

THE PSYCHIATRIST AT THE COCKTAIL PARTY

A Play In Monologues

By Frederick Feirstein

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## CHARACTERS

BEN STRUTHERS -- the psychiatrist

LARRY -- the host of the cocktail party

BEA -- Larry's mother

JOYCE -- Larry's fiancée

STEVE -- Joyce's son

RENEE -- Larry's friend from college

MEATO -- owner of meat markets and Renee's husband

RENEE'S DANCE PARTNER

JAUREZ -- The Guest of Honor, a rebel leader from Quistador

JIMINEZ -- the second in command, Jaurez's "right hand"

"THE OLD MAID" -- the point of view character

JOE -- a "headhunter"

MARK STERN -- owner of a business selling New York City souvenirs

One set: Larry's living room

The present

## LARRY CORNERS THE PSYCHIATRIST

Look who's standing in my bedroom door!  
Give me your coat, Ben. Glad you could come  
To one of my fund-raising bashes.  
This one is for that man from Quistador.  
Startling, these guys in khaki and mustaches.  
Try an hors d'oeuvres. The catering is yum.

Where's Mary? ..., Jeez, does she have a fever?  
I hope it's just the flu and nothing more.  
Even you'd be a hypochondriac  
With my mother — it was so hard to leave her.  
I wish Mary wasn't flat on her back;  
I wanted her to see my new decor.

It's Pop-Colonial, a parody:  
Brighton bamboo, but painted Third World red.  
The knicknacks are from 42nd Street,  
Las Vegas, and Disneyland: *our* ivory  
But crafted out of plastic — Go on, eat —  
And not one single elephant shot dead.

Mary would have loved our rebel guest,  
An illustration of her Ph.D.  
On Latin intellectuals *cum* killer.  
I think this baby far outstrips the rest.  
He has a Harvard social work degree  
And still reads shrink books. God, I think he'd thrill her.

The women love him, so he said to Joyce  
Jokingly. Doc, while I still have your ear,  
I want to tell you something. Please don't smirk.  
I think I may be making the wrong choice  
In getting married. (Hi, Steve.) Come stand here.  
Each time I get engaged, my goddamn quirk

Obsesses me — is that the proper word?  
Some aspect of her body starts to look  
— Her breasts, her neck, even the way she walks —  
Like Mom's or Sis's. Isn't that absurd?  
I've haunted bookstores, looking for a book  
About this. You know my shrink never talks

But simply nods or says, "In time we'll see."  
Except that lately I can't get it up!  
When Joyce lies on her side, her torso's curve  
Is Mom's! I know what you must think of me.

*Our little Larry got a crazy kup.*

*Our little Shmedipus ain't got the nerve,*

I hear my coffee magnate father say,  
*That's why I left a trust fund for the jerk.*  
*He can't support himself in love or work.*  
That's not the truth. You want to hear it, Ben?  
You want to hear the only, maddening way  
A woman makes my soldier stiffen?

Remember when I first came on to Joyce?  
— Before her husband died, when she was his..  
Exactly when I first came on to Liz,  
Nancy, and Beth. All mothers of a boy  
Rebelling as I was! I should keep my voice  
Down. Can you hear me? I hope this won't destroy

Our friendship, Ben. Don't smile. I'm serious.  
Joyce was your student, sort of like your child.  
You see Renee dancing? It drives me wild  
To watch her luring her husband. It  
Makes me absolutely delirious.  
I think deep down I can't leave Momma's tit.

I'm boring you, you hear this every day  
And write that sex is often infantile.  
I will not toddle down the wedding aisle,  
Hoping that once your Joyce becomes my wife  
This craziness will somehow go away,  
And that at forty-two I'll change my life!

Please think about this as you mingle here.  
Joyce shouldn't have to tough this out with me,  
Her husband dead. I bet her son is gay.  
I wonder if I have a buried fear  
Of "hamasexuality," as Dad would say.  
I can't believe that I am fidgety

Around Renee, and that the Meat King  
Her husband — that fat, that ignorant, that crass  
Wholesale butcher is what I really crave,  
That somewhere in me I am conjuring  
His slipping a long bratwurst up my ass.  
I am my mother's not my father's slave!

