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My Proper Ground

The Poetics of Place in the Twentieth Century

By

Ken Moffat

Thesis and poem submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Poetry: Text, Practice as Research.

School of English

University of Kent

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“No, I have never found
The place where I could say
This is my proper ground,
Here I shall stay;”

‘Places, Loved Ones’ – Philip Larkin

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Of Canterbury, Who Fell In



A Shepherd's Calendar

Ken Moffat

“But (will some say:) what make I loytering here? It is neither in the Saxon, nor yet the Romane, neither the intervening Britain’s time, that we are to expect the finding of our Cities Originall. It’s much elder: Rome it selfe not so old. Indeed I read that one Rudhudibras or Ludrudibras a King of the Britains almost nine hundred years before our Saviours Incarnation, was our Cities Founder. So sayes the Author of the British story, a Writer, though by the best of our Antiquaries (Cambden especially) for the generality of his History exploded, as fabulous; yet in this particular followed by divers men of Judgement, and good Antiquaries too: with what warrant, as I cannot determine, so neither will I examine, but leave it as I finde it to the scanning of others. So much for our Cities Originall and Antiquity.”

William Somner, *The Antiquities of Canterbury* 1640

“Canterbury is an old, ugly, medieval sort of town, not mended by large modern English barracks at one, and a dismal dry Railway Station at the other end...there is no trace of poetry about it.”

Karl Marx, letter to his daughter, Laura, Monday 19th March 1866

“What then?”
“We shall get out at Canterbury.”
“And then?”

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: *The Final Problem*

“Now lat us ryde and herkneth what I seye.”

Æfterra Geola: January

Salsify

“A.D. 1011. In this year, between the nativity of St. Mary and Michaelmas they beset Canterbury, and entered therein through treachery; for Elfmar delivered the city to them, whose life Archbishop Elfeah formerly saved. And there they seized Archbishop Elfeah, and Elfward the king’s steward, and Abbess Leofruna, and Bishop Godwin; and Abbot Elfmar they suffered to go away. And they took therein all the men, and husbands, and wives; and it was impossible for any man to say how many they were; and in the city they continued afterwards as long as they could. And, when they had surveyed all the city, they then returned to their ships, and led the Archbishop with them. Then was a captive he who before was of England head and Christendom; - there might be seen great wretchedness, where of before great bliss was seen, in the fated city, whence first came to us Christendom and bliss ‘fore God and ‘fore the world. And the Archbishop they kept with them until the time when they martyred him.”

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

Fated city.
Of Canterbury who fell in,
I sing.
This place of pubs and parsons,
Of faith and hope and sealed wax
Of pilgrimage and kings.
From the Prince’s Well
To the Priory of Martin
We spray our scent
Those sent
To Kent
To fall in.

Nestled amongst the springs
That Wibert channelled in:
Sunwin’s Well,
Hottewell.
We lather
In Radegund’s Well
Splendid under a cooling sun,
Fall in.

We are unique
With our partible gavelkind;
Our ancient, Salic socage
Extracted from the Conqueror,
Terra Salica:
Fall in.

How long has settlement been here?
A jadeite axehead,
Julieberrie Barrow,
Beaker people and bronze workers.
A fordable section of the Stour
In our marshy valley
And then the camp at Bigbury.
All before Our Lord;
Our druidic, bardic past.

“Of all these, by far the most civilised are they who dwell in Kent, which is entirely a maritime region, and who differ but little from the Gauls in their customs.”

Until Aulus Plautius strove
To quell the stronghold
By the alder grove.

This home of *Bonnes-hommes*,
Friars of the Sack,
Mendicant Carmelite,
Benedictine, Franciscan,
Dominican devotion,
Particular Baptists in the Zoar Chapel;
God, there's been some praying here.

*We are a merrie people.
We daunce indoors and out,
Play, vitally, the virginals, rebec and lute
And the maypole on the Dane John
Is our totem.
We shoot our longbows at
Butts in the Abbot's Field.
We ride out to hunt
Or watch the bear and the bull
Chained and baited at the stake.
We play at dice and shovegroat,
Shootball and football.
We are players all
And our revels begin
With the cycle of Dunstan
For this is a merrie cittie.*

Firstlings.
Back to the year's beginning,
A cold day in Augustine's.
Spaced beneath the spare ruined choirs,
Underneath the loam and the brickearth,
The Royal dust of Kent and Austrasia,
Three graves, adjacent tombs,

The Saxon Kings of Kent, our sentinels,
Rest easy.

Rest easy Eadbald and Emma.
Rest easy Hlothhere and Wihtrred.
Lawmakers and codex kings,
Through life have tholed,
One slain in battle, one slothed in age,
Invoke the witan
One more time.
Raise up the Spear-Danes,
Dress the mead-benches;
Strengthen the warrior bands.
Augustine, Aethelbert, Mulus,
Theodore of Tarsus,
Schoolmaker,
Rest and watch.
Where life is nasty,
Short and Jutish.

Canter with me here
At a pilgrim pace.
Much that you see will remain familiar,
The casual violence and occasional slaughter,
Double murder off the Sturry Road,
The taxi driver whacked in Wincheap;
Assault and murder on Stephen's green.
Forget the horror of Reed Pond.
Avarice, greed, lust, revenge,
Even now, even here,
In our polis
Our *temenos*.
Cupped in our hollow
Beneath the heaving hills,
Where Bertha and her maids
Pass daily through the Queningate
To prayer.
It is hard to live here long
Without striking root deeply.
Fall in.

Did Claudius bring his elephants here?

Visitors come not seldom
As we shall see.
Margaret of Anjou hears
The boys sing mass before
The altar in the Undercroft.
The Patriarch of Antioch
Brings his four dromedaries

And two docile camels
To our stone and wood Jerusalem.

And amongst them
The Reeve and Bailiff
And the officers of the monastery
Ride out in superintendence
Of country estates.
We will meet them in the lanes,
In the blue darkness of tithe barns,
Dispensing justice
In Pie Powder Court,
Amongst the oaks and the limes
And in the squalid backstreets
Spying on vice.

Hear these voices.
On still, moonlit nights
Bell Harry tolls the tocsin
For curfew.

Northgate, Burgate, Newingate, Ridingate,
Worthgate, Westgate, still.

*Gif feaxfang geweorð, L sceatta to bote.1
Gif man gekyndelice lim awyrdeþ, þrym leudgeldum hine /3r/ man forgelde.2.*

*Æfterra Geola they came.
Pounded our Roman walls
For twenty days,
Thorkell the Tall
Fell in through the North Gate
Unopposed
That Elfmar let in.
Winged and horned beasts
Maddened and savage
Speaking an alien tongue.
Torque, fire and confusion.
The Lords of Hell are here.
The seax under the ribs
And Dane Axe on sinew,
The Blood Eagle an example.
And then the ravishing of our women,
Dragged by their hair
In common places,
In street and home
Forced and howling
Then cast naked into the flames,
Their children*

*on the tops of spears
Such screaming.
And it happened here.
They sold us as slaves
At our own North Gate.*

*Elfeah they take to Greenwich
And batter to death
With the bones of oxen
At a drunken feast.*

This is a month of death.
Two parents, two marriages down
And all in this benighted month.
I curse each hour of its thirty one
Miserable, cold and stunted days.
There are ways to cope.
Dry January?
More than ever this is a time to drink
To gain the sense of teetering on the brink,
To lather the tongue in Malbec.

This salsify tastes of oysters;
Viper's herb, serpent root.

Christmas revels have left us
Cold and broke and empty.
Our kerbsides a hangover
Of spilled Norwegian Spruce
The Council fails to collect.
The shops have lost their Winter glamour
And we our clamour to spend in them.
Restaurants modestly close
Till Valentine's
And a Lenten lull invades us.
The steady and tiresome rain
Dull colours each working hour
And we assume a Puritan pout
To get us through the days.
The nights draw in by five
And the traffic is blocked
And grid-locked in bewilderment.
Sitting still on the Dover Road
With the engine off:
There is no new birth here.

Laconic students return
From bright family homes to a term
Of work, the lark
Of a Freshers' start

Far behind them.
Tourists forsake us
And the German market
That gathered for Christmas,
All gluwein and bratwursts,
Folds up
Like a cheap fair that came for the children
And passed just as fast.
Dunstan mourns the death of the year.

The Canterbury bells are pealing
Far through the frosty air.
There is an east wind coming
From the Urals
Which always brings snow.
Such a wind as never
Blew upon Canterbury yet.

Solmonađ:February

Redcurrants

“In the following month, James and Annie Fields went down to stay with Dickens at Gad’s Hill Place; again there were more expeditions, more long walks, more parties, more dinners. They all went to Canterbury in large four-horse carriages, complete with postillions in red coats and top-boots, and it was here that Dickens found another clue to the novel he was about to write. In the cathedral there, he was depressed by a service which seemed no more than a token of worship and which would find its place in the pages of Edwin Drood. It was in Canterbury that Dickens also gave one intimation of his fictional method when, asked which house was the original for Dr Strong’s school in David Copperfield, Dickens laughed and replied that several “would do”. It was here, too, that he was happy to lose his identity. A crowd collected around the carriages and one man, pointing to James Fields, shouted out, “That’s Dickens!” Dickens then handed Fields a small parcel and said, in tones loud enough to be heard by the crowd of onlookers, “Here you are Dickens, take charge of this for me.””

Dickens: Peter Ackroyd

February brings us new light
Peering over the dome of Golden Hill
Stretching our days
Offering the first shoots of hope
For the dawning year.
Trust not this Fool’s spring;
Beware the beguiling crocus.

Restaurants emerge blinking into day
Casting off the long post-winter slough
With new menus and offers
Aiming to tempt.
Spring has come in winter.
Ice in the ditches
Mirrors the sunlight.

So this is my lunch poem.

The sun is streaming
Through clerestory windows
Over the torsos
Of sleeping trains
Into this Goods Shed.

It is too early for drinking

So I choose a glass
Of chilled Picpoul
And peruse the *menu du jour*.
The choices, giddyng,
Though that could be the wine.
It is far too early for drinking
And that is all the fun.

But this is the best time.
This is what I love.
The whole napkin-ness of it all.
The anticipation of
The epicure sitting down to dine
On sensual consolation.
Give me a Dickens of a meal.

Bring me your coulis
Your roulades and ballotines
Your foamed and foraged
Amuse-geule.
A consommé
Devoutly to be wished –
A dish to die for.
Fondants, veloutes,
Navarins and saddles
Your *Pommes Anna*
With kale and crisp ham
And lobster *sous-vide*.
The whole *service gueridon*.
Batter my heart
With buttery *jus*
Until I am undone.

Carefully crafted plates
Are crossing the pass
And the beautiful,
Prodigal, Polish
Waitress describes each
Dish as it lands.
There is a sense
Of triumph, of netting
Life's sybaritic catch.

Flash fried fish
And the flesh falling away
From fowl
And fillet.
This is more than taste.

The unique

Redcurrant on
Each cheesecake
Glistering, beaded,
Marooned with care.

A wilderness of cheeses.
Homage. Fromage.

Now I am seeing
The beads in the glass
That only Keats noticed.
There is no blushful Hippocrene
On the *carte des vins*
But I am Endymioning
My way through conversations
Crushing joy's grape
Against my palate,
Mercurial and Wilde.
No pun eludes my grasp.

But,
Twilight now
Suffuses the great windows,
Evensong is past.
Torpor and *ennui*
Begin to creep
And the waiting staff
Check their phones
And yawn
Awaiting *le porboire*.
There is a sense
Of things coming to an end
And all is just crumbs
And the heeltap
Of an aged wine.
It is like that poem
By Baudelaire.
The great imperative,
Always be drunk.
The *Grand Guignol*
Of an evening awaits me –
Do I drink or sleep?

J'attend encore.

*" This last night the king and queene did lie together here att
Conterburie, Long maye they do soe, and haue as manie children as
wee are like to haue, I haue sent you two of the kings poyntes one for
your selfe and an other for a frend . . . "*

*The Watch is on the alert.
Word is out in the County.
Two well attired individuals,
Shifty characters, youngsters,
London types on a lark.*

*Paid the Gravesend boatman
An impossible sum,
Hiding from bands in Rochester
Hurling over the old
Eleven arched stone bridge
On the Medway
Then headlong down Watling Street,
Urging, urging,
Past Boughton under the Blean,
Harbledown at a glance,
Racing along St. Dunstan's Street
Tom Smith
John Smith
To the Tower for admittance
"Unbar the gate!"*

*To Mayoral custody,
Justice prevails:
"I am The Prince of Wales".*

*In happier times
He sleeps above the Fyndon Gate.
Sic consummatu est.*

*But he'll wear two shirts against the cold
And they will have his head.*

A pair of DFLs
Sniff estate agent windows,
All deck shoes and raspberry cords.
We do not love them in our city.

*"Out early.
Took horse at Deale.
I troubled much with
The King's Gittar
And Fairebrother,
The rogue
That I entrusted with
The carrying of it
On foot
Whom I thought I had lost.
Came to Canterbury; dined there.
I saw the Minster*

*And the remains of
Beckett's tomb..."*

Pepys. Can't spell.
Disinterested. Minster indeed!
Hurried home to bury
His parmesan and
Write coded notes
On the London fire.

It is the early 'nineties.
There is a wedding in England's oldest church,
St Martin's, bedecked for tradition,
The banns read three times, the obligatory lecture
Given by the vicar and now the Winter sun blanches
Cravat and top hat, the bride made luminous
In ivory gown and stockings,
The Registrar, overcome with romance,
Writes February 14th as the date, which it isn't,
But we smile and take it as an omen, of sorts.
The wedding breakfast at The Abbots Barton,
Paid for by my mother, whose absence we toast.
The family, duly drunk, roar approval
And throw the last of their confetti
As the Bentley arrives, white and naff,
Whisks us to the bridal suite at The Falstaff,
Thence to Vienna.
Those whom God hath joined together
Let no man put asunder.
Now that's poetry, for richer or poorer,
Yet she does, within five years.
World with a very short end.

*"That's Dickens!"
This man of all letters,
Who knows a thing or two
Of disappointed marriage,
This bitter humourist
and blacking house boy,
Mr Popular Sentiment,
Is hurrying here
From Betsy Trotwood's
Donkey Down
On Broad-babbling-Stairs
In haste to cast
From local flesh,
Micawber, Heep, Wickfield.
In top hat and cravat*

*Past hawker and huckster,
And The Little Inn,
The gentle riot
Of a market in Kent.
Wayworn and ragged
He urges on
Past Doctor Strong's
Jackdaw School
Through the Westgate's
Glacis towers,
Whose stone walls
Do indeed a prison make,
and cast long shadows
Across his soul,
To the ancient, latticed
And bulging house
Where love and Agnes are born.*

*We need his crass vitality
To wake us all from Winter.
Though he loves us not.
Oh, he read to us, the old cuss,
And writes with his hands in
A basin of water
At The Fountain Hotel.
We are "Perfectly polite, like
The touch of a beautiful instrument."*

*Soon turns his face to the East
And windy Thanet,
Another Albion by the cliff-top house
From whence he reads his Tennyson
On the shore, crossing, in his mind,
Another and a further bar.*

Looking out to Thanet Isle;
The Isle of Death.
The flat lands beyond
The Wantsum Channel with their bays:
Pegwell, Botany, Viking, Joss
And the murderous shifting Goodwins.
Giuseppe Morelli sells
Gelato ice from a bicycle,
The Mad Chef's Bistro,
The grotto cave and Dreamland
The waking horror where Tom Eliot
Got nothing from nothing in a bus shelter.
Where Richard Dadd went mad
And became his own fairy-feller.

Let Dickens have his Thanet.
It is another country,
They do things different there.

Here,
Candlemas.
Epiphany passed
Doubt and uncertainty returned.
Candles blessed, baubles downed.

Turtledoves and pigeons.
The Lord is in the Temple.
And this is the twelfth great feast.

Hreðmonað: March

Artichoke

“There was a wonderfully cobwebbed feeling about this dizzy and intoxicating antiquity – an ambiance both haughty and obscure which turned famous seats of learning, founded eight hundred or a thousand years later, into gaudy mushrooms and seemed to invest these hoarier precincts, together with the wide green expanses beyond them, the huge elms, the Dark Entry, and the ruined arches and the cloisters – and, while I was about it, the booming and jackdaw-crowed pinnacles of the great Angevin cathedral itself, and the ghost of St. Thomas a Becket and the Black Prince’s bones – with an aura of nearly pre-historic myth”

Patrick Leigh-Fermor: A Time of Gifts

Mr Barclay, quietly,
Checks into his Folkestone hotel.
The Bristol, on The Leas,
An unremarkable choice
At nine guineas, per week,
Full-board, but “the blood
Flows more calmly in the town of Harvey”.
Not for him The Grand
Or the majestic Metropole
Sitting on the Leas
Looking at the sea
That Owen swam in
In nineteen bloody eighteen.
He is not to be seen.
Drives his two nag, *deux chevau*,
Chugging into the holy city.
And what did Beckett make of Becket?
“Hurts? He wants to know if it hurts?”
Krapp shrine-?
Nothing to be done-?
Waiting, waiting,
For unnoticed nuptials
Signed off by Messrs. Pugsley and Bond,
March 1961.
Pavilionstone.

An old hoar hare.
Prayer and fasting.
The horror, the horror
Of Lent.

There is a report.

An announcement.
The Peacock Angel of the heptad
Is upon us.
Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariæ
He shall be called by the tetragram.
Adonai. Elohim.
Behold the handmaide
Be it unto me, according to thy word.

*Waiting, waiting.
Nothing to be done
In Covid Canterbury.
We stand like statues
Outside our supermarkets
In Soviet silence.
Shuffling forwards
Two metres apart.
A tissue. A tissue.
We're falling down again.
Our pubs, our restaurants shut,
A funereal pall falls
On our city.
Empty trains visit and leave the West
From London.
We did not see this coming.
Those that walk abroad
Walk amazed, the café culture
Swept away overnight.
We eye each other suspiciously
Looking for signs of the cough
And quickly adopting new habits.
Isolation. Social distance.
Furlough.
We were busier during the war.*

This Great Mortality.
The Buttermarket desolate
And scarce a soul on Palace Street.
What dystopian plague is this?
St George's silent, The Parade perplexed.
We paint our lambs' blood above our doors;
O Lord, leave us our firstborn.
We eat with our loins girded
And shoes upon our feet.
Await the sacrificial one.

That afternoon
We walked up through Chaucer Fields,
Free, enfranchised and at large,
On our daily allocated, government walk.

Not quite afraid
But with a sense of something coming;
Hands held more tightly than before.
The city was all before us.
With wandering steps and slow,
Looking down on Canterbury,
With even its great church shut
We took our solitary way.
The university apocalyptically empty,
The occasional masked and cautious person
Scurrying to safety.
Beverley Farmhouse, locked.
I think of Laurie
And hope he is well.

*We are back in the Fourteenth Century.
Thirteen hundred and forty eight, to be precise.
Too few left to carry the bodies for burial.
A Great Mortality.
Born astride a grave.
No service, servants, craftsmen, workmen;
Who will sow the harvest?
We look to the Heavens to help us.
The Cheker of the Hope
Barred and dry.
All entertainment banned.
Blessed Thomas!
Now and in the hour of our need
Let not the plague pits swallow us.
Bring on The Pardoner.*

Passion-tide.
All aboard the slow train
For the fated way of the cross.
The last days are upon us
And Pilate waits for an answer.

What the fuck is truth anymore?

Cyrenian Simon,
Where are you now?
We need our brows wiping.
Falling falling falling falling
Stripped and weeping
This is, surely, the end?

Where the Resurrection Men?

The Goods Shed has the first artichokes
Of the year for a simple pottage.

“To Make an Arterchoak Pie

*Take the bottome of six Arterchoaks, being
Boyled very tender, put them in a dish and put
Some vinegar over them, season them with Ginger and
Sugar, a little Mace whole, putting them into a pie...”*

And then thrown out,
As good for nothing?
All this Great Globe.
This Jerusalem.

The artichoke with a tender heart
Dressed up like a warrior.
Cardoon capers.
The only food for Lent.

*And our King Bolingbroke is laid to rest
Near by the saint whom he adored.
He was Time’s subject
Till Time bid begone.
Uneasy lay that head
That wore a crown
Whose cares are now all ended.
He, too, saw plague,
Dreamt Jerusalem and died
And a king can die but once.*

*Rudely exhumed
They presumed
Him not the thing he was.
That russet beard once more appeared,
Died once, but buried twice.*

It is not the daily broadcast
By the ragged Prime Minister.
It is not the daily death count
Pushing, now, two thousand.
It is not the epidemiologists –
Who knew there were so many? –
It is not the silence
It is not the lack of laughter
It is not the emptiness of space.

It is the fear in the eyes of the parent
Looking at the child
That tells us we might be done for.
That tells us, however mighty,
How fragile everything is.

Peacocks invade Deal town centre
And a cough can still Bell Harry.

On an expected Sunday,
Quietly and at a trot,
See, our king comes to us,
Righteous and victorious,
Upon a Margate donkey;
Cloaks and rushes on the floor:
We might still be palmers.
Kyrie Eleison.

Eostermonað: April

Rhubarb

“The close or circumvallation, where the houses of the prebendaries, and other persons belonging to the cathedral stand, is very spacious and fair, and a great many very good houses are built in it, and some with good gardens; where those gentlemen live at large, and among whom a very good neighbourhood is kept up; as for the town, its antiquity seems to be its greatest beauty: The houses are truly antient, and the many ruins of churches, chapels, oratories, and smaller cells of religious people, makes the place look like a general ruin a little recovered.”

Daniel Defoe: A Tour in Circuits, Through the Island of Great Britain (1722)

I observe this green, copper Christ.
Betrayed by the person from Kerioth,
The one true apostle,
Suffered under Sandys',
Shot to pieces, broke and dismantled,
Resurrected in the 'eighties,
Ascended unto the Christ Church gate.

Credo in unum Deum

And, I reflect, that I, too,
Though no Nazarene,
Have been betrayed by a kiss.
Just here,
One night, under a strawberry moon
In this, the cruellest month.
April's sorry fool.
Noli me tangere.
My soul,
For what it is,
Is forfeit.

Eli! Eli! lama sabachthani

All of us shouting at a deafened god
In our cold cathedral.

Here let us stand, close by the church.
Here let us wait in this cold cave
Of Gothic tracery,
Ribbed and conoid fan vaulting,
Where still, holy air
Gathers endlessly in angled light.

A nod to Orlando Gibbons then
Hurry through the Nave
With its timber boat struts
To the choir screen steps.
Past Chichele's cadaver tomb,
An outlandish abundance of bone.
The ancestors of Christ,
Adam delving in the West;
This is England in glass and stone.
With miching malice I carve
"John and Isabella"
Into the holy cornice
By the Lavatory Tower,
Mimicking our mad, malevolent King
Who camped away on Barham Down
And hurried here to be crowned.
The profane and the profane.
The prayed out ends of holy days.
I am observed, of all men, in the Precincts
And button my coat
And hurry my ways.

Munire digneris me

My thirty three piece suit.

Whan that Aprille
Whan that Aprille

The remembrance of Chaucer.
The taxman cometh.
April returns.
To Caunterbury they wend.
Not pilgrims now, but tourists,
Kagouled against the sweet showers,
Speaking the usual familiar,
Unfamiliar languages.
Curious, circumnavigating
The great Cathedral,
Uselessly spending their priceless hours,
Haunting the British restaurant,
Staring at the carcass
Of a ruined pig.
Looking for the heart of our city.
Restless, unsatisfied,
They come, they go
In Becket-loads
With maybe a fridge magnet
Or an "I Heart London"
Mug for their pains.

Giving up on a city
That will not tell its story.

Eostara -
Hear us, Eostre.
Hear us, Goddess.
Plead your paschal presence
For this is the reckoning time.
See our blood sacrifice
In the sufferings of the hare.
Feel the burst of the frost.

One of last year's leverets,
Lean and jittery,
Flies across the fields.
Birdsong everywhere
On Binnewith Island.
The first cuckoo of the year,
Heard on Hambrook Marshes;
Bluebells lay a cobalt carpet
In dark Denge Woods,
And we go up into
The woods at Crundale for shelter.
A bittern booms at Stodmarsh.

*"And as a bitore bombleth in the myre
She leyde hir mouth unto the water down."*

We never can keep our secrets

*John the Bad
Biting his black fingers.
John the Autistic
Slouching towards Canterbury
To be crowned.
O black, Lackland.
It is said he killed
A boy with a chess board
This Softsword in fury blind
While still a child himself,
Locked up mother and son
To starve and die –
Bite marks found upon her breast –
Lasciviously brings his latest wife
To luted lunches and crude crown wearing
In our Church.

And God departs England.
Coffins hanging from the blasted trees.
Not a matrimonial bell to be heard.*

The sweet birds flown to Flanders.

*“Rhubarb, O, for rhubarb
To purge this choler!”*

*Of John who fell in
The square mouthed Wash.*

*Of John and his forty, fattened hogs
Burnt black as day at Rochester.*

*Of him the monks shall howl
Upon his death
That “Hell is foul
But fouler still by his entry”
And all the waters of the fenny swamp
Will fail to douse the flames.*

Here let us stand in this green courtyard
Close by the cathedral,
Here let us wait
And guinea fowl, partridge and parson shall file
Their clucking and crooked way
Amongst winged schoolboys,
Past parochial schoolmasters
Parroting primers and prep for the day;
The popinjay in full array.

These priests who put the nod
In synod,
These wardens of bell and book and candle
Giddy as geldings at a point to point
And God jockeys them all.

Look to that Prior’s Court
Where they locked up the drunkards
Beneath the Norman Staircase.

*“You
Could call it Jerusalem or feel it
As you walk, even quite jauntily, over the grass,”*

*Here in Meister Omer’s little house
Vengeful, victorious Edward holds his parliament
Before the longest fireplace in England.
On the Feast of Augustine
Brings 40,000 men,
Clarence, Gloucester,
Talbot, Norfolk,*

*Blount, de Grey,
Such Lords and Earls and Dukes;*

*“With a great many more of lesser degree
In sooth, a goodly company”*

*Hears word of Henry’s capture
Somewhere in the night time
Somewhere in the North,
He with the grandfather
Made of glass
And offs him in the Tower,
Laconically.*

Bakehouses and barns,
The grain store and mint;
Lanfranc’s legacy;
Where Kind Kit Marlowe
Learned Latin and Greek.
We’ve seen him in The Beaney,
Doublet slashed
To show the shot silk beneath.

*“There’s a dark entry where they take it in,
Where they must neither see the messenger,
Nor make inquiry who hath sent it them.”*

It is another Easter
And I am in Rome
Letting my life fall apart
And spending my days
In art and poetry
And Trastevere.

Here stands one whose name is writ in wine.
And I am thirsty.

Chasing down the mad
Baroque, Bernini busts
From Villa Borghese
To Piazza Navona,
Il Campo di Fiore
Proserpina raped again.

I make it in the rain
To the Cimitero degli Inglesi
Which, the Curator tells me,
Is closing and
I cannot come in.
“Please?” in my imperfect Italian

“Please?”
“Just five minutes. Just
Keats.”

She relents and lets me in,
Saying, “Keats, no Shelley!
Only Keats!”.
And, in time and space,
We are man and dead poet
Collapsed together
Until our time is up
And I catch a ride
On an empty bus
Back into town.

“Rome it selfe not so old”

O Rome Rome Rome Rome
Canterbury’s
older than Rome.

What I have written, I
Have written.

*John the Deserter
Abandons the city
To fiery France,
Nor siege, nor resistance,
Just a daring Dauphin
And the Langton boy,
The Lincolnshire lad,
Traitor and exile,
Who denounced our church.
They strut and flit
For two whole years
Till John shits his last
And it is passed
And bonfires burn
Along the coast of England.*

Eleven balls of marzipan
Upon the Simnel cake.

There is a gauche Golgotha
On the lawn by the main door
And someone has rolled
Away the stone
To show the ancient trick
And placed a neat and folded
Shroud inside.

But there are no
Surprises anymore.
There are no revelations.
No epiphanies.
Where is this new life?
Where the new birth?
Just vinegar and hyssop
Spilled upon the earth.

There is still some hope
On Schere Thursday.

Then April bleeds out
On holy cobbles
And it is finished.

Drimilcemonad̃: May

Asparagus

“I went day by day at my poem for a month at the end of which time the other day I found my Brain so overwrought that I had neither Rhyme nor reason in it – so was obliged to give up for a few days – I hope soon to be able to resume my Work – I have endeavoured to do so once or twice but to no Purpose – instead of Poetry I have a swimming in my head – And feel all the effects of a Mental Debauch – lowness of spirits – anxiety to go on without the Power to do so which does not at all tend to my ultimate Progression – However tomorrow I will begin my next Month – This Evening I go to Canterbury – having got tired of Margate – I was not right in my head when I came – At Cant I hope the Remembrance of Chaucer will set me forward like a billiard ball...”

John Keats: Letter to Taylor and Hessey, May 16 1817

Riverrun. All rivers are becoming.
Our Stour.
Run softly, so clean, so clean
A mile-wide river
Reduced to this snake hipped stream.
It only lacks an Ophelia, by Millais.
I stepped in it twice.
It was, I thought, both times,
The same.
Alluvia amidst the waterweed.
And was *Endymion* written here?

Most people forget
This High Street is an island
From the Weavers' Bridge
To the Westgate,
From the Miller's Field
To Binnewith.
Disconnected and floating
In time and tides.

*“Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.”*

Et in Arcadia ego.

The ultimate progression:
Ascension. And our descent
Into godless days -

Pieces of silver
In the city sewer -
The eleven, overwrought,
Lowness of spirit.
The broken sons of Zebedee.
We are to stay
In this Jerusalem
To testify of those things
In diverse tongues,
Admired and derided in equal part,
Performing perfunctory acts
Of kindness or devotion
Seeking some usefulness
Amongst the dusty cobbles;
Looking for signs in streetlights.
Our grief we carry like a balled fist
Even unto the end of time
While Men of Kent mock us as
Drunkards tongued in new wine.
Where is the rabbi of Capernaum?
White Sunday. The Pentecost.
A rushing of the winds and then
The tongues of fire.

The grandeur of the dooms
We have imagined
For the mighty dead;
The torn girl trembling
By the mill stream
And it but
The third hour of the day.
What happened in April was foretold
And cannot now be undone.
Aceldama. The Field of Blood.
Greet Matthias Apostle.

Hail Mary! Queen of May.
Let there be a crowning.
Pray for us.
Now and at the hour
Now and at the hour
Of death.
Our Lady's tears.

In this city are many mansions,
Inns and heathen houses;
We all can dwell within.
We polish our idols before
We bolt up our wooden doors,
Pull tight our chains

And sleep the sleep
Of the smug and the dead.
Put thoughts of the homeless
Out of our heads.
Sweep up the stone and hang out the shroud
For now and forever we shall be
A godless crowd.

*A Whitsun feast:
The young King and Emperor
Banquet in our city.
High Mass, knelt in prayer,
Veni Creator Spiritus,
The Saint's hair shirt and broken skull,
Merriment at high table,
Dauncing –
"The Gloves of Spain" -
A prile of Queens in Canterbury,
Sixty dappled palfreys
Gioveni innamorati
Such nobles among the citizenry –
And he is promised the papacy -
Wolsey, Warham, Buckingham, Suffolk,
Dorset, Fairfax and Cornish.*

*Costly sable simars,
All lynx fur and jewels.*

*Farewell and adieu
You sweet Spanish ladies.
Farewell
You ladies of Spain,
Capped and veiled,
White and green and tawney.*

*The first pew was of gold brocade
The second lined with murrey satin
The third pew, loftier,
A canopy of crimson,
The fourth, an emerald,
The fifth sardonix
The sixth sardius
The seventh chrysolite.
The eighth Beryl,
The ninth a topaz.*

*And I saw the holy city
Coming down from God
Prepared as a bride
For her husband.*

*Behold!
The Tabernacle of God.
Nihil supra.*

Spring is sprung;
Walk through Solly's Orchard, Blackfriars',
Dance in the Greyfriars' Garden.
The Reeve, The Miller,
The Franklyn, The Merchant,
The Nun and the Priest
Are here.

Spring is well upon us.
Outside in the Buttermarket
A motley man plays a hurdy gurdy.
Like Dr. Johnson's dog, the schtick
Is not that he plays it well
But that he plays it at all.
The second wave of returning
Tourists clap politely.
We have always fleeced our guests.

The river brings life to pasture
And our cattle,
So well fed
On fresh Spring grass,
We milk three times a day.
As Sidney Cooper paints us
Fat heifers in the Canterbury meadows,
Fording a brook or minding
A sheep lew in East Kent.
A bucaholic if ever there were one.

*This skinny son
Of The Swan and Hoop
Cold-foots it down Castle Street,
Past Worthgate Place,
Fretting about his brother's cough,
But relieved
That the dam has broken
And the stream is flowing.
Thanet is behind him.
An endless fountain of immortal drink
Pouring in to him from the heaven's brink.
He cannot hear the city's din
Walking on our cobbles
And inspiration is within him.
He observes the movement of the moon,
Too soon, too soon,*

*And through the Westgate Garden he will speed
Easily onward through flowers and weed,
His name will be writ in waters deep
Endlessly towards a young, eternal sleep.*

On May 21st 1921,
David Jones, poet, painter,
Ravaged by his time in Flanders,
Visits our Cathedral to slap the effigy
Of Archbishop Peckham with his open palm
For crimes against the Welsh.
What is it with these poets?

Proustian fingers of asparagus,
Green and pink and ultramarine
To their white feet;
Topped off with a soft boiled egg.
The very taste of May.

“Count the flowers in a meadow in May”

I am reading from the pulpit of the great church
Looking down on a maroon congregation,
My own elevation
As mysterious as any other.
A thousand schoolboys have
Arranged themselves laconically
And lethargically
In the Great Cloister
As they have always done.
Coached through the city
By busy tutors
Then hushed and silent
Through the Martyrdom door.

“Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begot us”

Ecclesiasticus.
A puerile, schoolboy joke.

