

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Volume 15 - Number 4

Summer 1965

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## CONTENTS

- |    |                      |   |
|----|----------------------|---|
| 1  | CHARLOTTE A. RAINES  | <i>I Heard a Reading by<br/>Brother Antoninus</i> |
| 2  | GEORGE W. NITCHIE    | <i>Two Poems</i>                                  |
| 4  | LEWIS TURCO          | <i>Four Poems from<br/>Pocoangelini</i>           |
| 7  | ARNOLD PRICE         | <i>Lullaby</i>                                    |
| 8  | OTTONE M. RICCIO     | <i>Two Poems</i>                                  |
| 16 | MORTON MARCUS        | <i>To Jana</i>                                    |
| 18 | RICHARD SHELTON      | <i>Two Poems</i>                                  |
| 20 | FRED FEIRSTEIN       | <i>Toward a Definition</i>                        |
| 25 | DOROTHY BECK         | <i>The Birthday Party</i>                         |
| 27 | DAVID PEARSON ETTER  | <i>Prairie Summer</i>                             |
| 30 | IRENE SCHRAMM        | <i>The Songs for<br/>Abe Kosow</i>                |
| 37 | SISTER MARY JONATHAN | <i>The Movies, 1934</i>                           |
| 38 |                      | <i>Books in Brief</i>                             |

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**I HEARD A READING BY BROTHER ANTONINUS**

it is a cold night  
under the blue-gum tree.

Who is playing?

Two drifting spiders.

blowing on a long thread  
dropped from the branches,  
riding on the wet leaves  
dropped from a black twig.  
what a thin thought-thread  
holds them together.

What is the strength of a thought-thread

at night?

only that one can  
create it himself.  
only that it exists . . . .  
it is there.  
and so, their crawling-up  
can go on.

Spun by one small God-creature  
Frail thread carries two into space  
Not fastened now at either end  
And drifting to no place.

but as long as one spins it out,  
both can climb upward still.

**Charlotte A. Raines**

**TWO POEMS****The Sparrows' Nest on the Telephone Pole**

Eyeless, unfledged, and hideous, they wait  
for the only thing they have ever known  
to repeat itself. Whatever happens—  
wind in nearby branches, a lineman from  
the phone company, mother with a bug—  
“In me,” they say, “in me,” each one a mouth  
connecting its thumb-sized bubble of skin  
like a lop-sided dumbbell to the whole  
globular world. “In me.” Feathers will come;  
trim and industrious, they will emerge  
into a finite world they cannot eat,  
to perch importantly and sing to us  
that all that is over for good, and how  
lucky we are that some nightmares come small.

George W. Nitchie

**Episode on a Quest**

The ogre jumped him at the ford  
But got his belly full of sword  
And kissed his foot and called him “Lord.”

The woods beyond were full of bears  
That tried to take him unawares;  
He left them squeaking in their lairs.

The lady in the lonely hall  
Did all she could to make him fall  
But simply got no place at all.

Upright and valiant, he withstood  
All that a man of honor could  
By force of virtue. He was *good*,

And consequently never knew  
How much he owed to people who  
Loved him for what he could not do.

The wounded ogre, hungry bears  
And fading lady called him theirs  
And told themselves, "He cares, he cares!"

The legend grew, until at last  
He came again, and was aghast  
To hear their greetings as he passed:

"There's the great man what hurt me so!"  
"He eats young bears!" and, soft and low,  
"Ducky, you learned me all I know."

The end came quickly. No one wept,  
But ogre, bears and lady kept  
Eternal vigil where he slept.

And only wicked people said  
That men like him were better dead.

George W. Nitchie

## FOUR POEMS FROM POCOANGELINI

## Number 9

“Would you bite me,  
 little mouse?” asked Pocoangelini.  
 The mouse bit Pocoangelini’s finger.

“You have soft fur,”  
 Poco said. “Would you nip the feeding palm?”  
 “Yes, it is the palm that feeds me,” said the mouse.

“Oh, little mouse,  
 you have soft fur,” Pocoangelini  
 said, “such soft red, blood red fur, my little mouse.”  
Lewis Turco

## Number 14

In Angelini’s woods  
 the nightly owl, his eyes  
 shining in shadow, broods  
 on the shrew’s goods:  
 her wares and merchandise.  
*Make no mistake he says  
 the world’s a trap of days  
 whereas the beak of night  
 takes a great bite.*

The shrew of roots  
 awakens and goes out  
 to seek. She loots  
 that baron of green shoots,  
 the beetle. *Armored lout*  
*Make no mistake she says*

*the world's a drain of days  
whereas the mouth of night  
takes a good bite.*

The beetle in his lair  
clicks as Poco sings,  
lone and unaware,  
of something fair  
and grim. *Among other things  
to learn the baron says  
is that the world's a vice of days  
whereas the mandibles of night  
take a fair bite.*

And Pocoangelini?

