

GREG THOMAS

**From Edinburgh to Saturn: The Edwin Morgan Archive at
the Scottish Poetry Library**

The Scottish Poetry Library's Edwin Morgan Archive is, at one level, a testimony to Morgan's friendship and collaboration with Hamish Whyte. As the editor of Mariscat Press, Whyte was also one of Morgan's publishers, but it is his meticulous documentation of Morgan's creative life over three decades to which this collection attests. Morgan first came to Whyte's attention in the 1960s, when Whyte was a Classics undergraduate at Glasgow University, Morgan a guest lecturer on Aristophanes at The Alexandrian Society, the university classics society.¹ By the mid-1970s Whyte, by then trained in librarianship, was collecting and collating Morgan's work, his interest piqued further upon discovering Morgan's poem 'The Fifth Gospel', and his 1968 collection *The Second Life*. But he only contacted Morgan personally in July 1977, to ask him to contribute to *Noise and Smokey Breath*, the anthology of Glaswegian poetry, art, and photography which he was then compiling. In 1980, while planning an exhibition for Morgan's sixtieth birthday at the Mitchell Library, Whyte decided to consolidate his bibliographic work into a large checklist, published that April to coincide with the exhibition. He wrote to Morgan again, asking for some factual pointers, and from that point on effectively became his bibliographer, the two corresponding increasingly regularly. It was through Whyte's compilation of this checklist, and the expanded one included in *About Edwin Morgan* (1990), that he really began to collate the material that comprises the Edwin Morgan Archive, although the process ultimately continued well beyond 1990.² The library bought the collection from Whyte in the late 2000s – it had previously colonised a large stretch of shelf-space in his flat – and it was divided into books, periodicals, audio and video files, ephemera, broadsides and posters, and personal artefacts, essentially the same cataloguing system used for Whyte's earlier checklists.

One exception to that acquisition process concerns the books from Morgan's office at the University of Glasgow which now fill one section of

the archive, which Morgan sold to a Glasgow bookshop on retiring in 1980, Whyte buying back as many as he could find. Many were used for teaching, and they perhaps reflect Morgan's students' interests as much as his own. Another is the accrual of personal artefacts, many of which the poet donated to the library himself after moving from the Anniesland flat he had lived in for four decades into a nearby nursing home in October 2003. For some time, Whyte would also 'pick up and keep almost anything' related to Morgan, for which reason this section contains such oddities as a Strathclyde Transport Zonocard and, more poignantly, a hospital wristband (personal interview).

The archive opened in April 2009, on Morgan's eighty-ninth birthday. He attended the opening ceremony in a t-shirt emblazoned with a print of a Tunnocks Caramel Wafer bearing the slogan 'Glasgow', a more loaded gesture of civic allegiance, Whyte suggests, than many people realised. Morgan would have preferred the archive to have been in his home city, although he was certainly pleased that it was housed in a public rather than academic library. It seems to have been important to Morgan that his work be stored in publically accessible institutions – the other large Morgan archive is at the Mitchell Library, Glasgow – reflecting an egalitarian streak equally evident from the contents of the archive itself.

So what does the archive tell us about Morgan? In biographical terms, perhaps less than his collected correspondences at Glasgow University. This said, some of those personal effects might bear for some a kind of talismanic residue of character, most obviously the sleek, curved 1960s teak desk which Morgan purchased from Lewis's Department Store in 1962, a consciously modern furnishing for the modern high-rise he had just moved into. It was placed in the study, where ironically, it remained unused for poetry. Morgan preferred to write in his dining room, Whyte notes with its two large windows facing south and west, and views of Bingham Pond, Great Western Road, and the Kilpatrick Hills made famous in 'Strawberries'. Perhaps a false idol, then, but an undeniably seductive one.

As a whole, the archive perhaps evidences something more concrete about Morgan's character. That is, although Whyte sourced large amounts of material himself, Morgan became increasingly instrumental to the acquisition process, sending him copies of most new publications, and documentation of other projects, over several decades, often with dates and annotations

on accompanying postcards now indexed alongside them. This assistance, Whyte states, reflects an instinctively fastidious brain, and an interest in the dilemmas of bibliographic process, as did the filing system in operation in Morgan's flat: Scottish literature in the hall, gay literature and science fiction in the study, Americans and Russians in the spare room, periodicals in his bedroom bookcase. This zeal for preservation might seem surprising given that 'Morgan likes to present himself', as Robert Crawford has noted, 'as a poet of the new'. But, as that article adds, 'a strong archival sense' also permeates his poetry, though 'his science-fictioning may empoweringly conceal this'.³ A meander through the archive's collection of print and audio interviews, many not included in the 1990 source-book *Nothing Not Giving Messages: Reflections on Life and Work*, complements such speculations of personality, as do those brief but sprightly postcard messages to Whyte.⁴ But the archive's primary value is as a marker of Morgan's authorial character: an index of the creative projects he was involved with between the late-1930s and his death in 2010, encompassing, besides numerous flyers, invitations to readings, plays, conferences, seminars and birthdays, publishers' catalogues, press releases, and other tantalising ephemera, an extensive haul of creative and critical writing.

