

Printed on Water

Also by Gerry Loose:

Change (images by K. Sweeney McGee)

Yuga Night (with Larry Butler & Kathleen McGee)

Knockariddera

Measure

Eitgal

Being Time

The Elementary Particles

Tongues of Stone

as editor:

The Holistic Handbook

as editor & translator:

The Botanical Basho (with Yushin Toda)

Gerry Loose

Printed on Water

*new &
selected poems*

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Full Powers

This collection of Gerry Loose's poetry selects from thirty years of work. Loose's writing is always, in the best sense — that of poets as different as Louis Zukofsky and Ted Berrigan — occasional. We orient ourselves in it by means of shared, often dateable, landmarks: the birth, growth and crises of children and of crucial personal relationships, the politics of the Cold War and of more recent state-sponsored disenfranchisement, the ageing and passing of parents. Though references to practice are usually left implicit in this poetry, the thirty years saw Loose's centre of attention change¹ from Zen to Tibetan Buddhism, which this non-Buddhist might try to characterise as a shift away from a focus on the Void² to one which includes the Plenitude which is implied within it. One of the pleasures of knowing Gerry is sharing in the exhilaration of his engagement with the minutest details of the living and non-living worlds (worlds I think we've both become less confident of distinguishing between as we get older), and the tendency of these details to branch off towards boundless complexity before our eyes³. Uniquely, Loose unites a Linnaean intoxication with names with a poet's critical sense of the limits of Language and of naming as a process of setting limits, whether on boundary-stones marked in Ogham or in the restrictions placed on human potential by military euphemism. That Loose can combine his sense of the particular with an equally clear-eyed view of the larger dimensions of landscape, history and ethics makes him a valued, wise and above all useful friend (I can barely see further than my own nose), and makes these poems — detailed on every scale — a varifocal lens for twenty-first century eyes.

Peter Manson
October 2006

¹ 'Change' is the title of a matrix-game based on the *Book of Changes*, designed by Loose in collaboration with Kate Sweeney McGee and published as a boxed set of 64 cards by Bob Cobbing's

Writers Forum in 1987.

² The Artist Yves Klein once exhibited an empty, white-painted gallery space under the title 'Le Vide'. Albert Camus' entry in the visitor's book read "With the void, full powers". A year later, Klein's friend Arman crammed the same space so full of objects that no human could enter it, naming the result 'Le Plein'.

³ The first conversation I ever had with Gerry was at the height of my own fascination with fractals. I remember writing down the equation behind the Mandelbrot Set, which Gerry recognised from its use in the mathematical modelling of animal population dynamics.

from Eitgal

Part One

1

Am I not Eitgal winged fury wings of wind
the blusterer the breathmaker the singer
the scald
fletcher of Michael a feather fallen of the
archangel plume and pennant of Skellig
of Michael abbot of this sea rock where I am
blown where I blow
ach a windbag
Christ abate my pride

2

Wordblind half bard
sourer cleric
unchaste monk
succoured futile flesh-stone

3

Are those to the east
the mountains of my youth
passed through for Skellig westward
scald crow hill cloud shadows taking
days to pass black wings on the
greying rock lichen shadows growing
on the flanks of mountains
neither slower nor quicker
than moss than black birds than my faith
the passage of a cloud shadow

4

Notice then how the sun petrifies
the night wet stones the sea's waves
melt to pudding my questions borne
down doubts flattened
felicity in prayer rising
gannet heavy to fall smack in the sea
leave me staring stupid
work to be done

5

Moan of monkish prayer doleful introspective
to sing christ in sun days gale days alike
lifting old stones moss stones
with worksong unbidden to the lip
tuneless and tuneful unthought
and thick with now rising over head and ears
as our cells stone on stone
swell and diminish as the work
laborare est orare

6

These things I see I miss to bend the knee
flying spiders on the wind making that leap
I cannot peregrinatio on umbilical abdominal
web line landing anywhere unknown stone or
campion grove
Small boys chatter unknowing
words in the face of god
a choir falling apart a looseness in the face
flying of stiffness

7

If the Caolcu the holy men the whippet
thin men of Iona those doves of the church
Colm's darlings returned here

these silly monks blow me up
seal fed grain fed sheltered
yet complain

flutter at them not at me. Learn
hardship from the north.

Perhaps he serves neighbour best who is not hungry
christ's men we all are
sin to please the flesh
they pleasure themselves mortifying

8

Eitgal is a quern
wordquern grind corn grating men host thin
sacrament monks for the sacrament of love

I know Mary I know Mary

I wear the monks for her
I thresh I grind quern-Eitgal for love
love of the earth
love of the mother
the mother of god

Eitgal wants a woman
 quiescent member tumescent menhir
 rock hard rocked into menhir socket
 erected with ropes hauled into
 soft earth moist mother
 exposed to weather
 hail flailed crack of lightning

ah the horned god wears my meat.

