

I first met William in the mid 1950s when he was a student at Westminster School with Edmund Gray, two of whose sisters, Cecilia and Sophie, were at the same Catholic Day School, More House, as I and my sister Rita.

I remember a period when I went regularly to dinner at 5 Cranbourne Court where William lived with his mother Rachel, the walk there and back part of the memory. I would set off from Cromwell Road where we lived in a small flat at the top of a tall building overlooking the Natural History Museum and walk towards the embankment crossing the Albert Bridge in the evening light, especially noticeable over the river because of the reflection in the water. There was something pleasing about the atmosphere at No 5 with its through light, the drawing room open to the dining room with windows at each end. From the drawing room you saw the trees of Battersea Park.. William usually walked me back and this seemed to be an extension of the evening as I recrossed the bridge to go home, the sky now dark and the street lights on. I cannot remember if Albert Bridge was lit up as it is now.

Rachel Cookson was a good hostess and cook and, though I cannot recall specific meals, a special flavoured salt with dark grains which we would sprinkle on the salad stays in my mind as well as the small glass of sherry offered as an aperitif. After dinner we sat round the fire (was it a real fire then?) and William would recite poetry, for him a natural thing to do, though I, at first, felt self conscious as listener. The evenings were calm and I was never exposed to the Rachel who could later, apparently, be so difficult with some of William's girl friends because I had no romantic attachment to him but was a friend who shared some of his interests and the romance of ideas.

We used to go to films by Jean Cocteau and Ingmar Bergman: *La Belle et La Bete*, *Orphee*, *The Seventh Seal* and other sunnier Bergman films. We talked about literature and about Ezra Pound with whom William had started corresponding after reading *Rock-Drill* and reviewing it in *The Trifler* (the Westminster School literary magazine). He and Rachel stayed with Pound when he left St Elizabeth's Hospital in America and moved to Rapallo in Northern Italy. Rita and I also had an Italian connection for we had visited our Uncle Wystan (W.H. Auden) in Ischia, far down in the south and reached by taking a boat from Pozzuoli near Naples. We first stayed on our way from India to school in England.

I went up to Oxford (St. Hugh's) in 1959 and by the time William came up to New College I had made a number of friends and hardly saw him but have an isolated memory of a slightly uneasy trip to see *Psycho* in a cinema in Headington, the awkwardness partly the result of not having seen him for some time.

Wystan's Professorship of Poetry coincided with my years at St Hugh's and I went to his lectures, later published in *The Dyer's Hand*, a proud niece thriving in reflected glory, delighted by the huge crowd which packed these occasions. I stayed a fourth year as I had started a B.Litt thesis on Shelley's Prose. Shelley's letters puzzled me for they could be cold but I was intrigued by the theatrical psychological scenarios of the Gothick novels I started researching in relation to the two he had written. I also felt infected by a sense of melancholy and stranded as though life was going on elsewhere – most of my friends having left. I abandoned the thesis and went to Florence to stay with Thekla and John Clark and Thekla's daughter Lisa, friends of Wystan and Chester Kallman.

Unfortunately I caught meningitis in an epidemic and on Good Friday was taken by what, in my fevered imagination, were bandits (in reality volunteers incognito in surgical type masks on ambulance duty over Easter), to a hospital in Carreggi, a large medical complex on the outskirts of Florence, where I spent a month under the care of Professor Vanucchi. I returned to London feeling I had gone through a sea change. During a slow process of recovery I tried, as I had done on and off through my life, to write, though always with an inhibitory awareness of Wistan and a fear of making a fool of myself.

Agenda had come into existence in 1959 under the auspices of Ezra Pound and I was glad when I was back in London and recuperating in 1963, to be invited by William to review Ted Hughes' *Earth Owl* for the magazine, at that time issued in a very slim format with matt coloured covers. *Agenda* became the link with William who was leading his own busy life teaching at a Tutorial College and editing the magazine while I had started working in an antique shop owned by Lennox Money whom I married in 1968 and was learning about furniture, particularly from the Colonies, and moving in the world of auction houses and dealers. Perhaps the aesthetics of that world encouraged an existing preoccupation with personal aesthetics and I later spent a number of years running a small exercise studio sharing the fears and neuroses of women like myself but realising the importance of exercise as a therapy for body and mind and liking the idea of movement and the reminder of a few years at Sadlers Wells and an unfulfilled ambition to become a dancer.

During the 70s we were not much in touch but in the mid 1980s I invited William round, partly, I seem to remember, prompted by a school friend, Judith Pakenham (she and Rachel were another pair of sisters at More House), who was now writing poetry under her married name of Kazantzis. Since then Judith's work has appeared in various places including *Agenda* and a poem of hers has succeeded in travelling the underground – a place where short poems focus attention in a special way spotted between advertisements and read between stops. William arrived on his motorbike wearing a leather jacket – a more fashionable look than I remember from before – but otherwise much the same, at least in appearance. I discovered that William's mother had died and later also discovered that a poem of hers was published in *Agenda* as a memorial tribute - a movingly minimal one. Not long after this meeting I was invited to a party to celebrate his marriage to Margaret little guessing that I would be working for *Agenda* in 1993, walking this time from Pimlico Road to Cranbourne Court, crossing Albert Bridge in the morning and returning in the late afternoon, often through Cheyne Walk, passing both the house in which Dante Gabriel Rossetti had lived and the house where George Elliot died, the two blue plaques close neighbours. This renewed crossing of the bridge seemed to be a symbol to me of something, I am not sure what, and quite unlike my previous journeys where no symbolic meanings were attached.

