

A Coney Island of the Mind, Poems Study Guide

**A Coney Island of the Mind, Poems by Lawrence
Ferlinghetti**

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Chapter 1, A Coney Island of the Mind

Chapter 1, A Coney Island of the Mind Summary

In the first poem, Goya's scenes represent suffering humanity as if the people in the paintings still exist, and they do although they are changed. Modern man still suffers as we are stranded across the freeways of America. The second poem expresses surprise at the similarities between the original Greek and the modern American democracies. The third poem argues that the poet's eye sees the surface of the world, complete with empty Ellis Islands, Cinerama holy days, materialism and the immigrant's dream come "too true." Poem four depicts a bomb catching the president at his prayers as Nagasaki survivors and lost teacups full of ashes float past. In poem five, a carpenter from Galilee claims to be God's son, stating the proof lies on parchments, located around the Dead Sea. They stretch him on a tree and call him down, but he does not come down. He is used as a model as he just hangs there.

In poem six, a statue of Saint Francis is erected in front of the church of Saint Francis in San Francisco, where no birds sing, as old Italian workers watch and reporters interview a young priest. The statue's arms stretch to the non-singing birds as she sings to herself. Poem seven questions what to say to "foolybear," her brother, her mother, and the "cat with future feet" as the birds go mad, throwing themselves from trees, and the sperm seed spills. In the eighth poem, a man and his wife walk through Golden Gate Park. She feeds the squirrels, and they sit down in a still spot to eat oranges without looking at each other. He naps as she watches the birds. Finally, she lays down and fingers an old flute as she looks at him, depressed. In the ninth poem he waltzes into a place where he is "wowed" by a dame who says "we could really exist," but the next day, she has bad teeth and really hates poetry. In the tenth poem, the poet states that he has not lain with Beauty or lied with it as a means of glorifying it since Beauty is above flattery. Beauty sits at church where art directors choose things for immortality, knowing that a thing of joy lasts forever. He is afraid to rest at night and miss Beauty's movement; yet, he has slept with poetry in his bed and spilled out poems.

In the eleventh poem, Morris Graves is not the same "Wild West;" it is now a wild white west where night is the native habitat of birds and the only place where they can act according to their nature as imagination finds itself still mad. Poem twelve complains that the painting will not die no matter how many times he hounds it into oblivion. In poem thirteen, the poet reinvents Dante's Paradiso and Inferno. Paradiso would be a place where people are naked and there are no angels explaining the perfect monarchy, while Inferno would contain no fires or altars in the sky except for fountains of the imagination. In poem fourteen, Chagall ignores his mother's admonishments and keeps painting "Horse with Violin in Mouth." When he finishes, Chagall jumps on the horse and rides away, waving the violin, and gives it to the first naked nude he finds with no strings attached. In poem fifteen, the speaker's voice states that the poet is an acrobat, balancing; a poet is a super realist who must perceive the truth and catch Beauty, but he may or may not catch her.



In poem sixteen, Kafka's Castle baffles us with its heavenly weather and mystery. Poem seventeen states that life is not a circus, although there are gay pride parades, baboons, camels of lust, fake Last Suppers and imaginary wafers of grace, among other circus-like things. In poem eighteen, he sees himself slaying sinners in his Sunday sleep and making old ladies young with his erection. In sleep, the dreamer conquers everything, but standard "time times on." Poem nineteen discusses the memory of woods, rivers and fields of his childhood, but in reality, the fields are streets; this shows a "shadow in eternity" that he hardly dreams of which makes him question every spring and thing. Poem twenty describes the first time he falls in love, in a penny candy store, to the sight and smells of jellybeans, licorice and gum. Leaves fall, the sun hides, and a girl runs in the store as his heart says "too soon, too soon!"

In poem twenty-one, she loves flowers and fresh fruit, but halfass drunken sailors scatter semen over the virgin landscape. At a certain age, love searches the lost shores and hears birds singing from the other side of silence. Poem twenty-two recalls the hysteria of kids chasing Johnny Nolan as an old man laments on his violin, a baby cries and a ball bounces. In poem twenty-three, Widder Fogliani, a jolly Italian lady of American distraction, is beaten by the poet at her own game of painting mustaches on statues. She gives away a Christmas goose without anyone knowing. In poem twenty-four, they squat on the beach of love amidst ruined beauty, secure on the brink of love and the salt sex's tide with "limp buried peckers." They laugh until they realize the sea is deeper than they thought and they drown. In poem twenty-five, love gasps like a fish out of water, but no one hears its death.

In poem twenty-six, the youth delights in sensuality but now lies behind, still dancing. Poem twenty-seven describes the poet's search for love one night where he sees the peacock walking and the ring dove cooing. The clock tolls two times: once for birth and once for death. In poem twenty-eight, the poet says that love lies here though it is painful. Poem twenty-nine describes a scene which is always the same scene of searching for sex. Though to half the people it does not matter who they make love to, to the other half, it is more important than anything else. Examples in literature, such as in "The Sun Also Rises," are provided. Complications arise in the search, making it like a grail quest. The search always ends with the glory of the hunting cock crying out as the trees fall, but the seeker is alone and begins again.

