

PS

*edited by Raymond Friel and Richard Price*

number 1



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*Richard Price*  
***Migrant***

This first issue of this prose supplement to *Painted, spoken* pays homage to *Migrant*, a little magazine that ran for only eight issues from July 1959 to September 1960, but was arguably one of the most important British poetry magazines of the last century.

Started by Gael Turnbull in America with Michael Shayer as contributing editor in England, the magazine and its book imprint became a place where new American, Canadian, Scottish, English and other work would find enthusiastic publication and be distributed among key poets of the time.

In the course of curating an exhibition on *Migrant* for the British Library I learned more and more about this remarkable magazine, one of the first places that Black Mountain Poetry was first promulgated in Britain and a prescient publisher of the poetry of Charles Tomlinson, Roy Fisher, Edwin Morgan and others. It's later press published Ian Hamilton Finlay's first book of poems, an early Edwin Morgan booklet, and Roy Fisher's *City*, as well as the work of one of the most popular performance poets of the day, Pete Brown.

I was lucky to be in contact with Jill Turnbull, Gael's widow, who was able to provide a good deal of information and who I have the opportunity to very much thank here. Through Jill I made contact with several of those associated with *Migrant* at the time and was given firsthand accounts by Jonnie Turnbull (Gael's first wife) and Michael Shayer, which I reproduce here with their kind permission. I am also very grateful to Roy Fisher and to Alexandra Sayer, my research assistant on the exhibition, *Migrant and the Possibility of Poetry*. The exhibition runs from January 19<sup>th</sup> to March 25<sup>th</sup> 2007 and coincides with the publication of *British Poetry Magazines 1914-2000: a history and bibliography of 'little magazines'*, compiled by myself and David Miller (British Library and Oak Knoll).

A contextual account of the groundbreaking nature of *Migrant* is given in my article, "Migrant the Magnificent" in *PN Review* Jan-Feb 2007.

*Jonnie Turnbull*  
**The *Migrant* Years**

Gael started Migrant Press after we moved to Ventura in 1958 from Worcester, England. We were in Ventura for seven years and while there, he published all the issues of his poetry magazine, *Migrant*.

At the time, Ventura was a small town on the southern California coast just north of Los Angeles – it's now a city. We moved there when Gael was offered the post of 'anesthesiologist' for Ventura County Hospital.

Our house was up on a hillside overlooking the ocean and two off-shore islands which were owned by the government and closed to the public – there was a colony of wild boar on one of the islands. The entire front wall of the living-room was made of glass panels – floor to ceiling – which allowed us a view for miles up and down the coast, as well as Ventura beach in the near distance, and the town below.

The house was a small one with only two bedrooms, and was a little crowded when our third daughter arrived in 1961, but the view and situation was worth it. Our property consisted of two large terraces on the inland edge of town, and there was nothing in back of us but the Pacific coastal mountain range. A deep ravine ran along one side of the house, and there was a steep hillside drop in front. The terrain was covered mostly in brush, such as sage and manzanita, plus erratic stands of eucalyptus and scrub-oak trees, but nearly all the hillside houses had ice-plant as a ground cover: a succulent with brilliantly coloured daisy-like flowers when in bloom.

When Gael decided to start up a little mag, the first hint of what he intended came when he suddenly appeared one afternoon carrying what looked like a large, very cumbersome piece of junk. It was an old mimeograph machine which he had found downtown in a 'second-hand' shop. My first reaction was, "You're not serious"; and I tried not to laugh or be too disparaging when he finally, proudly, had it set up. It was ancient – a

far cry from the electric machine I had used at secretarial school "What're you going to do with it?" I asked. "Start a magazine," he replied.

As soon as we discovered what an inky mess the thing was, it was immediately relegated to the end of the workbench in the garage. It consumed and exuded heavy black ink to such an extent, the stuff got everywhere – hands, clothes, floor, bench-top, the paper-feed and the exit tray, tea mugs – never mind the drum and stencil to which it was supposed to be confined. The wipe-up cloth was always useless.

Undeterred though, Gael was soon cranking out the sheets of the first issue of Migrant. He happily shared the garage with black-widow spiders, the occasional tarantula, the guinea-pigs in the cage on the workbench, and the cat and cat-basket beneath. Sometimes there was even a roadrunner speeding past the garage-door, up from the ravine, or – when you went outside – a great black condor circling high beyond the upper-terrace. I saw it once – Gael a couple times.

The machine had a hand crank, and you started off the copying process by putting a thick blob of ink in the bottom pan and rocking the drum to ink the pad. Then you attached the stencil and began turning the handle to feed the paper in.

The paper-feed should have been continuous, but you were lucky to get more than three or four consecutive feeds at a time. The next sheet usually went askew and jammed; the paper scrunched up, wrinkled and became smeared with ink. It was maddening. It was impossible to keep your fingers from getting inky; so besides the ink-smears, black finger-prints inevitably appeared on some pages. The ink also came too freely through some of the letters on the stencil because they'd been typed too vigorously. This made the final, printed result often uneven – letters in some words too black and splotchy, too faint in others. Nevertheless, the first issue of Migrant was finally ready to be mailed.

I soon joined in the fun of getting out the first issue - helping to collate the pages on the dining-room table, folding, stapling on the cover (which Gael finally

conceded should be printed professionally), stuffing and addressing envelopes. I even took my turn at cranking the 'monster'.

Beyond the dining-room table, double-glass doors opened onto the patio, and there were often distractions as you worked. One of the funniest sights was to see our Siamese cat being chased by a humming-bird, its rapier-like proboscis just millimetres away from the cat's behind. The cat also liked to bat around discarded tails from the lizards that lived outside around the house – watching with quizzical fascination as the appendage flopped about, apparently still alive, but not alive.

Gael was a correspondence addict, and his volume of mail soon increased considerably as his contacts widened. He exchanged poems and received 'little mag' poetry collections from all over – including Britain, Canada, the US, France, even from Japan where Cid Corman was based. I remember one letter, on purple paper in purple ink, from Elvis Presley's young wife Priscilla – but I'm afraid her poems didn't make it into *Migrant*.

It was as a result of this correspondence, and encouraged by Roy Fisher and Michael Shayer in England, that Gael had decided to start up *Migrant*. The idea was to cross-fertilize poetry, to encourage English-speaking poets in Britain, Canada and the US, in particular, to read each other's work. And 'Migrant' seemed the right title – especially as it reflected Gael's own migratory past.

Because there was no other room in the house for him, Gael had his desk and file-drawers in the laundry-room, next to the washer and dryer. However, the desk was below a corner window, and it did have a great view of the ravine and the coast to the south. He stuck to this arrangement for quite a while, but finally couldn't compete with all the family noise: the washer or dryer whirring away beside his desk, me washing dishes in the next room (the kitchen) while listening to the latest baseball game on the radio, the kids (including neighbour kids) playing about, with the TV blaring forth in the living-room. So he rented himself an 'office'



downtown. It was a completely bare room except for a second-hand table, chair and desk-lamp which he bought, but it was a place of peace, and Migrant was able to continue.

As Gael made more and more contacts with poets in the US, he was sometimes able to meet with some of them. The Ventura house was too far out of the way for casual visitors, but there always seemed a steady stream of relatives. Gael's sister Tess lived in Claremont where her husband was a professor of mathematics, and his other sister Karen lived in San Diego where her husband was a chemistry professor; and he had an aunt living in Los Angeles who was a chiropractor and had been a missionary in the Belgian Congo. My two sisters, teachers, also lived in Southern California, and my mother and father at a resort lake in the mountains.

One of the poet visitors I remember with most fun was Cid Corman. He was quite bulky, and we had to put him in the laundry-room on a cot that had replaced Gael's desk. Cid nearly fell off the cot the first morning when a sonic boom rattled the windows and shook the house. It came from one of the missiles regularly tested from Point Magu (just south of us) flying past. This was a common occurrence and we were used to it, but I think it shook Cid more than a little. He was lucky, though, that we didn't also have one of our regularly occurring earthquake tremors while he was there. It's a wonder the house survived all the shaking it got, as well as the mud-slides from violent rain storms.

I also remember a visit from Charles and Brenda Tomlinson with their youngest daughter. We took them out to see Death Valley, Charles and Brenda a bit wide-eyed over many aspects of American culture - especially the signs, with their curious use of the English language. These fascinated Gael as well as Charles, and Gael finally had quite a photo collection of them. I think our visitors were also impressed by my sister's driving at nearly 100 mph on the long, almost completely deserted road through the Mojave desert. But I think what probably made them the most wide-eyed was the box of two-dozen, assorted and extravagantly concocted American

doughnuts we brought them for breakfast in their motel room on the first morning. They were made up in twists, spirals, bars or rings and were glazed, powdered, iced or covered in hundreds-and-thousands. I'm sure Charles and Brenda had never seen anything like them – certainly not for breakfast!

