

LITERARY CALIFORNIA

How The West was won and where we're heading

Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997)

Planning a career as a labor lawyer was what he had in mind when he began his freshman year at Columbia University, but he fell in with a crowd of wild souls there, including fellow students Lucien Carr and Jack Kerouac and non-student friends William S. Burroughs and Neal Cassady. These delinquent young philosophers were equally obsessed with drugs, crime, sex and literature. Ginsberg, the youngest and most innocent member of the circle, helped them develop their literary smarts, while they helped him in turn by utterly shattering his bookish naivete.

As a famous American poet, Ginsberg was able to attain audiences with important political figures all over the world, and during the 60's he took advantage of this repeatedly. He pissed off one important official after another, causing furors in India, getting kicked out of Cuba and Prague, and annoying America's right wing to no end.

He was a familiar bushy-bearded figure at protests against the Vietnam War, and his willingness to state his controversial views in public was an important factor in the development of the revolutionary state of mind that America developed during the 1960's.

The list of 60's events that Ginsberg played an important part in is almost unbelievably huge.

He participated in Ken Kesey's Acid

Test Festivals in San Francisco, and helped Kesey break the ice between the San Francisco hippies and the antagonistic Hell's Angels. In the summer of 1965 Ginsberg made a seminal trip to London with several other Beat figures. Their reading at the Royal Albert Hall signalled the beginning of the London underground scene, based at the UFO Club, from which bands like Pink Floyd and the Soft Machine would emerge.

Bob Dylan often cited Ginsberg as one of the few literary figures he could stand. Ginsberg can be seen standing in the alley in the background of Dylan's 1965 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' video, and would later play a major part in Dylan's 1977 film 'Renaldo and Clara.' Ginsberg, Gary Snyder and Michael McClure led the crowd in chanting 'OM' at the San Francisco Be-In in 1967.

Ginsberg, Burroughs, Jean Genet and Terry Southern were key figures at the Chicago Democratic Convention antiwar protests in 1968.

One of the only radical events of the Sixties that Ginsberg was not a part of was the Stonewall gay uprising, and Ginsberg showed up at the site the next day to offer his support.

HOWL

- for Carl Salomon -

I

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by
madness, starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn
looking for an angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly
connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night,
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat
up smoking in the supernatural darkness of
cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities
contemplating jazz,

who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and
saw Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement
roofs illuminated,
who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes
hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy
among the scholars of war,
who were expelled from the academies for crazy &
publishing obscene odes on the windows of the
skull,
who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear,
burning their money in wastebaskets and listening
to the Terror through the wall,
who got busted in their pubic beards returning through
Laredo with a belt of marijuana for New York,
who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in
Paradise Alley, death, or purgatoried their
torsos night after night
with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol
and cock and endless balls,
incomparable blind; streets of shuddering cloud and
lightning in the mind leaping toward poles of
Canada & Paterson, illuminating all the motionless
world of Time between,
Peyote solidities of halls, backyard green tree cemetery
dawns, wine drunkenness over the rooftops,
storefront boroughs of teahead joyride neon
blinking traffic light, sun and moon and tree
vibrations in the roaring winter dusks of Brooklyn,
ashcan rantings and kind king light of mind,
who chained themselves to subways for the endless
ride from Battery to holy Bronx on benzedrine
until the noise of wheels and children brought
them down shuddering mouth-wracked and
battered bleak of brain all drained of brilliance
in the drear light of Zoo,
who sank all night in submarine light of Bickford's
floated out and sat through the stale beer after
noon in desolate Fugazzi's, listening to the crack
of doom on the hydrogen jukebox,
who talked continuously seventy hours from park to
pad to bar to Bellevue to museum to the Brook-



