

*Lee Harwood*

*Collected Poems*

## Books by Lee Harwood

### POETRY

- title illegible*. Writers Forum. London, 1965; reprinted 1996.  
*The Man with Blue Eyes*. Angel Hair Books, New York, 1966.  
*The White Room*. Fulcrum Press, London, 1968.  
*Landscapes*. Fulcrum Press, London, 1969.  
*The Sinking Colony*. Fulcrum Press, London, 1970  
Penguin Modern Poets 19 (with John Ashbery & Tom Raworth)  
Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1971  
*Freighters*. Pig Press, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1975.  
*H.M.S. Little Fox*. Oasis Books, London, 1975.  
*Boston-Brighton*. Oasis Books, London, 1977.  
*Old Bosham Bird Watch*. Pig Press, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1977.  
*Wish you were here* (with Antony Lopez), Transgravity Press, Deal, 1979.  
*All the Wrong Notes*. Pig Press, Durham, 1981.  
*Faded Ribbons*. Other Branch Readings, Leamington Spa, 1982.  
*Monster Masks*. Pig Press, Durham, 1985.  
*Crossing the Frozen River: selected poems*. Paladin, London, 1988.  
*Rope Boy to the Rescue*. North & South, Twickenham, 1988.  
*In the Mists: mountain poems*. Slow Dancer Press, Nottingham, 1993.  
*Morning Light*. Slow Dancer Press, London, 1998.  
*Evening Star*. Leaf Press, Nottingham, 2004.  
*Collected Poems*. Shearsman Books, Exeter, 2004.

### PROSE

- Captain Harwood's Log of Stern Statements and Stout Sayings*.  
Writers Forum, London, 1973; reprinted 1995.  
*Wine Tales: Un Roman Devin* (with Richard Caddel)  
Galloping Dog Press, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1984.  
*Dream Quilt: 30 assorted stories*. Slow Dancer Press, Nottingham, 1985.  
*Assorted Stories : prose works*. Coffee House Press, Minneapolis, 1987.

### TRANSLATIONS

- Tristan Tzara – *Cosmic Realities Vanilla Tobacco Dawnings*.  
Arc, Gillingham, 1969. 2nd ed, Todmorden, 1975.  
Tristan Tzara – *Destroyed Days, a selection of poems 1943-1955*.  
Voiceprint Editions, Colchester, 1971.  
Tristan Tzara – *Selected Poems*. Trigram Press, London, 1975.  
Tristan Tzara – *Chanson Dada: selected poems*. Coach House Press /  
Underwhich Editions, Toronto, 1987.  
Tristan Tzara – *The Glowing Forgotten : A Selection of Poems*.  
Leaf Press, Nottingham, 2003.

**LEE HARWOOD**

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**1964-2004**

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## Foreword

These *Collected Poems*, or collected poems and prose, include most of my work written between 1964 and 2004. A few poems have been cut as not all poems last the course. I've also added some that haven't appeared in book form before – mostly from the 1970s – as well as some recent unpublished work. The section titles in this volume generally correspond to the original books where the poems first appeared, though not always.

Over these years I think, and hope, I've changed in the way I see the world. It would seem natural that there should be a parallel development in my writing. Re-reading these poems, however, I realise there are often repetitions and echoes, insistences that remain throughout on or under the surface. A reader will soon recognise them, despite shifts in the scenery.

The poems, I imagine, harbour curious stories, questions and explorations, instructions for assembling pictures, declarations of love and other obsessions, elegies, and often enough a collage of all these things. They set off, one hopes, into the unknown or barely guessed at. It's in the reader's hands.

Language is never perfectly reliable but – obvious enough – it's all we have to talk to one another. It's to be used as well as possible, as precisely and clearly as possible, but not to be wholly trusted. The complexity of language and people and "life" is to be worked with, accepted, and all their contradictions to be relished. I learnt this, and ways of mapping it all, early on when still in my teens from reading Ezra Pound, and then a year or two later from Tristan Tzara, Jorge Luis Borges, and John Ashbery. After that, the list of writers I'm indebted to spreads far and wide, whether it be the thought and imagination of Jack Spicer or the sharpness and heart of Anne Stevenson or the amused tenderness of Constantine Cavafy. My thanks to them all.