His mortal instrument  
sounds between tree and tree  
as planets flee  
and dawn splits firmament.  
*Mistake me not he sings  
the world's a chain of rings  
of darkness and of light  
unbroken by any bite.*

Lewis Turco

### Number 16

*Butterflies cannot live  
here in the desert*  
Pocoangelini told the giant  
butterfly upon the cactus branch.

The butterfly drank from  
a red blossom that  
crested the cactus. It shook its great wings  
and waited for the night wind to fall.

*There is sand in my eyes,*

*and in my ears, sand;  
sand up to my waist, my hands are buried  
in sand* said Pocoangelini.

The butterfly with its  
orange wings brushed from  
his eyes the clinging grains, unstopped his ears.  
*Thank you* said Pocoangelini

*you are beautiful and*  
the desert wind sprang  
up out of the mountains. The butterfly  
was blown out like a candle. Its wings  
fluttered into the night  
flaming. *Butterflies*  
*cannot* Pocoangelini said as  
the sand made a blanket for his tongue.

Lewis Turco

### Number 27

In the empty stadium he stood  
in the batter's box  
swinging at balls that weren't there.  
*Whiff! Strike twelve* said Pocoangelini.  
The empty bleachers roared.

No one on the mound wound up and pushed  
a fast one past him.  
Pocoangelini furrowed  
the air, the bat whistling in the dust, sun  
scorching his cap's visor.

*Strike twenty, twenty-one* Poco said  
and stopped to rest. Then,  
again, he swung and swung and swung

at nothing. *Fifty, fifty-one* he said.  
The empty bleachers roared,  
the shadow umpire swept home plate with  
a wisp of wind. Then  
Pocoangelini took a  
cut and hit one. It was red. As it rose  
over the wall they roared.

Lewis Turco

### LULLABY

*Solo, soleil,*  
My sun, my one,  
Slumber your number of hours away.  
Light now is done  
Delight of my day,  
Bright be your dreaming,  
Lullay.

Beam in your bed,  
Glow from your pillow,  
Brighten my night  
Delight of my day.  
*Solo, soleil,*  
Burn dark away,  
Lullay, lullay, lullay.

Arnold Price



## TWO POEMS

## The Other Side of Nine\*

## I

as children  
 we threw stones at each other  
 they cracked our glass shirts  
   it was much later  
   that you bought  
   dark-green sunglasses  
 we were both ashamed of liberties we took with each  
   other  
   sunglasses gave you a way out  
 harnessed to my guilt I trotted on the neat road to  
   adolescence  
 I bathed in holy rivers   water-snakes curled around  
   my legs  
 afraid   I lay in the sun  
   experience crusting on my skin  
 I whistled songs through my teeth  
   upturned in philosophical swaggerings  
   a whining repercussion drums through the  
   sticky morning  
   hopping right and left  
   with minute perturbations

## II

I flesh a spreading land  
       farmers plough my thighs

\*Part V of this poem first appeared in **Northeast**, 1964.

my tongue a comb of grain  
     I harbor the complete ocean  
     sailfish swim through my throat  
 my tongue crusts with salt  
 coins and songs drip from my hands  
     my tongue folds down to silence  
     the drop of night closes my eyes  
 the smell of fruit and flowers  
     shapes a constellated universe  
     waiting to be peopled  
 exhale sunlight with me  
     come let's enter the New Temple  
     the buzzer sets our brains on fire

### III

the assembly  
 dictionaried for attendance  
 sits in mute obedience  
     hatewords pour from loudspeakers  
     chorused cheers break out  
 leashed robots march out in single file  
     take their places  
     strain to groupstrut  
 toward the savage decisiveness of blood  
     one drags his step  
     the knotted whip slashes his head  
     forcing him to kneel  
     he raises his eyes to a drunken sun  
     the lash catches his nosebridge  
     flecks each eye in turn  
     blood smears his face  
     he buckles groundflat  
     waiting for the cut on his shoulders

waiting  
 dangles him at whipend  
 until he swings to follow the others  
 contradictory as the night the end of any dream is  
 surrender

## IV

down into caves of wet history  
 metal minds descend  
 the darkening corona of time clasps  
 this intensity of movement  
 it is impelled to shrink  
   to a fragile crystallite  
   which snaps  
   at the first alien breeze  
 a frigid whisper of air penetrates the stillness  
 the glint of shadowy steel points to attention  
 gloved propaganda stuffs the throats of steel  
   metals creak  
   through the rumble of rust  
   an idea trembles its way to birth  
 the order falls  
   ignoble experiment exploding in a  
   dervish of confusion  
   the dust of venture settles  
 the stray eye among all that unseeingness  
 finds only fused metal  
   nothing stirs  
   except a stumble of smoke  
   from one pyramid of steel  
 to have caught the sun unawares  
 and charged it against the world  
 has it unnerved the Fates  
 playing their tiddlywinks