As a portfolio of creative work, the archive has three valuable features. Firstly, it contains almost all of those rarer collections – *The Vision of Cathkin Braes*, *The Cape of Good Hope*, *Starryveldt*, *Emergent Poems*, *Newspoems* – whose constituent poems are generally encountered, if at all, in one of Morgan's later selected or collected editions, allowing an intimacy with the original form and context of publication inevitably lost in engagement with, for example, Carcanet's 1990 *Collected Poems*. Secondly, it contains many of the journal issues to which Morgan contributed across his career, featuring poems collected neither for large-scale release nor the small-scale publication exemplified above, extending as far back as several 1930s editions of *Glasgow University Magazine*, or *GUM*, to which Morgan contributed under the pseudonym KAA, chosen 'after the rocksnake in Kipling's *The Jungle Book*'.⁵ Thirdly, there are a small number of those still more elusive poems composed on the spur of the moment in letters or on publications posted to Whyte. The inside cover of a copy of *Haiku Quarterly* 7-8 (1992) containing Morgan's 'A Definition of Six' features 'one extra, for H.W.':

Welcoming Three Guests

'Haiku Haiku.' 'Hi!'

'Hai Kukai Kukai Ku.' 'Hi!'

'Haik Uhaik U.' 'Hi!'⁶

Some of these rare poems are markedly confessional in tone, others experimental – to forge a simplistic distinction. Morgan's contributions to *GUM* are of particular relevance to the first category for the contorted youthful voice they evidence. Written in a lavishly alliterative free-verse, peppered with high-impact adjectives, they were influenced, as Morgan has noted in interview, by Keats and Tennyson's 'splendid, luscious phrasing', and by the 'alliterative four-stressed lines' of the Anglo-Saxon poetry he read at university.⁷ Gerard Manley Hopkins also seems a feasible reference point for their bold phonetic correspondences and irregular stress patterns. 'Dusty Flower' and 'Plainsong for a Lovely Lady', from a March 1939 issue, are typical. Interestingly, both evoke innocent, suffering female personas corrupted by insidious, ambiguous external forces. The conceit of the former is very similar to Blake's 'Sick Rose':

Dusty flower,
In the slumberous ashes of your vast petals
Cracking and crumbling over your leaves
A serpent writhes,
Rasps maddeningly round your velvet lips,
Lies like a dead thing heavy and still on your heart

The contrasting alliterative melodies and prescriptive adjectives used to offset the flower, 'faultlessly afloat in the forest', against the 'slant-eyed' serpent, 'sybarite of silken sepals', generates a sense of intense moral struggle, while the image of the flower's 'velvet lips', 'all silent and broken and spent', 'rotted and destroyed by the dark consumer', bears a clear subtext of sexual corruption.⁸ The title figure in 'Plainsong for a Lovely Lady', more clearly seems a woman corrupted by carnal passion:

She lay upon the golden plain
with waves of light breaking around her.

Her splintered dream on the red horizon
 burst into rocketing flowers of flame and ice
 like a nest of sumptuous mandrepores doomed
 by diver's boot.

Overhead, 'streamers of smoke, of blood, carmine, gam-boge, grey',
 'whispered to the aching sky the story':

of their birth and future that were as gar-
 ments of glad day to them
 but to the lady death.⁹

These poems partly suggest a self-alienation rooted in an unwarranted sexual awakening. The title characters seem like authorial foils, but second or third person narration eschews open confession. Along with their tendency to describe rather than generate desired emotive qualities, and a dense phonetic patterning which seems to allude to some submerged voice, they suggest a frustrated yearning for self-expression. Neither are successful poems by subsequent standards, although 'Dusty Rose' closes on a Miltonic image of cosmic flight, the story of the flower's destruction 'hurtling heading over the huge| and virgin fields of the heavens', which predicates the searching, regenerative energy and intergalactic imagery of Morgan's later work (311).

Chronologically speaking, the next poem held in the archive is 'A Warning of Waters at Evening', published in winter 1949,¹⁰ at least part of the gap indicating Morgan's war service. The 1950s, as James McGonigal's biography *Beyond the Last Dragon: A Life of Edwin Morgan* has recently made clear, was a period of tortured self-scrutiny for Morgan. The poem 'Northern Nocturnal', first published in a PEN anthology in 1955, seems singularly indicative of this. Revised from an earlier draft, McGonigal states, in September 1954, a period denoting 'the nadir of EM's sense of his own worth as a poet and person' (118-20), its evocations of despair are stikingly frank. The poem describes a nocturnal walk along Glasgow's streets and riverbanks – 'Moonlight| Is silvering the stark Necropolis,| The pavement glitters like a river' –¹¹ the silent alleyways and gutters a metaphor for the 'gaunt arteries and walls of the heart' (104). In the final stanza, this allegorical depiction of despair unravels into an undisguised cry:

When all is dark indeed: the whirl, the luminance
 Clouded from identity [. . .]
 When all is cold as cavern-flume, sea-floor,
 Jupiter, or Pluto in the Thule of the sun:
 And then to blackness, silence, cold, my sense
 Chokes blind in breaking death, death like this night will free
 My fire and shower of desire to the stone and the steel and the sea (104)

The final couplet expresses a longing for death whose candour is unmatched by the abstracted suffering of Morgan's contemporary collections. A sense of melodrama is retained from those adolescent verses, and again, much of the registered distress and self-alienation suggests repressed homosexual desire, the final line partly a lament that Morgan's 'fire and shower of desire' could not be expressed within the prescribed boundaries of his character. He would later speak of Kelvingrove Park's river walkways as prime 'trolling' spots,¹² granting the poem's imagery of nocturnal wandering further significance: 'Who walks its flashing roads? Who laughs and sings?'(104).

