

A
CONEY ISLAND
of the
MIND

to K.

Poems by LAWRENCE
FERLINGHETTI

A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK

SEVENTEENTH PRINTING

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1
A CONEY ISLAND
of the MIND

In Goya's greatest scenes we seem to see
the people of the world
exactly at the moment when
they first attained the title of
'suffering humanity'
They writhe upon the page
in a veritable rage
of adversity
Heaped up
groaning with babies and bayonets
under cement skies
in an abstract landscape of blasted trees
bent statues bats wings and beaks
slippery gibbets
cadavers and carnivorous cocks
and all the final hollering monsters
of the
'imagination of disaster'
they are so bloody real
it is as if they really still existed

And they do

Only the landscape is changed

They still are ranged along the roads
 plagued by legionnaires
 false windmills and demented roosters

They are the same people
only further from home
on freeways fifty lanes wide
on a concrete continent
spaced with bland billboards
illustrating imbecile illusions of happiness

The title of this book is taken from Henry Miller's INTO THE NIGHT LIFE. It is used out of context but expresses the way I felt about these poems when I wrote them – as if they were, taken together, a kind of Coney Island of the mind, a kind of circus of the soul.

The scene shows fewer tumbrils
but more maimed citizens
in painted cars
and they have strange license plates
and engines
that devour America

2

Sailing thru the straits of Demos
we saw symbolic birds
shrieking over us
while eager eagles hovered
and elephants in bathtubs
floated past us out to sea
strumming bent mandolins
and bailing for old glory with their ears
while patriotic maidens
wearing paper poppies
and eating bonbons
ran along the shores
wailing after us
and while we lashed ourselves to masts
and stopt our ears with chewing gum
dying donkeys on high hills
sang low songs
and gay cows flew away
chanting Athenian anthems
as their pods turned to tulips
and helicopters from Helios
flew over us
dropping free railway tickets
from Lost Angeles to Heaven
and promising Free Elections

So that

we set up mast and sail

on that swart ship once more

and so set forth once more

forth upon the gobbly sea

loaded with liberated vestal virgins

and discus throwers reading Walden

but

shortly after reaching

the strange suburban shores

of that great American

demi-democracy

looked at each other

with a mild surprise

silent upon a peak

in Darien

3

The poet's eye obscenely seeing

sees the surface of the round world

with its drunk rooftops

and wooden oiseaux on clotheslines

and its clay males and females

with hot legs and rosebud breasts

in rollaway beds

and its trees full of mysteries

and its Sunday parks and speechless statues

and its America

with its ghost towns and empty Ellis Islands

and its surrealist landscape of

mindless prairies

supermarket suburbs

steamheated cemeteries

cinerama holy days

and protesting cathedrals

a kissproof world of plastic toiletseats tampax and taxis

drugged store cowboys and las vegas virgins

disowned indians and cinemad matrons

unroman senators and conscientious non-objectors

and all the other fatal shorn-up fragments

of the immigrant's dream come too true

and mislaid

among the sunbathers

In a surrealist year
 of sandwichmen and sunbathers
 dead sunflowers and live telephones
 house-broken politicos with party whips
 performed as usual
 in the rings of their sawdust circuses
 where tumblers and human cannonballs
 filled the air like cries
 when some cool clown
 pressed an inedible mushroom button
 and an inaudible Sunday bomb
 fell down
 catching the president at his prayers
 on the 19th green

O it was a spring
 of fur leaves and cobalt flowers
 when cadillacs fell thru the trees like rain
 drowning the meadows with madness
 while out of every imitation cloud
 dropped myriad wingless crowds
 of nutless nagasaki survivors

And lost teacups
 full of our ashes
 floated by

Sometime during eternity
 some guys show up
 and one of them
 who shows up real late
 is a kind of carpenter
 from some square-type place
 like Galilee
 and he starts wailing
 and claiming he is hep
 to who made heaven
 and earth
 and that the cat
 who really laid it on us
 is his Dad

And moreover
 he adds
 It's all writ down
 on some scroll-type parchments
 which some henchmen
 leave lying around the Dead Sea somewheres
 a long time ago
 and which you won't even find
 for a coupla thousand years or so
 or at least for
 nineteen hundred and fortyseven
 of them
 to be exact
 and even then
 nobody really believes them
 or me
 for that matter

You're hot
 they tell him

And they cool him

They stretch him on the Tree to cool

And everybody after that
 is always making models
 of this Tree
 with Him hung up
 and always crooning His name
 and calling Him to come down
 and sit in
 on their combo
 as if he is the king cat
 who's got to blow
 or they can't quite make it

 Only he don't come down
 from His Tree

 Him just hang there
 on His Tree
 looking real Petered out
 and real cool
 and also
 according to a roundup
 of late world news
 from the usual unreliable sources
 real dead

They were putting up the statue
 of Saint Francis
 in front of the church
 of Saint Francis
 in the city of San Francisco
 in a little side street
 just off the Avenue
 where no birds sang
 and the sun was coming up on time
 in its usual fashion
 and just beginning to shine
 on the statue of Saint Francis
 where no birds sang

 And a lot of old Italians
 were standing all around
 in the little side street
 just off the Avenue
 watching the wily workers
 who were hoisting up the statue
 with a chain and a crane
 and other implements
 And a lot of young reporters
 in button-down clothes
 were taking down the words
 of one young priest
 who was propping up the statue
 with all his arguments

 And all the while
 while no birds sang
 any Saint Francis Passion
 and while the lookers kept looking
 up at Saint Francis
 with his arms outstretched
 to the birds which weren't there

7

[19]

In Golden Gate Park that day
 a man and his wife were coming along
 thru the enormous meadow
 which was the meadow of the world
 He was wearing green suspenders
 and carrying an old beat-up flute
 in one hand
 while his wife had a bunch of grapes
 which she kept handing out
 individually
 to various squirrels
 as if each
 were a little joke

And then the two of them came on
 thru the enormous meadow
 which was the meadow of the world
 and then
 at a very still spot where the trees dreamed
 and seemed to have been waiting thru all time
 for them
 they sat down together on the grass
 without looking at each other
 and ate oranges
 without looking at each other
 and put the peels
 in a basket which they seemed
 to have brought for that purpose
 without looking at each other

