by
Russyll
Atkyns

the
Abortionist

the
Corpse

Two
Dollars
Free Lance Press
Russell Atkins

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The Abortionist

And

The Corpse

+Two Poetic Dramas to Be Set to Music

The Free Lance Press + 1963

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Free Lance Poets and Prose Workshop, Inc.

Cleveland, Ohio
THE ABORTIONIST
A POETIC DRAMA TO BE SET TO MUSIC

Sence: A basement of a half-departed building
In a desiccated, dark, old section of
downtown in a large city.

D.R. DRASSAN: An teen agent.
Dr. Drazsak: Well, Miss Harrington. You're late.
I'm all ready. Near here you say? Then watch.
There are the door steps. Then the door.
Recall the bell? When you arrive ring it.
Don't neglect the bell. It tells me it's you.
Good. Come quickly. Miss Harrington.
One hangs up.
Were she Dr. Harrington himself
Other hang up, and she would rear him in
the case, and a second bell could be
striking small piece of change into the nagel.
At least we use the lamps from Harrington.

(Drazsak stands against himself in the pre-
vision for the visit of his patient. He rolls in
heltered operating table behind apparatus in a cor-
ner of the room under a light. This position
obscures the table all but the head. He draws out
of bag various instruments. He does this and more
with a rather wild air about him. He is contemplating
a hypodermic needle when there comes a ringing
of a little bell. He grows ruthlessly active. Unlock
the door, then hurriedly seats himself behind desk.
There is a space.)

Come in. Miss Harrington.
(Enter Cecilia Harrington, face hidden somewhat
behind ruff collar. Young. Narrows.)
Scene: A basement in a half-deserted building in a deteriorated, dark, old section of downtown in a large city.

DR. D R A S S A K A R (on phone)
Dr. Drassakar. Well. Miss Harrington. You're late. I'm all ready. Near here you say? Then watch. There are the down steps. Then the door. Recall the bell? When you arrive ring it. Don't neglect the bell. It tells me it is you. Good. Come quickly, Miss Harrington. (he hangs up)
Were she Dr. Harrington himself Other first-staged beforehand would rear me to the occasion!
(he then addresses small mice in a cage sticking small pieces of cheese into the cage)
At last we take the lamps from Harrington!
(Drassakar next applies himself to the preparation for the visit of his patient. He rolls a battered operating table behind apparatus in a corner of the room under a light. This position obscures the table all but the head. He draws out of bag various instruments. He does this and more with a rather wild air about him. He is contemplating a hypodermic needle when there comes a ringing of a little bell. He grows ruthlessly active. Unlocks the door, then hurriedly seats himself behind desk. There is a knock.)
Come in, Miss Harrington.
(Enter Cecilia Harrington, face hidden somewhat behind coat collar. Young. Nervous.)
two

DR. DRASSAKAR
Sit down, Miss Harrington
And why do you tremble?
Let me help you - your coat -
(rises to assist)

MISS HARRINGTON
No, no. I won't take long, Dr., for I -
That is - I - well - I
Have something to tell.
It's of - we understand,
My decision? - you see -
That is - I mean -

DR. DRASSAKAR
This is but nerves, I say.
For now, relax, Miss Harrington.
The instrument's temporarily off-key'd.
Talk of something -
Grow calm and -

MISS HARRINGTON
Hear me. Dr.! Our plan's a fang through me.

DR. DRASSAKAR
Ah now, Miss Harrington, listen:
Don't let the commonplace
Distress you. Remember,
These days strain you,
I say then look to a beyond
Of cheer. Vision the unspoiled,

three

The beautiful, the rose-of.
You have listened to talk.
Listen, however, to a man
Who knows, who has, as a
Master of it, of ruins
Lifted Again; to disgrace
Given mask; to no more
Afforded more; to discords
The resolutions found.

MISS HARRINGTON
Dr., of course. You only
meant to help. I know
For I came to you at will.
I am thinking of father;
It will be a Lisbon horror
To him; the Vesuvius
To crush his at heart
For me! To tell mother
I'm to have a child,
To tell her that, for all,
I have no husband -
That he was without -
Without honor, will
Make stone of her.
How shall I say -?