## of Cast the Last Throne?

steam-baths are for soldiers retired from war  
  waiting for pensioned gratitude  
“you have earned the thanks of an entire nation”  
  that nation disappeared  
sticky morning light  
is no time for remembering out-of-office  
  promises

## V

this last morning the world has to secrete final  
  hoards

I find two stones  
smooth and flat  
like those we flung at each other in our  
  childhood

but much larger  
though I strain I can't budge them  
the change of years  
has pushed my strength  
into a corner  
surrounded by stakes  
that pierce occasional attempts  
my long hands make  
to break out of The Cage

in the rain  
the mind runs back and forth  
like a station-to-station parenthesis  
the naked trolley-car  
rocks forward  
stops dead  
then screams back along the same diversion  
until diversion becomes habit  
and habit becomes disintegration

## VI

even a girl I loved between the noon and night of  
dying

forgot my name

I nudge my partner's shoulder

pointing her out to him

"she smokes too much" he says

his voice has a sad look as it floats from his lips

her nerves are tangled with an emotional drive for a  
notice-to-all-comers-I-am-a-despondent-unemployed-  
but-selective

desirability

her cigarettes chain her to the smoke

until she curls up from her chair

and drifts out the window on a blue cloud

my partner and I

peer down to the street

from thirty-two stories up

watching her parachute

under her scream

until the sound is lost in the depth of air

swirling around her

when she strikes the pavement

there is only the fluff of her skirt

neither of us hears bones crunch

my partner comments "she didn't bounce"

I answer "just a pile of worn clothes"

## VII

the extra time I spin the wheel it stops on a number  
not between zero and nine not formed by familiar  
turns

a foreign design flung onto the screen recklessly

I cross the river floating through banks of crumpled  
uniforms  
that shrug only there and occasionally  
the day  
you moved against your destiny  
a book closed for good  
in The Accountant's office  
a dry smile was His only comment  
you came and asked me what was next  
I shook my head I had no future left for you  
this morning I thought there were some leftovers  
of time in the abandoned dish the diners  
left nothing but a tip:  
EAT FAST OR YOU FAST  
scribbled in the dust  
under the dish  
thick-fingered letters  
try the Hope Department  
their shelves are always full-stocked  
I'm sorry  
I have nothing for you  
when you're settled  
drop around and we'll talk  
you have some interesting  
ideas

### VIII

did He think it strange  
that you sterilized the knife  
before pushing it into His throat?  
His Daughter didn't scream when she walked in  
the murder made a place for Her

## IX

upturned philosophical swaggerings with wining  
celebrations  
swim through sticky hours of someone else's morning  
and though we inhale the history of all we've had  
and though we grin at the Devil with jagged lips  
we spew sunlight fumes that eat through thoughts  
that what we see on next year's calendar  
might philosophically become a fragment of peace

motion

now meaningless

squares off

to run sideways

across

planned routes

wheels turn

for turning's sake

and though the trolley-car is the only way to

reach my selves

I trip on the step

and lie

half on the street

half in the car's belly

the operator swears at being delayed

passengers smile

no one moves to raise me from the step

I think it over

I'm tired

this is just as fine

a death

as any other

I lie there

and

wait

**Ottone M. Riccio**

**Tea Is Tea**

the turning staircase fools our duel of minds  
and back is front though front is back  
and up and down reverse the light

the dark picks up the eyes' blind questions  
and dim reports flash back to time  
perhaps the last refuge is a partial surrender

I mean the teethmarks on your shoulder  
my stamp of ownership I wave  
a rent receipt you refuse to be amused  
set out cups for tea and rush  
the conversation the riddle of the stairs  
twisting themselves to stark opinions must be solved

the smile I toss behind your back  
is not a judgment Stranger knives  
have slipped through silk like this  
and time has mended slits before  
I only score a thought a blade of meaning  
shining in reflections of the night's light  
to leave you something to consider  
when the bleak upheaval appears

but tea is tea and it must cool  
and words a bridge across the dark  
we sit as though the second hand  
has stopped on all the clocks

the stairs you say are waiting I nod  
my heavy head we leave the cups  
to crust with tea-stains  
and count the stairs to now

**Ottone M. Riccio**



## TO JANA

Daughter, today  
you've had the world  
for seven months  
pass to your lungs  
and out again.  
There are always  
two balls of air  
inside your chest  
compounded of  
the end of night  
unraveling  
another day  
toward which you push  
your little gift  
of just-used air  
and take as yours  
the oxygen  
the atmosphere  
serves up in waves  
through the steep trails  
of your nostrils.

