

I Heard They Were Closing St. Casimir's

I heard they were closing St. Casimir's.
 The convent silent and brooding,
 The window-pocked escarpment that ever loomed over the flat landscape of Marquette Manor
 From prairie
 To parish,
 City square
 To slum.

A hundred years of blackshod feet
 Shuffle into silence,
 Sisters in voluminous folds of rustling habit,
 Pale perfect faces wimpled,
 Worn out
 From the yowling births
 And the howling trauma
 And the violent demise of the neighborhood
 Under the Holy Cross.

No more
 Little blonde Marias learning Lithuanian,
 No more
 Aves in the garden's cool shadows,
 No
 Rosaries recited by ancient virgins
 In the murky grotto
 Where cold water trickled silvery over that
 Unnatural cinder cone of sibilance
 And the Sisters' whispered prayers
 So long unanswered
 Hung over the shrine like fog.

Once
 The Sacred Grove of perfect trees bore fruit – sweet juicy slobbery pears
 and mouth-puckering sour apples
 Once
 The garden's black nightcrawler earth yielded a savory prize when
 Deep in the dusk
 We gathered a watermelon
 Green, round, and luscious.
 (Cracked it wide in malicious glee --

But the sweet red meat glistened with a jagged hex,
And we passed 'round a bottle to ward off the curse.)

Once

We wondered mysteries and horrors

When "Pray-the-Lords" tramped past our bungalow.

Were they shaven to the white of their skulls under the cowls,

Those holy wives of Christ?

Breasts bound to their pallid bodies?

Womanhood maimed with no maidenly vestige?

Or did they bear the babies of lecherous priests

in secret cellars of the motherhouse?

Now

Gangster bangers and crack whores roam the grounds.

They've tagged the Lughan Monument ,

Cracked the chapel's amber glass,

And care not a bit if the

Secrets of the lily, sword, and crown are

Forgotten history.

Moth-white dust settles over the

Empty rooms and

Mother Maria's Venerable bones

And a busload of brittle old nuns retreats to the suburbs,

Where they'll bide their slow time

Till the end of mystery.