DR. DRASSAKAR
Miss Harrington no fear
Of that have no fear.
Just don't say of course!
You have attended my counsel? Hush will be hooded
Over it. Only you and I
Will know that Cecilia Harrington
Was to have a child.

MISS HARRINGTON
This you don't know - my decision -
I will have the child
Dr., -

DR. DRASSAKAR
Will have it?

MISS HARRINGTON
I have passed Highland Glades-Upon-Wieck
It sat stoned up in that Blank.
I commiserated passing.
Was I not responsible
More than to myself? Should I
Respond to the occur?
I have always wanted a child, Dr.
It waited to love, I thought. I
smoothed my hand on it.
In a grim sudden Dr.
A death was more-of.

DR. DRASSAKAR
Miss Harrington, such sentiments
Oppress me. You, young and
Beautiful; the gem of a

Generation and a father
Famous throughout, surely,
You think how propitious
The universe is - All is. Ha!
Miss Harrington, don't be hasty.
Nine shadows of a year
And this texture of yours
Vanishes (he rises abruptly)
Bruted about, dilated
Swined in the sty -

MISS HARRINGTON
Dr., I-I-

DR. DRASSAKAR
You don't want that, Miss Harrington.

MISS HARRINGTON
You must listen -

DR. DRASSAKAR
You can't mean else.
(places himself against door)

MISS HARRINGTON
You don't understand. I forbid -

DR. DRASSAKAR
You forbid it do you!
MISS HARRINGTON
Do you ask for money?
Here tonight? You've assorted, readied, undertaken. Oh, forgive me!
Thoughts have built up a pillar of me. This terrible thing!
I won't think more of it.

DR. DRASSAKAR
Did I mention money?

MISS HARRINGTON
Are you detaining me, Dr.?

DR. DRASSAKAR
Hoping to exact a debt I thought of you. You will pay?

MISS HARRINGTON
Tell me the cost.

DR. DRASSAKAR
In money, Cecilia Harrington? In pain!
(locks door. She reaches for it)
What's to be said for you?
Be calm. Do not resist
(he seizes her)

MISS HARRINGTON
Dr. - !

DR. DRASSAKAR
Sit down!

MISS HARRINGTON
You're a madman!

DR. DRASSAKAR
So you would slander the Dr.?
(he forces her into a chair; he lifts a glass from the table containing a liquid)
Miss Harrington, drink this, will you?
(forces her to drink)
This will incapacitate you,
Of course.
(pause)
(Cecilia Harrington, her head held in her hands)
Consider your self my patient,
Will you? What of patients? I remember some recovered;
Paid the bill; conversed with others similar, Dogs!
What a low of conditions!
I hated them. (Cecilia Harrington, head yet in hands)
Miss Harrington, can you hear me?
I'm scorpion'd for revenge.
So you shall feel it sharp
Violating the sanctum.
(Dr. Drassakar bears her to the table across the room. There he proceeds in a violent manner to tear off her clothes)
Lie beautifully corpsed, will you?
That is assume the cadaver of him.
Ten years in debt, Miss Harrington!
The interest's just short of
Death. Let me tell of the debt of your father.
Yearly it changes a season in me!

Ten years ago, Dr. Harrington grew famous.
What on? Ideas thiefed of me,
From a confidence of ours.
I was famous awhile.
Your father, Miss Harrington,
And I, once together
Engaged in questionable
Business - this business!
To extinguish me, he, Dr.
Harrington, your father,
Occasion'd it all over
But that on me the sinister contours looked better.
I professionally died.

MISS HARRINGTON(delirious)
Here's something - something very
mysterious - think more of it -
I've always wanted a child -
ininitely possible -

DR. DRASSAKAR
The drear'd heath of an ever of birth and success!
To one the womb. A gross, Miss Harrington,
A gross of years! (there is violent action at the table: she screams)
So weed it out!

