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DUST OF SILENCE

OLIVER PITCHER

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PREFACE

Oliver Pitcher is known primarily as a man of the theatre, where the author both writes and performs — the misty beauty and cynical humor that are the essence of these shorter works give us a chance to go behind the scenes and into the mind. From wide human understanding we are thrown into a deep personal problem, from the human comedy we join him as he laughs at himself then suddenly realize he is laughing at us.

This is no book to be skimmed and cast aside for the surface is only an introduction, a veneer to the thick grain beneath, and while the paint is brilliant, the darkness has more to reveal. Not the least of these subtleties is an illusive propaganda that serpents through this tapestry like a golden thread, here shining and there hidden, but insistant. This too is a carryover from the theatre where something must always be said — if not from the soap box, then with the knowing glance of a mime. And who can say exactly what a glance means?

Here is a writer who loves words: words as meaning, suggestion, sound, image — a careful development of fantasy and image that seems to deepen as we re-read the lines, catching us in a descending whirlpool of impressions.

This is poetry of sound, not designed for the quiet of a musty library or the noise of a subway: it is a poetry of thought, poetry of feeling, poetry of the theatre written with an actor's image and sung with an actor's voice and a writer's understanding. Although deeply personal, it must be read out loud, it must be felt and heard and repeated.

Robert Grantham
New York City
1958

Bob:

The preface is great.

Wouldn't it be wise to clarify the 'serpent of propaganda'? I don't always read easy; the reader is entitled to any kind of aid he can get. My platform, my propaganda, is Compassion which I'm shrieking straight into the face of the impregnable and horrifying Inevitabilities (and don't I know them!) The Inevitabilities are what I'm dealing with in *Dust of Silence* and even the non-conformist (*The Twittering Machine*) isn't really safe. In many ways he is the most vulnerable and his exile cannot be called a happy one. The Silent Ones can at least baffle the conformists, and that's a weapon. After all, all the ranting 's been done by the conformists, over a hundred years of it. They are more exhausting than they could possibly realize; they've deafened themselves and numbed their finer instincts, leaving themselves the wrong kind of energy (if there's any left at all!) to be really effective in (the wrong kind of) action. The Young Men have mustered with their mustard; the Young Men are Angry. Mouse turd! I've been angry for thirty-five years! The Silent Ones do have rage-indignation; it gets them out of bed in the morning, in gleeful idle moments they make lists of those who should be assassinated. What keeps them from the actual killing is their finer instincts or absurd altruism that does, and must match the absurdity of the die-hard Little Rockites.

Oliver Pitcher

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POEMS

RAISON d'ETRE

for Hal Jenkin

Over the eye behind the moon's cloud
over you whose touch to a Stradavari heart shames
the chorale of angels
over Mr. Eros who tramples the sun-roses
and sits amid willow trees
to weep
over the olive wood
over the vibrant reds, blacks, luminous golds of
decay
over the strength of silence and advantages of
unawareness
over the Rosey Eclipse
over the geyser in the toilet bowl
over the cynical comma
over madness itself
the occupational hazard of artists
over the catcher caught in his catcher's mitt
over oil and opal, blood and bone of
the earth
over the iron touch behind pink gloves
over retired civilizations sunken below levels
shimmering in rusty lustre
over myself

I wave the flag raison d'etre.

SIX O'CLOCK JOURNAL for S.F.

So long
as we lie closely on this mattress-isle
and do not let our hands, legs, arms,
or our
 anythings
go one iota beyond it, we and
 everything
will be an island set free, floating after
the Peloponnesian War, a windward yellow
kite with the large painted eye, but more
safely, more truthfully so, a cocoon. A
mattress with a prospect, flares! Instructed,
forewarned, can we be saved in onely-ness?
 "We two?"
 "Why not?"
 "But WE TWO?"
which fluctuates between two poles, tarnished
and straining under the dual misnomer: Love
Love ---"
 "Keep it there," I say. "Ah! keep it
there and don't bite this moment, it's precious."
 The room turns pregnant before silence . . .
 "Must you go?"
 The other party is always right. (though
all I need is Love saying, "Strength . . .)

* * * * *

In the battle of coffee and gin, coffee always
wins. April air is stained with your absence.
Mist clouds cavort, scamper toward Caprice
River. In this second, cellucid, silence hears his
name mispronounced on the lips of the clock's tick.
When you left you pressed your mouth to hair and
chuckled your promise, this feel of seersucker,
leaving my "When" unanswered. Two spots in my chest

are gouged out where you kissed and out of these caverns
of loneliness air is pin pricked with six o'clock noise.

