

His leg was amputated.
He died in a hospital bed in Marseilles.
The room reeked of infection.
It was crowded to the ceiling with chimeras, his Muses.

JACK OF LANTERNS

Ah, Jack, the children still read
your big, sad beatnik books
and know in their quivering hearts
that you had the true touch.

Ah, Jack, fame was nothing
but an awful pain in the ass,
and sometimes not even that.
The best part was doing it,
fingers burning up the keys.

Ah, Jack, I saw you laid out
in a funeral parlor in Lowell,
your bloated corpse
stuffed into a plaid sports jacket,
a clip-on bow tie like a black butterfly
motionless
on your rotting Adam's apple.

Ah, Jack, where has all the magic gone?
Where are the golden whiskey bars of yesteryear?
Your voice comes to me in the traffic of the night,
its big engines down-shifting, diesels on the overpass,
star-wind, exhaust that fills the sails of my soul.

Ah, Jack, can you hear the real jazz now,
the electric-blue dharma wheels
racing down the freeways to paradise?

Ah, Jack, was that you waving
from an old freight car full of fried shoes?
Are you with Neal in the hobo jungles of heaven?
Are you crouched over a steaming pot of pinto beans?
Do you groove on saxophone sunflowers?
Is Buddha on your breath?
And is it always October in the railroad earth?

Ah, Jack, light a lantern for me
so I can find my way through
"Love's multitudinous boneyard of decay"

— Gene Mahoney

Vineyard Haven MA