MISS HARRINGTON
Help me!
(she screams loud and long: he comes out
downstage, his hand bloody, holding the fetus)

DR. DRASSAKAR
Miss Harrington, it is all over!
(he places the fetus in a washbowl.
Cecilia Harrington moans in delirium)
This will kill him - DEAR Harrington!
(starts over. There is a rap on the door.
Dead silence. Cecilia Harrington moaning de-liriously. The rap is repeated)

NIGHT WATCHMAN
Dr. Drassakar!
(silence)
Xavier the night watchman, Dr. Is everything alright?

DR. DRASSAKAR
What do you want, Xavier?

NIGHT WATCHMAN
Making the round, Dr., I thought -

DR. DRASSAKAR
Excellent. Everything is proper, I hope?

NIGHT WATCHMAN
Yes, well, that is - I -
(Cecilia Harrington thrashes on table.)
ten

Gives short cry

What's happening in there, Dr.?  
(Drassakar hurries over to Cecilia Harrington, attempts to stifle her. Struggle. The sound of things falling. She gasps. Short screams. Drassakar strikes her to floor. Knocking on door insistent) 
Dr. Drassakar! Dr. Drassakar!  
(She is writhing on floor. Bust and head visible) 
Dr. Drassakar!
(night watchman pounds the door. The pounding stops. Dr. Drassakar listens toward door. Cecilia Harrington moans. Drassakar turns. His eyes catch sight of the fetus. He proceeds to lift Cecilia Harrington up from the floor behind the table. Seizing the sheet from the table he wraps it around her shroud-like. She is faintly protesting - places her in arm chair on full stage. Blood colors the winding sheet)

DR. DRASSAKAR
You are a mother, Miss Harrington.  
(clothes fetus in a cloth, thrusts it at her) 
What when the newspapers tell the story! ?  
Sit up here, girl! Falling about won't help.  
Madonna of the Chair! Look up! Ugh!  
You're impossible!  
Here is the child. It's too bad  
Harrington can't see you. I laugh at you!  
Harrington will hate it!  
(sound of footsteps) 
They promise the police, Madonna of the Chair!

eleven

(there is a hurried sound of about five men. There voices are confused. Drassakar stark)

NIGHT WATCHMAN  
In here!  
(terrific pounding)  
(Cecilia Harrington slumps dead in the chair. Fetus falls to floor)

VOICE I  
Open up in there!  
(terrific pounding)

DR. DRASSAKAR  
You can't save her!  
(Drassakar hurries to Cecilia Harrington. Examines her)

NIGHT WATCHMAN  
I have brought the law, Dr. Drassakar!

VOICE II  
Let's break it in!  
(there is a crash against the door)

NIGHT WATCHMAN  
Again!

DR. DRASSAKAR  
(leaning over Cecilia Harrington)
twelve

Dead

(curtain begins to close slowly)
(the door weakens. Drasakar retreats. Picks up knife. Door falls open. They face each other. They advance. Suddenly Drassakar rushes upon them. There is a shot. Drassakar falls among them as they bear him to the floor.)

The Abortionist was originally published by FREE LANCE, a magazine of poetry and prose in the Spring 1954 issue.
(A room in a large mansion of great age. On a wall is a magnificent portrait of a man. Beneath it is a kind of altar on which two candles burn. On the portrait and stage a blue light pours so that the portrait stands forth prominently. A woman in black veil-like garments stands motionless looking at the portrait. Behind her to the side, two glass-panelled doors would show far over what is at present an unintelligible garden)

WIDOW
Cold scare of the sky - the alas strewn way!
Our drear of friends funeral'd - funeral'd away.
Palling beyond hedges at the lean of trees,
We left you Larenuf, done, dead, ceremonied.
Time cannot make less of it, only more engrieve!

End of you! Rakes of it cruel over the heart's field. In one of months, a death comes to you again. Resemblance, the presence of you, all will wane. Out of the vaulted grey, a shadowed rain.
(Enter two hired men of rugged appearance)

I HIRED MAN
Lady, when you are ready, we have the car waiting near.

WIDOW
I am ready, will it be properly late when we reach the cemetery?

I HIRED MAN
Perfect for what we have to do.

WIDOW
Come then.
(All exit. Stage dimmed. Only light on portrait lingers. Dies)

SCENE II. VAULT

(Enter hired men and widow. They enter through a highly ornamented gate staged so that the audience seems to be in the vault looking out upon the grave night. It is a moonlit night.)

