NATIONAL Life stories

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NATIONAL LIFE STORIES

ARTISTS' LIVES

David Gascoyne

Interviewed by Mel Gooding

C466/03

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Oral History
The British Library
96 Euston Road
London
NW1 2DB
020 7412 7404
oralhistory@bl.uk

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The British Library **Interview Summary Sheet**	**National Life Stories** **Title Page**
Ref no: C466/03	**Digitised from cassette originals**
Collection title: Artists' Lives	
Interviewee's surname: Gascoyne	**Title:** Mr
Interviewee's forename: David	**Sex:** Male
Occupation: poet, artist and translator	**Date and place of birth:** 1916
Dates of recording: 11.07.1990	
Location of interview: interviewee's home	
Name of interviewer: Mel Gooding	
Type of recorder: Marantz CP430	
Recording format: D60 Cassette	
F numbers of playback cassettes: F1380 – F1385	
Total no. of digitised tracks: 12	**Mono or stereo:** Stereo
Additional material:	
Copyright/Clearance: full clearance given	
Interviewer's comments:	

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F1380 Side A

.....of an interview with David Gascoyne made on the Isle of Wight on Saturday the 9th of March 1991.

David, I want to start by asking you to talk about your very early childhood, and about your parents. Where were you born?

At Harrow under the Hill, in the middle of the War in 1916. And my parents, my father was trainee cashier in the Midland Bank in the Pall Mall branch I think, but he was soon called for...no, he wasn't called up, he volunteered, and because his health wasn't very good he wasn't sent to the front, he was sent to guard the big guns defending the Firth of Forth in Scotland. And soon after I was born my mother took me up to Kinghorn on the north side of the Firth of Forth, which is where he was stationed. And when I was up there, one of my earliest memories is being held up by - well it wasn't a memory probably, because I think probably I was told about it, and I seem to remember it, I have a dim memory of Kinghorn, going down to the beach and drinking sea water out of a Nestlé's milk tin and finding it tasted rather nasty!

Yes!

And hearing the wind in the slates of the little house that we lived in. And having my first haircut in fact in Edinburgh, just after the Armistice. But what I was going to say was that, I was held up to the window to see in the distance the German fleet going north to Scapa Flow, to be sunk, as it was.

This would be 1916, '17?

Well no, this was after the Armistice.

Oh yes, of course, 1918.

Yes. And soon after the Armistice my father was demobilized, and they came back to Harrow where I was born, in the house of my godmother, who had been the headmistress of the school that my mother was brought up in at the age of 6 or 8 onwards. My grandfather was an actor, who had abandoned his family, his wife and children, when he was...oh, when my mother was six. And my mother and her two sisters, my mother was brought up by my grandfather's sister, who was the actress Winifred Emery. My mother's name was Winifred Isabel Emery. And so Winifred Emery was then married to Cyril Maude, who became actor-manager of the Haymarket Theatre, and they lived in London and in Bexhill, and my mother lived with them and they sent her to school in Harrow, the school of this Florence Mole, a sort of...quite a good school for young ladies. And there she grew up to the age of 18, when Miss Mole said, "I'm going to retire now, perhaps you would like to take over the school with (INDECIPHERABLE) Wright", who was my mother's contemporary. And they ran the school before the War, and among the pupils was Lance Sieveking(ph) of the BBC, now rather forgotten, but I think that Nellie(ph) Trevelyan knew him.

Yes.

And also Peggy and Patricia Preece. Patricia Preece as you know later became mistress and briefly the wife of Stanley Spencer.

That's right.

Yes. And at this time, through Cyril Mooreland and Winifred Emery my mother got to know W.S.Gilbert, who lived at Grimsdyke near Harrow, and he used to invite Mother to go and swim in the pool in his garden and to take...well, to have the pupils if she wanted to. And so, one day my mother took Patricia Preece's sister to swim in the pool at Grimsdyke, and the girl called out, "Oh Miss Emery, I'm out of my depth, I'm out of my depth", and old W.S.Gilbert, who was probably reading a newspaper in a deckchair by the pool, gallantly got up and jumped in the water and swam out to rescue her, and had a heart attack and sank to the bottom. So that evening we were placards in London, the evening paper said, you know, 'Death of W.S.Gilbert, with(??) Winifred Emery, who was at the scene'. And of course that was the name of this famous actress - at least she was famous in those days. She was not altogether pleased about that! (LAUGHS)

What about your father?

Well my father as I say had...at the beginning of the War he had got a job in the Midland Bank, and I think he was a trainee cashier in Pall Mall, and then we went...he joined up and went to Scotland as I was saying. And as soon as the War was over, and he was demobilized, he came back to live in Harrow, though he didn't stay there very long; this was quite a big house belonging to Miss Mole. And my mother's friend R.F. Rabbifur(ph) Wright, generally known as 'Ginger' or 'Tiny' Wright, lived in the same house. And then the bank sent my father to the branch of the Midland in Bournemouth, because his lungs were thought to be not very good and they thought Bournemouth was a good place for his health. As a small child I remember Bournemouth quite well as a matter of fact.

The whole family moved to Bournemouth?

The whole family, there was three of us, yes. We lived near Bournemouth station in a flat to begin with, and then we went - though I don't think this matters very much - but we had a rented house later on at the top of Branksome Chine. And at this time my mother started to work for...with...gave elocution lessons through a remarkable lady who was the sort of queen of culture in Bournemouth at that time, Mrs. Farnell Watson.

Farnell?

Farnell Watson. Yes, which is not very important. But among her students she taught the piano to Alice Lush, who later became a very well-known accompanist to the BBC.

Can I just get this clear? It was Farnell Watson who taught Lush?

But she had a sort of...that's right, she had a kind of academy, a school of music and elocution, and also she persuaded my mother to produce a musical comedy with the Bournemouth Amateur Dramatic Society. That's to say my mother was already giving elocution lessons, which she had had when she was younger. And in fact when we moved from Bournemouth to Fordingbridge she used to go back to Bournemouth in the early days of radio to do a poetry programme.

Does this mean that as an infant she read a lot of poetry to you?

Well it was really more Tiny Wright who read poetry to me. Well yes, my mother did read, but she read Dickens to me before I could read at all.

Yes?

Yes.

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Do you think this was important?

Sketches by Boz, 'Pickwick Papers' and 'Just So' stories, 'The Jungle Books' of Kipling, and 'Child's Garden of Verses' and so on.

You were very precocious later on as a writer.

Yes.

And you've always been formidably well read.

Oh, I don't know about that!

Well, modesty apart, I think that must be true. Do you think this very...

I had an insatiable curiosity, and I read everything that I could lay hands on.

Yes. Do you think it's true that this very early introduction to very good writing, writing at an adult level really...

Oh no, well my parents' taste was pretty average really. I mean they liked...both my parents loved Dickens so much that they called me David after David Copperfield!

Now that's interesting.

But their taste would be more like people like Galsworthy. My mother had...before she was married she knew a remarkable character who she referred to as 'Daddy Pierre'(ph). Now he worked for a radical journalist who, at the turn of the century worked...I cannot remember the name of this journalist, he was very famous in his day. And he must have introduced my mother to Bernard Shaw, H.G.Wells, and writers of that period and calibre. But my mother had, apart from this school of Miss Mole, she had no...not a very good education I think, she never went to university or anything like that.

No, but that's hardly the point. The point is that, before you could read and before you could speak almost, she was reading...

Yes, but I never thought of my parents as at all intellectual, even artistic particularly. But my mother should have been an actress, but as she'd been brought up by this famous theatrical couple, Cyril Maude and Winifred Emery, when my mother was 18 or...perhaps she was 21, I remember my mother telling me this story many times, the actress Winifred Emery said to her, "Now my dear, I know that...we've brought you up and educated you, and you're part of the family, and I know that you will want to show your gratitude to me, so I want you to promise me one thing, and that is that you will never go onto the stage, because I've been through it all, and I know that it's no life for a young girl". And so my mother never did go on the stage, though her life would have been totally different if she had of course.

We're going to talk later...

(INAUDIBLE - BOTH TALKING) ...think a frustrated actress.

Yes. We're going to talk later about...sorry?

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It was in her blood, and all through my childhood she was always reminiscing about the Edwardian theatre, which she knew quite well as a young girl, through her family. (BREAK IN RECORDING)

We're going to talk later I know, David, about your own brief adventures on the stage.

Oh yes, yes.

Which happened towards the end of the Second World War, and in the mid Forties.

Yes.

And that itself seems to indicate that there was a sort of histrionic thread.

Well this stage connection of my mother's was obviously important, because I heard her talk about it so much. And the fact that the Emery family went back to the time of Garrick, there were always Emerys on the stage. And it's something that matters to me, really. I never met my grandfather, because after he abandoned his wife and two daughters in about 1895 I should imagine (well I never saw him; my mother hardly saw him again, even when he was dying of cancer later) he went to the bad(??). When my mother was displeased with me as a child she used to say, "I'm afraid you're going to grow up to be just like your grandfather"! And my impression was one that he drank himself to death with brandy! (LAUGHS) But his sister you see had been very famous; she had been Ellen Terry's understudy, and created...one of the earliest to play Lady Windermere for instance. Barrie wrote parts for her, and Shaw wrote a one-actor for this couple(ph). They knew everybody in the theatre in the Edwardian period.

Yes. And that must have been for your mother a very exciting connection.

Yes. She was always telling anecdotes and reminiscing about that, yes. In fact her cousin became Judge John Maude, who was in chambers with Jeremy Hutchinson.

Really?

I never met him.

Now can we go back a bit again, to Bournemouth. How long were you in Bournemouth, can you remember?

Well it seemed quite a long time, but it can't have been very long. We lived in about...yes, three different places, a flat near Bournemouth station, and then lodgings, and then as I say, a house at the top of Branksome Chine, that's to say the west end of Bournemouth. I remember going from Sandbanks to Studland quite often at the weekends.

How old were you then?

Well I suppose I was between two and three, yes four, up to the age of four I think.

Do you have clear memories of your childhood?

Yes I do really.

Visual memories?

Yes.

One of the things that struck me in looking at a draft of an autobiography that you wrote some years ago, is how vividly you remember in fact some things.

I do really, yes.

And that goes back even to your time in Kinghorn on the Firth of Forth.

I have a vivid memory, and a good memory for places, in that if I've been to a place and I know it well, I have a kind of little mental map in my head; a kind of model really rather than a map, not a flat map. You know I can... Once I've been to a place I can generally find my way around.

After Bournemouth...

Then my father was moved to the Midland Bank at Salisbury, and we had a little thatched cottage outside...well, just outside Salisbury, near the cemetery. Now that was the time when everybody was dying of the great flu epidemic which followed the first war. And my mother and I both had it, and we were seriously ill and had to stay in bed for weeks on end, and all day long there was a procession of...I mean funeral processions, going to the cemetery. Then the Midland Bank found a house for us to live in The Close at Salisbury, near the Harnham Gate at the far end of The Close. And from there I was sent up the hill to the Godolphin Kindergarten; the Godolphin was a very good school in Salisbury, for girls really, from the age of eight to eighteen I suppose. But there was a kindergarten attached to it, and I used to go there on foot every day; I mean I walked without my parents when I was six, five. I learnt to read there. And of course living in The Close at Salisbury my parents were aware of the choir school, we used to see the choristers going to the cathedral, and I suppose they said, 'Well if the boy has voice it would be nice to send him there, when he's older'. And in fact from Salisbury, when I was six, and after my twin brothers were born, and my mother had played the role of Lady Teazle in 'School for Scandal' which her aunt had made a great success of in a revival in the Edwardian period, we moved to Fordingbridge, and my father was the manager of the Fordingbridge branch, and we lived there for six years.

You say your mother played Lady Teazle in...

As an amateur, yes.

In a local production?

The Salisbury Amateur Dramatic Society, yes. The people from the Salisbury Museum helped to get costumes which were the exact date the play was first produced.

Really?

Yes. As far as I know it was quite a good production. I was taken to see it when I was only six.

This must have been very remarkable, to see your mother acting on stage.

Yes. Two or three times. We did a sort of potted version of 'As You Like It', scenes from 'As You Like It', to play in the open air, and I was a page and my mother was Rosalind, and my father was Jacques I think, two or three times.

I'm sorry, the Midland Bank found a home for you...

In The Close at Salisbury.

Salisbury, yes. And then, you then, after a while you went to the choral school.

My father was promoted to manager of the branch at Fordingbridge, which was about ten miles from Salisbury. And that, I spend six years of my childhood there, and I simply loved Fordingbridge really. When we first arrived there I was the age of six; other people in the village who my mother got to know said, 'Oh, you can't the boy to the local school', it wouldn't do for the son of a bank manager. So I used to go to the Vicarage, and have lessons with the vicar's daughter, Miss Little(ph), for a couple of years, until at the age of eight I went to Saltland(ph) and had my voice tested and was accepted as a boarder probationer, and then I became a chorister after a year or two, a full-time...I mean, there were probationers and choristers. And...yes, I was there till my voice broke at the age of 14. But when I was 12 my father, managing the Midland Bank, among his clients was Augustus John for instance. Across the road from us there was a doctor and his family from Sark, a Dr. Hoffmann(ph). And Mrs. Hoffmann(ph) was a very respectable sort of woman and said to my mother one day, "My dear, I hear there's some new people coming to the village, the name is John. They say he is a painter. Now do you think I should call? You see, I have the dear girls to think of" you see. And my father said, "What? Call Augustus John? I'd rather think of flying(??)" you know. (LAUGHS) So anyway, that was among the interesting things. My parents tried to...(BREAK IN RECORDING

So you have no memories yourself of Augustus John.

No, no. Well he was just, you know, something of interest in my childhood at Fordingbridge.

So, a substantial part of your later childhood then was spent as a chorister?

Yes.

At Salisbury. What was Salisbury like at that time?

Well, it was...you see, if you are a chorister at the choir school, you don't have to pay so much as you would at an ordinary prep school. But, obviously my feelings are mixed about it; I have written about it in that...my one and only novel written when I was 15, 16, called 'Opening Day', which has a chapter about Salisbury in it

When you say your feelings are mixed, in what way?

Well I gradually grew to like it, but you know...I was rather tall for my age I suppose, and slightly different from the other boys. No, I got on very well on the whole, and I grew to love the musical part of it. And we had a wonderful organist, choir master, that was Walter Alcock, and later Sir Walter Alcock, who played the organ at Westminster for three coronations, and was a friend of Baron(??) of Elgar. Rather a martinet, but...a disciplinarian, but through him a grew to appreciate good music which formed a pretty good repertoire of sorts really.

But you were...

Good music, and...

You were a day boy there?

No, I was a boarder from the age of eight.

So although it wasn't far away, you...

Well it was about ten miles.

Ten miles.

Yes.

You boarded.

Well my parents would come to see me on Saturdays, at the weekends sometimes. We had to stay at school for Christmas and Easter holidays because of singing in the choir. But it was rather fun, 'The Choristers' Hols' they were called, and were were allowed to go out into the town. And at Christmas all the cannons and the dean and everybody in The Close would give parties for us and take us to the theatre or the cinema. So I rather enjoyed that really.

So you were at boarding school for how many years?

From 1924 to 1930.

And did you find that painful at all, in relation to your mother and your home?

No, because they were so near, really.

You saw a lot of them?

Yes.

So you didn't have that traumatic and painful sort of experience that a lot of young boys have?

Oh, I suppose I was homesick and unhappy for a short time at the age of eight, mind you. But I gradually got to like it on the whole, quite a lot really. The school in those days was inside The Close, a building with a front and edge to it designed by Wren, with steps going up to a big door. Then later it became the Archive Office, and after I'd left, in fact after the War I think, the school moved to the Bishop's Palace, it was on the other side of the cathedral.

What happened after your voice broke, and you left the choir?

At the age of 12 my father, who was a terrible worrier, was...for instance...I think the root core(??), the chief reason it happened was that the local ironmonger was going bankrupt and borrowing more and more money and unable to pay it back, and my father worried about him. Then this poor man committed suicide, and shortly after that my father drove out into the New Forest, in the little car that we had then, and ended up in a ditch and lost his memory, didn't know who he was. So, then the bank said, "Oh well, obviously you're not manager material, and so we that we don't have to reduce your salary we'll move you to Head Office. And so that was...when I was 12 my parents moved to London and they found a flat over a branch of the Midland in East Twickenham, over the bridge from Richmond.

I must say, everything you've said about your father's employment by the bank suggests that Midland was a very humane and caring sort of employer.

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Yes, I think they treated my father quite well, yes.

So you moved to Twickenham.

Oh, first of all it was East Twickenham, and then later Teddington. But because I never could pass any examinations, and I couldn't get a scholarship anywhere - a lot of the boys at the choir school did get scholarships to public schools or left school, or else their parents could afford to send them to a public school. But mine couldn't, so I went to the Regent Street Polytechnic, and I hardly got into that, but I did manage to pass a sort of preliminary exam to get into it.

And so became one of Hogg's Boys.

Yes, I suppose so. Yes, I hadn't thought of that, yes, it's true, mm.

You know there's a monument to him in Regent Street now.

Yes, there would be, wouldn't there, yes. (INAUDIBLE WORD) Polytechnic.

This is Quintin Hogg's father of course.

Yes. Well at the time when I was going over to (INDECIPHERABLE WORD) up from Richmond station to Waterloo and then to Oxford Circus, the Broadcasting House had just gone up really, and also the Queen's Hall was there. And I was never any good at the Poly really.

You were never any good at...?

Classes that...I wanted to start to learn German, but as I'd been taught Latin at Salisbury I had to go on learning Latin, which I never was very good at. I wasn't even very good at French until I started to want to read in French on my own, and started to buy French texts and decipher them with a dictionary I suppose.

When was that?

Oh, I suppose it was...14 or 15. When I was 16 the headmaster of the Polytechnic sent for my parents and said, "We like your boy, and he's very good at English, and that's about all, and this is a matric. factory, and as he'll never pass an exam you might as well take him away". I wasn't expelled, but...(LAUGHS) The headmaster says you're wasting your money, so...

And you were then 16?

Yes.

Clearly lots of other things were happening at that time. You were already writing.

Yes. My first collection of poems, (INAUDIBLE) was published when I was still at school. In fact there is a frontispiece by the son of the art master.

What was his name? Can you remember?

My mind goes blank.

Don't go because of your microphone.

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Oh yes.

It doesn't matter, we can check that. But...

In fact his obituary was in the paper, I just saw it quite by accident and I didn't know that he had become so well known. But this boy was my best friend at the Polytechnic, and he lived at Croydon and I lived at Richmond, or Twickenham. But some times at the weekends I'd go out to Croydon and... A friend of mine, the son of a doctor at Fordingbridge, Jack Raike. Dr. Raike was a sort of patriarch figure at Fordinbridge when we moved there, and he had two sons; one of them was Jack Raike who became a doctor, who was also a painter and a friend of William Coldstream. And when I saw him again, you know, after some years, he lent me a copy of the original edition of Ulysses - very precociously - and I lent it to my friend, Ray...was it Kenneth or...isn't it terrible, I can't remember. And he read it and left it behind on top of a bus I think on the way to Croydon. So I had this terrible guilt feeling to Raike, but he was very forgiving about it. And I went on seeing him until...in fact the last time I saw him was in Camden Town, probably the same day that we both saw Roger Roughton(s sister

Really?

I don't know if you remember me mentioning him.

I'm sorry, I want just to be clear about this. We're talking now about...are we still talking about the son of the art master?

Yes, I'm talking about him and also talking about Jack Raike, because this made me think of this incident of losing a copy of Ulysses when we were both still both at school.

Yes. That would be very early. I mean that must have been the year it was actually...

No, it was ten years...

Oh no, of course not, 1920 it was published by...in Paris.

Yes.

So we're at Regent Street Poly. A not very distinguished academic career.

No. But as the headmaster said, it was a matric. factory.

Yes. And a sort of gentle suggestion that you might leave.

Well, I tell you, I was given so much money for lunch you know, and what I used to do is I didn't...I was supposed to have lunch in the school canteen, but I used to go out, leave the school roots(??) at one, and put my red and green cap in my pocket, and I would go either to the British Museum and have a bun and a glass of milk and (INAUDIBLE WORD), or I'd go the National Gallery, or I'd go to Bumpuses, which had a beautiful branch in Oxford Street in those days, or to a gallery in Bond Street, that I began to very early. And I remember going to the Tate Gallery for the first time on the way back from school.

And you were at this time writing in the evenings at home presumably?

Yes. Well I had four little poems published in the school magazine at Salisbury when I was a chorister. And the strange thing is that my early passion in poetry was...[I'm capping again,

I'm sorry]...for the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly the poetry of Rosetti. And I was fascinated by the Pre-Raphaelite painting, particularly Burne-Jones kind of Pre-Raphaelitism, and then Aubrey Beardsley. So another museum that I used to go to at weekends when I was still at school was the V & A.

So really, what was happening was that you were educating yourself essentially?

Oh yes, yes.

Outside the Polytechnic?

(INAUDIBLE WORDS) back actually, yes.

Well, yes, in a sense you've continued to be a...you've continued to have a strong auto-didactic streak, haven't you.

End of F1380 Side A

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F1380 Side B

I want to return to the point at which you left the Regent Street Polytechnic David, in a while, and to go on then to talk about the publication of your first books. But before we leave your childhood and your early education, your formal education behind, I want to go back and ask you to tell us some more about your godmother, who I know played a very important part in your life.

Yes.

And your mother's friend and colleage, Rebecca Wright.

Well, she was called Rebbi (INDECIPHERABLE). She was always referred to by my mother as 'Tiny', and by me and my brothers as 'Ginger'. She became my mother's godmother herself. But my godmother was Florence Mole, always known as 'Gha-Gha' to me, though she wasn't in the least gaga. So that was my sort of earliest name for her and it stuck. My mother always said that she spoilt me; she used to come to stay with us regularly, and whenever she came I would say, "What have you got Gha-Gha?" She'd bring me sweets and toys and books. And then during my childhood, from Fordingbridge onwards, I would go at least once a year to stay with her in Crediton Hill at West Hampstead, so I got to know that part of London. And my godmother was a well educated woman, she had studied in Germany and been taught the Froebel method of education I think. She was the daughter of a Victorian water-colour painter who belonged to the Royal Society of Water-colourists, and was quite well known at his death; a friend of Blunket Foster(ph) for instance. And she and her sister were both, I later came to think, were very much like characters in the drawings of Du Maurier in Punch, you know, with the bustle and that sort of thing.

Yes.

And her sister Clara had this house in Crediton Hill, West Hampstead, near West End Lane, and it was full of objets d'arts and Victorian water-colours and Meissen china and that sort of thing. And she was not only a keen theatre goer but she loved shopping, and whenever I went to stay with her we'd go on the top of a bus to either High Street Kensington, to sales, that was one of her passions. She had an enormous collection of gloves and umbrellas and handbags and that sort of thing, and she would give my mother clothes and... She was extremely generous.

How did your mother get to know her? What was her connection?

She was sent by...I think it was probably Winifred Emery who found this school at Harrow, which was a school for young ladies, and as I say, my mother was her pupil until she was 18 I think.

Yes. And...

She was a very strong personality. She wasn't mannish, but she didn't...she never fell in love with a man; I don't think she had any...I don't think she cared for men in that way at all. But I wouldn't...couldn't possibly have described her as a lesbian, but she...she had a very intimate relationship with the woman who ran the school with her, Mrs. Godwin.

And it was when she retired from Harrow that she took the house in Hampstead?

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Well she went to live in her sister's house at West Hampstead, that's right, she shared the house with her sister, and an invalid brother called Alec, who lived in a wheelchair. There was another brother who was a sort of businessman, man about town.

I get the impression that her importance for you was as somebody who introduced you to another world.

Well in a way, yes. She played the piano, rather badly but... And I wouldn't say she had extremely good taste, but she was very well read, and...I mean she read all the time, and she'd go to the pictures, and the theatre particularly. But she belonged to a rather curious...not a sect exactly, but...not Christian Science, but something of that sort, at Golders Green. And the artist who designed the chapel for them was Ivan Hitchings.

Oh really?

At a very early age I saw these...we thought them incredibly sort of modern and...

Do you know if those decorations still exist?

It's quite (INAUDIBLE WORD). I don't know.

When I said her importance was that she introduced you to another world, I was thinking of the world of London, of the sales, of the city.

Yes yes. Well you see, at a very early age when I was still living at Harrow, my mother would take me out from Harrow to Baker Street, to London. And I remember a birthday party, I suppose I was four, being taken to Selfridges for lunch, and they had just opened a milk bar...not a milk bar, but an ice cream parlour, and then being taken to Maskelyne and Divance, which was the magic, conjuring theatre next to the Queen's Hall; it was a marvellous little theatre, it's forgotton now. But they were the sort of...that was...birthday treat now. I suppose I was four, possibly five.

That was with your mother and with your godmother?

Yes, that's right. And also I remember when I was very small still, being taken by my mother up to London to see my great aunt in her last... When my mother married my father, she was more or less disowned by the Maudes. They said that, you know, she was not marrying beneath her, that my father had no prospects. And so it was a kind of break really, but after I was born there was a sufficient reconciliation for my mother to take me to see Winifred Emery in her last role in London, in a theatre in St. Martin's Lane, she was playing the role of Queen Elizabeth. And I remember seeing her in this costume, and she'd given me a box of chocolates or something you know. An impressive woman with great presence, and was supposed to be very beautiful in a rather cold sort of(??) way.

Yes, but I want to go back to Florence Mole, because she interests me as somebody who clearly had some quite profound influence upon you.

She was a very strong personality, and she would...when she was younger she would race up and down stairs and bang doors, and shout, you know. (LAUGHS) And she was always very well dressed in her own particular way. Her favourite colour was mauve. But she was an extraordinary character. She used to come and stay with us at Fordingbridge once a year or so.

It would seem to me that you were a very impressionable child.

Yes, I suppose I was, yes.

And, a figure of this kind, in an impressionable child's life, can be very very important. And it's interesting to me that, after what was really in some ways a rather sheltered life as a chorister, I mean with its own sort of culture and its own enclosed world...

Yes...

You then moved to London, and you went to a completely different sort of school, the Regent Street Polytechnic, with a journey to school of a completely different kind. But that somehow or other maybe you were prepared for what we might call the London life, or the cosmopolitan life by Florence Mole and the (INAUDIBLE - BOTH TALKING).

