



HAL
open science

Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg: A Story of Influences - Alexandre Ferrere

Alexandre Ferrere

► **To cite this version:**

Alexandre Ferrere. Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg: A Story of Influences - Alexandre Ferrere. Empty Mirror, 2018. hal-03849795

HAL Id: hal-03849795

<https://hal.science/hal-03849795>

Submitted on 21 Dec 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg: A Story of Influences

By Alexandre Ferrere

The well-known link between Allen Ginsberg and Walt Whitman comes from both Ginsberg's readers and Ginsberg himself. One of the first explicit mentions of Walt Whitman in Ginsberg's published poetry is to be found in a 1954 poem entitled "Siesta in Xbalba And Return to the States"¹:

[...]
– Returning
 armed with New Testament
critic of horse and mule
 tanned and bearded
satisfying Whitman, concerned
 With a few Traditions
metrical, mystical, manly
... and certain characteristic flaws

– enough!

This poem is composed at a time when Ginsberg was traveling through various cities of Mexico; the first part was more precisely composed between Mexico and San Francisco, the second part was composed between Guanajuato and Los Angeles. The mention of Uxmal in the poem matches an entry of his personal journals of that time² (January 12th, 1954 Uxmal). According to John Lardas and his Spenglerian study of Ginsberg's poetry, this particular poem can be read as "America's position in the grand scheme of historical cycles"³ because the very place of Xbalba is both "the Place of Death and the Place of Regenerative Powers"⁴ in Mayan mythology. This idea of a wonderful land saved from a downfall is, of course, significant in Whitman's poetry. In fact, as an enthusiastic patriot of humanity and of America Whitman had stated:

Do you see O my brothers and sisters?

¹Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected Poems: 1947-1997*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006, p. 118.

²Ginsberg, Allen. *Journals: Early Fifties, Early Sixties*. Ed. Gordon Ball. New York: Grove, 1977, p. 37.

³Lardas, John. *The Bop Apocalypse: The Religious Visions of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs*. Urbana: U of Illinois, 2001, p. 182.

⁴Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays, 1952-1995*. New York: HarperCollins, 2000, p. 285.

It is not chaos or death it is form and union and plan it is eternal life
it is happiness.⁵

This dualism between old and new, “death” and “life” is based, implicitly in Whitman, on a supposedly usual false reading of life. This led to his vision of social and political democracy as an “adhesiveness” between humans (“the sane, healthy love of man for man”⁶), just like Ginsberg noticed in an essay on Walt Whitman, where he depicted him as a “sort of prophet of American Democracy”.⁷ But regarding more precisely the poem “Siesta in Xbalba And Return to the States”, Ginsberg is making allusions to Walt Whitman, which gives the poem a global new meaning. For example, there are at least two references to Whitman's poetry in this stanza:

So I dream nightly of an embarkation,
 captains, captains,
iron passageways, cabin lights,
 Brooklyn across the waters,⁸

The repetition of the word “captain” is of course a reminder of Whiman's “O Captain! my Captain!”⁹ and the mention of Brooklyn a reminiscence of Whitman's “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”¹⁰ (which Allen Ginsberg also recorded¹¹). These references, which added to the explicit reference of Whitman “satisfied” by Ginsberg, include the former poet in the same branch of Whitman's poetry. In “Siesta in Xbalba”, Ginsberg is discovering a new world, “wandering solitary in the wild”¹² through “Noble Ruins”¹³. In his self-abandonment, he drew a line (both textually and figuratively) between an omnipotent and eternal nature and the superficial society, the “culture of [his] generation”:¹⁴

As I leaned against a tree
 inside the forest
expiring self-begotten love,
I looked up at the stars absently,

⁵Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *The Complete Poems of Walt Whitman*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2006, p. 68.

⁶Ginsberg, Allen, and David Carter. *Spontaneous Mind: Selected Interviews, 1958-1996*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001, p. 167.

⁷Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *Deliberate...*, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁹Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 253.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹¹Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg*. Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo, 2008, p. 434.
"Recorded Whitman's *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry* for a film last June [...]."

¹²Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 107.

as if looking for
something else in the blue night
through the boughs,
and for a moment saw myself
leaning against a tree...

... back there the noise of a great party
in the apartments of New York

This split between Uxmal, which seems a place for realization, authenticity and meditation, and the United-States is also revealed in his journals. Indeed, the day before returning to the heart of the United-States, while in Santa Ana, he asked:” What is the meaning of my life which waits for me to assign one?”¹⁵ In Mexicali, near the frontier, he found the city “so noisy, dirty” with “deserted ghost streets and sad quiet aircooled diners [...]”.¹⁶ Thus, this gap appearing poetic in the words, typographic on the poem and emotional in his journals, acts like an invisible frontier between spirituality and materialism. The gap between his mind, his thoughts, and a superficial world is wide and it is to be found in his poem, which contains the “mind's raw content as in Walt Whitman's “Song of Myself”, like Ginsberg depicted in a speech on meditation and poetics.¹⁷ Allen Ginsberg is meditating on humanity, its interrogations and its contradictions: “I contradict myself; I am large I contain multitudes”¹⁸ would say Whitman (as well as Emerson¹⁹). Indeed, just like Whitman wrote at the beginning of “Song of Myself”, “for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you”, Allen Ginsberg made an inner mental revolution, a complete circle from him to himself while trying to pierce the universe's secret (from “leaned against a tree” to back to “leaning against a tree” in the extract above). Finally, to paraphrase Whitman (and Emerson²⁰), every atom belonging to Ginsberg belongs to the universe as well, which is very close to what Allen Ginsberg declared in an interview:

I am taking the word from our prophet, Walt Whitman. This is the tradition of the Founding Fathers, this is the true myth of America, this is the prophecy of our most loved thinkers –

¹⁵Ginsberg, Allen. *Journals: Early...*, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

¹⁶*Id.*

¹⁷Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *Deliberate...*, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

¹⁸Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 69.

¹⁹Emerson, Ralph Waldo, and Irwin Edman. *Emerson's Essays - First and Second Series Complete in One Volume*. New York: Harper & Row, 1981, p. 41.

“Suppose you should contradict yourself ; what then ?”

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 52

“All men have my blood and I have all men's.”

