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NORMAN THE YOUNGER by David Boyd

Recently, I was more than delighted to buy, for the princely sum of 75 pence on Ebay (the postage was £2 though), one of NN's earliest published books.

This is a rather fragile and distressed paperback dating to 1942, when Norman was just 28 and striving to establish his literary reputation.

It is an *Anthology of Religious Verse* published by Penguin Books under their 'Pelican Books' imprint, and, despite its condition, is at least complete and just about readable.

It's fascinating stuff, both as a piece of history and as an insight into NN's earlier life.

In his characteristically pithy Introduction, NN observes that '... many of the literary reviews will not touch religion with a barge-pole.'

The mention in the blurb on the back cover of NN in 1939 having delivered a lecture to the Student Christian Movement Conference on *Morals and the Modern Novel* must have been a precursor to his publishing his first full book of literary criticism, in the form of *Man and Literature* (1943).

Just a year later (1944) Faber published *Five Rivers*, his first book of poetry.

The connection with student Christianity probably dated back to NN's involvement with Bessie Satterthwaite, a fellow Millomite and a devout Christian.

Around this time, though, NN embarked upon a new relationship, with a schoolteacher from London / Kent, Enrica Garnier, who undertook the thankless task of typing-up NN's manuscripts and to whom *Five Rivers* is dedicated.

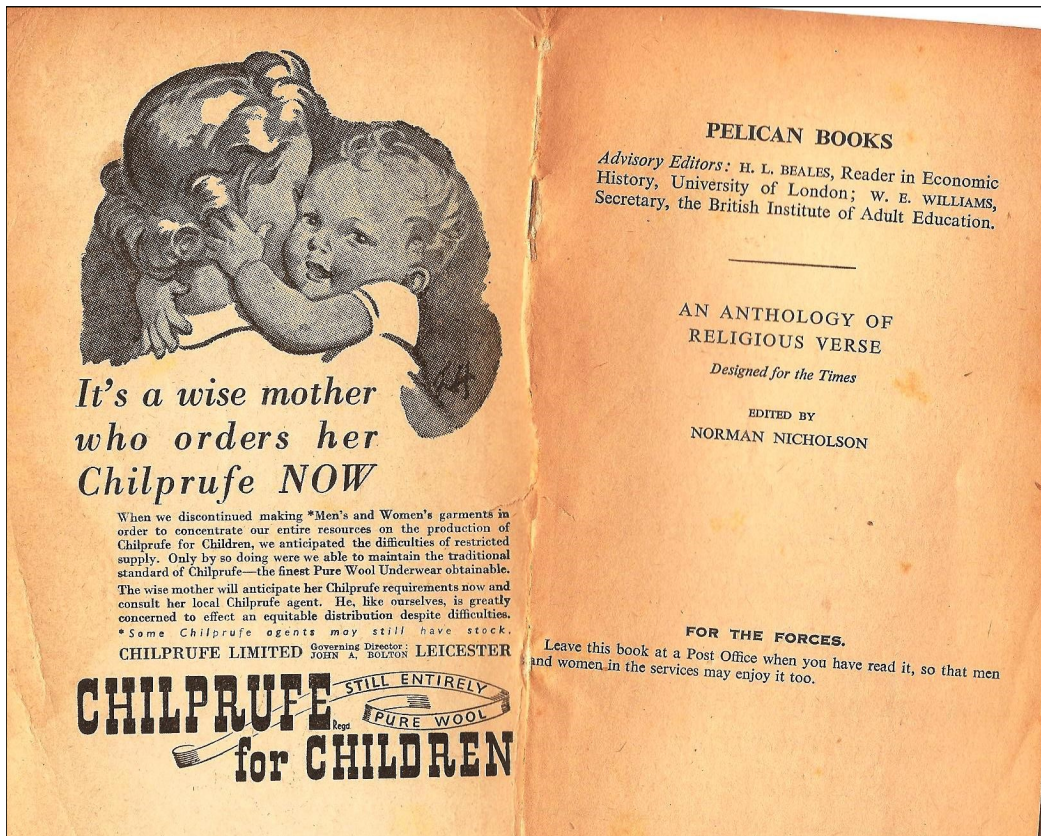
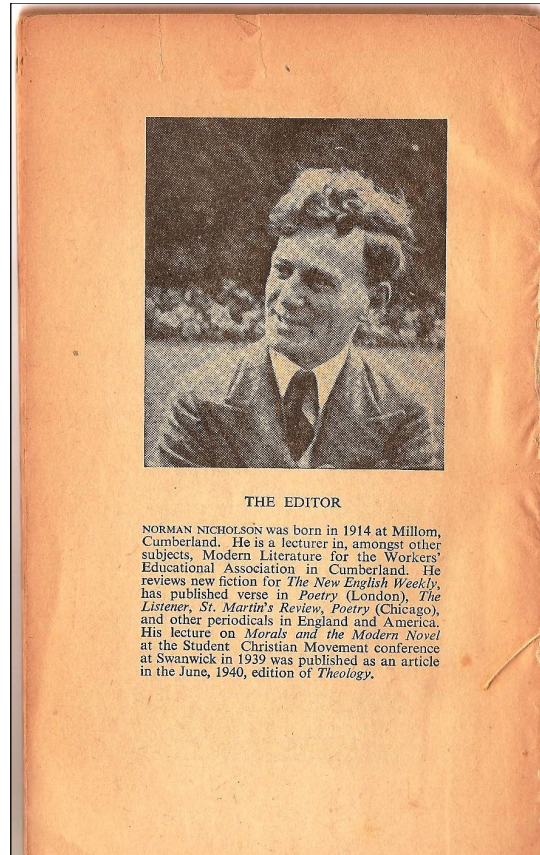
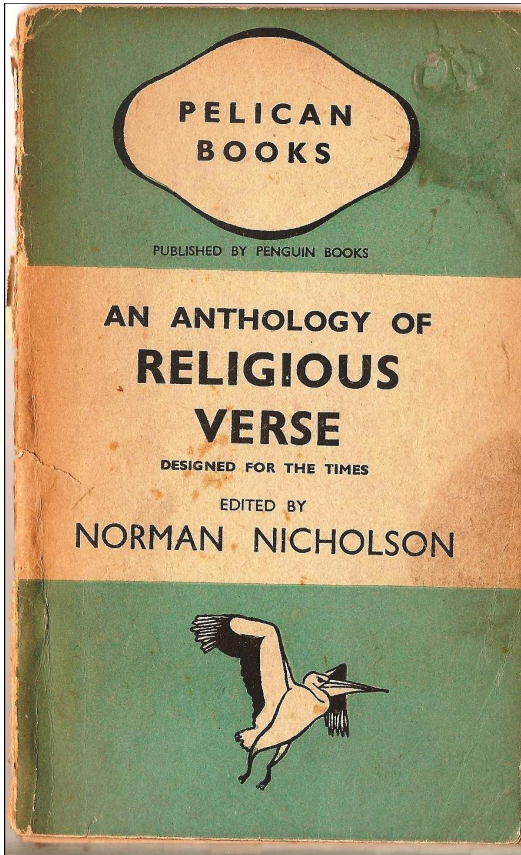
Enrica's school was evacuated to Pontesbury in Shropshire after suffering heavy wartime bombing, and Enrica herself became acting headmistress of the evacuees.