Yes, I think so, yes. As I say, every year from the age of eight to the age of 14...no, 12, because we were living in London then, I would go to stay with her, and she would take me, for instance to the Golders Green Hippodrome to see things like 'Treasure Island' and 'Lilac Time', and to the West End, to the theatre, even when I was very small, to see things like a Thackeray play, 'The Rose and the...' oh, it doesn't matter, but any rate... And even to the Coliseum, at the time when it was a music hall, to see Pavlova - I can't remember that, but... And also the Palladium I would think, by Miss Mole, Florence Mole at a very early age. And later she took me with my mother to see the first performance in London of Robert Donat, in an adaption of 'Precious Bane' at the the Hampstead Theatre. And Flora Robeson at the Westminster Theatre in 'The Anatomists of Brody'(ph). (LAUGHS) I remember on both occasions hearing my godmother say to my mother, "Not a very suitable play for the boy!" (LAUGHS) But then of course, when I was going to school from East Twickenham, rather Richmond station to Regent Street, I had a season ticket, and with that ticket I was able to go up on Saturdays to every new production at the Old Vic, so I had a very good theatrical education really. And I also, while I was still at the Polytechnic, I went for a term, I suppose a series of about a dozen lectures, on the history and art of cinema, directed I think by Grierson.

Really? This would be in...

Early evenings, in the Morley College.

And this would be in the late...

In the early Thirties.

In the early Thirties, yes.

And I also, through 'Tiny' Wright, 'Ginger', who lived...was working at the Credito Italiano, a job which she hated but she had to earn a living.

I'm sorry, she was working where?

The Credito Italiano, the Italian bank in the City. And lodging, when I was about ten I suppose, she moved to lodge with Alida Clementaski(ph) Monro, who didn't live with her husband, but she had this house in Bloomsbury, and this friend of my mother's lodged with her. And through her I got to know the Poetry Bookshop. I was taken at a very early age, I suppose when I was...I wouldn't have appreciated it if I'd been younger than 12, but to hear...there were poetry readings every week at the Poetry Bookshop near the British Museum. And one week I was taken to hear T.S.Eliot reading Christina Rosetti.

This friend of 'Tiny' Wright's was married to Harold Monro?

Elida Clementaski(ph), she was Polish, and she married Marold Monro and ran the Poetry Bookshop with him for many years.

Yes. That was the Poetry Bookshop in Great Russell St?

Just off Great Russell St., yes, that's right. It had been at another address to begin with, but then they moved; all the time that I knew it it was in a little street off Great Russell St. near the British Museum.

Yes. What time was this, David?

1930, '31, '32.

You were about 14, 15?

Yes, that's right.

Yes. So, through 'Tiny' Wright, you had another entrée into the sort of...intellectual, artistic world.

The Monros were friends of Eliot, that was one of the reasons why he would read there occasionally. But this friend of my mother's, 'Tiny' Wright, would come to stay with us once a year at least in the summer, and would recount anecdotes about her life in London, of this house of Alida Monro. And for instance I remember her saying, "Oh yes, Alida told me that Vivien Eliot came round the other night, and lay on the floor and talked about Tom's iniquities".

This was Eliot's first wife?

Yes. And also Anna Wickham(ph) would lodge in the same house, and I used to hear anecdotes about her.

Do you remember what Eliot read at that particular evening?

I remember him reading a poem of Christina Rosetti's which goes, 'Passing away, seth(??) my soul, passing away. Rusters(ph) in their garlands, something in thy ray(ph)...' etc. etc. etc. 'And I answered, 'Yey'! (LAUGHS)

It's a very characteristic thing for Eliot to write. I can just hear his voice reading that. So, this 'Tiny' Wright was really a cultured woman.

She was, she read incessantly. With her meagre wages, every week she would buy a new volume of Everyman's Library, and she left me an enormous number of these...Everyman's Library were the hardback; in those days remember they published(??) anything... But she was a frustrated writer.

She had met your mother at the school...?

She was a pupil at Miss Mole's school in Harrow.

In Harrow. And she had run the school with your mother, hadn't she, for...

Well my godmother had this extraordinary idea of passing the school on to these two young unqualified girls you know.

And they ran it for how many years? About...

Well my mother met my father, because among her pupils was Dorothy Gascoyne, whose brother was my father you see. Well there he began to court her, and then the Maudes said "Oh no, he's not a suitable marriage for you". They'd planned something rather better!

So in fact...

Well both my parents were in a way what you might call 'neorasmay'(ph), and so they really were kind of classless in a sense.

That in itself would have had quite some influence upon the way you developed I think.

Yes.

So these two young girls really, ran the school in Harrow until your mother married.

Yes.

And moved away. So they were there for two or three years perhaps.

Mm.

And then...'Tiny' Wright moved to London.

Well, she lodged with my godmother.

That's right.

Yes. So did my parents for a time. I remember this house in Gayton Road in Harrow.

Yes. And then your parents moved to...

First of all to Bournemouth, and then to Fordingbridge. Then my father had this nervous breakdown, and the bank said well you'd better come to the head office in London, and he finally became the Chief Cashier in Pall Mall.

So did you see much of 'Tiny' Wright during the Fordingbridge years?

Yes, she used to come to stay with us as I say regularly. So did my godmother.

Yes. And then when you came back to London, or when you came to London and began to live in Teddington, and then...

Well, Teddington eventually, we first of all...

Twickenham, I beg your pardon.

It was East Twickenham, just over the bridge from Richmond.

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Yes. And then you moved to Teddington.

Yes.

During those years, you maintained contact yourself with 'Tiny' Wright?

Oh yes, yes. I used to go to see her regularly, and I remember that house of Alida Monro in...well Alida's in Heathcote St. I think it's called; you know, Gray's Inn Road, Mecklenburgh Square, I remember that. I've written about it in 'Opening Day'.

Yes. What's intriguing about all this, David, is that the key figures in your upbringing, especially in relation to your intellectual and artistic development, I'm thinking...

Were women.

Were women.

Yes.

I'm thinking of those who read to you, who took you to the theatre, who took you to the shops, to the sales, who introduced you to the vitality of the city and so on. And the people for whom you had strong feelings. Because I think I'm right in thinking that your feelings for 'Tiny' Wright were very intense.

Well I was very devoted to her. But so were both my brothers. She was marvellous with children. She should have been a teacher, but as she had no qualifications, when this little school, and my mother married you know, and then she gave up the school, and I was born a couple of years later... I wasn't born immediately after my parents were married, and I was...then I mean she had to get a job, and that's how she got herself into this bank which she worked in for many years, and she wasn't really suited to it at all, she just did it to earn a living, because she had no money. She had no family - or what family she had had, weew not interested in her. She was again, like my godmother, she...nowadays people would refer to her as a lesbian, but she never had a lesbian relationship, but she had crushes on women. I remember a series of crushes. And she had a crush on my mother a lot you see; my mother was just patient with her, she wasn't that way at all inclined, but, you know, she put up with her, and she realized tht she really was a very loyal and devoted friend. And she found her very tiresome, because she was a neurotic, frustrated spinster, with a passion for reading and for...not only for reading but for children, for the open air, for games of a sort(??). And she was called 'Tiny' because she was about five foot tall I suppose, more or less.

How did her neurosis manifest itself? In what way was she neurotic I mean?

Well, I mean I think she'd be called that nowadays, and I think Alida Monro was sorry for her and kind to her. But I had two headmasters at Salisbury, there was Robertson, the Rev. Arthur Robertson who later became a canon, but he married...his second wife had been matron, and she was an interesting, intellectual woman, Dora H. Robertson. She wrote a book called 'Saren(ph) Close', which was published by Cape and is a history of the choir school at Salisbury, and it's a very interesting book. I was trying to get a copy from a second-hand dealer the other day. It has a photograph, a frontispiece, of all the choristers about 1928, sitting on a wall in front of this old school which is no longer used as a choir school. But I remember hearing her play in the drawing room, which was...the headmaster's drawing room was adjacent to the dormitory which at one period I'd slept in, and in the summer nights you would hear Doro Robertson in the drawing room next door playing 'Jesu, joy of my desiring' and Spanish dances, or pieces like 'Granadas', you know.

Did you have...you brought her into the conversation for some reason. Did she have, do you think, any influence upon you?

She recognized that I had a gift as a...you know, I don't know quite what I...she thought I had a gift or...either it was acting or for literature. Because I remember her giving me a copy of 'The Hound(ph) of Heaven' for instance when I was about 12, or...yes, because she... Then when I was 12, Roberton retired and a very strange character called Sandberg(ph) took over his job. And he was a raving neurotic; I mean he was a manic depressive, and he had favourites and scapegoats. Fortunately I was never either really, but... He really was a manic depressive. One day, for no reason at all, we'd have the day off, and another day he'd be bullying people, and we were kept in a detention and so on. A figure who had the most influence on me really at Salisbury was Walter Alcock, who was a very fine musician indeed. And not only did we sing all...from the great Tudor music of, you know, Tallis(ph) Gibbons and Byrd and so on. We sang for instance the 'Messiah', the 'St. Matthew Passion', the 'Christ's(??) Oratorio', Brahms' 'Requiem', Dvorak's 'Stabat Mater', and above all 'The Dream of Gerontius' with the London Symphony Orchestra, and very good soloists. And that had a tremendous effect on me really.

Of course this means that your being a chorister at Salisbury at that time then was a wonderful education, musical education.

Wonderful musical education, yes.

And did you have any sort of personal...

What I always felt afterwards that I got from Alcock, he was very severe with me because I didn't have a very good voice, but later, well I remember going to tea with him with Burl Groves(ph), who's now quite well known in the music world, Dr. Burl Grove(ph). And what I got from him was this thing about performance; that's to say nothing is more important than giving a good performance, you know. That's to say a kind of professionalism.

Which is something that has...with the acting and theatrical background has stayed with you, hasn't it? Because...

Well, (INAUDIBLE WORDS) sort of background, yes. You learn to appreciate that, yes.

I mean you read a lot in public, and in doing so you believe in preparing yourself to do that.

Yes.

Making a programme and presenting the poetry in that way. And that's something perhaps we can talk about much later.

I learnt about music from Alcock, that's to say that there was an hour's rehearsal practice every day, weekday, you know. And from somebody like that you pick up certain things.

Let's go back however, to Florence Mole and 'Tiny' Wright, and remembering also the wife of your first...

Yes, Dora Robertson, yes.

Headmaster at Salisbury. What strikes me as interesting is that, as I said earlier, that formative influences, though this period of your development seem to have been women.

Women, on the whole, yes.

And in two very infuential cases, women of ambiguous sexuality.

Yes! (LAUGHS)

Have you anything to reflect on that?

That includes Alida Clementaski(ph) I think, that...she didn't have much of a sex life at all I don't think.

Do you think this is a significant thing really?

It could be. I wouldn't...I wouldn't put it that way I think myself, but yes, it has occurred to me from time to time that that could be an intellectual factor in my life, yes. Another...someone I mentioned earlier at Fordingbridge. When we moved there my mother was taken up as they say by the sort of village matriarch, who was the wife of the leading doctor, who was quite old by that time, Dr. Raike. And she was quite an important influential figure in the village life. Though we call Fordinbridge a village, though I suppose you'd call it a town now, but... And she had two or three sons, two of them I know were undergraduates, and one of them was Jack Raike who became a doctor like his father. But when I was, well, say eight, nine, ten, he used to lend me books.

Jack Raike also had connections with W.H.Auden, didn't he?

No, he had no connection with W.H.Auden, but he was a painter, an amateur painter who was a friend and introduced me to Coldstream, and he became quite a good amateur painter. Finally ended up living in Camden Town, and retired as a doctor. I think he had quite an influence on me as I was growing up. (BREAK IN RECORDING)

Through 'Tiny' Wright then, David, you were introduced to the Poetry Bookshop, and readings of contemporary poems and so on.

I must have spoken to Harold Monro, but of course I would have been...he died when I was about 13 I think. No, not 13; he died when I was 14 or 15. But I had met him several times, but I was too young, they wouldn't have had conversations with me. It was Alida I got to know quite well. I went on seeing her until she left London with...she had an enormous number of dogs, and she went to live in Sussex I think eventually; I didn't see her any more.

And what happened at the Poetry Bookshop?

Well, after Alida gave it up it was closed down.

At this time you were beginning to write yourself, weren't you?

Yes.

At about 13, 14?

Oh well I had poems published in the school magazine when I was 12 I think at Salisbury, and I had pieces published in the Polytechnic magazine, whatever it was called. I began to...I contributed to...another figure who was perhaps important and might be relevant in a certain sense, that he was a very mild, rather quiet, reserved man, was Mr. Griffiths, who was the

second in command, or deputy head or whatever, of this second, very curious manic depressive headmaster, Sandberg(ph), who was sacked after I left, or a few terms after I left, no great surprise. But Mr. Griffiths then became the headmaster.

This was at Salisbury?

Yes. Well he was...well, obviously among other things my English master. But not only that, he had a gramophone, and I used to go to his sitting room during off hours, and he would play for instance the first secular music I ever heard, and enjoyed and became passionately interested in was a record of Corteau(ph) playing the Schumann piano concerto. So...you know. And he lent me books. And not only that, but he used to take a weekly paper called 'Everyman', which was a literary review with articles on the arts and so on which came out weekly in those days, 6d a week I think. And he'd pass these on to me. And then when I went to the Polytechnic I continued to take this, and one of my earliest pieces of journalism was an article on modern French poetry, with photographs of Breton and Eluard and so on. This was when I was about 18 I should imagine.

Oh, it must have been earlier.

Could have been, yes.

Must have been earlier. Because by that time you were writing the book on surrealism.

No, 19 I was when I wrote that. Yes, maybe I was 16.

You're talking about before you went to Paris presumably?

Yes, I think so.

Well in that case you're talking about being about 15, aren't you?

Yes, I suppose so, mm. Things get a bit blurred, the chronoligical sequence.

Can you remember where that first publication was?

What do you mean, where?

Where did you publish this piece on contemporary French poetry?

Well I was saying that through Griffiths, Mr. Griff as we called him, who became the headmaster at Salisbury after I'd left, he took this magazine called 'Everyman' once a week, and he used to pass it on to me, and then I went on taking it after I'd left Salisbury. And that was one of the first papers that published an article of mine.

I'm sorry, I missed that. I knew you'd taken the magazine, I wasn't sure that it was that magazine that you'd written for.

Yes, I did, I.....

End of F1380 Side B

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F1381 Side A

Tape Two of an interview with David Gascoyne, recorded on the Isle of Wight.

.....start this tape David by talking about your earliest publications, 'Roman Balcony and Other Poems', which you published in 1932, and 'Opening Day', the novel you published in 1933. The poems I believe were published while you were still at school.

That's right, yes. I just wanted to get my poems into print I think. There was only one poem in that collection which had been published in a magazine, that was again the weekly review called 'Everyman' which I mentioned earlier. And I don't think it had any reviews, I don't remember them. Anyway, it was simply the result of, I wanted to get into print. And I suppose I was developing pretty rapidly, because I soon...very soon...Mother said to me, "You'll regret it before long", and I did. She didn't think it was a good idea to get published so young.

Why did you regret it?

Well because as I say, I was developing very rapidly, and I soon grew out of imagism and the kind of poetry that I wrote when I was in my early teens.

Although there are some very good poems in that first volume, I think you'd agree now.

One or two possibly.

One or two that have been re-published since, and...

Yes, yes.

I must say that there are poems in that volume that I enjoy.

Oh good.

Among the ones that you re-published.

Well I wasn't very ambitious, and never really succeeded in living up to what I really wanted to write you know. When I was still at school at the Polytechnic, one of the places that I used to go to in the lunch break for instance, I would go to Zwemmers on the Charing Cross Road on my way home quite often. But the lunch break there was a very fine bookshop called 'Bumpuses'; it hasn't existed for years now, but it was half-way between Oxford Circus and Selfridges on that side of Oxford Street, and later moved nearer to Marble Arch on the other side of the road. But I remember buying there for instance the first edition of the English translation of 'The Notebooks of Mount Loeds(ph)', and Rilke, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Cocteau's 'Opium Journal'. And I don't know, I began to read, you know, all kinds of things then. And I think I started reading Proust, and the Scott Moncrieff translation when I was still living at East Twickenham, because I remember reading it in the Bamboo Garden at Kew Gardens! The first volume I mean, 'Swann's Way'.

Also at this time you began to read Baudelaire?

Yes.

And Rimbaud.

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I bought French books either from Zwemmer or from Hachette, which was near Charing Cross in those days. I remember buying 'Les Illuminiaciόns', a very nice little...small edition, yellow covers, paperback, and 'Une Saison en Enfer', and the early prose of Mallarmé. Now, my parents had friends who were a Greek family who had lived in England many years, and they lived near us at East Twickenham. Mr. Patous(ph) was a very cultured man who spoke very good French, and I used to go to him sometimes in the evenings to read with him, Mallarmé for instance, to try to understand and translate. And he was very shocked by a poem of Mallarmé, thought it was terribly decadent. I was trying to read these things for myself with the dictionary at a very early age.

So this spurred on your French.

Yes. I'd been considered a very bad pupil in French at my first school, and I wasn't very good at it in my second. It wasn't until I started trying to read it myself. And as far as speaking goes it wasn't until I went to Paris, and had my 17th birthday in Paris, that I began to be at all fluent. And that was really I think the best influence of what helped me most, was talking to the night porter at the Hôtel Jacob in the Rue Jacob.

I imagine that it was these French writers that had a very direct and profound effect upon you?

Yes, yes it did, yes.

Did you feel any sense of affinity for example with Rimbaud, because of your age, of the fact that you were yourself a...

Partly, yes.

A teenage boy?

Yes. I didn't understand how different he was from anybody really until much later.

But the legend itself might have...

Oh yes, it did. I read an enormous amount. In fact I wanted to write a book about Rimbaud, and I got a ticket through Alida Monro, through her influence I got a reader's ticket at the British Museum, and I read everything that I could get hold of there. The few English books, and practically all the French books. And among them I found Volgver Fondon(ph)'s 'Member(ph) of a Voyou', which appeared after Roland le Renegé's(ph) 'Rabid of Voyant'(ph), and is altogether a different interpretation.

You were intending, weren't you, to write this book towards the end of the Thirties?

When I came back from my visits to Spain at the beginning of the Civil War when I was there with Roland Penrose and Christian Zebos(ph), I came back partly because they wanted me to deliver a lot of Civil War posters to the ILP, Heather Brockway(ph) and so on, and also because I had already accepted an engagement from the Oxford University...would it have been the Literary Society? At any rate, I was supposed to talk about surrealism, as my book had been out for about a year by that time. And at that time, on this occasion I met Audrey Beecham and Esmond Romily's brother Giles for the first time. And I got to know Audrey Beecham very well, and of course she was the favourite student and friend of Enid Starkey, who I got to know, not very well but fairly well. And she was engaged on writing her epoch making 'Life of Rimbaud' at that time, and she dissuaded me, she said it wouldn't be a good idea if two books on Rimbaud came out at the same time, so I gave up writing mine. But I

did in fact introduce her to Matterasso(ph), the archivist, the man who had all the photographs which she used to for her book.

Do you regret not writing that book?

Not really, no. I wrote a few chapters and they've been lost. I wasn't mature enough to write it, no.

Well, you say that, but it might have been very interesting to have a book...

I was growing up with an increasing awareness of my own immaturity if you know what I mean.

Yes. I imagine it would have been a very different book from that of Enid Starkey.

Oh yes, yes. But hers is an extremely good book.

Yes.

Although she makes certain presumptions which have been proved as untrue, but...perhaps over enthusiasm.

We can go back though to some years before. You published 'Roman Balcony', as you say, to no great aclaim.

No, just to the satisfaction for me to see my poems in print!

But, you felt more, and do you still feel more positive about the novel?

Well I think...I don't know whether I said it to you, but it was favourably reviewed by Harold Nicholson and Mary Butts, who is an interesting and now forgotten writer, whose books I liked at that time.

And who lived in Paris for quite a long time.

Yes, I think so. She'd been a friend of Cocteau and so on.

Yes. She was also helpful and friendly to Robert Medley when he lived in Paris in the late Twenties.

Yes. I never met her, I should have liked to have done. She must have been a very interesting woman.

A very extraordinary woman, yes.

Yes. She was a descendent of the Butts who was the friends of Blake, and she lived at Poole in her youth. I've read an autobiography which speaks with considerable dislike of Bournemouth, but I loved Bournemouth as a child, and also Swanage, Poole and Swanage, and Corfe Castle, all those places.

Swanage became the subject of that rather marvellous essay by Paul Nash if you remember called 'Seaside Surrealism'.

(INAUDIBLE - BOTH TALKING) who lived there for a time. I spent a holiday there with this friend of 'Tiny' Wright you know. I went to stay with her alone in a boarding house.

Yes. That's interesting, because as I was going to say, Swanage occupies a rather special place in the annals of British surrealism!

Yes. I remember going for a holiday with my parents and my twin brothers and my father's sister and her husband and their little boy, to Worth Matravers, it was a wonderful holiday we had when I was I suppose 10 or 11 I should think.

'Opening Day'.

Yes.

How did that come to be published?

Well I must have shown it to 'Tiny' Wright, R.F.(??) Wright. As I say, she was Alida Monro's lodger at the time and she passed it on to Alida, and Alida knew Cobden Sanderson, who had just published the collected plays of Harold Monro with Eliot's introduction, and they accepted it. That was published in the autumn of 1933.

This was a novel written...

I must have started writing it when I was still at the Polytechnic.

Yes, when you were 15.

Yes. It was typed by a typing firm or whatever in Richmond I remember, in instalments.

And it was published in 19...

I've typed everything else by myself.

Yes. It was published in 1933 by Cobden Sanderson.

That's right, yes.

And how much did they pay you for it?

Well I think I must have had fifty pounds in advance, and I had the remains of a legacy from my godmother.

And it was with this money that you were able to go to Paris for the first time.

Mm, yes. Strangely enough, I had some time during that summer, answered an advertisement; it may have been in 'Everyman', if it was still being published. Somebody in Hamburg wanted a tutor, an English tutor for their adolescent son, and I answered it, and was initially accepted. Then they changed their mind, and instead of that I went to Paris. It might have made quite a difference. I've always regretted not being able to speak German.

Yes. But, this implies that you were going to go somewhere, and it hardly mattered where. And yet Paris...

No, I had a great desire to go to Paris.

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I would have thought so, yes. And you arrived in Paris...?

I'd already been frequenting David Arfe(ph)'s Parton(ph) St. book shop, and among the people I met there, there were two people in particular, George Reevy(ph), who was living in Paris at the time, and round the corner in Red Lyon Square was a now completely forgotten woman poet called Winifred Holmes, who had a book published by Dent in that series of little square books, you know what I mean, like Edwin Ure's(ph)...what is it called...something about time, sequence.

Dylan Thomas, surely, the 'Twenty-five Poems' was published in that format.

Yes, it was, yes. And Norman Cameron. Anyway, Winifred Holmes, she was the sort of woman who had a painting of Marlet de Rothsang(ph) in her sitting room, which was sort of...

I beg your pardon...?

The sort of woman - absurd description, but who had a painting by Marlet de Rothsang(ph) in her sitting room, in the mid Thirties that was, you know, the height of... She was a very nice woman. I hardly remember ever meeting her again, but I do remember her saying that if you're going to Paris you must stay at the Hôtel Jacob, in the Rue Jacob. And later I found that it was the hotel where people like Djuna Barnes and the American expatriats used to stay a lot in the Twenties, well the late Twenties. And I had to leave it and go to a rather cheaper hotel in Rue de l'Odeon before leaving Paris in 1933. And then I was staying almost opposite Sylvia Beech's shop, and I used to visit her every day, at 'Des Moniers'(ph), in the same street.

Yes, two more bookshops that were very important to you in your life.

Yes. I bought my first copy of Wallace Stevens' 'Harmonium' from Sylvia Beech.

Really?

Mm.

So you went to Paris. On your own?

Yes, on my own, yes.

And found yourself at the Hôtel Jacob.

That's right. And because of George Reevy(ph) I was soon introduced to...well there was a woman whose name I can't even remember, but she lived in the same street that Man Ray had a studio, though I didn't know Man Ray at that time. She worked...there wasn't a British Council in Paris (INDECIPHERABLE) to the British Institute, and I got to to know some teachers there. I soon got to know, through George Reevy(ph), Julian Trevelyan, and then Stanley William Hayter. And I must have met Cyril Connolly for the first time during this visit.

Was Connolly living there, or just...?

I don't know if he was living there, but I certainly met him there. He used to visit Paris frequently in those days. He was published by Jack Hanes' Obelisk Press, 'The Brock Pool'(ph) you know. And it was through Connolly I think that I got to know Henry Miller. I think that...in fact Connolly was one of the first people to appreciate Henry Miller in England,

and strangely enough so was Eliot. He published an essay of Miller called 'Annette et Toilique'(ph) about Anais Nin's journal in...I think probably the last number of 'The 'Criterion' in which I published a review of a book on Rimbaud, a French book on Rimbaud. And I went to a party given by Faber by Eliot for the last number of 'The Criterion'. And I think probably Alida Monro was there, possibly Mary Hutchinson. Certainly...I think...not Ronald Knox...never mind.

What year would that be, can you remember?

1934 I think.

'34, '35. Did you know Julian Trevelyan before you went to Paris?

Not before I went to Paris, no.

But he was living there of course at the time.

He was at the time, yes.

Painting and also frequenting Stanley William Hayter's...

Yes yes yes...Attelier

Attelier set. Did you go to that Attelier at all?

Well I went to a party given by Stanley William Hayter in the Passage D'Enfer there I think, alongside the Rue Compagne Premiere. And it must have become rather a wild party, because somebody knocked over a huge block of glass which he used for pressing his prints, so it was broken. And the woman he was living with then was Della Husband(ph), and she was so furious that everybody was chased out and we went to the Rue de l'armbre(ph), somewhere behind the dome, to continue this party.

Well you met Julian then in Paris at that time.

Yes I did, yes.

Did you meet Penrose at that time in Paris?

No, I was introduced to Penrose two years later in 1935 by Paul Eluard. I didn't know of him at all before that.

So what did you do in Paris?

In 1933?

Yes, your first trip, your first sojourn.

I went to the Louvre of course, and I went...did the usual sort of sightseeing things. On my 17th birthday I had lunch all by myself at a favourite restaurant, which is in the middle of the garden part of the Champs-Elysées between the Place de la Concorde and the Rond Point. It's circular, and it has a sort of...maybe you've seen it.

No, I don't.

