A CONEY ISLAND OF THE MIND

Poems by LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI

A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK
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1

ACONEY 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 legionaires
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

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

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
a very tall and very purely naked young virgin with very long and very straight straw hair and wearing only a very small bird's nest in a very existential place kept passing thru the crowd all the while and up and down the steps in front of Saint Francis her eyes downcast all the while and singing to herself

What could she say to the fantastic foolybear and what could she say to brother and what could she say to the cat with future feet and what could she say to mother after that time that she lay lush among the lolly flowers on that hot riverbank where ferns fell away in the broken air of the breath of her lover and birds went mad and threw themselves from trees to taste still hot upon the ground the spilled sperm seed
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

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 leaced 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

'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 mithering monkeys
make-believe monks
horny hiawathas
and baboons astride tame tigers
with ladies inside
while gooly 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
ever eat fake Last Suppers
at collapsible tables
and mocking cross ourselves
in sawdust crosses
And yet gobble up at last
to shrive 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
saying 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 Cum

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
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 five cent 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
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.

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
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
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 gas mains 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 thirdhand
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 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,
Confounded 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.
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 mitt
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 Tulleries
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.
I have heard 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
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
wolking 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 gramaphone
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 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 Volkswagen 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 fiftycentsize 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
of lost Ubangi
staggering thru the 'successive ogives' of Hell
down Dante's final fire escape
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
Just as I used to say
love comes harder to the aged
because they’ve been running
on the same old rails too long
and then when the sly switch comes along
they miss the turn
and burn up the wrong rail while
the gay caboose goes flying
and the steamengine driver don’t recognize
them new electric horns
and the aged run out on the rusty spur
which ends up in
the dead grass where
the rusty tincans and bedsprings and old razor blades and moldy mattresses lie
and the rail breaks off dead
right there
though the ties go on awhile
and the aged say to themselves
Well
this must be the place
we were supposed to lie down
And they do
while the bright saloon careens along away
on a high hilltop
its windows full of bluesky and lovers with flowers
their long hair streaming
and all of them laughing
and waving and whispering to each other
and looking out and wondering what that graveyard where the rails end is

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
4

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

5

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'

you would maybe think so

yet

the way some

librarians

and cultural ambassadors

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

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
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 Thirdavenue 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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