

John Whitworth

Thingies

The mordant, black and midnight priest,
Sophisticate of seeming,
The horrid, humped, carnivorous beast,
That bellows down my dreaming,
The bone-yard's luminescent feast,
The interminable, teeming
Ghosts of the recently deceased,
The recent violently deceased,
Uninterrupted screaming.
The boxes in the garden shed,
The sacks behind the paling,
The coffins in the flowerbed,
The hammering and nailing,
The Lord Protector's wizened head
Transfixed upon a railing,
The sense of overpowering dread,
Of truly transcendental dread,
And somewhere something failing.
The shitehawks on the blasted oak,
The hornets in the attic,
The bumboy sniffing lines of coke,
The murderous asthmatic,
The message from the shadow folk
You hear above the static,
This time you need to go for broke,
To smell the smoke and go for broke,
And do the full dramatic.
You need to startle the devout,
And trample on their hearses,
You need to spell your blessings out,
You need to count your curses,
You need to twirl yourself about
To ponder which the worse is,
You need to sing, you need to shout,
You need to shout without a doubt,
And chant your wicked verses.

My Friends

So many of my friends are sick
My words are notches on a stick.
So many of my friends will die
My words are bibles in the sky.
So many of my friends are dead
My words are prisoners in my head.

My friends are stranded in the words.
I let them fly like little birds,
Like little birds on little wings,
To tell the world astounding things.
I celebrate them as they go.
I know and soon the world will know.

And then the world will stir and start
And feel a chill about the heart
And beat a pathway to my door
And cry in thunder, 'Tell us more!'
But I, within my little house,
Will sit as quiet as a mouse.

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Dead Boy

The dead boy comes to his bed at night
And he is warm as a living child
Smelling of earth and the forest wild
And his eyes and his mouth shut tight, shut tight,

And the father cries to his Heaven's height
From the dirt and the dust and the gravel piled
On the bones of the child who was meek and mild,
And he cries to God that it isn't right.

It isn't right and it isn't just
That the father lives and the boy is dead,
For the bones are white in the dirt and dust,
And the voices of God are inside his head,

The voices of God from the gates of horn,
And fiddle-de-dee the voices say,
Better by far you had never been born,
Never crawled to the light of day.

So wrap your heart in a sheet of lead
And drown it deep in the cold black sea.
The father lives and the boy is dead.
Better by far this should never be.

Twin Souls

My soul is pure, unspotted, edged with light,
A clear window, opening on the blue,
Still surface of a lake whose birds are white.
See how they glide and plane across the view
Of sky and water, circling endlessly,
And calling as my soul calls out to you.

And you are flying like a bird to me.
I hear the swish and shiver of your wings
Inside my head, inside my heart, for we
Were born to cleave together in all things.
And you are here, but oh, your wings are black,
Your eyes are flame and all your body sings.

Across the water like a razorback,
A song of darkness, violence and blood.
It breathes sweet perfumes' aphrodisiac,
Not nurtured on anaemic angel food.
It sings that everything you say is right.
It sings that everything you do is good.

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Dr Donne Likened to My Cat Jack

(The beautiful opening couplet is from Peter Ryan's remembrance of Izaak Walton's 'Life of Dr John Donne')

*Oh thorny, glowing, twisted heart
That walked the London streets a while,
Teach me to work your subtle art
And coax the sweetness from the bile.*

Teach me my soul to recognise,
That wandering, sportful, wayward twin.
Teach me to see without my eyes,
Teach me to feel beyond my skin.

Here, in the coffin of my bed,
I cogitate on this and that,
God and his Angels at my head,
Warming my footsoles, Jack the Cat,

Soft fur-ball, connoisseur of purr,
Who knows the thinginess of things,
Jack the divine philosopher,
Observer at the courts of kings.

Say Jack the Cat is Jack the Lad,
Cavorting with the muses nine,
And Jack the Priest, who tames the beast,
Turning the water into wine.

Sprucely, surefootedly he stalks
Up Ludgate Hill to Old Saint Pauls.
O listen to the talk he talks
As kites foregather on the walls.

Watch, as he steps fastidiously,
Neatly evading fire and flame.
His glowing, twisted heart is free,
And Jack the Poet is his name.