The Llŷn Writings
Also by Peter Riley:

Poetry
Love-Strife Machine
The Canterbury Experimental Weekend
The Linear Journal
The Musicians, The Instruments
Preparations
Lines on the Liver
Tracks and Minshafts
Ospita
Noon Province
Sea Watches
Reader
Lecture
Sea Watch Elegies
Royal Signals
Distant Points
Alstonefield
Between Harbours
Noon Province et autres poèmes
Snow has settled ... bury me here
Author
Passing Measures: A Collection of Poems
The Sea’s Continual Code
Aria with Small Lights
Alstonefield (extended edition)
Excavations
A Map of Faring
The Day’s Final Balance: Uncollected Writings 1965-2006

Prose
Two Essays
Company Week
The Dance at Mociu
Contents

1. Sea Watches 7

2. Six Prose pieces (1977-80)
   St Merin’s church (i) 27
   St Merin’s church (ii) 28
   St Merin’s churchyard 29
   A spring on the upper slopes of Mynedd Anelog 30
   In a white van . . . 31
   Rhwngyddwyborth, 6th September . . . 32

3. Poems and notes (1980-5)
   ‘fixed points in succession . . .’ 35
   Dithyrambic, after the Vicar of Aberdaron 36
   ‘Ptolemy on Llyn . . .’ 37
   ‘Late autumn, the peninsula on the turn . . .’ 38
   Porth Gwrtheyrn 39
   A Repetition of Machado at Porth Gwrtheyrn 40
   Porth y Nant 41

4. Sea Watch Overstock (1984-9)
   Pieces, fragments, and notes . . . 45
   The Nightwatch Notebook 47

5. Mornings with a Walkman at Rhwngyddwyborth (1989-90) 53
   Things Saying Themselves in Llyn (1990) 56

6. Sea Watch Elegies 59

7. The Translations of St. Columba’s Sea-Watch 67

8. Overheard by the Sea 71

9. Between Harbours 75

10. Six small prose pieces formerly attached to ‘Between Harbours’ (1994) 85

11. Absent from Llyn 1994-1997: four prose poems 89
12. Llŷn in the Rain, September 1998 97
   Only the Song 103

13. Llŷn, Pausing and Going 105
   Addenda and Notes to ‘Sea Watches’ 111
   Bibliography 123
SEA WATCH OVERSTOCK
1. *Pieces, fragments, and notes during the writing of Sea Watches 1984-7*

***

So calm and clear a day you could turn and face it, and say, “My life is a mince of pain.”

An earth tremor, a low rumble, the little grocery shop at Rhydlios trembles and the tins rattle on the shelf we thought a heavy goods vehicle had passed by.

The farm: earthen banks separate the fields, the fields scattered with goose feathers dung and mushroom stalks to the cliff edge, furrows of white rock.

Hollow bone, porous tuff, delicately poised at the land’s edge an industrialist’s wink could crush all of it

Except the calm clear factor spoken trembling in florescent stone.

***

Insane hilltop citadels on igneous outcrops heather filling the air with sweetness, stonechats perched on swaying bracken fronds, patches of broken stone

sphagnum grasses, bilberry, insane citadels guarding nothing, ravings of old men, actor-politicians, the body preserved and guarded in the mountain-top house pride of intellect spasm of power

but wishes all shall fail thee.

***

Crossville Bus Company, Pwllheli 2458 or Caernarfon 4631 Route Llangwnadl–Nefyn. No go the circus. Telephone box vandalised. A fritillary at St Mary’s Well.
Buzzed by a RAF jet from Anglesey, the herd runs towards the sea.
Enter a bald woman leading a blind child.
“The world can only be served by the extraordinary” (Goethe)

***

Walking in the dark night, sea sky and land confused together. Noisy sea. Dim, clouded flickering of house windows... again an earth tremor.

Nothing but the total gimpsed in facets and so the fish eyes in the tree the cars honking each other the ground thick with crossed bone.

Phil Davenport died this week in Mozambique.

No return, a single light ahead across the cancelled fields.

***

Waking in the night I see the door-light through your hair.

***

A faint cry in the night, of sandpipers through the steady wind and rain on the roof

"brine stings the window” (B.C.)

The faint piping of oyster-catchers in the morning like an aeolian machine behind the steady rain on the roof and the wind on the corners.

Collect these details, as your wages.
2. The Nightwatch Notebook

Texts prepared in 1989 for Sea Watches VIII, then called “Eight Sea Sunsets” and the whole work “Shining Cloth”, written at night out on the cliff or on returning to the caravan, in either case in the dark and not entirely legible.