Thoreau, Emerson and Whitman. That each man is a great universe in himself [...]”²¹

This is also the meaning behind a poem published posthumously:

– we are all one Great Being
 whose presence is familiar
– To be It, need to be
also the mosquito
 that bites me
– I am also a mosquito
on the Great Being.²²

Just like his sudden realization with Blake few years earlier, he is not a stranger in this world, nor a different being from the universe itself, nor the ruins of a modern world. In his personal journals of that time, from which a lot of expressions and verses are taken to compose the poem “Siesta in Xbalba”, he wrote about how nostalgic the ruins turned him and how difficult the composition of this poem was, especially regarding romantic aspects of the ruins. His confrontation with the ruins seemed to have pulled the trigger of an uneasiness, realizing at the same time both the present and the past, the living and the dead, in a metaphysical and mystical way.

In the same year, 1954, and just like he did with Blake, Allen Ginsberg also composed a poem entitled “Love Poem on Theme by Whitman”²³ and as Brian Docherty noticed,²⁴ it is inspired by Whitman's poem “The Sleepers”.²⁵ While Walt Whitman is considered to have written the spiritual and physical nakedness of men, Allen Ginsberg wrote without any filter about sexuality. In this poem, Ginsberg put two usually separate characteristics: the pure physical sexuality and the question of the self. In fact, he writes about someone who is trying to find his place in a fantasized situation where he slipped into the room “between the bridegroom and the bride”. The erotic context of the darkness and the confusion of the senses frame the struggle of disillusionment. Indeed, the bride cries and the groom is “covered with tears” while the poet offers “kisses of farewell” before “the mind wakes”. At the end, when the sexual tension was diminished, the “inhabitants” were described as “unsatisfied” and “seeking each other out in the silence”. The dimension of physical pleasure is underlined in its

²¹Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *Deliberate...*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

²²Ginsberg, Allen, and Rachel Zucker. *Wait Till I'm Dead: Uncollected Poems*. Ed. Bill Morgan. UK: Penguin, 2016, p. 35.

²³Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

²⁴Docherty, Brian. "On "Love Poem on a Theme by Whitman"" *Modern American Poetry*. University of Illinois, n.d. Web. 01 Mar. 2016. <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_1/ginsberg/lovepoem.htm>.

²⁵Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 315-322.

vain but important quest, like a land from where the ship of the senses have to sail away toward a vision of oneself. Furthermore, in a witness statement for The Chicago Seven Trial, Allen Ginsberg tried to explain the religious significance of “Love Poem on Theme by Whitman”²⁶ concerning the plurality of love and lovers, and its natural aspects. This explanation links the poem to Whitman’s concept of adhesiveness, and reveals the “unconscious” desire he tried to unlock from the moral. The religious aspect seems to be the natural love and its transcending expression in any form, especially spiritual, in order to find a way through the darkness. Allen Ginsberg also added that Walt Whitman was “one of [his] spiritual teachers” and that he is “following him in this poem”.²⁷ Ginsberg realized himself through the model of Whitman, and the vocabulary Ginsberg uses in this poem is very close to Whitman's, who wrote in “Song of Myself”:²⁸

An unseen hand also passed over their bodies,
It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.

In another poem entitled “Many Loves”, Allen Ginsberg also affirms his sexual choices, mixing physical and psychological seduction under an epigraph by Walt Whitman, like a leitmotiv he followed his whole life:

“Resolved to sing no songs henceforth but those of manly attachment”²⁹

This poem goes further into sexual acts and explicit words, altogether with both a lyric and erotic dimension, with a re-introduced innocence after its loss in nowadays' concept of politically correct. Of course, Allen Ginsberg's use of sexual and explicit terms is inherited from Whitman, at least in philosophical and social basis:

A main stream of American thought embodied in our national poet Walt Whitman maintains that complete freedom of expression in this area of sexual imagery is essential to the development of our social and political system as a free-personed democracy.³⁰

According to scholar John Tytell, Allen Ginsberg “saw Whitman as a sexual revolutionary”.³¹ This total emancipation of words Allen Ginsberg asked for and wrote about is still today a major issue. In 2015, a teacher even lost his job when a student “asked to share Allen Ginsberg's poem “Please Master””.³² Considering the natural aspects of the texture of

²⁶Ginsberg, Allen, and David Carter. *op. cit.*, p. 241.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 242.

²⁸Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 31.

²⁹Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

³⁰Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *Deliberate...*, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

³¹Tytell, John. *Naked Angels: Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs*. New York, NY: Grove, 1991, p. 95.

³²Stern, Mark Joseph. "A High School Teacher Was Forced to Resign for Sharing an Allen Ginsberg Poem. How Absurd." *Slate Magazine*. Slate, 22 May 2015. Web. 07 July 2016.
<http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/05/22/a_high_school_teacher_shared_allen_ginsburg_poem_and_had_to_resign.html>.

Ginsberg's poems and their pure and tacit agreements, the poems "Love Poem on Theme by Whitman" and "Many Loves" seem in the direct genealogy of Whitman's idea of candor. As Ginsberg remarked: "Whitman's word, for what he asked from the future poets, was "candor".³³ In "Cosmopolitan Greetings", Allen Ginsberg gives advice, from trivial recommendations ("don't drink yourself to death"³⁴) to more philosophical thoughts, close to quantum theory ("two molecules clanking against each other require an observer to / become scientific data"³⁵). But it is also the occasion for him to explain what candor really is or how "Candor ends paranoia".³⁶ If candor seems to be of capital importance to Allen Ginsberg, it has to be defined in precise terms. Walt Whitman in his 1855 preface of *Leaves of Grass* wrote:

Men and women and the earth and all upon it are simply to be taken as they are, and the investigation of their past and present and future shall be unintermitted and shall be done with perfect candor. Upon this basis philosophy speculates ever looking toward the poet, ever regarding the eternal tendencies of all toward happiness never inconsistent with what is clear to the senses and to the soul.³⁷

Candor therefore appears as an anti-filter for the soul, to see with the mind rather than with the eyes. This view of the world, without prejudice, artifice nor false statement helps to build a true vision of oneself. According to Whitman, followed by Ginsberg later, candor is absolutely compulsory for a poet who tends to embody a figure of pure being:

The great poets are also to be known by the absence in them of tricks and by the justification of perfect personal candor.³⁸

And candor leads to both global and personal examinations in order to complete an objective reflection on every being. This is to be found in one of the most well-known poems of Allen Ginsberg: "A Supermarket in California".³⁹ It is interesting to notice that this poem was also referred to as simply "Whitman" in a letter Allen Ginsberg wrote to his father.⁴⁰ In this poem, Ginsberg is directly speaking to Walt Whitman: "What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman",⁴¹ as an echo to Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" ("What thought you have of me now, I had as much of you"⁴²). Allen Ginsberg is asking apparently innocent questions that

³³Ginsberg, Allen, and David Carter. *op. cit.*, p. 506.

