**Carcanet Oral History Interview [25 July 2018]**

**Respondent: Grevel Lindop (GL)**

**Interviewer: Lise Jaillant (LJ)**

LJ: I was reading an article you’ve wrote for *PN Review* some time ago about your childhood in Liverpool, and I’m just wondering: Liverpool is a very different city from Oxford, right? You studied at Oxford. So, what happened when you moved to Oxford? Was it a total shock?

GL: It was wonderful, because I was very tired of Liverpool. Liverpool was in a very depressed state in the mid-1960s. The docks had collapsed because of the invention of shipping containers. The ocean liners no longer went there. There was nothing but the car factory, and the car factory was always plagued with strikes, and so the city was economically depressed. All the pleasant heritage tourist places like the Albert Docks had not been refurbished, they were just derelict; miles and miles of derelict docks. It was poor. For a young person, it was a depressing place. And it was magical, because I went to Oxford on my eighteenth birthday and it was just, it was everything I wanted. It was wonderful, and I was very, very happy there. It wasn’t a shock in the bad sense at all, I just loved it. And I was already writing. I was writing poetry, and this and that, and trying to write fiction, which I’ve never really done.

LJ: So, when did you start writing poetry?

GL: From childhood, really. But I began . . . when I was 16 or 17, quite seriously. And then a year after I went to Oxford, I met Michael, because we were at the same college, we were both at Wadham [College]. We met in the college garden in October 1967. I went to Oxford in 1966, and I met him in 1967, in October, and we immediately became friends. And before long, Michael took over this magazine, Carcanet, and I started contributing to it.

LJ: Did you have meetings with people from Cambridge? Because at first, as you know, it was a joint venture between Oxford and Cambridge.

GL: In my experience, not really, no. It was labelled as an Oxford and Cambridge magazine, but the Cambridge input was very small, and I think it soon stopped altogether. I don’t know if Peter Jay, maybe, was at Cambridge? I’m not sure. Or was he at Oxford? I don’t know. He was a bit older than me.

LJ: He was definitely involved.

GL: But I think by the time that Michael took it over, it was not publishing. It had stalled, it was defunct. And the editor was looking for someone to pass it on to, so Michael took it over and it immediately became an Oxford magazine. And the label Oxford and Cambridge was just dropped.

LJ: Obviously, you worked very closely with Michael Schmidt –

GL: Yes, we saw each other all the time.

LJ: - and you published several poems as well, in the early issues of Carcanet. Did you work with him at the editorial level as well?

GL: I did for about six months. But I really hated it. I hated reading all the submissions that came in, we got vast numbers of poems coming in. And many of them were very bad. And I just began to feel sick, every time I saw them, because Michael is a good editor, but I’m not.

LJ: I’m sure you’re very modest! I was reading some old issues of Carcanet magazine, and at some point, there was this statement saying that, ‘We don’t want to accept just one single poem, we want a series of poems, serious poets.’ Is that something that you . . . a commitment that you shared?

GL: That would be Michael. I mean, it’s fine with me, but I didn’t have any share in making that policy. Michael was far more -

LJ: You were a very committed poet; you didn’t just write one single poem –

GL: No, I wrote all the time. Yes.

LJ: And what kind of poems did you admire? Did you have a strong editorial line, or –

GL: Well, it’s interesting because at the beginning, we thought of ourselves as Imagists, because around the time we started working on the magazine, Michael was very close friends with Peter Jones, who was editing the Penguin book of Imagist Poets. And so, we all, we heard about this through Michael, and all the people associated with the magazine went and read Ezra Pound and the Imagist’s Manifestoes. And that kind of thing. And then when Peter’s anthology came out, we studied that, and so in a way, we developed an attitude to poetry by the study of Imagism. In fact, at one stage I think we actually called ourselves the Oxford Imagist Poets. And other groups . . . H.D., Pound and Aldington, Flint and those people, T. E. Hulme. And other groups of student poets at Oxford, attacked us and ridiculed us because of this.

