YORKSHIRE POETRY, 1954-2019:

LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, CRISIS

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PhD

University of York

English & Related Literature

October 2019

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the writing of a large selection of twentieth- and twenty-first-century East and West Yorkshire poets, making a case for Yorkshire as a poetic place. The study begins with Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes, and concludes with Simon Armitage, Sean O'Brien and Matt Abbott's contemporary responses to the EU Referendum. Aside from arguing the significance of Yorkshire poetry within the British literary landscape, it presents poetry as a central form for the region's writers to represent *their* place, with a particular focus on Yorkshire's languages, its identities and its crises.

Among its original points of analysis, this thesis redefines the narrative position of Larkin and scrutinizes the linguistic choices of Hughes; at the same time, it identifies and explains the roots and parameters of a fascinating new subgenre that is emerging in contemporary West Yorkshire poetry. This study situates its poems in place whilst identifying the distinct physical and social geographies that exist, in different ways, throughout East and West Yorkshire poetry. Of course, it interrogates the overarching themes that unite the two regions too, with emphasis on the political and historic events that affected the region and its poets, alongside the recurring insistence of social class throughout many of the poems studied here. Moreover, this study reflects on contemporary Yorkshire poetry alongside the rhetoric surrounding Britain's decision to Leave the European Union in June 2016. It comprises the first substantial study of several contemporary poets, whilst conducting the first detailed literary and sociolinguistic examination of poetic responses to the Brexit crisis, as ongoing in 2019.

Ultimately, this thesis concludes with substantial in-depth evidence to argue not only Yorkshire's validity as a poetic place, but that East and West Yorkshire (historically the places of Larkin and Hughes) are, to this day, poetic in their own right.

CONTENTS

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of two incredible people
- the former a personal loss, the latter a public one -
who left this world during a particularly dark year
as this research project was in its infancy.

Their love and values remain.

Colin Burroughes
1945-2016

Jo Cox
1974-2016

Acknowledgements

The PhD is often lambasted as an exercise in loneliness; I am overwhelmingly grateful to the people mentioned here for never allowing me to feel that way:

My partner Nat deserves a world of thanks for supporting me enduringly, with incredible patience, humour and love. So too, to my brilliant parents, who have always encouraged me to be anything and everything that I want to be, and to be it to the absolute best of my ability. Massive kudos to my mum, who has read (almost) every word I've ever written and accompanied me to some of the most peculiar places in the name of research. My brothers and wider family too are incredibly supportive, and I cannot thank them enough for being so. Special thanks to my
hairy babies Cosmo and Luna, Pixie and Naboo for lifting my spirits and being (quite literally) by my side even during the most trying of moments.

I had long dreamed of studying at York, and am very appreciative of the incredible knowledge, support and expertise I found there. Enormous thanks are of course due to my supervisor, Matt Campbell, for his patient advice, support and encouragement, from the moment I approached him with research ideas. Thank you also to Hugh Haughton, who provided valuable insight on my Thesis Advisory Panel and helped to clarify many ideas in my head. Thank you to Chloe Wigston-Smith for chairing my confirmation panel, and of course to Jonathan Ellis and J.T. Welsch for generously agreeing to examine this thesis. During my time at York I have been very lucky to be supported by the White Rose College of the Arts and Humanities and the Arts and Humanities Research Council; among other benefits, this allowed access to the incredible breadth of knowledge, expertise and support of Caryn Douglas and Clare Meadley, to whom I am incredibly thankful.

Of course, the support I have found and relied on throughout my thesis has extended far beyond York: I will be forever grateful to James Underwood for his advice from the very beginning of this process; so too, to Rebecca Devine, Felicity Powell and Vic Clarke for the camaraderie, shared enthusiasm and moral support, and to the Philip Larkin Society committee, particularly Graham Chesters and Philip Pullen for their constant encouragement and limitless knowledge. Last, but by no means least, thank you to my friends, with a special mention to Laura, Holly, Steph, Catherine, Heather, Louise and Eleanor. You have each supported me uniquely, constantly and immeasurably.

To everyone else in this list, and to many, many more besides,
I will forever be thankful.

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this University or any other. Parts of Chapter Three have been published in the *Ted Hughes Society Journal* 7, no. 1 (2018), pp. 49-66, under the title 'From *Remains* to *Elmet*: a lexical study of Hughes's West Yorkshire texts.' All sources are acknowledged as references in the footnotes and bibliographies.

Kyra Piperides Jaques
October 2019

'TRUE GRIT AND YORKSHIRE? WE'VE HEARD IT ALL BEFORE': INTRODUCTION

Philip Larkin's 'Going, Going' (1972) depicts a version of England that is in a state of unthinkable decline; the poem seems to be poised on the brink of disaster:

> And that will be England gone,
> The shadows, the meadows, the lanes,
> The guildhalls, the carved choirs.
> There'll be books; it will linger on
> In galleries; but all that remains
> For us will be concrete and tyres.[1]

The commissioned piece recalls the poet's descriptions of Hull – the East Yorkshire city that he moved to in 1955 – from the poem 'Here', which was published just over a decade before 'Going, Going', in 1961. 'Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster/ Beside grain-scattered streets, barge-crowded water', 'And out beyond its mortgaged half-built edges,/ Fast-shadowed wheat-fields, running high as hedges'.[2] This traditional idyll is increasingly being replaced by 'concrete and tyres'. In 1961, Larkin's England was a place of progress, Hull was in a state of rebuild after the destruction of the Blitz. The expansion of the city into its hinterlands (or 'mortgaged half-built edges') in 'Here' is positive, despite the poet's scepticism regarding the consumerist culture that is emerging in the city centre, as 'residents from raw estates' 'Push through plate-glass swing doors to their desires'.[3]

However, by the time 'Going, Going' was commissioned, this post-war culture of capitalist materialism had developed to the point of regression, with 'kids screaming for more -/ More houses, more parking allowed,/ More caravan sites, more pay.'[4] Economic progression has become a threat to English tradition, which

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[1] Philip Larkin, 'Going, Going', in *The Complete Poems of Philip Larkin*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2014), 83.
[2] Philip Larkin, 'Here', in *The Complete Poems of Philip Larkin*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2014), 49.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Larkin, 'Going, Going', 83.

has been consigned to the history books and 'galleries', as well as to the environment, with the country devolving into a kind of wasteland: 'but greeds/ And garbage are too thick-strewn/ To be swept up now'.[5] The UK, here, was on the brink of joining the European Economic Community – the country would ultimately join in 1973 – and Larkin envisions his country becoming the 'First slum of Europe: a role/ It won't be so hard to win,/ With a cast of crooks and tarts'.[6] Whilst Larkin could be criticising Ted Heath's early-1970s Conservative government here, it seems more likely that he is taking issue with the Labour government of Harold Wilson, which governed either side of Heath's tenure; Wilson was responsible, through his 'white heat' rhetoric, for the advances in technology and the modernisation that led to many of the changes that the poet derides.[7] Despite Larkin living in the relatively remote East Yorkshire city, this wasteland is still encroaching on Yorkshire's rural and coastal beauty spots, the 'unfenced existence' to which the narrator in 'Here' escapes:[8]

> […] move
> Your works to the unspoilt dales
> (Grey area grants)! And when
>
> You try to get near the sea
> In summer…[9]

This feeling of impending doom and living within the 'remains' of a soon-to-be forgotten past will be recurrent within the Yorkshire poetry studied within this thesis.

This feeling is immediately suggested by the title of Ted Hughes's 1979 collection *Remains of Elmet*, which centres the poems (and Fay Godwin's photography that features beside them) amidst the geographical relics of the ancient kingdom. Whilst both Larkin's and Hughes's Yorkshire-based poems can be interpreted

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[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Richard Greyson, *British Politics: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010), 19.
[8] Larkin, 'Here', 49.
[9] Larkin, 'Going, Going', 83.

with a cynicism for the mostly politically-driven changes within the county (and the country) in their present, the poets reflect on this very differently. Whilst Hughes's poetry within *Remains of Elmet* contains a nostalgia for West Yorkshire's productive and politically powerful past, Larkin's writing – especially in 'Going, Going' – focuses more on concern for the future, alongside his despair at the enormous changes in his present. That their poetry is positioned differently – Hughes's looking back to an idealised past, Larkin's looking forward with trepidation, to an unknowable future – could in some ways be linked to their specific relationships to place. These regional relationships (with Yorkshire, in particular) will be central to this thesis, and thus will be the predominant focus during the exploration of twentieth- and twenty-first century poems here.

They may have been literary contemporaries, but Larkin (1922-1985) and Hughes (1930-1998) were very different, both in terms of persona and poetry. Their differences have been widely discussed: in terms of their individual poetic style, Larkin's poetry is generally framed as beautifying the everyday, whilst Hughes's is often mythical, considerably more metaphysical than that of Larkin.[10] However, greater attention has been paid to the stark differences between their poetic personae, as well as the relationship between the pair. Most recently explored by Neil Roberts in his paper 'Hughes and Larkin: A Rapproachment?' (2019), in J. Ryan Hibbett's *Philip Larkin, Popular Culture and the English Individual* (2019) and in the exhibition *Larkin and Hughes: Poets and Rivals*, their relationship has famously been described as antagonistic, at best.[11] However, Larkin and Hughes's mutual connection to Yorkshire has not received as much attention, perhaps because the two poets' relationships with Yorkshire are very different. Whilst Ted Hughes was born in Mytholmroyd, in the West Riding, before studying at Cambridge

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[10] James Underwood, 'Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes,' *The Richard Stead Breakfast Show* (radio broadcast), aired Mar 21, 2019 (Leeds: BBC Radio Leeds, 2019).

[11] Neil Roberts, 'Hughes and Larkin: A Rapproachment?' in *The Ted Hughes Society Journal* 7, no. 2, 47-56; J. Ryan Hibbett, *Philip Larkin, Popular Culture and the English Individual* (London: Lexington, 2019); *Larkin and Hughes: Poets and Rivals* (exhibition), curated by University of Huddersfield Department of English Literature & Creative Writing students (curators), Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield, Heritage Quay, 20 March – 21 July 2019.

University and spending most of his adult life living in the south of England, Philip Larkin was born in Coventry, in the West Midlands. He studied at the University of Oxford, ultimately moving to Kingston-upon-Hull, in the East Riding, in 1955 and living there until his death in 1985. For Larkin, then, Yorkshire was his adult home; for Hughes, his roots there were from his childhood, and his family.

However, both poets were influenced and inspired by Yorkshire, its various people, histories and landscapes, albeit in very different ways. The people in Larkin's poems, the Yorkshire histories that he writes, are those of others: the people he observes are strangers encountered in the street (or 'in the M1 café').[12] For Hughes, on the other hand, Yorkshire's people, its histories, and their representation in his poems are inherently personal:

> You claw your way
> Over a giant beating wing.
>
> And Thomas and Walter and Edith
> Are living feathers
>
> Esther and Sylvia
> Living feathers[13]

In 'Heptonstall Cemetery', Hughes's childhood – and ancestral – West Yorkshire home allows him to reconnect to the memories and roots of his deceased family (explicitly named in this poem). With reference to the deep connections between landscape and identity, in *Seeking Authenticity in Place, Culture and the Self*, Nicholas Osbaldiston draws particular attention to 'those nonhuman elements of landscape that are symbolic of the generations that have passed on,' suggesting that 'the history of an area is important to the shaping of the collective identity and subsequently impacts upon the private self.'[14] On a similar note, E. Relph's

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[12] Larkin, 'Going, Going', 83.

[13] Ted Hughes, 'Heptonstall Cemetery', in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 122.

[14] Nicholas Osbaldiston, *Seeking Authenticity in Place, Culture and the Self: The Great Urban Escape* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 62.

book *Place and Placelessness* is particularly useful for conceptualising the relationship between identity and place. Relph states that, 'to have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one's own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular.'[15] In the relative wilderness here, in the 'remains' of what was once the kingdom of Elmete, these connections *remain*; despite their literal remains occupying plots in the cemetery, as the 'Wind slams across the tops', the poet is transported to a time in which his lost family were 'living', evoked within the specific place in which they lived.[16] In light of this personal connection, and in contrast to the more public setting of Larkin's Yorkshire poems, it is no wonder that Hughes is comparatively rooted in the past.

In the time since this research project began, national interest in Yorkshire literature has increased: indeed, during the time that the final chapters of this thesis were being written, Simon Armitage was named the UK's Poet Laureate and Andrew McMillan was shortlisted for the Oxford Professor of Poetry role. In 2016, the BBC broadcast 'The Yorkshire Coast' as part of their *Books that Made Britain* series of television programmes; both Richard Morris's *Yorkshire: A Lyrical History of England's Greatest County* and Paul Chrystal's *Yorkshire Literary Landscapes* were published in 2018.[17] The first of these texts divides the county into its constituent regions – with frequent links between them throughout – providing some literary criticism within a text with a more descriptive and, at times, biographical feel; the latter provides an overview of the ways in which a comprehensive list of 51 poets, novelists and playwrights – from Andrew Marvell to Fiona Mozley, as well as several of the poets discussed in this thesis – were influenced or informed by the Yorkshire regions in which they lived or worked. The vast number of writers that Chrystal chooses to discuss in his book, however, disallows a detailed exploration of the relevant texts. In contrast, this thesis

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[15] E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), 38.

[16] Hughes, 'Heptonstall Cemetery', 122.

[17] 'The Yorkshire Coast', *Books that Made Britain*, BBC1 television broadcast, Oct 16, 2016; Richard Morris, *Yorkshire: A Lyrical History of England's Greatest County* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2018); Paul Chrystal, *Yorkshire's Literary Landscapes* (Darlington: DestinWorld Publishing, 2018).

considers a smaller – but no less illuminating – selection of writers, to address their links to region and local poetry in considerable detail, with deliberate focus on the East and West Yorkshire of Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes, respectively.

Whilst Yorkshire poetry is attracting increasing contemporary attention, it has been anthologised since at least the nineteenth century. Critical discussion has occurred too, albeit to a lesser extent. At the end of the nineteenth to the very beginning of the twentieth century there was a sudden interest in poetry written in Yorkshire, with two volumes of *Poets and Poetry of Yorkshire* published in 1868, and *Modern Yorkshire Poets* and *Yorkshire Anthology* following in 1885 and 1901, respectively.[18] More contemporary versions have been published too: *Contemporary Yorkshire Poetry*, edited by Vernon Scannell, was published in 1984, with Ian Parks' *Versions of the North: Contemporary Yorkshire Poetry* in 2013 and *The Valley Press Anthology of Yorkshire Poetry*, edited by Miles Salter and Oz Hardwick, published in 2017.[19] Curiously, whilst two reputable volumes of East Yorkshire poetry exist – *A Rumoured City: New Poets from Hull* in 1982, edited by Douglas Dunn, and *Old City, New Rumours: A Hull Anthology* in 2010, edited by Ian Gregson and Carol Rumens – no notable collections of contemporary West Yorkshire poetry have been published.[20]

Poetry magazines and independent presses, however, have been important to the promotion of local writing in West Yorkshire, with *Poetry and Audience*, *Stand*, *The Poetry Business* and *The North* all based within the region, and with *Bête Noire* holding a similar literary prominence in the East. The poetic 'scenes' and reputations of these regions have been strengthened by the links to local

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[18] William Grainge, *Poets and Poetry of Yorkshire* vol. i and ii (Wakefield: W.T. Lamb, 1868); William Andrews, *Modern Yorkshire Poets* (Hull: A.Brown and Sons, 1885); J. Horsfall Turner, *Yorkshire Anthology: Ballads & Songs – Ancient & Modern* (Bingley: T. Harrison and Sons, 1901).
[19] Vernon Scannell, *Contemporary Yorkshire Poetry* (Yorkshire: Yorkshire Arts Association, 1984); Ian Parks, *Versions of the North: Contemporary Yorkshire Poetry* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2013); Miles Salter and Oz Hardwick, *The Valley Press Anthology of Yorkshire Poetry* (Scarborough: Valley Press, 2017).
[20] Douglas Dunn, *A Rumoured City: New Poets from Hull* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1982); Ian Gregson and Carol Rumens, *Old City, New Rumours: A Hull Anthology* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2010).

universities as well as the seminars, lectures, readings and events associated with these magazines and presses; highly regarded literary festivals in Ilkley and Bridlington, to name just two, continue to bring some of the nation's most highly regarded writers to Yorkshire, too. Hull's status as UK City of Culture 2017 undoubtedly helped to keep poetry at the fore in East Yorkshire, with the BBC 'Contains Strong Language' festival, and the exhibition *Philip Larkin: New Eyes, Each Year* allowing the public to reflect on the poetry that has been and *is* produced within the city of Hull.

The poetry currently being (and yet-to-be) written and published in these Yorkshire regions, then, is just as important as that in the past. Thus, some of the work included in this thesis is very recent. As more writing is published, Yorkshire poetry is constantly being redefined: the inclusion of newly published poetry felt important, in terms of ensuring that the version of Yorkshire poetry presented in this thesis was as up-to-date and accurate as possible. In the same vein, whilst many of the poets to be discussed would be considered 'traditional' in their practice, less traditional forms are included too. In particular, the published versions of spoken word poetry – which is enjoying vast audiences at present – is included, due to the popularity of the form amongst Yorkshire poets. In her collection *Chronotopia*, Kate Fox writes of her 'stand-up poetry':

> For me, there is something subversive and powerful about speaking for and from particular, local places. It doesn't have to be parochial. Places at the edges and on the margins need to know they are seen, heard and represented in a neo-liberal, globalised world which leaves many behind. Poetry can do this. […] spoken word performed in and for particular places, changing in every show, connecting of the audience in front of it, can do this.[21]

There is an inherent and important connection, then, between poetry and place; in terms of spoken word, Fox suggests, this allows the empowerment and unification

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[21] Kate Fox, *Chronotopia* (Portishead: Burning Eye Books, 2017), 9.

of otherwise marginalised voices. In many cases, as will be discussed later in this thesis, these voices are often marginalised by place itself.

In *The Spoken Word Revolution*, Mark Eleveld suggests that the power of spoken poetry lies in 'the experience of verbal communication': 'hearing a poem lends the experience of literature an immediacy, a reality not found on the page', as 'the orally delivered poem brings to us the sound and idiolect of a person's voice, a quality often muffled between the covers of a book or intentionally obliterated by poets who seek a purity of language rinsed of human speech.'[22] Whilst the published forms of these poems are, admittedly, not adaptable by the poet once in print, their urgency and spatial specificity often remains, reflective of the dialect of their writers who would otherwise be reading them aloud. Just as the social, political and cultural qualms of Larkin and Hughes are reflected in their poetry, so too the specific lives and times of contemporary poets are reflected in their writing (or its voiced equivalent).

These poets, in their publications or performances, therefore, occupy a curious position of power: their work not only allows identification within the particular social circles that they represent, but also becomes an interesting reflection of the social and political thought of the poet and their specific place and time. Whilst the poet's voice must not be considered solely representative of homogenous thought within their communities, in some of the most powerful cases considered in this thesis, the arts permit a voice to people and places that may not usually find it on a national level (notably, Kate Fox worked with an Islamic girls' school to produce a collection of poetry, which she then reflected on in her own work).[23] This, quite significantly, is the case in Yorkshire, as will be explored throughout this thesis.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

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[22] Mark Eleveld, *The Spoken Word Revolution: slam, hip hop & the poetry of a new generation* (Illinois: Sourcebooks, 2003), 4-5.

[23] Kate Fox, 'The Day of the Hijab' in *Chronotopia* (Portishead: Burning Eye Books, 2017), 49-53.

So, what makes a Yorkshire poet? Whilst Yorkshire poets are clearly not a homogenous group either, the most obvious way to identify a 'Yorkshire poet' is through their relationship with region. In the most recent of the anthologies that encompass the entire county, editor Ian Parks includes 'poetry written by poets with a strong connection to Yorkshire either by birth or close association.'[24] In *Yorkshire Literary Landscapes*, Paul Chrystal adopts a similar approach, 'embrac[ing] writers born here or who lived here and whose work has been influenced by Yorkshire landscapes of one sort or another.'[25] The same technique of classification will be employed in this thesis: as it happens, most of the West Yorkshire poets whose work we will explore were, like Hughes, born in the county, whilst many of the East Yorkshire poets, like Larkin, were born elsewhere. This was, however, not at all by design, and neither 'qualification' of Yorkshire-ness is considered superior to the other. Rather, we will explore the significance of Yorkshire as a home of twentieth- and twenty-first century poets, the various contexts that reflect the county in their poetry, and the ways in which their works could be considered *in* or *of* 'their' place in the north of England.

The concept of 'northernness' and 'the north' is an interesting facet of Yorkshire identity. Whilst by no means synonymous with 'Yorkshireness', the northernness within a north/south dichotomy is important for consideration, not least because of the significance of place. Both distinct concepts of Englishness will be explored here. In '"Constructing the North": Space and a sense of place', Stuart Rawnsley conflates Northernness with identity, finding that:

> the North of England evokes a greater sense of identity than any other
> 'region' of the country. At the same time it provokes the most derision
> and rejection from those whose identity has been constructed and

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[24] Parks, *Versions*, ix.
[25] Chrystal, *Landscapes*, 7.

shaped elsewhere […] No other region has such an intensified 'sense of place'.[26]

Given this 'greater sense of identity', it is little wonder that northernness can be evidenced in literature. As with any facet of identity, conceptions of the north are subjective, thus, each poet's definition of northern identity is different. In *The Idea of North*, Peter Davidson finds that 'For the contemporary poet Sean O'Brien, the quintessence of north is snow over the ports of Newcastle and Hull', whilst 'For Simon Armitage, north is where he stands on the Yorkshire slopes of the Pennines, and he wrote YORKSHIRE on the basalt sand of a beach in Iceland to prove it'. 'For Philip Larkin', meanwhile, 'true north is a voyage northward off the maps', with his northern home 'a place of exile from the metropolis, from the centre of culture and power.'[27] Each of these versions of north is distinct in its difference from elsewhere, their identity 'intensified', as Rawnsley puts it.

Northernness, as a result of this strong sense of place, has become a relatively common topic for critical discussion too, with regard both to literature and to culture on a wider scale. As well as Davidson's *The Idea of North*, other particularly prominent examples considered during the development of this thesis include Simon Armitage's *All Points North*, Neville Kirk's *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of 'the North' and 'Northernness'*, Dave Russell's *Looking North: England and the National Imagination* and Katie Wales' *Northern English: A Social and Cultural History*.[28] The most recent, and one of the more influential studies of northern literature is Katharine Cockin's 2012 collection *The Literary North*. In her introduction, Cockin suggests that 'the north of England has been subjected to stereotype, misrepresentation and myth' before going on to note that 'what

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[26] Stuart Rawnsley, "Constructing the North': Space and a sense of place', in *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of 'The North' and 'Northernness'* ed. Neville Kirk (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 3.

[27] Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 11, 12, 206.

[28] Simon Armitage, *All Points North* (London: Viking, 1998); Neville Kirk (ed), *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of 'the North' and 'Northernness'* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); Dave Russell, *Looking North: England and the National Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Katie Wales, *Northern English: A Social and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

becomes clear is the tenacity of the stereotyping of the North. When literature does not perpetuate these stereotypes, it tends to enter dynamically, sometimes perversely, into a dialogue with them.' 'The stereotypes and myths of the North seem so familiar that they need no discussion,' Cockin writes, as she identifies the ways in which northern writers necessarily have to negotiate stereotypes of their own cultural identities and existences that have, in the past, been written for them.[29]

Whilst this thesis will follow the lead of several of its Yorkshire poets in attempting neither to perpetuate nor dispel stereotypes and clichés about Yorkshire and northernness, it is important to identify their existence, and in some cases, their specific origins. So too, we must acknowledge the binary positioning that many of these stereotypes perpetuate, the difference between northern and southern, 'hard' and 'soft', the oppositions simultaneously 'othering' one another. Indeed, in *The Idea of North*, Peter Davidson finds that:

> The north of England is consistently described in terms of dearth, authenticity and pastness. These are images of the industrial cities and towns, although the countryside is imagined as bleak in a different way, the novels of the Brontës, starveling hilltop farms, black weather. But descriptions of the north by northerners return again and again to the trope of urban pastoral, to the close interpenetration of country and town, memory and nostalgia, benign pastness. With the turn of the twenty-first century, industry itself, the very idea of an industrial town, is becoming part of the past, subject of nostalgia.[30]

Here, Davidson situates the descriptions and stereotypes of the north by those from elsewhere in opposition to the ways in which northerners perceive and represent their places and themselves; both replicate – and, perhaps, reinvent or reinforce – stereotypes, the latter with a greater or more nuanced understanding of the image's authenticity.

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[29] Katharine Cockin, 'Introducing the Literary North', in *The Literary North* ed. Katharine Cockin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1-2.
[30] Davidson, *Idea of North*, 199.

Northerners have, of course, been representing themselves and their places in literature throughout, and long before, the timespan considered within this thesis, despite the distance from largely southern-based publishers of 'the Oxford-Cambridge-London axis' at the beginning of the twentieth century.[31] In *An English Journey*, published in 1934, Bradford-born J.B. Priestly wrote of Yorkshire in stereotypical terms: 'The sun was low but still shining strongly and, with the increasing smokiness of the air, it made a strange chiaroscuro, as Northern as high tea and the proper short "a" sound […] We were now in the true North country. One glance at the people, with their stocky figures and broad faces, humorous or pugnacious, told you that.'[32] Similarly, in 'Yorkshire and the Novelist', published thirty-four years later in 1968, Halifax-based Phyllis Bentley wrote that Yorkshire writing was characterised by its 'determined preoccupation with ordinary people and ordinary life': the inherent idea of 'ordinariness', it is implied, is resonant throughout Yorkshire.[33]

Rather than an 'ordinariness' Ian Parks (born in Mexborough) finds, in his collection of Yorkshire literature, a 'sense of independence and otherness' 'dissent […] a certain outspokenness', that he deems 'rooted' 'in history, landscape, language and character'.[34] Throughout Yorkshire, there is strong local heritage and identity: in *Yorkshire: A Lyrical History of England's Greatest County* (2018), Richard Morris suggests that 'Yorkshire's selfhood is more like that of an empire than a country'.[35] Parks, it seems, would agree with this, identifying 'a long-standing and deep-seated conviction that the North in general, and Yorkshire in particular, were in some inexplicable sense "different"'.[36] In this claim – as well as in the very act of publishing a collection of Yorkshire poetry – the poet and editor

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[31] Parks, *Versions*, xiii.
[32] J.B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: William Heinemann, 1934), 134.
[33] Phyllis Bentley, 'Yorkshire and the Novelist' in *The Kenyon Review* 30, no. 4 (1968), 522.
[34] Parks, *Versions*, ix.
[35] Morris, *Yorkshire*, xvi.
[36] Parks, *Versions*, ix.

himself represents the proud difference that is often attributed to northerners, and Yorkshire people in general.

This really begs the question of how northerners – and the people of Yorkshire in particular – define their own regional identities, in contrast to how it is regarded by others. This dichotomy is evident throughout Kate Fox's poem 'Nice Cup of Tea', written 'for the 2014 Yorkshire Festival when the Tour de France came to Yorkshire', which begins with the Yorkshire-based poet reiterating some of the common stereotypes about her place:

> True grit and Yorkshire?
> We've heard it all before.
> It's flat caps and whippets
> and Brontës on the moor.
>
> It's mills and mines and limestone
> and cyclists on the tour.[37]

However, despite the suggested eye-rolling ('We've heard it all before') at these tired and outdated stereotypes (the mills and mines long-shut, the flat caps and whippets only illustrative of a very specific Yorkshireman), this is a poem that speaks of the poet's pride in her place and the stereotypes that she feels *do* define her people:

> The way we don't like to make a fuss,
> we're sensible and stoic,
> measuring our life in teaspoons,
> our cuppa consumption heroic.[38]

This pride (itself a highly stereotyped aspect of Yorkshire identity) was particularly noticeable in the wake of the 2012 London Olympics, when the county was shouting particularly loudly about its sporting prowess: Martin Wainwright noted in the *Guardian* that Yorkshire 'finished up with seven gold medals, two

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[37] Kate Fox, 'Nice Cup of Tea' in *Chronotopia* (Portishead: Burning Eye Books, 2017), 20.
[38] Ibid.

silver and three bronzes, placing it twelfth in the medal table if regarded as an independent country, as it should be'.[39] In 2019, the internet is rife with stereotypes of Yorkshire, written both *by* and *about* people from the region. In a *Yorkshire Times* article 'What makes Yorkshire special?' Jan Harris makes note of an extensive list of famous Yorkshire people – 'The Game of Thrones cast includes plenty of Yorkshire faces, including Huddersfield actress Lena Headey, Sheffield's Sean Bean and York's Mark Addy' – and culinary highlights including 'curry in Bradford', an 'afternoon tea at […] Betty's', 'Yorkshire pudding and the best cup of tea (Yorkshire of course).'[40]

The cup of tea features throughout Fox's poem too, an emblem of the resilience of Yorkshire people: here, with an allusion to York-born W.H. Auden's Miss Gee – a stoic northern woman whose uncomplaining nature led to her death, followed by medical students dissecting her knee – to illustrate the healing and conciliatory nature of this stoicism, coupled with the famous Yorkshire brew:

> Your daughter's up for shoplifting,
> your son lives up a tree, you've got leprosy and Alzheimer's
> and cancer of the knee
> but least said, soonest mended.
> Just have a cup of tea.[41]

This particularly *Coronation Street* style scenario chimes well with the attitudes of Philip Hensher in the *Spectator*, who points out the class-based stereotyping of northerners in literature: 'I don't think I have ever read a book about the North which mentioned the Yorkshire gentry, who have done so much to shape the region. But Harewood House and Castle Howard are as clearly in the North as Blackpool […] The truth is that all the comparisons between northern manners

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[39] Martin Wainwright, 'Yorkshire finishes twelfth in medals table at Olympics,' *The Guardian*, Aug 12, 2013, accessed Apr 18, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/uk/the-northerner/2012/aug/13/yorkshire-olympic-medals-gold-tourism-leeds-york-dales-sheffield-hull/.
[40] Jan Harris, 'What makes Yorkshire special?' *The Yorkshire Times,* Aug 1, 2016, accessed Apr 18, 2019, https://yorkshiretimes.co.uk/article/What-Makes-Yorkshire-Special?platform=hootsuite/.
[41] Fox, 'Cup of Tea', 21.

(warm, inclusive, sing-a-long, put the kettle on, love) and southern (cold, snooty, judgemental, Ottolenghi-favouring) are actually between a working-class culture and a bourgeois one'.[42] Henscher's comment is of course only anecdotal; anyone who has seen *Downton Abbey* or *Gentleman Jack*, to name just two examples, will know that this certainly does not extend to other popular culture forms. However, this sentiment certainly rings true with many of the poems we will encounter throughout this thesis; although the men with 'flat caps and whippets' nowadays might represent a higher class of Yorkshiremen, they are in the minority here.

In a tongue-in-cheek *Independent* article, Lancashire-based writer Chris Maume frames the characteristic that may be considered 'pride' as a self-centred arrogance, suggesting 'the Yorkshireman's ability to bear grudges for all eternity', 'a refusal to acknowledge any other point of view' and 'an innate belief in his own infallibility and the superiority of tykes as a breed' as among Yorkshire's less savoury characteristics: 'And, possibly the worst characteristic because it incorporates all the others, the way he wears his Yorkshireness like a uniform, or a suit of armour.'[43] In the *Yorkshire Post*, Jane Dowle addresses many of the Yorkshire stereotypes that she has been faced with in the south: 'I've been informed that I'm "down-to-earth" and that I possess "a heart of gold"', 'honest and straight-talking' and 'argumentative'.[44] As the humble cup of tea remains the answer to all of society's ills in 'Nice Cup of Tea', these characteristics are represented too, with no less pride than the more pleasant ones:

> An argument with a colleague?
> Your house, your job, your tights fall through?

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[42] Philip Hensher, 'How do you define a "northerner"?' *The Spectator*, Jun 8, 2013, accessed Apr 18, 2019, https://www.spectator.co.uk/2013/06/the-north-by-paul-morley-review/.

[43] Chris Maume, 'Do we need Yorkshiremen?' *Independent*, Jun 24, 1996, accessed Apr 18, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/do-we-need-yorkshiremen-1338559.html/.

[44] Jane Dowle, 'Yes, we're blunt talkers in Yorkshire, but perhaps we've got a right to be,' *The Yorkshire Post*, Aug 26, 2013, accessed Apr 18, 2019, https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/opinion/jane-dowle-yes-we-re-blunt-talkers-in-yorkshire-but-perhaps-we-ve-got-a-right-to-be-1-5986636/.

> Say your piece, your head held high,
> then have another brew.[45]

Dowle initially suggests the ludicrousness of these stereotypes: 'How applicable those noble characteristics might be to every single one of the 5.3 million people who live here is a matter of debate. At more than 6,000 square miles, Yorkshire is the largest county in Britain. And across those hills and dales and towns and cities, I bet you can't find two people who totally agree about what makes Yorkshire special.'[46] However, with a note of that famous 'Yorkshire pride', she continues that 'over the years, this idealised version of ourselves has been forged. We send out our ambassadors and they speak for us all. You see it in the conviction of the countless politicians our county has produced, from Harold Wilson to Betty Boothroyd', ultimately reaching a similar conclusion to Stuart Rawnsley: 'I can't think of another county in the whole of England and Wales which has a stronger identity of its own than Yorkshire.'[47]

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The stereotypes of 'indifference' and 'hard-headed[ness]' as well as the pride in Yorkshire's power to endure, can be attributed to the hardships that have been faced in the north, especially during the twentieth century. Throughout this thesis, contemporary and recent contexts will be juxtaposed with ancient matters pertaining to the definition of specific Yorkshire identity and poetry. In particular, Yorkshire's unique geology, frequently stereotyped as bleak and inhospitable – though, as we will discuss later in this thesis, the county's geology is incredibly diverse – can here be seen as projected onto the communities who live within it. Whilst the poetry and its 'places' here are divided along the man-made and bureaucratic borders of 'East' and 'West', the communities and regions themselves

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[45] Fox, 'Cup of Tea', 21.
[46] Dowle, 'Yes, we're blunt talkers.'
[47] Ibid.

are affected by physical borders and divisions (rivers, mountains, valleys): these are frequently present in the poetry that we will discuss throughout this thesis.

Of course, one of the more prominent spatial divisions is that between 'north' and 'south', with deep implications for identity and community, as well as the associated stereotypes. Andrew Duncan extends the 'hard' northern working-class and 'soft' southern bourgeois dichotomy to the region's literature too, 'with the South producing high-flown poetic beauties, religious and philosophical theories, and the North hard-headedly breaking them up into pieces and hanging onto its indifference.'[48] Whilst this notion may be something of a generalisation, Duncan's theories regarding the origins of this difference are more accurate: 'It is time to see through the alleged bleakness of northern poetry. It is implausible that this stems from the weather, which is after all only a couple of degrees colder than the South. It isn't the landscape, since most people don't live in the craggy and mountainous parts. It is more reasonable to look for the bleakness, isolation, aggression and so on in particular family structures.'[49] This extends to social and cultural history, too.

In one of the most relevant recent publications to this thesis, James Underwood's 2018 chapter "Pit Closure as Art': Poetry from the North of England', this 'bleak' atmosphere is contextualised within twentieth and twenty-first century northern poetry:

> The country was switching coal for inter-national capital, fish for finance, boats for bonds. And yet the consequences of this change were very much real, materially seen and felt right across the North, in its pits, works and docks, and on the housing estates which depended on them. This was not simply the decline of specific sectors, but the

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[48] Andrew Duncan, *Centre and Periphery in Modern British Poetry* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 133, 137-8.
[49] Ibid.

collapse of economic, social and cultural certainties that had underpinned life for centuries.[50]

What had once been a place of thriving industry – of course the Industrial Revolution 'was a crucial factor in the construction of a Northern sense of place' – rapidly descended into an industrial wasteland suffering widespread poverty and unemployment.[51] The long history of industry here contributed to the 'memory and nostalgia, benign pastness' that Davidson suggests as key to northern cultural imagery.[52] In terms of identity, this defining characteristic of the region has become obsolete: the place can only be described in terms of the past, because this is the deep-set vernacular imagery that is available. Whilst the government's Northern Powerhouse strategy has reportedly resulted in upward employment levels – specifically reporting that in 2016 'the North reached a record high employment rate of 72.6%', with '42% of the UK's total car production' and 'seven of the UK's 27 key tech clusters' in the north – as we will see throughout this thesis, for Yorkshire poets, literary critics and communities, this does little to make up for the hardship and mass unemployment of the past.[53] The effects of Brexit on this too, remain to be seen.

Brexit (Britain's exit from the European Union), is potentially going to be the defining political context of this first part of the twenty-first century and, as such, will be focal to the fifth and final chapter of this thesis.[54] In the referendum, Yorkshire returned some of the highest majorities for Leave, with Harrogate, Leeds and York the only regions of Yorkshire that voted to Remain. The repercussions of Brexit, and the extreme uncertainty that its as-yet-unknowable process has evoked, look set to have enormous negative consequences throughout the United Kingdom, particularly in the north of England (ironically, in the areas

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[50] James Underwood, "Pit Closure as Art': Poetry from the North of England' in *British Literature in Transition, 1980-2000, Accelerated Times* edited by Eileen Pollard and Berthold Schoene (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 159-160.
[51] Rawnsley, Constructing the North, 6.
[52] Davidson, *Ideas of North*, 199.
[53] HM Treasury, Northern Powerhouse Strategy (2016), 3, 6.
[54] Brexit is currently scheduled to occur on ~~April 12th~~ ~~May 22nd~~. ~~June 30th~~ ~~October 31st, 2019~~ January 31st 2020 – although that may have changed (again) in the time after submission.

that voted in some of the largest majorities to Leave the European Union), with potentially catastrophic effects on British unity, too.[55] Throughout this thesis, poetry and politics will be discussed side-by-side, from the effects of the Second World War, to the Miners' Strikes; the inclusion of this final Brexit chapter will demonstrate the importance of poetry as a means of channelling regional anxieties and the political frustrations of a region that has long felt its distance from London – the nation's traditional political (as well as literary) centre – detrimental in many senses, as well as something to be proud of.

The earlier chapters in this thesis will be divided by the boundaries of East and West. The concept of borders and boundaries within place are fascinating, and hold a contemporary resonance; as Parks suggests, 'with the exception of natural ones such as rivers and mountain ranges,' most of these 'are political constructs imposed on us from above.'[56] However, despite the lack of physical indicators, besides the demarcation of road signs, these borders are important to local and personal identities, markers of difference by which people and communities define themselves. It is particularly problematic, then, when these are changed: as the alterations of county boundaries within Yorkshire and Lincolnshire has proven. In 1974 the Local Government Act redefined the regions of Yorkshire: what was once divided into the North, East and West Ridings of Yorkshire (South Riding only existed in Winifred Holtby's novel of the same title), became North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire, with some of the more outlying places being redefined as Lancashire, whilst North and South Humberside united the north and south banks of the River Humber. This latter move was unsuccessful and quickly reversed, with East Yorkshire reinstated in the north, and Humberside's southern parts re-joining various areas of Lincolnshire.

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[55] Lisa O'Carroll, 'Brexit to have greatest negative impact on regions outside London', *Guardian*, Jul 4, 2018, accessed Mar 24, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/jul/04/brexit-greatest-negative-impact-regions-outside-london/.
[56] Parks, *Versions*, xiii.

Despite the borders and divisions between the different regions that will be explored throughout this thesis, Yorkshire – with the exception of the three Remain-voting cities – came, by a small majority, to the same conclusion in terms of its referendum vote: it will be interesting, then, to bring East and West together in response to this pivotal, contemporary moment. Poetry from both regions will be explored alongside one another in a national, rather than regional context, examining their similarities alongside their differences. Rather than regional boundaries, in this case, divisions in the poetry will be of a more ideological nature: this is a region (a country) divided, in an entirely different way, marking a final, poignant contrast to the other, powerful divisions that are prevalent throughout this thesis in its entirety.

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If, as Tim Cresswell writes in *In Place, Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*, place 'plays an important role in the creation and continuation of ideological beliefs', and, as Relph concurs, 'the relationship between community and place is indeed a very powerful one in which each reinforces the identity of the other, and in which the landscape is very much an expression of communally held beliefs and values and of interpersonal involvements,' then the imagery of landscape and place in poetry is an extremely powerful tool.[57] In 'Poetry and place', Welsh writer Owen Sheers suggests that, in conveying place, poets draw on 'local and national history, the light, the weather, the engagement of humans with that place, personal experience and memory and even the smell and sound of it.'[58] Robertson and Richards similarly find that landscapes 'are cultural products', 'physical, iconological and ideological', they 'are the products of human values, meanings and symbols, and of the, usually, dominant culture within society'.[59] The poet, then, has power through the replication of place to transport the reader,

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[57] Tim Cresswell, *In Place, Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 161; Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 38.
[58] Owen Sheers, 'Poetry and place: some personal reflections', in *Geography* 93, no. 3 (2008), 174.
[59] Ian Robertson and Penny Richards (ed), *Studying Cultural Landscapes* (London: Arnold, 2003), 2.

to inflect political, cultural, geographical and ideological contexts into their meaning, and to give voice to – and this is especially true in the case of the post-industrial North – what was once a relatively voiceless society in literature, culture and society as a whole.

In the introduction to her 2017 collection *Chronotopia*, Bradford-based Kate Fox writes that 'poems come from […] places soaked in time and time soaked in places.'[60] Place, here, is deeply and inextricably related to time, history and, consequentially, memory on both an individual and community-wide scale. The employment of a poet's local landscapes, whether central or incidental to a poem, carries hundreds, even thousands of years' worth of cultural and historical associations: as Robertson and Richards suggest, landscapes 'reveal, represent and symbolise the relationships of power and control out of which they have emerged and the human processes that have transformed and continue to transform them. Landscapes are, therefore, cultural images that often hide the processes that have made them – social, political, economic, spiritual – behind a placid and familiar surface.'[61] In an essay entitled 'Landscape and Identity', Catherine Brace further emphasises that 'landscape doesn't just show us what power relations exist, it actually *perpetuates* those relations; landscape is an instrument of cultural power […] In this sense, it is a form of communication: communicating aspects of identity and the power of some identities over others.'[62] This is particularly interesting, given the north's industrial disempowerment, and the imbalance of social, cultural and political power between the north and the south.

This thesis, then, will explore the various ways in which well- and lesser-known Yorkshire poets, both those born and raised within the county and others who relocated in later life, convey and interact with place in their poetry. Particular emphasis will be placed on the language that poets use to describe their county,

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[60] Fox, *Chronotopia*, 8.
[61] Robertson and Richards, *Cultural Landscapes*, 4.
[62] Catherine Brace, 'Landscape and Identity', in *Studying Cultural Landscapes*, edited by Ian Robertson and Penny Richards (London: Arnold, 2003), 124.

and their (and others') lives there. Ultimately, this thesis will conclude how East and West Yorkshire have affected the work of some of Britain's most famous poets, as well as many lesser-known ones; conversely, it will note the ways in which these poets and their writings have affected their 'place', in return. Analysis will be predominantly of a literary nature, but where appropriate, this will be complemented by techniques from linguistics and the digital humanities, as well as criticism originating from ecology, history, cultural geography, sociology and politics; the adoption of these will be guided entirely by the content of the diverse range of poems explored here. As well as examining the relationship between poetry, culture and regional stereotypes, we will gain a greater understanding of the role of Yorkshire's social, historical and political contexts in local literature. Just as we will discuss the reflections and repercussions of twentieth-century social and political crises on the work of Yorkshire writers, this thesis will conclude with an insight into the effects of Brexit on the poetry emerging from the region at this pivotal political moment in twenty-first century Britain.

I
THE EAST

With a current population of just under 340,000 across 930 square miles, the East Riding of Yorkshire is much smaller today than it once was.[1] Despite being an ancient county with historic boundaries (and officially becoming an administrative county in 1889), the East Riding's borders and boundaries have, over the past forty-five years, been vastly contentious. In 1974, as a result of the Local Government Act of 1972, the counties on both banks of the River Humber were united by the regions of North and South Humberside. This act was wildly unpopular and was abolished just over two decades later; in 1996 North Humberside reverted to its East Riding origins, with South Humberside re-joining North and North East Lincolnshire.[2] With its southern boundary at the River Humber, the present county stretches along the east coast, from Bempton and Flamborough to Spurn Point and as far inland to the west as Pollington, Elloughton and Stamford Bridge. Whilst the city of Kingston-upon-Hull (hereafter referred to simply as 'Hull') is self-governing, and therefore not actually included within the ceremonial county of the East Riding of Yorkshire, this is not the case in terms of parliamentary districts; Hull will, therefore, feature heavily in this section; 'East Yorkshire' or 'the East Riding' should be considered shorthand for 'Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire' throughout.

Philip Larkin moved to Hull in 1955 and lived there until his death in 1985: he experienced both the East Riding and North Humberside, although he was not alive to witness the East Riding reinstated.[3] Undoubtedly the region's most famous twentieth-century poet, Larkin has come to be synonymous with Hull poetry, his work etched on benches, floors and wall plaques throughout the city that became his home. Buildings and roads bear his name, with his face on a local bus and fibreglass

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[1] East Riding of Yorkshire Council, *Some basic statistics about the East Riding of Yorkshire, together with a selection of performance indicators and key facts about the East Riding of Yorkshire Council* (Beverley: East Riding of Yorkshire Council, 2009) 2.

[2] The Humberside Structural Change Order, 1995. *Local Government, England and Wales* (1995: 600), accessed Jul 29, 2019, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1995/600/contents/made/.

[3] James Booth, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014), 16, 198.

toads – created for a 2010 trail to mark twenty-five years since his passing – still 'squatting' throughout the city. Larkin's poetry was, of course, featured within the city's successful bid for the title of UK City of Culture 2017, and a large exhibition 'Philip Larkin: New Eyes, Each Year' ran for three months during the celebrations.

Larkin's presence, then, is still large within the city, his poetic voice resonant within the local 'poetry scene'; despite not actually being *from* Hull, his affiliation with the city was instrumental in establishing the local poetry community in the late twentieth century. The first chapter of this section will thus explore the work of Philip Larkin, and the ways in which he wrote and related to Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire. In the second, we will explore the work of other East Riding poets, from those writing at the same time as Larkin, to those living and publishing their poetry in Hull and East Yorkshire now. These will include works published in the two modern 'Hull' anthologies, *A Rumoured City: New Poets from Hull* (1982) edited by Douglas Dunn with a foreword from Larkin, and *Old City, New Rumours: A Hull Anthology* (2010), edited by Ian Gregson and Carol Rumens and published as part of the Larkin25 celebrations.

Chapter 2 will be framed by the long poem 'The City Speaks' written by East Yorkshire based poet and publisher Shane Rhodes. The poem, which was commissioned for the Hull UK City of Culture 2017 celebrations, was released at the beginning of the year of culture, and engraved in fountains installed in Queen Victoria Square in the city centre (a location that will be focal to several of the poems explored here).[4] Through the lens of both Larkin and Rhodes, then, we will examine the work of a vast selection of East Riding poets, discussing the various ways in which they relate to the region in their work; at the same time, we will consider the poetic legacy of the former writer within the present literary landscape.

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[4] Russ Litten, 'The City Speaks' in *The City Speaks: A Poem for Hull*, Shane Rhodes (Hull: Wrecking Ball Press, 2017), 31.

CHAPTER 1:
'Here is unfenced existence':
Philip Larkin and Hull

In 1982, three years before his death, Philip Larkin wrote of Hull: 'a place cannot produce poems, it can only not prevent them, and Hull is good at that.'[1] This lukewarm praise is typical of his attitude toward the city, which had been his home since he was appointed librarian of the university library in 1955.[2] As early as 1955, though, Hull was having an effect on Larkin's work: Larkin's second poetry collection *The Less Deceived* was published by The Marvell Press, based in Hessle (on the outskirts of Hull) in the same year that the poet relocated to the city. Whilst Larkin continues, in the aforementioned quote, to state that the city 'neither impresses nor insists,' Hull holds a shadowy presence in the background of several of his poems; besides its role in the poem 'Here', this presence remains largely unexplored. Indeed, much of the debate surrounding Larkin's relationship with Hull centres on whether or not he liked the city.[3] Given that the Larkin narrative is rather oversaturated by this topic of contention, this will only be discussed briefly here, with the remainder of the chapter focused not on whether Larkin *liked* the city, but on the impression it made on the poetry he wrote there.

Certainly, Larkin's attitude upon arrival in Hull seems less than enthusiastic: 'I wish I could think of just one nice thing to tell you about Hull – oh yes, well, *it's very nice & flat for cycling*: that's about the best I can say.'[4] However, Weston and Underwood – admittedly, in a book celebrating Hull's cultural history – have defended the poet's attitude towards the city, pointing out that the poet 'had something of a knack for seeming unenthusiastic about place.'[5] Indeed, Larkin's idiosyncratic, deprecating wit

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[1] Philip Larkin, 'Foreword,' in *A Rumoured City: New Poets from Hull*, ed. Douglas Dunn (Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe, 1982), 9.

[2] Prior to this, the poet who was born and raised in Coventry, had lived and worked in Oxford, Wellington (Shropshire), Leicester and Belfast.

[3] Derek Spooner, 'Reflections on the Place of Larkin,' *Area* 32, no. 2 (2000): 212.

[4] Philip Larkin, 'To Ansell and Judy Egerton – 26 July 1955,' in *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin*, edited by Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 246.

[5] Daniel Weston and James Underwood, "'A Poetic Place": The Hull of Philip Larkin,' in *Hull: Culture, History, Place*, ed. David J. Starkey, David Atkinson, Briony McDonagh, Sarah McKeon and Elisabeth Salter (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 260.

has been acknowledged as a frequent facet of his multiple epistolary personae; lines from his letters, removed from the context of the correspondence itself and the particular relationship it sustained, become unreliable and one-dimensional forms of evidence. These have been frequently – and recently – used inaccurately within the media to suggest the poet's distaste for the city.[6] Consequently, in a recent spate of documentaries about Larkin, scholars and critics have felt the need to weigh in on this debate, with John Wedgwood Clarke stating, 'at first Larkin had said that Hull was a dreary place, but he changed his mind'.[7] In an academic context, and from a literary standpoint, this seems to be rather beside the point. Regardless of the poet's like or dislike of the city, it was in Hull that Larkin lived most of his adult life and produced much of his mature poetry.

Discussion of the ways in which Hull features within Larkin's poems tends to be limited, sometimes simply dismissed as 'it doesn't': Janice Rossen finds that Larkin's poetry 'does not seem to imply that the poet had a personal relationship with Hull', whilst James Booth suggests that 'the value of his poetry does not depend on any local reference.'[8] Whilst this is true, an understanding of the particular East Yorkshire landscape in which Larkin was writing enhances the value of the poetry; a detailed exploration of the relationship between Hull and East Yorkshire and Larkin's work (rather than just his life) is warranted, and will lend further insight to existing critique. In his essays about Larkin and Hull, Derek Spooner is reluctant to confirm a direct link between Larkin's poetry and the city, arguing that 'it is an exaggeration to describe Larkin as a poet of place' as, whilst 'a handful of Larkin's poems speak to the reader very directly about Hull and its immediate environs, enhancing our awareness of the city [...] the predominant sense of place conveyed is

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[6] Stephen Walsh, "'What a hole": Hull has embraced Philip Larkin – but did the love go both ways?' *Guardian,* May 30, 2017. Accessed May 21, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/may/30/hull-hole-philip-larkin-poet-love-both-ways?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other/.

[7] 'Through the Lens of Larkin: The Art of Larkin's Photography,' BBC1, Sept 15, 2017, television broadcast.

[8] Janice Rossen, *Philip Larkin: His Life's Work* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 53; James Booth, 'From Here to Bogland: Larkin, Heaney and the Poetry of Place,' in *New Larkins for Old: Critical Essays*, ed. James Booth (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 190.

not specific to any locality.'[9] Whilst Larkin's poems may not be as explicitly rooted in the Yorkshire landscape as, say, those of Hughes's *Remains of Elmet*, this does not mean to say that the East Riding is not present in his work. This chapter will dispute this argument of placelessness within Larkin's poetry. The first section will explore the position of the narrator in Larkin's Hull poems, whilst the second will discuss the implicit Hull-based social and historical contexts that lie under the surface of his poems, to clearly demonstrate the subtle presence of Hull and East Yorkshire within the poet's oeuvre.