The brothers get by not loving
 some of the brothers desiring
 Eitgal loves all
 Eitgal wants a soft woman human
 no harm in that where's the harm in that
 harm to Eitgal
 cut it off cut it off

Poor pale wrinkled fishskin dead fingers
 digging wet moss
 my tongue too like this back to the root
 (cleft foot sounding board palate cloven)
 wormlike bloodless
 sooner than glib

11

Whey faced lank haired clerks
in the hermitries and father houses
herons bent over illumination
trilling of larks and linnets
rather far a fat fish fed sea goose
to stave off unsought starvation
the better to prayer

12

Pig latin pork latin
watery snot ridden phlegm
we grunt and snuffle
hawk over our prayers fatten
out the lean latin
we ate belly of pork
nipples intact on the singed scalded skin.
Pigs

13

The night moth turning aside
stunned by daylight
resting here under this green
by night seeking the sun that terrifies
in weak rushlight
we sing singed by the awful vision
eyes filmed sancte venite
candles to the dawn

Saille little willow chieftain tree
hawk tree spring tree

come to me Mary
christ come to me

wind whirl turn roll ear shell volute whirl

come to me now

sallow wallow will shroud corpse mouth bubble

come Mary christ

sally leap spring back resilient salvation

come now

crack willow withy goat willow sally
white willow sallow with ears

come to me Mary
christ come to me

The herb garden

I'm not sure if it is at all possible to steal stones but I took them anyway from the fields and from the ruined houses of the townland, anywhere so long as they were the right shape and size, hefting them through rushes and briars where the barrow would not go. Two or three feet long and no more than ten inches wide; ideal were fallen lintels from doors, better still from windows.

I buried them half in half out the stony soil like a small Karnak two feet out from the south facing wall, filling the pocket with our building rubble mixed with black friable soil you could eat : the riches of aeons of rock, generations of leaf mould, lifetimes of dung.

The herb garden I made there interested me less than what grew wild in the wall – the tiny ferns sheltering dinosaur insects and the scarlet cranesbill cutleafed and bloody. And the clump of campion I stole from Sceilg Mhichil.

I claim treasure trove on this cairn – the capstone prised back – filling still with drifting dust motes

There are some words that I dropped in the slow and squally
summer meadow I was renting from Kelly to make hay.

Walking the windrows with my hay pike nothing over my head
only the clouds a two day old telegram was delivered there to me
: my father was dying.

I stuck the pike into the flank of the hillside dropped the words
and travelled four hundred filial miles.

Old words – a wisp of hay that a nourished cow already
ruminating will moistly so gently nuzzle like a lover's kiss the
wisp in a corner of the manger the manger in a cow cabin that
has remained unchanged undisturbed for an entire generation.

Words I had though once to digest and cud into a poem of the
year my father died of the year my second son was conceived of
singing land dreams.

Who will chance upon that abandoned half song on the edge of
that meadow in lost 1978 a distant parish at the lip of the
Atlantic?

spell for the untimely dead

the small & the wild
the undisclosed & the overlooked

the curlew pulling the rain along

the dust that the saw brings forth
the unwavering & patient line of the saw

you are seen

first naming of the island birds

hammer of daybreak

busy gleaner of the woodland floor

field walker dung turner

tight wound spring

wind singer wind bringer

sleepers in the sweet cress stream

breaker of dreams

murmurer of constant wonders

little ruler of the tides

scriber of sky circles

stretcher of pinions

broody hatcher of sea stones

threader of sea to shore

throat stretcher

half rung water ring

sudden singer at the suck of tide

little stander on water

sky swarmer flier in shoals

walker of rock shadow

discussing herons

1

which morning was it that or this
you cooked deceivers & honey fungus slippery jack & penny bun
larch bolete & boletus impolitus for which we have no name

while octobering trees gave their roof-dripping sermons
& parliaments & assemblies of crows & gulls
were whirring & kraaing whistling & hooting

flighting together & shoaling with starlings
wheeling & rowing from ground to branch
branch to branch food in beak denying arguing

discussing refuting engaged in monkish discourse
& all so busy in the air a great cacophony
rattling & belling the passing of the day

only the heron straight through this
silent but for wiping sky with her great greycloth wings
neck hunched waved in time for which we also have no name

but in the evening by Craigallian loch
a broken trout on the broad path stiff
amid an explosion of scales of shining purpose

before the heron can appear on a river
the river must hold the possibility of a heron
a glimpse of a rose or rose hip
flash of goldcrest or echo of her call
lip roll of water backing against current
the possibility of water or air, unlikely elements

before the heron can appear
there must be a heron shape
dropped into the well of brain
after image of light flash
the river must not rise too high
or the heron will not arrive
when the heron comes to the river
an island appears at her feet

because I opened my eyes from sleep
the cormorant flew past the window

because I paused at the river bank
a kingfisher skimmed upstream

because I sheltered in a holly grove
the rainbow grew in the east

because the kingfisher perched there
a holly branch leaned to the river

because the river flowed here
the cormorant arched under

the cormorant surfaced under
under the surface under

holly roots under
riverbed under

sleep under under
the dusty world

from the ogham

Cloghane Carhane

EQQEGGNI MAQI MAQI CARRATTIN

was he a friend

women fight

here among the ivy

now I begin to see him lust

in the ivy

women fighting

bees swarming

now we're all angry

should be

taking stock

minding cattle

was he a friend

thief of the grove of silence

his lust

drains blood

boils my blood

was he a friend

Cloghane Carhane

underneath his name

carpenter's work

it starts to make sense

hazel

it starts to make sense

alder

the most withered wood

the job in hand

clarity

cutting

the highest of bushes

ivy

nettles

the most withered wood

it answers muster

the elm

the apple

forest & orchard

and the hazel

Poltalloch

CRONAN

there is a murmuring

such beauty

the rose redness that grows in a man's face

the intensest of blushes

equally wounding

sense comes to him when he goes to his death

the noise is made

the noise made in delirium

the noise made marveling

the noise is made

when he goes to his death sense

death enfolds him

a sheltering hind