WIDOW
We were not seen. Here is the grave of Larenuf.

I HIRED MAN
(setting down lamp and the wedges)
Should we begin, lady?
(Widow nods. Men begin to pry away at stone slab that forms a little door to place where coffin lies.)

WIDOW
(in evident mingled pity and suppressed anxiety)
Larenuf, we have silenced through the grave's gates.
sixteen

Dusts haunt about you in the ghastly late.
If we were The Awaited only and had come
To salvage you out of death as out of tomb
To take you home!

(Hired men move slab and draw out coffin.
A bunch of decayed flowers fall off of the casket)

WIDOW
A wither of horror these flowers, Larenuf!

I HIRED MAN
Lady - ?

WIDOW
I am prepared.

I HIRED MAN
If you visit to have a look at him, he probably will
have the same
look, buried four days.

(Hired men pry open coffin lid. They lift
the lid. Corpse of Larenuf. Widow stares upon
corpse.)

WIDOW
Larenuf. Of course you would be thus.
Bravely waiting on the worse.

II HIRED MAN
He seems only a little changed, lady.

seventeen

WIDOW
Ah, Larenuf, you lie here passed merely nowhere.
The head, the lips, familiar there.

I wished you "other worlds" knowing you were here.

I say again - it is hard not to say - ashes or gone all;
Dead, were you suddenly unrecognizable;
Had you been jaded, unsympathetic or old,

I would have bowed off as they resignedly
Through the heath'd faint perfumed array.

(more to hired men)
Kissable he is. Yet he is from kissing far.
The moons of his eyelids extinguished are.
A blur comes there. The face cakes more.

There is not the same, though same the setting.
Of his Sahara'd cheek, some sordid etching.

Now this place moved upon, keeping has of his
lifelike hand.
Insidiously moved again, he will break
And all ends.

(to hired men)
Leave me a moment, will you?
(hired men step out of vault. She kneels
beside the encoffined body. Lovingly caresses
the dead hand. Kisses the corpse upon the lips.
Rises slowly.)
Goodnight for now, while resemblance is yet on your brow.

(Exit widow. Enter hired men)

II HIRED MAN
How many times will she come back?

I HIRED MAN
Until he dies his second death she says.

II HIRED MAN
You think the lady a little crazy?

I HIRED MAN
What else? But she can pay since she is rich.

II HIRED MAN
Well, we'll have something to sleep on.

I HIRED MAN
He was a very handsome fellow.

(Hired men replace coffin. Gather tools and lamps and exit closing ornamented gate. Stage dimmed.)

SCENE III
(Setting as in scene I with portrait. Each scene is dark of stage. Widow must be very shadowed and dim. Only the portrait stands forth.

Enter Widow. Her grief has her. Under a dull light her eyes have that deep look, resembling the hollows of a skull. Her veils in this scene are torn and hang askew.

WIDOW
A year has come shadow'd and doled away.
I have knocked upon things of the world, Larenuf, and they,
As in a void, resound in long echoes, hollow'd, vanishing in decay.

Once-pleasures, and things once profound, all are museum'd.
I am some barren spectator among them.
They are nothing now. What could they have seemed?

Many months passed. Another rains over the slab.
Each one the more more carelessly will rob You of identity, Larenuf. That will I die of.

A say again - it is hard not to say -ashes or gone all;
Dead, were you suddenly unrecognizable;
Had you been jaded unsympathetic or old,

I might have bowed off resignedly as they
Through the heath'd faint perfumed array,
Cloisteredly thinking of the mystery.
twenty

In one of months a death shall come to you again.
Resemblance, the presence of you, all will wane.
Out of the vaulted grey, a farewell of rain.

Tonight we will once more through the grave's gates.
Gloom will fierce about the ghastly late.
And then my dearest and sweetest Larenuf,
Ours will be a silent, strange romancing,
My recognition, your resemblance lingering.

(Enter the two hired men)

I HIRED MAN
Lady, when you are ready we have the car waiting by.

WIDOW
I am ready. Is it the same hour as before?

