Peter Riley was born in Stockport in 1940. His education was at Stockport Grammar School, Pembroke College Cambridge, and the Universities of Sussex and Keele, and he has lived since in the south-east of England, Denmark, the Peak District, Cambridge, and Hebden Bridge. His first book of poetry was published in 1969. His poetry has always pursued the intersection of diurnal and exceptional experience, the commonplace and the potential, seeking to inhabit the route where language, on a loose rein, leads the author towards the unexpected recognition. It is also a poetry of result, personal, political, and historical, so it does not exhort and it does not decry: it stands witness. While much of it is a pure extension of the local, Riley sometimes takes up the technique of describing an elsewhere – a foreign, unknown place, a prehistoric grave, a very new or very old music and asking it to declare its hidden messages and singing its song. His several books of prose have worked out some of these concerns in studies of Transylvanian village music, travel notes in Romania, English village carols and improvised music. Since 2012 he has been the poetry editor of The Fortnightly Review (online) where the purpose of his reviewing has been to establish a way of describing the appearance and results of poetry without recourse to any of the closed or parochial vocabularies. His poetry is itself the central and generative point of all these possible avenues, and has ventured into intense compaction and expansive narration, hop-skip-jumps and immense rambles, always returning sooner or later to the known percep, the only workable meeting place.

The two volumes of this collection include all the poetry up to 2017 which he wishes to see preserved, and some which he does not. Something like a tenth of its contents has never been published previously.
Peter Riley

Collected Poems

Volume 1

Shearsman Books
Note to the Reader

Untitled poems are headed by three asterisks, those which are parts of groups or sequences by a single asterisk, or bullet. Dates are those of first separate publication, unless this is greatly distanced from time of writing.

Cover

Abandoned mineshafts in the Great Flat Lode (mineral rocks under the Carn Brea, south of Camborne, Cornwall).

Image by courtesy of Dr Keith Russ.
Contents


Where was I? 19
Privately 20
All Saints 21
High Lane 1964 22
Wanderers Nachtlied 23
Love Poem 24

As If Sonnets (The Lost Pamphlet) 25

and by the way, 28
The Encyclopaedia Office 30
Richmond and Kew 33
‘We become extensions…’ 34
Burnham Beeches 35

Four Dream-and-Waking Pieces 36
1. Part of an Inferno 36
2. Summer 37
3. The Return, the Silver Bough 38
4. Dream 29/xi/1966 40

II. Poems, Hastings 1965-1967

Introitus 45
Puisque j’ai perdu 47
Music, wife, snow outside, a lot of old books 50
‘I live with the child…’ 51
Bus across Mid-Sussex at Night 52
Three Poems after a literary convention in Ashdown Forest 53
Train skirting the South Downs 53
‘To back up…’ 53
On Behaviour, after reading Herrick 54
Train 55
‘Out into the open…’ 56
Sparty Lea Epilogue 57
‘About this evening…’ 58
An American Photograph 59
Emilio de Cavalieri: Lamentations 60
Further to Cavalieri’s Lamentations 62
At Pott Shrigley Brickworks 63

Snow in a Silver Bowl 64

The Twelve Moons 68

Seafront 74
‘Wind on glass…’ 75

III. Love-Strife Machine

Poems written on 11th May 1968 79

A Day
1. Getting Up 90
2. Having Breakfast 91
3. At the Children’s Playground 92
4. Visiting the University 93
5. At the Café 94
6. At the Labour Exchange 95
7. Having Dinner 96
8. Visiting People 97
9. Visiting Other People 98
10. In the Pub 99
11. Going Home 100
12. Doing Nothing in Particular 101
13. Tidying Up and Going to Bed 102
14. In Bed with You 103

IV. Poems, Hove 1967-1969

Other Poems written on 11th May 1968 107
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Lost Conditional</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The sea is flat…’</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The screw that holds the window shut…’</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three-part invention for John Dunstable</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Serious Songs</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Round Dances</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Machaut Songs</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strange Family</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The wind across the chimney top…’</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘That it is not so simple…’</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria: The Shadows</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine Resistance</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Free ramble over the Archpoet’s</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aestuans intrinsecus ira</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘As it might be possible’ (The Fighting Temeraire)</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘A mist coming in…’</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Away from Wagner</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘O see like a silver ship…’</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Memoirs of the Highland Zone</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. ‘which murmuring encloses…’</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ‘the mist full of caves…’</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ‘very early morning…’</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A story told of Anglesey</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Instructions for morning</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. ‘angel of the north…’</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valley of the Moon</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘From the window…’</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>V. Poems, Denmark 1969-1973</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Sky streaked with rain…’</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Snow is falling…’</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Through the day’s obscurity…’</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blåbærvej</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Archilochus

