

SERENADE by
AARON KRAMER

reading his own and other poems
by **POETS OF NEW YORK:**

ALEXANDER F. BERGMAN

MAXWELL BODENHEIM

MORRIS ROSENFELD

Accompanying notes with drawings by —

Fried, Harris, Jean Hale, Neel,

Kruckman, Lishinsky, Tambak,

Reisman, Solman, Strickland,

Toney, Weingarten.

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AARON KRAMER, poems
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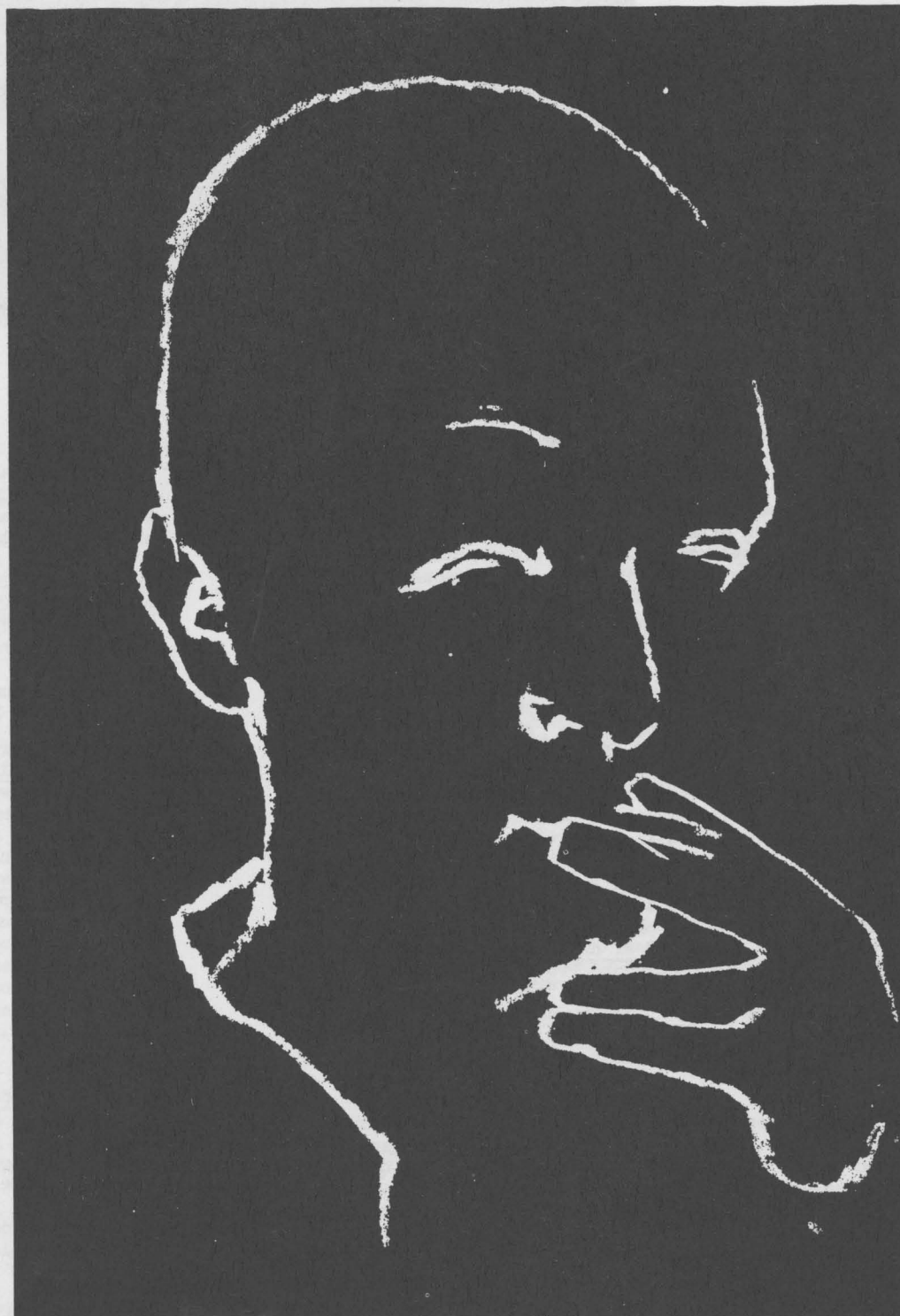
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Aaron Kramer

Aaron Kramer was born at the close of 1921 in a tenement section of Brooklyn. Through high school and college he worked part-time, and since graduation, at nineteen, has worked full-time, continuously, at a variety of jobs, including the War Department, several war plants, a shipyard, a meat-processing firm, an office workers' union, an import house and a used-truck dealer.

His first published poems -- from 1934 on -- bear the imprint of three major fears: depression, fascism, and war. The Alarm Clock, his first volume, appeared in 1938. Another Fountain, 1940, was dedicated to the German dramatist, Ernst Toller, a suicide in exile. During World War II, three more collections of his poetry appeared: Till the Grass is Ripe for Dancing, Thru Our Guns, and The Glass Mountain.

Kramer first achieved national prominence during the war, when -- at the age of 22 -- he was included in Seven Poets in Search of an Answer. Four years later, his work in The Poetry and Prose of Heinrich Heine won him international acclaim as "the finest translator of Heine in our time." The Thunder of the Grass, The Golden Trumpet, and Thru Every Window! placed him, according to Shaemas O'Sheel, "among the first rank of American poets."

His lectures and recitals have attracted a vast audience. His poems, articles and reviews have appeared in dozens of periodicals. Much of his work has been broadcast, choreographed, anthologized and translated. Traditionalist composers, such as Charles Wakefield Cadman, and modernists like Lukas Foss, have set his poems to music. His Guernica was performed by the New Dance League of San Francisco. His United Nations Cantata opened the American Music Festival of 1947. He has served as judge in the Lola Ridge Memorial, Goethe Bicentennial, and other nationwide contests -- as editorial adviser to the Harlem Quarterly, as guest director of numerous poetry workshops.

In 1949, the United Nations Film Division commissioned him to write a script in verse. The same year, his Emma Lazarus Centenary script was performed at New York's Town Hall. In 1950, his series of biographical sketches and translations, Four Yiddish Pioneer Poets, ('a highwater mark" -- Eve Merriam) was reprinted in Canada, Brazil and South Africa. Denmark Vesey appeared in 1952, and has since been set to music, receiving a number of West Coast performances. Roll the Forbidden Drums! his tenth and most ambitious volume, was published in 1954, with an introduction by Alfred Kreymborg. The same year, two of his songs were performed at the Berkshire Music Festival.

