The Poetry and life of Allen Ginsberg

Allen’s Harmonium 1997

Edward Sanders
Dedicated to the building of
the civilization envisioned by
Allen Ginsberg in such poems as “America”:

When can I go into the supermarket and buy what I need
with my good looks?

and “Death to Van Gogh’s Ear!”:

Now is the time for prophecy without death as a consequence

and “Memory Gardens”:

Well, while I’m here I’ll
do the work—
and what’s the Work?
To ease the pain of living.
Everything else, drunken
dumbshow.

The Poetry and Life of Allen Ginsberg
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In a way Allen Ginsberg’s life was shaped by pogroms and the surge of revolution in the Jewish Pale of Settlement.

first in the 1880s
and then in the pogrom-evil years of ’03–’05 which caused his grandparents on both sides to flee to the freedom of the USA.

THE PALE

The Pale was the legal zone in western Russia set up through the centuries where almost 5 million Jews were forced to reside.

The Pale extended from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Black Sea in the south. In the 19th Century it included Lithuania, Belorussia (White Russia), the Crimea Bessarabia & much of the Ukraine.

GRANDPARENTS IN THE PALE

Allen Ginsberg’s grandfather, Pincus, was born in a town called Kamenetz-Podolskiy on the upper Dniester River. He was orphaned early, then moved to Pinsk further north in the Pale.

There were ghastly new restrictions on Jews in 1881.
in the repression after the assassination of Tzar Alexander II and many instances of government-sanctioned pogroms. The Tzar even banned the Yiddish Theater; and restrictions were increased on where Jews could live in the Pale. There were quotas set up on the number of Jews to be let into the universities, and to legal, medical and government jobs.

It was in this context that Pincus Ginsberg fled to the USA in the 1880s to settle with relatives in Newark, where he met his future bride Rebecca Schechtman—Louis Ginsberg, Allen’s father, was born in ’95

HIS MATERNAL GRANDFATHER & GRANDMOTHER

Mendel Livergant was Naomi’s father (changed to Morris Levy at Ellis Island)

& lived in a village named Nevel south of St. Petersburg, west of Moscow & north of Vitebsk in the middle of the Jewish Pale where he sold Singer sewing machines to the peasants

Mendel married a woman named Judith they had four children, all of whom wound up in Allen’s poems—Eleanor, Max, Sam & Naomi who was born in 1894

Naomi grew up speaking Yiddish She played the mandolin Her parents were sympathetic to the revolutionaries.

In the Russo-Japanese war of 1904 Mendel Livergant and his bro’ Isser went to the U.S. to avoid getting drafted (& underwent the name-change from Livergant to Levy)
& Judith & the kids
moved to Vitebsk
    a city of radical ferment
(where Marc Chagall
    had lived when young)

–Vitebsk was later destroyed by the Nazis.

Then there was
what they called the Revolution of 1905
when the Tzar’s soldiers opened fire
on 300,000 marchers petitioning for
    the 8-hour workday, more money, the
    right to vote & a parliament
& 100 protesters,
some praying and carrying ikons
fell dead in the snow
    by the Winter Palace
after which
there were massive strikes in cities
    all over Russia,
    and then massive repression
including ghastly pogroms
    in the Northern Pale

–pogrom is the Russian word for “devastation”

This was the year that
Naomi, age 10, & her mother and sisters
escaped to New York
    to Orchard Street

(Isser’s family went to Winnipeg)

& her father Morris opened a candy store
in the Lower East Side

Then the family moved to Newark
Naomi went to Barringer High
in 1912
where, both age 17, she met Louis Ginsberg.
ONE SOCIALIST, ONE COMMUNIST

Allen’s mother was a communist

Louis was a socialist like his parents

& thus was established a classic pull-&-shove in the family 'tween the two sets of politics

NAOMI’S FIRST BREAKDOWN

Naomi had gone to Normal School & become a teacher in Woodbine, NJ

She suffered her first breakdown in 1919 light was painful to her she lay in a dark room 3 weeks She was not yet married but later that year, with the opposition of her future mother-in-law she and Louis were hitched

The first son, Eugene, was born 1921 and named after the great American Socialist Eugene Debs

THE BARD

The bard named Irwin Allen Ginsberg was born at 2 a.m. on June 3, 1926 in Newark, NJ

They named him after his great-grandfather S'rul Avrum Ginsberg

Louis was an English teacher at Central High in Paterson

He was a well known poet with three volumes published during his lifetime
“Would that all sons’ fathers were poets!”
A.G. later exclaimed, in his “Confrontation with Louis
Ginsberg’s Poems” in Louis Ginsberg’s
Collected Poems.

An early family apartment was
on Fair Street in Paterson
(now torn down
& not far from the Great Falls
in the Passaic River)

where Louis sat
in the evenings
at a modest wooden desk
’neath a gooseneck lamp
writing poetry
–a desk that Allen later acquired
after his father's passing in ’76
and brought to his apartment
in the Lower East Side

Allen wrote a poem when he was nine or ten
which was published in the Paterson Evening News
He could still recall it 60 years later:

“Once upon my window sill
A sparrow hopped but then stood still
I asked him why he did the latter
He said to me, ‘It doesn’t matter.’
Men kill a cow for mutton pie
So should I confide in you my woe?”

Allen, his brother and mother spent
two summers at Camp Nicht-Gedeiget
which means “No Worry”
near Monroe Lake
in Orange County
about 60 miles north of
New York City (Louis wd visit on weekends)

Allen’s first songs were
learned at his mom’s communist meetings:
“Oh the Line” &
“The Red Flag”
Around 1929
after Naomi had pancreas surgery
she flipped again–
Light and sound hurt her
She was sent to Bloomingdale Sanatorium
not far from Tarrytown

Around 6 months later
she was let out
and joined the family in Paterson–
1930

'35

1935, Naomi another session with flip
again light gave her great pain
After two months she came out of it

Then a few months later,
either late '35 or early '36,
she went under again
and was sent to Greystone and
given shock treatments

Naomi returned home in '36

Naomi more paranoid
Was sent back to sanatorium on June 24
She was there three years (Greystone)
and let out in 1939

1940

He was an early “Jack the Clipper”
an attribute that remained
throughout his life

as he amassed many many many news clippings
on Hitler and Mussolini, and the Spanish Civil War.
in the late '30s into 1940

He learned of his gayness apparently by high school time
but kept many locks on the door
He wrote his class Graduation Poem
& wondered which college to attend
He leaned toward Columbia
to follow a friend from Paterson High

He kept getting crushes on fellow students
One student, Paul Roth, went to Columbia
later became a doctor
Allen kept his crush in secrecy

'42

Naomi was again hospitalized at Greystone
in '42 and '43.

Part II

'43

The Vow to Help the Working Class

The slender & nervous sixteen year old
took the ferry from Hoboken to Manhattan
on the way to the university entrance examination
and made a solemn vow
that if he got into Columbia
he would devote his life
to helping the working class

(Ginsberg was prone to vows--
see his later vows with Neal Cassady
and Peter Orlovsky)

He enrolled at Columbia in '43, age 16
an Ivy league school— hardly a citadel of sentiment
for the workers
even with exradicals like Lionel Trilling
and Marxist art-genius Meyer Schapiro
as his mentors

That was the school year
he’d meet young Republican Jack Kerouac
and continued his fierce training in rhyming
(He forged beautiful skills at rhyme
  to which he returned toward the end of his life.
He was famous throughout his career for his
  spontaneous rhymes)

Among his faves were Thomas Wyatt &
Christopher Smart (1722-1771)
  whose “Jubilate Agno”
  was written while Smart was crazed.

Ginsberg
  with a crazy mother
  was very very sensitive
  to
  craziness
Crazy Wisdom
Crazy Times
& Vision

Another big influence, of course, was
Walt Whitman, Ginsberg’s life long “unwobbling pivot”
described by him in a letter to one of his college professors as
a “Mountain too vast to be seen.”

Decades later, when reading from Whitman to his students,
he would weep during “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed.”

And so Irwin Allen Ginsberg began
a polite, Cold War liberal Columbia upbringing—

In December o’ ’43 he met one William S. Burroughs
  who was working as a bartender in the Village
His parents, who operated a gift shop and
  garden supply shop in Fla., sent him $200 a month—

Ginsberg & Kerouac
learned much from Burroughs' library
Ginsberg first experienced Blake there,
  and Baudelaire
  Big impact on future Beats:
  Burroughs' Book Hoard
Another life-long friend A.G. met his first year in College was Lucien Carr, a polished & confident youth from St. Louis whom Allen first saw in Lionel Trilling’s Great Books Seminar ’44

Naomi had been released from Greystone & Allen often went with her to the opera

Louis & Naomi broke up that year
Her paranoia & all the fights were finally too much for both to endure
Naomi moved to NYC
where she had a love affair with a doctor for the National Maritime Union & lived with him for a while.

Around May of ’44
the ’Zap* met Kerouac who was then a merchant seaman (it was World War II)
apparently at the pad of Edie Parker and Joan Vollmer on 118th Street (the crowd hung out at the nearby West End Bar)

Kerouac flunked out of Columbia in ’42
In Dec ’42 he joined the Navy, but then feigned bonk bonk to get a discharge then joined the merchant marines.

Ginsberg and K. were talking buddies

On August 14, Lucien Carr killed David Kammerer Burroughs’ pal from St. Louis who was erotically obsessed with the attractive young man

–late at night, in Riverside Park, Upper West Side of Manhattan
knifed him twice in the heart

tied up the body & rolled it in the Hudson River

_________________________
Burroughs gave Carr some cash and some advice
Kerouac helped dispose of the death knife
and Kammerer’s glasses

Through Burroughs Kerouac and Ginzap
discovered uppers, particularly benzedrine
available in drugstores in inhalers
an important force
in Kerouac’s novels
and Ginsberg’s poems

& in the forging of literary frenzy

August 16 Carr turned himself in
confessed, charged with murder

Burroughs and Kerouac were arrested
& Kerouac’s father refused to bail him out.

Jack was taken from jail to marry Edie Parker

Then, freed on bail, they went to live in
Grosse Pt., Mich. for a while
—a brief while

’45

3-16-45 a Columbia U dean
rushed into Ginzap’s room at the college
and found him in bed with Kerouac
(they had on shorts)
sleeping

Allen had written “Fuck the Jews” with accompanying
skull and crossbones on the window,
putatively to miff the reportedly anti-Semitic
cleaning woman.
Ginzap had also written on the glass
   “Butler has no balls” (Butler was one of the
    college’s deans)

AG had to wipe off the words
and was suspended from college
   ordered to see a shrink
    and tossed from the residence
for having the unwelcome overnight guest (Kerouac)
& for the graffiti

AG later told his biographers he was trying to goad
   the antisem cleaner

A YEAR FROM COLLEGE

After this, age 18,
he took a year from college

   He worked first as a welder at
      Brooklyn Navy Yard, till April
then at Gotham Book Mart, but
   owner Frances Steloff fired him.

June of ’45 he received his draft notice.
   Hitler was dead &
      Hiroshima a few weeks ahead
He declared himself homosexual
was sent to merchant marine training school
   for rest of summer of ’45

Beginning in August
   he was in U.S. Maritime
      Service for 3 1/2 months

During ’45 Kerouac’s father dying of C
and Jack spent lots of time at home

Ginsberg and Jack
began talking about the “New Vision”

early urgings that lead to the B.G.

Ginsberg fell in love with Kerouac
Down in the gay part of Manhattan, by th’
West Side docks,
they caressed one another

’46

Naomi living with Eugene, who was out of
the WWII army & off to law school
She was prone to stride around nude
A.G. apparently felt his mom’s nudity
reinforced his gayness

(see Ginsberg’s poem “Kaddish”)

In th’ fall of ’46 Ginzap readmitted to Columbia

Same fall Kerouac was living in Ozone Park (in NYC)
working on The Town and the City.

& Lucien Carr was let out after two years
for the Kammerer killing

Ginsberg was in constant communication with his father,
often by card and mail
The correspondence was often
what they call brutally direct

Fall of ’46 Neal Cassady to NYC with
17 year old wife LuAnne
Cassady was from the flophouse realm of
Denver

’47

January, Ginsberg met the youth from Denver

Cassady was already friend of Jack Kerouac
A.G. and Cassady made it first
on a cot in a Harlem pad
in January ’47

March Cassady split back to Denver

Summer Kerouac and Ginsberg joined him there

Ginzap went to Denver
to be with Cassady
Cassady was very involved with girlfriend Carolyn
–also seeing first wife, and various others, plus furtively making it with A.G.

Ginsberg frustrated,
wrote fairly good poem on August 23
“The Bricklayer’s Lunch Hour”

writing rhymed quatrains on Benzedrine
the summer o’ ’47 in Denver

Hitching ca end of August 47
with Cassady toward Burroughs’ grass ranch
in New Waverly, Texas

they took a vow of love and fidelity
kneeling together in Oklahoma
(as mentioned in “The Green Automobile”)

Ginsberg dropped out of Columbia again, and after summer took merchant ship to Africa and back

Then rest of fall worked odd jobs in Paterson

Winter to pad in East Harlem

In the Milieu of Aimless Frenzy

Naomi moved in with her sister Edie who worked days as a union organizer.
Naomi getting crazy
fearful of relatives with bags of germs
on the fire escape
or the “three big sticks” in her back

1947 she flipped again & was sent to Pilgrim State on Long Island
Hitting her head against wall
Docs recommended lobotomy
Allen signed forms okaying
it in late Nov. 1947
(a source of some of his later guilt)

I think she was there till she died
on June 9, 1956

'48

Winter of 47-48 the 'Zap returned to Columbia
in a frenzy

Writing a paper on Cézanne
for Meyer Schapiro
he’d take some tokes
then go Cézanne-staring
at MOMA

On way back from a seder in Paterson
(at Louis’ house)
Allen and Kerouac
parted at 125th St.
Allen demanded Jack hit him–
“I wanted attention from him
any kind of attention”

April Cassady wrote he was married, and wife
was pregnant

“Two Sonnets” After reading Kerouac’s manuscript,
The Town and the City Spring of 1948

Serendipity
Allen’s friend w/ tb
from whom he rented a pad w/

orange crate shelves
theology studies
St. Theresa of Avila
Plotinus
St. J of the C
all material for “Howl”

Living in East Harlem– June-July 1948:
where he had an auditory “vision”

heard a voice chanting Blake’s “Ahh, Sunflower, Weary of Time” and “The Sick Rose,” and “Little Girl Lost.”

(Out of that vision his early poem, “On Reading William Blake’s ‘The Sick Rose’”)

WATCH OUT, BARD

He crawled
onto the fire escape
to the window next door
He tapped and shouted
“I’ve seen God!”
to two startled women

Part III

We left Allen Ginsberg in his East Harlem apartment in the summer of ’48
where he had experienced a powerful auditory “vision” of the Bard William Blake chanting poetry

an experience that was to be key in Ginsberg’s next fifteen years as a poet.

Around this time Allen began inserting questions into his poetry—
His very early works contain few, if any bardic questions:
but when he gets to his "Vision" poem:
"On Reading William Blake's 'The Sick Rose,'"
written at the time of the Blake Voice Vision,
"The Sick Rose" and "Little Girl Lost,"

there are three sentences ending in question marks.

After the Vision of Blake, the Elegant, Pulsing Question became one of his most powerful poetic devices
(There are 47 question marks in Allen's Collected Poems in the poems BEFORE he wrote "Howl" in 1955)

("Howl" has no question marks because “Howl” is, in a way, the long declarative throb–answer to hundreds of questions he had already asked.)

In his Blake Vision, of course, he sensed Eternity and it set off a long hunger to “see Visionary Indian Angels who WERE Visionary Indian Angels”

(The next fifteen years were a quest for Cosmic Consciousness up until his poem “The Change” written after experiencing the Calcutta ghats amoil with flame
–a poem renouncing the “power” he had constructed out of the Blake Vision)

The Blake Vision also had “Holy Loner” aspects that brought into focus his “feelings of rejection as a confessed homosexual and as a Jew,” as the writer Paul Christiansen has pointed out.

His father, Louis, watched his son with a wary eye:
    July ’48:
    Louis’ advice re Neal
        “Dear Allen, Exorcise Neal.
        –Louis”

’49

There came a time in February o’ ’49 when a bedraggled, Loner Beat, Famished Phantom named Herbert Huncke showed up at A.G.’s pad at 1401 York Avenue

just released from prison, feet blistered, socks wet and talking suicide

He was the archetypal “Madman beat in time” of the “Howl” threnody
Allen offered him a place to stay
Not long thereafter Huncke began bringing his pals to the pad
a heist gang
    that used the place for storage of stolen stuff

On April 23 all were arrested,
even the Bard Allen Ginsberg,

it made a big splash in The New York Times:

One of the accused, Allen Ginsberg, of 1401 York Avenue
told the police that he was a copy boy for a news service who
had “tied-in” with the gang, all with police records, to obtain
“realism” he needed to write a story.

Sure, Allen sure.

A sad sad dad bailed out his son
Mark Van Doren, of the Columbia U faculty, offered help
and Lionel Trilling introduced the Bard to a Col. U law prof
who recommended that A.G. plead bonk bonk

Allen did just that
and was sentenced to Columbia-Presbyterian Psychiatric Institute

There wasn’t a room available right away
so he lived with his dad in Paterson

and then on 6-29-49

the up-a-creek Bard went into the 6th floor ward of the
Institute on
168th Street

where he met poet Carl Solomon
    to whom he was to dedicate “Howl”

Part IV

We left the story of the great Bard Allen Ginsberg
when he was in Columbia-Presbyterian Psychiatric Center
in Washington Heights
after being swept up on the edges of a heist gang
run by the future Beat hero,
   but then down and out, Herbert Huncke

--There was a car chase, with Ginsberg
one of the occupants
   and a famous arrest that made the
   front page of The New York Times

Several professors at Columbia pulled strings, as they say,

and Ginsberg entered the Washington Heights shrink zone
in late June of 1949--

He was very depressed

Then one day Ginsberg was standing in the hallway
watching a guy being wheeled into the ward

swollen from insulin shocks

and began one of the more famous of
20th century literary conversations

He traced through his visionary experiences
   (the Voice of Blake in Harlem ’48 for instance)
The man listened exceptionally unimpressed, then said,
“Well, you’re new here. Wait awhile and you’ll meet
some of the other repentant mystics.”

The man asked who Ginsberg was. “I’m Myshkin,”
Allen replied, referring to the rather crazy prince in
Dostoevsky’s The Idiot.

The bloat-faced man then said, “I’m Kirilov,” referring
to a character in The Possessed.

The shock patient was Carl Solomon, to whom the Bard was to
dedicate “Howl” five years later.

A talented writer, Solomon was living proof to Ginsberg
that the best minds of his generation were
destroyed by madness.
Solomon had once seen a performance in Paris by Artaud himself

and on another famous occasion had thrown potato salad at a lecturer speaking On “Stéphane Mallarmé and Alienation” at Brooklyn College

immortalized later in “Howl.”

Ginsberg wrote William Burroughs from the institute and said he was again thinking of becoming a labor lawyer

Burroughs wrote back in a disquieting mood: “I think the US is heading in the direction of a socialist police state similar to England, & not too different from Russia. I congratulate myself on my timely withdrawal.”

’50

2-27-50
’Zap
left the nut house
& moved in w/ Dad in Paterson

He was convinced, at that moment, that the best course for his life was to find a job, get a girlfriend, return to Paterson.

He told Jack Kerouac his days of being gay were over

Five days later Ginsberg sent 9 poems to the great William Carlos Williams

(having just seen Williams read at the Guggenheim Museum)
including “Ode to the Setting Sun,” a New Jersey industrial landscape graveyard poem (written in the Psychiatric Institute) which predicted the great “Sunflower Sutra” o’ 1955

The Letter to WCW with 9 poems, and “several other verses form the text of the small collection known as The Gates of Wrath, which was later lost for many years, it seems, and was only able to be published when Bob Dylan found it in his archives around 1968

The Gates of Wrath’s themes are “passionate love and the divided self.” Plus, of course, thanatopsis

No other bard since Poe has so delved death.

Ginsberg once told me what an influence Poe was on his poesy.

The thanatopoesis opted early, as in “In Death, Cannot Reach What Is Most Near” & “This Is About Death” both from mid-1949

The first version of “The Shrouded Stranger” was in The Gates of Wrath

“The Shrouded Stranger” to me is his first poem to match the pulses of his psyche

•

In the spring of ’50 in Provincetown true to his promise to the psychiatrists he had his first heterosexual love an out-of-door bliss-zap by the docks

with a woman named Helen Parker who had once been engaged to John Dos Passos They fell in love
but he was not willing to leave Paterson & his therapy for life with her in P-town
and a few months later she set aside Ginzap for a singer named Ramblin’ Jack Elliott!!
That was the spring he was hired as a reporter for a labor newspaper, Labor Herald, in New Jersey
but he was fired in September
then decided he’d go on prole-patrol with a job in a ribbon factory in Paterson.

Meanwhile his father Louis had married a woman from Paterson named Edith & Louis & Edith had purchased a house.
Always a family man Allen & Edith were close over the years & Edith was pleasantly tolerant of the young men soon to form a Generation

1951

Meanwhile in ’51 Williams put two of Ginsberg’s letters into the fourth book of Paterson, published that year and in the spring in an apartment on West 20th across from a seminary Jack Kerouac wrote On the Road cooked for and coddled by his wife Joan Haverty

That summer she was pregnant He insisted she have an abortion. She refused.
And he dumped her refusing to pay for the prenatal doctor & denying he was the father of Jan Michelle Kerouac born on 2-16-52

From mid-’51 to the end of 1953 the ’Zap lived in NYC
preparing the manuscript for Empty Mirror 1947-’52

(which was not published till 1961)

’52

New Directions’ James Laughlin accepted some “prose poems” for publication.

’53

Good poem:
“The Green Automobile” 1953-1954

& in the summer
Ginzap worked as a copy boy
for the New York Herald Tribune
$45 a week

and almost every day
of these years he read torrentially
and asked 10,000s of questions
(Allen asked more questions, I think,
than anyone I ever met)

In late ’53
to Florida to hang out w/ Wm. Burroughs
then Havana, then Mexico

for a few months of many adventures.

’54

One of the adventures included
making himself some huge drums
suspended by vines
and tapping a rubber tree to tip his drumsticks

(See his poem, “Siesta in Xbalba Chiapas-SF”)

That spring he split for California
to be with Neal Cassady

and lived for a while in an impossible
ménage à trois
with Neal and his wife Carolyn

He savored the quick and flaming literary scene:
Kenneth Rexroth, Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, Kenneth Patchen

the year of Allen’s great song
“The Weight of the World is Love.”

He moved to a pad on Nob Hill with a girlfriend, Sheila Boucher

and the ’Zap picked up a job for $250 a week
doing market research

Then in December he met Peter Orlovsky
a friend of the painter Robert LaVigne
and they soon became lovers

Orlovsky came from a troubled impoverished family
the third of five children
and had been on his own since age 17
He brought his brothers Julius & Lafcadio
into the beat milieu with him.
Both brothers were in and out of hospitals.
Julius once remained silent for 14 years,
(or so A.G. once told Ezra Pound & Olga Rudge)
in the mode of a Manichaean
because he felt that the entirety of evil in the cosmos
was coming from his mouth and body

'55

Ginsberg’s
shrink
at Langley Porter
told A.G.

it was OK to
move in w/ Peter Orlovsky
give up his job
& write poetry

“I asked him what the
American Psychoanalytic Association
wd say about that
& he said
“There’s no party line
no red book
on how people are supposed
to live

If that’s what
you really feel
wd please you
what in the world
is stopping you from doing it?”

On February 3
Ginsberg moved out of his hotel
(he’d broken with Sheila)
across the street from the Hotel Wentley
(famous from John Wieners’ poem sequence)

and moved to 1010 Montgomery
Then 8 days later
P.O. moved in also

He & Peter
took vows to one another.
A.G. was reading many books
but writing little

He was interested in experimenting in W.C. Williams’
triadic line
or indented tercets
combined with Jack Kerouac’s long-breathed lines--
when he turned 29 on June 3

Peter then went off to NY to visit his family.

Allen took a hitchhiking trip to Yosemite, Lake Tahoe, etc.
then back to SF

One day in early August
He began typing
on a used typewriter
on scratch paper
with nothing to gain
nothing to lose

the first 12 pages of “Howl”
He had a line from an earlier notebook

“I saw the best mind angel-headed hipster damned”

–I saw an early version of “Howl” at the Whitney Beat show in ’95 and remarked to Allen about the indentations –which, of course, are not in the final version– and he told me he had been imitating W.C. Williams–

Then, the same day he wrote those brilliant long-breathed pages beginning with “I saw the best minds of my generation....”

he chant-jotted the Carl Solomon section (Part III)

Peter returned from his trip to the East Coast when high on peyote he & Peter went forth on a peyote-halo walk in SF

and spotted the Sir Francis Drake Hotel looming in lit-up gloominess like the blood-eating fire god Moloch

So he added the Part II Moloch section beginning “What sphinx of cement....”

He began the revisions of Part I which lasted a number of months

In September ’55, A.G. and P.O. moved to 1624 Milvia in Berkeley for $35 a month

revising revising revising revising tuning the lyre for the Mind Entire.
Part V

We left the story of the great Bard Allen Ginsberg in the fall of 1955 when he was still revising “Howl”

CITY LIGHTS

In 1953 a poet named Lawrence Ferlinghetti, & Peter Martin founded a paperback book store in San Francisco called City Lights Books

A.G. and Ferl’ met in August of ’55 Ferlinghetti didn’t want to publish Empty Mirror but liked the manu of “Howl” Allen showed him—and wanted to publish

THE SIX GALLERY READING

Ginsberg learned that a young bard from Wichita Michael McClure had been invited to set up a reading at the Six Gallery but had been too busy

Ginzap took over the planning and lined up McClure, Phil Whalen, Jack Kerouac, et al. w/ Kenneth Rexroth as mc for Oct 13, 1955 It was a Thursday

There were about a hundred in the audience First Philip Lamantia read Then McClure’s “For the Death of 100 Whales” then Phil Whalen
then an intermission

after which Ginsberg read “Howl” (Part I only)
building in confidence
    --Kerouac shouting “Go! Go!”
    while beating rhythm on a wine jug--

The crowd was “blown away”
    (to use the parlance of a few years later)

Ginsberg was in tears
    by the time he roared to its end
as was Rexroth.

Snyder ended the Six Gallery reading
w/ his “A Berry Feast.”

(A good account of the Six Gallery reading can be
found in Michael McClure’s book Scratching the
Beat Surface)

There was an actual orgy after the reading
which I always forgot
    to ask A.G. to describe--
dang!

•

One afternoon
    on a SF bus
he came up w/
    the “Footnote to Howl” finale:
    the famous chant of “Holy Holy Holy...”

'56

Naomi died on June 9, 1956
    while Allen was in California
As the casket was lowered
at Beth Moses Cemetery
    in Farmingdale, LI
the rabbi would not chant Kaddish
because a minyan
was not on hand

Naomi quiescat

It ate at his heart
    she’d not had the proper chant
and he began a search
    to write one of his own.

In July of ’56 Ginzap took off
on a ship, the USNS St. Pendleton
carrying Cold War stuff
    to the arctic circle
    for the Defense Early Warning
    radar apparatus up there

carrying the proofs of Howl
    which City Lights had set
(printed at Villiers Press in London)

There were errors in the line breaks of the 10-league lines
He had to pay for the fix-ups himself!
    (Though it only ultimately cost $20
    he volunteered to pay up to $200!)

While on ship, Phil Whalen forwarded mail
to A.G. (which he picked up in Takoma)

One was a letter from Naomi
just before she died

She mentioned the mimeographed “Howl” he had
sent her, and she lamented how
    “I still have the wire in my head.”

    “I’m looking for a good time,” she wrote
    “I hope you are not taking drugs
    as suggested by your poetry.
    That would hurt me.
    Don’t go in for ridiculous things.
    With love and good news.
    Naomi”

After Howl was published in August ’56
Ginsberg sent out oodles of copies among the recipients:
Pound, Moore, Eliot, Auden, Jeffers, Charlie Chaplin, Carl Solomon, Patchen, et numerous others over 100 copies

There was a big article in the September 1956 New York Times by Richard Eberhart on “West Coast Rhythms” which ID’d A.G. as an important young poet.

A.G. always helped his friends get their books published This is not so common among literati

It was the Best Minds factor Ginsberg promoting his friends Kerouac, Corso, Burroughs, Snyder, Whalen, &
even Levertov, Niedecker, Oppenheimer, et al.

Fall o’ ’56 Ginsberg met Denise Levertov in Guadalajara & added her manuscript o’ poems to his collection to show editors

Returning to NYC the same fall Peter and Allen stayed with Elise Cowen in what is known as Yorkville, in Manhattan, Upper East part.

A.G. had manuscripts by Snyder, Whalen, Duncan, Dorn, Creeley, Lamantia, Levertov, McClure, and Charles Olson even

He surged into The New York Times offices on West 43rd and requested a review of Howl
(Don’t you wish you had the guts
to do that for YOUR book of verse?)

Mademoiselle, thanks to the ’Zap, published Levertov
and even some Burroughs.
He approached Time, Life, Esquire, The Hudson
Yorker, and New Directions, et al
demanding ink for himself
and the Best Minds group

’57

Ginsberg
helped persuade Don Allen
to do the famous San Francisco Scene
issue of
Evergreen Review (#2)

(which I purchased at the University of Missouri bookstore that fall)

Early ’57 Kerouac, Allen, Peter, Gregory
split for Tangiers and Paris
(Ginsberg loaned Kerouac $225
for the passage, which he had a lot of trouble
getting repaid.)

In Tangiers Allen spent 5 or 6
hours a day
typing Burroughs’ manuscript
later known as Naked Lunch
(Burroughs concept of how even the reverse side print
showing through as giving
sense to text-flow cut-up sequencing)

•

In March, U.S. Customs seized 520 copies of Howl
coming in from the printer in England

May 21
two cops bought Howl at City Lights
and it was handcuff time

The American Civil Liberties Union took the case
with a trial scheduled for August 22

In October the judge declared “Howl” not obscene
a huge historic “victory” for a generation
    that had discovered new sounds for
    America’s great Liberty Bell

The media hay harvested by Ginzap
from the “Howl” triumph
catapulted him into a worldwide fame
which was to last till his death
    in April of 1997
    almost 40 years later.