A. Saturday

Between insistence and response a sudden crack
a report of unknown origin
three-quarter moon low over the farmhouse.
Imperfect circle, perfect fear.

Saturday (2)

The world-sheet folding the line through time
as the arm turns inward for protection
against the spread [? against the speed]

A land hump black against the silver turmoil
that advances greedily but wants no reward,
a long stone against the star, a theory that works
that predicts reliably and declares its limits
and opens the door for the singers.

Sunday

Cloudy complicated sunset, patches and layers shifting
against each other on the horizon, a dark underlay
moving gently from left to right, family of three choughs
on the headland, their hollow cries
Sitting so still “a god might enter him”
Sitting so still an equation might settle on his arm.
[…]
Patchwork of yellow cloud-wisps carpeting the sky.
Like a night watchman his freedom
disperses into echo, a proof might
pass through him [...]

C. [Lassus, Byrd]

Cirque of rain clouds. What did we see today?
A wet moth clinging to a grass stalk.
An ancient church in a clump of elms.
Dark grey turbulent sea pounding the land, you
cannot love it “To love the sea is only
to love death” (Mann) Still head
Still head in the passage of weather
A wet moth clinging to a grass stalk.

D [Hildegard]

Light is torn from us.

To end up alone in a grim seaside bungalow
(homo fragilis) smelling slightly unsavoury
and burning the night light as the spray
hits the window in outer dark, harbour [?harvest]
of the extraordinary, eyes turned back in.

The horizon blurs, a flock of jackdaws black rags
against the sky, waiting, the dark will come in
and the light will go out, the light will be restored.

The strange animals in the head will dine together.

E [Taverner]
(Eclipse of the Moon: 17th August 1989, 2:30 a.m.)

Never stop. Pause and protract. Withdraw
and separate. Lay items together in order
like a stone wall on top of a cliff, a spider’s web across a culvert. Listening for an answer.
“Death should not be a problem. If all goes well, you pass into dreaming and the world vanishes.”

Waves, wing-beats.

[F and G are lost except for one word, “lucifer” or possibly “dulcimer”]

H

Back at the caravan I switch the light on to a chorus of complaints. I make myself some cocoa and read Chinese poems. The “I” of these poems is always alone.

***

Soul tangled in wires [?violas] serious, uneven, alone, not-alone, worried about the gas cylinder the fire that flowers at the end of breath

Worrying florescence that might suddenly go pop. And the head fire fall into dream leaving everything unfinished. A string band playing in the farmyard in the middle of the night?

***

Later the blur intensifies, moon over a black shed glows like a light bulb through ice thin strips of cloud in streaks across sky like something very fast photographed but there is no speed. Waiting to pass into company.

***
I settle comfortably into bed
by the small caravan window
onto grey field edge, black shed
and streaks across the sky. Legible,
heartening lines. Too dark to
write, I write. I fill the pages.

***

Filtered moonlight on the bed,
serious words, some of them,
about nothing much, the head of a tree
against the sky, a wish for sleep,
serious breathing in the room, like a lighthouse.

***

And so calm and clear the shining cloth
curvature of [thought] which
passes, becomes cloudy, spreads
into a width of mental movement
also in [   ] of largesse for
tomorrow, [   ]ing what we keep
when we lose the moon and the sea and the whole
[two lines written on top of each other]
saves terrestrial events from waste.
7

The Translations of St Columba’s Sea-Watch
1. To be enfolded bodily in a summit
   Like the ink in a letter
   And witness the sea’s entire calm.

2. The heaving waves riding the glitter
   A continual singing
   Addressed to a cause.

3. The clear headland with its smooth strand
   We are established at the outer edge
   Cloaked in brightness, smeared in birdsong.

4. The local waves beating on the rocks
   The [—] from the graveyard.

5. Great flocks of birds hanging over the sea
   Rare mammals’ passing down the coast
   Gods of food, gods of want, human centres.

6. Watching the tide rising and falling, my
   Back to the land, I attain my secret name.

7. And recognise my failings, so difficult to speak out.
   A contrite or empty heart, watching the sea.

8. Honour the movers of these powers:
   Sky messengers, earth cakes, ebb and flow.

9. Read books good for the soul.
   Learn to avoid power of lies.
   Meditate silently, sing aloud.
10.
I gather dulse from the rocks, I go fishing
I share the food in the community
Alone in my room.

11.
So to think further the simple heights of physics
That redeem our term, and the necessities become
Lighter, and life is [prized.]

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item[1] possibly shout, call
\item[2] glossed whales
\item[3] query priced or prised
\end{itemize}