

# Interview with Lawrence Upton

## Caroline Andrews

Balham, South London, October 1998

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### Note 1

This interview, which is really a set of interviews over a number of meetings edited pasted together, was made for a project which never reached completion. [CA]

### Note 2

Tapes and transcripts of the discussion of **Written Graphical**, **Stone Head**, **Meadows** and **Wire Sculptures** appear to have been lost.

I had not been in any rush to have this published as the exchange did not focus on areas then of particular interest to me, or not in a way that interested me, but made too much of biographical matters though I had no objection to its being published or used as background for anyone wishing to know more about the circumstances of the making of my poetry.

While much of what I say here could have been said more clearly, I don't think that there is anything that I would retract, except where I have qualified it myself at the time. I might, however, say something completely different another time

Eventually, Ms Andrews published an edited version on her website; but that has now disappeared. Wanting to bring it to a conclusion, I have edited the text a little, just in order to make it readable. I have also added a few comments.

I have lost contact with Ms Andrews and am assuming her agreement; she did agree that I held sole copyright. [LU]

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**CA:** Lawrence Upton, are you a professional poet?

**LU:** The word "professional" is problematic. Like so many words, it shifts its meaning significantly from person to person and context to context... *[LATER COMMENT: I would now just say "No!" Or "Yes."]*

One of the things that "professional" is often taken to mean is doing something without emotional involvement being considered; and that clearly does not apply to my situation as a poet. *[LATER COMMENT: I disagree with the last statement entirely]* As a meaning complementary to that, there is a suggestion that it is possible to do certain things regardless of personal emotion, providing that one has followed agreed or legitimate procedure. You can't write poetry that way. There are no procedures and never were except the ones that one agrees with oneself. *[LATER COMMENT: Not entirely true]*

To be a professional poet in this country, in the sense of living on income derived from one's poetic activity, one often has to do as one is implicitly told, including in the practice of poetry; but that doesn't interest me. *[LATER COMMENT: In terms of the practice of poetry, it repels me]* One also has to help maintain an almost masonic approach, excluding and helping to exclude from outlets poets who don't follow the unwritten behavioural rules. *[This is as true in 2011 as it was when I started, only now it seems it is being done by members of the self-appointed British Poetic Revival]*

One is trying to achieve a coherence that some believe we have lost somehow but which we rarely attain. The idea of writing professionally, in that context, writing without emotion, is as pernicious to me as is the heart-on-the-sleeve anecdote marketed as poetry, stories with attendant emotions on display. Writing that way is a sort of professionalism, getting the job done, having something to show for the work, especially something people want to buy; but people wanting to buy something is often not a measure of its quality or its usefulness.

Another meaning is that of having a professional qualification in writing and that does not apply to me. Not only am I ambiguous in my feelings with regard to some creative writing courses et cetera, although not in the idea of being able to teach others much of what one knows, I am also losing any faith I had in the validity of the qualification process. *[I would emphasise now that I made these remarks in the light of my experience in F.E. It seems now to me quite different in Goldsmiths, where I have been for some years]* I --

**CA:** What do you mean?

**LU:** I'm trying to say.

**CA:** No, I mean with regard to, what was it you said? just now, right now, the validity of the qualification process. What do you mean by that?

**LU:** I mean that, in some areas at least, in this country, the assessment of students is corrupt; and, therefore, the certificates issued are unreliable.

**CA:** The examiners are taking bribes?

**LU:** Not at all. There are other forms of corruption than financial corruption, although money comes into most things... In most areas, financial corruption is the least of our problems... Really, what I am saying does not apply to the question you have put to me. My own experience of Higher Education gives me no direct reason to suspect any difficulty. However, in Further Education, where I used to teach for 12 years or more, there were considerable problems; and if it is as widespread in F.E. as I am fairly certain it is, then I wonder about Higher Education; but I don't actually know. I do wonder about the efficacy of H.E. when I hear of 90 plus students in a tutor group. Yet everyone I know who works in H.E. strikes me as being pedagogically sound.

Examination as such does not exist now in many areas of Further Education. That's not a bad thing in itself; but what replaced it was. I'm all for continuous assessment, open book work and so on. But in the 90s we began to get skills-based evidence-based assessment; and the difficulty with that was in the way it was set up, piloted, planned and set up, and so quite deliberately set up in the other sense. It doesn't provide evidence of skills, unless you regard bullshitting as an assessable professional skill. Which of course it is, but that's the skill which dare not be mentioned for fear the honest people find out; so it goes by a variety of other names.

It is a tick box system that provides evidence of boxes having been ticked. Assessment of the students' skills is left with those who have a personal incentive to see the students pass -- lecturers who don't want to be bullied for having low pass rates, managers who don't want to be bullied for having lecturers with low pass rates...

Everyone in teaching now is bullied or else bullying, and some are being bullied and bullying, or so it seems to me; most of them are. And everyone needs extra resources because the profession -- there's the word -- is under-resourced. It used to be that you received resources on the basis of student numbers; now a lot of it is based on student results. External examiners now have to look at the paperwork not students' work. They assess the system of teaching -- sorry delivery, we have to remember it's a retail product -- not the content. In my subject, Computing, an expert now might be someone who was quite good at Word Processing, our external guy was, while we were teaching programming, network management and database design. So, even if they had wanted to examine the work as such, they probably couldn't do it. And all they ever did was tell us that my policy of teaching beyond the syllabus and assessing to it was making the students expect too much. Expect too much!

**CA:** I think you are exaggerating because you are angry for some reason.

**LU:** Am I?

**CA:** Yes.

**LU:** Why do you think that? What have I said to you to make you think that?

**CA:** You are suggesting that the entire examination system is corrupt.

**LU:** No. I am saying that there is corruption in the system. It is itself corrupt; but, within it, there are many just trying to do their best and to survive, whilst being attacked for it. Remember that I am not necessarily talking about back-handers. I made that clear. In fact, the usual reward is negative -- if you do as they require, you don't get hurt, you keep your job -- we haven't talked about that, but I am very happy to, if that's what you want. The examination system has gone largely. In its place, we have a system of students presenting folders which are "internally-assessed" by lecturers who, increasingly, have also gained their qualification that way.

I was told that, in the new system, my professional status counted for nothing without a D32; and the fool who told me that admitted it was a matter of three hours work to prepare a folder. He explained how easy it is to pass the D32. That, to him, was praise for the system.

That's corruption. Internal assessment is a system whereby, and here I do exaggerate a little to make the point, the system says to the lecturer "Is it ok?" and the lecturer says "Yes" and his manager backs him up without checking, except -- as Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* had it with bombing patterns -- the paperwork looks ok; everyone with a clean nose passes, everyone takes their wages, and the government crows that we are getting more qualified. No one ever is allowed to ask how much has been learned. The point is --

**CA:** Lawrence, we're getting into areas quite beyond my ability to judge.

**LU:** On the contrary, you've expressed a judgment. Just now. You judged that I am exaggerating. [*LATER COMMENT: Quite right, but still it should have been dropped at this point*]

**CA:** I said I find what you are saying hard to believe.

**LU:** Well, we're agreed then that judgment and belief are quite separate. Let us not lose sight of that, a valuable agreement.

**CA:** I won't rise to that.

**LU:** The point is --

**CA:** The point is that I want to speak of poetry.

**LU:** Fine. I think we are. I don't make poetry in isolation. You asked me a question about professionalism and we are living in a country where the concept, the benign version of that concept, is being destroyed. I am speaking of a profession to which I gave twenty years. You are talking to a poet who sees political dimensions to his writing, not just in content but in his

act of making, more in the act than in the content, actually, and by a long way. I am talking about corruption of one of the vital systems of our societies, because we aren't one society and haven't been for some time. Education is the source of our societies. The government says it agrees but it is destroying education. What use is poetry if the population is brain dead? & it might as well be if it isn't educated in a situation where there is little hope of learning outside of educational systems. This is happening because no one wants to know. No one. I start to tell you and you say you don't believe me. You don't argue it. You don't provide evidence. You just say you don't believe me. When I respond, you try to change the subject. This is happening all over...

You may know the Forster story of a heaven where there's something for everyone and even a dais for speeches by those who wish to argue that they haven't died...

That's fine; let people talk shit if it takes their fancy; but presumably in that heaven the infrastructure and services were in effective and reliable hands. I don't want to be in an aircraft that's been programmed by an incompetent.

**CA:** Do you think that's likely to happen?

**LU:** Yes. Nothing so large could be programmed by one person, but there is plenty of bad software around so I don't have that much faith in team work. Have you phoned an I.T. helpline recently? I'll help you formulate an awkward question, an unexpected one rather than something arcane, and I'll tell you the answer -- no, I'll write it down and put it in an envelope. Then, if you're willing to spend the charges, you can phone up your ISP and see how long it takes to get the answer or how many different answers you get.

**CA:** That would be evidence. But I am not sure what of. *[Mutual laughter]*

**LU:** You want evidence? I'll introduce you to others who will say the same thing as I am saying about Further Education. One is still in the profession so he may not wish to be quoted by name. But he'll tell you about lecturers signing off students as having satisfactorily completed the course who haven't submitted any work. Now I am talking about Electrical Installation; the possibility of your house burning down or your toaster being electrically live...

I'll introduce you to others who are making reasonable livings out of I.T. who will tell you the courses at my college -- they used to work in the team -- are bollocks now though a few years ago they were some of the best in the S.E. of the country.

**CA:** When you were the Head of Department.

**LU:** Yes, and before; but I think I made them better. Maybe not. They were, however, very good when I arrived. I got rid of a know-nothing and a bright but lazy one from the National Diploma team.

**CA:** Sacked them?

**LU:** Of course not. Just moved them somewhere where they couldn't do damage. The know-nothing should have been sacked, but that wasn't what happened.

I'll could tell you about the student with NVQ certificates from a college he never attended. Someone else sat his multiple choice for him. I'll tell you about a student in his second year of a degree the last time I heard of him who cannot tell you the difference between software and hardware. And that's hardly specialist.

**CA:** I couldn't.

**LU:** Yes, you could. You know the difference or you couldn't use your computer; and this one can't or couldn't last time I saw him. I don't mean he couldn't give a specific textbook definition. I mean he couldn't form the concepts or, if he could, he couldn't express them in any known language.... Nice bloke, but thick; and even more ignorant than he is thick because he doesn't work. Never wrote a line of code in his life. Never did anything.... I could show you a report on me, by an external examiner who, realising I threatened his position by saying all this or things like it, criticised my teaching methods without ever seeing me teach.

**CA:** So you have a score to settle.

**LU:** ... No...

I don't wish these people well, but that's something else. In every college I know of it's the same. Anyone who criticises the system is attacked. And effectively attacked. You get unbearable teaching loads or they frame you and discipline you in kangaroo courts.

**CA:** You know of this happening?

**LU:** Yes. I'll introduce you to my friend Jethro Cadbury. I have his permission to use his name: he's given it to all his friends, not just me, and he knows nothing about this interview. Sacked for resisting dumbing down of a degree course - a degree course at an F.E. college, but H.E. [*LATER COMMENT: Mr Cadbury has now been found to have been unfairly dismissed by an Employment Tribunal Appeals Court - Ref EAT/1407/98*]

They tried it on me. A trumped up charge of racism first. I fought that. I had to: it was gross misconduct and they'd have been terribly sorry but they would have had to let me go...