Chapter 1, A Coney Island of the Mind Analysis

The fact that Goya's paintings represent people as if they still exist shows the poet's notion that art is immortal and immortalizes those that it reflects, an opinion that is repeated in several other poems as well in this collection. Modern man suffering being depicted as being stranded on the freeways of America symbolizes the changes that the world has endured. Surprise at the similarities between Greek and American democracy is surprising since democracy as a practice is modeled on the original Greek democracy. There is also a play on words when the poet refers to Los Angeles as "Lost Angeles," implying some sort of degeneration, likely moral. The allusion to an empty Ellis Island symbolizes the goal to reach freedom or something better and empty could



refer to being devoid of people or devoid of that symbolism. The fourth poem mentions a surrealistic year, the president being bombed and Nagasaki survivors, clearing alluding to the bomb that was dropped on Nagasaki, Japan during World War II on August 9, 1945. The fifth poem alludes to the story of Jesus Christ in the Bible; the tree he is stretched on is the cross, the image of which is used as a model for Christianity.

The construction of religious paraphernalia is ironic since it occurs in San Francisco, a city renowned for its immorality, but it is especially ironic in this case due to the similarity between the names. There is also a contrast between the old Italian workers and the young priest. The fact that the birds do not sing seems to be symbolic, stating that even the birds in this immoral city do not sing; yet, Saint Francis, symbolizing religion, is able to sing even in the midst of San Francisco. Poem seven seems to insinuate an accidental pregnancy followed by an abortion, referring to "foolybear" possibly as a nickname for a significant other, and the "cat with future feet" as the fetus. The sperm seed being spilled indicates a waste which intimates an abortion. Golden Gate Park alludes to a natural place in the middle of an urban. The couple's stillness and her depression as she looks at him imply a problem in their marriage. The ninth poem seems to suggest that first impressions are not always useful in determining compatibility with a person, as well as implying the importance of an appreciation of poetry to the poet. The tenth poem personifies Beauty and uses the extended metaphor of the poet and Beauty birthing poems.

The eleventh poem condemns man's destruction of nature, stating that man simultaneously kills the imagination. Poem twelve argues that art is immortal. The thirteenth poem seems to suggest that the perfect afterlife would consist of art and imagination. The fourteenth poem provides an example of the resistance to artwork that is found, while emphasizing the "naked nude" and punning "no strings attached" about the violin. Poem fifteen is an extended metaphor comparing the poet to an acrobat who tries to tell the truth and catch Beauty by creating a beautiful poem, but he may or may not succeed.

Poem sixteen suggests the mystery and ambiguity of an afterlife. Poem seventeen begins by stating that life is not a circus, but then it compares features of life to features of a circus. Poem eighteen states that, while dreaming, people can conquer anything, they must wake to the real world and real responsibilities. There is also quite a bit of alliteration in this poem. Poem nineteen demonstrates the optimistic spin that memories can take, which can cause confusion when realizing the truth of the memory. Poem twenty hints at youthful love while indicating that it occurs too soon by the image of an innocent child in a candy store.

Poem twenty-one personifies love as it discusses a young lady's loss of innocence and her lamentation of that loss. Poem twenty-two symbolizes the hysteria of youth with the mundane details that memory may recall throughout the years. In poem twenty-three, Widder Fogliani giving away a Christmas goose without anyone knowing symbolizes the secrecy of charity, and contrasting her charity with her game of defacing statues represents the duality of human nature. Poem twenty-four signifies drowning in love and



sex since it is much more complex than they thought. Poem twenty-five describes the death of love in the midst of the chaos of the world through the personification of love.

Poem twenty-six symbolizes the sensuality of youth decaying into age but still being able to enjoy it. Poem twenty-seven provides visual images of love and sex through the peacock and the ring dove. The clock tolling twice in one night for birth and death seems to symbolize the birth and death of an erection. Poem twenty-eight suggests that though love is painful, mankind deals with it anyway and never gives up. Poem twenty-nine condemns the futility of searching for sex purely for the physical enjoyment. It alludes to the Bible, "The Sun Also Rises," Shakespeare, Marcel Proust, Grecian Urn, Yerma, Christopher Columbus, "Romeo and Juliet," King Arthur, "Ulysses," Freud and "Anna Karenina."



Chapter 2, Oral Messages

Chapter 2, Oral Messages Summary

In "I Am Waiting," the poet waits for a "rebirth of wonder." He waits for the rebirth of patriotism in the form of someone rediscovering America. He waits for the Second Coming, a rebirth of religion. He awaits the discovery of the secret of eternal life, death. He awaits desegregation and sexual discovery. He awaits intimations of immortality through great writing. He awaits a "renaissance of wonder." "Junkman's Obligato" tells the reader to be irresponsible, miss payments, and let everything be repossessed. Let's disappear behind city dumps without bidding anyone farewell, small bad, know whores, sleep in phone booths and puke in pawnshops. Go under the city and reappear in putrid clothing, because the end, chaos, is coming! Junk for sale; there is still time to go. Avoid fame and wealth, sell everything, and descend in society. The poet wants to go to the Isle of Manisfree.