And did those feet?

Always, we processed in full gowns
Silently through the Martyrdom
And down the aisle of the great Nave
To a bemused reception from the boys.
The doctors in their floppy Elizabethan hats,
Faintly ridiculous, the flash of silk
In the varied hoods,
Ermine for Durham and Newcastle,

Warwick for Warwick – I wear my scarlet wild.

“When I was a child...”

Corinthians.

Tradition.

Our Founder.

Commemoration.

It has come to pass.

I have been here.

I have *been* here.

I was not right in the head when I came...

The season of exams is upon us.

“Let us now pray for those taking part in public examinations”

(Hasn’t God got anything better to do?)

A necessary evil in the silent hall;

Invigilators with squeaky shoes.

It is time for champagne.

It is not always May.

A French 75 in Jacob’s house

Watching the bustle of the High Street

Through heavily latticed panes.

“May’s in Milton

May’s in Prior

May’s in Chaucer, Thomson, Dyer”

May’s in Thanet.

With the angels.

The Edict of Toleration.

A statue of the wine god, Silenus.

Mosaic floors, a bull’s horn.

The event that will mark our city:

Æthelbert’s gift.

*“Her Gregorius papa sende to Brytene Augustinum mid
wel manegum munucum, þe Godes word Engla þeoda
godspellodon.”*

Augustine’s feast.

Recall the first pallium.

Bringing the silver cross among the heathen.

Walking down St Martin’s

With the forty.

*“Let thy anger and thy wrath
Be turned away from this city”.*

The receipt of a lone monk
And he shall baptise a king.

Return the swallow absent long
For May is on the lawn.

Ærra Liða: June

Strawberries

“As in the last sacrifice four women did honor to the truth, so in the following auto da fe we have the like number of females and males, who suffered June 30, 1557, at Canterbury, and were J. Fishcock, F. White, N. Pardue, Barbary Final, widow, Bradbridge's widow, Wilson's wife, and Benden's wife.”

Foxe's Book of Martyrs

Sumer is icumen in.
Solstice and equinox,
Roses in the Westgate Garden
For the month of the Sacred Heart;
I dream of rats and kings.

Midsummer Night
Always surprises
Coming as it does just as we
Are used to the sun on our faces.
Then it is at its zenith
And we look again to darkness.
The beginning of Summer
Is its end.
Sol sistere.

The Feast of the harbinger,
Bonfires and wakefires

*“Now will the Christian miscreants be glad,
Ringing with ioy their superstitious belles:
And making bonfires for my ouerthrow.”*

St John's fire.
One to increase,
One to decrease.

*“Þænne monað bringð
ymb twa and feower tiida lange
ærra Liða us to tune,
Iunius on gearð, on þam gim astihð
on heofenas up hyhst on geare,
tungla torhtust, and of tille agrynt,
to sete sigeð.”*

Se lengsta dæg

We climb to the top of the Dane John
At dawn.

Think of the burning of witches.

The normal laws of life are broke.

Titania dances at daybreak.

June 6th 1786: "James Taylor, labourer of the parish of Thannington, was convicted before Edward Toker Esq. in the penalty of 10d, charged on the oath of William Tyler, victualler, with having – on Saturday night last – been found in his gardens and there maliciously broke and destroyed eight cabbages" Kentish Gazette

A slow news week;

These cabbages and kings.

The dog dog Dogtown days

Are upon us.

*They came again, in June,
For more of ours.
Bring them to the south of the Winchepe
Up by the lime kilns.
A hot, hot day.
Seven this time, three men, four women.
Bradbridge's widow, Wilson's wife among.
Old Bradbridge burned at the Autumn, poor sod.*

*Harpfield and that bastard Bonner
Bring them on carts from the prison.*

*We had to watch.
We had to watch our own.*

*They were quiet, pious, unlaced themselves,
And knelt in final prayer, no tears,
At least the bastards allowed them that.
Wilson's wife caught my eye
And I, I shuddered, and I looked away.
The offer to recant and then the bindings
Tight and firm above the wood.
And then, from nowhere,
A subdued sound of chords,
They started to sing, quietly, at first,
As if rehearsed, all seven,
Holy hosannas in the evening light,
As sweet as if we all were in our church,
Before they lit the faggots.
Such hope, such hopeless hope.*

Why did they use green wood?

*There was smoke for full fifteen minutes.
Whirling and whirling in the evening breeze,
Like souls seeking salvation.
And then the coughing, rasping and heaving,
No prayers or singing now,
The smoke did scald our weeping eyes,
As if we could have watched.
And finally flame,
Tiny, at first, I watched it snaking,
Sly and benign until it flowered
Of a sudden and burst into a sickening bloom.
And then the screaming began.
For as long as I live I'll hear the screaming;
Shrill, unearthly, we looked away.
No gunpowder on their necks
So they burned full and long
Until the silence and some crackling.
The pity of savages would have spared them this.
Burned for Midsummer.
Burned for faith.*

We watched till the last blessed soul expired.

Took ale in silence at The Maiden's Head.

The smoke still hangs on our city tonight.

Bereft in Blean

A lonely writer, her wit quite gone,
Tells friends, "The rain falls
And the birds never give over singing,
And hot sulphur fumes rise from the valleys"
Down amongst the Downs.

And she has been to Venice,
Voyaging out:

*"There is no lovelier place
Than Canterbury"*

A time of finals and frivolity.
Lazing in the Westgate gardens
With Kelsey Farm strawberries
And prosecco.

June is a hot month
In the fabled city.
Gables swell, stone cracks.
French schoolchildren
With paper maps.

And river boats coin it in.

*They come again in June.
What is done in Lubeck and Rostock
Is done again to us.
“Germany calling, Germany calling”
While Cologne smoulders
Tugboat Annie cries her maritime warning.
The bombers come in fast and low,
Spit down death on our sleeping city,
Four ton bombs and chandeliers;
The High Street gone to Hell in a hand cart.
Marlowe’s birthplace in smithereens
Shop after shop
Lit by the chandelier flares
St George’s, St Mary’s burning, burning,
The Longmarket, Watling Street
Burning, burning,
Butchery Lane, burning.
In the darkness we watch
From the stillness of Abbotsbury Heights
Wondering whatever shall be left
Suffering explosion after explosion.
The Cathedral too gothic in the sudden lights.*

*The next morning we survey the damage
See the Red Dean in cocked hat and gaiters
And are told the stories.
The firewatchers on the roofs,
The Archbishop in tin hat and pyjamas
Scurrying around the Precincts,
The terror of stray dogs in burning streets.
And then the burial of the dead.*

Walter David Jones, Welshman,
Welsh to his battered
Esgidiau
Never climbed Snowdon.
And I am here for, what?,
The thirtieth time
On Yr Wyddfa?
The highest man in England
And Wales,
Looking east to Cantium
And down the Pass of Arrows,
Bwlch y Saethau,
Across the lake to Y Liwedd
To where a maid of Kent

Awaits
To change my life forever.

I hadn't always meant to stay.
I had applied to other burghs,
Oxford, Ashford,
Maidstone, York,
But a feeling of infidelity,
A sense of being
Pulled up by the roots
Always, always brought me home
To be a Man of Kent.
The satisfaction of that slip road
Past Harbledown,
The safety of Hall Place,
Vernon Holme,
The lights by the Victoria
And that view of our church.
London Road
With its twee B and Bs
And care homes,
Past Conrad's grave.
The Monument,
Pausing at the Dunstan's crossing.
The towers before me.
We are returned.

Never let me go.

Æfterra Liða: July

Oysters

“Godmersham: Thursday (June 20).

“My dear Cassandra,

I will first talk of my visit to Canterbury, as Mr. J. A.'s letter to Anna cannot have given you every particular of it which you are likely to wish for. I had a most affectionate welcome from Harriot, and was happy to see her looking almost as well as ever. She walked with me to call on Mrs. Brydges, when Elizabeth and Louisa went to Mrs. Milles'. Mrs. B. was dressing, and could not see us, and we proceeded to the White Friars, where Mrs. B. was alone in her drawing room, as gentle, and kind, and friendly as usual. She inquired after everybody, especially my mother and yourself. We were with her a quarter of an hour before Elizabeth and Louisa, hot from Mrs. Baskerville's shop, walked in; they were soon followed by the carriage, and another five minutes brought Mr. Moore himself, just returned from his morning ride.”

Jane Austen. Letter to sister, Cassandra, 1808

After the Solstice comes the heat.

Barthes was killed by a laundry truck
O Hara by a random beach buggy.
Hart Crane plunged into The Gulf of Mexico,
-“Goodbye everybody!” -
Kees just disappeared
And not even in the dead of winter.
I will probably croak in the spokes
Of a reckless Deliveroo cyclist.
Himself consumed in headphones
As he aims to deliver a late, lamb combo
With a side order of Albanian liver
To a remote terrace somewhere in the city.
It will be messy. There will be parsley
And onions everywhere and maybe a token
Turkish sausage to hold onto
As I shuffle off my cous-coused coil
Under the pitying gaze of a shocked and baffled
Student chugger.

You cannot write about Canterbury without
Writing about Cafe des Amis
Which has been here forever
And was where I had my first meal

And where I taught A Level English
To failed re-sitters who paid me in Mexican beer.
Mansfield Park and pork tortillas.
The poor dear would be spinning in her Hampshire grave
Remembering formal and stuffed up dinners
At Another Park
A few miles up the road.

*“The celebrated German Boy!”
The child prodigy is here
That all Europe aches to hear
In the forenoon at our Guildhall;
A recitation “mit seiner schwester.”
Admission: two shillings and sixpence.
In the evening tender notes
Float on the nailbourne
Away from Bourne Park.
Zauberflöte.
Wunderkind.*

Up the road in Blackstable,
The Landing of the Oysters.
The first catch on Long Beach,
Sea service, Mayoral parade
And then the glowing grotters.
This is more than cakes and ale.
And these are the days of plenty.

*“He was a brave man
That first ate an oyster.”*

Magpies strafe the hedgerows
Looking for fledglings,
Cocky and sheen
That brash machine gun rattle.
Elsewhere,
The woodpecker’s manic yaffle.
Psithurism; susurrations,
The singing of the trees.
Pine compline
In the dark East Blean.

Here is more singing.
Here is more music.
But not for the children.
Zeppelin at Rutherford –
Floyd at the Tech;
The Medicine Ball rumbles into town.
Caravan at The Beehive

The Wilde Flowers at The Westgate Hall,
The Blind Dog at St Dunstan's;
What a scene.
Kilburn and the High Roads –
Matching Mole -
There ain't half been some clever bastards
Here.

A bad month for Archbishops:
Deusdedit, Walter,
Langton and Runcie
All make the immortal step
In July.

A strange crew.
Seldom seen and hardly heard
In their city.
I saw Archbishop Williams once
Striding out of Marks and Spencer
With a carrier bag.
Socks or a St Michael hair shirt
Perchance?

Langton lies in the St Michael chapel,
A man in great need of socks.
The oil man I never see.

“Runcie, you bastard, come here!”

As Charlie Passey pulls himself up
By the pumps along the bar.
“The Bell and Crown is always open”,
Says Charlie.

*See the pilgrims come
Some drunk,
All unwashed,
Pitifully praying
While our monks tally coin.
Kiss the reliquary
And pay, pay, pay.
This is the feast day
On the tenth day
Of the seventh month
After seven times seven years.
The planning is meticulous
To translate the holiest
Shrine in England.
Langton astounds the teenage King
And beggars the Bishop of Rheims*

On a Tuesday, always a Tuesday.;
Free wine at the gates of the city.

“Seynt Thomas honour me
Thorgh whos blod Holy Chyrch ys made fre”

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Pandulf watches on
This symbol of the wrongs of kings.
And peace at last is with us.
This scourge of all the Angevin
High in the Trinity Chapel.

And now some sallow tallow
Marks the spot.

Our year is done.
Clouds begin to build
For the holidays.
Rain and wind are threatened.
The feeble English summer
Falters on.
We need a way to hang on
To our Summer,
To keep the dream alive.
Maybe sailing
Or fishing
On a hot sunny day
On our river.

I have never been fishing on the Stour
In July
Or any other month
For that matter.
But, if I did,
It would be in a little wooden boat
Maybe round Binnewith Island,
Amongst the weeds,
When the river is at low ebb.
Just me and a cork bobbing,
On a sober Sunday,
The oar resting in the water,
Fishing for trout or perch,
Biding my time.
I would be
Like Izaak Walton
Just a few miles up the road,
The Compleat Angler,
Looking for The Fordidge Trout,
That rarest of fish,

“Near the bigness of a salmon”.

“Fishing on the Great Stour in central Canterbury, is now not seen as appropriate and is not encouraged”

And so I will never go fishing
On the Stour in July;
The Council forbids it.
Which seems to me a shame.
I should have liked to have
“Laid aside business, and gone a’fishing”
As the great man says,
A well governed angler,
Plying my trade on a Sunday.
And I think he would be right
When he says that
“Angling is somewhat like poetry”
But:

“The river in the centre of Canterbury is not best-suited to fishing.”

Says the Council,
And I shall have to obey.
And never know the pleasure
Of idling away a hot afternoon
Amongst pescatorial pals.

I have seen fish in the Stour in July,
And others fishing, for that matter.
Away from the noise of the city
Contemplative and calm.
There must be nothing,
Absolutely nothing,
Half so much worth doing
As messing around on the Stour in boats.
Just to catch fish, talk
And maybe take a swim
In *our* river.

But the Council is clear.

“To conclude, the River Stour running through the centre of the city is not managed as a fishery and the river is not best-suited to the activity of fishing.”

And so I can watch and wish
And ponder, that I
Shall never go fishing in the Stour
In July.

Weodmonað: August

Samphire

“To those who attended Conrad's funeral in Canterbury during the Cricket Festival of 1924, and drove through the crowded streets festooned with flags, there was something symbolical in England's hospitality and in the crowd's ignorance of even the existence of this great writer. A few old friends, acquaintances and pressmen stood by his grave.”

Edward Garnett

August for the people;
The geese migrate already.
Grey, honking chevrons
Nightly across the sky
Heading Northward
Marking the end
Of something.
Soon, the murmuraton
Of returning students,
For now, the city
Is at peace in itself.
The Cantiacci
Go placidly about their business.
The cricket season
Comes to stumps,
The tourists depart
And we are at ease in this credible place.
Weed month. We sort
The wheat from the tares.

Let us savour our city.
Walk with me.
Let us consider what has gone.
Stroll along King Street
Where the Old Synagogue stands removed,
Past Mr Wesley's Pepper Pot Chapel
With his Canterbury Group fallen from grace,
“Cold as stones”.
Here, a former strip joint -
Unthinkable and almost laughable
In our bashful city.

A fat man on a bench –
“We'll have to do it again.” –
Confuses our guests
Looking down to the Friars' Bridge.

Down Prince of Orange Street,
Theatres and Catch Clubs,
Glees and madrigals,
Harmony and unity,
Dancing School Yard,
Mrs Terry's pastry shop.

Here have been cordwainers,
Cheesemongers, coach-builders,
Saddlers and shirt makers,
Grocers and bakers
All in a hundred yard street.

And on to the King's Bridge,
All hiring fairs and Huguenots at
The start of the island.

*"Unfaithful wives beware, also butchers, bakers, brewers, apothecaries,
And all who give short measure."*

Knapped flint and stone quoin,
King strut and scissor brace roof;
The Eastbridge.
Who else has almshouses
In their High Street?
Charity and a ducking stool.

Stonechat and wrens by the river
Troglodytes troglodytes

*Rain soaks the St Lawrence Ground
And in between melancholy showers
Woolley square cuts his way
To a fine half century
Against the bark of the lime tree
On a wet sluggish outfield
On the opening day of cricket week.
The Hampshire fielders
Stretch and yawn
And yearn for the comfort
Of the dressing room
As they slide towards the rope
Of yet another boundary.*

*Capitulating on 101,
Woolley raises his bat to the cheers
Of the bonneted and boatered faithful,
The fashionable visitors,
And sets about scuttling*

*The south coast batsmen
With Freeman and Marriott
In support,
Spinning for victory.*

*Somewhere, elsewhere,
Next door to a darkened house
A church bell tolls.
Someone produces
A starting handle
And a smart dark car
Is gunned into life
As a single cyclist leads
Away from the startled village
For the final journey.
Across Bourne Paddock,
The Nailbourne risen in salute,
And down the hill
Past St Peter's
And on the high road
To the cricketing city.*

*Sleep after toyle,
Port after stormie seas;
Sea-writer, skipper-novelist,
The philosopher of the sea
Is sunk*

“What I really wanted was rivets, by heaven. Rivets!”

This Lime Tree Café my prison.
Someone has tidied up this ground,
And not in a good way.
Underwood Close, Cowdrey Place;
What memories of the ‘Seventies
At this home of cricket.

Growing up in Yorkshire, I would watch
The black and white fables unfold
Of The John Player League on Sundays.
Benaud and Arlott the tellers of the tale
As we sped up the last ten overs. What a team!
Underwood, Knott, Iqbal,
Luckhurst, Amiss, Denness.
“We are Kent!” yells a drunk
At the back of the Ames Levett stand.

These Old Stagers.

Hopper Levett, gentleman hop-farmer

And wicket keeper, turned up so drunk for a game
They had to throw him in the shower.
The first ball is well down leg side
And hurtles to the boundary for byes.
Hopper doesn't move.
The second ball nicks the bat
And Hopper takes off.
A splendid one handed catch
Arcing high to his left.
"The only time in my career" says he,
"A catch on the very first ball!"

You cannot tell jokes
In poetry. It's all about.
The timing.

For years Fuller Pilch swung proudly
From The Bat and Ball. God, I served at the bar in that pub,
Oceans of Fremlin's and Shepherd Neame
On match days, six deep for the whole of lunch
And the carpet sticky as any wicket,
But they came for the four-day game.

"Was we in 'ere when the ceiling fell down?"

They came for Botham,
They came for Dickie Bird.
Vanburn Holder with his pipe
At the bar.

Tony Saxby with
"Just a little half".
That barmaid.
Those evenings.

Hlafmaesse
We should have had
A Lammas Day trial.
The first corn falls
At Lammastide.
And we, shortly after.

"I'll see you when you're older."

A crowded pub on Christmas mornings
And me with a new flat opposite.
I think I wore a groove in St Lawrence Rd
On my crossings.
Football Saturdays
And always in the pub afterwards.

In the four corners of the barn
We place the Lammas bread quarters.
The Feast of First Fruits.
Protect the early grain.

Is this holy
Or the Devil's Day?
None can say.

“Possible.
The figuration of a possible”
“I am not dead; I am in Herne Bay”

Flushed.

It is the last days of the holiday.
One eye on the new term.
Back to school in all the shops.
What sallies forth we managed
Are finished
With just a Thai orchid
Or reindeer pelt to remind us
Of further climes,
Settling back in
To our city.

It is time for the last long sleep
As August goes out
Obliquely.

Haligmonað: September

Hops

“Elizabeth stayed two weeks at St. Augustine’s and on September 7, which was her birthday, a banquet was held in her honour at the Archbishop’s palace. Now forty years old, we may be sure she was dazzlingly attired, her jewels blazing, not yet wearing a wig perhaps but with a few strands of grey dulling her bright red hair. She was seated at the high table in an “ancient marble chair” probably St. Augustine’s Chair brought from the cathedral. Among the guests was Marshall de Tetz, the French ambassador, and at a table nearby sat the Mayor of Canterbury and members of the Corporation. A number of Canterbury citizens, tantalised by seeing only glimpses of the Queen, forced their way in to get a good look at the royal personage. In an imperious voice, Elizabeth told them to move aside so that she could see the guests at table.”

Hail Mother of England: Bateman, A.

September has come. It is mine.
I sit in one of the dives
On St. Dunstan’s Street
Uncertain and afraid
Watching a drunk negotiate
The freefall of a balustrade.
I project my verse
And worse.
Outside, a maelstrom
Of busy buses lug
Up and down St Thomas’ Hill.
The faithful hurry home
For supper
Collars up against the wind.

This is a melancholy month, the sense
Of something, finally, coming to a close.
Thirty two years to this day, I fell in.

Through a torpid South London,
All wrecking yards and high rise flats,
The industrial north of the county,
Marshland and metropolis,
Mudflats and motorways.

An old train with corridors and carriages.
Windows down to let in
Late Summer heat
As we journeyed on.

And then, crossing the Medway,
That desperate expanse,
The sudden space of East Kent,
Angular oast houses and bridleways,
An occasional inn,
Isolated farms and untrodden paths.
Another Eden, a new slower world
With charming halts and tapered rolling hills;
A crown sat on a ridge.

Towns on the Downs.
A commotion of cherries
And plenitude of Kent pear.
Parched lines of fruit trees
Blossom in the loam.
Wye, Chilham, Chartham, home.
Fall in.

I came with poems
In my head and pockets.
I came with a lesson to teach.
Gaudeamus igitur.
And I have taught them all;
The dim, the feckless,
The endlessly bright.
Texts ancient and modern.
Theories we have kicked around
The classroom.
The hanging question.
The poser, the facer,
Bringing silence to the sixth.
Those days
When passion increased,
And the clock stops ticking
And the hunt in the text is on;
Such pleasure.
Where are they now?
Ubi sunt, qui ante nos
In mundo fuere.

So far away
My Yorkshire childhood:
Roaming amongst the wild wolds,
The red village of Sledmere,
Scouting the trout at Skerne.
Day trips to Bridlington,
Shopping in Hull,
Half Moon Court at the castle in York
With a frighteningly real Dick Turpin.
Wetwang, Bainton, Bempton Cliffs –

Stories of the Hole of Horcum;
Down Garrowby Hill in a low gear
And fixated by the nailed god;
Enchanted at night in Peasholm Park.
Danes Dyke, Robin Hood's Bay
So far away, so far away;
I was the dreamer
And the dream
Until time took me on.

*Such as thou art, sometime was I.
He is coming home, finally,
Edward, Woodstock.
His Good Parliament behind him,
Twelve black horses come rattling down
The dusty Canterbury Road from Blackheath.
A sable cortege.
Uncoupling at our West Gate.
We all were there
All two thousand were there.
The silence was Aeolian breath,
Just the rattle of the gun carriage
And the snorts of the war horses bringing him
And the clank of the two black knights
With the silver ostrich plumes;
A silk palled coffin
With sword and copper gauntlets.
Gaunt was there.
Bolingbroke was there.
Such as I am, such shalt thou be.
Homout
Ich dien.
Bolingbroke
Will kill his son.*

By God the hop
Has made this County. Away with ale.
Revere Westbere.
We drink our Shepherd Neame
By the pottle.

De Hoppo

*"It is warm and dry, and has a moderate moisture, and is not very useful in benefiting man,
because it makes melancholy grow in man, and makes the soul of man sad, and weighs down
his inner organs."
Abbess Hildegard*

Pole pullers and pole men,
Docker's boys and tally men
All along the green bine stem
Plucking the fruit into the hop bin;
Hopping down in Kent.
First the flea
Then the fly,
Then the mould
Then they die.

Food festival in the Dane John
The best of Kent;
Music and Brogdale beasts
All ales and ciders,
Fenders and frolicking.

Michaelmas fair, recruiting parties;
Swinging boats and merry-go-rounds
All in our Precincts.
Harvest done
And the Reeve
Is engrossed in accounts.
Broil the rucklety goose
And lay on the nutcrackers.

Holy month and all are called.
And in their secular thousands they come;
An irruption of students migrating south.
Alight here for Cathedral and University.
The cocky, the nervous and the first time from home.

We have a surfeit
Of students. They are
Half the life-blood of us
Whose service
Is perfect freedom.

And I am back in St. Stephen's
Where I began
In a house that didn't exist
Thirty years ago,
Though I walked past the plot
On my way from my box room on the Heights
To Frank Gowlett's Old Beverlie;
Bat and trap and Sunday lunch drinks,
Nulli Secundus plastered on the wall.

"How's Jackie?"
"Better than nothing."

Now overlooking Birley's Field.
Nightly the bellringers call the change
In diatonic delight.
The Reverend Kev. is in his church
And all's right in the world.
From my room,
Further at the great church.
I hear the curfew
Toll the knell of parting day.
Nine of the clock.

A murmuration of starlings over my house,
Over the balcony, where I survey –
Betokens, what?
Passerines passing?
The importance of group
And community?
Or the path that leads
To darkness?

Close and slow.
Summer is dying in the city.
Beer gardens thin
As the nights draw in
And pavements lose their furniture.

The Salt Way
Through Clowes Wood,
Wintering skylarks over Tyler Hill
And driftwood
On the mud flats
Of Seasalter
Flaunt the bleakness of Autumn.
Lights on in The Sportsman
And an east wind
Blowing through the estuary.
I recoil inland
To my home and fire.
The salt pans and suliformes
Behind me.

*No measles, no smallpox in our city,
Our streets new-paved and dung and filth removed.
Hogs only housed in certain places
And offal carried far to the furthest groyne.
There is a white lady upon a fine horse.
The procession going back to Dunstan's and further,
The drummers and the fanfare from the West Gate top,
She shall have music wherever she goes.
Her horse light-foots it and the Virgin Queen*

*Has come to flirt with the French.
They carry her on a golden chair
Beneath a lavish awning.
Four fecund knights beneath her,
Just blazing jewels and that red hair in the sun.
He was not the only Nosey Parker that day
But she can sit in the Augustine Chair
And carry it all before her.*

Vespers at the cathedral.
Deus, in adiutorium meum intende
Domine, ad adiuvandam me festina
Gloria patri
Canticles and versicles.

æfensang
Is forty minutes long
But darker in the Quire.

Winterfilleð: October

Cobnuts

“Gandhi arose at a very early hour and said his prayers. I rose at the same time for my prayers and after finishing I went into the kitchen to get some tea. He came to find me; he was immensely amused and sat on the kitchen table watching me, swinging his legs and chatting. He came with me to the Cathedral and was much impressed, sitting beside me in the stalls; he was very intent on the service and said of the hymns that were sung that they might have been written especially for him...In the evening we sat on the hearthrug before a blazing fire, he in the oriental cross-legged fashion: he erected his small hand-loom and began to weave while we talked.”

Searching For Light: Hewlett Johnson

Bring that harvest into the city
Wheat and corn and barley.

Bring hops
Bring apples
Bring Selling pears.
Bring beets and blackberries
Brogdale plums
Tomatoes and Walmestone herbs.

*“These five days
have I hid me in these woods and durst not peep
out, for all the country is laid for me. But now am
I so hungry that, if I might have a lease of my life
for a thousand years, I could stay no longer.”*

Bring me cobnuts
From Potash Farm
Roasted and buttered
And served with port.

*“Kent, sir. Everyone knows Kent.
Apples, cherries, hops and women.”*

Huffkins, choynes and Canterbury Tarts.
Kentish Pudding Pie.

“For to make Tartys in Applis

*Take gode Applis and gode Spycis and Figys
and reyfons and Perys and wan they are*

*wel ybrayed collour'd wyth Safron wel and
do yt in a cofyn and do yt forth to bake wel."*

Let the granaries burst in the city,
Sole and ale and lambs' tail pie.

*"He koude rooste, and sethe, and broille, and frye,
Maken mortreux, and wel bake a pye."*

"In swich caas of the ercedekenes curs"

At the mid-point of the path through life,
I found myself lost in Lyminge Wood
So dark, the way ahead
Was blotted out.
But I was with
My Beatrice.
And when we emerged
To the grassy car park
Relieved and dejected in equal part,
We kissed away our Autumn.

I sing, of course, of myself.
A raggedy Six Preacher
From the taciturn North;
The Figure of Outward
In The Longmarket
Sipping coffee on a
Cobbled street.
Blood and soil,
These roots clutch hard.
These leaves, more dilettante
Than sibyl (line).
But mine,
Nonetheless,
Walking down Palace Street
Past timbered, medieval houses,
Ducking through old St Alphege's,
He of the oxen bones,
By The Old Synagogue
And The Crooked House
Pondering the lost pubs of this city:
The Prince of Wales, The Jolly,
The Rose and Crown and Man of Kent,
The Falstaff Tap, The Flying Horse,
The Loco and The Leopard's Head.

*"They toke hir in and logged hem at mydmorowe, I trowe,
Atte Cheker of the Hope, that many a man doth knowe."*

This route. My roots.
Remembering the callow youth
Who came upon a time.

Now I am Cade
The Captain of Kent
And this is my fee simple.

*On the ridge of quarry hills
Near Lympne, above Romney,
Barton is in the Barton.
The Holy Maid of Aldington.*

*Under the Archbishop's protection
The Mad Maid of Kent
Is brought into our city.*

*Trance-falling, fitfully,
Secreted at St. Sepulchre's,
The daughters of Anselm,
Black-veiled Benedictines.
Two thousand in the chapel
For the visions
Of a daughter of Albion –
"The King shall die within the month!"-
Accosts the King at Canterbury
Alone and in a monastery.*

*A public act of penance
For these her bidden blandishments,
But the Bluff King has his nuptials
And her head is on the bridge.*

Blood and soil.
These roots clutch.

The ghost of Kipling
Walks the old road
Between Broad Oak and Herne;
That way through the woods.

*"For, so the Ark be borne to Zion, who
Heeds how they perished or were paid that bore it ?
For, so the Shrine abide, what shame—what pride—
If we, the priests, were bound or crowned before it?"*

How long
Before Milner falls?
We change our covenants with the past.

*“’Gainst the need, they know, that lies
Hid behind the centuries.”*

*Saturday 3 p.m.
The barrage balloons down
For repair. Through the air
They come again, 109s
Strafing our streets
Strafing our people
Leaving the shocked and head-scarved dead
Strewn among vegetables and fresh bread
In the main street.
The exclamation
Of a brown paper bag.
How terribly sudden
Life sometimes is.
How death.
In seconds gone
Leaving the screams
Of those
Who just came for their shopping.*

Now counting yearling sheep in a field
At the back of Oswalds
And dreaming of hogget.
A roofer quietly goes about his business.
The stutter of mallet
On a rustic house repair.
The church bell nods
The progress of the afternoon:
A dragonfly darts uniquely.
The Nailbourne also rises.

This, surely, is England?
The road snakes round past the big house
To Mr Relf’s little tavern.

*Yan, tan,
tethera, methera,
pip.
Azer, sezar,
akker, conter,
dick.*

Who is hiding in the oak from the wind?
Now pausing at the five barred gate before
Heading up the hill and down to the orchard;
Upwards into the woods.
Hot trodding it back down Crows’ Camp Hill

To the abandoned station, Charlton Park,
Where Churchill eyed his Boche Buster.

A linear village with a blacksmith.
These bournes.
These happy hundreds.

All Saints, All Souls,
Soul Cakes and Hallowtide.
Stretch out your hand to the fire
And remember the Saints
At All Hallows.
What some call Samhain
Is here.
Remember the dead.
Persephone gone down again.
A quarter day;
Cleanse us with fierce fire.

*“One for St. Peter, two for St. Paul
Three for the man who made us all.”*

For O! For O!

Blotmonað: November

Cranberries

“Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury – 1962

This was a one-off, Write Me a Murder by Frederick Knott. 21 to 24 November 1962. Why does it seem like yesterday? I remember so clearly this beautiful town and the charming theatre and the sheer wonderful and extraordinary luck to have digs inside the precinct.

One of the houses belonging to the cathedral was used for some of the actors. In the morning I looked out over the cathedral. I had never seen a more beautiful sight in all my life. The colours changed every day and during the day on the ancient yellow stone. It was sheer delight to wander in the great, gaunt, granite cathedral. At night I had a key to get in the gate, since there was a small door cut into the huge gate itself. Then I was a lone figure in the grounds and there was nothing so breathtakingly beautiful. I felt I had been given a secret key that revealed Paradise”.

Steven Berkoff: Free Association.

The reckoning of time,
Unredeemable again.
A month of immolation;
Fetching the salting tubs.
Sacrifice and suffering,
Dressing the sacred tree.
Honour Father Sky
In fire and light
In the forever rain.

The vine leaves
Against the brick walls of my house,
Are rusty and broken.

Listen...
Speak of faded leaf
On saints' high ground
They fall.
Fall backward
As the Autumn poets sing.

“Se mónað is nemned Novembris on Léden, and on úre geþeóde "blótmónað", forðon úre yldran, ðá hý háðene wáeron, on ðam mónþe hý bleóton á, ðæt is, ðæt hý betéhton and benémdon hyra deófolgyldum ða neát ða ðe hý woldon syllan.”

End days.
Something is coming,

Slouching towards Canterbury.
What rough beast?
Will the sky never smile again?
The seagulls cry
Driven inland by the storm.
Rain washes the curtain walls of the city
And drains bubble over.
It's pissing down
In Rhodaus Town.
The traffic still at Pin Hill.

But, Hail, the Hero of Agincourt!
Hail, Lud of the Mud!
The game's afoot –
He with the mad and melancholy son
And the father-in-law made from glass -
The Cinque Port men-at-arms in a row
The Duc D'Orleans in tow,
All things are ready
If our minds be so.
Spearmen and bowmen
On the King's Mead
This is your finest hour –
Gentlemen of England
Are now abed;
Pray at your father's tomb.

*Bloodmonth.
We sheer off our cattle at the Bullstake.
Those that will not last the coming blast
We slaughter.
Those bulls with strength, we spare.
Martinmas is upon us. Beef and beer.
The bleeding heart of an ox oozes.*

*His Martinmas will come
As it does to every hog.
In his mother's arms
In Languedoc.
But, for now,
He walks our city,
This terse, tall and most blond of men.
Our lion in wicked Winter.
Coeur de lion.*

*Positioned in our cloister,
Two kings play at pitch and toss
With monk and Sacrist,
Noble and baron,
For gain. Quitclaim.*

*Before he takes the cross
He takes the crowns
And seals with wax
For ten thousand marks.*

*They say Jacob Jew paid more gold
Than any man in England
For his ransom.*

To Oxford, to Cambridge they go
For tense consultation
Amongst the white stones.

Nelson's brother weeping in the Precincts,
The Hero of the Nile is downed,
Bell Harry peals out.

