

*Printed on Water*

*Also by Gerry Loose:*

Change (images by K. Sweeney McGee)

Yuga Night (with Larry Butler & Kathleen McGee)

Knockariddera

Measure

Eitgal

Being Time

The Elementary Particles

Tongues of Stone

*as editor:*

The Holistic Handbook

*as editor & translator:*

The Botanical Basho (with Yushin Toda)

**Gerry Loose**

**Printed on Water**

*new &  
selected poems*

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### **Acknowledgements**

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## Full Powers

This collection of Gerry Loose's poetry selects from thirty years of work. Loose's writing is always, in the best sense — that of poets as different as Louis Zukofsky and Ted Berrigan — occasional. We orient ourselves in it by means of shared, often dateable, landmarks: the birth, growth and crises of children and of crucial personal relationships, the politics of the Cold War and of more recent state-sponsored disenfranchisement, the ageing and passing of parents. Though references to practice are usually left implicit in this poetry, the thirty years saw Loose's centre of attention change<sup>1</sup> from Zen to Tibetan Buddhism, which this non-Buddhist might try to characterise as a shift away from a focus on the Void<sup>2</sup> to one which includes the Plenitude which is implied within it. One of the pleasures of knowing Gerry is sharing in the exhilaration of his engagement with the minutest details of the living and non-living worlds (worlds I think we've both become less confident of distinguishing between as we get older), and the tendency of these details to branch off towards boundless complexity before our eyes<sup>3</sup>. Uniquely, Loose unites a Linnaean intoxication with names with a poet's critical sense of the limits of Language and of naming as a process of setting limits, whether on boundary-stones marked in Ogham or in the restrictions placed on human potential by military euphemism. That Loose can combine his sense of the particular with an equally clear-eyed view of the larger dimensions of landscape, history and ethics makes him a valued, wise and above all useful friend (I can barely see further than my own nose), and makes these poems — detailed on every scale — a varifocal lens for twenty-first century eyes.

Peter Manson

October 2006

<sup>1</sup> 'Change' is the title of a matrix-game based on the *Book of Changes*, designed by Loose in collaboration with Kate Sweeney McGee and published as a boxed set of 64 cards by Bob Cobbing's Writers Forum in 1987.

<sup>2</sup> The Artist Yves Klein once exhibited an empty, white-painted gallery space under the title 'Le Vide'. Albert Camus' entry in the visitor's book read "With the void, full powers". A year later, Klein's friend Arman crammed the same space so full of objects that no human could enter it, naming the result 'Le Plein'.

<sup>3</sup> The first conversation I ever had with Gerry was at the height of my own fascination with fractals. I remember writing down the equation behind the Mandelbrot Set, which Gerry recognised from its use in the mathematical modelling of animal population dynamics.

*from Eitgal*

Part One

1

Am I not Eitgal winged fury wings of wind  
the blusterer the breathmaker the singer  
the scald  
fletcher of Michael a feather fallen of the  
archangel plume and pennant of Skellig  
of Michael abbot of this sea rock where I am  
blown where I blow  
ach a windbag  
Christ abate my pride

2

Wordblind half bard  
sourer cleric  
unchaste monk  
succoured futile flesh-stone

3

Are those to the east  
the mountains of my youth  
passed through for Skellig westward  
scald crow hill cloud shadows taking  
days to pass black wings on the  
greying rock lichen shadows growing  
on the flanks of mountains  
neither slower nor quicker  
than moss than black birds than my faith  
the passage of a cloud shadow

4

Notice then how the sun petrifies  
the night wet stones the sea's waves  
melt to pudding my questions borne  
down doubts flattened  
felicity in prayer rising  
gannet heavy to fall smack in the sea  
leave me staring stupid  
work to be done

5

Moan of monkish prayer doleful introspective  
to sing christ in sun days gale days alike  
lifting old stones moss stones  
with worksong unbidden to the lip  
tuneless and tuneful unthought  
and thick with now rising over head and ears  
as our cells stone on stone  
swell and diminish as the work  
laborare est orare

6

These things I see I miss to bend the knee  
flying spiders on the wind making that leap  
I cannot peregrinatio on umbilical abdominal  
web line landing anywhere unknown stone or  
campion grove  
Small boys chatter unknowing  
words in the face of god  
a choir falling apart a looseness in the face  
flying of stiffness

7

If the Caolcu the holy men the whippet  
thin men of Iona those doves of the church  
Colm's darlings returned here

these silly monks blow me up  
seal fed grain fed sheltered  
yet complain

flutter at them not at me. Learn  
hardship from the north.

Perhaps he serves neighbour best who is not hungry  
christ's men we all are  
sin to please the flesh  
they pleasure themselves mortifying

8

Eitgal is a quern  
wordquern grind corn grating men host thin  
sacrament monks for the sacrament of love

I know Mary I know Mary

*I wear the monks for her*  
I thresh I grind quern-Eitgal for love  
love of the earth  
love of the mother  
the mother of god

9

Eitgal wants a woman  
quiescent member tumescent menhir  
rock hard rocked into menhir socket  
erected with ropes hauled into  
soft earth moist mother  
exposed to weather  
hail flailed crack of lightning

ah the horned god wears my meat.