At almost dawn,  
that last darkness  
when I can see  
the fog sliding  
among the pines,  
I've visited  
your room and heard  
the breezes slip  
from your nostrils  
with the fragrance  
of damp trees. Once

there was salt, a  
brackish odor  
I have smelt high  
in the Rockies,  
past the timber line,  
a thousand miles  
from any sea,  
yet so full of  
the Pacific  
the air became  
slippery as kelp  
and dazzled me  
with rainbow seams  
of fluid pearl.  
This although the house  
was shut behind  
windows and sour  
with the gases  
all the household  
had expelled.

  Why  
I should wake now  
every morning  
at this hour,  
I cannot say,  
unless it is  
the tiny breezes  
which blow about  
the mountain of  
your head promise  
a high country  
and the gay edges  
of a blue wind.

Morton Marcus

**TWO POEMS****The Lovely San Diego Lady**

busdriver is driving drunken  
sailors to the sea  
is driving me past bars  
where whores serve beers to those possessed  
of ID cards and sometimes hope past Pain  
less Nell's where she tattoos  
many colored mottos  
to be read in bed with giggles  
past tencent peepshow movies  
where womenmaking men watch one almost  
naked making love to a couch  
past all the patient fagots on the plaza  
who eventually grow old knowing  
every hidden secret of the flesh she calls out  
transfers ceaselessly  
advertising streetcorners  
taking us all finally to the pain  
ful blue Pacific. Come  
to La Jolla. Bring money.

**Richard Shelton**

**Don't Get Confused**

the important thing is  
to suffer successfully  
above all not to show it  
no marks no wrinkles

An unsuccessful sufferer I know  
is getting bald  
his wife and dog notice it  
when his girlfriend runs  
barefoot through his hair  
says "Oh Jesus"  
is not praying

Girl I know suffers pimples and proximity  
trembles when anyone touches her nipples  
which are pimples  
hair goes straight from suffering  
eyelashes fall off

Fat people suffer by the pound  
one fat woman suffered until  
she grew a moustache and four chins  
fingers became too short  
lost inside her wrists  
suffered thousands of calories daily  
finally died on an elevated  
was let down from heaven by a crane  
suffering vertigo

Don't get confused about suffering  
suffer like a saint  
for integrity art self-expression then  
go out to the world  
having suffered bravely like hell  
beautiful, always beautiful

Don't get confused about this  
is not the poem  
is what I took out

**Richard Shelton**

## TOWARD A DEFINITION

### 1. The Teacher

I had to, in the sixth grade,  
“Draw the room you desire.  
Dream the room you desire.  
Draw the room for tomorrow,”  
my teacher said with her smock.  
We groaned.  
I whispered, “You stink.”  
“Remember that it is required  
to draw our pictures in ink.”  
But she had failed as a painter  
and couldn’t bear any children.

I tried to  
dream. For luck I touched the  
ceiling ten times.

I jumped up whispering

“DreamtheroomyoudesireDrawtheroomthat’sre-  
quired”

but the vision wouldn’t appear.

“Dinner is ready, Freddy,”

my mother echoed the teacher.

“Freddy, you have to stop dreaming.”

Her apron looked like a smock.

“Freddy,” my mother was screaming.

“It’s already seven o’clock.”

#### STEAK

as I entered the kitchen

and stringbeans

soggy with blood.

Words sprung up

from punctures the prongs made

to castigate me:

“Steak comes from the cow

with green in her mouth.

The farmer waits

for more calves to grow.

Grass is the color of

STRINGBEANS.”

“Freddy, don’t pick on your food.

The people in Europe are starving.”

A white calf danced on my plate.

“Freddy, don’t pick on your food.”

And my sister’s mouth full of steak

so properly chewing and humming

— she opened her mouth when she chewed —

and the grating sounds in the street

hanging much longer because it was spring  
 and the meat-smells, taste of the blood,  
 and the shiney surface of stringbean.  
 I dreamed of a house in the country,  
 surrounded by evergreen hills,  
 and a wishing-well filled with a rainbow,  
 and no cows, calves ;  
 and grass with unpolished surface.

I dreamed of a room in the house,  
 a basketball hoop in a corner ;  
 and t.v. with one channel only  
 because that would be more exciting,  
 it would be almost like an adventure,  
 like spending a week in the country.

And books like

oe,    son,  
           s      n  
           u      i  
           r      b

Robinson C      o  
 Swiss Family R  
 and a book on fixing t.v.  
 if a hurricane knocked the house down,

“Freddy, stop picking your food.  
 Freddy, you have to stop dreaming ;  
 your steak will turn into ice.”  
 (and a book on how to make ice-cream.)