I HIRED MAN
Later. It will be very late when we reach the cemetery.

WIDOW
(moving over to the portrait)
Very late, Larenuf. Larenuf, linger. my love.
Come. Quick!

I HIRED MAN
Lady, it's none of my affair, but I - perhaps -

WIDOW
Say, if you please.
twenty-two

I HIRED MAN
Open it now?

WIDOW
Let me see the ravage of a time. Open it.

(Coffin lid is lifted. Recoil and horror upon the faces of the hired men and widow. Larenuf appears hideous and broken of face like a cracked mask. Widow grasps her throat and looks made stone of. For a minute or so they are engrossed by the crumbling Larenuf. There is only continuous and descriptive music.)

(Widow, waving men to leave her)

WIDOW
Leave me.

(Men leave)
Larenuf, we have secreted through the grave's gate, And my love, for what? You leave me. A little wait.

How you are dying again! - an image too quickly dreamed. This portrait, Larenuf, is sadly out of frame. Ruins shadow across you too serene, And out of name!

On the dust-dulle'd forehead, a little ghastly quake, Skull'd and so horrid is the death that wrecks A face bearing yet a trace of my Larenuf.

twenty-three

"Other worlds," "spiritual thresholds," "heavens and hells,"
Friends will describe it so. But these things in the imaginations of men have being.
To me you will have lapsed into nothing!

Crumbled and wormed the last look of once Larenuf, Passing out of the lighted-up into the -- what?

And as such how fragile a thing fondly loving is made, Centered upon resemblances and in identities! of shade; Dying along sun forsaken places that fade.

Where there dwelt a dunness and a fellow light That made out of so much of sound and sight A man named Larenuf, came the blight, And his composition cracks up in a night.

Here's Love my heart of everything and farewell, A little remains like you where all of you dwelt. I'll come again but may never more hope to tell.

(Widow rises slowly. Exits. Enter hired men)

II HIRED MAN
I never thought of how it was! If and when we come again, he'll be trash!
I HIRED MAN
Let's close the thing up.

(Coffin is replaced. Lamp and tools are gathered. Hired men leave stage as it dims.)

SCENE V

(setting as in Scene I with portrait. Lightning and thunder and anger of rain. On portrait and stage a light pours. In this scene the light that falls upon them is green and hideous. The portrait must stand forth.

A stairway is prominently outlined at left stage. The Widow descends having over her right arm a black mantle and in her left hand the graveyard lamp. She is wearing an evening dress very dissipated in character and white. She is depraved looking and the bones of her face are bold.

There comes the chiming of a clock. She stops upon the stairs.)

WIDOW
Eleven o'clock: the men have not as yet come through the wrack of night with under'd drum.

Rain, dastarded on my husband! He lies, after the years,

Bereft of the false-face and so has on

The true death of man's mien!

Drears and drears of friends funeral away. Glance of the lightning illumes their way, Palling beyond and beyond eternally!

Bowing again and again bowing resignedly Through the heath'd faint perfumed array!

There, through the appall of the grave's gate, Even as it is, Larenuf, late and too late, I will lone about you among the desecrate.

Ah, there are your meaningless bones they save, Lying alack and bleak'd and brave.

There through the long of processional trees, Throng'd by the tendril'd winds, the thickened leaves

Break open. A white death-mask flees!

(entering from the terrace furiously, she
places over her shoulder the mantle of black; siezes the lamp taking out of a drawer a gun, she places it in a little bag; takes lamp and goes over breathes upon the candle that remains burning to blow it out; pausing between the open panelled doors, the ghostly choir with tinkling accompaniment is heard again. The Widow hurries out into the thunder and the lightning takes all light from the stage leaving a sudden gloom in which the thunder growls under music)

SCENE VI VAULT

( Prelude of harsh hurried music. The storm commences to rage. The stage is dark, all but the ornamented gateway of the vault. Through it we look out into the lightning and thunder and rain of the sodden cemetery. Enter two hired men, breathlessly. Conceal themselves in vault. Shouting across the grave is heard.)

I HIRED MAN
They haven't spotted us.