³⁴Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 954.

³⁵*Id.*

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 955

³⁷Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 501.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 504.

³⁹Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁴⁰Ginsberg, Allen, and Louis Ginsberg. *Family Business: Selected Letters between a Father and Son*. Ed. Michael Schumacher. London: Bloomsbury, 2001, p. 37.

⁴¹Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁴²Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 124.

gradually evolve into metaphysical questions, just like the apparent simplicity of Whitman's statements in "Song of Myself". If two respective passages are put side by side, the similarities are uncanny, both in form and content:

Ginsberg

I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the pork chops?
What price bananas? Are you my Angel?

Whitman

Who goes there! Hankering, gross, mystical, nude?
How is it I extract strength from the beef I eat?

What is a man anyhow? What am I? And what are you?⁴³

From the usual to the existential, from the food to the Man, both passages have the same construction and lexical field. In a letter explaining the poem, Allen Ginsberg gives credits to Walt Whitman as a deep influence:

He was the first great American poet to take action in recognizing his individuality, forgiving and accepting *Him Self*, and automatically extending that recognition and acceptance to all [...]

Without self-acceptance, there can be no acceptance of other souls.⁴⁴

The figure of Walt Whitman also haunts the work of Allen Ginsberg for particular aspects. For example, in the long poem "Iron Horse",⁴⁵ Walt Whitman is mentioned twice explicitly and at least once indirectly. The first time Whitman appears, Allen Ginsberg writes

Whitman, Carpenter, Gavin Arthur, saying

We are leaves of the Tree

saying

We are drops of water running to the ocean

thru the fish's mouth –⁴⁶

In this extract, Walt Whitman is more than the figure of the poet: Ginsberg put Whitman near Carpenter and Gavin Arthur for precise reasons. By the name of Carpenter, he must be referring to the poet Edward Carpenter mentioned earlier in the poem.⁴⁷ He is known for his involvement in favor of sexual freedom and homosexuality. He encountered Whitman in

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 37-38.

⁴⁴Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *The Letters...*, *op. cit.*, p. 137-138.

⁴⁵Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 440.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 443

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 442

many occasions and according to Martin Murray, Carpenter said that Whitman was “before all a lover of the Male”⁴⁸ and that Carpenter had been “sexual”⁴⁹ with Whitman. As for Gavin Arthur, he is known for a book entitled *The Circle of Sex* (in which Edward Carpenter also appears). It is unsure, but Gavin Arthur maybe had an affair with Edward Carpenter and Neal Cassady, which made Allen Ginsberg having an affair with Walt Whitman by proxy as he declared:

Neal Cassady, Dean Moriarty, who slept with Gavin Arthur, who slept with Edward Carpenter, who slept with Whitman. And I slept with Dean (Neal Cassady), so...⁵⁰

This link in time and this distant physical love is what Allen Ginsberg calls “the Whispered Transmission, capital W, capital T”.⁵¹ There is also a direct homosexual allusion in “A Supermarket in California” to be linked with Walt Whitman, when Ginsberg depicts him “eyeing the grocery boys”.⁵² There is also a deeper allusion, written between brackets:

(I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the supermarket and feel absurd.)⁵³

This line can be ambiguous because, according to Ginsberg quoting Whitman about *Leaves of Grass*, “who touches this book touches a man”.⁵⁴ Allen Ginsberg also quoted this particular passage in another poem written like a tribute to Walt Whitman, “I Love Old Whitman So”.⁵⁵ Furthermore, while the ambiguity about Whitman's sexuality is still an unanswered question among specialists, Allen Ginsberg is pretty sure of Whitman's homosexuality, offering a new reading of Walt Whitman's poetry, a “homoerotic rhapsody”.⁵⁶ Allen Ginsberg even saw homosexuality in Lorca's “Ode to Walt Whitman”, full of “erotic beauty” regarding men.⁵⁷ At least, Allen Ginsberg himself described his homosexuality as “Whitmanic”.⁵⁸ The poem “A Supermarket in California” and its poetical aspects, leads us to our second part, examining how Whitman influenced Allen Ginsberg's poetical vision.

In fact, one of the most important words of the poem “A Supermarket in California” is

⁴⁸Murray, Martin. “Walt Whitman, Edward Carpenter, Gavin Arthur, and The Circle of Sex.” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 22 (Spring 2005), 194-198, p. 196.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 197

⁵⁰Ginsberg, Allen, and David Carter. *op. cit.*, p. 318.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 317.

⁵²Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁵³*Id.*

⁵⁴Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *Deliberate...*, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

⁵⁵Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 900.

“I skim *Leaves* beginning to end [...] and touched by his desperado farewell, “who touches this book touches a man””

⁵⁶Ginsberg, Allen, and David Carter. *op. cit.*, p. 319.

⁵⁷*Id.*

⁵⁸*Id.*

the final word, which is “Lethe”.⁵⁹ First of all, the word includes a mythological dimension and gives a retro-actively new meaning to the poem, which becomes a timed metaphorical quest (“Where are we going tonight, Walt Whitman? [...] the doors close in an hour”). Then, it also means that Walt Whitman is, on the one hand, pictured in hell by the author and on the other hand, there is a kind of disappointment because Lethe is also the river of forgetfulness. In both cases, “America” is forgetting the lessons Walt Whitman gave in his poems on democracy and Allen Ginsberg depicts him on the verge of his final disappearance, making the immobility of thoughts a sudden flash in which they both “stroll dreaming of the lost America of love”. Is the actual America to be found in “Death to Van Gogh's Ear!”⁶⁰ in which “the American Century [is] betrayed by a mad Senate which no longer sleeps with its wife” (personifying this way the political institutions)? Is it where Garcia Lorca (who appeared by the watermelons in “A Supermarket in California”) is “the fairy son of Whitman” killed by Franco? It seems that it is, because Whitman “warned against this “fabled Damned of Nations” later in the poem.⁶¹ This expression is also to be found in Allen Ginsberg's acceptance speech for the National Book Award in Poetry for his book *The Fall of America*, seventeen years after “Death to Van Gogh's Ear!”.⁶²

The influence of Whitman is so deep that not only did he influence him on his opinions, but he also influenced his way of writing. For example, it is interesting to notice that the passage “hankering, gross, mystical, nude”⁶³ of Whitman is very similar to Ginsberg's “Howl” which opens by “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked”.⁶⁴ And this similarity goes further because the original typed draft of this poem opened with “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness starving, mystical, naked”.⁶⁵ According to Allen Ginsberg, the change of the word “mystical” into “hysterical is a “crucial revision”⁶⁶ and he uses the famous Whitmanian expression to justify this modification (“Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / I am large, I contain multitudes.”). The influence of Whitman on “Howl” is considerable; another example is the epigraph of “Howl” which is a quote from “Song Of Myself” which reads:

“Unscrew the locks from the doors!

