**Carcanet Oral History Interview [15 August 2018]**

**Respondent: Gareth Reeves (GR)**

**Interviewer: Lise Jaillant (LJ)**

LJ: You studied at Oxford, right? Perhaps you can start here, your student experience at Oxford.

GR: Correct, right. I was an undergraduate at Trinity College, from ‘65 to ‘69 and ‘68. Which was roughly contemporary with Michael [Schmidt], I think he might have turned up a year later, I’m not sure. And I read English, I was going to actually read History, but I could never remember dates, so in those days it was easy to change subject, as long as you kept in the same College, so I changed to English. I had Denis Burton, a Milton scholar, who was my teacher, who knew every word of *Paradise Lost* off by heart, which is a bit terrifying.

LJ: And did you come from Oxford originally?

GR: No, then I was - I grew up in, funnily enough, mentioning Milton, I grew up, spent a lot of my youth in Chalfont St. Giles, in Buckinghamshire where Milton wrote *Paradise Lost*. But then, I moved to, the family moved to Lewisham in Sussex. And actually, that’s where I was living when I was an undergraduate.

LJ: And your father was a poet, right?

GR: James Reeves. A poet, critic and children’s author. And also, he was quite an expert, also, on folksong. And among other people, he knew Robert Graves, for instance, very well. Michael admired him, liked to talk about that.

LJ: So, how did he meet Robert Graves?

GR: Before the war, he… I’m not sure how they first encountered, but he became a very… an admirer of his poetry, and contacted him and went out to Deià, where in fact, he met my Mum. So, I guess, Robert Graves was indirectly responsible for my existence. [Laughter]

LJ: And I guess your father was quite a big influence for you as a poet, right?

GR: Yes, I often wonder that. In that, I don’t know if… he encouraged my writing, in fact I have a poem about this where he encouraged my writing, he said for every poem I write, I’ll give you a sixpence or something, and I was [inaudible 00.03.19] and I didn’t write anything for ages after that. But on the other hand . . . who knows? Stylistically, I don’t think so, but I’ve always had literature around, and poets who would come to the house and so on, so I must have been absorbing it in all sorts of ways.

LJ: And when did you start writing poetry?

GR: I guess, seriously, as an undergraduate. Not much before then. Though my first attempts, I don’t know, I think I went down quite a few cul-de-sacs before I, sort of, got going.

LJ: I see, you mentioned you met Michael Schmidt at Oxford, do you remember the first meeting at all?

GR: I think it must have been, funnily enough we were talking about this today, so it must have been… I was there ‘65, ‘68 and so it must have been 1966. We met at the Oxford Poetry Society, and I think that’s when Carcanet first came into the picture as well. I think it might have been ‘66, it might have been ‘67. I think ‘66. A mutual friend, Roger Garfitt, he was president or something of the Poetry Society, said there’s this magazine that somebody wants somebody to take over, called Carcanet. And Michael leapt up and said, ‘I’ll take it over.’ And that’s when it started. And I think that’s, certainly it was around that time that I met Michael then I became, I think I was Secretary of the Oxford Poetry Society, and then President. And he kept the magazine, Carcanet, going when we were undergraduates, and then he turned it into a Press, I think, in his last year, certainly the year after. I was actually, believe it or not, a graduate trainee for the Oxford University Press [OUP]. But I wouldn’t know… when I left Oxford… I was – graduate trainees are taught all sides in the Oxford University Press then, I don’t know what they do now, they try to teach their trainees all sides of the business: production, editing, sales, all that, so that you knew your way around. And then to do this, they’d send you off to one of their education branches, many of them in India. And I would have been, I was due to go off to… I think, I can’t remember, somewhere in Europe, but they didn’t have –

LJ: But they had a branch in India?

GR: They had several branches in India - I think it was, it would have been, maybe, Calcutta I think, as it was then called.

LJ: Yes... I think it was their educational branch.

