

The World As Is

New & Selected Poems
1972-2015

Joseph Hutchison

NY
Q Books™

The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.
New York, New York

NYQ Books™ is an imprint of The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.

The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.
P. O. Box 2015
Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10113

www.nyq.org

Copyright © 2016 by Joseph Hutchison

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the author except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

First Edition

Set in New Baskerville

Layout by Raymond P. Hammond

Cover Art: "Earth Soul" (©2016, 18 x 24, acrylic on paper)
by Raina Gentry | www.raintree-studios.com

Author Photo by Kimberly Anderson (Evergreen, Colorado)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016933873

ISBN: 978-1-63045-028-1

Contents

2004–2015: New and Uncollected Poems

Crayoned Rainbow	/ 21
Household Gods	/ 23
First Bird at First Light	/ 24
Oddments	/ 25
At Willamette National Cemetery	/ 27
A Bust of Janus Speaks	/ 29
The Things That Carried Them	/ 30
A Conflict Photo	/ 31
Dream Bird	/ 32
Augery	/ 33
Leaving the Financial District	/ 34
Red Light at Rush Hour	/ 36
The Gulf	/ 38
Glimpse	/ 43
Meltdown	/ 44
The Greatest Show on Earth	/ 45
Touch	/ 46
Still's Figure Speaks	/ 48
Revenant	/ 49
Mortal Desire	/ 50
Watch	/ 51
Grumpy Old Man	/ 52

Watch Repair / 53
The Lifting Bird / 54
The Bat Man / 55
Sea Dream / 56
The Other Life / 57
The Outback / 58
Ode to Something / 59

1972–1985: Uncollected Poems, Poems from *Thirst* and *The Undersides of Leaves*

Greeley, Colorado: Sunday Evening Scene / 65
Fly, He Said / 67
Meditation / 68
Talking in Sleep / 70
Sense and Absence / 71
Inside My Life / 72
Intrograph / 73
Suburban Housewife Eating a Plum / 74
The Greyhound Station: Midnight / 75
The Gift / 76
Milkweed on a Windy Spring Day / 77

from *Thirst*

Nightworks / 81
The Open Book / 82
Grace / 83

from *The Undersides of Leaves*

The Insomniac / 87

Old Blind Woman / 88

Demosthenes, Dying, Addresses His Dead Lover / 89

Oranges / 92

Artichoke / 93

The Books / 94

Letter to a New Critic / 95

Something for Issa / 97

For Pablo Neruda / 98

Belief / 99

Poem to Be Kept Like a Candle, in Case of Emergencies / 100

Late Evening in a Foreign City / 101

Sunrise Off Point Grey / 102

June Morning / 103

Invocation / 104

**1986–1995: Uncollected Poems, Poems from *House of Mirrors*
and *Bed of Coals***

The Boutonniere / 107

William Matthews / 108

from *House of Mirrors*

Part of a Series / 111

At the Arts Fundraiser / 112

Thirst / 113
Mountain Flower / 114
Equinox at the Rainbow Hill Ranch / 115
Garlic / 116
From a Tour Boat on Crater Lake / 117
Robert Emmitt / 118
Elegy for Michael, a Friend, Killed in His Car / 119
House of Mirrors / 121
From the Family Album / 122
Interlude at Green Mountain Park / 123
The Map / 124
The Next Room / 125
Internal Combustion / 126
Lifting My Daughter / 127
My Three-Year Old with His First Conch Shell / 128
Joni Mitchell / 129
Saint Patrick's Day Blues / 130
Walking Off a Night of Drinking in Early Spring / 131
Wandering Music / 132
The Trembling / 133
Crossing the River / 134
As the Late September Dusk Comes Down / 135
Cape Kidnappers, New Zealand / 136
City Limits / 138
Memory (II) / 139
Good / 140

Concert at the Coliseum / 141

After All These Years / 142

At the Mirror / 143

from *Bed of Coals*

Vander Meer / 147

Con Brio / 148

Orphic Vander Meer / 149

From an Unmailed Letter / 150

Fighting Grief / 151

Pausing Outside My Apartment / 152

The Effects of Light / 153

One of the Lost Moments / 155

Vander Meer at Sundown / 156

Elemental Prayer in a Black Hour / 157

The Wound / 158

Vander Meer's Duplicity / 159

This Day / 160

1996–2003: Poems from *The Heart Inside the Heart, The Rain at Midnight, and Sentences*

from *The Heart Inside the Heart*

Naming the Seasons / 165

A Story About Fall / 166

Runaway John / 167
The Metaphysics of Thirst / 168
“Leading a Life” / 169

from *The Rain at Midnight*

Family Planning / 173
Sundown / 174
Punishment / 175
An Amusing Anecdote / 176
Three Male Voices / 177
The One-Armed Boy / 178
Strange but True / 179
Something More / 181
White Owl / 183
Dusk / 184
Bending over My Reflection / 185
One Wave / 186
What I Know / 187
Black River / 188
The Ghost / 189
The Moonlit Dream / 190
Outing on a Gray Day / 191
On a Used Copy of Witter Bynner’s Translation
of the *Tao Teh Ching* / 195
Seduction / 196

The Blue / 197

A Midsummer Night's Tennis Match / 199

Brightness and Shadow / 200

The Rain at Midnight / 201

from *Sentences*

“Un Licor Extremo” / 205

Breath... / 205

North Country / 205

In the Labyrinth / 206

Blues / 206

Two Starfish near Siwash Rock / 206

Shadows / 206

Old Faithful / 207

**2004–2013: Poems from *Thread of the Real*, *The Earth-Boat*,
and *The Satire Lounge***

from *Thread of the Real*

Thread of the Real / 213

Snowstorm at Dawn / 218

January Thaw / 219

Kooser Creek / 220

Solitaire / 221

Winter Sunrise Outside a Café Near Butte, Montana	/ 222
Fox Hollow	/ 223
A Dream of Difference	/ 224
George W. Bush's First Presidential Press Conference	/ 225
Tests of Faith	/ 228
Field Notes Concerning the Bomb	/ 231
Dark Matter	/ 232
The Mist of Sustenance	/ 233
Comfort Food	/ 238
From a Swaying Hammock	/ 243
Mortality	/ 244
Ritual	/ 245
Yoga	/ 246
Unfinished Stories	/ 247
Sacred Stories	/ 249

from *The Earth-Boat*

Mayan Riviera: Advice for Travelers	/ 253
Guanábana	/ 254
The Earth-Boat	/ 255
Black-Footed Albatross	/ 256
Photograph from a Caribbean Beach	/ 257
Voice of the Fountain	/ 258

from *The Satire Lounge*

To Poets Who Whine About the Inadequacy of Language / 261

Uncles / 262

The Poet Tenders His Apologia in Terms He Hopes His Son Will

Understand / 263

Index of Poem Titles / 269

Acknowledgments / 279

About the Author / 285

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.