

**GARTH GREENWELL**

**Festival**

It's late. The doors to all the theaters are closed. But  
in broad Place de l'Horloge in the shadow of the palace  
we shoulder aimlessly our way through crowds.  
Every third step, a hat laid out for coins.  
In a corner streetlamp's circle a man  
batters out Rachmaninoff on an ancient upright  
that creaks away from him on its wheels; actors  
from the little troupes declaim at every curb;  
somewhere by the toilets a brass band plays. Noise—

confusion and noise, everywhere in its bright rags art  
pleading for alms. The coin of our attention, snatched at, slips:  
nothing in the tumult to love. Faces  
eerie as moths endure painted above us, men  
on high crates impersonating stone,  
waking sudden to startle  
the children who shriek at them and scatter  
and gather again like fish. Only at intervals, discreet  
as the Rhone, the very poor hold out their hands.

We cross into the dark leading down to the river. Close to it,  
where pavement gives way to grass, we stand and feel  
the huge water sliding silent in its banks. Then,  
placing your palm on my back, turning me to you,  
you knit your free hand with mine  
and slowly, to a cadence entirely clear  
of the music behind us, you coax me into a dance: simple,  
solemn, your face in the fold of my neck,  
a dance by the black river, a dance in the midsummer black.