(Four men, three police officers and an inspector, briefly halt in consultation by the vault, then scatter in search of hired men.)
twenty-eight

(Policeman and Inspector reappear)

INSPECTOR
They seem to have slipped us. I see a light in the caretaker's house. Come on.

I HIRE MAN
Now we can make the break.

(They approach the gate. They open it.)

Hold back! Somethin's coming!

(Hired men hide themselves again)

II HIRE MAN
Look! Say - !

I HIRE MAN
Of all th- !

II HIRE MAN
It's the mad lady!

(The Widow approaches. Upon her coming the music assumes a dreadful character, horrifying up out of the deep. The Widow comes, opens the ornamented gate, pauses for a moment on the threshold.)

twenty-nine

I HIRE MAN
It's different tonight, lady. I'm giving the orders! Put out the lamp!

WIDOW
(Surprised, then overjoyed)
Friends, friends! You have not foregone me, have you?
Hurry, there is that that we've sworn to do!
The coffin!

I HIRE MAN
The Law's in the cemetery! Put out the lamp, lady!

WIDOW
Even now he may lie here - a trace of the once here. The head, the lips familiar there!

II HIRE MAN
Put out that lamp or we'll make you!

WIDOW
The coffin! Every moment he is drawn away! The coffin! The coffin! Hurry!

I HIRE MAN
I'll show this lunatic -
(He starts forward. The Widow recoils and thrusts out her arm long, the gun pointed firmly.)
II HIRED MAN
Look out, she's got a gun!

WIDOW
Mine are still the orders! Draw out his narrow bed!

I HIRED MAN
Why you - ! Quick! Get the thing drawn out!

(They rush forward; they jerk away the slab; they seize the coffin furiously; they draw it forth and hurl it open. It is full of the bones of Larenuf. Shriek of the Widow at the hideous truth—

WIDOW
Unknowable! End of you! Nothing! Ha!

(Enter Inspector and policemen, running, their flashlights on: they flash them upon the huddled form of Widow; the blood upon her face and her contorted position make her hideous. Enter caretaker with lamp. Inspector examines her.)

INSPECTOR
Dead.

The *Corps*e was originally published in the WESTERN REVIEW (Iowa State University) in January 1954.
EDITOR'S NOTE

With the production of these two works, Mr. Atkins began a series of original experiments for poems as dramas. They were unique on the current American literary scene at the time of their appearance and were in some ways antedate.

The Abortionist was not designed as a comment, pro or con, relating to abortion, but it is, as is its relative The Corpse, an object poem in play form to be set to music.

Casper LeRoy Jordan
Editor, Free Lance
March 1963

The foregoing drama-poems have not sought to effect "strong characterization" or the usual "insights" into "human behavior", since these were incompatible with the experimentation.

R. A.
EDITOR'S NOTE

With the production of these two tracts, Mr. Atkins began a series of original experiments for which we are grateful. They were unique in the nascent American literary scene of the time of their appearance and were in some ways influential.

The Abortionist was an engrossing and a compelling piece of work, relating to abortion, but it is, as its title remarks, The Corner, an object poem in play form to be acted in public.

Casper LeBey Jordan
Diller, Free Lance
March 1969

The intriguing drama-comic piece is wrought in allegorical, character-studies by the visual images into "human behavior," since these were incompatible with the enactment.  

K.A.
Russell Atkins' poetry is becoming so well known it is pointless to tell how wonderful it is. If you've already read it you know, and if you haven't, stop reading this right now. Now after you've asked "How long has this been going on...How did I miss it... Has he written other stuff as terrific as this" (he has)...you have become a full-fledged member of his fan club. Welcome, brother, and continue reading. Born in Cleveland, where he still lives, Atkins attended the public schools of his native city, and has studied art, and musical composition at several prestigious schools. About ten years ago he pioneered with his "Psychovisualism" an advanced attitude about "musical composition" which caused an international furor in music circles. In poetry he has been a consistently able experimentalist, and has been in the forefront. He has been acclaimed by some as one of America's finest poetic talents. Having created a style and form which is unique and all his own, Atkins has produced some very startling and enduring work. His writing sounds and feels the same every time, yet it is always brand new...fresh and exciting as if you'd never read it before.