GR: Yes, Calcutta I think, as it was called then. Anyway, but they didn’t have a posting for me for many months, and so I was given very odd jobs, boring jobs, working in just the usual, and I got fed up with this… hanging around here. I don’t know if I really wanted to go into this as a business, I would go to the training sessions and they would say, ‘You know, it’s not all having lunch with Graham Greene, its hard graft, making a profit.’ So, I had too long sitting around, thinking about it. If they’d sent me straight off to India, I might have had a different life. And meanwhile, I was getting more and more interested in American poetry, so while I was sitting round at OUP, I actually applied to go to Stanford University. So, I gave up the –

LJ: But Stanford -

GR: - Yes, where I had a fellowship to do a PhD, I’d got a grant for that.

LJ: So, initially you’d wanted to work in publishing too? But then decided perhaps it was not for you.

GR: Sometimes I think academia is, in Britain anyway, has become a bit… I don’t know what you’d think of it, I find it’s become a bit commodified. I guess I’m a bit old-school. But then publishing has become a bit of rat race too. I don’t know, I sometimes think I would have done better to stay in publishing. But I got interested in American poetry, wanted to follow that up more, got this fellowship to go Stanford, and in the meantime, I got married, so we went out there, together.

LJ: Before that, you published a book with Carcanet, in 1969, right? A booklet? Your first collection.

GR: Called *Pilgrims*. Yes, which, most of those, you’ve done your research.

LJ: Well, I had a look at it upstairs [at the John Rylands Library], it’s here.

GR: Yes, I’m not terribly proud of most of the poems in that pamphlet, but between giving up my OUP job and going to Stanford, I… let’s get the sequence right here. Michael had moved out to Pin Farm, south of the city, there was a spare room there, and I stayed there, and helped him with the Press that he was starting up then. And he was incredibly industrious, he’d be typing away at seven o’clock in the morning when I was still getting up, as far as I remember. Pin Farm was fun, actually. It had no hot water and things like this, so you would, you know, if you wanted a bath, you had to heat up lots of kettles, it was quite primitive. But it was fun, and I would do - I’d help… Peter Jones was around then too. And we would all do lots of that parcelling up, pamphlets and magazines. As I remember.

LJ: You mentioned that Michael used to get up very early.

GR: Oh yes, he’s a demon worker, oh yes. He’s been a demon worker from birth, I think. [inaudible 00:11:18] Very industrious. So that’s when that pamphlet came out. And actually, because I… not very long at [Oxford], but I had learned things about production, and I would feed them, I think I was the main liaison with the printer. I mean, I’d go visit the printer, and we’d talk about layout, and things like this, and I did quite a help with the physical production of those early pamphlets.

LJ: Did you help with the design as well? I think the person who did the design for your booklet was Simon Chester. I don’t know if you knew him, or…?

GR: I don’t - did I ever meet Simon Chester? Was he an undergraduate? I’ve forgotten, I think he might well have been at Oxford with us. It rings a faint bell.

LJ: Well, he designed the cover for your books.

GR: Thank you, I’d forgotten that. Yes, which was that wheel, with the spo – what do you call it, a steering wheel for a ship? Anyway, a tibber.

LJ: So, did you do any poetry readings for this book, or…?

GR: I’m trying to think. After that was published, soon after that was published I went to America anyway, so… and there, I was getting going as a postgraduate student, so there wasn’t, and I wasn’t – frankly, I began to wonder about a lot of the poems in that book, so I wasn’t doing any readings then. I might, I think I probably did as an undergraduate, these gatherings and poetry readings in Oxford.

LJ: You mentioned that you were part of this Poetry Society at Oxford, I mean, what kind of events did you have?