In Nov 1957 Ginsberg wrote Kerouac
from Paris
    announcing he’d written the lines
much of which later graced part IV of “Kaddish”

Farewell
    with long black shoe
Farewell
    smoking corsets and ribs of steel
Farewell
    communist party & broken stocking
    with your eyes of shock
    with your eyes of lobotomy
    with your eyes of stroke
    with your eyes of divorce
    with your eyes alone
    with your eyes
    with your eyes
    with your death full of flowers
    with your death of the golden windows of sunlight...

Part V

We left the story of the great Bard Allen Ginsberg
in November o’ 57
when he wrote Kerouac
from Paris to announce he’d written many of the lines
    that would later form one of the most riveting
He was already famous from the publication of Howl and the victory by Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s City Lights Books in the “Howl” obscenity trial.

’58

In February in London he read all of “Howl” felt full of tears as the reading built in the howlin’ intensity he gave those early readings that he was reading to Blake himself the “Soul in the Fog.”

July ’58, A.G. returned to NYC He was a famous poet

and he had written some remarkable poems in Europe “Death to Van Gogh’s Ear” “Poem Rocket” “Europe! Europe!” and the beautiful threnody “At Apollinaire’s Grave”

He was more and more fascinated with Whitman’s prophecy of the Fall of America:

“I’d like to write a monstrous and golden political or historical poem about the fall of America.... talk about Dulles the way Blake talks about the kings of France shuddering icy chill runs down the arms to their sweating sceptres.”

I remember how excited the NYC poetry scene was in 1965 when John Ashbery returned from living in Paris

It was the same whenever Allen returned There was that klieg light buzz to a room A hush and electric spark at his entrance

I think it was because he made you believe wherever he went that the world was going to get better through the power of Bardery alone
Jack Kerouac on the other hand was having a bit of trouble with fame

Fame has a way of eating livers and it was snacking away on the anxious author of On the Road

Kerouac’s mom, Gabrielle, had been sending hate letters to Ginsberg in Paris.

Meanwhile Ginsberg successfully urged James Laughlin at New Directions to publish Corso and Snyder

•

We have already traced how when his mother died (Allen was in S.F.) the rabbi refused to chant the Kaddish because there was not a ten-man minyan to codify the chant

His mind kept whispering “kaddish kaddish kaddish.....” on his triumphal return to NYC after 18 months in Europe till one night in mid-November of 1958

Allen was at the pad of a friend in the West Village named Zev Putterman They listened to Ray Charles Allen chanted from Shelley’s “Adonais”

They took some morphine and meth in an pre-hep-B, pre-AIDS mode of needles and nickel bags

He told the story of Naomi now dead two years and when he traced the tale of Naomi denied Zev Putterman found a copy and chanted it

The ‘Zap walked home from the West Side to his East 2nd Street pad after the Putterman Kaddish yearning ‘pulsively
He jotted nonstop from 6 a.m. Saturday
till 10 p.m. on Sunday
taking some Dexedrine
till 58 pages were done

He began editing and reworking in January ’59
a process that lasted till ’61.

’59

In early ’59 a famous underground flick was filmed
by Robert Frank and Al Leslie
more or less based on Act Three of
Kerouac’s play, The Beat Generation

The shooting lasted 6 weeks, but MGM had
copyrighted the name B.G.
so it was renamed Pull My Daisy
after the poem/tune written
by Allen, Jack & Neal
back in ’49

Also early that year a
benefit by Ginsberg at Living Theater at 14th & 6th
I attended
so that William Carlos Williams’ Many Loves
could be produced

On February 5th a big reading at Columbia’s McMillin Theater
1,400 packed the place
and 500 outside
—a kind of bardic vindication
for all his undergrad troubles.

It was around that time also
there was controversy over the banned issue
of the Chicago Review

A section of Naked Lunch was selected for publication
in the Chicago Review in early ’59
plus Kerouac’s “Old Angel Midnight,”
and prose by the estimable Edward Dahlberg
but a right-wing columnist in the Chicago Daily News
wrote about it in a column called
“Filthy Writing on the Midway”

so that the university pulled it.

The 'Zap and Corso and Peter went to Chicago
to protest

(Allen read “Howl” in Chi
    which Fantasy released as a record)

There was a benefit for the Chicago Review legal expenses
at the Gaslight on MacDougal Street-
Miriam and I went
    We were students at NYU
    we’d met in Greek class
& on our dates
paid careful attention to Beat readings in coffeehouses
the Beat bookstores of 4th Avenue,
beat folkies in the park, Beat summertime drum sessions
   on the Staten Island Ferry
   in honor of Edna St. Vincent Millay
& any place where poets clutched spring binders

(See the story “The Poetry Reading” in Tales of Beatnik Glory)

In the summer Ginzap went back to CA
& first took LSD as part of a research project
conducted by Gregory Bateson
at the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto

While 'Zap was in CA that summer
Corso sold his tv, bed, etc
    for cash to return to Europe.

'60

Allen kept polishing polishing polishing
the verse to be published in '61
in Kaddish and Other Poems

“I write so little,
    painfully & revise... I don’t
have your football energy
for scrawling endlessly on pages....
I guess all this publicity is bad,” he wrote to Kerouac
after Kerouac had advised:
“Beware of fame,
poems will be nonsequitur”

Beat Political Split:

Kerouac supported Richard Nixon in the fall 1960 elections
Ginsberg Kennedy.

At Tim Leary’s place on Nov. 26, ’60
he took some psilocybin
and believed he could cure
Leary’s bad hearing
and fix his weak eyes

Mr. Leary was hesitant
to allow the naked Irwin Allen Ginsberg
to roam the streets of Cambridge
to preach love
zonked in a pro-tem Messiah mode

The Mailer Rule:
(Nov. 19, 1960)

Do not stab your wife
at the party
where you
are set to announce
your candidacy for mayor.

At the same unfortunate party
Ginsberg and Norman Podhoretz
—a famous Beatbaiter—
had a famous-at-the-time squabble
with Ginsberg calling P. a fuckhead
and P. calling G. an idiot.
And then came 1961
the year of the Kennedys

and Allen donated the handwritten draft of
“Kaddish” to the Living Theater
for a benefit
(De Kooning and Kline gave paintings
& Paul Goodman + John Cage also manu’s)

Ginsberg was caught in the age-old
“You’re famous, now what?” problem.

Allen took very seriously
his psychedelic experiences with Tim Leary
to the point he felt he had to proselytize
their use
for a New Consciousness
and a New Aeon

Among the first of those he turned on to psilocybin
were Thelonius Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Willem de Kooning
Franz Kline & Robert Lowell.

“The Revolution has begun,” he wrote to
Neal Cassady as a New Year’s salute

March 23, Peter and Allen departed for Paris
on the SS America

There was a young woman named Elise Cowen,
who had typed the final version of “Kaddish” for Allen
and very much in love with him

She was there waving on the dock, with Allen’s brother Eugene,
Carl Solomon, Janine Vega, LeRoi Jones,
and others

waving waving
In Paris 'Zap discovered
Burroughs had become obsessed with experiments in cut-ups
(a writing technique Brion Gysin had discovered)

Burroughs used the cut-up method
to break down what Burroughs called th’
either/or “Aristotelian Construct”

Burroughs had checked out of the
Beat Hotel in Paris for Tangiers

& Corso, Allen, Peter Orlovsky
split to hang out at the Cannes Film Festival
then by boat to Tangiers
to hang with Burroughs

a crazy set of months
which scholars of Beatdom
nod and noodle over

Burroughs was always “difficult” as they say
and there were plenty of miniature storms
among those attracted to the author of Naked Lunch

The reviews for Kaddish and Other Poems
were coming in
and were not of the type such
a great poem should command

Allen left Morocco in late August for Greece
He had royalties! sacred royalties!
One check from Ferlinghetti for the
big sales of Howl

and another – $450– from the magazine Show Business Illustrated
for a piece on the Cannes Festival

After Greece, he went to Israel
where he met the socialist theologian Martin Buber

then
the 'Zap
was depressed going
to India (first from Israel to Kenya)
some say because he seemed to have lost his sense of identity.

Perhaps Burroughs’ cut-up method, in part, had pared away the power, word & image & flung the Bard into a place of frantic futility & galactic mush-gush

He was singing the “Famous First Book/You’re Famous/What Next? Blues.”

(I’d heard he was depressed— I was a 22-year-old student at New York University— and began sending him issues of my mimeographed magazine Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts which, when he wrote back, he told me had helped bring him out of his darkness

(part of his depression perhaps came after his friend Elise Cowen— in Feb. of that year— had jumped from her parents’ apartment window to her doom—see Joyce Johnson’s fine book Minor Characters for more information on Elise Cowen, whose poetry I published in my magazine.)

Allen’s self-analysis in India:
not to be so Jeremiah-like & drive opponents into a raging corner.

One of the finest nature poets, Gary Snyder, and his brilliant wife Joanne Kyger arrived in Delhi in late February ’62 just days after Allen and Peter O

The four soon split for the Himalayan foothills in search of a well-known holy man named Swami Shivananda

Ginsberg was to search and search in India for the final answers from holy guys
Snyder, of course, knew much about Zen practice
and in his calm teacherly way
tried to fill the frenetic Allen
in on the waves of Zen

They traveled more, and went to the town where the Dalai Lama
had set up his Tibetan gov’t in exile

The Dalai Lama granted the four an hour’s audience

He was not that interested in trying acid.

It was in India, after many travels
that the mail caught up with A.G.:
the news that Elise had suffered a nervous breakdown
and jumped

In Bombay, just before Joanne Kyger and Gary Snyder
were to leave the country

Gary, Allen and Peter
gave a public reading
attended by over 100, including the American consul--

Summer of ’62
Lawrence Ferlinghetti
was reluctant
to accept
either one
of A.G.’s
suggested titles:

Bunch of Poems
or
Hiccup
for the tome teleos’d
as
REALITY SANDWICHES

Part VIII

We left the story of the great bard Allen Ginsberg
when he was in India with his mate Peter Orlovsky
in 1962

His great books, Howl and Other Poems
and Kaddish and Other Poems
had already been published

He was an international celebrity
yet he was in a depressed mood in India

and was seeking out holy men
and learning the mantras & melodies
he was soon to bring to America
and sing
with his ever-present finger cymbals--

The poets Gary Snyder and Joanne Kyger, then married,
joined Allen and Peter

They traveled to the Himalayan foothills to see
Swami Shivananda
and then to visit the Dalai Lama
before Snyder and Kyger returned to their
home in Kyoto, Japan.

In May '62 the 'Zap visited Sikkim where he met Gyalwa Karmapa

considered a direct descendant
of the Buddhist poet Milarepa
who lived around 1000 A.D.

The meeting went well
"He offered to
teach me tantra
& I offered to
teach him pills,"
he later humorously described it.

In the fall of '62 Ginsberg went
what I would call ghat-batty

He began to visit the Nimtallah Ghats in Calcutta
smoking pot (with many others there also)
"a strange visionary experience"
which helped him to observe the ghastliness
with a measure of calm, as he jotted to Kerouac
watching the burning bodies
with fakirs & sadhus
    who sat in groups

& the mourners in white robes smoking ganja and singing hymns

with a circle of blind men, beggars,
    tum-tum-tumming on drums

bodies being oiled and placed on the pyres
roiling and rolling
    in the foreverness

Ginsberg went a number of times to these once-a-week ghat-fires

When he told me about it later
it seemed as if it was his first hands-on study of death
    and it was just the beginning

for no other poet in history
    not even Poe or Shakespeare
    studied death so intently.

    His ghat-visits coincided with
    the Cuban missile crisis
    when it REALLY SEEMED as
        if there might be a world wide
            nuclear Boom-Boom.

    At the end of ‘62
    Peter and Allen split by boat
    Calcutta to Benares

    There were many more adventures, such as visiting the Taj Mahal,
    but it is the tale of how Allen Ginsberg aided
    someone left for dead in the streets
        that to me throws up a giant torch
            on his humanity

    It was early 1963
    Kennedy was still alive
    The missile crisis had ebbed
    and the Cold War seemed likely to decline
        with a touch of grace from peace-minds
One day on a street where humans were left to die
Ginzap came across a guy in the fetal position
wasting away, flies eating the red meat of his wounds—
a soon and certain visitor to the worms.

There was a red teacup nearby

AG washed the cup and offered the gentleman some water
Then he brought him some curried potatoes
he was too weak at first to eat

Allen then went to the Ganges to wash his clothes
and when he returned the
dying naked man still lay in the same spot
in the light of the sun

He asked a young man what the naked man wanted
and the young man replied that he wanted to be
carried to
the water

Allen and Peter toted him to the river
and washed him

In the coming weeks they tended to his care
Brought him a mattress
hired a guy to wash and feed him

Allen finally learned he’d been tortured and had his tongue cut out by Muslims
and had a brother on the other side of India

Allen contacted the brother, and the brother came to Benares
Allen then demanded that a local hospital admit the man

and by the time the brother arrived
the wounded man
was able to leave Benares with his brother by train—

A classic Allen Ginsberg anecdote

He came away from India with
the concept of sacred singing
For instance when he had visited the Caves of Ajanta with Gary Snyder

he’d marveled at Snyder’s singing of the Prajnaparamita Sutra—

Allen then decided to chant mantras at his readings

(Allen made sure that all of his friends got copies of the Prajnaparamita Sutra
   Mine resides on the wall of my Woodstock studio)

He flew from Calcutta to Bangkok in May of ’63 then to Saigon
   where the U.S. was just then beginning its twelve-year violence

Then to Cambodia to see the beauty of Angkor Wat and wrote his well-known poem of the same name

then on June 11 to Japan for additional time with Gary Snyder and Joanne Kyger in Kyoto

He was there for five weeks then took a train to Tokyo
   On the train he wrote his eerie, scary poem-chant “The Change”

in which he summarizes his spiritual quest since the 1948 vision of William Blake through all the spiritual flashes of the 1950s and early ’60s the burning ghats of Calcutta the visits to holy people

   and, simply stated, decided that it was time to renounce the impersonal concepts of “Vision” and return to the body.

He sent me the poem “The Change” and I published it that year in my magazine at a secret location in the Lower East Side.
We left our tracing
of the great bard A.G.
after he wrote a poem
   important to his bardic path
   called “The Change”
on the Kyoto-Tokyo express in July o’ 63
in which he pulled away from his intense drive
   for universal vision
   and a Hunger for Prophecy & Futurity
and came to know the “truth of only the
   body” as in the halls of the Kremlin
   and Kennedy’s doomed White House
   “the schemers draw back
   weeping from their schemes.”
On the hurtling iron horse he jotted,
“In my train seat I renounce
   my power, so that I do
   live I will die....”
He was headed back to the USA
from travels to India, Japan and SE Asia
   in ’62 & ’63
no longer needing to alter
   the unalterable.
He had an invitation to a poetry conference in
Vancouver organized by Robert Creeley
   in July of ’63
It was a big success
and Ginzap was out of his doldrums.
The great Charles Olson
also at the Conference
told Allen, “I am one with my skin.”
Allen was also
“I’m actually happy,”
he wrote his father

After Vancouver
   Allen returned to San Francisco
staying with Lawrence Ferlinghetti and his wife Kirby

Ginsberg then moved back into one of his old apartments in SF on Gough
and his early love Neal Cassady and his girlfriend Anne Murphy moved in also!

(Cassady had already met Ken Kesey
   and the proto-Merry Pranksters
   on their voyage into Learyland)

•

The Beginning of The Vietnam War

Madame Nhu
   sister-in-law of Pres. Diem of 'Nam
was coming to 'Frisco
and A.G. decided to join the protesters

He fashioned one of the most unique posters in
the history of peacework,

printing the following on a large sign
   on which he also sketched the Buddha's footprint
three fish joined at one head:

   Name hypnosis and fear is the
   Enemy—Satan go home!
   I accept America and Red China
   To the human race.
   Madame Nhu and Mao-Tse Tung
   Are in the same boat of meat.

However interesting as a sign in a picket line
outside the Sheraton Palace Hotel

the Vietnam War was to continue
   another 12 years.
Late in ’63 Allen flew back to NYC experiencing a severe money drought

Robert Frank wanted to make a movie of “Kaddish” so the bard went every other day to Frank’s house to write a possible scene

For each, Frank, the bard later wrote, paid him $10

“& thus kept me in money for about two months while I was getting on my feet again.”

Finally Allen gave it up, because of the “areas of embarrassment & invasion of privacy” as he jotted in his diary if he had transformed elliptical verse to the harsh light of dialogue.

In early ’64 ‘Zap met Bob Dylan at Ted Wilentz’ house through the writer Al Aronowitz

Ted & Eli Wilentz had the very best bookstore on the set It was then at 8th Street and MacDougal and above it Ted lived and set up a kind of literary salon.

Thus began an association ’tween bard and minstrel that lasted from ’64 all the way to Ginsberg eagerly trying to stay alive in early 1997, diagnosed with liver cancer, in order for Dylan, Paul McCartney, Patti Smith, et al to perform in an MTV salute to the ’Zap.

It was now too that I met the bard and we began the first series of many capers together
The first was when he drew the cover stencils for a little book by William Burroughs called Roosevelt After Inauguration which I published in Feb. ’64 when the printer refused to allow it in the City Lights edition of Yage Letters

Allen’s Hand-drawn Cover for the Fuck You/Press edition of Roosevelt After Inauguration

I felt so incredibly awed & honored when he treated me as an equal

He took me to parties and introduced me to literati such as Norman Podhoretz, John Hollander & Mary Frank

Allen & Peter O moved to a legendary pad at 704 East 5th
My Peace Eye Bookstore was just about to open
a few blocks away
at 383 East 10th
& a few months later we began to hold rehearsals there
for a folk-rock poesy/satire band called the Fugs

Some of the ambience of A.G.’s place on East 5th
can be picked up in Tales of Beatnik Glory,
particularly the story
“Siobhan McKenna Group Grope”

I was putting out “rare book” catalogs
and had just graduated from NYU
One day I went over to Ginzap’s pad
to scrounge some literary relics
for my catalog

I’d heard
of a signed Dylan Thomas
dress shirt
that’d shown up in someone’s catalog.

A.G. graciously donated his cold cream jar
by the bed, and inscribed it as follows:

“This is the jar of bona fide ass-wine or cock
lubricant, into which I regularly plunged my
hardened phallos to ease penetration of P. Orlovsky....
winter 1964,” and signed it.

It was not the fastest-selling item
in my catalogue
&, as I recall, I gave it later
to Richard Avedon
during a Fugs photo shoot.

All of a sudden the real estate people were
calling the grid of tenement streets
(slums since after the War of 1812)
the East Village
and something called Underground Newspapers were beginning to happen—
The L.A. Free Press, the Berkeley Barb, and The East Village Other,
(the latter founded in ’64 and named by the bard Ted Berrigan)

He tried to visit Kerouac, who was living with his mother Gabrielle in Northport, Long Island

Allen could be persistent
Once Allen waited by the bushes while Peter Orlovsky knocked but Gabrielle refused to let O. in
or, when Allen called,
    to take any messages or #'s

Even though it was Freedom Summer in Mississippi with Freedom Schools and a huge voter registration drive 1964 was the year New York City suffered one of its unfortunate periodic bouts of Authoritarianism

    (the control-fetishes of Mayor Giuliani in the late 1990s had their roots in earlier eras)

Back in ’62 something called the New York Coffeehouse Law had been enacted

    in which if a restaurant wanted to have live entertainment it had to acquire a “coffeehouse license”

    which required submissions of blueprints, installation of sprinklers, more fire exits, kitchen flues—

    installations overseen by the ultracorrupt NYC Building & Fire Code Departments.

Many of us, including Allen G., myself, d.a. levy, Diane Wakoski, David Henderson, Ishmael Reed, Marguerite Harris & many others read poetry in East Village coffee houses especially at the Café Le Metro on 2nd Avenue
For some reason, the Dept. of Licenses began to bust poetry readings, if you can believe it

Allen Ginsberg, Ellen Stewart of the Café la Mama, Joe Cino, myself, Jackson MacLow and others began to protest--
(young firebrands Henry Stern and Ed Koch helped us)

We started a campaign that ultimately led to the city gov’t pulling back and letting verse be heard without chop-bust.

But it wasn’t easy, and it wasn’t instant.

Then, late in 1964, LeMar The Committee to Legalize Marijuana was formed

(and there was a demonstration, I think it was January 10, 1965 outside the Women’s House of Detention in the West Village in a mild snow with Allen, snowflakes on his beard, holding a “Pot Is Fun” sign one of the most widely spread images of the time.)

•

NYC in ’64 also cracked down on Lenny Bruce He had a way of putting together crisply timed and brilliant routines that ruffled prudes and angered squares–

His routine on Adolf Eichmann is as controversial now as it was 33 years ago. Ditto for his vignettes on Jacqueline Kennedy and the JFK assassination & the one on Eleanor Roosevelt’s bosom.

(Bruce’s famous Rule #16 [deny deny deny, even if you’re caught] is being used right now, as I type this during the Clinton/Lewinsky Spurtagate controversy)

Bruce was arrested in NYC and Allen developed a petition in his defense which was signed by a wide selection of Americans,
Part X

The great bard Allen Ginsberg
was invited to Cuba
  by the minister of culture
to a writers’ conference in Havana
in January o’ 65

The State Department said no,
but the bard threatened to sue
so he was given a visa

(Many of us would have muttered, “Oh, the
gummint doesn’t want me to go, I’d better
  change my plans,”
but not Ginzap)

The rules allowed him to fly in via Mexico City
but he had to RETURN by way of Prague

The CIA and its pals in organized crime
were desperate to snuff Fidel

and the political climate in Cuba
  was on its guard

That’s not all that was on its guard
for reasons that are utterly unobvious
America had its own worshiper of surveillance
  & violation of privacy
one J. Edgar Hoover, then
  the head of the FBI
  and busy already

trying to disrupt the antiwar movement
and overestimating (it kept his budgets & prestige high)
the threat to the Flag from America’s miniscule Communist Party

Anyway, J. Eddie Hoov’
that spring o' 65
sent out a one-page secret document
declaring Irwin Allen Ginsberg “potentially dangerous”

& possessed of a “propensity for violence and antipathy
toward good order and government”:

Things started out okay
He was given a spacious room at the Havana Riviera.

Ginsberg was ever attentive
throughout his career
to the concept of having fun at night

so the first evening he took a bus to La Rampa
known for its nightlife

There he was approached by some young men
who published a literary magazine called El Puente
(The Bridge)

They asked if he was Allen Ginsberg
Yes, he was

and they took him to an out-of-the-way club
and began to speak freely about the oppression in Cuba

There was a police group, they said, called Lacra Social
which was harassing gays

and those known derisively as los infernos
–apparently a Cuban type of beatnik.

People could be arrested for long hair and beards
even though it was Castro's own appearance

The young people asked Ginsberg to tell Castro about
the persecution from Lacra Social

As swamped with interviews and attention as anywhere else
Allen began speaking in public against Lacra Social
and the accusations of oppression

A reporter asked Allen what he would encourage Castro
to do, should he get to meet him

Allen said he would inquire why Lacra Social was
abusing los infernos and gays
and why was pot not legal, and why not do away
with capital punishment and instead give
those prisoners magic mushrooms and
jobs such as being the elevator operator
at the Havana Riviera hotel?

Allen kept bringing up the issues
in interviews

He visited Hemingway’s house
and was a judge
at the festival's poetry competition

One of Allen’s translators
was a young man
who had translated Kaddish

This young translator was taken to the police station one night and asked about his association with the 'Zap

The man was detained again after an evening in a theater and Allen was angry

He demanded an explanation from the Cuban minister of culture, Haydée Santamaria, during a meeting he had with her.

Haydée Santamaria was a heroine of the revolution & revered in Cuba—She had watched her fiancé and her brother too tortured to death by Batista's goons

Allen was upset at what she said, that Cuba was taking a stand on homosexuality because “too many gays were making public spectacles of themselves and seducing impressionable young boys”

and, in a moment that caused a national scandal, Ginsberg pat-swatted her rear as she left the room.

Things grew chilly in Cuba right away for the American bard His poetry reading was canceled at the university

He learned that the minister of culture was also upset with Ginsberg for suggesting that Raul Castro was gay and Ché Guevara cute

At a luncheon a few days later Ginsberg tried to set things right with Haydée Santamaria on the rear-swat He'd meant it to be friendly he said
She was in addition miffed over Ginsberg’s talking about marijuana to young people

Allen countered her upsetness by suggesting that Cuba invite the Beatles (whose Help! was just out) to perform

During the discussion on having the Beatles, Santamaria said “They have no ideology We are trying to build a revolution with ideology.”

Ginzap’s days in Cuba were going into the toss-out countdown

After a couple of parties –’65 was a year in which there was often a party AFTER the party and so it was that night: back-to-backers,

and finally he was asleep around 6 A.M. when three soldiers & an immigration official beat on his door

and took him to the airport to a plane bound for Czechoslovakia.


THE KING OF THE MAY

In Prague, Allen was treated well He was a guest of the Writers’ Union and was the beneficiary of one good aspect of a socialist country: there were performance royalties due him, built up in a bank from his poetry being read by others at a literary café There were also other royalties
from a book of his poetry
published in Czech

There was the sense of thaw in Prague
    that three years later would lead to the
    famous Prague Spring
    (followed by a Soviet invasion)

Allen was having a ball
He was always thrilled by the
    hundreds who wanted to interview him
& he was the hero in the neobeat cafe known
as the Viola
    where huge blow-ups of Fred McDarrah’s
    photographs of American artists and beats
    were arrayed on the wall

He wrote an excellent love poem
    “Message II”
    from Prague to Peter Orlovsky
    (p. 348 in Collected Poems)

Allen planned to stay a month in Prague
    including trips to Moscow and Poland.

In late March of ’65 he trained from Prague to Moscow
    chrono-tracking himself in his intricate journals.
His diaries always scorched with
    his erotic explorations on the road
    which, as we shall see,
    would betrouble him yet again
    with another authoritarian/police state

In Moscow the famous bard
    was the official guest of the Writers’ Union
    once Tolstoy’s mansion

Lots of smoked salmon, borscht, vodka, caviar and
    visits to St. Basil's, the Kremlin, the Pushkin
    Museum and the
    huge Gum dept. store

He met the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko
    and true to his relentless vision
Ginsberg plied him with his theories of open gayness, ganja and LSD

This was Russia after all, land of a million ears, and Yevtushenko asked him not to continue

"I feel rejected," A.G. said after the rebuff from Yev'.

Nor did Yev' dig Kerouac's theories about spontaneous composition.

With the poet Andrei Voznesensky however, the bard formed a long-term bond that lasted the rest of his life.

Ginsberg went to Leningrad, toured the Hermitage then went by train to Warsaw, where on April 10 another one of his fine peripatetic works "Café in Warsaw" (page 350 of Collected Poems)

then to Krakow, and by car to Auschwitz –there's a famous snapshot of A.G. by the Arbeit Macht Frei gates of the evilness zone

Then it was back to Prague just in time for the ancient festival in honor of May Day called Majales

The commies had banned it about 20 years and '65 was the first year it was reallowed

Students were to vote for a King of the May and there would be a beauty pageant to select a Queen

By a strange series of circumstances (the poet Josef Skvorecky was to have been the King but he became ill) Allen was voted in as the Kral Majales the King of the May!
He had always wanted to be the world’s
  King of Maytime
so it was something
  that made him smile the rest of his life

On May 1 Allen was brought to the May Day parade
wearing a golden cardboard crown
  escorted by five beauteous damosels
and a rout of students
  some with top hats and canes
    right out of the 1890s
He was dazzle-driven on a flatbed truck through Prague
  clinging his finger cymbals
    and singing mantras
thousands and thousands pouring to the streets
  driving past Franz Kafka’s pad
with Allen giving speeches
  like someone out on the stump
    whenever the truck should stop
Allen had been elected King of the May by
an overwhelming vote
  and the partying continued till midnight
the moment the Queen was to be elected.

The Czech Communist Party secretary for cultural affairs
waxed furious at
  the spectacle of a gay beatnik
    chanting to Shiva
      & eyeing guys
elected the Kral Majales

and so on the spot nullified A.G.’s election
  and called a halt to the nominations for Queen.
It was too late
  as evinced by the bard’s fine poem,

Meanwhile the secret police had placed A.G. under surveillance
'Zap was a secret policeperson’s dream come true
They all drooled to surveil him
J. Edgar Hoover
the Cuban police
and now the Czech

One of Allen’s notebooks came into the possession
of the Czechoslovakian fuzz

I recall a few months later at the Berkeley Poetry Conference
he described some of the items in the notebook
that might have put secret police in a tizzy
—one in particular
that described erotic experimentations
with a broom

On May 5 he was punched and hit by a man
snarling with homophobia— then
taken in custody by police

The officer snarled “Bouzerant! Bouzerant!”
Fairy! Fairy!

Allen hummed the seed syllable “Om”
to quell the violence

Then he was set free, but next day
police said they had his notebook
and at the police station
they told him it was being turned
over to a prosecutor for illegal writings

And then he was tossed from another
authoritarian nation

"due to many complaints about your presence
in Prague from parents and scientists and
educators who disapprove of your sexual
theories." This was May 7, the
day he wrote the powerful

"Kral Majales"

He was held incommunicado
and put on a flight to London
where he was to hang out with
Dylan
and the surging Beatles.

P a r t  X I

Allen always loved the time
he was the
King of the May

in a country where they had just
begun to allow Kafka’s The Trial
to be published
again–
driven through the streets of Prague
past Kafka’s house
clink-clanging his
finger cymbals
and wearing a golden crown

It had been one of those
frozen moments of fun

Then the police had come for him
and shipped him to London
They’d stolen one of his notebooks
& he was upset about it

On the plane he wrote his poem
“Kral Majales”

•

G I N S B E R G  M E E T S T H E B E A T L E S

There was some genius-level music
being made in ’65
by the Beatles,
and Bob Dylan

Both the Beatles & Dylan were in London
when the kicked-out Kral Majales from Kafkatown
arrived.
Dylan was in the middle of making his movie 
Don't Look Back
and the Beatles were on their prophet-train roll
preparing the soundtrack album of Help!
(In a few weeks, for instance,
they’d record their great tune “Yesterday”)

Ginsberg went to Dylan’s concert at Royal Albert Hall
There was a party afterwards
& Ginsberg was invited to the suite
where Dylan and the Beatles were gathered.

