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 In this issue:

Editorial: The City
 The Great Divide: An Interview with Michael Rosen
 The Hunter S. Thompson Interview
 In the City: Anthony Cropper, James Nash and Dee Rimbaud
 Excerpt from Naked City
 Leaving New York for Greece
 Into Belfast: Endpiece
 Excerpt from Naked City 2
 Existentialist angst in Modern society. The roll of the 'New Existentialist'
 Hunter S. Thompson: Loathing and Fear for a Nation 1939-2005
 Reviews

 The City
 Editorial by Stray Dog

This issue is devoted the city. Now that means many things to all of our readers; all cities are unique, even in the harsh striving face of global and some would say destructive consumerism. Corporations the world over are trying to change the urban landscape for good with the power of the brand. Trust me on this one, there isn't a person amongst us who hasn't had the tiresome experience of lying on a hotel bed and trying to figure out which city they were in. This is either because (a) we're jet-lagged, (b) drunk, and/or; (c) because major hotel chains have this annoying habit of making all their hotels look alike. Regardless of whether your in San Francisco or Bangkok you can guarantee that the furniture is mahogany, the bed has way too many pillows on it and someone in their infinite wisdom thinks that a block of plush paint above the bed will make you feel right at home. Not surprising that most of us flee expensive hotel chains in search of the real city. And the urban landscape is still there, beyond the coffee houses, the fast food joints, the mini malls, the shopping centres, the endless sales of bland clothing with bland logos, you can hear it in the language still spoken, in the words still yelled in the midnight hour. To me the city, the real city comes alive at night, at the end of a tourist season, when the shops close and the shoppers go home. In the silence between the last deli door closing and the first themed bar drinkers, you can hear the rhythm of the city and if you really want to smell the city, I suggest getting up just before dawn opening your front door, sit on the stoop and just breathe it in. At that time you see the real people of the city passing by enjoying the smell, the waking sounds of the city landscape, the sounds that grow and swell into a cacophony; try it some time, it brings peace to the soul and a sense to the mess.

In the bid to bring some this serenity in the chaos to this website I have been asked to introduce, in my capacity as the head dog at The Stray Dog Cafe, the forum. For those of you who have never heard of us, we have been around for sometime, working with the coffee house poets and philosophers, the beat poetry relapse, the ups and many downs of San Fran. So take out time to post up a hello, or some feedback and track me down and ask me questions.

Take time out from the rat race, reach out and realise that you're not really the only one out there in the city, there's millions of us, just waiting, just breathing, just laughing and crying, drinking and eating, waiting for the dawn, waiting for the night, waiting for a reason.

In this edition, Michael Rosen comes to terms with the loss of his son and the loss of a vast section of his life, a farewell to the great gonzo, Hunter S. Thompson, Anthony Cropper, James Nash and Dee Rimbaud come to terms with the naked city, Andrew O'Donnell takes us through the streets of Kathmandu, Zoe Artemis leaves New York for Greece, Dave Wood ends his travels in Belfast and we look at the work of T.F. Griffin on the eve of the release of The Great Refusal.

<http://straydogcafe.proboards46.com/>

 The Great Divide: An Interview with Michael Rosen
 Interview by Bixby Monk

Michael Rosen was born into a London Jewish family, the son of two distinguished educators - a childhood rich in books, stories and conversation; leading to ambitions of being an actor (a desire fuelled by weekly visits to the Questors Theatre in Ealing) or a farmer. Rosen attended Middlesex Hospital Medical School for a year but transferred to Wadham College, Oxford to study English Literature. At Oxford, he started to realise his ambition of acting (as well as writing and directing). During this period Rosen began a long love affair with contemporary working class ballads. He retains a passion for street rhymes, popular songs and folk stories. His first play, Backbone, was performed at London's Royal Court Theatre in 1969. His next stop was the BBC, where he worked on Play School, schools TV and radio drama. In 1973, Rosen joined the National Film School. His first collection, Mind Your Own Business, was published in 1974. Although it was not planned as a collection for children, it appeared on Andre Deutsch's children's list. Collections of humorous verse for children followed, including Wouldn't You Like to Know, You Tell Me and Quick, Let's Get Out of Here. Rosen was fundamental in opening up children's access to poetry: both through his own writing and with important anthologies such as Culture Shock. He was one of the first poets to make visits to schools throughout the UK (and further a field in Australia, Canada and Singapore). In 1993, Michael gained an MA in Children's Literature from Reading University. He also had a very distinguished broadcasting career, presenting such programmes as *BBC Radio 4's Treasure Islands*, *BBC Radio 3's Best Words and Meridian* - the World Service Arts programme.

Your childhood had a profound effect on your writing, you were brought up in a Jewish household, how did this lifestyle effect what you wanted to be and what you became?

I suppose that it provided the basis for everything. My parents were both very 'parental' and very much in the world, taking part in political and cultural events. This meant that their ways of going on, their thoughts, ideas and personal lives all had an impact on me. Their background was London's East End Jewish community. Their own parents or grandparents were immigrants from Eastern Europe, escaping pogroms and persecution. My parents were highly political and not at all religious. Their first political allegiance was to the Communist Party but they left this in 1957.

Their social allegiance was to education and creativity. All this sounds very serious and solemn but my household was full of jokes, music, laughter, teasing, story-telling, singing and people coming in and out.

In *Carrying the Elephant* (Penguin 2002) you wrote about the experience of losing your son to meningitis, the collection has the real feeling of being cathartic, both to the poet and the reader. It also differs from your work to that period, that at its core is a strong adult voice, an insurmountable grief, how did you tackle such a raw issue in such a public domain? All writing is public because it uses that very public social thing, language. I think of writing as a very particular kind of conversation: pre-meditated, reflective, structured consciously, with attention to the form and format and it's these aspects that direct a piece of writing towards this or that audience. In other words, all writing anticipates an audience by virtue of its patterning, shapes and forms. This is my preface to saying that I have no problems about opening a conversation about this kind of grief within the form that I chose. I might have problems with having it, say, in a church, but not within the confines of prose poetry.

In *This is Not My Nose* (Penguin 2004) this cathartic feeling continues, as you come to term with ten years of being a 'stranger' and your awakening from this illness. How do you think this awakening has effected your work? I think this is the bizarre moment of my life. The hypothyroidism is an exaggerated form of what everyone feels: that in some way or another the person they are now isn't exactly the same person as I was earlier and that the events that happened in between somehow estrange me from the person I once was. My hypothyroidism is an extreme form of that. What's more, the period of being hypothyroid was so long, it has a life of its own, as if I was, say in prison, or abroad, or some such. I think it's not so much the awakening that is affecting, but the slow coming to terms with what it was all about.

In this collection of eighty poems, you have revealed a startling and raw side of yourself, but why did you choose to write prose poetry over the traditionally perceived Rosen poem structure? I found that writing these 'paragraphs' (as I call them to myself), offers me the opportunity to think in a particular kind of short bite. Because I think of them as prose poems it gives me the chance to imagine them as paragraphs in a wider book, that they are linked in some way or another. These linkages don't have to be traditional prosodic ones e.g. verse form, choruses, but can be much more allusive: fragments of images, half sentences, short quotes and the like. (Though traditional poetry does this too, of course.)

How did you tackle the task of creating what is essentially one long prose poem that spans a vast section of your life?

I think I've partly answered that in the previous answer but I would add that it is through the fragments that I create the whole. The little foreword at the beginning of *Carrying the Elephant* was meant to express that. It's the mosaic principle, assembling each fragment to make the whole, but the whole is itself fractured.

What did you feel were the positives and negatives of this?

I won't speak anymore for the positives but the negatives are that it can be a self-indulgent way of writing. Any fragment can sometimes seem as valuable as the next. I have to try and weed out the unnecessary.

What are the pros and cons of being a 'children's poet' and how did you become one?

I became a children's poet by writing about my childhood. I thought I was being an ironic adult poet but children's literature 'claimed' me through the auspices of a children's book editor, Pam Royds and a BBC Schools Radio

producer, Joan Griffiths. Thereafter the apparatus of children's literature, the reviewers, the schools, the libraries, the teacher trainers adopted me. All this is incredibly supportive, informing and shaping. I am grateful to all of them and for all the analysis and thought and sheer hard work that provides this kind of enabling environment. The downside is only the usual one of snobbery. Poetry attracts snobs. Snobbery is one of the ways in which one school of poetry distinguishes itself from another. The snobbery is disguised as 'critical edge' and the like but mostly it's a social matter of disliking this or that kind of populism. This is couched in the language of classic technical aspects of poetry. Children's poetry has a few critics and poets who get exercised about this sort of thing and regard me as a debasing influence. That's OK, they're entitled to think that if what I'm trying to say is 'debasing'. However, the criticism suggests that it's not what I write about that is debasing but how I write. This, I regard, as absurd and in the end rebounds on the argument itself. That's to say, anyone who thinks that form, of itself, can be debasing has trapped themselves in a prison of literary narcissism.

How important do you feel children's literature is, not just to the target audience but also to adults?

Children's literature is as important and as irrelevant as adult literature. That's to say, it's clear that pretty well all the human beings that we know of seem to need or want narratives and reflective passages of language. With children, this need has certain interesting shapes and patterns that have built up over the years, certain kinds of 'safenesses', certain kinds of fantasies. There is also an interesting story to tell about how the thing we call children's literature is always mediated by adults whether as writers, editors, critics, teachers, parents. In a way, this means that children's literature isn't children's literature. It's a particular kind of adult-child literature and nearly always depends on these adult-child relationships. The 'baby' book for example, is in fact a parent-baby book.

Not many readers of your work are aware that you have also written for theatre, how do you feel writing for theatre and poetry has changed since your first production, Backbone, in 1969?

I'm long used to the notion that one group of people who know me for one thing have no idea that I did or do this or that somewhere else in my life, so no problems there. In some respects, writing, theatre and poetry haven't changed at all. The structures of the London theatre haven't changed very much, have they? Again, poetry seems quite similar too. We all write about slightly different things but the structures within which we write seem not to have changed very much. I think the newspaper and TV business exaggerate change and newness in order to sell their wares but if you look closely there are very few changes in the space of just a few decades. When I think of the sixties it feels very much like now. Even the thing that supposed to sound fresh and new, pop music, often sounds to me incredibly like sixties music - and even when it isn't, the structures are the same. Of course, there is a major change in demography in the UK. Thankfully the empire isn't 'out there' anymore. Its children and grandchildren have come here and we're all better for that, I think.

What advice would you give people wanting to write?

Read lots, write lots. Share what you write with people you respect. Try and get the things you write into forms that people you don't know can get hold of - internet, pamphlets, magazines, self-publishing etc.

What do you think would improve the quality of poetry in the UK, and if you had the power, how would you do it?

I would demand that TV and radio do poetry 'commercials'. In between programmes I would hire poets to read and perform poems, both their own and

some from the past. I would hire photographers and artists to experiment with these too.

 The Hunter S. Thompson Interview
 Interview by Adam Bulger

Hunter S. Thompson, known for such work as Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, was found dead on Sunday the 20th February 2005 in his Aspen-area home. He died of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound. He was 67.

This interview took place in early March 2003, shortly after the publication of Kingdom of Fear, in which Hunter looked back over decades of fast living, hard drinking and sharp writing. It is a story of crazed road trips fuelled by bourbon and black acid, of insane judges and giant porcupines, of girls, guns, explosives and, of course, bikes.

To an Answering Machine *I had an interview scheduled with Hunter Thompson.* Followed by an explosion of music over the telephone.

"Hey hey hey hi. Sorry, this thing is just dragging on longer than I thought. I'll call you, I'd imagine in like ten minutes".

OK. Sure. Twenty minutes later. *Hello?*

"I got caught up in some goddamn weird old English romance of some kind".

Was it something you were writing or reading?

"I was watching a movie..."

HST yells to someone in the room.

"...Sense and Sensibility, I think. I couldn't believe it, I was wrapped up in this ancient goddamned thing".

Jane Austen, right?

"Yes it is".

I've never seen it, I think I've read the book, though.

"Goddamn, I must be in a unique mood of some kind because I got completely into it".

Really. I wouldn't think you'd like that.

"I wouldn't either. I've never been into Jane Austen, particularly. But that was well done. A nicely done movie".

OK, then. What is the state of the American dream today?

"Oh, god. That's a pretty pre-thought out, written on a list kind of question. Not very good. Yeah I would say not. The American Dream ran out with the American century. I'm still figuring it out. That's a pretty strong statement. I'm still putting the pieces together right now".

What do you think Horatio Alger would do if he were alive today?

"He'd probably be a terrorist".

Do you think its possible for a man to be free in present day America?

"Well, it depends on who it is. I'm doing pretty well. I don't know about you. I have a feeling it's going to be more of a struggle than it's been for a while".

Why's that?

"Look around you. The military state we're being sort of formed into - shit, I wrote about this last night, I forgot what I said. The military structure - did you read the book I just wrote?"

Yeah. Kingdom of Fear. I thought it was a very apt title.

"Yeah, more so than I realized when I came up with it".

What do you think of how the Bush Administration is cracking down on civil rights?

"The Bush administration is a heap of Nazi shit. Bullshit. Yeah, you can put it that way. I don't know what your audience is ready for. What kind of target".

In the seventies you had a meeting with Richard Nixon and you talked about college football. What would you say if you had the same face time with George W. Bush?

"Oh, ahhh. To put this on realistic lines. I was the only person in the press corp. who could talk about football, and Nixon wanted to talk about football. I don't know. I don't think Bush would want to talk to me. I'm a journalist, of course I would talk to him".
But the impression that I had was that Nixon probably didn't want to talk to you that much, either.

"Well he sure as hell wanted to talk about football. Once I got into the car we became instant buddies. He was good company. I enjoyed him. He got me on the plane, showed me all around. I almost dropped a zippo into the gas tank of his Lear jet".

On purpose?

"No, no no. I liked him, at the time there. He was good company. That's all we talked about was football.
Do you think you'd be able to talk baseball with the former owner of the Texas Rangers?

"Well, I don't know baseball that well. I met Bush at some point, long ago and I don't know what the hell I'd talk to him about now. I mean; Nixon wasn't honest about anything but football. And Bush? I don't know. I'd be curious to talk to him; I'd like to ask him what the fuck he's doing. But I know I wouldn't ask that either. I'm a professional journalist. I would conduct a professional interview. I don't know. We'd probably find something to talk about".

What do you think of the state of political journalism?

"Very bad. Very lazy and almost cowardly in its obsequiousness".

What important questions are they not asking?

"God damn, man. Who wrote these questions for you?"

I did.

"Well, they're all kind of pertinent, but let's take a break and kind of work up to some of these".

OK. I'm going to ask you some more softball questions. What are you driving these days and what's its top speed?

"Oh Jesus, you really are one of these, aren't you? It's snowing out. I drive a Jeep Cherokee through the snow".

If they offered you the post of the governor of Samoa today would you accept it?

"Oh. That's interesting. Well, yeah, if I thought I could really have free hand. It would be an adventure. I'd try it for a year".

You're the last public figure to use a cigarette holder. What's the deal?

