Playing Games of Sense in Edwin Morgan’s Writing

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Introduction: "Not Playing the Game"? Influences and Inspirations: Morgan's Dialogising with Literary Tradition(s)

To be means to communicate dialogically.
When dialogue ends, everything ends.
Thus dialogue, by its very essence,
cannot and must not come to an end

Mikhail Bakhtin

of what we call genius, energy is the most essential part
Matthew Arnold

I.I Critical Appreciation

In Iain Crichton Smith's opinion, Edwin Morgan's poetry has always been large, vigorous, and imaginative.[1] It has been energetic and various, composed of straight narrative, concrete poetry, science-fiction, satire. "It has been life enhancing, technology-welcoming, adventurous, protean.… Its range of languages is gargantuan, using Latin, French, demotic Glasgow, grave Academe, the language of the computer and of geology" ("Vintage Morgan" 13). Ian Gregson in *Contemporary Poetry and Postmodernism* describes Morgan's dictionary as "a more centrifugal poetic" and goes on to draw the ingenious (postmodern) analogy that "reading Morgan can seem less like reading and more like channel-hopping" (134). The stations involved will not only be beaming in from (in Morgan's own words) "the

1 Edwin Morgan (1920–2010), Scotland's first national poet, has produced an extensive body of work: his major books of poems would include: *The Vision of Cathkin Braes* (1952), *The Second Life* (1968), *Instamatic Poems* (1972), *Glasgow Sonnets* (1972), *From Glasgow to Saturn* (1973), *The New Divan* (1977), *Star Gate: Science Fiction Poems* (1979), *Sonnets From Scotland* (1984), *Themes on a Variation* (1988), *Collected Poems* (1990), *Virtual and Other Realities* (1997), *New Selected Poems* (2000), *Cathures* (2002), *A Book of Lives* (2007). *Dreams and Other Nightmares: New and Uncollected Poems 1954–2009* (2010).

lunar mountains in Hugh MacDiarmid," but will also involve "the orbiting rocket in Anselm Hollo," and "the lobotomy in Allen Ginsberg" (qtd. in Gregson 136).

For Kenneth White, reading *Poems of Thirty Years* (1982) felt like a "gradual process of getting spaced out … for this virtuoso has a finger in every pie, from the meat pies you get in the local greasy spoon to the cherry pies they make in Nebraska" (32). The 1985 *Selected Poems* persuaded Denis Donoghue that "the force of Morgan's imagination is its variousness" (21), and Morgan's Italian translator joined those who find this variousness "disorienting and enriching at the same time" (Fazzini 84). As Robyn Marsack puts it, Morgan was interested in exploring a tension between his subject-matter and the chosen aesthetic form; he wanted "a kind of Whitmanesque inclusiveness without Whitman's gorgeous egotism" (27).

Since, to paraphrase Whitman, Morgan is "large and contains multitudes," others will read him in their own way, as "nothing else would do for a poetry recurrently involving freedom from coercion and restraint, and where only structure of perception and hypothesis at hand is operative" (Nicholson 10). The 1990 *About Edwin Morgan*, edited by Robert Crawford and Hamish Whyte, the first full-length book on the work of Morgan, provides a range of perspectives of looking at his poetry: Douglass Dunn studies *Glasgow Sonnets* and *Themes on Variation* and the way Morgan interrogates the myth of Glasgow; Marshall Walker explores Morgan's science fiction poems, but he also revolves around the theme of Scottishness; Robert Crawford seeks connections with W. S. Graham, Dunbar and MacDiarmid, and explores the relation between examples of change / metamorphosis and the established Scottish tradition; W. N. Herbert focuses on how far "Morgan's words" exhibit a Scottish attitude towards language, Peter McCarey studies Morgan's work as a translator and points to the way this experience influences his own poetics. *Contemporary Poetry and Science* offers another two essays: Crawford's "Spirit Machines: the Human and the Computational" and W. N. Herbert's "Testament and Confessions of an Informationist" which investigate the convergence of science and poetry in Scottish writing of Morgan.

The 2003 *Aspects of Form and Genre in the Poetry of Edwin Morgan* by Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, one of two monographs on Morgan's poetry, is more firmly rooted in genre. Instead of focusing on key collections, or on the poet's Scottishness (which at times seems slightly reductive, given

that throughout his whole life Morgan was proving that poetry has no nationality, and reaches beyond geographical borders), Edgecombe selects for discussion the genres most favoured by Morgan, and shows how he has radically modernised them. Elegies, journey poems, concrete poems, and dramatic monologues are prominent genres transformed by Morgan which Edgecombe investigates, and he does so with transparent enthusiasm and stylish liveliness. What makes Edgecombe's *Aspects* different from *About Edwin Morgan* is also the range of close readings, which often show Morgan's immersion in modes and traditions of writing having their roots outside Europe (one of such instances is Persian-inspired *The New Divan*).

But the most informative study of Morgan's work is Colin Nicholson's *Inventions of Modernity* which tackles all the issues and perspectives mentioned above, and provides valuable details on Morgan's poetic filiations reaching far beyond Scotland. Because Morgan's writing spans over half a century, *Inventions* includes "a seriatim of the aesthetic practices and associated ideologies he uses and refuses" (Nicholson 10). For Nicholson, fascinated by the unspeakable, the absurd, "the possible futures anciently set and possible pasts figured futuristically," Morgan's interest in "social, personal, linguistic and cultural othernesses comes to us in the poetics of communicative rationality, which often operates through mind-bending syntax" (5). Nicholson studies how Morgan recognises a grounded, limited subjectivity, and how he works at and against frontiers of the possible. The subsequent chapters of the monograph are organised more or less chronologically, but first and foremost thematically. Each theme is embedded within a carefully sketched framework of ideas which show that in his methodological approach Nicholson combines the perspective of a literary and cultural historian, as well as a cognitivist, even though he does not refer to any cognitivist schools. Nicholson adopts a range of lateral perspectives which show the poet's avant-garde way of thinking and writing; he traces Morgan's literary fascinations (most clearly with Mayakovsky and the concretists), and, the way I see it, succeeds in showing how the drive towards changing the unchangeable led Morgan from the apocalyptic visions to concrete experiments and to the affirmation of the sonnet (in his *Glasgow Sonnets* (1972), and *Sonnets From Scotland* (1984)) and science-fiction poetry (*Star Gate: Science Fiction Poems* (1979), *Themes on a Variation* (1988), *Virtual and Other Realities* (1997)).

James McGonigal's *Beyond the Last Dragon. A Life of Edwin Morgan*, written with Morgan's full support, and published a few months after his death in 2010, recounts his career, and offers an informative and engaging overview of Morgan's literary, cultural, anthropological and scientific fascinations. McGonigal divides Morgan's life into decades and proceeds chronologically from various early childhood interests and hobbies to his dramatic and poetic narratives written in his late eighties. Great emphasis is placed on Morgan's own comments and analyses of his works and on the cultural and political context they were written in and that is why I will refer to this book throughout my book. *Beyond the Last Dragon* is all the more valuable because it is the only book which discusses Morgan's work as a playwright. Not only does it mention *A.D. A Trilogy of Plays on the Life of Jesus* (2000) and *The Play of Gilgamesh* (2005) (discussed in Chapter Six and Seven of the present book), but also speaks about Morgan's interest in Japanese theatre, with his new versions of Japanese *Kyogen* plays (15th century farces) written for the London-based Jet Theatre, which show a significant change in Morgan's poetics that took place in the last decade of his life.

