



A Coney Island of the Mind

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

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The title of this book is taken from Henry Miller's *"Into the Night Life"* and expresses the way Lawrence Ferlinghetti felt about these poems when he wrote them during a short period in the 1950's—as if they were, taken together, a kind of Coney Island of the mind, a kind of circus of the soul.

A Coney Island of the Mind Details

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Author : Lawrence Ferlinghetti

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From Reader Review A Coney Island of the Mind for online ebook

Mary says

In "A Coney Island of the Mind"

Ferlinghetti's poetry is totally mind blowing and unbelievably still seems quite current...A masterpiece!!

Stef says

in honor of one of my favorite beat poets, i will write this review without touching the shift key
and, of course, my thumb readily on the space tab

a collection of interesting visual poetry

don't need to snap your fingers or wear black
or have a set of bongos

fluid writing, cool fluidly throughout

read over and over

and over

again

Erik Graff says

Throughout much of my youth I bore fealty to a single woman. In junior high it was Nancy, half a foot taller than me, she of the checked skirts. In high school and into college it was Rachel, artist, fabricator of her own clothing, the girl down the block. Nothing came of these relationships in the ordinary sense. We were friends, but the passion wasn't reciprocated. I never really expected it would be.

Rachel had a custom during my last two years of secondary school of having folks over for Constant Comment tea on her parent's front porch when the weather was good. The group was never very large as it normally only included those of us who would walk home together when classes were done. It did not include my older, political friends, some of whom were already in college. It did include some of those who were our suburb's counter-culture: pseudo-hippies, psuedo-beats, though we never used those terms, preferring "freaks" if anything.

I was loaned a copy of Ferlinghetti's poems on that porch one fine spring day shortly before graduation. Previously I'd only read a bit of Ginsberg, a poet who attracted both the artistic and the political types. Ferlinghetti was just a name to me, a representative of the older generations, a representative of the Beats.

Frankly, I wasn't much impressed, not like I had been with Ginsberg, not like I wss with the more conventional, and usually philosophic and/or romantic, poets we read in school.

I left Rachel and Park Ridge for college that late summer, staying faithful to the romantic ideal of her until another girl, a virtual stranger, contrived to impose her own romantic ideal and have her way with me. It was disappointing and I felt it an act of betrayal on my part. Rachel, presumably, was relieved.

This all comes back, incidentally, because I'm at the home of one of these old friends, the old, familial home in Park Ridge. His mother just died and I'm ostensibly helping him organize the house for potential sale. Ferlinghetti was in his room along with other memories.

Rand says

I am waiting for the rebirth of wonder

she loved to look at flowers

I am waiting

Johnny Nolan has a patch on his ass

The world is a beautiful place it is heavenly weather

They were putting up the statue of St. Francis

Christ climbed down the Dog at the pennycandystore beyond the El and one enters a completely different world

Don't let that horse run away with that violin

Britannie says

BY LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI

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

Adriana Scarpin says

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 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 Salvation Army to take over
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 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 awaiting retribution
for what America did
to Tom Sawyer
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*

Mind the Book says

Att läsas experimentellt till (inre) jazz.
En favorit är *Autobiography*.

#BOTNS bokbingo: 'Has a place-name in the title'

Masked says

the guy wrote a poem where marc chagall's mom is yelling at him.

"but he
kept right on
painting"

i love how sweet ferlinghetti's poems are. i don't think he means them to be. but they are.

Faith-Anne says

This is a perfect book for people interested in exploring the world of poetry. I know quite a few people who got hooked on the genre through this book.

Maureen says

In looking at the book page for this book, I am struck by how many people chose to include one of Ferlinghetti's poems. In my opinion, what that says is that although some of the slanguage and cultural references may be a bit dated, these poems still resonate with people, me included. I bought my copy of this book at City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, sat, and read it from cover to cover. Almost everyone who reads this book will find a poem that will stay with them a long, long time.

Leland says

Clearly, this is one of the most wonderful and important collections of American poetry yet written. Ferlinghetti is, in my view, king of the Beat Era poets.

Cyndi says

Surreal, romantic, hopeful and somewhat despairing. Some primo pieces of work evocative of the psychology of the latter 50s to early 60s, with the Cold War and the onset of the hippie movement.