The poem also gives the kind of nightmarish portrayal of Glasgow for which Morgan would later criticise poets like Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassie Gibbon.¹³ Notably, in a passage perhaps indebted to Thomson's 'City of Dreadful Night', the city-scape becomes a chain-mail grave-cloth, 'a mailed tomb where the full flood of bronze/ Palls the million of the living in strong and perdurable folds' (103). It is possible that, besides its evocations of private angst, 'Northern Nocturnal' was held back from broader publication because of this portrayal of Glasgow, a city Morgan would later depict as multifariously alive, as a kind of golgotha.

By contrast, 'Night Pillion', published in *Saltire Review* in 1957, seems the first poem to indicate that shift of register through which Morgan's outwardly focused, cannily optimistic mature work emerges, both in its affectionate imagery of Glasgow and in its more open, happy expressions of private affection. The poem opens on a Marinetti-friendly paean to the visceral thrill of motorbike travel:

ELEVEN struck. The traffic lights were green.
 The shuddering machine let out its roar
 As we sprang forward into brilliant streets¹⁴

But it develops into an affirmation of emotional connection to Glaswegian society contrary to both futurist egotism and Eliotic or Thomson-esque urban alienation:

Shadow play? What we flashed past was life
 As what we flash into is life, and life
 Will not stand still until within one flash
 Of words or paint or human love it stops
 Transfixed, and drops its pain and grime
 Into forgetful time. (54)

Although this section's opening tone is muted by the subsequent description of aesthetic or romantic experience as an abatement of the 'pain and grime' of city life, the closing lines make social engagement the real source of joy:

Joy is where long solitude dissolves.
 I rode with you towards human needs and cares. (55)

This newly discovered social conscience is complemented by another proleptic quality, the subtly suggested romantic energy between the back-seat narrator and his driver, based, McGonigal notes, on 'a young art student from Burnside', 'who would sometimes come to EM's house to discuss painting' (McGonigal, 126). In this poem the longed-for love is present, the teasingly genderless second person address – 'I rode with you' – familiar from the secret gay love poems of *The Second Life*.

The 1960s was a period of creative flowering for Morgan, heralding amongst other things, the birth of a natural-seeming, stirring voice of personal expression. The love poems in *The Second Life* (1968) are animated by a palpable sense of release, partly compelled by Morgan's relationship with John Scott. In 'From A City Balcony', the joy accelerated towards in 'Night Pillion' is poured 'like mountain water'.¹⁵ Not all readers were happily immersed though, Iain Crichton Smith stating that 'Morgan's poetry of the immediacy of love breeds clichés'.¹⁶ While we might not agree, the poems 'Phoning', published in *Lines* in 1966, and 'The Quarrel', in *Form* in 1969, are interesting in relation to this comment, as seemingly uncensored accounts of romantic episodes in which considerations of craft are, to

some extent, overridden by urgency of statement. 'Phoning' recounts an evening in, set amongst Glasgow's 'dark rain', 'roofs and cranes':

we sat on the bed
and I dialled Montreux
[. . .]
and we spoke to your sister
Glasgow to the snows
and the sunny funiculars
and meetings by a lake
reflecting her walk
so far from Law and
the pits and cones
of worked Lanarkshire¹⁷

The poem typifies several themes of Morgan's 1960s poetry: the traversal of physical distance through communication technology, complemented by a perpendicular graphic suggesting a message strung along a phone-wire; an imagined journey bracketed by descriptions of Glasgow, mid-renovation, with looming cranes. At the same time, unselfconscious, intimate recollection is implied by the breathlessly clipped lines, fronted in informal lower case, and second person address:

my arm on your shoulder
held you as you spoke
your voice vibrating
as you leaned against me
remembering this
and your finger
tapping my bare knee
to emphasize a point
but most of all
in that dusky room
the back of your head
as you bent to catch the distant words
caught my heart (22)

Such unbroken personal recollection is rare in *The Second Life's* love poems, which tend to open out into broader thematic panoramas obscuring the nuggets of memory they grew from.