With the exception of Nicholson's *Inventions of Modernity* and a limited number of articles in literary magazines, critics pay little attention to Morgan's concrete poetry, seeing it as rather insignificant stage of the poet's experimental undertakings. Even Mary Ellen Solt in her *Concrete Poetry: A World View* sums up Morgan's varied body of concrete poems in one short paragraph; it seems that this can only be justified by the fact that the book was published in 1968 when Morgan was gradually gaining recognition in the literary world. In the present book, I would like to see Morgan's concrete experiments as fine examples of postmodern writing in which "the medium is the message" (Marshall McLuhan). Different faces of the concrete are explored in Chapter One, Two, Three and Four, but more importantly each chapter presents a distinct cultural and literary phenomenon which again is viewed through the prism of the theories within a discourse of contemporary human sciences. Similarly, *The Whittrick: A Poem in Eight Dialogues*, forgotten and marginalised by the critics, is subject to analysis in Chapter Five, where the emphasis is placed on the figure of the trickster, one of the most important figures in the discourse of human sciences.

One of the aims of the present book is to show that (cultural) transgression is integral to Morgan's forms of attention, and that his poetry and

drama question cognitively privileged habits of observation. Ezra Pound's dictum "MAKE IT NEW" changes into Morgan's "CHANGE RULES" and Jasper Johns's "Take an Object. Do something to it. Do something else to it" (Johns 54). If, as Nicholae Babuts notes, at the semantic level, "language is a matter of covering and uncovering of semantic bands in a wide spectrum, an ebb and flow of conceptual sequences that are activated by different word patterns on different occasions" (77), and if because meaning is dynamic, a matter of extension and delimitation, and "there is a struggle for meaning" (Babuts 77), then in Morgan the struggle is indeed intense and often processual. It is certainly determined by various games of sense creation. It goes without saying that within Morgan's immanent poetics we might speak of different games: "verbivocovisual" sense constellations, latent textuality and the rhetoric of mis-reading as well as (de)(re)constructivist mimesis of repetition and difference in his concrete poems, mythopoetic "writing-through," games of (linguistic) *anamorphosis*, and intersemiotic translations.

As the nature of the text determines the kind of knowledge it demands from the reader (Babuts 87), and the methodological approach chosen by the critic, I apply various—cognitivist, post-structuralist and deconstructivist—methodological tools. I refer to the theories proposed by Ronald Langacker, Nicolae Babuts, Reuven Tsur, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Gerald Vizenor and Mikhail Bakhtin. Keeping Langacker's conception of conventional imagery and scene construal as a methodological framework, in my analyses I attempt to develop the issue of cultural (linguistic and non-linguistic) context. My cognitive analyses focus on anthropocentric conceptualisation of space as a typical way of expressing experiences within the categories of states such as "me in relation to the world," "me in the world," "the world within me." But some of Morgan's writerly poems, especially concrete ones, with their "changing messages and messages of change" (Watson 191) and transformations, based on the principle of repetition and difference, create favourable conditions for introducing Derridean différance, freeplay and dissemination of meaning. There are instances where Morgan denies the text a unique meaning and extols the value of its plurality, therefore in my analyses I do not aim at establishing the truth of the text, but its plurality, its polysemous potential. It might seem that the cognitivist and deconstructionist methodologies are mutually exclusive but when the tendency to respect the idea of

order of representation is weaker, one can notice how the standpoints of deconstructionism and cognitivism draw nearer, particularly in the conception of Reuven Tsur who, drawing on Joseph Culler's Rule of Significance, stresses the idea of Constructing a Stable World within the universum of meanings, with attention given to the coherence of physical-socio-spiritual environment on the one hand and the coherence of the poetic text on the other (Tsur 43–44).

The choice of perspectives of looking at the texts is never accidental, but always determined by the philosophy of a given text or a group of texts. Reconstruction of the patterns of perception of the speaker and his / her perspective of seeing reality, as well as the basis of conceptualisation is provided by spatial thinking and spatial metaphors (Babuts 70). Additionally, I look at the body of Morgan's works from a comparative perspective and throughout the book I attempt to bring to the fore the issue of dialogue in Morgan's writing. Therefore great emphasis is placed on the dialogism of Morgan's creative process, on dialogism of his creative design, and on truly dialogical vision of the world both in his poetry and drama. The multifarious dialogism permeating his works plays crucial role in the construction as well as reconstruction and deconstruction of meaning of words, phrases, larger units of narration or concrete constellations. The book moves from one dialogue to another; it begins with Morgan's intersemiotic translation of Cage's *Lecture on Nothing* and finishes with another instance of *intersemiosis*: the postmodern version of the most ancient epic in the world, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. The issue of dialogical perspective is visible also in numerous references to the theories of Bakhtin, the father of comparative literature. Bakhtin's interdisciplinary approach to literature, and crucial importance of dialogue as a form of thinking, and "as a modern way of thinking about thinking" (Holquist 16), or as a sort of epistemology (Holquist 15–17), is certainly foregrounded throughout the book. Additionally, the references are made to Bakhtin's carnival sense of the world and trickster discourse, the Other, and last but not least heteroglossia. "To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. Thus dialogue, by its very essence, cannot and must not come to an end" (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 252), this is how Bakhtin refers to the significance of dialogue in Dostoevsky's poetics. Bakhtin observes that this dialogism clearly visible in the structure of the novel, between its

elements, but also at a micro-level of the dialogues of the heroes, in their words and gestures.[2] I would argue that Morgan's case is similar in the sense that various kinds of dialogism are visible at the level of single words, imagery building, structures of the poems, but also at the macro-level in the philosophies of his poetic and dramatic pieces, and each of the chapters focuses on a given dialogism employed in sense creation.

Chapter One, being the first instance of Morgan's dialogism, offers a comparative reading of John Cage's *Lecture on Nothing* and Morgan's "Opening the Cage: 14 Variations on 14 Words." Taking Bakhtin's concept of language as not given (*dan*), but posited (*zadan*), the chapter studies the avant-garde "written through" (autothematic) compositions of Morgan and Cage, and explores the way the principle of repetition and difference in Cage's *Lecture* and Morgan's concrete poem leads to (d)(r)esemantisation / (d)(r)ecategorisation of words and phrases. Additionally, the "verbivicovisual" aspect of the two texts is examined.

A comparative perspective applied in Chapter Two results in a transactive analysis of Morgan's emergent poem "Message Clear" which dialogises with Christ's famous saying "I am the resurrection and life." The poem is seen through the cognitive prism of Reuven Tsur's idea of Constructing a Stable World and Michel Foucault's concept of ONE SPEAKS. I analyse the workings of dynamic processes of *anaphoresis* and *metaphoresis* thanks to which we are able to see the poem's morphodynamics. The latent textuality of the poem and the rhetoric of re/mis-reading it seems to promote, open it to various readings, including a kabbalistic and Gnostic interpretation.