In "Autobiography," the poet mentions his quiet life at Mike's Place. He is an American who had an unhappy childhood. He was in the boy scouts and then the military. He reads a lot. He has seen and experienced much. He has traveled to islands where books are trees and lived in cities where trees are books. He describes the cities where he has traveled. He observes that dollar bills do not have "In God We Trust" written on them because dollars have become gods themselves. He believes that humanity is amiss and has seen it in history. He is like a dog, an observer of mankind. He is a self-made man who has plans for the future. He has seen a word in a tree and a hill of poetry. He notices girls' complicated sensations as they enjoy an euphoria of kisses. He has seen goddesses and historical figures in modern events. He seeks the meaning of existence and may write an eponymous epitaph instructing the horsemen to pass.

In "Dog", the dog freely observes the world, seeing reality. He is indifferent to policemen and Congressman Doyle. The dog is a real realist with something to say. "Christ Climbed Down" recounts Christ climbing down from the tree and running to where there are no Christmas trees, Sears' nativity scenes, Santas, carolers or gifts. He steals into an unknown Mary's womb for an immaculate reconception and Second Coming. In "The Long Street," the street passes through the world, filled with all sorts of people. It is a place where everything happens. It is like a train where people try to glimpse the driver's face. There are carnivals and whorehouses, yet it is the only part of the world, a place to do nothing. Nobody is there except oneself, and then one is dead and has reached their station. They must descend. "Meet Miss Subways 1957" describes a woman who rides the Time Square Shuttle at four in the morning. She has cotton plugs in her flat black nose and wears sad slacks and a matching handbag. She holds onto the iron rings with beat black arms, a black butt in her black hand. The cars shuttle forever, staggering through hell down Dante's final fire escape.



Chapter 2, Oral Messages Analysis

"I Am Waiting" is evidence of the poet's discontent with the world in which he lives and his yearning for it to improve. "Junkman's Obligato" is a condemnation of materialism and social standing; it basically urges the reader to forgo the attractions of these things and go to the Isle of Manisfree, the symbol for freedom, peace and simplicity. It alludes to the New York Times, the Salvation Army, George Washington, "Waiting for Godot," Life Magazine, Walt Whitman and Broadway. It also alludes to the popular nursery rhyme when it quotes the "ole man is snoring."

"Autobiography" is the poet's view of the world and his life. He blatantly criticizes many aspects of society, especially materialism. He alludes to American Boy Magazine, the Boy Scouts, Tom Sawyer, Lindberg's flight, "Lorna Doone," Noah, Jesus, the Laughing Woman from King Arthur's court, Brooklyn Bridge, Reader's Digest, Columbus, Ezra Pound, Yellow Pages, Walden Pond, Melville, "Moby Dick," Kilroy, Ben Shahn, St. Joan, Aphrodite, "Rue des Beaux Arts," "La Dame Sans Merci," and the horsemen of Revelations. He quotes a song from twentieth century pop-culture when he says, "Mother never told me there'd be scenes like this."

"Dog" praises the life of an animal that is not forced to adhere to societal standards, which frees it from typical reactions and the restraint of everyday living. "Christ Climbed Down" criticizes the commercial and materialistic Christmas through the image of Jesus Christ's disapproval. The tree from which Jesus climbs down is an allusion to the cross. The poet appears to be suggesting that the Second Coming of Jesus is necessary because of the evils of the world in the form of materialism. "The Long Street" suggests that the whole world is connected in a continuation of events and desolations that inevitably results in death. "Meet Miss Subways 1957" is a lamentation of the monotony, desolation and misery of life, seemingly more so for African Americans.



Chapter 3, Poems of Pictures of the Gone World (1955)

Chapter 3, Poems of Pictures of the Gone World (1955) Summary

The first poem depicts a woman hanging clothes on a clothesline on a roof, praising her beauty and sensuality as the clothes wrap around her. In the second poem, love comes harder to the aged because they have been running on the same rails for too long. Eventually, they miss their turn, a rail breaks off and they arrive at the place to lie down while the saloon careens on down the track with lovers and blue skies. In poem three, Praxiteles sculpts trees, chameleons, doves, lovers and other superhumans caught on their way to death, but they never reach death, still existing now, three thousand years later. Yet, Praxiteles dies at the age of twenty-eight, proving that sculpture is not for young men. In poem four, the poet comes upon the poetry of Rene Char while in Paris, but he does not see the poet's plangent dream. While Rene Char sees Lorelei upon the Rhine and angels at Marseilles, Lawrence Ferlinghetti only sees nude couples in the sad water and the lasciviousness of the spring. In the fifth poem, Sorolla's paintings of women create illusions of love for Spanish impressionists that are as real as today's memory of picnickers moaning their climax.

Poem six states that truth is not the secret of a few despite the fact that some people act superior about this. The Spiritual is best conceived in abstract terms. Lawrence Ferlinghetti states that high altitudes in museums make him feel constipated. Poem seven states that fortune has cookies to give out, like the hot summer day in Brooklyn when the firemen turn on the hose for a couple dozen kids. The kids play in the water, but really there are only six of them, and he remembers Molly. The firemen turn the hose off and return to the firehouse. Molly looks at him and he realizes that it is only the two of them really there. In poem eight, she has a face that darkness can kill in an instant, but it is also hurt by light and laughter. She says "we think different at night" and quotes Cocteau. She believes that she shocks the angel inside of her. She smiles, lights a cigarette and lets a stocking fall. In poem nine, fantasies are not as real as old style romances when the hero protects and has only honorable intentions toward the heroine. No one ever beats him at anything until one day she, who was so timid, offers her body.