"For one thing, it is not a holder. It is a filter. A big difference. A filter clears a full ounce of scum and tar a day, keeps it from ruining my lungs. The first time I used it, I saw what came out of a filter and I never stopped".

How does that compare with your double life as a character in the Doonesbury comic strip?

"Well that's a horrible piece of shit. I got used to it a long time ago. I used to be a little perturbed by it. It was a lot more personal. The bastard was, well, I don't read it or follow it. It no longer bothers me".

What's the best drug to write on?

"You've got dumb questions".

Um, sorry. Have you ever done ecstasy?

"Yeah. It seemed kind of mild and talky. I didn't mind it. It's not in the nature of the kind of drug I am normally accustomed to, it was a quasi-drug, I guess".

What kind of music are you listening to?

"Let's see. I just got the new Bob Dylan box set from the Rolling Thunder tour from 1975. It's kind of a big package with a book and several CDs in there. It's maybe the best rock and roll album I've ever heard".

You don't think that was after his peak?

"Shit. You really are dumb. You have to listen to it and find out. If you think that, you really are ignorant. What do you want to talk about, Eminem?"

Is writing still fun for you?

"Yes".

What's the best firearm for home security?

"Twelve gauge short barrel shotgun".

And what's the best for just fucking around?

"Machine guns are kind of nice. You can have a lot of fun with them. It's like watering the lawn. I don't get to play them very often".

Ralph Steadman said that you almost killed him in a gun-related explosion while he was visiting you in Aspen. What happened?

"I don't know that story, but no doubt it's right. I can think of several times. Ralph is well acquainted with my lifestyle".

He also said that you claim that you are one of the few people who should be allowed to own a handgun gun, and he said that you definitely shouldn't be allowed to own one. HST laughs.

"Ralph is one person who definitely shouldn't be allowed to drink whiskey".

Why's that?

"I'll wait for his reason why I shouldn't have handguns. Whiskey is not beneficial for Ralph".

You were a very vocal critic of the Clinton administration, but you were in correspondence with Sandy Berger, Clinton's Defense secretary. Are you guys still friends?

"Oh, yeah, definitely, he's a good boy. I disagree with a lot of my friends. Just because he's my friend doesn't mean he has to agree with me".
Are you still in touch with Patrick Buchanan?

"Occasionally. We're still friends. Patrick is a libertarian, or at least in that direction. I think of politics as a circle, not a spectrum of one line not just right and left. Patrick and I are often pretty close. Patrick's an honest person. He's a straight guy and very smart guy".
His magazine, the American Conservative, is really interesting. It's all anti-Bush, basically.

"I'm pleased with that. I frequently agree with him. He's an intelligent - you might call him a politician".

He did run for President a couple of times.

"Yeah, he's a politician".

Why exactly did you try to deliver an elk's heart to Jack Nicholson's house?

"I thought it would be fun and it's in the spirit of our relationship. A little humour. I don't know; it just came to me tonight. I had a few bombs, you know. We do that pretty frequently, exchange bizarre presents. I couldn't have foreseen the horrible circumstances around it. He had just gotten in from LA. I didn't know it, but he had a stalker. I saw him the afternoon he got in. I said I'd see him later. I figured, shit, I have some presents for the kids. I was supposed to get there a little earlier. I feel a little queasy looking back on the night. Of course it was all in good humour. It went wrong in so many weird ways. I went out there and sort of did my thing and left, feeling rejected sort of. Bear in mind I was pretty much wanked up, in the mood I frequently get in with Jack. He's pretty fast. He's one of the natural aristocrats of our time".

He's fast?

"Oh, yeah, we have a good time talking. Jack is quick. One of the smartest people I know".

What do you think of how the Hell's Angel's have gone mainstream?

"Don't confuse the Hells Angels that I wrote about with what the Hells Angels are now. I consider Sonny Barger to be a friend of mine".

Really. Even after his boys beat you up?

"Shit, he didn't do it. You swim with sharks, you're going to get bit once in a while. I wasn't surprised by that. In fact, I thought it was long overdue by the time it happened. I always got along fine with Sonny. I haven't seen him in a while. He's an extreme case of a sociopath, but I like him".

After Altamont, too. (Altamont was a free concert, a culmination of the Rolling Stones 1969 tour, security was provided by the Hells Angels. It ended in a violent blood bath and the stabbing to death of a Stones fan by a Hells Angel. Many claimed it was the end of the sixties ideals and dreams).

"That was way over the line. I've seen stuff like that before. Not kill people in that sense, but I wasn't surprised at all at the Angel's behaviour. That's what they do. The Stones and Rock Scully, the people who decided to have the Angels as their personal security, I would blame them". You would blame the incident on whoever chose the Angels as security.

"Right. I don't know who I would have chosen, but that's a guarantee of an explosion and a disaster".

Do you ever watch Fox News?

"Very rarely".

What do you think of their level of discourse?

"I think it's low and dumb".

I heard that you and Allen Ginsberg had the same weed dealer in the 60s.

"That's an obscure and arcane story, isn't it? But yeah, yeah. I had met him before in New York during his poetry readings and things. In San Francisco, it turned out that we did have the same weed dealer. That's when you bought weed in tins, tobacco tins. Ten dollars, fifteen. I lived in an apartment right next store to the guy he was buying it from. I was working on the Hells Angels book. I got to talk to him about it, and he was a big help. Allen was a good one".

You liked him a lot.

"He was the real thing, in the way. He was involved in everything. Allen was a gentleman and an honest man. He was fun, wonderful sense of humour. He helped me with the book. He took some time".

How was he in a crisis?

"He did that ohm thing..."

HST starts chanting

"OOOOOOOOOOHHHHHM. He just tried to hum it away. I first saw that in La Honda. There were Cops; he was trying to get people out of jail. I was being a journalist I had, more or less a neutral zone pass. I could go back and forth between the Angels and the cops. I could negotiate. I had gone down there. My son was two years old at the time".

In La Honda?

"No, I was out in Sonoma. I went down to La Honda for a little fun. I took my kid with me. Fun, you know. Allen and I got in a police chase. I was driving. The cops had pulled some people over. It was a madhouse over there, that whole La Honda scene. Blinking, blazing, lights going on all the time. I know that I've described that some place else, so I won't get into it. We stopped to intercede on some other arrest the cops were making. As a journalist I could do that".

You have claimed to be the most accurate reporter people could read. A lot of people would disagree. How would you defend that claim?

"With the exception of typos, I have some ungodly types in my work. In terms of my...I might not get the dates right every once in a while. I try to be more accurate than other journalists, which is not that difficult. You have to distinguish between what happened and what the situation was. I'm not doing a very good job of this. And imagination".

Do you think that's due to your willingness to put objectivity by the wayside?

"Well, you can't be objective when you're dealing with passionate situations, politics and so forth. I guess you can, I never have. For instance if you were objective about Richard Nixon, you would never get him or understand him. You had to be subjective to understand Nixon. You have to be subjective to understand the Hells Angels. Would you be objective about Altamont, I guess. A million people gathered, a riot started. I was supposed to be there".

Oh yeah?

"I took one look at it on the last day and figured fuck this. Like a million people. Guaranteed explosion and disaster. Imagine having gone in there early and going down by the stage and not having a helicopter to get you out? I know people who were trapped under there for eight hours! Just horrible...then I don't know...police brutality. I can't really be objective. I can claim I am. Well, I mean, free press, street press, it's the goddamned street press right now that's the only, that's doing this job with us, on us, with Bush and passing propaganda. Just, uh - disgusting!".
The mainstream press, you mean?

"Yeah, the mainstream press is uh, is uh, in the bag, in the pocket of Bush and the military and they seem to like it there! Not all of them, I've got a lot of good friends, good people in journalism, that feel more strongly than I do, or at least as strongly".
Right.

"The uh, *New York Times*, eh, yeah, it's a different animal. There's not too many papers like that. But the press in general, the media, the TV, is doing a disgraceful job in covering this situation in this country and around the world. This is where I have to bring some subjectivity into it that I believe is right! A president that came in here, uhhh...about two years ago..."

Right, barely elected.

"Barely elected, yeah, and I guess it's only been two years, and he's taken this nation from a, uh, um, let me think looking at it from a, uh, just objectively, from a prosperous nation at peace to a broke nation at war".

Right, but I mean, there were those assholes who flew the plane into the World Trade Center.

"Who were they indeed? Now, do you believe that, that a bunch of Arabs jumped up from some kind of a campfire and fucking mountains over there and snuck into this country and hijacked those planes and did that by themselves?"

Well what are you proposing? I mean I think they were funded years ago by the CIA and it was a blowback, but, I don't think there was any direct... Are you saying there might be some other American agency or some international agency that directly supported them in that?

"Uhh, this is tricky territory, but yeah, that's what I'm getting at".
Really.

"I can't sit here and jerk up documents like Joe McCarthy, there's no proof of that. But I'm sure there is. And the idea that we're getting the whole story, uh, through the uh, the media, or from the President, is absurd on it's face because you never do, for one thing. And there's so many unanswered questions and loose ends and uh, lets see, well, lies! Yeah, about what happened. That they, in the run-up to that day, the years, I wrote a column about it right after it happened".
Yeah, I've read it. I thought that was great, the thing about your phone conversation with Johnny Depp, right?

"Yeah, that was one of them. Yeah, that one and the one right before it. I was just finishing my sports film for ESPN when, I was about to go to bed, and I had been up all night, you know the usual, you know struggle, deadline..."

Mmhmm.

"And sort of on my way to bed, I saw something on the, heard or saw, something about a plane hitting the World Trade Tower. The first reports were of the "small plane" - like one of those things that sometimes hits buildings around the world. That got my attention just enough not to go straight to bed. I turn around and have a look at the TV set, just in time to see that other one go straight in. Jesus".

Um...

"Hang on a second there... there's so many things about who uh, oh boy, this is a dangerous area. But I talked to witnesses, I'm just thinking of one in particular, a guy, a driver who watched the, just happened to be taking uh, maybe the owner of the Giants, I forget who he was, but he was out at the Meadowlands. But he saw both of them hit".

Right.

"Direct line of sight. The first one, he didn't get really get a line on, but it got his attention, though he hadn't seen the approach. But the second one, he said, uh, and I heard this from other people, but very few, really, calm and sane accounts the moments of insanity. I happened to see the second one go in, but just the last few seconds, as it came out of the left, stage left, and then ploughed right into the front of the centre of the TV picture and the centre of the building, uh, perfectly. And I wrote that it was one of the most efficient, uh, most skilful and just about impossible um, acts of piloting... That's a very rare, uh, uh pilot... can take a big plane and plant it right as if a target or bulls-eye was on the side of the building. Apparently that second plane approached, and veered off, and made sort of a half-loop and then sort of came back and aimed again and then hit the building".

Right.

"Have you heard this, or did you see that, or do you know about it?"
Yeah, well I've seen the tape so many times.

"But have you seen what would be before the tape that we see, like a minute before the hit?"

No, I haven't.

"Well, I haven't either, really. But there were eyewitnesses. And several people have said that, but you had to be watching. This guy happened to be at the Meadowlands. Cause I've kind of seen it as something that's really horrible and atrocious but not that hard to pull off. I mean it just seems like they got some box-cutters and they hijacked a plane and they flew it into a building. It doesn't seem like there was that much skill or that much preparation really. It's pretty broadly assumed that there's is a lot more to that story than the uh, the simple, kind of evil guys who just wanted to learn enough about flying to take a plane off but not land it".

Right.

"Remember, everything we know about that, that incident, and it was a horrible thing, I mean tragedy! Uh, and about Iraq and about Afghanistan and the people allegedly inside those countries, you know, Bin Laden... Everything we know in this country is spun through the CIA or NSA, but lets call it the CIA".

Do you think that the foreign press is any better off?

"Well the foreign press is not necessarily...don't agree with us, do they? No, I would say that, the, just the round-the-world feeling about our invasion of Iraq using, I'm not sure what the hell they're using now as pretence. Did they say the World Trade Towers?"

What, the pretence for invading Iraq?

"Yeah, is it more of that stuff or is it...?"

No, they want to spread democracy now, that's the message.

"Well I've been dealing with these guys for forty years. I've been covering politics and I was in the air force and kind of around that stuff. I know... something about the structures and behaviour of the military and

politics, the White House. And uh, it gives you a certain perspective, at least to ask questions".

Yeah, your depth of knowledge and personal experience...

"Well, plus if you go back and read some of the things I've written, I don't stand by that first column I wrote on the World Trade Tower, uh, tragedy. Like I said, I was just going to bed, and they called back and said, 'you gotta write another column about the bombing in New York.' Nobody really knew what it was. And I wrote a column, and it's in the book".

What newspapers and magazines are you reading right now?

"Well, I mean lemme look here umm... *New York Times, New York Observer, The Nation, uh, Consumer Reports, Sports Illustrated.* Now I look up and I see the *Statistical Abstract of the United States...* I see *Legal Affairs, uh lets see, Time, National Geographic, Foreign Affairs Quarterly, uh, The Progressive, The Economist.* It goes on and on. It's a, it's a load. But I find that I really stay uh, more, certainly not more knowledgeable out here than I would be if I were in Washington, but the people I know and can call and then see frequently, I stay pretty well informed out here. There's a network that has taken me forty years to cultivate and build".

The end of your ESPN columns it says you live in a fortified compound in Aspen. How exactly is it fortified?

"Well its not really fortified, it's, I put that in there I guess, it helps me keep gawkers away. And it helps to - somebody gets shot out here every once in a while".

You get shot out there?

"There was a story about me shooting my secretary a while ago. It was bogus. But now I have, it keeps me a little bit, it keeps people from being too eager to rush in here and knock on the door. I had a lot of that. Huge amount of kinda curiosity seekers".

Ok. What do you think of um, I'm sorry, I'm getting back to my list of questions.

"You can tell that right away, 'what do you think of...'"

Yeah I know, I'm sorry man.

"Go ahead".

What do you think of the state of America today vs. when you were writing in the 60s and 70s?

"Ho, it's a whole different game. Yeah, this is a, uh, oh, a corporate, uh state, really. Pretty much on the order of uh..."

Like the Weimar Republic, kinda?

"Yeah, yeah exactly. There we go! And it's ah, I don't know, National Socialism in a way, that would be a good conversation. Let's, wait; let's say something about that. Let me hear, what do you think about that, just, I'll go on, I just want a little uh... lets see, the thing that fascinates me is, I've been reading *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* again. I see parallels throughout the Third Reich to the extent where I often refer to this as the Fourth Reich".

The post-American Century then.

"Well it's a convenient break you know, the new century. And it just happens to be that we started off with, well, you might call it a bang, you know? Why the voters in this country continue to vote for the same people who plunge them into economic doldrums and real trouble?"

Why do you think that is?

"That is what brings us I guess to the uh, Third Reich and that comparison. It baffles me, enrages me. And I can't, it seems to me like simple stupidity".

You think people are just dumb?

"Well, the education [in this] country, the patriotism, the boom boom boom drum, and the propaganda, and the cooperative media, yeah. That, well come to think of it, the Germans were economically stricken, weren't they?" Yes, that's why they weren't so opposed to getting the Nazis in.

