Short title of thesis: ALLEN GINSBERG'S POETICS

# ALLEN GINSBERG'S POETICS
# AS A SYNTHESIS OF AMERICAN POETIC TRADITIONS

by

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## ABSTRACT

In this essay I analyse Allen Ginsberg's theory of poetry. It is my contention that his poetics is a syncretistic attempt to unite what Roy Harvey Pearce called the "Adamic" and "mythic" modes of creation in American poetry. In the former, as exemplified by Whitman, reality resides in the Self; the latter, as in Pound's work, is centred in myth and history. These two poets provide the background for my study of Ginsberg's ideas, but I also examine other influences, including those of Eastern thought. By uniting the different traditions, Ginsberg wants to assure the continuity of poetry as a moral force capable of reshaping human consciousness and improving the human condition. He advocates a return to the oral tradition, whereby poetry becomes a communal, ritualistic act, achieving a total spiritual and physical involvement of the visionary poet and his audience.

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## RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet essai j'analyse la théorie poétique d'Allen Ginsberg. Ce que je prétends, c'est que sa poétique est une tentative de joindre ce que Roy Harvey Pearce appela les modes de création "Adamique" et "mythique" dans la poésie américaine. Dans celui-là, comme chez Whitman, la réalité demeure dans le moi; celui-ci, comme dans l'oeuvre de Pound, est centré en mythe et histoire. Ces deux poètes donnent la pénombre à mon étude sur les idées de Ginsberg, mais j'examine aussi d'autres influences, y compris celles de la philosophie orientale. En unifiant les traditions différentes, Ginsberg désire assurer la continuité de la poésie comme une force morale ayant la capacité de refaire la conscience humaine et d'améliorer la condition humaine. Il propose le retour à la tradition orale, par lequel la poésie pourrait devenir un acte communal et rituel, atteignant une unité spirituelle et physique entre le poète visionnaire et son public.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I should like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Egbert Faas, for kindly giving me access to his dossier of photostats of interviews and articles by Allen Ginsberg, the originals of which are in the Poetry Collection at the University of Buffalo, Buffalo, New York.

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# CHAPTER I

## TO GATHER FROM THE AIR A LIVE TRADITION

For the epigraph of his recent book of poems, The Fall of America, Allen Ginsberg chose the passage on "adhesiveness" from Walt Whitman's "Democratic Vistas". Part of the quotation reads as follows:

> It is to the development, identification, and general prevalence of that fervid comradeship, (the adhesive love, at least rivaling the amative love hitherto possessing imaginative literature, if not going beyond it,) that I look for the counterbalance and offset of our materialistic and vulgar American democracy and for the spiritualization thereof.... I say democracy infers such loving comradeship, as its most inevitable twin or counterpart, without which it will be incomplete, in vain, and incapable of perpetuating itself.[1]

In a 1974 interview in Partisan Review Ginsberg gave his reasons for selecting this passage:

> It does point to a goal and an ideal and a human potentiality that America was supposed to fulfill because that was the prophecy, the need, and the psychological condition of American democracy, and Whitman named it and particularized it very clearly in that passage. Also it gives credence, historical background, and traditional justification to my own adhesive poems.[2]

During a radio talk show with Ginsberg in November, 1972, someone walked into the studio with news of the death of Ezra Pound. Ginsberg's first reaction was to

utter a short mantra, "AH", then he talked about Pound, saying that Pound was "the greatest poet of the age".[3] His reasons for such high praise were based on the conviction that Pound was

> the one poet who heard speech as spoken from the actual body and began to measure it to lines that could be chanted rhythmically without violating human common sense ... the first poet to open up fresh new forms in America after Walt Whitman--certainly the greatest poet since Walt Whitman.[4]

These statements by Ginsberg are significant for several reasons and I have juxtaposed them in order to suggest the theme and substance of my essay on Ginsberg's poetics, its roots, and the influences on its formation. Ginsberg's aesthetics is a rich and complex web of ideas, woven together of a great number of different concepts and theories. I hope to show in this study that although Ginsberg draws on a variety of ethical, religious, and aesthetic sources, his main concern in constructing his poetics has been to provide a synthesis and a continuation of the central trends of American poetic tradition. Ginsberg's singling out of Whitman and Pound as the greatest figures in that tradition is important not only for his intellectual recognition of their artistic innovations, or for his emotional attraction to their iconoclasm, but because Whitman and Pound represent the two strongest currents in the divergent streams of American poetry.

The chief value of Ginsberg's poetics lies, in my opinion, precisely in its syncretistic attempt to bring about a reconciliation of this traditional divergence.

It was Roy Harvey Pearce who has perhaps most clearly called attention to the division of American poetry, naming the two modes of poetic expression "Adamic" and "mythic".[5] I have adopted his termini for the course of this essay because they stand for a critical approach that attempts to strike at the very essence of poetry, of poetic consciousness; an approach that combines successfully the "extrinsic" and "intrinsic" methods of interpretation.[6] For it is on this most profound spiritual level that Ginsberg has sought to unite the poetics of the "Adamic" Whitman, his poetry of the Self, and the "mythic" Pound, poet of history and objectivity. In Ginsberg's synthesis the traditional boundaries of "Adamic" and "mythic" seem to blur and soften: Whitman is seen not solely as the poet of the Self but as a poet of "history" whose purpose was to "alter the consciousness of the nation";[7] and Ginsberg applauds The Cantos in "Adamic" terms--not as "the tale of the tribe", but as a personal document in which Pound had built "a model of his consciousness over a fifty-year time span", as Whitman had in Leaves of Grass.[8] In Ginsberg's poetics exploration and expression of the self go hand in hand with an integration of outer reality within the poet's consciousness,

so that the act of writing poetry is not merely a practising of a craft, an essentially private affair, but it is also a generation of force fields, possessing power to enter effectively into the affairs of men. Thus there is no contradiction when Ginsberg writes, on the one hand, that "I see the function of poetry as a catalyst to visionary states of being",[9] and when he says, on the other, that

> regarding poetics, continued recovery of community ritual modes will be my own effort. What kind of song can a million lonely middle-class pro-peace demonstrators sing on the streets of Miami & San Diego, what American mantra can be chanted in unison, what verse forms suit massive rhythmic behavior to manifest public consciousness to dumbed leader Mind?[10]

On the contrary, by uniting the poetics of the Self and the poetics of "history", Ginsberg aims to restore poetry to that eminence which it enjoyed in ancient times, and to which it has perfect right by its own nature.

Ihab Hassan writes that "like his master, Walt Whitman, Ginsberg is a poet of Orphic hopes: he wants to wed language to the flesh".[11] I take this to mean a basically "Adamic" wish whereby Ginsberg wants to cut through the "opacity" of language, the language of modern poetry, so that the totality of the poet's self may shine through it and stand revealed. In Ginsberg, however, the desired transparency of language serves equally for the filtering-through of reality, of myth and history, as in Pound, as in William Carlos Williams; and accordingly Hassan completes

his thought: "But in his 'angelic ravings', Jeremiah jostles Orpheus and Buddha: biblical anger, pantheistic joy, and mystic calm mingle".[12] Complementary to the Orphic voice, in Ginsberg's poetry and poetics the Promethean voice also breaks through: the call of the poet as prophet, shaman, "unacknowledged legislator", "antenna of the race". In his syncretism Ginsberg goes beyond the limits of aesthetics; he aims at nothing less than the union of the creative-contemplative and the creative-active aspects of man. First and foremost, it is the poet's task to bring about such a union in his consciousness, for, as Ginsberg states in one of his important poems, "Poet is Priest".[13]

Ginsberg's synthesis embraces all phases of the art of poetry: the state of mind of the poet before and during composition; the making of the poem; the social relevance of poem and poet; and speculations about the future of poetry. In order to gauge the range of his ideas, I shall devote separate chapters to each of these areas, and set them against a background of related ideas in American literary theory and, where they apply, specifically against those of Whitman and Pound. Ginsberg has of course been influenced by writers and thinkers other than Whitman and Pound, and I shall examine his indebtedness to William Carlos Williams, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs and others in the chapter immediately following

this introduction.

Ginsberg is an avowed Buddhist, but his Buddhism is mixed with Gnostic mysticism and a characteristically American pragmatism. Since for him the art of poetry is essentially a religious act, a discussion of his religious and philosophical ideas will be necessary for a more thorough understanding of his poetics. Such a discussion will also help to establish my contention that Ginsberg's theory of poetry is in the line of the American transcendentalist tradition. Ginsberg's belief that the poet is an inspired visionary is due in no small part to this transcendentalist trait which has, in turn, determined his predilection for a spontaneous mode of writing: the poet must trust his inspired intuition above his intellect in the act of writing.

In the formulation of his prosody Ginsberg adopted Charles Olson's and Kerouac's theories about breath as a rhythmic unit, but he has also been influenced by the Hindu mantra which has led him to think of poetry as a complete spiritual and physical act. From these theoretical and practical bases stems his call for the revival of the oral tradition; poetry must leap off the printed page, become vocal and be <u>heard</u> again in order to accomplish its moral mission. Thus, in Ginsberg's view, the language of the new poetry will encompass both the "Adamic" and "mythic" modes of creation; poetry will be, as Whitman put it,

"a faithful and doubtless self-willed record" of the poet's own "physical, emotional, moral, intellectual, and aesthetic Personality",[14] and at the same time it will also contain and interpret reality--"history", as Pound had envisaged it--by basing itself on "objectivity and again objectivity", and pay close attention to language, for, as Pound said, "language is made out of concrete things".[15] Poetry will,then lose its rarefied and self-conscious nature, its "opacity", and become, in Ginsberg's words, truly "an interpersonal art form".[16]

In the above sense do I see Ginsberg's contribution to aesthetics to be squarely in the mainstream of American poetic traditions, and as a natural convergence of those traditions. My method in this essay will be one of presentation rather than criticism; in part because I find myself in agreement with most of Ginsberg's conclusions, particularly with his advocacy of the re-establishment of the oral tradition, and also because I believe that a meaningful critique of his syncretistic attempt can only be undertaken after his theories will have been tested by poets to come. My study is limited to an exposition of Ginsberg's theory of poetry; any detailed examination of its application or applicability to his own poetic practice would have to be the subject of another investigation.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER I

[1] The Fall of America (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1972), n. pag.

[2] John Tytell, "A Conversation with Allen Ginsberg", Partisan Review, XLI, 2 (1974), 255.

[3] Allen Ginsberg, Allen Verbatim: Lectures on Poetry, Politics, Consciousness, ed. Gordon Ball (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), p. 180.

[4] Allen Verbatim, p. 180.

[5] Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961). The themes "Adamic" and "mythic" will be defined and discussed in Chapter II of this essay.

[6] These are René Wellek's terms. For a detailed exposition see his and Austin Warren's Theory of Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1942), chapters III and IV.

[7] Anon., "An Interview with Allen Ginsberg", Unmuzzled Ox, III, 2 (1975), 19.

[8] Allen Verbatim, p. 181.

[9] Anon., "Craft Interview with Allen Ginsberg", New York Quarterly, No. 6, Spring 1971, p. 31.

[10] Allen Ginsberg, "On the New Cultural Radicalism", Partisan Review, XXXIX, 3 (1972), 424.

[11] Ihab Hassan, The Dismemberment of Orpheus (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 252.

[12] Hassan, p. 252.

[13] Kaddish and Other Poems (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1961), p. 61. The poem is "Death to Van Gogh's Ear!"

[14] Walt Whitman, "Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads", Leaves of Grass, Comprehensive Reader's Edition, ed. Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 563.

[15] In a letter to Harriet Monroe, Selected Letters, ed. D.D. Paige, (New York: New Directions, 1950), p. 49.

[16] "Craft Interview", p. 37.

