A VANISHED HAND
My Autograph Album
Also by Anthony Rudolf

Poetry:
The Same River Twice
After the Dream
Mandorla (illustrated by Julia Farrer)
Zigzag: FiveVerse/Prose Sequences

Memoirs:
The Arithmetic of Memory
Silent Conversations: A Reader’s Life
Journey Round My Apartment

Fiction
Kafka’s Doll (illustrated by Paul Coldwell)
The Mermaid from the Azores

Criticism:
Byron’s Darkness
At an Uncertain Hour: Primo Levi’s War against Oblivion
Wine from Two Glasses
I’m Not Even a Grownup: the Diary of Jerzy Feliks Urman
Engraved in Flesh (on Piotr Rawicz), 2nd edition
The Jew etc: R.B. Kitaj catalogue introduction

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MPT Bonnefoy issue (1992)
Poems for Shakespeare IV
Voices within the Ark: 20th Century Jewish Poets
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Collected Poems and Selected Translations of A.C. Jacobs

Translations
Poetry: Yves Bonnefoy, Edmond Jabès, Claude Vigée, Evgeny Vinokurov, Alexander Tvardovsky, Ifigenija Simonovic
Drama and fiction etc: Ana Novac, Eugene Heimler, Honoré de Balzac, Jean Clair
A Vanished Hand
My Autograph Album
Memories of the 1950s

ANTHONY RUDOLF

Shearsman Books
For
Nathaniel and Helen
and
my granddaughter Leah
and
Naomi and Jason
and
my grandson Charlie
Acknowledgments:
Mark Pirie for publishing an extract in *Broadsheet* (New Zealand)
Naomi Rudolf and Ruth Blane for Alma Cogan tombstone photographs
I would like to thank four people, Gabriel Levin, Miriam Neiger, Rabbi Frank Hellner and, in particular, Rabbi Howard Cooper, for their thoughts about the Hebrew wording on Alma Cogan’s tombstone
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. . . O for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!

TENNYSON, ‘Break, Break, Break’
There is a powerful moment in *The Glass Menagerie*, when Jim, the gentleman caller, brought home by his friend Tom under false pretences, signs with a great flourish the high-school yearbook of Tom’s sister Laura who, it turns out, had loved him when he was the star student. The irony is that Jim too is a loser who, unlike his fellow warehouse worker Tom (a secret poet and alter ego of the playwright, which implies redemption despite the utter bleakness of the play), will never escape his destiny; for a brief moment, however, he rides high, monarch of all he surveys, that is to say, of poor crippled Laura tied to her impossible mother in a *ménage à deux*. I saw the Young Vic production of the play with Paula [Rego], a fellow fan of Tennessee Williams, a few days before adding these words to my essay. A high-school yearbook is not an autograph album, but it is a ‘keepsake’ volume of an important kind, more usual in North America, though now becoming more common here. The first time I saw the play was in the 1980s at the beautiful Edwardian theatre in Portsmouth when I was the guest of a friend who was starring in it, Susannah York. Susannah, who sadly died on the day that I am writing this very paragraph and with whom I had hoped to discuss the Young Vic production, got me signatures for my son’s autograph album when he was young, including Peter O’Toole, a notoriously difficult catch. She also signed copies of her books (*In Search of Unicorns* and *Lark’s Castle*) for my two children, but that’s different from
albums. Nicholas Humphrey and I visited her on different days in hospital during her final illness. She told Nick that she had had a good innings. Despite the use of this metaphor, she was not a cricket fan. Nobody’s perfect.

