Striking Legacies:

Place Attachment and the Post-Industrial Landscape in the Poetry of Tony Harrison, Ian Parks & Helen Mort, a Critical and Creative Study

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Abstract

This critical and creative thesis explores the representation of the post-industrial landscape in contemporary poetry. The critical element of this thesis considers the works of Tony Harrison, Ian Parks, and Helen Mort, three contemporary poets from industrial and post-industrial towns and cities in the north of England and interrogates the poet-place relationship in the context of the deindustrialised North of England. The poet-place relationship is considered from a sociological perspective and includes explorations of representations of social class and mobility, contemporary and historic British politics, protest and belonging. This thesis has been developed via a combination of close reading and textual analysis and author interview where possible, in conjunction with consideration of author biography. This is accompanied by a collection of original poetry developed in conversation with this research, and in the context of another industrial and post-industrial town in the northern half of England, Ilkeston, the author's hometown.

Introduction

This thesis is a critical and creative study of place attachment and the post-industrial landscape as it is portrayed in the work of contemporary poets from the northern half of England. The first section of the thesis is a critical exploration of these themes in the poetry of Tony Harrison, Ian Parks, and Helen Mort. This is then followed by a collection of original poetry developed in conversation with the themes and ideas explored in the critical component, and centred on Ilkeston, my hometown, between the cities of Nottingham and Derby.

It is important to establish definitions – not least in the case of the term 'post-industrial', which is commonly but often vaguely understood, and can be applied correctly in a multitude of contexts. I am using the term 'post-industrial society' as it is used by sociologist Daniel Bell in his 1973 book, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*.[1] This definition predates almost all of the poetry considered in this thesis, and the collapse of British industry in the late 1970s and 1980s, which colours so much of the work of Harrison, Parks and Mort, as well as myself. However, it provides a fitting context for that work. Bell discusses the movement towards what Ralf Dahrendorf deems a 'post-capitalist' society, which Bell explains as such:[2]

> It is post-capitalist society, in short, because relation to the instrument of production no longer decides dominance or power or privilege in society. Economic or property relations, while still generating their own conflicts, no longer carry over or become generalized as the major center of conflict in society. Who then constitutes the ruling class of post-capitalist society? […] while there may be managerial or capitalist elites, real power is in the hands of the governmental elites. […] conflicts occur primarily in the political arena; changes are introduced or prevented by the government elites; and when managerial or capitalist elites seek to exercise power outside their domains, they do so by seeking to influence governmental elites.[3]

[1] Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
[2] Ralf Dahrendorf, *Between Social Theory and Political Practice* (Gewerbestrasse: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).
[3] Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, pp. 51-52.

The term, thus defined, has been used in describing much of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century industrial history of England and Britain. Whilst Bell's definition itself precedes the dawn of the post-industrial society, it is one that has persisted and that is frequently deferred to: in his 2008 publication, *Three Lectures on Post-Industrial Society*, Daniel Cohen points to Bell's definition as one that prevails.[4] Cohen also states that '[t]he capitalism of the twentieth century was constructed around a central figure: the industrial firm […]. Twenty-first century capitalism is engaged in systematically dismantling that industrial society.'[5] In Britain, many factors regarding this shift can be traced to the 1979-1997 Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, and especially to the 1980s. As Huw Benyon notes, '[a]rguably the greatest impact of the Thatcher governments lay in the weakening of the trade unions and the fundamental alteration of the framework of industrial relations.'[6] This fundamental alteration, alongside the Thatcher government's appetite for continued privatisation, have culminated in Britain's current situation as a post-industrial society, which is, as Cohen continues, 'to describe the world by what it no longer is (the industrial society) rather than what it has become.'[7] This forms the backdrop to much of the poetry discussed in this thesis: Harrison and Parks lived through it as adults; Mort and I have lived with that legacy as a backdrop to our lives and writing, and all four of us have consciously written it into our work. Considering where each of us grew up and call home – Leeds (and more recently Newcastle) for Harrison, Mexborough for Parks, Chesterfield for Mort, and Ilkeston for me - this hardly could have been otherwise.

[4] Daniel Cohen, *Three Lectures on Post-Industrial Society* trans. by William McCuaig (Cambridge, MI: MIT Press, 2008), p. 1.
[5] Daniel Cohen, *Three Lectures on Post-Industrial Society*, pp. 1-2.
[6] Huw Benyon, 'Still too much socialism in Britain: The legacy of Margaret Thatcher', *Industrial Relations Journal* (2014), Vol. 45 (3), 214-233 (p. 216).
[7] Cohen, *Three Lectures on Post-Industrial Society*, p. 3.

‘Place attachment’ is a term used to define the relationship between an individual and a place of specific, deep-rooted importance to them. As Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low discuss:

> The fundamental assumption of our and others' analyses of place attachment is that it is a complex phenomenon that incorporates several aspects of people-place bonding. This means that place attachment has many inseparable, integral, and mutually defining features, qualities, or properties; it is not composed of separate or independent parts, components, dimensions or factors.[8]

As a phenomenological concept, place attachment can present in many ways and in varying degrees; as Lea Sebastien discusses, ‘[p]lace offers a relational understanding where people and their environments are products of their various connections rather than of some essential self ’.[9] The emphasis of the critical portion of this work will be on the relationships between the poets and their birthplaces and the places in which they grew up, exploring how those relationships, connections, and, by extension, attachments, are manifest in their poetry.

All three poets discussed in the critical portion of the thesis were, like me, born and raised in industrial towns and cities in the northern half of England, north of any reasonable conception of the English ‘north-south divide’, at different stages of the decline of British industry. These poets will be explored sequentially and generationally, from oldest to youngest, and from the earliest published to the most recent. Of course, all four of us have been writing consecutively in more recent years. Nonetheless, it is intended that this approach will allow more easily for developing influences to be shown from one poet to another, and for historical events to remain comparatively consecutive in presentation, without too much need for cross-referencing.

The first chapter focuses on the work of Tony Harrison. Born in Leeds in 1937, he is the oldest of the poets explored here, and his life and career have coincided with the tail-end

[8] Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low, ‘Place Attachment: A Conceptual Inquiry’, *Place Attachment* ed. by Irwin Altman, and Setha M. Low (New York: Springer, 1992), p. 3.
[9] Lea Sebastien, ‘The Power of Place in Understanding Attachments and Meanings’, *Geoforum,* 108, 2020, 204-216 (p. 206).

of the industrial boom and the following decline and movement towards a post-industrial society. This chapter explores representations of place in Harrison's poetry, focusing on Harrison's discussions and presentations of Leeds and its people. Harrison's poetry is, as Agata G. Handley notes, 'rooted in the experience of a man who came out of the working class of Leeds and who, avowedly, became a poet and a stranger to his own community'.[10] Yet, despite this estrangement, Harrison has consistently and repeatedly referenced his working-class heritage throughout his career, and this chapter will also consider his use of poetry as a vehicle for promotion of social change and as discussion of class identity and inequality.

Chapter two focuses on the same themes in the poetry of Ian Parks, who was born in 1961 in the mining town of Mexborough, South Yorkshire, less than ten miles each way from the bigger industrial towns of Doncaster, Rotherham and Barnsley. Parks, the son of a miner, has maintained strong local links, and in 2009 he returned to live in the house in which he was born. Parks' explorations of place, and his recurring interest in representing working-class history in his poetry, are main points of focus in this chapter, which considers the impact of community on the expression of identity, and the poet's complex sense of belonging. As Rory Waterman notes:

> Parks took advantage of opportunities that had not been open to his forebears to 'better' himself, and became of all things that 'crude four-letter word', as Harrison's alter-ego put it in his poem 'v.': a poet. And in so doing, he inadvertently distanced himself from the people he had grown up among and had most loved.[11]

This 4000-word essay, published in *Dark Horse,* is the only academic criticism of Parks' work to date, aside from some book reviews and blog posts. Waterman focuses on themes allied to those I explore in the second chapter of this thesis, and therefore his essay is referred to on several occasions. However, Waterman's essay is short, and concentrates on one collection.

[10] Agata G. Handley, 'On (Not) Being Milton: Tony Harrison's Liminal Voice', *Text Matters*, 2016, 6 (6), 276-290 (p. 276).
[11] Rory Waterman, ''I didn't qualify': Ian Parks, Mexborough and the Quest for Identity', *Dark Horse*, pp. 36-42, p. 36.

Moreover, while Waterman's essay touches on Parks' indebtedness to Harrison, a more detailed analysis, exploring his interconnectedness with other poets and poetries, is overdue.

Chapter Two seeks to open up the conversation surrounding Parks' depiction of place. Like Harrison, Parks has frequently returned to his hometown in his poetry, exploring his working-class background and the community in which he was raised. In this thesis, he is situated as a pivot between the older Harrison and the younger Helen Mort and myself, and his debt to Harrison and the indebtedness of Mort and myself to Parks is not overlooked, but foregrounded and demonstrated.

The third critical chapter of this thesis considers the poetry of Helen Mort, who was born in 1984 and who grew up in Chesterfield, north Derbyshire, close to the South Yorkshire industrial city of Sheffield. Most of this chapter concentrates on Mort's debut collection, *Division Street*: in recent years, Mort's work has moved away from the themes focused on in this thesis, although her recent fiction in particular demonstrates that her home environs remain integral to her creative consciousness.[12] Of Mort's debut collection, Chloe Charalambous states: '*Division Street* witnesses Mort's guilt as she crosses the invisible picket line of the "gilded College gate", betraying her Northern hometown'.[13] The long poem 'Scab', among others, finds the speaker exploring the legacy of a deindustrialisation she has only experienced second hand, against a backdrop of studying and returning to her hometown. Although a few years younger than Mort, I share many of these concerns in my life and poetry. I was born in 1989 in the former mining town of Ilkeston, Derbyshire, still live in the town, have undertaken three degrees at two institutions, and have felt both the pull of my town and the pull away from it. Also, like these poets, I too was a first-generation undergraduate in both my immediate and extended family. The thesis

[12] Helen Mort, *Division Street* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013); Helen Mort, *Black Car Burning* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2019). The novel is set on the eastern side of the Pennines.
[13] Chloe Charalambous, 'Division Street', *DURA Dundee*, 2013, https://dura-dundee.org.uk/2013/12/29/division-street/ [accessed 05/02/2022].

thus concludes with a portfolio of my own poetry, and a discussion of it in the contexts of the post-industrial, place attachment, and the work of the three poets explored in the critical component.

This thesis contributes to, and is in dialogue with, the already extensive scholarship on the work of Harrison. However, it is the first study to consider his poetry alongside that of Parks and Mort, and the first scholarship to interrogate the work of Parks and Mort at length. In the case of Mort, this might be because she is still young, and has only published two full-length collections to date, with (at the time of writing) a third forthcoming later in 2022. Parks, on the other hand, is as forgotten in literary scholarship as he is influential on poets such as Mort and myself. As such, one interest of this study is recovery research: playing a role in restoring Parks to his rightful place in the modern canon of northern English poets of place. Moreover, it the first study to consider any of these poets specifically in the context of literary geography. As Neal Alexander and David Cooper discuss, 'one conspicuous feature of the spatial turn in literary studies is a tendency to privilege prose fiction and non-fiction over other kinds of writing, particularly in work on the modern and contemporary periods.'[14]

The final critical chapter of this thesis serves as both conclusion to the creative element, and to the thesis as a whole. In this concluding section, the commonalities identified within the works of the poets discussed will be considered alongside a portfolio of my own creative work, which has been developed in conversation with the research presented in the critical component. In this final chapter, the relationship between my own geographical roots and the development of the poetry will be explored. As the granddaughter of a (former) miner, raised in a working-class family in a former mining town in the East Midlands, there are many parallels with the experiences of the poets named here, and that town and upbringing, directly

[14] Neal Alexander and David Cooper, 'Introduction' in *Poetry and Geography: Place and Space in Post-War Poetry* ed. By Neal Alexander and David Cooper (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.2.

and contextually, are the focus of the poems presented in the portfolio. The intention is not to present Harrison, Parks, Mort and myself as a sole lineage of 'northern' poetry of post-industrial place, but it is to suggest a lineage does exist. Many other poets also belong to this lineage. Some of these poets are also discussed, briefly, at points in this thesis, and it is intended that further work exploring such poets and their connection to the themes of this thesis will be enabled and encouraged by the present thesis – as well as more poetry exploring post-industrial legacies and place attachment.

I. *a poet then a pit*: Heritage, Community, and Industrial Decline in the Poetry of Tony Harrison

Born in 1937, Tony Harrison grew up in a working-class family in wartime and immediately post-war Leeds. From the outset of his career, Harrison has written for stage, screen, and print, although he rebukes the idea that he is anything other than a poet, saying of his work that 'Poetry is all I write'.[1] And indeed, Harrison has made an illustrious career from this, as Neil Astley states:

> [Harrison] is one of the few poets who makes a living entirely from poetry, something he always wanted to achieve in order to prove to himself and to his working-class parents that writing poetry was as much of a proper job as being a baker (like his father) or a teacher (what his mother wanted him to become to make use of his education), and it is significant that he has done this not by relying on fellowships, grants or other handouts, nor resorting to literary journalism.[2]

This career has coincided with a period of declining industry in the United Kingdom, with Harrison's native West Yorkshire being one of the localities most economically impacted by this decline. Harrison has frequently documented the results of this in his poetry, with what is arguably his most famous poem, *v.*,[3] being written in response to the Miners' Strikes of 1984-5.

Throughout his career, Harrison has been acutely aware of the fine line he treads between classes, or more precisely between the working-class community in which he grew up and the educated, literary circles in which his work receives most of its acclaim. As John Haffenden states, '[Harrison gratifies] that sector of society which is educated to read literature,

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[1] Tony Harrison in Neil Astley, 'The Wizard of [Uz]' in *Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies I: Tony Harrison* ed. by Neil Astley (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1991), pp. 10-13 (p. 10).
[2] Astley, 'The Wizard of [Uz]', p. 10.
[3] Tony Harrison, *v.* (Hexham: Bloodaxe Books, 1985).

but at the same time [he disabuses] it of its expectations.'[4] Harrison has claimed that this is a conscious effort to disrupt, saying of his own work:

> I would say that where the poems seem to become most satisfying in a "literary way" to the readers of poetry, it is precisely at those moments that I want to remind them that there is a vast group of people who don't read poetry, and to remind them of the privilege of their literacy. That is certainly a very determined strategy, consciously and artfully subversive in that sense.[5]

It is this 'consciously and artfully subversive' awareness within his work that, in particular, earns Harrison his place within this thesis, and this chapter will explore the way in which Harrison's work presents his often complicated relationship with his hometown and the people associated with it. Here, Harrison's poetry will be explored, for the most part, in chronological order of publication and, despite Harrison's varied career as a poet and verse-dramatist, the focus will be on his poetry written for the page, as is also the case both for my study of Ian Parks and Helen Mort.

Harrison's debut pamphlet, *Earthworks,*[6] was published in 1965 by Northern House, a publisher founded at the University of Leeds, and which published Harrison's work alongside several other university alumni. The title of this pamphlet suggests that depictions of class struggle have been a concern of Harrison's poetry from the outset. The modern definition of the word is, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* puts it, '[t]he action or process of excavating earth, esp. in civil engineering work; an instance of this. Also: an embankment or other structure made of earth as a result of this process.'[7] In Old English, however, an 'earthwork' was '[a] task in working the land, an agricultural labour.'[8] An 'earthwork', then, can be an act of labour, or the impression left on the land by an act of labour, often revealing the traces left

[4] John Haffenden, 'Interview with Tony Harrison', *Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies I: Tony Harrison* ed. by Neil Astley (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1991), p. 231.
[5] Tony Harrison in John Haffenden, *Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies I: Tony Harrison,* p. 231.
[6] Tony Harrison, *Earthworks* (Manchester: Northern House, 1964).
[7] The Oxford English Dictionary, *Earthwork* (2022) <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/59062?redirectedFrom=earthwork#eid> [accessed 9 August 2022].
[8] The Oxford English Dictionary, *Earthworks* (2022).

behind by a community. This title speaks to the durability and symbiotic nature of the person-place relationship, of the landscape changed by the actions of the individual, but also of the landscape changing the individual, and the potential for the apparently permanent to become obsolete.

Earthworks includes 'The Flat Dweller's Revolt',[9] a reflection on humanity's removal from the natural world. Of the nine poems in this early pamphlet, this is the only one explicitly to mention his hometown of Leeds as the setting, something that would become a common thread in his debut full-length collection. In many ways, 'The Flat Dweller's Revolt' could be considered to pre-empt *v.*: both poems use quatrains of iambic pentameter with interlocking rhyme, present a less salubrious protagonist, and share a setting of an unglamorous city cemetery in which 'ageing sons laid flowers on one stone'. [10] In 'The Flat Dweller's Revolt', Harrison is laying much of the ground for his imminent development as a poet of Leeds and its characters, as well as establishing what would later become known as his signature style formally. As Rosemary Burton discusses, '[a]t a time when few poets write formally, metrically and in rhyme, Harrison has found a way to rehabilitate such suspect techniques and to reconcile formality with the rhythms of everyday speech'.[11] This has been consistent since the outset of his career.

As is common in Harrison's work, the title plays on semantic ambiguities: in this case, the dual interpretation of the word 'revolt', with both the ideas of revulsion and revolution associated with the term explored in its lines. The poem, then, could be titled to depict the speaker's repulsion, or a desire for revolution, an army of 'risen men' led by the flat dweller, reclaiming 'the length and breadth of Leeds'.[12] The poem opens with the speaker expressing

[9] Tony Harrison, *Collected Poems* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 3.
[10] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 3.
[11] Rosemary Burton, 'Tony Harrison: An Introduction'in *Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies I: Tony Harrison* ed. by Neil Astley (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1991) pp. 14-31 (p. 14).
[12] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 3.

his revulsion at his living conditions: '[d]ogs in mangers feel, he thought, like this'.[13] In an attempt to escape this feeling, the speaker takes a walk in his local environment, '[h]is keeling mind: he had to go and walk'.[14] His journey is one on which he seeks to 'reclaim' the land from those who have 'cultivated' it; forced by circumstance into cramped living quarters, a space in which neither he nor his partner are able to be fully comfortable, for fear of disturbing neighbours. Instead, their actions mirror their living environment: '[t]heir claustrophobic actions, hers and his, | their guarded actions louder than their words'[15] and thus begins his metaphorical deliberation on class revolution, in which the human subject of the poem is shown to express the desire for seeds of 'London Pride'[16] (a purple-flowered weed) to thrive amongst the cultivated lawns and stand '[l]ike risen men'.[17] This wild and unruly weed is evocative of the working classes, given Harrison's use of 'common earth' and the subject wishing to see them take back the open spaces that are theirs by right.[18]

Written in free indirect discourse, the poem blurs the line between Harrison and his subject, although unlike Harrison (who was twenty-seven years of age at the time of the poem's publication), the subject is, it is implied, an older gentleman: his is an 'autumnal love'.[19] Harrison's character, like Philip Larkin's speaker in 'Annus Mirabilis' who mourns that the sexual revolution began 'rather late for me',[20] has missed the opportunity to enjoy the newfound freedoms of the sexual revolution, the world of youth beyond and behind him, and in what is perhaps bitterness, wishes pregnancy on the women doing so; he beseeches the moon to 'shine on insured love [and] break the dykes of all protected brides'.[21] The moon is a

[13] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 3.
[14] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 3.
[15] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 3.
[16] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 3.
[17] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 3.
[18] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 3.
[19] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 3.
[20] Philip Larkin, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2003), p. 119.
[21] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 3.

common symbol of madness, and combined with the speaker's 'keeling mind',[22] this request of it to observe those engaging in intercourse using contraception, and ensure that their contraception will fail, could stem from some form of insanity arising from his living conditions. This is an expression of the speaker's desire to see these women tamed into dutiful roles and, as Sandie Byrne points out, this poem depicts 'women enclosed in, and enclosing men in […] a world of silences, repression, and still-births'.[23]

I have already noted some of the parallels between 'The Flat Dweller's Revolt' and *v.*, although *v.* is by no means the only poem of Harrison's to continue the development of both the form and content established in this early poem. In 1970, six years after the publication of *Earthworks,* Harrison published his debut collection, *The Loiners.*[24] The collection takes its name from the demonym for the people of Leeds, and indeed, the characters in this collection are all apparently united by this location. David Storey states that '[p]ersonal or family identity intersects with place both in the sense of home as the domain of a "private" domestic life and a rootedness within a locality.'[25] Given this, Harrison's choice to populate his poetic debut with the places and people that were familiar to him is a natural one, considering that the poet has both an extensive familial connection to Leeds and – despite his increased removal from some peers through education – considerable feelings of local belonging. As he has put it, 'I had a very loving, rooted upbringing. Education came in to disrupt that loving group and I've been trying to make new wholes out of that disruption ever since.'[26] Moreover, his identity has been shaped by his relationship to Leeds, and it is the place Harrison most keenly represents in his discussions of class and portrayals of class relations. Leeds was both the location in which he

[22] Harrison, *Collected,* p. 3.
[23] Sandie Byrne, *H, V. & O: The Poetry of Tony Harrison* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 78.
[24] Tony Harrison, *The Loiners* (London: London Magazine Editions, 1970).
[25] David Storey, 'Land, Territory and Identity' *Making Sense of Place: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* ed. by Ian Convery, Gerard Corsane and Peter Davis (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), pp. 11-22 (p. 12).
[26] Tony Harrison in Richard Hoggart, 'In Conversation with Tony Harrison' in *Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies I: Tony Harrison* ed. by Neil Astley (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1991) pp. 36-45, p. 36.

was raised in a working-class family, and where he developed the tools to transcend his environment, having stayed close to home to study at Leeds University, and as Gordon Jack considers, '[f]eelings of belonging tend to be strongest amongst young people who perceive that they have been fully included and accepted within their local community, or who have close connections through local ancestry.'[27] Thus it makes sense that in this first full-length collection Harrison would stick to the old adage, 'write what you know': like D. H. Lawrence's Eastwood and its corollaries in many of his novels, or Alan Sillitoe's working-class Nottingham in his novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning,*[28] for instance, Harrison is a working-class, highly educated writer who creates semi-fictionalised narratives out of the environment he had known best, and has now left, filling them with the local colour only available to a native, and the unadorned but no less felt passion for place common to a recent export.

The Loiners opens with 'Thomas Campney and the Copernican System' a character study of the man from whom Harrison purchased his first books.[29] Campney would travel the streets of Leeds pushing a cart full of items for sale, hunched over by a curving spine from pushing his cart of books. As Rory Waterman notes, '[the] grim irony is not only that Campney associates heft – crippling weight – with added value, but also that he carts around knowledge that, in a kinder world, might have saved him.'[30] But Campney's world is anything but kind, and as the penultimate stanza tells us, 'just one | More turn of the earth, those knees will crack | And he will turn his warped spine on the sun.'[31] His fate is sealed, and Harrison clearly blames Leeds itself for his sad demise – but it is Harrison pointing the finger of blame, not Campney:

[27] Gordon Jack, 'Place Matters: The Significance of Place Attachments for Children's Well-Being', *The British Journal of Social Work*, 40 (3), 2010, 755-771 (p. 758).
[28] Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (London: Harper Collins, 1958).
[29] Harrison, *Collected*, p.15; Rosemary Burton, 'Tony Harrison: An Introduction', *Tony Harrison* ed. Neil Astley (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1991), pp. 14-31 (p. 28).
[30] Rory Waterman, 'Oh So Loinerly' in *British Literature in Transition: 1960-1980 Flower Power* ed. by Kate McLoughlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 275-288 (p. 277).
[31] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 16.

even Campney's dreamscape is '[s]wathed in luminous smokes like factories […] in a dark, Leeds sky.'[32] For him, Leeds is the world, and just as he is ignorant regarding the true cause of his ailments, he is unaware of the role his home has had in perpetuating his suffering.

Campney is far from the only character in *The Loiners* to suffer. In the second poem in the collection, 'Ginger's Friday',[33] the eponymous child Ginger (or 'John') is the focus of the poem, which centres on his confession to the priest. He is doing as he thinks he should, and confessing what he understands might be his 'sins'. In his confession he details his first masturbation, explaining how he witnessed his neighbours, 'Mrs Daley, all bare on her knees. | Before her husband straddled in his shirt'.[34] This act of juvenile voyeurism, and Ginger's subsequent confessing to it, results in a punishment of 'broad, black belts' to his back on his return home.[35] The priest may or may not be a conduit to the Lord, but he evidently provides a hotline to the boy's parents.

The poem opens with the rather bright and summery olfactory imagery of '[s]trawberries bubbling in great vats | At Sunny Sunglow's [wafting] down the aisle'.[36] Here, Harrison immediately places the poem in the heart of industrial Leeds, and the choice of fruit also provides a seasonal timeframe for those in the know, as Sunglow's manufactured strawberry jam in the late spring and early summer months. Sunglow's was a decidedly Leeds brand, named for the sunshine on the patch of land that would eventually house its manufacturing plant; and although the company eventually acquired additional premises nationally, it maintained an identity as a Leeds brand until its absorption by Robinson's and Hartley's.[37]

[32] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 15.
[33] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 17.
[34] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 17.
[35] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 17.
[36] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 17.
[37] Moorhouse History, http://www.moorehousehistory.co.uk/moorehousejam [accessed 30th May 2020].

