

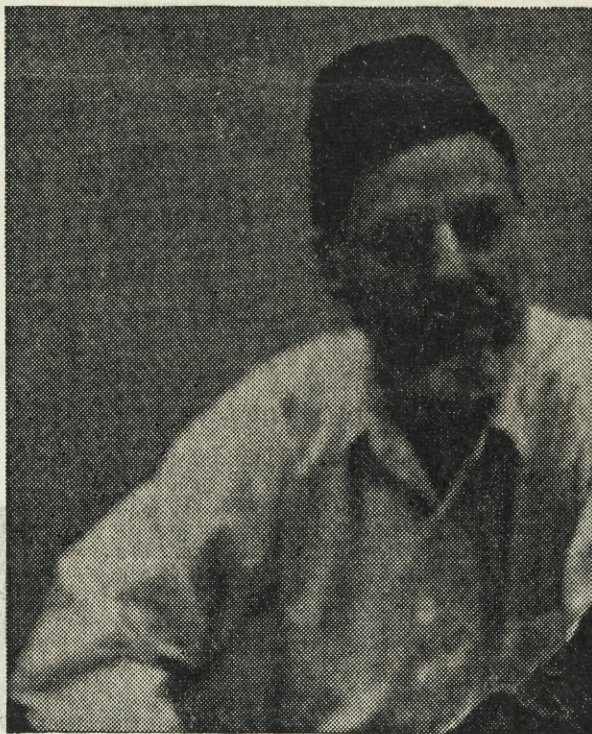
Assassination Raga

Tune in to a raga
on the stereo
and turn on Death
without its sound
Outside the plums are growing in a tree
'The force that through the green fuse
drives the flower'
drives Death TV
'A grief ago'
They lower the body soundlessly
into a huge plane in Dallas
into a huge plane in Los Angeles
marked 'United States of America'
and soundlessly
the 'United States of America'
takes off
& wings away with that Body
Tune out the TV sound
& listen soundlessly
to the blind mouths of its motors
& a sitar speaking
a raga in a rage
at all that black death
and all that bad karma
La illaha el lill Allah
There is no god but God
The force that through the red fuze
drives the bullet
drives the needle in its dharma groove
and man the needle
drives that plane
of the 'United States of America'
through its sky full of flak & death
as it wings soundlessly
from those fucked-up cities
whose names we'd rather not remember
Inside the plane a wife
lies soundlessly
against the coffin
Engine whines as sitar sings outrageously
La illaha el lill Allah
There is no god but God
The plums are falling through the tree
The force that drives the bullet
through the gun
strikes everyone
as the 'United States of America'
flies on sightlessly
through the swift, fierce years
with the dead weight of its Body
which they keep flying from Dallas
which they keep flying from Los Angeles
And the plane lands
without folding its wings
its shadow in mourning for itself
withdraws into itself

(Reprinted from Ramparts)

Accompanying himself on sitar at San Francisco's Nourse Auditorium for the Incredible Poetry Reading. Ferlinghetti read his "Assassination Raga" for the first time that evening, June 8, 1968. It had been completed a few hours earlier, as the poet watched Senator Robert Kennedy's funeral on television.

in death's draggy dominion
La illaha el lill Allah
There is no god but death
The force that through the green fuze
drove his life
drives everyone
La illaha el lill Allah
And they are driving the Body
up Fifth Avenue
past a million people in line
'We are going to be here a long time'
says Death TV's spielman
The cortege passes soundlessly
'Goodbye! Goodbye!' some people cry



Lawrence Ferlinghetti

The traffic flows around & on
The force that drives the cars
combusts our karma
La illaha el lill Allah
There is no god but death
The force that drives our life to death
drives sitar too
La illaha el lill Allah
Tripping through the strings
they lift the Body
of the United States of America
and carry it into a cathedral
singing Hallelujah He Shall Live
For ever & ever
And then the Body moves again
down Fifth Avenue
Fifty-seven black sedans after it

There are people with roses
behind the barricades
in bargain-basement dresses
La illaha el lill Allah
La illaha el lill Allah
but sitar sings & sings non-violence
sitar sounds in us its depths of ecstasy
against old dung & death
La illaha el lill Allah
La illaha el lill Allah
The force that strikes its strings
strikes us.
And the silver train starts up soundlessly
at a dead speed
over the hot land
an armed helicopter over it
The tracks are lined with bare faces
A highschool band in New Brunswick plays
the Battle Hymn of the Republic
They have shot it down again
They have shot him down again
& will shoot him down again
and take him on a train
and lower him again
into a grave in Washington
La illaha el lill Allah
Day & night journeys the coffin
through the dark land
too dark now to see the dark faces
La illaha el lill Allah
Plums & planes are falling through the air
La illaha el lill Allah
as sitar sings its only answer
sitar sings its only answer
sitar sounds the only sound
that still can still all violence
La illaha el lill Allah
There is no god but life
There is no god but life
La illaha el lill Allah
Sitar breathes its Atman breath in us
sounds & sounds in us its lovely om om
La illaha el lill Allah
At every step the pure wind rises
La illaha el lill Allah
People with roses
behind the barricades!

—Ferlinghetti, June 8, 1968