

Classic Poetry Series

John Gould Fletcher
- poems -

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John Gould Fletcher(3 January 1886 – 10 May 1950)

John Gould Fletcher was an Imagist poet, author and authority on modern painting. He was born in Little Rock, Arkansas to a socially prominent family. After attending Phillips Academy, Andover Fletcher went on to Harvard University from 1903 to 1907, when he dropped out shortly after his father's death.

Background

Fletcher lived in England for a large portion of his life. While in Europe he associated with [Amy Lowell](http://www.poemhunter.com/amy-lowell/), [Ezra Pound](http://www.poemhunter.com/ezra-pound/), and other Imagist poets, he was one of the six Imagists who adopted the name and stuck to it until their aims were achieved. Fletcher resumed a liaison with Florence Emily "Daisy" Arbuthnot (née Goold) at her house in Kent. She had been married to Malcolm Arbuthnot and Fletcher's adultery with her was the grounds for the divorce. The couple married on July 5, 1916. Their marriage produced no children, but Arbuthnot's son and daughter from her previous marriage lived with the couple.

On January 18, 1936 he married a noted author of children's books, Charlie May Simon. The two of them built "Johnswood", a residence on the bluffs of the Arkansas River outside Little Rock. They traveled frequently, however, to New York for the intellectual stimulation and to the American Southwest for the climate, after Fletcher began to suffer from arthritis.

Fletcher suffered from depression and on May 20, 1950 committed suicide by drowning in a pond near his home in Little Rock, Arkansas. Fletcher is buried at historic Mount Holly Cemetery in Little Rock, and a branch of the Central Arkansas Library System is named in his honor.

Poetry

His early works include *Irradiations: Sand and Spray* (1915), and *Goblins and Pagodas* (1916). Amy Lowell said of him , 'no one is more absolute master of the rhythm of verse libre. Fletcher invented the term 'polyphonic prose' to describe some poetic experiments of Amy Lowell, a form he himself, also experimented with in his *Goblins& Pagodas*. In later poetic works Fletcher returned to more traditional forms. These include *The Black Rock* (1928), *Selected Poems* (1938), for which he won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1939, and *The Burning Mountain* (1946). Fletcher later returned to his home in Arkansas and reconnected with his

roots. The subject of his works turned increasingly towards Southern issues and Traditionalism.

In the late 1920s and 1930s he was active with a group of 11 other Southern writers and poets known as the Southern Agrarians. This group published the classic Agrarian manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*, a collection of essays rejecting Modernity and Industrialism. In 1937 he wrote his autobiography, *Life is My Song*, and in 1947 he published *Arkansas*, a beautifully written history of his home state.

In The City Of Night

City of night,

Wrap me in your folds of shadow.

City of twilight,

City that projects into the west,

City whose columns rest upon the sunset, city of square, threatening
masses blocking out the light:

City of twilight,

Wrap me in your folds of shadow.

City of midnight, city that the full moon overflows, city where the cats
prowl and the closed iron dust-carts go rattling through the shadows:

City of midnight,

Wrap me in your folds of shadow.

City of early morning, cool fresh-sprinkled city, city whose sharp roof
peaks are splintered against the stars, city that unbars tall haggard
gates in pity,

City of midnight,

Wrap me in your folds of shadow.

City of rain, city where the bleak wind batters the hard drops once and again,
sousing a shivering, cursing beggar who clings amid the stiff Apostles on the
cathedral portico;

City where the glare is dull and lowering, city where the clouds flare and flicker
as they pass upwards, where sputtering lamps stare into the muddy pools
beneath them;

City where the winds shriek up the streets and tear into the squares, city whose
cobblestones quiver and whose pinnacles waver before the buzzing chatter of
raindrops

in their flight;

City of midnight,

Drench me with your rain of sorrow.

City of vermilion curtains, city whose windows drip with crimson, tawdry,
tinselled,

sensual city, throw me pitilessly into your crowds.

City filled with women's faces leering at the passers by,

City with doorways always open, city of silks and swishing laces, city where
bands

bray dance-music all night in the plaza,

City where the overscented light hangs tepidly, stabbed with jabber of the crowd,

city where the stars stare coldly, falsely smiling through the smoke-filled air,

City of midnight,
Smite me with your despair.
City of emptiness, city of the white façades, city where one lonely dangling
lantern
 wavers aloft like a taper before a marble sarcophagus, frightening away the
ghosts;
City where a single white-lit window in a motionless blackened house-front
swallows
 the hosts of darkness that stream down the street towards it;
City above whose dark tree-tangled park emerges suddenly, unlit, uncannily, a
grey
 ghostly tower whose base is lost in the fog, and whose summit has no end.
City of midnight,
Bury me in your silence.
City of night,
Wrap me in your folds of shadow.
City of restlessness, city where I have tramped and wandered,
City where the herded crowds glance at me suspiciously, city where the churches
are
 locked, the shops unopened, the houses without hospitality,
City of restlessness,
Wrap me in your folds of shadow.
City of sleeplessness, city of cheap airless rooms, where in the gloom are heard
snores
 through the partition, lovers that struggle, couples that squabble, cabs that
rattle,
 cats that squall,
City of sleeplessness,
Wrap me in your folds of shadow.
City of feverish dreams, city that is being besieged by all the demons of
darkness, city of
 innumerable shadowy vaults and towers, city where passion flowers
desperately and
 treachery ends in death the strong:
City of night,
Wrap me in your folds of shadow.

John Gould Fletcher

The Calm

Largo

In the morning I saw three great ships
Almost motionless
Becalmed on an infinite horizon.

The clatter of waves up the beach,
The grating rush of wet pebbles,
The loud monotonous song of the surf,
All these have soothed me
And have given
My soul to rest.

At noon I shall see waves flashing,
White power of spray.
The steamers, stately,
Kick up white puffs of spray behind them.
The boiling wake
Merges in the blue-black mirror of the sea.

One eye of the sun sees all:
The world, the wave, my heart.
I am content.

In the afternoon I shall dream a dream
Of islands beyond the horizon.

White clouds drift over the sky,
Frigates on a long voyage.

In the evening a mute blue stillness
Clutches at my heart.
Stars sparkle upon the tips of my fingers.

Mystical hush,
Fire in the darkness;
The breaking of dreams.

But in the morning I shall see three great ships

Almost motionless
Becalmed on an infinite horizon.

John Gould Fletcher

Tide of Storms

Allegro con fuoco

Crooked, crawling tide with long wet fingers
Clutching at the gritty beach in the roar and spurt of spray,
Tide of gales, drunken tide, lava-burst of breakers,
Black ships plunge upon you from sea to sea away.

Shattering tide, tide of winds, tide of the long still winter,
What matter though ships fail, men sink, there vanish glory?
War-clouds shall hurl their stinging sleet upon our last adventure,
Night-winds shall brokenly whisper our bitter, tragic story.

John Gould Fletcher