

# Introduction: a dialogue on influence

*Michèle Mendelssohn and Denis Flannery*

MM: This collection is the result of a serendipitous conversation you and I had many years ago. So, perhaps unusually, we have decided to forgo the traditional editors' introduction and to use dialogue instead.

DJF: That's right. We first thought of this collection while talking by the ocean at a Henry James conference in Newport, Rhode Island.

MM: *Alan Hollinghurst: Writing Under the Influence* explores the way in which Hollinghurst is in conversation with his various influences. It seeks to chronicle these exchanges and observe the intellectual give-and-take in his writings – from his early poetry and scholarship to his novels, translations for the theatre and work as an editor of Housman and Firbank.

There's a formal logic at work in our decision to 'talk out' our introduction: our 'dialogue on influence' echoes the phenomenon our book examines. It also anticipates the concluding chapter, in which Hollinghurst is in dialogue with the biographer Hermione Lee.

DJF: 'Influence' carries a number of different meanings in the context of this book. There is the literal sense of 'flowing in' – the entry of life, literature, ideas. For literary scholars, of course, the word 'influence' has a Freudian sense, as channelled by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence*, with its outlining of intergenerational, conflict-laden psychodramas between poets young and old, strong and weak. This Bloomian – and homoerotic – sense is certainly around in Hollinghurst. Allan Johnson wrote about this in his 2014 book *Alan Hollinghurst and the Vitality of Influence*.<sup>1</sup>

Yet Hollinghurst's works also have a genial, accommodating sense of acceptance about their influences, one that feels very English to me.

In *The Line of Beauty* the narrator describes how Toby Fedden ‘amiably accepted the evidence’ that he and Nick Guest are friends (4–5). For me, Hollinghurst seems to accept just as amiably the evidence that Ronald Firbank, Henry James, Alfred Tennyson, Rupert Brooke and Jean Racine are components of his writing life. And, like Toby Fedden, he seems to get a lot out of this.

MM: So, it’s as if Hollinghurst were holding out his hand to authors dead and alive, to the past and to the present. Yes, his influences are often English. But he’s also something of an armchair cosmopolitan. *The Folding Star* captures both these sensibilities.

One of the pleasures of putting this collection together has been listening in, so to speak, on Hollinghurst’s ‘amiable’ interactions. The collection is centrally interested in exploring how Hollinghurst breaks new ground even as he prowls the precincts of certain well-established literary traditions – from the English novel at its most canonical to early homosexual literature. Like Jane Austen and E. M. Forster, he displays a certain realism – an attention to domestic detail and a wry, well-observed sense of humour. But his work is also daringly eccentric and charmingly iconoclastic. One critic claims that he brought ‘within the orbit of serious fiction subjects and acts that other writers, even gay writers, might “tastefully” elide.’<sup>2</sup> I think that’s true. And what he covers is an ‘A to Z’ of cultural practices, legacies and secret histories ranging from AIDS and architecture to bathhouses, bisexuality, camp, decadence, ekphrasis, French theatre ...

DJF: ... postcolonialism, property prices, rimming ... the list goes on.

MM: He holds a paradoxical position as an author who is a pioneer of ‘a tradition on the margin of the mainstream.’<sup>3</sup> His works are not those of a young fogey or an R-rated Max Beerbohm. But, in important and substantial ways, they articulate a new-old narrative. They enrich the novel form by playing with its most entrenched practices in formally sophisticated ways.

*Writing Under the Influence*, as a title, seeks to capture the sense of intoxication that operates in so much of this writing. *The Line of Beauty* registers this literal and metaphorical valence when Wani grabs one of Nick’s Henry James monographs and cuts a line of coke on it. Under the crosshatchings Wani makes with his credit card, the young James peers out from his cover photo. He’s a ‘quick-eyed, tender, brilliant twenty-year-old’ (LB 254) who seems to be watching Hollinghurst’s two twenty-somethings get high. The novel is about intellectual intoxication – the

highs Nick gets from 'his passion for Henry James' (LB 435) – as well as intoxication from sex, drugs and alcohol.

DJF: Or we might think of Alex in *The Spell*: lost in house music and enjoying his first ecstasy pill, newly able 'to see his own happiness as wave on wave of lustrous darkness, each with a glimmering fringe of light' (S 84). 'Influence' is also related to the drinking metaphor on which our title plays: being under the influence. There's a criminal aspect: DUI, driving under the influence. This kind of 'influence' can be dangerous but also ritualized and structured. Think of drinking games and bar-going habits, as well as drug culture and the rituals of clubbing.

MM: There's a similarly ritualistic, repetitive dynamic in the way Nick lives under James's influence in *The Line of Beauty*. He's drunk on James: he's 'at the height of a youthful affair with his writer' (208). His party piece is to quote bits of James to amuse his philistine chums – what he calls 'prostituting the Master'. He's drunk on the attention he gets when he does this.

DJF: That sense of intoxication is one that many readers feel when they read Hollinghurst. The power and beauty of his writing – its sonorous style and formal deftness – produce moments of somatic, sometimes ecstatic, intoxication. Judith Butler has observed that 'to be ec-static means, literally, to be beside oneself'.<sup>4</sup> She elaborates on this particular state as being a 'porous boundary, given over to others, finding oneself ... taken out of oneself'.<sup>5</sup> These affective states are ones in which Hollinghurst's protagonists often find themselves. This sense of transport and susceptibility is a huge part of reading his works.

MM: Yes, I agree. And his writing can be so humorous. Laughter is another form of transport. So is parody. At times, his works overtly inhabit and appropriate other artistic worlds and styles. That's another way of 'writing under the influence'.

Then there's Hollinghurst's proclivity for pseudo-history and made-up 'facts' about real people, like Nick dancing with Margaret Thatcher or, in *The Stranger's Child*, Cecil Valance's acquaintance with Rupert Brooke. There's something inventive and mischievous about these intrusions. They remind me of the Ordnance Survey's inclusion of made-up streets in its maps, tiny intentional errors intended to foil plagiarists.

DJF: It's interesting that you go to geography, with those Ordnance Survey maps riddled with 'traps for the unwary', as James might have put it. The

link between pained, exiled subjectivity and its sometimes comic encounters with new geographies of reality throbs through Hollinghurst's work.

MM: There's also something to be said about the large generic terrain he covers, despite the fact that he is best known for his novels. This collection is the first to encompass the variety of genres in which he has worked.

DJF: That was always one of the book's ambitions: to deliver a historically tessellated exploration of Hollinghurst's breadth. It's easy to forget the multi-generic nature of his archive in the face of the novels' success.