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2 Dostoevsky could hear dialogic relationships everywhere, in all manifestations of conscious and intelligent human life; where consciousness began, there dialogue began for him as well.… Thus all relationships among external and internal parts and elements of his novel are dialogic in character, and he structured the novel as a whole as a 'great dialogue.' Within this 'great dialogue' could be heard, illuminating it and thickening its texture, the compositionally expressed dialogues of the heroes; ultimately, dialogue penetrates within, into every word of the novel, making it double-voiced, into every gesture, every mimic movement on the hero's face, making it convulsive and anguished; this is already the 'microdialogue' that determines the peculiar character of Dostoevsky's verbal style. (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 40)

The third chapter is an analytical overview of Morgan's concrete poetry (especially his various "writings through") in which the poet ventures into meditation upon the nature of language, sign and meaning. The chapter explores the way the principle of repetition and difference leads to (d)(r) esemantisation / (d)(r)ecategorisation of words which in turn introduces the game of (empty) signifiers. I attempt to show how the process works by referring to Ronald Langacker's theory of imagery / construal, and Jacques Derrida's theory of dissemination of meaning and freeplay. Additionally, the chapter investigates the dialogical relation between Morgan's concrete poems as *arrière-garde* and the avant-garde of Russian modernists: Vasily Kamensky's "ferroconcrete poems," as well as Ilya Zdanevich's and Velimir Khlebnikov's *zaum*.

Chapter Four foregrounds the theme of broken communication and *anamorphosis* in Morgan's poetry as related to Khlebnikov's *zaum*. The emphasis is placed on the element of playfulness and introducing a game with the readers. Beginning with computer poems, and moving to games of illusion in selected concrete poems, the chapter investigates various forms of anamorphic gaze in Morgan's poems and finally comes to the technique of linguistic *anamorphosis*. This chapter focuses on the ways the poet tries to resurrect the creative imagination through a development of the linguistic *ostranenie* ("alienation," "making strange") which the Russian formalist critics of the 1920s saw as essential part of poetry making. I investigate Morgan's lateral perspective of looking at things, and ways in which in seemingly distorted / deformed poetic reflections he unexpectedly reveals another sense of reality.

Chapter Five examines Morgan's "dialogising" with selected canonical texts of culture (in the form of re-narrations, re-interpretations), and explores the ways in which the Scottish tradition of "zestful topsyturvydom," embodied in the figure of Whittrick, the trickster, manifests itself in Morgan's writing. The textual example of trickster discourse, *The Whittrick: A Poem in Eight Dialogues*, is analysed through the prism of Bakhtinian theory of carnival sense of the world and Gerald Vizenor's theory of trickster discourse. In the course of analysis the author attempts to show how the trickster manifests itself on three levels: as a character endowed with fluid identity, as a narrative structure (trickster-relation, trickster-timespace), and a processuality on the level of plot and narration.

The sixth chapter explores Morgan's selected conventional poems "dialogising" with Christian mythology. The chapter might be seen in a thematic relation to the transactive analysis of Morgan's concrete "writing through" presented in Chapter Two. This part of my book provides an opportunity to see the evolution of Morgan's experimentation with form and diction, from his early apocalyptic / surrealist poems to those where a poetics of recycling of images dominates. Apart from analysing Morgan's poetic texts, I focus on the dramatic *A.D. A Trilogy of Plays on the Life of Jesus* depicting Jesus's life from his birth to crucifixion, and "filling the gaps" left by the Synoptic Gospels. By exploring Morgan's dramatic texts the author opens a new field of study, as Morgan's plays have not been subject to scholarly analyses so far. The dramatic and poetic texts are viewed in a comparative perspective in order to show how Christian mythopoetic themes are processed and reproduced, how the essence of myths, their structure and ontological references are de/reconstructed, to become hybrid forms of para-myth and anti-myth.

Chapter Seven closes the book with a study of intersemiotic translation of the Sumerian *The Epic of Gilgamesh* which Morgan renders as a five-act poetic drama *The Play of Gilgamesh* (2005). Apart from a few mentions (in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama* and Ziolkowski's *Gilgamesh Among Us: Modern Encounters with the Ancient Epic*), the drama is one more instance of the text which thus far has not been subject to an in-depth academic analysis. The chapter is a comparative reading of the two texts with emphasis put on the similarities between the texts, but it also explores Morgan's techniques of contemporising of the ancient epic poem and his trickster-like attempts to make it a bit more Scottish in character. By placing the play on the life of Gilgamesh in the last chapter of the book I would like to emphasise the issue of seeing ancient texts not as something of the (long-forgotten) past, but rather as belonging to the here-and-now, and offering new beginnings.

The architecture of this book requires that before we focus on specific literary dialogues in subsequent chapters, we should draw a sketch of a map of Edwin Morgan's encounters with various literary traditions, with poets who certainly left their signatures on Morgan's creative mind and whose presence can be traced either in the poet's imagery or in his formal experiments. The sketch aims to offer a series of pointers across and through the scene, and the themes it introduces will be further developed in the book; additionally, it

emphasises the importance of playfulness in Morgan's immanent poetics. It is also worth noting that a considerable space is given to Morgan's quotations, for in his argumentations one can trace certain qualities and characteristics that will be further investigated in the subsequent chapters of the book.

I.II Drawing a Sketch of a Map

Putting together his anthology *Worlds* (1974), Geoffrey Summerfield asked the contributors for an account of their own ways into the making of poetry, of their poetic inspirations, to which Edwin Morgan responded thus:

> I think of poetry as partly an instrument of exploration, like a spaceship, into new fields of feeling or experience (or old fields which become new in new contexts and environments), and partly a special way of recording moments and events (taking the "prose" out of them, the grit of the facts of the case, as being in our age extremely important). (*Nothing Not Giving Messages* 192)[3]

And indeed the idea of exploration of new poetic environments is something easily noticeable in Morgan's output. What is immensely important in his experiments is the idea of transformation of energy, with the emphasis placed on energy:

> Energy in poetry … is compelled to manifest itself through form, not simply or necessarily metrical structure but a continuous inevitability of movement from word to word ("continuous" ideally, or only in the greatest poetry, but the sense of control of direction must be interrupted as little as possible), startling the reader's mind into considering something which the poem follows to the end of consideration and closes with a satisfaction. If poetry is the manifestation of energy in order, Arnold's statement is still the backbone of the argument; we are dealing with ordered energy, not with energetic orderliness. (Morgan, *Essays* 81)

Morgan often returns to this theme in his essays and explains that the idea of energy is linked to the concept of poetry as a game. The game as such might be more or less overtly thematised, "Not Playing the Game" for instance appears to be a manifesto of the idea of a poem as a game theory where "construal depends on the choices made by other parties or players, yet contrives to keep distance between achieved structure and free-fall relativising" (Nicholson 110):

3 Hereafter *NNGM*.

– Although a poem is
undoubtedly a 'game'
it is not a game.
And although now it is even
part of the game to say so,
making it a "'game'"
is spooky, and we'll
not play that.

– Who are you kidding, said
the next card. You just played.

– Anything I play
has no rules, if
you see the rules
it's only 'play'-
the 'dealer's eyeshade'.

– I like that smoker's cough the "'dealer's eyeshade'".
Your deal is showing, my dear.