D. and the Beatles had met already
the previous year
but, for some reason there was considerable silent tension
at this meeting of the essence
of the Rhymed Song Folk/Pop Complex &
Ginsberg tried to “break the ice” as they say

He fell into Lennon’s lap and asked if he’d ever read Blake
Lennon had once edited a magazine at art school
called the Daily Howl

and a bit of ice was dislodged
on the shores of fame.

(Ginsberg began a friendship with Paul,
and later with Linda, McCartney
that lasted the rest of his life
There’s a big oil painting by McC in the guest bedroom of
Ginsberg’s loft)

Next day the bard went to the embassy
to try to get his notebook back from the
Prague police

There was a party for Ginzap’s 39th birthday
at a London bookstore
–rock & roll, miniskirts, Tom Jones shirts, & lots of see-through–

John & Cynthia Lennon
plus George Harrison & Patti Boyd
came to th’ bard’s party
Allen was a bit drunk as he rushed to greet the ill-at-ease singers (who were glancing around to make sure no cameras were snapping) for the "Zap was naked, wearing his jockey shorts on his head, and a "Do Not Disturb" hotel doorknob sign attached to his Clinton.

Allen spent time with the poet Basil Bunting in Newcastle. Bunting had been a pal of Pound and W.C. Williams and had been "rediscovered" by young English poets.

Ginsberg’s June '65 poem "Studying the Signs" after reading Bunting’s book Briggflatts.

Another distilling beautiful 4-page poem, from the chaos of the first half of '65, "Who Be Kind To" p. 359 in the Collected Poems was written for the International Poetry Reading at Royal Albert Hall on June 8 (which Allen and the filmmaker Barbara Rubin organized—

with 7,000 people in attendance, including Indira Gandhi)

Then a week in Paris strip-searched at JFK and a pocket-lint search for pot returning to the USA June 29.

HALL DANCE OF GUGG JOY

Most of us who are honored with Guggenheim Fellowships in verse
wait patiently
   for the check
but not A.G.
   who, upon returning to the States,
raced to the Guggenheim offices
on Park Avenue South

to do a dance of Nike! Victory! Triumph!
   and Joy of Cash!
through the hallways and offices
(and perhaps also to get
   the fellowship check
   a little ahead of schedule)

The Guggenheim gave him the largess
for one of his most important poetic ventures—
He purchased a VW camper
   & outfitted it with a desk, bed & icebox
so that he could drive around the nation
   while composing a series of travel poems
   including the fine “Wichita Vortex Sutra” of ’66

In July Allen flew to SF
   for the Berkeley Poetry Conference
one of those gatherings
   whose impact ripples out through
decades in the world of
   poesy & theory–

Gary Snyder, Robert Creeley,
Jack Spicer (who would pass away soon after), Robert Duncan
John Wieners, the great Charles Olson
plus some of us (then) younger bards:
Ted Berrigan, Lenore Kandel, and myself

(Donald Allen, editor of the New American Poetry anthology,
arranged for Grove Press to fly me out
   –many thanks to Grove Press, which I too casually
   forgot formally to thank 35 years ago)

Ginsberg read to a huge crowd in Wheeler Auditorium
where, later in the week, Charles Olson
gave a genius-level Bacchic talk
that astounded a generation.

In August, after the Berkeley Poetry Conference
A.G. went camping with Gary Snyder for a month
in the Cascades, Crater Lake National Park,
and Mount Rainier in Oregon

They were alone in the vastness
reading Milarepa’s poems aloud in the morning
Allen learning again
the ineffable Zen centerèdness

that made the bard Snyder
such an emblem of the times.

**Part XII**

1965 was a great year
to understand the soul of the great bard
Allen Ginsberg

for it was then
we see how he refused to be isolated
from the broader culture
no matter how controversial he might have seemed

and he dared to be his own history.

We have noted how
in August of 1965, after the Berkeley Poetry Conference,
A.G. went camping with Gary Snyder for a month
in the Cascades, Crater Lake National Park,
and Mount Rainier in Washington

alone in the vastness
reading Milarepa’s poems aloud in the morning

While Allen was away
I was picking up his mail for him in New York City–
My Peace Eye Bookstore was thriving on East 10th
and the Fugs were performing at standing-room-only
That August, while Ginsberg was in the mountains with Snyder we learned of an attempt by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics & Dangerous Drugs (forerunner of the DEA) to set the ’Zap up for a pot bust

It was an archetypal event
Allen responded to it
    with his own investigation
    conducted over decades

    into the involvement of U.S. gov’t agencies in dealing and drug smuggling.

What happened was this:

A couple of young men, Jack Martin & Dale Wilbourne had been arrested for alleged possession of marijuana

Four BNDD agents
    met with Martin
    and threatened additional charges
    plus a bail bump-up from $5k to $100k
unless he set up Ginsberg
    for a pot arrest.

(Ginsberg had been very outspoken for legalization
The photo of him at a Lemar march
    with a “Pot is Fun” sign
    had been published around the world)

“We want Ginsberg,” one of the agents had said.

We learned about the incident
    & I put out a press release about it
The Fugs and others held a benefit for the defendants where the Federal agents in question showed up outside the gig and harassed people!

As a further emblem of his soul
Ginzap did not quail
and vacuum his pockets

Instead he went on the offensive
began clipping articles on
  how many times the police
themselves were arrested for selling drugs
started asking questions
  (Ginsberg I think asked more questions
   in his life
   than anyone in the history of
    Western Civilization)
and later, of course, the famous
  bet Ginsberg made with the
   head of the CIA, Richard Helms,
    over CIA involvement in the heroin racket

That fall, Ginsberg was in California
  & took part in large antiwar rallies
   in Berkeley & Oakland
organized in good part by Jerry Rubin.

(The Fugs drove across
  America in a VW van
   to take part in the rallies
One of our concerts
was with Ginsberg and Country Joe & the Fish
   at UC Berkeley.)

There was a march from Berkeley
  through the black area of Oakland
   and into downtown Oakland

Ginzap and Gary Snyder
  sang mantras
    from a sound truck
  to spread peace

But the police stopped the march
  at the Oakland city limits
& members of the Hell's Angels bike gang
  tore into the head of the march
and pulled down a
PEACE IN VIETNAM sign

They cut the speaker wires
& the march ended right there.

Several weeks later
another march was scheduled
and the H. Angels again threatened violence

Allen organized a public forum
for a kind of debate 'tween
the Vietnam Day Committee
(sponsor of the upcoming march)
and the H.A.'s.

The bikers came away
still planning to disrupt the walk.

Then Ken Kesey
proposed a meeting
'tween the march organizers & the bikers

at Sonny Barger's house in Oakland

The Angels had some kind of ultra-'noidal vision
of the Domino Theory

The D.T. held that, like a line of dominos falling in a flowing ripple
the nations of SE Asia would
tumble to commie

& it was somehow felt that
the dominos led across the moily Pacific
and would implode
upon a commie Oakland

—too much amphetamine.

Most of those at Kesey's pad
dropped acid
except Ginzap,
who feared what they called in those days a
Galactic Bummer.

The talk oozed acrimonious
till A.G. opened his small harmonium
and began to chant the Prajnaparamita sutra

Soon some Angels joined the chant
and Neal Cassady, Ken Kesey
and everybody finally.

Barger put Dylan’s “Gates of Eden” on the player
and the Angels agreed not to
break up the rally

Allen wrote one of his better poems of the year,
"First Party at Ken Kesey's with
   Hell's Angels"
dated December '65.

It was an example of quality peacemaking
The Angels issued a press release
they were not about to attack a bunch
of dirty commies

& the march occurred without any violence.

**Part XIII**

We left off our tale of the great bard Allen Ginsberg
in the fall of 1965
when he intervened
   with the Hell's Angels
to get them not to
attack an antiwar march
   in Oakland

Bob Dylan was in California in late ’65
He gave Allen $600
   with which he purchased a
reel-to-reel Uher tape recorder
   just about the finest you
could get in that era

(Dylan also bought the bard Michael McClure
an autoharp, and Peter Orlovsky an amplifier)

Allen took the Uher with him
It was portable, with a shoulder strap
and a hand held microphone
with a pause button

Thus, on the beach
on the road
in the woods
at a party
or at Ferlinghetti’s cabin in Big Sur

Ginsberg could experiment
with a kind of spontaneous verse
  acutely observational in the mode of W.C. Williams
with the long lines of Blake
  & the eye of a photographer
  (Ginsberg’s photos later became
  very well respected– he took
  literally tens of thousands of them,
  beginning in the 1940 proto-Beat era
  all the way to his death in 1997)

Allen did his best work
  after periods of introspection & study
and now he was ready to take on a Whitman-level
study of America
  in early 1966
  with the Vietnam war
  throbbing in the background.

The war the war the war
Dylan’s politics had shifted to the right
  as far as Vietnam was concerned
It chilled McClure when Dylan
  let it out &
refused to take a stand against
  the Vietnam War
and in fact took what would have been called
in the era
  an imperialist stance.

During recent months
Allen & his father Louis
had been arguing furiously by letter
  over the war
and it was in the context
of Blake, Uher, Williams,
the beauty & balefulness of his nation
that Ginsberg
began, in a few weeks,

his great poem “Wichita Vortex Sutra”

Tim Leary was arrested on 12-23-65
in Laredo for grass
(On trial on 3-9-66

and given thirty years in the slams!)

My Peace Eye Bookstore was raided on January 1, 1966
& I was charged with obscenity

for my magazine
(though I later won the case)

Allen immediately did a benefit for me in Los Angeles

On January 26
the "Zap began a long journey in his
new VW van

across the USA
driven by Peter Orlovsky

and recording instant verse

in the front seat with his Uher

the line breaks

indicated by the clicking

of the on/off switch

The camper meandered here & there in the west

and into Texas

and then up to Kansas

where the radio blurt-blared

with religiosity & war news

Barry Farrell, one of Life magazine’s best writers,
traveled with Allen

on the Wichita Vortex trip

writing a big story, “Guru Comes to Kansas”

Driving in to Wichita

the bard began dictating the lines
that were to become the 18-page poem which he finished on February 14.

“Thy sins are forgiven, Wichita!
    Thy lonesomeness annulled, O Kansas dear!
    as the western Twang prophesied
    thru banjo, when lone cowboy walked the railroad track
    past an empty station toward the sun
    sinking giant-bulbed orange down the box canyon–
Music strung over his back
    and empty handed singing on this planet earth
    I’m a lonely Dog, O Mother!
Come, Nebraska, sing & dance with me–
    Come lovers of Lincoln and Omaha
    hear my soft voice at last....”

A post-acid post-Whitman song of a great nation
published in the Village Voice
    on April 28
    a further revelation
    of his stature
    as an American bard

   •

Allen found time to write the liner notes
for the second Fugs record
    which we recorded that spring.

   •

April 17, Gordon Liddy, later
    sent to jail for his role
    in Nixon’s dirty tricks team,
led a raid by Dutchess County police
on Tim Leary’s huge 2,500-acre estate in Millbrook
    loaned to him by Billy Hitchcock
29 people were there and searched,
    and all 64 rooms of the mansion searched
but no grass was found.

Liddy was sure he had found something
    ascribable to Leary
    but it turned out to be peat moss
Allen helped organize a full-page ad in The New York Times to help Mr. Leary

In June Allen testified in D.C. against making LSD illegal to no avail.

The summer of ’66 saw the death of the brilliant poet Frank O’Hara struck down by a dune taxi on Fire Island July 24

Allen wrote his “City Midnight Junk Strains” for Frank O’Hara (p. 457 Collected Poems)

The next day Bob Dylan had his motorcycle accident in Bearsville an injured neck and other bruisings

Three weeks later Allen visited Dylan bringing him some books, Rimbaud, Blake, Dickinson, Shelley.

The fall of ’66 loomed like the frenetic highway of the same name hundreds of interviews, readings, letters, journal entries, skin-slurps, hookahs, plane trips, arguments & kisses

He wrote “A Vow” on October 11 a fine example of what could be called the Scold Poem. Like the great Norman Thomas, the bard was sometimes content merely to scold—singing his vision of calming down the Greed Machine (p. 460, Collected Poems)

Then came the great year of Flower Power, 1967

**Part XIV**

The Year of Flowers
Gary Snyder began the Human Be-In on January 14 in the Golden Gate Park polo field with a riff on a conch shell

The formal name for the event was “Gathering of the Tribes for a Human Be-In”

The name of course came from the Sit-Ins in the South to integrate lunch counters, say, at Woolworth’s & later the popular Teach-ins against the war in Vietnam

Now it was Be-In and this one event set the cultural tone of the year along with the rhymed doublet: Flower Power

There were 20,000 there to surge in primary-color splendor with the fine Pacific psyche-light at last outshining the Puritanical searchlight from Plymouth Rock

as the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Jerry Rubin, Gary Snyder, Tim Leary, Lenore Kandel, Ginsberg & others made words and music.

All across America that spring there were Be-ins, Smoke-ins, Love-ins, Tipi-ins and In-ins

Ginsberg was everywhere, like a bardic blur chanting his nation

& cling-clinging his finger cymbals.
On February 12, for instance, a huge celebration in Toronto called Perception '67 with Marshall McLuhan, The Fugs, Paul Krassner

In May in Cleveland, a benefit for the ultraharassed young poet named d. a. levy one of America’s great unsung.

Ken Kesey had purchased a farm near Eugene, Or & 'Zap visited –Neal Cassady and the Merry Pranksters were there

May 25, they took the great psychedelic tour bus called Further on the road to a gig at Western State College in Oregon with the Jefferson Airplane

It was the last time Ginzap would see great pal Neal Cassady.

JUNE 27

The year before after a Fugs concert the police had invaded Peace Eye Bookstore & seized many issues of Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts

I was arrested; the ACLU took my case and after a trial before 3 New York judges I was found not guilty

So I threw a victory party at Peace Eye June 27 1967

The great bard was there The place was totally packed on a hot summer night when some neighborhood kids
began to toss firecrackers through the open door

We went outside to cool them out
A.G. came too

One of them was brandishing
a wide-tipped hunting arrow
It was an emblem of Allen
as he sank to his knees on the sidewalk
in front of the wide-eyed youth
and made his hands in the shape of a mudra

The young man raised his arm back
as if to hurl it into the bard’s neck

but Allen’s calm words
cause him to put it down
to his side

–another emblem of conduct by a great poet

On July 5 ‘Zap flew to Italy
for the Spoleto Festival, where he met Ezra Pound
and tried to get Lb to abandon his famous multi-year silence
though all he would do was shake Allen’s hand
then it was off to London
& a party for ‘Zap at James McNeill Whistler’s house
Allen was always thrilled when the bacchants of rock & roll
allowed him to hang with them
as when he sat in the recording booth
during the Rolling Stones’ recording of “We Love You”
with Lennon and McCartney doing harmony

July 20
Allen gave a talk “Consciousness and Practical Action”
at the Dialectics of Liberation Conference in London

at which, also, Gregory Bateson gave a seminar
“Ecological Destruction by Technology”
which astounded the American bard–
Bateson had predicted Global Warming decades
before it came to public parlance.
Allen took his father Louis and stepmother Edith on what they call a “whirlwind” tour of Europe, then after his parents had returned to the States,

July 28 driving to Wales
he stopped for a visit to Wordsworth’s Tintern Abbey ruins
& then once in Wales
    a poem writ on acid, one of his better,
called “Wales Visitation”

That summer, while Allen was in Europe
his mate Peter Orlovsky was in Bellevue
    after too much amphetamine

Peter was spotted in those months cleaning
the cobbles of Avenue C with a toothbrush

I remember he sold me his Bellevue pajamas
for $6 one day in the park after he escaped
    I wanted to wear them at Fugs shows

On September 23 drove to Sant Ambrogio to have lunch with
    Olga Rudge & Ezra Pound

He brought along his harmonium
    sang Lb the Prajnaparamita sutra–
a few weeks later, in mid October
he visited Pound again at his winter home in Venice
played “Eleanor Rigby” and “Yellow Submarine”
and Dylan’s
“Gates of Eden” & “Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands”

One evening he spoke at length with Pound
    after walking around Venice checking out
    locations mentioned in the Cantos

Pound spoke finally of himself & his troubles–
“But the worst mistake I made was the stupid suburban prejudice of anti-Semitism. All along, that spoiled everything.”
October 21 was the day of the
Exorcism of the Pentagon in D.C.
& Allen visited again with Pound
& his longtime companion Olga Rudge

helping the grand old man of meter
try to escape his past

*

Ginsberg was one of the greatest
givers in the History of Verse

Charles Rothschild, one of the managers of the Fugs
began to help Allen get properly paid for his readings
Allen wanted
what other famous writers obtained
for bardic

He’d formed a non-profit corporation
The Committee on Poetry
(I was vice-president for a few years)

to create a sense of order
in the thousands upon thousands upon thousands
that Ginzap gave away to help others.
In ’67, the Year of Love
he gave away around $20k

$4,000 to the filmmaker Jack Smith, $1,500 each to
beat bro’s Corso and Huncke
the West Coast communard Irwin Rosenthal, $2,500

$1,500 to the great artist/scholar/filmmaker Harry Smith
$400 to Ken Kesey, and money to the filmmaker Barbara Rubin,
to the bards Ray Bremser, Diane di Prima, Amiri Baraka,
Charles Plymell, et alia bardifica

He paid the Chelsea Hotel bill for the English poet Basil Bunting
when Bunting came to NYC
to read at the Gugg

He bought a new harmonium for Bhaktivedanta
& four Vedic chanting records for Ezra Pound
Not all were so friendly
The Diggers called a meeting that fall
at the Glide Church in S.F.
on the question of money

Digger Emmett Grogan had a penchant for shriek-fit
and plied it then.

The Diggers, he said,
wanted “all the bands, stores, and people in this whole
fucking hippie scene—go nonprofit. That means
if you’re a store you take that money you make
& share it with the people who make
your beads and sandals.”

Ginsberg was in the room, and suggested people
turn themselves into foundations as he had done
in forming the Committee on Poetry

Then he spoke directly to Grogan:

“What does a guy like me do who’s making some bread
and decides he wants to buy a little piece of land?
I just bought some groovy Committee on Poetry land....
(He’d purchased some land in Nevada City, California
with Gary Snyder and Richard Baker)

and like now I think I’d like
a little of something for myself.
Just for myself.”

Grogan yelled back, “Let’s cut the money
Say I make beads & you make sandals
we’ll trade them

Ginzap: “What do you want me to do, carry my poems around
and trade them?”

•

That fall, the murder of Ché in Bolivia
& Allen’s fine poem in response
“Elegy Che Guevara” (Venice, November ’67
p. 484, Collected Poems)
beginning with the startling image
  shown to the world
  of Guevara’s face in death
  almost seeming to smile.

“One radiant face driven mad with a rifle”
  he wrote
  “Confronting the electric networks”

P a r t  X V

The great bard Allen Ginsberg
kept his famous shoulder to the wheel
  in the ghastly year known as ’68

In February
  Ferlinghetti replied
  he loved Allen’s next book of verse
  Planet News
  especially the beautiful poem from ’67
  called “Wales Visitation”

February was also the month
his friend and onetime lover Neal Cassady passed away
Cassady had gone to a wedding in
  San Miguel de Allende
  He'd left his bag at a railroad station
  a few miles away
and after the party
  drunk and high
  he died on the tracks
  walking back

He was the first of the beatnik hexad
to pass.

His “Elegy for Neal Cassady”
laid down beautifully the grief
  of someone who’d lost a soul buddy
with memories of discourse
  Spirit to Spirit
  as in the lines,
  “I could talk to you forever,
Late in February Allen (and the Fugs) performed in Appleton, Wisconsin where Senator Joseph McCarthy is buried

We performed an exorcism that enraged the right.
Right wing radio man Paul Harvey growled enormously about it on his show

but we summoned his soul --the Fugs, Ginzap, and about 50 locals--

with Allen commenting on the Great Redbaiter's homophobia but we were respectful

Allen recited a Hebrew prayer, and an invocation to Shiva and we recited the Prajnaparamita Sutra then sang “My Country ’Tis of Thee”

then a few minutes of Hare Krishna after which I chanted the final words of Plato’s Republic in Greek

people left friendly items on and around the stone

then we got the hell out of there

THE FARM

Huge stacks of mail and the endless ring ring of the phone helped make the bard want to get to silence
& he asked filmmaker Barbara Rubin
to look for a place in the country.

A big factor in wanting a country place
was to help get Peter Orlovsky off methedrine
    His condition had gotten more serious than
toothbrushing the cobbles of Avenue C
    in a meth-addled thirst for cleanliness.

Peter, of course, was a poet of stature. I often think of
his graceful lines in Don Allen’s New American Poetry:
    “...on a hill a butterfly
makes a cup that I drink from, walking over a bridge
of flowers.”

Allen and Barbara Rubin had been occasional lovers
He made it with women more often
    than commonly known
& she apparently had a passion to marry the bard
a passion she shared with but a few of her friends

She looked around Sharon Springs and Cherry Valley
west of Albany,
    near Jewish summer resorts
She was increasingly drawn to orthodox Judaism
    which may have led her where to search

She found an old farm outside Cherry Valley
surrounded by state forest
    90 acres, run down, no electricity

    Allen bought it
    & he and Barbara went to the farm mid-March ’68

In addition to helping Peter,
who came to the farm with his oft-hospitalized brother Julius
Ginsberg also had in mind getting Kerouac up there
to dry out his liver

Though Barbara Rubin soon drifted away from her dreams
    of marriage with the bard
the Farm remained a factor, a haven for poets & seekers
for the rest of A.G.’s life
    through the 1990s
MAY ’68

one of his more controversial poems
“Please Master”
the 1st bardic evidence
of his interest in what they call
“rough trade”

Allen agreed to come to Chicago in August
as part of a Festival of Life

It was intended to be a rock & roll antiwar peace party

but the year had other intentions
It was a year of pings
–the pings of bullets

Martin King in April– ping!
Robert Kennedy in June– ping! ping!

The great uprisings of students in Paris
and Columbia University
& the biggest antiwar movement
since just before World War I

So that by the time of the Chicago Democratic Convention
there were soldiers everywhere
and a thuglike convention
where dissent was suppressed, as we shall see.

Allen had taught many of us the mantras
he’d brought back with him from India

and just before the Democratic Convention
he and I issued a statement
published in the underground press
calling for those who came to Chicago
Allen had an assignment (and press pass) to cover the convention for Esquire Magazine (along with Terry Southern, William Burroughs and Jean Genet, who sneaked into Chicago from Montreal)

Allen’s French was very good and I was amazed how well he translated for Genet

The city had refused to issue permits for participants in the Festival of Life to camp out in Lincoln Park

where each night at 11 p.m., the police would billyclub and teargas everyone out of the park

Allen sang OM for hours, and sometimes I joined in

MONDAY, AUGUST 26

Barricades were built in Lincoln Park to defend the right to sleep there at 12:30 a.m. the police clubbed and attacked the barricades

Tonight they marched behind a street sweeper truck whose water tanks had been converted to hold tear gas!

(These ghastly police state devices maybe gifts from Garden Plot or the CIA Chaos program?)

To me this was the last mote of proof in 1968 that the Nation was lost

Ginsberg said "I got gassed chanting AUM
with a hundred youthful voices
under the trees...

The Daily Mayor has written a
bloody vulgar script for American Children.

•

GINSBERG SHOWS ABILITY AS HALFBACK DURING TEARGAS ATTACK

We left the park to return to the Hotel Lincoln
(next to Lincoln Park, where we were staying)
but there were snout-nozzled cops there
lobbying tear-gas grenades
which plomfled near our feet.
We crouched down and dashed through
the hostile molecules
heads low, knees high
as if we were halfbacks
on a high school football team
toward the lobby.

TUESDAY AUGUST 27

At dawn on the 27th
Ginsberg came back to the park
singing various mantras
for several hours
till his voice became hoarse and whispery.

Allen was the only bard in the history of Western Civilization
to have over-ommed,
that is, he'd uttered the seed syllable “Om” so many hours
trying to quell the violence
he peace-pained his voice
and was omming, at the end,
like Froggie the Gremlin.

That night the protesters threw a
60th Unbirthday Party for Lyndon Johnson
at the packed Chicago Coliseum
Six thousand people were there
While Phil Ochs sang “I Ain't Marchin’ Anymore”
a guy burned his draft card
and then in one amazing sequence of seconds
there was a sudden poof-up of
maybe a hundred blazing draft cards
pointillistically patterning
the Coliseum audience.

Ginsberg's voice had not yet returned
from his many hours
of chanting
to quell the violence
so he passed me a note to read
to the audience:

“Introduce me as Prague King of May – Ed– in my turn,
you explain I lost my voice chanting Aum in park – so please
you read my piece – then I’ll do 3 Minutes of Silence Mind
consciousness & belly breathing”

•

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 28

That afternoon
Daley had allowed
a single rally at the bandshell
in Grant Park
sponsored by the Mobilization–
From 10 to 15,000 showed up

About 4:30
Dave Dellinger addressed the crowd
through a portable bull horn
to announce a nonviolent march to the Democratic Convention.
4 1/2 miles
from Grant Park

Grant Park is connected to downtown via a series of bridges
across railroad tracks to the west
Lines of soldiers prevented the march from leaving
over any of the bridges
and many of us sat down in front of the troops while
U.S. Army helicopters circled overhead

It was very scary
There were fixed bayonets
& jeeps with barbed wire
hippie-sweeping screens
plus the whoppa whoppa
of helicopters
that mixed with the songs Phil Ochs
sang to calm us:

"We're the cops of the world, boys,
We're the cops of the world...."
& then his song,
"Outside of a Small Circle of Friends."

singing through the bullhorn
someone was holding to his face.

Then Allen Ginsberg,
still hoarse from singing seed syllables
in the rings of violence
charted "The Grey Monk" of William Blake
through the bull horn

All of us who were sitting and waiting
were chatty and restless
yet by the time he chanted (from memory)
the final verses of the wounded Gray Monk
All grew silent
except the ghastly helicopters:

"Thy Father drew his sword in the North,
With his thousands strong he marched forth;
Thy Brother has arm'd himself in Steel
To avenge the wrongs thy Children feel.

"But vain the Sword & vain the Bow,
They never can work War's overthrow.
The Hermit's Prayer & the Widow's tear
Alone can free the World from fear.

For a Tear is an Intellectual Thing,
And a Sigh is the Sword of an Angel King,
And the bitter groan of the Martyr's woe
Is an Arrow from the Almighty's Bow.

The hand of Vengeance found the Bed
To which the Purple Tyrant Fled;
The iron hand crush'd the Tyrant's head
And became a Tyrant in his stead."

A few of us had pushed fresh daisies
into the rifle barrels at the Pentagon
just 10 months ago
and now, even though
    I again had fresh white flowers
I knew this was a different type of event
    and that I would likely have been
bayonetted and shot
pushing petal in metal

Finally, after hours of negotiations,
the protesters found a way
    of getting out of Grant Park
and they surged
    across a bridge
    & gathered in front of the Hilton
        on Michigan Avenue at Balbo

In the lobby where the Democrats
prepared to go to the convention hall
    four miles away
soldiers with helmets & guns
    marched past the plush divans
        & the potted trees

Then, without warning, a throng of police charged the
demonstrators at 7:56
    smashing, macing, beating
apparently to clear the avenue

Jeeps with machine guns mounted to them
arrived at the Hilton

"Wahoo! Wahoo!"
    like the bomb riding cowboy
    at the end of Dr. Strangelove
shouted an officer on a three wheeled motorcycle
as he mashed into the crowd

Thus began hours of bloodshed
In the streets outside the Hilton and Convention Center
    and it was there
    in the surgery-room glare of the television lights–
that thousands took up the chant
 "The whole world is watching
 the whole world is watching....."

McCarthy volunteers set up
a first aid station on the Hilton's 15th floor
 at his suite
They gave up their passes
 to get the injured up to the rooms

Humphrey was on the 25th floor--
 An aide opened a window and complained
 of tear gas

On the nominating floor four miles from the Hilton
CBS-TV's Dan Rather gave a live report,
 "A security man just slugged me in the stomach,"
 to which Walter Cronkite replied,
 "I think
 we've got a
 bunch of thugs here,
 Dan."

Inside the convention that horrible night
Senator George McGovern was a last minute peace candidate
after McCarthy refused to lead a floor fight
 against Humphrey

Senator Abraham Ribicoff was giving his nominating speech:
 "With George McGovern," said Ribicoff, "we wouldn't have Gestapo tactics
 on the streets of Chicago."

Mayor Richard Daley, his face reddened with malevolence,
shouted, “Fuck you, you Jew son of a bitch!
 You lousy motherfucker, go home!”

Daley was seated in the front
Ribicoff looked down at Red Face, and said
 "How hard it is to hear the truth."

Allen Ginsberg leaped to his feet in the balcony
and began shouting "OMMMMM" for about five minutes
Meanwhile, outside
 in the television lights
the teargassed, terrified and angry crowd
continued its own version of ommmmmm, chanting, "The Whole World is Watching! The Whole World is Watching!"

(This section adapted from 1968, a History in Verse)

**Part XVI**

After the ghastly Democratic convention in August ’68 in Chi

the great bard Allen Ginsberg condensed his feelings in an interview with Playboy:

Chicago had no government, he said, “It’s just anarchy maintained by pistol. Inside the convention hall it was rigged like an old Mussolini strong-arm scene– police and party hacks everywhere illegally, delegates shoved around and kidnapped, telephone lines cut.”

He spent the rest of the year at his farm in Cherry Valley, NY (not far from Cooperstown)

They were good months. There was plenty of organic produce, no electricity, and he built a meditation room in the attic.

Over the years he attracted an entire generation of poets and the creative to the Cherry Valley area– so much allure there was in his soul-mind.