It's rather like a bandstand, but you know, with a circular fence and garden round, and tables sort of sheltered... Well anyway, yes... Among other things a friend of David Archer called David Abercrombie gave me an introduction to a rather fascinating couple called Hauton-Lara(ph); they were quite influential in avant-garde theatre and cinema in those days, and they had a little experimental theatre half-way up the Rue Lépic, which goes up...the route to Montmartre. I was taken by a man whose name I can no longer remember, but who was a water-colour painter who took me to Vannady's(ph) house where they had preserved Berthe Morrison's old studio just as it was when she left it. I met through his British council friends a family called Lalois(ph), who was in important music critic in the Seizième, you know, the Arrondissement. And I used to go there sometimes in the evenings. On one occasion I met a Russian composer, now forgotten, a very interesting...Arthur la Rulier(ph). And also Francois Mauriac came, and I...I mean I was introduced to him; I didn't speak very fluently in those days. I think I was very...I've always been lucky and privileged in the people I've got to know in Paris, and never had a difficulty about being invited to French people's houses and so on for meals and...

So, you were spending time establishing a circle of acquaintance in Paris, meeting certain English people who were already living there, like Connolly and Trevelyan and Hayter...

Yes, through...(INAUDIBLE - BOTH TALKING)...of my own age, you see, there was this important friendship to me with, the girl who had just left Bedales and was being finished in Paris, living in a pension in Passy, and that was Kay Hyme. And through Kay I met quite a lot of her contemporaries of Bedales.

One of whom would have been Julian.

Well Julian was older, but he knew her because she was from Bedales. I don't know how he...she must have been...she was about my age, perhaps a year older.

Did you see much of Julian in Paris at that time?

I must have done, yes. I remember one particular party in the Rue Daguerre, which is a part of Paris near the Place Denfert Rochereau that I go to quite often when I go back to Paris now. Later John Montagu(ph) lived at the same address on the Rue Daguerre.

Really?

Yes.

Well I think that maybe...I may have that address in a book of mine.

It's a sort of passageway with studios like, well, not sheds exactly, on each side. And I had the impression that Julian lived there, but I must have met him at a party there. Yes.

What was he like, at that stage in his life?

Oh he was doing rather surrealist kind of interesting...using cork. Now there is a shop near the Gare Montparnasse which I saw last time I was in Paris at the New Year, and it's still there, selling cork. And Julian made some pictures out of cork that he bought at that shop.

Now, let's talk a bit about Kay Hyme and your relationship with her in Paris and later. What actually...how did you get to meet her, do you remember? Was it at this party?

I think it must have been, yes.

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What was her interest?

She wasn't intellectual. She was a very attractive, youthful girl, full of fun. Interested in everything and nothing in particular! We used to meet at six o'clock on the terrace of The Dome, for days on end, for weeks on end, and this little restaurant where we became regular customers for dinners. Then I used to go on the Metro back to Passy with her every evening.

Was she very important to you?

She was really, yes. I must have written hundreds of letters to her.

And you continued to have a relationship with her after you came back to London?

Yes.

She features quite a lot then in the London Journal doesn't she?

Well yes, and in the Paris Journal, yes.

Now, was it during this period that you began to consolidate an interest in surrealism?

Well, as I mentioned in the article in the Ernst(??) Exhibition that you read yesterday, during that first visit of mine I got to know first of all Pierre Leuvre(ph), Galerie Pierres(ph) in the Rue de Seine which is very...two or three minutes' walking distance from the Hôtel Jacob. And there was Mademoiselle Henriette, she later became Henriette Gomez, and had her own gallery and became a Balthus...sort of particular agency. And I used to go to that gallery to look particularly at Miro. There was a certain period of Miro's painting which I really liked better than any other, and still do I think. And through her I went to see Jan Boucher(??) in Montparnasse. I can't say that I knew her at all well, and my memory of her is rather as a sort of grande dame of agents, or...

Dealers?

Dealers. And she gave me an introduction to Max Ernst, and that's how I came to got to see him in the Rue des Plantes and brought a goache from him for about five hundred francs. I'd also been to a surrealist workshop, Josee Corti(ph), which in those days was in the Rue de Clichy , round the corner from Church of the Trinité, (INAUDIBLE).

And did you meet Breton?

No, I didn't meet Breton till I was introduced to him in 1935 by Stanley William Hayter.

'35, that was two years later.

Yes. But briefly, when I came back from my first visit to Paris, I got to know Roger Roughton, and I think I was reading to you the passage that I've written recently about sharing a flat with him in Great Maze Pond in Southwark, quite near where Alice de Brochy(ph) lived until recently.

Yes.

And then I persuaded Cobden Sanderson to commission me to write the book on surrealism, I'd become so interested in the subject you know. And that was the summer of 1935.

The summer of 1935 you were in Paris?

I went to Paris to collect material for this book. I was already in correspondence with Eluard and Breton; I had met Max Ernst but none of the others. My first visit was to Eluard and I spent the morning talking to him. We had already corresponded, and he knew that I had tried to translate some of his poems, and at the end of that morning he said to me, "Now I'm going to read you some of my favourite poems". And he read to me for instance things which I didn't know then, and got to know because of that. Maas, in Débord Valoir(ph), the woman...the passionate love poet of the nineteenth century. Very little known in England, although I find in the Griegson(ph) 'Anthology of Poems' peoems of hers, in his 'Anthology of Love Poems'. Jarry, Jarcreux(ph) and Jama Nouveau(ph). Jarcreux(ph) is the (INDECIPHERABLE WORD) about the Pippa(ph), you probably don't know the poem.

No.

I think I may have...though it doesn't matter. I think there's a translation of it in the Chatto book of nonsense poetry. (BREAK IN RECORDING)

This is...of course to go ahead, the meeting with Eluard is in 1935, and I want us to go back briefly David, to complete the picture of your first visit to Paris, which is 1933 in the autumn.

Yes.

You spent your birthday in October in Paris and you came back just before Christmas I think.

Yes.

But, you were staying at that time just opposite Shakespeare and Company's.

No, after I left the Hôtel Jacob in the Edlangdeterre(ph), which is a bit expensive. It's a marvellous hotel; I have stayed there subsequently, but not very often. So I moved to the Hôtel de l'Odeon, which is about half way up the Rue de l'Odeon towards the theatre, from the Place Soncer(ph). Almost opposite Sylvia Beach; I used to go to her shop almost every day, and she had a lending library. I always used to go to her friend Adrian Lonier(ph), Maison des Amis du Gibes(ph) which was in the same street. And I read a lot of French books that I borrowed from her. But, yes, an amusing anecdote is that one day Sylvia Beach said to me, "Would you like to meet Hemingway?" And I said yes. "Well he is passing through Paris on his way to Africa", and subsequently wrote 'The Green Hills', you know, when he was on safari there. Anyway, I went back in the afternoon and he was there, and she introduced me to him. He was very charming, and said, "Oh, I remember when I was a young kid in Paris and I didn't know anybody; would you like me to show you around?" And I said I'd love to, but of course I didn't really believe it would happen, and it didn't. But when I went back to the shop the next day I found it in an extraordinary state of disarray, because...he had picked up a recently published book by Wyndham Lewis which contained...it was a series of essays on contemporary writers - I wish I could remember the title of the book now. But one of the essays was about Hemingway, and it was called 'The Bamarx'(ph). And it was dim visions of contemporary writers. And Hemingway was so furious that he ran amock and threw the books all over the place and absolutely wrecked the shop!

How did Sylvia Beach react to this?

Well with resignation I suppose.

I suppose, yes. She must have known him well enough!

Yes.

Well...so then you came back to London, just before Christmas, and back to...

Before long I met Roger Roughton through David Archer again.

Yes. And were you still living at home?

Yes. We'd moved by that time I think from East Twickenham to Teddington. No, perhaps not; not in 1934, that's true. That was a little later.

So you were still in East Twickenham.

Yes.

Living at home with your parents?

That's right, in a rather pokey little flat above a suburban branch of the Midland Bank.

And what did you do when you got back?

Well before very long I had this idea of going to live in Southwark in this little flat in Great Maze Pond, which I shared with Roger Roughton.

Roger Roughton. How did you meet Roger Roughton?

Well, he had become a customer at Hartle(ph) Street, at David Archer's shop, and he said there's somebody who has been coming in here lately I think you'd like to meet. And so I went to meet Roger in Hampstead when he was living with his mother and sister. Somewhere off Haverstock Hill.

I think at that point we can turn the tape.

End of F1381 Side A

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F1381 Side B

I want to turn now David to your period in Paris in 1935. Cobden Sanderson had commissioned you to write a book on surrealism.

Well I persuaded them to, yes.

And in the early summer, June, of '35, you went to Paris?

Yes, I went to Paris and I stayed in the Hôtel de Libia(ph) again. And the first member of the group who I had already been in correspondence with and had translated a few of his plays was Eluard, who was then living in the Rue de Jenge(ph), a small apartment. He was not so rich as he had been; he didn't have many pictures in his place in that apartment. But he was the first one I met. And at our first meeting I remember...and at the end of the morning, because it was a morning when I went to see him, he read me a lot of poems by his favourite poets, some of which I had never heard of before, such as Massin(ph), D'Ebord Valmor, Jarcreux(ph) and Jama Nouveau(ph). A few days later Stanley William Hayter, whom I knew already took me up to the Rue Blanche to Rue la Fontaine(??), to see André Breton. And it is still there, I've been recently, in recent years to see Enisa(ph), his widow, his third wife. And she has moved the apartment down a floor, but it's exactly the same. But as we came into the courtyard, because it's some way in from the street, a dog started to bark, and as this dog started noisy barking, I looked up, and there was Breton in this little balcony at the top floor looking down on us. It seemed rather severe, but any rate...I found him slightly intimidating at the first meeting, but he was very courteous as he always was. Then I was invited to attend the Surrealists' daily meetings at the Café de la Place Blanche, which is round the corner. And I used to go regularly at six o'clock every day, and Breton...the cafe had this arrangement of putting a lot of tables together so that up to...well, say 16 or 20 people sometimes, a dozen I should think had these...with Breton at the top and Berier at one side. Georges Shumier(ph), Maurice Henrí(ph). Oh, who were they all? Oscar Dominguez(ph) came from time to time; Man Ray not very often; Eluard never because he'd already begun to quarrel with Breton, though it was never mentioned and I didn't realize it at the time. Dali didn't come because he lived at the other end of Paris, on the edge of Montrouge, near the Porte D'Orléans. But because of Eluard being on very friendly terms with Dali, who after all had married Gala, who had been Eluard's wife, I got...well, I was employed by Dali to translate an essay of his called 'Conquête de l'Irrationelle', 'Conquest of the Irrational', which was to accompany a booklet of reproductions to introduce his next New York exhibition with Julien Levy. And that took me at least a week. And the idea was that I should go there every morning and translate at his little desk with my back to the room, to the studio, and facing the window looking out towards Montrouge. And then if I was having difficulties I would ask Dali, who used as a matter of fact to be out quite often, but Gala was generally there and she gave me more help than Dali, whose Catalan accent was still very strong with these rrrrrr, very gutteral r's. But I somehow managed to translate it, and it was really more satisfactory than I might have expected in those days, as a translation. I still have a copy upstairs which I won't bother to get to.

It was translated as a pamphlet in this country wasn't it, as a small booklet I believe.

Oh, I have never seen it. I've only got a very battered copy of the little book that actually was printed in Paris because I walked with Gala to...

Oh really?

Up to Avenue du Maine, to the printer which was near the Gare Montparnasse.

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How did you find Dali?

Well, strange. Of course, you have his...persona, but...yes, (INDECIPHERABLE WORD) on the whole. He was not the sort of person one would become friendly with, and anyway I was I think slightly intimidated. I got on with him well enough, but... Two remarkable things happened while I was there. I did on one or two occasions see him...actually saw him painting. Because, although I was sitting at my table, a long desk with my back to the studio apartment - it was quite a small studio apartment really with the dining room recessed well over the bedroom further on which I never saw, and this large room in which he painted, and which was full of paintings of his and objects, which are now famous. And there a long piece of mirror at my feet, so I could see what was going on in the back in the room, while I was writing.

And how did he paint? I mean, in...

Well he had a set of paintbrushes, and one of them had about three camel's hairs in it, very very tiny indeed. And he used to fix a kind of special lens into his eye when he was painting.

So that, certain parts of the painting, certain details were painted with extremely fine brushes.

Yes.

And with the aid of a magnifying glass.

Yes. And I don't say he painted in a trance, but he was, you know, completely absorbed in what he was doing and totally unconscious of me or anything else. Maniacal almost.

What was that?

Frenzied; not frenzied, but maniacal is the word I use.

There were two things you said, one is that you saw him paint, and the other...?

Well, yes, several things as a matter of fact! There is a little 'bonne' there; whether she was Spanish or not I don't know, but she was a local girl who came in to work for him, to get the lunch and so on, and she was a bit scared of them I think. Gala can't have been an easy person to work for. But every day at lunch Dali would complain that the baguette of bread wasn't long enough, and the poor girl had to go out and get another one! (LAUGHING) At that time the Surrealists were planning a series of 'conférences', of lectures of happenings and so on, and there was even, I think (INAUDIBLE) had a copy of this extremely rare folder, a piece of Bristol card I suppose you'd call it, with...it was in Breton's very beautiful writing, instead of being printed or typed, and round the edge there were drawings by various surrealists. And among the things which were planned and actually never happened, was a lecture by Dali, and I can't remember the title. But one of the features of this lecture, if you it could be called a lecture, was that on the platform with him he was to have an old woman, and he explained to me that he was going to have pink tape up her arms from the fingers, and at one point he was going to have a spirit lamp on the table on the stage, and he was going to make an omelette and put it on her head, and then he was going to tear off her fingernails by pulling off this pink tape from them, you know.

Yes.

And in order to do this, he had got in touch with a film extra agency to get somebody to play this part you see. And he went out and he explained to me, you know, (INAUDIBLE), "...and

so would you tell them what I want"! (LAUGHS) They were both out, both Gala and Dali, and the little maid came and said to me, "There's somebody at the door", and so I went to the door. And there was this old lady with glasses, black, who appeared sort of typical old lady, Frenchwoman of the kind that you see in the market, like that, you know. And, she looked past me into the room, and (although??) it looked horrified, there was a huge painting called 'The Masturbator' on one side. She didn't know the title, but anyway, it was obviously very strained. And that hairdresser's bust of a woman with a (INAUDIBLE) round her neck and some other very strange objects. Well she just had a glimpse of these things. And then I began to explain to her what was required of her. And she crossed herself and gave a sort of little scream and rushed away! (LAUGHS)

Did he find someone to do the job?

He did in the end I think, yes. I heard accounts of...it did eventually come off.

I asked him how you found him, because obviously Dali became more and more a poseur, more and more a sort of madly sort of...exhitionist. (DG TALKING INAUDIBLY OVER MG)

Well this was the thing that he developed for the American public. And I think he had been once to New York, but he didn't really develop until they went there just before and during the War.

The accounts of him by Bunuel, who knew him of course in the early years in Barcelona and so on, indicate that...and when he first came to Paris, that he was if anything really rather shy, and...

Yes, yes.

In some ways rather modest.

That's right, I think he was.

He was very beautiful, wasn't he?

Er...well I wouldn't say that. His moustache was already there, but he hadn't developed it to the extravagant size that it was later. He wasn't at all dictatorial or authoritarian and so on, to me, and he hadn't...that was a kind of persona that he developed later. He hadn't yet written his memoirs you know.

I suppose you didn't...

And I think it was Gala who really pushed him and developed all this side of him. She did a great deal of good for him in a way. And he owed a great deal to her, and it was natural that he should sign her name to a lot of his pictures of that period. On the other hand she was very ambitious socially, and she wanted, you know...well...I've written about all that. An American called Tim Magurk(ph) wrote a biography of Gala called 'Wicked Lady' and I reviewed it for the Times Literary Supplement (INAUDIBLE). She was an utterly fascinating woman. And another thing that happened which was rather remarkable during that week when I was there, was that Eluard came with his daughter Bigan(ph), I call...you know, Cecile, who is about my age, very shy. And she always wanted to be loved by Gala who didn't reciprocate I don't think, she was not at all a good mother. And in the middle of lunch Gala said, "You know what are the most wonderful love poems I ever read?" And he went to the bookshelft and brought a collection of his poems and read aloud at the table, 'Mi

Patagée'(ph), which was dedicated to Gala. Well, Dali simply went on sort of crumbling his baguette of bread, which was one of his cultivated obsessions.

What an extraordinary sort of confrontation then, or...

It was strange, yes. I was privileged really to be the only person not of the family present.

How did...by this time Eluard was of course remarried, wasn't he, to Nouche(ph).

Yes, Nouche(ph), yes. The first time I set eyes on Nouche(ph) was a week or two before this. I had already met Man Ray, had been to to visit him in the Rue Compagne Première. And he was always extraordinarily friendly and kind. And of course I'd seen photographs of Nouche(ph). And one day I was sitting alone at the Café Flore in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and I saw this beautiful woman come in and sitting there for a time. And I rather suspected it was her. And then a young man in a brown leather coat, a youngish man, literally...I mean obviously it was Réné Crevel(??), who I never met or spoke to. And he came in and presented her with a bunch of violets and went away again. Well then she was joined by Man Ray and others, and I think possibly I was introduced to her then, but I never got to know her very well. Of course I was only 19, and these people were in their 30s. Man Ray was 40 I suppose.

Yes. Now, at this time...

And then you see, the next thing was, I one day, towards the end of the time I was going, translating this thing for Dali, I arrived one morning about half past nine, ten, I forget, and Dali is in his coat, his overcoat, that sort of thing that you go out in, I think, on...when I say doorstep, there were steps going up to this studio in the Mougin(ph)...not Mougin(ph)...I'm sorry - it's quite unimportant! And Gala was saying to him, "Et surtout ne l'embrasse pas!"

Translate?

Above all, don't kiss him! (LAUGHING) 'Embrasse pas'! And, I thought it was rather odd. And anyway, he went away looking very upset, and then, soon afterwards Gala explained to me that one of their closest, one of their best friends had been taken very ill and was in hospital and that Dali had gone to see what was the matter. And of course in fact, when he came back at lunchtime he told us about him having locked himself up in his bathroom and gassed himself, and put a note through the door. There are two or three versions of what was on the note, but... 'Dégoûté, dégoûté'...

Disgust, disgust.

Yes, he was disgusted with life. Because it was the time when...at the end of that summer was the first Congress of Intellectuals for the Defence of Culture Against Fascism, you know, in 1935. And it was the time when the surrealists were still making approaches to the Communist Party, because you know, 'Le Surrealism (INAUDIBLE) de la Revolución' had already published about six numbers. And, Creval(ph) was sort of in between, he wanted...he was on the side of the Communist Party, and on the other hand... But anyway, that was one of the reasons he committed suicide I think.

So, the only time you saw Creval(ph) was when he came into the cafe and presented...

That's right, came in to the cafe and gave Nouche(ph) the violets, and then about a fortnight later he committed suicide. I went to the Café de la Place Blanche in Montmartre that evening, and that was the only time I saw Eluard there, he came in and said, "Oh, they're

going to give him a religious funeral you know", and he was very shocked and scandalized, and they all were horrified. Because he had been taken to the nearest hospital which was run by Bond Sir(ph); it was a sort of convent hospital. What didn't occur to them was that suicides don't get religious funerals if they're Catholics! Anyway, they immediately decided that they were going to make a tremendous 'bagarre', a row, and smash up the chapel and, you know, and so on. And I said, oh, well I'd like...you know, I thought it would be exciting to come. And they said, "No no, you mustn't come, because you'd be deported immediately as a foreigner". The whole thing was an awful anti-climax in the end because of course he didn't get a religious funeral. They all went to the chapel but nothing happened.

Did you go to the funeral?

No no, I wasn't...I was told that on no means should I go, because I should get deported. Because they really thought there was going to be one of their...'bagarre' is the word. There were lots of occasions like that, from the early days of Dada onwards.

Now at this time you met, in Paris, Roland Penrose.

Well towards the end of my stay, before the...I think it was before the Congress, which was at the Place Maubert, which was quite near the hotel where I was living at, I could walk there. I think I attended all the sessions. There was Henri Barbusse, there was Theodore Dreiser, there was...Henri Manreux, there was Ana Siggers(ph), there was...oh, (INAUDIBLE), there was...I can't remember (INAUDIBLE WORDS) tother people, but, you know. I think even Thomas Mann was there. Ernst Toller certainly. And because the Russian delegates...[I'm sorry, I have to remind myself, can you cut it off there?] (BREAK IN RECORDING)

So, in this period, you were going to the meetings of the Congress of Intellectuals Against International Fascism, or...?

Yes. And you see, what had happened was that Breton was going along...whether Montparnass or Montmartre I don't remember, because I wasn't there, but I heard about it. And they were going past a big restaurant, it was probably the Coupole in Montparnasse I should think. And the swing doors came out, and there was Ehrenburg, and whoever it was, but Breton said, "Look, there's Ehrenburg". Breton went up to her and said, "Mon honeur est en danger!" And slapped her on the face, you know, like that, clack clack! And so because of this, Ehrenburg immediately went to the organizer of the Congress, who wer4e mostly members of the Communist Party you know. And of course Breton was forbidden to make to his speech, which was... And Eluard had to do it in his place. And they arranged it so that he was the last of one evening, and it was interrupted at midnight and everything closed down, and it was half-way through, and he had to finish the thing reading it for Breton the next morning before anybody had turned up, so it was deliberately sabotaged.

Yes. Let's go back for a moment. Ehrenburg of course was the Soviet delegate to the Congress.

That's right, yes.

And, what was the reason for Breton's outrage at Ehrenburg?

Well she had accused them of being pederasts, which is an expression used by Claudel of all people, too. I can't remember the exact terms of Ehrenburg's...well it wasn't meant to be an attack, it was simply his way of describing that this was particularly insulting to Breton.

Especially to Breton, who had a horror of homosexuality.

Absolutely, yes.

And I think of the close circle, Cravel(ph) was the only homosexual, acknowledged homosexual.

Precisely, yes. I wrote this thing in French, and it's...(LEAFING THROUGH PAGES)...one, two, three four, five pages, and it really...it's never appeared in English.

That's your piece on Cravel(ph)?

Yes. It's my reminiscence of that period, that incident.

Oh, I think you should translate it! (LAUGHS) It's another job for you. We were talking then... I was going to ask you about your reception in Paris at that time. Here we have a young, 19-year-old boy really...

They were all very kind and helpful.

Who announces that he's going to write a book on surrealism.

Yes.

And were they helpful with material?

They were very helpful. They gave me all kinds of material. In fact I wish I had it now. An awful thing happened at the end of the War, when my father retired from the Midland Bank and went with my mother to live near my mother's sister, one of my aunts in Vancouver Island. And all through the War when I was living at Teddington I had a tallboy in my room, you know, a thing about as high as that with drawers, with a big drawer at the bottom. It was full of letters, manuscripts, documents, and a lot of the stuff that they gave me. For instance very rare Dada pamphelts and things like that, catalogues, photographs and so on. It was lost, because when my family broke up, and my brothers were both married by that time, and I didn't know what to do with this thing, and I hadn't anywhere to put it, and my brother had it for a time. And anyway, it got lost in the end with all these documents and papers and letters and manuscripts.

What a tragedy!

Yes.

So you brought back presumably a great load of...

Yes I did, yes.

Of materials. And of course you also did a number of translations...

Yes.

Because 'A Short Survey of Surrealism', which...

I have a few of the translations, yes.

Which you published, had an anthology of...

The two poets that I never...one I never met was Rene Char, and the other was Tristan Tzara, who was not on speaking terms with the surrealists at the time when I went in 1935. But I did translate an extract from his extraordinary poem, 'L'hors Approximatif'(ph). It's a very long poem and I translated about half a dozen pages. And that was in the first edition of 'Short Survey'. But then, Tzara somehow got to hear about it, and he'd found out that I had repeated a story told by Breton in one of his earlier works, books, of a Dada incident when Tzara ended by handing them all over to the police when they were making a row; they were making a scandal during a performance of his play, 'La Cur a Barbe'(ph), the bearded hound(??). And Breton...I haven't got the book in my hand, so I can't quote absolutely accurately, but Breton wrote "25 poems by M. Tristan Tzara ought really to be called '25 lucubrations of a police agent'"! (LAUGHING) That's because when they started to make a row and...it was the kind of thing they liked to do you know. Somebody opened a night club called Naldarore(ph), and they thought this was outrageous, to take this great work of imagination and turn it into a night club name. And they smashed that night club up. Well there were various occasions; I am not giving you a history of surrealist manifestations of that kind! (LAUGHING) But anyway, that was one of the reasons why Breton and Tzara were not on speaking terms any longer. Also it was because Tzara became a Stalinist communist eventually. And so, Tzara was so annoyed about this story being repeated that he threatened to sue Cobden Sanderson unless they removed this translation, so the second edition doesn't have it.

You in fact met Tzara later didn't you.

I met him for the first time in Barcelona.

Yes. And became quite friendly with him.

I did eventually, yes. Right up until not long before his death in fact. I was living with Mary Gibbal(ph) in her apartment in the Rue de Lille, and Tzara lived at the other end. And it was during the Algiers...Algeria...the end of the War, in Algeria. And people were being plasticated.

Bombed.

Mm.

So you met Eluard, who clearly was very charming and helpful to you.

Yes very, yes.

And it speaks of great generosity of spirit, doesn't it, that he should have been so helpful.

Yes.

I mean he was already a very distinguished...

Yes yes.

And famous man.

Yes. The next year, in 1936, there was a book brought out in England by a little known publisher now called Nott, Stanley Nott(ph), called 'Thorns of Thunder' which was the title of an Eluard poem. And that little anthology of his poems translated by many hands, the best of

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which of course was Samuel Beckett and George Reevy(ph), and myself and possibly Humphre Dems(ph), and I forget the others.

You had dealings with Dali, which we've spoken of. Tell us something more of your impression of Breton, because Breton was this extraordinary sort of protean figure really.

Yes indeed. Well I was really I suppose in awe of him really; I had tremendous admiration for him. He was very imposing. Everybody, in describing Breton would refer to his leonine head, you know, and great bearing, and extraordinarily sort of old-fashioned courtesy really INAUDIBLE WORD. I mean he would bow. And he had a very sort of (INDECIPHERABLE WORD). One thing I did have the opportunity to notice was that he was quite a different person in public than he was if you spoke to him in private with one other person or with nobody else at all. I did have a conversation alone with him on one or two occasions.

You were telling us that you went to his flat for the first time.

He forced himself to be authoritarian, because he felt, I suppose rather like Freud, that in order to lead this...to pioneer this psycho-analytic movement you had to be authoritarian, keep the whole thing going you know.

When you met him you were telling us you went to the flat for the first time and had that rather sort of...dramatic...