LJ: You were from a different generation, you know, H.D., Richard Aldington, that’s the 1920s, so you came much later. So, what’s the difference between your group and the Imagist group?

GL: Well, my own discovery of poetry as a serious art actually came through reading Robert Graves. I read *The White Goddess* when I was sixteen. That kind of became my Bible, and as soon as I read it, I went out and bought Graves’s Collected Poems, then the whole thing. And he was my poetry hero, and then subsequently Yeats was added on to that. So, in terms of broader perspective, I was kind of, if you like, neo-romantic. With Graves and Yeats as models. In terms of technique and detail, it was the influence of the imagists, to show up in that.

LJ: Did you meet Laura Riding?

GL: No.

LJ: Michael Schmidt mentioned he was in touch with her in the 1970s.

GL: Yes, that happened after I left Oxford, and I don’t think she was ever in England at that time, she was living in the States. Michael might have met her there, or he may just have corresponded with her. I’ve never been enthusiastic about Laura Riding. I mean, she did have an attraction with Graves, obviously. And some of her work resembles his, or his resembles hers, as she would no doubt say. But I’ve always found her work unreadable. At any length, I just can’t get through it. It’s so over intellectual –

LJ: So, you admired Robert Graves, but not Laura Riding, really.

GL: - not Laura Riding, really.

LJ: Ok, so Carcanet published your first collection of poems, *Against the Sea*, 1969.

GL: To call it a collection is a bit of a compliment, because it was a small pamphlet. A tiny thing. What happened was that after publishing the magazine for several years, Michael decided to publish some pamphlets. And *Against the Sea* was in the first series of pamphlets. And then from the pamphlets he went on to books. And then he started another magazine, which became *PN Review*. So, it developed, stage by stage.

LJ: It’s a very nice booklet, with a nice blue-green cover. Did you choose the cover?

GL: Well, it was designed by a man called Simon Chester, who I think Michael is still in touch with. I had a poem about Ariadne, the myth of Ariadne and Theseus in it, and I wanted a cover that looked like a maze, or a labyrinth. They didn’t exactly come up with that, but that strange square design is effectively like a maze.

LJ: And obviously it was your first collection of poems and was well received.

GL: On the whole, yes, I had a good review from Martin Seymour-Smith, I don’t think they got many, but it was ok. And Michael wanted to continue, and then I was approached by Faber, and I had a group of poems in the second Faber Introduction… they used to do these anthologies of new poets. I was in the second one.

LJ: So, what was your reaction towards Faber, because obviously that’s an established publishing house?

GL: It was extremely negative. Because they proceeded in a very strange way. They wrote to me, they said they’d seen my poems in magazines and in the pamphlet, and they’d like to include me in this magazine, would I send them some work? So, I sent them a collection of work. And instead of selecting poems from that, they went to other sources and took poems which I had not sent them, and which I no longer write.

LJ: Ok. So, who was your contact at Faber?

GL: I can’t remember. The letters may be in the archive here, I’m not sure.

LJ: I hope so.

GL: I think they will be.

LJ: I haven’t seen anything.

GL: No, but I felt . . . I felt bad about it, because I didn’t approve of their choice. I thought it represented me badly. And unfortunately, because I was very young, I didn’t have the confidence to object. If it happened now, I would say, ‘Look guys, you either publish from the work I’ve sent you, or forget it.’ But of course, at that age, I didn’t have that confidence.

LJ: Especially with Faber.

GL: Yes! With Faber. Exactly. And so, I think the selection mis-represented me. It was ok, but it didn’t lead to anything. They didn’t… I think the editor must have been crazy, because it didn’t make any sense. Anyway, Michael wanted to publish me, so I put together a volume in due course for Carcanet, and I’ve been with them ever since, which I’m really happy about.