## CHAPTER II

## BEGINNINGS AND THE BACKGROUND

The early development of Ginsberg's thought and poetry indicates a wide and voracious reading. The lists of influential writers he has compiled from time to time appear at first glance to be undifferentiated. Although he admits to having read some Whitman while he was a student at East Side High School in Paterson, N.J., (where, he says, he had already thought of himself as "a mystical creep"),[1] Whitman's name is absent from a list that includes Emily Dickinson, Poe, Shelley, Wordsworth, Andrew Marvell and Milton.[2] To Lionel Trilling, who was one of his professors at Columbia, he confided that as a poet he has descended from Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Dostoyevsky, among others.[3] In his first letter to William Carlos Williams, (which Williams included in Paterson), he mentions Hart Crane, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Allen Tate, and "old Englishmen" whose styles he attempted to imitate and fuse in his own earlier lyrics.[4] In a 1966 interview he provides an even wider list: Apollinaire, Pound, Williams, Kerouac, Burroughs, Blake, ("more than anyone from spiritual points of view"); Indian poets Kabir and Mirabi; Dickinson and Whitman; "a little Poe"; Vachel Lindsay, Robert Creeley, Charles Olson; "a lot of Shelley"; Rimbaud, Artaud, Jules Laforgue; the Tibetan poet Mila-Repa; Gary Snyder, Gregory

Corso, Peter Orlovsky.[5]

The above catalogues are, of course, in part lists of favourite authors, but Ginsberg's choice is not haphazard. With a few notable exceptions, the poets could be classified as romantics and symbolists--intensely personal poets who conceived of their work as a record of their inner reality. They confirmed Ginsberg's own instinctive feelings about poetry: it must be above all a powerful self-expression, an extension of the mysterious workings of the creative mind.

Ginsberg considered his formal education at Columbia largely a waste of time, even though his teachers included poet-critic Mark Van Doren, the critic Lionel Trilling, and Raymond Weaver, a biographer of Herman Melville. The academy was, in Ginsberg's view, "a venomous, vicious, vitriolic, malevolent, jealous enemy of any kind of composition from nature",[6] and while the above invectives sound somewhat sharp and unjust, they are mitigated by Ginsberg's account of what was actually taught in the English Department at Columbia:

> Whitman was hardly taught and was considered like a creep. Shelley was a creep too. John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate were like the supreme literary touchstones. Joyce and Lawrence were the property of funny modernist cats like William York Tindall, who was considered eccentric by the rest of the faculty. . . . Williams was an unknown factor. Like he lived thirteen miles away and he was never even invited to read. Pound was taught, but not for his advances or his inventions or his prosody or his understanding

of composition. He was taught as a freak-out.[7]

Ginsberg's intellectual hunger, not assuaged in college, received satisfaction from another source. William Burroughs lived near Columbia in the middle nineteen-forties, and his apartment became a regular meeting ground for a number of students and aspiring young writers, Ginsberg and Kerouac among them. It was Burroughs who supplied Ginsberg with books by Kafka, Céline, Yeats, (A Vision), Proust, Rimbaud, Spengler (Decline of the West), Cocteau and others. "Burroughs educated me more than Columbia, really", Ginsberg said some twenty years after his university days.[8] Burroughs was at that time working on his first book, Junkie, and Ginsberg was impressed by Burroughs' style, but even more impressed by the writer's honesty in describing his experiments with mind expansion. In 1966 Ginsberg appeared as a witness for the defense in the obscenity trial of Naked Lunch, and made no secret of Burroughs' influence on him over the past two decades. "He's got a fantastic ear for common speech", he said of Burroughs, and said he considered his work "an enormous breakthrough into truthful expression of exactly really what was going on inside his head, with no holds barred".[9] Ginsberg was very much aware of the literary merits of Burroughs' work, ("there is a great deal of very pure language and pure poetry in this book", he said

of Naked Lunch),[10] and while his response to what he felt was the essence of the book was couched in "Adamic" terms, praising "the enormous courage it took to make such a total confession",[11] he knew that the "confession" was simultaneously a devastating critique of society. Ginsberg had no doubt sensed that Burroughs was working toward a synthesis not unlike his own; for while attempting to make his "confession" as total as possible, Burroughs was also practising his art with the precision of a scientist--he did say, in fact, that "I think that the time has come for the line between literature and science, a purely arbitrary line, to be erased".[12] While there is a similarity of intention in Ginsberg and Burroughs, it is important to note the difference in artistic execution; Burroughs' experiments remain within the confines of the printed page, whereas Ginsberg chose to become a pioneer in the re-establishing of the oral tradition.

It was through the direct influence of another friend, Jack Kerouac, that Ginsberg began to concentrate on the oral quality of poetic language. ". . . Kerouac was the first writer I ever met", said Ginsberg, "who heard his own writing, who listened to his own sentences as if they were musical, rhythmical constructions. . . ."[13] Kerouac had independently worked out a new aesthetics for what he called "spontaneous prose"; while I shall discuss it in detail in Chapter IV of this essay, I think it is important

to draw attention to it at this stage, not only for its prosodic innovations that affected Ginsberg's development, but also because Kerouac's artistic theory and practice was a clear manifestation of "Adamic" sensibility. Ginsberg viewed Kerouac's work not as something peripheral but as a continuation of American prose traditions: "there is a tradition of prose in America, including Thomas Wolfe and going through Kerouac, which is personal, comes from the writer's own person--his person defined as his body, his breathing rhythm, his actual talk".[14] Gertrude Stein was also part of that tradition; what Ginsberg appreciated in the work of Stein and Kerouac was the fact that their language was an extension of their consciousnesses, not something "borrowed" from outside.

The other important turning point in Ginsberg's artistic development, the one that put him in touch with American poetic tradition, occurred with his meeting and subsequent relationship with William Carlos Williams. He was at a reading where Williams recited some of his poems, and although at first he did not understand Williams' rhythm and principles of composition, later on, he says:

> I suddenly realized he [Williams] was hearing with raw ears. The sound, pure sound and rhythm --as itwas spoken around him, and he was trying to adapt his poetry rhythms out of the actual talk rhythms he heard in the place that he was, rather than mentronome or sing-song archaic literary rhythms he would hear in a place inside his head from having read other writings.[15]

Williams' discoveries, his reproducing actual speech patterns and "body rhythm" were not wholly original as in the case of Kerouac; his aesthetics owed a number of its key components to Pound, (he admitted that "meeting Ezra Pound is like B.C. and A.D.")[16] and to Whitman. The greater body of his work was written in the "mythic" mode, backed by an aesthetics which he had evolved in conscious opposition to both Whitman and Pound; and yet, the statement he makes about his poetry, that "the rhythmic pace was the pace of speech" is an amplified echo of what Pound had said;[17] his advice to young poets, "write carelessly so that nothing that is not green will survive", on the other hand, has Whitmanian overtones.[18] Williams' advice means that only what proceeds straight from the heart will have lasting value; he is the same poet whose most famous axiom is "No ideas but in things", which means that only what proceeds from the reality of things will be of value. There may be some contradiction here, perhaps because Williams did not try to reconcile Self and Thing in his aesthetics; for in fact, as Ginsberg had also alluded to it above, his poetry by its very precision and accuracy proves that the poetry of "things" precludes carelessness.

In the Whitmanian or transcendentalist scheme of things spontaneous speech about reality would not have posed a problem; for at the core of it stands the belief in the reality of the Self. For a poet imbued with such

convictions the correct way to compose is to "write carelessly", i.e., listening to an inner voice which is the voice of reality. It was inevitable that through the influence of Burroughs, Kerouac, and Williams, Ginsberg had arrived at the source of this poetic ideal which was Walt Whitman. It was with Whitman that all his earlier gropings had fallen into place.

In "Notes for Howl and Other Poems" Ginsberg wrote:

> By 1955 I wrote poetry adapted from press seeds, journals, scratchings, arranged by phrasing or breath groups into little short-line patterns according to ideas of measure of American speech I'd picked up from W.C. Williams' imagist preoccupations. I suddenly turned aside in San Francisco, unemployment compensation leisure, to follow my romantic inspiration--Hebraic-Melvillian bardic breath. . . . I realized at the time that Whitman's form had rarely been further explored (improved on even) in the U.S., Whitman always a mountain too vast to be seen.[19]

Ginsberg was of course right: the fact that this "mountain" contained a gold mine had been ignored by the "official" American poets whose model and idol was T.S. Eliot. It is difficult to imagine today, when we are in the midst of a Whitman revival, that up until some twenty years ago Whitman was considered by many critics and poets, if not exactly a "creep", then at least a primitive with a barbaric yawp whom it was best to leave ignored.[20] Ginsberg was one of the first of the younger poets to call attention to Whitman; he had felt that Whitman's was the voice of the true "Adamic" ancestor whose heritage would revitalize

his own poetry.

The "Adamic" mode, as Pearce defined it, refers to a kind of poetry that "may nominally argue for many things, may have many subjects, may be descriptive of the world at large; but always it will implicitly argue for one thing--the vital necessity of its existence and of the ego which creates and informs it".[21] The function the "Adamic" poet assigns to poetry is a re-creation and a rediscovery of the world through his own self. Such a poet sees himself not merely as a piece in the vast mosaic of nature; he is of it, but at the same time above it--he is a master in his own right. Whitman could conceive of creating poetry only in such "Adamic" terms: "The trunk and centre whence the answer was to radiate . . . must be an identical body and soul, a personality--which personality, after many considerations and ponderings I deliberately settled should be myself--indeed could not be any other".[22] He identified Leaves of Grass as "the outcropping of my own emotional and other personal nature, an attempt, from first to last, to put a Person, a human being (myself, in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, in America) freely, fully, and truly on record".[23] The poet, like a new Adam, names the world, trusting all the while in his intuition and imagination as the sole sources of knowledge and judgment. By going back to Whitman, Ginsberg had put himself in touch with a body of ideas that is at the centre

of the American poetic tradition, and a brief survey of these ideas will serve in delineating the background against which Ginsberg's contribution to aesthetics must be viewed.

Most of Whitman's theories were derived almost intact from Ralph Waldo Emerson who, in turn, acquired the key concepts of his transcendentalism from Wordsworth, Coleridge, the German Romantic Movement, and from Oriental philosophies. It was Emerson who said that the poet is an "emperor in his own right", that he is "the true and only doctor" who "turns the world to glass, and shows us all things in their right series and procession".[24] The poet is a creator in the image of the Original Creator; his power of imagination is an inspired replica of that "divine aura which breathes through forms"[25] and gives his self substantiality. Emerson's thoughts are directly related to the English romantics, notably Coleridge, whose definition of the imagination could easily have been his. "The primary Imagination", wrote Coleridge, "I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as the repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM".[26] Such a conception of the imagination gave birth in Emerson to that exalted view of intuition (knowledge from within), as opposed to "tuition" (knowledge from without) which so decisively influenced Whitman and his theory of poetry.

Such a view, moreover, was instrumental in placing

poetry on a pedestal where it became a supreme form of acquiring and disseminating knowledge. This was a concept which "mythic" poets were likewise unwilling to eschew. Whitman's assertion that "the topmost proof of a race is its own born poetry"[27] reappears in several essentially unchanged forms in Pound's writings. The one most often quoted, "Artists are the antennae of the race",[28] is elaborated upon in Guide to Kulchur, in many of the literary essays, and in ABC of Reading. "A nation", declared Pound, "which neglects the perceptions of its artists declines. After a while it ceases to act, and merely survives."[29]

In order to get closer to the centre of the problem Ginsberg has had to face, it will be useful to examine Pound's attitude to Whitman, for, as Pearce had observed, "All American poetry since [Whitman] is, in essence if not in substance, a series of arguments with Whitman".[30] Pound's feelings about Whitman were mixed. It is on the whole correct what Charles B. Willard wrote that "Pound's chief objection to Whitman's poetry is one of technique; Whitman's portrayal of America and his fundamental meaning he still admires".[31] With all his objections to Whitman's poetic sensibility, Pound realized that Whitman was the great beginner, the poet who "broke the new wood",[32] who was "a start in the right direction".[33] This view of Whitman is no different from the image Whitman had of

his role as a poet. "I am the bard of the future", he declared,[34] and in "Poets to Come" he called on future poets to carry on and complete his work:

> Poets to come! orators, singers, musicians
> to come!
> Not today is to justify me and answer what
> I am for.
> But you, a new brood, native, athletic,
> continental, greater than before known,
> Arouse! for you must justify me![35]