Demon thoughts whisper, "Dance with me" at this
demon's hour, the half-nelson thoughts. A star North
of heaven winks a knowing eye.

(You held a candle to my clock, love, and I salute you.
A clock with no numbers.

I confess: so strange that even now I see you in the
unimportant dark of my room, a poison of mouths, forms
of incandescent montage, speaking a word now, "Six
o'clock." Exclamation point to my years! Oh, rip
away this pain of other questioning! of petal plucking,
of bleeding daisies with hemlock stem. . . A madman's
aviary a smile would make this cell. . .)

You who
were that smile, eased past time's fence, sampled
dew, your wings heavy with jewels.

You who
left, leaving a cocoon, hear this creak: a porch swing
deserted at midnight, or is it the door of the (step right
up, see) domesticated poet caged in rhyme, left ajar?
escaped unto himself!

Yoo Hoo
Unsaved by love's unreasonable facsimile, escape
unto yourself! So long, chrysalis. We have done it.
So long.

* * * * *

This morning it is true. I join the Grown Men, the
legion of tilted lovers who walk the di Chirico Street of
exploded clocks, to the militant pulse of dawn. Raw
bedsheets are draped about, we walk to corners where
a shadow approaches. It is our own

the Grown Men
walking in metropolis rain, sloshing cold, as little old
ladies aping harlequins might, we cower and hunch: there
is too much man-madness about us.

The Grown Men

sprung in a Spring of derrick-lies, sand and chrome-misconceptions, form our own valleys where we lose ourselves in wire branches and bird-smelling cubicles.

O wrongly piloted, lost, lost as such.

With The Others, that is where I can be found, in the middle of the worst of the lot, the kaboodle; each of us groin to groin. There is one other; a voyeur, who mingles with us, or tries to. He is a Grown Man who would be part of anything righteous that would give him the opportunity to be violent in defending it. We shun him; we, The Others, spilling a same murky shadow: Another drunken Irishman, Another docile Negro, Another hypertensive Jew, Another self-righteous Englishman, Another bravura Italian, Another self-justifying German, Another . . . oh, all the rest, pointing at the shadow, in chorus, "What're you, just plain stupid, or Polish?" and laughing. . . Groping, all we need is one sweet voice saying, "Strength. The Beautiful Strength".

...

Grown Men

are myths suffering the tightest agony: surprise in isolation, groin to groin, yet secret one from the other, fleeing to rain and this gritty season, reconciling all this way: facts no longer, men, but rite.

Who was it once spoke of some sorely needed change change? The change sorely needed as the changing of Adam's leaf.

* * * * *

Naked in December, as best befits our world, stripped of the future, I secretly kiss the space where love trembled, as best befits our world, and exist on the ledge of impermanence, where there always seems room for just one more.

This is no hour nor climate for butterflies.

THREE
LOWER WEST SIDE PARAMYTHS

TRIPTYCH IN A COLD WATER FLAT

Off the subway at the corner where the neon
winks WINE firefly blue and bloodshot LIQUOR,
chart the course of the fallen star to this pole and
zenith of here and now scratched on the back of a
match book. Here at this eastward corner suburb
of time, turn left and lash out; now ride high
up, up, up, and up
to the tin-ceilinged pantheon nearer heaven than
wizened flame.

Knock, knock. Knock, knock, knock.
(Lights! Camera! Action!
The door has the first line.)
"Squeek".
"Hello."

1.

Awakening, slowly turning a narcissus toward
herself, "Hello. . . Don't I know you?"

"Do you have a beautiful mirror?"

Aware only of the idol in the plum colored
robe of velour decorated with pearls, assimilations
that were Garbo's tears; the hair of tarnished gold,
wearing Cupid's liberal bow and full set of proud
beams, she turns this way and that way, displaying
self to self. After a moment, mis-timed but glut-
tonously sated, into the narcissus turned mirror,

"Ah, yes. Indeed, here is a beautiful mirror."

So much for the close-up. In the background is
a grand piano with the keyboard padlocked. A
fringed shawl from old Spain is draped over it, and
I hasten to make comparison with a certain Matisse
before revulsion creases my brow.

2.

"Hello."

"Won't you come play with me? I'm expecting Tinkle Bell and that mean mean Captain Hook by shortly."

("Oops! G'bye."

Out a door -)

"No; please don't go. . ."

3.