Whilst this is a character poem and not ostensibly autobiographical, John's desire to masturbate for the first time and subsequent surprise at having 'spurted sticky stuff' is provoked by his witnessing his neighbours having sex 'from his attic bedroom',[38] an image returned to in the much more obviously autobiographical 'Me, Tarzan',[39] from the later *The School of Eloquence*. Although also written in third person, 'Me, Tarzan' engages with Harrison's childhood separation from his peers at grammar school, and a young Harrison 'shoves the frosted attic skylight, shouts: || Ah bloody can't ah've gorra Latin prose.'[40] This recurrence of the attic room is significant as it implies repeated attachment to Harrison's own childhood room; Ginger might not be Harrison, but he also, slightly unusually, has an attic bedroom, and shares a confusion with the world and its sudden impacts on him that Harrison gives to his own younger self in the later poem. Certainly, it is not a stretch to say Harrison is likely bringing his own childhood to bear, to some extent, in his depiction of Ginger, and he would later return to similar feelings and motifs in exploring his own experiences. As Jerry M. Burger considers, 'people develop emotional attachments to their former home because they often think of that home as an extension of their self-concept. Put another way, the places where we live become a part of who we are.'[41] Harrison's use of the urban imaginary in 'Ginger's Friday' shifts the poem from being purely anecdotal to being subtly and tacitly personal: to some extent, at least, this is a boy growing up in an environment that is a facsimile of the one the poet had known.

'Allotments',[42] the fourth poem in the collection, is the first poem in *The Loiners* in which the protagonist is the first-person speaker. The poem presents a teenaged speaker who recalls being interrupted mid-coitus in 'the graveyards of Leeds 2',[43] a postal district that is just

[38] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 17.
[39] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 126.
[40] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 126.
[41] Jerry M. Burger, *Returning Home: Reconnecting with our Childhoods* (Maryland: Rowan and Littlefield, 2011), p. 22.
[42] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 20.
[43] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 20.

a few miles across suburban Leeds from the one in which *v.* would be set over a decade later. The speaker of this poem and the alter-ego of *v.* share broadly the same frustrations. In any case, in 'Allotments' we are shown the Leeds of Harrison's childhood and early adolescence, and as the poem tells us, '[i]n Leeds it was never *Who* or *When* but *Where*', a preoccupation that will permeate Harrison's poetry for at least the next quarter-century.[44] Whilst the collection spans many locations (Marseilles in 'The Railroad Herides';[45] Africa in 'The White Queen',[46] 'The Heart of Darkness',[47] and 'The Songs of The PWD Man';[48] Prague in 'Prague Spring' and probably also 'The Bedbug';[49] Newcastle in 'Newcastle is Peru';[50] and Durham, in a poem using that city's name for its title), it comes back to Leeds, and all of its characters are 'Loiners' insofar as the book title claims them to be.[51] With his first collection, Harrison established himself as a poet of place, and of the people that inhabit those places, and made Leeds the omphalos of his poetic world.

Amongst these fictionalised narratives, Harrison's presence is felt keenly throughout, either as observer, narrator, or indeed character. The 'Loiner' of 'Newcastle is Peru' is Harrison himself: he writes, '[a]fter Nigeria and Prague I come | back near where I started from', sketching details of a journey he had himself taken in recent years as he travelled for work.[52] The poem concerns itself with various experiences of life overseas, the passage of time in relation to the Earth's movement, and aspects of childhood; for Harrison, these revolutions move him farther from Leeds, embodied in the fairground ride he remembers from his youth, from which 'all the known Leeds landmarks blur | to something dark and circular.'[53] The farther

[44] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 20.
[45] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 30.
[46] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 23.
[47] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 41.
[48] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 44.
[49] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 60.
[50] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 64.
[51] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 70.
[52] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 64.
[53] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 65.

Harrison gets from Leeds and his roots – both geographically and emotionally – the harder it becomes for him readily to recognise the opulence or decadence in things he now considers commonplace. And yet his mind returns to his hometown so that it remains on the edge of vision, just as he has physically returned to another industrial city in the north of England, Newcastle: relatively close to Leeds and the only major English city to the north, but also utterly distinct from it.

Evidently, from the beginning, family, as well as place and belonging, has been a significant concern in Harrison's poetry: his second collection, *from the School of Eloquence,*[54] focuses largely on his parents, and opens with the poem 'Heredity',[55] a quatrain in what had by now become Harrison's most familiar form of interlocking rhymed pentameter:

> *How you became a poet's a mystery!*
> *Wherever did you get your talent from?*
> I say: *I had two uncles, Joe and Harry –*
> *one was a stammerer, the other dumb.*[56]

This poem works as an epigraph, standing over this collection, and whilst it explores Harrison's poetic heritage humorously, it is not without serious implications. Harrison says of this:

> I was very conscious at the same time as I was being shepherded towards [...] great founts of eloquence that I had a family about me with an uncle who stammered and an uncle who was dumb, and others who were afflicted with a metaphorical dumbness, and lack of socially confident articulation.[57]

The suggestion that Harrison's poetic 'talent' is an imperative and an inheritance from the voiceless is a leitmotif of the collection. Also, in saying his poetic gift was bestowed upon him by his uncles, one of whom was 'a stammerer' and the other 'dumb', Harrison presents his work as a job, and one he must labour over; as the collection's title suggests, eloquence is learned, studied. By the same token, this poem also dismisses the notion of birth-right or

[54] Tony Harrison, *from the School of Eloquence and Other Poems* (London: Rex Collings, 1978).
[55] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 121.
[56] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 121.
[57] Tony Harrison, 'Facing Up To The Muses' in *Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies 1: Tony Harrison* ed. by Neil Astley, pp. 429–54 (pp. 436–37).

entitlement, that education is the privilege of the rich; in providing this humorous answer to the query of the origin of his skill, Harrison aligns his gift not with those who provided his education, but with those who raised and loved him within his wider family unit, presenting himself primarily as a voice for those who, due to their own heritage or circumstance, have been denied one.

Joe Kelleher summarises that *from the School of Eloquence* is a collection concerned with 'moving away from home, of making a home of one's own, of measuring the ways one returns to the places that have formed one, and taking the measure of the changing self that makes those returns.'[58] Like Harrison's reflection in 'Newcastle is Peru', from *Loiners*, Harrison's second collection brings us back to 'near where [Harrison] started from',[59] but it is a different self that examines the people and places of childhood. Perhaps the most significant event Harrison encounters through the poetry in *from the School of Eloquence*[60] is the loss of his mother, as explored in 'Bookends' ('Baked the day she suddenly dropped dead | we chew it slowly, that last apple pie'),[61] and the impact this loss has on his relationship with his father: '[a] night you need my company to pass | and she's not here to tell us we're alike!'[62] Harrison's return home both in a physical and a literary sense are a result of these events. As Burger notes, '[p]eople visit childhood homes to establish a sense of connection with their past, to deal with current crises and concerns, and to work on issues from the past that won't go away.'[63] For Harrison, the death of his mother provides a practical reason for his return, and also forces him to both reflect on his past at home in Leeds, and to confront the emotional distance between

[58] Harrison, *from the School of Eloquence*; Joe Kelleher, *Writers and Their Work: Tony Harrison* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers, 1996), p. 1.
[59] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 9.
[60] Harrison, *From the School of Eloquence.*
[61] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 137.
[62] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 137.
[63] Burger, *Returning Home*, p. 18.

himself and his father: '[b]ack in our silences and sullen looks, | for all the scotch we drink, what's still between 's | not the thirty or so years, but books, books, books.'[64]

In the literal sense, Harrison keenly knows his place as a boy done good from a working-class suburb of Leeds, even though he has essentially left his most obvious class constraints and hometown both behind. Yet in the other sense of the phrase, he doesn't know his place at all, as Stan Smith discusses:

> In the class-ridden culture of postwar Britain, to know one's place was to accept subaltern status, to acknowledge subordination and inferiority - to be, as Heaney puts it 'biddable and unforthcoming', not rebelling against a whole cultural system that assigns individuals their places in the social hierarchy, but rather coming, as Heaney confesses, to 'hate where I was born| hate everything that made me.'[65]

In stark contrast to Harrison's work as a playwright and translator, which has predominantly been developed through translations and interpretations of Greek Classics, Harrison's poetry has become an arena in which he, as he puts it, uses 'me own name and me own voice'.[66] This commitment to authenticity allows Harrison to tread the line between rebelling against the established social hierarchy, and celebrating his working-class background, even though he also has no desire to romanticise it. This social conscience has been a driving force throughout his career, and it is perhaps this unwillingness to denounce his working-class background, choosing instead to use much of his poetry as a vehicle to explore the stark differences between his beginnings and his professional success, that provokes comments such as those from Alan Brownjohn in *Encounter*, who stated that Harrison's poems of the 1970s bore 'his very own brand of chip-on-the-shoulder coarseness'.[67]

One example of this 'chip-on-the-shoulder coarseness' can be found in 'Them & [uz]',[68] which Harrison dedicated to Professor Richard Hoggart. That this pair of sixteen-line

[64] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 137.
[65] Stan Smith, *Poetry and Displacement* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 6.
[66] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 133-134.
[67] Alan Brownjohn, 'The Fascination of What's Difficult', *Encounter*, 70.3 (March 1979), p. 64.
[68] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 133-134.

Meredithian sonnets, numbered 'I' and 'II', should be dedicated to a fellow University of Leeds alumnus, with similar familial beginnings to the poet, is fitting, especially given that Hoggart is perhaps best known for his defence of both profanity and the working-class dialectic in Lawrence's controversial classic *Lady Chatterley's Lover*,[69] in the *Regina v. Penguin* 1960 obscenity trial. It should also be noted that Hoggart's most significant work is *The Uses of Literacy*,[70] a hugely popular sociological study on the impact of media on working-class life. Of Harrison, Hoggart states:

> Most of his Masters at Leeds Grammar School, the poshest school in town – to which he won a scholarship, would have agreed that Tony Harrison's childhood experiences were not the stuff of literature, just as they thought his accent wasn't good enough for reciting Keats or taking Major roles in Shakespeare.[71]

It is clear from much of his writing that Harrison's working-class Leeds accent was the cause of many rebukes throughout his education, and the poem opens with a declaration of 'αἰαῖ',[72] before the sounds are repeated as Yorkshire dialect, 'ay, ay !'. These opening four syllables, in effect, exemplify the two halves of Harrison – the working-class background and family life, and the extensive, privileged education the Education Act (1944)[73] provided him, by allowing access to grammar school and the higher education that followed. The remainder of this opening couplet, 'αἰαῖ, ay, ay !... stutterer Demosthenes | gob full of pebbles outshouting seas',[74] continues this balancing of his education and his home life and upbringing, with Harrison comparing himself to the Greek historical figure – knowledge undoubtedly garnered in school – and using the colloquial term 'gob' to do so.[75]

[69] D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (London: Penguin, 1960).
[70] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Routledge, 1957).
[71] Richard Hoggart, 'In Conversation with Tony Harrison', *Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies I: Tony Harrison,* p.37.
[72] Harrison, *Collected,* p. 133.
[73] *The Education Act* (1944).
[74] Harrison, *Collected,* p. 133.
[75] Harrison, *Collected,* p. 133.

In the fourth stanza of the poem's first section, Harrison takes on the voice of the teacher that chastises him, using the phrase 'your speech is in the hands of the Receivers,'[76] apparently a reference to those who use received pronunciation (RP) – young Harrison's accent is to be eradicated by those who know better. The first typed draft of 'Them & [uz]' included the lines 'and POEtry all (even cockney Keats) | dubbed into bland RP',[77] implying the poet's view on the eradication of the dialectic, in literature and beyond, but this gilds the lily: the point is implied strongly enough without those lines and Harrison was right to change them for the finished poem. Sue Edney suggests that 'dialect offers a medium for the expression of ownership of place and also of [the writer's] creative productions that was […] diluted, in Standard English,'[78] received pronunciation broadly being the spoken counterpart to standard English. For Harrison this is also true, although his use of dialect also rejects the ideal that Standard English or received pronunciation are superior to regional speech, concluding in the second sonnet of the pair that 'You can tell the receivers where to go'.[79]

The opening couplet of part II, 'So right, yer buggers, then! We'll occupy | your lousy leasehold Poetry' mirrors the 'we' used by Harrison's teacher in part I, [80] although in this repetition it is turned against him – whilst the teacher may speak for the upper classes and the aspirant social climbers below them in a rigid conception of the class system, Harrison is also not alone. The speaker's assertion that '[p]oetry' is their 'lousy leasehold', suggests that it is not owned by the rich and educated permanently, although they may have claimed it as a necessary vehicle for 'high art' in modern times – it is after all only a leasehold, and not a permanent arrangement, and, indeed, Harrison's frequent use of 'traditional' elements of poetic form – most notably interlocking rhymed couplets and iambic pentameter – shows more than

[76] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 133.
[77] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 133; Brotherton Archive BC MS 20C Tony Harrison/01
[78] Sue Edney, 'Printed Voices: Dialect and Diversity in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Lancashire'in *Place, Writing and Voice in Oral History* ed. by Shelley Trower, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 60.
[79] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 134.
[80] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 134.

simply a preference for a style of writing; in avoiding experimental or radical contemporary forms, Harrison ensures that the radicality of his poetry remains solely in its content. In utilising the aspects of poetry deemed most synonymous with high art and juxtaposing this against both working-class subjects and dialect, Harrison has ensured that, for him at least, poetry is an 'occupation', in both senses of the word.

In the third stanza of part II, Harrison declares that 'You can tell the Receivers where to go | (and not aspirate it) once you know',[81] 'aspirate' here referring to the percussive action of the breath in received pronunciation, but also linking to 'aspiration' in the sense of hoping for better; the perception often being that belonging to the upper or middle classes is somehow aspirational is therefore, if tangentially, dismissed. Education and aspiration are different things and being educated need not mean leaving your class or your heritage behind – a sentiment Harrison would express again in *v.*, in the voice of his working-class Leeds United-supporting Loiner alterego:

> *Aspirations, cunt! Folk on t'fucking dole*
> *'ave got about as much scope to aspire*
> *above the shit they're dumped in, cunt, as coal*
> *aspires to be chucked on t'fucking fire.*[82]

Ultimately, Harrison found his love of literature and language developed in grammar school, in spite of the issues faced when reading aloud: 'I chewed up Littererchewer and spat the bones | into the lap of dozing Daniel Jones'. Like Demosthenes practicing oration with pebbles in his mouth,[83] Harrison did not let his teacher's mockery keep him from his interests, suggesting that he outperformed his peers – surely not an understatement given the illustrious career he went on to have in literature. Here, Harrison's phonetically colloquial spelling of 'Literature' also links back to the opening image of Demosthenes, with Harrison's playful inclusion of 'chew'.

[81] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 134.
[82] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 270.
[83] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 133.

In his drafting notes for the poem, the poet considered various colloquialised spellings and ultimately disregarded 'literachur' and '-chooa' as options, choosing instead the pun.[84]

In part II of the sequence, Harrison concludes that '[m]y first mention in the *Times* | automatically made Tony Anthony!' highlighting Harrison's feelings that the British media and society perpetuated the erasure of the working-classes from positions of influence: 'Tony' has working class connotations that 'Anthony' does not.[85] An unused couplet from the drafts also mentions his name (which is a strong focal point throughout both sonnets), stating that Tony is not a nickname, but that 'it's long for Tone'.[86] Sandie Byrne states that:

> Harrison's poetry is not concerned solely with physical, social, and political disablement – the dumb, the gagged, the inarticulate and the ineloquent – but shows even native speakers of Standard English silenced, or at least severely restricted in the carrying power of their words, by the curtailing of freedom of expression and by the non-existence of an audience, or a medium to reach an audience.[87]

Harrison speaks not *for* the working-classes, but from a place of understanding. He is well aware of his status outside of the class in which he was raised; as he states in 'Turns',[88] describing himself in young adulthood, 'I thought it made me look more "working class" | (as if a bit of chequered cloth could bridge that gap!)'.[89] Whilst he is aware of the chasm that separates him from his background, he still wants to signify where he came from. In doing so, Harrison highlights his roots to those reading his work, showing that any criticism or observation of working-class life is coming from a place of experience and observation, not one of superiority or outside authority. As Rosemary Burton considers:

> Education, poetry, articulacy – these were powerful weapons which for too long had been in the hands of others. Harrison fraternised with the enemy, schooled himself in the use of their armoury and, equipped with an education, several languages, and a hard-

[84] Brotherton Archive BC MS 20C Tony Harrison/01.
[85] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 134.
[86] Brotherton Archive BC MS 20C Tony Harrison/01.
[87] Sandie Byrne, *H, V. & O: The Poetry of Tony Harrison* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 56-57.
[88] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 162.
[89] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 162.

> earned facility for the composition of verse, he plotted revenge on his teachers and the class system which had made his parents and people like them feel inadequate.[90]

In choosing to equate himself with the self-taught Athenian orator Demosthenes, Harrison not only links to the Greek history and language he learned in grammar school and later translated, he is also drawing a parallel that anoints him as a voice of everyday Leeds life.

'Me, Tarzan',[91] from the same collection, explores this social divide from the opposite side of the fence – from Harrison's perspective of his peers at home, and their activities – and presents the idea that whilst, on the one hand, Harrison is academically privileged because he has had the opportunity to study at this level at an early age, on the other, there were sacrifices made for him to do so. In other words, for him to have made the most of this opportunity, much of his time after school had to be spent studying. In 'Me, Tarzan',[92] Harrison talks of the boys outside playing, mentioning Pee Wee Hunt's *Twelfth Street Rag.*[93] This upbeat and cheerful dance hall tune was best known at the time as the theme tune to *The Joe Franklin Show*; the tune is reminiscent of *Charlie Chaplin* or *Laurel and Hardy* sketches, and Harrison's use of it here provides the boys outside playing with an air of slapstick comedy, a strong contrast to young Harrison's Greek and Latin studies inside.

Leeds, as we have seen, is a place that underpins much of Harrison's work; and a place is more than a landscape or group of buildings. One of Harrison's methods for exploring his hometown is in his use of character vignettes and monologues, as seen so prominently in *The Loiners.*[94] Although some of the characters in that collection are people who haunted the Leeds of Harrison's childhood, such as Thomas Campney, the people that recur the most throughout the span of his work are those he is most familiar with: his family, and especially his parents. Book Two of *from the School of Eloquence* opens with a closing – the death of Harrison's

[90] Rosemary Burton 'Tony Harrison: An Introduction', *Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies I: Tony Harrison,* p. 18.
[91] Harrison, *Collected,* p. 126.
[92] Harrison, *Collected,* p. 126.
[93] Pee Wee Hunt, *Twelfth Street Rag* (UK: Garrod & Lofthouse Ltd., 1948).
[94] Harrison, *The Loiners*.

mother. In 'Book Ends I & II',[95] Harrison ruminates on the immediate aftermath of his and his father's loss. This poem is as much about the end of Florence Harrison's life as it is about the way she, in life, described her husband and son as 'like book ends',[96] observing the similarities between them. In placing this at the beginning of the collection, Harrison draws a line under Book One: this volume will have a different tone and focus. It is at this point in his work that Harrison moves to speaking very openly about his family, and his work more frequently invokes the use of the first person without the aid of real or imagined characters. From the opening line of 'Book Ends I', Harrison's focus is on his mother: '[b]aked the day she suddenly dropped dead | we chew it slowly that last apple pie'.[97] As Sandie Byrne notes, 'The first two lines, with no simile, metaphor, or other poetic device, seem straightforward enough, but their syntax is not quite ordinary, and it imposes a slightly strained reading.'[98] Although written in the regularity of loosely iambic pentameter, the syntactical irregularity – we might more naturally say 'we slowly chew the apple pie she baked the day she suddenly dropped dead' – places the initial emphasis on the person who baked, rather than on those eating the fruits of her labour. As Byrne continues, '[her] absence removes the binding, disconnects the "book ends" who themselves were parallel not through identicality but through a common posture […] which to *her* made them seem a pair.'[99] Like the alter-ego of *v.,* Harrison's father represents another version of what he could have been without 'books, books, books'.[100] If we consider this alongside the poem 'Blocks'[101] from the same collection, and dealing with the same period in Harrison's life, Harrison also saw his mother as a driving force in his education, with the 'simple rhymes that started at her knee'[102] eventually leading to his career; Harrison's

[95] Harrison, *Collected*, pp. 137-138.
[96] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 137.
[97] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 137.
[98] Byrne, *H, V. & O*, p. 14.
[99] Byrne, *H, V. & O*, p. 17.
[100] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 137.
[101] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 176.
[102] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 176.

mother was ultimately both the thing that connected him with his father, and was partially responsible for the thing that separated the two men from one another. Although it is not named explicitly, 'Book Ends II'[103] also provides us with the first reference to the Beeston Hill graveyard that Harrison would later use as his setting for *v.*, and the line '[t]here's scarcely room to carve the FLORENCE on [the gravestone]' reflects the family vault as it is presented in the later, longer poem.[104] His long family history in the Leeds area is being established in his poetry, as well as his partial removal from it – at least, at this point, psychologically.

It is fitting that Harrison opens *Book Two from The School of Eloquence* with the death of his mother, as Florence Harrison is repeatedly returned to throughout the collection. The sequence titled 'Next Door'[105] considers the cultural diversification of working-class areas that was common throughout the 1970s and beyond. The sequence begins with the death of the Harrison's next-door neighbour, Ethel Jowett, who was seemingly responsible for some of Harrison's early exposures to literature and opera: 'she gave my library its auspicious start'.[106] Upon her death, the house passed to the another family, and young Harrison bore witness to their domestic violence:

> The Sharpes came next. He beat her, blacked her eye.
> Through the walls I heard each blow, each *Cunt! Cunt! Cunt!*[107]

Through this sequence Harrison explores a rapid shift in the working-class social dynamic. Where at one time, that of Harrison's parents' generation, families tended to remain in the same house, often for generations, the death of their neighbour Ethel has heralded a new era for the street, an era partially emblematic of the rapid diversification of, and increasing transience within, postwar Britain, which coincided with the influx of immigrants from the the West Indies and the Indian subcontinent. As Harrison ruminates in the closing poem of the sequence,

[103] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 138.
[104] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 138.
[105] Harrison, *Collected*, pp. 140-143.
[106] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 140.
[107] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 141.

‘[l]ast of the “old lot” still left in your block. | Those times, they’re gone. The “old lot” can’t come back.’[108]

Harrison frames his father’s racist views, which he does not hold back from revealing, as coming from a place of fear of change, presenting his father in a sympathetic light. Like the Skin of *v.*, who is more outspokenly vile, this racism is not presented as necessarily being rooted in hatred, but rather as a by-product of government policy and of the general treatment of working-class areas by government. He is xenophobic in the truest sense of the word: scared of what foreignness and unfamiliarity might mean for him. As expressed in the first poem of the sequence:

> *It won’t be long before Ah’m t’only white!*
>
> Or t’Town Hall’s thick red line sweeps through t’whole street.[109]

The second line is not italicised, implying that it is the speaker’s opinion, not the father’s. Where his father considers race to be the segregating factor, Harrison sees it as a political division, divide and rule, scapegoating.

In the sequence ‘Illuminations’[110] Harrison explores his post-war family holidays in Blackpool and returns his father to familiarity: ‘50 weeks of ovens, and 6 years of war | made you want sleep and ozone’,[111] for Harrison’s father, these family trips to Blackpool are welcome and familiar breaks. Whilst not explicitly a location of industrial or post-industrial importance, the northern seaside town has long been a popular holiday spot for those in working-class northern towns and cities, including Leeds. As Tim Edensor and Steve Millington discuss:

> The Illuminations thus add to the rich variety of attractions offered by the world’s first working-class holiday resort, a site at which workers from the Northern Britain were released from their everyday factory discipline to feast and drink alcohol, be whirled

[108] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 143.
[109] Harrison, *Collected*, pp. 140.
[110] Harrison, *Collected*, pp. 157-159.
[111] Harrison, *Collected*, pp. 157.

> around in fairgrounds, swim in the sea, cavort on the beach and be dazzled by lighting.[112]

Harrison also discusses Blackpool in the third of the 'Sonnets for August 1945'[113] sequence, titled, 'The Figure',[114] in which he writes: 'I've never seen a family group so glad | of its brief freedom, so glad to be alive, | no camera would have caught them looking sad.'[115] It is clear that these family holidays left a lifelong impression on Harrison, the time spent as a family in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War leaving him with many positive memories of the place. As E. Relph states:

> The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence. There is for virtually everyone a deep association with and consciousness of the places where we were born and grew up, where we live now, or where we have had particularly moving experiences.[116]

Although not a permanent location, the repeated visits during Harrison's formative years make Blackpool an important location in his poetry; removed from the banality of everyday life, the family dynamic changes. Given that Blackpool is a destination that is synonymous with the working-class, and has been on the receiving end of ridicule in more recent years, as Edensor and Millington continue, 'it has proved difficult to surmount the negative associations that have surrounded Blackpool for decades, a mediatised reputation that has been and continues to be inflected with expressions of class identity.' Harrison's presentation of these family holidays as happy events, looked at almost nostalgically, is in itself just one example of the poet's refusal to bend to the opinions of the upper- and middle- classes. As Waterman considers, 'very often his later poetry has shown a marginalised or manipulated demographic resisting the 'genteel aggro' of the powerful, as *v.* has it – whether the setting is classical or contemporary, local or

[112] Tim Edensor and Steve Millington, 'Blackpool Illuminations: revaluing local cultural production, situated creativity and working-class values', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 19 (2), 2013.
[113] Harrison, *Collected*, pp. 196-204.
[114] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 200.
[115] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 200.
[116] E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Ltd., 1980), p. 43.

far-flung.'[117] Although a relatively local destination, the reality of his time in Blackpool could not be further from the everyday of Leeds, and as an adult, Harrison reflects on his father's situation at this time, empathising with the demands that were placed on him when Harrison was a child, which is shown in the earlier quoted '50 weeks of ovens…' segment of the poem and the lines immediately following: 'you snapped: || *Bugger the machines! Breathe God's fresh air!'*[118]

With the added benefits of age, wisdom and hindsight, Harrison understands how his father wanted peace and rest during these rare breaks from work, although in part II of this sequence he also reflects on their estrangement, highlighting the growing and permanent parting of their interests:

> I lectured them on neutrons and Ohm's law
> and other half-baked Physics I'd been taught.
> I'm sure my father felt I was a bore![119]

Harrison places this particular event as happening the first year of his grammar school education, showing that he believes he is at fault for breaking their family unit:

> The current would connect. We'd feel the buzz
> ravel our loosening ties to one tense grip,
> the family circle, one continuous US!
> That was the first year on my scholarship
> and I'd be the one who'd make that circuit short.[120]

Here, 'loosening ties' refers not only to the loose holding of hands during a turn on a family game of electric shocks on the pier, but also Harrison's shift further from his beginnings, as he starts out on the path towards his future and career, alien to his parents. The 'continuous US!'

