



The Collected

Free Verse

of

John H. Hewitt

(1925 to June 1929)

Relapse [1928]

Caruso felt this way singing jazz
or an old violinist
that knew and loved and thumbed
Beethoven Bach and Brahms
and had to fiddle in a danceband for his keep

Still

it relaxes the muscles
pleases the ear
very so much
with reiterated continuity of like endings

2

Agitation [1928]

I wish someone
would start an agitation
to bring hills and mountains into our towns.

Think of the fun there would be!

Besides
the mountain air
would be sweet
and the heather
and the whin.

Will you begin?

3

Accomplice [1928]

I saw a strip of orange peel
on the sidewalk
and did not kick it
into the gutter!

An old-and-charming lady
with boa-and-blacksilk
slipped on it and fell.

I broke that woman's leg.

The Miner's Fund [1928]

A little man opens a door out into space
and spoke remote and musical
I, sitting headphones on his head nodding by the fire
listens . . .

He was appealing for the miners.
said they starved, and had no shoes or shirts,
their grates were cold.

It sounded strange to me
that men whose job it is
to dig coal out of hollow hills
should have no work to do

and yet
have fireless homes

It sounded strange to me
nearly as strange
as a little man opening a door out into space
and speaking remote and musical

Hints. [1929]

A cabbage in a barrow,
apples in a box,
an empty basin in tin across the road
or razor blades in dust bins
. are to me

as pregnant with suggestion
as daffodils
or primroses were
Wordsworth.

The New Psalter 1927

I

Beauty has been my quarry all the days of my life
I have followed by quiet waters

Passing I have glimpsed her glittering in the trees
O cedars of Lebanon
and oaks of Mamre.

In still gardens,
Olivet

In very silent places
O Gethsemane

Mayhap I shall find her at some Calvary
But not thy Golgotha
O Israel.

II

The fool hath said in his heart : There is a god :
and hath sojourned still in wickedness
nor turned away from evil
for fear of the Lord that is.

But I will say: There is no god
and go my way as if there were no god
For I am I
and he is he
and we are strange to one another

Wherefore I say, rejoice
There is
no god.

III

From the pinnacle of self have I cried down to thee
O Lord god hear my cry.

From the loneliness of the cold mountain have I cried to thee
O god of Sabaoth.

I will not go down to thee
for in the valley are the multitudes
I am afraid
and I would be separate.

But the lark and the birds of the air
have come from their nests on the ground
singing that they have been sent

Therefore O Lord Jehovah thou shalt come
only on the wings of music
and dulcets and harp playings
of skilled musicians done.

IV

I will lift up mine eyes to the everlasting hills
out of the stir, the trampling roar of cities,
and hot turning of chariot wheels.

For in the lonely places

The Lord is tabernacled
and I would know the Lord

And after I have seen the Lord
passing the everlasting loneliness
I will return and cry unto my kinsmen

Lift up your eyes to the hills
which are from everlasting . . .
arise, let us go unto them . . .

And the Lord of the Everlasting hills
shall face the hills
no more alone . . .

A City Song of Suggestion (1926)

I sing this song for love of you
O city for love of you.

I know you, was born within you,
Therefore I love you

Streets glittering in rain

men strong

Slums paper blown and dusty ...

Bars with warm tempting lights

Shops and apron fellows with bleak faces

Ships with whistling rigging

streaming decks

fuskins

portholes

Chimneys holy and high
and secular spires.

whirling traffic round white-gloved policemen

quiet avenues;

rosebushes by the door
and names on the gate like whiffs of spring

Summer songs are far from you.

my city

your streets are dusty,
walls high

Behind and above the high hills call
but the crowded streets call
and I heed them

They say: come

join me, join us - come

And I go.

I mix with you people O city

snuffling beggars with

sad stories on little slates

brokenbooted men with creaking boards

barefoot boys shouting trivial news

clattering horses and vans
 lines of waiting workless men
 glorious motors exulting in their power
 long low luxurious limousines
 fat cigarmakers.
 and messengers on wheels of fire.

Then a voice within me whispers
 "It will not always be so"

Then I dream in your streets

Your people see me and smile
 and pass

I dream of you my city and your people

And the voice whispers

New Jerusalem

And in my heart I sing amen

and your people see me and smile and pass

That is why I sing of you,

O City that I love so.

What the Fire Spirit in the Coal Said [1925]

Do you not hear me speaking out
 mid the roar of the glowing coals?
 Great tales and rare I am telling now; you but heed.

I tell of primeval forests,
 jungles, swamps, and sluggish rivers
 slow crawling slime dwellers and peace
 broken only
 by the dripping,
 the drip,
 drip,
 constant drip

from branches and limbs and fronds of innumerable
 trees
 and palms and tree-like ferns.

