

## EDITORIAL

Petros Bourgos and Michael Thorp were both contributors to *Poetry Salzburg Review*, Petros' poems appearing in No. 11 (Spring 2007) and Michael's prose poems in No. 9 (Spring 2006) and No. 14 (Autumn 2008). Petros died in a swimming accident around midnight on the 29th of August 2008, while vacationing on Karystos in his native Greece. Michael died of heart-related causes at his home in Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland, on the 1st of November of the same year. Both were in their late 40s, far too young, to my way of thinking; both deaths were utterly, shockingly unexpected.

I won't pretend to be impersonal in writing about either Petros or Michael – they were both dear friends of mine. Also, they were both involved in projects with me (and I was involved in projects of theirs). What I want to record here is my sense of the loss involved, though less in personal terms than with regard to their creative work, as well as a sense of their legacies.

Petros is the more difficult one to deal with, in as much as he published extremely little in his lifetime, and as far as I'm aware he rarely or never showed his films in public. I became friends with Petros in 1981, when he and I were both coming to the end of our courses at Middlesex Polytechnic. Petros was studying Engineering, to please his family back in Greece; he'd become friends with a fellow student and friend of mine on the History of Ideas course, the writer David Menzies. Petros returned to Greece soon afterwards, but then came back to England in late 1989, if I remember correctly, to study Film and Video. In 1990 we visited the elderly writer and translator Edouard Roditi in Dieppe; this was partly so that Petros could make a film of Roditi (I acted as Edouard's interviewer). Petros returned to Greece again in late 1998 and remained there until his death.

It's hard to know how much Petros actually wrote, or how many films he made. The poem of his that I published as a Kater Murr's Press poem card, "the boat ...", shows a strong lyrical bent and a concern for very spare language. The later poems that appeared in *PSR* are brief, almost fragmentary, compressed, dark in tone. I'm putting together another Kater Murr's Press publication of Petros' poems in the near future, and there are hopes for a book to appear in Greece, once his manuscripts have been sorted through. As far as the films go, I saw a short film he made, based on my short story "The Oak Tree in the Garden" (from a book of mine called *Out of this World*), and a rough cut of the Roditi film.

(Unfortunately Petros never made a final edit of the latter.) Petros also did a good deal of translating from the English into Greek, including Samuel Beckett and Djuna Barnes, but also contemporary poets (for example, Philip Jenkins). As far as I'm aware nothing from his translation work has been published.

Possibly what's most haunting about Petros is the fact that, despite how little there is that has been made public to date, he's still left behind a sense of something quite remarkable.

I helped to organise a memorial reading for Petros, at which Gad Hollander, Jeff Hilson, Stephen C. Middleton and others paid tribute to him, while a number of other poets, such as Rupert Loydell, Paul Holman and Wendy Saloman, sent their regrets at being unable to attend.

Michael Thorp was a very different person to Petros – though I suspect they might have enjoyed a glass or two together and a long talk, if they'd ever met. Michael was very productive and nowhere near as reticent about making his work public. What Michael did insist upon, however, was that his work should appear in places and ways that seemed as appropriate as possible. As an editor and publisher he had exactly the same scruples and concerns. In his short essay "Pneumatics", published in *PN Review* (No. 93, September/October 1993), Michael wrote: "it has appalled me to realize just how little concern most writers have for the context in which their work will be received. To me this indicates a disregard for the work, for themselves, and for the reader." He went on to stress the collaborative nature of publishing, the involvement of author and publisher, as well as typographer and printer. "A book does not communicate by its text alone, but by and through the integrity of the whole. Its look and touch and hold – *even* the way it is sold – contribute or detract from the efficacy with which a book communicates its author's vision."

I'll begin with Michael's work as an editor and publisher. He started with a magazine called *Cloud*, which ran for four issues, all of them published in 1988. Michael then branched out into publishing books, Cloudforms as he called them, and a pamphlet series entitled Markings. The overall project, however, continued to be referred to as Cloud. I can't remember how I first came to be in touch with Michael, but he published me twice in *Cloud* (and also later on in the Markings series). It was the beginning of a friendship that lasted until Michael's death, a friendship mainly conducted through letters – but what letters Michael wrote! His correspondence was surely another side of his extraordinary creativity, alongside his writing and visual art and his editorial and

publishing work. *Cloud* included Denise Levertov, R. S. Thomas, Edward Mycue, Bill Wyatt, Paul Green and Sue Arengo, as well as visual art by Prunella Clough, Fred Fowler, Arthur Hunter-Blair and Michael himself. Short extracts from the Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky's *Sculpting in Time* were included – and Tarkovsky, with his deep spirituality, his awareness of tradition and history alongside his thoroughly contemporary approach to the shaping of an artwork, was a key figure for Michael. *Cloud* was highly distinctive in its design and its inclusion of visual art, as well as in its concern with the relationship between the arts and spirituality. These were vital elements in Michael's other publishing work, as well. He published books or pamphlets by George Oppen, Edouard Roditi, Lawrence Fixel, T. W. Sutherland, James Kirkup, Werner Dürrson (in Michael Hamburger's translation), Peter Dent, Leonard Schwartz, Peter Money, George Messo .... Scarcely an obvious list of authors: Michael took chances, following his own sense of what was lively and important, regardless of literary fashions.