[117] Rory Waterman, 'Oh So Loinerly: Geographical Transitions and the Struggle to Belong in Tony Harrison's The Loiners' in *British Literature in Transition, 1960-1980: Flower Power* ed. Kate McLoughlin (Cambirdge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 275-288, (p. 288).
[118] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 157.
[119] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 158.
[120] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 158.

of this section also gave the pamphlet in which the sequence was first included its title, *Continuous,*[121] which bears the dedication 'for mam & dad *in memoriam'*.[122]

With the poem's closing quatrain, we are brought back to the present – gone are the family days at the beach, and what is left is grief:

> Two dead but current still flows through us three,
> though the circle takes forever to complete –
> eternity, annihilation, me,
> that small bright charge of life where they both meet.[123]

The 'both' of the final line must be the two that are dead, as the line that precedes this lists three things. This suggests there could be two alternate readings to the poem's close: either Harrison is remembering the intimacy and love shared by his parents, either in life or in some imagined afterlife, or Harrison himself is the 'bright charge of life', borne of their love. That the 'circle takes forever to complete' supports this second option; Harrison now has children of his own, and even if he should be reunited with his parents in death, the cycle continues generationally, an example of what Byrne states is 'Harrison's refusal of the kind of false balance which would unite the divisions he finds and resolve the oppositions he makes', which she correctly asserts 'is nowhere better illustrated than in the endings of his poems.'[124] Here this refusal shows that although Harrison's parents are reunited in death, he is not with them and their family unit is incomplete – an earlier expression of some of the fundamental sentiments explored in *v.*[125]

This sentiment of heritage is also echoed in the collection's final poem, 'Background Material', evidently written after both of his parents had died.[126] Discussing the photos on his writing desk, Harrison reflects on images of his mother and father, and states plainly: 'Dad's

[121] Tony Harrison, *Continuous*, (London: Rex Collings, 1981).
[122] Harrison, *Continuous*, Dedication Page.
[123] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 158.
[124] Byrne, *H, V. & O*, p. 86.
[125] Tony Harrison, *v.*, (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1984).
[126] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 185.

in our favourite pub, now gone for good. | My father and his background are both gone'.[127] Here, the 'background' refers to the backdrop of the photograph: the now closed pub, but also to Harrison's father's way of life and upbringing. The way of life the Skin in *v.* observes, where '*This lot worked at one job all life through. | Byron, 'Tanner', 'Lieth 'ere interred''*,[128] and the new reality in a city of declining industry and high unemployment rates is like that Harrison presents in part II of 'Divisions', full of 'pensioners and unemployed'.[129] The ending of 'Background Material',[130] and therefore the ending of *Book Two from The School of Eloquence*, is a literal reflection of Harrison as photographer:

> in his if you look close, the gleam, the light,
> me in his blind right eye, but minute size –
>
> in hers, as though just cast from where I write,
> a shadow holding something to its eyes.[131]

Like the closing of 'Illuminations', once again Harrison considers how he is what remains of his parents.

In 1984, Harrison wrote *v.*, an extended monologue modelled loosely on Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a County Churchyard'.[132] Harrison used his platform and prominence as one of the most well-known poets of the 1980s to emphasise the importance of the then-ongoing miners' strikes, and provide a perspective that would have been unfamiliar to many readers of poetry, often from more affluent parts of the country, and with different concerns to those expressed in the poem. Whilst *v.* does not make direct reference to the strikes, a quote from Arthur Scargill is used as an epitaph, and both the speaker and the quotation give the poem context: 'My father still reads the dictionary every day. He says your life depends on

[127] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 185.
[128] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 271.
[129] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 188.
[130] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 185.
[131] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 185.
[132] Thomas Gray 'Elegy Written in a County Churchyard', *Poetry Foundation*, https:||www.poetryfoundation.org|poems|44299|elegy-written-in-a-country-churchyard, accessed 19|05|2020. The two poems share a form and end in an epitaph, and have a comparable setting, alalthough Gray's is a country churchyard and Harrison's an urban one in Leeds in the 1980s.

your power to master words'.[133] This epitaph not only equates the poem with the events of the strike, it also links to Harrison's preoccupation with language and eloquence, tying in *v.* with the poems *From The School of Eloquence*.[134] As David Kennedy puts it:

> [W]hile *v.* does not give a direct account of the Strike, it tries to show what was at stake in it. This is made clear by the fact that, apart from isolated references to the poet's mother and grandmother, the cemetery in v. is a place of dead working men who represent the same lineage in which Harrison must locate himself[.][135]

In this poem, as in many poems in *From the School of Eloquence*, Harrison's use of the first person breaks from many of the character vignettes of *The Loiners,* implying that for Harrison this is again a personal matter. Although the people of Leeds were a primary focus of his first collection, it is not until the civil unrest caused by industrial closures and the continuous decline in living standards under Thatcher's Conservative government that Harrison so prominently or extensively centres himself in a poem that explores a quasi-invented character, set in his native city. Harrison's geographical distance from his hometown by this time (he lived in Newcastle, and travelled extensively for work), and his financial and economic independence from the industrial sector, had not weakened his emotional connection to Leeds though it evidently has caused him to feel guilt, and in this poem, he focuses on that relationship following the death of his other parent, his last close family connection to the city. In the poem, Harrison's speaker admits that he now returns to Leeds only sporadically, for 'Flying visits once or twice a year'.[136] This, combined with the poem's repeated refrain of 'Home, home to my woman',[137] suggests that to Harrison, his physical 'home' is no longer Leeds. Nonetheless, the cemetery at Beeston Hill, a few minutes' walk from the former family home, will still be his final resting place: the poem opens with the invitation for readers of the 'Next millennium'

[133] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 263.
[134] Harrison, *from the School of Eloquence.*
[135] David Kennedy, ''PAST NEVER FOUND' – CLASS, DISSENT, AND THE CONTEXTS OF TONY HARRISON'S v.' in *English*, 2009, vol. 58 no. 221, pp. 162–181, p. 171.
[136] Harrison, *v.*, p. 12.
[137] Harrison, *v.*, p. 26.

to ‘search quite hard | to find my slab behind the family dead’, and near the end provides directions to assist them in this endeavour.[138] In the tenth stanza, the largely blank headstone of a banker is depicted as being that way because ‘[his] children and grandchildren went away | and never came back home to be interred’.[139] They made lives (and raised children) elsewhere, much as Harrison has done himself, although it is clear he intends not to repeat their symbolic final abandonment.

Mark Libin claims that the three main narrative threads of the poem – ‘alienation, disenfranchisement, the erosion of the common Briton’s roots – create an overwhelming sense of “home” as a nostalgic ideal’, although Harrison hardly idealises the present condition of his erstwhile home environment, full of litter and graffiti left by disenchanted youths with nothing to do and no aspirations.[140] Nonetheless, the poem does display considerable nostalgia for how things once were. The speaker explores his alienation from his predecessors, and in doing so highlights the gulf between two defining aspects of his upbringing: his family life on one hand, and his grammar school education and what it precipitated for him personally on the other. Unlike the children of the banker, who perhaps did not experience the sense of community belonging that is especially likely to prevail amongst working class communities in any location, Harrison’s experience of belonging to both his family and his community cultivate his desire for Leeds to be his final resting place.[141]

From the teenage encounters outlined in ‘Allotments’ to the mature Harrison’s reflection in *v.*, Harrison is frequently drawn to burial sites in his poetry of the 1970s and 1980s. The speaker of the early poem ‘The Death of the PWD Man’, included in *The Loiners*, states,

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[138] Harrison, *v.*, p. 7; I have visited the streets in which Harrison grew up, and the graveyard – and, with some difficulty, located the Harrison family vault. The directions provided by the poem are accurate, as is the poem’s warning that finding it will not be easy.
[139] Harrison, *v.*, p. 9.
[140] Mark Libin, ‘‘Prick-tease of the soul’: negative dialectics and the politics of Tony Harrison’s *v.*’, *Textual Practice*, 31:7, 1379-1397, p. 1392.
[141] There could also be an element of cultural sexism at play, as the alternative solution for the banker’s headstone remaining empty is that he only had daughters, who traditionally would have been buried alongside their husbands under their married names, like Harrison’s mother in his family plot.

'I'm drawn to graves like brides to baby-wear | Spending an afternoon ashore to see who's buried there'.[142] Harrison seems to share this impulse, then, and it is fitting that this impulse finds its most significant outlet for him in his longest and most magnificent poem which focuses on the graves of those he loved first and the place where he assumes he himself will be memorialised in stone. Osman Balkan states that 'The location of the grave is of great symbolic importance to those left behind because it provides them with a sense of ownership and affinity with a particular place.'[143] Harrison's return to the graveyard, both physically and poetically, imbues the soil that received his ancestors with meaning. Where 'Allotments' explores Harrison's youthful explorations of the terrain of his childhood and early adulthood, *v.* introduces a sense of alienation from his hometown, stemming from his travel and education, although it is ultimately a poem of belonging: of Harrison accepting that despite differences in circumstance and experience, his success is in part due to where he has come from, not in spite of it, as he concludes in the epigraphic final stanza, and in apparent answer to the question posed in 'Heredity' and discussed earlier in this chapter:

> *Beneath your feet's a poet, then a pit.*
> *Poetry supporter, if you're here to find*
> *how poems can grow from* (beat you to it!) SHIT
> *find the beef, the beer, the bread, then look behind.*[144]

Harrison also reflects on the irony that in death he may end up somewhere he both belonged and did not belong; whilst Leeds was the place where he 'learned Latin and learned Greek', the 'worked out' coal mine Beeston Hill sits atop, and the symbolic and literal subsidence of everything above it, remains in stark contrast to his reality as a scholar and indeed 'bard' (his own knowingly aloof word of self-reference) visiting from another city. Mining was a very real career for many of Harrison's peers, particularly during the period he was completing his

[142] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 47.
[143] Osman Balkan, 'Burial and Belonging', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Vol. 15 (1), April 2015, 120-134, p. 121.
[144] Harrison, *v.*, p. 33.

studies, and the 'sanctity' of the soil at Beeston Hill stems not only from the bodies interred there, but also the livelihoods that were built in the mine underneath, subsidence from which now 'makes the obelisks all list'.[145] These livelihoods disappeared with the dead.

In a time of subsequent industrial closure, those opportunities have evaporated for those not able to escape through learning, as the poet had done. To make this point flesh, Harrison allows his imagined 'Skin' character, or 'alter-ego', to explain his own predicament, the predicament that might have been the poet's had he not had the ability and opportunity to pursue another path:

> *Ah'll tell you what really riles a bloke.*
> *It's reading on their graves the jobs they did –*
> *butcher, publican and baker. Me, I'll croak*
> *doing t'same nowt ah do now as a kid.*[146]

Here, it becomes apparent that mining is merely the latest symptom in the wider issue of industrial decline and lack of investment in northern towns, with the listed professions slowly overtaken by chain corporations and supermarkets – or either beyond his available skillset or rendered virtually obsolete: '*Look at this cunt, Wordsworth, organ builder, | this fucking 'aberdasher Appleyard!*'.[147] We are finally made fully aware that this encounter and character is imagined, and also that he is a part of the poet, when 'He aerosolled his name, and it was mine'[148] – but, crucially, we already know he is not the poem's main speaker, who has no personal need for this artless, angry rebellion. It is in this way that Harrison's employment of the elegiac for *v.* provides a lament not only for the 'Skin' and northern industry, but for working-class ways of life more holistically. As Kennedy argues:

> [W]hile the poem can certainly be said to mourn and commemorate the decline of the working class, it can also be said to mourn not only the decline of class as a social and political conception but also the possibility of dissent.[149]

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[145] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 265.
[146] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 270.
[147] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 270.
[148] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 273.
[149] Kennedy, 'PAST NEVER FOUND', p. 165.

The poem is globally minded, though, as well as being focused on one time and place. As David Thomas notes, 'The poet's careful attention to the legacies and landscapes of post-industrial Leeds returned penetrating insights into the structures of plunder and profit that define the global economy as a whole.'[150] He continues that, 'Writing in the turbulent aftermath of the energy crises of the 1970s, *v.* countenances the possibility of coal's eventual exhaustion, and documents the social consequences of rising unemployment.'[151] And as Hugh Hebert states, the poem links 'some of the dominant themes of contemporary British writing: industrial decline […], post-industrial despair.'[152] Moreover, beyond the national and global socio-political ramifications of the 1984 strikes, Harrison explores the intimate relationship the individual has with place in *v.*, a matter that can be transposed in poetry to any location with a poet to write about it.[153] In the opening stanza, where the speaker describes himself as 'bard'[154] rather than poet, alliterating with the 'butcher'[155] and 'baker',[156] he implies a harmony between these three crafting professions, although the distinction between them is also impossible to ignore and reinforced by his choice of register for the job title he uses for himself. Arguably, though, because of the lack of alliteration (though it also begins with a plosive), the occupation that stands out on the third line as different is 'publican',[157] a service profession; in the fourth line, the plosive alliteration continues, yet it is Harrison's 'poetry' which is marked as comparable to his ancestor's 'beef, beer and bread'.[158] This could suggest that although Harrison's career is ostensibly at odds with that of those in his direct lineage, there is still a sense of belonging here; Harrison, like his ancestors, both creates and serves a product for

[150] David Thomas, 'The canary in the coal mine: Tony Harrison and the poetics of coal, climate, and capital', *Textual Practice*, 30:5, 915-932, p. 916.
[151] Thomas, 'The canary in the coal mine', p. 917.
[152] Hugh Hebert, 'Vindications of Morality', *The Guardian*, 17th October 1987.
[153] Harrison, *v.*
[154] Harrison, *v.* p. 7.
[155] Harrison, *v.* p. 7.
[156] Harrison, *v.* p. 7.
[157] Harrison, *v.* p. 7.
[158] Harrison, *v.* p. 7; Harrison, *v.* p. 7.

public consumption. It is in some ways a fanciful supposition, of course, and the fact remains that his is an elite profession of the mind, relying on an education denied to his forebears: as the Skin puts it *'They'll chisel fucking poet when they do you | and that, yer cunt, 's a crude four-letter word.*'[159] The skinhead has a point. What is more, he is witty in delivering it. And what is even more, we eventually discover that he is in fact the poet anyway.

In the years since *v.*'s publication, Harrison has focussed considerably less frequently on Northern England, though it does occasionally still make an appearance. 'Under the Clock', for example, the title poem of Harrison's 2005 collection, considers his parents' early courtship, and how they would meet 'Under Dyson's clock in Lower Briggate'.[160] Briggate, the main shopping street in Leeds city centre, is divided into 'Upper' and 'Lower', and here Harrison links the wedding bands on display behind the 'barred windows' of a jewellers shop near the place of their meetings with the ones his parents wore until their deaths: 'like that I felt on Dad's when we held hands, | or on Mam's crumbling finger in cremation's flames'.[161] The poem is in two stanzas, the first of which presents the location and its historical importance to the speaker, whilst the second explores his feelings upon returning to the location in the present, 'Today back on Briggate'.[162] The poem is bittersweet, in parts considering the relationship with his now long-dead parents, 'the Latin you'd proudly ask me to construe'[163] simultaneously highlighting his parents' pride in, and educational distance from, their son's achievements. Ultimately, though, death is the shadow that hangs over the poem – both the deaths of his parents and, ultimately, his own inevitable end. Although Harrison is 'glad that Father Time and I survive',[164] it is the imagery of 'the scythe, the hourglass, the wings'[165]

[159] Harrison, *v.* p. 19.
[160] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 329.
[161] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 329.
[162] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 329.
[163] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 329.
[164] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 329.
[165] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 329.

which he considers, all of which symbolise transience and death. There is a similarity to the connecting current between the speaker and his parents in Harrison's much earlier poem 'Illuminations',[166] which in that poem 'still flows through us three', here tempered by the shift of subtextual, symbolic focus: that he will inevitably join them in death.

Though the references to Leeds have diminished in Harrison's more recent poetry, there are, however, numerous instances throughout his later work which explicitly provide opinions on class and the establishment. In 'Laureate's Block',[167] from the collection of the same name, he expresses his distaste at the suggestion that he should succeed Ted Hughes as Poet Laureate:

> I'm appalled to see newspapers use my name
> as 'widely tipped' for a job I'd never seek.
> Swans come in Domestic, Mute, and Tame
> and no swan-upper's going to nick my beak.[168]

Where many would consider it flattering that press and public might tip them for the role of Poet Laureate, Harrison believes it would be an attempt to buy him, and by extension his poetry and freedom of expression. Moreover, he suggests that the office itself is an attack on the poet's role, and should be obliterated:

> There should be no successor to Ted Hughes.
> 'The saponaceous qualities of sack'
> are purest poison if paid poets lose
> their freedom as PM's or monarch's hack.[169]

Despite making a living from poetry, Harrison's voice is not for sale. As Hoggart writes:

> He would never and has never reneged on his background. Typical of that background is a strong, bloody-minded, saving streak of self-protection from all kinds of snobberies.[170]

[166] Harrison, *Collected*, pp. 157-159.
[167] Harrison, *Collected*, pp. 329-332.
[168] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 329.
[169] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 331.
[170] Hoggart, *Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies: I Tony Harrison,* p. 37.

Although Harrison, like many of his peers, moved on from Leeds for pastures new and his physical returns are now fleeting visits 'once or twice a year',[171] the people and places of the city are neither forgotten nor left behind.

[171] Harrison, *v.*, p. 12.

II. *They did this to remind us where we came from*:

Ian Parks' Mexborough

Ian Parks was born in 1959, in a bedroom of the terraced house in Mexborough in which he currently resides – a house he left in 1977 at the age of 18 and to which he returned in 2012. The publication of his poetry, on the other hand has never returned to the same place: Parks has produced eight full collections of poetry, but as Ian Pople observes, 'His shtick seems to be to have a new book out with a new publisher. But that variety of publisher never seems to diminish or dilute the quality of Parks' writing'.[1] This habit of publishing with smaller, independent presses may go some way towards explaining the dearth of criticism (beyond reviews) on Parks' body of work, despite the length and breadth of his career. At the time of writing, a selected works is due to be published by Calder Valley Press in late 2022 or early 2023, with a new collection, *The Jesus of Mexborough,* set to follow in 2023, its title the first of Parks' books to mention his hometown explicitly.[2] Indeed, since Parks' publication of *The Exile's House* with Waterloo Press in 2012,[3] he has, as he puts it, 'tried to write for and from the people of the town [he] grew up in, despite the pain and difficulty involved in attempting such a thing'.[4] His subsequent publications show a marked increase in focusing on life and fables from the North of England, and increasingly South Yorkshire and his hometown of Mexborough, which constitute both the focus of, and a backdrop to, most of his poetry, though he has no desire to romanticise the present predicaments he sees in the 'unrelenting grimness

[1] Ian Pople, 'Ian Parks' "Citizens" Reviewed by Ian Pople', *The Manchester Review*, August 2017, http://www.themanchesterreview.co.uk/?p=8404.

[2] The 'big seven' is currently normally conceived of as comprising Cape, Faber, Picador, Penguin, Chatto & Windus, Carcanet and Bloodaxe. The categorisation is almost arbitrary, but my point here is that Parks has published away from what constitutes the poetic limelight, never with any of these presses, nor with other 'bigger' independents such as Seren or Shearsman.

[3] Ian Parks, *The Exile's House House* (Brighton: Waterloo Press, 2012).

[4] Personal Correspondence (included with permission of the author), 2017.

of the north, | its chapels, pit-heads, slag heaps, union halls',[5] as he puts it in 'The Great Divide'.[6]

The Exile's House grapples repeatedly with life in and near Mexborough, and is the first of his collections to do so in such a concerted manner.[7] Parks attributes this to having needed space from the events of his upbringing and, amongst other things, The Miners' Strikes of 1984-5:

> For a long time, I resisted writing about Mexborough where I was born and grew up. I think that was due to some painful memories I had of the Miner's Strike [sic] of the 1980s and the disruptive effect it had on my own family, not to mention the whole community I grew up in. It took nearly 30 years before I could assimilate that experience and work out how inextricable it was from my thinking as a poet.[8]

Often considered as primarily a 'love poet', something which only intensified with the publication of the 2009 collection *Love Poems*,[9] the prevalence of poetry exploring love and relationships in his work has, as Parks admits, been something of an accident, and as he states in the preface to that collection, 'I never started out to be a love poet. In some moods, I don't necessarily see myself as one even now'.[10] Indeed, a comparable selection of Parks' poems about physical landscapes could constitute a significantly longer typescript. In Parks' attempt to 'get so much of the world' into his poems, he has also become a poet of place – from Sarajevo mornings during the Bosnian War (Parks was a volunteer), through unnamed cities both ancient and modern, to sites of historical importance and northern English towns. The title of his forthcoming collection, *The Jesus of Mexborough*,[11] suggests both a continuation of this interest in place, and a further deepening of his focus on his hometown. This chapter will

[5] Ian Parks, *Shell Island* (London: The Waywiser Press, 2006), p. 52.
[6] Parks, *Shell Island*, p. 52.
[7] Parks, *The Exile's House*.
[8] Personal Correspondence, July 2017.
[9] Ian Parks, *Love Poems* (Leeds: Flux Gallery Press, 2009).
[10] Parks, *Love Poems*, 'Preface', p. xvii.
[11] Ian Parks, *The Jesus of Mexborough* (forthcoming).

explore the deepening of that local interest in the most recent phase of his career as a poet, and will focus especially on his two most recent publications, *The Exile's House* and *Citizens,* [1213] and that forthcoming ninth collection, which I have seen in typescript.[14]

In 'Songs of Freedom',[15] from the 2006 collection *Shell Island,*[16] Parks specifically explores a landscape haunted by the industrial past. The title of the poem is obviously an allusion to Bob Marley's 'Redemption Song',[17] which stood as a testament to the black men and women of Jamaica sold into slavery; the phrase 'Songs of Freedom' is taken directly from Marley's chorus: 'won't you help to sing these songs of freedom? 'cos all I ever had, redemption songs'.[18] Read in conversation with this, and considering the meaning conveyed by Marley's use of the term, the poem more clearly comments on the exploitation of the working-classes and industrial decline. It provides a haunting scene, the line 'they rise from empty workings, gantries, wharves' evoking the voices of the long-dead generations that once worked these now abandoned places. [19] Here, Parks also makes the personal a part of this landscape, with the penultimate stanza expressing a fear: 'This place might claim me yet: | its cold, its sharp austerities',[20] suggesting that though the poet has thus far escaped the expected life path of a working-class boy from Mexborough, he still harbours a concern that he may not be able to outrun what he may perceive to be his destiny.

Though the landscape – or 'This place' as Parks calls it – is never named, the poem is rooted in the suggestion of the northern industrial: 'Come north this time and find me',[21] and

[12] Parks, *The Exile's House.*
[13] Ian Parks, *Citizens* (Ripon: Smokestack Books, 2017).
[14] Parks, *The Jesus of Mexborough*. The typescript was provided to me by Parks in various stages of completion between 2020 and 2022. Unless indicated otherwise, I have quoted from the most recent version at the time of thesis submission, September 2022.
[15] Parks, *Shell Island*, p. 36.
[16] Parks, *Shell Island*.
[17] Bob Marley and the Wailers, *Uprising* (London: Island Records, 1980), track 12.
[18] Marley, *Uprising.*
[19] Parks, *Shell Island*, p. 36.
[20] Parks, *Shell Island*, p. 36.
[21] Parks, *Shell Island*, p. 36.

the reference to a 'backwater town',[22] a phrase repeated six years later in 'Off The Map',[23] as well as Parks' use of the phrase 'might claim me yet',[24] all suggest a location about which Parks has an intimate and abiding knowledge.

Parks continues to explore his personal relationship to place, and indeed his own place in the world, in 'Staying On',[25] in the 2010 collection *The Landing Stage*.[26] However, the title is not a reference to Mexborough: the poem is a reflection on staying in Oxford after completing studies there. He considers his reasoning, and the simultaneous ability to 'choose' and desire to 'prove' his 'right' to do so:

> my staying on is different, chosen from
> so many other possibilities
> to prove I had the right to choose.[27]

Parks' need to 'prove' he could choose to stay indicates that, like Helen Mort's experience of studying at Cambridge (which will be discussed in the following chapter), Parks also experienced a feeling of being set apart from the bulk of his academic Oxbridge community. The penultimate stanza of the poem centres on an undefined 'it', which could be read both as a feeling, and as an objectifying, impersonal description of the speaker: 'It almost fades into the red brick wall'.[28] Here, two allusions are at play – one to the 'red wall' of typically Labour-voting electoral constituencies in the north of England (of which Mexborough is a part), and that of the 'red brick universities' which, along with Oxford and Cambridge, comprise the traditional and in most cases elite universities in England. Here, Parks seems to imply that he

[22] Parks, *Shell Island*, p. 36.
[23] Parks, *The Exile's House*, pp. 24-25.
[24] Parks, *Shell Island*, p. 36.
[25] Ian Parks, *The Landing Stage* (Belfast: Lapwing Publications, 2010), pp. 58-59.
[26] Parks, *The Landing Stage*.
[27] Parks, *The Landing Stage*, p. 58.
[28] Parks, *The Landing Stage*, p. 59.

is in fact indistinct from others doing the same thing in Oxford, that he is not making much of a difference.