So it's appropriate that our book opens by attending to Hollinghurst, the poet and scholar. Bernard O'Donoghue begins 'Abjuring innocence: Hollinghurst's poetry' by reminding us that poetry was Hollinghurst's first love. Judging by *The Stranger's Child's* recent focus on a single poem, it's a love that hasn't gone away. Surveying Hollinghurst's poetic career, O'Donoghue reminds us of how beautiful Hollinghurst's poetry is, especially his Housman-inspired, 'highly patterned', 'Nightfall (For an Athlete Dying Young)' with its 'eloquent numbness' and its tantalizing, withholding relationship both to narrative resolution and to the Shakespeare of *Hamlet*. The capacity of Hollinghurst the poet to transport his readers is also, for O'Donoghue, there in 'Alonso', a poem that channels the Shakespeare of *The Tempest* and is distinguished by a remarkable 'imaginative underwater vision.' This poetic capacity is also vividly evident in the powerful prose style of his writings *on* poetry, especially that of Mick Imlah. For O'Donoghue, Hollinghurst the poet vividly anticipates how Hollinghurst the novelist combines a drive towards narrative with a readiness to tell stories that refuse resolution but are none the less substantial.

Angus Brown's chapter traces the trajectory from Hollinghurst the brave – if maybe stolid – postgraduate student, to Hollinghurst the aesthetically inspired critic, to Hollinghurst the groundbreaking novelist of *The Swimming-Pool Library*. For Brown, the early years of Hollinghurst's career, from his 1977 M.Litt. thesis to the publication of his first novel in 1988, constitute the era when a major preoccupation of his work – what Brown terms 'the secret choreography of book and body' – is established. Many of our contributors are attentive to Hollinghurst as someone who writes about sex, as we'll discuss later on, and Brown explores how, in early Hollinghurst, processes of writing and reading are themselves an often-forgotten corporeal and erotic affair of eyes, bodies and, especially, hands.

Your chapter, 'Poetry, parody, porn and prose' outlines the mischievous laughter Hollinghurst elicits as he turns an American doctor's prurient,

paranoid and homophobic counsels on sexual morality into chiselled queer verse that, as you point out, lacerates normative ideas about masculinity. That parodic drive is often there in the novels' relationships with literary precursors as well as visual objects – the photography of Robert Mapplethorpe, the homoerotic drawings of Tom of Finland or the religious painting of Holman Hunt. Reading *The Folding Star* is 'like looking at a portfolio of brilliant sketches and elaborations on Tom's work' that reflects on a festive sexual world with a supple melancholy. In your reading, Hollinghurst explores the gap between these erotic carnivals: those weighty, disruptive moments of disappointment, disconnection and grief that give such sombre substance to the aesthetics of his writing.

MM: As editors, we also wanted this collection to reflect on sexuality in Hollinghurst's work. That relationship correlates in fascinating ways to the historical circumstances of its publication.

DJF: That's right. So much of the sexual-political landscape has changed since Hollinghurst first began publishing, yet so much of the neoliberal political culture he depicts (especially in *The Line of Beauty*) is utterly persistent. He's a writer of 'now', yet he's also part of the past. One of my favourite lines in his works acknowledges this implicitly: 'I'm always forgetting how sexy the past must have been,' Will says in *The Swimming-Pool Library* (247). It signals not only Hollinghurst's passion for sex as an engine of history but also the very quirky and eroticized historical sensibility of his writing.

Hollinghurst came into my life through history. In 1988 my then boyfriend, Mark Cornwall, gave me a copy of *The Swimming-Pool Library* as a gift. That was a charged year, particularly with regard to sexual politics. These were the days of Clause 28 (the Thatcherite ban on discussing homosexuality in schools) and a time when, in retrospect, death was coming – via HIV/AIDS. Michel Foucault had died in 1984 of this illness and his great friend, the author Guy Hocquenghem, died similarly in 1988. So my earliest memories of reading Hollinghurst are braided around the tragic stories of their deaths. Mark is now a professor of History. For me, *The Swimming-Pool Library* forged a very enlivened sense of the relationship between history and subjectivity.

MM: Over the years, several men have told me similar stories about the personal nature of their relationship to Hollinghurst's works. Some of them have been older, and they can remember the times Hollinghurst chronicles. Others have been young adults – I remember an eighteen-year-old mentioning Hollinghurst in his Oxford admission interview. He

tried to be casual and offhand, but he just lit up when he talked about the novels.

DJF: That's just great!

MM: That's not to say that women don't also have stories to tell about their particular connection to his works, of course. We live in a culture that still fetishizes women's bodies, and I've been interested to observe how, in Hollinghurst's novels, men's bodies come under similarly intense scrutiny. To read him is to be confronted with an overwhelmingly male aesthetic tradition. I can understand this intellectually through nineteenth-century decadent and aesthetic cultural traditions in which women are often marginal, idealized or dreaded. Still, it's jolting to read novels partly set in the late twentieth century in which women are, generally, outsiders. His works cover historical periods that have been transformative and liberating for all sorts of other groups, too, but they are not part of his remit, so to speak.

A woman undergraduate told me her mother gave her *The Stranger's Child*, and that the intergenerational aspect was something they both relished. That's symptomatic, I think, of Hollinghurst's changing place in literature. Until the publication of *The Stranger's Child*, in 2011, it was commonplace to consider him a 'gay' writer, but his categorization is one that Kaye Mitchell and Joseph Ronan acknowledge and interrogate.

In "Who are you? What the fuck are you doing here?": queer debates and contemporary connections, Mitchell reads Hollinghurst as an author who is not necessarily considered 'queer' despite being 'gay'. One of the problems she observes is that the pessimism and internal criticism that currently preoccupy queer studies and queer theory do not sit comfortably alongside writings so attentive to a pre-Stonewall past. By reading Hollinghurst in conjunction with David Leavitt, Colm Tóibín, and Michael Cunningham, Mitchell reveals that his works are in tune with many of his contemporaries. His fiction 'retains a strong seam of critique' of certain aspects of gay culture – including politics and sociality – yet the ambivalence of Hollinghurst's protagonists, Mitchell argues, reflects how 'the past crucially inflects and affects how he engages with the present', including AIDS and the ephemerality of homosexual communities. Hollinghurst's portrayal of relationships oscillates between ethics, interconnectedness and a certain 'rejection of sociality and futurity' that makes him 'more of his time than we might imagine'.

'We find in Hollinghurst's fiction a fundamental ambivalence about assuming something as definite and concrete as a gay identity', Mitchell observes. Taking this as its point of departure, Joseph Ronan's chapter

observes the ostentatiously discreet bisexuality in *The Stranger's Child*. That the word 'bisexual' never appears in the novel is symptomatic, he argues: its loud silencing replicates a broader cultural erasure of bisexuality. The novel makes a virtue of this situation by turning to 'camp excess' to manifest bisexuality as an absent presence in the characters' lives. This approach, Ronan suggests, critiques the socio-cultural dynamics responsible for the erasure in the first place and problematizes the flattening, oversimplifying effect of reading stories as 'gay' at the expense of 'more ambiguous sexual possibilities.' Although Ronan did not know this when he wrote his chapter, in our book's last chapter Hollinghurst discusses Cecil's bisexuality as a 'fact.'