I would also like to thank the editors and publishers who over the years have brought out my books. Bob Cobbing (Writers Forum), Lewis Warsh and Anne Waldman (Angel Hair Books), Stuart and Deirdre Montgomery (Fulcrum Press), Nikos Stangos (Penguin Books), Ian Robinson (Oasis Books), Ric and Ann Caddel (Pig Press), Peter Hodgkiss (Gallop Dog Press), John Muckle (Paladin), John Harvey (Slow Dancer Press), Peterjon Skelt (North and South), Alan Baker (Leafe Press) and, finally, Tony Frazer (Shearsman Books). My thanks too to all the editors of the magazines where these poems first appeared. Their work and care is a generous encouragement for any writer.

**Lee Harwood**

In memory of  
my grandmother Pansy Lee Harwood (1896-1989)  
and Paul Evans (1945-1991)  
who showed me so much



# **H.M.S. Little Fox**

**1967-1968**

## Forestry work no. 1

Did I say that?

The prospect of such expanses still to be covered ...

hardly having set out   intimidated    so soon?

Up onto the ridge   the forest here like a cool grove of ash

with sunlight filtering down

Like a pilgrimage, maybe?

On the map there are a series of points    “The Procession”

Later playing with the children, it’s quite natural ...

Your body gives    “The Acceptance”

I pick the wild flowers carefully

and take exactly one example of each species

“and with reeds and yellow marsh flowers in the clearing”

This conscious and essential “delicacy” in handling surroundings,

of course, flows out    takes in the

You understand this when we touch

In turn I slow my instincts    I know

to take in all the marvels as you give them me

So many pictures of “The Dreams”



## Love in the organ loft

*for Marian*

The cathedral lay feeling rather damp among its trees  
and lawns, lichen covering its white stone walls  
near the ground that is still wet from a rain shower.  
It is April – of course. (Why should songs have all  
the good lines? – like “I love you”, too.)

I’m beginning to wonder what I’m doing  
and what is going on? All I know is that it’s now  
very late at night, or early in the morning ...  
You see, even this is disturbing and disordered.  
Is someone weeping in the street outside?  
It sounds like a man. It is 3.30 a.m.  
But when I go to the window, I can see no one.  
I might have asked him in to cry in the warm,  
if he’d wanted. This isn’t as stupid as it seems.  
But everything on this (surface) level is so disjointed  
that it can make even this possible act of kindness  
appear to “THEM” as “foolishness” (if “they” feel patronising)  
or “absurdity” (if “they” feel insecure that day).

At 5.00 a.m. I am still watching over my love  
I love her more, so much more, than I’ve ever loved anyone,  
even myself. In fact, this is a completely new  
experience of *love*, like it is the first REAL time,  
and love for real.

“My eyes hurt now, but birds begin  
to sing outside anticipating the dawn – though I can find  
no connection. Why should I? How absurd can I get  
in this county town of the south-west province?  
There appear to be no limits anywhere anymore.”  
“His lips were sealed.” “What is going on now?  
You needn’t doubt that I’ll just wait –  
‘Faites vos jeux’ – until I get to the bottom of this.”

The cathedral and its own lush green and garden,  
and the comfortable and quietly rich church houses  
with their private gardens that are set out  
around the green – they are all peaceful and certain.

There is no question of escapism. (And it's about time I woke up to this fact and appreciated the possible sincerity of many such people and bodies.)

The birds masquerading as a "dawn chorus" have now become quite deafening with their twitterings - I am sending for a shot-gun sales catalogue.

But what can this mean? - that I should sit here all night watching over my love and at the same time I fix more than double my usual intake to feel without compassion by brain wince under chemical blows.

I mean what is happening? - NOW! Do you see what I mean? - like does the cathedral nestle in the sky's warm lap? OR does the sky respectfully arch over the cathedral's gothic towers and roof, flying buttresses and pinnacles? This parable can be used for most things - think of a river ...