Without as much as an Excuse Me, now, dressed in tacky remnants held together with open pins, clothes pins, and half completed patchwork stitching (interrupted by a thought), the actress stands at the open skylight in a wind gale. Unmindful of hurricane and the tardy opinions of others, she smiles faintly, superior; one hand clutches her symbol of mental levity, her Girl Scout hat. Her other hand, ah, this is the hand of one whose first calling was to be a Spanish dancer but her hands were too small. That is, she could hardly make the subtle, vague gestures so much a part of her being, with her delicate hands crammed with castanets.

"Hold the book."

I do. It is the threadbare playscript for the touring company of the play END OF THE LINE. She awaits her cue line. One hand bides time with space a fan in repose, kindred to space, though the feelings behind it are outsize. Upstairs, above the skylight, overhead, someone paces back and forth; (his feet must be big to be heard so distinctly through marble floors. Back and forth. . . The feet of the Director) She awaits her cue line.

This could go on well into the night, so tiptoe squeek

down, down, down, and out
to this corner where I stand on my hands; car headlights become stars have a truer reality. With my

eyes clenched tight, black, all is hidden: that room furnished with bushels of fans, cluttered with hideaway beds and Chinese boxes; incense of pretense burns to hide true odors. Careful! the floor is a trap door.

Black, hidden is the actress who clutches her throat, her yellow feathered boa constricts; she speaks her one line in her play; she addresses her lover. "Moon? Moon? 'Moon?'" The billboard man across the way winks firefly blue and bloodshot. . .

I will escape into this doorway of fruits of iron as chorme plated progress swooshes by. See, see, actress! it flies too.

TWO OF PRIDE'S FACES

Trapped

in the vacuum of spent echoes a young man stood, alert, high atop a roof beneath azure (sun of Croesus) and looked out over the city where nothing grew. He turned his witnesseth head very slowly, first this way slowly then that, mechanically, like one who evokes with lavender eyes, the eyes of an effigy; a prophet at Gommorah sniffing the air for climatic warnings, premonitions. He did not speak, fleck soot, send the needed signal, put the cautious finger to his lips, condemn nor condone the decay which arose in sulphury boulders, proud billows of soot and brimstone; a nightmare of corrosion harvested by time and man: sovereign air. He was unshattered, aloof. He returned to his pleasure of feeding groats and mincemeat to the luminous-plumed birds that came to him from distant unpredictable climes and gnarled boughs.

Two bums squatted on a doorstep; a familiar climate pervaded, this block was their living room. The older bum was preoccupied in an enterprise of the flesh of an onion; he was cutting it with his knife in delicate strips, pluckily. As he crunched and munched, a flood of tears muddy gullies down the grizzly harvest of laugh-wrinkles. The young bum, tranquil of expression, deprived

of lines, chilled to the marrow with an Idea, would only peek at the old bum's pungent hi-jinks from the corner of his eyes without being caught, it would betray his hunger. So he continued to do when Curiosity, the cat, slithered out from beneath her mantle of shadows.

Trapped!

The old bum spoke. "Here's a piece of onion. A goody of a bonbon, an unravished delight plucked by the nimble fingers of vestal virgins from the earth's cornucopia. Want it?"

The young bum was looking upward, shadows of bars had fallen upon him, he felt himself caged. His thought was taken up with the vision of the young man standing naked as a Greek statue atop the roof. The face resembled his own but it was like communicating through water; only with the most intense effort could the two merge into one. The old bum nudged him; the young bum made several little stern shakes of his head.

"You sure? . . . Well, my name is Reality. I don't see why you and me can't be side-kicks; what's your name?"

"Pride."

Time; time like a white sheet of paper before the news is printed on, for no communication passed between the two bums except the eloquent growling of Pride's stomach, wrinkling the sheet of time.

"Two pieces left, you re welcome to one of them."

A moment. It took Pride that long to extend his trembling hand.

A shuddering in the wind: the sorcery of taffeta?
. . . or the asthmatic wheezing of old ladies?

"Souffrir. Souffrir. Souffrir."

as if to disguise further. The tears in the young bum's eyes gave the globes of his eyeballs the cast of marble. And he hadn't even started to chew the onion!

The onion was exotic, nectar, a Far Eastern delicacy set before Balthazar.

"I guess Pride is only your maiden name." The old bum began to retch with a vertigo of victory.

* * * * *

The man atop the roof turned his back and slowly walked out of sight, but going in the direction of bountiful Zodiac. . . Now only the birds, surly hags, their feathers uncombed, are atop the roof, stiff with death.