"Exactly but, the country on paper, in a state of prosperity. And we know better about who was, you know, what stocks were really worth what. But, it was a prosperous country; seemingly, people weren't wheeling wheelbarrows of dollar bills through the streets to buy a loaf of bread. And, just to watch the quality of life in this country go down and down, and lesser expectations of happiness and freedom and discretionary income, leisure, all the things that seemingly defined this country uh, in the past let's say 50 years. It has been... moving forward and upward, a lot of quarrels in there, a lot of things to argue about, but I don't think it has been, in most peoples eyes, a nation where the current generation of children can, and does look forward to a standard of living lesser and lower than their parents. You know, not live as well".

What's that?

"What, excuse me. I, I didn't hear you".

No, I didn't catch your last comment, I'm sorry.

"Oh, well it's the diminishing of personal expectations in this country. And the uh, the hope, the feeling of hope. I talk about this all the time to a lot of people: Are you more optimistic about the next ten years than about the last, when you started?"

Who, me?

"Yeah".

No! I... man, to rip you off, I'm full of fear and loathing. I am a citizen in the Kingdom of Fear. I'm scared every waking moment man.

"Well, uh, Jesus, that's horrible! That's a kind of, uh, prevailing sentiment".

Yeah.

"And you know, you look at fear and people, a population that's uh, just riddled with fear and confusion and, uh, loathing, goddamn. Never did it occur to me when I came up with those words that I would be using them to describe the state of the nation 30 years later or whatever".

Yeah, you said that 30 years ago, and fear keeps coming through in your works. I mean it's so powerful, like your use of it. And I was just kinda wondering what you're fearing right now.

"Well I don't, I'm past, uh, fearing things. I'm old enough to, not really uh, worry about some of the things that maybe I once did. I'm a successful writer, I'm out here, I'm you know..."

I just had one last question, and it kind of plays into what we were just talking about. Your friend Warren Zevon was diagnosed with inoperable cancer. [Warren Zevon died on Sept. 7, 2003 - ed]

"Yep".

And I just wanted to know how you have reacted to this, if you've mellowed out at all, if this has kind of affected what you're fearing, or your concept of fear.

"Well no, I'm very sad about Warren's situation, but I think it's my job to, uh, console him, to ignore it. They're all quacks out there, and many people have come through fatal uh, prognosis. I assigned him to write the music for this movie we're working on here, the Rum Diaries".

I'm curious about why you're doing the kinda sports-centric thing with ESPN. I know you started as a sports journalist but...

"I got a soft spot in my heart for sports and what the hell, I bet on it, I'm into it all the time, I might as well make some money on it. One of the things I think I've learned over time is I have to make movie on, excuse me, money on, I have to get paid for my vices somehow, or else its gonna be destructive. If you're paid for being crazy, then you're not crazy, is that right?"

And when the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.

"I think the real difference is functional and dysfunctional rather than sane or insane. And John Walsh at ESPN is an old friend. And I like it; it keeps me, the column kept me kinda sane, a regular deadline every week. I gotta finish it and read it the next day. I like the regularity of

it. I grew up in newspapers. And it just gives me a nice little break every week".

Well that was my last question.

"Well that's, uh, good luck! And you're gonna need it".

An abbreviated version of this interview originally appeared in RAMP magazine.

The full version can be found at <http://www.freezerbox.com>

 In the City: Anthony Cropper, James Nash and Dee Rimbaud
 Interview by Andrew Oldham

With the release of Naked City I took the opportunity to catch up with the editor of the collection, Anthony Cropper and two of the writers in an undisclosed location in the city.

I ask Dee Rimbaud and James Nash about their short stories, The Model Woman and Father and Sons which make an appearance in the new collection from Route, Naked City. Can you both tell us a little about the story?

"It was a bit of a tease really..." starts James.

"The Model Woman..." adds Dee, "Is about a waitress who works in an Italian Restaurant in Glasgow. Her world revolves around the restaurant, as she is engaged to one of the owner's sons; and it would appear the trajectory of her life is already mapped out. Then, one day, she is confronted with the apparition of her fantasy-self in the flesh; an encounter that shakes her confidence and makes her doubt her chosen path.

"I've always been interested in the father and sons relationship, and that we have real and 'pretend' ones throughout our life. Some fathers are looking for sons, and some sons are looking for fathers, perhaps because they have lost their own, or theirs were unsatisfactory. I also wanted to show how some of these 'pretend' relationship can be pathological," finishes James.

I turn my attention to the editor of the collection, the award winning writer, Anthony Cropper and ask the million dollar question that all writers want to know. What made you think 'yes, this is good story' when you read tDee Rimbaud's The Model Woman and James Nash's Fathers and Sons?

"Both were engaging right from the start. Both were detailed, close pieces with a strong sense of place and reality. Father and Sons offered much by way of suggestion, whereas Model Woman seemed more direct, more forceful in its prose".

Where did the ideas for your stories come from?

"I knew someone once who sacked all his friends from time to time, and made new ones. He had been seriously damaged as a child, and his adult relationships reflected this. Brendan was loosely based on this person," answers James.

"I was having a late lunch in Dino's Restaurant in Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow. I was watching staff taking lunch, relaxing in between rush periods, and I just let my imagination take off from there" is Dee's response.

Cropper watches them both as the two writers take a sip from their respective drinks. I have to ask them. How did you find Anthony as an editor? James nearly chokes and Dee smirks. Anthony sighs and looks out the window.

"He was a sympathetic and subtle editor, never intrusive, and always intelligent. Whenever he made a suggestion, it was a good one," starts James.

"He and Ian Daley have done a fine job in putting together *Naked City*, and I am very pleased to have my story included in this collection," answers Dee. They both watch Anthony, wait for his response, he sighs, laughs a little, reaches for his own drink - they wait - all writers crave praise, because their parents never actually figured out what they did and therefore couldn't actually praise it.

"I can't con myself. If I think something's good, then I say so. Whether that's objective or subjective I don't know. I read stories, any stories, and I always think about how the writer has done things and how I do things. I'm pretty critical, but realise you've got to let writers have their own space. The main thing in this collection was getting a cohesive set of stories together, ones that would work as a whole to illustrate some aspects of life in these changing cities. The nit-picking wasn't that important".

Anthony, How hard was the editing process?

"It's great to read some good stories. The surprises are well worth the effort, and seeing the collection come together as a whole is satisfying. The lows, well, reading through a lot of stories can be tiring, but I can't complain too much. Again, the main thing was getting the stories together, getting them to fit, putting some sort of structure to the book. That's the thing that took a lot of doing. Mostly, the stories needed minor changes, just some inconsistencies, but there were some which I thought could be made stronger with tightening them up, paring them down. When it comes down to it, you can only make suggestions. Reading a piece of work and seeing where it could be chopped and changed isn't that hard. I'd pass on suggestions and wait to see what the writers made of them".

If James and Dee could change anything in the stories, re-edit them, what would they choose to change? James whistles, Dee looks up at the ceiling starts to hum as Anthony sits back relieved of being the editor.

"I might spend more time on the relationship between the narrator and Brendan. It could be part of a much longer piece," replies James. Dee is more confident in his response, he knows what he wants and what he wants to write.

"There is nothing I would want to change in this story".

Anthony, How do you feel the process of editing has helped you as an author?

"I think anything to do with working with writing is a help, whether it's editing or running workshops or just reading. Anything that makes you think about your own work must be good. I'm very critical of my own material. I'll write quickly but will chop and change a lot when I've pages to work with".

And, what was the oddest submission you received?

"Nothing specific springs to mind, but there were a couple of stories which were way too long, more like novellas".

What 'drew' you to edit the *Naked City* collection?

"The initial idea was Ian Daley's. He'd discussed it with me some time ago and even then I thought it was a good idea. I've lived in a fair few cities, Manchester, Liverpool, Oxford, Chester, Bristol... and the rapid and dramatic changes were evident. I'd wanted to be involved, even before reading the stories. When I did get to go through them it was easy to see it would be a very good collection".

James and Dee, when and how did you first start to write?

"First started to write as child," says James, "I loved reading, and I used to tell my brother and sister stories while we were lying in bed with our bedroom doors open. Turned to poetry about ten years ago, and from there to short stories".

And Dee?

"Really, as soon as I learned the alphabet," he chuckles, "Prior to that, I used to act out elaborate stories with my toys. That said, a good Scottish comprehensive education soon knocked the stuffing out of the creative impulse; and I may never have written again, had it not been for

the encouragement my third year English teacher, Maurice Cox. Initially, I wrote only poetry, as it more immediately served my need for instant gratification. I didn't tackle fiction and its demands until I was in my early thirties".

The process of writing is often seen as a lonely, isolated occurrence. Can you both take us through, blow by blow, how the story first came to you, how you wrote it and where, how you resolved problems and crafted the final piece? James nods, opens his mouth to reply but Dee starts.

"The story first came to me in a restaurant. It was some time ago now, so I can't remember the writing process in detail. However I can tell you that, in general, when the 'muse' comes to me, I will write the poem or story down without pausing for breath. After that, I'll read it through, decide it's 'crap' and then put it away in a folder for future revision. These first drafts can languish forgotten for months, years or even decades (I'm not exaggerating). On a semi-regular basis, I will look through all my folders, and re-read these first drafts. Usually, one story or poem will strike me, and I will be able to see the way forward with it. So I'll work on a second draft, and the piece won't seem so 'crap', but I know it's still got some way to go, so I put it back in its folder... and so it goes, on and on, until I consider the piece to be finished. If memory serves me right, I wrote the first draft of *The Model Woman* somewhere between 1995 and 1998".

James?

"I had an idea about a man, still mourning the death of his son, his marriage collapsed through the strain of mourning for the lost son. I also saw the man as someone who saw images of children and particularly boy children everywhere. He was unconsciously drawn to them. With a surviving younger son, and a demanding job, he takes time out at lunchtime to browse in a junkshop and he finds two Chinese figures, one perfect, the other with subtle internal damage. He meets a charming stranger in the shop who reminds him of his dead son. There follows a strange and uncomfortable 'flirtation' which ends in discomfort as he realises that this young man is not his son, and is very damaged. I have the two Chinese figures at home, and built the story around them. There may be something of my broken marriage in the story. But I have never had sons. The problem was all to do with indicating the themes but not shouting them out aloud. I kept removing and removing all the stuff which seemed to be too obvious. I wanted to allude to the issues, not tell my reader what to think". Before I can ask Anthony, he moves from his seat and heads for the bar. We all put in order before he's five yards away and we turn back to the interview in hand, secure in the knowledge that vocal chords and vowels will soon flow easier.

How do you overcome the feeling of isolation as a writer?

"I work as a freelancer in schools, libraries, theatres, writing groups all the time. I wish there was more isolation," bemoans James. Dee laughs.

"Is isolation something that should be overcome? There is so much emphasis placed on the gregarious nature of humans and animals, that isolation is seen as a negative state of being. Gregariousness is, I believe, a primitive instinct that belongs to an era when we could only survive in a herd. This herd instinct requires that its members have a common purpose and, by extension, a common thought process (often dictated by the Alpha male). Gregariousness gives birth to monsters, be they crowds of football supporters or xenophobic Nazis. In truth, I believe we are all isolated, but some of us succumb to our loneliness and are willing to sacrifice our individuality for the warm, dangerous arms of the crowd". What do you both do for day to day job?

"Teacher, presenter, journalist, facilitator. Completely freelance," answers James.

"I have done so many different day-to-day jobs I've lost count. My last working stint, as a propsman for film and television, came to an

abrupt end when I suffered a brain haemorrhage and nearly died, back in 2001. Since then I have been mainly a house-husband and dad (although I do earn some 'pin money' through my writing, art, illustration and graphic design). Incidentally, my daughter, Rosie Sunshine, was born only two weeks after I had my brain haemorrhage," adds Dee.

We watch Anthony at the bar for awhile, a debate has sprung up between the barman and the writer, none of us can make out what the two are arguing about. After much semaphore action by Anthony we move on.

Do you think a writer draws from their experiences or creates fantasy? If so, how do you do this?

"I think writers do both," starts James, "consciously and unconsciously. I sometimes draw directly from experience or stories people have told me. My second poetry collection seemed to have nothing to do with my own life. I read it now and see the end of my second marriage".

"Where does experience end and fantasy begin?," asks Dee, "Everything we experience is registered and processed in the brain, which is a fantastically elaborate organic computer, made up of millions of hard drives, connected together by kazillions of USB cables. No-one knows how this network of mini super-computers is made up, or exactly how it processes information, but one thing I can say, without any hesitation, is that all fiction, even the wildest kind, has its origins in experience. All fiction and all fantasies (even extreme paranoid schizophrenic delusions) are by-products of experiences. Imagine, if our brains were made by Microsoft - we'd be safe from delusions and fantasies. We'd be safe from fiction too!"

If you could have received one piece of advice before you started writing what would it have been?

"Just keep doing it!!" barks James.

"Persevere," adds Dee.

"Keep it simple," says Anthony as he returns burgeoned with drinks, trays and a bar towel, "And read it through a number of times before submitting. And then there's the old chestnut; stick a tenner in to oil the works".

James and Dee you 20 words, in which to sell your story to potential readers, what would those 20 words be?

James?

"Does a loss or relationship nag at you daily? In this story one man transcends his bereavement through time".

"'Whatever you do, do NOT read this story!' (this tactic always works with my 3 year old daughter). Seriously though, I don't know what to say in response to this question. I don't know how to sell a story, in twenty words or a hundred".

And where next?

"I'm writing a novel. That takes up all my attention," replies James reaching for his drink.

There is confusion between James and Anthony, something about the towel which is thankfully drowned out by Dee.

"I feel I'm coming to the end of a cycle with my writing. My novel, [Stealing Heaven From The Lips Of God](#) has just recently been published, and my third collection of poetry is nearly complete. Where I go after that, I'm not sure. I've got a lot of projects bubbling away on the back burner, but I can't think about them until the poetry collection is under wraps". Thanks James, Dee and Anthony, and now to drink and writing.

Anthony Cropper was born in Fleetwood, Lancashire. He is the author of two novels (*Weatherman*, 2001 and *Jack and Sal*, 2004). He has co-edited two collections of stories (*Next Stop Hope*, 2003 and *Naked City*, 2004) and is currently working on a third (*Wonderwall*, 2005).

Recently, Anthony won the BBC's 2004 Alfred Bradley Award for his radio play, *Telling Stories*.

He is in the process of completing a third novel, provisionally entitled *Fluke*.

James Nash is Writer in Residence for Leeds University, Faculty of Education, and for High Schools in Calderdale.

He is a freelance writer and edits a poetry column in *The Leeds Guide*. His third collection of poems *Coma Songs* was published in 2003 to great acclaim. He has had several short stories published over the last year.

Dee Rimbaud was born in 1962, in Glasgow, Scotland. Both his parents were artists. He started writing poetry in his teens and won the Lochaber High School poetry competition in 1979. He edited *Dada Dance* magazine from 1984-1989 and *Acid Angel* magazine from 1998-2000; and is currently editor of *AA Independent Press Guide*, a detailed listing of over 1,500 independent magazines and presses from around the world - available from <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/dee.rimbaud/aaipg.html>

His poetry, short stories and artwork have been published in several hundred magazines and anthologies worldwide.