Wednesday Supermarket Poem(s) 156
‘I sit in the café-bar…’ 157
White Arrows 158
Slottet 159
‘We are at large under the white beam…’ 160
‘Threats and promises…’ 160
To live trying 161
Let us all 161

Northern Harbour 162

Across the Island 170
Grassy Lenses 171
Folded Message 172
‘Open the curtains…’ 173
‘Across the axis…’ 174

VI. The Linear Journal 175

VII. Poems, Peak District (i) (Macclesfield, Harecops) 1973-1978 176

from Preparations
First Third 213
Climacteric 214
Last Quarter 215
Blow Blow Thou 216
Care of the Body 217
The Song Sung 218
The Day Fishing 219
Arbor 220
Edward III 221
Edward IV 222
Edward V 223
A Song to Conclude 224
from *Untitled Sequence*

- In a German Car Park
- Bunker Hotel
- Is this Düsseldorf or Kiel?

Wetten Mill New Year’s Eve 1974-5

- ‘And again those bright calculations…’
- ‘Snowdrops and crocus…’

*Birth Prospectus. The End of Us.*

- Still and White
- ‘In what sense to know’
- Some pieces of *The Irish Voyages*
- Essay on the West Window of Killagha Abbey
- Gallarus
- Canzon

*Company*

- Toy Music
- Polecats’ Song

VIII. The Llŷn Writings

1. *Sea Watches*

2. *Six Prose Pieces*
   - St Merin’s Church (i)
   - St Merin’s Church (ii)
   - St Merin’s Churchyard
   - A spring on the upper slopes of Mynydd Anelog
   - In a white van…
   - Rhwngyddwyborth 6th September…

3. *Poems and notes*
   - ‘fixed points in succession…’
   - Late autumn, the peninsula on the turn…
Porth Grwtheyrn 279
A Repetition of Machado at Porth Grwtheyrn 280
Porth y Nant 281

4. *Sea Watch Overstock*
   Pieces fragments and notes 282
   Night-watch notebook 284

5. Mornings with a Walkman at Rhwngyddwyborth 288
   Things Saying Themselves in Llŷn 291

6. *Sea Watch Elegies* 293

7. *The Translations of St. Columba’s Sea-Watch* 298

8. *Overheard by the Sea* 300

9. *Between Harbours* 301

10. Six small prose pieces formerly attached
to *Between Harbours* 309

11. Absent from Llŷn 1994-1997 311

12. Llŷn in the Rain, September 1998
    Only the Song 314

13. Llŷn, Pausing and Going 322

Notes 325

IX. The Derbyshire Poems

Following the Vein
   ‘The sphere descends…’ 329
   ‘Unfold the line…’ 331
   ‘So, walking down…’ 333
# Tracks and Mineshafts

I.  
Material Soul 337  
*Eight Preludes* 339  
*King’s Field* 349  
(two poems and a letter) 354  
*Glutton* 357  
‘A person’s single reach…’ 363  
Manifold 364

II.  
‘The light alternates…’ 365  
‘Expert hero…’ 370  
‘Wait for the light…’ 371  
‘The flesh, eyestruck…’ 381  
‘Year cap split…’ 384  
(The cancelled diatribe) 388  
‘Deeper into stone…’ 391  
‘And there, at this very spot…’ 392

III.  
‘Held in conative energy…’ 394  
‘The city’s surface…’ 397  
‘In the dream-shaft…’ 398  
‘Flesh withstands…’ 399

Adonaïs 400  
‘And the miners all dead…’ 401  
‘Full moon…’ 402

# Lines on the Liver

*Spitewinter Edge Lookout Prose* (untitled) 405  
30 diurnal poems 425  
*Processional and Masque* (The Replies) 443

Notes 451
X. Poems, Peak District (ii), Little Bolehill 1978-1985

The Idea Is 455
Another week on Llŷn 456
Black Holes 457
‘The point of generation…’ 458
‘I depend…’ 459
Middleton by Wirksworth 1980 460
‘We fall to the earth…’ 461
‘The blind traveller…’ 461
(Postlude) 462

