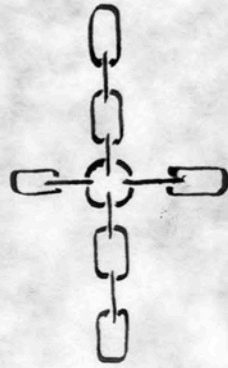


Philosophe  
En  
Lisant

p m swanson

Philosophe



En

Lisant

by

P. M. SWANSON

Dec 82

# I

a print ~  
i stare within white borders  
to enter cobwebs of a hidden room ~  
yellow-brown reflections whisper in  
through a window somewhere out of sight ~

gathering the musty scent into my hair  
i see

an old man sitting ~  
dark brown robe  
loose boots

a soft bound book that needs two arms for full support ~  
honey hands collect the open page  
in fingerbent protection  
almost white ~

pale face in play of light and shade ~  
down cast eyes intent  
on words i cannot see ~

world within a world within a world  
he does not know i stare  
he does not see his room ~  
white balding head  
white beard ~

as if his life lived in the printed word  
and clothing light and chair were but an afterthought  
that grew around his world like a dream ~

i knew him once in sleep  
as grandfather who smiled distantly ~  
then as father

silent solemn guide ~  
between the years he grew to self reflection  
of a life i lived within my rooms ~

not me yet of me  
carrying my mind  
out of confusions to pursue a search  
for answers that no questions could explain ~



beyond me in his silences  
within my opening dreams  
the yellow warmth of solitude my own ~  
the hidden corners of his room recede  
gathering the shadows of the floor  
in secrets that surround him  
in a prayer of challenges  
i do not understand ~  
these i enter like a novice  
to absorb and penetrate  
the growing mystery.

## II

halfway caught between realities  
thought-images emerge within my head  
as if the old man spoke and yet did not ~  
and i am bound again  
within the tunnel of my sight ~

white hair and face merge into halo light  
an old and holy man  
sitting on a stool  
back supported by a wooden beam ~  
he holds a bible carefully  
pages worn and curled ~

above  
behind his head  
a wooden shelf  
thrown to loose straw and cloth  
in bedding for a night he has not found ~

an evening hour of solitude  
a barren dim-lit room ~  
a brown robed monk  
in meditation on the holy book ~

a lion that is almost lamb  
grows in a mirage from shelf to wall -  
faint outline brown on brown  
that spirals yellow into circulating walls  
like melody of distant hymns ~

within  
beyond  
he reads  
no conflict arguing the worth of breath  
or quality of cloth ~



he sits apart  
as if his room was circled  
timeless in the knowledge  
of the deathless life  
that roots in every man.

### III

tonight  
the hermit studies  
lonely and obscure ~  
nine lives of tarot walk within his brain ~  
incense of cinnamon  
gathers from the floor  
towards a hidden source of gold brown light ~

sorcerer of truth  
master of the night  
he rides the shadows into golden dawn ~  
the book of prophecy lives in his hands  
his eyes consume  
elude the printed word ~  
mind diving deep between the lines  
to penetrate the mystic root of power ~

his whisper weaves as in a closing prayer  
out of  
into  
hypnotic silences~

...de profundis  
a maximis ad minima  
et ad extremum...

## IV

print of a painting  
yellow brown  
light and dark in flow ~  
the only flickering of white  
catches between an open book of hands  
and the sudden forehead of a sage ~

the aging scholar sits  
stooped in philosophies  
knowing his room  
as the creation of his mind  
that wrap him earth in dampness  
like an obscure puzzle to be solved ~

listening carefully  
the ear can catch the bristles of his breathing beard  
when it rasps the woven brown that is his robe ~  
no other sound ~  
the stillness rises like a tide  
that plans to suffocate ~

ancient concepts rise in molecules  
to know that nothing is without its opposite ~  
to balance light the darkness grows immense ~

the outward eye swims through a golden sea  
of wall escaping into scent of straw ~  
a small shelf warps towards a blackened floor  
till sight is caught inside an easing shade  
to find again  
the old philosopher ~

he studies brown in depth  
reflecting gold ~  
an alchemist of thought  
forever trapped  
exploring the penumbra of eclipse.





## V

staring at the print  
the old man  
as through a window frame  
i wonder  
if his wall holds a print of me  
sitting at my desk  
frozen in an image two dimensional ~

perhaps i grew somewhere within his head  
projected in full history  
until i lived ~  
or maybe both of us exist  
as separate lives  
as pictures on the wall ~

when i am not here  
he finishes his reading  
grabs an apple for a midnight snack  
pulls his bedding off the shelf  
and goes to sleep ~  
and when i am spaced deep within a book  
he stares at me  
wondering my name  
and my reality.