The young bum blinded with tears, eats, eats, and eats. His falling tears make the sound of marble masks breaking or of a transmigration.

Release.

This is the apotheosis and he doesn't mind. . . not even as he feels himself released, and turning into a buzzard. A buzzard released from his cage, set free in the prison of the world.

DUST OF SILENCE

for Earl Hyman

This is the hour the pale and neutral moon pricked by Styglan traffic f lobs to the gutted out yards, front and back. This is the hour young men with store houses congested with empty picture frames for heads, walk the dusty roads in stocking feet. Their canvasses are tattered to cards of identity scattered upon the sea. . .

Smithereens of sound is now dust of silence. . . slowly fallen upon the roofs and this street like a parental hush; heavily, the imperial mantle. . . At ten A. M. after the dishes were washed and Christ had been hanging makeshiftly from a crops for hours, (silenced as effectively as our neighbor's dearly-beloved rope, even though we knew it would happen and did happen) it was this way. Heliotrope scented silence sneaked between these cell houses near Calvary, into those sties and these chicken coops. Goldleaf chickens cocked their heads and perched on one leg longer than they normally

would. Distant spurts of light, puffs of lightning or vague suggestions of incendiaries? only the penumbras could be seen far off on the thin black strip of horizon of Calvary Hill. But only a few saw, and from the corner of their eyes. It was darkly this way on this and certain other streets at ten A.M. when an oxblood dawn kept its grip on the city, the morning German boys having their boyish prank were expected to march through the Arc de Triomphe, even though we knew it would happen, and did happen. This hush pervades now, heavily, the reciprocal hush; the dripping faucet silences: the dust, the sovereign dust. Car noises are heard, yes, a faint rumble of trucks, buses languid in their freedom, but they remain distant, engines balking at their reins, sniffing, not at all sure they want to come through this narrow, one-way street, they would be trespassing on roofs, engine, arc, chickens, all stamped GUILTY BY ASSOCIATION, a clay pax from dust un-risen on drizzling Easter. Who slammed that door? ! What defiance! . . . The sound sends out a warning tremor of an impending bolt of violence; on a window sill where geraniums and dust mops are flowering, a geranium shivers. The cooper across the street, standing in the arch entrance to his shop, made a few half-hearted taps on a barrel he was making earlier this morning, but now he has disappeared in the blackness of his shop where he keeps the light off. For years the sound of fireworks has been heard in the distance and it will remain this way, everyone is sure of it, so there is no cause for alarm since no one knows what day is being celebrated, and there is safety in silence.

Now is the moment a gray hand streaks across
this slate of sky; cache the begger's
ransome of dreams!

the aged have outbursts now

the moment of dog-eared statistics hesitating a
moment before their consecration into dust

now the aged squawk, feather
flayed birds; the screeeech
and screeeech and screeeech
to out-sound the clack of
their joints and bones in
their ricky licky music

now; the Kewpie Doll ascends the throne; the
scene is shifted!

the aged complain of the vibra-
tions coming from the caves beneath
cellars; and everyone hears! now

The Generation two-timely plucked, thereby born
OUT OF GENERATION quickly tape the aged and
soundproof like mummies until they promise
a better display of the manners they taught,
and now all muster a twenty-one fart salute:

"Silence!"

"Silence!"

"Silence!"

(etcetera.)

long story
At
sunset
he
found
round-hipped
laughing
Love.

At
sunrise
he
saw
Love
to
the
subway.
And away she went riding
backward.

the remark

(The tugboat outside
anchored to fog, captainless
waits,)

The cocktail party snagged between
ceiling and linoleum bubbles of its component
parts: the toothy shout, wave, tight lip laugh,
asterisked to another hour and planet
eye-closed bongo dancing, the staccato-ed
armpit, when, whoa, the basilesk remark
at the crystal to lip, gashed a laugh
felled a shout to earth, closed a bewildered
eye and stamped all, all and final
to a mottled and fuming bas-relief.