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Bard or bird?
Aerial perspectives in Larkin's 'Hull' poems

Perhaps the most important – and interesting – place to start, when discussing Larkin and place, is the position of the poetic voice. Larkin's narrators are habitually detached, separate from the scenes that they seek to describe. With relation to place, Rossen considers this detachment evidence that the poet is 'rejecting any idea of rootedness' whilst Spooner describes it as an 'outsideness', characteristic of Larkin's position 'as a relative newcomer to the city.'[10] This 'outsideness' keeps the narrative persona separate from the communities and landscapes that are contained within the poems. In 'High Windows' and 'The Whitsun Weddings', for example, this separation manifests as a window: in the former poem, the poet imagines life beyond 'the sun-comprehending glass'; in the latter, the narrator observes through the windows of his 'three-quarters-empty train'.[11] As Rossen notes, 'Larkin is a spectator, separated from the landscape by glass.'[12] There is a barrier separating the poet from any intimate or emotional connection, maintaining his peripheral position, but importantly the barrier is transparent, his view unobscured.

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[9] Spooner, 'Reflections,' 215, 210.
[10] Rossen, *Philip Larkin*, 53; Spooner, 'Reflections,' 212.
[11] Philip Larkin, 'High Windows,' and 'The Whitsun Weddings,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 80, 56.
[12] Spooner, 'Reflections,' 212; Rossen, *Philip Larkin*, 52.

A further narrative viewpoint, that is less widely discussed but is vastly prevalent in Larkin's work, is that in which the poetic persona is positioned not just *outside* but *above* the scene. This is possibly the case in 'High Windows', if we understand 'high' to mean that the windows are situated at a position of height in the building, rather than merely being 'tall' or 'large' windows. However, this narrative perspective really comes to the fore in poems including 'Here' (1961) and 'The Building' (1972), both of which will be considered extensively in this chapter. With the poem 'Here' in particular, the place of the narrator has long been a topic of debate and disagreement within Larkin criticism. The poem is in a constant state of movement, as is immediately apparent from the first stanza:

> Swerving east, from rich industrial shadows
> And traffic all night north; swerving through fields
> Too thin and thistled to be called meadows,
> And now and then a harsh-named halt, that shields
> Workmen at dawn; swerving to solitude […][13]

Here, the narrator is travelling through the countryside of either East Yorkshire or Lincolnshire, towards Hull. As readers we pass the River Humber – 'the widening river's slow presence' – as it widens towards the Humber Estuary, arriving, at the beginning of the second stanza, in the midst of the specific architecture of Hull city centre:

> Gathers to the surprise of a large town:
> Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster
> Beside grain scattered streets, barge-crowded water, […][14]

Larkin's fast-paced narrative, listing the sights and sites of the city centre, travels quickly through Hull, barely allowing the reader time to gather their own bearings before taking off east, out of the city, towards the countryside:

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[13] Philip Larkin, 'Here,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 49.
[14] Ibid.

> […] Pastoral of ships up streets, the slave museum,
> Tattoo-shops, consulates, grim head-scarfed wives;
> And out beyond its mortgaged half-built edges
> Fast-shadowed wheat-fields, running high as hedges […][15]

Whilst an intimate knowledge of Hull allows for a detailed navigational interpretation of the narrator leaving the docks behind, passing Wilberforce House museum and the city's growing suburbs, even the uninitiated reader can sense the rhythmic urgency of the first two lines quoted above falling away as the heavily-populated city gives way to the more open countryside. In the fourth and final stanza, the narrator finally comes to a stop:

> Loneliness clarifies. Here silence stands
> Like heat. Here leaves unnoticed thicken,
> Hidden weeds flower, neglected waters quicken,
> Luminously-peopled air ascends;
> And past the poppies bluish neutral distance
> Ends the land suddenly beyond a beach
> Of shapes and shingle. Here is unfenced existence:
> Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach.[16]

There is a certain stagnancy permitted of the poet and his reader here, a stillness as 'silence stands/ Like heat' that is celebrated, whilst nature goes on around them. In the first four lines, the narrator relaxes, free from the pressures of the city. As the 'luminously-peopled air ascends' it is lifting away; the verse slows, as the frantic lists of the city – 'Cheap suits, red kitchen-ware, sharp shoes, iced lollies,/ Electric mixers, toasters, washers, driers' – have no place here. Interestingly, in the second half of the stanza, we presume that the narrator has come to a halt because so has the land: he can go no further. However, here, his 'existence' is *unfenced*: our narrator is free. It is not the 'unfenced existence' that is 'out of reach' of a narrator desperate for escape; rather, the narrator, when he is 'here', is *himself* 'out of reach'.

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[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

That the end of the land represents freedom for the narrator of 'Here' lends weight to the interpretation that the narrator is, in fact, taking on the perspective of a bird in this poem. This also addresses the long-held disagreement among Larkin scholars. Whilst James Booth (2014) argues that 'no vehicles are mentioned, but "Here" moves implicitly from sitting in a swerving train approaching the city to walking around the streets, to pedalling a bicycle through the suburbs and out across the flat landscape to the sea', this explanation, on the whole, seems too awkward and over-complicated.[17] It certainly is not the smooth journey that the reader accompanies the narrator on throughout the poem.

Taking an entirely different line of argument, J. Ryan Hibbett (2019) writes that the poem:

> features a disembodied speaker – one who supplies an ordering consciousness yet assumes the gifts of perspective and continuity bestowed only by modern technology and movement. The speaker's gaze runs akin to a cinematographer's tracking shot, as often used to create a sweeping, context-oriented introduction […] In actuality, of course, the seemingly neutralized speaker is highly selective, filtering through memory, choice, and poetic technique the reality of the landscape; as with film itself, a fragmented and spliced sequence is made to seem an uninterrupted whole.[18]

In 1993, Andrew Motion had similarly suggested that the journey is viewed through a camera mounted on a helicopter.[19] Whilst Hibbett's argument goes some way to addressing the 'smoothness' of the travel that makes Booth's explanation uncomfortable, it is presumably reliant on Motion's belief – for the aerial shots at least – that the narrative viewpoint is inspired by the view from hovering aircraft. This, too, is an uncomfortable assertion, due to the disruptive presence that a helicopter would provide, in contrast to the essential noiselessness of some of the scenes that Larkin describes here. 'Silence' would not 'stand like heat' in the coastal-

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[17] Booth, *Life, Art and Love*, 265.
[18] J. Ryan Hibbett, *Philip Larkin, Popular Culture and the English Individual* (London: Lexington, 2019), 101-102.
[19] Andrew Motion, *A Writer's Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 250.

countryside landscape that had just been disturbed by the unignorable presence of a helicopter; neither would we be able to observe the 'residents from raw estates' going about their daily lives in the city centre if a helicopter were observing them. Routines, here, would be disrupted; if the helicopter had a camera, people in the streets would surely be looking at it. The only presence, besides the human narrator, that could travel, unacknowledged, down these streets is the bird; of these two possible narrative figures, only the bird can travel smoothly and quickly from rural Lincolnshire, through Hull city centre, and out toward the East Yorkshire coast.

Particularly apparent, from the bird-narrator's perspective, are the towering points on the skyscape: 'Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster'.[20] So too, of course, are the region's watercourses; whilst the manmade structures – many of which were built during Larkin's tenure in the city – form important points of navigation, the geographical landmarks – including the Humber Estuary, the rivers Hull and Humber that dissect the city, and the seas that lie beyond them – are even more distinct when viewed from the sky. In *Philip Larkin, Popular Culture and the English Individual*, Hibbett makes the interesting distinction between the birds-eye view, and what he terms the 'worms-eye view' in Larkin's poetry.[21] Whilst, in the theory we explore here, the latter position can be explained as the bird-narrator occupying a ground-level position, Hibbett's observation is valid and valuable: when buildings (or 'Larkitecture', as Hibbett terms them) appear in Larkin's poems, they either loom enormously before the narrator, or the narrative voice speaks from a top-level position, often even from the skies above them.

This interest in height is particularly interesting with regards to the years in which Larkin lived in Hull (1955 to 1985). The city the poet arrived in was still very much in a state of post-war rebuild: as the most bombed city outside of London during the Second World War, Hull was still recovering, in a physical and economic sense in

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[20] Larkin, 'Here,' 49.
[21] Hibbett, *the English Individual*, 98.

1955.[22] Whilst exploring the city, the poet photographed a bomb site that remained in the city over a decade after the last of the bombing took place:

Image 1: a photograph, taken by Larkin in 1955,
of a bomb site that remained in the city centre.[23]

Whilst the city centre was being rebuilt as a result of the intense and concentrated bombings, slum clearance was taking place, too; rather than rebuilding the inner-city accommodation that had been destroyed, and to replace purpose-built dock-workers' terraces that, by modern standards, were deemed uninhabitable, new housing estates were built on the outskirts and suburbs of the city. The first of these estates, Bilton Grange, was completed in the same year that Larkin moved to Hull, with Longhill, Greatfield, Orchard Park, Ings Road and Bransholme to follow in the next decade.[24] Thus the 'mortgaged half-built edges' in 'Here' are those of a city growing and attempting to improve the living conditions for its people.[25] The Department of Economic Affairs' 1967 report on Humberside (written six years after the 1961 publication of 'Here') highlights a shortfall of quality housing as one of the

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[22] Department for Economic Affairs, 'Humberside: A Feasibility Study,' 1967. Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Office, LAB 21/232, The National Archives, Kew.
[23] Philip Larkin, Photographs of Philip Arthur Larkin, U DLV/2/5/30; Richard Bradford. *The Importance of Elsewhere: Philip Larkin's Photographs* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2015), 126-27.
[24] Jo Byrne, 'Housing and the Move to the Estates,' in *Hull: Culture, History, Place*, ed. David J. Starkey, David Atkinson, Briony McDonagh, Sarah McKeon and Elisabeth Salter (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 250.
[25] Larkin, 'Here,' 49.

area's key barriers to economic expansion.[26] The report projects a significant improvement in this by 1970: this process is seen in progress in 'Here'. However, the estates are described by Larkin as 'raw': at the time of 'Here' the areas are new, the multiple implications of the adjective acknowledges the fresh pain that the dispersal of relocated communities was causing to the people of Hull, whose wounds of war were not yet healed.

Houses, however, generally occupy only one or two storeys above ground level; Larkin's narrator, particularly in Hull, is preoccupied with structures that occupy significantly more vertical space. Three important, sky-scraping constructions were erected during Larkin's life in Hull, and feature prominently within his poetry: Hull Royal Infirmary, the Humber Bridge, and the Brynmor Jones Library (a project which, in 1955, the poet had just acquired ownership of). The Humber Bridge will be discussed in detail with reference to the poem 'Bridge for the Living' later in this chapter; the hospital and the library, however, prove illuminating to explore alongside one another, through the two poems, 'The Building' and 'By day, a lifted study-storehouse…', that were written about them, respectively.

In 'The Building' (1972), Larkin's narrator is fixated on the height and the visual image of the hospital, commanding the reader to 'see' what he impactfully described as 'This clean-sliced cliff':

> Higher than the handsomest hotel
> The lucent comb shows up for miles, but see…
>
> […]
>
> For see how many floors it needs, how tall
> It's grown now…[27]

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[26] DFEA, 'Humberside,' 21.
[27] Philip Larkin, 'The Building,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 84-6.

The height of the building – significantly, the fact that it is taller than the 'locked church' that we gaze down upon, given that church spires traditionally loomed over their parishes – is a comment on mortality and the replacement of religious healing by the National Health Service. The prominence of the 'cliff' on the landscape that Larkin once remarked was 'very nice & flat for cycling' is highly significant for the poet whose fear of death is now well-known.[28] Whilst critics do not reach a consensus on the specific hospital Larkin refers to here, with Watt and Burnett believing that the poem refers to Kingston General Hospital, generally it is agreed that the poem describes Hull Royal Infirmary, which replaced it ('how tall/ It's grown now').[29] Given that the first draft of the poem is dated 17th January 1972, it seems likely that – whether or not the 'visit to the hospital' that 'inspired' the poem was to the new Infirmary or earlier to the General Hospital – the description of the architecture does relate to the thirteen floor Infirmary that opened in 1967:[30]

Image 2: the 'lucent comb' of Hull Royal Infirmary.[31]

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[28] Larkin to Ansell and Judy Egerton, Jul 26, 1955, *Selected Letters*, 246.

[29] Motion, *A Writer's Life,* 420; Archie Burnett, 'The Building,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete* Poems, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 458.

[30] Burnett, 'The Building,' 458; Larkin to C. B. Cox, Aug 3, 1972, *Selected Letters*, 461; Motion, *A Writer's Life*, 420.

[31] 'Hull Royal Infirmary celebrates 50th birthday in City of Culture year.' ITV News, Jun 16, 2017. Accessed Sept 29, 2017. http://www.itv.com/news/calendar/2017-06-16/hull-royal-infirmary-celebrates-50th-birthday-in-city-of-culture-year/.

At 57 metres tall, the distinctive building towers over Hull; importantly, like the Humber Bridge, it is visible from the Brynmor Jones Library: it 'shows up for miles'.[32] The resonance of Larkin's 'cliff' imagery here, and the relevance to the poet's fear of death, is apparent in the reminiscences of his 1970 poem 'How':

> How high they build hospitals!
> Lighted cliffs, against dawns
> Of days people will die on.
> I can see one from here.[33]

Here, the 'cliffs' are 'lighted' *against* death; they are illuminated, they are visible. Whilst still a danger, the 'days people will die on' an ever-implicit threat, in 'How' the 'cliffs' are a form of salvation against death. The line 'I can see one from here' is ambiguous: can the poet see a hospital, or see a person dying? If he can see the former, the likelihood is that it contains the latter. However, as the cliff 'grows' toward the structure in 'The Building', the higher it gets, the greater threat it becomes to the ageing poet. The salvation of the cliff is inseparable from the threat of the sea; the higher the 'cliff', the more dangerous the potential fall from it. For the poet who wrote in 1971, 'I dread hospitals, & the very fact of being in one is enough to frighten me', the Building serves as an ever-visible reminder of his own mortality, 'a struggle to transcend/ The thought of dying'.[34] It has been widely agreed that the poem's allusive title acts as a representation of this fear: 'by refusing to name names Larkin registers something unspeakable in the patients' distress.'[35] Whilst 'The Building' as a referential term alludes to shared, local knowledge, implying that a local reader could hazard a safe guess as to which 'building' the poet is describing, the ambiguity is akin, too, to the uncertainty of a hospital visit, or indeed of one's own, unpredictable lifespan.

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[32] Motion, *A Writer's Life*, 420

[33] 'Philip Larkin and the NHS.' People's History of the NHS. Accessed Oct 3, 2017. https://peopleshistorynhs.org/encyclopaedia/philip-larkin-and-the-nhs/.; Philip Larkin, 'How,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 112-13; Motion, *A Writer's Life*, 418.

[34] Larkin to Monica Jones, Mar 11, 1971, in Burnett, 'The Building', 458; Larkin, 'The Building,' 86.

[35] Motion, *A Writer's Life*, 420.

Interestingly, whilst it is generally agreed that 'The Building' is in fact Hull Royal Infirmary, aesthetically, Larkin's description could easily be confused with the Brynmor Jones Library. The two high-rise buildings, which themselves 'rose' almost simultaneously, both had an unmistakable impact on Hull's skyline. Both were on the outskirts of the city centre; a near-straight line (as the 'bird' flies), with Pearson Park and Larkin's top-floor flat almost halfway between them. The poet, then, was living between the two landmarks that were symbolic of work, and of death. This is particularly poignant, given that Larkin's place as perhaps the best-known Hull poet is a result of both his work, and his death and ultimate resting-place in the city. If we are to believe the sentiment expressed in 'Toads' (1954) and 'Toads Revisited' (1962) the poet is working his way to eventual death in the parallel building just 2.5 miles north of the hospital:

> Why should I let the toad *work*
> Squat on my life?[36]

> Give me your arm old toad;
> Help me down Cemetery Road.[37]

In the first poem, work is a barrier to the narrator living his life; in the latter, it is guiding him toward death. Despite the fact that the poet actually died in a small, private hospital rather than the NHS-run 'Building', that work and death seem to go hand-in-hand for the 'Toad' narrators lends the fact that Larkin's library and the Infirmary were built at similar times an extra note of intrigue that surely impacted his perceptions and descriptions when writing 'The Building'.

Larkin had, after all, gathered a vast knowledge of the *process* of building landmark structures by 1972. He took charge of and altered the plans for the university library upon arrival at Hull; he claimed that the initial plans 'looked like a rejected design

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[36] Philip Larkin, 'Toads,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 38-9

[37] Philip Larkin, 'Toads Revisited,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 55-6.

for a cinema' that would be 'the laughing stock of the British Isles'.[38] The poet whose work and cultural influence came to be so inextricably associated with the city, had a significant but lesser-known and -acknowledged impact on the city's skyscape, too. The ultimate design was, like the Infirmary, state-of-the-art with modern facilities; the two, as we have acknowledged, were architecturally similar, and even the streets surrounding the buildings were alike, with lines three to four of 'The Building' – 'All round it close-ribbed streets rise and fall/ Like a great sigh out of the last century' – applicable to both structures.[39] In the short poem 'By day a lifted study-storehouse…' – 'an eightieth birthday tribute to Sir Brynmor Jones', after whom the library was named – Larkin wrote:[40]

> By day, a lifted study-storehouse; night
> > Converts it to a flattened cube of light.
> Whichever's shown, the symbol is the same:
> > Knowledge; a University; a name.[41]

Of course, the intense 'knowledge' housed within these buildings is similar; so too, the 'cube of light' directly compares with the 'lucent comb' of 'The Building'. The metaphorical descriptions of the 'study-storehouse' here could apply equally to either of the two lofty structures.

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[38] Larkin to Ansell and Judy Egerton, May 31, 1955, *Selected Letters*, 243.

[39] Larkin, 'The Building,' 84.

[40] Archie Burnett, 'By day, a lifted study-storehouse,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete* Poems, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 507.

[41] Philip Larkin, 'By day, a lifted study-storehouse,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 120.

Image 3: The Brynmor Jones Library in 2016.[42]

In line with Larkin's revised plans, the first section of the library was completed in 1960, with the second stage of the development – an eight-storey extension – completed in 1970.[43] The construction of the library is immortalised within Larkin's letters and photographs. Whilst the cost of the library was small in comparison to the £4,000,000 investment that the NHS made in Hull Royal Infirmary, it still made him uneasy: 'It's rather awful to have your judgement backed to the extent of £300,000: every day I go to look at the pile-drivers bumping away & the excavators chewing dispiritedly at the sticky banks. I hope we have a mild spring so that they can get on with it, & no relaxation of the credit squeeze either.'[44] Lines 24 to 26 of 'The Building', which have thus far been discussed in relation to the hospital's comparable height against that of its much smaller predecessor, also becomes a comment on the NHS and the universal healthcare arrangement of the welfare state:[45]

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[42] 'Brynmor Jones Library,' (photograph, University of Hull, Hull), http://www.hull.ac.uk/editor-assets/images/Hull-Uni-campus/library/Brynmor-Jones-Library-and-Plaza-Exterior-BJL-UNI-8090-min-Cropped-1900x1268.jpg/; note that whilst the red-brick extension is new, the high-rise levels remain as in the plans approved by Larkin.
[43] Philip Larkin, 'An Interview with the *Paris Review*,' in *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-82*, ed. Philip Larkin (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 56.
[44] 'Hull Royal Infirmary celebrates'; Larkin to Patsy Murphy (neé Avis), Jan 10, 1958, *Selected Letters*, 282.
[45] 'Philip Larkin and the NHS.'

> For see how many floors it needs, how tall
> It's grown by now, and how much money goes
> In trying to correct it.[46]

'Trying to correct it' refers to the health of the ever-growing population in 'The Building', but similarly could apply to the construction of the Brynmor Jones Library, which proved expensive both in terms of money and time. In May 1958 Larkin wrote that he was 'watching the girders rise on the site of my library, about half as fast as they ought to'; three months later he recalled that 'Some of the new library fell in on Thursday! It's going very slowly.'[47] By May 1959, the library was taking shape: 'My library approaches the final stages: after months of grumblings about the south end the [vice-chancellor] has at last walked round and looked at the north end, which is much, much worse, being a mere jumble of pipes and windows in no kind of order […] Still, I don't care. My desk will be 8' x 4' […] & I shall have a private lavatory.'[48] Despite its tribulations, Larkin was keen to document the construction of the library: a folder of the poet's photographs of the project's progress, now housed in the Hull University archives, contains 129 items from various stages of development:

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[46] Philip Larkin, Photographs of Philip Arthur Larkin, U DLV/3/82.
[47] Larkin to Judy Egerton, May 25, 1985, *Selected Letters*, 286; Larkin to Judy Egerton, Aug 24, 1958, *Selected Letters*, 289.
[48] Larkin to Judy Egerton, May 5, 1959, *Selected Letters*, 302.

Images 4 and 5: Larkin, photographed by an unacknowledged colleague,
surveys the progress of the Brynmor Jones Library (1957-1959).

Images 6 to 9: a selection of some of the many photographs Larkin took to document the
first stage of the library's construction (1957-1959).[49]

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[49] Philip Larkin, Photographs of Philip Arthur Larkin, U DLV/3/82.

Images 10 and 11: two of Larkin's many photographs of the second stage of the
Brynmor Jones Library construction (1967-1970).[50]

A final comparison between the two buildings is the illusion of class-levelling,
brought to the fore by the financial anxieties implicit within 'The Building'. The
narrator describes the local, working-class Hull neighbourhood that houses the
Infirmary, from his position (his perch, perhaps?) which is, in this case, within the
confines of 'The Building'. The bird, it seems, is caged here.

> Traffic; a locked church; short terraced streets
> Where kids chalk games, and girls with hair-dos fetch
>
> Their separates from the cleaners[51]

Beyond the walls of the hospital, within which the narrator observes, life goes on; as
children play in the streets, women are running their errands, going about their
daily business. If we adopt 'The Building's bee-imagery for a moment, the narrator
may be within the 'lucent comb', but it is outside that appears to be a *hive* of activity,
where the observing figure longs to be. Life has paused for the patients within the
hospital, for the time being at least. Their daily activities have been disturbed: it is
'Half-past eleven on a working day' yet, unlike the people observed on the streets

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[50] Philip Larkin, Photographs of Philip Arthur Larkin, U DLV/3/174, U DLV/3/175.
[51] Larkin, 'The Building, 85.

outside, it must be impossible to tell which vocations the other patients have been temporarily extracted from. The hospital is

> Like an airport lounge, but those who tamely sit
> On rows of steel chairs turning the ripped mags
> Haven't come far. More like a local bus
> These outdoor clothes and half-filled shopping bags
> And faces restless and resigned[52]

The 'local bus' here is reminiscent of the trolley-buses that bring the 'residents of raw estates to the shops in 'Here'. But, unlike in 'Here', the transport is a point of ambiguity in relation to class: there is no indication of where the patients travelled from; it is entirely possible that they were unable or unwilling to travel by private transport to the hospital for a variety of reasons. Similarly, the 'outdoor clothes and half-filled shopping bags' could indicate that the patients lack the money to fill their bags, or to possess and wear appropriate clothing; equally, though, this could be indicative of a day that has been interrupted: perhaps they were not aware that they would be sat in a hospital lounge when they set off on their shopping trip.

Indeed, 'Here' provides an illuminating point of reference when interpreting the Hull-based economics of 'The Building'. It is notable that the 'cheap suits' and 'red kitchen-ware' are 'desires' in the former poem, not 'purchases'; perhaps the 'cut-price' crowd are unable to 'Push through plate-glass swing doors' to acquire them?[53] In the NHS hospital, however, there is an implication of social levelling. Despite it being 'Half-past eleven on a working day', the hospital is full of patients, their occupations are irrelevant:

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[52] Larkin, 'The Building,' 85.
[53] Larkin, 'Here,' 49.

as they climb

　　　　To their appointed levels, how their eyes
　　　　Go to each other, guessing[54]

In an encyclopaedia entry on 'Philip Larkin and the NHS', 'People's History of the NHS' accurately note that, in the poem, 'there appears almost a conflation of the climbing of the hospital stairs with a notion of social mobility, but that all reach their "appointed levels" suggests an ambivalence towards the possibility of a truly egalitarian system.'[55] There does not seem to be any particular social code on which their 'levels' are 'appointed', hence the other patients' preoccupation with 'guessing'. This is particularly interesting when we consider the parallels between 'The Building' and 'By day, a lifted study-storehouse…' and the economics of late-twentieth-century English society. Just as the NHS was intended to be indiscriminate in its provision of services, student grants and scholarships systems were supposed to ensure that higher education was available to all those who were sufficiently able. In practice though, in 1970s Britain only one in seven teenagers went to university (one in eight by the end of the decade); many did not even go to sixth-form because of the lack of certainty regarding funding and university places for those who could not otherwise afford it.[56] Similarly, those who could afford to pay for their healthcare would still likely opt for private provision (Philip Larkin died in a private hospital close to his home in 1985).

Rather than being instrumental in class-levelling, then, the ascension to 'appointed levels' in 'The Building' could be a purgatorial image. Instead of religious devotion, 'The unseen congregations' are divided by very secular means:

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[54] Larkin, 'The Building,' 85.
[55] 'Philip Larkin and the NHS.'
[56] 'From student grants to tuition fees.' *Guardian*, Jan 23, 2003. Accessed Nov 2, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/jan/23/uk.education/.

> The unseen congregations whose white rows
> Lie set apart above – women, men;
> Old, young; crude facets of the only coin
>
> This place accepts.[57]

On the wards, patients are 'congregated' and divided by age, gender and, presumably, the nature of their illnesses. Their individual lives and identities have been subsumed by their very presence in the hospital; rather than 'outdoor clothes', there is a uniformity of hospital gowns and bedding in the 'white rows'. The enjambment 'the only coin// This place accepts' introduces further ambiguity: is human illness here little more than monetary, or is the narrator adopting a play-on-words of the idiom 'two sides of the same coin' to express the identical vulnerability of all people, no matter their social status, to death? If the latter is taken as the prominent interpretation, then the line 'This place accepts' recognises that the NHS is universally accessible. In reality, this dual meaning is fundamental to a reading of the poet's scepticism of the NHS and innate distrust of hospitals, acknowledged in his confession: 'I'm a craven BUPA subscriber'.[58]

Notably, too, when the narrator looks out from the hospital, they see a 'locked church'. In 1992, Nigel Lawson claimed that 'The National Health Service is the closest thing the English have to a religion.'[59] Religion, of course, was (and is) allegedly accessible to all, regardless of status. Whilst Lawson's memoir was published twenty years after 'The Building', the political opinion is relevant to, and resonant within, the poem. The church is closed, people instead come to the hospital 'to confess that something has gone wrong'.[60] If the hospital has replaced the church, then the 11:30am weekday visit has replaced Sunday worship, confession and prayers. In the final stanza of the poem (and the single line that marks the poem's end), the narrator questions this worship of universal healthcare and the enormous

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[57] Larkin, 'The Building,' 85.
[58] Larkin to Barbara Pym, Jun 26, 1971, *Selected Letters*, 440.
[59] Nigel Lawson: *The View from No. 11: Memoirs of a Tory Radical* (London: Bantam, 1992), 613.
[60] Larkin, 'The Building, 85.

hospital (in terms of both height and monetary investment) that it has brought with it:

> This place accepts. All know they are going to die.
> Not yet, perhaps not here, but in the end,
> And somewhere like this. This is what it means,
> This clean-sliced cliff; a struggle to transcend
> The thought of dying, for unless its powers
> Outbuild cathedrals nothing contravenes
> The coming dark, though crowds each evening try
>
> With wasteful, weak, propitiatory flowers.[61]

These final lines undermine the entire poem with a feeling of futility. Ultimately, we will all die; whilst the provision of healthcare funded by the state is capable of prolonging life (or, perhaps, prolonging death?), like religion it cannot provide immortality. Unlike the older hospital buildings, 'The Building' is not unassuming and does not blend in with the residential dwellings in the nearby streets. If size is equated with importance, with its new, towering height, the hospital has replaced the church spire as the most important building in the city, as well as being the most notable landmark on the skyline. For the poet, the constant reminder of his own mortality is a further imposition on the landscape; even the dark of night does not hide the 'lucent comb', the 'Lighted cliffs, against dawns/ Of days people will die on'. If anything, it becomes all the more apparent.

The levelling power of the hospital, and the ambiguity it causes, is threatening to the narrator here. Whilst, in other poems we have explored in this section, a position at great height has been reassuring, distancing for the narrator, in 'The Building' this is noticeably reassessed. As the narrator looks down over Hull's streets, the distance from the everyday life within the city does not allow the implicit sense of superiority or knowledgeability that is often suggestive of 'looking down upon' someone or something. Neither does the distance permit the freedom that is generally evoked

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[61] Ibid, 85-86.

when Larkin's bird-narrator takes to the skies. It is notable that the view of the narrator in 'The Building' cannot travel beyond the ward-window's immediate sightlines: limited to a view of the 'short terraced streets', the narrator is unable to 'fly' coastward again until his fate is medically decided.[62] Instead, the narrator's distance from the movement of the city is a reminder that, in illness – or even in death – life goes on, unreachably, without us. Whilst it seems unlikely that there is correlation between the severity of illness and the height of the ward, the image of the cliff provides extra anxiety behind the narrative: the higher up in 'The Building', it seems, the further there is to fall.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

'An end-of-the line sense of freedom':
Hull contexts in Larkin's poetry

When Douglas Dunn edited the local anthology *A Rumoured City: New Poets from Hull* (1982) it was Larkin – under whom Dunn had worked in the university library, and who was the region's most famous contemporary poet – who provided the foreword. The resulting piece, which Jean Hartley regarded 'the finest tribute the area could wish for' is full of references to Larkin's own poems, as well as a deep sense of freedom.[63] This is present both explicitly – 'When your train comes to rest in Paragon Station against a row of docile buffers, you alight with an end-of-the-line sense of freedom'[64] – and implicitly, through references back to 'Here':

> People are slow to leave it, quick to return. And there are others who
> come, as they think, for a year or two, and stay a lifetime, sensing that
> they have found a city that is in the world, yet sufficiently on the edge of
> it to have a different resonance. Behind Hull is the plain of Holderness,
> lonelier and lonelier, and after that the birds and lights of Spurn Head,
> and then the sea. One can go ten years without seeing these things, yet

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[62] Ibid, 85.

[63] Jean Hartley, *Philip Larkin's Hull and East Yorkshire* (Beverley: The Hutton Press, 1995), 44-45.

[64] Philip Larkin, 'Foreword,' in *A Rumoured City: New Poets from Hull*, ed. Douglas Dunn (Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe, 1982), 9.

they are always there, giving Hull the air of having its face half-turned towards distance and silence, and what lies beyond them.[65]

Echoes of 'Here' are numerous: we can recall the 'Loneliness' that 'clarifies' for the narrator of 'Here'; so too, the 'bluish neutral distance' of the sea contributes to the reciprocal sense of peace and freedom between the two pieces. We can only imagine 'what lies beyond' the 'distance and silence' that Larkin describes in his preface – the 'face half-turned' recalls the phrase 'half-turned toward Europe' that we will soon see in 'Bridge for the Living' – but it seems likely that it is the 'unfenced existence', the freedom that the East Yorkshire coast allows the poet when 'Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach'.[66]

This sense of freedom is interesting here, both in relation to the concept of the bird-perspective, and in terms of Larkin's poetic relationship to Hull more generally. If, as the University of Michigan's *Dictionary of Symbolism* notes, 'the bird is often the disembodied human soul, free of its physical constrictions,' then the 'birds and lights of Spurn Head' are easily construed as the free, unconstrained, unrooted soul of the poet.[67] In a biographical sense, Hull provided Larkin a certain 'distance and silence', particularly from his mother and his long-term partner; he had previously lived in close proximity to both women.[68] Interestingly, Larkin wrote in 'The Importance of Elsewhere' (1955), with reference to Belfast:

> Lonely in Ireland, since it was not home,
> Strangeness made sense…[69]

Whilst, in this sense, 'home' refers to England, the disconnection from home that is represented in this poem is relevant to the poet's life in Hull, too. In a 1963 letter to Barbara Pym, Larkin claimed to be 'writing this at my "home", which is what one

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[65] Ibid.
[66] Larkin, 'Here,' 49.
[67] Allison Protas, Geoff Brown, Jamie Smith and Eric Jaffe, 'Birds,' *Dictionary of Symbolism*. 2001. Accessed Jul 19, 2019. http://umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html/.
[68] Motion, *A Writer's Life*, 1993.
[69] Philip Larkin, 'The Importance of Elsewhere,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 64.

always calls where one's surviving parent lives, I suppose'.[70] It might seem unusual that, eight years after moving to Hull, he refers to Loughborough, where he never actually lived, as 'home'. Like Belfast, then, by not being 'home', Hull offered the poet a sense of liberation:

> As for Hull, I like it because it's so far away from everywhere else. On the way to nowhere as somebody put it. It's in the middle of this lonely country, and beyond the lonely country there's only the sea. I like that.[71]

Fundamental to the poet's appreciation of the city is its specific, unique geography, the juxtaposition of city and country, with the sea and its essential 'loneliness' that follows. This is the loneliness that 'clarifies' in 'Here', that 'made sense' in 'The Importance of Elsewhere'. The freedom of East Yorkshire's rural hinterlands represents a salvation, away from 'home', for Larkin.

This is particularly pertinent given the resonance of freedom within Hull. The city is home to the Freedom Festival, an annual outdoor arts festival that commemorates the life and work of late-eighteenth century MP William Wilberforce, whose work led to the abolition of the slave trade. Wilberforce House, in Hull's old town, was his birthplace, which was then turned into a museum to commemorate his life's work. Wilberforce House is recognised by Larkin in 'Here' as 'the slave museum', a reference which refutes any claims that the poem is not specifically about the city.[72] This was relevant to Hull because of its role as an international port city: Hull was a migratory hub since medieval times. This is acknowledged in Larkin's foreword to *A Rumoured City*: 'Signs in foreign languages welcome you.'[73] There is, then, a further implication to the 'unfenced existence' of 'Here', the 'strangeness' that 'made sense' to the migrant in 'The Importance of Elsewhere'. Of the multicultural city that resulted, Nicholas Evans suggests that 'the ebb and flow of every high tide brought

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[70] Larkin to Barbara Pym, Dec 7, 1963, *Selected Letters*, 362-63.
[71] Philip Larkin, 'An Interview with the Observer,' in *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-82*, ed. Philip Larkin (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 54-5.
[72] Larkin, 'Here', 49.
[73] Larkin, 'Foreword,' 9.

people with new skills who have enriched the expanding conurbation.'[74] Although the city is not well-known as a point of migration in the present day, the 2011 census was considered newsworthy when it revealed that 12,000 European migrants lived and worked in Hull.[75] Whilst the city has been largely welcoming to its migrants, the freedom that Hull afforded Larkin as an English migrant was the ability to be an outsider, to occupy a peripheral position.

Larkin's reluctance to recognise the city as 'home' is reflected in his observational narrative perspective in poems such as 'Here': he is watching over the scene, rather than a participant in it. This perspective only changes when the poet's freedom is threatened. In 'Bridge for the Living' (1981), the cantata that Larkin was tasked with writing with musician Anthony Hedges for the opening of the Humber Bridge, the 'loneliness' of East Yorkshire becomes threatened:[76]

> And now this stride into our solitude,
> A swallow-fall and rise of one plain line,
> A giant step for ever to include
> All our dear landscape in a new design.[77]

The poet includes himself in the community he describes when the normality of the life he has built there is threatened: suddenly it is '*our* dear landscape', 'this stride into *our* solitude'. As 'the first direct road link between Hull and the south bank of the Humber,' the bridge was intended to improve the region's famously poor transport connections.[78] The Humber Bridge was officially opened by the Queen in July 1981; according to Martin Wilcox, the bridge 'an iconic structure […] came to

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[74] Nicholas J. Evans, 'The Making of a Mosaic: Migration and the Port-city of Kingston upon Hull,' in *Hull: Culture, History, Place*, ed. David J. Starkey, David Atkinson, Briony McDonagh, Sarah McKeon and Elisabeth Salter (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 146.
[75] Ibid, 145.
[76] Larkin to Charles Monteith, Oct 24, 1973, *Selected Letters*, 490; Archie Burnett, 'Bridge for the Living,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete* Poems, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 504.
[77] Philip Larkin, 'Bridge for the Living,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 119.
[78] 'History,' *Explore the Bridge*, Humber Bridge Board, accessed Sept 19, 2017.
http://www.humberbridge.co.uk/explore_the_bridge/bridge_history_and_detail/history.php/.

symbolise the city and region.'[79] In a 1965 letter, Larkin wrote that 'Hull's a difficult place to drop in on': this factor that made the city appealing to the poet was the very reason for the bridge's existence; the Department for Economic Affairs reported in 1967 that the area's 'poor road connections with the rest of Britain' were one of two barriers to its economic expansion.[80] By effectively bringing Hull and its hinterlands 'closer' to the rest of Britain, Larkin's 'remoteness' and 'loneliness' became endangered; this sentiment is implicit in the cantata.

Whilst the words in 'Bridge for the Living' are clearly to some extent influenced by the fact that the poem is a commission, it is important too that Larkin uses 'our' in these instances rather than 'my': this is an imposition on the status quo of wider Hull society, not just the poet's. If we momentarily return to the bird narrator, it is difficult not to see the imposition as much into the airspace of the bird as to the land of the poet:

> Isolate city spread alongside water,
> Posted with white towers, she keeps her face
> Half-turned to Europe, lonely northern daughter,
> Holding through centuries her separate place.
>
> Behind her domes and cranes enormous skies
> Of gold and shadows build; a filigree
> Of wharves and wires, ricks and refineries,
> Her working skyline wanders to the sea.[81]

The 'white towers' that have been 'posted' amidst the 'domes' and 'cranes' of the city are further obstacles for the bird to 'swerve' around. The first section of the poem, before the asterisk-marked break, seems nostalgic for the 'Here'-esque landscape that the verb 'posted' implies the 'towers' have been forced onto, uninvited. In a letter to Hedges, Larkin states that 'the first part describes Hull's

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[79] Martin Wilcox, 'Dock Development, 1778 – 1914,' in *Hull: Culture, History, Place*, ed. David J. Starkey, David Atkinson, Briony McDonagh, Sarah McKeon and Elisabeth Salter (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 134.

[80] Larkin to Pamela Kitson (neé Fogwell), Mar 12, 1965, *Selected Letters*, 371; DFEA, 'Humberside,' 21.

[81] Larkin, 'Bridge for the Living,' 119.

essential loneliness, and is descriptive and slow-moving, the second tries to feel
cheerful about the ending of this loneliness through the agency of the bridge, and I
suppose could be called celebratory.'[82] Indicative of the poet's attitude is the fact that
the latter section is a third shorter than the former.

The 'slow-moving' nostalgia in 'Bridge for the Living' arises from the anxiety that
Hull will no longer hold 'her separate place', as the south encroached over the River
Humber; the 'remote three-cornered hinterland' would soon be connected to the
south, too. That the poem – like the foreword to *A Rumoured City* – recycles the
language and sentiments of 'Here' provides a final piece of evidence that the 1961
poem *is* about Hull. Even the nature is the same: 'The piled gold clouds, the shining
gull-marked mud' is repeated in the 'enormous skies/ Of gold and shadows' and the
'plain gulls stand'; the 'Loneliness' of the 'birds and lights' in 'Here' and Larkin's
preface to *A Rumoured City* are present as 'errant birds carry her loneliness/ A
lighted memory no miles eclipse.'[83] In his Hull poetry, Larkin recognises that the city
has its own independent histories by necessity, an unavoidable product of its historic
remoteness. He implies its geographical uniqueness too: reiterating ideas of the gold
skies, the poet noted in an interview that:

> you get some very fine effects of light, particularly in the evenings when
> you have the sunsets building up westwards down the river, with
> magnificent pilings up of cloud, all golden and rose and so forth. That,
> again, is not the sort of thing you'd see in the average mid-England
> provincial town, and that's the sort of reason I like being in Hull.[84]

Of course, despite Larkin's assertions in this statement, these descriptions probably
could be of anywhere; this is similarly the case with the gull imagery, which depicts
photographs that the poet captured on Hessle Foreshore. However, their
reoccurrence throughout his poems and interviews make clear that, despite being a

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[82] Larkin to Anthony Hedges, Dec 15, 1975, *Selected Letters,* 534.
[83] Larkin, 'Here' and 'Bridge for the Living,' 49, 119; Larkin, 'Foreword,' 9.
[84] Motion, *A Writer's Life*, 250-1.

little generic, in much of the imagery the poet is writing his own lived experiences of Hull.

The poem 'I Remember, I Remember' (1955) ends with the line 'Nothing, like something, happens anywhere'.[85] Much of the imagery that recurs in these poems could 'happen anywhere' but, quite distinctly they are not *anywhere*: they are quite confidently *Here*.
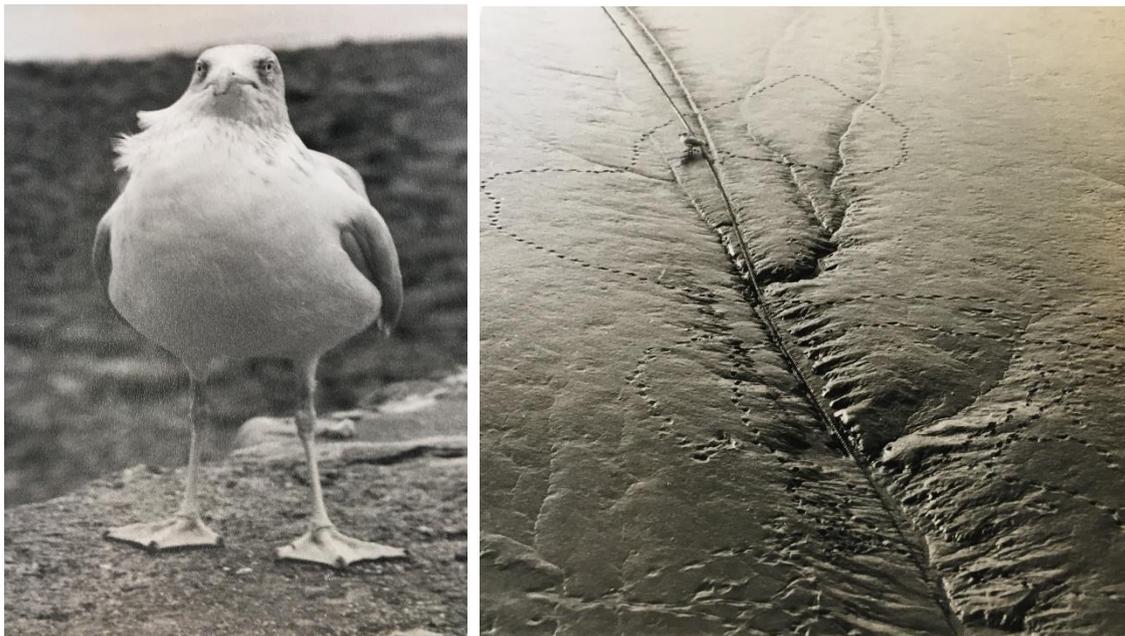
Images 12 and 13: a close-up image of a seagull and 'shining gull-marked mud', taken by Larkin in the 1960s.[86]

Whilst Andrew Motion reports that Larkin 'felt more like writing a threnody for the things he loved about the region which the bridge would put an end to', it seems unlikely that he would have accepted the commission if he was wholly opposed to the construction of the bridge.[87] Curiously, he did keep a postcard, with an image of the bridge during the process of its construction, within his photograph albums:

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[85] Philip Larkin, 'I Remember, I Remember,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 41-42.
[86] Philip Larkin, Photographs of Philip Arthur Larkin, U DLV/2/5/33.
[87] Motion, *A Writer's Life*, 487.

Image 14: a postcard (undated, unwritten) depicting the Humber Bridge under construction, kept by Larkin within one of his photograph albums.[88]

However, the second section of the poem, that Larkin claims 'tries to be cheerful', reads almost exclusively as an imposition; Motion suggests that Larkin 'struggles to convince himself that he doesn't mind his solitude being violated. He concedes that the bridge's '"stride into our solitude" might be beautiful [...] but can't help implying that its function is deplorable – however much he might try and pretend otherwise in the final four lines.'[89] If 'Here' establishes that 'Here is unfenced existence:/ Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach', 'Bridge for the Living' ponders (or rather, frets about) what 'Here' will be when this is no longer the case. As the bridge 'brings about the ending of this loneliness', to the poem it brings regularity. Every couplet is a perfect rhyme and each line – with the exception of the first line of the final stanza – has the regularity of ten syllables. This second part emphasises the awkward, patchwork efforts by which north and south are united:

> ...the song,
> Sharp from the east, sun-throated from the west,
> Will never to one separate shire belong,
> But north and south make union manifest.[90]

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[88] Philip Larkin, Photographs of Philip Arthur Larkin, U DLV/3/163.
[89] Motion, *A Writer's Life*, 488.
[90] Larkin, Bridge for the Living, 119.

As recommended in a 1969 report by the Department of Economic Affairs, the Humber Bridge was key to uniting the East Riding of Yorkshire, West Riding of Yorkshire and Lindsey (on the south bank of the Humber, in Lincolnshire) to form the county of Humberside.[91] The collective ceremonial county had already been in theoretical existence at the time Larkin was writing 'Bridge for the Living', but it was not until the opening of the Humber Bridge that a physical manifestation of this link really allowed Humberside to be united, as 'north and south make union manifest.'[92]

Even as the south of Britain was encroaching, Hull seems to have maintained focus on her European connections; in the first part of 'Bridge for the Living' as in 'Here', for the time being at least, she is still 'Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach' to her southern neighbours.[93] Whilst the Humber Bridge ostensibly adds a further notion of freedom and independence to the city, in 'Bridge for the Living' we are reminded by the historic images of fishermen sailing the North Sea – 'scattered on steep seas, ice-crusted ships/ Like errant birds carry her loneliness' – that Hull has long travelled for economic purposes.[94] Specifics pertaining to the city's maritime history come into the fore in 'Here', too, as the poem's association with Hull becomes increasingly evident in the third stanza: anyone who had visited Hull in the mid-twentieth-century would be familiar with the 'fishy-smelling' aroma that Larkin references again in 'The Whitsun Weddings': 'We […] smelt the fish dock'.[95] Today's Hull no longer smells like fish, but the aroma is nonetheless remembered as a quirk of the city, a by-product of Hull's historic prominence in the whaling and fishing industries, from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively.

The alliterative 'ships up streets' that may initially seem a curious image in 'Here' references the way in which the maritime city was built around its docks.[96] This led to the memorable image of boats sailing through the centre of Hull, until its

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[91] DFEA, 'Humberside,' 21.
[92] Larkin, 'Bridge for the Living', 119.
[93] Larkin, 'Here,' 49.
[94] Larkin, 'Bridge for the Living', 119.
[95] Larkin, 'Here' and 'The Whitsun Weddings,' 49, 56.
[96] Larkin, 'Here,' 49.

redevelopment and the relocation of the docks to out-of-town locations in the late twentieth century. The most central of the old docks was repurposed as a marina for pleasure boats, so even in the twenty-first century, Larkin's striking description remains relevant.[97]

Image 15: a postcard preserved by Larkin in his photograph albums. Painted by Atkinson Grimshaw, the image depicts Princes Dock in 1887, a perfect representation of the 'ships up streets' imagery. The 'domes and spires' can also be seen in the background.[98]

Naturally for a poem about a port city, Weston and Underwood find that 'Here' is 'a poem of transit and arrival'; so too is the city that it seeks to describe.[99] As – like Larkin himself – the residents of neighbouring villages arrive into the city for work and recreation, citizens of other British towns and cities arrive via Paragon Station, the same station from which Larkin's train departs in 'The Whitsun Weddings'. Citizens of other countries, meanwhile, have long arrived in Britain through Hull's ports. The majority of these, rather than staying in Hull, used the city as a point of transit, departing to their destination via the roads or railway links. Larkin satirizes

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[97] 'History of Hull Docks,' *Research Guides*, Hull History Centre, accessed Jul 22, 2019, http://www.hullhistorycentre.org.uk/research/research-guides/history-hull-docks.aspx/.

[98] Philip Larkin, 'Postcard: "Princes' Dock, Hull 1887",' 20C. Photographs of Philip Arthur Larkin, U DLV/2/5/25, University of Hull Archives, Hull.

[99] Weston and Underwood, 'A Poetic Place,' 260.

Hull in 'Here' as a place 'Where only salesmen and relations come'.[100] This image is reinforced in 'Friday Night in the Royal Station Hotel' (1967):

> Through open doors, the dining-room declares
> A large loneliness of knives and glass
> And silence laid like carpet[101]

If this image is anything to go by, we might presume that the city at the weekend was a ghost town, once all the weekday workers had returned home. Notably, Larkin uses the words 'loneliness' and 'silence' here: these are the words that we've already seen the poet use with reference to Holderness and the freedom afforded by rural East Yorkshire. The commonality here, of course, is the detachment and absence from other humans within these places.

Historically, of course, this 'loneliness' and 'silence' was not a part of the city's working landscape: the docks would be operated throughout the night, and throughout the weekends. From the twelfth century, Hull became one of the United Kingdom's major ports; its estuary placement, 'in the triangle of flat country between the Humber and the North Sea', was key to this.[102] The city's unique location made it ideal for links to the continent, particularly northern Europe and Iceland, with more inland areas of the UK conveniently accessible downriver. Thus, the city was built to 'cluster' around the docks, with its importance to the shipping trade accounting for the 'barge-crowded water'.[103] Railway links expanded Hull's connections to major production centres of the UK further.[104] From the Middle Ages Hull's port was a major exporter of lead and wool, as well as grain, as evidenced in Larkin's 'grain-scattered streets'.[105] In Georgian Hull, the city's proficiency in the

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[100] Larkin, 'Here', 49.
[101] Philip Larkin, 'Friday Night in the Royal Station Hotel,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 80-1.
[102] Larkin, 'Foreword,' 9.
[103] Larkin, 'Here,' 49.
[104] Martin Wilcox, 'Dock Development, 1778 – 1914,' in *Hull: Culture, History, Place*, ed. David J. Starkey, David Atkinson, Briony McDonagh, Sarah McKeon and Elisabeth Salter (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 118.
[105] Larkin, 'Here,' 49.

shipbuilding industry only added to the 'barge-crowded water', whilst corn-milling and seed-crushing factories became important parts of the city's industry. Industry figures on the city skyline in 'Here' too: as well as rebuilding the post-Blitz city, the 'cranes' that 'cluster' in the poem are hauling shipments to and from their vessels, as photographed by Larkin in 1964:

Image 16: photograph from the poet's collection, of cranes and machinery at Hull Docks, taken during the filming of the BBC 'Monitor' programme (1964).[106]

The city we encounter in 'Here' is very much a working city; the people we encounter are working people. We come across people three times in the second and third stanzas of the poem:

> And residents from raw estates, brought down
> The dead straight miles by stealing flat-faced trolleys
>
> A cut-price crowd, urban yet simple, dwelling
> Where only salesmen and relations come

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[106] Philip Larkin, Photographs of Philip Arthur Larkin, U DLV/3/118.

Tattoo-shops, consulates, grim head-scarfed wives [107]

On first glance, these descriptions may seem discriminatory or derogatory; rather the poet actually acknowledges further Hull-based contexts here. Significantly, Weston and Underwood find that '"simple" is not a synonym for stupid; rather it celebrates a lack of pretension.'[108] This conclusion is strengthened by Larkin's introduction to *A Rumoured City*, where he describes Hull as 'Unpretentious'.[109] So too the 'grim head-scarfed wives' initially seem to be a caricature of the hardy, northern, working-class woman. However, in the 1960s, as Larkin was writing 'Here' and becoming increasingly integrated into Hull, a revolution was underway. Larkin here references 'the women of the fishing community, left to cope while their husbands were away at sea.'[110] Due to the large number of Hull's men who were employed on the trawlers, and the terraced streets purpose-built during the expansion of the industry for their habitation, there were large communities where, as Lavery states, women were left to run the household and raise the children whilst knowing that their husbands (and often their fathers and adult sons too) were employed in a perilous occupation; 'trawlermen died at sea at the rate of more than one per week'.[111] In early 1968, several years after the publication of 'Here', 'Fifty-eight Hull trawlermen perished in the "triple trawler tragedy"' over the period of three weeks. In reaction to the tragedy, a group of seafarers' wives known as the 'Headscarf Revolutionaries' launched a successful campaign to improve safety measures on seaborne trawlers, which culminated in a trip to Westminster: 'multiple changes were enacted in weeks.'[112] Larkin's descriptions of the 'urban yet simple' community and the 'grim head-scarved wives' may thus be attentive to the social change going on around him, rather than being insulting, as it first appears. The poem that has long been viewed as a non-specific reflection on place, with little more than caricatured images

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[107] Larkin, 'Here,' 49.