lyn Bridge,
lost battalion of platonic conversationalists jumping
down the stoops off fire escapes off windowsills
off Empire State out of the moon,
yacketayakking screaming vomiting whispering facts
and memories and anecdotes and eyeball kicks
and shocks of hospitals and jails and wars,
whole intellects disgorged in total recall for seven days
and nights with brilliant eyes, meat for the
Synagogue cast on the pavement,
who vanished into nowhere Zen New Jersey leaving a
trail of ambiguous picture postcards of Atlantic
City Hall,
suffering Eastern sweats and Tangerian bone-grind-
ings and migraines of China under junk-with-
drawal in Newark's bleak furnished room,
who wandered around and around at midnight in the
railroad yard wondering where to go, and went,
leaving no broken hearts,
who lit cigarettes in boxcars boxcars boxcars racketing
through snow toward lonesome farms in grand-
father night,
who studied Plotinus Poe St. John of the Cross telep-
athy and bop kabbalah because the cosmos in-
stinctively vibrated at their feet in Kansas,
who loned it through the streets of Idaho seeking vis-
ionary indian angels who were visionary indian
angels,
who thought they were only mad when Baltimore
gleamed in supernatural ecstasy,
who jumped in limousines with the Chinaman of Okla-
homa on the impulse of winter midnight street
light smalltown rain,
who lounged hungry and lonesome through Houston
seeking jazz or sex or soup, and followed the
brilliant Spaniard to converse about America
and Eternity, a hopeless task, and so took ship
to Africa,
who disappeared into the volcanoes of Mexico leaving
behind nothing but the shadow of dungarees
and the lava and ash of poetry scattered in fire

place Chicago,
who reappeared on the West Coast investigating the
F.B.I. in beards and shorts with big pacifist
eyes sexy in their dark skin passing out incom-
prehensible leaflets,
who burned cigarette holes in their arms protesting
the narcotic tobacco haze of Capitalism,
who distributed Supercommunist pamphlets in Union
Square weeping and undressing while the sirens
of Los Alamos wailed them down, and wailed
down Wall, and the Staten Island ferry also
wailed,
who broke down crying in white gymnasiums naked
and trembling before the machinery of other
skeletons,
who bit detectives in the neck and shrieked with delight
in policecars for committing no crime but their
own wild cooking pederasty and intoxication,
who howled on their knees in the subway and were
dragged off the roof waving genitals and manu-
scripts,
who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly
motorcyclists, and screamed with joy,
who blew and were blown by those human seraphim,
the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean
love,
who balled in the morning in the evenings in rose
gardens and the grass of public parks and
cemeteries scattering their semen freely to
whomever come who may,
who hiccuped endlessly trying to giggle but wound up
with a sob behind a partition in a Turkish Bath
when the blond & naked angel came to pierce
them with a sword,
who lost their loveboys to the three old shrews of fate
the one eyed shrew of the heterosexual dollar
the one eyed shrew that winks out of the womb
and the one eyed shrew that does nothing but
sit on her ass and snip the intellectual golden
threads of the craftsman's loom,
who copulated ecstatic and insatiate with a bottle of

beer a sweetheart a package of cigarettes a can-
dle and fell off the bed, and continued along
the floor and down the hall and ended fainting
on the wall with a vision of ultimate cunt and
come eluding the last gyzym of consciousness,
who sweetened the snatches of a million girls trembling
in the sunset, and were red eyed in the morning
but prepared to sweeten the snatch of the sun
rise, flashing buttocks under barns and naked
in the lake,
who went out whoring through Colorado in myriad
stolen night-cars, N.C., secret hero of these
poems, cocksman and Adonis of Denver-joy
to the memory of his innumerable lays of girls
in empty lots & diner backyards, moviehouses'
rickety rows, on mountaintops in caves or with
gaunt waitresses in familiar roadside lonely pet-
ticoat upliftings & especially secret gas-station
solipsisms of johns, & hometown alleys too,
who faded out in vast sordid movies, were shifted in
dreams, woke on a sudden Manhattan, and
picked themselves up out of basements hung
over with heartless Tokay and horrors of Third
Avenue iron dreams & stumbled to unemploy-
ment offices,
who walked all night with their shoes full of blood on
the snowbank docks waiting for a door in the
East River to open to a room full of steamheat
and opium,
who created great suicidal dramas on the apartment
cliff-banks of the Hudson under the wartime
blue floodlight of the moon & their heads shall
be crowned with laurel in oblivion,
who ate the lamb stew of the imagination or digested
the crab at the muddy bottom of the rivers of
Bowery,
who wept at the romance of the streets with their
pushcarts full of onions and bad music,
who sat in boxes breathing in the darkness under the
bridge, and rose up to build harpsichords in
their lofts,

