

A Postcard from

by Michael Hendrick

In January 1976, Columbia Records released *Desire*, the Bob Dylan LP, replete with liner notes by Allen Ginsberg. I was 18 years old at the time and worked at a newspaper in Allentown, PA, as a copywriter/copyboy.

Part of my duties included taking over the switchboard for half an hour, so the receptionist could take her 9:00pm break. The USA in the mid-70s was a steep peak in the landscape of drug-culture and just about any chemical known to the law was available in any high school. That said, I found the newsroom to be a great place to be on LSD, with the flickering fluorescent lights, tapping typewriters and wire machines clicking out the news.

On a Saturday night, with my copy of *Desire* in hand, I showed up to work the switchboard. Enjoying the art on the LP cover would be an excellent waste of time and I proceeded to do so, until I came to the Ginsberg liner notes. It had a vague address for him at the bottom - a school in Boulder, CO - so in my happily altered state, I wrote to Mr. Ginsberg on the subject of poetry. I am sure the note was naïve and rambling, if not incoherent...but I cannot recall what I wrote.

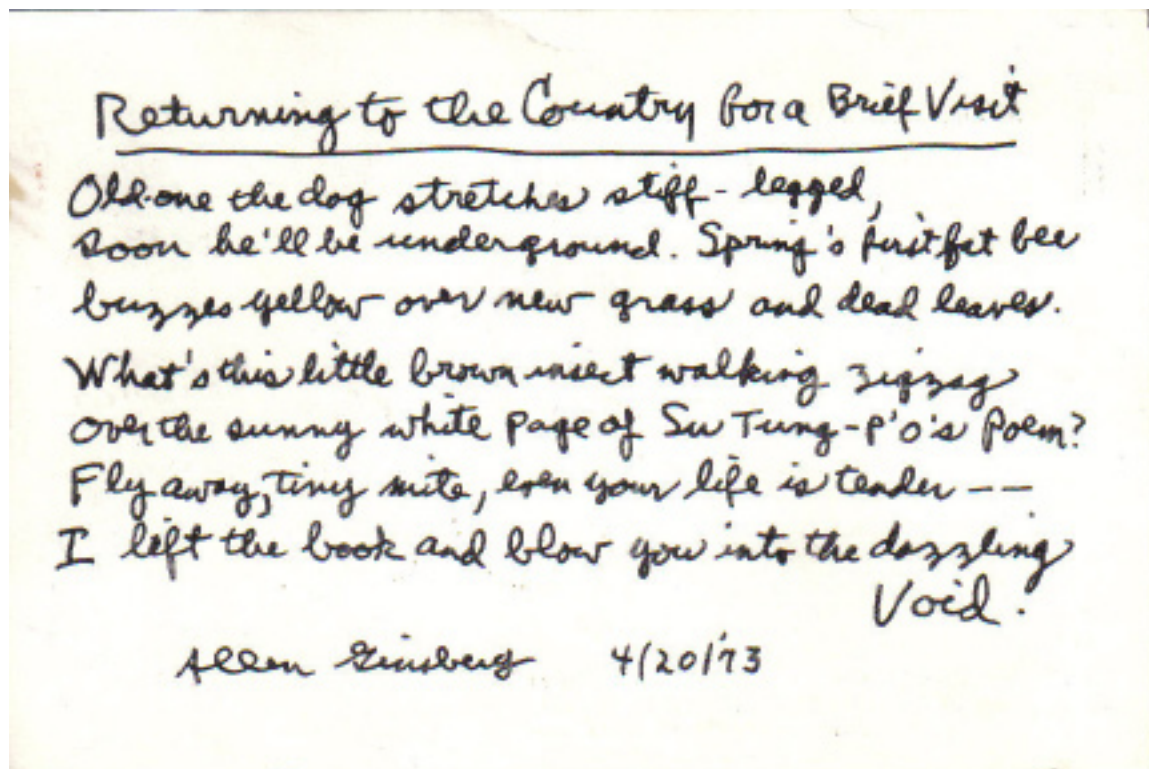
Four months later, I was surprised to find a

postcard from the Poet in my mail. It was informative and exciting but at the same time critical of my note to him. He took the time to write “fuck you” to me, an honor I hope I share with few people. He also detected my drug use, referring to my questions to him as “dopey.” I wrote a few more after that but they were answered by his assistant, so I gave that up and moved on.

A few years later, Allen and Peter Orlovsky came to do a local poetry reading. I sat up front and was able to catch the microphone stand when Allen knocked it over with his harmonium, while singing a version of Blake’s “The Tyger.”

After the pair finished with their readings and songs, a queue formed to get books signed by them. I have never been one for autographs and I already had Allen’s handwriting and signature on the postcard, but I got in line and shuffled forward. When I got to the front of the line, I put out my hand to shake and said to Allen, “I just wanted to say thanks for answering my letters. It means a lot for a young writer to be able to get mail from someone so important in the world of literature. It is a big inspiration.”

At this point, Allen cocked his head and looked puzzled.



Front

Allen Ginsberg

"I wrote back?" he asked, seemingly incredulous. I said thanks, again, and was on my way. Even though the card says "fuck you" and calls me "dopey," it has been a personal trophy for all these years.

One day, maybe a year later, I was in New York City, walking up Bowery Street, when I saw William S. Burroughs coming towards me. I didn't believe it was him. He had the usual suit, overcoat, hat, etc, and two big brown paper shopping bags with handles, one in each hand. I thought it could be a mistake. I let him pass and when he was about five or six feet behind me, I turned on my heel and said, clearly, "William Burroughs!" He turned around in a split-second. I stuck out my hand and said "glad to meet you" and told him I found his work inspiring. I said a few other things and then he started asking questions about me.

It seemed odd for him to be interested in me. I remembered all the stories I had read in Kerouac's books. Sadly, I told him a little about myself but then told him I had things to do but that it was very nice to meet him. I got the feeling I could have stuck around and followed him home but I, in my youth, was fearful of the gentle, great man. I continued on my walk through the city and wondered how long Burroughs would have stood there, chatting with me. Youth may

be bold, but is not always bright...

Transcription of the postcard:

April 29, 76
POB582 Stuyvesant Sta.
N.Y. 10009 N.Y.

Dear M.H.

- 1.) Poetry is what you, or anyone, writes, not a definition which limits activity to an "idea" of what it should be. (There's something dopey about your definitions anyway. Fuck you.) (Afterthought)
 - 2.) Any conscious goal, by eliminating irrational unconscious information, & data, fucks up the creation of poetry. You discover it, you don't figure it out in advance. 'can't plan genius.'
 - 3.) To talk to your private self is the way to talk to all self. Personal is universal simultaneously.
 - 4.) Your questions are all fucked up and irrelevant. Your (our) problem as poets is to write truth as we recognize it, not worry about our egos being recognized - or our poems - you asked, I answered
- Allen Ginsberg