GR: That would be, we would invite outside poets and famous poets. We’d have, oh… quite a few. We certainly had George MacBeth, I remember we had… I’m sure we had Ted Hughes, we tried to get T. S. Eliot, but he said, ‘I’m rather busy at the moment, writing plays.’ He must have been in the middle of writing ‘The Cocktail Party’ or something. We got really famous poets, Ted Hughes several times, for instance –

LJ: And what was the reaction of your father when you published your first collection of poems? Do you remember if he said anything, or…? Because obviously as a poet himself -

GR: I think…yes, it’s a good question. I think he was more interested in – I may not – because I went off to America, soon after, in fact, did it even come out – no, it came out while I was in the UK. I’m not sure if I even gave him a copy of that. Yes, I think I must have done. I can’t remember his reaction, I don’t think he was wild about it, quite rightly so. He was more interested in my subsequent poems actually. But I didn’t have another book out before he died, so he saw some of the other ones, but not, no other publications, he died in, just after I’d got a job at Durham. He died in 1978. And my first full volume wasn’t until 1984. Though I did come out in, when I came back from the States, again I worked with Michael for the Press in the Corn Exchange. You know, the Press was in the Corn Exchange.

LJ: And before that, you went to the States, right?

GR: I went to the States, and when I came back, then *Ten English Poets* came out, I remember that, and I think my father had a copy of that, and I was in *Ten English Poets*, just before he died. And he said nice things about it, as I remember.

LJ: That’s good. So, why did you decide to apply to Stanford? Because obviously that was not the usual choice to do, right?

GR: Yes. It… there was advice from my old tutor at Oxford who said there’s something called the English-Speaking Union which acts as a funnel as it were, a channel, for English people wanting to apply to foreign, overseas universities including the States, and they act as an initial filter and then they recommend you, and they have a list of universities they were, that they had dealings with, including Princeton, Harvard, Yale, Stanford… not sure if Berkeley… and several other quite good ones. And I applied to Stanford because I liked the idea of California, A, and B, it has to be said, that Stanford was one of the few places that offered you fellowship money from the word go. Berkeley for instance, you had to be there for a year before they gave you a fellowship at all. And I was getting married then and I thought I better have some money, so that was the main reason. I think I applied to several places, but that’s why I accepted Stanford.

LJ: And did you know the work of Wallace Stegner at that time?

GR: Because I got a writing fellowship while I was there, taking a fellowship, is that what you’re referring to?

LJ: No, I mean, obviously he was there, I think he created the programme in 1946, so he had been there for quite a long time.

GR: He was, I’m trying to… he wasn’t there when I was there, he was… I don’t think, was he? If so, because he’s a novelist, of course -

LJ: He was more or less retiring –

GR: That’s right, he was around but he’d retired… the main attraction academically, apart from the money, was it had a good reputation poetically, and I knew that Donald Davie was there. Although he’s English, I was interested in him, partly because he was an Englishman who’d sort of… was getting in, who’d written a lot about American poetry, Ezra Pound in particular, and I thought that would be the – I didn’t know him – actually my Father knew him a bit, my Dad knew him. I’d never met him, but his reputation was part of the reason why I thought it would be good to go to Stanford. Although actually I became very friendly with Al Gelpi who was an American poet, whom I’m still very friendly with. Davie died, of course.

LJ: So, obviously Davie was much older than you were at the time, and when you met him, what kind of relationship did you have? Was it more like a mentor thing?

GR: Interesting - he was away at Princeton some of the time I was there, and I was doing a regular PhD, I wasn’t doing a writing programme, he was involved in that, so I sat in on, nevertheless, on some of his poetry writing courses, which was a great thing to do. I mean, I… yes, I think I took one as one of my modules, but I wasn’t actually doing a full writing programme. And he was quite amusing. I was amused by… he never gave any – because in America everybody gets As, but he would never give As, you were lucky if you got a B+. He was very tough. I think I got a B+. But he was very encouraging, he was a wonderful teacher, because in print he could seem quite acerbic and sharp, but as a teacher of writing poetry, he was wonderful. He really tried to see what you were doing, or what you could do with the work, he didn’t try and make you write like him. He was extremely good, he was wonderful, and he was a real tonic. I still think about him as the reader over my shoulder. I did send him poems of mine, and he was – so I kept up –

LJ: That’s interesting, so he was teaching creative writing, right?

GR: He taught creative writing, but he also taught regular – well actually, what was he doing then? I don’t think he taught Pound, even then. He wasn’t into Pound. I mean, he’d sort of grown out of Pound.