In poem ten, a horse is hitched alone at night and whinnies as if a sad nude astride him grips his hot legs and sings a single syllable. In poem eleven, the world is a beautiful place if you ignore the horrible things that happen every day. It is even easier to ignore if the bad things do not happen to you. The world is the best place of all for good things, and mankind lives it up until right in the middle, death comes. In poem twelve, Lawrence Ferlinghetti does not think of Ireland as he reads Yeats; he thinks of New York and all the gone faces that expect it to be different each time. He thinks of the El with the sign that says "Spitting is Forbidden" and his lost book that says "Horsemen pass by!" In



poem thirteen, the woodlark sings, a wild beast, like Holderlin in a stone tower or a carpenter's house at Tübingen. It is like Rimbaud's nightmares and logics, a sophism of madness. There is the more recent assumption that there is a direct connection between language and reality, the world and a word. That is a laugh if you ask Ferlinghetti.

Chapter 3, Poems from Pictures of the Gone World (1955) Analysis

The first poem shows the sexuality of women in everyday, common activities. The second poem is an extended metaphor relating the age that love is able to found to a train on its tracks. The third poem shows the immortality of art contrasted with the mortality of the artist. The fourth poem compares and contrasts the romanticized poetic dream with the reality of the location. Poem five comments on the reality of art compared to modern events.

Poem six criticizes the snobbish attitude of some learned people when they should be sharing the truth instead of hoarding it for themselves. Poem seven praises the small blessings in life. It also comments on the way our memory can add or subtract people depending on the circumstances of the memory. Poem eight describes a sensitive woman who obviously does some sort of lascivious deed to "shock the angel inside" of her; perhaps she is a prostitute. Poem nine praises old style romances where the men were honorable and the women rewarded them with sex anyway.

Poem ten concentrates on the loneliness of night, alludes to sex, and makes use of alliteration. Poem eleven satirically states that the world is great if you ignore everything in it that is not great. It also seems to criticize people's lack of concern with other people. It ends on a desolate note, stating that good or bad, life ends right in the middle. Poem twelve states that he sees his hometown instead of Yeats' hometown when reading Yeats, demonstrating the universality of writing by being able to associate it with one's own frame of knowledge. The faces which expect it to be different each time, along with the book that says "Horsemen pass by," seem to suggest desolation, monotony and death. Ferlinghetti alludes to Coney Island in this poem. Poem thirteen mocks the idea that there is a connection between language and reality as well as any who believe that it is so.



Characters

Lawrence Ferlinghetti, appears in *A Coney Island of the Mind*, Poems

Lawrence Ferlinghetti is the poet, author, and narrator of this collection of poems. The poems reflect his opinions and beliefs about many aspects of society and the world. The title of the book is "A Coney Island of the Mind" which Ferlinghetti explains symbolizes a circus of the mind or soul, showing his frame of mind when he wrote these poems. His general tone is forlorn and pessimistic, seeming to despair of life and the current situation of the world and the people in it.

In "A Coney Island of the Mind," Ferlinghetti says that the poet is an observer who sees the surface of the world. He recalls a night where he was wowed by a dame but the next day found that she had bad teeth and hated poetry. He has not lain with Beauty but he has slept with her in his bed and spilled out poems which are her offspring. He reinvents Paradiso as a place where people are naked and there are no angels explaining the perfect monarchy and Inferno as a place without fires or altars in the sky except for the fountains of the imagination. Ferlinghetti sees the poet as an acrobat trying to catch Beauty, but he may miss her. In his dreams, he conquers all though reality continues. He questions his memory when he realizes that the fields of his memory were really streets. He falls in love for the first time in a penny candy store as his heart tells him "too soon, too soon!"

Ferlinghetti awaits a "rebirth of wonder" in the form of patriotism, religion, the secret of eternal life, the end of war, sexual discovery and great writing. He sees mankind as materialistic and wants them to renounce those instincts and live in peace. He is an American who had an unhappy childhood. Ferlinghetti was in the boy scouts and the military. He reads a lot; he has seen and experience much in his travels and his residences. He believes that humanity is amiss and sees himself as an observer. He is a self-made man who has plans for the future. He has seen goddesses and historical figures in modern events. He seeks the meaning of existence and may write an eponymous epitaph instructing the horsemen to pass.

When Ferlinghetti reads Rene Char's poetry while in Paris, he does not see the poet's dream of Lorelei on the Rhine and angels at Marseilles; he only sees nude couples in the sad water and the lasciviousness of the spring. He believes that Sorolla's illusions of love are as real as the picnickers moaning their climax. Ferlinghetti believes that the truth is not the secret of a few and that the Spiritual is best conceived in abstract terms. He thinks of New York as he reads of Yeats' Ireland. He thinks of the EI and his lost book. He believes that it is "a laugh" to believe that there is a direct connection between language and reality.