The belief that ignorance is usually cloaked in pompous wordiness seems well proven by everything put down so far. And, in fact, anyone feeling the need to relieve his by now strong resentment of me will be, when possible, met in all humility. I accept my guilt and am not surprised at these numerous "accidents" that seem to follow my progress through this city, like falling slates and flower pots.

But please, when you all feel relieved, will someone tell me how it is I am so blessed at last with a real love - and this like I've never seen possessed by anyone? But also ... and yet ...

And yet I know I need no explanations and, least of all, justifications. The fact that the woman I love with such continual and intense joy and find what was before always transitory

## The nine death ships

1

"This isn't the Black Forest!" he cried. But the sky was *so* blue. "Do come in and put your revolver on the sideboard." And so, many days passed. It all became very neat and tidy. The house was swept clean and all the revolvers put in a drawer suitably labelled.

"I'm getting closer."

"You sure are."

2

The three men were very persistent, to the extent that they even became boring. The servants were appropriately informed. Only the dogs looked glum at the new situation.

"BANG!" – that changed it.

"My sweet, you see what I mean?"

The carriage continued ignoring the man who quietly read a newspaper.

3

Manhattan is not at all confusing if one appreciates logic. I do, for one.

4

The little house was so full of people that inevitably one of the walls gave way – but, surprisingly, nobody was injured or upset in the least.

"What a magnificent garden you have!"

We lolled the whole afternoon.

It was impossible to count the number of woodpeckers in the flock. But, unperturbed, they continued to wreck the country's entire telegraphic system.

The shot-gun blasted away.

5

"My eyes hurt from doing so much finely detailed clerical work in such a badly lit office."

That was how the report began.

Death was so near, it became a shy joke among the inmates.

6

There was a small black book on the well scrubbed table in the lighthouse. You could hear the sea pounding the walls outside. Inside the book were stuck several photographs of gravestones in wintery graveyards. It was late winter. There were also some postcards which portrayed the deaths of various characters. One was an obvious choice - "The Death of Chatterton" - painted by Henry Wallis. But the oval photo of Miller was not at all expected. The caption simply said "MILLER / Northfield Bank Robber / Killed on front of Bank, Sept. 1876." He lay naked and dead on the mortuary slab. The photo shows only his head, shoulders, chest and upper-arms. There were two obvious bullet holes - one low in his left shoulder, and the other high in the middle of his forehead. But it was only the first wound that had a stream of blood running from it.

The noise of the storm had by now grown quite deafening. It was impossible to hear what anyone said, no matter how loud they shouted. I was then further upset by the discovery that I was alone in the lighthouse. And it didn't look as though anyone would ever return. It was not even known if there had been anyone there to leave in the first place. It was all very confusing, and it seemed that I never would meet the owner of the small black book. For the while he certainly showed no intentions of returning for it.

I carried on whittling and putting ships in bottles.

Spring ploughing would be our next worry.

7

The houses were all yellow and the ladders green - such a conscious plan of life and its colours could only be described as "revolting", and that was being too kind by far.

The lush red of blood, though, and all its varying moods and hues was a continual source of surprise and joy.

"Don't worry."

8

"It was raining so hard and all the games had been played. There was nothing for it – we would just have to spend the afternoon watching the servants play leap frog. What a bore."

Luckily he never finished his memoirs.

9

It seemed that the worst was over. The iron black fleet had finally steamed out of the bay. There was no communication. But at dawn the horizon was still empty. The sea was slate grey. If only this had been "the worst" – but nobody can tell. The year was unsure – maybe it was 1900 or 1901.

The orchestra had to be slaughtered – they put everyone's nerves on edge. It was only through luck that Stravinsky escaped. That would be funnier if it was a joke. Insanity is always terrifying and illogical in its own logic.

As a distraction, let's not forget "the amusing woodpeckers" or "the surprising shot-gun" or "the confusing yet simple street map of Manhattan". They all serve some purpose – whatever that is.