LJ: But when you took his course, you were actually learning how to improve your writing, right?

GR: Yes, exactly, and I did that, and he was one of the supervisors, because you had to have three in America. For my PhD on T. S. Eliot and Virgil.

LJ: So, he was creative work and critical work, as well.

GR: Yes. And he did lecture on eighteenth century poetry, I think. But I didn’t go to any of those, because I was going to lectures on – I wanted to learn about American literature generally, I went to some advanced undergraduate courses – as a graduate student, if you wanted to catch up on things, you could go to advanced undergraduate, so I went to ones on American fiction and Melville, and things like this, because I knew nothing about it from my English education.

LJ: Obviously creative writing was not common in England at that time, so how was it to discover this new discipline in America?

GR: How did I?

LJ: I mean, how was it for you to discover the discipline?

GR: I kind of knew the difference, that it didn’t exist in England but it did in America, and so, you know, there were a list of modules you could go to, courses you could choose –

LJ: Yes, but about creative writing, you didn’t learn creative writing at Oxford, right, so when you started at Stanford, I’m just wondering about your first time, discovering the discipline –

GR: I found it quite exciting. I was a bit sceptical like most English people were in those days, they’re not anymore. I thought, ‘Mmm…’ So, I didn’t go along really thinking I would learn to write. I went, partly to see what sort of thing went on, but also, I would sign up for courses taught by people whose poetry I respected, and one of them, another poet, was Ken Fields, I don’t know if you’ve come across his poetry at all? He’s published by Chicago University Press, and he was a very good teacher. And then, Donald Davie had been away and he came back, and he was doing one of these courses, so I – and that’s, that was my attitude, I should be with poets and see how they functioned.

LJ: Ok, so was it more like a formal setting, like a discussion around the table and like a traditional workshop thing, or was it one to one?

GR: No, it was a group, maybe… anything up to ten people. Usually between six and ten.

LJ: Quite informal creative writing?

GR: Sort of formal - yes, people do it, I gather this is the standard practice now, but I’m not sure if - when Donald was doing it, he would say, read your poem, people react, round the room, but the poet would say nothing at all until everybody’s reacted. And that’s how he would do it. I think Ken Fields was a little more informal, he liked to tell anecdotes and then get everyone to join in that way: ‘Well, I think this…’

LJ: And your fellow students were Americans?

GR: Mostly.

LJ: Mostly Americans, yes?

GR: I think we had one… yes, we had a South American person who went on to translate a lot of South American poetry. And one of my classes had Dana Gioia in… who’s become quite a… Dana Gioia, who’s become quite a… he has some official quality position in America, I’ve forgotten what it is now[[1]](#footnote-2). He’s a great, he’s trying to convince the world how Longfellow is a great poet, as I remember. But he was -

LJ: You went there for two years, and then you got . . . this poetry fellowship?

GR: Ah, how did you –

LJ: Eventually you stayed quite a long time in America, five years –

GR: Yes, nearly five years – that’s right, I had a one-year fellowship, I broke my, I had two… two years courses and then I stopped with my PhD, I got a fellowship and was writing more. When I had the fellowship. Yes. Come to think of it. Being a fellow, you had to go to the courses, you had to sit in on them, as I remember now, you didn’t necessarily have to take them. You had to sit in on them, yes, I took one course, first year undergraduate, come to think of it. That was just for a year and then I went back to write my PhD. Which I left, not having quite finished, I had to finish that in England.

LJ: But your PhD’s from Stanford?

GR: Yes. I finished most of the writing of it, but I hadn’t done the tidying up, so I did it by post.

LJ: And what was your PhD about?

GR: It was… yes, it became – it was about the influence, if that’s the right word, the presence of Virgil, believe it or not, in T. S. Eliot’s poetry. Because everybody goes on about Dante and my argument was, there’s a lot of Virgil-ian presence in… that’s what it was, and I’m not sure how I got into that. I remember, I got into it actually because I… when I was at Stanford, Valerie Eliot’s edition of the ‘The Waste Land Manuscripts’ [*The Waste Land: A Facsimile & Transcript of the Original Drafts]* came out, and it was looking at that that I realised there was a lot of Virgil-ian presence in the poetry, and that’s what got me.