And then
 he took his shirt and undershirt off
 but kept his hat on
 sideways
 and without saying anything
 fell asleep under it
 And his wife just sat there looking
 at the birds which flew about
 calling to each other

 in the stilly air
 as if they were questioning existence
 or trying to recall something forgotten

But then finally
 she too lay down flat
 and just lay there looking up
 at nothing
 yet fingering the old flute
 which nobody played
 and finally looking over
 at him
 without any particular expression
 except a certain awful look
 of terrible depression

See
 it was like this when
 we waltz into this place
 a couple of Papish cats
 is doing an Aztec two-step
 And I says
 Dad let's cut
 but then this dame
 comes up behind me see
 and says
 You and me could really exist
 Wow I says
 Only the next day
 she has bad teeth
 and really hates
 poetry

I have not lain with beauty all my life
 telling over to myself
 its most rife charms
 I have not lain with beauty all my life
 and lied with it as well
 telling over to myself
 how beauty never dies
 but lies apart
 among the aborigines
 of art
 and far above the battlefields
 of love
 It is above all that
 oh yes
 It sits upon the choicest of
 Church seats
 up there where art directors meet
 to choose the things for immortality
 And they have lain with beauty
 all their lives
 And they have fed on honeydew
 and drunk the wines of Paradise
 so that they know exactly how
 a thing of beauty is a joy
 forever and forever
 and how it never never
 quite can fade
 into a money-losing nothingness

Oh no I have not lain
 on Beauty Rests like this
 afraid to rise at night
 for fear that I might somehow miss
 some movement beauty might have made
 Yet I have slept with beauty
 in my own weird way
 and I have made a hungry scene or two
 with beauty in my bed
 and so spilled out another poem or two
 and so spilled out another poem or two
 upon the Bosch-like world

The wounded wilderness of Morris Graves
 is not the same wild west
 the white man found
 It is a land that Buddha came upon
 from a different direction
 It is a wild white nest
 in the true mad north
 of introspection
 where 'falcons of the inner eye'
 dive and die
 glimpsing in their dying fall
 all life's memory
 of existence
 and with grave chalk wing
 draw upon the leaded sky
 a thousand threaded images
 of flight

It is the night that is their 'native habitat'
 these 'spirit birds' with bled white wings
 these droves of plover
 bearded eagles
 blind birds singing
 in glass fields
 these moonmad swans and ecstatic ganders
 trapped egrets
 charcoal owls
 trotting turtle symbols

these pink fish among mountains
 shrikes seeking to nest
 whitebone drones
 mating in air
 among hallucinary moons

And a masked bird fishing
 in a golden stream
 and an ibis feeding
 'on its own breast'

 and a stray Connemara Pooka
 (life size)

 And then those blown mute birds
 bearing fish and paper messages
 between two streams
 which are the twin streams
 of oblivion
 wherein the imagination
 turning upon itself
 with white electric vision
 refinds itself still mad
 and unfed
 among the hebrides

12

'One of those paintings that would not die'
 its warring image
 once conceived
 would not leave
 the leaded ground
 no matter how many times
 he hounded it
 into oblivion
 Painting over it did no good
 It kept on coming through
 the wood and canvas
 and as it came it cried at him
 a terrible bedtime song
 wherein each bed a grave
 mined with unearthly alarmclocks
 hollered horribly
 for lovers and sleepers

Not like Dante

discovering a commedia

upon the slopes of heaven

I would paint a different kind

of Paradiso

in which the people would be naked

as they always are

in scenes like that

because it is supposed to be

a painting of their souls

but there would be no anxious angels telling them

how heaven is

the perfect picture of

a monarchy

and there would be no fires burning

in the hellish holes below

in which I might have stepped

nor any altars in the sky except

fountains of imagination

Don't let that horse

eat that violin

cried Chagall's mother

But he

kept right on

painting

And became famous

And kept on painting

The Horse With Violin In Mouth

And when he finally finished it

he jumped up upon the horse

and rode away

waving the violin

And then with a low bow gave it

to the first naked nude he ran across

And there were no strings

attached

Constantly risking absurdity
and death
whenever he performs
above the heads
of his audience

the poet like an acrobat
climbs on rime
to a high wire of his own making
and balancing on eyebeams
above a sea of faces
paces his way
to the other side of day
performing entrechats
and sleight-of-foot tricks
and other high theatrics
and all without mistaking
any thing
for what it may not be

For he's the super realist
who must perforce perceive
taut truth
before the taking of each stance or step
in his supposed advance
toward that still higher perch
where Beauty stands and waits
with gravity
to start her death-defying leap

And he
a little charleychaplin man
who may or may not catch
her fair eternal form
spreadeagled in the empty air
of existence

Kafka's Castle stands above the world
like a last bastille
of the Mystery of Existence
Its blind approaches baffle us
Steep paths
plunge nowhere from it
Roads radiate into air
like the labyrinth wires
of a telephone central
thru which all calls are
infinitely untraceable
Up there
it is heavenly weather
Souls dance undressed
together
and like loiterers
on the fringes of a fair
we ogle the unobtainable
imagined mystery
Yet away around on the far side
like the stage door of a circus tent
is a wide wide vent in the battlements
where even elephants
waltz thru

This life is not a circus where
the shy performing dogs of love

look on

as time flicks out

its tricky whip

to race us thru our paces

Yet gay parading floats drift by

decorated with gorgeous gussies in silk tights

and attended by moithering monkeys

make-believe monks

horny hiawathas

and baboons astride tame tigers

with ladies inside

while googly horns make merrygoround music

and pantomimic pierrots castrate disaster

with strange sad laughter

and gory gorillas toss tender maidens heavenward

while cakewalkers and carnie hustlers

all gassed to the gills

strike playbill poses

and stagger after every

wheeling thing

While still around the ring

lope the misshapen camels of lust

and all us Emmett Kelly clowns

always making up imaginary scenes

with all our masks for faces

even eat fake Last Suppers

at collapsible tables

and mocking cross ourselves

in sawdust crosses

And yet gobble up at last

to thrive our circus souls

the also imaginary

wafers of grace

Frightened

by the sound of my own voice

and by the sound of birds

singing on hot wires

in sunday sleep I see myself

slaying sundry sinners and turkeys

loud dogs with sharp dead dugs

and black knights in iron suits

with Brooks labels

and Yale locks upon the pants

Yes

and with penis erectus for spear

I slay all old ladies

making them young again

with a touch of my sweet swaying sword

retrouving them their maiden

hoods and heads

ah yes

in flattering falsehoods of sleep

we come we conquer all

but all the while

real standard time ticks on

and new bottled babies with real teeth

devour our fantastic

fictioned future

In woods where many rivers run
 among the unbent hills
and fields of our childhood
 where ricks and rainbows mix in memory
although our 'fields' were streets
 I see again those myriad mornings rise
when every living thing
 cast its shadow in eternity
and all day long the light
 like early morning
with its sharp shadows shadowing
 a paradise
that I had hardly dreamed of
 nor hardly knew to think
of this unshaved today
 with its derisive rooks
that rise above dry trees
 and caw and cry
and question every other
 spring and thing