Matthew Gallant says

This was my first book of poetry. A gift from my college professor uncle. I read it right away, eager to break

away from the school-taught (to this day!) Frost/Poe/Dickinson monotony. Don't get me wrong, they were great, but I suspected there was more out there and I was right. Ferlinghetti was the beginning for me. Incidentally, Uncle John also gave me a little text called "Revenge of the Lawn," which I just finally cracked last week after it stayed in storage since high school. Sorry, Richard, I mean, Mr. Brautigan.

Bill Kerwin says

This is one of the best-selling poetry books of all time, and, although that is no guarantee of poetic excellence—after all, Rod McKuen and Martin Farquar Tupper both sold a lot of books in their day—it is a sign that the author had his finger on the pulse of his time, that his work embodies the yearnings and anxiety of a particular age.

That is certainly true of Ferlinghetti's *A Coney Island of the Mind* (1958). No other book so perfectly captured the *zeitgeist* of the '60's counterculture, the optimism of the young radicals who would take this book into their hearts. Sure there were other poems, some by arguably better poets—the lyric (and ironic) Byronisms of Corso, the Shelleyan ecstasies of McClure, the prophetic lamentations of Ginsberg, the *zen* eclogues of Snyder—but none of the others embodied so perfectly their vision of their world: sceptical of all institutions, yet open to the experience of joy and suffering—with a painter's eye, a mystic's soul, and a lover's heart.

The first third of the book, entitled "A Coney Island of the Mind," contains a remarkable number of memorable individual passages:

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/... 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...

What could she say to the fantastic foolbear/ 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...

Don't let that horse/ eat that violin/ cried Chagall's mother/ But he/ kept right on/ painting...

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...

The last third of the book, which contains the complete text of the earlier *Pictures of The Gone World* (reviewed early by me on Goodreads) is also filled with passages which are equally memorable.

I think, though, that the best section of this book is the middle section "Oral Messages," a name Ferlinghetti gives to the loosely structured poems "conceived specifically for jazz accompaniment." Nothing evokes the leisure, hip, casual feel of the age better than these seven poems.

I will conclude with a passage from the "oral message" entitled "I am Waiting":

*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*

aconeyisland says

**I am leading a quiet life
in Mike's Place every day
I hear America singing
in the Yellow Pages.**

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 Lindbergh 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.

Elyssa says

Lawrence Ferlinghetti might be one of the lesser known Beats, which is unfortunate. Although I generally do not like poetry, this is one book that's been on my shelf since high school. My admiration for Ferlinghetti resulted in visiting his City Lights Bookstore when I was in San Francisco ten or so years ago. I had hoped to run into him, but was not successful; however, just being in his world was enough for me. I periodically page through this book and re-read his poems and take pleasure in their imagery and cadence.

tENTATIVELY, cONVENIENCE says

review of
Lawrence Ferlinghetti's [A Coney Island of the Mind](#)
by tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE - November 12, 2011

Rereading [A Coney Island of the Mind](#) for what might be the 1st time in **41 yrs** felt like going home again - by wch I mean that it *feels* like something that I'm very familiar w/ - even though I'm not. There's always the possibility that when one reads something in one's 'formative yrs' that it becomes deeply instantiated. Rereading this felt strangely comfortable - like being w/ an old friend that I can trust.

Ferlinghetti was probably the 1st 'rebel poet' I ever read. When I did so, in the early 1970s, his literateness & anti-war attitudes jived w/ my own. These days. I often feel like I live in an all-too-illiterate society (hence my enthusiasm for Goodreads' counterbalance) & reading a bk at all, esp 1 that references many other writers & artists, is ultimately what probably makes me feel like I'm in the company of friends - even though I only 'know' most or all of these people thru their works.

Goya (p9) & Morris Graves (25) & Dante (28) & Chagall (29) & Kafka (31) & Hemingway & Proust & T.S.Eliot (44) & Djuna Barnes (45), etc, etc, grace these pages as characters. What a cast! Ferlinghetti is, of course, the cofounder of City Lights bks & a publisher - as well as a writer in many forms. I can relate: I'm the cofounder of Normal's Books & a publisher & a writer in many forms. I reckon that if I ever have the opportunity to meet him (he's still alive at 92 as I write this) he wdn't have any problem recognizing many of the creative people that I frequently mention & wd probably stump me from time-to-time w/ his own extensive knowledge. If only this were the case more often!