Yes. There was the dog barking, and Breton came out to see what was going on, looked down on us, and I looked up and saw him there, it was very impressive in a way. This extraordinary apartment which is still like that, because Elisa(ph) Breton has kept it as it was. Of course today there are far less objects and paintings than there were, and more at the same time. But, I mean the key of the thing was that extraordinary painting of Chirico called 'The Child's Brain', which was in his room. And later he got a great deal more, but he had begun to collect Eskimo objects and that kind of thing. As well as strange things found in the flea market. Found objects, surrealist objects, and paintings and drawings of a great variety.

And how did he greet you when you first met?

Well he was very cordial and agreeable, helpful. But distant, you know.

Did he show...was he at all concerned that you might misinterpret, or get surrealism wrong for an English audience?

No, I don't think so. I mean he confided to me; he approved of me being his translator of that pamphlet which appeared next year, published by Faber. I made one terrible howler in that, which did annoy him, though he wasn't...demonstratively angry about it. There's an expression, Prince Rupert's drops(??) you know, which are in fact...a remarkable feature of the glass spinners, the glassmakers' art, which is a bubble of glass which is so thin that if you touch it it bursts into so many fragments that it just vanishes.

Really?

Mm.

And what mistake did you make?

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Well I translated it as being one of those glass things that you find on chandeliers, which was an...

Almost the opposite in fact.

Yes! That was a quite gratuitous translator's footnote, so... But apart from that... It was a fairly faithful translation. In fact an American publisher wrote and asked me permission about six months ago to reprint the whole thing in a book called, 'Great Thinkers of the Twenty.....

End of F1381 Side B

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F1382 Side A

.....David, that you had occasion to observe the difference between Breton's behaviour in a public setting and Breton in private.

Yes. Well, at these daily sessions at six o'clock at the Café de la Place Blanche which I think had been Cirano(ph) before that, he sat at the end of these tables all put together so they made a long table, and...well, he was among friends, but he could be impatient or dictatorial or, you know, he'd rather lay down the law. The thing was that, to discuss the affairs of the day I suppose, their current preoccupations. People had drinks, you know, until it was time to have dinner, then he'd go home and most of the rest of us would go to a local bistro or small restaurant, generally with Georges Hugnet and his wife Germaine, and Maurice Henri, who was really you know, a cartoonist, but very young and had a charming wife - well not very young, but...one of the younger ones. And Perry(ph) often would come with us. And there were other, less well-known, less important surrealists whose names I can no longer remember who were associated with the movement at the time. Because on one occasion I did have a private conversation with Breton. They'd opened a shop which didn't last very long called 'Granida' after that novel analyzed by Freud, do you know what I mean? The author's name Janderson(??)?

Janderson(ph)?

'Granida'.

Yes. That was the name of their shop which they had for surrealist paintings and objects and so on, but it didn't last very long. And I remember finding myself alone in the shop with him one afternoon, it was his turn to look after the shop! (LAUGHS)

Go on.

Well he could be very kind and...not kind, but...much more gentle and...a very wide range of subjects that interested him.

He lived a fairly austere sort of life really, didn't he?

He did, yes, yes.

In public, more imperious.

Yes, yes.

Now, it was at this time, wasn't it, that you met Penrose, as I've learnt.

Yes. I think it must have been...I can no longer remember whether it was before or after this series of meetings with the 'Place Vaubert Paris de la Net Mutualité'(ph). But anyway, one day I was going along the Rue de Tournon round the corner from the Rue de l'Odeon, and I ran into Eluard who was accompanied by Penrose, and I hadn't met him before, and...well, Penrose has described the incident in his 'Scrapbook', you know, about how we decided that we must get together and...do something about bringing surrealism to England. And so after I'd gone back to England and written and published 'Short Survey of Surrealism' - how I managed to write a book in such a short time I...it's incomprehensible to me now, and I take such a long time to do this sort of thing.

Because it was actually published before the end of the year, wasn't it?

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It was, yes. It had a modest success and went into a second edition within a year.

Yes. But before we do that, did you see anything more of Penrose in Paris?

I don't remember seeing much of him in Paris then, no. But as soon as he got back to England I was very soon...got the way of going up to Haverstock Hill, you know, to this house that gradually formed this committee which organized the exhibition which used to meet once a week you know, and perhaps more often towards the...when was it, May or June was the opening time, yes, June and May.

It's remarkable how fast those things happened isn't it?

Yes indeed.

You were in Paris until August, or thereabouts. You came back, you delivered a manuscript, plus translations, to Cobden Sanderson. You must have delivered that by the end of September.

I suppose so, yes.

You must have done the whole thing in a few weeks.

I did in fact, yes, at Teddington.

A very remarkable...

And I think how long it takes to write the least thing now, an awful effort.

It's a very good book of course, it still in its own way...

Well it's because I was given material which I managed to compress into, you know, a short space really.

But you make that sound easy, but of course actually compressing, and doing it with the clarity with which you did it, was quite an achievement I think, quite a remarkable achievement.

Thanks.

And the book has remained of interest, hasn't it, I mean...

Well of course it is still in print in America, yes.

What I was just saying is that...

Though it only goes up to the War; a lot happened during and after the War.

What do you mean?

Well, it only goes up to 1936 in fact.

Of course it does, yes. Well it's become in its own way a part of the literature that it set out to describe. I mean it's not a surrealist book, but in its anthology section of course it brought the work into English, which...

It could have been much better, the anthology part.

But what I was just talking about was the speed, David, with which this happened. And then, Penrose came back to London in the autumn. And if you think about the scale and the significance of the exhibition of '36, to have organized that.

Well I mean, it was very much Penrose; I couldn't possibly have done it myself, I just happened to have got to know him. And I mean, he'd known them all very much longer than I had.

Tell me now about Penrose at that stage in his life. Because you were meeting him then quite a lot, quite intensively, during the winter of '35, '36.

During the winter and spring, yes. Yes, that's right.

What was he like?

Well he was...it wasn't very obvious, but if you knew that he was of a wealthy Quaker family, you know; he was very English in a way. But then revolt against all that sort of thing, but at the same time, once you knew that, you know, it fitted.

He was a remarkable man, wasn't he, Penrose.

Oh yes, yes.

I mean to have come from the background he came from.

Yes.

And I mean, he was also of course...received that most marvellous of compliments didn't he, from Breton who called him a 'surrealist in friendship'.

That's right, yes. Yes, he was that always.

And he knew, and was aware of the quality of the work being produced by...

Yes yes, he was, yes.

Ernst and Miro and de Chirico, at a time when they were hardly...

Very few people in England really...

Recognized them.

Mm. Very few English dealers. I mean Freddie Mayor I suppose was an exception.

What was his household like at that time in Hampstead?

Well I don't remember much about the household. He must have had servants but I don't remember much about them. It wasn't like Patsy, who was his housekeeper at Farleigh(ph), but...

Now who else came on to the scene at that time?

The people who came to the meetings in...

George Reevy(ph)?

Well no, not very much. I think George Reevy had gone to America by that time. It was he who introduced me to people in Paris in 1933, but I don't remember him being much associated with the exhibition. Yes, he was around certainly. Herbert Read, Paul Nash...

Ruthven Todd?

Ruthven Todd occasionally, yes. Humphrey Jennings. I remember Geoffrey Grigson saying to me once, "I've been getting some poems from a young man, poet, from Scotland recently and I've given him your address, so you will expect to hear from him". That was Ruthven Todd, and I remember his tottering up Grove Terrace in Teddington one day - well when I say tottering, he had his own way of walking with his glasses rather like that!

Glasses twisted on his head.

...and so on. But anyway, and then I got to know him very well, and he...I think he was a little older than myself as a matter of fact, and he'd been reading and translating things of a similar nature, so we got on very well from the start.

Can you remember much about the meetings of the committee that organized the great '36 exhibition?

Well, not very much, except that we ended up by drinking quite a lot as a rule.

Did you feel a great sense of excitement and of...perhaps even a sort of missionary sense, that you were bringing something into this country...

It was exciting, yes. I don't remember feeling particularly a missionary exactly, no.

Did you have anything, David, to do with the actual selection of works? I know that Herbert Read, Penrose and Nash...

I didn't choose what was to be shown and what wasn't to be shown, no.

Were on the hanging committee, so called?

Yes.

And of course a great deal of marvellous work was brought over from Paris.

Yes, yes. Well that was largely I think due to Roland's contacts with people like, particularly Eluard.

Eluard?

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Yes. In fact you know, the nucleus of Penrose's collection came from Eluard.

Yes. Of course he'd bought it from Eluard from Eluard fell on hard times.

That's right, yes.

Around about his period of course.

Yes, that's right.

In fact when you visited Eluard it may well be that many of the paintings had already been sold...

Yes that's true, there weren't many pictures there, very few in fact.

Had been sold to Penrose.

I don't know how many times I visited that apartment on the Rue de Gendre(??), but I remember going there again with Penrose when we were on our way to Barcelona in 1906, and Nouche(ph) was in bed and his mother Madame Grandald(ph) was there. No, I don't remember many pictures there.

Now I want to ask you, how far - it's a question I've never asked you before - and it's how far at this point you felt yourself to be, as it were a mediator, a sort of critical mediator of an important movement, and how far you felt yourself to be a participator, a surrealist as such?

For a short time I was thought to be a surrealist, that's right, I was writing surrealist poetry by then. I even wrote and it was published, a sort of manifesto in French, named 'Cahier d'Art'.

Was this the manifesto of the British Group?

Yes.

And you wrote that?

Before there was a British Group, yes! (LAUGHS)

And that was published...yes, I remember this was published in fact by what one might call a slightly surrealist...circumstance, the manifesto of the British Group was actually published first in French, wasn't it?

Yes, (INAUDIBLE), yes. (LAUGHING)

You've probably seen numbers of 'Cahier d'Art', because it really was about the best art magazine. And it wasn't...Zerbos was not like 'Iliaz', or what was the other one's name? The one that did (INAUDIBLE). I mean, I think that Zerbos was really...I can't quite find the word, but... It was a more serious review than those two.

Yes. We shall have occasion to talk of Zervos won't we in a while, because of your trip to Spain with him.

Yes.

And it was through him I suppose that you met Picasso's mother.

That's right, yes.

And subsequently Picasso himself.

That's true.

Was there anything here...I mean where were you publishing here then, that could carry surrealist writing?

Well Roger Roughton's little magazine you know.

'Contemporary Poetry and Verse'?

Yes.

Sorry, 'Contemporary Poetry and Prose'.

That's right. There was in fact at that time a little magazine called 'Janus' which can't have had more than two or three numbers, and one of them published a fairly long series of text of mine I suppose called 'The Great Day' I think.

Who was the editor of that?

I can't remember.

I think I know but I can't remember as well. Never mind, it'll come back to you.

One of these people no longer around unfortunately, been round for quite a while.

And, so you were publishing with Roger Roughton's 'Contemporary Poetry and Prose', and occasional pieces with 'Janus'.

David Archer published a little book of poems, half of which were surrealist poems called 'Man's Life Is This Meat'. I think I've told this story before, how I came to find this title. I was still seeing quite a bit of Grigson from time to time, not so much as when I first got to know him. And one day I went up to Hampstead to Keat's Grove. I don't think that Grigson and Penrose knew each other, though they were more or less neighbours - different parts of Hampstead of course. But anyway, I went up to see Grigson and I told him that David Archer wanted to publish a collection of my poems and that they were mostly surrealist poems and some of them had been published in 'New Verse'. And Grigson at that time had a book of printers' types, I don't know how you'd describe that, you know what I mean.

Yes. Typographer's manual.

Typographer's manual, that's right. And we opened it at random and in one set of letters there was this quotation, I mean a line from a book, which ended up with the words 'Man's life is' and then at the top of the next page with the words 'this meat'. So this was a kind of example of a verbal 'found object' if you see what I mean. And he said, "Well that makes...you know, so I'll use that". It was a completely meaningless phrase which...

Acquired meaning by your taking it from that context.

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Yes, mm. Well that was published in 1936 I think, by David Archer.

Yes. Grigson had been a friend and a supporter of yours from...

Well yes, in a way; yes, I owe quite a lot to him. At one time when I first...after he'd published his first longish surrealist poem of mine, 'The Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis' in 'New Verse'. There was a period when I used to meet him regularly in an office - not an office, a tea room off Fleet Street when he was working for, first of all the Yorkshire Post and then the Morning Post. He was the literary editor, and I did occasionally do short reviews of books for him. And at these tea time sessions we'd have long talks. And he always had a pet hate of the week, you know! (LAUGHS) He was a master of invective.

Can you remember any of his pet hates?

Not now, no. The Sitwells.

The Sitwells? Well they were just for one week; I mean it was...

Yes, that was (INAUDIBLE WORD). No, but I used to go to tea with him in his very nice garden at Keat's Grove. And there I met for the first time Kathleen Raine and her then husband Charles Madge, Gavin Ewart who was still at Wellington I think, Norman Cameron I think I must have met through Grigson. In fact I met quite a lot of people through him, as I was saying earlier, Ruthven Todd. But then he was well known for turning on his contributors you know, he would publish something and then a few months or a year later publish some...you know, I won't say vicious attack. Long after that, I said something to somebody, we were talking about Grigson and I said, "Well he could be rather waspish you know", and he said, "Waspish, don't you mean a hornet?" (LAUGHING)

Did he turn on you?

Yes. No exactly, but I was...this was the kind of thing which was typical of Grigson. It was after he'd published a book on Samuel Palmer. I met him in the London Library. I had a ticket for the London Library through the influence of Herbert Read, and I didn't pay for it all, or I got it very cheaply, and I used to borrow a dozen at a time. Anyway, I was there, and I met Grigson. He was going to catch a train at Paddington and was staying somewhere in that direction, so we went together. And on the way I simply said to him, "Geoffrey, when's your next book on Samuel Palmer coming out?" as though there was going to be a sequel. He was furious, the stupidity that anybody could ask a question...that anybody could be interested in Palmer after this (INAUDIBLE 2/3 WORDS). And he became, as he did, strangely sort of...petuperative(ph).

How had you met him in the first place David?

Because I was a contributor who had sent him poems which he published.

To 'New Verse'?

Yes.

And that would have been back in 1933?

Yes, that was 1933.

I mean he set a lot of people going, didn't he?

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That's right, he did, yes. He got me going.

And he was a marvellously perceptive editor.

He was, yes. He introduced me for instance, I think I probably met Herbert Read through him the first time, because he was a neighbour. And in his house in Keat's Grove he'd have work by Ben Nicholson, and a Wallis, you know, 'On a Cardboard Box'(ph). And a little macquette of Moore about that size in there. In fact I remember going with him round to that rather strange row of studios with Read and...

Park Road?

Yes. And...Park Road I think was Moore's studio which was round the corner.

Yes it was, yes. And also when I first went to Paris I already must have known Grigson of course, and seen him, because I remember him telling me, "If you're going to Paris be sure to go and see Elion(ph). Now he was perhaps the best abstract painter of his time. I didn't take sides on this sort of dichotomy of surrealism and abstraction of that time you know, I was just interested in them all, and Elion(ph) was a remarkably fine...

Very good painter.

Painter for a period, particularly round about 1933.

Did you visit him in Paris?

I did. I went to see him, and I had a long talk with him, and he...as a result of his conversation I began to be able to appreciate Poussin for instance, you know, from the point of view of...not so much the allegorical significance people see in it now but...

The underlying abstract structure of it is what Elion(ph) was very very keen on.

His paintings of that period were marvellous of that kind I think.

Yes. Of course John Piper visited him at very much the same time, about 1933.

Yes.

And he had quite an influence upon Piper.

Yes.

And he subsequently contributed of course to 'Axis'.

He probably was never a very good painter, but the among of painters that I've met he was one of the most interesting conversationalists. I mean he was a wonderful talker. And I'd met him again later after he'd been converted to socialist realism and he did a series of petrol pumps and things like that, you know! (LAUGHS) Which had the virtue of being well painted and well composed but they were very dull compared with the...

With the abstractions.

Mm.

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So, we've gone back here a little bit to Grigson and 'New Verse'. And he was among the first people of course to publish you after...

Yes, but Grigson was a man of great sensibility, and a wonderful sense of Englishness, and very good taste in painting I think and arts in general. He had quite a strong influence on me I think. For a while. I've written a tribute to him in a book which has only been...it's seen by quite a few people, but it's a limited edition which was published not long before he died. I didn't see him for many many years. After this terrible gaff about Samuel Palmer there was a woman called Glenda David, who was a literary agent who lived in Hamstead. She discovered Colin Wilson for instance. And I went to a dinner party that she gave, in Well Walk I think, and there was Grigson, and he was quite amiable then, he'd forgotton this thing about Palmer! But I never(??) met him later when I'd been living in France, and he'd become much more francophiled than he had been when I first knew him.

Yes. Well he lived in France for several years.

That's right.

Can we go back then to the period '35/'36, and to the period of the exhibition, which you had instigated.

It got more exciting when opening day of the exhibition came along, and I began to plan various things, including this idea of a surrealist phantom. Now Shiela Legge had written me a fan letter when 'A Short Survey of Surrealism' came out in 1935. And I answered her and we made a rendezvouz, and I think she was living in a bedsit in Earls Court, you know. And she had nothing to do with the film maker of the same name, one had an e and the other didn't. Anyway, she was an attractive woman, and we got on very well. There was a time when she went to Paris for a time, hoping to become a model of Man Ray, but I don't think she was quite his type and she was rather disappointed about that. At any rate I had this idea of making this surrealist phantom; I pinched the idea of the head made of roses you know, a rose bush growing out of a dress from Dali. But I got Motley's the theatrical designers who did all the costumes for the Old Vic at that time in St. Martin's Lane, to do a sort of wedding dress, which they did very cheaply really. And then I got a Mayfair florest to make mask of roses, real roses, and we took her out to Trafalgar Square and had a photograph. My original idea had been that she should have a thighbone as a kind of sceptre, but couldn't find one anywhere, and I went around orthopaedic shops and finally came up with a leg, and as her name was Legge that was what she carried around with her!

So that was your idea?

Yes, that was my idea.

This was in the nature of a stunt.

Yes.

And of course the exhibition was sort of...

Well Breton came to open it, but Eluard wouldn't come until Breton had gone back. That showed the rift between them had already become quite serious.

There's a famous photograph isn't there taken at the Burlington Galleries, in which Eluard and Nouche(ph) I think is in the photograph and Sheila Legge and Eileen Agar(ph), Ruthven Todd.

Ruthven Todd was taking my place because I had gone out on some errand.

Is that why?

(INAUDIBLE - BOTH TALKING)

I've always wondered why you weren't in that photograph.

Yes, that's right.

Dali's in it.

Well, when Dali gave his lecture in a diver's suit: that was an idea of Edward James, with whom he was staying at the time, and those were...Edward James' Afghan wolf hounds were led in on a leash. And it was when he began to stifle because of his helmet you know, he couldn't breathe any more, and it was I who went out to find a spanner to undo...(LAUGHS) And to find a spanner in Bond Street is not very easy! Anyway we got him out in the end and he went on. A most ludicrous occasion, because it had a man with...what do you say, magic lantern...no, there must be another term, but slides, but they were always upside down, which I suppose was a surrealist approach in a way. During the period I was there almost every day, most days all in all, and often sleeping in the flat of my mother's friend 'Tiny' Wright, whom I've been talking about, who by that time had had to live in Kennington, behind Waterloo somewhere.

Dylan Thomas was also around at this time wasn't he?

Yes, he was. But he came, and did some stunt, but they didn't really... He was a surrealist, his kind of poetry was surrealist without him knowing anything about it, and...he didn't care for any kind of isms very much really.

Did you know him well at this time, or were you ever a friend of his at this period?

Yes I was a friend of his. I met him in 1933 I think, at least in the summer of 1933, because of our both being a contributor to funny old Victor Newburg's 'Poets' Corner' in the Sunday Reverie. He lived in an old cottage at Steyning in Sussex you know. And the people who were contributors to his column would go down there for the weekend.

What Newburg lived there, yes.

Yes, with a rather stern woman who looked after him and was a teetotaller, or rather didn't approve of people drinking very much. What was her name? Mrs. Park, yes, that's right. That was where I first met Dylan. And I also met a South African friend of mine, (INAUDIBLE) Simpson, who now lives in Surbiton.

A writer?

Yes, but I won't talk about her because she has...although she's a dear old friend she's not had all that importance in my life as a writer.

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So we're at...really we've reached the Surrealist Exhibition, and I think it's probably true isn't it that more or less by this period you were beginning to have some second thoughts in any case about surrealism as such.

Well, I think I'd already started to read up Rimbaud seriously with the idea of writing a book about him. And one of the books I came across in the British Museum was this 'Rimbaud le Voyou', or was it lent to me by George Reevy(ph), that I cannot quite remember. But anyway, I do remember meeting Breton one day with this book under my arm and Breton saying, "What's that you're readin?" and I showed it to him, and he said, "Ah! Ca c'est un livre dirigé tout á fait contra moi".

That is a book...

Completely directed against me! What is a bit of exaggeration, but it does contain the most serious criticism I think of surrealism that anyone has ever made really.

End of F1382 Side A

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F1382 Side B

David, Breton came to London to open the 1936 exhibition. By this time he was already...had already quarrelled with Eluard, and this probably explains why they came to London at different times.

It was not exactly hushed up, but it was not generally known that the rifts between them had become so serious. Because after all it wasn't very long since they had collaborated in one of the surrealist masterpieces, 'l'Immaculé Concepción'.

Yes. Anyway, it's while Breton was in London that you recall that, seeing you carrying Benjamin Fondane's...

I think that it must have been lent to me by George Reevy(ph) in fact. I've got a little note to that effect somewhere. And I do remember him saying, when he asked what I was reading, and I showed him the book, and saying, "Ah, that's the book completely directed against me". (SAME IN FRENCH).

Yes. This is Benjamin Fondane's book, and it's called, 'Rimbaud, le Voyou', Rimbaud the Hooligan.

Hooligan is the word I found to translate it when I translated an extract for 'Poetry Nation'(ph) many years ago now.

Why do you think Breton felt so strongly about that book, and felt that it was...it constituted a critique of surrealism?

Well it does I think constitute perhaps the most seriously...the critique that he was inclined to take most seriously, and therefore took most offense at. One has to begin by saying that Fondane was...as a young man was an intellectual in Romania, writing in Romanian about the French writers. And gradually getting more and more avant-garde and coming to Paris in the early Twenties and becoming a friend of Brancusi, his fellow Romanian, and following the Surrealist movement from its earliest days with great interest, and feeling gret sympathy with it. But then, after his encounter with the great Russian philosopher Birg Shestaf(ph), he began to think seriously along the lines of a revolt against reason, which seems to be parallel with that of the surrealists. It's not just...seen to be irrational for the sake of irrationality, not at all; it was a realization that we are tyrannized by reason to the extent of sheer scientific materialism of dominating the whole of the world outlook that is commonly accepted by everybody everywhere now. And he felt that the surrealists' revolt against reason was too reasonable! Because really fundamentally the thing is that Fondane, although he was fundamentally a religious man I think - but he wouldn't have declared himself to be such, he would have preferred the word 'metaphysics' - but fundamentally he was not a reductionist materialist, and the surrealists went along with Marx and Freud, and rejected any kind of belief in the transcendent and the metaphysical or, you know, anything that couldn't be explained away by reason and materialist science. As anti revolutionary, anti bourgeois, conformist etcetera. But Breton having declared...well, once and for all we'd better go back on that. I mean he even admitted that 'Dieu (INAUDIBLE) porc', which was something. But anyway...

Sorry, what was the meaning of the French phrase you've just quoted?

'God is a swine', PORC. Yes. Whereas Fondain's feeling which he expressed in all his writings really was...his prose writings, was that one has to struggle, as his master Shestov(ph) would say, against the evidences, that's to say against sheer materialism. I think

it's all summed up in the poem in my 'Collected Poems' which is addressed to Fondane, which I wrote during the War and obviously before I knew that he was going to die in a concentration camp at the end of the War.

Would you like to read that now? It might be helpful. (BREAK IN RECORDING)

This is originally called 'To Belger(ph) Fondain', now it's called 'I.M., In Memorium, Bolgver(ph) Fondain, 1898-1944'.

'This is the osseous and uncertain desert and valley which(??) death's shadow, where the desire and sweet spiritual spring is sought for but unfound. It is beyond and far, and lost in the essential blue of space, among the rock and snow, (INDECIPHERABLE WORDS) the instinct asks for. They who wait without the great thirst of despair or curse, they who quench their thirsts in death shall fall asleep among the mirages. But the inspired and the unchained and the endowed(??) of desperate(??) grace shall break through the last gates, by violence take God's kingdom and obtain the serpent state.'

I wrote that during the War when Fondane was living in clandestinity in Paris. And he never saw the poem, and whether it represents what he stood for or not I don't know. It's a purely subjective reaction to what I got from him.

You were reading 'Rimbaud, Le Voyou', 'Rimbaud, The Hooligan', as part of your studies towards a projected book on Rimbaud...

Yes.

And you would have known that that book by Fondain was written against another book, 'Rimbaud, le Voyant', 'Rimbaud, the Seer'.

Well yes, that is not terribly important now, it was...I think Fondane's book remains the key book of this kind of, for this period(??).

What, Fondane's book?

Yes. Raymond de Rénéville's book, it was valuable in its time of...the view of Rimbaud which is most commonly accepted.

Rimbaud as...

Well as what he announced himself to be. But the important thing is that he abandoned his position as the poet as seer; he gave it all up and saw that it was, you know, a folly, and so on. He was disillusioned with the whole thing. 'Je ne pouver pas continuer, puis ceti(ph) mal', I couldn't go on any longer, and besides it was mal, it was bad, it was...

Wicked?

Well not exactly wicked, no; I suppose in a sense thinking of it, it was (INDECIPHERABLE 2 WORDS) yes.

The reason I've interpolated that little bit of history about the two books and so on was that I wanted to prompt you to talk a bit more about what happened after surrealism. Because after the exhibition you went into a period really of intensive political activity.

Well, yes well I went to Spain to work for the propaganda ministry; certainly I was very much aware of the menace of Hitler and I could see that the Spanish Civil War was for the Germans a sort of rehearsal for the future war.

Mhm. And you were involved...

I don't claim to have been more than a prophet than anybody else, but I think I was more certain of the war coming than somebody like Mesens for instance.

E.L.T. Mesens?

Yes.

Why do you single him out as somebody not particularly prescient?