Huh. But I beat them and their stories. They got a black man to say I'd abused him.

Then, when I'd beaten that off, all my records were destroyed and I was accused of not having done work, basic work such as lesson planning! I was the head of department, overseeing all the courses, training student lecturers and all; and they suggest I am not planning. I did nothing but plan. Unfortunately, they're like the police and they say whatever they want and make up the evidence they don't have.

**CA:** And?

**LU:** And nothing. I saw it coming and kept copies; and copies of copies. Many never imagine it is possible for these things to happen and don't prepare; me, I tried to work out what I would do if I was trying to frame me and made provision accordingly. Their last attempt included a complaint that I had, and I quote, inexpertly photocopied a document. I have their charge sheet at home if you don't believe me. And for that, an experienced teacher, a head of department -- my computer education is straight As -- for that there was to be a formal disciplinary hearing... I never met a photocopying expert, except Bob Cobbing... It was a joke.

**CA:** I am still finding this hard to believe; though I am fascinated. You tell me there's a man doing a degree who is not up to it.

**LU:** Oh yes. He's not up to a foundation course.

**CA:** How did he get on a degree course then?

**LU:** He passed a National Diploma, which is a recognised qualification, and the university needs students to get funds so they accepted it at face value.

**CA:** How did he get a Diploma?

**LU:** He fulfilled the assessment requirements. And they leak.

**CA:** And you're saying that the external examiners do nothing?

**LU:** I am saying that they are in on it if only passively. Often they don't have the time to investigate. Their own colleges won't give them the time off. The whole thing relies on good will and it's gone. Often they know less than the students. Lots are jobsworths; those with integrity are eased out...

Everyone gets compromised and everyone keeps shtumm. In my last college, the one I just described, the registers disappeared for months at a time and then reappeared in a new and supposedly transferred form; the old records disappeared. The new records showed that all the students had attended when they had not. Records are being falsified wholesale. A colleague, a visiting part timer, made a claim for unpaid work, work I had booked him to do quite correctly; and he was told there was no record. When he asked for the relevant documents showing that, they couldn't provide them.

The same college abolished the examinations department -- on what they called efficiency grounds! -- and gave the work to the departments, at the same time as they broke up departmental power, putting everyone in teams with a yes person at its head...

So there was no uncompromised person overseeing any course and no person overseeing them all! There's that form of professionalism. You may understand my lack of enthusiasm for the word...

I can see you [*laughing softly*] getting edgy.

**CA:** Let's see if we can talk about poetry without going into the matter of Albion's mendacity. I doubt it...

**LU:** I tried being professional once, as a poet, professional in the sense of living by it; and I didn't like the pressures I felt to go against what I felt I ought to be writing. Whether or not I'd have made it then is doubtful; but if I had I wouldn't have liked how I would have had to have done it. So I have sought to make my living as if I were not a poet. It's less compromising and more reliable and realistic. I have sought, so sensibly, to keep my writing a completely separate thing from how I earn my living. My writing has no commercial value.

**CA:** A hobby.

**LU:** I wouldn't use that word. I have tried not writing and thought I was going mad. So it's more than a hobby.

**CA:** Therapy?

**LU:** No. It may have a therapeutic effect; but that isn't the same thing. Therapy is fine but it's a different approach to writing than I take, and it has little or nothing to do with what interests me. Maybe I should have said that I thought I was going more mad.

**CA:** You think you're mad?

**LU:** I'm mad, you're mad. We're all mad here...

Whatever else has fallen apart in my life, he said waving his paw in one direction, I make poetry, he said waving his other paw in the other direction. I make it regardless of what others think, as regardless as I may be. It's just that I don't think that I am able to make any money out of the practice of poetry and don't try because I believe that the attempt would be destructive.

**CA:** That doesn't tell me why you object to my calling it a hobby.

**LU:** [*Long pause*] No... I suppose it doesn't... I thought it had; but maybe no... There can be hobbies, I mean individuals following hobbies, which are ok; but it's a bit like some uses of the word amateur... There's seriousness and rigour

to the craft of poetry which I do not think is conveyed by the word hobby. Although of course, some hobbyists show tremendous technical skill...

One thing is that I am not doing the work just for myself. I may have to keep it to myself because so few take notice but that is something else. If we didn't have such a guild system, I might do better. I don't know. I --

**CA:** What do you mean? What do you mean by *guild system*.

**LU:** Spend a little time looking at the names appearing and reappearing on festival lists; then see what names get the jobs, the residencies, the publications, the radio talks, the grants... It's a behavioural thing; and it's very similar to what I just described happening in British Further Education

Poetry is being commodified, along with anything else. Everything is getting invaded by snake oil salesmen. That's what happened in education. All of a sudden you're being shouted at by some marketing type or human resources wannabe who is telling you that he or she is better qualified than you to say how people should be taught. They blur the difference between training and education, the difference between fact and propaganda, the difference between knowledge and understanding and rote learning

**CA:** Do you have a teaching qualification?

**LU:** It's a long story; but I do know of that of which I speak. I have two separate teaching certificates and a separate teaching diploma. I studied my profession heavily and am qualified to teach just about everything except Martian flower arranging. But I don't want to embarrass you by saying something you'll think outrageous so let's bring the subject back to poetry as if it weren't connected to anything else -- yes, that's unfair -- shall we open another bottle? I'll take the shrug to be a yes.... Where are we? Hobbies. Amateurs. I don't want to be connected with that vast number who say "I am a Christian so I am a poet" or versions of that. I saw one the other day qualifying his poetry by saying "I am a schizophrenic". He'd sent work to an editor with that in his covering letter.

**CA:** How many say that?

**LU:** Thousands, maybe, tens of thousands. Christians that is. If they don't go to church it's because they're so busy writing in their notebooks.

There were thousands in the 70s; unless they only existed then and only sent their poetry to *Poetry Review*. Otherwise they must be with us now in similar numbers.

**CA:** You were told that there were tens of thousands.

**LU:** I saw it for myself. I was Chair of the Poetry Society's Publications Committee for a year and then I was Deputy Chair of the Society for two. So I was concerned with that stuff. The contributions used to come in by the lorry

load and the majority were just bad. That's not the problem; the consistently bad we have with us always; and we also have editors; but some of what they said about their poetry suggested a problem to do with attitude rather than ability. The majority of poems showed no sign of their writers having read much poetry or having any idea of how to go about writing poetry.

**CA:** You think there's a proper way to go about it?

**LU:** I think there are ways of going about it which must result in failure on any terms by any but the most idiosyncratic of approaches; and there are as many such ways potentially as there are people in the world.

**CA:** What do you want to do about people who don't approach poetry as you think they should?

**LU:** Well, I take issue with that as being an account of what I have said. Are you trying to be provocative?

**CA:** Moi?

**LU:** People can write poetry how they want. Even if I don't like what they are doing I still don't want to do anything about it. But a lot of it doesn't interest me.

There's a lot of behavioural assessment going on in official appreciation of poetry. It's hard to get on in The Poetry Industry without brown-nosing. It's being professionalised in a malign way. You get your qualification, that's not happened to a great extent yet; you brown nose; you build your c.v. blah blah blah

But for some time now, long before these latest trends, there's been a self-appointed group getting the publicity. They go around calling each other the finest, the most important.

**CA:** May I cut in? Yes? I take it we're talking about the mainstream... You don't reckon it.

**LU:** I reckon some of them. I am not actually talking about the mainstream. I am talking about the bit of the mainstream which gets promoted; some non-mainstream poets get promoted -- token stuff... There's a lot which is of interest in Harrison, but I don't actually like it, which is different. I have a lot of respect for Heaney, but I don't actually like it, which is different. I have a lot of respect for Heaney, but I think he is terribly over-rated. Charles Tomlinson was a major poet for me, whatever I mean by that, for a long time, though I am less impressed now; and... and... Can't think of his name. Poet from Launceston in Cornwall. Is he mainstream? He has written some wonderful poetry. There's an awful lot of shit too.

**CA:** And is he mainstream? The poet from Launceston.

**LU:** Charles Causley. That's his name. God knows. I am not sure what the term means. I find Clemo is more interesting, talking about Cornish poets. Sometimes I think that. As soon as you look closely at any example or set of examples, it begins to blur. And it gets mixed up with the experimental / avant-garde thing. There's another confusing term. I am coming to the conclusion that it is unuseful, often used by people who don't know really what they are talking about.

**CA:** What do you mean?

**LU:** I mean what I say. They speak of experimental poetry or avant-garde poetry as if it can be compared to or opposed to some other kind of poetry which is presumably a norm or a tradition or not experimental, bringing up the rear. I don't like the term avant-garde at all. I don't like its associations.

As to experiment, what, in any particular case, is the experiment? If we cannot say what the experiment is? then how come we are using the term? A great deal of poetry is experimental in another sense, perhaps every poet who still has some life in them is experimenting each time they start to make a poem. Just as every poet, hopefully, is innovating linguistically... Is innovation always and inherently good?

**CA:** Are you asking me?

**LU:** I am if you want to answer.

**CA:** I'd prefer to hear your answer.

**LU:** OK. Innovation is all the rage at the moment and not just in poetry; so it seems; and, as a result I think, it's increasingly meaningless as a useful term. I heard a talk by a person who was speaking about industry a few years back. She kept saying how important it was for industry to innovate and seemed to be saying that if you developed a culture of innovation then you could do without formal research. I was still pondering what a culture of innovation might actually mean apart from some kind of mental musical chairs; and how we are going to cope without anyone researching anything, just sales people and product assemblers; and someone asked the pertinent question: could you give us an example of such innovation?

It caused considerable perplexity. It was visibly perplexing the speaker and she tried to waffle her way out of it, or so it seemed to me; but the questioner wouldn't let it go. Eventually, she offered the example of that little plastic container you fill with washing liquid and put in the washing machine. That was it. Hardly the industrial revolution.

All these ideas -- well, they're not ideas -- all these words may or may not refer to ideas, but usually don't. When Gilbert Adair used "linguistically-innovative", whether or not he was the first, it had some punch, but then everyone uses it and it gets watered down. That's inevitable, I suppose. But

when loose and or worn out terms are used in generalisations, those statements that begin "The trouble with the mainstream is..." or "The trouble with the avant-garde is..." then it's hardly worth listening.

**CA:** Why did you use "Mainstream" as the name of a press?

**LU:** All sorts of reasons, all pertinent to what we are talking about. One of them was to defy those who define themselves and their friends as mainstream and so of main interest. It's the metaphor that's at fault. There are many rivers in the poetical landscape, perhaps. Always there's this drive to put everything in a hierarchical order, which falsifies the way things are. In this case, the metaphor assumes what everyone knows is untrue, that there is only one river. If people walked outside of towns, they'd begin to see how it is. There are dozens of them and if one is bigger now, in millennia it will be smaller; so the mainstream is an idiotic idea. It looks to me as if people can't let go of the deity as their big concept. Or maybe what calls itself the mainstream is just a canal. Canals are important, sure. They're good for trade, they're good for entertainment. But what actually makes the landscape is the rivers. What lasts is the rivers.

And I do not see, in the range of poetry that is currently presented by established presses and media, the heterogeneity that one finds in English literature over the last 600 or so years.

I would like to think that creativity and openness of those who have been published by Mainstream typifies the mainstream... if there was one... I painted myself into a corner there, didn't I!