– Back in the box you go in words.
'Back in the box', in other words.
Now we'll just let that
'"'dealer's eyeshade'"'
wilt on whatever can support it, like
a poem on baize.

(Morgan, *Collected Poems* 277)[4]

The poem seems a fine example of Morganesque poetic imagination. It celebrates the mercurial essence of his creativity, with its playful dialogism of exchanges, juxtapositions, quotations within quotations; the game of lexemes "game" and "play" might be seen here as the energy "as order," the idea he takes from William Dunbar, the energy which is manifested through verbal composition and connections.

Some of those verbal compositions and concatenations can be seen in relation to Morgan's literary inspirations and also the great importance he attached to his perspective of being-in-the-world:

> It would be wrong not to acknowledge the liberating effect of the American non-academic poets I read in the late 1950s (the Beats led me on to Black Mountain, Williams, Creeley), and then of the Brazilian concrete poets I discovered in 1962.

4 Hereafter *CP*.

> I am also aware of a deep, almost spooky underground debt to some poetry in the Scotch tradition (certain aspects of Dunbar and Burns). And I have learned much from translating foreign poets (Montale and Mayakovsky in particular). But I like poetry that comes not out of "poetry" but out of a story in today's newspaper, or a chance personal encounter in a street, or the death of a famous person: I am very strongly moved by the absolute force of what actually happens, because after all, that is it, there is really nothing else that has its poignance, its razor edge. It is not an easy poetry to write, and I thinks it requires a peculiar kind of imagination that is willing to bend itself to meet a world which is lying there in the rain like an old shoe. (*NNGM* 192)

The last three sentences signal Morgan's strong emphasis on drawing his inspiration from the here-and-now, and the importance of being-in-the-world, of the emotional component, often hidden or not expressed openly, even in the context or form that would exclude emotional engagement. Rodney Edgecombe calls it Morgan's "urgent humanism" (Edgecombe 3), and adds that "even the most austere and constructivist of his concrete lyrics disclose a breathing human presence through the interstices of their designs" (Edgecombe 3). We will see that in the three chapters devoted to concrete poetry and particularly in Chapter Two on "Message Clear."

I.II.I From Scrapbooks and Collections to Found Poems and Newspoems

> *At ten I read Mayakovsky had died,*
> *learned my first word of Russian,* lyublyu*;*
> ("Epilogue: Seven Decades" *CP* 594)

"What sort of child notices in the newspaper the suicide of a Russian futurist poet and revolutionary, and has begun to learn that language by the age of ten?" James McGonigal asks, and he gives two answers: "a gifted child" and "an only or a lonely child" (*Beyond the Last Dragon*[5] 15). Morgan himself answers that question when he speaks about his fondness for collecting words which is later on transformed into passion of poetry making:

> … if you are an only child you tend to be by yourself and make up your own games. I collected stamps and then quite early on I began collecting words. I had a great list of words I would go through. My father would bring home gardening catalogues and I would make a list of the names of these strange, interesting plants.… I don't

5 Hereafter *BLD*.

> know what I was going to do with these but it must have been some kind of early pointer to the fact that I was going to use words myself. That was a solitary thing. (Cant 12)

When Morgan was eleven he started his collection of encyclopaedia magazines that were published in weekly parts. His interest in juxtaposition of subjects, ranging from Chinese mythography and Babylonian mathematical astronomy to geographical exploration, to zoology fed into scrapbooks that he began to keep in 1931 or 1932, into which he would paste cuttings from various sources. Interestingly, he maintained that practice up until 1966 (*BLD* 41). It could be argued that the collections of cuttings reappear as it were in Morgan's poetic use of cut-outs from newspapers in *Newspoems* (*CP* 117–30) and the photo-journalism of *Instamatic Poems* (*CP* 217–29). I will refer to the early practice of scrapbooks when discussing Morgan's "found poems" (cut from newspaper print, headlines, pasted on to sheets and then photographed), collected in *Collected Poems* and in *Themes on a Variation*.

Among many passages from Morgan's early scrapbooks, there is one from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*:

> There was a child went forth every day,
> And the first object he looked upon that object he became,
> And that object became part of him for the day or a certain
> part of the day,
> Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.

The passage, McGonigal argues, suggests an element of Morgan's later poetic skill in "giving voices to a variety of objects, creatures and historical or imagined characters, through a powerful sense of identification with their viewpoint" (43). These issues are further developed in the chapter devoted to *anamorphosis*.

I.II.II Translations as Rites of Passage

Morgan was often returning to the *Faber and Faber Book of Modern Verse* (1937) and an *Anthology of World Poetry*, with translations from many different languages, including Persian mystic, Hafiz whose example he would follow in *The New Divan* (1977). The relationship between Morgan's poems and his translations adds a new perspective to his literary inspirations:

> I really did take translation seriously—I found I would easily imagine myself to be, say, Montale, or Brecht.… You're beginning with a poetry that's not the same as yours, but it puts out little claws which latch on to your own poetry, and which end up influencing you. ("Guardian," 26 Jan 2008: 11)

Morgan was attracted to a number of poets; he translated into English and Scots from Anglo-Saxon, Russian, Portuguese, German, Spanish, Italian, French, ancient Greek, Dutch, Khmer, Armenian and Hungarian. Among the poets he translated we find: Andrei Voznesensky, Boris Pasternak, Velimir Khlebnikov, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Salvatore Quasimodo, Eugenio Montale, Federico García Lorca, Bertold Brecht, Haroldo de Campos, Eugen Gomringer, Edgar Braga, Henri Michaux, but the list is much longer. *The Rites of Passage*, the title of the 1976 collection of translations, indeed gives an idea of transgressing spatial, temporal and imaginary borders. Interestingly, in a late interview, Morgan spoke about seeing his *Translations* as *Collected Poems Number Two*. In James McGonigal's view, this deeply imaginative identification with other poets' minds and voices might help identify Morgan's emotional attachments at different stages of his life, and in his *Beyond the Last Dragon* he refers to the translations again and again. Each chapter of this book refers to various aspects of translation practices, from the traces of Anglo-Saxon imagery building in *Dies Irae*, the intersemiotic translation of Cage's *Lecture on Nothing*, Morgan's writings through in his *Emergent Poems*, to his version of the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

I.II.III Anglo-Saxon Affinities

Among the European traditions that surely inspired young Morgan one can find the French Symbolists.[6] But as the poet recalls, from his early school years, he was also drawn to Anglo-Saxon poetry, and this is where his work as a translator actually begins:

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6 It was the whole of the French Symbolists movement that really got under my skin when I was a student, Baudelaire and Rimbaud, but Verlaine too, and others.… I particularly admired what Baudelaire was doing because it was classical. If you want a classical poetry, that's it. He had an extraordinary command of regular modes of writing, and yet at the same time he's got a very deep infusion of something you could only call Romantic, even decadently so.… [Rimbaud] is also able to combine that formal control with the most extraordinary adventurousness of ideas and language. (Morgan, *NNGM* 124)

> I was one of a few who positively liked Anglo-Saxon.… The poetry appealed to me very, very strongly. I liked both the … elegiac side of it which is pretty strong, but also the heroic side of it… and I thought I would like to have a shot at it. I had read various translations, and it didn't seem to me that any of them really met the case, and I thought I would just go through the whole thing, and do it. (*NNGM* 122–123)

Morgan began to translate *Beowulf* into Modern English driven by the same imperative that made Auden bring Anglo-Saxon heroic poem into dialogue with contemporary anxieties (Chris Jones xxii). "In the *Beowulf*-poet's ancient stories of feud, genocide and monstrous conflict, Morgan found a thematic rhyme with his own times; he found strange likeness" (Chris Jones xxii). On the fiftieth anniversary of its publication Morgan wrote: "the translation, which was begun shortly after I came out of the army at the end of the Second World War, was in a sense my unwritten war poem, and I would not want to alter the expression I gave to its themes of conflict and danger, voyaging and displacement, loyalty and loss" (qtd. in Chris Jones xxii).

