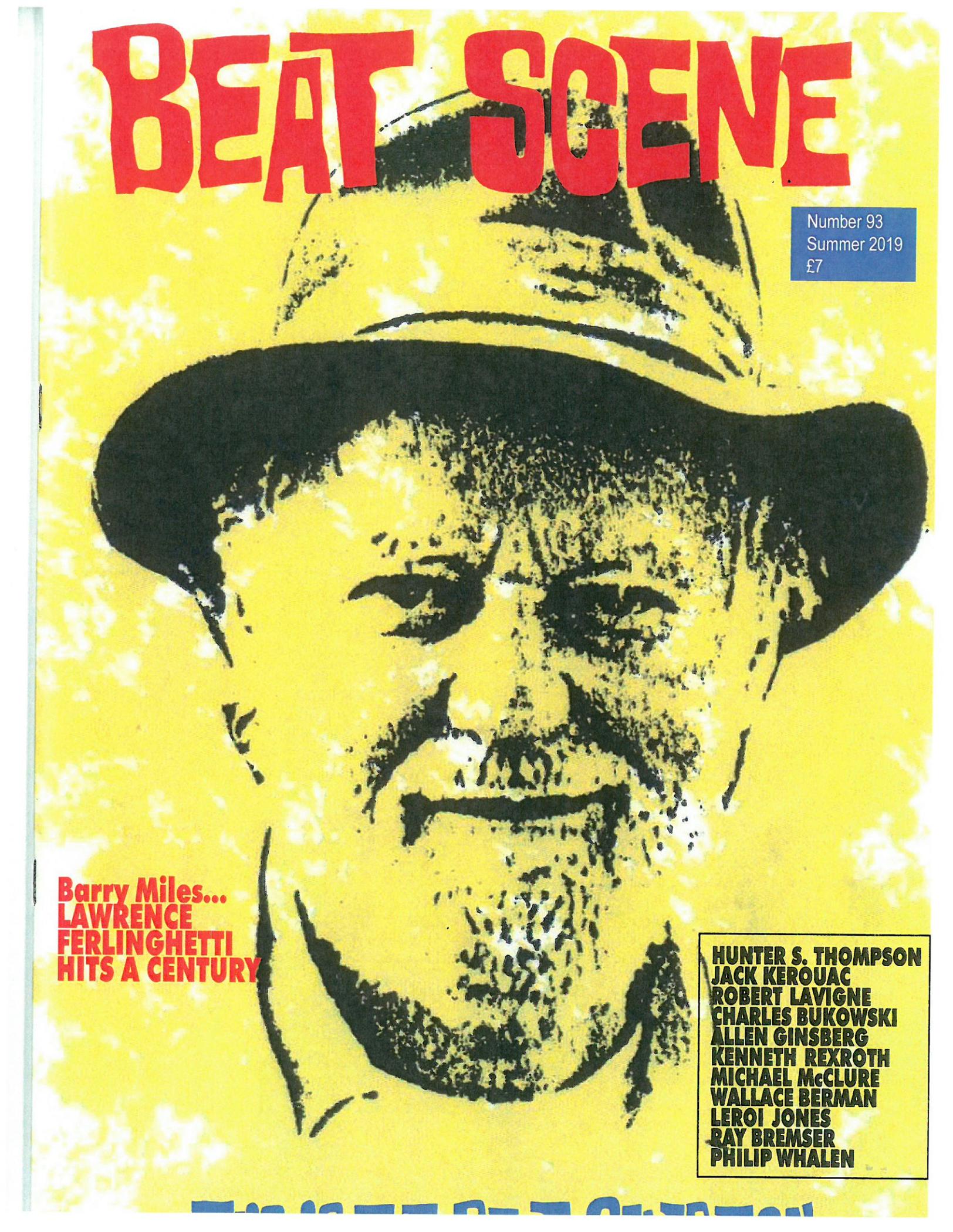


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Barry Miles...
**LAWRENCE
FERLINGHETTI
HITS A CENTURY**

**HUNTER S. THOMPSON
JACK KEROUAC
ROBERT LAVIGNE
CHARLES BUKOWSKI
ALLEN GINSBERG
KENNETH REXROTH
MICHAEL McCLURE
WALLACE BERMAN
LEROI JONES
RAY BREMSER
PHILIP WHALEN**

“Imaginary Reasons of Dust” Kerouac and Ginsberg’s Fraternal Tiffs

Charles Shuttleworth

The friendship between Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs and the artistic association that it produced is arguably the most significant in 20th Century literature, resulting in a monumental aesthetic shift and an ethos that still resonates in the culture wars today. In this they were never entirely alone; Lucien Carr was with them from the beginning, bringing the three together and spurring them with his call for a literary New Vision, and this core group expanded to include other important members of what Kerouac later dubbed the Beat Generation, including (in order of appearance) Herbert Huncke, Neal Cassady, and John Clellon Holmes. But this article will focus specifically on Kerouac and Ginsberg at a moment when their artistic efforts were nearing fruition – the fall of 1955, during Kerouac’s stay with Ginsberg in his cottage in Berkeley.

