

Last Harvest

SAMPLER

ALSO BY HARRY GUEST

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The Artist on the Artist

* published by Shearsman Books

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Harry Guest

LAST HARVEST

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Shearsman Books

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2175 A.D.

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yoo.kan.not.say.twen.tee.wun.fow.zand.or.sev.enn.
a.d.is.rong.tu. wee.yooz.wurdz.not.a.b.c.
at.skul.wee.lern.short.wurdz.wiv.just.wun.sownd.
zer.wuns.hoo.teech.us.du.not.no.yuze.long.wurdz.
no.wun.duz.
wen.wee.leev.skul.wee.go.to.kol.if.wee.ar.brite.
wee.lern.vare.how.to.sel.fingz.
how.do.wee.sel.fingz.
wee.say.vis.iz.ur.kup. cee.it. bie.it. vat.iz.ur.kar. bie.it.
ven.vay.say.how.mutch.
five.pownz.or.ten.pownz.plus.for.pownz.or.nine.tenz.plus.ait.pownz.
vare.ar.just.free.noatz. wun.wunz.five.wunz.ten.wunz.
at.kol.yoo.hav.tu.pay.ten.bie.ten.bie.ten.pownz.eetch.yer.
wee.ar.at.kol.for.free.yerz.
yes.ur.lot.ov.kash.
it.is.kwite.hard.to.copnt.in.wunz.and.fivze.and.tenz.
wee.hav.no.bux. vay.voz.awl.bernt.yers.bak.

haitch.gest.rote.it.

A Paragraph from Mallarmé's *Crise de Vers*

I say two words – “a flower” – and from
the depths of sheer oblivion as
my voice consigns there contours like
curved outlines other than blooms known,
arising musically and suave,
concept itself identifies
the one not there in all bouquets.

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Stone Islands

B.C.

One mile-long chasm tilting to the sea
scraped for millennia by springs, downpours
and time. Dry now.

At the parched mouth
above some curling waves storm-petrels whirr
outside this so-called grotto. One huge leg
of limestone stamped in to these hardly ever tides
to cause a cave never inhabited
like elsewhere long ago, a given space
of ecstasy, blue mirror shimmering for
a beckoning sun.

Between this standpoint and
horizon juts a danger-isle far-flung,
the fifth one in the archipelago
named Filfla, rarely visited, too barren.

Back,
up left, along the cliffs, two temples wait
built there before the pyramids, before
Stonehenge, much added to from centuries
to next. All hefty stones, some giant slabs
bigger than wardrobes and far heavier,
dragged to the sites it's thought upon round stones
not logs, not many trees to waste, half-inched
by inch, then further, roped perhaps, pulled, that's
enough, phew (mopping brow), wait for new sun
and start again, no hurry.

Quâ phallic (really?)
sloping slightly, two tall pillars hinting at
a doorway or a gate to emptiness.
Once inside, enclosed, lesser trilithons

offer sometimes an entrance to low altars
for what to whom.

Some orthostats have holes
and, wider, “letter-box-slits” for
delivery of what again – food? gifts?
objects in homage? pottery? figurines? Who
across the æons can decide. At times
a tiny gap prised out might just allow
a shaft of sunrise through at winter solstice
or midsummer dawn to hit the further wall.
It’s all conjecture, pliable, of interest though
all stays unproved.

How did the builders come?
From where (when’s known) and why? To slay
all pygmy elephants who’d grazed there for so long?
Escape from enemies? Pushed off in exile?
To find somewhere that’s not as far as where
the sea’s finality ends tumbling down
to nothingness?

A.D.

Some coasts spread broken areas
harsh underfoot but genuinely fine
to stumble over, hearing waves some five
feet lower lap, see lizards vanish in
a flick. No gulls surprisingly. Too far
to fly for scavenging? Unlikely. Pools
in sunlight dry so fast they leave
pale salt where water was. Given the long-
drawn hard unwelcome rock small wonder that
the travelling apostle got shipwrecked.
We had the privilege of watching his
dark distant statue underneath the sun-

set each evening across the bay.

Elsewhere
quasi-forgotten fields and rough stone walls
stagger down slopes to keep the earth and grass.
Two sorts of limestone underneath and used.
Coralline's durable. Smooth yellow slabs
are easier to cut.

These days and sadly
there's more "development" as on
the Channel Isles, less landscapes than
there used to be. Yes people have to live
somewhere. Roofs over heads. Hotels
for tourists like ourselves. There's no
solution but all could be well without
unworthy millionaires and second homes
filled just a week or two per year.

Grey on the land.
Thick heat each noon. Uninterrupted azure
overhead. One town upon a hill is called
the silent one. These streets of golden stone
disappear intriguingly round curves too
narrow happily for traffic. A sort
of loveliness, a kind of calm. Church towers
bristle from parishes. Each cross, a plus,
gives eight enlightening rays out. On a shield
a prancing horse bright red would like to reach
the crescent moon. A rebus probably.
Which language?

Well, we surely will one day
set out aglow again and possibly return
with nothing less than zero. Now we leave
the darkest blue of sea patched here
and there with green that lies a while
or swirls. One falcon glimpsed, inland.
Some red-capped sparrows in a hedge.