**CA:** You said earlier that you see a political dimension to your work. In what sense?

**LU:** In every sense. You see --

**CA:** Everything is political, is that what you are saying?

**LU:** And are you saying that there is any activity which is not political? If so, please tell me what it is.

**CA:** We don't all think that everything we do is political.

**LU:** Maybe. Maybe we aren't all prepared to admit it. We aren't all happy. No, forget that. That isn't the same thing. I still don't know of any activity which does not have a political dimension and you haven't told me.

**CA:** But what is the political dimension of writing a poem? I'm interviewing you, Lawrence.

**LU:** Perhaps we are using the word "political" in different ways. I am using it to mean how we live together in a community, politics being the study and practice of how we live together in communities. That process is a

combination of public activity and private activity; but the privacy is of one's home so that there are still other people involved. How we negotiate and use that transition between privates and publics has major ethical implications. The private is not separable from the public. Each affects the other. In private there are communities too. The individual, within its body, interacts with siblings, with lovers, with parents, with children and with friends. Again, there are ethical implications. Each of us, solitary, is a community. We are not really unified beings. We may be free, but that does not mean that we are at liberty to do as we wish. We are responsible for our actions, answerable to ourselves and to others, and that includes failure to interact, as well as the effects of interaction... We are responsible for our actions. Therefore, any activity, and especially an activity which consumes a great deal of one's time, has implications for the propriety of one's behaviour in general...

Furthermore, one is answerable and responsible for what one says as a poet, though the word "says" may need some examination.

**CA:** So you're not speaking of party politics as such?

**LU:** Of course not.

**CA:** What do you think of party politics?

**LU:** As little as possible.

**CA:** You have no time for any of the parties?

**LU:** Not really. Perhaps there are fewer crooks in the Labour Party than there are in the Conservative Party, but I have no time for either, really. I voted Liberal Democrat at the last election. That was partly a perception that they have some integrity; but I would expect that to dissipate if they gained any greater power. I was inclined not to vote at all; but I was persuaded that the Liberal Democrats had some chance of beating the incumbent Conservatives. I'm talking about my own parliamentary constituency. Of itself, that is neither here nor there to me; but I disliked my last MP. He was personally rude to me and I believe him to have been generally arrogant and ineffective. I had lobbied him on a number of occasions and he always refused to even come to see me. A short walk from the chamber to the lobby. To one of his own electorate. I have written to him and received no answer at all. So it was worth the effort of going up the road, in fact someone drove me there, just to throw rotten fruit at him. *[LATER COMMENT: Another sidetrack caused by me and not stopped]*

**CA:** You speak metaphorically.

**LU:** Yes, but only because it hasn't been possible to do it literally.

**CA:** Otherwise you'd do it.

**LU:** If it were possible to do so without getting grief myself. Well, maybe. He was too much of a schmuck to go to any great trouble for. My main upset about that is that he'll get a pension; but I can't do anything about that.

**CA:** Why shouldn't he get a pension?

**LU:** Because he didn't do the job; and the pension of an MP is, I am pretty sure, non-contributory. That is, it is part of his pay. He was my representative and he didn't represent me. He claimed to be following his own conscience; actually he did what he was told. He was a nonentity. That's a large part of what it takes to do well in party politics, I don't even know what politics has to do with it.

**CA:** You don't have to answer this, of course, but I'll ask anyway: will you vote at the next election and, if so, how?

**LU:** I shan't vote, I think. If I do, I shall vote Liberal Democrat. I will do that if I think that the new bloke has done a good job. I believe in crediting good work.

**CA:** So you don't care who gets elected?

**LU:** I do, but I don't want it to be either Labour or Conservative. I don't have a good choice. Blair has promised all sorts of good things, but I don't believe him. We had nearly 20 years of rubbish with Thatcher and it only changed because the Labour Party made themselves like the Conservatives. What's the good of that? The problem wasn't the policies but the stupidity of the electorate who kept voting for these destructive policies. And that hasn't changed. The problem wasn't who was in power, but what they were doing with that power and that hasn't changed.

**CA:** You don't think Labour is any better than the Conservatives? I thought you were a socialist.

**LU:** So I am. So is anyone with any intelligence, I mean good understanding. They aren't socialists. They're not stupid but they are corrupt. Clever idiots. What has all this to do with poetry? This is nothing to do with politics, nothing to do with my world view.

**CA:** Well, I was hoping to see if I could get at how you see your writing fitting in to the political situation.

**LU:** The political situation is disastrous. Apart from the diminution of such freedoms as we have had, there is the change in the world situation -- the victory of American capitalism over whatever it was the Soviet Union had and the rest of the world, the cocacolonisation of China and so on. Then there's the consumption of natural resources by the west, the north, whatever one calls it; and the size of the world's population -- and that's a real problem.

We are becoming less democratic but the marketing types have persuaded the many that we are becoming more democratic. The world faces nuclear war, poverty, disease... & religious belief is on the increase.

**CA:** And you are against religion?

**LU:** It's irrelevant. The problem is our own stupidity.

**CA:** What's your solution?

**LU:** Ha! I don't have one; but having faced that question before after saying much the same thing to others, let me anticipate the next question and say not having a solution is no proof that the identification of the problem is false.

With the popularisation of I.T. it has become normative to speak of solutions with the implication that a problem always has a solution. Not all problems do have solutions. We all die. We've never dealt with that. Similarly, we are not as bright as we like to think; we are our own enemies.

I used to be active in all sorts of things -- trade union activity. Much good it did anyone. Short term it did. I helped keep a few people in work longer than they might have been, that sort of thing. But I have been more than a little abused by the very people I was trying to help; or else had to repeat my efforts repeatedly because the very people I was helping kept undoing what I was doing.

So now I'm out of all that and I keep myself largely to myself. I actually prefer to be on my own. I go to poetry performances and I walk.

**CA:** You say "performance" rather than "reading"?

**LU:** Yes. Though I am not talking about performance poetry or slam. I am talking about using the poem on a page as a score or jumping off point for the poem in performance. What's on the page is generally a recipe.

**CA:** But surely you don't learn that much from the experience of seeing a reading.

**LU:** Oh you do. With a lot of the promoted mainstream, as we've mentioned that, whoever they are, what you learn is that they're not very good at reading, or fairly unadventurous, and they are usually self-regarding. But with a poet paying attention to the poem, you get so much -- things for which there is no notation, gesture, micro changes of tone of voice and volume and speed, you witness the poet experiencing her poem and that can be extremely revealing.

**CA:** When you say her poem, are you thinking of someone in particular?

**LU:** No!

**CA:** You are lucky. You live in Greater London so you can go to readings regularly and there are a lot of them. People who live in small towns and villages can't.

**LU:** That's true. But it's true of paintings and sculpture. Do you think the galleries are invalid?

**CA:** No. Of course I don't, Lawrence! Honestly. But plastic art isn't so transient as a poetry performance.

**LU:** But music is. Shall we abandon concerts?

**CA:** All right!

**LU:** I'm serious. If it were possible for everyone to witness these things that would be marvellous, but it isn't. Some will immediately lurch to the stupid assumption that the practice is elitist when in fact the limitation is just a function of our physical natures. But there are tapes. We need more recordings and we need to get them distributed.

**CA:** And films?

**LU:** Maybe. I think personal accounts are more valuable actually. Films don't convey the visual to the degree that tapes convey the aural and there are problems and limitations there anyway

**CA:** Video?

**LU:** Video... film... I don't think there is much difference from this point of view. I can't pin it down, but I still think I'm right! I am open to persuasion and certainly wouldn't want to dissuade anyone from making films.

**CA:** What about the future?

**LU:** Sorry. No understanding. Please?

**CA:** What does the future hold for you... for poetry...

**LU:** No idea, Caroline. Sufficient unto the day is the poem thereof. I have given up... No, really, I am quite serious.

**CA:** Are you serious?

**LU:** Entirely. Why do you doubt me? Because I refuse to make prophecies?

**CA:** I was responding to your claim to have given up. You say you have given up. Are you serious?

**LU:** Entirely, as I have said.

**CA:** But you don't act like someone who has given up.

**LU:** Don't I? I feel like it. I haven't given up on everything...

Oh, you want more. Look, the details do not matter. That would just take us into unproductive autobiography. Poetry keeps me going. I can't see that the details are of any interest, except morbid interest. Have we finished?

[This section was cut here by agreement.]

**CA:** Lawrence, could you outline, as briefly as you like, your last few years, say the last decade or so.

**LU:** I'd left secondary teaching and gone into Further Education. I'd already been doing some part time FE teaching. It wasn't that much of a disruption for me. I'd changed jobs about every 18 months for some years --

**CA:** All of them teaching jobs?

**LU:** Oh yes. I'm no cop at anything else. But I taught all kinds of things, Literature, Language Awareness, Theatre, Media Studies, Photography, Computing, anything really to both keep myself in income and to avoid teaching conventional English, which drove me up the wall.

**CA:** I'm sorry to interrupt again, but you've quite taken my breath away. I've never heard all this. Were you qualified to teach all of that?

**LU:** Well, I didn't have teaching certificates in them all, but I was fine. I'd studied lots of that stuff. The computing, I was studying then. They funded me to study half a day a week because they were short of computing teachers. And actually that was how I came to leave secondary teaching. I was seconded, eventually, to study it full time for a year and went straight from that to a full time post as a lecturer. After a while the head of department job became vacant and I went for it and got it...

At much the same time my long term relationship broke up...

After 4 years as Head of Computing at my college, I was given sickness retirement and left teaching.

**CA:** Tell me more about the break up of your relationship.

**LU:** It's not interesting!

**CA:** Perhaps not. But some of the associated events are. I think a lot of your present views on things in general relate to that experience.

**LU:** It's confirmed some suspicions I had. My only worry about all this is that to tell it all would take a whole day.

**CA:** Give me the highlights.

**LU:** Well it was always a fairly turbulent relationship, but I quite like turbulence and I was for staying together. She wasn't. Retrospectively, I am

very glad that she wasn't. I was much better out of it. But at the time I was just for sticking at it. I tend to stick at things. I take a lot of time to commit to things and then I stick. Loyalty is one of my vices.

Some years into our time together, she started up a relationship, which she thought I knew nothing about, with a colleague at her work; and to my own astonishment I found I wasn't particularly jealous.

I was hurt.

I knew or thought I knew he wouldn't cope with her. She was very tiring. And I thought I'd wait it out. It wasn't how I wanted things to be and I am sure I was angry as well as hurt; but I wasn't going to get anywhere by raging; negative criticism just made her throw tantrums.

There came a day when she told me she wanted to separate; and I remember thinking how relieved I was. I'd have argued if I had any more to give; but I wouldn't want to compel anyone to live with me and I was tired out. I said ok and we rather sorted things out there and then, one evening after work, in a matter of minutes.

We weren't married. That was a problem. She owned the house and I had owned one. She left her husband for me, but somehow managed to make him leave the house.

Anyway I sold mine and spent the money on the house we shared, which was in a bad way.

We agreed that night I'm talking about that neither of us could afford to buy the other out. Between the two of us we made a very good living, but we spent it all as soon as we got it.