More disarmingly confessional is 'The Quarrel', a poem set, McGonigal states, during a holiday with John Scott in Northern Italy (162). Beneath 'the chill of the Dolomites', an argument unfolds, perhaps over infidelity:

I turned on you. What I didn't understand
 I made painful, saying
 it had to be known.
 We were past caring who heard,
 who saw us on the stairs.¹⁸

Largely unembellished passages of physical description follow:

You sat on the bed, I turned
 And pressed my forehead
 On the cold window, in the growing dark
 [. . .] I found I was in tears
 In silence, with my back to you,
 Hardly caring if you knew (24)

If such passages remain evasive in the sense that the protagonist is not characterised, another shows the class disparity between author and lover in a manner plainly based on the academic Morgan's relationship with the store-man Scott:

– Give me the key you said
 I know I'm common as dirt.
 Go on with your fancy friends
 I know I'm nothing (24)

Some poems in Morgan's next collection *From Glasgow to Saturn* deal with similar themes – 'you are not faithful.| This Saturday on what corner will you meet your next friend?' – but none possess this kind of documentary frankness, or apparently direct correlation with personal experience.¹⁹

It would be glib to speculate too boldly on the reasons for certain poems' absence from collections, but this tone and detail of personal admis-

sion counteracts Morgan's tendency to disguise details of his private life within his poetry, at least until the mid-1980s – the shift partly to do with his more open admissions of homosexuality after Scotland decriminalised it in 1980. Personal revelations before this period are generally either drained of contextualising detail, or placed within long, fantastical sequences which repel the inference of biography. Take the references to Morgan's wartime lovers at the start and close of 'The New Divan' (1977), a poem sweeping disorientatingly between times and cultures, or the description of John Scott's funeral in 'Callisto' from *Stargate* (1979), the final of a series of poems set on Jupiter's moons.

The archive also contains much of that more experimental work which Morgan tended to reserve for fugitive presses and magazines congenial to adventurous forms. A veritable timeline of late 20th independent press activity can be constructed from the journals it contains: from the 1960s *Bo Heem E Um*, *Broadsheet*, *Extraverse*, *Joglers*, *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse*, *Tlaloc*, from the 1970s-1980s *Angel Exhaust*, *Second Aeon*, *Stereo Headphones*, from the 1990s-2000s *Gairfish*, *Object Permanence*, and more. Other iconic independent publishing ventures are attested to by some of Morgan's more elusive collections, notably *Starryveldt* (1965), a product of the Swiss concrete poet Eugen Gomringer's eponymous press, and *Scotch Mist* (1965), Morgan's contribution to the Ohio-based beat poet D.A. Levy's *Polluted Lake* series.

Of particular interest in this regard are Morgan's responses to the international concrete poetry movement formed in the mid-1950s, which brought visual form to the fore of poetic meaning. 'Dogs Round a Tree' and 'Original Sin at the Wateringhole', printed in Ian Hamilton Finlay's one-off 1963 journal *Fishsheet*, are Morgan's first published concrete poems. Playful picture poems comparable to some of Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, they evidence Morgan's enthusiastic but irreverent engagement with concrete style, the former using permutations of a stereotypical canine yelp to visually represent dogs careering around exclamation-mark tree-trunks:

ow!
 wow!
 bowwow!
 !bowwow
 w!bowwo
 ow!boww
 wow!bow
 wwow!bo
 owwow!b
 bowwow!
 wow!
 ow!²⁰

This use of ‘graphic space as structural agent’ affirms a vital tenet of concrete style as laid out in the Brazilian Noigandres group’s ‘Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry’ (1958).²¹ But the pictorial visual form, which seizes some of the referential power lost by semantics in such poetry, overrides that manifesto’s endorsement of non-figurative graphics. ‘Original Sin at the Watering-hole’ is a snake-like coil of sibilant adjectives, describing the thrashing of hippopotamuses upon ‘s|pottingalittlefloatin|g|asp!’:

asp
 on
 taneousobstreporousos
 tentatioussstentorianosmos
 isofhys
 tericallysnortingposseofs
 portingshehippopotamusses
 pottingalittlefloating
 g
 asp²²

Besides another pictorial graphic, this time suggesting the coils of a serpent, the poem’s subtly incorporated linear narrative – it is to be read from start to finish – transgresses another key tenet of concrete, the purely spatial juxtaposition of language-forms characteristic of, for example, Finlay’s 1960s work.

Also worth mentioning are the various single-poem publications Morgan produced in the same period, notably the aforementioned *Scotchmist* (1965), and *Sealwear* (1966). The former, hand-stamped in blue ink onto a squat paper booklet bound in luddite fashion, visually represents the easterly spread of fog over the Forth across a seven-page sequence:

FIRTH ROCK BUOY GULL BARGE FIRTH
 FIRTH ROCK BUOY GULL BARGE HAAR
 FIRTH ROCK BUOY GULL HAAR HAAR
 FIRTH ROCK BUOY HAAR HAAR HAAR
 FIRTH ROCK HAAR HAAR HAAR HAAR
 FIRTH HAAR HAAR HAAR HAAR HAAR
 HAAR HAAR HAAR HAAR HAAR HAAR²⁶

Because of the time-lag between engagement with each page, the diagonal drift effect also used in 'Little White Rows of Scotland' more clearly represents movement. The engulfment of the panorama by the single word 'Haar', meanwhile, adapts the concrete poets' aims to pare language down to universals to ends both localising and comic, 'Haar' both a Scots term for mist and an irreverant burst of laughter.

