

The World As Is

New & Selected Poems
1972-2015

Joseph Hutchison

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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.