By all accounts of this time period, the Kerouac-Ginsberg friendship had never been closer. In the months preceding Jack’s arrival, both had been suffering from desperate loneliness – Kerouac flat

broke and living unhappily with his family in Rocky Mount, NC; Allen also poor, unemployed, and heartsick over Peter Orlovsky, his new love interest. Of the two, Jack’s circumstances were the more desperate. It had been five years since the publication of *The Town and the City*, he was being sued for child support by his second wife, Joan Haverty, and in mid-February 1955, his mother, Gabrielle, quit her job at a shoe factory in New York City to live in Rocky Mount with her daughter, Nin; Nin’s husband, Paul Blake; and their young son, Paul Jr. Jack, suffering from chronic thrombophlebitis in his leg, felt incapable of holding a steady job and affording an apartment of his own. Thus he also moved to Rocky Mount, where he had his own space in the house’s closed-in porch, but Paul and Nin were dismissive of his writing and disdained his refusal to work. By May of ’55, he wrote to Allen that he’d likely become “a lunatic ... [i]f I don’t get published soon” and begged him to “please do something ... pray for me, something ... I want to kill myself ... my family doesn’t even want me to get drunk anymore.” (1) Allen

1 *Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: the Letters* page 291. Edited by Bill Morgan and David Stanford -Viking Press - 2010

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wrote back that "I am really as hopeless as you," and asked, "Can you come out here see me? I pray you do." (2) A week later he stated, "I am on the verge of true despair ... Mostly my hangup with Peter, usual woes of lovelack. ... I think it would help me a great deal if you could come out." (3) And to enable Jack's journey, Allen managed to procure \$50, sending him \$25 and having his brother, Eugene Brooks, who was also Jack's attorney, send another \$25.

Jack's new sense of homelessness was compounded by his spiritual isolation. In past years he'd had the option of living with the Cassadys, but now he felt that was no longer an option. He'd left them the year before amid heightening tensions: on top of his lack of money and his sexual relationship with Carolyn were the triad's sudden religious disagreements, as at the same time that Kerouac had begun studying Buddhism, Neal and Carolyn had discovered the Christian mystic Edgar Cayce, and the two factions, equally passionate, argued over their views, creating what Carolyn later called a "schism." (4) Jack's Buddhist beliefs and practices also further soured his relations with his family; even Gabrielle, his greatest supporter, along with Nin, pestered him to stick to "the religion you were born with." (5)

Jack's study in Buddhism had begun in late 1953, after his painful breakup with Alene Lee (Mardou Fox in *The Subterraneans*), and in the year and a half since then it had become central to his thinking, a critical part of his identity. Yet his consoling sense of the world's impermanence and unreality, that life is "a dream already ended" (6) and thus its suffering illusory had also been dismissed by Burroughs and Carr, leaving only Allen as receptive to his message. To Jack, therefore, Allen's friendship had

become critical, and he focused on converting him to his way of thinking both in letters and in compiling *Some of the Dharma*, a manuscript designed to enlighten readers about his discoveries. *Some of the Dharma* was in fact begun with Allen in mind. While still with the Cassadys in March of '54, Jack wrote to Allen explaining the religious impasse they'd reached and vowing to "write this big letter and empty my notebooks so you can judge." (7) The typing of his notebooks soon evolved into an ongoing project

which he sent to Allen, writing, "I hope you like it; I hope it instructs you." (8) At times *Some of the Dharma* addresses Allen directly, echoing the Buddha's conversations with his disciple Subhuti in the Diamond Sutra, Kerouac's favorite Buddhist text. Allen responded with encouragement, vowing to "study Buddhism with you," (9) and siding with Jack, calling Cayce a "crackpot."

(10) His openness and support drew the two friends closer.