It has been a truly fascinating privilege to have had some mail and even telephone discussions with a number of these wartime evacuees, some of whom remember NN visiting and all of whom recall Enrica with very great affection and respect: they are a formidable bunch of ladies, even in their old age!

'September in Shropshire', in NN's *Collected Poems* celebrates this part of NN's early life, although the relationship with Enrica seems to have fizzled-out, and, very sadly, she never embarked on another, and died a spinster, a few years after NN's death.

Some images of this interesting little paperback I hope exemplify some of this.

IMAGES OF AN EARLY ANTHOLOGY OF POETRY EDITED BY NICHOLSON



And so, to the chorus . . .

The importance of music as a thread running through Nicholson's life can be observed in the framework it provides for the opening chapter 'January' in *Provincial Pleasures*, and hence, that *music* is present from the very start of *the year*.

We observe the New Year being launched with community singing, as part of the spectacle of the gathering, assembled to welcome in the New Year, under the town clock, to a cacophony of life music: the band, a piping sea-bird overhead, *Contralto Ethel sits alone in the choir...*, the Ironworks buzzer, the tenor bell, *Auld Lang Syne is heaved into the air as if the tune were being tossed in a blanket*, the band drums up and blazes away..., *they are singing now in the chapel, ...The organist pulls out new stops...*

Music often defines a place or a time in our lives, by providing a trigger for memory; the sounds of the evening, which weave the Community together—*knotted together... a bootlace tangle* (PP, page 17), and *Her seventy-year-old voice returns to the task of leading the little crocodile of voices along the winding path of the tune* (PP, page 19). It is this music, which binds the Community together, often transcending class, political and religious barriers (PP - 'February') and providing a leveller, outside the harsh working environment, indifferent to the status held by employee and manager alike.

