

Michael Broder / TWO POEMS

UNSPEAKABLE 1

I see ugliness making a comeback
in the unwashed heads, unrazored cheeks
of people on subway cars or aimlessly
wandering streets still acrid with the dust
of a whole burnt offering offered up
in the squint of an unbelieving eye,
not to propitiate but terrify,
not a god but a nation deemed corrupt.
Impeccable the purity of lust
with which they dove into eternity,
the pleasure they must have felt for weeks
knowing that Allah would soon take them back.
Just beyond a steel and glass curtain
lay heaven and salvation certain.

UNSPEAKABLE 2

Come, let us go to where an altar burns,
where sacrifice of oil and flesh was made.
Wearing sacramental robes and hoods,
let us pray as we have always prayed.
Let us mark a rite as yet unmarked
on any calendar as sacred time
this day on which five thousand souls embarked
choking on the dust of acrid crime.
What? I thought you knew — how to heap the mound,
to lend the proper savor to the smoke,
the rituals to consecrate the ground,
which gods delight in wine and which in jokes.
If neither you nor I these rites can lead,
how will the living ever rest their dead?