## VI

as image of my psyche  
the old man reads  
a silent guide  
who draws me to explore  
the shadows of a secret room ~

i see the moving walls in redgoldbrown  
as energy as calm as camouflage ~  
his wisdom isolates  
illuminates  
until out of my blindness i perceive  
the chair of my beliefs  
the shelf that hides the dreams i dare not speak  
the book that writes in centuries around my life  
with words i know but do not understand ~

the old man sits  
reading through my mind  
pivoting my energies  
to penetrate the darkest corners  
of the earthen floor ~

and when i barricade myself  
to cancel violent streets and screaming stores  
he sits as company for loneliness  
until the room grows deep  
absorbed within  
his white gold silences.



## VII

book of ages  
onion skin  
in gold edged conflict  
with the cover ~  
faded cloth bent dull  
darkened into years of fingerprints ~

out of silence  
out of black calligraphy  
symbols pierce the pupils  
of an old man's eyes ~  
heavy lids  
circled dark from lack of sleep  
he reads ~

a worn and lonely man  
head bent  
back slouched into shadows ~  
chair and floor absorbed in almost night ~  
fishnet cobwebs eat the dust  
into wooden beams  
the wooden shelf  
the straw ~  
in a quiet symphony of red and gold  
the dying sun withdraws ~

when was he young?  
white hair and white grey beard  
his brown robe worn  
split open at the knee  
falling to loose shadows and loose shoes ~

where did he grow  
this white haired ghost of childhood?  
what ambitions carried him  
a solitary search  
trying to define the camouflage  
of violent thoughts he locked within his skull ~



a golden warmth creeps easily into his skin ~  
he reads  
somewhere at peace  
as if the truth he sought  
was captured in the words  
he saw too many times to understand ~

he stares through the reflections  
of a life he never saw  
and yet it seems  
he searched too long to care.

## VIII

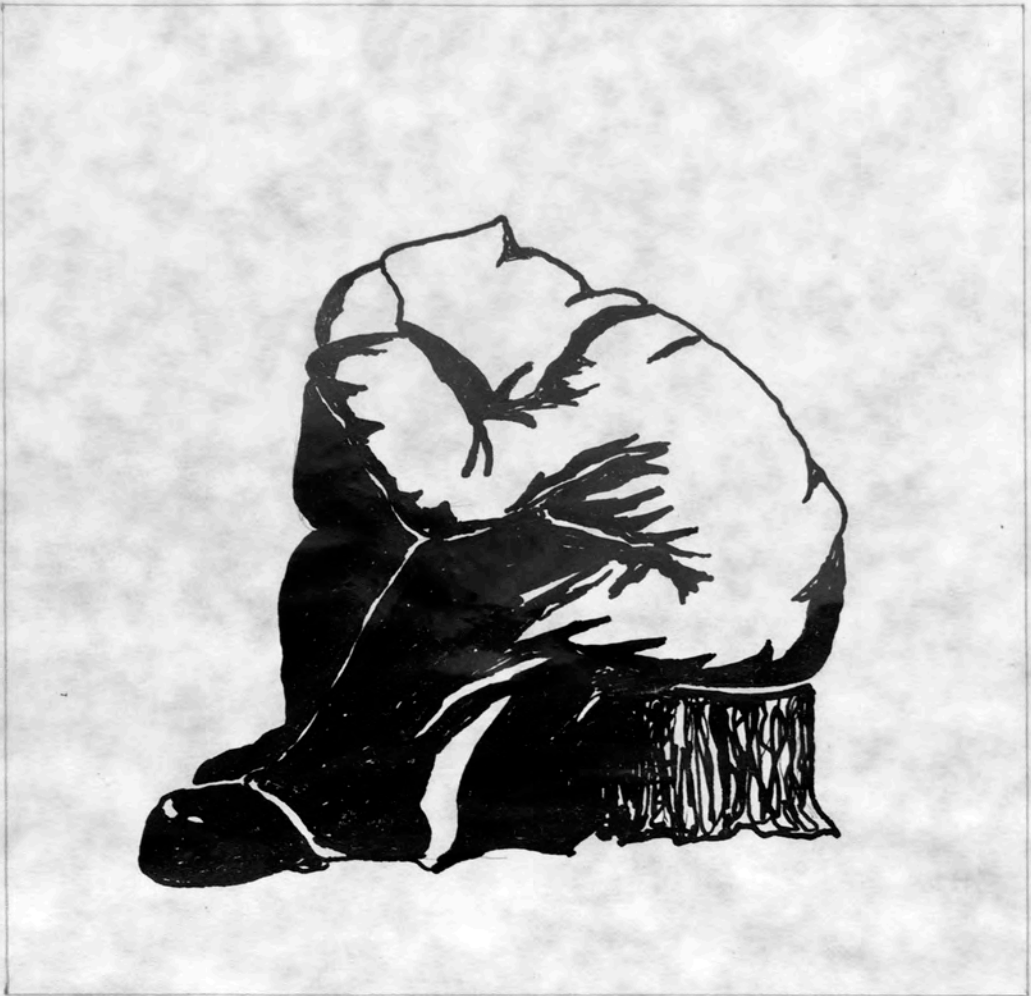
as i watch it seems  
the wandering jew lives quietly  
silently  
within the picture frame ~

