

Rewriting the North:
Place, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Devolution

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Abstract

Between the 1997 devolutionary moment and the 2016 Brexit-vote, the Union's continuity has become increasingly uncertain. In England, the fraught relationship between the North and the South East of England has been at the centre of debates regarding devolution, with the 'English Question' taking on an explicitly regional dimension. At the same time, British devolution developed a distinctively cultural registration, functioning on the one hand as a surrogate for national parliamentary representation; and, on the other, regional decentralisation, an attempt to disrupt the status of London as Britain's cultural epicentre. *Rewriting the North* extends this debate by appraising the relationship between British constitutional culture and the literary North. To do so, this thesis advances two interlinked arguments. First, that Northern England has functioned in the national imagination less as a geographical territory than as a culturally loaded spatial metaphor for a nexus of socio-economic and constitutional tensions throughout Britain. Second, that this construction of the North has been augmented by a persistent cultural North-South divide, which has served as a bulwark of the Union in securing the continued suppression of a national England.

Drawing on political arguments advanced by the New Left, and contemporary literary interventions in this field, *Rewriting the North* identifies what I term 'the cultural politics of devolution'. Through close readings of six contemporary authors – Sunjeev Sahota, Sarah Hall, Anthony Cartwright, Adam Thorpe, Fiona Mozley, and Sarah Moss – this thesis uncovers the processes by which twenty-first-century fiction about Northern England imagines alternative democratic futures for the region and the English nation. The corpus of primary works situates the North at the centre of several contemporary political developments in Britain, and is characterised by the complexities of devolution

as a state-led process: uneven development, tensions between regional and national powers, democratic deficit, and agency are central concerns to which these novels consistently return. 'The cultural politics of devolution' thus represents a new theoretical approach to devolutionary studies that stages a dialogue between a decentralised literary-critical practice and a thematic concern with political devolution as a state-led process. *Rewriting the North* considers the extent to which twenty-first-century representations of Northern England simultaneously convey an urgency for alternatives to British state centralisation and reflect the limits of devolution for radical democratic change. The formal and stylistic contradictions of the texts discussed herein indicate a rejection of devolution as an emancipatory challenge to British hegemony, and position Northern England's democratic promise in direct opposition to the Union.

Introduction: Locating the Cultural Politics of Devolution

When I relocated to Nottingham in 2017 to begin work on this thesis, I had not predicted the extent to which my time over the next three years would be spent occupying the space between Junctions 25 and 35 of the M1. During these commutes, I followed signs directing me towards ‘The South’ as I headed for my new institutional home. Still, upon reaching my junction to leave the motorway, road signs continued to designate this area as being much further away than where I currently was. Had I not already reached ‘The South’ in Nottingham? And where had I exited ‘The North’? I certainly could not recall a particular moment signalling my departure, and the area remained frequently signposted almost immediately after I had left the A-roads of York. And what did it mean to be leaving ‘The North’ to some part of England that I very much considered to be part of ‘The South’, even though it did not look that much further away on a map? Contemplating these questions, it was on the non-places of the M1 that I became increasingly aware that the North is not just a geographical territory. On the one hand, it is a cardinal direction, no different from East, West, or South. On the other, however, it is a culturally loaded spatial metaphor for a nexus of socio-economic and, as this thesis will argue, *constitutional* tensions throughout Britain.¹

It is the central contention of this thesis that constructions of the North have served a state-supporting function whereby Northern England is simultaneously

¹ My distinction between ‘the North’ and ‘Northern England’ throughout this thesis is more than a point of nomenclature. In order to mitigate the risk of reinforcing a mythological ‘North’ or ‘Northernness’, ‘the North’ refers to the ideological construction I identify in literary and cultural production, while ‘Northern England’ describes the geographic region.

marginalised but integral to the preservation of the British Union.² In the chapters that follow, I identify the diverse ways in which twenty-first-century novels set in and about Northern England have responded to the region's contradictory status, tracing how they attempt to imagine alternative political possibilities for Northern England and the English nation. The texts under discussion here offer different lenses through which to read the North as part of broader constitutional questions concerning regional uneven development and England's own place in the Union. Sunjeev Sahota's Sheffield-based novels, *Ours are the Streets* (2011) and *The Year of the Runaways* (2015) explore the geographic and socio-economic elisions inherent in multicultural ideology, revealing political multiculturalism to be a unitary state logic that relies on uneven development throughout England. Read against New Labour's redefinition of Britishness as part of a multicultural politics, they offer critiques of the state-sanctioned categories of Britishness and British citizenship that emerged at the turn of the millennium. In Sarah Hall's *Haweswater* (2002), *The Carhullan Army* (2007), and *The Wolf Border* (2015), the fraying of the British state intersects with several socio-economic and political divisions between rural peripheries in the North-West of England and Westminster, local versus national priorities, pressures for regional devolution in Cumbria, and the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum (which *The Wolf Border* imagines to be successful). The final four novels examined in this thesis – Anthony Cartwright's *The Cut* (2017), Adam Thorpe's *Missing Fay* (2017), Fiona Mozley's *Elmet* (2017) and Sarah Moss' *Ghost Wall* (2018) – were published shortly after the United Kingdom narrowly voted in support of leaving the European Union. These texts emerge from a specific political moment of

² This thesis is focused on the Union of Parliaments and England's place in an increasingly devolved multi-national state form. While I recognise that there are many different competing nationalisms throughout the UK, Celtic, Ulster, and Welsh nationalisms are beyond the scope of this study.

constitutional instability and represent a culmination of the geographic, cultural, socio-economic, and political tensions explored within the first two chapters. As I will demonstrate, these texts evoke a set of socio-political and geographical relations in which the North is a formative and yet under-theorised ideological engine of the British state. This position is increasingly relevant at a time when regional devolution, national independence, and the future of Britain are key elements of contemporary political debate throughout the UK.

The vote to leave the EU on 23rd June 2016 catalysed several existing constitutional tensions throughout the UK. Wrangles over the Irish border and ongoing pressures for Scottish independence led to increasingly visible fissures throughout the four nations. At the same time, the question of England – both regarding its status in the constitutional organisation of the Union and regional inequality throughout the nation – has resurfaced as an urgent contemporary concern.³ For many, the Leave vote was an English revolt against an outward-looking ‘Global Britain’.⁴ Consequently, some critics

³ See Craig Calhoun, ‘Populism, Nationalism and Brexit’, in *Brexit: Sociological Responses*, ed. by William Outhwaite (London: Anthem Press, 2017), pp. 57–76; Michael Kenny, ‘English Nationalism, the 2019 Election and the Future of the British State’, *Political Insight*, 11.1 (2020), 24–27; Anthony Barnett, ‘Albion’s Call: Brexit, Democracy and England’ (Open Democracy, 2018) <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/film-albion-s-call-brexit-democracy-and-england/>> [accessed 16 January 2020]; Barnett, *The Lure of Greatness, England’s Brexit & America’s Trump* (London: Unbound, 2017); Jason Cowley and Katy Shaw, ‘The English Question’, *New Statesman*, 27 November 2019 <<https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2019/11/english-question>> [accessed 16 January 2020]; Alex Niven, *New Model Island: How to Build a Radical Culture Beyond the Idea of England* (London: Zed, 2019).

⁴ Theresa May’s first speech as Prime Minister utilised the rhetoric of ‘truly global Britain’ to describe the nation taking its rightful place on the world stage, unhindered by Brussels’ administration. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-governments-negotiating-objectives-for-exiting-the-eu-pm-speech>. For an analysis of Brexit as a product of Britain’s post-imperial decline, see Anshuman A. Mondal, ‘Scratching the Post-Imperial Itch’ in *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses* ed. by Robert Eaglestone (London: Routledge, 2017) pp. 82-91, and for a discussion of Brexit and a populist English nationalism, see Barnett, *The Lure of Greatness* and Craig Calhoun, ‘Populism, Nationalism and Brexit’ in *Brexit: Sociological Responses* ed. by William Outhwaite (London: Anthem Press, 2017) pp.57-76.

suggested that, in the post-Brexit-vote period, a ‘progressive culture’ cannot be imagined without abandoning the idea of England altogether.⁵ The increasing focus on England in the political sphere was matched in literary culture, with a surge of post-Brexit-vote novels seemingly critiquing the ‘Little Englandism’ that was perceived to lay at the heart of Brexit. Bruno Vincent’s *Five on Brexit Island* (2016), Sam Byers’ *Perfidious Albion* (2018) and Ian McEwan’s *The Cockroach* (2019) offer satirical and deeply pessimistic visions of Englishness, while John Lanchester’s *The Wall* (2019) and Fiona Shaw’s *Outwalkers* (2018) utilise dystopian allegory in their narratives centred on the securitisation of territorial borders.⁶ Britain’s status as an island nation takes on a new meaning in Lanchester’s novel, with a concrete barrier erected around its periphery, and Shaw’s young-adult *bildungsroman* imagines a future of constitutional rupture and governmental surveillance that encloses England from the rest of Britain and the wider world.

Crucial to understanding twenty-first-century tensions surrounding the future of England is the regional dimension to Brexit-era Englishness. While devolution on a national scale began more than twenty years ago, there is a growing appetite for devolved powers in the English regions, with the North of England at the forefront of these debates.⁷ Indeed, places within Northern England have a long history of differentiating

⁵ See Niven, *New Model Island* and ‘Why It’s Time to Stop Talking about English Identity’, *The Guardian*, 15 July 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/15/english-identity-patriotism-england-independent>> [accessed 15 September 2020].

⁶ Paul Kingsnorth’s *The Wake* (2014), set during the Norman conquest, is also often retrospectively read as a Brexit novel insofar as it forebodes the focus on Englishness that was catalysed in the referendum. See Christian Schmitt-Kilb ‘A case for a Green Brexit? Paul Kingsnorth, John Berger and the pros and cons of a sense of place’ in *The Road to Brexit: A Cultural Perspective on British Attitudes to Europe*, ed. by Ina Habermann (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 162-178.

⁷ See Sue Longlands, ‘Taking Back Control: Devolution, Agency and Brexit in the North of England’ in *Scotland and Arbroath 1320 - 2020: 700 Years of Fighting for Freedom, Sovereignty, and Independence* ed. by Klaus Peter Muller (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020), pp. 509-522.

their local politics from Westminster's centralised authority, leading to Northern England occupying a position within the national imagination as a 'region of discontent': from the Jarrow March in 1936, the Miners' Strikes in the 1970s and 1980s, to the North-East's devolution referendum in 2004, and the deeply politicised representation of the region in Brexit discourse.⁸

One account of Brexit holds that the referendum provided a form of democratic participation for England's socio-economic peripheries and the opportunity to seize power – if only temporarily – from a perceived London-based political elite.⁹ In his analysis of Brexit voting demographics, Tom Hazeldine suggests that 'though the North-South divide isn't England's only fault line, it's no accident that the deindustrialized periphery ranged itself against the London establishment in the referendum, sealing Remain's fate'.¹⁰ This association between the North and the 'deindustrialized periphery' reproduces a common regional stereotype within Brexit's political discourse, but Hazeldine nonetheless highlights an important point concerning how the EU referendum became entangled with questions of regional devolution as a symptom of England's uneven development.¹¹

The mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, spoke shortly after the referendum, arguing that devolution is 'the best answer to Brexit' and 'the time has come

⁸ John Tomaney, 'Anglo-Scottish Relations: A Borderland Perspective', in *Anglo-Scottish Relations from 1990 to Devolution and Beyond*, ed. by William L. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 231–48; For more on the 'One Yorkshire' devolution movement, see <<https://www.york.gov.uk/council/one-yorkshire-devolution/1>> [accessed 10 May 2020].

⁹ See Andy Bounds, 'Andy Burnham sees more devolution as "best answer to Brexit"', *Financial Times*, 9 May 2018. <<https://www.ft.com/content/7a6aa9c0-52ce-11e8-b3ee-41e0209208ec>> [accessed 10 May 2020].

¹⁰ Tom Hazeldine, 'The Revolt of the Rustbelt', *New Left Review*, 105.1 (2017), 51–79 (p. 61).

¹¹ See Hazeldine's development of this thesis in *The Northern Question: A Political History of the North-South Divide* (London: Verso, 2020).

to free up places like Greater Manchester to chart our own path and our own way of responding to the uncertainty it brings'.¹² Burnham's assertion invokes earlier debates in political science regarding the future of England both within the Union and as a nation which urgently needed to reconcile its own socio-economic and geopolitical fault lines. In 2000, Robert Hazell proposed that there are two versions of the 'English Question': 'A UK version, about rebalancing England's place in the Union post-devolution' and an 'English version, about decentralising the government of England'.¹³ There is, then, a *regional* 'English Question' that is internal to England, and which has persisted for two decades into the twenty-first century.

At the same time, Brexit marked a watershed for the place of the North in Britain's contemporary political and literary imagination. From the outset of the campaigns, the EU referendum reactivated discussion of the North-South divide within a distinctively twenty-first-century political frame and saw a geographically undefined, discursive version of the North become a fulcrum of the Leave vote in media and political discourse.¹⁴ Seen as a 'revolt of the rustbelt' against Britain's metropolitan elite, the referendum pitted the placeless and culturally constructed poles of 'North' and 'South' against each other once again. Both media and critical accounts framed Northern England as an inward-looking, nostalgic regional backwater that had failed to shake off the effects of deindustrialisation, becoming a 'distressed locality', home to 'the left behind' and to

¹² Burnham cited in Bounds, n.p.

¹³ Robert Hazell, *The English Question* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 221.

¹⁴ See, for example, Kirsty Major, 'Why the North of England Will Regret Voting for Brexit', *The Independent*, 24 June 2016 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/why-the-north-of-england-will-regret-voting-for-brexit-a7101321.html>> [accessed 14 July 2020] and Ben Glaze and Jack Blanchard, 'Labour Heartlands Give Huge Backing to Brexit as the North Votes to Leave', *Mirror*, 24 June 2016 <<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/labour-heartlands-give-huge-backing-8271074>> [accessed 14 July 2020].

Sunderland, England's 'Brexit city'.¹⁵ This association was also reflected in a wave of post-Brexit novels concentrating primarily on working-class communities in small – often deindustrialised – towns broadly located in Northern England. Cartwright's *The Cut*, Thorpe's *Missing Fay*, Jon McGregor's *Reservoir 13* (2017), Amanda Craig's *Lie of the Land* (2017), and Kenneth Stevens' *2020* (2017) all retreat to England's socio-economic peripheries to explain the victory of the Leave campaign, while, contrastingly, Linda Grant's *A Stranger City* (2019) offers a celebratory portrayal of London's extra-national status as a 'multicultural' city. Put simply, the development of a post-Brexit-vote literary culture saw the North's status as London's inward-looking counterpart reaffirmed in the national consciousness.

In this context of ongoing disparity between England's metropolitan centre and the North, *Rewriting the North* examines the ways twenty-first-century fiction set in and about Northern England explores the concept of political devolution. What the texts discussed herein all have in common is that they locate Northern England as an appropriate site from which to instigate demands for democratic alternatives to a British centralised state form, and to varying degrees, attempt to imagine a political future for England beyond the Union. Taken together, these novels explore a linkage between the cultural and political economy of the British state and advocate for localised social and

¹⁵ For a rare critique of the way in which media equated the Leave vote with an exclusively working-class North, see Zoe Williams, 'Think the North and the Poor Caused Brexit? Think Again', *The Guardian*, 7 August 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/aug/07/north-poor-brexit-myths>> [accessed 29 November 2017] and Barnett, *The Lure of Greatness*, p. 103; Peter Rushton provides a sociological analysis of representations of Sunderland during the referendum, see, 'The Myth and Reality of Brexit City: Sunderland and the 2016 Referendum' (Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Sunderland, 2017) <<http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/id/eprint/7344/>> [accessed 15 September 2020]; For an examination of uneven development and Northern England, see Gordon MacLeod and Martin Jones, 'Explaining "Brexit Capital": Uneven Development and the Austerity State', *Space and Polity*, 22.2 (2018), 111–36 (p. 118) and Harold D. Clarke, Paul Whiteley, and Matthew Goodwin, *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 8.

democratic relations in the North of England that may, in turn, allow a politically activated England to emerge. It is this process that I term 'the cultural politics of devolution'. Below, I outline the literary and political debates in which this thesis is situated, before mapping out the chapters that follow.