(The captainless tugboat
anchored to fog
waits and, true to promise to Those Who Escape
wheezes its beckoning once. Twice. And final.)

suburbia

"COME ON, HONEY, COME ON, WAKE
UP, WAKE UP! I CAN HEAR THE
CLOCK TICKING AWAY AND THERE'S
---OH, MY GOD, THERE'S ONLY TWO
SECONDS LEFT! HONEY! GET UP,
HONEY, GET UP! THE DOOR'S GOING
TO OPEN AND YOU BE THERE!
YOU'VE GOT TO, YOU'VE JUST GOT
TO BE THERE TO STICK OUT YOUR
NECK, YOUR HANDSOME BROOKS
BROTHERS NECK, HONEY, TO SAY
'cuckoo! cuckoo!'"

formula for tragedy

Mouse meets cat.
Mouse eats cat.

little poem

We walked in the hoarfrost.
You pointed at the skyward
horse and laughed prettily
through your nose. I won-
dered: if I wore a silly
hat with poppies, if I could
neigh too, and had wings,
would you love me too?

for Roni

nevertheless

The poet started.

By the lake
by the lake
by the wet cool lake.

Oh! man with a dusty mouth in
a season of Aprils. Oh! monk
in moonlight dancing a medeival
cloister to a silent pavane.
Oh! alabaster man awakening in
the black carhouse at the End
of the Line.

He came to a just end. One day
at high noon while writing about
the moon, he was sunstruck,

POEMS AND PROSE POEM

THE TWITTERING MACHINE for Claire Leyba

When Harlequin entered his room
dreary as a castle and found the Angel
(her hair bleached the color of air)
seated on his cot, majestically
(he should have known by that
which Angel she was)
he offered her a cup of wine
red wine, to put some color
in her cheeks,
(Why does he mistake her for Mae West!
He insits on it.)

Suspicion, its very odor
permeates in little explosive poofs.
Harlequin knows, he is certain
she has sticky fingers. He wonders
how far she would get with
the Empire State Building so
he adjusts his stomacher
clamps his Foley catheter
dons his vicuna-lined dunce cap
and hails a subway.

(But they don't see me.)

Expressly screeching at every bend
the approach the land of boppery.
Cutting into the 125th Street station
the Angel is suddenly Butterfly McQueen!

(But they don't see me.)

They
never short of labels
have one for me.
The Martian.
Stunted vocabulary. Wrong, Again.

I
am merely an ordinary
Twittering Machine, But

They
are generous. Ride, do not run
on either side, left or right.
One has a choice. But not I, oh no.
Line Straddler, that's me
twittering smack-jam up the middle
elbows, knees and all.

Twittering, sputtering
regurgitating, they get the message:
"This tunnel is as much mine
as yours!"

They
left and right, have need to be leery
leery of me. I have one wing
at the nape of my neck
like a mane, like a fin
which gives me the appearance
of soaring and enables me
to twice as fast
backwards.
I'm wearing spurs on my elbows.
This also helps.

They
son't know it, but I do!

They
are breaking all speed
limits. Racing to the nearest exit.

They
have weapons. I know
that too. But so have I
so

don't anyone cock their eye, at me
unless they know what they're doing.

Among my many talents is

cockatricity

and a word to be said unto:

"I told you so,"
(twittered from the roof.)

"Our planet
tripped on a star, don't think it didn't.
As some men might have it: leave it to all
the king's men to set her a-right. Do
away with a few star! Truth of the mat-
ter is it was the king's men who gave
her the shove.

The stars
loosely tacked to space, unburdened by
other's blame, lightly, concern them-
selves with the graver issues: yowls,
yuks, and cat-calls, willy nilly and
paper-loose. The celestial excursion!
but funward, don't think they're not."

Expressly aimed toward the Brooklyn Bridge
the Angel is suddenly Marilyn Monroe
and she speaks:

"The meeting place
of stars and men of kings is the half-
hidden garden with its stench of person-
al flowers — asphodel, narcissus, for-
get-me-not — banked in solitudes
with its personal glaze. The way is
long and leads directly to the golden
uncharted sea, but our secret subway
awaits us."

"So whispers the piebald Angel short of
breath, exhausted from repeating, in
the red fox chubby (it is cold at the
pole of time's suspension) scuffing
the air and versifying. But whom does
she think listens? Our prisms are
sacred to us, there will be no invasion
tonight

BUT
some of us have moved to the outskirts of
time when nobody was looking.

Those Others
They've got It, you know.

Some of us have packed our decanter

of promises in an overnight bag and MOVED.
(twittered from the window.)

SO
(twittered from the doorway.)

to avoid the ushers in white robes at the
end of the line, I say unto you, get off
at the stop BEFORE the next.

(I'll close the door to my
steel-padded cell now.
Yale-locked, padlocked,
night -latched; vault-safe
I'll sit, waiting in dread
of an inactive life

BUT
prepared for living and the
oncoming fog of uncertain
demands; me, elbows, spurs,
wing, cockatricity, and all.)