LJ: And you’ve been very loyal to Carcanet, you’ve always stayed with them. I mean, I saw one letter from the 1980s, 88, James Reed, he suggested that you move to another publishing house, Cape, but then you said ‘No, I’m going to stay with Carcanet.’ So, it seems to me you’ve stayed with them despite their small problems?

GL: I think it’s been mutual, because the benefit of that, of course, is that I still have a publisher. When, you know, many poets, even established ones, have gradually been dropped by large houses. Maybe because they don’t have enough sales, or something like that. But Michael will always support his authors. And so, he has worked through certain poets, for a lifetime. I really respect that. I know Carcanet is now one of the top poetry publishers, and they win a lot of awards and that kind of thing. I’m quite happy to be with them.

LJ: And you’ve been associated, not only as a published writer, but also as an editor, someone who really contributed to the Press from the beginning, so that’s another important aspect of it.

GL: Yes, you’ve probably seen the collection of essays called British Poetry since 1960, have you, which Michael and I -

LJ: Yes, I was at the British Library yesterday and I read it.

GL: Yes, we put that together.

LJ: And I read your chapter on the Liverpool poets, actually, and I had a question to ask you about the Liverpool poets, because that’s really interesting, you know, their relationship is mass audience, I was thinking of what’s happening today . . . with very popular poets.

GL: Exactly, yes.

LJ: But it seems to me that your chapter was very critical of these Liverpool poets.

GL: It was, yes. I mean, I was young and arrogant in those days, and I can see that I was looking at the situation from the perspective of what would now be called the page poet, as opposed to a performance poet. But I think, I don’t know, my allegiance was still to poetry as a high art, which requires great attention to detail, delicacy, and probably is better on the page because the reader can read poems several times. I’ve got nothing against poems that can be read and impact in a club or on stage, but that isn’t the kind of tradition that I work with. But I think I was, you know, I was young and impatient and thought I knew everything. I was probably wrong. What I am pleased with this, it was the first serious, critical article that anyone had written about the Liverpool poets.

LJ: I didn’t know that.

GL: Yes, and it’s still cited often today. Even if people disagree with it, because there was nothing else.

LJ: It’s a very good piece of scholarship because you actually went to see poetry performances, spoken poetry. So, you did what scholars do today, they try to actually get involved, so that’s a very good piece of scholarship.

GL: Well, what I did want to do was to take them seriously, even if I didn’t entirely like what they were doing. I also predicted that Roger McGough would be that one that would last longest, and that’s true, that’s happened.

LJ: And you mention as well that people who actually went to this event, were quite young people, in their twenties, so –

GL: Yes, it was the beginning of performance poetry as it is now.

LJ: Interesting. You mentioned that it was quite a show, it was very visual.

GL: You know more about this article than I do! I haven’t read it for a long time!

LJ: I just read it yesterday! It’s quite fresh in my memory.

GL: I haven’t read it in five years or more.

LJ: That’s one question I had about poetry readings, because Peter Jay mentioned that it was not common in the 1960s to do poetry readings. So obviously the Liverpool poets are a special case, but I’m just wondering about yourself [inaudible 16:45] at Carcanet magazine and Carcanet Press, I mean, did they do, did you do poetry readings?

GL: Oh yes.

LJ: Even as a young person?

GL: Yes, I did them as a student, I’ve done them ever since. Yes, I do as many as I can.

LJ: So, you started at Oxford?

GL: Yes, basically, and Michael would sometimes act as impresario. I remember going out to read in a church onetime, somewhere out in the country, and we went up in the pulpit, you know, where the priest would stand and we read the poems from there. And there was the Poetry Society at Oxford, in the University.

LJ: Michael was the president.

GL: And they would have visiting readers, regularly.

LJ: Ok, so you did have readings, I see.

GL: I don’t know when it started, but it was going on when I was there.