I worked at the mahogany dining table where I had dined so many years ago, conscious of the changing light as the day went by and surprised to discover much later that the large wooden clock on the wall which I had seen as a rustic work of art, registered the time, at least some of the time, its working reality apparent when its maker arrived to do adjustments. Various changes had taken place at Cranbourne Court: William and Margaret slept in the bedroom which used to be Rachel's; Emma, their daughter, slept in the room which had sometimes been rented to a student and the small room which had been William's bedroom was now his study. *Agenda* and a family competed for space and Jill the Dalmatian guarded this crowded space, an important spotted presence, sometimes resting at my feet when I was working on the computer which, thanks to the efforts of Grey Gowrie, had been provided for

us by the Po Shing Woo Foundation. We also received income funding from them when The Arts Council had ceased giving us annual amounts, though still providing money for specific issues. Grey became a trustee at the same time that I began work at *Agenda* but soon had to step down when he became Chairman of the Arts Council. He already had connections with the magazine and had guest edited an issue on American Poets. It was at a talk he gave on Robert Lowell in November 2002 at The Royal Literary Society that I last met William (I had left *Agenda* in 2000 and, though in touch, was working at the time at The College of North West London). He said he was enjoying going to Italian classes and that his left arm and hand were better, with increasing mobility of the fingers (he was left handed and had been unable to write for a long period after a fall which affected the nerves in his left shoulder, arm and hand). I intended to go round at Christmas to leave a present on the pile in front of the Christmas tree but failed to do so, though sent a card. When I did go round, after hearing of his death, there was for once no tree and no cards had been posted out - signs that things had been very bleak indeed. Usually William printed a card from one of Emma's special paintings (often of horses for she liked riding - a taste nurtured by visits to Patricia McCarthy in Mayfield who owned a horse). For some days William's voice remained on the answerphone but now Margaret's nicely chosen "the Cookson family" greeted one as if his presence continued with Emma and Margaret.

His death came as a shock. I think we all presumed that William would survive his troubles as he had done before. These troubles at what was to be the end of his life mirrored earlier troubles. I was aware of undercurrents when I started working at *Agenda* but it took time to piece together a complex history with various perspectives and my initial semi-ignorance and the sense that I belonged to an older pre-history helped in some ways, though to others it was most likely a hindrance. Edmund Gray, a figure from this more distant past, had become a trustee when the magazine was formed into a Charitable Trust and had been associated with it from the beginning. His maternal grandfather was Lawrence Binyon (named Binbin by Pound, Edmund becoming Binbinides) and through him *Agenda Editions* printed Binyon's translation of *The Divine Comedy* which Pound so admired. Edmund's family also knew David Jones, one of the founding fathers of *Agenda*.

Peter Dale was still Co-editor with William during the first five years of my time at *Agenda* but Michael Alexander, who had been an associate editor, had already left. Like Grey and Edmund they had been contemporaries at Oxford. Perhaps it is not surprising but worth remarking that Grey, Peter, Michael and William all wrote poetry and taught English whether at tutorial colleges, schools or at University. Patricia McCarthy, now Editor of *Agenda* and Sam Milne, Assistant Editor, follow this tradition.

William in his dual capacity as editor and trustee of *Agenda* controlled the magazine. Before I arrived Stanley Honeyman and Harold Pinter had been trustees (I think we could have up to 7 but not less than 3) and after Grey's brief trusteeship, Jacky Thompson, a friend of Edmund's and mine, braved the role - joining John Bayley (William's tutor at Oxford), Edmund and William. Jacky actively helped the magazine and persuaded her husband Julian, a Director at Sotheby's, to show me how to do Management accounts. Julian was a grandson of Walter de la Mare who, according to his biographer Theresa Whistler, was adept at figures. Jacky and Julian were part of the world I had shared with Lennox thus providing an unexpected link. Sam Milne and Anne Beresford, new figures to me when I first arrived, remained throughout on the *Agenda* Editorial Board - a more decorative than a fully operational reality which we joked about - for consultation was not a natural instinct in William though he liked

having people he liked on board. He exercised a form of divide and rule and could manipulate people's vanities using a certain psychological knowingness which was irritating but this was counter balanced by dogged loyalties.

When Peter decided to cease being Co-editor, William, always an admirer and publisher of Peter's poetry, was unhappy but not totally surprised for there was background history to this as I discovered. Though he had considered that Peter's different approach made a healthy balance to his own and was good for *Agenda* he would never have countenanced any kind of take over by anyone, regardless of the opinion of the other Trustees. Quite apart from the problems that arose when he was drinking there were several occasions when he had over-ridden Peter's editorial decisions at the last minute, sometimes through a lapse of memory or lack of co-ordination with Peter but also from a solipsistic immunity to the autonomy of others – a definite view that he knew best. William's 'divide and rule' instincts meant that I was often unaware of editorial agreements or plans and even if William occasionally may have imagined he had passed on details, the end result was the same.

Anne, Sam, Peter, Michael Alexander and Michael Hamburger (Anne's husband) as well as being published in *Agenda*, the magazine, also appeared in small individual *Agenda Editions* as did William. His brief imagist cameos and translations were published in a first collection *Spell*, then in *Vestiges*, then *Vestiges and Versions*. I remember the look of these editions and some titles lodge in my mind - discrete entities freed from their content – *The Roman Quarry* (David Jones) for which Nancy Sandars had provided notes, *On a Deserted Shore* (Kathleen Raine), *The Lamp* (by Penelope Palmer, one of the first women poets published in *Agenda*), *Believing words are Real* (Roland John, Editor of *Outposts* and The Hippopotamus Press), *The Mystery of the Chairty of Charles Peguy* (Geoffrey Hill), *Seven Arab Odes* (Desmond O'Grady), *The Seasons of Cankam* (Peter Dale and Kokilam Subbiah), *The Sele of the Morning* (Anne Beresford). John Cayley's *Ink Bamboo* was a combined publishing venture with Bellew. John, a Chinese scholar, helped William with notes for his *Guide to the Cantos*. In addition to combined publications there were sympathetic links with publishers such as Peter Jay of *Anvil*, a meticulous editor and poet (a classicist) who has produced handsome editions of work by Peter Dale and Michael Hamburger as well as undertaking the complex task of printing William's Revised *Guide to the Cantos*.

Over the months I learnt to locate the back issues which lined the shelves put up by an American called Peter Martin, now back in the States, whose advertisement William saw in a local Battersea newspaper. These reached up to the ceiling of the narrow corridor and I was often precariously balanced on a ladder or down on my knees on the new blue carpet from Peter Jones. I, the carpet, the shelves and a sofa upholstered in blue were all new in 1993. William himself felt he was making a new beginning. Readers of *Agenda* will be familiar with the impressive array of tributes, anthology issues, translation issues (*Agenda* had always been interested in translation, an important feature of its history) and more technical issues with titles like Rhythm Issue or Long Poem Issue, these mainly edited by Peter Dale. Anthony Short, a great friend from Oxford, now also dead, told me how impressed he had been reading William Carlos Williams's *Asphodel* in *Agenda*. In Spring 1993 we had reached Volume 31 and there were of course many more issues to come and more names anthologised, including those of a number of women poets. William though irritated by aspects of feminism, was sympathetic to women and to some extent felt controlled by them, not always to the good when he developed a romantic and obsessive crush as he sometimes did. For him the concept of a Muse was real though I saw it, at times, more as an indulgence and alibi rather than an inspiration.