Parks was twenty-five years old at the time of the Miners' Strikes of 1984-5, and attended pickets with his father, who was a miner, when back home from university.[29] A 'painful' memory, in both physical and emotional senses, is discussed in 'The Incident', included in *The Exile's House*:[30]

> It was the coldest morning
>
> of the strike. Me, my father and his mates
> had formed a sort of makeshift picket line.[31]

This has the rhetorical flourishes and linguistic register of an anecdote ('mates', the ungrammatically colloquial 'Me, my father'), and a narrative to match: the poem depicts how Parks (the poet makes it all but explicit that he is the speaker) lost a tooth on the picket line in Mexborough. Moreover, the narrative is told in unrhymed, unmetred couplets, Parks' choice of form visually replicating the asymmetrical divide of the picket in each stanza. The poem explores his feelings of belonging and acceptance on that picket line, and from the opening stanza, the scene he sets is a welcoming one: the informal tone of 'mates' and 'sort of' gives the impression of a confidence being imparted conversationally. However, Parks is careful to define the people he was with as friends of his father and not of himself, and ultimately acknowledges the painful reality that he 'didn't qualify':[32] his position as a university graduate 'somehow made me suspect, | set apart', a point reinforced by that enjambment, as though he is momentarily thrust into opposition to them, now an unwilling part of the Establishment.[33] Like Harrison, then, Parks both belongs to the community and doesn't, and he knows it.

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[29] Personal Correspondence (included with permission of the author).
[30] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.9.
[31] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.9.
[32] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.9.
[33] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.9.

But even more than Harrison, he shows in some of his poems an active involvement in the machinations of class politics and protest, which only heightens his sense of difference even while it simultaneously draws him closer to his hometown community. Julia Bennett states that 'nostalgia and authenticity figure strongly in family narratives and both tie together people and places through time'.[34] For most people, family is their first experience of belonging to a community; our understanding of *where* we belong in the world stems from *who* we perceive ourselves to belong with. In 'The Incident',[35] Parks relays a lived experience, both for anecdotal purposes and to convey his uneasy but true sense of belonging within his community. The poem identifies to all who read it that Parks is not using Mexborough and his working-class roots as a way of gaining social currency, or as a tool to highlight experiences about which he knows nothing; despite the many experiences he has outside of the town, some of which are obviously of a privileged kind, 'The Incident', and its speaker's place on the picket line in the anecdote it tells, align him with his community.

The industrial towns and cities of Northern England have long held a strong reputation for their community spirit, not least in the immediate wake of the industrial closures and during the Miners' Strikes. As M. D. Matasganis and M. Seo discuss, 'at times of crisis, communities with strong social support mechanisms are likely to fare better than others, but when crises become extraordinarily severe, such social support mechanisms might falter or become eroded.'[36] Where this community erosion may threaten to set Parks apart from the people of Mexborough, he uses his subject-matter as a way of bridging the gap. As he notes:

> The poems that have arisen out of my response to the working-class community I was born into are important to me. I suppose they are, in some sense, a record of my struggle to find a language which can carry the weight of that experience. I think of those poems

[34] Julia Bennett, 'Narrating family histories: Negotiating identity and belonging through tropes of nostalgia and authenticity', *Current Sociology*, Vol. 66 (3), 2018, 449-465, p. 451.
[35] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.9.
[36] M. D. Matasganis & M. Seo, 'Stress in the Aftermath of Economic Crisis in Urban Communities: The Interplay of Media Use, Perceived Economic Threat, and Community Belonging', *Communication Research Reports*, 31:4, 304-315, p.311.

> as being not so much 'for' or 'about' the people of that community but 'by' them in the sense that they arose from a common, shared source. The poems are a way of voicing that. The tensions that exist there exist with the overlap between public and private poetry.[37]

However, while Parks is able to speak for the town with the fidelity of someone born and raised on the inside, and communicates his poems in the idiom of the people, the events of the poem show Parks also as an outsider, and to some extent he was one. As Rory Waterman puts it, in his discussion of 'The Incident':

> He was back in Mexborough, but wouldn't stick around for long. He is implicitly and inextricably on the side of the miners, but he isn't one of them, either. He is one of the politicised but also highly educated Left.[38]

'The Incident' is not the only poem of Parks' to focus on the site of a picket. In 'Orgreave',[39] Parks reflects on the location of perhaps the most notorious dispute of the strikes – a clash so integral to their lasting legacy that it has become infamous, and which led, seventeen years later, to a re-enactment staged by artist Jeremy Deller.[40] Parks' opening line places The Battle of Orgreave alongside historic battles: 'Like this at Wakefield, Towton, Marston Moor'.[41] The first two of these battles occurred during the War of the Roses, in 1461 and 1460 respectively, and the latter during the English Civil War in 1644. The first two are therefore battles between two royal houses, but the third was part of a war, it might be said, between royal power and revolutionary power, and a small but significant step towards working class representation; all three are from civil wars, Parks implying a connection between them and class-based 'civil war' in the late twentieth century. The exclusion of 'The Battle of' from

[37] Ian Parks in Tuesday Shannon, 'Poems of Community and Historical Memory: an interview with Ian Parks', *Wild Court* (2021) *<https://wildcourt.co.uk/features/essays/poems-of-community-and-historical-memory-an-interview-with-ian-parks/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=poems-of-community-and-historical-memory-an-interview-with-ian-parks> [accessed 9 May 2022].*
[38] Rory Waterman, ''I didn't qualify': Ian Parks, Mexborough and the Quest for Identity', *Dark Horse,* Late Autumn and Winter 2015, 36-42, p.39.
[39] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.40.
[40] This is discussed in the next chapter, in relation to Helen Mort's poetry.
[41] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.40.

the poem's title ostensibly draws attention to the place of Orgreave rather than the events, highlighting that Orgreave exists outside of the event that has come to define it in public imagination. In fact, the poem does not use the word 'battle' at all, despite conjuring what initially seem only to be images of historic conflicts in the second stanza: 'helmets in the sunlight, push of pike, | a trampling down by horses in the mire.'[42] In the third stanza, though, it becomes clear that the conflict Parks is referring to is much more recent than the historic battles we are encouraged to think belong to a different, perhaps less civilised time: 'the shields not steel but Perspex | driving back the miners'.[43] Here, the use of 'Perspex', a brand name for acrylic plastic used to make riot shields, implies a capitalist connotation: Parks might easily have called it, for example, 'plexiglass'. In using the brand name, Parks intimates that a capitalist world is subjugating the miners. Moreover, Parks' use of metonymy in the depiction of 'the shields […] driving back the miners' dehumanises the police officers holding them, by reducing them to the objects they carry, in empathy with many miners who were primed by circumstance to see the police officers as the physical representation of the government they were protesting against, rather than a group of individuals taking orders in return for a livelihood. Parks may have sympathy with the former, but he is alert to the universal dehumanisation that occurs when opposed positions turn to violence. This is echoed in the poem's grammatical structure. 'Orgreave' comprises only two sentences, the second of which is split with a semi-colon. The opening sentence establishes the context of conflict, whilst the first clause of the second homes in specifically on Orgreave and the specific events of the strike. Parks' closing clause then equally weights the wider social conflict with the personal repercussions, and humanises the poem from its reminiscing speaker's perspective, albeit by

[42] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.40.
[43] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.40.

showing the proud scars of battle: 'my father bringing home a bloody nose | to show he'd not been slacking in the fight.'[44]

Using the personal to comment on the wider situation is something Parks also does in 'The Cage'. [45] This poem is a reflection on Parks' father's career as a miner, and echoes some of the themes of heredity in Harrison's work. The poem is structured in eight tercets, and Parks keeps the lines short, with no more than five words in each. As Waterman notes, 'the short-lined poem racing down the page in a visual echo of the way the men it describes plummet through bedrock on a journey the poet had never needed to take.'[46] The staccato feel that the frequent enjambments provide adds to the poem being reminiscent of the jolting journey through the bedrock. Harrison's speaker in *v.*[47] states that 'I've never feared the grave but what I fear's / that great worked out black hollow under mine',[48] and Parks expresses a comparable fear in 'The Cage',[49] in discussing the nightmares his father would have regarding being dropped into the pit, and stating 'Through me his dreams persist.'[50] There is a degree of duality in this line, though: whilst the section preceding it gives the suggestion that it is his worst dreams that persist, the positive ones may also continue, filtered through his poet-son's pen. As Harrison discusses in 'Breaking the Chain',[51] working-class parents 'wished for their sons a better glass of gear';[52] the fact that Parks doesn't work a manual job and has obtained a career dependent on his education instead could be considered as a manifestation of this ambition being realised.

[44] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.40.
[45] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.8.
[46] Waterman, ''I didn't qualify', p. 37.
[47] Harrison, *v.*
[48] Harrison, *v.*
[49] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.8.
[50] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.8.
[51] Tony Harrison, *Collected Poems* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 166.
[52] Harrison, *Collected Poems*, p. 166.

The title of 'The Cage'[53] comes from the name for the metal elevator that would be winched down to take men to the seam, and the wider connotations of restriction and claustrophobia directly relate to the experience of being in one. Parks does play on these connotations, though, linking those feelings to his own sense that he may have reneged on his heritage: 'Son follows father / in the way of things.'[54] This poem highlights that Parks did not follow his father in terms of career, whilst simultaneously exploring the idea that in using the manual labour of his ancestors as a ground for his poetry to explore, Parks has followed his father in a different way; had mining not been his father's occupation, it likely would not have made its way into his work either. The other suggested sentiment is slightly more morbid and gives the poem the feel of a reflection on Parks' own mortality. Like Harrison in *v.*, in death Parks will follow his father underground, achieving what he couldn't in life.

This poem is also included in the collection *The Exile's House*, the title of which raises questions regarding who, exactly, the 'exile' is, and where they might be exiled from. The collection's title poem gives an answer to at least one of these questions, the closing lines suggesting that it is the poet who is the exile:

> Under a lantern like a paper moon
> at a table ringed with stains
> he drinks and listens as the night dictates
> words of resistance, lines of dissent.[55]

If Parks is the 'exile', though, what is less clear is where he is exiled from: is his return to Mexborough exile from the academic world of Oxford? Or was he in exile from his home at Oxford? Throughout the collection, and indeed through much of Parks' poetry as a whole, his speakers express a sense of not belonging anywhere firmly or irrevocably, and often they are

[53] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.8.
[54] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.8.
[55] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.4.

outsiders or observers to events. 'The Exile's House'[56] seems to represent making uneasy peace with this status and feeling.

However, there are also poems in the collection in which a strong sense of local identity is paramount. 'The Wheel',[57] one of Parks' most overtly political poems regarding his mining community heritage, explores the impact of pit closures on a local level, and bears the dedication '*for Helen Mort'*.[58] The wheel in question is presumably the pit wheel in Mexborough: the speaker talks about '[His] dead forefathers' being buried in its 'shadow'.[59] This wheel is now a monument, as is common in many former mining towns across Britain, and Parks observes that it has been repurposed thus to '[remind] us of where we came from | what we did and who we were'.[60] Parks' views on the historical exploitation of the English working class, expressed elsewhere in poems such as 'Orgreave',[61] infer here that the monument is more an act of control or oppression, intended to keep the town's inhabitants "in their place", and the same sentiment finds its way into 'The Wheel', as we shall see.

The poem observes that the pit wheel 'used to dominate this town',[62] suggesting not only physical domination, but also psychological domination. Like Harrison considering the burial location of his ancestors in *v.*,[63] Parks notes that his forefathers were 'buried in the shadow cast by [the pit wheel]',[64] and again, 'shadow' implies both a physical shadow and a metaphorical one. Moreover, Parks' ancestors were not only buried in its shadow in death, they had spent their working lives 'buried' by a coal seam under earth that is also in its shadow. In reflecting that he 'passed it on [his] way to school',[65] there is more than just a routine journey

[56] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.4.
[57] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 5.
[58] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 5.
[59] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 5.
[60] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 5.
[61] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 40.
[62] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 5.
[63] Harrison, *v.*
[64] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 5.
[65] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 5.

implied – Parks literally 'passed' on joining his father in the mines to pursue further and higher education, and ultimately a career as a poet. However, the poem concludes with a revolution, in both senses of the word. Parks suggests that the people of Mexborough might one day:

> […] drag it from the valley floor,
> aim it at the cities of the south,
> set the wheel in motion, watch it roll.[66]

Here, the wheel itself becomes a metaphor for the potential power that might be wielded by the northern English working class, suggesting that eventually they might recognise this themselves and revolt or protest. It is a fanciful notion, of course, and a far cry from the present in which young people point at the wheel 'questioning' what it is, or was.

Parks' tendency to write poems 'for' poets working with similar themes of working class belonging, geography and history – such as 'Downpour',[67] dedicated to Ian Harker,[68] 'Mill Bank',[69] for Cathy Galvin,[70] and 'The Wheel',[71] for Helen Mort – could be considered as a somewhat symbolic passing on of the mantle or responsibility to represent these localities. [72] It also has the effect of placing Parks within a poetic community: for readers, the dedication brings another party to the table, so to speak; the dialogue is no longer solely between poet and reader, but a conversation in which the work of the other poet is implicit. Cathrine Degnen states that 'place attachment does not only operate at the level of the individual. Instead, it is also the profoundly social, collective ways of sharing, discussing and debating memories of

[66] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 5.
[67] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 3.
[68] Ian Harker is a Leeds-born poet, his poem 'Sea Interlude, Blackpool, 1987' was shortlisted for the BBC Proms Poetry Competition. https://poems.poetrysociety.org.uk/poets/ian-harker/ [accessed May 14th 2022].
[69] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.53.
[70] Cathy Galvin is 'British born of Irish parentage' and states that she feels 'at home everywhere from Coventry to Connemara and those landscapes inform [her] creative work'.
[71] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.4.
[72] Helen Mort was born and raised in Chesterfield, and is perhaps best known for the long poem 'Scab', a discussion on the Miners' Strikes of 1984 and artist Jeremy Deller's reconstruction of them.

place.'[73] In this way, Parks makes a conversation out of what has long been presumed a solitary profession, furthermore indicating to the reader where they might find further poetic discussion on the matter, and further community.

The dedication of 'The Wheel' to Helen Mort is of particular interest here,[74] considering the thematic elements at play within the poem, with Parks discussing ideas of heritage and revolution. In a 2013 interview with the Leicestershire-based poet Roy Marshall, Parks stated, 'I'm reading *Division Street*, the first full collection by the remarkable Helen Mort and thinking that the future of poetry is in safe and capable hands.'[75] Mort is a poet from Chesterfield and Sheffield, both close to Mexborough and both also closely associated with industrial heritage, and her debut collection has much to say about that heritage and its legacy, as will be discussed in the following chapter. However, the poem's turn towards revolutionary rhetoric has more in common with the poetry of the Chartists, a keen interest of Parks'.[76] When considered in this context, 'The Wheel' embodies Chartist Messianism, which as Mike Sanders discusses, 'generally emerges at moments of historical crisis [and] is a complex, sometimes contradictory, intellectual and emotional structure. It expresses a critical attitude towards the existing social order […] and affirms a belief that a truly just society will, eventually, be established.'[77] Published halfway through the 2010-2015 Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government's term, as the working-classes were plunging deeper into poverty at the hands of the post-financial crisis austerity measures, the timing of the poem firmly meets this

[73] Cathrine Degnen, 'Socialising place attachment: place, social memory and embodied affordances', *Ageing and Society*, 36.8, (2016), 1645-1667, p. 1648.
[74] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.4.
[75] Ian Parks in Roy Marshall, *Ian Parks. It's Always a Good Time to be a Poet...* (2013) <https://roymarshall.wordpress.com/2013/08/14/ian-parks-its-always-a-good-time-to-be-a-poet/> [accessed 14 February 2022]. Mort's debut collection is discussed at length in the following chapter of this thesis.
[76] Parks' PhD focused on the Chartist movement, and he has since given numerous talks and lectures on the topic.
[77] Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.206.

requirement. Like the anonymously-authored Chartist poem 'The Voice of the People',[78] which was originally published in an 1841 issue of *The Northern Star* (and which would lend its title to an anthology of chartist poetry),[79] Parks' work embodies the Chartist revolutionary rhetoric. The poem's easily remembered quatrains of rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter comprise a rallying call, in which the speaker claims to be a champion of the people:

> 'Tis the voice of the people I hear it on high,
> It peals o'er the mountains – it soars to the sky;
> Through wide fields of heather, it wings its swift flight
> Like thunders of heaven arrayed in the night.
>
> It rushes still on, like the torrent's wide roar;
> And bears on its surges the wrongs of the poor.
> Its shock like the earthquake shall fill with dismay,
> The hearts of the tyrants and sweep them away.[80]

As is also occasionally prevalent in Parks' work – not least in 'The Wheel' – the poem concludes with the working classes succeeding in their revolution against the 'tyrants' that seek to exploit them. The Wheel draws on the same rallying spirit.

Parks' academic interest in the Chartist movement – it was the subject of his PhD thesis – has become increasingly prevalent in his work since his return to Mexborough, as can be seen frequently throughout the collection *Citizens,*[81] and in the typescript for Parks' forthcoming collection *The Jesus of Mexborough.*[82] Moreover, the passage of time is a common theme in Parks' body of work, particularly in the poems that we might consider place-oriented. As he says himself, 'There are places where the membrane between past and present thins.'[83] An instance of this 'thinning' can be found in the poem 'Mill Bank',[84] in which Parks layers a recent past event from a seemingly personal experience against a further-past economic history.

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[78] 'The Voice of the People', first published in *The Northern Star*, 4th December 1841.
[79] Robert G Hall, *Voices of the People* (London: Merlin Press, 2007).
[80] 'The Voice of the People', first published in *The Northern Star,* 4th December 1841.
[81] Parks, *Citizens.*
[82] Ian Parks, *The Jesus of Mexborough* (Unpublished manuscript, provided by the author, 2022).
[83] Personal Correspondence (included with permission of the author).
[84] Ian Parks, *The Exile's House* (Hove: Waterloo Press, 2012), p. 53.

Here, Parks highlights the former significance of a now-redundant industrial location, 'The place had been important once: | a mill, a mill-dam and a packhorse track',[85] but the once-bustling mill has become a saccharined location where 'Children [play] under the stone bridge'.[86] Like Mort's observations of Litton Mill in the poem of the same name,[87] discussed in the next chapter, Parks' focus is on the durability and permanence of these industrial constructions: buildings that have essentially outlasted the industry they were built to serve, and will probably eventually outlast the poets that are observing them, suggested by the 'always there' of Parks' closing line. [88] Although the historical focus of the location has become the backdrop to events rather than the centre of them, it is still not an inconsequential location, as the poem concludes: 'Incongruous in your cocktail dress | you seemed to be the spirit of the place: | encountered, not forgotten, always there.'[89] Like the female subject of the poem, the mill itself stands out against its natural backdrop of 'the wood […] stones and tangled roots',[90] as a place that changed the economic landscape of its location as much as it now alters its physical landscape. This is very much in line with Henri Lefebvre's considerations of the impact of the past on present places:

> The past leaves its traces; time has its own script. Yet this space is always, now and formerly, a present space, given as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality.[91]

Here, the 'associations and connections' that Parks makes as a member of the local community become part of the poem.

This poem is written in seven tercets and can be divided into three parts: the first opens the poem, setting the scene in the recent past, before moving further back and exploring the

[85] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 53.
[86] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 53.
[87] Helen Mort, Division Street (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013), p. 43.
[88] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 53.
[89] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 53.
[90] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 53.
[91] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 37.

history of location, and finally returning to the recent past and uniting both of these histories. This technique, which we may refer to as an instance of temporal layering, is closely linked to depictions of place. Temporal layering occurs when a place is not considered solely within the present, but when past iterations, or future potentialities are imposed against (or on top of) the contemporary site. In this poem, layering allows Parks to explore the societal via the personal, seeing the setting to the events of the poem as only a native can, and is an example of what Graham D. Rowles deems 'autobiographical insideness'.[92] An aspect of place attachment, autobiographical insideness stems from belonging within a community tied to a geographical location. As Rowles considers:

> The process of generating this sense of insideness is an active and creative one. It involves projecting a sense of self into the space in which one resides and, in many cases, of creating a place that is an expression and at the same time a constant reminder of who the person once was, or at least believes oneself to have been. Place and person become fused: each becomes an expression of the other.[93]

The act of remembering or exploring a location as it once was is, in essence, an act of self-exploration: a consideration of how the changing personal identity intersects with the changing landscape. In areas impacted by declining industry, whereby the defining monuments and industrial architecture become redundant, this exploration takes on an additional facet, becoming a search for the continuing significance of the individual within a location without purpose. Parks' conclusion, though, renders his earlier use of the past tense, with 'The place had been important once',[94] a half-truth: though no longer pivotal to economy or industry, the mill has left a lasting impression, as striking as a woman dressed-up and out of place.

[92] Graham D. Rowles, 'Place and personal identity in old age: Observations from Appalachia', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 3, (1983), 299-313 (p. 307).
[93] Rowles, p. 307.
[94] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 80.

Though a half-truth, it is one that can also be found in the poem 'Off the Map'.[95] The speaker here ponders an out-of-date map on a train station wall, lamenting that the former industrial hubs are now 'lost cities on the edge of things | that were important once.'[96] Here, Parks explores the historic landscape, noting various places that used to be central to the day-to-day running of the country, before concluding that they are now no longer relevant, and instead of offering employment and opportunity to those that inhabit them, they are forgotten locations from which the inhabitants long to escape. The final quatrain, with its stripped back language and absence of punctuation (bar the closing full-stop), reflects the claustrophobic feel of a town from which individuals cannot remove themselves:

> where promise keeps receding
> to these backwater towns
> at the end of the line
> that offer no escape.[97]

Like the pace of the receding promise, this closing stanza tightens visually as its lines shorten, before screeching to a sudden and foreboding conclusion, with the closing phrase of 'no escape' hammering home the reality for many born and raised in low-income and working-class communities. Parks desired a return to his comparable hometown, and achieved it, but did so on his own terms, and returning by choice is not the same as having no choice but to remain.

Parks' repetition of the phrase 'important once' across multiple poems (for example 'Mill Bank' and 'The End of The Line'), should also be noted – the implied suggestion that these places are no longer important being somewhat undermined by their utilisation in Parks' poems. These places still *are* important, at least to the poet, and the poems in which he uses them work to beseech readers to see their significance beyond their histories, a point reinforced

[95] Parks, *The Exile's House*, pp. 24-25.
[96] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 24.
[97] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 80.

and intensified by Parks' frequent layering of time – past and present and sometimes future – within the poems.

The poem 'Downpour',[98] which Parks has dedicated to Leeds poet Ian Harker, also considers the passage of time. In this poem, an idealised pre-industrial past is presented as simpler than the present, free from the complications of modern life and distractions such as 'office blocks […] shopping malls […] motorways […] concrete car parks'.[99] Again, in exploring the changing times, Parks focuses on places, and modern monuments, infrastructure and architecture are symbolic of the changing attitudes of those who inhabit them, each leaving a legacy; and for the falling rain to have a cleansing effect on all it touches, Parks surmises that 'you'd need to change the hearts | and ears of those it falls upon'.[100] But ultimately this is a poem about the legacy of industrialisation, a process that swept up the working classes and has now, in many cases, left them behind. In concluding the poem, Parks considers the environmental impact of the industrious twentieth century, acknowledging that even the falling rain is different in the present: 'This rain has acid in it and it burns'.[101]

In his 2017 collection *Citizens*,[102] Parks continues the concerted shift to Mexborough and the north of England as a focal point in his poetry which began with *The Exile's House.* The opening title poem seems to reflect obliquely on the result of the 2016 European Union referendum, with the opening phrase of 'Free agents' hinting at the outcome which resulted in the UK withdrawal,[103] and 'every exit covered by a camera on a pole' implying the surveillance of such a legislative superstructure.[104] This is once again hammered home with the symbolic

[98] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 3.
[99] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 3.
[100] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 3.
[101] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 3.
[102] Parks, *Citizens*.
[103] Parks, *Citizens*, p.11.
[104] Parks, *Citizens*, p.11.

description of the EU flag as 'twelve stars | encircling nothing':[105] the Union itself is a concept, an economic union, empty at its heart. The journey Parks depicts in the poem mirrors the results of the referendum, with the starting point hinted at as being an old town – the movement through 'new estates' suggesting the existence of old ones. [106] The poem does not suggest one referendum outcome would have been preferable to another, though: it simply provides an allegory for where we are, and the conditions in which it took place.

In considering this in relation to the post-industrial landscape, the formerly prosperous industrial towns of northern England were much more likely to vote to leave than to remain. As Matthew Goodwin and Oliver Heath state: 'Groups in Britain who have been "left behind" by rapid economic change and feel cut adrift from the mainstream consensus were the most likely to support Brexit.'[107] Like Parks' journey in 'Citizens', the result of the referendum trickles outwards, the dissatisfaction of these communities on a local level triggering a shockwave through Britain, contradicting the desires of those in wealthier metropolitan areas – or as Parks describes them in the poem's closing stanza, cities with 'no feature',[108] where 'the landscape had no soul.'[109] – and having implications on a national and international level.