[108] Weston and Underwood, 'A Poetic Place,' 250.

[109] Larkin, 'Foreword,' 9.

[110] Derek Spooner, '"Places I'll Remember…" Larkin's Here,' *Geography* 77, no. 2 (1992): 140.

[111] Brian W. Lavery, 'Lillian Bilocca,' in *Hull: Culture, History, Place*, ed. David J. Starkey, David Atkinson, Briony McDonagh, Sarah McKeon and Elisabeth Salter (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 235.

[112] Lavery, 'Lillian Bilocca,' 235.

of the people therein, actually engages with Hull and its social, historical and political narratives in ways that have, until now, been unacknowledged.

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Whether from the heights of his office in the new Brynmor Jones Library or from his top-floor flat overlooking Pearson Park, Larkin's view over Hull must frequently have been from above. Indeed, Larkin revealed that 'most of *The Whitsun Weddings* and all of *High Windows*' was written from inside the flat.[113] It is little wonder, then, that many of the poems he wrote about Hull occupy this position above the city, imagined throughout this chapter as the literal birds-eye view. Whilst it is by no means applicable to all of his poems, this bird-as-narrator perspective provides a helpful interpretation that explains both the smooth manner in which the narrator traverses multiple land and skyscapes in 'Here', and the detached, yet unnoticed, observational narrative therein. It should be remembered that whilst a traditional birds-eye view is assumed to be from the sky, birds can also conduct their business from ground level; the perspective of 'looking up', therefore, is not automatic cause to reject notions of a bird's perspective.

So too, this chapter argues that there are definite and intimate references to Hull within Larkin's poetry. Of course, the poem most frequently associated with Larkin and Hull is 'Here'. Whilst Rossen disputes that the poem is about Hull, Spooner cites 'Here' as evidence of Larkin's 'attempt[s] to recreate the familiar'; Weston and Underwood call it 'the Larkin poem in which we can most tangibly locate Hull and the East Riding.'[114] This, by all means, is the case: 'Here' is one of several poems that conveys the poet's intimate knowledge of Hull; however, as it is phrased in Larkin's typically detached manner, this may not be immediately apparent. Jean Hartley states that 'One of the reasons for the popularity of Philip Larkin's verse, is that it is

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[113] Larkin, 'An Interview with the *Paris Review*,' 56.
[114] Rossen, *Philip Larkin*, 53; Derek Spooner, 'Larkin's Here,' 134; Weston and Underwood, 'A Poetic Place,' 250.

rooted in his everyday experiences and his perceptions of the places around him.'[115] This seems very much to be the case: the city in which the reader of Larkin's Hull poems is immersed is the one in which Larkin lived since 1955 and whose detailed and complex histories he had absorbed. Whilst the poems discussed in this chapter *could* be interpreted through the lens of other towns and cities, this does not make them any less about Hull; nor does it detract from the considerably deep contexts that are implicit within them.

Mid-to-late twentieth century Hull, however, was a city whose main industry was in decline. This will be dealt with further in the next chapter; however, in his biography of the poet, Andrew Motion suggests that Larkin appreciated the transient state of his new hometown: 'What Larkin found, in other words, was a city at the end of one kind of life, waiting for another to begin. Wandering along the wooden cobbles of the deserted high street in the Old Town, past the disintegrating warehouses and sunken boats rotting in inland docks, he felt he was in a place set on the edge of things.'[116]

Image 17: a photograph taken by Larkin whilst exploring Hull (1955-57)
of 'ruined timber ships on the Humber foreshore'.[117]

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[115] Hartley, *Larkin's Hull*, 8.
[116] Motion, *A Writer's Life*, 249.
[117] Philip Larkin, Photographs of Philip Arthur Larkin, U DLV/2/5/30, U DLV/3/118; Richard Bradford. *The Importance of Elsewhere: Philip Larkin's Photographs* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2015), 126-27.

It is this peripheral status that both permits Larkin's particular narrative style and is key to the freedom that we can sense in the final, transcendental stanza of 'Here': 'Here is unfenced existence/ Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach.'[118] The city may be busy, with the claustrophobia of its 'cluster' of 'spires and cranes' and the 'crowded[ness]' of the 'water' but Hull and its hinterlands retain their valuable distance from the rest of the country in 'Here'. Despite its international shipping connections, 1960s Hull lacked any particularly convenient or direct transport routes to the south, thus it still felt isolated from the rest of the world; the 'isolate villages' and the 'solitude' and 'silence' of rural East Yorkshire allowed the narrator to withdraw into an 'out of reach' space where 'Loneliness clarifies'.[119]

In 1989, Noel Hughes reflected that 'Hull suited [Larkin] well. The scale of a provincial town with easy access to the sea and rural Yorkshire was most appealing'; Motion agrees, stating that 'once the initial trauma of his move from Ireland was over, Larkin settled into the habit of praising Hull – not least for its remoteness.'[120] When this remoteness was threatened by new road links to the south, then, it is understandable that the stanzas in 'Bridge for the Living' are favourably weighted to pre-bridge nostalgia, with the post-construction section of the poem comprising fewer stanzas and significantly less passionate imagery. If Hull represents freedom for Larkin, the bird, with its classic 'free' imagery, is an apt position for the narrator to adopt. As these new vertical constructions encroach into the bird's airspace, we can sense how the poet's freedom is threatened. The hospital is a reminder of the threat of death; the Humber Bridge signifies encroaching urbanisation; even Larkin's library is a reminder of the 'toad *work*' that threatens his freedom on a daily basis. Whilst Hull Royal Infirmary, the Brynmor Jones Library and the Humber Bridge are iconic structures that make the Hull skyscape distinct, they are at the same time

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[118] Larkin, 'Here,' 49.
[119] Larkin, 'Here,' 49.
[120] Noel Hughes, 'An Innocent at Home,' in *Philip Larkin: The Man and his Work*, ed. Dale Salwak (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 56; Motion, *A Writer's Life*, 250.

constant and looming threats on the horizon to the poet that, from the high spaces he frequently occupies, were ever visible.

Whilst we have discussed some of the impacts of Hull on Larkin's poetry, the reciprocal effects of Larkin on Hull must also be acknowledged. We have already discussed the poet's contributions to the plans for the Brynmor Jones Library and its consequential impact on the city's skyline; as arguably the city's most famous poet, his legacy continues within Hull to this day. With a building at the University of Hull – and a road nearby – named after him, his face on the side of a bus displaying Hull icons, a commemorative blue plaque on his Pearson Park flat, a 'Larkin trail' and, of course, the seven-foot statue of the poet accompanied by engravings of quotes of his poems engraved in the floor of Hull's Paragon Station, the poet's presence remains strong in Hull. The impact of Larkin on the city's literature, too, is undeniable: whilst the Hull poets in the next chapter will be explored in their own right, the effects of Larkin and the legacy of his presence on contemporary writers living and writing in Hull will be an important strand of exploration as we consider how, as Larkin himself noted, 'a place cannot produce poems, it can only not prevent them, and Hull is good at that.'[121]

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[121] Larkin, 'Foreword', 9.

CHAPTER 2:
'Round here we can make bones speak.'
Contemporary poems of the East Riding.

Unlike Larkin's poetry, there is no doubt that Shane Rhodes' 'The City Speaks' (2017) is a poem about Hull. Subtitled 'A Poem for Hull' and commissioned as part of the Hull UK City of Culture 2017 creative programme, the poem – as indicated by its title – is intended to give the city a poetic voice. As well as being engraved in some newly-installed fountains, the poem was printed as a limited edition A4 commemorative volume containing photographs and artwork produced within and about Hull. In his preface to the collection, Rhodes writes that:

> Our vision for this book was clear from the outset. We wanted a book which would embody the best of Hull. We embarked on a search for the work of local artists and material which would have a Hull connection wherever possible. We sourced paper from a local paper merchant and scoured local museums and galleries for inspiration. This became a journey of discovery which has enabled us to produce something which celebrates the beauty of the printed word, local creative talent and pride in the City and its people.[1]

The purpose of this collection, then, is different to that of the Larkin poetry we have encountered (with the possible exception of 'Bridge for the Living'). This was intended as a positive reflection on the city, Rhodes' 'love poem to Hull.'[2] This does not, however, detract in any way from its importance as a contemporary literary portrait of the city and its history; as Russ Litten remarks in his review, published on the back cover, the 'words engraved on the pavement in Victoria Square will last another lifetime at least, but their sentiment will chime in the hearts and minds of our citizens for generations to come.'[3] It would be interesting to conduct a similar piece of research to this after a few decades have passed to determine, just as we will

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[1] Shane Rhodes, *The City Speaks: A Poem for Hull* (Hull: Wrecking Ball Press, 2017), 3.
[2] Rhodes, *The City Speaks*, 3.
[3] Russ Litten, 'The City Speaks' in *The City Speaks: A Poem for Hull*, Shane Rhodes (Hull: Wrecking Ball Press, 2017), 31.

soon do with Larkin, the extent to which Rhodes' words or sentiments have influenced not only 'citizens', but future Hull poets in 'generations to come'.

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'The cold hot chocolate of the Humber':
East Yorkshire's estuarine poetry.

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In *Yorkshire: A Lyrical History of England's Greatest County*, Richard Morris writes that:

> Between the estuaries of the Tees and the Humber are soaring headlands and rocky foreshores, fishing villages astride deep inlets, remote beaches, still-working ports, and boisterous resorts. Behind Hull, there is Europe's fastest eroding shoreline, where truncated roads point to places long since taken, and elderly couples hold out in bungalows that teeter on the edge of crumpling cliffs. At the end of it all comes the remote, dynamic other-world of Spurn, with its lighthouses, migrating birds and soughing marram grass. Yorkshire people have strong feelings for their coast.[4]

We are reminded, in this description, of the ways in which Philip Larkin describes Hull and its hinterlands in 'Here', as discussed in the previous chapter. The city's unique geographical space, at the confluence of the Rivers Hull and Humber, as well as the more remote stretches of East Yorkshire remain of particular interest to the poets living and writing in the region to this day. This, in part at least, is a result of the importance of this specific location, and the geography around it, to shaping the city and its industries, and consequently the many other strands of local history that we will explore here.

Rhodes' poem is cyclical: it opens and closes with hugely symbolic metaphors for the local geography:

> Words come from a room within a room.
> The history of this place has layers.
> The centre is the edge, so peel away.
> Peel and peel and peel.

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[4] Richard Morris, *Yorkshire: A Lyrical History of England's Greatest County* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2018), 214.

> Peel til something resonates,
> til something gives.[5]
>
> At the core there's a crack
> where the horizon meets the sky,
> where a tug floats like a lolly stick
> on the cold hot chocolate of the Humber.
> While in the distance, Trinity's bells
> peal and peal and peal.[6]

In the first of these stanzas, in which Rhodes alludes to centuries ('layers') of local history (key elements of which we will go on to explore) – as well as the local determination and tenacity involved not only in uncovering it all ('peel and peel') but in creating it in the first place – it is difficult not to imagine an onion.[7] Whilst the rings in the trunk of a tree is another plausible interpretation, in the fifth stanza Rhodes writes 'Peel another skin.'[8] This skin, whilst referring to decades of human history too, further reinforces the onion imagery. In the stanza that closes the poem, Rhodes writes of 'a crack/ where the horizon meets the sky'. If we are to imagine an onion sliced down the centre, interpretation of this multi-faceted metaphor becomes really valuable. The layers here not only represent the city's deep history, but the way in which it came to be a city, too. At the 'crack' is the Old Town, the city's former dockside trading streets; as the layers develop, we can imagine the city growing outwards, and are reminded of the 'mortgaged half-built edges' as discussed in analysis of Larkin's 'Here'.

The 'crack' introduces some ambiguity: on first glance, the 'cold hot chocolate of the Humber' seems to indicate that the 'crack' is the River Humber. This image would have great aesthetic resonance as, on a map, the Humber appears like a crack in the east of England. If this is the case, the onion metaphor alludes to the temporary counties of North and South Humberside; North Humberside is exclusively

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[5] Rhodes, *The City Speaks*, 7.
[6] Ibid, 25.
[7] It is difficult, too, not to hear the voice of Eddie Murphy as 'Donkey' in Shrek saying, '*onions* have *layers*'. The complex and multi-faceted character that he alludes to is fitting in this sense, at least.
[8] Rhodes, *The City Speaks*, 15.

described in the poem, recognising that the opposite regions of the former county were physically 'cracked' apart: recently by politics, historically by geological means. Alternatively, however, the 'crack' may refer to the River Hull, that splits East and West Hull. If this latter explanation is the case, we can picture the city growing outwards on either side of the docks, built to flank the river that intersected the settlement. In this case, the 'cold hot chocolate of the Humber' is only slightly more distant, to the south of the city, the brown river into which the River Hull feeds.
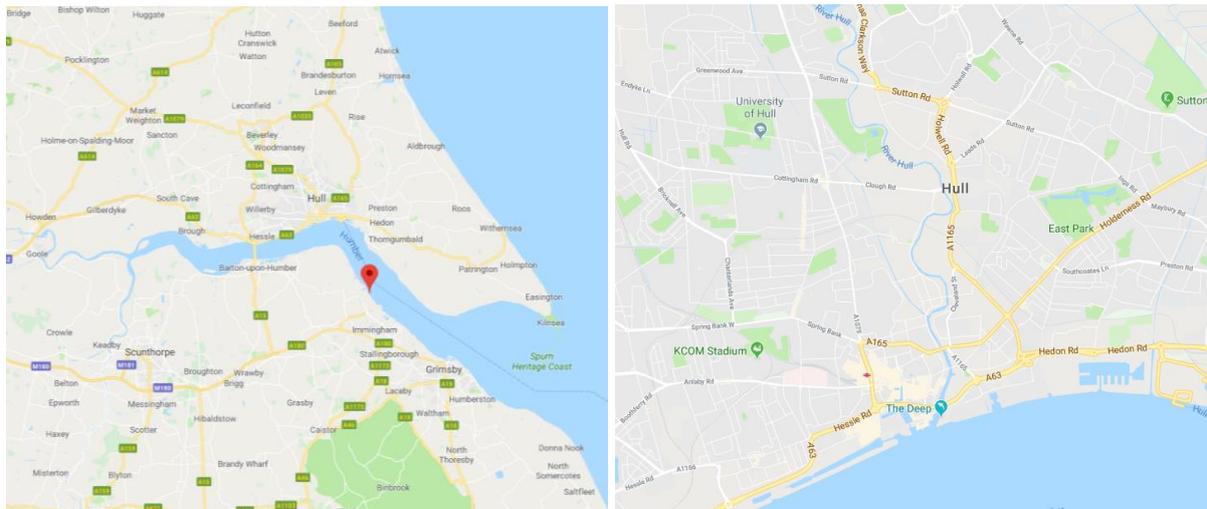
Images 1 and 2: the River Humber dissecting the UK directly below Hull (left),
and the River Hull dissecting the City of Hull (right).[9]

If we were under any allusion as to the prominence of water within the poem, the cover of *The City Speaks* immediately indicates its centrality:

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[9] 'River Humber' and 'River Hull,' *Maps*, Google, accessed Aug 13, 2019,
https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/River+Hull/@53.7624914,0.4271507,13z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s
0x4878bf1f59e8783d:0x4878b89096be632f!8m2!3d53.8667612!4d-0.3584836/,
https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/Humber/@53.6946836,0.6008089,10z/data=!4m13!1m7!3m6
!1s0x4878eaf3a9b6dd5f:0x91342434a73a6519!2sHumber!3b1!8m2!3d53.6501443!4d0.2822148!3m4!1s0x4
878eaf3a9b6dd5f:0x91342434a73a6519!8m2!3d53.6501443!4d-0.2822148/.
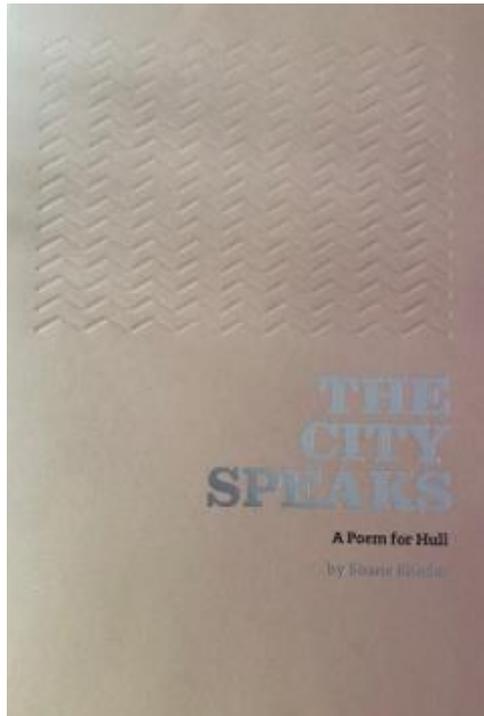
Image 3: The front cover of
Shane Rhodes' *The City Speaks: A Poem for Hull* (2017).

The embossed waves above the title are not unlike those of the River Humber, immediately adjacent to Hull's Old Town, in the city centre. The prevalence of rivers in this city, and the industries that the rivers long supported, has ensured the centrality of water amongst the works of many other Hull and East Riding poets, too. Vicky Foster's 2016 collection *Changing Tides* – to which we will return in detail later – is divided according to the tide's cycle, the book's sections reflective of personal circumstance:

High Tide

There will be days when we
Are full.
And when we are buoyant.
When a fresh sea breeze clears
Everything away
And sunlight

Glints on the water,
And anything seems possible.[10]

Low Tide

And sometimes we will empty.
Sometimes there will only be
Thick, black mud
As far as the eye can see.

And we will be stuck here,
For a while at least.[11]

Foster's collection is shaped through this metaphor and her personal and intrinsic connection to the city and its geography: her emotions and their reflection in her poetry are projected onto the landscape with the understanding that this is a cycle. Whilst each stage will recur, it will pass too. This cyclicality, and the sense that the narrator's life, as the tide, is shaped by forces greater than herself, is concurrent with the ideas of local layered history in 'The City Speaks': just as the bells 'peal and peal and peal,' high and low tide will recur time and time again.

Sean O'Brien's *Downriver* (2001) and *The Drowned Book* (2007), meanwhile, reflect on the poet's two riverside home cities: Hull and Newcastle. In 'A Northern Assembly,' in which the poet declares 'The North – The North is poetry,' the poetic landscape is shaped on and around these rivers:[12]

A North that's not a party game
But can support a sovereign claim
Begins at Humberside and knows
How Andrew Marvell's metre goes –

Let North, from Humber's shore to Tweed
Exist in verse, if not yet deed,

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[10] Vicky Foster, 'High Tide,' in *Changing Tides* (Huddersfield: The King's England Press, 2016), 7.
[11] Vicky Foster, 'Low Tide,' in *Changing Tides* (Huddersfield: The King's England Press, 2016), 27.
[12] Sean O'Brien, 'A Northern Assembly,' in *Downriver* (London: Picador, 2001), 22.

> And let a poem legislate
> For this ideal imagined state[13]

In O'Brien's celebration of the north, poetry is not so much a by-product, an incidental part of northern culture, but a founding and fundamental part of it. Poetry is ideologically and geographically bound to the waterways, including the rivers that demarcate the boundaries that define the poet's concept of north. If 'The North is poetry' it must surely be water, too.

Indeed, as Paul Chrystal notes in his exploration of O'Brien's poetry, the poet remembers his childhood in Hull 'being wet,' with reference to two interviews in which the he situates his poems within this soggy space:[14]

> I'm a pluviophile […] I grew up in Hull, which was built on a flood plain […] If you dug a hole in your back garden, it would slowly fill with water. And when I was little, parts of the city would flood. It was exciting. I am haunted by the idea of the pubs in the old part of the city having their cellars flooded, and I'm intrigued by the idea that the floodwater might somehow insinuate itself into the beer.[15]

> I grew up in a northern city, and the landscape fascinates me: the flat, Saxon plains of east Yorkshire, the spectacular hills of the north and west, the uncompromising industrial cities – they form a complex identity. And they all touch on the Humber – the great, epic, Mississippianly wide river Humber – which runs past the doorstep like a continental division and moves out vastly into the sea […] There was a half-amphibian feel to the place. Water was inescapable.[16]

Thus, in *The Drowned Book*, there is a constant sense of (or immersion in) water. In 'Water-Gardens' we can picture O'Brien's image of the garden filling with water:

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[13] O'Brien, 'A Northern Assembly,' 21.

[14] Paul Chrystal, *Yorkshire Literary Landscapes* (Darlington: DestinWorld Publishing, 2018), 155-159.

[15] Emma Townshend, 'Right as rain: why poet Sean O'Brien thinks a waterlogged garden is a thing of beauty' in *Independent*, Feb 10, 2008, accessed Jul 30, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/property/gardening/right-as-rain-why-poet-sean-obrien-thinks-a-waterlogged-garden-in-a-thing-of-beauty-779372.html/.

[16] Sarah Crown, 'A life in books: Sean O'Brien,' *Guardian*, Aug 14, 2009, accessed Jul 30, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/aug/14/interview-sean-obrien/.

> Water looked up through the lawn
> Like a half-buried mirror
> Left out by the people before.[17]

The reflective surface, 'Like a half-buried mirror,' does not lead to the narrator gazing upon his reflection; instead it becomes a kind of portal, allowing the reader to imagine the figures who had gazed into the water before:

> The dark, peopled water
>
> Was leaning and listening.
> There on the steps of the cellar,
> Black-clad Victorians
>
> Were feeding the river with souls.
>
> […]
>
> The voices came back
> From sinks and gratings[18]

The narrator's life, here, appears fleeting alongside the permanence of water, ever-present on this landscape. The poem has a certain darkness too: the water that gives and sustains lives – as well as livelihoods here – is, at the same time, a threat, feasting on 'souls' and, thus, taking lives away too. Flooding is a continuous threat here, we are reminded, as 'The river revisits his cellar' in 'River-doors'.[19] Whilst the recurring presence of water throughout the region's poetry is largely a result of its role in local history, as well as its constant peripheral presence, so too, we must remember the threat of 'extinction' through water's devastating and all-consuming potential impact here.[20]

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[17] Sean O'Brien, 'Water-Gardens,' in *The Drowned Book* (London: Picador, 2007), 4.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Sean O'Brien, 'River-doors,' in *The Drowned Book* (London: Picador, 2007), 6.
[20] Sean O'Brien, 'The River in Prose,' in *The Drowned Book* (London: Picador, 2007), 16.

The prominence of water is clear in Julie Corbett's 2012 collection *On the Humber* too, with her poems immediately geographically situated by her chosen book title. Whilst Rhodes' 'cold hot chocolate of the Humber' avoids aestheticizing the less-than-appealing waters by sentimentalising them, in 'Mapmaker' Corbett does neither, describing the landscape with the accuracy that the title implies:

> don't colour it blue
> use brown and grey.[21]

This description recalls that of O'Brien in 'Grey Bayou', 'Its grey-brown tides, its skies/ That dwarf the bridge…' whilst the poem itself is likely an allusion to Elizabeth Bishop's poem 'The Map', which ends: 'Topography displays no favourites; North's as near as West./ More delicate than the historians' are the map-makers' colors.'[22] Corbett, then, describes the Humber with the detail of a topographer: to depict the foreshore with blue water and yellow sand would render it unrecognisable; an accurate depiction may be less conventionally aesthetically appealing, but an inaccurate map is quickly rendered useless. This is particularly poignant here, where 'maps guide a sailor home.'[23] So too, if Rhodes were to beautify the Humber his poem would lose purpose; the images would be unidentifiable for the local citizens that it is designed to resonate with. Rather than idealising the coast to visitors then, Corbett instructs:

> follow the path of silt
> that pillows the walls
> of old docks and quays.[24]

As well as providing a further example of her determination to tell it like it is, so to speak, Corbett's use of the 'old docks and quays' as a navigational point here also shows how engrained on the landscape these derelict buildings have become. Whilst some of the docks were redeveloped after the industry's decline – and the move of

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[21] Julie Corbett, 'Mapmaker', in *On the Humber* (California: Folded Word, 2012), 6.
[22] Sean O'Brien, 'Grey Bayou,' in *The Drowned Book* (London: Picador, 2007), 24; Elizabeth Bishop, 'The Map,' in *Poems* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011), 5.
[23] Rhodes, *The City Speaks*, 13.
[24] Corbett, 'Mapmaker,' 6.

the remaining shipping centres to the west of the city – many were left empty, the quays an ever-present reminder of the city's industrial past.

The importance of the maritime industry – including trawling, shipbuilding, shipping and associated businesses – is indicated by its prolonged focus in 'The City Speaks'. The second stanza of the poem re-adopts the onion metaphor 'peel and peel' to explore vocation and the poet's own ancestry within the city; historically widespread employment within the maritime industry allows even this personal reflection to have assumed resonance within the city:

> Peel back the writer and you have a filleter.
> Peel back the filleter and you have a trawlerman.
> Peel back the trawlerman
> and you have a trawlerman's dad.
> Peel back the trawlerman's dad
> and you have a stowaway.[25]

In this stanza, Rhodes actually traces the city and its people back through history, whilst photographs and paintings of the docks in operation aid the reader in picturing the city's docks thriving in their heyday. Just as we could see the city growing outwards in layers, in this stanza we can visualise its people moving in the same way. The stowaway who made his home in the city would have arrived at the docks and presumably taken root in the centre of the city. As the fishing industry expanded and separate docks were built to the east, the trawlerman (and his dad) would likely have relocated from the centre to the Hessle Road area to be in close proximity, for convenience. However, before the fishing industry went through its ultimate decline and many of the docks closed, slum clearance forced many families to move from Hessle Road to the new council estates, including Orchard Park, where Rhodes' family lived. This migration of these close-knit communities out of the city centre became even more prevalent as the industries declined: with each generation,

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[25] Rhodes, *The City Speaks*, 9.

then, the family imagined here is moving further away from the centre, layer by layer.
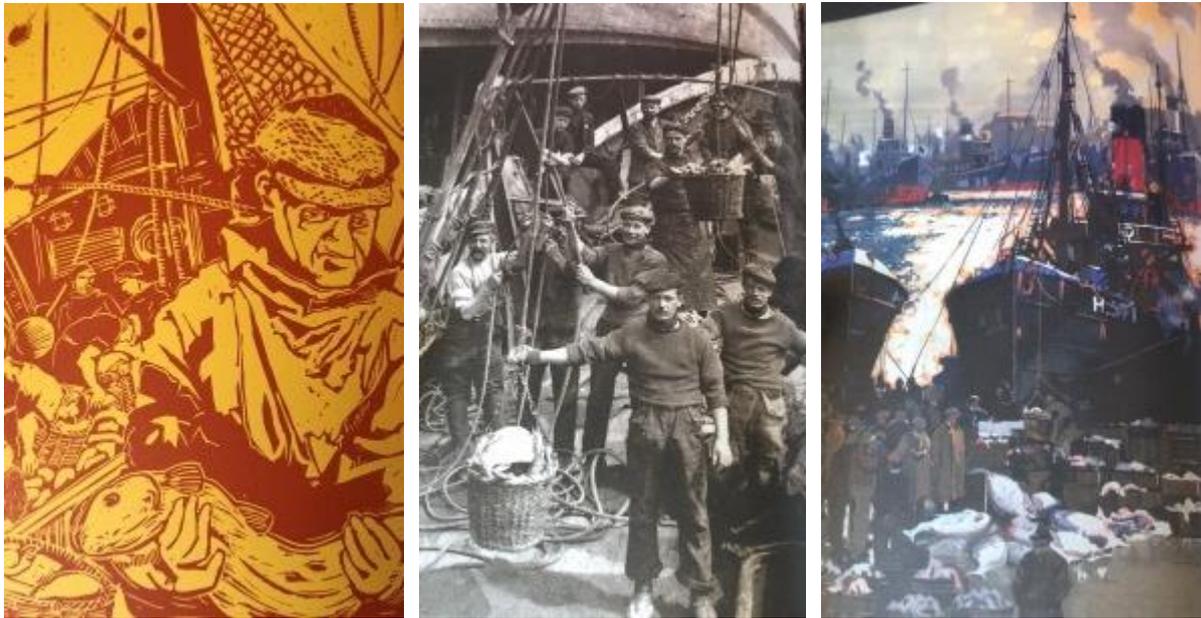
Images 4 to 6: a lino cut of a trawlerman by Derek O'Connor (1986),
a photograph of Billingsgate, St Andrew's Dock by Paul Gibson (1908)
and an image of St Andrew's Fish Dock from East Coats Industries poster (1938).[26]

Despite the downturn in fishing, some of the related industries did still thrive in Hull, including filleting, with fish simply purchased from elsewhere. Thus, the filleter remained in employment, but no longer had to live near the docks, as, unlike the trawlermen, their working hours were more regular. The writer, in the final layer, represents the more middle-class suburban areas and villages that sit on the outskirts of the city, including Cottingham and the Avenues, near the university, where many poets have lived, studied and worked. Although describing his own position, it is curious that the writer is the point of succession after filleter, and listed amongst the maritime industries; are writers as numerous as employees of the fishing trades, in the contemporary city? This also begs the question: is the maritime

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[26] Derek O'Connor, 'Trawler man,' lino cut (1986), Paul Gibson, 'Billingsgate, St Andrew's Dock,' photograph (1908), and East Coats Industries, 'St Andrew's Fish Dock,' poster (1938), in *The City Speaks: A Poem for Hull*, Shane Rhodes (Hull: Wrecking Ball Press, 2017), 28, 12, 8.

city now, as Charlotte Runcie described it in the *Telegraph*, 'a city of poets'?[27] Of course, given its purpose, Rhodes' poem does not directly reference the industrial collapse that caused the city's decline, that the City of Culture title was ultimately intended to improve. The vocational transitions may have been a necessity, but this is subtly written into the poem's narrative.

In her poem 'Why I Love Where I Live' (2016), Vicky Foster pays similar tribute to the city, its history, and the heritage into which she was born. Unlike Rhodes' poem, this is not a commission, however it is written in a similarly celebratory tone:

> Because hands
>
> That have
>
> Laid rugby balls
>
> On muddy try lines,
>
> Thrown winning punches,
>
> Stacked bricks,
>
> Hauled trawler nets,
>
> Coaxed valves and pipes,
>
> Whisked eggs and flour
>
> Into celebration meals -
>
> Those are the hands
>
> Of my people

[27] Charlotte Runcie, 'City of Culture? Hull is a city of poets' *Telegraph*, Nov 20, 2013, accessed Oct 16, 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/10462063/City-of-Culture-Hull-is-a-city-of-poets.html/.

And this

Is my city.[28]

Foster, like Rhodes, lists the various occupations of members of her community however, unlike in 'The City Speaks' this is not listed as a mark of progression or 'layered' history: the list of professions here occurs simultaneously, together they make up a community. Whilst Rhodes' poem is preoccupied with voicing the city's oral histories, Foster's emphasises the tactile, manual labour and the use of 'the hands/ Of my people.' All of these things that the city is famous for – the rugby teams, the Olympic boxers, the maritime industry – utilise the hands, the tools that 'stacked [the] bricks' by which the poet's city was built. Importantly, like Rhodes, Foster does not address the decline of the trawling businesses in the poem. As both poets list other vocations prominent within the city alongside maritime careers, there is a sense of determination and endurance; with regards to Foster's poem, the idiom 'to turn one's hand to something' is particularly fitting.

The docks' decline was devastating to the city though, and particularly to the once close-knit fishing communities. As we have already seen in Corbett's 'Mapmaker' – and, indeed, in Philip Larkin's photograph of the abandoned ship in the previous chapter – the devastation had a visual impact, too. This is evoked in Genny Rahtz's poem 'Hull', included within the 1982 collection *A Rumoured City: New Poets from Hull*:

> remnants of full use
> Are warehoused
> In semi-shrouded lots
> On museum streets.[29]

By the time that Rahtz was studying at the University of Hull in the mid-1970s, Hull's fishing industry had been irrevocably damaged by a combination of new

[28] Vicky Foster, 'Why I Love Where I Live', in *Changing Tides* (Huddersfield: The King's England Press, 2016), 99.
[29] Genny Rahtz, 'Hull', in *A Rumoured City: New Poets from Hull*, ed. Douglas Dunn (Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe, 1982), 94.

employment regulations affecting dockers' working practices, and the effect of the Cod Wars and the fishing quotas enforced by the EEC. Hull's most prominent fish dock – and the one beside which the Hessle Road fishing community was established – St Andrew's Dock, closed in 1975 after over 100 years in operation.[30] As a result, even in 'Hull', a poem that describes the city's rivers, there is no mention of the fish docks in operation, merely 'the groups of boys/ Seen fishing from the path.' Although fishing persists here, it is shore-based and recreational. The maritime trades that remain, in the city and in the poem, are limited to the shipping 'barges' and 'the paddle steamer' transporting passengers between the north and south banks of the Humber.[31] Even this was rendered redundant by the Humber Bridge in 1981. The maritime industry in 'Hull', then, is being absorbed into the history books and the artefacts of the museums.

Whilst Rahtz's poem is written from the observational perspective of a visiting university student – presumably in the suburban territory of the 'writer', the outer layer – Sean O'Brien's 'Le Départ' explores the human effects of the loss of industry, specifically on the ex-trawlermen who found themselves increasingly left behind. The poem, also published in *Old City, New Rumours*, takes the reader not around the city and its hinterlands like Larkin, Rhodes, Corbett and Rahtz, but into a local pub, in amongst the local trawlermen, in the middle of the fishing industry's decline. The poem's title – French for 'departure' – seems jarringly exotic or 'highbrow' for the poem; whether this is a reflection of the multicultural background of the dockers, the 'exotic' seas that they would sail in the industry's heyday, or whether the unlikely title is representative of the unlikeliness of the men actually 'departing' again, is ambiguous.

Despite the casual employment, in the industry's heyday there was no shortage of jobs, so the trawlermen were almost guaranteed employment if present on the day of sailing. In O'Brien's poem, however, set during the industry's steep decline, the men

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[30] Jo Byrne, 'Memory on the waterfront in late twentieth century Hull', (lecture, *Culture Café Series*, University of Hull, Hull, April 14, 2018).
[31] Rahtz, 'Hull', 94.

in the poem are in limbo, surviving on the hope of gaining employment on the next ship. The poem begins:

> You've been leaving for years and now no-one's surprised
> When you knock to come in from the weather.
> The crew is past embarrassment.[32]

When the industry was thriving, a trawlerman's three days at home would have included frequent pub visits; now the men congregate there, recreating the camaraderie of life on deck, out of habit and desperation.[33] Similarly, the 'knock to come in from the weather' in days past would have been the return home from sea, or even the sailor coming in from the deck; now it merely relates to the trip to the docks, the failed bid for employment. The resulting desperation becomes increasingly evident in the men's other behaviour too:

> Until then there is querulous Ninepin
> (The loss of his ticket for thieving)
>
> […]
>
> A month ago
> Rochteau, stuck for credit, offered up
> The pelvic bones of Mungo Park
> In exchange for a fifth of *Jim Beam*.[34]

In his study into British 'class image and reality', Arthur Marwick concludes that 'the tragedy of long-term unemployment was that it could destroy a man's confidence in himself', causing him to lose his identity and sense of self.[35] As the 'sentimental stevedores' loiter 'In the drinking clubs in the dank afternoons' going by their 'nautical names' (an attempt to cling onto their working 'selves') in the hope of 'news', their self-destructive behaviour helps to maintain their seafaring identities,

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[32] Sean O'Brien, 'Le Départ', in *A Rumoured City: New Poets from Hull*, ed. Douglas Dunn (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1982), 80.
[33] Byrne, 'Memory on the waterfront,' lecture.
[34] O'Brien, 'Le Départ', 81.
[35] Arthur Marwick, *Class: Image and Reality in Britain, France and the USA since 1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 81.

to avoid this loss of self. The only 'news' that comes, however, is the death of a crew member:

> Somebody drowned last night, walked sideways
> Off a Polish fishmeal hulk.[36]

Whether suicide or a result of the dangerous working practices that were rife within the industry, the men seem unsurprised and unconcerned.

The hope of sailing prevails in the poem, with each morning bringing potential – 'And then inspect the shipping lists/ Until the time is right' – with each incoming boat a possible source of employment: 'How can you not be struck by these arrivals?/ The perfect boat is sailing Tuesday week'.[37] However, each successive night brings disappointment as those who have failed to find any prospects of departure gather once again:

> It is easily night: soft boom of lighter-boats
> Beyond the fogwall, swung on inauthentic tides
> That left you here, that left you here.[38]

Ultimately, this state was permanent and most of the men were left on the shore. For the region's contemporary poets then, all that is left is the opportunity – perhaps in some cases the *need* – to reminisce, back both to their memories and those of their ancestors in the city.

This is especially the case in two of Julie Corbett's poems in *On the Humber*, in which we gain alternative perspectives of life in the fishing community. In 'At the Dock', the poet adopts a child-like narrative perspective, in a poem set at St Andrew's Dock, one of the most common points of departure for the trawlermen:

> I liked kicking
> the lumps of ice

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[36] O'Brien, 'Le Départ', 80.

[37] Ibid, 81.

[38] Ibid.

you said were
chipped from blue 'bergs
sailing off Greenland[39]

It seems that these memories are those of the child's dockside interactions with a father returning to sea. The 'lumps of ice' discarded on the dock floor would have presumably been used to preserve the fish caught by the distant water trawlers; as the child imagines the possibilities of distant lands (and distant icebergs) we are reminded of the Humber's links to the sea, the positioning of the land, in Larkin's words, 'half-turned toward Europe.'[40] The child-like viewpoint is maintained in 'Shore Leave Weekend', in which we also get a glimpse of the lives of Larkin's 'grim head-scarfed wives', the women who took care of the children and the household, with very little money to do so, whilst the men on the distant-water trawlers were at sea for twenty-one days, with only three days on shore before setting sail again.[41] Whilst Larkin's narrator describes the activities of the women with the distance of a middle-class man, Corbett's narrator takes the reader physically inside the flat, recounting the scene in multi-sensory first hand:

four smells -
steak and kidney pie, stale breathy
beer, shoe polish and the kit bag

that guest by the veranda door -
meaning he was home.[42]

The reader is immersed in the scene; the result is a greater understanding and empathy for the woman who baked the pie as well as caring for the household and children, for the husband to come 'home, spending love/ in the pub, tailors and sweet shop', before returning to sea as the cycle began again:

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[39] Julie Corbett, 'At the Dock', in *On the Humber* (California: Folded Word, 2012), 18.
[40] Philip Larkin, 'Here,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 49.
[41] Ibid; Byrne, 'Memory on the waterfront,' lecture.
[42] Julie Corbett, 'Shore Leave Weekend', in *On the Humber* (California: Folded Word, 2012), 16.

> By Monday the flat was ready -
> ripe enough for the purging
> with mop bucket, bleach and boil wash[43]

The role of the seafarer's wife, then, was relentless - it is no wonder that the 'head-scarfed wives', to the onlooker, appeared 'grim'.[44]

Just like the Headscarf Revolutionaries who paved the way for female activism in the city, so many of Hull's defining features and moments result from the connections to the rivers, and the sea beyond them. Rhodes encourages the reader, the local, even the cultural tourist to 'listen' to the narratives implicit within the city:

> Put your shell-like to the floor.
> Listen to the buildings breathe.
> The city speaks. It speaks of rust
> and silver that became a street,
> that became a land of green ginger,
> a King's town then a city.[45]

The poem may seemingly relate to the past, but the suggestion that 'the buildings breathe' implies that the city is very much alive. If we recall the cyclical homonyms in the first and last stanzas – 'Peel and peel and peel' and 'Peal and peal and peal' – this notion is reiterated. The first of these, which as we have recognised, encourages the reader to delve through the city's rich histories, reflects backwards; the second, which evokes the sound of the bells chiming at Trinity Church (now Hull Minster), acknowledges the passing of time. With every peal, new history is made (to be 'peeled' by future poets and readers, perhaps). As we picture the city ageing, in the stanza above, Rhodes recognises the development of the Old Town: 'silver that became a street,/ that became a land of green ginger'. In today's city, Silver Street

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[43] Ibid.
[44] Larkin, 'Here', 49.
[45] Rhodes, 'The City Speaks,' 7, 25.

gives way to the Land of Green Ginger, two roads named due to their proximity to the metal and spice trading close to the docks.[46]

In the third and fourth stanzas of 'The City Speaks' we encounter further contexts:

> Before the three coronets were stamped
> we punched our gold with H for Hull.
> Before the gas lights we ran on oil.
> Oil for making paint and soap, hemp
> for old ships' rope. From hollowed boat
> to sail to steam. Latchlifter to another dream.
>
> Round here we can make bones speak.
> Peel another sheet and look inside.
> The wool, the salt, the grain and hides,
> the bow, the stern, the wine and stone.
> A sailing needle, a scrimshaw tooth.
> Tattooed maps guide a sailor home.[47]

We are reminded by the first two lines of the third stanza of Hull's atmosphere of independence, as discussed in the previous chapter, as well as calls for Yorkshire independence, as will be discussed later. Rhodes foregrounds the numerous manufacturing and processing industries that developed in the city because of the presence of the docks, from the paint and soap factories to the roperies that served the ships. The poet lists the imported goods that were hauled into the docks:

> The wool, the salt, the grain and hides,
> the bow the stern, the wine and stone.

By this we are reminded, both in terms of form and content (particularly the recurrence of 'grain'), of Larkin's lists in 'Here':

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[46] Paul Schofield, *Old Town and City Centre Walks*, guided walk, May 2016, Hull.
[47] Rhodes, 'The City Speaks,' 11-13.

> Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster
> Beside grain-scattered streets, barge-crowded water'.[48]

The latter of these stanzas (the fourth in the poem's sequence) permits the reader an insight into the city's maritime trade that is not unlike a visit to the Maritime Museum. Rhodes' list of imports is flanked by relics of the industry's history: the 'sailing needle, a scrimshaw tooth' are described like a list of exhibits, whilst 'Round here we can make bones speak' acknowledges not only the evocation of history, but the whale skeleton which resides within the museum (whaling ships were among the vessels that departed from Hull until the practice was outlawed). The Maritime Museum is acknowledged in Vicky Foster's 'Why I Love Where I Live,' too:

> Can't they see
> We've wandered
> Free museums
> All our lives?
> Looking upon whale bones,
> Mammoths,
> Viking ships
> And freedom fighters?[49]

The recurrence of this museum in these poems recognises the shared local heritage contained and displayed within it. What might be construed merely as pride in local cultural facilities in these poems is actually recognition of shared local identity and acknowledgement – 'whale bones/ Mammoths,/ Viking ships' – of the region's past industrial might and maritime presence.

As the 'Tattooed maps guide a sailor home' in Shane Rhodes' 'The City Speaks,' it is important to recognise that 'home' becomes synonymous with 'Hull' throughout the poem. In the seventh stanza, it is the poet himself who is returning home:

> More than once I tried to leave you,
> but your familiar voice brings me back.
> I travel across or under the harp

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[48] Rhodes, 'The City Speaks,' 13; Larkin, 'Here,' 49.
[49] Foster, 'Why I Love Where I Live,' 98.

and know I'm home again.
Wrapped in these layers,
out on an alluring limb.[50]

Accompanied by a painting by Daniel R. Mitchell of Paragon Interchange, recognising the station's importance in the city that is itself an historic transit hub, the poet describes the sight of the Humber Bridge as 'the harp', with Hull the 'home' it signals. Again, Rhodes describes 'layers': in this case the layers of personal and regional history here are a form of comfort, whilst the 'alluring limb' recognises the local geography, as East Yorkshire extends out, limb-like, into the sea at Spurn Point.

Image 7: acrylic on canvas painting of Paragon Interchange
by Daniel R. Mitchell (2016).[51]

This stanza links back to Larkin's description in *A Rumoured City*, too. We do not know whether Rhodes, in his narrative, is arriving into the Paragon Station: as he travels 'across or under the harp' this is ambiguous; the train does travel under the Humber Bridge and along the side of the river (the view from the train here is presumed to be the point where Larkin observes how 'sky and Lincolnshire and

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[50] Rhodes, 'The City Speaks,' 19.
[51] Daniel R. Mitchell, 'Paragon Interchange,' acrylic on canvas (2016), in *The City Speaks: A Poem for Hull*, Shane Rhodes (Hull: Wrecking Ball Press, 2017), 18.

water meet' in 'The Whitsun Weddings'.[52]) However, it is only possible to travel 'across' the bridge by foot or road; unless he is travelling 'across' the 'harp' on a bus or 'under' it by train, it is unlikely that he would disembark into the station. Larkin, however, did exit here, and it is this narrative that we can see under the surface of Rhodes' poem, and reflected in the choice of painting:

> When your train comes to rest in Paragon Station against a row of docile buffers, you alight with an end-of-the-line sense of freedom […] People are slow to leave it, quick to return. And there are others who come, as they think, for a year or two, and stay a lifetime, sensing that they have found a city that is in the world, yet sufficiently on the edge of it to have a different resonance.[53]

It is quite clear that both poets' sentiments towards the city are the same. The first two lines of Rhodes' stanza – 'More than once I tried to leave you,/ but your familiar voice brings me back' – could almost be a response to Larkin's line, 'People are slow to leave it quick to return.' In the same way, 'out on an alluring limb' is really another way of saying 'a city that is in the world, yet sufficiently on the edge of it.' It is difficult of course to say whether Rhodes is influenced by Larkin's writing – although in a commissioned piece to celebrate the history and culture of the city, some level of pastiche is likely – or whether the similar sentiments acknowledge a particular influence or feeling instilled by the city or region itself.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

'On a bench above the bogs by Queen Victoria': Narratives of class in East Yorkshire poetry.

In 'The City Speaks,' it seems that Rhodes deliberately targets the working classes in his attempts to connect through shared experience. This is especially the case in terms of the occupations discussed which, with the possible exception of the 'writer',

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[52] Philip Larkin, 'The Whitsun Weddings,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 56.
[53] Philip Larkin, 'Foreword,' in *A Rumoured City: New Poets from Hull*, ed. Douglas Dunn (Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe, 1982), 9.

are exclusively working-class roles. As we have already observed, the city was established around these working-class vocations: as a non-traditional audience for poetry it makes sense, therefore, that Rhodes' poem is pitched at a relatable level, incorporating well-known moments of the city's history. This ultimately makes the poem relatable and, it was presumably hoped, unifying.

Given the title, it is fitting that the poem is written to be read in the distinct, working-class, Hull dialect. This is particularly the case as Rhodes lists the cargo historically shipped in and out of the city's docks in quick succession: 'The wool, the salt, the grain and hides,/ the bow, the stern, the wine and stone.'[54] With the flat vowels of the Hull accent, the difference between 'stern' and 'stone' would be indecipherable when read aloud, but for their contexts. This is a poem about voices and making the regional voice heard; this is implicit in the poem's semantics. Rhodes fills the poem with references of an oral or vocal nature, as italicised below:

> *Words* come from a room within a room.
>
> Peel back the *writer* and you have a filleter.
>
> Round here we can make bones *speak*.
>
> A sailing needle, a scrimshaw *tooth*.
>
> His *words* still ringing round the house.
>
> What does the strange fruit *taste* of?
> It tastes like fireworks in the *mouth*.
>
> Amy's plane *coughs* vapour trails
>
> but your familiar *voice* brings me back.

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[54] Rhodes, 'The City Speaks,' 13.

> *Listen* to the buildings *breathe*.
> The city *speaks*. It *speaks* of rust[55]

Despite the frequency of these words throughout the poem, their presence remains subtle, giving the city an essence of life – living, breathing, *speaking* – throughout 'The City Speaks'. The significance here is not only in giving the region and its people a literary voice, but in their situation next to the *mouth* of the Humber. The fact that Rhodes references 'fireworks in the mouth' is no accident, considering that the firework display that opened the City of Culture celebrations was launched from vessels positioned in the river mouth (the same river mouth into which trawlers would historically have disappeared from view). This is certainly not the 'untalkative' landscape of Larkin's 'Here': as this poem was released, the city was positively shouting.[56]

In 'The Hull Poets and Pigeons', a poem published in *Old City, New Rumours: A Hull Anthology* (2010), Maurice Rutherford likens the city's poets, in their rather impressive numbers, to the birds (often considered vermin) that congregate in the city centre: 'Hull City Hall's a favoured pigeon squat'.[57] The poem attempts to dispute John Osborne's quote, '...the third generation Hull poets are proving worthy inheritors of the Larkin-Dunn estate', writing that:

> few of them are native to the town,
> most come by chance, or maybe second choice,
> and some have taken off with good degrees;
> others fillet fish or sign for the dole.[58]

This hierarchy of roles has particular resonance with Rhodes' list of successive occupations in 'The City Speaks.' It is interesting, given our previous analysis of Larkin's bird-narrator, that Rutherford adopts the image of poets as birds, too. The poem contrasts the differences in class and privilege that separates the poets who, in

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[55] Ibid, 7, 9, 13, 15, 17, 19.
[56] Larkin, 'Here,' 49.
[57] Maurice Rutherford, 'The Hull Poets – And Pigeons,' in *Old City, New Rumours: A Hull Anthology*, ed. Ian Gregson and Carol Rumens (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2010), 105.
[58] Ibid.

Rutherford's words, are not 'native' – of whom Larkin and Dunn are good examples – and those who leave the city, and yet still acquire local 'acclaim':

> earn, in time, the town's acclaim
> be granted all the privilege and pomp
> the Three Crowns coat-of-arms would guarantee [59]

Those who are born and die within Hull's working-class community, Rutherford suggests, remain unknown within the city's literary tradition:

> And so I doubt Hull City's Fathers will
> remark the passing of one *Rutherford*,
> son of a Hull fish curer's manager,
> and writer of occasional short verse.[60]

However tongue-in-cheek his writing, to the poet, who was born in Hull and worked as a writer within the ship-repairing industry, this might reasonably seem an unacceptable injustice, however characteristic of the city's history.[61] The acclaim he describes must surely refer to Larkin who, despite being born in Coventry and not living in the city until the age of 33, is widely known as 'the bard of Hull'.[62]

As a successful port, the city is a historic place of movement and transit; arguably the status of not being – to adopt Rutherford's term – 'native', itself creates a curious link between these poets and the city's heritage and traditions. Equally, in referring to Hull's poetic tradition as 'the Larkin-Dunn estate', Osborne namechecks two poets who were not born in the region, but relocated to Hull as adults, their work raising the profile of the city's literature. Similarly, the first line of Rutherford's poem - 'But few of them are native to the town' – suggests that many of this next generation are

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[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid, 106.

[61] Ian Gregson and Carol Rumens, ed., *Old City, New Rumours: A Hull Anthology* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2010), 123.

[62] Stephen Walsh. ''What a hole': Hull has embraced Philip Larkin - but did the love go both ways?' *Guardian*, May 30, 2017, accessed May 31, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/may/30/hull-hole-philip-larkin-poet-love-both-ways?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other/.

largely from elsewhere too: it is interesting that this pattern of poets migrating from elsewhere to make Hull their home continues.

Throughout the poem, Rutherford writes of the class difference that exists both within his contemporary poetry in Hull, and historically, too:

> few Hullites there can be
> who're unaware of Marvell's old complaint
> […]
> but fewer still will know that Stevie Smith
> lived here her early, valuable years.[63]

Whilst this is undoubtedly true, and Marvell's poetic reputation was likely helped by his privileged upbringing and political roles, Smith only lived in Hull for the first three years of her life; the city may thus have had a great influence on the poet, but it seems unlikely that she actually began to formulate any of her poetry there. It is interesting, though, that Rutherford writes that 'Hull City Hall's a favoured pigeon squat/ and Queen Victoria's monument is not'.[64] As a civic building and exhibition space for artistic events, Hull City Hall has obvious middle- and upper-class associations; twice a year it also hosts the university's graduation ceremonies, the point at which Rutherford suggest native and non-native poets leave the city (likely to 'fly south'), 'taking off with good degrees'.[65] The exclusivity of the City Hall is juxtaposed with the open square that lies beyond the building's grand doors and imposing columns. Rutherford writes that you can 'clap your hands in Queen Victoria Square -/ indigenous pigeons will take to the air', suggesting that the applause that congratulates the privileged artists also serves as a method of dispersing or silencing their working-class counterparts.[66] On the other hand, however, Rutherford's remark may imply that locally-born poets write for the craft, not for critical acclaim; thus this public approval causes them to immediately flee.

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[63] Rutherford, 'The Hull Poets – and Pigeons,' 105.
[64] Ibid.
[65] This was the case until summer 2019, when – citing access reasons – the university moved their ceremonies to the newly built Bonus Arena.
[66] Rutherford, 'The Hull Poets - and Pigeons,' 105.