His book Planet News came out from City Lights that fall

He bought a pump organ & spent the Cherry Valley winter (& wow does it get cold up there!) writing melodies to William Blake

Readers will recall Ginzap’s ’48 auditory “Vision” of
Blake chanting “Ah, Sunflower, Weary of Time”
& “The Sick Rose”
in a tenement in Harlem
spiritual experiences
that profoundly affected his verse.

He turned to the “prophetic simplicity”
of Blake’s songs
after the “Police State shock despair” of Chicago.

The fine keyboard man Lee Crabtree,
who had been in the Fugs
visited the farm and showed Allen
how to transcribe his melodies.

Once that fall Ginzap drove to Woodstock
where he sang his version of Blake’s “Grey Monk”
with members of the Band
at Big Pink.

•

CRACKDOWN ON UNDERGROUND PRESS

Ginsberg had begun his multi-decade investigations
into the secret police
There was an extensive network of what they called
Underground Newspapers
all over the States–

Around October of ’68
a CIA Chaos (Civilian Disruption) Agent
(Chaos was a disruption program against the
anti-war movement)
whacked out a memo which noted
“the apparent freedom and ease in which filth,
slanderous and libelous statements
and what appear to be almost treasonous
anti-establishment propaganda
is allowed to circulate”
in underground papers.

The CIA smut-sleuth then suggested a strategy for silencing
the underground:
“Eight out of ten,” he wrote, “would fail if a few phonograph record companies stopped advertising in them.”

The CIA of course denies it directly carried out the concept of interdicting the record company moolah stream–

Instead the FBI did it. In January of ’69 the San Francisco office of the Bureau wrote to headquarters that Columbia Records by advertising in the Underground “appears to be giving active aid and comfort to enemies of the United States.”

The memo suggested the FBI persuade Columbia Records to stop advertising in the underground press.

It worked. By the end of the next year many record company ads had been pulled & a number of undergrounders had folded

Ginsberg sniffed this crackdown out and spent years researching it finally supervising a book, based on his research, for the PEN American Center called The Campaign Against the Underground Press.

MARCH 12, 1969

Ginsberg (and Kerouac too) kept everything doodles on napkins drafts of poems, bus tickets, you name it

On March 12, Allen began shipping the many boxes of his papers from his dad’s attic in Paterson to the Special Collections department
Allen’s melodies to Blake revealed another of his Muse skills: he was good at shaping melodies–

The Fugs had done some recording at Apostolic Studios at 39 East 10th with an engineer named David Baker

We liked what he did and so when Allen Ginsberg wanted to record his settings of William Blake I recommended Apostolic

The summer of ’69 when Allen recorded there– he had some fine musicians to help–

Julius Watkins, who had played with the Thelonius Monk Quintet, on French horn, Elvin Jones played drums on some of it Charles Mingus recommended Herman Wright on bass Don Cherry breathed some hot trumpet & percussion onto the oxide-dappled tape.

Allen recorded 19 Blake tunes that June & July which were released, as they say, by MGM Records in 1970

•

In October of ’69 Allen was just about to leave for a poetry tour beginning with Yale & then a teach-in about Vietnam at Columbia U

He was up at the farm
Gregory Corso had come for a visit

It was the night of October 21
the phone rang
Gregory answered,
it was the writer Al Aronowitz

He turned to Ginsberg–
“Al! Jack died.”

Early the next morning
Ginsberg and Corso walked through the early snow
to the woods up the hill
& carved Jack’s name in a tree

Part XVII

Kerouac was watching The Galloping Gourmet
eating some tuna & sipping whiskey
in his living room
jotting in a notepad
when the blood burbled up his throat.
He never regained consciousness

Allen wrote a beautiful poem, “Memory Gardens” after Jack’s funeral
with the lines
“I threw a kissed handful of damp earth
down on the stone lid
& sighed
looking in Creeley’s one eye,
Peter sweet holding a flower...”

& ending with:

“Well, while I’m here I’ll do the work–
and what’s the Work?
To ease the pain of living.
Everything else, drunken
The fall of ’69 saw John and Yoko’s Bed-In for Peace in Canada. Allen was mentioned in “Give Peace a Chance” so he called Lennon during the Bed-In to give good wishes.

In early December the ’Zap testified at the ghastly Chicago Conspiracy Trial. It was a rough time. Allen was subjected to what William Kunstler depicted as “a refined form of fag baiting” by sex-&-drug obsessed prosecutors. But it was probably the first & only time mantras & the Seed Syllable Om were ever sung in a Federal trial plus Allen chanted from memory much of “Howl.”

Allen’s poetry was becoming ever more imaged with environmental issues beginning in 1970 when he was in Philadelphia for the first Earth Day April 22 walking with Senator Ed Muskie & thousands on a three mile walk from the art museum to a park. Then 12 days later the hideous shootings on a campus hill at Kent State University –the subject of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young’s “Four Dead in Ohio.”
Allen was investigating
the involvement of US agents & agencies
in the drug business
& during a meeting with former Attorney General
Ramsey Clark
A.G. learned about the FBI’s sleazy campaign
against Martin Luther King

He was still fascinated by Whitman’s concept
of the Fall of the nation
& was writing the verse that was to become
The Fall of America
poems of these states
1965-1971

Allen stayed at his Cherry Valley farm for
much of 1970
It was run as a commune

with a busy moil of guests & residents
Ray & Bonnie Bremser & 3 year old child,
Peter Orlovsky & his good friend Denise Mercedes,
Gregory Corso,
& oodles of visitors such as Robert Creeley
Ann Charters, Carl Solomon, Herbert Huncke

a big thatch of the Best Minds crowd

THE MARCH ’71 HELMS BET

As we have noted, Allen began researching
the drug trade
& asking thousands of questions
wherever he went

Being a Jack the Clipper, Ginzap amassed
hundreds of clippings and articles on the subject
(a bunch of which he sent me in 1970)

It was inspired by the 1965 attempted set-up of
him by Federal narcs, & by the continued troubles
two consecutive generations were facing (Huncke,
Corso, Burroughs
& then the Ken Kesey/flower child generation)
Allen “developed information,” as they say, that the CIA was involved in drug distribution & that a CIA-operated air base at Long Cheng was being used as a dope depot for opium-running.

Then, on March 4, 1971 he read with his father Louis at the Corcoran Gallery in DC.

At a reception beforehand Ginsberg met the head of the Central Intelligence Agency Richard Helms.

Many would have fawned, bowed & quailed at a meeting with the great secret policeman who had a fascination, it later was learned, with CIA mind control experiments robowashing and programmed deeds.

but Ginsberg was not afraid and challenged Mr. Helms about CIA involvement in the drug trade.

Helms denied it, of course, and then they made a bet.

If Allen was right about CIA/drugs then Helms would meditate an hour a day for the rest of his life.

If Allen was wrong, he’d give Mr. Helms his bronze dorje.

The liberal D.C. establishment was a bit miffed & horrified at the great bard’s exchange with the spymaster but it was another illuminating look into his soul–

Seven years later C.L. Sulzberger of The New York Times wrote the ’Zap a letter:
“Dear Allen,

I fear I owe you an apology. I have been reading a succession of pieces about CIA involvement in the dope trade in South East Asia and I remember when you first suggested I look into this I thought you were full of beans. Indeed you were right and I acknowledge the fact plus sending my best personal wishes.

Cy Sulzberger”

(4-11-78)

As far as I know, Allen never attempted
to get Mr. Helms to start
a daily meditation practice

**Part XVIII**

We left the tale of the great bard Allen Ginsberg
in March of 1971
when he made a bet with the spymaster Richard Helms
in D.C.

that the CIA had been involved
in drug trafficking
in Southeast Asia

Pshaw! Pshaw! sputtered the wry spy guy
but Ginsberg was correct
(and out of it came his marvelous tune, later,
the great “CIA Dope Calypso”)

The Seventies had begun
& the Bard was as famous as ever
on his 45th birthday June 3

By ’71’s end he’d written 575 pages of verse
he later placed in his Collected Poems

The spring of 1971 he spent in California
where, in May, he met Chögyam Trungpa

the founder of the first Tibetan Buddhist center in the USA
Tail of the Tiger, located in Vermont

(they’d met very briefly before, in India)
Trungpa urged Allen to “make up your own poems on the spot. Don’t you trust your own mind?”

The next night, at a benefit, the ’Zap unlocked the lid of his little Indian harmonium and spontan’d forth with a 25 minute piece called “How sweet it is to be born here in America.”

Thus had begun in verse what Kerouac had long ago urged,

bebop level spontaneity grounded in Mind

(I know from first hand experience A.G.’s genius at spontaneous verse— in the spring of 1966 when the Fugs were recording their second album one night we all made up spontaneous verses at a recording studio up by Lincoln Center I have it on tape— he was very very adroit at the instant laying down of interesting lines)

June 30 Allen set Blake’s “Tyger Tyger Burning Bright” to music while that summer helped put together a petition to the Swiss gov’t to grant political asylum to Timothy Leary on the lam after escaping from jail convicted for just a tiny amount of grass

The petition of 25 writers included Kenneth Rexroth, Anaïs Nin, Ferlinghetti, Kesey, Laura Huxley, Michael McClure and others

UNKNOWN BENEFACTOR

Out of the U.S. mail blue an “unknown benefactor” sent Ginsberg a round-trip ticket to India the summer o’ 71

He left in September
he’d not been there for 9 years
and was horrified
at the ghastly poverty & starvation
he viewed in refugee camps
long lines, not enough food to be given

& huge throngs of people on Jessore Road
 ‘tween Bangladesh & Calcutta
failing & falling & filling
the fire-fumed ghats
He wrote a long poem, “September on Jessore Road”
in which he chant-sang against
the malice-moiled powerful of the world
more concerned with napalm
than relief of suffering

It’s the final work in his book
The Fall of America
poems of these states
1965-1971

October 9, 1971
was John Lennon’s 31st birthday
& he and Yoko Ono were in Syracuse, NY.

The day before the great album
Imagine
had been released

Allen visited them at their hotel room that night
for a party
Jonas Mekas filmed it
Allen on harmonium & finger cymbals, Lennon on guitar
Phil Spector & Klaus Voorman also on guit’s
doing the kind of thing so easily done
in those days
a jam session consisting of
mantras, Blake’s “Nurse’s Song,”
and then a medley of Lennon/Beatles
including “Yellow Submarine”
& “Give Peace a Chance.”

That fall also Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky read at NYU’s
Allen, still surging with Trungpa's urging
to go Spontaneous
created a poem on the spot
that lasted an hour, titled
“Why write poetry down on paper
when you have to cut down trees to make poetry books”

Unknown to the Bard,
Bob Dylan & David Amram
were standing in the back of the hall,
digging the spont'-riffs

Dylan and Amram
came over to Ginsberg's pad later that night
where they jammed
with Amram on his famous French horn,
Dylan on a Guild
& the 'Zap on harmonium

(Dylan gave him some chord lessons
so that Ginsberg discovered he
could improvise in a 12–bar blues format
–Lightbulb!)

THE RECORD PLANT SESSIONS

This lead to some memorable recording sessions
beginning on November 9, '71

at the Record Plant in NYC

Dylan brought a pal from Woodstock with him
the singer/guitarist Happy Traum.
Also on the sessions were Jon Sholle, David Amram, Ginsberg,
and a number of poets
including Gregory Corso, the Russian bard
Andrei Voznesenky, and others

The filmmaker Barbara Rubin was on hand
and I was there too
my book on the Manson group, The Family, had just
I remember that someone was playing on a milk crate with wires stretched across it like a psychedelic psaltery.

There was a second session November 17
Allen improvised an early version of
    “CIA Dope Calypso”
with Dylan on guitar

There were other tunes, including “Going to San Diego,” an anthem urging
  everybody to go to San Diego
  and protest Richard Nixon
(after Kent State & the secret bombing of Cambodia)
–San Diego was at that time the site of the Republican Convention
  though later it was moved to Miami Beach

They also recorded Allen’s “September on Jessore Road”
which he was just putting in final form
  in these temporary moments
  in the quick flow of the Seventies

**Part XIX**

The poet, publisher & counterculture leader John Sinclair had been set up for a miniscule pot bust by an undercover agent in Michigan
  and sentenced to “10 years for 2 joints”
It was a very very very unjust sentence.

By late 1971, John had been caged in maximum security
  for a couple of years
and was a burning cause in the counterculture.

After I’d finished my book on the Manson group
I wrote a long investigative poem called
    “The Entrapment of John Sinclair”
  tracing the Sinclair set-up
which John Lennon read when it was published
  in the Los Angeles Free Press.

Lennon decided to do a concert in support of John Sinclair
They booked Crisler Arena in Ann Arbor
and tickets sold out in a couple of hours.

It was an eery police state time in America–
The entire weight of Attorney General John Mitchell’s
apparatus was about to focus on Lennon
& sometimes our phones clicked and popped
like a performance poet
doing throat-boings

Miriam and I were living a couple of blocks from Lennon & Yoko Ono
in the West Village
and somehow our phone lines got crossed

I kept hearing this English chap trying to make calls
while I was on the phone
Finally I realized who it was,
It was Lennon!
so I complained to the phone company
who said there was a shortage of lines
which caused the screw-up

(which I found not quite believable)

The concert for John Sinclair occurred on a chilly December 10th
Ginzap began the night by singing mantrams
for about a half hour
and performed one of his spontaneous poems.
Stevie Wonder had just come out with “Superstition” and
overwhelmed the packed crowd with his
rendition
The great Phil Ochs was there; I read a poem, Bob Seger performed
Jerry Rubin spoke, & others including Dave Dellinger & Rennie Davis

Phil told me that Lennon had called him to sing a song
he’d written about Sinclair,
He imitated Lennon’s voice doing the opening lines
“IT ain’t fair, John Sinclair
Ten for 2 for smoking air”

The crowd was stunned to silence when John Sinclair spoke to
the 20,000 from a phone at Marquette Prison.

There was a party afterwards,
and the last thing that happened
was Allen– it was almost dawn–
fingering chords on his harmonium &
singing to a very sleepy Lennon & Yoko
his long lament about suffering in India
“September on Jessore Road.”

Lennon had told us that he was willing to do concerts
in city after city
till the counterculture hero was set free.

Fifty-five hours after Lennon and Yoko’s performance
they let John Sinclair out of prison.

The Republicans had intended at that time to hold their
convention in San Diego
to renominate the Nix man
& Lennon had agreed to participate
in big demonstrations
in San Diego
I think it was then
that the INS, the FBI, the U.S. Senate even
took fierce action to toss Lennon out of the country.

1972

Early ’72
saw a staged version
in a theater in Brooklyn
of the great poem “Kaddish”
which ran for a month

Allen then left for a tour of Australia with Lawrence Ferlinghetti
I remember he returned with tales of
the Aborigines and their concept of
“Universal Dream Time”

In May
in Boulder, Colorado
Allen took Buddhist refuge vows
He’d decided to place himself in the lineage of
Chögyam Trungpa,
the Tibetan Buddhist teacher
whom he had met in ’71

He loved Trungpa much in the
way he’d loved Jack Kerouac
that is, one who called him to account at just about every point yet remained a friend

When Ginsberg was visiting Gary Snyder in Nevada City, California he decided to call presidential advisor Henry Kissinger at the White House

He got through! Allen wanted the future Secretary of State to get together with peace movement leaders such as Dave Dellinger to forge a dialogue.

Apparently Eugene McCarthy offered to host such a meeting and Allen tried to set it up, but, you know, a bard can get through to someone like Kissinger once, but not twice.

I recall how Allen told me he had these dreams about Kissinger which caused such anger that he was grinding his teeth down as he slept!

In June there was a weird break-in at the Democratic offices at the Watergate Hotel complex in D.C. Some CIA-connected guys, plus a right wing Cuban, were arrested and thus the Fates were about to unravel what Nixon was trying to weave

Ginsberg went to Miami with Peter Orlovksy to commit civil disobedience at the Republican Convention (moved there from San Diego)
He had prepared an ambitious collection of verse,  
The Fall of America (Poems 1965-1971)  
one of his finest books  
& it was about to be published in late '72  
to win him the National Book Award

1973

Early in the year the 'Zap  
fell on ice at his Cherry Valley farm  
and broke his leg. A few weeks later, April 19-21  
Miriam, daughter Deirdre (then 8), and I  
visited A.G. at the farm

As we wended our way o'er very rural road-ruts  
in our Land Rover  
I spotted A.G. sitting in a reclining aluminum chair  
in bibbed overalls and leg-cast  
by the driveway

He was writing some short poems he called  
“Annotations to Amitendranath Tagore’s Sung Poetry.”

Just as we arrived he jotted:

“Right leg broken, can’t walk around  
visit the fishpond to touch the cold water,  
tramp through willows to the lonely meadow across the brook–  
here comes a metal landrover, brakes creaking hello.”

He read it to us, hot from his bard-eye.  
We spent a couple of days there.  
Part of the fun was going with Allen to a farm auction  
We went rockhounding in nearby road cuts  
for Devonian fossils &  
Miriam & Allen cooked a groovy stir-tossed dinner  
of asparagus/Chinese mushrooms/onion chunks/ginger/oil  
in a huge iron frying pan  
a repast that A.G. had learned from Gary Snyder

On Easter afternoon  
we drove the pain-legged bard back down to  
his apartment in the Lower East Side  
with his cast arest on a round-topped trunk  
we’d bought at the auction
When Miriam, I and Deirdre
had visited the great bard Allen Ginsberg
we’d found him in an introspective mood
   after breaking his leg on the ice at his
farm in Cherry Valley

He did seem more subdued
   & he was in pain

He had just been inducted, with Kurt Vonnegut,
into the very prestigious
   American Academy of Arts & Letters

It was the months of the Watergate mess
and it slowly was becoming apparent
   that Nixon might come to justice.

Because of John Lennon’s 1971 concert for John Sinclair
& his general antiwar stance
   the forces of Attorney General John Mitchell
tried to toss him out of the country
though he was living here legally

They reached back to a small pot bust in England
as an excuse

Lennon brought his energy & vast international clout
   (plus his big financial resources)
to organize an impressive defense

Allen did what he could to assist Lennon
and during that year he also worked his network
to defend Timothy Leary who had at long last
been seized by the U.S. in Afghanistan,
   after a long flight from
another miniscule pot bust
   that had ’shroomed
in police state stupidity
   into a big deal
It was also the year Abbie Hoffman was busted, charged with dealing & energy was poured forth to help him also.

Thriving in the chaos-moil, Allen went on a long tour of Europe still on crutches, leg in a cast

His new collection, The Fall of America Poems 1965-71 was getting the type of attention & praise that bards tremble to receive

THE CIA/KISSINGER OVERTHROW

Meanwhile, before he could be byebye’d Nixon, plus Henry Kissinger and the military-industrial-surrealists in their serial aggression organized a coup against the elected leftist gov’t in Chile

On September 11, CIA-backed military men attacked the presidential palace and killed the elected president of Chile Salvador Allende

It was a time of evil. When the great Pablo Neruda died a few days later the new right-wing nut government of Chile would not allow a public funeral

Ginsberg had been a friend of Neruda’s and mourned. He vowed to try to have Kissinger imprisoned if Nicanor Parra or any of his other Chilean friends should come to evil.

Another great poet died also around that time W. H. Auden on September 28 A.G. & Auden had not long ago read together in England It was adding up. It wasn’t so much Time’s Wingéd Chariot but the whack whack whack of the Scythe Man in the Time-Track
& the futility of it all
that pointed the bard toward
meditation & an actual religious practice.

He was about as famous as a bard can be
but it was a different fame than that gi’en poets
more belovéd by the people
such as, say, John Greenleaf Whittier
or Robert Frost

It was the fame of turbulence, of an acid-age Sappho,
or a Whitman without the 19th century constraints
of jail-risk & censorship

So, the great bard turned to
Vajrayana Buddhism
& the teachership of Chögyam Trungpa

Ginsberg took part in a 3-month retreat near
Jackson Hole, Wyoming in late 1973
He sat many hours a day
sorting through his rich
mind-river

& wrote a lot
including “Mind Breaths”
which would be the title verse
for his book of 1978

1974

Ginzap won the well-deserved National Book Award
for The Fall of America
Poems 1965-71

–with some fine poems,
including “Wichita Vortex Sutra”
& the poem about calming the Hell’s Angels in the fall of ’65
at Ken Kesey’s

& the elegies to Neal Cassady
& Ché Guevara
& Frank O’Hara
& I can’t not mention the poem
“Consulting I Ching Smoking Pot
Listening to the Fugs Sing Blake.”
It was about the only major literary award Allen received. He always hankered for more—
the Pulitzer and, say, the Nobel Prize, though he was just a tad too, uh, erotic for the long-sought phone call from Stockholm.

Once we were talking about the MacArthur Fellowships, and the 'Zap brought forth a kind of high-pitched, anguished, c’mon! tone to his voice:
“I want one of those!”

Meanwhile Chögyam Trungpa wanted to open a Buddhist poetry school in Boulder, Colorado & asked Allen, Anne Waldman, & others to help him.

It was the summer of Nixon’s famous farewell helicopter trip cleansing the White House & there was a mote of hope in the nation.

Allen & Anne Waldman became the cofounders of the school but what to name it? Anne came up with the Gertrude Stein School—probably in the long term a better name, though not without drawbacks but A.G. wanted a Kerouacian symbolism and Anne summoned what was to be: The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics which had its first summer session in ’74.

This was the same summer A.G., Peter Orlovksy & Orlovsky’s friend Denise Mercedes, worked on his cottage at Kittkidizze in the gold country.
In the spring of '75
Bob Dylan was back in New York
with a kind of '64-'65 hard edge
hanging out in Greenwich Village clubs

His album Blood on the Tracks
had been a big success.

After the summer he decided to go on the road
in a bus
with friends

Bass player Rob Stoner he charged with setting up a band.
And he invited Joan Baez, his
friend from the early '60s

The concept grew
to include security guys, advance workers
(who go in advance to every place where a
concert will happen
to set up hotels, meet with concert hall staff,
work the media
et alia multa)

D. had decided to make a movie
Sam Shepard was brought aboard
to write spontaneous scripts

At 4 a.m. one morn Dylan called Ginsberg
& invited him to join the
tour

Allen got Dylan’s permission
to invite William Burroughs
but W.B. wasn’t about to
get sucked into the
chaos/coke/chasm
of a mid-'70s rock & roll flow.
Part XXI

We left our tale of the great bard Allen Ginsberg in the fall of 1975 when he was invited by Bob Dylan to join the Rolling Thunder Review.

It was ten years since Dylan had given Allen the money to purchase a fancy Uher tape recorder with which he wrote his brilliant “Wichita Vortex Sutra”

Allen continued his awed perception of Mr. Dylan and was flattered to be asked aboard the Thunder.

It was organized in secrecy. Apparently not even the musicians knew what town they would play in till the day of the gig.

There were many musicians who performed in segments, and then all came onstage for the finale: “This Land is Your Land”

And so it began. On November 3, after a few concerts, Ginsberg, Dylan, Sam Shepard, Peter Orlovsky and the film crew visited Jack Kerouac’s grave in Lowell, Massachusetts where A.G. chanted from K.’s Mexico City Blues then he and Dylan sat cross-legged by the stone & composed a slow spontaneous blues exchanging stanzas for Kerouac “Zap on harmonium, Dylan on guitar.

The Rolling Thunder buses came to Madison Square Garden December 5, 1975 for a concert to raise money to help free Rubin “Hurricane” Carter.
The night before R. Thunder had performed in the prison where Carter was being held for a murder he did not commit

($100,000 was raised at the Garden and, after six more years, Carter was finally freed)

SNOWMASS

Meanwhile, an incident occurred at a Buddhist retreat in Snowmass, Colorado that caused quite a stir in literary circles.

The well known American poet W.S. Merwin & his partner, Dana Naone, were attending what is known as a Seminary

Merwin and Naone had spent the summer at Naropa in Boulder. He'd given a reading with John Ashbery a couple of lectures, and a workshop

That fall Chögyam Trungpa invited the couple to take part in the Seminary, which lasted three months, from early September till around Thanksgiving, 1975 at the Eldorado ski lodge, at Snowmass, about 14 miles northeast of Aspen.

There were from 125 to 130 in attendance. At the Seminary about a month was spent on Hinayana, a month on Mahayana and the final 30 days on Vajrayana

The schedule set two weeks of lectures & classes followed by two weeks of sitting & meditation

A Halloween Party

Trungpa decided to have the group hold a party on October 31 and that everyone should wear a costume

The party was held in what Merwin described as a “semi-dark ski-lodge dining room” of “boom-resort architecture.”

The place was packed
It had a kind of Vajra-Bacchic atmosphere
There were costumes of a wide variety
   including several men with
      wrathful deities painted in, on and around
      their genitals
   and another, wrapped Warholishly in aluminum foil
      as Enlightenment

Trungpa himself arrived
and not long afterwards his guards
began stripping some of the revelers.

W.S. Merwin and Dana Naone had danced for a while
   then returned to their room.

Trungpa asked for his “assistants” to go fetch them.
They didn’t want to come down.
Several hours of negotiations ensued.
Finally the guru ordered his guards
   to break and enter.
They smashed into the room
Merwin defended himself with a broken beer bottle
They were dragged before Mr. Trungpa
where there were angry words ’tween the poet, his partner
and the guru.
Several others spoke up. Trungpa punched one of them in the face
and his assistants, who had been given the
baleful name “vajraguards”
   stripped Merwin & Naone.

It was a famous literary event, in that
the telling of it percolated though
   literature-land for a number of years.

Ginsberg was not at the Seminary
but was caught in the moil of its repercussions
because the alcoholic Trungpa was his teacher.

In the world of the Beats, however,
   it was probably to be considered a minor event
and to be ascribed to the paths of Crazy Wisdom
though to many it was an moment of semifascist infringement.

1976
Early in the year
Allen had to leave the Rolling Thunder Review with
the very bad news that his 80 year old poet father,
Louis, had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

Always a family man, Allen rushed to his father’s aid
“Don’t ever grow old,” was Louis’ advice. Louis required
constant care, but it appeared as if he would survive for a while

so the bard could take a two week trip to Paris & Brussels.
In March he taught a course at Naropa
    on the poetry of Charles Reznikoff

Recording with John Hammond

In June the bard began recording with producer John Hammond
who’d done primal sessions for
    Bob D. and Bruce Springsteen

The ‘Zap
    unafraid and unhesitant as always
brought Hammond the improvised blues from the ’71 Dylan dates
    plus his settings of Blake
    & a copy of his book First Blues

Hammond produced 8 new songs in the June sessions
which, with the tunes from the Dylan sessions,
    were enough for an album.

Columbia, in its beneficence,
    coughed up an advance of $3,000
plus paid session rates for the musicians involved
(Arthur Russell, Jon Sholle, David Mansfield,
& a young man on recorder from Glassboro State College in
    NJ named
    Steve Taylor
who was to become very important in the bard’s
    experiments in music
    the next 21 years)

Allen was teaching at Naropa the next month–
    America’s Bicentennial
when July 8 a horrible call that Louis had passed away in his sleep.
On the plane to NY the bard unhooked the bellows
of his little rose-hued harmonium
and composed a blues in Louis' memory,
on “Father Death, I’m flying home...”

(There’s a beautiful version on one of Allen’s CDs, with Steven Taylor singing exquisite harmony)

His father’s death, his 50th year, the
thock! thock! thock! of the Scythe Man
everywhere evident
Ginsberg took on the blues of his harmonium
for a few months, feeling “finished as a poet,”
    he wrote to Gregory Corso.

Feeling finished, but not finished
because he had three books in the works:
the new City Lights collection Mind Breaths
plus The Collected Correspondence of Allen Ginsberg and Neal Cassady

A manic genius metabolism just can’t
    cease however blue the
    Scythe Man sings.

Part XXII

We noted in our previous section
how the great bard Allen Ginsberg
    was hearing the sad thock! thock! thock!
of the Scythe Man

who had taken his father in July of ’76
& left the bard
    who was always very sensitive to the
    art form known as the blues

    singing the Father Death Blues

That fall Jimmy Carter was elected president &
the uptight U.S. climate relaxed
    just a tad
with the war finally ended
Allen Ginsberg
now in his fifties
kept up his complicated balance
of research, writing, actual Buddhist practice, founding a school,
coping with his eros,
& singing now, always, the High Metabolism
Gotta Roam Blues
(a midlife variety of his “Father Death Blues”)

These were the years he
was formally investigating the activities of
the FBI & intelligence agencies.

(The reader will recall how A.G. in the ’60s
& early ’70s did historic research in
the connection between the CIA
& drug smuggling from Southeast Asia.
There was his famous bet with CIA
chief Richard Helms of 1971.)

An attorney named Ira Lowe, in D.C. helped Allen
and others (including myself)
get their secret files
F.O.I.A.

Though some complain that it’s still difficult to get their files
one of the marvels of America is
the Freedom of Information Act of 1966
which requires that the records of U.S. government agencies
be made available to the public.
The law states that such information must be made available
within ten working days as a rule
to the person requesting it.

The law exempts nine classes of information including
some related to national security

The F.O.I.A. was amended by the Privacy Act of 1974, which requires federal agencies to provide individuals with any information in their files relating to them and to amend incorrect records.
Wow.

It was this law that A.G. used to sail into the haunts of the secret police to examine its campaign in the 1960s which effectively wiped out the Underground Press movement.

Allen amassed a big collection of FBI and government documents. He worked with the writers/editors group called PEN and its Freedom to Write Committee to present this research to the public—a project he called “Smoking Typewriters.”

*

READING WITH LOWELL

February 23, ’77 Allen read with Robert Lowell for the Poetry Project at St. Mark’s Church in NYC. Since Lowell had enormous stature in the academic world, the reading gave Allen a sense of well-tuned satisfaction, as he said at the time:

“What this means is that people won’t be able to attack me so easy anymore because I’m, in a sense, protected by his regard. If he’s willing to read on the same platform with me & say I wrote a masterpiece—Kaddish—it means I can’t be considered a barbarian jerk, which is what I’ve been having to listen to year after year.”

It was a famous reading and the great Lowell, who had once, in 1965, declined to attend a White House Arts Festival because of the war, was so soon to pass away, age 60, on September 12.