# **Boston to Brighton**

**Boston**

**1972-1973**

## Boston Notebook : December 1972

in the park surrounded by apartment buildings,  
art museums        in the kitchen  
word for word        snow on the ground

to get something clear        mapping  
how it really is now        (embarrassingly so?)  
"I just want to tell you the truth"

In the sky we read of momentous changes  
And chart them?

the small daily details  
talk with people    what eaten    drunk

"peppermint cremes and champagne.  
44 Joy Street, Boston, Massachusetts"

\*

There's no pleasing some folks.

You pays your money  
and you takes your choice.

\*

the grey pyramids set on a flat desert plain

wild flowers and long grasses in springtime on some island  
to the south and east of here. Shall we say Mediterranean?

the well-known riders approach - not out of any nostalgia,  
but rather the fact of their very existence

Along the front of the porch        someone was walking up and  
down, and beyond him        the blue sky was set with fragments  
of white clouds

Some kind of bitterness held in foreign lands





"I said now wait  
stop a minute  
I said now don't  
hold the phone  
'cos I really really really  
got to  
    have you"

## Portraits : 1 - 4

### *Portrait : 1*

rows of white houses leading down to ...  
sun sparkling on the sea  
and the white cliffs off to the left  
the east (that is)  
(looking south)

“south coast sea town I dream of”  
title of this song

### *Portrait : 2*

a dark forest covering a large area of land.  
On its edges are flat ploughed fields  
and further on you come to some crude peasant villages  
- all quite small and somehow Russian looking.

On a Sunday (the time is summer)  
the peasants gather at the centre of the village  
to talk, to even dance, on occasions -  
there being a church service earlier in the day  
presumably

### *Portrait : 3*

tree lined avenues - poplars in full summer leaf -  
crossing flat grainlands - maybe France -  
the golden cornfields north of the Loire,  
(that's 15 years ago) - Tours - Chartres

*Portrait : 4*

the sailors' postcards sent from ports  
far away and far apart "off on manoeuvres"

the thoughts of "an easy home" somehow lost  
amongst all this activity, though still nagging  
in our more "uneasy" moments

Aboard the cruiser *H.M.S. King Alfred*, May 12th, 1905.  
"We are just now out for a spin down the Firth & if all  
is right we leave here for Portsmouth tomorrow morning  
at 6 am, arriving there on Sunday night. I am enjoying  
myself pretty fair. Feeding on coal dust & salt water.  
Hoping you are all well I remain                      Johnnie/"

## The destruction of South Station, Boston

In front of the warehouses, trucks and buses driving by,  
the red demolition crane and two yellow bulldozers

All the giants, massive

... on the sidewalk, lost amongst all this,  
I can't understand what I'm doing  
eating the hamburger plate (\$1.35)  
in the *Blue Diner* across the street.

South Station half pulled down  
and beyond the tracks the docks  
falling apart –  
foreign steamship lines complaining at the  
lack of facilities and dangerous conditions  
– two diesel engines and a shunter  
standing, their engines running,  
at the end of the platform

Like is “it” taking over –  
does the “massive” run the city, exclusively,  
or do I run within the city, “exclusively”?

A small room looking into a cramped courtyard,  
the music on the radio – a shell to keep off  
the nakedness in a strange city, any city,  
“home or away” always foreign  
moving through these

yet the whole affair lumbering on like an automaton  
regardless ... (the giant red machines)  
though this too dramatic  
a picture everyone goes their way  
strange pleasures inside it all

## Nineteenth Century Poem

to say "on the edge of tears ..."  
hard to define      the tears rarely happening

rather it is a state  
the confinement of loneliness  
walking the streets with such pain

"friendship"?  
"a sharing of interests" not the same as "a mutual concern"  
- any fool can talk books, one way or another

A clump of yellow crocus in the Victory Gardens  
The bright morning turning dark  
Rain clouds in the early afternoon

Your state a result of whether you've eaten or not.  
It's that simple, brutal, often enough

To imagine, amongst all this flat language,  
another place.