Because, if I can find it, there's a passage in my journal, I'm going to read for a change. It all to me(??)...to a head, that's before we went to Barcelona. I'm not going to be able to find it. (BREAK IN RECORDING) This an entry of my journal for the 21st of October 1936. This is after the end of the Great Exhibition of the summer of course.
'On the Saturday evening I had to go over to Hampstead. Maissance(??) again was there, as annoying as ever. And after dinner we had to go round to see Hugh Sykes Davis(ph) who has an abscess in his anus and is about to be operated upon. The great moist warm wind blew up from the Heath and shook the trees and the lamplights as we left the house. While Valentine stood at the door and waved goodnight, in a moment of exultation I cried as we stode down the wet pavements, (FRENCH - TRANSLATED BELOW)... and went on where he'd left off talking about some woman!'

Could you perhaps freely translate that for us?

'But don't you think that it's a moment of tremendous drama now that the world is about to burst into red flames, and all individuals are disintegrating?' is what the English says. It's a very romantic exclamation. But it was percipient, because it was just from Hampstead Heath that you could see the Blitz burst dramatically.

Yes. But Mesens' response of course means, 'But you are still so young...dear friend' yes. Well I was simply saying that you did then become involved one way or the other in politics. Of course a lot of people were involved at that time, and especially the surrealists. And you went to Spain, and so on. But that is something I want to talk about. But before we do that, since we're on the subject now of Fondane, I want to go back to this aspect of your development. Because we might think of that aspect of your development as something that was as it were underground during this period.

Yes.

Your outward involvement was with politics and with personal relationships of one sort or another, but beneath that there was something happening to you which was I think related to your reading of Rimbaud, and then to your reading of Fondane.

Yes. Fundamentally the thing is that I was no longer satisfied with a world outlook, as surrealism used to be thought of as that, (INAUDIBLE 3 WORDS). That it's based entirely on dialectical materialism, and materialism being the most reasonable kind of reason, that's to say it's an outlook entirely dominated by reasonable materialism really.

Yes. And after...

This reason that was the driving force of 'Le Secte Lumière'(ph), the Enlightenment there, the gradual rejection of any kind of religious foundational outlook to life. It's a disbelief in anything that's not visible. But the surrealists in their revolt against reason, they were still reasonable because they remained dialectical materialists.

Yes.

That's to boil it down to its essentials really.

But you went to Paris and Fondane, didn't you?

I did, yes. I wrote to him about this book on Rimbaud and had a wonderful letter back, which I bitterly regretted having lost after a time. And in it he said, "Next time you're in Paris perhaps you would like to come and see me". And I did in fact get in touch with him and went to see him at a place he used to stay at near the southern south of Paris somewhere, a little country place with a lake, or large pond (INAUDIBLE WORD). Then later in the winter when he'd gone back to Paris I used to go every now and again to see him in his apartment in a very very old building in the Fifth Arrondissement, which is known as the Latin Quarter I suppose, near the Roman ruins that seems to be off the tourist maps, 'Les Arènes de Lutece', where Jean Paular(ph) lived later.

How did you find him? What sort of a man was he?

Again I'm stumped. I'm very bad at describing people from memory.

What impression did he make on you?

Well somebody with very intense inner life. He earned his living by making films. He had worked on a film called 'Erapt'(ph), based on a novel by the Swiss writer Ramouth(ph).

Did you talk a great deal to him?

Yes. Well I listened to him a lot, yes. I would go up after dinner about nine o'clock in the evening and he would immediately set about making turkish coffee. He lived in this very old building with very thick walls, and in his living room there was an aquarium inserted into the wall.

Do you associate your encounter with Fondane and his thought with your own...well you clearly do; I mean to what extent I really mean do you associate your own move to a more metaphysical or even religious attitude towards poetry, at that time?

Yes. Well it has to be distinguished from adopting a position of being converted to religion, it's not that at all. It's realizing that the commonly accepted everyday outlook on the world of people who no longer practise religion, and that means that they are reduced to a purely materialist explanation of the world. And it's not so much that one wants to enforce a set belief or a dogma of any kind on other people, but that one feels that mankind cannot go on living by bread alone.

Mhm. Where did Fondane locate spiritual meaning then, if it was not to be found in orthodox religion?

Well he represents a continual fight really for belief.

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For belief?

Mm. Of some sort of belief.

That the struggle to believe can be as it were, something as...can act if you like in place of the ability to believe.

Yes.

But that it's important that the struggle should take place, against evidence.

That's right, yes.

What about Pierre Jean Jouve then at this stage of your life?

Well the thing is that I was seeing both of them, but they neither of them knew each other or sort of knew much about each other. This seems very extraordinary to me now, that I was on the one hand going to the Rue de Tournon to see the Jouves and his circle, and the other hand going to see this very solitary man just across the Boulevard St. Michel. (BREAK IN RECORDING)

David, what was it that impressed you so much about Pierre Jean Jouve?

Well I first came across his name and his work when I went to try to live in Paris in 1937. I felt I belonged there much more than in London really, than in England. And Roger Roughton gave me an address in the Fifth Arrondissement near Notre Dame that there was a house of flats in which e.e. cummings had an apartment. And there was an attic that was free on the top floor and I took that, and I had very little money. One of the things that I used often to do in those days was to wander along the quais because there were booksellers' boxes, even more than there are today, all along from Notre Dame down to almost to...well at least as far as the Gare Rofsay(ph). And then I found in a box the French translation of the poems of Holderlin's 'Madness', (INAUDIBLE WORDS) translated by Jouve and Pietlasovski(ph), who is the brother of the painter Balthus. That had already been published about ten years I think, and as I say, I found it in a box. Then I went on from being very impressed and excited by this book to reading his own poetry and prose. And at that time I used to go to a bookshop, a 'librairie', near the Luxembourg Gardens, near the Gare du Luxembourg, and run by a woman whose name I cannot remember. But I expressed my interest in Jouve, and she had a sort of lending library, rather like Syliva Beach had done earlier, and she said, "Oh, if you're interested in Mr. Jouve, he is one of my customers, clients, and so if you would like to meet him, be here on such and such a day". And I turned up, and I was introduced to him, and he immediately asked me to go and see him at the Rue de Tournon, which is the street that leads down from the Cenotaph to the Luxebourg, is called the Palais de Luxembourg, you know. And I went to his apartment and it was a wonderful apartment. I don't know if you know Henry James' novel called 'The Ambassadors'.

Mhm.

Well it always reminded me of the apartment in which the young heroes, French (INAUDIBLE WORD) might have lived...(INAUDIBLE WORDS).

Yes. (LAUGHS)

And I met...it was a very impressive apartment, very thick walls, and not luxurious but rather austere, but very comfortable. And I met his wife, Blanche Reverchon, who was the analyst,

and he'd been married to her since 1922 or 4 I think, I think for about...for over ten years. And there was his part of the apartment and his study, and there was her consulting room, and then there was the drawing room or whatever you'd call it. And before long I found myself being invited to their Thursday evening parties. And Blanche Reverchon was very orthodox, although she herself had been analyzed by Freud and she was a Freudian psychiatrist, in that she encouraged and allowed her patients to meet each other socially. And these occasions on Thursday evenings from nine o'clock onwards were a mixture of Blanche's patients and Jouve's literary, artistic, musical and philosophical friends; not that it was a very large circle, but it was a very interesting one. And I got into the habit of going to these soirées. And I suppose it must have been a year later, after Munich, I was so depressed that I could hardly get up, and I went to see Blanche and told her about this, and she said, "Well if you like we can try an analysis. I can't...I don't say I can cure you, but I might be able to help you". So I went into analysis with her.

How long were you in analysis?

Not very long. It was interrupted by my having to go back to England at the beginning of 1939, knowing that the war would break out very soon.

Was she an orthodox analyst? You've just said that she wasn't orthodox in her...

We she was unorthodox, allowing her...encouraging her patients to meet each other, and even to have affairs with each other. There were a mixture of English and some French went there; quite a lot of German refugees, and Bianca Löwenstein(ph), Princess Löwenstein(ph), and friends and relatives of hers. And Jouve had quite a connection with Salzburg, because he used to frequent the Festival of Salzburg before the War, and he was a friend of Bruno Walter, Stefan Sweig and people like that. And his extraordinary novel which I...two novels which are now published as one, one is a sequel to the other, is one of the most extraordinary novels on psychoanalysis ever written I think. It's called 'L'Aventure du Katleen Casha(ph), 'The Adventure of Catleen Casha'(ph), who is a film star and who comes to realize that she is killing the people that she loves; in fact her lover committed suicide, and the effect it has on people(??) is disastrous, and finally she decided to go to go to an analyst. And the second volume 'Vagadu'(ph), which...it casts(??) Vagadu(ph) in its title anyway...

Vagadu...?

Vagadu(ph) is an African word meaning something like life force I think. And the second volume is simply an account of an analysis which he got I think from a tale(??) given him by Blanche.

When I asked was she an orthodox analyst, I was already aware that in encouraging her patients to meet and so on that this was itself unorthodox. But I meant that actually in analysis itself...

Well, after some time...one thing I can say about her is that she had a very strong, decisive influence, which is hardly ever acknowledged on Jacques Lacoit(??), who became the sort of great...

Yes, indeed.

Yes. That was I think as a young man, he saw a lot of her, and I think that she influenced him. The sad thing is that at the end of her life they found that all her papers had got destroyed, and she never published anything really, or very little. Galmar(ph) published three introductory lectures of Freud, an earlier work of his quite a long time ago, which she did in

collaboration with her husband. And one day, after I'd known her for quite some time, and I went on seeing them when I went back to France after the War, "Blanche, it seems to me that your kind of analysis is far more like Jung than Freud". She said, "Oh, that's interesting, I've never had time to read hm!" So...

Yes. What one gets is a picture of a different sort of intellectual life altogether in Paris.

Yes.

These soirées, subconsciously intellectual and artistic, where people are invited from different fields to meet.

Well, when I say it was artistic, I mean that Balthus...there were two or three magnificent early Balthus paintings in the Jouves' apartment, and he used occasionally to make an appearance.

But if you go back to your account and knowledge of the surrealists, again this formalizing, this socializing, this regularity of...

Regular meetings, that's true, yes.

It's something that's very un-English, isn't it? It's something very much...

I have been in Kathleen Raine's house in Chelsea so many times, and met so many different people there. But not on quite such a regular basis, no. And there were these regular meetings of the Hampstead...at Roland Penrose's place in Hampstead, Haverstock Hill in 1936, but it didn't...became much more intermittent after the (INAUDIBLE 2/3 WORDS).

Mhm. What do you think makes Jouve such a remarkable poet? I mean why have you made the claim, as you do in the introduction to your 'Collected Poems 1988', you said there something to the effect that Jouve was one of the greatest poets it had been your privilege to know. And I was intrigued by that, because there's very little Jouve available in English.

That's true I'm afraid. It's only since his death has he become more available I think to the French public. Although his 'Complete Works', which is not complete, are rather expensive, or like the Mercule France(ph) version of the (INDECIPHERABLE TITLE) sort of book on india-paper. But now at least you can get the novel I was talking about, 'Cuts'(ph and 'Vagadu'(ph) in (INDECIPHERABLE). A film's being made of his first novel, 'Purina 1880'(ph). Not a very good one. And now I think they're making a film of the other one which I've been talking about. But he is the kind of man who really made quite a...pushed recognition and publicity away from him really. He was the most dedicated writer I have ever come across.

What else were you doing in Paris in '37 and '38? What prompted you to go back to Paris in the first place?

Well I just felt I'd be more at home there, and more stimulated. And I've always loved Paris very much from the first time I went there. And I used to get so bored in England, living in a suburb.

You were still living at home?

I had a lot of friends in England, yes, a certain number of friends.

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You were still living at home?

Yes.

Isn't this odd, or not, that someone as precocious as a writer, a published writer now, you published your own book, Holderlin's 'Madness' in 1938.

That was published by Dent in 1938. That was inspired by the Jouve book you know, I would never have written it without that.

Mhm. You had been to Spain, you had lived in Paris. And yet in England you continued to live at home. Was this purely economic, or...?

Yes, it was purely economic really, yes. I tried to live in London as I was telling you, in Southwark you know, but...in the end I really couldn't afford to live in... My parents weren't rich at all, and I never had a private income, and didn't earn very much as a writer.

End of F1382 Side B

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F1383 Side A

This is tape four of an interview with David Gascoyne recorded on the Isle of Wight on Saturday, March the 9th, 1991.

We were talking, David, about Pierre Jean Jouve, about the way in which his poetry had influenced you, or was beginning to influence you during tht period of '37 '38, following your discovering of his own translation of Holderlin's poems.

Yes. The first collection of poems of Jouve that I read after I'd made the discovery of his translations was a collection published by NFLF Gallimard in 1934 I think, called 'Suer de Sang', 'Bloody Sweat' I suppose you'd translate that, which has an extraordinary introduction which I have translated, and it was published as a little pamphlet by Words Etcetera two or three years ago, which is a...well it's a kind of manifesto of poetry which is influenced by the discoveries of death psychology, his wife being a Freudian analyst, and mysticism which is a kind of quest for absent god, or absent being, deity, whatever, however you like to put it. The dark life of the soul, and the kind of material from the unconscious which reflects the appalling state of Europe, with Hitler coming more into the ascendant. There is this volume, and then there is Kirier(ph), and then there is 'Natier Cileste'(ph). And in fact in his poetry there is this combination of, or rather the description of spirituality in terms of erotic or material of...in fact the saying that that which is above it is as that which is below, is very much applicable to him. And he does see that as a kind of second movement that...movement of the spirit can be expressed in terms of erotic experience and vice versa.

He was himself interested in St. Teresa wasn't he?

Oh yes, and in the Reespruch(ph), and St. Catherine of Sienna.

These being...

Yes, this is more apparent in his earlier collection, 'Les Noces', 'The Nuptials', published in 1924, around that time I think.

How did you live in Paris?

Well I lived in an attic in the Rue de la Bouché, overlooking the roofs of Notre Dame; not on the river, but just one removed from the river. And in the apartment beneath mine was e.e. cummings whom I would see from time to time, though I never got to know him very well, and his very beautiful American photographer wife. And also at the same time I was seeing an entirely different set of people, that was Henry Miller and Lawrence Durrell and Anais Nin there, and their circle.

Did these become friends of yours?

Yes. I saw them a lot. And I wasn't...I mean I didn't see Fondane every day by any means, or the Jouves, but...when I wasn't seeing them I was seeing Miller and his circle really. Because I think I got to know Miller because Cyril Connolly, whom I met in Paris in 1933 was published by Obelisk Press, (INAUDIBLE 2 WORDS) who also published Miller's book; before 'Tropic of Cancer' he published a book called 'Black Spring', which was a collection of essays and articles. And one of the items in it was called 'A Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere', and I think Miller had told...I mean Connolly, who had met Miller through having mixed with the same publisher, told him there was a young surrealist in England, and so he gave him my address, and Miller sent me this thing, it was a book called 'Black Spring' in proof before it was published.

Really.

And so I wanted to go to see him when I got back to Paris. And I was immediately introduced to Lawrence Durrell, and read his 'The Black Book' in manuscript. And we became great friends. And as I was saying, how did I live, how did I manage to support myself without any money? In fact I don't know how I should have...avoid severe malnutrition, not to say starvation in 1937-'8 if I hadn't been able to go to see Lawrence Durrell and his wife Nancy every day. It was quite a long walk from where I lived to the (INAUDIBLE), but that is what happened.

You mean they fed you?

Yes.

Durrell himself couldn't have had a lot of money at that time.

Well no, they weren't rich exactly, but they weren't altogether penniless.

What did you do with Miller and Durrell and Anais Nin?

(LAUGHS) Talked to them! I got on all right with Anais Nin for a short time. In fact she writes in her journal about how I introduced her to this novel of Jouve which I was so enthusiastically talking to you about just now. She became very enthusiastic about it. There's a thing which I've been wanting to write for a long time, and particularly in the sense of Miller and Anais and June, whom I never met, have come into...a certain notoriety due to this recent film, which you must have read reviews on. I haven't seen it. Anais, she knew that I was very poor, in order to allow me to earn a certain amount of money she offered to let me type some of the volumes of her still unpublished diary. I was very glad to do this, although I was not a very good typist, but had a little portable you know. But during that time I had to go back to England for one reason or another, and in order to finish doing this typing I took the journal with me. And later when she found out that I had taken this French journal out of the country and across the Channel, I mean she was so furious we had a terrible row, and I don't think we ever spoke to each other again after that. I used to...I have been to meals on her barge which was moored near the Louvre you know, she rented from the film actor Misha Simone(ph), 'La Belle Aurore'(ph).

Where was Miller living?

He was living at the Villa Sera(ph), which was not too far from the studio that Dali had had at one time.

What did you think of Miller's writing?

Well I wasn't too enthusiastic about 'Tropic of Cancer', but at his best I was very enthusiastic, yes. In fact I wrote one of the earliest reviews in England in this little review about him.

That would be a review of what?

'Tropic of Cancer'.

Of 'Tropic of Cancer', yes.

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And I probably mentioned 'Black Spring', which I really prefer. And I think that 'Colossus of Maroussi' is probably his best book. And then there was all...I'm sorry, Larry Durrell was always saying to me, "You must come and stay with us in Corfu", but of course I never had enough money for the fare! But Miller actually went with him; I think the last time I saw Miller must have been when he went off in 1939 to go to Corfu. I think I had gone back to England by then anyway. I wrote...Durrell and I would argue about this that and the other, particularly about this... Anyway, I disagreed with Durrell's...what shall we say, metaphysical outlook, and I wrote him a 30 page letter which he never replied to, but this was when he'd gone to Greece at the beginning of the War. And I got a postcard from Miller. The postcard was a picture of the gold mask of Agamemnon, which you may know, or seen the introduction of. And it simply said that he'd read the letter and that he agreed with it and said something like 'Bravo' or something like that.

Really?

Yes. I wish I'd kept it, but it disappeared in that disastrous tallboy that I was talking about earlier.

So you were mixing in that particular circle. You were meeting with Jouve. By the way, what happened to Jouve?

When the War came, one of the people whom I'd met, a friend of...well, an acquaintance...no, a friend of Connolly, an Irishman I was extremely fond of called Desmond Rhine. His first wife's American and his second I think was Australian, and his third wife died only just recently, Mary Rhine. Anyway, he never did anything much, except when he was young and had not spent all his money he bought out a special limited edition of 'The Artificial Princess' of Firbank, which was illustrated by Burra. Anyway, he was one of Blanche's patients in the Seventies and I saw him quite a lot.

But you were telling me what happened to Jouve.

What happened to Jouve. Well when the War came, and the Germans invaded France and then Paris, and everybody fled, and Desmond drove Blanche and Pierre and...I can't remember who else, to the unoccupied zone, and they finally got to a place called Jeune Fils(ph) in Haute Provence, and from there to Geneva, where he spent the rest of the War.

And did he return to Paris after the War?

Yes he did, to find that that wonderful apartment on the Rue de Tournon, he was never going to get it back. I think he managed to recover the mediaeval statue or statuette of the Virgin which I refer to in the poem called 'The Fabulous Grass'.

That's the poem dedicated to Blanche, his wife, isn't it?

That's right. And there's a collection of his called 'La Vierge de Paris'(ph), which refers to this statuette, which was in a niche in his study where he wrote in the Rue in the Tournon. But he managed to get a large studio apartment which had belonged to one of the sons of Stravinsky. Again south of Paris, near the Porte d'Orléans...doesn't really matter the name of the street, but...

And when did he die?

Oh, he lived to a great age. He died in 1970-something I think.

So did you see more...

'74 was it? I saw him until just before I 'went off my head' in 1964, and was sent back to England. Blanche came to see me in the psychiatric hospital run by the (INAUDIBLE) church which I'd been sent.

Yes. That was a parenthesis because I wasn't sure what had happened to Jouve after the War.

Of course as soon as I went back in 1947, '48 I was seeing him all the time, and I took up analysis again with Blanche for a while.

You did? Fondane of course was...

He died in Birkenau.

In Birkenau. He was gassed. Now, so it was during this period in Paris, the pre-war period, '37 to '39 when you were forced to return obviously when the War broke out, just before.

I didn't want to go on living in Paris.

This was the time when you were writing the poems that were brought together in the collection published in 1942, '43.

Yes, with Sutherland, yes.

With Sutherland's illustrations, called 'Poems, 1937-'42'.

That's right, yes.

Which volume of course was greeted by Steven Spender as the poetic event of the year in 1942.

Well, I had a very nice letter from Louis MacNeice among other people about it, though I never got to know him very well, but...

How did it come about that...

I remember reading a review in the New Statesman when it was published and thinking, my God, they've taken me seriously; I'm afraid it quite alarmed me really. Because it was my first book of any consequence.

How did you get...

I'd already had this tag...you know, English surrealist poet, which took me a long time to get rid of. I never actually adjured to surrealism, I just ceased to want to write that sort of poem you know, or quasi automatic writing, without correcting what you'd written; I became more interested in creating...saying something which had form as well as content you know.

This suggests does it not a fundamental weakness in automatism.

Oh yes. Well I think most surrealist poets themselves agreed after a time that that was not sufficient.

The interesting thing is that Breton's poems are often anything but automatic.

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Yes, that's true. In March I think Gomar(ph) are publishing for the first time a collection of his 'Poem-Objects'.

Oh really?

Yes, a reproduction. And I hope to be able to review it.

How did it come about...

It was one of the most interesting things he ever...

Yes, I agree. How did it come about that Sutherland illustrated your...the 'Poems, '37-'42'?

Well I have written about that in an article that I wrote for a volume of tributes to Tambimutto, who was my publisher.

But could you tell us something about that?

Well it was because Tambi had the idea of publishing a series of collections, with illustrations by contemporary artists. And Kathy Raine got Barbara Hepworth to do drawings for her 'Stone and Flower'. Nicholas Will(ph) got Lucien Freud I think to do something for his collection. And I had been friendly with Peter Watson since 1938 in Paris...

Peter Watson was the publisher of the 'Poetry London'...

No, Peter Watson was a very rich son of Naypole(ph) Dairies magnate, and he spent his money on collecting pictures. He had a very luxurious apartment in Paris in the Rue du Bac, which is a famous address, and he had an American boyfriend called Dylan Foots(ph). And I've written in my Paris journal about having lunch there with Steven Spender, Ines, his first wife, and Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas and so on. No, he financed 'Horizon' during the War.

Ah yes, I've got it wrong. I was trying to think of the person...

No connection with Nicholas and Watson, I don't know who they were.

No. So it wasn't the Watson in Nicholas and Watson who had financed 'Poetry London'.

No, it was Tamby who was...'Poetry London Editions', which was part of the firm called Nicholas and Watson; a sort of separate department of this firm, with offices in Manchester Square. And he said, "I want to publish your poems, and who would you like to illustrate them?" And I'd seen paintings of Sutherland in...not only in the...one or two in the Surrealist Exhibition, although he wasn't a surrealist painter officially. And I'd seen more in Peter's collection, and so I asked Peter if he would think that...they did ask Sutherland whether he would do it with Tamby.

It's a very successful fusion, isn't it?

Yes.

It makes a very handsome book.

Yes. So I was very lucky.

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Did you get to know Sutherland as a consequence of that?

Yes I did for a time. I could have got to know him better I think, if I'd made more of an effort. (BREAK IN RECORDING)

David, where were you at the outbreak of war?

Well I was living in my parents' house in Teddington, Grove Terrace Teddington. Quite a nice garden suburb build specially for Shellmex employees, but my parents got a house there with quite a big garden with a mulberry tree in it. And we got to know a family living on the same estate round the corner called Shaw-Lawrence. And there was a couple with two children who were in the their late teens, early twenties, Peter and Betty, or Bettina Shaw-Lawrence. And they'd just moved to Richmond, 30 The Green, Richmond, and the day that war broke out I remember going over to Richmond and coming back with them in a tremendous thunder storm which was very dramatic at the outbreak of the war. It started up in this huge spectacular thunder storm. And the phoney war went on, nothing happened. I remember being in London in the very early days of the War and there was an air-raid warning and there was a party in Charlotte Street I think, everybody rushed out of the shelter. But after very long, nobody did that any more. And I resigned myself to being called up sooner or later, and I went eventually, at the end of 1939 I think to a medical examination in Kingston. And to my surprise, they...they were very polite to me and said, "Would you like to sit down?" I'm not sure they didn't say 'Sir'(??)! And finally said, "Well, you're C3 and you won't be called up for a very long time, and probably not at all". So...and then I found myself, you know, with nothing to do in the War, and I could sort of (INAUDIBLE WORD) myself to... And I thought, well it's the experience of my generation, why should I be exempt? Because I wasn't a pacifist. This young couple, brother and sister, the Shaw-Lawrences, Peter Shaw-Lawrence was a pacifist, and he went to a tribunal and got exempted. But before the end of the War he had joined up voluntarily. Well anyway, yes, Gavin Ewart was stationed at Kingston and he used to come to see us occasionally at that time. Next year I went to stay with Peter Watson, and Steven Spender was there, in a place in south Devon, and I can't remember the name exactly. But it can't have been far from Dartmouth, because I remember walking over to see my great uncle, the actor Cyril Maude in his old age. He'd finally retired there after having lived in London at Bexhill for many years, and he'd married again. Which is interesting, because he had encouraged the debut of Rachel Kempson, Michael Redgrave's wife, now Lady Redgrave, and also an actress in the Coventry Rep with whom I acted called Ruby Head, who is now forgotten. But I'm jumping ahead really, I'm sorry. I'm trying to get on to the stage thing. Before I went on the stage, this friend of mine, Desmond Rhine who I mentioned the previous session, who was a fellow patient with me of Blanche Reverchon, the wife of Pierre Jean Jouve. He had come back to England at the beginning of the War after he had driven the Jouves to safety in Switzerland, and he finally came back with his second wife Isabel. And he got himself a job on what was called an HM examination vessel with a friend of his who was a painter, a requisitioned yacht at Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight. And he wanted to give up this job, and he had to find somebody to take his place, so I said I'd do it. That was my first experience of the Isle of Wight, of Yarmouth in fact. And there was this rather beautiful yacht; I suppose in peacetime it would have been a luxury yacht, called...'HMS Llantony'(ph) it was called.

HMS...?

Llantony, LLANTO...you know, it was associated with...the (INAUDIBLE WORD) isn't it?

Yes.

And...I don't want to go on too long about this, but that was my experience as a ship's cook for a while until the whole thing was taken over by the Navy proper, instead of being the Merchant Navy, and so I wasn't fit to go on doing that job. It was 24 hours on, 24 hours off, and we'd go up and down the Solent, and if there was any vessel coming in or out of Southampton Water we'd go alongside. And an old Naval gent - we'd have one on board you know, off and on - would get up and go out on deck with a loud hailer, with a loudspeaker, and shout messages, you know, to the vessel! And when they weren't doing that they would do petit-point, something like...yes, embroidery! (LAUGHS)

And how long were you on this...?