Sealwear is a single-poem-booklet hand-produced by Morgan himself. Each copy of a tiny run was written in felt-tip, bound in gold card and circulated privately under the name Gold Seal Press. The title and its design mimic those of a rubber clothing company, indicating, perhaps bathetically, the extensive analogies between concrete poetry and the visual language of advertising. Inside, a series of multi-coloured two-word phrases, anticipating Morgan's later *Colour Poems* (1978), is strung together through a haphazard process of semantic association, grammatical fragmentation and homophonic replacement, loosely bound by associations of water and sky:

see here
 sea ware
 sea air
 air wheels
 we laze
 lay ears
 sway heel

sail where
eel's way
wet seal
silhouette²⁷

The final, single-word phrase 'silhouette' brings the poem to a punning close on the apposite image of a black, perhaps rubber-clad figure.

Morgan's permutational poetry, a sub-category of concrete, uses the shuffled repetition of quotes to generate new and surprising meanings, a technique used in different contexts by, amongst others, Tristan Tzara, Bob Cobbing and William Burroughs. 'From an Old Scottish Chapbook', printed in Clark Coolidge's *Joglers* in 1966, re-arranges four folk song titles, 'The sorrowful lovers', 'The brown jug', 'The golden glove' and 'The blythsome bridal' into various surreal combinations: 'The glove lovers', 'The blythesome brown', 'The sorrowful golden'.²⁸ Their logical recalitrance partly reduces the poem to a jumble of graphic units, but the phrases retain that peculiar quality of intimation typical of the best use of the form.

The 1982 poem 'A *Mot* and its Range' shows Morgan using permutation to ruminate on the challenges facing a second-wave avant-garde. Written in reaction to a questionnaire circulated amongst contributors to *Stereo Headphones* by the magazine's editor Nicholas Zurbrugg, in which he asked whether poetry had 'advanced significantly' since Dada, it is appended to Morgan's printed response. After noting that 'neodada must be more ludic than shocking', Morgan introduces the poem, which re-arranges a Duchamp quote criticising 1960s pop art aesthetics – 'I threw the bottle-rack and the urinal in their faces as a challenge and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty' – as 'the poetic and oblique way out'.²⁹ His variations – 'I threw the bottle-rack and the aesthetic beauty into their faces as a urinal and now they admire them for their challenge', and so on – temper Duchamp's scorn, suggesting that neo-dada stances might recuperate rather than stultify the polemical energy of 1910s anti-art, admiring its 'challenge' while acknowledging its implicit 'aesthetic beauty'.³⁰

Such experiments waned but did not cease after the 1960s-70s heyday of visual poetry. Further visual-linguistic adventures include Morgan's 1994 collaboration *Wurdwappinschaw|Palabrarmas* with Cecilia Vicuña, a typographically complex, post-concrete exercise in translating double-meanings

between Scots and Spanish, and his stamp designs with Linda Taylor for Alec Finlay's 1996 album of artist-and-poet-illustrated stamps.³¹

The release of many such works into commercially peripheral echelons of literary culture, alongside Morgan's presence within its corridors of power, suggests a complex attitude to the relative advantages of 'independent' and 'mainstream' publishing – another imperfect distinction. It might suggest ethical ambivalence. It might equally reflect what Robyn Marsack calls Morgan's ability to 'have it both ways', a formal and tonal range not amenable to any one house-style.³² A postcard sent to Whyte with a copy of the 1987 collection *Newspoems*, composed 1965-71, reflects one aspect of a resulting dilemma regarding publication. The 'newspoems' are collage-poems, created from pages of newsprint partially eradicated to reveal the kind of momentarily encountered message generated by hurried mis-scanning. 'Levitation of the Trinity', for example, reads 'THREE| STANDING| ON| **BIRDS**'.³³ But the edition's formal adventurousness also extends to its binding. Each copy of the first edition, as Morgan wrote:

[H]as the contents in a different order, including the title-page, which may in fact come at the beginning, but I thought you'd prefer one of the more eccentric ones! Do you think these poems would mix with the otherwise fairly straightforward contents of my next Carcanet book (cleaned up and clearly printed of course), or should they remain in the Wacy! Ghetto?³⁴

Aleatoric pagination, a technique neatly enhancing the sense of chance encounter invited by the poems, was only possible within the 'ghetto' of independent publishing, although some newspoems were in fact included in the 'next Carcanet book', *Collected Poems*.

