



Back Roads to Far Places

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

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This single long poem of intimately linked verses is not a translation, although the echoes of Japanese poetry and Tibetan Buddhist texts are many. Starting out after Basho but meeting Milarepa and Dante among others en route, the poet finds his own way, toward a kind of American mantra.

Back Roads to Far Places Details

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Author : Lawrence Ferlinghetti

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mwpms says

Like other members of the Beat Generation and San Francisco Renaissance (known associates), Ferlinghetti took interest in Japanese poetry (much of it being translated into English for the first time) and Zen Buddhism. In fact, *Back Roads to Far Places* contains passages that illicit comparison to Beat Generation and San Francisco Renaissance poets...

O man in saffron
in the Golden Gate
chanting Hare Kirshna
squatting lotus
among the fern-fronds
At sundown
no more Krishna
The fern-fronds
unrolled!
- Ferlinghetti, **Back Roads to Far Places**

brilliant network-lights tentacle dim suburbs
Michigan waters canalled glitter thru city building blocks'
Throne-brain lamps strung downtown, green signals'
concentrate brightness blinking metal prayers & bright Hare
Krishna
[...]
- Allen Ginsberg, **Rising over night-blackened Detroit
Streets** (Collected Poems 1947-1997, pg. 521)

And 'in the middle of the journey'
of my life
came upon my self
'in a dark wood'
And laughed + cried + lived + died
And understood
Nothing
- Ferlinghetti, **Back Roads to Far Places**

"[...] grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they
could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long
Island City."
- Jack Kerouac, **On the Road** (pg. 106)

The long poem seems to have emerged from a tribute to Matsuo Bash? (*Back Roads to Far Places* **likely takes its name from *Narrow Road to the Deep North***). In fact, Bash? makes an appearance early in the long poem...

Bash? would have liked
a lake like this
back roads
to far towns
reflected in it
- Ferlinghetti, **Back Roads to Far Places**

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of *Back Roads to Far Places* is the fact that it is not typed but handwritten with illustrations by the poet...

Casey Kiser says

"A flutter of wings/ Sound and weeping fill the air
And the quivering meat wheel turns
O wheel of meat/ made of us
with no end and no beginning
(all beings being one)
turn and turn and turn!"

"Passing by/ the roadside image/ of some god
I fall/ from my/ sacred cow/ into nothingness"

"The door to the invisible/ is visible
The hidden door/ is not hidden
I walk through it forever/ not seeing it
I am what I am/ And will be/ what will be"

"And in the middle of the journey/ of my life/ came upon myself/ 'in a dark wood'
And laughed +cried+lived+died/ And understood/ Nothing"
