



Allen Ginsberg

Jack Foley

Ginsberg at the Mall

I saw him first eyeing me from Radio Shack
pretending to look over electronic equipment
but really wondering what hot stuff he might haunt
Since dying, he'd become a chicken hawk

At the DVD store I "accidentally" brushed against him
He was surprisingly solid
"Excuse me, Mr. Ginsberg," I said,
"I thought you were dead."

"Young man," he answered, "I *am* dead"
and then he laughed a big laugh
"You expect me to haunt supermarkets? Or book stores?
I try to keep in style.

What's a nice poetic young man like you
with a copy of *On the Road* in his pocket

doing in a place like this?
Wanna see me change?"

What I had seen was the old Ginsberg of the 90s
hunched over, professorial, and with that funny squint
in his eye. Suddenly he was Hippy Ginsberg
of the 60s—loud, funny, dominant, bearded

He began to sing—badly
(death had not changed that)
until I was afraid that people would notice us
but actually no one turned around,
it was as if we couldn't be heard by anyone

"Hare Krishna!" said Ginsberg, ha ha ha
"How about it, kid,
Wanna get laid? You look a little like Neal Cassady
or at least *some* of you looks like *some* of him.
How about it, you wanna have sex?"

"I don't think so, Mr. Ginsberg. I've never had sex with a ghost."
"Nothing to it," he answered,
and suddenly my clothes were off
and I had an erection
and I was coming as I'd never come before.

Ginsberg hadn't touched me,
and he was still standing there fully clothed, laughing.
"How did you do that?" I said.
"It's just a trick we ghosts have. Pleasure is heaven. Heaven is pleasure.
You get me? The Beat Generation, Kerouac said,
that was just a bunch of guys trying to get laid.
In heaven we do it all the time."

"You're in heaven?"
"Well, I'm somewhere, and I call it heaven. Even the CIA is there,
and all the people they killed. We all get on pretty well together."

Suddenly he was Professor Ginsberg again. "Same multiple identity,"
he said as he vanished
"into air, into thin air"

In my hand was a book whose title was *The Posthumous Writings of Allen Ginsberg*
but as I tried to open the book
its pages withered and vanished.

“You’ll have to wait for *that* volume,” said Allen’s voice
and he laughed again. “Wouldn’t you like to have *that* book?
You’ll have to write it yourself—”

Courage teacher, old poet, have you become an owl of wisdom, a hawk of power, a swan
of beauty, a sunflower, a leaf, a bit of sunlight, a worm burrowing in the earth?—

Have you become
—*immortal*?

*

*All lives
Are deceptions
Of ourselves
Of others
The only joy
Is to break through
(In what may be
Itself a deception)
To an illusory
Sense
Of “The real”
Patterns
Repeat
The only joy
Is always
And never anything other than
NOW—
This sudden, illuminating, vanishing, flourishing, empowering, fructifying
Moment
Is the only
Joy
The only time
When we can stand clear of error
(Or believe we do)
And it is open
To anyone
No matter what
His/her circumstances
It is to experience ourselves
Not as suffering, complaining, miserable, happy, dissatisfied, satisfied, terrified
“Creatures”
But as (in the root sense)
Beings
This moment is nothing less
Than the heart of joy*

*And can occur
Even in the acutest of suffering
All life, said the Buddha, is suffering
Except
For this
Except for
This*

Jack Foley is a widely-published poet and critic who, with his wife, Adelle, performs his work frequently in the San Francisco Bay Area. He has published thirteen books of poetry and seven books of criticism, including *Visions and Affiliations*, a “chronoencyclopedia” of California poetry from 1940 to 2005. His weekly radio program “Cover to Cover” can be heard live at kpfa.org. His selected poems, *EYES*, appeared recently along with a chapbook, *LIFE*.