two thousand years of wandering  
to be  
the rebel born to some forgotten cause ~  
grown old and ageless  
in solitary thought  
that holds him exile to the common flow ~

all names are his ~  
unbeliever  
who knew where not to believe ~  
once called heretic  
until he disappeared and someone else was found  
to take his place ~

then called eccentric  
except the rich alone  
hold the excuse for eccentricity ~  
owning nothing but his robe  
and one worn book  
the world called him crazy  
and let him be ~

now he lives in solitude  
somewhere forgotten in a corner of the earth  
nothing owned leaves nothing to be lost ~  
mellow gold and brown  
with sun for company  
a cave made room for shelter  
a stump for stool ~  
a shelf for straw  
loose stuffing for a mattress  
somewhere invisible  
and his needs are met ~



for luxury  
one book  
in which his mind can travel  
the dimensions of word metaphor ~

nothing lost  
nothing gained  
he waits some miracle of stars  
to be recalled to wandering  
as lonely prophet  
echoing deaf ears.



# IX

who is he?  
this old man  
that someone painted to create  
a world once removed?

is he a god?  
the fringe of hair that wraps around his head  
like fuzzed remnants of white wool ~  
the grey white beard that rests upon his robe ~  
the puckered forehead  
boney fingers  
gather to project illusions of antiquity ~

the hidden sun  
defines a wrinkled wall  
to collect an eerie trinity of light  
in white to yellowbrown to black ~  
the black predominates ~

what does he read?  
the book rests heavily between his hands  
as if the weight of words had curled page and cover  
in omens of a shadowed destiny ~

this is no book for sun  
it gathers darkness like a promise unfulfilled ~  
a strange mythology recalling suicides  
between the heros history denied ~

above the old man's head  
a shelf half empty  
waiting between sun and shade  
to hide the book from eyes  
until the fragile pages crumble into dust ~

face worn beyond his years  
the old man read  
his knowledge threading secrets  
that leave imagination blind.

# X

riddle put to light and shade  
like old man of the moon  
grown between refractions  
that disturb a nowhere sun ~

his earth wall pivots memories  
of ridge and pit relief  
yellow-brown-red-black emerge  
where colour never lived ~

stray smoke gathers slowly  
where no fire can be found  
gathering as in a cloud  
that has no word for rain ~

there is no age without the child  
no word for sleep where sleep is not  
no voice within the echo  
of a silence born in thought ~

the old man reads an empty book  
one finger drew in blood ~  
where no one traced the death of life  
life is not understood ~

straw that is not straw recalls  
a shelf above his head  
trapping wooden memories  
of shape without a form ~

he rides the shadows like a chair  
no eyes have ever seen ~  
weaves a robe from darkness  
that his knowledge never owned ~

somehow a shoe that knows no toe  
out of a time that time forgot ~  
somehow a floor that never was  
he is where all is not.

# XI

tonight the picture burns  
red gold smouldering ~  
weary  
omnipotent  
the old man does not move ~

tonight he is prometheus  
that great father of the gods  
who created  
form out of the formless  
making men ~  
he gave them fire  
to hide their helplessness ~

now he sits in haze of smoke and heat  
the human world burns  
he does not turn ~  
out of his stillness  
smoke eats into cloud  
balance out of chaos  
fire bound by flood ~

the book of destiny is in his hands ~  
he marks the century  
that writes him crucified  
for creativity.

## XII

just an old man  
sitting  
reading ~

no family  
no friends ~  
those that he knew  
have died or disappeared ~

too tired  
to begin again  
he reads  
to escape  
the confines of mortality ~

he is wise  
but none ask for his wisdom  
he is old  
but no one notices ~

secluded  
in his austere room  
forgotten  
by the world ~

not happy  
not unhappy  
an old man reads.