Jack left Rocky Mount toward in late July, 1955, but then, while "hitch hiking across horrible Texas" and suffering from his thrombophlebitis, he detoured to Mexico City "for kicks" and "full penicillin treatment for my leg here, minus American doctor bills." (11) He stayed in Mexico for more than a month, during which time the two maintained their correspondence, and never in their lives had they been more in tune artistically. For years they'd served as each other's supporters, with Allen championing Jack's work and at times acting as his agent, and Jack encouraging Allen's artistic development. In May Jack had written an extremely warm letter, urging him not to be "discouraged by the neglect you are receiving"



2... Ibid 293-94

3... Ibid 297-98

4 ... Carolyn Cassady, *Off the Road: Twenty Years with Cassady, Kerouac, and Ginsberg* - Black Spring Press - 1990 - page 235 -

5 ... Jack Kerouac - *The Dharma Bums* - Viking Press - 1958 - page 109.

6... Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: *The Letters* - Edited by Bill Morgan and David Stanford - Viking Press - 2010 page 213

7... Ibid 230

8... Ibid 228

9... Ibid 240

10... Ibid 314

11... Ibid 288

and particularly praising his more recent poems as “valuable. Because original. ... [T]he new poetry that you write, free, ... has become a classic style”; and he predicted that “a hundred years from now or earlier, Ginsberg will be the name, like Einstein in Science, that the Jews will bring up when they claim pride in Poetry.” (12) In urging free expression, Jack was promoting his own method of spontaneous composition, and on the heels of his encomium, “[a]fter years of ... ‘resenting and resisting’ Jack’s theories,” (13) Allen took the plunge. In August he sent Jack the first six pages of a new poem, tentatively entitled “Howl for Carl Solomon,” which constituted an artistic breakthrough. Allen wrote that it was “nearer to your style than anything.” (14) Jack wrote back, calling it “powerful” and counseling him not to revise, saying, “I want your lingual spontaneity or nothing.” (15) Allen then assured him that what he’d sent was “the first pages put down, as is ... 100% original draft” and adding, “I realize how right you are, that was the first time I sat down to blow, came out in your method, sounding like you, an imitation practically.” (16)

In the letter including the first pages of “Howl,” Allen also mentioned his intention to move out of his apartment at 1010 Montgomery Street in North Beach, San Francisco, across the bay to Berkeley, as he was planning to enroll at U.C. Berkeley in the fall. “I found a cheap house (\$35 per month), one room, Shakespeare Arden cottage with brown shingles and flowers all about, big sweet garden, apricot tree, silence, a kitchen and a bathroom too ... six blocks from school, perfect place to retreat be quiet” and he told Jack that “you will be welcome to settle there for one year, two years, a month, however long.” (17) And in an additional bit of news, he explained that “[a]n art gallery here asked me to arrange poetry reading program this fall” (18) – the Six Gallery reading where Allen would first perform “Howl,” his first rapid step to fame.

Meanwhile in Mexico City, working through August and early September, Jack wrote his poetic masterwork, *Mexico City Blues*. With his arrival in

Berkeley, then, the two were on the verge of achieving a new level of recognition and success that they’d been seeking, and their friendship was seemingly at a harmonious peak. Jack moved into Allen’s cottage at 1624 Milvia Street, and by all accounts it was a special time for both. In *Kerouac: the Definitive Biography*, Paul Maher Jr. writes that “The three months in California were arguably the best time in Kerouac’s life thus far” (19); and in *Memory Babe*, Gerald Nicosia expounds, “Jack had never felt greater love for Allen, nor greater need of his companionship, and they spent day and night talking, reading each other their latest works, and enjoying the intellectual-artistic community of which Allen was now a respected member.” (20) Yet toward the end of November, there was a rift: Kerouac left Berkeley, retreating to the Cameo Hotel on San Francisco’s Skid Row before a short stay with the Cassadys and then a cross-country trek back to Rocky Mount for Christmas. This episode has rarely been noted, but the bad feelings on Kerouac’s part lingered for months.

What had happened? Jack included his complaint in *Some of the Dharma*, albeit with a slightly veiled reference: “Why should the world become suddenly darkened for me because one person, G., envies me and hates me?—does anyone else envy me?—who is he envying and for how long and with what? Bah, I’ll go along the road writing and drinking and teaching the Good Law like before intended, and Karma will out—NOW I’m talkin with my blue buttons on, boy———(21)

This entry is a word-for-word transcription of what Jack wrote in his journal labeled “1955 Berkeley Blues etc.” except in the journal instead of “G.,” Jack wrote the name “Ginsberg.” Then, when typing *Some of the Dharma* sometime later, he elaborated on what triggered his rage: “THE OCCASION: We were at a girl’s house in Berkeley, G., me, and Bhikku Gary Snyder, discussing the Prajna-Paramita more or less, where I re-iterated that the self has no reality but G. said: “Well, I dont care, I’m gonna go right along and

12 ...Dennis McNally - *Desolate Angel - A Biography - Jack Kerouac, the Beat Generation, and America* - Random House - 1979 - page 197

13... *Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: the Letters* - Edited by Bill Morgan and David Stanford - Viking Press - 2010 - page - page 315

14... Ibid 319.

