

Seventh Avenue

Late Tuesday afternoon the romantic self weaves
up Seventh Avenue amid too many lookers, too many
feelers: romance hates democracy;

how can *you* be so great and golden inside
if your trunk is shouldered among other trunks
block after block, block after block —

you can't help glimpsing an otherness in others
that is not just surface: they ache,
their aches ache away north and south all Tuesday

in murmurous torsos like yours . . .
What apprehension blossoms even now in Manuel
shifting steaks at the ten-foot grill of Charley O's

beneath the towering chef's hat they make him wear?
When I was twenty I'd have written
that he was only thinking of Cadillacs and sex;

now I'm afraid he's just as worried as I am
about love vs. lesser things and the point of it all.
Manuel, stay there at the sizzling grill till midnight

and then just drink or sleep, man,
don't write poems —
do me that favor. It's loud enough already

out here on Seventh Avenue with that cat's boom box
and these three giggle girls being Madonna together
and that guy hawking wind-up titans wielding laser lances.

Who's Wordsworth for any extended period on Seventh Ave?
In this pre-dusk traffic you catch the hint
that Manuel and thou if seers at all are seers only

for seconds — now the steak, taxi, buttocks, headline
and wallet resume their charismatic claim to be what counts.
Soul on Seventh is a sometime on-off quick-flip thing . . .

What I want is a poem long as Seventh Avenue
to sprinkle gold on every oppressed minority,
every young woman's subtly female hips,
every sad and suspicious American face
and the quiddity of every mud-tracked pizza shop;
proving, block after block, stanza by stanza
that I'm not just one skinny nervous pedestrian
but the one who matters because he sees and says.
I want that. The Avenue grins and says
"You want that? How does it feel to want?"