LJ: I’ve been trying to find things about the history of poetry readings and –

GL: The word readings - much earlier, because I think what happened was that they used to be more poetics. I found a letter, I used to know the Oxford poet Anne Ridler, and I found a letter to her from Kathleen Raine, where Kathleen’s talking with Anne about the fact they’ve both been at a poetry reading. Where there’d been T. S. Eliot, William Empson, Kathleen Raine and Stephen Spender. They all read poems. But it was in somebody’s house, so it was a private event. So, I think what happened was that things like that gradually became public.

LJ: I see. Could you tell me more about the Poetry Society at Oxford? How was it?

GL: I can’t tell you much, I can’t really tell you anything, because I wasn’t really involved very much. I went along sometimes, but I was never involved, I wasn’t on the committee, I wasn’t the president. Michael will know all about that. But I don’t, no, sorry.

LJ: It’s ok. You say you met Michael in 1967, he became a close friend from the beginning?

GL: Straight away, straight away. We met in the garden at Wadham College, and we talked in the garden, walked around, and then we went up to my room and we listened on my radio to a talk, a broadcast lecture by W. H. Auden, of which I can’t remember anything about, but we both sat there with [inaudible 17:28] by Auden, and I don’t know, we’ve been completely close friends ever since. We must have found an affinity, I think.

LJ: And how was Michael, as a young man?

GL: Just the same as he is now. When he was young, he was an old man, and now he’s old, he’s younger. He’s one of these people, you know, who never change. I mean he will have changed a bit, but he always knew all the important people, he was always networking, he was very sophisticated because he was a year older than I was and he’d been in Harvard, so he knew everything. He always knew who were the important people to talk to, and I was completely naïve about this, so he amazed me.

LJ: So, what you are saying is, he was very good at networking, at meeting these people [inaudible 20:23]

GL: And of course, highly intelligent.

LJ: He often presented himself as a Mexican, and obviously his parents were American, even though he grew up in Mexico.

GL: They were American by heritage, but they were Mexican citizens, because his family, I mean, you need to ask Michael about this, but his -

LJ: - that’s part of his identity.

GL: Yes, his family had been in Mexico since the 1860s, and he had Mexican nationality. He spoke Spanish before he spoke English. He was brought up - his parents were quite old when he was born, he was brought up by a Mexican nurse, who spoke Spanish to him, so he spoke Spanish before he spoke English. And he played with Mexican kids. So, the Mexican thing is very important to him. And this is manifested in his partner, Angel Garcia Gomez. I think that that is [inaudible 21:36] his Mexican heritage still. He had dual nationality, I think he was also American, he left Harvard and came to the UK because of Vietnam. And he said he saw no reason why he should be fighting America’s wars [inaudible 21:57]. And he eventually took British nationality. I was looking through, a couple of years ago, I was looking through an old diary of mine, from my student period, and I actually noticed I recorded the day that Michael came to see me, and told me that he was giving up his American nationality, because of Vietnam.

LJ: Ok. So, you still have the diary?

GL: It’s in the library, but you can’t see it.

LJ: I can’t see it?

GL: It’s got an embargo until my death. Because there’s too much confidential stuff in it. But one of the things I found there, to my surprise, was that Michael, initially, before he started publishing pamphlets, he was talking about having a book stall in the Oxford market. He was going to become a market bookseller.

LJ: Well, I’m not surprised, because he’s very keen on selling his books!

GL: But it kind of, it developed from there. I’d forgotten, but I found this . . .

LJ: So, did he actually sell books in the market?

GL: No, it was an idea, but he didn’t do it. I was looking there because, well, I suppose two years ago, there was an American lady here who was writing a biography of Elizabeth Jennings, which has just come out, Dana Greene. And I offered to go through my diaries, to see if I could find anything about Elizabeth Jennings, because Michael and I used to go visit her every week. She used to have us, and probably other young poets, to tea at her house, so we used to go around and visit her. But I couldn’t find a thing in my diary.

LJ: Interesting, and do you remember how she was? Because obviously she was quite a difficult woman, right?

GL: Not to us. Well, I think Michael had a lot of trouble with her, but then he was her publisher, so -

LJ: Because obviously she was very depressed.