⁵⁹Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 177

⁶²Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *Deliberate...*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁶³Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 37-38.

⁶⁴Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

⁶⁵Ginsberg, Allen. *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile, Transcript, and Variant Versions, Fully Annotated by Author, With Contemporaneous Correspondence, Account of First Public Reading, Legal Skirmishes, Precursor Texts, and Bibliography*. Ed. Barry Miles. New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006, p. 13.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 124

Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!”⁶⁷

This epigraph is a real symbol of the content of “Howl”, which tends to dismantle and criticize the modern era and its alienation. This point could be linked to the first line of the epigraph. But in “Howl”, Allen Ginsberg even praises a kind of madness, which in this case is the very idea of the epigraph's second line. Whitman's poetry and personality spread visually through the poem in its form, the free verse and “the long democratic-minded inclusive verse-line of Whitman”.⁶⁸ According to an essay on “Howl” Allen Ginsberg wrote in 1959, the writing techniques of Walt Whitman “had rarely been further explored (improved on even)”.⁶⁹ He added that “no attempt's been made to use it in the light of early twentieth century organization of new speech-rhythm prosody to build up large organic structure”. This point of view is also shared by Gregory Corso, another famous beat writer, with whom Ginsberg wrote a manifesto about the reading of “Howl” at the Six Gallery (in 1955).⁷⁰ In this manifest, they wrote about “Howl”:

The poem initiates a new style in composition in the U.S., returning to the bardic-strophic tradition, till now neglected in the U.S., of Apollinaire, Whitman, Artaud, Lorca, Mayakovsky – and improving on the tradition to the extent of combining the long lines and coherence of Whitman [...]

From his extension of modern poetry, Allen Ginsberg is indirectly paying tribute to the great influence Whitman had on the very writing of “Howl”. This tribute is unequivocal in one of the early non-edited typescript of “Howl”, in which Whitman appears between Wolfe and Buddha:

Who read Marx Spengler Antonin Artaud Gne Gneet Genet Gurj Jeff
Genet Gurjjeff Spengler Dostoievsky Antonin Artaud Rimbaud
Wolfe Louis Ferdinand Celine Proust Wolfe Whitman Buddha
Ginsberg Kerouac Burroughs & Neal Cassady [...]⁷¹

To some extent, Whitman is at the heart of the poem in a symbolic way, for at least two reasons. First, Whitman offered him the appropriate structure for both Ginsberg's poetry and his aim. This point is intuitively revealed by the end of the first part of “Howl”:⁷²

To recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose and stand before
you speechless and intelligent and shaking with shame, rejected yet
confessing out the soul to conform to the rhythm of thought in his

⁶⁷Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 809.

⁶⁸Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *The Letters...*, *op. cit.*, p. 405.

⁶⁹Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *Deliberate...*, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 239-242.

⁷¹Ginsberg, Allen. *Howl: Original...*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁷²Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 138-139.

naked and endless head,

Concerning this stanza, the perspective of Allen Ginsberg is insightful. Indeed, in a note⁷³ he clarified what he meant, which has to do with Whitman's "perfect personal candor" described in the 1855 preface of *Leaves of Grass*.⁷⁴ This is the same "candor" we encountered earlier but it is more precisely "the role of poetry as revealing naked mind, identical self with the experience (and suffering) of love".⁷⁵ The work of Ginsberg concerning the composition of the poem and his aim to speak the language of the soul without artifice is, in a way, performative: He is writing what he is trying to write, like a *mise en abyme*. After the publication of the poem, his Whitmanian inspiration would also instigate reproach from some critics, who read the poem like "a weak imitation of a form that was used eighty or ninety years ago by Walt Whitman".⁷⁶ This influence of Whitman on Allen Ginsberg and "Howl", can also be amusingly found in the edition proposal of this poem. After the reading of the poem by Ginsberg at the Six Gallery, Lawrence Ferlinghetti wrote a telegram to Ginsberg which reads "I greet you at the beginning of a great career",⁷⁷ quoting deliberately what Emerson wrote to Whitman after reading *Leaves of Grass*.⁷⁸ This anecdote is not that naive. It also appears to be a real bridge between Ginsberg and Whitman built by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, linking the two poets for the content of their poetry and their attitude toward the role of the poet. In fact, in "Adapted From Neruda's "Que dispierte el leñador",⁷⁹ which is a translation of Pablo Neruda's "Let the Railsplitters Awake", Allen Ginsberg completed his view regarding the role of the poet. Pablo Neruda's poem is built the same way some of Whitman's poems are and contains a lot of references, both to Whitman and Whitman's themes. If Allen Ginsberg translated the words of Pablo Neruda, the reason is that the text certainly pleased him. When compared to Whitman's poem "Poets to Come",⁸⁰ a sensation of a shared point of view and mutual ideas appears:

Ginsberg/Neruda

I'm nothing more than a poet:

⁷³Ginsberg, Allen. *Howl: Original...*, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

⁷⁴Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 493-509.

⁷⁵Ginsberg, Allen. *Howl: Original...*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁷⁸*Words and Deeds in American History*. Digital image. *The Library of Congress*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Mar. 2016.

<<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mcc&fileName=012/page.db&recNum=1&itemLink=r%3Fammem%2Fmcc%3A%40fileId%28DOCID%2B%40lit%28mcc%2F012%29%29>>.

⁷⁹Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, 704.

⁸⁰Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 13.

