

Mr. Bojangles

Bojangles so much burdens me
With his memory
That I am often caught, mid syllable,
As he stitches back the grey fields of my brain—
Hems my seldom freedom
With the snipping clip and canter
Of his heels
And toe-down spin that pins me to his pain.

“I read in the *Daily Herald*
That some negras east of here
Went wild and killed . . .”

The impossibly mad and running rhythms of your soul
Were all you needed then.
How many butlers had you played?
How many times the fool?
How many county fairs
The accolade of time must count you for?

Beneath the door
I see your shadow skipping, skipping, skipping
Along the light
And wonder that those years pursuing
Brought you little further on or more
Than they pursued against the night.

But we are free men now, then, old man.
Our names are James, and George, and Mister,
Who see you from a wall bestride the years
As you flicker . . .

As you flicker . . .

As you flicker . . .

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Shirley Temple has grown from plump to fat,
And old Bojangles,
Sole worn through behind the tap,
From black to Black.