Pound knew that he had to make "a pact" with Whitman;[36] as early as 1909 he wrote of Whitman that "I honour him for he prophesied me while I can only recognize him as a forebear of whom I ought to be proud", and admitted that although he read Whitman "with acute pain", he found himself "using his rhythms".[37] He added: "Mentally I am a Walt Whitman who has learned to wear a collar and a dress shirt (although at times inimical to both)".[38] As Willard pointed out, there are many superficial and important similarities between Whitman and Pound: both were in a sense "poseurs" who had themselves photographed endlessly; they were the centres of coteries; they developed highly individual styles of letter writing; their working methods were based on non-logical sequences of themes; in their poetics they called for simplicity and directness of expression; and they both had troubles with censorship.[39] More significant than the above is the fact that both poets had all through their lives been

engaged in writing one gigantic poem that terminated only with their deaths; and equally important, they had attempted an infusion of Eastern ideas into their systems of thought, Whitman from Hindu mysticism, both directly and through Emerson, and Pound directly from Confucius. Both poets called for a new poetic language; in Whitman's view, "the poetry of the future aims at the free expression of emotion . . . and to arouse and initiate, more than to define or finish";[40] and Pound envisioned a poetry in the twentieth century that will be "harder and saner", "austere, direct, free from emotional slither".[41]

Here, of course, the similarities end. Whitman's call for an even more all-encompassing self-expression (the poet of the future must be a "savage and luxuriant man")[42] is incompatible with Pound's idea of the poet as scientist, a practitioner of an art which is "a sort of inspired mathematics",[43] whose chief virtue is not subjectivity but a "harder and saner" objectivity. "The interpretive function is the highest honour of the arts", he he wrote, "and because it is so we find that a sort of hyper-scientific precision is the touchstone and assay of the artist's power, of his honour, his authenticity".[44]

This ~~is,~~ in essence, the credo of the "mythic" poet, one whose poetry does not rely for its authority on the poet's self, but, in Pearce's definition, "on a power which is by definition beyond man and his works . . . those

large, extra-human, form-giving patterns of belief and commitment called myths".[45] Whitman and Pound are thus the antipodes of the American literary tradition; they are the embodiments of the Emersonian poles of cognition, the one founding everything on the supremacy of the self, on intuition; the other on the eternal forces of myth and history, on "tuition". It is understandable, therefore, why Ginsberg, in attempting a synthesis of these opposing modes of poetic thought and practice, would be impelled to make a pilgrimage to Whitman, and then, just as inevitably, reach back to Pound.

Ginsberg, like Pound, saw Whitman as a spiritual father,[46] but he, quite unlike Pound, had looked upon him not as someone to be "honoured", but as a Great inventor whose ideas and example were still sufficiently alive to be absorbed and "justified". He saw Whitman as a poet of passions, of "body acceptance, body exploration, come-passion and compassion";[47] he believed above all that "all Whitmanesque fantasies were practical realities".[48] In Whitman he saw confirmed his own ideas that true knowledge arises out of the self; and poetry must be a powerful expression not only of consciousness but of the entire body. His experiments with Whitman's long line are a part of his identification with Whitman; but Ginsberg saw much more in Whitman than just a model for poetic composition. He considered himself a bard and prophet in the Whitmanic

vein; like Whitman, a disseminator of faith and an all-embracing humanism, combining Western and Eastern modes of consciousness.

Ginsberg's relationship to Pound has in the main been an intellectual one. Pound had written that "the function of an art is to strengthen the perceptive faculties and free them from encumbrance",[49] and Ginsberg saw Pound's value exactly in those terms. In the fall of 1967 he visited Pound in Rapallo and Venice, and his pilgrimage to the silent old poet ended up in a series of pleasant encounters. On arrival Ginsberg presented himself to Pound, thus: "I am a Buddhist Jew whose perceptions have been strengthened by the series of practical exact language models scattered through The Cantos like stepping stones".[50] He told Pound how much he and other poets had learned from him, that Pound's poetic inventions have given him "ground to walk on". But the few occasions on which Pound spoke, he only derided his own poetic achievement and called it "worthless"; so Ginsberg tried to bolster his confidence.

> Pound said, "Bunting told me my poetry referred too much and presented too little". So I said, "Well, I saw Bunting last month in New York and he said, 'Read Pound if you want hard, condensed, exact precision in language'".[51]

Ginsberg acknowledged the importance of the ideogrammic method, and admitted "drawing from Pound's discovery and interpretation of Chinese as later practiced

by Williams".[52] The other important aspect of Pound's new poetics was, for Ginsberg, the significance Pound attributed to the substantiality of vowels in a line of poetry. "Rhythm MUST have meaning", Pound had emphasized,[53] thus the length and the tonal qualities of each vowel must contribute to the total meaning of the line and the entire poem. Ginsberg singled out Pound's own recital of his "Usura" canto (Canto XLV) as a prime example of Pound's attention to vowels, and during a lecture at the University of Wyoming he made an exhaustive formal analysis of the poem, pointing out the unity of music and meaning.[54] He saw in Pound the great modern predecessor who was "going through a transition from one language to another, trying to go from English to American, trying to find prosody which could actually measure talk so you could get some regular music out of it. . . ."[55] And following in Pound's footsteps, Ginsberg has made the reuniting of poetry and music one of his main preoccupations.

But in his quest "to wed language to the flesh", to revive the oral tradition, to bring together "Adamic" and "mythic" traditions, Ginsberg felt the need to have a "model", a "Guru", an ideal poetic ancestor. He had found it in William Blake, because for Ginsberg Blake came to represent a unified poetic consciousness whose perceptions of the "outside", of reality, were in unison and existed side by side with his visionary self. For Blake, "the

Poetic Genius was a pure myth-making faculty, not arbitrary in its creations, but naturally expressive of man's consciousness of reality".[56] For Ginsberg, Blake's mystical synthesis became the guiding light in his own syncretism. From his first vision, in which he heard Blake's voice, Blake became Ginsberg's spiritual companion, a living presence of such closeness that, as Ginsberg relates, during meditation he often feels that "Blake's gnostic transcendental psychedelic inner glow comes on. . . ."[57] The examples of Blake and Whitman helped convince Ginsberg that the true poet must become a seer and prophet; and he must attain a higher level of consciousness as a precondition for creation.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1] Richard Kostelanetz, "Ginsberg Makes the World Scene", New York Times Sunday Magazine, July 11, 1965, p.28.

[2] Anon., "Craft Interview with Allen Ginsberg", New York Quarterly, No. 6, Spring 1971, pp. 12-13.

[3] Diana Trilling, "The Other Night at Columbia: A Report from the Academy", Partisan Review, XXVI, 2 (1959), 217.

[4] Paterson (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 205.

[5] William Knief, "An Interview with Allen Ginsberg", Part I, Cottonwood Review, No. 2 (1966), p. 1.

[6] Cottonwood, p. 6.

[7] Jane Kramer, Allen Ginsberg in America (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 119.

[8] Kostelanetz, p. 28.

[9] "Naked Lunch on Trial", Naked Lunch (New York: Grove Press, 1966), pp. xxxii and xxxiii.

[10] "Naked Lunch on Trial", p. xxxiii.

[11] "Naked Lunch on Trial", p. xxxii.

[12] In Burroughs' letter to the court, "Naked Lunch on Trial", p. xxxv.

[13] Allen Ginsberg, Allen Verbatim: Lectures on Poetry, Politics, Consciousness, ed. Gordon Ball (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), p. 152.

[14] Allen Verbatim, p. 153.

[15] Alison Colbert, "A Talk with Allen Ginsberg", Partisan Review, XXXVIII, 3 (1971), 295-296.

[16] William Carlos Williams, I Wanted to Write a Poem: The Autobiography of the Works of a Poet, ed. Edith Heal (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), p. 17.

[17] I Wanted to Write a Poem, p. 26.

[18] Paterson, Bk. III, iii, p. 155.

[19] "Notes for Howl and Other Poems", Fantasy Records (1959), No. 7013. See also Kostelanetz, p. 30.

[20] It was Randall Jarrell who in 1952 paid one of the first unqualified tributes to Whitman in his article "Walt Whitman: He Had His Nerve", Kenyon Review, XIV, Winter 1952, 63-79.

[21] Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 187.

[22] "Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads", Leaves of Grass, Comprehensive Reader's Edition, ed. Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 569.

[23] "Backward Glance", pp. 573-574.

[24] "The Poet", Essays, Second Series (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1968), pp. 7, 8, and 20.

[25] "The Poet", p. 26.

[26] Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Biographia Literaria (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1906), p. 159.

[27] "Shakspere Today", Prose Works 1892, vol. II, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: New York University Press, 1964), p. 474.

[28] ABC of Reading (New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 73.

[29] ABC of Reading, p. 82.

[30] Continuity of American Poetry, p. 57.

[31] Charles B. Willard, "Ezra Pound's Appraisal of Walt Whitman", MLN, LXXII, 1 (1957), 26.

[32] Ezra Pound, "A Pact", Selected Poems, Edited with an Introduction by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 97.

[33] "The Renaissance", Literary Essays, Edited with an Introduction by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 218.

34 In a passage excluded from "Readers to Come", Leaves of Grass, p. 636.

35 Leaves of Grass, p. 14.

36 "A Pact", Selected Poems, p. 97. This relatively early "pact" was renewed some forty years later in the "Pisan Cantos". See Roy Harvey Pearce, "Ezra Pound's Appraisal of Walt Whitman: Addendum", MLN, LXXIV, 1 (1959), 23-28.

37 "What I Feel about Walt Whitman", Selected Prose 1909-1965, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 145.

38 "What I Feel about Walt Whitman", p. 145.

39 Charles B. Willard, "Ezra Pound's Debt to Walt Whitman", Studies in Philology, LIV, 4 (1957), 574, 579.

40 "Poetry Today", Prose Works, vol. II, p. 481.

41 "A Retrospect", Literary Essays, p. 12.

42 Whitman to Emerson. in preface to Leaves of Grass, 1856 ed., Leaves of Grass, p. 734.

43 The Spirit of Romance (New York: New Directions, 1952), p. 14.

44 Spirit of Romance, p. 87.

45 Continuity of American Poetry, p. 286.

46 Ginsberg has even gone to the trouble of establishing a "physical" contact with Whitman, through the common bond of their homosexuality. Ginsberg had slept with Neal Cassady, Cassady slept with Gavin Arthur, Arthur slept with Edward Carpenter, and Carpenter, presumably, with Whitman. See Ginsberg's Gay Sunshine Interview, with Allen Young (Bolinas: Grey Fox Press, 1974), p. 16.

47 Alison Colbert and Anita Box, "The West End Excerpts of an Interview with Allen Ginsberg, West End, I, 1 (1971), 36.

48 Gay Sunshine Interview, p. 6.

49 "The Wisdom of Poetry", Selected Prose, p. 360.

50 Michael Reck, "A Conversation between Ezra Pound and Allen Ginsberg, Evergreen Review, No. 55 (1968), p. 29.

[51] Allen Verbatim, p. 185.

[52] "Craft Interview", p. 16.

[53] In a letter to Harriet Monroe, Selected Letters, ed. D.D. Paige (New York: New Directions, 1950), p. 48.

[54] See "Poetic Breath and Pound's Usura", Part III, Chapter IV, Allen Verbatim, pp. 168-173.

[55] Allen Verbatim, pp. 172-173.

[56] Albert J. Kuhn, "Blake on the Nature and Origin of Pagan Gods and Myths", MLN, LXXII, 4 (1957), 566.

[57] West End, p. 289.

## CHAPTER III

## COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS

One of the distinguishing characteristics of American literature has been its strong religious or metaphysical strain. There are, to be sure, social conflicts described between men; but more often, we encounter the naked solitary individual pitting himself against the unknown, the "Other"--Nature, Cosmos, God. The American poet has rarely conformed to the cultural or religious values of the society in which he lived; he has nearly always sought to unravel the mysteries of human existence, of the relationship between himself and the cosmic forces, all by himself. Emerson's concepts of self-reliance, of the poet's being "the plain old Adam, the simple genuine self against the whole world",[1] have affected subsequent theories of poetry. Having their roots in Puritan values, these concepts have been enriched by borrowings from Eastern mystical thought and pre-Christian philosophies, and have come to form the basis of an authentic American religious philosophy. "Mythic" poets were less affected by transcendentalism, though even they have shown themselves to be somewhat less than indifferent; but the poets of the Self--prophets, visionaries, mystics--have naturally held fast to its principles.

The poet, then, in order to be able to "turn the

world to glass", as Emerson said, must acquire a higher level of consciousness than other humans, so that he may then be able to communicate or commune with the eternal world spirit. The idea that the true poet is an instrument of higher powers, a "holy lunatic", is, of course, not a transcendentalist invention; it is as old as poetry itself, and knows no racial or religious boundaries. Transcendentalism is unique in that it has combined Western and Eastern ideas, from Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, as well as Indian mysticism, both Hinduist and Buddhist.

