Gael Turnbull (1928-2004) was born in Edinburgh, but grew up in Jarrow and in Blackpool, before emigrating to Winnipeg at the outbreak of the war with his father and mother, respectively a Scottish Baptist Minister and an American of Swedish descent. He returned to England in 1944 to complete his schooling and then to study Natural Sciences at Cambridge University. After rejoining his family in North America, he studied for an MD at the University of Pennsylvania and in 1952 became a GP and anaesthetist in northern Ontario, as well as providing medical assistance at logging camps in the area. There followed a short stay in London (1955-56), and a position as anaesthetist in Worcester until 1958, followed by a similar position in California. He returned to Worcester in 1964, to avoid the possibility of being sent to Vietnam as a medical orderly. He was to work as a general practitioner and anaesthetist until his retirement in 1989, whereupon he returned to live in Edinburgh.

An independent figure, he was central to the early transatlantic poetic contacts which were to have a transforming effect on many poets in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. Frequently collected and anthologised, his own poetry was deeply personal and owed little to any particular school, although it is fair to say that his admiration for the work of William Carlos Williams, another poet-doctor, never left him and was an early driving force behind the discovery, and the maturing, of his own poetic voice.

Jill Turnbull is a glass historian, author of The Scottish Glass Industry 1610-1750 (2001) and articles on glass and ceramics. Born in Gloucester in 1936, she married in 1956, spending the next 25 years as an Army wife and having three children. She qualified in social work at Bristol University in the early 1970s, practicing initially in the Cotswolds and then as a mental health social worker in Worcestershire. After the break-up of her first marriage, she met Gael Turnbull in 1981. They married in 1983 and moved to Edinburgh following his retirement. After completing a degree in the History of Design and the Visual Arts in 1992, she worked for two years at Edinburgh College of Art, before completing a doctorate in the Scottish History Department of the University of Edinburgh, where she remains an Honorary Research Fellow. Since Gael Turnbull's death she has been his literary executor.

Hamish Whyte was born in Renfrewshire in 1947. He worked as a librarian in Glasgow for many years, and also as a bibliographer. He has edited several anthologies, including Mungo's Tongues: Glasgow Poems 1630-1990 and An Arran Anthology. He runs Mariscat Press and has published the poetry of Gael Turnbull, Edwin Morgan and many others. His own poetry has been published in various magazines, and his long poem Window on the Garden was published as a book jointly by Essence Press and Botanics Press in 2006. A new collection from Shoestring, The Unswung Axe, is due in 2012. He is an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Scottish Literature at Glasgow University. He now lives in Edinburgh.
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Introduction

Creating poetry was Gael's first love, but he also enjoyed thinking, talking and writing about it. He took great pleasure in corresponding with fellow poets, and would make a real effort to meet with those whose work he admired, like William Carlos Williams and Basil Bunting, often establishing life-long friendships. One of his great pleasures was to encourage new writers and to publish them in *Migrant* and later in his “minimal missives”. Some, like Ian Hamilton Finlay, became well known, others such as Hugh Creighton Hill never achieved the recognition Gael thought they deserved.

There are always choices to be made, and the selection of items for inclusion in this book has been influenced by their importance to Gael himself, as well as for their wider interest. Some are related to his support for those he felt to be neglected, whether they were his contemporaries, like John Adlard, or Victorians such as Emily Pfeiffer. Some of the journal entries were not intended for publication but they do, I think, offer insights into individual characters at a moment in time. Some are very personal. Gael enjoyed a close relationship with Basil Bunting, and he was very touched by Basil’s reunion with Peggy, in which he played a part. His description of those events¹ was found tucked into a folder of Basil’s letters—only to be read after the deaths of those involved. Parts of that story are known, but only Gael knew the full truth. The style of the individual subjects varies as widely as the subjects themselves—from stream of consciousness jottings about Ginsberg to academic musings on the nature of poetry itself. Their variety—and sometimes their intensity—reflect the man.

This collection of notes, memories, journal entries, reviews, critiques and comments indicates the wide range of Gael’s prose—whether published, personal or polemic—all of it reflecting on the poets and poetry that meant so much to him. I am most grateful to Tony Frazer, who is responsible for the footnotes in this volume (except where otherwise indicated), and to Jonathan Greene for alerting us to the existence of the photograph on page 74.

Jill Turnbull
Edinburgh, July 2012

¹ See ‘Bunting, Brigflatts and Margaret Greenbank’, page 65-74 of this volume.
Canada, the U.S.A. and Migrant
An Autobiographical Sketch

In the autumn of 1952, I had expected to have started a research project at the Babraham Institute of Animal Physiology just outside Cambridge. Instead, I was in the small town of Iroquois Falls in Northern Ontario doing General Practice. How this happened is not immediately relevant even as the unexpected shift in my life has been very relevant, indeed crucial.

Not that Canada was totally unfamiliar. I had lived from January 1940 until April 1944 in Winnipeg and had even briefly travelled on a Canadian passport. There was no separate Canadian citizenship at that time and any British subject if they happened to be living in Canada automatically received a Canadian one. I had also acquired a Canadian accent something of which still persists and undoubtedly shall.

I was in Canada again in the summer of 1949 to Snow Lake in Northern Manitoba and had hitch-hiked through Western and Northern Ontario, then south to Toronto. For the 100 miles between Longlac and Hearst, there was only one forest ranger post. A few years before, there had not even been a road.

I was recently married. Our eldest daughter was born in Iroquois Falls and I had my first experience of working as a family doctor. When I arrived, I discovered that the person I was replacing had been chiefly responsible for giving the anaesthetics for the resident general practitioner surgeon and it was assumed that I would do the same. I was too young and too ignorant to admit my ignorance so I did not refuse. By the end of the three years we were there, I had acquired some proficiency and without serious mishap. This chance also greatly affected the pattern of my later life.