In 1955 appeared his Teardrop Millionaire and other poems by Morris Rosenfeld; also A Ballad of August Bondi, which was set to music and performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, with Pete Seeger featured as Balladeer. In 1956 the American Jewish Historical Society published his essay, The Link Between Heinrich Heine and Emma Lazarus; the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences published his Concert of Concerts, translated from Mickiewicz; he served as chairman of judges for the American Poetry Society's annual lyric award; appeared at Carnegie Hall in a performance of his own verse-narration, In Us Lives the Music; lectured and recited in hospital wards, public and braille libraries, university and concert auditoriums.

1957 has seen the production of his allegorical verse-play, The Tinderbox, by the British Broadcasting Corporation. Half-completed is a new verse-play with music, Moses, as well as a volume of his New York poems, together with drawings by 12 artists, some of which are here reproduced.

Mr. Kramer received his M.A. degree from Brooklyn College. He is married, and the father of two daughters.

The poems by Bergman, Bodenheim and Rosenfeld included in this recording, were selected by Aaron Kramer, who also prepared the biographical notes on these poets.

THE ROCKABYE LOVE

Rockabye love on the fire-escape;
each of your eyes is a shiny blue lake;
each of your breasts is a billow of cream;
softly now sing me a boat for my dream.

Let me hear nightingales all the night through;
see how the trees build a web on the blue;
let me go rocking from star to wild star
up to the lands where the elf-people are.

Rockabye love on the fire-escape;
tell me the tenement ogres are fake;
tell me the screech of an automobile,
the wail of a beggar, is never so real

as one little sunbeam, one little dove:
rockabye, rockabye, rockabye love.

SERENADE

Home to your eyes
where moons arise
across the night I ride;
home to your breast
where storms would rest
I come, my magic bride,

my bride, my bloom
because of whom
the street lamps burn so well,
each factory-spire
is set afire
and seems a citadel.

WORK DAY

I've been working arms and back all day
where sunbeams lie in scraps upon the floor,
until I'm caught in a machine-like sway
that rocks asleep whatever lived before.

I watch the clock, as though my looking there
might egg its finger to the touch of five,
when, stumbling through the crowds to Union Square,
I'll pick the sunniest bench, and grow alive.

THE LOVERS

In the solitary places,
in the wildlands of the park,
lie the lovers--and their faces
speak with yearning of the dark:

when from bush or bowing tree
they can hear the royal choir
honoring love's majesty
with a melody of fire,

while the dangers of tomorrow,
the despairs of yesterday,
all the rebel hordes of sorrow
with a kiss are held at bay.

May there be no storm tonight,
sweet, blind monarchs, to unblind you!
And may no policeman's light
thrust aside the dark to find you!

TREATMENT

Fix our firm in the back of your brain.
None of our customers ever complain.

We promise a treatment truly aesthetic,
fair and considerate, almost poetic:

washing, trimming, waving your hair,
filing your nails, cleaning with care

the skin that has taken more soot than sun--
you'll shine like a movie star when we've done,

and all your neighbors at last may see
the wonderful person you wanted to be.

Fix our firm in the back of your brain.
we'll ride you away from the roar of the train

and find you a place on a pleasant acre.
What more can you ask of an undertaker?

NOCTURNE

With what amazing wand, oh night,
have you bewitched my ragged town
into a princess, proud and bright,
at whom the marvelling moon gapes down?

--My cinderella-town, that seems
suddenly to have stepped inside
a chariot of clouds of dreams...
To what far castle does she ride,

oh night, and in what prince's arm
shall she ecstatically whirl
before tomorrow's harsh alarm
recalls her: wretched, ragged girl?

TRAIN SONG

Rain in the shoe, cold in the lung,
pain on the limb, gall on the tongue,
night in the brain, wind in the bone--
no fun riding a train alone.

Only the ears, only the ears,
hearing a soft music of tears
under the wheel's punishing drone--
no fun riding a train alone.

Only the eyes, only the eyes,
Seeing behind walls of disguise
Neighboring eyes quietly moan--
No fun riding a train alone.

CHAINS

I took a walk through the streets of my town.
There wasn't a prison for miles around,
yet I thought I heard a clanking sound.

Louder than foghorns, louder than trains,
louder than children who laughed at their games,
I could swear I was hearing a sound of chains.

Slowly I went from street to street,
stopped every fellow I chanced to meet--
not one had fetters around his feet.

I asked if they heard what I could hear,
but they looked at me as though I were queer.
"Chains, indeed!" they said with a sneer.

"You ought to find a job as a clown
--speaking of chains in a free man's town!
Get out of here, or we'll knock you down!"

--Dear home of the smiling deaf and blind:
d'you think I'd leave your gates behind
While chains are clanking in my mind?

RUSH HOUR

Too late to kiss my wife goodbye
or hunt the missing boot;
too late for even milk and pie
I rush downstairs and out.

The dawn's a snowball in my face--
I stagger east half-blind
past where a sunrise and a bus
are hoped for by mankind.

Poor devils, are they also tossed
into the jaws of day?
No more to be Miss Muffet's guest?
Too late for curds and whey?

From every bedroom now I hear
the arrogant alarm;
from every hall the poor appear
and swirl into the storm.

Each side-street gives its workers up;
the snowflakes beat them back,
and still the legions will not stop--
they march to the attack.

And I march also, push inside
the train with all the rest;
with them maniacally ride
while clocks go frowning past.

No trees, no houses--only clocks
at every avenue.
We squint, we shove, we crane our necks
to catch a better view.

--Why should a minute mean so much?
Are we afraid we'll miss
a rendezvous? No chance, at such
a snowbound hour as this!

No chance! The answer's in their eyes
and in my own as well.
It is a day like other days:
our time-cards wait in Hell...

IN THE LUNCH WAGON

There is no cafeteria in Hell
more clangorous, more foul of sight or smell.
Yet at the stroke of clemency, we race
from every labyrinth to that one place.

Past whirling dishes, waitresses, and steam,
I see the clock (that killed my nightly dream)
still smiling, and my own smile cannot live
--as though I'm a discovered fugitive.

In threes and fours, some use the hour of food
to make a fiery anvil of their mood.
The whispers leap like flame. They forge a sword.
In secret armories it will be stored...

Some steal to freedom, or pretend they do,
by eating in the rear, away from view.
They drop their nickels in the music box
and hear a song that overcomes the clock's.

And while they chew, the passion of the tune
returns them to a face, a tree, a moon...
Once more they're clung to, all their worth is seen:
not mocked and ground to dust by a machine!

The flesh revives, the eyes renew their flame;
for three sweet minutes they are not the same--
until a record's over. At the shock
they look up, and behold the smiling clock.

SADIE: A SERENADE

Sadie, Sadie--the men have all gone;
in a minute I'll be going too.
You might as well put some clothing on;
tonight will be cold, I'm warning you.

I lock up the books, and you watch with that smile.
What's there to smile about, you and the clock?
Can't you be serious once in a while--?
Would you smile if I hit you with a rock?