who coughed on the sixth floor of Harlem crowned
 with flame under the tubercular sky surrounded
 by orange crates of theology,
 who scribbled all night rocking and rolling over lofty
 incantations which in the yellow morning were
 stanzas of gibberish,
 who cooked rotten animals lung heart feet tail borsht
 & tortillas dreaming of the pure vegetable
 kingdom,
 who plunged themselves under meat trucks looking for
 an egg,
 who threw their watches off the roof to cast their ballot
 for Eternity outside of Time, & alarm clocks
 fell on their heads every day for the next decade,
 who cut their wrists three times successively unsuccess-
 fully, gave up and were forced to open antique
 stores where they thought they were growing
 old and cried,
 who were burned alive in their innocent flannel suits
 on Madison Avenue amid blasts of leaden verse
 & the tanked-up clatter of the iron regiments
 of fashion & the nitroglycerine shrieks of the
 fairies of advertising & the mustard gas of sinister
 intelligent editors, or were run down by the
 drunken taxicabs of Absolute Reality,
 who jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge this actually hap-
 pened and walked away unknown and forgotten
 into the ghostly daze of Chinatown soup alley
 ways & firetrucks, not even one free beer,
 who sang out of their windows in despair, fell out of
 the subway window, jumped in the filthy Pas-
 saic, leaped on negroes, cried all over the street,
 danced on broken wineglasses barefoot smashed
 phonograph records of nostalgic European
 1930s German jazz finished the whiskey and
 threw up groaning into the bloody toilet, moans
 in their ears and the blast of colossal steam
 whistles,
 who barreled down the highways of the past journeying
 to each other's hotrod-Golgotha jail-solitude
 watch or Birmingham jazz incarnation,

who drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out
 if I had a vision or you had a vision or he had
 a vision to find out Eternity,
 who journeyed to Denver, who died in Denver, who
 came back to Denver & waited in vain, who
 watched over Denver & brooded & loned in
 Denver and finally went away to find out the
 Time, & now Denver is lonesome for her heroes,
 who fell on their knees in hopeless cathedrals praying
 for each other's salvation and light and breasts,
 until the soul illuminated its hair for a second,
 who crashed through their minds in jail waiting for
 impossible criminals with golden heads and the
 charm of reality in their hearts who sang sweet
 blues to Alcatraz,
 who retired to Mexico to cultivate a habit, or Rocky
 Mount to tender Buddha or Tangiers to boys
 or Southern Pacific to the black locomotive or
 Harvard to Narcissus to Woodlawn to the
 daisychain or grave,
 who demanded sanity trials accusing the radio of hyp-
 notism & were left with their insanity & their
 hands & a hung jury,
 who threw potato salad at CCNY lecturers on Dadaism
 and subsequently presented themselves on the
 granite steps of the madhouse with shaven heads
 and harlequin speech of suicide, demanding in-
 stantaneous lobotomy,
 and who were given instead the concrete void of insulin
 Metrazol electricity hydrotherapy psycho-
 therapy occupational therapy pingpong &
 amnesia,
 who in humorless protest overturned only one symbolic
 pingpong table, resting briefly in catatonia,
 returning years later truly bald except for a wig of
 blood, and tears and fingers, to the visible mad
 man doom of the wards of the madtowns of the
 East,
 Pilgrim State's Rockland's and Greystone's foetid
 halls, bickering with the echoes of the soul, rock-
 ing and rolling in the midnight solitude-bench

dolmen-realms of love, dream of life a night-
 mare, bodies turned to stone as heavy as the
 moon,
 with mother finally *****, and the last fantastic book
 flung out of the tenement window, and the last
 door closed at 4. A.M. and the last telephone
 slammed at the wall in reply and the last fur-
 nished room emptied down to the last piece of
 mental furniture, a yellow paper rose twisted
 on a wire hanger in the closet, and even that
 imaginary, nothing but a hopeful little bit of
 hallucination
 ah, Carl, while you are not safe I am not safe, and
 now you're really in the total animal soup of
 time
 and who therefore ran through the icy streets obsessed
 with a sudden flash of the alchemy of the use
 of the ellipse the catalog the meter & the vibrat-
 ing plane,
 who dreamt and made incarnate gaps in Time & Space
 through images juxtaposed, and trapped the
 archangel of the soul between 2 visual images
 and joined the elemental verbs and set the noun
 and dash of consciousness together jumping
 with sensation of Pater Omnipotens Aeterna
 Deus
 to recreate the syntax and measure of poor human
 prose and stand before you speechless and intel-
 ligent and shaking with shame, rejected yet con-
 fessing out the soul to conform to the rhythm
 of thought in his naked and endless head,
 the madman bum and angel beat in Time, unknown,
 yet putting down here what might be left to say
 in time come after death,
 and rose reincarnate in the ghostly clothes of jazz in
 the goldhorn shadow of the band and blew the
 suffering of America's naked mind for love into
 an eli eli lamma lamma sabacethani saxophone
 cry that shivered the cities down to the last radio
 with the absolute heart of the poem of life butchered
 out of their own bodies good to eat a thousand

years.