The Literary 'English Question'

The literary North is key to activating a literature of England. Taking Michael Gardiner's claim that 'English Literature is not the literature of England', the central argument advanced throughout this thesis is that a key step in resolving the literary 'English Question' is a heterogeneous rearticulation of Northern England as a 'placed' geographical territory that is capable of going beyond class stereotype and regional mythology.¹⁶ Gardiner has frequently asserted that England has no national literary culture to parallel that of the devolved nations in Britain; instead, literary England has been suppressed by a formation of English Literature that is less suited to England as a place or territory than it is the imperial endeavours of the British Empire.¹⁷ In his assessment of the discipline of English Literature as a structuring principle of the Union, Gardiner describes a historical process in which the discipline has served as a 'constitutional glue' for the Union, acting as a bulwark against post-imperial civic England that may threaten the Union.¹⁸ What is crucial about Gardiner's account is the argument

¹⁶ Michael Gardiner, *The Return of England in English Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 1.

¹⁷ Michael Gardiner, *The Constitution of English Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 1.

¹⁸ Gardiner, *Return of England*, p. 298; Robert Crawford traces how English Literature has played a determining role in the maintenance of British Unionism after Empire, describing the discipline as 'a force which must be countered continually by a devolutionary momentum'. *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 7.

that English Literature is not the literature of England as a place, and has relied on an ‘a-political’, ‘placeless’ and ‘stretchy’ version of imperial England played out in the cultural sphere.¹⁹ English Literature has, therefore, served the priorities of the British state and upheld a constitutional structure in which England has no distinctive parliamentary basis.

Gardiner’s evaluation of the discipline of English Literature as an integral part of Britain’s unwritten constitution – or rather, Britain’s constitutional ‘*culture*’ – draws on earlier arguments made in political science.²⁰ Questions regarding the long-term viability of the Union are not new, with post-British critical perspectives emerging from developments in the New Left during the 1970s. In his landmark study *The Break-Up of Britain* (1977), Tom Nairn proposed that the British state was in crisis, describing the Union as a ‘general mass’ now subject to ‘territorial disintegration’ as it is unable to unify its competing internal nationalisms in the wake of the dissolution of Empire.²¹ Nairn’s pioneering work on the future of Britain’s nations and the Union predicted that increasing

¹⁹ Gardiner, *The Constitution of English Literature*, p. 1; Gardiner identifies the period between the 1790s and 1810 as the time in which English Literature became ‘an alternative codification’ of Britishness, developing further during the nineteenth century, the First World War, and again after the decline of Empire’, p.19. Key literary figures in his thesis include Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who connected ‘the permanence of a state with the land and the landed property’ and William Shakespeare, who embodied ‘the values of an empiricist and exceptionalist British state’, p. 41; p .37. Gardiner identifies Shakespeare’s universal status in British education, and a key emblem of ‘English’ literary heritage, an association bolstered by Michael Gove’s educational reforms in 2012. The constitutional conservative modernism of F.R. Leavis, Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot is also noted as an example of the relationship between literary culture and the state, a movement which Gardiner identifies as reinforcing a ‘natural’ Britishness during the 1920s and 1930s, as empire started to break down, pp. 69-98.

²⁰ Claire Westall and Michael Gardiner, *Literature of an Independent England: Revisions of England, Englishness, and English Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 1 [emphasis original].

²¹ Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London: Atlantic Highlands, 1977), p. 12.

pressure for devolution in Scotland and Wales would leave the British state with little structural integrity.²²

Nairn's work continued to influence a generation of scholarship on the question of British identities in general, and on Scottish and English identities in particular.²³ In *Island Stories* (1998), Raphael Samuel proposed that 'Britain is a term with a very uncertain future', noting that the rise of Scottish nationalism has initiated the terminal phase of Britishness, leaving Britain's 'credit as a source of symbolic capital [...] exhausted'.²⁴ Evidence of this 'exhaustion' materialised during the 1990s when the New Labour government proposed devolution to Scotland, Wales, and Greater London in an attempt to satisfy energies for independence and prevent further constitutional instability. Nevertheless, Nairn later argued in *After Britain* (2000) that these devolved national governments are less politically radical than they might at first appear, and that big changes in central authority are yet to take place to enable devolution to really 'work', and make national assemblies part of the fabric of the British state.²⁵ Nairn's predictions

²² Nairn's thinking on the trajectory of the British state is also closely associated with Perry Anderson, whose work during the 1960s on Britain's political development formed part of the intellectual foundations of *Break-Up* (known as the 'Nairn-Anderson thesis'). See, for example, Anderson's 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *New Left Review* 1.23 (1964) 26-53.

²³ Krishan Kumar suggests that critical interest in Englishness gained traction during the 1990s, and offers his own list of works in this area. See *The Making of English National Identity*, p. 251. See also Jeremy Paxman, *The English: A Portrait of a People* (London: Penguin, 1998); Ian Baucom (1999); Tom Nairn (2000); Arthur Aughey, *The Politics of Englishness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Peter Ackroyd, *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2002); John McLeod and David Rogers (eds.), *The Revision of Englishness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Krishan Kumar, *The Idea of Englishness: English Culture, National Identity and Social Thought* (London: Routledge, 2015); Simon Featherstone, *Englishness: Twentieth-century Popular Culture and the Forming of English Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009) Michael Kenny, *The Politics of English Nationhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²⁴ Raphael Samuel, *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain. Theatres of Memory, Volume II*, ed. by Alison Light, Sally Alexander, and Gareth Stedman Jones (New York: Verso, 1998), p. 41.

²⁵ Tom Nairn, *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland* (London: Granta, 2000), p. 156.

on this matter appear to have held true; Scottish devolution has not dispelled momentum for a clean break from Westminster that might be achieved through independence. Moreover, the constitutional adjustments of 1997 not only re-energised discussion surrounding ‘the break-up of Britain’, but, as Westall and Gardiner have identified, raised the question as to whether membership of the Union could be entirely re-negotiated from the inside out – England included.²⁶ Consequently, in devolutionary Britain, England has become less ‘the gaping hole’ in the devolution question and increasingly taken centre-stage in the debate about its own political future in the wake of Britain’s perceived imminent break-up.²⁷

Twenty-first-century analyses of England’s place in the Union frequently note the overdetermined status of ‘Englishness’ as a key barrier to a progressive civic English nationalism. The term is heavily freighted with a range of cultural meanings that have led to England occupying the status as a reactionary inverse to Britishness. For instance, in *The Making of English National Identity* (2003), Krishan Kumar recognises that the association of Englishness with constructions of the pastoral idyll has led to an a-political English quietism in favour of a supposedly outward-facing Britishness. According to Kumar,

a muted, quiet cultivation of Englishness has persisted for much of the twentieth century alongside a more public and arguably, as in the past, a more dominant Britishness. In a world of superpowers, in a world more insistently global than ever before, it would seem that the future lay with the larger entity, with Great Britain rather than with Little England.²⁸

²⁶ Westall and Gardiner, p. 119.

²⁷ Hazell, p. 1.

²⁸ Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 239.

England's status as a narrower iteration of Britain has further prevented a progressive, civic Englishness. Cultural critics have recently examined the re-emergence of the 'English Question' during and after the EU Referendum.²⁹ In *New Model Island* (2019), Niven proposes that we abandon the idea of England altogether and that with the end of Britain must come the end of England, making way for constitutional reform based on 'radical regionalism'.³⁰ For Niven, England is

a backward-looking, self-hating place, not because of any actual mystical curse, but because its populace has continually been oppressed, constricted and prevented from self-actualisation by the violent and mostly unchecked ascendancy of its ruling class over the last several hundred years.³¹

Niven views 'Englishness' as a term too tarnished with a sense of 'narrowness' and 'nostalgia', proposing a revival of the Left predicated on 'the late-twentieth-century push for regional devolution, which preceded the retreat into Englishness over the last two decades'.³² So, while Gardiner asserts the urgency of 'post-imperial English citizenship', Niven takes a more sceptical view towards the prospect of a politically autonomous England, advocating instead for a 'radical regionalism'.³³

While Niven suggests leaving England behind, this thesis suggests that a return to 'place' and 'territory' in literary representations of Northern England plays a crucial part in achieving a national literature of England. In focusing on representations of Northern

²⁹ See also: Rudolph G. Adam, *Brexit: Its Causes and Consequences* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2019); Anthony Barnett, *Albion's Call: Brexit, Democracy and England* (Open Democracy, 2018) <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/film-albion-s-call-brexit-democracy-and-england/>> [accessed 16 January 2020]; Cowley and Shaw, 'The English Question'; and Calhoun, 'Populism, Nationalism and Brexit', pp. 57–76.

³⁰ Niven, *New Model Island*, p. 110.

³¹ Niven, *New Model Island*, p. 33.

³² Niven, *New Model Island*, p. 7.

³³ Gardiner, *Return of England*, p. 5; Niven, *New Model Island*, p. 7.

England as a place, *Rewriting the North* dispels regional mythologies surrounding the North to contribute towards a post-British literary articulation of England. This orientation towards place enables what Gardiner has described as a ‘provincialised national reading’ of England, that would

be likely to return experience to local contexts, working between dialects and showing the connectedness of the many facets of the state, as did many of the writers of the late 1950s – but it might also aim to thoroughly re-provincialise the writing of England by casting the nation in a sense which is pointedly impossible to see as natural.³⁴

Gardiner’s Deleuzian notion of ‘re-provincialis[ation]’ is potentially liberating for both the English regions and England as a nation, offering a renewed capacity to form a placed national literature of England detached from the imperial formation of English Literature. Counter to the pejorative connotations of the ‘provincial’, this approach would not amount to a parochial regionalism, but one that allows England as a national formation to emerge. Building on Gardiner’s synthesis of literary analysis with parallel developments in political science, *Rewriting the North* contributes towards the de-naturalisation of the British state-nation, inserting a new conceptualisation of the North into ongoing political and literary debates regarding regional devolution and England’s political future.

Devolution as Literary Culture

The need for a devolved English literary culture has emerged within twenty-first-century literary studies as an urgent area of critical enquiry. The spatial biases of the literary economy are due, in part, to London’s cultural dominance as a signifier of Britishness, an

³⁴ Gardiner, *Return of England*, p. 14; 146.

association which compounds the suppression of a national literature of England.³⁵ The city has enjoyed increased creative representation to the extent that it constitutes an entire subfield within contemporary British literary and cultural studies today.³⁶ James Procter's work has provided a starting point for establishing devolution as a literary-critical practice, pioneering ways of reading texts beyond the parameters of the M25 in relation to a wider national narrative. *Dwelling Places* (2003) emphasises the 'widening discrepancies' across Britain, suggesting the inadequacies of adopting a macro-level critical approach to British literary and cultural production.³⁷ Justifying the project's regional focus, Procter notes how it is not just the internal nations of the UK that require a devolved lens that would, for example, recognise England's own highly differentiated socio-economic and cultural demography. As he puts it, '[e]ven within England the notion of "two nations" – the affluent, silicon South and the once-Industrial North where the impact of structural unemployment has been its greatest remains a key imagined geography'.³⁸

Echoing Procter's work, the 'Moving Manchester: Mediating Marginalities' project led by Lynne Pearce, and its later monograph form, *Postcolonial Manchester: Diaspora Space and the Devolution of Literary Culture* (2013), sought to promote 'a newly devolved canon of English literature which embraces not only ethnic and cultural difference but

³⁵ See Corinne Fowler's analysis of the differing fortunes of two comparable debut novels published in 2000: 'A Tale of Two Novels: Developing a Devolved Approach to Black British Writing', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 43.3 (2008), 75–94.

³⁶ See, for example, Nick Hubble and Philip Tew, *London in Contemporary British Fiction: The City Beyond the City* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016)

³⁷ James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 3.

³⁸ Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 3.

also *regional difference*'.³⁹ *Postcolonial Manchester* retains a critical eye on 'diasporic' writings from lesser-known black and Asian authors in Manchester, suggesting that the city's 'devolved literary cultures challenge and revise our collective sense of Manchester, of diaspora space and, indeed, of Britain itself.'⁴⁰ Concentrating exclusively on Manchester as a site of diasporic literary and cultural production, these projects respond to Procter's assertion that literary scholars must recognise 'the politics of location'; in doing so, Lynne Pearce, Corinne Fowler and Robert Crawshaw identify the extent to which London as 'the nation's "multicultural" heartland' has marginalised cultural production 'in the regions'.⁴¹

Literary critics and publishers are increasingly recognising the need to pay critical attention to cultural production from Northern England, and regions outside of London more broadly. For example, Katy Shaw has argued that '[d]espite the UK government's Northern Powerhouse agenda, the UK literary industry remains staunchly focused on a predominantly London base.'⁴² This spatial imbalance is partly a consequence of geographic location and the often-negative connotations attached to the 'regional'. As Fowler identifies, fiction viewed as 'regional' tends to enjoy nowhere near the same degree of commercial or critical attention as novels located in London or the South East,

³⁹ Lynne Pearce, Corinne Fowler, and Robert Crawshaw, *Postcolonial Manchester: Diaspora Space and the Devolution of Literary Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 3.

⁴⁰ Pearce, Fowler, and Crawshaw, pp. 4–5.

⁴¹ Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 1; Fowler and Pearce, p. 3; Notably, most existing devolutionary studies have emerged from within postcolonial studies. Such a relationship is not entirely surprising given the disciplinary work of postcolonialism on centre-periphery relations, laying the theoretical groundwork for studies of 'marginalised' production in various contexts and forms.

⁴² Katy Shaw, 'Writing the Northern Powerhouse: Evaluating the Northern Writers' Awards as a Potential Model of Intervention for Addressing Regional Representation in the "London-Centric" UK Literary Industry', *Creative Industries Journal*, 12.1 (2019), 3–13 (p. 3).

whose location is not considered a defining characteristic.⁴³ Notably, novels set in London are usually seen as ‘national’ and are naturalised portraits of contemporary Britain.⁴⁴

Conversely, the non-commercial form of poetry has exerted a far greater degree of regional pride emanating from independent presses across the country. *Out of Bounds* (2012), edited by James Procter, Gemma Robinson, and Jackie Kay, offers ‘an alternative A-Z of poetic Britain’ that explicitly cites its devolutionary purpose in its introduction, stating that ‘[i]t is by moving beyond the bounds of London that this collection stakes its claim to new critical ground’.⁴⁵ In a similar vein, Claire Squires observes the disproportionate concentration of major publishing houses in London. Squires notes the ‘big five’ publishers as Bertelsmann, Pearson, HarperCollins, Hodder Headline, and Hatchette, whose location exacerbates the domination of London-based fiction in gaining access to mainstream publishing presses and reproduces a canon of already successful writers.⁴⁶ Independent literary presses have likewise responded to this imbalance, demanding that these publishing powerhouses set up offices outside of London.⁴⁷

⁴³ Fowler, p. 76.

⁴⁴ This process was played out in fiction responding to the UK’s Brexit vote. Ali Smith’s London-based novel, *Autumn* (2016), was heralded as the first work of a seasonal state-of-the-nation quartet considering post-Brexit Britain.

⁴⁵ Jackie Kay, James Procter, and Gemma Robinson, *Out of Bounds: Black British & Asian Poets* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 2013), p. 15.

⁴⁶ Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 21.

⁴⁷ In 2018, the Northern Fiction Alliance released an ‘open letter to the Londoncentric publishing industry’. Directed at mainstream publishing houses in London, the letter asked for the industry to change to better reflect its readers, noting how ‘white, middle-class and London-centric our industry still is’. See Northern Fiction Alliance, ‘An Open Letter to the London-Centric Publishing Industry’, *The Bookseller*, 2018 <<https://www.thebookseller.com/blogs/open-letter-london-centric-publishing-industry-769181>> [accessed 15 September 2020].