DJF: Hollinghurst's readiness to make literary absent presences manifest is also evident in his most recent work, as Julie Rivkin shows. In '*The Stranger's Child* and *The Aspern Papers*: queering origin stories and questioning the visitable past', the absent presence relates not only to sexual possibility but also to the affectively determining and, in many ways, nation-building, work that narratives of literary influence can be made to carry out. Situating James's 1888 novella *The Aspern Papers* at the centre of the webs of literary influence that constitute *The Stranger's Child*, Rivkin reads a will to 'unmask a triumphalist public narrative and reveal its terrible costs and distortions' as central to Hollinghurst's project – and not only in his novel of 2011. For Rivkin, Hollinghurst is consciously, admirably, influenced by *The Aspern Papers*' critique of the violent naivety attached to gaining access to the 'reality' of the past. He is also susceptible to what she terms an 'allergic reaction to queer theory'. The presence of Tennyson as another dominant figure of influence in this novel serves, though, to align it with recent theoretical work on queer temporality. Rivkin, then, reads Hollinghurst as an 'active contributor' to the conceptualization of queer temporality that has, in recent years, been carried out by the very academic trend he has been prompt to parody.

MM: His concern with time is matched by a preoccupation with places and spaces, as Geoff Gilbert emphasizes. In 'Some properties of fiction: value and fantasy in Hollinghurst's house of fiction', Gilbert attends to the connection between the affective and economic values of property as observed in *The Line of Beauty*'s sexually explicit scenes. For the reader, these scenes open up erotic internal worlds that stretch beyond the strict geography of the book. The keyholders-only London garden where Nick loses his virginity, the Feddens' French home that frames Toby as an object of Nick's interest: these are the kinds of spaces, Gilbert suggests, where the novel observes the story of private property as it intersects with

personal narratives and ‘the historical determination of a collectivity’. Thatcherism, Gilbert contends, is a libidinal arrangement that structures the characters’ lives and loves. The book operates as more than a class critique, however. He considers the novel’s correlation between psychic reality and real-world values by building on Laplanche and Pontalis’s psychoanalytic work on the construction of the subject in relation to its place in the world, as well as on Virginia Woolf’s vision of autonomy.

DJF: One of the joys of editing this collection has been what its contributors have taught me about Hollinghurst. I’ve always found *The Folding Star* dense, gloomy and, for a novel about erotic obsession, oddly unsexy. Robert L. Caserio’s ‘Hollow auguries: eccentric genealogies in *The Folding Star* and *The Spell*’ has helped me understand the extent to which those qualities are at work in ways that constitute one of Hollinghurst’s richest affective and aesthetic projects. For Caserio, Hollinghurst submits ‘his narrative structure, his protagonist and his reader to a surfeit of genealogical explanation in order to provoke a cold reaction, not merely a polite one’. Well, he certainly succeeded with me! Like Rivkin, Caserio is bravely attentive to the temporal complexity and negativity of Hollinghurst’s lines of influence here. If, for Rivkin, *The Stranger’s Child* explores the weak foundations and agonizing costs of national narratives as and through literary influence, then *The Folding Star* does the same with more enclosed, self-generating narratives of restored objects of desire, historical explanation and fantasies of new love. The result is, for the characters, a wild goose chase that also amounts to something ‘moving’ that grounds Hollinghurst’s subsequent work. Early in his chapter, Caserio refers to A. E. Housman, whom Hollinghurst edited and thought singularly unsuited to narratives of development. Later on, Caserio’s discussion of *The Spell* examines the way in which it is in conversation with *The Well-Beloved*, Hardy’s novel of stonily compulsive repetition. I wouldn’t have linked Alex’s dancefloor joys in *The Spell* with Hardy’s treatments of intergenerational eros. But now I do.

MM: And where Caserio excavates Hollinghurst’s Georgian archaeologies, you explore his readings and translations of seventeenth-century French theatre. ‘Using Racine in 1990; or, translating theatre in time’ is also concerned with the particular moment with which Hollinghurst engages. Your chapter proposes a transhistorical approach to his translation of Racine that renders into English the French of one of the most formal writers. But, as you show, the years of his translations (especially 1990 for *Bajazet*), bring Hollinghurst’s interpretation of this tight, seventeenth-century formalism into free but indirect dialogue with the

late twentieth-century queer theory of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Tony Kushner's adaptation of Corneille, and films such as Derek Jarman's *Edward II* and Denys Arcand's *Jesus of Montreal*.

DJF: What does a Racinian hero or heroine do if not act 'under the influence'? *Phaedra*, which Hollinghurst knows well but has not translated, is the most obvious example, but all of the characters in *Bajazet* are – deeply, claustrophobically – under the influence. So too is Titus in *Berenice*, which Hollinghurst went on to translate in 2012. This is a state of primal susceptibility. Across Hollinghurst's *oeuvre* its usual manifestation has something to do with male homosexual desire. The arc of his career shows that that state of affective, physical and aesthetic susceptibility extends beyond the narrowly, 'identifiably', sexual.

'Race, empire, and *The Swimming-Pool Library*', John McLeod's chapter, documents this, outlining the extent to which the pursuit of pleasure in the metropolis can become a reenactment of the racist violences and attitudes of Empire. For McLeod, these 'dominant attitudes to race are quietly put under pressure, if not called entirely into question,' by the novel. The means through which this pressure is applied have everything to do with the two key words in the title of this book: 'writing' and 'influence.' The retrospective nature of Will's narrative with its resultant production of two Wills – one who is immersed in the heated summer of 1983 and one who narrates that summer's events in an unspecified later time – creates a space for critique around the worst of his privileged assumptions. This scenario does not present an ideologically salvational alternative, however. In McLeod's view, *The Swimming-Pool Library* 'cannot fully uncouple itself from the prejudicial milieu it seeks critically to expose.' But the presence of different figures of influence, explicitly named and thoroughly threaded through the novel, creates interrogative possibilities that facilitate what McLeod, invoking Edward Said, calls the 'complex counterpointing' of culture and imperialism.

Alan O'Leary's 'Cinema in the library' puts visual media into an economy of antagonistic twinning with the 'writing' of our title. In this reading, the queerness of Hollinghurst's novel emerges from its capacity to link cinema, modernist form and middlebrow culture. For O'Leary, cinema resists *The Swimming-Pool Library*'s dominant aesthetic of pattern and finish. Hollinghurst's first novel has a remarkable formal unity yet cinema – whether as pornography, Hollywood epic, or as it appears in Firbank's fiction – resists this aesthetic. It is a disruptive and 'obtuse' force. Cinema's variegated, unassimilable status also twins it with the historical 'reality' of HIV and AIDS, phenomena that, for O'Leary, are 'all

too well-known' beyond the novel's 'suspended summer' and therefore receive no explicit representation in the novel.

