Edwin Morgan, Ian Hamilton Finlay and UK Concrete Poetry

Curated by Greg Thomas

Annotated Item List

Section 1: Edwin Morgan, Ian Hamilton Finlay, and the birth of concrete poetry in the UK

Concrete poetry is poetry which foregrounds language’s material qualities, most fundamentally by using unconventional typography and layout to create poems designed to be looked at as well as read. Concrete poetry could be considered both a set of stylistic traits present in much literature and art, and a specific movement formed in 1955, when the Swiss poet Eugen Gomringer and a group of Brazilian poets called the Noigandres agreed to give their work that common title. After spreading to many countries worldwide, the concrete poetry movement started by Gomringer and the Noigandres began to influence British poets from 1962 onwards. Two of the first to explore its potential were Ian Hamilton Finlay and Edwin Morgan. This first section of the exhibition contains some of the earliest works they produced in response to the international movement.

Entrance cabinet top shelf (l-r)

1. *Fishsheet* / ed. Ian Hamilton Finlay

Wild Hawthorn Press, 1963

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. *Rapel: 10 Fauve and Suprematist Poems* / Ian Hamilton Finlay

Wild Hawthorn Press, 1963

Scottish Poetry Library special collections

1. ‘Homage to Malevich’ / Ian Hamilton Finlay

from *Rapel: 10 Fauve & Suprematist Poems*

1. ‘Homage to Larionov’ / Ian Hamilton Finlay

from *Rapel: 10 Fauve & Suprematist Poems*

1. ‘S.O.S’ / Ian Hamilton Finlay

from *Rapel: 10 Fauve & Suprematist Poems*

1. *Telegrams from my Windmill* / Ian Hamilton Finlay

Wild Hawthorn Press, 1964

Scottish Poetry Library special collections

Entrance cabinet bottom shelf (l-r)

1. *Starryveldt* / Edwin Morgan

Eugen Gomringer Press, 1965

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. *Sealwear* / Edwin Morgan

Gold Seal Press, 1966

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. *Scotch Mist* / Edwin Morgan

Renegade Press, 1965

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse* 6 (with insert) / ed. Ian Hamilton Finlay

1963

Scottish Poetry Library special collections

1. *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse* 13 / ed. Ian Hamilton Finlay

[s.d.]

Scottish Poetry Library special collections

Reproductions below entrance cabinet (l-r)

1. ‘Starryveldt’ / Edwin Morgan

from *Starryveldt*

1. ‘In Praise of Surtsey’ / Edwin Morgan

from *Starryveldt*

1. “it is little” / Ian Hamilton Finlay

from *Telegrams from my Windmill*

1. “redboat” / Ian Hamilton Finlay

from *Telegrams from my Windmill*

Section 2: The origins of concrete poetry in Morgan and Finlay’s work

Morgan and Finlay, like other UK concrete poets, were already exploring the relationship between visual expression and language, and other themes and styles in common with concrete poetry, prior to their discovery of the international movement. This area contains reproductions of some of their early works which reflect such links.

Reproductions second left-hand shelf top (l-r)

1. ‘The Dancers Inherit the Party’ / Ian Hamilton Finlay (with Zeljko Kujundzic)

From *The Dancers Inherit the Party* / Ian Hamilton Finlay

Migrant Press, 1960

Scottish Poetry Library special collections

1. ‘The Pond at Oo Farm (Rousay)’ / Ian Hamilton Finlay

from *Origin*, 6 / ed. Cid Corman, 1962

Scottish Poetry Library special collections

1. *Sovpoems* / Edwin Morgan

Migrant Press, 1961

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. ‘Aye but Can Ye’ & ‘Whit Mair?’ / Vladimir Mayakovsky trans. Edwin Morgan

from *Sovpoems*

Reproductions first left-hand shelf side (l-r)

* 1. From *Glasgow Beasts, an a burd, haw, an inseks, an, aw, a fush* / Ian Hamilton Finlay

Wild Hawthorn Press, 1961

Scottish Poetry Library special collections

1. *Concertina* / Ian Hamilton Finlay (with John Picking & Peter McGinn)

Wild Hawthorn Press, 1962

Donated by Edwin Morgan, Scottish Poetry Library special collections

Section 3: The spread of concrete poetry in the UK

While there was no coherent concrete poetry “movement” in Britain, from around 1963 Finlay and Morgan did begin communicating with other poets exploring language’s visual dimensions in response to the international style. This section contains examples of these poets’ work, while the basement display case contains some of the most important of the 1960s-1970s little magazines and small press publications through which concrete poetry was circulated.

First right-hand cabinet (t-b)

1. *Eclipse* / Alan Riddell

Calder, 1972

Scottish Poetry Library reference collection

1. ‘The Five Buddhas and the Womb of the Thatagatas’ / Dom. Sylvester Houédard

from *Gloup & Woup* / ed. Bob Cobbing

Arc, 1974

Scottish Poetry Library special collections

1. ‘Typestract 1972’ (reproduction) / Dom Sylvester Houédard

from *Typewriter Art* / ed. Alan Riddell

London Magazine Editions, 1975

Scottish Poetry Library special collections

1. ‘Amor’, from ‘The Three Graces’ (photograph) / Ken Cox

from *Gloup & Woup*

1. *Pentacle* / John Sharkey

South Street, 1969

Kindly lent by Thomas A. Clark

1. ‘Kurrirrurriri’ / Bob Cobbing

from *Gloup & Woup*

Scottish Poetry Library special collections

1. *Mindplay* / ed. John Sharkey

Lorrimer, 1971

Scottish Poetry Library special collections

Reproductions third and fourth left-hand shelf tops (l-r)

1. Times Literary Supplement 6th August 1964

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. Times Literary Supplement 6th August 1964

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. From *Broadsheet*, 3/ ed. Hayden Murphy

1967

Edwin Morgan Archive

Basement cabinet (l-r)

1. *Form,* 4 / ed. Stephen Bann, Mike Weaver, Phil Steadman

Cambridge, 1967

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. *Tarasque,* 4 / ed. Simon Cutts et al

Nottingham, [s.d.]