Prepared!
(My smiling echo)
Speed on, speed on.
By now, the Angel
might well be any of the persons of T.C,
Jones. There's no telling where those two
will end up.

WASHINGTON SQUARE: AUGUST AFTERNOON
to J.M.B.

Crouched over and across from the wailing girl,
(dabbing nail polish where nylon hell broke loose, and
realizing fully for the first time there is no way to
really repay the rich, unless it's a kind thought now

and then) her impatience crackles the sound of
orange-colored cellophane;

crouched over and across from the door TO LET
where glass "I" slipped,
the visage of the little boy, deceived, misinformed
at the bend in the path. He found his bush, Spectral-
peeing-(suddenly grown, and WOW !-snarled in a
Gidean discourse-whizzing, the fly zips, the visage
vanishes.) Tomorrow's fertilizer, the good and bad
of all;

crouched over and across from the newspaper
sniffers,

the poet who gave up the middle class, upper and
lower, as hopeless (sprawled on the fertilized French
poodle grass scorched brown; he, not the class, for
security insults, melody embarrasses.) Too early
risen, weighed down by The Rosey Eclipse, he hears
the sound within his head of The Nail hammered into
hardwood and knows, allez oop, the day beckons. He
throws back his head, the head of a stunted rooster
(no, not at all like an alley cat) he trumpets and
challenges the day with a deliberate cough, pppllut!
and "Hopeless! Hopeless!" He's found his song; he
saunters off to someone's sparrow roost called home,
so small it holds nothing but pocket editions.

Crouched over and across from the thread winders,

the "Here comes the sightseeing bus! Stick out
your tongue, do things,"

the scent and music of anemone on the breeze up
from Wall Street, sashaying, (tempting one to say he
wears ribbed velvet and not cordouroy), the Porcelain
Boy upholds the emblazoned reputation the rouged
tourist clipped with the Grayhound visa, Categorized
and catharized, the spot is X'd on the margin.

Crouched over and across is N.Y.U.

THE ICONOCLAST'S CLOSET

Holding the last of his old-found toys, he subjects himself to grim inventory which he makes whenever a son is born. The close quarters of the closet of this mind, to alien nostrils has the smell of fever and the sound of gurgling in sewers.

First, the reactionary is gouache. There! there he sits, his graystone face chisled with Brahman hands, behind a long black desk, on a swivel chair that never swivels. His dictionary has one word: NO buttered out generously to everybody everything everyday. His mind is a curved line starting at void ending at vacuum tripping over raspy negatives all the way. Gray hair and little cabbages are growing from his ears. One day, in a whistle voice, he said: MAYBE. Clarions blew in large hall rooms! shimmying eucalyptus, shattering the tombs! A stallion ran wild into the horizon and the sun rose high on a new gray day. And from The Sitters favorite kidney a mite-y sprout grew;

second, the prayer houses, Above the chants, organ and sputterings of the blindly devout in the service

Service, the most impressive elements are the silences. These he has preserved in a glass ball; /

third, aris-tuckus-y;

fourth, marriage. Marriage, the shopgirl's technicolor dream, the dream of the heir to the nuts-and screws millions married to the heiress of the dynamo zillions; marriage, the dream of the poorgirl already two months gone and the nightmare of the woman valiantly scarred;

fifth, bits of paper; credos, documents, agreements, treaties, all labeled

FOR THE BETTERMENT OF ~~ME~~

MANKIND

scratched out, rescribbled, tucked away in a vest pocket.

(He knew none of these things when,)

On closer observation we notice the closet isn't a closet at all. His house had been bombed like all the rest. Ideals are taught early in life; thereafter, right on through to the deathbed, experience nullifies one ideal after another; so many bombed statues to the left and right of the paths. With his chain of keys is a bottle opener; this is the key to his kingdom. So we see, the closet is really an outhouse.

In a moment's pause, he turns to face his day. Not below, not above, but directly ahead. I suspect there are few among us who can exchange, transmigrate, and see his day as he. . .

Interrupted, he interrupts: "I see the day before myself, and I am true to it. Fill in your days; go racing across your worlds on squeaky crutches." The cry of a new born son heralds the day; the iconoclast returns to his inventory.

Silence; it exalts us with its rareness.

from HARLEM: Sidewalk Icons

Man, in some lan
I hear tell, tears wep
in orange baloons will
bus wide open with
laughter.

Aw, cry them blues Man!