Manchester, Liverpool… 463

‘Bronchitis, headache…’ 467

Ospita 468

XI. Noon Province

The Night Train Arrives at Avignon 475
Market Day at Apt 476
Fragments at Les Bassacs 477
Les Bassacs 478
Roofwatch 1-2 479
Afterthought 480
Stubborn Interval 481
St.-Saturnin, the Ridge 482
Meditations in the Fields 1-3 483
The Walk to Roussillon 485
Lines at Night 1 486
Lines at the Pool above St.-Saturnin 487
Meditations in the Fields 4 489
Lines at Night 2 490
Lacoste 491
Recalling Lacoste 492
Rustrel and Gargas 493
Up the Big Hill and Back by Ten 494
Counting the Cost 495
The Walk Back to Gordes 496
Numbers at Les Croagnes 497
Just a Song 498
Notes on the Attempt to Visit Lorand Gaspar 499
The Slower Walk to Roussillon with Kathy 500
The Telephone Box on the Edge of the Corn Field 501
Last Night 502
Orange to Chartres 506
Slow Meditation in the Café-Bar
Les Caves du Mont Anis, Le Puy 507

Notes 509


Reader
Harecops 515
Macclesfield 516
Denmark 517
Bolehill 518
Egbert Street 518
Pastoral 519
Hastings 519
High Lane 520
Through Woods and Fields 521
After a Poem by Nicholas Moore 521
Irish Drones 522
What the Fate Capsule Told Me 523
Golden Slumbers 524

Addenda to Reader
Socialism (Prayer) 525
Aigburth (Howl) 525
Nicholas Moore Retake (Pact) 526
**Lecture**

‘Wie schön bist du…’ 529
‘Only true passion…’ 530
I Wrote a Letter from France 531
‘Congress of twins…’ 532
Regendered 532
Glow Worm True Worm 533
Heinrich Biber 534
Die Mondnacht 535
Magdalenian 536

**Author**

In manus tuas 539
‘Pure need scores the pavement…’ 540
‘Voiced consonants…’ 541
As with rosy steps 542
E Questa Vita un Lampo 543
Delphine 544
O That Singer 545
Bar Carol 546
‘And love alone…’ 547

**Notes** 548

**XIII. Snow has settled...**

Prelude 551
Wirksworth (i) 552
Wirksworth (ii) 553
Relenting of duress… 554
Further Education 555
North End 556
Poem Beginning with a Line by Nicholas Moore 557
London Bridge 558
Norwich 559
Great Eastern 560
West Side 561
Bolehill 562
Next Door But One 563
Little Bolehill 564
Midsummer Common 565
Cambridge Blue 566
A Shropshire Lad 567
Dublin (i) 568
Dublin (ii) 569
Fontaine de Vaucluse 570
Loft 571
Hackney Loft 572
Parker’s Piece 573
First In Last Out 574
S. Cecilia in Trastevere 575
S. Maria in Trastevere 576
S. Pietro in Montorio 577
Dar es Suriani 578
Château Musar 581
Château de Muzot 582
Hergla 583
Djebel Bou Dabbous (i) 584
Djebel Bou Dabbous (ii) 585
Ghar el Melh 586
Saint Louis’ Island 587
Saint Médard’s Quarter 588
Saint Séverin’s Landing 589
Causeway 590
Pascal’s Corner 591

Notes 592

Index of Titles 595
SAMPLER
I.

Poems: London
1962-1965

SAMPLER
SAMPLER
Where Was I?

Sipping hot chocolate in a shop window and the 13th Century dementing outside, my friend Michael, who will wear a grey plastic mac to anywhere on earth, visibly chuckled, his forehead seemed to sprout architraves we very nearly missed the train.

In Berlin we met a girl who only painted fish and took the professorial Richard home with her. In Koblenz on the other hand Nick got in with a very smart set who didn’t have walls or beds or something.

We drew lots. I ended up with a small cripple called Lorenz with one hand and a hook, and they said, “I hope I don’t get the black dwarf” and I did. He collected toy soldiers and was going to write novels. Totally kind.
Privately

Earthly creature by your kindness more future than the stars: we lose ourselves north and south and in our ecstasy forget, as if travelling. A light shines from the earth that is not reflected, a line unfades over the dark plotted fields cutting our unwillingness to be: we are, our senses parade the quaking systems by fleshlight, meeting head-on a law of movement in love. A love of movement in law.
All Saints