Charles introduced Gael to Hugh Kenner, professor and literary critic at Santa Barbara (just north up the coast), and Gael and Kenner became good friends. He helped Gael with many new contacts.

There was also a visit from Denise Levertov, whom I remember being particularly serious and solemn. And I remember a pleasant visit to San Francisco to meet Robert Duncan and his companion Jess.

Then there was the trip to New Mexico to see Ed Dorn and Bob Creeley. Creeley was renting the old ranch house where D.H. Lawrence had lived for so long. We picked up Ed Dorn and his family first, then drove to the Lawrence place where Creeley was living with his family, and there were soon a lot of kids running about. It was a very hot July (115 F. at one point), and we went with Ed and his family to see a great display of July 4<sup>th</sup> fireworks before we left. He also took us to see some of the Pueblo Indian communities close to where he lived.

Looking back, I'm amazed Gael had any time to put out 'Migrant'. He was soon the 'anaesthesiologist' for three hospitals – two in Ventura and one in Ojai (located in a nearby valley). He was always on 24-hour call, and he often worked through the night on a bad accident case and would still be there to start his regular list at 7:00 a.m. Or he would finish a night session at Ojai and have to make the half-hour drive back from Ojai to begin his list.

At the time, there were horrendous head injuries resulting from people being thrown out of cars, when cars seldom had seat-belts, or people wouldn't wear them. There were also head injuries from motorcyclists who wouldn't wear helmets. So Gael spent long hours of his life in those days, assisting at heart-rending (and preventable) trephining ('burr-hole') operations. His friend, a local principal (headmaster), was killed in such

an accident involving a police-car chase, an occurrence all too common.

However, Gael was indefatigable, and had learned to 'power-nap' as an intern. Besides weekly sessions teaching anesthetics to the junior doctors, he was soon also involved with the local theatre group – his most memorable performance being as the Dauphin in 'Joan of Arc'. He was a bit of a ham, but this could affectionately be excused because of his infectious enthusiasm. His love of play-acting was part of his great desire to tell stories, and in the days of his Viking ancestors, he would no doubt have been a skald. He was apparently a popular teller of stories during his boarding-school days, captivating the boys in his dorm after lights-out – often being begged for 'just one more'.

Gael was the proud owner of a vintage, English Singer – a white open-top, little 'roadster' type of car. Mechanically, it was simple enough even for Gael to fix (usually), and he loved to tinker with it. He soon bought another old Singer he kept just for spare parts; and before we left, he found another one, half buried in the sand at a beach house, which someone gave to him to take away. The 'Doc' soon became a familiar sight around town in his Noddy-like little car.

Throughout his life, Gael loved walking, and he would have loved to go walking up in the hills above us. However, our particular terrain was inhabited by rattlesnakes and mountain cats, the scrub was nearly impenetrable, and there were no trails. It was a drawback, but he happily made do with long walks on the beach.

I guess it was this desire to go 'walking' that decided him to go up Mt. Whitney one weekend with an exchange-teacher friend from England. Mt. Whitney – in the Sierra Nevada range to the northeast of Ventura – is over 14,000 ft. and one of the tallest mountains in the US. Gael and Stan made it to just over 10,000 ft. but Gael finally succumbed to an overwhelming attack of altitude sickness and they had to come down. Later in life, with very deep enjoyment, he confined himself to the gentler slopes of England, Wales and Scotland.

Gael loved to make things, loved the challenge of solving the problems involved. He was gifted with his fingers and could turn out little animals or cartoon figures in clay or plasticine, or do paper cut-outs in just a few minutes – much to the delight of the children. He also loved to sketch while out walking, and he tried his hand at pastels, and later, watercolours. But his real talent was in cartooning – he could catch the essence of a character in just a few strokes. Fortunately, as it turned out, most of his creative energy was finally confined to poetry.

His efforts at ‘making things’, though, weren’t always restricted to little things. I came home once to find a huge stack of concrete blocks and a pile of sand in the patio. There had been a serious mud-slide down the upper-terrace into the patio a few days before, and Gael – stripped to shorts in the heat – was mixing concrete. I should have known.

I had been intending to call in a builder, but Gael couldn’t resist the challenge – he’d never built a wall before. There was soon a retaining-wall in place, about eight-feet high, and as far as I know it’s still sturdily holding the upper-terrace in place. Gael, though, was never fussy about ‘finishing touches’. He loved simple, functional creations, with the ‘beauty’ in the function. So either end of the wall just sort of drifted away as he ran out of concrete blocks. A year or so later, he decided to have a go at replacing the steep, concrete driveway up to the house, and it was also a success – but this time he did have the help of my experienced father.

I don’t remember any particularly dramatic or calamitous events which touched us personally during these Ventura years. There was a tsunami from Japan which hit the beach and washed away a considerable section of the coast road, but it didn’t seriously affect the community. And there was the Cuban missile crisis and Kennedy’s assassination, but on the whole, I just remember an enjoyable seven years.

We finally left Ventura when Gael was due to be called up to fight in Vietnam. Some of the doctors he worked with had already been called up. Gael had always been a

pacifist and didn't want to fight in any war. Then he was told that he wouldn't be allowed to serve in the American Army as a doctor, unless he agreed to become an American citizen and serve for a minimum of five years – otherwise he would be taken in as a medical orderly.

Gael – his heart always in Britain – had no desire to become an American citizen, and by now he was becoming fed-up with the way privatised medicine was going in the States. More and more unscrupulous doctors were taking advantage of patient insurance-cover to over-charge. And 'Good Samaritan' doctors no longer dared stop even for a sidewalk accident because so many were being sued by greedy lawyers if anything went wrong. Now Gael just wanted to get back to Britain and the National Health Service, which he firmly supported. So we were soon aboard the S.S. Oriana on our way back to England.

The Oriana was a cruise ship, coming from Australia (filled with returning military personnel and their families) and going via Los Angeles, Acapulco, the Panama Canal, Bermuda and Jamaica to Le Havre and Southampton. It was a lovely, two-week voyage; and the ship brought all our household goods – including the washer and dryer, the mimeo monster and a VW van – free. An epidemic of measles and mumps spread through the throngs of kids en route, and Julie got the measles and Shari the mumps, and even Gael had the mumps when we arrived. But he wouldn't stay put, and he horrified our nurse-landlady by walking happily around Malvern the first day.

We went back to Worcestershire because we had spent three previous years there, loved the area, and we still had friends there. Also Michael Shayer was living in Worcester with his family, teaching chemistry at King's School, and he and Roy Fisher were full of new ideas for Migrant.

When we first arrived, Gael was determined he wasn't going to do anything but write and be a poet for at least a year – we would live on our savings. It wasn't long before we found an old 'rabbit-warren' of a house at Stiffords Bridge, Cradley (of mixed lineage – part

Elizabethan, part Victorian and everything in between). We had an acre of land with farm fields stretching away on two sides, and the back garden bordering Cradley Brook. There was also a country pub on either side of the bridge. There was plenty of room on the back lawn to play cricket, and the first evening we moved in, I caught a brown trout for tea. We were just ten minutes away by car from Malvern and the Malvern Hills.

Gael quickly resumed his Migrant activities. He wanted to continue by publishing the work of unknown, or little-known, American, Canadian and British poets in pamphlets or small books. However, a group of doctors (former friends and colleagues) in Worcester wanted him to join the practice they had just started, and they kept pestering until he finally gave in – he insisted, though, that he would be only a part-time partner and he wouldn't do weekends. Needless to say, he was soon working just as hard as he had been in Ventura – even doing anesthetics again as well as being a GP. But he still managed to be a poet.

*Sept. 2006*

## Michael Shayer

*Interviewed by Richard Price*

Michael Shayer was the British editor for *Migrant* magazine and the press. A friend of Gael Turnbull's since school, Shayer contributed a great deal to the Migrant project, sourcing new British poetry and, with the book imprint, taking at times a leading role in the editing, design and production of the books. He is also a poet and one of the most distinguished psychologists in the United Kingdom, publishing groundbreaking work on improving the intelligence levels of children in primary and secondary schools over time. These excerpts are from an interview conducted by Richard Price on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

**R. P.:** Can we go right back to the beginning, to the forties and fifties? I'm interested in the school that you went to and the college that you went to. Can you describe Perse School?

