

## An Open-Hearted Symposium

During the Spring semester of 1973, I was scheduled to teach "Jack Kerouac and the Beat Writers" at Salem State College. This was the first time that the course was to be offered, and I wanted to enrich it by providing the students with something more than the traditional lecture format.

It is my contention that, when teaching literature, one should draw from as many resources as possible in order to understand the literary spirit from which a particular author or body of literature emerged. Jack Kerouac, having been born (1922) and raised in Lowell, Massachusetts and having been a recent contemporary provided the perfect opportunity for such a teaching approach. In Lowell, an abundance of material and personal acquaintances were within close proximity to Salem State. Also, many of Kerouac's associates and friends, some of whom appear as thinly disguised characters in his novels, are still active and productive in literary circles. By meeting people who served as characters in Kerouac's work, and by visiting the city in which many of his works are set, an unusual opportunity was available to measure and evaluate Kerouac's creativity, imagination, and artistry.

During the Autumn of 1972, I asked two students, Steve Salvo and Brian Joyce, coordinators of the annual Spring Arts Festival, if they would be interested in sponsoring a "Kerouac Symposium" which would coincide with my teaching of the course. Without much hesitation, they enthusiastically supported the idea and secured the necessary appropriations for funding the event.

At this point in time, there appeared to be very little interest in Kerouac as a man or as an artist. We thought that a symposium might generate some activity. So, the next question was whom to invite? I recalled seeing a photograph of John Clellon Holmes, Allen Ginsberg, and Gregory Corso at Kerouac's funeral in Lowell on October 24, 1969.

John Holmes, whose book Nothing More to Declare contains excellent commentary on the Beats, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg, was first to be contacted. When we called him, he expressed great delight at the idea and also suggested that we invite Aaron Latham who was working on a Kerouac biography at the time. Ann Charters' biography had not yet been published. Latham accepted our invitation.

Then Gregory Corso came to mind. Few people, it seemed, were familiar with him or his poetry, and we thought we could draw him out of the background. Fancy that. However, we had no idea of how to reach him. Holmes suggested that the best way was to write to Corso in care of Allen Ginsberg, which we did.

Ginsberg, upon hearing of our plans, expressed disappointment that we had not invited him. I started to explain that I didn't think that we could afford to pay him. After all, he was a person of national prominence, and I presumed that he demanded a lot of money. Ginsberg was quick to point out that something suitable could be arranged. He then stated that he was a very close friend of Kerouac and that he felt a sense of responsibility toward him. He also suggested that Peter Orlovsky would be available and would accompany him. So done.

Stanley Twardowicz, whom I had met through some friends in Northport, Long Island, was also invited not only because he knew Kerouac so well while he lived there, but also because he had audio tapes of Kerouac and paintings by him. He generously offered to bring them to the symposium.

And finally, Professor Charles Jarvis from the University of Lowell (formerly Lowell Tech) was invited. I had read his essay, "Jack Kerouac - Angel Goof" in the Lowell Public Library, and I was aware that he had associated with Kerouac during his later Lowell years and had also interviewed him on his radio program in 1962. Jarvis would provide a Lowell perspective and would read his essay to begin the symposium.

I had no idea how these people would interact. Holmes, Ginsberg, Corso, and Orlovsky had not been together since the Kerouac funeral. I felt confident, however, that something interesting would emerge as indeed it did.

It is interesting to note that between the initial planning of the "Kerouac Symposium" and the occurrence of the event, the beginning of a Kerouac revival was becoming evident. On October 12, 1972 Rolling Stone published "Neal's Ashes" by Gina Berriault. On December 2, 1972 the New Republic carried "Reconsideration: Jack Kerouac" by Crawford Woods and, on the same date, Allen Ginsberg's "Introduction to Visions of Cody" was published in the Saturday Review. Then Kerouac's Visions of Cody was finally published by McGraw-Hill and an excerpt was in the January, 1973 issue of Oui. The February issue of Playboy contained "Gone in October" by John Clellon Holmes and during the early Spring, reviews of the biography by Ann Charters, Kerouac, were everywhere.

Of particular note, because of reference to it in the "Symposium," was an interview of Allen Ginsberg by Allen Young in the January, 1973 issue of Gay Sunshine. In it, Ginsberg mentions some of his sexual activities which involved Kerouac. The April issue of Esquire contained a similar article by Gerald Clarke. Things were moving. ohw

Poetry Reading  
A Tribute to Jack Kerouac

Salem State College  
Salem, Massachusetts

April 4, 1973  
7:30 P.M.

Participants: Poetry read by Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso  
with Larry Kiley on guitar accompaniment and with occasional  
remarks by Peter Orlovsky.

Ginsberg: ...the first mantra I ever heard was this, "Three  
Refuges" sung by Kerouac in a Frank Sinatra mode.

Mantra:	Sung by Ginsberg and Orlovsky
Buddham saranam gocchami	I take refuge in the Buddha
Dhammam saranam gocchami	I take refuge in the Truth
Sangham saranam gocchami	I take refuge in the Church

"Town and the City Sonnet" by Kerouac. Read by Ginsberg.

"The Shrouded Stranger" by Ginsberg. Read by Ginsberg.

"Pull My Daisy" by Ginsberg and Kerouac. Sung by Ginsberg.

Ginsberg: What I'll be doing is reading poems relating to Kerouac,  
or mentioning his name, or written with him in mind from  
early times on.

"Malest Cornifici Tuo Catullo" by Ginsberg. Read by Ginsberg.

"Dream Record: June 8, 1955" by Ginsberg. Read by Ginsberg.

"Sunflower Sutra" by Ginsberg. Read by Ginsberg.

Corso: The things I'll do are the things that Jack Kerouac dug of  
mine and the elegy I wrote for him upon his demise.

"Mexican Impressions" by Corso. Read by Corso.

"Sea Chanty" by Corso. Read by Corso.

"The Mad Yak" by Corso. Read by Corso.

"This Was My Meal" by Corso. Read by Corso.

"The Last Gangster" by Corso. Read by Corso.

"Fragment 1956" by Ginsberg. Read by Ginsberg.

From Mexico City Blues by Kerouac. Read by Corso.

"230th Chorus"

"19th Chorus"

"74th Chorus"

"Ignu" by Ginsberg. Read by Ginsberg

"Elegiac Feelings American" by Corso. Read by Corso

From The Scripture of the Golden Eternity by Kerouac. Read  
by Ginsberg.

"64"

"The Lion for Real" by Ginsberg. Read by Ginsberg.

"Why Is God Love, Jack?" by Ginsberg. Read by Ginsberg

"The Moments Return" by Ginsberg. Read by Ginsberg.

"Memory Gardens" by Ginsberg. Read by Ginsberg.

"Blues for Jack Kerouac" by Ginsberg. Sung by Ginsberg.

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Ginsberg: For Kerouac's peace, then. Repose - Requiescit in pace.  
Buddhist highest perfect wisdom sutra; heart of the highest  
perfect wisdom sutra, which was one of his favorite Buddhist  
texts saying, "Gone/gone/Completely gone to the other shore/  
Completely utterly gone to the other shore/ Intellect, Salutations."  
Mantra: Sung by Ginsberg and Orlovsky  
"Gātē gātē pāragātē  
pārāsāngātē bodhī svāhā

Ginsberg: In English equivalent, as translated by one of Ken  
Kesey's "Merry Pranksters" - "Gate/gate/ Out the gate/Out  
the same gate/Buddy shove off."