From THE SYSTEM OF DANTE'S HELL

THE EIGHTH DITCH (IS DRAMA)

(Your tongues are fire
& your strategems hell
itself.)

NARRATOR*

Tent among tents. Inner tent, dark/ blaring sounds from outside. Too dark for shadows. Tho the moon is heavy, large, upon the outside of the outside tents. A wood floor. Beds strewn about, beneath the inner tent. Cries outside. Deaf ears sleep, heavy ruffling sounds. Men asleep inside. Four men asleep.

This is the first scene. Tho it is the end. Show it first, to give it light. As it shd be seen (BEFORE) as some justification. Some mortal suffering; slant the scene towards its hero's life. His black trusts. Together, we look in.

1st Scene. (SAME AS ABOVE ONLY AFTERNOON. TWO MEN SIT ON BUNKS. ONE IS READING, THE OTHER STARES AT THE BOOK FROM ACROSS THE ROOM. The flaps of the tent are up, & we are looking in, at the two.

46- (young smooth faced turning pages slowly). (Absently) Brittle youth, they say, I am dead america. And they know the season's change. I am as I am. Young, from sidewalks of wind. I think nothing of you, or myself, who has not yet come out. We wait. (looks up) You & I, somewhere, to hear:
Call me Herman. (now at reader). What do you feel. Grass? Games?
False muscles cut thru waver, thru precious sanity. Your earth is round & sits outside the world. You have millions of words
to read. And you will read them. (LOUDLY) So buy expensive
clothes and become middleclass that summer after college. But
don't sneak away! You can't. I'll never know you, as some ad-
venturer, but only as chattel. Sheep. A "turkey", in our vernacular.

(Puzzled, looking up) Things are joys even cut off from our lives.
This was a field. A rough wood, they cut off. For loct mostly, im-
personal. Busses of young sinister shadows herded into summer. So
much of this'll get lost... These pictures, of what sadness?

Who are you really?

The Street! Things around you. Even noises at night, or smells you
are afraid of. I am a maelstrom of definitions. I can even fly. But
as you must know, whatever, poorer than yrself. In hell, for it. If
there is God. Or roof where we lay under summer burning our minds.
(64 rises slowly, taking out cigarette, unbuttoning his shirt.)

You're not Grimsley. You don't shit under houses. I mean, you don't
lie about who you are. I don't recognize you as anything. Just dust,
as it must be thrown into the air. You'll disappear so fast. (Sadly)/
Can we talk about movies? What is it I shd talk about now? What shd
I be thinking up? My uniform is pressed and ready. I sit, abstracted,
suckling my thoughts. This is a siesta they told me.

(Shirt open crossing towards 46's bunk) Forget your draperies. Your
wallpaper. Television is not yet common. I love what is in me. These
hours control our speech. You speak some other tongue. I understand
your gestures. Your shadow on the pavement. Your strangeness.

What else can I give you? What else is as strong in me now. Bridges,
smells. (pause, looking out the tent flap, smiling) I delivered
papers to some people like you. And got trapped in it; those streets.
Their mouths stank of urine, black women with huge breasts lay naked
in their beds. Filthy mounds of magazines, cakeboxes, children. I
cd walk out of yr life as simply as I tossed newspapers down the
sewer. It was Nassau St., mostly, and later the street where
Skippy lived. Also Johnny Holmes. But that was crosstown so I don't
know if you know. I used to live in the insurance projects, right
across from Tolchinsky pickel works. I almost killed myself
twice around there. But we moved a couple of times since then. Even
back here, Day St. is where I live now & I control the Secret Seven.

Rarities: Elegance. Foppishness. Not really knowledge... tho I guess
I wdnt know... actually. I take it as agression... and hate you for it.

Do you think I'm rich?

It makes no difference. When you move to my neighborhood it'll be
with a trumpet & school jacket. I have to make my move. I want to
last, & this is the only way.
46- What do you mean? You want to last. How?

64- I want you to remember me...forever.

46- Remember you?? Why?

64- (Smiles, now without shirt, and sitting on edge of cot.) I want you to remember me...so you can narrate the sorrow of my life. (laughs) My inadequacies...and yr own. I want to sit inside yr head & scream obscenities into your speech. I want my life forever wrought up with yours!

64- You want immortality? Someone like you...You shd be happy you don't sleep forever in the vestibule. That you don't wipe your ass with newspapers or disappear into the marine corps. Damn. You know you cd turn up years later in a park studying drama. Thank whoever for that. You know it cd still happen!