**M.S.:** Perse School. Yes, this was the school that many of the dons of Cambridge used to send their bright boys to but it was also a school that had strong emphasis on the arts. So it's not surprising that Peter Hall was one of our former pupils. They had an approach to teaching English that derived from the work of Caldwell Cook. So we had a little stage and auditorium called 'The Mummery' and a Tying House where there were all the costumes and when we studied Shakespeare it consisted of us actually acting it. So there was that and then we had, sort of, active teaching of languages. So you'd come into a Latin class and say 'salve magister' or 'salve puelli' etc. etc. In some ways it was quite like many a public school but it also had this arts side to it as well. So that was very nice. And this was, I think, 1943/1944, Gael Turnbull was sent by his, now American, father. His father had been a Presbyterian minister and by that time he was a professor of homiletics, I think it was in Seattle but I'm not quite certain. And being in origin from Scotland he sent Gael back for his last two years of secondary education to the Perse and we were both at the Perse boarding house. It was mainly a day school but it had a small boarding house of about forty boys. So we both did our higher certificates, they were at the time, and both got our entry into Cambridge. He went to Christ's, I went to Clare.

[...]

**R.P.:** And then you went to Clare, what was that like?

**M.S.:** It was OK. Amongst other things, I joined the mountaineering club and David Attenborough was also at Clare at the time and also in the Cambridge mountaineering club. [...] Yes, they had a series of meets they called and you'd go to somewhere like North Wales and you'd stay in a climber's hut and do a weeks climbing. So I had done that and I went on a summer one in the Lake District and unfortunately fell off backwards and ended up with this leg round the back of my neck. Clean break straight across the middle of the thigh and so I was in hospital for three months, nearly the whole of the Christmas term. I had an enormous plate put in, there are six great big screws still there and it hasn't given me a moments trouble ever since but I was still in a plaster cast in hospital for three months. There was a lady that used to come around with the book trolley and I don't know how it came about, I'm not quite certain what came first but somehow I got hold of QD Leavis' *Fiction and the Reading Public*, right? So the next time when the lady came round I said 'Oh, you haven't got James Joyce's *Ulysses*, have you?' And so her face lit up and she said 'No, but you can borrow mine'. So a period of intense reading took place.

**R.P.:** Was the hospital back here?

**M.S.:** No, in Birmingham. Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham. After this bout of compulsory boredom, reading came out of the boredom. When I came back to Clare I asked my tutor if I could switch from Science to English and he said 'Well, if you're interested in literature because you want to write, you can always do that but first of all you'll find it bloody difficult to pick up after a year, where your fellow students are. If you do you're Science degree you've got a perfectly good living there and the other you can always do and if it takes off, fine.' So, I completed my science degree in Chemistry.

**R.P.:** Were you keeping in touch with Gael at this point?

**M.S.:** Let me think. [...] Now Gael having done Part I [of the Cambridge Natural Sciences tripos] for his first two medical



years, there was nothing more he needed from the university, you see? He'd done that. So he then emigrated to Philadelphia to do his hospital work in Philadelphia. So he did, I think, the first two years of his hospital work in Philadelphia, which is where I joined him in 1950, also as an emigrant.

**R.P.:** So he had left a couple of years before?

**M.S.:** That's right.

**R.P.:** But you were still in touch, correspondence wise?

**M.S.:** Oh, yes. We were good friends. I remember Gael and I going to a poetry reading in Philadelphia with E. E. Cummings, who turned up drunk, as usual. [...] I remember him reading that wonderful poem where he sneers at *My Country 'Tis of Thee*, hymn of the Republic or whatever it is. Anyway you don't want to go into a story about Philadelphia. I had done two years of National Service for Shell from '48-'50. This was the same time that Gael was doing his hospital work and the rest of his medical training, or part of the rest of his medical training in Philadelphia and he was still there when I emigrated. At the end of my National Service I emigrated to the States and, obviously, stayed with Gael until I got a job and I got a job at a company called Rohm & Haas, people who invented Perspex and things like that. So I did a year's research for Rohm & Haas until the draft board got after me.

**R.P.:** Let's go back to Philadelphia though. Was there an arts scene? Was there a poetry reading scene there?

**M.S.:** There were all sorts of scenes. There was a downtown scene. There was a coffee house chain called Horn and Hardart at the time and the downtown people had christened one, God knows why, but they christened one of them 'The Heel'. So, after I got back from work from Rohm & Haas and got something to eat, I would often wander down to 'The Heel' and you would then find, very much like a Parisian café, you would then find eight or fifteen people with tables put together etc making cups of coffee go as long as they could and who were they? They were people who played in the Philadelphia orchestra, people who were interested in poetry,

people who were interested in literature, that sort of person and there we are. So that was part of our life. There was a wonderful theatre called the Hedgerow, which was out of town right on the outskirts and that was where I saw Jean Paul Sartre's *Huis Clos*. Philadelphia was quite alive in those days but it was a very intense year.

**R.P.:** So, were you both writing as well as going to things?

**M.S.:** Gael was writing much more than me, I was hardly writing at all at the time. There was just one poem I wrote in Philadelphia. It was a very nasty poem almost an Ian Hamilton Finlay sort of poem and after a wonderful performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony conducted by Eugene Ormandy I was walking back late at night with completely empty streets [...] But Gael was spending much more of his time as a present and future poet already. I remember I once showed one of Gael's early sort of attempts at an epic poem based on *Gilgamesh*, I showed them to somebody around here was a fairly well known English academic called something Brown and I remember him saying that 'These are ridiculously jejune. Sneer sneer sneer sneer'. So I didn't go for any more advice from this fellow Brown. He [Gael] was writing that when we were already at Cambridge. He was absolutely spewing out words. But you'll see later that he ceased to spew and started to carve but that's a later story. Anyway, his thing goes right back. Mine was relatively speaking a passive interest in literature without necessarily thinking myself producing much or anything.

**R.P.:** Did you find that in the end it was no good going to older, perhaps more academic people for advice, that you had to advise each other? Or was there another way of finding a community that would share discussions about your work?

**M.S.:** What happened was. I mean, the reason I went to the States is that I still had this idea of studying English etc etc. So my intention was to quickly build up enough money so that I could do English at Harvard. That was my plan, rudely interrupted by the draft board. So I then wrote to Leavis in Cambridge and said I've got to come back to England is there any possibility of, apart from going to your lectures but of

coming to your supervisions? He extremely kindly said that I could come along in an unofficial sort of way, which meant that I didn't have to pay anything. But I never even thought about it at the time. It was terribly kind. So I used to go to some of his supervisions and went to all of his lectures so I spent a year in Cambridge there and that would be '52/'53. You know just reading and thinking as much as possible. I remember I was staying in a little medieval house that Freddie Raphael wrote up in one of his autobiographies. Very lively place that he used to visit. So that was my next move. Now at that time Gael would be in Canada.

**R.P.:** Because he had slipped north to avoid the Korean draft as well.

**M.S.:** He had slipped north and he had to get jobs like being sort of resident doctor in a lumber camp, some way away from the cities. But it was something very good for him. And he, of course, was in touch with all the younger poets in Canada at the time. Particularly the ones based round Toronto: Ray Souster and Irving Layton.

**R.P.:** Had you had some immersion in contemporary American poetry at that time, in Philadelphia?

**M.S.:** No. I hadn't gotten any further than E. E. Cummings.

**R.P.:** So that came later?

**M.S.:** Mhm. It was Gael who was, by his Canadian friends, he was put in contact with Robert Creeley and a fellow who edited *Origin*, Cid Corman and the people at Black Mountain College.

**R.P.:** Gael goes through an important time in Canada, but then he's back in London in about '55.

**M.S.:** That's right and I think he had a shortish time in London and strangely enough, needing to get a job, he ended up in [one of the hospitals in] in Worcester where I was living.

**R.P.:** How did that come about? Was it sheer coincidence?

**M.S.:** I would think that, obviously, as a young doctor you have to apply to all sorts of places until something comes up and presumably Worcester came up and I was there and we were good, old friends and we had been corresponding. Actually we were corresponding not only in thing but in very primitive tape recorders and sending tape letters to each other at that point, when he was in the States. So that was in the mean time.

**R.P.:** Would that help explain the 'transcribed from a recording' that you get in some *Migrant* issues.

**M.S.:** Very likely. Yes, yes it would.

**R.P.:** So they are kind of letters?

**M.S.:** That's right, that's right. So for myself I really only started writing at all round about when *Migrant* magazine was first floated.

**R.P.:** How did you land up in Worcester after coming back to Cambridge?

**M.S.:** Ah, OK. After a year at Cambridge I met a Norwegian, Ebba, who I married. We then spent a year in Norway when she was teaching in a place called Sandane, in Sognefjord, and I was able to get books from the University Library in Oslo so I was continuing my reading etc. and at that particular point I started to try to write a novel. Right? However, having believed that after *Ulysses* it was probably...had I been Beckett I would have known what to do. Since I wasn't Beckett I found out that I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to write an ordinary novel and I knew enough to know that after *Ulysses* in a certain sense of the word the form is finished. So we spent a year there and then we came back to England and I had to get a job and King's School, Worcester came up. So from 1954 I was teaching at King's School, Worcester until 1965. So that's why I was at Worcester and then Gael came and was there for some years. He then went back to, wait a second...I'm not at all certain of the chronology here but Gael must have been in Worcester well before *Migrant*.