By day we walked the city and planned eating. By night we made love and slept. A part of Manchester I’d never known well previously but Tony Connor lent us his “bachelor” room which was a fairly bare space on the second floor of an old office block, not now extant. It had a window out the back over the rooftops of that shabby and about-to-be-redeveloped urban sector, which at several early mornings threw up a yellow infusion of town-haze, in which the dark blocks sat. There was dust everywhere and one naked light bulb. It was our first domestic act ever to go to Woolworths and purchase for, I think, 1/-, a plastic shade for it, pink as I remember. It was Christmas. The twisting stairs up to the room shifted and groaned every time we used them. You stood in the room naked, a black kitten staring out of your arms. There was nowhere to cook or even heat a kettle of water but it was warm because Tony had bust the lock on the gas meter some time previously and we fed the same shilling through again and again – no one had come to read this meter in the last five years, he said. We took our meals in a cheap café along the road at All Saints, which also does not now exist. I record the adequacy of living, with no excursions and no justifying work. The furthest we got was The Manchester Museum, about half a mile away, where we spent an excessive amount of time in the netsuke collection, which also does not now exist, and ignored most of the rest. The labour was one of calm close attention.
High Lane 1964

Snow arrived the day after Christmas,
carpeted the roadway and mooned
outside our window all day.
There was light on the hills
and blue-black lines where hedges ran.

The light of the world lay
on the dark soil,
the king sat quietly among trees
willing at any time to
dissolve away with no fuss,
conscious of a job well done,
smiling his January smile,
promising to return.
III.

Love-Strife Machine
1969

Note. Love-Strife Machine was in four sections of which sections 1 and 4 are printed here. The poems in sections 2 and 3 have been dispersed into the chronological and topographical orders in this collection.
Poems Written on 11th May 1968

* * *

And now he swings over to the bitter left
and the other man comes up behind
this could put Blackpool back in the 3rd division
or me right off the map,
    these constant manoeuvres

Cutting a hillside into terraces
has something more to it than supply,
more to it than fun
    or cheating at the supermarket.

The succession of rain and sunshine
wears the structure down
to a desperation resembling pain,
love, hate, aren’t in it —
work: to make it at least feasible
that the lines should intersect the way they do
    on the map of it all.

The earth so sweetly goes on without us.
What condolence the earth has,
the long straight valley up to
Jacob’s Ladder in thickening light
blaze of subsoil on the fellside
a flame at the head of the valley,
earthly beacon.

I came in the world’s evening
alone, the attendant creatures
sent home, and face to face, clawing
at the scree, working the bone
knowing this stone
also as a city
I underwrite.
** ***

To cut notches in the
green ridge was one way of saying
w/ chalk between the teeth
nothing to this down-land village its
amateur, dramatic, society.

The porous white underlay,
barren, enfolds so much
weather not just at weekends.

Husbandry of the dead
notched into the skyline
above the far from
dependable condition of meadows –
the white: the stars: the stone, to give
a straight answer.

The cliff road over the ridge to Brighton
and nothing holds us, even
by car, at that speed
away from the light in the ground.
To blaze through language as if blazing through life got all burnt-out a built-in defence structure is too expensive

(that stone house fermenting and rotting in the valley fermenting and rotting in the valley

the valley screams as it rushes past any world-image broken.

O our intimacies torn apart to the uttermost ends of the earth and sky in this furore carried off by sea and air wrenched into music,

fulsome and beautiful turned bitter in starlight.

We agree, we give ourselves to the weather.
I am from language and will return to language
& no one will know
what else I might have been.

Storm waves blot out the lights
along the seafront of Hove and Brighton
not the back streets of Manchester or
network of estate roads south of
Stockport not there the
same wind curves across the land
tearing thick grass on the
Derbyshire moors / I wasn’t there.

The centre of all this tumult
this plastic material woven into
the rocks and meteorology
of the continental shelf
a morphosis the colour of blood
and winter sunsets - out of
dreams of limestone - consolidates, into

a device capable of speech and silence that can
hold the world in a syllable
for good or ill.
How can they live
wedged into the curve of the embankment
   as if the threat were not personal
& febrile extension served
   against the creatures of fire?

The universe is not contained
   in this machine;
this machine is contained in the universe
   is how it could go with some honor.

Or the house is a mountain
   and the room a cave
open into a remoteness
   measured
in the flight of birds.
V.

Poems: Denmark
1969-1973
SAMPLER
* * *

Sky streaked with rain and wind
weighs on the dull fields far into
distance, birds fly over the pond.
Your shoulder ahead of me, your
soft grey scarf in the vast cold landscape
that spreads round us all the time
like a helpless guide.

* * *

Snow is falling. Are we still
as we were and shall we stay?
Who can say? My heart
packed into your hands
knows roughly where we are.

Apples, cow bells, tin-openers and silk scarves
piled up in the hall. What we were
has just arrived. Do we want it?