I want love for you all,
[...]
I didn't come here to solve anything

I came here to sing
And for you to sing with me⁸¹

Whitman

Not to-day is to justify me and answer what I am for
[...]
Arouse! For you must justify me.
[...]
Leaving it to you to prove and define it,
Expecting the main thing from you.⁸²

Walt Whitman is a companion, a comrade with whom Allen Ginsberg shares the same thoughts. But more than that, Allen Ginsberg admitted that Walt Whitman was both an inspiration and a reason to take the pen in “Improvisation in Beijing”.⁸³ In fact, it summarizes a lot of the main themes and writing techniques Allen Ginsberg uses in his poetry, like the candor he praises in poems like “Love on Theme by Walt Whitman”:

I write poetry because Walt Whitman gave world permission to speak
with candor.⁸⁴

Or recognizing indirectly the strong influence of Whitman's style on the structure of poems like “Howl”:

I write poetry because Walt Whitman opened up poetry's verse-line for
unobstructed breath.⁸⁵

Allen Ginsberg also plainly refers to the eternal bridge built between them, thanks to their respective poetry, just like he wrote about William Blake. And it works the other way, for he can talk to both present and future generations too:

I write poetry to talk back to Whitman, young people in ten years, talk
to old aunts and uncles still living near Newark, New Jersey.⁸⁶

⁸¹Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 706.

⁸²Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁸³Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 937.

⁸⁴*Id.*

⁸⁵*Id.*

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 938

Allen Ginsberg keeps on defining the reasons he writes poetry, honoring Walt Whitman as asked by Confucius (Ginsberg read Ezra Pound's translations of Confucius⁸⁷):

I write poetry because Chuang-tzu couldn't tell whether he was butterfly or man, Lao-tzu said waters flows downhill, Confucius said honor elders, I wanted to honor Whitman.⁸⁸

What is interesting in this verse, is that Walt Whitman is named along with three major figures of eastern wisdom. Furthermore, Allen Ginsberg throws bridges between two different figures, both in time and areas, building an implicit link between them and reinforcing the strength of literature which goes beyond time and space. The last mention of Whitman in "Improvisation on Beijing" goes with the following verse:

I write poetry because Walt Whitman said, "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself (I am large, I contain multitudes.)"

I write poetry because my mind contradicts itself, one minute in New York, next minute the Dinaric Alps.

Here Allen Ginsberg expresses his gratitude toward Walt Whitman who depicted what is going through Ginsberg's mind (contradiction) and that it is not a flaw but a quality acting like a poetical catalyst waiting to be developed and written. Walt Whitman is therefore a complex figure, especially when it comes to be analyzed under the prism of Allen Ginsberg's mind and work. In fact, many times Walt Whitman appeared as a prophet, like in "Ode to Failure" where Whitman is named along with Mayakovski, Alexander the Great, Monet and many others:

Many prophets have failed, their voice silent
[...]
Walt Whitman viva'd local losers [...]⁸⁹

Though in Allen Ginsberg's poem "Television Was a Baby Crawling Toward That Deathchamber" it is his turn to prophesy like Whitman⁹⁰ and that Allen Ginsberg himself defined himself as a "54 years old Prophet"⁹¹ in "Ode to Failure", it appears in the passage above that Walt Whitman "failed" and addressed "losers". This of course refers to the eighteenth section of Whitman's "Song of Myself":

⁸⁷Ginsberg, Allen. *Journals Mid-fifties, 1954-1958*. Ed. Gordon Ball. New York: HarperPerennial, 1996, p. 213.

⁸⁸Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected..., op. cit.*, p. 938.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 745

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 280

"I prophesy" is repeated four times in a row.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 745

I play not marches for accepted victors only, I play marches for conquer'd and
slain persons

[...]

Vivas to those who have fail'd!

And to those whose war-vessels sank in the sea!⁹²

Allen Ginsberg is surely mimicking Walt Whitman in verbalizing the Whitman's word "vivas" and in adopting the form "viva'd" just like Whitman use in "conquer'd" and "fail'd". So this is not an ordinary failure, nor a total failure, and the reader gets to know it at the end of Ginsberg's poem:

I never dissolved Plutonium or dismantled the nuclear Bomb before my skull

lost hair

I have not yet stopped the Armies of entire Mankind in their march toward

World War III⁹³

This is not a failure because what appears as the aim of his poetry, and to a certain extent his vision on the role of the poet, are so beyond reach and utopian that it can only eventually lead to a failure to accomplish it. This is the case concerning Mankind but also regarding his hope for his own soul:

I never got to Heaven, Nirvana, X, Watchamacallit, I never left Earth,

I never learned to die.⁹⁴

In joining Walt Whitman and many other artists in this "Ode to Failure", Allen Ginsberg confessed that poetry can only head toward a universal peaceful humankind without necessarily a success in its aims. But what is important is that some invested poets are altruistically trying their best to change the course of History and this why Allen Ginsberg wrote "O Failure I chant your terrifying name". He strongly believes in poetry as a tool with a Whitmanic use, which, as we have seen, can be then read in his own poems. In a journal entry of 1956 (July 5th) he wrote in a passage about Whitman:

The poetry attempts to express & validate or see as real his own feelings which are genuine, the struggle to find a way to feel he actually felt in conflict with what he thot was possible on earth with society & people & boys –⁹⁵

What is interesting in this passage is that the verb "attempt" is used twenty-four years before the poem "Ode to Failure" and its confession regarding the failure of the poet/prophet. In fact, this is a reminder of Whiman's candor, as he wrote in his 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass*:

⁹²Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁹³*Ibid.*, p. 745

⁹⁴*Id.*

⁹⁵Ginsberg, Allen. *Journals Mid-fifties...*, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

How beautiful is candor! All faults may be forgiven of him who has perfect candor.⁹⁶

According to Allen Ginsberg, Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*, is almost “a program for a new race of poets”.⁹⁷ And some poets went beyond History when they tried to sound out the mystical nature of Man and the notion of Universe. According to Allen Ginsberg's reasoning in “Cosmopolitan Greetings”, Walt Whitman did it:

The universe is subjective.

Walt Whitman celebrated Person.

We are observer, measuring instrument, eye, subject, Person.