In 'February' - PP - we meet *The Amateur Operatic Movement*, which is at the core of the Community, through direct involvement or as an observer in the audience. The verses of Life's week may have been the hard graft of mine-working, sung by the toil of individuals, but the weekend and free-time became, for the Community, a chorus, seeking release and solace in the escapism that music could provide.

Chapter 12 of Nicholson's *Cumberland and Westmorland*, 'The Mining Towns', includes an interesting insight into this musical diversion and its importance in everyday life, expanded in the section 'Music', where Nicholson traces the way in which music develops from church and chapel into the well followed, cross-county singing festivals and choir competitions, and again, the work-life-balance offered to those who would *hurry home from work, perhaps after eight hours down the pit to a half-empty concert in a mission room...*

Music defines and introduces various characters to us, throughout Nicholson's writing, including Nicholson himself. In *Wednesday Early Closing*, we see an early invitation, overtly offered, for the boy Nicholson to join the Church Choir (WEC, pages 120 - 121), later deciphered for him by his father.

WEC also offers us a further interesting insight into the structure that music, and its influence, added to Nicholson's year. Similar to that with which we opened this study (beginning *the year* in PP - 'January'), chapter 4 WEC describes Nicholson's (step-)Mother's piano-playing involvement at chapel, and how the *once-a-month Sundays on which she accompanied the service became the twelve pillars around which the rest of the year was built*.

There is also a tender insight here, into his pride in his Mother's musical contribution, expressed in *As for me (NN), I would sit through the service, dithering with pride...* (WEC, page 83).

There are other characters to be met: Ethel in PP - 'January' - a character whose life seems intrinsically linked with music; the male singers who frequented the chapel she attends; and the miners, Cornishmen, who brought their own influences into Cumbria, and as Nicholson states, *like the Welsh, the Cornishmen sang*.

(Phil Houghton) continues overleaf on page 4

... Music In Nicholson's Prose by Phil Houghton

Christopher Crackenthwaite, a larger than life character, appears in *PP*, introduced in 'January', as once having been Choir Master. Later in this chapter, he describes the existence of the bass voice, the miner's music of Male Voice Choir, as *something which comes out of the rock, into the food and the water* (a very "Nicholsonian" concept - see Nicholson's *Author's Introduction* to his work, in F E S Finn's anthology *Poets of our Time, 1965: ...though Millom is an industrial town, we who live in it are really living on the land...the food...the milk...the steel...come out of the soil and the rock to begin with...the shaping of human lives*).

Captain Cox appears in *PP* - 'May' - the embodiment of Miner and Amateur Operatic Society stalwart, facets which Nicholson draws on equally to describe him in this text. The dialogue between the writer and Cox provides us with a playful insight into the layering of daily life, setting the subterranean world of the miner, as a strata running alongside the world above - *and I stop for a rest right under that elder tree...exactly there - hundreds of feet down*. In Cox we see the toil and music as similar strata in the lives of folk.

Music can also be seen as the release from the mundane, the daily round, the hard graft of the mines. *PP* - the closing of the chapter 'February' - describes how the *Sunday after Opera is a blank and bleak day*. This is the return to reality from the escapism of this musical highlight 'The Opera', a place, where strict teachers could be transformed into *Oberon, King of the Fairies* (*WEC*, page 120, a character who also appears, similarly described, in *PP* - 'February'). *Portrait of the Lakes*, page 175, describes music as one of the vents for *surplus energy*.

There are many industrial metaphors linked to these dispersed musical references and descriptions across Nicholson's writing. In *PP* - 'May' - we consider again, Captain Cox, *in his pit-clothes, red as a devil... whose bass voice can creak out a greeting vibrating like the wires of a railway signal*.

The influence of church and chapel, Nonconformity, and incoming influences brought by miners from afar appears again in *POL*, where page 175 gives - *Nonconformity burned up surplus energy like a gas-vent at a colliery ... Messiah, choir suppers, Concerts. The singing even burst out ...*

In *PP* - *October* - page 171, we see music as a thing to be mined, where the festivals are a *sport that binds the men together, and enables them to hear the submerged music in their own souls*.

Music, it would appear, as well as that which carries life and landscape as it flows through Nicholson's poetry, is also a vein which runs throughout his prose, a tune which carries structure, memory, characters and Community, stitching them together in *Life's Amateur Opera*.