I bet you can hardly wait till I'm out--
that package the watchman's carrying in
has something or other you know about--
I can see by your wink--and I think it's gin.

Sadie, Sadie--I'm wise to your tricks:
as soon as I'm out he'll lock the door,
and open the package, he will, and mix
a couple of drinks, then a couple more.

When he's good and high, you'll come alive
and stretch your arms, and shake your hips,
And down from the calendar you'll dive
right into his lap, with your pursed-up lips.

"WHAT KIND OF WATCHMAN..." the clock will yell--
but you'll stick out your tongue, and shut the light...
Sadie, Sadie--I'll never tell;
a wink for a wink, if you'll kiss me good night.

UNEMPLOYED SONG

Last month I worked in a hell-hole shop
with just enough light to see the machine,
where the motors yell and the hammers drop
and the boss marks time till you leave the latrine
and your favorite dream is a bench on the Square
feeding pigeons and swallowing air.

I've sat here now through a stream of hours
where the waterfall sounds a familiar sob,
and I envy the simple routines of flowers,
the pigeons that never seem out of a job,
and my favorite dream is the motor's yell
high up in that shop, in that hole of hell.

BOARDWALK BLUES

I've got a hunger, don't know where;
it cries like a baby into my head;
I bought five hot dogs, but it didn't care;
frozen custard, but it wouldn't be fed.

I've got a thirst, don't know where;
It cries like a beggar till my throat goes dry;
I bought five sodas, but it didn't care;
Malted milk, but it wouldn't die.

Tried every ride on the Steeplechase,
poised my spine for every thrill;
laughed and laughed all over my face;
body went spinning, head stayed still.

Five wooden men stood up in spite;
I pitched my heart with every ball.
After an hour they were out of sight,
and the manager gave me a kewpie-doll.

Boardwalk-blues ... if my pockets tear
I'll just keep walking -- no reason to care.
I've got a thirst, don't know where.
I've got a hunger, don't know where.

AN OLD MATTRESS IN THE LOTS

Far off from where most people pass
I've found, surrounded by some grass,
the ghostly mattress of a bed
with all its wounds exhibited:
springs half-rusted, cover frayed,
entrails hideously displayed.

Who dragged it here? and why so far?
Was it despised enough to mar
a room? Did death once wrestle life
upon it? Or was once a wife
discovered with her paramour
oblivious to the creaking door?

The sun, in partnership with me,
probes gently for its history:
inspects each bump, each fold, each seam;
questions the springs until they gleam,
until they glitter with such zest
-- as though to gild a rich man's rest.

Who knows? Perhaps the poor old ghost
has more life left than I supposed!
Perhaps, before a crow-like storm
swoops down upon the prostrate form
and makes a feast, some time of thrill
may be allotted to it still.

The pink-faced youngsters, by mistake,
may try the path I tried, and make
the same discovery. Instead
of singing songs about the bed
they'll call it castle, choose up sides,
wage war to rescue captive brides.

Or, maybe, on some stifling night
two lovers -- fleeing walls -- may light
upon this unexpected prize;
and, tenderly, as though with eyes
enjoy each bump, each fold, each seam,
and dream and kiss, and kiss and dream.....

HALLOWEEN

Forgive me, dear, if I did not gasp.
Being the father's no easy task.
Next time you show me your toothless friend,
I promise: my hair will stand on end!
He really deserves to see me afraid --
He's the best jack-o-lantern that ever was made.

Don't think I'm a stranger to Halloween:
I've known how to make old ladies scream;
they'd look out the window, and there I stood
moaning and groaning -- in a white hood.
They'd open the door, and there I grinned --
my witch's hair blown wild by the wind.

At midnight, when all on the list had been shocked,
we beat a retreat to our fort in the rocks.
There we joined hands, and mumbled the word
that only seven had ever heard;
and while October flew off in a gale
we quaked in the dark at a ghostly tale.

I'd like to be able to quake and gasp
at a story of ghosts, at a Halloween mask;
I'd like us seven, turned women and men,
to huddle away from October again!
But Willie now is a ghost himself,
and Jean keeps hers on a secret shelf.

Philip's haunted -- having grown rich;
and sweet, plump Ruth's being burned as a witch.
Mary and Bob have made friends with fear:
a black cat crosses their path each year.
-- I, too, have been sometimes afraid to dream:
all year, one year, it was Halloween . . .

SONG OF NEW YORK

New York! proudly I breathe its magic name.
What other town in all the world would dare
lift up such lion-towers to daunt the air?
hang out such bold advertisements to shame
the stars?

Nor is their cry an idle claim
with cross-word puzzle, gin and solitaire
to keep the desperate from his despair;
with escalators beckoning all the lame
to soar past lameness -- in our splendid town
more sorrowers are laughing per square acre
than anywhere on earth! And if you take a
stroll somewhere, and find yourself bogged down,
there's sure to be an information booth
with every possible answer but the truth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The poems by Maxwell Bodenheim are from his Selected Poems (Bernard Ackerman, Inc.-Beechurst Press, 1946) and are used by permission of the publishers. Alexander F. Bergman's poems are taken from They Look Like Men (Bernard Ackerman, Inc., 1944) and are used by permission of the publishers. From Aaron Kramer's Till the Grass is Ripe for Dancing (Harbinger House, 1943) are taken: "The Rockabye Love," "Work Day," "Boardwalk Blues;" "Unemployed Song" is from The Glass Mountain (Beechurst Press, 1946); "The Lovers," "Train Song," and "Treatment" appeared in The Thunder of the Grass (International, 1948); "Serenade," "An Old Mattress in the Lots," and "Chains" are from The Golden Trumpet (International, 1949); "Rush Hour," "In the Lunch Wagon," "Sadie: A Serenade" and "Halloween" from Roll the Forbidden Drums! (Cameron & Kahn, 1954.)

MORRIS ROSENFELD

Of all Yiddish poets, Morris Rosenfeld alone -- and while yet a young man -- was acknowledged by the non-Jewish literary world as a notable singer. He was born in Poland, on December 28th, 1862. His grandfather had been a fishery worker -- as were his father and uncles.

In 1882 he left home to "try his fortune" in the West, working for short periods of time in Amsterdam, London and New York. A year later, he settled in London as a sweatshop worker: sixteen hours a day at the machine drained the blood from his body; the "slack" seasons left him gaunt.

At the machine, he found an outlet in angry song. His verses were soon known to many London workers. At first, he wrote clumsily -- being unfamiliar with poetic technique. By the close of 1886, however, when he had moved to New York, the Yiddish press began accepting his work. His first collection of poems, Die Glocke, appeared in 1888; this book included a section titled Lebensbilder, in which he described the conditions of a tailor-shop worker. Here, for probably the first time in Yiddish, were memorable labor poems. He was at once acknowledged as a singer of the first rank, and the pages of many publications were opened to him.

