

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 20<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

The premiere performance of the revised version was given by Anna Patalong and Elizabeth Rossiter at The Forge, Camden, on 20<sup>th</sup> 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,

sempre *p*

10

-ing a town with the pin of a brooch,

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.*

28

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

*cresc.* *p*

8<sup>va</sup>

sonoro  
8<sup>vb</sup>

III Ped.



36 *sempre p* *pp* *p*

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

(8) *mp* *pp* *p* *mp*

*8<sup>va</sup>*

*8<sup>vb</sup>*

40 *poco*

- - no - rant and wan - ton as the

(8) *p* *p*

*8<sup>vb</sup>* | Ped.

46

dawn.

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

III Ped. *8<sup>vb</sup>*

# The Hawk

**Alla marcia** ♩ = 92  
*p senza espress.*

Soprano

Piano

'Call down the hawk from the air; let him be hood-ed or caged till the

4

yel - low eye has grown mild, for lar-der and spit are bare, the old cook en -

yel - low eye has grown mild, for lar-der and spit are bare, the old cook en -

7

*mf pesante*

raged, the scull - ion gone wild.' I will not be clapped in a hood, nor a cage, nor a - light up-on a

raged, the scull - ion gone wild.' I will not be clapped in a hood, nor a cage, nor a - light up-on a

11 *f* *sempre f*

wrist, now I have learnt to be proud ho-ver ing o - ver the wood in the bro - ken

15 *p senza espress.*

mist or tumb - ing cloud.' 'What tumb - ling cloud did you

17

cleave, yel - low - eyed hawk of the mind, last even - ing? that I, who

(8)

*mp dim.* *p*

20 *sempre p*

have sat dumb-found-ed be - fore a knave, should give to my friend a pre-tence of wit.'

*pp*

# To his Heart, bidding it have no Fear

Senza misura, non adagio

Soprano *p*

Be you still, be you still, tremb-ling heart; re-mem-ber the wis-dom out of the old days:

Piano

Affettuoso ♩ = 56

3 *pp*

Him who trem-bles be-fore the flame and the flood, and the

*pp* *p*

poco ped.

6 *p cresc.* *mp* *mf espress.*

winds that blow through the star-ry ways, let the star -

*mp* *mf*

Ped.

9 *p*

ry winds and the flame and the flood

*mf* *sonore* *p*

B $\flat$

13 *pp* *dolciss.* *mp* *espress.*

co - ver o-ver and hide, for he has no part with the

*pp* *pochiss. f* *mp* *p*

Ped.

17 *p*

lone - ly, ma - jes - tic-al mul-ti - tude.

*pp*

# To a Squirrel at Kyle-na-no

Capriccioso ♩ = 100  
*pp sempre*

Soprano

Come play with me; \_\_\_\_\_ why do you run through the shak - ing tree

Piano

6

*(pp sempre)* *mf* *pp*

as though I'd a gun to strike you dead? when

*(pp sempre)* *mf* *pp*

11

all I would do is to scratch your head and let you go.

# In The Seven Woods

**Semplice-Agitato** ♩ = 60

Soprano

*p*

I have heard the pi - geons of the Se - ven Woods

Piano

*p*

*leggieriss. sempre*

6

— make their faint thun-der, and the gar - den bees hum in the lime- tree\_

10

*cresc.*

*accel.* . . . . .

— flowers; and put a-way the un - a-vail-ing out - cries and the

♩ = 80  
*f*  
14 *non dim.*

old bit-ter ness that emp-ty the heart.

*f*

*f*

Ped.

♩ = 60  
18 *p* *f*

I have for-got a while. Ta-ra up-root-ed, and

*p*

*f*

♩ = 80 (♩. = ♩) *p*  
20 *f* *p*

new com-mon-ness up-on the throne and

*f*

*p*



21  $\text{♩} = 80$  *f*

cry-ing a - bout the streets and hang-ing its pa - per flowers from post to post

8<sup>va</sup>

L.H. R.H.

8<sup>vb</sup> Ped.

24 *più f* *ff*

be-cause it is a - lone of all things hap - - - - - py.

(8)

L.H. R.H.

(8)

28

(8)

Musical score for measures 30-31. The score is in 3/4 time and features a complex piano accompaniment with sixteenth-note runs and triplets. The vocal line is indicated by a dashed line at the top. Dynamics include *più ff* and *ff*. Measure numbers 30 and 31 are marked at the beginning of their respective staves.

Musical score for measures 32-35. The tempo is marked as  $\text{♩} = 60$ . The vocal line includes the lyrics: "I am con - ten - ted, for I know that". The piano accompaniment features sustained chords and triplets. Dynamics include *p*, *ff*, and *mf*. A pedal point is indicated as "III Ped." at the bottom. Measure numbers 32, 33, 34, and 35 are marked at the beginning of their respective staves.

Musical score for measures 36-39. The tempo is marked as  $\text{♩} = 80$ . The vocal line includes the lyrics: "Qui - et wan - ders laugh - ing and eat - ing her wild heart a - mong pi - geons and bees,". The piano accompaniment features triplets and dynamic markings of *mp*. Performance instructions include *accel.*, *mp leggiero*, *rit.*, and *accel.*. Measure numbers 36, 37, 38, and 39 are marked at the beginning of their respective staves.

♩ = 60 *p* *mp* *p* *accel.* ♩ = 80 ♩ = 60

39 while that Great Ar - cher, who but a-waits His hour to shoot, still

42 hangs a cloud - y qui - ver o - ver Pairc - - na -

44 ♩ = 80 lee.