**R.P.:** He was there from about '55 to [towards] the end of '58.

**M.S.:** That's right, that would be it. And at that point he went back to the States because he was now 40 he was free of National Service and took a job in Ventura, California. And then one day I got either one of these or a letter saying, and you'll find by the way that he'd already published a Migrant book by then. So he said, look I'm going to start a magazine, will you be a joint editor with me and you handle it at that end because, in effect, we were expecting what circulation there was, if any, was going to be here rather than the other side of the Atlantic. And basically, the intention then on his part, was to, I mean he had been, quite rightly, very excited by Charles Olson, Robert Creeley and various of the others who were experimenting with different forms and particularly forms of projecting the voice and he was into that and he thought that ought to be brought into the poetic life over here rather than the crap that was going on. I said, yeah fine, fine. And then, being at this end I was receiving various stuff in. I got stuff in from Anselm Hollo and Edwin Morgan. Oh, and the first other Migrant book, was, of course, Gael produced *Dancers Inherit the Party* because he had a contact by correspondence with Ian Finlay from before. So he did from Ventura the *Dancers Inherit the Party*. So, after that. Also I had stuff in from Roy Fisher. I said I think I can do a series of pamphlets or small books of poems at this end. So we had an Anselm Hollo publication called *Finn Poems* and Edwin Morgan's that we called *Sovpoems* which are really good translations of both Brecht and some Russians. And then the third one was...Roy Fisher's *City*. [...] They were being produced after we'd done three or four issues and so that the two hundred and fifty odd people that were on our correspondence list we then sent details of this and they sent in their money and they got the others. My memory says that it was round the same time as *Migrant V* or *VI*.

**R.P.:** So there was no sense in your mind that you closed *Migrant* magazine to start a press?

**M.S.:** No, no. It was only after issue VII that Gael said, "Look I think it's lived its life." And I said "Well, look I've still got stuff on this end and I think we could get some good books out of it." So the books after that were like that. The

collection of Anselm Hollo's and so on and then the Pete Brown *Few* that I'm extremely proud of having published those were done as decent paperback books.

**R.P.:** Did you, as it were, talent spot? Did you see the poems in other magazines or read about poets and then go and ask them for material or was *Migrant's* reputation going ahead of it?

**M.S.:** I think it was a mixture of the two. Of course, you'll remember, or actually you won't remember, at the time there were at least two good book shops in Charing Cross Road that used to stock little magazines and small publications [...] Better Books was one of them and I used to go down periodically and see what was there and at the time it was possible by doing that to see for yourself everything that was going on. Obviously I must have used some of the context to get our list of subscribers at this end. I must have sent copies of *Migrant* or some information on it to various people on the scene who might be interested in it and quite few did take it up and there we were.[...] But at that time everything was there freely available and I don't think I missed anything and I knew what I wasn't interested in. [...]

**R.P.:** Where was *Migrant* going? Was it a metropolitan magazine that just happened to be published in Worcester? How did it locate its readers? How would you assess the sort of readers it had?

**M.S.:** You have to think of Gael's position as a person, as a developing poet. Here he was, stuck in California. Apart from his Black Mountain College friends, possibly Ferlinghetti in San Francisco, apart from his few contacts out there I think almost certainly he was thinking of his future here rather than over there. And so, it was British or Scottish *Migrant* that was his persona then and he wanted to establish a foothold here for the kind of poetry and writing that he valued. And my job was simply to find readers and writers, contributors. I simply do not know how I picked them up. How did I find Edwin Morgan? I have no idea. He may have been one of our subscribers and he may have heard of it. I think, I'm almost certain that I had some copies of *Migrant* and also the earlier pamphlets, I think I had them in Better

Books. So there would be a certain amount of public presence.

**R.P.:** Did you do readings associated with *Migrant*?

**M.S.:** Oh yes, yes. In fact, both Gael and I were amongst the earliest, if not the earliest and I'm talking now about 1958 of going to pubs with folk singers and delivering our poems in alternative sets with the folk song people. And I remember particularly at that time because, funnily enough, it connects up entirely with my current Latin studies. I was asked to do a reading, I think it was with Denis Goacher. I think he may still be with us; he was an actor for the BBC. He was a friend of Basil Bunting's as well. This would be, it might have been 1959, it might have been 1960. Reading in Kensington somewhere and I wanted to read Creeley but I was so fed up, particularly on the folk song scene. Now if you're a folk singer you know your songs. You don't come up to the microphone with a piece of bloody paper in front of you and I was so fed up with poets shuffling up to the microphone and dropping their papers on the floor and sort of reading it. Also, I knew that whatever it was that Creeley had done, it wasn't an on the page thing. So I memorised all my set of Robert Creeley poems just in the same way that folk singers memorised those. Actually I'm not at all sure that Stevie Smith wasn't there as well, it's ringing a bell. Anyway that was my contribution to the evening and looking back on it that was a good move.

**R.P.:** Were these readings in the Worcester area?

**M.S.:** No, this was in London. Oh but the folk song things were all in the Worcester area. And I've got something that I've found of Gael's that brings back again some memories about that because it was an important part of Gael's development, this. When he came back to Worcester, which would be '63, something like that? No, it wouldn't be '63 because that was when we did the *Migrant* [Festival] thing and he wasn't there. It would be more like '64/'65, yes. After he came back to Worcester, you know he was a Morris dancer? But after this, you know this was in his previous existence in Worcester that he and I were doing readings together. He had a little group of about three musicians and he started writing poems that could be delivered with the

music [...] they were absolutely wonderful. I remember once they were asked to do an after-dinner thing at a rugby club dinner somewhere. Now can you imagine a more potentially hostile audience for poems than a rugby club? And he and his group did some of those and these rugby club people, they were absolutely bowled over. They were saying 'Oh, wonderful! Wonderful!' Tears coming out of their eyes almost.

**R.P.:** He was incredibly winning. He won you over very quickly, in a good way.

**M.S.:** Yes, yes.

[...]

**R.P.:** Shall we talk about Finlay? The *Dancers Inherit the Party*, how did that start? How did the connection with him start?

**M.S.:** Gael had come across him, I think. Well, I'm not certain now whether it was me. It was certainly Gael that knew Roy Fisher before I did but I'm not entirely sure about Ian. I mean, I said we had some subscribers north of the border and it's possible that Ian was one of them because I had a whole sheaf of stuff of Ian's, I know, in my house.

**R.P.:** But the correspondence trail suggests that it was yourself and Finlay first, as far as I've seen.

**M.S.:** Yes, I would think that's right. Both him and Roy Fisher I had batches of the things and I was sending some up to Gael saying, can we use some of these in the magazine? Because he was producing a magazine still on a cyclostyle thing, from Ventura. [...] So among these things there must have been, I would think that Ian suggested, amongst the various other things, I had all sorts of interesting stuff, I think he must have suggested that as a possible publication. It went out by post to Gael and, you know, he did it.

**R.P.:** And it was a big success. [...] Then what happened later with *Dancers*?



**M.S.:** Ah, well. I said that we took the view that as soon as Stuart came along there was no point in having *Migrant* books any more because Stuart would do a better job.

**R.P.:** Stuart Montgomery [of Fulcrum Press].

**M.S.:** Stuart, he travelled all over the country finding every possible book shop that would take any poems, any books that were produced and he did a really good job. And I was explaining before, in those days, I don't know whether it's still the case, but in those days to run a little press without making a loss and with a possibility of a profit, what you had to do was to do a signed limited of about twenty five copies which you charged enough money for with a slightly better binding, say, which collectors would buy and that would pay the whole of your production costs for all your paperback as well. And then, if your paperback ones sold, then, of course, every time you did a re-print it was pure profit. That's how you had to do it. Stewart wanted Ian's poems to get a wider public so he re-published this but failed to mention that it wasn't actually the first publication. He had to get his signed collected.

[...]

**R.P.:** Well, that was fast-forwarding a little bit to Fulcrum, but what about [Roy Fisher's] *City*, how did *City* come about?

**M.S.:** [...] The only thing is, as with Ian, I had a whole sheaf of stuff of Roy's, much more than just what was in *City*. One or two poems were published in *Migrant* magazine itself, somewhere, I think you'll find. As at that time, I was thinking of having some poetry pamphlets and I had all these things of Roy's and playing around with them on the table, I thought I saw a pattern that made sense in some of the prose and some of the poems. And I think I made a selection and sent it back to Roy and said "What do you think?" And Roy's memory is that, yes he remembers me doing that and he then looked also at his own collection and also made some further choices and re-editing and so the final version was a combination of my editing and his editing. And you'll find that there's a little poem on the end of it as a coda which I still think is absolutely essential. Because it's a very gloomy

piece, *City*, and there's this wonderful little throwaway humorous thing at the end which I still feel the thing needs, which he had censored when he did later publications of *City*.