Blumenkette (1890), his second volume, consolidated his position. But praise and publication were all that editors could offer him. It was unheard of in those years for contributors to receive payment. To maintain his family it was necessary for Rosenfeld to continue working in the sweatshop. His eyes and general health deteriorated, yet it was during that period of hardship he produced his greatest poems. Occasionally he would stop work for a couple of months, to travel from city to city with his books, singing and reciting before large audiences of Yiddish workers.

In 1894 he founded a weekly journal, Der Ashmodai. Dos Liederbuch, a volume of his collected poems, appeared in 1897. It failed to bring the financial return for which he had hoped, and the embittered poet resigned himself to a sweatshop future. His book, however, came to the attention of Leo Wiener, professor of Slavic languages at Harvard, and author of a pioneering work on Yiddish literature. Recognizing an unusual new talent, Prof. Wiener in 1898 published a volume of unrhymed translations, Songs from the Ghetto, which immediately established Rosenfeld's reputation among America's literati.

During the next few years, he was invited to lecture at Harvard, Wellesley and Radcliffe. He was lionized everywhere. Translations soon appeared in French, German, Czech, Rumanian, Polish, Russian, Hebrew, Hungarian and Japanese. Some of his poems were included in an anthology edited by Maxim Gorky at the turn of the century. He was invited to tour Europe, where he was feted by royalty and had the pleasure of hearing great actors recite his poems.

It seemed that he had "arrived." But the years of suffering finally took their toll. A gifted son died before his seventeenth year; this was followed by a stroke which left the poet feeble and almost blind. In 1912, simultaneously with the nationwide celebration of his 50th birthday, his Naiste Shafungen appeared, and -- as was the case with almost all his books -- enjoyed a phenomenal sale. Dos Buch fun Liebe appeared in 1914.

A period of obscurity followed, during which a rumor started that Rosenfeld had died. He then had the rare treat of reading eulogies in the same newspapers that had lately abused him. They acknowledged him now for what he undoubtedly was: the greatest folk-singer of the Jewish people.

THE GHETTO TREE

In New York's teeming ghetto
there stands a gnarled old tree.
Unheard in all that tumult,
it sighs: Ah, woe is me!

It looks around in wonder
and murmurs with a sigh:
how wretched and neglected,
how pitiful am I!

There's only gloom to look at;
fantastic sounds to hear.
Where are you now, old forests?
you birds, that sang so clear?

Where are you, saucy breezes?
Oh, come and stir my bough!
And you -- so deep, so tranquil --
blue sky, where are you now?

Where are you, mighty giants?
Why don't you gallop past
upon your speedy stallions,
and blow a trumpet-blast?

Time was -- I still remember --
before I learned to bend:
How freely rang the laughter
of heroes through this land!

The larks -- they trilled so sweetly!
The sun -- it shone so bright!
How wonderful the world was,
with so much joy and light!

But now I watch the pygmies:
they scurry here and there,--
debased are man and nature --
life's meaningless and bare ...

What good am I, old orphan,
still standing here alone?
I've lost my dearest comrades,
so let me, too, be gone!

Oh, cut me down, I beg you!
This is no tree you save,
but one poor dreaming head-stone
alone on Freedom's grave

THE TEARDROP MILLIONAIRE

It's not a tuning-fork of gold
that sets my throat to sing,
nor do my melodies unfold
to satisfy a king.
The groans of slaves, when they are tired,
awake my bitter songs;
it's only then that I'm inspired:
I reckon up their wrongs.

And this is why I pine away,
and half-alive I linger --
what wages can the workers pay,
what pittance to their singer?
They pay with tears for every tear --
that's all they can afford:
I am a teardrop millionaire,
and weep upon my hoard.

MY LITTLE SON

I have a son, a little son,
a youngster mighty fine!
and when I look at him I feel
that all the world is mine.

But seldom do I see him when
he's wide awake and bright.
I always find him sound asleep;
I see him late at night.

The time-clock drags me off at dawn,
at night it lets me go.
I hardly know my flesh and blood;
his eyes I hardly know ...

I climb the staircase wearily:
a figure wrapped in shade.
Each night my haggard wife describes
how well the youngster played;

how sweetly he's begun to talk,
how cleverly he said,
"When will my daddy come and leave
a penny near my bed?"

I listen, and I rush inside --
it must -- yes, it must be!
My father-love begins to burn:
my child must look at me! ...

I stand beside the little bed
and watch my sleeping son,
when hush! a dream bestirs his mouth!
"Where has my daddy gone?"

I touch his eyelids with my lips.
The blue eyes open then:
they look at me! they look at me!
and quickly shut again.

"Your daddy's right beside you, dear.
Here, here's a penny, son!"
A dream bestirs his little mouth:
"Where has my daddy gone?"

I watch him, wounded and depressed
by thoughts I cannot bear:
"One morning, when you wake -- my child --
you'll find that I'm not here."

MY CAMPING GROUND

Don't seek me where the myrtles bloom!
Not there, my love, can I be found.
In every shop where lives are tombed,
there I make my camping ground.

Don't seek me among warbling birds!
Not there, my love, can I be found.
I'm chained wherever chains are heard.
There I make my camping ground.

Don't seek me where the fountains splash!
Not there, my love, can I be found.
Where tears are shed, where teeth are gnashed,
there I make my camping ground.

Come find me, if you love me true --
for I am waiting to be found!
Oh, make my sad heart sing anew;
make warm, make sweet, my camping ground!

MAXWELL BODENHEIM

This poet was born in Mississippi in 1892, joined the Army in 1910, came to Chicago in the midst of the great poetry renaissance, and became a participant in that movement. His first volume of verse, Minna and Myself, appeared in 1918, followed by eight others. He also produced 14 novels, harshly realistic in approach, reflecting life in New York's "roaring Twenties." Some of these, particularly Replenishing Jessica and Naked on Roller Skates, became big sellers, and are still read -- not so much for their quality, perhaps, as for their violence and eroticism.

During the Twenties, Bodenheim was famous in Bohemian society, and made headlines regularly -- featured in a number of scandals, fights, and suicides. He became a star attraction for tourists in the "Village" (which he depicted in the novel Four in Greenwich Village) and in the artists' colony of Provincetown.

"He etches in acid," wrote Wm. Rose Benet. "He sometimes endeavors to shock for its own sake. But he is usually a subtle and skillful workman, a remarkably ingenious fashioner of phrase. Not that merely; for through his best poems runs a vein of very sharp-sighted even though scathing commentary upon the shams of our civilization."

As long as Bodenheim was willing to play "Pierrot" with his dazzling style and racy content, the literary world could forgive his denunciations, and paid him handsomely. But with the depression he found himself -- as a spirit -- and lost himself a lucrative career. "Well, I am rebelling/ At the men who make me/ Their grimacing marionette!" he wrote in *Pierrot Objects*. He became a militant poet of social protest. And, in his effort to make contact on a large scale, began to write with a simplicity and directness that were entirely unpalatable to the dominant literary circles.