In the UK his work has appeared in over a hundred magazines and journals, including *Acumen*, *Ambit*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Magma*, *New Writing Scotland*, *Nomad*, *Orbis*, *Oxford Quarterly Review*, *Reater* and *Route*.

His first poetry collection, "*The Bad Seed*" was published by Stride (1998): copies are available from

<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/dee.rimbaud/thebadseed.html>. His second collection, "*Dropping Ecstasy With The Angels*" was published by Bluechrome (2004); and can be purchased online at: www.bluechrome.co.uk/storebcPoetry.asp

His novel, '*Stealing Heaven From The Lips Of God*' will be published by Bluechrome in September 2004, and advance orders can be made online at: www.bluechrome.co.uk/storebcFiction.asp

His web-site, which carries over 300 examples of his art as well as substantial extracts from his books, is at www.thunderburst.co.uk

 We were sitting at the staff table, having a fag break after the lunch rush was over. Tony and Eck and their cousin Alfonso were talking about football, as usual. I was sitting, making out I was reading a *Cosmopolitan*, but I was really eavesdropping on a couple sitting at the window table. Sometimes I do that during breaks or after the shift has finished and we're winding down with a beer or a wine or something. This couple were very glamorous-looking. The woman was just like a model out of a magazine. She was wearing a beige check skirt suit, which looked like it had been tailored especially for her. There was a slim, gold bracelet round her wrist; and this seemed to emphasise how slim and elegant she was. It also added a certain sophistication to her every gesture. I watched her carefully, over the top of my magazine. She was very refined: even the way she swept her hair back over her ears to reveal her little mother-of-pearl earrings was refined. Her hair itself was gorgeous: straight out of the Timotei advert; pure blonde, like the colour my hair was before I hit puberty. Her boyfriend was a total dish. They were made for each other. He was wearing a designer label suit; and he looked for all the world like a film actor, like a younger, more handsome version of Robert De Niro. He oozed self-confidence; and his gestures had a nonchalant, dreamy quality; like he was moving through a liquid that was thicker than air, but thinner than water. He was a bit drunk, but unlike Tony or Eck, this only added to his charm. At least, to me: his girlfriend though seemed to be irritated by

it. She kept accusing him of not paying attention to what she was saying. Her voice was a bit pinched-sounding. I, on the other hand, was paying her as much attention as was humanely possible. I couldn't hear all that she was saying though because Tony, Eck and Alfonso were having quite an animated conversation. I couldn't hear what her man was saying because he was facing away from me, but his voice had a lovely, soft murmuring quality to it, like the sound of a slow moving river. I was really surprised that his girlfriend was so agitated because I'd have been hypnotised into acquiescence by the sound of his voice alone, never mind his good looks and expensive clothes. His girlfriend though seemed to be getting more and more exasperated with him. Eventually, she shouted at him, loud enough for the whole restaurant to hear. 'Oh for fuck's sake! What's the use?' This caused Tony, Eck and Alfonso to swivel round and gawk at her. The whole restaurant seemed to freeze into silence. Then the woman got up and stormed off into the ladies' toilet. Even in a rage she was elegant. She carried herself with the sort of dignity you only see in the movies. If it had been me I'd have tripped over a chair leg or something and people would be thinking I looked like a right piece of baggage.

 Alien: Two Cities
 Article by Andrew O'Donnell

I don't know what the constant re-invention of cities in this strange, modern era of ours actually means or indicates. God knows. Everything is in flux.. it's all expectation.. or party.. or let-down. I've been at my most cerebral and my most lonely in cities. Sometimes I think the experience of visiting cities is some kind of weird composite of.. firstly.. that long, drawn out expectation of arrival (the more potent when you're not coming in by plane, I've found), then the bombardment of the senses that is the city itself.. signs, coffee, politics, leisure tours, bus timetables, travel guides, postcards, clothes, galleries, shops, bottled water, bars, train routes, more coffee.. and perhaps the odd rickshaw or tuk-tuk thrown in just for fun.. AND THEN that strange boredom you get when you're all unwound, unpartied, templed-out, gallery-and-theatred out, rollercoaster'd out, architected out, quaint observational non-sequiturs spilling from your lips.. and your head hurts coz you know you can only manage a sedate hour in an email cafe or in some dark corner of a cafe with a frappaccino moaning in your hand and "on-your-rights.. on-your-lefts" still scurrying round your brain.

What made Kathmandu so interesting was that first factor.. the approach, the getting-there. Also the fact that I never intended to go there. I met some people in India who had already booked tickets with a fairly cheap bus company and ended up tagging along. Arriving in Kathmandu was amazing.. and not totally unrelated to the fact that we'd all spent a good forty eight hours on a tiny tourist bus mingling body odors.

Arriving from the southern border crossing at Sonauli you cross Nepal's green belt and then suddenly hit the Himalaya.. they loom up from the road like some great wall of brown and grey.. and from there you spend another good twelve-fifteen hours winding up, down and through them.. until you reach the vast chamber pot of the Kathmandu Valley.

Kathmandu remains my favourite city. And I think I might rate it so highly because it's so isolated. To my knowledge Nepal only really has two major cities.. Pokhara and Kathmandu.. And because of this a visit to either of them differs so greatly to a stay anywhere else in Nepal. In many countries it could be that visit after visit to cities just provides gradations of sameness to the foreigner.. this COULD be the case in

many places (especially with the advent of multi-national franchises) ..not so in Nepal.

Kathmandu is by turns chaotic, rambling, peaceful and serene. Because of the fact that it's in a valley you will have views of the mountains, way off in the distance, at the end of many roads. Much of the bulk of Kathmandu is still not very well explored by the tourists.. and this is probably because of the way that the government has chosen to concentrate most tourist accomodation in the heavily populated downtown tourist area of Thamel. Of course Thamel is not the be-all and end-all of Kathmandu BUT it IS a fascinating area to spend time in.. like London's Soho. If you are interested in seeing how the tourist culture overlaps with Nepalese culture Thamel is for you. Rickshaws come and go, many times without much street space to really accomodate them ..along with the taxis and local traffic.

Kathmandu's streets are thin and winding.. it's easy to get lost within minutes of leaving your hotel.. but this is also what provides the charm. A host of small galleries are situated near the centre.. restaurants are everywhere.. meals that seem so cheap are gobbled up by the walletful.. this is also the irony.. that, if you venture twenty minutes out of Thamel you'll find meals in Nepalese restaurants that, unsignposted, provide meals for a smidgin of that first, seemingly cheap, price.

What pleases me about Kathmandu is that it is still a good city to walk around. Most cities, unfortunately, still don't boast much of a feast for the eyes just by wandering around them for a few hours.. Some of the most interesting things in Kathmandu can be found simply in the street.. it doesn't seem to take a pre-paid trip to an ancient pagoda to see interesting things.. and this is perhaps why it can be separated from a good many Asian cities. The only thing that is worrying is the amount of traffic on holidays and at peak times.. I'd hate to think that Kathmandu might become as polluted as Delhi and other major cities..

Gwangju, though, is a hybrid of those last two qualities.. and a very different kettle of Kimchi. Here the main street of Geumnamno, in the downtown area, is wide and Western-like.. there is a large amount of denim on show. Gwangju is South Korea's self-proclaimed 'City of Art' and it's Art Street is a short walk from the main street. This area is quiet and not as precocious as what you might imagine a community of artists to be, which is something immediately attractive when you first come here.

Gwangju also has a glut of cinemas and bars and is an interesting mix of Korean culture thrown in with that Starbucks epidemicry.. plus all your average fast food names are catered for. But there is very little need for any of this because, in my book, Gwangju is the shit when it comes to eating out.. and the variety is extremely pleasing. You can have a full korean spread for your average english dining costs, down to some great stews, soups and rice dishes for the price of a couple of chocolate bars. If you like spicy dishes you'll love what Korean food has to offer.. and if you're a meat lover (like me) you won't be disappointed. Pork is cooked and eaten at table and is wrapped in lettuce and cabbage along with other spices and sauces. While drinking is pretty much ubiquitous in England, Koreans tend to have something to eat whenever they get together.. and this provides an always-interesting take on social gatherings.

Along with that.. Gwangju's resident mountain- M udeungsan, holds reign over much of the mountainous scenery to the east and north of the city. Much of the area around has its hills and lakes and, if you're interested in temple visits, there are some interesting day trips to be done.

It's this weird mix of chaos and calm that finally fascinates the most. Gwangju has a history of protest (its main street was the site of Gwangju's students pro-democracy movement in 1980, in which up to 200 people were killed or 'disappeared') but away from the downtown area are many restaurants and bars that are quiet and relaxing whilst still retaining their own individuality.

 Leaving New York for Greece
 Article by Zoe Artemis

The last thing I did before I left for JFK airport was to pin my 'don't blame me I voted for Gore' button onto my lapel. That was last summer. As I walked through the metal detectors at the airport the alarm went off, and the security guard said to me, 'it's probably that button you're wearing, please take it off.' Oh great I thought, please arrest me, this would be great publicity for 'the cause.' But they let me through and I proudly put my button back on and boarded the plane. When I arrived in Athens, my cousin Pericles was waiting for me. He had driven all the way down from my ancestral village of Mavromati, in central Greece, to pick me up and take me back with him. Many years ago I had inherited a small house in Mavromati from my grandparents and for the last two summers I was finally making use of it. Two hours later we began to approach the highlands and like a mind altering drug my mood shifted to one of exhilaration. With another hour to go we drove through winding steep roads and the air was thinning out and smelling fresh. The physical kingdom of light was so startling I felt as though I was looking at a Van Gogh or a Monet painting. Every image was sharply defined. The sight of goats, donkeys, farmers, and widows dressed in black, walking along the road, moved my cynical New York soul into a place of humanity.

Mavromati is a village of about 1,500 people, wedged between mountains and seemingly lost to the modern world. In the summer of 2003 the village passionately took hold of me and I decided to finally make a commitment to being there, at least for the summers. My soul clearly needed a lifestyle to the extreme opposite side of the New York spectrum. When we arrived at my house, my cousin Litsa along with about a dozen of my relatives were there to greet me. The women prepared a variety of tasty, wholesome mezze. My culinary skills are nil and in New York I mostly eat out in restaurants. Naturally, I prefer home cooking and I've come to respect its status as a high art form for women in the village. I hadn't seen my relatives since last summer. My cousin Stephano, who looked after my house throughout the year, said to me, why did you wait so long to get here? What do you mean, I asked. 'You've only been coming to Mavromati the last few years'. 'I know', I said 'I wish I had come here sooner too.' Well, he said, 'better late than never...leave New York and move here, at least then we can all die together.' Everyone nodded in agreement and we broke out laughing. It was amazing that we were all able to communicate with each other, considering they spoke no English and my Greek speaking skills were only fair. Looking out at Mt. Olympus from my kitchen window, I said to Litsa, 'I forgot to bring my alarm clock and I want to get up early and watch the sun rise.' 'Don't worry,' she said, 'we don't need clocks here, in the morning we wake up to the crowing of roosters, and when it's 10 pm we hear the wheezing of horses.' She was right. Throughout my entire stay it was the crowing that motivated me to wake up at 6am and write for two to three hours. From the villages to the islands Greece expresses herself through the extended family, the slow passage of the seasons and their relation to the natural elements.

During the second week I received a phone call from my friend Kevin who lived on the island of Skiathos. Kevin is a retired English stage actor living on Skiathos all year round, like so many other European

artists and writers. I met him the year before when I first visited the island. As we spoke on the phone, I told him how happy I was being in my village, how the landscape, big sky and sense of community inspired me to write. I also expressed to him my frustration of not having anyone to speak English to, or read my work to, and how I yearned to be by the sea. He said, 'well then come to Skiathos for a few days'. He went on telling me about a writing retreat on the island that was starting in a few days, led by a poet from Prague named Luka. 'If you want to join in I'll speak with the instructor, and see if there are any openings.' Yes, I said, 'please speak to him, I had been thinking about coming to Skiathos for the weekend, but I'll stay longer if I can take the workshop.' Kevin rang me back the next day and said it was all arranged, there was still room in the workshop. 'All right I'll see you three days, and call you when I arrive on the island.' Little did I know that the universe was setting me up to organize my own writing retreat the following year on Skiathos.

Three days later I was on the bus to Volos, where I could then catch a ferry to the island. The bus was filled with villagers, farmers and a few chickens. Gazing out the window the sight of farmers ploughing their land, women carrying buckets of water from the natural springs and white stucco houses accessorized by blue shutters, yellow roses and bougainvillea heightened my senses. After two sweaty hours we arrived in Volos and soon after I boarded the ferry.

The water, wind and salty air was invigorating and cleansing. When I disembarked, three hours later, there was a large group of locals, mostly women holding up signs and shouting, 'rooms for rent.' Greece is known for its filoxenia and even when it came down to business, it was heartwarming to be greeted at the port in this manner. I began haggling for the best price. 'I need quiet, but I want to be right in town, I need an air-conditioned room, but nothing fancy, just clean.' I followed Kyria Marina to her pension as she offered me the most affordable price.

The following morning the workshop began at Papageorge's cafe right on the port overlooking the sea. All the participants were European, mostly from the UK. Being an Anglophile, I was delighted. There were seven of us, four women and three men. We began the process of introducing ourselves and then Luka presented us with our first exercise. 'Close your eyes and breathe deep, then scan the past twenty four hours of your life as if you were watching a movie. Notice the experiences that hold some charge for you. Then let the mind land on a single image and notice each detail and then begin to write. You have 15 minutes'.

As we wrote together the only noise we could hear was the sound of the waves beating against the docks. Most of the tourists were either still sleeping or at the beach, so we practically had the entire cafe to ourselves. The first words I wrote were 'Shepherds, fishermen, shopkeepers, widows in black are all gods in disguise.....' Fifteen minutes later each of us read our work aloud. He then asked us to make a list of images we see, or hear or smell or feel in the immediate environment. This was my list: the smell of salt water, the blue painted urn on the yellow table cloth, a couple in love sitting at a table, the bluest sea. After we finished our list, Luka told us to go back and add the words 'reminds me of' to the end of each phrase, and finish the sentence. I wrote 'a couple in love sitting at a table reminds me of Lambros and myself....sitting at our usual outdoor cafe in Mavromati we talk for hours.....we notice no one around us.....though everyone else notices us.....the American and the farmer....we need to be more careful.....' Reading aloud our impressions to one another was ridiculously fun. Luka then showed us a post card of a British ship with a group of passengers. I think it was a

photograph of the Mauratania from the 1930s. He asked us to write sentence or two about our impression of the photo. I wrote: 'I like the time when men wore hats, grace was noble as modesty then, that which is hidden is more interesting.' As the days went on the writing exercises became more challenging and our writing time extended into one hour intervals. Many of us brought first drafts of poems and short stories that needed rewriting.

Most often, when the course ended at noon, we would go to Ayia Paraskevi Beach that had a forest as its backdrop. There were two very fine tavernas right on the beach where we ate lunch and drank wine. Afterwards we went swimming and sunbathed. Later in the afternoon we went back to our rooms to write or take a siesta. Taking a siesta after lunch is one of my favorite pastimes. It's a lulling, drug like induced hypnotic sleep. In the evenings we would all have dinner together and take long walks. The balance between writing and swimming and socializing was good medicine. I know I couldn't have lasted here for seven days without taking the writing workshop. Without being challenged, even paradise can feel boring and empty.