LJ: Ok, so you were writing poetry and doing your critical work.

GR: I was trying to write poetry. Yes, that… funnily enough I was looking at the *Ten English Poets*, because that would have been the first thing I published – do you know that volume? And I was looking at those poems and I realised that some of those poems were written when I was at Stanford. So, that was when I was thinking, maybe what I can write is worth continuing with. But even those I would get -

LJ: It’s interesting that you mentioned Davie, and he stayed in America for most of his life, so why did you decide to return to England?

GR: Why did he?

LJ: Why did you decide, because obviously you had this model of an Englishman, who was very successful Professor -

GR: Well, he actually – when I, I’m trying to think… yes, he left – he actually went down to Vanderbilt soon after I -

LJ: Yes, 1978.

GR: I wasn’t, I mean I… got to know him… and I kept in touch. But, I wouldn’t say that was the main – yes, academically I did consider looking for jobs and the like, but then… Carol and I, my wife and I, she worked in publishing, children’s book publishing, she had some good jobs there at Stanford. It was more a domestic decision, we thought, ‘Well, if I don’t try and get a job in England now,’ we didn’t know if we wanted to be expatriates. So, we thought then, if I didn’t go back to England and try to get a job in England, I never would be able to, somehow. And then we thought, it would be easier to go back to America if I wanted to.

LJ: But what I find surprising is that obviously you had this very prestigious fellowship at Stanford, and the economy in England at that time was very bad, right? We’re talking about the mid-1970s. So I’m just wondering, you know, it must have been quite a difficult decision –

GR: I would ask, somebody I got to know quite well, and I went to listen to his lectures, which were wonderful, was Ian Watt. And he said, ‘Oh, I’ll look around for you and see if I know anybody who might, you know,’ and they would say, ‘Mmm, dunno.’ Yes, it was – but then we thought it was –

LJ: That’s another model, because Ian Watt was English, right?

GR: Yes, exactly yes, it’s funny how they wouldn’t be interested in speaking to an English person out there, ‘What are you doing here?’ sort of thing. Yes. We were torn, but it was precisely because it was difficult, I thought, if I don’t do it now, it’ll get even more difficult. I think that was the thinking. But also, I have to say, one of the off-putting things was, what I call, the academic meat-market. The MLA [Modern Language Association] conference, I don’t know if you’ve been? You’ve been through that?

LJ: Well, I did my PhD in Canada, so I –

GR: Have you suffered the MLA?

LJ: Yes, because my PhD was at Vancouver, so everybody goes to the MLA every year. I do know the North American job market.

GR: Right, yes, and it was pretty bad then, I thought, ‘God, can I put myself through that?’ And also, I have to say also, to put it bluntly, our America was California, and we loved California, and I didn’t want a job stuck in the middle of… it sounds awfully snooty, but I thought, you know, in England at least it’s small if you’re stuck out on a limb, you’re not very far away. And I thought, I would love to get a job in California, but the pressure was so enormous.

LJ: Tell me about the political climate in California at the time, because Wallace Stegner said that was awful, which is why he retired, so tell me about your experience of writing in California in 1971.

GR: You mean… political politics, not literary politics?

LJ: I mean, the kind of political environment that you encountered?

GR: Yes, we had a lot of friends – one of our friends who’s still there, and he visits us, and we visited him recently actually, out in the States. He’d got, he found himself living in a house with some… Venceremos which is a sort of underground, rather sinister group… he had to get out, because he found they had guns in the basement or something. Yes, quite.

LJ: Oh my. A left-wing group?