The kite

dangling from a bough-cloud is learned, knows as kin
the icon faces cracked in Harlem sidewalk squares,
the blissfully ignorant rope skipping:

"Lollypop sticks make me sick
wiggle ana wiggle, two four six"

the car brakes' sudden alarm . . .the kids' unlearned
hush. So goes the day.

Night. Black

is the air, white the kin-kite.
Laborers dream, the do, of swinging at the ball
and missing in a cosmic Yankee Stadium.
Swinging, swinging, always missing.

Dawn, Easter parader

comes wearing a cloche-cloud down to her eyes
decorated with a victim's shriek.

Sunday

ah, Sunday, is here.
Yam skinned women with calloused dreams look
high, far to the kite and while wiping away
Saturday labor beads of sweat, webs of mourner's
weeping, kindred

Monday

arrives on the express and waits panting
at the station...

"Lollopop sticks make me sick
wiggle ana wiggle, two four six.
They do."

The kite is learned.

HARLEM DAWNfor Charles Sebree

Dawn. Street. Hour of sailor's leave's-up,
stale beer in the hour glass . . . minutes
minutes pink gnats of minutes.

Ebony masks on walking poles, a menial gait.

TIDY THE STREETS BEFORE SUNRISE

from the eyrie hawks the phantom lady wearing
the heirloom megaphone of dove feathers, dried
blood. Promises, that largess given the black
palm will in turn be scattered among the birds.

Dawn. Street. Hour of girls who wear paper
flowers in their hair and one glass slipper,
calling veneer mahogany evaporated milk cream
dyed rabbit sable. Wearing one glass slipper,
the other leg bent stork-like.

Look, look! see Death behind the piebald Gal-
lahad veil covering his face patched and pock-
marked. Hobbling, the vender's gait, carrying
a red sheet on a stick. (Mismatched glass slip-
pers,)

THE COCK CROWS!

And look, look. Sleepwalking sailors, hypno-
tized phantoms, vanishing girls in feather coats
frisk the dawn. Death is drenched in his guise
of marble, Dawn. Street.

SOUTHERN FUNERAL

Six o'clock silhouette, gray, ribbons on the heart,
dogs bay at a scarecrow's grave. Ghosts of nephews
beckon with old men's voices, in a wheat field gutted
to alum crystal.

Thoughts plunging and darting.

A piebald jigger has lost his bearing in the mid air
of a breakdown, above a cornstalk, The tightrope is
slack. Blood clay clings to the life lion's intentions.
"Hear, kitty kitty kitty! Here I come, and I ain't
looking both ways on a wone-way street!"

Autumn leaves of dollars, and a scarecrow
purified tree of all desiring, lie at Mr Kitty-Man's
feet, Mr Kitty-Man with callouses on his counting
fingers.

"Stop the rattling
the rattling in the trees,
dry leaves
dry leaves
Stop the prattling
the prattling of the breeze!
dead leaves
dead leaves
Cover the mirrors
silence the clocks
hush the rumbling beneath the rocks!
Confetti our hopes in the air gone blind
the silence, his silence, deafens my mind!"

Six o'clock, the bankers-gray time of day.

A midwife runs thru the cornstalks: a scarecrow in
mourning forth into the past, a jungle of frenzied cord
ends,

A DEFINITION

An apartment building superintendant is a man who maintains order without being a supreme power, without a carte blanche to call his own, a bootblack at the mercy of his polish; in short, he has neither pot nor window. Bullying, finger-shaking, the power behind the throne (to himself); everything, even the throne is a whole size too large yet he lords over all in his true sovcrign, the basement with the water pipes, the subterranean cosmos. . . but no goldfishes! Ash cans and mops.

Victim and witness, vaguely aware of the form into which he has been hammered, he wears his ugliness proudly like a horror-helmet, and tugs at the reins of runaway mops! Such is the superman's function.

At any black as royal hour just before the garish dawn, we can hear the endless gramophone record of fanfarannade and abracadabra of this Minos on a trapeze, coming from the super's highroad: the basement hell. Listen.

JEAN- JAQ U ESor John and Ruth Stephan

THE INFANT

The quagmire of an overstuffed sofa---
the shin is for kicking the cat is for
skinning the stick is for sticking
this is just the beginning: the snowsuit inferno,
Earth and stairs they leap ice bites hot
water bites wind bites the bite of the
white she-wolf is broken glass. Red means
HURT. The sun is a splinter for the eye
lollypop is. . .

horehound suspiciousness.

