

[Interview]

I SING OF NORMAN P.

From an interview with Allen Ginsberg in the Fall 1987 issue of New Letters, a quarterly published in Kansas City, Missouri. The interview was conducted by Robert Stewart and Rebekah Presson.

I had a very funny experience a couple of years ago when I dropped some Ecstasy . . . and I suddenly remembered Norman Podhoretz. And I said, Gee, good old Norman, we went to college together. He wanted to be a poet, and he thought he'd commit suicide when he was thirty if he didn't get to be a great poet. So then when he got to be thirty, he realized that John Hollander, who was also at college with us, was a poet, and he wasn't. So he had to go some different way for power, and he got very perverse thoughts and started taking revenge on poetry power. Like denouncing Kerouac. He's still denouncing Kerouac as a moral degenerate. And I say, Good old Norman Podhoretz. If he weren't there like a wall I can butt my head against, I wouldn't have anybody to hate. And why hate him? He's part of my world, and he's sort of like the character Mr. Meany or the Bluenose or the Blue Meanie. At the same time, he has some sense in him. And the poor guy is dying, like all of us. So, how could I pile my hatred on him anymore? But did I ever really hate him or was I just sort of fascinated by him?

I also saw him as a sort of sacred personage in my life, in a way: someone whose vision is so opposite from mine that it's provocative and interesting—just as my vision is interesting and provocative enough for him to write columns against it in the newspaper. In fact, maybe he's more honest than I am because he attacks me openly. So I should really respect him as one of the sacred personae in the drama of my own transitory existence.