In 'Oracle',[110] another allegorical micronarrative in verse, Parks presents a modern incarnation of the Oracle at Delphi. The speaker journeys to this oracle, and she is found not in 'sacred olive groves',[111] but rather at 'a mill | abandoned when the textiles died.'[112] Here, Parks shows what locations he considers to be sacred and important, as well as the people he wants

[105] Parks, *Citizens*, p.11.
[106] Parks, *Citizens*, p.11.
[107] Matthew Goodwin and Oliver Heath, *Brexit vote explained: poverty, low skills and lack of opportunities* (2016) <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/brexit-vote-explained-poverty-low-skills-and-lack-opportunities> [accessed 16 May 2022].
[108] Parks, *Citizens*, p.11.
[109] Parks, *Citizens*, p.11.
[110] Parks, *Citizens*, p.14.
[111] Parks, *Citizens*, p.14.
[112] Parks, *Citizens*, p.14.

to draw attention to – the oracle of Parks' poem is not a high priestess of a religious order, rather a stoned squatter in a derelict building. The speaker heads to the 'underside' of the city,

> where streets are unlit and no one goes.
> And there I found her
> cold and drugged and shivering
>
> on the mattress where she dozed.[113]

Note the slant rhyme of 'no one goes' and 'dozed', and the implication that, in some conceptions, people like her are therefore 'no one'. And when the oracle cannot answer his question, it is the city that he escapes back into, the familiar buildings of the skyline at dawn providing him with a refuge from this uncomfortable situation:

> the spires
> and domes and minarets
> reclaiming their identity from the night,
> the dawn a yellow slit.[114]

This is, at least in part, the comfort of anonymity. Parks' feeling of being comforted by the landscape is one that is explored further in 'Towpath',[115] in which he shares his familiar and comforting home landscape with a visitor. The poem opens *in medias res*, and in apparent conversation: 'Another time I'll take you to the pub | where old men spend all day over one pint',[116] a subtle allusion to the poverty or frugality of those living in the area, who cannot afford or choose not to spend money on another drink, but who nonetheless choose community over sitting at home. This is Parks' familiar environment, as we learn when he states that 'You'd never think the hill across the way || was once a slagheap',[117] although he will not share all of what he knows with his guest:

> just as I'd never venture to explain

[113] Parks, *Citizens*, p.14.
[114] Parks, *Citizens*, p.14.
[115] Parks, *Citizens*, p.16.
[116] Parks, *Citizens*, p.16.
[117] Parks, *Citizens*, p.16.

the wide canal that cuts under it all
the things it once displaced.[118]

Whatever his motives, in 'Towpath' Parks highlights the difference between belonging to a location and experiencing it as an outsider.[119] Whilst the invitation of the closing stanza to 'claim this morning as your own'[120] seems genuine enough, the morning must not truly belong to the visitor, lest it need not be claimed. This is markedly different from when Parks included himself within the situation in the first stanza, using the first-person plural pronoun 'we' to state that 'For now, we have the towpath laced with frost';[121] when Parks is included, then both time and place can be possessed fully. Here, what is essentially a quasi-pastoral scene depicting a morning dog walk through a deindustrialised area takes on an edge of territorialism inspired by Parks' relationship to the place.

In the poem 'A Bricked-up Window on the Great North Road',[122] an unnamed female character 'always slows to see' the titular landmark when driving past.[123] She laments that this sight reminds her of the poem's speaker, and of how 'a government can stretch its arm | as far as air and sunlight which are free.'[124] The poem is made up of three sentences spread over two quatrains of iambic pentameter, with the word 'politics',[125] coming at the close of the first stanza, disrupting the expectation of an ABAB interlocking rhyme scheme. Indeed, the anticipated rhyme for politics does not emerge until the penultimate line of the poem, with 'bricks'.[126] The rhyming of politics and bricks suggests that the changed physical landscape is

[118] Parks, *Citizens*, p.16.
[119] Parks, *Citizens*, p.16.
[120] Parks, *Citizens*, p.16.
[121] Parks, *Citizens*, p.16.
[122] Parks, *Citizens*, p.44. The Great North Road was once the main connecting road between London and Edinburgh, starting on the edge of London and passing through Doncaster, five miles to the east of Mexborough. The modern A1 follows almost exactly the same route, albeit with several minor deviations such as by-passes.
[123] Parks, *Citizens*, p.16.
[124] Parks, *Citizens*, p.44.
[125] Parks, *Citizens*, p.44.
[126] Parks, *Citizens*, p.44.

representative of the shift in the political one, highlighting that for Parks the physical and the political are symbiotic. The speaker of the poem concludes that he thinks 'it has no meaning: except bricks | and mortar fill a space where choices used to be.'[127]

The concept of choice, or of having options, is one Parks has frequently explored in his poetry. As we have seen, in several poems he admits that his perspective on his hometown differs from that of some of its other inhabitants: as expressed in 'Staying On', for example, for the speaker staying in Mexborough was a choice. Increasingly, there are fewer options available to those living in economically stagnant, post-industrial working-class communities, something the 2016 referendum highlighted. As Goodwin and Heath conclude:

> First, income and poverty do matter. Groups of voters who have been pushed to the margins of our society, live on low incomes and lack the skills that are required to adapt and prosper amid a post-industrial and global economy, were more likely than others to endorse Brexit. […] where people live also played a significant role. The left behind groups, those who were the most likely to support Brexit, face a 'double whammy'. While they are being marginalised because of their lack of skills and educational qualifications this disadvantage is then being entrenched by a lack of opportunities within their local areas to get ahead and overcome their own disadvantage.[128]

The timing of this poem, and indeed of the entirety of the *Citizens* collection, shows that Parks' movement towards more politically-minded commentary in his poems has not been accidental. The inconclusive result of the 2010 UK General Election, amongst other things, triggered this movement. As he considers:

> It played a part in my shift from private to public poetry. It made me think of the great radical tradition which, being the son of a miner, I was born into. And so, it was that I wrote poems about what Andy Croft described as my 'places of painful historical memory' – and particularly the Miners' Strike of the mid 1980s in which I took an active part. But there were also poems about the Levellers, the Chartists, the Great Trespass, and the Jarrow March. I was testing poetry to see if it could carry that kind of political weight and I still am.[129]

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[127] Parks, *Citizens*, p.44.
[128] Goodwin and Heath, *Brexit vote explained* \ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/brexit-vote-explained-poverty-low-skills-and-lack-opportunities> [accessed 16 May 2022].
[129] Parks in Shannon, 'Poems of Community and Historical Memory'.

Published in the aftermath of the Brexit vote, the deprivation of post-industrial areas in the UK was a popular topic at the time and Parks presents a balanced perspective on this. He is careful not to caricaturise these places or their inhabitants and avoids stereotyping and assigning blame. In many ways, *Citizens* is for Parks what *v.*[130] was for Tony Harrison: a movement towards a more overtly politically-motivated poetry with a refusal to scapegoat the working-classes. However, unlike Harrison, who at the time of writing *v.* had long since left Leeds and was no longer a part of the community he grew up in, Parks is still very much a member of the Mexborough community, and his work is celebrated and appreciated by its inhabitants. He frequently launches his new collections and pamphlets at the former WMC in his hometown, for example, and regarding the community reading and writing group he launched in the year of the EU Referendum, 'Read to Write', he states:

> People kept telling me that there was no appetite for poetry in such a depressed area where engagement with the arts was low. […] Under the normal conditions the group meets twice a week and I present a taught session followed by a workshop in order to keep the reading and writing balance stable. I have been ambitious, teaching *Beowulf*, *Paradise Lost*, and *The Waste Land* to large groups. We have been on the road too, performing at pubs, at railway stations, in art galleries, libraries, and parks. All of which shows that poetry is not the preserve of a privileged elite and is alive and well in the hearts of everyone who is allowed to be exposed to it. The government are currently encouraging young people not to become artists at the very time when we need them most.[131]

In the poem 'Registry of Births and Deaths' Parks once again combines the past and the present.[132] Parks' house used to be Mexborough Registry Office, something he had recently discovered at the time of writing the poem.[133] It opens with reference to 'my door',[134] although of course it was not Parks' door at the time when people stood there to register births and deaths; the possessive 'my' merges the past and present – like the layering of time in 'Mill

[130] Tony Harrison,.*v.* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1985).
[131] Parks in Shannon, 'Poems of Community and Historical Memory'.
[132] Parks, *Citizens*, p.17.
[133] Personal Correspondence (included with permission of the author).
[134] Parks, *Citizens*, p.17.

Bank', though in this instance the location is even more personally significant. Here, Parks considers the personal element of historically common industrial tragedies, the grieving mothers, sisters, and widows who would have been tasked with registering the deaths of lost loved ones – for, despite the poem's title, the focus is almost wholly on the registration of deaths, not of births:

> They queued for hours outside my door
> to register the deaths of men –
> of husbands, fathers, brothers, sons
> who died in some disaster underground:
> crushed when seams collapsed, encasing them
> or choked inhaling poisonous fumes.[135]

When births are mentioned, very briefly, they are also shrouded in the pall of death: 'infants also, born to coal and dust || the deaths of them, the deep successive tides.'[136] This is the line of succession that Parks himself was born into, and a heritage that he has escaped, even though he has chosen to return to where it all happened. Living amongst so many reminders of Mexborough's industrial heritage is in turn a reminder of what his life might have been had he been born in a different time, and the town which 'itself is riddled and subsides', as the poem puts it, is an objective correlative for the people inhabiting it.[137] In Harrison's *v.*, 'subsidence' from the mines beneath 'makes the obelisks all list' in the graveyard;[138] in Parks' 'Registry of Births and Deaths', it does the same thing to the land of the living, who must simultaneously endure life in a town that has lost the industry that caused this subsidence.

With his selected poems due for publication in late 2022 or early 2023, Parks has delayed the release of his next full collection until 2023, though the typescript has been ready for a while. *The Jesus of Mexborough*,[139] as is indicated by the title, once more heavily features

[135] Parks, *Citizens*, p.17.
[136] Parks, *Citizens*, p.17.
[137] Parks, *Citizens*, p.17.
[138] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 265.
[139] Ian Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.

Mexborough and the post-industrial community is a reoccurring theme and location of importance. In the collection's title poem, Parks presents Mexborough as a town in decline, with his description of 'the shuttered street' evoking a town in the midst of economic scarcity,[140] a place now closer than ever to economic collapse in the wake of the austerity measures of the 2010s. Here, Parks names the pub 'the Bull', the only mention of a location specific to the town; though he also lists other businesses. These are 'Poundland' and 'Greggs', cheap chain corporations which have stepped in to fill the gaps in many former industrial areas – as they have elsewhere – but more salubrious chain stores such as Marks and Spencer, Waitrose or Pret a Manger are both conspicuously unmentioned in the poem and, in these three cases among many others, remain absent from Mexborough, a town of nearly 20,000 inhabitants. The poem is loosely in the ballad form (though at times modulating out of an interlocking ABAB rhyme scheme or alternating lines of tetrameter and trimeter) and presents a typically balladic narrative of trial and tribulation centred around its protagonist. In a recent interview, Parks stated, 'Jesus supposedly said "a prophet is never welcome in his own hometown" – although the inhabitants had just tried to throw him from a cliff!'[141] and in the poem the Jesus of 'Jesus of Mexborough' is an unwelcome figure:

> They chased him through the nearest pub,
> they said he was deranged.
> They chased him till they had no breath
> but something in them changed.[142]

Despite being a champion for the working-classes and seeking revolution – 'Don't think I came to bring you peace – | I came to bring a sword' – [143] he is an unwelcome interloper. Perhaps, to hark back to 'The Wheel',[144] Jesus also 'pushed against the pit wheel | and he tried to make it

[140] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.
[141] Parks in Shannon, 'Poems of Community and Historical Memory'.
[142] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.
[143] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.
[144] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.

turn':[145] that wheel is symbolically to remain buried wholesomely in the middle of town for a while yet. The Jesus of Mexborough is exiled from his hometown, not that he holds this against the town's inhabitants, as he makes clear in the poem's final lines: '*You'll find me on the edge of town | still carrying my cross'*.[146]

In 'The Seam',[147] Parks returns to the coalface, reflecting on his first visit there at the age of ten, with his father. The poem juxtaposes Parks' fear of the pit, 'Nothing I'd known could be worse than this',[148] with his father's obvious respect for it: 'the gleaming wall of sheer black rock | which he bent close to kiss.'[149] The poem is in some ways evocative of Harrison's 'Bookends',[150] though where Harrison focuses on his side of the divide between himself and his father, Parks explores this more from his father's perspective. Rather than the 'books, books, books' being what separates Parks from his father,[151] it is the job which gave his father a community and identity, as seen in the penultimate stanza:

> On his last day he poured the water out
> forever from his tin canteen
> and said goodbye to everything.[152]

For Parks senior, retirement was a complete ending, although his belonging within the mining community is something that remains with him until his death, as represented by the 'crude tattoo' given him on his first day, '[quivering] on the bedsheet […] when he died.'[153]

For Parks, the memory of his father is inextricably tied to the mining industry. As seen in 'The Cage' and 'The Incident',[154] his father's job is central to who Parks perceived him to

[145] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.
[146] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.
[147] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.
[148] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.
[149] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.
[150] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.
[151] Harrison, *Collected*, p.137.
[152] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.
[153] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.
[154] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 8; Parks, *The Exile's House*, p. 9.

be. This is not something that is isolated to his most recent poems of the past decade: if we look at the *Shell Island* poem 'The Great Divide',[155] Parks describes his 'father's eyes' as being 'black-rimmed and smiling after a long shift'.[156] Here, the 'she' of the poem, a woman looking at Parks and seeing him for who he really is, may be observing the physical similarity of inheritance when looking into Parks' eyes – but for Parks, they cannot be separated from his father, or his father's job as a miner. Parks seemingly makes an unsteady peace with his heritage, finally coming to be proud of the community in which he was raised, 'not pity at the thought of it, but anger first, then pride.'[157] Like a young Tony Harrison feeling out of place in grammar school, but reclaiming his cultural heritage in 'Them & [uz]',[158] in 'The Great Divide', Parks runs the gamut of feelings regarding 'the bitter streets | where [he] was born'.[159] Here, Parks lists what, to him, constitutes the 'unrelenting grimness of the north',[160] places which, to his mind, are synonymous with the landscape:

> its chapels, pitheads, slagheaps, union halls,
> processions through the darkness, millstone grit [.][161]

The places Parks lists as defining his hometown are mainly places of community, where people gather either for work or for pleasure. In this poem, Parks shows that despite any negative emotion he may have towards his hometown – and indeed, beyond its 'unrelenting grimness', Parks has plenty to say about 'the valley floor | that offered no escape' – ultimately, it is a place of community.[162]

Again, in this collection, Parks' more personal reflective poems are interspersed with wider societal and historical reflections. The Battle of Marston Moor, which receives an

[155] Parks, *Shell Island,* p. 52.
[156] Parks, *Shell Island,* p. 52.
[157] Parks, *Shell Island,* p. 52.
[158] Parks, *Shell Island,* p. 52.
[159] Parks, *Shell Island,* p. 52.
[160] Parks, *Shell Island,* p. 52.
[161] Parks, *Shell Island,* p. 52.
[162] Parks, *Shell Island,* p. 52.

honourable mention in 'Orgreave',[163] is given its own poem in *The Jesus of Mexborough*. Here, Parks considers the 'arable land' that was the site of the infamous 1644 battle during the First English Civil War.[164] The poem contemplates the circumstances of the civil war, declaring in the first stanza that it happened 'in a time of indecision and a time of change'.[165] In the closing stanza, Parks returns to the present, 'the scrub, the footpaths, and the open plain',[166] with the repetition of 'in a time of indecision and a time of change' as the poem's final line. This repetition draws a direct parallel between the social and political conflict of the English Civil War with the current situation in the United Kingdom;[167] with the result of the 2016 referendum being so close, and the subsequent UK withdrawal from the EU resulting in numerous complications, such as the continuation of the Schengen border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and the impact a hard border on the island of Ireland would have on continued peace and adherence to the Good Friday Agreement.

In 2021, alongside an interview I conducted with the poet for the journal *Wild Court*,[168] and in which he discussed his relationship with his hometown, Parks published 'Shooting Stars' and 'Jarrow March'.[169] Both poems are due to be included in *The Jesus of Mexborough*. In 'Shooting Stars',[170] Parks touches on the North-South divide, albeit allegorically: 'Here we have no shooting stars | to leave a trail across the northern skies'.[171] Smoke and light pollution from industry might be to blame for the lack of visible shooting stars in the northern night sky,

[163] Parks, *The Exile's House*, p.40.
[164] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.
[165] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.
[166] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.
[167] Parks, Unpublished Manuscript.
[168] Tuesday Shannon, 'Poems of Community and Historical Memory: an interview with Ian Parks', *Wild Court* (2021) *<https://wildcourt.co.uk/features/essays/poems-of-community-and-historical-memory-an-interview-with-ian-parks/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=poems-of-community-and-historical-memory-an-interview-with-ian-parks> [accessed 9 May 2022].*
[169] Ian Parks, *Two New Poems by Ian Parks*.
[170] Ian Parks, *Two New Poems by Ian Parks* (2021) <https://wildcourt.co.uk/new-work/two-new-poems-by-ian-parks/> [accessed 21 July 2022].
[171] Ian Parks, *Two New Poems by Ian Parks*.

though of course shooting stars are also symbols of good fortune, and of ambitions that might be fulfilled. The stars are not just stars: here, as in the immortal quotation from Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windemere's Fan*, 'We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars' – and some of us are not.[172] However, despite 'Three hundred years of smoke and grime' hiding them from view,[173] the streets of the North are still 'filled with hopeful souls'.[174] Parks places the blame for these centuries of oppression on the government and the South: 'Your cities have polluted | our dark regions with their light.'[175] Such is the foundation of the divide; those in the North have long been exploited for the benefit of the wealthy and powerful, as is the nature of capitalism, as Ellen Wilkinson discusses:

> In capitalist society vast changes can be made which sweep away the livelihood of a whole town overnight, in the interest of some powerful group, who need take no account of the social consequences of their decisions.'[176]

The poem includes a protest against HS2, the new proposed high-speed railway from Glasgow to London, 'Likewise you will not listen when we say: | divert your high-speed railway from our door'.[177] The use of 'Likewise' here implies that the Government's refusal to listen to the needs and wants of the people of the North is a common occurrence. Parks concludes the poem with the plea 'give us back our clear cold winter night | and let our children see the shooting stars'.[178] The past may be written in stone, but it is not too late to change the circumstances in which today's youth are growing up, if only those with the power to act do so.

As is by now a common occurrence in Parks' work, 'Jarrow March' juxtaposes the current political climate – what Parks' deems a 'bland, slipshod democracy' – against the

[172] Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windemere's Fan* (London: Bodley Head, 1893).
[173] Ian Parks, *Two New Poems by Ian Parks*.
[174] Ian Parks, *Two New Poems by Ian Parks*.
[175] Ian Parks, *Two New Poems by Ian Parks*.
[176] Ellen Wilkinson, *The Town That Was Murdered* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1939), p. 7.
[177] Ian Parks, *Two New Poems by Ian Parks*.
[178] Ian Parks, *Two New Poems by Ian Parks*.

past,[179] in this case the Jarrow March which occurred between the 5th and 31st October 1936.[180] This march saw approximately 200 men, all inhabitants of the industrial town of Jarrow in County Durham, march to parliament to deliver a petition protesting job losses in the area brought about by the closing of Palmers Shipyard. In the early nineteenth century, Jarrow had been a mining town, plagued by protests and misfortune, including a cholera outbreak. With the opening of new, more profitable seams in the North of England, the mine was closed in 1851 and so began Jarrow's transition towards being predominantly a shipbuilding town. The mine was subsequently sold and reopened, though in the intervening few years the shipyard, which employed over 10,000 people, had become the biggest local employer.[181] The parallels between the 1936 economic situation in Jarrow, and the more recent issues besieging former industrial towns formerly reliant predominantly on one industry, Mexborough included, are numerous. However, Parks is mournful that the thirst for social justice in Britain is no longer what he implies it was in the period between the World Wars. As the opening line puts it, 'Instead of revolution we have rain'.[182]

Parks refers to the miners who stayed behind whilst the unemployed shipyard workers marched to London ('Some stayed at home and made the pit-wheel turn'),[183] and also brings in the contemporaneous outbreak of the Spanish Civil War: 'some manned the barricades in Spain | and came back changed'.[184] Whilst Britain had a policy of non-involvement in the Civil War, around 2,100 British volunteers joined the International Brigade to assist the Republican Army in Spain, with an estimated 530 British and Irish volunteer troops never returning home. Of these volunteers, the vast majority were working-class men – in addition to the writers who

[179] Ian Parks, *Two New Poems by Ian Parks*.
[180] Historic England, *People and Protest: The Story of the Jarrow March* (2022) <https://heritagecalling.com/2021/10/04/the-story-of-the-jarrow-march/> [accessed 21 July 2022].
[181] Encyclopedia Britannica, *Jarrow* (2022) <https://www.britannica.com/place/South-Tyneside> [accessed 21 July 2022].
[182] Ian Parks, *Two New Poems by Ian Parks*.
[183] Ian Parks, *Two New Poems by Ian Parks*.
[184] Ian Parks, *Two New Poems by Ian Parks*.

had more famously volunteered, George Orwell and W. H. Auden amongst them.[185] By October of 1936, the time of the Jarrow March, a number of key battles had already been fought, including the July 1936 military uprising in Barcelona and the Siege of Madrid.[186] Whilst the Jarrow March seemingly 'achieved nothing' at the time, the news coverage it generated, and the subsequent use of the footage as part of Labour's post-war election campaign, was considered hugely influential in helping to secure the landslide Labour victory of 1945.[187]

Given its significance in working-class history, it is unsurprising that Parks has chosen the Jarrow March as the focal point for this poem reflecting on the post-industrial slump that has been experienced across many former industrial areas. In 1939, Ellen Wilkinson, former Labour MP for Jarrow, wrote:

> The Poverty of the poor is not an accident, a temporary difficulty, a personal fault. It is the permanent state in which the vast majority of the citizens of any capitalist country have to live. That is the basic fact of the class struggle […]. Class antagonism cuts as deeply to the roots of capitalist society as it ever did.[188]

This is a sentiment that Parks shares. Since his return to Mexborough, he has become a champion of, and he has made quite an impact upon, his local community, building strong relationships with the area and using his talent as a writer in the service of his people – for example, by setting up and running the Read to Write programme, a weekly reading and writing group he now leads at the Balby and Mexborough Libraries.[189] In recent years, the focus of his work has shifted alongside the focus of his everyday life, and whilst his poems continue to voice his frustration at what many working-class communities currently face, his involvement

[185] Historic UK, *Britain's Fight For Spain* (2022) <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Britains-Fight-for-Spain/> [accessed 21 July 2022].
[186] Encyclopedia Britannica, *Timeline of The Spanish Civil War* (2022) <https://www.britannica.com/list/timeline-of-the-spanish-civil-war> [accessed 21 July 2022].
[187] Historic England, *People and Protest: The Story of the Jarrow March* (2022) <https://heritagecalling.com/2021/10/04/the-story-of-the-jarrow-march/> [accessed 21 July 2022].
[188] Ellen Wilkinson, *The Town That Was Murdered*, p. 7.
[189] Personal Correspondence.

on a community level ensures he is not simply paying lip service to the cause. At least for as long as Ian Parks is in Mexborough – and he shows no sign of leaving – Mexborough will be a key component in the poetry of Ian Parks.

III. *A stone was lobbed in '84*: Class, Protest, and Belonging in the Poetry of Helen Mort

Helen Mort was born in Sheffield in 1985, the year after the Battle of Orgreave, and the same year in which Tony Harrison's *v.* was published.[1] Raised in Chesterfield, she studied for her undergraduate degree at the University of Cambridge, before moving closer to home to complete postgraduate study at the University of Sheffield. Like Tony Harrison's Leeds, Mort's Chesterfield and the region surrounding it – including Sheffield, South Yorkshire, and northern Derbyshire – have been prominent themes in or settings for her work from the outset of her poetic career. In 2010, Mort was named as the youngest poet-in-residence at the Wordsworth Trust in Grasmere, which was followed by a two-year tenure as Derbyshire Poet Laureate between 2013 and 2015, a period of time during which Derbyshire and the North of England continued to be a prominent focus of her work.[2] Moreover, Mort's interest in Northern England has not been limited to her poetry, with her 2019 debut novel *Black Car Burning* utilising the rugged Yorkshire landscape as its setting.[3] The focus in this thesis, however, will remain on her poetry, in particular, her pamphlet *A Pint for the Ghost* and her debut collection *Division Street*.[4] Her subsequent poetry has focused less concertedly on these themes, though the chapter culminates with brief discussion of this more recent work.

Published in 2009, *A Pint for the Ghost* was a concept pamphlet, meant as an accompaniment to Mort's theatrical show of the same name. However, only three of the poems first published in its pages made it into *Division Street*: 'A Chaser for Miss Heath',[5] the title of

[1] Helen Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost* (Luton: Tall-Lighthouse, 2009), cover matter; Tony Harrison, *v.*, (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1985).
[2] Helen Mort, *Division Street* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013), cover matter;
[3] Helen Mort, *Black Car Burning* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2019).
[4] Mort, *Division Street*.
[5] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, p. 13.

which was edited down to 'Miss Heath';[6] 'A Mild for Stainless Stephen',[7] which became just 'Stainless Stephen' for its inclusion in her first full collection;[8] and 'A Pint for Dad' which was later retitled 'Brocken Spectre'.[9] Like many of the poems in the pamphlet, these three poems explore characters specific to Sheffield and northern England, as Mort discusses in the pamphlet's foreword:

> I was born in Sheffield and spent most of my years as a teenager in nearby Chesterfield, with its Crooked Spire and peculiar legends. Growing up in Derbyshire, I was always aware of what a singularly ghostly place it is, how many stories are attached to the landscape.[10]

These are the 'ghosts' that make up the pamphlet, both local figures and more personal ones to Mort, such as her father and her former ballet teacher. Alongside these poems, the closing two poems of the pamphlet are the ones primarily of interest in this thesis.