The past exercised a powerful presence. William, whose natural courtesy Grey and others have noted, also had a particular sensitivity towards older generations with whom I think he identified, sometimes assuming the persona of a wise elder and occasionally of a curmudgeon. He had a toughness, even aggression, which he harnessed to his crusader role defending forgotten talents and reputations out of fashion. Conscious search for the 'cutting edge' was missing for the cutting edge which counted for him still seemed to belong to Pound. If things became stale at times with a tendency to recycle a few names they at least avoided short-lived novelties.

His loyalty to his 'house' poets was balanced by his Poundian concern with the historical engines of 'kulture' which drew on international voices. It came as a pleasant surprise when Eleni Cubitt, whom my family first met when my father worked in the Sudan, rang *Agenda* for some help with a programme which she and Dr Jenny Richardson, Director of The Foundation for Hellenic Culture were preparing. The idea was to pair 20th century Greek with English poets: Cavafy, Gatsos, Seferis, Ritsos and Elitis with Auden, MacNeice, Eliot, Dylan Thomas and, breaking the 20th century pairing, William Blake. Eleni had met Louis MacNeice when he stayed briefly with my parents in the Sudan. For the Cavafy/Auden double bill in September 1995, the speakers included David Ricks (on Cavafy) and Richard Davenport-Hines who had just published a biography of Auden.

We made a number of visits to the Arts Council in Great Peter Street and had discussions with Grey (when Grey was Chairman) and his administrator, John Dowling, as well as meetings with Alistair Niven, Director of Literature at that period, Gary McKeone, Clarissa Luard, and, if a translation issue was in the offing, Jilly Paver. We also met with John Hampson who was then at The London Arts Board. But the forms we filled up for funding were faceless. Towards the last year or so of my time at *Agenda* Philip Spender, a friend and godson of Wystan (his father Michael, Stephen Spender's elder brother, had been on the same Karakoram Expedition as my father in the 30s) helped us make applications to Charities for funding. He had in *Agenda's* early days acted as distributor and taken the magazine round to bookshops, something which we tried to do ourselves but never on a sufficient scale, though we later had help from Tania Waghorn.

The Post played a vital role in the life of the magazine and William became anxious if the postman delivered late and equally anxious about posting in pillar boxes which could test one's faith, especially the slim wall pillar box in Cheyne Walk which he and Emma passed on the way to her school and which they liked to imagine had mischievous magical properties capable of whisking the mail away to a land of lost letters.

Reciprocal complimentary copies of poetry magazines would arrive from near and far and, either by design or accident, we received 2 copies of *The London Magazine* when Alan Ross was alive. Our complimentary list which included a number of poets and benefactors was extravagantly generous in relation to our limited budget. Invitations for poetry readings and prize givings seemed to fill the year and suggest that poets were a convivial lot but much of this was to do with marketing and raising their profile and financial viability. I have numerous memories of visits to different places – pubs, bookshops like Bernard Stones (readings were organised by Marius Kociejowski when he worked there) Waterstones, Books Etc, or The Troubador, The Poetry Society, The Voice Box and, for grander occasions, The Purcell Room. William had made a special effort when I first started working for him to take me to a reading of Wystan's poetry organised by The Blue Nose Poetry group (which included Mario Petrucci whom I was later to publish) and introduced me to Glynn Maxwell whom he had published in

Agenda. The venue, tucked away in an obscure location, created a sense of mystery which also existed when visiting The Old Operating Theatre, reached by a small wooden curving staircase and through a room called the herb garret. The building belonged to the past and felt fit for ghosts - Keats, perhaps, or spirits from the operating table. I used to feel that it would be unwise to leave late. The two annual prize-givings I remember - The Forward Prize and the TS Eliot Memorial Prize - attracted useful publicity, at least for some poets, as well as welcome funds. William Sieghart's views were rather different from those of William but Valerie Eliot had often been a benefactress to *Agenda*. We were encouraged by the Arts Council to organise our own readings and events to raise money and open *Agenda* to a wider circle of people. These ephemeral occasions, often in tandem with the publication of an issue or an edition, are worth recording, however briefly, before they are shrouded in the mists of time. I would like to highlight a few and credit those who helped us though much of the picturesque detail has blurred in my mind.

The first I recall was at Westminster School in 1993 and made possible through the help of John Field, both teacher of English, librarian and archivist, whose story of the school, *The King's Nurseries*, was published in 1987. We were celebrating the launch of *Agenda - An Anthology* (the edition published jointly with Carcanet) which spanned 30 years from 1959 - 1993 and it seemed fitting that this should take place in the historical surroundings of William's old school on a lovely Summer evening. My preoccupations on this occasion were with providing food and drink and I have little memory of the poems read but a memory of sunlight and old rooms.

The next event in 1994 was at The Tricycle Theatre on a Sunday (the only day that was free in their busy schedule), the venue suggested by the poet David Harsent. Audrey Nicholson who had taught English at a London comprehensive and is remembered with affection for her enthusiastic espousal of poetry and poets, decided to busy herself on our behalf rallying friends and acquaintances to attend. Her circle included some well known figures in the world of poetry and translation and these became familiar faces over the years - Peter Porter and his wife Christine, Tony Rudolph of the Menard Press, Dinah Livingstone of Katabasis, Marius Kociejowski and his wife Bobby and others besides. We printed a particularly nice poster in white, black and red - *Agenda* colours - which reproduced a drawing given to William by Jean Cocteau showing a classical profile and lyre with the words 'Bonne Chance a William Cookson l'ami Jean Cocteau'. My son Otto and I went to rather wild lengths placing the posters not only in bookshops but on bare spaces on street walls or in the underground (fly posting I suppose and of course we should have got permission but in spite of the fact they were pulled down almost immediately we caught the attention of some passers by). We later used this drawing on catalogues and stocklists. Our line up of poets was not especially representative of *Agenda* but they were taking part in order to raise funds for the magazine. Stephen Spender, Harold Pinter, Christopher Logue, James Fenton, Hugo Williams, John Burnside and Anne Beresford read both a selection of their own poems and something from a poet they liked, as we had suggested they do. This was one of Stephen's last public appearances. He read from his book *Dolphins* and simply and movingly a sonnet of Shakespeare's for it was, by coincidence, April the 23rd - St George's Day and the anniversary of Shakespeare's birth.