GR: Very left-wing, Venceremos. Yes, ‘We shall overcome,’ and they were – but this was at the time, of course, this was when… Vietnam War. And America got out of Vietnam in ‘74, I think it was. So that was all very, there was a sort of positive feeling about that. But there was still the bombing of Cambodia, all that was going on and there were protests about that. And while we were there, on the campus, the great Melville scholar, whose name I’m forgetting, it’ll come in a minute, he, his classes, he was very left-wing and he would have his classes on the campus quadrangle, encourage his students to protest. Of course, so he was finally drummed out of Stanford for doing this. I‘ve forgotten his name, I can’t remember. And Donald Davie was very, was very, well I’ve talked to Donald about this, I mean he was very against that sort of activity, as you can imagine. But he said to me, I just hide behind my passport. But we had, quite a few, we had some friends who went down, this was also the time that Chile, the coup, we had friends who, well acquaintances who went down and came back with horrific stories. Having said that, I could never write… I couldn’t write about that sort of thing, it was too…poetically, I felt a bit like Donald Davie, I think this is their problem. But I don’t… I could go on, I went on an anti-, I did go on one demo – I remember being chased by the police and having to jump over a fence because I was afraid that if I was caught, I would, they would just send me back to England, so I jumped over this fence and ran for it. It was an anti-Cambodia bombing demo. So yes, I was pretty left-wing. I mean, Donald Davie’s pretty right-wing. But when he went to Vanderbilt, I remember him writing a letter to me saying, ‘You know Gareth, they call me a pinko down here,’ [laughter].

LJ: Did you discuss politics with Donald Davie?

GR: Not really, no, apart from these few brief, not much, no. We stuck to literature…

LJ: So you returned to England, and Michael offered you a job at Carcanet, right?

GR: Yes. Well, he wanted help, yes, basically. He said, ‘Well, while you’re looking for a job, why don’t you help me out?’ Since I’d had my OUP experience, which by then was pretty old, but nevertheless there were some things I could do. There were things I could help him with. Again, yes, with design, just office jobs, things – one of the things he was doing was, he had an IBM typewriter, one of those ones then that had memories, they were sort of primitive computers.

LJ: Yes I’ve read about that in the archive.

GR: He would do the typesetting, can you imagine? I remember one of the things he was deeply involved in when I was helping him out, this was in the Corn Exchange, was, he was doing C. H. Sisson’s three volume edition of the English Sermons. Three fat volumes, and he was typesetting these, everyday up at dawn, he would be tapping away. And I would do some of that for instance, I remember that was one big task. It was the days when presses were, I mean, obviously the high-quality editions of poetry would be done in the letterpress, but this was just churning out copy. It was a lot of work.

LJ: Yes, so that was your second experience of publishing, and again you decided to go back to academia.

GR: Well, I was always, I was looking for an academic job. I was doing that, completing the final stages of my PhD, so I’d do that and then go and work on the PhD in the evenings, but help out with Michael and keep the wolf from the door.

LJ: So you didn’t want a job in publishing?

GR: Not really. I suppose I… thought, well, I thought if I don’t get a job in academia in England, then I might try going back to America once I got the PhD. Or I might go back into publishing. So, I was dithering. Well I actually, when I started applying to British universities, I was getting quite a few interviews, so I thought it was worth keeping going, it was a good sign, you know how it is. . . You do these interviews with the same people, then somebody drops off and you know they’ve got a job. I mean, I was interviewed at Leicester University, three times was it? They kept nearly offering me a job, and then not, and in the end they offered me a temporary job, but meanwhile I got a job at Durham, so I -

LJ: So, it was quite a tough market.

GR: It was a tough market. But I could see I was getting somewhere. So, I kept going. Meanwhile you see, the Press had grown up enormously in my - while I was in America. So, it was really, I mean amazing how Michael built that up in five years.

LJ: So, what is his main quality, how did he do it? You mentioned that he worked a lot –

GR: Incredibly industrious. I remember even, yes, he’s always been active, he’s very proactive, he would write letters to pe – I just remember, for instance, because I would have been reading some Neruda, and the great translator of Neruda is Nathaniel Tarn, and I remember him having started a great correspondence with him. For instance, I can’t remember at what phase, but in the early days, he had Nathaniel Tarn interested so he would make contacts and when he was expanding the – because Carcanet the magazine, then transformed – you’ll have to ask Michael more about this. I can’t remember how the transformation started, but he started the *PN Review*, first of all there was hard copies every six months, and he did a lot of work just encouraging people to show interest and contribute things. And, he met Sisson, he got to know Sisson through Donald Davie. He, Donald Davie and Michael got to know each other, nothing to do with me at all, that was he – Donald was somehow, I don’t know how they first met, got to know Michael when I was in the States, I think.

