Retired Ballerinas, Central Park West

By Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Retired ballerinas on winter afternoons
walking their dogs
in Central Park West
(or their cats on leashes—
the cats themselves old highwire artists)
The ballerinas
  leap and pirouette
  through Columbus Circle
while winos on park benches
(laid back like drunken Goudonovs)
hear the taxis trumpet together
like horsemen of the apocalypse
  in the dusk of the gods
It is the final witching hour
  when swains are full of swan songs
And all return through the dark dusk
  to their bright cells
  in glass highrises
or sit down to oval cigarettes and cakes
  in the Russian Tea Room
or climb four flights to back rooms
  in Westside brownstones
where faded playbill photos
  fall peeling from their frames
  like last year’s autumn leaves


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