Ginsberg has embraced transcendentalism in his search for an alternative to the nihilistic materialism of our age, and, more importantly, because transcendentalism provided a common bond between him and the poetic tradition he chose to be a part of. He has traced his spiritual lineage through Whitman and Blake to Pythagoras, for, he said, "underneath the academic or public traditions of the West, there's always been the esoteric private hermetic stream",[2] going back "from Blake through Paracelsus and Plotinus and Jakob Böhme all the way back to Pythagoras, . . . the Eleusian mysteries and the Bacchic mystery cults".[3] The seminal point for him has been Blake, both as mystic poet, and as mediator in a mystical experience he has since come to consider as the focal point of his spiritual development. The vision which he experienced in 1948 was described by him on a number of occasions as "an

auditory illumination . . . an auditory epiphany . . . a cosmic vibration breakthrough",[4] and I will quote from one of the detailed accounts he gave of it:

> When I was twenty-two I had a vision of William Blake in which I heard his voice. I was living alone--a room in Harlem, separated from companions, solitary, in pain really, reading "The Songs of Innocence and Experience", having just masturbated, lying on a couch, looking out of a window on to the carved cornice of an old Harlem building. I caught the sunflower poem. I was gazing at a page and heard a voice saying, "Ah, sunflower, weary of time..." I experienced a sudden sensation of lightness of the body, a very grave deepening of my awareness, the sensation that I was being spoken to through Ages by the Ancient of Days, my father who I realized loved me and had loved me since the beginning of creation. It was the first time I'd ever experienced such complete bliss and feeling of mystery in the universe. I realized this particular moment was the moment I'd been born for. The same voice, grave and deep--"grave the sentence deep"--pronounced the words of "The Sunflower" while my eyes were contemplating them on the page, with intermittent flashes of the same ecstasy flowering in my consciousness. Almost everything I've done since has these moments as its motif.[5]

Ginsberg's vision seems to conform to the type of mystical experience which is characterized by its ineffability; the paradoxical urge of the subject to relate the experience; its transience; and the passivity of the subject.[6] The feeling of love, of oneness with all mankind is also part of the experience, and there is a sense of "awakening" which is common to both Gnostic and Hindu mysticism, and also to what Richard M. Bucke termed "cosmic consciousness". Bucke was a psychologist and a friend of Whitman's; Whitman no doubt derived the phrase

"cosmic consciousness" from him, a phrase that also became part of Ginsberg's vocabulary. Bucke argues that beyond simple consciousness which animals possess, and human self-consciousness there is cosmic consciousness, a mystical level of mind-sensation. The attainment of this spiritual level comes through a sudden illumination, the subject experiencing "a sense of being immersed in a flame, or rose-coloured cloud";[7] it is accompanied by a feeling of intense happiness, of having been saved. There is also an awakening to the meaning and purpose of the entire universe; there is a sense of immortality, and a liberation from the fear of death.[8] These aspects of the mystical experience are implicit in Ginsberg's vision, from which he went on to immerse himself in Western and Eastern mystical literature, and has ended up as a Buddhist.

In his wide reading he has encountered the works of Thomas Taylor, whose translation of the remaining Gnostic fragments was read by Blake. Ginsberg says that Amos Bronson Alcott, friend of Emerson, Hawthorne, and Thoreau, brought Taylor's translations to America and loaned them to Emerson. "The same sources Blake was using . . . were also influential in the formation of the American individualistic transcendentalist tradition which is so influential now . . . ."[9] Here, as elsewhere, Ginsberg is intent on showing that the revolt of the "beat" writers of the early nineteen-fifties was not something isolated

or without precedent, but rather as a revival of the transcendentalist-Gnostic tradition, as a breakthrough of "an enlarged or cosmic consciousness or a big consciousness".[10]

Ginsberg's poetry of that period, beginning with Howl and Other Poems, was often criticised as "exhibitionistic". But, Ginsberg wrote, "when I wrote 'Howl', I thought it was like something in the Gnostic tradition", and "exhibitionism is: somebody trying to communicate, get out of his shell, break out of this prison we're all in".[11] Ginsberg here is using gnostic terminology, for according to Gnostic thought the body and soul are prisons, locking in a fragment of the Eternal, called spirit or pneuma, and so prevent the pneuma from reuniting with its origin, the eternal Spirit. The essence of a visionary experience is precisely the "awakening" of the spirit to its transmundane reality; it must then shun the world and await the descent of the One, the Unnamable. There are evidences of gnostic yearning in Ginsberg's poetry; for instance, a few lines from "Magic Psalm":

> O Phantom that my mind pursues from year to year
> descend from heaven to this shaking flesh
> catch up my fleeting eye in the vast Ray that
> knows no bounds--Inseparable--Master--
> Giant outside Time with all its falling leaves--
> Genius of the Universe--Magician in Nothingness
> where appear red clouds--[12]

In Emerson the One is called the Over-Soul; and

in a vision its power can induce in man a reawakening of the spirit through gnosis, i.e., knowledge of the One. According to an early gnostic text, "If a person has the Gnosis, he is a being from on high. If he is called, he hears, replies, and turns toward Him who calls him, in order to reascend to Him".[13] Emerson's sense of gnostic oneness, that all men are "children of the fire, made of it, and only the same divinity transmuted, and at two or three removes"[14] is echoed by Ginsberg when he says that "everybody is really inhabited by the Holy Spirit". By Holy Spirit he means "the recognition of a common self in all of us and our acceptance of the fact that we're all the same one".[15] Similarly to the revolt of the "beats", Ginsberg associated the Hippie Movement, the "flower children", with a gnostic reawakening. He was quite explicit about how hippies should acquire philosophical support:

> Now these kids can check back through ancient symbols and learn about the traditions from which they've sprung or to which they correspond. One source would be early Gnostic texts about the nature of man and the universe—in particular, the nature of the Guardians of cosmic order who try to keep man locked in the body stump: the establishment.[16]

These, again, are gnostic terms, and Ginsberg sees the members of the establishment as incarnations of the evil Archons who created and rule the material universe. The words "body stump" alludes to the Gnostics' contempt and disdain for the body and the world; but the words coming

from Ginsberg are not convincing, for he has always been much too preoccupied with his physical self and the affairs of the world. His body consciousness and his humanism are in a large part the result of his studies of, and attachment to, Hinduism and Buddhism, where, in yoga particularly, the body is an integral part of spiritual development.

Thus, Ginsberg's syncretism includes the attempt to find a common ground between Eastern and Western religious thought, and, more importantly, between what he called "the esoteric private hermetic stream" of Western poetic consciousness and Indian mystical literature. Gnostic thought, he insisted, "proceeds originally out of the same middle Eastern consciousness that also travelled into the Orient, and brought ideas of the Sun God to India and served as the foundation of the Vedas. . . . Basic conceptions of thought are parallel . . . in the more sophisticated realms of Western thought".[17] Indeed, the Bhagavad Gita reveals a number of similarities to gnostic concepts. Krishna's saying that "a portion of Me in the world of the living becomes a living soul, eternal"[18] is a version of the pneumatic principle, and so is the relationship of the atman (microcosmic Self) to brahman (macrocosmic Self), for the atman, like the pneuma, "is never born, nor does it die, nor having once been, will it again cease to be".[19] But unlike in Gnosticism, in Hinduist and Buddhist thought the body is not a hated

"stump"; and Ginsberg's involvement with ritual prayer, meditation, and chanting has helped bring about a respect and a positive awareness of his physical self. Mantra chanting especially made him realize the possibilities available through the body, in that chanting can regularize the body's "rhythms", and can in fact induce not only a supreme calmness but higher consciousness as well. When Ginsberg chanted at the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968 for eight hours, he realized that "it was possible, through chanting, to make advances on the body and literally to alter states of consciousness . . . this was the first time I'd gotten into neurological body sensations, cellular extensions of some kind of cosmic consciousness within my body".[20]

Ginsberg is not an orthodox Buddhist or Hinduist. He does not believe in reincarnation, or that the end-all of the mystical striving is an extinction of the ego. Altering or expanding consciousness, whether through illumination, meditation, chanting, or via hallucinogenic drugs, is a means to create a more complete, more aware human being of himself, and to concretize this heightened awareness in a truly relevant poetry. He sees psychedelic drugs as a mode of strengthening the visionary faculties, and not something incompatible with great poetry, "as many drunken novelists and poets all the way back to Anacreon attest".[21] Some of his own best poetry was written

under the influence of drugs, (Part II of "Howl", certain parts of "Kaddish", "Wales Visitation", and others), and the insights gained and presented are certainly not those of a disordered mind; although violent, surrealistic imagery predominates, reason is never suspended--witness the significance of Moloch as a symbol of destructive social forces. Ginsberg's use of drugs not only does not diminish but in fact enhances the powers of his will to synthesize intuitive expression of the self and outside reality.

The "Adamic" poet's implicit trust in his own self and his intuition directs him toward a mystical, transcendent vision of his existence as poet. By achieving "cosmic consciousness", by being bathed in the voice of "the Ancient of Days", he becomes one with the Over-Soul, becomes its priest and messenger. Ginsberg saw that in his writings Whitman manifested a "messianic oceanic identity",[22] and that he was "simply enlarging the personality or expanding the consciousness by recognizing what was actually in his consciousness".[23] Whitman himself spoke of his "oceanic identity", his Selfhood, in transcendental terms, as a "miracle of miracles" and "hardest basic fact, and only entrance to all facts", for "under the luminousness of real Vision it alone takes possession, takes value".[24] The visionary Whitman (see Part 5 of "Song of Myself" for a description of one of Whitman's

mystical experiences) apotheosized the Self; as V.K. Chari remarks, "Whitman believed that the whole world is but a spectrum analysis of 'my soul'".[25] And the poetry that arises from the soul, from "a cosmical point of view", will have for its subject the entire cosmos contained in the soul, "twining all lands like a divine thread, stringing all beads, pebbles or gold, from God and the soul, and like God's dynamics and sunshine illustrating all and having reference to all".[26]

For the mythic poet, Pound in particular, poetic consciousness resides at a less exalted level. Instead of being a visionary mystic, he professes to be a kind of scientist; instead of prophet, he is a teacher; as opposed to intuition, he puts his trust in "tuition". Poetry for him begins "where the science of medicine leaves off";[27] and the poet is a diagnostician concerned with the well-being of his nation. He does not consider the state of his consciousness central, typical, or universal; on the contrary, Pound says, "the serious artist is scientific in that he presents the image of his desire, of his hate, of his indifference as precisely that, as precisely the image of his own desire, hate or indifference".[28] The "mythic" poet also proceeds from "knowledge", not of a transmundane higher reality, but of philosophy, of history, and of his art.

Yet the metaphysical or transcendent element in

Pound's poetry and poetics is not wholly absent; and Ginsberg did not fail to see it. While no doubt he read Pound's early essays on religion and philosophy, he had gleaned his insights of the Poundian phenomenon from his 1967 visit with Pound and from the later cantos. His being with Pound in Italy had seemed like being in the company of Prospero, and the last "paradiso" cantos and canto fragments had seemed to him to be the final testament of a great poet who in his "tempus tacendi" had attained a kind of cosmic consciousness. Ginsberg's favourite canto is Canto CXV where Pound had written:

> Time, space,
> neither life nor death is the answer

where, Ginsberg said, Pound "sounds like Chuang-Tzu, he sounds like Buddha. He sounds like some Chinese philosopher of the void".[29] In Ginsberg's view Pound was "a pragmatic mysticist",[30] for he knew of Pound's lifelong interest and attachment to the thought of Erigena, of the medieval Neoplatonists, and of Plotinus. Pound was a polytheist who believed that a "light from Eleusis" persisted throughout medieval times and had in effect inspired the singers of Provence and Italy. Although a Confucian, he had held that the role of ecstatic religions, such as the Dionysian mystery cults, was and is "to stimulate a sort of confidence in the life force".[31] And while not denying the validity of mystical visions,[32]

he valued contemplation mainly as "the dynamo" of the active life, of "making" poetry.[33] The making included the moral, Confucian intention of putting ideas into action; and since for Pound the self was not the reality from which a true language would flow, the only authentic language for him, as Pearce observed, was history, which he found it necessary to tear to shreds in order to reach "the roots of its moments of truth".[34]

For Ginsberg, Pound's "pragmatic mysticism" meant that Pound was a visionary of history and ideas; that his mission was to collect and present that body of true "ideas in action" which could engender a new renaissance, and do it in a powerful and musical language "free from emotional slither". Ginsberg's appraisal of Pound and Pound's achievement in "Adamic" terms is not a distortion but an evidence of his syncretistic drive, for along with that coexists a will to absorb, illuminate, and "act in" history. His poetics attests to this fact, and in his own later poetry, in Planet News and in The Fall of America gnostic-Buddhist visionary consciousness is implicit, while the poet as teacher and historian is explicitly manifest.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1] Roy Harvey Pearce quotes from Emerson's journals in The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 153.