The pennycandystore beyond the El
is where I first
 fell in love
 with unreality
Jellybeans glowed in the semi-gloom
of that september afternoon
A cat upon the counter moved among
 the licorice sticks
 and tootsie rolls
and Oh Boy Gum

Outside the leaves were falling as they died

A wind had blown away the sun

A girl ran in
Her hair was rainy
Her breasts were breathless in the little room

Outside the leaves were falling
 and they cried
 Too soon! too soon!

She loved to look at flowers
 smell fruit
 And the leaves had the look of loving

 But halfass drunken sailors
 staggered thru her sleep
 scattering semen
 over the virgin landscape

 At a certain age
 her heart put about
 searching the lost shores

 And heard the green birds singing
 from the other side of silence

Johnny Nolan has a patch on his ass

Kids chase him
 thru screendoor summers

 Thru the back streets
 of all my memories

 Somewhere a man laments
 upon a violin

 A doorstep baby cries
 and cries again
 like
 a
 ball
 bounced
 down steps

Which helps the afternoon arise again
 to a moment of remembered hysteria

Johnny Nolan has a patch on his ass

Kids chase him

The Widder Fogliani
 otherwise known as Bella Donna
 the Italian lady
 of American distraction
 the Widder Fogliani
 was a merryoldsoul
 she had whiskers
 on her soul
 and her soul was a pussy
 But she had a hard coming of it
 that time I beat her
 at her own game
 which was painting moustaches
 on statues
 in the Borghese gardens
 at three in the morning
 and nobody the wiser
 if ever she gave
 some stray Cellini
 a free Christmas goose

We squat upon the beach of love
 among Picasso mandolins struck full of sand
 and buried catspaws that know no sphinx
 and picnic papers
 dead crabs' claws
 and starfish prints

 We squat upon the beach of love
 among the beached mermaids
 with their bawling babies and bald husbands
 and homemade wooden animals
 with icecream spoons for feet
 which cannot walk or love
 except to eat

 We squat upon the brink of love
 and are secure as only squatters are
 among the puddled leavings
 of salt sex's tides
 and the sweet semen rivulets
 and limp buried peckers
 in the sand's soft flesh

 And still we laugh
 and still we run
 and still we throw ourselves
 upon love's boats
 but it is deeper
 and much later
 than we think
 and all goes down
 and all our lovebuoys fail us

 And we drink and drown

Cast up

the heart flops over

gasping 'Love'

a foolish fish which tries to draw

its breath from flesh of air

And no one there to hear its death

among the sad bushes

where the world rushes by

in a blather of asphalt and delay

That 'sensual phosphorescence

my youth delighted in'

now lies almost behind me

like a land of dreams

wherein an angel

of hot sleep

dances like a diva

in strange veils

thru which desire

looks and cries

And still she dances

dances still

and still she comes

at me

with breathing breasts

and secret lips

and (ah)

bright eyes

Peacocks walked
under the night trees
in the lost moon
light
when I went out
looking for love
that night
A ring dove cooed in a cove
A cloche tolled twice
once for the birth
and once for the death
of love
that night

Dove sta amore
Where lies love
Dove sta amore
Here lies love
The ring dove love
In lyrical delight
Hear love's hillsong
Love's true willsong
Love's low plainsong
Too sweet painsong
In passages of night
Dove sta amore
Here lies love
The ring dove love
Dove sta amore
Here lies love

And that's the way it always is and that's the way it always ends and the fire and the rose are one and always the same scene and always the same subject right from the beginning like in the Bible or The Sun Also Rises which begins Robert Cohn was middleweight boxing champion of his class but later we lost our balls and there we go again there we are again there's the same old theme and scene again with all the citizens and all the characters all working up to it right from the first and it looks like all they ever think of is doing it and it doesn't matter much with who half the time but the other half it matters more than anything O the sweet love fevers yes and there's always complications like maybe she has no eyes for him or him no eyes for her or her no eyes for her or him no eyes for him or something or other stands in the way like his mother or her father or someone like that but they go right on trying to get it all the time like in Shakespeare or The Waste Land or Proust remembering his Things Past or wherever And there they all are struggling toward each other or after each other like those marble maidens on that Grecian Urn or on any market street or merrygoround around and around they go

all hunting love and half the hungry time not even knowing just what is really eating them like Robin walking in her Nightwood streets although it isn't quite as simple as all that as if all she really needed was a good fivecent cigar oh no and those who have not hunted will not recognize the hunting poise and then the hawks that hover where the heart is hid and the hungry horses crying and the stone angels and heaven and hell and Yerma with her blind breasts under her dress and then Christopher Columbus sailing off in search and Rudolph Valentino and Juliet and Romeo and John Barrymore and Anna Livia and Abie's Irish Rose and so Goodnight Sweet Prince all over again with everyone and everybody laughing and crying along wherever night and day winter and summer spring and tomorrow like Anna Karenin lost in the snow and the cry of hunters in a great wood and the soldiers coming and Freud and Ulysses always on their hungry travels after the same hot grail like King Arthur and his nighttime knights and everybody wondering where and how it will all end like in the movies or in some nightmaze novel yes as in a nightmaze Yes I said Yes I will and he called me his Andalusian rose and I said Yes my heart was going like mad and that's the way Ulysses ends as everything always ends when that hunting cock of flesh at last cries out and has his glory moment God and then comes tumbling down the sound

of axes in the wood and the trees falling and down
it goes the sweet cock's sword so wilting in the
fair flesh fields away alone at last and loved
and lost and found upon a riverbank along a
riverrun right where it all began and so begins again

