face, your country  
And say simply  
Very simply  
With hope  
Good morning.*

**Sontag** – Susan Sontag (1933-2004) was a USAmerican, critic of theatre and film, literary theorist, political activist, novelist, essayist, and famous bisexual. She was the longterm partner of the famous photographer Annie Leibovitz.

**Ginsberg** – Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) was a USAmerican poet in the Beat movement. Ginsberg's book *Howl and Other Poems* was seized by customs and tried for obscenity in 1957. The publisher, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, won his suit. The beginning lines of "Howl" are as follows:

*I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving  
hysterical naked,  
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an  
angry fix,  
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the  
starry dynamo in the machinery of night,  
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the  
supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities  
contemplating jazz,  
who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan  
angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated,  
who passed through universities with radiant eyes hallucinating Arkansas  
and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war,  
who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene  
odes on the windows of the skull,  
who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their money in  
wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through the wall,  
who got busted in their pubic beards returning through Laredo with a belt  
of marijuana for New York,  
who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise Alley, death,  
or purgatoried their torsos night after night  
with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and  
endless balls,*

**Dylan** – Bob Dylan (b. 1941) is a USAmerican singer/songwriter. Considered an icon of political resistance and social rebellion, Dylan continues to tour to this day. For a bizarre biopic of his life, see Todd Haynes's 2007 film *I'm Not There.*, in which Dylan is played by Richard Gere, Heath Ledger, Ben Whishaw, Christian Bale, and Cate Blanchett.

## Rent Glossary of Terms

**Cunningham** – Merce Cunningham (1919-2009) was an avant-garde US American dancer and choreographer. He began his career dancing in Martha Graham's company. In the late 1950s and 1960s he frequently collaborated with musician John Cage and fine artist Robert Rauschenberg. Later collaborators include the musicians Radiohead and Sigur Rós and the artists Jasper Johns and Suzanne Gallo.

**Cage** – John Cage (1912-1992) was an avant-garde US American musician and composer. His most famous piece is *4'33"*, which is a piece for a solo piano (but has been adapted for all sorts of instruments, even full orchestra) in which not a single note of music is played; the music, instead, is the sounds that one hears instead of the music composed. Cage frequently collaborated with Merce Cunningham, who was his partner in life, as well.

**Lenny Bruce** – (1925-1966) US American stand-up comedian and social commentator. Bruce was a very controversial figure, who pushed the boundaries of free speech. He was famously tried for obscenity in the mid-1960s for using the word "cocksucker," and he was banned from many clubs, entire states, and completely banned from Australia. He is now considered one of the greatest and most important comedians of all time.

**Langston Hughes** – (1902-1967) US American poet, novelist, essayist, and playwright. Hughes is known for his work during the Harlem Renaissance, but also as a political activist and communist. The following is from his poem "Let America Be America Again," which begins:

*Let America be America again.  
Let it be the dream it used to be.  
Let it be the pioneer on the plain  
Seeking a home where he himself is free.*

*(America never was America to me.)*

and ends:

*America never was America to me,  
And yet I swear this oath--  
America will be!*

*Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,  
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,  
We, the people, must redeem  
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.  
The mountains and the endless plain--  
All, all the stretch of these great green states--  
And make America again!*

**Uta** – Uta Hagen (1919-2004) was a German-born actress and acting teacher in the United States. She won two Tony awards, including one for the original Broadway production of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Her book *Respect for Acting* is used as a textbook in many acting classes. It advocates naturalism/realism.

## Rent Glossary of Terms

**Pablo Neruda** – (1904-1973) was a Chilean poet, writer, and political activist. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. He is most famous for his book of poetry *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*.

**Dorothy / Toto / Over the Rainbow / Auntie Em** – reference to L. Frank Baum’s novel *The Wizard of Oz*, which was made into a film in 1939 starring Judy Garland as Dorothy.

**Trisexual** – A slang exaggeration of *bisexual*. Bisexuals have sex with both men and women, *trisexuality* implies attraction to a third gender or transgendered persons. The word is often used as though it were *try-sexual*, as in “I’ll try anything.”

**Homo sapiens** – this phrase is the proper scientific designation for human beings. In Latin it means “wise man.” Larson celebrates *homo sapiens* in contrast to markets, statistics, computers, video games, and virtual reality in general. Compare with the phrase the company yells at the end of “La Vie Bohème”: “Actual reality—ACT UP—Fight AIDS.”

**Carcinogens** – a carcinogen is any substance that promotes cancer, cigarettes being the main offender here.

**Hallucinogens** – drugs that induce hallucinations. Hallucinogens are psychoactive drugs, which give the user a fundamentally different type of experience from normal consciousness.

