Lawrence Ferlinghetti

A Coney Island of the Mind
After the Cries of the Birds
Back Roads to Far Places
Her
The Mexican Night
Pictures of the Gone World
Routines
Starting from San Francisco
Unfair Arguments with Existence

New Directions
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 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

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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 toilet seats tampax and taxis  
drugged store cowboys and las vegas virgins  
disowned indians and cinemad matrons  
unroman senators and conscientious non-objects.

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  
pushed 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  
float by
Sometime during eternity

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 hip

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
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 hallucinatory 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
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

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
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
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 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
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 pennycandy store 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 half-ass 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
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

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
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
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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

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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 middle-weight 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 Karenina 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 nighttime novel yes as in a nightmare 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