**R.P.:** How does it relate to *Persephone* [Shayer's first poetry collection]? Were you writing that and shaping it at the same time?

**M.S.:** Yes, at the same time. *Persephone* simply came about that I had a notebook in my back pocket and I was teaching Chemistry at King's School Worcester and it was the sort of school where, not like comprehensive schools now, if you didn't have any lessons in the afternoon the other teachers went off and played golf. So as soon as I was free I buggered off, either by car or by foot and always where I was I had this notebook in my pocket and as I travelled around here there and everywhere and sometimes before breakfast, 7 o'clock in the morning, sometimes after lunch, sometimes in the evening things came and I wrote them. And, obviously, they would be affected, particularly by my reading of William Carlos Williams at that time. By the way you were talking about Philadelphia, certainly Gael and I were both aware of William Carlos Williams at that point. It was his poems that were an influence, rather than Robert Creeley or Charles Olson.

**R.P.:** *City* appeared in instalments, two instalments. There was a *City II, Hallucinations*, what was that about?

**M.S.:** Ah, well [...] my memory is after we made the selection of *City*, probably at least a year afterwards, Roy found, I think he found rather than wrote, it may have been afterwards, [...] But he said, "I think I've got some more material that could have gone with *City*". So, I sent that to Gael and I have a feeling it was Gael who reproduced that. I think we may have stuck it in with *Migrant VIII* or something.

[...]

**R.P.:** So, you have success in your own terms from Migrant Press. You were producing lovely books by the end of Migrant Press but Stuart Montgomery has come along with Fulcrum. His distribution is very hands on, he's a people person, he's going round to shops. It's often a weakness, I know this

because I have this weakness as an editor, that you produce the work but you don't distribute it properly.

**M.S.:** Quite, you can say the same about *Migrant*. Although, in the case of the *Migrant*, funnily enough we were not interested in general readership. We were interested only in fellow writers and they were on the whole many of the people on our subscription list.

**R.P.:** I think Gael talks about building a context with *Migrant* and that's one of the reasons why he has anonymous letters, sometimes they're not anonymous letters and he has quotations, translations. There is a sense of it, in a way it's almost like *City* itself, it's a collage of different types of register. [...]

**M.S.:** [...] I mean you could say that this was, you're absolutely right in saying that this set up a context and there's more to be said about that in a moment. I mean this was sort of cine vérité, or what was that pre-war movement in documentaries called? Mass Observation. You could say that it was getting whatever you could out of that kind of sociological activity into what could affect writing or sensibilities. So again you will find a poem somewhere in Gael's collected which doesn't actually say 'For Michael' but it was for me and it says something, it's a short poem, it says something about 'I, by carefully constructing a poem, you on the other hand' and this was my contribution to *Migrant*, 'you rejecting all, externally sourced forms.

[...]

**R.P.:** Just to take you back a little bit, to Bunting. Roy Fisher, I think, somewhere talks about Gael showing him some poems from Bunting that he'd copied out into his Commonplace book, probably around '55/'56 and that may have been Roy's first connection to Bunting. What was your connection to Bunting, how did that take place?

**M.S.:** Well, Gael looked him up in Newcastle. You'd have to, it's in one of the books about Basil, it might well be yours, but you'll find I think that either in yours or one of the others that he does give a date to when he first met Basil and Gael's reaction was 'Oh God, this is a scout master' and Basil's later

comment on that was 'Well, that was Wing Commander Bunting'. So, he'd met Basil I would think somewhere around '58, somewhere like that. [...] Yes, he'd gone up to find him. In fact he may not have been in Newcastle, he may have been in Jarrow at this point, my memory is hazy on this. But he met him and we got hold of a copy of *Poems 1950*, done by Cleaner's Press, and then either Gael and I together or myself and Ebba and my children separately, we used to up and visit Basil from time to time in the early sixties. So I remember we had a lovely expedition one day with the children to Lindisfarne, the sun was shining and we had picnics.

[...]

**R.P.:** Did it encourage Bunting to write? The fact that here were two younger poets coming up and becoming friends with him?

**M.S.:** I would say the combination of Gael in the first instance, then reinforced by Tom [Pickard]. It was the catalyst.

**R.P.:** And then the Newcastle scene began to develop in the sixties.

**M.S.:** That's right. In various places the Morden Tower Bookshop, Morden Tower readings started and Basil was quite an early reader there. In fact, he was absolutely amazed that this might have been the first time he'd ever read for a non-literary audience, I think. He was absolutely bowled over by it. They loved him, he loved them. So, that would be before *Briggflatts*. Again, having that sort of experience, he was in a very bad way.

**R.P.:** In what sense?

**M.S.:** Oh he had an absolutely miserable job. I think he was doing the financial pages of a Newcastle paper and he had very short sight and very strong correction on his glasses and was beginning to get cataracts. He was pretty miserably paid as well. So life was pretty unpleasant for him at that time except when odd friends from the literary world came up to visit him. But somehow the attention from this that and the

other person must have sparked something off, and so at some particular point, I guess it would be some time late '63 early '64 that he was taking the little trolley train into Newcastle. He'd have his notebook and hundred of hundreds of words etc and as he came back he'd do more and *Briggflatts* grew. And then there was one evening when Gael had invited him down to stay. Gael was living in Cradley, just the other side of Malvern at the time and Gael had invited Basil down for several days and we had a flat in Worcester. First floor flat in Worcester which was convenient. And it was arranged that Basil would do a reading of some new poem that he was working on and we had quite a select audience there, whistled up at very little notice. My memory is that there was Roy, I think there was Adrian Mitchell, there was, who else? [Michael] Butler was another, I should think and one other. [...] Anyway there we were, five or six, or six or seven of us sitting in a sitting room and Basil started reading his bloody poem. It was coming out of nowhere, if you understand what I mean. There was nothing that prepared any of us for anything like that and I remember feeling that it had an enormously primitive and medieval in the sense of something going back a thousand years to Norse history or something. It had that sort of feeling to it. And on the one hand you heard it, in a sense that you heard the music of it, then there was this narrative of some kind coming in, that nothing could have prepared you for. And we were all bowled over by it but I don't think any of us had any idea of what sort of thing this was. And another, the other thing about it that really struck me at the time was that he said that this was "part of a work in progress. This was about three of the five sections in it. And I've got an overall sense of what the overall structure of it is" and I thought how incredibly risky it was in the sense of giving hostages to fortune, to say that at that point on the other hand you have to remember that he had a whole lifetime of development behind him and he was absolutely in no doubt that he could do it. Whereas I, being much younger, would feel that if I were in that position I would keep it hugged to my chest. I wouldn't reveal anything until I'd finished it. He was confident enough at that point, he knew he would do it. Unless he got killed on a railway or something. Then I think early in '65 he'd finished it.

**R.P.:** So, were you and Gael responsible for connecting Bunting to Stuart? Was that an introduction that you made?

**M.S.:** Yeah. Stuart was already on the scene you see and I forget the details but the people who were on the scene, apart from us were: Stuart Mills, Stuart Montgomery had made contact and I think he sent us bits of *Circe*, it was a poem sequence of *Circe* and it just seemed natural. I think probably one day he said, I don't know whether I saw him in London or whether he came up to Worcester but he said, "I'm going to start publishing".

**R.P.:** So what's the connection with Stuart Mills how did that come about?

**M.S.:** Stuart Mills was one of the bookshops that sold our...

**R.P.:** Is that the Trent bookshop?

**M.S.:** Yes, yes. One of the ones that stocked our *Migrant* pamphlets.

**R.P.:** And that was a separate scene in some sense, the Nottingham/Trent?

**M.S.:** Oh yes it was because that was the, sort of, visual and aesthetic side of it which was connected up with later Coracle Press and of course yet another wing with Ian Hamilton Finlay. And you will actually find, I hope I've managed to locate it, I had to go back yesterday and unpack all the dust-covered boxes, I hope I've found a little pamphlet of Gael's from around that period, which shows that he too was, to some extent, I mean he always sketched and things, and he always had somewhat an interest in the combination of the visual and the poetic.

**R.P.:** Yes, that might have been one of the reasons why he was so keen on Black Mountain, they wanted all the arts to seem to leak into each other.

**M.S.:** Well they did but, you know, they had a recent exhibition first in Bristol and then here in Cambridge and it was obvious to me that, all of us on the literary scene seemed to think that Black Mountain was this great, sort of literary set. And bugger that they were completely peripheral to what was going on at Black Mountain college. They were

just a small part. I mean, the central stuff was Cage and the artists who were abstract expressionists and all the crafts staff and there somewhere around Black Mountain were these people in the corner just doing poetic stuff. It was, obviously not central at all.

