

60TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

CITY LIGHTS

Pocket Poets

Anthology

Edited by Lawrence Ferlinghetti



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CITY LIGHTS BOOKS
San Francisco

Lights

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**City
Lights**

INTRODUCTION

Even though some say that an avant-garde in literature no longer exists, the smaller independent publisher is itself still a true avant-garde, its place still out there, scouting the unknown.

And as long as there is poetry, there will be an unknown, as long as there is an unknown there will be poetry. The function of the independent press (besides being essentially dissident) is still to discover, to find the new voices and give voice to them—and then let the big publishers have at them—which is what has happened in our case—many authors we first printed now being published by the biggest houses in the world.

Still, what one scout on some imagined frontier may discover and choose as a way forward may turn out to be merely a cowpath leading back to the barn or a false lead trailing off into the woods. Choosing a retrospective of sixty years of City Lights Pocket Poets—sixty volumes—is a critical exercise at every step testing how right or how important (or how trivial) the editor's choices were. In general I would say the list suffers not from what or who is included but from who is left out, either by ignorance, inattention, ill-timing or bad luck (when other publishers beat us to it).

From the beginning the aim was to publish across the board, avoiding the provincial and the academic, and not publishing (that pitfall of the little press) just 'our gang.' I had in mind rather an international, dis-

sident, insurgent ferment. What has proved most fascinating are the continuing cross-currents and cross-fertilizations between poets widely separated by language or geography, from France to Germany to Italy to America North and South, East and West, coalescing in a truly supra-national poetic voice.

Thus within these covers, Ginsberg meets his almost exact contemporary Pier Paolo Pasolini, the Chilean Nicanor Parra exchanges caustic insights with French Resistance poet Jacques Prévert, Catholic Buddhist Kerouac meets Catholic anarchist Kenneth Rexroth, Diane di Prima and Anne Waldman join revolutionary voices with Daisy Zamora and Rosario Murillo, Frank O'Hara encounters the son of Bertolt Brecht, Robert Duncan and Philip Lamantia exchange passionate eruditions, Kenneth Patchen and Robert Bly cry out against a murderous world, Gregory Corso and Peter Orlovsky swap wise and loony street poetry, and Mayakovsky meets the Red Cats, while uneasy bed-fellows Yevtushenko and Voznesensky recognize their common enemy. . . .

So may our little cultural exchange program continue into the 21st century in a world without walls in which poetry is still the best news.

—LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

21

Heaven
was only half as far that night
at the poetry recital
listening to the burnt phrases
when I heard the poet have
a rhyming erection
then look away with a
lost look
'Every animal' he said at last
'After intercourse is sad'
But the back-row lovers
looked oblivious
and glad

City
Lights

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

25

The world is a beautiful place
to be born into
if you don't mind happiness
not always being
so very much fun
if you don't mind a touch of hell
now and then
just when everything is fine
because even in heaven
they don't sing
all the time
The world is a beautiful place
to be born into
if you don't mind some people dying
all the time
or maybe only starving
some of the time
which isn't half so bad
if it isn't you

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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

City Lights

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

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

26

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!

Lights

Rafael Alberti

HOMECOMING OF LOVE AMONGST ILLUSTRIOUS RUINS

The calcined stones come back.
The fallen temples come back,
The bursted whore houses, the green courtyards
Where the smile of Priapus
Keeps warm the memory of fountains.

My love, let us go along the vanished streets,
Across the bright geometry which still points
To mysterious love and hidden
Pleasures, still so sweet in the night.

Here is the house of the goddess. In the blue
Sanctuary you can still smell the perfume
Of sea foam and jasmine and
Carnations salty with her flesh.

The phallic symbol, jolly as ever,
Riots in the thick foliage — stretched out
On the happy pan of the balance
Which offers it to love. It is heavier
Than all the fruits of the earth.
Aphrodite smiles in the shadows
As she feels the sea throb in her buttocks.

O ancient brightness! O far off light!
Naked light, love, shine on us always.
And when the day comes when we are no more than stones,
After we too, my love, are only ruins,
Let us lie like these stones singing in the sun,
Leading others to love along our vanished ways.

KENNETH REXROTH



City Lights

Nicolas Guillén
MADRIGAL

Your womb is smarter than your head,
And as smart as your bottom.

See—
The fierce black grace
Of your naked body.

You are the symbol of the forest,
With your red necklaces,
Your bracelets of curving gold,
And the dark alligator
Swimming in the Zambezi of your eyes.

KENNETH REXROTH

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Lights

Pablo Neruda
POEM

I remember you as you were that last autumn—
Your grey beret, your calm heart,
And the flames of sunset wrestling in your eyes,
And the leaves falling into the waters of your soul.

You clung to my arm like a vine.
The leaves caught up your slow calm voice—
Vertiginous hearth where my heart blazes—
Sweet blue hyacinth twisting over my soul.

I can feel your eyes, voyaging away, distant as that autumn,
Grey beret, voice of a bird, heart of a huntress—
Where all my deep agony migrated,
Where my happy kisses fell like embers.

The skies from shipboard. Fields from the hills.
Your memory is of light, of smoke, of a still pool.
Deep in your eyes the twilights burned.
The dry leaves of autumn whirled in your soul.

KENNETH REXROTH

Federico García Lorca
THE WEEPING

I have shut my windows.
I do not want to hear the weeping.
But from behind the grey walls,
Nothing is heard but the weeping.

There are few angels that sing.
There are few dogs that bark.
A thousand violins fit in the palm of the hand.
But the weeping is an immense angel.
The weeping is an immense dog.
The weeping is an immense violin.
Tears strangle the wind.
Nothing is heard but the weeping.

KENNETH REXROTH

City
Lights

Antonio Machado

MEDITATION FOR THIS DAY

Facing the palm of fire
Which spreads from the departing sun
Throughout the silent evening—
In this garden of peace—
While flowery Valencia
Drinks the Guadalquivir—
Valencia of slender towers
In the young skies of Ausias March,
Your river changes to roses
At the touch of the sea.
I think of the war. War
Has swept like a tornado
Through the steppes of high Douro,
Through the plains of growing bread,
From fertile Estramadura
To the gardens of lemon trees,
From the grey skies of Asturias
To the marshes of light and salt.
I think that Spain has been sold out,
River by river, mountain by mountain, sea by sea.

KENNETH REXROTH

Kenneth Patchen

THE STATE OF THE NATION

Understand that they were sitting just inside the door
At a little table with two full beers and two empties.
There were a few dozen people moving around, killing
Time and getting tight because nothing meant anything
Anymore

Somebody looked at a girl and somebody said

Great things doing in Spain

But she didn't even look up, not so much as half an eye.

Then Jack picked up his beer and Nellie her beer

And their legs ground together under the table.

Somebody looked at the clock and somebody said

Great things doing in Russia

A cop and two whores came in and he bought only two drinks

Because one of them had syphilis

No one knows just why it happened or whether

It would happen ever again on this fretful earth

But Jack picked up his beer again and Nellie her beer again

And, as though at signal, a little man hurried in,

Crossed to the bar and said Hello Steve to the barkeeper.

Lights

Kenneth Patchen
PASTORAL

The Dove walks with sticky feet
Upon the green crowns of the almond tree,
Its feathers smeared over with warmth
Like honey
That dips lazily down into the shadow . . .

Anyone standing in that orchard,
So filled with peace and sleep,
Would hardly have noticed the hill
Nearby
With its three strange wooden arms
Lifted above a throng of motionless people
—Above the helmets of Pilate's soldiers
Flashing like silver teeth in the sun.

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