

Gil

The old man with the head like a skull
and the rag of a coat flapping
on his shoulders, his eyes so bare
we turn away from the indecency—he
has claimed this part of Bank St.,
walking it daily, hourly, till he has
squatter's rights among the yuppies and
the would-be artists and the convention-
ally sane.

We notice him more than we
notice each other, tho' we would rather
not. We force a blankness in our faces,
veil our eyes. Or if we look we are
like the young evangelist who hands him
tracts at arm's length, declaring
God's love and his own fear. Our fear.

The old man walks all day, in one shop, the
next: the bookstore, the second-hand store,
the restaurant. He does not buy. He does
not sit down to drink coffee, to eat. Simply
you are sitting at a table lunching with a
friend, and the old man walks in, walks by,
walks through the restaurant and circles
back to the door and out again.

When he passes, a knowledge glides
along my bones. The shadow in his eyes
unveils me. I know the ghosts that
yammer in his head, propelling him
in his shuffling rounds.

On Bank St.,
I pull a little closer to my friends.
I veil my eyes. And though I walk,
I shuffle, shuffle. His shadow
dogs me.