At our last evening together while we were all dining together, Luka asked me whether I thought Greece was a western or eastern country. 'I think it's both,' I said. 'The thread of their classical past has long been woven into the oriental fabric of Byzantium Greece. No matter how Americanized or Europeanized Greece has become, it is basically a peasant country. Once you venture outside of Athens, you step back into a time warp. Therein lies its charm and restorative powers. The sights and sounds of 'men only' kafenios, the wailing tones of rembetika music, the pungent smell of lamb roasting over charcoal and the stroking of the komboloi (worry beads) are more reminiscent of an eastern culture, than a western one. Greece has always felt more like an eastern country to me.' As a result of the workshop I now had a body of work that was near completion and some first drafts. The comments of the participating writers and the instructor was invaluable in helping to bring some loose ends together and made me better writer. I wrote new poems and reworked two short stories that were now ready to send out for publication. In seven days we began together as strangers and very quickly moved towards being a tight knit community. I was aware that long term friendships had been created. After saying our heartfelt good-byes I walked over to the El Morocco Bar to meet Kevin for our last drink.

The El Morocco is situated high on a hill, taking up about 20 white washed steps. Scattered on each step are saffron, pink and lime green pillows to sit on, with low Arabic style tables, and a clear view of the sea. As I waited for Kevin I ordered a glass of retsina and gazed out at the horizon. I thought, what is this great secret that lies in those jagged mountains and sea--those meaningful glances between it and us? It was an 'Aha' moment. When Kevin arrived I said 'thank you so much for turning me on the workshop, it was just what I needed.' 'I know' he said, 'look, with all the writers you know in New York, you should think about organizing your own writing retreat on the island next summer.' 'That's a great idea, I think I'll do it.' He went on, 'I'll be your liaison and help you with accommodations and whatever else you need.' We clicked our glasses of wine, and I said 'done.'

The next morning I made the journey back to Mavromati. As I boarded the bus, I was lucky to find a seat. It was quite crowded. A middle aged, shabbily dressed, thin woman, with no front teeth and a wild look in her eyes was standing next to my seat and leaning to close to me for my comfort. 'Excuse me' I said to her, and she went berserk. She proceeded to curse at me and then took her hand and hit me on my head. I was stunned

and my first instinct was to lunge at her and strike back. But I quickly realized this woman could really hurt me, and so I decided to ignore her and she finally moved away from me. At the next stop she got off the bus. People around me were saying 'she's crazy, are you all right?' I'm fine I said, my head throbbing. I thought about all my years traveling on the New York subway, encountering unbalanced people many times, yet I never experienced anything like this before.

I got back to Mavromati around 8pm and felt wired, so I decided to walk up to the town square. The scene was unusually lively and there was a big screen TV set up for people to watch the final match of the European soccer game that had been going on all week. Within an hour's time Greece had won, for the first time, everyone said. I'm not a sports fan, but I got caught up in the mania and I celebrated with my friends and relatives by drinking and dancing at the square until midnight.

The crowing sounds woke me up the next morning. I made my cup of Starbucks coffee, and went outside to my backyard to see the sun rise. I watched the beams of light shoot through the darkness over the great plains, surrounded by big mama mountains. I watched big sky openly spray her light like a big showoff for all to see. Hours later I heard the sound of sheep bells, and I waved kalispera to Kyrios Pavlos as he proudly led his flock down the road in front of my house, for their morning constitutional. I finally went inside to get dressed and my next door neighbor Kyria Eleni knocked on my door to welcome me back. She brought me a whole bunch of aubergines from her garden and invited me over for coffee the next morning. I then turned on the radio to my favorite station, Epirors, which plays traditional mountain music. With the clarinet as the main instrument, it sounds like the earth is crying. I think because it's so incredibly soulful it makes me feel joyful and not sad.

People in Greek villages, as in most indigenous cultures, have a natural aptitude for song and dance as a way to celebrate all kinds of events, harvest time, marriage and mourning. As Anglos we best express ourselves with words. Greeks are unsurpassed story tellers, but the use of gestures is also part of their rich oral tradition. An upward turn of the head means no. Their hands play a big part in conversation. A Greek man will break out into a dance whenever the spirit moves him. The best actors in the world are those who are expressive with their eyes and body language. I remember one morning when I was looking for the bus stop in the nearby village of Mouzaki. I saw a middle aged man with a thick black mustache, sitting at an outdoor cafenio. I walked over and asked him for directions. Without saying a word, he picked up his foot and pointed it towards the left road.

During my last week in Mavromati my next door neighbor Kyria Eleni's son-in-law Yiorgo suddenly died of a heart attack. On the day of his funeral I was sitting at an outdoor cafe, when suddenly a procession of about two hundred people appeared, walking all together on the road towards the church. Unlike the men, all the women were dressed in black and it was close to 90 degrees. Several of the men were carrying Yiorgos casket and everyone was chanting a mourning dirge. At the head of the procession was the village priest, Papa Nikos, carrying a large cross. These noble villagers walked a half a mile in the the boiling heat to the church. I have never forgotten this picture. For me it represented shared community and sacrifice.

I returned to New York the day before the Olympic Games began. My friend Linda who visited me the day after my return, said 'you look fabulous, you look like you just came back from rehab or did you go and have plastic surgery?' 'I definitely didn't have plastic surgery, but you could say I was at a rehab of sorts,' I replied. I grudgingly managed to get through

the rest of the summer, but it wasn't pleasant. New York is the worst place to be in August. But come fall and during the months of October through December there's no place in the world more stimulating or more thrilling than New York City. The energy is bold, frank, free and there is a celebratory atmosphere in the air. Friends and relatives come in to town at this time to visit. Numerous poetry readings, cultural events, concerts, parties and the buzz of Thanksgiving and Christmas Holidays electrify the air. New Yorkers talk fast, walk fast, with irony as its main feature of speak. I can't help getting caught up in the insanity of it all.

On Jan. 1, however, the axe falls, at least for me. The weather seems to abruptly turn cold, gray and gloomy. The Christmas tree at Rockefeller Plaza comes down. The glittering lights and decorations throughout the city are removed. The magnificently decorated shop windows on Fifth Avenue are replaced by 'the new spring line.' The city empties and the rich escape for some faraway place in the sun. It's at this time of year my soul yearns for colors, grows weary of worldly pretensions and I begin to dream of Greece. The process of organizing the writing retreat was a new venture for me and it lifted my spirits and put me in contact with many new people. Whenever I mention to anyone that I'm organizing a retreat on Skiathos, peoples' eyes and ears perk up with curiosity and excitement. Greece's long illustrious history and its landscape conjures up dreamy images of the sea, the light, ancient ruins and rustic elegance. With the excesses of the 90's the new countertrend is for rustic living. Artists especially want to be part time peasants; want to undo being slaves to round-the-clock creature comforts.

As fall approached I began the process of organizing the writing workshop for the summer of 2005. I'm fortunate to know many well-respected writers in New York, and after some consideration I decided to ask New York poet laureate George Wallace to lead the Skiathos Writing Retreat. I met George about five years ago at the annual St. Mark's New Year's Day Poetry Marathon in the East Village. We were both in the back room where refreshments were being served. We looked at each other, as if we recognized one another, and I walked over and introduced myself to him. It turned out that we had several mutual friends, including jazz musician David Amram who had been one of Jack Kerouac's closest friends. When I told George that my ancestors were from Greece he told me that his father was born in Thessaloniki, but that he had never visited Greece. He told me he was organizing a four city marathon tribute honoring Jack Kerouac soon and invited me to read an excerpt of Kerouac's work. Not only did I read, but I also gave a dance performance at the tribute, accompanied by David Amram & his Trio. Although I had never met Jack Kerouac, I have known both Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso. Back in the early 80's I had a long term friendship with ex-con and raconteur Herbert Huncke..

The writing retreat in Greece is a unique opportunity to spend a week with one of the finest poetic voices in the English language. George is one of the hardest working writers I know. When I invited him to teach in Skiathos he happily accepted. He told me about his life long dream of meeting the great surrealist poet Miltos Sachtouris who was now in his 80's and living in Athens.

The retreat is designed for both aspiring and seasoned writers. My intention is to provide a space for writers to come together from all over the world, in a mutual commitment, to hone our craft and push ourselves more deeply as artists. I know the writing friendships I have made at workshops have continued to nurture me when the muse was not keeping me company.

The Course: June 25–July 1, 2005, Skiathos, Greece

'Imagination-Based Poetry': The process is to stretch your imagination and to focus on wordplay and inventive writing. Instead of the traditional confessional approach to self-confrontation or deep-imaging, the inventive approach leads writers to discover meaning and art by cultivation of the imagination. 'Imagination-Based Poetry, whether it is magical realism, surrealism, dada, or fictive writing, permits the writer to escape ego-based writing and reach into deeper truths about our nature and our experience.

The cost is only \$595. which includes course (about 20 hours) and accommodations. Skiathos beaches have been rated the 7th best, not only in Greece, but in the world.

About George Wallace: An award winning poet, journalist, museum curator and co-host of his own weekly radio show, Wallace has had eleven poetry books published, translated into many languages. Four years ago George organized the hugely successful U.S. four city 'Big Sur' marathon honoring Kerouac. Each year he travels to Europe and gives readings throughout the UK, the Netherlands and Paris. For more info about Wallace visit <http://www.poetrybay.com/>

 Into Belfast: Endpiece
 Article by Dave Wood

*peace seeps from out the ground and seeks its sun
 peace digs to every tendril - and where the veins
 go root around - there's movement waiting there
 peace is the river - feel the river run*

After two weeks travelling, hosted, being looked after, fed with information, poetry, ideas and Guinness, I spent my last Northern Ireland night in Belfast. I was to fly back the next day to England and its glorious Nottingham East Midlands Airport. I still find it strange to talk about the difference between where I'd been travelling for two weeks and the geographical north. How can you describe Teelin Point near Donegal as part of the south? When I talk about the Mourne Mountains, I say they're in the south of the north. Perhaps a new compass should be invented which takes in not only south-southeast etc but also north-southnorth or northnorthnorth. Is this feasible? Would NESTA fund me? If Ms Vorderman would like to post a comment...

I've only stroked (but not scabbed) the skin of Ireland this journey. Maybe that's good. The intention was to view the place from a position and vision of neutrality. - it was difficult at times and I had to keep steadying myself. Can you be neutral in Nor'n Ireland? An old story goes that a youth was stopped, shoved up against a wall and asked whether they were Protestant or Catholic. Quick thinking they came up with the answer, I'm Jewish'. Of course, the answer wasn't accepted; 'Is that Protestant or Catholic Jewish?'. I can't imagine stories like that ever ceasing.

My background in politics always dictated 'if in doubt - move to the left'. There is a changing tide between Loyalism and Nationalism. With the economy becoming more gluttonous there are further class issues - a four cornered struggle; Protestant Working and Middle vie with Catholic of the same. Conspiracies of old (from the late sixties, particularly) are still in the mindset and the 'can we trust any of our representatives?' of the English is seeping in with the coffee and shopping sophistications of the city. We all suffer from it - including myself. The spark's still there in Irish politics so it's neither apathy or antipathy - just complete mistrust of how things are being handled from both sides. It's interesting the use (or over-use) of glass in high walled department stores in main town centres;

is it a symbol of vanity, reflection, vapidty or vulnerability? Answers on a postcard to...

Anyway, at last people are talking about their experiences there. For example, I was told by one interviewee, that when she applied for some lottery funding, the paramilitaries tried to take the pot of money over. She stood her ground and knocked fear on the head. Up until 1997, few that I met would mention the troubles. Now it can feel like a reminiscence workshop; the growth, the developments, the road-building and the settling into a kind of peace all being like a shock of the new. Though this may just be my observation, it would be interested to find someone who's been diary-ing the re-building and re-hydrating of the nation's spirit. I walked into a changing way of life and the billboards said so.

I've brought back very little for other people. Kurt and Sharon, who looked after the flat have exactly what they requested - a bookmark each. Illuminated with Celtic knotwork they sit nice ethnically-flush with the stone from Cushendall beach, where the sea would pull the pebbles back over each other to make the bona-fide sound of beauty. I picked one up myself - a rugged heart shaped one - I'm still a romantic even at the age of almost 39 (13th October - same day as Thatcher's and Currie's Birthday). A pine cone from just one of St Patrick's Cathedrals in Armagh, albeit battered and bruised (the pine cone that is) went to my boss who was poorly sick at the time.

Everyone in the address book has pretty much had a card too - if not the address book itself. I did promise to send one to the Arts Council East Midlands but didn't take the address with me - so my apologies to Simon and Lou.

There's lots of things I'd do (and will do) different next time. I'll give myself more time to organise the trip, make sure I get the forms right, make the process pay and let Ireland have the time she needs to take counsel with me.

There are still poems to write. I've not forgotten my creativity. The new term has started and I've had to ride the rollercoaster (could be a song in there somewhere) of finding out as a tutor whether I've got enough enrolled on my courses to warrant them running. Not everybody wants to do creative writing nowadays (something England and Northern Ireland currently share apparently) and they all think I'm weird anyway.

After the press release I sent out on return, there have been a few *well dones* but no local authority contact, no book deals, no bunting, no welcome back or Bruce Forsyth, *Didn't he do well?*. Whereas in Northern Ireland, the press were contacted by the hosts and I had first-rate coverage. Though according to a local drunk (slurring and glassy eyed) The Ilkeston Advertiser used the picture from the Newry visit as well as the information sheet I sent out.

Meanwhile, at the initial time of writing this finishing article I received good news. The Cnocnafeola Centre (Attical) are putting my poem dedicated to them on the home page of their website. I'm hoping this is the just the start of the next phase of my writing career and when I do get the necessary funding to return to Northern Ireland, have a Guinness waiting for me.

My thanks to Incwriters for their patience, good humour and passion for writing.

Other creative pieces by Dave Wood can be viewed at www.davewoodinireland.blogspot.com and

www.ghsotsandshadows.blogspot.com.

Anyone wishing to contact me can do so by e.mailing davewrite2002 at yahoo.com (replacing at with @). Put the word Ireland in the title bar and send no attachments.

Dave Wood will return later in the year with articles on his journey to Italy.

Brendan chatted, and I listened, as we threaded our way under a railway bridge and into the waterfront area. He was twenty-three and had finished university eighteen months before. He was from Middlesbrough. He had recently broken up with his girlfriend. He had never known his mother, been brought up by his dad, and then, at seven when his father had died, had been fostered or been in care throughout the rest of his childhood.

We found ourselves standing on the narrow footbridge over the river to the Tetley's brewery. All around us were the beginnings of new buildings, of a new Leeds. Cranes hung against the now clouded white sky, like crossed swords on an heraldic device. I told him about myself. A surprising amount. His eyes seemed fixed on the river below, but every now and again I felt his gaze on my profile like a warm breath. I was in my mid-forties. Fresh out of a marriage. Senior Social Worker. Fucked up. A father.