64- I think not. Hah, even this much concentration has made my stock rise. Certainly these trees shadows outside slant into my voice. That's enough to etch with certainty my fingers on yr lives. Your endless movings thru halls. (seriously) But I want more. I will spread over you like heaven & push black clouds thru your eyes.

46- (turns on stomach, reading the book again). Perhaps, I am weak...but perhaps not.

64- (Sitting on bunk begins to read book over 46's shoulder. As they are reading 64 places his hands on the other's shoulders, putting his face very close to the reader.) What do you know? You sit right now on the surface of your life. I have, at least, all the black arts. The smell of deepest loneliness. (Moves his fingers slowly on the other's shoulders.) I know things that will split your face & send you wild eyed to your own meek thoughts!

46- Oh? I'm stronger than people think. I'm an athlete, and very quick witted. Ha, I'll bet you wdn't play the dozen with me. (looking up.)

64- No...I wdn't do that. You'd only make me mad and I'd have to kick yr ass. I want more than yr embarrassment! (He sprawls his legs across the bunk, still holding the other's shoulders.) You still have to leave the country. You're not even out of highschool yet. Paintings to see. Spend time in college. Spend money for abortions. Music to hear. Do you know about jazz yet?

46- Jazz? Hell yes. What's that got to do with anything.

64- You don't know yet, so why shd I bother. I don't know really. I never will quite understand.

   But I do know you don't see anything at all clearly. Who's yr favorite jazz musician?

64- Ha Ha...OK, sporty, you go on! Jazz At The Philharmonic, eh?

46- Yeh, that's right. I bet you like R & B & those quartets.

64- You goddam right...and I probably will all my life. But that's got nothing to do with anything. You'll know that when you narrate my life. I'll be a ....fool! (slides down to where he is laying parallel to 46, hands still around his shoulders).

46- Belly Rub parties too.

64- Yeh...I'm a bellyrub man! But that's my circle, now. I've reached my tether. I am static & reflect it meaningfully. But you, my man, are still in a wilderness. Ignorant & weak. You can be taken. It's 1947 and there are at least 13 years before anything falls right for you. If you live? (laughs). I know names that control your life that you don't even know exist. Whole families of definitions. Memories. (He moves his body onto the prone 46)

NARRATOR* The mind is strange. Everything must make sense, must mean something somehow. Whatever lie we fashion. Whatever sense we finally erect...no matter how far from what exists. Some link is made. Some brief gesture towards light. This is 1947 and all of you (out the flap) have not been born. Not yourselves I look at now. These ears, hands, lips of righteousness. This is a foetus drama. Yr hero is a foetus. Or if we are to remain academic...he is a man dying.

46- you talk like a man with a paper ass. (turns page)

64- Hah, that's all in your head, baby. I talk like morton street, Newark where I live now. Three blocks down from hillside ave. I talk like a hippy dip negro with turned up shoes. I talk like where we are. My friend, my honorable poet, you hear, exclusively, what you want. (laying on top 46, begins moving his hips from side to side).

46- Are you Aubry?

64- No...I told you to call me Herman. Herman Saunders, from Morton St. An underprivileged negro youth now in the boy scouts. You're what's known as a middleclass Negro youth, also in the boy scouts. You knew all that. (He loosens his belt and slips his trousers halfway down.)

46- Well that's senseless enough (continues to read, but every now & again peering halfway over his shoulder at 64.)

64- Oh don't worry. Don't worry. Hucklebuck Steamshovel Blues. I Got. Deadeye, redeye, mean man, blues. I Got. Don't worry. Just sit tight (laughs). Or no, you better not!

46- You talk alot!
64- Right, baby. Right, I do. I Got. Blues. Steamshovel blues. (begins loosening 46's belt, tugging gently at his trousers). Blues. I Got Abstract Expressionism blues. Existentialism Blues. I Got. More Blues, than you can shake your hiney at. (Tugs harder at trousers). Kierkegaard blues, boy are they here, a wringing and twisting. I even got newspaper blues. Oh, fool, the blues blues. Not one thing escapes. All these blues are things you'll come into. I just got visions and words & shadow. I just got your life in my fingers. Everything you think sits here. Out thru that flap, the rest of your life. Hee Hee, You don't know do you?

46- Oh shadup, shadup, willya, for christ's sake keep your fat mouth quiet. (Now tries to turn to get up from under 64 but the other has him secured and is pulling his pants down past his buttocks.)

64- You name it, I've got it. Pure description, thass me. Pure empathy for you cock sucker.

46- What? What're you trying to do? I never sucked no cock!