Not very long.

...this rather unlikely sort of...trip on the boat?

We used to have special rations. I used to go shopping in Yarmouth in the morning. And we had a cockney mechanic, an engineer I should say, not a mechanic, who used to say, "What, none of your Chinese messes!" (LAUGHING) But I did manage quite a good steak and kidney pie on one occasion. But I'm digressing. That's what I did during the War: it's one of the things I did. But then, another thing I did was to go to stay, in 1940, at Marshfield with John Davenport, who had just come back from living at Hollywood, where he'd known people like Huxley and Stravinksy. And he was married to a school mate of my friend Kay Hine, one of the Forbes-Robertson twins. And I went to this sort of house party at Marshfield, in a converted oast-house north of Bath. And Lennox Barclay was there and Arnold Cook and William Glock(ph). And somebody was playing the piano all day every day, and they had just received review copies of Bela Bartók's 'Mikrokosmos', a series of pieces.

'Mikrokosmos'?

'Mikrokosmos', a series of six volumes of studies for the piano, which I taught myself to play a little later: the first volumes of it anyway, not the most difficult part. And through Davenport I think I must have heard that there was to be a Bath Festival, and it was interrupted by the War, but in spite of the War they started to have it. And I got myself a part in a production in Bath, at the Pump Room of Jane Austen's novel 'Persuasion', part of which takes place in Bath you know. And I had two or three tiny walk-on parts, and the girl who falls off the Cob in Lyme Regis in the play was played by Joan Greenwood. Now the whole thing was produced by a German woman refugee whose father was a famous director in Germany, in the Weimer Republic, her name was Dorothy Alexander. And that's how I got to know her. I think I was introduced to her by...probably by John Davenport. And then, a little later she started a little repertory company in Welwyn Garden City, and I was in the cast and Joan Greenwood was in the cast. And Eugene Wilson's(??) daughter Anne, whom I'd met and got to know in Paris before the War, who was a member of the cast, I think she ASN(ph). And we did three or four plays in Welwyn Garden City. And then the brother of...no, the boyfriend of Bettina Shaw-Lawrence, whom I've talked about and I know from Richmond and Teddington, was working...had a small part in Coventry Rep, which were touring for ENSA in a terrible vulgar farce called, 'It's a Wise Child'. And so, there again a place was free, and I went and was auditioned at Drury Lane, and got myself a part in this company. I was terrible to begin with, but after I'd learnt the lines I'd gradually worked into it and I was in this company for a year, different town every week and a different camp every night.

So in fact your family inheritance...

Well yes, I called myself Daved Emery, because that was my other family name.

...as far as the theatrical side is concerned, at this point came out.

Well I gradually learnt the sort of basics of technique and how to project, and how to stand still and one or two other tricks. But I never was really a very good actor. Then I thought at that time that I wanted to possibly write poetic drama, or a drama of some sort. It was a good way of learning from the inside.

Yes. You may not have been very good, but did you enjoy that?

I did really, yes. I liked the company on the whole. There were always one or two people I didn't like very much, but they could always be avoided. It's a funny life. We would have lodgings, though if you felt you could afford it you could go to a hotel, and I did that on quite a few occasions. I was in my book collecting period, and everywhere we went there were second-hand bookshops, and one could make the most wonderful discoveries, and that was something to do during the day time. Then one would have an early meal, and then one would have to be picked up or meet the coach at about six or half past six to seven, and then drive out to some camp, a different one every night, Army, Navy and Air Force - not very often the Navy of course.

And what did you play?

Well it was a farce called 'It's a Wise Child', and the punch-line was when the ingenue or the young leading lady says, "I think I'm about to become a mother"! And it was a really ghastly play that was converted into English from the American, and it was really about a baseball player I think originally from Chicago, and it became a cricketer from Canterbury who had put the girl in the family way, or at least she pretended that he had.

It wasn't exactly high drama then!

It certainly wasn't, no.

Did you go on to play other parts...

But the troops loved it.

Well off course. But did you go on to play other parts in other plays?

Not with the Coventry Repertory, no.

Did your theatrical career come to and end at the end of that year, or did you...

No, well after that I got a job...I got the part of a priest in Twelfth Night, with a company, I've forgotten, an actor whose now gone and forgotten, Richard Hudd, Dicky Hudd we called him, with Wendy Hiller and Peter Copley and Julian Glover and one or two other not altogether forgotten names. And that was for munitions workers instead of the troops. It lasted about three months.

So you actually worked with some of the...really some of the best actors and actresses that were around. Well Wendy Hiller and Joan Greenwood.

And eventually, the first play of.....

<u>End of F1383 Side A</u>

F1383 Side B

After 'Twelfth Night' you were in the first play by Ronald Miller...

Miller. Yes, it was called 'Murder From Memory'. It was about a psychic detective played by Ernest Milton. And the first scene was in a railway carriage, there was a snowstorm, and everybody was stranded in the railway carriage in the snowstorm, and they could see a house blazing with lights like the Marie Celeste, and they go there and it's completely empty. And I played the part of a young man, and it really was a very small part, but I was in this railway carriage, and then they ordered the passengers to go into the house, including Ernest Milton who was the sort of medium. And then they sort of solved the mystery of what had happpened in this house. And because of the snowstorm I caught cold, and I had sneezed 30 times in the first act. And then I was sent to bed. But in the course of the second act I walked in my sleep and had to fall downstairs and be caught at the bottom. And then at the end of the last act I had to open the door and put my head round and say, "Has anything happened?" And by that time absolutely everything you can imagine had happened. And that brought the house down. But it hadn't a very long run, because it was during the blackout, but not only the blackout, it wasn't air-raids it was fog. And so nobody was coming to the theatre very much.

What year was this?

I actually got to know Peter Ustinov briefly, because his first wife had a small wife in this play, and he used to come to the theatre and pick her up, and I would go out with them to supper occasionally.

Did he strike you...

The leading lady was an actress now forgotten called Sophie Stewart.

How did Peter Ustinov strike you? Did he seem then a remarkable figure?

Oh yes, he was brilliant, yes. Very funny.

And what year was this? Well, it'll be in this...(LEAFING THROUGH BOOK) 1942.

Oh yes, that's right.

So this sees you well into the War.

Yes.

How did you feel, David, about the War at this stage, and about the fact that you were not on active service? Did that matter a great deal to you?

Not very much, no. My memory of the War is, as I say, very unchronoligal and confused.

What happened after 'Murder From Memory'?

Well it seemed to me that that was almost towards the end of the War, but I suppose it wasn't. I remember staying with Peter Watson on two occasions, one as I say early in the War in south Devon. Then he was in Glasgow; I don't think we went together, but we met up together in Glasgow. And David Archer had moved there with his bookshop. And I met Jan Glavler(ph) and Sidney Graham, W.S.Graham.

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And you might have met then the two Roberts.

Yes I did, yes, that's right.

That's Robert MacBryde and Robert Colquhoun, who were students at the Glasgow School of Art.

And another thing that happened to me during the War...that's right, they were... Another thing that happened to me during the War, I was thinking really of Peter Watson because he must have had pictures of both of them I think at one time, and certainly he had a Yankov(ph). But he put up the money for 'Horizon', and the first winter of war I went to stay with him in his apartment in Grosvenor Square...no, Berkeley Square. And that was when he and Stephen Spender and Cyril Connolly decided, you know, he'd put up the money for them to do 'Horizon', and I was sort of in on that from the beginning. And I got to know Lucien Freud and Johnny Craxton during that time. And Michael Redgrave. Another thing that I remember during the War is being in and out of the 'Horizon' office quite a lot, and seeing...and I saw a lot of Peter, he had a flat in...is it called Palace Gate? Near the road that leads from Knightsbridge to High Street Kensington. On the other side of the road from the Albert Memorial there are two gates; I think one of them is called Palace Gate.

Queen's Gate.

Queen's Gate, that's right. It was a very modern block of flats there.

This is Peter Watson?

Yes.

Yes. Did you spend much time during that period... Of course it was very much the period of Fitzrovia.

Yes.

Did you spend much time during that period in the pubs of Fitzrovia?

Yes. There was a basement club, which wasn't the same room, but it was rather similar to what became the Colony(??) Room. I mean it was in a basement instead of on the first floor, in the same street.

What was that called?

I can't remember.

Was that the Mandrake?

The Mandrake was quite near. Rather superior people used to go to that.

But did you have...

Right at the beginning of the War there was a...you know Freddie Gore, well he had a German refugee wife called Benedicta, an extremely intelligent young woman who was a friend of an American friend of mine, Buffy Johnson in Paris. And I met up with her again in the early part of the War. And we used to go to the Swing Club together, near the Windmill Theatre.

And one night we were there, swinging madly, and the man who ran the club had bad gambling debts, he was a compulsive gambler, the bookies sent round a gang to sort of beat him up to get the money out of him, so we had to hide under the table. But I did swing very energetically from time to time in those days.

And did you frequent at all the Wheatsheaf and the other pubs with Dylan Thomas and...?

Occasionally. The thing was, in those days I really...I hadn't enough money to drink shorts. I think when I was on tour if I went to the pub which we often did, the company, then I did drink. But I never really enjoyed drinking beer after beer after beer, and I don't think people drank lagers much in those days.

Not at all.

I was not a very good pub crawler. There's a description of a pub crawl in the journal, which is rather typical of what the sort of experience was for me.

What about Tambi, Tambimutto?

Yes, well I saw a lot of him because he published my poems in 1943. And I was often in and out of Manchester Square of course, where his office was. And his nearest pub for 'Poetry London' offices was in Oxford Street, the 'Pig and Pound', do you know that one?

Mhm. It no longer exists.

Oh. It was sort of done up and became rather boring after a time.

There were several pubs of some importance at that time. There was the Black Horse and the Wheatsheaf in Rathbone Place.

I also used to know quite a few people in the BBC, particularly Louis MacNeice. There are quite a few other people I knew. And there was the pub oppose the...not Broadcasting House, the other building behind, I think they've given up now.

The other great pub for the BBC was The George wasn't it, in Mortimer Street.

Yes. But there was another building besides Broadcasting House, behind it there.

Oh really, I didn't know that.

Yes.

Had they taken over the hotel opposite at that time?

Not during the War, at the time I'm thinking of. Louis MacNeice gave me a small part...well it was the time when the Allies took over Sicily, and Louis MacNeice wrote a thing on the spur of the moment about Sicily, including...who was the tyrannical emperor who was a pupil of Plato? You know, I mean.

Alexandra?

No, the tyrannical emperor of...Sicilian...oh well, anyway. How awful I should forget this completely...(BREAK IN RECORDING)

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You mentioned earlier that you had met Lucien Freud during this period.

Mm. I first met him in Berkeley Square, with Peter Watson. Because Peter Watson had a real flare for spotting young talent, and both Lucien and John Craxton were at that time pupils of, what's his name, Morris, Cedric Morris, you know. And they were often in London. And they were inseparable at that time. And I remember them doing things like climbing lamp-posts and setting fire to the newspapers of old men in the Underground and things like that, and then getting out at the next station! (LAUGHS) They were really wild. But the drawing that Scoob Books are using for the new edition of my journals was done by Lucien at that time. Of course I never got to know him very well, but we did spend about a week together in this house that Peter had rented and I was staying.

Where was that?

It was near Lewes, somewhere inland from Lewes in Sussex.

Mhm. And this would be towards the end, then...

It must have been because the buzz-bombs were going over all the time. What are they called?

V-2s.

V-2s, that's right.

This was Hitler's last offensive.

Yup.

And that was where you were...

I had a narrow escape in a taxi, going along the Marylebone Road, just past Madame Tussaud's, when one of them went off in mid-air just above the taxi.

Really?

Yes. And another one came over Teddington, and my father had built a bunker...I mean an air-raid shelter in the garden at Teddington. And we hardly ever used it; I used to sleep there sometimes when I felt like it. But one night we really had to go there, and one of these V-2s exploded at Popes Grove, you know, near Twickenham, which is quite near us.

Where were you...

This friend of mine...well the time when I was acting in London, at the Ambassadors, and all through the War I used from time to time when I was in London go to see my friend Desmond Rhine, who by that time had married Isabel and had some children by her. And he had a beautiful place near South Ken. Underground station. It was concealed from the street, and (INAUDIBLE), and there was these grounds and a studio which was used by Bianca Loebenstein(ph).

By...?

Bianca Loebenstein(ph). She had been married to Prince Loebenstein(ph), and he was one of Blanche Reverchon's patients.

And was she an actress or...

Oh no, she was a sculptress.

A sculptress.

Yes. A German refugee sculptress married to Prince Hubertus Loebenstein(ph) who wrote a book of self analysis published by Fabers. I can't remember what it was called, a curious book.

And this was towards the end of the War.

Well all through the War Desmond lived there, and from time to time I would go there. And one of this enthusiasms, and someone he knew well was Norman Douglas. And I remember being introduced and going to a dinner party and meeting Douglas there, through Desmond.

Where were you at the end of the War?

Well, not long after the War ended my father retired from the Midland Bank. He'd become Chief Cashier at the head office of the Midland, and he retired and they decided to go to Vancouver - I mean Vancouver Island, British Columbia. So I was left behind. And I had lodgings for a while in South Kensington, and then I went to...a rather disastrous period of my life, I went to...I was invited to go and stay, live, in the house of Billy Crozier, who was married to Eric Crozier who was in Benjamin Brittan's...

Librettist.

That's right. Yes, the librettist. I was trying to know the seaside place.

At Aldeburgh.

Aldeburgh, yes. And I remember going to the first performance of Peter Grimes with Billy. But before I'd stayed there very long, Eric Crozier took the occasion of leaving Billy and walking out, and it looked as though it was my fault, you know, but it wasn't really. He not long after married one of the principal singers in the company. We didn't like one another(??) anyway. And I was a serious sort of amphetamine addict by that time. One thing that I am most grateful to Billy Crozier was that she arranged to have all my teeth removed because they were terribly bad. It's a wonder how I managed to get on to the stage at all I had such awful teeth. But we quarrelled the whole time. Now she's become a friend of Jeremy Reath(ph), and he gets on all right with her.

So this was towards the end of the War.

This was after the end of the War.

After the end of the War. After your parents had left.

That's right.

And you had lodgings in South Kensington.

Yes. After they'd actually left for British Columbia I also went to live in the flat of Robin Waterfield, you know who I mean?

Yes, indeed.

He had moved from the shop in Cecil Court, near Watkins, to a little bookshop in Marylebone, near Marylebone Town Hall and Library.

This is Robin Waterfield the bookshop person who had the big bookshop in Oxford, yes. (BREAK IN RECORDING) You mentioned that by this time you were a serious amphetamine...

Yes, I was, yes.

Addict. And I think this might be the best moment to talk about how that had come about. How did you become an amphetamine addict?

Well I read to you last time the thing I've written recently about it. And as I said, I first heard of Benzedrine, amphetamines - I don't think people referred to them as amphetamines in those days, it was Benzedrine - that it was recently discovered from an American friend of mine in Paris, a friend of the Durrells and Henry Miller and so on. And then, as I suffered from perennial catarrh, and I still do, Benzedrine inhaler for catarrh came on the market and was to be found in any chemist shop. And I took it, and I found that by sniffing it a great deal it produced a sort of high, and it also was very good if you were feeling depressed, and it would re-arouse your interest in things, you know. And then I began to discover that by taking out this wadding inside and soaking it in water, and shaking it up with water and then swallowing the water, one got a very powerful dose. It kept one awake, and it reduced ones appetite, that's why it was so often used for slimming later, until it was banned altogether.

When you discovered this, was this in London or in Paris?

In London. Not in Paris; I heard about it in Paris just before the War. And after a few years of that influence, Benzedrine produced...and I not only did this with inhalers, but a friend of...a doctor of Julian Trevelyan's, and Julian introduced me to him, Dr. Blut, who lived in Notting Hill Gate somewhere...

Is that Brut?

No, Blut, for blood, the German word for blood, which is...a very suitable name. He was...his principal patient was Anna Kavan, who was sort of a licensed drug addict, you've probably heard of her.

No.

Anna Kavan.

Oh, Anna Kavan, yes.

With a 'K'. And I used to go to him once a week, and he would give me a powerful injection of a cocktail of ox blood and methadone(??). But methadone(??) was also used as a catarrh inhaler, and it was rather better than Benzedrine I think. The effect was much the same.

So you moved on to that?

Yes, it was the sort of drug that really didn't cost you a fortune like heroin, but you know, to be an addict you have to really have a lot of money.

So what was Dr. Blut up to?

He had a passion for injecting people! He was a strange character. He contributed to 'Horizon' once, wrote an article about the psychoanalyst therapist Benzwanger(ph), you know who I mean?

No, but...

Well he's a less well-known figure in the history of psychiatry, but...quite interesting theories of his own. He was a sort of specialist in Benzwanger(ph). And Connolly published an article by him. He was a refugee of course and he had been the Svengali of Conrad Vite(ph) at one time.

Conrad...?

Vite(ph).

Being who?

Oh well he was a very famous German film actor, who appeared in the first...made his name in 'Dr. Caligari'. Then he was a stage actor in the Weimer Republic, and then he came to England and made a lot of films here. Went to Hollywood in fact.

Yes. Julian Trevelyan had recommended this doctor to you.

He was going to him for treatment too.

For catarrh, or...?

No, Julian had a serious breakdown at the end of his marriage to Ursula Darwin.

And so, these injections were supposed to help you with your catarrh?

No no, no.

What were they supposed to help you to do?

Well to counter depression I suppose.

I see, so they were really like a weekly injection of something that would give you...

Yes, that's right.

...a fairly powerful sort of 'high'.

Well yes, to counter...an anti depressant is one way of putting it.

And were you still on the Benzedrine at this time, or...?

No. More methodine(??).

Didn't this constant injestion of Benzedrine and then methodine(??) cause you to be ill?

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Well I was, I had a burst stomach abscess you know.

And this was during the War?

That was during the War, yes.

Because I remember you telling me that your mother I think found you...

Yes, she found me flat on the floor on the first floor, you know, at Teddington. And I was alone with her that day, and she came up and found me, and I couldn't move. And she sent for the doctor, and the doctor had diagnozed a rupture. I was losing blood, and if I hadn't been rushed to hospital and had a complete blood transfusion I could have died probably.

How long did it take you to recover from that?

Well I was in hospital at Mortlake, which was...the London Hospital had moved out there because of the War, for about six weeks. And in the end I ran away, because at the end of six weeks the doctor said, "Well I think you're well enough to go home now", and then he changed his mind, and I was so angry that...I was allowed to dress in a dressing-gown, and somehow I got a pair of shoes, and crept out of the wash-room into the grounds, and climbed over the wall and caught a bus: I had enough money in my pocket to get to Richmond. And my mother had to go back the next day to collect my belongings, and they said to her, "We will never have him again even if he's dying"! (LAUGHS) So, that was a funny experience.

But did you go straight back on to the Benzedrine, or on to the methodine(??)?

Well, before very long, yes.

For how long did you go on taking this?

Well it went on for many years, yes. When I first went to the States with Kathy Raine, I got depressed there; one could get Benzedrine I think but not very often, and in fact...I remember my first appearance at the YMHA, where Dylan Thomas had been the year before, we were billed as three younger poets, you know, Cathy Raine, W.S.Graham and myself. And I had to try to find Benzedrinein New York somehow, and it was not a very good dose, and it was...it was rather a failure really.

This was 1949?

No, this was 1951, '52 I was in the States for the first time.

Oh really.

Yes.

So you really had been...now this is a serious business; this is something like 11 years, or 12 years that you had been up and down, on and off these drugs.

That's right. And in France, when I was living in Aix and in Paris...

In the late Forties?

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No, from 1954 to 1964 I was still buying there what I could, a mild form of amphetamine called Maxeton(ph), which French students in universities used to take to pass their exams you know.

By the early Fifties it was possible to get Benzedrine in pill form, wasn't it?

Yes.

So were you then taking it in that form?

Not really. One couldn't get it. It was very difficult to get it prescribed; it was no longer obtainable over the counter. And the inhalers had been withdrawn from circulation I think by that time.

What do you think was the major effect of Benzedrine addiction, or amphetamine addiction?

Well the worst effect was oral hallucinations really, voices in your head the whole time.

When did they start?

In the late Forties I suppose, Fifties, the early Fifties.

So, for 8 years or so it was, apart from this dreadful illness when you lost blood and your stomach was very badly affected, you were taking it in order to counteract...

Well it was a massive...insult I think to the central nervous system.

But mostly in order to counteract depression?

Yes. I think so.

So a predisposition to depression...

Yes.

...was now really making itself powerfully felt?

Yes.

It could be of course that the actual...that the cure was the illness; that the depression was in fact a resonse to withdrawal perhaps, or whatever?

No, I think it was the other way round.

You simply were predisposed to depression, and this was a way of fighting it.

Cyclic depressions, yes. A mild form of manic depression, you know. I suppose (INAUDIBLE).

But after a number of years, the effects were otherwise, including hallucination, voices...

Yes.

Do you think your subsequent breakdown in...

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Well this one was...well, there was a mild one in London just at the end of the War, when my parents were still in England before they left for America.

Mhm. And they looked after you did they, during that...?

Well no. I was already living in Hampstead, in Belsize Park, in Downside Crescent in Billy Crozier's house.

And who looked after you then?

Well I suppose Billy did really.

I was going to say that the major breakdown, the first major breakdown occurred in 1954?

'64.

'64.

Yes, in Paris.

Yes. Do you think this could be traced back to the addiction?

Well undoubtedly it was the final result of that, yes. I really went completely out of my mind. I felt I had a divine message to communicate to De Gaulle, and I tried to get into the Palais de l'Elysée, and the guards, you know, the bodyguards of De Gaulle sort of came out of the little concierge...I'm sorry, I'm a bit tired, and I'm not being able to express myself very clearly. And I fought with them, and then I was kept in a prefecture near the Elysée.

This was a police hospital?

Yes. Well I went to Sainte-Anne you know, which is the...and I spent the night in a padded cell and a strait-jacket in Sainte-Anne. And I spent some time in a hospital in the suburbs of Paris.

And then you came back to England.

Yes, then they said, "You must go back to England, and on no account must you live alone". And then again, after I'd been living here with my parents, after my father's death I was in London and I tried to get into Buckingham Palace, and...you know that story anyway.

No I don't, but that story must tell me.

Well that's how I got into Horton you know.

Horton being the hospital on the Isle of Wight?

No, Epsom.

Oh, Epsom, I beg your pardon, yes.

You never heard or saw 'Myself Dicharged'?

No.

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Well it was a monologue I wrote for the radio, which is based on my experience of Horton. And a lunatic asylum and the various lunatics I met there, how three of them committed suicide. It was a dramatized form of...the basis was absolute fact really. It was first broadcast more than ten years ago I think now, on the Third Programme, or Radio 3. And then it was published in 'Resurgence'.

I think that will complete this tape.

End of F1383 Side B

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F1384 Side A

Tape five of an interview recorded with David Gascoyne at his home on the Isle of Wight on Sunday the 10th of March 1991.

David, I'd like to talk this morning about your period in Paris, post-war. I believe that after your acting career and various other adventures you went back to Paris in about 1947.

Yes.

Can you tell us something about how you lived in Paris during that period.

Well I'll tell you how I got there first.

Yes, do.

Before the War I occasionally used to run into a couple who were sitting in the terrace of the Café Flor I think probably, in St. Germain-de-Prés, a young American and his wife. A slightly enigmatic couple I thought. And then, to my surprise at the beginning of the War I had a letter from them, from America...from somewhere, it doesn't really matter, (INAUDIBLE) I think, asking me if I would go to to live with him and his wife in America. And of course I wrote to them you see and said it was impossible for me to leave the country. And then I forgot about it. But then he turned up again after the War in London, and said, "Would you like to come with me to Paris?" He had lost his wife by that time, I don't know what happened, she fell over a cliff or something (INAUDIBLE) (LAUGHS). And at the same time he was the boyfriend of Nancy Cunard, or rather Nancy Cunard had conceived a mysterious passion for this young man. And when she heard that I had...that there was a possibility of my going to Paris with - I can't even remember his Christian name, it's awful - she became absolutely furious, and rang up and said, "I'm going to come round and fight(??) you"! (LAUGHING) And I said, "Well come round then!" But nothing happened of course. There was nothing between us, I mean homosexually really. At least I didn't feel that way about him, and and I don't think he did about me. But it looked like that perhaps. And anyway, in the end I went with him, and he had...a friend had lent him an empty house, apartment, in a rather to me mysterious district of Paris, somewhere near the Champ d Mars, Eiffel Tower, that part of Paris rather, which I didn't know at all. And then he used to go out and leave me alone, and finally disappeared, leaving me stranded with absolutely no money at all! (LAUGHS)

But in the flat.

Yes, this was in the summer of 1947, yes. So, well I didn't know what to do. And I wandered about, and in fact a couple of nights I even slept under the bridge, the Pont Royal I think. Yes, that's right. Not the Pont Royal, the one at the end of the Rue du Bac. And I really can't explain how...what... But in the end I was adopted by the wife of a French diplomat, Roland de Margerie. And...I can't really remember how exactly how it came about, and I was installed in the Hotel Pas de Calais in the Sixième, in the Rue des Sts. Pères in the St. Germain district. And the de Margeries lived on the other side of Rue de St. Germain, in the Rue St. Guillaume. And during that year I was introduced by Jenny to an extraordinary number of interesting people. I'd go to lunch there at least once or twice a week, and there were always interesting guests. And...I can't remember the chronological order of the things that happened to me, but they were very interesting (INAUDIBLE) really.

Who did you meet?

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Oh, oh well, I went to see the Jouves again of course. I think I met for the first time one of my best friends now in Paris, a poet, perhaps not at all a famous poet, but he won the Prix Mallarmé which is quite prestigious, called Lézère(ph). But he was still quite well off at that time, he had a car, and I saw quite a lot of him. Through Jenny I met an enormous number of people which I can't...there was the biologist John Rothstar(ph); I remember her taking me to visit him somewhere on the outskirts of Paris. And he had a son who was probably a genius, but who was confined to bed; he must be dead now. So that was interesting. She was crazy about...she had a passion for (INDECIPHERABLE). One of the great events in her life was visiting Roqué(ph) in Switzerland, not long before he died. Murdered by a rose(ph), which was...that thing about the terrible blood poisoning he got from a rose(ph). Another...somebody else of great importance to her she talked about, because her husband Roland had been Ambassador in Thailand during the War, and (INAUDIBLE) a bit later he was accused by his colleagues or people (INAUDIBLE) of being a collaborationist, but he was never really that - I mean that's to say a supporter of Hitler. But I think he managed not to support either one or the other side, and he continued to be a (INAUDIBLE). And during this period Jenny met and became interested in, and fell under the spell of Teilhard de Chardin. And I hadn't heard of him before, but she told me before that one day he arrived for lunch. (INAUDIBLE).

