

Ferlinghetti, The wounded wilderness of Morris Graves

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[The wounded wilderness of Morris Graves]

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

The wounded wilderness of Morris Graves
is not the same wild west
the white man found
It is a land that Buddha came upon
from a different direction
It is a wild white nest
in the true mad north
of introspection
where 'falcons of the inner eye'
dive and die
glimpsing in their dying fall
all life's memory
of existence
and with grave chalk wing
draw upon the leaded sky
a thousand threaded images
of flight

It is the night that is their 'native habitat'
these 'spirit birds' with bled white wings
these droves of plover
bearded eagles
blind birds singing
in glass fields
these moonmad swans and ecstatic ganders
trapped egrets
charcoal owls
trotting turtle symbols
these pink fish among mountains
shrikes seeking to nest
whitebone drones
mating in air
among hallucinary moons

And a masked bird fishing
in a golden stream and an ibis feeding
~on its own breast'
and a stray Connemara Pooka'
(life size)
And then those blown mute birds
bearing fish and paper messages
between two streams
which are the twin streams
of oblivion
wherein the imagination
turning upon itself
with white electric vision
refinds itself still mad
and unfed
among the hebrides

Morris Graves, Bird in the Spirit (1943)

Tempera on paper, 24 inches x 30 inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