There was an extremely trenchant critical spirit to Michael's writings at times, as well as a probing, keen intelligence and an utter disregard for the fashionable, as I've already indicated. I feel that he was always on the lookout for fresh insights and understanding. There was also a very strong contemplative side to Michael, and he was deeply concerned with the spiritual and how it might be approached in poetry and art. He wrote a number of strikingly individual essays, erudite and thoroughly considered as well as bold in spirit. Amongst these are his essay on James Kirkup, "Making Place" (in *Diversions: A Celebration for James Kirkup on His Eightieth Birthday*, University of Salzburg Press, 1998), and three essays on my own writing, *Breaking at the Fountain* (Stride, 1997), *A Shared Inherence: The Spiritual Letters of David Miller* (Desert Garden Samizdat, 2005) and "In the neighbourhood of the spirit: The Ghost Work of David Miller" (*Golden Handcuffs Review*, No. 10, Summer – Fall 2008). (The most substantial of these, *A Shared Inherence*, was produced lovingly by Michael himself in a limited edition of 25 copies, each of which had an original collage of Michael's on the cover.) Other essays included "The Social Contract" (*Cloud*, No. 1, 1988), on the phenomenon of the Artist-in-Residence, "A Note on Woodcutting" on his artist-friend Arthur Hunter-Blair (in *Threads of Sanity*, 1996 – one of the Markings pamphlets), "Pneumatics" (which I have already mentioned) and *The Captive Soul: Modern Art and the Aestheticisation of the Spiritual* (Desert Garden Samizdat, 2008), a very considerable piece of critical writing, to my mind. To these I might add "Prayer through Poetry", a talk he gave that would be well worth publishing.

In *A Shared Inherence*, Michael wrote: “The prose poem is a very particular ‘other kind of space’, or ‘other kind of room’, involving a ‘*Dream geometry*’ of a most exacting kind. Against a white page, it suspends the image of a piece of writing more dramatically than any other form of words. Its composition is a matter of intricate weights and measures, of volume, density and transparency” (p. 38). He was thinking of my own writing in the first instance, but how true this is of his own prose poetry. I think this is entirely apparent if one looks at the pieces of Michael’s that appeared in *PSR*, or that were published by Kater Murr’s Press (“Speak your mind to us now”, 1998 and *Four Prayer Poems*, 2004), for example. Other gatherings of Michael’s prose poems included *Parts of Speech* (Cloud, 1995), *Prayer Poems* (Desert Garden Samizdat, 2007) and *Ghost Thoughts* (DGS, 2007). *The Crime of the Flower* (Kater Murr’s Press, 2002), on the other hand, was a play that brought to mind German Expressionist drama, and which shared the trenchant critical spirit that animates some of Michael’s essays. Michael’s widow, Frances, has informed me that there are also unpublished poems, short plays and prose pieces.

Although many people would have known Michael as a writer and/or an editor and publisher, others knew him primarily as a visual artist, a painter and collagist. He studied Fine Art at Reading University in the 1980s and took part in exhibitions (writing a statement about his art for one exhibition in 1993), but according to a note about himself at the back of *A Shared Inherence*, such public showings became rare. (I suspect that this was due to his meticulous concern for context, as noted earlier.) I never saw any of Michael’s paintings, but I saw many of his collages – and he was extremely productive. (Just to give an idea: the collage, dated 22.5.05, on the cover of my copy of *A Shared Inherence* is Paper Collage No. 1861.) Judging by his collages, I’d say that Michael was an extraordinary artist. Apart from anything else, he had an amazingly subtle sense of colour; at times, also, a feeling for what was *close* to colourlessness, but *not* colourless – his work could inhabit *that* edge. He also, for example, could work back and forth between abstraction and figuration, quite effortlessly, it seemed, and with a sense of how powerful, and how beautiful, an image can be. Perhaps this was because his art always had a living quality to it and made you think of landscapes, things in nature, people, dreams ... much as his poetry did.

I’m glad to have known Petros Bourgos and Michael Thorp, glad to have worked with them, and glad that their poetry appeared in the pages of *Poetry Salzburg Review*.

David Miller