The Spirit of Hague
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“We’re all angels and heaven is right here,” writes author Richard Hague (24). This sentiment from “Heaven, 1957,” a beautiful piece of prose poetry written about one of Hague’s first spiritual experiences, leads me to this question: What is spirituality? Many people equate it with religion, but in my opinion that is a serious mistake because it greatly limits and eliminates many other possible realms of spirituality. On the one hand, religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, which is highly organized and structured, mostly through various denominations of church (Shepard 388). On the other hand, spirituality is an insightful journey into self discovery and the path one takes to open the soul. Being a spiritual person involves having a strong sense of inner peace and acceptance that comes from “making connections.” I am particularly fond of the definition of spirituality given in a book entitled Conversations With God: An Uncommon Dialogue, by Neale Donald Walsch. Walsch is very confused about religion and the meaning of life, so he has a “question and answer” session with God. To his astonishment, God started answering his questions. When Walsch asked God about religion and spirituality, God suggested to him that “religion encourages you to explore the thoughts of others and accept them as your own, and spirituality invites you to toss away the thoughts of others and come up with your own” (61). While one can find spirituality through connecting with a higher power (God, Buddha, Allah, etc.), nature, the universe, and other people, Richard Hague used nature as his primary source of spirituality. Richard Hague learned a tremendous amount about himself and his spirituality throughout his life, and he accomplished this by passionately connecting with the world of nature.

From reading Milltown Natural, it is clearly apparent to me that nature had a very prominent place in Richard Hague’s life. He developed this love of nature fairly early in life. As a child, Hague was always exploring the river, collecting a wide assortment of animals, studying the intricate biology of insects, and leisurely fishing with his grandpa. In “Menagerie,” Hague started “collecting all sorts of diversified animals: an alligator, several different kinds of snakes, beetles, turtles, dogs, numerous insects, and parakeets.” He learned from these animals “that there were alternatives, other ways of being and living” (35). Unfortunately, Hague’s wild curiosity and exploration of these animals caused their untimely demise. At the end of the story, when the alligator dies, Hague finally realizes the unfairness in taking an animal out of its own environment and expecting it to conform with ours. He understands that all animals need to be respected for their own unique qualities. Hague recognizes how imperative it is for each animal to occupy its own special place in the universe, because to deprive them of that place is literally death! Through this epiphany of “connecting” with the animals, Hague developed a new-found respect and admiration for the perfect creation of order in the world.

“Small Bright Things, And Flash, And Glint, And Glitter” is another wonderful example of Hague “discovering” his spirituality through nature. In this story, he recalls getting his “Buddy Holly specials,” referring to his new glasses (26). He finally sees faraway things more clearly. Although he likes this new-found “seeing”, he soon realizes how compromised it is. He receives the “big picture” but misses all of the “little things” that are glaring in front of his face. To rectify this void, he periodically takes his glasses off so that he can, ironically, see more clearly. Isn’t it amazing how people with
perfect vision can walk through life in a constant blur, and people with imperfect vision can see their surroundings with crystal clear sight! Hague connects with nature in this story when he truly starts to appreciate every breath taking detail of beauty in everything he looks at.

Another extremely significant part of Hague’s spirit rests in the infamous Ohio River. It represents some of his most treasured memories and some of his most tragic heartbreaks. Early in life, Hague spent endless days and nights at the river with his grandfather; fishing, and eagerly listening to every word of his grandpa’s fascinating stories. Through these stories, Hague is “afforded a rich and always youthful, even romantic, lore” (“Shitepokes” 8). In his childhood, the river was an endless possibility, an all consuming fortress sacredly guarding his soul. Later in life, however, the darker side of the river is revealed to Hague, when Jackie Finnegan, the love of his life, drowned. This horrible tragedy forever changes Richard Hague. Her death greatly disturbs him and still does to this day. Why? Does Hague ponder how something as beautiful as the river could destroy something equally as beautiful? Does he resent the river for “stealing” Finnegan, the river that “took and held Jackie Finnegan, and still holds her, she whom I never held?” (“Old Woman River” 106). Is Hague terrified of death, and does Finnegan’s death bring him to the awareness that he is a mere mortal who will also die? Unfortunately, I can’t answer these questions and neither can Hague. I can only speculate, as does Hague, concluding that all of these questions have potential validity in comprehending the significance of the river. Many people fear what they don’t understand, and I believe the river and Finnegan’s untimely death represent a huge unknown. Hopefully, given enough time, this spiritual void and confusion about the solemn tone of the river will be replaced with a deeper spiritual awareness and acceptance.

Finally, in my opinion, the “Farm” had the most profound impact on Hague’s spirituality. He is drawn into the farm’s simplistic beauty, as if it were his life’s calling. He finds a calmness and a sense of purpose through his time spent there, admiring the distinct features of the four seasons, planting various kinds of trees, driving around the county getting completely lost in the amazing scenery, fishing with friends, and visiting with family. Hague’s time there is almost a necessity because in the real world, he is getting caught up in the meaningless rush of life and “spiritually, he hunched in fear and exhaustion” (“Mowing The Bald” 119). The Farm is an exercise in finding himself, slowing his hectic, spiritually draining pace, and smelling the roses. Through Richard Hague’s time spent at the Farm, his soul miraculously blossoms and his zest for life is strongly renewed.

Hague has described himself as “partly Catholic” (Demalone), and in “Mowing the Bald” he discusses how he has “taken a hiatus from the formal church” (118), which leads me to believe that religion and church were not at the core of his spiritual development and that nature plays a much more significant role in his spiritual awakenings. His love of the natural world greatly enhances his spiritual being and allows him to, very simply, grow spiritually by “discovering the purpose in everyday events,” (KSU lecture) and that is the “Spirit of Hague.”

Works Cited