By now he was past 40, unpublished, and without the means of support. Slowly began a financial and physical decline. Again he made headlines, but of a far different kind. From 1935 on, he would occasionally be found drunk on the street, or asleep and half-starved in a subway train, or dispossessed for non-payment of rent. There was no glamor now about him-- yet ghouls still came to Greenwich Village looking for the ragged poet who might be sitting on a bench in Washington Square or declaiming verses in a restaurant for a free meal.

Through this gradual downfall, however, his poetry gained in purity of expression and in spiritual power. *Lights in the Valley*, his last collection of verse, was published in 1942. Two years later he was included in *Seven Poets in Search of an Answer*, and in 1946 appeared his *Selected Poems*. He began numerous projects, but no longer had the stamina or hope for publication to carry them through. His name was practically blotted out from the 'respectable' literary scene.

In February, 1954, Bodenheim made headlines for the final time, having been brutally murdered, together with his wife, by a young maniac who asked the court to reward him for killing "a couple of reds." At the funeral, his old-time friend and colleague Alfred Kreymsborg read a eulogy written by Aaron Kramer, which ended with the words: "Those who tried to bury Bodenheim for almost 20 years knew very well what they were up to. He unmasked their hypocrisy, lashed out at their cruelty, and prophesied their doom. But 20 years from now, and more, when the darlings of the cults are long forgotten, a few voices of our generation will live and be dearly loved -- among them the rich, bold, incorruptible voice of Maxwell Bodenheim."

SPRING, 1943

Peeking, dotting, skeining,
Spring meandered into the roaring city.
The singular desolation throughout the world
Seemed to encourage winter -- it fell back
Grudgingly, leaving rear-guards of sleet-lunges,
snow-flurries.
Yet, only the outer spring could be rasped, rebuffed.
Exactly timed, essential, less visible
Springs in the bottom nooks of hearts and minds
Do not depend upon weather for their emerging.
In April, near the North Pole, a man could still
Feel the breaking, the push, the tips of birth
Within himself, transforming the towering ice-floes.
In the blustering city, some faces began to melt
In spite of overcoats and mufflers.
The faces of older people melted first.
They had more desperate need for inward spring.
The faces of children dissolved
Into nodding buds of curiosity.
The faces of people with little money
Were also among the first -- they longed for a green
Alive, unpretentious, impartially covering, so
Unlike the crass green on dollar-bills.
The faces of soldiers and sailors melted too.
As they neared the rush through gauntlets,
clutchings, infernoes,
Spring to them was a universal, beauty-marked wife
Never grossly possessed, and distributing
innocent favors --
A wife who might never be seen or touched again.

TO A ROSE

Red rose, the crude, flat revelry has died
And now, with petals loose, you lie beside
The girl, the bottle on the window sill,

The snore, the crumpled twenty-dollar bill.
And in another gas-filled room, you droop.
The essence in your heart can barely stoop
To brush the face, contracted, white and sore,
The slight, forever still form on the floor.
A shop-girl eyes your priceless, glowing stain,
Price-marked behind a florist's window pane.
She buys you, smells the frail, oblique appeal
And gladly goes without her noon-day meal.
And in this blatant night-club, on her knees,
An old scrubwoman picks you up and frees
A ghost of unguessed youth, pale and intent,
Made almost real within your dying scent.
You rest upon the statesman's coffin, near
The lowered silk hat and the unmeant tear.
You would be more at home upon the grave
Of some obscure, spent struggler, child or knave.
Red rose, you are a healing, signalling bloom,
But, lashed between the cradle and the tomb,
Few men can see, in hurried glance and stride,
Your paradox of unassuming pride.

SINCERELY YOURS, CULTURE (Fifth Sonnet)

The clock struck three, the rooming house was filled
With horrible and fitful scratching, snore,
A man and woman quarreling, minds drilled
By slowly hardening lacks, flesh bearing sore
And strangled feelings in a scream for breath.
A sick child's wail, the slamming of a door
Trailed into silence -- silence like the death
Of sophistry, remorse pinned to a floor.

The listening poet in his garret moaned
Beneath this weight of unsolved sufferings,
Tore up the slim nobilities, disowned
The subtle largesse decked in paltry wings,
And entered every room of his abode,
Lifting not only men -- but his own load.

ALEXANDER F. BERGMAN

Born in Brooklyn in 1912, Bergman was the second of four children who "lived in the one dark room" behind their father's laundry shop. At the age of five he had a brief taste of country life, and after the family's return to New York he decided to become a scientific farmer. The Brooklyn high schools offered no course in agriculture, "so he insisted on going to the school at Elmhurst, Long Island. This meant he had to travel two hours each way; he got up at five every morning."

"He loved the sea and the country," writes his brother. "In the summer he got jobs working on farms." It was his plan to attend Amherst, but the depression made it impossible; instead he became a bookkeeper, working "from four till midnight so that he would have more time to do the things he loved. But instead his resistance broke down and he developed a bad cough."

He was 23 at the time. Although soon discharged from the sanatorium, a year later "he was admitted to Montefiore Hospital with an advanced case of tuberculosis."

For a lover of the green, windswept world, such incarceration was most painful and nightmarish. The death of his dearest friends in Spain, however, turned him from self-pity, and he began to study intensely -- recognizing that the earth was more profoundly sick than he.

By his 26th birthday the poet was completely bed-ridden: "The greater part of the tissue of his lungs had been destroyed ... But this was the time when he began to express himself seriously in poetry. All day and night he sat, propped up with pillows, studying and writing. Even after the lights were turned out, he scribbled in the dark."

As he grew in understanding, and in compassion for those dying around him, Bergman became a pillar of strength in the hospital, patients and staff alike turning to him for advice and comfort. "The day before Alex died he was still writing, although he was taking oxygen and it was growing more and more diffi-

cult to breathe ... He died quietly with his face turned to the light outside the open door" -- two weeks before his 29th birthday.

They Look Like Men, his only collection, appeared three years later. Joy Davidman, who edited this posthumous volume, dedicated her War Poems of the United Nations jointly to Bergman and Funaroff, "Poets of the American People."

The novel Limbo Tower, by Wm. L. Gresham, is based partly on the life of this poet.

LETTER

I hope he doesn't see me walking past his bed
But if he does I'll make believe
I didn't hear him if he calls.

Young man, a minute please.
I can't get out of it I guess.
I don't mind the time, it's the smell
Of old age and rotting flesh I hate.

I want to talk to you.
He'll tell me what a mighty man he was.
I'll bet he's pressed a million pants,
And even was a Socialist
Before his kidneys took up all his time.

Come closer please, I want to ask you
If you have some time to spare.
I've got the time all right
But not enough to sing, to love, to go away
And never see that ugly face again.