Cheeks mean love but duty is a pee pot.
No outlines of day are left uncrayoned in dreams.
They mean MORE:

I want. Shin for kicking cat for skinning
stick for sticking
this is just the beginning
I want.

JEAN-JAQUES

Pick a number from 1
to 30, circle it on your
calendar, Jean - Jaques
died thumbing his nose.

The sheets, spotted, a sad sea of Latin faces.
Blood and bone, grandmothers sitting, kneeling,
knitting manners and diets in a graveyard, or doing
their beads. And not a comtesse in the lot.

Jean-Jaques lies in an empty black room of the
mind where the face of the Angel of Death appears. . .

“Take it on the lam, Angel with your twelve karat
halo, disrobed of personal feeling. Fat and beaming
or slick and chi-chi, Angels of Death all have smelly
feet . . .”
wet with tears. . .

"Jean-Jaques, When you returned to yourself you were dragging a carrion carcass behind you."

"Shed your wax tears for the neon-world!"

"The door of entrances and exits has gone, Jean-Jaques. Gone!" (Ave! Ave!)

A dark cloud of tragic laughter. All say good-bye. The petrified sheet. Reflected on the half-lidded eyeball: the anxious gawk of a little black haired girl, hail hidden behind the door. She shuts her eyes, and slams the door,

(Ave.

Aa aa aa aa

ve.)

THE PALE BLUE CASKET

Why don't we rock the casket here in the moonlight?

A man begins in the cradle and ends in the casket. That's if he's a two time winner. In between? The echo of a long lament. A mosaic of sleep. A marble laugh. A few grapes. A short wail from the other shore. The scattered moldy crumbs of best intentions and the insecure peace of distance. The moon and the sun go on playing an eternal game Show-me-yours-and- I'll-show-you-mine but words fail us. We say, here lies a man in a telephone booth, already cold and without direct communication to the moon to warm himself.

And rock so soon!

Rock, rock, rock the casket here in the moonlight.

CARILLION

Ringling clearly as an echo, elusive, through the
tree tops of the Foret de Compiegne, the splinters
of sound, primordial, sharply through to the Cote
d'Azur where the mirror of the sea awaits the slim
figured voice,

 "I want. I want.", . . .
awaits to receive into itself, whole. . .

 "I want. I want."
---but it is not the voice of Jean-Jaques.

Jean-Jaques by another's name.

The name of our first love. Our own

received and sunken. Another rupture in the sea,

PSYCHE

When Psyche rose up from slag
rose, pearl, and madrepore
geyser-sprung, dripping
resplendent in her blanket of innocence:
rose, pearl, and madrepore
and no brass band, she did not know
there were swamps, strategically located,
to cross. The concocted images
as they will, took contour and sound
by the merest osmosis, that of thinking outward
from source, her bird cage skull, outward,
setting images free only to be trapped
 on the unpainted canvas of space.
 "Who is to paddle? Who is to drive the
amphibious Cadillac? Oh, yes. One can always fly."
 The girl flew.

Exhausted, and stained the color of truth
she takes off her black glasses (for glass plays
tricks where tricks have been played on it). She
scowls majestically and squares off. She clears
her throat to speak, to utter The Word that would
crack marble, crack dawns! But no word comes, the
universe is spared for one more day. She tosses a
taciturn glance over her shoulder but the world does
not turn to salt. Egg of disappointment, yolk of
restlessness caught in her throat, she swallows it
whole,

 "I don't care; whacking on the wicker of my
cage, I hear a zither, and I don't care!"

 She, of-The-Word-which-she had-forgotten,
 shimmying like there is no tomorrow
 finds her bearings, unfolds her arms
 and descends into the painted backdrop
 in nearsighted believing that it is Aurora.
 Rose, pearl, and madrepore.
 Descending, eating sunflower seeds
 she flips playing cards over her shoulders
 at the tardy brass band.

SALUTE

Murderers
of Emmet Till
I salute you
and the men
who set the
murderers
free I salute
you. Twice.

I salute
the brothers
of charity
who let Bessie
Smith bleed to
death. She
had the wrong
blood type.
It wasn't white.

I salute
all self-annointed
men
who dole out freedoms to other
men.

I could go on. But won't. I
salute everything, all things
that infect me with this knot
twisted in my subconscious; knot
of automatic distrust, unravelled.
I salute everything, all things
worthy of my confusion, my awe,
my fury, my cursing, which never
looks good in print. . .worthy of
my tears. . .ALL HONORABLE MEN!
I salute you.

You could go on. . .But won't.