Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s ‘Dog’

The dog trots freely in the street
and sees reality
and the things he sees
are bigger than himself
and the things he sees
are his reality
Drunks in doorways
Moons on trees
The dog trots freely thru the street
and the things he sees
are smaller than himself
Fish on newsprint
Ants in holes
Chickens in Chinatown windows
their heads a block away
The dog trots freely in the street
and the things he smells
smell something like himself
The dog trots freely in the street
past puddles and babies
cats and cigars
poolrooms and policemen
He doesn’t hate cops
He merely has no use for them
and he goes past them
and past the dead cows hung up whole
in front of the San Francisco Meat Market
He would rather eat a tender cow
than a tough policeman
though either might do
And he goes past the Romeo Ravioli Factory
and past Coit’s Tower
and past Congressman Doyle of the Unamerican Committee
He’s afraid of Coit’s Tower
but he’s not afraid of Congressman Doyle
although what he hears is very discouraging
very depressing
very absurd
to a sad young dog like himself
to a serious dog like himself
But he has his own free world to live in
His own fleas to eat
He will not be muzzled
Congressman Doyle is just another
fire hydrant
to him
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
and 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
with his head cocked sideways
at streetcorners
as if he is just about to have
his picture taken
for Victor Records
listening for
His Master’s Voice
and looking
like a living questionmark
into the
great gramophone
of puzzling existence
with its wondrous hollow horn
    which always seems
    just about to spout forth
    some Victorious answer
    to everything

**Lawrence Ferlinghetti** served in the US Navy during World War Two, and was stationed in Nagasaki after the war’s atomic end. ‘Anyone who saw Nagasaki,’ he later wrote, ‘would suddenly realize that they’d been kept in the dark by the United States government as to what atomic bombs can do.’

‘Dog’ was a favourite of Ken Coates. It originally appeared in Ferlinghetti’s collection, Coney Island of the Mind, published in 1958. Ken spoke of hearing the poem on a long-player record, before reciting a few lines himself. Some years ago, we wrote to Mr Ferlinghetti, care of City Lights Bookshop in San Francisco, asking his permission to print ‘Dog’ in The Spokesman. Although no reply has reached us so far, we trust its appearance now will not displease the poet, whom we salute in his 95th year.

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If nuclear technology is so safe, why don’t we have reactors in Westminster?

Mick Whelan
General Secretary

Alan Donnelly
President

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