**Pee-wee Herman** – a comedic fictional character created and played by Paul Reubens. Pee-wee Herman began as a stage act, became a film (*Pee-wee’s Big Adventure*), and eventually the children’s television program *Pee-wee’s Playhouse*, which ran for six years. Reubens was arrested in 1991 for allegedly masturbating in a public theatre during a screening of a pornographic film, and the news coverage of this event was a huge scandal in the United States. The reference in *Rent* is intended as a show of support for Reubens.



**Turpentine** – an organic solvent used for thinning oil-based paints, as well as for getting high.

**Gertrude Stein** – (1874-1946) was a USAmerican activist, avant-garde playwright, essayist, and extremely important figure in the art world. She was also a famous lesbian. She famously said “I’ve been rich and I’ve been poor. It’s better to be rich” and “America is my country, but Paris is my hometown.”



## *Rent Glossary of Terms*

**Antonioni** – Michelangelo Antonioni (1912-2007) was a genius Italian filmmaker. He is most famous for his trilogy of films *L'Avventura*, *La Notte*, and *L'Eclisse* from the early 1960s, his 1966 film *Blowup*, and his 1975 film *Professione: Reporter (The Passenger)*, which stars Jack Nicholson. Antonioni is famous for his long takes and almost impossible tracking shots. His films are favorites of US American director Martin Scorsese.

**Bertolucci** – Bernardo Bertolucci (b. 1940) is an Italian filmmaker possibly best known for his film *Last Tango in Paris*, which starred Marlon Brando. He won the Academy Award for Best Director for his film *The Last Emperor* in 1988 and the film itself won nine Oscars.

**Kurosawa** – Akira Kurosawa (1910-1998) was a genius Japanese filmmaker, whose films are considered among the most important, influential, and greatest of all time. Kurosawa's oeuvre of thirty films includes *Rashōmon*, *Seven Samurai*, *Throne of Blood*, *The Bad Sleep Well*, *Yojimbo: the Bodyguard*, *Dersu Uzala*, *Kagemusha: the Shadow Warrior*, and *Ran*.

**Carmina Burana** – a musical composition by Carl Orff. The movement in the piece that would be instantly recognizable to anyone reading this document is the section called “O Fortuna,” which opens and closes the *Carmina Burana*.

**Václav Havel** – (b. 1936) is a Czech playwright, poet, essayist, and politician. He was the first president of the Czech Republic in 1993 and held the position for ten years. Havel is an artist and a political activist who has been appreciated for both. Havel's Christian name is pronounced *vahts-lahv*, with the stress on the first syllable.

**The Sex Pistols** – a punk band formed in Great Britain in the mid-1970s, they are widely credited with initiating the punk movement. The Sex Pistols were originally comprised of vocalist Johnny Rotten, guitarist Steve Jones, drummer Paul Cook and bassist Glen Matlock. Matlock was replaced by Sid Vicious in early 1977.

**8BC** – a performance-space, art gallery, and nightclub in the underground art scene that exploded in New York's East Village in the early 1980s. 8BC is named for its location on 8th Street between Avenues B and C.

**S&M** – Sadism and masochism. The term denotes various different types of non-normative sexual play that involve the transformation of pleasure into pain, the domination of one partner by the other, and clearly defined sexual roles. S/M has been vilified by various media as sex perversion, and its popularity is often downplayed in “gay rights” literature, but it is widely practiced by heterosexual couples as well as homosexual couples and other sexual groupings.

**Salon** – a gathering of artists who share their work, usually at someone's house in their *salon*. These were enormously popular in France beginning in the seventeenth century.

**High Holy Days** – in Judaism: Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

## *Rent* Glossary of Terms

**Vocoder** – voice-encoder, a device which digitizes speech or song, tweaking the sound to make it sound electronic (of course it actually *is* electronic at that point.) Cher and Madonna use this constantly in their music.

**ACT UP** – the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power is an organization founded over twenty years ago. ACT UP's famous slogan was SILENCE=DEATH. ACT UP is a politically active group that has worked to disseminate information about AIDS, promote sex education, and fight for healthcare for people living with HIV/AIDS.

**AZT break** – Allison Gibbes, who worked as the dramaturge on the 2014 productions of *Rent* and *La Bohème* in repertory at the Glow Lyric Theatre in Greenville, South Carolina, shared the following: In the 1980s, people on AZT had pill bottles with timers that reminded them to take their meds every four hours. It's anachronistic in *Rent*, since in the '90s people were taking their AZT every twelve hours, but Larson sort of stole it from the novel he plagiarized. I found a picture of the timer bottle and some mentions in books about the stigma attached to the sound of the alarm.

**Let he among us without sin be the first to condemn** – Reference to the Biblical story of Christ and Mary Magdalene. Refer to John 8:7. Mary was sentenced to be stoned for prostitution. As she was hauled outside the city, Christ said "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." All of Mary's accusers walked away and Christ told Mary to "Go, and sin no more."