However, as Carol Rumens notes, Hull's poetry scene is alive and constantly evolving.[67] In Hull's contemporary poems, many writers are increasingly keen to embrace their working class backgrounds; indeed, all of the poets whose collections are considered on their own merit in this chapter, rather than as a result of their selection for anthologies, were born into Hull's working class communities. Indeed, Queen Victoria Square – and even the monument itself – is explicitly referenced within Dean Wilson's 'Rhubarb Rhubarb':

> I once met
> an Emmerdale extra. On a bench above the bogs
> by Queen Victoria.[68]

It seems unlikely that clapping would make Wilson's pigeon disperse. The setting of Wilson's poem plays upon the everyday setting and situation; there is absolutely nothing remarkable about the site of the meeting. So too, the language of his poem is very different from that we have come to expect of Hull poetry, from the examples we have explored thus far. Local idiom and non-Standard English have become increasingly commonplace in the region's contemporary poetry: even the commissioned poem 'The City Speaks' contains the lines 'Peel til something resonates/ til something gives.'[69] That the clipped part of 'until' is not even signified by an apostrophe here suggests that 'til' is an accepted part of local vernacular. In Vicky Foster's collection *Changing Tides*, Hull vernacular is incorporated to an even greater extent; she incorporates the unglossed dialect of the city in her work: 'hot pattie and chips,' 'Roads, pathways/ And tenfoots'.[70] In a manner not unlike Tony Harrison in *The School of Eloquence* – which we will discuss in greater detail in 'Section II: The West' – Standard English is being rejected by contemporary East Yorkshire poets, in favour of their own regional lexis and dialects.

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[67] Gregson and Rumens, *Old City, New Rumours*, 8.
[68] Dean Wilson, 'Rhubarb Rhubarb', in *Sometimes I'm So Happy I'm not Safe on the Streets* (Hull: Wrecking Ball Press, 2016), 57.
[69] Rhodes, 'The City Speaks,' 7.
[70] Foster, 'Why I Love Where I Live,' 97, 96.

Language, then, becomes an intrinsic form of division in East Yorkshire poetry; whilst Larkin may not have consciously written in a technically 'higher' or more standard form, responses from several poets writing in the region in his wake seem to be consciously subverting his language. In 'Here' we may recall that Larkin wrote of the 'grim head-scarfed wives.'[71] In 'View from Hessle Road,' a poem included in *Old City, New Rumours*, Maurice Rutherford speaks for the 'wives' in the local dialect (emphasis the poet's own, a nod to the lines directly borrowed from Larkin):

> "Oozee?" perhaps
> they'd gob out from *the side of their own lives*.
> "We've never 'eard of 'im down 'Ezzle Road."[72]

In a combination of pastiche and retaliation, Rutherford caricatures Larkin in much the same way that Larkin had caricatured the people he observed in Hull:

> Old Bikeclips with the size 12 Oxfords wrote,
> but eloquently, of a *cut-price crowd*.[73]

He draws attention not only to the language Larkin used – 'wrote,/ but eloquently' – but also to the differences in daily life and livelihood between the middle-class poet-librarian, living near and working within the university, and those of the 'cut-price crowd' and '*grim* and *head-scarfed wives*/ from fishy-smelling streets', presumably in the Hessle Road area, near the docks:

> perhaps there's something to be learned
> in asking why it was he wrote of them,
> not they of him[74]

Rutherford concludes, through this stanza and the reported speech quoted above, that the women writing of Larkin would be impossible: the realities of their daily existence within the close but relatively closed Hessle Road community contributes

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[71] Larkin, 'Here', 49.

[72] Maurice Rutherford, 'View from Hessle Road', in *Old City, New Rumours: A Hull Anthology*, ed. Ian Gregson and Carol Rumens (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2010), 110.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

to their complete ignorance to 'Hull's late bard'. This poem raises the important point that, until relatively recently, Hull's working-class citizens were only represented second-hand, through the eyes of middle-class observers, in mainstream local poetry. Even in Douglas Dunn's *Terry Street* (1986), the poet – who actually lived on the titular street – and the reader are positioned outside the scene, looking on the subjects ('they' not 'we') as if watching a documentary, looking on as tourists or even gazing upon a museum scene:

> In small backyards old men's long underwear
> Drips from sagging clotheslines.
> The other stuff they take in bundles to the Bendix.[75]
>
> Up terraces of slums, young gum-chewing mothers sit
> Outside on their thrones of light…[76]

The unaware subjects – the working-class citizens who populate Larkin's and Dunn's scenes – seemingly lack the privilege of their observers. Unlike the poets, these women (the 'grim head-scarfed wives' and the 'young gum-chewing mothers') did not have the leisure time to observe, neither, we assume, would they have had the means or the access to publish their observations had they the inclination to do so.

Of course, the women were likely more worthy of observation by the two male poets because of their inherent differences: as we have discussed, neither Larkin nor Dunn were originally *from* Hull. In particular, Larkin's lack of intrinsic link – be that of birth or family heritage – to the region is further suggested by Vicky Foster in 'Why I Love Where I Live.' She responds to Larkin's description of the city as 'fishy-smelling', both in the poem 'Here' and in a letter, in which he stated that 'Hull smelt

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[75] Douglas Dunn, 'The Patricians,' in *Selected Poems, 1964-1983* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 5.
[76] Douglas Dunn, 'New Light on Terry Street,' in *Selected Poems, 1964-1983* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 4.

revoltingly of fish this morning. My secretary said that meant it was going to rain. And it did':[77]

> Because when people
> Tell me that
> This place
> Smells of fish -
>
> I'm surprised.
> I never noticed.[78]

Unless this is interpreted as sarcasm, it seems that the complaint about the smell of the fish-docks only serves to mark the visitor – and Larkin's narrator by association – as an outsider. Fishing is a part of the poet's, and the community's heritage. Even after their closure, this is signified in Foster's poem, as throughout the city:

> By the imprints
> On the soles of our shoes
> Of the fish trail.[79]

Foster, here, exhibits her proud link to the city's working-class dockside industries that has afforded her immunity to the unpleasant scent that greets the uninitiated.

In 'What Does Your Father Do?' by Roger McGough (published in *Old City, New Rumours*) the poet explores his very different relationship to his working-class upbringing and roots. Whilst McGough was born and raised in Liverpool (itself another maritime city) he moved to Hull to study at the university. As Rutherford suggests in 'The Hull Poets - and Pigeons', the university enables students to progress up the social ladder, thus providing a route out of working-class city life. In McGough's poem, the student narrator is embarrassed by his working-class background, as revealed by his father's occupation. It seems ironic that, in this

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[77] Larkin, 'Here,' 49; Larkin to Richard and Patsy Murphy, Aug 17, 1955, *Selected Letters*, 249.
[78] Foster, 'Why I Love Where I Live,' 97-98.
[79] Ibid, 98.

maritime city where the docks were one of the major forms of employment, the student would feel it necessary to avoid discussing his father's role in the industry:

> Should I mumble "docker" in the hope of being misheard?
> ("There he goes, a doctor's son, and every inch the medical man")
> Or should I pick up the hook and throw it down like a gauntlet?
> "Docker. My dad's a docker."[80]

That the similarities that one might expect to allow the narrator to feel more at home in his new city actually cause him embarrassment and mark him as an outsider within his new community further emphasises the division between the working-class city centre, physically built around the docks, and the middle-class, suburban university campus. Of course, in later adulthood the narrator feels close to his father's memory through associations with the docks:

> In dreams now, I hear him naming the docks he knew and loved.
> A mantra of gentle reproach. *Gladstone, Hornby, Alexandra,*
> *Langton, Brocklebank, Canada, Huskisson, Sandon, Wellington,*
> *Bramley Moor, Nelson, Salisbury, Trafalgar, Victoria.*[81]

The adult narrator is embarrassed of his teenage class-consciousness and natural inclination to hide his heritage in an attempt to fit in. Despite his poetic voice retaining a standard form, the poet has developed a pride in his working-class origins and is comfortable enough to exhibit it; so too, he is suitably horrified by the injustices done by his teenage self to his working-class roots.

The implications and injustices inherent in social class are explored in Peter Didsbury's poem 'Coasts of Africa 1850,' too. Whilst the poet was born in the historic fishing town of Fleetwood in Lancashire, he has lived in Hull since not long after; thus, his poem was included in *Old City, New Rumours* in 2010. Didsbury's poem is engaged with Hull's history by way of association: he uses the fame of William

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[80] Roger McGough, 'What Does Your Father Do?' in *Old City, New Rumours: A Hull Anthology*, ed. Ian Gregson and Carol Rumens (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2010), 121.
[81] Ibid; Maurice Rutherford, 'The Cod Farm', in *Old City, New Rumours: A Hull Anthology*, ed. Ian Gregson and Carol Rumens (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2010), 104.

Wilberforce, one of Hull's most celebrated men, to raise the profile of an associated man from elsewhere. 'Coasts of Africa 1850' is prefaced by a line from a memorial to William Henry Hobday, published in the *Fleetwood Chronicle* in January 1912: 'Deceased for many years was engaged in the suppression of the African slave trade.'[82] To a poet living in a city where William Wilberforce is so widely celebrated for his role in the abolition of the slave trade, the modest line on Hobday must have seemed unjust. It is important to note Wilberforce's recurrence in Hull poetry: he is referenced thrice within the relatively small sample of poetry explored in this chapter. This includes the 'Pastoral of ships up streets, the slave museum,' in Larkin's 'Here' and 'his flat near where Wilberforce lived' in Wilson's 'Rhubarb Rhubarb.'[83] The significance of the MP's work to abolish the slave trade, and the museum to which Larkin alludes to, are afforded a whole stanza in 'The City Speaks', alongside a picture of the famous 1787 engraving of Brooks Slave Ship:

> There's a mulberry tree in William's garden.
> His words still ringing round the house.
> "So much misery condensed in so little room".
> Peel another skin. "We are all guilty".
> What does the strange fruit taste of?
> It tastes like fireworks in the mouth.[84]
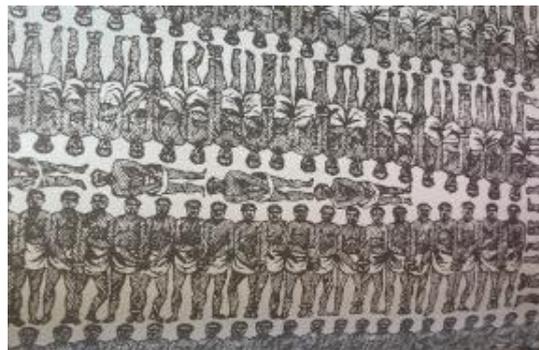
Image 8: engraving of 'Brooks Slave Ship'
by James Phillips (1787)[85]

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[82] Peter Didsbury, 'Coasts of Africa 1850,' in *Old City, New Rumours: A Hull Anthology*, ed. Ian Gregson and Carol Rumens (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2010), 17-18.

[83] Larkin, 'Here', 49; Wilson, 'Rhubarb Rhubarb', 57.

[84] Rhodes, 'The City Speaks,' 15.

[85] James Phillips, 'Brooks Slave Ship' engraving (1787) in *The City Speaks: A Poem for Hull*, Shane Rhodes (Hull: Wrecking Ball Press, 2017), 14.

So too, if we recall Sean O'Brien's narrator gazing into the water in his garden, he evokes the image of Wilberforce doing much the same thing:

> *The reformer stood at the end of his garden [...] inwardly calling on the creator*
> *for assistance and looking down into the Hull...*[86]

Wilberforce's prominence – in history and in the words of local poets – is partly of course a result of his class, wealth and role as a Member of Parliament. Through his poem, Didsbury imagines the seafaring life of Hobday (the *other* William), and invites the public to remember too:

> Hear him sing of home.
> Hear him tell the tale of the names of the coasts
> [...]
> Or stand and gaze with him through lidless eyes
> [...]
> Let the smoke caress in the semblance of a breeze
> that beach by the Irish Sea where he paddles at evening.[87]

Didsbury's multi-sensory approach is not unlike that of Rhodes above: both poets are inviting their readers to remember, the difference being that, in the case of Didsbury and Hobday, these evocations are less powerful because – as a result of class and geographical distance – Hobday's are not shared memories in Hull.

As Didsbury plays on the region's knowledge of William Wilberforce to impart knowledge of William Hobday, Maurice Rutherford plays on the reader's prior knowledge of Philip Larkin's oeuvre for the success of his pastiche poems. Larkin's poetry, it seems, has permeated the literary landscape here to such an extent that – whether in response or imitation, to inspire or to counteract – his language and form persistently recur throughout twentieth- and twenty-first-century poetry written within the region. In 'The Autumn Outings,' Rutherford strategically deconstructs Larkin's 'The Whitsun Weddings' to form an ideological and poetic response in

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[86] O'Brien, 'The River in Prose,' 16.
[87] Didsbury, 'Coasts of Africa', 18.

which he problematises the state – or lack – of employment in the region, after the decline of the maritime industries. Although very similar in form – both poems comprised of eight ten-line stanzas with an ABABCDECDE rhyme scheme, and ten syllables per line, with the exception of the second line of each stanza, which comprises four syllables – the scenes are very different to those of the middle-class poet:

> That Whitsun, I was late getting away:
>   Not till about
> One-twenty on the sunlit Saturday
> Did my three-quarters-empty train pull out,
> All windows down, all cushions hot, all sense
> Of being in a hurry gone. We ran
> Behind the backs of houses, crossed a street
> Of blinding windscreens, smelt the fish-dock; thence
> The river's level drifting breadth began,
> Where sky and Lincolnshire and water meet.[88]

> That autumn I was quick getting away:
> only about
> one-twenty on the rain-drenched Wednesday
> I locked the premises and motored out,
> all sense of any kind of business gone[89]

The optimism of the recently married characters that Larkin's narrator observes in 'The Whitsun Weddings' is inverted in 'The Autumn Outings': rather than springtime promise we get a sense of seasonal decline. Circumstances, it seems, are growing bleaker as we move towards winter. Rutherford plays on Larkin's conservative poetry, infusing his parody with a trade unionist stance, as the poem follows the devastation of the closures and redundancies that resulted from industrial decline. The relaxed attitude of Larkin's narrator on the sunlit Whit

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[88] Philip Larkin, 'The Whitsun Weddings,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 56.

[89] Maurice Rutherford, 'The Autumn Outings', in *Old City, New Rumours: A Hull Anthology*, ed. Ian Gregson and Carol Rumens (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2010), 107.

Saturday only serves to emphasise the pain of the narrator of 'The Autumn Outings' who, on the rainy Wednesday, closes his business for the final time.

Given his career as a writer within the fishing industry, Rutherford would have been only too aware of the losses of a threatened industry: as Hull's fishing industry declined, so too did its associated businesses, including shipbuilding, to devastating effect.[90] References to Larkin's works are frequent throughout the poem, all intended to emphasise this devastation: 'What survives?/ Of Us: too early yet to tell' clearly parodies and inverts the sentiment of Larkin's 'What will survive of us is love' from 'An Arundel Tomb'. Similarly, the headline 'PIT CLOSURES SHOCK' that contradicts the official slogan '*Play up, and play the game.*' is not unlike the '*Fight Cancer*' that replaces the poster encouraging people to '*Come to Sunny Prestatyn*' in 'Sunny Prestatyn'. In the latter poem, the 'tuberous cock and balls/ Autographed *Titch Thomas*' compare with the graffiti 'SCARGILL FOR KING and TARZAN IS A SHIT' in 'The Autumn Outings'.[91] The reference to Scargill suggests support for trade unionism in the region; whilst not a mining area, we are reminded that East Yorkshire was having its own industrial troubles. Rutherford, then, enters into an intertextual dialogue, or even battle with Larkin, parodying his work to highlight the hopelessness felt within the poem and the community.

The distance between the unemployed workforce and the lawmakers who are considered complicit in the decline and associated devastation of local industry is emphasised through a further intertextual reference in the poem, this time to Larkin's 'Going, Going'. Larkin's poem, about the disappearing British countryside, criticises the councils who are similarly complicit:

> On the Business Page, a score
> Of spectacled grins approve
> Some takeover bid that entails
> Five per cent profit (and ten

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[90] Byrne, 'Memory on the Waterfront', lecture.
[91] Rutherford, 'Autumn Outings', 107; Philip Larkin, 'An Arundel Tomb' and 'Sunny Prestatyn', in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 71-72, 64-65.

>   Per cent more in the estuaries): move
>   Your works to the unspoilt dales
>   (Grey area grants!)[92]

As Rutherford parodies this section of Larkin's work, for the first time his sentiment echoes Larkin. However, Rutherford's disapproval applies to the treatment of people rather than the land. Rather than the state of Britain reflecting its architecture and infrastructure, for Rutherford it reflects human welfare and wellbeing, and the social and political injustices that cause the devastation and deprivation experienced by many in Hull's working-class (as well as families throughout the UK) during the country's industrial decline:

>   In brass-lined boardrooms up and down the land
>   deep in regret
>   a million more redundancies planned
>   while chairmen's hiked-up salaries are set
>   and Urban Councils chase arrears in rents.
>   Wide-boys, insider-deals, some M.P.s
>   grow richer by a second home in Spain,
>   a custom-plated white Mercedes Benz,
>   that new portfolio. True-blue disease.
>   The spores of loss, somewhere becoming gain.[93]

Like Rhodes, Rutherford too adopts Larkin's method of listing as a means of presenting these injustices in quick succession. As things are lost in 'Going, Going' - 'The shadows, the meadows, the lanes/ The guildhalls, the carved choirs.' - in 'The Autumn Outings' the listed elements are things gained, not by the community but by the wealthy politicians who are planning and approving measures that will cause severe losses to some of the poorest members of their society.[94] Rutherford critiques the losses caused by capitalist bureaucracy: where the former poem describes the

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[92] Philip Larkin, 'Going, Going', in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 82.

[93] Rutherford, 'Autumn Outings', 107.

[94] Larkin, 'Going, Going,' 82.

loss of the traditional English landscape, the latter references the loss of traditional industries and ways of life, by association.

Echoes of Larkin are frequent throughout late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century poetry from the East Riding; these are by no means limited to the work of Maurice Rutherford. If Rhodes encourages us to 'peel and peel' away layers of regional history, this is clearly possible through lines of the area's literary history too. Whether pastiche or imitation, response or rebuttal, a frequent desire to echo the senior poet's words or sentiments exists within East Riding poetry. In Sean O'Brien's 'The Snowfield' he writes of the same park that Larkin referenced in 'Toads Revisited'. O'Brien's narrator is driven to Pearson Park, identifiable by its 'planthouse' through loneliness, as Larkin's narrator is there as an alternative to work.[95] Both observe patients of the nearby hospital (the Avenues hospital where Larkin would ultimately die) as well as people deemed 'mad':

> Sick men, mad, half-born, who are sitting
> As long as the afternoon takes.
> Left there by helpers hours ago[96]

Here, the characters that O'Brien's narrator observes remind us immediately of those in Larkin's poem:

> Palsied old step-takers,
> Hare-eyed clerks with the jitters,
>
> Waxed-fleshed out-patients
> Still vague from accidents.[97]

Both narrators are distanced from the people they see in the park; as drawn as they are to Pearson Park they are seemingly not one of those who 'belong' there. Whilst

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[95] Dunn, *A Rumoured City*, 15.

[96] Sean O'Brien, 'The Snowfield', in *A Rumoured City: New Poets from Hull*, ed. Douglas Dunn (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1982), 82.

[97] Philip Larkin, 'Toads Revisited', in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 55-56.

O'Brien's narrator is not one of *those* men in Pearson Park, the similarities of his poem with Larkin's incidentally allies him with a new category: the poets of Pearson Park. Although O'Brien grew up in a working-class district of Hull, both poets are working and writing within the relatively affluent university area in these poems, their identities marked by their difference. Despite this park being midway between the university and the city, it is clear that – on a weekday at least – the poets simply do not belong here.

Place, then, is a further, frequent method of revisiting and rewriting Larkin's landscapes. The journey that Frank Redpath takes in 'There' – its title immediately placing it in opposition to Larkin's 'Here' – observes the mundane, the day-to-day lives of the working people he encounters. Unlike Larkin's poem this is not merely observations of people in the public space of the city centre; Redpath's poem takes us into the workplace and some of the private spheres of the working-class, gives us as readers a greater insight into the lives of the 'urban yet simple' 'cut-price crowd':[98]

> for caretakers equip
> Their caves with tea-cups, vacuum-flasks, calendars, and
>
> Cleaners pin postcards from friends at the seaside
> To broom-cupboard walls, and among the ledgers
> Accounts clerks cherish succulents and cacti.[99]

The lists and hyphenations of the workers' modest items are particularly reminiscent of the 'desires' ('Cheap suits, red kitchen-ware, sharp shoes, iced lollies') in 'Here'. Like Larkin, Redpath's narrator is that of an outsider or tourist; unlike Larkin, however, Redpath's reader is granted access to these working-class spaces and invited to imagine themselves interacting with the characters he observes: 'Or you may find yourself there, surprised,/ When asking for directions'. The community-driven conclusion of Redpath's poem – 'They quicken, they stave off death. They satisfy' – contrasts with the solitary satisfaction of Larkin's 'Loneliness clarifies' and

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[98] Larkin, 'Here,' 49.
[99] Frank Redpath, 'There', in *A Rumoured City: New Poets from Hull*, ed. Douglas Dunn (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1982), 104.

'Here is unfenced existence:/ Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach.'[100] Redpath's conclusion finds comfort in the presence of people and 'evidence/ Of other people's lives'. This is a stark contrast to the solitary relief of Larkin's conclusion.[101]

A similar point of contrast is the two poets' descriptions of the rural, East Yorkshire landscapes that they travel to (and through). Redpath's route is unstructured:

> abandon the car,
> Jump over ditches, mount by sheep track
> To the scree slope on the blind side of a farm or village[102]

Whilst the landscape is the same, this is very different to Larkin's route:

> swerving through fields
> Too thin and thistled to be called meadows[103]

Whilst Larkin's narrator is positioned above the landscape he describes, Redpath's narrative exists very much within it. The latter, locally-born narrator seems to have the intrinsic regional knowledge that allows him to leave the conventional route behind. This is also a notion of temperament; it is difficult to imagine Larkin (or his narrative persona) 'jump[ing] over ditches'. Like Corbett, Redpath does not render the East Yorkshire countryside as anything but ordinary, mundane even. He responds to the synesthetic imagery from 'Here' – 'Here silence stands/ Like heat' – with the everyday:[104]

> Where, in the silent heat, if patient,
> You may observe the unremarkable
> Events that litter loading bays and backyards.[105]

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[100] Ibid; Larkin, 'Here,' 49.
[101] Redpath, 'There,' 104.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Larkin, 'Here,' 49.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Redpath, 'There', 104.

Day-to-day life, after all, *is* unremarkable, and it is this that the local poets, rooted by their regional attachment, are well-placed to portray.

So too, many poets writing in the region since Larkin have proven themselves much better placed to take the reader into the local, working-class areas than the Coventry-born poet. Rhodes, Wilson and Foster, in particular, venture through their daily landscapes with the reader, providing a greater insight into areas of the city's life to which the middle-class academic poet, who relocated to the region in adulthood, might have lacked access or understanding. With the exception of 'The City Speaks', this – perhaps counter-intuitively – often results in less sentimentalism; the city often becomes a backdrop to poetry, rather than the subject of it. This is especially the case in Wilson's 2016 collection, *Sometimes I'm So Happy I'm not Safe on the Streets*: his titles ground the poems in place, by referencing specific areas within the city, whilst the poems themselves make little or no further reference to the place itself. 'Tiger's Lair', for example, referencing the Hull City AFC supporters' bar, situated beside Paragon Interchange, describes the performance of an Elvis impersonator.[106]

In much the same way as other poets we've discussed, Dean Wilson does not ignore the less appealing aspects of city life: employing a witty narrative persona, he allows the reader access to them. In 'Pattie and Chips and a Can of Coke', the nonchalant title is a stark contrast to the poem's subject: 'There's been/ another stabbing'.[107] The curious title's meaning seems to be twofold. The first is the location of the first 'stabbing':

> the other
> poor bugger
> breathed his last
> in the gutter

[106] Dean Wilson, 'Tiger's Lair', in *Sometimes I'm So Happy I'm not Safe on the Streets* (Hull: Wrecking Ball Press, 2016), 7.

[107] Dean Wilson, 'Pattie and Chips and a Can of Coke', in *Sometimes I'm So Happy I'm not Safe on the Streets* (Hull: Wrecking Ball Press, 2016), 19.

outside *In Cod We Trust*.[108]

The narrator relishes the disharmonies between the unfortunate death and the pun of the chip shop's name: the site of his death would long be remembered (for deaths in the public realm, memorials often mark the location long afterwards). This chip shop's name is an ironic comment on religion and capitalism: the motto of the USA (printed on US dollars) asks whether fast food is more dependable than religion within this particular society. 'Cod,' however, did not protect the 'poor bugger' from his untimely death.

Secondly, the tale of the second stabbing is akin to gossip, the story that greeted the narrator as response upon placing his titular order at his local chip shop: if the title is his order, the poem is the response he receives. Wilson's description of the poem's firmly working-class street is characteristically deprecating:

> at the posh
>
> end of
> the street,
>
> behind the burnt
> out portakabin.[109]

This inner-city street is unrecognisably different to the suburban region of Larkin, or even the working-class yet sentimentalised place of Rhodes; the only thing less aesthetically pleasing than 'the burnt/ out portakabin' must be the fact that this street was the site of not one but two stabbings. The locals' nonchalant attitude, juxtaposing the murder with a chip shop order, seemingly suggests that this is not a dramatic or unusual occurrence here. We might presume that, given the wit and deprecation that features throughout Wilson's collection, this is not entirely an

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[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.

accurate portrayal; it does, however, poetically describe the city in less-than-aesthetic terms, in a similar way as we have already seen in Corbett's 'Mapmaker.'

Wilson's at-once mediocre and seemingly unsafe landscape is simultaneously an unlikely and a very ordinary setting for romance. The grim unpleasantries of the city's nightlife are addressed within what might be considered an alternative love poem:

> When I see a can
> of Strongbow
>
> I think of you my dear.
>
> When I see
> a pool of sick
>
> on the pavement
>
> I think of you my dear.
>
> When I see a man
> pissing in a doorway
>
> I think of you my dear.[110]

This rueful description of a less-than-aesthetic lifestyle gives way to more typical love imagery in the final two stanzas, in which the poem becomes specifically located in Hull's Old Town, beside the Humber, too. Whilst the poem's title 'Another Terry Poem' links with the poem 'Terry' earlier in the collection, a subtle intertextual reference is also created to the lifestyles of those on the titular, working-class road in Dunn's *Terry Street*:

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[110] Dean Wilson, 'Another Terry Poem,' in *Sometimes I'm So Happy I'm not Safe on the Streets* (Hull: Wrecking Ball Press, 2016), 48.

> They don't get high on pot, but get sick on cheap
> Spanish Burgundy, or beer in rampant pubs,
> And come home supported and kissed and bad-tempered.[111]

This is not the only allusion to Wilson's poetic predecessors in the city. The poem also imitates the Larkin-esque transcendence, the lift in style and tone that takes the reader to the very end of the land in the final stanza of 'Here'. In Wilson's case, transcendence is the movement away from these mockingly derogatory notes of affection; the self-consciously maintained masculinity falls away here to reveal the language that we may more traditionally expect of a love poem:

> When I'm sat
> in The Minerva
>
> I think of your
> hand in mine
> on the pier.[112]

'The Minerva' and 'the pier' are well-known sites on the Hull landscape; interestingly, the only other moment when Hull landmarks are mentioned – outside of titles – in Wilson's collection is in the poem 'Rhubarb Rhubarb'. Again, in this poem, the narrator is falling in love:

> We met up a week later
> on the bridge by the Deep
> […]
> and walked along the river
> to his flat near where Wilberforce lived. [113]

As the narrator here reflects on these 'landmark' moments, the local is removed from his daily routines; in the areas he usually frequents, he momentarily becomes like a tourist, conscious of the sights and the landscape around him. The pub, the submarium, museum and the city's waterways become points of reference as he

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[111] Douglas Dunn, 'The Clothes Pit,' in *Selected Poems, 1964-1983* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 3.
[112] Wilson, 'Another Terry Poem,' 48.
[113] Wilson, 'Rhubarb Rhubarb,' 57.

maps out his burgeoning relationship: the city centre becomes an atypically romantic space. In the same way, in 'Why I Love Where I Live,' finds romance in the landscape, on the same pier on which Wilson's narrator holds Terry's hand:

> Because the pier
> Where I sat alone
> And whispered my pain
> To the wind
>
> Turns out to be
> The same place
> My parents
> Walked together
> Finding out love.[114]

Identity here is bound up with ideas of place, the inherent familiarity of place reflective, for the poet, of generations of family history. Hull, then, is the place that (to paraphrase Larkin) underwrites Foster's existence, and that of so many of the region's poets, too.[115]

<div align="center">*</div>

Within the poetry of Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire, then, is a certain cyclicality, a recurring relevance of the past. As we visit the same places time and time again in the work of different local poets, layers of local literary history are being written as well as resurrected. In the same way that Shane Rhodes encourages us to 'peel and peel' through layers of regional history, we are able to observe the ways in which local poets write and rewrite their 'places' which, in many cases, results in pastiche of or rebuttal to the previous works of Philip Larkin. In particular, the shadow of 'Here,' widely regarded as Larkin's 'Hull poem' is present in the work of many poets. We may expect this Larkin-echo in the anthologies *A Rumoured City*, which was compiled by Larkin's colleague Douglas Dunn, and *Old City, New*

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[114] Foster, 'Why I Love Where I Live,' 95.
[115] Philip Larkin, 'The Importance of Elsewhere,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 64.

Rumours, which commemorated twenty-five years since the poet's death; that Larkin's words are resonant too through the independent collections of local poets is extremely significant. Whilst these references, in many cases, expose Larkin's place as an 'outsider' or on the periphery, as a poet who relocated to Hull as an adult and wrote of the place as an observer, at the same time these intertextual relationships further engrain his historic importance and prominence within the region's poetry.

This cyclicality extends to the themes that are prominently represented within local poetry here, too. In a region so geographically and historically defined by water, it is perhaps only logical that water, including the region's watercourses, hold a centrality within local poetry. Less expected though, may be the battle for a working-class poetic voice here that culminates, to great effect, in Rhodes' 'The City Speaks' in which the local, working-class heritage, as well as the city as a whole, are permitted a voice, even a stage, at the beginning of the UK City of Culture 2017 celebrations. Whilst the middle-class voice of the visiting academic poet to some extent characterised twentieth-century Hull poetry, as we move into the twenty-first century this no longer seems to be the case. Since the publication of *A Rumoured City*, there has been a distinct increase in the diversity of voices emerging from Hull's poetry scene. This change begins to be apparent in *Old City, New Rumours* (with Rutherford's 'The Hull Poets – and Pigeons' a particularly relevant example), but only becomes truly clear when other twenty-first century publications are considered too.

Many of the poets working and writing in Hull today – including Wilson, Corbett, Rhodes and Foster – are not from overly privileged upbringings. This relatively recent diversification of the regional poetic voice here permits the reader to access different spaces in the city; where the same areas are explored, the viewpoint has changed. Whether on the Humber banks with Corbett, the pier with Foster and Wilson or Wilberforce's garden with Rhodes, there is a sense that we are *within* the city and its hinterlands rather than hovering above it. This is, to some extent, a result of the greater depth of connection that many of the locally-born writers have with

the region and its histories: they – and their poems – are more overtly rooted to place. Whilst the level of detail in Larkin's Hull writing has an incredible unappreciated or unacknowledged depth, the work of other poets we have considered in this chapter take us, as readers, deeper into the cityscape itself: they constitute further layers of the poetic scenes *and* the poetry scene here, of which Larkin's contribution, although highly significant, is just one of many.

II
THE WEST

With etymological roots back to the Middle Ages, the administrative county of the West Riding of Yorkshire was formed in 1889 and operated for close to a century.[1] In 1974, the county was divided, with regions allocated to North, South and West Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester and the county that was at the time known as Humberside. However, Yorkshire's 'Ridings' were where we began and, thus, how we will continue. Whilst many of the poems discussed in this chapter were written in or about the region that came to be known as West Yorkshire, we will at times defer to other regions that used to be united within the West Riding but now identify with alternative counties, due to their previous unity and the contexts and implications that they share, as a consequence.

The West Riding of Yorkshire was considerably larger than the East, with a much higher population: at 2,777 square miles the West Riding was 'in itself larger than any English county, except one,' whilst, at the beginning of the twentieth century, over 75 per cent of the population of Yorkshire lived in the West Riding.[2] Among other factors, the presence of several renowned universities, alongside a pre-existing literary tradition, has encouraged a diverse poetry 'scene' in the West Riding; West Yorkshire, and its neighbouring regions are now home to a significant number of poets, both new and established, of local, national and global renown. This is the case both in the cities, and out into the towns and villages that extend across the Pennines: each of these areas have their own unique identities, as a result of specific historical and geographical factors, including the shifting regional borders and boundaries which, in the poetry considered in this chapter, contribute to a tension between local identity, and broader Yorkshire identity.

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[1] A. H. Smith, *The Place-names of the West Riding of Yorkshire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 117-118.

[2] Richard Morris, *Yorkshire: A Lyrical History of England's Greatest County* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2018), 181; Lettice Cooper, *Yorkshire: West Riding* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1950), 11.

Whilst, as we have noted, there have been no contemporary anthologies of West Riding poetry, poets here are numerous and highly regarded. This section will begin by examining Ted Hughes's *Remains of Elmet* (1979), his reflection on the rural West Riding of his childhood; the second half of Chapter 3 will delve further into the poetry of Yorkshire's rural west through the writing of other poets, from *Elmet* to contemporary times. This second part of is framed by Zaffar Kunial's collection *Us* (2018), and will consider the region's rural landscapes, valleys and hinterlands. This will provide continuity with *Remains of Elmet*, considering the links between rural histories and landscapes in the West Riding. Chapter 4, in contrast, will journey into the industries and the urban centres of the West Riding, focusing on poetry related to West Yorkshire's cities and industrial histories (to some extent, its present, too). The key collection discussed here will be Helen Mort's *Division Street* (2013).

Forty years have passed since the publication of *Remains of Elmet*, and almost ninety since Hughes was born in Mytholmroyd. Changes to the West Riding of Hughes's childhood – and his adulthood, too – will be important here: events including the 1984-85 Miners' Strike and the 2016 EU Referendum have greatly impacted on the poetry written in the area and on the lives of the people living there. The Miners' Strike and its impacts will be central to this chapter, with 'Brexit' explored in the section that follows. By its conclusion, this section will contribute to a greater understanding of the relationships between individual twentieth- and twenty-first-century poems originating from the former West Riding of Yorkshire, as well as their links to Hughes's work and to the culture and identity of the region, including the social, political and geographical influences that contribute to the (re)shaping not only of the poems, but of the place itself.

CHAPTER 3:
'Darker with the whole view North':
Poetry in the Rural West Riding

In the introductory poem of *Remains of Elmet*, the narrator listens to his elderly uncle's recollections of Calder Valley history:

> And the smoky valley opens, the womb that bore him,
> Chimney above chimney, hill above hill[1]

Ted Hughes was born in Mytholmroyd, in the Upper Calder Valley, and lived there for the first eight years of his life before his immediate family relocated to Mexborough in South Yorkshire, leaving behind the 'smoky valley' with its distinct landscape of 'chimney[s]' and 'hill[s]'.[2] Despite only living in Mytholmroyd during his early years, the Calder Valley seemingly made a deep impression on the poet; in 1979 *Remains of Elmet*, his collaboration with photographer Fay Godwin, was published. The combination of poems and photography provides the reader a unique and striking insight into the specific area of rural West Yorkshire, the poet's ancestral home, 'the womb that bore' not only his uncle, but the poet himself.

It is significant here that the poet's family have left the 'womb'. In the mid-to-late twentieth century, when Hughes was writing, West Yorkshire was in a period of transition. Not only has Hughes's immediate family connection to the 'womb' of the Calder Valley (the umbilical cord, so to speak) been severed by their move south, so too the region's connection to its history is breaking: the 'chimney above chimney' that came before the characteristic hills, were being decommissioned. In his preface to *Remains of Elmet*, Hughes writes: 'Throughout my lifetime, since 1930, I have watched the mills of the region and their attendant chapels die. Within the last fifteen years the end has come. They are now virtually dead.'[3] This death of industrialism is afforded greater resonance by Godwin's brooding black and white

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[1] Ted Hughes and Fay Godwin, 'Six years into her posthumous life', in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 7.

[2] Paul Chrystal, *Yorkshire Literary Landscapes* (Darlington: DestinWorld Publishing, 2018), 123.

[3] Ted Hughes, 'Preface', in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 8.

photographs of abandoned buildings, juxtaposed with images of the wild countryside. Four years before the publication of *Remains of Elmet*, Glyn Hughes published the travel journal *Millstone Grit* – a book that Ted Hughes 'dug out his copy' of, when preparing *Remains* – in which he wrote that 'The great beauty of the moorlands and valleys is mixed with the knowledge of their desecration, and one is not to be ignored for the other.'[4] It is this paradoxically desecrated yet uniquely beautiful region that Hughes and Godwin commemorate in their collaboration.[5]

In a letter to Fay Godwin, in which he discusses his motives to write the collection, Hughes says of his uncle: '[he was] a living archive of the Calder Valley […] His whole life at the end – in his eighties – was recounting the life of the whole region. And I thought I really must get what I can of what I grew up in there – because it is over now, with that generation.'[6] This is alluded to in the first poem, too:

> He has brought me my last inheritance,
> Archaeology of the mouth'.[7]

The collection of poetry and photographs, then, becomes an attempt to memorialise the recent history of the changing West Yorkshire valley. Jonathan Bate remarks that 'the poem was written in 1975; the retention of the present tense for [the uncle's] voice when publishing it after his death the following year gives it added poignancy.'[8] Here, and for the moment, at least, Hughes is keeping his uncle's memories and histories alive.

However, when the poem was later republished with the title 'The Dark River' in *Elmet* (1994), the poet's edits included changing 'chimney above chimney' to 'chimney behind chimney'. Consequently, the perspective is altered: the narrator is

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4 Glyn Hughes, *Millstone Grit*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1975; London: Pan Books, 1987), 11. Citations refer to the Pan Books edition; Jonathan Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* (London: William Collins, 2015), 389.
5 'Ted Hughes to Fay Godwin – 4 July 1976', in *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. Christopher Reid (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 380.
6 Ibid, 378.
7 Hughes, 'Six years into her posthumous life', 7.
8 Bate, *The Unauthorised Life*, 391.

now above the valley looking down into it, rather than vice-versa. Additionally, Hughes altered the moment when his uncle began to speak from 'And the smoky valley opens' to 'And the smoky valley never closes'.[9] Whilst this may just reflect the poet's preferences in revision, it is notable that a further fifteen years have distanced Hughes, temporally, from his uncle's death. Whilst the former revision seems to suggest that this further distance positions him as an outsider, the latter change in phrasing seems to remove the initial sense of anxiety that Calderdale history will be lost forever.

The physical geography and geology of the Upper Calder Valley is distinctive and important to shaping both the area's history and Ted Hughes's poetry in *Remains of Elmet*:

> *Moors*
> Are a stage for the performance of heaven.
> Any audience is incidental.[10]
>
> *Rock has not learned*
> Valleys are not aware
> Heather and bog-cotton fit themselves
> Into their snugness, vision sealed[11]

Whilst the first poem of the collection indicates the centrality of human history, particularly that of Hughes's ancestry, within *Remains of Elmet*, this is part of a dual focus. The physical geography of Calderdale, intermingling thousands of years of geology with the cyclical botanical lives that it sustains, occupies a similarly focal position, both as 'stage' and as personified protagonist: 'Rock has not learned/ Valleys are not aware'.

The Pennine valley is, according to the West Yorkshire Geology Trust, formed mostly of millstone grit rocks from the Upper Carboniferous period of around 310

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[9] Ted Hughes, 'The Dark River' in *Three Books* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 3.
[10] Ted Hughes, 'Moors' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 19.
[11] Ted Hughes, 'Rock has not Learned' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 50.

million years ago.[12] Geology is particularly important to *Remains of Elmet*, both literally and figuratively: Yehuda Amichai finds that 'Hughes's work is a landscape… a whole landscape… each poem is a hill; covered with plants and volcanic, and archaeological – layered all together'; detailed references and subtle allusions to the history and geography of the Upper Calder Valley are woven throughout the collection.[13] The deepest layer of history in the West Yorkshire area is evoked by over 310 million years of geology; as Timothy Clark points out, 'timeframes of geology […] undermine at a stroke any narrowly human-centred perspective on things.'[14] The timespan of the geological landscape therefore indicates the temporality of the human activity upon it. This is particularly resonant given Hughes's growing distance from 'the smoky valley' between *Remains of Elmet* and *Elmet*.

The most prominent geological formation in *Remains of Elmet* is millstone grit. Because of its abundance in the area, millstone grit was frequently used for building in the villages: 'the use of this stone for the basic components of buildings and also for the detailed features and boundary walls […] means that the build environment fits into the landscape very naturally.'[15] For this reason, 'millstone' or 'millstone grit' is particularly prevalent throughout *Remains of Elmet*:

> *Wild rock*
>   Tamed rock.
> Millstone grit – a soul-grinding sandstone.[16]

Millstone grit was both 'wild' (naturally occurring on the landscape) and 'tamed' (the construction material for buildings and paving), surrounding the local

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[12] 'The Geology of Calderdale', West Yorkshire Geology Trust, 4-5, accessed Mar 6, 2017, http://www.wyorksgeologytrust.org/misc/Geology%20of%20Calderdale.pdf/.

[13] Yehuda Amichai, 'Ted Hughes Poetry' in *The Epic Poise: A Celebration of Ted Hughes*, ed. Nick Gammage (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 212.

[14] Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 141.

[15] 'Mytholmroyd Conservation Area Appraisal', Calderdale Council, accessed Apr 12, 2017, www.calderdale.gov.uk/environment/conservation/conservation-areas/mytholmroyd.pdf

[16] Ted Hughes, 'Wild Rock' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 40.

inhabitants. Despite naturally being 'a rich golden brown colour', a conservation appraisal by Calderdale Council finds that the stone is 'often weathered at the edges to a darker sometimes blackened appearance.'[17] In *Millstone Grit* Glyn Hughes utilizes the local stone further, adopting it as a metaphor for the Calder Valley community: 'Rough, truculent and dour they might appear, but this, as with their stone, is only a forbidding exterior: break it open and, just as the millstone grit itself is gold inside, so these people sparkle with courage, humour and kindness,' a regionally-relevant recycling of widely-imposed tropes of Yorkshire identity.[18]

The collection's close focus on the geological traits of the Upper Calder Valley is made clear by the fact that stone(s) are referenced twenty-eight times throughout *Remains of Elmet*, with fourteen additional references to rock(s), as can be seen in Table 1, overleaf:

[17] 'Appraisal', Calderdale Council.
[18] Hughes, *Millstone Grit*, 8.

Rank	Frequency	Word	Rank	Frequency	Word
17	34	hill(s)	64	11	end(s)
21	28	stone(s)	65	11	mill(s)
24	23	light	67	11	wild
27	22	valley(s)	69	10	ball
37	18	wind	71	10	day(s)
41	15	black	72	10	god(s)
42	15	earth	76	10	silence
44	15	men	77	10	sun
47	14	rock(s)	79	9	air
48	14	water	81	9	hand
50	13	dead	87	9	old
52	13	heaven	89	9	word
56	12	eyes	92	8	high
57	12	heather	93	8	huge
59	12	rain	94	8	mother(s)
60	12	wall(s)	95	8	new
62	12	world	96	8	nothing
63	11	dark	97	8	sheep

Table 1: content words listed by their ranking within the
100 most frequent words in *Remains of Elmet*.[19]

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[19] This simple lexical analysis was generated using 'Simple Concordance Programme 4.0.9' (Alan Reed, 2016). The entire 1979 text of *Remains of Elmet* (including the prologue, but omitting title pages, dedications, front matter, contents and index pages). Naturally the highest-ranking words are 'grammatical' terms that are crucial, but not very interesting for lexical analysis! Thus, Table 1 disregards these in favour of 'content' words ranked by frequency and alphabetised where frequency is the same.

Whilst this table can only offer a quantitative interpretation of *Remains of Elmet*, it does allow us to unlock key information and make broad observations about the text and its aesthetic focus. We can clearly observe Hughes's focus on the geography of the Calder Valley, from the geology of 'world' and 'earth', 'hills', 'stones' and 'valleys' to the native plants and animals including 'heather' and 'sheep'. Even the most unassuming of Hughes's carefully-chosen lexis provides valuable and satisfyingly deep contexts and connotations that resonate throughout *Remains of Elmet*. Even the 'sheep', the last word on our particular list, are hugely symbolic in Hughes's collection:

> Even the sheep, standing windslapped
> High in rigging
> Look heroic[20]

Sheep have long been farmed in the Calder Valley, their suitability to the Pennine landscape providing the wool that was weaved on early Calder cottage looms. Most importantly, however, Hughes uses sheep as a symbol for human members of the local community too: thus, these sheep who 'look heroic' are personified, the descendants of the 'stony masticators' (both human and sheep) on the early farms that pioneered the local settlements. Thus, sheep are photographed more frequently than humans in *Remains of Elmet*:[21]

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[20] Ted Hughes, 'There Come Days to the Hills,' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 54.

[21] Ted Hughes, 'Remains of Elmet,' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 53.
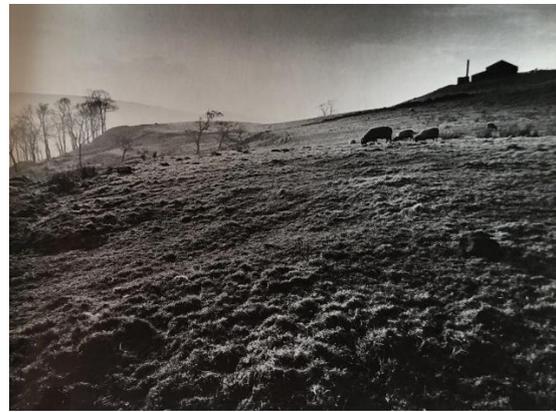
Images 1 to 4: photographs of sheep taken by Fay Godwin at Wadsworth Moor,
above Widdop, Crimsworth Dean and near Thursden, respectively.[22]

Some of the most moving sheep imagery in the collection describes the way in which
the people of Upper Calderdale were collectively shepherded into industrial mills,
before they flocked away to first world war battlefields:

> Happy work-hum of the valley mills
> Stifled the shouting above looms
> Which were too sunk in the pit anyway
> To share the air-stir ironically
> With the sheep's crumble of doll's curls and calcium.

[22] Fay Godwin, Wadsworth Moor, Above Widdop, Crimsworth Dean and Near Thursden in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 104, 41, 93, 105.

[…]

The throb of the mills and the crying of lambs
Like shouting in Flanders
Muffled away
In white curls
And memorial knuckles

Under hikers' heels.[23]

Given the dual identity of the sheep in *Remains of Elmet*, when we encounter the dead sheep and the 'crying lambs,' the metaphor becomes particularly poignant. So too, we are moved to empathise with Hughes's determination to record the history before it is crushed 'under hikers' heels' or reclaimed by the weather and landscape around it – 'The melting corpses of farms/ The hills' skulls peeled by the dragging climate' – like the ruins in Godwin's photographs:[24]

Images 5 to 7: photographs taken by Fay Godwin of a sheep's skeleton and derelict industrial buildings at Jumble Hole Clough, Crimsworth Dean and Lumb Valley, respectively.[25]

Notably, there is a high frequency of terms relating to the variable Yorkshire weather such as 'wind', 'rain' and 'sun' too: as Simon Armitage remarked in 1998, 'everyone

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[23] Ted Hughes, 'The Sheep went on Being Dead,' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 43.
[24] Hughes, 'The Sheep went on being Dead,' 43.
[25] Fay Godwin, Jumble Hole Clough, Crimsworth Dean and Lumb Valley, in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 15, 39, 42.

around here knows how much it rains.'[26] The binary opposites 'light' and 'dark' are also significant here:

> Roof-of-the-world-ridge wind
> And rain, and rain.
>
> […]
>
> Wind. Cold. A permanent weight
> To be braced under. And rain.[27]

It is difficult to know here whether the poem – and the weather within it – recalls memories, evokes pathetic fallacy or perpetuates stereotypes. Notably, Peter Davidson finds that northern England is characterised by 'darkness', whilst Jonathan Bate points out that 'Ted Hughes is our poet of light, but also of darkness. Of fresh water but also of death.'[28] It is interesting, then, that 'sun' appears within this list too, albeit not as frequently as 'rain' and 'wind':

> And from now on,
> The sun
> Touches you
> With the shadow of this finger.[29]
>
> A land naked now as a wound
> That the sun swabs and dabs [30]

The sun, when it does come, is in a form akin to a heavenly or motherly force, naturally perhaps, given its life-giving and -sustaining role to the plants and animals that are just as focal here as the people. Similarly, despite the focus on 'ends' in *Remains of Elmet*, the term 'light' is used more than twice as frequently as its more typically pessimistic pair 'dark'; it is the third most prolific content word in the

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[26] Simon Armitage, *All Points North*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), 44.
[27] Hughes, 'Wild Rock,' 40.
[28] Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2005) 21; Bate, *The* Unauthorised Life, 5.
[29] Ted Hughes, 'Bridestones' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 64.
[30] Ted Hughes, 'Where the Millstone of Sky' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 66.

collection. 'Silence' and 'soft' evoke a multi-sensory response that contrasts with the hardness of the rock and stone; whilst 'heaven' and 'gods' cast a spirituality over the poems, 'mills', 'men' and 'dead' seem to reflect the recent, difficult histories of industry, its decline and the wartime death toll in the rural West Riding.

With its relatively high frequency, 'dead' may, on first glance, appear reflective of the 'blunt speaking and straight-forward' speech habits that Katie Wales finds characteristic of 'resilient Northerners'; certainly, *Remains of Elmet* makes no attempt to dispel other 'core stereotypical imagery' of 'the North as urban and industrial, grim and bleak, harsh'.[31] This deduction would seem logical, considering the themes of ancestry, history and nature that persist through the collection. Interestingly, however, 'dead' is used primarily to describe the decline of industry – 'I have watched the mills off the region and their attendant chapels die […] They are now virtually dead' – and as an adjective within descriptions of nature, 'Over dead acid gardens'.[32] Only the occasional animal or plant is described as 'dead' in a forthright manner: 'The sheep went on being dead'; 'Dead farms, dead leaves'; 'Then the bird died.'[33] For people, Hughes generally adopts more sensitive and metaphorical phrasing; spirituality takes the lead here over finality:

> Six years into her posthumous life
> My uncle raises my Mother's face
> And says Yes he would love a cup of tea.[34]

Whilst there is no suggestion of rebirth or reincarnation for the narrator's mother, in the first quote, the extinction evoked by 'dead' would be inappropriate; she, like her

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[31] Katie Wales, *Northern English: A Social and Cultural History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 28; Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) 269.

[32] Ted Hughes, 'Preface' and 'Rhododendrons,' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 8, 87.

[33] Ted Hughes, 'The Sheep went on Being Dead,' 'Dead Farms, Dead Leaves,' and 'Heptonstall Old Church,' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 43, 55, 118.

[34] Hughes, 'Six years into her posthumous life', 7.

brother, the 'uncle', is survived by her descendants and their memorialisation of her local histories; the collection, of course, is dedicated to her too.

'Mother(s)' are frequently mentioned throughout the collection, and for this reason in particular. With connotations of both mother nature and maternity, the mother is integral in *Remains of Elmet*, and not only because of the connection to her life and ancestry through the poet and his uncle. In later poems it is the mother that provides future hope, for example through the creation of a baby bird amidst imagery of destruction and desolation:

> At the end of the world.
>
> Unending bleeding.
> Deaths left over
>
> […]
>
> And now this whole scene, like a mother,
> Lifts a cry
> Right to the source of it all.
>
> A solitary cry.
>
> She has made a curlew.[35]

Here again, nature finds a way to prevail amongst the human destruction, evoking a note of salvation in what seems an otherwise desolate and helpless poem. On balance, however, this is one of only several hopeful moments in the collection; the recurrence of 'dark' and 'death' alongside Godwin's photographs of graveyards, sheep skeletons and derelict buildings – and, undoubtedly, the fact that the book and

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[35] Ted Hughes, 'Long Screams' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 26.

its images are in greyscale, too – contributes to a sense of mourning, interspersed by the hope of nature, through *Remains of Elmet*.[36]

Images 8 and 9: photographs taken by Fay Godwin at
Mount Zion Baptist Chapel and Haworth Parsonage.