However, these critical advocations for a ‘devolved’ literary culture approach devolution as a synonym for regional decentralisation, rather than a political-constitutional process with legislative implications. This spatial approach neglects how political devolution signified ‘the endgame of a growing ambivalence deep in the British management of culture’, and therefore has a limited application for imagining alternatives to the British Union.⁴⁸ Joseph Jackson, for example, explains how a spatial approach to devolution

is close to the British state’s interpretation: as a kind of regional management, an extension of local government, that presents no threat to the constitutional *status quo* of Britain as would, say, an independent Scotland ending the Union.⁴⁹

Jackson pinpoints a recurring fault line in the way devolution is often deployed, especially in regional literary studies. In these examples, devolution amounts to the disruption of London’s cultural dominance, rather than significant constitutional change. This ontological difference emphasises the need to distinguish between national and regional forms of political devolution. While the former refers to the creation of national parliamentary institutions, such as Holyrood, the latter describes a redistribution of regional autonomy which is always subordinate to the larger territorial unit of the nation-state, taking the form of Mayoralities, City Deals, and Local Enterprise Partnerships. However, this is not simply a question of scale; English regional devolution was never envisaged to have the same constitutional significance as national devolution in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Unlike the redistribution of political power affected by the creation of national parliaments that were theoretically equal to Westminster, regional

⁴⁸ Michael Gardiner, *The Cultural Roots of British Devolution* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004) p. x.

⁴⁹ Joseph Jackson, *Writing Black Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), p. 45.

devolution was intended to deliver centralised policy more effectively, a process more aligned with Procter and Fowler’s spatial approach to devolution.⁵⁰ Scott Hames makes a similar case in a Scottish literary context, drawing a useful distinction between two national forms of devolution termed the ‘dream’ and the ‘grind’.⁵¹ Hames identifies the ‘dream’ as a ‘story of *cultural* vanguardism in which writers and artists play the starring role in the recuperation of national identity’.⁵² In contrast, the ‘grind’ refers to political devolution as a ‘shrewd and sometimes grubby saga of electoral expediency, characterised less by stirring visions of democratic rebirth than ploys of cynical circumspection’.⁵³ Hames notes that Scottish cultural devolution (or, the ‘dream’) ‘played out within the political logic and electoral boundaries of the ‘grind’, suggesting how devolution viewed in the decentralising mode – as we have seen – often operates within the political state structures it is intended to challenge.’⁵⁴

Considering this complexity, my understanding of devolution throughout this thesis encompasses and extends Procter and Fowler’s concern with deprivileging London as Britain’s cultural epicentre. But what this decentralised approach to devolution often neglects are the constitutional correlates of *political* devolution. While my focus on Northern England presents a challenge to the cultural bias of London, I also consider the extent to which the literary North engages with devolution as a political process, making demands for democratic alternatives to the British centralised state form. In this sense,

⁵⁰ Arthur Aughey, *The British Question* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p.vii.

⁵¹ Scott Hames, *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution: Voice, Class, Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020) p. xii.

⁵² Hames, p. xii [emphasis added].

⁵³ Hames, p. xii.

⁵⁴ Hames, p. 40.

‘the cultural politics of devolution’ represents a new approach to devolving British literary culture that stages a dialogue between a decentralised methodological practice and a concern with political devolution as a state-led process.

While the ‘cultural politics of devolution’ encompasses the ways contemporary novels represent broader social and political formations in Britain, I do not read these texts as necessarily mimetic of actual political relations or ‘representational’ in a simplistic sense. While it is commonly argued that Scottish cultural devolution preceded political devolution, literature about regional devolution in Northern England appears much more guarded in its democratic vision.⁵⁵ Rather than blazing the trail for political devolution, the texts considered throughout this thesis underline the limits of the kind of agency offered up by a constitutional process which ultimately preserves the British state form. Thus, throughout this thesis, cultural devolution is not simply derivative of political devolution, but emerges throughout these texts as only a partial regionalist politics that occurs outside of, and in opposition to, centralised parliamentary politics. Put simply, while the texts considered herein represent several twenty-first-century political developments in Britain, they also seek to *reimagine* them and offer up alternatives to the centralised British state form as a democratic model.

Historicising the Literary North

Returning to the idea of Northern England as a region associated with political discontent, this image has occurred alongside a persistent cultural and literary construction of a geographically ambiguous ‘North’. As we shall see, the North has operated in the national imagination less as a given territory with a set of geographic parameters, than as a set of

⁵⁵ See Hames, p.xii

class-inflected cultural codes, characteristics, iconographies, and literary aesthetics. Historic literary representations of Northern England have repeatedly framed the region as what Philip Dodd terms a 'second-rate Lowryscape', a place 'consistently described in terms of dearth, authenticity, and pastness'.⁵⁶ This class-inflected narrative of the North is often associated with industrialisation and its aftermath. The industrial revolution was a central factor in establishing a 'sense of place' for the North, with sectoral specialisation distinguishing regions from each other and resulting in 'regional coherence centred around towns such as Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Newcastle, and Bradford, which became foci of economic growth'.⁵⁷ At the same time, the social problem novels of the nineteenth century saw the city take on a metonymic role for a broader, working-class urban-industrial North. As Dave Russell argues, Victorian social problem novels 'have done more to define the North as "other"— as harsh, bleak, industrial, and the "land of the working class" – than any other single cultural form'.⁵⁸ Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), subtitled 'the two nations', Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854), and Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854) are among the most commonly cited texts in the nineteenth century construction of an archetypal North as an inherently 'bleak place typified by squalor, poverty and industrial labour' in opposition to depictions of a more 'gentrified and attractive South'.⁵⁹ In a similar vein, H.V. Morton's travelogue *In Search of England*

⁵⁶ Philip Dodd, 'Lowryscapes: Recent Writings about "the North"', *Critical Quarterly*, 32.2 (1990), 17–28; Peter Davidson, *The Idea of the North* (London: Reaktion, 2005), p. 199.

⁵⁷ Stuart Rawnsley, 'Constructing "The North": Space and a Sense of Place', in *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of 'The North' and 'Northernness'*, ed. by Neville Kirk (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 3–22 (p. 7).

⁵⁸ David Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 87.

⁵⁹ Jane Mansfield, 'Fiction and the Meaning of Place: Writing the North of England, 1845-1855 and 1955-1965' (PhD Thesis: Leeds Metropolitan University, 2010), p. 285; See also: D. C. D. Pocock, 'The Novelist's Image of the North', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 4.1 (1979), 62–76; I am not advocating an overly simplistic, homogenous view of these novels, but as texts which are often examined

(1927), opposed 'beautiful old England' with 'industrial England', while in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) George Orwell posited that it was only 'beyond Birmingham' that 'the real ugliness of industrialism' can be encountered.⁶⁰

This construction of the industrial North took on a new cultural and economic significance during the post-war period through to the 1990s. Successive waves of uneven development and governmental policies which disproportionately affected the economies of Northern England and the Midlands led to a geographically broad vision of the North yoked to its socio-economic status. This vision was intimately tied to deindustrialisation, poverty, unemployment, and a localised sense of community forged through manual labour. For example, the 1950s and 1960s marked the emergence of Mersey Beat, kitchen sink drama, the films associated with the British New Wave, early Northern Soul, the plays of the so-called 'Angry Young Men', and the Movement poetry. These works contributed towards a regional subgenre of class-inflected literary and cultural production referred to as 'Northern grit' that was typified by a formal reliance on social realism and regional dialect, often set in declining urban environments and associated with a particular version of white working-class masculinity.⁶¹ The individuals depicted in these works were often characterised by a 'keep calm and carry on' attitude, authenticity, nostalgia, and a strong sense of community identity associated with manual

within historical studies of the literary North. Indeed, while Dickens and Disraeli approach the North as a caricature from the South, Gaskell lived in Manchester and knew the city well.

⁶⁰ H.V. Morton, *In Search of England* (London: Methuen, 1933), p. 185-186 and George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962 [1936]), p. 94 cited in Stephen Kohl, 'The "North" of "England": A Paradox?' in *Thinking Northern: Textures of Identity in the North of England* ed. by Christoph Ehland (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007) pp. 93-116 (pp.96-97).

⁶¹ John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and Sheila Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1958) are some of the earliest examples of kitchen sink drama. Keith Waterhouse's *Billy Liar* (1963), Lindsay Anderson's adaptation of David Storey's *This Sporting Life* (1964 [1960]), and Ken Loach's *Kes* (1969) are parallels in British cinema.

labour, all of which were taken to represent the everyday lives of England's 'ordinary people'.⁶² These representations frequently employed de-industrial *leitmotifs* situated in the decaying 'sink estates' of Northern England and the Midlands, which contributed to a vision of a geographically imprecise North as an industrial monolith marked by dispossession and alienation.

The Thatcher period is also an important staging post in the socio-economic construction of the North, solidifying the association of Northern England with working-class identity and deindustrialised urban spatial settings. Accelerated deindustrialisation during the 1980s saw the total employment base in Northern England contract by half a million, with cultural and literary responses reflecting this hardening of socio-economic and geographic division in England.⁶³ John Hill notes how, in the 1980s,

[t]he iconography of rows of small, terraced houses and cobbled streets characteristic of 1960s realism [gave] way to run-down housing estates with boarded-up windows (precisely the sort of estates just built in films such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960)). Factories (as in *Business as Usual*) have become wastelands and images of work, such as there are, are linked to the service sector (especially shops) rather than manufacturing.⁶⁴

The 1980s represented a period of vibrant renewal for social realism as a response to the divisive Conservative administration and the 1984-1985 Miners' Strike. One of the most noteworthy developments of the 1980s and 1990s was the emergence of literary and

⁶² It should be noted that I am using the term 'nostalgia' in its usual negative sense here. In Chapter 3, I will be exploring the potential for a more radical application; David Law offers an excellent account of this tendency in which he concludes that the North's stereotypes are 'profoundly' entrenched by realism, and are 'implicated in the totalising rhetorics of masculinity, class, heterosexuality and authenticity'. See "'Guddling for Words": Representing the North and Northernness in Post-1950 South Pennine Literature' (PhD Thesis: University of Lancaster, 2003), p. 299.

⁶³ Tom Hazeldine, *The Northern Question: A Political History of the North-South Divide* (London: Verso, 2020), p. 118.

⁶⁴ John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s: Issues and Themes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 167.

cultural production reflecting the implications of deindustrialisation, with the ‘Thatcher Revolution’ seen as a fulcrum in the development of the British novel in particular.⁶⁵ The economic recession resulting from the onset of neoliberalism during Thatcher’s administration saw a surge in cultural production that reinforced the association of the North with working-class culture and the deindustrialised landscape. At the time, these socio-political shifts were reflected in the multiple novels of Barry Hines, most notably, *The Price of Coal* (1979) and *Looks and Smiles* (1981), Pat Barker’s *Union Street* (1982) and *Blow Your House Down* (1984), Livi Michael’s *Under a Thin Moon* (1992), and Jeff Noon’s *Vurt* series (1993; 1995; 1996; 1997).

Yet, while it is now *de rigueur* to suggest that the Thatcher period represents a watershed in the development of the late-twentieth-century British novel, with Dominic Head identifying it as ‘a period of renaissance in English fiction’, this trend of postmodern, fragmentary narrative representation did not appear to map on to fiction set in Northern England.⁶⁶ Many of the works that explicitly responded to the socio-political shifts of Thatcherism and its effect on ‘Northern’ industrial communities emerged much later in the early 2000s.⁶⁷ Retrospective responses to the Miners’ Strike reaffirmed the association of the North with deindustrialised spatial settings, working-class identity, and the aesthetics of social realism. Several contemporary historical fictions appropriate a

⁶⁵ See James. F. English, ‘Introduction: British Fiction in a Global Context’ in *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*, English (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 1-15; For dedicated discussions of Thatcherism in relation to developments in British fiction, see Joseph Brooker, *Literature of the 1980s: After the Watershed* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) and Kimberly Duff, *Contemporary British Fiction and Urban Space: After Thatcher* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁶⁶ Dominic Head, *An Introduction to Modern British Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 45; Noon’s Manchester-based cyberpunk series, *Vurt*, is perhaps an exception to the rule here.

⁶⁷ The Thatcher period is often discussed as having initiated a tidal wave of postmodern representation and narrative innovation in novels of the 1980s and 1990s. For a critical appraisal of this development, see Tew, Horton and Wilson eds. *The 1980s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014) and English, *Contemporary British Fiction*.

specific iconography of Northern England during the 1980s and 1990s in often nostalgic ways, imagining the region only in terms of its industrial past. An awareness and subsequent use of this topography are central to Gordon Burn's *The North of England Home Service* (2003), David Peace's *Red Riding Quartet* (1999; 2000; 2001; 2002) and *GB84* (2004), and Philip Hensher's *The Northern Clemency* (2008), all of which focus on the symbolic purchase of the industrial landscape as synonymous with working-class disaffection, inviting readers to view the Strike as central to the spatial imaginary of their work. For instance, Peace's depictions of Northern England are, as Christopher Vardy argues, dominated by 'dystopian post-industrial landscapes' and 'imbricated with nostalgia'.⁶⁸ The drunken toast of a corrupt police officer in Peace's *Nineteen Eighty Three* (2002), 'To us all and to the north – where we do what we want!', captures what Raymond Williams describes as the 'structure of feeling' of a region defined by disaffection and exploitation.⁶⁹ One of the most overtly political evocations of the Thatcher period and the effects of deindustrialisation is Anthony Cartwright's *How I Killed Margaret Thatcher* (2012), depicting nine-year-old Sean Bull's plan to murder the Prime Minister against a backdrop of political discontent and socio-economic decline. However, here and elsewhere in Cartwright's work, a reactionary nostalgia fails to offer a means to imagine alternatives to the present, signifying how the socio-economic transformations of the 1980s instigated a cultural framing of Northern deindustrial communities as irretrievably stuck in the past.

⁶⁸ Christopher Vardy, 'The Allure of the 1980s', *Alluvium*, 2.4 (2013) <<https://www.alluvium-journal.org/2013/07/21/the-allure-of-the-1980s/>> [accessed 15 July 2020].

⁶⁹ David Peace, *Nineteen Eighty Three* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2002), p. 228; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 134.

In contrast to the retrospective tendency of the 'post-Thatcher novel', poetry set in Northern England quickly responded to the destructive effects of Thatcherism and deindustrialisation. In Yorkshire, Ted Hughes' *Remains of Elmet* (1979), Tony Harrison's controversial *V* (1985), and Sean O'Brien's collections *The Indoor Park* (1983) and *The Frighteners* (1987) became emblematic of a wider regionalist poetic response to the continued socio-economic decline in industrial towns during the Thatcher period and a growing democratic deficit in Northern England. Critics have already identified the devolutionary thrust of poetry in the North during this period. James Underwood, for example, argues that '[i]f these are the decades in which the British poetry map began to devolve, then this is in part because these are the decades in which the North of England was cast adrift from the country's political and economic powerbase in the South-East'.⁷⁰ While Underwood approaches devolution in the spatial, decentralising sense here, his observation foregrounds the relationship between a literary regional or place-bound affiliation and lived socio-economic and political inequality. There is, then, a longer history of cultural devolution in Northern England emerging as a response to Thatcherism's assault on industrialisation.