Universe is Person.⁹⁸

This affirmation echoes to an excerpt of a poem in his journals of 1961: “Before me, Whitman saw Space”.⁹⁹ But most of all, it is a beautiful testimony on the role of poets who can observe both the outside world and the inner struggles. According to an opinion shared by Allen Ginsberg and Walt Whitman, as we have seen, the poet is therefore a pure observer and a skilled writer who can operate a metamorphose on three levels: Himself, the world he lives in and his readers. This is just like Allen Ginsberg wrote, summarizing his own views on Whitman's poetry: “[...] despite the dark night of the soul in America, the illumination is intact in the poets”.¹⁰⁰ And Whitman's vision of America strongly influenced Allen Ginsberg's, as we will see in a third part.

Walt Whitman influenced Allen Ginsberg on his political background and on his very definition of what the United-States is. “America” is indeed the name of one of the most well-known poems written by Allen Ginsberg. Throughout this poem, the author is showing his strong disapproval regarding American politics. The poet personifies the figure of America by asking numerous questions, for example about war (“America when will we end the human war?”¹⁰¹) or using provoking statements for the fifties (“America I used to be a communist when I was a kid I'm not sorry”,¹⁰² “I smoke marijuana every chance I get”...¹⁰³). The subject of this poem is directly inherited from Whitman, who also wrote a poem entitled “America” (as well as William Blake¹⁰⁴). But while Whitman is depicting, expecting and even

⁹⁶Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 504.

⁹⁷Ginsberg, Allen, and Louis Ginsberg. *op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁹⁸Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 954.

⁹⁹Ginsberg, Allen. *Journals: Early...*, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

¹⁰⁰Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *The Letters...*, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

¹⁰¹Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

¹⁰²*Id.*

¹⁰³*Id.*

¹⁰⁴Blake, William, and Geoffrey Keynes. *Blake Complete Writings; with Variant Readings*. London: Oxford UP, 1972, p. 195.

prophesying a land of freedom, “centre of equal daughters, equal sons”,¹⁰⁵ Ginsberg is actively aggressive: “Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb”¹⁰⁶, “I’m sick of your insane demands”...¹⁰⁷ And little by little, Ginsberg realizes that he is part of America (“It occurs to me that I am America. / I am talking to myself again.”¹⁰⁸). In this poem, Ginsberg offers his view on America, criticizing money (“When can I go into the supermarket and buy what I need with my good looks?”¹⁰⁹), sometimes with a powerful irony and parody (“America I will sell you strophes \$2500 apiece \$500 down on your old strophe”¹¹⁰) but also politics (“America free Tom Mooney”¹¹¹), racial segregation (“America I am the Scottsboro boys”¹¹²) and for the last verse, writing about his homosexuality: “America I’m putting my queer shoulder to the wheel”.¹¹³ All along this poem, he uses the anaphoric “America”, just like the repeated base “who” in “Howl” or “Birdbrain” in the eponymous poem later. He also plays on sounds and rhythm to criticize Indians' conditions:

That no good. Ugh. Him make Indians learn read. Him need big black
niggers. Hah. Her make us all work sixteen hours a day. Help.¹¹⁴

In this passage, he mimics Indian stereotyped speech “Ugh” to make it evolve toward “Help”. In fact, Allen Ginsberg embodies everyone and everything, from basic human rights, individuals or concepts to important figures of American History. This is exactly what Whitman wrote in the preface to the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* about the role of the poet:

“[...] He is the equalizer of his age and land...”¹¹⁵

and:

“The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately he has absorbed it.”¹¹⁶

Even if the word “affectionately” is in the case of Allen Ginsberg ironic, he is therefore following the definition of the poet inherited from Whitman, “absorbed” and involved in his country. Indeed, in an early draft of his poem “America”, Allen Ginsberg wrote:

I Allen Ginsberg Bard out of New jersey take up the laurel tree cudgel
From Whitman¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁵Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 376.

¹⁰⁶Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

¹⁰⁷*Id.*

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 155

¹⁰⁹*Id.*

¹¹⁰*Id.*

¹¹¹*Id.*

¹¹²*Id.*

¹¹³*Ibid.*, p. 156

¹¹⁴*Id.*

¹¹⁵Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 496.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 509

¹¹⁷Ginsberg, Allen. *Journals: Early...*, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

This line is the proof that, just like he felt with William Blake, he is taking up the torch, which here has the form of a cudgel. Considering a more personal work of Allen Ginsberg, published posthumously and for the first time in a book, Walt Whitman also appears to be the confidant of Allen Ginsberg, more precisely on the fate of America:

Walt Whitman
I lost
Tears again last nite
Screwed out of Heaven
by a bitter face with eyeglasses
and a nightstick
Waving Death over America¹¹⁸

In this poem, an extract of “what he called a longer poem on politics”,¹¹⁹ Allen Ginsberg complains to Walt Whitman about a threat over America, symbolized by police violence (“nightstick”). This induces the fact that Walt Whitman must have been some kind of a guardian of America, or at least an embodiment of a certain vision of America, shared by the two poets. And this is maybe why in “Salutations to Fernando Pessoa”, Fernando Pessoa being another admirer of Walt Whitman,¹²⁰ Allen Ginsberg wrote;

Reagan's dirty work an American Century aberration
unrepresenting our Nation Whitman sang in Epic manner
tho worried about in *Democratic Vistas*¹²¹

Allen Ginsberg describes a Whitmanic nation, being destroyed by one man. Whitman appears as a leader, a country goal, a peaceful vision of an eternal America. This is why Ginsberg's volume of poetry *The Fall of America* is dedicated to Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*.¹²² Allen Ginsberg also used and quoted *Democratic Vistas* in an address, talking about “the awesome prophecies [...] that have now come true”¹²³ of Thoreau and Emerson, that is to say the transcendentalists and of course Walt Whitman, nicknamed the “more naked”.¹²⁴ Allen Ginsberg also praised Walt Whitman in a speech entitled “Public Solitude”, aware of “our

¹¹⁸Ginsberg, Allen, and Rachel Zucker. *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 216

¹²⁰Fernando Pessoa wrote a poem entitled *Salutation to Walt Whitman*:

Pessoa, Fernando. *The Poems of Fernando Pessoa*. Trans. Edwin Honig and Susan M. Brown. New York: Ecco, 1986, p. 81.

¹²¹Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 976.