“Then go to your room without dinner.

But you’ll have to eat it for lunch.”  
 Later that evening,  
 when I had chosen my channel,  
 my mother walked into my room.  
 She asked me what I had been doing,  
 if I had been dreaming of dinner.

I answered that I had been watching

a film of a boy and his mother,  
how the boy ran away to an island  
when he couldn't draw for his teacher.

He made pictures by  
swishing his pail,  
in his well, on the surface of rainbow,  
but often he had to destroy them  
to haul up a drink for his mother.  
She had followed the boy to the island.

One day when the mother was thirsty  
and wondering why he was tardy,  
she followed the boy to the well.

The boy was swishing a picture  
of an island on which was no mother.  
She yelled at him, "Why are you playing  
instead of drawing my water?"

The water swelled to a tidal  
wave when her yell became  
a hurricane, raising them up in a  
cloud to the sky.

And the picture closed with the teacher  
painting the boy and his mother  
and both had halos of rainbows,  
on a fire-escape in the city.

## 2. The Room

I once didn't draw for my teacher  
a picture she said was required,  
but painted instead my desires:  
a room in which was no teacher.



I lived in the room when my teacher  
told me she knew my desires.  
But the words came out as a bellow;  
I had made her a cow in the picture.

One day when I grew to a man,  
I think as old as my teacher,  
and couldn't reach my desires,  
I thought I would look for that room  
and the objects I once had desired.

But the only rooms I could find  
which somehow resembled the old one  
were in curious slums of the city;  
and I found that I couldn't remember  
the objects I once had desired.

Fred Feirstein

## THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

There were no presents wrapped  
To hand the hostess. "Birthdays die,"  
She said, "when birds are clapped  
Into a cage and made to ride

The bus. No charge account  
Will grow through me. I ask of you  
A greater debt: to mount  
The wired ceiling of my zoo

And see what animals  
The lord has given me to show  
The world how many falls  
My winters get, right here, below

The polar regions where  
My senses live.

                                  If you can guess  
The nature of the hare  
You'll know one-fifth my feebleness.

Its ears are what I lack.  
Though music makes me dance, to please  
The world I've lost the knack  
Of hearing things like trees

And rippled grass. The sound  
Eludes me now — of danger, dawn,  
And whistling hunters bound  
To call the hounds across the lawn.

No less regarded, scent  
Of others lost to me. The noses

Of dogs do not invent.  
 Though stories overlap, the poses  
 Are revealed, as when a cat  
 Pretends he does not feel. But touch  
 Him once and watch him bat  
 The air, responsive to so much  
 That touch is his, that sense  
 I've drowned in consciousness of sin.  
 If there is recompense  
 For what I lack today within  
 The human brain, I'd fear  
 To lose what's left for me. The taste  
 Of wine would disappear,  
 All pleasures seem a senseless waste,  
 And sight, sublime till now,  
 No longer willed but meaningless,  
 An eye beneath the brow,  
 A hand below the reach of bliss.  
 What meaning has my age  
 If I ignore this loss?"  
Enwrapped,  
 We stood before the cage  
 Until we saw how she had trapped  
 The frightened hare, the bird,  
 The dog, the mouse, the cat, and then  
 The gifts that she preferred,  
 As one by one we tumbled in.

Dorothy Beck

**PRAIRIE SUMMER**

(For Carl Sandburg)

**1**

Hollyhocks are blooming in schoolyards  
of towns along the Soo Line.

In chicory lots Chevrolets rust  
under the Clabber Girl signs.

In Winneshiek County, Iowa,  
near where Hamlin Garland once lived,  
a whole Norwegian family  
is out planting apple trees.

**2**

Our village of rambler roses  
contains cats in trellised shade,  
children asleep on islands of moss,  
and quiet men who smoke pipes and sit  
on stone benches at the courthouse.

**3**

Heart-shaped leaves fall in the pitcher  
of lemonade: 3c a glass, 3c a glass.

**4**

Dripping with a sticky green sweat,  
my brother, who would be farmer,  
walks the highway to Plato Center.

The endless cornfields swell above him.  
Heat waves jump up from the concrete.

To breathe deeply is to half drown.

5

The barber's son brings me a gift:  
13 butterflies in a cellophane bag.

The grass shudders in the lawnmower.

A bluejay screams in the jaws of the sky.

6

Under the oak tree by the back fence  
my beautiful blonde sister  
is writing a poem about Altgeld.

Dinner pails are in it. And picks and shovels.  
Slow footsteps on broken stairs are in it.  
And angry men with Polish names.  
Darrow is in it. And Debs and Sandburg.

Next week she will read it aloud  
to the Women's Club and the D.A.R.