Cinema and television series of the 1980s and 1990s also paralleled this literary political activism. Ken Loach's film adaptation of Hines' *Looks and Smiles* (1981) represents one of the earliest cultural responses to the mounting levels of unemployment in industrial towns during the 1970s and 1980s, centring on three young people who are left disenchanted by the lack of opportunities in Sheffield. This disaffection also permeates Chris Bernard's Liverpool-based film *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985), and the

⁷⁰ James Underwood, 'Pit Closure as Art', in *British Literature in Transition: Accelerated Times, 1980-2000* ed. by Eileen Pollard and Berthold Schoene (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 162-77 (p. 162).

dramaturgical output of Andrea Dunbar, among others.⁷¹ The development of a specific subgenre of social realism engaging with the Miners' Strike also characterised this period. Alan Bleasdale's Liverpool-set TV series, *Boys from the Blackstuff* (1982), identified many of the issues emerging in the 1970s, and which also underpinned the strikes during the 1980s. The series lamented the end of a working-class culture heavily associated with manual labour and masculinity, with unemployed tarmac layer Yosser Hughes' catchphrase 'Gizza job!' quickly entering the public consciousness. Mike Herman's *Brassed Off* (1996) centres on concerns of unemployment in the aftermath of pit closures, while *Our Friends in the North* (1996) captures the political energies of the North-East, pitting the Metropolitan Police against the striking miners and establishing a dichotomy between North and South.⁷²

What these works all have in common, however, is that they operate within a set of regional aesthetics in which deindustrialised urban space is the default landscape for an almost exclusively working-class North. These cultural texts speak to a historical trend within cultural production set in Northern England in the Thatcher period that David Forrest and Sue Vice describe as a 'Northern Chronotope'.⁷³ Forrest and Vice suggest that *The Price of Coal* (1977), *The Northern Clemency*, and *GB84* operate, somewhat self-consciously, within a 'spatial narrative, which aligns the North within a working-class symbolic system in opposition to the middle-class South'.⁷⁴ Despite the didactic social

⁷¹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 134.

⁷² See David Forrest, 'Our Friends in the North and the Instability of the Historical Drama as Archive'. *The Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 8.2. (2011), 218-233.

⁷³ David Forrest and Sue Vice, 'A Poetics of the North: Visual and Literary Geographies', in *Regional Aesthetics: Mapping UK Media Cultures*, ed. by Ieuan Franklin, Hugh Chignell, and Kristin Skoog (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 55-69 (p. 55).

⁷⁴ Forrest and Vice, p. 61.

projects of these works, they also solidified a set of regional aesthetics that continue to permeate literary representations of Northern England in the twenty-first century. Likewise, socially realist television series and cinema from Loach, Mike Leigh, and Alan Clarke paved the way for contemporary representations of the period as the effects of Thatcher's administration continued into the new millennium. Stephen Daldry's *Billy Elliot* (2000), Shane Meadows' film *This is England* (2006) along with its multiple television spin-offs, and Paul Abbott's *Shameless* (2004-13) are just a few notable examples of what Russell describes as reworkings 'of stereotypical or comic versions of the region's history and culture' that mark Northern England as 'other' following the socio-political shifts of the 1980s and 1990s.⁷⁵ Gardiner goes a step further in his analysis of *Billy Elliot*, reading the text and its adaptation within a recurring post-strike class narrative of 'overcoming broken communities in Northern England'.⁷⁶ Gardiner notes how the central protagonist "escapes" a community destroyed by the miners' strike, and the embarrassingly provincial attitudes of his family, to dance for the Royal Ballet in a performance only his father can afford to attend', pinpointing the oppositionality between a provincial identity in the North and the emphatically British institution of the Royal Ballet.⁷⁷

This representational struggle has led to the North being yoked to a class-inflected imaginary of the deindustrialised sink estate, while also risking the fetishisation of working-class culture that elides the harsh realities of industrial labour. In her appraisal of cultural responses to the Miners' Strike, Katy Shaw argues that 'working-class culture

⁷⁵ Russell, p. 269.

⁷⁶ Gardiner, *Cultural Roots*, p. 122.

⁷⁷ Gardiner, *Cultural Roots*, p. 122.

is firmly established as a culture of struggle one experiences in manipulating and inverting forms of high culture as part of a wider battle for expression and authorship'.⁷⁸ However, there is a reason to be wary of perceiving this as a straightforwardly emancipatory dialogue, recognising its double-edged nature. Positioning literary and cultural production from Northern England as inherently 'working-class' and 'against the grain' of a dominant narrative contributes towards an essentialist oppositionality that constructs the North as the rebellious working-class counterpart of the sophisticated sensibilities (or 'high culture') of an equally constructed South. If Northern England is to be detached from an iconography of regressive provincialism, nostalgia, and class obsession, critical accounts must avoid approaching the region as England's internal 'other' that struggles to speak.

This exposition of cultural and critical approaches to the North suggests that the status of Northern England in relation to the rest of the country is perpetuated externally but also *internally* in culture. As Rob Shields writes:

A nostalgic discourse of tradition valorises the North as the homeland of a traditional British Working Class and the culture associated with it – ferrets, pigeon racing, mines and mills, fish and chips, regional accents and football – as well as organic communities ... Its rougher pleasures of the outdoors contrast with the more refined pleasures of the high-culture of London and its commuter belt.⁷⁹

This valorisation of Northern England as the nation's 'other' alludes to what Henrietta Phillips describes as 'quasi-postcolonial power relations' in which the North has been subject to continued structural marginalisation under a multi-national state system that

⁷⁸ Katy Shaw, *Mining the Meaning: Cultural Representations of the 1984-5 UK Miners' Strike* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), p. 16.

⁷⁹ Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 229.

prioritises the metropolitan capital.⁸⁰ The North, then, cannot be viewed as straightforwardly geographical. As this thesis will show, the North operates less as a geographically bounded territory than a longstanding socio-economic metaphor that has served the priorities of the British state and kept the possibility of a unified political England at bay.

Defining the North

Any cultural or political discussion of the North is complicated by the impossibility of delimiting geographic parameters of a region which does not constitutionally exist. The multiple, differing critical interpretations of what constitutes the North testify to the region's overdetermined and predominantly symbolic status. Shields notes how 'the "North" of England is not a precisely mapped jurisdiction with clear borders. It is said by many to extend as far South as the Cheshire border, including Manchester, and by a few to include the Midlands – everything North of Watford'.⁸¹ Likewise, Russell argues that the North in literature is 'often generously defined so as to embrace, amongst other areas, D.H. Lawrence's north Nottinghamshire, Alan Sillitoe's Nottingham and Arnold Bennett's Potteries'.⁸² Helen Jewell's influential study, *The North-South Divide* (1994), identifies a line joining the River Humber, Trent, and Mersey to define a Southern boundary, while Shields describes the North as a 'space-place myth' separated from the rest of England by

⁸⁰ Henrietta Phillips, 'Cultural Representations of the Moors Murderers and Yorkshire Ripper Cases' (PhD Thesis: University of Birmingham, 2016), p. 24; for an analysis of the continued structural socio-economic marginalisation of Northern England, see Mike Savage, *Social Class in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Pelican, 2015).

⁸¹ Shields, p. 209.

⁸² Russell, p. 80.

a straight line drawn from the Severn to the Wash.⁸³ Contrastingly, Katherine Cockin pinpoints the construction of the M1 as an essential indicator of the North, suggesting that the Watford Gap service station ‘has characterised northward travel and featured in many media engagements with the north’.⁸⁴ But while many studies of Northern England have attempted to define parameters for the region, these approaches are limited because they overlook how space both reflects and is *produced by* social relations.⁸⁵ Such geographical determinism precludes how constructions of the North have functioned as imagined spaces and been mobilised in several political and cultural contexts.

Other existing studies of Northern England are written mainly for non-academic audiences and take the form of travel-writing or memoir, both of which tend to romanticise the author’s relationship with the region. Dave Russell and Stephen Wagg’s *Sporting Heroes of the North* (2004), Peter Davidson’s *The Idea of North* (2005), Stuart Maconie’s *Pies and Prejudice* (2007), Martin Wainwright’s *True North* (2010), and Paul Morley’s *The North* (2013) identify Northern England’s marginalised status but also rely on a particular mythologisation of the region. One critical account that goes beyond this self-exoticising lens is Christoph Ehland’s *Thinking Northern* (2007). For Ehland, the North of England is as much a place as it is a mythology that cannot escape its past, it is a ‘fragmented vision, somewhere along the lines of Wordsworth’s daffodils, Manchester capitalism, and Beatlemania’.⁸⁶ Likewise Russell seeks to ‘make sense of northern

⁸³ See Jewell, ‘Where does the divide take place?’ in *The North-South Divide: The Origins of Northern Consciousness in England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 8–27; Shields, p. 259.

⁸⁴ Katherine Cockin, *The Literary North* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 5.

⁸⁵ Russell goes as far as to include a map of what he designates as ‘the North’ in its preface, although Russell later acknowledges the region’s ‘imagined’ status. p. xvii; p. 8.

⁸⁶ Christoph Ehland, ‘Introduction: Northern England and the Spaces of Identity’, in *Thinking Northern: Textures of Identity in the North of England*, ed. by Ehland (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 15–32 (p. 20).

England's place within national culture', concluding that the North 'has enjoyed some degree of agency and been celebrated, even cherished, but always on terms dictated by the centre and its positional superiority and in ways that do not fundamentally challenge perceived truths about the nature of English identity'.⁸⁷ Russell raises a crucial point in how regional imagery, regardless of whether it is 'truthfully conceived or accurately portrayed', is often 'disseminated and deployed in the interests of the agendas of competing and contending social groups', though he does not acknowledge the constitutional implications of these conflicting versions of England.⁸⁸

Within literary studies, Cockin's *The Literary North* (2012) also recognises a strategic function of the North. In her introduction, Cockin acknowledges that '[t]he north of England has been subjected to stereotype, misrepresentation and myth', and sets out to examine the recurring features of the 'literary North' between the nineteenth and late twentieth century.⁸⁹ Cockin notes the need for attention to be paid to literary form, identifying that, while the region has been examined in various cultural forms, 'the literary North of England has not hitherto been considered in any systematic way'.⁹⁰ The collection surveys a range of literary genres – including science fiction and children's literature – emerging from various towns within Northern England between the mid-nineteenth century and the late twentieth century, and identifies several recurring motifs and characteristics that have helped construct – and occasionally challenge – the region's mythology. Yet, while the collection offers a valuable reassessment of myths of the North,

⁸⁷ Russell, p. 9.

⁸⁸ Russell, p. 10.

⁸⁹ Cockin, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Cockin, p. 1.

'making power relations taken for granted in the literary canon more visible', discussion of these 'power relations' does not concern the twenty-first-century literary North, or its role in the relationship between England and Britain.⁹¹

Addressing this critical blind spot, my theorisation of the North borrows from cultural geography, taking the view that 'space is a representational strategy' rather than a fixed or static entity removed from the workings of society.⁹² The interplay between 'space' and 'place' and social power relations is crucial to considering how the material and cultural landscapes of Northern England are not passive backdrops to social processes, but are integral to the reflection and reproduction of social and geographic consciousness and contemporary class struggle in England.⁹³ In a similar vein, this thesis approaches the North as an 'imagined community', in the spirit of Benedict Anderson's observation that 'all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined'. Although Anderson's 'imagined communities' refers to nations, I am deliberately applying the term regionally here to explore the 'imagined' status of the North.⁹⁴

While my discussion of representations of the North relies on constructions of the region as an opposition to an equally constructed 'South', I want to clarify that in examining the relations between these two poles, I am not suggesting a simplistic binary opposition, but a complex web of changing socio-economic and geopolitical relations that

⁹¹ Cockin, p. 19.

⁹² Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, *Thinking Space* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 1.

⁹³ Within Marxist cultural geography, Edward Soja has termed this phenomenon the 'socio-spatial dialectic'. See 'The Socio-Spatial Dialectic' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 70.2 (1980) 207-225.

⁹⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 6.

transcend territorial boundaries. Despite the persistence of reifying images of the region, Northern England is far from uniform, and its internal sub-regions remain highly differentiated. As I have already mentioned, a long history of uneven development, the emergence of technologised mass culture, and the social and financial implications of globalisation, have all resulted in multi-faceted socio-spatial divisions than cannot be adequately discussed using binaristic nomenclature. Likewise, we must also consider other socio-economic and geographic divisions within the region; there remains vast inequality between metropolitan and non-metropolitan towns, and rural and coastal areas across all regions of England.⁹⁵ As Mike Savage explains, ‘the social class geography of the UK is too complex to reduce to simplistic north-south dichotomies. [...] Yet the “north-south divide” remains an incredibly powerful trope in both political and public discourse’.⁹⁶ Indeed, the North-South divide requires a more nuanced cultural geography that is capable of accounting for ‘pockets of high elite populations’ in places like ‘Cheshire, the Ribble Valley, and in Yorkshire’s own “Golden Triangle”, which lies between York, Leeds, and Harrogate’.⁹⁷ The regions comprising Northern England are not homogenous spaces of industrial decline; they encompass economically prosperous suburban fringe towns that enjoy a largely middle-class population, in addition to the region’s major cities – such as Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, and Liverpool – who are benefiting from urban renewal and rebranding themselves as financial and cultural hubs.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ For a critical discussion of the North-South divide as a multi-faceted geographic and socio-economic formation, see Danny Dorling, ‘Persistent North-South Divides’, in *The Economic Geography of the UK*, ed. by Neil M. Coe and Andrew Jones (London: SAGE, 2010), pp. 12–28.

⁹⁶ Savage, p. 276.

⁹⁷ Savage, p. 279.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Brett Christophers, ‘The BBC, the Creative Class, and Neoliberal Urbanism in the North of England’, *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 40.10 (2008), 2313–29.

Northern Powerhouse or the Dream of Decentralisation?

The city of Manchester is a case in point, having served as the primary location for twenty-first-century local governmental attempts at rebalancing England's economy, bolstering intra-regional differences. These recent state-led initiatives have seen Manchester's status as a synecdoche of the North mobilised in political rhetoric as the epicentre for the economic regeneration and development promised by the Northern Powerhouse project. In drawing this introductory chapter to a close, I now turn to recent governmental attempts at regional devolution that centre on Manchester, and illustrate the ongoing cultural purchase of constructions of the North within the political imagination.

Since its emergence in 2014, the idea of the Northern Powerhouse has come to embody the government's strategy for devolution within England, taking the decentralising form that Hames describes in the 'dream' of cultural devolution.⁹⁹ Led by former Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, the project concentrated on what it found to be the North's 'core cities' of Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield, Manchester, Newcastle, and Hull, attending to the need for infrastructural developments and better transport links both between these cities and down to London. In his speech, Osborne promised to make 'the cities of the north a powerhouse for the economy again', projecting a vision of an imagined urban 'North' that was to become an economic and creative force to parallel that of London.¹⁰⁰ A new high-speed trans-Pennine rail link between

⁹⁹ Graham Haughton et al., 'Mythic Manchester: Devo Manc, the Northern Powerhouse and Rebalancing the English Economy', *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 9.2 (2016), 355–70 (p. 355).

¹⁰⁰ George Osborne, *Chancellor: 'We Need a Northern Powerhouse'*, 23 June 2014 <<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellor-we-need-a-northern-powerhouse>> [accessed 4 March 2020].

Manchester and Leeds was one of the earliest initiatives of the project, shortly followed by the proposal of HS2 between London and Manchester and, most recently, HS3 – or ‘Northern Powerhouse Rail’ – connecting Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Bradford, Doncaster, Huddersfield, Sheffield, Newcastle, and Hull.

Despite the project’s initial appeal in how it attempted to address a range of economic, cultural, and infrastructural regional disparities, the financial benefits of the Northern Powerhouse are yet to materialise, with the project often criticised as merely paying lip service to the need to rebalance England’s economy. Neil Lee argues that

[t]here are two main ways to understand the Northern Powerhouse. The first is that it is a strategy – a long-term focus of policy action around a single goal. The second is as a brand, a label which can be applied to often pre-existing policies to give them coherence, focus and portray the government as acting for the North.¹⁰¹

Lee concludes that the latter has proven to be the case, noting how much of the proposed areas of spending are simply rebranded pots of existing funding that pre-date the initiative.¹⁰² Likewise, it is worth noting that while the 2014-2015 city region agreement effectively devolved responsibility to the Greater Manchester Central Authority (GMCA), there was no increase in available funds here either.¹⁰³ What this indicates is that the Northern Powerhouse is more of a discursive formation or political exercise, offering little in the way of constitutional reform or meaningful change in the region’s most deprived areas. This ineffectuality is compounded by the project’s disproportionate focus

¹⁰¹ Neil Lee, ‘Powerhouse of Cards? Understanding the “Northern Powerhouse”’, *Regional Studies*, 51.3 (2017), 478–89 (p. 480).