MM: While this book attends to the influence of cultural forms, historical turning points, theoretical interventions and literary-critical genealogies, its last chapter acknowledges that none of this would be possible without the author's own influence. Although 'being influenced' sounds passive, in order to *be* influenced an author has to *do* something to his source, as the art historian Michael Baxandall has pointed out.<sup>6</sup> For influence to occur, the author must take the dominant, active role in the relationship.

Creative writers, literary critics and biographers all use their sources differently. Critics tend to operate with an inbuilt sense of Barthes's 'death of the author'. Writing about a living figure, however, requires some recalibration. It made me feel quite keenly that reports of the so-called 'death of the author' have been greatly exaggerated. In the case of Hollinghurst, the author is very much alive: he writes e-mails and gives interviews. Biographers have a different relationship to authors' lives and archives. *The Stranger's Child* is, in many respects, an extended meditation on this. In the interview that forms this book's last chapter, the biographer Hermione Lee tells Hollinghurst that the novel made her 'laugh out loud (and laugh as a biographer)' because 'it's a very dubious picture of the biographer at work'.

'What can I say?: secrets in fiction and biography' explores Hollinghurst's long-standing relationship to biography and discusses how his interest in its evolution informed his 2011 novel. He reveals that the novelist he became is indebted to the biographer he didn't become. Lee observes that Lytton Strachey's 1918 *Eminent Victorians* changed biography and that by including Strachey in the novel, Hollinghurst brought together 'what happens to the history of biography and life-writing in Britain in the twentieth century and what happens to homosexual freedom or the increasing enfranchisement of gay people'. This history included the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1967, the year that Strachey's gay life was laid bare in Michael Holroyd's biography. Entering this new era first as a scholar and, later, as a writer, Hollinghurst felt the need to write in a way that made the most of its possibilities, to write freely and openly about times and places in the early twentieth century. The conversation between Lee and Hollinghurst shows that it takes a great deal of insight into human psychology to make a good biography or novel. Both depend 'not only on proper scholarship and research but on the wisdom of the writer'.

DJF: And that's part of Hollinghurst's work, along with its recognitions, formal (if polite) dismissals and occasional invitations to lingering

intimacies. As he tells Lee, ‘I’m aware, of course, of often crossing a corner of the territory of some great writer in the past and tipping my hat to them but getting on with my own business.’

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## Notes

- 1 Allan Johnson, *Alan Hollinghurst and the Vitality of Influence* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 20–30.
- 2 Daniel Mendelsohn, ‘In Gay and Crumbling England’, *New York Review of Books*, 10 November 2011, [www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/nov/10/gay-and-crumbling-england/](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/nov/10/gay-and-crumbling-england/) (accessed 19 January 2016).
- 3 Georges Letissier, ‘Queer, Quaint and Camp: Alan Hollinghurst’s Own Return to the English Tradition’, *Études anglaises* 60.2 (2007) 198–211: 199.
- 4 Judith Butler, ‘Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy’ in *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004) 17–39: 20.
- 5 *Ibid.* 25.
- 6 Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985) 58–9.

# 1

## Abjuring innocence: Hollinghurst's poetry

*Bernard O'Donoghue*

Although Alan Hollinghurst's reputation as a leading novelist of his time is beyond question, it was important to be reminded by Rachel Cooke in her *Observer* interview with him on the occasion of the publication of *The Stranger's Child*, in 2012, that 'he wasn't always going to be a novelist though. Poetry was his first love.' At school, he says in that interview, he was fascinated by poetical forms; for example he wrote three sonnets for a competition on 'the pleasures of life'. He says, 'Being a poet at school had a certain prestige; it was a source of glamour. And if you could write modernistic poems, which no one could understand, then even more so.'<sup>1</sup> This mischievously blimpish view of poetry disguises a taste for the modern (if not exactly the modernist) that Hollinghurst has never shed. For example, his taste in architecture, about which he has written with some authority, marries the classical, on which he is an informed commentator, with a firm commitment to the imaginatively new.

Hollinghurst's initial love for the practice of poetry continued from school to his distinguished career in English, begun in 1972, at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he was undergraduate, graduate and tutor. From his first year he was tutored and befriended by John Fuller, with whom he was a major mover in the running of the college's very successful poetry group, the Florio Society, of which Hollinghurst was secretary (the only executive post) in his second year.<sup>2</sup> In 1974 his poem 'Death of a Poet' (the assigned subject) won the university's prestigious Newdigate Prize for poetry, and throughout his undergraduate career, at the end of which he got a First Class degree, although he worked with distinction on English fiction and drama it was generally thought that his primary bent was for poetry.<sup>3</sup> After taking his BA in 1975, he stayed on at Magdalen College where he wrote an M.Litt. on a group of novelists: Firbank, Forster and Hartley.<sup>4</sup> In the thesis he argued that (as with Proust's Gilberte and

Albertine) these writers featured innamoratas who were ostensibly female but might be based on male attachments, the celebration of which would have been controversial at the time of publication. Of the three writers considered in the thesis, Firbank remained his strongest enthusiasm: Hollinghurst edited three of Firbank's novels for Penguin Classics and wrote essays on him in the *Yale Review* (2001) and in the *Times Literary Supplement* (2006).<sup>5</sup> Firbank's works and life are a prominent theme in *The Swimming-Pool Library*.

Although his academic interests seem to have shifted towards fiction by the time of his M.Litt. in 1980, Hollinghurst's publications remained primarily in poetry for a while longer. John Fuller's Sycamore Press published two early Hollinghurst pieces: 'Isherwood is at Santa Monica' and 'The Well' were published in 1975 as *Sycamore Broadsheet 22*; in 1982 it published *Confidential Chats with Boys*, a pamphlet made up of five numbered sections in unrhyming quatrains of twenty lines each. In between those two publications, Hollinghurst was one of the six writers included in Faber's *Poetry: Introduction 4*.<sup>6</sup> There were ten poems by him in the Faber volume, including the two from the Sycamore broadsheet. But, he tells Rachel Cooke in the *Observer* interview, after *Confidential Chats*, 'the Muse left me'.<sup>7</sup> In 1981 his friend Andrew Motion included Hollinghurst's three-part poem 'Where the Story Ended' in a Christmas supplement for the Poetry Book Society.<sup>8</sup> 'Where the Story Ended', dwelling on 'Miss Monk's front-garden', is already concerned with the evanescence of lives and the buildings they occur in, a prominent theme in his later fiction: the poem ends with

the places  
deserted by the dead who woke  
and slept here for a century.