* * *

Through the day’s obscurity she burns,
through failed languages and the constant
drone that penetrates the window-frames
she burns like a lamp in the night
somewhere close to the sea.

She burns like a red fire
beyond parked lorries at the roadside.
1. Eight rows of small one-storey houses, screened by hedges, hollyhocks, small pines, snow scattered, and us foreigners.

2. Distant woods, lines of pollard willows across snow fields without limit.

3. Slightly raised horizon with trees, cold wind and snow direct from Germany.


5. Abandoned gardens on the edge of the town, black and red shrubs in snow, white powder blown onto the road.

6. I cycle out before dawn, sound of dynamo echoes from roadside hedges clogged with slush it slips and dims.

7. Northern country, far from old home, post takes four days, edge of a harder history. Wondering and sometimes it works.
8. Every morning I take the snow roads by bicycle
   think of all the boots that have trodden this frozen ground
   an undemanding job.

9. Underground hot-water pipes go
   by the side of the pond. Passing
   birds make the most of it.

10. Dark with snow outside
    beating against the windows we
    laugh at each other.

11. Clumps of snow hang
    on the bushes outside. The radiator hisses.
    Stay indoors all day, listen.

12. My breath forms a patch of frost on the lapel of my coat.
    Again I cycle before dawn in a white darkness
    about my business.
SAMPLER
VI.

The Linear Journal

(1973)
Part One

1. [Tarascon-sur-Ariège]

Someone touches my shoulder and bang this extraordinary thing clapped in my face full of trees buildings and a river I can’t begin to think about coping with ah these, the Central Gardens of your presence, your image, that I hardly know…

A fixed-term loan of variegated parklands known as “continuing to exist” or all of the past and all of the present “Have fun,” they say, “Goodbye.” Goodbye goodbye. Our home is totally unmade, we start departing.

And here we all are, sweaty with trust, clutching our licenses on the corner. We flutter we continue to exist we line up we break our pencils in the car door, the wood splinters, we are moved, we take up our memory-bags and away.

My regard, of you, takes the form of a band of adolescents in shorts setting out on an alpine ramble overburdened with tents and calamine lotion disoriented and thinking, for the first time of wine.

Out of this scramble no clarity emerges no government no textbook no map though the light is everywhere we go.
O my eyes hurt and the bottle is cooling in the stream. The desired condition flattens itself on the wall, textual erosion at the river-bend and calcium accretion, we have madrigals of love and war set up in a clearing by the road.

Now there is a hard opaque layer over all that transportation, the furthest dark nick of cavern pulsing through the night sky. Intently, our madrigals stand in the gloaming: green and furiously small, they attract flies and small groups of homeless seeking rest.

O my eyes hurt and a hard opaque layer is cooling in the sky, the desired condition fastens itself on my skin – sexual light on the road and cancelled glory bring us crashing to a future state. We creep into our madrigals and die.
The simple pulse like a train is all we need
to get up this huge pass
escape route (1943)
over the top
and it comes easily upon us at this
marginal age that pejorocratic machinery
is at it again elaborating without end
the planned failure of hope. But we
are caught in our own song and the leaf
turns at our feet, there is no harm beyond
the single blade / the cut / the end / get
back. We go by the old routine,
we know the words of command, they are
thrust right into the mountain
where they stand on quaint platforms facing
west, which is not our line today
and the cave slowly clogged up with calcium carbonate
(crystalline) on and on again the leaf turns a
horsefly stings my holiday on its
leg O now my
leg hurts too I sometimes think
a little man in the uniform of
a ticket-inspector is peering through
everything I say and desperately trying
to ask someone something but then we hold
special passes and all the hurt piles
up against the cutting / go
home.
Please don’t tell me about your life.
The innkeeper is very pleased to have us here
or rather bemused and the waterfall
does not disturb his rest. Someone
is singing through the ache of
tiny cobbled streets and in the hot dusk
the whole binding of the landscape
folds over, shut. The song
does not disturb his rent. The bottle is half
full I pass it round. We are still here:
they threatened us with cosmic stature
and moral rectitude by turns but
we took the short cut down and settled
grumbling in the clear but thick air round about.
The financial inadequacy of our shoes
made epic excursions a burden hard
to bear and we took our coffee
delicately, in two-handled cups.
For these are honeymoon tents, and the Asian lights
are thus authentic: these are the first steps out
from solitude into two, the social flare.
Then you fell over.
I laughed. It wasn’t drink but
poetry and the echo of war.
As a matter of fact I find things
impossible, day by day.