

Old Town

Often, returning home, I follow
a dark lane through the old part of town,
where any puddles glitter yellow,
reflecting lamplights, and it's thronged.

Here among the crowd that comes and goes
from bars to home or brothel,
where there are goods and men, the debris
of a great sea port,
I rediscover, in passing, the infinite
in humility.

Here, a sailor and a prostitute, an old man
cursing to himself, a quarrelsome crone,
a soldier crouched by a fry shop,
a boisterous teenaged girl
impassioned by love –
all the creatures of life
and affliction;
within them, as within me, God stirs.

Here, among humble folk, I sense
a kinship, my thoughts becoming
most pure where the way is most base.

Umberto Saba
from *Trieste and a Lady*, 1911
translated by Will Wells