## Boston Spring

Song of praise?  
the strong wind cutting across the river  
blowing grit in the eyes of the pedestrians crossing the bridge  
after visiting an exhibition of Indian miniatures  
from the little valley kingdom of Kangra in the Punjab Hills  
(N.W. India) painted in the late 18th century  
or early 19th century? I think not.

\*

- 1) Take a bath.
- 2) Drink some chocolate.
- 3) Go to bed.

What else ?

\*

There are so many evasions  
and the cunning fox knows all the  
bolt holes and impenetrable thickets  
in this particular patch of woodland.  
Emergency Instructions by heart,  
by rote, THAT IS  
“rote, n. Mere habituation, knowledge got  
by repetition, unintelligent memory.”

**Brighton**

**1973-1977**

## Old Bosham Bird Watch

*for Jud*

1

out of nothing comes...

nothing comes out of nothing

cut / switch to

a small room, in a building of small rooms. "Enclosed thus." Outside there are bare trees groaning and twisting in the wind. A cold long road with houses either side that finally leads down hill to a railway station. The Exit.

2

Out on the estuary four people in a small dinghy at high tide. Canada geese and oyster catchers around. The pale winter sunlight and cold clear air. Onshore the village church contains the tomb of Canute's daughter, the black Sussex raven emblazoned on the stone. Small rooms.

3

Sat round a fire. The black Danish raven rampant.

In the dream.

Enclosed, I reach out. She moves in her ways that the facts of closeness, familiarity, obscure. Our not quite knowing one another in that sense of clear distance, that sense that comes with distance, like old photos making everything so set, clear, and easily understood – so we think. Face to face the changes flicking by second by second. Not the face fixed that yes I know her. Not the easy sum of qualities

4

How long since you've known who you are? How long? Why who you? Don't know. Long time. Only have old photos, old images, old ikons peeling. That man who lived at X, did Y, travelled to Z, and back, "The Lone Gent"?

Why, who was that masked man? Why, don't you know?

NO!



5

In the closeness that comes with shared actions. From keeping a room clean, keeping clothes clean, cooking a meal to be eaten by the both of us. In that closeness, maybe on the edge of losing something gaining something. Questions of clarity and recognitions.

6

We swing hard a-port then let the current take us, the ebb tide pulling us out towards the Channel. The birds about, the colours of the sky, the waters, all the different plants growing beside the estuary, and the heavy brown ploughed fields behind these banks. Here, more than anywhere else, every thing, all becomes beautiful and exciting – and the fact of being alive at such moments, being filled with this immense beauty, right, Rilke, “ecstasy”, makes the fact of living immeasurably precious.

7

Enclosed by cold in the winter. The clear sharp days walking down hill looking out to sea, the wind up, the waves crashing on the shingle beaches. And the days of rain and harsh grey skies, coming home from work in the dark through the car lights and shop lights. The exit always there. I can't say I “know” you. But neither can I say what “knowing” is. We are here, and somehow it works, our being together.

8

The sky, the gulls wheeling and squawking above, the flint walls of these South Saxon churches, the yew trees branching up into that winter sky. I know these. But not what you're thinking, what anyone is thinking. I can never know that, only work with that – as it comes. Open arms open air come clear.

9

The dinghy is brought ashore. The people drag it up the bank and carry it to the cottage where they stow it neatly. Everything “ship shape”. Out to sea the coasters head for Shoreham and Newhaven. Along the coast small blue trains rattle along through Chichester, Littlehampton, Worthing, and on to Brighton. The fire is stoked up in the small room. The people in the cottage all eat dinner together, are happy in one another's company. That I love you, we know this, parting the branches and ferns as we push on through the wood.

## Portraits from my life

### *Page 1*

Something passes before one's eyes, or even  
at the edge of one's vision

There are swirls of light and crashings of sea water

Redon drew portraits of Bonnard and Vuillard

And the bottom right panel of Giotto's 'St. Francis receiving the stigmata'  
shows St. Francis (plus companion)  
feeding, or greeting, the birds  
All - St. Francis, companion, birds, and lone (palm?) tree  
- somehow floating on a cracked gold background.

