

GEOFFREY COOK

THE HEART OF THE BEAST

13 DIVERSE SCENES OF THE CITY
& PEOPLE OF CLEVELAND

after

Charles Meryon's etchings
"Eaux-fortes sur Paris"

&

Pierre Bonnard's lithographs
"Quelques Aspects de la Vie de Paris"

In Memoriam

d.a. levy
Adelaide Simon
Loring Williams

*I envy you. You North Americans are very lucky.
You are fighting the most important fight of all -
you live in the heart of the beast.*

Che Guevera, 1964

Prelude

From the south
on Interstate 77
on the gray horizon / a monolith

Terminal Tower
above fire-spitting mills

beyond
in northern sky
snow
freezing November breeze
Cars whistle-pass
radio is turned on:
"And they've all come
to look for America."
Up from Akron

Canton
Appalachian Ohio
the South

Industrial Smog
Over Cuyahoga Valley
(solarplexis of American Civilization!)
steel mills
fire
heavy steam flowing-up
dirt
railroad yards
ore ships

freeway meets I-71 from Columbus
a sign:

"East 9th Street
Downtown."

1.

Hart Crane's House

*

Afternoon

Hart Crane lived in this house
Now, busses & cars crawl past
across the street
Bulldozers!
An old man sweeps the sidewalk.

*

Night

The house burns
The old man stands outside
blanket around
shivering
he weeps on the sidewalk.

*

Morning

Bulldozers come
they move fast
- the City wants the land
The house is an empty lot
The old man still sweeps the sidewalk.

East 115th Street & Euclid Avenue

2.

Old Simon

Old Simon
skinny Christian
sits in a coffee house
after day's work in a paint factory
surrounded by the young
who listen to him talk
as he makes Jesus into his own image
serving man
though persecuted by quisling Jews
& Italian police.

The Well
(East Cleveland)

3

January Morning Rush Hour

Heavy snow across Shoreway
Cars slog through slush
horns blaring
Air thick with fumes.
On right, buildings
On left Lake
frozen / to white horizon.

Memorial Shoreway

4

Old Woman in a Rest Home

She lies on a bed / staring
Sun is too much
for her old eyes
Curtain is drawn
Nurse tells her it's time
for toast & tea.
She doesn't want to go
to complain to the old ladies
of spending
the rest of her life
in this home for the
dying.

5

The Evangelist

5 O'Clock
Dark-walled street
Honking traffic
Stampede!

An old man
rotting teeth
foul breath
spews poor English
(with an Eastern
European accent)
throwing Bible into air
shouting:
"The End / The End
is Near
REpent!"

jumping above throng
(dirty trousers
baggy
ruffle up & down)
"You bother people, Old Man!"

Public Square

6

Trinity Cathedral

Coming
catfish
through vaulted arches
they crave cannibalistic salvation

Kvrie eleison
Kvrie eleison
Kvrie eleison

Christe eleison
Christe eleison
Christe eleison

Kvrie eleison
Kvrie eleison
Kvrie eleison

July sun
Cleveland is burning
3 cops
3 Nationalists
4 people in cross-fire

Tanks trudge outside.

July, 1968

7

Adele's Lounge Bar
To Paula Marie Savarino

People push their way into this tight-packed cave where they hopefully wait for a seat; letting their lifeless, yet deathless days escape into the night. In the dim light, their images are cast upon the mirrored walls, while the juke box serenades the quarters & dimes shoved in as sacrificial honey cakes by the tight-boxed semi-virgins.

Quickly, like moccasin-footed warriors, the bar owners stalk the broke customer to sacrifice him from the womb of his seat to the street, complaining of the depreciation of their business while their customers sniff the strong smell of urine seeping through the bathroom doors.

Long-haired boys walk through the entrance, sweeping their eyes for a friend. And young students wander in, hoping to find that new freedom, proclaimed by the prophets of love & of dope.

Nightly, they congregate for their mass of pretzels & beer. Nightly, they assemble to meet their own; in hopes they may not have to go home alone - in hopes there may be another to clutch / in the morning / at the sun's awakening.

May
museum park
Chrysanthemum bushes & cherry trees
Ducks in pond
People

w
a
l
k
i
n
g

s
t
a
n
d
i
n
g

lying on grass
little children
p l a y i n g /running
A young couple hand-in-hand
they throw popcorn at ducks
laughing
they walk through people
past preaching evangelist
past man pleading for peace
past ornate fountain
& into museum

Monday morning
first Monday in January
from museum steps / across abandoned park
rush hour traffic on Euclid Avenue
frozen pond
Wind / flurries.

University Circle

9

Hough

Setting sun
gray, fly-paper sky
Smogged slums
"Motherfucker Honkie"
running
looming Large

white eyes
through black skin
Ripping-off wallet/watch
"Let's kill
this Sucker!"

10

Death of a West Virginian Motorcyclist

*'Tis the gift to be simple
'Tis the gift to be free
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be*

Old Appalachian Folk Song

February
Cuyahoga Valley
steel mills spew fire & fumes
Factory whistle blows!
\$110 in my pocket
The Bars?
There is no love in the bars
only whores to make the nightshift shorter
A dime bag to make big city blues ride
and pride
a Harley-Davidson!

Opening the garage door
Laying rubber
Winter at 60 m.p.h. freezes through leather
Skidding...

Spring
across the Ohio River
Afternoon caresses our green hills...

Near West Side

11

The Wandering Jew

Old man
works slow
like an old, unwed woman
picking faults
out of the foreign brutes
(so like the Blond Beasts
35 years ago...)
with Yiddish accent
they can't understand
This anachronism
of the dead decades.

Cedar Hill

Dharma Bum

Neon lights
 flashing on kids
 on corner
 "I was on the road for 15 years."
 Jaw clutched perennial pipe
 Squatting like duck
 with 18 year-old girls
 jumping round sidewalk
 Halts
 holding chest
 "I've got to catch my breath
 45, you know."
 Girls laugh
 It's hard to make the young ones
 not like Mexico
 or North Beach
 in the early 50's
 Writing novel last 5 years
 since heart went bad
 & 80 year-old father took him back
 - disgrace to his Jewish family.

The Coventry

Lake View Cemetary

Overcast lumbers through April sky
 bringing back winter's monotony
 Buttoning-up jacket
 Walking faster past the Garfield Memorial

 black with the industrial dirt of 90 years
 the body
 twisted by a quirk into President
 wrenched by a bullet
 he lay useless for months
 now his mausoleum is a
 national monument

 Freezing rain patters on stones
 on ground of my forebearers
 who came to civilize this continent
 from England
 Scotland
 Ireland
 France
 Germany
 Switzerland
 Sweden
 who erected this city in name of
 their Protestant
 Catholic
 Jewish God
 their ghosts stand sentry
 from graves
 over city

Thunder crashes at Shiva's feet

TUMMMMMMM...TUMMMMMMM

When I die

Let my body burn on the pyre of bright purple
 & orange gods
 Let me ascend beyond the clouds & smog
 & Let me rest on a high, snow-soaked peak of the
 Sierra Nevada

When I return

Let my body be a boy below Shasta's summit
 Let me feel the growing earth
 & not know the hate of the street
 nor the fear of an alien / in a strange
 neighborhood

Postlude

Downtown buildings
 through morning haze
 Garbage truck whines street
 little girls play jump-rope on sidewalk
 a few spring flowers on an apartment lawn
 I can hear trucks on the Shoreway
 I think of my journey
 across the Plains
 over the mountains
 through the desert

As I leave
 Is it too much to say
 I love you all?