

Halvard Johnson

Etudes

This is a piece I play
using the black keys only.
On the sidewalk across
the street, someone has collapsed.
No one rushes up in concern.
Why should they? Why should they?
Nobody's business but his own.

Here is the song of the bomber
with clusters of notes
struck by my fist.
It is named after a smouldering
village, which none of us
knew the name of, even then.
My hand is bashing away at the keys.

Less than ever
do I understand you. A trill
in the bass, third and fourth fingers.
I don't even know where
you come from.
The trill broadens to a tremolo.
I stare at you, wide-eyed in amazement.

Here my left hand crosses
my right hand to pick out several
tones at the very top of my range.

I think of it as swallows,
darting, looping high against
a darkening sky. Or bats
swooping out of the attic at nightfall.

Chords. Great majestic chords
moving out across
a landscape, like a column
of tanks. When broken,
there is a rippling effect,
a movement like that of water
moving swiftly over abandoned bones.

— from *Winter Journey*
St. Paul: New Rivers Press, 1979