2

ORAL MESSAGES

I AM WAITING

I am waiting for my case to come up
and I am waiting
for a rebirth of wonder
and I am waiting for someone
to really discover America
and wail
and I am waiting
for the discovery
of a new symbolic western frontier
and I am waiting
for the American Eagle
to really spread its wings
and straighten up and fly right
and I am waiting
for the Age of Anxiety
to drop dead
and I am waiting
for the war to be fought
which will make the world safe
for anarchy
and I am waiting
for the final withering away
of all governments
and I am perpetually awaiting
a rebirth of wonder

I am waiting for the Second Coming
and I am waiting
for a religious revival
to sweep thru the state of Arizona
and I am waiting
for the Grapes of Wrath to be stored
and I am waiting
for them to prove
that God is really American
and I am seriously waiting
for Billy Graham and Elvis Presley
to exchange roles seriously

These seven poems were conceived specifically for jazz accompaniment and as such should be considered as spontaneously spoken "oral messages" rather than as poems written for the printed page. As a result of continued experimental reading with jazz, they are still in a state of change. "Autobiography" and "Junkman's Obbligato" are available on the Fantasy LP recording No. 7002, "Poetry Readings in the Cellar," which I made with Kenneth Rexroth and the Cellar Jazz Quintet of San Francisco.

and I am waiting
to see God on television
piped onto church altars
if only they can find
the right channel
to tune in on
and I am waiting
for the Last Supper to be served again
with a strange new appetizer
and I am perpetually awaiting
a rebirth of wonder

I am waiting for my number to be called
and I am waiting
for the living end
and I am waiting
for dad to come home
his pockets full
of irradiated silver dollars
and I am waiting
for the atomic tests to end
and I am waiting happily
for things to get much worse
before they improve
and I am waiting
for the Salvation Army to take over
and I am waiting
for the human crowd
to wander off a cliff somewhere
clutching its atomic umbrella
and I am waiting
for Ike to act
and I am waiting
for the meek to be blessed
and inherit the earth
without taxes
and I am waiting
for forests and animals
to reclaim the earth as theirs
and I am waiting
for a way to be devised
to destroy all nationalisms
without killing anybody

and I am waiting
for linnets and planets to fall like rain
and I am waiting for lovers and weepers
to lie down together again
in a new rebirth of wonder

I am waiting for the Great Divide to be crossed
and I am anxiously waiting
for the secret of eternal life to be discovered
by an obscure general practitioner
and save me forever from certain death
and I am waiting
for life to begin
and I am waiting
for the storms of life
to be over
and I am waiting
to set sail for happiness
and I am waiting
for a reconstructed Mayflower
to reach America
with its picture story and tv rights
sold in advance to the natives
and I am waiting
for the lost music to sound again
in the Lost Continent
in a new rebirth of wonder

I am waiting for the day
that maketh all things clear
and I am waiting
for Ole Man River
to just stop rolling along
past the country club
and I am waiting
for the deepest South
to just stop Reconstructing itself
in its own image
and I am waiting
for a sweet desegregated chariot
to swing low
and carry me back to Ole Virginie
and I am waiting
for Ole Virginie to discover

just why Darkies are born
and I am waiting
for God to lookout
from Lookout Mountain
and see the Ode to the Confederate Dead
as a real farce
and I am awaiting retribution
for what America did
to Tom Sawyer
and I am perpetually awaiting
a rebirth of wonder

I am waiting for Tom Swift to grow up
and I am waiting
for the American Boy
to take off Beauty's clothes
and get on top of her
and I am waiting
for Alice in Wonderland
to retransmit to me
her total dream of innocence
and I am waiting
for Childe Roland to come
to the final darkest tower
and I am waiting
for Aphrodite
to grow live arms
at a final disarmament conference
in a new rebirth of wonder

I am waiting
to get some intimations
of immortality
by recollecting my early childhood
and I am waiting
for the green mornings to come again
youth's dumb green fields come back again
and I am waiting
for some strains of unpremeditated art
to shake my typewriter
and I am waiting to write
the great indelible poem

and I am waiting
for the last long careless rapture
and I am perpetually waiting
for the fleeing lovers on the Grecian Urn
to catch each other up at last
and embrace
and I am awaiting
perpetually and forever
a renaissance of wonder

JUNKMAN'S OBBLIGATO

Let's go
Come on
Let's go
Empty out our pockets
and disappear.
Missing all our appointments
and turning up unshaven
years later
old cigarette papers
stuck to our pants
leaves in our hair.
Let us not
worry about the payments
anymore.
Let them come
and take it away
whatever it was
we were paying for.
And us with it.

Let us arise and go now
to where dogs do it
Over the Hill
where they keep the earthquakes
behind the city dumps
lost among gasmains and garbage.
Let us see the City Dumps
for what they are.
My country tears of thee.
Let us disappear
in automobile graveyards
and reappear years later
picking rags and newspapers
drying our drawers
on garbage fires
patches on our ass.
Do not bother
to say goodbye
to anyone.
Your missus will not miss us.

Let's go
smelling of sterno
where the benches are filled
with discarded Bowling Green statues
in the interior dark night
of the flowery bowery
our eyes watery
with the contemplation
of empty bottles of muscatel.
Let us recite from broken bibles
on streetcorners
Follow dogs on docks
Speak wild songs
Throw stones
Say anything
Blink at the sun and scratch
and stumble into silence
Diddle in doorways
Know whores thirldhand
after everyone else is finished
Stagger befuddled into East River sunsets
Sleep in phone booths
Puke in pawnshops
wailing for a winter overcoat.

Let us arise and go now
under the city
where ashcans roll
and reappear in putrid clothes
as the uncrowned underground kings
of subway men's rooms.
Let us feed the pigeons
at the City Hall
urging them to do their duty
in the Mayor's office.
Hurry up please it's time.
The end is coming.
Flash floods
Disasters in the sun
Dogs unleashed
Sister in the street
her brassiere backwards.