[...]

**R.P.:** You wrote another book after *Persephone*...

**M.S.:** Ah, *Poems from an Island*, yes, yes. I was much more proud of that than I was of *Persephone*, it embarrasses me. *Poems from an Island* was absolutely delightful. It also contains two poems, one on Eliot and one on Yeats, which I still think are rather good. I think they hit a button that I haven't seen anybody else, actually, express. I mean the book of poems, is the complete cine verité, it actually happened. My wife noticed that somebody had bought, you know I was a Catholic at that time, it wasn't in the Catholic Herald but in a Birmingham Catholic newspaper, there was a little advertisement saying "Cottage offered on Inishbofin". So we booked that for I think two or three weeks. We drove out there and left the car at Cleggan Quay and en route to there we had gone to Sligo and stood by Yeats' grave and we'd gone to Innisfree, so there was that sitting in my head and there was also a quarrel with Eliot sitting in my head as well. Then we got on to Inishbofin. That was very exciting because at that time, we had to persuade one of the fishermen from Inishbofin to come out to Cleggan Quay to pick us up. And at that time one of our babies was, I don't know, six months old or something and then there were two older girls, not very old then either, they were seven and five or something like that. So we set out in a force five and these dark blue waves. It was alright, I mean they weren't breaking badly, and we came round the side of the island where the wind suddenly stopped because we were in the lee of the island but before that we had this wonderful smell which I later found out was ladies' bedstraw, you know, nearly a mile off, this wonderful warm smell coming over the cold sea. And the man in his fishing boat stopped in the middle of what was a wide harbour at one point and beckoned and a couple of boys, they can't have been more than about ten, rode out the rowing boat and we were still rocking very slightly and we had our baby in a little container

of some kind and I remember at one point we had to trust these boys. Had to hand him into the boat and then get ourselves into the boat. And then we said goodbye to the bloke, then these little boys rowed us to the shore and we walked straight up to our little hut, with a peat fire and that sort of thing. And it wasn't long after, maybe the same evening, I think I wandered along the shore and I saw about twelve paces out, there was a tiny island about twice the size of the top of this table, covered in unchewed grass because no cattle could get at it and it would be available possibly or not at different times. Anyway I walked out to it and sat on it and I think I immediately wrote my Yeats poem and then as I was walking around the island during the day various things happened and then I just knew intuitively that there was something magical about this little spot. So I would come back to this one and load into my notebook whatever the day had brought and thus it continued. More or less a day after or two days after that the whole thing finished, it was done. Never done anything like that before or since.



## *Virna Teixeira* **Letter from São Paulo**

*In the first of a series of reports from Brazil, Virna Teixeira introduces her native city and its contemporary poetry scene.*

Located in the southeast of Brazil, São Paulo is one of the five more populous cities in the world, with a population of more than 18 million people. It has all the problems of a big city, particularly of a third world one, including the heavy traffic and social inequality, but it is a very cosmopolitan place to live. Immigrants that included Europeans (mainly from Italy and Spain), Japanese, people of Syrian and Lebanese descent and a number of Jews came to São Paulo in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20th century drawn in part by the coffee boom, as well as the effects of the world wars elsewhere. Internal migration from other parts of Brazil in search of better economic and educational conditions still continues today.

São Paulo is the largest city in South America, the main business centre in Brazil and arguably the most important centre for arts and literature. The cultural life of São Paulo is intense and the contemporary poetry scene has been an active one in the last few years. The reopening of the official building *Casa das Rosas* (literally the "house of roses"), a mansion on *Avenida Paulista*, one of the main avenues in São Paulo, has stimulated considerable activity. The *Casa das Rosas* is run by the poet and literary critic, Frederico Barbosa, who (supported by the state government) created the Haroldo de Campos space, in tribute to the Brazilian poet who died in 2003. Frederico Barbosa works with a team of young poets and, together, they have organized a widely varied series of contemporary poetry readings, debates, events and workshops.

*Casa das Rosas* is a good starting point to talk about the poetry scene in São Paulo. It is a democratic place, that welcomes very diverse events, from those with an

international flavour, such as Scottish poet Liz Lochhead's poetry reading there (sponsored by the British Council) to more local events such as readings by as the *Cooperifa* poets. *Cooperifa* is a cultural cooperative organized by poet Sergio Vaz in a poor neighborhood in the outskirts of Sao Paulo. *Cooperifa's* poets meet weekly in a local bar, *Zé do batidão*, for open mic nights of readings that attract large crowds of people. Their style is very informal, sometimes with influence of *cordel*, a Northeastern troubadour type of poetry and rhythm and also of hip-hip and rap. *Itau Cultural* Institute has published an anthology, *O rastilho da polvora* and a CD, *Sarau da cooperifa*.

Other recent milestones have included a neobaroque poetry reading and book launch with Uruguayan poet Victor Sosa, Peruvian poet Reynaldo Jimenez, and Brazilian poets and translators Horácio Costa, Claudio Daniel and Luiz Roberto Guedes. Neobaroque is a Latin America aesthetic that started in Cuba with Lezama Lima in the 1940s. The term was coined by Haroldo de Campos in the 1950s and gained wider currency in 1980s with Severo Sarduy, Néstor Perlongher, Roberto Echavarren and José Kozer, amongst others. The anthology *Medusario* (Fondo De Cultura Economica, 1996) is a well-known and recommended compilation of neobaroque poetry published in Mexico. Another good example is the recent anthology *Jardim de Camaleões* (*Editora Iluminuras*), organized and translated by Claudio Daniel and Luiz Roberto Guedes and published in Brazil in 2004. The theme is complex: neobaroque poets are not a homogenous "group"; rather their poetry is asymmetric, and in terms of place and language, dislocation is the rule.

Another personal highlight at the *Casa das Rosas* was the reading, discussion and debate with two Angolan poets, Abreu Paxe and Conceição Cristovão. Angolan poetry mixes Portuguese and African words, ethnic and mythic references with modernist and experimental influences and social themes (mainly after the 1970s). Abreu Paxe represents a kind of rupture with this tradition with his very singular syntax and freedom from

political rhetoric – his poetry tends towards prose, and there is an autonomy to the words but also a cadence, a rhythm. There is a growing interest in the literary production by former African-Portuguese colonies and recently a few books by lusophone authors have been edited in Brazil.

A series of interviews with contemporary poets, “breaking the silence”, organized together with professor Vicente Pietroforte from the University of São Paulo, has also attracted attention as the poets are interviewed by literature students and the audience participates directly with questions.

Other nearby cultural institutions, such as Itau Cultural sponsor literary events as well. For the second year in a row a virtual “literary corridor” was set up one weekend in October along Avenida Paulista, with 150 events at 15 different locations.

This diversity and full agenda in early evenings at Casa das Rosas mirrors in a sense the rhythm of São Paulo. International and national banks and companies line Avenida Paulista where Casa das Rosas is located, in the heart of a major business district.

*Giles Harvey*  
**Letter from New York**

New York is a place that goads one into rhapsody, a kind of sickened, not-quite-voluntary hymn. Desperate, admirable people move here in the belief that the city's grotesque energy will somehow enfranchise their genius, otherwise too dumbly pent within them. Perhaps such faith stems from the awful and exhilarating feeling you get in New York that if anything is going to happen, it is going to happen *here*. Most of the people you meet are working on a novel. An anthology of these works in progress - these private, sustaining passions - might provide a picture of this world-center more intimate and up-to-date than anything in the most recent copy of *The New York Times*. Sadly, I can offer no such collection. Instead I present the opening paragraphs of three entirely imaginary novels, each with its own unique defects. I have no intention of pursuing them beyond these first tentative steps; I will allow them to stand as emblems of the possibilities that hover about one everyday in the life-quickening atmosphere of this city, where everything is something trembling on the verge of something else.

**The Sickness of Modern Man**

**One**

In New York, at night, the sky is filled with tenebrous rumblings. Plane after plane coming into land at JFK. Car-horns, sirens, closer by. Drunks, too, outraged at the state of affairs, their voices charged with a rancour ten lifetimes of shouting would not exhaust. And in the day, beneath your feet, rising up from the grids, those clattering torrents of sound. People, rammed together down there, being shuttled to and fro. All that loud furious energy tamed. For our convenience. On an uptown express train the white tiles of 18<sup>th</sup> Street, 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, 28<sup>th</sup> Street, scroll by, before the brakes take

hold, a stuttering metallic skirl, and you ease into Penn where the doors hiss open onto another fresh accretion of commuters. Up the escalator, above ground once again, looking North on Broadway, a river of trembling aqueous lights extends all the way up to 59<sup>th</sup> Street, the incongruous green of Central Park. Again sirens, car-horns, the rich purr of a passing helicopter. It is the people, of course, that make the most noise. In bars and diners, on street corners, broadcast over loudspeakers, hailing, soliciting, insisting. The hoarse incessant chorus of human demand and frustration. We are here and we *mean business*. What do you do, as an individual, with all this ugly vitality? This superabundance of wild, perspiring, inexorable, long-suffering life? Or is the question rather, what is done *to* you? Such thoughts, such impressions, came to Jared Gramstrup each morning on the journey he made from his Village apartment to the Corporate Head Quarters of The D.E. Shaw Group in Midtown. The Belly of the Beast, as he called it. The Belly of the Fucking Beast.