Translating "The Seafarer" in 1954 Morgan followed in Pound's footsteps, Crawford notes. And he remarks that "in translating not only 'The Ruin' and the heroic-elegiac poems 'The Seafarer' and 'The Wanderer' but also Anglo-Saxon riddles as well as the whole of *Beowulf*, Morgan outdid Pound and Auden" (Crawford 11).

The themes of Anglo-Saxon literature reappear in Morgan's early as well as later poetry. One can find traces of imagery of "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer" in "Dies Irae," especially with the episode that in Jones's view becomes a topos of twentieth-century poetry:

> It was a dream; bitterly then I woke
> With the hoar chill of dawning on the sea
> And shrieking of the wind and savage gulls (*CP* 23)

Dies Irae collection (1952) includes not only translations of the Old English elegies, but also four of the *Exeter Book* riddles. Two of those, "Swallow" and "Storm," are written in the convention of the Old English riddle where the object of the puzzle speaks for itself. This ventriloquism of animals and inanimate objects will frequently reappear in Morgan's mature work: from the sequence "The Beasts of Scotland," the talking sperm of "A Voyage," to the more explicitly riddle-like "The Apple Song" (*CP* 237–238) and "The Three Trees" (*CP* 349–350), the latter being a twentieth-century echo of the talking tree in "The Dream of the Rood" (Chris Jones lxvi). Crawford also

mentions a strong Old English influence on "The Vision of Cathkin Braes" and notes that a medieval legacy keeps resurfacing in Morgan's "Grendel" or in the *Newspoems* collected in *Themes on a Variation* (1988) which include "Caedmon's Hymn" and two "New English Riddles."

"The Old Man and the Sea," the opening poem of *The Second Life* (1968), with "The Death of Marilyn Monroe" and "Je ne regrette rien" depict, similarly to Morgan's other well-known poems such as "King Billy," "Che" or "Cinquevalli," not to mention *The Play of Gilgamesh*, his interest in developing a poetry of heroic elegy, or, more generally speaking a heroic poetry. The poet often returns to Anglo-Saxon[7] components such as: deliberate harshness, surface obscurity, concrete and actively sensuous language, greater onomatopoeic emphasis, alliteration. The traces of Anglo-Saxon poetics will be explored in the last two chapters of the book.

I.II.IV European Modernism

"A poet with a strong sensuous and linguistic tone to his imaginary can find himself inspired with words, with rhythm, with shape, with concatenations (audible as well as thematic)," writes Morgan in his *Essays* (81–82). And certainly he found all these in the poetry of Mayakovsky,[8] especially in his embrace of everything new, in his attempt to incorporate into his poetry the urban, industrial and technical dynamism of the modern world (Morgan, *Essays* 61).

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7 It is also worth noting that Morgan's essay "Dunbar and the Language of Poetry" reveals his view of the continuing afterlife of Old English and of its place within a specifically Scottish poetic tradition. For Morgan, Dunbar, along with the alliterative Middle English verse of *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* and *Pearl*, "abuts on the Anglo-Saxon poetry" (*NNGM* 122). Morgan believes that "the alliterative tradition lingered longest in the north-west of England and Scotland" (*Essays* 82–85). Chris Jones asserts that it is true that the northern dialects of Old English evolve directly into Scots and Anglo-Saxon is one of the sources of Scotland (See Morgan's *Crossing the Border*). "Aware of the dual history of Old English, Morgan moves between English and Scots in his verse, finding pleasure in the possibilities of code-switching," he notes (Jones lxviii).

8 For Morgan, Mayakovsky's life was equally fascinating as his work: "although people say his life was tragic because he killed himself relatively young, he was, in a deeper sense, optimistic, and I think that was one of the things that drew me to him" (*NNGM* 106).

Morgan saw Mayakovsky as a genuine modernist, with his

> determination to refresh and revive language, not only in the post-Revolution sense of a newly liberated popular speech which must find its way into art … but also at the aesthetic level of mind-bending imagery and juxtaposition, and an acutely inventive use of word and sound in every device of onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance and dissonance, pun and palindrome, and perhaps above all (and in the spirit of the highly inflected Russian language) morphological play and dislocation. (Morgan, *Essays* 61)

Morgan would contrast Mayakovsky's optimism[9] with the attributes of T. S. Eliot, whom he admired "but didn't quite like from the point of view of what he was saying" (*NNGM* 106). It was due to Eliot's pessimism, "the very deep-rooted pessimism of Eliot, and also the sense of, whatever he was doing in being avant-garde as regards the form of poetry, he was extremely conservatively traditional in other parts of his mind" (*NNGM* 106). Contrasted with Eliot's modernist experiments, Russian modernism offered a different perspective, open to the future, not linked to the past. That is why Morgan admits: "I'm drawn more … to European modernism, especially Russian modernism, than to the modernism of Eliot and Pound although, obviously one learns, couldn't help learning, from what they've done about matters of technique" (*NNGM* 106).

Mayakovsky's experiments are not the only Russian influence on Morgan's imaginary, though. At the "magical" proto-concrete spectrum, Morgan finds Ilya Zdanevich's *zaum* ("transrational" poetic language characterised by indeterminacy in meaning) developed into optophonic patterns in his famous "Easter Island" (1919), where, as Morgan notes "the letters are placed and designed to give the immediate double visual effect of the actual Easter Island script plus an imaginary inscription in Old Church Slavonic,