[2] Anon., "Interview with Allen Ginsberg", Unmuzzled Ox, III, 2 (1975), 16.

[3] Alison Colbert, "A Talk with Allen Ginsberg", Partisan Review, XXXVIII, 3 (1971), 293.

[4] Colbert, p. 299.

[5] Allen Ginsberg, "Mystery in the Universe", Rogue, No. 3, June 1965, pp. 5-6.

[6] William James gives these four characteristics of the mystical vision in his Varieties of Religious Experience (London, New York, Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), pp. 371-373.

[7] Richard Maurice Bucke, M.D., Cosmic Consciousness (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1969), p. 72.

[8] Bucke, pp. 72-75.

[9] Colbert, p. 293. See also Allen Ginsberg's Allen Verbatim: Lectures on Poetry, Politics, Consciousness, ed. Gordon Ball (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), pp. 31-32.

[10] Colbert, p. 301.

[11] Paul Carroll, "Playboy Interview: Allen Ginsberg", Playboy, April 1969, p. 90.

[12] "Magic Psalm", Kaddish and Other Poems (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1961), p. 92.

[13] From Evangelium Veritatis, quoted by Hans Jonas in his The Gnostic Religion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963; enlarged edition), p. 89.

[14] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet", Essays, Second Series (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1968), p. 4.

[15] Playboy, p. 90.

[16] Playboy, p. 240.

[17] Unmuzzled Ox, p. 16.

[18] The Bhagavad Gita, trans. Eliot Deutsch (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), XV. 7., p. 118.

[19] Bhagavad Gita, II. 20, p. 39.

[20] Playboy, p. 92. For further discussion of the mantra as a medium for poetry see next chapter.

[21] Harry J. Cargas, "An Interview with Allen Ginsberg", Nimrod, No. 1, Fall/Winter 1974, p. 28.

[22] Alison Colbert and Anita Box, "The West End Excerpts of an Interview with Allen Ginsberg, West End, I, 1 (1971), 40.

[23] West End, p. 39.

[24] "Democratic Vistas", Prose Works 1892, vol. II, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: New York University Press, 1964), p. 394.

[25] V.K. Chari, Whitman in the Light of Vedantic Mysticism (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 16.

[26] "Good-Bye My Fancy", Prose Works 1892, p. 662.

[27] Ezra Pound, "The Serious Artist", Literary Essays, Edited with an Introduction by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 42.

[28] "The Serious Artist", Literary Essays, p. 46.

[29] Allen Verbatim, p. 186.

[30] Allen Verbatim, p. 186.

[31] Ezra Pound, The Spirit of Romance (New York: New Directions, 1952), p. 95.

[32] See Pound's "Axiomata" in his Selected Prose 1909-1965, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), pp. 49-50.

[33] See "Degrees of Honesty", Selected Prose, p. 67.

[34] Continuity of American Poetry, p. 97.

# CHAPTER IV

## MANTRIC POETRY

In 1962 Allen Ginsberg went on a trip to India, to experience the physical (or magical) reality of the land of Buddha and Hinduism, secretly hoping for a major spiritual blood transfusion. As recorded in his Indian Journals, no great miracle took place; in fact, at the end of the one-year visit he felt "washed up desolate on the Ganges bank, vegetarian & silent hardly writing & smoking no pot . . ."[1] and feeling that "now all personal relations cold exhausted".[2] One of the positive things that occurred during the trip was a solidification of his ideas about poetry, and in his later theoretical work, Improvised Poetics,[3] he had in the main elaborated upon the concepts he jotted down in his diaries in India.

The gist of his poetics is contained in a journal entry, dated July 8, 1962, (the capitals are Ginsberg's): "IF THE POET'S MIND IS SHAPELY HIS ART WILL BE SHAPELY".[4] He thus directly relates consciousness to the actual form the poem will take. The idea "Mind is shapely, Art is shapely" had previously occurred to him in connection with "Howl",[5] but it was elucidated in conceptual terms during and after his Indian pilgrimage. The axiom contains in capsule form all important elements of his poetics of synthesis: spontaneity, breath and thought as

rhythmic units, chanting and sound arrangement, juxtaposition of unrelated material, and, ultimately, the unification through language of Self and Reality. An examination of these components will be necessary for an understanding of Ginsberg's syncretism.

First, spontaneity. Ginsberg said he took the idea of spontaneous writing from Kerouac, and that Kerouac, in turn, had been influenced by the letters of their charismatic friend, Neal Cassady. Cassady's letters were usually written moments after some intense experience, and they possessed a kind of immediacy, a richness of descriptive detail and sheer visual power which impressed Kerouac. Cassady was a compulsive, non-stop talker, and Kerouac had felt that Cassady's actual speech rhythms were faithfully reproduced in his letters; consequently, Cassady's style, ("all first person, fast, mad, confessional"),[6] appeared to be a singular attempt at linking oral delivery to written art. It was not like the pure automatic writing of the surrealists; yet to Kerouac it had seemed like as close a representation of "mind-flow" as he had read anywhere. Cassady's writing offered new possibilities to Kerouac who was at that time writing in the vein of Thomas Wolfe; and his subsequent experiments with spontaneous writing became parts of his first original novel, On the Road.

Kerouac wrote a short theoretical piece called

"Essentials of Spontaneous Prose", in which he described the art of writing in terms of sketching, similar to the work of a painter, the aim being a representation of some definite "image-object", either from memory or from real life. The writer was supposed to begin at the centre of some visual detail or experience, and then continue writing "outwards swimming in a sea of language to peripheral release and exhaustion".[7] The method retained none of the rules of conventional fiction writing; the structure of sentences was to conform to breathing similar to the musical phrasing of jazz musicians, and approximate a kind of "blowing". The writer should devote no time to think of the proper word; instead, he should concentrate on a build-up of words that in time will coalesce into an over-all great rhythm of meaning. "No revisions", Kerouac warned, for a conforming to natural inner sense of time and timing is the way to clarity. "Crafting" would only diminish the shock and power of the natural utterance, for, he said, "the best writing is always the most painful personal wrung-out tossed from cradle warm protective mind".[8] Any writing that does not arise spontaneously from the body is false, because there the language is dead. In his "Belief & Technique for Modern Prose" Kerouac reiterated some of his ideas in a "List of Essentials", the most important points being that "No time for poetry but exactly what is", and that true

writing is a recording of "visionary tics shivering in the chest"--"the unspeakable visions of the individual".[9]

When Ginsberg went to live in San Francisco in 1954 he had Kerouac's "Essentials" pinned on his wall. It was the time of the "San Francisco Poetry Renaissance", a period of great excitement and artistic fermentation. It was there that Ginsberg met with Robert Duncan who, Ginsberg was to discover, had formed similar ideas of spontaneous writing, based on the findings of William Carlos Williams and Charles Olson. Ginsberg had again come face to face with new attempts to continue certain traditions in American poetry, for Duncan's definition that "the poem is an occasion of spirit"[10] has its roots not only in "projective verse" or in "open form" poetics, but it goes back to Whitman, to Emerson's concepts of "organic form", all the way back to the Romantics.[11] Indeed, the new poetics of Kerouac and Duncan carry on from the Wordsworthian concept that poetry is "a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", only it is more spontaneous in that it is not subject to artificial metric laws and the intellectual act of revision. At the same time, Olson's "composition by field"[12] is a continuation of Pound's aesthetics in its piling up of perceptual data, and of Williams, who let his rhythm follow the actual speech patterns he heard around him.

Ginsberg's dictum that if the mind is shapely

then the work of art will also be shapely is akin to Olson's definition that form is an extension of content, and to Kerouac's point that "mind-flow" will ultimately determine its own structure. In Ginsberg's terms, "the page will have an original but rhythmic shape—inevitable thought to inevitable thought, lines dropping inevitably in place on the page, making a subtle infinitely varied rhythmic SHAPE".[13] Thus, the natural progression of mind and body rhythms produces a poem which is in itself a simulacrum of a process, and in that "it has the contingent quality of an event, and not the timeless quality of an object".[14] And if the poet's aim is to reproduce faithfully the free flow of his consciousness, then revision would do violence to the actual truth of his perceptions, the total reality of "mind-flow".

The very nature of spontaneous composition impels the poet to disclaim of being a poet at all. While poets writing in the "mythic" mode see themselves as scientists, makers, craftsmen--Pound said technique is "the test of a man's sincerity",[15] and Eliot's famous dedication of "The Waste Land" reads "To Ezra Pound, il miglior fabbro --the poet who is a recorder of his consciousness prefers to renounce all pretensions to acquired skill and technical brilliance as requisites of his being a poet. "I'm not trying to write poetry", Ginsberg had said, "I'm not interested in poetry, I'm not interested in art. I'm

interested in reproducing the contents of my consciousness in a succinct, accurate way".[16]

I believe it would be unwise to take this last statement at face value. It is true: Ginsberg inherited spontaneity from writers working in the "Adamic" mode; but when he put the concept into practice, it became inseparable from language and rhythm, so he went back to Pound to round out the theory of breath as rhythmic unit. It is important to note that in the above declaration Ginsberg himself speaks of reproducing the contents of his consciousness "in a succinct, accurate way"; and if we accept (as I do) the critical judgment that "concentration and exactness of focus are, when he is able to summon them, among Ginsberg's undeniable powers",[17] then his seeming unconcern for form is more of an hommage to Kerouac than actual fact. Moreover, by his own admission, he does in fact revise his poems, removing, as he says, "a lot of syntactical fat"[18] to arrive at a "direct presentation", and he notes, "that's Pound's phrase--'direct presentation'".[19] Ginsberg here is actually talking about craft, the art of poetic language; for a poet to write intelligibly in, or of, a visionary state must have at his disposal the exact words with which to reproduce the illumination. MIND MUST BE SHAPELY, Ginsberg is saying; this, in my view, presupposes that mind has as its integral part a smooth "channel" (language) through which it

may flow unimpeded; lacking that, the vision would remain blocked up in the mind. Ginsberg is far from being inattentive to formal problems; of Howl and Other Poems he said that in that book he was conducting experiments with the long line, the short line, combinations of them, with and without a fixed base; and he saw his later work, "Kaddish", as his first free composition where he broke up the long line into shorter breath units and arrived at "a variable stanzaic unit".[20]

Before discussing the rhythm of "open poetry" as an extension of human physiology and as an adjunct of spontaneous expression, I would like to touch upon the ontological status of poetry as seen by Ginsberg and some "mythic" poets. For the objective poet, the poem is more than a faithful rendering of emotion; it is actually seen as an energy construct capable of effecting changes in readers and listeners. Ginsberg wrote:

> I determined long ago to think of poetry as a kind of machine that had a special effect when planted inside a human body, an arrangement of picture mental associations that vibrated on the mind bank network, and an arrangement of related sounds and mouth movements that altered the habit functions of the neural network.[21]

Pound likened the most important aspect of poetry to electricity or radioactivity, "a force transfusing, welding, unifying", which must carry along the intellectual part of the poem.[22] In Olson's theory, the "open" or

"projective" poem is "energy transferred from where the poet got it . . . by way of the poem itself . . . to the reader", for the poem is both an "energy-construct" and an "energy discharge".[23] Ginsberg's adoption of scientific terms similar to those used by objective poets is an indication of his awareness that for a poem to be effective when "planted inside" the reader's mind it must be presented effectively; spontaneity alone will not assure that effectiveness. Here we enter into the subject of breath as the other important element in Ginsberg's poetics.

