

Edward Nesbit

A Pretence of Wit

*Five Settings of W. B. Yeats
for Soprano and Piano*

A PRETENCE OF WIT

EDWARD NESBIT

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The premiere performance was given by Emily Hindrichs and Joseph Middleton
at Aldeburgh Church on 20th October 2012.

The premiere performance of the revised version was given by Anna Patalong
and Elizabeth Rossiter at The Forge, Camden, on 20th November 2012.

Duration c. 8'

PROGRAMME NOTE

A Pretence of Wit sets five poems of W.B. Yeats which deal in different ways with the subject of nature and man's relationship to it. 'The Dawn' and 'In the Seven Woods', the two songs which frame the cycle, celebrate nature and suggest that the thoughts and actions of human beings are trivial by comparison. 'The Hawk' and 'To a Squirrel at Kyle-na-no' are shorter, more light-hearted songs which portray the eponymous animals in a more literal pictorial way. At the centre of the cycle, and at its expressive heart, lies 'To his Heart, Bidding it have no Fear', a slow song which expresses awe at the majesty of the natural world. Although the theme of nature runs through the five poems, the songs are musically independent from one another, and the intention was to create the maximum degree of contrast of mood and texture.

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The Dawn

I would be ignorant as the dawn
That has looked down
On that old queen measuring a town
With the pin of a brooch,
Or on the withered men that saw
From their pedantic Babylon
The careless planets in their courses,
The stars fade out where the moon comes,
And took their tablets and did sums;
I would be ignorant as the dawn
That merely stood, rocking the glittering coach
Above the cloudy shoulders of the horses;
I would be – for no knowledge is worth a straw –
Ignorant and wanton as the dawn.

The Hawk

‘Call down the hawk from the air;
Let him be hooded or caged
Till the yellow eye has grown mild,
For larder and spit are bare,
The old cook enraged,
The scullion gone wild.’

‘I will not be clapped in a hood,
Nor a cage, nor alight upon a wrist,
Now I have learnt to be proud
Hovering over the wood
In the broken mist
Or tumbling cloud.’

‘What tumbling cloud did you cleave,
Yellow-eyed hawk of the mind,
Last evening? that I, who had sat
Dumbfounded before a knave,
Should give to my friend
A pretence of wit.’

To his Heart, bidding it have no Fear

Be you still, be you still, trembling heart;
Remember the wisdom out of the old days:
*Him who trembles before the flame and the flood,
And the winds that blow through the starry ways,
Let the starry winds and the flame and the flood
Cover over and hide, for he has no part
With the lonely, majestic multitude.*

To a Squirrel at Kyle-na-no

Come play with me;
Why should you run
Through the shaking tree
As though I'd a gun
To strike you dead?
When all I would do
Is to scratch your head
And let you go.

In the Seven Woods

I have heard the pigeons of the Seven Woods
Make their faint thunder, and the garden bees
Hum in the lime-tree flowers; and put away
The unavailing outcries and the old bitterness
That empty the heart. I have forgot awhile
Tara uprooted, and new commonness
Upon the throne and crying about the streets
And hanging its paper flowers from post to post,
Because it is alone of all things happy.
I am contented, for I know that Quiet
Wanders laughing and eating her wild heart
Among pigeons and bees, while that Great Archer,
Who but awaits His hour to shoot, still hangs
A cloudy quiver over Pairc-na-lee.

W. B. Yeats

A Pretence of Wit

The Dawn

Tranquillo-Animato ♩ = 69
p semplice

Soprano

I would be ig-no-rant as the dawn that has

Piano

7

subito *mf* *pp*

— looked down on — that old queen mea-, old queen mea-sur-, sur-ing,

Piano

sempre p

pp

10

— ing a town with the pin of a brooch,

Piano

III Ped.

12 *p semplice* *p*

or — on the with-ered men, men that saw from their pe-dan-tic Ba-by-, Ba-by lon the

(8)

mp

p
III Ped.

15 *mf* *p* *mf*

care - less pla nets — in their cour-ses, the stars fade out — where the moon comes, —

(8)

mf

mf

18 *f pesante*

— and took their tab lets and did sums; I would be ig-no-rant as the dawn

(8)

f *mf* *f* *f* *mf*

f

21

that mere - ly stood, rock - ing the glit - ter - ing coach, I would be ig - ig -

più f

f *mf* *f* *più f*

24

- no - rant, rock - ing the glit - ter - ing coach, I would be a - bove the cloud - y shoul

ff *cresc.*

ff

28

ders of the, shoul - ders of the hor - ses; I _____ would _____

p

cresc. *p* *sonoro*

III Ped. *8^{va}* *8^{va}*

36 *sempre p* *pp* *p*

— be - for no know-ledge is, for no know-ledge, no know-ledge is worth a straw - ig

mp *pp* *p*

p *mp*

8^{va}

8^{vb}

40 *poco*

- - no - rant and wan - ton as the

p *p*

p

8^{vb} Ped.

46

dawn.

pp *leggero poss.* *p* *pp* *sim.* *pp* *poss.*

III Ped. 8^{vb}