SAMPLER

Otherlands
Also by Harry Guest

Poetry
A Different Darkness
Arrangements
The Cutting-Room
The Achievements of Memory
Mountain Journal
A House Against the Night
The Hidden Change
Lost and Found
Coming to Terms
So Far
Comparisons & Conversions
Some Times

Novels
Days
Lost Pictures
Time After Time

Radio Plays
The Inheritance
The Emperor of Outer Space

Translations
Post-War Japanese Poetry (with Lynn Guest and Kajima Shôzô)
The Distance, The Shadows (66 Poems by Victor Hugo)
Versions
From a Condemned Cell (33 Sonnets by Jean Cassou)

Non-Fiction
Another Island Country
Mastering Japanese
Traveller's Literary Companion to Japan
The Artist on the Artist
Otherlands

Translations of
Jean Cassou,
Rainer Maria Rilke
& other poets

by

Harry Guest

Shearsman Books
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SAMPLER
Clément Marot
(1495-1544)

About My Self  [De Soy Mesme]

I’m not now what I used to be
and can’t bring lost time back to me.

Those lovely Aprils flew out through
the window, those sweet summers too.

Neglecting other gods I know
I served my master Eros though

if he could get me born once more
I’d serve him better than before
Mellin de Saint-Gelais
(1487-1558)

Sonnet

Watching that range of distant mountains I compare it to the length of my distress; those peaks are lofty, my desire as high, they stand there firm, my faith’s as serious. So many glittering brooks stream down their side. From my eyes tears flow just as readily. I cannot count how many times I’ve sighed. Those summits suffer gales as ceaselessly. A thousand flocks graze on those lower slopes. As many loves are nurtured and reborn inside my heart which fosters all my hopes which bear no fruit. My joys have been withdrawn. We’re much alike. One feature’s not the same – in them the snow lasts, in me it’s the flame.
Maurice Scève
(c.1510-c.1564)

from Délie, dizain no. CCXVI

At divers times, so many hours and days,
you come, my lady, to my soul to share
from hour to moment, moment to always,
the mesh of contradictions lurking there.
You live through calendars of mine which seem
exempt at least from minor grievances
while I, lost to reality in dread,
feel I have no-one but my self to please.
That’s why I can’t restrain the Furies by
will-power however ardently I try.
Délie dizain CCLVII

That mirror hanging always on its nail needs daybreak to receive her image where my heart in waiting daily must entail false hoping that she’d like me with her there. Your luck is such she often comes to see you look at her knowing you won’t betray tears shed, complaints, what happens after. All is secrecy since any woman may get caught by you but if she’s held in thrall no-one can join her as a referee.
To the Reader

Scève's prologue to his long philosophical poem ‘Microcosme’

A vain desire to visit various lands
brings kudos to the vagabond who strays
forfeiting much by switching skies and grounds.
More cautious use of years earns better days.

Time wasted gains approval from all those
who gape at new amazement which can reap
rewards won also by the ones who chose
to work – a verb to make the idle weep.

Thus wandering in sunlight I shall deign
to try both late and uselessly to please
not cup in hand to ask a different favour.

Thus lilies withered can flaunt blooms again
and autumn coaxing decorate fig-trees
with second fruit though green and lacking flavour.

NOT HERE NOT THERE
Olivier de Magny  
(d. 1560)

“Holà Charon...”  
A Dialogue in Sonnet Form

The Poet  
Hey! Charon! Yes, you, boatman of the dead.

Charon  
Some bumptious ass is yelling. Who are you?

The Poet  
The weeping spirit of a lover who  
For faithfulness gained only tears to shed.

Charon  
What do you want?

The Poet  
To cross the Styx to Hell.

Charon  
You’ve killed a man?

The Poet  
That I have never done.  
Love made me die.

Charon  
I can’t take anyone  
Who’s gripped by love as though beneath a spell.
The Poet
Oh be a sport for once. Take me across.

Charon
Get someone else to row you. Neither I
Nor Fate would dare to disobey Eros.

The Poet
I’ll go in spite of you. My soul has more
Tears for my eyes and loving tricks to try.
I’ll be the river, be both boat and oar.
Joachim du Bellay  
(1522–1560)

Sonnet LXXVI from L’Olive

When fierce storms scrape high hills and level ground  
And rip her olive-tree from my poor heart  
The famished wolf will lie down with the hound  
Supposed to keep his flock safe and apart.

The pathway of that gale will sweep the skies  
To emptiness, quenching their blue with dark.  
Fires will give off no heat, no light. Those eyes  
Of hers, once beautiful, will have no spark.

All creatures will exchange the lair they’d made  
One with the other and the clearest noon  
Resemble midnight at its bleakest. Soon

The colours of each field will seem the same,  
The sea lack water, woods contain no shade  
And roses lose the scent which lent them fame.
Philippe Desportes  
(1546-1606)

Sonnet LI from *Les Amours d’Hippolyte*

The water dripping from a stalactite  
Wears out the hardest marble and it’s known  
That diamonds melt in lion’s blood despite  
Resisting anvils and the flame. All stone –  
Boulders – the granite cliff blocking the way –  
Succumb when fire attacks the living rock.  
North winds have toppled oak-trees you would say  
Were old and tough enough to stand the shock.

But cursèd Eros sees how day and night  
I spend my breath in sighing, my bruised eyes  
Get drenched with tears, my soul’s charred by my plight.  
I find no way to soften the hard heart  
Of one augmenting by her cruel art  
My love for her, my sobs, my wounds, my sighs.
“Amour en mesme instant m’aiguillonne et m’arreste…”

Love can at the same moment goad and check,  
Console and terrify, blaze up and freeze,  
Pursue and flee, construct with care and wreck,  
Crown me as victor, force me to my knees.

The plaything of the storm, tossed high, brought low,  
I’m steered by Love erratically at will.  
I feel secure awaiting the death-blow,  
Believe I’ve won when I’m a loser still.

What pleased me once displeases me to-day.  
I fall in love with her I don’t desire.  
Finding my heart’s delight I’m led astray

And get entangled in protecting wire.  
Knowing what can assist me in my plight  
I move to act and fail to do what’s right.
Théophile Gautier  
(1811-1872)

The Preface to *Emaux et Camées*

Goethe ignored the brutal times  
when empires made the cannons roar.  
His *East-West Divan* (book of rhymes)  
gave breathing-space for art to soar.

Shakespeare he spurned for Persian song,  
perfumed himself with sandalwood  
and borrowed metres which belong  
to Middle-Eastern brotherhood.

Calm on his divan hour by hour,  
aware those battles raged in vain.  
he plucked a petal from each dower.

I wrote, although the hurricane  
lashed windows which I always close,  
*Enamels* first, then *Cameos.*