64- You did...but you didn't want to know now. Ask your grandmother. I mean about all those beaches and songs. Singing for your supper. Hah. You don't have any of the worries I got. I'm pure impression. Yeh. Got poetry blues all thru my shoes. I Got. Yeh, the po-e-try blues. And then there's little things like 'The Modern Jazz Blues. Bigot Blues. Yourself, my man...your stone self. Talkin bout Blues. There's a bunch. I mean, the 3 button suit blues. White buck Blues (short short blues, go thru me like wind, I mean, pure wind.) I'm pure expression. White friend blues. Adultery blues (comeon like you some dumb turkey, cool as you come on to us, like a stone turkey they had you in the new world.) Got What? Yeh, like love, baby, like love. I had the Kafka blues...and give it up. So much I give up. Chicago, Shreveport, puerto rico, lower east side, comeon like new days. Sun everywhere in your eyes. Blues, comeon, like yr beautiful self. (Sink down on boy, and 46 gives short sharp moan, head raising up quickly then, looking over at 64, slumps head on elbows & closes eyes).

Come on, man, wiggle a little. (46 begins to move with the other who is on top of him pushing up and down as fast as he can)

64- Ooh, yeh, I came. I came in you. Yeh. (takes out penis and shows it to 46). That's that make you think.

46- (Still on stomach, looking blankly over his shoulder at 64) I donno what it makes me think. Only thing is I guess I'll get pregnant.

64- (smiling) Probably...so what.

46- How long will it take?

64- Not long, a few days.

46- (drops head on arms looking off outside tent).
64- Now don't worry bout it too much. Take it slow.

(Another youth comes into the clearing outside the tent. He goes to the
tent and pushes the flaps back. Stands in doorway looking in.)

62-Otis - "Oh yeh! (46 tries to pull up pants. 64 backs away slightly.)
Yeh. I know what you guys were doing and I want some. (He un-
zippers his pants and takes out a short black crooked penis.
46 pulls up his trousers and sits up on edge of bunk)

46- Wait the hell you talking about.

62- You know what I'm talking about. Come on (waves penis around).

64- Look Otis, why don't you be cool, huh? Make it.

62- Whaddayoumean? make it? You goddam pig, you want all the ass
for yrself, huh?

46- Look Otis, forget it will you. Leave me alone, for christ's sake!
Will you just leave me alone.

62- Leave you alone? Oh, yeh...now huh? After that goddam Herman bangs
the shit out of you! Bullshit. I want some too.

64- Go fuck yrself you crooked dick muthafucka. Nobody want nonea your
crooked ass petter. Go jerk off.

62- You bastard (goes for 46 but 64 grabs him and they wrestle. 46 runs
thru the flap.)

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NARRATOR- It comes back. What you saw...of your own life. The past/ is
passd. But you come back & see for yourself.

FIRST SCENE AGAIN.

Inside the tent. Night heavy in it. Four shapes covered on the bunks.
Deep slow breath of sleep. A figure rises from a bed, and the moon
throws his shadow twisted on the canvas. He moves across the floor,
stooping at one of the bunks.

64- (whispering) Past, hey (shaking 46) wake up. Hey. (looks over his
shoulder at the other sleepers. 46 turns slow in sleep and 64
climbs into his bed.)

46- (waking half frightened) What? Who is it?

64- (Grins..voice made low soothing) It's me, Saunders. (He moves close
to 46 and pushes himself onto the other's hips).
What do you want? (64 doesn't answer, just leans back away from the other, taking off his shorts then pulling down the other's pajama bottoms.)

Shhh, don't make so much noise. (He lays prone on 46. He begins slowly moving his hips.) Oh, ooh, shit (makes noises thru his teeth).

Is this all there is?

Yes. And why do you let me do it?

Because you say it's all there is...I guess.

(Now the two other figures under the tent rise from their bunks.)

Wattley- Hey what's going on!

Cookie - (peering thru dark) Yeah, hell, what's happenin captain.

(64 - begins laughing...now making loud sounds for the others' benefit)

0000h yeh, get it, sweet cakes. Throw that ol nasty ass. Ooo0

Wattley- Oh, man...some free ass. I gotta get me some.

Cookie - Yeh, hell, yeh. Hurry up Herman we gotta get some too. Uh-Huh.

(64 - still moaning and whining). Ok, ok, don't rush me. This is just gettin good.

(64 - barely looks up at the others, turns his head looking out the tent tent). That other blues do you have, Herman? How many others?

(Screaming with laughter) Oh, yes, yes, yes. I got all kinds, baby. Yes, indeed, as you will soon see. All kinds. Ooooh, thass elegant.

