

VINTAGE FROM

CACTUS Land

by RICARDO I. PATALINJUG

*This is cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star.*

—T. S. ELIOT

I. THE SOLITARY MAN

The day has ended. Dry lawns
Strewn with dry leaves yawn
The hours away in silence. The
Winds groan and disseminate
The pungent odor of decay.
The waning moon whimpers
While the shrivelled bare
Branches of dying trees moan
Their dying complaints.

With weary footsteps and with
Dusty boots and with aching
Bones, the master drags himself
Home: to the home that is
Always waiting; to the same
Cell filled with the same
Disgusting hollowness. To the
Same wife that is always asking
Silly questions.

The dog wags its tail tiredly
The master taps its head lightly
Heaves a sigh and closes his eyes
Then settles down on a rocking chair
(Like a fallen scarecrow)
And waits for supper. The radio
Echoes in muffled screams
The stale news of the day
While in the drawer the revolver
Waits for the trembling hand
To press its cold trigger.

II. THE CONFUSED MAN

O what shall I do? What
Am I going to do? If the
Couch of a psychiatrist
And the theories of Freud
And Jung will not do, where
O where shall I go?

III. THE ROBOTS

The rhythm of hurrying feet
In dusty pavements
(Salubrious but graceless)
Is like the beating of
A desperate heart
Hurrying for the last hour.

Green light: like automaton
Abruptly they stop.
Red light: they flow like a waterfall
Frantically conscious of Time
For the Great Clock chimes
The hour of dusk.

O the battered composure of the soul . . .
O the great fissure of the great wall . . .
Why should I care? O why should I care?
I'll go to the meadows
Only to see the scarecrows
While in the city the robots
Come and go talking about Vietnam
And the dementia of Sukarno.

IV. INVITATION

Let us hum Gounod's Ave Maria
Let someone toll the bell
In the belfry tall
But don't ask me
For whom the bell tolls
For John Donne had given the answer
In rhythm macabre:
It tolls for thee.

Write your epitaph
And I will write mine too
Hurry up please its almost time
Wash your hands
And I will wash mine too
Hurry up please its almost time
The coffin is finished
Though the paint is still wet
But the hole has been dug
And the mourners are ready.

Bow down your head
And I will bow down mine too
One. Mea culpa
Two: Mea culpa
Three: Mea maxima culpa.