What do you think of Teilhard de Chardin? How did he strike you in personal terms, and what did you come to think of his writings?

He was very...I mean he had a kind of aura of...I won't say sanctity, but of somebody, you know, very special. A quiet, reserved, I wouldn't say humble, but... And I later read him, not excessively. And I don't think I swallowed his theories whole...I felt that it was one way of seeing what was happening in the world. But he had very penetrating insights in some respects. I had before, during the War, experience in trying to express that book that I told you about that never came to anything, 'The Sound of Midnight'(ph). A feeling of subjectivity being a kind of universal entity, almost a substance. When he talks about the (INAUDIBLE) of human...it was very similar to that really.

Did that idea then or ever have any correspondence for you with Jungian notions of...?

Yes, but not this idea of subjectivity being a kind of universal substance almost. That's to say I have this...I think I have it still, I find it difficult to put into words, that when it is the ancient idea of the macrocosm and the microcosm being inter-related. And that without subjectivity - I think even stones have what you might call subjectivity in the sense I'm using the word - there would be no time; that's to say without time...I mean without subjectivity there would be no time, because time is really constantly being registered simultaneously by subjectivities all over the planet.

This is something similar to...

It's an idea I've had all my life.

...an idea I found last night in Kathleen Raine's latest book on Blake.

Yes.

In which she finds an idea similar to this in Blake. 'A rock, a cloud, a mountain...' this is a quotation from Blake, 'were now not vocal as in climes of happy eternity, where the land replies to the infant voice, and the lion to the man of years, giving them sweet instructions; where the cloud, the river and the field talk with the husbandman and the shepherd'.

Yes, they're certainly related to the idea, but the centre of the idea what I'm trying to say is that, time doesn't exist except in the consciousness or the subjectivity of simultaneous entities of human beings before any kind of being; registering the passing of the present moment into the past, simultaneously everywhere. Without that there would be no such thing as time.

Yes.

So... Well under the influence of Benzedrine really, because, as I think I've tried to explain when we were talking about that subject, that it enables you to form associations and ideas, see links of... And under the influence I worked had out a sort of a theory, and I got so excited about it I had to communicate it to people. And one of the people I...through Julian I got an introduction to...

Julian Trevelyan?

Julian Trevelyan, to Julian Huxley. I spent a morning discussing it with him, but of course he couldn't...I couldn't express myself sufficiently well for him to take it in. He was kind and interested, but couldn't see anything in my...

He was not likely to be particularly sympathatic to a metaphysic of this kind.

At one Christmas just after the War one of my brothers was staying at Teddington and had a car, and he drove me to Oxford, and I had an interview with an Oxford physicist. He must have been astonished at my telling him.

I'm sorry, you had...?

An interview with an Oxford physicist in the Banbury Road I think! Must have been I think on the Boxing Day you know, no warning whatsoever, and I turned up at his doorstep and tried to explain this mad theory.

Theory is not really the best word for it, is it?

No.

It might better be described, as it is the literature, as a vision, or a...an awareness even, or a...

Yes. I had this feeling at the time that it was something that had to be recognized by science in order to... But I no longer think of science, or world views in the same way now.

It would have been a function of what was still comparative youth, wouldn't it...

Yes.

...in your case, that one would want to see it as a system or as a...

I was trying to combine everything in one whole way of thought, you know, which I call 'dialectical super-materialism'.

Dialectical...

Super-materialism.

We're still talking about the post-war period?

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Yes. I tried to write this book immediately after the War, and finally gave up trying to find a publisher for it. Gollancz read it, Harion(ph) Press read it, but of course it was always turned down. It was full of quotations, it was a sort of mosaic of...

Does the manuscript still exist?

Well, during the War, I think I may have told you before, that I was in contact with Miss Stelph(ph) of the Gotham Book Mart in New York, and all through the War she sent me new American poets and books and things of the Left(??) and so on. And the 'Partisan Review'. And then when I went to America in 1951, I still owed her a lot of money, and in lieu of payment I gave her the manuscript of this book. And I don't know what became of it, whether it's among her papers or not.

Presumably one could track it down.

Yes, if you've got sufficient energy or patience! But...no, I had to (INAUDIBLE) with it from time to time. But it was only just a cranky curiosity I'm afraid.

This is interesting, because it could be that the attempt to systemetize your thought at this time, and the attempt to synthesize it into book form, and to a sort of a theory as it were...

Yes.

There is something cranky about it, and...

No, I had no training whatever in philosophy, and would have been impatient of it anyway. So it was terribly unprofessional and...

How far do you think you were really working at that time under the influence of Benzedrine, in the sense that...I mean rushing to talk to a physicist in Oxford, engaging Huxley in a morning's sort of colloquium.

No, I was very excited with these ideas that I had, that all seemed to fit together, you know. It made sense of the world.

Can we go back to Paris, because...

Yes, as well, as I say, what became of the rather strange American, I don't really know in the end. I should think that he resumed a relationship with Nancy Cunard, which may have ended up disastrously. But to go back to Jenny de Margerie and the Rue St. Guillaume, and all those lunch parties and discussions with her, and concerts and theatre...

Could you just give me her name, so that I can...

Her name is de Margerie, MARGERIE. And her Christian name was Jenny like the English way of spelling it.

Jenny.

Yes. Her uncle was André Germain of the Banque de France, so she was related to...she had an extraordinary background; she was also related as I said, to Rostock(ph).

Can you...you can't remember how it came about that she adopted you, as you put it?

Well, she had a passion for poets, and particularly English poets. And after, you know, she saw me at this hotel, and she invited me to meet her family, and have meals with her two or three times a week. And she said, "I'm your 'marraine'" which is French for a godmother, you know. And she did an enormous amount of...it was a fascinating period really. On another occasion she took me out, beyond the Porte d'Orléans, to the south of Paris, to visit the great Russian philosopher, Berdaieff(??), whom I had already read, but not very much. And it was a Sunday afternoon, and he had a lot of young Russian, mostly Russian people there to tea, and I think he was being...his wife was dead and his sister was acting as housekeeper. I don't...he must have been in his 70s, if not getting on for 80. And he was very cordial, and we had tea with him, and then he took us afterwards into his study. And I was immediately struck by the fact that all round the room there were portraits of Tolstoy, Chekhov, Nietzsche; I can't remember, perhaps not Nietzsche, but philosophers and writers. And the biggest picture of all, over his desk, was of Chestoff(ph), which I immediately recognized.

Now Chestoff(??) as a writer, you had been introduced to by Fondane.

(INAUDIBLE) I never met him. Yes that's right, yes.

In '38.

There's one book of his in English which came out in 1920, translated by Lawrence's friend Kotalyanski(ph), and with an introduction by D.H.(??)Lawrence, 'All Things Are Possible', so... And there are several books; most of his books are translated into French. Now he's published...all his works are published in English in America, but they're not easy to get here. Anyway, the thing was that Chestoff(??) and Berdaieff(??) had been great friends in their youth in Moscow I think; oh it must have been, yes. But Berdaieff(??) was a Christian, Chestoff(??) was Jewish - I mean he was not what you would call a practising Jew, but that was his background, and he remained pretty faithful to it really. So temperamentally it wasn't so much their ideas being in conflict, but temperamentally they always quarrelled. And there's a very amusing description by Fondane, who wrote down his conversations with Chestoff(??) over a period of many years: I've translated a sort of short summary of it, how they always...couldn't meet without quarrelling.

It was Fondane who I think in 1938 met you in the street, and said, "Chestoff est mort".

That's right, yes.

Chestoff is dead.

That's right. It was a rather snowy winter, the last winter before the War. I may not ever have seen Fondane again after that.

I was going to ask you that very question. You didn't see him again? He died in the War of course, so you...

Well he lived in (INAUDIBLE); he managed to escape the attentions of the Gestapo, although he was Jewish - wasn't obviously Jewish, but I'm told...the general belief is that he was betrayed by his concierge eventually.

So, what did you then do in Paris? You were part of the circle around Jenny de Margerie.

Yes.

You were meeting very interesting and exciting people.

Yes, very interesting people. I got to know a young couple, a brother and sister, their name was Leclerc, and their father was the director of the educational publishing firm called Armand Coller(ph). And I'd been introduced to them by a young American I met in London before...after the War and before going to Paris, who was the representative in Europe of the Haydn Society of Boston, which were making a recording of all Haydn's chamber music. But through this young man I met the Leclercs, and I used to go go to lunch there. And then, through...

How do you spell the name?

Like the Gaullist general, LECLERC, of the French generals (INAUDIBLE) of Paris.

LEC...?

...Leclerc, Lecler.

Ah!

Without a K.

Yes. I'm sorry.

I still see her. She's become a great Picasso expert, she's doing a catalogue (INAUDIBLE) of all the (INAUDIBLE) engravings.

Really?

They had not the slightest idea that she was going to develop like that at the time. But what happened was that somehow or other, through Jenny perhaps, or through her strange uncle who had been a friend as well, and calumny to Proust, Henri Germain, I met a young man called...(BREAK IN RECORDING)

His name was...?

Olivier de Mangy(??). He became quite a well-known critic for a while, but doesn't do very much any more. But with Brigitte and her brother Francois, we went on a trip for the first time. I'd always wanted to see the 'retable' of the tryptych of Grunewald at Colmar. You know the retable?

Yes of course.

And so we made a little trip, and managed to get a car, I think the Leclercs' parents' car. And we went to Colmar via Nancy, and spent the night there and saw this amazing work that I'd always wanted to see. Cristian Zebert(ph) had given me a portfolio of black and white reproductions before the War, so I knew it from reproductions, and I always wanted to see it.

That must have made an enormous impression upon you.

It did, yes.

So back in Paris.

Yes, well that was just one of the many things that happened during this period.

Have you ever written about that Grunwald crucifixion?

No. It in fact is part of the inspiration of the poem called 'Ecce Homo', the series called (INAUDIBLE). But I hadn't seen the painting itself then, when I wrote it.

So, what were you writing at that time? You weren't keeping a journal during this period?

I wasn't keeping a journal. There's a poem called 'Innocence and Experience', which is a transcription of an event involving Jenny de Margerie. I don't know whether the recorder was switched on when I was talking about the mystery of how I ever managed to live in Paris without any money, but one of the things that happened before the War was, a South African friend, a friend of the composer Pierre Ranier(ph), who was studying in Paris with...with...it's terrible, I can't think of the name...Nadia Boulangerph). I was introduced to an extraordinary Italian pianist called Renate Borgatti, who is in fact one of the characters that Compton Mackenzie used in his book called 'Strange Women' which takes place on the isle of Capri. I don't know if you ever read that.

No. And what was the name of the pianist?

The pianist? Renate Borgatti, like the car, BORGATI [sic] - I'm not sure whether there are two T's.

Yes.

She played the piano in an astouding way, had a sort of great tour de force which leave her audiences...her fans have always persuaded her to play the transcriptions of Wagner, which...she nearly always snatched the piano! Anyway, what happened was that she knew that I was living in Paris without any money, and she said, "I know somebody who will help you". She persuaded a Madame Edwardes, whose husband was the director of the 'Magasin du Louvre', very very rich.

Director of the...?

'Magasin du Louvre', one of the big department stores in Paris. Who had a sumptuous hotel particulier in the Rue de l'Université, in part of the old Faubourg St. Germain. And she did that, and she persuaded Emilla(??) Edwardes to give me...I can't remember how many francs, but so much a month you know.

Really? This was post-war? Pre-war?

No, this was before the War, but the subject, or the basis of the poem called 'Innocence and Experience' is, it turned out that Jenny knew Madame Edwardes, and she said, "Would you like to meet her again?" And so we both went back to this enormous house. And in the poem you...there is a description literally true from memory, of the collection which either she or her husband had.

Do read it.

Yes. 'In that room, the hotel's master (hôtel is in the sense of hôtel particulier, which means private mansion) had but seldom entered, though his youth's collections, here as elsewhere were the source of all that caught the roving eye. A Degas statuette, a hand-high Rodin piece, upon the wall above the fireplace a nice Jerico, two Turkish ladies or Bengars(ph); some fine

old pots and a miraculously carved ivory ball within a ball within a ball, that stood upon the escritoir, etcetera'.

Yes.

Yes, 'She showed us down a quite dark passage hung with glass masked pastels of Redol(ph), Morrizeau(ph) maybe...' etcetera.

An astonishing private apartment, with...

Yes. That's not the only sort of private collections I've seen. This was an amazing one, yes.

Yes. What were you writing at this time?

Well, one or two of the poems in 'The Vagrant'.

Yes.

On one occasion I came across the first time, in that part of Paris, in fact very near what is now the Musée d'Orsay, was a little bookshop which was also a publisher, André Silvare, SILVARE. And he was the only publisher of one of the great French poets of the century, I think. But because he only had this one small publisher (INDECIPHERABLE WORDS) anything like that, didn't have any names like that, or Mefker(ph), or any of the most important firms. He hadn't the same sort of public, he wasn't recognized then. He was recognized by all of his most important contemporaries. I'm talking about Oscar Vladislas Lubich Vilash(ph).

May I ask you to sell that so...

Kathleen devoted part of a number of (INAUDIBLE) to this writer, and... The Nobel prizewinning Milosz, MILOSZ, you know...he was a kind of a nephew, and they were Polish Lithuanian. In fact, the old poet who died in 1939 and I never met, I only came across his poetry in 1947 for the first time.

And what is his name again, Oscar...?

Vladislas de Lubich Vilash(ph). Now I'd better not embark on the other Lubich; you've got his name from him when he was (INAUDIBLE). But...as I say, he was only published by André Silvare, and I happened to be in this particular street...it's no use trying to remember names now, I can't. And I got a little selected poems, a little book from this shop. And that afternoon, it was a beautiful September day, and I took the train from Montparnasse to visit Versailles, simply to see the gardens; I'd been there before and had seen them, Paris and everything. And during all of this wonderful afternoon I read Milosz for the first time, and it was very exciting to me. And that resulted in a poem called 'September Sun', in a collection called...

'A Vagrant'.

Yes. And I think that the poem called 'Evening Gain'(ph) was the result of an excursion with Jenny. Possibly it was when she took me to visit this biologist cousin, or.....

<u>End of F1384 Side A</u>

F1384 Side B

.....David, that during this period in Paris you were writing, in fact writing some of your very best poems, the poems that were collected in 'A Vagrant' and other Poems' in 1950.

I've never wanted to repeat myself, and after the book published by Tambi with the Sutherland illustrations, I rather changed my style, I think they were different.

Yes. What would you say characterized the style of the poems in 'A Vagrant and other Poems'?

Well they're less concerned with the unconscious and dream states and so on. But they're not awfully...they have connections with a certain number of poets (INAUDIBLE) descriptive people and places.

Would you say there was a strong French influence in 'A Vagrant'? Leaving aside the fact that you were living in Paris.

The subject matter of some of them, yes. But, for instance a poem called 'Guimos'(ph) in Oxford Street was actually originally intended to be called...to be about Edgware Road, because I was living at that time with Robin Waterfield in Paddington. And I felt that the Edgware Road was one of the most dreary streets in London or any modern capital at that time, and I changed to Oxford Street. Somebody once asked me, "What were those demos in Oxford Street about?" (BOTH LAUGHING)

That's almost as good as the person who said after a reading, "That was very good, but could you tell me, what exactly are keats?" (BOTH LAUGHING)

That must have been...because it was from that address, Robin Waterfield, that I went with this strange young American - well, I say young, he was about my own age - to Paris, and to find (INAUDIBLE - LAUGHING). It was in fact the most wonderful woman, I'm very glad that I met her occasionally, you know, even though it was rather strange circumstances.

'A Vagrant', the poem which gives the title to the volume, is based upon your experiences...

Oh yes, it talks about living in a hotel room. And I have a note in the new introduction to explain the expression 'cozy corner', which was a kind of arrangement in many bedsits and hotel bedrooms, of book shelves round the head of the bed. It was called a 'cozy corner' - (INAUDIBLE) I think! (LAUGHS) This odd, (INAUDIBLE) expression.

When I said a certain French influence, I was thinking really in terms...there's a certain sort of formality, a certain sort of crystalline formality about some of the poems in that volume.

Ah, well I think I began to be more concerned in writing the poems that I should set the matter, the experience, or the subject in a satisfactory form. I tried out various variations. Something that I started...I don't claim any originality for it, but a thing which appealed to me was a variation on the sonnet, that is to say, not so formally exact as a solid form, of which there are two or three variations, but the equivalent length, and the same kind of frame for what one has to say; that's a poem of three stanzas of five lines each, and where the rhyming system can be worked out on various ways. ABABA or something like that; there are all kinds of variations, permutations.

Was Baudelaire an important influence do you think at this time?

I wouldn't say so, no. All through my life I've revered him and think of him as one of the very great European poets. I think that probably, knowing Jouve and reading his appreciations of Baudelaire helped me to appreciate him more probably. He is a poet that can be read from many angles and degrees of superficiality or profundity, I dare say according to how you approach him I think.

Well the question was prompted by something of the subject matter.

Yes.

And something of the formality of those poems. And the subject matter being, in many cases, the experiences of the figure in the city.

Yes, yes, quite. No, I hadn't thought of that. I remember that, before I went to Paris when I first started to read Baudelaire, tried to read it to myself, one poem that caught my imagination, and I remember thinking of it when I was crossing the Hungerford Bridge, you know, in the Thirties. And that's the poem called 'Rêve Parisien', which a dream of Paris at night. Fantastic kind of dreams that he... Perhaps the idea, or something that comes across from certain poems in the earlier collection is perfectly expressed by Baudelaire; I mean it's not his idea alone, but it's the poem called 'Alchemie de Vers'(??). And the whole idea of Fleurs du Mal making flowers out of evil, that's to say transforming...it's another version of the alchemical concept of turning lead into gold. But turning suffering into something positive. Make a diamond out of dust is another way of...I put it somewhere.

Yes. Were you seeing much of the Jouves at this time?

Yes, I did, yes.

Did you by any chance resume...

They'd moved to a new apartment, as I think I may have said to you before, I don't know if you were recording me, was in the Rue Antoine-Chantin, which is right out by Alesia, the southern periphery of Paris, near the Porte d'Orléans. They couldn't get back the wonderful Rue de Tournon apartment, and this was a large room like an artist's studio with a north light, and then stairs and a balcony, and behind the balcony that there was a kitchen and a bedroom, and a (INAUDIBLE), the balcony overlooking this large room. And there was this huge refectory table which must have been...that he'd bought in the Twenties or Thirties, and where he did all his writing, that had been preserved. And also his mediaeval statuette, and also a small piece of a 'soubois'(ph), or wood, of Courbet, who was one of his favourite painters, and I think a small Delacroix. But the Balthus of course, I don't know whether he preserved the Balthus that he had in the Rue de Tournon. And a painter who's rather forgotten now, the name of SIMA, Sima, I don't know whether you've come across him, he was also one of the painters that Jouve had known and collected.

Did you by any chance resume analysis with Mdme Jouve?

Yes, I did, yes. She'd moved her...of course she no longer had her consulting room in the Rue de Tournon, she had rented a room on the ground floor of, I think it was the Avenue Georges V, yes, on the Right Bank. And I did visit her there many times, yes, during that period.

Did you find that analysis with her helped you a great deal?

Yes I think it helped me, certainly.

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In what way?

Well one understood certain things about myself, but I don't know that I got very much further during the post-war period really. But, she helped me understand what my problems were. And the thing which she said to me which - I've repeated this before to many people - which helped me to understand my problems, she said, "The trouble with you is (expressed in a French proverb) 'la mariée est tres belle'" The bride is too beautiful. Which makes you impotent, because you feel you can't really live up to it, or fulfil the...

And what was she referring to as the bride?

Well, my ideal of what I wanted to do; my ambition as a poet really.

Yes. In the Journal...

I've always been dogged by the underlying...I don't know about conviction, but feeling that I was going to be a failure, that I was going to disappoint people: not a failure, but that I was bound to disappoint people. I suppose that's the fact of being an infant prodigy! The result of being regarded as a prodigy (INAUDIBLE WORDS) precocious.

In the Journal for '38 to '39, when you refer...

(INAUDIBLE - BOTH TALKING) afterwards which had a sexual conotation.

Yes! Can I just finish? I was going to say, in that Journal, referring to your analysis with Blanche Jouve, you refer to the almost ecstatic feeling you had before, what might almost be called inspiration, and then the disappointment. And you quote her then as 'la mariée trop belle'.

Yes. You remember that expression, yes.

Yes. Can you go on a bit more about that, because I think that's very interesting in relation to your work.

Well I think that that was what she understood of that (INAUDIBLE), and that was the sort of (INAUDIBLE) to her, and I've remembered it always because I thought that was a very succinct and telling way of putting it.

Very perceptive.

Mm.

You were saying then, and I interrupted you I'm afraid, that that was a problem...has that been a recurrent problem, it's a problem that's dogged you all your life?

Yes. I was thinking about writing poetry in Paris after the War. If I'd had more self confidence and taken myself more seriously, I certainly would have, you know, given more time to thinking, and I would have written poetry in a more deliberate way. But I suppose that is the trouble, that I've always been lacking in certain...(PAUSE)...yes, self confidence is the only term I can think of.

And yet, your precocity as a writer, and your ability to sort of live life in very straightened circumstances in Paris, and to survive, always accompanied I know, certainly in the late

Thirties and then again in the Forties by these bouts of acute depression already, and these exacerbated perhaps by Benzedrine...

They were not always as acute as they became in the end, no.

No. But nevertheless the Paris Journals of '38, '39 record a lot of...

Yes, that's true.

...very severe depressions.

Yes.

Or malancholia I think is almost a better word.

When I first went to...yes, I see this word in connection with (INAUDIBLE) now saying that depression isn't adequate. The old depression (INAUDIBLE), 'The Anatomy of Melancholy' of Balthimer(ph) shows that people have suffered from it all the time, and particularly at that period.

So you don't think that the analysis after the War added substantially to the insights that you'd got from it in that pre-war period?

I don't really think so, no. But the fact that I continued to be in relation with the Jouves, who were both very important and dear to me all through that period, and again later, after I had been to America.

Can I ask you a question now which has intrigued me, and you don't have to anwser it if you don't want to. It touches on things we said last night, we talked about last night in relation to Florence Mole and...

Oh yes, yes.

...and 'Ginger' or 'Tiny' Wright. In your Paris Journal of '38, '39, in reference to a session you had with Blanche Jouve, an analysis session, you say that you had arrived at some interesting insights in relation to Florence Mole.

Yes.

And that's all you say.

Yes.

And I'm wondering if you can remember...

No, I can't remember what came out in the course of a session of analysis, but it certainly was bound to come out.

What was bound to come out?

Well, when you are undergoing analysis you dig up as far back as you can, don't you? Memories and so on. I remember in relation to what Freudians called 'the Oedipus complex', telling Blanche an experience as a child when we lived at Fordingbridge, my father had appendicitis and had to go to the cottage hospital. And during that period I slept in my

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mother's bed. I was eight, nine, something like that; I don't know whether I was still...no, it must have been before I started to go to school, so it was before I was eight. And we lived in a bungalow, and behind the bungalow in the garden there was a field in which cows were put out to graze. And during the night a cow broke through the garden gate outside, and came down, there were some steps, and I saw the silhouette of horns in the moonlight outside. And this memory came out in the course of a session with Blanche, and I told her about it, and she said that that was, you know, it was the angry father coming. I also had a vision of...well she told me herself, I didn't realize it, but I was saying it, that I saw her as a kind of witch with horns; and that is a thing that happens in analysis, you see the analyst as very hostile, you know, that's...I mean it's called 'resistance' I think.

Yes. You can see why I've returned to that, because...

I don't think that I would be classified by an analyst as a classic case of the Oedipus complex.

No, no. It's anything but really, because it seems to me as I said to you last night, that it's a matter of some interest that profound influences on you in childhood, at least two, tended to be women, of ambiguous sexuality, and that strikes me as something that possibly entered your analysis and became, I suppose...at that time in Paris...(BREAK IN RECORDING)

I interrupted you.

Well at that time in Paris you were, in any case...thinking of yourself essentially as homosexual, weren't you?

Well I've always thought of myself as essentially bisexual actually, though really the heterosexual part has not been very successful because...I mean the classic example of the unsatisfactory nature of being born like that. I mean I've had relationships with women and not been able to go to bed with them satisfactorily because of, you know...that's vice versa I mean. I don't really want to go...it would take a complete session of recordings for me to discuss my sex life frankly.

Certainly not, but it's something that occurs openly in the Journals; it's not as if here we're broaching upon anything that hasn't...

No, of course not.

...been touched upon.

(INAUDIBLE - BOTH TALKING)...I'm perfectly willing to discuss it as frankly as possible.

Let's go back then after this return to the pre-war period, let's go back now to Paris and the poems of...the writing of the poems for the volume 'A Vagrant'.

Yes.

That was published in 1950 I believe, yes. And it's at that time that you went to...no no, it was a bit later than that that you went to the United States isn't it?

Well that was later, yes. That was not until '51.

Is there anything else that you might want to talk about, about that particular period in Paris?

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Oh well there were many events that...I mean, well, one of the people I used to talk to in the St. Germain sometimes was Jimmy Baldwin.

Really?

A brief friendship; (INAUDIBLE) consisted really of conversations in a bar called 'La Reine Blanche' in St. Germain-des-Prés.

This is James Baldwin, the American black writer.

That's right, yes.

How as he at that time? How did he strike you?

Well he suffered I think from melancholy too. But I liked him very much, I admired him very much. I think it was about the time he wrote a book called 'Jimmy's Room'.

'Giovanni's Room'.

Jimmy's isn't it? Oh no, perhaps not, 'Giovanni's Room', that's right, his name was Jimmy, that's right.

It was published as 'Giovanni's Room'.

Yes that's right, that's the book I'm thinking of.

And of course he lived in Paris for a great deal of his life, didn't he?

I suppose he did. Somebody else I met for the first time, through Jenny de Margerie I met...she introduced me to quite a lot of people in the diplomatic corps, in the embassies and so on, and somebody I met at that time was...was (INAUDIBLE), only briefly. But when quite recently we were in Malmö at a festival together...

In where?

Malmö, MALMO with a diaresis, in southern Sweden.

Yes.