I was attracted to Renee in school,  
Before the Meat King crawled into her bed.  
But then I wasn't rich enough, an heir;  
Just a Momma's boy, a cheerleader, a fool.  
But now, however, I am debonair,  
A boy to flirt with, now that my father's dead.

TO LARRY WHO DOUBTS HE SHOULD MARRY

Larry, imagine after dying that your soul  
Wakes up in a barren, rural home  
In Quistador — genetically a gnome,  
But smart, aware of living in a hole

From watching t.v., watching men like you  
Throw parties where they somberly confess  
They feel powerless when they undress,  
Or get excited by some rebel's coup.

Imagine *being* like you're feeling, Larry,  
And think concretely of your peasants' lives,  
The helplessness they suffer with their wives,  
And how they'd laugh to hear you might not marry

Because you're too "obsessed" to make a home  
With Joyce who gives you what you'd rather give  
Politically — to strangers. Larry, live  
As if you're not inhabiting a gnome.

All day I hear my patients curse their fate,  
How psychologically they re-create  
Their parents tyrannizing them with guilt  
Until their penises refuse to tilt,  
How history seems passed down in their genes:  
Oedipus zipping down his gabardines

And, like you, finding Guess who? Mother!  
Abel getting all A's, despite his brother  
Who beats him nightly when the lights are out,  
And wakes up in adulthood wracked by doubt.  
I don't speak glibly when I say rejoice,  
Suffer your neurosis. But marry Joyce.



## LARRY'S MOTHER

You're Doctor Struthers, aren't you?  
The former mentor of his fiancée.  
I'm Larry's mother. Call me Bea.  
Larry never thinks of introducing me,  
As if he's lying and I might give him away,  
Or set up an intriguing rendezvous.

Though Larry' Harvard, I am crass  
And all his friends find me refreshing. So,  
What do you think? You like the merchandise?  
You're puzzled, but you giggled twice.  
Am I a psychiatric type that you don't know,  
Or just an agèd piece of ass?

I was a Catskill comedienne.  
True. Always "on," always playing a part  
Till Larry's father, may he rest in peace,  
Insisted on calling me, not Bea, but Beatrice,  
And that I had more than a mouthpiece — a heart.  
That isn't cockamamie, Ben.

If I might be presumptuous  
(Who me?), I'd like to solicit  
(Please no blushing, no erection)

Your thoughts about this insurrection  
Larry's supporting now in Quistador. No thoughts on it?  
Try the stuffed shrimp: they're scrumptuous.

Tell me if this is self-destructive: Quistador  
Borders the country where we import  
Our coffee beans. Larry says  
To me, only to me, Juarez  
Will leave our crops alone if we support  
His cause, if we serve schnapps to the señor.

But now, of course, I overhear my Larry  
Talk only of ideals to everyone.  
Did he reveal this other side to you?  
He's not your patient, there is no taboo  
Involved. Believe me, it ain't fun  
To ask you. Your pet Joyce he plans to marry

Don't know, or else won't say. That shrimp is good.  
The caterer was my lover. So,  
Knowing Larry, what do you think?  
What will you have to drink?  
Take your time, but tell me what you know.  
Our coffee business now is thriving, knock on wood.

But if it goes, and I am gone,  
What happens to my son? How will he fend  
For himself — he's never done it — on his wits?

Under pressure Larry quits.  
You know how as a kid he used to defend  
Himself in school? He'd befriend the scum,

Or give them money so they wouldn't beat him up.  
Like now — I never thought of it!  
You see what happens even talking to a shrink?  
Your golden silence made me think!  
He's buying protection, the little shit.  
Let me pour *our* coffee in your cup.

## JOYCE

Hello, Doctor ... Why am I looking glum?  
I didn't realize, Ben. Show me the look.  
I'm glad that you could leave your work and come ...  
See patients on a Saturday? Silly,  
I thought you might be working on your book!  
Where's Mary? I hope she isn't ill. She  
Doesn't take much care of your ... her body. Larry  
Is somewhere back there asking someone if  
He finally ought to take the plunge and marry.  
What do I want to do? Pour me a stiff  
Drink and I'll tell you. Sometimes, Mine Herr Shrink  
— Always — I want to run away in time  
And be your fawning student, whoops! I think  
There's more than scotch and soda in this. I'm  
Getting high on talking to you. I hate  
Larry's parties for these dwarfs of history  
Like that one with the beard, that second-rate  
Castro with his obligatory bad-  
Mouthing America. Here's my son.

