

Six Things I Ask Myself

Who

Who turns this terse verse? Man of mere
Craft, deft or daft in designing
Word-kerneled lines, cobbled in rhymed husk?
Manic mantic, soothsaying seer
Of blind, blinkless eyes, divining
Vivid, dread visions at day's dusk?

Clever inventor conducting
Trials of styles, matters, and forms,
Divinely devising new norms?
Keen geometer constructing
Figures fixed in free-fancied space,
New angles traced on ancient base?

Yarn-spinner in speech, twister of tales,
Weaving complex textures of text?
Tone-poem composer whose scales,
Pitches, and rhythms rise and fall?
Who pens this, I ponder, perplexed,
All these at once, or none at all?

What

Not an idle prey who would pray to idols,
I am right to profit from what prophets write,
If not barred or banned from the band of bards,
Who have known so long what I long to know.

Not that chit-chat about housewives' lives,
Nor the clap-trap in the workmen's dens,
Not the hodge-podge of the "what they say,"
That mish-mash hash from a small-talk crock.

Not the rash flash from the first-news crews,
Nor the bosh wash of a newspeak cheek,
Not the trash splash of the headlines' finds,
Nor the pot-shot rot of a talk-show Joe.

When I've left the herd and have heard what's left
Of the sole, still sound of a still sound soul,
I shall mine my own and will own what's mine
In the holed-out thought of a thought-out whole.

When

When I put this pen to paper,
Dreaming through a sleepless night,
Drawing in the red-wine vapor,
Drowsing by the taper's light,
Nightly growing slowly old,
I bear the barren cold.

When I weigh my words on waking,
Toiling on my work-free days,
Tensing tightly, stiffly aching,
Tiring from painstaking ways,
Daily aging at my seat,
I stand the sterile heat.

When I right slant-rhymes I've written
Stretching over empty years,
Struggling as I could, care-smitten,
Striking back grief-bitten tears,
Year by year I strain and strive
To rhyme my unrhymed life.

Where

In my low-lit room,
At my book-stacked desk,
I have jarred my jangled rhyme
From the dawn till long past dusk.

In my school-scarred mind,
Though with wit still fit,
Often scratching head half-maned,
I have metered rough-shod feet.

In my tried-true heart,
With its fears and veers,
I have plowed down proud-weed height
In my furrowed, skew-lined verse.

I, at lost mid-life
In a wild dark wood,
Turn over a fresh new leaf,
Unwrit page both long and wide.

How

When locked, blocked,
I don't write but wait
From light till late,
On the watch (though not the clock),
 To hear clear
Just how mute-brute things
From filled, still springs
Will reveal their sighs and cries.
 Their word heard,
All my core ore burns,
Absorbed orb turns,
And top surface shakes and quakes.
 I look, shook,
Not with gawk or leer
But hawk-eyed peer
That delves into things themselves.
 I grasp, clasp
At the sense-dense pith
And, word-stirred-smith,
Try to pound it out in sound,
 But next, vexed,
Find our native speech,
Its creative reach,
Always thwarts my will and skill.
 So, I might write,
But don't dare declare
My meant intent
Till I've read what I have said.

Why

What rage would taint this chaste page,
What urge smirch still virgin sheets?
That to strut and stride down streets,
Linger on the limelit stage,
Or bear the bard's bay-leaf wreath?

Will my quiet quill bequeath
From beneath the green-knolled grave
Verse testaments unversed times
Could rescue from rhymeless crimes
And save in some unscathed nave?

No. . . . My mustardseed belief
Can't make that leap of faith, thrust
That mountain in the sea, trust
Blindly in the blind. In brief,
Dust turns to dust: write I must.