Ginsberg holds that the poem's energy is derived from breath, and the length of breath is determined by the poet's thought emitted in the form of sound. Breath and sound are inseparable, and Ginsberg holds Olson in high esteem because he believes that projective verse is an attempt to reach back to and re-establish the oral tradition. Kerouac's theory of breath, arrived at independently from Olson, is directly inspired by music, by his listening to Charlie Parker and Lester Young; for the tenor saxophonist is "drawing in a breath and blowing a phrase on his saxophone, till he runs out of breath, and when he does, his sentence, his statement's been made".[24] In the late nineteen-sixties Ginsberg began to compose poetry almost exactly in this fashion: instead of putting the poem on paper, he recorded it directly on the tape recorder, the phrases being terminated by his actual

breath and the organic spacing of his mind. Divisions of phrases or separate breath units were marked on the tape with a click produced by Ginsberg with a device on the microphone; and when he transcribed the poem on to paper, the clicks indicated the end of a phrase and, in the written form, the end of a line.[25] In his earlier experiments with the fixed base the device was used not just as a rhetorical joint in a long poem, but Ginsberg saw it as an oral or musical link of tying the rhythmic cadenzas together. The "who" anaphora, for instance, in Part I of "Howl" is like the twang of the lyre in ancient Greek poetry before the singer begins to sing the line.

Ginsberg believes with Pound and Olson that the syllable, and within it, the vowel, are the most important components of a line articulated according to breath. Each syllable must be intentional, must have relevance, so that the line receives power and density by each syllable's being endowed with meaning. Even the smallest part should function in concordance with the poet's overall intention. The vowels in the syllables must carry that intention by their natural length or brevity.

The shapeliness of the creative mind is indeed a determinative factor in the shaping of the work of art; and the poet immersed in the actual process of articulating his consciousness is also simultaneously "swimming in the sea of language", with the result that his language cannot

fail to influence his mind. Ginsberg does not deny the primal importance of the Self, of visionary consciousness as a formative force in the act of writing; but in perceiving language not only in terms of process but also as a thing having materiality, and of the poem as a kind of machine, he perforce concentrates on it and makes use of it not only as a channel for the mind but as an energized and energizing vehicle containing reality. What I am trying to say is that Ginsberg, in paying attention to the components of language, came to realize the power inherent in language; and that his becoming acquainted with mantra syllables as potential linguistic force fields has led him to attempt to wed language both to "the flesh" and to the reality outside flesh and ego. When he said of the "Poems of These States" that he wanted to make "a series of syllables that would be identical with a historical event",[26] he was clearly giving voice to "mythic" intentions. The rift in poetry must be closed, Ginsberg is saying; the poetry of Self and the poetry of Things, inspiration and poiesis, Orphic and Promethean modes must be united not just for the preservation of an art but for the sake of humanity.

Breath as a structural unit has been carried to its furthest point by Ginsberg when he combined it with the principles of mantra chanting. The mantra is based on precisely formed and articulated syllables that are

of gods, places, and objects. Correctly pronounced, the mantra is said to possess magical powers. Mantras are connected to the Hindu theory of japa, according to which the essence of everything is sound. Japa is considered a science, based on mantras, and it postulates that every object, organic, non-organic, and even spiritual, has in it a system of forces that is in constant motion and thus produces sound, the sound produced being the mantra, "indwelling sound", possessing creative power. Perfect articulation of the mantra is absolutely essential for the evoking of the object or deity of which it is the sound; "a mantram cannot be enlivened unless it is constantly repeated with a clear grasp of its meaning and a clear utterance of its letters, every one of which is charged with nuclear energy".[27] In Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, Heinrich Zimmer notes the following about the power of the mantra:

> Originally the word mantra meant simply a verbal instrument for producing something in our minds. Such an instrument was regarded as possessing power. A word or formula—say, "democracy" or "charity"—represents a mental presence or energy; by it something is produced, crystallized, in the mind. The term mantra-shakti is employed to denote this magic power possessed by words when they are brought together in a formula or effective slogan.[28]

Apart from using the mantra as a yoga exercise, (see previous chapter), where the body becomes almost literally a musical instrument, since the sounds

are produced in different parts of, and reverberate through, the body, Ginsberg's main interest in the mantra lies in its magical properties. By making mantras in the American language, his aim is to create magical phrases "which will stick in peoples' consciousness like a rock",[29] and induce the listener to reproduce in his mind, through verbal repetition, the same impulses that led the poet to his original articulation of thought. "Sound is the primary sense", he said, "to collect all the scattered consciousness into one spot",[30] and the mantra "refocuses mental and physiological activity right back into the present, in a world of frankly physical sound, pure sound, body sound. . . ."[31] In Ginsberg's poetics the visual properties of the poetic image are reinforced by the magical properties of mantric language units, involving the mind and physiology of poet and listener. It aims at an initiation by the poet of a communal religious experience in which cosmic consciousness is attained which will then affect the daily life of the people involved. The force of this poetry "machine" is essentially moral; as in japa, so in Ginsberg's mantric oral poetry "the veiling forces have to be subdued by the force of expression".[32]

Ginsberg is, of course, aware of the difference between English and the language of the original mantras, Sanskrit. Sanskrit has an advantage over English because in it the physical characteristics of different sounds

are tied non-arbitrarily to their meanings. As Zimmer writes elsewhere, a natural power is inherent in Sanskrit, for it is not "a historical tongue based on convention but an emanation of Being (sat) in sound (sabda); hence the power of the sacred mantras and of the Vedic hymns to touch the quick of truth and so to work magic".[33] Yet Ginsberg envisages similar possibilities in the English, or rather the American language for its use in poetry; it is for this reason that he emphasizes a close attention to vowels and syllables as carriers of meaning.[34] The restoration of the substantiality of vowels will lay the foundation for a poetry that will be a stately, ritualistic music.

Is there a contradiction between spontaneity and a minute attention to syllables? If treated as mutually exclusive poetic principles, then they would seem to be, at least on an abstract theoretical level, irreconcilable. In Ginsberg's poetics, however, they are not incompatible when they are put into practice by an experienced poet or singer, for the mantric poet concentrates naturally on the components of his spontaneous utterance. "I try to pay attention all the time", Ginsberg says; (underlinings are his).[35] The poet imparts his vision in a language of which he is in control. The poet's "shapely" mind swims, in Kerouac's words, in a sea of language; or more exactly, it is immersed in a medium of meaningful sound. If we

recall Ginsberg's Blake vision, it is important to note its auditory nature. The visions of the poet do not happen in a vacuum; and the selection of the most appropriate meaningful sounds does not occur arbitrarily or separately but concomitantly and simultaneously. The poet's mind must be, to begin with, "high epiphanous mind";[36] the poet will not be self-consciously involved in "writing a poem", but will be involved in a process of objectification similar to a meditation exercise which, Ginsberg says, will bring on "a recall of detailed consciousness that is an approximation of high consciousness".[37] Such a conception of writing poetry is as far as it can possibly be from the process of arranging certain words on a page intended for mind-consumption. Instead, it conceives of poetry as a sacramental act, a communion of minds and bodies afloat in the materiality of language.

Ginsberg is aware that poetry is both transmission of individual visionary insights and a transmitter of its own reality inseparable from language. The transmitter can take various forms: it can be a natural, rhythmic speech, like "speaking slowly, interestedly, to a friend";[38] it can be a ritualistic chant, proceeding from vision through the medium of mantric incantation; or it can be song. Whether speech, chant, or song, the mantric poem's concerted sound-images will follow one another in a spontaneous, ideogrammatic succession until the object-event begins to

shimmer in its own reality and completeness; until the entire poem becomes one mantra, one ideogram. By the very nature of its being, by its innate power and potential, the mantra-poem is a moral instrument, combining individual vision and universal history; its function is to register its truth in the mind and body of the listener, aiding him in self-realization, and urging him to perform constructive, humane actions in the world.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

[1] Indian Journals (San Francisco: Dave Haselwood Books and City Lights Books, 1970), p. 208.

[2] Indian Journals, p. 209.

[3] Improvised Poetics (Buffalo: Anonym Press, 1971).

[4] Indian Journals, p. 41.

[5] "Notes for Howl and Other Poems", Fantasy Records, (1959), No. 7013.

[6] Jack Kerouac in Ted Berrigan, "Interview with Jack Kerouac", Paris Review, No. 43, Summer 1968, p. 65. For a sample of Cassady's letters see Ann Charters biography Kerouac (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1973), p. 180.

[7] Jack Kerouac, "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose", in A Casebook on the Beat, ed. Thomas Parkinson (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1961), p. 66.

[8] "Essentials", A Casebook, p. 66.

[9] "Belief & Technique for Modern Prose", A Casebook, p. 67.

[10] Robert Duncan in Allen Ginsberg, Allen Verbatim: Lectures on Poetry, Politics, Consciousness, ed. Gordon Ball (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), p. 135.

[11] Emerson wrote in "The Poet": "It is not metres, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem,-- a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or an animal it has an architecture of its own". Essays, Second Series (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1968), pp. 9-10. -- In the 1855 Preface to Leaves of Grass Whitman wrote that "the rhyme and uniformity of perfect poems show the free growth of metrical laws and bud from them as unerringly and loosely as lilacs or roses on a bush, and take shapes as compact as the shapes of chestnuts and oranges and melons and pears. . . ." Leaves of Grass, Comprehensive Reader's Edition, ed. Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 714.

[12] See Charles Olson, "Projective Verse", Selected Writings, ed. Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966), pp. 15-26.

[13] Indian Journals, p. 41.

[14] Oscar Skowronek, "A Formalist Approach to Allen Ginsberg" (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1970), p. 45.

[15] "A Retrospect", Literary Essays, Edited with an Introduction by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 9.

[16] William Knief, "An Interview with Allen Ginsberg", Part I, Cottonwood Review, No. 2 (1966), p. 5.

[17] Helen Vendler, "The Fall of America", New York Times Book Review, 15 April, 1973, p. 14.

[18] Improvised Poetics, p. 8.

[19] Improvised Poetics, p. 7.

[20] "Notes for Howl . . ."

[21] "To Young and Old Listeners: Setting Blake's 'Songs' to Music, and a Commentary on the 'Songs'", Blake Newsletter, IV, 3 (1971), 98-99.

[22] "The Serious Artist", Literary Essays, p. 49.

[23] "Projective Verse", p. 16.

[24] Kerouac, Paris Review, p. 83.

[25] Improvised Poetics, pp. 13-14.

[26] Improvised Poetics, p. 35.

[27] Swami Pratyagatmananda Saraswati, Japasutram: The Science of Creative Sound (Madras: Ganesh Co. 1971) p. xxii.

[28] Heinrich Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization (Washington, D.C.: Pantheon Books, 1946), p. 607.

[29] Improvised Poetics, p. 37.

[30] Allen Verbatim, p. 21.

[31] Allen Verbatim, p. 20.

[32] Japasutram, p. 180.

[33] Philosophies of India (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 607.

[34] For a detailed discussion see Allen Verbatim, pp. 167-173.

[35] Anon. "Craft Interview with Allen Ginsberg", New York Quarterly, No. 6, Spring 1971, p. 34.

[36] "Craft Interview", p. 35.

[37] "Craft Interview", p. 35.

[38] Improvised Poetics, p. 2.