¹⁰² Lee cites the government’s 2014 Autumn Statement which promised to provide ‘£10 million to support the expansion of the very best academy chains in areas of the north’ which was actually a national scheme which had been underway since 2010 (HM Treasury, 2014, p. 51, cited in Lee, p. 487).

¹⁰³ See Haughton et al., p. 366.

on Manchester and the 'big cities' of the North West, ignoring the North East, smaller towns, and rural areas.

Moreover, Osborne's speech underlines the extent to which the Northern Powerhouse is fundamentally a Unionist project insofar as it is framed as vital to the success of the UK as a whole. Emphasising his commitment to the North, Osborne stated that 'we are one nation. And there's no way to build a strong economy, and a strong United Kingdom, unless we spread opportunity to every part of this land. And our plan to do so starts now'.¹⁰⁴ Osborne suggested that Northern England is 'less than the sum of its parts' and should be more 'like London', undermining any potential equality between the cities of Northern England and London.¹⁰⁵ This vague rhetoric reveals that the North remains unable to exist beyond its status as an (always inferior) 'other' to England's South, even as it is publicly poised as a centre of regeneration and renewal.

Infrastructural decentralising projects such as the Northern Powerhouse also warrant a degree of scepticism regarding the displacement of London as a centre of economic and cultural power. Since the 1980s, there have been attempts to position the region of Greater Manchester as a London in miniature. The MediaCityUK creative hub is a consequence of a BBC initiative that aimed to position the corporation as being less Londoncentric in the run-up to the renewal of its Royal Charter in 2007, intending to be more representative of their license fee payers.¹⁰⁶ In economic terms, while the proposal was partly approved on the basis that it would 'be of considerable benefit to not only [the

¹⁰⁴ Osborne, n.p.

¹⁰⁵ Osborne, n.p.

¹⁰⁶ See House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, *The BBC's Move to Salford: Twentieth Report of Session 2013-14*. 15 July 2013
<<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmpubacc/293/293.pdf>> [accessed 19 July 2020]

Salford Quays], the city as a whole, and the region in general', the majority of the additional jobs created were primarily taken up by workers relocating from outside of Greater Manchester.¹⁰⁷ Salford's BBC office was a corporate incursion that made particular areas of Greater Manchester more attractive to a metropolitan – and often commuter – demographic.¹⁰⁸ In terms of displacing London as Britain's cultural epicentre, despite the BBC attempting to rebalance the cultural disparity between its London base and Northern England, it remains that so much of what we understand to be cultural value and political power is locked in London. Regardless of any economic boost as a result of the relocation, the corporation's vision remains staunchly centred on England's capital city, creating only a dialogue between the continuing powerbase in London and the 'Northern' outpost in Salford.

It is crucial to note that these broader regional developments also position Manchester as a microcosm of the entire North of England, going hand-in-hand with the gentrification of the city's former industrial quarters. As Deidre O'Neill points out:

the destruction of the shipping industries and the concomitant jobs in related industries, and the shift to a 'regenerated' space of theatres, MediaCityUK, apartments and shopping malls, encapsulates the global shift from production to consumption – a working class once at the hub of world trade and goods has been

¹⁰⁷ Salford City Council, *Outline Planning Application of Peel Media Ltd.'s Land at Quays Point off Broadway Salford Quays Salford* (Salford City Council Planning Committee, 2006), p. 71 <<https://studylib.net/doc/16028838/application-no--06-53168-out-applicant>> [accessed 22 June 2020]; Andreas Schulze Bäing and Cecilia Wong, 'The Impact of Brownfield Regeneration on Neighbourhood Dynamics: The Case of Salford Quays in England', *Town Planning Review*, 89.5 (2018), 513–34 (p. 532).

¹⁰⁸ In their recent analysis of local-governmental initiatives, John Tomaney and Andy Pike argue that Manchester city centre's government-sponsored transformation has effectively created 'a new town of office blocks and adjacent flats, in which a young in-migrant workforce lives'. See 'Levelling Up?', *The Political Quarterly*, 91.1 (2020), 43–48 (p. 44).

‘socially cleansed’ and is now nothing more than a nostalgic part of the heritage industry, caught in the middle-class gaze, providing an aesthetic pleasure.¹⁰⁹

So, Manchester has been saddled with the impossible task of representing a North perceived externally as an urban-industrial ‘other’ space, while at the same time being reinvented as a neoliberal product of state investment. As Alexander Beaumont puts it, the city thus ‘occupies a contradictory status as a unique space on the one hand, and its tendency to function as a metonymic stand-in for Northern England on the other’.¹¹⁰ The undefined geographical scope of the Northern Powerhouse lends further credence to the view that recent state-led regional regeneration initiatives rely on a homogenous view of Manchester as a representative of the entire region of Northern England. In this sense, despite governmental attempts at addressing England’s financial spatial imbalances, these regional policies rely on a geographically vague and undifferentiated construction of the North, exacerbating intra-regional inequalities and offering no power redistribution that might be capable of challenging Westminster’s authority.

Thesis Structure

Inserting a placed literary articulation of Northern England into ongoing debates regarding English regional inequality and British constitutional culture, the four chapters that follow unfold largely chronologically, and trace the development of the North in both the British literary and political imagination between 2001 and 2018.

¹⁰⁹ Deidre O’Neill, ‘The (Global) Northern Working Class: Engels Revisited’, in *Heading North: The North of England in Film and Television*, ed. by Ewa Mazierska (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 279–95 (p. 288).

¹¹⁰ Alexander Beaumont, ‘Original Modern or a New Kind of Ordinary’, *Alluvium*, 4.3 (2015) <<https://www.alluvium-journal.org/2015/06/26/original-modern-or-a-new-kind-of-ordinary/>> [accessed 30 December 2017].

Accordingly, each chapter centres on key political developments and the contexts in which they are explored: multicultural Britishness and the urban North; post-British England and the rural North; Brexit and the deindustrial North; 'Global Britishness' and the neo-primitive North.

Chapter 1 examines Sunjeev Sahota's *Ours are the Streets* (2011) and *The Year of the Runaways* (2015) as decentralised literary interventions into debates surrounding British political multiculturalism. Focusing on the relationship between Northern England and Britishness in the context of the 2001 Northern Riots and New Labour multiculturalism, I identify a mutually supportive relationship between 'multicultural' political policy and British literary culture. I consider how Sahota's explorations of migrant experience in Sheffield operates at the intersection of race, class, and regional inequality; his novels present political multiculturalism as a failed project of unitary state nationalism in post-Empire, devolutionary Britain. My argument in this chapter is that Sahota's fiction attempts to complicate a state-supporting narrative of Northern England as a reactionary place of racial hostility, redirecting conversations of racism and alienation towards British political practice at the turn of the millennium.

Taking Sarah Hall's fiction as case studies, the second chapter explores how depictions of rural space in Northern England appear to reject a version of the English pastoral that prevents the political realisation of the English nation. Hall's work demonstrates a recurrent concern with competing notions of rurality as part of a broader exploration of the relationship between the centralised British state form and regional economies in rural Cumbria. Focusing on *Haweswater* (2002), *The Carhullan Army* (2007) and *The Wolf Border* (2015), I approach the pastoral mode as a cultural version of Englishness blocking access to an institutionalised English national identity, suggesting

that Hall's persistent rejection of the pastoral literary mode functions as a 'devolutionary' pull against centralised state power in Britain and attempts to imagine a politically autonomous England emerging from the North-West.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on representations of the North after the EU Referendum. Chapter 3 explores the ways in which the North functions in the post-Brexit-vote literary imagination as a geographically vague, socio-economic metaphor for deindustrialisation. Anthony Cartwright's *The Cut* (2017) and Adam Thorpe's *Missing Fay* (2017), attempt to counter, but ultimately replicate, a nostalgic, deindustrialised version of the North that was mobilised as a vehicle for the Leave vote during and after the referendum. Exploring the relationship between place, region, and class in these texts, I trace the link between constructions of the North and the 'Little Englandism' that was perceived to lie behind England's decision to exit the EU. This chapter suggests that Thorpe and Cartwright's use of nostalgia and their formal and thematic treatment of the division between London metropolitanism and deindustrialised communities, operates within a regional mythology in which the North functions as a localised, specifically *English* antithesis to a London-centred Britishness.

The processes of what is, following on from the last chapter, another form of nostalgia is the central focus of the fourth and final chapter. Chapter 4 turns to the 'global' orientation of Britishness as a 'progressive', rearticulated state-nationalism after the Brexit vote. Focusing on Fiona Mozley's *Elmet* (2017) and Sarah Moss' *Ghost Wall* (2018), I identify an inward 'primitive turn' in post-Brexit-vote fiction set in Northern England as a response to a national macro-narrative of 'Global Britain'. Through an examination of the temporal and environmental characteristics of primitivism as it functions in these two novels, I argue that this contemporary manifestation of primitivism represents an

attempt to reterritorialise England as a heterogeneous place in opposition to the British state's deterritorialisation of national space. My analysis of *Elmet* and *Ghost Wall* in this chapter is indicative of a central argumentative strand running throughout this thesis, suggesting the need to reconceptualise the relationship between the region and the nation that goes beyond, on the one hand, a metropolitan 'Global Britain'; and, on the other, a reactionary English regionalism.

Chapter 1: Multicultural Britishness and the Urban North

In the summer of 2001, violence erupted on the streets of three former mill towns in Northern England. Heralded as the most severe instances of urban violence in Britain since the 1980s, the disturbances in Oldham, Burnley, and Bradford were presented as the result of increased tension between the towns' ethnic minorities and white communities.¹ The conflicts were predominantly sparked by orchestrated rivalries between young working-class Asian men and white extremists, leading to the media quickly terming them 'race riots' or 'Northern race riots'.² In Oldham, the violence unfolded over three consecutive nights in May, shortly followed by disturbances in Burnley. Concentrated in Bradford over the weekends of 8th and 9th July, the largest clashes took place when groups of white youths attacked the police and Asian-owned businesses in the Arncliffe and Holmwood areas, resulting in injuries to over 300 police officers and 287 cumulative arrests.³ In the wake of the so-called 'race riots', images circulated in newspapers that set the Asian community and police officers in opposition with one another, tacitly depicting the former as internal others pitted against the law. These images were paralleled by several tabloid papers that blamed the growing hostility of the areas' white communities on the government 'funneling' public grants 'worth millions' into the local authorities with a majority migrant population.⁴

¹ Claire Alexander, 'Imagining the Asian Gang: Ethnicity, Masculinity and Youth after "the Riots"', *Critical Social Policy*, 24.4 (2004), 526–49 (p. 526).

² See Paul Bagguley and Yasmin Hussain, *Riotous Citizens: Ethnic Conflict in Multicultural Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

³ Dominic Cascaini, 'Q&A: 2001 Northern Town Riots', *BBC News*, 1 June 2006 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5032166.stm>> [accessed 7 December 2018].

⁴ See, for example, David Wilkies, 'Race Riots Blamed on Millions Paid to Migrant Areas', *Daily Mail Online*, 31 May 2006 <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-388431/Race-riots-blamed-millions-paid-migrant-areas.html>> [accessed 7 September 2020].

There is, however, a crucial disjuncture between how government responses portrayed the riots and critical accounts of them. Perhaps the most notable divergence is how the latter commonly identified the significance of socio-economic deprivation in these towns.⁵ Huw Beynon and Lou Kushnik argue that the government's failure to 'prepare for the decline and later the collapse of the textile industry, or to counter institutional racism in the educational, housing, employment and criminal justice areas' compounded existing tensions in the area, while Ash Amin likewise notes that the conflicts were the product of 'a long history of economic deprivation and helplessness'.⁶ Similarly, Paul Gilroy interprets the riots as 'testimony to the depth of degradation found in decaying post-industrial towns', noting how industrial decline has been 'intertwined with technological change, with immigration and settlement, with ideological racism and spatial segregation along economic and cultural lines'.⁷ In terms of the relationship between economic and spatial segregation, the events of 2001 are significant for considering the status of Northern England in the British national imaginary. On the one hand, the riots reflect the specifically spatial character of race in England and the need for revised understandings of racialised experience attuned to the socio-economic and geographic inequalities exacerbated by the British centralised state form. On the other, the discursive representation of the riots indicates a disconnection between the North,

⁵ Notably, these socio-economic factors received minimal attention and were largely glossed over in state responses to the riots. See Cattle (2001) and Denham (2002).

⁶ Huw Beynon and Lou Kushnick, 'Cool Britannia or Cruel Britannia? Racism and New Labour', *Socialist Register*, 39 (2003), p. 239 <<https://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/article/view/5801>> [accessed 7 September 2020]; Ash Amin, 'Unruly Strangers? The 2001 Urban Riots in Britain', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27.2 (2003), 460–63 (p. 461).

⁷ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Routledge, 2013 [1987]), p. xvi.

England, and Britishness – tellingly, the riots were not ‘British’; instead, they were English in general and *Northern* in particular.⁸

In any event, the riots appeared fundamentally at odds with New Labour’s rebranding of Britain as ‘one nation’ from the late 1990s into the early millennium. The cultural rebirth of Britishness reached its pinnacle in Tony Blair’s rhetorical deployment of ‘Cool Britannia’ as a reinvigorated celebration of Britain as ‘a young country’ that was forward-looking, progressive, and emphatically multicultural.⁹ After the devolution of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, this idea of British multicultural pluralism has been a major project of New Labour as an explicitly nationalist politics.¹⁰ In the context of Britain’s ongoing constitutional fragmentation, Blair’s redefinition of Britishness was necessary for New Labour to ‘shore up a continued hierarchical relation between the devolved national areas and the British parliament in England’s capital city’.¹¹ This culturally pluralist state nationalism formed what Ben Pitcher describes as an ‘elaborated Britishness’ that effectively maintained the nation-state after a period of constitutional weakening during the 1990s.¹² My understanding of multiculturalism throughout this chapter therefore pertains to a significant phase in Britain’s constitutional instability, and

⁸ Max Farrar, “‘The Northern ‘Race Riots’ of the Summer of 2001 - Were They Riots, Where They Racial? A Case-Study of the Events in Harehills, Leeds’”, in *Parallel Lives and Polarisation* (presented at the BSA ‘Race’ Forum Seminar, City University, London, 2002) <<https://libcom.org/library/northern-race-riots-summer-2001-were-they-riots-were-they-racial>> [accessed 13 May 2020].

⁹ Tony Blair, ‘Leader’s Speech, Brighton 1995’, *British Political Speech | Speech Archive*, 1995 <<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=201>> [accessed 7 September 2020].

¹⁰ See Ben Pitcher, *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹¹ Pitcher, *The Politics of Multiculturalism*, p. 44.

¹² Pitcher, *The Politics of Multiculturalism*, p. 44.

the state policies and practices concerning ethnicity that underpinned Britain's refashioning as a culturally plural, but *unified*, multi-national state.¹³

The riots thus appeared to represent the failure of multiculturalism, depicting the three mill towns in Northern England as a site of dispossession, hostility, and racial prejudice on both sides.¹⁴ Indeed, governmental responses to the riots contributed towards a socio-political framing of mostly deindustrialised areas of Northern England as deprived and backwards-looking, both 'other', and inferior, to a dominant narrative of multicultural Britishness. In their recent book, *'Race,' Space and Multiculturalism in Northern England* (2020), Shamim Miah, Pete Sanderson, and Paul Thomas advance precisely this argument, proposing that the 2001 riots solidified an idea of Northern England as a space of 'failed multiculturalism' subject to a narrative which positions the region's deindustrialised towns as 'racialised territories, a source and object of conflict, and a breeding ground for criminality and ideologically driven violence'.¹⁵ They go on to suggest that the region had come to symbolise racial hostility since the mid-1980s, when Northern England 'took centre stage in political and media discourse over British

¹³ It is important to note that my understanding here is informed by Pitcher's theorisation of political multiculturalism as a state nationalist project and is only one of many conflicting understandings of the term. Several critiques have been levelled at multiculturalism across cultural studies and sociology, often focused on how state policies of multiculturalism promote the assimilation of other cultures into the 'British' way of life. See, for example, Bhikhu Parekh, *The Future of Multi-ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report* (London: Profile Books, 2000) and Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley, *The Crises of Multiculturalism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age* (London: Zed, 2011). For Arun Kundnani, the riots, combined with events since September 2011, have 'sounded the knell death' of multiculturalism. See Kundnani, 'The Death of Multiculturalism', *Institute of Race Relations*, 2002 <<https://irr.org.uk/article/the-death-of-multiculturalism/>> [accessed 17 September 2020].