## **The Decline of the West**

### **I**

I am a sick man...I am a spiteful man. I am an Englishman. O dear. I'd promised myself I wouldn't begin with that; a moment ago, before I started writing, I was scanning the long list of possible openings long since accruing in my notebook, and many worthies, many able and adept locutions, presented themselves for use; but then, very quickly and without really thinking about it, I decided I would go with, I am a sick man...etc. It sounds rather too clever, I fear, too cute. And I am anything but cute. I am...well, spiteful. Bitter. Rankled. Possessed of a brawny and rambunctious cholera. *English*. And it is altogether appropriate, I suppose, to begin with this fact—of my Englishness, that is—because this is what people over here notice about me first: my resonant, patrician, thoroughbred English bass. It

prompts in these New Yorkers an attitude of automatic reverence. It speaks to some dim, recessed nub in the national unconscious that continues to recognize the true accent of authority. I like the roles we fall into, the faded but still legible script on the palimpsest of history. A colonial master, inspecting the natives, distressed somewhat by the vulgarity of their habits, but amused nevertheless. From barbarism to decadence without any civilization in between. That's about right. Yes, Americans amuse me, if nothing else. Their guileless harping on about Liberty and the Land of the Free, all this cant about the divinely sanctioned Pursuit of Happiness. Meanwhile the pyramids continue to be built. Meanwhile the five-year plans go off like clockwork. It is difficult to purchase a bagel in this city without recognizing one's place in a great chain of oppression and deceit. Behind the glass counter, with its gaudy display of cream cheese, there toils an army of colorful immigrants, garbed in the belittling uniforms of late capitalism. I imagine what must be the intricate misery of their lives, awaking at dawn in a housing project out on the infernal fringes of the metropolis, riding the subway for an hour, stuffing sandwich after sandwich, then returning for the night to their remote cells. And the White Man is scandalized if these underlings are the least bit curt, the least bit inattentive to their manically punctilious appetites. I ordered *low-fat* cream cheese. I said *easy* on the mayo. I said *hold* the goddamned mustard. Meanwhile outlaws fill the mountain caves...

## **A Life Without Principle**

### **1**

What did I feel the first time I saw New York? I felt, no doubt, what every person feels the first time they behold that gaudy thicket of skyscrapers: namely, that I was sailing toward a continent of happiness, where I would be free to rove, enfranchised and at large; I felt that until then I had seen only grey whereas now I was finally

seeing green; I felt both very big and very small; I felt that my life was going to change. The first few days passed in a kind of barely repressed ecstasy of observation; I became a connoisseur of new sensations. Everything made me happy. From the colorful chaos of Midtown to the quiet solemn stone of Columbia, from the incubated heat of the subway to the green tip of Battery Park where the Hudson sloshed languidly against the banks, I walked around with my head humming. I pretended I was Walt Whitman and seemed incapable of thinking in anything but the most incandescent Biblical cadences. Ah, what can be more stately and admirable to me than mast-hemmed Manhattan? River and sunset and scallop-edged waves of flood-tide? The sea-gulls oscillating their bodies, the hay-boat in the twilight, and the belated lighter? So enamored was I of every slightest inflection of scenery, I scarce had time to remember I was dying.

*Raymond Friel*  
**Not Near Enough**

*Be Near Me* by Andrew O'Hagan (Faber)

David Anderton, the central character and centre of consciousness of Andrew O'Hagan's new novel, *Be Near Me*, is in many ways a convincing and compelling creation. He is a priest and an aesthete (not an entirely unknown combination), a scion of an indigenous English Catholic family, recounting the story of his life after a period of late trauma. We are reminded several times of his recusant ancestors who were martyred in the sixteenth century, a family memory passed down from his father, who died while Anderton was an adolescent. His own martyrdom at the hands of the mob for 'paedophile' activity, when it happens, feels very much preordained.

After a public school education with the benign Benedictines of Ampleforth, the protagonist goes up to Oxford in 1965 with his copy of *Rubber Soul* and a bottle of malt from his mother. He comes alive when he falls in love with Conor, a fellow student. These are among the most moving and convincing sections of the book. Revisiting Conor's death in a car accident O'Hagan's narrator achieves an authentic lyricism which the novel often aspires to. The poignancy of young love cut off prematurely is well evoked: 'He lost his life before his love of life or of me was tested.' The narrative voice deepens into an elegy of some power: 'I hear his sacred heart and see his eyes closing as he falls asleep. And I say: be near me.' But O'Hagan is no stylist. He manages the now established mode of Scottish urban realism well but he is far short of the poise and poetry of, say, John Banville. The passages which attempt lyricism have a dissatisfying vagueness about them, as when David Anderton describes a swim off Ailsa Craig: 'I swam further down and seemed to master the moment with its strange miracles of thought.' The epiphany is only alluded to rather than evoked. The water is engulfing in



a 'shocking, sacramental way.' The reader is only given the intended effect, and this cannot be put down to any assumed deficiencies in the narrator.

Anderton's response to the early traumatic loss of Conor is to convince himself he has a vocation to the priesthood and go to the English College in Rome for his training. After ordination, he serves as a priest for twenty or so years in Lancashire, his home county (although he's Edinburgh-born). So far, so credible. The plot begins to bear too much strain, however, when Anderton applies to the Bishop of Dumfries and Galloway, an old friend from Rome, to be posted in his diocese to be near his mother, *who lives in Edinburgh*. This unusual move brings Anderton to the benighted post-everything dump known as Dalgarnock in Ayrshire and sets up, all too schematically, the scene of Anderton's martyrdom. O'Hagan makes the most of the opportunities for *versus*: prods v. papas, English v. Scots, men v. women, education v. ignorance, class v. class.

Anderton's *via dolorosa* begins, none too subtly, on Good Friday. When he says he had 'just come back from the second service of the day' at lunch time a suspicion begins that O'Hagan doesn't know his way around Catholic liturgies. Later on in the conversation with his sparky housekeeper Mrs Poole ('you're such a dangerous snob, Father David') Anderton refers to a man 'who had come to ten o'clock Mass that morning.' This is just plain wrong. There is no Mass on Good Friday and there hasn't been since ancient times. Credibility is strained beyond endurance when, still on Good Friday, he goes to visit the school. There are some comments from the staff that they shouldn't be in that day, but this is never explained. It would appear that Anderton visits the local Catholic school on Good Friday (the irritating cameo of the alcoholic headteacher throwing up in the car park is reminiscent of Ken Loach at his most crudely polemic) solely to meet the disaffected but beguiling pupil, Mark McNulty, who will lead him along the path of thorns.

This for me is the central problem of a novel which in many ways opens up new territory and is a brave

attempt to probe the darker corners of the recent life of the Catholic Church. It just isn't credible. A priest enjoying a glass of fine wine at lunch time on Good Friday is one thing (and not entirely beyond the bounds of credibility), but a baying anti-paedophile mob *which includes his parishioners* torching the parish house (referred to throughout as the rectory) is a step beyond plausibility. So is the way Mark McNulty speaks to Fr. Anderton on their first meeting. The expletive-laden rants aren't the problem. McNulty in many ways is a triumph of characterisation. And the sweet divagatory Gethsemane McNulty and the priest spend together drinking and dropping Es, which culminates in Anderton kissing McNulty in the front room of the parish house as dawn's light is seeping through the curtains (that's all that 'happens') is brilliantly evoked. I like the suggestion in that scene that Anderton betrays himself with the kiss, a theme which is explored to good effect at the trial. But what O'Hagan doesn't allow for is the atavistic respect which the dog collar commands in the Catholic community, *especially* in the most deprived communities. The Catholic Church has suffered a catastrophic loss of face because of the sins (crimes) of some of its most prominent members and the inability of its most prominent leaders to deal with the abuse scandals wisely or effectively, but within the tribe the old respect holds, even for an English Proust-reader washed up in a Scottish hell-hole.