**CA:** What did you spend it on?

**LU:** Clothes. Restaurants. Books. Taxis. Travel. Those were her impulses rather than mine, except perhaps books and travel; but I was very happy to indulge. I was far and away the biggest contributor to the household income; but we agreed that we'd sell the house in the spring -- this was autumn -- and divide the money between the two of us. I didn't wish her ill and I was probably a lot to do with the break up. I'm not easy to be with long term *[laughter from Andrews]* as you *[Upton laughing]* may have noticed.

**CA:** You're actually very easy to be with.

**LU:** Maybe. Imagine living with me. And I think we had tired each other out because of our differences. You could either steadfastly ignore her, which is what her husband had done; or you could steadfastly resist her excess, which is what I had done. We were both very tired.

After a few weeks, things changed. She was got at by colleagues with agendas. She took it into her head that I had no claim on the house and asked me to leave. I refused. She said she'd take me to court. I told her not to be so silly. But her response was just to keep picking rows all the time.

**CA:** Why did you refuse?

**LU:** Because she knew damn well I did have an interest. She may have thought I didn't in law. I think she got a lot of bad advice, but then she asked the people who would tell her what she wanted to hear. She knew I had a moral claim. She'd roll on the floor, riven with guilt, chanting "I'm sorry, I'm sorry".

**CA:** Rolled on the floor?

**LU:** *[laughing a little]* Oh yes. She was quite demonstrative. And I didn't trust her. I trusted her less and less. I began to see things about her that I had not allowed myself to see before. I suppose it would have been the same before. You know that line? I think it's from Harlan Ellison. You ever fall in love with yourself?

**CA:** Some people do.

**LU:** Yes.

So life was quite lively and we didn't make much progress towards separation.

Also, we remained lovers, at her instigation, though we didn't sleep together.

**CA:** Really?

**LU:** Yes. It didn't occur to me as a possibility till she said it.

**CA:** What did she say?

**LU:** I think it was: Do you fancy a fuck, Lol?

**CA:** She called you "Lol"?

**LU:** Yes. The only one granted the privilege! Anyway, she offered her honour and I honoured her offer, as the limerick has it.

It reassured her that she had power over me; and it kept her loneliness away. Such nonsense. Otherwise, it was a very productive time for me. I threw myself into my new job, and did what I think of as very good things there; and I was writing a lot, I suppose that's what you are really after.

**CA:** Actually I am interested in all of it.

**LU:** Really? I think what I was writing then was very good. I stand by a lot of it still. I started going again to the *Writers Forum* workshops which I'd dropped out of. I went more frequently to *Sub Voicive* again. I'd begun to miss that too what with studies and with the sense that my relationship was breaking up

and that I ought to sort that out one way or the other; and I was happy to have the time to go back to those events. I found I couldn't always concentrate. I had been studying Modern Greek and abandoned that. I needed something.

At home, things got madder and madder. I hadn't actually helped. You see it became apparent to me that she had some idea of setting up a new relationship with this chap from her work. I knew him and his wife and I knew or thought I knew enough to know that was a daft idea. And it turned out I was quite right. Anyway, when I told her so, it made her angry. He wasn't going to leave his wife. Then I found out that the weekend before she had broken up with me he had left his wife! And he'd moved into a room just up the road from here. Some distance from my place, our place, but not that distant. This area was getting trendy and that attracted her.

And then, by some means or other -- I think I heard her talking to her sister, she can't speak quietly -- I realised that she had demanded he give a sign, by leaving his wife, that he was serious. Her side of the deal was that she would get me out of the house so he could move in. Only *[laughing]* I wouldn't go. Do you really want all this?

**CA:** Yes. *[Laughing]* Keep going. You're doing fine.

**LU:** I said I would go if we could have something in writing; but she was having none of that. She kept saying that my demand just showed how bad the situation was and in her turn demanded that I trust her. She would give me what I was due; but she couldn't say what it was or how she would decide. She must have thought I was daft. Sometimes I said that as she had been having an affair there wasn't much to trust. That got to her. But it wasn't the most diplomatic thing to say.

**CA:** Were you faithful to her?

**LU:** What's that got to do with it?... Blimey.

When she wanted her husband out, she just shouted and shouted at him until he went. They were both being unfaithful, she with me, maybe others; but she played on his sense of guilt and he went. Silly fool. It took three days. Just three days. And I went along with that. Not one of my noble moments. I think she assumed she could make me go the same way. She shouted. She hit me. She smashed things. I just kept saying let's do a deal or take me to court. She wouldn't. She pretended several times she would, but it was all waffle. Despite all the upset she caused herself, she hadn't had such a good time in years. She liked the attention of friends who were getting all sorts of vicarious returns out of us and she liked her own hysteria. One morning when we were both trying to use the bathroom, you know how small my bathroom is, and she said "I'm very tired with all this sleeping on floors; but it's fun too; it's a bit

like being a student, isn't it". I remember that ever so clearly. She was putting on a pair of tights, balancing on one leg.

**CA:** May I ask? Had you just made love?

**LU:** I can't remember. Quite possibly, but I can't remember. It had stopped being special. Though it was rarer than it had been. Much rarer. But it was foraging by then. I didn't get much out of it any more. It's a good question; but I don't know the answer. What I do remember is what she said and how.

At first I thought she was barmy. I'm talking about a fraction of a second; and then, I suppose, I took it as a kind of assault and mockery of me; and then I realised how fragmented it showed her to be. Not just the switch from one persona and mood to another, but her failure to see my point of view.

She soon got into saying I scared her. If she was scared, it was pretty daft to sneer at me; and for a moment that's how I took it. God knows what my face looked like, but she reacted to me, saying I didn't love her, had no interest in her -- all sorts of things. I had said nothing! And you think: Is this real? And somewhere along the way I found she was phoning up my friends and telling them all sorts of nonsense.

**CA:** What sort of nonsense?

**LU:** That I couldn't accept that she was finished with me. That I was still deeply in love with her and she was scared I might try to kill myself. That I had told her if she didn't give me her interest in the house, I would kill her. That sort of thing, if you know a category to include it all. Most people didn't say anything about these calls. Embarrassed, I suppose. I lost a lot of friends. I lost a lot when I criticised them for not telling me, when I heard, because they'd told someone else who told me. Sometimes I lost friends by just expressing to them my contempt for someone else for not telling me. And then they'd let me go. That is to say I found out who my friends were. I found out who the fools were. She lost a few too because some had the brains to ask for some kind of evidence or said that I didn't look to them like someone about to kill myself. Anyone who challenged her version in any way, if they were female, was asked by her: How can you say that as a woman?

There was a departmental answerphone at my work, one of those with an audio cassette where you could leave long messages; and I'd get into the office to find she had filled it up, raving. I'd walk out the house, quite possibly with everything quiet, even amicable, and walk to work. It's a pleasant walk which could easily take half an hour if I stopped to talk to the ducks on the ponds; and I'd find she'd gone on the phone as I left and sometimes she'd be on it still as I got in. My colleagues found it very embarrassing; and it interfered with their ability to work.

She told my next door neighbours that I was beating her up. They believe that Jesus died for their sins and took her in as their Christian duty. So she was next door. That was jolly.

**CA:** And you objected to that?

**LU:** No, not as such; but I objected to the consequences.

You want more, do you?

Well, let's see if I can explain it.

As with most people with a simple solution to everything; or, in their case, an account of reality into which they can fit everything, they don't test their beliefs. That is, it doesn't seem to me that they test it. They're always going from the particular to the universal and, worse, they subordinate their experiences to their prior beliefs.

So these two didn't look at the whole situation, even though, by the way, they are professional social workers - professionals again, and intelligent; but took a simplistic approach: this is a person in need of our charity, that was how she presented herself, therefore we shall give it.

So I was judged, and I was not assessed, not in a practical way.

He did come in and seek to counsel me not to commit suicide.

Again, it was the supposed victim's account which was not questioned. I suggested that they should consider the possibility she was lying, but that would have been failing in his duty. At one time or another he and his wife have had the power to remove children to places of safety; but they don't seem to have the first idea how to avoid being conned.

When I told him they were helping to make things worse, he gave me a sanctimonious lecture on his Christian duty and regretted that I would not let Jesus into my life. Or maybe that was her. He went away when I told him Jesus has been dead 2000 years. Meanwhile she, my ex, piled on her rediscovery of religious belief.

Others have told me that she'd said I prevented her going to meetings: she was brought up C of E and then became a Quaker.

Actually I had encouraged her. I got all the books from the Quakers when we set up together. I've still got them. I read them and tried to talk to her about it. All I got was: That's not the kind of Quaker I am. When I asked about the details of what kind of Quaker she was, she said it didn't matter. In retrospect, that was a pattern perceivable in much of her life; but I had been too smitten by her to see it.

I offered to go with her and she rejected that. My mother told me that my grandfather, who was an Anglican, used to go to Catholic services because

my grandmother was Catholic, saying it was all the same to him. I always liked that idea. I'd gone through my own fairly intense rejection of Catholicism and then got to the point where I don't really care whether people practice religion or not. But, in all the time we were together, she never went; but as soon as she was next door she was praying. Now maybe that indicates some terrible effect that I really did have on her; and I have considered that. But I don't think so. She may well have rediscovered some kind of faith. People do when they are up against it, and that applies to all of us, I suspect; but she was also one for ridiculous poses, the kind of things children say. She told me, once, that she had written many novels; but they didn't exist. She told me that she read Pamela every other year as a matter of course. It wasn't true. I think she supposed that as long as she tipped Jesus into every other sentence, she could keep her hosts happy. And so it was.

They didn't do anything when she made war on me. Before that, when she'd been in the house, she'd had to live with the atmosphere she created and she didn't have an audience. She wanted an audience. But she'd yell and scream at me and throw herself around in poses of spiritual abandon and I'd just go upstairs and write it all down. That calmed me down and left her sitting in her own mental shit. When it went quiet, I'd go down and make her a cup of tea; and everything would be ok for a while, as long as I didn't comment on her behaviour. She'd go off and stay with her lover for a while; but she wasn't prepared to share his room all the time. Good enough for him, but not for her! She wanted space and comfort.

I think she spent her time at the window next door. Once I was away for a week and she called the police to say she thought I might have killed myself because she hadn't heard any water running for three days. As someone said to me: What kind of a person listens to the use of next door's drains. In fact, she knew I was away. She thought I was with another woman and phoned everyone to ask where I was. When she couldn't find out, that just made her more angry! She told the police that my motive for suicide was that I was heart-broken at her leaving me. I think by then she believed it.

**CA:** Were you heart broken?

**LU:** Not at all. I was having a great time apart from her bullying.

I've got ahead of myself but I'll just say that, after the police broke in and established I wasn't there and hadn't been there, they left her. It was just before the start of term and I'd left a pile of clean work clothes and a folder of lecture notes, ready for when I returned. She tore up the notes, and that was all the team's timetables too, and interwove my clothes with bits of the glass from the window.

**CA:** You know what I am going to ask.

**LU:** I suppose you are going to express some kind of disbelief. Fine. I'll keep going. Unless you want me to stop. Of course, if you don't believe me, it makes no sense not to stop me.

By this time she had a solicitor who kept writing to me with all kinds of threats and I wrote back saying: Do your worst but remember that I am quite happy to leave. And I have all of that stuff.

As that went on, I'd get barmy phone calls from her: Do you know how much this is costing me in solicitors' fees?