### *Page 2*

on the side of the lake a decaying boathouse  
the whole landscape windblown

waves breaking on the granite boulders that form a  
promontory beside the boathouse

Up through the trees  
the log houses

MAPLE SYRUP

Grumiaux playing Bach's sonatas and partitas for violin  
Fetch some logs in for the fire  
GIN

"thank God for Culture"

*Page 3*

In a hotel room, that seems to be near  
the railroad station, sunlight is reflected on  
the worn and elderly furnishings and the  
woman who sits in a pink slip by the large  
round table.

In the suburbs a young girl in her early teens  
stands naked before a mirror in an elegant and  
large drawing room.

*Page 4*

O Princesse de Broglie

“my body’s falling apart, breaking down”

the sky blue silk gown slips off your shoulder  
to eventually reveal your plump white body  
as erotically delightful as your slow eyes.

Discreetly I leave the salon, O Princesse, and  
the excellent company of the charming M. Ingres,  
and return through winding night streets to  
the bed of my own dear Madame d’Harwood  
whose sweet darkness and well rounded form ...

“my body’s falling apart, breaking down”

*Page 5*

The fruit is in the bowl,  
is in the white whicker basket,  
or lies artistically about the table top



vast green sea  
 waves breaking far out from the shore  
 bright midday  
 of spring drizzle and strong westerlys

### *Off the coast*

2.

Barnacle Bill the Sailor had a dream that night. He dreamt that Ibn 'Abdi Rabbihi<sup>1</sup>, the much loved and respected Islamic poet and scholar, was one evening sitting to *sagg*<sup>2</sup>. On his knees he balanced a transistor radio tuned in to Radio Cairo. The radio was playing a continuous programme of Arab popular songs. The toilet window, which was open, overlooked a lush walled garden. And since it was dusk the garden seemed even the more lush with its dark foliage and plants still dripping with the rain from a recent thunder storm.

The humid evening's quiet was only broken by the wailing songs on the radio. And Ibn 'Abdi Rabbihi thought, as time drifted by, of the roses flowering in that garden, and considered the similarity of a rose to the sea. Of how since both were creations of his mind, ideas that eternally existed in his knowing and His knowing, that there really could be no difference between the two, despite their apparent individual beauties. He remembered those lines of Muhyi 'l-Din Ibnu 'l-'Arabi<sup>3</sup> in his poem *Fusúsu 'l-Hikam*:

“How can He be independent when I help and aid  
 Him?

For that cause God brought me into existence,  
 And I know Him and bring Him into existence.”

And also in the collection of odes, Tarjumánu 'l-Ashwaq, he'd written:

“My heart is capable of every form,  
.....  
Love is the faith I hold: wherever turn  
His camels, still the one true faith is mine.”

On the same night Lawrence Hammond, 2nd mate on the steamship *Charterer* out of Lowestoft, was on the bridge on the middle watch. There was the usual yellow glow of light from the instruments and the sound of the engines he had known so many other nights as the *Charterer* ploughed its way up the Channel. There was a light squall and he could hear the hiss of the waves as they curled past the side. As he lent forward trying to look out at the night he noticed large drops of water on the outside of the glass screens of the bridge. The sight of them completely filled him and he remembered the droplets of water that sit on a rose after a summer shower. He was back in that summer day, the sea a thin band in the distance, and the skylarks twittering in the sky above.

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<sup>1</sup> died 940 A.D.

<sup>2</sup> drop excrements.

<sup>3</sup> 1165-1240 A.D.

## London To Brighton

on the late night train home

“kind gentle creature he was, died quite young”  
heard from the next seat down  
“quite diffident, and nervous”

“I shall have to answer at the Pearly Gates.  
He declared a passionate love to me,  
and I... “ (the rest unheard – train noise)

now all that comes through  
is noise of talk and small laughter,  
but none coming through clear

“choreographer” (of course(?))

In love with the man in one’s life  
or not, as the case may be