LUNCH WITH COUNTERINTELLIGENCE CHIEF

I had a chat on the phone with the ’Zap
on April 25, '77
He said he had picked up from Ira Lowe some of my FBI files,
   one of which indicated the Bureau had
   Miriam's and my pad on Avenue A (in the '60s)
   under surveillance
   since, for instance, it described how once I left the house
   & entered an automobile.

He and Peter Orlovsky had recently lunched
with the legendary former CIA counterintelligence chief
   James Angleton

Angleton, whose cover was blown as director of counterintelligence
in fine reportage by Seymour Hersh in the New York Times back in '74
(Angleton complained later to Hersh that his wife
   had no idea for 31 years he was the feared
   counterchief
   and as a result had left him!)
   had been forced from his job.

Anyway, by the time Peter Orlovsky & Ginsberg had lunch with him
the superspy was working on a book, Allen told me,
& quite anecdotally fluent.

   Angleton told Ginsberg he had ordered Ezra Pound into the
   Pisan tiger cage in '45 to keep him from being killed
   by Partisans.

At the time Allen was researching the names of
those whom the FBI & CIA had sent into U.S. domestic groups
such as the Panthers
   to sow dissension
   under Cointelpro or Chaos.

Angleton, a lifelong friend of T.S. Eliot's,
gave A.G. the name of a deputy director of the FBI
who, he said, held a master list of provos & informers.

   •

The PEN Center report was published in 1981
   by City Lights Books
under the title Unamerican Activities, and included
Ginsberg’s Smoking Typewriters
That summer I taught a month-long class in Investigative Poetry
at the Naropa Institute in Boulder.

The class voted to work together on a single poetic investigation
& to my surprise decided to take a close look at

the incident between the poet W.S. Merwin, his mate Dana Naone, and Chögyam Trungpa & his vajraguards
that had occurred at the Buddhist retreat in Colorado on Halloween '75.

For a month the class conducted interviews & searched for the truth
by creating a composite weave of statements from those who had observed the event & aftermath

The result was a book, fabled in its time, titled The Party, A Chronological Perspective on a Confrontation at a Buddhist Seminary.

To his credit, Allen did nothing whatsoever to hinder the research though it pained his heart.

Part XXIII

We left our history of the great bard Allen Ginsberg in the summer of 1977

when he was supervising an investigation of the activities of the FBI and the CIA and other intelligence agencies

against the antiwar and Underground Press movements
As we have noted he secured the services of attorney Ira Lowe in D.C. to help poets get their files

(Lowe obtained some of mine for instance)

Ginsberg was at the level of Blizzard Fame
The letters, phone messages, knocks on the doors, manuscripts demanding book blurbs blizzarded in to Box 582 Stuyvesant Station NY, NY 10009

In the late summer/fall of 1977 Ginsberg worked on his next book for City Lights, Mind Breaths Poems 1972-77 with some excellent poems, “Don’t Grow Old,” (about his father) “Ego Confession,” plus a high-energy poem about being mugged on East 10th in which he was probably the only person in the history of Lower East Side muggery to have chanted “Om Ah Hum” o’er and o’er during the mugging, and in the book another fine poem “Contest of Bards”

There was never a bard with so many friends & so many humans whom he animated

He had circles in France
Circles in Italy
Circles in LA
Circles in Boston
There were Circles from his visits to India
Circles in China! &

’s all through Eastern Europe!

& all swirling in his retentive mind
Most of them felt DIRECTLY connected to him and they all wanted action!

October of ’77
he was in the air on the way
to a symposium called “LSD: A Generation Later”
at UC Santa Cruz
and dropped a hit in the plane
thinking about the CIA & LSD.
Later at the symposium
he told what he had done and asked
“Am I, Allen Ginsberg, the product of
one of the CIA’s lamentable, ill-advised, or
triumphantly successful experiments in mind control?”

There comes a time in the
Glut of 20th Century Stuff that a bard
especially a pack rat like Allen
HAS TO ACHIEVE SOME SORT OF
Zenification of the data chaos!
The ’Zap kept everything
doodles on napkins
gigantic blizzards of incoming mail
He had moved to a building at 437 East 12th street
near Avenue A and Tompkins Park
where he had taken two apartments on the
same floor and connected them
The result was a complex of small rooms
that served him well
He finally had walls for bookshelves; a room where all the
tapes of his readings were organized (he
taped EVERY single reading—there must have
been thousands of cassettes)
Around this time the poet Bob Rosenthal became Allen’s personal secretary. Rosenthal in the coming years made Allen’s ever increasing bardic burdens possible to endure otherwise Ginzap could have wound up like the old coot I once read about whose cabin was entirely filled with a giant string ball he had created because for Ginsberg, even though he had stored many boxes of archival material at the Columbia U library the Bard Blizzard had become nearly overwhelming!

Students at Naropa by now were typing his notebooks but there were those mail sacks from the Globe!

Once around this time I visited Ginsberg and he asked me what I did with all the magazines and books and galleys wanting book blurbs that arrived I said I stored them chronologically. He lowered his voice, almost as if he were admitting a crime, his voice just about a whisper, and said “I’ve started throwing some things away. It’s just too much.”

•

He began focusing on teaching—transmitting his studies of William Blake for instance He and I shared a passion for the study of metrics and Allen compiled a study list on the complicated ancient Greek & Latin metrics In addition he created Beat Generation reading lists to formalize a canon He knew how important the Battle for Space in the Textbooks would become.

His Buddhist practice continued He created a place to meditate and to
do prostrations
at his new pad on East 12th.

Ginsberg performed in Woodstock, NY in December of ’77
with Peter Orlovsky, Happy Traum & a
young man named Steven Taylor
whom he’d met at Taylor’s New Jersey college in ’76

It was amazing. Taylor had a beautiful high tenor voice
and could follow Allen’s vocal phrasing as
adroitly as a ventriloquist!

& those of us in the audience at the Woodstock Artists Association
were astounded
at how Taylor’s harmony voice floated
in a kind of mystic perfection
above Allen’s bardic bass

For the rest of Ginsberg’s life Taylor worked
with him,
touring, recording, arranging, and
annotating his melodies.

Allen was upset with
never-too-brave Columbia Records
for recently declining to release the bard’s album
produced by John Hammond

Allen told me at the time that a Columbia executive
said, “Ginsberg, you’re shaking
your putz out there
in front of everybody” &

“What if William Paley heard it?”
was another comment
(Paley was the founder of CBS)

The album had such classics as
“Everybody’s Just a Little Bit Homosexual,”
“Hard-on Blues”
& “CIA Dope/Calypso.”
John Hammond’s comment on the project:
“It’s absolutely brilliant”

Allen spent the winter of ’77/’78 at his Cherry Valley farm

though I note that in January o’ ’78
he came out on stage one night
improvising poetry at an Iggy Pop concert.

That year
Ginzap taught a line-by-line course on William Blake’s
The Book of Urizen

(after Allen passed away, I heard that
the transcriptions of his various lectures on Blake
at Naropa were something like 2,000 pages long)

Allen began to focus on the Rocky Flats nuclear plant near Boulder
where they built the plutonium triggers
for the Bomb
Plutonium had leaked out into nearby ground water.

1978 was a big year for the anti-nuke movement.
It was reflected at Rocky Flats by ongoing demonstrations
particularly at the railroad tracks leading into the place

In June of ’78 Allen
wrote his antinuke/antibomb “Plutonian Ode”
& less than a day after finishing it
he was arrested for blocking the railway
at Rocky Flats.

At the court hearing where he entered a plea
he read the poem to a crowded room
then returned to the tracks
– a group of protesters had put up a tepee on the ties–
& was arrested a second time.

Part XXIV

We left our history of the great bard Allen Ginsberg
in the summer of 1978 when
he was arrested at Rocky Flats
released
then returned to be arrested again
the same day

blocking the railcars of plutonium
coming in to build the triggers of doom.

November 30-December 2
saw the great Nova Convention
in New York City
honoring William Burroughs

There was a wide variety of performers
including John Cage, Merce Cunningham,
Brion Gysin, Laurie Anderson, myself,
Anne Waldman, Frank Zappa, Philip Glass
& others
  including Robert Anton Wilson
  & Timothy Leary

to celebrate the shy-bold humorist
and space prophet from St. Louis.

Two books in ’78:
  Mind Breaths
and a book of his correspondence
  with Neal Cassady

In February 1979
The National Arts Club gave Allen its Gold Medal
for his lifetime achievement in poetry

at the club headquarters on Gramercy Park South
with the great Ted Berrigan as master of ceremonies

Luminous minds of many sorts were on hand
such as John Ashbery, who said,
  “I think he’s changed the role
  of the poet in America. Now everybody
experiences poetry. It’s much closer to us now than it was twenty years ago. And I think that is due not only to his poetry but to his truly exemplary way of living.”

Allen toured in the spring through Europe with Peter Orlovsky and Steven Taylor. By now Taylor was the musical firmament on which the 'Zap rested

Taylor brought Allen’s songs to art with his perfect harmonies & his skills at arranging

That summer Allen taught a course at Naropa that went line by line through Wm. Blake’s “Vala, or the Four Zoas”

In the fall he toured Europe again for several months in those exhilarating/exhausting cycles of the thrill of performance only to return to his New York office & Glutted Mountains of mail and duty! in what Thomas Carlyle called the “Dry-as-Dusts”

The politics of America of course impinged upon its most political of Bards

Back in July of ’79 the Sandinista National Liberation Front had tossed out the creepy Somoza family dictatorship (in place since 1934)

The Sandinistas nationalized some industries & right-wingers around the world rolled their eyes in Domino-Theory dread.

During those months the slow-building stage was hauled into place that led to the Contras Irangate & the continuing involvement of
Another big crisis was the November 4 seizure of 66 U.S. embassy employees in Tehran by students who demanded the return of the Shah of Iran for trial. (The Shah was in the United States for cancer treatment)

President Carter was perceived as “weak” for his handling, especially when the attempt on April 24, ’81 to rescue the hostages failed.

Ginsberg’s bardic sniffing skills were sniffing a right wing drift & he didn’t dig it

Meanwhile his guru, Chögyam Trungpa had encouraged the bard to consider wearing a suit and tie so as to get a more serious hearing from his audiences.

Allen’s haberdasheries were the various Goodwills in the cities he visited but soon he began to sport white shirts, ties and suit coats.

I chuckled at the emphasis on suits and ties recalling how I’d seen the great ‘Zap back in 1959, and then in ’60 at poetry readings wearing the same shirt & it wasn’t clear if it had been given a intervening wash

Added to the moil in Nicaragua & Iran was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan where there had been a Marxist coup in 1978
followed by the kind of shooting &
clique-kill confusion
that led to a Soviet invasion
in December of ’79.

This gave the CIA and other clandestine services
the chance
to intervene secretly against the Russians
in a long & hounding war

a legacy that’s still not very well understood
(& will not be till
the activities of the CIA & Reagan’s CIA director Wm Casey
are fully explicated.)

Carter was battered by it
especially when he stupidly refused
to allow American athletes to compete
after training all their lives
in the 1980 Moscow Olympics

1980

And so, when 1980 blossomed in the Time Garden
Allen Ginsberg faced
an uncertain American future–

After all, had he not won the National Book Award
for a tome titled The Fall of America?

Thanks to Steven Taylor in the main
Allen began to write Public Poems
with Music
on political themes

a pattern he continued all the way to his passing in 1997

Political Poems with Music for 1980 include
“Birdbrain” and
“Capitol Air”

1980 saw Allen compose one of the century’s finest
environmental poems:
his “Homework
“If I were doing my Laundry I’d wash my dirty Iran
I’d throw in my United States, and pour on the Ivory Soap,
scrub up Africa, put all the birds and elephants back in
the jungle,
I’d wash the Amazon river and clean the oily Carib & Gulf of
Mexico,
Rub that smog off the North Pole, wipe up all the pipelines
in Alaska,
Rub a dub dub for Rocky Flats and Los Alamos, Flush that
sparkly Cesium out of Love Canal
Rinse down the Acid Rain over the Parthenon & Sphinx.....”

& flowing onward with startling images
–It’s worth finding and memorizing
& then to take action!
Allen would have wanted your
action.

MARCH 1980

The Party was published
–the poetry group I’d taught at Naropa had voted
to set it loose to the public
& it was nicely produced by Susan Quasha at
Station Hill Press in Barrytown near Bard College.

Tom Clark also published a book on the Trungpa/Merwin/Naone
incident,
The Great Naropa Poetry Wars

and so Allen was upsettedly swept up again in the moil & boil
of this matter
for about another year
till the literary kettle ceased to spew.

Over his shoulder the bard heard the iron clacks
of Reagan’s stern-wheel’d chariot.
Reagan showed the kind of robotic persistence that Democrats often lack:

He tried in ’68, ping!
He tried in ’72, ping!
He tried in ’76, ping!
and then in 1980, he won the nomination!

Carter swung to the right on domestic issues
He refused to support Senator Edward Kennedy’s historic
“Health Care for All Americans Act”

and the first real chance for a National Health Care System
since Truman’s 1948 proposal
was shot down in
griny conservative-Democratic lack of vision

That year the bard received a $10,000 NEA Creative Writing fellowship

He’d become friends with financier George Soros
For years the bard went to the New Years parties thrown by Soros and his wife Susan
Back in the late ’70s he was worth a mere $600 million
and when Allen won the NEA
he called him and asked what he could do with the money

Soros laughed & suggested he put it in the bank.

In October the filmmaker Barbara Rubin died of postnatal infection in France after giving birth to her fifth child

She was a ceaseless advocate for interesting art & music during the ’60s
(She was the first one to point out to me the presence of the Velvet Underground)
Barbara had located the Cherry Valley farm Allen bought & can be seen rubbing Dylan’s aching head on the Bringing It All Back Home album jacket

Rubin, whose films include Christmas on Earth, once hoped to settle down with Allen in Cherry Valley later married and lived as a devout Chasid till the Scythe Man seized her early too early too early

Allen was on tour in Europe when someone told him the ghastly news December 10 of John Lennon’s shooting, an event that tore out the soul of a decade much as Kent State had done in 1970

To Allen it was as if someone had stolen the Mona Lisa’s smile from the time-track.

Part XXV

In 1981 on rising he’d record his dream thoughts in the long gift of Jung & Freud do prostrations (as part of his Buddhist practice) then discuss his daily schedule with Bob Rosenthal the General Manager of his interface with the gnawing public

It was a year when Ronald Reagan & th’ neo-cons began the attack on the Nicaraguan Revolution
He’d returned to his two-apartment complex on East 12th in NYC in early 1981 after a long five-country tour of Europe with Peter Orlovksy & Steve Taylor.

He was at the age where a big one-nighter tour started to take what they always call a “toll” – a sort of Scorch Tax on his physicality and his continuing ability, to use the words of Tuli Kupferberg, to “stay above room temperature.”

He always carefully arranged the things of his pad:
- artworks, books, meditation zones
- his writing supplies

almost as minutely precisioned as, say, Robert Creeley

Early in March, novelist Bill Burroughs, Jr., son of William died in Florida of cirrhosis of the liver. He’d had a transplant in ’76. I remember him throwing up blood in our apartment at Naropa one summer later, hopelessly craving alcohol, he would sit on the floor of the Liquor Mart in Boulder chugging vodka to join the flow of the solar system’s second generation stardust as quickly as he could.

Allen returned to Naropa in the spring.
where he taught a minutely detailed
“Literary History of the Beat Generation”
& organized Bill Burroughs, Jr.’s papers
made sure that Billy’s journals were
typed into manuscript form

as for the “Literary History of the Beat Generation”
it was duly taped
& no doubt transcripts are held in the
Allen Ginsberg Library at Naropa

Conservatives & Literary Opponents
sneered at Ginsberg often
as some sort of
barbarian invader

but in truth he was a better scholar than
just about all of them.

Time will drum this truth.
In fact, he was a great scholar
The same ferocity for accurate detail
he brought to, say, the history
of the CIA & heroin smuggling
in SE Asia

he brought to the details of
Poesie’s History.

He could recite by mind
thousands of lines of verse

& knew the history of poetic things
as much as any staid professor
in bentwood walls

How do I know this?
Read the transcripts of his essays,
interviews & lectures

June ’81

The ’Zap had gone back to NYC and
was getting ready for a long tour
when he went to a club called Bonds to meet a group called the Clash

and went backstage to meet them

The lead singer, Joe Strummer, asked the bard to read some poetry

Instead he proposed his po-tune “Capitol Air”
They rehearsed it a few minutes
& A.G. sang it for the 3,000 awaiting

thus adding a new-wave hero band to those with whom he had performed (the Fugs, Phil Ochs, John Lennon, Dylan, et alia multa)

SUMMER '81

Ginsberg worked on the proofs of Plutonian Ode: Poems 1977-1980 for City Lights

his 8th for Ferlinghetti’s great House
(if you count Iron Horse, published in tandem with Toronto’s Coach House Press)

•

All these tastes of the mega-stage with rockers helped him hunger to form a band.
In August I heard from a staff member that Ginsberg was going to call his band Glass of Chicken

Glass of C. apparently was Corso’s term for Shambhala

•

A RETURN IN TRIUMPH

The bard loved to return to Columbia for triumphal readings
as if he had some sort of spot on the palm
from his university days of the ‘40s

November 14, 1981
marked his third historic reading
at McMillan Theater

for a 25th anniversary recitation of “Howl”
Was it really twenty five years
since the great threnody/joy psalm
had been published!?

Jack Kerouac who had beaten time
on a jug of Burgundy
and shouted “Go! Go!”
during the first performance
at the Six Gallery back in th’ fall o’ ’55
was gone
Neal gone
the surge of the late ’50s & ’60s gone
& the nation was oozing & spewing to the right

yet the theater was packed
His family far and near had gathered
and as one person who was there has described it:
“Many luminaries, including Carl Solomon were present.
Steve Taylor accompanied Allen...... The audience
was literally awestruck, one of the only times
I’ve experienced that. Allen made many funny asides
annotating his works
as he read.”

Thunder always thunders.

•

In late ’81 he moved to a house in Boulder
where he was to headquarter for the next five years
devoting himself more to the
growth of the Jack Kerouac School
of Disembodied Poetics
at the Naropa Institute

& left his New York office
worked on the text for
for City Lights

EARLY ’82

At Jimi Hendrix’ Electric Ladyland studio
on 8th St. in the Village
the Clash were recording

Ginsberg spent a few days with them
helped write three or four tunes
His suggestions they tested
on empty tracks
to gauge their flow
The bard loved the ambience of
successful rockers
and couldn’t resist the urge to teach
bringing them Gregory Corso’s newest book for instance,
and the City Lights classic Clean Asshole Poems by Peter Orlovsky.

The album was called Combat Rock
and the bard, not always so modest
did not ask for
publishing royalties on the
tunes he helped doctor.

JANUARY 16, 1982

Tuli Kupferberg & I got together
with some hot musicians, including Coby Batty,
John Zorn, Marc Kramer, Randy Hudson &
Steve Taylor
to play the Mudd Club in New York City

It was not quite a reunion of the Fugs
(who had not performed since 1969)
but close enough
& the place was utterly packed

I invited Allen to sing along with us when we performed Tuli’s great tune “Nothing” from the first album of ’65

Tuli basso’d forth with his traditional verses
“Monday nothing Tuesday nothing
Wednesday and Thursday nothing.....”

The music was slow and properly eery
John Zorn on saxophone
Kramer on scary organ
Coby Batty on hand held drum

Then Allen sang a verse in a slow Ancient Bard voice of declination:
“New York Nothing
Moscow Nothing Washington DC Nothing
Salvador War foooor Nothing
Chögyam Trungpa (pause) Buddha (pause) Nothing”

Allen & Peter O flew to Nicaragua on January 21 at the invitation of the poet Ernesto Cardenal (the minister of culture after the Sandinista Revolution of ’79)

for an international literary festival in honor of the national poet of Nicaragua, Rubén Darío

The bard did not want to incite the kind of trouble he had back in 1965 when he had been tossed, first from Cuba & then from Czechoslovakia

for this time the circumstances were very different.

Much had been learned by 1983 of what the CIA and military intelligence had done in Chile in the early ’70s to destabilize & overwhelm the freely elected left-edged government
Allen knew those intricacies, knew them well
& wanted to see for himself
what was going on in Nicaragua
without helping
the harbor-miners & Contra-feeding maw
of the Reagan era.

It was an era of the Lie
(For instance, New York’s own Senator Patrick Moynihan
resigned from the Senate Intelligence Committee
in 1985 when CIA director Wm. Casey flat-out lied
under oath about the CIA mining of
Managua’s harbor)

The Sandinista National Liberation Front that
finally overthrew the ghastly Somoza family dictatorship
was named for Augusto Cesar Sandino
a great Nicaraguan patriot
who was killed by Anastasio Somoza
on whose orders he was lured to an airport
in Managua and offed in ’34.

The FSLN, as it was known, put together a broad coalition,
including business interests, to get rid of the dictatorship,

but Daniel Ortega’s Sandinistas felt the opposition of the USA
from the very beginning

During the festival
Allen, Ernesto Cardenal
& Yevgeny Yevtushenko
wrote a “Declaration of Three”
which called on the “world’s writers to come
to Nicaragua to see with their own eyes
the reality of Nicaragua, and lift their voices
in defense of this country,
small but inspired.”

Not long after Allen and Peter returned from Managua
a CIA destabilization plan, worth $17 million in ’82 dollars
oozed into the media.
Out in California
where he played the legendary McCabe’s
Guitar Shop
he recorded two tunes with Bob Dylan in
Santa Monica
as a kind of demo tape
–one tune was “Do the Meditation Rock”
    a kind of an interesting-metered shuffle
    with a rushing chorus of
    Do the meditation  Do the meditation
    Learn a little Patience and Generosity

& the other was “Airplane Blues”

    It was always a pleasure to hear him sing “Airplane Blues”
    with its sum-up hook line of
    “Hearts full of hatred
      will outlast my old age”

(Both po-tunes are in
the ’Zap’s ’86 book The White Shroud)

•

A TRIBUTE TO JACK

In late July/early August of ’82
there was a big celebration at Naropa
to mark the 25th anniversary
of On the Road

So many were on hand that space had to be rented at
the University of Colorado
    and at the Chautauqua complex
    out by those graceful red faces
    known as the Flatirons

All the complexities of the Beat/Flower Power/Rock & Roll/
Art/Movie/New Literature conspiracy were on parade

as Allen, with the same intricate high metabolism he’d
used to find publishers for his entire generation
    or had organized the reading at the Six Gallery in ’55
now brought to Boulder a list of humans that included
Wm Burroughs, Gregory Corso, Diane di Prima, Carolyn Cassady,
Herbert Huncke, John Clellon Holmes, Lawrence Ferlinghetti,
Carl Solomon, Robert Frank, Joyce Johnson, Ken Kesey,
Ted Berrigan just months to live, Ray Bremsen, Anne Waldman,
Michael & Joanna McClure, Timothy Leary, Paul Krassner &
Kerouac biographers
Ann Charters, Dennis McNally, Gerald Nicosia
plus Abbie Hoffman
& father-thirsty Jan Kerouac
now almost 30

There were over 130 “accredited” as they say
reporters on hand

Robert Frank filmed conversations
on the Chautauqua porch
where those of the Beats or Beat-touched
bumped & interacted
were introduced, or renewed antique friendships

A.G. was everywhere
urging and coordinating
sleeping just five a night

till it was over
& he took to bed for three days

It made Naropa good bread
but it had cost the Bard a few thousand of his own money
but money never measures the love of a soul

It was another pay-out for Jack
in the lineage of
Ginzap pressuring Mark Van Doren
on The Town & the City
so that Robert Giroux
accepted it unread from Van Doren
& a $1,000 advance

& Ginzap coming up with the ending of Doctor Sax
& hundreds of other benevolences
toward his thankless pal
That fall he attended a conference at UCLA
organized by Norman Cousins & Robert Rees
    both on the faculty

between writers from the Peking Writers Union
    and inkers from the USA
among them Arthur Miller, Gary Snyder & Kurt Vonnegut

It was the first opening of the Door
and presaged
    a visit to China, A.G. included,
    two years in the future.

BARDING FORTH

The great Bard sailed forth for another tour of Northern Europe
    and Scandinavia
    into '83

With him was his young strong-voiced musician/singer
Steven Taylor.

It's not that easy
    to track Allen's travels
    during his final decade & a half

They say that
    cosmic rays
    are more plentiful
    up in the air

and Ginzap probably had more such rays
    bonking his noggin
    than any other bard in history

While he was barding through Europe
John Hammond let forth the double album, First Blues
    1971-1981
    on his own John Hammond Records
The reader will recall how back in 1978
the feeble-thinking & cowardly Columbia Records
had refused to put it out
so Hammond, the discoverer of Dylan,
formed his own label.

There had been additional sessions in ’81
and now here it was,
24 tunes

TO SING OR NOT TO SING

“...I know Allen will follow me around the world
with his terrible singing voice...”
–Ted Berrigan
Ann Arbor Song

In the matter of his music and singing
some liked, some disliked

Some felt it detracted from his writing
but it came from a long tradition
going back to Archilochus
& the choice of a bard
to sing, to chant, to recite
& to do all three
in freely-chosen combinations

Allen loved his voice
His phrasing was very good
Check out “Ballad of the Skeletons”
or the fast-metered
“CIA Dope Calypso”

&, with Steve Taylor singing harmony
say, on “Father Death Blues”
or “Do the Meditation”
it was very pleasing to see & to hear

but the ’Zap used as few chords as John Lennon
or the early Dylan
and, as art songs,
wend weakened in the Time Track
however brilliant the Mind & Voice
    infiring them.

A SCHOLAR AT SONG

Steve Taylor told me how once
during the ’80s
he went to the Metropolitan Opera with Allen
& the bard knew all the melodies & words
    of La Traviata by heart!

PETER IN TROUBLE

As Allen and Steven Taylor toured Europe
Peter Orlovsky was set to join them
bringing his banjo & his fine skill at yodeling

yet Peter was again in sore trouble.

Always a caregiver
& attentive to the super-minutiae of healing
he’d nursed his father Oleg dying of cancer
that fall
trying to “ease the pain of living”
till November 12 he’d passed away in NYC

He arrived in Europe
    moily & erratic
    & needing care himself

& strayed beyond Beat Generation standards
for deportment on the road
    which were among the most relaxed standards
    in the history of western culture.

1983

John Lennon had suggested that A.G. do “Jessore Road”
(from his 1971 tour of India
    the refugee horror on the road from
    Calcutta to East Pakistan)

with a string quartet
Steven Taylor composed it & it was recorded in Amsterdam with the Mondrian String Quartet.

Allen was in an interesting film called Poetry in Motion much of it shot in Toronto early in the year

then he went out on a big tour to “support” the double First Blues

returning to

’s of correspondence

•

June 3, his 57th birthday celebrated with his brother Eugene who had just turned 62

•

Burned out from Naropa he became codirector emeritus after ten years with Anne Waldman (and year ’pon year of flaming youth eagerness staff) creating probably the finest academy of its time

•

AUGUST 1983

The poet of beautiful vowels Lawrence Ferlinghetti & his City Lights Books had published all of Allen’s great collections

and what a March of Ink they were!!

Howl and Other Poems Kaddish and Other Poems Reality Sandwiches Planet News
This was the year he secured the services of a young book agent famed for his brashness & boldness named Andrew Wylie who had begun his agenting in 1980 by representing the great I.F. Stone in his book The Trial of Socrates.

Wylie urged the bard to publish a Collected Poems with a major publisher Allen was hesitant at first not wanting to break his long-time flow with Lawrence Ferlinghetti.

They telephoned the author of A Coney Island of the Mind and he was less than happy so AG.. was ambivalent about proceeding

Then there was a breakthrough Wylie negotiated a six-figure contract with Harper & Row (later HarperCollins) which allowed Ferlinghetti to keep all of AG’s City Lights books in print

Harper & Row would publish a Collected Poems, an annotated edition of “Howl,” (in the way that such a book had been done for Eliot’s “Waste Land”) a book of new poems (which was to contain the exquisite poem “White Shroud”), a volume of Letters, one of Essays, and one of Journals

(Wylie, who had studied ancient Greek at Harvard, then written for the underground papers and owned
a bookstore on Jones Street in the West Village,
w/ stints at cab driving and showing up at Max’s Kansas City in the afternoons for free fried chicken,
surged forth to become one of the most successful of American literary agents
  with around 300 clients at the
time of this writing
& offices in NY, London, Madrid, Tokyo
  and perhaps other places too)

MIRACLE DREAM

He was always a Dream Man
and so
  he awakened before full light on October 5
in his apartment in Boulder

from a dream
  no Gentleman from Porlock
    would interrupt

to write one of his finest poems.
He called it “White Shroud”

It began with 10 rhymed & semi-rhymed couplets
the first one:
  “I am summoned from my bed
to the Great City of the Dead”

He was walking with the great pacifist writer
  David Dellinger
It was a kind of Sheol, or Bronx Elysium

He comes across
a cranky-haired shopping bag lady sleeping on a wooden platform in an alley
whom he startlingly recognizes as Naomi!

He spots
  a nearby basement store
    room where he could
live
“she needed my middle aged strength and worldly money knowledge, housekeeping art. I can cook and write books for a living, she’ll not have to beg her medicine food, a new set of teeth for company, won’t yell at the world, I can afford a telephone...”

Then he awakened in a “glow of life”

before dawn wrote down his poem, ran out of ink went downstairs where Peter Orlovksy was already up

“I kissed him & filled my pen and wept.”

•

I remember how A.G. had wept reading the Crazy Jane poems of Yeats.

’56
’83

a 27 year flow of guilt for Naomi

still minyan-less still with wires in her body still singing the Internationale from the Beyond

for a mother dying weirdly never dies.

Part XXVII

FALL 1983

I spoke with Allen on October 25 We chatted about many things
how to improve relations with Russia
for instance
& techniques he’d learned from Trungpa
on the struggle against nukes

He mentioned he was leaving Boulder

“I’m retiring here
I’m about $10,000 in debt
because I’ve been sort of inert
I’ve got about $10,000
in secretarial fees....

[He’d not been touring since the spring]

I’m coming back to NY
[after a few years in Boulder]
“I’ve hired an agent, Andrew Wylie,
to peddle my books to Madison Avenue
for a standard edition of poetry & prose
about 4 volumes– collected poetry & everything.

