The Photographer

Louis Simpson

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq

Recommended Citation

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by the University of New Mexico Press at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Mexico Quarterly by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.
LOUIS SIMPSON

THE SILENT PIANO

We have lived like civilized people . . .
O ruins, traditions!

And we have seen the barbarians,
breakers of sculpture and glass.

And now we talk of "the inner life,"
and I ask myself, where is it?

Not here, in these streets and houses, . . .
so I think it must be found

in indolence, pure indolence,
an ocean of darkness . . .

in silence, an arm of the moon,
a hand that enters slowly.

* * *

I am reminded of a story
Camus tells, of a man in prison camp.

He had caryed a piano keyboard
with a nail on a piece of wood.

And sat there playing the piano.
This music was made entirely of silence.

LOUIS SIMPSON

THE PHOTOGRAPHER

A bearded man seated on a camp-stool—
"The geologist. 1910."

"Staying with friends"—a boy in a straw hat,
on a porch, surrounded with wisteria.
“Noontime”—a view of the Battery with masts passing over the rooftops.

Then the old horse-cars on Broadway, people standing around in the garment district.

A night view of Manhattan, light-lines with sweeps of shadow.

“Jumpers”—as they come plunging down their hair bursts into fire.

Then there are photographs of a door-knob, a chair, an unstrung tennis-racket . . .

“Still life. Yes, for a while. It gives your ideas a connection.

And a beautiful woman yawning with the back of her hand, like this.”

LOUIS SIMPSON

IN RUSSIA

I can see my mother’s family sitting next to the kitchen stove, arguing . . . the famous Yiddish theater.

The sisters return . . . they’re breathless, they’ve been down to the river . . . with their arms filled with wildflowers.

Then, later, night has fallen, and the stars are luminous, gliding above the trees and rooftops.

There’s a love-song, an air. And then they turn down the lamps in the old world long ago.