Phil Houghton - Cumbria

From Wednesday Early Closing—April

They are sauntering now among the budding bread-and-cheese, with never a suspicion that it is what they pay no notice to that they will remember the most poignantly—the lark song, the lamb bleat, the king-cups in the ditch, the blackthorn in the hedge. Such things, coming without warning before their eyes or into their ears, will bring back the tingle of courtship more palpably than a midnight of willed recollections.

'Oh,' she says, pointing among the celandines, 'a bee.'

And he does not even notice the celandines, but the bee has left its buzz in his memory for ever.

Reflections on 'Wall' by Wendy Cook

Wall

*The wall walks the fell -
Grey millipede on slow
Stone hooves;
Its slack back hollowed
At gulleys and grooves
Or shouldering over
Old boulders
Too big to be rolled away.*

NORMAN NICHOLSON, 1975

'Wall' first appeared in 1975 in *Stitch & Stone: A Cumbrian Landscape*. This slim booklet was produced by the Ceolfrith Press, Sunderland, who commissioned six poems from Nicholson and printed them alongside embroidered landscapes by Kenneth Dow Barker, an Ingleton man, and outdoor kind of chap: collier, roadman and would-be farmer. On his retirement he celebrated life in the Dales with his stitched pictures. The poems Nicholson contributed to the project were 'Cornthwaite', 'Beck', 'Scafell Pike', 'Nobbut God', 'Haytiming' and 'Wall'.

Six years later, 'Wall' reached a wider audience when it appeared in what-was-to-be Nicholson's final book of poetry, *Sea To The West*. Nicholson was then sixty seven.

But perhaps the germ for 'Wall' existed much earlier than 1975.

In Nicholson's very first book of topographical writing *Cumberland and Westmorland*, he wrote:-

The stones of the walls . . . keep their footing and balance on the
steepest slopes, climbing high over crags . . .¹

Already the walls are living creatures: they have feet ; they move.

Cumberland & Westmorland was the tenth book in 'The County Books Series', edited by Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald. Published in 1949, when Nicholson was thirty five, different writers were commissioned to cover each county: Phil Drabble, for example, contributed *Staffordshire*. For Cumbria, Vesey-Fitzgerald astutely chose Nicholson.

The idea gestated, then maybe lay dormant for twenty-six years, a quarter of a century, (and a third of a Nicholson's lifetime), until he developed it into 'Wall'.

In fact, he has more to say about walls in *Cumberland and Westmorland*:-

On Saddleback, the walls lie as if once they had covered the fell
in a chain net, until it arched its back and broke through at the
top and left the tatters of the chain hanging about its flanks. ²

Reflections on 'Wall' (continued) ...

In 'Wall', that same word 'arches' crops up, though now it is the wall which arches, accommodating to the slipping fellside:

At each give of the ground,
Each creak of the rock's ribs,
It puts its foot gingerly,
Arches its hog-holes,
Lets cobble and knee-joint
Settle and grip.

From that early-expressed idea, 'the walls keep their footing and balance' Nicholson, knowing how drystone walls stand, precisely because they are unmortared, free to shift and ease, and withstand ice, wind and wet, developed the idea of the wall as a living, moving creature. From the local phrase, 'they built it to stand', Nicholson creates 'but not stand still. They built it to walk.'

For a man who loved all of Lakeland, including the fells, perhaps it was sure he would see life in their close companions, the drystone walls.

And this is no poetic fancy: this is how the drystone walls of Lakeland really do last.

A well-built dry-stone wall will stand intact, without needing repair for hundreds of years. This is several times the lifespan of a cemented wall. Dry-stone walls shift and bend in order to conform to the natural movements of the land, the frost heaves, the sinkholes, the settlings in the rainy season. A dry wall that is distorted and bellied and yet still fairly sturdy has reached . . . 'old age'.

Steven Allen, Cumbrian Waller ³

Dry stone walling is so durable because it contains no mortar to crack and fail, but is held together merely by the weight of stone, and by the skill of the builder who selected and fitted the stones together. Dry stone structures are constructed in such a way that as they slowly settle with time, they become stronger and more closely bound.

Alan Brooks and Sean Adcock
Dry Stone Walling BCTV booklet ⁴

The Wall like a Herdwick sheep, picks its way down crags, putting its feet gingerly, arching its back, letting its knee joints settle and grip. Like Herdwicks, the stone walls of the Lakes are a thousand shades of grey. In 'Wall' Nicholson was clearly thinking of Herdwick sheep: 'slow stone hooves' clearly hints 'sheep' rather than the explicit millipede simile. Nicholson's wall-creature is knotted from several metaphors: the sure-footed Herdwick, the armour-backed millipede, the entwined wrestlers.