15... Ibid 315-16

16... Ibid 316

17 ...Paul Maher Jr. *Kerouac: The Definitive Biography* - Taylor Trade - 2004 - page 316

18 ...Gerald Nicosia - *Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac* - Grove Press - 1983 - page 491

19 ...Jack Kerouac - *Some of the Dharma* - Viking Press - 1997 - page 346

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just be Allen G.” and I yelled, “O for krissakes I’m gonna leave you if you go talkin like that” (I was getting drunk & surly on wine) and he yelled “Well then GO!” “Thank you,” I yelled, “a most excellent idea!” and I stalked, left the house, went back to the cottage, packed up, and left California. eventually. (22)

A version of this episode is included in chapter 5 of *The Dharma Bums*, i.e., Allen’s statement without Jack’s angry reaction and the fallout that ensued. And Allen also wrote about it in his journal at the time, expressing immediate regret over the incident: “Then go—why don’t you go then,” I said, with black Lucifer in my eye riding across the dusky room to him on the bed.

And he rose saying, “Yes it is a good idea,” muttered for me to hear, “It’s a good idea he muttered again—
And thinking once more, I desired to undo his going, after a moment I said, “Jack don’t go.” But he went. (23)

Why didn’t it just blow over? Why did it precipitate Jack’s leaving? One could reason that the closeness of the two men, sharing a single room for two months, had worn thin, and Jack was happy to retreat to spend some time in the Cameo. It was a place he had stayed before – in 1953 while working as a railroad brakeman, and in 1954 after he’d squabbled with the Cassadys. In *Good Blonde* he praises it as a place where “for 75 cents a night you could always get a clean room with no bedbugs and nice soft mattresses with soft old clean sheets, clean enough, not snow-white Fab by any means but better, and nice quilts, and old frayed carpets and quiet sleep: that’s the main thing” (24); and in *Some of the Dharma* he adds, “The Beauty of the Cameo Hotel whether when as brakeman or now 1955, I always had the quiet opportunity to remember my own mind— (25) Maybe he needed to escape all the drinking he’d been doing, which according to Nicosia in *Memory Babe* had been “almost nonstop ... He was in deep trouble, and he knew it.” (26) Yet it couldn’t have been happy to spend Thanksgiving Day

there alone. And the place was depressing. In *Some of the Dharma*, Jack also includes a haiku: “Old man dying in a room / Groan / At five o’clock” (27) and writes, “BUT AS TO SKID ROW, Neal is right— people live in Skid Row because they hate life—” (28) As to Jack’s claim, though: was Allen envious of him in the fall of ’55? In a journal entry dated July 5, 1956, Allen states, “I’m consumed with envy of Jack’s holiness & devotion to singleminded expression in writing, (29) but this isn’t the sort of envy that would create a rift. A more likely possibility was Jack’s fast friendship with Gary Snyder. Jack admired Gary for all the reasons detailed in *The Dharma Bums*: he was a poet and scholar, a student of Buddhism as well as anthropology and Far Eastern languages; like Jack he’d been a seaman; and he was an experienced outdoorsman who took Jack on the hike up Matterhorn Peak in the Sierras. While Jack and Gary didn’t actually see eye-to-eye on Buddhism either, they enjoyed each other’s company and learned from each other. And Phillip Whalen was another poet and Buddhist that Jack befriended, Gary’s former Reed College roommate and fellow U.S. Forest Service fire lookout, a job that, with their prodding and support, Jack would take the following summer.