The final point which undermines the novel on the grounds of credibility is the interior landscape of the narrator. As an Englishman of the upper middle classes, as a young lover, as a connoisseur, a romantic, a poet even, he is presented as a rounded and well realised character: complex, disagreeable, dislikeable at times, but plausible. Anderton the priest is not, even though he's presented as weak, with apparently little time for the 'pastoral' aspects of the role (which doesn't leave much else) unless his parishioners are under the age of sixteen. What you would expect in one so steeped in the Church and so intellectually able is a religious memory (*anamnesis*) beyond his family tree, an ease with the

reference points of the tradition, trains of thought which would often converge with the cultural and theological world of Catholic Christianity. Where that should be, there is a narrative void, filled with references to Chopin and Alsatian wine.

I wanted this novel to work. I don't know of any successful presentations in literature of the priesthood since *The Power and the Glory*. Understandably, those who have been damaged by the Church seek to articulate their experience and present it in literature. Their own hurt and bitterness, however, is often too close to the surface (*Once a Catholic*) and while this may work as therapy it seldom works as art. O'Hagan doesn't give in to the temptation to seek out easy targets, but he does appear to give in to the temptation of trying to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. He tries to bridge the gap between the Scottish school of urban realism and the English middle class milieu of McEwan, Barnes et al, by dropping a character from one world into the other. A novel which examined these themes with a central character from within his own community might have been a much more searching examination of the issues, and something nearer to the truth of things.

## *Richard Price* **An Information**

### **Booked**

In **Tom Leonard's** *Being a Human Being and other poems* (see [www.objectpermanence.co.uk](http://www.objectpermanence.co.uk)) there are lean, probing registers, some forms of discourse being brought up against their own 'translation' ("statehood is right to arms / statehood is control of the air"). "Wish You Were Here" is a pulsing set of short worked commentaries on holidaymaking; "The Proxy Badge of Victimhood" a polemic of considerable power. **Elizabeth Burns, Jim Carruth, Alexander Hutchison** and others appear in **Duncan Glen's** *Zed20* Summer 2006 issue. Also from Akros, Glen's *Small Press Publishers of Scotland: Idealists & Romantics 1922-2006* documents the little press scene in a readable attractively designed history and reference work. **Michael Kindellan** and **Reitha Pattison** each translate/transform eight troubadour poems from Bertrand de Born (d.1215) in this quietly but beautifully produced Arehouse Press pamphlet (see [www.cambridgepoetry.org](http://www.cambridgepoetry.org)). The poem-with-art, art-with-poem series *Tolling Elves* edited by **Thomas Evans**, surely one of the great little magazine series of recent years, has come to an end, but copies may still be available: at least you can see the covers at [www.onedit.net/tollingelves/contents.html](http://www.onedit.net/tollingelves/contents.html) where you can also glean contact details. **David Miller's** Kater Murr Press is an earlier similar excellent enterprise that is still very much going and has digitised its art and poetry at <http://home.freeuk.net/katermurr/index.htm>. Contributors include Alyson Torns, Giles Goodland, Natalie d'Arbeloff, Johan de Wit and many others. **J. H. Prynne's** *To Pollen* is a work of stilled compressed anguish and, as with Leonard's book, state terrorism appears to be the primary theme ([www.barquepress.com](http://www.barquepress.com)). Barque also issue the space / physics / environmental theory poetry of **Allen Fisher** in *Singularity Stereo* and Ian Hunt's *Green Light*, in which reference is made to **Daisy Goodwin's** *Little Book of Command Structure* and the reader is invited to "Go deeper into the beck and call, and even vigilance will administer itself strange spaces: the railway lands, the zone of embroideries, the small brown birds of the inter-war years." About eight years after starting it a certain **Richard**

**Price** and **David Miller** finally publish their *British Poetry Magazines 1914-2000: a history and bibliography of 'little magazines'* (British Library): hundreds of accounts of magazines, a union catalogue, historical commentaries, and extensive author index. The first number of **Sudeep Sen's** stylish *Atlas* includes work by **Charles Bernstein, Les Murray, R Raj Rad, Stephen Watts, Tishani Doshi, Fiona Sampson, John Welch**, and many others (info at [atlasaarkarts@gmail.com](mailto:atlasaarkarts@gmail.com)). Lastly, there's **Catherine Wagner's** songish, philosophicalish, painful mother/wife/occupier-of-alive-cells book *Macular Hole* ([www.fencemag.com](http://www.fencemag.com)) from a few years ago, but yours truly is a lifelong learner and have you read it yet? If you ever have the chance to see/hear Wagner read then book that plane / ferry / spaceshuttle tootsweet (I did recently at a remarkable reading by Wagner, co-billed with Leslie Scalapino, and both offering a lot structurally and aurally to think about).

### ***It's A Record***

**Bob Dylan** crosses *Time Out of Mind* with *Love and Theft* and good oldfashioned *Modern Times* is the boogiewoogie result. Precisely who did hit him over the head in the mystic garden? - anyway, it got results. **British Sea Power** clear away the noise from their first Long Player, clarify the melodies, and *Open Season* is a witty janglefest. **Gnarls Barkley's** *St Elsewhere* conjures a Was Not Was style synthetic-but/so-real-soul record; wonderful singing as the duo belt through and bend soul genres; there's even a Grandmaster Flash manic laugh at one point, but was one track's plasticky electronica and another's necrophilia really necessary? Oh, probably. **Joanna Newsom's** *The Milk-Eyed Mender* - cranky quirky loquacious Emily Dickinson with highpitched oomph, piano and something that sounds like a heavenly harp; homespun divine!. Coarser at times (yes "surprised by the language") than *Dear Catastrophe Waitress*, **Belle and Sebastian's** *The Life Pursuit* : are they projecting back to sounds that never existed but should have?). Midges that die so that others might love! Beautiful trumpet addressed to the "nearly made-it" of "Dress up in you"! Steely Dan-ish (early period) guitar! A song's letter told as it's written! I'm reduced to exclamations! The lyrical fluency, articulacy, wrongfootingness: back from the pony

derby, I hang my poetry spurs up and sob. Paragraph. Is Sheffield modernising the Fifties for everybody? **Arctic Monkeys** dust George Formby down, plug him in to an electric guitar, drum him up, and give us all Liberal Studies advice that still sounds almost 'cool' (as I believe the youngsters call it). Then **Richard Hawley's** *Coles Corner* conjures Buddy Holly, Johnny Cash, even Hank Williams (in tone and song-construction) and I'm absolutely happy to listen to the tender retrofuture. Meanwhile his old mate from Pulp, **Jarvis Cocker** provides lyrical input to **Charlotte Gainsbourg's** *5:55* a dark, tense, temptation of a pop record floating on Air. Cue ingenious Francophilic link. Well **The French** didn't last long (the band, not the nation) but when **Darren Hayman** goes solo he sounds more like the band he was in before *that*. *Table for One* is pleasingly **Hefnerish** (though it also shows what a tight sound The French's *Local Information* had). "Caravan Song" has English 'trailertrash' staying mournfully at home, a song for stray dogs is sung absolutely sincerely (no, really), and "That's Not What She's Like" continues Hayman's word/wired/weird dance along the man-woman divide, crooning about on the man side of what he maybe sees as the wall. Perhaps his thirst for knowledge will only be satisfied if he's reincarnated as a woman (will it be like he thinks?), but until then it's a pleasure to hear the negotiations, if at times a little disconcerting. Sadly, the Hefner double-album compilation of out-takes and other rarities, *Cat Fight*, doesn't really add up (unlike the earlier, more modest *Boxing Hefner* which is a honed, coherent, compilation), especially as a fair chunk in this retrospective is re-engineered work from tracks that became *Local Information*. Another paragraph. And one last mention to Cat Power's *The Greatest* – afraid I'm going to use the word "haunting" – think the timbre of Dusty Springfield or the vocalist used on a single from Io that I can't remember the title of (quality journalism here) – yes, haunting voice of Chan Marshall with a Memphis back-up band (this Cat Power's *Memphis* to Dusty's *Nashville*?).

**Mainstream Roundup:** Unfortunately there is not enough space for a Mainstream Roundup.

## **Contributors**

Richard Price's poetry includes *Lucky Day* (Carcenet) and *Earliest Spring Yet* (Landfill Press).

Jonnie Turnbull was Gael Turnbull's first wife.

Michael Shayer was the British editor for *Migrant* and Migrant Press. Until his recent retirement he was Professor of Applied Psychology at King's College London.

Virna Teixeira's collections include *distânica* (Rio de Janeiro: 7Letras, 2005). She is currently producing a parallel text anthology of Scottish poetry for publication in Brazil.

Giles Harvey lives in New York.

Raymond Friel's collections include *A World Fit To Live In* and *Seeing The River*.

PS

*the prose supplement to Painted, spoken*

Raymond Friel  
Giles Harvey  
Richard Price  
Michael Shayer  
Virna Teixeira  
Jonnie Turnbull

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