To write for me a letter to my wife.
Was she tall was she short was she fat
Was she thin when it mattered what she was?
Are there any more at home like him?

And tell her this, but say it in your own words;
Never in my own words
I've got a sacred language
That she wouldn't understand.

Dear Rose:
Tonight I feel so bad I want to die.
That's not the way I feel tonight,
Dear Jane; That's not the way I feel at all.
Dear God that's not the way.

Please try to come and don't be mad no more.
I didn't see you now a long time.
In my words, if she remembers,
Anything that wasn't groaning, slobbering,
Unclean, she'd never come.

And bring the boy. I want to talk to you before I die.
What can the old man have to say
That must be said, to them, to me
Or anyone alive? What?
Love, Abraham.

LAMENT

In this time of the year when leaves fall
Yellow and dry with sickness and age,
The old men and the ailing die,
And some among us here must die.
I am ailing, I am old, ai ai ai.

The angel of death walks in the corridors,
The many-handed stalks all night.

Hear me; I was a baker once,
I labored at night while the populace slept;
When couples walked in the starlit streets
I saw their feet through the cellar grating.
In summer the sweat ran down my nose
And mingled with the dough I kneaded;
The bread turned brown in the fiery ovens
While I paled in the sunless heat.

There's no season of joy for such as we;
In winter the rain and the melted snow
Gathered in puddles around our feet;
I burned above and froze below,
I breathed in ice and fire.

Twenty hard years I was buried there,
I buried my wife and my child there,
I buried my youth, I buried the sun,
I buried the dream of America there.

Ai ai ai, heavy dark years;
And now on the porch of this lazar house
I sit for an hour in the fugitive sun.
But the falling leaves disquiet me;
There's no season of joy for such as we.
The Angel of Death walks in the corridors,
The many-handed stalks all night.

WAR SONG

Under the palaces, the marble and granite of banks
Among the great columns based in a sunless slime
The anonymous bearers of sorrows
Toil in their ancient march.
 they look like men
 they look like men

Flesh sour with decay
Strung with old hunger
Claws curved to the grip of the masterless loom
Bones bent by the unceasing wheel
 they look like men
 they look like men

Clocks without faces
Clocks without numbers
Dialing the days full of death
Grinding the nights in their rustless bowels
 they look like men
 they look like men

Whence do they come? How endure?
How spring like dragons' teeth from gutters of death?
Full-armed and numerous, where do they go?
To gather red lilies sprung from their seas of blood.
 they look like men
 they look like men

The wheel has not broken
The stones have not crushed
The ooze has not buried
The sword has not slain
 they look like men
 they look like men
 they look like men of war.

JERICHO

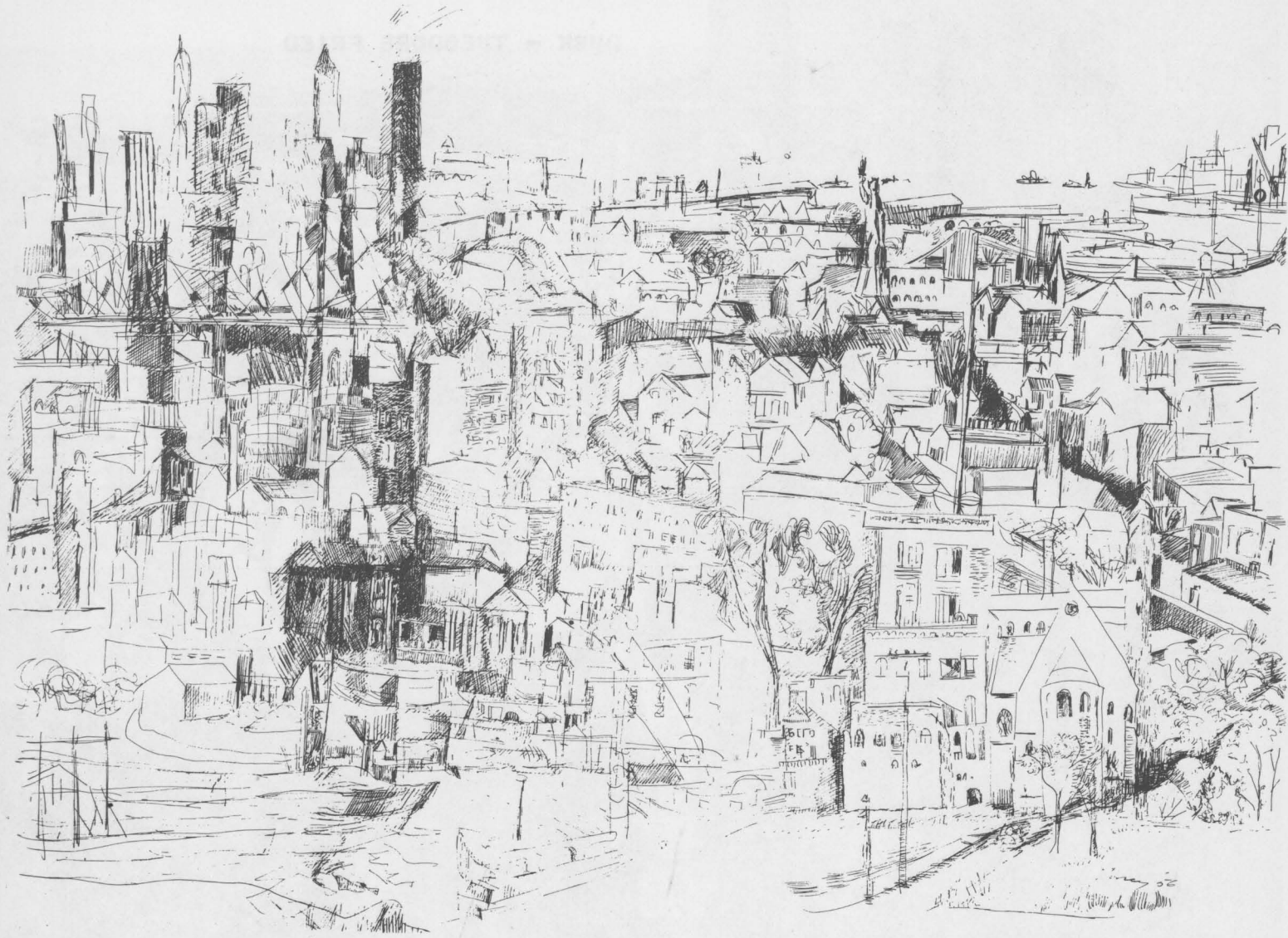
We cannot be kept within the walls,
The false barriers will break at the shout
Of our anger free from its long silence.

The builders of high bridges and sweet spires,
the quiet people decent in their homes
and all who sing for liberty
will meet the embrace of our shrunken arms.