With all these interests in common, then, Allen was the one who may have felt the outsider, and it may have caused some rivalry, especially given Allen’s romantic attraction to Gary, on whom he had a “crush.” (30)

Yet there’s no indication that Allen did feel jealous or hateful, especially at this moment when his life was so vibrant. The Six Gallery reading had been a smash, and immediately afterward, via telegram, Lawrence Ferlinghetti committed to publishing *Howl and Other Poems*. If anything, it was Jack who had reason to be envious. Allen had urged him to participate in the reading. Jack wrote to Malcolm Cowley, “Allen Ginsberg has arranged for me to read before an audience, but I won’t do it because I’m too bashful. Poet ain’t court jester, I say. He, tho, gets up on stage and howls his poems.” (31) Ironically, at the reading Jack very much played the court jester in the

22 ...Jack Kerouac - *Good Blonde & Others* - Grey Fox Press - 1993 - page 17

23 ...Jack Kerouac - *Some of the Dharma* - Viking Press - 1997 - page 346

24 ...Gerald Nicosia - *Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac* - Grove Press - 1983 - pages 291, 293.

25 ...Jack Kerouac - *Some of the Dharma* - Viking Press - 1997 - page 346

26... Ibid 346

27 ...Allen Ginsberg - *Ginsberg, Journals Mid-Fifties: 1954-1958* - Edited by Gordon Ball - Viking Press - 1995 - page 271.

28... Ibid 169

29 ...Jack Kerouac - *Selected Letters 1940-1956* - Edited by Ann Charters - Viking Press - page 519.

30... Ibid 524

audience, whooping while the poets read, calling out “Yes!” “Go!” etc. He was arguably an important factor in the evening’s success, revving up the crowd with his antics, and encouraging them to drink wine (he’d collected money and brought in gallon jugs of Burgundy) until the place became raucous. But by the end of the night he may well have regretted passing up the chance to read. All the poets on stage – Allen, Gary, Phillip Whalen, Michael McClure, and Phillip Lamantia, along with Kenneth Rexroth as m.c. – became instantly recognized as part of the new scene, the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance. Jack reacted by getting horribly drunk, writing John Clellon Holmes that it was “the worst binge of my life which left me with aching heart for two full days and premonitions of death. ... I go out and get hopelessly entangled in waterfront bottles of wine ... fall and crash and puke, I have scabs on my face ... ending up in great final sad depression of all time ...” (32)

Jack spent Thanksgiving Day working on a new novel that he soon abandoned, entitled “Peter and the Beat Generation” with the character Peter as author surrogate. Jack had written the first chapter a short time before: it’s included in *Some of the Dharma* under the title “The Town and the City” (see p. 355; it’s entitled “Peter and the Beat Generation” in his journal). In the Thanksgiving Day chapters, Peter is 24 years old, his father George has just died (Jack was 24 when his father, Leo, died of stomach cancer), and the young man, bedridden, speaks to a German doctor about his stomach pain: “I don’t like life,” said Peter. ‘Vell, none of us do,’ said the old German, ‘but what you goan do? die? cry? vy? I ask, ‘vy?’” After the doctor leaves, Peter’s “belly quivers and lances, quivers and lances ... like a toothache, something throbs on and off, on and off, as like pride and humility, pride and humility, for whenever there is pain we groan, with absence of pain we gloat.” (33)

Could Jack’s pride have been hurt by Allen’s success? This was a major shift in their relationship, as previously Jack had always been the literary star – the published author of *The Town and the City*, with

seven other book-length works since completed – while Allen was yet to have published his first. “I always thought of you as my little brother, my little petushka, even tho you’re Jewish, because you’re like a little Russian brother,” (34) Jack had written to Allen three years earlier. Now suddenly the tables had turned, and as Jack would write to John Clellon Holmes the next spring, when Jack returned to live with Gary Snyder in Mill Valley, “Such weird things



going on around here. Allen Ginsberg is famous in San Francisco and introduces me around and people say ‘Who’s this?’” (35) By including “Beat Generation,” the term he’d coined years earlier, in a sequel to his one published novel, Jack was seemingly striving to cash in and not be left behind.

One other report of Jack’s anger at Allen at this time comes from Peter Orlovsky, as chronicled in *Jack’s Book*: “In ’55 Jack came around and got into an argument with Allen, accusing Allen of being lecherous toward me, and banged a crack in the bathroom door, calling Allen a lecher. After young boys, you know. His Catholic upbringing, I guess.” (36) Allen also echoed this in a journal entry written during this period, referring to “Jack’s several

32... *Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: The Letters* - Edited by Bill Morgan and David Stanford - Viking Press - 2010 - page 185

33... *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956* - edited by Ann Charters - Viking Press - page 578

34... *Jack’s Book: An Oral Biography* edited by Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee - Hamish Hamilton - 1978 - pages 191-92.

35... Allen Ginsberg - *Journals Mid-Fifties 1954-1958* - Viking Press - 2010 page 197

36... Jack Kerouac...*Some of the Dharma* - Viking Press - 1997 - page 343

37... Ibid 348.