GL: Poor Michael. Yes, no, I didn’t have any trouble at all. In fact, nothing but good, because she was –

LJ: She was very friendly to you?

GL: Yes, and she wrote fabulous reviews of my books. And she wrote a superb review, I think, in the *Independent*, of –

LJ: Oh yes, because she was also a reviewer.

GL: Yes, I mean, I still quote that review, because it was so good. And she used to send me lovely letters, I mean, the letters are in here, in the library. You can see those.

LJ: In the new part of the collection? Because I haven’t seen anything -

GL: I think they’re mostly in the old part, they might be in the new part. Some are in the new part. Yeah. But you know, she also guest-edited a number of Carcanet magazines.

LJ: Yes, I’ve read this.

GL: Yes, I mean she was very friendly. She was quite, sort-of… she seemed quite absent-minded and confused. And her rooms were completely cluttered with things, she had little toys and ornaments, and things like . . . furniture for doll’s houses. Every surface was covered with things, absolutely covered.

LJ: And she lived in a studio flat, right?

GL: She lived, I think she rented a, maybe two rooms or something from the landlord, maybe what we’d call a studio. What you’d call a bedsit, I guess. But I kept in touch with her, on and off, for most of her life. Sometimes went to readings and would go see her in Oxford after I left. She was great, very nice, very kind person, but lots of problems, you know.

LJ: Did she talk about her problems with you?

GL: No. Not really, no. The kind of, the funny and sad thing I remember about her was, one day at her house, going and sitting on the sofa, and there was something hard underneath, so I moved the cushion, and there was a bottle of gin hidden under the cushion, you know, and that was her private supply.

LJ: And what did you think of her poetry?

GL: I liked it; I still like it very much. I mean, she wrote too much, but I think the best of it is wonderful. I admire her.

LJ: So, obviously Michael Schmidt did quite a lot of work editing, because apparently she sent him quite a lot of stuff and they had to choose the best parts.

GL: Dana Greene, who did the biography, told me that, in the archives, there are fifty thousand poems by Elizabeth Jennings. Which is . . . I mean, that must be almost a record, I think. And it kind of points in the direction, I think, of some kind of mental illness. That she couldn’t stop writing. And she didn’t revise, she would just write another poem, and another, and another.

LJ: Do you think she was writing as a form of therapy, perhaps? Trying to find a solution to her problems?

GL: I think, well, I think she just couldn’t not do it. Which in a way is wonderful, but it wasn’t always particularly good, and some of it was very repetitious and so on. But it may have been to avoid looking at her problems. I don’t know. I’m not a psychiatrist.

LJ: So, obviously you knew Peter Jones as well, right?

GL: Yes.

LJ: Could you say a few words about him? How was he?

GL: A lot older than Michael. Very friendly, very intelligent. He had been a teacher at the school which Michael attended, and when Michael came to Oxford, I think he left his job and followed Michael to Oxford, and they lived together. So, it was . . . made a slightly strange relationship, I think.

LJ: Strange in what sense?

GL: Well, in some ways I think Michael is quite glad he managed to get away from Peter. In some ways. I think Peter was emotionally dependent on him. And because he was much older than Michael, it was difficult for Michael to develop, in some ways, independently, because this man was always there, you know [inaudible 29:07].

LJ: Michael has been quite open about it. He told me that, for him, it was a bit difficult, because, you know, the social cultural context was quite different at the time, so it was a bit difficult. So, you visited them at their farm?

GL: Yes, I think, after probably one or two years in college, Michael and Peter rented this house at Pin Farm. Yes, have you been there?

LJ: No, I need to go, because I’m going to Oxford very soon, I’d like to take a few photos. Apparently, it still exists. And the decoration was quite Mexican, right? In one of your letters you wrote that they had this lovely Mexican decoration?