Hollinghurst had still been an undergraduate when the 'Isherwood' pamphlet was published in 1975, and he had not yet come out as gay. But there are plenty of hints in the two poems there – more overt in the 'Isherwood' poem than in 'The Well', which is a strange mixture of Freud and Grendel's mere in *Beowulf*. The context of the 'Isherwood' poem tells us everything we need to know: on St Valentine's Day in 1953, at Santa Monica, Christopher Isherwood, who was forty-eight, met the eighteen-year-old Don Bachardy; they were to remain partners until Isherwood's death in 1986. But there were other reasons why that encounter came to mind in 1975 or the years leading up to it. Significant prompts for the poem may have been two films much celebrated at the time: *Cabaret* was a major event in 1972, based on Isherwood's two *Berlin Stories*, published

in 1945 but describing events in Germany in 1931–2 as Hitler was coming to power. (Several other stories in the series had been published in the 1930s, including ‘Sally Bowles’ in 1937, included in *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939); ‘Mr Norris Changes Trains’ was published in 1935.) An earlier film based on the two 1945 *Berlin Stories* by Isherwood was *I am a Camera* in 1955, which influenced *Cabaret* in a number of ways. Isherwood had gone to Berlin to take advantage of the sexual freedoms associated with the Weimar Republic as its era was coming to an end and speeding into repression. The second major film – even more celebrated in those years – which may have been a less direct influence was Visconti’s *Death in Venice*, based on Thomas Mann’s short novel about the writer Gustav von Aschenbach, who is obsessed by a beautiful Polish boy Tadzio as the city is invaded by plague. Three of the five stanzas of Hollinghurst’s Isherwood poem end with a refrain: ‘A gold-haired boy twirls upside-down on rings’ (and the fourth is a variation on it). It is a line that for a filmgoer of the time unmistakably recalls Tadzio in Visconti’s film, even if the immediate occasion of the line was a television documentary about Isherwood in which a golden-haired young man did indeed twirl upside down on rings at Santa Monica.

The first line of Hollinghurst’s second stanza develops the reference to Isherwood: ‘Novelist, camera, and three-poem poet’. The poem ends with the poet/novelist able to be frank, ‘a happy escapee, / home, with himself and few secrets.’<sup>9</sup> The sea-traveller in that stanza, ‘home from a lost sea’, is able to engage with one of the most secure homecoming poems in the language, Stevenson’s ‘Requiem’ (more sardonically evoked in Philip Larkin’s ‘This Be the Verse’). Hollinghurst’s poem is a subtle evocation (remarkable for so young a writer) of a flickering black-and-white film, and it sustains its uncertainties to the end with the word ‘escapee’: Isherwood has escaped the homophobic judgements such as those of the doctor noted in the poem who labelled him ‘Infantilismus’, into a free Californian world with ‘miles of beach and a crazy pier’; but the ‘escapee’ also recalls the disapproval that greeted Isherwood and Auden’s departure to America shortly before the start of the Second World War.

This poem might lead us to expect Hollinghurst to become a socially engaged – even campaigning – poet, very unlike the schoolboy with his interest in poetical forms. But ‘The Well’, the second poem in the broadsheet, is entirely different. It is hard to avoid a Freudian interpretation – hard even not to suspect a play with such interpretations:

Its rim is fringed  
with moss and hart’s-tongue fern,

a fronded entry, mysterious  
and soft as a vulva.<sup>10</sup>

The spirit of the poem is again secrecy – what is ‘never talked of’ – though here applied to the world of female sexuality. Hollinghurst’s teasing references to homosexuality are already striking.

*Confidential Chats with Boys* took its title from a sententious American book by William Lee Howard, MD, published in 1911 (and reprinted in 2006 ‘as a facsimile of the original’ because it was ‘a scarce antiquarian book’, according to Amazon).<sup>11</sup> The first of the five sections of Hollinghurst’s pamphlet begins in the spirit that its title promises:

There are things in trousers called men,  
almost too well-mannered, passing  
as gentlemen – human skunks  
hatched from rattlesnakes’ eggs. (CCB 1)

And it ends in that same spirit:

Keep your eye on that jug,  
that candlestick, and when he moves,  
hit him to leave him scarred:  
scar the skunk and coward for life. (CCB 1)

It is astonishing, and horrifying now, to realize that the violence here comes straight from Howard’s pathological book: ‘Sometimes it is necessary to smash a boy who makes evil suggestions to you. Don’t talk to him, smash him in the face. Smash him good and hard.’<sup>12</sup>

The campaigning spirit of this first section of Hollinghurst’s poem is maintained only stealthily, though: the following four sections are a series of detailed and wonderfully evocative memories of the poet’s childhood as the only child of a country bank manager. These memories are perhaps the most impressive pieces of technical lyricism that Hollinghurst has written: the first sense of a stable poetic voice. The poem as a whole is a kind of miniature bildungsroman in verse, moving from the isolation and sickly terror of section 2, with ‘the orchid silence’ such women as the long-legged lady in Sickert’s ‘pink and green *Ennuï*’ bring with them (CCB 2), to the child’s play at ‘Banking Business’ in section 3 which hid the ‘hard-core innocence’ of cuttings from *Geographics* (CCB 3).<sup>13</sup> Section 4 makes more explicit the dawn, or pre-dawn, of sexuality when the ‘very young’ boy is thrilled by travesty: the femininity of ‘pleated summer skirts / with swirling flower prints’ served as ‘gowns that swept the floor’

and – with a suddenly sensual turn – ‘licked the naked legs’ (CCB 4). This section catches the undeveloped language of adolescent romanticism, as it may be encountered in opera:

Dear, I long for your caress.  
Dear one, will you say yes? (CCB 4)

The final section concludes this dwelling on the paraphernalia of romanticism, with ‘my Russian music’ and ‘lilies on the suicide’s grave’, ‘Lorelei and the cold river’ (CCB 5). The poem ends brilliantly by bringing together all the jumbled images that have operated in this uncertain bildungsroman: like liqueur chocolates taken surreptitiously from an open box:

sweet, unpleasant, but addictive,  
an overdrawn bachelor’s gift  
not likely to be missed. (CCB 5)

The closing image is a perfect amalgam of guilt and the innocence which is necessary for guilt to be felt at all, like the ‘sunlit innocence’ at the end of a later Hollinghurst poem, ‘Rain’ – a kind of secret stealth which is founded on an addiction which is only dimly sensed.