Let us arise and go now
into the interior dark night
of the soul's still bowery
and find ourselves anew
where subways stall and wait
under the River.
Cross over
into full puzzlement.
South Ferry will not run forever.
They are cutting out the Bay ferries
but it is still not too late
to get lost in Oakland.
Washington has not yet toppled
from his horse.
There is still time to goose him
and go
leaving our income tax form behind
and our waterproof wristwatch with it
staggering blind after alleycats
under Brooklyn's Bridge
blown statues in baggy pants
our tincan cries and garbage voices
trailing.
Junk for sale!

Let's cut out let's go
into the real interior of the country
where hockshops reign
mere unblind anarchy upon us.
The end is here
but golf goes on at Burning Tree.
It's raining it's pouring
The Ole Man is snoring.
Another flood is coming
though not the kind you think.
There is still time to sink
and think.
I wish to descend in society.
I wish to make like free.
Swing low sweet chariot.
Let us not wait for the cadillacs
to carry us triumphant
into the interior
waving at the natives

like roman senators in the provinces
wearing poet's laurels
on lighted brows.
Let us not wait for the write-up
on page one
of The New York Times Book Review
images of insane success
smiling from the photo.
By the time they print your picture
in Life Magazine
you will have become a negative anyway
a print with a glossy finish.
They will have come and gotten you
to be famous
and you still will not be free.
Goodbye I'm going.
I'm selling everything
and giving away the rest
to the Good Will Industries.
It will be dark out there
with the Salvation Army Band.
And the mind its own illumination.
Goodbye I'm walking out on the whole scene.
Close down the joint.
The system is all loused up.
Rome was never like this.
I'm tired of waiting for Godot.
I am going where turtles win
I am going
where conmen puke and die
Down the sad esplanades
of the official world.
Junk for sale!
My country tears of thee.

Let us go then you and I
leaving our neckties behind on lampposts
Take up the full beard
of walking anarchy
looking like Walt Whitman
a homemade bomb in the pocket.
I wish to descend in the social scale.
High society is low society.
I am a social climber

climbing downward
And the descent is difficult.
The Upper Middle Class Ideal
is for the birds
but the birds have no use for it
having their own kind of pecking order
based upon birdsong.
Pigeons on the grass alas.

Let us arise and go now
to the Isle of Manisfree.
Let loose the hogs of peace.
Hurry up please it's time.
Let us arise and go now
into the interior
of Foster's Cafeteria.
So long Emily Post.
So long
Lowell Thomas.
Goodbye Broadway.
Goodbye Herald Square.
Turn it off.
Confound the system.
Cancel all our leases.
Lose the War
without killing anybody.
Let horses scream
and ladies run
to flushless powderrooms.
The end has just begun.
I want to announce it.
Run don't walk
to the nearest exit.
The real earthquake is coming.
I can feel the building shake.
I am the refined type.
I cannot stand it.
I am going
where asses lie down
with customs collectors who call themselves
literary critics.
My tool is dusty.
My body hung up too long
in strange suspenders.

Get me a bright bandana
for a jockstrap.
Turn loose and we'll be off
where sports cars collapse
and the world begins again.
Hurry up please it's time.
It's time and a half
and there's the rub.
The thinkpad makes homeboys of us all.
Let us cut out
into stray eternity.
Somewhere the fields are full of larks.
Somewhere the land is swinging.
My country 'tis of thee
I'm singing.

Let us arise and go now
to the Isle of Manisfree
and live the true blue simple life
of wisdom and wonderment
where all things grow
straight up
aslant and singing
in the yellow sun
poppies out of cowpods
thinking angels out of turds.
I must arise and go now
to the Isle of Manisfree
way up behind the broken words
and woods of Arcady.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I am leading a quiet life
in Mike's Place every day
watching the champs
of the Dante Billiard Parlor
and the French pinball addicts.
I am leading a quiet life
on lower East Broadway.
I am an American.
I was an American boy.
I read the American Boy Magazine
and became a boy scout
in the suburbs.
I thought I was Tom Sawyer
catching crayfish in the Bronx River
and imagining the Mississippi.
I had a baseball mit
and an American Flyer bike.
I delivered the Woman's Home Companion
at five in the afternoon
or the Herald Trib
at five in the morning.
I still can hear the paper thump
on lost porches.
I had an unhappy childhood.
I saw Lindberg land.
I looked homeward
and saw no angel.
I got caught stealing pencils
from the Five and Ten Cent Store
the same month I made Eagle Scout.
I chopped trees for the CCC
and sat on them.
I landed in Normandy
in a rowboat that turned over.
I have seen the educated armies
on the beach at Dover.
I have seen Egyptian pilots in purple clouds
shopkeepers rolling up their blinds
at midday
potato salad and dandelions
at anarchist picnics.

I am reading 'Lorna Doone'
and a life of John Most
terror of the industrialist
a bomb on his desk at all times.
I have seen the garbagemen parade
in the Columbus Day Parade
behind the glib
farting trumpeters.
I have not been out to the Cloisters
in a long time
nor to the Tuileries
but I still keep thinking
of going.
I have seen the garbagemen parade
when it was snowing.
I have eaten hotdogs in ballparks.
I have heard the Gettysburg Address
and the Ginsberg Address.
I like it here
and I won't go back
where I came from.
I too have ridden boxcars boxcars boxcars.
I have travelled among unknown men.
I have been in Asia
with Noah in the Ark.
I was in India
when Rome was built.
I have been in the Manger
with an Ass.
I have seen the Eternal Distributor
from a White Hill
in South San Francisco
and the Laughing Woman at Loona Park
outside the Fun House
in a great rainstorm
still laughing.
I have heard the sound of revelry
by night.
I have wandered lonely
as a crowd.
I am leading a quiet life
outside of Mike's Place every day
watching the world walk by
in its curious shoes.