I was also given the job of what was called the bush doctor. Iroquois Falls was, and may still be, a company town, owned by the Abitibi Power and Paper Company. The wood pulp for the paper mill was cut from several hundred square miles of forest just to the north and east of the town. For reasons that I never fully understood, it was thought important to have a doctor tour the half dozen or so camps during the winter.

This was partly for any immediate medical care, partly as some sort of guarantee that the company was not negligent in regard to health and hygiene standards. What I actually did was minimal and highly
inefficient but gave me a glimpse of a pattern of traditional forestry which was rapidly disappearing with mechanization.

I saw men working waist deep in snow with hand saws and horses, loading the logs on to sledges with a “jammer” (a system of pulleys from a vertical frame) which were then heaped in the frozen river or on the lake to wait for the break up in the spring.

But most of my time was spent by the stove in one of the huts staring out at the ice and snow. I would be out for 2 to 4 days at a time by the end of which I was thoroughly bushed and unable to concentrate on anything. The forestry engineers who ran the operation were virtually all English-speaking and university educated. The men were mostly from northern Quebec. This was my first real encounter with French Canada. I am ashamed now to think of how intermittent was my effort to learn to speak and understand. However, I did manage enough for the practicalities of “bush doctoring”: the sprains, bruises, minor cuts and ever-present and ever-varied *la grippe*.

In the spring of 1953, John Sutherland published five of my poems in *Northern Review*. Although I had had some poems accepted previously by Peter Russell of *Nine*, those never appeared so that the group in *Northern Review* were my first publication and I owe a great deal to the generosity and encouragement of John Sutherland and his wife.

Almost immediately after, I received a letter from Raymond Souster who had read them, asking to see poems for his magazine *Contact*. To Souster also and his suggestions and criticism and interest, I owe equally as much or more.

The effect of all this on the course of my writing was crucial. Chiefly, it must be said, because Souster put me in touch with Cid Corman and his magazine *Origin* and a group of young American poets, also being published in *Contact*. I found myself reading, often with puzzlement or frank antipathy, writers with ideas about the writing of poetry very different to those with which I had grown up.

Of Canadian poets, I was soon reading and in contact with Louis Dudek, Irving Layton, D.G. Jones, F.R. Scott and others. Dudek sent me the gift of a copy of the *Autobiography* of William Carlos Williams which made an enormous impression on me. There were occasional visits to Montreal and Toronto. I published other poems in various Canadian
An Autobiographical Sketch

magazines. I helped to edit a little anthology of *New Canadian Poetry* which was published as an issue of the magazine *Artisan*, by Robert Cooper in England. I never corresponded with A.M. Klein but his ‘The Rocking Chair’ is part of my permanent sense of both Canada and what poetry is about.

From being a solitary and unpublished writer, I became in those three years part of a community of writers, largely if not exclusively Canadian. How much this distorted, how much it stimulated and developed my writing, is difficult to guess. But effect, it certainly had.

In parallel to this exclusively English-speaking and writing world was my encounter with that other and French-speaking Canada. This was given impetus by my experience in “the bush” although there was the largely French-speaking twin town of Ansonville as well as many French-speaking people in Iroquois Falls itself, where there was a thriving French theatre group. I made particular friends with a completely bilingual local teacher, Jean Beaupré. It is perhaps difficult to imagine now but there was very little contact then, even in Montreal, between the poets of the two languages in Canada. I had been told on more than one occasion not to waste my time and energy trying to make contact. However, F.R. Scott had published some translations of Anne Hébert.

By prowling bookshops and some personal contacts—chiefly Avi Boxer, then living in Montreal—I read and corresponded with Gilles Hénault, Roland Giguère, Jean-Guy Pilon and Anne Hébert. I spent some time trying to read and understand Alain Grandbois. Eventually, with the help of Beaupré, I published four little duplicated bilingual collections of poems by Hénault and Giguère, and also by Saint-Denys-Garneau (by then dead) and a young Montreal poet with whom I failed to make personal contact but whose poems Avi Boxer had sent, Paul-Marie Lapointe. I was also struggling to read some contemporary French poets from France itself. Giguère himself was in Paris at the time.

I found the *Canadiens* most friendly and even patient with my dreadful schoolboy French on the few occasions that we met. For the translations of course I had Beaupré, sufficiently bilingual to correct and suggest idiom even in English. I became even more aware of the impossibilities of translation—and the fascination. But it was the poetry
of Saint-Denys-Garneau which made the most enduring impression. This was not so much for the content of it—too introspective for my own use—but for a certain tone and pace of expression, where playfulness and gentle self-mockery shifted back and forth easily with great simplicity and vigour of expression.

It is possible—and I find myself hearing Saint-Denys-Garneau: “Il se peut que nous soyons trompés exagèrement sur ce compte…”—that I have been able to use something from his poetry in a poem such as ‘Black Spruce’ although there are other influences, some merely part of the conventions of French poetry generally (the poème-en-prose).

The ‘Seven Snapshots’ were written in 1965, a decade later, and in retrospect. There were many other poems that I wrote in Canada, some on Canadian subjects, some published, but these are the only ones that have survived, with ‘Riel’ (reprinted elsewhere). There is also a ‘Jeu’ or ‘Ballad’ (verses on the sanitary arrangements of a logging camp) still occasionally recited but not totally appropriate to a literary journal.

‘A Night Call’ was written in 1957 and broadcast on the BBC.