In *Ted Hughes and Nature: 'Terror and Exultation*,' Keith Sagar suggests that by the time Hughes was writing *Remains of Elmet* 'the collapse was complete. All that remained were derelict mills and memories.'[37] Alongside personal losses, the loss of industry certainly contributes to the tone of the collection. The woollen and worsted industries had a long history in the area *because of* – rather than in spite of – its otherwise inhospitable landscape: the river networks permitted transportation to cities and, during the Industrial Revolution, were instrumental to the function of water-powered mills.[38] Whilst the soil was not ideal for crop farming, the 'short, coarse grass [with] innumerable springs of fresh water made [it] excellent pasturage for sheep'.[39] Thus, towns and villages had been established along the river, throughout the valleys; when cheaper production caused the decline of Yorkshire

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[36] Fay Godwin, Mount Zion Baptist Chapel graveyard and Haworth Parsonage, in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 36, 101.

[37] Keith Sagar, *Ted Hughes and Nature: 'Terror and Exultation'* (Lancashire: Keith Sagar, 2009), 227.

[38] Herbert Heaton, *The Yorkshire Worsted and Woollen Industries from the Earliest Times up to the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920), 259.

[39] Lettice Cooper, *Yorkshire: West Riding* (London: Robert Hale, 1950), 13.

weaving, communities there were left without the industries that they had been built around.

This detrimental loss is reflected in 'Hardcastle Crags', where:

> the leaf-loam silence
> Is old siftings of sewing machines and shuttles.[40]

The desecration of the Yorkshire landscape here is twofold. As industrialisation moved weavers from their homes into the mills, full-time factory work also drove them to give up secondary agricultural work. By the time of Hughes's childhood, he notes in a letter, 'everybody – all our family – was absorbed in the life of the mills […] Neither of our parents, and nobody else, had any interest whatsoever in wild life or the wild countryside.'[41] Then, after industrial decline, mills and factories were abandoned, as evidenced in Godwin's photographs (particularly images 6 and 7). In the poem 'Hardcastle Crags', the 'leaf-loam' evokes the ancient peat deposits that occurred here as a result of prehistoric weather and animal farming.[42] However, this fertile land is no longer comprised merely of nutrient-rich soils. The 'shuttles' that have infiltrated this otherwise peaceful natural imagery, were among the catalysts that led to the industrialisation of the woollen industries; the Flying Shuttle was invented in nearby Lancashire. The echoes of industry are still resonant here, disregarded and yet still disturbing the silence and the author's perception of nature.

Whilst the decline of industry was detrimental to the Calder Valley, even more so was the First World War. The loss amongst the villages was extreme; Hughes's father 'was one of only seventeen survivors of an entire battalion of a thousand men

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[40] Ted Hughes, 'Hardcastle Crags,' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 13.

[41] Heaton, Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries, 93; 'Ted Hughes to Anne-Lorraine Bujon – 16 Dec 1992', in *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. Christopher Reid (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 623.

[42] Tomas Remiarx, *Forest of Elmet – part 2; from woodland cover to blanket bog* (Echoes of Elmet Steering Group, 2004), accessed Apr 12, 2017, https://web.archive.org/web/20120204065426/http://www.lhi.org.uk/docs/Elmet_Article2.doc; Calderdale Council, 'Mytholmroyd Conservation Area Appraisal', 3; *The Geology of Calderdale* (West Yorkshire Geology Trust), 7, accessed Mar 6, 2017, http://www.wyorksgeologytrust.org/misc/Geology%20of%20Calderdale.pdf

massacred by Turkish artillery.'[43] The war consequently becomes a further defining point in the local history that is explored within *Remains of Elmet*. Writing to Fay Godwin in 1976, Hughes explains that he 'grew up with the feeling that all those buildings were monuments to a great age and a great generation which was somehow in the past, and the people round me […] were just survivors, toiling on […] stupefied by what happened.'[44] For the generations who either fought in the war or lost loved ones, history seems to have frozen here. Jeffrey Meyers states that in his 'war poems Hughes conducted his own fierce campaign against hypocrisy, oppression, and the waste of human life.'[45] Evidencing this sentiment, Hughes likens the lives of his ancestors to 'slavery', and repeats this sentiment in 'Hardcastle Crags' with the

> …generation of slaves
> Whose bones melted in Asia Minor.[46]

Unlike the poem's other seven-line stanzas, this final stanza ends on its sixth line; the abrupt ending reflects the premature deaths of local soldiers killed in Gallipoli. The landscape that once was characterised by the 'Happy work-hum of the valley mills', now 'Is a grave of echoes'; the 'leaf-loam silence' marks the loss of industry and lives here.[47]

In *Ted Hughes: A Literary Life*, Neil Roberts finds that 'Hill-Stone Was Content' 'conflated the Great War with the industrial revolution that made it possible, not only technologically, but in terms of the disciplining of men.'[48] In a particularly interesting metaphor, Hughes personifies stone throughout *Remains of Elmet*. Significantly, if the number of references to stone(s) and rock(s) in Table 1 were combined – given that the words are effectively synonyms here – this hypothetical result would be the sixteenth most frequent term in the collection, and the most

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[43] Jeffrey Meyers, 'Ted Hughes: War Poet', *The Antioch Review* 71, no. 1 (2013), 30.
[44] 'Ted Hughes to Fay Godwin – 4 July 1976', 379.
[45] Meyers, 'War Poet', 38; 'Ted Hughes to Fay Godwin – 4 July 1976', 379.
[46] Hughes, 'Hardcastle Crags,' 13.
[47] Hughes, 'The Sheep went on Being Dead' and 'Hardcastle Crags', 43, 13.
[48] Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 132.

frequently occurring 'content' word. This is largely a result of Hughes's conflation of the local people with the local stone:

> Hill-stone was content
> To be cut, to be carted
> And fixed in its new place [49]

Here the stone, as the local workers, is apathetic and shows no resistance to being 'conscripted/ Into mills'; that the workers lack individuality in this metaphor is symbolic of the increasing depersonalisation in the textile industry, that historically would have operated from the home in small, family businesses. Stripped of autonomy here, man is 'carted' around, manipulated and 'fixed in its new place' just like the natural resources. As the worker becomes the stone, the stone becomes the machine:

> And inside the mills mankind
> With bodies that came and went
> Stayed in position, fixed like stones
> Trembling in the song of the looms.[50]

Individuals are just 'bodies', their identities meaningless in their collective operation of machinery. The process of removing the workers' autonomy is complete here as they become one with the equipment, 'Trembling in the song of the looms.'

The consequences of this process become clear in 'First, Mills':

> First, Mills
> and steep wet cobbles
> Then cenotaphs [51]

Here the stone that was used in the construction of the mills – that Roberts considers instrumental in preparing men for war – was used in the construction of the

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[49] Ted Hughes, 'Hill-Stone was Content,' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 37.
[50] Hughes, 'Hill-Stone was Content,' 37.
[51] Ted Hughes, 'First, Mills,' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 34.

cenotaphs in their memory. The implication here is that, had mills not replaced home-based family businesses, perhaps memorials would not have replaced men. However, whilst Hughes problematises the processes of capitalist industrialisation that urged workers into mills, the essential tragedy in *Remains of Elmet* is the consequential alienation from nature:

> It forgot its wild roots
> Its earth-song
> In cement and the drum-song of looms.[52]

Stone has been fixed into place by 'cement', as the workers are seemingly bound to 'looms'; the restorative process, we must assume, is rediscovering these 'wild roots' and 'earth-song'. This is key to Keith Sagar's theory that 'the image of stone returning to earth is one of the many images in Hughes for the restoration to Nature of its own'.[53] If the stone and people are one here, this equates to the natural and sustaining biological processes as a body breaks down underground:

> The sunk mill-towns were cemeteries
> Digesting utterly
> All with whom they swelled.[54]

The 'digestive' imagery that recurs throughout this poem is one of reabsorption and restoration; whilst the 'digestion' of bodies sustains vital carbon and nitrogen cycles, the 'digestion' of the stone, the mills and their associated detritus metaphorically allows the impurities to be removed, so the land and its people can be healed after the traumas of recent history.

Just as Hughes describes people as stone, he adopts human bodily imagery to personify the land and juxtapose Calderdale history with its geological origins. He

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[52] Hughes, 'Hill-stone was Content', 37.
[53] Sagar, 'Ted Hughes and Nature', 246.
[54] Hughes, 'Remains of Elmet,' 53.

describes the end of the Ice Ages that defined the Calder Valley during the Palaeolithic era by 'goug[ing] out the steep-sided valleys' as the:

> Death-struggle of the glacier
> Enlarged the long gullet of Calder
> Down which its corpse vanished.[55]

This pivotal moment – no longer, of course, in human living memory – left evidence of its presence on the landscape in a way that has shaped lives thousands of years later. That evidence of the 'mill towns' is already being consumed by nature – both in the poem and in Godwin's photographs – is a reminder of humans' transience and comparative powerlessness, alongside that of nature.

Interestingly, in Godwin's accompanying photograph, it is the railway line that marks the most notable path through the valley, rather than the river that runs close by:

Image 10: a view over Todmorden, taken from Blackshaw Head, by Fay Godwin.[56]

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[55] Rodney Collinge, *Mytholmroyd: The Development of a Pennine Village*, (Hebden Bridge: HebWeb, 2017), accessed May 3, 2017, http://www.hebdenbridge.co.uk/news/2017/017.html; Hughes, 'Remains of Elmet,' 53.

[56] Fay Godwin, Todmorden from Blackshaw Head, in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 52.

The rivers, once defining features in the Calder Valley and just as crucial as the digestive tract running through the body, are present in surprisingly few of Godwin's *Remains of Elmet* photographs. Just as Hebden Water, the river that had once served Gibson Mill in Hardcastle Crags, is now described as 'dilapidated', the connecting River Calder seems incidental, having effectively been replaced by the railway.[57] In 'First, Mills' the narrator speaks of

> the bottomless wound of the railway station
> That bled this valley to death.[58]

Here again, as the railway sustained modern industry in the area, industrialisation is blamed for excessive loss of life. Bate adopts this imagery too, reporting that 'From [Scout] rock, young Ted could […] see the arteries leading out to east and west. The railway, fast and slow lines in each direction.'[59] If the Calder Valley is the life-giving 'body' here, the bleeding of the men out of the 'bottomless wound' is not only a tragic image, it is detrimental to the future of the community.

The introductory poem to the collection contains a further bodily reference to the throat, with 'Air hijacked in the larynx' as the uncle speaks of Calder history. Here, the uncle's impending death will bring the end of his narrative:

> Any moment now, a last kick
> And the dark river will fold it away.[60]

For Hughes, his uncle *was* the Upper Calder Valley. In 'Remains of Elmet', as the rich history of the area is digested; the place now:

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[57] Hughes, 'Hardcastle Crags,' 13.
[58] Hughes, 'First, Mills,' 34.
[59] Bate, The Unauthorised Life, 25.
[60] Hughes, 'Six years into her posthumous life,' 7.

Admits tourists

To pick among crumbling, loose molars
And empty sockets.[61]

These tourists, presumably, are here to 'digest' the area's history in a very different way. Hughes wrote to Godwin that, 'I realise now I was living in the last days of a Pompeii.'[62] The tourists are not visiting a contemporary society, rather they are observing the *remains* of an ancient one. The 'loose molars/ And empty sockets' liken the old Elmet to a skull, the loose and missing teeth able to 'masticate' no longer.

In 'The sheep went on being dead' the poet writes of

The melting corpses of farms
The hills' skulls peeled by the dragging climate.[63]

Attitudes towards the valley have undergone a curious change. The industrial revolution caused the local community to denounce their role as farmers and caretakers of the local environment, illustrated by the imagery of neglect and decay. During industrial decline this matter was only worsened, with the abandonment of mills (as seen in Godwin's photographs taken at Lumb Valley and Jumble Hole Clough). At the same time however, the area became popular with hikers and tourists. Hughes once wrote of his Calder Valley countryside, 'It's a giant public park now, a sad and terrible museum.'[64] In 'The Sheep went on Being Dead' and 'Remains of Elmet', these tourists are more like the archaeologists or history-enthusiasts, visiting ancient sites of decay and destruction than visitors to a working town.

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[61] Hughes, 'Remains of Elmet,' 53.
[62] 'Ted Hughes to Fay Godwin – 4 July 1976', 379.
[63] Hughes, 'The Sheep went on Being Dead,' 43.
[64] 'Ted Hughes to Fay Godwin – 4 July 1976', 379.

The idea of the valley being a museum or memorial to the past is reflected in the eerie silence of the first stanza of 'Hardcastle Crags':

> But here the leaf-loam silence
> Is old siftings of sewing machines and shuttles
> And the silence of ant-warfare on pine-needles
> Is like the silence of clogs over cobbles.[65]

After the war, 'First, Mills' suggests, 'Everything became very quiet'.[66] This is reflected in the high frequency of 'silence' and 'silent' in Table 1. The ants silently waging warfare in the first stanza – likely an *army* of the Northern Hairy Wood Ant that is native to this woodland – are a microcosm of the human wars that devastated Calder society.[67] Gifford suggests that the poem 'retorts that a native of Hughes's generation is attuned to sounds beneath the silence of the famous beauty-spot, which rob it of its pastoral innocence […] the sounds of industry and war': the narrator is struck by the violence in nature that would ordinarily go unnoticed.[68] The silence marks an emptiness, an echo. But even in 'The Sheep went on Being Dead', when industry was still audible in the 'Happy work-hum of the valley mills', this 'Happy hum' is just an illusion. With the hindsight afforded to his generation, the narrator is aware that this hum merely 'Stifled the shouting above looms'.[69]

The focus on war throughout the collection ensures that mortality is heavily implicit. As men (and ants) wage war, other species take refuge in the woodland:

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[65] Hughes, 'Hardcastle Crags,' 13.

[66] Hughes, 'First, Mills,' 34.

[67] 'Overview', *Hardcastle Crags*, The National Trust, Accessed Nov 24, 2016. https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hardcastle-crags#Overview/.

[68] Terry Gifford, *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 158; the sound of 'clogs over cobbles' is pertinently rooted in Calderdale: the popular Walkley Clogs factory was founded in Heptonstall in 1851 and moved to Mytholmroyd in 1946. By 1979 'clogs over cobbles' would have been a familiar, local sound; Hughes's generation is not only 'attuned' but now even *accustomed* to the sounds of war.

[69] Hughes, 'The Sheep went on Being Dead,' 34.

> Where the red squirrel drops shavings from a branch-end of survival
> And beech-roots repair a population
> Of fox and badger.[70]

Whilst fox and badger are threatened by certain subsections of British society who hunt as a pastime (under the illusion of pest control), the native British red squirrel in 1979 really was at 'a branch-end of survival'. The red squirrel has inhabited the British Isles since the Ice Age; their numbers rapidly declined in the twentieth century, replaced by their competitor, the grey squirrel. The last reported sightings of red squirrels in Hardcastle Crags were in the mid-1980s; their extinction in the area came only a few years after the publication of *Remains of Elmet*.[71] The red squirrel, then, has been reduced to a moment in the history of the Upper Calder Valley, too.

As a place of salvation, the Hardcastle Crags woodland offers 'fox and badger' protection: the 'beech-roots' mark a route away from the anthropocentric world to a safer underground. However, Hardcastle Crags has long been a place of escape for humans too: in *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life*, Bate details the picnics that Hughes's family enjoyed at Hardcastle Crags, both during the poet's childhood and that of his mother, before him.[72] It is notable though, that even in this 'hide-out' industrialism is never far away, with Gibson Mill situated within the woodland.[73] Whilst the dense canopy of leaves in Godwin's photograph still appears to provide protection and escape, Elaine Feinstein writes that Godwin's 'black and white images suggest a bleakness that an innocent hiker, passing through the same area on a sunny day, might well miss. […] The valley is haunted by those who served the oppressive looms […] and by conscripts who once marched away to die in the First World War.'[74] By the 1970s of Hughes's writing, the woodland can no longer protect people from themselves, just as it can no longer protect the native squirrel. As the

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[70] Hughes, 'Hardcastle Crags,' 13.
[71] Sara Parsons (Visitor Services Manager, Hardcastle Crags), personal correspondence, May 15, 2017.
[72] Bate, The Unauthorised Life, 32.
[73] National Trust, 'Overview'.
[74] Feinstein, Life of a Poet, 208.

squirrel is becoming extinct here, so too are Hughes's ancestors and therefore his connection to the history and heritage of his home.

Image 11: taken within Hardcastle Crags by Fay Godwin.[75]

In *Remains of Elmet*, then, Hughes recognises the ancient history that formed the Calder Valley and shaped the communities of his ancestors, but regrets the recent history that abused them. Indeed, Keith Sagar states that Hughes 'cannot regret that the moors, into which so many lives were ploughed like manure, are now breaking loose from the harness of men.'[76] Whilst the Romantic trope of the return to nature is a form of escapism, in Hughes it is a necessary process of renewal and rebirth. In *Romantic Ecology* Jonathan Bate writes of 'the stability of the notion of "spring", the knowledge that every winter will be followed by a spring which will bring warmth and new life.'[77] From the desolate poems in *Remains of Elmet*, as well as Godwin's snowy photographs, we can deduce that the Calder Valley, here, is in its harsh wintry state. Whilst the people of Calderdale have been celebrated for their resilience and determination in an oppressive climate poorly suited to agriculture, the 'winter' in *Remains of Elmet* is a time of 'disaster and mourning.'[78] However, as Bromwich notes, 'for Hughes every image of strife is also potentially an image of

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[75] Fay Godwin, Hardcastle Crags, in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 12.
[76] Sagar, Ted Hughes and Nature, xiv, 151.
[77] Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, 52, 2.
[78] Sagar, Ted Hughes and Nature, 152.

rebirth.'[79] The twentieth century, we are reminded, is only a brief moment in the history of a landscape formed millions of years ago: the redemption of spring is coming.

Images 12 to 15: wintry photographs taken by Fay Godwin above Midgley, near Alcomden, at Blake Dean and at Bridestones Moor, respectively.[80]

Because of the relative transience of the anthropocene on this landscape, whilst Hughes's family connections are important on a personal level, place takes up a relative protagonist position. Thus, the imagery in *Remains of Elmet* goes through a

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[79] David Bromwich, 'Ted Hughes', in *Grand Street* 5, no.1 (1985), 250.
[80] Fay Godwin, Above Midgley, Near Alcomden, Blake Dean and Bridestones Moor, in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 99, 106, 109, 45.

peculiar exchange: as the 'stone', the people here are described as the land, whilst the land itself is personified as the living, sustaining and enduring force on which human activity, for the moment at least, adopts as a stage. As Glyn Hughes writes in *Millstone Grit*, the Calder landscape 'is beautiful and dramatic, but it doesn't achieve this despite the ugliness, the tragedy and pain of its history – on the contrary, these are part of it.'[81] As Hughes's poems and Godwin's photographs demonstrate, the land here is quick to absorb and 'digest' evidence of human activity, in contrast to the human communities that are effectively bled dry by the war. Whilst the collection is concerned with preserving the 'archaeology of the mouth', then, this is secondary to the hope for a redemptive springtime, in which 'wild roots' are rediscovered and nature's overwhelming power displaces industry to become central here, once again.

<div align="center">*</div>

'The brushstroke of a black road':
Rural landscapes in West Riding poetry

In his debut collection *Us*, published in 2018 by Faber and Faber, Zaffar Kunial grapples with traditions and meanings of place, mostly centred on his father's birthplace, Kashmir, his mother's home in the West Midlands and his more distant Scottish heritage.[82] However, these reflections on personal and geographical past are punctuated by the present: his adult life in Hebden Bridge, just over a mile away from Hughes's Mytholmroyd.[83] In contrast to Hughes, who was born here before moving away, Kunial is a Yorkshire poet in the same way as Larkin and many of the Hull poets studied in the previous section: they have adopted the region as their home, and therefore can be considered Yorkshire poets, albeit positioned differently to those who were born locally. The title *Us* is directly related to the various societal

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[81] Hughes, Millstone Grit, 9.
[82] 'Zaffar Kunial', *Literature*, British Council (no date), accessed Feb 27, 2019, https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/zaffar-kunial/.
[83] 'Zaffar Kunial', *Poets*, Scottish Poetry Library, (no date), accessed Feb 27, 2019, https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poet/zaffar-kunial/.

positions that the narrator negotiates within place, whether in Birmingham, in Hebden Bridge, or elsewhere, and the ways in which identity is bound up with place and ancestry; this forms a particularly interesting contrast with *Remains of Elmet*, and its similar concerns.

In a *Guardian* article, Carol Rumens explores 'the precision with which [Kunial's] poems search the vexations of identity', suggesting that whilst 'us' initially seems to be an inclusive pronoun, it also 'creates stress for those who refuse or are refused belonging.' She finds that Kunial's work 'consists of interestingly twisted strands of connection and disconnection'.[84] For Tim Cresswell in *In Place, Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*, 'places are fundamental creators of difference.'[85] In *Us*, Kunial's narrator explores place with regard to difference: the significance of belonging 'within' a community versus the place of the outsider.[86] In a 2018 interview, Kunial emphasised the relationship between linguistic experience and identity in his poetry, with particular relation to his collection's title: 'sometimes personal history comes through memories around individual words, often very small words – like the word *the*, or the word *yours*, and of course the word *us*.'[87] Rumens discusses the title in dialectical terms too: '"Us" means "me" in many English dialects: Kunial hears it in his birthplace (Birmingham), in the shout of mixed aggression and curiosity, "Oi you, tell us where yer from."[88] This use of 'us' as a first-person pronoun would not be out of place in Yorkshire, either.

The 'us' that excludes the narrator – rather than including him, as Standard English may presume – is like the form of 'us' that excluded school-age Tony Harrison: '"We

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[84] Carol Rumens, 'Poem of the Week: Us by Zaffar Kunial,' *Guardian*, Jul 2, 2018, accessed Feb 27, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2018/jul/02/poem-of-the-week-us-by-zaffar-kunial/.

[85] Tim Cresswell, *In Place, Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*, (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 154.

[86] Rumens, 'Poem of the Week'.

[87] Zaffar Kunial, interview with Sam Murphy, 'Through Small Mysteries that Add Up: Interview with Zaffar Kunial', *Headstuff Literature*, May 23, 2018, accessed Feb 27, 2019, https://www.headstuff.org/culture/literature/poetry/interview-with-zaffar-kunial/.

[88] Zaffar Kunial, 'Us,' in *Us* (London: Faber and Faber, 2018), 50.

say [ʌs] not [uz] T.W." That shut my trap.'[89] Whilst we have, thus far, considered

Ted Hughes the major ancestor to contemporary West Yorkshire poets, the work of

Tony Harrison will be important here too. His collections *The School of Eloquence*

(1978) and *V.* (1985) have particular significance to the poems that will be discussed

in this chapter, and the next. The former collection legitimises the place of regional

dialect within Yorkshire poetry: the poem 'Them & [uz]' refutes the notion that

Received Pronunciation is the only acceptable form for spoken poetry – 'Poetry's the

speech of kings. You're one of those/ Shakespeare gives the comic bits to: prose.' –

as Harrison, in his childhood, was led to believe.[90] As Rumens identifies, Harrison's

narrator faces ridicule from 'the ruling "educated" class' in 'Them and [uz]' as a

direct result of Yorkshire dialect.[91] Kunial's poetry, then, reinforces the importance

of voice, accent and dialect, already identified as playing a significant role in West

Yorkshire poetry.

Although aesthetically very different to Ted Hughes's descriptions of the region,

rural West Yorkshire is recognisable in several of Kunial's poems, including

'Rainglobe'. Whilst the poem – introduced by a quote from Scottish writer Hugh

MacDiarmid – could be representative of the poet's ancestral roots in Orkney, the

'storm-knocked world', 'the cobblestones [and] the coastal fog', 'the whirl/ of cloud

and flood' and 'this stony sky' are reminiscent of the lexis chosen to describe the

landscape and climactic conditions in *Remains of Elmet*, too.[92] Semantically, their

descriptions are very similar: stones are prevalent amongst the gloomy, wet

conditions, whilst the tensions between nature's restorative and dangerous powers

prevail.

In 'The Path', we are further immersed into this landscape through one long, cyclical

stanza of twenty-eight lines. The tension between nature as restorer and as threat is

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[89] Tony Harrison, 'Them & [uz]' in *The School of Eloquence and other poems* (London: Rex Collings, 1978), 20.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Rumens, 'Poem of the Week'.
[92] Zaffar Kunial, 'Rainglobe', in *Us* (London: Faber and Faber, 2018), 40.

implicit here, in the repeated two-word sentence, 'They're there'. Both opening and closing the poem, this phrase transitions from a threat to a comfort:

> They're there. To the side.
> It's hard not to stare
> at the centre of the screen
> and the stopped kerb.
> Struck.[93]

Ambiguity is inherent in the language here, creating a sense of confusion that prevails throughout the poem. That 'they're' positioned 'To the side' reinforces this threat posed by their unidentifiable nature: the narrator finds it 'hard not to stare/ at the centre of the screen'; as a result, 'they're' outside of peripheral vision. This unknown being cannot be seen because of what seems to be technology's central focus. Whether or not this is the same post-industrial Calderdale landscape, time and society has clearly moved on since *Elmet*. Kunial recognises the impact of technology on twenty-first-century lives, distancing people from nature much further than Hughes's 'Hardcastle Crags' could imagine.

The character is threatened by this lack of awareness regarding their surroundings, emphasised as 'the stopped kerb/ Struck'. The character trips over this ordinary feature of their manmade environment: even daily surroundings have become a threat. However, this poem urges the reader to 'look past' the threats that are an increasingly emphasised part of modern life:

> But, dear me, look past
> what the worst want you to see
> and share.[94]

Here, Kunial comments on the scaremongering and hate-spreading that are all too prevalent in social media platforms. The internet abounds with both targeted and non-targeted hate and negativity: this throws further inflections onto 'They're there.

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[93] Zaffar Kunial, 'The Path', in *Us* (London: Faber and Faber, 2018), 7.
[94] Ibid.

To the side.' Here, 'they' could apply to any number of minorities that are indiscriminately portrayed as threats to modern life. That 'they' are not even specifically recognised suggests the superficiality of this form of -phobia: the character feels permanently threatened without knowing who they are threatened by. 'Share' here identifies how, with one thoughtless click on social media, hate and fearmongering can be disseminated widely; it also recognises that physically 'sharing' in person seems to be in decline.

As well as 'sharing' with our fellow humans, it seems we must also 'share' our time and attention with nature and our physical landscape: after all, if they had been more mindful of their movements through the landscape, Kunial's character almost certainly wouldn't have tripped over the kerb. Is it this 'unknown threat', or the constant demands of the online world that have stopped us from 'sharing' time with nature, the poem asks? To defy this, the character goes 'off the grid', escaping 'phoneless' to Nutclough Woods, near Hebden Bridge, where the landscape becomes more recognisably that of Hughes's West Riding:

> And, dear self, even
> when the scene strays far from
> headlines, when you've gone,
> alone, phoneless, stepping over
> limb-like roots, and dips, and glooms
> into Nutclough Woods on this
> treacherous side of the hill – even still,
> look to the verges,[95]

This Hughesian world of 'limb-like roots, and dips and glooms', is 'far from/ headlines', a tranquil idyll far removed from the threats and anxieties of day to day life. Here, in the West Yorkshire countryside, the narrator feels threatened, but in a different way: 'stepping over/ limb-like roots' 'on this/ treacherous side of the hill'. The 'alone, phoneless' narrator is anxious, aware that were they to trip, fall, or get lost, they have no way of calling for help. Their anxiety is implicit in the 'limb-like'

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[95] Ibid.

description of the 'roots', a reminder of internalised headlines of bodies being discovered in the countryside, alongside the fearful connotations of venturing alone into gloomy woods. However, their lack of phone allows the narrator a certain mindfulness, closer to the nature and landscape that they live amongst, but rarely take notice of. The enjambment in lines 10-13 ('alone, phoneless, stepping over/ limb-like roots, and dips, and glooms/ into Nutclough Woods on this/ treacherous side of the hill') marks a deliberate slowness: the flow of the poem is punctuated by the meticulously careful steps of a character moving through the landscape with trepidation.

Despite this nervous initiation into rural West Yorkshire, the narrator soon becomes more confident, comfortable within nature, his growing familiarity with the woods reflected in one of the poem's few rhymes: 'treacherous side of the hill – even still'. The pause, marked by the dash, signals a turning point in which the landscape is no longer a threat. Indeed, the following clause – 'look to the verges' – is interesting. The use of 'to' rather than 'at' suggests that the character is 'look[ing] to' the landscape for guidance, rather than merely observing it; this contrasts with the kerb (a manmade kind of verge) responsible for the character's fall earlier in the poem:

> look to the verges, where some tiny
> pixel-flowered herb, perhaps cleavers,
> takes hold at a sharp corner
> of the descent, like a half-remembered
> snatch of a meme, down
> past the path, through the scrolling
> of a fern's frayed edges[96]

From the moment that the narrator enters Nutclough Woods ('And, dear self') the poem is one long, continuous sentence, clauses separated only by enjambs and various punctuation. This contrasts with the short sentences in the poem's anxious beginning. Within nature, then, the narrator relaxes. As their sentences lengthen, their words become polysyllabic, their language less precise, infiltrated by the

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[96] Ibid.

uncertainty of 'perhaps' and similes 'like a half-remembered/ snatch of a meme'. Here, technology still permeates nature in linguistic terms: 'the snatch of a meme', a 'pixel-flowered herb', 'the scrolling/ of a fern'.[97] The very way that we relate to nature, the poem implies, has changed: the words 'pixel', 'scrolling' and 'meme' are jarring, yet understandable, unlikely invaders into nature's lexicon. Whilst West Yorkshire, in the previous section, was largely seen as a post-industrial wasteland, the county into which Kunial moved is increasingly becoming known for its innovative tech industry, with governmental aims to improve trade and productivity in the north, and with Leeds announced in 2019 as the future home of Channel 4's national headquarters.

In *Seeking Authenticity in Place, Culture and the Self*, Nicholas Osbaldiston suggests that 'nature, landscape and scenery promote a certain aesthetic that sets a place apart from the metropolis. They are essential features that attract those tired of the everyday'.[98] Technology, then, has come to the fore here: this tranquil landscape is still permeated with inflections of the city, the technological metropolis. The 'pixel-flowered herb' demonstrates tech innovation and these new industries metaphorically transposing themselves on the landscape, just as the 'old siftings of sewing machines and shuttles' echoed through 'Hardcastle Crags'.[99] This may be the same Pennine landscape that Hughes wrote of, but petals have become pixels: society has evolved, points of reference have changed.

However, in Kate Fox's *Fox Populi* (2013) one key element of *Remains of Elmet* persists. The Yorkshire-based stone imagery is present in several poems, including 'Opposite Sides of the Wall', where cultural difference between lovers is reduced, physically, to a description of their hair:

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[97] Interestingly, in the Hull dialect, the words 'fern' and 'phone' are indistinguishable when spoken.
[98] Nicholas Osbaldiston, *Seeking Authenticity in Place, Culture and the Self: The Great Urban Escape*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 29.
[99] Ted Hughes, 'Hardcastle Crags' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 13.

> his black hairs mingle with my light ones
> after we wash,
> limestone and granite.[100]

Despite their differences, both lovers are stone; they may be comprised of different particles, but they are stone all the same. Their alliance, despite originating from different sides of an unspecified border, is productive: rather than being separated by the titular wall, their two stones combine to form a new one:

> and we move together
> as if stuck
> with invisible mortar.[101]

The 'invisible mortar' that bonds them is almost as strong as the stone itself and, when bonded, makes the individual stones stronger. The strength and endurance of stone, recurring from Hughes's poetry, is reiterated by Fox in 'Stolen Stones', where

> You might create something
> that feels as solid
> as belief
> or stone[102]

The stone that frequents Hughes's landscapes, as one of the most common words in *Remains of Elmet*, stays present here; the ancient power and reliable permanence that it stood for in Hughes's work endures into the twenty-first century.

As we return to Zaffar Kunial's *Us*, the prevalent ancient and natural elements of rural West Yorkshire also figure in 'The Path', where they offer the speaker a sense of sanctuary, just as it had for centuries (as discussed in relation to Hardcastle Crags in *Remains of Elmet*). The wanderer is offered respite from the pressures of technology. Nature, here, has overcome technology and modern fearmongering: even in its most threatening, 'a sharp corner/ of the descent', the rural landscape is a

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[100] Kate Fox, 'Opposite Sides of the Wall', in *Fox Populi* (Middlesbrough: Smokestack Books, 2013), 60.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Kate Fox, 'Stolen Stones', in *Fox Populi* (Middlesbrough: Smokestack Books, 2013), 59.

facilitator or nurturer of life, as 'some tiny/ pixel-flowered herb' 'takes hold' there. In this poem, nature appears to represent a salvation. This is further suggested in the final two lines of the poem:

> unmagnified. *Look for*
> *the helpers.* They're there.[103]

Whilst 'they' remains ambiguous – as do 'the helpers' – nature has neutralised the threat that 'they' represent. That 'they're there' has, through the progression of the poem, become a comforting note of support, recognises that the character – despite being 'phoneless' – is not alone. The helpers could be a reminder of the importance of human contact, in an increasingly impersonal society, or the elements of nature that are waiting unnoticed, by the wayside; these elements were present long before the technology that caused humans' current distance (from nature and from one another), and indeed the technology that had detrimental effects on the landscape of Hughes's ancestors. Technology has altered human life on previously inconceivable levels, the poem suggests. Whilst many aspects of the poem – particularly the nature of 'the helpers' – remain unexplained, the sense of sanctuary and salvation the narrator finds in Nutclough Woods implies the potential tranquillity, the alleviation of the complications of modern life, that can be found within an escape from the technological metropolis.

Rural West Yorkshire is further explored in 'The Long Causeway', in which the narrator and his son traverse the unique Pennine landscape, 'driving higher and higher', 'skyward, to Blackshaw Head, in a hired red Aygo.'[14] The poem, named after the medieval packhorse route that joined Sheffield to Derbyshire, implicitly immerses the narrative and its characters in thousands of years of local history. However, their journey towards Blackshaw Head – 'up and around the next bend. On black ice.' – is disturbed by technology's constant interruptions:

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[103] Kunial, 'The Path', 7.

> *Continue straight ahead*. Which is not easy down here,
> up and around the next bend. On black ice. *Boom boom boom*
> *Even brighter than the moon moon moon*. Turning down the radio
> so I can hear the satnav, and myself think… *'Cause baby*
>
> *you're a firework*[104]

Once the technological interjections are silenced, the narrator becomes aware of his child's movements in the back of the car: 'I ask my boy,/ whose car-seat faces back, if he's playing a game. *I'm making/ things happen, Daddy*.'[16] This is a point of transition in the poem. As the image of the landscape changes, so does the poet's perception of the world around him:

> Rounding the corner, the green dark
>
> edge is taken off the horizon as we go over the tops.
> On the turn is a white page, more defined than the lost sheep
> and hill clouds. *I'm Jack Frost*, he says. And behind
> that cold stick he'd picked up in the woods – like a new word
>
> in the mirror, I see the brushstroke of a black road, tapered
> to a point backwards – then before it, I see flashed
> what was a 'sword'; that twig he'd seen to the hilt as gold
> and now is differently sharp – a wand, delicate and moon tipped:
>
> conducting the snow's dance, beyond the stick's flourished
> end, on a half-hidden Long Causeway.
> I'm slowing now, to a stop.
> Snow-wand, sword, branch; whatever
> it is – the wave of it, or the first particle at its point –
>
> paints all that is behind us with all that lay ahead.[105]

The 'white page' is a new start for the narrator and his son, a fresh outlook amongst the Pennines, in which the child's voice becomes prominent over technology,

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[104] Zaffar Kunial, 'The Long Causeway', in *Us* (London: Faber and Faber, 2018), 44-45.
[105] Kunial, 'Long Causeway', 44-45.

allowing the father-son connection in their exploration of the landscape and the endless possibilities of their combined imaginations. Whilst acknowledging the past, the poem closes with emphasis on the future – 'all that lay ahead' – represented by the son (in distant terms, future generations, and more imminently, adventure).

A comparable moment of clarity to that experienced as the narrator and his son drive over the Pennines, is present in Simon Armitage's 'Lepus' (1997):

> Mist, asleep like poison gas
> in the valleys underneath. But up here
> clear skies, where the mind comes up
> from the deep, lighter than air.[106]

Here an escape into the Pennines allows the narrator distance from reality, to be positioned above valley life. Just as Hughes's ancestral history was transposed onto the West Riding landscape, for Kunial and Armitage, in these poems, West Yorkshire (particularly retreat into its rural landscapes), represents escape from technological abundance, toils and 'poison[ous]' everyday life, but also a more open future of lineage, possibilities of adventure and unlimited potential.

The peculiarities of place versus placelessness in these border hinterlands are addressed in Armitage's *All Point North* (1998). Here the narrator reflects on his own place both in the first and the second person, with the former italicised:

> *I live on the border, between two states. On the one hand, I am who I am, and I know who that person is. It's me, and I can prove it. I've got family and friends who'll vouch for me. I've got a birth certificate to show where I'm from, a passport that says where I've been, and neighbours who know where I live. I've lived here all my life, just about, and I know this place like the back of my hand. I know what I'm doing and I know what it's doing to me. And I know about belonging, and which of the people are my lot – us.[107]*

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[106] Simon Armitage, 'Lepus', in *CloudCuckooLand* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 76.
[107] Simon Armitage, *All Points North* (London: Viking, 1998), 1.

The narrator's identity, here, is constructed in relation to place, the ambiguity of 'the border, between two states' and to the people who reside there too. In this place, alongside these people, he can construct his sense of 'belonging' and internally understand who he is, and *why*. This is remarkably like the sentiments of Kunial, regarding his title *Us*; it is interesting that the word 'us' is emphasised at the end of this quote, subtly aligning Armitage's literary Yorkshire with that of Tony Harrison's 'Them and [uz]' (with Kunial's *Us* ultimately joining them too). As if looking in the mirror, Armitage can see how other people construct his identity in relation to locality; here the border between personal views of the self, and external views constructed by others is compared with the physical (changing) borders that define place in much the same way:

> You live on the border. It's a cultural fault-line, this side of it being the Colne Valley, West Yorkshire, the last set of villages strung out along the trans-Pennine A62. Over the hill on the other side is Saddleworth, Lancashire. Saddleworth used to be in Yorkshire but the Boundary Commission recognized the watershed for what it was. One day a sign appeared at the brow of the hill saying *Oldham Metropolitan Borough* in luminous green letters. The day after that, the sign was obliterated with a shotgun wound, and a hand-painted board with the word *Saddleworth* was planted in front of it, finished off with a huge white rose.[108]

Place is multiplicitous here – at the same time legal, political, cultural – and, frequently, its nature is contested. What is significant here too, though, is the way in which identity is defined through personal identification with place; this is particularly important when interpreting the work of poets with such a strong sense of local identity as many of those explored here. Identity and personhood are flexible, vulnerable, even.

Changing boundaries in places like Saddleworth make concepts of place controversial, and the redefining of borders problematic, detrimental to local (and personal) identity. Indeed, Stewart Rawnsley confirms this in "Constructing the

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[108] Armitage, *All Points North*, 1-2.

North': Space and a Sense of Place' (2000), stating that 'Saddleworth still insists it is part of Yorkshire though the planners of the early 1970s decided that it belonged with Oldham and not Huddersfield.'[109] The ancient icon of Yorkshire, the white rose that embellished the new sign, competes with the one declaring Saddleworth a part of Lancashire, regurgitating old tensions. Forced to contemplate their regional identity, the people of Saddleworth seem to feel Yorkshire-based. For those who had lived there their entire lives, Yorkshire identity was attributed to them at birth before being revoked by governmental redefinition of borders (the placement of the *Oldham Metropolitan Borough* sign akin to ancient methods of planting a flag in order to stake a claim to land). Whilst Henry Tudor's red rose was victorious in 1485, in the twentieth century in Saddleworth, the determination and tenacity of the white rose prevailed:

> The council took down the offending object but a couple of days later it was back, this time in metal, and the official sign torn up from the soil and left mangled on the hard shoulder. This went on for months until the council gave up or couldn't be bothered.[110]

That this is constructed as a Yorkshire-based war against the Lancashire authorities is reinforced by Armitage's wording in the final part of the anecdote:

> Today, both signs stand next to each other, making whatever lies beyond a kind of no man's land. All we know is that this side is Yorkshire, always was, and on the other side the buses are a different colour. People setting off into Saddleworth for the day talk about 'going over the top', as if they shouldn't necessarily be expected back.[111]

The opposition between red and white rose, it seems, was by no means concluded at Bosworth. Crossing the border, here, is an adventure; the people down the road in Lancashire are caricatured as hazardous to the Yorkshireman, the terrain potentially

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[109] Stewart Rawnsley, 'Constructing 'The North': space and a sense of place,' in *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of 'The North' and 'Northernness'*, ed. Neville Kirk, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 56.

[110] Armitage, *All Points North*, 2.

[111] Ibid.

perilous and not for the faint-hearted. By adopting the imagery of trench warfare, traversing the Pennine border becomes akin to journeying into another country, to confront the enemy. This has a literal meaning too, of course, and is the same 'over the top' that Kunial travels in 'The Long Causeway'. Kunial's poem, though, describes a sense of adventure, whilst Armitage's suggests daring in the face of danger.

As Armitage journeys metaphorically to another country, Harrison does so literally. There is – Tony Harrison suggests in 'Facing North' (1978) – an enduring, proud element of Yorkshire identity that will follow the local from county to county, from country to country. Prefacing his poem with a quote from Louis MacNeice, 'The North begins inside', the writer discovers inside himself a preference for the harsh, dark, windy conditions of home, even when displaced well outside of the county:

> God knows why of all rooms I'd to choose
> the dark one facing North for me to write,
> liking as I do air, light and views,
> though there's air in the North wind that rocks the light
> I have to keep on, all year round, all day;
>
> […]
>
> I feel the writing room I'm leaving grow
> dark, and then darker with the whole view North.[112]

The Yorkshire Kunial discovers in the Pennines, Harrison finds in the darkest room: this is clearly aligned to widely perpetuated stereotypes of Northernness, the West Yorkshire of the Brontës' moors and Hughes's valleys. The writer, here, is most productive in what seems to be his natural state of endurance, finding himself unnecessarily battling weather and lighting conditions in a way that one imagines his ancestors doing. The narrator's intrinsic inclination to a writing room that subverts all the things he thought he preferred – 'liking as I do air, light and views' –

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[112] Tony Harrison, 'Facing North', in *Collected Poems* (London: Viking, 2007), 218-219.

suggests a deeper connection to northern life, beyond – and to some extent, in support of – these stereotypes. If, as we previously considered, the narrator's Yorkshire voice is his 'inheritance', then this inclination to dingy, cold, dark working conditions almost certainly harks back to his heritage and the living and working conditions of the 'old lot', his ancestors in the mines and in the Pennine valleys.

Just as hard and inhospitable conditions are common within West Yorkshire poetry, they are frequently transposed onto the people too. In Ian McMillan's 'Smoke' (1994), the narrator's dream-vision of a girl is marked by her northernness:

> It started with a dream:
> she wore smoke, she wore a wide skirt,
> she was a slow dancer, lived in the North'.

That this girl is a vision of the narrator's associations with (perhaps, even longing for) the north is compounded by a later vision of Yorkshire:

> Smoke. Grey smoke from
> a burning chimney
> in a smokeless pit village.'[113]

The merging identities of the northerner with local stereotypes can be found in the first stanza of Simon Armitage's 'KX' (2006), too:

> Northerner, this is your stop. This longhouse
> of echoing echoes and sooted glass,
> this goth pigeon hangar, this diesel roost
> is the end of the line. Brace and be brisk,
> commoner, carry your heart like an egg
> on a spoon[114]

Through his powerful imagery, Armitage satirises the stereotype of northern industrial darkness that persisted, long past the decline of coal-mining and coal-

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[113] Ian McMillan, 'Smoke', in *Dad, the Donkey's On Fire* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), 102.
[114] Simon Armitage, 'KX', in *Tyrannosaurus Rex versus The Corduroy Kid* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), 7.

powered industry.[115] Even the 'goth' pigeons here are black (miserable too, or disguised as Hughes's Crow, perhaps?), their roost described with the connotations of dark and dirty diesel. If this is a bus or train journey, it has arrived in Yorkshire's deepest valleys, perhaps within a relatively closed community signified by – 'This longhouse/ of echoing echoes'. The announcement 'Northerner, this is your stop' is necessary due to the train's newly 'sooted glass'. However, this 'is the end of the line': only the Northerner, it is implied, would want to exit in deepest Yorkshire, therefore only they would be on the train.

The announcement is also a warning to the Southerner that they have come too far. This is, of course, not the only warning: the narrator effectively speaks in stereotypes as they warn: 'Brace and be brisk,/ commoner, carry your heart like an egg/ on a spoon'. Only a 'commoner' would be exiting here, the poem's stereotypes suggest; the narrator encourages the 'commoner' to behave in terms more often used to describe the harsh northern wind: 'brisk' and 'brac[ing]'. The egg and spoon race metaphor is peculiar. The school sports day race speaks of competitiveness and playfulness, the ambiguity questioning what it takes to win the egg and spoon race: is the speaker in the poem warning people to be quick ('brisk'?), or protective with their hearts? If they should protect their hearts, what is posing the threat? The unassuming and arresting charms of West Yorkshire, into which they are being primed to exit, perhaps? Of course, the worst-kept secret of the egg and spoon race is that they often are hard-boiled. In direct opposition to the millstone grit imagery employed by Glyn Hughes earlier in this chapter, the northerner may appear to have a fragile, vulnerable exterior, but under the surface their heart is hardened. Northern life has long been portrayed as more difficult, more of an endurance than its southern equivalent; considering the hardship that came after the decline of industry here, it is understandable if locals have been metaphorically hardened.

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[115] As Lettice Cooper researched her book *Yorkshire: West Riding*, she noted that 'the observant traveller is struck by the blackness of the West Riding towns. Barnsley has "a smoaky aspect", says Defoe, "and is called Black Barnsley", but he does not know whether the name comes from the smoke or from the black look of the moors'. (Cooper, *West Riding*, 54-55).

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Like *Remains of Elmet* there is a certain level of anxiety resonant throughout the poems explored in this section, alongside a strong sense of regional identity. Understandably, given the redefinition of borders and boundaries toward the end of the twentieth century, there is a tension here regarding place, and what it means to be *in* and *from* a certain place. Whilst, for Kunial, this figures as the narrative of an outsider and, later, the explorer discovering the rural hinterlands of his new home, for Armitage it is the anxiety of the potential for a long-held regional identity to change or be revoked, revealing questions about the self and the way that we relate to others whose only difference is marked by arbitrary, autocratically-defined and -manipulated borders. For Harrison, meanwhile, facets of regional identity are realised and questioned with relation to *other places*; the West Yorkshire poet, who like Hughes had relocated, ponders the effects that his Yorkshire identity has on his individual character and preferences within a new and distant home.

Only forty years have passed since the publication of *Remains of Elmet*, yet – partly because of the reflective nature of Hughes's collection, and partly because of the way in which local communities were forced to move on after industrial decline – the West Yorkshire in contemporary poetry is a very different place to the region we explored in the earlier collection. Only Hughes's stones, in a manner befitting their physical permanence, remain prominent in contemporary poets' descriptions here. Whilst Kunial's narrator in 'The Path' finds similar salvation in Nutclough Woods to that Hughes and his ancestors found in Hardcastle Crags, this provides only temporarily relief. The community has moved on from the immediate aftermath of the industrial decline, so it is possible that the implicit hope for springtime salvation in *Remains of Elmet* has been realised. However, this has not been characterised by a rediscovery of 'wild roots': in the contemporary poetry explored here, petals have been replaced by pixels; today's poets write of an entirely different lifestyle, overtaken by technology and the need to endure in the city.

CHAPTER 4
'This one thread in the great weave of history':
Industrial landscapes in West Riding poetry

As became evident in the previous chapter, the poetry scene in late twentieth- and early twenty-first century West Riding is thriving; this, however, is not indicative of universal productivity within the region. Indeed, discussing the years 1980-2000, James Underwood states that, 'If these are the decades in which the British poetry map began to devolve, then this is in part because these are the decades in which the North of England was cast adrift from the country's political and economic powerbase in the south-east'.[1] This sentiment underpins much of the poetry that will be discussed here. The end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first was characterised by decline in the north of England, particularly within the mining and manufacturing industries. Focal to this section, then, will be the Miners' Strikes that began on 12th March 1984, ending on 4th March 1985 (with the mass mobilisation of police from 18th March 1984, and the Battle of Orgreave on 18th June 1984). This was an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to prevent colliery closures and the prospect of consequential, widespread loss of local jobs.[2] It is interesting that, despite the time that has passed, contemporary West Yorkshire poets still dwell on local mining heritage, perhaps a result of a strong sense of injustice that remains here.

For many of the poems that we will discuss here, this is dealt with by re-creation. Even the younger poets, who could not have been involved in the events they describe, frequently seek to re-enact points and scenes of perceived regional injustices in their work as a kind of poetic documentary; like Hughes in *Remains of Elmet* this comes from a desire to ensure that the events are not forgotten, the poets having taken note of the suffering inflicted on their communities both during, and

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[1] James Underwood, "Pit Closure as Art': Poetry from the North of England', in *British Literature in Transition, 1980-2000, Accelerated Times*, ed. Eileen Pollard and Berthold Schoene (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 172.

[2] Christopher Hart, 'Metaphor and the (1984-5) Miners' Strike: A Multimodal Analysis,' in *Discourses of Disorder: Riots, Strikes and Protests in the Media*, ed. Christopher Hart and Darren Kelsey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 139.

before, their lifetimes. Just as constant reminders of the consequences of the Second World War and the decline of the textile industry haunt *Remains of Elmet*, Helen Mort's *Division Street* (2013) is preoccupied with the legacy of the Miners' Strikes and colliery closures, and their repercussions throughout Sheffield and the north.[3] Most of Mort's collection is set in 2003-2004, but it was published in 2013: the repetition of 'thirty-years' constantly harks back to the time of the strikes and immediately before. Three decades have passed, but society has not recovered.

In a 2016 blog post, with reference to her poem 'Scab' which responds to a film dramatizing the Battle of Orgreave, Mort wrote: 'As someone born in 1985 who grew up on the fringes of ex-mining country, I was afraid people would think I didn't have the right to approach the subject. It took me a long time to work out that's exactly why I should.'[4] Literary responses from the next generation effectively begin to reverse the political silencing of mining families, through the loss of their livelihoods and destruction of their communities, whilst also portraying the continuing effects on those who were not even born when the mines closed. However, the poet did not lose *her* job: a sense of 'distance and division' is unavoidable, exaggerated by the time that has passed.[5] Mort's interest in intersections of place – 'I'm interested in borders, where one thing becomes another' – is significant in terms of the changing shape of the West Riding, but symbolically it is relevant to *Division Street* too: the time period that Mort writes of, after the closure of the mines as locals attempt to move on is, in terms of social history, very much 'one thing becom[ing] another'.[6]

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[3] Whilst Sheffield is now part of South Yorkshire, the city's inclusion within the old administrative county of the West Riding of Yorkshire, as well as its position at the end of the Yorkshire coal belt that includes many of the other places considered here, warrants its inclusion in this chapter.
[4] Helen Mort, 'The Shame of Interest,' *Freefall* (blog), Sept 9, 2016, accessed Feb 27, 2019, https://helenmort.wordpress.com/2016/09/16/the-shame-of-interest/.
[5] Helen Mort, 'Publications,' *Helen Mort – Author*, (no date), accessed Feb 28, 2019, http://www.helenmort.com/publications.html/.
[6] Helen Mort, interviewed by Mike Farren, 'Interview: Helen Mort – Poet & Cultural Fellow at Leeds University,' *The State of the Arts*, Jul 28, 2015, accessed Feb 28, 2019, https://www.thestateofthearts.co.uk/features/interview-with-helen-mort-poet-cultural-fellow-at-leeds-university/.