GL: Oh yes, they had lots of Mexican things, and Michael had a Spanish typewriter, which was very interesting. And it was a special, quiet typewriter. So, it didn’t tap. But it kind of made a slightly squeaky noise. So, you’d hear it sort of wheezing. [Grevel mimics the noise] When he was typing, rather than tap, tap, tap. Anyway, that’s irrelevant. I used to go over there for dinner and that kind of thing, and we would go to the pub up the hill to fetch drinks, like sherry and beer, and bring them down to the house from the pub. And it became the headquarters of Carcanet Press. And then I moved to Manchester in 1971 -

LJ: Yes, to become a junior lecturer, right?

GL: Yes.

LJ: So, you moved to Manchester before Michael?

GL: Yes, and the Head of Department, I think, or the person who hired me, anyway, was a guy called C. B. Cox, Brian Cox, who probably has a big archive here as well. And he ran this journal called the *Critical Quarterly* which was, it was quite a leading poetry journal, it published new poems by Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, R. S. Thomas, all those people.

LJ: Yes, I had a look at the archive, one question I had have, did you mention to Michael that you were in touch with Brian Cox? I mean, did you put Michael in touch with him, or?

GL: Well, he certainly knew that I was, you’re thinking about whether I was involved in the move of Carcanet to Manchester?

LJ: Yes, at some point, Michael writes to Brian Cox saying, ‘Ok, I’m really interested in *Critical Quarterly* and I’m just wondering about the connection between the two, I mean, obviously, they were part of the same panel on the Arts Council, but I’m just wondering if you helped create this relationship, or if Michael just, you know, created this relationship?

GL: I think, it’s very hard to remember at this length of time. I used to discuss poetry a lot with Brian Cox, and Brian knew that I was a close friend of Michael, and so I think we probably all communicated in a triangle, and at some point Brian had this idea of inviting Michael to come to Manchester and bring Carcanet with him. Which was great, of course. So, he arrived, I don’t know, do you know what date he came to Manchester?

LJ: In 1972.

GL: So, it’s just the year after me, yes.

LJ: So, what was your first impression of Manchester? I mean, obviously you’re from Liverpool so you probably knew Manchester before that, but –

GL: No, because people from Liverpool never went to Manchester, and people from Manchester never went to Liverpool. Liverpool and Manchester are great rivals. Great enemies, you know, they compete with each other. So, you know, in football, and everything else. So, I didn’t know Manchester at all really, no.

LJ: What was your first impression?

GL: Well, very dirty. It was black in those days, because of the smoke. I came to Manchester because I wanted something, I wanted something different from Oxford. I had a wonderful time at Oxford, but I thought, if I stayed at Oxford, I would sink into it and never leave at all. I would turn into a fossil because I was so comfortable. I thought I should have something different. I needed a contrast. And they offered me a job at Manchester, so I came.

LJ: So, did you consider it as, a kind of temporary job, and you would go back to -

GL: I don’t know what I thought, I didn’t expect to stay in Manchester. I think it’s a surprise for a lot of people, Manchester, it’s somewhere that people come, and they don’t expect to stay. Maybe less now, because it’s had more of an identity. Again, like Liverpool, it was a bit depressed at that time. Because Manchester is based on textiles, and the textile industry was collapsing, so you know, it wasn’t very prosperous. But it was a very interesting city, it was extremely vivid, and I wrote some poems about Manchester. Because it seemed very interesting, it was quite different to anything I’d experienced before. And there was –

LJ: Today, the city centre of Manchester is very nice, at the time, were did you live, what kind of neighbourhood did you live?

GL: Well, I lived on the edge of Moss Side, which was quite…famous for crime, and drug dealers.

LJ: Quite different from Oxford!

GL: Yes, but it was very close to the University. I didn’t like getting up early, so I could get out of bed and be in the University and teaching a class in 15 minutes. All I had to do was walk across the park. So, that was an advantage. I could stay up late at night and I didn’t have to get up early in the morning.

LJ: Tell me a little bit about your colleagues, so you mentioned Brian Cox, did you have a good sample of colleagues and friends?