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accusations of 'lechery' at me." (37) And further confirmation of this homophobic attitude is in another of Jack's entries in *Some of the Dharma*, where he writes, "WHITMANESQUE" (or universal homosexual lecher) interest in sexuality is like running around gathering branches and leaves without knowing what their roots are—the roots of all these penises and vaginas of people and animals is in the Sea of Rebirth ... By running around in multiplicities of activity and feeling up your own brothers under sheets cacoëthes befall thee of your own making—" (38)

Whatever the ultimate cause of the squabble, Jack's hostility toward Allen is evident in a number of subsequent snipes included in *Some of the Dharma*, some veiled and some not. He wrote in his journal on November 25 and included verbatim first a seeming self-critique and a then defiant insistence that Allen make up with him. The first entry reads (clearly speaking of himself as Buddha), "BUT IF YOU ARE AVALOKITESVARA BUDDHA, or God, then you must [...] pat, protect & purify all beings under all conditions including Ginsberg and all your Satans and all— N O W" (39) On the heels of that, however, he writes, "You've got no more reason to look up enemies to forgive them than to look up old forgotten friends to pat and protect and reassure them [...] If anybody wants anything let them find you" (40) That passage in *Some of the Dharma* is altered from his journal entry, where the word "enemies" had originally been "Ginsberg" and "them" changed from "him." And a few pages later in his journal is a statement that Jack omitted from the book: "Allen is nothin but a brother who went astray – Jews are Dumb" (41) The hostility persisted after Jack left California. In early January, 1956, while back in Rocky Mount, lonely but busy writing *Visions of Gerard*, he wrote that "A. and all Fags are little girlbitches." (42) In the version in his journal, "A." is "Ginsb."

In another veiled entry in *Some of the Dharma*, Jack writes, "Maybe the reason why some people cant understand the Surangama Sutra is because of their bad Karma," whereas in the notebook "some people" is "Ginsberg." During their earlier correspondence about Buddhism, Allen had called the Diamond Sutra "a perfect statement" (43) but said he was "[s]till struggling with Surangama," (44) and clearly Jack wanted Allen to accept his Buddhist precepts. Throughout that winter in Rocky Mount, the jabs continued; fueled by Jack's loneliness and unhappiness with family, he lashed out in his journals again and again and typed them into *Some of the Dharma*: "The truceless hate that the angels of darkness bear the angels of light' — ***** A.G. & me?" (45) So reads *Some of the Dharma*, while in the journal, "A.G." is "Ginsberg." In his "PRAYER FOR THE JUJU BEADS," he takes aim at an array of people including "the raging Rexroth" (who'd thrown Jack out of a soiree, castigating him as a drunk), "the malicious Ginsberg," "the greedy Neal," and "the selfish Kerouac." (46) He shows hubris in writing that "As a poet of personal materialistic concerns, Ginsberg can only make use of my heavenly overflow." (47) Eventually, though, Jack begins to soften: "ALLEN, his harmless 'evil'—forgive him before he dies—your evil schemes, poor lad, dont stack up in this endless emptiness" (48) (in his journal "lad" is "Ginsberg"). And in his "PRAJNA PRAYER," where in *Some of the Dharma* he writes, "My hatred of such gab is emptiness," (49) in his journal "such" reads "Ginsberg's," and he adds, "To Ginsberg, therefore, when I see him, I'll just say, 'Let's cut out the gab' – for gab it all is –" (50)

In their long relationship, this was hardly the only sore point between the two men. The most directly hostile words came from Jack in 1952, after Allen, then acting as Jack's agent, criticized the *Visions of Cody* manuscript (then-entitled *On the Road*) that Jack was submitting to Carl Solomon, Allen's friend, at Ace Books. Amid elements of praise, Allen deemed

38... Ibid 349

39... Kerouac, Berg Collection 49.11 Holograph notebook "10."

40... Jack Kerouac...*Some of the Dharma* page 373

41... *Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: The Letters* - eds Bill Morgan and David Stanford - Viking Press - 2010 - page 278.