7

Below a bluff of yellow tombstones  
two houseboats gather old shadows  
and the waves of a speedboat.

Time for bare feet, beer, and box scores.

8

What do sunflowers talk about after dusk  
when the wind goes down and the moon comes up?

9

I love to sit here on the screened porch  
and go over the names of prairie towns:  
Morning Sun, Carbon Cliff, What Cheer;  
and the Indian names of rivers:  
Wapsipinicon, Kishwaukee, Pecatonica.

**10**

After the band concert in the firefly park  
katydids sing above a circus of weeds—  
weeds that are hiding a whiskey bottle,  
a new baseball, and a book of magic.

**11**

Midnight: rain beats on the clapboards,  
soaks the grass, cleans the walks.

Wonderful, the smell of tomato vines.

Far off, the lusty wail of diesel horns:  
beef to Chicago, tractors to Omaha.

**12**

Tomorrow, bumbling among bees,  
I will be fisherman,  
seeker of lost railroads,  
and ambassador to all the forgotten  
kingdoms of Chautauquas and streetcars.

**David Pearson Etter**

## THE SONGS FOR ABE KOSOW

## 1

Before he'll put the paper in your hand  
 the half-blind Abe Kosow, newspaper vendor,  
 will feel your dime and squeeze closed his  
 grey hand around its cold silver.  
 His grey hands, from slow dying for a hundred years,  
 are out of step and time with Madison Avenue.  
 Pity doesn't scent from him: it reeks.  
 He watches the all-blind, how simply with a sign  
**MY DAYS ARE DARKER THAN YOUR NIGHTS.**  
**DO YOU THANK GOD**  
**YOU CAN SEE. HELP ME BUY A SEEING EYE**  
**DOG** they build  
 mountains of coin. And sees himself, soon when his  
 eyes dark completely, and wishes he were black;  
 Jewishness, for pity, has gone out of style.

Forty blocks below the world changes: here  
 a bastard city strikes its coat and shows its  
 old bare hide, faint with lice, rats  
 and killer toms. Nights the air of left garbage  
 and dried semen dampened by dark, names its  
 atmosphere,  
 Spanish share the sidewalk with the new  
 generation of youth and art.

Kosow in hat and shuffle comes home: dragging  
 his pants cuffs, feeling his way, smelling  
 of rank pity. His neighbor: the large Margaret  
 whom he cannot touch. Four flights above Manhattan  
 they share the same toilet. Margaret the young  
 who rattles the walls and floor nightly  
 with her many different men,  
 Kosow the Jew the old who listens for her flush,  
 rises, and runs to share the quick and only warmth.

Just past Third Avenue, Abe  
 stays long outside the Catholic Church.  
 Dark in the shadows of Sunday,  
 he sees the long lines of valentine choir boys,  
 their high song like the shout of an August noon.  
 Winding into the mass they go, he hears their  
 song in a crystal dream after his years  
 of dark koaning in a Temple.  
 A lean young priest leads the boys, as when he was  
 ten.

To the ancient tenyears Jew then, straight  
 descended from the thickest loins of Isaac and  
 Abraham of the Old Testament, he was a desert  
 in a quiet sun, and the church was high and white,  
 and the sound of the crystal from inside  
 drew him to its look and sound over and again.

## 2

**Yeshiva Boys**

Caught up in bunches they are in the day  
 like black otherworld birds of carrion  
 made up for 1800 in the 1960's.  
 Boys that age would remove pais,  
 thickness of voice and the long coat,  
 the marks that set them off by themselves.  
 It's all right on the East Side;  
 but crossing such a small frontier as First Avenue  
 sets them out, emasculated. Things don't change—  
 these are the boys now on Avenue B,  
 this was Abe Kosow in 1920,  
 doubting himself across First Avenue  
 to see how he was different.

**St. Stephen's Boys**

Circling fast, the pack of young wolves  
 eye his big coat, his pared hands



and they quick-close in.

“Show us your dick! Let’s see his dick!”

“He hasn’t got one, kikes haven’t,  
they’re cut off in the Jewish church,  
by the priest!” Laughter. Pivot:

“You son of a bitch you killed Jesus”.

“He did, Father says so!” “Take down his  
pants and let’s whip him!” And so Abe of Isaac  
and Abraham is tortured in turn by his boy-angels.

“You bastard”, with every blow,

“You killed Jesus, the Jews

killed Jesus”! With blooded mouth

and swollen eyes he takes his shame home.

At ten, to doubt the base on which your house  
rests, is to doubt yourself and all true and real.

Abe heard for many streets and years  
the chanted sound, the dirge of dung.

