

**The World As Is**

**New & Selected Poems**  
**1972-2015**

Joseph Hutchison

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Set in New Baskerville

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## Ode to Something

*Zero does not exist.*

—Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

Why is there something  
rather than nothing?  
Because nothing  
never was, was ever  
just a trick of math  
that turned  
a placeholder  
into lack,  
into absence—  
and zero  
like a ball-peen  
hailstone  
struck  
a crack across  
the smooth windshield  
of speeding  
reason, making  
the mind's eye see  
nothing  
everywhere.

But nothing is nothing  
like something,  
something  
with its amber  
honeys, cabernets  
and cheeses,  
blood,  
blindworms,  
blossoms,  
lips, hips, hands,  
pain and rage,  
heartbreak, night-sweats,  
ten thousand joys

intense  
and transient.  
No wonder  
so many dread  
the sheer abundance  
of something,  
its “flow of  
unforeseeable  
novelty,” endless  
irruption of  
forms and essences.  
How can reason hope  
to hang its dream  
of knowing all  
on such a flood?  
How feed  
its fantasy of mapping  
every last height,  
every depth, making  
both beginning and end  
knuckle under  
to understanding?  
Therefore:  
nothing. Nothing  
that gives something  
direction, an arc  
of action,  
a story,  
a meaning,  
the way deities  
used to do.

Truth is, though, we  
swim in mystery  
reason can't (can  
never) plumb:

no beyond, only  
being and somethingness:  
our lives like sparks  
in a vast  
becoming,  
bright flecks  
of foam  
on a breakneck river,  
swirling in the world as is.

## City Limits

*for Melody*

You're like wildwood at the edge of a city.  
And I'm the city: steam, sirens, a jumble  
of lit and unlit windows in the night.

You're the land as it must have been  
and will be—before me, after me.  
It's your natural openness  
I want to enfold me. But then  
you'd become city; or you'd hide  
away your wildness to save it.

So I stay within limits—city limits,  
heart limits. Although, under everything,  
I have felt unlimited Earth. Unlimited you.

## Ritual

Meloxicam to soothe the angry disk between L2 and L3, pinched and bulging like a bitten tongue. Prilosec to save the stomach from the ravages of Meloxicam and to keep down the Resveratrol (an oblong lump of compressed soot said to keep the blood vessels pliant and cancer at bay). Also a capsule of fish oil the warm color of tequila *añejo*, and vitamin C of course, and a packeted pile called Nature's Code, whose purpose I can't recall. Nevertheless, I wash the whole handful down every morning with a half-sweet, half-biting antioxidant berry-juice mixture made to scape chemical rust off the walls of my many millions of aging cells. As in the past, in eras rife with superstition—irrational, unscientific, fearful of demons, djinns, ghosts of ancestors, rival gods: this irritable reaching after time and health, this hapless genuflection to the Invisible.



## Guanábana

After hurricane Gilbert, this place  
was only shredded jungle. Now  
it's Jesús and Lída's *casa*,

built by him, by hand, weekends  
and vacations, the way my father  
built our first house. Years

we've watched the house expand,  
two rooms to three, to four, to five.  
The yard, just a patch of gouged

sand and shattered palmettos once,  
is covered now in trimmed grass,  
bordered by blushing frangipani

and pepper plants—jalapeños,  
habaneros—and this slender tree  
Jesús planted three years back,

a stick with tentative leaves then  
out of a Yuban coffee can, but now  
thirty feet high, its branches laden

with *guanábana*—dark green  
pear-shaped fruit with spiky skin  
and snowy flesh, with seeds

like obsidian tears. Jesús  
carves out a bite and offers it  
on the flat of his big knife's blade:

the texture's melonish, the taste  
wild and sweet—like the lives  
we build after hurricanes.