¹²²*Ibid.*, p. 811

¹²³Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *Deliberate...*, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

¹²⁴*Id.*

inmost private desire” which could be responsible for feeling “alienated”.¹²⁵ Allen Ginsberg's intimacy with a Whitmanic vision of America is also confirmed in the poem “For the Soul of the Planet is Wakening”.¹²⁶ In this poem, advocating for a mind's revolution against “satanic cities & nations”, Allen Ginsberg writes:

[...] & only
the prophetic priestly consciousness
of the bard – Blake, Whitman
or our own new selves – can
steady our gaze [...]

In this extract the poet says that Blake and Whitman implicitly showed the way toward “new selves” and puts the emphasis on their consciousness of the world. Walt Whitman is once described by Allen Ginsberg in his journals with a “guarded look” which must be a case of “self-imposed repression & consciousness”, still according to Ginsberg. This image of Walt Whitman is the image of someone who knows a lot without wanting to say everything, that is to say the figure of a wise prophet. But it seems that Blake and Whitman had different influences on Allen Ginsberg. Indeed, while Blake's influence operated more on Ginsberg's mysticism and symbolism, the influence of Whitman seems to have been more prone to affect Ginsberg's involvement in politics. At sixteen years old, as biographer Barry Miles noticed, Allen Ginsberg wanted to “devote his life to helping the working class” and go to law school in order to be a lawyer.¹²⁷ There are clues that introduce a link between this vocation and the influence of Walt Whitman on him. For example, in a poem entitled “Thoughts on a Breath”, Allen Ginsberg wrote:

O Walt Whitman salutations you knew the laborer,
the sexual intelligent horny handed
man who lived in Dirt
and fixed the axles of Capitalism, dumb and
Laughing at hallucinated Secretaries
Of State!¹²⁸

The whole poem is a criticism of capitalism and of the modern industrial America, just like in “Howl” and many other of Ginsberg's poems. Whitman is here the man who “knew” the human being as an entity with feelings (“sexual intelligent horny”), with a physical condition

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹²⁶Ginsberg, Allen, and Rachel Zucker. *op. cit.*, p. 101.

¹²⁷Miles, Barry. *Allen Ginsberg - A Biography*. London: Virgin, 2002, p. 32.

¹²⁸Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 638.

(“who lived in Dirt”), rather than objectifying it as a tool for the industry. In fact, in a 1956 letter, Allen Ginsberg depicts Walt Whitman as “crucial in development of American psyche”.¹²⁹ Once more, Allen Ginsberg used poetry as a tool to denounce governmental abuses, praising “the spectacle of Poesy triumphant over the trickery of the world [...]”.¹³⁰ Walt Whitman is therefore an essential influence to understand the political consciousness behind Ginsberg's poetry. Like Allen Ginsberg wrote in his journals of 1956:

Whitman first noticed the ants in America – then Kerouac¹³¹

From his own experiment with Whitman's poetry to the use of his own interpretation on Whitman, Allen Ginsberg developed a political poetry suffused with a long tradition of raising awareness. In many of his political poems, Allen Ginsberg often quotes or implicitly refers to Walt Whitman as we have seen in the examples above. This also the case in the engaged and whirlwind shaped poem “Wichita Vortex Sutra”,¹³² written against the war in Vietnam, in which Allen Ginsberg wrote:

Blue eyed children dance and hold thy Hand O aged Walt
who came from Lawrence to Topeka to envision
Iron interlaced upon the city plain [...]

This is referring to a real trip Walt Whitman made in 1879 as Robert R. Hubach noticed.¹³³ Furthermore, as Hubach explained, Whitman wrote a poem in 1880 entitled “The Prairie States”. The beginning of this poem contains the same precise expression “iron interlaced” Ginsberg uses in the extract from “Wichita Vortex Sutra” above:

A newer garden of creation, no primal solitude,
Dense, joyous, modern, populous millions, cities and farms,
With iron interlaced, composite, tied, many in one¹³⁴

In “Wichita Vortex Sutra”, Allen Ginsberg also used Kansas as a background for his poem, just like Whitman did for “The Prairie States”. It also important to notice that in Ginsberg's poem, the word “Hand” has a capital H, changing a simple hand into a symbol of a way to follow, just like in a biblical relationship between Men and God. Allen Ginsberg even compared “Whitman's line” with “biblical sentences in psalms”, made in order to mimic

¹²⁹Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *The Letters...*, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

¹³⁰Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 631.

¹³¹Ginsberg, Allen. *Journals Mid-fifties...*, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

¹³²Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

¹³³Hubach, Robert R. "Walt Whitman in Kansas." *Kancoll.org*. The Kansas Historical Quarterly, n.d. Web. 2 June 2016. <http://www.kancoll.org/khq/1941/41_2_hubach.htm>.

¹³⁴Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 300.

“speech tradition”.¹³⁵ There is another mention of Whitman's view of America in the poem “Iron Horse”, more precisely in its second part:

And Hart Crane's myth and Whitman's –

What'll happen to that?¹³⁶

Allen Ginsberg must be referring to Hart Crane's poem “The Bridge”, which is a long poem about America, particularly about New-York and the Brooklyn Bridge. Regarding the context of Ginsberg's poem, which is actively advocating for a global pacifism, Whitman's myth surely refers to his own view of Brooklyn in his poem “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”.¹³⁷ In that way, he is placing himself after Walt Whitman and Hart Crane, keeping the desire to build a new America that would be alive, deeply involved in freedom and peace. In a 1956 letter to Richard Eberhart,¹³⁸ he put Hart Crane and Walt Whitman side by side once more, quoting them as examples of a criticism regarding the suppression of “our expression of natural ecstasy”.¹³⁹ He also mentioned the two authors in an interview, but this time about their different views on America:

And there's also this, in a sense, the fall of America as a nation-state and the fall of any national concept. And an appreciation of the Amer-Indian vision of America as “Turtle Island”, the actual land like in Hart Crane, rather than in America like in Whitman, Kerouac, or myself.¹⁴⁰

Once more, Allen Ginsberg seems to feel closer to Whitman's idea of America for he placed himself on the side of Whitman. And this idea of a former America, a true original country which means an America of the origins also appears at the end of “Iron Horses”, where Allen Ginsberg wrote:

Mannahatta's

tunnel-door cobbled for traffic,

trucks into that mouth¹⁴¹

The mention of Mannahatta, which is the ancient name for Manhattan¹⁴² (“the aboriginal

¹³⁵Ginsberg, Allen, and David Carter. *op. cit.*, p. 110.

¹³⁶Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 460.