(Wattley and Cookie crowd around the bed harassing 64 and screaming with anticipation.)

Goddamit don't make so much noise!

(Tent flap is pushed back and Otis-62 comes running in.)

62- Yeh, uhhuh, I knew it. I knew you'd be gettin off some more. Well, goddam it I'm gonna get somea this.

(He rushes towards the others. There is a melee.)

But what kinds, Herman, what kinds?

64- Oooh, baby, just keep throwin it up like that. Just keep throwin it up.

-- LeRoi Jones
ROUTINE: Roosevelt after Inauguration

Immediately after the Inauguration Roosevelt appeared on the White House balcony dressed in the purple robes of a Roman emperor and leading a blind toothless lion on a gold chain, hog called his constituents to come and get their appointments. The constituents rushed up grunting and squealing like the hogs they were.

An old queen, known to the Brooklyn Police as "Jerk Off Annie," was named Joint Chief of Staff, so that the younger staff officers were subject to unspeakable indignities in the lavatories of the Pentagon, to avoid which many set up field latrines in their offices.

To a Transvestite Lizzie went the post of Congressional Librarian. She immediately barred the male sex from the premises—a world famous professor of Philology suffered a broken jaw at the hands of a bull dike when he attempted to enter the library. The library was given over to Lesbian orgies which she termed the Rites of the Vested Virgins.

A veteran panhandler was appointed Secretary of State, and disregarding the dignity of his office, solicited nickels and dimes in the corridors of the State Department.

"Subway Slim Teh" Lush Worker, assumed the office of Undersecretary of State and Chief Protocol, and occasioned diplomatic rupture with England when the English Ambassador "came up on him"—Lush-worker term for a lush waking up when you are going through his pockets—at a banquet in the Swedish Embassy.

Lonny the Pimp became Ambassador at Large and went on tour with 50 "Secretaries" exercising his despicable trade.

A female impersonator, known as "Eddie the Lady" headed the Atomic Energy Commission, and enrolled the physicists into a male chorus which was booked as "The Atomic Kids."

In short, men who had gone gray and toothless in the faithful service of their country were summarily dismissed in the grossest terms—like, "You're fired you old fuck. Get your piles outa here."

And in many cases thrown bodily out of their offices. Hoodlums and riff raff of the vilest calibre filled the highest offices of the land. To mention only a few of his scandalous appointments:

"Secretary of Treasury": "Fantamon Mike," an old time Schmoecker.

Head of F.B.I.: A Turkish Bath attendant and specialist in unethical massage.
Attorney General: A character known as "The Mink" a peddler of unlicensed condoms and short con artist.

Secretary of Agriculture: "Catfish Luke" the wastrel of Cuntville, Alabama, who had been drunk 20 years on paregoric and lemon extract.

English Ambassador: "Blubber Wilson" who hustled his goof ball money shaking down fetishists in shoe stores.

Postmaster General: "The Yen Fox Kid" an old time junkie and con man on the skids. Currently working a routine known as "Taking It Off The Eye." You plant a fake cataract in the savage's eye--(savage is con man for sucker)--cheapest trick in the industry.

When the Supreme Court overruled some of the legislations perpetrated by this vile rout, Roosevelt forced that august body, one after the other, on threat of immediate reduction to the rank of Congressional Lavatory Attendants, to submit to intercourse with a purple assed baboon, so that venerable, honored men surrendered themselves to the embraces of a lecherous snarling simian, while Roosevelt and his strumpet wife and the vetere brown nose Harry Hopkins, smoking a communal hookah of hashish, watch the lamentable sight with cackles of obscene laughter. Justice Blackstrap succumbed to a rectal hemorrhage on the spot, but Roosevelt only laughed and said coarsely, "Plenty more where that came from."

And Hopkins, unable to contain himself, rolled on the floor in syncophic convulsions saying over and over, "You're killin' me, chief. You're killin' me."

Justice Hockactonswol had both ears bitten off by the Simian, and when Chief Justice Howard P. Herringbone asked to be excused pleading his piles, Roosevelt told him brutally, "Best thing for piles is a baboon's prick up your ass. Aight Harry?"

"Right chief. I use no other. You heard what the man said. Drop your moth eaten ass over that chair and show the visiting simian some southern hospitality."

He--Roosevelt--then appointed the baboon to replace Justice Blackstrap, "diseased."

"I'll have to remember that one boss," said Hopkins breaking into loud guffaws.