'All the 'fs' then,' was his response to this.

I smiled and continued. Two sons. The elder, Simon, had died in a car accident two years before. But I didn't say how much I missed him every single day. How much he would have liked the Chinese figures too. Liked them, as I did, for the way they looked and what they represented. One perfect and the other so mysteriously damaged. Or how much Brendan looked like him, and how fascinating and painful that was. Like picking at a scab obsessively, a day or so too early, and finding you've made yourself bleed. Instead I talked about Oliver who was twelve and lived with his mother. My comic, and strong-minded, youngest son. And curiously it was the first time I had been able to talk about either of the boys without something catching in my voice. Finally I felt I had to justify talking about Simon, and a flash of something brief but unrecognisable passed over Brendan's face when I said, 'Of course the strange thing is that although Simon's dead, I always have to mention him. The fact that I had two sons. Anything else would be betrayal.'

'How old was he, your son?' he asked.

'He was about to be twenty-one,' I answered, looking into the dark and still water below, 'Driving home from university in my wife's car, he just went off the road. The doctors said it could have been a stroke. Our marriage didn't last long after that.'

I felt again the shame I always had when I talked about my marriage break-up. The sense of public failure.

There was a pause, and I could see him assimilating this information, his brows knotted. He was not handsome, just had the pleasant looks of youth. But there was a charm beyond the ordinary in the movement of his face. His willingness to engage. His intelligence. I felt myself very drawn to him, but unwillingly. It felt disloyal to Simon. Close to treachery. And Simon, I had to remind myself, had been intensely shy; he would never have struck up a conversation with a stranger, and indeed would never have been able to meet a stranger's eye.

Steam from the brewery bubbled into the sky behind his head as he said, 'Just the same age as me then.'

I looked at Brendan. He had winded me. And it was as if I was gasping for breath. Surely he knew the effect his words would have? His expression was fascinated, like a scientist who, having discovered a process to measure pain, was trying it out. I turned away from him to look back at the Parish Church. And over to the right at The Royal Armouries like a huge grain silo. The pause pooled into a longer silence.

 Existentialist angst in Modern society. The roll of the 'New Existentialist'
 Article by Sam Morris

The 4th January 1960 was an overcast and drizzly day in Northern Central France. Albert Camus was preparing to return to Paris with his publisher Michel Gallimard, Gallimard's wife and daughter and powerful four-door sports car, a Facel Vega. The Vega was infamous for its rear hinging "suicide" doors that were known to pop open with high speeds and high vibrations. However this would not be the issue on this particular journey. Joining the Route Nationale No 5 and at about half a kilometer from Yonnes, the car lost control and hit a tree. Michel's wife and daughter were thrown from the car, landing between 10 - 20 ft from the wreck, they would recover. Michel suffered severe impact wounds, and would die two days later in hospital. Albert was killed instantly. He was only forty-six years old and had written as recently as 1958, "I continue to be convinced that my work hasn't even been begun." Camus had wished to take a train back to Paris and was renowned for his dislike of cars, the train ticket for the return journey was found in the top pocket of his jacket. This literary tragedy stamps a full stop on a body of works that could have included the above incident as a motif for its opinions and view. The real ironic tragedy of Camus death is not that he wanted to get a train and was convinced to travel by car, although this does slap you with "what ifs". The true paradox is that the incident would not look out of place in one of Camus's novels. In *'The Myth of Sisyphus'* when speaking of everyday life, he writes:

'Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, according to the same rhythm...But one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement.'

This is Camus's revelation of 'absurdity', terminology borrowed from J P Sartre, and he is claiming that normal consciousness and perspective are, to a certain degree, empty, or taken to an extreme not worth living. We could easily imagine that the culmination of these events could be the car crash on the road to Yonnes. An 'absurd' end to the 'absurdity' of existence.

This 'absurdity' is illustrated again in one of Camus's short novels, *'L'etranger'*. The hero, Meursault, attends his mother's funeral with an air of ambivalence prompted from the outset of the text with the statement 'Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know,' and continues in an attitude of indifference to the world as he meets a girl the following day and takes her to a show. Meursault searches for immediate sensation from a world that he views as indifferent to all its inhabitance. Eventually Meursault kills a man in this attitude of passive separation to the world. Although Camus never used the term in his life, he is showing the basis of

an existential standpoint¹[1]. An approach to existence that maintains we are 'unnecessary' and that the world of matter that envelops us is the only reality. Therefore any 'meaning' we attempt to attain is a pure illusion. J P Sartre champions this approach in his novel 'Nausea', where 'nausea' is the state that overwhelms the main character Roquentin when alienation of personality and the mystery of being take hold. Roquentin is left 'alone in the midst of these happy, reasonable voices [in the bar]' in a state of suppression from the uncaring universe we exist in. This necessarily leads to Sartre's famous dictum that 'man is a useless passion'.

This all sounds very depressing and suicidal and you then may ask why I am choosing to discuss it. I cannot deny these states of being exist, and as we stampede towards further technological mastery and materialism, I feel man is more susceptible than ever to angst ridden existence. Moments when our environment, and perception of it, grate against our passive selves, when life seems meaningless as illustrated by Eliot's *Hollow Men* or much of Samuel Beckett's work. Yet man goes about his days in a state of paradox. There is an intense feeling that we all experience during our best moments that life *has* meaning; that it is priceless, and filled with immense potential. Either on holiday, or when enjoying ourselves, when immersed in an activity, music or at moments of celebration: we no longer feel separate, contingent or extraneous to reality. As W. B. Yeats expresses it in his poem *Under Ben Bulbin*:

Know that when all words are said
 And a man is fighting mad,
 Something drops from eyes long blind,
 He completes his partial mind,
 For an instant stands at ease,
 Laughs aloud his heart at peace.

I find that while playing sport these moments can be recognised. For me these moments arise while in a football game, when you play with such ease, and are sure that all touch and contact with the ball will be inch perfect. I am usually a very inconsistent and average football player, yet in moments of relaxed concentration volleys can be struck with confidence yet minimal effort. I have slipped out of the 'me' that stumbles and trips in both action and speech, to a 'me' that is purposeful and overflowing with vitality. It seems, at these times, that a glow has ignited in my head and all action and movement are at one with your surroundings. This is what J G Fichte meant when he said that man only knows himself in action. I no longer feel separate, contingent or extraneous to reality, I feel part of reality.

The seventeenth century French philosopher Blaise Pascal expressed this as 'authentic existence', in contrast to 'inauthentic existence' in which people tend to waste their lives concerned with trivialities²[2]. Likewise, the twentieth century German philosopher Martin Heidegger wrote of 'Being that degrades itself in the mediocrity of everyday life' and of our 'forgetfulness of Existence'. In other words, we can become so bogged down by the actualities of just surviving, day by day, that we forget to enjoy the feeling of being alive in the world. Why is this? Why can we experience moments of oppression and at other times moments of almost godly status? Vision or Nausea, Meaning or Meaningless?

Some may view this problem as basically philosophically irrelevant, like

¹[1] The name Existentialism was first used by the Danish Christian philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard (1813 - 1855.)

²[2] Heidegger maintained that, with the exception of great poets, man achieves 'authentic' existence only in the face of death.

asking which is truer, summer or winter; or which moods are truer happiness or depression. Yet when, as Colin Wilson highlights in *The Outsider*, 'Van Gogh painted *The Starry Night*, which seems to be a pure affirmation of life, yet end his life leaving a note saying "Misery will never end"...the question was not only significant but, literally, a matter of life and death.' And for me this holds true.

Furthermore this sense of lack of meaning or purpose is so apparent in Twentieth century literature, philosophy and art, while liberal humanism finds it impossible to account for the irrational extremes of human behaviour; it is also problematic to maintain allegiance to the creation of a benign Marxism. Structuralism, post-structuralism and deconstruction have eliminated the individual human subject and created scepticism about whether it is possible to make any true statement. To add to this there is a general consensus that the certainties provided by religion and their doctrines have been lost, never to be regained or replaced. Science, in solving our practical problems, but at times only widens the empty inner void of meaninglessness. For me, Existentialism is a passionate protest against the prevalence of mere, cold logic. It is the demand that intuition and vision should and need to be admitted to the canon of learning. The basic axiom of an Existentialist is the 'stature of man'. An Existentialist philosopher would commence his analysis of man's stature by pointing out that while there are times when man feels supremely happy and confident, there are other times when he feels substantially less than human. Existentialism offers no consolidation; it purely confirms the diagnosis. Without God man must see himself as important because if he does not, no one will. This injection of importance is the true role of the 'New Existentialist'.

The apparent dichotomy between affirmation and possible suicide is tackled in a series of seven books published between 1955 and 1966 labelled *The Outsider Cycle* by their author Colin Wilson. Consisting of *The Outsider*, *Religion and the Rebel*, *The Age of Defeat (Stature of Man, in America)*, *The Origin of Sexual Impulse*, *The Strength to Dream*, *Beyond the Outsider* and *Introduction to the New Existentialism*. These works culminate in what Wilson labels his 'New Existentialism or Existentialism mark three; with Romanticism as Existentialism mark one and early twentieth century Existentialism as mark two. This I will clarify shortly.

Wilson first notes that this state of mind that refuses to feel at home in a dehumanised world is not a twentieth century phenomena, but has its founding in the poets, artists and writers of the European Romantic movement. Wilson argues that he sees the origins of Romanticism in Newton's *Principia Mathematica*. With it, man had been repositioned in the universe with the option, if he wished, to obtain what would seem to be ultimate knowledge. Man was free to pick fruit from the tree of knowledge, at will. As opposed to the view that God distributed knowledge at his own discretion to a subservient mass. With this new bound freedom in hand, the early Romantics felt that although the world was a difficult place, the 'visions of ecstasy' and 'moments of affirmation' enabled the introduction of a deeper meaning hidden from the harsh face of reality. We can see this in visionary work of Blake and Palmer, and the poems of Wordsworth. So there is an underlying optimism in the works of Schiller, Wordsworth and Goethe. However the plummet back down to cold oppressive reality was at times impossible to stand and we see many early deaths and suicide throughout the Romantic creative realm. It was as if the movement expired in bursts of self pity. Yet the initial impetus, the centering on the self and the irreconcilable nature of man, is taken up as a foundation for Wilson's progression to twenty first century application. This can be seen to a

degree in the writings of the contemporary historian of philosophy Jacques Barzun:

'Some critics have concluded that the Romantic outlook is doomed to failure as it tries to reconcile the irreconcilable...[yet] twentieth century culture is still eager to achieve this reconciliation. Like Romanticism, it starts from man and accepts the contradictions within him. Man is both great and helpless...for glory and for wretchedness...with reason and driven by an irrational life force. He cannot give up or withdraw from his earthly effort for...he is 'embarked', engaged in the struggle before he knows there is one. Hence the Romantic valuing of the qualities that may see him through; energy, daring, capacity for experience, courage, intellect and imagination.'³[3]

At this point it would seem that Camus and Sartre made the only necessary conclusion by feeling that 'absurdity' and 'nausea' were apparent, and therefore the norm, and however you approach them you are destined to be left empty. Wilson points out that this is due to our application of our will in the process of experience and he cites Sartre's mentor Edmund Husserl, the founder of Phenomenology, as giving light to this. Husserl started from the idea that our consciousness is 'intentional', that when we see something we have to grasp it like our hands grasp an object. Furthermore we vary the energies we give to this process of grasping. When I am in a gallery or museum I put more effort and energy into the action of seeing, so I can grasp as much as possible. At the other extreme when I look at my watch and fail to see the time and must look again, I am not engaging with my surroundings at my highest pressure. I am, to a degree, further within my self. So it would seem that when Camus experiences 'absurdity' and Roquentin experiences 'nausea' there state of stoical pessimism is due to an inability to see beyond or an inability to sustain the effort. In contemporary western society no one sustains the effort. It is easier to watch a film or the television, or take some narcotic, as opposed to immersion in the act of perception with an aim. Our varying states are pacified by our 'quick-fix' culture. When the world shouts at us with aggression, we can retreat into the latest soap opera, and level our concerns at easily absorbed fictional characters. As opposed to working through our varying selves with a mind to self development, or simply the more strenuous action of reading a novel. More than this; moments of what G K Chesterton called 'absurd good news' can be deceptively seen as outside influences and not the foundation of our possible outlook formulated by our elevated perceptive state. So we are left in flux, but with no idea why we are in flux, or which stage of the fluctuation is to be taken as a foundation to build on.

For Wilson, Existentialism is in its essence, a confrontation with one's own self. The key question is 'what shall we do with our lives?' Therefore whatever queries may be leveled against the nature of the universe are secondary. The salvation of the individual, as opposed to a comprehensive intellectual system, is the end objective of an Existentialist. Wilson highlights moments in Camus's work where he approaches a sense of Chesterton's 'Absurd good news.' When Meursault is on the eve of his execution, he feels a surge of affirmation and claims that "I'd been happy, and that I was still happy". This is very reminiscent of when Raskolnikov, the central character in Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment, considers the possibility of being executed for the murders he has committed. He reflects that "he would prefer to stand on a narrow ledge for all eternity, surrounded by darkness and tempest, rather than die at once." The fear of death has raised his consciousness of freedom to a point where he becomes

aware of the absolute value of his existence. The imminent snuffing of all we have acts wonders to concentrate the mind. Wilson also highlights who Sartre mentions he never felt as free, as when he was working for the French resistance during the war, and could have been captured at any moment. The pressure of the end of freedom makes you value the nature of cognition. In modern western society this pressure is almost nonexistent. Man has created aspects of entertainment, sports, games and computer games to place obstacles in his path and overcome them. Almost a method of inducing any pressure on our existence to heighten our appreciation. In a way we are bringing about a false crisis and dealing with it as such. In a game of football, eleven men are stopping me getting a ball in the back of a net. This is the obstacle I must overcome, and I must 'step up' my game if I am to do so. If I achieve this I get a reward, not the goal, but a feeling of euphoria in my own achievement and ability. Our modern media culture has endless ways in which we can search for superficial obstacles to overcome. I am by no means saying football is the only facet, it is purely an example. Earnest Hemingway spent his whole life searching for crisis moments, from bullfights, deep sea fishing to war. This searching can be explained when we see what he wrote in *The Old Man and the Sea*, 'a man can be destroyed but not defeated.' Stoical about the limits of his being, so he therefore craves what seem to be the highest moments of a harsh, uncaring existence. When this satisfaction started to cloy the only end for him was alcohol or suicide, he chose both.

This apparent blind game of dogged acceptance to a harsh reality is modern mans prejudice. We accept our lot of boredom and triviality and feel that things just happen because they do. Yet if Wilson is correct, we must always remember that "Husserl has shown that man's prejudices go a great deal deeper than his intellect or his emotions. Consciousness itself is 'prejudiced' -that is to say, intentional."4[4] We are at blame for our own boredom.