In his book *Consciousness Regained*, Nick Humphrey has a chapter on collecting, how the classic versions of the hobby (or obsession) depend on completing sets, on variations and so on, what Gerard Manley Hopkins called ‘rhyme’, or ‘likeness tempered with difference’. This could apply to autographs, but not in my case, since I was eclectic and not specifically collecting film stars or Middlesex cricketers. Walter Benjamin’s words are germane to this exploration of my quondam self: ‘Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector’s passion borders on the chaos of memories’. Benjamin was referring to adult collectors, specifically to collectors of books. But the ‘chaos of memories’ is what floods back to me as I explore my long lost and newly found autograph album. My autograph collecting, however, cannot be dignified with the word passion because I managed to obtain only sixty signatures during a period of less than ten years. There was competition from my stamp collecting and my cigarette card collecting, the latter entirely dependent upon the largesse of smokers and the junk-shop in Temple Fortune, the former upon letters received by parents and grandparents and from specialist outlets like Stanley Gibbons in the Strand. Unlike my stamp album, with its rows of stamps as obedient as toy soldiers, the autographs are indeed chaotically ranged and (dis) ordered. I fear that the meanings discerned from the gestalt will be as disordered as those called for by Rimbaud in his famous letter of May 13, 1971 (the first of the two remarkable ‘lettres du voyant’), sixty quantums interacting in a miniature cosmos, which as a participant observer I still harbour hopes of bringing to order, although I am only too aware of the risks. Note the conclusion of ‘The Idea of Order at Key West’,

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where Wallace Stevens addresses and implicitly criticises the literary critic and ideological lover of order, Ramon Fernandez:

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker’s rage to order words of the sea,
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

After all, as Stevens put it in ‘Mr Burnshaw and the Statue’ (in *Opus Posthumous*), a lesser poem than ‘The Idea of Order at Key West’,

. . . even disorder may,
So seen, have an order of its own . . .

Or, if you like,

. . . things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar

to quote Stevens again, this time from one of his two most famous poems. By a strange coincidence, I can claim a connection to Ramon – I knew his son, Dominique – and to Stanley Burnshaw: I corresponded with him over the use of one of his poems in an anthology. The nearest I got to Stevens himself, one of my favourite poets of all time, was to be driven past his house in Hartford, Connecticut, by another translator of Yves Bonnefoy, Richard Stamelman.

Will my grandchildren Charlie and Leah collect autographs when they are teenagers? Or is this a practice from the childhood world of one who, for example, attended that classic annual event of the 1950s, the Schoolboys Exhibition at the Royal Horticultural Hall in Westminster, a jamboree no longer possible to imagine? On my desk is the album itself, a veritable talisman, unadulterated testimony from a world that is lost

*Introduction* ☀ 11
and gone forever, and most of the autographers dead. ‘…. O
for the touch of a vanished hand, / And the sound of a voice
that is still!’, wrote Tennyson. Strictly speaking, it should be
‘signature album’, since an autograph is any piece of hand-
writing. However, let’s stick with the version familiar from
childhood when youngsters bought or were given a notebook
with ‘autographs’ or ‘autograph album’ on the cover. Mine,
after a vanishing act of thirty years (the length of time I have
lived in my post-marital flat), is a treasure trove of nostalgia
which I thought I would never see again. The other day I was
in the shared attic above my flat and knocked over a box of
old papers. I brought the whole box downstairs, enjoyed going
through the papers, put a few aside grateful that I had kept
them, and threw away most of the rest. There, at the bottom of
the box, was the album. It is not, however, a purpose-printed
album but an ordinary hard-cover notebook, the cover bluey-
green. I would never have thought of adopting and adapting an
ordinary notebook for my autographs. After all, I had a proper
stamp album. The notebook would have been my father’s idea.
I am racking my brains as to why we did not buy me a proper
album. I doubt that the reason was to save money although
my father, generous with pounds, could be mean with pennies
and, in any case, this notebook probably cost around the same
amount as an album. Many of the signatures were written on
pieces of paper which I then glued into the notebook. But
surely I could have stuck them into a proper album. Unless the
albums on sale in Market Place NW11, probably in Ellingtons
the newsagent and stationer, were too small. Too small for
what? Well, the first item in the album (on what would have
been about the twentieth page, the earlier pages having been
scissored out) takes up the whole page because it is a signed
photograph. Is that a clue? Did I possess this and other full-page
items before I owned the notebook and discovered that they