I once started out
to walk around the world
but ended up in Brooklyn.
That Bridge was too much for me.
I have engaged in silence
exile and cunning.
I flew too near the sun
and my wax wings fell off.
I am looking for my Old Man
whom I never knew.
I am looking for the Lost Leader
with whom I flew.
Young men should be explorers.
Home is where one starts from.
But Mother never told me
there'd be scenes like this.
Womb-weary
I rest
I have travelled.
I have seen goof city.
I have seen the mass mess.
I have heard Kid Ory cry.
I have heard a trombone preach.
I have heard Debussy
strained thru a sheet.
I have slept in a hundred islands
where books were trees.
I have heard the birds
that sound like bells.
I have worn grey flannel trousers
and walked upon the beach of hell.
I have dwelt in a hundred cities
where trees were books.
What subways what taxis what cafes!
What women with blind breasts
limbs lost among skyscrapers!
I have seen the statues of heroes
at carrefours.
Danton weeping at a metro entrance
Columbus in Barcelona
pointing Westward up the Ramblas
toward the American Express
Lincoln in his stony chair
And a great Stone Face

in North Dakota.
I know that Columbus
did not invent America.
I have heard a hundred housebroken Ezra Pounds.
They should all be freed.
It is long since I was a herdsman.
I am leading a quiet life
in Mike's Place every day
reading the Classified columns.
I have read the Reader's Digest
from cover to cover
and noted the close identification
of the United States and the Promised Land
where every coin is marked
In God We Trust
but the dollar bills do not have it
being gods unto themselves.
I read the Want Ads daily
looking for a stone a leaf
an unfound door.
I hear America singing
in the Yellow Pages.
One could never tell
the soul has its rages.
I read the papers every day
and hear humanity amiss
in the sad plethora of print.
I see where Walden Pond has been drained
to make an amusement park.
I see they're making Melville
eat his whale.
I see another war is coming
but I won't be there to fight it.
I have read the writing
on the outhouse wall.
I helped Kilroy write it.
I marched up Fifth Avenue
blowing on a bugle in a tight platoon
but hurried back to the Casbah
looking for my dog.
I see a similarity
between dogs and me.
Dogs are the true observers
walking up and down the world

thru the Molloy country.
 I have walked down alleys
 too narrow for Chryslers.
 I have seen a hundred horseless milkwagons
 in a vacant lot in Astoria.
 Ben Shahn never painted them
 but they're there
 askew in Astoria.
 I have heard the junkman's obbligato.
 I have ridden superhighways
 and believed the billboard's promises
 Crossed the Jersey Flats
 and seen the Cities of the Plain
 And wallowed in the wilds of Westchester
 with its roving bands of natives
 in stationwagons.
 I have seen them.
 I am the man.
 I was there.
 I suffered
 somewhat.
 I am an American.
 I have a passport.
 I did not suffer in public.
 And I'm too young to die.
 I am a selfmade man.
 And I have plans for the future.
 I am in line
 for a top job.
 I may be moving on
 to Detroit.
 I am only temporarily
 a tie salesman.
 I am a good Joe.
 I am an open book
 to my boss.
 I am a complete mystery
 to my closest friends.
 I am leading a quiet life
 in Mike's Place every day
 contemplating my navel.
 I am a part
 of the body's long madness.
 I have wandered in various nightwoods.

I have leaned in drunken doorways.
 I have written wild stories
 without punctuation.
 I am the man.
 I was there.
 I suffered
 somewhat.
 I have sat in an uneasy chair.
 I am a tear of the sun.
 I am a hill
 where poets run.
 I invented the alphabet
 after watching the flight of cranes
 who made letters with their legs.
 I am a lake upon a plain.
 I am a word
 in a tree.
 I am a hill of poetry.
 I am a raid
 on the inarticulate.
 I have dreamt
 that all my teeth fell out
 but my tongue lived
 to tell the tale.
 For I am a still
 of poetry.
 I am a bank of song.
 I am a playerpiano
 in an abandoned casino
 on a seaside esplanade
 in a dense fog
 still playing.
 I see a similarity
 between the Laughing Woman
 and myself.
 I have heard the sound of summer
 in the rain.
 I have seen girls on boardwalks
 have complicated sensations.
 I understand their hesitations.
 I am a gatherer of fruit.
 I have seen how kisses
 cause euphoria.
 I have risked enchantment.

I have seen the Virgin
 in an appletree at Chartres
 And Saint Joan burn
 at the Bella Union.
 I have seen giraffes in junglejims
 their necks like love
 wound around the iron circumstances
 of the world.
 I have seen the Venus Aphrodite
 armless in her drafty corridor.
 I have heard a siren sing
 at One Fifth Avenue.
 I have seen the White Goddess dancing
 in the Rue des Beaux Arts
 on the Fourteenth of July
 and the Beautiful Dame Without Mercy
 picking her nose in Chumley's.
 She did not speak English.
 She had yellow hair
 and a hoarse voice
 and no bird sang.
 I am leading a quiet life
 in Mike's Place every day
 watching the pocket pool players
 making the minestrone scene
 wolfing the macaronis
 and I have read somewhere
 the Meaning of Existence
 yet have forgotten
 just exactly where.
 But I am the man
 And I'll be there.
 And I may cause the lips
 of those who are asleep
 to speak.
 And I may make my notebooks
 into sheaves of grass.
 And I may write my own
 eponymous epitaph
 instructing the horsemen
 to pass.

DOG

The dog trots freely in the street
 and sees reality
 and the things he sees
 are bigger than himself
 and the things he sees
 are his reality
 Drunks in doorways
 Moons on trees
 The dog trots freely thru the street
 and the things he sees
 are smaller than himself
 Fish on newsprint
 Ants in holes
 Chickens in Chinatown windows
 their heads a block away
 The dog trots freely in the street
 and the things he smells
 smell something like himself
 The dog trots freely in the street
 past puddles and babies
 cats and cigars
 poolrooms and policemen
 He doesn't hate cops
 He merely has no use for them
 and he goes past them
 and past the dead cows hung up whole
 in front of the San Francisco Meat Market
 He would rather eat a tender cow
 than a tough policeman
 though either might do
 And he goes past the Romeo Ravioli Factory
 and past Coit's Tower
 and past Congressman Doyle
 He's afraid of Coit's Tower
 but he's not afraid of Congressman Doyle
 although what he hears is very discouraging
 very depressing
 very absurd
 to a sad young dog like himself
 to a serious dog like himself

But he has his own free world to live in
 His own fleas to eat
 He will not be muzzled
 Congressman Doyle is just another
 fire hydrant
 to him
 The dog trots freely in the street
 and has his own dog's life to live
 and to think about
 and to reflect upon
 touching and tasting and testing everything
 investigating everything
 without benefit of perjury
 a real realist
 with a real tale to tell
 and a real tail to tell it with
 a real live
 barking
 democratic dog
 engaged in real
 free enterprise
 with something to say
 about ontology
 something to say
 about reality
 and how to see it
 and how to hear it
 with his head cocked sideways
 at streetcorners
 as if he is just about to have
 his picture taken
 for Victor Records
 listening for
 His Master's Voice
 and looking
 like a living questionmark
 into the
 great gramophone
 of puzzling existence
 with its wondrous hollow horn
 which always seems
 just about to spout forth
 some Victorious answer
 to everything