Out of our beds and our uniform cells
out of the smelling, serried, crowded wards
into the clean streets of little towns,
the green fields that never saw our faces --
we shall go -- past the homes of the straight
firm walkers into the cities that banished us.

There are those who will fear our poison
our twisted, sometimes bitter faces,
our eyes of lizards stranger to the sun.

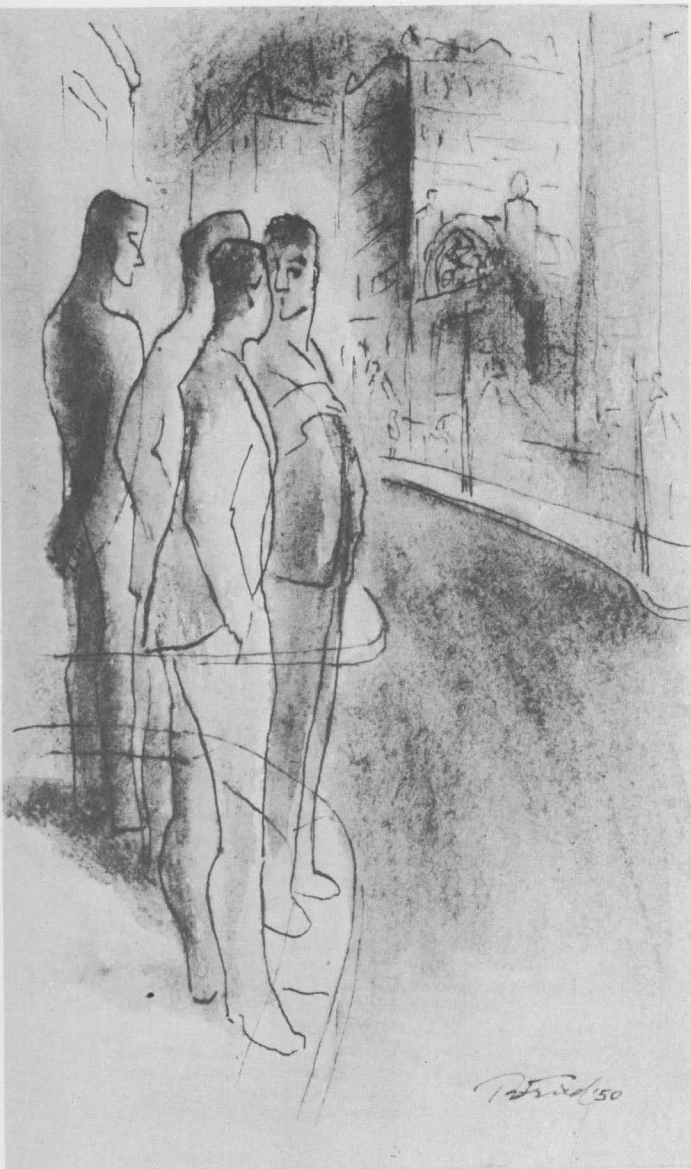
There are some who will tremble
when we walk with the hungry hordes,
the marchers with tired feet,
the fighters for peace, for freedom,
the sowers of wheat.



