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)