

Jig-a-Jig

O what's the crack with Liquid Jack
Who lived in the hovel by the railroad track
And carried that shovel across his back
And a useless scarf and a tattered old sack;
With face so red and his jaw so slack
From imbibing of the mead and hearty beer
To dull the terror and annul the fear
Of what might come in the dark of the night
To shatter the illusion and distort the sight
And hasten him over the trembling earth
That he's stumbled across since his premature birth?

Where has he scurried to since that day
When he took up his haversack and hurried away?
I have to know for I need to find
The detailed sense of his sad, strange mind;
And I need to know beyond a doubt
The tell-tale secret he found out
When he ventured forth to the top of the mound
With crooked stick and his scurrilous hound
And scrabbled in the gravel with a desperate cry
That shattered the drums of the passers-by
Howling the name of his life-long love;
Howling her name to the canopy above;
Howling the name of Aubergine Annie
Who inhabited a houseboat with her brother called Danny
And her sordid cat and her irritating tranny
And her constipated budgie and her feminist granny.

“Annie!” he caterwauled “Annie! Annie! Annie!
Why have you done such a thing to Jack
From the tumbledown hovel by the railroad track?
Where have you gone with your aubergine hair
And your sumptuous mouth and your penetrating stare?
And your hurdygurdy and your dancing bear?
Why did you vanish in the night so black
over the horizon in the cold, cold air?”

Would that they told me where he's fled
And whether they both are alive or dead
For I have a quest that will test their mettle
And a debt to claim and a score to settle
And if I don't get satisfaction,
An explanation or a full retraction
I will remain and pound the floor
With my heavy feet by the waiting door

And you will tremble with the dreadful sound
Of the awful tread on the hardened ground
As I dance my dance and I jig my jig
For I don't care tuppence and I don't give a fig
For the lowering frown of the wayward preacher
Or Immanuel Kant or Frederick Nietzsche
Jean-Paul Sartre with his witless jokes
Or any of them dead philosopher blokes;
And I care even less for Macdonald's Farm,
Or Hugo's Hunchback of Notre Dame;
Or the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayam,
Or mad Dick Dadd or Augustus John,
Or Wolfgang's randy Spanish Don;
John of Gaunt or Paul Cezanne
Or Lady MacBeth or Ludwig van,
Or the Flying Scot or Noah's Ark
Or Sherlock Holmes or Sebastian Bach.

And don't dare mention here to me
By the treacherous ford and the gnarled elm tree
Piaf, Trenet, Juliet Greco
Claris Cliff and her daft art deco
Or Samuel Spade the private eye
And Alexandra Kollontai;
Mahler, Bruckner or Ravel,
Virginia Woolf or Vanessa Bell
Charlie Parker, Lady Day,
Thomases, both Hood and Gray,
Percy Bysche or Mary Shelley,
Woody Guthrie or Leadbelly;
Douglas Fairbanks, Cary Grant,
Uncle Vanya, Charley's Aunt:
Dames three Mirren, Dench and Rigg
Cannot stop my deadly jig.

Come the snow and come the shine
I will dance this jig of mine
In the rain and in the sleet
Dance and prance along the street
With gamboling lamb and galloping pig
Dance, dance, dance my jig-jag-jig
Jig-jag-jig-jog-jig-a-jig
jig-jog-jug-jag jiggajig-jig!

And I will jig both day and night
For I have no nerve and I fear no fright
Jig-jag-jug-jog-jig away
Tomorrow, yester and today
Jig by the altar and jig by the font
By the counterpane and the underlay
This, the next and every week,
Until they give me what I want
And furnish me with what I seek
The whereabouts of Liquid Jack
And Aubergine Ann with her eyes deep black.

And I will not venture home
Nor beat a path to distant Rome
Bratislava or Cathay;
Severn Strand or Isle of Mull,
Kingstons upon Thames and Hull;
Casablanca, Stroud or Perth,
Bermondsey and Rickmansworth,
Here I am and here I stay:
I cannot, will not go away;

Not to where the ebb-tide wanes
Nor where they bury the remains
Of hopes, and dreams, and fears and woes,
The care of friends, the dread of foes,
And places where the mandrake grows;
Unless I hear the news I lack
Of fleeing Ann and running Jack
Til then I'll step both fast and slow
And jig my jig-a-jig of woe...

Thus yet the accidents of birth
Determine how I walk the earth:
For here it was beneath the tree
The first, worst word was told to me:
From that dull day 'twas clear to see
I'd never wander blithe or free;

And still I fear I'll find no peace,
Epiphany nor sweet release:
For I suspect that no-one knew
Just what was false and what was true

Except you