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You know Dr. Struthers. How's the party, Steve?  
I'm glad you like the Guest of Honor. He  
(Larry claims) will soon take over Quistador  
And bring equality to everyone.

Larry is raising money for his war.  
Yes, try your Spanish out on him. I'm glad  
You're interested. But tell me when you leave.

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What is he doing? Just driving me mad.  
But I don't want to talk about Steve yet.  
The music's playing, and I want to dance.  
I want to close my eyes and fantasize  
That I'm in college with the power to  
(Don't laugh) destroy your analytic stance.  
That's what I thought when I looked up at you  
This way, knowing of course you liked the look.  
I knew because you'd either rub your eyes  
Or look for something (safety?) in your book,  
Or ask me questions like you're doing now.  
I haven't laughed all week. *Stop, Joyce. Ask him how*  
*His patients are*. How's Mary? Glad she's healthy,  
And Larry's well, and Larry's very wealthy.

## RENEE'S HUSBAND

I'd like to introduce you to my wife  
Who's in the powder room. Her name's Renee.  
She's beautiful but needs to live in strife  
— Only with me, a charitable man.  
Doctor, would you snatch a canape  
For me, by reaching over if you can?

Why should I suffer? When I was a child  
My mother would always battle  
Not with my father, not with my brother — *me*,  
Though I never acted wild.  
She'd hollar when I'd shake my rattle,  
Or suddenly shake me violently.

But I want to get back to my wife.  
Doctor. As you'll see when you see her mood  
Swings, swinging from bad to good,  
She gives me no calm in my life  
Which I need with a mother like that.  
Do we choose our mates from the past,  
Looking for love that can't last?  
She's like an acrobat

Not in bed, but with emotions.  
I want her on medication  
— True Women's Liberation  
From all her crazy notions

Of how I'm black and white, of how I,  
Deprive her, showering her with gifts.  
She yells it is for *me* I give her little lifts,  
And why don't I let her die?

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Renee, come meet this fine psychiatrist.  
I didn't catch your name at first.  
Put that drink down. I insist.  
Have a coke if you're "dying of thirst!"  
These canapés are great. Aren't they, Doc?  
Not gin and tonic! Tell her it's no good,  
On top of these ups for her mood,  
To drink, that they'll put her into shock.  
What she buys from these dealers is shlock!  
It's better she mix food:  
Liverwurst, frankfurters. Would  
You bite them like you bite my cock!  
What do you mean? He's used  
To hearing words like this!  
Tell him how you bite when we kiss,  
When you're getting, like now, juiced.

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Please, Doc, don't wander off.  
I know you don't like talking,  
You guys — silent types who cough  
Ahem, ahem. Don't start walking

Away from me, or else I'll give you you-know-what.  
Don't stare like her who's cool,  
Especially when I'm hot.  
Don't treat me like an infantile fool  
Who, when he's rattled, will shake.  
I'm not the kind of man  
Who'd rather bend than break  
But will do everything he can.  
Why am I talking like this,  
When I'm asking for your assistance  
To help my wife, not piss  
You off with what she calls my butcher's persistence?

So here I've introduced you to my wife  
Who's eating like she should to keep her health.  
We'd like a consultation. Please, your card.  
The fee's no matter. I'm a man of wealth  
Who'll pay what's necessary till this strife  
Between us ends. You'll be her bodyguard  
Because one day I'll go, I'm scared,  
Out of control, if she keeps acting mad  
At me, at what's inside her, at the wall  
She always bangs when we're embattled,  
When I act cool, when I call her on all  
Her manipulations, when I refuse to get rattled.

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Put that drink down. Where are you going?  
A mood swinging her to that good-looking man.



Dance with him, bitch. Stand up if you can.  
Do you see how she's showing  
You, spitefully, how nuts she can be,  
Deserting me like this,  
Giving that stranger a kiss?  
Look at what she does to me!