I had no sympathy. She didn't need a solicitor anyway. And she wasn't making use of the one she had. They were milking her. What a dream for a crooked solicitor! A client who didn't want to reach a compromise. A client who wanted to settle scores for events that hadn't happened -- that's as far as I can work out what her account of our life together was. Is, maybe. She could have had the house to herself so easily; and I could only conclude that she didn't want anything in writing because she wanted to rip me off. One bit of her did. It was like dealing with a misbehaving class. Some friends advised me to walk away; but I wasn't going to do that.

**CA:** Principle?

**LU:** Something like that. Other times she'd ring me up and say: You're evil. Then, she'd hang up and then ring again and say it again, over and over. Sometimes she'd do that at 3 in the morning. We had an old-fashioned hardwired phone so you couldn't unplug it. If you didn't answer she let it ring for an hour.

If I came in late, she'd phone up and say: Where have you been? She was watching for me out of the window, you see.

I'm not quite sure of the chronology here. I'd need to look at my diary.

**CA:** You've told me you don't keep a diary.

**LU:** I don't and I never have, except then.

**CA:** Why did you keep a diary?

**LU:** As a way of staying sane by keeping mental order; as a way of avoiding unintentional distortion; as a defence against anything barmy she might do - I always had a feeling that I might need a record. And it was wise.

When she found out, late on, I had a diary, she went berserk. She couldn't just make her version without challenge. It limited the claims she might have made; and I am glad of that because there is no certainty she wouldn't have been believed.

**CA:** How did she find out? Did you tell her?

**LU:** I mentioned it at Marriage Guidance.

**CA:** I thought you didn't want to retrieve the relationship.

**LU:** I didn't, though I might well have continued if she'd changed her mind.  
Weakness.

I'd have liked to have reached some kind of consensus about what was going on. But, no, we went there because she told me she'd arranged for them to moderate our financial negotiations and I thought that was a good idea. When I got there, it was clear they knew nothing about any such arrangement. They were there to save our marriage and neither of us really wanted to save it. She wanted a witness while she raved at me. She liked the theatre of that. I think that day the buzz word was sadist.

Look. Eventually we did a deal, but not before she must have run up an enormous solicitor's bill; and, in so far as I can calculate it, the deal was less than I had offered to give her in the first place, even before she paid her solicitors. My total solicitor's bill, including administrative charges, including all professional fees, was way below £500. But then I wasn't paying them to sit and watch me make a fool of myself; and I wrote my own letters or there were no letters.

Anyway. We had a deal. Then I approached our existing mortgage company in order to do the paperwork; but, when I told her -- to keep her happy, I thought, she phoned them up and said we had changed our minds. I found that out afterwards. So I'm sitting there thinking there's a letter in the post and she knows there won't be one. And I get another letter from her bloody solicitors saying I am not fulfilling my side of the bargain; why haven't I got a mortgage? I phone up the mortgage people to ask them to hurry up and they say: But you've told us not to proceed.

Three times we went through that charade and all the time her solicitors were phoning mine raising all kinds of difficulties about unrelated matters. Fortunately my solicitors were as money-grabbing as hers and not at all keen to work for nothing; I had given them explicit instructions to the effect that I would not pay for anything at all unrelated to the transfer of ownership of the house.

More?

**CA:** Yes, go on.

**LU:** OK. I got a financial advisor and met with her at work; and she got me a mortgage from a company 50 miles from London. My solicitors told hers that I had the money, but refused to say from whom, on my instructions. She told me that if I didn't tell her the source of the money the deal was off. I said ok and that if she didn't follow through then my offer was reduced by something or other. I think it was a thousand. Nothing happened. I mean that we went ahead.

My neighbours had had enough. She was driving them up the wall, shouting at me down the phone in the middle of the night, in their house, crashing around in fake hysterics. I think, I don't know, but I think that when she said she was buying a flat with the money I was paying her they asked her to leave. She thought they'd look after her until she was ready, I suppose; but she'd demonstrated that she was together enough to buy a house and, most importantly, that she had let what is now my house go. Up to then she had been saying: It's the family house; I raised my children there; I can't leave it. Convincing stuff unless you knew she'd been nagging me to agree to move for a couple of years. I suspect now, by the way, that moving had been a way to get me to agree to selling the house -- I'd have been homeless on moving day if I hadn't seen it coming.

**CA:** Really?

**LU:** Yes, really. And then she let them see that she was in far from treacherous waters. So they pushed her out.

It was pretty near the transfer. Once the deal was done everything went quickly, except when she sabotaged it, as I have said, because there was no chain.

Then, she turned up on the doorstep. I had been told that I couldn't prevent her from entering, which I had been doing, just to get some kind of peace, and must let her in. So in she came: "I've come to tell you how evil you are." That was the start.

At one point, quite soon, she suggested that we go to bed; and within seconds, even while I was refusing, this had become her coming back. She forgave me! The whole tone of what she was saying was switching minute by minute. It was like exercises in a theatre workshop.

It was horrible.

At the time, I thought she was just scared. Like me, she was in her 40s, but this was the first time she'd have been alone. Her lover had dropped her by then; and he was talking about going back to his wife, which he eventually did.

She was selling her interest in what had been her marital home to me -- and now she had to go through with the purchase of her flat. She'd been living with mum and dad when she got married.

**CA:** You said you couldn't afford to buy her out.

**LU:** That's right. But you see, she had plans for herself and this chap. They seem to have started to include her staying put; so she wanted to buy me out, the version of her which knew I had a valid interest; so she went for a low valuation -- one of the valuations, which I knew nothing about until later,

actually had her lover's name and address on it -- and I took that value and used it as mine. She could hardly turn round and say she didn't accept her own figures, though now I am surprised she didn't try. At the same time my salary had increased; and in any case I was just so weary of it all I couldn't face moving as well. This had been going on for two years. So I bought her out even though it was financially tight.

**CA:** OK. Sorry to interrupt.

**LU:** Don't be.

I think or I thought and sometimes still think that she was suddenly scared. She'd got married as a teenager, as I just said, and had never been on her own. But now I think that maybe all she was doing was trying to get forensic evidence against me; of rape. Whatever her motive, I was revolted. I knew by then she'd been coming out with this nonsense about loving her so much I wanted to kill myself. She'd tried to get me to accept that I had no right to any return on my investment in the house for ten years - yes, that was their final offer, sorry, nine years... their first and final offer, a small payment and then a smaller payment a decade later; and while I was waiting I could go into rented accommodation. I'd had my character slandered, work clothes torn up and put in the rubbish, glass put in my clothes, professional papers destroyed and so on and so on and here she was saying she still loved me and come to bed.

Caroline, I'm actually boring myself. I've told this story so often. I'm going to do this quickly. She said if I didn't do as she said and let her back, she'd go to the police and say I'd beaten her up. I told her she must do as she saw fit --

**CA:** I imagine you said "Fuck off"

**LU:** No. I didn't. I said a lot of hurtful things, but not that.

**CA:** What did you say?

LU: Oh nothing really. Well, quite a lot. Nothing productive. The truth as I saw it. Some petty things. I said the only use she'd be was dead and then she could be used as fertiliser. Childish stuff. I did say that I understood it was usual, where money changes hands for sexual favours, to negotiate a fee before hand rather than presenting a bill after twelve years. That did go home. I know that because it was repeated to me that she said Lawrence called me a prostitute.

What I kept saying over and over again, loudly, and pleading sometimes, was that I wanted her to go.

She kept trying to grab hold of me.

She kept saying Kiss me! Kiss me! Hold me!

She was heavily made up and half starved. I think she'd managed to develop an eating disorder. A sort of Princess Di haircut, too. She looked a little bit like a resurrected corpse in a Hammer Film and she had looked very beautiful without make up. She didn't need make up.

I really was revolted.

She was uncanny and eerie and I didn't trust her.

I made it quite clear she should go and kept trying to get away from her. If she tried to touch me, I hit her hands away; when she gave me space, I walked away. And she kept following me. I went in the dining room and she tried to follow me, barging at the door.

I'll miss a lot of this out. I've got tapes of the police interviewing me about it if you want a reliable account; but I'll come to that. Let me skip. She threw herself on the floor and said oh oh he's hit me in the stomach oh I'm in so much pain.

**CA:** And you hadn't hit her.

**LU:** No! It was all nonsense. I called a good friend and told him and he came over. After I'd called, she got up and called a hanger on of hers and said I'd beaten her up and then she went and lay down again.

She really got into the role. While these poor sods were motoring out into the sticks where I live she's calling out to me in a sanctimonious voice "I forgive you for what you have done to me, but I am going to have to protect other women from your violence". I didn't answer; she was just rehearsing. I stayed out of the room she was in.

My mate got there first and dealt with her friend when he arrived till he took her away; and he, my friend, stayed for some time, chatting with me. I think he was worried about me.

Then my solicitor was told of new demands to do with furniture and fittings and that she was thinking about whether or not to cooperate with the police. The clear implication was of blackmail. Give me what I want or else. I stonewalled that.

Subsequently I found that she had been going to the police for six years or so, that is long before I thought there was anything amiss, reporting domestic violence and refusing to make a formal complaint; so this whole wheeze had been in preparation for some time, just in case she needed it. It was a set up from the beginning; and in preparation from before she took her lover, as far as I can tell. I suspect she planned the taking of a lover and just waited till one turned up.

**CA:** Did she cooperate with the police.

**LU:** Oh yes! It took another two years to go through the courts. Cooperate? She was driving it. And the police blocked me at every step. They withheld documents etc. I made complaints and the complaint was referred to that police station, Sutton, so they investigated themselves and found I was making unfounded complaints. My solicitor blocked me.

My ex boasted to someone that her solicitor and mine were really getting on well; and my solicitor told me to plead guilty. So we know what getting on well means, though I don't understand how that came about.

The only indication I got was from a police sergeant who indicated he didn't believe her story. I asked him why he was acting on what he didn't believe and his answer was "A woman accusing a man of violence? That's jobsworth". That wasn't on the record of course. No one else heard it apart from a constable.

I changed my solicitor and things improved somewhat; but I could write a few hundred pages of horrors if that's what we were doing. In court, when we eventually got there, my barrister got a confession from the doctor who had written the report supporting the accusation: that she hadn't actually made an examination. Her report had basically been dictated by the patient, who told her what she would see if she examined her. I've got her statement if you want it. It's a lie. My ex is a powerful woman and she gets her way unless you stand up to her. Do you want me to say the doctor's name so she is in the text? Oh, the interviewer shakes her head with an ironic smile. All right, I won't then.

The Crown Prosecution Service tried to stop me presenting forensic evidence, but they lost that fight. We got a forensic scientist, one who usually works for the police, very respectable, and his view was that the most likely interpretation was self-injury, three bouts of it, spread over about a month, and that however they were caused --

**CA:** What were caused?

**LU:** Oh. They had photographs of her covered in bruises. The photos were taken about a month after the supposed attack. And the police were too stupid to ever ask if the bruises were what they seemed to be. They tried to say that the bruises were the result of my hitting her hands away, but they were in the wrong position. Maybe they weren't stupid. Maybe they were just keen to see me convicted for their own glory.