In 2017, reflecting on *Division Street* four years after publication, Mort reported, 'I returned to its pages and found a remarkable number of cigarettes lurking there […] Perhaps I'm obsessed with the smoker as observer, slightly detached from the day'.[7] This detached observer is exactly the position that Mort's semi-autobiographical narrative allows the reader to occupy. In a 2013 interview, Mort stated that 'the people I imagine in my work are often like those faces you see in a crowd and convince yourself it's someone you know, someone dear to you perhaps, only to draw in close and find that it's a stranger after all. But of course, strangers are just people you're yet to meet.'[8] The combined personal and temporal distance, then, allows the ex-mining communities to be observed critically in Mort's work, in which people and places are inextricably linked: 'landscape is hugely important to my work, because I'm interested in people and I think places of all kinds have a huge psychological influence on us.'[9] She may have a local connection to the area, but she does not herself know the feeling of disconnection or dislocation from the industry; however, 'growing up where I did, I got this sense of the landscape and the community being shaped by it: this anti-Thatcher feeling you're aware of even at that age, and slowly started to make sense of as you got older and saw what a devastating impact the strike had.'[10] In *Division Street* Mort is a critical observer of the poverty that Thatcher's Britain, including the decommissioning of the mines, left behind in the towns and villages of the West Riding.

Before even opening *Division Street*, we are quickly reminded of The Battle of Orgreave (which took place at Orgreave Coking Plant, in Rotherham) by the greyscale cover image. The famous *Guardian* photograph, taken by Don McPhee in 1984, of face-to-face confrontation between George 'Geordie' Brealey (a striking miner) and Paul Castle (the frontmost of the wall of policemen), represents a

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[7] Helen Mort, 'A Millay a Day… (#4), '*Freefall* (blog), Oct 10, 2017, accessed Feb 27, 2019, https://helenmort.wordpress.com/2017/10/12/a-millay-a-day-4/.

[8] Helen Mort, interviewed by Rachael Allen, 'Interview with Helen Mort,' *Granta 125: After the War, The Online Edition*, Sept 25, 2013, accessed Feb 28, 2019, https://granta.com/interview-helen-mort/.

[9] Helen Mort, interviewed by Chloe Stopa-Hunt, 'In Conversation: Helen Mort,' *Orbits: Weekly Shorts from the Oxonian Review*, (no date), accessed Feb 28, 2019, http://www.oxonianreview.org/wp/in-conversation-helen-mort/.

[10] Mort, 'Poet and Cultural Fellow'.

dramatic power struggle between the authorities upholding the law, and the disempowered workers defending their livelihoods.[11] The white font, too, with its seemingly random mix of upper and lowercase letters, is akin to rapidly-scrawled words of protest; the 'v' in *Division Street* is black for emphasis, suggesting of the symbol for 'versus', and of course referencing the language, contexts and class divisions in Tony Harrison's *v.*, too. A sense of 'division', then, begins with the book's cover:
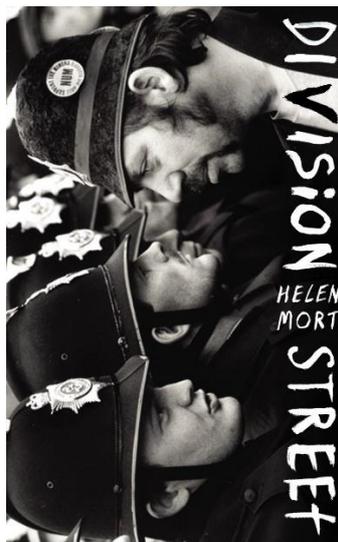

Image 1: the front cover of Helen Mort's *Division Street* (2013).

This image, of course, is thought-provoking in itself: is it depicting, as Martin Wainwright sentimentally considers in the *Guardian* in 2009, 'a brief moment [...of] rapport between one of the solid line of officers in greatcoats and a miner who was joshing with them [...as] the lips of both men started to curl; they seemed to have the promise of smiles not sneers'?[12] Or is the moment captured more akin to an interesting, early-twenty-first-century equivalent: the calm smile of Birmingham woman Saffiyah Kahn opposing Ian Crossland's anger in Joe Gidden's photograph, taken on 8th April 2017:

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[11] Martin Wainwright, 'The Miner and the Copper,' *Guardian,* Feb 24, 2009, accessed Mar 6, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2009/feb/24/miners-strike-photo-don-mcphee/.
[12] Wainwright, 'Miner and Copper'.

Image 2: 'Saffiyah Khan (left) faces down English Defence League (EDL) protester Ian Crossland during a demonstration in the city of Birmingham, in the wake of the Westminster terror attack.'[13]

Personally, I would argue for the latter: Khan and Brealey's demeanours are similarly composed, comfortable in their stances (physically and politically), whilst their opposition in both photographs appears – as Wainwright identifies – to be sneering. Whilst the latter may be more relevant to Chapter 5, the photographs express a similar sentiment: Brealey was defending his community, his career and his way of life; Kahn was defending a woman in a hijab, who had been confronted by Crossland and other EDL members.[14] One can only imagine Giddens' photograph emblazoning the front cover of a similarly-positioned book of poetry written in 2047. Giddens says, of his own photo, 'Kahn looks very calm and collected; she has a smile on her face and her hands in her pockets. By way of contrast, Crossland looks angry […] when you compare the two he definitely looks more riled up. I think that's what makes it so special – her expression and the fact that she doesn't look intimidated or scared whatsoever.'[15]

A significant power struggle resonates in both images: whilst both Kahn and Crossland are English and working class, Crossland – as a white male – occupies the traditionally more empowered position. Whilst Brealey and Castle are both white

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[13] Joe Giddens, 'EDL Birmingham march,' (photograph. PA Images, London, 2017).

[14] Tim Mobbs, 'Checking in with Saffiyah Kahn, the Woman who Faced Down the EDL,' *VICE*, Apr 10, 2017, accessed March 6, 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/z49jn8/checking-in-with-saffiyah-khan-the-woman-who-faced-down-the-edl/.

[15] Kate Samuelson, 'The Story Behind the Viral Photo of a British Woman Smiling at a Far-Right Protester,' *TIME*, Apr 10, 2017, accessed Mar 6, 2019, http://time.com/4733122/saffiyah-khan-birmingham-protestor-edl/.

men, Castle is performing an upper-working to middle-class role and – as a policeman – is naturally empowered when in uniform. The Miners' Strikes, of course, were considered by many to be a class war; importantly, though, the socially empowered figure in each photograph appears eminently less in control. Interestingly, according to Mort, 'a lot of people have said they don't like the cover of *Division Street* because it gives a misleading impression of the book. It is very stark and oppositional'.[16] The poetry generally does not share the urgency and political fury implied by the cover image, which may be expected, given the Miners' Strikes were almost thirty years in the past when the collection was published. However, beneath the constant yet calm underlying anger, this feeling of oppression and opposition is ever-present and enduring.

Sheffield, in Mort's collection, is a frosty place. References to 'snow' are abundant, symbolic not just of the 'harsh north', but of the cold atmosphere perpetuated by the strikes. The whiteness of the snow marks a stark contrast to the blackness of coal and soot that was once stereotypical of mining districts. In 'Twenty-Two Words for Snow', this cold is combined with an emptiness, a sense of a society left silenced by the closure of the pits:

> The lawn was freezing over
> but the air stayed empty
> and I wondered how the Inuit
> would name this waiting –
> our radio playing to itself in the bathroom,
> the sound from the street
> of ice-cream vans out of season
> in this town where we don't have
>
> twenty-two words for anything,
> […]
> In the kitchen, dad sifts flour,
> still panning for something.[17]

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16 Mort, 'In Conversation'.
17 Helen Mort, 'Twenty-Two Words for Snow', in *Division Street* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013), 2.

The emptiness of 'the air' is reflected in the 'waiting' for salvation from bleak reality: here time stands still. Despite the freezing winter, ice cream vans persist: is this a desperate hope for income, a comment on the 'hardy north' stereotype, or the echo of metaphorical 'summertime' in the minds of the community enduring this harsh winter? Meanwhile, the radio – a symbol of potential escapist pleasure – plays to itself in the bathroom, in which no one is getting ready for work: perhaps its timer has never been un-set, hopeful that one day work will resume.

In *Real Barnsley* (2017), Ian McMillan writes of the landscape of his childhood in a similar way:

> that's the thing about the post-coal landscape; it will never return to the pastoral setting that it was before they found the black diamonds, but somehow there's a species of uneasy peace, as though somebody has just popped out to the shop and left the broken door hanging on its hinges.[18]

A perfect metaphor for this, employed by several West Riding poets, is Mother Shipton's Cave, in Knaresborough. Inside the cave, objects have been 'frozen in time', calcified by the minerals abundant in the water droplets that seep through the ceiling. Mother Shipton appears in several local poems, including those by Huddersfield-born Simon Armitage, and Ian Duhig, who lives in Leeds.[19] In 'Mother Shipton' (2016), Duhig writes:

> I know you'll pass the World's End bar
> to cross that river by the well
> whose water changes time to stone
> to find our Yorkshire Sibyl's home.[20]

The Seer, Shipton, immortalises relics 'past' the end of the world. If we think again to Mort's 'Twenty-Two Words for Snow,' it is the entirety of the Yorkshire mining community that is frozen in time, after the colliery closures. This sentiment recurs

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[18] Ian McMillan, *Real Barnsley* (Bridgend: Seren Books, 2017), 64.
[19] Paul Chrystal, *Yorkshire Literary Landscapes* (Darlington: DestinWorld Publishing, 2018), 9, 95.
[20] Ian Duhig, 'Mother Shipton', in *The Blind Road-Maker* (London: Picador, 2016), 31.

throughout the poem. The (seemingly permanent) intermission in the community's working lives is signalled by the enjambment between the two stanzas: 'in this town where we don't have// twenty-two words for anything'. These two lines are both literally and figuratively central to the poem: quite literally, in these times of decline, they 'don't have' *anything*. Referencing the trope of the Inuit people having twenty-two words for snow, that 'in this town' 'we don't have' 'twenty-two words for anything', suggests that a community in which work had been the priority had no need for so many synonyms. If there were twenty-two words for anything though, the poem implies, they would almost certainly be mining-related.

'Fur', meanwhile, evidences the impact of colliery closures, the strikes, and their repercussions, felt even by the next generation:

> Snow wants my childhood for itself.
> It wants to claim The Blacksmith's Arms,
> digest the Calow Fish Bar whole. Snow's tongue
> has found the crevices of Eastwood Park.
> It licks the war memorial, weighs down the trees
>
> and everyone I know is sinking past their knees.
> On Allpits Road, the family dog is swallowed neat.
> Snow gets beneath my schoolfriends' clothes
> and touches them until they freeze, and still
> it wants the long-abandoned Working Men's Club,
>
> hollows where bar stools scuffed the floor.
> It moves to fill each empty glass behind the bar.
> On Orchid Close, I stand to watch it fur the driveway
> of a man who's lived in the same bungalow for thirty years
> and dreams of digging his way out.[21]

Whilst the snow here could be literal, a manifestation of the 'inhospitable' northern climate, it is predominately symbolic: the snow is a metaphor for the impact of unemployment and the depression that engulfed ex-miners as their livelihoods were

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[21] Helen Mort, 'Fur', in *Division Street* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013), 10.

taken away from them. Whilst documenting West Riding life in 1950, Lettice Cooper
wrote:

> Misery, like an east wind, shrivelled the Pennine valleys. I have
> sometimes heard prosperous people, who knew nothing about such
> conditions of life, say carelessly that unemployed men were glad not to
> work, and perfectly happy as long as they had the dole. Of the majority
> this could not have been more untrue. With a very few exceptions they
> suffered in the marrow of their self-respect.[22]

A resulting depression creeps like a layer of snow, throughout the working-class
landscape in *Division Street*, its cold penetrating the pub, the park and the chip shop
until ultimately 'everyone I know is sinking past their knees'. No life, in this
community, is left untouched.

The community-wide nature of this impact is suggested, as Mort feels her childhood
being 'claimed'. Whilst the obvious victims of pit closures are the miners themselves,
the impact on their children is described too: 'Snow gets beneath my schoolfriends'
clothes/ and touches them until they freeze'.[23] Here the 'snow' is not content with
merely affecting the father: it affects the lives of their children too, with their 'freeze'
a metaphor for the loss of childhood innocence in these suddenly poverty-stricken
communities: 'Snow wants my childhood for itself.'[24] Arguably the most tragic
image in 'Fur', though, is the 'man who's lived in the same bungalow for thirty
years/ and dreams of digging his way out.'[25] Clearing the winter's snow (here, in a
literal sense) from his driveway, is the closest this miner can get to the livelihood
that, during the 1980s, was taken away from him. Like the father in 'Twenty-two
words for snow,' still 'sift[ing] flour/ still panning for something', he re-enacts
former working techniques as he 'dreams' of an elusive escape from 'the same
bungalow for thirty years' into which he has become confined, that has become his

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[22] Cooper, *West Riding*, 77.
[23] Mort, 'Fur,' 10.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

reality.[26] Even the road name marks the all-encompassing grip of mining on the region: 'Allpits Road' is a constant and depressing reminder that *all pits* are now impassable.[27]

Coal had long been the region's main export and livelihood, an industry originally pioneered by fourteenth-century monks.[28] Cooper further describes the 'geological features of the West Riding which have helped to determine her history.'[29] The most prominent of these is:

> the coal belt which stretches north and south from Shipley to Sheffield, and east and west from the Pennine Border of the Riding to a line drawn beyond Leeds and Wakefield. When steam superseded water as the driving power of industry, the West Riding, already lucky in her innumerable streams of running water, found herself fortunate again in rich supplies of coal, which made her, for good or ill, one of the foremost industrial districts of the world.[30]

Writing in his 2018 book *Yorkshire: A Lyrical History of England's Greatest County*, Richard Morris concurs, exploring the county's geographical history further: 'aback of it all, of course, was coal: the abundant, on-the-spot fossil plant matter that had been laid down in deltaic swamps all those hundreds of millions of years ago, and which from the commercial development of the steam engine in the eighteenth century became the fuel that powered the making and carrying of almost everything.'[31] Even in the mid-twentieth century the mines were thriving, their coming demise unpredicted. Cooper's 1950 accounts depict a fruitful industry,

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[26] 'Twenty-two Words for Snow', 2.
[27] Interestingly, in a further connection, Mort writes in her blog post 'Life, Friends, is Boring' (Jun 6, 2017, https://helenmort.wordpress.com/2017/06/22/life-friends-is-boring/) that 'For years I've been influenced by the timeless, elegant music of Richard Hawley. […] When I wrote my first collection 'Division Street', I was influenced by the way Richard Hawley titles his albums after evocative local street names and place names: Hollow Meadows, Coles Corner, Lowedges.' 'Allpits Road' would certainly fit this pattern.
[28] J.W. Walker, *Wakefield, its History and its People* (Wakefield: S.R. Publishers Ltd, 1966), 106; McMillan, *Real Barnsley*, 81.
[29] Cooper, *West Riding*, 14.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Morris, *Yorkshire*, 206.

whilst McMillan writes that 'the late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of great expansion […] there was a sense that we actually were living somewhere important'.[32] The decline of mining in the region in the 1980s, then, was sudden, unexpected and dramatic: 'At the end of the nineteenth century the West Riding contained over 450 working coal mines'; 'When the strike began, 56 of Britain's 173 working pits were in Yorkshire. In 2015, none. The only coal mine it is now possible to enter is a museum.'[33] Indeed, McMillan finds that 'The miners' strike is Barnsley's recent defining moment; it was the event that changed the town forever'.[34] The cold, inhospitable atmosphere that abounds in caricatures of the north is not, in this case, a geographical quirk; rather, it marks the effect of devastating industrial losses, and the poverty that results.

As in Mort's *Division Street*, sinister repercussions of widespread unemployment are suggested in Ian McMillan's 'Poems Occasioned by the High Incidence of Suicide amongst the Unemployed' (1994). The poem bears a sentiment expressed in *Real Barnsley* (2017): the 'pits have now gone, together with the infrastructure and the collectivism and the solidarity that went with them. Thousands of people employed directly and indirectly; families working down the pit but always saying that their lads would never work down the pit, that they'd go onto something else, something better, and now they never can'.[35] In a succession of eight three-line stanzas, with a rhyme scheme, repetition and singsong-like metre reminiscent of a nursery rhyme or playground song, we learn of various ways in which the region's sons have killed themselves:

> Now then, fatha, how's your Stan?
> He brayed hissen to death
> wi' a watterin can.[36]

[32] McMillan, *Real Barnsley*, 159.
[33] Morris, *Yorkshire*, 206, 211.
[34] McMillan, *Real Barnsley*, 21, 87-88.
[35] Ibid, 88.
[36] Ian McMillan, 'Poem Occasioned by the High Incidence of Suicide amongst the Unemployed', in *Dad, the Donkey's On Fire* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), 25.

McMillan's Barnsley dialect lends the poem a suggestion of local authenticity; alongside the serious causes of death here – beneath the playful verse that makes light of it – these are marked as very working-class deaths within a working-class town, resulting from the loss of prospects and livelihoods. The devastation is not limited to men though, as the final stanza attests:

> Now then, fatha, wheers the wives?
> They're cutting their sens
> wi' carving knives.[37]

Curiously, whilst their self-harm is tragic, the women are not committing suicide. Perhaps this acknowledges little change in women's perpetually limited prospects, or reinforces the trope of the enduring, northern working-class woman. The wives cannot die: their responsibilities to their families persist, particularly in the wake of their husbands' deaths (literal, or metaphorical).

Female support, of course, was important during the strikes; women's roles are often unacknowledged or undervalued, partly due to their 'exclu[sion] from underground mining since the Coal Mines Act of 1842.'[38] Many women in West Yorkshire mining towns recognised the strikes as key to their own politicisation: in her 1995 thesis (submitted a decade after Orgreave), Jacqueline Ellen Briggs found that 'for many of the women, they were able to see how politics did have an effect upon their everyday lives'. 'A significant proportion of those interviewed joined a political party, in all but one case this was the Labour Party. The one exception […set] up a local branch of the Green Party'.[39] Whilst 'some women continued to occupy traditional roles', and others 'had jobs whose work became the only source of family income during the strike', 'wives who made the tea and sandwiches in [earlier

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Jean Spence and Carol, 'Side by Side with Our Men?' Women's Activism, Community, and Gender in the 1984-1985 British Miners' Strike,' *International Labour and Working-Class History*, 75, no. 1 (2009): 73.

[39] Jacqueline Ellen Briggs, 'The 1984/5 Miners' Strike: The Politicising Effects?' (doctoral thesis: University of York, 1995), 337, 330; Spence and Stephenson, 76.

demonstrations] went on the picket lines in 1984'.[40] By the 1990s women (including Anne Scargill, wife of Arthur Scargill, the Yorkshire-born trade unionist who led the National Union of Miners during the strikes) were staging sit-ins, occupying offices and chaining themselves to railings outside the Department of Trade and Industry.[41] The women are suffering here too, but they are channelling their suffering into empowerment, moving into the male dominated public sphere of politics within the community. McMillan's poem, therefore, recognises women's centrality to the functioning of the family unit during the strikes and thereafter, both in the public and private spheres. Interestingly, though, it is still the man who is asked questions as representative of his household, despite his comparatively disempowered position, unemployed with his wife empowered as breadwinner and political equal. McMillan deals not only with job losses in his poem, but with the restructuring of the traditional community: indeed, Spence and Stephenson suggest these amongst factors contributing to the breakdown of mining communities, alongside the divisions and displacements that the closures caused.[42]

The impacts of colliery closures persist within ex-mining communities, as livelihoods were lost not only for current workers, but the children and grandchildren who expected to follow the traditional family career-path too. In mining communities, 'a way of life emerged in which boys automatically followed their fathers' employment.'[43] In Wakefield-born Matt Abbott's 'Farewell, Kellingley' (2018), the poet – who 'came from a line of coalminers on [his] dad's side' – writes of the industry that, were he born a decade or two earlier (or, had the industry not been decimated), he may have found himself involved in, too.[44] However,

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[40] Spence and Stephenson, 'Side by Side', 74, 76; Briggs, *Politicising Effects*, 314.

[41] Briggs, *Politicising Effects*, 314.

[42] Spence and Stephenson, 'Side by Side', 69-70, 74.

[43] Marie Hartley and Joan Ingilby, *Life & Tradition in West Yorkshire* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1976) 68-69.

[44] 'Kellingley Colliery, sunk between 1958 and 1962, closed in December 2015': this was the end of an era. (Northern Mine Research Society. 'Yorkshire Coalfield.' *Coal Mining in the British Isles*. Accessed Aug 7, 2019. https://www.nmrs.org.uk/mines-map/coal-mining-in-the-british-isles/yorkshire-coalfield/.)

> This was no longer the industry
> that our family could invest our lives in.[45]

Because of this tradition of successive family employment, for many, this career was all they knew. With unemployment, they lost an important facet of their identities, and the emotional and physical 'investment' made in the mines:

> [it] was so much more than a job
> or a career.
> It was his life
> and his pride
> and his honour.[46]

In what effectively becomes a lost link to generations of family history in Abbott's poem, we are reminded of similar losses in the Calder Valley, in *Remains of Elmet*.

In 'Spinning a Yarn' (2017), Kate Fox adopts weaving imagery to illustrate an ancestral connection of multiple generations working the same job, particularly within woollen industry of her Bradford heritage:

> Imagine
> you're holding a thread
> which is held by your mother,
> then her mother,
> then her mother,
> double, treble, quadruple twisted ties,
> back, back in a long line that stretches further than you can see.
> […]
> and even though we can't see their faces
> or hear their voices,
> you hold that thread that they've all spun,
> and still the looms are clacking on,
> the threads are criss-crossing with other chains,
> from women written out of history,
> with ones who shouted loudly.

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[45] Matt Abbott, 'Farewell, Kellingley,' in *Two Little Ducks* (Birmingham: Verve Poetry Press, 2018), 23.
[46] Ibid.

> […]
> but at this moment it's making a double helix
> down your maternal line,
> then springs back,
> echoes of thunderous looms,
> the shuttle's clack,
> you're holding it, just this one thread
> in the great weave of history.[47]

Fox's image of DNA's double helix suggesting that industry is engrained in communities here is potentially problematic; Fox and Abbott are just two examples of vocation not being in any way genetically predetermined. The imagery is presumably intended to express a similar anxiety to *Remains of Elmet*: that, with the decline of the industry in which her ancestors had been employed, the poet loses further connection to the past, in the words of Hughes, her 'inheritance'.[48] To sever these ties, then, is like severing the 'thread' in Fox's poem, an intrinsic connection to home and history. This is literally the case when communities were themselves displaced from an area in which their ancestors had traditionally lived and worked.

The persistent anger produced as a result of the loss of industry – particularly those in which communities were employed en masse – is clear as Abbott's 'Farewell Kellingley' continues:

> Thousands of lives
> betrayed and abandoned.
> Thousands of existences
> struck off as stories
>
> […]

[47] Kate Fox, 'Spinning a Yarn,' in *Chronotopia* (Portishead: Burning Eye Books, 2017), 60-61.
[48] Ted Hughes and Fay Godwin, 'Six years into her posthumous life…' in *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 7.

> Industries: in history books.
> Prospects: a commute.
> Postcodes left anonymous: strangled at the roots.[49]

The community is still coming to terms with the fact that the industry they built their lives around is now 'history', accessible only through 'stories' recounted by ex-miners and their families. Though it may only be recent history, the passing of time is implied by the fact that the poet was not alive when the mines closed: like Mort, Abbott was born in the early aftermath of the closures. Regardless, the community's anger gains a voice through his work, despite the growing temporal distance from the events of the 1980s. The prospect of 'a commute' as the only option for work is reminiscent of Hughes's deindustrialised Calderdale. This sudden lack of local vocation, in this once-productive place, contributes throughout these poems to a feeling of anonymity or having been abandoned and left to decay, 'strangled at the roots' with little hope for the future of the area or its inhabitants. It is little wonder that the community into which Abbott was born was so angry.

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'Nostalgia for the very recent past, the past that hasn't cooled yet' in West Yorkshire's urban poems.

As we turn back to *Division Street*, hope and a sense of progress only comes through the narrator's admission to Cambridge University: here, the generation who were slightly too young to work in the mines may allow society to finally move on. However, with the move to a prestigious university comes the division between northern working-class life, and that of the southern elites into whose world the narrator is displaced. As we will soon see, Mort's narrator implies that she is entering enemy territory, due to historic opposition across spatial and class boundaries. This opposition is similarly reflected in Steve Ely's 'Ballad of the Scabs'

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[49] Abbott, 'Farewell Kellingley,' 23.

(2015), which positions the southern upper- and ruling-classes against the Yorkshire working communities:

> The ruling class got nervous
> and planned a counter-attack
> to perpetuate their power
> and put the workers on the rack.
>
> […]
>
> Oxbridge Universities
> Fleet Street and the BBC
> Scotland Yard and Whitehall
> and the Royal family,
>
> Put their heads together
> class warriors to a man
> dispensed with pretence of democracy
> and adopted the Ridley Plan.[50]

To the Yorkshire-based miner, the Ridley Plan was a direct and assimilated attack on the north by those with prestige in the south. Indeed, Underwood finds late-twentieth-century northern poetry generally reflective of 'the condition of living in the Thatcherite and post-Thatcherite North, where things are done to you, where ministers consider "managed decline" an appropriate policy for northern cities, and where sections of the population can undergo the estranging experience of being described and maligned as "the enemy within".[51] It is no wonder that these communities felt ostracised and victimised; of course, to them, the 'enemy' was the largely southern establishment, as well as their colleagues who refused to strike, thereby undermining their fellow miners' efforts.

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[50] Steve Ely, 'Ballad of the Scabs', in *Englalaland* (Ripon: Smokestack Books, 2015), 136-142.
[51] Underwood, 'Pit Closure as Art', 170.

It is interesting here that both Mort and Ely's poems refer, in their titles, to the derogatory term for non-striking miners, the people on whom the failure of the strike action was blamed, and to whom Ely's poem is addressed:

> They bussed them through the picket lines
> through hails of broken slabs
> Ian MacGregor's beggars
> Margaret Thatcher's scabs.
>
> [...]
>
> See, all those bastards need to win
> is Brotherhood to fail
> in cringing fear of state assault
> of courts and fines and jail.
>
> […]
>
> They thought the Tories were their friends
> but how were they deceived
> within ten years their pits were shut
> their villages bereaved.[52]

Significantly, Ely calls his poem 'The Ballad of the Scabs'. Ely's second-hand reconstruction of the Miners' Strikes here adopts the ballad form which evokes generations of working-class history and conflicts in the West Riding. In *English Folk Poetry, Structure and Meaning* (1980), Robert deV. Renwick writes that Yorkshire folksong served many purposes, particularly as didactic or satirical entertainment; significantly, they frequently 'depict[ed] conflict within a rural setting'.[53] For the Luddites in 1812, the traditional form was adopted to celebrate their efforts (and, presumably, to taunt their opponents).[54]

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[52] Ely, Ballad of the Scabs, 136-142.
[53] Robert deV. Renwick, *English Folk Poetry: Structure and Meaning*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), 123.
[54] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class,* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 611.

Ely's 'ballad' acknowledges the significance of this form within local, working-class industrial history. The metre and rhyme are jaunty, featuring a didactic note befitting the form, warning workers neither to trust the establishment nor to betray their colleagues. Noticeably it is the 'scabs' who – by being seen to 'betray' their fellow miners, causing 'Brotherhood to fail' and, ultimately, the demise of their own jobs – are portrayed as the opposition in Ely's poem. This is, of course, a very regional perspective that, while prevalent in Yorkshire, was not reflective of the whole country: in Nottinghamshire, miners had voted overwhelmingly against the strike. As a result of this regional disparity within the industry, striking miners formed flying pickets outside non-striking collieries, their intimidation resulting in clashes: Ian Hernon writes that 'Harworth colliery closed when 200 pickets turned up, outnumbering the twelve police on duty. The furious Harworth men vowed to go in the following day to defy the 'Yorkshire mob' but changed their minds when 450 pickets streamed down the motorway to their pit gates.'[55] Through his second-hand reconstruction, Ely's ballad calls for working class unity in opposition to perceived injustice.

The 'scab' becomes a trope in West Riding poetry from the miners' strikes onwards. Three decades later, we can see this reflected as Helen Mort's Cambridge-bound narrator is burdened by guilt, 'the idea of having crossed an invisible picket line' a result of the social mobility afforded by her place at Cambridge. Mort ultimately designates herself a class-traitor and by association a 'scab' too.[56] Despite being away from home, the narrator's life is haunted by West Yorkshire's industrial and political past (a past that the poet herself, we must remember, was not alive to experience). The five-part poem alternates its location between Sheffield and Cambridge: Sheffield dominates, occupying parts one, three and five (each with three stanzas); parts two and four both comprise two stanza Cambridge sections. Life in Cambridge

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[55] Ian Hernon, *Riot! Civil Insurrection from Peterloo to the Present Day*, (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 223-224.

[56] Mort, 'Interview with Helen Mort,' 2013

is starkly different to Sheffield's frosty depression, as the narrator is catapulted into an elite lifestyle:

> My college room is opposite
> a gown-hire shop. Next door, a girl
> sings opera all afternoon, stops once
> to ask me where I got my accent from.
> A Chinese woman enters carefully,
> empties the bins without a word
> I sit behind my polished desk
> and watch the dusk disguise each shop,
> the corridor in silence till my neighbour
> trills back into life again. Day
> after day, I cannot learn the tune.[57]

The 'gown-hire shop', the cleaner, the 'polished desk': these are all alien to Mort's narrator, notable for their difference to home life. Whilst the narrator finds the language of opera incomprehensible, her own northern voice marks her difference, so notable that the singing neighbour 'stops once/ to ask me where I got my accent from'. It is ironic that, for the singer, the presumably Italian opera is more normal here than the Sheffield accent; Mort, meanwhile, cannot 'learn the tune' of language here.

The narrator would have to make an important decision when settling into Cambridge: whether to resist losing (to some extent, at least) her Yorkshire accent and avoid suppressing her northern identity, or whether to succumb to Received Pronunciation. Notably, in 'Sunset ovver Barnsley' (1994), Ian McMillan likens the sunset's colour to the shade of an enraged parent: 'as red as thy face/ when tha got mad wi him on't telly/ tellin kids ow ter talk'.[58] If Mort's character were to lose her accent, it can be presumed that her newly-acquired speech style would be met with the same derision in West Yorkshire as the programmes voiced in RP, perceived as erasing children's northern identities. We have to wonder whether the Yorkshire

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[57] Helen Mort, 'Scab', in *Division Street* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013). 16.
[58] Ian McMillan, 'Sunset ovver Barnsley', in *Dad, the Donkey's On Fire* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), 127.

dialect in McMillan's poem is exaggerated to appease the parent who was so infuriated at the risk of it being lost. Language remains problematic throughout Mort's poem, just as it was in Harrison's *The School of Eloquence* thirty-five years before: 'a wine/ everyone else is able to pronounce,' 'mutter the Latin under your breath/ not knowing if it's thanks or blasphemy'.[59] For the city that doesn't 'have// twenty-two words for anything', Latin would be an unnecessary complication, an elitist language that side-lines those who do not understand.[60] Non-verbal languages flummox the northern student too: 'the challenge of the cutlery' as well as the 'fish-tail ballgowns/ free champagne' and the 'table/ lined with oysters, marble-blue' would, to many, represent grandeur; in contrast to the images of Sheffield, they appear unnecessarily pompous, excessive even.[61]

Significantly, the cyclical poem starts and ends with Sheffield, normalising working-class Yorkshire life and framing Cambridge's peculiarities as 'other'. In the same way, repeated descriptions of the Battle of Orgreave emphasise the devastation suffered by Yorkshire mining communities, at the hands of politicians (combined, of course, with the brutality of 'bobbies from ten counties', 'the cavalry, the fifty-eight Alsatian dogs').[62] Orgreave, then, is focal to the poem. Whilst the first section recalls Orgreave, presumably as if in the words of an ex-miner, parts three and five are framed through the viewpoint of a creative or film director; they would likely not have been there, and probably weren't from Yorkshire either. These recreations (each further distanced temporally from Orgreave itself) serve to reinforce Mort's belief that 'things get re-enacted and happen over and over and we're all complicit.'[63] The narrator observes this repetitive cycle, as nothing changes. As the Battle is recollected in part one, the city's path to devastation is apparent:

> A stone is lobbed in '84,
> hangs like a star over Orgreave.

[59] Mort, 'Scab,' 17.
[60] Mort, 'Twenty-Two Words for Snow,' 2.
[61] Mort, 'Scab,' 17.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Mort, 'Poet and Cultural Fellow'.

Welcome to Sheffield. Border-land,
our town of miracles – the wine
turning to water in the pubs,
the tax man ransacking the Church,
plenty of room at every inn.
And watch: a car flares
into a burning bush.[64]

The miner, here, typifies Mort's helpless observer. Interestingly, as we have seen, 'stone' is particularly abundant within Yorkshire poetry, as of course it is within the Yorkshire landscape. Here, as the neighbourhood regresses, declining into deprivation and, ultimately, depravity – 'the wine/ turning to water in the pubs', 'And watch: a car flares into a burning bush' – this native stone becomes a weapon. As 'A stone is lobbed in '84' the landscape aids the fight.

Whilst capitalism replaced religion as the tax man ransacked the Church, the mining community have given up on both government *and* religion and determined to take their own fates into their own hands. As 'the wine/ turning to water in the pubs' suggests not only a lack of funds or leisure time, but also a regression of fortune, the star of Bethlehem's guiding light becomes weaponised: the star of Orgreave is leading the relatively defenceless men into what would become known as a merciless battle between the miners and the police. As the 'car flares/ into a burning bush', the legend of God speaking to Moses through the burning bush and electing Moses as leader of the Israelites in this case carries a different message. Here the mining community is speaking to the authorities, and ultimately refuting their leadership and their laws.

Mort's poem reminds us that the way in which striking miners were dealt with caused further division and distrust between the northern workers and politicians, the media and the police: 'Thatcher described the miners as "the enemy within"', whilst 'Scargill said that Orgreave showed that Britain was in the grip of a "police

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[64] Mort, 'Scab,' 16.

state" and accused the police of "blind hatred" towards the pickets.'[65] Meanwhile, news and media coverage 'construct[ed] a discourse in which the police are seen as victims of violence acted out by the miners.'[66] The media frequently framed the strikes as a war, likening Thatcher to Churchill and Scargill to Hitler; The Sun even attempted to print a cover photo of Scargill captioned 'Mine Fuhrer' (although their printers ultimately refused to print it). The adoption of war-based language was key to 'delegitim[izng] the NUM and the striking miners while legitimating the position and actions of the government and the police. The general war frame entails an opposition between two sides, one of which is seen as 'the enemy' [...so] the actions of government and police are justified as being in the national interest.'[67] This dichotomy reinforces stereotypes of northern, working class men as savages compared with their civilised southern counterparts.

Police officers from all over the country were deployed by the National Reporting Centre on an enormous scale; the striking miners viewed this as 'an occupying army', with policemen 'accommodated in local barracks' and using the opportunity 'to try out new public order tactics and riot equipment': 'for two years most police forces had sent their men to army camps for drill and some officers admitted to the adrenaline buzz of being in a paramilitary unit with an almost free licence to impose their will on the "enemy."'[68] This is referenced by Abbott in 'Farewell, Kellingley':

> And they sent in all these coppers, shipped in from elsewhere;
> London, or Nottingham, or somewhere else irrelevant.[69]

These tactics are critiqued by the poet as contributing to a complete loss of faith in political representatives. The police, who had been deployed to Yorkshire from the (irrelevant) south, are portrayed as invaders, their authority giving them the distinct air of a colonising force. In the case of Orgreave, 'by 9.00 a.m. there were 10,000

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[65] Spence and Stephenson, 'Side by Side', 69; Hernon, *Riot!*, 230-231.
[66] Hart, 'Multimodal Analysis,' 134-345.
[67] Ibid, 150-151.
[68] Hernon, *Riot!* 224-226.
[69] Abbott, 'Farewell, Kellingley', 23.

pickets facing 8,000 police officers, more men than belonged to any mainland force outside London'.[70] Whilst Briggs states that, 'in the case of the 1984/5 miners' strike the Government was clearly the strikers' opponent' – the police just a manifestation of governmental power – the heavy-handed tactics of some police officers changed this; the police became the enemy too. Interestingly, 'interviewees tended not to blame the local police'.[71] 'Farewell, Kellingley' reiterates that it is those 'shipped in from elsewhere' that were disparaged:

> they taunted the picketing miners;
> wafting notes
> that floated on laughter,
> as though they were prodding
> a caged-up animal.
>
> […]
>
> they acted with brutality.
> Treated with contempt
> and disregard.
> Crushed by the state[72]

Here the policemen (and the politicians whose rulings the police uphold) appear cruel, immature and inhumane in their attitudes towards the miners; on the other hand, the miners are considered animalistic and inferior – 'a caged-up animal' – by the taunting police.

In *Riot! Civil Insurrection from Peterloo to the Present Day* (2006), Hernon reports that 'pickets and their families repeatedly complained of police provocation and the language used against their women.' 'Police swore at mothers taking their children to school, and baited pickets about what they could afford to buy their children for Christmas' with reports that '"They would show £10 notes and talk about the bicycles they were going to give their children, and then roll ten pence pieces across

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[70] Hernon, *Riot!* 229.
[71] Briggs, *Politicising Effects*, 320, 334.
[72] Abbott, 'Farewell, Kellingley', 23.

the road to the pickets."' Footage from Orgreave showed 'the police charging, lashing out indiscriminately […] a policemen repeatedly beating a fallen miner with his truncheon.'[73] Whilst law enforcement was fighting flying pickets, the intimidation of non-striking miners and fear of 'mob rule', led politicians to reinforce a perceived sense of southern superiority by sending London policemen north, at least in the eyes of the striking mining community, as represented by Matt Abbott in 'Farewell, Kellingley'. However, the behaviour of some of the policemen only served to suggest a moral inferiority, effectively reversing the implication that Northernness equates to heightened savagery.

West Yorkshire has long been no stranger to conflict. Alongside battles for land – from the Brythons in 350BC, through conquests from the Celts, Romans, Danes and Brigantes, to the Battle of Bramham Moor in 1408 – industrial violence (and working-class political defiance) has a history here too.[74] In Huddersfield alone, 'food rioting erupted […] on three separate occasions during the 1780s and 1790s': during a corn shortage in 1783, Halifax rioted and prevented local grain being sent to the cities and abroad, for fear that the growers and their community would be left to starve.[75] Meanwhile, 'in 1812 [Huddersfield] was the epicentre of the Yorkshire Luddite disturbances', with other 'commands' situated around the West Riding, including in Leeds, Halifax and the Spen Valley. In 1992, Hargreaves reflected that:

> During the last two decades of the eighteenth century and the first half of
> the nineteenth century [there was] a frequency, intensity and scale of
> popular protest unprecedented in the town's history, earning
> Huddersfield notoriety by 1813 as "a hotbed of disaffection" and "a
> metropolis of discontent"[76]

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[73] Hernon, *Riot!* 232, 230.

[74] Cooper, *West Riding*, 20-21, 28-29, 38.

[75] John A. Hargreaves, "A Metropolis of Discontent': Popular Protest in Huddersfield c.1780-c.1850', in *Huddersfield: A Most Handsome Town: aspects of the history and culture of a West Yorkshire town*, ed. E. A. Hilary Haigh (Huddersfield: Kirklees Cultural Services, 1992), 189-190; Thompson, *English Working Class*, 71.

[76] Hargreaves, 'Popular Protest', 189-190; Thompson, *English Working Class*, 609.

All this lies behind section three of 'Scab', which describes a 'reconstruction' or 're-enactment' of the Battle of Orgreave: 'There are battle specialists,/ The Vikings and The Sealed knot.' Orgreave, the re-enactment suggests, was as fundamental to British history as other re-enacted conflicts, like the Battles of Hastings or Bosworth Field, perhaps. However, reconstruction is subjective, and should, of course, be safe: 'This is a reconstruction. Nobody/ will get hurt.' 'There will be opportunities to leave,/ a handshake at the end.'[77] The re-enactment even comes with a content warning: 'Please note/ the language used for authenticity:/ example – scab, example – cunt.'[78] The re-enactment, unlike the actual event, is highly choreographed: 'When I blow the whistle, charge/ but not before':

> On my instruction,
> throw your missiles in the air.
> On my instruction, tackle him,
> then kick him when he's down,
> kick him in the bollocks, boot him
> like a man in flames. Now harder,
> kick him till he doesn't know his name.[79]

Here, Mort demonstrates how situations can quickly deteriorate; a controlled crowd can descend into a mob under the instruction of its leader: if the actor blindly follows this 'instruction', the re-enactment becomes more real than it first appeared.

In Steve Ely's 'One of Us', from *Englalaland* (2015), the striking Yorkshiremen were regarded as a 'mob' – like the one being re-enacted in Mort's poem – 'ruled' by Arthur Scargill ('King Arthur, the Cossack-quiffed/ syndicalist from nuh-than-lad Worsborough Dale').[80] This media-image of the miners, however, differs from imagery in West Yorkshire poetry. Ely's Scargill is a northern, working-class hero

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[77] Mort, 'Scab,' 17.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Steve Ely, 'One of us', in *Englalaland* (Ripon: Smokestack Books, 2015), 120.

who empowered 'the Yorkshire that flew into lines of coppers'; he is noticeably different to the politicians he opposed (even the northern-born ones):

> President of the NUM via White Cross
> Secondary Modern, Woolley Pit and the diehard
> red-raggers of Yorkshire, the real Yorkshire,
> where we lived, with pit tips, comprehensive schools
> and sideburned Tetley bittermen,[81]

For the West Yorkshire miners, then, Scargill was a leader with whom they could identify. Of course, Margaret Thatcher was northern too. Ely's poem implicitly views the Prime Minister, and other northern-born politicians as inauthentic, compared with Scargill's retained Yorkshire identity:

> *'There are five points I'd like to make in response*
> *to that frankly, preposterous assertion…'*
> – and in our flat South Riding vowels
> he reeled them off, one after the other,
> fluent as the Dearne, consonants blunt
> as cobbles, arguments sharp as a diamond-bit,
> each word a slap in the face,[82]

The words may appear in Standard English on the page, but Scargill's local voice retains its regional dialect through Ely's description: as representative of the miners, Scargill is eloquent but his Yorkshire dialect is present and powerful.

In Ely's poem we must imagine the speaker's dialect; Tony Harrison, on the other hand, frequently recreates the dialect of his childhood, as we have already seen. With regards to Harrison's 'Them & [uz]', Anthony Rowland attempts to establish whether a poem's use of dialect gives a voice to an otherwise silenced community within a class system that privileges middle class voices, or whether the 'bourgeois' middle class role that the poet ultimately embodies leads to conflict within the text, whereby the working class are 'inarticulate' in comparison to their 'eloquent' middle

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[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid, 120-121.

class counterparts.[83] This theme seems pervasive throughout West Yorkshire poetry; the cultured violinist in contrast to the narrator in Helen Mort's 'Scab' reiterates very similar sentiments. Even prior to Orgreave, the fraught link between local dialect and political power was firmly situated in West Yorkshire poetry. From just the title of Harrison's 'The Rhubarbarians', a poem from *The School of Eloquence* (1976), in which working-class 'glottals glugged like poured pop': Rowland identifies that 'actors creating a hubbub sometimes repeat the word 'rhubarb' […] Dins consisting of 'rhubarb' thus represent the blabla or bara-bara of 'barbaric' speech, as defined by the exponents of Standard English.'[84] The title plays on the stereotype of northerners as 'barbarians' (and the fact that, among other places, rhubarb is widely grown in Yorkshire).

The concept of working-class voices being reduced to an indecipherable 'din' positions Harrison as translator for a middle-class readership. On the other hand, however, 'Harrison shortens standard noun and verb phrases into dialect contractions alien to the Standard English of 'true' sonnets: 't'mob' and ''s silence' in the third stanza represent the Luddites', and his own, northern dialect', deflecting notions that Yorkshire speech – in this case that of the Luddites – is unfitting for classical poetic forms.[85] As Nicholson argues,

> vernacular poetry signifies a willingness to incorporate colloquial or demotic elements from everyday speech: Harrison stretches literary tolerances of these elements to the limit. In his handling, 'vernacular' is both returned to its etymological roots and developed into a powerful critique of England's class-based cultural hierarchies.[86]

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[83] Anthony Rowland, *Tony Harrison and the Holocaust*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 263, 269-270.

[84] Tony Harrison, 'The Rhubarbarians', in *Collected Poems* (London: Viking, 2007), 123-124; Rowland, *Harrison and the Holocaust*, 266.

[85] Rowland, *Harrison and the Holocaust*, 271-272.

[86] Colin Nicholson, 'Vernacular Poetry', in *The Edinburgh Introduction to Studying English Literature*, ed. Dermot Cavanagh, Alan Gillis, Michelle Keown, James Loxley and Randall Stevenson, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Universryh Press, 2014), 93-94.

In this case, rather than being patronising, the inclusion of dialect by the poet of working-class upbringing is an act of empowerment.

Like Scargill as spokesman, then, Harrison brings working-class voices to the fore, normalising them, to some extent. Scargill's political power reverberated around Yorkshire, empowering working-class miners and their communities by association: the county was mobilised, like the actors following the directorial instruction in 'Scab'. Despite the ultimate failure of the strikes, Scargill is remembered here as a hero, who stood up for the miners in this regional and class-based conflict. The politicisation that remained in West Yorkshire after the strikes contributed in many ways to the volume of political poetry written in the area to this day. Indeed, Joe Kelleher describes the 'mark of political allegiance' with regards to 'the divisive coal-strike in Britain' that is prevalent throughout these poems, and 'allows [poets] to participate in the power processes'.[87] Like the ballads, poetry here becomes a political act, and attempts to counterbalance the southern accounts of the tensions. Scargill was remembered here as a hero; this surely would not be the case in southern-based re-enactments. The poem problematises the re-creation and ultimately rewriting of history. For this reason, perhaps, Mort does not attempt to retell the story of Orgreave in the poem: the accurate retelling could surely only be that of local, first-hand recollections, told in local dialectical voices.

In the fifth section of Mort's 'Scab', the Battle of Orgreave has become even more detached from its 1980s reality: from recollections to re-enactments, it has now become 'a blockbuster' movie. As the 'truth' becomes further removed, the Battle is glamorised, idealised even:

> a film that gives the town
> its own brass band, cuts out
> the knuckles fringed with blood,
> grafts in a panorama of the Moors.
> This is our heritage: an actor
> artfully roughed up, thirty years

[87] Joe Kelleher, *Tony Harrison* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1996), 18-19.

of editing to keep the landfills
out of shot.[88]

In the film – Mark Herman's *Brassed Off* (1997) – the narrator recognises the contexts of her childhood; the aestheticization, alongside the fictionalisation that brings the film to a jubilant ending, *Division Street* suggests, was not reflective of reality. Here, we can see that the narrator's 'heritage' is even more subjective and choreographed than the re-enactment. In making the miners' stories accessible to national, even international public, Yorkshire 'heritage' is altered; as the miners are relegated to local legend, the narratives of history here are rewritten to suit a wider audience.

In West Yorkshire, history was beginning to be eroded too: for Tony Harrison the passing of time is marked by the loss of members of the community. In part one of 'Next Door', a poem that appears in *The School of Eloquence* section of the 1984 version of Harrison's *Selected Poems*, the family neighbour 'Ethel Jowett died', the woman who 'gave my library its auspicious start'.[89] Ethel's funeral contains the first sign that the town's 'traditional' community faces extinction:

> Mi mam was "that surprised" how many came
> to see the cortege off and doff their hats –
> All the "old lot" left gave her the same
> bussing back from "Homes" and Old Folk's Flats.[90]

The description of the 'old lot' is twofold: alongside acknowledging membership of this traditional community, comprised, presumably, mostly of retired miners and their wives, it also notices that they are indeed now all 'old', shipped in and out of their contemporaries' funerals from their retirement homes. Progress in the community is notable in the neighbourhood's changing ethnicities. Once a racially homogenous neighbourhood, after the death of his wife, the character's father fears *'It won't be long before Ah'm t'only white!'* Harrison recounts the racism that results from this change (ironically, Thatcher's 1979 success was partly attributed to her

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[88] Mort, 'Scab', 16-17.
[89] Tony Harrison, 'Next Door', in *Collected Poems* (London: Viking, 2007), 140.
[90] Ibid.

stance on 'dependency culture […and theories of] the nation being "swamped" by immigrants')[91]:

> *All turbans round here now, forget flat caps!*
>
> *They've taken over everything bar t*'CO-OP.
> *Pork's gone west, chitt'lins, trotters, dripping baps!*
> *And booze an' all, if it's a Moslem owns t'new shop.*
>
> *Ay, t*'Off Licence, *that's gone Paki in t'same way!*
> (You took your jug and brought your bitter draught)
> *Ah can't get over it,* mi dad'll say,
> *smelling curry in a pop shop. Seems all daft.*[92]

The father, in this poem, is the 'Last of the "old lot" still left in [his] block./ Those times, they're gone. The "old lot" can't come back.' After Ethel's relative permanence, the neighbouring house repeatedly changes hands, each deepening the father's dismay that 'The "old lot" can't come back': 'The Sharpes came next. He beat her, blacked her eye./ Through walls I heard each blow, each *Cunt! Cunt! Cunt!*// The Jowett's dahlias were left to die.'[93] There is little permanency, perhaps a result of a need to relocate for work. As the final traditional community habits and practices die out with the 'old lot', Harrison's narrator finds that 'Now mi dad's the only one keeps up his front// Also the only one who shifts his snow/ and him long past his three score years and ten.'[94] As hard, manual labour seems to be in decline here, Harrison's father character, 'keep[ing] up his front' and 'shift[ing] his snow', is still determinedly labouring in whatever way he can, much like the ex-miner that moves snow from the driveway in Helen Mort's *Division Street*. Even though the region has

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[91] Steve Rogowski, *Social Work: The Rise and Fall of a Profession?* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2010), 61-62.
[92] Harrison, 'Next Door', 141.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid, 143.

begun to move on, this generation are still suspended in their permanent state of winter.

In many of the poems discussed in this section, then, West Yorkshire might have been frozen in time by Mother Shipton, at the moment that the collieries closed and life, as it had been here, changed forever. Yet time is simultaneously passing too quickly for the ex-miners who have been abandoned in limbo there: Mort's collection feels like it 'has been written against the clock.'[95] Whilst the next generation (as represented by Cambridge-educated, PhD-graduate Helen Mort) represent progress, this progress caused greater distance from their industrial heritage. As Mort moves away from the topic in her second collection *No Map Could Show Them* (2016), largely focusing on the unrecognised achievements of female mountaineers, mining references endure, as if part of her vernacular. This is particularly the case in the untitled poem that prefaces the collection:

> No map can show you
> but you're in every line.
>
> There: like the underground stream
> and the once-worked mine.[96]

Mining references are equally noticeable in 'My Diet', a semi-autobiographical poem about her experience with eating disorders:

> My diet is
> the South Yorkshire Coalfields diet.
> It includes nothing but a small apology.[97]

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[95] Kate Kellaway, 'Division Street by Helen Mort – review', review of *Division Street* by Helen Mort, *The Guardian*, Nov 24, 2013, accessed Feb 28, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/nov/24/division-street-helen-mort-review/.

[96] Helen Mort, 'No map can show you,' in *No Map Could Show Them*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 2016), [no page number].

[97] Helen Mort, 'My Diet,' in *No Map Could Show Them*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 2016), 13.

In the 'thirty years' that are frequently mentioned in *Division Street*, as well as the extra time that passed before the publication of *No Map Could Show Them*, the regions that once constituted the West Riding have been increasingly starved of their mining roots. Mining history becomes increasingly distant, the community increasingly different; as time passes, further dividing the community from its mining past, the ex-miners remain abandoned by politicians, their stories rewritten by the media, re-enactments, and (more positively), the new generation of local poets.