Not every issue had a launch but we became accustomed to planning readings for translation issues or special tributes. In 1996 The Irish Issue edited by Patricia McCarthy was launched in Dublin at The Writers Centre (with the help of the poet Dennis O'Driscoll); in 1997 the Dante/Pound issue, thanks to the efforts of Jacky, was launched to the accompaniment of a quartet and champagne in a grand, high ceilinged room in Grosvenor Place,

the premises of the Accademia Italiana and European Academy; in Summer 1998 the anthology/translation issue I edited had a more informal celebration at Lauderdale House (through the poet Shanta Acharya who runs their poetry programme and whose thesis on the influence of Indian thought on Emerson was, coincidentally, supervised by John Bayley). Lack of funds meant that publicity for these events was a problem for we could not do things on a large scale and though we made efforts to contact the Nationals and *Time Out* with information for their listings, there was no guarantee that we would necessarily be included. It is therefore with gratitude that I remember how Sally Crawford, who together with Elizabeth Cook, Keith Jones and Charles Leftwich read at Lauderdale House as new *Agenda* poets, gave us some welcome publicity on her *Poets of London* website. Keith Jones bravely read in spite of Parkinsons evoking a Welsh childhood and the power of Tarot while Charles Leftwich offered a Zulu style reading – flamboyant and rhetorical – inspired by his South African boyhood in Natal. Sally’s spare verse contrasted with Elizabeth’s more rounded tones.

By an accident of timing The Nehru Centre, originally intended as the venue for my issue, but unable to offer a space till November, became the venue for the just published tribute to the Welsh poet RS Thomas. We decided to run a double bill. Grey, who had contributed to the issue, read a poem by Thomas and Kevin Perryman, editor of *Babel* and translator into German, another admirer of Thomas and contributor to the issue, made a special trip from Germany to read a poem he had written in honour of him. William read David Jones’ *The Hunt*, a reminder of the Welsh identification of a canonical *Agenda* figure. The *Agenda* canon was off-set by readings from Pasuvayya, the 20th century Tamil poet (translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom and read by her in both Tamil and English), Tagore’s very short poems from *Particles* and *Sparks* (translated by William Radice and read by him in Bengali and English), poems by Lui Hongbin (read dramatically by himself in Chinese followed by Peter Porter’s more measured English translation) and Peter Dale’s beautiful versions of early Tamil ‘Cankam’ love poetry. Tagore, some will remember, was initially taken up by Pound but later dropped. Translating Tagore’s poetry is extremely difficult and it would be interesting to compare translations – William Radice with Ketaki Kushari Dyson, for example, to understand how the tone can vary. Earlier dated translations, including Tagore’s own, have blurred a modern appreciation of his poetry. Andrew Robinson and Krishna Dutta, both contributors to my anthology issue, have translated his letters and written about him – a figure far more subtle, humorous and practical than some people realise. He had a certain physical vanity and was no doubt susceptible to praise (he was conscious of his appearance and had jars of face creams my mother recalls) which may have made him respond too easily to the initial adulation of a Western audience though he later reacted against this.

Both the Peters and William Radice were invited to read an original poem of their own and I was struck at the time by the contrast in style and subject matter: Dale’s haunting by an intrusive voice, Porter’s moving musings on death, being a colonial and snobbery and taste in art, Radice’s comparison of a damaged child and a damaged Germany. Shusha Guppy sang in the interludes and her repertoire included a poem of Ted Hughes which she had set to music, celebrating both him and the Welsh theme, songs in her native Persian and a nostalgic rendering of Byron’s *We’ll go no more a roving*. Firbank and an India of a different era seemed to cohabit the evening in a way which may sadly vanish. The Director at that time, Professor Indra Nath Choudhuri, told me how much he had enjoyed hearing the poems of RS Thomas.

In summer 1999 our Greek double issue combining contemporary (as opposed to modern) and classical work - William had been adamant that there should be a classical section – was doubly launched with the generous financial and organisational backing of the Greek Embassy and Cultural attache, Victoria Solomonides. An evening at The Hellenic Centre was followed by an afternoon reading at the Grove Auditorium at Magdalen College, Oxford (hosted by The Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages and the Foundation for Hellenic Culture). Some Greek poets came over for the occasion to read their work in the original and the English translations were read by the actress Fiona Shaw, Leo Aylen (actor, poet and contributor to the issue) and David Connelly, both guest editor and translator in the contemporary section. The contributors included 2 Oxford dons, Oliver Taplin and Christopher Robinson, who also took part in the readings. Hugh Vickers, a friend from Oxford days who writes music reviews for the *Oxford Times* and *Independent*, agreed to cover the event producing a witty and complimentary review. This was the second Greek issue published by *Agenda* (the first edited by Peter Levi) and partly a response to a conference in Athens organised by the Ministry of Culture who wished to encourage translation, particularly of contemporary literature. Publishers from various countries had been invited such as Gallimard from France but from England I remember the mix of well known and smaller publishers which included Faber, Hodder, Marion Boyars, The Serpent’s Tail, Anvil, Arcadia and the Dionysia Press. Jilly Paver represented the Arts Council. I had never been to Athens and this brief visit, thanks to the Ministry of Culture, included sightseeing and a boat trip to islands in the company of Greek writers and poets. Images remain of white cats along the alleyways which led up the hill to The Parthenon and a large ship which we did not fill moving through waters past islands full of associations. Someone pointed out Skyros where Rupert Brooke died of an infection before seeing action. William, Margaret and Emma had taken a summer holiday in Greece and these lines from ‘Chalki’, one of the ‘Three Island Fragments’ published in the *Agenda* issue in tribute to Derek Walcott (begun while William was alive) and dedicated to him, are characteristic of William’s use of modernist technique to evoke an image reflecting back in time through a shared recall of poetry.