I’m coming back to NY in December
& I’m going to try to restructure my
whole finances.”

I broke in, “I thought you did some investing with your brother
I thought you were set up for life!”

He protested, “Oh No! NO
I’m just living on what I make from readings
and what I get from City Lights
(reportedly about $7k a year)

E.S.: “I thought you had salted away
a lot over the years.”

A.G.: “No, I’ve got to do it now (laughs)
I’m going to see if I can do something
w/ my papers at Columbia
to get an annuity out of them
as Robert Bertholf suggested

I have all of my stuff
more or less intact
I sold some stuff to Columbia
Literary letters from Burroughs, Kerouac & Corso
That’s the only thing missing
The “Kaddish” I gave away
   to the Living Theater
   [for a benefit auction]

They say it’s worth anywhere from
200,000  500,000  a million
nobody knows
I’m getting too old to run around now.

I’m getting more and more interested in
   technical stuff
writing glyconics
   & things like that”

Want to hear some?”

“Sure,” I replied.

Then he chanted a complicated pattern of verse he’d written
in metrical couplets: the first line a glyconic
& the second in what’s known as 2nd Asclepiadean:

\[
\begin{align*}
  & - \circ \circ \circ \circ \circ - || - \circ \circ \circ \circ \circ \\
  & \text{“One deep time I could write of death} \\
  & \text{Love joy God in my youth Loves in my heart I carry} \\
  & \text{Now new love in my age I feel} \\
  & \text{Right speech come to my heart Time for the Muse to Weep...”}
\end{align*}
\]

& other glyconic/Asclepiadean couplets
   chanted he
   in his thrilled-with-verse
   voice of the Bard

“I find it easy to do those,”
   he said
Through Henry Geldzahler, then the NYC Commissioner of Culture, and Raymond Foye, Allen met a famous young artist named Francesco Clemente and his wife Alba and began a friendship that lasted to the end.

AG always had a flair for design and drawing and festooned his books at signings with ornate ouroboroi, skulls with flowers in the teeth, and many kinds of intricate inkery

The bard worked with Clemente on a remarkable & beautiful edition of “White Shroud”

A.G. hand-inked the poem into a folio at Francesco’s studio on December 20 and then the artist illustrated the brilliant verse with some thrilling watercolor figures including a stunning green ouroboros at the close where, instead of the snake holding its tail in its mouth a human head mouths a breast

The folio was published as a book for a Clemente exhibition in Basel in ’94

’84

The New York Times Sunday Magazine ran “White Shroud” early in the year

and then on March 15 The New York Times published a blacklist created by the Reagan-era United States Information Agency of prominent Americans not to be invited for government-funded overseas appearances—there on the blacklist along with Ralph Nader, Walter Cronkite, Betty Friedan and Coretta Scott King was the great bard Allen Ginsberg!

Meanwhile, the ’Zap set about creating a little better sense of order in his part of the universe
All his life
    all the way back to the Spanish civil war
    he’d been a compulsive news clipper
    and he was also the Kodak Man!

Ann Charters had gathered some of his photos
back in 1970
    for a small collection called Scenes Along the Road

but few sensed what photographic hugeness
    lurked in the Forest Ginsberg!

Ginsberg’s photos were “on deposit” along with his gigantic archives
at Butler Library at Columbia

On deposit meant that they were open to scholars
    with the bard’s permission

Over the years he’d sent people to the photos in the archives
    and sometimes the prints & negatives both wd. disappear

A.G. asked a young writer & publisher named Raymond Foye
    to work on the photos

Foye went to Butler Library
    & was rather horrified to see the negatives out of their sleeves
    & scattered here and there in the boxes
There were thousands upon thousands of
    his photographs
        many of them still in their ’40s/’50s packets
        from the Tompkins Square Park pharmacy
            where he’d had them developed

Many were the large old-style negatives, 2 1/4-inch square,
    which stood the test of blow-up well

that is, would a scrubbly-chinned, defiant Jack Kerouac
    leaning up against a Lower East Side roof-wall in 1953
            stand the test of becoming a 11X14 art print?

Foye tried to keep a chronological sense of the rolls
    putting the negatives into archival sleeves
        creating a numbering system in 3-ring notebooks
He ordered contact sheets from the negs

AG studied the prints and contact sheets
selecting what he liked

He tried blowing up a few of the negs
onto top quality 11X14 paper

Brian Graham made prints of those choices
(Graham is Robert Frank’s printer)

Borrowing an idea from his friend the photographer Elsa Dorfman
Allen wrote detailed histories
which he inscribed on blank space at the bottom fronts of the photos.

Foye and Allen put together a portfolio of signed prints
and Foye began to show them to galleries and dealers
The Spencer Collection at the NY Public Library
was among those who purchased a set at $5,000

The Holly Solomon Gallery on 57th Street
agreed to do the bard’s virgin show
which Foye curated
(with an opening in early ’85)

Thus was born another industry in the Forest Ginsberg:
A.G. – Chronicler of the American Beat Generation Experience

Up to then his cameras had been
not that carefully chosen & his techniques
dancing somewhere ’tween luck, Cage, & excess energy.

He pestered his pal Robert Frank
one of America’s finest photographers for advice.

And met the great Berenice Abbot
who once had worked with Man Ray
A.G. dug immensely her NYC photos from the 1930s

“It was like going back in a time machine....”
he later wrote.

She urged him to get a camera with large negatives
He got Abbot to accompany him to Olden’s camera store in NYC
to check out the action on a Rolleiflex
he was about to purchase

Another example of the bard
throughout his career
-reaching out to the best minds
for the best advice.

After his early negatives were blown up
and it was seen they were art

the same bard who
made his own
big set of drums
in the jungles of Chiapas
in ’54
was utterly unafraid
31 years later
to leap into the art of
the Visual Muse.

In fact, he went click-batty for a while
He shot thousands upon thousands of pictures
during his roamings
One person on his staff spent all her time
keeping track of the prints

It was a visual diary: “It’s beginning to replace writing a lot,”
he wrote, “not the poetry, though, but the peripatetic notes
I used to take.”

At first, before the explosion of photo shows,
it was a financial drain,
as he blew up hundreds of shots and alternate shots
of the same view
to large size prints
•

HAWKING CHUCKLING AT THE EDGE

One of Allen’s key assistants
during those years
was his bibliographer, Bill Morgan
who’d worked since 1980 on a very detailed
bibliography– it included even rounding up
the multitude of book blurbs
the bard had dashed off

He started cataloging all the books in Ginsberg’s apartment
Then around 1984
began work at Columbia
   “to organize those hundreds of boxes”
     as he later described it

Around that time Barry Miles had gotten a contract
from Simon and Schuster
   to write a bio of Allen

The 'Zap worked out a deal
for Morgan to get a percentage of Barry Miles’ S&S advance

so that Morgan could work full-time
   bringing order  –heh heh–
   to the “word horde”

Allen loved to feel
   as if his work were organized
     in a retrievable, graceful
        raked-sand Zen Zone

(you can see it in the order he made
   in the room, say,
       where he began “Howl”

except that apparently,
in the Universe
   you create more disorder
     when making order of your things
according to Hawking’s A Brief History of Time

so that if you memorized all of Bill Morgan’s two-volume
bibliography of the great poet’s writings
   for instance

you would create disordered energy in the form of heat
   from the ordered energy of food
     lost in the air around you
       in convection and heat

such as to increase the disorder of the Universe.
That year, 1984, he jumped out on
two little tours of Europe

and on June 4 took time to
come to a reunion of the Fugs
    at the Bottom Line

–you can hear his voice shout-crooning along
    on the live CD that we have left behind in the time-track.

* *

Meanwhile the commissions & contracts for this & that piled up
Raymond Foye was smiling when he told me that
it would take Allen fifteen minutes just
to describe the basic array of projects
    he had to complete

Guilt was never far away from the dark-diaryed bard
who seemed to savor having something lurking
    & guilt-demanding
such as sitting in a well-appointed cabin that spring of ’84
at the Atlantic Center for the Arts in Florida
an easy gig as a Master Teacher yet
worrying about the introduction to his
    Collected Poems
        which he’d not yet finished

* *

He spent the ’84 summer in a Boulder town house complex
    which Naropa rented in those years for its summer faculty

and finally completed Collected Poems 1947-1980 on July 18
837 pages of flow
    with 88 pages of notes

He quit smoking
& was swimming regularly in Boulder Creek
    which flows down from the mountains
        & across the city

At summer’s end
as he prepared to face the
impending publication of his heart’s work
he wrote a fine little
addendum to Christopher Marlowe:

It’s All So Brief

I’ve got to give up
Books, checks, letters
File cabinets, apartment
pillows, bodies and skin
even the ache in my skin.

September 14, 1984
(p. 57, White Shroud)

echoing, say,
that searing final line of loss
in Olson’s Maximus Poems:

My wife my car my color and myself

Part XXVIII

A TRIP TO CHINA

We left our tracing of the great bard’s life
with the completion of 88 pages of notes
for his Collected Poems

which now Harper & Row
was taking to galleys
corrections, design
& ink
& the great bard was not the sort
to wait around
eating his nails.

In October he traveled to China
with a delegation that included
Gary & Masa Snyder, Francine du Plessix Grey,
Harrison Salisbury, William Least Heat-Moon, Toni Morrison,
Maxine Hong Kingston, William Gass
for the American Academy of Arts & Letters
A.G. prepared himself by studying the '66-'76 Cultural Revolution in China

& learned that
“I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness” meant to the Chinese those wrecked by the Cultural Revolution

Gary Snyder
moved by the visit to Cold Mountain temple
where Han Shan had lived
Gave the monk there his '58 translations of the Cold Mountain Poems
and wrote some verse on the spot
“At Maple Bridge”

As for Allen, he was shock-miffed
at the rather puritanical Chinese culture
& made sure he talked aplenty
on sex & politics & personal freedom
He had a gig to file reports on China to UPI

From Shanghai on Dec. 14
he sent me a packed postcard:
“The Cultural Revolution here 1966-74 was like worst elements of U.S. right and ‘left’ takeover, bookburning, gangs of street kids with spears going downtown to torment old bearded scholars, etc. New Economics ‘4 Modernizations’ now really interesting “open door” of Mind too. Students shy, eager, virginal, good English, a few able to talk frankly private thoughts.

Been down Yangtze Gorges on 3 day boat– & various cities, teaching. Now on weekend vacation rainy train Shanghai to Nanching, travel with postgraduate English student translator interpreter whose wife had baby last week– mist & smog, marvellous small scale farming fields along the R.R. line, heavy industry, umbrellas, cranes, orange buses, beehives along the road.

Mental open door limited by Party rigidity, karma of past crimes, official figure 20,000,000 ‘bad elements’ sent to work camps country or killed 1957-1976. Merry Xmas Happy Hanukah New York to Miriam & Didi—

Allen Ginsberg.”
The 'Zap stayed longer than the rest though he was dragged to bed for a couple of weeks with a ghastly flu
But, his vim always victorious, kept touring and teaching in China till December 28 when he returned to San Francisco

In China there was a flurry of interesting poems, including a dream wherein William Carlos Williams dictated to him a narrow-lined work (published in White Shroud as “Written in My Dream by W.C. Williams”

& “I Love Old Whitman So” written in Baoding after speed-reading through Leaves yet one more time.

While the bard was in China there was some trouble in the Forest Ginsberg when Peter went a bit crazy on the Lower East Side again He was drinking too much-- He showed up naked at 437 East 12th with a machete threatening to sever his own head & was taken to Bellevue tied to a chair

Allen & Peter were advised by a psychiatrist not to see each other for a year

Peter went to Chögyam Trungpa’s center in Nova Scotia & Karmê Chöling in VT
In January
the photo show, called “Hideous Human Angels”
at the Holly Solomon Gallery
was a fiscal success
& another strollway opened wide
in the Forest Ginsberg

I count 47
photo shows
all o’er th’ world
’tween ’85 & ’96

February 2
Harper & Row published
Collected Poems 1947-1980

It was one of the best selling books of verse
in the history of western civilization

& the reviews flowed forth–

It upset Gary Snyder
that the Collected Poems
was snubbed by the official culture

didn’t get the awards it was due
He mentioned the Pulitzer
& the National Book Award

I could guess why
What Kenneth Rexroth called “The light from Plymouth Rock”
still beams mightily
  o’er what used to be called squaresville–
There were too many hard cocks
trails of semen
  & attacks on the military-
industrial surrealists

to win corporate sponsorship

•
‘85 was the year the artist/filmmaker/magician Harry Smith came over to visit—a car backed into him & fractured his knee—he was homeless & stayed about a year in the bard’s guest room

“Harry Smith painter, filmmaker, sound archivist & occult bibliophile, roommate for bulk of year” is how the bard described it in his biographic précis

The bard had always attracted the verbally combative such as Kerouac, Lucien Carr, Barbara Rubin, Burroughs, Corso—some of the sharpest tongues in a sharp-tongued time & now Harry

One part of his brain a brilliant creator
One part a ruthless destroyer capable of even gutting his own work & a wit as pointy as a laser knife

It wore on Allen though one of his finest photographs (the first on his new large-neg Rolleiflex) had been taken of Harry not long before in Harry’s tiny room at the Breslin Hotel pouring some milk.

When Bob Dylan came over for a visit Harry refused to get up and chat with the singer.

Dylan (and much of his generation) had been impacted by Harry’s famous Folkways collection Anthology of American Folk Music

Allen’s psychiatrist finally suggested that
Harry had to depart because he was raising the Ginzap’s blood pressure.

SUMMER OF ’85
Naropa in Boulder

There was a symposium with William Burroughs & Norman Mailer on the subject “The Soul: Is There one, What Is It, & What’s Happening to It?”

I recalled a dinner at Burroughs’ bunker on the Bowery on Valentine’s night ’74:

He was talking about the Soul how out-of-body sex was possible like John Donne’s floating lovers & how he also believed that souls crisp up and die at 10,000 degrees & that was America’s great sin: it was the nation that first murdered souls.

November-December 1985 the bard went to Moscow with a writers delegation from the American Academy of Arts & Letters There’s an eerie snapshot by the bard of writer Louis Auchincloss standing next to Dostoevsky's writing desk at the Dostoevsky Museum in Leningrad (in ’Zap’s 1991 photo book from Twelvetrees Press)

It was just before Glasnost and the bard complained of political and erotic censorship whereupon a bureaucrat with the Moscow Writers Union said “Henry Miller will never be published in the Soviet Union.”
1986

The bard became Distinguished Professor at Brooklyn College replacing John Ashbery who was in the second year of his MacArthur Fellowship. Ashbery had invited Allen to B.C. a couple of times & had been impressed with Allen’s teaching at Naropa and so recommended him for the gig.

It was a good choice. Ginsberg began at something like $60k (it advanced to $85k during his years there)

& later also taught at the CCNY graduate school on West 42nd.

Freed from his administrative duties at Naropa the bard tossed himself into his new gig with an überworkaholic dedication— with the same high metabolism, guilt & need for bardic laurels—working too hard when sleep was required tired eyes like bruised apples—that he gave to his photos his diaries his politics his love life his search for verse

THE NICARAGUA STATEMENT

At the PEN International Conference in NYC he drafted, with Arthur Miller and Günter Grass what he called a “controversial widely-endorsed delegates’ statement against American intervention in Nicaragua”

and he went for the second time to the Rubén Darío Poetry Festival in Nicaragua
We have noted now & then on the bard’s complex relationships with Cultures:

Italy  England  France  Germany  Scandinavia  
Russia  Eastern Europe: Poland, Czech. & Hungary  
China  & of course India

In each place  
he had pals  
and passions

For instance, India  
Indira Gandhi had been at the Royal Albert Hall in ’65  
when Ginsberg read  
Also there was a woman named Pupil Jayakar,  
a close friend of Gandhi’s  
Around 1985 A.G. was contacted  
by Pupil Jayakar, then the Indian minister of culture  
who wanted the bard to organize a poetry reading  
as part of a two-year Festival of India

Allen accepted the task  
but basically handed the project  
over to Bob Rosenthal

who recalled, “Allen suggested a pan India festival with tribal dancers, Vedic chanters, Baul poets Dallit (untouchable) poets”  
as well as several poet friends from Calcutta

This was under the umbrella of A.G.’s  
Committee on Poetry

Part of it was a Festival of Poets in Bhopal  
and Rosenthal worked with the Indian gov’t  
“and got together a tour in the USA which included bilingual readings at the Museum of Modern Art in NYC hosted by Lita Hornick, UCLA, Santa Fe and maybe Chicago.”

Another example of  
the vast  
’s of the Zap.
60 YEARS ON EARTH

There was a
Festschrift: Best Minds: A Tribute to Allen Ginsberg,
edited by Bill Morgan and Bob Rosenthal
with glory-zings from the likes of
Cage, Creeley & other best minds.

He wrote a foreword to John Wieners’ Selected Poems: 1958-1994
for Black Sparrow Press

•

White Shroud: Poems 1980-1985 out from
Harper & Row

with some of his finest verse
including the title poem

Out too that year the interesting
Howl Annotated
edited by Barry Miles
from Harper & Row

It was modeled on the Waste Land facsimile book
& featured scans of the original
typed manuscript of Part I
with numerous hand corrections

and then also facsimiles
of four subsequent drafts
with their many alterations

& then 18 typed drafts
of Part II (“What sphinx of cement & aluminum.....”)

& then various version of Part III
(“Carl Solomon, I’m with you in Rockland”)

& also various versions of the “Footnote to Howl,”
(“Holy! Holy! Holy!”)
some of which I thought were
a little better than the Footnote the
Bard finally chose
There was a “Howl” 30th anniversary panel & Gala Reading at the MLA convention in NYC

SUMMER OF 1986

A man of means in Texas named Michael Minzer wanted to finance a CD project starring Ginsberg

He’d already produced a recording in Dallas of “Airplane Blues” and Blake’s “Nurses Song”

Minzer met that summer with young Hal Willner who’d been music coordinator for NBC’s “Saturday Night Live” since ’81

Willner was renowned for his “multi-artist tribute productions” and asked Hal to produce the Ginzap

Willner has a tendency, going into such a project, to project a maddening vagueness as to particulars & methodology

but he is famous in the music world for knitting fine art from Chaos.

Allen was skeptical for months – he was as scorched as Samuel Beckett’s toast from being burned down by Columbia Records & from all the offers o’er the years that had wound up as dried foam on the failure bucket.

MACEDONIA

The ’Zap was invited to Lake Ohrid in Macedonia to the Struga Festival to receive their annual award a laurel wreath of gold
Steve Taylor composed his remarkable string quartet piece
to “White Shroud”
& it was premiered August 25 in a cathedral
with the Pro Arte Quartet
under the ikon painting of the black Madonna
on the inside of the dome

On this tour the 'Zap also went to Budapest
& and also some benefits for Solidarity
in Krakow & Warsaw

Part XXIX

1987

Peter & Allen’s year of planned separation ended
Peter wanted A.G. to sell his archives
& move with Peter to
Chögyam Trungpa’s Buddhist center in Nova Scotia
and bring there also Peter’s sister, brothers & mother

Meanwhile Trungpa
was gravely ill
He’d been in and out of a coma
for a number of months

from too many Bacchus vines
on the Vajra

.

This was the year the Bard tried to
“slow down”
Of course perhaps his own metabolism
was signaling the braking
He had now passed over the festschrift
year

Why are some writers so Driven?
I think of the frantic eyes
of Dickens & Dostoevsky
& Ginsberg
   “my queer shoulder at the wheel”

always groaning
o’er all the work
    that teemed on his desk

APRIL 4

Trungpa passed away of heart failure on April 4

His body was embalmed in salt
and placed in a meditation position
    in an upright closed box of wood

at the Karmê Chöling center
    in the Green Mountains of Vermont

& carried in a procession
to a two-story brick stupa
    in a meadow
    and there atop it
    the leader was cremated

with thousands assembled.

The bard was once again seeing flames
    & smoke
    eat love.

    “Universe is Person,”
    the bard once wrote.
    “Mind is outer space,”
    he also wrote.
    “Candor ends paranoia,”
    a sentence for the Path

BAD BLOOD
May 9

There was a three day symposium
at St. Mark’s Church
to mark the 20th Anniversary of the Poetry Project
with readings and panels

I’d ended the reading on Saturday night
with my “Yiddish Speaking Socialists of the Lower East Side”
sliding my hands into the gloves of the Pulse Lyre
to forge sweet tones
beneath those socialist days

A bunch of us went out afterward to the Taj Restaurant
on East 6th
(Ed Dorn, Alice Notley, Ginsberg, Jerry Rothenberg,
Anselm Hollo, Bob Rosenthal, Anne Waldman
& others)

I was feeling upbeat rather than beat-up
I showed everybody the plastic handcuffs
I’d kept as a souvenir
   from the sit-in a few days before
   at the CIA in Langley.

Allen sat across from me &
mentioned John Clellon Holmes
locked on the path of mouth cancer
how he’d had his jaw, his
tongue & part of his throat removed–
it will give him an extra year, he said,
to write more, & wind up
his affairs

& then we were talking about
cyclical vengeance

He said there was speculation that the MOSSAD was behind
the murders of Indira Gandhi & and Anwar el-Sadat
to block peace
(Gandhi had been at A.G.’s reading at Royal Albert Hall in ’65)

He’d thought it was paranoia
till he brought it up with William Burroughs
who thought it not at all impossible

“It’s a terrible problem,” he said,
   “Bad blood”
& then the bard who was famous for being able to chant verse by the hour
who knew poems like “Lycidas” by heart
then recited some lines
   from Yeats’ “Meditations in Time of Civil War”:

“Vengeance upon the murderers,’ the cry goes up,
‘Vengeance for Jacques Molay,’ In cloud-pale rages, or in lace,
The rage-driven, rage-tormented, and rage-hungry troop,
Trooper belaboring trooper, biting at arm or at face,
Plunges towards nothing, arms and fingers spreading wide
For the embrace of nothing: and I, my wits astray
Because of all that senseless tumult, all but cried
For vengeance on the murderers of Jacques Molay.”

Bad Blood  Bad Blood
Born in the Time-Flood

SUMMER OF ’87

Allen was pulling his text-dappled oar
   on his teeming Boat of Books
      at the Naropa summer session

They had invited Marianne Faithfull to teach
Her CD “Strange Weather,” produced by Hal Willner
   had just come out
      and it was impressive–

she had a thick-woven, true-toned voice
   you liked to hear.
Faithfull played her CD for the bard
& Allen gave her some cassettes of his tunes in exchange

She listened
   & then made a lawyerly pronouncement
      “Maybe you shouldn’t sing”

The message was don’t sing please don’t sing
but you’re a great reciter of
   your great American lines
That settled it. Allen decided to work with Willner on a spoken verse/music project in the hugely cool tradition of Kenneth Patchen, Kenneth Rexroth & the Kerouac/Steve Allen session.

Allen went back to New York after the close of Naropa’s season.

The bard, Willner, and exec. producer Minzer chose 80 poems which A.G. read one night at his pad on East 12th. Everybody listened to the tapes & the 80 was winnowed to 50. Willner has very extensive contacts among the better musicians and composers. He contacted about 12 of them & invited them to A&R studio in NYC to hear AG read his verse.

AG rerecorded the selections for six hours, then poems were assigned to composers such as Gary Windo, Steve Swallow, Mark Bingham, Arto Lindsay, Marc Ribot, G.E. Smith, Lenny Pickett, Bill Frissell, et al.

They created music to swoop around the words 17 pieces that flowed across the AG bardic passion-zone from tender family memories to rougher modes – from “Aunt Rose” to “Shrouded Stranger” to “Kral Majales” to the spank-me ditty, “C’Mon Jack”.

After a week in the studio A.G. performed with some of the musicians at the Bottom Line in NYC on August 21 as part of a Fugs reunion in honor of the 20th anniversary of the Summer of Love.

Peter Orlovsky was there. During one of our tunes he started screaming “Lydia! Lydia!” in a soprano voice over and over.
enraging some of the audience
& then security guys
carried him away
  eyes widened
  & legs spread wide

(The sessions and mixing for Allen’s project
continued into the next year
–Chris Blackwell and Kim Buie of Island liked the project
  & voted to release The Lion for Real)

•

There was a festival inspired by the presence of
William Burroughs in Lawrence, Kansas
  in August of ’87
called the River City Reunion

A.G. had an exhibition of his photos at Lawrence
& gave a beautiful reading of
  “Howl”

  Much of the audience could follow it
      with pursing lips
  or memory-flashes
      as if listening
          to great music long familiar

Allen had suggested that Hal Willner
  produce a CD of Burroughs

so Willner visited Burroughs at his house
to begin the CD project known as Dead City Radio

Another project brought into place by the
  bard of howl.

•

There’s a general bardic rule
  that says that a poet
      should never declare herself
          a deity

yet on October 31
A.G. tossed off a brief poem called “Proclamation” which began

I am the King of the Universe
I am the Messiah with a new dispensation

It was the mindset of

wanting to stroll naked through
Cambridge in 1962
after his first psilocybin with Leary

or, say, 1948, when he crawled out on
the fire escape in Harlem
to startle the neighbors with
“'I've seen God!”


•

PEACE NOW ’88

Early in the year called ‘88
he flew to Israel
to teach a course called Photographic Poetics
with Robert Frank
at the Camera Obscura School in Tel Aviv

While there in Tel Aviv
he took part in a huge Peace Now demonstration
against the bad treatment of Palestinians
in occupied territories

He read his 1974 poem “Jaweh & Allah Battle”
before a crowd of 60,000
(one of his best political poems,
ranking, say, with the 1980 eco-chant “Homework”
“Jaweh & Allah Battle” was
later set by Philip Glass as part of Hydrogen Jukebox)

Back in New York
the bard began attending weekly meetings
with around 100 Jewish writers/artists
(among them, Norman Mailer, Kate Millett, Susan Sontag, Erica Jong,
& Roy Lichtenstein)

to forge a stand on the treatment of Palestinians

AG arranged to have the PEN center come out against
An Opera with Glass

The opera Hydrogen Jukebox began calmly enough when Philip Glass ran into A.G. in the St. Mark’s Bookshop

and asked the bard if he’d perform with him at a benefit for the Vietnam Veterans Theater at the Schubert Theater

Allen took down from the store shelf The Fall of America and showed Glass “Wichita Vortex Sutra”

The performance went well and there were meetings at Ginsberg’s apt to plan a grand collaboration

Work began in earnest in the fall of 1988 with neither Glass nor Ginsap impressed with the wormwoody proposals of Dukakis or Reagan in the struggle for the Presidency

They selected a trail of verse as a descant on the real America and its real future—Did the bard chant accurately when he named one of his books The Fall of America?


and the 1974
“Jahweh and Allah Battle”

fresh in mind from chanting it in Tel Aviv.

the Moloch section of “Howl”
& sections from the “National Security Agency Dope Calypso”
intermingled with his poem “Violence”

& ending with the
po/tune he composed on the plane
coming back from Boulder after father Louis passed:
“Father Death Blues”

(The American Music Theater in Philadelphia
    sponsored perf’s in the spring of 1990
w/ the world premieres at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston,
    SC & Spoleto, Italy in June 1990)

The opera featured six singers, a small ensemble of keys,
winds & percussion, with Martin Goldray directing

•

In ’88 there was another opera
    based on the bard’s works
at th’ Hamburg State Opera House
titled “Cosmopolitan Greetings”
    with Robert Wilson directing & music by George Gruntz

•

A tour of Japan next
with readings,
    plus an anti-nuke rally in Osaka

& benefits at Seika & Kyoto Universities
with his friend the poet Nanao Sasaki
    “to protect Okinawan Shiraho Blue Coral Reef.”

•

JUNE 25, 1988

Lowell, Massachusetts began to
celebrate its hometown boy
In late June they dedicated the Kerouac Commemorative Park with 15 passages from Kerouac cut upon 8 three-sided granite columns more or less dolmen’d into the array of a mandala

•

Harry Smith

Harry could be like a lasery sandbur but had a gentle fraction inside that brought him intense friendships especially with women

Miriam would talk with Harry for hours on the phone over the years so A.G. arranged for Harry to live at Naropa as a kind of “Shaman-in-Residence” He had a cottage on campus which became a kind of Seekers’ Abode an Adytum where he collected things, made hundreds of tape recordings from ’88 to ’91

(After Harry passed away it became the Naropa hand-set print shop.

–A.G. had first met Harry in the ’50s at the Five Spot at a Thelonius Monk gig. Harry was taking notes on Monk’s syncopation. Harry brought Allen to his pad and rolled some of his movies. Later A.G. took a reel to Jonas Mekas, thus introducing Harry to the prime instigator of the underground movie movement)

•

The ’Zap delivered the Charles Olson Memorial lectures at SUNY Buffalo
Meanwhile his photo career was in full careen, with shows in Tokyo, Krakow, Warsaw, Tübingen, Whistler House in Lowell, Fogg Museum in Cambridge, Vision Gallery in Boston, & Tilton Gallery in NYC

•

The end of the century saw the kudzuing of ghastly right wing think tanks & foundations well funded & weird

In October o’ ’88 the right-winger’s right-winger, Senator Jesse Helms, with the help of the Heritage Foundation vom’d forth a law which forced the F.C.C. to enforce a 24-hour ban on “indecent” language on all the nation’s airwaves

The ’Zap realized “There goes Howl” & so, again, rose to the protection & in his own words “organized consortium P.E.N. American Center. A.C.L.U. with Pacifica Radio to oppose F.C.C. censorship of arts broadcasting.”

(The results? There were court decisions in 1993 which left in place a ban on erotolalia from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m., with freedom to chant eros over the air from late in the evening till dawn.)

•

POE JOB PHOBIA

I spoke with the bard on 12-16-88 He was in the hospital He seemed short of breath The dr., he said, told him he was healing like a young man I was calling to ask him to perform at place called the Kitchen in January to protest the crackdown in Czechoslovakia on the Plastic People band and a cultural leader named
He said, “If I’m healthy, count me in.”

He said he’d been reading a hostile biography of Bob Dylan & we talked a bit about what I’d come to call the “Poe Job” such as what Goldman had done to Lennon
The Poe Job of course goes all the way back to Rev. Rufus Griswold’s hate-bio of the Raven man

The bard was feeling a bit Poe’d himself
He’d read the manuscript of Barry Miles’ biography which was about to come out
and he felt Miles was harsh on his Buddhism
by which I guess he meant
the considerable space
Miles devoted to
the ’75 stripping at Snowmass & its literary aftermath.