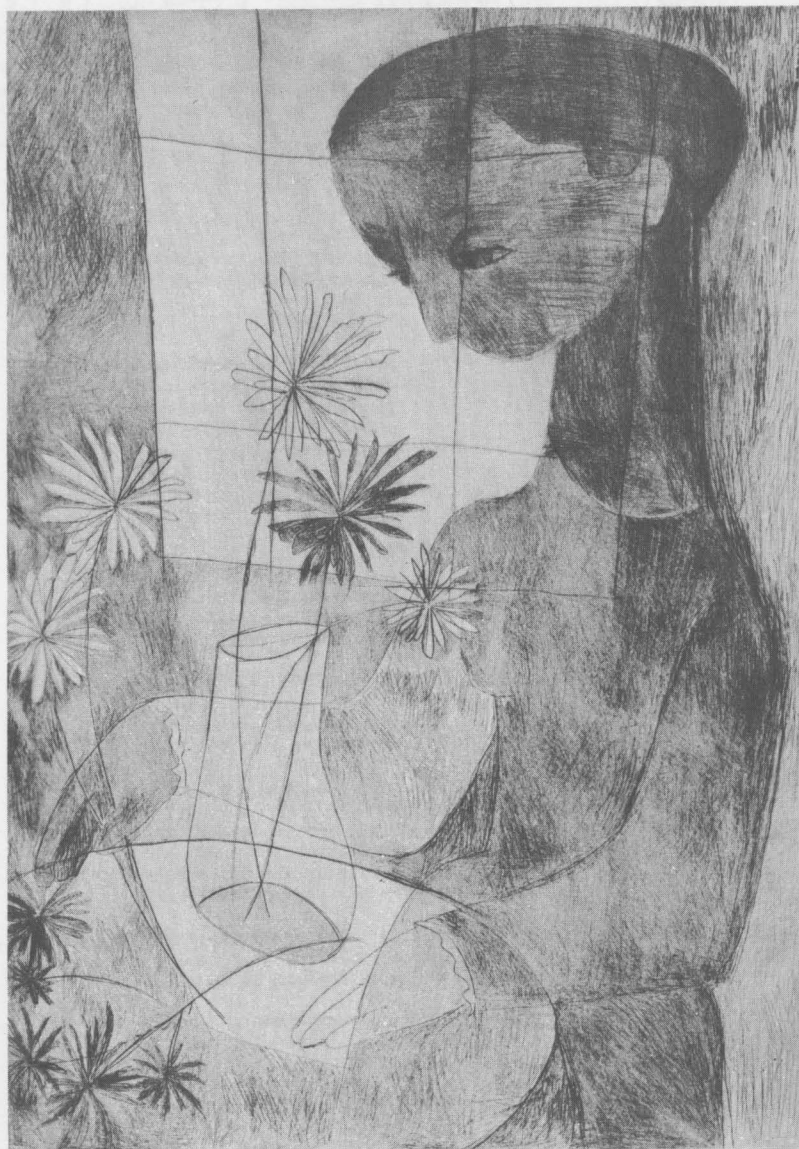
NEW YORK PANORAMA - ANTHONY TONEY

— WILLIAM DEWEY —
— JOHN BROWN WITH TOWNERS —

DUSK - THEODORE FRIED



YOUNG WOMAN WITH FLOWERS -
- HILDE WEINGARTEN





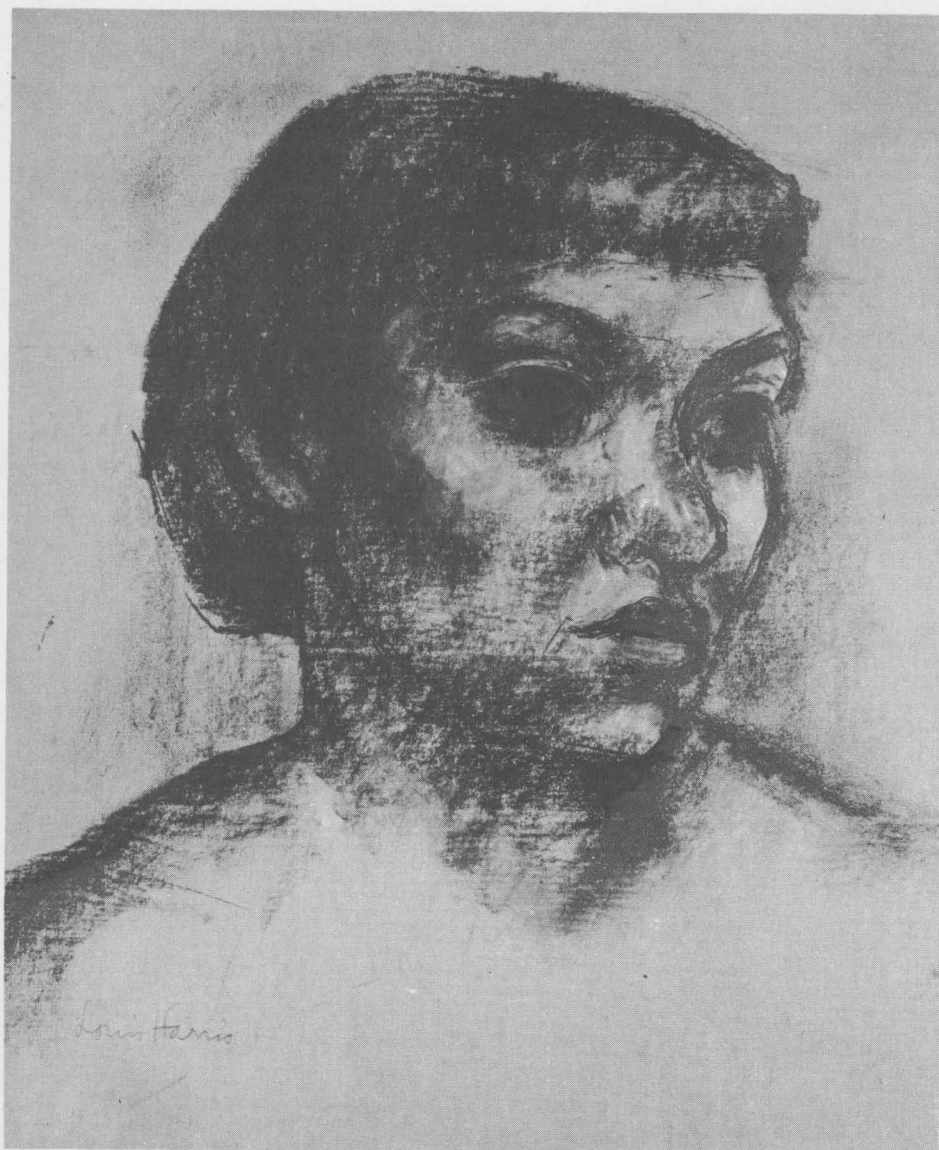
GRINDER - HERBERT KRUCKMAN



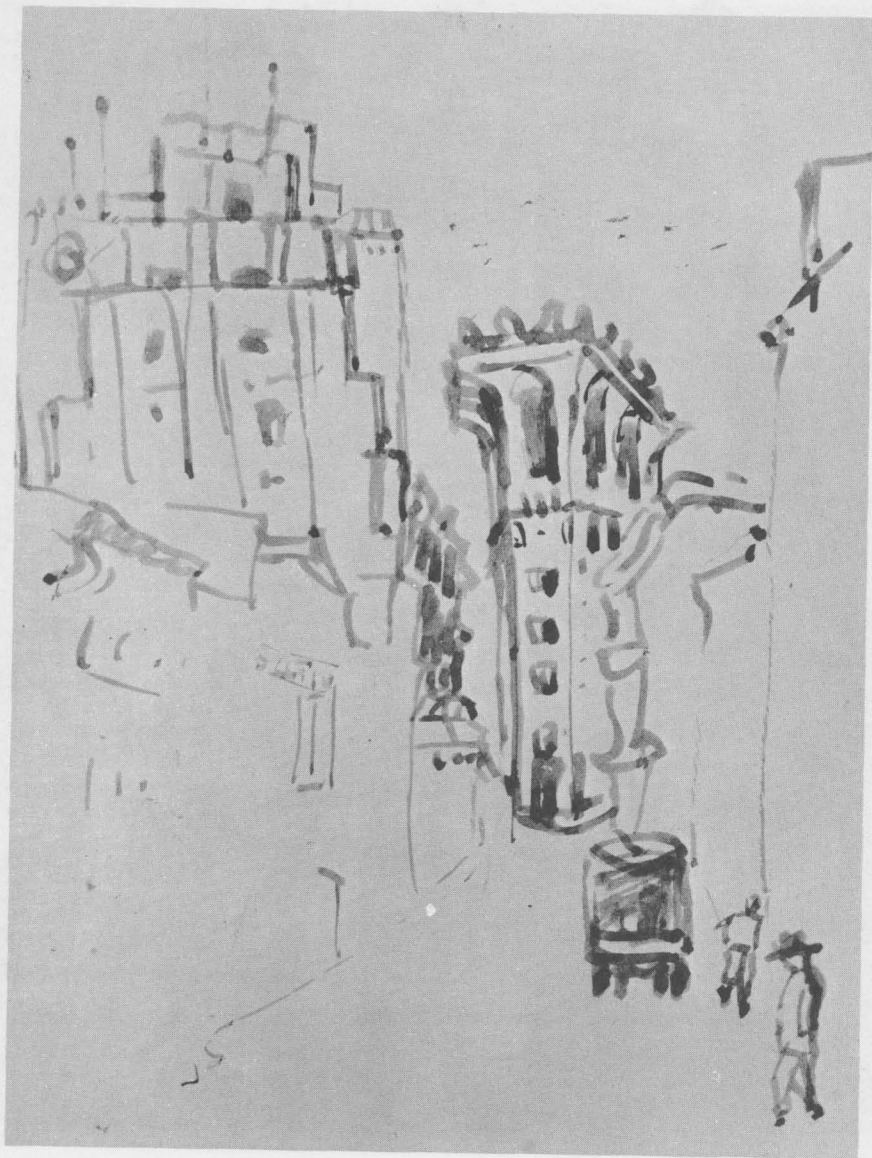
BUTCHER SHOP - PHILIP REISMAN



SONS - ALICE NEEL



WOMAN - LOUIS HARRIS



STREET - JOSEPH SOLMAN



INTERSECTION - ESTELLE TAMBAK



FAMILY PORTRAIT - SAUL LISHINSKY



FRUIT DEP'T - EDWARD STRICKLAND



HEAD - JEAN