It's quite sad really. Sad in the colloquial sense. That night eventually she turned up on the doorstep of her ex-lover, after leaving my house. I found that out during the trial. She stayed the night. When I first saw the photos, I thought he must have hit her. I thought he was quite capable. But then I had to face the probability that she stalled and stalled the police, bashing herself

up till she thought she looked bad enough. While it was coming to trial her mother died. Her mother had cancer and she was always scared she'd get it. She must have been really low. And she found the experience of being cross-examined awful.

**CA:** How do you know?

**LU:** I lived with her, shared a bed with her, for twelve years and I watched her being cross-examined. And anyway *[laughing]* after a few minutes she said to my barrister "How can you do this to me? How can you do this as a woman?" Answer the question please. Then she says "I forgive you" and turns her back. She faced the wall for the rest of the cross-examination, refusing to speak, though they didn't leave her there long.

**CA:** Did the judge make her speak?

**LU:** No. I think he found it illuminating. They left her answering with her back to them. And my barrister just said No more questions. But that's how she would always behave, that sort of thing, when she had no answer. She wasn't very good at saying she was wrong. And she couldn't say she was wrong then anyway, could she; and I think by then she'd realised she was going to be taken apart. She'd created the situation.

The starting point was a submission of documents which contradicted her evidence about the background to our dispute. As I recall, there was a letter from me to her, putting the lie to one of her crucial statements, her whole reason to justify going to see me; she denied seeing the letter; which denial was followed by a copy of her reply, showing she had seen it -- I think that's what happened, but I'm getting foggy; I had barrowloads of information, and evidence, most of which was never needed; and the next thing she was given was a map-to-a-scale of the house marked up from her account of the supposed attack -- the point of that was what she had described could not physically have taken place as she described it; and it was going to go on, this battery of challenges to her story, which would have been improvised. Her story would have been improvised.

She's a very good story-teller.

It was really quite awful, or would have been if she hadn't given up trying to answer.

But it had to be done. She was lying, but she had the police and Crown Prosecution Service behind her. They must have known she was lying. What kind of a lunatic beats up someone and then gets an experienced forensic scientist to look at the evidence as a defense?

So, when I fought for that, my feeling is that anyone who had believed her would have started to have doubts. But they weren't going to let a little thing like perjury get in their way. They were professionals!

**CA:** All right!

**LU:** Anyway, there it is, the many servants of the monarch ranged against me, on their terms, and with their resources. I had to destroy her credibility. Actually it wasn't very hard to do. It can't have been very pleasant for her. But I sanctioned it and I gave the barrister ideas of the most effective ways of doing it.

I'd treated her statements to heavy textual examination and exegesis, as if I were doing a heavy lit crit, and passed pages of notes to my barrister. I think I knew every flaw in the account and it was full of flaws.

I seem to remember my barrister being quite surprised when I advanced the theory that we don't necessarily know the layout of our own homes, not in such a way that we could draw them to scale. At first she didn't want to trust to that; but she did as I asked and sure enough we got my accuser to describe the house as it had been when she moved in first, not as it was ten years later with the improvements that had been made. She described a door that didn't exist and effectively described herself walking through a wall.

You don't say: tell me what happened in the house as it is now; you just say: tell me what happened and then they describe it remembering how the house was. That doesn't happen if you are really remembering. It does happen if you are making it up

So, if she'd submitted to the questioning, she would have had to describe the supposed events in detail without the actual house in front of her; whereas I had been able to answer her lies and help prepare questions by direct reference to the house. She'd planned and planned right up to the events and then improvised; and that was her downfall. If it was a downfall. She's probably got another mug by now. But at the time of the trial she was in pretty bad shape. My barrister started on that line of inquiry; the liar saw where it was going and that was it. But of course the prosecution wouldn't let go. She hated me. A shrivelled up thing, she was. This was obviously proof of how much psychological damage I had done. Christ!

I'm not sure exactly what my barrister had in store; I left the actual cross-examination decisions to her -- she was, after all, a professional! but some of the possibilities we had discussed were real blinders; and I saw my ex just wilt as she realised what was happening.

For the first time in all those years she didn't have people saying oh that's terrible, without question; for the first time she was challenged just as the police should have challenged her if their hands weren't so deep in their trousers pockets; so she did the only thing she knew and threw a kind of tantrum.

**CA:** Did you feel sorry for her then?

**LU:** Not then. I was *[laughing]* delighted. Well maybe I was sorry in the background; but what was in my mind was that so serious were the injuries she was claiming I faced up to five years in prison, losing the house, the job, everything, if I was found guilty; so when she started to bugger it up I was very happy

**CA:** Was that ever a serious possibility? That you would go to prison?

**LU:** Well, it depended on a jury, which is a lot less biased than a magistrate; but I have no great faith in them. They're chosen from the same pool that gave us sequential Thatcher victories. Anyway, they did find me not guilty and in double quick time.

**CA:** What happened to her?

**LU:** Nothing. I'm surprised she didn't get mentioned in the new years honours for that level of lying. She didn't let go either. I had lots of trouble after that. I don't know if she was calling in favours from people or just blackmailing them, but all sorts of shit hit me. Maybe she got people to freelance. A lynch mob is fairly easy to organise, I believe.

**CA:** Like what? What sort of things.

**LU:** Like repeatedly phoning me up months after she'd been exposed as a perjurer; so that I had to change not just my home number but even phone company. I only stopped her doing the same at work by telling her I would make a formal complaint to my principal that I was being harassed by an employee of another college.

**CA:** Would they have done anything?

**LU:** They'd have had very little choice; and I could always have made a complaint directly to the principal of her college. If I told you the rest of it, you'd accuse me of paranoia.

**CA:** Not necessarily.

**LU:** Believe me.

Anyway, I turn it all into poetry. And that's the only interesting thing. Through all this only a few people stuck by me. That has been illuminating. The police malpractice only confirmed what one knows. The circumlocution office opened my eyes too.

**CA:** The circumlocution office?

**LU:** The law. Or, I could say, I have seen the spider and drunk.

**CA:** You're bitter then.

**LU:** Realistic. If it sounds bitter, that's because most views of our self-appointed masters are so over-sweetened. It's painful not to distort oneself

either way, into complacency or into reaction; but I try. God that sounds so pompous. Cut that out.

**CA:** You say that you've turned this into poetry. Can you tell me about that?

**LU:** Did I say that? Oh. Well, yes, I did, I'm right! It's not a one to one transfer. It comes into things. It's a reading of the world via verifiable detail; an acknowledgement that almost everything we are told is a lie, or probably so; that our brains are dysfunctional once we abstract from the selfish; that we could do something about that, except that our brains are dysfunctional once we abstract from the functional and selfish.

In some ways it'll only be an intensification. It certainly won't be or will rarely be the subject of what I am saying.

**CA:** But you think your lover conspired against you.

**LU:** No. I know it. The evidence is there. I've got her statement at home. There is a difference between not having evidence and people not accepting the evidence or refusing to look at it because they don't like the conclusion. Come over and have a cup of tea some time and I'll walk you through the important paragraphs of her statement, a few hundred words, concerning the events which supposedly took place between my kitchen and my living room. It's quite clear. She told lies and they took them as truth. She gave them photographs and they gave her belief -- beads and mirrors from the nice Christian lady who doesn't vocalise her own agenda.

I suspect one reason she went to the police in the first place was my contempt for them. She didn't like my opinion; and she also saw that it gave her an advantage; or she thought it did; she thought it was a weakness. She found it quite shocking as she got to learn how much I despised them, and still do, being the good little bourgeois she always has been. She is the kind of person they are paid to protect.

**CA:** Did you not love her?

**LU:** Madly; but then she didn't exist. I might as well have fallen in love with an actress in an advertisement. It was all an act. A very clever person. All her desire was to be thought well of; and she became -- not other people's opinion of her but --- but what she thought other people thought of her.

It's all fashion and newfangledness. There was no person to love.

I have only ever seen her self-righteously angry over two things - once someone compared her to Linda Snell, in *The Archers*, which is a very good comparison but limited, and once she thought I compared her to Emma Bovary and shouted at me for five minutes -- which, when I thought about it, was the most illuminating piece of information about herself she ever gave me.

Unfortunately, she hung on, hoping I'd kill myself. My love had died as a passion long before she fell out of love with me; and it died as I saw her scheme; but still she hung on, even after her humiliation in public, manipulating people to try to hurt me.

There was nothing I could do. When she finally took her stuff, I was advised not to be there and she must have thrown every possession I had on the floor.

I called the police and they started taking notes.

As they began to realize this was a situation they had created, and that also it was evidence against her – this was before the trial -- they stopped taking notes and I never heard anything again. I didn't chase them; they'd only have given me more grief.

**CA:** And what were these other things she did.

**LU:** They were -- really rather boring. They were the kind of things which are claimed to have happened by people about to be sectioned under the Mental Health Acts. It was very clever to keep doing effective but petty things; because if I tell anyone then they know for certain I have lost my mind.

I think they have stopped now; so that when I get a threatening letter or a parcel goes missing, I tend to assume now that it's just the idiocy of the world; but at the time, she would tell me where the next hit was coming from and in it came.

She named my new line manager before she was appointed -- my friend has got the job and she knows all about you; she'll get you. And so she did.

You just try to pay your council tax this year, that was another one. And so it was.

They weren't boring at the time, but they are now.

What is interesting is that people allow themselves to be used.

What is using them is just a swollen self-regarding balloon. But they take it from their politicians and their employers; so why not from their companions?

When I look at my **Wire Sculptures** I see a lot of this, but it's not explicit. If it were, the book would be unreadable. I know. I've had two goes at writing it up and both have been unreadable. I'd have to fictionalise it in order to make it readable.

And I see it coming into **Human Tissue**, which is a new set I am writing.

The other way it all comes into things is that I tend to be more solitary than I was. I go for very long walks.

**CA:** What do you mean by long?

**LU:** All day every day sometimes. All night sometimes when there's a moon. The summer after the trial I walked half way across Greece but *[laughing]* Greeks kept trying to give me lifts! I walked and I bussed to be accurate.

**CA:** Sleeping rough?

**LU:** Sometimes, but usually cheap rooms. Odd you ask that. I quite like comfort, but I can do without it. I slept rough rather than be exploited and, more often, when I buggered it up. A farmer let me stay in an abandoned farmhouse. That was good. I could have stayed there and just developed roots. I like the mental space you get with solitary walking or staying in one place. He didn't actually let me stay there; he forced me, with desperate kindness, to stay there. Another time I went back to a village I'd been with her and hired a room -- we always went in the small posh hotel -- and I stayed there in a white room for a month.

**CA:** Didn't you go out?

**LU:** Oh yes, all the time. A stray dog and I adopted each other one year. I went back and back.

I'd get up early and walk as far as I could and sit, preferably under an almond tree or a fig tree, and then in the evening walk back. But my base was this sparse clean room to which I went back --

**CA:** You like cleanliness?

**LU:** Personal cleanliness. I could take up residence in a running shower. I don't care about tidiness and dust. Well, you've seen my kitchen surfaces! But the room was cleaned each day; and I had only taken a small rucksack, so all I had was a notebook and the book I was reading.

**CA:** Which was what?

**LU:** Ovid *Metamorphoses*. One of my favourites. When I went to Athens one year I stayed in a Hotel called "Pythagoras"!..