1989

We gathered January 29 at the perf space called the Kitchen on West 19th
to call upon the government of Czechoslovakia to give total freedom of speech to its artists and singers

There were many performers, including Eliot Sharp, Vicki Stanbury & the Plastic People’s own Bratlislav Brabenec with his long-toned saxophone

Allen had healed enough to read “Kral Majales”

and Steve Taylor & I sang my “Incantation Against the Government of Czechoslovakia”

to the overflow crowd.

Not many months ahead:
the nonviolent rev in Czechoslovakia
The ‘Zap was honored at a banquet Feb. 11 at the Associated Writing Program’s Convention in Philadelphia.

The Fugs performed with the bard. We wrote a melody to his ’55 masterwork “The weight of the world is love.”

& it still gives a thrill to listen to the tape of it from that night with 1,000 screaming writers & professors at its close.

At the end A.G. and the Fugs sang Blake’s “Nursing Song” with the sing-along final lines, repeated o’er and o’er “& All the Hills Echoéd” to an ecstatic crooning auditorium again a thrill to hear over 10 years later Allen’s voice had all its fine bass qualities that night in key in control & reaching his golden thread toward Blake.

Barry Miles’ 533 page biography Ginsberg was published by Simon & Schuster.

I liked its honesty & how Miles was able close as he was to the bard to get to a critical distance.

As for Allen, there was a further frenzy of readings at schools & colleges He kept up the flow of fund raisers.
that year
I count at least 11 benefits


In addition he had some more photo exhibitions in LA, Chi, Poland, Austria & Germany

and his fine spoken verse/music CD
The Lion for Real
by Great Jones/Island Records
produced by Hal Willner
(secret executive producer Michael Minzer)

In May he moved his office from his East 12th pad to 2nd Avenue & 14th
subletting two rooms from the daughter of Arlene Lee (Lucien Carr’s ex & Mardou Fox in K’s Subterraneans. It was in torrid eros with Arlene Lee in the ’50s, A.G. once told me, that his dong was perma-bent to the left)

Then a few months later the office moved to 41 Union Square, th’ 14th floor

probably the only poet ever to have his own staff & office in the former Great Zone of the Left

In a more controversial area he attended a NAMBLA convention in ’89

Sometimes he complained to me he was being attacked from the right for his love of youth

He was always extremely candid in matters of eros “Candor ends paranoia” he wrote in “Cosmopolitan Greetings”
but he would travel to colleges
& give forth the message
it was okay to make it with
his legal-age students

& now and then I give a reading at a college
where they still talk of the furor from
A.G. erotic talk
of decades ago

“I myself don’t
like underage boys,” he once told The New York Times
“But they have a right
to talk about the
age of consent.
I see it as a free speech issue—a
discussion of the law.”

The bard helped get a three-year grant
for Harry Smith
from the Grateful Dead’s Rex Foundation

On December 2, Bush & Gorbachev
announced the end of the Cold War

and on December 29
the writer Vaclav Havel
was elected the president of Czechoslovakia

Part XXXI

1990

In March A.G. came to the Zen Center
near Woodstock
with Anne Waldman.
He recited the libretto of Hydrogen Jukebox

Later we chatted
He told me that Burroughs
sold $180k of his shotgun-paint-tube-splatter
on-plywood/collage paintings last year
He’d taken up art after his trilogy
   Cities of the Red Night
       The Place of Dead Roads
            & The Western Lands

Burroughs gets up, Allen said, smokes a j
takes his methadone,
writes till 4 p.m.
   then dinner & a few drinks, then zzz

“And he’s healthy!”
   the bard said with a cackle,
comparing W.B. to himself
crunched with high blood pressure,
       gout, diabetes, et al.

PRAGUE

That spring Allen organized a visit to Prague
to celebrate the warless revolution

He’d not been back since
   being tossed in ’65

This time he was received by the Lord Mayor Mr. Koran
& President Vaclav Havel

and re-laureled as King of the May once again!
and toured various colleges
   reading & lecturing

•

Hydrogen Jukebox premiered
   with Philip Glass
at the Spoleto Festivals
   in Charleston, SC & Spoleto, Italy

I spoke with him when he returned
& he mentioned how he dug being called Maestro
   at opera houses

•

The 'Zap was an American delegate
And what was probably the first lecture by a major poet in the history of Western Civilization:

“Chemical Substances & Poetics,”
at the Albany College of Pharmacy
in Albany, NY

•

A GOOD SYSTEM FOR BARDING AROUND

In his final years
the bard had the same stage setup
wherever he read

A sketch of the stage was included in a rider
to his contracts:

The flowers on the lower left were to be,
in the bard’s words, “a modest bunch of flowers, preferably non-florist, local weeds or garden growth.”

His rider also called for a pot of chamomile tea and honey
“already pre-mixed to save mess of honey on mss. and audience time.”

1991

Around the time of the Gulf War’s
inception of spent uranium-shell bombardment

Ginzap was a guest lecturer for a week
There’s a fine photo by Gordon Ball  
showing cadets in grey uniforms  
reading “Howl”  
one with his long thin fingers  
wrapped up over his short-shorn hair

Oddly it was America’s poets who sensed  
the underlying  
sham of Desert Storm  
& Allen joined Poets Against the Gulf War

There was a MLA Special Session on “Kaddish”  
with Gordon Ball and Helen Vendler  
in San Francisco

and the book Allen Ginsberg Photographs  
from Twelvetrees Press in Santa Monica

MORE SCURRY HURRY FLURRY OF ’91

• Master Class at the Walt Whitman Birthplace Association, Long Island, NY

• Symposium on Tiananmen Square with Feng Lizhi at the New York Academy of Sciences

• Keynote Speaker, Buddhist Psychology Conference, at th’ Karma Triyana Monastery in Woodstock, NY

• Symposium with Lewis Hyde, "Art & Politics.” at Kenyon College, Ohio

• Great Falls Preservation and Development Corporation 200th Anniversary, Paterson, NJ

• Reading Jack Kerouac's Dharma Bums & Jacob Rabinowitz's Translations of Catullus for Spring Audio Cassettes

• Harriet Monroe Poetry Award at the University of Chicago

TOUCHING THE COOLING NOGGIN
November 27, ’91
Harry Smith died at the Chelsea Hotel

The bard heard about it & rushed to the hospital
Harry had been coughing blood,
and finally it was copious,
& he fell down in the hallway at the Chelsea.
They tried to revive him, a crew from Saint Vincents,
but he was gone.
Allen thinks he came back from Boulder
to N.Y. to die.
A.G. went into the hospital morgue
& sat with him. One eye was semi-open, he told me,
& the other bruised from the fall.
There was a tube still in his mouth,
a bandage keeping it there, & blood
on his beard. His head hair was white
& fine– Allen felt it– the head was
still warm.
He meditated, he said, for an hour– a Tibetan
tradition apparently.

Later there was a memorial at St. Mark’s Church
at which Harry’s friends, and the Fugs,
sang & eulogized him,
and also Harry’s branch of the
Ordo Templi Orientis
performed a Gnostic Mass
for the departed artist

Tuli Kupferberg told me at the end of December
that A.G. was in the hospital in Cooperstown
with liver problems.
Perhaps the hepatitis C
that was to eat his life
five years later.

1992

The bard with the legendary vim
always bounded back
There was a party for the Portable Beat Reader
at the Poetry Project at St. Mark’s Church
February 5

Joyce Johnson, Hettie Jones, Ann Charters, Peter O.,
Herbert Huncke, Allen and I read

It was a fine, unsentimental evening
& afterwards Miriam & I, Ann Charters & A.G.
had a late dinner at
Kiev on 2nd Ave. & 7th.

He mentioned how he had helped Jan Kerouac
sue for a share in Jack’s estate
She now got 50%, he said.

In Paris the French minister of culture, Jacques Lang
presented the bard with the
Chevalier de l’Ordre des Artes et des Lettres

& he was also elected
fellow of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences
in Boston

NODDING AT NAROPA

I taught a course at Naropa that summer
on setting up multi-decade information systems
to assist in the long-term writing of verse.
Our apartment
was next to A.G.’s

which gave us the first evidence
of the bard’s declining health
I was distressed at his condition
He could be seen sleeping at readings
He had severe diabetes
& at dinner parties
he would excuse himself
to rush back to his apt
to shoot up his insulin
& was restricted to a stringent macrobiotic diet

yet noddy as he seemed
his legendary metabolism
kept foaming through
to give us a sense
“This Bard is Forever.”

•

That October
Michael Schumacher’s 769 page
biography of Ginsberg, called Dharma Lion
was published by St. Martin’s Press

(Dharma Lion, read in conjunction with
Barry Miles’ Ginsberg
together give a hologrammatic
view of the bard
from birth up into the late 1980s)

•

Brooklyn College
& CUNY Graduate Center:
Walt Whitman Centenary Celebrations

(For a brilliant Ginsberg presentation on Whitman
read his essay “Taking a Walk Through Leaves of Grass”
in A.G.’s Deliberate Prose, Selected Essays
from HarperCollins, 2000

Part XXXII

1993

A newspaper, Long Island Newsday
asked the bard to compose a poem for
the upcoming occasion
of Bill Clinton’s inauguration

so, after consulting friends, the bard put together his
“New Democracy Wish List” on January 17
perhaps as a kind of response to Maya Angelou’s poem at the inauguration

It had many good points
which Clinton mostly ignored
(the bard sent him a copy)

February 28
the bard called with the ghastly word
that Carl Solomon
had passed away that morning
from lung cancer

& a few days later, March 2
the World Trade Center bombing
–fundamentalism cursing the American city

March 26 I went to his apartment
and filmed the bard reading his
“New Democracy Wish List”

It was a fine slice of his ’93 life
because while we were running tape
various pals called the bard,
Phil Whalen, Gary Snyder,
and ex-governor Jerry Brown
who wanted A.G. to write a pamphlet
for a series he was starting

Around this time he began Buddhist retreats
with (and benefits for)
Gelek Rinpoche of
Jewel Heart in Ann Arbor

plus annual benefits for Tibet House
with Laurie Anderson
The bard went to his 50th high school class reunion
at Eastside H.S. in NJ

SOLOMON

“ah Carl.... now you’re really in the total animal soup of time–”
“Howl”

I always admired Solomon’s
good-hearted, very aware Lonerism
& I was surprised
that no one seemed to be giving him a public memorial
to I called Ed Friedman at the St. Mark’s Church
and Allen too of course

and helped organize the one
which was held at the Church on June 16

That day I bused to NYC from Woodstock
and visited Allen’s office on Union Square

He had just come from a dr.’s appointment
I was surprised at how much of the office was devoted
to his photos! There was a shot of a very beautiful
Joanne Kyger from 1963
    & a young Harry Smith that looked
    just a tad like
    d.a. levy of Cleveland.

The bard gave me a big piece of kombu energy seaweed--
very expensive he said, from a rich friend
He cracked off about a square foot– you chew it
    for proper bardic metabolism

Also a copy of Louis Ginsberg’s collected works
& Solomon’s final big book

The bard through the 33 years of crossed paths
always loaded me down with books, CDs,
clippings, manifestoes & urgings

The highlight for me at the Solomon memorial
was singing harmony with Allen on the
Prajnaparamita Sutra
while playing my 3-stringed Strum Stick

Ted Morgan, Ann Charters & others spoke
then Gregory Corso
read a fresh poem written in big scrawls
on a crumpled & folded paper.

The bard closed the night with “Howl”
He started slowly, then built it up in a
rhapsodic, rapturous way
He later said he given it an “operatic rendition.”

Allen had to split almost at once
because he’d promised to appear that night
at the opening of a club called Shaman.

That fall the ‘Zap had a sabbatical from Brooklyn College
so in a horror vacui temporis
he filled in the gap
with a four-month tour of Europe

I saw him on September 5
just before he left
He had come to Woodstock for my musical drama Cassandra

He’d read a pamphlet on Bosnia by George Soros, the financier
who was spending some of his millions
promoting free trade & democracy
in Eastern Europe

Soros was alarmed at the rise of nationalism
“His point,” the bard said, “is that replacing the
Cold War mentality now
is a hypernationalism
that threatens the peace
not only of Europe
but of the whole world
and that’s going to be the big plague of the future and the cause of wars.”

He taught with Anne Waldman at the interesting Schule für Dichtung in Vienna in September

and went to Budapest, Belgrade, Bydgoszcz, Krakow, Lodz & Warsaw

Then traveled to premieres of Jerry Aronson’s The Life and Times of Allen Ginsberg” in Paris, Berlin, Prague, Barcelona, Madrid, Córdoba, and Athens in a long ego-ribboning line of praise & money-scoop

He performed in Berlin at a Jewish festival & did a few tunes with the klezmer band, the Klezmatics.

In Athens he wrote one of his better hortatory poems, “C’mon Pigs of Western Civilization Eat More Grease” in his final book Death & Fame

He toured to Dublin where he did what he called a “TV collaboration” with a rock star named Bono of the band called U2

At trek’s end the bard visited Paul Bowles in Tangiers & the spots he had haunted with Peter Orlovsky & Jack Kerouac back in ’57 & ’61

Then it was back to the States in January for a Vajrayogini Buddhist retreat with Gelek Rinpoche in Michigan.

Gelek Rinpoche was Allen’s Buddhist mentor following the demise of Chögyam Trungpa.

•

Hydrogen Jukebox which had been recorded in a studio in '92 and '93
1994

The CD Kronos Quartet H Howl USA came out early in the year
On it the bard performed the poem to music
on a CD that contained a piece called “Cold War Suite”
with the voice of the great I.F. Stone!
On January 20 he performed “Howl” with the Quartet
at Carnegie Hall

Tikkun magazine honored
A.G. at its January 16-17 conference
“because of his important contribution
to progressive culture, and because of his unique
blending of Jewish particularism & universalism.”

NEW AMAZING GRACE

Since ’92 I’d been collecting verses
from poets & composers
for The New Amazing Grace

The verses could be on any subject
and very secular
except that I wanted just a faint beam of
hope—like the “sunlight in the window”
in Naomi’s final letter
in “Kaddish”

NPR had picked up my quest and had broadcast a piece
on it
so that a big influx of submissions had come in from
ministers in the heartland & regular folk, but

I was having trouble getting New Amazing Grace verses
from some of my bards

Pete Seeger was one of them
Finally I wrote him to the effect that I couldn’t
believe that one of the greatest song writers
The guy who wrote “Turn, Turn, Turn,”
& “Where Have All the Flowers Gone”
& half of “If I Had a Hammer”

couldn’t come up with
a 4-line quatrain for NAG.

It worked. Seeger finally mailed his in on April 14

Burroughs, Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg were other holdouts
though all ultimately came through

Allen called one evening in late January & said he had a verse
and started singing it.

It was something like,
“When you grow old
you’ll shit your pants.....”

I broke in, “No! No!”
I never would have thought I’d ever edit or censor
my hero

but I mentioned that the NPR piece
had brought in a rinse of submissions
from Methodist ministers
& the regular folk of radio land

(I had no idea he was having incontinence problems
from his diabetes)

On March 14 he wrote:

“Re Amazing Grace– I’ve just
not been able to do anything– or
nothing’s occurred to me– my head full
of panic at unfinished CD Rhino notes now
delaying release of the 4 CD’s another
2 months, my overload responsible–
I’ll still try–
Love Allen”

I wasn’t sure he even knew the melody and meter for
“Amazing Grace”

so I sent him a note with the
metrical structure:
in 3/4 time

Two weeks later he called
complaining that he’d been up all night

and sang me some very beautiful verses

After he’d finished
   & I’d remarked how excellent they were, he asked
   “Do you know where I am now?”

   “No.”

   “I'm on the toilet.”

The verses arrived
   in the mail
   a few days later:

   Stealers of Amazing Grace

   0 homeless hodon meny a street
   Accept this change from me
   A friendly smile or word is sweet
   As homeless Charity

   Woe workingman who hears the cry
   And cannot spare a dime
   Nor look into a homeless eye
   Afraid to give the time

   So rich or poor no gold to talk
   A smile on your face
   The homeless poor where you may walk
   Receive amazing grace

   I dreamed I dwelled in a homeless place
   Where I was lost alone
   False looked right through me into space
   Passed with eyes of stone

   Paul Kinsberg
   1/21/94
“Your last letter with ballad meter ( راضي راضي راضي راضي ), helped clarify the form.

Here’s 4 stanzas. The last stanza could go first.

Use 2, 3 or 4 of the stanzas in any order you edit.

Thanks for the prompting & persistence– but I lost a night’s sleep working it over!

Love

Allen”

It was some of his final finest verse.

MAY 8, 1994

I went to NYC to mc a panel at St. Mark’s on Investigative Poetry & once downtown I called A.G. He was just getting up after a party he’d thrown last night for his Brooklyn College students

He’d been dreaming, he said, as he awakened, about Olson’s poem that begins “Mud & wattles” (#4 of “The Songs of Maximus”)

He dubbed for me a tape of Joyce reading from Finnegan’s Wake and Wilde reading “Ballad of the Reading Gaol.”

Then we went to the church for the panel with Bernadette Mayer, Nourbese Philip, David Henderson and A.G.

Then oodles of kids and poets to Ginsberg’s for dinner, then back to the church for a poetry reading Backstage Allen told me that
Jan Kerouac was going to hold a press conference at the upcoming NYU Beat Festival challenging Kerouac’s mom’s will

A slice of a day in
the life of Allen

MAY 15, 1994

I spoke with the ’Zap
He told me that Johnny Depp
had paid Kerouac’s estate $50,000
for one of Jack’s jackets

(I must have mis-heard him,
because I think it was only a mere $15,000)

NYU BEAT FEST
May 17-22, 1994

Its formal name was “The Beat Generation Legacy and Celebration”

It was the kind of conference
that the bard always
joyed to serve

in that it validated
all the frenzied years
of forging a generation

It was sponsored by the NYU School of Ed
Ann Charters and A.G. were the honorary chairs

One of the B.G. panels was titled
“The Legacy, Connections & Influences”
with myself, Doug Brinkley, Gordon Ball and others.

I was innocently sitting at the red-clothed dais
when Hunter Thompson arrived
in a curl-brimmed beige campaign hat
& a green shirt
and handed me a lit hash pipe
in front of 8 or 900 people
in packed Eisner & Lubin Auditorium

What could I do but
flow some smoke
from my distinguished writer pal?

They invited Jan Kerouac
who chanted some work
at Eisner & Lubin Auditorium one evening

She was screwed up physically at 42
Was on dialysis I heard

& yet she read with great vitality
& even chant-sang a poem
to a rap track

and looked not that different from when she
was a 14-year-old wild child on Avenue B
in 1966.

MAY 19

There was a big reading at Town Hall on 43rd Street
of the poets at the conference

Anne Waldman & I m.c.’d
We called William Burroughs in
Lawrence from a phone on the stage
& he read a piece

Then later backstage
based on what A.G. had told me
I mentioned to Michael McClure
that Johnny Depp
had paid 50 grand
to Kerouac's estate
for one of
Jack's jackets

Ferlinghetti was out on the mike
Corso & the Russian poet Andrei Voznesensky were chatting nearby

Ray Manzarek & McClure were just about to go out to do their poems w/ piano

when McClure flipped me his hard-analysis Dorian eye, & said "I have five or six of those."

"So do I," I replied, my mind shifting cunningly from free will to Goodwill thinking, of course, that Depp might need a 2nd coat for when the 1st is in the cleaners & a third for his summer home

A HOME FOR HIS ARCHIVES

Allen wanted his archives to go to his alma mater

but the Atropos/Lachesis/Clotho trinity had other plans

The archives had been brought to a sense of order after years of work by Bill Morgan (& also Jacqueline Gens)

A few years previously it had been appraised in an item-by-item manner by Bob Wilson of the Phoenix Bookshop at over $4 million (and Bill Morgan told me Wilson did not actually get through all the items)

It was a perilously lofty figure
even for Irwin Allen Ginsberg.

In the end Columbia could not find the resources to acquire the trove.

It turned out that Stanford University had money—there had been a hiring freeze on personnel. The library wanted to spend their $ on one large expensive item.

A scholar named Steve Watson was doing some research at Stanford. The librarians there thought Columbia owned Allen’s files and when they were told otherwise they called Bill Morgan.

By now the bard had selected an unwobbling price—a million dollars (excluding A.G.’s massive photo archives).

Morgan negotiated back and forth for several weeks with the bard’s agent Andrew Wylie handling some of the fine points

among which was the provision that the bard would be given 2 week’s free room & board per year at Stanford to visit his treasures.

Key professors at Stanford, Marjorie Perloff in particular, plus Gilbert Sorrentino and Diane Middlebrook stepped forth to urge the purchase.

Part XXXIII

A CELEBRATION OF THE BARD AT NAROPA

They organized a celebration of Allen that July at Naropa called Beats & Other Rebel Angels: A Tribute to Allen Ginsberg. It was a huge one & since there was a kind of edge-of-frenzy
tap tap-ing at the edge of the Beat Generation anyway
there was Cannes-esque
flavor to the celebration

as Meredith Monk, Miguel Algarin, Joanne Kyger, Ferlinghetti,
Amiri Baraka, Galway Kinnell, Sharon Olds, Robert Creeley,
Gregory Corso, Philip Glass, Michael McClure, Francesco Clemente,
Raymond Foye, Anne Waldman, David Cope, Gary Snyder, Antler,
Andy Clausen, Ken Kesey
& a pleth’ of Others
flew to the high air of Boulder.

They dedicated the Allen Ginsberg Library
July 3

My part included a lecture on July 5,
“The Ginsberg Method: How to Keep from Getting
Boxed-In in a Chaotic World.”

7-8-94

I watched the great bard
read his “Sunflower Sutra”

& jotted in my notebook,

“How afire
this spire”

There were a series of national ads for the Gap clothing line
One featured Andy Warhol, another William Burroughs
and one with the text:
“Allen Ginsberg wore khakis”
for which the bard received $20,000
which he donated to Naropa

He insisted that the ad state the Naropa donation
but it was printed in such small pointed type
that you needed a magnifier to see it.
The bard did a book signing at Barnes & Noble in SF which miffed Lawrence Ferlinghetti because of the store-eating aspect of big chains.

Out came, in the fall o’ ’94, the 4-CD set from Rhino Records called Holy Soul Jelly Roll Poems & Songs 1949-1993 & the ’Zap went forth on what they often call a “whirlwind” tour of signings & readings to promote sales

ARRIVALS AT STANFORD

In September o’ ’94 The bard’s papers began arriving at Stanford

174,601 items in around 500 boxes all meticulously indexed w/

24,179 pp of manuscripts 18.9k of “Journals & Notebooks” & 2,500 tape recordings

Hey o bright scribe of 2002, want to write a 50,000-page bio of a bard?

•

The fall of ’94 saw a right-winger named Newt Gingrich & a ghastly cohort of like-minded wing nuts take over Congress for the first time in 40 years the Senate too fell to a form of right-winger a bit more polite than Gingrich’ sneer squad.

The bard had a fearful take on the right-wingers froth-fingering the throat of America They boded no good he felt
for freedom,
especially for gays

and any who might fall into
the remarkable category of
“madman beat in time”

NEW AMAZING GRACE

I was barding around
   & flew to New York from Milwaukee
then headed to Allen’s house on November 20
to get ready for the first performance
of the New Amazing Grace
a benefit for the Poetry Project & St. Mark’s Church

We practiced at the church during the day
–a remarkable gathering of top-rank gospel singers
plus musicians such
   as Steve Taylor & Coby Batty

The audience was treated to a thrilling
   hour and a half
   of beautiful singing

The quatrains of Waldman, Rothenberg, Creeley,
Schickele, Seeger, Bly, Wakoski, Eshleman,
   and about 75 others
soared to a sacred/secular zone
   of great power

But it was when Allen Ginsberg walked upon the
stage among the singers
   to soft-voice his four amazing quatrains
that the summit was found

The audience had been given copies of all the lyrics
and encouraged to sing along.
By the close of the evening
everyone was on their feet and trembling the walls

1995
There were at least 3 trips to Europe that year & at least 8 benefits plus oodles of gigs in the States.

- For 5 days in May '95 he read all the poems in his upcoming Selected Poems: 1947-1995 at the Knitting Factory on Leonard Street. 8 p.m. show time, $16

The five gigs were video’d with a 3-camera shoot

- June 1, he suffered a pulmonary embolism an obstruction of the lung by an embolus, any foreign substance such as a blood clot or dislodged tumor cells It’s a very serious condition that usually requires at least a few days in the hospital yet somehow the bard found vim enough for a conference called “The Writings of Jack Kerouac” at NYU on June 4, 5 & 6

Panels had names such as “Bop, Blues and Scat: the Jazz Nexus in Kerouac’s Writing” & “Language, Voice, Beat and Energy of Kerouac’s Poetry”

The latter panel was chaired by Allen G on the morning of June 5 at NYU’s Eisner & Lubin Auditorium

Just before it began Jan Kerouac approached the bard and asked to make a brief announcement that the NY Public Library & the Bancroft Library at the U of Cal had offered $1 million for
She was not allowed

There were some exasperated words
& apparently security guards escorted her out

Meanwhile a long banner was unfurled in the room
“SAVE JACK’S PAPERS”

A group of poets calling themselves the Unbearables held some parody events
–such as a Kerouac Impersonator contest–
calling the $120 per head NYU conference
“The Beats Sell Out”

June 6 was a big night at Town Hall
on 43rd Street off 6th Avenue called
“An Evening With Jack Kerouac: Poetry and Prose with Music”

As I entered the Unbearables picket line was chanting
“Where are the Fugs
Now that we need them?”

A bunch of us read, focusing on Kerouac’s writing
Graham Parker, Odetta, Anne Waldman, myself, & others
including Gregory Corso
who wowed them
by complying when the audience
shouted for “Marriage”

Annie Leibovitz was posing us
for Vanity Fair
in the upstairs dressing room at Town Hall

I sat next to Allen
who looked weak and sallow

He said he’d had a pulmonary embolism last week
They’d done a chest X ray
and it had blipped on the negative
How big? I asked.

About the size of a Spanish olive, he replied.

It went away, he said, with medication.

He seemed trembly

& couldn’t stand

for a long time.

Then how come

you’re going to Italy tomorrow?

I asked.

He said his schedule was light

and then he’d have 9 days to heal at Francesco Clemente’s place

in Amalfi in the south near Naples

before returning to his summer duties.

I held his hand

& marveled once again at his power.

Then we were standing offstage

by gilt-wood sconces
topped with stylized artichokes.

Allen was getting ready to be driven home
to rest for his flight
to his photo exhibit at the Venice Biennale.

I was seeing the Rot Bird

as Graham Parker and Odetta

read Kerouac’s prose.

O Rot Bird I see your beak-bites

in the gilt-wood sconces

on the backstage wall

where the bard stands

next to the boxes of mike stands.

“You have to live as long as your daddy,”

I said to him.

“I will,” he replied.

but I could hear the

wings of the Rot Bird

whirring in the nerves.
of Kerouac's words
as Allen exited stage right
to his cab.


The 'Zap made it to his photo exhibit “108 Images” at the Venice Biennale on June 8 with Hiro Yamagata, a rich & famous Japanese artist who was reported to be supporting Gregory Corso with $3,500 a month

The invitation to the Yamagata Venice exhibition bore a color photo of a psychedelically painted Rolls Royce convertible

•

With the money from the Stanford archives purchase A.G. purchased and rehabbed Claes Oldenburg’s former loft on East 13th near 1st Avenue Larry Rivers also lived in the building

(Oddly enough they found the place in an ad in the Times. Rosenthal hired an architect though the bard worked on the design & the long loft was completely redone, with separate offices & a guest room)

Allen told me that the monthly maintenance was kept low because a McDonald’s rented the ground floor on the 14th Street side of the building

There was a bit of jeering and sneering in the media over the sale of his archives.

In an interview with The N.Y. Times
he said that his agent got 5%, the archivist Bill Morgan
who slaved 13 years on the trove
& set up the deal 10%
plus a giant slice for taxes &
   “I was left with a third
   I bought the loft
   Now I’m back to square one.”

All of us wanted him to get into
that building as quickly as possible

One night Miriam and I walked the bard
up the three flights to his apartment on E. 12
& it was a painful experience

He walked very very slowly
pausing at each landing
   breathing heavily

I was reminded of how Chekhov
in his final winter
decided to stay in Moscow
to be with his wife Olga Knipper
but the flat was on the upper floor
& it took the wrack-lunged doctor
   as much as a half hour
   to pause-puff up the steps

Miriam noticed how very yellow
   his skin seemed to be
She thought, “Why are they taking so long fixing
up that place so beautifully
when it’s killing him
to walk up the steps
He’ll be dead before he gets to use it.”

diabetes
gout
high blood pressure
liver prob’s
   congestive heart failure

–thock thock thock
I was in New York City to plan the second annual performance of the New Amazing Grace and cabbéd with the bard in the rain up to the VA hospital on 23rd to visit Peter Orlovsky in a locked ward on the 17th floor

We had to pass through a metal detector and get passes. His ward had a buzzer door with the sign: Ring for Attendant Elopement Risk

During those years Peter looked like a combination of Gustav Courbet & a 19th-century French farmer but that late afternoon in his green hospital suit he looked as glum as Leonardo’s “Self-Portrait” in the Royal Library in Turin

He had a hardbound copy of The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich on the visiting room table He said he spiffled in his mind through the WWII Nazi attack on Russia to get himself calmed down to sleep

He was taking lithium & something called Tegretal The latter of which was giving him dyskinesia so they were giving him less to lessen those effects

Peter didn't want to be there. “Life has been no fun,” he said.

I'd had many fine adventures over the years with Peter beginning in ’64 when he and his brother Julius used to help collate the pages of Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts
I reminded him of the time we went down with Neal in the VW van to see Kesey in La Honda in ’65. I also mentioned the beautiful woman named Lydia so smitten with him in ’66.

& I thought of other moments of fun such as his thrilling descending yodel line while playing the banjo back in ’77 in Woodstock.

He said he was going to resume his Buddhist practice. Just as we left Allen pulled out a camera and took some snaps of Peter & me.