The horizon

a shimmering haze

Sea-cave

Dark under rock face

Where the waves glint and turn

In the dawn

The Greek issue had occasioned our introduction to Leo Aylen and Pauline Lisowska who ran *Piccadilly Poets*. We had each been invited by them on separate occasions to judge poems at their Sunday events at The Actor’s Centre, our names joining an overflowing list of previous judges. Julie Whitby’s *Poems for Lovers* (an *Agenda* Edition) was launched at one of the Sunday events and Julie, trained as an actress, was able to engage an audience and read well, something which poets are expected to do nowadays. One of the aims of *Piccadilly Poets*, apart from offering an opportunity to members of the general public to read out poems in front of an audience, was to give actors the opportunity to read poetry. When William’s revised *Guide to the Cantos* was finally ready Peter Jay and *Piccadilly Poets* worked together for the launch at The Diorama, the venue to which *Piccadilly Poets* had moved. William enjoyed reading poetry out loud and was an accomplished reader, particularly of Pound whose lines he knew so well. He read Pound using an incantatory style – not as extreme as Pound’s own style but effective both in rhythm and in understanding of the verse. This could be described as the ‘echt’ reading – one which Kathleen Raine whom William often visited and whose *Temenos* lectures we had both occasionally attended – instinctively preferred – but

Leo's actors read well, though without the lengthening of vowels. There remains however a justifiable distrust of poetry read by actors though some, like Tom Durham, who specialise in reading poetry, can be excellent as indeed are some of the actors Josephine Hart has invited to read at her monthly programme at the British Library Conference Theatre. But interestingly among Josephine's guest readers two who are not actors but impressive readers – Grey Gowrie and Bob Geldoff – show that poetry will never be a theatrical preserve. I also recall a superb reading by Paddy Pakenham at Lauderdale House in 2002 of Wylan's 'You', one of the poems I chose for the evening Shanta had offered me to present a personal view of my uncle. A Classical Scholar at Magdalen, before becoming a Barrister he too has joined the Honourable Shades of friends who have died before they should.

In addition to these events we took part in two conferences at Senate House under the aegis of The School of Advanced Study (The University of London). The first, in October 1999, was on Thom Gunn and timed for the publication of our special issue to celebrate his 70th birthday. It was organised by Peter Swaab (UCL) for The Institute of English Studies. There was a good collection of speakers including Karl Miller and many of the poets and academics who had contributed to the issue, some new to *Agenda* others familiar like Alan Jenkins, Clive Wilmer, Stephen Romer and Martin Dodsworth,

The second, in November 2000, was not linked to an issue though an important issue for *Agenda* – 'Modern Poetry and Prejudice'. I had already left *Agenda* but felt it would be a good idea to air the problems of prejudice encountered in relation particularly to Pound but also Eliot and then at Gabriel Josipovici's suggestion widened the context to include not just the familiar anti-semitic debate but other perceptions of prejudice in poets and the current attitudes which have blurred the old distinction between public and private by seeing the personal as political. This was organised with Dr John Armstrong, Director of the Aesthetics Programme who kindly took under his wing what was both an ethical and aesthetical debate. We focussed on Eliot, Pound, Larkin and Auden (and could also have included Ted Hughes but it seemed too soon) – all poets who have come under fire in one form or another from different quarters. The John S Cohen Foundation gave us some funding and the *TLS* acted as sponsors. A combination of poets, writers and academics were invited and if the panels were not planned adequately (mainly my fault) there were some good talks, two of which were later published in Michael Schmidt's *PN Review* – Gabriel Josipovici's wide-ranging talk which covered all the chosen poets and Elaine Feinstein on Pound. Blake Morrison and Alan Jenkins both chose to speak on Larkin while Roger Scruton's talk was titled 'The Prejudice against Prejudice'. As it turned out there were no specific talks on Eliot or Auden. The other speakers were Jonathan Keates, John Armstrong and Robert Eaglestone (Royal Holloway) while the panel included Stan Smith from Nottingham Trent (an Auden scholar), Michael Coyle and Ron Bush, both American academics with a particular interest in Modernism who have written on Pound, Josh Cohen (Goldsmiths) and the poets Peter Porter and Roland John. David Moody (another modernist scholar at York University whom William had particularly wanted to invite) had to cancel. Christopher Ricks, whom I phoned tentatively and rather late in the proceedings had another engagement as did Anita Desai. I had also wanted to invite Amit Chaudhuri, the novelist, (who would have liked to participate and draw a comparison with what was happening in India) and David Dabydeen, the poet, but lack of funds and unreliable email requests put paid to these ideas. In retrospect (I was criticised at the time) I should have approached more women to take part - perhaps Sushila Nasta, Editor of *Wasafiri* and Marina Warner or the poet Mimi Khalvati or some women academics - particularly as Gail Macdonald, an American academic recommended by Michael Coyle, could not come as planned. I think that I was instinctively rebelling against the

idea of a politically correct balance but the result was an imbalance. Furthermore my attempts to invite teachers and students from schools were not successful, (I am now far more aware of the organisational problems posed by school commitments), with the exception of Jonathan Keates, the writer, who teaches at the City of London school and who gave a marvellous and humorous talk about the reality of introducing certain texts, whether *The Merchant of Venice*, passages from Browning or poems of Larkin to students from a range of religious and racial backgrounds including many who were Jewish. It appeared that students had a more robust response than the strictures of PC might imply but while Larkin was taught Pound was not.

Sadly William decided he would not attend, though his name had been printed on the flyer. This was partly through ill health but mainly, I think, because he feared that Pound would fair badly and still very upset at the volte face over plans of reconciliation to erect a plaque to Pound in the Church of St John the Divine in New York.

William though happy reading in public was less happy debating. Moreover he was not really interested in the organisational aspects of these events as well as having strong reservations about anything he felt was too academic. I had wanted to create links with The Institute of English Studies as I had found the large scale Anglo-American Conference organised by Mark Ford and Steve Clark interesting and had liked some of the seminars I attended later. We had been encouraged by The Arts Council to form partnerships with other organisations as a means of survival and of attracting funds but William preferred more random and informal bonding.

What did appeal to him were the day to day practical demands of running a magazine. He enjoyed using a now antiquated machine (called Renaddress) to address envelopes and liked weighing issues or editions, buying stamps at the local post office situated in a small corner shop nearby run by Indians, or making visits on his motorbike to Polprint. Bicycles were a prominent feature in the entrance hall of the flat for William had at least two, including one that folded and Margaret and Emma each had one. The motorbike used to be housed in a garage round the corner where the overflow of books and back issues were also stored until they were shifted to Jed the binder.