I'd see people come and go, but I'd stay; and then at the last minute when I hardly had time to get back in time to start teaching I'd get a ferry. One time it took me forty hours without a break to get back I was so far away from everything -- on a rock near Rodos with a ticket from Thessaloniki Airport

**CA:** I have no idea how far that is.

**LU:** Far. I'd assumed I could get a boat north and then get something to Thessaloniki, but that would have been too simple. I had to go to Piraeus and then get to Salonika. And I didn't find the boat as restful as I should because I spent most of the time worrying I was going to miss the train. Which I did. That was when I decided to have a day or two in Athens at the end of

holidays. Mind you, that was the plan with Thessaloniki! and I just left it too late.

**CA:** How long was the boat journey to Piraeus?

**LU:** It took about eighteen hours. You're chasing the sun so the sunset goes on for a long time. That's the best bit. I wrote stacks about all that, but it wasn't very good.

**CA:** So you missed your plane.

**LU:** No! I missed the train but I still got to the airport. I went by road.

[end of tape or session]

**CA:** I want to run through a few of your more recent imprints. I've picked them up here and there and I want to try to get to an accurate picture of what they did and how they were used. Let's start with *A Reasonable Man Printing*

**LU:** Well, that's not one of my presses

**CA:** Is it not?

**LU:** Lilian Ward ran that in the early 80s. 15 or more years ago. I worked with her and we were very close personally and most of the publications were mine; but it wasn't my press. It was cheap and cheerful to the nth degree, it came to an end and Lilian's dead...

**CA:** *Älv Bokförlag*. That's yours isn't it?

**LU:** Yep. I was in Sweden and someone gave me the opportunity to use an ink duplicator and make a publication or two. So I did. I had another press too but I can't remember what I called that. That was even further ago. *Älv Bokförlag* was some time in the 70s.

**CA:** What does it mean, *Älv Bokförlag*?

**LU:** I know what I mean, but I am not sure a Swede would agree with me. It was my attempt to say "Elf Books". It barely existed as a separate operation.

**CA:** *Call this poetry*.

**LU:** You're doing this alphabetically, aren't you. Chronologically would have made more sense... Anyway, *Call this poetry*. This was going to be a major press but I started to reduce the amount of self-publishing I do. It replaced *Pointing Device* and we should speak of that.

**CA:** We'll come to that. *Drunk in a brewery*?

**LU:** I was asked for some poems by a magazine. I sent them on paper and offered them on disk. They said, we don't need that, and then published such

a mess and because of such fundamental misunderstandings, that I concluded, as the common phrase has it, that they couldn't get drunk in a brewery. They were poems I wanted available in correct form so I published them myself. I created a specific press for the purpose both because it didn't fit in with the plans I had for Pointing Device and because it gave me the opportunity to be rude to the editors who had made a mess of my poetry.

**CA:** OK. *Faik Editions*

**LU:** In my book **Karben Fleem Is Not Often**, which was a graffito I saw in a pub toilet, I included a list of "Lawrence Upton's Major Works" - all of them fake of course. One was "Tom's Cruise for his Uncle's Craze"... I had an idea that I would write them all; and then, it was very much in the air, I had the idea to get other people to write them. This is a long time ago, by the way. The only person willing to write such a book and let me put my name on it, that was what put people off, was cris cheek. So he wrote and I published **tales of cristian endurance** which had cris's subtitle **of meissen men**. And for completeness sake, we had a fake publisher too. Faik Editions. Cris litho-printed a card cover so it seemed to have some substantive existence. At one point we had a fake editor who would write you fake letters!

**CA:** *In Lieu Publications?*

**LU:** This was during the 80s when I was doing the middle class family bit. I published myself in lieu of a publisher. Just before that I'd had publishers - *Zimmer Zimmer, Writers Forum, Tapocketa, Lobby, Galloping Dog, A Reasonable Man* - and then that just stopped. So I had "In lieu Publications"; but I also published in lieu of everything else. A lot of it was bundles of tractor feed paper with a staple through it or sometimes without the sheets even separated and no staple.

**CA:** *Leper Press*

**LU:** This would be 92 through to 94. I was a bit of a leper. All that stuff you have already asked me about. I can't imagine you'll want to keep that so I'll add that my ex-lover was phoning people and visiting them telling them what she said were the realities about me. I don't know much of it but drunken violence was a large part of it; brain damage due to drug abuse was another good one; and that had led some bad feeling and a lot of embarrassment. Most people didn't want to be near me. Alaric Sumner was an exception. I'd rather mention those who stood by me and Alaric wasn't swayed by that shit; and, at the risk of embarrassing him, I don't think the man knows how to put his reputation or his comfort before friendship. So I published as *Leper Press*... I wasn't an out and out leper; but enough that I thought I would name it. Move on please.

**CA:** *Mainstream...* I think we've covered that. *Mondegreen?*

**LU:** You have Mondegreen? Where did you get that from?

**CA:** I don't know. What's the problem?

**LU:** No problem, but I am surprised. It hasn't done anything yet and I didn't know anyone knew I was thinking of using it. Never mind. It doesn't exist yet. Next one. I'm quite enjoying this. It's a good game.

**CA:** Yes, you're smiling. You don't often smile.

**LU:** Nothing to smile about. Come on, next one!

**CA:** *Press Press*

**LU:** You have done your homework. I can't even remember when I used that. Must be a couple of decades ago. It was a one off. I published a pamphlet, didn't want to keep having the same name, and plucked the obviously throwaway name "Press Press" out of the air.

**CA:** *Pointing Device?*

**LU:** This was around the end of the 80s, start of the 90s. I wanted a new press and this name seemed both to say "I am telling you the way significant writing is going" and "I.T. is important. In fact, it worked most effectively on the first meaning because then PCs were still fairly rare and most people still didn't know what a pointing device is.

So for a while it was my main outlet. My press. All the file names for it on my computers started with the letters PD and I had a lot of grief with a nasty idiot at work who shared those initials. He was then appointed over me, not that he knew anything about computing, or humanity, and he began to destroy the quality of my department with errors due to his misapprehensions combined with deliberate sabotage. This was one who would destroy records and then ask for them. I couldn't bear to be using anything which denoted him attached to writing I valued so I had to stop using the press name.

**CA:** *RWC?*

**LU:** Much the same time. My magazine. I think it did good work. Read Write Create. RWC. I am winding it down now. I think it has served its purpose.

**CA:** So now your main press is... Call this poetry? or Mainstream?

**LU:** Mainstream, although both still exist I suppose. I would prefer not to publish myself so much as I have done.

**CA:** Why is that?

**LU:** Two reasons. One reason is editorial. It is valuable to get someone other than oneself to choose one's poems for publications. Even publishing oneself is an act of selection; but being published oneself subjects the writing to two selections, oneself and the publisher. So cutting down on one's self-

publishing is a way of applying a more reliable filter... Is that clear? It sounded a bit muddled.

**CA:** No, it was quite clear. You said there were other reasons. What are they?

**LU:** One other reason. That's distribution. If I publish myself the majority of people I reach will be the people I have already reached. Another publisher is likely to bring me new readers.

**CA:** What about the old readers?

**LU:** Many of them will come along. If a few drop out maybe they're not that interested anyway. Maybe I am just good at getting them to buy my books... I used to really hassle people, you know. Nowadays I take a take or leave it approach really. *[laughing]* My sales have dropped greatly, but at least I know the copies of things that are bought are going to people who want them. Sometimes I even give them away and make a loss, but I wait to see if they are willing to buy them first.

**CA:** Why give them away?

**LU:** They're as poor as me

**CA:** And are they all people who agree with you?

**LU:** In what way?

**CA:** Politically, for instance. Or poetically.

**LU:** I'm not sure how you can be consistently in agreement with me poetically because I am making it up as I go along. I think agreeing with someone's poetics is posthumous... or always partially misguided. I mean maybe they just stopped thinking and went static. You could agree with where they stopped, I suppose, if you were into necrophilia. Otherwise they'll change and you're still stuck with your set of changes which are almost certain to be different.

**CA:** Lawrence! There are lots of poets who don't change their methods much and still have readers.

**LU:** I didn't say methods, I said politics... Or stopped thinking. Surely that's what I said. It's what I meant. And I didn't say necrophilia is rare... But there is also the difficulty of clearly apprehending what they are doing poetically... What one can latch on to is the kind of poetic line a poet is following. You see this all through history, that someone is highly-rated in their life and then later forgotten. The perspective of history is likely to be quite different to a contemporary view; and part of that is misapprehension... part of it is the way the work adds up in total... a great deal of it is curatorial politics of course... But, to come back to one of your questions, agreement isn't in it.

**CA:** And another part of the question was: Do they agree with you politically?

**LU:** I don't know. I doubt it. The politics is bound up with the poetry, but it's the poetry we read. Politics is discussion and rhetoric and policy. That's not poetry. Politics is of its time much more than poetry.

**CA:** What is poetry?

**LU:** Is poetry what.

**CA:** You tell me.

**LU:** Yes, that could be.

**CA:** What could be?

**LU:** Yes, what could be...

**CA:** You're playing games!

**LU:** A good basis for poetry

**CA:** Well, ok; but could you be more serious?

**LU:** I am very serious...

**CA:** OK. Earlier you said that anyone who is intelligent is a socialist. Do you stand by that?

**LU:** Anyone who is really using their intelligence.

**CA:** So anyone who is not a socialist is unintelligent.

**LU:** They are not using, or they are abusing, their intelligence.

**CA:** There are some very clever people who would disagree.

**LU:** There are all kinds of intelligence; and it remains intelligence if it is abused; and all kinds of socialism. I don't care whether they have signed up or not. I'm just saying that anyone who is not inclined to a sharing secure non-combative society without massive personal wealth and hereditary power is a bit damaged in the head, damaged that is as compared to their potential.

**CA:** How does this relate to poetry?

**LU:** Ah! Possibly not at all. Possibly totally. Poetry is so slippery when we try to judge it by categorical thought... Whatever we do logically is potentially damaged in one way or another... And if we approach poetry logically, as a set of tracts, it won't work. It's like a pin man in a book trying to see into the room the book is in.

**CA:** An image you have used in a poem.

**LU:** ... I think so, yes; it seems to me to be a potent image. I try to be aware that there is much we do not see that is nevertheless present without taking a supernatural position...

**CA:** So you don't mind that Pound was a fascist?

**LU:** I mind very much, but it doesn't affect -- and *[laughing]* it affects my reading of him; but the poetry remains the poetry. It's a problem, I agree; and that's the potency of poetry. Much of his nonsense can be heard up and down the country and it's pernicious and useless; but poetry takes the content and presents it in a different mode. Yeats is similar. A lot of what he is saying is bollocks.

**CA:** So you wouldn't be in favour of writing a socialist poetry?

**LU:** Wouldn't know how to start. Wouldn't want to start. Can't write; won't write.

**CA:** Or Capitalist.

**LU:** Or Capitalist. The politics is in the poetry. I think anyone who denies this is... fooling themselves... or using the word politics or some other word in a completely different way to me... or just not paying the kind of attention to the world that poetry demands. We are social animals and so everything we do is to do with how we behave... But, I thought we'd dealt with this. Look! You can stand up and say right on things and get the audience with you or make little homilies in line with fashion and have yourself quoted or turned into a hymn; but to pull that off as decent poetry you must at least believe what you write with all of yourself, no room for doubt or questioning; I am all for doubt and questioning, mind you, but I am talking about poetry here; and even so people read what they want to read. Look at how distorted the image of Blake is.