In *Cumberland & Westmorland* there is more insight into Nicholson's thoughts about wrestling:

... by Wendy Cook

...the spectator sees only two men staggering round each other like a couple of drunken policemen trying to dance. The real contest that is going on is lost to him. It is not to be seen at all. To appreciate wrestling the mind must move in imagery which is almost entirely tactile. The wrestler must fix his hold, keep his balance, try to judge the mind of his opponent entirely by touch. Muscles and joints must learn to think in their own dimensions.⁵

Nicholson has tumbled on similarities between Cumberland walls and Cumberland wrestlers that go beyond their 'Leaning together'. For spells in wrestling maybe nothing, or very little, appears to happen, yet weight and balance are shifted, movement felt and adjusted to. The movement of the wall may not be seen either, but it is there, a subtle settling and shifting. The wall, like the wrestlers, is a union of touch and balance, its physicality echoes their taut exercise of muscles and joints. The wall too thinks 'in its own dimensions'.

The wall: long, thin, millipede-like, passes movement wave-like along its length, its individual feet invisible. Nicholson is not the only one to have noticed this wave-like appearance: Paul Glendinning [UMIST]⁶ has speculated about the wave periodicity of the wiggles that develop as dry-stone walls age. 'Many of these walls have developed a lateral instability and are now decidedly wiggly, and it is natural to speculate on the period or wavelength of these wiggles.' The millipede metaphor seems rather nicely justified.

In fact nothing that Nicholson wrote about drystone walls was fictitious. He recorded what he could observe and expounded it as clearly as he knew how. Luckily, Nicholson is a master of both observation and clarity.

In perhaps the ultimate tribute to Nicholson's 'Wall', The Dry Stone Walling Association have entitled a video/DVD: *The Wall Walks The Fell*.⁷

¹ Nicholson, N. *Cumberland & Westmorland* 1949 p.17

² ibid

³ *The Atlantic Online* May 2000 "Someone there is who loves a wall" Michael Finkel: <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/2000/05/finkel.htm>

⁴ <http://handbooks.btcv.org.uk/>

⁵ Nicholson, N. *Cumberland & Westmorland* 1949 p.119

⁶ Glendinning, P. "View from the Pennines: Almost Automorphisms" 2003: <http://handbooks.btcv.org.uk/>

⁷ "The Wall Walks The Fell" Video/DVD 30mins.

Highlights the importance of walls in Cumbria, showing how they were built and their part in the landscape. Also features present day wallers describing how they became involved in the craft: <http://www.dswa.org.uk/>

Wendy Cook
February 2010

[email address redacted: January 2019]

“Giving it Wigan” by Neil Curry

It would be wrong to say that music was a dominant theme in Nicholson’s work, but it is constantly there. Even when telling us about the box-kite in ‘The Pot Geranium’ he describes it as, “Crimson as the cornets of the Royal Temperance Band/ When they brass up the wind in marching.”

Clearly music was important to him and it began, it seems, with his step-mother. The first we hear of her in *Wednesday Early Closing*, when she was still Miss Sobey, is that she was managing the piano and music shop next door at Number Fifteen and well known as a pianist and as an accompanist at local concerts. And after the marriage, one of the first life-changing events he remembers is the arrival at Number Fourteen of an upright piano.

Concerts played an important part in the social life of Millom and though he admits to having no musical talent himself, they established his reputation as a boy-reciter, making him, as he put it, ‘better known in Millom than I have ever been since.’ And, he adds, ‘The Music Festival of those days was one of the favourite winter sports in our part of the world.’ There were passions involved too. ‘I’ve known a baritone from Barrow, who had missed the Rose Bowl by one point, raise his fists angrily to the Adjudicator until Herbert Thomas threatened to throw him down the stairs.’ But Barrovians were off-comers, so what could you expect?

Music is there in these accounts of his early years and is still there in his final collection *Sea to the West* where that fine poem ‘At The Music Festival’ not only recalls those passionate singers, but uses the occasion to tell us how, like them, he would wish to end his days; by ‘Giving it Wigan’.

*Neil Curry
June 2010*

At the Musical Festival

‘He gev it Wigan!’ we’d say long ago
When our loved local baritone,
Rendering *The Erl King* or *Ruddier than the Cherry*,
Hurled his voice like an iron quoit
Clean into the Adjudicator’s
Union-Jacked box at the back. [...]

[The remainder of this poem has been redacted
for copyright reasons. January 2019.]