## CHAPTER V

## POET IS PRIEST

Mantric poetry requires of the poet to assume a definite social stand; it thrusts upon him the awesome responsibility of the prophet, a role, in Ihab Hassan's words, "both dreary and portentous".[1] Ginsberg has not been reluctant in taking up this role, and he has sought to verbalize the hidden truths of private and public consciousness. "Prophecies, Futurecies!" wrote Ginsberg, "Great claim of the Bard, to call directly to the Soul hidden in the world, obscured and forgot weeping sunk in material thickness, old Gnostic tune",[2] But Ginsberg's "tune" is not just a gnostic call for inner exploration, for the individual to withdraw from participating in the affairs of the world. If it were, his poetry would have followed the recipe laid down by a true Gnostic in an ancient Mandaean chant:

> From the day when I came to love the Life,
> From the day when my heart came to love the Truth,
> I no longer have trust in anything in the world.
> . . . . . .
> In what is made and created
> I have no trust in the world.
> In the whole world and its works
> I have no trust in the world.[3]

Admittedly, Ginsberg has little trust in the world as he finds it; but this fact does not lead him to resignation

or passivity; on the contrary, it propels him to a more intense desire to participate and effect changes in the world. In his syncretism Orpheus--enchanting singer, explorer of the underworld of the Self, healer and mystic --must unite with Prometheus, bringer of fire, active revolutionary, realist, originator of progress and history. According to his unified mantric theory of poetry, the poet's art includes a rhythmic articulation of visionary states of consciousness; and it also includes a rhythmic articulation of what is latent in public consciousness. The poet must have his finger on the pulse of his times and speak out as priest and prophet. In Ginsberg's consciousness the two aspects do not just coexist side by side, separately, but they merge in a unified whole. The mantric poet, Ginsberg writes, must strive to utter "what's socially unspoken, what is prophetic from the unconscious, what is universal to all men, what's the main subject of poetry, what's underneath, inside the mind".[4] Cosmic or high epiphanous consciousness enables the poet to see more clearly and present true facts that others cannot recognize; as Whitman wrote in Leaves of Grass, "the visions of poets [are] the most solid announcements".[5] Ginsberg confirms this, based on his own explorations:

> . . . articulation becomes more rhythmic when the body and mind are most elevated . . . at those moments the mind is very clear and mortal motives are seen and the voice often comes

> directly from the heart area of the body. And so there's likely to be an accuracy of speech that could be considered prophecy since the accuracy generally penetrates past present and future in its evaluation of emotional states.[6]

I take this statement as a precise definition of Ginsberg's mantric visionary consciousness, and as clear evidence of a union of "Adamic" and "mythic" modes in his poetics. In emphasizing the prophetic side of the poet's role in the world, he has also continued American poetic traditions, for both subjective and objective poets had sought to influence the world around them, the former by imparting the lessons of the Self, the latter by communicating the lessons of history. As D.H. Lawrence pointed out, American literature is essentially moral;[7] and the poet sees himself as a moral leader whose word contains truths and medicinal ingredients that will benefit those who heed it. The cosmic "knowledge" the poet attains through vision, or the illuminations he gleans from history and myth, are ultimately meaningless if they are not put to use in the world. Pound saw right from the start that the artist, an "antenna", must be a moral being if his art is to be of any consequence. "Good art cannot be immoral", he wrote. "By good art I mean art that bears true witness, I mean the art that is most precise".[8] He said that a nation's writers are "the voltometers and steam gauges" of that nation, that their art must be true and honest, otherwise they will do damage.[9] The moral

sense of the poet must be more highly developed than that of other people; and through his medium--language charged with meaning--he must warn, protest, awaken; in short, show the way.

In somewhat simplified terms, the prophecies of the "Adamic" poet are based on intuition, and the teachings of the "mythic" poet are founded on history; their effectiveness on the moral plane is influenced by their limitations. Whitman had an immense belief in America, and prophesied a great future for it. But he also spoke of the ruthless materialism that began to pervade the American soul only one hundred years after the birth of his nation. For the future safeguarding of the nation's spiritual values he envisaged the arrival of mighty poets, "national expressers", who will "vivify" and protect those values. They will be the consciousness and conscience of the people; they will personify its truest aspirations. He wrote in "Democratic Vistas" that the poets' visionary self will alone guarantee the future of America:

> I suggest, therefore, the possibility, should some two or three really original American poets (perhaps artists or lecturers) arise, mounting the horizon like planets, stars of the first magnitude, that, from their eminence, fusing contributions, races, far localities, &c., together, they would give more compaction and more moral identity (the quality today most needed,) to these States, than all its Constitutions, legislative and judicial ties, and all its hitherto political, warlike, or materialistic experiences.[10]

Whitman offered no practical solutions; he believed that the Word emanating from the poet's visionary Self will be all that is needed to inspire men to that "personalism", that "adhesiveness" which will alone bring about a regeneration of the human race.

Pound, on the other hand, had all his life been seeking practical solutions; but this did not prevent him from assigning a leading part to the artist in reviving "that old bitch gone in the teeth", that "botched civilization", for which "there died a myriad, / And of the best among them", in the holocaust of the First World War.[11] In 1922 he started a movement he called "Bel Esprit", to save the "best minds" from succumbing to madness, spiritual inanition, or lapsing into silence; since, as he saw it, "there is no organized or coordinated civilization left, only individual scattered survivors",[12] the "survivors"--poets and other artists--must help themselves so that they could produce art. His interests shifted to politics and economics; he identified the original corruptive evil force as "usura",[13] excessive interest on money loaned which disregards production or potential production, blocking the equitable distribution of wealth. As a Confucian he believed that the best Government was a kind of benevolent dictatorship, ruled by a monarch who surrounded himself with, and listened to the advice of, the greatest artists, scholars, and scientists. His lis-

tening to history as the only intelligible language had for its purpose the uncovering of those paideumas, radical "ideas in action" that brought about flourishing civilizations, so that he could then apply what was relevant in them to his own times. But the language of history is a language of riddles; in the end, his zeal for a new renaissance, to "make it new", had led Pound to espouse Mussolini's system; and of his pragmatism, in the near-silence of his mystical "paradiso", there remained only the unanswerable question: "And as to why they go wrong, / thinking of rightness".[14]

Ginsberg, moral poet, prophet and visionary, inherited both Whitman's belief in the Self, as well as Pound's pragmatism; and the two have merged into a new synthesis in his consciousness. Mantric poetry is at once "an exploration of mind-consciousness and the discovery of unconscious awareness",[15] and what Pound designated for literature, "news that STAYS news";[16] and Ginsberg is aware that "American poets have always been one of the real sources of news--news you couldn't get from Time/Life".[17] And Ginsberg, the mantric poet, is an apocalyptic visionary prophet-reporter who is totally involved in the life of his nation. He still believes in the ideals of American democracy, and is not afraid to affirm his belief, as he does with Whitmanesque grandeur in "H* Y*M* T*O* U*S*":

> O America, Imagewife of Mankind, thou art Earthy Russia, Watery China, Fiery India, Airy Europe & Aetherial Australia. Also thou & these all Subatomic South Americas are but one--Thou art one world, O well meaning! What more Patriotic praise could I offer![18]

But he is also aware that America is having a nervous breakdown, or is in the process of going insane with its materialistic consumption-oriented capitalism. The political leaders are either morons, villains, or madmen; with their twitchy fingers on the nuclear button the end of the world can come at any minute. Moloch, "whose fate is a cloud of sexless hydrogen", is not a symbol, not even a mighty ideogram; it <u>is</u> reality, a "solid announcement" of reality.

Ginsberg acknowledges the fact that the mantric poet's difficulties are greater than those of the prophets of old because, as he says, "not even Jeremiah had to confront a subject as immense as what I and you have to deal with, which is the end of the habitable human world".[19] In possession of the Vision, and in command of the Word, the mantric poet <u>must speak</u>, he <u>must act</u> in what may be the final hour of mankind. Ginsberg's sense of his moral duty is intensified by the influence of Hindu philosophy, which states that although man's desired end is cessation of action, yet he must not abandon action. The <u>Bhagavad Gita</u> clearly states, in the words of Krishna to Arjuna: "Perform thy allotted work,

for action is superior to inaction;"[20] and again, "Not by abstention from action does a man gain freedom, and not by mere renunciation does he attain perfection".[21] This is also the essence of the fourth category of the Buddhist Eightfold Path, "Right Action". But man must not act for the sake of action, or for some personal reason, but as part of his way to spiritual enlightenment, as part of the process of freeing himself from the shackles of karma, the totality of his worldly actions which determine his fate. For the Gita also states: "This world is in bondage to Karma, unless Karma is performed for the sake of sacrifice. For the sake of that, O son of Kunti, perform thy action free from attachment".[22]

Thus, in Ginsberg's poetics, poetry is both a sacramental and a sacrificial act, a manifestation of "right action". It must be an aid for survival, it must be true prophecy--"a beautiful enough prophecy with such exquisitely penetrant prosody that the hardest hat will vibrate with delight".[23] Regeneration must start with poetry, with the overt, public act of the mantric poet involving his audience in his visionary consciousness, in the subjective and objective truth of his vision. He must become a pragmatic visionary, a public figure. But Ginsberg's pragmatism is quite different from Pound's in that he does not try to change "the system" from the top as Pound had attempted, but working from the bottom up.

The poet must become an inspired singer because, as Ginsberg said, "the more inspired he is, the more likely his language will penetrate through the fogs of imprecise language into other people's consciousness, directly or indirectly, and affect their breathing and their apprehensions";[24] because he sees breath speech "as the basis of divine rhythm".[25] Spontaneous mantric poetry, practiced communally, will ultimately give rise to peaceful "civil disobedience", confrontations with Moloch mentality. The answer is not more violence but "organized chanting and organized massive rhythmic behavior on the streets, shamanistic white magic, ghost-dance rituals, massive nakedness and distribution of flowers".[26] In the student unrest and hippie movement of the late nineteen-sixties he saw the first signs of a possible "cosmic" revolution. "What's happened to young people is a sudden breakthrough of cosmic consciousness", he asserted in a 1969 interview;[27] he thought that a lot of people had awakened to the reality of a poisoned world whose rulers deliberately alienate men from one another. That is why he called out that "the time has come for the orgy to become a communal form of 'adhesive' democratic festival";[28] he said that massive manifestations of "white magic", and not bloody social revolution, must counteract, via exorcism, the "black magic" of the police state. Violence only begets violence; a true renaissance can be achieved only though spiritual, peaceful means, as

taught by Buddhism. Ginsberg believes that all things are "holy", and by affirming that "nobody can be a Buddha unless everybody is a Buddha, nobody can be enlightened and safe unless everybody is enlightened and safe",[29] he testifies to his all-embracing humanism; "we're all involved in each other's consciousness", he said.[30]

Ginsberg is convinced that Western man's rational mind has brought mankind to the edge of the abyss; now irrationality (or rather true rationality) must be allowed to have its way to overturn the rule of Moloch. "We need a million children saints", he said, "adept at high unhexings, technological vaudeville, rhythmic behaviors, hypnotic acrobatics, street trapeze artistries, naked circus vibrations--magic politics . . ."[31] which, along with peaceful resistance "might edge the nation" toward higher consciousness.[32] The regenerative process must start with "individual soul development",[33] any attempts to change the human condition from the "outside", i.e., through political means, are in Ginsberg's view stillborn from the start. This is why he is against not only the American capitalistic power structure, but also against communism in all its forms. His first-hand experiences in Cuba and Czechoslovakia had shown him that in both countries the communist system was just another form of oppression; he noted that "the police bureaucrat Party hacks were like Mayor Daley ward-heelers: flag-waving,

fat-assed square types", and not true revolutionaries.[34] Above all, he strongly opposes the suppression and/or manipulation of the creative artist under communism, where he is allowed to function only as a fawning propagandist of Marxist-Leninist ideology.[35]

Marxism or communism offer no viable formulas of solution for Ginsberg, as in his view they propagate only another version of robot mentality. He is vehemently against any kind of vulgarized concept of "progress", be it social, political, or economical. Material "progress" has, in fact, gone too far, over the human limit; in order to counteract its ill effects, while there is still time, Ginsberg calls for the dismantling of all inhuman monolithic structures, all the perverse by-products of technological advance. The answer, he believes, lies in decentralization: "we'll have to tear down the cities--they stink--then decentralize and miniaturize our machinery".[36] His economic views are based on Pound's theories; he felt that the Vietnam war had proven Pound's point about usurious speculations. During their meeting in Rapallo he told Pound: "The more I read your poetry, the more I am convinced it is the best of its time. And your economics are <u>right</u>. We see it more and more in Vietnam. You showed us who's making profit out of the war".[37] Ginsberg belives with Pound that the power of the banks --the banks make money out of nothing--must be broken,

and other forms of credit must be devised.

These issues, however, are peripheral for Ginsberg, and not of central importance as they had been for Pound. "Individual soul development" is the first priority, and the peaceful miraculous revolution of a million Buddhist exorcists must come first, through "total sacramental harmonious shamanistic ritual prayer magic massively performed".[38] He believes that if through communal mantric poetry "the direction of the will can be changed and consciousness widened, then we may be able to solve the practical problems outlined: ecological reconstruction and the achievement of clear ecstasy as a social condition".[39] In his theory and practice Ginsberg may be preparing the ground for a new synthesized religion, with the mantric poet as its priest, and his poetry as its testament.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER V

[1] Ihab Hassan, The Dismemberment of Orpheus (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 257.