So henceforth the proceedings of the court were carried on with a screeching Simian shitting and pissing and masturbating on the table and not infrequently leaping on one of the judges and tearing him to shreds.
"He is entering a vote of dissent," Roosevelt would say with an evil chuckle. The vacancies so created were invariably filled by simians, so that, in course of time, the Supreme Court came to consist of nine purple assed baboons, and Roosevelt, claiming to be the only one able to interpret their decisions, thus gained control of the highest tribunal in the land.

He then set himself to throw off the restraints imposed by congress and the Senate. He loosed innumerable crabs and other vermin in both houses. He had a corps of trained idiots who would rush in at a given signal and shit on the floor, and hecklers equipped with a brass band and fire hoses. He instituted continuous repairs. An army of work men trooped through the houses slapping the soloms in the face with boards, spilling hot tar down their necks, dropping tools on their feet, undermining them with air hammers, and finally he caused a steam shovel to be set up on the floors so that the recalcitrant soloms were either burned alive or drowned when the houses flooded from broken water mains. The survivors attempted to carry on in the street but were arrested for loitering and sent to the work house like common bums. After release they were barred from office on the grounds of police record.

Then Roosevelt gave himself over to such vile and unrestrained conduct as is shameful to speak of. He instituted a series of contests designed to promulgate the lowest acts and instincts of which the human species is capable. There was a Most Unsavory Act Contest, A Cheapest Trick Contest, Nolest a Child Week, Turn in Your Best Friend Week—professional stool pigeons disqualified—and the coveted title of All Around Vilest Man of the Year. Sample entries: The junkie who stole an opium suppository out of his grandmother’s ass, the ship captain who put on women’s clothes and rushed into the first life boat, the vice squad cop who framed people planting an artificial prick in their fly.

He—Roosevelt—was convulsed with such hate for the human species as it is, that he wished to degrade it beyond recognition.

"I'll make the cocksockers glad to mutate," he would say, looking off into space as if seeking new frontiers of depravity.

He could endure only the extremes of human behavior. The average, the middle aged (he viewed middle age as a condition with no relation to chronological age), the middle class, the bureaucrat (one of his first acts was to burn every record in Washington. Thousands of bureaucrats threw themselves into the flames) filled him with loathing.

-- William Burroughs
ITCHY

WHAT is your name, feathers & eyes Mabel Spinning Wheel
Marguerite Pearl Flower
What are you spinning feathers flowers & pearls
   "...répons-, répons-, réponds, vite!"
Eaglefeather fullseye manheaded lionwheel
   "Ah, Marguerite!
   Ah, Marguerite,
   réponds-toi, réponds-toi!
   Répon-, Répon-, réponds, vite!

Angelflame

THE SIGN OF 4

not meaning what they thought at all

ANGELFLAME

Did you tell any lies today?
Learn anything?
Did the thought occur to you, "This is a good solid unchanging world?"

KNOTHEAD!

Did you forget anything?
Are you paying attention?

FEABRAIN!

What are you doing right this minute?
What shall you do one second from now?

Too bad!
Too late!
You LOSE!

(temporarily)

YANKEE DOG YOU DIE!

(temporarily)

Aimlessly
Not a success
Accidentally evil
Idleness

(temporarily)
Angelname

"When in trouble or in doubt
Run in circles, scream, & shout."

Why do you live the way you do?
Feather spins as it falls.
Even if you did it better
Who would care?

LION BURNING CIRCLE BIRD BEAST'S MANWHEEL

THEY PUT YOU IN JAIL FOR TRYING BUT THEN YOU'RE
NOT INTERESTED IN CHRISTIANITY EXCEPT AS ONE OF THE
CHIEF KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING THE PSYCHOSIS PRESENTLY
AFFLICTING OUR SEVERAL MINDS (WHICH IS TO SAY
AFFLICTING CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CULTURE &
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CULTURE ISN'T AS SICK AS THE
INTELLECTUAL JOURNALS TRY TO TELL US

IT (i.e. the culture itself) IS AN ILLNESS
"laying up crowns & harps in Heaven"

ANGELFLAME

is what we've got we itch all over
& if we scratch the light escapes & we fall in darkness
total cynicism ("I got a right
to do whatever I please")

Angelflame

Hanged for a sheep as well as a goat
We talk mean
& die sudden.

25:IV:60

--Philip Whalen

"Arter you lub, you lub you know, boss. You can't broke lub. Man
can't broke lub. Lub stan'--e ain't gwine broke--Man heb to be
very smart for broke lub. Lub is a ting stan' just like tar, arter
he stick, he stick, he ain't gwine move. He can't move less dan you
burn him. Hab to kill all two arter he lub fo' you broke lub."

- Slave song, 16th cent.