To get a fuller idea of these secrecies and closed-off realities, we might anticipate something Hollinghurst said in the introduction to his selection of Housman published by Faber in 2001. Writing of Housman’s echoing of Shakespeare’s songs in *A Shropshire Lad*, he says:

It was the golden lads who more concerned Housman, of course; and it is perhaps the difficulty of that illicit subject which, while lending the book a fascinating tension, makes too for a certain instability of tone, clumsy humour and forced diction sometimes co-existing in a single poem with passages of limpid sensibility. It would be interesting to know to what extent readers over the past century have considered, or even acknowledged, the homosexual foundations of the book. The disguise in the conventional forms and terms of ballad, song and epigram fits so well; even if nowadays we notice, and are perhaps grateful for, its transparency, and feel that Housman was right to enlist the time-honoured dignity of these forms to his less licensed sufferings.<sup>14</sup>

This is a moving and profoundly illuminating observation about Housman, and the ‘disguise’ here was the subject of Hollinghurst’s thesis on the three novelists. But, while the qualities noted do not exactly correspond to the instabilities in Hollinghurst’s own poetry (he could

never be accused of forced diction, and even less of clumsy humour), the general point about 'less licensed sufferings' fits the circumstances of his early career in the period when most of his poetry was written: before, one might say, the rather insecure Muse left him in the early 1980s and his more confident fictional persona took over.

Before this there had been a more substantial opportunity to weigh Hollinghurst's poetic achievement rather more extensively in the ten poems of the Faber *Poetry: Introduction 4* in 1978. With the benefit of a brief hindsight (from 1981 and 1982), we can see emerging the typical Hollinghurst poem. The first poem, 'Over the Wall', is the same kind of invaded pastoral as 'The Derelict Houses at Great Barrington' as the children 'climb over the wall', and it echoes 'The Well' in its probing of the unknown: 'How far will they go?'<sup>15</sup> In later life an 'unhurried adult' will see the area inside the wall 'as investment or heritage' (again, a hint of *The Stranger's Child*); but the child's transgressive excitement returns to him 'on the edge of sleep' as he 'instinctively breaks and enters' and ends with 'hands rifling silk'.<sup>16</sup> The fourth poem of the *Poetry: Introduction 4* group, 'Christmas Day at Home', echoes the later section of the bildungsroman of *Confidential Chats*, but it also returns by contrast to the transgressively unfamiliar:

these journeys  
of our own to permanent places  
can keep us fit to talk to.<sup>17</sup>

Even these familiar places have 'unvisited fields' in them; before the resignation of the poem's dutiful end – 'the still afternoon gives us / happiness and humility, as it should' – a more troubling idea has been entertained: an idea that 'makes us children / and says something of being old'.<sup>18</sup> We are again on the margin of an unfamiliar, or unfaced, realm of experience.

Before this, the poem 'Nightfall (For an Athlete Dying Young)' can, by a longer application of hindsight, be connected to Housman's poem XIX in *A Shropshire Lad*, 'To an Athlete Dying Young', included by Hollinghurst in his selections in 2001. Housman's classically Housmanesque poem contrasts the living young athlete being carried on the townspeople's shoulders after winning a race with the same athlete's coffin being carried on the same shoulders when he is 'Townsmen of a stiller town'.<sup>19</sup> The imagery is unrelieved: 'silence sounds no worse than cheers / After earth has stopped the ears'.<sup>20</sup> The oddest note comes at the end when the 'strengthless dead' (like the shrouds in Yeats's 'Cuchulain Comforted') flock to gaze on the 'early-laurelled head',

And find unwithered on its curls  
The garland briefer than a girl's.<sup>21</sup>

In Renaissance love-poetry rosebuds (and garlands) were archetypally transient; but this athlete's garland, though it is 'briefer than a girl's' (presumably that of a child in a game), remains 'unwithered'. The transparency in Housman, for which, as Hollinghurst said, we are generally grateful, is suspended in the final image here (and indeed in the sporting terminology throughout which betrays the great classical scholar's insecure grasp of that discourse).

Hollinghurst's response poem is very different, beginning in the tones of his personal pastorals: 'we walk a while alone / on the terrace'.<sup>22</sup> This elegy has an eloquent numbness, sustained by the highly patterned three stanzas, set at three moments of the same day, all 'on the terrace': 'After tea', 'before supper', 'At dusk'. But the movement is not towards any resolution; at the end the 'we' of the poem 'go into the house', 'as if to sleep'.<sup>23</sup> The end, in its suggestion of 'perchance to dream', confirms with its emptiness the illusory nature of the afternoon's only imagining of the 'young man running there'.<sup>24</sup> The elegy, one of Hollinghurst's most beautiful poems, surpasses the disengaged generality of Housman's more conventional original.

If the 'we' of 'Nightfall' remain unidentified, two other poems in *Poetry: Introduction 4* invite more personal questions. Framm, the enthusiastic schoolmaster in 'The Drowned Field', is greeted by the returning narrator. The poem is full of the 'half-pedantic' jokes that its narrator prepares us for: 'Tyrania' (whose line in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* provides the poem's title) has an arch 'y' rather than 'i' in the first syllable; Framm hurries off to 'invoke' the schoolboys to 'the pastoral sea' (a verb just about possible in the Latin *invocare* but not in English).<sup>25</sup> And this very elegantly constructed and scanned poem – five five-lined stanzas rhyming ABABA – ends with an unmetrical bump as the expected final iamb is undermined by a banal trochee: 'fields. Or was Framm blinded by those arc-lights?'<sup>26</sup> What stays with the reader of this teasing poem is the element of sexual travesty in the actors of the school play: presumably the twelve-year-old Tyrania who was 'lewd with all her mother could devise' was a boy, the vision of whom 'must surely mist Framm's eyes' – 'the orange cheeks and pencilled brows of knights'.<sup>27</sup> But what kind of truth are Framm's eyes blinded to by the unscanning arc-lights?

The other poem in the group that offers us a name to contemplate is 'Ben Dancing at Wayland's Smithy', a love-poem to a young man, set in the heart of England but placed in an historical perspective so long that the actions and affections of the poem's individuals seem heartbreakingly ineffectual. This ineffectuality in the face of all the place's 'weather'

is a defeat by ‘the noise of the wind ... in league with the silence of the land.’<sup>28</sup> The same geophysical inexorability is evident in the imaginative underwater vision of ‘Alonso’, where the drowned duke of *The Tempest* is condemned to remember in a Dantesque ‘tenebrous confessional’. This beautiful poem ends with an extraordinarily imaginative underwater vision (comparable to Seamus Heaney’s perspectives in the later *Seeing Things* (1991) – both in the volume’s title poem and the celebrated twelve-liner on Clonmacnoise):

Boats and the blades of oars  
traverse the sky:  
without parachutes  
divers come spiralling down  
to take from my hair  
the pale cold pearls.<sup>29</sup>

Of the remaining two poems in *Poetry: Introduction 4*, ‘Survey’ is a surreally inclined description of the geography and contours of England and their manageability:

In France you could travel the length  
of England and only be half-way down;  
in England everyone has seen the sea.<sup>30</sup>