CHRIST CLIMBED DOWN

Christ climbed down
 from His bare Tree
 this year
 and ran away to where
 there were no rootless Christmas trees
 hung with candycanes and breakable stars

Christ climbed down
 from His bare Tree
 this year
 and ran away to where
 there were no gilded Christmas trees
 and no tinsel Christmas trees
 and no tinfoil Christmas trees
 and no pink plastic Christmas trees
 and no gold Christmas trees
 and no black Christmas trees
 and no powderblue Christmas trees
 hung with electric candles
 and encircled by tin electric trains
 and clever cornball relatives

Christ climbed down
 from His bare Tree
 this year
 and ran away to where
 no intrepid Bible salesmen
 covered the territory
 in two-tone cadillacs
 and where no Sears Roebuck creches
 complete with plastic babe in manger
 arrived by parcel post
 the babe by special delivery
 and where no televised Wise Men
 praised the Lord Calvert Whiskey

Christ climbed down
 from His bare Tree
 this year
 and ran away to where
 no fat handshaking stranger

in a red flannel suit
and a fake white beard
went around passing himself off
as some sort of North Pole saint
crossing the desert to Bethlehem
Pennsylvania
in a Volkswagon sled
drawn by rollicking Adirondack reindeer
with German names
and bearing sacks of Humble Gifts
from Saks Fifth Avenue
for everybody's imagined Christ child

Christ climbed down
from His bare Tree
this year
and ran away to where
no Bing Crosby carollers
groaned of a tight Christmas
and where no Radio City angels
iceskated wingless
thru a winter wonderland
into a jinglebell heaven
daily at 8:30
with Midnight Mass matinees

Christ climbed down
from His bare Tree
this year
and softly stole away into
some anonymous Mary's womb again
where in the darkest night
of everybody's anonymous soul
He awaits again
an unimaginable
and impossibly
Immaculate Reconception
the very craziest
of Second Comings

THE LONG STREET

The long street
which is the street of the world
passes around the world
filled with all the people of the world
not to mention all the voices
of all the people
that ever existed
Lovers and weepers
virgins and sleepers
spaghetti salesmen and sandwichmen
milkmen and orators
boneless bankers
brittle housewives
sheathed in nylon snobberies
deserts of advertising men
herds of high school fillies
crowds of collegians
all talking and talking
and walking around
or hanging out windows
to see what's doing
out in the world
where everything happens
sooner or later
if it happens at all
And the long street
which is the longest street
in all the world
but which isn't as long
as it seems
passes on
thru all the cities and all the scenes
down every alley
up every boulevard
thru every crossroads
thru red lights and green lights
cities in sunlight
continents in rain
hungry Hong Kongs
untillable Tuscaloosas
Oaklands of the soul

Dublins of the imagination
And the long street
rolls on around
like an enormous choochoo train
chugging around the world
with its bawling passengers
and babies and picnic baskets
and cats and dogs
and all of them wondering
just who is up
in the cab ahead
driving the train
if anybody
the train which runs around the world
like a world going round
all of them wondering
just what is up
if anything
and some of them leaning out
and peering ahead
and trying to catch
a look at the driver
in his one-eye cab
trying to see him
to glimpse his face
to catch his eye
as they whirl around a bend
but they never do
although once in a while
it looks as if
they're going to
And the street goes rocking on
the train goes bowling on
with its windows reaching up
its windows the windows
of all the buildings
in all the streets of the world
bowling along
thru the light of the world
thru the night of the world
with lanterns at crossings
lost lights flashing
crowds at carnivals
nightwood circuses

whorehouses and parliaments
forgotten fountains
cellar doors and unfound doors
figures in lamplight
pale idols dancing
as the world rocks on
But now we come
to the lonely part of the street
the part of the street
that goes around
the lonely part of the world
And this is not the place
that you change trains
for the Brighton Beach Express
This is not the place
that you do anything
This is the part of the world
where nothing's doing
where no one's doing
anything
where nobody's anywhere
nobody nowhere
except yourself
not even a mirror
to make you two
not a soul
except your own
maybe
and even that
not there
maybe
or not yours
maybe
because you're what's called
dead
you've reached your station

Descend

MEET MISS SUBWAYS

Meet Miss Subways
of 1957

See Miss Subways
of 1957

riding the Times Square Shuttle
back and forth
at four in the morning

Meet Miss Subways
of 1957

with fiftycent size cotton plugs
in her flat black nose
shuttling back and forth
on the Times Square Shuttle
at four in the morning
and hanging on
to heaven's iron rings
with cut-up golden arms
a black weed in a black hand

You can meet Miss Subways
You can see Miss Subways
of 1957

wearing sad slacks
and matching handbag
and cruising thru the cars
and hanging on
with beat black arms
a black butt in a black hand

And the iron cars
shunting on forever
into death and darkness

o lost Ubangi

staggering thru
the 'successive ogives' of Hell
down Dante's final
fire escape

3

Poems from
PICTURES OF THE GONE WORLD
(1955)

Away above a harborful
 of caulkless houses
among the charley noble chimneypots
 of a rooftop rigged with clotheslines
 a woman pastes up sails
 upon the wind
hanging out her morning sheets
 with wooden pins
 O lovely mammal
 her nearly naked teats
 throw taut shadows
 when she stretches up
to hang at last the last of her
 so white washed sins
 but it is wetly amorous
 and winds itself about her
 clinging to her skin
 So caught with arms upraised
 she tosses back her head
 in voiceless laughter
and in choiceless gesture then
 shakes out gold hair
while in the reachless seascape spaces
 between the blown white shrouds
stand out the bright steamers
 to kingdom come

This group of poems has been selected from my first book, "Pictures of the Gone World," published in 1955 in the Pocket Series (City Lights Books, San Francisco 11).