**525,600 minutes** – In 1996, the year *Rent* premiered on Broadway, there were 527,040 minutes in the year. 1996 was a leap year. In non-leap years, there are 525,600 minutes in the year. Plus *five hundred twenty-seven thousand forty minutes* doesn't really have the same ring to it.

**Pussy Galore** – character in the 1964 James Bond film *Goldfinger* which starred Sean Connery. Honor Blackman played Miss Galore. One of the quirks of Ian Fleming's novels is the ridiculous and sexually suggestive way he names his female characters. Consider, for example, Honey Ryder, Mary Goodnight, Plenty O'Toole, Holly Goodhead, and Xenia Onatopp.

**Brownie** – brownies are female boy scouts.

**Money Penny** – Miss Money Penny is secretary/assistant to James Bond's boss M, the head of the British Secret Service. Bond and Money Penny have a professional relationship, but their encounters in the films are always rife with sexual tension.

**My martini** – James Bond prefers his martinis with vodka instead of gin and (this is very significant) has them shaken, not stirred.

**Spider-Man** – popular comic book character who swings from New York City buildings and fights evil (just like Joanne, Mark, and Maureen).

## *Rent* Glossary of Terms

**Boho** – short for *Bohemian*. See “Bohemian” above.

**Scarsdale** – a community in Westchester County, New York, about an hour North of Alphabet City by car.

**Mazel tov** – Hebrew. The phrase technically means “good luck” but is used to say “congratulations” or more literally “good luck has occurred!”

**Buzzline** – the sleazy show is Larson’s invention.

**Open sesame** – the phrase is now in common parlance in English, but derives from the legend of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. “Open Sesame” are the magic words that open the mouth of the cave where the thieves hide their treasure. Ali Baba spies on the thieves, hears the magic words, and when they leave he sneaks in and steals some of their treasure.

**Old sport** – Britishism used by US Americans to exaggerate and mock high culture. It is used constantly by “The Great” Jay Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s 1925 novel.

**The Plaza Hotel** – built in 1907, the Plaza is located at Grand Army Plaza on Central Park South. It is a New York City landmark, and also features prominently in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*.



**Clit Club** – legendary lesbian club now located at 2nd Avenue and 14th Street. “Clit club” has become slang for any lesbian bar.

**Rubber** – material fetishized by some in queer culture. For fun and sexy details see legendary sex theorist Pat Califia’s essay “Beyond Leather: Expanding the Realm of the Senses to Latex” (1984), published in her landmark collection *Public Sex: the Culture of Radical Sex*.

**Limelight** – theatrical spotlight technology invented in the nineteenth century. The technology has been completely replaced by electricity, but the word is still in common use as a variant for *spotlight*.

**Latex / Rubber** – *Rent* supports safer sex y’all. Go here: <http://www.sexuality.org/concise.html> for more information.

## *Rent* Glossary of Terms

**Circle Line** – famous boat cruise and tourist destination in New York City.

**Vampire welfare queens** – “welfare queen” is a pejorative (and racist) term made popular by Ronald Reagan during his 1976 presidential campaign. A welfare queen was supposedly a woman who was getting wealthy off of welfare, not working, and having numerous children or committing welfare fraud to keep up her lifestyle.

**Mimi chica, donde estás? / Tu mama esta llamando / Donde estás, Mimi?** – Literally this translates *Mimi girl, where are you? / Your mom is calling / Where are you, Mimi?* The word *chica* is used here by Mimi’s mother as a term of endearment: a more accurate translation might be: *Mimi honey, where are you?*

**Safety net** – this was a term bandied about by President Reagan. The “social safety net” was a way of describing welfare and other state- and federally-sponsored programs which provided for the working poor. Reagan’s policies kept the social safety net in place for the elderly and for veterans but made “deep cuts in welfare programs, such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, food stamps and Medicaid, that are relied on primarily by younger families”.<sup>9</sup> If I were to be provocative about it, I might say that President Reagan’s version of the safety net protected older (primarily white) people, but neglected to provide for younger people of color, immigrant populations, and the working poor. The safety net is, as noted by the homeless people in *Rent*, not available for them.

**Santa Claus Is Coming** – famous Christmas song from the 1930s written by J. Fred Coots and Haven Gillespie. The correct lyrics are as follows:

*You better watch out  
You better not cry  
You better not pout  
I’m telling you why  
Santa Claus is coming to town*

The song is obviously designed to get children to behave, but Larson doesn’t allow the famous line to finish, so that instead of Santa Claus coming *to town*, Santa Claus is simply *coming*. I’ll let you look that pun up yourself.

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<sup>9</sup> Rosenbaum, David E. “Reagan’s ‘Safety Net’ Proposal: Who Will Land; Who Will Fall.” *New York Times*. 17 Mar. 1981. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1981/03/17/us/reagan-s-safety-net-proposal-who-will-land-who-will-fall-news-analysis.html>>.