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. *OU,* 22/ ed. Henri Chopin

Ingatestone, [circa 1965-9]

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. *Broadsheet*, 22 / ed. Hayden Murphy

Dublin, 1967

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. *Tlaloc*, 11 / ed. Cavan McCarthy

Leeds, 1967

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. *Joglars*, 3 / ed. Clark Coolidge & Michael Palmer

Providence/New York, 1966

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. *Second Aeon*, 11 / ed. Peter Finch

Cardiff, [circa 1968-9]

Edwin Morgan Archive

Section 3: Experiments and Developments

Finlay’s concrete poetry was characterised from the outset by innovations in material form. This section includes examples of such forms as the standing poem and poster poem. Morgan meanwhile, found new ways to incorporate narrative statement into concrete poetry, as well as experimenting with physical format, as reflected respectively by such works as his *Emergent Poems* and ‘Festive Permutational Poem’.

Second right-hand cabinet (t-b)

1. *Standing Poem 1 (Pear/Appear)* / Ian Hamilton Finlay

Wild Hawthorn Press, 1963

Donated by Edwin Morgan, Scottish Poetry Library special collections

1. *Standing Poem 2 (Apple/Heart)* / Ian Hamilton Finlay

Wild Hawthorn Press, 1964

Donated by Edwin Morgan, Scottish Poetry Library special collections

1. *First Suprematist Standing Poem* / Ian Hamilton Finlay

Wild Hawthorn Press, 1963

Donated by Edwin Morgan, Scottish Poetry Library special collections

1. *Canal Stripe 3* / Ian Hamilton Finlay

Wild Hawthorn Press, 1964

Scottish Poetry Library special collections

1. Ocean Stripe 5 (with reproduction of inside page) / Ian Hamilton Finlay

Tarasque Press, 1967

Scottish Poetry Library special collections

1. *The Horseman’s Word* / Edwin Morgan

Akros, 1970

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. *Gnomes* / Edwin Morgan

Akros, 1968

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. *Newspoems* / Edwin Morgan

Wacy! / 1987

Edwin Morgan Archive

1. ‘Concrete Ballad of Reading Gaol’ (reproduction) / Edwin Morgan

from *Newspoems*

Left-hand shelf tops

1. *Festive Permutational Poem* (8 streamers) / Edwin Morgan

Brighton Festival Publications / 1967

Kindly donated by Stephen Bann

Reproduction fourth left-hand shelf top

1. ‘Spacepoem 3: Off Course’ / Edwin Morgan

from *From Glasgow to Saturn* / Edwin Morgan

Carcanet, 1973

typeset for exhibition

Reproduction right-hand shelf side

1. ‘Newmarket’ / Edwin Morgan

from *The Horseman’s Word*

typeset for exhibition

Reproduction stairs to basement

1. *Emergent Poems* / Edwin Morgan

Editions Hansjörg mayer, 1967

Edwin Morgan Archive

Stairs and first floor walls

1. *Poster Poem: Le Circus* / Ian Hamilton Finlay

Wild Hawthorn Press, 1964

Donated by Edwin Morgan, Scottish Poetry Library special collections

1. *Sea ms* / Ian Hamilton Finlay

Wild Hawthorn Press, [circa 1964-67]

Donated by Edwin Morgan, Scottish Poetry Library special collections

1. *Ajar* / Ian Hamilton Finlay

Wild Hawthorn Press, [circa 1964-7]

Scottish Poetry Library special collections

Basement cabinet

1. *Wave/rock* / Ian Hamilton Finlay

1966

Donated by Edwin Morgan, Scottish Poetry Library special collections

Reproduction, First floor children’s area wall

1. ‘Bees’ Nest’ / Edwin Morgan

from *Starryveldt*

Set in vinyl for exhibition (thanks to Signsation, Edinburgh)

The poem ‘Bees’ Nest’ is reproduced from Edwin Morgan’s 1965 concrete poetry collection *Starryveldt*. The poem’s rectangular visual form is at one level very formal and non-figurative, but the clues in the poem’s language also make it seem like the shape of the hive referred to in the title. Morgan’s shuffling of its constituent phrase from one line to another, meanwhile, and the close spacing of words, suggest the bees’ teeming motion, with the seriffed upward strokes of the letter “b” like wings struggling to unfurl. The phrase’s exaggerated alliterativess and accents, meanwhile, suggest an interest in recording the phonetic dimensions of the Scots language which presages Tom Leonard’s poetry. Like many of Morgan’s poems then, the playfulness of ‘Bees’ Nest’ belies the nuances of its composition; it thus exemplifies something of the surprising breadth of expression possible within concrete poetry.

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