That was a few years ago now. But I was, you know, I saw his name on the list of people who were going to be there, and I wondered, would he remember me? He did immediately call me by my Christian name; he even remembered the restaurant where we'd last had lunch at that time. Which I thought was quite incredible, because he'd been...his life had been so full and rich, and he'd been ambassador in India, and that he should...I was very gratified indeed that he should remember me. I also remember meeting, she had...I don't know whether...she must have known Blanche, but she was not a friend of hers, but an important figure in the French psychoanalytic movement is the Princess Marie Buonaparte. And somebody else that I met through Jenny, because she had this passion for (INAUDIBLE) Rilke, was the son of the Princess of Thurn und Taxis.

Oh really? Yes, to whom the 'Duino Elegies' are dedicated.

Yes. She...or he stayed in this palace of hers.

Yes. Did you meet Beckett at that time at all?

Much later, yes. That was later I met Beckett. That reminds me of the theatre, I was remembering another thing that I've remembered about that period. Through Jenny, she had many English friends, and among them was a remarkable - I think of her now as an old lady, but she wasn't so - was Charlotte Bonham-Carter. The extraordinary thing is that, when a few years ago Judy and I were in London we went to the Tate Gallery, the Kokoschka exhibition, and I ran into Charlotte Bonham-Carter who was very old, was doubled up.

Very stopped, yes.

Yes.

I haven't seen her for some time, but she was very much a person about the art world.

That's right.

Until very recently.

Several people called her a 'culture vulture'! (LAUGHS) But she was a sweet person, and she was always very kind and friendly to me. And I first met her through Jenny de Margerie when she was in Paris. And on one occasion, it was to be the first performance of the T.N.P, or Teatre Nacionale Populaire at the Trocadero of the French translation of Büchner's 'Death of Danton', 'Danton's Death' translated in English by Swendheim(ph). But anyway it was a superb...I was fascinated, but I went with Charlotte Bonham-Carter to see this. She didn't appreciate it as much as I did I think. But then after the performance I went to take her back to her hotel, and then I went...I was staying at that time in the Hôtel de la Risianne(ph) I think. Maybe I'm confusing it with a later period; it doesn't matter. I associate it with Jenny, because it was through her that I met Charlotte Bonham-Carter. And on my way home after having deposited her wherever she was staying, I went into a cafe and there was the French translator, who was not in fact French...oh, now I'm going to have to...another of these terrible blanks. (BREAK IN RECORDING)

Go on.

Another character I remember, and had a certain insight into was, I don't know if you know the name of the painter, or...(INAUDIBLE) called Wols, WOLS.

Yes.

You do?

Oh well a very important artist in my opinion, yes.

Do you think so? Yes, because I didn't realize how important he was I think at that time, I just knew that he was an interesting figure, and I'd seen a very small number of his pictures. But he was living in the same hotel as myself, and in a curious way...there was a 'ducan'(ph), and a kind of little porthole or window which looked into his room. I didn't...(LAUGHING)...spy on him, but I couldn't help being aware of him. And he was living, I don't know whether it was his wife, but with a mistress or a wife, on the most appalling terms. I used to hear these ghastly rows going on. And occasionally I would meet him in the foyer of the hotel and we would say, you know, 'Bonjour'. But I never really knew him. And then later I saw more of his work and realized what an interesting man and wished that I had known him.

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Yes, a very interesting artist.

There's a novel of Barbusse perhaps is...apart from 'Le Feu', which is his account of the First War, I think it's called 'L'Enfer' now.

It is called that, yes.

Well it's about somebody who...

Somebody who has a peephole into the next-door room.

Yes, a (INAUDIBLE); not a peephole, it was like a little glass round porthole, which looked down into this room.

How strange, yes.

Yes, that was an interesting experience! (LAUGHS) It was about that time that I began to see exhibitions of the graphic work of the poet Micheau(ph), who I never knew but I was introduced to once later.

Did you know, while we're on the subject of artists in Paris, did you know Masson at this time?

No I didn't; no, I didn't meet him in 1935, but I didn't get to know Masson until I was living in the summer at Aix, because he had a studio there - not in Aix itself, but on the way to Letonomy(ph), a village that...about 15 kilometres to the west of Aix.

We perhaps can talk about him when we talk about your life in Aix. But...

Obviously I don't think we can get round to that this morning.

No, but we...we're at the point where you came back then to London, 1948/'49?

Yes.

Can you remember when you came back to London?

I came back - I call it almost exactly a year - at the end of the summer of 1948. One thing I could tell you about is that through Jenny I spent Christmas at a place called Royaumont, I don't know if you've heard of it; it was an abbey that was deconsecrated during the French Revolution.

And how is it spelt?

ROYAUMONT.

Royaumont.

Royaumont, yes. Jenny knew the owner, a remarkable man who lost his wife, she was a victim of Nazism, the Resistance. I wish I could remember his name. But someone who came there and I met, and I think...I don't know whether I knew him before, but anyway...yes, I must have met him before, that's David Pryce Jones, whose wife I think was Hungarian. At any rate he had relatives in...it was just a small (INAUDIBLE) really. And the abbey has

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been for a long time used for seminars, for conferences; I mean every week there's something there. But I was just spending Christmas there. The bedrooms used to be monks' cells you know.

Yes.

Yes. And Jenny brought her daughter...I mean her son, who was known at that time as Bobie, and who was going still, when I went to lunch (INAUDIBLE - INTERFERENCE ON TAPE)...studying at what they call the 'Science Peru'(ph), which was the 'Science Politible'(ph), which is the school that most people who enter the 'Quai D'Orsay' or the French Foreign Office, whatever you like to call it, go to. And later he became Ambassador to London...

Oh really.

A few years back. I think his proper name was Emmanuel de Margerie. Although I have known him when he was young, I didn't actually meet him in London at that time; I was living in the Isle of Wight. Funnily enough, you know 'Adam' magazine and Miron Grindea, whom I've known for a very long time now, and he had an evening...how long ago now? Eight, ten years of the Institute Francais. And Jenny's son, who was Ambassador at the time should have been there, but he was ill, and his wife was there whom I had met in Aix as a matter of fact. Oh, complicated interview!

Interconnections, yes.

And as a matter of fact, Jenny brought her daughter, whom she never got on with very well, that is Diane de Margerie who was still in her teens possibly, and she's younger than I am at any rate. And she visited me with her mother during this time, this Christmas that I spent there. And she became married to Francois Savier Jeujá(ph), who is now by publisher, who publishes my poems, Kathy Raine's poems in French, the poems of my friend, Yves le Baisseur, whom I've already mentioned as being a very close friend of the Jouves.

You came back to London then at the end of '48.

Mhm.

End of F1384 Side B

F1385 Side A

Tape Six of an interview with David Gascoyne recorded at his home of the Isle of Wight, Sunday March the 10th, 1991.

David, in...beginning of '49, the winter of '49 you returned to London.

Mm.

This was the period of run-up to the publication of 'The Vagrant', and of the production of a play of yours I think in 1950.

Yes that's right, yes I'd forgotten about that.

What did you do when you came back to London?

I have no distinct memory of my return to London actually. But...was there the play called 'Hole in the Fourth Wall'? Was that I think...

That's right, or 'Talk, Talk, Talk'.

Yes, well around...between coming back to Paris and going to America the first time I must have written the essay on Carlyle, and the play...there was a one-act play which is really...the manuscript of it is lost now, and it's a kind of satire on the state of the English theatre while there was still the Lord Chamberlain's office censorship. And the kitchen sink school of drama, they hadn't yet started.

No.

I can't summarize the play, but I do remember there was a...it's not a realistic play at all; the basic setting was a tennis court, this idea of a conventional play opening with someone coming through french windows and saying,"Anyone for tennis"! I had, you know, a tennis net across the stage, and there were various sort of stereotyped figures that appeared in West End plays. And there's a lot of fun made of the Lord Chamberlain's office, and the Lord Chamberlain's office boy and so on and so forth. And then suddenly, towards the end of it, there's a blackout, going back to the War, and the stage is in complete darkness. And then I persuaded Michael Redgrave to record a long, very serious speech, and everybody was sitting round. And then somebody throws a candle into the middle of the stage and lights a candle, and you see all these faces sitting round in candelight. It didn't really come off; it only lasted for about a week, and it was at a tiny little theatre called the Watergate at the Adelphi, not far from where the old Arts Theatre used to be, I mean at the beginning of the...what's it called...Limmo(ph).

What did you do during that year? Where did you live?

I'm trying to remember where I lived. I suppose with...perhaps with Billy Crozier again, in Belsize Park.

Did you live with Robin Waterfield at all at this time, or...?

I don't think I went back to Robin's. I honestly don't remember. The play was directed, put on by Elizabeth Sprigg(ph), no relation to the actress and novelist who did a book about Gertrude Stein and so on. She was a very interesting woman, I got to know her very well. She was living right at the top of Hampstead at the time.

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So how did that year pass? You were preparing presumably your book of poems for publication.

I was seeing Edith Sitwell at that time I think; it must have been then that I...yes, it must have been then that I got to know Carson McCullers through meeting her at Edith Sitwell's - I don't know whether you're recording now].

Yes I am.

Yes. I used to go to the Sesame Club quite a lot in those days, and met a lot of interesting people through Edith Sitwell. In fact I met Roy Campbell.

Yes. Not a person I would have thought you would have had a great deal of sympathy with.

Oh no, I was absolutely (INAUDIBLE - BOTH TALKING)...but then I was very disarmed to find that he had a squeeky little voice really. And he was really quite sympathetic. I couldn't dislike him, but I know of his Civil War poetry. But he had a beautiful daughter, and he was the uncle of a friend of mine, whom I didn't know till later, that's Michael Wishart, the Wishart of Lawrence Wishart, and I think somehow connected with (INAUDIBLE) and Epstein actually.

The Sesame Club. Where was that?

That was off Grosvenor Square in Mayfair.

And this is where Edith Sitwell held court?

Yes, when she was in London, which wasn't...family place in the north of England, do you know it?

Yes. I've forgotten the name as well, it doesn't matter. How did you get to know Sitwell, Edith?

I think I told you, after the War I was invited by Jack Lindsay(ph) to give a reading with...well I didn't know until I...I don't think I knew him till I got there, at the Unity Theatre with Hugh MacDairmid and Edith Sitwell. And after that she invited me to...I met many times, I wish I'd written about it really, a very varied lot of people. Roy Campbell for instance, Leslie Hartley, the Master of the King's Music...Malcolm Williamson. And possibly...yes, Humphrey Searle I think, who later wrote the music for 'Night Thoughts', and he did a setting of her 'Gold Coast Customs'.

Yes. How did you find Edith Sitwell? I mean, I'm asking you this not just for anecdotage, but because people had very strong reactions to her.

Yes.

What was yours?

Well, I found her fascinating, I got on with her very well. She was always extremely charming to me. She took me to see Alec Guinness...well Alec Guinness was somebody else who would occasionally turn up for these lunches, and he was actually doing Hamlet during this period. And I went with her to a matinée to see it, it was a disastrous performance I'm afraid. He was not designed to play...I don't think he's very good in Shakespeare at all.

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No. That's not his forte.

No.

What did you talk about with Edith Sitwell, can you remember? I mean...

Oh, she was...(LAUGHS)...she was very good at gossip. An American friend may have been...she knew a lot of rich American people; it may have been Mrs. Jock Whitney, who I met at one of her parties, and who was full of a book that I hadn't heard of which had just come out in America, and a lot of people were very enthusiastic about it, and it was Salinger's 'Catcher in the Rye'.

Yes. And it was through Edith Sitwell that you met Carson McCullers.

That's right, yes.

How did that come about?

Well I arrived at one of these lunches a bit early perhaps, and as soon as I got there Edith said to me, "There is somebody coming who I think you will find very interesting, and it's Carson McCullers, and the last I wrote to her I ended up by saying, 'I do wish you were here' or something like that, and she's taken it...my word, and she will be coming to lunch". Because immediately she got this letter Carson booked a passage on the pleasure...it may have been the Queen Mary, and she did in fact arrive later for lunch. And at the end of the party she said to me, "I wonder if you could find...I hate the Dorchester" she said. She'd just arrived and didn't like it. "Could you find me somewhere more sympathetic to live?" And so there was a room in the house where I was lodging in Chelsea that I think was vacant, and in fact she did come and lived there for about a fortnight or three weeks.

Was this the Dorchester in Jermyn Street?

No, the Dorchester...you know...

No, I'm sorry, I've got this confused. The Dorchester in Park Lane.

In Park Lane, yes. The other hotel where Carson McCullers, who was...one of her best friends and she'd known since she started writing, was staying at the Cavendish. That was in fact the only time I ever went into the place was to meet and to go out to dinner with him.

That was Tennessee Williams.

Yes.

I'm sorry. So...

I can't remember whether this was just before or after Lehmann(ph) published 'The Vagrant'.

Yes. Anyway, I'm sorry I had that slightly wrong. It was Tennessee Williams who stayed at the Cavendish, and Carson McCullers had been installed at the Dorchester, which she did not like.

No, that's right.

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So at lunch you proposed that she should go somewhere else with you.

I didn't actually; she asked me and it suddenly occurred to me that she might like that, because it was a very pleasant part of London and a nice house and sympathetic people. Two brothers, George Lawrence and his brother Sir John living next door, and I was living with George. I think it was Kathleen Raine who introduced me to George Lawrence. It was when I couldn't bear to go on living in Hampstead at Downside Crescent any longer with Billy Crozier, because our relationship had become so disastrous we were constantly quarrelling, even throwing things at each other. One Christmas I ran away to Paris all by myself without letting anyone know. I must have been absolutely intolerable and (INAUDIBLE). But it was just a sort of...the chemistry just didn't...we just didn't, you know, hit it off.

So you were now living in Chelsea.

That's right, yes; I must have been living...that's right, that's where I was living when I came back from Paris.

And you found rooms for Carson McCullers.

Yes. I don't think I will recount this in detail. If I'm going to tell the story of my brief friendship, relationship with Carson McCullers I think it would take a whole session to do it properly.

Really?

All I can say is that during this time I took her to see the private view of a magnificent exhibition of Mexican art at - I'm including pre Colombian work - at the Tate, and introduced her to Rothenstein, who was very pleased to show her round. Another occasion was to spend the weekend at Bourne End with Rosamund Leymann, who I had met but didn't know very well; I felt I knew her much better after that. And strangely enough we went down there from Paddington, and on the same train I recognized her on the platform, was the actress sister, Beatrix, who was a communist and she kept herself very much to herself, and she didn't want to be recognized, I think she just said "How do you do?" and she went off to her own flat over the stables I think!

Really? This is Beatrix Lehmann?

Yes. She was there at the same time. I saw her several times on the stage, she was a remarkable actress, extraordinary.

Yes. How was 'A Vagrant' received, can you remember?

Well it was received with a marvellous notice in 'The Sunday Times' I think by Edwin Muir(ph). Yes, it had quite good notices.

This is 1950.

Mm. Well what happened that year, again through Edith Sitwell, was she introduced me to the writer Bryher, BRYHER, who was the daughter of a shipping magnate and a millionairess. And she had a scheme of giving a travelling grant, a 'bros'(ph) they'd say in French, to a younger writer. One was given two hundred pounds, which was quite a lot in those days, simply to travel. And I went...I wanted to know Provence, but that didn't come off. I spent a week in Paris, and during that week in Paris I ran quite by accident into Humphrey Jennings on the terrace of the 'Domageur'(ph). I think I was staying at the Hôtel

Jacob again for a week, at that time. And I met Humphrey, and of course I'd known him at the time of the Surrealist exhibition, and after. And Roger Roughton, Ruthven Todd and I had tremendous admiration for him, and I liked him enormously. This happened to me the last time I ever saw him, because he was on his way to make what was to his last film, a documentary in Greece. I expect you've heard of what happened to him.

Yes, he fell off a cliff and was killed.

Yes, that's right. The camera went a little bit this way, and, you know, with his back to the cliff, and he fell over backwards, struck his head on a rock and never recovered consciousness. But I remember this last conversation, it must have been...apart from his camera crew, the last English friend to have seen him. And he during the course of the conversation said, "David I think I've made up my mind what I want to do with the rest of my life. I'm going to devote it to painting". Because I mean he'd been a film maker in Cambridge, he'd directed theatre, and he'd written poetry, and he'd also written of course 'Pandemonium' which hadn't been published then. But he'd also done quite a lot of painting. Anyway, I went on this journey from...I intended to go to Avignon, but I overslept somehow, and had to go back via Aix to Marseille. I found myself travelling up to the Alps, and I had to get out and go back again. Anyway, I didn't get to Avignon, which was going to be the basis for me to explore Provence for the first time. And I found myself in Marseille, and from Marseille I went to Cassis, which was a place I'd heard of from many people, people like Cyril Connolly and others; many English artists, intellectuals used to go there before the War. This was 1950, yes. So I stayed in Cassis, then I went on to Villefranche, and from Villefranche I finally went to Venice for the first time. It would take me far too long to tell you in detail everything that happened, but that was my first experience over there I think.

You did this journey, this very exciting journey it sounds like, on this scholarship or 'burse'(ph), and...were you on your own?

Yes I was unfortunately. I wish I'd had somebody to go with me; I wanted somebody very much, I was very lonely you know, I wanted to share... I got to know the Riviera for the first time. I went to Vence, where there's a deluded idea that D.H.Lawrence was buried there, but of course he died near there. And I went to Nice and caught a bus to Vence, which is not a very long way away. It's a wonderful journey winding up towards Vence. And I bought a pot of cyclamen I think, and I went to the cemetery at Vence and asked the guardier where was D.H.Lawrence's grave. But of course then I realized finally that he wasn't really there at all; he'd died at the hospital for...consumptives I suppose you'd say, and his ashes had been taken to America. But anyway, I left the cyclamens with the guardier.

That's strange, because I had always thought he had been buried there as well. In fact I recall seeing what I thought was his headstone with a phoenix on it.

Yes. Well I think they put that up outside the hospital where he died.

Ah! Tell us briefly something of your first impressions of Venice then.

Ah, yes, well I didn't want to leave it. I ended up...I had a...yes...it started up on the way from Milan to Venice by my striking up an acquaintance with an American who was the brother of a famous American film star of that epoch, in fact the hero of Sunset Boulevard. It was his brother you know. And we had a brief sort of homosexual relationship, we stayed in the same hotel, and then he had to go on to see the 'Passion Play' at Oberammergau which was going on that year, and he was dead set on doing this sort of American tour. So it brought our relationship to an end. It was a pity really.

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This happened in Venice?

Yes. At the beginning of my stay there.

Venice was at that time...I mean this was the post-war period, so the enormous floods of tourists perhaps hadn't yet...

Not quite so bad, no.

Begun to reach...

The film festival was going on, which I went to. I wrote three Venetian nocturne poems, and sent them to Marguerita, the Princess Marguerita Catani(ph), who wasn't actually(??) American and a cousin of Eliott, do you know who I mean? Her magazine, a marvellous review called (INAUDIBLE).

Yes.

And I got very hard up, because I had this money, and she sent almost by return of post a very handsome fee for these poems which helped to pay my hotel.

How marvellous!

I knew of Peggy Guggenheim, we had mutual friends like Antonia White and Djuna Barnes, and several other people. So I kept on putting off going to see her, I don't know why, and finally I did, and I went to lunch there, and she said, "Well do come back to dinner". And I went back to my hotel for a siesta, and lay down on my bed, and suddenly one of the bed-posts broke, and I was precipitated onto a marble floor of this room. So that I went to dinner with Peggy, and during dinner I began to feel very uncomfortable, and explained to her what had happened to my back. And she said, "Oh you must stay the night and have my masseur to see you tomorrow". And in the end it became a week, and I stayed at this Carlioni(??), the palace, the truncated palace towards the Saluté, which is where Guggenheim has a museum.

Had a museum, yes. She sounds as if...

She took me to dinner one night across the canal where Geoffreys, the art dealer, was living at that time. And the Sutherlands were staying with him; I think that may have been almost the last time I met Graham and Kathy Sutherland.

So in fact she was very generous and hospitable to you.

Peggy was, yes.

Not that she had any reason not to be, but...

I wrote a letter of protest to the Literary Review when it first started in Edinburgh you remember, before it was taken over by the...I can't remember the name, (INAUDIBLE) who runs Quartet Books, but anyway... There was a review of, or a reference to Peggy, 'Rich bitch', Piers Paul Read, and I wrote a letter of protest because I had this experience of knowing her, not very well, but... I think she encouraged people to call her that maybe, because, against the advice of all her friends she published these really rather impossible memoirs which upset everyone.

Yes, and of course...

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She had a good relationship with her servants, who all seemed to like her very much. She was very generous. She could be...at that time there was an exhibition of Pollock going on. Now she was marvellous to Pollock in a way, and at the same time she exploited him. But I mean, Djuna Barnes couldn't have written 'Nightwood' if it hadn't been for a sort of annual stipend that she got from Peggy. She did a great deal of good, but she was the sort of person who didn't want people to...she was an irritable woman you know! (LAUGHS)

Was she irritable with you at all?

(INAUDIBLE - BOTH TALKING) not really, no, on the whole. No, I got on with her pretty well. But she was moody.

Was she living with anybody at that time?

No, I don't think so, no.

She had of course been married to Max Ernst.

Yes. No, I liked her. She had an absolutely appalling sister, whom I met when I went to America later, which was...I'm leading on to...

This was...

And the other thing that happened in 1950, I actually went a lot to the Biannalle that year. And among them, there was a magnificent exhibition of Cubism, that's to say all the best Cubist painters, a lot of them...Gris and so on. But of course also the Belgian Pavillion in that year was devoted entirely to Ensor, so I got to know his work pretty well then, which was a kind of revelation to me.

I was just about to say that must have been something of a revelation.

Yes.

And I would have thought that in many ways you might have found Ensor's work deeply sympathetic.

Yes I did, yes. I kept a little notebook during that period. It would take too long to reminisce about Venice at that time in detail.

Do you still have the notebook?

The Company came to that wonderful theatre, the Venici, which is a theatre opera house surrounded by a canal, you know. And it was soon after I arrived, I had at that time...a time when 'Hole in the Fourth Wall' was put on, I had enough money to order myself...it wasn't actually a Saville Row, but just round the corner, a black corduroy (I'm wearing black corduroy trousers) black corduroy, double-breasted suit, which I used to wear for occasions like that. I used to wear it in the evening; it lasted a long time, I even wore it in America. But an English company with Ernest Milton as Malvolio, and...I said it last night, you know who I mean, 'Brief Encounter'... What is the point of telling these stories if (INAUDIBLE) all vanish? (LAUGHS)

Well everybody will know who was the female lead in 'Brief Encounter'.

Yes. Well she was Olivier. And I went round, and I sent her flowers saying that I would go to the (INAUDIBLE) at Hammersmith to see her! It was a kind of joke. (LAUGHS) And I also had acted with Ernest Milton, so it was a kind of reunion with him.

But you had worked with him, hadn't you, during the period of your own theatrical career, if we can call it that. Have you ever written about this, what sounds like a marvellous, even if at times a lonely journey?

The sojourn in Venice? Yes. I met David Wright you know, who is totally deaf.

Yes.

Not with Pippa, but with his former wife or mistress.

What, in Venice?

Yes. Briefly, but they couldn't stay very long.

Had you known David before that?

Yes, I met him just after the War. And he started at the same time. I used to go to Oxford quite often for a while to see Audrey Beecham who was quite a close friend for a while.

David's a marvellous poet isn't he I think?

Yes he is, yes.

And a very good maker of anthologies.

Yes wonderful, yes. 'The Penguin Book of everyday...

Verse, and a Penguin Book of Romantic Verse.

That's excellent, yes.

It was also very very good.

Yes.

And of course, did he not make a marvellous anthology of twentieth century English verse with Heath Studds(ph)?

Yes, that's right.

He must have been a very handsome young man at that time David, because he's a striking looking person isn't he?

Yes, I'm sorry that my relationship with him has rather sort of faded away.

Is that just a matter of circumstance?

Yes, it's not intentional. The last time I saw him in fact was at a party given at the Tate to launch that anthology called 'With A Poet's Eye', to which he contributed and I had contributed. And there was a tremendous sort of bruhaha going on in the restaurant, created

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by Rex Whistler(ph) you know, at the Tate. And he was trying to say something over the crowd, and in fact he was trying to tell me that Pippa was dead, but I didn't understand until afterwards.

Oh really.

But now happily he has married the widow of his best friend, Paddy Swift you know, the painter who...they both spent a lot of time together in Portugal.

In the Algarve. They wrote a book, well David wrote a book and it was illustrated by Patrick Swift, yes.

Yes. He painted my portrait at one time. He had a studio in that square behind Victoria Station. It's too late now, and there's not enough time to talk about another friend of mine called Beatrice or 'Bumble' Dawson.

Do you know where the portrait is by Swift?

I don't know what became of it, no. He did one of George Barker, who was a quite close friend of his. And of quite a few other people I know. He was not a very good painter, but he was a very sympathetic man.

I've asked you this, and I'm not sure whether I got an answer, and that is whether or not you've ever written...I don't think you've ever really written about this period have you, of this journey to Venice?

No, I haven't, no. Pity really.

You came back then to London?

I still have quite a lot of detailed memories that I haven't had time to tell you about.

Well maybe we can...

I came to London. And another interesting thing that happened to me before I went to America, at the invitation of John Malcolm Brinnen(ph) was the first of what subsequently became the bi-annual...the 'Bienale de la Poesía' in Belgium, a series of international poetry festivals which take place every two years. And the first one was at Knokke le Zoot(ph), you know, near Ostend. Well I'd been on my way there, stopping off in Ostend and finding the cafe that was associated with Ensor as a matter of fact.

Really?

Yes. And I tavelled back with the wonderful Greek poet who was a Consul in London, called Seferis.

Oh yes.

He was the most interested person there.

He was the Greek Ambassador in London wasn't he, at that time?

I think he was a Consul actually.

Or Consul, yes.

I got to know him briefly.

He lived at the bottom end I think of Sloane Street.

Yes. That's right, because I was living in Chelsea and I remember going to see him once or twice.

He's a marvellous poet.

Yes, a very great poet I think. Oh he was a very close friend of Durrell.

Yes. What sort of a man was he?

You ask these questions, I find it very difficult to...

I know you do, I'm sorry.

A little sketch! (LAUGHS) Extremely difficult.

We're almost at the end of this tape, so I won't embark upon the American journey here. We can turn the tape over or...

We'll have to do it another time.

We'll have to do it another time. But we need to turn at some point to the American trip with Kathleen Raine.

Yes, I have a lot of interesting memories of that, and I did a lot of interesting things. Although I had hardly any money at all, I did manage to meet quite a lot of interesting people.

Good. Well I think we'll end the tape at that point, David. Thank you very much.

End of F1385 Side A

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End of Interview

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