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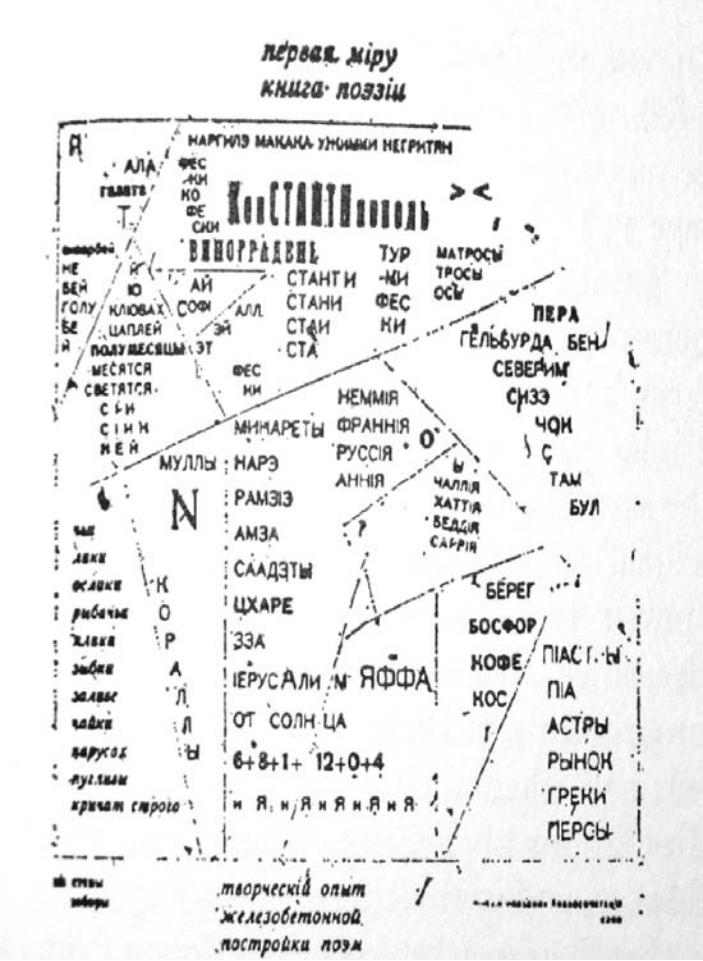
9 Interestingly, when translating Mayakovsky, Morgan encountered problems with language. Mayakovsky's exclamatory style and sudden changes of tone and imagery were difficult to render in Standard English. "It was almost as if the spirit of the language failed me," Morgan recalls (*BLD* 229). However, in Scots he managed "to "tap a Scottish tradition both of grotesque exaggeration and fantasy and of linguistic extraversion and dash that goes back through MacDiarmid, Burns and Dunbar. And at the same time, it may be that the linking of the fantastic / wild / grotesque with the moral / political / social comes more easily to the Scottish than to the English poet." (Special Collection 4579) *Wi the Haill Voice: 25 poems by Vladimir Mayakovsky* appeared in 1972.

both being 'coded' messages where the visual and / or phonetic data remain talismanic" (*Essays* 29).

He was also influenced by Vasily Kamensky's "ferroconcrete poems" (*zhelezobetonnyya poemy*) which show the mingling of visual and sonic effects. One can find echoes of Zdanevich's and Kamensky's techniques in Morgan's concrete poems, as will be shown in the chapter on repetition and difference.



But there is one more poet (whose technical exuberance inspired Mayakovsky) and whose poetry Morgan appreciated greatly, namely Khlebnikov. He translated many of Khlebnikov's poems and in many of his poems does he immerse himself in a Khlebnikov-like play with word-roots (English in "The Computer's Second Christmas Card" and Scots in "Canedolia"), play of pure sound ("The Loch Ness Monster's Song"), of nonsense becoming sense ("Shaker Shaken"), of the convergence of languages ("The First Men on Mercury"). Khlebnikov's influence is investigated in Chapter Four.

I.II.V The 1960s and Concrete Movement

One of the characteristics of Morgan's poetic career is his openness to contemporaneity and technological shifts. As poetry is the space of dialogue with reality, Morgan joyfully affirms concrete poetry and the play it offers between linearity and spatiality, both in poetry and in life outside the text.[10] Morgan affirms a revolt in perception, or as he calls it "a jolt into perception" (*Essays* 32) that concrete poetry has brought and will bring in the future. "There will be no more double-column Spensers with every line turned over because there is 'no space' for it," Morgan exclaims (*Essays* 32). He even refers to Ezra Pound's famous haiku "In a Station of the Metro" and presents it as Pound intended it (and as it never is) which turns one of the most famous haikus of the Western world into an almost concrete haiku (a genre hybrid) where building poetic imagery depends not only on the conventional syntax, but is additionally strengthened by the poem's typography; the transient (and perhaps illusory) character of the apparition of the faces in the crowd or petals on a bough is expressed through the sequential order of appearance of the elements of the scene, but perhaps more importantly, the syncopation visible in the progressive order within a composition foregrounds the issue of processuality of sense creation:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
Petals on a wet, black bough :

(*Essays* 32)

10 "The battle between linearity and spatiality which concrete reflects is something that is in life itself and is going to have far-reaching consequences … When you enter a very modern newly-designed shop or a large open-plan house you may have feelings of unease, you don't see the familiar signposts and you don't quite know where to go or what to do—this is because the concept of space has taken over and it needs some adjustment on your part … The problem of concrete, then, is not hard to relate if you start to think about it, to changes that are going on in our society. And if it is important that the arts should be sensitive to these movements of thought and movements of perception which affect or are going to affect people's lives, and I certainly think this is part of their function, then concrete poetry has its place."(Draft of article "Concrete Poetry" in Glasgow University Special Collections Acc 4848 / Box 69 Concrete / Sound Poetry.)

In Morgan's view, concrete poetry might influence the patterns of perception of the reader or listener, and challenge the "well-known insularity" not only within Scottish literary culture, but also in the UK: "The English Channel is a pretty narrow strip of water … but it's remarkable what an effective barrier it can be for the passage of ideas" (Glasgow University Special Collections Acc 4848 / Box 69). For Morgan, the formal experimentation foregrounded by the concrete challenges "laziness and torpor," especially with regard to the fact that, as he puts it, "the majority of English poets since the war have been busy stacking their neat little bundles of firewood, but they have stopped planting trees" (Glasgow University Special Collections Acc 4848 / Box 69).

For Morgan, concrete poetry brings a new medium at the moment when the poetic change should take place:

> The young painter or sculptor, for example, is working today in an atmosphere of marked creative excitement. This doesn't mean that the assemblages of Rauschenberg or the luminous pictures of John Healey represent the directions art has to take: it is simply that the artist feels himself to be in the midst of a varied and vigorous range of aesthetic activity. The English poet, on the other hand, has been containing himself with a narrowed spectrum in which the traditional looms large and the exploratory has been almost forgotten. (Glasgow University Special Collections Acc 4848 / Box 69)

In Morgan's view, this reluctance towards poetic exploration and antipathy towards experimentation, was too engrained in British, and, by extension, Scottish culture, and this was, as Eleanor Bell sees it, one of the main reasons why he was drawn to the experimentation of the Beats[11] in the USA and to developments in concrete poetry as they were emerging in Brazil, Switzerland and Sweden. "Morgan was acutely aware of the problematic nature of

11 Morgan was attracted to the Beat poetry of Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Gary Snyder, and the prose of Jack Kerouac, with their anti-establishment, anti-hierarchical views on modern life. What fascinated him in Ginsberg was his directness of language, "the extraordinary impression his verse makes of a person actually speaking to you, getting something off his chest, an angry frustrated person, an outsider, a wild one, a lone wolf who raises his 'howl' of his against the most widely-cherished prejudices of his country" (Special Collection 4581/47(a)).

tradition weighing down on the shoulders of young Scottish poets,"[12] Bell notes (107). In his article "The Beatnik in the Kailyaird" (1962), he argues that Scottish culture had become too conservative, too married to the "ghost of their country's history" (Morgan, *Essays* 167)

Morgan's engagement with international writers and movements continued through the years with concrete and sound poetry in Brazil, Switzerland and Austria as well as with Dom Sylvester Houédard (or Don Sylvestarre, as Morgan named him) and Ian Hamilton Finlay's Wild Hawthorn Press. Some of his best known poems, such as "Canedolia," "The Chaffinch Map of Scotland" combine national content with international form. Internationalism was central to Morgan's approach to writing in the 1960s. McGonigal notes that "if Scotland was slow to thaw in literary matters, he found congenial writers in Europe and Latin America to admire and translate" (*BLD* 135). He engaged with German avant-garde developments and with Brazilian *Noigandres* group, in the concrete poetry of Eugen Gomringer in Switzerland and the sound poetry of Ernst Jandl in Austria (*BLD* 135).