42... Ibid 283

43... Jack Kerouac...*Some of the Dharma* - Viking Press - 1997 - page 381

44... Ibid 39

46... Ibid 395

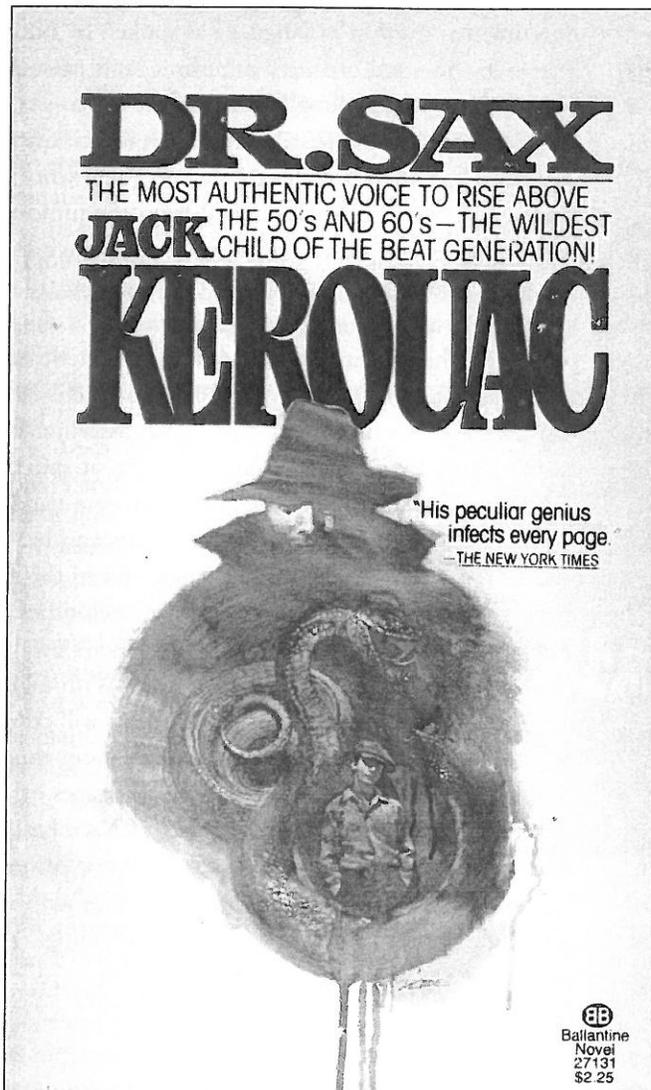
47... Ibid 405

48... Kerouac, Berg Collection 49.19 Holograph notebook "Dharma (9)."

49... *Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: The Letters* - eds Bill Morgan and David Stanford - Viking Press - 2010 - pages 177-78

50 Ibid 179

it unpublishable – “crazy in a bad way” – and accused him of “juss crappin around thoughtlessly with that trickstyle often, and it’s not so good.” (51) Kerouac responded venomously, calling him and Carl “goddamn cheap little shits” and “Parasites.”



Regarding *Visions of Cody*, Kerouac stated, “I see it now, why it is great and why you hate it and what the world is ... specifically what you are, Allen Ginsberg ... a disbeliever, a hater, your giggles don’t fool me, I see the snarl under it.” (52) A month later, however, after Allen wrote an apologetic, self-deprecating letter

and praised Jack’s new novel, *Dr. Sax*, as a work of genius, Jack responded by writing, “You know I was mad at you, but you know it doesn’t take me long to stop, and many times I wanted to write you and say, ‘Well, you understand, sometimes I get mad, etc.’”

(53) And there were other spats, such as when Burroughs, in love with Allen, talked of visiting him in San Francisco and Jack wrote to Bill saying Allen wanted him to come. Allen became angry because he was uninterested in Bill sexually and was trying to dissuade him. Jack apologized, calling what he’d told Bill “a poor little kind white lie,” (54) and Allen wrote, “My rage was annoyance but I generally took it as a minor thing.” (55) Jack, though, always took the disagreements harder, writing, “I don’t want to fight and I don’t want to be misunderstood as ‘mean’ – But I do think we’ll need a serious mutual confession and admit a new backlog of secret hates we have for each other that if not uprooted will grow.” (56)

Two months later, in December 1954, Jack had a new beef over something that had happened when the two partied together in New York, claiming “I’m not mad,” but then stating, “You didn’t have to show off to the bearded bohemian hepcats in the crowd.” (57) A month after that, his anger again had blown over, he wrote, “...how I love letters from you my fine sweet Allen. And don’t ever worry about me getting mad at you again – I swear off of that for the last time, every time I get mad at you it later turns out imaginary reasons of dust. bah. Never again will you get a scowl, or a bad word from me, and I dig you as a saint already, a real saint.” (58)

A good case for Allen’s saintliness can be made from all the abuse he took from Jack over the years, direct and indirect, amid their love for each other. Always there was the problem of Jack’s parents’ anti-Semitism and bigotry against homosexuals, stances that Jack at times adopted, especially when drunk. Allen was aware that on his deathbed, Jack’s

51... Ibid 185

52... Ibid 246

53... Ibid 248

54... Ibid 246.