Polprint was down a turning off the Uxbridge Road and I enjoyed meeting John the printer and Jed, from whose premises (next door to Polprint) it later seemed sensible that issues should be collected for distribution, leaving us only review copies and some complimentaries to post out each time a new issue was published. However back issue and edition orders came to us and I remember a good deal of weighing, packing and stamping. I also made several visits to Ada the typesetter in whose bright flat high up in a grey council block classical music would be playing and whose typing had something of the pyrotechnics of a pianist performing the Minute Waltz, the speed accounting for some strange typos which would creep in to join existing unnoticed strays, a tribute to human error. All three, John, Jed and Ada, were Polish. The tradition of using Polish printers began, as Agenda readers will know, with *The Poets and Painter's Press* run by Csezlav and Krystyna Bednarczyk in the 60s underneath the arches near Embankment Station (I seem to remember but am not sure – it might have been somewhere else) and Krystyna has continued to handset handsome editions for *Agenda*.

For several months in 1997 I used to travel to Green Lanes in Palmers Green, ignorant then of the Stevie Smith connection, and spend the day at Grosvenor Financial Management feeling very backward as Nigel Kingsley, *Agenda's* accountant at that time (there was also the long standing link with Rudolph Bissolotti and later, for a brief

spell, David Cane), taught me to use a mouse and master a software package called TAS. Back at Cranbourne Court on my own with the computer I had on several occasions to be bailed out of confusion by my cousin Rishad Talyarkhan who would patiently explain things on the telephone. Before TAS I had tried to emulate Mildred Corbett Singleton, my efficient predecessor, who had shown me how to do the accounts in a huge black ledger. Mildred had taken over from Caroline Wright, a girl friend of William's whose mother Jean McVean (also published in *Agenda* Editions) helped to fill Rachel's vacated role and hosted the party for Margaret and William on their marriage. We never fully computerised *Agenda* and continued using a card index for subscribers but they were also entered on TAS and I could track subscription renewals and sales and print out accounts.

A familiar and stabilising routine, shaped by working from home, developed during my years at *Agenda*. William would join Margaret for a reasonably priced canteen lunch at The Royal Marsden where she worked as a medical secretary. If Emma was on holiday she would go too, often accompanied by a retinue of toys. An argument about walking or taking the small green Volkswagen was invariably won by Emma who would opt for the car. I was there long enough to experience the change of routine from William collecting Emma from Christchurch Primary School in Chelsea to Emma's returning on her own from her Secondary School, Burntwood, in Wandsworth. *Agenda* could and did trespass on domestic arrangements but it was an unwritten rule to be finished with work by about 5 so that the flat became a private space again and the computer would become Emma's for the evening. When Margaret's mother died a piano was brought over from The Isle of Wight and squeezed into the dining area. Margaret had sung in a choir before she was married but now had no time and I never heard her sing or play but always thought she had a very pleasant voice. Emma practiced both on the piano and also on a violin.

William kept the radio on for company and there were days when a sense of isolation hung in the air though the phone would ring and faxes appear. On other days people might drop in to chat, purchase issues and editions or discuss proofs. Alan Wall, poet, novelist and critic, who has appeared in serious guise in *Agenda*, would amuse us in Cranbourne Court with his stories and I would stop work in order to join in but as a rule continued at the computer half taking in the conversation going on in the background. Arrivals were met with a salvo of barks from Jill which drowned our words, subsiding only once the visitors were seated. Jill was alive all the time I was there, though finally an invalid and being carried to the park, and, after a long period of care, put down. If visitors came at lunchtime they were often taken to the pub on the corner and, on occasion, to the Café Rouge round the corner where Emma liked to go as a treat when on holiday. Ironically the Café is almost opposite the Nursing Home, now called The Meadbank, where Rachel Cookson spent her last days, returning to Cranbourne Court for weekends. Lunchtime was also when we scheduled our trustee meetings which became increasingly frequent during my last few years at *Agenda*. We would bring in sandwiches and always some cakes for Edmund and though the meetings were conducted with pleasant informality we dealt with pressing financial issues which determined not only the existence of the magazine but fees for William and myself, neither of whom had any private income as security, nor a second job. The need to budget and curtail the size of issues as well as finding ways to raise funds became the constant action plan.

Peter Russell, on a rare visit from Italy, came daily to Cranbourne Court where, free from the strictures in his cousin's house close by in Anhalt Road, he fortified himself with gaullaises and whisky as he wrote at the small round table by the window overlooking Battersea Park now acting as the dining table, the original dining table at the

other end of the room a dedicated work station on which stood computer and printer. The flat had to be aired before Margaret returned from work. I recall affectionate talk about Peter's son who lived with him in Italy and an older daughter in America who, I think, wrote poetry, as well as a good deal of critical comment on Berlusconi. Peter, friend of Pound, poet and creator of Quintilius, an alter ego, had run a bookshop in London and helped William in the early days of *Agenda*. He died within a few days of William but at a far riper age.

Geoffrey Hill, on a return trip from America, came to tea with his second wife Alice and their young daughter Alexandra (I think that was her name). This was an occasion when both Geoffrey and William could introduce a wife and daughter. The Hills had a cat with them on this trip and this led to the discovery that we all liked and owned cats. William used to have a cat before Jill and Emma had recently been given a kitten by Sam. My son and I had two cats left but still lamenting Loki, an Abyssinian, run over when just a year old during one of his restless wanderings. Geoffrey wondered whether the choice of the name Loki was influenced by Wylan whose interest in Norse Mythology and sagas was well known. But in fact we were brought up on Mythology and Fairy Stories, both Northern and Eastern. Wylan, who also loved and owned cats, chose their names from opera - Lucina, Tamino, Rhadamanthes. Perhaps we should have called our cat Lucky Loki – but would that have cut any ice with the Eumenides?