The brothers get by not loving  
some of the brothers desiring  
Eitgal loves all  
Eitgal wants a soft woman human  
no harm in that where's the harm in that  
harm to Eitgal  
cut it off cut it off

10

Poor pale wrinkled fishskin dead fingers  
digging wet moss  
my tongue too like this back to the root  
(cleft foot sounding board palate cloven)  
wormlike bloodless  
sooner than glib

18

11

Whey faced lank haired clerks  
in the hermitries and father houses  
herons bent over illumination  
trilling of larks and linnets  
rather far a fat fish fed sea goose  
to stave off unsought starvation  
the better to prayer

12

Pig latin pork latin  
watery snot ridden phlegm  
we grunt and snuffle  
hawk over our prayers fatten  
out the lean latin  
we ate belly of pork  
nipples intact on the singed scalded skin.  
Pigs

13

The night moth turning aside  
stunned by daylight  
resting here under this green  
by night seeking the sun that terrifies  
in weak rushlight  
we sing singed by the awful vision  
eyes filmed sancte venite  
candles to the dawn

Saille little willow chieftain tree  
hawk tree spring tree

**come to me Mary  
christ come to me**

wind whirl turn roll ear shell volute whirl

**come to me now**

sallow wallow will shroud corpse mouth bubble

**come Mary christ**

sally leap spring back resilient salvation

**come now**

crack willow withy goat willow sally  
white willow sallow with ears

**come to me Mary  
christ come to me**

## The herb garden

I'm not sure if it is at all possible to steal stones but I took them anyway from the fields and from the ruined houses of the townland, anywhere so long as they were the right shape and size, hefting them through rushes and briars where the barrow would not go. Two or three feet long and no more than ten inches wide; ideal were fallen lintels from doors, better still from windows.

I buried them half in half out the stony soil like a small Karnak two feet out from the south facing wall, filling the pocket with our building rubble mixed with black friable soil you could eat : the riches of aeons of rock, generations of leaf mould, lifetimes of dung.

The herb garden I made there interested me less than what grew wild in the wall – the tiny ferns sheltering dinosaur insects and the scarlet cranesbill cutleafed and bloody. And the clump of campion I stole from Sceilg Mhichil.

I claim treasure trove on this cairn – the capstone prised back – filling still with drifting dust motes

There are some words that I dropped in the slow and squally  
summer meadow I was renting from Kelly to make hay.

Walking the windrows with my hay pike nothing over my head  
only the clouds a two day old telegram was delivered there to me  
: my father was dying.

I stuck the pike into the flank of the hillside dropped the words  
and travelled four hundred filial miles.

Old words – a wisp of hay that a nourished cow already  
ruminating will moistly so gently nuzzle like a lover's kiss the  
wisp in a corner of the manger the manger in a cow cabin that  
has remained unchanged undisturbed for an entire generation.

Words I had though once to digest and cud into a poem of the  
year my father died of the year my second son was conceived of  
singing land dreams.

Who will chance upon that abandoned half song on the edge of  
that meadow in lost 1978 a distant parish at the lip of the  
Atlantic?

## **spell for the untimely dead**

the small & the wild  
the undisclosed & the overlooked

the curlew pulling the rain along

the dust that the saw brings forth  
the unwavering & patient line of the saw

you are seen

## first naming of the island birds

hammer of daybreak

busy gleaner of the woodland floor

field walker    dung turner

tight wound spring

wind singer    wind bringer

sleeper in the sweet cress stream

breaker of dreams

murmurer of constant wonders

little ruler of the tides

scriber of sky circles

stretcher of pinions

broody hatcher of sea stones

threader of sea to shore

throat stretcher

half rung water ring

sudden singer at the suck of tide

little stander on water

sky swarmer    flier in shoals

walker of rock shadow

## discussing herons

I

which morning was it that or this  
you cooked deceivers & honey fungus slippery jack & penny bun  
larch bolete & boletus impolitus for which we have no name

while octobering trees gave their roof-dripping sermons  
& parliaments & assemblies of crows & gulls  
were whirring & kraaing whistling & hooting

fighting together & shoaling with starlings  
wheeling & rowing from ground to branch  
branch to branch food in beak denying arguing

discussing refuting engaged in monkish discourse  
& all so busy in the air a great cacophony  
rattling & belling the passing of the day

only the heron straight through this  
silent but for wiping sky with her great greycloth wings  
neck hunched waved in time for which we also have no name

but in the evening by Craigallian loch  
a broken trout on the broad path stiff  
amid an explosion of scales of shining purpose

2

before the heron can appear on a river  
the river must hold the possibility of a heron  
a glimpse of a rose or rose hip  
flash of goldcrest or echo of her call  
lip roll of water backing against current  
the possibility of water or air, unlikely elements

before the heron can appear  
there must be a heron shape  
dropped into the well of brain  
after image of light flash  
the river must not rise too high  
or the heron will not arrive  
when the heron comes to the river  
an island appears at her feet

3

because I opened my eyes from sleep  
the cormorant flew past the window

because I paused at the river bank  
a kingfisher skimmed upstream

because I sheltered in a holly grove  
the rainbow grew in the east

because the kingfisher perched there  
a holly branch leaned to the river

because the river flowed here  
the cormorant arched under

the cormorant surfaced under  
under the surface under

holly roots under  
riverbed under

sleep under under  
the dusty world

from the ogham

Cloghane Carhane

EQQEGGNI MAQI MAQI CARRATTIN

*was he a friend*

women fight

here among the ivy

now I begin to see him    lust

in the ivy

women fighting

bees swarming

now we're all angry

should be

taking stock

minding cattle

*was he a friend*

*thief of the grove of silence*

his lust

drains blood

boils my blood

*was he a friend*

## Cloghane Carhane

*underneath his name*

carpenter's work

it starts to make sense

hazel

it starts to make sense

alder

the most withered wood

the job in hand

clarity

cutting

the highest of bushes

ivy

nettles

the most withered wood

it answers muster

the elm

the apple

*forest & orchard*

and the hazel

Poltalloch

CRONAN

there is a murmuring

such beauty

the rose redness that grows in a man's face

the intensest of blushes

equally wounding

sense comes to him when he goes to his death

the noise is made

the noise made in delirium

the noise made marveling

the noise is made

when he goes to his death sense

death enfolds him

a sheltering hind