Humanity, appears in A Coney Island of the Mind, Poems

Although specific people are mentioned throughout Ferlinghetti's collection of poem, the majority of the characters are not specific; they are only listed as humanity in general. Using the generic sense of the people of the world, Ferlinghetti provides his thoughts on people in general in nearly every poem. He depicts people as sufferers in the world throughout the ages. He also views people as materialistic and greedy. He shows people as victims, offenders and observers. Humanity is portrayed as being hopelessly hopeful amidst the chaos or monotony of their lives.

In "A Coney Island of the Mind," humanity's sufferings have changed since Goya painted his scenes of suffering, but they still suffer, stranded across the highways of America. Survivors of war are mentioned as a condemnation of war, as the president demonstrates religion through his prayers. Religion is also demonstrated through the model of Jesus Christ on the cross. Marital discord is seen in a man and his wife's silent walk through Golden Gate Park and her depressed looks toward him. Life and mankind mimics a circus with the chaotic and animal-like actions of the people in the world. People are obsessed with sex and love, which often ruins them because they are not aware how to wade the emotions; no one even notices that love is dead. People enter a grail quest for sex, half of them not caring who they make love to while the other half thinks it the most important thing in the world. This search for sex ends in loneliness because it is purely physical satisfaction.

In "Oral Messages," the poet condemns the world as void of patriotism, religion and sexuality in its pure sense. The world is materialistic and obsessed with social status. Chaos, the end, is coming and everyone should renounce materialism and find peace. The world is just one long street with all the people of the world doing everything. Everything happens, but eventually nothing happens and there is no one there; it all ends in death.

In "Selections from Pictures of the Gone World," love can be attained easier by the young than the old because the old have ridden the train for too long and will eventually miss their turn. In Paris, reading the poetry of Rene Char, humanity is portrayed as the opposite of the poet's vision of godlike and angelic, being seen as lascivious and sad. Sorolla's illusions of love are as real as picnickers moaning their climax in their sexual obsession. The world is beautiful if you ignore the horrible things that happen, especially if those horrible things do not happen to you. Mankind is seen as indifferent to others' sufferings. Regardless of the good or bad, it ends in death. The gone faces of people in New York show their expectation that things will be different; they are disappointed. The people who think that there is a direct connection between language and reality, the world and the word are deluded. Ferlinghetti provides a grim view of humanity and their hopes.



Jesus, appears in Chapter 1: A Coney Island of the Mind and Chapter 2: Oral Me

Jesus shows up real late, a carpenter from Galilee, claiming that he is the son of God who made heaven and earth. The proof is on the parchments which are around the Dead Sea which will not be found until 1947. No one believes him so they stretch them on a Tree where he hangs but does not come down. He is used as a model. Jesus climbs down from the bare tree and runs away from the materialist Christmas. He steals softly into an anonymous Mary's womb to await the Immaculate Reconciliation and the Second Coming.

Man and Wife, appears in Chapter 1: A Coney Island of the Mind

A man and his wife walk through Golden Gate Park. He wears green suspenders and carries a beat up flute. She feeds grapes to squirrels. They sit and eat oranges without looking at each other. He takes his shirt off and sleeps. She watches the birds and lies down, looking up and fingering an old flute. She finally looks at the man with an awful look of terrible depression.

Miss Subways, appears in Chapter 2: Oral Messages

Miss Subways of 1957 rides the Times Square Shuttle back and forth at four a.m. She has fifty-cent size cotton plugs in her flat black nose, cut up golden arms, and a black weed in her black hand. She wears sad slacks and a matching handbag. She hands onto the iron rings with her beat black arms, a black butt in her black hand, as she rides into death and darkness.

Widder Fogliani, appears in Chapter 1: A Coney Island of the Mind

The Widder Fogliani is an Italian lady of American distraction, also known as the Bella Donna. She has whiskers on her soul. The poet beat her at her own game: painting mustaches on statues in the Borghese gardens at three in the morning. She secretly gives a Christmas goose to a stray Cellini.



Chagall, appears in Chapter 1: A Coney Island of the Mind

Chagall paints 'The Horse with Violin in Mouth' against his mother's admonishments. He finishes the painting, jumps on the horse and rides away, waving the violin, and gives it away, with a low bow, to the first naked nude he finds with no strings attached.

Dog, appears in Chapter 2: Oral Messages

The dog trots freely and sees reality. He does not hate cops, but he has no use for them. He is not afraid of Congressman Doyle, but he is afraid of Coif's Tower. He is sad, young, serious and democratic.

Praxiteles, appears in Chapter 3: Poems from Pictures of the Gone World (1955)

Praxiteles is a sculptor of bronze trees, stone doves and lovers. He creates immortal sculptures, but he dies at twenty-eight, proving that sculpture is not for young men.

Molly, appears in Chapter 3: Poems from Pictures of the Gone World (1955)

Molly plays with the poet under the firemen's hoses. After the firemen leave, she looks at the poet and runs in, causing him to think they are the only ones there.

Sorolla, appears in Chapter 3: Poems from Pictures of the Gone World (1955)

Sorolla paints women in hats upon beaches which beguile Spanish Impressionists.



Objects/Places

Goya's Paintings, appears in Chapter 1: A Coney Island of the Mind

Goya's paintings depict people of the world at the moment when they attain the title of "suffering humanity."

Straits of Demos, appears in Chapter 1: A Coney Island of the Mind

The Straits of Demos are where the poet sees symbolic birds and realizes the similarities between American democracy and original Greek democracy.