But, surprisingly, the poet who initiated Morgan's interest in concrete movement was not Gomringer, Jandl or one of the Campos brothers. In the letter to Houédard, Morgan writes that the one who triggered the whole process was the Portuguese concretist E. M. de Melo e Castro to whom he wrote in May 1962; he sent Morgan the anthology *Poesia Concreta* published in Lisbon and containing the Brazilians' work, and that was what started his concrete experiments.[13]

If, as David Kilburn asserts, concrete poetry "does not refer to any consciousness and is not concerned with worlds or experience, real or imaginary and is thus not ontological" (10), then the connection with mindscapes, human or otherwise of Morgan's poetic work would proof the exact opposite. He sees concrete poetry as related to concrete human experience and is not concerned with its potential for producing nonsemantic or abstract patterns, and even if he occasionally uses such patterns he does so in order to achieve an overall semantic purpose; he sees the concrete "as an instru-

12 See Eleanor Bell "'The ugly burds without wings?:' Reactions to Tradition since the 1960's" *Modern Irish and Scottish Poetry*. Eds. Fran Brearton, Edna Longley and Peter Mackay. Cambridge University Press, 2011. 238–250.

13 See Special Collection 4848 / 21.

ment of immediate communication: a flash; a blush; a burst; a curse; a kiss; a hiss; a hit; a jot; a joke; a poke; a peek; a plea; an ABC. An instrument of communication, but also an instrument of pleasure" (Glasgow University Special Collections Acc 4848 / Box 69). Despite the Brazilian call "against the poetry of expression," Morgan points out that "expressionisms, individualisms, and romanticisms move in and out of concrete poetry and have to be reckoned with" (*Essays* 24). He acknowledges, and certainly affirms, a great range of effects in concrete poetry from "warm" to "cold." Some of it he finds humorous and witty; some of it he deems stark and hermetic; he mentions political, religious, mathematical, sculptural poems; he affirms those two- and three-dimensional, those abstracts concrete forms such as animals, and those which concretise abstract forms such as grammatical relationships. And as we will see quite clearly in subsequent chapters, Morgan sees his verbivocovisual experiments on the "warm" side of the concrete (Special Collection 4848 / 21). Morgan notices a peculiar correspondence between his own work and that of Ian Hamilton Finlay's, and suggests that his humour and Finlay's boats "may be of some use, both tying concrete to certain bollards of human life and human pleasure" (qtd. in *BLD* 156).

I.II.VI Scottish Roots

In *The Second Life*, Morgan places two of his poems, addressed to two literary figures hugely important to his work, "To Hugh MacDiarmid" and "To Ian Hamilton Finlay" side by side. In the lines that echo the older poet's diction, he says that "out of scraps of art and life and knowledge / you assembled that crackling auroral panorama / that sits on your Scotland like a curly comb…" (*CP* 153). The poem could be related to MacDiarmid's "In Memoriam James Joyce:"

> The point where science and art can meet,
> For there are two kinds of knowledge,
> Knowing about things and knowing things,
> Scientific data and aesthetic realisation,
> And I seek their perfect fusion in my work.

But it could as well be an allusion to MacDiarmid's "poems of knowledge"—which open out into various sciences—where the method of analogy is widely used, sometimes with carefully worked out parallels, sometimes with a hint directed to the agile reader (*Essays* 206). One can notice traces

of MacDiarmid's fascination with science in Morgan's science-fiction compositions, but, quite surprisingly, also in some of his concrete experiments to which I will refer in the chapter on mimesis of repetition and difference.

The poem to Finlay, even in its sole construction, reflects the transparency and simplicity characteristic of the author of "made things" (or "avant-gardener," as Morgan called him):

> You give the pleasure
> of made things,
> the construction holds
> like a net; or it
> unfolds in waves
> a certain measure,
> of affection.
> (*CP* 154–155)

Beginning with a lyrical verse in traditional form, and switching to concrete poetry, poster-poems, postcard-poems, poem-objects and landscape poems, Finlay has continually searched for a new face of poetry (Morgan, *Essays* 185). Fascinated with his friend's experiments, Morgan notes that this poetry is still basically verbal, but takes into account the changes in our sensibility "induced by developments in the plastic arts, design, typography, and (especially) constructivist aesthetic theory and practice" (*Essays* 185).

Interestingly, years later, in a lecture on the tensions between the creative intelligence and critical response, Morgan described the two poems as companion pieces (*BLD* 155). He proposed that it was possible to write a "critic's poem" by writing "from a position of knowledge and warmth, about writers who have very distinctive qualities, and to allow the concentrating power of poetry to say something that critical prose might not reach" (Special Collection 4848/46). Such metatextual undertones can be found in many of his poems, which shows his deep need of space of multifarious convergence of artistic practices.

But Morgan's interest in contemporary Scottish poetry is only a tip of the iceberg, as it were. There is a long tradition of Scottish writing Morgan is familiar with and drawn to: the tradition of heteroglossia, of ironical grotesque, of "zestful topsyturvydom." In Byron, for instance, Morgan finds the poet's inclination for mercurial reinventions. His "eternal impressionability, the lack of patience with reason, the search for unknown links-forward rather than known links-back, is certainly zestful and creative, and

one of the keys to his poetic method" (Morgan, "Voice, Tone and Transition in *Don Juan*" 57–58). Morgan even goes as far as to connect his poetic method with the national character.[14]

In Dunbar, Morgan finds the display of poetic energy in forms that have "considerable technical and craftsmanly interest, rather than distillation of poetic situation, in personal emotional encounters" (*Essays* 89). Morgan praises Dunbar's agility, his virtuosity in tempo and momentum, a command of rhythm. And he notes that if Dunbar has at times "words with no matter," Chaucer and Henryson in their less satisfactory texts have matter (the story) and form (the careful metre) but no word-energy (*Essays* 89). "The fusion of the two elements had to wait for Shakespeare," he concludes (*Essays* 89). When characterising Scottish poetry of the fifteenth century, with the emphasis on Dunbar, Morgan stresses the importance of a lyrical run or "lilt of a peculiar kind which comes from a nice fusion of native alliteration and French-based verse-form" (*Essays* 88). He also mentions a chatoyant and dance-like quality to this poetry. Lastly, he discusses the chief Scots development of the alliterative habit—satirical invective and "flyting," with many variants from "the norm of harmless 'aesthetic' *tour de force* improvising to the two extremes of serious denunciation and outspoken bawdiness" (*Essays* 88). "The pilling up of defamatory variants," he continues, "is of course an ancient method of satire, based on the invective of vulgar speech; its tendency towards humour, in literature as in life, because of the element of fantasy or incongruity which increases the longer the variation is kept up" (*Essays* 91). Interestingly, Morgan's affinity with the comic grotesque is in Rodney Edgecombe's view related precisely to Morgan's Scottish heritage (and the mode of the flytings) in connection with his temperament (95).