To go
back home with dreams and photographs
taking some wonders barely understood
to ponder on at dusk beside the fire,
pass over snow draping the Alps and take
at last the train from Gatwick skimming past
thick foliage and running water once
again.

on Malta and Gozo, April 2016

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Stones Set

for Tilla Brading and Frances Presley

To glance away after so many
years – decades – those three moors explored
with others or alone, streams to cross
or follow, strange woods far apart
some not pathed, all dense, thick, once a fox
turning the corner – pause – decides
to leave, tors in snow climbed gingerly,
deer's footprint, splash of water down a hill
below an Iron Age forge now silent,
tall wall of fog ahead blue sky warm
on your nape, large space of bare rock,
one April cuckoos heard north distance,
east and south nearer, one seen east close
flit from ash to single tree, buzzard above,
the openness, in season flowers, sense
almost of eternity although to
be back in time for tea, rest, bath,
recall the wind, clouds changing colour,
sheets of rain and sun, the miniliths
and higher, split with frost, leaning
in softer soil, may fall, patterned in rows
or circles, placed far earlier than
the pyramids, less massive than
Stonehenge or Avebury,
enough however here for mysteries,
times to get lost on, found again,
a different beauty, wilder, spread, bare and
always the past put there in stone to stay

Where To and From *or* Back to Back

Back to the middle ages... Did they know what they lay in the centre of? Say dark on one flank, triple-pre-post-modern on the nearer i.e. us. We must recall how savagery got dubbed crusades, condemn the vicious acts of Tudors, take a breath and shift to ponderous angles of what brought enlightenment. Those shadowed eras haunt the ages Chesterton defined so well as “Christian killeth Christian” not unlike some decades in our recent past.

All seems to go wrong easily. So much to mourn for when the Holy Ghost plus Jesus plead for peace and harmony, forgiveness, love, compassion. Not too difficult.

In Psalms the Father (ours for some) seems to have strayed from utter beauty crossed with common-sense to smiting, bloodshed, warfare, just a hope for help against both enemy and sin. Starvation too. In truth the focus stays firm for creation, comfort, “portion”, works and wisdom – intermittent beams sent from a verbal lighthouse there for guiding while we so-called humans vitiated most of what religions are about e.g. fresh wonder, the unknown drawn nearer, faith as hints for life, a way to climb that slope which looked so hard and turn frustration to another type of curve.

Religion should
be flexible, no proselytising, your
religion might not suit his, hers or mine.
All must refrain from violence, admit
the presence of all others, find some queer
perhaps (why not?) but smile and tolerate,
treating humanity with equal calm.
Think X a kind of mirror of yourself
unless of course you learn of theft, drugs, fraud
and prejudice but they're not really all
that common. Yet.

We sadly know some thrive
on terror. There exists a vile sect still
pretending there's a pseudo-deity,
a counterfeit, a dirty sham who wants
what's been created wrecked, what's right ignored,
what's innocent destroyed, a man who loves
a man hurled to his death. To train a lad
of fourteen how to mix inside a crowd
minding their business then let off a bomb
so he'll be blown to smithereens along
with families who may (may not) believe
the drivel he'd been coaxed to – is this brand
of horror a *religious* way of life?
Teaching a younger boy to shoot to kill
some prisoners makes it certain he'll end up
a slaughterer impossible to cure
or aid. Will those two pass eternity
beneath the flaring skies of hell? Maybe
with thugs who made them monsters far before
their years which wouldn't happen anyway.
The twisters who watch torture gloatingly,
plan murders, live on hatred can't deserve
the privileged title "human", ever know
what a religion is these latter days

when certain faults condemned do not exist
now.

Prayer's a good initiative if there's
a recognized intention sent from self
to elsewhere. Disappointments come of course.
And vanish, surely that's the point, each prayer
by only seeming ineffectual
threads like a submarine through solid land
below the kneeler inexplicably
and tends to alter into something not
foreseen. A lesson in a sense for one
can't tell God what to do. What's needed is
a flag more like a rainbow under which
we'll free the chains of fear, hope soon there'll shine
a sacred epoch to eradicate
these evils so they'll never slither back

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A Dream

I wandered in distress somewhere alone
and noticed nothing anywhere save for
a string of clouds darker than yesterdays,
unthought of now wherever now may be.

Now hangs on glances to each side though mist
blurred looking further – like a trudge across
the moor when, suddenly, lines of grey stone
set upright you'd gone by will vanish while

the rise ahead holds for a time a height
as one horizon – like a brink past which
a gulf might yawn of denser fog not to
plunge into now or later. Then I felt

a moisture trickling on my cheeks like tears
I hadn't shed as yet. Those chasms in
my brain filch names and words away. They lose
what used to flicker from my tongue with ease

replacing badinage with silence, themes
with walls of soot, true learning with a void.
That's why the sleeping pilgrim has to keep
his pacing till dawn choruses occur

and, banishing the stroll to nowhere, prove
fragments remain which may not glow enough –
the way ahead will fade away, this dream
convey no message but a lasting fear.