Parchments, appears in Chapter 1: A Coney Island of the Mind

The parchments lie around the Dead Sea as proof that Jesus Christ is the son of God, but they are not found until 1947.

Tree, appears in Chapter 1: A Coney Island of the Mind

The Tree is the cross that Jesus Christ is stretched on and from whence he does not come down. It is used as a model.

Statue of Saint Francis, appears in Chapter 1: A Coney Island of the Mind

The Statue of Saint Francis is erected in front of the church of Saint Francis in San Francisco. It is a tall, naked, young virgin with long, straight, straw hair. A bird's nest is placed over its groin. Its arms are outstretched, and it sings to itself.

Golden Gate Park, appears in Chapter 1: A Coney Island of the Mind

Golden Gate Park is where the man and wife walk through. It is an enormous meadow and the spot where trees dream.



Morris Graves, appears in Chapter 1: A Coney Island of the Mind

Morris Graves is a wounded wilderness that is not the same since white man found it. Nature exists there, and the imagination turns upon itself.

The Horse with the Violin in Mouth, appears in Chapter 1: A Coney Island of the Mind

The Horse with the Violin in Mouth is Chagall's painting which he gives to the first naked nude he finds with no strings attached.

Kafka's Castle, appears in Chapter 1: A Coney Island of the Mind

Kafka's Castle stands above the world as the last bastille of the Mystery of Existence among heavenly weather.

Heart, appears in Chapter 1: A Coney Island of the Mind

The heart flops over and gasps 'love' like a fish out of water, but no one hears its death.

Isle of Manisfree, appears in Chapter 2: Oral Messages

The Isle of Manisfree is the place to go for peace and simplicity, behind the broken words and woods of Arcady.

Mike's Place, appears in Chapter 2: Oral Messages

Mike's Place is where the poet lives a quiet life and watches the champs of Dante Billiard Parlor and French pinball addicts.

Paris, appears in Chapter 3: Poems from Pictures of the Gone World (1955)

Paris is where the poet finds the poetry of Rene Char, though he does not see the same world that Rene Char does.



Poetry of Rene Char, appears in Chapter 3: Poems from Pictures of the Gone World (1955)

The poetry of Rene Char described the beautiful Rhone and the angels debarked at Marseilles, but the poet sees only the lasciviousness of reality.

Truth, appears in Chapter 3: Poems from Pictures of the Gone World (1955)

The truth is not the secret of a few; it is best conceived in abstract terms.

Her face, appears in Chapter 3: Poems from Pictures of the Gone World (1955)

Darkness could kill her face in an instant, which is as easily hurt by laughter or light.

Oldstyle Romances, appears in Chapter 3: Poems from Pictures of the Gone World (1955)

In Oldstyle Romances, the hero has a heroine with long, black braids and let's nobody kiss her. Everyone tries to run away with her, but the hero draws sword and defends her, telling her that he loves her and has only honorable intentions. No one ever beats him at anything. Finally, she offers him sex.

The world

The world is a beautiful place if you ignore the bad things in it, especially if the bad things do not happen personally. Good things happen also, but death always comes in the middle.

The EI

On the EI, there are flyhung fans and signs that state "Spitting is forbidden." It careens through its third story world. A guy in a rocker watches the EI pass every day, expecting it to be different.



Nightmare and Logic

Nightmare and Logic is Rimbaud's sophism of madness that argues that there is a direct connection between language and reality, world and world. The poet states that it is "a laugh if you ask me."

Brooklyn

In Brooklyn, firemen bring their fire hose and squirt water to the sky for the kids to play in.

Themes

Religion

One recurring theme throughout this collection is the theme of religion, specifically Christianity. Some appearances of this theme are blatant while others are more subtle. In "A Coney Island of the Mind," the first mention of religion occurs when Lawrence Ferlinghetti mentions "Cinerama holy days," referring to modern society's tendency to worship movies and media more than God and religion. He also states that a bomb catches the president at his prayers, emphasizing the president's religious habits. The fifth poem in the first chapter is solely about Jesus Christ, a carpenter from Galilee who claims to be God's sons and states that the proof is on parchments around the Dead Sea. They hang him on a tree, or cross, where he refuses their entreaties to come down. He is used as a model.

There is also a poem about the erection of a statue of Saint Francis in front of the church of Saint Francis in San Francisco. This is ironic since San Francisco is known for its faulty morals, symbolized by the birds that do not sing. The statue sings to herself, suggesting that religion can sing in the midst of immorality. Ferlinghetti reinvents Dante's *Paradiso* and *Inferno* so that *Paradiso* is a place where people are naked and there are no angels explaining the perfect monarchy, while *Inferno* contains no fires or altars in the sky except for fountains of the imagination. In his metaphor of life as a circus, he alludes to "fake Last Suppers" and "imaginary wafers of grace." In "I Am Waiting," one of the things that Ferlinghetti awaits is the Second Coming, a rebirth of religion. In "Christ Climbed Down," Ferlinghetti states that Christ climbs down from his tree and runs away from Christmas commercialism. He steals into an unknown Mary's womb to await an immaculate re-conception and Second Coming.