Bybrook Field to
Bybrook Cemetery.
We found her in the rain
Festooned in geraniums
And white and yellow roses.
Half anonymous
And all so
Far, far from home.
Did the red virgin
Visit us here
With her terrible prayer?
The path of suffering
On the Canterbury Road
To be finally rooted.

A month of respects.
Remember
Remember
Light the bonfires.
Purchase the poppies
We don't have the right
To forget.

*The flag is at half-mast
At Broome Park
His country house needed him -*

*"Mad" Mick Mannock
Flying ace, V.C.
In flames in Flanders.*

*Philip Mortlock Young,
The first of our boys to go,*

Clare College, Cambridge,
To Givenchy,
His bravery captured
On the cover of the Illustrated News.
William "Budge" Burgess, the finest
Sportsman the school had ever seen
Fell on the Somme, lost forever;
Archie Hardman, left back, schoolteacher,
And "Mac" Mackenzie both
Bought a packet at Passchendaele.
Eric Sharp, victor ludorum,
Lies forever under African skies:
Sprinted the guns alone, one last time
And fell in.

Our lost, lost boys.
Of the four hundred, one hundred fell in.
Who knows if they went with songs to the battle?
But they were young, sheered off
And did not last the coming blast

Taptoe
The day thou gavest, Lord,
Is ended.
The sun goes down
On the Bullstake and we
Remember them.

Call him Ishmael!
Melville at The Falstaff –
Charlie Olson would have been proud,
A Nantucky boy in the holy city
Two pints on from Sandwich.

"An odd hole – ineffably funny".

Stir up, we beseech thee,
The will of thy people.
Come you camel riders
From your Summer palaces;
Leave the sherbet and the dancing girls.
Stir straight up from East to West,
They are playing at dice in the taverns.
Excita.
Excita.
Stir up the mixed and the candied peel,
Toss in the dates and raisins.
Cinnamon, all spice, nutmeg, salt,
Liberal with the brandy.

Ludi Plebeii

Epulum Jovis

There is no celebration here,
But chrysanthemum and topaz.
Our holy souls in Purgatory,
Still we invite our gods.

Nights to be out on the town
With the mad American.
Shooting pool
Or arm wrestling
In Lady Luck.
The thirst he could not slake
For Rhenish.
He never bore me on
His back and I,
I lost him
Around the chimes at midnight.
Where be his gambols now?

No wine, no beer
November.

The ten hours light abating.

Stir up the citizens.
Stir up the lumpen past
Stir up the goodly voices:
The deceased are the travellers among us.
The children of Godefrid, Lambin Frese,
Luke the Moneyer, Gerold the Fuller,
Mainer the Rich, Odbold,
Odo, Eugo, Solomon Turte.
Stir the people of Heathenmanne Lane.
The plain chant of time past.
The polyphony of the dead:

We will
We will remember them.

Ærra Geola: December

Chestnuts

“I have spoken to you today, dear children of God, of the martyrs of the past, asking you to remember especially our martyr of Canterbury, the blessed Archbishop Elphege; because it is fitting, on Christ's birthday, to remember what is that peace which he brought; and because, dear children, I do not think that I shall ever preach to you again; and because it is possible that in a short time you may have yet another martyr, and that one perhaps not the last. I would have you keep in your hearts these words that I say, and think of them at another time. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

T.S.Eliot: Murder in the Cathedral

So what is to be done
In the winter, in the night time?

Walking through Brockhill
To the castle at Saltwood.
Smokefall, the lights are on
And the endless, fenced
Garden secure.
We can only think of that day
With rancour.
And yet, it survives.
Advent.
It is coming, coming.
Fasting and prayer,
Advent images and vessel cups,
Pay the box carrier half a penny.

Mōdraniht

We watch the whole night through.

Look to the East.
He comes with clouds descending.
Come Emmanuel.

Snowmen and robins in the calendars,
Burn the Advent candle.
Hallow Tallow.

And the first is Ishmael and all the prophets.
The second, the Holy Book,
The third is the mother.
The fourth, the harbinger.
The last is the Light of the World.

And there is a sermon.
“Dear children of God
Today I shall be short”.
He fears his imminent death.
He does not think he will come again.
There is time to outlaw the de Brocs.
Always there is work to be done
Whatever may be coming.
The angelic voices were mistook..

Exiled in Sandgate for Christmas.
All day the Border Force rib
Hugs the pebble grey shore.
All night the helicopter hums
Scouring the coast
For those differently exiled.
We huddle closer in our bed.

I, too, a migrant
Now handfast with this city.

Ave Mater Angliae!
Hail, Mother of England!
Hail the unending epic
Of this burgh.
Lay the rose
Where Sudbury goes
Headless.

Here, here they all came,
The Henrys, the Edwards,
The Richards, the Charles.

Here has been Pope and Circumstance,
King and Kingmaker;
Conqueror, Confessor,
Erasmus, Gandhi,
Cromwell, John.
Godwinson, Mozart, Pole.

Fall in Karl Marx,
Here is poetry amongst the poverty.
“Mark you that and noat you wel.”

Fall in John Keats,
Endlessly frigging your mind
For your piss-a-bed poetry.
This town of beauty
Is a joy forever.
Aeolian splendour.

Fall in Defoe and Austen,
Lionheart and Longshanks,
Go widdershins about
And learn to pace this city
Not in space
But in time.

Fall in Old Boz
With your manic, meandering walks.

Waiting for Beckett to just fall in.

Fall in Korzeniowski;
The tale's about to be told.
"It was a dark and stormy night,
We sat by the calcined wall.
It was said to the tale-teller
Tell us a tale, and the tale ran thus:
It was a dark and stormy night."
Davy Jones, fall in.

*The riot of puddings:
Clubs, cudgels and halberts
Amongst the cakes and ale.
Royalist and Roundhead,
"For God, King Charles and Kent!"
Burgate barricaded with old timber
And the mob is on the town.
First the shutting of the shops
And then the breaking of heads,
Fire and Fairfax and Ireton,
Our gates torn at their hinges
And cindered in the streets.*

I order a goose from Susannah,
Buy stilton, Madeira;
Walnuts and port
From The Shed.
Some sage for the stuffing.

Ready the hooden horse,
Mummers plays and hoodening,
Hand bells and carolling.
And Christmas is upon us.
Alpha and Omega. A and O.
Blow the Burghemote long and low
One more time.

While faith holds wide the door

For the oblation of nations;
Hark the herald angels beg
For pennies.

*The cruellest killing in Christendom.
Christ Church dark,
The monks at vespers;
Trespassers advance in silence,
First footing
In the Transept.*

*No traitor to the King
But a priest.*

*Four blows,
The lily and the rose.
This fellow will not rise again
Any more.*

So why does he nightly come to my door
Brain-dripping and holy
From his dark Martyrdom?
Through the brutal and cheap streets
In tears, sodden and uncomprehending,
To the gate of my turbulent house
In the jump and dead of night.
This Cheapside brat, murdered in haste;
Fitzurse, de Morvill, de Tracy, le Breton
Their names cursed
For severing that crown
Which the unction of sacred chrism
Dedicated to his God.
Rest easy.

“I do not think I shall preach to you again.”

There will be time for epiphany
Hereafter.
There will be time for wonder
After twelve fat nights,
When the miracles begin
And the cult is born.
There will be time for ale
And wassail
And ginger shall be hot in the mouth
And you
Shall be Queen of the Bean.

*And was America founded here?
Robert Cushman,*

*Freeman of the city,
With a shop on The Parade,
Hard by St Andrew's church –
Impossibly beached in the street, no less –
Departed for Leiden,
Widowed and returned,
Finds room in an inn on Palace Street,
Financing, hiring, Mayflower, Speedwell,
Brownists and Merchant Adventurers.
New life, new birth.
The ships to find a nation
And they signed the contracts here.*

They are coppicing the alder grove
While the sap is low.
A lone woodman whistles
Between the orange stools.
An ancient song.
Talking about re-generation.

*“Out goes the candle
Out goes the light
Out goes my story
And so Good Nite”*

Of Canterbury, who fell in.
Why is that airman holding his arm?
He hasn't fallen,
He is quick, there
Upon the memorial;
Part broken.
The boy needs nursing.
Airmen here were special;
Youths of grit and mettle,
The sons of Mannoek,
Spitfire boys we still imagine
In the skies over Farthing Common,
Hellfire Corner. Scrambling out
Of The Cat and Custard Pot.
Angels one five.

Drive the twisty road
Into the sunken village.
Follow the fingerpost
To the church in the wood,
Our Chapel Perilous,
Hard by the old manor.
And mind the injunction,
Beware lest you tramp
Upon sacred ashes,

Beneath those rugged elms,
That yew tree's shade,
And come you back to the city.
Dry bones can no-one harm.

Of Canterbury, who fell in.

“Now preye I to hem alle that herkne this litel tretis or rede, that if ther be any thing in it that lyketh hem, that ther-of they thanken oure lord Iesu Crist, of whom procedeth al wit and al goodnesse. / And if ther be any thing that displese hem, I preye hem also that they arrette it to the defaute of myn unconninge, and nat to my wil, that wolde ful fayn have seyde bettre if I hadde had conninge.”

Where is England? Where is Kent?
Where is Canterbury?
What make I loytering here?

“Rome it selfe not so old”

Should auld acquaintance?

*“O what we ben!
And what we come to!”*

Blessed Thomas, pray for us.

*“Eusas ben and showd
Eusa on the road”*

I do not think I shall preach...

“I nam nat precius”

I do not think

“The flour is goon, ther is namoore to telle”

A buzzing insect enters
My car, my colour, my self:
What did he do yet other
Riding the axile tree?

For all the Gods

Anathemata.

Me.

Mine.

My Proper Ground

The Poetics of Place in the Twentieth Century

Abstract

By invoking a sense of place attachment understood in terms of Simone Weil's concept of "rootedness", I explore the concept and its presentation in the work of certain Twentieth Century poets. Specifically, I concentrate on the poetry of David Jones, Laurie Duggan and Charles Olson. What unites all three writers is a fixation on a specific locus and I try and unpack the depth that that locus adds to the impact of their writing. The three writers in question do not constitute anything like a school, but as operators within the modernist or post-modern traditions they share stylistic and thematic concerns that make their work cumulatively compatible for specific study under the headline of the poetics of place, whilst offering different perspectives on that concept. Where they differ in their concentration on locus is where the thesis intensifies and I argue that Olson's total occupation of the city of Gloucester, Massachusetts, contrasts with Duggan's struggle to find an understandable homeliness in the city of Canterbury, Kent and with Jones' yearning for a mythical or historical Wales of the imagination and of his forefathers. With all three poets, however, the need to belong somewhere appears paramount in the presentation of their poetic selves. The thesis sits alongside my own long poem attempting to comprehend my complex relationship with my adopted home city of Canterbury, away from my Yorkshire roots.

Introduction: The Poetics of Place

Writing in exile, in London, in 1943, Simone Weil wrote:

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future.¹

Weil's concept of rooted-ness is not so simple as to imply merely a sense of place, but a more complicated French pre-occupation with notions of the *terroir* of the human condition and the phenotype of an individual person's constitution. Uprooted, herself, from her native Paris and having, painfully, to confront the rapidly changing identities of Vichy and Occupied France, Weil is well placed to describe the physical and spiritual attachment of the individual to a specific place. No less a mind than T.S Eliot has said of Weil and *The Need for Roots*:

In trying to understand her, we must not be distracted – as is only too likely to happen on a first reading – by considering how far, and at what points, we agree or disagree. We must simply expose ourselves to the personality of a woman of genius, of a kind of genius akin to that of the saints.²

Quite as bluntly, Edward Casey in *the fate of place* offers this observation:

Place is as requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We are surrounded by places. We walk over and through them. We live in places, relate to others in them. Nothing we do is unplaced.³

Martin Heidegger wrote, at his simplest, earlier in the century, of us as beings in time and in place, and of our sense of consciousness of all implications of that triangulation. *Dasein*, in his reading, becomes much more than simply being or existence and is rooted in a consciousness of existence. Thus, place became an increasing preoccupation for Heidegger. *Dasein*, in his work, can be read as “being –in”, the character of which is an *existentiale* of

¹ Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, (London: Routledge, 2002) p.43

² Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Preface viii*

³ Edward S. Casey, *the fate of place*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), *Preface ix*

Dasein. One step further and Being-in-the world is a unitary phenomenon where being and the world are not separate entities, but must be considered together. We are beings in time, but also beings in space and that interaction with surroundings is also a key part of the *Dasein* asking the fundamental questions of why we are, who we are and where we are.

In his interview for *Der Spiegel*, published posthumously in 1976, Heidegger asserted, thankfully more plainly,

I know that everything essential and great originated from the fact that the human being had a homeland and was rooted in tradition.⁴

I wish to investigate that notion of homeland, who we are and where we are and how those two concepts collide in the poetry of the Twentieth Century and I am contemplating place as a space to which an individual is emotionally and culturally attached and through which he or she attempts to comprehend their own identity – although by no means in the more troubling implications of homeland demonstrated in Heidegger’s public life. As root, it is more than mere geography. Place is a meditation between the human subject and the geographical object. We try to comprehend our landscape in order to understand ourselves. As such, we wish our place, or a place, to be somehow tied up with whatever we perceive as ourselves. As Billy Collins puts it in ‘A Sense of Place’,

If things had happened differently,
Maine or upper Michigan
might have given me a sense of place -

a topic that now consumes 87%
of all commentary on American literature.

Our place can be the place of our birth, the place we wished we were born or a place we have come upon. We may choose a place because of ancestral ties or from the sense of being

⁴ Heidegger, M, ‘Only a God Can Save Us’, interview *Der Spiegel* Magazine, May 31, 1976, trans. by W. Richardson in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, (London: Routledge, 2009) p 49

involved in a living chain of history; either can imbue a place with meaning. Since the first intrepid traveller decided to stop following the herds and drove a stake into the ground in the space between the two rivers and declared, “Here is my space”, humans have developed strong and complex bonds with the places of their dwelling or places they visit.

As Eleanor Cook first notes in ‘T.S.Eliot’s Sense of Place in *Four Quartets*’

The word place in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is allotted fourteen different categories under four general headings

And:

The need to place ourselves in various senses of the word place – to think of ourselves in terms of place – appears to be a longstanding human need.⁵

Let us begin with Eliot, whose centrality to Twentieth Century poetry is indisputable and who, since undergraduate days, I had always considered a writer with a clear focus on place. It is easy to be seduced into considering Eliot as a poet concerned with place when we recall pieces such as ‘Landscapes’ or *Four Quartets*. The titles of the four constituent parts of *Four Quartets*, alone, at first glance, seem to reveal an incredibly sharply defined sense of place, and the importance of individual places. However, closer reading reveals a more liminal and nomadic absence of grounding in Eliot’s poetry that belies the initial impression and shows the nominal spaces in *Four Quartets* to be really jumping off points for wider philosophical contemplations. Whilst *The Waste Land* is very much focused on London and the South East, place is significantly less important than Eliot’s wider depiction of the spiritual collapse of the Western World. And so I am interested to consider the relative absence of a sense of place and identity in Eliot’s poetry as a contrast to three other Twentieth Century writers who we can consider to be in the Modernist tradition, culminating in detailed studies of these three

⁵ Eleanor Cook, ‘T.S. Eliot’s Sense of Place in *Four Quartets*’, *Connotations* Vol. 8.2, 1998/99)

key poets and a consideration of how a sense of place remained, and potentially grew as, an important concept in English and American poetry in the Twentieth Century.

In *Little Gidding*, Eliot advises us:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

Eliot suggests that exploring is a kind of self-exploring to find the epiphany that enables us to know ourselves, but to know ourselves in terms of the place from where we started. Eliot is an American writing in England and yet only one of his quartets harks back to his American roots. Even so, he had earlier written to his close friend, Marquis Childs, “Missouri and the Mississippi have made a deeper impression on me than any other part of the world.”⁶ – a sentence that could have been written by Twain himself.

“The Invisible Poet”, as Kenner described him, appears transient in most of his poetry and the reader would be forgiven for not knowing that Eliot studied at Harvard, the Sorbonne and Oxford, which are all absent from his poetry, though he expanded further to Childs:

It is self-evident that St. Louis affected me more deeply than any other environment has ever done. I feel that there is something in having passed one’s childhood beside the big river, which is incommunicable to those people who have not. I consider myself fortunate to have been born here, rather than in Boston, or New York, or London.⁷

So incommunicable is Eliot’s feeling that he really seems not to try to express it, until he publishes *The Dry Salvages* in 1945. In *Four Quartets* he, thus finally, gives a definitive sense of place which has been hitherto lacking from his poetry.

Interviewed in 1959, Eliot spoke of his links with the American poetic tradition:

⁶ James Edwin Miller, *T. S. Eliot: The Making of an American Poet, 1888–1922*. (State College, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001) p. 62

⁷ James Edwin Miller, *T.S Eliot: The Making of an American Poet*, p 62

I'd say that my poetry has obviously more in common with my distinguished contemporaries in America than with anything written in my generation in England. That I'm sure of... It wouldn't be what it is, and I imagine it wouldn't be so good; putting it as modestly as I can, it wouldn't be what it is if I'd been born in England, and it wouldn't be what it is if I'd stayed in America. It is a combination of things. But in its sources, in its emotional springs, it comes from America.⁸

For the early Eliot, place is just literal, an accident of geography. Hence 'The Boston Evening Transcript' is no more about Boston than it is about Rochefoucauld, much unlike Robert Lowell writing on his home city, and 'Preludes' describes life in a drab, modern city, but not a specific one. The "smell of steaks in passageways", "faint stale smells of beer" and "early coffee stands" could be anywhere between New England and the 5th arrondissement. Perhaps place comes more into focus in his first masterpiece. Rainey's impressive scholarship based on Valerie Eliot's revealing of the original manuscripts show us that Eliot probably wrote significant parts of *The Waste Land* before he left London for Lausanne and Margate, which may explain why those two places receive such scant reference in the final draft.

By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept...

On Margate sands
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.

A bus shelter where Eliot allegedly wrote this is no real anchor to a specific place.

I have done a rough draft of part III but do not know whether it will do and must wait for Vivien's opinion as to whether it is printable. I have done it while sitting in a shelter on the front – as I am out all day except when taking rest.⁹

Though written in convalescence between Margate and Lausanne, the principal locus of *The Waste Land* is arguably London, and yet the poem is not specifically *about* London. Although

⁸ Donald Hall, *The Paris Review* "The Art of Poetry No. 1" Spring-Summer 1959

⁹ T.S. Eliot, Hugh Haughton (Ed.), Valerie Eliot (Ed.), *The Letters of T S Eliot, Volume One, 1898-1922*, (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1998) p.478

the routes are carefully detailed, Eliot is merely describing King William Street, London Bridge and the City as this is where he exists and works on a daily basis and the crowd he describes could be any crowd in any European or American city. After hopping about from the Starnbergersee to Margate, the resolution, if there is a resolution, specifically invokes

Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London

It is the city as unreal that fascinates the poet, not as real. Though we have the daughters of The Thames, and an invocation of Spenser, this is not London as it is commonly lived, or was lived by Eliot himself. This London is as much of myth and legend as the Chapel Perilous. From Gethsemane to Golgotha with not a familiar stop between.

There is one moment, however, where Eliot captures a specific locus in *The Waste Land* long enough for us to imagine it, savour it and dwell in it.

This music crept by me upon the waters"
And along The Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.
O City City, I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
The pleasant whining of a mandolin
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls
Of Magnus Martyr hold
Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.

This unique and vividly imagined scene stands out in the whole poem as a place with real resonance for Eliot. The passage presents a kind of rendering of place that we will later see in Olson's *The Maximus Poems*; detail of a specific and named place that we see almost nowhere else in Eliot's poetry. It is as if The Invisible Poet has come out of the shadows and presented us with a small piece of correlative London by way of an epiphany. The fact that he is capable of being focused on one place, but almost always refrains from being so, is a strong suggestion that places for Eliot are generally ephemeral, mere nouns along the way to finer meditations. Whereas places are inevitably linked to the temporal, Eliot's concern is

with the spiritual to which end he directs his conclusions. The Peace which passeth understanding belongs to no post code.

Because of the individual titles of the four quartets published by Eliot in his final great poetic flourishing, it is all too tempting to reflect on him as a significant poet of place. Cook argues vociferously that *Four Quartets* is suffused with a sense of place:

There must be few other works of art to match Eliot's *Four Quartets* in its rich and suggestive sense of place.¹⁰

That is an easy line to fall for given the naming of four specific venues in the overall work and it is true, as Leimberg asserts, that Eliot is connected to all the places he highlights in some way.

The places named in the titles are all revisited places in an autobiographical sense. Eliot really went there, the re gaining personal intensity and historical importance as the poetry progresses from the country house Burnt Norton to the village of East Coker, the "home" from which the Eliot family "started", to the rocky isles near the seacoast where Eliot used to spend his holidays as a boy and, finally, to Little Gidding which well deserves the name of a place revisited in English history before Eliot makes it the climax of his tetrad of revisited places.¹¹

Cook goes further still asserting that:

Eliot is one of those authors capable of so describing an actual place that it comes sharply to our eyes and ears and nose and tongue and skin. This place could not be other. It is as if we had been transplanted there.¹²

And yet within the matter of a few paragraphs she argues:

When I actually visited East Coker, I was slightly surprised to find it a very well-to-do elegant small village. Somehow Eliot's "dung and death" had spilled into my sense of the place – something that would have surprised the high-toned inhabitants I met.

So, not so sharply to the eyes and ears, then. Indeed, after forty years of reading *Four Quartets* I find I can no more visualise East Coker or Burnt Norton than I can fly to Little

¹⁰ Cook, 'T.S.Eliot's Sense of Place in *Four Quartets*'

¹¹ Inge Leimberg, 'The Place Revisited in T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*', *Connotations* Vol 8.1 1998/99

¹² Cook, 'T.S.Eliot's Sense of Place in *Four Quartets*'

Gidding itself. Which is largely the point. The four places mentioned explicitly in *Four Quartets* are not actual physical places described so that we can visualise them and revel in their details; they are places of the imagination. The imagination is the place where the world makes sense, not Burnt Norton or East Coker per se. Whatever emotion or colour Eliot summons in *Four Quartets*, and *The Waste Land* for that matter, it is achieved by dint of the place as objective correlative. Ironically, the High Priest of modernism is really asserting the old Romantic principle that the mind is the place.

Burnt Norton is a meditation on the spatialisation of time and becomes a dialectic on both time and space with occasional reference to a specific place – the rose garden at Burnt Norton, a place with some personal and emotional connection for Eliot.

I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where

This is the still point in spatialised time. Space and time are warped together like dancers in a set formation. Eliot loves and pursues the paradox that space is time and time is space and endlessly plays with this dialectic. In doing so, one imagines Heidegger can't be far from his mind. But this is a revelation *in* the Burnt Norton garden, not *about* it.

And yet, although we go “Down the passage” and “Through the first gate, into our first world” and there is a drained pool, I cannot agree with Cook, at all, that we are presented with “that formal English garden in *Burnt Norton* whose plan we could sketch from Eliot’s description”. Whilst the poet gives us “Garlic and sapphires in the mud” and tells us that the leaves are dead, this could be any garlic or any sapphire. Burnt Norton, itself, is used as the correlative to a meditation on time. And it is not plausible to simply argue that time is place. It is not.

Indeed, in sharp contrast to Cook, Kenner writes in *The Invisible Poet*,

We never know quite where we are in the poem but all possible relevant experiences are congruent.¹³

The colours, the lay-out or, in fact, any details that would make this garden a new Paradise are not given to us for it is not the garden itself that is the poet's focus. This is a meditation on a place in which the meditation increasingly takes centre stage.

In the third part of the poem we are underground. Eliot may or may not have joked with his brother that, specifically, we are underground in Gloucester Road tube at the intersection of the Circle and Piccadilly lines, but I would not glean that from the passage. The "men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind" could be whirled in any Underground, Metro or U-Bahn anywhere in the world. The point is that the underground passage acts as a proleptic nod to the Dante section of *East Coker*. The wind-blown commuters, Eliot, himself, included perhaps, are just the everymen of every station. They all go into the dark.

East Coker offers a more straightforward, traditional genealogical grounding. Eliot begins with a concrete ancestral connection, but ends on a spiritual note.

Now the light falls
Across the open field, leaving the deep lane
Shuttered with branches, dark in the afternoon,
Where you lean against a bank while a van passes,
And the deep lane insists on the direction
Into the village

Eliot moves throughout the poem, in a variety of voices, some more convincing than others until "And where you are is where you are not" and the more spiritual, "Home is where one starts from". There is nothing of East Coker here other than the emotional correlative of the ancestral home of the modern Eliot family. Nothing of the lintels, the house colours, the avenues or distinctive features and buildings that, no doubt, make up the Somerset village.

¹³ Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T.S. Eliot*, (London: Methuen 1965) P 252

Even when Eliot describes the East Coker cemetery, it could be any cemetery anywhere,
with any number of Elyots in it:

a lifetime burning in every moment
And not the lifetime of one man only
But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.

Similarly, claims have been strongly made for the *The Dry Salvages* as a powerful evocation
of both the Mississippi River and the Cape Ann of Eliot's childhood. But this "strong, brown
god" of a river,

sullen, untamed and intractable,
Patient, to some degree, at first recognised as a frontier;
Useful, untrustworthy, as a conveyor of commerce;
Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges.

could be any river from The Humber to The Chaopraya, so vague is the description. This is
not the river as Twain described it. Its character is just as distant and far removed as the salt
smack of the Cape Ann coastline. There are powerful evocations of both sea and river:

The distant rote in the granite teeth,
And the wailing warning from the approaching headland
Are all sea voices

And the wind is the ferocious Nor'easter:

while the North East lowers
Over shallow banks unchanging and erosionless

But it is as if Eliot soon tires of the river as a living thing and prefers it as metaphor to
contemplate on time and Krishna. It vanishes entirely from parts III, IV and V as Eliot moves
towards his abstract conclusion:

We, content at the last
If our temporal reversion nourish
(Not too far from the yew-tree)
The life of significant soil.

We cannot be blind to the irony that it is just such significant soil we have been searching for all along in the poetry.

Arguably, the climax of *Four Quartets* occurs in *Little Gidding*.

But this is the nearest, in place and time,
Now and in England.

Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

Travelling through time, from his ancestral roots in Somerset through to childhood summers in Cape Ann, *Little Gidding* returns Eliot to an England under the Nazi menace with the counterpoint to a Vaughan-Williams pastoral - "Dove descending breaks the air" - bringing its "incandescent terror". But beyond suggesting the place arose from the ashes of The English Civil War and linking this with the Blitz of London, the meditation again tops the locus.

The final section of *Little Gidding* is set in both nowhere and everywhere, to continue the poem's contradictions and juxtapositions. By avoiding a specific location, Eliot hopes to achieve a universality or absolute that soars above the physical and the temporal.

So, while the light fails
On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel
History is now and England.

But the key word here is history. Eliot is not remotely concerned with the small Cambridgeshire village of Little Gidding, but with the idea of the Pentecostal community that lived there three hundred years previously.

See, now they vanish,
The faces and places

The place where "the fire and the rose are one" has no grid reference. It is a place in meditation, a place in faith and, along with the Peace which passeth all understanding, it can

only be attained through a rejection of our earthly, temporal world in favour of a noumenal resolution.

The actual identity of both characters and places in *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* is always enigmatic. Quarter-hints and half-stories result in shady places and even shadier individuals. The movement in both *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* is away from a world on the verge of both spiritual and structural collapse and in this movement the writer must inevitably reject the physical places within that world as well as the world itself. Eliot has no time or inclination for mere towns or cities. They serve only as a jumping off point for higher thoughts.

For the transient, invisible poet that Eliot is, places themselves hold no value, are mere distractions on the way towards discovering that which is real in a spiritual sense. Hence,

Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal

The fact that he can, on one occasion, depict a highly visual pub scene in Lower Thames Street, but hardly ever repeat the exercise shows how little specific spaces are to his poetry and, perhaps more generally, to his perception of the world. And so Cook's assertion that "*Four Quartets* offers a rich and suggestive sense of place"¹⁴ now seems a little shaky.

Despite, as I have stated hitherto, Eliot's centrality to the Twentieth Century tradition, I remain interested in the lack of focus on place in his poetry in comparison with an apparent real need to identify with a locus evident in so many of his contemporaries and those who came shortly after. Eliot appears as an out-lier swimming against a very obvious tide.

¹⁴ Cook, 'T.S.Eliot's Sense of Place in *Four Quartets*'

I offer some instances of other writers focusing on place just to demonstrate that I have chosen from a significant field. For a writer such as Allen Fisher, *Place* is clearly the place he was born and then occupied for his formative years and adulthood, the South London he has always known:

the earth won't wait
the loci of a sphere i have seen it
I, not Maximus, but a citizen of Lambeth
cyclic on linear planes
the construction of parallels along a water line
where the intersections are our mistakes
return we will not¹⁵

Fisher flits back and forth in time so that the South London he describes is both time past and time present:

This is the manor of Lambeth
Terra Ecclesial de Lanchei. In Brixistan Hundred.
Once held by Goda sister to the Confessor
taxed for ten hides¹⁶

Throughout the poem there is a consciousness of people walking the landscape before him and also, therefore, at the same time as him. This Place is alive to the past, peopled by the past, but experienced in the present:

In the newspaper we are warned that the Thames will freeze
so that the ghost of Evelyn that walked that ice in 1684
may saunter¹⁷

This is a device I have replicated in *Of Canterbury Who Fell In* reproducing events and historical happening in a poetic present.

Fisher's complex Modernist form brings an unsentimental tone to the work and liberty to revel in the subject:

¹⁵ Allen Fisher, *Place*, (London, Reality Street, 2016), p 11

¹⁶ Allen Fisher, *Place* p 16

¹⁷ Allen Fisher, *Place* p 29

left into Wandsworth Road and up Thessaly Road to cross the railway grounds at Running Shed over the Turntable following railway tracks from there east of Nine Elms South Goods Depot over main terminus to cross North Goods Depot over Nine Elms Lane passing Railway Wharf to the Thames river and along to Vauxhall Bridge

being the old boundary of, the southern part of the Parish of St. Mary in Lambeth from the map made prior to 1960.¹⁸

The style here may owe more to *Finnegan's Wake* than to any poem and it does make us ask what a poem is, what prose is and what a prose-poem is, though the spirit of Blake is never far from the poem either. The free style allows for total immersion in the subject and for treatment of place at the most mundane level as well as the most profound. That Goda once held land in the Brixton Hundreds is as much a potent, useful and grounding fact as stating that Wandsworth Road leads to Thessaly Road. This is something we will return to in all the poets of this study.

For another influential British writer, Jeremy Prynne, born in Kent, his holy city, or temenos, is the Cambridge at which he studied and later taught:

Where we go is a loved side of the temple,
a place for repose, a concrete path.
There's no mystic moment involved: just
that we are
is how, each
severally, we're
carried into the wind¹⁹

The temple, in this holy city, is, significantly, “a place of repose” but also a place where “we are”, both phenomenally and noumenally:

I saw it
and love is
when, how &
because we
do: you
could call it Jerusalem or feel it

¹⁸ Allen Fisher, *Place* p.29

¹⁹ J.H. Prynne, *Poems*, (Northumberland, Bloodaxe Books, 2005) p. 43 'The Holy City'

as you walk, even quite jauntily, over the grass.²⁰

With its intended Blakean allusion *The White Stones* invokes the stone colleges of Cambridge as another Jerusalem, with their pastures green, along with subtler allusions to older, standing stones and markers of antiquity; sentinels of space and place and meaning.

This somewhere is an everywhere, but also a specific locus, with a specific geology: East Anglia:

Hunstanton to Wells is the clear
margin, from which hills rise into
the “interior”; the stages broken through
by the lobe bent south-west into the Wash²¹

Fellow British Poetry Revivalist, John Riley creates in *Czargrad* an idealised vision of the holy city, a new Constantinople to rival Prynne’s Jerusalem; Douglas Oliver called it Riley’s ‘broadest, most comprehensive poem’²², evoking ‘an imagined, pristine, Eastern Orthodox city, shining a little with Byzantine gold, ambiguously holding out promise of true government, of true citizenship’. The city is realised in imagination, but a very precise imagination:

not imitating
nature but man’s art we heard
a priest chant vespers to an empty church (save
for us, spectators) God
in the city . the brain sticks . proposes
formulations:
a city of squatters, drum
of the dancing bear at morning, past noon
both man and bear asleep in ruins, the bear’s paw
delicate . easy
dome after dome and dome within dome²³

²⁰ J.H. Prynne, ‘The Holy City’

²¹ J.H. Prynne, *Poems*, p 65 ‘The Glacial Question, Unsolved’

²² Douglas Oliver, ‘John Riley’, *PN Review* 20, Volume 7 Number 6, July - August 1981.

²³ John Riley, *Selected Poetry and Prose* (Exeter: Shearsman 2016) p 62

The poem is written in four parts in the years preceding Riley's acceptance into the Russian Orthodox Church. Again, there is the free flowing style, unencumbered by capitalisation or unnecessary punctuation and Riley moves towards a resolution whereby *Czargrad* is recognised realistically for what it is, but is also "jewelled in time", potentially neither past nor present or, inconceivably, both; both here and fifty thousand years ago:

though the City is partly corruption, decay
a world of greys and greens and white under cloud
no nearer no further than fifty thousand years ago
by steps each of which is stable in itself
the City, jewelled in time²⁴

It is not the city itself which is of interest here, more the notion of The Promised Land, the Utopia; the spiritual resolution of secular grief. That both poets hark back to the great cities of legend and antiquity is, in itself, intriguing; nostalgia and romantic longing clouding our desire for meaning. We will see this in David Jones' fascination with Welsh legend and Charles Olson's invocation of the Maximus protagonist. Even a cursory study of the focus of these three poets, Fisher, Prynne and Riley shows a common fascination with place in Twentieth century poetry that reveals Eliot to be unusual in his ubiquity.