3

In hintertime Praxiteles
laid about him with a golden maul
striking into stone
his alabaster ideals
uttering all
the sculptor's lexicon
in visible syllables
He cast bronze trees
petrified a chameleon on one
made stone doves
fly
His calipers measured bridges
and lovers
and certain other superhumans whom
he caught upon their dusty way
to death

They never reached it then

You still can almost see
their breath
Their stone eyes staring
thru three thousand years
allay our fears of aging

although Praxiteles himself
at twenty-eight lay dead

for sculpture isn't for
young men
as Constantin Brancusi
at a later hour
said

In Paris in a loud dark winter
 when the sun was something in Provence
 when I came upon the poetry
 of René Char
 I saw Vaucluse again
 in a summer of sauterelles
 its fountains full of petals
 and its river thrown down
 through all the burnt places
 of that almond world
 and the fields full of silence
 though the crickets sang
 with their legs
 And in the poet's plangent dream I saw
 no Lorelei upon the Rhone
 nor angels debarked at Marseilles
 but couples going nude into the sad water
 in the profound lasciviousness of spring
 in an algebra of lyricism
 which I am still deciphering

Sarolla's women in their picture hats
 stretched upon his canvas beaches
 beguiled the Spanish
 Impressionists
 And were they fraudulent pictures
 of the world
 the way the light played on them
 creating illusions
 of love?
 I cannot help but think
 that their 'reality'
 was almost as real as
 my memory of today
 when the last sun hung on the hills
 and I heard the day falling
 like the gulls that fell
 almost to land
 while the last picnickers lay
 and loved in the blowing yellow broom
 resisted and resisting
 tearing themselves apart
 again
 again
 until the last hot hung climax
 which could at last no longer be resisted
 made them moan
 And night's trees stood up

'Truth is not the secret of a few'
 yet
 you would maybe think so
 the way some
 librarians
 and cultural ambassadors and
 especially museum directors
 act
 you'd think they had a corner
 on it
 the way they
 walk around shaking
 their high heads and
 looking as if they never
 went to the bath
 room or anything
 But I wouldn't blame them
 if I were you
 They say the Spiritual is best conceived
 in abstract terms
 and then too
 walking around in museums always makes me
 want to
 'sit down'
 I always feel so
 constipated
 in those
 high altitudes

Fortune
has its cookies to give out
which is a good thing
since it's been a long time since
that summer in Brooklyn
when they closed off the street
one hot day
and the

FIREMEN

turned on their hoses
and all the kids ran out in it
in the middle of the street
and there were
maybe a couple dozen of us
out there
with the water squirting up
to the
sky
and all over
us
there was maybe only six of us
kids altogether
running around in our
barefeet and birthday
suits
and I remember Molly but then

the firemen stopped squirting their hoses
all of a sudden and went
back in
their firehouse
and
started playing pinochle again
just as if nothing
had ever
happened
while I remember Molly
looked at me and
ran in
because I guess really we were the only ones there

It was a face which darkness could kill
in an instant
a face as easily hurt
by laughter or light
'We think differently at night'
she told me once
lying back languidly
And she would quote Cocteau
'I feel there is an angel in me' she'd say
'whom I am constantly shocking'
Then she would smile and look away
light a cigarette for me
sigh and rise
and stretch
her sweet anatomy
let fall a stocking

funny fantasies are never so real as oldstyle romances
 where the hero has a heroine who has
 long black braids and lets
 nobody

kiss her ever

and everybody's trying all the time to

run away with her

and the hero is always drawing his

(sic) sword and

tilting at ginmills and

forever telling her he

loves her and has only honorable intentions and

honorable mentions

and no one ever beats him at

anything

but then finally one day

she who has always been so timid

offs with her glove and says

(though not in so many big words)

Let's lie down somewheres

baby

Terrible

a horse at night

standing hitched alone

in the still street

and whinnying

as if some sad nude astride him

had gripped hot legs on him

and sung

a sweet high hungry

single syllable

The world is a beautiful place
to be born into
if you don't mind happiness
not always being
so very much fun
if you don't mind a touch of hell
now and then
just when everything is fine
because even in heaven
they don't sing
all the time

The world is a beautiful place
to be born into
if you don't mind some people dying
all the time
or maybe only starving
some of the time
which isn't half so bad
if it isn't you

Oh the world is a beautiful place
to be born into
if you don't much mind
a few dead minds
in the higher places
or a bomb or two
now and then
in your upturned faces
or such other improprieties
as our Name Brand society
is prey to
with its men of distinction
and its men of extinction
and its priests
and other patrolmen

and its various segregations
and congressional investigations
and other constipations
that our fool flesh
is heir to

Yes the world is the best place of all
for a lot of such things as
making the fun scene
and making the love scene
and making the sad scene
and singing low songs and having inspirations
and walking around
looking at everything
and smelling flowers
and goosing statues
and even thinking
and kissing people and
making babies and wearing pants
and waving hats and
dancing
and going swimming in rivers
on picnics
in the middle of the summer
and just generally
'living it up'

Yes
but then right in the middle of it
comes the smiling
mortician

12

Reading Yeats I do not think
of Ireland
but of midsummer New York
and of myself back then
reading that copy I found
on the Third Avenue El

the El
with its flyhung fans
and its signs reading
SPITTING IS FORBIDDEN

the El
careening thru its thirdstory world
with its thirdstory people
in their thirdstory doors
looking as if they had never heard
of the ground

an old dame
watering her plant
or a joker in a straw
putting a stickpin in his peppermint tie
and looking just like he had nowhere to go
but coneyisland

or an undershirted guy
rocking in his rocker
watching the El pass by
as if he expected it to be different
each time

Reading Yeats I do not think
of Arcady
and of its woods which Yeats thought dead
I think instead
of all the gone faces
getting off at midtown places
with their hats and their jobs
and of that lost book I had
with its blue cover and its white inside
where a pencilhand had written
HORSEMAN, PASS BY!

sweet and various the woodlark
 who sings at the unbought gate
 and yet how many
 wild beasts
 how many mad
 in the civil thickets
 Hölderlin
 in his stone tower
 or in that kind carpenter's house
 at Tübingen
 or then Rimbaud
 his 'nightmare and logic'
 a sophism of madness
 But we have our own more recent
 who also fatally assumed
 that some direct connection
 does exist between
 language and reality
 word and world
 which is a laugh
 if you ask me
 I too have drunk and seen
 the spider

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