And at dawn
 the splash of the slime dwellers' tails

I tell of ages long
 so long they seem nigh endless
 Then the waters rose
 ever upcreeping creeping
 and the trees into deep sleep fell
 droop't
 and as bowed by unutterable anguish dropt one by one
 For the creatures had sunk beneath the fern roots long ago
 and their splashing tails and lashing were at rest
 Ages the trees slept.
 when they woke the world was altered
 gone the sunlight sparkle
 gone the quiet winds
 gone the sweet and sway of branches
 gone the creatures that had splash'd.
 When they woke it was all darkness
 not the evening gloom that stumbled
 mid their tall trunks long ago.

when day went and came.
 It was darkness, mother of night.
 They knew not how the time pass'd
 but God knew
 and I.
 Came then man the mighty killer
 hairless now but strong and happy.
 New trees rose, made gay the valleys
 covering the gentle hillside.
 Took Le Hes and bent them quickly
 to his mind's desire.
 Shap'd him huts and boats and bows
 sail'd the sea
 and kill'd swift creatures that no longer liv'd
 in slime.
 Then Le took the cold red iron stone
 look'd at it in sorrow.

Then I whisper in his ear
 and he rose and said I dreamt a dream
 Went and dug the sleeping fern-trees
 from their petrifying jungle
 in the dark heart of the hill
 Cast them on a pile of branches
 struck two stones together
 cried I saw it in a dream
 Built a fire and made the ironstone
 pliant to his hand as putty
 more I have to do and am telling
 but my strength is almost vanish'd
 and I see thro' that small window
 comes my climbing brother Sun
 to whom I shall ascend
 leaving naught but ashes in the grate.

Hic Jacet [1929]

I pass'd the lonely God's acre where my grandfather lies
 at the green foot of a little hill
 beyond the smoky city.
 The shaken yews were full of mutterings and voices.
 The beeches creak'd as tho' the wind might blow them down

But he lay in the middle in the damp cold clay
 the mossy headstone tilted, and never made a sound.
 And I thought it woud be good to sleep there quietly
 when I have liv'd as long as my grandfather.

For he went up and down the Earth for over eighty years
 and knew the minds and faces of the whole human race
 but here is laid at last among his early fathers
 in the old yew-hidden ancestral
 burying ground

We all do fade as a leaf
is on the stone
above the grass grown grave
where my grandfather lies.

The grass is kneehigh and wet with dew
a trailing bramble clammers up.
The yews are full of sparrows and other birds
that flutter in and out.

And I take off my hat
to the sturdy old lagan
who carved the quiet tragedy
of that hard line.

My old grandfather
lived for over eighty years
and had more learning
than a common working man.

Yet after fourscore
he knew no more
than we all do fade as a leaf.

I wonder am I foolish
to waste my eyes and breathe
over the same old mysteries
as troubled him before.

For I perhaps will lie beneath this stone
and never know a truer thing
than was carved on it before.

Thorns.

I saw a man with a bundle of black thorns
tied up in brown paper with dirty yellow string
and he wasn't thinking of Jesus . . .

He was running for a train.
And when he puff'd up his stains
he sat beside a man he knew
and spoke . . .

The talk was blown in gusts down
of gardens, roses, and catalogs,
and bad seasons, and dry spells,
and good growing weather.

So he wasn't thinking of Jesus
altho he had so many thorns!

Regret

I met a girl today
I hadn't seen for over seven years
and she said
Hello Jack
just as if it had been yesterday
I told her I loved her

Why the devil can't people forget?

A Father watches an Emigrant Ship Depart.

It must be good to stand in your own back yard
and watch your pigeons surge against the flaming sun
Then swirl in circles back again
To the old half painted sled.

Here I stand and my little flock of pigeons
wheel away from me into the sun
and I do not know
if ever they'll come back.

When I walkt tho the town
without a hat today
people stopped and nudged
and snivled stupid things

And in a bleak sun area
a bunch of women, sluts and gossips,
jeered catcall after me
and thought it very funny.

Poor fools how could they know
that I am only following
what will be the customary habits
of new Jerusalem

I almost lost
They won't inherit it.

My grandfather was a seedsman by trade
and knew the names of grasses by thousands.

He could tell you by rubbing between finger and thumb
just what each blade was ^{reed}.....

He knew a lot about guano and the islands
where the seagulls throng
- ~~its~~ fuligous ... and in Chile as well.

Now the grass grows over his grave
and he can't tell what kind it is

And birds have flown over his headstone
for all that he can say.

Finis

Here lies John Horn
poet and fool
born in this town
- - - years ago

He stood tiptoe
on the kerb.

Here ends The Collected Free Verse
of John H. Heartt

The End.

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