I wish to consider, principally, three poets for whom, in even further contrast to Eliot, a sense of place has significantly coloured and, in some ways, defined their work. Firstly, Charles Olson, who bases his modernist behemoth *The Maximus Poems (TMP)* in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in the region of his birth and focuses entirely on the small fishing port as the microcosm from which we can all draw wider conclusions.

Secondly, David Jones, born in London to Welsh parents but with a lifelong ache to be Welsh and understanding himself endlessly in terms of his longed for ethnicity. The sections of *The Anathemata (TA)* which deal with Cambrian geology and Welsh folklore give a

²⁴ Riley, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, p 69

physical anchor to Jones' frustrated definition of himself as a Welshman in a way that foreshadows the physicality of Prynne's *The White Stones*.

Finally, Laurie Duggan, an Australian poet, born in Melbourne, but for several years residing in Kent, captures the sense of being confused by place in *Crab and Winkle*, where everything bears an imperfect resemblance to what he has known and understood before. The keenness to engage and identify with what, at times, is an alien culture and landscape is, perhaps, at the very heart of the volume. The contrast between Olson's sureness of self-identity in New England, Jones' rejection of the country of his birth, and adoption of a largely mythological kingdom, and Duggan's struggle to make sense of, and identify with, his surroundings give a rich sense of the complexity and subjectivity of understanding ourselves in terms of our position in time and space. As a trio, they offer a very different sense of existence in the Twentieth Century from that offered by Eliot anchored around a need for rootedness, somewhere. Almost as if, despite his centrality, Eliot has become a model to be rejected as the increasingly diasporic nature of the Twentieth Century re-awakens a need amongst humans to know and understand their own handful of earthy dust.

Introducing Charles Olson

Gloucester, Massachusetts, may seem a rather specific, unremarkable and random space upon which to focus a meditation on life and yet it is the main locus of Charles Olson's epic work *The Maximus Poems*. Edward Dorn (to whom Prynne dedicated his *Poems*) captures the reader's initial bemusement well,

I am certain, without ever having been there, I would be bored to sickness walking through Gloucester. Buildings as such are not important. The wash of the sea not interesting in itself, that is luxuria, a degrading thing,²⁵

and yet, as the oldest fishing port in America, it is the perfect point from which to contemplate the rebirth of a nation and a people who arrived via the sea and then made their life from that sea.

Furthermore, Gloucester may not be the place of Olson's nativity, that claim falls to Worcester, Massachusetts, only a few miles westward, but it was, perhaps more importantly, the location for most of his childhood vacations and what more fertile shore can there be for the imagination than that closed garden of childhood delight, the place not of everyday, but of holiday? I cannot not make the connection here that Eliot's earliest surviving letter is from his nine-year-old self on holiday in Gloucester, where he holidayed every year from the age of four. And so Gloucester offers both personal and universal traction to Olson as the *leitmotif* for the contemplation of his own life, the life of a town and a nation and maybe even the sense of the local as the cosmos in a broader philosophical trawl.

The affinity Olson shared with his neighbourhood is shown as early as his first poems where he writes wistfully,

Between the river and the sea I sit writing
The Annisquam and the Atlantic
My boundaries, and all between
The moors of doubt and self mistrust.
(‘Purgatory Blind’)

demonstrating a sense of belonging to, and possession of, the Cape Ann area he grew up in and would return to in mature life. And there, at once, Gloucester, for Olson, is home in a mundane, domestic sense, but is also polis, or city or body of citizens; the potentially

²⁵ Edward Dorn, ‘What I see in The Maximus Poems’, in *The Poetics of the New American Poetry* ed. Donald Allen and Warren Tallman (New York: Grove Press 1973) p 298

idealised city state. It is the land assigned to Maximus of Tyre. But it all begins with politics.

And a letter.

The Maximus Poems began as a series of letters to Vincent Ferrini in Gloucester.

As such they provide a vehicle, a “great White Cadillac” for the public voice known as Maximus of the private individual Charles Olson, although eventually the distinction between public and private, Olson and Maximus, becomes inconsequential as the integration of person and place, man and his earth, is achieved.²⁶

Beginning as howl or jeremiad about the insensitive destruction of historic town properties in the teeth of the bulldozers of Urban Renewal, the poems evolve to consider the history of the region, the nation, the person and, ultimately, offer up Olson’s philosophies on language, life and, seemingly, everything else.

The Maximus series is certainly ambitious in its own right, focusing as it does on a single locality that serves as a microcosm by which to measure the present and the nation and which grows to encompass earth, heaven and hell.²⁷

And place and identity are, for Olson, inextricably linked as Gloucester author Peter Anastas observes:

Place, as Olson taught, is not only where we live, but also where we get our bearings from. Place is who we are and how we feel about ourselves, how we are anchored in the world. Place is our very identity “the geography of our being” as Olson put it.²⁸

And for Olson, and Maximus, Gloucester becomes the fulcrum of the world, the original and final place, the home of the hitherto mentioned audacious individual. Writing to Herbert Kerry, Olson said:

I regard Gloucester as the final movement of the earth’s people, the great migratory thing...migration ended in Gloucester...the motion of man on the earth has a line, an oblique northwest-tending line and Gloucester was the last shore in that sense.²⁹

²⁶ George F. Butterick, *A Guide to The Maximus Poems of Charles Olson*, (Berkeley: University of California Press) xix

²⁷ *Butterick, A Guide to The Maximus Poems of Charles Olson* xix

²⁸ Peter Anastas *Enduring Gloucester* Online Blog Dec 28 2014

²⁹ Charles Olson, *Muthologos, Lectures and Interviews*, (Ed. Ralph Maud, Vancouver: Talonbooks 2010) p 161-2

What happens in Gloucester happened in Tyre and vice versa and so Gloucester is Olson's Everytown, though never losing its own individual and characteristic identity and landmarks:

And I, of course, use it as a bridge back to Venice and back from Venice to Tyre, because of the departure from the old static land mass of man which was ice, cave, Pleistocene man and early agricultural man, until he got moving, until he got towns. So that the last polis or city is Gloucester.³⁰

Jerusalem, Byzantium, Venice, Tyre. And yet Gloucester is Olson's Folsom, older than them all, though it has its own unique character associated in the buildings and in the people who inhabit them. Within the "hidden city" are specific buildings and the buildings themselves have specific stories. As early as Letter 2, Olson is keen to show us "the house the street cuts off", which is 90 Middle Street, Gloucester, where black slaves were quartered in Nineteenth century slave pens.

the small white house on Lower Middle
(the one diagonally across from the handsome brick with the Bullfinch doors)³¹

numbers 28 and 21 Middle Street respectively, the former a house Olson himself had stayed in for some time. The handsome brick is in the style of architect Charles Bullfinch of Boston, but "Bullfinch doors" takes on a life and vibrancy of its own. This is a polished polis and Dorn is wrong. Buildings matter.

Introducing David Jones

At the age of twelve, the poet David Jones visited the Tower of London and Westminster Abbey "where (careful that no-one was looking) he spat on the tomb of Edward I, conqueror of Wales."³²

³⁰ Olson, *Muthologus*, p 162

³¹ Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) p 11. Afterwards, *TMP*, *abbr.*

³² Thomas Dilworth, *David Jones: Engraver, Soldier, Painter, Poet*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2017) p 15

His iconoclastic outrages did not end there. On May 21st 1921, Jones made his first and only visit to Canterbury Cathedral where he found himself alone before the tomb of Archbishop John Peckham, who was Edward's Archbishop whilst conquering Wales. "Raised to historical fury and muttering army execrations (and hoping no verger was watching), Jones gave his effigy "a whack" hurting his hand."³³

The question is begged as to why an Englishman born in Arabin Road, Brockley, South East London in 1895 should have been moved to enact such futile violence on long dead historical figures suspected of an anti-Welsh vendetta.

Walter David Jones was born the son of a North Welsh printer's overseer whose parents spoke only Welsh to each other (and Jones, paradoxically, despite trying, never mastered the Welsh language in his lifetime). In time, he would reject the very English "Walter" in favour of the Welsh-leaning "David" and, ultimately "Dai" to his intimate friends. Though he lived his entire life in England, and mostly London, the half-Welsh Jones identified entirely and utterly with his Cambrian ancestry. There were childhood trips to Wales, Tregaron specifically, but,

for Jones, Welshness was largely an imaginative acquisition....His Welsh admirers would claim him as their own, and he loved when they did; but, to borrow the language of Gestalt psychology, his intellectual, imaginary Welshness figured against a London-English social cultural background.³⁴

And yet Jones' poetry is shot through with a yearning for, and celebration of, all things Welsh. His first published poem, *In Parenthesis*, presents the monologue of an imaginary Welsh combatant of The Great War, Dai Greatcoat, (read in a subsequent BBC Third Programme production by Richard Burton who claimed it was the single performance of his career of which he was most proud). Given that Jones served for longer than any other

³³ Dilworth, *David Jones: Engraver, Soldier, Painter, Poet*, p 15

³⁴ Dilworth, *David Jones: Engraver, Soldier, Painter, Poet*, p 16

British poet in the trenches in, of course, the Royal Welch Fusiliers, it is impossible not to detect the poet himself in the monologue, as parody or otherwise. Each of the poem's seven sections is prefaced with a quotation from the Welsh epic *Y Gododdin* from the Thirteenth Century *Book of Aneirin* depicting the disastrous Battle of Catraeth; parallels with Mametz Wood inevitably drawn:

Men went to Catraeth familiar with laughter
The old, the young, the weak, the strong.³⁵

The warrior boast of Dai Greatcoat is arguably the core of *In Parenthesis*. He is both the mythical and the universal soldier having served in every battle since Time began but principally:

My fathers were with the Black Prince of Wales
at the passion of
the blind Bohemian King³⁶

And Dai, himself,

Was with Abel when his brother found him
under the green tree.
I built a shit-house for Artaxerxes.
I was the spear in Balin's hand
that made waste King Pellam's land.³⁷

The last reference to The Fisher King takes us all the way back to Eliot and Jessie Weston whose *From Ritual to Romance* fuelled Jones' second epic work.

In *The Anathemata*, Jones goes beyond myth and legend into the physical, geological construction of his beloved Wales, mirroring his own act of poetic making in the glacial creations of the country's north:

Before the melt-waters
had drumlin-dammed a high hill-water for the water-maid

³⁵ *Y Gododdin*

³⁶ David Jones, *In Parenthesis*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1937) p 79. Afterwards *IP abbrev.*

³⁷ *IP* p 79

to lave her maiden hair.

Before they morained Tal-y-llyn, cirqued a high hollow for
Idwal, brimmed a deep-dark basin for Peris the Hinge and for
Old Paternus.³⁸

In *Rite and Fore-time*, this Dylan Thomas-esque heavy alliteration evokes the natural violence and lasting impression of the fore-time glaciers combining the geological vocabulary, drumlins, cirques and moraines, with the nouns of both folklore and modern Snowdonia. The transformation of glacial nouns into verbs captures perfectly the entropy of land transfiguration. Idwal, both murdered prince and glacial cwm, Llanberis, the pass leading to Yr Wyddfa, (which Jones saw, but never climbed, bizarrely), Llyn Padarn and Bala Lake, icons of the modern Snowdonia landscape, are all referenced in the short passage above.

Intertwined with this we have echoes of *The Mabinogion* and Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* with Arthur receiving his mortal wound just under Bwlch y Saethau and all the glamour, pomp and romanticised heroism of Celtic Revivalism, unashamedly presented as a more authentic culture than its English counterpart. We will have to proceed and understand Jones' notion of his own identity in a romanticised Wales, one that possibly never even existed, but one in which his own interpretation of himself is inextricably entwined.

Introducing Laurie Duggan

Laurie Duggan's *Crab and Winkle* has a most specific and precise locus:

Through cumulus, the hump of Thanet, then Pegwell Bay.

The University of Kent, Canterbury downhill like a 19th century painting.
Cathedral dormant. A low rise city in the valley of the Stour.

³⁸ *IP* p 82

A half-timbered hall: Beverley Farmhouse.³⁹

The farmhouse; irritating, loveable, frustrating. We return to it again and again from distinct forays into the local landscape, Faversham, Canterbury, Margate; the East Kent that Duggan tries to comprehend and link with. And whilst it grows inevitably familiar it can still literally grow the unfamiliar and that which is baffling just as easily.

How would I identify those ragged bushes round the farmhouse wall?
Leaves paired from the stem a leaf-width gap between shoots
(say three centimetres)⁴⁰

Duggan holding onto the metric measurement in a place where the inches still reign.

Duggan's "ensemble of instances"⁴¹ or "warped shepherd's calendar" specifically invokes the Crab and Winkle railway line between Canterbury and Whitstable; the world's oldest commercial railway line with all its evocation of industrial grandeur and innovation. But in Crab and Winkle Land even language is designed to confuse and disorientate the non-native, taking on new forms:

Gillingham is
Jill, not Gill

Teynham is
Ten, not Tain⁴²

So much so that basic signifiers are missing:

When the () sings before dawn
from the branches of the ()
the blue () is unfurl
while grey ()s circle in the skies⁴³

³⁹ Laurie Duggan, *Crab & Winkle*. (Exeter, Shearsman, 2009), p 7. Afterwards *C & W abbrev.*

⁴⁰ *C & W* p.38

⁴¹ Tony Baker, 'No Sound Finally Vanishes', *Jacket* 40, 2010

⁴² *C & W* p72

⁴³ *C & W* p 101

The limits of his language are, indeed, becoming the limits of his world. This is solitary research into an alien land. A land that, nevertheless, brings plenty to be satisfied with; welcome pints in The Miller's Arms, the home of The Soft Machine, coffee at The Goods Shed, but is still impossible to wholly comprehend.

To begin with he needs the words of others to describe his own conundrum:

*mother...I'm in a field
somewhere in England
and I've lost part of my brain
(Jarvis Cocker)⁴⁴*

But Duggan has nowhere to turn back to. On the one hand his new environment blatantly fails to recognise his homeland:

Pam and Jane, having sold up and moved to Melbourne, now want to move back to Sydney, or rather The Blue Mountains (which are not Sydney). Other than my friends, their news, all I hear of Australia is cricket, drought and the Australian Wheat Board scandal. In the English papers the place may as well not exist⁴⁵

At other times he bleakly insists, "I do not miss my country" whilst holding on to the possessive "my". And yet, through all this, Duggan comes to a compromise with his new landscape. As Tony Baker observed in his review for *Jacket*:

Duggan's poetry has the virtue too that it never "abandons the local"...he builds his work out of what he finds in, on or about the premises. He searches in the immediate, not the meditated. *Crab and Winkle* is local speech, current only in the particular part of Kent that Duggan's book explores. Part itinerary, part calendar, part journal, part pub crawl, it's a loose structure with a tight focus.⁴⁶

In fact, Duggan's Australia is everywhere. Despite Canterbury being diametrically opposed to Melbourne, historically, spiritually and in a host of other ways, modern Australia keeps popping up in East Kent in the most unexpected places.

previously unnoticed, behind the bar of The Miller's Arms

⁴⁴ C & W p22

⁴⁵ C & W p 63

⁴⁶ Tony Baker, 'No Sound Finally Vanishes', *Jacket* 40, 2010

a photograph of the Sydney Opera House.⁴⁷

Duggan's new/old world collides with his old/new world and yet he recognises they are connected.

The continuity. What I write in a pub in Kent is read in an office in Adelaide, a pensione in Rome, an internet café in The Blue Mountains, an apartment in upstate New York⁴⁸

and yet his identity is still inherently Australian as he acknowledges in a low cultural brow aside:

a sign reads: Respect Our Neighbours/Please Leave Quietly
(but I am the neighbours)

(I am, perhaps, Neighbours)⁴⁹

For all three poets there is an attempt to combine location and identity. Either an inhabited, yearned for or imagined location, but in all three cases a location that defines the writer or has the opposite effect. A landscape or locus in which to comprehend themselves. Their self-imagined rootedness adds to their self-comprehension as if to reject Eliot's assertion in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' that:

(The poet) must be aware that the mind of Europe – the mind of his own country – a mind that he learns in time to be much more important – is a mind which changes.⁵⁰

For each poet that we consider will be seen their own concept of self and identity, what Heidegger would have defined as the unchanging inner reality of the person, being not concerned with the changing mind of a place, but with their own individual, authentic mind reinforced, developed, shaped and defined by a place of their own choosing. In so doing,

⁴⁷ C & W p 94

⁴⁸ C & W p 96

⁴⁹ C & W p 97

⁵⁰ T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1932) p 16

they move away from the annihilation of self, advocated by Eliot, as we begin to see a new personal preoccupation in Twentieth Century poetry.

Beginning with David Jones, I will look at the three poets separately to see, in each case, how central a notion of place is to the overall effect of the poetry and how place is being used to define the persona of the poetry or, perhaps, indeed, to define the poet himself; as such, to analyse the concept of place attachment in modern literature.

The selection of the three poets is not random and, though none of them individually might draw connections with each other, their individual relations with place form an interesting triangle, (and indeed triangulation away from Eliot), and bring a different depth to their poetry. Olson has the most powerful identification with a present and historical place and evokes it powerfully and uses it as an extended metaphor. David Jones rejects his place in the modern world and harks back to a mythical and medieval world through which he attempts to understand himself. Laurie Duggan is bemused and confused in a landscape he struggles to perfectly comprehend and harks backwards to his South East Australian homeland. For reasons which I will go into in the Relation of the Poem to the Dissertation chapter, all three poets have heavily influenced my own creative work on place and identity and, not unsurprisingly, have forced themselves into the foreground of my vision. That is my main reason for focusing on their work rather than, say, Basil Bunting or Geoffrey Hill, who could equally claim attention here.

Chapter One: David Jones “Becoming Dai”.

“About eight hundred years ago a prince of Aberffraw defeated his Welsh and English enemies at Colehill, between Flint Sands and Halkin Mountain. Holywell, where my father, James Jones, was born, is about three miles north-west of the battle-site. The birth of a son to John Jones, Plastrwr, Treffynnon, in 1860 would indeed seem a matter having no apparent connection with the battle won by the Great Owain Gwynedd in 1149. But however unapparent, the connection is real enough; for that victory symbolized the recovery of a tract of Britain that had been in English possession for well over three centuries. Had that twelfth century recovery not occurred the area around Holywell would have remained within the Mercian zone of influence. In which case its inhabitants would centuries since have become wholly English in tradition, nomenclature, and feeling. Had local history taken that course, it follows that I should not now be speaking to you at the invitation of the Welsh B.B.C., as an artist of Welsh affinities. You see by what close shaves some of us are what we are, and you see how accidents of long past history can be of importance to us in the most intimate sense, and can determine integral things about us” (David Jones: BBC Wales interview 1954)⁵¹

Locating David Jones

Walter David Jones was an Englishman, born in Brockley, South East London, to Welsh parents. He never mastered the Welsh language, never climbed the Principality’s highest peak, Snowdon, and yet, to all intents and purposes, his poetic soul and identity, and affinity, are deeply Welsh.

Jones is not widely written on as a poet and Professor Dilworth, with whom I have enjoyed correspondence, at the University of Windsor, Canada, retains pre-eminent status in Jones’ criticism. Perhaps what has prevented Jones’ reputation from growing greater, both in his lifetime and afterwards, is the profoundly allusive nature of his writing with the reader in need of some sort of concordance to cut through the various Catholic, literary and, mostly, Welsh mythical allusions Jones makes. He is significantly more allusive than Eliot, for example, and his allusions tend to be towards even more elusive texts. For that reason, you will find me painstakingly explaining passages from his works in order to continue the

⁵¹ David Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1959) p 25

argument clearly, for only a short passage of time after intense study of Jones' epics even the most diligent reader will find themselves reaching for the concordance again as the clear understanding briefly possessed passes again into the mists of allegory.

However, as Jones, once again, begins to attract attention as a writer and artist we still find the conundrum of his identity a challenge for us. Michael Collins, in 1982, noted that *In Parenthesis* was:

The first evidence of a different attitude toward Wales in Anglo-Welsh literature. This attitude was essentially a new and sympathetic concern for the history, culture and heritage of Wales.⁵²

Kim Howells, broadcasting on Radio Wales in March 2011 calls him a “semi-detached Welshman.” which may appear harsh, though is not too wide of the mark, but this is contrasted by Francesca Brooks' 2021 assessment of Jones as,

an Anglo-Welsh poet and artist whose archive is held at The National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, and who is lauded as one of the great figures of Welsh modernism.⁵³

Brooks notes the Welsh National Opera's staging of *In Parenthesis* in 2016 as a mark of the importance of Jones to Wales, rather than vice-versa, though I think it more likely that Jones stands outside whatever might be considered the canonical traditions of English or Welsh culture. My aim here is to consider some of the literary and cultural influences upon Jones to determine the self-identity at the heart of his writing. This will take us on a journey through a wealth of obscure and ancient texts, many of which have no purchase with any other writer of The Twentieth Century. Brooks argues that Jones draws on the Early Medieval Library for inspiration and colour in his writing, but I will argue that it is the ancient Cambrian texts upon which he dwells more profoundly, and plunders more plentifully, and that this rich

⁵² Michael J. Collins, 'Keeping the Flag Flying: Anglo-Welsh Poetry in the Twentieth Century' *World Literature Today*, (University of Oklahoma, 1992), Vol. 56 No. 1

⁵³ Francesca Brooks, *Poet of the Medieval Modern; Reading the Early Medieval Library with David Jones* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), Introduction p.3

focus on the past leads him to a self-identification with a Wales that, if it ever existed at all, is impossibly distant and shrouded in myth and legend. My enquiry into Jones' sense of place will move through a number of discussions, looking at his contemporaries, close consideration of *In Parenthesis* and *The Anathemata* towards an understanding of the key term that I wish to associate with his writing, hiraeth; that profound longing for one's home especially associated with the Welsh.

Y Gododdin is the text that most heavily influences the opening of Jones' first work *In Parenthesis*. The date of the first text is uncertain, being anywhere from the Seventh to the Thirteenth Century. It survives only in *The Book of Aneirin* and tells the story of the destruction of The Gododdin at *Brwydr Catraeth* (Catterick, in all probability) ending Celtic rule in North Wales and ceding territory to the Sais or Saxons. Telling the legend of the *Hen Ogledd* of ancient Gwynedd, as it does, it is far from being a mainstream text, but Jones transposes onto this narrative the *Gwaith Camlan*, *Morte d'Arthur* and *The Mabinogion* to create a collage of myth, legend and history that is both the broth of the specialist and the soup of the amateur, suggesting both rigour and carelessness in equal part. It is, however, insufficiently attentive of us as readers to simply equate the calamity of Camlann, or of Catraeth, with the slaughter of Mametz Wood which, though never directly named, is most probably the locus of much of the poem.

In Parenthesis is most unusual for a first poem. Even more unusually, Jones avoids the short poem option throughout his whole writing career so that we have to consider lengthy, apocalyptic, *faux*-narratives using pre-existing stories to comment on contemporary life. It is clear that the poem reflects the four years that Jones served in The Royal Welch Fusiliers in The Great War and in Ireland afterwards— making him the longest serving of all the British war poets – but it is by no means a biographical poem, or even a war poem. Likewise, the central character of Dai Greatcoat is both Jones and not Jones.

Jones' war service record is unusual. He served on the Western Front for longer than any other British poet, twice as long as Owen and Sassoon, for example, and yet his work is rarely considered alongside those whom we would identify as The War Poets. It is clear that his war experiences had a lasting impact on him through the subsequent nervous collapses he suffered and there is a credible argument that his life-long fascination with *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* was really an artistic manifestation of survivor-guilt. Most unusually, Jones served as a private soldier throughout the war, unlike most of the war poets who were, largely, junior officers. Consequently, he knew the life of the average infantryman better than most and superbly captures both the vernacular language and attitude. By comparison with the, seemingly, trivial, yet authentic, dialogues of Jones, Sassoon – “He’s a cheery old cove/Said Harry to Jack” – comes across as patronising, remote and in-authentically quaint in his depictions of Kitchener’s army.

Jones, a kind of Pinter of war poetry, is more or less reporting direct speech as he remembers it in all its mundanity:

A mile you say?
About a mile sir – straight on sir – machine gun, sir, but
they’re spent, most of ‘em – but further on sir, by Foresters Lane – he’s got a fixed rifle
on the road – two of our people - last night sir.
The Borderer sergeant bid good night and passed like his
Predecessors toward the west.
‘Night sergeant.
‘Night chaps – yes cushy – but buck up on the road.⁵⁴

But to comprehend the incomprehensible, to make sense of The Somme, Jones has to go deep into Welsh history and folklore even if it means comparing The Somme and its hitherto unimagined casualties with the death of three hundred warriors at Catraeth. The parallels may be slight but, to Jones, the Welshness is all. He goes back, literally, to the land of his fathers and finds his own emotional and cultural hinterland to be distinctly, definitely and

⁵⁴ *IP* p 38-9

defiantly Cambrian. But the journey has to be forced. Whilst Jones has known of the existence of the fragment called *Y Gododdin* for some time he finally reads it, in translation, when *In Parenthesis* is virtually finished. The point being that Welsh legend didn't necessarily present itself to the soldier's mind in the first instance, but to the writer and mythmaker's mind twenty years later as he strains to create a Welsh *Edda* in the guise of a latter day cyfarwydd or story-teller. Elizabeth Ward, in *David Jones: Myth Maker*, notes "the predominantly literary and idealistic perception of Wales...a tendency which was to colour David Jones' attitude to the "Welsh question" throughout his life"⁵⁵

Jones didn't visit Wales at all for the first eight years of his life, but his introduction to the country, in 1904, changed him. His Welsh grandfather told him tales from *Llyfr Taliessin* linking him to a proud and ancient past.

Back in Brockley, while listening to his father sing, he felt a "passionate conviction" that he belonged to his father's people without understanding why.⁵⁶

The interesting phrase here, of course, is "without understanding why" and there is never any explicit comprehension of why the boy from Brockley decides to be so utterly and undeniably Welsh other than a fascination with the bardic Romantic tradition of Welsh legend.

Coinciding with nine-year-old David's determination to be an artist, his identification with Wales seems partly to have been compensation to his father for attachment to his mother, which underlay drawing. Indicating this was his renouncing at the age of nine the name "Walter" – the choice, he knew, of his mother – because it was Saxon. Now he answered only to David.⁵⁷

Perhaps, prosaically, and with apologies to residents, it could be pointed out that Brockley is not, nor ever has been, a fashionable district of London and that the young Jones simply needed to focus on a locus more exotic for his emerging imagination. At the time that the

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Ward, *David Jones: Myth Maker*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983) p 9

⁵⁶ Thomas Dilworth, *David Jones, Engraver, Soldier, Painter, Poet* p19

⁵⁷ Thomas Dilworth, *David Jones, Engraver, Soldier, Painter, Poet* p19

Jones family moved into Arabin Road, Dilworth describes Brockley as “an unfinished housing development” and, despite the presence of organ grinders with their accompanying monkeys and the itinerant lavender sellers, the picture is of an uninspiring part of town. Inhabitants of Hampstead, Kensington, Brixton or Clapham might all claim a sense of place in where they live, but suburban Brockley is unlikely to inspire such pride. Whilst Allen Fisher was later able to make poetry out of Lambeth, Jones aspires to join the London Welsh and escape the bland mediocrity of his surroundings. There is a contrast here with Edward Thomas, born in Lambeth to Welsh parents, who, despite naming his children Merfyn, Bronwen and Myfanwy, became, predominantly, a poet of the South Downs and Gloucestershire and an even more direct contrast with Ian Sinclair later who, though Cardiff born, writes overwhelmingly about London and with a defined sense of fascination and place. For Jones, it had to be Wales. The displacement seems to be about a visceral attraction to the myths and legends and richness of the history of Snowdonia.

Jones and his Contemporaries: Modernist Poetics of Place

Stylistically, both *In Parenthesis* and *The Anathemata* directly mirror the amalgamation of prose and verse found in *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch* and *Llyfr Coch Hergest*, which are the twin foundations of *The Mabinogion*.

Most of *In Parenthesis* is not verse, yet it is nearly all poetry, which is language used to maximum potential. It is an epic poem.⁵⁸

And so Jones has his style for his epic narratives, but, for his form, there are also other precedents for him to latch onto. The Ninth Century Welsh monk, Nennius, apologises in the preface to his *Historia Brittonum* that, “I have therefore made a heap of all that I have found,

⁵⁸ Thomas Dilworth, *Reading David Jones*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p 20

both from the Annals of the Romans and from the Chronicles of the Holy Fathers, and from the writings of the Irish and the English, and out of the tradition of our elders.” and there can, perhaps, be no better description of both of Jones’ major epics than that he has indeed made a heap of all that he has found, in prose and in verse, of lived experience and loved myth and legend. A heap of broken images, indeed.

This is a remarkable divergence from the poetic mainstream at the time when we consider the activities of Jones’ British counterparts. Eliot is involved in his *Four Quartets*, Auden is at his poetic best and debating, with Day-Lewis and Spender, events in Spain; MacNeice, just back from Iceland with Auden, has moved to London and is writing the poems that will make up *The Earth Compels*. All urban men writing to other urban dwellers about distinctly urban matters. In South Wales, a teenage Dylan Thomas is beginning to write in the nostalgic, bombastic, Romantic, lyric tradition that would become his hallmark. Against all this Jones resembles, mostly, Blake, in his scope and vision and Manley Hopkins in his attention to language and rhythm.

All this is slightly ahead of young R. S. Thomas, who doesn’t publish his first volume of poetry until 1942, but who will become, arguably, the best known Welsh poet of his generation and the poet of real North Wales, championing and challenging his rural parishioners in equal part. Thomas knows intimately the farms of the men and women he describes, lives among them, cares for them with a tough, admonishing love that led M. Wynn Thomas to describe him, on account of his emotional austerity, as “The Solzhenitsyn of Wales.”

Evans? Yes, many a time
I came down his bare flight
Of stairs into the gaunt kitchen
With its wood fire, where crickets sang
Accompaniment to the black kettle’s
Whine, and so into the cold

Dark to smother in the thick tide
Of night that drifted about the walls
Of his stark farm on the hill ridge.⁵⁹

Oft and frequently, Thomas writes in microscopic detail about the farmers and other North Wales dwellers who come into his scrutiny. Jones could never have written so simply about Welsh life and its people. Partly because there is not enough of the grand narrative of heroism in the lifestyle to interest him, but, mostly, because it was a way of life he simply never bothered to contemplate.

Perhaps a more fruitful comparison can be made with the Argentine born Welsh poet, Lynette Roberts. Like Jones, Roberts is part of the Welsh diaspora. Of Welsh descent, she was born in Buenos Aires, studied at art college in London, married a Welshman, Keidrych Rhys, (though christened William Ronald Rees Jones) and moved to the Tywi estuary where she wrote her poems. Dylan Thomas was the best man at her wedding.

Like Jones, Roberts had Eliot as her friend and editor at Faber, similarly suffered devastating nervous breakdowns and, again, like Jones, remains under-rated. Where Jones found spiritual nourishment in Catholicism, Roberts became a Jehovah's Witness. Her husband included Jones' verse in *Modern Welsh Poetry*, 1944, alongside poems from Dylan Thomas, R.S. Thomas, Vernon Watkins and Emyr Humphries. At times, there are resemblances to Jones' own work and Roberts produced a novel, as steeped in Welsh medieval legend as anything that Jones could summon, full of Geraldus Cambriensis, Owain ap Cadwgan and Rhys ap Tudor.

Writing in the introduction to her *Collected Poems*, Patrick McGuinness notes:

Certainly her work can be seen in the context of modernism, in whose second generation Roberts belongs. It obviously shares something with that of Eliot and Pound, but perhaps the nearest to her in vision and conception is David Jones, another poet created from, and was created by, war and Wales.

⁵⁹ 'Evans'

McGuinness goes on to assert other features we can identify with Jones:

In her fascination with archaeology and geology, her sense of place as the layering of time, we might see unexpected (and strictly limited) similarities with the Charles Olson of Maximus.

Her poem, 'Cwmcelyn', beginning with the *Book of Revelation* in Welsh, could have been written by Jones himself:

Over walls of boracic and tundra torn wounds,
Darkening peaked Fuji-yama, clearing
Cambrian glaciers where xylophone reeds hide
Menhir glaciers and appointed feet.
Out of this hard. Out of this sheet of zinc.

We, by centrifugal force...rose softly...
Faded from blood sight.

Patrick McGuinness, again, observes, picking up the thematic of rootedness identified earlier with Weil,

Though her parents' families, Australian for generations, had originally come from Wales, she was Welsh by a combination of choice and imaginative will. 'Poem from Llanybri' is a cosmopolitan claim to a rooted culture that is also a culture of rootedness.

But, unlike Jones in his hard forced epics, 'Poem from Llanybri' shows Roberts to be lyrically, simplistically and effortlessly Welsh:

If you come my way that is ...

Between now and then, I will offer you
A fist full of rock cress fresh from the bank
The valley tips of garlic red with dew
Cooler than shallots, a breath you can swank

In the village when you come. At noon-day
I will offer you a choice bowl of cawl
Served with a 'lover's' spoon and a chopped spray
Of leeks or savori fach, not used now,

In the old way you'll understand.

‘Lamentation’ shows a poignancy that Jones rarely attempts and possibly only achieves once, at the end of *In Parenthesis* where, we could argue, the poetry is indeed more in the pity.

O the cold loss of cattle
With their lovely big eyes.
The emptiness of sheds,
The rick stacked high.
The breast of the hills
Will soon turn grey
As the dogs that grieve
And I that fetched them in:
For the good gates are closed
In the yard down our way.

What passing bells for those who die as cattle? This is a style she masters and returns to in poems such as ‘Plasnewydd’:

You want to know about my village.
You should want to know even if you
Don’t want to know about my village.
My village is very small. You could
Pass it with a winning gait. Smile
They stand in corners plain talking
Flick the cows passing down our way

And the poem finishes with:

The cows are on the move.
I must be off on the run:
Hal-e-bant. pussy drwg.
Hal-e-bant fan fach.
Hal-e-bant for the day is long
We must strengthen it:
Ourselves:
To the cows
Fetch them in.