It is particularly interesting that, even the most contemporary of these poets tend not to attempt to dispel Yorkshire stereotypes; rather they address and negotiate them whilst accepting the realities of working-class life in their hometowns. This is certainly the case in Peter Sansom's 'Sheffield by Night' (2006), in which positive and negative facets of experience are juxtaposed to accept that Sheffield is a 'normal' English working city. Whilst the narrator's most negative perceptions do not come to fruition – 'I'm not mugged/ in the subway or offered sex to feed a habit' – this is not an aestheticized picture of the litter-strewn streets 'After the nightclubs have turned out and before/ the cleaners have plugged in, the city is as still as a snowglobe this last day of summer.'[98] As the narrator progresses through the city they remark, 'I sweat up Paradise St that was Workhouse Rd/ and out under green-lit trees of the cathedral'.[99] The contrast between these former and current street names is striking, and recalls Larkin's semi-sarcastic comment on modern life: 'I know this is paradise'.[100] In contrast to the workhouse, of course the nightlife economy is paradise; but what else is paradisal about the litter-scattered, uplit streets? Other initially beautiful images are quickly undermined here too:

> A dog walking itself in the corner of my eye
> past Pollards is gone before I see it's a fox.
> Next, Boots the Chemists bright as a cruise ship
> but the *Marie Celeste*; then over Fargate

[98] Peter Sansom, 'Sheffield by Night', in *The Last Place on Earth* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006), 27.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Philip Larkin, 'High Windows', in *The Complete Poems of Philip Larkin*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 80.

and down Chapel Walk, the Link, the Samaritans,
and double-take at shoes a month's wages;
[…] The Grade II listed eyesore on the skyline
is a memory of the Socialist Republic
and in its people-centred daring typical
of Sheaf Field, home of the cyclepath and bendi
-bus, the most wooded city in Europe if you
don't listen to Brum, and the most parks too,
that turned the steelworks into a shopping centre,
and the shopping centre into another world –[101]

These undermining points come in quick succession: the clever dog is actually a fox (an animal which, despite its beauty and largely benevolent behaviour, is still widely viewed within society as vermin), the cruise ship is a corporate pharmacy, the shop raising money for charity is charging prices that would impoverish most who attempted to shop there. Meanwhile, an important historical building is ugly, the 'most wooded city in Europe' probably isn't, and the steelworks – formerly a huge local manufacturing industry – has been displaced in favour of consumerism, making money disregarded in favour of spending money. Sansom is not denying the ugliness of the city in which he once lived and worked and is not denying it beauty either: after all, the snowglobe, the green-lit trees, the chapel and the cathedral are traditionally beautiful images.

In much the same way, Ian Duhig writes Leeds as 'Ashtrayville' (2016), a place that by its title immediately appears grey, dusty, smoky and unpleasant. This comparison continues in Duhig's imagery: 'You walk faster, your feet fitting perfectly/ the footprints in the ash as thick as snow.'[102] The city may seem inhospitable, littered with wasteland-like imagery, but as we progress through the poem it becomes apparent that this is not the case:

Imagine a city. It is not a city you know,
although it seems familiar as you walk

[101] Sansom, 'Sheffield by Night', 27.
[102] Ian Duhig, 'Ashtrayville', in *The Blind Road-Maker* (London: Picador, 2016), 32.

> towards it down a road full of pot-holes
> under an arcade of colourless rainbows.[103]

Like Sansom's Sheffield, this is not a paradisal image: like the ash, even the rainbows seem to be grey. The road down which the narrator invites the reader to travel is full of potholes, but this does not detract from the comforting familiarity that the landscape, however unappealing, evokes. This conflicting unappealingness mixed with familiarity continues throughout the poem:

> All the paving stones have been stolen,
> so you walk down the centre of the streets
> till one chooses you, its second choice,
> you realize, one untaken before now.[104]

Duhig acknowledges that the route into Leeds is rarely the traveller's first choice: the Yorkshire town certainly lacks the grandeur of traditionally aspirational cities such as London or Manchester. This, however, does not make the path any less valid, just as the city should be no less desirable because of the 'greyness' that forms the stereotype of northern industrial towns, even decades after the demise of their industries.

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Regardless of their personal opinions of their West Yorkshire homes, there is a certain level of stereotypical negativity that the poets studied in this chapter do not seek to counteract: if 'the North of Hughes and Harrison is a moribund, atrophied place, hurtling towards its end times, if not already there', the north of Ely, McMillan and Mort has not changed in any major way.[105] This is a post-disaster, industrial wasteland, characterised by feelings of disconnection and division that harks back to Thatcher's 1980s politics. These stereotypes by no means portray the region in its best light; they exaggerate the West Riding's unique traits, from post-industrial

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[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Underwood, 'Pit Closure as Art', 172.

poverty to the tranquillity of the Pennines, the social, historical and cultural differences that mark the region's clear distinctions from the rest of the country. Indeed, in *Neither Nowt nor Summat*, Ian McMillan suggests that, 'perhaps what divides Yorkshire is that its fragments don't really empathise with each other but what unites us is that we don't feel fully English so we feel embattled and proud and Other.'[96] This notion is key to the collective sense of 'Yorkshireness' that unites the poets and poems studied in this chapter. The West Riding is no more: its borders have been manipulated and confused, divided into sections of West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and even, in some cases, Lancashire. Given the extent to which identity is circumscribed by place, this can be detrimental to understanding of the self, or one's place within the landscape.

Later in his writing, McMillan continues to muse: 'I think a condition of Yorkshireness is nostalgia for the very recent past, the past that hasn't cooled yet.'[97] This is reflected in the approach of many of the poets studied here, to northern identity and to the devastation suffered because of the decline of industry, 1980s politics and the north-south divide that, as McMillan identifies, renders them 'other'. This otherness is apparent throughout the poems studied in this chapter, in the inherent pride displayed through the poets' refusal to idealise less-than-savoury aspects that contribute to the character of their hometowns. The poems written here convey an appreciation for the fact that the people and the places in contemporary West Yorkshire are entirely imperfect, they are scarred by the effects of cuts and closures, however they are enduring, with working women politicised whilst the elderly ex-miners continue shovelling snow as an outlet for their desire for manual labour.

It is hugely significant that the poems studied here all seem to reflect on these similarly pivotal moments in Yorkshire history, and that many of them endeavour either to re-enact these moments of recent history – or the suffering in their aftermath – for the reader. Whilst aesthetically very different, this is similar to the approach taken by Ted Hughes in *Remains of Elmet*; like Hughes, the poets here are

recreating not their own memories, but those of their ancestors in the region. Whilst clearly not limited to poets from the historic administrative county of the West Riding, this particular post-industrial recreation seems to be a subgenre widely adopted by twentieth- and twenty-first-century poets in this part of Yorkshire. Whilst Hughes's collection may be influential to this trend, the motives for the poets in reconstructing these scenes seems similar: to maintain contact with local and ancestral tradition, as well as to document the suffering of their communities at the end of the twentieth century. Whilst the physical and cultural landscape has changed since *Remains of Elmet*, then, prospects are still bleak in the former West Riding of Yorkshire. The region's poets do not betray this reality: indeed their works reflect the hurt still present in a region that has long felt betrayed.

III
YORKSHIRE'S BREXIT NARRATIVES

As Sections I and II have demonstrated, despite being united under the county of 'Yorkshire', the separate regions are in many ways distinct, divided by their social and cultural histories, their dialects and even the distance between them. In June 2016, however, a certain ideological and political consensus was evidenced here: Yorkshire, on the whole, voted in favour of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union.

On 23rd June 2016, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland held a referendum on whether the nation should exit the European Union or continue its membership. Nationally, the UK voted to leave the EU by a margin of 3.8%, with 51.9% of voters opting to leave and 48.1% voting to remain. The turnout was substantial, with 72.2% of those eligible to do so casting their votes.[1] Aside from the small margin, the vote was controversial for several reasons: the union was very clearly split, with England and Wales voting to leave the EU with majorities of 6.8% and 5% respectively, whilst Scotland and Northern Ireland returned remain majorities of 24% and 11.6%. London, significantly, voted to remain by a majority of 19.8%, too.[2] Three years later, the consequences of this disparity are yet to be fully realised.

Despite the fascinating implications for this in poetry throughout the United Kingdom our focus in this section, of course, remains on Yorkshire. With a 15.4% majority vote to leave the EU, Yorkshire and the Humber returned the fourth-highest regional vote for Leave.[3] Indeed, only three of Yorkshire's voting districts – Leeds, Harrogate and York – voted to remain in the EU; many of Yorkshire's other

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[1] 'Results and Turnout at the EU Referendum,' *EU Referendum*, Electoral Commission, accessed Aug 6, 2019, https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/results-and-turnout-eu-referendum/.

[2] 'Results,' *EU Referendum,* BBC, Jun 24, 2016, accessed Aug 6, 2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results/.

[3] 'Results and Turnout'.

electoral districts garnered much greater favour for Leave than the national consensus. Some of these numbers are particularly high in the East and West Yorkshire regions that we have already discussed in this thesis, with regards to the work of their poets. In Calderdale, the setting of Ted Hughes's *Remains of Elmet*, 55.7% of voters chose Leave, whilst Simon Armitage's Kirklees returned the slightly smaller 54.7% in favour of exiting the union. The consensus to leave was even stronger in other parts of Yorkshire: in Ian McMillan's Barnsley, Matt Abbott's Wakefield and the Kingston-upon-Hull of Larkin, Wilson, Foster and others, the votes for Leave amounted to 68.3%, 66.3% and 67.6%, respectively.[4]

As might be expected with such a divisive and widely repercussive political event, artists and academics have responded powerfully to Brexit: in a 2017 British Council report, John Newbigin finds that:

> The result of last June's referendum sparked a predictable rush of comment and response from individuals and organisations in the arts and creative industries across the UK […] There is a strong desire to work with creative people across Europe to counteract the rising tide of ultra-nationalism, recognising that the issue of Brexit and its consequences is not happening in isolation.[5]

Given the strong social and political responses we have explored throughout this thesis, it is unsurprising that Brexit is emerging as a frequent topic or theme – in some cases prominently, and in others with subtlety – in many of the poems published by the region's writers since 23rd June 2016. In contrast to previous chapters, then, this chapter will explore texts from both East and West Yorkshire, as they negotiate and respond to this very contemporary moment in social and political history within their poetry.

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[4] 'EU Referendum Results,' *Past Elections and Referendums*, Electoral Commission, accessed Nov 24, 2018, https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/electorate-and-count-information/.
[5] John Newbigin, *The Response of the Arts and Creative Industries in the UK to Brexit* (London: British Council, 2017), 2-3.

CHAPTER 5:
'We've taken back control':
Post-referendum poetry in East and West Yorkshire

The importance of literature as an interpretation, representation and, in some cases, reflection of culture on a social and political scale is outlined by Robert Eaglestone in the introduction to his 2018 edited collection *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*:

> Culture is the heart of national identity, as Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* showed. A nation is too huge to be a real community in which everyone actually knows each other. Instead, nations are produced in the imagination by concepts, narratives, memories and traditions: that is, through the work of culture. One aspect of culture especially closely linked to national identity is literature.[1]

As we conclude our journey through the writing, places and times of twentieth and twenty-first century East and West Yorkshire poets, this final chapter will bring both regions together, examining cultural explorations of Brexit with regards to notions of place. In this chapter we will revisit three poets whose work we have already explored in some depth in previous chapters; all three collections were published in 2018, so we can assume the poets' knowledge of the EU Referendum result, as well as some awareness of the social, political and economic environment within which the vote took place.

The first, and most substantial section of analysis will concern Matt Abbott's *Two Little Ducks*; following this, we will explore three poems from Simon Armitage's *Flit*, and one from Sean O'Brien's *Europa*. The city of Wakefield will feature heavily in this section: one strand of Abbott's collection, as we have already established, is firmly rooted here; so too, Armitage's collection *Flit* was commissioned by – and, to some extent, written in – Yorkshire Sculpture Park, situated close to the city. The three collections were chosen due to the discernible prominence of Brexit within

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[1] Robert Eaglestone, 'Introduction: Brexit and literature,' in *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*, ed. Robert Eaglestone (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 1.

their narratives. We must of course remember that only three years have passed since Britain's vote to leave the European Union: we do not yet have access to a wide sample of poetic responses to Brexit; this chapter, then, is only the beginning, forming a baseline study of the ways in which this pivotal political moment is represented in this particular region's literature. As we have seen within the responses to industrial decline and the Miners' Strikes in previous chapters, poetic reflection, recreation and response continues decades after the events themselves.

It is important to considerer some of the contexts that link the regions that we will be studying side-by-side here. As we have seen in previous chapters, the two central cities of Hull and Wakefield are still suffering from widespread poverty due in part to sudden mass unemployment in the late twentieth century; in Wakefield's case this stemmed from the decommissioning of mines, whilst Hull's was a result of the fishing industry's decline. Both cities also voted to Leave the European Union by a considerable majority. These two statistics, of course, are inextricably linked. As discussed by Federico Fabbrini in *The Law & Politics of Brexit* and Craig Calhoun in 'Populism, Nationalism and Brexit' (the latter title providing invaluable insight into some of the theories behind the leave vote), the result here was characteristic of Northern, de-industrialised towns and cities, in part because of their perceived disconnect from the south.[2] The distance and disparity between north and south, and London's political centrality – not only in England, but throughout the United Kingdom – has assumed inflections of inequality and injustice; as we will come to see, these borders, boundaries and geographical distinctions have a lot to answer for here.

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[2] Federico Fabbrini, 'Introduction', in *The Law & Politics of Brexit*, ed. Federico Fabbrini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 4; Craig Calhoun, 'Populism, Nationalism and Brexit', in *Brexit: Sociological Responses*, ed. William Outhwaite (London: Anthem Press, 2017), 59.

'The establishment deafened by the voice they never heard': *The Language of Brexit* and Matt Abbott's *Two Little Ducks*

Perhaps the most overtly and obviously Brexit-related of the texts considered in this chapter is Matt Abbott's debut collection *Two Little Ducks*. This, therefore, is where we will begin. Abbott's work is an extended, published version of his spoken word set. It may not be typically or traditionally considered canonical, in terms of post-referendum Yorkshire poetry, but its importance and relevance is heightened here. As we have seen in previous chapters, spoken word poetry has long played an important role in Yorkshire literature, particularly as a form of political response.[3] With regards to language, then, Steve Buckledee's 2018 study, *The Language of Brexit: How Britain Talked Its Way Out of the European Union* will be particularly important in this section. In the first substantial linguistic exploration of Brexit rhetoric, Buckledee demonstrates 'the highly effective linguistic strategies employed by the Brexit campaigners compared with the dispassionate, at times spiritless language used by pro-Remain campaigners,' or, in short, how language contributed to the effectiveness of the Leave campaign.[4] Whilst this is interesting in its own right, Buckledee's text will be employed primarily here not to determine the effectiveness of political discourse, but to examine the ways in which political language has infiltrated poetry written in Yorkshire since the Brexit campaign.

Matt Abbott's *Two Little Ducks* is a social reflection that focuses partly on Brexit from a regional context. In his foreword, the poet summarises the background to the poems thus:

> The first strand explores the core reasons behind so many working-class
> communities supporting Brexit. I grew up in a city which voted 66%
> Leave and find the sweeping 'hothead Brexiteer' generalisation unfair. If

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[3] Whilst this is less the case for a published version, the urgency and immediacy of this form is also particularly appropriate as response to contemporary politics, given the room for adaptability, and the opportunity for audience engagement that it permits ('Spoken Word,' *Glossary of Poetic Terms,* Poetry Foundation, accessed Jan 2, 2019, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/spoken-word/.)

[4] Steve Buckledee, *The Language of Brexit: How Britain Talked Its Way Out of the European Union* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 2.

anything it only serves to deepen the mentality which led to the vote in
the first place.[5]

Through this reference to the city of his childhood, Abbott immediately roots his
poetry not only regionally, but in terms of social class, too. His words also preface
the 'strand' of poems as a kind of rebuttal, a defence against the '"hothead Brexiteer"
generalisation' and its consequences.

Perhaps the most immediately obvious reflection of this multi-faceted rooting is the
vernacular language and working-class, Yorkshire dialect, along with idiom and
profanity, that Abbott adopts throughout his collection:

> who kiss goodbye
> to the trillions that we send 'em.[6]

> Shit on us,
> for thirty years,
> and then ask us for a favour.[7]

So too, as the poems from *Two Little Ducks* speak of 'Wetherspoons' and 'WhatsApp',
'The Great British Bake-Off' and 'Nick Griffin's BNP,' Abbott produces a voice very
much of its place and time.[8] Of course, this informal verse is reflective of the less-
formal nature of the spoken word medium, but there is something else at play here
too. In *The Language of Brexit*, Buckledee questions: 'So was it *The Sun* wot won it in
2016?'[9] Here, the linguist evokes the language adopted by tabloids during the
campaign: 'simple, monosyllabic vocabulary plus slang and/or deliberately
ungrammatical English intended to present Britain's best-selling tabloid as the voice
of ordinary working people.'[10] In his Brexit-focussed poetry, Abbott wields the same

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[5] Matt Abbott, Preface, in *Two Little Ducks* (Birmingham: Verve Poetry Press, 2018), 13.
[6] Matt Abbott, 'Wake Up and Smell the Tetley's,' in *Two Little Ducks* (Birmingham: Verve Poetry Press, 2018), 15.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid, 16; Matt Abbott, 'Red, White and Blue,' in *Two Little Ducks* (Birmingham: Verve Poetry Press, 2018), 51-52.
[9] Buckledee, *The Language of Brexit*, 148.
[10] Ibid, 141.

lexicon as the tabloids that arguably encouraged the leave vote. He does this for much the same reasons as purported by Buckledee too: in *Two Little Ducks*, Abbott attempts to adopt the voice of 'ordinary people', to be a spokesperson for the historically voiceless community in which he grew up.

This division and polarisation between 'ordinary people' and 'elites', perpetuated by the media (and a number of politicians, too) can be evidenced throughout Abbott's collection. Importantly, as Kristian Shaw suggests, 'Brexit did not divide the nation, it merely revealed the inherent divisions within society.'[11] This 'inherent division' is presented by Abbott as the driving force behind the vote:

> It's the People's Revolution,
> after decades disenfranchised
> from the millionaires that tax us every day.[12]

Abbott's language choices are interesting here: not only does the pronoun 'us' place himself and his community in opposition to 'the millionaires' (presumably, 'them', a binary difference in pronouns that is repeated throughout the collection: 'How dare they all campaign as one,/ and beg us not to revolt?'), but the Leave vote is regarded as belonging to *the People*.[13] Both of these linguistic tactics were employed by members of the Leave movement throughout the campaign, to maintain and reinforce this 'them' ('the millionaires') versus 'us' ('the People') rhetoric:

> the leader of UKIP presented the central issue as one of honest,
> hardworking people wresting back control from a self-serving elite in the
> worlds of finance and business whose path to ever greater wealth and
> privilege was favoured by the political establishment in Brussels […] it is
> nevertheless extraordinary that certain newspapers managed to present
> such obvious establishment figures as [Nigel Farage, Boris Johnson, Jacob
> Rees-Mogg and Michael Gove] as tough little Davids with the spunk to
> take on the Goliaths of the banks, the multinationals and the Brussels

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[11] Kristian Shaw, 'BrexLit'. In *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses,* ed. Robert Eaglestone (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 16.
[12] Abbott, 'Wake Up and Smell the Tetley's,' 14.
[13] Ibid, 15.

bureaucracy. This was achieved in various ways, but the most basic linguistic technique employed was clever use of the word *we*.[14]

In imitating this language, Abbott positions himself as a worthier spokesperson for 'the people' of Wakefield than

> Michael Gove, who sang a tune
> to reach his dizzy peak;
> Boris Johnson, peddling lies
> every time he speaks[15]

It is clear, too, that Abbott is not convinced by Nigel Farage's character, described by Buckledee as 'an ordinary bloke […] photographed in a pub, holding a pint of real ale (never Eurofizz lager) and chatting amicably with fellow customers.'[16] For Abbott at least, the 'former city banker/ who's bastardised the nation,' is not worthy of his rhetorically-acquired 'man of the people' title that seemingly has many within the poet's community convinced:[17]

> It's the working-class ecstatic
> like I've never seen before.
> Farage being hoisted up above
> like Bobby Moore.
> Crumbs of toast fall before
> his gurning disbelief:
> no seat in Parliament,
> but right now, he's the chief.[18]

For Abbott, then, Farage was totally unqualified for his new status: this is not only a result of his lack of 'seat in Parliament,' but, as a 'former city banker,' his total lack of understanding of the 'working-class' people he had come to represent.

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[14] Buckledee, *The Language of Brexit*, 54-56.
[15] Matt Abbott, 'Two Little Ducks,' in *Two Little Ducks* (Birmingham: Verve Poetry Press, 2018), 78.
[16] Buckledee, *The Language of Brexit*, 54-55.
[17] Matt Abbott, 'Not the Taste, but the Smell,' in *Two Little Ducks* (Birmingham: Verve Poetry Press, 2018), 69.
[18] Abbott, 'Wake Up and Smell the Tetley's,' 14.

Indeed, for Abbott, the Leave vote was one of protest, by a community desperate to be heard:

> The establishment deafened by
> the voice they never heard.
> A bulldog in the ballot box;
> the table overturned.[19]

Here, 'the table overturned' refers to the sudden power of the – until now underestimated – working class vote: the tables, as the idiom states, had 'turned'.[20] This apparent reversal in power is referenced in the idiom in the stanza that closes the poem 'Wake Up and Smell the Tetley's,' and from which its title is derived, too:

> Whitehall trumpeted by Wetherspoon's.
> The "Powerhouse" in the polls.
> Wake up
> and smell the Tetley's:
> we've taken back
> control.[21]

This stanza is particularly powerful and loaded with context: 'Whitehall trumpeted by Wetherspoon's' evokes imagery of the chain pub's stereotypically working-class clientele gathering and sharing opinions in much the same way as the politicians in Whitehall. At the same time, it acknowledges the powerful rhetoric pedalled by Wetherspoon's chairman Tim Martin, who regularly spoke on behalf of the Leave cause; this included on a post-Referendum 'debate tour' of his pubs (largely the northern ones in Leave-voting areas) and the distribution of pro-Brexit propaganda in the pubs' magazines, website, and even on beer mats.[22]

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[19] Ibid.

[20] There is also a level of anger inherent in the action of flipping a table.

[21] Ibid, 16.

[22] Tim Martin, 'Tim's Viewpoint,' *EU Debate*, accessed Aug 7, 2019, https://www.jdwetherspoon.com/tims-viewpoint/.

Wetherspoon's, of course, is a national chain of pubs; the poem is given a northern inflection by Abbott's allusion to the much-contested Northern Powerhouse rhetoric, implying at the same time that the North has not enjoyed the empowering and class-levelling results intended by the governmental strategy, but also that the vote has itself turned the North into a Powerhouse, in the sense that 'the voice they never heard' was suddenly and dramatically empowered. A Yorkshire context is furthermore evoked by the third and fourth lines, and the title: 'Wake up/ and smell the Tetley's.' Here, Abbott rewrites the idiom 'wake up and smell the coffee' or 'wake up and smell the roses' which, according to Merriam-Webster, means 'to realise the truth about one's situation: to become aware of what is really happening.'[23] This pseudo-reality-check for the politicians is infused with Tetley's, rather than 'roses' or 'coffee': this could refer either to the brand of tea or ale; whilst the tea may fit more logically within the idiom an alternative to coffee to 'wake up' to, interpreting this as the bitter ale has certain implications for our perceptions of the people here; the latter is, of course, referenced in the 'sideburned Tetley bittermen' of Steve Ely's 'One of Us', too.[24] Either interpretation roots the poem firmly in Yorkshire: Tetley tea has been based in Yorkshire since 1837, whilst the brewery was established there even earlier, in 1822.[25] The 'we' that have 'taken back control,' for Abbott then, is not Farage or the tabloid journalists: it is the working-class, tea- or ale-drinking Yorkshire communities who have suffered 'decades disenfranchised.'

Buckledee's research seems to support Abbott's statement on the link between northern, working-class disenfranchisement and the Leave vote, finding that:

> The referendum showed that Britain was also split down the middle in
> terms of the winners and losers in a post-industrial and globalized

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[23] Merriam-Webster, 'Wake up and smell the coffee/roses,' dictionary, accessed Aug 7, 2019, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/wake%20up%20and%20smell%20the%20coffee/roses/.

[24] Steve Ely, 'One of us', in *Englalaland* (Ripon: Smokestack Books, 2015), 120; interestingly, while Wetherspoons stock Tetley tea, they do not stock Tetley's beer.

[25] Tetley, 'Tetley Tea Heritage,' *About Tetley*, accessed Aug 7, 2019, https://www.tetley.co.uk/tetley-story/; Carlsberg Group, 'Tetley's Original.' *Tetley's*, accessed Aug 12, 2019, https://www.carlsberggroup.com/products/tetley-s/tetley-s-original/.

economy, with the latter having used the EU vote as an opportunity to send a powerful message to a political class they perceived as indifferent to the difficulties of their daily lives.[26]

Throughout this thesis we have encountered numerous examples of Yorkshire communities becoming, in Buckledee's words, 'losers in [the] post-industrial and globalized economy.'[27] Indeed, much of this discontent seems to be a product of the decline of the maritime industries in Hull and the colliery closures in Wakefield.[28] The residual anger from the mass unemployment, as well as the miners' treatment during the strikes, and the feeling of voice- and powerlessness that resulted are portrayed as popular and legitimate reasons for voting Leave throughout *Two Little Ducks*:

> And there we had it: one vote
> to shake it up forever.
> Huge pockets of people
> right at the end of their tether.
>
> […]
>
> it's not the taste of what we own,
> it's the smell of what we miss.
>
> The way my father's face would fall
> when I asked him about the mines.
> How pals of his were ostracised
> for limping over picket lines.
>
> How Orgreave and Hillsborough
> were a message from the top.

[26] Buckledee, *The Language of Brexit*, 173.

[27] Ibid.

[28] As Richard Morris pointedly notes: 'at the end of the nineteenth century the West Riding contained over 450 working coal mines'; 'When the strike began, 56 of Britain's 173 working pits were in Yorkshire. In 2015, none. The only coal mine it is now possible to enter is a museum.' (Richard Morris, *Yorkshire: A Lyrical History of England's Greatest County* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2018), 206, 211.)

> After decades feeling powerless,
> somehow, we've swapped…[29]

Given the enduring pain and frustration that Abbott portrays within his family and his local community, over thirty years after Orgreave and the strikes in the mid-1980s ('Shit on us,/ for thirty years,/ and then ask us for a favour'), it seems no wonder that, as Geoffrey Evans and Anand Menon note, 'former manufacturing areas, and those where levels of pay were relatively low and levels of unemployment relatively high, were all more likely to favour Leave.'[30]

The state of 'unemployment' in these 'former manufacturing areas' becomes a further example in 'Not the Taste, but the Smell', not only of the deprivation that partly seems to have led to the Leave vote, but of the stark differences between life here, and that of Farage, Johnson, et al, in the south:

> Most of us are in debt before we're twenty.
> I've met alcoholics, who aren't even eighteen.
> And those queues around corners
> for Food Banks?
> One of the most mortifying things
> I've ever seen.
>
> The postcode lottery:
> skint and demoralised.
> Year after year of being
> politically colonised.[31]

The fundamental hopelessness and abandonment felt by the communities in this poem since the 1980s, as well as their historic ostracising during the strikes, is not forgotten here:

> Left behind and demonised:
> we'd fight to stay afloat.

[29] Abbott, 'Not the Taste, but the Smell,' 68.
[30] Evans and Menon, *Brexit and British Politics*, 62.
[31] Abbott, 'Not the Taste, but the Smell,' 68.

> And we know they only give a shit
> when they've given us a vote.[32]

As the media 'demonis[ation]' of the West Yorkshire working classes during the strikes is evoked here, Abbott finds his community slandered online and in the press once again:

> And we've all these
> "hothead, red top, Twitter Nazi,
> Bulldog Brexiteers,"
> but the majority of the Leave vote,
> I'd class as social peers.
> Down and out for decades
> until democracy drove dissent.
> I grew up in a city
> that voted 66%.[33]

Here, Abbott refutes the sweeping generalisation that lazily labels Leave as racists as well as, in 'Wake Up and Smell the Tetley's', accusations of their stupidity: 'Pin us all as ignorant,/ fantasists and crooks'.[34] Instead, he emphasises the widespread suffering, 'Down and out for decades,' that 'drove dissent.'

In *How to Stop Brexit (and Make Britain Great Again)*, Nick Clegg suggests that 'voting for Brexit felt so good to so many people because it felt like a victory of ordinary voters against the arrogance of an out-of-touch political elite. It was a triumph of the many against the elitist few.'[35] Whilst the motives behind individual votes were undoubtedly more nuanced than this – indeed, Khalili and Kouvelakis warn against generalising that this was a white, working-class revolt – in early June 2016, Owen Jones predicted that, 'if Britain crashes out of the European Union in two weeks, it will be off the backs of votes cast by discontented working class people.'[36] If we are

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[32] Abbott, 'Wake Up and Smell the Tetley's,' 15.
[33] Abbott, 'Two Little Ducks,' 75.
[34] Abbott, 'Wake Up and Smell the Tetley's,' 15.
[35] Nick Clegg, *How to Stop Brexit*, 57-58.
[36] Laleh Khalili, 'After Brexit: Reckoning with Britain's Racism and Xenophobia.' In *The Brexit Crisis: A Verso Report* (London: Verso, 2016), 23; Stathis Kouvelakis, 'Open Letter to the British Left by a Greek Leftist.' In *The Brexit Crisis: A Verso Report* (London: Verso, 2016), 84; Owen Jones, 'Working-class

to assume that Abbott's collection is based on his social observations within the community in which he was born and raised (and he thus has a strong knowledge of) then, in Wakefield at least, Clegg and Jones's observations acquire considerable veracity.

The binary of 'us' versus 'them' in the Brexit narrative, however, was not limited to north versus south, working-class versus elites: a further strand of this rhetoric concerned race, ethnicity and nationality. Whilst some of this merely distanced Britain metaphorically and linguistically from the continent, rather a large proportion of this race-based opposition focussed on the 'Jungle' refugee camp in Calais, at which Matt Abbott volunteered 'either side of the EU referendum.'[37] Buckledee notes the 'considerable coverage' of the Jungle in UK tabloid media in the run-up to the referendum, noting that:

> The majority [of migrants here] were Syrians, and therefore were legitimate asylum seekers rather than economic migrants, and they included unaccompanied children. *The Mail*'s focus, however, was not so much on the humanitarian issues as on episodes of violence, such as clashes with the French police and threatening behaviour towards lorry drivers in an attempt to secure a lift through the Channel Tunnel.[38]

Perhaps because of this 'considerable coverage' and the bias that Buckledee implies as inherent within it, as well as simply to portray *his own* experiences to a wider audience and readership, The Jungle is one of three strands of focus in *Two Little Ducks*: Abbott's 'coverage' of the topic, thus, is 'considerable' too.

This subject evokes one of Abbott's key complaints with regards to Nigel Farage, too. As Leave-voters celebrate in 'Two Little Ducks,' Abbott is critical of Farage's

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Britons feel Brexity and betrayed – Labour must win them over,' *The Guardian*, Jun 10, 2016, accessed Jan 1, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/10/working-class-britain-brexity-betrayed-labour-vote-leave/.

[37] Abbott, Preface, 13.

[38] Buckledee, *The Language of Brexit*, 102.

attitudes towards the refugees, whose suffering in Calais the politician has effectively condoned:

> Meanwhile, on Fleet Street,
> Nigel has his say.
> A cock and balls on the cliffs of Dover:
> "send them all away".
>
> But as pints click in Thanet,
> they're beyond the brink in France.
> We're "taking back control",
> whilst they're aching for a chance…[39]

Here the wealth of Fleet Street contrasts with the poverty that Abbott portrays in Calais throughout *Two Little Ducks*; the 'control' that is being 'taken back' in the UK is set against the complete lack of control possessed by the refugees in the Jungle. Dover, of course, is the English port directly across the Channel from Calais; its 'white cliffs' are a trope of home and Englishness throughout many cultural forms. The metaphorical 'cock and balls' on the cliffs, then, seems symptomatic of the approach of the 'former city banker/ who's bastardised the nation.'[40] Thanet, the Kent parliamentary seat that Farage contested, is on the East coast; 'as pints click in Thanet,/ they're beyond the brink in France' reminds us that, whilst the two may be widely portrayed as separate worlds, only just over thirty miles (as the crow flies) separates them.

Minimising this distance is a tactic employed by Abbott several times in *Two Little Ducks*. In the poem 'Twenty-Two Miles' the poet notes the even smaller distance between Dover and Calais:

> Just twenty-two miles, that's all it is.
> The sunlight bounces off the cliffs,

[39] Abbott, 'Two Little Ducks', 75.
[40] Abbott, 'Not the Taste, but the Smell,' 69.

And because they're taller,
they look closer from France.[41]

This distance is minimised even further in the poem, as Abbott puts it into more Anglicised terms:

It's the same between Leeds and York.
Between Newcastle and Hartlepool.
Manchester and Blackburn.
Birmingham and Leamington Spa.
Northampton and Milton Keynes.
Oxford and Reading. Bristol and Newport.
Exeter and Torquay. Southend and Romford.
Portsmouth and Bognor Regis…
Calais and Dover.[42]

This comprehensive list of English cities ensures widespread resonance and, through its listing alongside the other English pairings – short journeys that, one might assume many readers or audience members making frequently and without much forethought – brings Calais metaphorically closer, it is *almost* English itself. The importance of this message is underlined by the bingo-caller's reference to the number, 'Two Little Ducks' that Abbott adopts as the collection's title; the number features frequently in various contexts throughout *Two Little Ducks*. So too, the poems 'Red, White & Blue' and 'Le Tricolore' are situated, in the collection as in Abbott's spoken word set, alongside each other, ensuring the dialogue between the poems, even should the reader fail to comprehend their kinship that is set out by their titles.

In the former poem, Abbott sets out a complicated, twenty-first century relationship with the Union Flag:

Mods or monarchy? Taint or teach?
Buckingham Palace or Benidorm beach?

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[41] Matt Abbott, 'Twenty-Two Miles,' in *Two Little Ducks* (Birmingham: Verve Poetry Press, 2018), 62.
[42] Ibid, 63.

> Roadside burgers, Readers' Wives;
> Enid Blyton's Famous Five.
>
> Tourism, paraphernalia,
> Boris Johnson's bumbling failure;
> car stickers, calf tattoos,
> coffins on the evening news.
>
> A reg. plate on a lorry bound for Dover;
> an orphan's eyes fixated at a tunnel by the port.
> A victory lap for Team GB, that Sunday night in Stratford;
> families nationwide, enraptured by a sport.[43]

The reflections of Abbott's narrative persona on the flag of his birth, then, are complex, confusing. The flag's positive inflections are contrasted – often in the same breath – with less-than-savoury aspects of its history, or even its present. The monarchist pride in and respect for Buckingham Palace (a tourist hotspot, of course) is contrasted with Benidorm beach, a place often stereotyped as the destination for British holidaymakers who want everything about their trip to be British, besides the weather (think 'cheap package holidays and full English breakfasts in the sun.')[44] Similarly, the stereotype of Britons retiring to Spain is evoked: Buckingham Palace and Benidorm conjure up two very different archetypal images of British pensioners). So too, the proud image of the London Olympics – 'A victory lap for Team GB, that Sunday night in Stratford' and the united 'families nationwide, enraptured by a sport' – is undermined somewhat by the imagery of the stanza that precedes it. Who, after all, can forget the sight of 'Boris Johnson's bumbling failure,' as, on the same day that Team GB won their first gold medal, he found himself stationary on a zip wire, flags akimbo, looking – as Esther Addley beautifully puts it – 'like a damp towel on a line.'[45] By way of contrast, if 'families nationwide' were

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[43] Matt Abbott, 'Red, White & Blue,' in *Two Little Ducks* (Birmingham: Verve Poetry Press, 2018), 52.
[44] Ben Tufft, 'Package holiday resort Benidorm hopes to become world heritage site,' *The Independent*, May 1, 2015, accessed Aug 7, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/package-holiday-resort-benidorm-hopes-to-become-world-heritage-site-10219041.html/; These stereotypes, of course, have been largely perpetuated by the television series 'Benidorm'.
[45] Esther Addley, '"Like a damp towel on a line": the day Boris Johnson got stuck on a zip wire.' *The Guardian*, Jul 16, 2019. Accessed Aug 7, 2019.

united in any way by this latter image, it is hard to imagine it being in anything other than collective embarrassment.

The narrator's complex relationship with his flag is summarised in two particularly meaningful stanzas later in the poem:

> I feel bad for saying I'm ashamed of it.
> I feel bad for saying I'm proud.
> Arms aloft; chanting
> with my back towards the crowd.[46]

> Rape, pillage, rule, ruin…
> educate, transform.
> Liberate from fascism.
> Call migrants a "swarm".[47]

The final line of this second stanza unlocks a key linguistic feature of the Brexit campaign that, in turn, reveals the inherent need for narratives such as Abbott's, to contrast those in the media. Buckledee tells us that:

> Articles in the pro-Brexit press used highly emotive language, in particular metaphors of natural phenomena capable of causing enormous damage – *flood, tidal wave,* even *tsunami* – or terms from the semantic fields of military operations – *invasion, army of immigrants* – and great numbers – *hordes, swarms* and the like. Such language implies a degree of risk hardly backed up by hard facts.[48]

Abbott too uses the provocative language of these 'natural phenomena capable of causing enormous damage' in his poetry – 'an earthquake left a chasm' – but for very different reasons; here it is his own community that are responsible for the

https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/jul/16/stuck-zip-wire-boris-johnson-london-2012-olympics/.

[46] Abbott, 'Red, White & Blue,' 53.

[47] Ibid, 54.

[48] Buckledee, *The Language of Brexit*, 98.

natural disaster.[49] By adopting these terms in his poetry, the poet is effectively 'taking back control' of them:

> When I look at newsstands in Britain,
> I see "swarms", "imposters",
> "criminals", "tribes",
> "invasions" and "illegals".
>
> I do not see "humans".
> I do not see "victims".
> I do not see love.
> I do not see responsibility.[50]

Instead of suggesting that a "swarm" of migrants is something to fear, he uses the term as evidence of his shame in those forming the rhetoric in his country, as well as in his flag and – by extension of course – his national identity. At the same time, by emphasising the short distance between Dover and Calais, and by giving the people there a voice through his poetry, he attempts to rehumanise them: 'swarm' is, after all, a collective noun with which one might label insects or pests, certainly not other human beings.

It is this treatment of the refugees – situated only twenty-two miles from Britain – as somehow less than human, that Abbott problematises in 'Le Tricolore':

> The National Guard are going hard
> on unarmed refugees.
> Ignoring shrieks of panic
> and humanitarian pleas.
> In riot gear,
> they circle the perimeter like sharks:
> blue lights, white smoke, red sparks.[51]

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[49] Abbott, 'Wake Up and Smell the Tetley's,' 14.
[50] Matt Abbott, 'Where Is the Love?' in *Two Little Ducks* (Birmingham: Verve Poetry Press, 2018), 70.
[51] Matt Abbott, 'Le Tricolore,' in *Two Little Ducks* (Birmingham: Verve Poetry Press, 2018), 55.

Whilst this violence may not be happening on British soil, the very fact that many of the migrants are there because they have been refused asylum by Britain, and that they are such a short distance away – and with emphasis on the shared colours of the flags of Britain and France, too – underlines Abbott's feeling that the British are wholly complicit in this process of dehumanisation:

> Now I'm not saying that everyone's innocent;
> that every refugee is an angel.
> But there's a human crisis – right there –
> and Britain is entirely complicit.
> They're being terrorised, illegally,
> by protective wings that we pay for.[52]

In attempting to 'protect' British interests, the poem implies, we have reduced the Jungle's refugees to animals, the French *and* the British complicit as oppressors.

So, how does this link to Nigel Farage? Although not mentioned by name in this poem, Farage's work is referenced in 'Where Is the Love?', Abbott's reflection on the mistreatment and dehumanization of migrants in the Jungle (of course the name, 'the Jungle' itself only increases this perception of the people there as animalistic.)[53]

> I see billboards consisting entirely of brown faces,
> and a slogan that reads:
> "BREAKING POINT."
> It is remarkably similar
> to the work of Josef Goebbels.[54]

Abbott may refute the labelling of Brexit-voters as Nazis, but through this comparison of Farage to Goebbels, he certainly implies this of the UKIP leader. The

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[52] Abbott, 'Where Is the Love?' 72.
[53] The title of the poem references the 2003 hit song by the Black Eyed Peas, 'the product of a landmark historical tragedy' in the wake of 9/11. (Alice Vincent, 'Will.i.am on the making of Where is the Love: "We weren't trying to make a hit,"' *Telegraph*, May 4, 2018, accessed Aug 8, 2019, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/music/interviews/william-making-love-werent-trying-make-hit/.)
[54] Abbott, 'Where Is the Love?' 71.

poem here references the now infamous poster unveiled by Farage in the run-up to the referendum:

Image 2: UKIP's 'Breaking Point' poster.[55]

These 'billboards consisting entirely of brown faces' for Buckledee represented a turning point in the UKIP rhetoric, the moment of 'Farage's abandonment of his previous commitment to eschewing anything that could be interpreted as racist was seen by many as a last-ditch effort to swing voters with an appeal to the fear factor.'[56] Indeed, as Ankhi Mukherjee notes, 'the sole white person in the photograph had been hidden by a box of text.'[57] This seems too strategic to be a coincidence. The image, 'which pictured Middle Eastern refugees queueing at Europe's borders' was a shock tactic, designed to instil fear in Britons who felt that their way of life was threatened, to provoke a reaction to increase its dissemination, and to divide voters even further; this is despite the fact that, as Auer notes, 'in reality Brexit will have no bearing on those seeking sanctuary from war and persecution [...but] this fact was easily lost on British citizens who felt betrayed by the earlier promise of their

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[55] UK Independence Party, 'Breaking Point: The EU has failed us all,' (poster, UK Independence Party, Newton Abbott, 2016).
[56] Buckledee, *The Language of Brexit*, 97.
[57] Ankhi Mukherjee, 'Migrant Britain'. In *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*, ed. Robert Eaglestone (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 78.

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government to greatly reduce EU migration.'[58] The (assumed) connection between migration and the EU is powerfully summed up by Colin Crouch:

> the European Union […] brings immigrants with unfamiliar cultures and languages; it is difficult to distinguish immigrants from refugees, who come in alarming numbers from even more unfamiliar cultures; and since these refugees are Muslims, they are likely to include terrorists who will try to kill us.[59]

It is understandable that this message, pedalled by the media and far-right politicians alike, would instil fear in the general public.

There is little difference here, Abbott's poem implies, between the propaganda of far-right politicians and the words of the journalists who repeat their messages:

> When I watch the news,
> I see refugees *usually* attacking lorries.
> Lining the roads like a pack of wolves;
> scaling fences
> and sprinting towards Britain
> (towards YOU!).[60]

Through his italicisation of 'usually' in the second line of this stanza, Abbott highlights this media bias; the poem implies that – while of course this might happen – it is a rarity. Redefining the narrative, the refugees that the poet describes his encounters with are very different:

> Yesterday afternoon, I was sat playing cards
> with Ethiopians and Eritreans.
> The breeze picked up,

[58] Stefan Auer, 'Brexit, Sovereignty and the End of an Ever Closer Union,' in *Brexit: Sociological Responses*, ed. William Outhwaite (London: Anthem Press, 2017), 47.
[59] Colin Crouch, 'Globalization, Nationalism and the Changing Axes of Political Identity,' in *Brexit: Sociological Responses*, ed. William Outhwaite (London: Anthem Press, 2017), 101-102.
[60] Abbott, 'Where Is the Love?' 71.

so they invited me inside:
into their home.[61]

This is not, Abbott emphasises, the behaviour of animals; there lies extreme disparity between his own lived experiences and those he sees on television:

And the gap between the things I've seen
on a TV screen and The Jungle,
is the gap between a certain stride
and a brow-beaten stumble.[62]

Taken out of their tabloid newspaper context, and reproduced in Abbott's poem alongside the poet's own rehumanising words, in the language of the newspapers - "swarms", "imposters",/ "criminals", "tribes",/ "invasions" and "illegals" – as well as the images beamed by news channels into British homes – 'a pack of wolves;/ scaling fences/ and sprinting towards Britain/ (towards YOU!)' – the hate and discrimination becomes apparent.[63] So too, we come to understand how the fear factor encouraged the Leave vote. In traditional northern left-wing and Labour constituencies (like Abbott's Wakefield), Jeleniewski Seidler reports, Farage's message was successful, offering a solution to the issues that it problematised:

They felt that at least their concerns about immigration were being listened to by UKIP, even if they did not agree with many of the party's policies - and for years UKIP was mainly focused on getting the UK to leave the EU. At least they felt that they were not being patronised and ignored, or made to feel that raising questions about immigration meant that you *must be* racist.[64]

This sweeping label of 'racist,' is the same issue problematised by Abbott in his introduction, and throughout *Two Little Ducks.*

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[61] Abbott, 'Twenty-Two Miles,' 63.
[62] Abbott, 'Two Little Ducks,' 75.
[63] Abbott, 'Where Is the Love?' 70, 71.
[64] Jeleniewski Seidler, *Making Sense of Brexit*, 27.

Of course, even in the twenty-first century, the media still has a huge influence over the opinions – and voting intentions – of the general public.[65] In *Contemporary Britain*, John McCormick writes that 'tabloids tend to be more openly partisan and to present an often simplified and exaggerated picture of politics.'[66] Upon reflection of the language perpetuated there, it becomes clear how otherwise non-racist people were manipulated into a fear of a migrant 'invasion'. Buckledee writes that 'the tabloids hammered away at the immigration question and did so with language that stopped just short of being actionable under Britain's race relations act,' whilst Clegg notes that 'the *Mail* [led] with immigration warnings […] on seventeen of the twenty-three weekdays before the referendum.'[67] 'The last few weeks of campaigning,' Gurminder K. Bhambra writes, 'were marked by an increasingly toxic discourse on citizenship and belonging and the rights that pertain as a consequence.' That this political attitude, followed by the successful leave result, legitimized divisions within society is demonstrated by 'increasing racist and xenophobic attacks on migrants and minorities after the decision for Brexit.'[68] The shame that the poet feels towards this hostile environment is reflected throughout the collection, but particularly within 'Where Is the Love?':

> I see Britain First banners that read:
> "FUCK REFUGEES,"
> on demos where they bring knuckle dusters and hammers.
>
> When I walk through The Jungle,
> I pass a water tanker.
> On the water tanker, there's some graffiti.
> The graffiti reads:
> "Where is the love?"

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[65] Andy Beckett, 'Revenge of the tabloids,' *The Guardian*, Oct 27, 2016, accessed Jan 1, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/oct/27/revenge-of-the-tabloids-brexit-dacre-murdoch/.

[66] McCormick, *Contemporary Britain*, 136.

[67] Buckledee, *The Language of Brexit*, 204-205; Clegg, *How to Stop Brexit*, 65.

[68] Gurminder K. Bhambra, 'Locating Brexit in the Pragmatics of Race, Citizenship and Empire,' in *Brexit: Sociological Responses*, ed. William Outhwaite (London: Anthem Press, 2017), 91.

> They won't find it in Westminster,
> or most of the mainstream media,
> or, rather alarmingly, a lot of the British public.[69]

The behaviour perpetuated by people within his own country, the poet implies in the first of these stanzas, is considerably more animalistic than his experiences with migrants in The Jungle.

In his own spoken-word counter attack on the rhetoric of 'Westminster,' 'mainstream media' and 'a lot of the British public', Abbott most powerfully rehumanises the migrants by asking of his audience questions seemingly avoided by the press:

> You've got to ask yourself:
> Why would they flee from home, leaving everything behind?
> Why would they endure the journeys,
> risking death in dismal discomfort?
> Why would they settle in a camp
> that's been described as "living in hell"?[70]

Moreover, after arguing for understanding and 'love', Abbott points out that – to his local community at least – this vitriolic rhetoric should not feel unfamiliar:

> On the news, we see schemers and scroungers.
> A million misunderstood.
> Diverted, distracted and duped,
> by a blindfold covered in blood.[71]

The first line might be mistaken for a further media reference to the refugees; the remainder of the stanza, however, clarifies that, instead, the poet is referring to the working-class communities that have long been slandered in the press. This serves as a reminder too of the media treatment of the striking miners, just over thirty years

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[69] Abbott, 'Where Is the Love?' 72.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.

before. The 'disenfranchised' and 'demonised' were, in their time, positioned as the very same animalistic 'them' as the Calais migrants today.

This mirror-image of the 'us' versus 'them' media rhetoric is further referenced by Abbott in the poem 'Two Little Ducks,' in which both the working-class community of the poet's hometown, and the migrant community he encounters in Calais, are oppressed and mistreated by the 'Billionaires in the middle':

> Barbed wire on one side,
> and food banks on the other.
> Billionaires in the middle
> pulling parliamentary strings
>
> […]
>
> Kids in Britain are taught the meaning of poverty
> without the need for books.
> Kids in Calais are left to roam the streets,
> or cling to the bottom of trucks.
> Adults in power choose to turn their backs,
> as the nation self destructs…[72]

The British working classes and the Calais migrants, then, are both victims of an establishment that, during the Brexit campaign, systematically pitted them against one another. These British voters, Abbott suggests in 'Where Is the Love?' were 'Diverted, distracted and duped,/ by a blindfold covered in blood.'[73] One form of suffering and governmental neglect is simply being shrouded by another, in the poem's narrative.

The economic state of his community at home in Yorkshire, then, is framed by Abbott as a final example behind the working-class Leave vote. After the final stanza of 'Wake Up and Smell the Tetley's' (which we have already encountered), there is a

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[72] Abbott, 'Two Little Ducks,' 76, 78.
[73] Ibid.

sizeable gap before the easily-missed final line (which we thus far have not), almost like the poet's marginal addendum:

> Wake up
> and smell the Tetley's:
> we've taken back
> control.

> (Of what?!)[74]

The question that ends this poem is the realisation, after the marginal triumph for the Leave campaign, that no one – not even the politicians who campaigned for it – actually knew what 'Brexit' looked like, what 'Leave' really entailed, or *what exactly* 'the People' had taken back control *of*.[75] Earlier on in 'Wake Up and Smell the Tetley's,' however, Abbott offered something of an explanation of this, and what *his community* were 'tak[ing] back control' of, at least:

> And it might have been
> blind hope or
> empty opportunity, but
> why would anyone vote to stay like this?
> 'In'/'Out', 'Leave'/'Remain';
> nothing in between.
> They give us twos and threes
> and then ask us 'Stick or Twist?'
>
> Left behind and demonised:
> we'd fight to stay afloat.
> And we know they only give a shit
> When they've given us a vote.
> We're useful when we're cannon fodder;

[74] Abbott, 'Wake Up and Smell the Tetley's,' 16.
[75] Theresa May's insistent clarification – that 'Brexit means Brexit' – did little to help.

a nuisance when we're not.
Project Fear; the people's pride:
a chance to stop the rot.[76]

The Leave vote, within Abbott's Wakefield community, was an attempt to change the status quo; voters were using their democratic voice to try to 'take back control' of their own social, political and economic narrative.

This notion of 'control' is fascinating; Buckledee notes that:

> in an interview lasting less than an hour, Michael Gove had managed to use the word *control* thirty-five times, and that those who had not benefitted from globalization felt that what they had lost most of all was control over their destiny.[77]

A Leave vote signalled hope, the prospect of regaining some control, *different* prospects (not even necessarily *better* ones):

> Too right
> we chose to Leave:
> it was tumbleweed or mystery.[78]

Prospects are so dire here, Abbott implies, that just the element of change was enough to persuade many voters to reject the status quo and vote Leave. This message is reinforced by Buckledee's statement that a vote to exit the EU:

> promised a once-in-a-generation opportunity to change the course of history, correct the errors of the last four decades and liberate Britain […] It was not about petty details of tax rates or tariffs.[79]

In contrast, Buckledee continues, 'it was difficult for Remain campaigners to produce inspirational rhetoric when their message was essentially that it was better to just

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[76] Abbott, 'Wake Up and Smell the Tetley's,' 15.
[77] Buckledee, *The Language of Brexit*, 116.
[78] Abbott, 'Wake Up and Smell the Tetley's,' 16.
[79] Buckledee, *The Language of Brexit*, 119.

leave things as they were.'[80] This concept of 'leav[ing] things as they were,' *Two Little Ducks* suggests, was not an option for his community, certainly not a savoury one:

> The bastards bleed us dry,
> bridges slowly burn.
> Work us to the bone,
> nothing in return.
>
> […]
>
> Apprenticeships are now weekend jobs
> at JD Sports,
> and the welfare state considers us a nuisance.[81]

This is a community that was hit hard by de-industrialisation, its suffering only increased by a poor economic climate with very few opportunities or prospects.

The two stanzas from 'Two Little Ducks,' above, offer a view of the state of employment in which the 'bridges' being 'burnt' is entirely out of the hands of employees.[82] At the same time, that the 'bridges slowly burn' is a comment on the steady process of the UK's isolationism. The complete absence of future hope here is implied by the fact that 'Apprenticeships are now weekend jobs/ at JD Sports': apprenticeships allow employees the opportunity to train whilst working, gain an income whilst also gaining a qualification and, thus, progression opportunities. That this is no longer an option, and only the meagre, presumably minimum-wage 'weekend' hours 'at JD Sports,' are on offer reiterates the hopeless message of exploitation in the previous stanza, 'Work us to the bone,/ nothing in return.' It is no wonder, *Two Little Ducks* comments, that voters in working-class Yorkshire communities voted for the option that represented potential change.

