

CHRISTOPHER LEVENSON

## Fifteen Nocturnes

1

Evening lies fallow: afternoon's harvest of noise  
has been gathered in, sheaves of sunlight stowed  
in a dark barn. The estuary's gluttoned with gold,  
the total sky august, mysterious.

2

Textures of light; beyond  
an elusive flotsam of cloud  
richer darkness prevails  
among the salt marshes, extends  
deserted shorelines.

3

The skies grow lucid,  
jet trails ruffle then merge  
into mares'-tails, cirro-stratus.  
High winds up there. Down here  
after a close day, relief.  
Our local park's staked out  
with panels of shadow.  
A few lamps cautiously peer  
into encroaching darkness.  
Come what may, I am at ease  
making my peace with night.

4

I sit on the deck as though  
by merely observing the gradual  
diminishing of light  
I might somehow halt the erosion,  
staunch the transfusion of darkness  
into my veins as though  
I could change something.  
Acquiescence is all. Soon I must go inside,  
leave lawn chairs to their own devices.  
Shade overwhelms me, it is too dark to read.

5

Already on the outskirts indigo overlays,  
deletes, the pretence of order.  
Day's colours start to run, soon rooflines  
will recede and all the carefully tended  
parklands will be swallowed, ingested  
into the maw of darkness.  
Even while light remains  
nostalgia like algae entangles us,  
drifts over the placid lake where, listen!  
the marsh is obsessed with birds.

6

Do I grow too fond of the dusk  
with its veiled elusive half-lights  
and hide-and-seek lakeshore voices  
disturbing the foliage, children  
who will not let go, who want their day  
to last forever? Alone,  
I indulge this velvet calm,  
colour's slow fade-out from the kitchen garden,  
and am resolved, content  
how the skyline's edges blur  
and birdsong diminishes.  
I am herded into, welcome,  
the cold harbour of sleep.

7

Dusk cross-hatches the trees  
 just beyond earshot meadows and waterways  
 glisten with animals  
 that slink through reeds and root  
 for scents of home.  
 Ensconced in my drawing-room,  
 watching the world remotely on TV,  
 I am freed from all this till nothing  
 can overwhelm my prized  
 security.

8

As truck headlamps lance the twilight,  
 shadow transients converge  
 briefly, then melt back  
 into the undergrowth.  
 Beyond my French windows, on the patio,  
 birds still secure in summer  
 ignore the fall crimson.  
 In silence I receive  
 the absolution of darkness.

9

Darkness confers on the forest a letting-go,  
 a slow dispersal of form, reducing its shapes  
 into an easeful wilderness. We walk  
 attentive to silences, carry our own calm  
 before us like lanterns.

10

Feral flutter of wing, flash of claw  
 rips the silence apart.  
 Interrupted dreams  
 persist in their half-life, never  
 truly erased from consciousness,  
 sometimes re-appear  
 to shadow our everyday.

11

Thoughts like deer startled  
 leap out of dappled cover  
 into the full glare  
 of headlights, freeze-  
 framed in darkness.  
 Later while we sleep uneasily  
 night creatures pursue  
 their devious purposes, explore  
 rotted tree stumps, cool burrows,  
 another universe.

12

Across the river distant lights tantalize:  
 a mirage of dawn, a lamplit diaspora,  
 settles suburban hillsides  
 with discredited dreams  
 of community.  
 The sounds of night make up no unison  
 but break down into traffic, tavern brawls,  
 fire trucks, police-car sirens.  
 Only in this garden sanctuary,  
 for hopes absolved, for death, for dissolution.  
 Among these roots we can breathe easier,  
 become ourselves again.

13

Never enamoured of the night,  
 I crave the dawn's first unfolding  
 of hidden colour, the flags run up, the sluice  
 of daylight flooding the water meadows  
 and the sky at least for now a confident blue  
 I know will not last. Curtains drawn back,  
 I welcome autumn's warm hand on my sleeve,  
 and seek imagined peace.

14

How can we read the night?  
 Illiterate  
 to any final meaning,  
 I wake and scan by moonlight  
 the scrawl of a jet stream's  
 all but illegible message,  
 holding it up against  
 the trees' calligraphy.  
 How do I encrypt  
 these petroglyph graffiti  
 that do not outlast the minute  
 and cannot illuminate  
 such absolute blackness?  
 The night leaves me no choice.  
 I must believe in morning

15

Daylight elucidates  
 tarpaper shack and jetty, seaweed and foam.  
 The siege is lifted. Once again  
 I take the landscape at face value,  
 I am for now home free.