This is more loving than Dylan Thomas, less thunderous than Jones and the Welsh phrases are, innocently, un-glossed. Where Jones is on the broadest of canvases, Roberts, at her best, is a miniaturist and her detail reveals a deep sense of intimacy with the Twyi estuary that Jones, through his very distance, never manages.

Jones may seem a little out of place in the 'Thirties, with its left-leaning politically motivated writers, but it was not through ignorance of current affairs. In 1936, Edward VIII abdicated, Germany reoccupied the Rhineland and Spain erupted into civil war. Jones, still putting the finishing touches to *In Parenthesis*, held views that differed wildly from the orthodoxy. He deeply admired Edward, one of the SWEET PRINCES of the dedication of *In Parenthesis*, was strongly pro-Franco and "wished we could pull up to Germany proper & let the other buggers do what they choose." This pro-German stance should not surprise, though there is nothing to back up Elizabeth Ward's repeated claim, in *David Jones: Mythmaker*, that Jones has an underlying affinity with the basic attitudes of fascists. There is little animosity recorded by rank and file British soldiers towards their German counterparts and, more often, a grudging respect. This is something Jones could easily have picked up as a private soldier and, indeed, the figure of Ulrich is treated gently in *In Parenthesis* and receives a myrtle wand from The Queen of the Woods.

Reading *In Parenthesis*

That *In Parenthesis* is such a piece of undeniably Welsh literature should come as no real surprise given that it is Jones' major response to his four year experience in The Royal Welch Fusiliers. However, he misses no opportunity to deepen the Welsh resonances and, through what we may call the central character of Dai Greatcoat, he likens the Welsh experience to the general experience of all mankind. Dai is Everyman and every soldier before him at all key points of Western cultural development. "I was with Saul", but crucially, "I saw him armed like Derfel Gatheren." - the Testament and Arthurian legend innocently and innocuously linked - "I was in Michael's trench when bright Lucifer bulged his primal salient out"; but primarily, and defiantly, Dai begins his boast with "My fathers were with the Black

Prinse of Wales.” After a near-appalling pun on Sir Thomas Wyatt (“I’ll stalk within yer chamber”) Jones begins *In Parenthesis* wearing his learning very heavily indeed. The title of Part 1, *The Many Men So Beautiful*, invokes *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and infantryman Wyatt’s service number is 01549, recalling 1549 and the posthumous first publication of the Tudor poet’s work. Proper nouns are vital to our understanding. John Ball could be the archetypal Englishman, but “Temporary unpaid” Lance-Corporal Aneirin Merddyn Lewis properly introduces the Welsh theme – Aneirin for the author of *Y Gododdin*, Merddyn for Merlin and Lewis for Llywelyn. In the same way, Mr P.D.I. Jenkins, the gentle and wistful middle class officer (Jones’ parody of himself?) captures the culture of his nation; Piers, for Plowman, Dorian, for Gray, (and also Jones’ mother’s preferred name for him) and Isembard, for Brunel. Topped off with a good Welsh surname, just like Jones himself. “There was a man in Bethesda late for the last bloody judgement”. It has to be Bethesda, instantly, neatly linking the Holy Land, place of miracle and the birthplace of The Virgin, with the small Snowdonian town.

The epigrams to each of the seven sections of the poem are taken from *Y Gododdin* recalling the destruction of a race or an age and the brutality with which war can annihilate a culture. The title of the second part of the poem – *Chambers Go off Corporals Stay* - invokes Shakespeare’s most martial play *Henry V*, also one of only three of Shakespeare’s plays to feature a Welsh character. Through the surface realism of the poem, Romance and legend ever threaten to intrude. In Part 3 “his mess-mates sleeping like long-barrow sleepers” reminds, again, of Arthur and his close knights, but it is in Part 4 *King Pellam’s Launde* that Jones really lets slip the dogs of Myth and Religion. Pellam is the maimed King of the blighted Waste Land in Malory, having suffered the ‘dolorous stroke’ from Longinus’ spear at the hand of Balin. Here we have the fusion of Christianity with Arthur and The Grail Legend and the full force of 1920’s modernism and its lament for Western culture with

Thomas Stearns Eliot leading the charge. The section of the poem focuses on the period when the battalion finally reaches the front line trenches and the desolation of “Pellam’s Launde” is all around them.

So thus he sorrowed till it was day and heard the foules sing, then somewhat he was comforted.

opens the section, a direct quote from Malory. This is a veritable echo chamber rebounding fragments of the canon of English Literature, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, ‘The Burial of Sir John Moore at Corunna’, though for significant sections it is realism that sprouts through the cultural canopy. The Stand-to-arms, the importance of comforters, the proper nouns locating real live places, Biez Wood, Moggs Hole, Sandbag Alley, Cats Post. It is Christmas morning and John Ball is on duty, though his mind wanders to “sweet princes by malignant interests deprived” – Dafydd, Llywelyn, Edward – “Come with Merlin in his madness”.

Through this melange bursts Dai with his hubristic *hwyl*. By now Jones had eschewed the formal “David” in preference for the Welsh “Dai” in his personal life. It is difficult not to visualise Dai the poet, in the greatcoat he wore for four long years, morphing into the central character of this diabolical diatribe which leaps out of the narrative and stands alone as poem, song or challenge, articulating his English “with an alien care”. I was with Abel. I was David. I was with Caesar. I was the Spear. My fathers fought at Crecy somewhere near here. The character is both good and evil, a trickster that revels in the amorality of history, both the spear of Longinus that blights Pellam and the adder which surprises the knight at the Battle of Camlann, causing him to raise his sword and signal the start of the whole disastrous shooting match. There is grandiloquence in the fighting on the side of Michael in the War in Heaven, juxtaposed with the mundanity of “I built a shit-house for Artaxerxes”.

There are even closer, personal resonances for Jones as he moves on to ponder Bran and the historic or legendary war between Wales and Ireland, undoubtedly resurrecting both his own

personal memories as an occupying soldier in the troubled Ireland of the Black'n'Tans and the brutality that immediately followed The Great War. He is every combatant that ever was and he is morally ambiguous. When the character falls to questioning towards the end of his tirade, there are no answers:

You ought to ask: Why,
what is this
what's the meaning of this.
Because you don't ask,
although the spear-shaft
drips
there's neither steading – not a roof tree.⁶⁰

The voice has become tired and baleful, peevish and broken. The existential doubt, that there is no questioning, though the Saviour is dead with legs unbroken and the Grail catches the drips of blood and water, is direct to the reader and uncompromising. The full force of Jones' own Catholicism imbues every word. He has gone from boasting to accusing. The interrogation is uncomfortably intense and is the closest Jones comes to moral outrage in the whole poem which marks him apart from other war poets whose outrage suffuses their every poem and is aimed towards the patriots or the generals. The answer appears straightforward. Without questioning or, indeed, without The Quest, Pellam's Launde will never be restored to order.

The focus switches back to Temporarily Unpaid Lance-Corporal Lewis and a curious passage in which Jones seems to consider degrees of Welshness.

It may be remembered Seithenin and the desolated cantrefs, the sixteen fortified places, the great cry of the sea, above the sigh of Gwyddno when his entrenchments stove in. Anyway he kept the joke to himself for there was none to share it in that company, for although Watcyn knew everything about the Neath fifteen, and could sing *Sospan Fach* to make the traverse ring, he might have been an Englishman when it came to matters near to Aneirin's heart. For Watcyn was innocent of his descent from Aeneas, was unaware of Geoffrey Arthur and his cooked histories, of *Twm Shon Catti* for the matter of that – which pained his Lance-Corporal friend, for whom Troy still burned, and

⁶⁰ *IP* p 54

sleeping kings return, and wild men might yet stir from Mawddwy secrecies. And he who will not come again from his reconnaissance – they’ve searched his breeches well, they’ve given him an ivy crown – ein Ilyw olaf – whose wounds they do bleed by day and night in December wood.⁶¹

Lewis looks down on, and despairs of, Watcyn because of his lack of comprehension, of ownership, of his Welsh heritage. He has no idea of his legendary descent from Aeneas, through his godson Camber, no wit of Geoffrey of Monmouth or the robbers of Mawddwy or the heroic and thieving Welsh wizard Twm Shon Catti. More poignantly, and perhaps bitterly, Lewis considers the fate of Llywelyn the Last, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, in the final sentence. Tricked in battle and killed by the English, his trousers searched for a list of conspirators and his severed head mockingly adorned with an ivy crown in London, Llewelyn makes a fine Christ figure, martyr-Saviour for the Welsh on this un-seasonal Christmas morning. Here we can potentially see Jones as a poet of nation and national identity rather than of an actual geographical place.

But these are all legends, as are Gwyddno and Seithenin, characters from the Thirteenth Century *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*. It is only the legends that interest Lewis and Jones. What Watcyn knows is the Neath fifteen and the faintly ludicrous ‘Sospan Fach’. What Watcyn could probably teach Jones, is that ‘Sospan Fach’ is the song of the Llanelli rugby fifteen, not Neath, from the tin plate workers of that place, though it was commonly sung by Welsh troops in the trenches. And he might taunt Jones with the refrain:

Dai bach y sowldiwr,
Dai bach y sowldiwr
,Dai bach y sowldiwr,
A chwt ei grys e mas

(Little Dai the soldier,
And his shirt tail is hanging out.)

⁶¹ *IP* p 89

Through Lewis, Jones explains his own yearning for Wales' mythical past. It is not the present Wales of Watcyn that interests him. It is not Neath and their hearty 1st XV. The reality for Wales in 1936 was, of course, very bleak. The previously thriving coal industry in the Rhondda Valley suffered greatly in the Depression and, in the North, the main industry of slate and copper mining collapsed entirely. Whilst a mythical sunken island off Cardigan Bay ruled by Gwyddno can capture Jones' imagination, the catastrophic decline of a slate mining town such as Blaenau Ffestiniog, "Slate City", cannot, though he would have been attracted to the tale of the doomed Prince Festin who gave the town its name.

For Jones, Wales is his historic inherited past, not a personal past. In this way, he differs crucially from a poet such as Dylan Thomas, who was born and lived in Wales, or Saunders Lewis, who knows and writes in Welsh. Generally, Jones writes of Wales at a distance, rather than immediately, using the myths, legends, and words of Wales, not personal experiences or memories.⁶²

This is not to criticise Jones; he is as entitled to his Romance as much as the next poet. But it is important to make the distinction that the Wales he is connected to is a distant, past Wales and one that exists predominantly not even in history, but in myth, legend and imagination. Jones' engagement with Wales itself was sporadic and infrequent. As a child he enjoyed holiday visits to Llandrillo-yn-Rhos and, as a young art student, he spent three months just outside Tregaron. As man and artist he made a number of lengthy visits to Eric Gill's artistic community at Capel-y-ffin in the Black Mountains, but he lived his life in England, in London mainly, among English people. As such, it is hard to agree with Corcoran when he states that:

Wales, of course, can never be merely idea and myth to David Jones – plastic and malleable and infinitely extensive – in the way that Byzantium, for instance, can remain idea and myth for Yeats, and Jones does not forget that the place of Wales in the "Great Britain" of the twentieth century needs to be discussed in its actual political reality.⁶³

⁶² Teresa Godwin Phelps: *Poetry Wales*, Vol 17 No 4 Spring 1982

⁶³ Neil Corcoran, *The Song of Deeds. A Study of The Anthemata of David Jones* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982) p.14

Whilst any sensitive reader would shy away from describing Jones' connection with Wales as plastic, I am unaware that Jones ever really confronts the political reality of modern Wales.

In his following paragraph, Corcoran seems to acknowledge this and contradicts himself:

There is, it would seem, little Jones can do with the South Wales coalfield other than to lament its robbery of the land's configured beauty. And when he does write, in a rather bizarre piece, in support of a Plaid Cymru candidate in the 1974 election, he disclaims all direct political knowledge: "I know nothing" he says "of political affairs, of what policy should or should not be followed, but the only "message" I have is that the Welsh language is what matters".⁶⁴

The Welsh language that he never learned. Meanwhile, radical Plaid Cymru supporters were taking to burning down English second homes in the Principality.

Aneirin Lewis is dead by Part 7 of the poem. The manner of his death is not revealed, but we are not spared the corruption and desecration of the corpse, "more shaved he is to the bare bone than/Yspaddadan Penkawr", "Unwholer, limb from limb, than any of them fallen at/Catraeth". Dai Greatcoat succumbs to a fatal gunshot wound in the lower bowel and the bodies of the fallen are visited and watched over by "The Queen of the Woods", a Gravesian White Goddess or Dryad, who brings the poem to its conclusion by affirming the innate virtue of the fallen comrades, Welsh and English and German, reserving for Aneirin Lewis a rowan sprig from his native North Wales.

She carries to Aneirin-in-the-nullah a rowan sprig, for the glory of Guendota. You couldn't hear what she said to him, because she was careful for the Disciplines of the Wars.⁶⁵

The elegiac tone, gently mocking Shakespeare's Fluellen, brings with it a sense of things coming to an end, not just Aneirin, but, in his name, the memory of the Gododdin and the end of the age of Celtic culture.

Oeth and Annoeth's hosts they were

⁶⁴ Corcoran, *The Song of Deeds*, p 14

⁶⁵ IP p 186

who in the night grew
younger men
younger striplings

Invoking the legendary prison of Arawn, Death Lord, again from the Thirteenth Century *Triads*, where Arthur was detained, (and possibly the Chapel Perilous), the fallen comrades are subsumed into Mametz Waking Wood itself in a magical metamorphosis. The poem ends as wrapped up in myth and mystery and Celtic Romance as when it started, but concludes with a gentleness that is one of its strange characteristics. Jones does not shy away from the appalling images of The Great War, burst bowels, the casual slaughter, the inevitable stepping on and, sometimes in, the bodies of the dead and gives, perhaps, the greatest description of a bomb blast of all the war poets.

out of the vortex, rifling the air it came – bright, brass-shod, Pandoran; with all-filling screaming the howling crescendo's up-piling snapt. The universal world, breath held, one half second, a bludgeoned stillness. Then the pent violence released a consummation of all burstings out; all sudden up-rendings and rivings through – all taking out of vents – all barrier breaking – all unmaking. Pernitric begetting – the dissolving and splitting of solid things.⁶⁶

Which could only be written from long remembered experience and out-Owens Owen.

But in his tenderness for the troops, demonstrated in the soft care of the Goddess and his empathy for each of the characters he depicts, Jones finishes the work on a spiritual note of hope. Despite his obvious partisanship, he is both Dai and Aneirin in part, but also John Ball as well, a tip of the tin hat to his London self, who he allows to suffer the same gunshot wound in the leg as himself. The legacy of Mametz is not the slaughter, but the love and comradeship and the ability of the human spirit to make the best black comedy of the worst possible situation.

⁶⁶ *IP* p 24

Throughout *In Parenthesis* we see the poet foregrounding mythical Wales through its legends and literature, but always asserting nation and national identity possibly at the expense of actual place.

Reading *The Anathemata*

The Anathemata (“special things”) is a poem that meditates on Western culture using signs and symbols from a range of backgrounds, fusing religion, geology, myth and literature into one great aesthetic patchwork. *Rite and Fore-time* begins with the preparation for a Catholic Mass, or even preparations for The Last Supper. As such, it is both now and then, present ritual and before-time reiteration captured with all due solemnity and reverence:

In the high cave they prepare
for guest to be the hostia⁶⁷

though already Jones is invoking Malory and an Arthurian past:

“The cult-man stands alone in Pellam’s land”. taking us back to *In Parenthesis* and *The Waste Land*

I was the spear in Balin’s hand
that made waste King Pellam’s land

Whilst the Eucharist is being prepared, the meditative focus of the poem drifts off and ponders the becoming and the coming of the Christ child in the form of the earth’s geological preparations, the heights, literal and metaphorical, thrust up by tectonic movement, the hills of Britain and then the mountains of Wales.

It is surprising that the poem so quickly becomes Welsh. Jones rapidly abandons Jerusalem, Kerieth and Judea in favour of *terra cognita*:

⁶⁷ TA p52

And where:

West horse-hills?
Volcae-remnants' *crag-carneddau*?
Moel of the mothers?
The many *colles Arthuri*

All the efficacious asylums
in Wallia vel in Marchia Wallia,
ogofau of that cavern for
Cronos, Owain, Arthur.

Terra Walliae!
Buarth Meibion Arthur!
Enclosure of the Children of Troy!⁶⁸

Dilworth notes:

The poem's only apparent peculiarity, if it can be called that, is its reflection of the poet's love for Wales, especially in its Roman-Celtic and medieval origins.⁶⁹

It can be called peculiar. One minute we are suppering in Jerusalem, the next hurtling past the West horse-hills of Uffington and Wiltshire, west-wards to Wales and Gwynedd. But Jones does not take the A5 for this is not real Wales. It is a Wales of the imagination; a Wales of fable. The Carneddau is an Ordovician ridge in Snowdonia, one of the three great ranges that make up most of the mountains of North Wales. There are more than a thousand ancient monuments on the Carneddau alone. Its greatest peaks commemorate Llywelyn ap Iorwerth and Dafydd ap Gruffudd and Arthurian caves, lakes and legends abound. To walk the Carneddau is to walk with Merlin, with Derfel, with the great Glyndwr himself. And yet Jones never set foot on it or even saw it. To invoke the Carneddau, but never wish to see it is to reject the real, and the physical, in favour of the idealised and imagined. It is to idealise a Wales that no longer exists and, maybe, never did. It is hard to articulate what kind or sense of attachment is at work here. It is as if Jones wants the myth and the romance but not the actual physical space and place of Wales. As his close friend Rene Hague asserts:

⁶⁸ *TA* p 55

⁶⁹ Dilworth, *Reading David Jones*, p 116

It was a great sorrow to David that he was cut off from Wales, but he was cut off from a Wales for which he had no more than a sentimental love. He was widely read in Welsh history, but the Wales he loved ended with the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd on 11 December 1282... and reached back into a Wales of myth and not of fact.⁷⁰

The *ogofau* Jones mentions are caves. Legends hold that Cronos, Arthur and Owain sleep in Welsh caves waiting to return, sleeping lords ready to rise again like the greater Lord before them. Jones links Wales to Jerusalem and, promptly, to Troy as well through the Trojan origin myths of Britain, specifically Camber, the grandson of Aeneas, son of Brutus and eponymous King of Cambria.

As Dilworth states:

For most of us, *The Anathemata* is an occasion of further education. Anything we learn in reading it is valuable because all of it is culturally objective. It deepens in us what T.S.Eliot calls “The Mind of Europe.”⁷¹

But this pre-occupation with ancient Wales is more than a dreamer’s romantic reverie. It is a quest for the grail of identity. And how are we to understand identity in Jones if the place he identifies with is unreal?

These origins are important, however, to understanding Britain and ourselves (if we culturally inhabit Europe or its former colonies), even if we are not British. As Shakespeare and Blake knew, the Celtic legendary past involving Arthur is the taproot of British culture.⁷²

Much of the poem’s opening sees Jones contemplating both creation and evolution and sensing no tension between the two. As such, *Rite and Fore-Time* becomes a very *Genesis* in itself, preparing the bedrock for the *Revelation* to come. It is all resurrection and reformation and the crucial images of the Eucharist, the bread and the wine, are transmogrified into the stone and running water of the geology and literal fabric of Wales itself.

Before the melt-waters

⁷⁰ Rene Hague: *Dai Greatcoat: A Self-Portrait of David Jones in His Letters*, (London: Faber & Faber 1980) p23

⁷¹ Dilworth, *Reading David Jones*, p 116

⁷² Dilworth, *Reading David Jones*, p 116

mythologises Gloucester as it stands, Jones has to turn his Wales into an ethereal mythology, not located in actual valleys or a present landscape.

But for now, in the poem, this is still all new beginnings, new origins, and Hector can be compared to the Fallen Christ in the endless overlay of myth on myth on legend. Jones leads us through the history and legends of Rome and Greece, the epic journeys and idealised women, Selene, the Northern Moon goddess of Thule, and then, remarkably, in three short hops:

is she Elenê Argive
or is she transalpine Eleanore
or our Gwenhwyfar
the Selene of Thule
West Helen?⁷⁵

We are taken from Helen of Troy to Eleanor of Aquitaine, progenitor of Arthurian Romance, to Gwenhwyfar, or Guinevere, the fallen woman of Malory. The onward odyssey leads inexorably to the coast of Britain, The Deadman, The Lizard, Land's End, Journey's End.

What is most interesting in the middle sections of *The Anathemata* is the attempt that Jones makes to interpret London, the city in which he lived for almost all of his life, in terms of a Welsh past. It would seem that Wales, or certainly the Wales of myth and legend, is relic and condensation of everything British that existed before the Saxon interlopers seized the kingdom. Jones merrily indulges in an act of cultural appropriation of the famed Queen of the Iceni:

How many poles
of their broad Angle hidage
to the small scattered plots, to the lightly furrowed erwau
that once did quilt Boudicca's royal gwely?

⁷⁵ TA p 92

Brockley may not be the stuff of poetry, but Rotherhithe certainly is. In the shortest section of the poem, Jones takes the old word for Rotherhithe, Redriff, and offers up a monologue in the voice of his maternal grandfather, shipwright and all-round local legend, Eb Bradshaw. If the accent were different, we could be back in a section of Olson's *Maximus Poems*.

Not for a dozen cords of Norweyan, red nor yaller, paid for,
carried and stacked
Not for a choice of the best float of Oregon in the mast pond.
Not for as many cubic fathoms of best lignum vitae
as I'd stock us till we re-sheave the blocks for master-
bargees plying the Styx.⁷⁶

The long sunken voices of the Thames are heard once more in the poem in the same way that Olson gives mouth to the long passed of the North Eastern seaboard.

As sure as I was articed, had I the job of mortising
the beams to which was lashed and roved the fault in all of
us, I'd take m' time and set that aspen transom square to
the Rootless Tree
or dash m' buttons.

At the time when Eb Bradshaw was master mast and block-maker, Rotherhithe was at the heart of the thriving, trading British Empire. It had spices from Zanzibar, tea from China, sulphur from Sicily, fruit from Jamaica, seafaring links to the Baltic and beyond and views of the whole North of the Thames from Execution Dock to the Prospect of Whitby and the opium dens of Limehouse in between. Jones finds further history in the region with Cnut's fabled trench or canal, beginning near Greenland Dock and referenced in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

According to Jones, Bradshaw spoke "in the home county accent of Churchill and George V, dropping 'g's at the end of words and saying 'gels' instead of girls." But, of course, Bradshaw died of a heart attack in 1891, four years before Jones was born and so the voice

⁷⁶ TA p 118

we hear in the poem is entirely imagined, if based on family stories. Though it is the voice of Jones' London persona, his London relatives on his mother's side. What is significant is the identification of Jones with an English voice and an acknowledgement of his own English heritage, though who knows how far he would have pursued this if his grandfather had followed a less heroic trade in a humbler part of London, such as Brockley. Jones' main connection to his grandfather appears to be a small log of *lignum vitae*, from Ebenezer's workshop, the hardest wood in the world, upon which the boy Jones used to sit in the garden and which, of course, makes its way into the poem.

The monologue delivered by Eb in this section is based on an argument that he did actually have with an Italian sea captain, according to family legend. Anxious to avoid ruinous weighing dues, the captain asks Eb to "hustle the job – and not so over nice the finish" and the response is long and impassioned and reveals Bradshaw to be a proud, artisan craftsman who revels in the quality of his workmanship.

What is impressive is Jones' easy usage of the language of the trade that Bradshaw knew so well. Again, reminding us of the authentic vocabulary of the seafaring community of Gloucester, Jones can effortlessly reference running-blocks, spare hearts, standing shrouds and dead eyes as if he'd studied to be a shipwright himself and, as with Dai Greatcoat's monologue, Eb Bradshaw builds to a technical crescendo and explodes in gusty vernacular:

tell the Wop, to-go-to
Canute.

Bradshaw has become a very Ahab of the mast-making world. We are, for now, entirely in the Victorian moment and re-imagining events in the quite recent past. Eb's rhetorical rant about how he will not undersell his craft "to pile a mint in sterling" takes in myth and legend as well as his own local points of reference. "When Proserpine unbinds the Baltic" and trade on the Thames grows brisk again he will not take half the freight in return for shoddy work-

manship. Dilworth describes him as “a male guardian and corresponds to the type of the resistance fighter” and Jones associates him with images of Hector, Hereward and Canute and, surely as such, is putting his ancestry, and thereby himself, into the integral line of the ancient history of this island. Most importantly, Jones seems to own Bradshaw and acknowledge him as a key part of his past and, therefore, potentially his present; certainly, his London present. In this section of *The Anathemata*, and the next, he opens up the duality of his identity; his real Englishness against his imagined Welshness.

The section, *The Lady of the Pool*, keeps us firmly anchored in London, referencing Lud himself and the Fleet Gate in the opening line. A new voice is introduced to the poem as the narration passes to Elen Monica, an itinerant cockney lavender seller, potentially taking Jones back to his native Brockley as his footnote indicates:

When, in August, lavender was cried in the street, my maternal grandmother was saddened by the call, because she said it meant that summer was almost gone and that winter was again near.⁷⁷

Elen, *The Lady of the Pool*, is no Thames maiden, coming from the pool or bend of the river between Rotherhithe and Shadwell, but her voice is more convincing, “Who’ll buy my sweet prime lavendula?”, and more authentic than the female bar room voice in *The Waste Land* for instance. Coming so soon after the Redriff section her voice acts as a counterpoint to that of Eb Bradshaw emphasising the capital’s feminine nature. Elen is many women. Coarse and loquacious, she could be of Troy, or Flavia Julia Helena, mother of Constantine the Great and finder of the wood of the cross. “Reared up by Redriff mast-pond”⁷⁸, she is Rotherhithe itself and, like Eb, knows the mast-making craft: “did know a sheaved block from a dead eye before I were gunwhale high.” She is Alisoun of Bath – “yet dealing much/ in the peregrination of Venus/much have I learned of them” – or a cockney Nora Bloom, an earthy,

⁷⁷ TA p 125

⁷⁸ TA p 135

physical, fully realised woman as far from the virginal Jones as it is possible to get. Blousy, trappy, and in the reader's face, but she knows the river and the City of London, enumerates its striking churches, St Bride's, All Hallows, St Martin's, Cheapside, St Michael, Cornhill, Mary-le- Bow and St Mary-at-Hill foreshadowing Sinclair's *Lud Heat* and steeping us in the oldest living and working part of London.

For a lavender seller, she is remarkably well versed, another echo chamber of all that Jones holds dear. There is Thomas Wyatt, "once in especial", Shakespeare, "For certain this Barke/was Tempest-tost" and Eliot and Chaucer:

about the virid month of Averil
that the poet will call cruel.
Such was her bread and honey
when with his darling body (of her body)
he won Tartary
Then was the droughts of march moisted to the root by that
shower that does all fruit engender – ⁷⁹

Her ranting jeremiad lacks coherence and structure, but she, and by assumption, Jones, knows the river and the City and revels in it, spouting landmarks and details that only a local could in this, her place. You can almost smell the sea-smack coming up river from the marshes, the boat:

Coming up on a spring tide
with her Rotherhithe mate and her Limehouse skipper and a
Sittingbourne bred pilot in her conning house.⁸⁰

Nowhere else in Jones' poetry is a specific, living landscape of now evoked as convincingly as in "The Lady of the Pool". It strikes us with a shock as we remember that Jones is a Londoner, born and bred, despite his longing for a distant Wales. This unsentimental outpouring, even with its dartings back to ancient Rome and legend, gives us a unique, vital

⁷⁹ TA p 157

⁸⁰ TA p 137

sense of place from the view of a *pacha mama* of London itself. The artery of the City, the life giver, the very reason for the settlement itself, this Thames, is flowing through the poetic veins of Walter David Jones. This water is Walter.

At Hallows

by the shameful tree
where the molls pray the Hanged Man and his
Dolorosy Queen.

At so many bliss'd sites
what body knows to whom they all hallow'd be?⁸¹

In his roots and in his lived experience, Rotherhithe offers Jones a rich anchoring. Jones subtly references Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskrigla* in his own notes. This is Jones' London *Edda*.

Come buy

Come buy, good for between the sheets, good for all ails o'
the head and nerves
B' the bell'd clout o' Martin, you'll owe me only five
farthin'
Buy m'livid flower

there's good souls

There ducks!

an' a' extree sweet bunch from the Sud Ridge...

Who'll have

m' living flower?

Who'll buy my sweet lavender?⁸²

Like a Thames-side Eliza Doolittle, Elen bids us farewell and we pass from shore to ship into "Keel, Ram, Stauros", the section which "establishes *The Anathemata* as the greatest maritime poem in English."⁸³ In its extended metaphor of the World Ship with the logos as the keel and the cross ("stauros") as the mast, it begins to prepare us for the final resolution of the poem, the events of Good Friday, linking us back to The Last Supper in the opening section. As we move back into the realm of Catholic iconography, we lose our sense of place,

⁸¹ *TA* p 161

⁸² *TA* p 166

⁸³ Dilworth, *Reading David Jones*, p 157

though not before Jones introduces us to another Queen of the Woods or Lady of the Pool in Gwenhwyfar, another idealised goddess of the poem and, perhaps more significantly for our purposes, Manawydan, the sea god turned Welsh ruler in *The Mabinogion*. The description of Manawydan is interesting:

The cruising old wicing!
This he averred he achieved on his ocean trip to the Thing-
Ness in Gynt-land, his hiraeth upon him, some fifteen days
Out from his dinas in Cemeis in Demetia.⁸⁴

Hiraeth: Jones' Relation to Place

As Jones' London self subsides like the tide, my attention is drawn to that use of the word *hiraeth*, a Welsh word with no direct English translation. It can mean a wistful homesickness, a grief or sadness over loss or, more intensely, a yearning for the Wales of your own or the historic past. It is clearly a word and concept that Jones is familiar with and one wonders how much he recognised it in himself? Pamela Petro observes:

So *hiraeth* is a protest. If it must be called homesickness, it's a sickness come on—in Welsh ailments come onto you, as if hopping aboard ship—because home isn't the place it should have been. It's an unattainable longing for a place, a person, a figure, even a national history that may never have actually existed. To feel *hiraeth* is to feel a deep incompleteness and recognize it as familiar.⁸⁵

I cannot think of a better word to describe Jones' relationship with Wales.

Aside from The Great War and the spiritual heart of the later work, the insistent quest to decide who Jones is and where he comes from is the defining thrust of both *In Parenthesis* and *The Anthemata*, which is by no means unusual for poetry in the Modernist tradition beginning with Eliot himself.

⁸⁴ *TA* p 172

⁸⁵ Pamela Petro, 'Dreaming in Welsh' *The Paris Review* Sept 18 2012

In those modern long poems which confront, and attempt to describe, a people's understanding of itself, what is being described essentially is the network of roots and attachments which define an identity for the poet.⁸⁶

As Olson puts it in 'Maximus, at Tyre and at Boston',

that we are only
as we find out we are

There are links between the two poets.

This desire to record intensely the junctures at which the self meets the public world, at which autobiography confronts history, relates *The Anathemata* to such poems as William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*, Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*, Basil Bunting's *Brigg-flatts* and, perhaps, Robert Lowell's *History*. Bunting and Olson work from a sense of the desire to preserve continuities in the face of an imposed discontinuity almost as anguished as Jones' own.⁸⁷

David Jones is, fundamentally, an English poet writing about a Welsh past. To be a Welsh catholic is to be part of a very tiny minority indeed, and a minority whose symbols and emblematic resonances set one entirely against the symbols and antecedents of Wales. They are for Rome, for Judea and all time and Jones' attempts to connect them with Llewelyn, Glyndwr and others seem forced, at best. There is an inherent clash between Jones' Catholicism and his Welshness and, arguably, the Catholicism being more significant in every existential sense, cancels out the latter. His Catholicism comes from London. It springs from, and is nurtured by, Jones' Catholic intellectual friends, is enacted in London churches and is an integral part of his London self. Jones is only ever London Welsh at best.

This is not to belittle his achievement. Even in its better moments, The Twentieth Century, with all its brutality and casual slaughter, of which Jones saw more than his fair share, its nations rising and falling and its political and social upheavals, was never an easy Century in which to exist. That Jones flees to a mythological place and past to make sense of his present

⁸⁶ Corcoran, *The Song of Deeds*, p 106

⁸⁷ Corcoran, *The Song of Deeds*, p 106

is understandable and the value of his poetry may well be the influence he undeniably had on a generation of British poets that followed. I am thinking specifically of Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns* and Seamus Heaney's *North*.

Forced by their own historical circumstances in the "Great Britain" of the sixties and early seventies into a similar need to understand and cope with a difficult present, these poets also search through a past "tradition" associated with a mythos of place, attempting to explore present suffering through considering the possible continuities and permanences of human value embodied in the history of specific locales.⁸⁸

North is specifically relevant with its revelations from exhumations, the digging into a Celtic past that is found in 'Bone Dreams', 'The Digging Skeleton', 'Bog Queen' and 'Punishment.'

White bone found
on the grazing:
the rough, porous
language of touch

and its yellowing, ribbed
impression in the grass –
a small ship burial.

We could almost be back with Aneirin Lewis at the close of *In Parenthesis*.

The same connection can be made with Hughes' *Remains of Elmet*:

Death struggle of the glacier
Enlarged the long gullet of Calder
Down which its corpse vanished.⁸⁹

The irony is, of course, that Heaney was undeniably and essentially an Irishman and Hughes was hewn from the Calder Valley he grew up in and, mentally, never left, whereas Jones has only his *hiraeth*, his longing for a sentimental and romanticised Wales that existed, at best, in the minds of bards and dreamers.