William and I used to talk about many things and the flat was full of reminders. There was a photograph of his father holding his hand as a very young boy and William could remember going for walks in the woods near his first home in Surrey. His father had died when he was still very young. He once said that he was sure his German blood from his father's maternal side explained a certain slowness and lack of quick witty repartee. He also spoke of a connection with Wordsworth but I am not certain how it was traced (I think through his mother) and there was a chair in the flat called the Wordsworth Chair. We spoke of his mother and a brother of hers who had owned an expensive and dashing car. She had an earlier brief marriage before meeting George Cookson, much older than her and with children from a previous marriage. William had met his half brothers a long time ago. It is during these conversations that I discovered how difficult his undergraduate days had been because of necessary trips to London every weekend to be with Rachel particularly at those times when she was ill. He also regretted his situation as an only son feeling that he had missed out on his youth. He could sometimes feel haunted in the flat when he was not well but on occasion working alone there I thought of Rachel and conjured a presence that was not malign but wistful. There is a photograph of her when young, fine featured and wearing a string of pearls. Her hair was dark and waved in the fashion of the time but when I first met her it was already grey. I regret that I never saw Rachel before she died and see her as part of *Agenda*. She had helped William's father when he edited the journal *English* and certainly encouraged and helped William in the early days of *Agenda*. Margaret, like William, was an only child and young when her father died but her mother remarried.

My background has a bearing on my work for *Agenda*. I have already mentioned my uncle Wylan who was close to my father John, a geologist who worked for The Geological Survey of India (of which he was Acting Director over the transition to Indian Independence) and later for the FAO (The Food and Agricultural arm of the United Nations) based in Rome. He had climbed in the Himalayas and was a founder member of the Himalayan Club. Wylan dedicated *The Ascent of F6* to him, the title inspired by K2 in the Karakoram. My mother Sheila Bonnerjee was a painter and came from a Bengali Calcutta family. She and two of her sisters, Anila (who also ended her days at

Meadbank where Rachel had been and was taken on short excursions to the Café Rouge by my sister Rita) and Minnie, married Englishmen while another sister, Indira, married a Parsee. The two brothers, Protap and Bharat, neither of whom married, had been sent to school in England. Their grandfather, W.C Bonnerjee, or Grey Beard, as the family used to refer to him, was the first president of The Indian National Congress (in its early stages planned in cooperation with sympathetic Englishmen such as Octavian Hume) and like others of his generation who were part of the Bengali Renaissance, had been impressed by the liberal ideas of the English and believed in the benefits of an English education. He sent all his daughters and sons to school and university in England. The westernised Indian has been subject of a good deal of satire both in India and in England. Kipling had disliked this type of hybridity though it had been encouraged by an earlier breed of administrators. My Indian grandfather, who later became an alcoholic, had read Greats at Balliol (Grey's College and famous for taking so many Indians and Africans in the days when PC did not exist but a particular brand of liberalism did) and then studied Law and practiced as a Barrister in Calcutta. He used to recite poetry to his children and via my mother I have a particular fondness for certain poems including Cory's translation of Heraclitus, which is the only poem I know in the original Greek.

.....
*I wept as I remembered how often you and I
Had tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky
And now that thou art lying, my dear old Carian guest,
A handful of grey ashes long, long ago, at rest
Still are they pleasant voices, thy nightingales awake
For Death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.*

I found myself in the role of PC promoter and upholder of The Arts Council dictates though the language of Political Correctness seems to me so depressing while collective references to ethnic minorities or marginalised groups create an abstract and misleading identity. But then I also find it difficult to connect with global abstractions like South Asian which I find irritating though obliged to use the term at times. The issue I edited was partly intended to celebrate 50 years of Indian Independence (only one can no longer just say Indian) and to bring in fresh voices. It was planned in two sections, the latter half on translation. I collected poems by both known and unknown poets and some who were not professional poets at all. The quality of these varied but they represented a range of voices. Among the many poets who had not been published in *Agenda* before (though published elsewhere) were several well known Indian poets writing in English such as Sudeep Sen and also Shanta Acharya, Sujata Bhatt, Debjani Chatterjee, Suniti Namjoshi, Jeet Thayil and a poet called Rose Aurora..

There were also various essays including one on Walter de la Mare (to celebrate his 125th anniversary of birth) by Peter Mudford who taught English at Birkbeck and one on the Georgians called 'Other Voices' by Rachel Trickett (who had been my tutor at St Hugh's). Some of the peculiarly English tones which an international Modernist voice overtook can echo back from a now ghost Empire (India in particular), their authenticity the subject of debate in cultural studies. Meanwhile our current culture encourages other voices to make themselves heard. Mario Petrucci's essay anatomising the phenomenon of the poetry workshop and the two reviews of *Beyond Bedlam*, a collection put together by Matthew Sweeney and Ken Smith combining the work of well known poets and unknown 'survivors' of depression and other disruptions of mental health., tackled creativity and judgement in contexts which reflect current sociopolitical trends. The reaction against what is perceived as elitist and exclusive and the concept of equal opportunity, widening participation in education and the arts and legislation on

discrimination and disability make evolutionary sense but there remains the thorny question of quality and what is to be understood by equality. And in all this debate what of Truth and what of Beauty? Keats' famous equation should not be too easily understood but instead act to unsettle aesthetics and expand taste. The late Dr Peter Johnson, a psychiatrist who wrote poetry, a friend of William's and also of my family, believed strongly in the therapeutic value of the arts. He had been impressed, in his review, by the work of the unknown 'survivors' in *Beyond Bedlam* as, with some reservations, had the Scottish poet, Thom Nairn. William's response was that these contributions made poor companions to the poetry of John Clare, Christopher Smart or Theodore Roethke. I am not sure what he ultimately thought about Sylvia Plath.

Naming is part of poetry and a record against oblivion but the roll call of *Agenda* names is too long to honour in full and there are some names I cannot now remember – that, for example, of an American student (? Michael) who spent some time at Cranbourne Court and helped *Agenda* several years before I started work and whom I later met briefly when he visited - but, though not all named, I think of the many people who combined to create the ecosystem in which the magazine existed - poets and writers both famous and hardly known, editors and publishers, academics, subscribers, funders, donors, trustees, printers, helpers and well wishers.