Literature and Art Compared to Reality

Throughout this collection, reality is often compared and contrasted with art and literature. In "A Coney Island of the Mind," Goya's scenes reflect suffering humanity as if the people still exist; suffering humanity has changed, but it still exists. In the twelfth poem, the painting will not die no matter how many times it is hounded into oblivion. Ferlinghetti reinvents Dante's *Paradiso* and *Inferno* so that *Paradiso* is a place where people are naked and there are no angels explaining the perfect monarchy, while *Inferno* contains no fires or altars in the sky except for fountains of the imagination. In the fourteenth poem, Chagall paints "Horse with Violin in Mouth" and gives it to the first naked nude he finds. The fifteenth poem compares writing a poem to an acrobat balancing: the poet must perceive the truth and catch Beauty, though he may or may not catch her. Widder Fogliani enjoys painting mustaches on statues. The twenty-ninth poem compares people searching for sex to their counterparts in literature, such as "The Sun Also Rises," and to a grail quest such as from the legends of King Arthur.



In "Autobiography," Ferlinghetti mentions seeing a word in a tree and a hill of poetry. He has seen goddesses and historical figures in modern events and places. In "Selections from Pictures of the Gone World" Praxiteles sculpts trees, chameleons, doves, lovers and other superhumans caught on their way to death, but they never reach death, still existing now, three thousand years later. Yet, Praxiteles dies at the age of twenty-eight, contrasting the immortality of art with the mortality of man. In Paris, Ferlinghetti does not see Rene Char's plangent dream of Lorelei upon the Rhine and angels at Marseilles; he sees only nude couples in the sad water and the lasciviousness of the spring. Sorolla's paintings of women which create illusions of love for Spanish Impressionists are as real as Ferlinghetti's recent memory of picnickers moaning their climax. When reading of Yeats' Ireland, Ferlinghetti thinks of New York. Ferlinghetti believes that Rimbaud's nightmares and logics is a sophism of madness is its assumption there is a direct connection between language and reality, the world and a word. Ferlinghetti says that is a laugh.

Sex

Sex and sexuality recur frequently in this collection. In "A Coney Island of the Mind," poem seven mentions sperm seed spilling, possibly alluding to an abortion. The ninth poem suggests a one night stand with a woman who impresses Ferlinghetti in his drunkenness, but he wakes to find she has bad teeth and really hates poetry. Poem ten is an extended metaphor; using sex as the metaphor for creating poetry, Ferlinghetti lies with Beauty to create poetry. In his dreams, Ferlinghetti makes old ladies young with his penis. In poem twenty-one, drunken sailors scatter semen over the virgin landscape of the young girl who loves flowers and fresh fruit, causing her heart to search those lost shores. Poem twenty-four refers to the "salt sex's tide" and "limp buried peckers." Poem twenty-seven refers to the clock tolling once for birth and once for death, alluding to erection and climax. The last poem in "A Coney Island of the Mind" depicts a scene where people search for sex, half not caring with whom they make love. The search always ends with the glory of the "hunting cock" crying out as the trees fall, climax, leaving the seeker alone to begin again.

In "I Am Waiting," the poet waits for sexual discovery to reoccur. In "Autobiography," he mentions girls' complicated sensations as they enjoy an euphoria of kisses. Whorehouses are present on "The Long Street." In "Selections from Pictures of the Gone World," a woman shows her sensuality even as she hangs clothes on a clothesline, the most mundane of activities. The scene where the firemen bring the hose to squirt the children ends with Ferlinghetti recalling that it was only Molly and him there. Also, the hose can be viewed as Freudian imagery. The eighth poem seems to imply that "she" is a prostitute since she shocks the angel inside of her. Old style romances begin with a protecting hero but end with the heroine offering her body to her protector.



Style

Style

Point of View

The point of view of this collection of poems is mostly first person, but it occasionally changes to third person. Each poem is an individual study so there is no specific pattern to the changes. The point of view is subjective and shows how the poet, Lawrence Ferlinghetti views the varying issues that are addressed throughout the book. The title of the book is "A Coney Island of the Mind" which Ferlinghetti explains on the first symbolizes a circus of the mind or soul. Therefore the content, the structures, and the points of view are chaotic and vary, presumably, according to the state of his mind at the moment when he wrote the specific poem.

The poems are written usually exposition and feelings with no dialogue at all. This is necessary since Ferlinghetti is not describing actions; instead, he conveys his thoughts and feelings on specific phenomena and events. The tone of most of the poems is forlorn and pessimistic, seeming to despair of life and the current situation of the world and the people in it. The book contains no action, no dialogue, and no objectivity, but it allows the reader to be privy to Lawrence Ferlinghetti's interesting opinions.

Setting

The setting of the book varies from poem to poem, as does most stylistic features of the collection. They are all situated in the modern world, but they are also often contrasted with the past world, causing the past to be part of the setting as well. Some of the setting is within works of art as he compares them to modern reality. Ferlinghetti situated most of these poems in the United States of America, but sometimes he wanders to Europe. At times, he even views the world as a collective body, especially in "The Long Street" where he expresses his opinion that the entire world is just one long road.