¹³⁷Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 121.

¹³⁸Richard Eberhart was an American poet (1904-2005) who praised Allen Ginsberg's “Howl” in an article: Eberhart, Richard. “On “Howl” Department of English - University of Illinois, n.d. Web. 19 Aug. 2016. <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/ginsberg/howl.htm>.

¹³⁹Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *The Letters...*, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

¹⁴⁰Geneson, Paul, and Allen Ginsberg. “A Conversation With Allen Ginsberg.” *Chicago Review* 27.1 (1975): 27-35, p. 30.

¹⁴¹Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 464.

¹⁴²Holloway, Marguerite. “I’ll Take Mannahatta.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 15 May 2004. Web. 07 June 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/16/nyregion/urban-tactics-i-ll-take-mannahatta.html?_r=0>.

name”¹⁴³), refers to a poem of Walt Whitman entitled “Mannahatta”.¹⁴⁴ Considering the use of the word “myth” and the use of an ancient name for Manhattan, both leading toward Whitman's poems and cosmogony, it seems that Allen Ginsberg had in mind a precise conception of New-York, an original New-York.

Allen Ginsberg also gave a precise role to Whitman regarding his visions on America. In “Plutonian Ode” in which Ginsberg wrote about Whitman as “a modern epic”¹⁴⁵ in the last part of the poem. This time, Walt Whitman is a symbolic father, both for Allen Ginsberg's poetry and America:

This ode to you O Poets and Orators to come, you father Whitman as

I join your side, you congress and American people,¹⁴⁶

Walt Whitman acts like a father and this of course is a reminder of the founding fathers, “defining American possibility” like Allen Ginsberg wrote in his journals.¹⁴⁷ In that sense, Whitman appears to Allen Ginsberg like a visionary who embodies a new America, an “ignu”¹⁴⁸ along with Blake as we saw earlier. Furthermore, and as a poetic and humanist conclusion to this study, Allen Ginsberg wrote in his journals what every Whitman’s reader must feel today:

Walt Whitman thou shdst be living at this Hour!¹⁴⁹

¹⁴³Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *op. cit.*, p. 350.

¹⁴⁴*Id.*

¹⁴⁵Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 710.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 713.

¹⁴⁷Ginsberg, Allen. *Journals Mid-fifties...*, *op. cit.*, p. 389.

¹⁴⁸Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected...*, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

¹⁴⁹Ginsberg, Allen. *Journals: Early...*, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

Bibliography

(Chronological order)

Works by Allen Ginsberg

Ginsberg, Allen. *Journals: Early Fifties, Early Sixties*. Ed. Gordon Ball. New York: Grove, 1977.

Ginsberg, Allen. *Journals Mid-fifties, 1954-1958*. Ed. Gordon Ball. New York: HarperPerennial, 1996.

Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays, 1952-1995*. New York: HarperCollins, 2000.

Ginsberg, Allen, and David Carter. *Spontaneous Mind: Selected Interviews, 1958-1996*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Ginsberg, Allen, and Louis Ginsberg. *Family Business: Selected Letters between a Father and Son*. Ed. Michael Schumacher. London: Bloomsbury, 2001.

Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected Poems: 1947-1997*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.

Ginsberg, Allen. *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile, Transcript, and Variant Versions, Fully Annotated by Author, With Contemporaneous Correspondence, Account of First Public Reading, Legal Skirmishes, Precursor Texts, and Bibliography*. Ed. Barry Miles. New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006.

Ginsberg, Allen, and Bill Morgan. *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg*. Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo, 2008.

Ginsberg, Allen, and Rachel Zucker. *Wait Till I'm Dead: Uncollected Poems*. Ed. Bill Morgan. UK: Penguin, 2016.

Works on the Beat Generation and Allen Ginsberg

Tytell, John. *Naked Angels: Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs*. New York, NY: Grove, 1991.

Lardas, John. *The Bop Apocalypse: The Religious Visions of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs*. Urbana: U of Illinois, 2001.

Miles, Barry. *Allen Ginsberg - A Biography*. London: Virgin, 2002.

Selected Chapters and Articles

Geneson, Paul, and Allen Ginsberg. "A Conversation With Allen Ginsberg." *Chicago*

Review 27.1 (1975): 27-35.

Murray, Martin. "Walt Whitman, Edward Carpenter, Gavin Arthur, and The Circle of Sex." *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 22 (Spring 2005), 194-198.

Web

Holloway, Marguerite. "I'll Take Mannahatta." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 15 May 2004. Web. 07 June 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/16/nyregion/urban-tactics-i-ll-take-mannahatta.html?_r=0>.

Stern, Mark Joseph. "A High School Teacher Was Forced to Resign for Sharing an Allen Ginsberg Poem. How Absurd." *Slate Magazine*. Slate, 22 May 2015. Web. 07 July 2016. <http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/05/22/a_high_school_teacher_shared_allen_ginsburg_poem_and_had_to_resign.html>.

Docherty, Brian. "On "Love Poem on a Theme by Whitman"" *Modern American Poetry*. University of Illinois, n.d. Web. 01 Mar. 2016. <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/ginsberg/lovepoem.htm>.

Hubach, Robert R. "Walt Whitman in Kansas." *Kancoll.org*. The Kansas Historical Quarterly, n.d. Web. 2 June 2016. <http://www.kancoll.org/khq/1941/41_2_hubach.htm>.

Words and Deeds in American History. Digital image. *The Library of Congress*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Mar. 2016. <<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mcc&fileName=012/page.db&recNum=1&itemLink=r%3Fammem%2Fmcc%3A%40field%28DOCID%2B%40lit%28mcc%2F012%29%29>>.

Eberhart, Richard." *On "Howl"* Department of English - University of Illinois, n.d. Web. 19 Aug. 2016. <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/ginsberg/howl.htm>.

Works of Other Poets

Blake, William, and Geoffrey Keynes. *Blake Complete Writings; with Variant Readings*. London: Oxford UP, 1972.

Pessoa, Fernando. *The Poems of Fernando Pessoa*. Trans. Edwin Honig and Susan M. Brown. New York: Ecco, 1986.

Whitman, Walt, and Stephen Matterson. *The Complete Poems of Walt Whitman*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2006.

Works of other writers

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, and Irwin Edman. *Emerson's Essays - First and Second Series Complete in One Volume*. New York: Harper & Row, 1981.