I asked what kind. “It’s an Olympus XA,” he said.

I knew they weren’t made anymore. “You can get them,” said the ever-teaching teacher “for about 150 dollars & K&M Camera on 23rd & 1st Avenue.”

Not long thereafter I picked one up at the very place he said they’d be.

November 15, ’95 there was a second benefit performance of the New Amazing Grace

Again the bard sang his trembling verses

He told me afterwards that he had been weeping through the evening’s final rounds.
There was an interesting show on the Beat Generation
at the Whitney Museum
curated by Lisa Phillips
which opened on December 8

I bused down to the opening
It was a typically jittery NYC art crowd
as manic in '95
    as it was in '65 or '55

I'd never seen so much well-turned-out black attire
There must have been several million dollars' worth
    of fresh purchased noir!

A girl on a bench wearing wide black lipstick
    in the Whitney lobby
was frantically wave-drying
    her just-painted black fingernails
while a friend to her side in black sunglasses
    was chatting on a cell phone
–an image of an image as Plato described in the
    Allegory of the Cave.

Inside was a mighty flow of images!
Especially a glass topped case of
    William Burroughs' cut-ups
& the manuscript of On the Road
    in a shrine-case

DECEMBER 10
BEAT NIGHT AT THE WHITNEY

Then on Dec. 10th
there was a reading at the Whitney
A.G. with Steve Taylor, and myself with Steve, plus
David Amram, Michael McClure w/ Ray Manzarek
& actor Keir Dullea reading
    Beat texts

Miriam and I were getting ready in Woodstock
to go to NYC for the reading

when Allen called early in the morning with bronchitis
and asked for “Pavarotti’s” throat therapy

(A doctor friend of mine had helped restore
my voice before a Fugs reunion
–he’d gotten the method from Pav’s dr.)

I read it to him:
1. Take lots of liquids
2. Squirt Vanceril down throat
every ten minutes
3. Don’t talk
4. Just before show time
   spray Afrin down throat

   Then you can fully
croon.
   It works.

We drove to NYC
to 437 East 12th, the bard’s pad

where Steve & I rehearsed the Sappho poem
   we’d sing in Greek at the Whitney

Allen was still weak.
   Miriam didn’t see how he could possibly perform.
An accupuncturist & massagist were working on him

yet somehow by show time
the bard was ready–

(It was sometimes the same with Gregory Corso
–backstage you might think
   he could never go on
yet, like a Kennedy, he’d spring up
   and press his lips to the mike
   in full bard vitality)

He performed the beautiful section
   “Oh mother, what have I left out
Oh mother, what have I forgotten....”
from Kaddish
and the fine pol-song “Ballad of the Skeletons”
with Steve Taylor

It was in The Nation that week
Allen was less than pleased with the quality
of Calvin Trillin’s political poems
The Nation published

so that “Ballad of the Skeletons”
was his answer lick
(to use a guitarist’s term)
on what pol-poesy should be

in the tradition of his “Capitol Air”
“Hum Bomb” and “CIA Dope Calypso.”

(beginning around this time the bard,
working with poets Andy Clausen & Eliot Katz
began collecting pol-po’s [political poems]
from his friends
particularly on America’s rightward drift.
The pol-po’s were to be published in a
special section of The Nation)

The Whitney gave us a Town Car
for the trip back downtown
with Corso announcing he’d support Colin Powell for pres
& A.G. heading
to a Harry Smith celebration at St. Mark’s.
where they were rolling Harry’s ’53 3-D movie
called Number 6

& Miriam & I said good bye to
bard Corso & bard Ginsberg
and drove back to Woodstock

Part XXXIV
1996

If you look at the Raw List
of things he did
in the year before his
As death is just about as complex as Beat Frenzy ’56.

Ginsberg was determined to go the Thomas Hardy path:
to write great poetry as he geezered.

In February he played at the annual benefit for Tibet House at Carnegie Hall.

In the audience was Danny Goldberg
then the president of Mercury Records
who had helped launch a spoken word label called Mouth Almighty
(headed by Bill Adler & Bob Holman).

Allen sang “Ballad of the Skeletons”
& Goldberg offered to release it on Mercury/Mouth Almighty.

In March the ’Zap collaborated with Ornette Coleman
in a “poetry/jazz telecast” from Paris.

He toured with Philip Glass
in France & the Czech Republic
doing portions of Hydrogen Jukebox.

& he scarfed further moolah from
Retentia, the Muse of the Retained Image
from a photo show in Milan.

I called Allen’s office on April 10
The bard was in Texas
and there was bad news
about his congestive heart condition
a very serious situation.

How about his new loft?
It won’t be ready for a few months,
I was told.
On April 13, I chatted with Allen
He was back in his NY pad
and seemed okay

I wanted some more info on his '77 lunch with
CIA spook James Angleton
(for 1968, A History in Verse)
&, as always,
he grabbed it out of his lobes
with not a missed beat
including some unfriendly remarks from the spy-sleaze
on Martin King
(that the great American was “nothing but a
whoremaster and a hypocrite”).

More good news from Retentia in April
the bard went down to D.C. for readings
& a part in the National Portrait Gallery photo show
“Rebel Poets & Painters of the 1950s”

In May there was the fine Illuminated Poems
with illustrations by Eric Drooker
from Four Walls/Eight Windows

BALLAD OF THE SK’S

May was the month they recorded “Ballad of the Skeletons”
w/ Lenny Kaye producing
Apparently they did a basic track and vocal
with Lenny on bass and Marc Ribot on guitar
David Mansfield on guitar
The era of “mailing around the ADAT”
for overdubs had long begun
so they forwarded an ADAT (digital 8-track tape)
to Philip Glass who laid down some piano

Then it was sent to Paul McCartney
who put on a bunch of stuff
including guitar, drums, an organ part & maracas

Mouth Almighty brought in Hal Willner
known for his miracle mixes
to work the faders, settings, pannings
and knobs

“He took a little bit of bagginess out of the record”
said Bill Adler
o’ Mouth Almighty

Jan Kerouac died on June 7 at 44
in Albuquerque the day after her spleen was removed
She had been on dialysis since ’91
the author of Baby Driver of ’81
Trainsong of ’88 & she’d been working on Parrot Fever
about her mother Joan Haverty

His usual bard-in-residence
for the summer session at Naropa
Then he spent ten days with Burroughs in Lawrence
taking pictures, and helping edit Burroughs’ essay on
“Bureaucracy & Drugs”

In August
he read the Blake-thread “Sunflower Sutra”
to music by Philip Glass
& conducted by Yehudi Menhuin
at Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center

On August 8 beat hero Herbert Huncke
respected writer of tales
passed away at 81
at Beth Israel in NYC

thock thock

In September the bard went on a
Buddhist retreat for ten days
with Gelek Rinpoche
On September 20 it was announced that filmmaker Gus Van Sant would direct a music video for “Ballad of the Skeletons”

Then, again at the St. Mark’s Church on October 8 there was a musical party for the bard’s Selected Poems 1948-1995 the release of “Ballad of the Skeletons” & the thirtieth anniversary of the great Poetry Project

We had a quorum so we could call ourselves the Fugs & we began with the core of our vision Wm. Blake’s “How Sweet I Roamed” with the great David Mansfield on mandolin!

I was surprised when the bard asked Tuli, Steve & me to include “River of Shit” in our set so I composed some new words for the bridge to fit the night

& performed it with the all-star cats some from Sonic Youth & Saturday Night Live.

People
tend ne’er
to speak
in public
of their rears or
their daily
visits to the
porcelain vortex

but the bard who could
write brilliant po-l-po’s
and ruminative philosophical poems
to limn the age

never let his audience
forget the vortex.

& so the Fugs roared forth with “Wide Wide River”
and the audience “caught fire” as they say
and roared along with us.

I was beginning to notice a memorial quality
in this string of salutes to the distinguished professor.

They seemed to me fueled by his obvious physical decline
these fetes for the ’Zap
in the ’94-’95-’96 triad

They celebrated Chekhov
at the opening of The Cherry Orchard
in 1904

He could barely stand erect on stage
rained upon with flowers
and speeches of glorifications
from actors, journalists & the heads
of literary societies

as if he were already gone

•
He finally moved to his shiny new loft
in September o’ ’96

Peter would have the double apartment on East 12th
–he had originally been a cosigner of the lease
& so had legal claim under the
ever crumbling NYC rent control rules
–in place since the rent struggles of World War II.

•

One of his final poems was a salute to his
fast-voiced accompanist & arranger
since ’76 Steve Taylor
now on the faculty at Naropa, and married to Judy Hussie

Generous as ever the bard
helped pay the maternity bills
for Steve & Judy’s baby Eamonn
born 12-3-96

1997

In February as in recent years the bard performed
in an all-star Carnegie Hall benefit for Tibet House
with Philip Glass, Michael Stipe, Natalie Merchant
& Patti Smith.

THE MTV SPECIAL

In his elegant loft
appointed so well with light-hued wood
fresh shiny floors
& un-catabolized white on the walls
the hourglass
was doing what it does so well
& the fate shears
were staring at the bard-thread.

I stayed there overnight on February 13
I’d taken part in a CD project with a bunch of recording artists
to lay down poems of Edgar Allan Poe
(I set to music the sonnet “To Helen” & “The Haunted Palace”
from “The Fall of the House of Usher”
–I learned from the bard that Poe had been
one of his first inspirations)

The CD was produced, as had been A.G.’s The Lion for Real
by Hal Willner & Michael Minzer
for Mouth Almighty Records

After the sessions I headed for the loft
on East 13th

At last enough wall space for his art collection
His records, books & CDs!

I was glad that the great Bard
had a pad with bowling alley bigness

Along a wall past his piano and a pump organ
was a spacious votivity zone–
a prayer rug & cushions
a cabinet & a table with candles
& Buddhist relics

beneath some tankas
whose meaning he could trace
with intricate tale
& Trungpa’s large “AH”
on the wall of peace, love,
acceptance, surrender.

He showed me his guest room
which sported a painting by Paul McCartney
& he took me into his bathroom
to marvel at his bidet!
The bathroom had its own window
which looked out onto the loft
toward the windows overlooking 14th street!

As weakened as he was
he told me he had a new boyfriend
and he was going to have his own
MTV Unplugged!
I slept on a long white leather-covered couch
he assured me he’d gotten from the Salvation Army

The Bard’s living room with Salvation Army couches

His bed was at the other end of the wide-hearted loft
The light stayed on by his distant bed
in his nighttime habit
    of journals & verse

I heard the padding of slippers at 4 a.m.
through the high-vaulted loft
I looked up and agreed with Miriam
    how yellow his face skin shone
        as he passed in the hour-glass silence

When we awakened
he offered a fresh rhubarb tart & rice milk,
    plus coffee & a hard boiled egg
        for breakfast

Hal Willner came over
to talk about the A.G. MTV Special scheduled for July 20
Allen was about as excited as I’d ever seen him
He said Dylan had agreed to do it,
    plus the hot young singer named Beck, and Philip Glass
& he thought McCartney
    would come

He checked his blood, then shot up some insulin
He asked where he could get pump organs fixed
for even his little hand-held one from Benares was broken

I suggested doing a Net-search for pump organ sites
–Bob Rosenthal agreed

I mentioned the big victorian pump organ
    with the nice bass sound I’d borrowed
    back in ’85 to write some arias
    for an opera the Fugs were doing

I said we’d ship it from Woodstock
    down to the loft
so that he or perhaps even Dylan, McCartney or Glass
could thunder-pump it for the Unplugged
    (we did ship it a few days later)

He was going out to lunch with Bono of U2
Got dressed in his flower-tied finery
    On the kitchen window sill
was a goblet of pennies
    next to the Tarot card for Justice

Ten days passed
& the great bard was feeling ever more fatigued so on February 23
Bob Rosenthal accompanied him all weak & unsteady
on the shuttle to Boston to see his cardiologist

On the flight A.G. read a poem from the night before
called “Fame and Death”
beginning “When I die
I don’t care what happens to my body.....”

It was then, in Boston I think, that his doctor asked him to go off all his various medications to try to focus on the cause of the tiredness.

MARCH 4

The bard left his sickbed in Boston to shuttle back to NYC in order to see Steve Taylor & Judy Hussie & new baby Eamonn in from Colorado for a visit.

Aboard the plane he write a little rhymed poem “A fellow named Steven” (p. 73 in his final book, Death & Fame)

Part XXXV

March 15 Gary Snyder called Ginsberg Bob Rosenthal answered who told him the diabetes, the heart murmur and various medications had joined to make the bard very very disoriented & fatigued

He called A.G. in the hospital who told his old pal he’d been diagnosed with a recurrence of hepatitis C “from years ago in India or Mexico. He was so medicated that he wasn’t able to talk very clearly,” Snyder later wrote.

 When Allen was brought to Beth Israel an emergency room doctor handed him a poem asking for suggestions
and the frail poet complied on the spot!
made some notes on the page
& the bard who wrote in Asclepiadeans
improved the poem
of the devotée of Asclepius

•

Of his final poems the most beautiful, to me
is the simple yet complex
four quatrain “Starry Rhymes”
at 4:51 a.m. on March 23, ending

“Orion down
North Star up
Fiery leaves
Begin to drop”

and then the next night
in tightly rhymed couplets
“Thirty State Bummers”
his final political poem, a remarkable
summation of the evil side
of the American imperium
it’s secret wars, support for killer dictators

with doublets such as
“Richard Helms Angleton live
we were lucky to survive”

We WERE lucky
to survive these oppressionists

•

March 27 at 2:29 a.m. in the hospital
“w/ dangerous hepatitis C” in the bard’s words
he awakened from a dream
that he’d had a baby

and there was a “glow of happiness next morn,
warm glow of pleasure half the day”

•
He phoned the world  
in cordless profusion  
probably made 500 calls  
maybe more

A.G. called Gary late at night in Nevada City  
He’d just been diagnosed  
with the teminality  
He had two to five  
Gary said he’d come to NYC for a visit in a few weeks  
and the call sang to silence with A.G.’s sob

He called Steve Taylor in Boulder: 
“....the doctor came in and I said well what’s the news  
and he said not good and I said cancer and he said yes. And I  
said any operation or remedy... and he said no... They gave me  
four to five months... But I’ve been weakening, I can tell,  
and I think maybe only one or two... I was amazed how calm I was...  
Some kind of equanimity– must have been all those years  
of Buddhist lectures, sitting....”

Taylor asked if he should fly to NYC before the Fugs went to Italy  
He said “No, carry on,”  
Taylor could visit after the tour, and  
maybe they could do some recording

Taylor asked if the bard had any new songs and he sang:

Steve Taylor sent us a note  
that Allen was in the hospital

Right away I called Allen’s # in NYC  
& reached Peter Hale  
long time staff member
who sketched out the bitter truth:
“He has liver cancer
There are so many nodes there’s
no way to pick it out–
a liver transplant is out of the question

He’s making a lot of calls
& writing furiously.”

•

How many phonecalls? Maybe a thousand?
To Dylan, McCartney, boyfriends, girlfriends,
relatives, writers
& a long sad tearful call to Burroughs.

To Hal Willner he said
“Sorry for not doing the Unplugged”
He suggested Hal check out the 25 hours of
tapes from the Knitting Factory in ’96

•

That afternoon, March 30, the bard called Woodstock
& spoke with Miriam
Peter Orlovsky, he said, was going to be his
attendant

(“He wouldn’t leave me alone
if I were sick in bed, dying,
grey-haired...he’d have pity on me,”
the bard said long ago

and he recalled how carefully Peter had cared for
his failing father Oleg back in ’82)

He assured Miriam he was not in pain
He’d finished his book
& he would be receiving guests at home.

He told her of the dream
wherein he’d had a child
and awakened very happy
It was the day, he said, they’d
given him the bad news
He asked how Miriam was
& wanted to be remembered to our daughter Deirdre
He said he wasn’t afraid

She said, “We love you.”
He replied, “I know.”

•

A few hours later
when Miriam described the call from Allen
I dialed him at the hospital
He was having a meeting with Bob Rosenthal
and couldn’t talk long

He said he’d finished his book
& was signing some photos

The perils of his illness, however,
were not so great
as to stop the
famous pr instincts of the bard
–he was afraid I was going
to break the story of his
terminal illness
in the Woodstock Journal

“Don’t write about it in the Journal,”
“Of course I won’t,” I replied.

“I’ll send you a new poem,” he said.

The bard with maybe a 25-page press list
& the keenest sense of ink since Whitman
wanted to coordinate one more release

“OK honey,” he said
“See you in a while
Love you.”

•

Among the calls were those to wealthy friends
asking them to keep up their support,
say to Naropa
“This is great!”
he exclaimed to Bob Rosenthal
“I’m dying, & no one can
say no!”

He was trying to reach George Soros
whose Christmas parties he attended
to ask for help
but couldn’t get through.

Maybe the ’Zap could have gotten Mr. Soros
to fund the much-needed
Golden Bard Retirement Home network!

Part XXXVI

They brought him home on Wednesday, April 2
to the light-wood-hued
loft with his books & paintings

& set up his final encampment

They placed a hospital bed near the
white-bearded photo of Whitman
on a white brick wall
between two windows that looked
upon 14th Street

There were plans to bring in portable
recording equipment
and possibly try to do his MTV special
from his resting place

Peter Orlovsky was there
helping him into his pajamas

It was around then, w/ Shelley Rosenthal’s help
that they made a mighty
fish head health stew on the stove
Wednesday night he listened to his final music
Ma Rainey’s “See See Rider”
and they brought down a blues text
from his well-ordered walls
so he could sing along

Miriam & I were at the Woodstock Journal office
that night late
getting the paper out before we
flew off to Italy for Fugs reunions

so we missed a message from the bard. First a cough,
then a weak voice, “This is Allen Ginsberg. It’s
Wednesday night, 10 or 10:30. I’m out of the hospital
and back home. I think the last time I talked to you
I was too tired to say much, but I’m home now.
So you call, you know, lunchtime 12:30 or 1:30.”

THURSDAY, APRIL 3

The next day A.G. was fairly alert
coming up with instructions for the next few weeks
and settling in for a multi-month Hey Jude fade

He was on the phone with Nanda Pivano
from Italy, one of his finest translators,
when he started to throw up

Rosenthal told her he’d have to hang up
& the bard said he wanted to go to sleep.

He’d written a letter to Bill Clinton
which noted he was sending some poems
but he’d not gotten to choose them

That afternoon before we left for Newark International
I called but they said he was asleep
It must have been after that terrible moment on the phone with Nanda Pivano.

FRIDAY, APRIL 4

Night came and then morn
& both Bob Rosenthal & Bill Morgan were worried
came early to the loft

Peter was not there
He had gone out
and purchased a hot bicycle.

Bob went in to awaken the bard
to see what they should do
but he could not be roused

They even went so far as to give a pinch
but the genius so easy to be awake slept fast

They called the hospice doctor
who quickly came
& judged he’d suffered a stroke in the night
had just a few hours to live

The staff called the family
& his brother Eugene & family arrived
late in the morning

The Fugs were in Milan
but Steve Taylor called the loft to get filled in
We'd just returned to our hotel
from a rehearsal place
along a canal designed
by Leonardo da Vinci

when we heard about the stroke
Bill Morgan said that
the end was very near.

We shared a loaf of olive bread
then opened some liquor
and held our glasses high, clinked them,  
“Here’s to the soul of Allen Ginsberg.”

TURN TURN TURN  
(TROPÉ TROPÉ TROPÉ)

Voice to voice to voice  
by e, by fax, by phone, by street-stop  
the word spread worldly

& I heard there were satellite trucks  
with their focusing dishes outside the building

The loft filled with friends  
Old pals gathered in quiet grief

There were Peter Orlovsky, Rani Singh, Shelley Rosenthal  
(& her and Bob’s two sons Aliah and Isaac)  
Francesco and Alba Clemente  
Philip Glass, Patti Smith and her daughter,  
Oliver Ray, Andrew Wylie  
Larry Rivers came down from his loft above  
Roy Lichtenstein, Raymond Foye  
Gregory Corso,  
    George & Anna Condo & many others

They went to sit beside him  
hold his hand,  
    whisper a message,  
    kiss him, weep

Andrew Wylie later said  
“I certainly worshiped him  
I thought he was a great man  
He had this amazing effect on me  
I always felt good for a day and a half  
    after seeing him.”

Wylie put his words on an important  
part of the bard:  
    the good feelings lasting days  
        from interactions
Gelek Rinpoche flew in from Michigan
He and other monks
chanted and prayed
by the bard’s extensive
sitting zone & altar in the midroom.

Allen’s cousin and doctor, Joel Gaidemak
was on hand as was a hospice nurse
to administer morphine

Two narrow tubes went up to his nose
with oxygen

Joel lived upstate, and the bard over the years
had “counted on his opinion a lot
in medical matters”
Bill Morgan later said

He was the kind of doctor, far too rare,
who would actually explain things
in bard-mind depth

Everybody was aware of the bard’s
photos of the dying Julian Beck & his uncle Abe Ginsberg
so the delicate issue of photos arose
A few went out to purchase cameras.

Corso wanted a picture with Allen
He crouched by the death cot
with his arm over the bard
while someone took a snap
with a toss-away Woolworth’s camera

(Oddly too that evening all of Corso’s books,
signed over to the bard
from all those years
somehow vanished
from the pad)
A friend who was there told me of one
of the bard’s young pals
sitting on the death bed
his back to Ginsberg
laughing and chatting

At last the quiet grieving day departed.
They sent out for food
and late in the evening many left
–his brother, weeping and
saying good bye
Gregory, others.

and then about 2 a.m.
people sacked out here and there

It was said his face perked up
toward the end
how the stress-lines smoothed
“I had never seen him so handsome,”
wrote Rosebud Pettet
in her careful
memoir of those hours

The artist George Condo
made some sketches
for a painting
which the bard had said was okay

Old friend Rosebud Pettet
sat stroking his feet
the bard attired in a Jewel Heart T-shirt
frailer and skinner than any had seen
but his face showed peace
to Rosebud closely looking

His breathing slowing down to 20
19, 18 per minute

And then at 2:40 a.m.
Saturday morn
4-5-97
he seemed to try to sit up

and then his diamond brain ceased being served.

Thus left earth
the bard called Allen Ginsberg
whom so many of us loved

the Lion faced one
in the long Egyptian boat
no doubt getting
as close to Osiris
& the sun disk
as he can

Buddha singing one
on a blue Tara raft

Kaddish chanting one
on a boat made of stone

Fun shouting one
on a boat made of froth

Pain relieving one
on a boat made of sighs

•

People were asked to give space
& touch him not till
certain prayers and inductions were performed.

His body was cordoned off for hours
as Gelek Rinpoche & the lamas
prayed and chanted
–there was something about
waiting till his cheeks
had sunk in a certain way
plus I think they had to grant the bard some initiations
which he had not had a chance to receive

All through Saturday they sat and chanted
till finally Bob Rosenthal called the
midnight squad from the morgue
who zipped the phantom all skinny
in a body bag

Peter Orlovsky
at the bed’s foot
hands pressed together
& bowing at the zip

Thus went back toward sunshine
the great bard Allen Ginsberg
O float on the wave just a bit more, bard flower

–Edward Sanders
March 1997-December 1999
Afterword
The Poetry & Life of Allen Ginsberg

I did not plan to write a book on Allen Ginsberg, but rather an extended elegy, which I began at the time of his death in April of 1997 when for a while grief seemed to course without limit. I would be walking down the street and suddenly weep thinking about him. After a while, I decided that maybe silent mourning was the proper route, and decided to abandon the inch or so of notes I had made for the elegy.

In September of that year, I taught a course called "The Poetry & Life of Allen Ginsberg" at the Schule für Dichtung in Vienna. To prepare, I created a fairly thick 3-ring notebook which included a history I put together of his life. In 1998 I decided to run some of that notebook in the Woodstock Journal. There was a favorable response from readers, so I kept publishing the notes, polishing them and adding new sections till it became obvious that a book was forming.

The life of Allen Ginsberg was very complicated, so The Poetry & Life of Allen Ginsberg is really a kind of pathway through the Forest Ginsberg, and because it is a pathway I have had to leave out a great many interesting anecdotes, events and interactions. Allen’s soul was such a great and positive beacon that he attracted literally thousands of people who felt close to him. Inevitably this walkway through the Forest Ginsberg could not touch a number of important connections in his life, and I ask for the indulgence of those poets, activists, filmmakers, musicians, family members, painters, Beat Generation scholars, & friends in countries all around the world, who had their own complicated relationships with the great bard Allen Ginsberg, and whose memories are not heard and seen along this pathway.

There are two good biographies of Allen Ginsberg, Dharma Lion by Michael Schumacher, and Ginsberg by Barry Miles. Read together, each with a slightly different point of view, Allen Ginsberg emerges as the great human that he was. His journals, his multitudinous interviews, his poems (always biographical), the endnotes to his books, his descriptions of his photos, and my own files, including many clippings, journals, letters and tapes from my own numerous interactions, performances and capers with him for thirty-four years, were helpful in creating this book. The memories of my wife Miriam, and of Bob Rosenthal, Bill Morgan, Raymond Foye, Rosebud Pettet, Steve Taylor, Andrew Wylie, Hal Willner, Bill Adler and others were very helpful, and I am very grateful for them.

I loved him, and he is in my mind almost as if he were alive even as I type this on a warm spring day, wishing he were staying across the street at Raymond Foye’s house (as he sometimes did) so I could go over there for a chat (and some good advice, for he was a teacher around the clock).

He kept everything–doodles on napkins, the 60,000 letters of friends, the 18,900 pages (and more) of journals, and just about every fragment of his time-track, so it might be interesting for someone to do a Total Biography of Ginsberg. He seemed to be asking for it with his tens of thousands of photos, his thousands of recordings and interviews, so perhaps a day-by-day bio, maybe 25,000 pages long, is what is required. That would be a Joycean endeavor. On the other hand, his final ten years would make a fine project for a biographer.

I cannot be the one, but I have written a temporary path, with log bridges over streams and ropes down cliff sides, through the Forest Ginsberg, for your study and enjoyment.

–Edward Sanders
Woodstock, NY
ALLEN GINSBERG

POETRY BOOKS

Illuminated Poems Illustrated by Eric Drooker, Four Walls Eight Windows, NYC 1996
Howl Annotated w/facsimile manuscript.  Harper Perennial (Paperback), NYC, 1995

PROSE BOOKS

Luminous Dreams  Zasterle Press, Gran Canaria, 1997
Indian Journals.  Grove Press, NYC, 1996
Chicago Trial Testimony.  City Lights Trashcan of History Series #1, SF, 1975.

PHOTOGRAPH BOOKS & CATALOGUES

Allen Ginsberg 108 Images.  Fred Hoffman Fine Art, Santa Monica, 1995
Playboy. (Interview w. Paul Carrol), Chicago, April 1969.
The Poem in its Skin. Paul Carrol, ed., Big Table/Follet, Chicago, 1968.

CD's  &  PHONOGRAPH RECORDS: Poetry

Howl & Other Poems  Fantasy Records, 1998
Jack Kerouac Mexico City Blues 242 Poems read by Allen Ginsberg Shambhala Pubs Audio, boston, MA 1996
The Ballad of the Skeletons w/Paul McCartney, Philip GlassProduced by Lenny Kaye, Mouth Almighty/Mercury, 1996
Howl, U.S.A.  Lee Hyla score, Kronos Quartet, Nonesuch, 1996
The Lion For Real: Produced by Hal Willner, Mouth Almighty/Mercury, 1989, 1996
Cosmopolitan Greetings Jazzy Opera, Music by George Gruntz, words by Allen Ginsberg, 2 CD's Genossenschafts-Bund Muzikscene Schweitz MG BCD9203, Postfach 266 CH-8031 Zürich, Switzerland, 1993
Birdbrain, with the Gluons, 33 E.P. single, 1981, Wax Trax, 638 E. 13 Ave., Denver, CO 80203 (o.p.).
Gate, 2 evenings with Allen Ginsberg, The Loft, 1001 Stereo, Munich, 1980. Distributed 2001, Frankfurt; by City Lights in USA. (o.p.)
Kaddish. Atlantic Verbum Series 4001, NY, 1966 (o.p.)
Howl and other Poems. Fantasy-Galaxy Records, #7013, 1959. 2600 10th St Berkeley CA 94710.

Fantasy-Galaxy Records, #7013, 1959. 2600 10th St Berkeley CA 94710.

Hobo Blues Band, (Hungarian production). Budapest


FILMS/VIDEOS

A Poet on the Lower East Side - Gyula Gazdag, 1997 AG with Istvan Eorsi & friends walking the Village telling stories: Contact GGAZDAG@EMELNITZ.UCLA.EDU

The Ballad of the Skeletons - Music video, directed by Gus Van Sant, Mouth Almighty/Mercury, 1996


Paul Bowles: The Complete Outsider - Produced & Dir. Catherine Warnow & Regina Weinreich, 1993; First Run Features, 153 Waverly Pl New York, NY 10014; [Appearances]


Growing up in America. Cinephile, Ltd. 508 Queen Street West, 3rd Floor, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5V 2B3 Phone (416) 368-7499 Directed by Morley Markson 1988. [Small interview].

It Don't pay to be an Honest Citizen. 78 min. color copyright 1984 Object Productions/Jacob Burckhardt 201 E. 4th Street NYC 10009. [Bit part].


Beat Generation. Renaissance Motion Pictures, 23 W. 73rd St. suite #101 NYC NY 10023. 212-496 0088. [Appearances.]


Allan N' Allen's Complaint. 30-minute color video, Nam June Paik & Shigeko Kubota. Appeared at 1983 Whitney Museum Biennial. Dist. by Send Video Arts, 1250 17th St., San Francisco, CA 94110. [Interesting feature.]

Poetry in Motion. 87 minutes, produced and directed by Ron Mann, 1982. Sphinx Productions in association w/Giorno Poetry Systems, 222 Bowery, NYC. Distributed by Giorno Poetry Systems. Includes "Bird Brain," "Do the Meditation," Capital Air" and an interview with Ginsberg. [Bit part, not good].


Me & My Brother. Dir. Robert Frank with Orlovsky Brothers, Joe Chaikin, NY, 1966 Distributed as below.

ARCHIVES

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ONWARDNESS

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