*Norman Nicholson
Collected Poems p. 367-8*

Hacking and Hammering or Carolling and Singing? Some Aspects of Nicholson's Sound-worlds by Antoinette Fawcett

When the Norman Nicholson Society was inaugurated, just over four years ago now, in March 2006, the words chosen as the motto of the society, from the mass of words which Nicholson had written, did not come from the well-known and often-quoted poems of *The Pot Geranium*, *A Local Habitation*, or *Sea to the West*, but from 'Caedmon', a poem from Nicholson's second book of poems, *Rock Face*. The quotation was: 'I hack and hammer at the handiwork of verse'.

Children in local schools who have participated in the three recent NN School Competitions will have seen this quotation in competition leaflets and on the book plates pasted into the *Selected Poems* donated to each participating school by the Society. The words with their Anglo-Saxon alliterative technique and strong rhythms sound rugged and craftsman-like, the opposite of lyrical or song-like – and as such were perhaps chosen to emphasize the fact that poetry, at least as Nicholson practised it, was not sissy, namby-pamby or wetly romantic, but rough-hewn, craggy, and down-to-earth. If Nicholson's work was to be fully accepted and celebrated locally, not only in the present but also well into the future, as we hoped it would be, then the emphasis should perhaps be on his craftsmanship and not on any inborn lyrical genius. After all, wasn't Nicholson a true 'Man of Millom' close to the people, the soil and stones, the plants and flowers, birds and small creatures, the industry and farming, the shop-life and the life of pubs, clubs, chapels and churches, the allotments and the graveyards, schools and police-stations? Nicholson, we hoped to show to the town and country folk of Millom and well beyond, was not a poet of pansies and purple flights of fancy, but someone like themselves, someone who just happened to labour at poetry, in much the same way that other men of his generation had laboured in the pits or the Ironworks, or had hammered and hewn at rocks in local quarries.

Poetry as hard labour? Or poetry as music and song? There is much evidence within Nicholson's work that the latter image was as powerful for him as the former. The poem 'Caedmon' itself can be read both as a hard-won song of complaint and as an eloquent praise-song. In the voice of Caedmon, the earliest named poet to have composed (and sung) in the English tongue, according to the account given of him in Bede's Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Nicholson's poem gives a complex and troubled vision of the poet's task. The poet, Caedmon, a simple herdsman, is compelled to his handiwork in spite of poverty, in spite of a lack of knowledge of the world beyond his own small locality, in spite of feelings of inadequacy with regard to his own language, which is not 'the liturgical tongue' of Latin, and in spite of his doubts about his own illiteracy. But at the same time the poetry which emerges from these lacks is sure and vivid: Caedmon has heard the angels speak, felt the words 'pricked out with fire, / Notched in my bones and burning in my body', whilst the angels themselves "crawled like gold lice" through his dreams. It is true that the song which emerges from Caedmon's mouth, as Nicholson imagines it, is presented as compelled and struggling, rather than as soaring and inspirational, but song it is nevertheless, with wonderfully musical effects which simply could not have been achieved in a more apparently lyrical form:

x x / / x / x x / x /

1) Where the spade grates on stone, on the grappling gorse

or:

x x / x x x / x x / / / / /

2) And the fog is in the bones of the drowned. Here fares far out

(x = unstressed syllable or very light stress; / = heavy stress)

The second example in particular (2), with its pause after the word 'drowned', which shifts the second half of that line far forward in time, is wonderfully imitative of the action of travelling, pushing into and over the waters. This second half-line stretches the journey as each word is

Some Aspects of Nicholson's Sound-world (continued)

given full weight and length. All the vowel sounds in these four words, "Here fares far out", are long, and made longer by the diphthongs in "here", "fares" and "out". The voice has to glide from word to word and pay full and proper attention to each one of them.

Or look at the lovely parallelisms and oppositions in syntax, concept and sound in a line like:

/ x x / x x / x / x x / x x /
 Walking at night on the shingle, waking at dawn in the straw

In 1957 the Canadian critic and theorist Northrop Frye, in his study *Sound and Poetry*, showed that of two 19th century poetic practices, the one represented by Tennyson and the other by Browning, the 'rougher', less mellifluous poet (i.e. Browning) is more truly musical in the sense in which we understand music:

...when we find sharp barking accents, long cumulative rhythms sweeping lines into paragraphs, crabbed and obscure language, mouthfuls of consonants, the spluttering rumble of long words, and the bite and grip of heavily stressed monosyllables, we are most likely to be reading a poet who is influenced by music. Influenced, that is, by the music that we know, with its dance rhythm, discordant texture, and stress accent. The same principle suggests that the other use of the term "musical" to mean a careful balancing of vowels and a dreamy sensuous flow of sound actually applies to poetry that is unmusical, that is, which shows no influence from the art of music.