¹⁴ Bagguley and Hussain, for example, note the criminalisation of South Asian Muslim men in Northern England in policies following the riots, describing how state responses 'bifurcate between a national-level focus on community cohesion and a local criminal justice system response that has been highly repressive'. Bagguley and Hussain, *Riotous Citizens: Ethnic Conflict in Multicultural Britain*, p. 2.

¹⁵ Shamim Miah, Pete Sanderson, and Paul Thomas, *'Race,' Space and Multiculturalism in Northern England: The (M62) Corridor of Uncertainty* (London: Springer Nature, 2020), p. 29.

multiculturalism and has then accelerated markedly in the post-2001 era of concern over “parallel lives” and Islamic extremism’.¹⁶ In this context, the riots contributed towards a broader iconography of Northern England suggestive of a culturally hostile and intolerant English ethnonationalism defined against a ‘progressive’ multicultural Britishness. This is a dualism which, as we shall see throughout this thesis, has persisted in various forms over the next two decades.

The Literary Politics of British Multiculturalism

Before I explore Sunjeev Sahota’s novels in more detail, I want to briefly situate his writing within the broader terrain of contemporary British ‘multicultural’ fiction and its critical and commercial reception. This chapter identifies a relationship between two distinct but interlinked forms of multiculturalism: first, political multiculturalism, referring to the state management of race and redefinition of Britishness discussed above; second, literary multiculturalism, the process by which Britain’s literary economy reproduces the ideological work of the former. By this view, just as political multiculturalism has functioned as a politics of state-nationalism in devolutionary Britain, the critical and commercial reception of popular ‘multicultural’ texts have served the priorities of a unified British state. For instance, in *Writing Black Scotland* (2020), Joseph Jackson points out that the development of the discipline of black British literature demonstrates a mutually supportive relationship between British literary culture and the Union. According to Jackson, in devolutionary Britain, the discipline of black British literature has not only ‘taken Britain’s constitutional continuity for granted’, but has

¹⁶ Miah, Sanderson, and Thomas, p. 3.

‘often unexpectedly dovetailed with the requirements of that British state nationalism’.¹⁷ While Jackson critiques the suppression of black Scottish representation in British literary culture, another state ‘requirement’ is the suppression of a regionally differentiated ‘multicultural’ literature of England. Indeed, the spatial biases of ‘multicultural’ British literature and its critical and commercial reception (herein described as literary multiculturalism), replicates the concentration of political power in Westminster; it presents London multiculturalism *par excellence*, whose Britishness is as natural as it is unquestioned.

The treatment of Zadie Smith’s debut novel, *White Teeth* (2000), is particularly useful for demonstrating this tendency. Upon its publication, Smith was ‘heralded as the new voice of British literature’, and *White Teeth*, though satirical, was ‘initially perceived as a celebratory examination of multicultural relations’.¹⁸ Significantly, Smith’s association with British literature was inextricably tied to the idea of London as the epicentre of Britishness as an outward-facing multicultural nation. Literary-critical responses to the novel echo this function: according to Kristian Shaw, *White Teeth* envisions ‘London’s potential in establishing a “happy multicultural land” of transnational associations’, while Corinne Fowler approaches the novel as emblematic of the relationship between British political projects and its literary economy.¹⁹ For Fowler, *White Teeth* has ‘proved amenable to a process of domestication that at least partially serves a celebratory cosmopolitan agenda’, while Smith herself is ‘readily marketable [...]

¹⁷ Jackson, p. 27; 28.

¹⁸ Kristian Shaw, *Cosmopolitanism in Twenty-First Century Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 67. Other ‘multicultural’ novels to receive similar acclaim include Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (2003) and Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), though to lesser extents. Along with *White Teeth*, Ali and Kureishi’s novels have since been adapted as television series.

¹⁹ Kristian Shaw, *Cosmopolitanism in Twenty-First Century Fiction*, p. 67.

as an apparent success story of British multiculturalism'.²⁰ Fowler's argument is significant here because it highlights the way in which British literary multiculturalism replicates and augments the priorities of the British state. Calling for 'a sustained focus by literary scholarship on the discomfiting links between the political and literary economy', Fowler charts the vastly differing fortunes of *White Teeth* and Joe Pemberton's *Forever and Ever, Amen* (2000) a comparable representation of a 'multicultural' novel, with the latter's parochial Northern association at the forefront of several biases leading to its relative commercial disappointment compared to *White Teeth*'s meteoric success.²¹ In their introduction to *Postcolonial Manchester* (2013), Fowler and Lynne Pearce make a similar observation, suggesting that 'the profile and status of London as the nation's "multicultural" heartland has served to marginalise diasporic cultural production in the regions.'²² What this divergence demonstrates is the way trends within literary production appear to reflect and reinforce the spatial biases of British *political* multiculturalism, replicating a logic that benefits the state as it allocates capital and narrates Britishness itself in a way that is centred on London.²³

²⁰ Fowler, p. 83.

²¹ It is important to note that Fowler's argument is much more complex than this, and explores several reasons for the diverging sales and overall reception of these two novels. In addition to the question of geography, Fowler considers Smith's endorsement by prominent authors, publicity, and marketing of the novel prior to its publication as compounding factors that effectively guaranteed its success prior to its release. See Fowler, *A Tale of Two Novels*.

²² Corinne Fowler and Lynne Pearce, 'Introduction: Manchester and the Devolution of British Literary Culture', in *Postcolonial Manchester: Diaspora Space and the Devolution of Literary Project*, ed. by Lynne Pearce, Corinne Fowler, and Robert Crawshaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 1–19 (p. 2).

²³ *Postcolonial Manchester*, edited by Lynne Pearce, Corinne Fowler, and Robert Crawshaw, is premised on this idea. Attending to the spatial bias of British literary multiculturalism, they argue that 'the profile and status of London as the nation's "multicultural" heartland has served to marginalize diasporic cultural production in England's other regions. See Pearce, Fowler, and Crawshaw, *Postcolonial Manchester: Diaspora Space and the Devolution of Literary Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 2; Pearce, Fowler and Crawshaw, p. 3.

Echoing Fowler and Pearce, this chapter proposes that Sahota's novels address the elision of regional English 'multicultural' representation, and complicate a vision of Northern England as a microcosm of a narrower ethnic Englishness. There is, then, a pressing need for a decentralised approach to multicultural fiction that is attuned to 'the politics of location' in England.²⁴ As Procter writes:

[D]ebates on empire and its aftermath have tended to flicker between metropolitan centre and postcolonial periphery while paying scant attention to the internal margins of provincial Englishness. Nevertheless, there is compelling evidence to suggest that the regional novel has played, and continues to play, a significant imaginative role during the period of the empire's passing.²⁵

There appears to be a connection between Procter's call for a devolved literary vision of postcolonial England and Gardiner's notion of 're-provincialisation'.²⁶ Procter's place-orientated focus on race in England contributes towards the disassociation of Englishness from a Powellite ethnonationalism, while also sharing an emphasis on regional differentiation articulated through attention to place, both of which are preconditions for the emergence of a re-provincialised literature of England.

Sahota is a writer concerned with a post-imperial imagination of deindustrialised towns in Northern England. In an interview with Katy Shaw in 2017, Sahota reveals an interest in the landscape of the region. Noting how the area continues to experience the

²⁴ James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 1. Since Procter's *Dwelling Places*, there have been important literary-critical works which contribute towards a 'devolved' approach to postcolonial Britain. See, for example, John McLeod's *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2004) and Pearce, Fowler and Crawshaw, *Postcolonial Manchester* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2015). It is, however, important to note that Procter and Pearce et al.'s use of 'devolution' is distinct to my own political understanding of the term, and is used here to describe the decentralisation of London as Britain's cultural epicentre.

²⁵ James Procter, 'The Return of the Native: Pat Barker, David Peace and the Regional Novel after Empire', in *End of Empire and the English Novel Since 1945*, ed. by Rachael Gilmour and Bill Schwartz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 203–17 (p. 203).

²⁶ Gardiner, *Return of England*, p. 146.

implications of Thatcher's dismantling of the steel industry in the 1980s, Sahota describes how increased migration in the preceding decades has resulted in the production of multi-ethnic experiences that are particular to the material and socio-economic implications of deindustrialisation:

[A] sense of betrayal from that time still hangs in the air today in many communities in the North of England. What that does to a community, how the blame for that is fixed on a government, and the sense of displacement caused by new communities coming in, is fascinating. The children of those new groups create a new dynamic and a unique nexus of conditions that is quite specific to the North. The landscape of the North seems to lend itself to that sense of isolation, of subversion, of going against the grain [...].²⁷

Sahota's two novels, *Ours are the Streets* (2011) and *The Year of the Runaways* (2015) betray this preoccupation with a distinctively urban Northern England. The novels are largely based in Sheffield, with occasional passages set in London, the Midlands, India and Pakistan. Local specificity characterises these accounts of a multi-ethnic Sheffield; references to existing residential estates, local bus routes, and road signs punctuate these narratives, with the socio-economic implications of deindustrialisation providing a frame for Sahota's exploration of the intersection of regionality, race, and class. Taken together, *Ours are the Streets* and *Year of the Runaways* eschew the cosmopolitan vision of British multiculturalism promulgated by New Labour. In both, the desire for national belonging results in an experience of state-racism that is compounded by Sheffield's socio-economic peripherality, but also which actively denaturalises Britishness. *Ours are the Streets* tells the story of Imtiaz Raina, a working-class second-generation immigrant living in Sheffield. Told from Imtiaz's perspective in the style of a diary or confessional memoir, the text explores his radicalisation and plans to blow up Meadowhall following a trip to

²⁷ Katy Shaw, 'Living by the Pen: In Conversation with Sunjeev Sahota', *English: Journal of the English Association*, 66.254 (2017), 263–71 (p. 267).

Pakistan, where he becomes involved in terror activities. Unable to forge an identity as an active participant in England, Imtiaz's lack of belonging manifests itself in an attack on Sheffield's largest shopping centre. In contrast to the purported 'inclusion' and 'community' of multicultural Britishness, Imtiaz's experience in Sheffield is marked by alienation and cultural disenfranchisement, leading to his decision to detonate a bomb in Meadowhall. This overtly political act will also lead to his own death.²⁸ As the title indicates, for Imtiaz, the street becomes a symbolic urban space to be reclaimed as a site of political possibility against state surveillance and profound social and spatial abjection.²⁹

The Year of the Runaways offers a distinctively neoliberal migrant narrative, exploring affective experiences of migration and the pursuit of legal British citizenship. Set in 2003, the novel traces the precarious lives of migrants in the years leading up to the 2007-8 global financial crisis, all of whom believe that migration to England will enable them to live 'the good life' promised by capitalist culture.³⁰ Told through the multiple narrative perspectives of three Indian men (Randeep, Avtar, and Tochi) and one British-Indian woman (Narinder), *The Year of the Runaways* presents England in the context of austerity, precarious accommodation and labour, and omnipresent state surveillance. Tochi and Randeep, for example, share dilapidated urban dwellings with ten other men who are all exploitatively employed in the same job, having arrived in England

²⁸ Ted Cantle, *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team* (Home Office, 2001), p. 27 <<http://tedcantle.co.uk/pdf/communitycohesion%20cantlereport.pdf>> [accessed 5 September 2020]; John Denham, *Building Cohesive Communities: A Report of the Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion* (London: Home Office, 2001), p. 1 <<http://www.tedcantle.co.uk/publications/005%20Building%20Cohesive%20Communities%20%28The%20Denham%20Report%29%202001.pdf>> [accessed 5 September 2020].

²⁹ Kundnani carefully traces the state surveillance and subsequent demonisation of Muslims in the twenty-first-century public imaginary in both the UK and the US. See Kundnani, *The Muslims are Coming!: Islamophobia, Extremism, and the War on Terror* (London: Verso, 2014)

³⁰ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 1.

by various unorthodox means: Randeep is staying in England on a visa, secured through marriage to Narinder, who lives separately in a flat nearby; Avtar has sold one of his kidneys to travel to England on a student visa; while Tochi arrived in the back of a vegetable lorry, and faces further discrimination as a *chamaar* or 'untouchable', unable to escape the prejudices of his caste either in England or India. Despite their differing backgrounds, what these three men all have in common is that they migrated to England on their internalised belief that it will afford them to become men who 'can choose their own life'.³¹ Yet, Randeep, Tochi, and Avtar's imaginings of 'the good life' based on entrepreneurial success and the freedom to choose are revealed as little more than an ideological fantasy. Their geographies remain fixed to remote, inner-city spaces in Northern England that are marked by economic deprivation, becoming trapped in a cycle of social alienation and precarity.

What is notable about *Ours are the Streets* and *The Year of the Runaways* is how they complicate a narrative of Northern England as a place of racial hostility, positioning the broader structures of the British state form at the core of their protagonists' social disenfranchisement and lack of belonging. In this sense, Sahota's denaturalisation of Britishness and attempt to provide a specifically *English* account of race in Northern England might be compared to the novels of Caryl Phillips, a writer whose most recent writing concentrates on the everyday lives of ethnically diverse communities in Yorkshire.³² John McLeod suggests that Phillips has been crucial in rearticulating

³¹ Sunjeev Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways* (London: Picador, 2015), p. 70.

³² Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) also deals with how Pakistani communities reconcile their religion and culture with life in an increasingly hostile environment in an unnamed fictional town (nicknamed by locals as 'Dasht-e-Tanhaii', or 'The Desert of Loneliness') in Northern England during the mid-1990s.

Northern England against a stereotype of racial prejudice, noting how Leeds – as the 2001 riots also indicates – has often been ‘a place of postwar British racial prejudice’:³³

The northern “English somewheres” towards which [Phillips’] work travels are never idealized or glibly celebrated, but articulated in order to secure a postcolonial discourse of the North, in contradistinction to the usual clichés – one which suggests the tactics needed for a transformed future for the region.³⁴

Phillips’ *The Distant Shore* (2003), for example, appears to be concerned with the complexities of establishing a placed vision of England which is both regionalised and ethnically diverse. Focusing on the everyday lives of a small unnamed village in Northern England, the novel opens on the statement that ‘England has changed: these days it’s hard to tell who’s from round here and who isn’t’.³⁵ Sahota’s novels affect a similar placing and re-provincialisation. His accounts of migrant experience in Northern England expose not only the spatial biases of political multiculturalism, but also the exclusions inherent in state-sanctioned notions of citizenship. This chapter thus focuses on Sahota as a writer whose fiction might be read productively alongside the work of Phillips in that it is concerned with multicultural British citizenship and belonging in Northern England. Like Phillips, Sahota’s narratives are inseparable from their socio-economic and geographic context of uneven regional development. What McLeod terms the ‘glitzy spectacle of millennial multicultural British chic’ is frequently complicated and problematised in *Ours are the Streets* and *The Year of the Runaways*: the socio-economic implications of deindustrialisation; the impossibility of establishing a place-bound sense of belonging in

³³ John McLeod, ‘English Somewheres: Caryl Phillips and the English North’, in *Postcolonial Spaces: The Politics of Place in Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Andrew Teverson and Sara Upstone (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 14–27 (p. 16).

³⁴ McLeod, ‘English Somewheres’, p. 27.

³⁵ Phillips’ 2011 essay collection, *Colour Me English* further explores his negotiation of growing up in Leeds and negotiating his English identity as a writer born in St Kitts.