GL: Yes, it was… it’s very difficult to be objective because I was very young. I got my first job in Manchester when I was 22. When I took a tutorial, students would sometimes ask when the tutor was coming, because they thought I was a student. I was so young. So, my early time at Manchester is all mixed up with my experience of . . . my own development. I was growing up and . . . I mean, all sorts of things happened. [Laughter] That’s a long story. It was… I had a good time, but it was very, very intense. I worked very hard. Some of my senior colleagues I really disliked, hated. Others I got on with very well. I had a lot of affairs with students. I had a lot of affairs with colleagues. It was…everything, you know.

LJ: It was the 1970s. I guess academia today is quite different. Well, it would be very unusual to be a lecturer at 22, I’ve never seen that.

GL: No, because I didn’t have a PhD, I hadn’t even – I didn’t even have a higher degree at all. I had a BA first class, and I was working on, I was doing research for a two-year higher degree at Oxford, which was a BLitt. A BLitt still exists, I think. It’s a two-year degree, it’s a bit like an MA. But of course, Oxford doesn’t have a proper MA, it has an MA that means nothing. So, it’s a two-year research degree. And I -

LJ: In addition to the BA.

GL: In addition to the BA, but I hadn’t even finished that. But they interviewed me and they gave me a job. Many of my colleagues didn’t have PhDs either.

LJ: That’s something that maybe I could mention, that at the time, at University of Manchester, it was mostly people from Oxbridge, Brian Cox I think was from Oxford or Cambridge, I can’t remember.

GL: He had done a postgraduate degree at Cambridge but it wasn’t his first university.

LJ: I see.

GL: Many of the people, of the lecturers had been to other universities, York, Leeds, one of the London universities. I’m trying to think who had been to –

LJ: So not exclusively from Oxford.

GL: I think very few of my colleagues had been to Oxford. Very few, actually. Mostly good provincial universities. That’s my impression.

LJ: Obviously you worked there for a long time.

GL: Yes. You were asking me something else and I’ve forgotten what it was.

LJ: Yes, I wondering about the arts scene at the time, did you go to a lot of poetry readings in Manchester?

GL: There were quite a lot of poetry activities – [bell rings] – Ah, we have to leave?

LJ: We can stay a little bit.

GL: Mostly, as I recall, most of the poetry activities were centred on the University. There was a poetry group of people who were writing, who used to meet. The English department had visiting poets reading, and Brian Cox had this nominal thing called the Manchester Poetry Centre, which basically was just the English department, and they would –

LJ: Oh, I see, it was not like a real centre?

GL: It never really grew up into anything. But they had people coming, they had Ted Hughes several times, they had R. S. Thomas, they had lots of famous poets. And I remember taking part in poetry readings in pubs, in Rusholme for example, where all the Indian curry restaurants are now, there were pubs and we used to do readings upstairs in those pubs. Yeah, so it was quite a lot. But it was mostly centred on the University, and what was then the polytechnic, which became MMU.

LJ: You mentioned Ted Hughes? Did you meet him?

GL: Not . . . I didn’t have any extended conversation with him but I was in the same room as him and I heard him read . . . I was too scared to talk to him. But I did meet, people I did have proper conversations with included John Betjeman, Stephen Spender, Kingsley Amis –

LJ: Kingsley Amis was actually involved with Carcanet magazine at the beginning, when it was –

GL: I’d forgotten that. Yes.

LJ: Yes, because they needed a senior figure –

GL: They had to have a senior member of staff, yes. Gosh, I’d forgotten about that.

LJ: And another question I had was about the politics, because obviously you know Brian Cox, he was often described as very right-wing, even though he did not describe him[self] that way. So, I’m just wondering about that, do you think it was politicised?

GL: Well, the magazine had the reputation of being right-wing, I think because Brian Cox and I suppose also C. H. Sisson and Donald Davie were associated with it at the time. I was very left-wing, I was for some years, when I first came to Manchester I regarded myself as a Marxist, and I was actively involved in what is now the SWP, it was the International Socialists in those days. So, I was out on the streets selling papers, you know, at factory gates and that kind of thing, and urging people to go on strike against the government.

