Queens Cemetery, Setting Sun

By Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Airport bus from JFK
    cruising through Queens
    passing huge endless cemetery
    by Long Island’s old expressway
    (once a dirt path for wheelless Indians)
    myriad small tombstones tilted up
    gesturing statues on parapets
    stone arms or wings upraised
    lost among illegible inscriptions
    And the setting yellow sun
    painting all of them
    on one side only
    with an ochre brush
    Rows and rows and rows and rows
    of small stone slabs
    tilted toward the sun forever
    While on the far horizon
    Mannahatta’s great stone slabs
    skyscraper tombs and parapets
    casting their own long black shadows
    over all these long-haired graves
    the final restless places
    of old-country potato farmers
    dustbin pawnbrokers
    dead dagos and Dublin bouncers
    tinsmiths and blacksmiths and roofers
    house painters and house carpenters
    cabinet makers and cigar makers
    garment workers and streetcar motormen
    railroad switchmen and signal salesmen
    swabbers and sweepers and swampers
    steam-fitters and key-punch operators
    ward heelers and labor organizers
    railroad dicks and smalltime mafiosi
    shopkeepers and saloon keepers and doormen
    icemen and middlemen and conmen
    housekeepers and housewives and dowagers
    French housemaids and Swedish cooks
    Brooklyn barmmaids and Bronxville butlers
    opera singers and gandy dancers
    pitchers and catchers
    in the days of ragtime baseball
    poolroom hustlers and fight promoters
    Catholic sisters of charity
    parish priests and Irish cops
    Viennese doctors of delirium
    now all abandoned in eternity
    parcels in a dead-letter office
    inscrutable addresses on them
    beyond further deliverance
in an America wheeling past them
and disappearing oblivious
into East River’s echoing tunnels
down the great American drain


Source: These Are My Rivers: New and Selected Poems (New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1993)