

A Lower East Side Poem

Just once before I die
 I want to climb up on a
 tenement sky
 to dream my lungs out till
 I cry
 then scatter my ashes thru
 the Lower East Side.

5

So let me sing my song tonight
 let me feel out of sight
 and let all eyes be dry
 when they scatter my ashes thru
 the Lower East Side.

10

From Houston to 14th Street
 from Second Avenue to the mighty D¹
 here the hustlers & suckers meet
 the faggots & freaks will all get
 high
 on the ashes that have been scattered
 thru the Lower East Side.

15

There's no other place for me to be
 there's no other place that I can see
 there's no other town around that
 brings you up or keeps you down
 no food little heat sweeps by
 fancy cars & pimps' bars & juke saloons
 & greasy spoons make my spirits fly
 with my ashes scattered thru the
 Lower East Side . . .

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25

A thief, a junkie I've been
 committed every known sin
 Jews and Gentiles . . . Bums and Men
 of style . . . run away child
 police shooting wild . . .
 mother's futile wails . . . pushers
 making sales . . . dope wheelers
 & cocaine dealers . . . smoking pot
 streets are hot & feed off those who bleed to death . . .

30

35

all that's true
 all that's true
 all that is true
 but this ain't no lie

40

1. Avenue D, which marks the eastern side of a geographical box with Houston Street on the southern end, 14th Street on the north, and Second Avenue on the west. The Lower East Side

was once broadly defined as including this area. The Lower East Side extends far below Houston Street, however, and the area above Houston is now generally called the East Village.

when I ask that my ashes be scattered thru
the Lower East Side.

So here I am, look at me
I stand proud as you can see 45
pleased to be from the Lower East
a street fighting man
a problem of this land
I am the Philosopher of the Criminal Mind
a dweller of prison time 50
a cancer of Rockefeller's ghettocide²
this concrete tomb is my home
to belong to survive you gotta be strong
you can't be shy less without request
someone will scatter your ashes thru 55
the Lower East Side.

I don't wanna be buried in Puerto Rico
I don't wanna rest in long island³ cemetery
I wanna be near the stabbing shooting
gambling fighting & unnatural dying 60
& new birth crying
so please when I die . . .
don't take me far away
keep me near by
take my ashes and scatter them thru out 65
the Lower East Side . . .

1980

This Is Not the Place Where I Was Born

puerto rico 1974
this is not the place where i was born
remember—as a child the fantasizing images my mother planted
within my head—
the shadows of her childhood recounted to me many times 5
over welfare loan on crédito food from el bodeguero¹
i tasted mango many years before the skin of the fruit
ever reached my teeth
i was born on an island about 35 miles wide 100 miles long
a small island with a rainforest somewhere in the central 10
regions of itself
where spanish was a dominant word
& signs read by themselves
i was born in a village of that island where the police

2. I.e., the controversial "urban development"—construction and modernization—carried out during the administration of Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller (1908–1979), governor of New York

1959–73.
3. Long Island, which extends east from Manhattan.

1. The grocer. *Crédito*: credit.