LJ: You were a contributor, to *PN Review*?

GL: Yes, I never worried about it. I thought, ‘What the hell?’ You know.

LJ: Because some writers definitely didn’t want to contribute to *PN Review* because it was seen as very right-wing.

GL: Well… I suppose all that is overwritten for me by the fact that I was a close friend of Michael, and that was more important to me than the politics.

LJ: What did you think of the politics? Because obviously there were many editorials that were described as right-wing.

GL: I’m not sure I bothered to read them, actually. Or if I did, maybe I didn’t understand them. I didn’t really care, to be honest. I wasn’t particularly bothered.

LJ: Did you talk about politics with Brian Cox?

GL: Sometimes, yes. It’s quite interesting, because in that situation, people can treat you as their pet Marxist, so they’ll have conversations with you and say, ‘Now, I know you won’t agree with this, but I think so-and-so, what do you think?’ And you say the opposite, and they say, ‘Yes, of course, that’s great, because you’re our pet Marxist.’ And somehow that… it’s domesticated. [Laughter].

LJ: So, they put you in a box, in a way.

GL: In a way, yes. But I don’t know.

LJ: So obviously you’ve had a long career, you’re first collection was published in 1969, so that was fifty years ago. I mean, how . . . I guess, how do you look back at this long career? What do you, what are you proud of?

GL: Well. There’s a, I suppose, a small number of poems that I’ve written that I feel are ok. So, I’m happy with those. In each book I’ve published, there’s probably a small number of poems that I feel, I’m happy with those.

LJ: So, for example, in the first collection of poems, which one do you prefer?

GL: I like the poem about Ariadne [*The Truth About Ariadne*]. That first one. I can’t remember what else is in it because I haven’t looked at it for forty years, you know. Sometimes I hear that other people have used my poems, like somebody told me they’d read one of my poems at their mother’s funeral, I was pleased about that. One of my poems, I’ve had more than one, one in particular of my poems was a Guardian Poem of the Week, about an opal.

LJ: Oh yes, I’ve read it.

GL: I’m fond of that poem. When it was the Guardian Poem of the Week, a lot of people spread it around on social media.

LJ: It’s about your grandmother.

GL: Yes, and apparently, I mean this is probably not very good from an environmental point of view, but I was told that there’s an open mining company in Australia that put it on their website, you know, I mean – [Laughter]. Probably not bright. I feel, if you publish, it’s like putting a thing on a balloon. It goes off, and what people do with it after that is not really under your control anymore. And I quite like that. So, it has a life of its own, and it means different things to different people… fine.

LJ: So, are you proud of having been associated with Carcanet from the beginning?

GL: Yes, I am.

LJ: Even though you could have been a Faber poet?

GL: Well, I don’t know that I could, because you know, even if they published my choice of poems, maybe . . . I think they just waited to see which ones the reviewers, the critics, would pick out. And if they hadn’t, I wouldn’t have been published by them anyway. So, I don’t know. I don’t look at alternatives, I just appreciate what is there, really. And I’m always doing something else, anyway. Looking at something else.

LJ: So, what’s your current project at the moment?

GL: Well, I’m writing more poems. And recently I’ve started writing again in very, very strict form, using rhyme and meter, and finding that really interesting because it’s so difficult. But it forces me to think of things I didn’t know I had. So, that’s good. And I’m starting to write a book about W. B. Yeats, I’ve just done a biography of Charles Williams, you know, the friend of C. S. Lewis, Tolkien, the Oxford poet. And I want to do a companion, a similar book about Yeats, tracing his esoteric life, spiritualism, magic, the occult, all that and its connection with his poetry, so yes.

LJ: And I’m sure many people will be interested, because with Yeats, there’s a revival. Well, thank you so much, I’m sorry we don’t have more time.

[Interview ends]