He saw Christ with his thorns and scent,  
with blood in his eyes to dark his shame,

and in his ears to close out taunting,

the years changed. O the doors of the old church,

the tall priest, he wanted his sidecurls gone and  
his cheeks flushed and to kneel by a booth and

have the beautiful Father touch him and say

“Abraham stay with us”. He knew his father had  
killed Christ, and pricked his beautiful eyes with  
thorns.

### 3

At 13, two weeks short of confirmation of being  
a man, that day he cut his facelocks

into the bathroom sink, smelling of his father  
and with his father’s blade.

Deep as the scar of change should be, he bled.

Together loving and fearing his blood,

once as the step to a different Abe,  
once as loss, alienation, the death of  
motherlove. Puberty came with the loss  
of his hair. For three years  
the dream had festered, at last  
possessed him: he had a choir buried,  
waiting. So locked, long he stood,  
locked on the far bathroom threshold  
then walked into his mother's kitchen  
and, unassailably, lost her and his home.  
Alone now, far from love, and the  
smell of hot chicken soup,  
in the Sunday shadows of the church again  
he faced the boys: there was nowhere else to go.

Brother Brother take him safely  
lock him into his mother's house  
Sister Sister show him a kindness  
warm him kindly with a Sister's love  
Father, Father, you thought tomorrow  
night is come and where is tomorrow  
Snow come and cool his cheeks  
Rain come and wet his brow  
Abe loves for the first time.  
He will wear the look of Mary  
beribboned on his soul. Mary, Mary  
of the slow hills, she of the cool touch,  
she stroked his heart with her little finger,  
he wears his heart in his eyes as a mirror  
for Mary who sees herself there  
and she sings and she dances on his wretched soul.

Prejudice grows from the day, playing in the street  
our mothers tell us for the first time: "Watch out.  
Stick with your own". They never stop telling.  
The boys now, three years older than at ten and

three more separate from any world but their own,  
 tore him to scraps about the heart, and rasped  
 his young nerves against the granite walks.  
 But Abe would wait there until the walls decayed and  
 fell,  
 and by the time the sun made hot tar-smells on the  
 city blocks, he half forgot his own shame of  
 difference, he was, conditionally, one of them,  
 the least loved, the butt of the Catholic boys.

### Mary

Mary, doubting the faith of the Fathers when they  
 stroked her knee under the parish table,  
 stopped going to the church, and to school  
 where the teaching nuns knew the serpent in their  
 garden.  
 Lying in carnal sin with half a dozen boys from the  
 school,  
 at 14 Mary was Magdalene, and the sound of electric  
 whistles  
 shattered night wherever Mary walked.  
 Rooms of mirrors, wet dreams of midnight,  
 shimmering ruby-light fingers beckoned whenever  
 Mary walked.  
 In 1960, when Abe sold papers uptown in the city,  
 she was a holy swollen mother of nine;  
 but Abe knew her at 14, and she was full and heady  
 with the heat and smell of young dissolution. Hanging  
 lower than death at 50, at 14 Mary raised up  
 all the Father's boys, and Abe knew her for ripe fruit;  
 but fruit from far, a soft unattainable need.  
 Mary's motive: to take a Jew  
 under the black beads and crucifix  
 hanging by her mother's bed: twice the spite.  
 Today, seduction. On the sabbath they lay together,  
 and then with a crash of shattered illusion

a thousand Mary mirrors are laughing.  
Follow me, Abe, crooning him  
her little right finger bent  
and the left tipped with saccharin and lye.  
Follow me to the far of madness,  
to the sun of skies, to the red of womb, say  
Jesus, what is Jesus to Mary of the hills,  
in his one day Abe learns to lust,  
to be fed once and sated by the beautiful,  
then Mary in his glass eye is smiling  
Mary, at once the smile is laughter,  
and out of the mirror falls Abe, down, down.

He walks to the river that carries off sewage,  
the East river, holy and dirty as Ganga,  
and then home, home is the son,  
the Prodigal back from Paradisio  
on Third Avenue. It wasn't Christ who cut him out  
nor the priests pacing St. Stephen's dooryard,  
but Mary: Mary of the mirror, crying  
JEWBOY - FAIRY - GO HOME TO YOUR MOTHER -  
YOU CAN'T MAKE IT, THE BOYS WILL GET YOU  
IF YOU COME BACK. Go home, foreigner, Jew.

## 4

Transformation, stitch by stitch  
to the long coat again, and the shuffle,  
and in three blocks the whole Jew is back.  
At fourteen only one year late  
he drank wine and canted his coffin,  
set himself in mold again,  
jelled and frozen with terrible permanence.  
Mary was gone, to whose arms but his mother's;  
on the soft home breasts then he lay,  
pretending innocence again.  
But half a century later,

the half-blind Abe Kosow, newspaper vendor,  
wife, unwed, children, unborn,  
living beside Margaret, large  
like Mary was, remembers.