England and alienating modes of state surveillance as racialised ‘others’, are concerns to which these texts consistently return.³⁶

Ours are the Streets and *The Year of the Runaways* represent decentralised accounts of literary multiculturalism. In what follows, I explore Sahota’s preoccupation with what Procter describes as ‘the politics of location’, and whose explorations of migrant experience operates at the intersection of race, class, and regional inequality, undermining political multiculturalism as a failed project of British state nationalism. It is my argument that Sahota attempts to complicate a narrative of Northern England as a reactionary place of racial hostility, redirecting conversations of racism and alienation towards the practices of the British state. While there are individual instances of racism from the communities in which these novels are based, what is most alienating for Sahota’s protagonists is an omnipresent and pervasive need to self-regulate and assimilate. In *Ours are the Streets*, Imtiaz’s growing psychological dislocation reflects his feeling of surveillance; he increasingly believes that he is being watched and that the authorities are aware of his planned terror attack. In *The Year of the Runaways*, encounters with state officials in the form of immigration officers, tense exchanges at visa offices, and unnavigable education systems embody an exclusionary state-sanctioned citizenship that reveals itself as a formalised mode of surveillance and control of ethnic minorities. Taken together, *Ours are the Streets* and *The Year of the Runaways* open up space to rearticulate the North beyond its racialised stereotype as the culturally

³⁶ John McLeod, ‘Reinventing the Nation: Black and Asian British Representations’, in *The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing*, ed. by Susheila Nasta and Mark U. Stein (Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 453–67 (p. 464).

homogenous home of the 'white working class', offering counter-narratives to the state's response to race and ethnicity after the 2001 riots.³⁷

From Assimilation to Abjection: *Ours are the Streets*

Told retrospectively in Imtiaz's first-person narration, *Ours are the Streets* charts his journey to Islamic radicalisation following a trip to Pakistan, a process which, Imtiaz tells us, will culminate in a terror attack on Meadowhall, a large shopping centre on the outskirts of Sheffield. The novel provides an *apologia* that Imtiaz intends to leave behind for his wife, Becka, and daughter, Noor, justifying his actions and communicating what he feels is a profound moral dilemma. Imtiaz expresses relief in the novel's opening sentence ('At last the page is stained') suggesting a confessional writing process before his death, because 'knowing you're going to die makes you want to talk'.³⁸ In terms of the novel's exploration of Imtiaz's journey – from initially wanting to be like everyone else and 'a part of their drift towards nothing' to becoming a 'new stronger Imtiaz' – *Ours are the Streets* might be read as what Sarah Iltott describes as a 'British Muslim Bildungsrome', which makes available 'a broader range of subject positions that are crucial in challenging representations of Islam as monoliths and in perpetual opposition to notions of Britishness'.³⁹ Although the novel attempts to go beyond polarising narratives of Muslims

³⁷ Pitcher's analysis of the British state's mobilisation of notions of 'community' and 'race' in political multiculturalism highlights the association of the 'white working class' with Northern England following the 2001 riots. See Ben Pitcher, 'Multiculturalism, Community Cohesion and "the White Working Class"' in *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) pp. 75-108.

³⁸ Sunjeev Sahota, *Ours are the Streets* (London: Picador, 2011), p. 1.

³⁹ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 3, p. 64; Sarah Iltott, *New Postcolonial British Genres: Shifting the Boundaries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 29.

in Britain, tracing the structures of inequality and marginalisation that contribute towards Imtiaz's radicalisation, Sahota ultimately rejects this 'expanded' Britishness that might include Islam – instead, indicating that the structures of Britishness are inadequate for transcending an exclusory discourse of 'community', 'assimilation', and 'integration'. In this way, Sahota foregrounds the limits of assimilationist rhetoric, revealing the ideological exclusions inherent in political multiculturalism and belonging in Britain.

Ours are the Streets attempts to counter, and thus transcend, a binary opposition between Muslims (specifically Asian men) and whites that was popularised in England after the 2001 riots and globally after the events of 9/11.⁴⁰ The first-person confessional prose provides a counter-narrative to the discourse of British political multiculturalism, communicating how state approaches to race have resulted in constant self-governing and alienation. Despite being born in England, Imtiaz feels culturally separate from both 'Britishers' (pejoratively referred to as 'Goreh') and the Asian 'freshies' around him, locating an 'in-betweenness' or 'hybridity' characteristic of migrant narratives.⁴¹ Imtiaz's social alienation can be read through Imogen Tyler's 'social abjection', a process in which individuals excluded from state-sanctioned definitions of belonging become 'abject, cast out and illegalized', occupying the social and political the margins of society.⁴² Imtiaz appears to be what Tyler terms a 'national abject', 'ideological conductors mobilised to

⁴⁰ In his speech to the Munich Security Conference in 2011, David Cameron condemned Britain's 'passive tolerance' of Islamic extremism and argued that the 'the doctrine of multiculturalism' was actually the cause of segregation. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference>. David Cameron, 'PM's Speech at Munich Security Conference', *GOV.UK*, 2011 <<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference>> [accessed 9 September 2020].

⁴¹ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 165; p. 78.

⁴² Imogen Tyler, *Revolted Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (London: Zed Books, 2013), p. 20.

do the dirty work of neoliberal governmentality' – as we shall see, Imtiaz represents the ways British political multiculturalism relied on internalised others, or 'national abjects' in order to legitimate itself through the governance of an internal threat to 'national values'.⁴³ Tyler attributes this process of stigmatisation and governance to the neoliberal state:⁴⁴

... a major characteristic of neoliberal 'democracies' is that they function through the generation of consent via fear and anxiety, rather than fidelity to national identity. We can understand this in terms of 'crisis management', in which crises are generated [...] by governments in order all the more effectively to procure public consent for the marketization of public institutions, goods and services and penal welfare and border-control regimes.⁴⁵

Although Tyler does not refer to the uses of 'crises' as an instrument of state self-preservation, the process she sets out here is strikingly similar to how Asians and Muslims in Northern England were 'subject to control, stigma and censure' as part of state-led practices of 'community cohesion' and 'integration', the formalised ideology of 'managing diversity' following the riots.⁴⁶ After the events of 2001, the 'War on Terror', and recent terror attacks in the UK such as 7/7, male Muslims, in particular, were

⁴³ Tyler, p. 9.

⁴⁴ My understanding of 'neoliberalism' throughout this thesis pertains to a particular economic, political and social model that has developed across the globe in various ways since 1980s. My thinking here is informed by David Harvey's formulation of neoliberalism as a practice premised on the idea that 'human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by private property rights, free markets, and free trade'. What is crucial for the discussion of migrant agency and citizenship in this chapter is the contradictory way in which the concepts of freedom and agency are central to neoliberalism's hegemony. As Harvey puts it, the very assumption that these social outcomes are 'guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade is a cardinal feature of neoliberal thinking', with the pursuit of being the individual who is 'free to choose' functioning as the lifeblood of neoliberal subjecthood. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 2; p. 7.

⁴⁵ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 8.

⁴⁶ See Cantle; Denham.

criminalised as ‘revolting’ subjects in the manner Tyler identifies here.⁴⁷ As Hussain and Bagguley point out, the combination of the riots, the political successes of the British National Party and the events after 9/11 ‘pushed British-Pakistani Muslims into the forefront of national political conflicts around citizenship, national identity and allegiance to the state’.⁴⁸ Pitcher likewise locates the exclusory practices of British state multiculturalism, arguing that the state views Muslim communities as ‘exceed[ing] the official parameters of multicultural Britain’.⁴⁹ This process led to the figure of the male British Muslim often standing as the undifferentiated face of both immigration and terrorism, enabling the state to bundle refugees, immigrants, and terrorists ‘into one revolting parasitical figure’.⁵⁰

In this context, *Ours are the Streets* forms Imtiaz’s attempt to write back to his social abjection under the British state. The novel provides the discursive conditions for Imtiaz’s memoir to function as a counter-narrative to a dominant discourse of ‘us’ versus ‘them’. When Imtiaz directs the narrative at Noor, for example, he emphasises the difference between media portrayals of terrorists and the ‘loneliness that takes hold of his gut’.⁵¹ He admits that she ‘won’t find it easy, [...] but don’t listen to what the newspapers and TV will have said about me. None of it is true. They don’t know me’.⁵² Here, the novel’s sympathetic tone communicates how a prevailing media and political

⁴⁷ In the context of the United States, Donald Trump’s ‘Muslim Ban’ in 2017 explicitly demonised Muslims, prohibiting individuals from six Muslim-majority countries from entering the USA.

⁴⁸ Yasmin Hussain and Paul Bagguley, ‘Citizenship, Ethnicity and Identity: British Pakistanis after the 2001 “Riots”’, *Sociology*, 39.3 (2005), 407–25 (p. 407).

⁴⁹ Pitcher, *The Politics of Multiculturalism*, p. 146.

⁵⁰ Pitcher, *The Politics of Multiculturalism*, p. 146; Tyler, p. 91.

⁵¹ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 2.

⁵² Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 2.

narrative of alienation and otherness has led to Imtiaz's isolation and subsequent turn to radical Islam. The textual space of *Ours are the Streets* thus becomes Imtiaz's 'Third Space', providing the 'discursive conditions of enunciation' in which social marginality can be transformed and utilised to articulate difference.⁵³ Here, then, Sahota humanises the narrative of the would-be suicide bomber through an emphasis on Imtiaz's focalising voice, attempting to 'put a human face on the threat of jihadi violence' while also enabling Imtiaz to write back against his abjection.⁵⁴ The process of writing functions almost as Imtiaz's plea for help and an understanding of his identity that goes beyond stereotype. Imtiaz tells us how 'that's what these pages are all about [...]. Wanting to be found out, which is only another way of wanting to be known', indicating that his suicide attack is less about a religiously-motivated act of violence than the desire both to be heard and to belong in England.⁵⁵

In terms of structures that uphold the relationship between ethnic 'others' and the state, a degree of self-reflexive awareness in Imtiaz's narrative locates the imperial power structures inherent in the use of English language, the discipline of English Literature, and the act of novel writing itself. Reflecting on his experiences of the British education system, Imtiaz reflects how:

I really did enjoy English and Art and stuff like that. And wondered about growing up and writing plays or something, like ones Miss Shepherd took us to see in our GCSE year. Knew it'd never happen, like. For all the usual boring brown reasons. But I'm loving writing this. It's really helping. It's like I'm normally walking round and I'm just confused about how I'm feeling or what I'm thinking. But when I'm

⁵³ Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 55.

⁵⁴ Jago Morrison, 'Jihadi Fiction: Radicalisation Narratives in the Contemporary Novel', *Textual Practice*, 31.3 (2017), 567-584 (p. 574).

⁵⁵ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 17.

writing it's like I'm rummaging until I find something that's not far off what it really is what I want to say.⁵⁶

Imtiaz perceives the discipline of English Literature and the art of writing creatively as racialised structures that are out of his reach 'for all the boring brown reasons'. Despite his childhood ambitions and the catharsis that he attributes to writing, Imtiaz assumes that such a profession is closed to him. There is also an implicit cultural pressure here, as we learn that Imtiaz has since progressed to university to study business, a pursuit he undertakes partly out of obligation to please his parents. Imtiaz's inability to imagine himself as a writer and the novel's overall concern with language demonstrates the longstanding implications of imperial notions of English identity that were associated with the English language in the post-war period.⁵⁷ This mechanism of exclusion is evident in the distance Imtiaz imagines between his position as a Muslim and that of a writer; he jokes that he 'ought to have been wearing glasses or one of those one-eyed jobs', presenting a playful stereotype that contrasts with the beckoning image of a suicide bomber as the novel progresses towards its end.⁵⁸

The novel returns to this exclusionary Englishness along the lines of ethnicity and identity. During his time in Pakistan, shortly after his father's death, Imtiaz explains to his uncle the difficulties of being born in England and growing up there as a second-generation immigrant:

We don't really know what we're about, I guess. Who we are, what we're here for. But that weren't nothing like what I wanted to say. Even to me it just sounded like the usual crap I'd been hearing for years. I wanted to talk about why I felt fine

⁵⁶ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 26.

⁵⁷ The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 was one of the earliest state policies to formally set out the requirements for immigrants to be proficient in the English language.

⁵⁸ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 151.

rooting for Liverpool, in a quiet way, but not England. I wanted to talk about why I found myself defending Muslims against whites and whites against Muslims.⁵⁹

Imtiaz substitutes national affiliation with England for a ('quiet') emphasis on the regional through football, indicating that regional identities attached to sporting culture are more accessible to him than a narrower Englishness.⁶⁰ Imtiaz's implicit association of England with whiteness evokes a reactionary ethnonationalism that reached its peak in Enoch Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech delivered in Birmingham in 1968, and which continued with the emergence of Thatcherism a decade later, both of which presented Englishness as 'a closed ethnicity rather than an open nationality'.⁶¹ Further, Imtiaz's reference to sporting allegiance speaks to an exclusory ethnonationalist Englishness that was encapsulated in the Tebbit test during the 1990s, further emphasising the impossibility of establishing an English identity as both a second-generation Asian immigrant and a Muslim.⁶² Imtiaz's inability to reconcile the two

⁵⁹ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 137.

⁶⁰ After the post-war ethnonationalism of Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher, there was an understandable reluctance to engage with the idea of a progressive Englishness from those on the cultural Left, calling instead for a revision of Britishness. Paul Gilroy's call to 'put the black in the Union Jack' demonstrates the way in which England and Englishness existed only as a reactionary ethnonationalism. Gilroy's scepticism towards a post-imperial civic English nationalism is also echoed by Stuart Hall, who describes Englishness as 'closed', 'exclusive' and 'regressive'. In his influential 'New Ethnicities' lecture, Hall proposes a 'non-coercive and a more diverse' understanding of ethnicity set explicitly against 'the hegemonic conception of "Englishness" which, under Thatcherism, stabilizes so much of the dominant political and cultural discourses'. In a later interview however, Hall concedes that 'Englishness is something we need to talk about' but it remains opposed to 'radical appropriation'. See Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. by Kuan-Hsing Chen and David Morley (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1996), pp. 442–51 (p. 448); Jonathan Derbyshire, 'Stuart Hall: "We Need to Talk about Englishness"' *New Statesman*. 23 August 2012. <<https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk-politics/2012/08/stuart-hall-we-need-talk-about-englishness>> [accessed 4 September 2020].

⁶¹ Tariq Modood, 'Ethnicity and Intergenerational Identities and Adaptations in Britain: The Socio-Political Context', in *Ethnicity and Causal Mechanisms*, ed. by Michael Rutter and Marta Tienda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 281–300 (p. 294).

⁶² The test, proposed by Conservative MP Norman Tebbit, challenged the supposed 'national loyalty' of immigrants, requiring that they support England's cricket team, rather than the country from which they

identity classifications alludes to an ideological mechanism of British multiculturalism which relies on Islam standing as a *racial* (rather than religious) category in opposition to an inherently English whiteness, resulting in Muslims functioning as an interiorised 'other' figure to be integrated into British culture.

It is in the imperative to assimilate, and the psychological effects of self-surveillance, then, that the novel registers a pervasive dominant narrative of political multiculturalism. Before he visits Pakistan, Imtiaz attempts to perform cultural assimilation and feels resentment when he cannot do so. When Becca suggests meeting her parents for the first time, Imtiaz is embarrassed that religious and cultural differences prevent him from reciprocating – as Zinck Pascal puts it, Imtiaz's '[r]espect for his mother's religious orthodoxy is incompatible with the idea of "shag[ging]" Becca'.⁶³ Directing the narrative at his wife, he admits that '[t]he normal thing would've been to take you to meet my ammi and abba aswell. But I couldn't do that. I couldn't do the normal thing for you'.⁶⁴ The weakening of Imtiaz's ability and desire to assimilate is concurrent with his growing paranoia and self-surveillance.

