

QUAI VOLTAIRE

By GEOFFREY JOHNSON

The hooded bookstalls on the quays,
The broad Seine sweeping by,
The rain-chill on the timeless breeze,
And the city's ageless cry—

What a cold bath to rhetoric
And fancy's fevered hop:
Poetic rage and politic
Here roar to dead full-stop.

For this is where most volumes end:
Epic and garden-prose
In mortuary calm extend
Their rows on unread rows.

The skull-cap dealer's look of bonze,
The indifferent passers-by
Match the plane-leaves of whirling bronze,
The river-sweep and sky;

And who survives that empty stare,
The crowds that seethe and breed
And vanish like pale leaves from air,
Has the heavenly fire indeed.