In the first of this closing pair of poems, 'Last Orders for Chesterfield',[11] Mort is the one doing the haunting. The poem explores a ghostly return to her hometown, prompted by her homesickness after leaving for Cambridge, 'So homesick in the fens | I couldn't sleep'.[12] Although upon her return to the 'town I left behind | two years ago',[13] things are simultaneously familiar and alien to her. In her absence, the town has forgotten her: she walks 'unrecognised | up Hady Hill', and in her 'local […] the landlord | will not see me.'[14] This uncanny return is not a unique experience, of course, as Daniel Boscaljon discusses:

> Although few attend to or discuss the peculiar tensions associated with homecomings, many people discover an odd tone of dissonance that disrupts the triumphant solace that had been desired upon return.[15]

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[6] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 36.
[7] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, p. 6.
[8] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 11.
[9] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, p. 17; Mort, *Division Street*, p. 56.
[10] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, foreword.
[11] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, pp. 20-22.
[12] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, p. 20.
[13] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, p. 20.
[14] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, p. 21; Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, p. 22.
[15] Daniel Boscaljon, 'Introduction', *Resisting the Place of Belonging: Uncanny Homecomings in Religion, Narrative and the Arts* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), p. 1.

Mort's personal growth in her time away is reflected by the familiar being made strange upon her return. Mort's feelings of having abandoned her hometown to pursue higher education are presented with the visual metaphors of the town slipping into neglect: 'The Rec is wrapped | in an amnesia of hawthorn bushes',[16] and her parents' house is 'overgrown | with waist-high nettles'.[17] Boscaljon continues:

> [P]laces can change as much as people do – when we return to a space that we remember, we may find that the place we left has been altered beyond recognition. What we remember has been lost beyond our ability to reclaim, relegated to a memory that we know as a poor substitute. Unlike other new places whose novelty we enjoy, finding an unfamiliar place existing in a space we once knew well causes us to suffer in a unique way.[18]

The homesickness that triggered Mort's ghostly wandering cannot be satiated, because the town that she left no longer exists, nor does the person who left it. As Stan Smith notes:

> [T]he ground-note of contemporary poetry is the recognition enshrined in the title of Thomas Wolfe's exemplary novel of modern alienation *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940), such poetry does not simply cast adrift from origins. On the contrary, it is in the tension between allegiance and autonomy, or between conflicting and conflicted allegiances, that it finds its common ground.[19]

This poem shows a movement towards the thematic explorations Mort would later make in 'Scab',[20] the longest and most celebrated poem in her debut full-length collection, though it lacks the later poem's complexity.

The final poem in *A Pint for the Ghost*, and the poem immediately following 'Last Orders for Chesterfield',[21] is 'After Hours'.[22] This poem is presented as an afterword and features the repeated refrain 'I belong',[23] precluding a series of images and landscapes specific to Mort's childhood hometown and the surrounding region, such as 'Harthill Moor',[24] a popular

[16] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, p. 20.
[17] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, pp. 21-22.
[18] Boscaljon, 'Introduction', p. 2.
[19] Stan Smith, *Poetry and Displacement*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 6.
[20] Mort, *Division Street*, pp. 16-23.
[21] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, pp. 21-22.
[22] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, p. 23.
[23] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, p. 23.
[24] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, p. 23.

location in the Derbyshire portion of the Peak District, and the 'long-deserted pubs' that Mort would return to in 'Scab'.[25] Here, Mort gives an explicit answer to the conflict that plagues much of her poetry, choosing to align herself with her childhood home.

Of the poems from *A Pint for the Ghost* that are reprinted in *Division Street*, the first to appear in the typescript of the full collection is 'A Mild for Stainless Stephen'. Aside from the shortening of the title to 'Stainless Stephen',[26] the poem is largely untouched, bar a few superficial edits. The title was the stage name of Arthur Clifford Baynes, a British Music Hall comedian popular throughout and beyond the 1920s, though as Mort notes, 'He never achieved enough fame to allow him to give up his day job as an English teacher.'[27] His stage name was a pun evocative of Sheffield's famous heritage of steel production, and his act included vocalisations of punctuation, which Mort riffs off throughout the poem. Here, Mort imagines the ghost of 'Stainless' returning to a present-day, unwelcoming Sheffield, where 'the shop lads | shove him into the cold'. This exclusion forces him to return to somewhere he expects to still be welcoming: the pub in which he used to perform. Like Stainless, though, the pub is long abandoned and forgotten, and he discovers a place where 'brambles twine around the pumps' and 'the jukebox hasn't changed its tune since '71' – the year in which Baynes died.[28] This presentation superimposes past nostalgia on top of the present reality, giving the impression that the place to which Stainless has returned to haunt is also haunted by its former relative glory.

Conceptually, the poems in *A Pint for the Ghost* bear more than a passing resemblance to those in Harrison's *The Loiners.*[29] However, whereas Harrison chooses to explore his character vignettes within their contemporaneous settings, Mort brings the ghosts of the past

[25] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, p. 23; Mort, *Division Street,* pp. 16-23.
[26] Mort, *Division Street,* p. 11.
[27] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost,* Notes.
[28] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 11.
[29] Tony Harrison, *The Loiners* (London: London Magazine Editions, 1970).

into her present, perhaps more akin to the way in which Ian Parks layers the landscapes of his northern England-based poems. Mort states that 'These are poems that invoke different characters: ghosts with unfinished business, ghosts who warn of danger, personal ghosts, even living ghosts. What all of these spirits have in common is a reluctance to be put to rest',[30] and indeed, the act of writing them did not exorcise them for Mort, with the characters and the landscapes they inhabit continuing to haunt her work through the development of *Division Street.*[31]

Published four years after *A Pint for the Ghost*, *Division Street* takes its title from the poem of the same name, which in turn is named for its location: a street in Sheffield city centre.[32] The title suggests that both conflict and the North of England will be found within the pages – and indeed, throughout the collection, Mort explores divisions both personal and collective, from intimate and familial relationships to public matters such as the Miners' Strikes of 1984-5. As Mort has said:

> I […] chose *Division Street* as a title because of the different resonances I felt this place-name held within it: the idea of conflict and separation; and the notion of trying to demarcate the landscape into different sections or 'divisions'. Both of these were themes in my approach to writing about the particulars or the parochial aspects of place.[33]

Born in a mining town as the 1984 Miners' Strikes were beginning, and growing up during a time of shifting social and political landscapes, Mort has witnessed (and experienced) the economic decline of her local area, which has often been followed by regeneration projects and gentrification.

[30] Mort, *A Pint for the Ghost*, foreword.
[31] Mort, *Division Street.*
[32] Mort, *Division Street.*
[33] Helen Mort, 'Writing a Place: Poetry and "ghost rhetoric", in *The Routledge Handbook of Place*, ed. by Tim Edensor, Ares Kalandides, and Uma Kothari (London: Routledge, 2020), p. 649.

This gentrification is the focus of the poem 'Litton Mill',[34] in which Mort explores the residential repurposing of industrial buildings: mills that 'are plush apartments now'.[35] Here, the use of 'plush' juxtaposes the building's current use with its former industrial purpose, which Mort indicates by layering it against the 'clank and jostle of machinery'.[36] In her choice of adjective, Mort also intimates the sudden inaccessibility of these repurposed spaces for the working classes who once earned their wages here: that this is 'plush' housing does not imply it is within the price range of most working class people. Mort also indicates that, in the present incarnation of the mill, there is an absence of 'living voices',[37] suggesting that although these comfortable rooms have occupants, they are now moribund shells. It is through this layering that Mort juxtaposes the lively industrial past against the more comfortable but less community-minded present. The reader is presented with an idealised, nostalgic past, where community was the focus of living and the buildings being turned into homes were still vital to those communities. The mill itself becomes a metaphor for the post-industrial shift: where once things were built to work, and were living, they are now built for living in comfort, and are dead – at least to the communities who served them.

The choice of closing with the words 'cannot hold',[38] drawing on W. B. Yeats' 'The Second Coming' ('the centre cannot hold'),[39] is evocative, and when considered alongside this, Mort's reference to the 'waterwheel' also provides a visual link to the opening line of Yeats' apocalyptic contemplation: 'Turning and turning in the widening gyre'.[40] Reading 'Litton Mill' in conversation with this, the poem begins to suggest that industrial loss is an indication that, indeed, 'Things fall apart'.[41] In this poem, Mort implies that, like the romantic relationship

[34] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 43.
[35] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 43.
[36] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 43.
[37] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 43.
[38] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 43.
[39] William Butler Yeats, *Selected Poetry* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 129.
[40] Yeats, *Selected Poetry*, p. 129.
[41] Yeats, *Selected Poetry*, p. 129.

outlined in the poem, the original purpose of the building was unable to withstand the passage of time; nothing is permanent, and even with a residential function, the Mill will eventually outlive its purpose: to repurpose Yeats' phrase, this new 'centre cannot hold'.[42] The repurposing also presents a very literal 'Second Coming', as buildings like Litton Mill are now in the second phase of their existence. This is not to say that the past is of no concern though, of course, and the poem is evidently at pains to suggest it provides an indelible (if also, by others, generally unacknowledged) backdrop: as Mort observes of the Mill, it is 'Flanked by stiff-backed chimneys',[43] highlighting that the industrial heritage of these areas is the background against which the post-industrial communities will be built.

From the repurposing of industrial buildings to the decline of traditional high streets, the poem 'Carnation' laments the death of local industry and the insurgence of service sector businesses replacing the more traditional businesses that once populated industrial towns like Chesterfield.[44] As popular chain stores have taken over family-owned businesses with links to the wider community, the modern town centre, especially in towns such as Chesterfield which are not major hubs and which are not sustained by a tourist industry, has often diminished beyond recognition in recent decades. Mort's observations on this shifting landscape focus on olfactory representations rather than visual ones. Unlike the other senses, the sense of smell has a direct connection to the brain's limbic system, which links to both the formation of memories and experience of emotions. Mort's utilisation of this in this poem establishes a thriving retail area, rooted in very traditional businesses – in modern, highly corporate times, many independent butchers and florists have been put out of business, unable to compete with the low prices and convenience of supermarket chains. These chain stores, often built away from town centres, offer a cheap and sterile alternative to the high streets, and in many areas

[42] Yeats, *Selected Poetry*, p. 129.
[43] Mort, *Division,* p. 43.
[44] Mort, *Division,* p. 24.

of declining industry, they have absorbed a proportion of the job losses brought on by factory and pit closures. In this poem, the layering of the landscape occurs via this reference to scent, and juxtaposing the florid scents of 'coconut oil, jojoba' that are redolent of The Body Shop, against the unmasked, earthy scents of 'caul and pig skin' that previously filled the Butchers' District forces the reader to be aware of both the historic and the current incarnations of the Butcher's District, and subtly indicates that the present is a saccharine palimpsest over a thriving, if workaday, past. As in 'Litton Mill', Mort once again chooses to constrain 'Carnation' to a single stanza, again uniting the past and present in the one 'room' of the poem. In the final four lines, Mort's use of pararhyme on the alternating line ends, with 'market stall' and 'buttonhole', suggests that despite the changes to the landscape it still holds a connection to the past. However, the takeover of corporate chain companies, where once family-owned and independent businesses thrived, gives the high street a very different, much more generic, feel. Like the Mexborough depicted in Ian Parks' 'The Jesus of Mexborough',[45] Chesterfield is also a town that has undergone a loss of businesses and industry that has permanently altered it. Whilst, ostensibly, the title of this poem refers to the carnation that is to be 'beheaded for your buttonhole',[46] the literal meaning of carnation is 'the colour of flesh'; even in Mort's selection of flower to name the poem, we see that flesh cannot be washed out of the district entirely, and he final act of 'behead[ing]' hints at the violence of the area's former trade, albeit at a beautified remove. [47]

If the passage of time imbues landscapes with new meaning for those who know them, describing the changing of seasons can be a useful shorthand to signify a span of time. Snow is an image that recurs throughout *Division Street* and, as Kate Kellaway notes in her review of the collection for the *Guardian*, 'In the same way that [Mort] favours silence, [she] is a

[45] Ian Parks, 'The Jesus of Mexborough', Unpublished Manuscript.
[46] Mort, *Division*, p. 24.
[47] Mort, *Division*, p. 24.

winter poet who prefers bare branches to opulent springs. Snow piles into more than one poem'.[48] One of the most striking images of snow comes in the closing stanza of 'Fur':

> 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.[49]

Here, Mort inverts the relationship shown in Seamus Heaney's 'Digging', which of course opened his debut collection and was a statement of literary intent against an ancestral background of hard graft:[50] the man who dreams of manual labour in Mort's poem is trapped inside, whilst the poet watches from outside, having already 'dug' her way out with a 'squat pen'.[51] The time period of 'thirty years' prior to the poem's publication, and the dreams of 'digging', suggest that the man is an ex-miner,[52] frozen in, and simultaneously out of, place. As Katy Shaw considers:

> The onset of pit closures generated a common fear that whole communities would cease to exist, causing whole populations to move elsewhere, abandoning regional roots, or remain static and jobless in a husk of a former industrial centre.[53]

The subject of the poem's close is representative of all those who chose or were forced by economic circumstance to stay, despite the lack of opportunity; the bleak, white, oppressive snow becomes symbolic of the poverty that has ravaged the town, whilst Mort, the onlooker, documents it. The snow specifically impacts businesses that once thrived due to the relative affluence of the local miners – Mort chooses to name 'The Blacksmith's Arms',[54] 'Calow Fish Bar' and the 'long-abandoned Working Men's Club' (also featured in 'Scab', albeit during a time prior to its abandonment).[55] This highlights the further impact of the pit closures; beyond the mines themselves, whole communities have collapsed as the financial implications of the

[48] Kate Kellaway, 'Division Street by Helen Mort – review', *The Guardian,* 24 November 2013, p.
[49] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 10.
[50] Seamus Heaney, 'Digging', *Death of a Naturalist,* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966) p. 1.
[51] Heaney, *Death of a Naturalist,* p. 1.
[52] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 10.
[53] Katy Shaw, *Mining the Meaning* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), p. 118.
[54] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 10.
[55] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 10; pp.16-24.

loss of an industry have rippled outwards. Whilst 'Eastwood Park'[56] is a less obviously class-defined location, it suggests the Nottinghamshire mining town of Eastwood that was the birthplace of D. H. Lawrence, one of the most famous working-class writers of his generation and, broadly, of the region of England from which Mort writes. These places are all united as recreational locations, indicating that the residents of this area can no longer afford what once were standard pastimes. Once again, the speaker of the poem is on the outside looking in ('I stand to watch it'),[57] suggesting that she is either unwilling or unable to alter the course of events. Like the lambs in Philip Larkin's 'First Sight,'[58] Mort and her peers have learned to navigate this snow-covered environment. However, unlike her peers, for Mort winter is over, and she has found herself in a new landscape 'utterly unlike the snow.'[59] In Larkin's poem, of course, the earth after the snow will be an 'immeasurable surprise':[60] something glorious that the lambs cannot yet comprehend is waiting for them. In contrast, for many living in the aftermath of industrial closures, quite the opposite fate awaits them.

In 'Fur',[61] the speaker claims snow 'wants [her] childhood for itself'.[62] Mort's use of the phrase 'my childhood' in reference to her hometown suggests that her environment is not merely a backdrop to these events, but that the place itself is representative of this specific period of her life. The snow covering this familiar landscape could be considered representative of the individual fearing a loss of self-identity when removed from a community, as much of this self-definition is provided by relation to others and location. Mort's use of this phrase also provides another layered representation of place; in this poem the Calow of the past and the present collide, with the reader unsure which version the snow is consuming. This is reinforced

[56] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 10.
[57] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 10.
[58] Philip Larkin, *Collected Poems* (London: The Marvell Press, 1988), p. 112.
[59] Larkin, *Collected Poems*, p. 112.
[60] Larkin, *Collected Poems*, p. 112.
[61] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 10.
[62] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 10.

by the use of 'schoolfriends'.[63] Although the reader is obviously aware that the speaker is undoubtedly an adult, confronted by this description the initial image presented is of a person of school-going age, before that is overridden with Mort's insistence that she is describing 'everyone I knew',[64] which reveals that the people of the past are being considered as they are now. Mort's description of 'the long-abandoned Working Men's Club' highlights that this is a town in the midst of depravation,[65] with the bleak, white, oppressive snow becoming a symbolic visual metaphor for the way in which poverty has ravaged a once thriving town.

'Fur' also highlights how the events of the Miner's Strike itself have forever changed the physical landscape of Chesterfield, not least for those of its inhabitants who remember the strikes and the town as it once was. Mort's reference to 'the bridge | where a man was felled with bricks | in the strike' exemplifies the way in which a location can be redefined by a pivotal event from a febrile past.[66] As Sue Clifford states, 'Everywhere is somewhere to someone – the land, embossed by story on history on natural history, carries meaning'.[67] Undoubtedly the bridge has a name, but Mort chooses instead to refer to it through the lens of this layering, contextualising the lasting impact of these events for the reader and highlighting her connection to the place and its history.

Unlike 'Fur', in which the speaker is an outsider looking in, in 'Twenty-two Words for Snow',[68] Mort, though still an observer, inverts this situation in more than just the physical sense of the narrative taking place from the inside looking out. In this poem, the speaker describes a feeling of 'waiting'[69] for her father 'in the kitchen',[70] suggesting that the poem is set in her childhood home. The title is an obvious allusion to the common saying that Inuit

[63] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 10.
[64] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 10.
[65] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 10.
[66] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 2.
[67] Clifford 'Local Distinctiveness', p. 13.
[68] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 2.
[69] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 2.
[70] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 2.

peoples have twenty-two words for snow, due to its abundance in their environment. Mort's remark that this town 'doesn't have twenty-two words for anything'[71] suggests, in the context of the poem's economic environment, that nothing here is abundant: the people of Chesterfield do not have twenty-two words for anything because they no longer have anything in abundance. This is amplified by the interstanzaic enjambment, which lengthens the pause between 'don't have',[72] ending stanza one, and 'twenty-two words for anything'.[73] Like Harrison in 'Them & [uz]' there is a stark difference between the language of the working-class and that of the upper and middle classes.[74]

'Twenty-two Words for Snow' ends without exploring the impact of the snow's arrival,[75] however, Mort provides a visual link to falling snow with the imagery of 'sifting flour'.[76] This image is followed by the speaker's observation that her father is 'still panning for something';[77] as the act of sifting gravel to find gold, this reference links back to mining. The implication of this ending is the suggestion that despite the mine closures, and despite the fact that Mort's father was not a miner, he, alongside the rest of Chesterfield's inhabitants, are forever linked to the industry, and forever condemned to suffer the legacy of that industry being taken away from the town.

Like Harrison's explorations of Blackpool in 'Illuminations' and 'Sonnets for August 1945',[78] in 'The French for Death',[79] Mort uses a family holiday in Dieppe to ruminate on her origins – in this case, the origin of her surname.[80] This is the poem that opens *Division Street,* so a search for her origins is where the book begins, albeit displaced to a foreign country. In

[71] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 2.
[72] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 2.
[73] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 2.
[74] Harrison, *Collected*, p. 133.
[75] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 2.
[76] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 2.
[77] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 2.
[78] Harrison, *Collected*, pp. 157-159; Harrison, *Collected*, pp. 196-203.
[79] Helen Mort, *Division Street*, p. 1.
[80] Helen Mort, *Division Street*, p. 1.

the seven decades since Harrison's family holidayed on the beaches of Blackpool, international travel had become increasingly popular and affordable. Nonetheless, Dieppe is not a common working class or package holiday destination, and it is indicative that Mort grew up in a more middle class family than the other poets discussed in this thesis. This poem is an interesting choice to be placed first in the collection; for many readers this will be their first introduction to the poet. Here, whilst the title places the name as being explicitly French, Mort establishes that her roots are not: 'Dad repeated it in Oldham's finest guttural'.[81] This, combined with the collection's cover image of a confrontation between a policeman and a protestor at the 1984 Battle of Orgreave, firmly establishes Mort as a voice of northern England, albeit one from the other, eastern side of the Pennines, and one who has benefitted from the social mobility achieved by her forebears. In the closing stanza of this poem, Mort uses the unusual imagery of a 'spindle of a shipwreck'[82] in the distance; whilst the spindle is suggestive of a ship's mast, it also links to both the famous crooked spire of Chesterfield, and the textiles industry the industrial north – on both sides of the Pennines – was once famous for.

Mort's father's hometown of Oldham, from where he obtained his 'finest guttural',[83] is explored in the poem 'Oldham's Burning Sands',[84] a memoir reflecting on childhood visits to the poet's grandparents in the Lancashire town. Named after the album by The Oldham Tinkers,[85] a Manchester-based folk band, here Mort presents a small vignette into weekends spent visiting her paternal grandparents. Although this is clearly a frequent visit to family, Mort frames it with the language associated with holidays, with the young Mort lying down 'beside the palm-leaf-coloured couch',[86] alongside her plea that her mother 'should have told me

[81] Mort, *Division Street,* p. 1.
[82] Mort, *Division Street,* p. 1.
[83] Mort, *Division Street,* p. 1.
[84] Mort, *Division Street,* p. 15.
[85] The Oldham Tinkers, *Oldham's Burning Sands* (United Kingdom: Topic, 1971).
[86] Mort, *Division Street,* p. 15.

granddad's street in Oldham | smelled of Sarson's Vinegar, not coconut'.[87] For the young Mort, these trips to Oldham are exotic getaways, and the scene she depicts is a comfortable and nostalgic one, of a jovial and lively family life: this is a family who are enduringly comfortable spending time with one another.

In 'Thread',[88] Mort deepens and philosophises her consideration of the importance of ancestral heritage:

> […] you're tethered
> to a man below, an ancestor
>
> who looks on silently
> from an old print: your face
> in his and his in yours.[89]

Here, Mort highlights the physical attributes we receive from our ancestors. Like Harrison's assertion in the 'Illuminations' sonnet sequence that he is his parents' legacy,[90] Mort observes that we come from those who have passed on before us. In stating that the unnamed ancestor in the 'old print' has 'set your course',[91] she suggests that where we are from has a significant bearing on where we will go; though this ancestor 'looks on silently',[92] he will still influence the decisions and choices made by the individual in the present. The use of 'tethered' also implies that it is something done against the individual's will,[93] and the closing line indicates that the unnamed 'you' to whom the poem is written is in fact anyone who might read it, 'like all the living, | anchored by the dead'.[94] Like 'tethered',[95] 'anchored' also indicates something forced upon the poem's 'you'; in other words, the heritage over which we have no control may stop us from achieving our full potential. As Mort notes in the opening lines, 'you have the

[87] Mort, *Division Street,* p. 15.
[88] Mort, *Division Street,* p. 51.
[89] Mort, *Division Street,* p. 51.
[90] Tony Harrison, *Collected Poems* (London: Penguin, 2008), pp. 157-159.
[91] Mort, *Division Street,* p. 51; Mort, *Division Street,* p. 51.
[92] Mort, *Division Street,* p. 51.
[93] Mort, *Division Street,* p. 51.
[94] Mort, *Division Street,* p. 51.
[95] Mort, *Division Street,* p. 51.

sky'.[96] However, though this may seem to provide limitless potential (and draws presumably consciously on the cliché that the sky is the limit), like the kite of the poem, the past is not something an individual can outrun.

Daryl Leeworthy states that 'The strike and its effects […] appear as a crisis moment in the collective biographies of entire communities and the individual biographies of the men, women and children involved: for them all it was a turning point.'[97] Indeed, this has certainly held true both for Chesterfield and for Mort. At the time of the last pit closure in the Chesterfield area – 1993 – Mort was in primary school, not that this has stopped her from exploring both the strikes and the impact of the closures in her poetry. Kellaway determines that, by doing so in the long poem 'Scab', Mort loses authenticity:

> Ambitious but least convincing is the long poem about the 1984 Sheffield riots (Mort was born in Sheffield in 1985). The poem feels willed and riskily inauthentic. She attempts, not altogether successfully, to get round the problem: "This is a reconstruction. Nobody/ will get hurt." But her attempt to connect South Yorkshire's picketing miners with life as a Cambridge undergraduate feels forced.[98]

If viewed as a forced connection of supposed counterparts, Kellaway's point is fair: the two are not alike in kind, nor in significance. However, Mort does not claim otherwise: instead, she juxtaposes them, in no way suggesting these two events are of either a similar scale or importance. What the poem makes clear, in fact, is that, like both Harrison and Parks, Mort feels uneasily distant both from the working-class community among which she was raised and the rarefied one she joined at Cambridge: both are at equal remove, in opposite directions, from the speaker. In much the same way as the poets that have come before her, both within the northern working-class communities and those explored previously in this thesis, Mort's exploration of conflict and betrayal is done by balancing her social observations with her personal ones. Unlike Ian Parks, who could write about the strikes from the perspective of

[96] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 51.
[97] Daryl Leeworthy, 'The Secret Life of Us: 1984, the miners' strike and the place of biography in writing history "from below"', *European Review of History*, Vol. 19 (5), 2012, 825-846, p. 825.
[98] Kate Kellaway, 'Division Street by Helen Mort – review', *The Guardian*, 24 November 2013, p.

someone on the picket lines with his father, or Tony Harrison, who could also consider it at the time it was happening, Mort is forced to see it all as a recent history she has in no sense lived, though she has been surrounded by its legacy.