The *Finnegans Wake*-like perspective on England draws on another of the subjects of Hollinghurst’s thesis to describe a view of England:

the skeleton of the great beast  
stretched out, as Forster saw it in  
‘system after system of our island.’<sup>31</sup>

The conclusion is geophysical again, and each mountain

range seems  
a longing to be water, thousands of tons  
of ocean held for you here to walk on.<sup>32</sup>

‘Convalescence in Lower Largo (Birthplace of Alexander Selkirk)’ is in Fife, again away from the centre of England and is surreal in a similar way: ‘When I sleep the tide rides into the house.’<sup>33</sup>

It is clear that by 1982 (when the Muse left him) Hollinghurst was a decidedly promising and gifted poet, and he was becoming widely

acclaimed as such. While the setting of the poems was English pastoral, the application of it (as perhaps always with pastoral) was decidedly complex. In the poems we repeatedly find a setting which seems to require a larger canvas for its development. We rarely find in these very accomplished pieces a conclusion that resolves to the poet's satisfaction the matter raised. Hollinghurst is an outstanding critic, and one of his finest pieces of criticism – his introduction to the posthumous *Selected Poems* of his friend Mick Imlah – gives us an insight into his own narrative poetics. Of Imlah he writes: 'The narrative impulse and interest were central to his poetry from the start. He never wrote a merely descriptive poem ... the little six-line verses on 'The Counties of England' visit playfully surreal histories on their hapless subjects.'<sup>34</sup> Imlah and Hollinghurst are very different writers; but Hollinghurst's appreciation of the brilliant inventiveness of Imlah's 'hinterland of histories, real and imaginary' is not surprising in the context of his own poems.<sup>35</sup> There are other links too: he praises Imlah for 'relishing formal control and syntactic play' and salutes his 'instinct for rhyme, rhythm and shape shown by few of his contemporaries.'<sup>36</sup> Above all he likes Imlah's sheer fictiveness, as in the minutes he wrote as a student for the Florio Society, which became 'ever more extended and involved fantasias on the relatively ordinary things that had actually been said and done.'<sup>37</sup> Imlah never wrote prose fiction; but one word to describe the qualities that Hollinghurst is extolling here is surely 'novelistic'. Until the end of his short and scintillating poetic career, Imlah's writing could never be called confessional or autobiographical. In Hollinghurst's words, it 'was only at the end of his life that he wrote poems undisguisedly about those he loved, his partner and his children, and they too take the form of anecdotes, transfigured by feeling and an exact instinct for how feeling may be expressed.'<sup>38</sup>

Imlah's total fictiveness and what (adapting the words of Hilaire Belloc) might be termed 'a strict disregard for truth' is a great strength in writers who have an impulse towards privacy (like Imlah himself, as Hollinghurst's introduction to the *Selected Poems* makes clear). It would be too great an irony to imply that there is anything evasive about Hollinghurst's own writing career, given the courage of his exploding of sexual – and other – taboos in novels from *The Swimming-Pool Library* onwards. But one of the most attractive things in his best poems – in 'Nightfall' and 'Alonso' and the middle sections of *Confidential Chats with Boys* – is a mixture of reserve and tact that serves as a kind of second theme behind the main subject in novels like *The Line of Beauty* and *The Stranger's Child*.

There have been occasional poetic sorties in the course of Hollinghurst's celebrated novel-writing life. They display the same accomplishment and

sureness of imagery, but they now seem more clearly the by-products of the novelist. Another Poetry Book Society anthology in 1989–90 published ‘Dry Season Nights’, a poem which has a cool and confident exoticism more in tune with the novels:

Slick, shuffling demons of the carnival,  
the Jab-Jab boys have bodies black with oil;  
they grab you if you do not give them coins.<sup>39</sup>

As well as the two sections of *Confidential Chats with Boys*, in the anthology *Magdalen Poets*, Robert Macfarlane included Hollinghurst’s poem ‘Brain-Garden’, an intriguing poem which has something in common with the exoticism of ‘Dry Season Nights’ but echoes too the surrealism in some earlier poems like ‘Survey’.<sup>40</sup> It displays too an inclination towards the abstract – even allegorical – that is unusual in Hollinghurst.

I’m making up my own brain-garden there,  
with old brain corals, big as dinner-plates,  
heavy as masonry, grey, lolling, dumb ...  
Each time I come I add a few  
to make it look like more than happenstance:  
a cairn of absent thoughts.<sup>41</sup>

Increasingly this small poetic corpus (we might pause to note that it is larger than the corpus on which T. E. Hulme’s reputation is founded, not to mention the works of Hollinghurst’s ‘three-poem poet’ Isherwood) can be linked in striking ways with the celebrated later novels. There are formidable cases in English of novelists who returned in their later writing lives to concentrate on poetry (the most glorious, of course, is Hardy). It is clear that Hollinghurst has the skills to follow this course if he chooses to: both the technique, gift for narrative and the ‘exact instinct for how feeling may be expressed’ that he saluted in Mick Imlah. But even as it stands, his poetic corpus has a distinctiveness and variety not quite paralleled by any of his contemporaries, moving as it does from an elegant, understated sense of the transgressive to the fearless creation of a world that makes no apologies for its preferences – pastoral, sexual or critical.

The last significant year of poetic publication for Hollinghurst was 1982: as well as *Confidential Chats*, the powerful and mysterious history poem ‘Mud’ was published in the *London Review of Books*.<sup>42</sup> But just before *Confidential Chats*, one of Hollinghurst’s finest pastoral poems

appeared in the Sycamore Press *Florilegium for John Florio*: ‘The Derelict Houses at Great Barrington’ of 1981 is a poem which exemplifies exactly the kind of direction his poems might have been expected to take.<sup>43</sup> It may be seen too as a distant relative of Hollinghurst’s 2012 novel *The Stranger’s Child* in atmosphere and in a kind of dialogic, Bakhtinian novelistic way. It is particularly reminiscent of the later book in its evocation of the passage of time: the ‘dissonant bells at ten past the hour’ which ‘bore witness to vanished patrons’, ‘the slow ascendancy of grass’ and the ‘slow tilt into nullity.’<sup>44</sup> It is tempting too to compare this kind of historical novelism to another major poem of the era, Derek Mahon’s ‘A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford’; the comparison is worth making to suggest that the kind of elegiac historical-pastoral of Hollinghurst’s poem is not limited to an English tradition. The *Florilegium* contains a second poem by Hollinghurst, ‘Rain’, a poem of unrequited but imagined love – ‘Alone in the huge bed’ – which ends with a note which we find again both in the poems and Hollinghurst’s novels – a wish for a departed ‘innocence’ which is not in fact so much innocence as a lost golden age: ‘the orderly garden, unbeaten roses, / our stupid, sunlit innocence again.’<sup>45</sup> The real drift of the poem is a wish not for innocence but for experience. Once again, this eighteen-line poem has a protractedness that seems (again with the benefit of hindsight) to want the scope of a more extended, fictional form, the form in which Hollinghurst was ultimately to be a supreme practitioner.

