THE BOXER

A short, lean,
gray haired man
about sixty flashes
a sweet smile
as he enters
one late afternoon.
He is wearing
a blue warm-up jacket.
He looks at
the English Bobby helmet
hanging from the ceiling
and mentions that
he should have bought
a couple of the old
Bobby helmets in London
when they changed
helmets three years ago.

"I come to Frisco
every three years.
Go to City Lights
and the Cafe Trieste
and think that
I'm talking with
all the new artists
and writers.
I was here in the Fifties —
Allen and Jack and me
started it all —
I'm only kidding!

I'm just an old boxer
from Milwaukee.
You can tell a boxer
from the way he walks.
I came to meet Ron Lundee
in Redwood City in a hotel.
He was Light Heavyweight Champ
in 1937 and he's 71 now.

So I was sitting
in the lobby
watching people
walk to the desk.
But when he came in
I knew it was Ron.
He had this balance
like a ball bearing
was inside him
and this cockiness in his walk.
See, there's two things
you never know
about a fighter
when he comes
into the ring -
his punch
and his heart.
You see a guy
with rippling muscles.
You don't know
if he's got a punch.
The punch comes
from the right foot,
right from the sole
of the right foot.
You can feel it
come through, whoosh!
I always tell a boxer
to take his natural stance
— nothing special —
however he
feels comfortable,
that's him!

Before a fight
the boxer weighs in at noon.
What do you think
a fighter eats then?
Not steak, it's too dry.
A fighter has to sweat,
so he has to eat

something greasy
like pancakes or waffles.
A good fighter
has to sweat. Be shining
with sweat in the ring.
If he don't sweat,
he's gonna wilt."

I show him
an old leather
boxer's helmet
on a dummy's head
hanging from the ceiling.
He remarks, "I don't like
my boxers to wear helmets.
It makes them feel safe
and takes away
their peripheral vision.
I'm going over
to City Lights and buy
Coney Island of the Mind.
I lost my copy.
I like Ferlinghetti
better than Ginsberg.
His language is leaner.
See ya!"
He walks cockily
on to Grant Ave.