LJ: It might be because Donald Davie came back to England quite regularly.

GR: Yes, absolutely. He’s very much a, in the best sense of the word, a networker, is Michael. So yes, in the best sense of the word, Michael’s an extremely good networker, extremely industrious, and very good, to put it bluntly, at getting people’s support financially – don’t ask me how. Well, he gets Arts Council funding and all that. He’s very good at getting financial support.

LJ: And you also know Peter Jones, you met in Oxford, and he was still working at Carcanet at that time. So, what was your relationship with Peter?

GR: Peter was actually, I got to know Peter – I haven’t met him for years, but he was very – I think when I was deciding to give up my job at Oxford, because I mean that was, I suppose, a big career move, and I was very unsure and I got to know Peter via Michael and for some reason, Peter was very helpful, chatted to me a lot, he gave me good advice. I think encouraged me to follow your desires. But he was very helpful. So personally, that was it, and he was publishing his book then… did that come out? His first hardback copy, when I was working in…

[crosstalk, inaudible 00.44.13]

GR: That’s right, yes, so, and I think I helped edit one of his books or something, but it was mostly personal, he gave me great advice.

LJ: Ok. And he was obviously older than you were.

GR: Yes.

LJ: So was he more like a mentor figure, perhaps?

GR: Father figure would be fair to say. Father figure is a good description.

LJ: And how would you describe his relationship with Michael?

GR: Oh, well, you know they, he was a schoolteacher of Michael’s at Christ’s Hospital. And I think he was probably a father figure to Michael. And of course, he gave up teaching, I think he took early retirement, he was older than both Michael and me. He gave up teaching, because I think he couldn’t take the pressures and so on, so I think that’s partly why I went to him for advice, and I think Michael was… but also, and Peter definitely encouraged Michael’s writing and other stuff so again, a father-figure. [Inaudible 00.45.35]

LJ: And then you got your job at Durham. Was it in the late 1970s, right?

GR: 1976. That very hot summer, as we keep being reminded. Because we came back from California, early ‘75 whatever. Everybody was saying, ‘The weather’s so hot!’ and we’ve come back from California, and we thought ‘Why is everybody saying that? It’s raining here! It’s just like California,’ I couldn’t see what the fuss was about, then I realised.

LJ: You must have been quite relieved to have a job in Durham.

GR: Yes, I had a two-year temporary, which they did say, if all things go well, then it looks likely we can keep you on, and they did.

LJ: And then you stayed at Durham.

GR: Forever and ever, yes.

LJ: A long and successful career.

GR: Well yes, it’s had its ups and downs. I took slightly early retirement, because I just found the managerial pressures actually, you know, you’ll know –

LJ: You mean with REF? The need to submit to the REF?

GR: Sorry? All that, yes, that stuff, and now the TEF or whatever it’s called, which I’ve never had to do anything with because I’ve retired. But also, even just, you know, you couldn’t just put on a course, ‘I’ll do this module, here’s your reading list.’ You had to fill in forms, give your vision for everything, and I got a bit fed-up. But young people I talk to seem to take it, young colleagues I see in the department – it doesn’t worry them, but I got fed-up. So, I was quite happy to [retire].

LJ: I do agree there’s a lot of form-filling –

GR: Much more, in my experience, now, than in the States. In the States you just offer your modules and people don’t bother you too much - I find, in my experience, people now applying to American universities, because there’s less administrative rubbish to have to deal with, which surprises me. I’m sorry, does that cover?

LJ: Yes, thank you so much.

[Pleasantries, interview ends]

1. Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts [↑](#footnote-ref-2)