

EARTH SONGS

Four Choruses for Men's Voices and Piano

Poems by John Haag

EARTH SONGS

Four Choruses for Men's Voices and Piano

1. The Mountain	4
2. The Boy Who Dined on Rainbows	9
3. "Paint like a man . . ."	14
4. Song Dogs	19

The distinguished poet John Haag was born in Idaho in 1926 and studied at the University of Washington with American poet Theodore Roethke. He also studied at the University of Reading (England) on a Fulbright Scholarship. He published three books of poetry: *The Mirrored Man* (1961); *The Brine Breather* (1971); and *Stones Don't Float: Poems Selected and New* (1996). He was a professor of English at Penn State University for more than 30 years. He died in 2008.

"The Boy Who Dined on Rainbows" and "Paint like a man . . ." are both drawn from *Stones Don't Float, poems selected and new* by John Haag, published by Ohio State University Press. *Stones Don't Float* is the winner of the 1996 Ohio State University Press/*The Journal* Award in Poetry. All four poems are used with the author's kind permission.

The Mountain

*"When we go to the Mountain we do not ask
for what we want. We have what we want."*

Kickapoo Shaman

At the edge of the woods the deer
danced to flutes young breezes played
while zephyrs choreographed small branches
for the bunting's pleasure. A box-turtle
munched amanitas that kill carnivores like us.
The brook chuckled, tumbling in its bed,
tickled by trout, no doubt, and fresh
on our tongues as the air that cleansed
our lungs. At rest on the massive stability
of stone, under the blue fluidity of sky, we
ask of this mountain only that it accept
our heart's profound affection.

The Boy Who Dined on Rainbows

By swift-flowing Switzer Creek
as a twelve-year-old terror
of tadpole and trout
I learned the secret of flight.
Belly-down on the broad planks
I stared into that swiftness
racing the bridge timbers
four feet below my heart and knew
that not the water but the magic
platform on which I rode
was moving, gliding upstream,
and on spread arms I soared
to places where my dreams
could not be doubted.

Rising, with willow pole
and skein of dripping rainbows,
I strode the dirt road home, never
touching the ground.

***"Paint like a man going over
the top of a hill, singing."***

Robert Henri

the day
a confluence of rhythms
rings in the cadence of the swaying grass
the long grass leaning by the roadway
and the grain like a green sea
in the spring suppleness of blade
changing color where the wind dips it
dropping away behind as the high pine
keens through its needles
and the hemlock tosses
in a long bass roll
an undulation prickled by
the tremolo of aspen
all this
and the roll of shoulder and torso
to the swinging thighs
till even the arched feet
fall singing.

Song Dogs

As a pre-pubescent mystic
I talked with the Song Dogs, howling
High in the back of my throat
to catch their pitch, and ask them
How? And Why? And please not to eat
our chickens. They taught me to love
the Moon that drenches our World
on Spirit Nights, and how to
eat my life without choking, and I
told them they could take a hen
now and then, but they refrained.

I've learned, long since, from the Navajo
that the Coyote clan, drifting on the rim
of emptiness, raised magic muzzles
into what would soon be air, and howled
the World free from formlessness
to spin beneath their wise paws.

Coyote has followed me East - a long
journey - but he has time. He came
to tell me soon they will sing
the Spinning Faster Song, accelerating
the Earth until only those who
love Her enough can hang on.
When the fools have been flung far
into the void, the song will cease.
And we who love Her will live
 in the Earth's love
 at the Earth's pace
 to Coyote's songs.