Tra mor yn fur, i'r hoff bau,
O bydded i'r heniaith barhau.
Till death be passed, my love shall last

⁸⁸ Corcoran, *The Song of Deeds*, p 106

⁸⁹ Ted Hughes, 'Remains of Elmet', *Remains of Elmet* (London: Faber & Faber, 1979), p 53

My longing, my yearning for Wales.
(‘Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau’)

The concept of *hiraeth* has parallels with words in other languages, generally to describe the homesickness of the soul, such as the Portuguese *saudade*, popular in Fado music, and the Romanian *dor* and, as such, is possibly an inevitable characteristic of diasporic nations. Even settled nations can romanticise what was really never there like the John Major vision of an England of warm beer and shadows lengthening on village cricket squares.

Salman Rushdie, reflecting on his Indian heritage, in *Imaginary Homelands*, puts it nicely:

Writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by an urge to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost: that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.

And so Jones creates a Wales of the mind and then yearns for it, passionately. But in that *hiraeth*, however sentimental it may be, is Jones’ self-perception, his self-identity and his understanding of that which is integral to him – “an artist of Welsh affinities”. We are not necessarily how we see ourselves or, for that matter, how others see us. But we have to comprehend ourselves in some way and it is clear that Jones recognises himself as Welsh, first and foremost, and strives to harden that identity throughout his poetry. Though his place is an imagined one, it is Cambrian through and through and, though he himself is a second generation Modernist, English poet, Welsh only by imaginative will, he exists, in his head, in a landscape as ardently Welsh as any of the eight counties, as Welsh as The Arms Park itself; his own mesmerising, Milkwood of Myth.

Chapter Two: Laurie Duggan: “*Unheimlich Manoeuvres, Home and Away*”

Introduction

Laurie Duggan is overdue significant and intense scrutiny to consider his contribution to poetry over the past 50 years and it is fair to say that he is somewhat overlooked by commentators, something that is borne out by the slender references to other critics in this chapter. Tim Wright has observed that, “Criticism of Duggan’s poetry has typically been framed in terms of its attention to place” and that is a line of argument I shall be exploring here.

This is not to pursue Jake Goetz’s argument that:

Through my spatial reading of Duggan’s use of collage, we are able to view the poet as “experimental geographer”⁹⁰

I am more inclined to Don Watson’s Introduction to *The Ash Range* where he plays with the notion that “Gippsland is an idea as well as a place”. However, Tim Wright goes on to assert, in an essay on Duggan’s *Blue Hills*, that, partly because of A.E. Housman,

By the early twentieth century, the image of “blue hills” comes to function as a ready-made metaphor for gesturing toward a nebulous beyond. Blue hills are not “really” blue and thus come to mark a sentimentalized epistemological gap, whether this is posited as between, for example, reality and illusion, distance and apprehension, or memory and nostalgia.⁹¹

Which is not acknowledging Gwen Meredith’s hugely popular Australian radio serial *Blue Hills* that Duggan is mischievously also referencing. Meredith herself is quoted as saying “everywhere you looked in Australia there were blue hills in the background”, and I shall be arguing for a much more physical, and certainly not sentimental or nostalgic, connection to the Australian landscape on Duggan’s behalf than we saw with David Jones. My argument is

⁹⁰ *Poetry Now* TEXT Special Issue 64 2021

⁹¹ Tim Wright, ‘Laurie Duggan’s *Blue Hills*’, *Antipodes*, Vol. 31 No. 2, (Wayne State University Press)

to connect Duggan firmly with the Australian landscape, as opposed to Australian nationhood, and to explore his occasionally confused feelings when separated from his roots for a significant period living in East Kent. Feelings which I will argue coincide with Jentsch's definition of *unheimlich* in his 1906 essay 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny':

With the word *unheimlich* ['uncanny'], the German language seems to have produced a rather fortunate formation. Without a doubt, this word appears to express that someone to whom something 'uncanny' happens is not quite 'at home' or 'at ease' in the situation concerned, that the thing is or at least seems to be foreign to him. In brief, the word suggests that a lack of orientation is bound up with the impression of the uncanniness of a thing or incident.⁹²

Early Poems

Interestingly, as with Jones, the shadow of war suffuses each section of Laurie Duggan's first published poem, 'East', from "STH VIET TROOPS FLEE LAOS" to "J.A.Duggan 36 sqdrn (1939)", "the field Forever England (& Uncle George)" to "COMMANDOS THRUST DEEP INTO LAOS", summoning up a Gippsland and Gippslanders that form his personal hinterland and this is where his poetry begins, though he soon assumes a more peaceful trajectory and his poetry exhibits a remarkably intense focus on place. Writing in *The Sydney Review of Books*, Ali Jane Smith comments on Duggan's, "long standing interest in the minute and contingent interactions between people and place." and goes on to assert:

'Localities' is a word that Duggan uses in interviews and in his own commentary on his work, carefully separating his ongoing interest in place from nation.⁹³

On his blog he has described himself as "an Australian poet living in Kent." And when I ask him how Australian he is in an interview he replies, "I discover how Australian I am when I phone someone like a plumber, who I've phoned before, and they say, ah! Laurie, and I

⁹² Ernst Jentsch, 'The Psychology of the Uncanny', *Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift*, 8.22-23, 1906

⁹³ 12th October 2016

suddenly realise that the only reason they say this is that I'm the only person they deal with who has an Australian accent.”⁹⁴ He is only slightly tongue in cheek.

This sense of being both familiar and unfamiliar with your surroundings is at the heart of Duggan's 2009 volume *Crab and Winkle*, which chronicles his first year of living in East Kent. In order to understand that later work, however, it is worth looking back to his earlier poems to get a sense of the poet in his Australian environment and identifying clearly with a sense of place, of his own and of his ancestors as well, as Martin Duwell, one of Duggan's most frequent commentators asserts:

The Blue Hills poems are so palpably about place that one needs to try to 'place' their author before going any farther⁹⁵

The long *Blue Hills* sequence is as specific in place as Olson's *The Maximus Poems*, focusing on the Blue Mountains which border metropolitan Sydney, and the reader is forced to try to come to terms with terrain which is as familiar to the poet as air and water. At the junction of the Brogo and Bega rivers:

log trucks cross the Bega flood bridge;
all the poets have moved to Sydney.

This is specific, rural Australia, but as David McCooey notes in a review in *Australian Book Review*,

However 'Australian' the work might seem – and Philip Salom is quoted on the back of the book noting that Duggan's 'voice feels very Australian' – Duggan's interest in art and music gives the attention to locality a 'trans-national' tenor.

It's not just Duggan's interest in art and music which cries out for attention. His work is littered with casual, off the cuff references to popular or low culture as well. He is comfortable collating a pan-cultural collage of the whole environment. It is no co-incidence

⁹⁴ Appendix

⁹⁵ Martin Duwell, 'Post-Poundian Places: The Collected Blue Hills by Laurie Duggan' (Sydney Review of Books), April 2013

that Australian radio long hosted a humdrum soap opera called *Blue Hills*. But it is still Australian and very much rooted in place:

These Australian locales are at once sites of transnationalism, ordinary experience, personal memory, and the various competing discourses of cartography, geography, local history, and climatology⁹⁶

As Duggan revealed in an interview with the author, “I’ve always tended to go for the local rather than the national”, and it is the poet giving us the first hand description of the landscape he sees and feels at home in:

Clear prospective flotsam
From the bank of a nearby creek⁹⁷

The proper nouns flow effortlessly as if Duggan is a Bushman in his own Outback. There is precision in this outdoor and external locality:

Across the border
Patterson’s curse
(the Banjo?)
At Jingellic, the Bridge Hotel;
the Murray flowing a hundred yards outside the window.
The river, a “brown god”?
(try saying that with a Frank Muir accent)⁹⁸

Duggan mixes the insignificant, the hotel, with the mighty Murray River, giving equal attention to each and throws in high cultural references to Eliot and low cultural references to Frank Muir. His ease is captured by his whimsical imagining of Muir, with his trademark rhotacism, saying “The wiver, a bwown god”. Totally unnecessary, and yet disarming, in a school-boyish kind of way.

The landscape is totally familiar, named, ordered and filed:

Layered mountains;
the nob of Ben Cruachan, sharper from the west,

⁹⁶ Duwell, ‘Post-Poundian Places’

⁹⁷ ‘Blue Hills 4’

⁹⁸ ‘Blue Hills 19’

blighted Mt Hump emergent for some distance.”

Above Cheyne’s Bridge the road swings up Hickey Creek
towards a gap; bared rock diagonal
hard under McMillan’s lookout.⁹⁹

There is a peculiar mix of Gaelic and more recognisable nouns, but Duggan is at home among the known and familiar. As he revealed in the interview:

My father’s family came from Gippsland and my father grew up in a place called Ensay in Victoria, which was named after one of the Scottish islands. It was named by a Scottish explorer/exploiter called Angus McMillan in the 1840’s and my father’s family had been there for quite a long time.

Australia is both a young colonial country and a country with an ancient indigenous past.

Whilst the names of the famous, and the infamous, live on in the place descriptors, Duggan, himself, attempts to hide amongst the shadows. In *The Ash Range*, (1987), specifically on his ancestral Gippsland, he, remarkably, allows an area of land and its history to tell its own story. A mere ten per cent of the work is original poetry giving us a largely document-built work. What is initially striking in *The Ash Range* is that this “retiring, impossibly modest person”, as a poet, has almost done the un-thinkable and annihilated the personal pronoun, removed the ego from the poem entirely. It is the reverse of Olson and owes more to Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* than any other work. In his introduction, Duggan refers to the work as “a documentary poem”, going as far as to add, “I suppose the work it most resembles in this respect William Carlos Williams’ *Paterson*.”. Putting the landscape first has antecedents going back to Hardy though is no more or less revolutionary than Olson sometimes putting the city, Gloucester, in pre-eminence.

Duggan’s own artistic interests are observed when he notes:

The idea of writing a book in which none of the words would be my own appealed to me greatly because for some time I had been interested in visual collage.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ ‘Blue Hills 32’

¹⁰⁰ Laurie Duggan, *The Ash Range*, (Exeter: Shearsman 2005) p 9

There is an assuredness in both *Blue Hills* and *The Ash Range* reflecting a landscape known intimately to Duggan and to other Duggans before him. He effortlessly and comfortably relates the proper nouns, Cape Woolamai, Poowong, Wollongong, names which are culturally remote from England and an English reader.

Blue Hills begins laconically but very specifically in situ:

.....dragon shape clouds over the national capital
Malcolm Fraser's feet stick out the end of the bed

Thick forest around Brindabella

The extended ellipsis provides a remarkably undramatic opening, but we move towards a definite ending, not distinguished by any full stop:

then it clears outside Melbourne

It is the sense of a place, not a drama happening, that intrigues the reader:

honeyeaters
flutter in the orchard:

return to the creek for a bath
& bring the goat

as the rain shifts from the Bemboka.

Duggan is keen on birds as well as keen to be precise about them. I have no conception of what a honeyeater is, does or looks like, but he is equally perplexed, later, when he can't identify a woodpecker, a chiff chaff or a nightingale in East Kent. However, Duggan is equally observant and in tune as an urban dweller. *In Blue Hills 10*:

broken parsley stalk in
glass ashtray
damaged pepper shaker

Not even a pepper mill, Duggan returns to this image (the only reference to a “pepper shaker” in world poetry?) thirty four years later in *Allotments*:

scratches on a metal table
accumulated stains, the image
upside down
of a pepper shaker¹⁰¹

Duwell concludes about *The Blue Hills* poems, “They have a rootedness in the country of their origin that Australians can respond to” which takes us all the way back to Simone Weill and our opening chapter. It is fair to characterise Duggan at this point as a relatively straightforward Australian poet.

Crab and Winkle

An Englishman in Australia is confronted by a series of unexpected apprehensions, unimaginable upon setting out. He may anticipate snakes and kangaroos and, possibly, the odd boomerang, but the sense of space, (“NOTHING NEXT 400 MILES”), the fact that this is a big country, and the realisation that everyone lives around the edge and not in the Red Centre is only comprehended with a quiet sense of shock after arrival. Add to this, the no worries optimism, the fizzy red wine and pale beer, the contrast and tension between the indigenous and the modern culture, the ubiquitous modernity and, perhaps, most of all, the outdoor culture and you have a sense of dislocation made all the more confusing by dint of the fact that for everything that is strange, there is something else equally familiar. Almost that, for every object there is an equal and an opposite object.

The converse must be true for an Australian on a first visit to England. The claustrophobia, the class attitudes, the preoccupation with the weather – (Duggan reflects this in his own

¹⁰¹ ‘Allotment #24’

work), - the strange language and the effortlessly ancient history (“the weight of history” felt at Knole, of all places) and, in particular, the cold climate that drives us all indoors. All of which is evident in a first reading of *Crab and Winkle*. The title of the work is derived from the nickname for the world’s oldest passenger railway line connecting Canterbury and the coastal town of Whitstable. As such, at its very core, it invokes both travel and discovery. It is a well-known phrase to the locals, but Duggan doesn’t explain it to his wider readership until nearly the end of the poem:

The Crab and Winkle Way ran from 1830 to 1932 as a passenger service, then till 1952 as a goods line. The present bicycle path opened in 1999. Halfway, a pond, the site of a winching station (to haul the trains up the slope from Canterbury)¹⁰²

It is as if he is holding on to this secret local knowledge for as long as he can, leaving those with no connection to East Kent very much in the dark.

Travelling takes forever, but we arrive in an instant. The narrator lands with a thump in the half-timbered Beverley Farmhouse, the building that is to protect, restrict and infuriate him in equal measure for the coming months.

Through cumulus, the hump of Thanet, then Pegwell Bay

The University of Kent. Canterbury downhill like a 19th century painting.
Cathedral dominant

Cameron Lowe has written of this passage:

I do not think it is going too far to suggest that in this short passage Duggan is not simply registering his arrival in East Kent, but is foregrounding that spatial representation is at the heart of *Crab and Winkle*; that, in fact, we are not engaged in the panoptic view from above, but are instead entering a text that will navigate the lived spaces of this unfamiliar environment. The view, if you like, from the ground.¹⁰³

¹⁰² C & W p137

¹⁰³ Cameron Lowe, ‘Anthropologist of space: the poetics of representation in Laurie Duggan’s *Crab & Winkle*’, *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, Vol 14, no 5, 2014

The traveller descends through clouds and unto Pegwell, an historic point of entry to England and East Kent (for Caesar and Augustine). It is a sudden and satisfyingly dramatic opening. From the University of Kent, the Cathedral does indeed dominate the medieval city. But the contrast to home is immediate. The speed with which roadkill is removed and the consistency of mushrooms surprises him. He doesn't know the words for angled brickwork and feels the need to "dive in amidst all this difference."

In his online Blog *England and Elsewhere 2006-2013*, he describes some of the early experiences of living in this new country.

2009-Sep-02: All my books about Australia are up in the attic (with the novels). There's a sense that I can't consult them; that I can't, as yet, write anything reflective about my birthplace. This wasn't supposed to happen. Moving elsewhere is supposed to stimulate memory, to allow fresh perspectives. In my case it's as though a door has slammed shut. So a whole resource (my country) or what I thought was a resource turns out to be unavailable.

Paradoxically perhaps, I find myself the inhabitant of Kent, a county no-one I've met knows a lot about. A 'home county' but off the radar of many British writers despite its history (Ford, Conrad &c). History asserts itself in one particular: the Kent coast was for years accessible more by sea than by land. Hence association with smugglers, escaping Kings &c. And only an hour and a bit out of London, where they seem to know more about Yorkshire.

Summer is over and the natives are readying themselves for an isolated winter warming before their own hearths. Luckily for the narrator, many of those heated indoor spaces that the British retire to serve alcohol and he revels in the cosiness of several well-known hostelries – The Bishop's Finger and The Miller's Arms, both ancient inns, and the cosy and unusual restaurant-cum-market, The Goods Shed. But the start of the poem finds him drinking alone in the bland bar of the University's Gulbenkian Theatre, a soulless and dead space as arid as the Red Centre itself. He describes it as "the nearest boozer" probably conscious by then that no English native would call a theatre café a boozer, despite the fact that it sells booze. He likes the local Spitfire ale, takes his time to allude to The (iconic)

Neptune, on the beach at Whitstable, but it is Christmas before he is referencing local pubs, (The Miller's Arms), comfortably.

Duwell in *Australian Poetry Review* notes that:

Another feature in Duggan's favour is his position as bemused but intelligent outsider (something more difficult to sustain in his Australian poems)...He also has a masterful control over tone so that this position as diasporic outsider is never cute or whimsical and the intensity with which the book looks at the world means it can never be accused of being merely fey or a diaristic exercise in self revelation.¹⁰⁴

And the protagonist has some, slightly off-beat observations on the natives:

Noted: for many English people of a certain class the sense of service, the desire to work for charities and causes. It's probably a trait absent completely from those of working class background.¹⁰⁵

Duggan said to me in an interview that "I tend to adapt to where I am anyway" and after a few initial hiccups – "The road signs don't always work (lost between Ash and Meopham having missed the A2)" – there is nothing more confusing than foreign road signs that require you to decode and respond in a matter of seconds – and confusion of the names of native trees – he begins to acclimatise to "the land of The Soft Machine and Caravan" though, oddly, it was not the Angelic Upstarts who sang 'Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps, Please'. The mistake just adds to the sense of insecurity.

The Goods Shed, literally a converted goods shed by the station from whence the Crab and Winkle line originated, occupying a space between the city and the university, is the epitome of Canterbury middle class, chic shopping, snacking and dining; wall to wall local, artisan produce. Duggan finds himself there a lot:

The train to Margate is a myth. Monitors show different times. People just sit on the platform patiently (in an icy wind). I get a refund and go to the "Goods Shed" for coffee (the market).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Martin Duwell, 'Laurie Duggan: *Crab & Winkle*', *Australian Poetry Review*, Feb 2010

¹⁰⁵ *C & W* p 67

¹⁰⁶ *C & W* p 30

From being non-plussed at people sitting passively in an icy wind, soon, he is dropping the inverted commas:

heading south into the sun at nine-thirty
to the Goods Shed where the surface of the wooden tables
is warm from overhead heating.

a row of unskinned rabbits (or hares?) draining perhaps¹⁰⁷

A Melbourne thought strikes him:

it's 3 pm, lighting up time (and still
lunatics in short-sleeved shirts) Hello Ken!
& dear Pam, homeless in Melbourne, as we
are homeless in Canterbury¹⁰⁸

But then it's:

everything back to normal
at the Goods Shed:

The two red headed and bearded butchers,
one, the son probably, a foot taller than the father,
intently dressing the cuts,

the fishmonger
reading the wrapping paper¹⁰⁹

And finally he merges the two:

What would Ken make of the Goods Shed, a Baci of one's own (?),
ceiling heaters some ten feet above. From metal poles on chains:
bouquets of hops (?), chillies, ham legs, a mosquito net, a fish trap, a lost
umbrella. A new lunch menu about to materialise – chalk on a drying
slate comes to life as the 10.50 for Charing Cross pulls in.¹¹⁰

He is still puzzling over the place five years later in *Allotments* as he ponders the:

arras over the bannister
hides pots of conserve,

¹⁰⁷ C & W p 60

¹⁰⁸ C & W p61

¹⁰⁹ C & W p 72

¹¹⁰ C & W p79

an old steam engine
roosts above the bread oven

someone talks strategy
the jargon of business school
ambulance lights on Station Rd
“blue sky thinking” or “stormy weather”¹¹¹

The place has become a familiar touchstone to rely on in an unfamiliar world, a space in which Southern and Northern hemispheres can collide.

Elsewhere, the sport is different, and the alcohol:

how by an almost complete avoidance
the matter of...
those who would spell it out
lose out

the matter of England?
the shadow of a football spinning from a knee,
Spitfire Ale (how Kentish)

He broadens his sphere of reference with visits to the nearby towns of Faversham and Whitstable, but the sense of being bemused and far from home is pervasive.:

*mother...I'm in a field
somewhere in England
and I've lost part of my brain*

(Jarvis Cocker)¹¹²

Duggan has said that he borrowed the idea of the frequent ellipses in the poem from Guy Devonport's translation of Sappho. “Because the manuscripts are rough and they've got gaps and they've got torn, instead of attempting to fill the space Devonport just used brackets and that's where I got the idea of using them from. But in that sense I use it to say ‘you fill in the appropriate adjective or term’”. Stylistically, it becomes hugely symbolic of the work as a whole. The breakdown in language and comprehension, a kind of cultural speechlessness.

¹¹¹ Allotment #31

¹¹² C & W p 22

But we are watching, just as much, the influence of Paul Blackburn on Duggan. When asked what he takes from Blackburn's poetry, he becomes effusive:

It's that sense of what you can take out – of how you can convey something. One of my favourite books by Blackburn is *In, On or About the Premises* which is just him in a bloody pub basically, but the way he registers things and picks up on what someone is saying, he is quite aware of the sounds of all this sort of stuff. The thing about Blackburn is that he also has this kind of resonance with the troubadour poets.¹¹³

I like the image of Duggan, himself, as a kind of troubadour poet, mooching around Kent and London, eavesdropping on things and recording ephemera. But, in many ways, it is Blackburn's *The Journals* that connects him to Duggan for me. Not just the month by month progression and the shadow of the calendar, but the layout of the page:

Back in the street
Fernando's is all lit up, so's
calle de la Union to the other side,
& the Ramblas .
It looks like Christmas. Baby,
it ain't

(PLAZA REAL WITH PALM TREES: second take)

Which could be straight out of *Crab and Winkle*. Consider also the precise use of location, of towns, restaurants, bars, the proper nouns that colour and infuse the narrative.

Between where Interstate 70 ends
temporarily, all the
traffic is back to East 40 (2 lanes, be
careful passing)
Teotopolis and Altamont, those towns, Shum-
way, Montrose, Effingham, to Terra HauteBlackburn

has as an acute sense of place, and the importance of naming, as Duggan. This is as specific as anything in *The Ash Range*, just more urban, and the layout is the prototype of much of both what and how Duggan was to present his work.

We get a sense of surprise from Duggan as he begins to explore his new locale:

the stour and its tributary channels
gush about Dean's Mill

¹¹³ Appendix

and under St Radigund's
a network of one ways
it seems impossible to navigate

-other end of town, the old tannery
up for development, as back lanes
connect old pubs and undertain sites

after a day of sunlight the grey blanket
comes down and everything stills.¹¹⁴

He, briefly, gets excited about Margate, overwhelmed by the unashamed tackiness of it all, and navigates London, Brighton, Bath. At the year's end ("New Year celebrations cancelled due to storms") his tone is still no more than that of a slightly disinterested journalist filing documentary copy for a provincial newspaper with a falling readership:

The modern part of Canterbury (south of the Cathedral, vicinity of St George's Place) was bombed out in 1940-43. Northgate and areas south and west bulldozed for the ring-road in the 1960s. Station Road West was extensively bombed (and the site of a bus depot from 1935 until the 1990's)¹¹⁵

The sense of *ennui* is overbearing. And the laziest fact-check would reveal that Canterbury was bombed out only in 1942. Duggan maintains the objective tone of a journal throughout the work, never once aspiring to the bucolic lyricism associated with a true Shepherd's Calendar. March finds him, un-dramatically "settling in" and back in the pub:

It's quiet in the Miller's Arms, Monday afternoon after the washing. Quiet too out on St Radigunds, the street that might have been a ring-road.¹¹⁶

Crab and Winkle is the quiet expression of bewilderment and faint alarm at the strangeness of a new culture where things can be both right and not right. A sort of Schrodinger's landscape.

Immigrant Spring Poem:

When the () sings before dawn

¹¹⁴ C & W p 28

¹¹⁵ C & W p 68

¹¹⁶ C & W p 80

from the branches of the ()
the blue()s unfurl
while grey()s circle in the skies¹¹⁷

The writer is having fun with language, with Devonport's parentheses, with his alien status and, mostly, with the reader. Coming at the start of April there is a sense of a warped parody of the beginning of Chaucer's *General Prologue* and an invocation of the writer most famously associated with the city. The brutal "Immigrant" is not entirely meant, but underscores the detachment which he expands upon further along the same page:

In the stationer's I view maps on the first floor, viewed myself by the security camera. The shop's proprietor comes upstairs and pretends to do odd tasks but is really just making extra sure I don't steal anything.

Sometimes it seems that this whole small world belongs to the National Trust and you will be able to buy preserves and tea towels at the kiosk afterwards.¹¹⁸

The feeling of being a mistrusted outsider is marked and causes rare resentment from the protagonist.

And, to make matters worse, he pointedly cannot find his English voice. A key section in the June sequence is unusually self-referential whilst reminding me of Eliot's rose garden in *Burnt Norton*.

a hole in a wall
leads into a garden

allotments and duck ponds
sheds and bridges

as close to willow pattern
as the Home Counties allow
light leaving the sky
the sick bed

immersed in typography

¹¹⁷ C & W p 101

¹¹⁸ C & W p 101

all the books I may/may not read
or write

what would hold English matter
as 'Blue Hills' held Australian?¹¹⁹

This wistful and unusually lyrical passage presents a giving up on the idea of ever being anything other than an Australian writer, despite the years spent living in England. As such, it represents a clear and intense association with the country of his birth and a key indicator of his identity being tied up inextricably with being Australian. As with David Jones, there is a very clear sense of identity being formed from a profoundly felt notion of displacement. He seems sensitive to this in a melancholy way:

you grasp a piece of conversation
hang on after the moment has passed
as though it were an object not a process

yet your writing has never done this
cut flowers, a marble vase on the sill,

outside/inside

for David Jones it could be
all of Wales¹²⁰

There is a sense of things coming to an end. But *Crab and Winkle* doesn't reach a crescendo, it rather fades away. As a poem it becomes increasingly elliptical, even Dadaist. Weather features heavily, but so do crosswords, birds and insects. He never seems to recover his focus after a trip to *avant garde* Berlin. *Apropos* of nothing he informs us that:

Basil Bunting widely aspired to minor poet/not conspicuously dishonest. An honorary 'southron', I don't have too much choice.

I have a language to learn.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ C & W p 130

¹²⁰ C & W p 150

¹²¹ C & W p161

That language may yet be vernacular English. As a card carrying Northerner, I've never used, or heard used, the word "southron" to describe my softer compatriots in the South.

The final image could be straight out of Bunuel:

a buzzing insect enters then leaves the room

And the poem ends. Appropriately, with no full stop.

Later Work

Five years after *Crab and Winkle*, Duggan published *Allotments*. By now he had been in the motherland long enough to know its ways. What could be more English than allotments? In a small, overcrowded island, with a legal system obsessed with land possession and trespass, the humble allotment is a powerful metaphor for the aspiration of the English, even at the lower end of the social order. Places matter, everywhere; even the smallest plot of earth.

Ali Jane Smith argues:

But reading *Allotments*, I thought about *The Ash Range*, and the way that place in Australia is still, thirty years on from that book, a subject that uncovers trauma. Localities are the common factor in the long documentary piece *The Ash Range* the fragmented, occasional, imagistic Blue Hills series, and the gentler poems in *Allotments*. For a poet who has worked with localities for more than forty years, is the difference, at least in part, to be found in his relationship with the place he writes.¹²²

She is right to find an inter-connectedness throughout Duggan's poetry, and a thread through the forty years of writing, and it is clear that cognitive mapping and a keen sense of space is perhaps the most recurrent *leitmotif*. When he is in a rural setting there is almost the sense of a very Australian aboriginal concept of place and connectedness, where the land

¹²² Ali Jane Smith, 'The Way Home: Laurie Duggan'. *Sydney Review of Books*

owns us and every rock, tree, hill or river is formed by the ancestors and is still the ancestors, whether his own or others, hence the importance of the proper nouns.

He manages this in *Crab and Winkle*, once he is in his stride in his adopted country: “Today in the heat, to Chilham, a walk through Godmersham Park and back through Ridge Wood, carpeted with bluebells”. East Kent is still rural enough, with rolling downs and coppiced woodland, to provide bucolic recreation, but Duggan is still dropping names as he walks. Chilham is a chocolate-box pretty English village and he would have known that Godmersham Park was once owned by Edward Austen and frequently visited by his more illustrious sister who made it the model for Mansfield Park.

“Then a walk from Selling Station up through orchards to Perry Wood. Along a ridge, views out to Lees Court (W) and (S) over Shottenden, the rape fields”. It seems unusually important to this narrator to seem overly familiar with these unusual place names. Where most will talk about a walk in the (non-specific) woods, Duggan has to do the naming game. What could be taken as the somewhat nerdy obsessiveness of a senior Geography master is probably more a fascination with etymology and the sound of place names; the excitement of the strange. One could even suggest that he is trying to connect in a very specific ancestral, aboriginal sense to the motherland?

From Wingham the path crosses a field of – is it barley? Later, after, Wickhambreaux, village of suspicious people, the track is overgrown.

Descend through Hospital Wood to Fordwich ‘the smallest town in England.’¹²³

But in an urban setting, perhaps surprisingly, Duggan is no less attuned to the sights and rhythms of the street. He is resonant of O’Hara in this, particularly of poems such as ‘A Step

¹²³ C & W p 123

Away From Them', not detached from, but still immersed in, the landscape he is describing.

As Susan Holahan has observed: "O'Hara does not write about the city; he lives in it"

But by now, this small city is becoming more familiar to Duggan. Though it is still, arguably, the work of an expatriate, there is a growing sense of comprehension of the urban landscape:

beware the moon
and stick to the road'
(advice for drunks)
above the bar of the Dolphin

the clientele post-prandial at 3 pm
as the light fails, in a street
named for St Radigund, poet,
friend to Gregory of Tours

Greek patterns on frosted glass,
the pargeted wall opposite
all scallop and rectangle
above a low green door.¹²⁴

The Australian exteriors of *The Ash Range* and *The Blue Hills* are replaced by the Kentish interiors, principally public houses, that Duggan finds himself in. This is Duggan matching his acquired Englishness to his erstwhile Australian-ness. He is now comfortably familiar with The Dolphin, just a short spit from The Miller's Arms, in St. Radigund's, by the Miller's Field, one of the best historically preserved areas of the city. He is amused to combine low culture – *An American Werewolf in London* – with references to a sixth century abbess and he recognises the pargeting on the ancient wall and the pilgrim sign of the scallop. He has mastered the crab and winkle way of thriving in the ancient city and references it easily and elliptically:

a dose of 'the finger' (Bishop's)
And the fire

¹²⁴ 'Allotment #84'

And he has arrived again at where he began. In his beginning is his end. The threat to the university theatre taking us all the way back to the start of *Crab and Winkle*.

Last days of The Gulbenkian? Possibly to be closed (or privatised)
& the last day of Olson (the reading group)

Koch warns about getting too universal
at the end of a long poem

(Olson's) fucks Gloucester harbour
(his alter ego
which gives birth to...?¹²⁵)

Conclusion

Duggan returned to Australia in 2018. Talking to the author, he said, “a couple of years ago I went back (and this is going to sound impossibly sentimental), hearing native birds and the smell of gum trees I thought “bloody hell”, I’ve got to return.” In 2017, he wrote ‘In Devon’ which is strangely nostalgic of *The Blue Hills* sequence:

out of puff
on Picket Head Hill

the distant coastline
- west, not south – is Dorset

a bird in the long grass: Chiff Chaff(?)

The lingering uncertainty can still be seen in the question mark, and the native birds are still not familiar, but with the attention to the unremarkable, and barely known, specific loci and the casual naming of horizons, he could be back in Gippsland, rural Victoria. By the time he is prepared to depart for the ghost gums and magpies, Duggan has found a home from home; an exterior England that he charts as lyrically and effortlessly as any South East Australian landscape.

¹²⁵ ‘Allotment #5’

Of all the poets and poems studied in this thesis, *Crab and Winkle* has the most direct influence on *Of Canterbury*, *Who Fell in*. Stylistically, the latter is more formal and orthodox, but the sense of place is core to both and the notion of a Shepherd's Calendar, perhaps more fully realised in my own work, is the framework upon which both poems are hung. The centrality of Canterbury and East Kent speaks, loudly, for itself.

I think, on reflection, Duggan may be more of an Australian poet than even he realises, or, to put it more literally, more of an Australian writing poetry than he realises. The central spatial representation in his work is always the land and the land, in Australia, is always bigger than the people; a sense metaphorically demonstrated by *The Ash Range*. Unlike our crowded island, with our indoor culture, Duggan brings an Australian sense of space to the English environment, born of the sense of endless unclaimed land, and a life lived outdoors under a big sky. By contrast, the English environment is claustrophobic, literally allotted and owned by people with their eyes to the pavement.

He does also have a keen interest in his ancestral landscape as well and there is a strong sense that Gippsland is his inheritance from his ancestors, but also is his ancestors at the same time. Given the powerful connection between the earth and the rocks and the trees and the subsequent self-identification, East Kent was always going to be a strange and unfamiliar environment to adapt to. But the real strength and success of Duggan, the particular triumph of *Crab and Winkle*, is how powerfully he gives voice to this feeling of a locality being *unheimlich*, exactly in the sense that Jentsch describes it at the beginning of the chapter. I cannot think of a better word to describe the overwhelming experience of the text with all of the significance that the concept of *hiraeth* exhibits in Jones' work. He even references it himself in a thought process prompted by a visit to Charleston, the twee Sussex home of the Bloomsbury set.

so what's *heimlich*? Old money
heating its cavernous ante-rooms?
a sense of order outside which
is chaos ('industry')?¹²⁶

In contemplating *heimlich* he neatly invokes its opposite.

But, again, as Duggan avers, "I tend to adapt to where I am anyway". By the time of *Allotments* we are seeing a more rootless, no worries, troubadour poet in the style of Blackburn, just passing through, observing and recording and leaving his readers with a genuine, objective visual collage of all he surveys. The dangerous looking man on the train, the call of crows, chandeliers and rows of golden taps, Red Lion Square and blackbird chicks are all casually captured by this inquisitive anthropologist of place. Either he has become accustomed to the country and made peace with his inner Englishman or else he has accepted the uncertainty and unfamiliarity as part of his very existence but, either way, the diasporic, bemused tone of *Crab and Winkle* is soothed leaving us only with the conclusion that the centrality of place as a geological or human concept in Duggan's poetry cannot be understated and that this is inextricably linked with a deep sense of displacement from his ancestral homeland and distinct natural environment.