William and I had many differences of opinion on poetry and, perhaps, a different ear as well as different tastes. Yet we also liked many of the same things. I remember him pointing out these lines from Landor's *Dirce*, amused by the first and moved by the last two:

*Stand close around, ye Stygian set,
With Dirce in one boat convey'd
Or Charon, seeing, may forget
That he is old and she a shade.*

If he was influenced by Pound, I was influenced by my uncle, though, of course, we were both influenced by other people too, not least our mothers. I found myself resistant to some of Pound's poetry, partly because of a dictatorship of opinion (both in Pound and in his admirers) which ran counter to my instincts. Wystan could of course sound and be dogmatic but differently. Poets can attract an admiring clique who seem to take over so that a personal appreciation becomes difficult but it is important to establish your own understanding of a poet, regardless of cliques, in an age when poets cannot rely on a community who share an idiom except sometimes in the limited world of academia. I was pleased that Dachine Rainer who died several years ago (her poetry was published in *Agenda*) liked both Pound and my uncle as people as well as admiring their poetry. She also liked the poetry of Ford Madox Ford and greatly admired e.e cummings. Dachine who was Jewish felt strongly that Pound had not been fairly dealt with and was highly critical of the lobby that was thwarting plans to put up a plaque in St. John the Divine. The problem of Pound and politics which has vexed so many is one that I had hoped to discuss with her and she could have been an important voice at the conference on Modern Poetry and Prejudice. On the question of prejudice and forgiveness I would like to quote from a poem published in *Agenda*, written by Norman Buller after visiting Wystan's grave in Kirchstetten with his wife, which uses lines from a number of Wystan's poems to create a meditation:

*As I, one of the many lives
You never perceived, stand aware
Of you this May morning, beneath*

*Their stolid headstones and the arabesqued
Ironwork of your Martyr's cross,
The Kirchstetten dead, even the Nazi
Suicide long-levelled in his
Separate garden, are imperceptibly
Crumbling back into their village
As earth to earth.*

The Nazi is the poet Josef Weinheber who would have been a neighbour of Chester's and Wystan's, had he not killed himself, and Wystan addressed him as a neighbour in the full Christian sense of the term and as a fellow poet in his poem 'Josef Weinheber'.

Just as William felt that he had to defend Pound against a particular climate of opinion I began to feel that I had to defend Wystan against a good deal of wrong comment and that I was in some curious tug-of-war where I was pulling for him and a different approach to poetry while William (and others) seemed too sure of the meaning of greatness or for that matter too sure about poetry. I found myself reacting against all of this and yearning for lines with simple mnemonic qualities, no claims to greatness, and with their own peculiar integrity of idiom (even cliché) whether light or serious or odd – a recognition of the human value of 'Those good foolish songs of ours' of which Primo Levi speaks. There are of course pitfalls in pursuing this line. A rash of typos of every sort peppered my issue as if some allergic reaction had set in to what was indeed a counter view. But for all the confusion resulting from insufficient proof reading and other mishaps, I have a protective affection for my experiment.

At least having known William for so long I could speak freely and used to criticise his more grandiose postures on poetry which were usually most evident when he was not well. At his best, however, he had a broad and clear vision, powerful in its personal certainty and rooted in a literary heritage from both his parents. People were impressed by his phenomenal memory but he also had a good eye and taste for the best, though this made for extravagances which he could ill afford. Not so surprisingly he was shrewd in relation to contacts for the magazine. If, during my seven years working in Cranbourne Court, I was often infuriated by him, as others have been, sometimes by the chaos of things, and sometimes just saddened by circumstances, I was also lucky to be part of *Agenda*, a magazine with a small but international circulation, its unique logo created by David Jones, its style faithful to a less commercial age though it tried in some ways to adapt and now is adapting. Not long before I finally left working for *Agenda*, I pulled on family resources and asked my son Otto (who had also been at Westminster School if briefly) to help with the accounts while Charles Leftwich (journalist and poet whose thesis on Ted Hughes and Thom Gunn had been supervised by John Bayley and who has been published in *Agenda*), started responding to the huge backlog of submissions. We even had volunteer help from a one time student at Oxford called Caroline Thomas who had submitted poems and who, recovering from a bad spell of manic depression, wanted to create order out of chaos and placed the submissions alphabetically in large lever arch files. Nearly seven years back we had had a part time assistant called Claire Benson (she had been at Newcastle University and, interestingly, was familiar with Peter Dale's work) who was very good at filing, would read through submissions, take minutes, and helped with the Westminster School event. How quickly the years had gone by. 'Time is fly' as Maria, the Spanish helper, used to say to my mother – time which poetry defies but not without a heaviness of heart I associate in particular with Anglo-Saxon poetry. Both Pound's version of 'The Seafarer' and Wystan's 'The Wanderer' (a variation) catch the Anglo-Saxon mood. It is a good thing that we studied Anglo-Saxon at Oxford – in my case

under the kind tuition of Pamela Gradon who died recently – and I share with my contemporaries memories of Christopher Tolkien’s lectures on Beowulf. Michael Alexander, an exact contemporary, is sufficiently well known for his translations to need no further advertisement. I found that WYSTAN had put Michael’s translation of *Deor* in his commonplace book *A Certain World*.

It seemed as if, in theory, we might establish a more organised system but the space could not accommodate a larger workforce and the flat was so closely integrated with *Agenda* that outside premises were a painful if sensible concept which would break an umbilical chord. There was also, as well as the problem of William’s drinking and depression, the permanent problem of funding. The changes which have taken place since, *faute de mieux*, have meant a shift of centre to Patricia McCarthy’s home in Mayfield, though Cranbourne Court still houses the spirit of *Agenda* in my memory.

The river, bridge and park remain as physical and metaphorical realities which outlive our personal timescales. Battersea Old Church where William Blake was married and where we met for William’s funeral was, as the vicar pointed out, William’s parish church. Its lightness and 18th century charm seemed to fit the happier moments of William’s life with Margaret and Emma, taking Jill for walks in Battersea Park through the seasons.

William’s maternal grandfather was The Venerable William Pelham Burn, Arch Deacon of Norwich, but like Pound, William was attracted to the idea of a natural world full of divinities, tree spirits, local deities – the multiple signifiers of a God which, as he said in a poem of his, could be found, if one looked, close at hand, present for him in Battersea Park.

I think William would be pleased to know (I meant to tell him at the time) that my mother who died in January 2002, a year before him, had written in the fly leaf of her Gita both the Peace Prayer of St Francis and the whole of that famous passage from Pound which begins:

*What thou lovest well is thy
True heritage
What thou lovest well shall not
Be reft from thee
What thou lovest well remains
The rest is dross.....*