[2] "To Young and Old Listeners: Setting Blake's 'Songs' to Music, and Commentary on the 'Songs'", Blake Newsletter, IV, 3 (1971), 101.

[3] Quoted by Hans Jonas in his The Gnostic Religion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963; enlarged edition), p. 90.

[4] Anon., "Craft Interview with Allen Ginsberg", New York Quarterly, No. 6, Spring 1971, p. 17.

[5] "As I Walk These Broad Majestic Days", Leaves of Grass, Comprehensive Reader's Edition, ed. Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 487.

[6] Harry J. Cargas, "An Interview with Allen Ginsberg", Nimrod, No. 1, Fall/Winter 1974, p. 24.

[7] D.H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (New York: Viking Press, 1923), p. 171.

[8] "The Serious Artist", Literary Essays, Edited with an Introduction by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 44.

[9] "The Teacher", Literary Essays, p. 58.

[10] "Democratic Vistas", Prose Works 1892, vol. II, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: New York University Press, 1964), p. 368.

[11] "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", Selected Poems, Edited with an Introduction by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 176.

[12] Petition enclosed with a letter to William Carlos Williams, Selected Letters, ed. D.D. Paige (New York: New Directions, 1971), p. 172.

[13] But in 1972 he wrote: "re USURY: / I was out of focus, taking a symptom for a cause. / The cause is AVARICE". "Foreword", Selected Prose 1909-1965, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 3.

14 "Canto CXVI", Drafts and Fragments of Cantos CX-CXVII (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 27.

15 "Should a Poet Propagandize Politics in His Poetry? Will His Art Suffer?", Writer's Forum, III, 4 (1967), 26.

16 Ezra Pound, ABC of Reading (New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 29.

17 Paul Carroll, "Playboy Interview: Allen Ginsberg", Playboy, April 1969, p. 90.

18 Indian Journals (San Francisco: Dave Haselwood Books and City Lights Books, 1970), p. 18.

19 "Craft Interview", p. 27.

20 The Bhagavad Gita, trans. Eliot Deutsch (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), III. 8, p. 48.

21 Bhagavad Gita, III. 4, p. 47.

22 Bhagavad Gita, III. 9, p. 48.

23 "Craft Interview", p. 40.

24 Nimrod, p. 25.

25 Tim Burke quotes Ginsberg in his "Melodious Mantras Magnify Magic of Musical Metaphors", Spectrum, No. 34, 20 November, 1970, p. 8.

26 Playboy, p. 244.

27 Playboy, p. 240.

28 Playboy, p. 240.

29 Alison Colbert, "A Talk with Allen Ginsberg", Partisan Review, XXXVIII, 3 (1971), 302.

30 Colbert, p. 302.

31 Playboy, p. 244.

32 Colbert, p. 304.

33 Allen Ginsberg, "Public Solitude", Address delivered at Arlington St. Church, Boston, Nov. 12, 1966, The International Times, No. 7, 30 Jan.-12 Feb. 1967, p. 4.

34 Allen Ginsberg, Gay Sunshine Interview, with Allen Young (Bolinas: Grey Fox Press, 1974), p. 26.

35 For an unequivocal condemnation of communist tactics against writers see his "Should a Poet Propagandize . . .", Writer's Forum, p, 26.

36 Playboy, p. 244.

37 Michael Reck, "A Conversation between Ezra Pound and Allen Ginsberg", Evergreen Review, No. 55, June 1968, p. 29. For Ginsbery's more detailed analysis of Pound's economic ideas see Part III, Chapter IV, "Poetic Breath, and Pound's Usura", Allen Verbatim, Lectures on Poetry, Politics, Consciousness, ed. Gordon Ball (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), pp. 173-177.

38 Playboy, p. 244.

39 Playboy, p. 244.

## CHAPTER VI

## THE FUTURE: MOTZ EL SON

If it is correct, as one critic put it, that "American poets have tended to think of poetry as prophecy, not as the practice of an art whose rules were known, and not as a way of thinking about a fixed and known reality",[1] then Ginsberg is probably "more" of an American poet than most. Poetry has always been for him a means to an end, and being a poet has been inseparable from being a public figure. He became the prophet of the so-called counter-culture, and during the height of "flower power" he was described as the high priest and Guru of the "hippie-pacifist-activist-visionary-orgiastic-anarchist-Orientalist-psychedelic underGround".[2] He gave innumerable performances, chantings, speeches, readings; he chanted from the gallery at the Democratic Convention in Chicago; he was arrested along with Dr. Spock in London; he compiled a formidable dossier on CIA activities concerning narcotics; he went to Prague and was elected "King of May"; he protested, marched, spoke, harangued audiences to bring about a new awareness, a higher consciousness in people, especially the young.

He came to the realization, however, that although his moral sense dictated he should be both poet and man

of action, his true poetic instinct warned him that by "running around the country" he will become less and less effective as a poet. Perform thy allotted work, said Krishna to Arjuna; and Ginsberg admitted that "I'm probably better off as a poet . . . so what I would like to do is get myself back, get my energy focused there, on language and on poetry, rather than tromping around in the streets. . . ."[3] And yet the poetry he deems worth writing must somehow embody action; it cannot exist apart from involvement in the world. "I've got to figure some way", he said, "of balancing . . . the immediate crisis demands of the streets with the longer range needs to create an art, which will be powerful . . . and holy and socially revolutionary".[4] In his mantric poetics he has begun to lay the foundations for such a poetry; and he envisages a further evolution whereby poetry will turn into song.

The revival of poetry as song has been one Ginsberg's preoccupations. Basing himself on Pound's discoveries and historical analyses, he traced the gradual disembodiment of poetry down to the present, concluding that if poetry is to continue to function meaningfully, and not just vegetate as a private but largely negligible oddity, it must reunite with music. There existed in Elevsian times and even earlier the unity of chant and dance; then dance and music separated, and there remained chanting, still performed in unison. Gradually, this gave way to individual

song, and when song and poetry departed from one another, only the spoken word remained. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries poetry finally lost its voice and became silent, to be experienced "between the eye and the mind which was not vocalized", but was simply the "by-product of mechanical reproduction and mass scale of books".[5] As in so many other ways, Blake again proved to be an exception; Ginsberg learned that "the title 'Songs of Innocence and Experience' is literal: Blake used to sing them unaccompanied at his friends' houses".[6] Then the process of reversal began with Pound and Williams, who brought back poetry to actual speech, stripping poetic language of clichés, inverted syntax, unnatural accentual rhythms, and artificial poetic structures. Also, in their poetical theories and practice the great pioneering work of Whitman had been brought to fruition.

But along with the insistence that poetry must be at least as well written as prose, Pound had also prepared the ground for poetry to become song. It was Pound, Ginsberg said, who "returned the body to poetry in the sense of poetry being spoken by a living body rather than just read, a voice aloud, on his way to pushing poetry back to dance".[7] Pound believed that "poetry attained its highest rhythmic and metrical brilliance at times when the arts of verse and music were most closely knit together",[8] as in Greece, as in Provence where the trouba-

dours, by "fitting motz el son of words to tune",[9] replaced rigidly mechanical metrical schemes. It was Pound's conviction that "verse to be sung is something vastly worth reviving",[10] as a means of concretizing poetry which he saw in danger of becoming increasingly abstract. He was quite specific about the ways such a revival could be achieved; he said in effect that "we will never recover the art of writing to be sung until we begin to pay some attention to the sequence, or scale, of vowels in the line, and of the vowels terminating the group of lines in a series".[11] In his poetics Ginsberg has capitalized on Pound's theory about the tone leading of vowels, and made it the basis of spontaneous composition.

Ginsberg clearly perceived of his own efforts and achievements, and those of Kerouac, Gary Snyder, Gregory Corso and others, as an attempt to give back poetry its lost voice. "This is specifically what we've been doing", he said, "the whole poetry revolution . . . to return to the oral tradition of actual speech, to make it possible to talk again, for real".[12] The establishment of real poetic speech, he said, "led to chanting, as in my poetry and . . . into the minstrel tradition returned, as with [Bob] Dylan".[13] Ginsberg thinks very highly of the work of Dylan, the Beatles, and other singers; it is, on the one hand, an evidence of the furthest development of poetic traditions, of verse returning to song; and on the

other, by being performed ritualistically in front of a large audience, it can alter people's consciousness. He sees especially Bob Dylan as a disseminator of cosmic awareness, for Dylan, in Ginsberg's view, has attained "such an extraordinary pitch of consciousness in his middle period that anything he does is from a high plateau", and has exerted a great influence on the young.[14] In the performances of Mick Jagger and some other rock artists he sees the realization of a further step in tradition's coming full circle: they reunite poetry, music, and dance as one total art form in a return to "shamanistic dance-chant-body rhythm".[15] "Ma Rainey, Pound, Dylan, Beatles, Ray Charles, Ed Sanders and other singers have returned language poesy to Minstrelsy", he said,[16] and he prophesied that before the end of the century poetry "will take on its ancient limbs" once again with the addition of dance, and become a source and transmitter of shamanistic high consciousness. Hence his vision of the rock singer as

> a naked prophetic kid, getting up on stage, chanting, in a trance state, language, and dancing his prophecies, all simultaneously in a state of ecstasy, which is, precisely, the return to the original shamanistic prophetic priestly Bardic Magic![17] (Underlinings are Ginsberg's).

In his own practice Ginsberg has evolved to a stage where he can alternate between speech and chant; he has at times turned, as he said, to "the bardic practice of chanted,

sometimes rhymed improvisations".[18] He has composed music to Blake's "Songs of Innocence and Experience";[19] "the purpose of putting them to music was", he said, "to articulate the significance of each holy & magic syllable of his poems; as if each syllable had intention".[20] And yet the "Songs" sound as if Ginsberg had improvised them.

On this note I conclude my brief survey of Allen Ginsberg's contribution to poetics. The levels of his syncretism are manifold, but through them runs the thread of his strong moral sense, his transcendental humanism. He has bridged the gap between separate trends of American poetic traditions, or has at least made a singular and significant attempt at achieveing a synthesis. The aim of such a synthesis is a transformation of the human condition, and only the unified consciousness of a great poet will be capable of initiating that transformation. The poet must be a visionary, a spontaneous expresser; but he must cut through the Great opaque sea of language, so that in his poems as mantras the true shape of reality, of past, present, and future history may shine through. Ginsberg looks out through Adam's eyes, but the world he sees is no mere projection of his self; his vision is intertwined with the "mythic" will to "sum up the physical and spiritual map of America".[21] Ginsberg's achievement is already part of American poetic tradition; how much attention poets will pay to it will in no small way determine the continuity of that tradition.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

[1] Hyatt H. Waggoner, American Poets from the Puritans to the Present (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1968), p. 795.

[2] Paul Carroll, "Playboy Interview: Allen Ginsberg", Playboy, April 1969, p. 81.

[3] Alison Colbert, "A Talk with Allen Ginsberg", Partisan Review, XXXVIII, 3 (1971), 306.

[4] Colbert, p. 306.

[5] Harry J. Cargas, "An Interview with Allen Ginsberg", Nimrod, No. 1, Fall/Winter 1974, p. 26.

[6] "To Young and Old Listeners: Setting Blake's 'Songs' to Music, and a Commentary on the 'Songs', Blake Newsletter, IV, 3 (1971), p. 98.

[7] Nimrod, p. 26.

[8] Ezra Pound, "The Tradition", Literary Essays, Edited with an Introduction by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 91.

[9] ABC of Reading (New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 56.

[10] "Musicians: God Help 'em", Pavannes and Divagations, (New York: New Directions, 1958), p. 220.

[11] ABC of Reading, p. 206.

[12] Colbert, p. 307.

[13] Colbert, p. 307.

[14] Alison Colbert and Anita Box, "The West End Excerpts of an Interview with Allen Ginsberg", West End, I, 1 (1971), 34.

[15] Improvised Poetics (Buffalo: Anonym Press, 1971), p. 51.

[16] Blake Newsletter, p. 99.

[17] Improvised Poetics, p. 51.

[18] Nimrod, p. 27.

[19] "Allen Ginsberg/William Blake: Songs of Innocence and of Experience by William Blake, tuned by Allen Ginsberg", MGM Records (ETS-3083).

[20] Blake Newsletter, p. 98.

[21] Helen Vendler, "The Fall of America", New York Times Book Review, 15 April 1973, p. 16.

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