**CA:** I think people find a lot of what he writes difficult.

**LU:** So it is. I don't see why it has to be easy.

**CA:** He could have made it easier.

**LU:** I doubt that you are right.

**CA:** Let me develop that if I may, but with regard to you... No, I am not going to make any comparison between your work and Blake's! I've read a fair amount of your poetry including much that hasn't been published and one thing that strikes me is that what you call the notational rules change from poem to poem sometimes.

**LU:** I think that's true. I used to look for unifying notational systems and have come to the conclusion that anything I might settle on would stifle me so now the layout on the page et cetera et cetera is one of the variables of the poem.

**CA:** But that's creating another barrier for the reader.

**LU:** No! It is a barrier. What causes it is the real barrier. I haven't made it; it's there.

**CA:** But you don't signal which mode you are using.

**LU:** I don't know what they are. The writing is a matter of finding out what I am doing so often. After a while I sometimes manage to improve on the original thing because by then I have some idea of what I am doing. But by then one is looking for a way out. You know, finish what you are writing and then put your pen down!

**CA:** But if you persisted with a style you would have a chance of saying what you have to say in a mode that would become familiar to your readers.

**LU:** Christ! Familiar to the classifiers... Apart from anything else, the way you say a thing alters what you are saying, adds to it, changes it, makes it possible even. If it weren't that way, we'd have one book of poems and that'd be it. It's not as if what I do is that radically different --

**CA:** I'd have to disagree!

**LU:** Well, what was I going to say? Not different to what? Never mind. I know this isn't what they've told you in classes, but you know that all they have to go on is what they've found lying around and managed to roll up into little balls.

**CA:** Dear me.

**LU:** And they have to move them into place backwards; so they can't see where they are going... Either that or you get the parasites who burrow into you and kill you so they can survive.

**CA:** And that's all you think of poetry teachers, is it?

**LU:** A few are ok. Some are symbiotic. Some of my best friends can be found under the ancient stones... There are those who live on you without being destructive but eating the parasites. That's ok. I don't mind having a co-operative teaching bird on my head... But let's remember they're really dinosaurs.

[end of tape or session]

**CA:** Tell me about **Messages to silence**

**LU:** In what way?

**CA:** Can you explain the title for a start?

**LU:** Poems might be considered to be messages & by and large no one is listening to mine... The voice of the poem delivers messages at a considerable rate; and often it is absolutely certain to me that no one is

listening. Again, there is a move within the poem, narratively, I mean, from gabbling away to saying very little;

**CA:** You distinguish between yourself and what you call the voice of the poem.

**LU:** That is right. Of course. It is the same with any poem, whoever wrote it. You say, perhaps, "I", but it isn't you. That is a mistake, I think it is a mistake, made by many who write poetry. They try to say it like it is, as they see it. So they are getting their fifteen minutes -- or fifteen hours more like -- of speaking poetry and they have to get it accurate. And the last thing that they achieve is accuracy because they are seeking to transcribe memory into a narrative structure ill-suited to memory.

**CA:** Can you say more?

**LU:** Poetry is different to news and psychology and philosophy, at least the way those kinds of knowledge are normally ordered, and the narrative structures which are appropriate to news and psychology and philosophy are not appropriate to poetry. If a psychiatrist asks you about your depression, it is appropriate to say "I feel sad"; but if I come along to read a poem then I don't give a monkey's fart if the poet saying "I feel sad" actually felt sad or not. Now it may be that the poet is sad and has the ability to use the fact to make a poem, perhaps by saying that they are sad, providing of course they do more than that; but when I read such a poem...

**CA:** You assume the poet is not telling the truth!

**LU:** No! I don't consider the possibility because it is so unlikely that I shall be able to tell; and it is irrelevant. You see? Memory is unreliable. Perception is unreliable. Poetry is a means of saying how it is which can deal with that. It doesn't matter, in itself, what the poet thought. With a doctor, for instance, it is the other way around. A doctor's only interest is in whether or not I express myself well; so that she can understand me, although an ability to be concise and clear might be a medical datum in itself; but the interest is in my subjective sadness, and the telling of it is part of that interest and a hoped for cure. With poetry, the sadness is neither very important or not; and the telling is almost all. The mistake I was referring to is that of the poet who assumes that the details of their own lives are intrinsically interesting. As a general rule that isn't true.

**CA:** And with **Messages to silence**?

**LU:** Well, what I have said holds there, but in that poem I was playing around with the -- to me -- misapprehensions and clumsiness of the -- got up -- scratched -- had breakfast -- had a banal thought -- style of poetry, seeing how far I could take it, how close.

**CA:** I think I'm with you!

**LU:** Well, it's quite simple. Most things in it are true, but not all. Everything is moved around. That's the way it usually is; but I foregrounded that element and experimented with ways of talking and conversing.

**CA:** Tell me about the things that aren't true.

**LU:** Well, when one tells a story, any kind of story, it either changes a little bit, sometimes quite a lot; and, if it doesn't, then it's likely you are boring your audience. Repetition does not make for an interesting tone of voice or style of delivery. So, even telling the truth is a fictionalising process. I, along with every other poet, push that process a little bit further than one usually does in conversation. Making it up as part of telling the truth is part of telling the truth. Or trying to.

**CA:** But I don't see how telling the truth can be attached to a body of work which includes shattering and obscuring words! I go from these pages of apparently introspective story-telling to other sets of pages where you appear to have destroyed your own means of expression.

**LU:** Well, I am not shattering and obscuring words in the sense of attacking their truthfulness, assuming for instance that there is any direct correlation between the words we use and the truth we tell.

In both cases, I am manipulating my means of communication in order to make a kind of communication that is other than a statement to the police, or a police report -- except that those tend not to be true in a factual way as well. It isn't a school essay: what I did. It isn't an amusing anecdote. It's none of those things; and it's not many other things!

When I, as you said once before, appear to be shattering and obscuring words, oh yes, I remember that, I am doing no such thing. I'll come back to that, if you want; but I'd like to alter the terms under which we hold that discussion. I won't start from the assertion that I am shattering and obscuring words. We'd need to establish some kind of consensus about what words are.

Coming back to **Messages**..., this kind of telling the truth also allows for getting things factually wrong. I'm bringing it back to what I had been about to say because I think that's the only way we'll get anywhere. I don't at all wish to be rude; but we do seem to be at some cross-purposes.

**CA:** OK. Though I'm not convinced that it is simply a matter of me not understanding.

**LU:** Fine. I didn't say that it was anyway. The nature of the story-telling in **Messages** means that, meant that, some of what I said would be wrong. There is a story line in which someone who doesn't know much more than anyone else spends part of his time telling other people that they are wrong and telling them the way it is, even if he does say it all under his breath. I

asked myself: How do I represent that? So I put in the mistakes. The chap in the poem is a fool even though a lot of what he says is spot on. And, also, I believe you see him getting a bit better at it.

**CA:** Better at what?

**LU:** Why, at not being a prat. But it takes a few hundred pages for him to get there.

**CA:** Is it that long?

**LU:** Oh yes. Volume 1 is the letters to Ulli though I have taken him out of it to a considerable extent in the titling. Then there is Volume 2, which continues addressing stuff to him, but also another friend, and then to no one named. Of course, if the I in there is not me then the Ulli and Eddie in there are not the Ulli and Eddie that I know; but I guess it doesn't feel that way if you are them! That adds up to about 100 pages.

Then Volume 3, a part of which has been published. That's about the same length again.

Then there is Volume 4, which is what I am working on now. It'll be much sparser and shorter. But all told it might make 250 pages.

I am working on finishing it, but it is probably always going to be a bit rough round the edges, like any collection of correspondence. It'll be incomplete and contradictory.

[end of tape or session]

**CA:** May we talk now about your proverbs? They're not published yet, are they.

**LU:** Some are; but by and large no. They've been read at readings, most of them have been read. They've been circulated on paper -- great sheets of paper with one proverb on it and a joke bureaucratic cover note. But there is no one book.

**CA:** Any reason?

**LU:** None in particular. It just hasn't happened. No one seems in a rush to publish. I rate them quite highly, but I am not sure that is an opinion which is widely shared. Technically, they do one thing again and again. It's a book of ideas.

**CA:** One book?

**LU:** Yes. It isn't finished though. It's one of those books, a collection of documents, a codex. But it's one thing and it's necessary to read a

substantial part of it to understand it, I think; unless you read a fair bit, then you won't see the same things coming round and round. But in terms of a total number of words, it isn't that long.

The starting point, as it now is, is the **Censorship Proverbs** and they tend to stand apart from the rest, but not entirely. There is a generality to censorship, the primary act of interfering with communication.

You get other cross-sections of society having their proverbs. Some are more identifiable than others. The **Justice Proverbs** are fairly easy to locate with several professions; but **Castle Proverbs** is not so straight-forward; and that's important. The reader has to think about it. *[Laughing]* The trouble is that, instead, the readers don't seem to think about it; they turn to something else.

Of course, these aren't proverbs. I'm attacking these people to whom I am giving fake proverbs. I'm satirising them... You can't write a proverb. Proverbs are collective writing. The oddest things become proverbial, though sometimes they were written in the hope of influencing people.

So, if someone, like me, comes to you and says "I have written a new proverb", they are deluding themselves or something else is going on. I don't think I am deluding myself; and I had no intention of misleading people; but I say this because some have taken me at face value and wasted a lot of time trying to decide whether or not what I have written is genuinely proverbial. It isn't. I hadn't realised it was necessary to say that.

As you read through the different sets of proverbs, **Merchants**, **Domestic** and so on, you'll see the same or very similar strings of words occurring; but the context shifts. People using much the same words aren't necessarily saying the same thing or saying it for the same reason....

I'll just fill up that silence - you didn't expect me to stop, did you! In a way the book cannot be ended... Sometimes, I sit down and write a set. **Justice Proverbs** were drafted one afternoon by Loe Pool at a time when I was up to my ears in the products of the Injustice Industry. There was little I could do about it beyond what I did, which was to try to see their corruption and, separately, their idiocy -- we are all idiots in our various ways.

The person who had put me in that situation couldn't be attacked easily, because she really lacked any substance. It was the police and courts I was after. They were the ones who paid attention to the lunatic. I'm saying this because I assume you are going to cut all that stuff I gave you

[rest of transcript and tape itself are lost]

**CA:** I'd like to speak of **Domestic Ambient Noise**.

**LU:** OK. Can we assume reading of the **User's Guide** that Cobbing and I produced?

**CA:** Surely... Well, what is it you would say that you are trying to achieve with **Domestic Ambient Noise**?

**LU:** Primarily to get it finished. Beyond that I haven't the faintest idea.

**CA:** Come on! You can't make a visual poem of 2000 pages and not know what you are trying to do.

**LU:** I don't know why not. It started exactly as Cobbing and I described in the **User's Guide**. For me, now, it's an opportunity to make poetry and a way to make poetry. It's not a programme for poetry in itself. It's been a great disappointment to me that more people haven't sought more to have us perform it or to make exhibits of it. It's an opportunity that is being lost. I do think it's an important project, though I don't know how important; and I can imagine readers in years to come wishing that people had paid more attention.

**CA:** Do you know how it will finish?

**LU:** Not clearly. The making of the booklets is a kind of slow motion improvisation itself. I think it's almost important that we don't limit ourselves too much beforehand.