 Hunter S. Thompson: Loathing and Fear for a Nation 1939-2005
 Article by Andrew Oldham

Hunter S. Thompson was much more than drink, drugs, guns and motorcycles, he was a million miles from the paranoid Doonesbury character, he was a continent away from the media portrayal of him in his latter years. This was a writer trying to make sense of not just a country but a home; and in many ways coming to terms with a growing right wing government and his own impending old age. Unafraid to view his thoughts and ideas (see reprint of one of his last interviews in this edition), he did seem more and more afraid that he was unable to stop the tide, that the America he loved, the America he celebrated, the America he admonished had changed so rapidly. This was not a liberal hippie or rebel without clue crying out with anger against apathy, this was not Howard Stern, he wasn't climbing on any old band wagon. Thompson had seen the blooming and inevitable death of the American Dream in favour of money, control and mass paranoia. The America he would grow old in wasn't the America of his youth or aspirations. Thompson had and was coming to terms with modern America, the puzzle that became the USA.

Thompson was born in Louisville, Kentucky on the 18th July 1939. His father, an insurance agent died from a rare immune disorder whilst the young Thompson was at High School. The young Thompson up till then had grown up in a comfortable, affluent home. Thompson was everything middle America wanted, a member of prestigious club called the Athenaeum Literary Association, he ran with rich, socially elite young people of Louisville and would have inevitably become a Republican but the death of his father

4^[4] *Introduction to the New Existentialism, P54.*

forced his mother to take a job as a librarian to support the family. Suddenly he was the poor kid amongst his friends, the dreams of an Ivy League school were now beyond him.

With increasing frustration and anger, the young Thompson rebelled against the Athenaeum Literary Association and became famous for outrageous pranks; flooding the ground floor of his high school with three inches of water, dumping a truckload of pumpkins in front of a downtown hotel. During this period he turned to writing and began to publish bitter and sarcastic essays for the literary association's newsletter, including one called, Open Letter to the Youth of Our Nation, signed John J. Righteous-Hypocrite: *"Young people of America, awake from your slumber of indolence and harken to the call of the future. Do you realize you are rapidly becoming a doomed generation?"*

During his senior year, Thompson was arrested several times for vandalism and attempted robbery. He was eventually barred from the literary association, and spent thirty days in jail. When released, he joined the United States Air Force as a provision of his parole.

He was honourably discharged in 1958 and began writing for any small newspaper that would take him.

1964 would be turning point for the young Thompson. During that year the California attorney general issued a report on a dangerous new motorcycle gang known as the Hell's Angels, and the national media picked up the story.

Thompson was hired by The Nation magazine to write a brief article about the gang. A book followed: *"For fifteen hundred dollars I would have done the definitive text on hammerhead sharks and stayed in the water with them for three months!"*. With the advance Thompson bought a motorcycle and began his investigative journey; for several months he followed Hell's Angels gangs across the States, until five Hell's Angels suddenly turned on him and beat him senseless. In 1967, he published his book, Hell's Angels. The first edition sold out immediately and broke onto the *New York Times* bestseller list. Thompson had a few problems with the sudden fame and the ensuing book tour; he showed up drunk for most of his interviews.

By 1969 Thompson was one of the most prominent journalists of his generation. Writing for *Playboy* magazine, Thompson developed his first true piece of Gonzo literature, The Temptations of Jean-Claude Killy. *Playboy* turned it down because the editors felt that it was too mean-spirited. In reality, Thompson had stepped beyond the who, what, where, when, and why of mainstream journalism and delivered something quite different: a piece where the writer was not objective but *subjective*, allowing his own personality and impressions of his subject to emerge. Thompson had created and coined the phrase: Gonzo Journalism.

In 1971, Thompson published his most famous book, Fear and Loathing In Las Vegas, later made into a film by Terry Gilliam.

Now firmly immersed in writing the life he lived, Thompson would become embroiled in the drug culture: *"I haven't found a drug yet that can get you anywhere near as high as a sitting at a desk writing, trying to imagine a story no matter how bizarre it is, [or] going out and getting into the weirdness of reality and doing a little time on the Proud Highway."* This sense of 'fleeting' would always be part of Thompson's psyche, to him politics, history, countries and journalism would come and go, but the ride was worth grabbing hold of.

Thompson once wrote to his friend Susan Haselden: *"In brief, I find that I've never channeled my energy long enough to send it in any one direction. I'm all but completely devoid of a sense of values: psychologically unable to base my actions on any firm beliefs. I seem to be unable to act consistently or effectively, because I have no values on which to base my decisions. As I look back, I find that I've been taught to believe in nothing. I have no god and I find it impossible to believe in man. On every side of me, I see thousands engaged in the worship of money, security, prestige symbols, and even snakes"*.

Hunter S. Thompson was found dead on Sunday the 20th February 2005 in his Aspen-area home. He died of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound. He was 67.

 A Manifest Integrity: The Poetry of T.F. Griffin
 Article by Ian Parks

T.F. Griffin's poems arise from a sense of wonder at the variousness of experience and essential otherness of the material world, gain their tensions from feelings of displacement, and find their ultimate resolution in a series of shared images which seek to elevate and sharpen our perceptions of everyday life. All of this grows from a deeply held conviction that the materialism that we see all around us had the inherent potential to erode the spiritual dimensions implicit in our lives - dimensions which are necessary in order for us to feel fully human. The problem that Griffin faces, in poetic terms, is to convince his audience of credibility - not of his beliefs, which are self evident - but of the authenticity of his experience and the relevance and value of that experience to his readers. And, like all other poets, Griffin is limited by the language he is obliged to use. In his poems, then, we are likely to encounter a powerful - sometimes intimate, sometimes detached - voice which seeks to isolate what Wordsworth called 'spots of time': those rare but highly-charged moments of epiphany during which the undercurrents of our lives suddenly surface, forcing us to recognise fundamental truths about ourselves, others, and the nature of reality which normally exists outside the range of our experience. This recurring motif of change and epiphany is intimately connected with what Ed Reiss has identified as 'themes of struggle, disappointment, and struggle again'. The purpose of this article is to introduce the poetry of T.F. Griffin to those who are approaching it for the first time, to offer a way of looking at it within the context of contemporary poetry, and to open up a debate among those who are already familiar with Griffin's work about an outstanding poet for whom critical attention has long been overdue.

The work of T.F. Griffin first came to prominence with the publication in 1982 of Douglas Dunn's anthology A Rumoured City which sought to bring together under one cover a wide variety of poets who shared a common background through their connections with the city of Hull. With a foreword by Philip Larkin and characteristically eclectic approach from the editor, A Rumoured City effectively launched the careers of (among others) Peter Didsbury, Tony Flynn, Ian Gregson, and Douglas Houston. Born in London in 1949, T.F. Griffin moved to Hull in 1969 and lived there for six years, during which time he struck up associations with other poets featured in the anthology, often writing poems in a heated workshop atmosphere in which ideas were exchanged and criticism made readily available. In Hull - The Poetry Years: A Personal Reminiscence (Bete Noire, 1992) Griffin recounts how he 'stepped off the train at Hull Paragon' and has 'never lived in the south since'. His comments on the developing relationship with Tony Flynn, that 'we lived in each other's notebooks' gives some indication of the intensity of this shared experience of carving out a poetic career from workshops and the publications of poems in magazines. An early appearance

in Encounter meant for Griffin that there was 'no turning back'. All of this, of course, is reflected in A Rumoured City itself: in an overlapping of themes, locations, politics and poetics. However, the Hull poet tag had the effect - with all poets featured in the anthology - of limiting even as it defined: and while this has been successfully surmounted by Griffin, his poetry is the least suited to being made to appear as if it were part of a poetic movement of group ideology. From the beginning, then, Griffin's work was characterised by a highly individual sensibility and a refusal to follow fashionable literary trends. In this he shares an affinity with Robert Graves - a poet he is known to admire - who doggedly remained true to his calling as a poet despite accusations of stubbornness or being out of touch with his audience. Like Graves, Griffin sees the poet's function as a calling in which truth is, by definition, uncompromising. The themes the poet feels pressured to address might be out of sequence with the expectation of his audience, but the themes are unavoidable nonetheless. It is this refusal to compromise his gift, which has earned Griffin the reputation of being something of a literary maverick: and, likewise, robbed him of the critical attention that should be his due. Seen in this sense, authentic poetry works *against* the temporary fashions, which are imposed on it from the outside by critics, reviewers, and academics whose priorities often run counter to those of the poet.

Although Griffin shares with Graves a conviction about the seriousness of the poet's sense of vocation, Graves' influence as a poet is hard to detect. The question of influence is an interesting one in this context as it throws light on the choices made by a poet as they struggle to find their own voice. Go far enough back and you'll hear the ghost of William Blake whispering in Griffin's ear, reminding him that the mystical and the ordinary are closely connected, and that a political dimension is implicit in all human situations. Griffin's radicalism manifests itself both in his choice of subject matter and the way in which he sees our shared experience of the world as a great leveller. Ultimately, Griffin would argue, despite any differences that might appear to exist socially, sexually, theologically, politically, or economically, we are all, as human beings, subject to the same basic doubts, assumptions and limitations; all made equal by the certainty of death. Underlying everything he has written is a powerful elementalism shot through with what we might call the sacred indifference of the natural world to human activity - a view he shares with Ted Hughes. Griffin himself has spoken about composing his early poems with Hughes' work open in front of him as he wrote, learning from the older poet phrase-by-phrase and line-by-line. So strong was Hughes influence early on in Griffin's career that it is surprising to see how effectively he has managed to shed those mannerisms in order to fuse all that Hughes has taught him into an idiosyncratic voice which is instantly recognisable and entirely his own.

In the middle of the 1970s the two poets began a correspondence, which is at once illuminating and fascinating, throwing light as it does on the way in which one poet can animate a spark of sensibility of another. Hughes' generosity of spirit is in evidence throughout and the things he has to say about Griffin's poetry both perceptive and encouraging. In one early letter, for instance, he highlights what he calls Griffin's 'knack of managing a wide very sensitive leaping connections and blunt commonplace objects in the same language'. Elsewhere, he writes that Griffin touches 'something real' and draws attention to the 'free yet precise syntax', which characterises the formal aspects of the poet's work. And these tensions are as much to do with the fine line Griffin appears to tread between formal and free verse as with the tensions implicit in the content of the poems. It is as if the unresolved areas of experience Griffin is drawn to as a poet find an adequate reflection in the unresolved nature of verse itself. It is no coincidence that these very features - which go some

way towards making Griffin's later work so distinctive - are the ones that we see being tried out time and time again in the poems he wrote between the correspondence with Hughes and the publication of Cider Days in 1990.

Cider Days is, to date, the central collection in Griffin's output, in that it encapsulates his achievements as a poet up to 1990 and, significantly, hints at the developments that have taken place since its publication. When Peter Didsbury reviewed it in the Hull Poets Special Edition of Bete Noire in 1992 he praised it for individuality of the poet's voice, the originality of the themes it attempts to address, and for Griffin's unflinching dedication to his calling. He sees in Griffin's work a determination 'to chart the struggle towards the acts of faith by which, faced with annihilation, one chooses and *decides to continue to choose love*'. The emphasis here (which is Didsbury's own) is important in that it draws attention to the fact that Griffin's work is constantly in process; that the issues raised within the poems is never quite resolved to satisfaction. The title poem of Cider Days demonstrates something of Griffin's method. In it the speaker begins from a concrete situation we are all familiar with - drinking with friends in the pub - and then extends it through a series of separate though interrelated images to take in the much wider issues of compassion and helplessness encountered by individuals in the face of global problems such as war and famine. In the hands of a lesser poet we would be made to feel that somehow the material was merely being appropriated for the poet's use in writing an effective poem: with Griffin we are convinced that the poem arose out of a powerful and genuine conviction that there is injustice in the world, and a rage against a system which renders us impotent in the face of such disasters. Here is a sensibility, which is attuned to the political without being limited by it. It is this emotional integrity - a blunt refusal to make something appear more significant or more felt than it actually is - which is the great strength of T.F. Griffin's work. Since the publication of Cider Days it has undergone something of a transformation, born out of a desire to open up both thematically, and formally. The question of development is an interesting one here. Ian Hamilton, like Griffin, is 'a poet of the miraculous persuasion' and, in the introduction to his Fifty Poems argues that a true lyric poet simply will not have a beginning, middle, and an end in terms of development - and it is therefore unrealistic on the part of their readers to expect this sort of progression. For Griffin, the lyric impulse is so powerful that it cannot be responded to in these sort of terms: it produces a poetry which is of the moment, hauling into its making all the elements available to the poet at the time of composition.

Having said that, Griffin's latest collection, The Quest is characterised by accessibility rarely in evidence in the earlier poems. In the opening poem of the collection, Swifts, for instance, we encounter the same assured movement from image to image, the same habit (derived from Shelley) of allowing each of these images to speak for themselves, and the same painful intensity we expect from Griffin's earlier work: and yet these swifts are never more than real birds seen in a real sky by a person who is, in essence, very much like you or I. And it is this willingness to allow himself into the poetic frame as a personality, I would argue, that is instrumental in making Griffin's more recent work so much more accessible. The title of the collection is significant too, drawing our attention to the poet's own quest for poetic identity and our collective quest as human beings for spiritual and emotional fulfilment. I would suggest that in poetry, as in much else, there exists a significant difference between obscurity and difficulty. T.F. Griffin's poems are sometimes difficult because the areas of experience he is attempting to articulate are by their very nature difficult to express. Obscurity arises when a poet is either defeated by the task of making the language adequate for the experience or when the poet simply wants to impress. In exploring the limits of

perception and questions relating to the nature of what it means to be human Griffin sometimes has to be difficult in order to communicate at all. On the rare, and conspicuous moments when Griffin fails to hold together all the disparate elements at work within his poems, he resorts to abstractions: and abstractions are his major weakness. Too often a poem will end abruptly with an unresolved gesture towards the cosmos, as if the poet has temporarily given up the quest. And yet we are always left with the sense that the question will not be left alone; that Griffin will return to it again in another poem and with renewed vigour.

Writing before these recent developments in Griffin's work, Douglas Dunn drew attention to the poet's 'belief that a callous materialism has, in the twentieth-century consciousness, denied life to spiritual possibilities' and came to the conclusion that Griffin's answer was to write a poetry which emphasised these possibilities by 'thinking through the imagination'. This phrase - which Wallace Stevens' - is central to an understanding of how Griffin's poems operate. It is this act of 'thinking through imagination', which makes Griffin's poems so distinctive and, I would argue, gives him flexibility he needs to tackle complex issues in immediate ways. It is as if he can somehow extend his empathy through the act of imagination in order to touch and reanimate the lives of an audience grown callous from too much exposure to the language of commercialism. In *The Photograph* (a poem which the author reads with great simplicity and conviction in his recording *Selected Poems*) Griffin begins with a very human situation and one with which we are familiar: a family posing for a photograph. In a language, which is as moving as it is precise, he then goes on to explore the complex relationships, which exist within a family, and way in which memory works on experience in order to change and redefine it. In *Adel Craig* (one of several piercing and unique love poems) he attempts to gauge the effect produced in the heart when one person is overwhelmed by the experience of another person's otherness, leaving them 'challenged, broken, and new'. And in *Frank*, the compassionate depiction of a Leeds derelict, Griffin manages to present us with an entirely un sentimental and yet entirely compassionate portrait of dignity surviving extreme circumstance, finding in this 'undesirable character' what many casual observers might never find: 'a manifest integrity'. These three poems represent the height of Griffin's achievement as a poet, give some idea of his tone and range, and are an excellent starting point for anyone coming to his work for the first time.