¹²⁶ C & W p 135

Chapter Three: “A Fabulous Aborigine”: Charles Olson and Dogtown

Introduction

It is impossible to do justice to the whole of Olson’s *The Maximus Poems* in one chapter of this study. However, if we focus on the sense of place, or rather a particular evocation of place, we can begin to make some connections with previous writers. Olson’s poem, or series of poems, is an act of investigation. Investigation into himself, into the place and history of Gloucester and into its very being. In undertaking this investigation, he comes to great statements about being and some realisations of the way life in twentieth century America is lived with some stern pronouncements for those living it. There are over three hundred poems in the sequence. Some of them stand-alone poems in their own right, others dependent on the whole for their individual meaning. They represent the major body of Olson’s work and, as a collection, *The Maximus Poems* deserve to stand alongside Jones’ *The Anathemata* as a contender for the title of greatest epic poem of the twentieth century.

The journey of the poem is relatively simple. The first volume looks out to sea, invokes Creely as ‘the figure of Outward’ and recalls the rich maritime history of the town. The second movement is the return on the curve to the town of Gloucester itself and the third is to investigate the peculiar collection of glacial and human debris of Dogtown on the fringes of Gloucester itself.

Writing on Laurie Duggan, we touched on the notion of First Nation ancestry and a link between Aboriginal sense of place and Duggan’s own connection to the landscape of Gippsland. Peter Minter, writing on transcultural projectivism in his short essay ‘Olson’s ‘The Kingfisher’ and 1970s Aboriginal art’ looks more deeply at the connections between Olson’s writing and the totemic geography of indigenous groups.

Minter quotes from *Aboriginal Art* by Howard Morphy,

Every action of the ancestral beings had a consequence on the form of the landscape. The places where they emerged from the earth became water-holes or the entrances to caves; where they walked, watercourses flowed; and tress grew where they stuck their digging sticks in the ground...where they died hills formed in the shapes of their bodies, or lakes formed from pools of their blood. Over time the features of the earth began to take shape, and as long as the ancestral beings lived on the surface of the earth they modified its form little by little.¹²⁷

If we consider Maximus of Tyre and the cast and crew of the whole epic as ancestral beings, with Olson's awareness of Indigenous Americans, we have our direct link to *The Maximus Poems*. As Minter argues:

From an aboriginal perspective, the landscape is therefore considered to be a composition of encoded narratives that are recalled and reiterated in moments of poiesis, such as in paintings (on bark, the body or canvas), stories or ceremony. As W.E.H. Stanner famously wrote in 1962, "(t)he Aboriginal moves, not in a landscape, but in a humanized realm saturated with meaning.

This is an interesting start point from which to consider Olson's *magnum opus* as an expression of totemic geography. Arguably, Minter is going too far when he states that "with some stretch of the imagination, Charles Olson would have been a fabulous aborigine.", however, Nathanael Pree investigates this further in 'Maximus and Aboriginal Australia: antipodean influences on the archaic proprioceptive epic'.

As with specific aspects of Aboriginal Australian culture, the proprioceptive aspect of the Maximus gestalt functions as the recreation of existence through full awareness of a body created out of space, enunciating its place and then turning, or troping, to create a tangible, solid sense of being.¹²⁸

Quite what Laurie Duggan would make of all this, we do not know. Pree develops this in greater depth in 'Spatial Poetics, Proprioception and Caring for Country in Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*' to explore "tropes that connect ancient cultures to postmodern poetic

¹²⁷ Peter Minter, 'Transcultural Projectivism in Charles Olson's 'The Kingfishers' and Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri's 'Warlugulong' in David Herd, (Ed.), *Contemporary Olson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p 260

¹²⁸ Nathanael Pree, 'Maximus and Aboriginal Australia', in Joshua Hoeyneck (Ed.), *Staying Open: Charles Olson's Sources and Influences*, (Delaware: Vernon Press, 2018)

concerns, and demonstrates that Olson's ultimate aim is akin to that of recreating country itself." Pree references handwritten notes in the Olson archive ("how's your churinga?") and his lectures from 1953 where he raises the Aboriginal concept of Tjuringa, sacred objects which help define a person and contain elements of their ontological and epistemological being. As Pree observes:

A page later in Olson's lecture he refers to "churingas" again, this time giving the definition as "spirit houses" which indicates he had an idea of their function as receptacles for a form of being; one which comprises a mode of psychic habitation that finds similarities in an Algonquin myth of a man with a house on his head.

Olson returns to this myth at least three times in *The Maximus Poems* though the significance of its usage is hard to interpret. A man whose immaculate house is with him wherever he goes is always at home. It may well be that Olson is generally more comfortable with indigenous Algonquin mythology and cosmology than myths that originate on the other side of the world but in Aboriginal culture, the proper verb "to dream" is *altjirerama*, "to see God".

In the invented character of Maximus of Gloucester, Olson not only sees God, he becomes God. Maximus is omniscient and omnipotent. He becomes *altjira* – an eternal being with no beginning in a specific topographical location (re-) founded in 1623, but previously inhabited by Algonquin native Americans. The similarities between the Algonquin spirit world and animistic beliefs are striking.

Olson's Gloucester

Whichever way we look at it, there is something spiritual or primordial haunting Olson's connection with Gloucester. So what does Gloucester mean to him? Ralph Maud puts it this way:

The early Maximus poems were written, literally, to Gloucester by Olson in his wanderings in the same way that Maximus, a second century neo-platonist, sent sermons back to his home city of Tyre.¹²⁹

But Olson, himself, qualifies this confluence of his own persona with history:

No Greek will be able
To discriminate my body.
An American
Is a complex of occasions
Themselves a geometry
Of spatial nature.
I have this sense,
That I am one
With my skin
Plus this – plus this
That forever the geography
That leans in
On me I compel
Backwards I compel Gloucester
To yield, to
Change
 Polis
Is this¹³⁰

Gloucester is both his and not his.

I was not born there, came, as so many of the people came
From elsewhere. That is, my father did. And not from the provinces,
Not from Newfoundland. But we came early enough.¹³¹

The mongrel nature of modern America is acknowledged, but always in the context that it is an older nation with an older indigenous population.

It is significant to recognise Gloucester as an entry gate for the whole of America, the first point of greeting and a point of confluence; a point of fluidity and transience for the majority. And yet, though not born there, Olson, through Maximus, identifies so entirely with the town

¹²⁹ Ralph Maud, *A Charles Olson Reader* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005) p.51

¹³⁰ 'Maximus to Gloucester 27'

¹³¹ *TMP* p 14

that it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between, poet, persona and town from a sense of supreme satisfaction at the centrality of Gloucester to all things and, therefore, his own centrality.

Dogtown to the right the ocean
To the left
Opens out the light the river flowing
At my feet
Gloucester to me back
The light hangs
From the wheel of Heaven
The great Ocean
In balance
The air is as wide as the light¹³²

As Clark records in his biography of the poet:

In the summer of 1915 Karl took the family off on the first of many holidays at the cape Ann fishing and resort town of Gloucester. Situated on the Atlantic shore thirty miles northeast of Boston, separated from the mainland by the Annisquam River, the boy's adopted part time "island" hometown would become the adult poet's creative precinct, "my front yard" as he called the place in later years.¹³³

We move towards Olson's entire possession of the town

The ownership
Solely
Mine¹³⁴

Kristen Case argues,

The Gloucester of *The Maximus Poems* is not merely a geographical location, but the site of a continual engagement between Maximus, the poem's persona, and his environment, an engagement that constitutes reality for the poet. A genuine gestalt.¹³⁵

Reality is not the town or the poet, but the liminal engagement between them. The river and the ocean are always flowing, giving a Heraclitean flux as the background to the poem.

¹³² *TMP* p 296

¹³³ Tom Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*, (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2000) p 8

¹³⁴ *TMP* p 420

¹³⁵ Kristen Case, 'Henry Thoreau, Charles Olson and the Poetics of Place' *The Concord Saunterer*, New Series, Vol. 17, 2009

Olson painstakingly builds and continually adds to an environment that the reader can visualise strongly as well as an open field through which Maximus', and therefore Olson's, energy is projected. It is both real and fictional, present and historical. As Case adds, "the poem becomes not merely a record but a map, a means of locating oneself in space and time"

The poems do not confine themselves to a single historical moment, but rather move fluidly between past and present embracing Whitehead's vision of reality as process.

For Whitehead, again, read Heraclitus.

The Gloucester created is a constant flux of human narratives, human voices, present dwellers alongside original Cape Ann settlers, both white and native American. It is an astonishing and breath-taking, moving montage encapsulating at least 350 years of life and lives in the town and persona. As such it mirrors the Limehouse passages in David Jones' *The Anathemata* where the spirits of Eb Bradshaw and Elen Monica are invoked, or, as previously noted, anticipates Allen Fisher's *Place* where the voices of the past are heard down the ages.

It is very much to Olson's credit that the voices of *TMP* are not always the voices and stories of the white man. Returning to Minter's assertion that Olson would have made "a fabulous aborigine", and referencing, again, Duggan's ancestral relationship with the earth, *The Maximus Poems* are suffused with an acceptance of first nation Americans as a part of the dialogue, and not just the man with a house on his head.

the mists of the Indians
On the land, the flow,
From the ice, of the hidden
Speech, the tales they tell
Of the m'teoulin, of the masques performed
In the waves, of the Indian watchers making on
To these other men who have come to the shore.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ *TMP* p 346

Or,

And the perfect bowl
Of the sky of Gloucester
In which these events
May be seen
Each Evening hour
Each Day before
Night comes
To cover Heaven's
Approach, to make love to
Earth
And bear us
As our Ancestors were
So Borne¹³⁷

In Maximus to Gloucester, Letter 157 we see,

an old Indian chief as hant
Sat on the rock between
Tarantino's and Mr
Randazza's and scared the piss out of
Mr Randazza so he ran back into
His house¹³⁸

And Olson is quick to point out;

It was the hatmakers of La Rochelle, the fish eaters of
Bristol who were the conquistadors of my country, the
Dreamless present.

Does 'dreamless' have an Aboriginal smack?

Olson inhabits Gloucester utterly, eagerly and entirely. It is, at times, as if the rest of the world has ceased to exist and only in infrequent sojourns elsewhere, such as the visit to Berlin in 'Maximus III' are we reminded that other locales exist. That the poems were written over a period of some twenty years shows an obsessional relationship with the town

¹³⁷ *TMP* p 563

¹³⁸ *TMP* p 347

and it is surely not unintentional that the poet's persona is also remembered inextricably with his own polis of Tyre.

Gloucester is oddly autonomous from the rest of the country and yet, paradoxically, embodies it. The Cape Ann rocks welcomed the first Europeans to the continent and formed the foundation of the New World, in a sense another Folsom. Robert Duncan's comments, reported in Davey (1974) that "Charles thought Gloucester was one of the holy places of this world" sit comfortably with this idea. And yet he is aware of its limitations and the damages inflicted on it. Much of 'Maximus I' is a lament for the triumphs of civilisation over cosmos and the advancement of commercialism over sacred ground – the "mu-sick mu-sick mu-sick".

The self-identification of poet and place ossifies further in 'Maximus III' and we see that as Olson, himself, decays, as Maximus' voice becomes increasingly elliptical, so Gloucester falls. We are near the very end of the whole work in December 18th:

Oh Gloucester
Has no longer a West
end. It is a
part of the
country now a mangled
mess of all parts swollen
& fallen
into
degradation, each bundle-
bound and scattered
as so many
units of poor
sorts and strangulation all hung up each one
like hanged
bodies¹³⁹

¹³⁹ *TMP* p 597

And though Olson's tone can be heard as bombastic, didactic and shouty, there is tender self-doubt in the later writing which chimes with a vulnerability that can be detected in the whole:

LITERARY RESULT

That a cormorant fishes
now out of my window – that Jeremy Prynne wishes
my own poetry – or us, two, as men, should
as Larry Eigner the one day yet, so many years ago I
read in Gloucester – to half a dozen people still –

asked me

why, meaning my poetry doesn't
help anybody. The black cormorant

not the gull

possesses
my view.¹⁴⁰

Gloucester has problems, largely caused by human progress. Values have disintegrated, focus has shifted from what is real to what is cheap and unreal and commerce has become King. We know that the poems originated in letters to Vincent Ferrini and that in them Olson/Maximus is enraged about the state of the modern world and its impact on the past. He is furious about the rise of commercialism, with all its falseness, juxtaposed with something good and natural about the polis of Gloucester – “kill kill kill kill kill/those/who advertise you/out.”. Oddly reminiscent of King Lear, the clear implication being that someone has taken too little care of this. As in *The Great Gatsby*, advertising becomes the focus for all that is cheap, soulless and preys upon the human spirit – Eckleburg amongst the fishermen.

The once bold seafaring town that bustled with larger than life characters engaged in a natural battle with the oceans and scraping a living of which one could be proud, has declined ever since:

one's forced

¹⁴⁰ *TMP* p 575

considering America,
to a single truth; the newness
the first men knew was almost
from the start dirtied
By second comers. About seven years
and you can carry cinders
in your hand for what
America was worth.¹⁴¹

As a point of intersection with David Jones, it is clear that, in a slightly romanticised sense, Olson views the fishermen of yesteryear as being involved in primary production and trade that is somehow linked to the authentic and primeval survival instincts of his ancestors and that that noble endeavour has been corrupted into a tainted commercial venture that led men towards individualised enterprise for individual gain, ignoring the needs of the wider community. Of the original settlement, “no-one/knew better/than to cash in on it”. His addresses to the local population are pleading and admonitory:

love is not easy
but how shall you know
New England, now
the pejorocracy is here, how
that street cars, o Oregon, twitter
in the afternoon, offend
a black-gold loin?¹⁴²

Pejorocracy? To define his anger, Olson chooses a word coined by Pound in one of his *Pisan Cantos*, dated 1948 (Canto LXXIX: "in short the snot of pejorocracy"). Literally, worse rule.

what we have a word for
(what he called it, howling,
over another's pay-
cock:

pejorocracy (what you have, my town, what all towns

now have: pee-jaw-rock

Cressy!

¹⁴¹ *TMP* p 139

¹⁴² *TMP* p 7

The thugs,
 the hypocrites
are always more to deal with than

the Good, the always damn
Safe

(what they've turned even the 4th of July into, the

Ones who made this country¹⁴³

Olson rails against the endless mercantile advance:

As the people of the earth are now, Gloucester
is heterogeneous, and so can know polis
not as localism, not that mu-sick (the trick
of corporations, newspapers, slick magazines, movie houses,
the ships, even the wharves, absentee-owned

they whine to my people, these entertainers, sellers

they play upon their bigotries (upon their fears¹⁴⁴

It is hard not to read these lines as wider condemnation of the American experience as a whole; the rhetoric of American identity, the meaning of America, what America could have been and what it has become. Olson's rancour is encapsulated in the sneering internal rhymes. *The Maximus Poems* does not invite close reading and, perhaps, because of the scale of the work, does not receive it, but the attention to sound, by the author, is scrupulous nevertheless.

It is important, throughout, to understand Olson's relish for Gloucester, what he senses it meant to the original settlers and, by association, what it really means to him. I think it is too easy to read Olson's depiction of Gloucester as an early call for climate awareness or eco-sensitivity. There is something more fundamental in it than that which potentially chimes

¹⁴³ *TMP* p 77

¹⁴⁴ *TMP* p 14

with Minter and Pree's reading of Olson as being much more connected to primordial events and the myths and dawn of creation.

Olson's Dogtown

Not all of Gloucester is ruined. Indeed, among the ruins he finds its elemental core. We can analyse this by homing in on a specific section, one of the more complete parts of the whole: Maximus from Dogtown. Dogtown is the name given to the commons settlement just outside Gloucester which was, largely, abandoned by the end of the Nineteenth Century. Water and, sometimes, ice oozes from the rocks making habitation possible; it is elementally a special place leaving Olson to evoke Okeanos, the Titan father of the river gods as well as the great river that encircled the world. In Dogtown, Olson can, literally, see God. It is interesting here that he, again, invokes the Greek, quoting Hesiod rather than experimenting with native creation myths. But, where the rivers are running, Olson is at his happiest. "Vast earth rejoices". The centrality of water at the heart of the elements is quickly confirmed: "deep swirling Okeanos steers all things through all things". The capitalisation of "WATERED ROCK" both shows its power and reminds us of the dry, infertile and dying opposite in Eliot's *Waste Land*, "if there were only rock/and no water." This is a place of vibrancy, not of waste and death. Humanity, general, awakes in Dogtown:

The soul is led from drunkenness
to dryness, the sleeper lights up from the dead¹⁴⁵

is taken direct from Heraclitus, *Fragments 73-76*: "A man, when he gets drunk, is led by a beardless lad, tripping, knowing not where he steps, having his soul moist...The dry soul is the wisest and best". In Dogtown, everything flows. *Et in arcadia ego*.

¹⁴⁵ *TMP* p 172

creation can still be witnessed and is, indeed, the ultimate point of creation, elemental or poetic, which is, in itself, the fundamental reality. As Stormont argues:

By diverting his reader's attention to Dogtown, Olson's intention is not only to illuminate how past and present literally collide there, but also that truths can be arrived at through analysing the archaic.¹⁴⁸

Dogtown is soft
in every season
high up on her own granite
horst, light growth
of all trees and bushes
strong like puddle's ice
the bios
of nature in this
park of eternal
events is a sidewalk
to slide on, this
terminal moraine.¹⁴⁹

Stormont homes in on the glacial past of the region:

The fact that the area is the site of a terminal moraine has not received adequate attention in critiques of the Dogtown poems. Olson's poetic intention, as outlined in "Projective Verse", is for the poem to act as an energy transfer and, that being the case, the metaphorical significance of a location strewn with remnants of the last glacial meltdown cannot be overstated. The boulders – some of which are huge – provide tangible evidence of nature's power and serve as the type of natural energy Olson hoped to inspire through his poems.¹⁵⁰

Rather than steering such observations towards an eco-critical reading of the poems, one might, instead, think of the terminal moraine as, itself, a central metaphor for the form of the overall work. *The Maximus Poems* are, in effect, a terminal moraine in and of themselves; a mind dump of epic proportions left for someone else to deal with.

Heraclitus uses the term *logos* to mean the principle of order and knowledge and, by invoking the philosopher, that is what Olson finds in Dogtown. It is the natural order where

¹⁴⁸ C. Stormont, 'Charles Olson and the Nature of Destructive Humanism' 2021

¹⁴⁹ *TMP* p 175

¹⁵⁰ C. Stormont, 'Charles Olson and the Nature of Destructive Humanism' 2021

human arrogance is doomed to fail. By taking on the bull, itself a sacred animal to the Greeks, Merry succumbs to the essential human weakness of trying to disturb the order of things. The bull, now grown, will always triumph and exhibits no hubris – “not even knowing/death/was in his power over/the man who lay/in the Sunday morning sun.” The parable is simple, but effective; Merry is punished and then exonerated:

Then only
after the grubs
had done him
did the earth
let her robe
uncover and her part
take him in

Follow the natural order:

Turn yr back on
the sea, go inland, to
Dogtown¹⁵¹

Despite the poetic plea in Letter 3 (Maximus I, II):

O tansy city, root city
let them not make you
as the nation is¹⁵²

Gloucester has succumbed to the human forces that beset both it and America.

Commercialism and a mean-spirited mass media have spread their infection in this holiest of cities, whereas:

Up
Dogtown hill on top one day the
Vertical American Thing will
show from heaven the Ladder

come down to the Earth
of Us All, the many who
know

¹⁵¹ *TMP* p 179

¹⁵² *TMP* p 15

There is one!
One Mother
One son

One daughter
and Each the Father
Of Him-Her-Self

The Genetic
is Ma the Morphic
is Pa the City is Mother-
Polis¹⁵³

The ascent of the ladder to Heaven, or our origins, is available only in Dogtown. Olson is making quite an incredible claim for the commons making it the centre of humanity itself.

Dogtown the under
vault heaven
is Carbon Queen
is Annisquam

What was written on Dogtown on December 22nd 1959 unlocks the sense of place in *The Maximus Poems*. Place is *the* place. Miriam Nichols has written in ‘Myth and Document in *The Maximus Poems*’,

The only view in *The Maximus Poems* is that of Maximus. Indeed no other view is possible if we follow Olson’s logic. But the point is that Olson does not perform the multiplicity of “eyes” that make up a polis and so it is easy to see dogma rather than allegory in his work.¹⁵⁴

Where we have said in this study that Olson’s approach is bombastic, on the grandest of scales, he will not settle for anything other than the discovery of the primordial centre of the universe, the site of beginning and ending and the very precise locus of creation itself. As poet/creator he is as rooted here as Dogtown in its own ice, or Okeanos in his oceans. This is the very epicentre of his being and this is Olson’s Dogtown dogma. What, ultimately, Australia has to be to Duggan, despite his ventures in the Northern Hemisphere, and what an

¹⁵³ *TMP* p 179

¹⁵⁴ Miriam Nichols, ‘Myth and Document in Charles Olson’s *Maximus Poems*’, In Herd, (Ed.), *Contemporary Olson*, p 34

ever out of reach mythical past has to be for David Jones, this ocean facing commons settlement, run down as a habitation, but still elementally defiant, is to Olson core, home, place and identity.

In 'Maximus from Dogtown I', Olson encounters a place where the primordial roots of creation still seem apparent. The fields of Dogtown, just across the harbour from Gloucester, appear to him to be oozing the fundamental building blocks of life.¹⁵⁵

As Olson wrote in his early essay 'Human Universe', "the only two universes which count, the two phenomenal ones, are that of himself, as organism, and that of his environment, the earth and planets."¹⁵⁶ and, therefore, humankind, by proper attention, has to know its place. In a sense, then, in an insistence on a sacred locus as the portal or gateway to the past, the present and eternity, Olson's notion of place is not as un-Aboriginal as we might have questioned at the start of this chapter. We know he read widely on Mexican belief systems and interacted with native Americans and their creation myths. That his own creation mythology should focus so sharply on Cape Ann, Gloucester and, chiefly, Dogtown, should not leave us so very surprised. His use of this small place as the beginnings of an appeal to revelation, aiming to reconnect us to things we once knew and valued, is as tender as it sometimes is angry.

We were a new, physical, naked, or open aboriginal space, which we have, in a sense, now miserably filled competently, but I think now uninterestingly.¹⁵⁷

But his aim was always bigger than localism.

I believe in religion not magic or science I believe in society
as religious both man and society as religious¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Davey, 'Six Readings of Olson's *Maximus*'

¹⁵⁶ Charles Olson, *Collected Prose*, (Ed.) Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p 56

¹⁵⁷ *Muthologos; Lectures and Interviews*

¹⁵⁸ *TMP* p 422

Though the depiction of it is incredibly intense and intricate, in many ways Gloucester is just a stepping off point for grander considerations of what is increasingly important in the second half of the twentieth century. The gradual departure from a grounded connection between man and the earth he inhabits and the drift towards commercialisation, towards the “mu-sick”, blinds humans to things they once knew instinctively and profoundly. The construction of polis does not have to mean estrangement from the earth and that polis itself can, and did, have another extended meaning, can still reveal something of the human spirit and condition, if only we would let it be.

Arguably, the clearest and most concise commentator on *The Maximus Poems* is still the poet, Jeremy Prynne. Prynne’s seminal 1971 lecture at Simon Fraser University is eternally illuminating and encapsulates Prynne’s view of the poem neatly.

There are two things in my mind right now about this poem of Olson’s...firstly, that this is a noble poem. And secondly that this is a simple one.

Prynne states two things about the poem that I would like to remember. Firstly, that “we are in the condition of something which is not lyric” and that Olson is standing in the tradition of Milton and Wordsworth as an epic poet, not a lyrical one. Secondly, that Olson begins *The Maximus Poems* with “the setting of Gloucester and the way out into the ocean” but that, later, “you go back down the line that you have already taken, you fold back into yourself just like that kind of tube, and you take what has been story and you fold it back into legend.”

The first story of knowing where you are is knowing where you come from...the second story is less local, more grand.

The second story is of myth and cosmos so that we are focused on looking immediately at Gloucester, for Olson, being the stuff of his rootedness, or his origin, but also as his departure point for cosmological consideration.

Now when, as I say, Maximus looks out to sea, he looks throughout the sea, down into the sea, out into the cosmos, we have the whole of Okeanos, the whole of the void, we have the whole of the condition of that circular curve in the condition of space.

And so *The Maximus Poems* may be about a specific locale, but they do not exhibit localism. Indeed, in going round the circular curve, starting in Gloucester, but moving away, right away, right round the curve and coming back again, we are to be prepared to focus on some of the more profound questions of life and individual being. *The Maximus Poems*, for Prynne, allow him to focus on home.

And what is home? Home is the planet on which you live. Nowhere have I been struck, oh more passionately struck by the notion that the planet, the whole globe, the earth upon which we live, is home to us.

We are reminded, perhaps, of Weil's sense of rootedness even as Olson takes the opportunity to consider Gloucester as its own great *Mappa Mundi*.

For Prynne, the simplicity of the poem is in its Homeric sense of homecoming. Not Odysseus, but Maximus and, very much *Homo Maximus* who brings us all home. Olson gives us the opportunity to journey with him and, through reading the poem:

You can also have the particular condition of transpiring through the noble arc. From the land to the shore, from the shore to the sea, from the sea to the ocean, from the ocean to the void, from the void to the horizontal curve, which is love. You have the condition. You turn it round. You bring it all back in. You curve right down and you are home.

Gloucester was, and is, home for Olson. He is the most comfortable in his setting of all three poets in this study, but not comfortable in a domestic or basic sense. In Gloucester, he possesses everything that ever was. He is both himself and his ancestors and the land that remains unspoiled around him. He is the knowledge that went before and the realisation of where we are now. As such he evokes both Algonquin and modern American and, just perhaps, he becomes a very fabulous kind of Aborigine indeed.

The last word on Olson may go to Iain Sinclair, fittingly thinking about Olson as he makes his own particular Olson pilgrimage to Canterbury to participate in a conference about the writer in ‘On the Back of the Elephant: Riding with Charles Olson’.

London’s an odd place just now, and coming onto the road, to find my way to Canterbury, is launching into another hallucinatory trip. Keeping an eye on traffic, on stalled civil engineering works and rehearsing what I might, usefully, say.¹⁵⁹

He listens to a CD of Olson’s contemporary Black Mountain poet, Ed Dorn, himself recollecting taking the pilgrimage road to Canterbury and Kent and finding himself “slightly disappointed”. Sinclair is going outward, on the curve, and he comes to a quick conclusion:

I start where I want to finish. And I’ll give you the key. I want to read that Olson poem, “MAXIMUS FROM DOGTOWN-II”, which comes from Maximus IV, V, VI. I think what is important to have in mind is what Jeremy Prynne talked about in a lecture in 1971 at Simon Fraser University; it stops you short, the idea that Maximus is a single poem coming from a complicated man. How does he put it? The poem is simple, but the life it came out of, and the pre-occupations that surround it, immeasurably dense and confused and packed with a kind of fertile obscurity. And the notion really is that life, as the thing that we’re given, that ribbon of being, is an allegory – which is how Tom Clark pitches it in his biography of Olson. A large and potent myth. A novel using the elements of a man’s history creatively, balancing research against memory and improvisation. With all the attendant risks¹⁶⁰

Sinclair, as with Prynne before him, hits on the notion of *The Maximus Poems* being, essentially, simple which, given the length and fragmentary nature is at once absurd, paradoxical and true. Where it is most true is in its understanding of identity and place. If we are to continue our trait of describing a poet’s identification with place in one word, for Olson we would have to resort to a by-product of Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein*, *Hingehorigkeit* – put simply, belonging somewhere, and not just simply to be pinpointed in geographical space.

¹⁵⁹ Sinclair, in Herd (ed.) *Contemporary Olson* p 298

¹⁶⁰ Sinclair in Herd, (Ed.) p 300

Olson, as Maximus, is myth and mythmaker. He is both homecoming and home, itself.

Though often vulnerable, his sometime surety is his sense of his place in the universe and his anchorage in a small town on the Cape Ann coastline. From where, safe in his own skin, he shows us ourselves. His allegory is our allegory. His text, the ribbon of being.

Conclusion: My Proper Ground; Both Here and There

The poetry considered most deeply in this thesis spans a period of approximately one hundred years from 1921 onwards. The Twentieth Century is already considered a century of incredible change in boundaries with old countries ceasing to exist entirely and new countries replacing them at an unprecedented rate. It is a diasporic century characterized by hybridity, transnationalism and multiculturalism. The term “refugee” originates in the Seventeenth Century and the expulsion of the Huguenots from France – to Canterbury, in many cases – but the term reaches wider national consciousness in the Twentieth Century

We have seen how displacement has helped create a very real sense of identity in the poetry of both Jones and Duggan and from this, a very real sense of identity and of place being inextricably linked, whether it is the place of current or previous habitation or a place of the imagination. We might expect disorientation and ambiguity to be the predominant feelings, but we are just as likely to be presented with their opposites.

And much of this spins off from T.S. Eliot, however much I tried to resist writing on him, either as action or reaction. Eliot enjoyed a centrality amongst Twentieth Century poets and his voice on place, at least on first hearing, is loud and impossible to ignore. Certainly that was the view of his close friend, David Jones. But, despite his centrality, Eliot’s poetry betrays an absence of rootedness and an absence of ownership of any place in relation to his own identity, which contrasts vividly with the writers we have focused on and with other writers whose names keep coming up over and over again in relation to poetry of place and identity; Williams, Prynne, Hill, Blackburn, Sinclair and Lowell giving a strong sense of how concepts such as rootedness and being in place, as well as a preoccupation with homelands, remain a key concern amongst the writers of the Twentieth Century.

Olson has his own personal rivalry with Eliot. Whilst he looks west to the prairies and down towards Folsom, Eliot is undoubtedly looking towards the east, and Europe; although it is fair to say that Eliot doesn't find a specific locus to connect with in Europe, just a magnetic pull to the cosmopolitan landmass in general. He can connect nothing with nothing anywhere. Olson, quite clearly, is suspicious of the New England blue bloods, Lowell and Eliot, and, while the latter, as argued, has a tendency to occupy the liminal spaces in poetry, describing places from the position of the outsider looking in, Olson revels in his entire possession of, and occupation of, the very familiar Gloucester, New England, like some great, garrulous Gulliver. He situates himself entirely in the sea-city and keeps both feet on one shore and emanates the feeling that it had to be Gloucester; anywhere else just wouldn't do. Nowhere else could be the front yard or the creative precinct.

In the three writers that we have focused on, rather than a sense of liminality, we find a need for permanence and home, be it Gippsland, Snowdonia or Gloucester. What unites the three writers, ultimately, is their desire for imaginative possession of a place that they know or imagine their ancestors inhabited, with all the social duties, rites, ties and obligations that came with that habitation. A place through which all three share an ability to time travel, to experience time present, and imagine time past, and in which history first collides, then interacts with, the present. A place which gives a certainty and sense of knowing where they have come from even if they are unsure of where they are going. "To arrive where one started/And know the place for the first time." It is perfectly possible, and probably more common than we think, to exist in the Twentieth Century in a perfect state of Keatsian negative capability. Whilst we may not fully comprehend where we are, let alone where we are headed, it is probably very sensible to have a notion of where we have come from and Jones, Olson and Duggan all exhibit that and clearly take a sense of comfort in claiming at least a portion of their identity from the knowledge. It is certainly worth noting that, on the

whole, all three writers tend towards the local rather than the national which, again, sets them apart from Eliot, then, and in England.

In many ways, these poets can be seen to be the tip of a poetic iceberg. We could have just as easily looked at William Carlos Williams' *Paterson* series in which he attempts to achieve for Paterson, New Jersey, what Joyce's *Ulysses* did for Dublin, with all its New Jersey dialect.

A man is indeed a city, and for the poet there are no ideas but in things.¹⁶¹

Or Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns*, connecting his early life with the topography and history of his native West Midlands and the Mercian King, Offa, in particular.

King of the perennial holly-groves, the riven sandstone: overlord of the
M5: architect of the historic rampart and ditch,¹⁶²

Or even Robert Lowell who juxtaposed self and history in ways that shone light on both. The importance of the city of Boston can never be underestimated as a means of both identifying and understanding himself. Lowell, at his best, is deeply focused on the individual's self-defining relationship with history and the city and area connected with him – 'Memories of West Street and Lepke' and 'The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket' – root him in Boston in ways that we never find in the work of other natives of that city, Sylvia Plath and Anna Sexton. That said, Lowell did claim to trace his ancestry back to The Mayflower.

I am conscious that, with the exception of Lynette Roberts, all of the writers I have focused on are male. But I do not think place attachment a male thing. Lowell appears a Bostonian in ways that Plath and Sexton never do, but Emily Dickinson exhibits a keen sense of place in Amherst, almost inevitably, and poems such as 'Paean to Place', and others, by Wisconsin

¹⁶¹ William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, (New York: New Directions 1992) *Introduction*

¹⁶² Geoffrey Hill, *Mercian Hymns*, *Collected Poems*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985) p 105

poet, Lorine Niedecker, show a profound understanding of the connection between place and identity. The poets chosen for this study were simply chosen for the clear contrast that we see in them in their approach to their real or imagined environments.

All three writers in their sense of place invoke what Weil would have referred to as “certain particular treasures of the past”. Either cultural totems or incidents and legends from their personal ancestral hinterland. There is inevitably a sense of claiming a patch of earth or, at least, claiming a patch of history of earth to hold onto and it was always inconceivable that this wouldn’t happen once we stopped following the animals and settled down in the space between the two rivers to grow crops on our own strip of earth.

As in the oldest epic we have, *Gilgamesh*, the nature of the human condition means we have no choice but to permanently consider our own impermanence; the fact that however fleet our footsteps might be, they are also fleeting and thus we cast around us for something to stay rooted by. Some way of marking ourselves when we ourselves are gone. That each of the writers we have considered have bound realms to their soul with hooks of steel, is actually intelligent, understandable and touching in equal part. Whether it is Duggan hurrying home to be amongst the ghost gums and kookaburras or Jones inhabiting a magical and mythical Cambrian past, it is both comforting and affirming. If you are going to die, there has to be some comfort in dying on your own earth. As Duggan, himself, pointed out in my interview with him which is transcribed and annexed, “I did start to think, I’m going to be 70 next year and I thought I’m still pretty fit and could do a lot of stuff, but I don’t want to be here when I can’t. I would rather be somewhere where I have connections.” Which seems to me to be a pretty elemental human need.