## RENEE'S DANCE PARTNER

Look at that Spanish guy in camouflage,  
Those Calvin Klein fatigues and combat boots,  
That beard trimmed in a mirror in the woods  
Where Larry sends him whiskey and canned goods,  
Like Larry's father stocked an Elks Club lodge  
With little franks and long cheroots.  
Why these phallic images, Doc?  
Why am I fighting down an urge to tweak  
A chin hair from that strutting, radically chic  
Cartoon? Let's do, "She loves me, loves me not"  
On him, sprinkle this caviar with snot,  
These slices of — what's this? — our Larry's cock?  
You should have listened to the malice of  
That quasi-nymphomaniac Renee,  
The one whose husband riveted your ear.  
She told me if you treated her, she'd play  
With you with words; then when you fell in love  
With her, she'd screw you to the wall with fear  
Of suicide, malpractice, homicide  
— Until I felt it bulging in my pants.  
Isn't that weird? She knew, giggled,  
urged everyone to watch me dance.  
I parodied a Charleston, till I wiggled  
Into the bathroom where I jerked it down,  
Thinking of Larry's girlfriend. Listen, Joyce  
Is not the girl for him. She's smart, she's kind.

The only woman in this phony town  
I ever loved, could love. And who's her choice  
To give her inner riches to, to marry?  
This 1960's throwback, little Larry.

I'll tell you now what's cooking in my mind,  
And brings these little franks and Larry's cock  
Together. Larry (You'll think this nuts)  
In college had the hots for guess who? Crazy  
Renee, the pom pom Queen, whose every honey  
Was someone with a hoard of family money,  
Like him the Meat King with his chopped meat putz.  
Not sentimental Larry she called "lazy."  
We'll dance again. But this time when we kiss,  
Slipping a pill from mouth to mouth, I think  
I'll tell her — leading her by the waist outside —  
That the way to zap her husband for the shrink-  
Sending he wants to do is to piss  
Him off right now by taking Larry for a ride  
In Meato's big back-seated Rolls (Un!) Royce  
While I, in the commotion, comfort Joyce.

## THE OLD MAID

You're flirting with me, though I'm half-alive,  
Trapped in a body turning forty-five.  
I made those lines up, Doctor, like a guy,  
Not to flirt, but to subtly ask you why  
I'm at this party for this silly cause  
When everyone I've met here so far bores  
Me with their chatter, while their heads turn back  
At every sexy twenty-year-old snack.  
What would you call them: Children? Pederasts?  
Afraid of Time? Of anything that lasts?  
I've put my years in on the couch (not bed),  
Trying to leave a world inside my head  
Of Family, Neighborhood — all crazy, yet  
Much warmer than this world, this silhouette  
Of business people using work instead  
Of family for a place to block their dread  
Of isolation, like this party for  
That Latin Marxist, womanizing bore.  
What do you think his politics could be  
When he's pinched each woman on the ass but me,  
Only because I never turned my back  
To him? These macho guys are gay, attack  
The ass, afraid of what a woman can  
Present. Deep down, I think, they want a man.  
That's what this party's for — to celebrate  
The revolution of that potentate  
Over his constitution — which is gay.

Look at the way he mouths his canapé  
While talking to that boy — is that Joyce's son? —  
About artillery, the kind of fun  
You have as they recoil and make a hole  
To burrow in like some sex-crazy mole.  
Is this what men don't want in me, my wit?  
My realistic view of life? My grit?  
There's nothing wrong with me except my age,  
Our age we live in like our body's cage.  
Doctor, if there were world enough and time,  
We'd have no tragedies, no walls to climb.

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What do I think of your guest, that Latin lover?  
With good analysis, he might recover  
The early motives of his need to kill.  
No joke. I think he's seriously ill,  
As everyone who makes not love, but war.  
Without his jargon? Just a Conquistador.  
Sorry you asked me? No? Then, listen, Larry.  
Throw the next party for when you marry  
Joyce, or for life, at least for food relief,  
Not for this creep who brings us death and grief.  
You know, you're also nearly forty-five.  
It is miraculous to be alive  
— Lonely or crazy, poor, rich, middle class —  
Wanting a piece of male or female ass,  
Not this destroyer in his khaki slime,  
This bore, this thief of other people's time.