Besides suggesting a considered approach towards different literary milieus, the range of publications in the archive also suggests that Morgan was keen to cultivate a readership beyond their shared confines, willing to submit to most projects requesting his involvement. There are a huge number of anthologies featuring Morgan's work, many aimed at children, or based around seemingly quotidian topics: food, gardens, rivers. Some throw up engaging lines of correspondence, or even inspired poems. One accompanying note to Whyte does, however, suggest mild bemusement

at the small roster of poems from which anthology contributions were continually selected: 'one more anthology for you (one more stretter-hawl)',³⁵

The breadth of topics which Morgan tackled as a critic, translator and editor of other authors suggests a similarly open-minded approach to themes and readerships. Having said this, critical writing from different stages of his career does reveal a distinct, shifting set of interests and values. That is evident in comparing a 1950 review of his friend W. S. Graham's *The White Threshold* with a 1956 letter to the editor in *London Magazine*, between which a clear development in Morgan's attitude to the poet's relationship to society can be traced. The first, printed in *Nine* magazine, suggests that Morgan's early thought was partly in thrall to Graham's voyages of inward discovery, and attendant ethos of social isolation:

[T]he poet writes to find himself, not to integrate his idea of himself with his idea of the world, and in the act of finding the self he is stung and irradiated with feeling, drenched, 'drowned', assimilated in a sea-change, so that the voyager becomes a different voyager and the next discovery of the self is of a richer face, with its past in its eyes, and the reaction to it is again different, and (if honest) more significant.³⁶

The dialectical artistic development described here would inhere throughout Morgan's career, but through a condition of mutual feedback with social environments rather than such solipsistic divinations. The emphasis on inward cognitive penetration also evident in Morgan's early poetry is betrayed by the review's verbose, tortuously darting sentences, while its taste for oceans, rivers, and engulfment – again also evident in early collections – seems indebted to Graham's sense of, in Morgan's words, '[t]he sea as a great natural symbol', 'its inhuman alienness and its infinite magnetism over the human heart'.³⁷

The 1956 correspondence, critiquing an article by Colin Wilson, contrastingly reflects the imperative of social engagement associable with Morgan's later work. Quoting Wilson's lament at the demise of political engagement in Western literature over the last thirty years, Morgan states that '[t]here were plenty of writers, some of them very great and very human writers,

who were 'actively involved with the destiny of their times', and from whom much might have been learned, by both novelists and poets: let me mention no more than Gorky, Mayakovsky, Sholokhov.' Further, contemporary examples would be obvious, Morgan continues, to 'anyone who reads Russian', or even 'translations of post-war Russian books. Leonov, Panova, Granin, Chukovsky, Ehrenburg'.³⁸ The hectoring tone is youthful Morgan, but the thrust of his argument anticipates the empathy and engagement of his later 'social poems', as he called them. That Morgan felt social commitment could be learned from communist literature reflects the importance of the 1950s-1960s translations from such sources gathered in *Sov-poems* (1961) and *Wi' the Hail Voice* (1972) as a sort of intermediate register. Such a quality would not filter extensively into his own poetry until the early 1960s.

Morgan's criticism of other authors from the late-1950s to mid-1960s suggests a thawing of introspection, the gestation of a social conscience, and a new alertness to international writing. His 1962 essay 'The Beat Vigilantes' documents his sense of beat poetry as an admirably politically committed genre – in interviews he often referenced Ginsberg 'turning his queer shoulder to the wheel' as a source of inspiration – and influence upon his 1960s work.³⁹ 'The Fold-in Conference', a cut-up account of the 1962 Edinburgh International Writers Conference, pays formal homage to guest-speaker William Burroughs, while 'Jean Genet: "A legend, to be legible"', published the same year in the beat journal *The Outsider*, reflects another new interest.⁴⁰ The outsider status of Burroughs, Genet and Ginsberg as openly gay writers no doubt appealed besides the iconoclastic energy of their writing.

By the time Morgan was writing an April 1967 review of the *Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas*, his new-found aversion to self-involvement had extended into a guardedness regarding the New Apocalypse writers he had emulated in the 1950s: 'even an aware self-centredness has its dangers' Morgan writes. 'There is throughout these letters a remarkable absence of sympathy, consideration, tenderness – an absence often disguised by the verbal high spirits which offers some aesthetic compensation'.⁴¹

Much of Morgan's criticism bears a certain quality of sublimated self-analysis, through which similar inferences of interests and values can be made. As McGonigal's biography notes, one of his closest artistic and ethical allies was the Hungarian Sándor Weöres, whom he first met in Budapest in 1966

(166). Morgan's writing about Weöres exemplifies this kind of displacement. Introducing his translations of Weöres in *Penguin Modern European Poets: Sándor Weöres and Ferenc Juhász Selected Poems* (1970), Morgan notes that '[t]he basic sympathies of an unpolitical poet give his work a humanity which his immense technical gifts and wide reading in no way obscure'.⁴² Morgan's own sense of a basic, universal set of human values, unobscured by technical virtuosity, broad reading, or commitment to particular social causes, comes across as clearly as Weöres's here, a stance which sets his criticism and poetry apart from much which might have been innervated by cut-up, concrete and the nouveau roman.

