



The Great Falls of the Passaic River, Paterson (image from The Crazy Tourist)

normal

Two Poems

Ballad of Another American Boy

I am from an ancient culture
I am from a new people
I am from the Pale of Settlement
I am from a fleeing mass who walk & pray in circles
I am the grandson of dung-colored horse soldiers and shawl-draped
Temple builders
I am first cousin to a total wastrel & second cousin to the
World's most famous mime.
I am the town to which I shall never return.

A history of Dark Handiwork has prepared me for life
The quickening of seasons has polished my urn for death.

I am the once wagging tail on Howard Johnson's dead dog
I am Harpo Marx chasing Margaret Dumas with a duck horn

Mickey Rooney chasing Corliss Archer
The last hobo jungle on the American River
I am The Little Tramp
The face that will never be printed on the Forever Stamp
I am the last dying elm in the town square
I am hot apple pie at Pops & Skeeter's All Night American Diner.
I am the town to which I shall never return.

I am the Bijou I am the hoo-doo the fisher of gar on
The Bayou I am the blood in the gutter on the other side
I am the rabid firehouse dog wrapped tight in a confederate flag
I am the Monsanto baby with the hydrocephalic head
I am the railroaded the blindfolded the stoopshouldered
The truckloaded I am the black elixir that wakes you
The greed that drives you the machine s that run you the
Cybro-hoo-doo that guides you the robot that replaces you
I am the jukebox the jalopy the last wild horse in the western
Sunset.
I am the town to which I shall never return.

on the banks of the great passaic

“When I’ve seen enough I’ll be back to splash in the Passaic again only with
a body so naked & happy City Hall will have to call out the Riot Squad.”

— Allen Ginsberg in a letter to William Carlos Williams, ca. 1957

from wherever they came whoever they were they settled here & there at first along the
river banks where hungry mosquitoes carried the spirits of the lenni lenape & eagerly
drank the blood of white settlers dutch german english whoever put up their farms their
mills their distilleries their slaughterhouses who claimed the banks as if they were virgin
girls all for their own to call this old land a new land all for their own with barbed wire &
chain-linked fences & soon to be iron horses & shovels & bottles & strange-god churches
filled with even stranger faces from wherever they came whoever they were now smoke-
churning chimneys signposts & sidewalks now phantom voices talkingshoutings now big
macktrucks marching & jukeboxes playing gangsters & hammers pounding staking claim
to the banks as if they were their own these were the banks of the once great passaic
curled up like a dying old man where i sat as a boy in 1958 toothpick in my teeth marking
my first memory by the face of the tide the flow of the current the dead carp the swirling
gull going going somewhere out there to wherever they came from whatever they were
going going going & going to from the banks of the great passaic

normal has been called “one of the last American primitives.” His most recent book, *i see hungers children, selected poem 1962 – 2012*, was published by LummoX Press in 2012.