For this exclusion, however, Mort does not blame her community: she is herself the 'Scab'[99] of the poem. *The OED* defines a 'scab' as a 'person who refuses to join a strike or who takes over the work of a striker; a blackleg; a strike-breaker',[100] but Mort provides her reader with a more curt and colloquial definition: the first stanza of part III closes with 'Please note | the language used for authenticity: | example – scab, example – cunt'.[101] The use of repeated words, repeated punctuation, and two metaphorical monosyllabic nouns, each literally denoting something on the body and each comprising three consonants and a vowel, presents a line that is perfectly balanced metrically, syntactically and visually, implying direct equivalency between those two concrete nouns. Like Deller's re-enactors, Mort assumes a role, though Mort's is that of an individual not as well versed in the ritual and pomp of Cambridge as her well-heeled peers. As is explored in section IV: 'The trick's in moving artlessly, | not faltering as if it burns | your hands'.[102] Here, Mort shows that she is familiar with the art of deception, showing that one of the ways in which she gave the appearance of belonging at Cambridge was by repeating rehearsed behaviour, but whilst the actions may appear to be the same, the tensions and sentiments behind them are inauthentic. Mort's language in each of the scenarios presented in 'Scab' is emphatically representative of each situation, with the colloquial juxtaposed against the formal in a mirroring of the relationship between the two locations she explores. The loaded 'cunt' and 'scab' of Part III starkly contrast with the more linguistically and thematically formal

[99] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 19-24.
[100] The Oxford English Dictionary Online, *Scab* (2018) <http:||www.oed.com|view|Entry|171622?rskey+sNzell&result+1#eid> [accessed 12 October 2018].
[101] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 20.
[102] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 21.

first stanza of IV: 'mutter the Latin under your breath | not knowing if it's thanks or blasphemy'.[103] As Michael James notes:

> Not only is a 'scab' a person who works during a strike and undermines it, but a wound which, while beginning to heal, still bears the visual mark of damage having been done. As the 'scab' in this second sense is still evident in Mort's poem in 2013, the repercussions of the strike are yet to have disappeared.[104]

However, for Mort the 'damage' explored in this poem extends beyond the reach of the industrial action, and indeed, Chesterfield. 'Scab' explores many of the same tensions found in the poetry of both Harrison and Parks. Like Harrison's exploration of his time as a 'scholarship boy' in, for example, 'Them & [uz]',[105] discussed earlier in this thesis, Mort considers her experiences as a 'small-town-girl-done-good' at Cambridge; like Harrison practicing and rejecting RP, Mort also expresses a sense of non-conformity when discussing her accent and experience at Cambridge. As Claire Hélie states, 'Orgreave is used as a paradigm for her own re-enactment of the dividing lines in her life. Indeed, part four uses the same rhetoric of theatrics to describe how she tries and mimics the attitude of the other Cambridge students.'[106]

The first of 'Scab's five sections uses a series of biblical references, with a 'stone lobbed in '84 | [hanging] like a star over Orgreave',[107] alluding to the star of Bethlehem; here, Mort is implying the 'birth' of a new age, world-changing to those who experience it, as Christ's birth is said to be in the Bible. Mort goes on to invert the gospel representation of Christ's generosity, 'the wine | turning to water in the pubs'[108] and 'plenty of room at every inn',[109] again drawing on the biblical tale to highlight the poverty of the pit town on strike. Here, Mort is also suggesting that the deprivation experienced during the strike and its aftermath was of biblical

[103] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 21.
[104] Michael James, 'Trading on Strikes: Trade Unions in Steve Ely's 'Ballad of the Scabs' and Helen Mort's 'Scab'' *Journal of Languages, Texts and Society*, 2017.
[105] Harrison, *Collected*, pp. 133-134.
[106] Claire Hélie, 'From Picket Lines to Poetic Ones: the 1984–1985 Miners' Strike and the Idea of a 'Condition of England Poetry'', *Etudes Britanniques Contemporaines*, https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.2658, 2015.
[107] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 16.
[108] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 16.
[109] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 16.

proportions, echoing the apocalyptic sentiment presented in 'Litton Mill'.[110] Parallels are drawn between the journeys made by the Wise Men and those made by police officers from neighbouring counties, though instead of gold, frankincense and myrrh, the police bear 'a half-brick […] a shield […] a truncheon […] a chain'.[111] Paired with the section's closing 'Anointment of blood',[112] the new era that Orgreave is ushering in is one of violence.

In part II, Mort's 'Cambridge offer sits untouched | for hours amongst the bills',[113] the promise of a fulfilled aspiration hidden amongst the mundane, whilst Mort sees in the New Year at 'Calow WMC'.[114] The first part closes with the speaker's 'steps | ruining the snow's unopened envelope',[115] with the envelope linking both the virgin snow and the Cambridge offer. Like her footsteps sullying the pristine landscape, Mort's subsequent journey forward at Cambridge turns a dream into reality, and a fresh start becomes the new routine. In this instance of snow, the weather acts to both silence and beautify the town; in the glow of moonlight, even the 'landfill site'[116] she passes on her way home is obscured under it.

At Cambridge, Mort is other, as is shown in the second part of II, when her neighbour 'stops once | to ask me where I got my accent from.'[117] Accent and background set her apart from most of her new peers, and the speaker feels she never truly fits in: 'Day | after day, I cannot learn the tune'.[118] The second stanza is in stark social contrast to the first – in her working-class community Mort is surrounded by people, she 'joins a conga line',[119] and although she is still the observer to some degree, she is also an active part of events. This is in strong juxtaposition to the isolation of the second stanza, where Mort has a single interaction

[110] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 43.
[111] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 16-17.
[112] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 16-17.
[113] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 18.
[114] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 18.
[115] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 18.
[116] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 18.
[117] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 18.
[118] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 18.
[119] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 18.

with her opera-singing neighbour and does not speak to the cleaner who comes in daily: 'A Chinese woman enters carefully, | empties the bins without a word.'[120] Yet, despite this isolation, Mort knows that to return to Chesterfield would be to condemn herself to a future of limited opportunity, a future that would result in the same way as the New Year's conga line, and like many people in former industrial communities, Mort's life would '[end] where it began'.[121] Writing on the social reforms that led to some working-class children receiving educations at grammar schools and through scholarships to private schools, Sandie Byrne states:

> Working-class schoolchildren sent to posh schools, uprooted from familial and social networks, could be assimilated into middle-class culture or be at home in neither, though often an observer of both.[122]

For Mort, moving to Cambridge at eighteen to pursue higher education, the latter certainly seems to have been the case.

In part III, Mort shifts her focus to Jeremy Deller's 2001 reconstruction of the Battle of Orgreave. The first section highlights the differences between this re-enactment and the reality: 'Nobody | will get hurt' and 'There will be opportunities to leave'.[123] What appear on the surface to be references to the physical violence of the Battle of Orgreave also function as reference to the long-term ramifications of the strikes and the pit closures. However, Mort's poem is also aware of itself as a reconstruction. Just as Deller is not a part of the working classes of post-industrial Chesterfield, neither is Mort, at least not fully, as she observes in the closing stanza of part V:

> You're left
> to guess which picket line
> you crossed – a gilded College gate
> a better supermarket[124]

[120] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 18.
[121] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 18.
[122] Sandie Byrne, *Poetry and Class* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 363.
[123] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 19; Mort, *Division Street*, p. 19.
[124] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 24.

Like both Harrison and Parks, Mort is fully aware that whilst she may have been raised within this community, she is not, or at least is no longer, a part of it in the way others are and have been.

Part IV once again reiterates Mort's isolation from her peers on the Cambridge University social scene. Throughout the sequence, Mort oscillates between the two worlds, belonging in neither. Mort's limited experience amongst the Cambridge social milieu sets her apart, her feelings of inferiority exemplified by the 'wine everyone else is able to pronounce'[125] and the boyfriend 'pulling at my hand and smiling | telling me how far I've come.'[126]

In *v.,* as we have seen earlier in this thesis, Harrison reveals that the 'Skin' with whom the poem's main speaker interacts is in fact his alter-ego, the person he might instead have become had he not been afforded the opportunities that ripped him from his origins: 'He aerosolled his name and it was mine.'[127] Here, Harrison's main speaker places the blame squarely on his own shoulders; what this poem is exploring is the path not taken, how he might have been were it not for his grammar school education and where it led him. In the closing stanza of 'Scab', Mort parallels this revelation:

> […] the entrance
> to your flat where, even now, someone
> has scrawled the worst insult they can –
> a name. Look close. It's yours.[128]

Where Harrison uses the revelation of the poet's name as an opportunity to consider the alter-ego, Mort uses it to highlight her present removal from her community. For Harrison, the name (however bitterly and uneasily) unites, whereas for Mort, it divides. As Harrison asked in *v.*:

> I doubt if 30 years of bleak Leeds weather
> and 30 falls of apple and of may,
> will erode the UNITED binding us together.
> And now it's your decision: does it stay? [129]

[125] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 21.
[126] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 21.
[127] Harrison, *v.*, p. 22.
[128] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 23.
[129] Harrison, *v.*, p. 31.

Almost thirty years later, ‘Scab’ explores these same tensions, and suggests that, for Mort at least, the division between the working-class background and the life of a poet-writer-academic, the community division still stands. Mort’s Chesterfield is also a place of what Harrison terms ‘the versuses of life’.[130] Whatever may have been left of community spirit amongst the working classes has all but been destroyed by the strikes and their aftermath, and the mistrust and betrayal from within the working-class that Harrison experienced as a ‘scholarship boy’ is still encountered by Mort and others like her:[131] working-class individuals obtaining the opportunity to study behind ‘gilded College gate[s]’.[132] Perhaps even more so, as the industries in which many earned a living when Harrison was younger have since disappeared, with jobs like ‘miner’, ‘machinist’ and ‘steelworker’ going the same way Harrison’s ‘Skin’ observed of the skilled trades ‘[h]aberdasher’[133] and ‘organ builder’:[134] the increased absence of work for the working-class widens the chasm between those who remain within the post-industrial community – either of their own volition or their circumstance – and those who can, or who choose to, escape it.

‘Scab’ presents the reader with the uncomfortable reality of Karl Mannheim’s post-industrial utopia,[135] in which thought will be celebrated and rewarded over action or manual labour.[136] Mannheim suggested that the decline of industry would signal the dawn of a knowledge-based society, and ‘Scab’ portrays this transition via the poem’s speaker; for her, academia has provided a new society, forcing her to attempt to reconcile an academic future with an industrial past. Through the poem, we see her sit more comfortably ‘in Calow WMC’

[130] Harrison, *v.*, p. 31.
[131] Byrne, *Poetry and Class,* 365.
[132] Mort, *Division*, p. 23.
[133] Harrison, *v.*, p. 19.
[134] Harrison, *v.*, p. 19.
[135] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1936).
[136] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 18.

than she does at a Cambridge summer ball,[137] showing her feeling of otherness by highlighting the unfamiliarity of high-society encounters – 'the challenge of the cutlery' and 'wine everyone else is able to pronounce'.[138] 'Scab'[139] presents the 'narrative of escape'[140] so often depicted in contemporary writing on the working-class by writers from outside this demographic, instead from Mort's perspective as an insider; the familiar trope of the working-class individual elevated out of their society by talent or knowledge is demonstrated here but, having lived this reality, Mort presents it not as the cliched happy ending of a work of pulp fiction but rather as a pervasive inner-turmoil stoked by the belief that to succeed beyond class expectation is a kind of betrayal. As Kristoffer Chelsom Vogt considers, 'When knowledge workers are celebrated as doing the work of the future, people who do practical work are cast as yesterday's people – soon to be useless remnants from a past epoch.'[141] In 'Scab', Mort trains for the former at one of the world's most prestigious seats of learning, yet feels more at ease among the latter, back where she is from.

'Scab' is not the only poem in which Mort considers the strikes and their wider ramifications. 'Pit Closure as a Tarantino Short' explores them from a different, less personal perspective.[142] The poem is written after Ian McMillan's 'Pit Closure as Art',[143] the title of which is neutral. Mort's titular allusion to Tarantino, on the other hand, immediately implies violence. As Kent L. Birtnall considers, 'Tarantino's status as auteur is distinguished by the

[137] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 18.
[138] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 18; Mort, *Division Street*, p. 18.
[139] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 18.
[140] Phil O'Brien, 'The deindustrial novel: twenty-first-century British fiction and the working class' in *Working-Class Writing: Theory and Practice* ed. By Nick Hubble and Ben Clarke (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) pp. 229-246 (p. 237).
[141] Kristoffer Chelsom Vogt, 'The post-industrial society: from utopia to ideology', *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 30 (2), 355-376, 2016.
[142] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 25.
[143] Ian McMillan, 'Pit Closure as Art', *To Fold the Evening Star: New and Selected Poems* (London: Carcanet, 2016), pp.3-4. McMillan, sometimes affectionately referred to as 'the Bard of Barnsley', is a well-known poet and radio presenter also from, and frequently writing about life in, South Yorkshire.

graphic character of violence in his films.'[144] In McMillan's poem, the working class find themselves trapped between the past and the future at the behest of 'The Artist',[145] an ironic personification of Thatcher's government:

> The door is locked.
> The door you came through
> is locked. The Artist
> has served The Art well.[146]

In Mort's counterpart, the government, represented by 'The suit who pulled the trigger',[147] leaves the victim dead in a locked room. For McMillan, there is still a small hope that should a door in either direction be unlocked progress might be made. However, for Mort, the matter is a cold case crime-scene. The final stanza does, however, suggest some sort of continuation, in the victim's ghostly imagined words: '*Nothing's finished, only given up*.'[148] Though walking away from the body, the suit is far from free of the crime he or she has committed; either the closures, or the violence they triggered, eventually will be continued.

Protest is often an act of care – of caring for a community and the conditions in which that community exists – as well as an act of belonging; when we belong to a community we come to care about those who constitute it. It is here that poetries of place often overlap with protest, as Jess Hill discusses:

> To perform place through writing about it, whether in a city story or a poem about a chair, is to pay attention to it; to express, but also to cultivate care. […] people should not just know but care about the places they live in; even allow themselves to fall in love.[149]

If we consider both writing and protest to stem from the same impulses of caring and belonging, it is almost a natural and expected progression that Harrison, Parks and Mort would each

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[144] Kent L. Birtnall, 'Tarantino's Incarnational Theology: *Reservoir Dogs*, Crucifixions and Spectacular Violence', *Cross Currents*, Vol. 54 (1), 66-75, p. 69.
[145] McMillan, *To Fold the Evening Star: New and Selected Poems*, p. 3.
[146] McMillan, *To Fold the Evening Star: New and Selected Poems*, p. 3.
[147] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 25.
[148] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 25.
[149] Jess Edwards, 'Literature and sense of place in UK landscape strategy', *Landscape Research*, Vol. 44 (6), 2018, 659-670, p. 666.

eventually utilise their social positioning on the outskirts of both working- and middle-class communities – as discussed in Chapter I of this thesis – to highlight the significant damage of industrial loss in their working-class communities. These fears were not unfounded: in the wake of industrial loss, the local economies of England's industrially reliant places, the majority of which are concentrated in the north of the country, were left devastated. The economic landscape in the North has shifted little since, with the prevalence of low-paid, zero-hours roles doing little to fill the gap left by the pervasive loss of industry.

Those gaps are considered in the poem 'Ex-Industrial (a trailer)', [150] which was published in the same year as *Division Street*, but which has not (or at least not yet) been included in a collection. Here, Mort explores the wider societal impact by focusing on a small, personal vignette. This poem utilises screenplay elements, in keeping with the 'trailer' reference in its title, which suggests that, from the outset, Mort wants readers to know they are not seeing the entire picture, but something edited down to present the most enticing version of the whole. Like Mort's criticism of film and television portrayals of the strikes in 'Scab',[151] the reader is only aware of part of a wider narrative, yet, unlike in those portrayals, she is actively making readers cognisant of this fact. The poem opens: 'Zoom in: near sunset in a town where everything's ex-this, | ex-that', 'everything' suggesting that both the town and its inhabitants are defined by what they used to be. The poem then provides a setting in which 'an artificial pond [has been] poured in to fill the gaps;' these are, presumably, the gaps left by the departure of industry. The 'gaps' presented within Mort's visual metaphor here become representative of the area in an economic sense. Industrial decline has created a 'gap' in the job market that is now occupied to some extent by the service industries – which are dependent on

[150] Helen Mort, 'Ex-Industrial (a trailer)' in *The New Statesman*, 4th December 2013, <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2013/12/ex-industrial-trailer> [accessed 17/09/18]. Whilst it was not included in *Division Street*, which appeared the same year, this poem was published in the left-leaning magazine *The New Statesman*.
[151] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 22.

the ostensible affability of workers and disposability of product – in much the same way as the landscape has been obscured by the artificial pond. In 'Ex-Industrial (a trailer)', [152] the distinction between the real and the artificial runs through each stanza, with a 'plastic rose' on top of the television mentioned in the second stanza, and the reiteration that the body of water is 'man-made' in the third.

The depiction of 'the ex-smoker [smoking]| behind the flats', suggests that in the context of this poem 'ex' is an inappropriate prefix; like the 'ex-smoker' who continues to smoke, the ex-industrial towns are, in a sense, 'ex-industrial' in imagination only. Many of the attitudes and behaviours that were specific to industrial areas have not ceased just because the industry has gone. If we link this to Mort's repetition of 'shadow […] shadows' in the second stanza, the suggestion that 'ex-industrial' towns live in the shadow of their industrial pasts begins to emerge. Mort highlights this in the last line of the stanza prior to the second repetition: 'Real shadows take the walls by stealth'. This juxtaposes the physical and observable with the emotional and psychological, indicated in the first use of 'shadow.' The neighbour smoking is 'Just out of shot', reiterating that things cannot always easily be seen, even though they exist.

Like the closing stanza of 'Scab', Mort's use of the second person address here is unusual; in 'Scab', though, where it is used to make the reader complicit, in 'Ex-Industrial (a trailer)' it serves a different purpose. Here, Mort is not encouraging readers to share the blame, but rather she is simply placing them into the location and situation she is depicting. The poem closes with a pause, and on an image of disappearing light, as 'the sun beneath the surface holds its breath,' which leaves the reader without resolution, linking back to the poem's inclusion of '(a trailer)' in the title. Like a cinematic trailer, 'Ex-Industrial (a trailer)' suggests that to see the 'bigger picture' behind life in these ex-industrial towns, the reader must experience the story in its entirety – and, as 'Scab' shows, this is not always possible for those

[152] Mort, 'Ex-Industrial (a trailer)'.

who come after. If we consider the screenplay elements incorporated by Mort in this poem to justify its classification as a script-poem hybrid, the poem that Mort presents in a cinematic context establishes a scene but refuses to resolve it. In the context of filmmaking, Nikolaj Lübecker refers to this as a device that is specific to what he deems the 'feel-bad film,'[153] a film which 'produces a spectatorial desire, but then blocks its satisfaction; it creates, and then deadlocks, our desire for catharsis.'[154] 'Ex-Industrial (a trailer)', then, is a feel-bad script-poem.

Throughout Mort's debut collection, and indeed her wider body of work, the theme of division and conflict persists. The closing poem of the collection is no exception to this. 'Lowedges' takes its name from a hamlet on the Derbyshire-Sheffield border,[155] at the southernmost point of the Sheffield district. Mort's opening line, 'And if those doors to other worlds exist | you'll find them here',[156] suggests that behind the humdrum depictions of everyday activity on a park, there are elements of magic, with the line being evocative of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*.[157] Mort states that her reason behind ending the collection with this poem was that, to her, it embodied her approach to place-writing, allowing the imagined reality to exist alongside the physical one:

> I chose to end the book with 'Lowedges' because I felt the poem embodied the approach I had taken to place writing in the collection as a whole, that it was suffused with ghost-rhetoric. In Philip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials' trilogy, portals to other worlds can be found by tracing a knife through the air somewhere unremarkable on an ordinary day. In 'Lowedges' our imaginative life can serve the same function in a familiar place. I wanted to juxtapose the familiarity of the everyday and the possibility of the remarkable, the sense of escapism provided by our different and overlapping narratives of place.[158]

Mort emphasises this perception of the place as both a border and a doorway formally, presenting five unrhymed couplets bracketed by an opening and closing one-line strophe, with

[153] Nikolaj Lübecker, *The Feel-Bad Film* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 162.
[154] Lübecker, *The Feel-Bad Film*, p. 162.
[155] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 58.
[156] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 58.
[157] Philip Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, (London: Scholastic UK, 1995).
[158] Mort, 'Writing a Place: Poetry and 'ghost rhetoric", p. 649.

the opening line acting as an introduction to Mort's heightened everyday reality, and the closing one reflecting, once again, on a division – this time, it is the rain that 'bisects the sky'.[159] With the representation of Lowedges as a place of collisions and juxtapositions, Mort's layering of place indicates that sometimes these locations cannot distinctly be separated or categorised, and will overlap.

In the years since *Division Street*'s publication, Mort has moved away from place-oriented poetry, as noted in the introduction to this chapter. Her second full collection, *No Map Could Show Them*,[160] bears some resemblance to Harrison's *Loiners*, in that the poems collected within focus on a range of people, though her collection does not share the strong connection to one city that also holds *Loiners* together: the characters explored in *No Map Could Show Them* are women whose achievements have been historically overlooked. It bears mentioning that Mort is still a poet in her thirties, considerably younger than Harrison or even Parks, who both also largely moved away from a focus on their hometowns in mid-career. It is possible that, like them, she will one day be drawn back in, at least imaginatively.

[159] Mort, *Division Street*, p. 58.
[160] Mort, *No Map Could Show Them.*

Preface

The Rough Guide to Ilkeston is a collection of original poems creatively exploring the themes of the critical component of the thesis, in the context of my own hometown. Ilkeston is a former mining town of 40,000 people, halfway between the cities of Nottingham and Derby, the other end of Derbyshire from Mort's hometown of Chesterfield, and in a county bordering Yorkshire, where Parks and Harrison both grew up, respectively in Mexborough and Leeds. There are commonalities between all four towns, not least in terms of demographics, despoliation and deprivation. I also share with the three authors focused on in this thesis an indelible feeling of connection, place attachment, to my hometown. Indelible, but also in a sense ineffable; *The Rough Guide to Ilkeston* is partly a fulfilment of the thesis's creative aims, but also partly an attempt to write through my connection to the town and its textures. The collection is followed by a chapter that unpacks some of its contexts, connections and contributions, and concludes the thesis.

The Rough Guide to Ilkeston

Wentworth Street

A fat mallard slices through the canal,
its heft creasing the plate-glass surface
in a rippling ‘v’, like a hand
sweeping a freshly made bed.

In the blood-orange dawn light,
the fur of evening frost along the footpath
flickers, and beyond the thin veil of trees
the morning traffic wheezes
its television-static breath.

And in black aerosol across the red-brick bridge:
ROAD TO NOWHERE.

Homecoming

Despite the distance
of a decade, you know every bump
and crack in the pavement,

anticipate each pothole and dropped kerb,
can recall every secret
shortcut, better than the veins
and creases latticing each hand.

The things best remembered
are those you've forgotten you know.

Midsummer

Kerbside, petrol turns in rainwater,
holographic illusions swirling in the dim light
of a midsummer dusk.
Streetlights brighten, stark LEDs
casting long shadows across the cobblestone street.

The journey home now all downhill,
before us: rows of terraces falling on top of each other,
front windows flickering the blue glow of evening news.

Beyond, fallow farm-land spreads out into the darkness.

The Ritz Cinema, South Street

Long after the last rows of listings
appeared in a corner of *The Advertiser*,
the once-white tiles of its art deco sweep
are stained the colour of a smoker's smile.

We push inside, where paint flakes
over a mildewed carpet,
and a family of pigeons burr
in the cradle of a lighting sconce.

Propped in the corner of a forgotten storeroom
a faded poster:
ADVANCE BOOKINGS DAILY! 4/6d.

Bennerley Viaduct

There was a faint rattling noise. Away to the right, the train, like a luminous caterpillar, was threading across the night. The rattling ceased. "She's over the viaduct. You'll just do it."
D.H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, 1913

Lawrence wrote about how the train zipped
along the seam where the two counties are stitched together,
steam engines rattling over the valley,
carts carrying coal to the south.
The Luftwaffe tried to flatten it; Heinkels
released their bombs and missed their mark.
We take a picnic, walk the footpath that runs where tracks ran,
eat sandwiches in silence, staring at a timeless view
of uneven green. Beneath us, the Erewash twists its way
toward the Trent.

Baileys Factory, Heanor Road

The signage reads ‘NORTON PLASTICS LTD’,
a relic from its third or fourth incarnation in the nineties.
The view through the sash-cord windows is blocked
by stacks of rotting cardboard, a decade of dirt,
and soot from the “accidental” fire we watched
from the relative safety of our front bedroom.
It blazed all night and took three trucks to subdue.
At the back, a fly-tipped double mattress blooms black mould,
and behind the rusted doors
forgotten filing cabinets overflow
with long-satisfied invoices and order notes.

Vandalism

Two decades ago, we took black sharpies to a factory wall:
scrawled our names next to tags, phone numbers, promises of A
GOOD TIME,
certain that our futures would be brighter than boarded shops
and subsiding mines.

We didn't know that rotting chipboard would be replaced
with double-glazed sashes, overlaid muntins shining an illusion
of divided light
into open-plan flats with solid wood floors, rent that the locals
can't afford –

the bricks that bore our names scrubbed clean.

Allotments

I

Under an accidental arbour
of apple trees and thicket,
makeshift fences of corrugated iron
and mismatched panels
mark out a patchwork boundary.

‘KEEP OUT’ is sprayed four-foot high
in electric blue, alongside, in smaller print,
‘NOBBO WOZ ERE’ and ‘STU + LINDZ 4EVA’.