There are other examples in a similar vein. Assessing Gerard Manley Hopkins's love poetry in Michael Schmidt and Nick Rennison's *Poets on Poets* (1997), Morgan notes that 'the tincture of homoeroticism, which is today quite clear and does not have to be apologized for, is made all the more moving from the restraint of its distilling', a statement which might adequately describe the seductive reticence of his own love poetry.⁴³ His 1983 essay 'Voice, Tone and Transition in *Don Juan*' places upon Byron the primary critique made of his own whittrick-like voice. 'Eternal impressionability, the lack of patience with reason, the search for unknown links-forward rather than known links back, is certainly zestful and creative, and one of the keys to his poetic method, but it may at the same time be self-protective in a man who is loath to expose a central jostle of unresolved beliefs and counter-beliefs.'⁴⁴ Projection theories seem crass if over-stressed, but such passages are certainly disarming.

'Behind all great critics there stands a paradigmatic poet', Jack Rillie notes. 'For Morgan, in the foreground at least, it is MacDiarmid, conscious though he is of his mentor's limitations.'⁴⁵ Morgan was, finally, and pre-eminently, a prolific MacDiarmid scholar. The archive contains numerous essays engaging different elements of the older poet's work, notably 'Poetry and Knowledge in MacDiarmid's later Work', published in a 1962 festschrift, in which the poets' common fascination with technology is revealed. Morgan states that MacDiarmid's work from *Stony Limits* (1934) to *The Kind of Poetry I want* (1961) can be seen as an ongoing exercise in attempting to bring science and technology into the realm of poetic contemplation, thus exemplifying, sometimes clumsily, both aspects of the ideal outlined in Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*:

[N]ot simply the acceptance by poetry of facts or things or attitudes which science may unavoidably set within man's future environment (once they have become an intimate part of that environment), but also a more positive co-operation by which poets will be 'carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself'.⁴⁶

The passage could equally be taken as a clarion call for Morgan's own science-fiction poetry. Given its publication context, that piece is unsurprisingly judicious in tone. A contemporaneous review of MacDiarmid's *Collected Poems* documents his mentor's limitations more unflinchingly (374-5):

Generalization is hazardous in dealing with writing where so often the good lays down with the bad in happy promiscuity – and in dealing with a man in whom there are so many apparent (and some real) contradictions and incongruities: one who has reconciled his Scottish Nationalism with his Communism, whose materialism is at least as mystical as it is dialectic, who believes in a 'poetry of fact and science' without having a scholar's command of accuracy or care for the validity of evidence, who is at different times a voice of working-class aspirations and a deeply anti-democratic purveyor of élite thinking.⁴⁷

The current of frustration coursing through this piece is less voracious than it was in the writing of many of Morgan's contemporaries about the divisive figurehead of the Scottish Renaissance, but it is palpable nonetheless. Morgan's criticism of MacDiarmid's marriage of nationalism and communism perhaps belies a comparable complexity in his own authorial character. That is, while Morgan's work frequently invokes anarchistic, perennially evolving communities, unbound to tribe or tradition – the science-fiction poem 'A Home in Space' springs to mind – he persistently used his critical writing as a platform to champion the cultural and social characters of his home country and city. This point, which could be extrapolated over a larger space, serves as an introduction to one of many areas of intrigue within a stirring incongruous artistic and critical spirit, a spirit which the Scottish Poetry Library's new archive catches in full sight.

Notes

- 1 All information in the first five paragraphs concerning Whyte and Morgan's relationship and the archive's compilation, is taken from a personal interview with Hamish Whyte conducted on Monday 23 January 2012 at the Scottish Poetry Library. Only direct quotes from that interview are referenced hereafter in the body of the text.
- 2 See Hamish Whyte, *Edwin Morgan: A Selected Bibliography 1950-1980* (Glasgow: [Mitchell Library], 1980); Hamish Whyte, 'Edwin Morgan: A Checklist', in *About Edwin Morgan*, ed. by Robert Crawford and Hamish Whyte (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), pp.140-255.
- 3 Robert Crawford, 'Morgan's Ludic Explorations', *Cencrastus*, 37 (1990), 22-4 (p.24). I have only provided citations according to the Edwin Morgan Archive's classification system in the case of unpublished material, but a copy of every published item referenced in this article is held in the archive.
- 4 For print interviews see, for example, Michael Gardiner, 'Interview with Edwin Morgan', *Angel Exhaust*, 10 (1994), 52-63. Audio-interviews include a cassette recording of *Edi Stark Meets Edwin Morgan*, recorded on 29 December 1999 and broadcast on millennium eve on BBC Radio Scotland, a few months after Morgan was told he had prostate cancer: Edinburgh, Scottish Poetry Library, Edwin Morgan Archives 01/112/05.
- 5 James McGonigal, *Beyond the Last Dragon: A Life of Edwin Morgan* (Dingwall: Sandstone, 2010), p.51. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
- 6 SPL EMA 01/67/05/01-02.
- 7 Marco Fazzini, 'Edwin Morgan: Two Interviews', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 29 (1996), 45-57 (pp.45-6).
- 8 'Dusty Flower', *GUM*, 50/10, 15 March 1939, p.311. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
- 9 'Plainsong for a Lovely Lady', *GUM*, 50/10, 15 March 1939, p.320.
- 10 'A Warning of Waters at Evening', *Accent*, 9.2 (1949), pp.117-18.
- 11 'Northern Nocturnal', in *New Poems 1955: A P.E.N. Anthology*, ed. by Patric Dickin-son, J. C. Hall and Erica Marx (London: Michael Joseph, 1955), pp.103-4 (p.103). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
- 12 Morgan provides one such description of Kelvingrove Park in 'Transgression in Glas-
gow: A Poet Coming to Terms', in *De-centring Sexualities: Politics and Representation Beyond the Metropolis*, ed. by Richard Phillips and others (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.278-91 (p.281).
- 13 See for example Edwin Morgan, 'Glasgow Writing', *Books in Scotland*, 15 (1984), 4-6 (p.4).
- 14 'Night Pillion', *Saltire Review*, 4.12 (1957), 54-5 (p.54). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
- 15 'From a City Balcony', in *The Second Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968), p.58.
- 16 Iain Crichton Smith, 'The Public and Private Morgan', in *About Edwin Morgan*, pp.39-53 (p.47).