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What do you think of Larry? Should I ask?  
Failed in some developmental task?  
Maybe of separating from his mother,  
So that he has a need to undercover  
Merge with a stronger man to help him leave  
The safety of her skirts? Am I naive  
In using psychoanalytic jargon? No!  
I like your laugh, Doctor. Shall we gossip at  
Each fool we see? Or would you rather chat  
With someone younger, sexier? No crime  
To want a newer packaging of Time.  
You hear the way I deprecate myself,  
A dusty bottle on a dusty shelf?  
Empty except when I am feeling witty.  
Beneath these battle scars, you know, I'm pretty.  
Dust me off, I'll turn into a genie.  
I used to call my analyst a meanie  
When he looked trapped like that. And he was right.  
I've got to run. Have a good time tonight.

## THE GUEST OF HONOR

Of course I know Dr. Struthers! Author of  
*Fathers And Sons, Macho Men/Their Mothers* ,  
Two of the books I take into the hills  
To teach my people how to bring out love  
In what we call our sisters and our brothers.  
I read aloud as we go through drills.

You look amused. Bewildered. Tell me what!  
Señor, this isn't flattery. It's fact.  
I've even read your esoterica,  
Under a palm tree on an army cot  
— That one on how we're doomed to re-enact  
(All of us, not just the hysteric) "The

Death of Mirroring Self-Objects." Have you read  
McPhee's provocative biography? No?  
His thesis is I'm driven to repeat  
My father's being pummeled in his bed.  
Each strategy repeats each murderous blow  
Struck by his first son, adopted from the street!

Intriguing? Shall I stay in New York City,  
On your couch, and put my actions into words,  
With no assassin in the waiting room,  
Until we find the psychic nitty-gritty?  
— As doctors used to look in their kings' turds  
For signs of self-destructiveness and doom.

Sorry for being light. McPhee cuts deep.  
Down there you're taught to treat your wounds with action;  
Food, food and more food when they sense my state  
— Despair! — when they can't wake me up from sleep.  
There's developing a Young Turk faction  
Ready to destroy me — full of hate,

Full of macho turds to fill their emptiness,  
Their empty mothers that they've got inside,  
Frightened child-women who abandoned them,  
Like mine ... It's not too difficult to guess  
The way she acted when my father died.  
A son was something merely to condemn

Like the judge condemned my brother. She'd look  
For signs of violence, madness in me, though  
I was her own, though I had different genes.  
I had to keep my nose pressed to my book.  
If I was struck, I couldn't strike a blow.  
The schoolyard joke! Later she'd check my jeans

For condoms, till I wanted to raise hell.  
Oh, how I fucked and fought in adolescence  
While she retreated more and more to prayer.  
I justified my passion to rebel  
By quoting Marx and Lenin, Che Guever-  
"Ah! Ah! Ah! That's more the essence,"



You'd say in *Macho Men/Their Mothers*. But hear  
The actor wants to take his makeup off!  
I hate the ignorance of peasants. Food, more food,  
This revolution to deny their fear  
That God The Father's dead. Please, don't scoff  
At my simplistic use of you. I brood

About my motives while I strategize.  
I want to be free. *They* want to be red.  
Illiterates and autodidacts, they  
Quote me Marx, Lenin, while Communism dies  
All over Europe! They want to get ahead,  
Those bureaucrats-to-be, the proven way.

How can I live with my own fabrication?  
How can I live freely, not revolted,  
Not a tyrant to myself, not led  
Into self-assassination?  
Wouldn't Larry, that idealist, be jolted  
If he could see the drama in my head,

The sacrificial rite that makes t.v.?  
Since Our Father died, we need blood, more blood  
— The Kennedys, Martin Luther King.  
The final makeup they will do on me  
Will simply be my face shoved down in mud,  
My brothers and my sisters pummeling.

## THE HEADHUNTER

Sorry. Didn't mean to bump into you.  
Never thought I'd say that in this five  
Bedroom, three bathroom co-op Larry has ...  
"Joe." Your average Joe, trying to survive  
Rent, taxes with no deductions. You are who?  
A starving member of the middle class  
— A shrink! who doesn't let a minute pass  
For free! Am I breaking a taboo  
By joking about money? All one's drive

Accomplishes is to put you in reverse.  
I am a Headhunter who's forced to work  
Eat, screw, and read *The Wall Street Journal* in one  
Room smaller than this living room, a jerk  
Who even in his thirties was perverse  
Enough to think the future would be "fun."  
Doesn't it seem that everything you've done  
Is worthless, and that everything is worse,  
That the I.R.S. is driving us beserk?