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14 "The splendid digressionism of *Don Juan*, its many voices and tangents and recoveries, its daring shifts of tone, do seem to have something of the Scottish quality which so disconcerted and irritated Dr Johnson when Boswell left him to converse with those master printers the Foulis Brothers at the Saracens's Head Inn in Glasgow: they were "good ingenious men," Boswell reports, but they had an "unsettled speculative mode of conversation" and they "teased him with questions and doubtful disputations." Also, what one might call the encyclopaedism of *Don Juan*—and Byron shares this with Scott—its lists, its informativeness, its use of many languages, is a recurring Scottish preoccupation. (Morgan, "Scottish poetry in the Nineteenth Century" 339–340)

In his introduction to the anthology *Scottish Satirical Verse*, Morgan foregrounds the flyting which he calls "a peculiarly Scottish kind of satire" (xvii). He stresses not only its liberating agency, but also a potentially destructive power of language: "in the past at least it may be regarded as a ritualized, aesthetized survival of the belief in bardic power, anciently shown in the superstitious conviction that an enemy could be 'rhymed to death'" (xvii–xviii). And it is not difficult to find comic, celebratory, "post-flyting" poems where one can sense attention to language and, as W. N. Herbert puts it, "a heightened awareness of those points at which normal discourse breaks down, allowing a different order of communication to take over" (69); and we can find these fine examples of Scottish flyting-inflected fantasias in Morgan's conventional, concrete, and off-concrete poems—"Caledonian Antisyzygy," "Canedolia," "The Whittrick," "The Flowers of Scotland," "The First Men on Mercury," to mention just a few. "Caledonian Antisyzygy" (*CP* 446–447) offers a fine example of the post-flyting play immersed in Scottish history and literary tradition:

> – Knock knock. – Who's there? – Doctor. – Doctor Who? – No,
> just Doctor. – What's up Doc? – Stop, that's all cock.
> – O.K. – Knock knock. – Who's there? Doctor Who. – Doc-
> tor Who who? – Doctor, who's a silly schmo?
> – Right, Out! – Aw. – Well, last chance, come on. – Knock knock.
> – Who's there? – Doctor Jekyll. – Doctor Jekyll
> who? – Doctor, 'd ye kill Mr Hyde? – Pig-swill!
> Nada! Rubbish! Lies! Garbage! Never! Schlock!
> – Calm down, your turn. – Knock knock. Who's there? – Doctor
> Knox. – Doctor Knox who? – Doctor Knox Box Talks.
> Claims T.V. Favours Grim Duo, Burke, Hare.
> – Right, join hands. Make sure the door is locked, or
> nothing will happen. – Dark yet? – Cover clocks.
> – Knock. – Listen! – Is there anybody there?

Morgan follows here his own counsel (with regard to Dunbar) that "like sound draw ear forward, sometimes before it has assimilated the sense" (qtd. in Crawford 15).[15] By applying the technique of repetition with variation, involving energy and containment, Morgan shows the use of sounds

15 He has experimented with such effects in his early poetry, but also in his later work:

"to draw the ear forward" which he praised in Dunbar. It seems that Morgan's sounds draw the ear back and forward, and are inspired to a great extend by language joke techniques, and yet even that links it with his enthusiasm for Dunbar whose "poems were produced by cooperating with and transforming the linguistic trends of his age rather than by relying … on the ancient common fund of human situation and story from which poetic feeling can be summoned with less expenditure of the specifically poetic gift" (Morgan, *Essays* 89).

If in "Dunbar and the Language of Poetry," Morgan discusses the way the word linkages contribute to poetic energy, then it seems he has embraced this technique as one of his favourite. In many of his poems do we encounter the play on word linkages.[16] For instance, Morgan plays with the sentence from Wittgenstein "the world is everything that is the case," or from Lévi-Strauss "any classification is superior to chaos;" both of the poems are further analysed in the chapter on the rule of repetition and difference.

Themes and variations play an important role in Morgan's work, and as Crawford aptly notes, seeing Morgan's whole "reveals that the fascination for change produces in his work a decoding, encoding, translating power which manifests itself through displays of energy whose variety rivals that of his admired Dunbar" (23). Crawford adds that whether we see Morgan's

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I am not here to talk about a scratch
video I am here to make a scratch I am
here to make a scratch video to make
tape recorder on a young man of mysterious
appearance coming towards me fore-edge
painting flip a friend did this flip of me
jumping flip from bank to flip bank
like the force of enchantment miniature home video
watch it miniature home video I am bounding
into fields and woods back I am
bounding from the door towards the fields (*TV* 118)

16 A subtle, lyrical instance comes in the poem "Oban Girl:"

A girl in a window eating a melon
eating a melon and painting a picture
painting a picture and humming Hey Jude
humming Hey Jude as the light was fading

In the autumn she'll be married (*CP* 237)

output against the background of Hugh MacDiarmid, or against the wider background of Dunbar, Burns and MacDiarmid, "his metamorphic vitality is in keeping with that of the most distinguished Scottish tradition" (24). Morgan's interest, however, is not in the tradition itself, but rather in change and changing rules: "obviously, tradition exists, and you are part of some kind of tradition, whether you want to be that or not, but it's not something that particularly interests me—I am more interested in what does change than in what has been and what is constant" (*NNGM* 131).[17] Transgression of limit is the essence of Morgan's immanent poetics. In *Virtual and Other Realities* we find a poem which seems to offer Morgan's own manifesto:

> Not seeking order, or the measured disorder
> of chaos theory, but pressing every border,
>
> scouring, tracing, probing and extending
> whatever tries to tell him it's an ending,
> breaking whatever tells him it's unbending. (63)

Reaching beyond the limits of the established order, searching for his own linguistic and imaginary vision of chaosmos is certainly the essence of Morgan's style(s) of writing and emphasises various aspects of his interface which will be further developed in the subsequent chapters of this book. As a prelude to our analyses I have chosen a quote from Douglas Dunn. I think the poet-critic brilliantly succeeds in capturing the essence of Morgan's poetics:

> Morgan steps into a form, uses it wilfully in a manner to which it is unfamiliar, and then steps away from it, leaving it in a state of revision.… Morgan is a writer of what appear to be self-conscious technical decisions.… He is a poet of "the good idea," often strung out sequentially… He is a poet of convictions as much as strong feelings. He is passionate, but impatient with pity, as if it is subordinated to the praxis of an ideology of optimism. He is interested in science, its imagination and fictions. There is little hospitality to nature in his work, rarely does he surrender to a landscape. There is a strong element of the histrionic in his poetry. He is altogether an extremely self-conscious poet, and most, perhaps all of the various ingredients in his poetry are at odds with prevailing orthodoxy, or it is at odds with them. (Dunn 76–77)

17 In drawing parallels between Morgan and Dunbar, Crawford offers one more perceptive remark: "If the whittrick flashes through Dunbar's many modes then, exactly because of the contention the CHANGE RULES, it also flashes through the whole poetry of Edwin Morgan" (24).