## Notes

- 1 Rachel Cooke, ‘Alan Hollinghurst: “The Booker Can Drive People Mad”’, *Observer*, 20 May 2012, [www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/20/alan-hollinghurst-strangers-child-booker-interview](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/20/alan-hollinghurst-strangers-child-booker-interview) (accessed 19 January 2016).
- 2 For Hollinghurst’s activities with the Florio Society and with Fuller’s Sycamore Press, see *John Fuller and the Sycamore Press: A Bibliographic History*, ed. Ryan Roberts (Oxford: Bodleian Library and Oak Knoll Press, 2010). Hollinghurst contributes some brief memories to this volume (see 21–3).
- 3 John Wain set the subject of ‘The Death of a Poet’ in his role as Oxford Professor of Poetry and said that he inherited it from Roy Fuller, who may have chosen it because of Auden’s recent death. Of Hollinghurst’s poem, Wain says, ‘His poem is clearly about Auden – a preference invited, of course, by the choice of that title in that particular year’ (John Wain, *Professing Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1977) 126). Hollinghurst says, ‘I seem to remember I didn’t much care for Auden at that stage of my life ... though at some point I came to value him much more’ (e-mail to the

- author, 26 September 2014). Of course, his tutor John Fuller would have made Auden a major presence at that point.
- 4 Alan Hollinghurst, 'The Creative Uses of Homosexuality in the Novels of E. M. Forster, Ronald Firbank and L. P. Hartley', M.Litt. thesis, University of Oxford, 1979.
  - 5 See Alan Hollinghurst, 'I Often Laugh When I'm Alone: The Novels of Ronald Firbank', *Yale Review* 89.2 (2001) 1–18; and 'Saved by Art: The Shy, Steely, Original Ronald Firbank', *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 November 2006, 12–15. The *TLS* article was a version of the third of the 2006 Lord Northcliffe Lectures at University College London where Hollinghurst had taught.
  - 6 *Poetry: Introduction 4* (London and Boston MA: Faber, 1978). For Hollinghurst's poems, see 67–78.
  - 7 Cooke, 'Alan Hollinghurst'.
  - 8 *Poetry Supplement Compiled by Andrew Motion for the Poetry Book Society Christmas '81* (London: Poetry Society, 1981).
  - 9 Alan Hollinghurst, 'Isherwood is at Santa Monica' in *Isherwood is at Santa Monica: Sycamore Broadsheet 22* (Oxford: Sycamore Press, 1975) 1.
  - 10 Alan Hollinghurst, 'The Well' in *Isherwood is at Santa Monica* 2–3.
  - 11 In the Roberts book on the Sycamore Press, Hollinghurst says Howard's book was lent to his parents 'by a well-meaning aunt' (*John Fuller and the Sycamore Press*, 23). That edition, from which he 'lifted' the title, was published in 1928, so it wasn't too scarce to be republished within twenty years.
  - 12 William Lee Howard, *Confidential Chats with Boys* (New York: Clode, 1911) 78.
  - 13 The first and third sections are the parts of the poem chosen for *Magdalen Poets*, ed. Robert Macfarlane (Oxford: Magdalen College, 2000) 167–8.
  - 14 Alan Hollinghurst, 'Introduction' in *A. E. Housman: Poems Selected by Alan Hollinghurst* (London: Faber, 2001) vii–xii: ix.
  - 15 Alan Hollinghurst, 'Over the Wall' in *Poetry* 67–8: 67.
  - 16 *Ibid.* 68.
  - 17 Alan Hollinghurst, 'Christmas Day at Home' in *Poetry* 70–1: 70.
  - 18 *Ibid.* 71.
  - 19 A. E. Housman, 'To an Athlete Dying Young' in *Poems Selected by Alan Hollinghurst* 16.
  - 20 *Ibid.*
  - 21 *Ibid.*
  - 22 Alan Hollinghurst, 'Nightfall (For an Athlete Dying Young)' in *Poetry* 68–9: 68.
  - 23 *Ibid.* 68–9.
  - 24 *Ibid.* 68.
  - 25 Alan Hollinghurst, 'The Drowned Field' in *Poetry* 72.
  - 26 *Ibid.*
  - 27 *Ibid.*
  - 28 Alan Hollinghurst, 'Ben Dancing at Wayland's Smithy' in *Poetry* 75–6: 76.

- 29 Alan Hollinghurst, 'Alonso' in *Poetry* 73–4.
- 30 Alan Hollinghurst, 'Survey' in *Poetry* 69–70: 69.
- 31 Ibid. See also the opening of chapter 19 of E. M. Forster's *Howards End*, where Forster takes an aerial view of England that influences these poems of Hollinghurst.
- 32 Ibid. 70.
- 33 Alan Hollinghurst, 'Convalescence in Lower Largo (Birthplace of Alexander Selkirk)' in *Poetry* 77.
- 34 Alan Hollinghurst, 'Introduction' in Mick Imlah, *Selected Poems*, ed. Mark Ford (London: Faber, 2010) ix–xxiii: xii.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid. xi.
- 38 Ibid. xii.
- 39 Alan Hollinghurst, 'Dry Season Nights' in *The Poetry Book Society Anthology 1989–1990*, ed. Christopher Reid (London: Hutchinson, 1989) 54.
- 40 Both 'Brain-Garden' and 'Dry Season Nights', as well as 'Sugar Mill', which was published in the *Times Literary Supplement*, were written during a month spent in Carriacou in the Windward Islands in early 1989.
- 41 Alan Hollinghurst, 'Brain-Garden' in *Magdalen Poets* 169.
- 42 Alan Hollinghurst, 'Mud', *London Review of Books* 21 October 1982, [www.lrb.co.uk/v04/n19/alan-hollinghurst/mud](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v04/n19/alan-hollinghurst/mud) (accessed 19 January 2016).
- 43 Alan Hollinghurst, 'The Derelict Houses at Great Barrington' in *A Florilegium for John Florio* (Oxford: Sycamore Press, 1981) n.p. Though authorship was not assigned in the pamphlet, it also contained the first published poem by Mick Imlah, 'Quasimodo Says Goodnight to the Beautiful Gipsy Girl he has Rescued from the Stake', and a particularly fine imagist music-poem by John Fuller, 'Concerto for Double Bass'. The poems are attributable with certainty by later publication in authored volumes, and revealed in Roberts, *John Fuller and the Sycamore Press*, 89.
- 44 Hollinghurst, 'The Derelict Houses at Great Barrington'.
- 45 Alan Hollinghurst, 'Rain' in *A Florilegium for John Florio* n.p.