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would not fit into a regular album? Why have those pages been cut out? Did the notebook already belong to me or one of my parents and was no longer needed for its original purpose? That would make sense. In those days, people were thriftier with possessions; waste was not encouraged. We will come on to the first signature in a moment. Let’s begin at the beginning, which is the inside front cover, since there is nothing on the front.
Two pieces of paper are glued onto the inside front cover of my album. The first covers the entire board and says ‘AUTOGRAPH ALBUM’ twice, top left and bottom right. Glued on top of it, along the diagonal, is a rectangular piece of paper on which is written: THIS ALBUM BELONGS TO A. RUDOLF / IF FOUND PLEASE RETURN TO: 41, MIDDLEWAY, HAMPSTEAD / GARDEN SUBURB, N.W.11 / PHONE: SPEedwell 7937 (my mother’s phone number in various incarnations for nearly seventy years). The handwriting on this is more mature than the 2 x 2 words on the lower sheet, which may enable me to date the beginning and end of my collecting phase. I have been able to unpeel much of the lower sheet from the inside cover, allowing me to read what is written there. Its inflexible arrangement – since it is a contents list and not the index it claims to be itself – explains why the early pages of the album were torn out:

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<th>1</th>
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<table>
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<td>Extra</td>
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It would appear that the number of autographs overran the pages allotted, so I tore out the pages and started again. Four of the autographs have been scissored out of those early pages and glued onto cards and the card glued onto the new page. What happened to the others? Some may have become unglued from the cards they were on and were re-glued by me onto new pages, others perhaps swapped. There are several categories listed but I have no autographs pertaining to them: what in the name of memory became of the artists, composers, golfers, hockey players, jockeys, motor cyclists, rowers, royalty, rugger players? This is a major league mystery. They can’t all have been swopped. There is only one illegible signature in the book, and it definitely belongs to a cricketer. It is inconceivable that this is a wish list – it is too specific. Also I had no interest in rugger or rowers or hockey, to name only three, so somehow, somewhere I must have obtained autographs of famous players.
Inside Back Cover