Moving by touch, touching each of the walls  
now Abe paces the room, waiting  
for the sound of Margaret coming home.

Gives up at past bedtime,  
caps out the Saturday holy candle,  
washes, and lays his bed.

In the moon-dreams of Abe Kosow  
his mother opens the dim lid of her grave  
and Abe lies in, to cry  
on her damp and candle-smelling breast,  
and beasts roil at the moon, and cats screech,  
to wait until the sound of the latch next door  
half wakes Abe to the scent and knowing of  
Margaret, Mary, the fifty-year old moon dream.  
He bades his mother well. He unwinds time.  
He sleeps.

Irene Schramm

**THE MOVIES, 1934**

The darkness was a welcome to the child  
where she could sit, in secret, by herself,  
watching the diamond curtains, her elbows  
parked on the arms of the imperial seat, her feet  
humming and skimming one inch above the floor.

The tiny lights in the dome begin to melt,  
the trombones neigh, the snowy images  
come up like fish, the tedious roll of names  
and words unwinds, and then the camera's eye,  
in an elevator blur, races her eye  
down the sixty thousand floors of a white  
Manhattan tower. Joan Crawford, out  
of a job, comes clicking down a corridor  
to wade a tidal montage of taxi horns  
and stoplights, hard-eyed, aimless, grief at rest  
on her jaw, Broadway having let her down.

The music rose like a wind dragging the great  
airs of autumn through brittle trees, and the child's  
throat began to harden and swell, and she wept,  
the screen's dead shine on her exultant face.

**Sister Mary Jonathan**

**77 DREAM SONGS.** *By John Berryman. Farrar, Straus. \$3.95.*

This is surely one of the most complex books of poetry to appear in many a year—also one of the best. A man named Henry wanders about modern America. Through a series of lyric dreams couched in alternately comic and tragic terms, we are presented a picture of boredom, horror, lack of purpose, dread and despair that Berryman sees as our current way of life. The picture is terrifying; the poetry difficult but wholly engrossing.

**JUVENAL: SATIRES.** *Trans. by Jerome Mazzaro. University of Michigan Press. \$5.*

A translation of poetry into English that remains true to both word and spirit is uncommon, but one that works as original poetry, as this one does, is exceedingly rare. Mazzaro not only succeeds in recreating the grand, majestic style Juvenal used to bring to light and ridicule the political and social wrongs of Domitian's Rome, but creates sixteen fresh satires for our own time. An introduction and useful notes are by Richard E. Braun.

**TAKEN CARE OF.** *By Edith Sitwell. Atheneum. \$5.95.*

Dame Edith may have been her own best creation. Her autobiography adds little to her life and rather vocal prejudices that we don't already know. It skitters about in high style, full of the grand manner that was her stock in trade. But, as with her poetry, hidden among the affectations and sham, there are gems worth hunting for and treasuring when you find them.

**IDEE FIXE and AESTHETICS.** *By Paul Valéry. Bollingen Series. \$3 and \$4.*

Pantheon, Random House, the Bollingen Series and General Editor Jackson Mathews are to be commended on the consistently high quality of the separate volumes in this series. When completed, it will include all the works of Valéry and be an immense

help in understanding that important but elusive figure. Seven volumes have appeared so far.

**THE COMPLETE POEMS OF D. H. LAWRENCE.**

*Viking. \$15.*

Here are all the poems Lawrence wrote. The edition is scholarly; the texts probably definitive. Lawrence ran the gamut from moving things of high purpose to private doggerel, from verses of immense strength to pettiness that is almost embarrassing. How the balance rests, each reader must determine for himself.

**A PROSODY HANDBOOK.** *By Karl Shapiro and Robert Beum. Harper & Row. \$4.95.*

This book should be useful to both writers and serious readers. It is a straightforward "guide" to the technical sides of poetry. It is well organized, more complete than its length might suggest, and well-stocked with revealing illustrations of the points made. It is particularly commended to beginning poets.

**ROOTS AND BRANCHES.** *By Robert Duncan. Scribner's. \$4.50.*

Book after book, the skill and reputation of Duncan have been built together. With this volume he now stands firmly among the finest of our poets. He has a huge range and many of the poems display a power that is almost awesome. He is individual in both crochety and curiously predictable ways. He is conventional and experimental. He is always fascinating and, most important, he is still growing.

**THE BROKEN GROUND.** *By Wendell Berry. Harcourt, Brace & World. \$3.95.*

Berry is young and his poetry shows it. He has a long way to go before he becomes a full poet. But there are poems here of such immediate appeal, such lush melody that one pauses to read, enjoy and smile with simple satisfaction. He has his own voice and uses it with promising style and skill. Berry is clearly worth careful watching.