

## Five Poems

### The Uncut Page

The surface of the rain-washed street reflects  
Distortedly in shimmers and in blobs  
The language of the glowing nighttime signs,  
And though illegible the street proclaims  
In drooling point-box imagery the joys  
That pulse through quiet lives with less than noise.  
The messages have swarmed, but most are lost  
In the thin upper atmosphere of time.  
If your hushed vocatives could brush my ear  
As lightly as a syllable of sleep,  
Eternity's long boulevard would bend.

Encountered of an evening on the air  
Are scents of grass, wet cloth, and gasoline,  
As well as essences I can't construe,  
Enumerate, or apprehend distinctly,  
But if you had but once passed down this street,  
And that were long ago, my sense is firm  
That some report of you, however faint,  
Would settle on my skin or light my eyes  
As starlight spreads like flour on the sea,  
And though my words might struggle with the tide,  
I would while coughing still pronounce your name.

If you had hidden in the uncut grass  
Or in the motes of dust the sun inflames  
At dusk, or in the patient uncut pages  
Of an unread book high on a shelf  
In a bookstore I had never entered,  
Then would there be in grass and dust and book  
A silent score that lingered deft to play  
Upon the idle instruments the world  
Ignores, or, more than this, a score or scores  
Residing everywhere and keen to float  
Your harmonies in anthems on the air.

Your modesty conceals you all too well  
From eye and ear and flesh, and spoken words  
Will not remind my ear of your lost voice  
Unless forgotten lines can string a net  
To snare an implication that you meant  
To hang upon a memory or dream.  
It forces no recital to invoke  
A melody that stumbles from a dream,  
Disintegrating, dropping its last notes,  
Unlooked-for gifts, like pennies in the sand,  
Their value less than nothing in the hand.

## Flaneur

For anybody with your gifts, it might  
Be noble of the heart to roll around  
This city endlessly and let your eye  
Interrogate the forms it sees and guess  
How far into the springy depth of time  
The boulevards can press. Please forgive  
The airy way of speaking I employ.  
There is a city here, and it is wide,  
Extensive in dimension as you see,  
And speaking of it over-fills the lungs.  
This is a city with a river and  
Some chestnut trees, and here and there a park  
With chunks of ruins artfully arranged,  
And squinting tourists on the louche *bateaux*.

The yeomen of the fancy wander here,  
Much wondering at all they see and hear,  
For here is ground for planting of the heart  
Where it could savor soil through centuries,  
The sluggish mud in Merovingian veins.  
Descend a hill at twilight as the lights  
Converge in front of restaurants, and you hear  
The sounds of cutlery as it is laid  
On tables out of doors, and once again  
Some questions may be asked about the plums,  
Where have they been harvested and when?  
Pears also are served in their liqueur  
And fresh bread in straw baskets with wine  
That shivers in the leafy autumn light.

You pass from streets to zones the less defined  
By modes of transportation or their trees  
Than by the interpenetration of  
Bright symphonies, roulades of marbled sound,  
Encircling and loud, competing here,  
Commemorating armies left in leaves,  
And through the noise a river bears away  
The ashes of the explanation, all  
That everyday events could organize,  
While you again are standing on a bridge  
And see it borne away; you watch it drown:  
Inconsequential banners and the leaves,  
The colors of October as they fade,  
The masonry immense with what it knows.

## Shy Girl

Without defenses others take for granted,  
She faced the world and knew its rougher side,  
And what she thought about, and what she wanted  
She couldn't say, and though she often tried  
To be with other people and to smile,  
She stammered in anxiety and blushed,  
Retreating to her bedroom for awhile,  
Convinced her expectations had been crushed.

The confidence that other girls could muster  
To flirt incautiously and laugh aloud  
Was never hers, lacking the social luster  
To be herself amid the feckless crowd.  
Confusion's seed found soil in her and grew  
With aptitude for pain that was a part  
Of her, indecent, quite indifferent to  
Her future, resident in her rapt heart.

The world is steeped in pain, and pain abides  
Like happiness in anything we love.  
It sometimes startles us, because it hides  
Its face from us inside a small alcove  
Of tenderness, where hope also resides.  
It trades upon the perfidy of mind  
And rides upon the road that darkness rides  
And blindly leaves poor hopefulness behind.

## Dancing at Dusk

I have forgotten what it was she said  
About the evening clouds and how they fed  
Upon the waning light, shot through with red  
And mousy gray: soft, sad, and sinuous.  
The western sky was wardrobe to our dreams,  
And even now in retrospect it seems  
As if the fabric of luxuriant sky  
Was offered at a discount just to us.  
Who deserved it more? Sometimes we crossed  
A bridge and saw the rainbow slick of oil  
Upon the surface of the water and  
Footprints in cuneiform on wet sand.

We used to watch the draining of the light  
On rivers and canals and mountain lakes,  
Water always darker than the sky,  
Valleys filling up with darkness as  
Mooring clouds were glowing pink and mauve.  
The earth slips into night, hand in glove,  
And venerates the softness of its plight.  
The dreamer sleeps almost till noon and wakes  
To feel he's found the secret as to why  
His future seems to stretch out into days  
Of lassitude, anxiety, or both,  
Without the impetus or clarity of youth.

And where are we tomorrow when it rains?  
Are we in offices with cubicles,  
Fluorescent lights depriving us of color?  
The life we're taught to live grips us and drains  
Us of our strength, belief in miracles,  
Anticipation of its growing fuller.  
We are tomorrow what we are today,  
Except we'll find it easier to laugh  
At little things, discontinuities  
Determining how hopes will fade away  
And may be passed off in a paragraph  
That deals with how we languish at our ease.

What are we talking about when we  
Talk about our lives? How do we know  
How to describe them for others to see?  
We feel love's promptings sometimes with a glow  
And sometimes in a flash, but it's confused  
And inconsistent, never settled or  
Coherent, the loved one much abused.  
Where is the fabled bourn we're hoping for  
That hides behind the vamping of the sky,  
The dying gaudy sky with blues and pinks  
That summon us to bottle them and try  
To print our lives in perishable inks?

## Wakefulness

At diminution of the day the evening  
Sonorities prepare the hour for  
Renunciation of all contravening  
Responsibilities. The bedroom door  
Is all that stands between you and the haunt  
Od dreams, sweet dreams, such as you've known before.  
Just lie upon the bed as you are wont  
To do, as other men and women do,  
As everybody does, and close your eyes.  
Think restful thoughts, not of those you despise  
Nor of the long travails that you've been through.

Untie the knot of consciousness and let  
Thoughts slip down any slumberous stream,  
And give yourself permission to forget  
The clamors of the mind. Let them seem  
Some other person's clamors, while in you  
There dwells no rancor or resentment or,  
Generally, anything you can't ignore,  
Except your sense that *something* is askew  
That could be straightened now, inside your head,  
And you descry a voice that calls to you,  
Demands your ear before you go to bed.

Insomnia is thoughtlessness denied.  
You hear the foolish voice that speaks to you  
From somewhere on the distant other side  
Of sanity, and all that you've been through  
Is but a prelude to the coming storm.  
In all the world there is not time enough  
To form ourselves into desired form  
Or ride upon the unforbidden seas.  
The rules we learn don't govern what we love  
Or how it is transfigured in a storm,  
As empty clothes run laughing to the trees.