[A Coney Island of the Mind](#) was originally published in 1958 & some of the poetry in it dates back to his 1st bk from 1955: [Pictures of the Gone World](#). It astounds me somewhat how much I can relate to the *attitude* of

this bk. He refers to "anarchy" in a completely friendly positive way w/o bothering to even acknowledge the substantial suppression of it in the USA of the time. Take this sentence from "Autobiography":

"I have seen Egyptian pilots in purple clouds
shopkeepers rolling up their blinds
at midday
potato salad and dandelions
at anarchist picnics."

It amused me, & seemed precocious, to read the phrase "drugged store cowboys" on p13 - knowing that a movie wd be similarly named decades later.

On p48 he mentions that the poems "Junkman's Obbligato" & "Autobiography" had been read by him w/ The Cellar Jazz Quintet & released on record. This recording is also on 2 different CDs - one w/ Kenneth Rexroth & one w/ Kenneth Patchen. There're probably people who wd find poetry read along w/ jazz to be a sad cliché of a bygone age - for me, these recordings are utterly wonderful. & reading these poems again I hear Ferlinghetti's readings in memory.

I rarely, or never, hear my poet friends mention Ferlinghetti. Is it b/c he's so much a part of the culture that there's no 'need'? After all, A Coney Island of the Mind is sd to've sold over a million copies - &, given that it's an easy read, most of those copies have probably been read. I wonder if it's more b/c he doesn't self-identify w/ the Beats - the literary superstars of the 20th century? According to his Wikipedia entry:

"Although in style and theme Ferlinghetti's own writing is very unlike that of the original NY Beat circle, he had important associations with the Beat writers, who made City Lights Bookstore their headquarters when they were in San Francisco. He has often claimed that he was not a Beat, but a bohemian of an earlier generation."

I don't really find his writing to be "very unlike that of the original NY Beat circle" at all & find that to be a somewhat surprising statement. The poetry, at least, seems akin to Ginsberg's. Then again, it's often unclear to me who the Beats were - aside from the core circle of friends most often referenced: Burroughs, Ginsberg, Corso, McClure, Kerouac.. Many people seem to be sometimes associated w/ the Beats & sometimes not.

If Ferlinghetti's not a Beat is he a progenitor (well, no, he's a few yrs too late for that)? His "I am Waiting" (from no later than 1958) is a list poem of sorts that predates Anne Waldman's more famous "Fast Talking Woman" by 16 yrs or so. City Lights published that too. Now Waldman's one of those folks ambiguously associated w/ the Beats (she's the coeditor of the Beats at Naropa bk) although I'm told she associates herself more w/ a New York school that's *not* Beat. Here's a small section from "I am Waiting" that seems like a good place to end this review:

"and I am waiting
for the war to be fought
which will make the world safe
for anarchy"

Granny says

One of the greatest influences of my teen years. Meeting and working with him in 1984 was an experience I'll never forget. Yeah, I still have my "ancient" copy of this book from the 1950's!

Punk says

Poetry. I like Ferlinghetti for his rhythm, humor, and creative use of white space. Sometimes, like ee cummings, Ferlinghetti seems to be constructing something on the page that makes sense only to him, but occasionally he hits on a structure that perfectly enhances the meaning of a poem. He uses this to great effect in works like "Johnny Nolan has a patch on his ass," where the text mirrors the rhythm and action of the poem.

This volume is an odd mix of political, sexual, and comical. Trains make a repeat appearance as a metaphor for life and death, and Ferlinghetti also uses a lot of literary allusions, sometimes building circular mazes out of them, especially in his oral poems. The middle section of this book is dedicated to poetry meant to be spoken aloud with jazz accompaniment, and thus considered to be unfinished and in flux. Weirdly, that middle section houses a lot of my favorites, like "Junkman's Obbligato," "Autobiography," and "Dog."

Other favorites: "One of those paintings that would not die," "Don't let that horse," "Just as I used to say," "funny fantasies are never so real as old style romances," and "The world is a beautiful place."

Four stars -- not every poem in here grabs me, but I like a lot of them, and I love more than a couple.

Renee Alberts says

my dad gave me his beat-up copy of Coney Island when i was in junior high, and showed me "11" the poem he'd recited for his forensics team when he was in high school. that poetry could be that natural, funny and defiant shocked me, and i've been hooked ever since.

this one is up there on the list of books that changed my life.
