

Classic Poetry Series

John Ciardi

- 3 poems -

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John Ciardi ((-))

John Anthony Ciardi (June 24, 1916 – March 30, 1986) was an American poet, translator, and etymologist. While primarily known as a poet, he also translated Dante's *Divine Comedy*, wrote several volumes of children's poetry, pursued etymology, contributed to the *Saturday Review* as a columnist and long-time poetry editor, and directed the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in Vermont. In 1959, Ciardi published a book on how to read, write, and teach poetry, *How Does a Poem Mean?*, which has proven to be among the most-used books of its kind. At the peak of his popularity in the early 1960s, Ciardi also had a network television program on CBS, *Accent*. Ciardi's impact on poetry is perhaps best measured through the younger poets whom he influenced as a teacher and as editor of *The Saturday Review*.

Men marry what they need

Men marry what they need. I marry you,
morning by morning, day by day, night by night,
and every marriage makes this marriage new.

In the broken name of heaven, in the light
that shatters granite, by the spitting shore,
in air that leaps and wobbles like a kite,

I marry you from time and a great door
is shut and stays shut against wind, sea, stone,
sunburst, and heavenfall. And home once more

inside our walls of skin and struts of bone,
man-woman, woman-man, and each the other,
I marry you by all dark and all dawn

and have my laugh at death. Why should I bother
the flies about me? Let them buzz and do.
Men marry their queen, their daughter, or their mother

by hidden names, but that thin buzz whines through:
where reasons are no reason, cause is true.
Men marry what they need. I marry you.

John Ciardi

Suburban

Yesterday Mrs. Friar phoned. 'Mr. Ciardi,
how do you do?' she said. 'I am sorry to say
this isn't exactly a social call. The fact is
your dog has just deposited-forgive me-
a large repulsive object in my petunias.'

I thought to ask, 'Have you checked the rectal grooving
for a positive I.D.?' My dog, as it happened,
was in Vermont with my son, who had gone fishing-
if that's what one does with a girl, two cases of beer,
and a borrowed camper. I guessed I'd get no trout.

But why lose out on organic gold for a wise crack
'Yes, Mrs. Friar,' I said, 'I understand.'
'Most kind of you,' she said. 'Not at all,' I said.
I went with a spade. She pointed, looking away.
'I always have loved dogs,' she said, 'but really!'

I scooped it up and bowed. 'The animal of it.
I hope this hasn't upset you, Mrs. Friar.'
'Not really,' she said, 'but really!' I bore the turd
across the line to my own petunias
and buried it till the glorious resurrection

when even these suburbs shall give up their dead.

John Ciardi

White Heron

What lifts the heron leaning on the air
I praise without a name. A crouch, a flare,
a long stroke through the cumulus of trees,
a shaped thought at the sky - then gone. O rare!
Saint Francis, being happiest on his knees,
would have cried Father! Cry anything you please

But praise. By any name or none. But praise
the white original burst that lights
the heron on his two soft kissing kites.
When saints praise heaven lit by doves and rays,
I sit by pond scums till the air recites
It's heron back. And doubt all else. But praise.

John Ciardi