Glued along the edge to the inside back cover is a piece of paper, the writing upside down when the book is the right way up; on it is written in pencil ‘For SWOPPING’ and inked in a box: ‘DUPLICATES AND UNWANTED AUTOGRAPHS’. Only one name is written there, Alma Cogan’s, which suggests that I had two copies since I still have one in the book. Inside the folder created by the piece of paper are two signatures carefully cut out from a scorecard or other cricket document, headed Worcestershire, and their names written by me alongside the faded pencilled handwriting: J. Flavell and L. Devereux. Such was the hold on my memory of my seemingly lost autograph album that on one of the occasions I met Harold Pinter — it was a July 14 gathering (2004 or 2005) at the French ambassador’s house — when, inevitably, the conversation turned to cricket, I told Pinter about my swops, mentioning Jack Flavell of Warwickshire, and would he consider a swop. Quick as a Denis Compton leg sweep, he said ‘Worcestershire’. I should point out that Devereux and Flavell were not heroes of mine and, clearly I obtained their autographs — undoubtedly at Lords and probably sometime between 1957 and 1959 — in order to swop them. Not really an insult, is it? More like a compliment. I would have swopped both of them for Bill Edrich, who was a minor hero — because he played for Middlesex and by association with Denis Compton — even though I was cross with him for refusing to give me his autograph. Edrich was well known for this.
My other Pinter story happened at a charity dinner where, as the guest of Musa Farhi, I found myself at a good table sitting next to the playwright. ‘When are you next going to write a full-length play?’ I asked politely and out of genuine curiosity. ‘All my plays are full length’, he replied with mock gravity, before explaining that he had no plans to write a long play. As for Pinter’s autograph, and those of other famous people, I have plenty of those in letters received over the years in my capacity as editor and translator. But obviously I no longer ‘collect autographs’. At a certain age, nothing beats the thrill of meeting someone whose autograph you genuinely want. So, during which years was I collecting the signatures? We shall see. I have already alluded to the competing collections: my stamp collection began and ended earlier than the autograph album. I was not to know that I myself would one day end up on a postage stamp, as Mr Rochester in Paula Rego’s Jane Eyre series. As for the cigarette cards, I have more to say about those in my book *The Arithmetic of Memory*. 
Written on the inside back cover itself are two lists, the first one headed family. In the first column against ‘ME’ is my own signature followed by the signatures of my father and mother against ‘DADDY’ and ‘MUMMY’. In the second column labelled ‘2nd’ and ‘3rd’ are two more of my own signatures, each more mature in writing and therefore later than the earlier one. The lettering of the first signature is compatible with a finding concerning Margaret Lockwood which we will come to. The final signature, ‘Ruth Rudolf’ is next to where I have written ‘Ruth’. Ruth, the oldest of my three sisters and born in 1945 when I had just turned three, was probably nine or ten when she wrote it. Mary and Annie, born in 1951 and 1953, have not signed the book, either because they were still too young by the time I stopped collecting autographs, or because there was no more room, since I drew a line and wrote out another contents list or index. Looking again at the inside front cover, I would guess that the list was written when I was thirteen or fourteen, the rectangular strip when I was sixteen or seventeen, and the three signatures on the inside back cover when I was eight and ten and twelve. This dating, however, is open to reassessment since I now notice that the third one is an imitation of my father’s signature. A preliminary thought prior to examining all the evidence would be that I began collecting in 1950 or 1951 when I was eight and ended in 1959, at latest December 1960 when I left school for what was not yet known as a gap year – in Paris – and then my three years in Cambridge.

The second list of names is headed ‘List of Autographs (or Autographed Photographs)’ and sub-headed to the left: ‘A = Stage’ / ‘S = Sport’ / ‘P = Politician’. There are twenty-six names, at which point there is no more space. Typically, I had not taken this into consideration when embarking on this list. To this day, I have difficulty in negotiating space (except when parking a car, one of my few practical skills and a valuable one in downtown
London) and time (except oddly enough when guessing the exact time, something which has never come in useful). I always underestimate or overestimate the time needed to accomplish a task. Still and all, I wonder how many of the names in the second list, and indeed the other names in the album itself, mean anything to younger readers. The list is not alphabetical, the
three categories are mixed up: it is not chronological, as the rest of this book will reveal, although traces of the order remain. It has no discernible logic. There is reason to believe that Margaret Lockwood’s was my first autograph and her name at the head of the list probably reflects that. Note that ‘S’ for Stage has been crossed out against her name and ‘A’ for Actors has been substituted, presumably to avoid confusion with Sport. There is one politician (P). Apart from the last six names, everyone is categorised. I see that I started out writing both names and then resorted to initials until Herbert Lom, who was allowed his first name; I then reverted to initials for Cogan and Vaughan before listing three cricketers merely by their surname. Warr was a ‘gentleman’, as in the ‘Gentlemen versus Players’ fixture; there was also a team called Gentlemen of Ireland. Parks and Thomson (misspelt as Thompson) were ‘players’, so, according to the convention of the day, J. J. Warr, still alive at the time of writing, Parks J. M. (ditto) and Thomson I. (deceased), deserve an apology.

A  Margaret Lockwood
S  Jean Desforges
S  Vic Herman
S  Jack Hobbs
S  Reg Harris
S  Alex Forbes
P  E. Shinwell
S  J. Logie
A  M. Bygraves
A  S. Eaton
S  J. Leach
S  T. Lawton

[second row]

J. Wade  S
D. Bennett  S
D. Bowen  S
G. Iden  S
E. Allan  S
B. Wright  S
L. Compton  S
Herbert Lom
A. Cogan
F. Vaughan
Parks
Thompson
Warr