Perhaps inevitably amongst poets there is exhibited, across the board, and at the heart of the Twentieth Century, a strain of discontent with the city and urban imagery can frequently be

used to represent corruption, soullessness and decadence. Inevitably this takes its cue from Eliot's *The Waste Land*, though it can be pre-figured even earlier in Thomson, but the theme can also be identified in *Paterson* and, to a lesser extent, in *Czargrad*. The strong metropolitan bias, on its own, is seldom a recommendation in any Twentieth Century poetry. It is not the re-developed Gloucester that Olson is eulogizing, but its past and its mythology. Similarly, David Jones is not drawn in North Wales to neglected towns like Llanrwst or Wrexham, but a more bucolic vision of a Snowdonian pastoral idyll and Laurie Duggan's Gippsland is part of the vast Australian natural centre. That poets, in choosing their earth, should choose it to be other than an urban landscape is perhaps as unsurprising as Keats expressing a penchant for nightingales.

What unites the three writers who are the main focus of this study, however, is the way in which they use attachment to a place as a means of exploring their past and their ancestry. Again taking the *Gilgamesh* motif, we can perhaps prolong our own brief lives by merging them with our predecessors with the additional benefit of gaining some added meaning and validation through the process. I define myself in terms of where I both come from originally as well as where I now reside. We have described David Jones' attachment to Wales in terms of *hiraeth*, but his attachment to Rotherhithe is more immediate and, in invoking his maternal grandfather, Ed Bradshaw, he is, in a sense, placing himself in the past in his grandfather's deck boots and elongating his own existence much in the same way that we can see Olson reflecting his current incarnation amongst the Nantucket sea-trade in general and its bluff characters in particular. Laurie Duggan is explicit about his father's people coming from Gippsland and that being the reason he focused his poems on that specific locus. By connecting with a place, we can connect with its past and, if that is a place where your forbears were prominent, it is not difficult to begin to comprehend your own existence in terms of that which has gone before and may still be flowing in your own blood. As Olson

was quoted in the introduction, “Place is where we get our bearings from...where we are anchored in the world.” As Weil wrote, in exile, “In order to love France, we must feel she has a past”

It is to that past that all our writers have connected, and rooted, and where they have found their proper ground.

Relation of the Poem to the Dissertation.

Simone Weil, who is the first reference in my dissertation, lies rooted permanently and, one assumes, finally in Bybrook Cemetery in Ashford, around 16 miles from Canterbury, two towns she knew but slenderly; Canterbury, if at all. The irony is never lost on me that one of the 20th Century's most ardent advocates for roots lies buried so far from her home and everything she held dear in occupied France and I always find a visit to the grave to be a poignant affair.

Taking Weil as a lead, my dissertation looks at the ways in which concepts of place and identity and self-understanding are integral to a full comprehension of the works of three poets. In particular, this is relevant when we revisit Weil's quote from the introductory chapter:

A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future.¹⁶³

My roots in Canterbury stem from a long history of working here in a very public role, running theatre companies, writing for the local newspaper, playing sports for city teams and running an iconic city establishment. In short, many of the ways in which a modern person can interact widely as part of a community.

Though now somewhat side-lined in Britain, a trend first observed by Defoe in the Seventeen Century, and continued remorselessly over decades, culminating in the disastrous Baedeker raids of the 1940s, Canterbury remains an important settlement world-wide. It is, itself, a UNESCO World Heritage site and the centre of the Anglican Communion; it is a

¹⁶³ Weil, *The Need for Roots*, p 43

place of deep spiritual importance to millions of people and is still the destination for pilgrimage. It is steeped in history. Again, recalling Weil, who wrote of France:

In order to love France, we must feel she has a past; but we must not love the historical wrapper of that past. We must love the part that is inarticulate, anonymous, which has vanished.

Indeed, so much of Canterbury has vanished, physically, but also in the sense of the voices that have long since left the city. The ancient spoken tongues, no longer spoken or even understood, and the stories that they told in danger of being forgotten forever. For much of the poem I have attempted to give a new articulacy to the anonymous part of Canterbury; to revive that which has vanished. Like Nennius in his *Historia Brittonum*, I have made a heap of all that I have found in the Kentish earth.

Because of its importance as a centre of pilgrimage, there is always an air of excitement connected with journeying to Canterbury. Whether it be the excitement of Chaucer's pilgrims at their onset in Southwark or the breathlessness of David Copperfield himself at market day, having made his way to the city down the Dover Road, there is always such a sense of potential which Ian Sinclair captures as he writes about journeying down to Canterbury for a conference on Charles Olson.

It's disorientating to know that you can be following the classic English pilgrimage route to Canterbury voiced by a kindly ghost sitting alongside you, recalling his days venturing into Kent.¹⁶⁴

To walk along the pilgrims' way is to walk along a spiritual ley line of England. The section of my own poem I had the most difficulty with was the recollection in September 1988 of journeying down from Yorkshire to Canterbury on a hot late summer's day to begin a new job and a new life. The recollection itself is still so vivid, with all the connotations of a

¹⁶⁴ Sinclair in Herd (Ed.), *Contemporary Olson* p 298

new start, the excitement of a life to be lived before me, the memory of detail and the emotions so full, but setting it down in words, initially, proved impossible.

Of Canterbury Who Fell In is a long poem focusing on the specific locus of the ancient city. As such, it relates the history of that specific locus, its rhythm, its life and my existence in it over a period of thirty five years. As with Jones, Duggan, certainly in *Crab and Winkle*, and Olson the focus of all our place studies is not our birthplace. Canterbury is not the city of my birth, nor is it where I grew up or spent my formative years. In defining my identity it is not long before I hit upon my Yorkshire roots by way of explaining myself, who I perceive myself to be and how I act. Whenever I get past junction 32 on the M1 I perceive myself to be home, and increasingly so as I head for the smaller portion of the East Riding in which I spent my first eighteen years of life. And yet, I have lived and worked in Canterbury since the age of 22 when I first accepted a position at a secondary school, where I subsequently went on to become the Headmaster. I have been married in Canterbury, suffered the loss of parents, become a grandfather and enjoyed some of the most meaningful relationships of my life here. Indeed, I have lived more than three quarters of my life here and have finished my growing up here. Its stones have been the stones I have railed against when in despair. Its fields where I have exalted. Whether we like it or not, the city and I have grown and changed together and I have formulated an understanding of the city as a locus with a very specific character based on both a rich history and a position of fundamental cultural significance. During my time here, Canterbury has been visited by the Pope and by royalty and ambassadors. Some of these figures I have met. Indeed, I have been involved in the planning of some of their visits. The landscape of Canterbury has changed as the council, and others, have sought to replace the hastily erected buildings of the 1950s and 60s, when the city emerged from its post war ruin, and now neither Canterbury, nor I, can say we are the same as we were in the late 1980s at the time of my arrival here. I like to think that we have grown

together and that now part of my identity, at least, is tied up with this city which I know, now, better than any city in the world or, indeed, any place that I have lived in. Thus *Of Canterbury Who Fell In* is an attempt to tell a significant part of my history as well as the history of Canterbury itself. My Canterbury is not the South London Allen Fisher evokes in *Place*, the Lambeth of his youth, though I do summon up the ancient history in the same way as he. At other times, like Jeremy Prynne and John Riley, I create an idealized vision of the holy city in Canterbury.

Canterbury doesn't give up its secrets easily. There are landmark moments such as the murder of Becket and the dissolution of the monasteries that everyone knows. But only the most ardent tourist will discover some of the other key events associated with the city. Not until I began to research in the cathedral library in the 1990s did I learn of the protracted visit of Richard the Lionheart in 1189 and the signing of the Quitclaim of Canterbury. Richard was not unusual amongst the Angevin rulers in that he spent as little time as possible in England and couldn't wait to hurry back to the richer lands of West and Southern France. In his ten year reign he spent as little as six months in England but, of those six months, six weeks were spent in this cathedral city. As with Olson in *The Maximus Poems*, I have had to do some digging to find the identity of the place and to resurrect names in danger of dying out.

The funeral of The Black Prince may be an event the curious tourist is alerted to in a visit to the cathedral, but much less well known is the two week visit of Queen Elizabeth I to celebrate her fortieth birthday in the city in 1573, with all its attached festivities. Her father had been a frequent visitor here, and not just so he could be accosted by the Holy Maid of Aldington in the precincts, and Charles I not only visited often, but consummated his marriage above the Fyndon Gate, much to the delight of one of his bed servants who afterwards preserved the royal pubic hairs as gifts for friends. Its literary history is rich. Aphra Behn and Christopher Marlowe were born here, Conrad lived just outside and is buried

here; Dickens was a frequent and enthusiastic visitor; the annual visit to Canterbury, postillions and all, was the highlight of his Summer.

Canterbury's importance owed as much to its geography as to its history. Every English ruler from Henry II to Charles II used Canterbury as a stopping off point for visits to the wider continent. The death of Becket made Canterbury the second most important site of pilgrimage in all of Europe, even bringing Erasmus at its height who, it is fair to say, was about as far from impressed as could be. These events I have incorporated into my work, but I also invoke events of potentially less, or different, significance. Edward IV held a parliament in the city and was here when he heard of the final capture of his rival Henry VI. We know that Keats was struggling to get *Endymion* significantly underway when he visited in 1817. It is delicious to imagine him writing that immortal beginning within the city walls. Mozart almost performed here, but certainly visited, and a direct counterpart of his, Ian Dury, was a lecturer at the art college in the 1970s and began his musical career here. Robert Wyatt and the highly influential Soft Machine emerged from the school I work at. In 1970 the long forgotten Medicine Ball Caravan festival rolled into town with Pink Floyd in the vanguard.

Two of the poets I focus on in my dissertation visited Canterbury, at least. David Jones did actually slap the effigy of Archbishop Peckham in the cathedral for crimes against the Welsh in 1921. Laurie Duggan lived here for many years and relates his experience directly in *Crab and Winkle*, but it was never fully home and he chose to settle in neighbouring Faversham, a dozen miles away, before returning to his native Australia.

There is no evidence to suggest that Charles Olson visited Canterbury, but his great idol Herman Melville certainly did and stayed at the city's Falstaff Hotel on Bonfire Night in 1849. He recalls Canterbury Cathedral in *Moby Dick*:

Her ancient decks were worn and wrinkled, like the pilgrim-worshipped flag-stone in Canterbury Cathedral where Becket bled.

Can Ahab's pursuit of the great whale also be viewed in terms of a pilgrimage? At separate times, all three poets are referenced in the poem.

The style of *Of Canterbury Who Fell In* also derives much from the works commented on in the dissertation, insofar as it is highly allusive and deals with a great deal of imagery not always directly related to the apparent subject in focus. It is probably the case that the poem would benefit from being delivered with its own concordance. Some images will resonate immediately, others may require looking up and some may never hit home at all, but, writing as someone who could never fathom the meaning or intention of Eliot's own wry notes on *The Waste Land*, I have resisted the temptation to intervene.

The poem is unashamedly modernistic, but also has elements of the epic. As such there are hat-tips to Homer, Chaucer, Dante, Spenser, Milton and Wordsworth. Like Duggan's *Crab and Winkle*, it can be episodic and sometimes falls down the occasional rabbit hole, but it takes the form of a Shepherd's Calendar and acknowledges this with nods to both Spenser and Clare. The calendar format was originally suggested to me by the form of Duggan's long work on the city. And the calendar connects us to the past. Modern Canterbury has its own rhythm, just like any other university town. Its beat changes when the students come, and again when the tourists come; and there have almost always been tourists. When we confront the calendar it is not so very difficult to imagine the medieval city with its Dominicans, Benedictines and White Friars and what the calendar and the passage of time meant for them. Canterbury is, perhaps, no longer an important city in the way that it was previously, but customs and traditions abide and connect us over the centuries. Shrove Tuesday, Lent, Ash

Wednesday, Whit. Sunday all still exist in one form or another today and still carry cultural capital.

The poem has a number of voices within it. The voice of the poet's persona, always on the left hand side of the page, is more akin to the quiet, unassuming and reflective voice of *Crab and Winkle*. The other voices are the imagined voice of the city, always on the right hand side of the page, and the voices of the many visitors framed in the centre. This polyphony of voices, some recent, some deeply historic, reflects the style of *The Maximus Poems*. In that work, the characters of Gloucester's past step on and off the stage of Olson's poem and I have unashamedly replicated that approach here. The voices may lack the bombast of Maximus himself, or the distinctive *hwyl* found in the poetry of Jones, but the patchwork approach of voice and counter-voice is intended to create an effect as unfinished and incomplete as the city of Canterbury itself. Some events in the city's history are recalled directly through close sources, such as *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* or Somner's *Antiquities of Canterbury*, whereas other events, such as the burning of the Canterbury martyrs, are described in wholly imagined terms and, in that case, written *in situ* at the Martyrs' Field itself. Whether this can be considered as an example of Olson's "composition by field" is open to debate.

Whilst Gloucester's history is deeply, unambiguously maritime, so Canterbury's is intrinsically religious as the prime see of the Church of England reflected in the city's motto *Ave Mater Angliae!* Consequently, the poem is suffused with religious imagery and litany from Candlemas, Passiontide, Easter, Passover, Pentecost, Advent and Christmas that the modern reader may now be unfamiliar with. I found it impossible to write the city's history without extensive referencing of the feast days and holidays that would have been so central to the lives of its inhabitants for so long and most of which had a strong Christian core. Whilst my experiences of Canterbury have, largely, been secular occasions it is impossible

not to interact deeply with the cathedral church itself. Hence also the frequent usage of Latin litany throughout the text. Latin has been one of the shriller of the city's voices over the centuries.

The fact that many of the celebrations span the centuries is also a helpful key to the past and my insistence on food and drink throughout the work is an attempt to connect today to yesterday. Having lived for some time so close to The Goods Shed in Canterbury, our local and evangelical farmers' market with its insistence on seasonal and local produce, I was minded to include food, drink and celebration as a central trope of the poem itself. We may not eat salsify or lampreys with the enthusiasm of our ancestors, but huffkins, Canterbury tarts and cob nuts are still very much a part of the cuisine of this County. As Heaney said "poetry is what we do to break bread with the dead." Breaking bread with the ancestral Cantiacci seems to me a very appropriate and fitting gesture. And it is very satisfying that there are still foods unique or very local to Kent. Canterbury aside, the county has a pride and a personality of its own that contrasts with the Surreys and the Berkshires of this world.

Likewise, the reader will confront the not infrequent use of Anglo-Saxon in the poem. For many years this, and then middle English, would have been the common tongue of the people of the city and its usage is intended to give historical depth and layering to the work as well as to catch the possibilities of the breath and the breathing of the thousands who have gone before. It is intended as a way of transferring energy from source to poem to reader in the way that Olson hoped projective verse might have the capacity to carry epic works. The polyphony of voices, whether it be Caesar himself, the breathless Keats or Shakespeare's imagined words of Jack Cade, bounces against itself to capture both the craziness of attempting to comprehend elusive history and the threefold nature of time past, present and future.

It might be worth pausing at this juncture to observe that at the very beginning of this journey, I told my supervisor that I had no intention of writing about T.S. Eliot, largely on the basis that I didn't feel I had anything new to say about him. Since then, every time I have found myself writing about the poetics of place I have invoked Eliot and his is the voice I hear most clearly when I read my own work. As he observed in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', it is impossible not to hear and imitate the voices of the past and the writers who have trodden ground before you. As such, I make no excuses here.

We shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.¹⁶⁵

Time past and time present in *Of Canterbury Who Fell In* are both perhaps contained in time future. And time future contained in time past. I have borrowed images from his *Murder in the Cathedral* in memory of that time when he, himself, came down to direct the world premiere of the play in The Chapter House, with The Red Dean, no doubt, in attendance.

Canterbury is a very ancient city. Whether, indeed, it is older than Rome, as Somner asserts in his *The Antiquities of Canterbury*, is unknowable, but the fourth century BCE jadeite axehead found here and the evidence of the existence of the beaker people in these parts would seem to suggest that people have been living in this corner of England and contemplating their place in the world for a very long time. It is certainly, at least, in its third millennium as a settlement.

What is Canterbury to me? Is it real or imagined? Presumably, the former. I have walked, and continue to walk, down Heathenmanne Lane, even though the name has gone. I walk Old Jewry and place my feet to the earth where Richard the Lionheart, Becket, Henry the Eighth and Christopher Marlowe placed theirs. I have sat in the stone house once owned by

¹⁶⁵ T.S.Eliot 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in *Selected Essays*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1932) p 14

Jacob the Jew and touched Augustine's Chair. I have stood, like Karl Marx, at the railway station and consulted the timetable. But there has always been poetry in it for me. It is not the mythical Wales of David Jones. Nor do I need to invoke part rant, part jeremiad at its destruction in the manner of Olson addressing the fathers of Gloucester. No doubt it is continuing to evolve as it should. It makes perfect sense to me, in ways that it didn't to Laurie Duggan.

But in writing about the city, I have taken something from Duggan, Jones and Olson in my portrayal of it. I take pride in its heroic past when events enacted here thundered around the world and I hear the cacophony of its past as David Jones hears legendary Wales with all its Cambrian glory. I hear its ordinary voices as Olson hears the roar of Nantucket whalers and I hear the contemporary voices of modern Canterbury as Laurie Duggan did, when he visited pub after pub, and listened in on ordinary conversations.

And I can now comfortably concede to myself that part of my identity, part of how I understand my place in the world and who I am, is wrapped up with the history I have of living in this ancient city. I have become rooted to the extent that I comprehend the world through its prism and I do feel a stirring in the soul when I come off the A2 at Harbledown and sense that I am nearly home.

To seal all this connectivity to the works I have studied at length, almost to make a blood oath between those texts and my own, the final image of *Of Canterbury Who Fell In* is an amalgam of the final images, collectively, of *The Maximus Poems*, *Crab and Winkle* and *The Anathemata* to give one ultimate, modernistic flourish to the work; one final heap of broken images to signify the epiphany of both comprehension and bewilderment that we encounter when we forensically consider our own and our environment's history. Time past.

Appendix: An Interview with Laurie Duggan. October 11th 2018
The Goods Shed, Canterbury

This interview took place one week before Laurie Duggan left the UK, after twelve years, to return to his native Australia and coincided with the publication of his *Selected Poems: 1971-2017*.

LD: Probably the most perceptive Australian critic that I've had is Martin Duwell, he does a monthly blog on line. He is a retired English academic from the University of Queensland. He has reviewed two or three of mine on that. Martin is sharp.

KM: On your blog you describe yourself as an Australian poet living in Kent. How Australian are you?

LD: I discover how Australian I am when I phone someone, like a plumber, who I've phoned before and they say 'Oh Laurie' and I realise that the reason that they know it is me is because I'm the only Australian they deal with and so they recognise me immediately. I suppose it's the usual thing for anyone if you move somewhere else – you only become aware of your own accent by the way it is reflected by your auditors, basically. I'm not a nationalist, never have been – I've always tended to go for the local rather than the national – in certain circles I've found it amusing that I was suddenly a brash Australian, whereas in Australia I am kind of this retiring, impossibly modest person.

KM: Billy Collins syndrome in Australian?

LD: Yes, it's kind of strange. And that's certainly cultural.

KM: In your writing, are we hearing the voice of a person or a persona?

LD: Oh it's the writing talking really. Whether it purports to be from this person, Laurie Duggan, is debateable. I've never been big on my own personality.

KM: The first line of my thesis is that Simone Weil said 'To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul'. You are about to be uprooted. Are you going 'home'?

LD: That sounds like something from Barry McKenzie actually!

KM: Yes, Rooted has a different meaning in Australia I do know.

LD: I don't know, I think that when we moved here in 2006 at first I was thinking ... we decided not to visit Australia for a couple of years and I thought basically that this was a good idea as I would be overcome by nostalgia but what I found in the first few years was that it just didn't happen. I would go back and I would enjoy visiting, but I wouldn't return to the UK thinking 'oh no, here I am back here again'. So I didn't feel like I was cut off at all. I think that it's because I tend to adapt to where I am anyway. As an aside from that I think it

is significantly different the way it is now to what it was like in the 1950s or early 60s when, as an Australian writer, travelling over here, you would be travelling by sea as air travel was too expensive, you would only have postal communication. You were, basically, in a new world. You were on your own. It's not like that anymore with the web.

But a couple of years I went back (and this sounds impossibly sentimental), hearing native birds and the smell of gum trees I thought 'bloody hell, I've got to return' and since then the feeling has become stronger. There is also another consideration, a purely technical one I guess: we didn't want to be both retired and living here because paying for heating and various other things like medical expenses would just get on top of us and I'm not eligible for very much since I have never worked here. I did start to think 'I'm going to be 70 next year' and I thought I'm still pretty fit and could do a lot of stuff, but I don't want to be here when I can't. I would rather be somewhere where I have those connections.

KM: In *Crab and Winkle*, the limits of your language seem, to quote Wittgenstein, to be the limits of your world?

LD: Yes

KM: And is it fair to say that *Crab and Winkle* is the product of a man speaking a slightly different lingo?

LD: I think so, yeah? An English poet-friend said I'd gotten some things amusingly wrong, but that's the special prerogative of the visitor! The same thing happens in long poems by other non-British authors. But the outsider thing can bring out details that a local might pass over. It happens in work by Kenneth Rexroth and Jonathan Williams. In a couple of places I left empty square brackets to indicate a lack of knowledge. I got the idea of doing this from the American poet Guy Davenport's translation of Sappho. Have you ever seen those?

KM: I know of them.

LD: Because the manuscripts are rough and they've got gaps and they've got torn, instead of attempting to fill the space Devonport just used brackets and that's where I got the actual idea of using them from. But in that sense I use it to say "you fill in the appropriate adjective or term."

KM: It's a part of the culture and so when you go to Ightham Mote and you realise it's called Eye-tem Mote – you talk about the strange pronunciations of things

LD: Well the classic one is the place called Wrotham – which is Rootem, which again sounds like Barry McKenzie. You get caught up with this all the time, but then so do people here if you come from a different part of the country. If you go up North people will think it's kind of funny if you don't know how to say the name of a place. And places around here like Gunstone, spelled Goodnestone, Meopham and places I've just had to learn. Well Meopham, I just had to listen to railway announcements.

KM: How "other" was it when you arrived?

LD: It wasn't totally "other" because we'd both been here...

KM: You'd been to Manchester?

LD: Yeah, I'd spent three months in Manchester in 1993 and I'd also been to the UK in 1987. We lived at the university of Manchester for three months and I've still got a sort of affection for the place even though the student accommodation and the surrounding area was pretty kind of grungy; there was something about the city that I liked. I mean one of the things I've loved here more than anything else is that the regional art galleries are just so brilliant. Galleries in Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, I spent a lot of time getting on trains and going walking through the various cities that the railway passed by

KM: Talking of what we talked of earlier, the kind of East Kent micro-climate. What were the unusual things about moving to this part of the county which is close enough to London to be cosmopolitan, but far enough away to have its own identity?

LD: Well, one of the things that I actually found interesting was that a lot of people that I knew in London knew less about around here than they did about, say, Yorkshire. It was as if it was almost a kind of lost place even though it's a Home County. Is it a Home County?

KM: Yes, yes it is.

LD: But people didn't know a lot about it, it was somewhere you just passed through on the way to Europe. So it was actually quite surprising, despite the fact that there'd been all these writers like Conrad, Ford Maddox Ford who lived down here for considerable periods. It seemed to a lot of people like an unknown territory. It was a place that a lot of friends that I had in London just didn't go to...and they may well go out to the West Country and they may well go out to Newcastle, or Cumbria and all of that, but they didn't tend to come out to Kent.

KM: I think that's a very accurate reflection

LD: I just seemed to meet a lot of people that were like that. It was like they really didn't know what it was like out here. Rosemary has a lot of relatives here because her uncles and aunts are all here and we've had occasions with them in the past when we were up in Manchester though, of course, they hadn't been up there before and they thought Manchester was a nasty and slightly scary place. They couldn't believe that Cheshire was nearby, because Cheshire was a nice place. It's the big significances in distance which you notice. I mean Melbourne and Sydney are 550 miles apart, but here things can change in as little as 25 miles. People's idea of space is a lot more confined.

KM: *The Ash Range* is another book of yours that fascinates me. How connected are you to Gippsland?

LD: My father's family came from Gippsland and my father grew up in a place called Ensay in Victoria, which was named after one of the Scottish Islands, it was named by a Scottish explorer/exploiter called Angus McMillan in the 1840s and my father's family had been there for quite a long time, but it's impossible to trace my ancestry on my father's side. They may

have been convicts. Who knows? They were in Australia a long time, before the middle of the 19th Century anyway. Dad was one of 10 children, his father was basically a farm labourer in Gippsland and the area they were in was in the mountains, fairly rugged. My grandfather was a small man. He was an extremely good jockey and won a lot of races. He also worked for the postal service and he used to deliver mail to remote mining camps. Dad became a motor mechanic and then during the depression he moved to Melbourne. He ended up being a mechanic in the Australian Air Force.

KM: Do you have roots in Gippsland?

LD: To that extent I do.

KM: Do you feel them?

LD: To a certain extent although after I wrote that book, I don't know, I don't feel any great need to go back there. I wasn't born there. I was born in Melbourne after the war. My father had been in Melbourne about 10 years by then and my mother had grown up in Melbourne. She was from a different social class. Her family were more middle class, but they had come down in the world because my grandfather on my mother's side had sort of Well, he was nuts. He spent the last eight years of his life in a mental institution. I used to joke that the only family connection with writing that I had was the fact that he and his brother ran a firm that manufactured much of the printers' ink that newspapers used. They were the Barrow brothers and I think they went out to Australia probably in the 1850s so they were a bit later than my father's side of the family, but they were well before the Russian Pogroms and all that sort of thing. They were a Jewish family who would have been in England for some time – probably a couple of centuries even.

KM: You have roots in Melbourne?

LD: Yes, my roots are in Melbourne even though I don't mind if I ever live there or not. I will certainly visit there a lot as I have friends there and Rosemary's parents are still there (her father is about to turn 90) so we will go backwards and forwards. I am hoping to be in Sydney. It's interesting given the political situation right now, I mean the Australian Government at the moment is just awful and they are having a pretty terrible time. So I am not going back to a place where things are politically any better than they are here but I did say – and I don't know how much sense this makes – those people are shits but they are kind of 'my' shits which means I feel a bit more able to deal with them. I suspect that the current Australian Government is not going to last all that much longer but maybe the one here won't either. Yeah, there is nasty stuff back there, there is no question about it – the place isn't paradise and that isn't the reason I want to go back. It's the gum trees and the birds.

KM: Ghost gums and birds?

LD: Yes, particularly Australian magpies and parrots.

KM: I think its (*Crab and Winkle*) strength is that it both does and doesn't take itself too seriously. Should there be levity in poetry?

LD: Oh absolutely! A couple of the poets I like a lot, the American poets particularly, someone like Philip Whalen, there are a couple of his books in particular – a book that he did when he was in Japan called *Scenes of Life at the Capital* which is just a wonderful book and there is another one called *Severance Pay*. He did write more than that, but those books are great and there is a lot of wit in them. And someone like Jonathan Williams. so much of his stuff is very funny. I met him over here because he used to spend half the year in Dentdale with his partner Tom and the other half of the year he would stay in North Carolina in the States and there is a poem about one of the most amazing road signs that he ever saw - O’Nans Auto Service, it’s just priceless. When I started writing I came up against a culture where you could be typecast as a ‘funny poet’ which meant you weren’t a serious poet which I always thought was completely rubbish. The further you go back in time a lot of the early poetry is just squibs and jokes.

KM: Do you think *The Maximus Poems* would have been improved with a little more levity?

LD: Yes, probably. As much as I like *The Maximus Poems* I actually like them as they get towards the end when Olson is more aware of his own mortality and it becomes a bit more abbreviated and they are a lot less bombastic. I don’t know if I would have ever really wanted to meet Olson particularly, although I have met two or three people who have met him and had dealings with him – Basil King, for one and Ed Dorn.

KM: I’m not sure we would have got a word in yet. We’d still have been on the end of the Olson lecture. While we’re on the subject of Olson, to what extent would you say *Crab and Winkle* is Projective Verse?

LD: Well, Projective Verse is a kind of an ambit claim in a way. I don’t think you can entirely take it at its face value. I mean I think Projective Verse is really an extension of both objectivism and imagism, they are taking it into something that is a bit more, well as opposed to imagism I guess, it’s a bit more verbally active. I can see what the objectivists were up to by calling themselves objectivists. But it was someone else who said, I think it was Harriet Weaver, ‘You can’t just present your poems, you have to have a movement’; so they invented the movement. The best book about objectivism is the one that Michael Heller wrote called *Conviction’s Net of Branches*. It’s quite a few years old now but it has been reprinted. It’s about the best possible introduction to objectivism. And Heller makes some really interesting distinctions between what the objectivists were doing and what someone like Robert Lowell was doing. I won’t go into those as I can’t quote him exactly, but I think he makes some really sharp distinctions between the uses that were made of experience. Lowell was always at the centre of his own work because he felt his family was always at the centre of things. The Lowell’s were prominent New Englanders. Someone said that if you were a Lowell, there were only about two other families you could talk to in New England. Lowell’s poetry is really just a consequence of all this, especially in the later stuff where he is just out of his brain on tranquillisers and is writing those terrible sonnets. Mind you I think that Lowell’s *Life Studies* is a very good book and there are a couple of other books he wrote around that period which are great, but the early work was turgid and the later work was just completely lax.

KM: I've read articles that have talked about, not necessarily a similarity, but almost as if an influence on your writing has been Frank O'Hara. My own reading, sometimes - Paul Blackburn.

LD: Oh Paul Blackburn, much more so! O'Hara is not really a strong influence. I mean, I like his poetry a lot, but he has not the same sort of influence on me as Blackburn has had. Blackburn, Whalen, and a lot of the early experimental Williams, in particular things like 'Spring and All' and 'The Descent of Winter'.

KM: What do you take from Blackburn?

LD: It's that sense of what you can leave out - of how you can convey something. One of my favourite books by Blackburn is *In, On or About The Premises* which is just him in a bloody pub basically, but the way he registers things and picks up on what someone is saying, he is quite aware of the sounds of all this sort of stuff. The thing about Blackburn is that he also has this kind of resonance with the troubadour poets. He is picking up on something of them - I wouldn't at all want to romanticise it - but the slightly vagabondish nature of that poetry, of people who are not necessarily trumpeting what the state wanted to hear, that's really part of it. The thing about Blackburn is the way he spaces things out on the page. He has incredible aural sense and there's music there, that really shows the way that you can use music in poetry without using conventional verse form.

KM: What's wrong with conventional verse forms and meters? You have shunned them throughout your career?

LD: No, I have used them on occasions. I have used them for satire, which is probably significant. That's how I learned to write - by learning how to do that stuff. I did things like counting syllables, I measured beats, pentameters etcetera. I grew up doing ABBA rhyme schemes, villanelles and all those sort of things. Which is kind of one of the reasons why I relate to my compatriot Alan Wearne because he said you should have a go at these things, even if you don't continue to do them. I think it's a good teaching thing. So I grew up learning about all these structures.

KM: But it restricts the voice ultimately?

LD: It's kind of interesting that the one thing that I've found regular form useful for is satire and the reason I wrote the satires in the late 70s early 80s was because I had been dispatched by a few critics as being a fairly formless dumb, hippy poet and it was partly 'Look at this. I'll show you! I can do this as well as you can!' And I certainly could as well as those people who criticised me, if not as well as the people who were doing all the good work. Satire seemed a suitable use for it. I'm not a hippy poet, but I guess I am laid back. My attitude has always been, "Well, your feet are on the ground, what are you going to do about it?" I really do get annoyed by poets who presume their own importance.

KM: It inevitably comes with the territory. The moment you use the personal pronoun and you publish a poem, you're announcing the arrival of an ego and it's a question of how

heavily it lands. As you say, the ego is the problem with *The Maximus Poems*, because of the bombastic tone.

LD: This is what I like about Philip Whalen a lot. He presents this 'I' character as being almost inept, as no kind of hero whatsoever, just a person trying to record things, sometimes not very well. I can empathise with that.

KM: The best example in some ways is Larkin who presents unpalatable views in the guise that it's a persona, it's not necessarily me speaking, but the kind of biography afterwards tells us that it was.

LD: I've got my Philip Larkin poem. I've got a couple of poems where I just subtracted one letter from the word that changed the meaning altogether. I did one with Eliot which was, "I've measured out my wife with coffee spoons" and the Larkin was, "Philip Larkin, the Librarian from Hell". When I studied at Monash I did a couple of years of Early English and the thing that struck me about it was how much of it was just squibs, just priests writing down jokes. There was nothing really pretentious about it at all. I like that. Doing things that other people might consider as trivial. I don't. I think a lot of things that last are actually fragments. I work hard on a lot of stuff and there are some things that come quite quickly, but I often realise afterwards these are things I've been working on for a long time in my head. Whereas the things I do a lot of work on are things I've just put down and then I go over them again and again and again. Ginsberg did this. He went on about spontaneity but he did revise. The best Ginsberg feels very quick. The last thing that he wrote that was any good was *The Fall of America*, which is fantastic poetry.

KM: I'm one of the few people who just doesn't like *Howl*.

LD: Oh *The Fall of America* is better. Much better. *Howl*? Yeah, I can see where it belongs and the same goes for *Kaddish*, although *Kaddish* is better than *Howl*, but *The Fall of America* is just fantastic, it's much more likeable, and the other thing about it is it's much more related to place. After that he ended up writing songs for pop concerts and a lot of his late work is just not very good. But the best Ginsberg is terrific.

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