(Frye 1957: xiii)

I would suggest that in many of his poems Nicholson is musical in Frye's sense of the word, that is, in a manner which is more Browning-like, and less Tennyson-like.

Again, the poem 'Caedmon' is instructive in this respect. Frye tells us that one of the distinguishing features of musical poetry is its 'long cumulative rhythms sweeping lines into paragraphs'. The 35 lines of 'Caedmon' have only eight sentences: long sentences sweeping forward like waves on the shore; shorter sentences like the emphatic crashing down of the wave. We can clearly see the to and fro-ing of this wave-movement if we count out how many lines each sentence occupies: sentence 1 = 7 lines; sentence 2 = 2 lines; sentence 3 = 3 lines; sentence 4 = 1 and a half lines (i.e. 2); sentence 5 = 3 lines; sentence 6 = 7 lines; sentence 7 = 7 lines; sentence 8 = 5 lines. This larger pattern of 7; 2; 3; 2; 3; 7; 7; 5 is musically pleasing and the balancing and contrasting of sentence against sentence can be clearly seen in the basic pattern of numbers which I have drawn out of the poem. A similar regularity in irregularity can easily be found within the stress and syllable patterns of the individual lines and their play against each other.

Nicholson's ear was fine and developed not only by his recitation and public speaking, acts from his boyhood described by him with relish in *Wednesday Early Closing* (Chapter 5), but also from a very early age by listening to music, and later by singing in choirs and in operettas. Before we know that Nicholson's widowed father is falling in love with the 'young lady', Miss Sobey, who manages the piano and music shop next door, we find out that Norman himself, at this point perhaps six or seven years old, is attracted to the music she plays all day long:

...hour after hour, our house was filled with music—loud in the shop, fainter in the dining room, and dying away altogether in the back kitchen. Up to that time, I had heard a piano only at school; I don't think I had heard a gramophone at all; while practically the only other music which had

by Antoinette Fawcett

reached my ears was that of the Salvation Army and the other brass bands in the street. So I was drawn as to a Pied Piper. Soon, on Saturday mornings and on school holidays, I was regularly finding my way to the next door shop, sitting on one of the piano stools, letting the music drench me like a glittering fountain.

(*Wednesday Early Closing*, p. 40)

This sensitivity to sound-worlds, the worlds of speech, local and particular; the worlds of natural sounds, of birds, wind and water; the worlds of manmade sounds, factory hooters and train whistles, the tinkle of shop-bells and teaspoons; and the worlds of music, song and poetry, will be apparent to anyone familiar with Nicholson's writings.

In the poetry alone, and focusing in particular on references to song and music, I have found at least 43 references, encompassing a range from Music Hall ('Yes, we have no bananas' in 'To the Memory of a Millom Musician'), to ballads, hymns, psalms, carols, canons and madrigals, to Brass Bands, both Salvation Army and Temperance, to competitive singing at Musical Festivals, to dance-music and to those most classical of classical composers: Mendelssohn, Grieg and J.S. Bach. Do other readers of Nicholson, like me, love the image of his visit to an apparently empty house where, as in De la Mare's poem 'The Listeners', no one answers to the knock on the door, but where in this case the house is inhabited not by ghosts but by the living presence of Bach, divided into different voices in his music? As Nicholson (or rather, the speaker of the poem) peers in through the window at a Marie-Celeste-like living room scene, he gradually penetrates the stock-still mysterious silence to see fire flickering in the hearth, its light 'skittering' 'like a goldfish':

It glittered along the shelves of books,
Titles, to me, unknown,
And down on the black and dizzy wax
Circling on the gramophone.

And I heard then a hushed conversation,
Fellow to fellow;
Falsetto chitchat of two flutes,
The aye-aye of a cello.

And I turned and blundered down the dark,
Heels scraping backyard loam -
'Mustn't interrupt,' I said:
'Bach's at home.'

From 'Is there Anybody There?' Said the Traveller

Both the intimacy of tone achieved so effortlessly in these softly-paced lines, and the genial domestication of the marvellously musical in this lesser-known poem from Nicholson's last collection, *Sea to the West* (1981), do, in my opinion, show that by the end of his long writing career, Nicholson had become so easy with his 'handiwork of verse', that his poetry, as well as being musical in the sense proposed by Frye, could also easily approach the condition of flowing song, but in words so clearly rooted in the simplicity of the everyday that we hardly realize they are singing.