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[80] Ibid, 126.

[81] Abbott, 'Two Little Ducks,' 77-78.

[82] The idiom 'to burn one's bridges' is typically referenced when, for example, an employee walks out of a job, destroying their reputation and personal connections and, thus, potential future paths. In this case, bridges are being burnt for them.

Towards the end of *The Language of Brexit*, Steve Buckledee writes that:

> Throughout this work it has been argued that the pro-EU camp did not match Leave's passionate campaigning and powerful language but when the final result was known Remainers seemed to find their voices at last, and it was an angry one.[83]

Two Little Ducks, it seems, is a product of this anger. The frustration in Abbott's poems, though, is not directed at 'the People' who voted to Leave:

> I know a lot of folk that blame Brexit
> entirely on bigots.
> And I know, from my heritage, that isn't fair. [84]

The poet directs his anger at the powerful forces – politicians, the media – who relentlessly marginalised and ostracised not only the refugees, who he defends throughout the collection, but the Leave-voting, working-class communities (in one of which he grew up). In response to the 'rants against refugees,' that the poet alludes to also in his preface – 'I encounter an alarming level of anti-refugee sentiment both online and through conversations, and unfortunately there is an overlap with a lot of Leave voters.' – Abbott offers, at the end of 'Two Little Ducks,' a pointed rant of his own:[85]

> And if anyone goes on rants against refugees,
> from headlines or red tops, or wherever…
> from my miniscule experience
> volunteering in France,
> I'll hold aloft those stories
> as a lifelong endeavour.
>
> So, who do we blame for this mess?
> The 52%, who opted to twist?
> The victims of war, viewing Britain as bliss?
> The Syrian barber;

[83] Buckledee, *The Language of Brexit*, 168-9.
[84] Abbott, 'Two Little Ducks,' 77-78.
[85] Ibid, 80; Abbott, Preface, 13.

> Maria, who's acclimatised to bleak?
> Or Michael Gove, who sang a tune
> to reach his dizzy peak;
> Boris Johnson, peddling lies
> every time he speaks;
> and EVERYONE
> in the Remain campaign,
> which was dismally fucking weak.[86]

'Blame,' then, is not easily attributed. The context of the collection, though, implies that – for Abbott at least – blame lies with the politicians, as evident at the end of the second stanza, as well as the 'headlines' and 'red tops' that feature in the first. This 'blame' is not only for 'peddling lies' and encouraging 'rants against refugees,' but for perpetuating the division and multi-faceted 'us' versus 'them' rhetoric that we can see adopted in many different ways throughout Abbott's poems.

In analysing Matt Abbott's collection alongside Steve Buckledee's *The Language of Brexit*, then, it is possible to tease out the linguistic techniques through which this division was encouraged, as well as the rhetoric that persuaded voters of the need to regain 'control' from the continent, with the slogans 'take back control' and 'we want our country back,' rife throughout the campaign.[87] As Kalypso Nicolaïdis writes, 'take back control' was particularly effective because:

> [it] meant different things to different people depending on what control was about (our laws, our money, our borders, our democracy), who it was taken back from (Brussels, Berlin, London, Apple), and what it actually referred to (autonomy, independence, freedom, sovereignty).[88]

In the same way, the idea of 'control' is explored throughout *Two Little Ducks*: we witness – among many other examples – the way in which the Yorkshire workers are

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[86] Abbott, 'Two Little Ducks,' 78.
[87] Andrew Glencross, 'Cameron's European Legacy: How Brexit Demonstrates the Flawed Politics of Simple Solutions,' in *Brexit and Beyond: Rethinking the Futures of Europe*, ed. Benjamin Martill and Una Staiger (London: UCL Press, 2018), 23; Bhambra, 'Locating Brexit', 91.
[88] Kalypso Nicolaïdis, 'The Political Mantra: Brexit, Control and the Transformation of the European Order,' in *The Law & Politics of Brexit*, ed. Federico Fabbrini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 25.

economically manipulated, the violence with which migrants in Calais are controlled and, of course, the power of the media over the discourse surrounding all of the above. Behind the desire to regain 'control,' Jonathan Hearn writes, 'lies a fundamental feeling of lack of control, of powerlessness.'[89] This powerlessness is shared by all of the oppressed groups in *Two Little Ducks*: significantly, each of these are allied with one another by their distance from politicians and journalistic elites. They are united, too, in ideological opposition to the latter group who, within Abbott's representation of the 'official' narrative, seek purely to divide them.

In *Two Little Ducks*, then, Matt Abbott, too, has 'taken back control.' As a poet and spoken word artist, Abbott is not 'powerless': he has a voice, a readership, an audience with whom he can share his alternative viewpoints, experiences and narratives. His collection represents a pursuit to lend a measured voice to not only the refugees he encounters in Calais, but to the working-class Yorkshire community of his childhood, and, in particular, the Leave voting majority there. In doing so, he reclaims and recycles the vitriolic language, narrative and rhetoric that has, until now, been the property of 'the establishment': in short, throughout *Two Little Ducks*, Abbott reclaims and wields linguistic 'control'.

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'You are now entering Europa':
The poetry of Yorkshire as England and England as Europe.

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Brexit is much more subtle, albeit no less thematic, in Simon Armitage's *Flit* and Sean O'Brien's *Europa*. As Nick Major notes, with regards to the second collection, 'O'Brien is a deeply political poet but avoids polemic. The imagination must be free to do its own work. It should not be cosseted by ideology.'[90] The same can surely be said of Armitage; it is difficult to imagine either poet publishing a collection with as

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[89] Jonathan Hearn, 'Vox Populi: Nationalism, Globalization and the Balance of Power in the Making of Brexit,' In *Brexit: Sociological Responses*, ed. William Outhwaite (London: Anthem Press, 2017), 19.

[90] Nick Major, 'Sean O'Brien: "England is strange. Some of it stopped in 1947 or 1954,"' *The Herald*, Apr 28, 2018, accessed Aug 8, 2019, https://www.heraldscotland.com/arts_ents/16189965.sean-obrien-england-is-strange-some-of-it-stopped-in-1947-or-1954/.

transparent a political message as Abbott's. Saying this, however, the blurbs of both collections comprise thinly veiled allusions to Brexit and the uncertainty it provoked. The text on O'Brien's back cover – in contrast to Major's words – positions the reader ideologically:

> *Europa*, Sean O'Brien's ninth collection of poems, is a timely and necessary book. Europe is not a place we can choose to leave: it is also a shared heritage and an age-old state of being, a place where our common dreams, visions and nightmares recur and mutate. In placing our present crises in the context of an imaginative past, O'Brien shows how our futures will be determined by what we choose to understand of our own European identity – as well as what we remember and forget of our shared history.
>
> *Europa* is a magisterial, grave and lyric work from one of the finest poets of the age: it shows not just a Europe haunted by disaster and the threat of apocalypse, but an England where the shadows lengthen and multiply even in its most familiar and domestic corners. Europa, the poet reminds us, shapes the fate of everyone in these islands – even those of us who insist that they live elsewhere.[91]

Armitage's blurb, by contrast, situates the poems geographically:

> In 2017, disillusioned by the domestic cultural scene and in search of a more depersonalised aesthetic, the poet Simon Armitage relocated to the small mid-European state of Ysp, and more particularly to its eponymous capital city. With no local contacts and only an out-dated pocket dictionary to hand, Armitage rented a small apartment in a former leprosy hospital and spent a year exploring Ysp's medieval backstreets, latter-day shopping malls, housing districts, redeveloped docks and rural hinterlands.[92]

Though their verse may resist polemic, neither poet's political nor contextual implications are particularly complicated to deduce here.

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[91] Sean O'Brien, *Europa* (London: Picador, 2018), back cover.
[92] Simon Armitage, *Flit* (Wakefield: Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 2018), back cover.

Like Shane Rhodes' *The City Speaks*, which we experienced in Chapter 2, Simon Armitage's 2018 collection *Flit* is a commissioned piece. That the book is commissioned and published by the Yorkshire Sculpture Park (Ysp) gives the reader immediate context for the semi-imaginary state that Armitage constructs. The landscape he describes throughout the collection intermingles fantasy with the realities of the Wakefield tourist attraction; so too, the poet's photographs that feature alongside the poems have fantasy elements superimposed onto them:
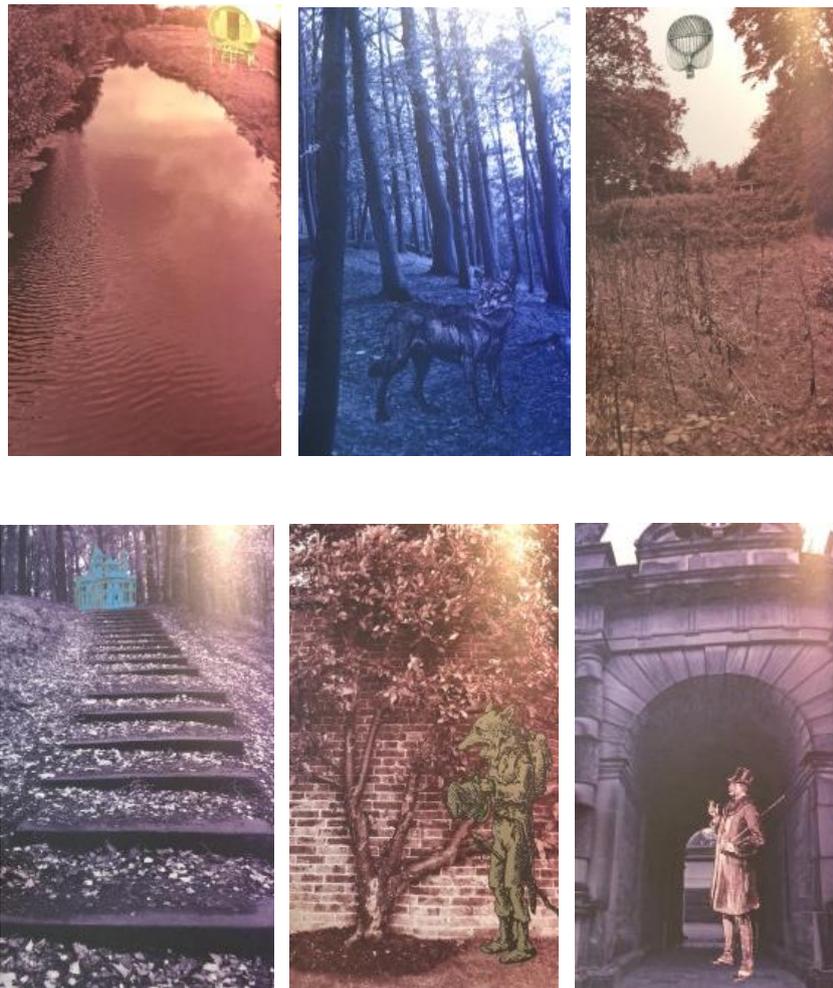
Images 1 – 6: Armitage's photographs, taken within Yorkshire Sculpture Park, superimposed with sketches. Image 2 also features on the front cover of the collection.[93]

The part-fictional narrative of Armitage's escape to 'Ysp' – 'disillusioned by the domestic cultural scene and in search of a more depersonalised aesthetic, the poet

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[93] Ibid, 73, 41, 38, 68, 57, 30.

Simon Armitage relocated to the small mid-European state of Ysp' – suggests his frustrations with the political state in 2017.[94]

Interestingly, whilst the OED offers multiple definitions of the word 'flit', the most relevant of these include: a noun for 'a removal: *do a flit*, to decamp', with the 1855 variant 'a moonlight flit' meaning 'a decampment by night with the furniture, to cheat the landlord' originating from a Glossary of Yorkshire Words; an adjective meaning 'swift, nimble, quickly-moving'; a verb, including the transitive 'to remove, transport, or take away to another place; to transfer from one position to another; to remove (a person from his house or habitation), the intransitive variant 'to shift one's position, either in a material or immaterial sense; to be gone, depart, pass away, remove', 'to move along, pass, proceed; to pass lightly or softly and (usually) with rapidity or suddenness, and the specifically northern example, 'to remove from one habitation to another, change one's residence, "move".'[95] There is a sense here then of escape or forced exile of a sudden or unexpected nature; the idea of this surreptitious escape to defy a landlord has particularly fascinating connotations with regards to Britain's move to exit the European Union. The idea of 'removal', too, is particularly poignant, given the uncertainty regarding the rights for EU migrants in the UK, or UK migrants living in the EU, if they stay in their chosen countries. As these freedoms, which UK citizens have enjoyed since the 1970s, are threatened, *Flit* is intertextually linked – by topic and by title – with John Clare's poem 'The Flitting' which protested enforced migration within England, and begins:

> I've left my own old home of homes,
> Green fields and every pleasant place;
> The summer like a stranger comes,
> I pause and hardly know her face.[96]

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[94] Ibid, 13.

[95] 'Flit', Oxford English Dictionary, accessed Jan 6, 2019, http://www.oed.com/search?searchType=dictionary&q=flit&_searchBtn=Search/.

[96] John Clare, 'The Flitting,' in *Poems of the Middle Period, 1822-1837*, vol. III, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S. Dawson, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 97.

This deep unfamiliarity and nostalgia represents – according to Alan Bewell – Clare 'grappl[ing] with his uprootedness':

> The intense alienation that Clare felt when he moved the three miles from his family cottage in Helpston to Northborough […] the issue had nothing to do with distance, but with the move itself, which meant that he could no longer claim that he belonged to a specific place. Legally alienated from his native parish, he was now a stranger moving among strangers in an alien space.[97]

This intertextuality, then, is apt: Armitage's narrator, too, has been displaced (although, this time by choice) to an unfamiliar location and he records it, tourist-like, through poems and photographs. His alienation is not only his apparent unfamiliarity with Ysp, but the complex and confusing notions of identity for a British citizen in a 'mid-European state', in the aftermath of the Referendum. Whilst the poet's escape to Ysp may be understood as a 'flit', the implications of this are deeper, to do with ideological and geographical uncertainty as European identity is seemingly removed from British citizens: as Britain attempts detachment from the EU, this feeling of exile from the continent is implicit here too. Given the nature of commission then, it is no accident that Yorkshire Sculpture Park (or Ysp) is positioned as a refuge for those who are similarly disillusioned to seek solace within.

Armitage's narrative is conducted from the centre of the UK and, at the same time, from a fictional location at the centre of Europe. 'In 2017' his narrator exploits the benefits of free movement (an important facet of EU membership): 'As a stranger in a foreign country with time on his hands, he made frequent use of Ysp's social amenities and public spaces, including its parks, gardens and museums.'[98] The privilege of being able to use another country's 'social and amenities and public spaces' in the same way that a local would is emphasised here; it is possible, of

[97] Alan Bewell, 'John Clare and the Ghosts of Natures Past,' *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 65, no. 4 (2011): 568.

[98] Simon Armitage, 'Introduction,' in *Flit* (Wakefield: Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 2018), 3. We are at this point, of course, reminded of the public dimension of the commission: 'Ysp's social amenities and public spaces, including its parks, gardens and museums' are available to the reader too!

course, that the 'parks, gardens and museums' would be recipients of EU funding too.[99] As the narrator explores Ysp, it could even be Hull, or any number of European port cities: he 'spent a year exploring Ysp's medieval backstreets, latter-day shopping malls, redeveloped docks and rural hinterlands.'[100] The narrator's walk through this dockside town into which he has migrated is uncannily similar to Larkin's descriptions whilst soaring through the streets and hinterlands of Hull in 'Here'.

This is not the only way that *Flit* is positioned intertextually in Yorkshire: some of Armitage's images that have been left without superimposed sketches, alongside the poems that they enter into ekphrastic dialogue with, remind us of Hughes's similar relationship with Godwin's photographs in *Remains of Elmet*:

Images 7 - 9: three of Armitage's photographs, taken within Yorkshire Sculpture Park.[101]

It is certainly not difficult to imagine these somewhat desolate and lonely, wintry images appearing within Hughes's collection. This is particularly interesting, given

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[99] Yorkshire Sculpture Park has, in fact, received grants from the European Regional Development Fund in the past. ('Henry Moore in Bretton Country Park.' Catalogue and Map. (Wakefield: Yorkshire Sculpture Park and the Henry Moore Foundation, 1994), 5.)
[100] Armitage, 'Introduction', 3.
[101] Ibid, 5, 27, 74.

the significance of rural West Yorkshire in Hughes's poetry, and that of contemporary poets there, too; in West Yorkshire, Ysp is ideally situated for these poets to seek refuge from the realities of politics and modern life.

Artwork situates the reader in a semi-imaginary landscape before Sean O'Brien's *Europa* is even opened: alongside the obvious inflections of the collection's title, the cover bears an image of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's architectural design for the Friedrichstrasse Skyscraper project. This futuristic and radical design was designed in 1921 for a competition which intended to determine the design for Berlin's first skyscraper:
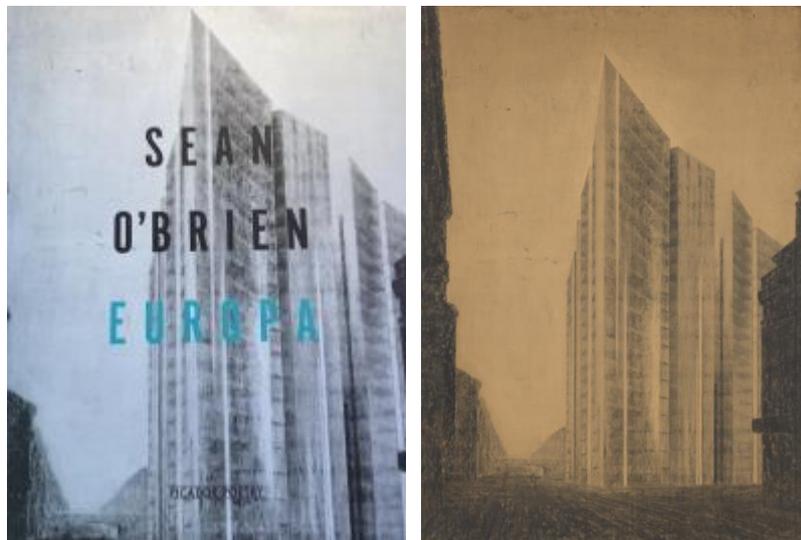
Images 10 and 11: the front cover of Sean O'Brien's *Europa*, beside the original print of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's sketches, that features on the front cover.[102]

New York's Museum of Modern Art, which now holds the prints in their collection, describe how the competition, and Mies's entry

> generat[ed] debate about the future of the city and represent[ed] hopes for new beginnings after Germany's defeat in World War I. While Mies's bold image of an entirely steel-and-glass skyscraper had a solid scientific and

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[102] O'Brien, *Europa*, front cover; Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 'Friedrichstrasse Skyscraper project' (charcoal and graphite on brown paper, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1921).

technological basis, his crystal-shaped plan reflected the more fantastic

visions of Expressionist architects and artists, who were drawn to glass as

a symbol of purity and renewal.[103]

That O'Brien chose this image for his front cover, then, is hugely significant:

contextual interpretations abound! Perhaps the most immediately apparent and

relevant of these is the dual perspectives on Europe and Brexit: in its conception the

European Union was a radical concept of post-war unity and has delivered the most

substantial period of relative peace in Europe in modern times.[104] Brexit, on the other

hand, was touted as a revolutionary concept too, with its supporters suggesting that

it offered Britain new opportunities and powers. It is significant that the design was

never actually constructed (although many of his designs were built in America, and

Mies ultimately designed the National Gallery, Berlin). In a 2018 interview, O'Brien

stated:

> I'm interested in the past, and the ways in which the past did not develop.
> This is sometimes referred to as nostalgia, which it's not. Nostalgia can be
> a kind of anaesthesia. But what I'm talking about is a sense of roads not
> taken.[105]

Unexecuted plans and unfulfilled potentials intermingle here with the European

facts and histories. Despite the fact that 'the EU is the largest market for UK exports

(54 per cent)', Jacob Rees-Mogg wrote in 2018 that 'by allowing us to strike out and

reclaim our status as one of the world's premier trading nations, Brexit provides a

unique and exciting opportunity.'[106] Like Mies's design, however, Brexit was (and is,

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[103] Museum of Modern Art, 'Ludwig Mies van der Rohe: Friedrichstrasse Skyscraper Project, Berlin-Mitte, Germany (Exterior perspective from north),' *Art and Artists*, accessed Aug 9, 2019, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/787/.

[104] David Hannay, 'Lest we forget, the EU has helped bring peace to Europe,' *InFacts*. Nov 9, 2018, accessed Aug 10, 2019, https://infacts.org/lest-we-forget-the-eu-has-brought-peace-to-europe/.

[105] Major, 'England is strange.'

[106] Charles Dannreuther and Simon Lightfoot, 'A Crisis of Europe', in *Institutional Crisis in 21st Century Britain*, ed. David Richards, Martin Smith and Colin Hay (London: Springer Nature, 2014), 171; Jacob Rees-Mogg, 'Afterword', in *Clean Brexit: Why Leaving the EU Still Makes Sense - Building a Post-Brexit Economy for All*. Liam Halligan and Gerard Lyons (London: Biteback Publishing, 2018), 281.

at this stage) still only theoretical; still in 2019, no one can be entirely sure of its practical realities or whether it will ever come to fruition.

Both collections, then, are *European*. This is literally the case as, in 2018 when they were published, Britain remained firmly a part of the European Union.[107] Figuratively, though, both poets situate their work from the outset in an imaginary space in the centre of Europe, albeit in different ways. This central, European space for O'Brien – described in an interview as 'a poet rooted in the landscape and dreamscape of northern England, but […] a defiant European in art and life' as well as 'a Europhile, but not a sentimentalist' – roots the collection in his own ideology, expressed in the same 2018 interview with Nick Major:

> As far as I'm concerned, this is Europe. Scotland is certainly Europe. There has never been much doubt about that. But England is also Europe, at least to people of my way of looking at things. It is inescapable, nor would I wish to escape it. So, England is part of the same terrain. [Leave-voters are] not leaving Europe, they're just moving into the box room.[108]

In *Europa*, then, Britain's European centrality reflects these views; geographically, of course, the country may sit on the periphery. In O'Brien's ideology, though, it is as central as any of the countries geographically positioned in the centre of the continent.

In the case of Armitage, the description of Ysp as 'mid-European' implies centrality. Literally, of course, Yorkshire Sculpture Park *is* relatively central to England, as can be seen on the map, overleaf:

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[107] We should of course remember that, even when (if) Britain leaves the EU, its geography does not change. The nation cannot physically leave the continent. 'European,' in this sense then, is shorthand for 'member of the EU.'
[108] Major, 'England is strange.'

Image 12: the geographical location of Yorkshire Sculpture Park.[109]

If we view Yorkshire as central to England, in a geographical sense or otherwise, it has interesting implications for the argument for devolved powers for the county, a conversation that has gained increasing momentum since the Referendum.[110] 'Mid', however, is ambiguous: it could reference a transient space wherein Ysp is in a peculiar middle-ground, no longer 'full' European nor 'not' European; in the same vein, it could be synonymous with 'half'-European, referencing Britain's peripheral position and unique terms of membership; so too, the poet may be implying a theory that Ysp's relationship with Europe is actually only in the middle of its term.

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[109] 'Yorkshire Sculpture Park,' *Maps*, Google, accessed Aug 10, 2019,
https://www.google.com/maps/place/Yorkshire+Sculpture+Park/@54.6576165,-
6.379141,6.17z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x487963bba23f7e39:0xe2e6f5a70d4f2db!8m2!3d53.6138804!4d-
1.5690893/.
[110] David Barnett, 'Brexit, Catalonia, Scotland… Yorkshire? "God's own county" is pushing for devolved independence,' *Independent*, Oct 24, 2017, accessed Aug 9, 2019,
https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/yorkshire-independence-devolution-devolved-parliament-mayor-northern-powerhouse-george-osborne-a8015556.html/.

Britain's complicated position in Europe in the aftermath of the Referendum is reflected in the preoccupation with borders and boundaries in *Flit*. As the collection progresses, these borders seem increasingly manmade and arbitrary, but with the potential to do considerable harm. This is dealt with in the poem 'Small Hours' alongside the desire to 'take back control' of the economy, through the traditional place of transit, arrivals and departures, the train station. However, in this case, the narrator finds himself locked out, excluded (exiled, perhaps?):

> Seen through the padlocked iron gates
> the one light in the concourse spills from the shrine
> of a vending machine stocked with the shiny saints
> of chocolate bars and fizzy drinks, which tonight,
>
> for reasons unknown, suddenly spews its profit
> of grain-coloured coins into the empty hall.
> From its roost in the rafters, a one-legged pigeon
> floats down to sample the cruel feast.[111]

The poem is set in the bleakness of the 'small hours': night is the actual reason for the 'padlocked iron gates' that prohibit the narrator from reaching the vending machine. Whilst this could be a simple 'grass is greener' allegory, the pigeon significantly is not locked out: his 'roost in the rafters' ensures his continued access to 'the empty hall' and 'the cruel feast.' It is of course possible that the pigeon is *locked in*, but the fact that he is a bird, not a human, and therefore is smaller and can fly implies that he is better-equipped to pass through or above 'the padlocked iron gates,' the borders proving impervious to the narrator.

As the argument for Brexit includes greater restrictions on British borders, to limit free movement, the poet reminds us here that – in being so determined to prevent migration into the country – voters have effectively locked themselves out of the continent and the benefits of European membership. So too, the pigeon indicates the arbitrariness of the borders constructed – physically and ideologically – by humans: to any other species, they are mere, fleeting obstacles. In some ways, the train station

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[111] Simon Armitage, 'Small Hours' in *Flit* (Wakefield: Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 2018), 9.

in 'Small Hours' could be evocative of the Channel Tunnel that connects Britain to France and the continent. At the beginning of the poem, the narrator describes how:

> They close the station at one a.m., the last train
> being the so-called Graveyard Express,
> a sleeper service with curtained windows
> which pulls out noiselessly, slinking into the east.[112]

The reader, then, joins the scene after the 'night time' of Brexit has commenced: the narrator has not boarded 'the last train' – the 'Graveyard Express' evocative of its finality – his final opportunity to 'flit' 'into the east' (symbolic, of course, of Europe). Before the train had even left the station the narrator was excluded from its inner-workings by the 'curtained windows'; had he boarded the train, the poem implies, he would have been relaxing and rejuvenating on the 'sleeper service', instead he is awake, locked outside the station, watching the pigeon through the night. Our narrator, then, has himself been exiled: in his 'small mid-European state,' he populates the last bastion of Europe in England in solitude, separated even from the pigeon.

As the final train 'east' has departed, the platforms (the boundary point) are no longer accessible: Britain, here, has locked the gates on her continental links. The unintended consequences of gating off not only travel, but also trade links is suggested as the vending machine 'suddenly spews its profit'. The machine, here, is haemorrhaging money. Brexit was sold to the British public on the promise of all the money that could be retained, money that is currently paid to the EU, despite the 'far larger' and largely unreported 'economic benefits derived from EU membership'.[113] These claims were not altogether truthful: as Mukherjee reports, 'the big red bus promising £350million more a week for the NHS was a mobilised lie (treasury figures for UK contributions to the EU budget revealed that it was just £156m a week for 2016/17).'[114] If this poem is a metaphor for the post-Brexit economy, it is

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[112] Ibid.
[113] Evans and Menon, *Brexit and British Politics*, 48-49.
[114] Mukherjee, 'Migrant Britain,' 78.

important to note that the narrator can *see* 'the shiny saints/ of chocolate bars and fizzy drinks' in 'the shrine/ of a vending machine', but he cannot access them. The consequences are mutual, though, and the 'one-legged pigeon's severed limb is an important allegorical point: has the EU lost a rather small but valuable part, or has Britain disabled herself? The pigeon can access the vending machine but cannot access the 'shiny saints', nor would he particularly want to. As the vending machine 'suddenly spews its profit/ of grain-coloured coins into the empty hall,' the pigeon is taunted by the money, which is described as akin to his staple diet. He doesn't *need* the money: he needs the food that won't now be dropped by people in the 'empty hall'. Life here is unsustainable both inside *and* outside the station: fluid, symbiotic movement and cooperation is vital. In 'Small Hours,' then, critiques the capitalist focus of Brexit (with particular emphasis on the 'shiny saints' and the 'shrine' emphasising society's worship of non-staple goods); the poem warns of potentially being so blinded by money, power, profit and 'control', that – by cutting off trade links – there is risk of society finding itself unable to support its own basic needs.

In an argument for global citizenship in the face of growing nationalist and isolationist rhetoric, the poem 'The Depths' reiterates this notion of borders and boundaries constructed by humans being an unnatural imposition on the landscape. The lack of boundaries or divisions for the 'Yspian' rivers allow them to flow freely; we are invited to imagine their waters flowing 'into the Ganges, Congo, Loire, Orinoco, Blue Nile.'[115] Like the pigeon, then, water and nature resist restriction, connecting the world even when humans do their best to build borders, barriers or walls. Notably, of course, besides Wakefield's River Calder, unnamed but present in the poem, only the River Loire is located within the European Union: these rivers further afield acknowledge the pro-Leave message of greater trading opportunities on a global scale. Could the River Calder become 'named' on the famous scale of these other rivers, the poem implies, as a metaphor for greater British power. The presence of the European river remains important throughout, as an argument for

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[115] Simon Armitage, 'The Depths', in *Flit* (Wakefield: Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 2018), 37.

the continuing importance of trade within the continent: without flowing through European plains, water would be unable to reach the African and Asian rivers.

Despite being located implicitly as an underlying theme, international cooperation becomes focal throughout *Flit*. In the poem 'Mozart's Starling', Armitage encourages the active contribution and cooperation of his reader, too. Here, the narrator is a frustrated poet who, in the second stanza, abandons the poem, leaving the reader responsible for completing its writing and deciding how it ends:

> But reader, can I hand over the responsibility to you?
> This morning I'm bored shitless by poetry;
> it's a temperate Bank Holiday weekend
> and I'm heading down to the garden hammock
> with my iPod and a pack of craft beers from the fridge.
> I'll leave a quill and parchment by the desk,
> but don't dawdle: in a few minutes' time
> that security guard – he's called Frank or Franz –
> will turn out the master-switch and go home.[116]

Whilst *Flit* has been gently allegorical, this poem suggests that even the most politically- and socially-conscious of artists can only provide a certain amount of guidance: at some point, the responsibility for interpreting and digesting the poems – and, when didactic, *acting upon them* – is handed to the reader. The finished text may not go in the direction that the poet intended, or it may not be successfully completed at all; this is the risk that the poet takes when he relinquishes control. The 'responsibility' handed to the reader is not unlike the responsibility and, ultimately, power handed to the British public during the Referendum.

Particularly interesting is the distinction between Frank and Franz; this presumably is a decision that the reader (upon themselves becoming the writer) must make, whether to proceed with the traditional English name, or its distinctly more European variant. The seemingly minor choice between consonants at the end of the name has potentially significant repercussions, whilst the minor disparity between

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[116] Simon Armitage, 'Mozart's Starling,' in *Flit* (Wakefield: Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 2018), 51.

the two names suggests similarities of culture, even when politics attempts to create divisions. 'Mozart's Starling,' then, is a comment on the responsibility of a reader – whether they are reading poetry, posters, the news or social media – to be discerning, as well as acknowledging their culpability in the ending.

This feeling of public responsibility and culpability can be sensed throughout Sean O'Brien's *Europa*, too. Indeed, as Nick Major writes:

> The predominant imagery of *Europa* concerns how our different histories – our memories, the countries of our minds the rubble of our world – shape us in the here and now. For O'Brien, the political road the UK – England, in particular – has taken is a mad betrayal of its past and future. Europa is an imaginative reorientation that reveals a truer picture of ourselves as Europeans, whether we like the fact or not.[117]

One key phrase from Major's analysis will set the tone of our exploration of the collection here: 'the rubble of our world.' O'Brien acknowledges that 'the poems in *Europa* were written between the spring of 2015 and the winter of 2017. They were written in awareness of the 2015 election result, of the EU Referendum result, and the brewing re-emergence of the extreme right all over Europe,' this idea of 'rubble' or *remains* refers not only to the very recent past of growing nationalism and isolationism, but stretches further back into European past:[118]

> Everything we might wish to celebrate or enjoy or remember or admire takes place on the same ground as centuries of the most awful slaughter and cruelty. You begin to suspect you can't have one without the other. It is certainly true of Europe, which is a battlefield from the coast to Russia, from Denmark to the toe of Italy and into Greece and Spain.[119]

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[117] Major, 'England is strange.'
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.

Europa is not, then, a celebration of European successes and positive values: it acknowledges and reflects on the darker aspects of continental history, those that – the poet argues – we should be wary of forgetting.

As the collection begins, the reader is welcomed to *Europa* by the first poem's title, 'You Are Now Entering Europa.' It is unclear where the reader is entering from, but the poetic landscape that we find ourselves in is – much like the post-industrial, post-war place of Hughes's *Remains of Elmet* – in a perpetually wintry state:

> The fallen leaves are frozen now,
> The windfalls bitter.[120]

This is an apocalyptic – or perhaps even postapocalyptic – landscape. The first line of the poem, 'The grass moves on the mass graves' evokes the immediate question of what has happened for 'mass graves' to be necessary. Interestingly, though, the grass *moves on*: the 'mass graves' are being covered up, there is a sense of progression and those buried beneath the surface being left in the past. This is reiterated by the narrator in the second stanza: 'No one writes./ And I forget. I mark the days.' History, then, is not being recorded or reflected on: it is being forgotten. 'I mark the days' is like a countdown: society, here, is so focussed on the future that it quickly forgets, 'moves on' from the past.

Throughout the poem, however, the narrator is increasingly haunted and encroached upon by 'The grass'. As it 'moves on' it is actually moving towards the narrator: the line 'the grass moves on the mass graves' is repeated at the start of stanza three; when this reminder fails, the remainder of the poem is concerned with the grass refusing to allow the narrator to forget:

> The grass is in the street, the street
> Is at the door. I may not be disturbed,
> You understand, I have my work,

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[120] Sean O'Brien, 'You Are Now Entering Europa' in *Europa* (London: Picador, 2018), 1.

> So near to its conclusion now
> That I will never finish it. The grass
> Is at the door, is on the stairs,
>
> Is in the room, my mouth, is me,
> While I mark off the days and think
> How blest I am to have my work,
>
> To tend the graveyard I become.[121]

The encroaching grass is not an evocation of beautiful, rolling Yorkshire countryside; the overgrown, untended streets are a symbol of selfishness as well as persecution and needless military losses. We are reminded, here, of Philip Larkin's poem 'Cut Grass':

> Cut grass lies frail:
> Brief is the breath
> Mown stalks exhale.
> Long, long the death
>
> It dies in the white hours
> Of young-leafed June[122]

Here, as the suburban homeowner mows his lawn, the mown blades of grass replicate the indiscriminate mass slaughter of soldiers and civilians during the wars. As Larkin's first stanza, quoted above, finishes with the enjambment signalling the demise of the grass, O'Brien's final stanzas use the same effect: as 'the grass' dies in the break between 'Long, long the death' and 'It dies', O'Brien's narrator seems to perish in the pause between 'How blest I am to have my work' and 'To tend the graveyard I become.' The lines 'So near to its conclusion now,/ That I will never finish it' become more poignant when, unlike the tercets that comprise the rest of the

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[121] Ibid.
[122] Philip Larkin, 'Cut Grass' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 94.

poem, the final stanza consists of just one line. Is this a sort of afterword, the reader is left asking, or is the poem cut short, structurally incomplete?

The sins of the society in 'You Are Now Entering Europa,' are not, of course, one-dimensional: here O'Brien writes the catastrophic future of a society that has not only lost (or deliberately ignores) the affect memory of war, but one that has become intensely self-absorbed. That this is a work-obsessed, capitalist society (it is possible, of course, that work here is a way of forgetting or ignoring) is apparent as the narrator's response to the grass 'at the door' is 'I may not be disturbed,/ You understand, I have my work'. This notion of 'my work' recurs throughout the poem, with its ultimate hollowness suggested when only the narrator's 'work' is left behind 'To tend the graveyard.' We must ask whether the narrator has deliberately eschewed all human connection in favour of the legacy of his 'work', or whether past relationships were lost to the mass slaughter; either way, the poem's pronouns mostly consist of 'I', with the one 'You' directly addressing 'the grass.' The narrator's self- and work-obsession ensures the complete lack of any inclusive 'we' here.

Even the use of 'You,' to address the grass, is a collective rather than singular 'you': the significance of 'grass' as both singular and plural is important here. In the first stanza the narrator asks 'How many divisions has the grass,' but this idea of the smaller parts that comprise the whole is almost hidden within the rest of the poem as the grass, en-masse, becomes a homogenous threat. The protagonist is not part of the group, his generalisations reflect his lack of interest in distinguishing between the many individual blades within the mass of grass. Whilst this has numerous implications within the racism and Islamophobia that formed a prominent subsection of the Brexit debate, it also has echoes of the treatment of workers (their conscription into mills and ultimately to war) that we found in *Remains of Elmet*. 'You Are Now Entering Europa,' is infused with this deep sense of anxiety regarding mass ignorance and apathy that prevents the society here from recalling the tragic moments of history and loss that have interweaved its successes. The poem warns of unthinkingly going along with the status quo: the narrator's complacency and

ignorance seems to be hurtling him towards an unknown, terrible fate. So too, this unpleasant end is a consequence of the narrator's self-absorption, self-importance and his isolationist determination to 'go it alone,' so to speak; this surely is a comment on separatist Britain within the Brexit rhetoric.

Whilst Sean O'Brien's *Europa* and Simon Armitage's *Flit* may appear, on the surface, to be less related to Brexit than Matt Abbott's *Two Little Ducks*, with some exploration their comments on the political situation – in Britain, and in Europe more widely – are just as present and just as strong, they are simply buried deeper beneath the narrative. 'Many in the UK now feel apart from the main,' Robert Eaglestone writes in *Brexit and Literature*: a consequence of this widespread alienation is the way in which both poets construct semi-imaginary, 'mid-European' settings for their collections as a means for examining the place of the migrant, exile or someone who is otherwise displaced (has 'done a flit', perhaps?)[123] This position also allows more local issues to be critiqued from a distance, through the eyes of an outsider.

As O'Brien's narrative launches the reader into the bitter winter of a heavily didactic apocalyptic landscape to critique capitalist isolationism and the complacency, ignorance and apathy of its wider society, Armitage's pseudo-migratory collection grapples with concepts that Britain must come to terms with as it leaves the European Union: redefined identities, new perspectives of space and place, and what it means to be European in contrast to being British. That Armitage adopts a Yorkshire setting for his imaginary European state is interesting in terms of proposals for Yorkshire devolution, but, at the same time, addresses the complex and confusing state of being geographically *in* Europe but no longer allied *with* it; feeling like a stranger in one's own country, or even feeling like the country has become foreign to them entirely. Through shared history, geography, culture, ideology and losses, in both poets' work we become familiar with this unavoidable, inextricable, at times unexplainable and – most importantly – *enduring* link to

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[123] Eaglestone, 'Introduction,' 6.

Europe. In 1981, Philip Larkin described his Yorkshire home as being 'half-turned to Europe'.[124] Despite the 2016 referendum result, in which the country seemed to turn *from* Europe, in Armitage and O'Brien's work at least, little about the position expressed by Larkin seems to have changed.

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[124] Philip Larkin, 'Bridge for the Living,' in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 119.

CONCLUSIONS:
'The North – The North is Poetry'

In 'A Northern Assembly,' Sean O'Brien declares: 'The North – The North is Poetry.'[1] Whilst this poem makes a case for devolution and the self-governance of Northern England, so too it argues the prominence of poetry as a literary form in the north, a fundamental part of regional expression rather than merely an incidental creative outlet. Of course, both northern and Yorkshire identities are powerful facets of regionalism and individual sense of self, with nuanced and often personal and place-specific shades of meaning. Throughout this study then, the strong regional identities emanating from particular parts of Yorkshire were viewed as subsects of Northernness, rather than the two being synonymous and interchangeable classifications. The poetry of Yorkshire *is* northern poetry, but it is quite distinct from, say, that of Lancashire, Northumbria, of Scotland, even. The original observations made here, then, are specific to the poetry of Yorkshire and, in many cases, to one poet or region, too.

In Section I we delved straight into the poetry of East Yorkshire: the first chapter presented an original reading of Larkin's Hull-based poem 'Here,' clarifying the narrator's movements through the perspective of the narrator as a bird.[2] There is an undeniable bias towards Hull poetry in this section, given the city is the place of Larkin. Of course, East Yorkshire is significantly smaller than West Yorkshire, and suffers, in this sense, from a smaller number of cities in which poetry is studied and can be widely promoted; whether this results in poetry from these smaller areas being less likely to be 'discovered', or whether writers here naturally gravitate to Hull and its reputation as a place of poetry, is not a conclusion that can be reached within the remit of this study. Whilst the Hull-bias could have been minimised

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[1] Sean O'Brien, 'A Northern Assembly,' in *Downriver* (London: Picador, 2001), 22.
[2] This reading was presented and particularly enthusiastically received at two conferences: Kyra Piperides Jaques. 'Bard or Bird? Hull Poets and Ornithological Imagery,' (conference paper, Philip Larkin: Personality, Poetry, Prose, Hull History Centre, Jun 13-14, 2019) and 'Philip Larkin's "free bloody birds": Imagery, Symbolism and Narrative Perspective,' (conference paper, Literary Birds: A Durham University Conference, Durham University, Oct 11-12, 2018). It is currently being prepared for publication.

more, this would have had the effect of shoehorning poetry into discussion explicitly for this purpose. However, as a result of Hull's prolific reputation for poetry, this thesis is able to provide the first substantial critical discussion of the work of many contemporary poets, including Dean Wilson, Vicky Foster, Shane Rhodes and Julie Corbett. So too, the section relates local poetry to the commission and events of a defining moment in very recent regional history: Hull's status as UK City of Culture 2017.

Section II, meanwhile, positioned Ted Hughes's poetry alongside numerous other poets, some of whom also have not yet been the subject of wide scholarly debate. Whilst the popularity and reputation of poets including Helen Mort, Kate Fox and Zaffar Kunial will most likely mean that their work is studied with frequency and depth in the future, this is, if not the first, *one of the first* studies to do so. Certainly, this section can claim originality by positioning the work of these writers not only alongside one another, but in the context of region, local literature and the writing of Ted Hughes, too. Perhaps the most interesting part of this section, though, is the discussion of what appears to be both a foundational and a developing subgenre in twentieth- and twenty-first century Yorkshire poetry: that of re-creation. *Remains of Elmet* could, in some ways, be considered a fundamental text to this, as the poet recreates the words, landscapes and past of his uncle and, by extension, his ancestral community in the Calder Valley. This form really comes to the fore, though, in contemporary poetry and is wielded, to great effect, by Helen Mort in 'Scab.' Largely, this act of poetic reconstruction by West Yorkshire poets seems to be an act of political defiance, ensuring that moments of perceived injustice, such as the Miners' Strikes, are represented in regional voices, aside from the 'official' narrative. As we gain ever-greater distance from this point in history it will be interesting to observe if this style develops and maintains its prominence within local poetry and, if so, which future moments it serves to recreate.

Approaching the work of Ted Hughes initially seemed a formidable prospect, given the wealth of scholarly debate that exists, and continues to be written, on his poetry.

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However, the lexical study that was conducted into *Remains of Elmet* produced fascinating and highly original results that provided not only a snapshot of Hughes's clear foci in the collection, but a new way of interpreting the text too.[3] At the beginning of this research project, this was intended as a way of interpreting all of the texts that were explored. The other collections, however, did not return such significant results: for shorter collections there were not enough different words to generate results that were particularly numerically different; in most cases, close reading produced much more interesting interpretations. The results for *Remains of Elmet*'s lexical study, though, were deemed far too significant to disregard in the final version of this thesis. They are included, therefore, as a solitary example of this sometimes fruitful, sometimes frustrating technique and as evidence that, when it does work, it yields fascinating results.

Perhaps the most original analysis – and potentially the area with most potential to be explored in greater depth in the future – is Section III. The analysis here constitutes not only the first detailed study of Yorkshire-based Brexit poetry, but is itself the first in-depth survey of poetic responses to the UK's vote to Leave the European Union in 2016. Whilst the writers considered in previous chapters were largely recreating events from the past (experienced by themselves or by their ancestors in the region), here the poets are reflecting on the present moment. In the future then, this chapter could form an important basis for studies into the literary and cultural responses to a defining political moment. The findings of Chapter 5 are of course limited by their contemporary nature; the realities of Brexit and UK politics – and the poetry inspired by it, too – mean that this chapter will likely be out of date soon after writing. In the time between submission and viva everything could have changed: there could be further volumes of Yorkshire-based, Brexit-responsive poetry, or standalone works published in journals, newspapers or anthologies. So too, in this short timeframe, the government's thus far mystifying approach to exiting the European Union may be clarified or even actioned; the Brexit 'deadline'

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[3] Kyra Piperides Jaques, 'From *Remains* to *Elmet*: A Lexical Study of Hughes's West Yorkshire Texts,' *Ted Hughes Society Journal* 7, no. 1 (2018): 49-66.

may, too, have changed. Only in years, maybe decades to come, will this chapter be able to be conclusively written. However, if anything that makes this section more exciting, and future work in this area – both to extend the timeframe, and to extend the regionality – entirely necessary.

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In 'A Northern Assembly,' Sean O'Brien defines the North as beginning from the Humber: this is roughly where our exploration of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Yorkshire poetry began too. This research started with a plan to explore Yorkshire poetry in its entirety: it quickly became apparent that it would be impossible to study the poetry of the whole of England's largest county with the desired level of depth and detail, within the constraints of this thesis. Thus, the topic was narrowed to focus on Philip Larkin's East Riding and Ted Hughes's West Riding, along the historic county lines within which the two poets lived and worked. This approach, of course, was not necessarily simple: due to changes in the area's borders in the 1990s, the regional affiliations and, thus, identities of some areas were redefined. Thus – in the West Riding section especially – some places that had once been considered part of West Yorkshire are now considered South; they remain, however, united by former geographies and many mutual contexts, so their presence within the particular thesis section was maintained.

Due to the focus on the geographical and geological history which shaped both the East and West Yorkshire landscapes – with consequences on the lives and livelihoods of their human inhabitants, as well as the cycles of nature that are prominent throughout the poetry of both areas – it was decided that the chapters should follow the direction of the sun: thus we begin in the East and end in the West. This has the added benefit of positioning the work of Philip Larkin ahead of that of Ted Hughes: although near contemporaries, most of Larkin's Yorkshire work that we have discussed here was published ahead of that of Hughes. Whilst the two 'senior' poets could have been considered in Section I with Section II focussing on their contemporary counterparts, the two discrete sections, bound by their

geography, was ultimately chosen in order to maintain the tight focus on place that enabled more detailed and nuanced *intra*-regional comparisons, before extending this to a more *inter*-regional focus in the final chapter.

Since this research began, questions around place, borders and regional identity have gained greater prominence and urgency. As the outcomes and consequences of Britain's referendum on membership of the European Union are still being prophesised, the US President promotes division and borders, and war-related displacement has led to a migrant crisis. The way borders, boundaries and citizenship should be policed (or otherwise) has thus become a hot topic of debate. Meanwhile, the climate emergency commands an opposing narrative, with activists urging global citizenship, a greater sense of unity and accountability to preserve the earth in its entirety. Closer to home, as Brexit resurrects questions of independence for Scotland and Northern Ireland, calls for Yorkshire to become an independent, self-governing state have returned to the fore too. In light of this potentially pivotal contemporary moment and the quantity of powerful poetic responses that local poets were producing, the final section was added to the thesis plan. This ensured that the findings remained current and reflective of social and political situations that, whilst affecting the entire country (as well as the rest of the European Union and potentially the world), are currently being played out within poetry originating from Yorkshire.

Throughout this study, the poetry from the two regions was examined in detail, with initial focus on the central works of Larkin and Hughes ultimately giving way to a plethora of published poets writing from within East and West Yorkshire. This was an interesting route into each region's respective poetic 'scenes', as well as forming a nice contrast between the former poet, who was born in the Midlands and relocated to the East Riding as an adult, and the latter writer who was born in the West Riding and ultimately moved south as an adult. Given this difference, it is interesting that Larkin's words cast a much greater shadow over contemporary East Riding poetry than Ted Hughes's poetry does in the West. Indeed, it seems that Tony Harrison's

School of Eloquence may have greater intertextual presence here, through the role it played in legitimizing local idiom. This is especially important, given the prominence and power of contemporary (yet historically-rooted) spoken word poetry in Yorkshire. Of course, it was not possible to include *all* poets of reasonable reputation from the regions: each of the poets whose work was included in this study were specifically selected in order to present a balance of well- and lesser-known writers, and – where possible – to explore the ways in which people of various genders, cultures and social classes relate to East and West Yorkshire within their poetry.

In terms of contexts, then, certain similarities between East and West Riding poetry have emerged throughout this thesis. In both places there is a particular gesture toward cyclicality: of life cycles, of nature and of the tide. This goes some way to accounting for the long histories of the regions, in some cases, with reference to times predating human habitation. These cycles define the lives of the communities living there (the high and low tide in *Changing Tides* is a prominent example of this) as well as continuing in spite of human interaction (this is particularly evident as nature reclaims the abandoned industrial buildings in *Remains of Elmet*). In this way, there is a distinction amongst the work of many of the poets – drawn out with respect to contemporary West Riding poetry in Chapter 4 – between urban (or industrial) and rural poetic places. In Section I this is frequently the contrast between Larkin's populated city and the 'loneliness' of its hinterlands; these same landscapes are repeated by other poets writing in the same region, with 'the pier' – which, notably, extends out of the land and into the river – becoming an additional location for reflection, solace and 'finding out love'.

As well as the landscape, specific events in human history are common ways in which place is defined: thus, throughout almost all of the poems considered in this thesis, there is a tendency to repeat, recreate or resurrect historic moments that were particularly defining to local identity. This ranges from a tendency – beginning from Hughes's *Remains of Elmet* – to position ancestry and personal history alongside

regional events, to very public moments in the region's past. Although the specific events differ between regions, the fact that this is particularly the case for working class identities is a commonality between them, so too that this is frequently a point of decline or disaster. In East Yorkshire, much of the poetry references the once prolific maritime industry, with frequent references to the achievements of William Wilberforce, too. Water is a particularly defining feature here, with the loss of these water-based industries causing much of the deprivation that we observe in the region's poetry. So too, in the West, industrial decline (as well, in *Remains of Elmet*, as the First World War) is presented as the primary factor for the poverty and suffering that was still rife into the twenty-first century, with the loss of both the textiles industry and the collieries, as well as the pivotal Miners' Strikes remaining focal into contemporary work.

Whilst previous scholars have explored the North and its literature in some depth, and there have been several discussions of works originating from Yorkshire, the specific focus on East and West Yorkshire in this research allows the discussion of these areas in much greater detail. This thesis has identified key themes, patterns and areas of interest in poems from these two very specific regions, from the middle of the twentieth century to the present day. This adds detail to existing knowledge of all the discussed poets, particularly those studies pertaining to place, intertextualities or influence in their work; figuratively mapping these poems onto their regions also provides greater knowledge for cultural and heritage studies of and within the two regions, too. Similarly, whilst there have been short discussions of both the relationship between Larkin and Hughes's poetry and other works from their regions, these are presented here side-by-side, and at significantly greater length. Those poets coming after Larkin and Hughes in their respective regions are no less poets of their own individual merit, of course; as well as exploring their relationship to their literary ancestors, this thesis discussed their work in its own right too, to determine each individual's specific and sometimes unique methods of writing within and about their Yorkshire homes.

Sean O'Brien, then, is surely right: whilst this study cannot make claims for the rest of the north, Yorkshire certainly '*is* poetry'. From Larkin and Hughes to Mort, Abbott, Foster and Rhodes, poetry is a versatile form widely adopted to write *in* and *about* Yorkshire. Perhaps most interesting is the variety of ways in which regional poetry is employed here: to describe and sustain personal and local identity, to represent land-, city- and sky-scapes, to portray home and to suggest notions of difference and periphery. One of the more frequent forms, deeply rooted in history here, is poetry as a political act: thus, the Miners' Strikes, the decline of industry, wartime conscription and Brexit are all discussed with great insight by Yorkshire poets. As Harrison infused mainstream poetry with local voice in *The School of Eloquence*, contemporary regional poets are ensuring that their voices, their politics and their regional interests are equally represented within literature. Larkin and Hughes may still be considered the region's central literary figures, but in 2019 – just as in the 1960s and 70s – poetry remains prolific and powerful in the literature of Yorkshire, from East to West.

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