Ferlinghetti describes his thoughts on some of the cities in which he has lived, but he also conveys his opinion on the wildernesses that he has visited, often expressing despair over the ruin since man's occupation. He describes the cities as places where "trees were books" and the remote locations as places where "books were trees." Some of the specific locations that he mentions are Paris, New York, Golden Gate Park, Brooklyn and Mike's Place.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is very casual, American English. The sentences do not conform to grammatical standards, often continuing for pages without any punctuation



or capitalization. This is an addition to the book by the means of allowing the reader to follow the flow of the poet's thoughts without being interrupted where he is not. The poems convey the poet's opinions about different aspects of society, past and present, as well as his views on art, religion and war. There is no dialogue, all of the poems being written in subjective exposition.

The words that are used to express Lawrence Ferlinghetti's opinions are often desolate and hopeless, if not outright condemning. He uses sarcasm and irony quite often to express his opinions about things that bother him, such as poem eleven in section three which basically says that the world is a great place if one does not mind all the horrible things that happen everyday. The poetry is full of mostly concrete examples to explain Ferlinghetti's opinion. His meaning is very rarely obscure. Alliteration is a literary device that is frequently used and helps to draw attention to a specific line or phrase within a poem. Ferlinghetti also alludes to many popular literary works, pieces of art, and locations that helps the poem to say more without needing as many words since most readers will already have certain connotations in mind with the specific allusion.

Structure

This book is composed of three sections. The first section is thirty-seven pages long and contains twenty-five poems. The title of this section, as well as the entire book, is "A Coney Island of the Mind" which was taken from Henry Miller's "Into the Night Life." The title is used out of context, but Lawrence Ferlinghetti explains on the first page that it expresses the way he felt when he wrote these poems: a circus of the soul. The second section is twenty-five pages long and contains seven poems. Ferlinghetti notes that these poems were specifically written for jazz accompaniment, and as such, these "oral messages" are still in a state of change. The third section is fifteen pages long and contains thirteen poems. These poems were selected from Ferlinghetti's first book, "Pictures of the Gone World."

The poems are descriptive, describing the thought processes of the poet's mind. Because of the structure of this book, there is no passage of time since the poems are mostly observations. There is no unified plot; each poem has its own plot, themes and message. Also, the physical structure of each poem is unique in that some are only a few lines long while other span across five or six pages. Some of the poems also have specific spacing that distinguishes them from other poems and expresses the poet's feelings in some way. Most of the poems have very clear, concrete messages that are easy to read, but there are several that are a bit more abstract. Overall, Ferlinghetti's view of life is very amusing.



Quotes

"They are so bloody real it is as if they really still existed and they do only the landscape is changed." A Coney Island of the Mind, poem 1

"All the other fatal shorn-up fragments of the immigrant's dream come too true and mislaid among the sunbathers." A Coney Island of the Mind, poem 3

"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." A Coney Island of the Mind, poem 6

"And his wife just sat there looking at the birds which flew about calling to each other in the still air as if they were questioning existence or trying to recall something forgotten." A Coney Island of the Mind, poem 8

"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." A Coney Island of the Mind, poem 9

"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." A Coney Island of the Mind, poem 10

"'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 alarm clocks hollered horribly for lovers and sleepers." A Coney Island of the Mind, poem 12

"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." A Coney Island of the Mind, poem 13

"And yet gobble up at last to shrive our circus souls the also imaginary wafers of grace." A Circus of the Mind, poem 17



"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." A Circus of the Mind, poem 25

"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." A Circus of the Mind, poem 29

"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 to 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." Oral Messages, "I Am Waiting"

"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 photo 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." Oral Messages, "Junkman's Obligato"

"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." Oral Messages, "Autobiography"

"I have read somewhere the Meaning of Existence yet have forgotten just exactly where." Oral Messages, "Autobiography"

"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 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" Oral Messages, "Dog"

"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 Reconciliation the very craziest of Second Comings" Oral Messages, "Christ Climbed Down"

"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 ever that not there maybe or not yours maybe because you're what's called dead you've reached your station Descend." Oral Messages, "The Long Street"

"In Paris in a loud dark winter when the sun was something in Provence when I came upon the poetry of Rene Char I saw Vancluse 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." Selections from Pictures of the Gone World, poem 4

"'Truth is not the secret of a few' yet you would maybe think so they way some librarians and cultural ambassadors and especially museum directors act you'd think they had a corner on it the way they walk around shaking their high heads and looking as if they never went to the bath room or anything But I wouldn't blame them if I were you They say the Spiritual is best conceived in abstract terms and then too walking around in museums always makes me want to 'sit down' I always feel so constipated in those high altitudes." Selections from Pictures of the Gone World, poem 6

"It was a face which darkness could kill in an instant a face as easily hurt by laughter or light." Selections from Pictures of the Gone World, poem 8

"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." Selections from Pictures of the Gone World, poem 11

"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." Selections from Pictures of the Gone World, poem 13

Topics for Discussion

Is the poet optimistic or pessimistic? Justify your opinion.

How does the poet feel about love? Provide examples.

Provide examples of the poet's religious views.

Compare and contrast the Jesus Christ that is depicted in poem five of the first section and "Christ Climbed Down" of the second section.

What does the poet say about poets and poetry?

Explain the view given of modern love and sex.

Provide three examples of seeming contradictions in the poet's views.