But no one in this country will rebel  
On his own behalf. Let the Communist  
Chinese peasant chop off his landlord's head.  
Don't say you have your own right to resist!  
The Boston Tea Party is our parallel,  
But we're screwed more. What do we do instead?



Your nodding, Sir, is welcome. Thank you, Mam.  
Maybe I'm loaded. I don't give a damn.  
Why don't we learn to make our own demands  
Like Señor Wences here. You're looking hazy

— When we were kids, he was a t.v. puppeteer  
Who made a face with lipstick on his hand.  
He entertains us now with politics,  
Except we liberals fail to understand  
The underpinnings of our Help is Fear  
— Of Uncle Sammy's cutting off our dicks.  
So we're distracted by the Senor's shticks.  
Before they altogether disappear,  
We'll vicariously join his rebel band.

No, Larry, I don't want to stop or leave  
Until I'm sober. What I want to do  
Is really radicalize this crowd,  
Make them uncomfortable — You! You! You! —  
By telling them what they deep down believe,  
By saying what they only say aloud  
In psychotherapy where it's allowed.  
Am I right, Doctor? Don't tug my sleeve,  
Larry, you *hand!* This really is a coup.

I'm going to sit-in in the dining room,  
And anyone who cares to join me, please  
Come with me now and make your protest heard  
— Above the sipping wine and nibbling cheese —

That we are fed up with the doom and gloom  
We live in, hippie babies left in turd,  
Too fixed in time to say a single word.  
Won't a magical economic boom  
Save us? *We* are the Communist Chinese!

MARK STERN

The guy who's sitting in is not an ass.  
My wife and I can only have one child  
Because today you can't be middle class  
And live in New York City and survive  
On less than maybe eighty, ninety grand.  
The cost of rent and school here drives me wild.  
My daughter wants a sister, brother. I've  
Tried to explain to her we can't afford  
An extra room, a second bill for school,  
That public schools are overcrowded, violent,  
That she'd be scared there, or at best be bored.  
She looks at me as if I am a fool.  
Go make a second-grader understand  
I spent ten thousand dollars last year just  
For school and camp. The consequence? *I'm* cruel.  
Go tell that to the U.S. government  
When tax time comes! I work two jobs. My wife  
Works one. I know I'm shortening my life  
To pay a nanny and a girl to dust.  
Crazy. Crazy. Crazy. Why do we stay?  
Who would hire a forty-three-year old  
Who markets New York City souvenirs?  
My wife has tenure at Queens College — gold.  
Besides, there is the opera, the ballet,  
The theater, restaurants, museums, the stores,  
The hi tech energy. Across the street  
From us the supermarket stays awake  
All night. At 3 A.M. I want some cake,

A hard salami sandwich, eggs and lox?  
I put my coat on — and my shoes and socks —  
And saunter (unafraid of getting mugged)  
To Grand Union or the coffee shop  
— The Greek's, who knows I'm sleepless, knows I'm bugged  
By money. We commiserate like whores,  
Or actors reading that their play's a flop.

When I review the story of my life,  
Waiting till thirty-five to have a child,  
Till we could learn to live with chronic fear,  
Till I could stop bickering with my wife  
Because the skimpy future drove us wild ...  
And now she teaches poetry but dreams of money,  
And that guy's sitting in to save his soul!  
*Right on! We're drones and taxes are our honey!*  
You want to know the hottest souvenir  
I sell? A New York City beggar's bowl.  
I'm going in to cross my legs and sing  
With him, "Oh, we shall overcome someday,"  
When rents go down, when they end death and taxes,  
When we are not mutated by adapting  
— Unable to have the sons we want. I want to say,  
The only way it seems you can relax is  
To sit in an Eastern position, passive.  
These problems both seem petty and feel massive,  
And, I'm ashamed to say, just make me numb  
To our city's spiritually dying.  
I used to call my bourgeois parents "dumb"