Poets by Any Other Name?

If the four hundred people who crowded into 023 Whitman Wednesday night to hear Allen Ginsberg (author of Howl) howl, they might have been a bit disappointed to find the 32 year old poet of the "San Francisco" school exclaim in answer to a question, "It's a drag being called a 'beatnik.' I'm a poet."

Mr. Ginsberg, a man of medium height and weight with thinning brown hair who met the crowd in dungarees and black turtleneck sweater, read and discussed his work, seriously and articulately. Both Mr. Ginsberg and poet Gregory Corso, who alternated reading with Mr. Ginsberg, seemed more than willing to answer any relevant questions put to them. Questions like "What is your philosophy of life?" elicited only true Zen-master responses—from Mr. Corso, "Fried shoes," and from Mr. Ginsberg, "I should know," he added, "because I taught in one for a while."

Both men, who speak for a number of other "San Francisco" poets, admire the form in William Carlos Williams' poetry. Williams' poetry, as their own, seeks to capture the rhythm and idiom of American speech. Paterson born Ginsberg claims that his poetry "has form, but it will take time before it is accepted, just as modern art was not accepted at first."

To a line like Corso's, "Penguin dust, bring me penguin dust," many students smiled. Some knew the question was on the lips of others: What is it? But all of the audience, sitting on the stage, lining the walls and the back, sitting two on a chair, were serious, respectful, interested in what the three—poets or "beatniks"—invited by SGS's literary magazine, Nocturne, had to say.

Away One Year

I think of New York City lost in stars
forgetting as a flower-burnt pet of childhood love—
Toutant the night is full
the stately Mayor in his top
disposing
moving in proportion like a huge jewel with tiny feet
he taps his long straight nose
through the years of his born
a ghost with weary wisdom of the city—

Beneath the Washington Square arch he begins to fossil

The new denominations of the day.
This has never been the Mayor of my city,
occasionally stopping in a tunnel even
with magnificent foundations in his eyes.

—Gregory Corso (excerpt)

In back of the real
railroad yard in San Jose
I wandered desolate
in front of a tank factory
and sat on a bench
near the switchman's shack.

A flower lay on the hay on the asphalt highway
—the dropt hay flower
I thought
—It had a brittle black stem
and corolla of yellowish dirty spikes like Jesus' inclining crown, and a colored dry center cotton tuft
like a used shaving brush that's been lying under the garage for a year.

Yellow, yellow flower, and
flower of industry,
tough spikey ugly flower,
flower nonetheless,
with the form of the great yellow rose in the brain.

This is the flower of the World.

—Allen Ginsberg