With T.F. Griffin, then we have a true poet who is actively, and in some ways *passionately* concerned about the world in which we live. There is a healthy radicalism at work here, both in the broadly political stance he adopts and his practice as a poet. And these poems, read as a whole, constitute a sustained attempt to relate the miraculous within that world to an audience he perceives to be, by and large indifferent to the mystical dimensions implicit in the human condition. The paradoxes, which arise from this situation, are what give his poetry its tensions and its sense of intelligence strangely at odds with the material it has to work with. There is a powerful refusal here too - to compromise either with fashionable literary trends or with the demands of a life that might impinge upon the terms of his calling. With such an ambitious agenda it would be unreasonable for us, his audience, to expect the sort of clarity we might get from a poet who has not chosen to aim so high. Much of what passes for poetry today appears limp and inconsequential in comparison with what Griffin has already achieved. And I think, from evidence in hand, it is fair to say that Griffin's best and most assured work is yet to come. He continues to welcome the challenge of transforming into poetry those indefinable moments or attitudes of mind that surface in all of us from time to time and make us realise there is more to life than the surface impressions would have us believe. His is a 'manifest integrity' born out

of a controlled rage against the way things are (when they could so obviously have been otherwise) and out of what Yeats chose to call the impulse to write poetry: 'the fascination of what's difficult'.

Reviews

VALLUM 2:2

<http://206.191.48.25/vallummag/homepage.html>

An expansive collection of poetry detailing aspects of our lives; politics, love, dreams, neuroses, passing of seasons, death and the experience of being a minority. In the latter, George Elliot Clarke's *Language* seizes the reader, as he discusses his isolation, fear as a 'queer nigger'. Clarke sets out his agenda in numbered verses that are alive with vibrant images, challenging the reader to understand his experiences through the transition of language; from Queen's English to English-Canadian. This graphic detailing continues in *The Assassination of Malcolm X*, in which he creates cinematic scenes, and despite mundane details the reader is compelled to go on, to respect the humanity of the corpses: 'empty eyeglass case'. Yet being asked to be aware of the elevation of Malcolm X to martyrdom.

This issue also celebrates the work of Peter Redgrove, publishing *Davy Jones' Lioness*; a passionate poem, ferocious with its use of animal imagery in creating demands, the power of infatuation, leaving the reader to gasp as the poem ends. Philip Hosbaum introduces the reader to Redgrove; a clearly enamoured introduction at best, that offers the reader an initial insight into Redgrove's work, influences and style. It leaves the reader with the desire to read Redgrove's collection, [The Idea of Entropy at Maenthorp Beach](#) as well as the rest of Redgrove's back catalogue.

A.F. Moritz uses simple and evocative language in *The Storyteller*, suggesting that the events of life offer a contradiction to the belief that time brings wisdom and transformation. Moritz counters this by suggesting that time merely allows commitment to the same action: 'from scarred mouth to scabbed mouth to mouth torn'.

Richard Peabody's *Two Minute Warning* adopts a more confrontational style; it reads like manic thoughts in the night, its urgency grabbing the reader.

The poetry is wide ranging, as are the essays by the likes of John Kinsella, [The Search for the New Idea, The Unique? Against Poetics?](#) explores and examines the need that poets have to understand and believe in poetics whilst vainly attempting to establish their writings as unique.

Vallum is passionate, ethereal, realistic and provocative, responding to change and movement of time, raising questions of the reader and proffering various solutions. AA

MICHAEL ROSEN: THIS IS NOT MY NOSE (PENGUIN ISBN 0 141 01583 7) £7.99 88PP.
<http://www.penguin.co.uk/>

'When *Lady Chatterley* came out, the kid we / called Tails bought one in. He covered / it in brown paper and wrote on the front: *Black / Beauty* by Anna Sewell. In class, we'd say, / What are you reading, Tails? And he'd say: *Black / Beauty*. We'd say, What's *Black Beauty* like, / Tails? Good book, he'd say. That year, we all read / *Black Beauty*'. This one vignette from a book of thirty that shows both Rosen's ability and confusion in the world of criticism, abounded by the image of being nothing more than a children's poet; this collection inevitably shows that maybe every poet should be tarred with this brush. For it is the brutal but naïve voice that carries this collection far beyond its peers, this is a collection that chronicles both childhood, the loss of innocence, the pain of experience and the inevitability of age in a breath taking myriad of humour, love and

despondency. This is the voice of the child within all of us, this voice of the adult in every child. In this collection, Rosen looks at his world a new, turns over every stone and shows us a frank, honest and heartbreaking map of his life, dealing with a whole gambit of life experience and the shocking aftermath of death, the coming to terms with illness. This is all done with masterful strokes of simplicity that gnaw at the heart of the reader and making them realise that you should never take anything for granted, that you should never believe everything you are told. Rosen is not a children's poet, he is not an adult's poet, he belongs to everyone; he is simply a poet. AO

 NEIL ASTLEY ed.: BEING ALIVE (BLOODAXE ISBN 1 85224 675 8) £10.95 512PP.
<http://www.bloodaxebooks.com/>

This is the long awaited sequel to *Staying Alive* (one of Britain's most popular poetry books). This anthology is no different, except that it does not fall down that gaping chasm that tends to start with 100 Poems for... this is not a seasonal book or marketing ploy. It is an honest attempt to make sense of the reader's world bringing in a myriad of poets from Eliot to Snyder, Pinsky to Auden, Shapcott to Muldoon, giving the reader the chance to be challenged, to be impressed, to laugh, to cry and to nod quietly to themselves on the way back from work, crammed on some train, tube, bus or car jam. These are tasters of great and new poets, a smorgers board of the living and dead coming to terms with the world, with love, with men and women, with beginnings and ends. A no time does the editor, Neil Astley, allow the poems to become saccharine, to preach, to dictate, to give the reader a map through the world, they are deftly executed by the editor, into sections that do not answer before the question. Astley has created an anthology that allows the reader to be questioned by the poetry and for them, in turn, to question the world around them. It won't be long before somewhere in the world a traffic jam will be found with no people, no signs of abduction or violence, just a copy of this book left in a few drivers seats, as an arrow pointing the way - now that's a powerful reason to part with your money and have a book that you will read at anytime in your life. AO

 T.F. GRIFFIN ed. THE GREAT REFUSAL (FLUX GALLERY PRESS) £6.95

The collection solidifies the best, and the ethos, behind the success of 2004, *The Flux Gallery*, Leeds. It delivers the finest poets who have read or have been associated with Flux: Steviana de Saille, Murray Edsger, Tony Flynn, T.F. Griffin, the late Des McHale, Ian Parks, Milner Place, Genny Rahtz and Ed Reiss. This neat package provokes, disturbs and illuminates the readers. Parks' poetry shines out of the pages with breathtaking beauty: 'She looked at me and the bitters streets / where I was born; the valley floor that offered / no escape; the Chartist cobbles hard rain / glistened on; and everywhere a sense of failing light'. His power lies in his ability to weave the reader, the narrator and the protagonist of his work into seamless poetry. No jars in the rhythm, no clumsy mistakes that have unfortunately become the hallmark of many poets tagged with the term 'love poet'. He weaves, dodges, through memories and places familiar but new to the reader. Edsger though is far cry from the style of Parks, his memorial, *Father*: 'Years earlier, spies / Had infiltrated his lungs / Made reports and gone / Leaving behind mines and bombs', plays with the everyday, distorts images that are 'mines and bombs' waiting to go off. In Place's *Certain Matters*, he touches on growing old, the absurd nature of love: 'Bit long in the tooth to write of love / all grey and grizzled, hounded by the years'. Those familiar with Place's work, know his satirical nature; his tongue in cheek search through his own life, often revealing the most painful, provoking lines: 'She tells of burning into fire / at stakes, on funeral pyres, in ovens / not designed for bread, and all the silences'. Flynn in this collection casts around the landscape and the universe, reeling in big ideas and creates little worlds of retribution,

strength and belief. This is a counterpoint to Reiss, McHale, de Saille and Rahtz, the fore still creeping into: 'the kingdom of crows and silence'. Yet, it is the inclusion of the stubborn, Graves like character of T.F. Griffin as editor and poet in this collection, which raises the stakes. His ability to create such a collection in the twenty first century shows that modern collections can surpass the bland, mediocre, thematic and fashionable school of thinking. That the work counts more than the fashions of the time: 'When nothing more could by-pass him / He swallowed whole'. This is wonderful collection rooted in the cityscape, in the skin and bones of the reader; the everyday made sublime, and the sublime made accessible to the poorest. This is not about contemporary poetry but about poetry itself, this is collection without the need for tags, pomp and circumstance, fashionable ideas or trends and this is why this collection will stand the test of time. In years to come this will be T.F. Griffin's legacy to all of us. BM

 JO HASLAM: LUNAR MOTHS (SMITH/DOORSTEP BOOKS ISBN 1 902382 68 4) £3

<http://www.poetrybusiness.co.uk/>

These glorious chapbooks from Smith/Doorstep should be the publishing coup of the 2005. Lightweight and simply designed they lull the reader into actually reading the goddamn things rather than just stare wistfully into yet another attractive design that has absolutely nothing to do with the content - as some hapless little computer nerd somewhere lovingly strokes the cover and goes on about different grades of paper and design programmes - thankfully we are spared this and more importantly we are delivered a simple gem in the shape of Jo Haslam, who moves effortlessly through this short collection; she delivers wonderful, Technicolor images in a monochrome world, that no cover could possibly capture: 'Even polar ice caps have their share of moths / trawling the white peaks, wings fragile as candy floss / quivering in the freezing air - one touch / on those peaks, you'd think they'd dissolve'. There is a brooding fear in this collection, a sexual pulse beneath the text, that roots the often-fragile words in the earth, making them tangible and solid. This is world that reader knows but hasn't seen and Haslam deftly moves through it, opening the eyes of the awake, the images linger in your eyes, the taste on your lips the sound of the words in your ears; these are lines that will haunt your waking hours and pad in the darkness of your dreams. They are a luscious beast dripping from the page, with wings of lace: 'rising from the skirting boards and flitting / suddenly from cupboards and drawers'. SM

 ANTHONY CROPPER/IAN DALEY ed. NAKED CITY (ROUTE 1 901927 23 7) £8.95 272PP

www.route-online.com

This is Route all grown up, a collection of thought provoking stories, well edited by two individuals who know what makes a collection tick. Short stories have been battered over the last few years, a major source of ignorance, they have been pushed to the back of the classroom cupboard, forgotten and shunned but thanks to the likes of Granta and Route, with the unwavering support and war cry of such institutions as

<http://www.saveourshortstory.org.uk/> we are seeing the long overdue return

to form in the UK. Readers, once over, forced to read the short stories of one writer now have the choice to read a collection bringing some of the finest next generation Booker authors to our shelves. The eclectic, the humorous, the heartbreaking, the psychological, the fear and angst are all here in a collection that not only embodies the city but occupies the very soul of the urban landscape. This is the regeneration of Route and the start of the renaissance for the short story on these isles, no longer will we have to submit to American editors or write for middle aged women's magazines. If Granta have the south, then Route have the north and it's only a matter of time before they take the capital. AO

 Contributors:

Zoe Artemis

Zoe Artemis, who is organizing the course, is a New York poet and dancer. She has performed and lead dance workshops for over 20 years throughout the U.S. Greece, Spain and the U.K. In her very first job she worked at the White House during the Carter Presidency, as an executive assistant. She is currently organizing 'Ode to the Sidewalks of New York Poetry/Jazz Reading' at the Bowery Poetry Club on May 15, hosted by David Amram. For detailed info about the Greece Writing Retreat and to registration visit <http://www.zoearthemis.com/>

Bixby Monk

Bixby Monk his half Scottish and Half Czech, he was born in 1968. Named by his father after the jazz musician, Bix Beiderbecke, he spent a disappointing childhood in the Edinburgh school system before leaving for the army. He splits his time between Edinburgh and Prague. His claims to fame are being the last war correspondent to cover the Gulf War and being the first war correspondent to leave Kuwait. He writes for several press agencies and writes under various pseudonyms in the UK and European Presses. He is the editor of Incorporating Writing (ISSN 1743-0380).

Sam Morris

Sam Morris is a freelance writer, living in London, with a foundation and training in Art History. He has previously worked with contemporary artists on various exhibition reviews and artist statements of intent and influence. Yet his main areas of interest are concerned with Existential writings and works that express the Romantic impetus towards elevated consciousness and human emotional understanding. He sympathises with the work of Goethe, Kafka, Camus, Sartre, Wilson, Vonnegut, Keats, Eliot and Ouspensky. Currently he is working on a novel concerning Gherardo Petrarch's (Francesco's brother) time in the Carthusian monastery of Montrieux near Toulon.

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Andrew O'Donnell

Andrew O'Donnell was born in Blackpool in 1977 and spent his youth drinking Kestrel lager on the streets of Bromley Cross and Egerton, the 'posh end' of Bolton, Lancs (where the moors creep in on the urban sprawl that is Bolton and Manchester.) He studied Literature and Philosophy at Staffs University before travelling around India and Nepal. He has (sometimes tenuously) lived in Kobe, Osaka (Japan), Pokhara (Nepal), Vancouver and London. He has been writing poetry and prose since he was about sixteen and has had poetry published with a handful of literary magazines and websites in England, Canada and the U.S.

Andrew Oldham

Andrew Oldham writes for Stage, Television and Film. His credits include BBC1's Doctors, BBC R4 Go 4 it, Piccadilly Key103 BTCC Christmas Campaign, the short film Divine Blonde and The Charlie Manson Room (showcased by Theatre and Beyond at Brighton Pavilion, part of The International Brighton Festival 2002). He is prior recipient of a Writers Award from the ACE NW (UK), a Peggy Ramsay Award (UK) and a nominee of the Jerwood-Arvon award (UK) and has been nominated for the London International Award. Publications include the crime story, Spanking The Monkey, in: Next Stop Hope (Route ISBN 1 901927 19 9). Poetry in The Interpreter's House (UK), Gargoyle (USA), Poetry Greece and Poetry Salzburg (Europe), Grain (Canada) and Dream Catcher (UK) to name a few. He is an academic and journalist.

Ian Parks

Ian Parks is a Hawthornden Fellow 1991, he has travelled through the United States of America on a Fellowship in 1994. His poetry has received accolades and awards, including the Royal Literary Fund 2003, the Oppenheim Award 2001 and 2002 and the John Masefield Award 2001. Ian was a National Poetry Society New Poet in 1996 and was a prior Poetry Editor for Dream Catcher (issues 7 -11). His collections include, *Gargoyles in Winter* (Littlewood, 1985), *A Climb Through Altered Landscapes* (Blackwater 1998), *The Angel of the North* (Tarantula CD 2000). *Departures and Rendezvous: Love Poems 1983-2003* is due for publication in 2005. His next collection, *Shell Island*, will be available from Way Wiser (USA) in 2005. He teaches at Leeds University.