Some of these unevenly-tended plots
have been left to wilden;
ramshackle wooden sheds rotting
among chest-high brambles and weeds.

The old boys arrive at dawn,
working most of the day
to stroll home at sunset,
clutching their tiny harvests
of carrots or courgettes.

II

Glass rooves reflect the fading daylight
of a late winter afternoon.
Gone are the white-haired men in flat-caps:
too cold for turning over topsoil or burying bulbs.
In long months of cold the bracken has thrived,
and on the edge of night these unevenly plotted patches
seem almost wild. Soon, teenagers will arrive, long-limbed
and awkward in hooded jumpers,
clutching open cans and lit cigarettes.
They'll build a bonfire from that discarded door,
tell ghost stories, forget they aren't scared of anything.

Blackberries

In the overgrown patch where blackberry bush intertwined
with nettle vines, we picked a path through,
secretly feasting on their bitter-sweet tang.
Castle-shaped buckets were filled at the pace of summer,

but those leaves had been laced with poison.
That night, our lips were stained black with charcoal,
arms and legs scratched raw with rash,
and our fingers were still purple with what had been juice.

Skimming Stones

Along the track you stoop, collecting stones –
the flattest, smoothest specimens bulge a pocket,
those that didn't pass muster discarded
in a desire line behind you.

At the water's edge you retrieve them,
turn one over between forefinger and thumb,
then hold it aloft like a priest offering communion.
In one swift movement, you pull back

and let go: it skips away to the centre.
Then you choose one for me, show me how,
hold my fingers. It breaks the surface with a splash, sinks
like a penny in a well.

Halogen Streetlamps

pierce the black weight
of sky. Streets knot
and stretch, weaving together.

Exhalations fog the air
and beneath us, grass sweats
morning-dew –

we will be gone
before blackbirds
break the stillness
and the sun begins its climb.

‘Dad’

The smell of turps and tobacco –
I am 11 again, in the front seat of your van,
twisting the radio-dial, letting music
bridge the chasm of lost time.

Dad, I say – but your Christian
name sits more easily
on my pre-adolescent tongue.

I recoil at the memory,
like a photograph meeting
a struck match.

Flight
i.m. Terry Williams, 1959-2019

The night I move to Barcelona
we smoke in the kitchen, and I tell you
I'm scared to fly alone,
so you draw diagrams in black biro
on the back of a *British Gas* envelope,
labelling lift and weight, showing me how.

Now fatherless, again, I try to remember
how I did it before
someone drew me diagrams.

It was harder to stay in the air.

Grief

wants rain, thick blankets,
soup and home-baked bread,
a comfortable jumper and warm
winter socks. It wants to be wrapped
and held close.

In the month you didn’t see begin,
the heat is claustrophobic
and anyway,
it is too hot to reach out
for a hand to hold.

The Flowers

are dying.

Mum has moved over to his side of the bed
and we take turns to climb
in beside her –
hopeful that grief
won't steal the air from her
like on the first night.

People bring more flowers.

From his bedroom my brother
texts me, knowing there are more people
in the kitchen than he can face
so I make tea and toast and sneak away.

We've run out of vases.

One sister can't stay in the house,
the other can't leave it.
There's too much to do and we don't know
how to do it and we need
butter and bread and milk and cheese
but people bring flowers
and there's nowhere to put them so the flowers
are dying, Dad is dead, and I'm making coffee.

Catechism

In the vestibule, Mum dips her hand in holy water,
blesses each of her wayward flock
with the sign of the cross.

We are well-practiced in this deception:
know when to kneel, stand, and pray,
say ‘amen’ in the right places and,

at the call for Communion, remain seated.
Before this grief, I would’ve grinned
at our perfectly-timed performances,

not understanding the comforts
of polished pews,
polished answers.

On Wilford Hill

At the boundary, consecration
meets concrete; the ivy thickens
and spreads as it pleases.

Behind the lichen-dappled limestone,
each monolith stands
as a reminder of what will happen,

and in white paint, on top of black,
a scratched and faded warning –
do not tread on the past, *keep to the path*.

Omens

Along the horizon, thick limbs cut into a slate sky.
A lone magpie waits for company.

Because I am made of superstitions, I hold my breath until I spot its white-tipped wings slicing through the grey morning,

see it settle beside its mate.
I hope they bring someone joy.

Burial

After the hymns (we don’t know the melodies),
the prayers and half-hearted ‘amens’,
we make way to the freshly dug plot,
and an unusually colourful crowd in winter coats.
The drizzle paints the morning grey,
and among the sprays of funeral flowers
condolence cards soften, blue notes
of apology bleed. The mahogany box seems
too small to hold all that you were
when you were present tense.

Chapeltown
i.m. Wilma McCann

It wouldn’t matter
that the kids were fed
and clothed, warm in bed.

That the husband who beat
then left you
still drank too much.

And it wouldn’t matter
that you were almost home.
The milkman

mistook you for a bundle
of rags in the field
where your children played.

What mattered, then,
was your postcode,
your twenty-year-old mugshot,

that you’d thumbed a lift,
offered a fuck for a fiver.

Mablethorpe Beach
i.m. Valerie Slack (nee Hall)

Ahead, you walk the shoreline,
wind whipping peroxide hair about your face,
and laugh
that infectious twenty-Superkings-Black-a-day laugh.
The two-decade old terrier they told you wouldn't survive
scurries at your feet.

We gather seashells and stones,
stash them in pockets
until they take 'pride of place' on your mantle.

For now, you teach me to make time
for good books and good company,
to search for treasure on every shoreline.

The Regulars

I

9:55, he paces as he waits for the bar
to be lifted from the heavy wooden door,
and filters in with the usual Thursday morning pension crowd.
After their orders of coffee, toast, seniors' breakfasts,
he asks for his drink in a tall glass, no ice –

and I am reminded of being fifteen,
refilling Dad's Smirnoff
to hide at the back of the cupboard.

His voice shows no trace of this town,
no drawn-out Midlands vowels, as he tells me
about a job interview in the city,
how he's having a few to settle his nerves.

The same lie he's told me seven times this year.
Another one for the road.

He hands back his glass and I pour again
because I am paid to oblige, nothing more.

Then he asks about me, and because I am paid to oblige
I tell him I'm working my way through university.

My son did the same, he replies,
though they've long been estranged.

One more. He smiles, and again I pour.
He downs in a gulp, then makes for the door.
Good luck! I call, but he's forgotten his lie,
he'll be back next Thursday, pension day, same time.

II

Every Thursday,
she brings company
and revels in the delight
of conversation
that's not been bought;
to be asked about her
grandchildren (now at university)
and the salsa lessons
she takes on Monday nights.

Other mornings, her watery latte
goes cold as tables are cleared
and pints are poured,
and her half-started conversations
are abandoned, at the demand
of just another customer.

III

His fist is as soft as a block
of butter, shaking
around two pound coins
and a twenty pence piece,
to be exchanged
for the first pint of the day.

Under the tap it pours
itself, clouds, settles:
thick and brown with
a white halo the width
of forefinger and thumb.

His skin is the jaundiced shade
of pages in antique books,
and the ink of a decades-old tattoo
is blurred beyond comprehension

not that it matters
whether it reads Mother
or Martha, those who meant enough
to be honoured are long gone.

Nothing left but this
small pleasure, the glass
sweating as the tremors still.

IV

Dying midsummer light
softens the creases and lines on skin
as sheer as bible-paper, dims the pallor
of the thick blue rivers confluent
and divergent across each limb.

He can almost pretend
he doesn't notice that each breath
is laboured, or that despite him cutting
her food into bite-sized chunks
she is eating less each day.

Each night the burden of lifting
her into bed is a little lighter,
a little heavier. Across the table
he clasps her hand, like a child
desperately holding his kite.

V

Maggie peers out from under the hood
of her khaki-green parka, her hands
pushed into the deep pockets,

and announces that the soup kitchen
kicked her out for shouting at this guy
who's just served twenty. She drags
an index finger across her throat,

pulls out a tenner with the other hand,
slaps it on the bar where it sticks
and drags in tacky pools of spilled booze.

What's it coming to when you can't even
get a bowl of fucking soup?

VI

He pulls himself up on tiptoes,
clutching a tenner,
and shouts across the bar:
Can you change this for my dad? For the machine?

Then, palms full of coins, he skips back
to the flashing lights of the slots,
where his part-time parent feeds
them in, one after another.

He colours in a placemat, slurps the dregs
from his Coca-Cola, attempts origami
with the empty
pink crisp packet.

At seven, he returns wax crayons to the bar,
hurries through the door
to the mother waiting anxiously
in the street.

VII

Outside, the church clock chimes eleven
and it echoes through the empty marketplace –
the stalls' steel skeletons set up,
glowing white in the stark LED light,
awaiting the morning's wares of knock-off
perfume and second-hand books.

When the bell rings for last orders
a small commotion ensues:
a rush for one more drink,
just another glass of wine.

The last pint poured and paid for,
I wipe down the bar, the tables, the menus,
collect the used glasses now full of fag-ends,
flat dregs, empty crisp packets.
Make idle conversation with my captors:

How's the kids?
How's work?
What's your mum up to these days?

Then I fill every fridge,
unscrew each nozzle to soak overnight,
sweep, mop, cash up,
bar the door, turn out the lights.

American Retro

You like the clean-cut checkerboard floor,
the stainless-steel edges of red Formica countertops,
the comfort of being transported to a place and time
in which you did not exist.

In the booth behind me, a woman taps morse code
with her acrylic nails, but the only letters I know are *SOS,*
and opposite, two girls in skinny jeans with septum rings
pick at a plate of *Elvis' Everything Topped Fries*.™

You raise your eyebrows, smirking at my order
of coffee and toast,
and opt for pancakes and bacon and syrup.
You who have never been to America.

Soon you will pop a pound in the jukebox –
of course there's a jukebox –
and tell me that 'Jailhouse Rock*'* was Elvis' Best. Song. Ever.
Why tell you that you are wrong?

Outside the pavement isn't a sidewalk,
and it is slick with this morning's rain.
The roadside puddles reflect the too-bright lights
of this perfect slice of americana. I'll leave you there.

May 2020

The apple-blossom drifts from the tree
and the road is so quiet I almost hear it land

on the tufted grass, that is already thick
with heavy-headed dandelions.

My neighbour drops potatoes in hot oil
and the smell spills through my garden.

These evenings stretch out, dragging me, still awake,
into the early hours of each tomorrow;

the nights are warmer, and the open windows let in the gnats,
the breeze, the too-frequent mechanical screech

of blue-flashing sirens.

Dredging

When they dragged the carcass
from the canal-bed, thirty years of rust
had made it impossible to tell

that once it was the red of the heavy summer strawberries
your grandmother's arthritic hands twisted from the vine
to stir into jam, or sneak to your waiting mouth.

Its saddle had once smelled of new leather,
like the armchair she'd hoist herself from
when she heard you ringing that once silver bell.

Every day of that heatwave it carried you
from your door to hers, where tea and buttered toast
always awaited you, somehow.

Now the spokes of its wheels,
long stripped of inner-tube and tyre,
sink back into silt, into memory.

Crossed Wires

A gleaming web overhead,
vibrating with the weight
of stories spun through each line;

thickened, frosted, furred –
stark white against the inks
of the night sky.

Leaving Chesterfield

Slate-grey sky, smudged
like partially-erased pencil
clutters with graphite-shaded clouds,
threatens to throw sweet,
wet drops onto cold ground.

Delayed. EXP. 17:27.

The station shop bustles
with dishevelled commuters
paying over the odds for Pepsi Max
or packets of Walkers.

Platform 2.

A couple cuddle under a
picket-fence canopy
as clouds capsize, and concrete
reverberates under
worn-out soles.

Coach C.

Droplets hit the window, settle
there, the crooked spire
slides from view.

Resilience

The shadow of a tendril curls
across the page. Distracted, I try to count
the strands, pull at the end;
it bounces back.

Your hair is red, unruly wildfire.
I try to pull you closer to me with
chubby fingers, then release it;
it bounces back.

She watches over the hallway.
The black hair that you tell me was the same
shade as yours when not seen in monochrome
is perfectly styled, and if I could reach into
the frame, pull the end –
it would bounce back.

Epidermis

The top layer peels
to expose plump, pink dermis
before drying, flaking,
to be sloughed away
with Dead Sea salt-scrubs
and anointed with rich,
thick creams (unperfumed).

Like sausages, splitting in the saucepan's heat,
oranges shrinking back from the rind,
snakes outgrowing and shedding skins:

I am always revealing too much of myself.

Polaroid

Cement slabs slickened by showers
reflect the mid-afternoon sunlight –

like the patent leather
of your best shoes

the blonde flecks
in your auburn hair

the glass of your wristwatch
caught in the camera's flash –

almost young,
almost beautiful.

Photographing the Photographer

camera swings from neck, a pendulum
stilled by the snap of the shutter

light hits the lens/aperture opens/burns the image into the film:

hands twisting at berries in the hedgerow, fringe flopping
over hooded eyes, cheeks creased as a smile begins

light hits the lens/aperture opens/burns the image into the film:

later, we find it discarded,
another face amongst the masses.

Aftermath

After we fuck,
your fingers twirl my hair,
pulling each spring towards you,
letting go, smiling, as they bounce.

Stretched out,
my hand reaches for you –

with fingers interlocking, our arms
are an ombre rope, dark tan
fading to milky white.

I am tethered:
the weight of your fist,
my anchor.

‘HOPE’

Between a boarded-up chippy
and a boarded-up florist
second- or third- hand
refrigerators lean to attention.

But there are no passers-by
no eyes to catch and tempt –
just fallen leaves, empty buses,
artificial light.

In the shelter of the closed shop doorway
a teenager tugs at his hoodie,
lifts a cigarette with his left hand,
shakes a cannister in his right.

Across every shutter
one word in thick black paint
repeats like a mantra, or prayer.
The streetlights flicker on.

Epilogue

In this short final section of the thesis, an epilogue to its critical and creative components, I explore where my own poetry sits within, or develops from, the themes and the poets explored in the first three critical chapters. This chapter is not presented with the intention of 'explaining' the poems in *The Rough Guide to Ilkeston*: they should stand or fall on their own merits. Rather, it is intended to highlight specific intersections, both thematic and stylistic, between the two components of the thesis, and to offer consideration of how my creative practice continues and develops the exploration of a broadly northern English post-industrial landscape.

One, perhaps slightly unanticipated, focus uncovered in the three poets' work is the prevalence of people in their poems of place. From the character vignettes of Tony Harrison's *The Loiners*, to Ian Parks's *Citizens*, to Helen Mort's childhood ballet teacher in 'Miss Heath', one of several character vignettes in *Division Street*, Harrison, Parks and Mort all flesh out their explorations of Northern England by populating them. In *Identity and Difference*, Martin Heidegger states that 'Everywhere, wherever and however we are related to beings of any kind, identity makes its claim upon us.'[1] But our identity, whatever it might be, does not exist in a vacuum: it exists in relation to the identities around us. Individual identity is not solely an internal or insular construct, but something that is continually developing and evolving in relation to the places and people around us. As we grow and the roles we fulfil in familial and societal settings change, so too does our self-perception. As E. Relph considers, 'identity is founded both in the individual person […] and in the culture to which they belong. It is not static and unchangeable but varies as circumstance and attitudes change.'[2] David Storey notes

[1] Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p.26.
[2] E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Ltd, 1976), p.45.

that ‘Personal or family identity intersects with place both in the sense of home as the domain of a “private” domestic life and a rootedness within a locality.’[3]

It follows, then, that in exploring place, people become a primary concern for well-rounded depictions, particularly in relation to urban communities, such as the post-industrial towns and cities mentioned throughout this thesis. The people of my hometown were the influence behind the sequence of poems titled ‘The Regulars’, just as those of Leeds were pivotal to Harrison’s *The Loiners* – and, just as is the case with Harrison’s debut collection, many of my poems collected here could not have been written without the insider knowledge and feel of a member of the community from which I have written. These seven poems, primarily written in free verse, were inspired by the people who would frequent the pub in which I worked part-time whilst studying for my MA, the event that set me on course to pursuing a doctorate, and changed the focus of my life; the sequence of seven poems are ordered to reflect a single day in the pub, from early open to the close, finishing with the final ‘regular’ attendee, the barmaid closing up. The speaker, however, remains almost absent as a character within this sequence of characters. She uses the first-person pronoun, and is a presence in that sense, but ultimately she is a utility for the community: the observing barmaid, with her own untold story. She is ostensibly central to the milieu she serves, but is also an absence, with one foot outside the world of the poems as a result. She is, in other words, the thirty-something insider who at once belongs and does not quite belong, because she has taken to analysing what she belongs to. Those details remain outside of the narratives of the sequence, of course, but intentionally affect its atmosphere. Even in the final poem of the sequence, of which she is the focus, the poem centres on the practicalities of her role, ignoring the desires and motivations of her as an individual.

[3] David Storey, ‘Land, Territory and Identity’, Ed. by Ian Convery, Gerard Corsane and Peter Davis, *Making Sense of Place: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), 11-22, p.12.

The poems ‘Polaroid’ and ‘Photographing the Photographer’ are short, originally ekphrastic poems, developed using a bundle of old photographs found in a local antiques shop; the photographs have not been included here, as might be expected of more concertedly ekphrastic work, as the sequence merely used them as a starting point – the images depicted a moment in the lives of their subjects, where the poems deviate from this to reflect on their wider, imagined lives and whatever circumstances may have led to the photographs being found by me in an antiques shop decades later. The photographs could ultimately be discarded from the poems that had been written to partner them. Nonetheless, the poems have a strong use of visual imagery stemming from their original development.

In addition to characters of the wider community, family and more intimate personal relationships are also frequent in these poems. Julia Bennett states that ‘nostalgia and authenticity figure strongly in family narratives and both tie together people and places through time’.[4] For most people, family is their first experience of belonging to a community; our understanding of *where* we belong in the world stems from *who* we perceive ourselves to belong with. The poems ‘‘Dad’’, ‘Catechism’, ‘Dredging’ and ‘Blackberries’ all explore family relationships and personal memories. Perhaps I have more in common with Mort than with Parks or certainly Harrison in how I present changing personal relationships with close family: my focus is on what connects us, not what separates us. The poem ‘Resilience’, for example, bears a thematic link to Mort’s ‘Thread’, considering my own genetic heritage and how it ties me to the women in my family tree.

If people are a primary concern of the poetries of place of all poets discussed in this thesis, so too is grief. Harrison’s *School of Eloquence* poems are reflections on the loss of his

[4] Julia Bennett, ‘Narrating family histories: Negotiating identity and belonging through tropes of nostalgia and authenticity’, *Current Sociology*, Vol. 66 (3), 2018, 449-465, p. 451.

mother and then his father; Parks' poem 'The Cage', among others, considers the loss of his father. In both cases, the speaker has lost someone he admits – indeed, it could be said to drive the poems and be the tension at their heart – is utterly unlike himself in certain respects. During the development of my thesis, I lost both my stepfather and grandmother in quick succession, and whereas several of my poems included in this collection touch on this implicitly, some were written in direct response. Like many of Harrison's poems which explore the death of his father, 'Flight' centres on the memory of a specific event and conversation I had with my stepfather. Both this poem and 'Grief' were written about his sudden death in June 2019, whilst 'Mablethorpe Beach' developed from a freewriting exercise after the death of my grandmother in October of the same year, whilst the poem 'On Wilford Hill', was written in response to a visit to Wilford Hill crematorium, the place where both my grandparents on my father's side were cremated and laid to rest. Inadvertently, they are poems about communal, or at least familial, belonging. But if my closest community is my family, I lose some of my connection to my community whenever one of them passes away.

The industrial towns and cities of northern England have long held a strong reputation for their community spirit, not least in the wake of the industrial closures and during the Miners' Strikes. As M. D. Matasganis and M. Seo discuss, and as I have quoted earlier in this thesis, 'at times of crisis, communities with strong social support mechanisms are likely to fare better than others, but when crises become extraordinarily severe, such social support mechanisms might falter or become eroded.'[5] We see this in Helen Mort's 'Scab', for example, or in Ian Parks's 'The Wheel', both of which imply locals might have lost touch with their heritage, or been replaced. This is also the focus of several of my poems, such as 'Bennerley Viaduct' and 'Bailey's Factory, Heanor Road'. Nonetheless, northern England has also long

[5] M. D. Matasganis & M. Seo, 'Stress in the Aftermath of Economic Crisis in Urban Communities: The Interplay of Media Use, Perceived Economic Threat, and Community Belonging', *Communication Research Reports*, 31:4, 304-315, p.311.

held a reputation for protest and political dissent. For example, both the Chartist movement of the nineteenth century and the Miners' Strikes of the 1980s – though both were nationwide – inadvertently focused mainly on the North of England, and each required a vociferous groundswell of popular support. As Joshua Hobson stated in the Chartist newspaper the *Northern Star* in 1844:

> The right to meet would be nothing without the right to speak; neither would the right to speak without the right to meet […]. Both are necessary for the very existence of freedom.[6]

The North has taken the right to speak, and therefore speak out, very seriously, with the poets explored in this thesis, especially Harrison and Parks, being no exception, and the primary cause of unrest in all of the localities explored here has been the Miners Strikes of 1984-85, and the resulting economic fallout from the deindustrialisation of these areas.

Such is the case in my Derbyshire hometown of Ilkeston, a town bordered by now closed coalmines on two sides, and on the cusps of the immediate catchments of the major cities of Nottingham and Derby. Ilkeston is situated on the Nottinghamshire-Derbyshire border, and the site of the Cossall mine is on the Nottinghamshire seam, whilst Shipley falls on the Derbyshire seam. This was significant during the Miners' Strikes, as miners on the Nottinghamshire seam voted not to strike, whilst the miners on the Derbyshire seam complied with the call. This led to frequent situations where neighbours, and even family members within the same household, ended up on opposite sides of the conflict, regardless of how they had personally voted. Whilst my work is not often overtly political, a number of poems are direct considerations of my local urban environment – poems such as 'Vandalism', 'HOPE' and 'Allotments' – and in presenting populated local areas they have, in effect, become small vignettes of social commentary, interwoven with observation of a political and social nature.

[6] Joshua Hobson, *Northern Star*, 20th July 1844.

One common feature of formerly industrial areas is the repurposing of industrial sites for residential or commercial use – the subject of, for example, Mort's 'Litton Mill'. 'Vandalism' centres on two local Mills, one of which, Armstrong Mill, is now a department store, whilst the other, Rutland Mill, has been repurposed as residential units. Mort's poem inspired me to think about what such places, in my hometown, mean to me. However, whereas her poem focuses largely on the industrial past of Litton Mill, 'Vandalism' explores comparable sites as places that, during my formative years, had been abandoned and left to decay, becoming in some cases clandestine adolescent playgrounds. These symbols of community loss have now been lost again through gentrification and regeneration. My fascination in this poem is more with personal loss than it is with the decaying loss that hangs over the town because of industrial decline. Though subtly, I wanted to interrogate how the geographical losses of my youth, my own losses, run in some senses counter to those of the community as a whole, or the public perception of such communities: they are losses of more extreme degeneration that, in the 1990s, I considered unquestioningly to be things that defined home.

This leads to another consideration of the urban landscape: graffiti, the marks of belonging and ownership left by youth – from Harrison's 'daubed v' in Beeston Hill graveyard, to 'the worst insult' sprayed across Mort's door in 'Scab', to 'HOPE' sprayed across shop shutters in my poem of that name. To write about the built and lived-in environment is to consider the way in which it is altered by those who inhabit it, including those who do so by means of what some call vandalism and what Harrison's 'v.' quasi-ironically terms 'art'. In my local area, a place where there are relatively few sanctioned options for teenagers and young people to spend their time and exercise artistic freedom, or feel a different sense of ownership or control, there are of course numerous examples of graffiti, assisted inadvertently by a Council that has limited funds to counter it, or to rejuvenate anything else. For context,

Banksy's 'hula-hooping girl', which appeared on a residential street in October of 2020, is less than a twenty-minute drive from my front door, and before Banksy officially claimed it many locals assumed it was a tribute from one of the local street artists, rather than an original: what would an artist like Banksy be doing in a nondescript town like Ilkeston?[7] Because of its prevalence in the local area, a number of my poems quote or feature references to graffitied slogans and phrases – specifically, in addition to 'HOPE', 'Shortcut' and 'Allotments'. Often, the use of the phrases and slogans sprayed or daubed where they have not been permitted has allowed me a route in – through voices that presumably are at least as much a part of their town as I am and who presumably have no funded, institutionally-sanctioned, potentially remunerative means to express their blunt or nuanced feelings in art – to explore political, social and ideological sentiments while grounding this in the verbatim sentiments of other members of the community. In 'Shortcut' for example, the observation of the phrase 'ROAD TO NOWHERE' sprayed on the side of a bridge provides a wider context of a location that could almost be pastoral based solely on the images presented prior to this in the poem.

The poems in this collection have largely been kept deliberately void of place names. Though many of the poems feature identifying landmarks, the choice to avoid the use of location names has been deliberate, so that the similarities of the former industrial towns of the Midlands and North is highlighted – the poems exist as being about both nowhere and everywhere like them simultaneously. To balance this, the collection has been titled to firmly place them in Ilkeston and its immediate environs. *The Rough Guide to Ilkeston* is of course a somewhat ironic title, playing on both the famous 'Rough Guide' travel series, and the dual meaning of the word 'Rough', given the details of the town conveyed in poems such as 'HOPE'

[7] BBC News, *Bike from Banksy's Nottingham hula-hooping girl vanishes* (2020) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-55028586> [accessed 23 March 2022].

and ‘Wentworth Street’. Needless to say, no Rough Guide covering Derbyshire – the Rough Guides to England and to Great Britain – mentions Ilkeston, other than this one.

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