AF



**Norman Nicholson (centre)
in "The Mikado" (Gilbert and Sullivan)
courtesy of the Millom Folk Museum**

Society News

The Norman Nicholson Society has kept its membership numbers steady at 132, easily comparable with other specialist literary societies, and a mark of how much Nicholson's work is loved and admired. The Society was set up with the intention of making sure that Nicholson's work will be continued to be read and so it is good to report that Nicholson's *Collected Poems*, edited by Neil Curry, is once again available from Faber Books as a Faber Find book (print on demand). The book can be ordered directly from the Faber website: <http://www.faber.co.uk/work/collected-poems/9780571243280/> along with *Wednesday Early Closing* and the smaller *Selected Poems*. If members do not already possess the *Collected*, this is a good opportunity to buy it (and at £25.00 much cheaper than the second-hand copies advertised on Amazon and other bookselling websites). This good news is undoubtedly due to the efforts of our Chairman, Dr. David Cooper, in negotiating personally with Faber and Faber in order to make sure that key Nicholson texts will constantly be available to the public.

We are very sorry to have to report the recent deaths of three members of the society, that of Mrs Rosemary Joyce, Nicholson's sister-in-law, Mr. Robin Gray and Mr. Raymond Palmer. Both Rosemary and Robin shared their memories of Nicholson with us in recent issues of *Comet*. It is hoped that obituaries of these members will appear in our next issue.

Members will have noticed that, in keeping with the plans set out by our Chairman in the Winter 09/Spring 2010 issue of *Comet*, our events programme this year is low-key in order to allow the Committee to focus on planning for the forthcoming centenary of Nicholson's birth, in 2014.

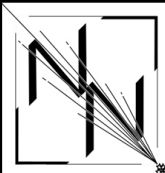
As detailed by our Chairman, we would very much like future events to be of a participatory and interactive nature. We are considering the possibility of putting on a play-reading for the now-traditional and popular Nicholson Birthday Party, to be held in early January in Millom, but would also like suggestions for further events. In particular, if members would like to host readings or discussion groups, please do contact us (either by writing to d.cooper1@lancaster.ac.uk; or to the *Comet* e-mail address, or to glennlang50@hotmail.com, or to any of the other committee members). We would also be glad to receive suggestions for venues.

As this issue of *Comet* demonstrates, there are many angles from which Nicholson's work can be viewed, not only from the perspective of 'Church' and 'Landscape' as the Faber 'tags' on their Nicholson web-page rather dauntingly, and perhaps, in this day and age, damagingly, suggest. Please send in ideas for future *Comet* themes to the e-mail address below (or to the mailing address). And do please keep on writing articles. Everything is welcome, including creative writing which responds to Nicholson's themes. Letters to the Editor are also encouraged. To get the creative juices flowing, maybe some of our members could spend some time thinking about Nicholson's social concerns, the part that the 2nd World War played in his work, love and sexuality, the visual aspects of Nicholson's work, the novels, the plays, the topographical works and so forth. Any further ideas for future themed issues will be gratefully received!

Members' News and September Event

Tom Rawling's poems have been recently edited by NN Society member, Michael Baron, as *How Hall, Poetry and Memories: A Passion for Ennerdale*. This little book has been beautifully edited by Michael, and contains photographs, line drawings and short prose pieces, as well as the poems for which Tom Rawling became known: 'Night Fisherman', 'The Names of the Sea Trout', and 'Ghosts at my Back' amongst others. The book costs a mere £7.50 and is published by Lamplugh and District Heritage Society. It's a great buy!

Please also try to attend the joint talk to be given at the Wordsworth Trust on *Rewriting the Lake District: the poetry of Norman Nicholson and Tom Rawling* by Dr. David Cooper and Michael Baron at the Wordsworth Trust In Grasmere on 18th September 2010 at 4.30 pm. Places are free, but you should book in advance by phoning: 015394 35544. You can also book online by filling in a web-form: <http://www.wordsworth.org.uk/events/index.asp?pageid=413> .



Comet: The Newsletter of the Norman Nicholson Society. Editor: Antoinette Fawcett 3, Burlington Street, ULVERSTON, Cumbria LA12 7JA. antoinettefawcett@hotmail.com
Grateful thanks to all contributors without whose efforts there would be no newsletter.
We are always searching for new articles and new contributors. Memories of Norman and Yvonne Nicholson are particularly welcome, also reflections on specific poems or prose-pieces. We also welcome creative writing on themes inspired by Nicholson's work.