

## **in the church of dead saints and ghosts**

*Edwin Rivera*

1

shell of shadow in the church of dead saints and ghosts  
offering silent prayers  
to broken stone.

this knee-bent man dressed in slopwork  
skeleton at the feast  
longing aboriginal  
sin long casehardened over his steely guise.

2

votive candles bow and flicker,  
thirsty tongues parched of prayer,  
alms, wick oil, worship,  
tender kisses, love.

flame perpetual, fueled by the memory  
of dead saints and ghosts.

3

geodesic dark sprawls across the nave  
as worn-pew splinters scrape  
the reprobate's spine.

moses with the dewlap beard will not  
summon the burning bush.

stained glass jesus will not  
weep jewels of blood.

plaster-of-paris mary will not anoint,  
heal, save, resurrect, beckon with her  
chipped, virginal fingers.

4

he had spilt hot breath against grimy multitudes  
of slack-baked skin on fleabitten sheets.

he had drawn pride-seeped daggers, which had mistaken  
flesh for butter, victims in slow tremulation at his feet.

he had experienced far too much heat,

heat of passion, heat of murder,  
in his mind linked inextricably,  
all conjoined within a mucid death.

5

where was the coal-eyed builder of the night?  
where was the creature with cerise lips, whose voice was woodwind song?  
why did the stars refuse to disclose their winking mysteries?  
why did they wheel overhead so distant he could not touch?

if he were handed a shovel, pestle, mortar, cement,  
offered to build and build to the skylights,  
his heart would not match his hands' wanting;  
the starry palace a mausoleum in ruins.

6

bitter architect, slump toward shadow  
melt away like the slack water  
that is neither ebb nor flow.

(regret soaring echo upon echo against brickwall dawns,  
becoming sad symphonies only he could hear)

7

he ached to grasp sunbeams, split lightshot waves with  
his thunder, shame the eternally blue skies, mock live-forevers,  
tramp down freshly-turned soil.

(born to regret, yet unable to surpass being born)

8

a soft sigh in the dark  
begs to be answered by an embrace.  
a set of weak eyes burn, alone  
in the struggle to read the manuscript of night.

the widowed fisherman hurls his line  
into the moon-shattered creek; the current  
gurgles, paddles slowly, chuckles against rock;  
mute tears glistened on his starred skin.

9

hour by hour, day by day,

the throngs environed him,  
the unwashed and bleary,  
the busy and the damned,  
bringing with them murmurs,  
whispers, excited chatter,  
busy rumbling, hearty laughter, empty  
clacking, whimpers, screams, tears,  
recriminations, lies,  
pain profound, pain ceaseless,  
smacking lips and smacking thighs, lives  
lived and lives lost and lovers living and lovers  
dead.

here the why's are what for;  
the whipped carcass sleeps its own sleep.

10

up now, shadow-shell, shuffle your  
sleepless carcass.  
weep your prayers, and brace for night.  
the votive you pilfered no more than warmth.

**Edwin Rivera** was born in Bayonne, New Jersey. He has published fiction in the journal *Families* and in *The Global City Review*, and a poem, "Cashing the Foodstamps of Love," will appear in *deCOMP Magazine* in April of 2009.

Formerly employed as a laborer and dockman for a major port company, he currently resides in New York City.