

Classic Poetry Series

Lee Harwood

- poems -

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Soft White

When the sea is as grey as her eyes
On these days for sure the soft white
mist blown in from the ocean the town dissolving
It all adds up her bare shoulders

Nakedness rolling in from the sea
on winter afternoons - a fine rain
looking down on the sand & shingle
the waves breaking on the shore & white

It is impossible to deny what
taken by surprise then wonder
the many details of her body
to be held first now then later

In body & mind the fine rain outside
on winter afternoons the nakedness
of her bare shoulders as grey as her eyes
the sea rushing up the beach as white as

The whole outline called 'geography'
meeting at a set of erotic points
lips shoulders breasts stomach
the town dissolves sex thighs legs

Outside then across her nakedness
it rains in the afternoon then the wonder
her body so young & firm dissolves the town
in winter grey as her eyes

Lee Harwood

The Final Painting

The white cloud passed over the land
there is sea always round the land
the sky is blue always above the cloud
the cloud in the blue continues to move
- nothing is limited by the canvas or frame -
the white cloud can be pictured like any
other clouds or like a fist of wool
or a white fur rose
The white cloud passes a shadow across
the landscape and so there is a passing greyness
The grey and the white both envelop
the watcher until he too is drawn into the picture
It is all a journey from a room through a door
down stairs and out into the street
The cloud could possess the house
The watchers have a mutual confidence
with the approaching string of white clouds
It is beyond spoken words what they are
silently mouthing to the sky
There was no mystery in this - only the firm
outline of people in overcoats on a hillside
and the line of clouds above them
The sky is blue The cloud white with touches
of grey - the rest - the landscape below -
can be left to the imagination
The whole painting quietly dissolved itself
into its surrounding clouds

Lee Harwood

The 'Utopia'

The table was filled with many objects

The wild tribesmen in the hills,
whose very robes were decorated with designs
of a strangeness & upsetting beauty
that went much further than the richly coloured silks embroidered there could ever
suggest; . . .

There were piles of books, yet each one
was of a different size and binding.
The leathers were so finely dyed. The blues
& purples, contrasting with the deceptive simplicity
of the 'natural' tans.
And this prism & arrangement of colours
cannot be set down - the fresh arrangements
& angles possible can only point through a door
to the word 'infinite' made of white puffy clouds
floating high in a blue summer sky;
this has been written there by a small airplane
that is now returning to its green landing field.

The table is very old & made of fine mahogany
polished by generations of servants.
And through the windows the summer blue skies
& white clouds spelling a puffy word.
And on the table the books & examples
of embroidery of the wild hill tribesmen
& many large & small objects - all of which
could not help but rouse a curiosity.

There are at times people in this room
- some go to the table - things are moved -
but the atmosphere here is always that of quiet & calm
- no one could disturb this.
And though the people are the only real threat,

they are all too well trained and aware
to ever introduce the least clumsiness
or disturbing element into the room.

At times it is hard to believe
what is before one's eyes -
there is no answer to this except the room itself,
& maybe the white clouds seen through the window.

No one in the house was sure of the frontiers
& the beautiful atlas gilded and bound with blue silk
was only of antiquarian interest & quite useless
for the new questions. The whole situation
was like a painting within a painting &
that within another & so on & so on -
until everyone had lost sight of their original landmarks.

The heath melted into the sky on the horizon.
And the questions of definition & contrast
only brought on a series of fruitless searches
& examinations that made everyone irritable & exhausted.

Once the surveyors had abandoned their project
the objects once more took over.
It would be false to deny the sigh of relief
there was when this happened & calm returned.

The bus bumped down the avenue
& ahead were the mountains & the woods
that burst into flower as spring settled.
The plan & the heavy revolver were all quite in keeping
with this, despite the apparent superficial
difference & clash of worlds -
there was really only one world.
It wasn't easy - admittedly - & someone
had to stay behind & ...
The word in the sky had slowly dissolved
& was now nowhere to be seen.
But instead the sun was flooding the whole room

& everything took on a golden aura
- this meant we were even aware of the
band of horsemen now riding through the forest
that surrounded the valley.

The many details may appear evasive
but the purpose of the total was obvious
& uncompromising

Lee Harwood

The Words

Clouds scattered across the sky all so far away
and then the space between this strange 'distance'
What does 'normal' mean, after all? you move
toward the window lights marking the headland
and the night becomes a milestone though
I the fog rolls up the hill from the sea
in waves the town desperate?
Whichever way we look though so much at hand
only held back by obsessions
but 'home' is so long ago don't cry
the light's a very pale blue then maybe the next time too
a faint glimmer across the bay neither moon
nor stars
and your letter making signs concerning 'understanding'
and 'the magic tortoise' what then? or just tiredness

At each alternative the colours in the sky
gradually changing until you're lulled into believing
you've seen this before but not quite
The wood-cut of a lone horseman
riding through a deathly countryside raped

'You're very brave' I clean the table-top
and you sat in that chair two red poppies
in the garden below at dawn
This apparent clumsiness is far from true

Lee Harwood