- 17 'Phoning', *Lines*, 22 (1966), p.22. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
- 18 'The Quarrell', *Form*, 1 (1969), 24-5 (p.24). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
- 19 'From the North', in *From Glasgow to Saturn* (Cheadle: Carcanet, 1973), p.23.
- 20 'Dogs Round a Tree', *Fishesheet*, 1 (1963), p.1.
- 21 Augusto de Campos, Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari, 'Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry', trans. the authors, in *Concrete Poetry: A Worldview*, ed.by Mary Ellen Solt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), pp.71-2 (p.71) (first published in *Noigandres*, 4 (1958) [?]).
- 22 'Original Sin at the Wateringhole', *Fishesheet*, p.1.
- 23 'The Flowers of Scotland', in *Edwin Morgan: Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1990), p.203 (first published in *Scottish International*, 2 (1968), p.3).
- 24 Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Little White Rose (To John Gawsworth)', in *Stony Limits and Scots Unbound* (Edinburgh: Castle Wynd Press, 1956), p.121.
- 25 'The Little White Rows of Scotland', *Broadsheet*, 3 (1967), p.5.
- 26 *Scotch Mist* (Cleveland, Renegade Press, 1965).
- 27 *Sealwear* (Glasgow: Gold Seal Press, 1965).
- 28 'From an Old Scottish Chapbook', *Joglars*, 3 (1966), p.36.
- 29 "'What is the State of the Contemporary Avant-Garde" Edwin Morgan', *Stereo Headphones*, 8-9-10 (1982), p.78.
- 30 'A Mot and its Range', *Stereo Headphones*, 8-9-10, p.78.
- 31 Edwin Morgan and Cecilia Vicuña, *Wurdwappinschaw|Palabrarmas: Morning Star Folio 5/2* (Edinburgh: Morning Star, 1994); *Illustrated Stamp Album for Postage Stamps of the World: Imagined Lands. Vol. XIV - Scotland*, ed. by Alec Finlay (Edinburgh: City Art Centre, 1996).
- 32 Robyn Marsack, 'A Declaration of Independence: Edwin Morgan and Contemporary Poetry', in *About Edwin Morgan*, pp.25-38 (p.37).
- 33 'Levitation of the Trinity', in *News poems* (London: Wacyl, 1987).
- 34 SPL EMA 01/02/08/02-03.
- 35 SPL EMA 01/37/01.
- 36 'Graham's Threshold', *Nine*, 2/2 (1950), 100-3 (p.100).
- 37 'Graham's Threshold', p.102.
- 38 Letter to the editor, *London Magazine*, 3/11 (1956), 65-6 (pp.65-6).
- 39 'The Beat Vigilantes', *New Saltire*, 5 (1962), 75-80.
- 40 'The Fold-in Conference', *Gambit: Edinburgh University Review* (1962), pp.14-23; 'Jean Genet: "A legend, to be legible"', *The Outsider*, 1/2, (1962), 35-40.
- 41 'Scalped by a Bourbon', *The Review*, 17 (1967), 41-4 (p.42).
- 42 'Introduction', in *Penguin Modern European Poets: Sándor Weöres and Ferenc Juhász Selected Poems*, ed. & trans. by Edwin Morgan and David Wevill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp.12-13.
- 43 'Gerard Manley Hopkins', in *Poets on Poets*, ed. by Nick Rennison and Michael Schmidt (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), p.188.
- 44 'Voice, Tone and Transition in *Don Juan*', in *Byron: Wrath and Rhyme*, ed. by Alan Bold (London: Vision Press, 1983), pp.57-77 (pp.57-8).
- 45 Jack Rillie, 'The Kind of Poetry I Want: Morgan as Critic' in *About Edwin Morgan*, pp.105-17 (p.109).

- 46 'Poetry and Knowledge in MacDiarmid's Later Work', in *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Festschrift*, ed. by. K. D. Duval and Sydney Goodsir Smith (Edinburgh: Duval, 1962), pp.129-39 (p.129).
- 47 'Collected Poems by Hugh MacDiarmid', *Critical Quarterly*, 4/4 (1962), 374-5 (p.375).

University of Edinburgh

Copyright of Scottish Literary Review is the property of Association for Scottish Literary Studies and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.