55... Ibid 253

56... Ibid 268

57 ...Dennis McNally...*Desolate Angel: A Biography - Jack Kerouac, the Beat Generation, and America* - Random House - 1979 - page 89

58... Berg Collection 55.7 Holograph notebook “1957 / Notes / Orlando.”

59... Ibid

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father, Leo, had told Jack to shun Allen, calling him a “cockroach” (59); and later in life, even when Kerouac was in his thirties and forties, his mother, Gabrielle, forbade him to have Allen in their house. Jack’s tolerance of their bigotry was part of his character – his love for his parents and his own mental problems. Diagnosed as schizophrenic at 21 by the U.S. Navy and by the clear weight of evidence certainly bipolar, Jack throughout his life suffered from extreme mood swings, and at times he was unquestionably a difficult person to be around. In the Sixties they drew apart amid Jack’s accelerating alcoholism and the differences in their political stances – Allen’s open, leftist activism and Jack’s conservative cocoon. Still, Allen’s love for Jack never abated, and there’s a wealth of evidence that the feeling, down-deep, was mutual.

In his 1957 journal, while Jack was living with Gabrielle in Orlando escaping the publicity of the recently published *On the Road* – famous at last – Jack wrote the following glowing recommendation letter for Allen, who was seeking a Guggenheim Fellowship. “I’ve known the applicant Allen Ginsberg since he was 17 years old,” it begins, and Jack is generous in praising Allen’s earliest work, which he states “began to pour forth language I’d never heard before ... Side by side with erudite classical images Allen would come up with homely common images from the streets bridges rivers and yakking conversations on both sides of the Hudson, a strange elegant lumpenproletariat song.” (60) The letter then relates Jack’s view of Allen’s maturation as a poet, equating his pre-“Howl” poetry with that of William Carlos Williams, writing “from the depths of everyday

life” and “elevating simple images to a classic lovely height, subordinating traditional concepts to the newly needed concept of verse as talk – the natural rhythm of speech, straight sincere soul talk.” (61) With *Howl*, Jack asserts, Allen achieved “the most exalted fruition of his studies, sufferings, experiments: rhythm of language as spoken by human beings in their real ordinary mouths ... and presented visually on a page in long Whitman-like sea-surges and incantatory Koran-ish or Torah-ish repetitions of cry.” (62) Jack then declares that it was Allen who taught him “how to release myself from the timidity involved in obeisance to traditional language which was preventing me from pouring my heart out truly sincerely. I suddenly saw through Allen’s mind the possibility the infinity of the freedom of American language ... and began to write from the sanctified inside of the private mind.” (63) If that assertion is surprising and overstates Allen’s influence, it speaks volumes about how deeply he and Allen were tied – brothers in their quest to express raw, uncensored truths in a new, pure, authentic voice; and in their quest they learned from and supported each other. The letter ends with a plea, discussing Allen’s need of funds for more extensive foreign travel: “With a grant of this kind God knows what great poems will come out of it! New poems by Allen Ginsberg about the wailing widows of Benares! the mountain sages of Kyoto! the mysterious Moslem saints of Morocco! the final eli eli howl of Israel written and wept in Israel! In the name of literature, I recommend him with all my might. I pray God you will grant this young genius his share of a great memorial.” (64)

60... Ibid.

61... Ibid.

62... Ibid.

63... Ibid.

64... Ibid.

Editor’s Note

Charles Shuttleworth’s essay touches on Jack Kerouac’s time in the Naval Reserve as a very young man in 1942. It seems pertinent to mention here *Hit the Road Jack! Jack Kerouac’s Short Time in the U.S. Naval Reserve* by Miriam Kleiman. A chapbook in the continuing series from the Beat Scene Press. Miriam - working at the Office of Public Affairs in Washington DC - (No 62 in 2017) has access to Kerouac’s records. Much of it makes quite startling reading. It tells the story of

an intense and fraught intermission in Kerouac’s life. Of how it involved his bombastic father and the psychiatrists who ministered to a frightened twenty year old Kerouac. The phase he was going through acts almost as a bookend with the rapidly fading figure who spoke of American jeeps in the Vietnam War on the very conservative William Buckley *Firing Line* show in the late 1960s.

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