



# Solo

*Collected Poems 1997–2007*



JOHN CALDER

HERLA

## Contents



### *For Sheila Colwin*

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## *Preface*

These poems cover just over a decade, 1997–2007, and follow a previous collection, *What's Wrong? What's Right?* My early poems were nearly all lost and for years between my twenties and old age, I wrote no verse except occasional humorous poems for special occasions. They are not chronological. Looking at this volume, which I have broken up into seven sections, I realize that I have no conscious models, but have simply tried to find a conversational style that would be both rhythmic and record what is going through my mind, including observations, conclusions, memories, things overheard and private thoughts that, as for all octogenarians, are necessarily looking at the end of life. Some are political and reflect my dismay at a world that has learnt nothing since I was born and produces ever stupider and worse-educated rulers; and at realizing, like Plato, that democracy will nearly always fail because it is so easily manipulated, and the larger the franchise the worse the quality of those who get elected. Only an educated, competent and honest elite is capable of running things well and there are few signs of such people in public life or running private industry either, so anger and disillusionment lies behind many of my poems in the political section. The twenty-first century may well be the last, and perhaps what I regret most is that the great art treasures of music, literature, painting, thought and scientific discovery will disappear along with all memory of those who have created them. But I am sure that many readers of these poems will find their own thoughts and dismay with the declining civilization of our time reflected here. I shall go on writing because I cannot help myself, but if they ever see the light of day, future work will be the *volonté* of others.

– John Calder, 31st Dec 2007

*Solo*

Those who are always together  
never have the time to think  
or read and discover in that reading  
who and what they are, and what other people are  
or to free the mind  
to a vision that is much too far  
for the dialogue of different minds  
even for poetry, a solo occupation.

To be solo is to be free,  
lonely perhaps, even leading to despair  
at the profundities the mind can contemplate.  
But better surely that, than the double state  
of never a single thought, of prattle and easy communication  
that becomes banality. The time lost quarrelling  
or learning news of little import  
takes up too much of life.

There is of course a happy medium.  
We all have social needs and sexual ones,  
but not the entire time. To find a balance  
where two or more agree  
and realize that the other must be free  
for most of life, especially later life,  
requires great tolerance and is not easy.  
To be creative, if only for oneself inside the mind,  
one must be solo.

*Poems about Poetry*

*What's A Poem?*

What's a poem?  
What is it?  
Written down  
just a bit, a little bit  
to pass the time  
and find a rhyme

What's it matter  
What it does?  
Words can seldom  
make a buzz.  
Think, then  
write it down.

Poems are  
what they are,  
nothing more,  
nothing less,  
though some, one fears,  
may live for years.

And fears are what  
they best portray,  
the moment caught  
for another day;  
words live long  
in print or song.

What's a poem?  
Only that.  
Don't define  
what it's at:  
what it is  
is all it is.

21st May 2002