I have previously described *Ours are the Streets* as an *apologia*, a diary, and confessional memoir, but it is also the vehicle that communicates Imtiaz's psychological

(or their parents) emigrated. For an analysis of the relationship between British Asian nationhood, citizenship and Cricket in the context of the Tebbit test, see Thomas Fletcher, 'Who do "they" cheer for?: Cricket, diaspora, hybridity and divided loyalties among British Asians, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 47.5 (2011), pp. 612-631; Links can also be drawn here to Caryl Phillips, who revealed in a 1999 essay that football provided a form of regional affiliation in Leeds that he has carried with him as an Englishman living in New York. See Phillips, 'Leeds United, Life, and Me', *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, 32 (1999) 182-85.

⁶³ Pascal Zinck, 'Dead End: The Failure of Multicultural Britain in Sunjeev Sahota's *Ours Are The Streets*', *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 38.1 (2015), 79-90 (p. 80).

⁶⁴ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 18.

deterioration and dispossession. Moving between Sheffield and Pakistan, the narrative is temporally and spatially disjointed, switching modes from past to present with Imtiaz reflecting on his own unreliable narration – he reveals early on that he ‘might be getting things mixed up a bit’ but ‘this is how he remembers things’.⁶⁵ According to Imtiaz, this fragmentation is the result of being watched, with the authorities aware of his planned terror attack. Imtiaz’s awareness of an unnamed presence frequently disrupts the narrative; he tells Becka and Noor that ‘[i]f they really are on to me then I need to get the rest of everything down quick’.⁶⁶ This narrative fragmentation works productively to foreground the imaginary status of Tarun, a Meadowhall security guard whom Imtiaz suspects may know of his planned attack, and possibly the ‘they’ to which Imtiaz refers above. As an authoritative figure of security, Tarun functions allegorically as a symbol of the state, a projection of Imtiaz’s self-surveillance and paranoia. Imtiaz initially glimpses Tarun on the tram from Meadowhall back to Sheffield city centre, describing Tarun staring at him ‘the way someone might stare at a tree or a painting’, but later forgetting about the encounter.⁶⁷ Tarun continues to haunt Imtiaz throughout the novel, with Imtiaz imagining Tarun in his home, invisible to Becka and others around him.

Read in the context of political multiculturalism, Tarun’s omnipresence embodies the psychological implications of government legislation which effectively instructed ethnic minorities to police themselves to ensure the performance of national values aligned with British citizenship.⁶⁸ The 2001 Cattle Report formed the state’s earliest

⁶⁵ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 13.

⁶⁶ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 202.

⁶⁷ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 111.

⁶⁸ Cattle, p. 19.

response to 'managing diversity', emphasising the need for ethnic minorities to 'develop a greater acceptance of, and engagement with, the principal national institutions' of Britain while working towards a 'meaningful concept of "citizenship"' which 'establishes a clear primary loyalty to this Nation'.⁶⁹ The report appears to prescribe a version of national 'allegiance' and 'loyalty' in which 'diversity' is assimilated into a set of state-sanctioned British values, implying the existence of delegitimised versions of citizenship that did not intrinsically perform 'allegiance' to the British nation-state. At the same time, the report also marked the creation of a self-governing citizen responsible for their performance of 'a specific set of social goals through which the state seeks to reframe the contract between citizen and state', displacing external control with *internal* systems of domination in which the 'national object' began to police itself.⁷⁰ In *Ours are the Streets*, Tarun appears to embody an internal system of control, continually surveying Imtiaz's actions. Tarun's association with political multiculturalism is acutely visible during a scene in which he gives Imtiaz some food tokens based on 'community', causing Imtiaz to recoil, describing how 'it always made him wince, that word'.⁷¹ The reference to 'community' is significant in the context of New Labour multiculturalism. The term 'provided a de facto mechanism through which the institutions of the state have sought to understand and deal with racialized groups', and features centrally in analyses of both multiculturalism and the riots.⁷² The Cattle Report mentions 'community' a total of 377

⁶⁹ Cattle, p. 20.

⁷⁰ Jonathan Burnett, 'Community, Cohesion and the State', *Race & Class*, 45.3 (2004), 1-18 (p. 13).

⁷¹ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 144.

⁷² Pitcher, *The Politics of Multiculturalism*, p. 76.

times in the 80-page document, demonstrating the acculturation of 'national values' and British national identity into an integrationist and regulatory state politics.

Imtiaz's awareness of the propensity to scapegoat Muslims is also tied to his integrationism. When Becka eventually meets Imtiaz's parents during a meal at a local Indian restaurant, Imtiaz's father, Rizwan, is subject to racist abuse by the bride of a drunken hen party. When the group enter, Imtiaz's describes his family's reactive self-regulation:

I could feel you were nervous, though, Abba and Ammi. The way you went quiet over your food. Like you were trying to make yourselves as small and invisible as possible. And when I said I were going to the toilet, Ammi looked frightened and asked me not to go, as if any movement away from the table were asking for trouble. Like this were our little corner and we should just stick to it.⁷³

This scene reflects the subordination of Muslims in the national imagination after 2001, reflecting how the 'focus shifted from the state's upholding of human rights to the responsibility of Muslims to integrate themselves into the shared values of Britishness'.⁷⁴ The bride asks Rizwan to take a photo of the group, before asking for a picture with him as 'a nice touch for the album'.⁷⁵ Before Rizwan can object, she throws her arms around him and asks him to kiss her; the situation persists, as the woman 'jiggle[s] her tits in his face' before another member of the group asks Imtiaz's mum about her husband's sexual preferences.⁷⁶ Mortified, Rizwan retreats into himself, repeatedly apologising until Imtiaz defuses the scene. Despite the Bride's drunken retort that 'there isn't a racist bone in

⁷³ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 44.

⁷⁴ Arun Kundnani, 'Integrationism: The Politics of Anti-Muslim Racism', *Race & Class*, 48.4 (2007), 24–44 (p. 34).

⁷⁵ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 49.

⁷⁶ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 49.

my body!', the incident testifies to a cultural environment in which Muslims are denied agency and thus prevented from challenging their marginalisation in public.⁷⁷

Rather than these individual acts of racism, then, it is the persistence of a broader socio-political context in which 'national objects' are denied agency that the novel registers state-racism, associating political multiculturalism with the dispossession and acculturation of particular ethnicities. It is Rizwan's refusal to challenge his position that angers Imtiaz the most: 'it were like you were letting yourself be humiliated all over again. And it just fucked me off.'⁷⁸ Rizwan's deference can be read within a broader national narrative of integrationism that underpinned both political multiculturalism and governmental responses to 9/11.⁷⁹ As Kundnani suggests, the 'origins of integrationism lie in the government's response to the riots in northern towns in the summer of 2001 and to 9/11'.⁸⁰ According to Kundnani, '[w]hile the anti-terrorist legislation of the "war on terror" institutionalised anti-Muslim racism in the structures of the state, integrationism has normalised an anti-Muslim political culture'.⁸¹ Sahota references the events of 9/11 to locate the novel within a particular moment in which Muslims are demonised in the public imagination. Before the conflict takes place, Rizwan asserts –

⁷⁷ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 50.

⁷⁸ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 51.

⁷⁹ This governmental 'othering' of Muslims was reinvigorated following the 2005 London bombings, and other recent terror attacks across Europe, including the Manchester Arena bombing in May 2017. For an insightful analysis of attitudes towards Muslims and developing discourses of terror, see Hanrik Anderson and Jochen Mayerl, 'Attitudes towards Muslims and Fear of Terrorism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41.15 (2018) 2634-2655.

⁸⁰ Kundnani, 'Integrationism', p. 31.

⁸¹ Kundnani, p. 29; See, for example, the government's White Paper published in early 2002: Home Office, 'Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain'. February 2002. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/250926/cm5387.pdf> [accessed 10 September 2020]

somewhat ironically, given his later submission – that ‘[m]aybe if there were move brave enough to speak out like me we would not be having our children driving planes into buildings’.⁸² Imtiaz’s recollection of Rizwan’s humiliation parallels this earlier dialogue, describing how he watched ‘with a kind of horror, as if you’re watching a tower collapsing’.⁸³ This scene illustrates the shortcomings and exclusory mechanisms of collective governmental strategies for improving multi-ethnic relations in Britain based on ‘shared values’ and ‘common citizenship’.⁸⁴ Instead of ‘cohesive communities’, Sahota inserts an image of multicultural Britain centred on the internalisation of state practices that rely on the subjugation and abjection of an internal other.⁸⁵

This national abjection is further complicated in the novel by Imtiaz’s working-class Sheffield identity. James Procter notes that in recent accounts of black Britain, “‘Britain”, the material site at which these identities are played out, has tended to remain a stable bland monolith, a singularly undifferentiated setting’.⁸⁶ Procter’s analysis of a hegemonic Britishness in critical approaches to black British literature also maps on to Imtiaz’s experience as an Asian British second-generation migrant in Sheffield. Sahota deploys a range of Sheffield dialect terms alongside Urdu, Punjabi, and Arabic, with the proximity of ‘sempt’ (in place of ‘seem’) alongside frequent uses of ‘Ameen’.⁸⁷ This linguistic plurality captures the two conflicting poles of Imtiaz’s identity, but it also

⁸² Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 45.

⁸³ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 73.

⁸⁴ Denham, n.p.

⁸⁵ Denham, n.p.

⁸⁶ Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 1; p.17.

indicates the way Imtiaz eschews broader categories of Britishness and aligns himself with a regional working-class identity. Pascal Zinck argues that

far from being lexica of integration, Urdu/Punjabi and English vernaculars serve as borders within borders, as markers of ghettoization between first-generation immigrants and their children as they face internal and external pressures to conform to society at large.⁸⁸

Further to these generational and cultural borders, we might also add the regional hierarchical structures implicit in Imtiaz's use of dialect here, acknowledging the disconnection between local and national experiences of race in England and conveying 'the specific vernacular of a British Pakistani northern working class'.⁸⁹

This connection to working-class identity is reiterated in the symbolic significance of urban space – and specifically, the street – for establishing an intersectional mode of belonging. As the title of *Ours are the Streets* implies, the street becomes a site of both political contestation and potential reclamation against both a citizenship that is structured on his exclusion and profound socio-economic inequality. The novel explores a complex, intersectional experience of both race and class which has been widened 'so that it can be supplemented by additional categories which reflect different histories of subordination'.⁹⁰ Imtiaz resents how his father must work long hours as a taxi driver, where he is frequently subjected to racism: 'Yesterday they took a leak in your taxi, last month they put a brick through your window. Maybe next they'll just burn the thing.'⁹¹

⁸⁸ Pascal Zinck, 'Dead End: The Failure of Multicultural Britain in Sunjeev Sahota's *Ours are the Streets*', *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 38.1 (2015), 79–90 (p. 80).

⁸⁹ Phil O'Brien, *The Working Class and Twenty-First-Century British Fiction: Deindustrialisation, Demonisation, Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2020), p. 139.

⁹⁰ Gilroy, *Ain't No Black*, p. 7.

⁹¹ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 72.

This reality, as Imtiaz tells us, is far from what Rizwan had hoped for his family when moving from Pakistan; the taxi driving was intended only to be a temporary source of income before moving on to something better but is now a cycle of extremely long hours and very little pay. Rizwan assures Imtiaz that 'we are doing it all for you' and 'it will all be worth it in the end'.⁹² Instead of the collective migrant story viewed by his father, demonstrated in his use of the pronoun 'we', Imtiaz regards his father's immigration journey as a failure: unable to move away from their estate, earn enough money to send home, Rizwan is compared with Imtiaz's cousins who boast of their holiday home in the suburbs of Lahore.

Reflecting on his father's journey and his eventual death on the streets of Sheffield, caused by a heart attack while chasing a fare-dodger, Imtiaz directs the retrospective narrative at his Abba:

We were meant to become part of these streets. They were meant to be ours as much as anyone's. That's what you said you worked for, came for. Were it worth it, Abba? Because I sure as hell don't know, I used to just slam the door and stand with my back to it wondering, What end? Whose end? When is this fucking end? Because what's the point, man? What's the point in dragging your life across entire continents if by the time it's worth it you're already at the end? Ameen.⁹³

Imtiaz's assertion that the streets 'were meant to be ours as much as anyone's' is doubly significant. On the one hand, it is plea for belonging, illustrating how forming a place-bound identity in England is contingent upon the performance of assimilation, locating a dichotomy between those who belong, and the racialised class narratives of Imtiaz and his father, who are continually configured as outsiders. On the other, however, it is a

⁹² Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 69.

⁹³ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 70.

politicised call to action – the streets are meant to be ‘ours’, indicating a potential reclamation. In the context of the 2001 riots, the streets are a symbolic racialised and political site for forging place-bound belonging, and also potential spaces for contesting oppression and marginalisation. The anger marking Imtiaz’s speech, conveyed through the repeated internal questioning of his father, evokes critical observations regarding second-generation migrants and their role in the riots; specifically, how they took to the streets to contest the status of their parents. Imtiaz’s resentment appears to reflect how, ‘by the 1990s, a new generation of young Asians, born and bred in Britain, was coming of age in the northern towns, unwilling to accept the second-class status foisted on their elders. When racists came to their streets for a fight, they would meet violence with violence’.⁹⁴ In a similar vein, Satnam Virdee observes how the streets were often the designated space of far-Right activism of the National Front, who attempted to ‘mark out and reclaim territory that they believed had been conceded to racialized minorities by strategically deploying graffiti, random violence and increasingly, marches in ethnically diverse areas’.⁹⁵ The frequency of the possessive pronouns ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ throughout the novel articulates this spatial and social division, configuring the street as a symbolic urban space of conflict and contestation, but also a potential place of collective reclamation – as Imtiaz tells his father, ‘they were meant to be *ours*’.⁹⁶

The local specificity of *Ours are the Streets* communicates this desire for a claim on the city, with Imtiaz’s identity initially appearing rooted in recognisable spatial co-

⁹⁴ Hussain and Bagguley, p. 408.

⁹⁵ Satnam Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider* (Basingstoke: Red Globe Press, 2014), p. 130; Virdee draws on a longer history of racism in England, tracing these events back to the late 1950s and 1960s when he observes ‘an exponential growth in street-level violence and racism directed against blacks and Asians accompanied by the introduction of racist immigration controls by the state’. Virdee, p. 100.

⁹⁶ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 70.

ordinates within Sheffield. The sections of the novel that take place prior to Imtiaz's visit to Pakistan are all set within locally particularised settings, moving between: Imtiaz's home in Brightside; Becka's home in Meersbrook; the Leadmill; Students' Union bars; the High Street; the Peak District; Bramall Lane football stadium; and Meadowhall. In contradistinction to this local specificity, after Imtiaz visits Pakistan, Sheffield's reference points are empty as the city is devoid of all meaning. Late at night, Imtiaz overlooks the city and describes 'row after row of semi-detached houses, Toyotas parked out front, and I don't understand how these people can invest so much hope in those things'.⁹⁷ Rather than being a site of social interaction and political realisation, Sheffield is merely a combination of geographic co-ordinates:

It's amazing how quiet this city can get. Sometimes I can hear drunks making their way back from town. Sometimes a Paki bombs down the road in his souped-up wheels. But usually, like now, the city goes quiet and it all looks and feels as ghostly as an abandoned fairground. I can see across the whole city from here. It's like it's built on these huge great grey waves. Off to the right up ahead there's the floodlights poking up from Bramall Lane. On the other side, I can see Meadowhall with its shiny dome wrapped in some sort of dim halo.⁹⁸

Sheffield's urban geography reflects the socio-economic deprivation resulting from deindustrialisation, emerging out of a specific cultural and historical moment in Northern England. For Imtiaz, Sheffield ultimately represents a dead end, with the city 'offer[ing] no prospect of cosmopolitan self-reinvention'.⁹⁹ Despite Imtiaz knowing these streets well, he experiences the city as an outsider, watching the city from the remove of his bedroom window, located outside of the centre in a residential estate. Imtiaz experiences

⁹⁷ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 2-3.

⁹⁸ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 29.

⁹⁹ Ana Cristina Mendes, 'Sunjeev Sahota's Fictions of Failed Cosmopolitan Conviviality', in *The Limits of Cosmopolitanism: Globalization and Its Discontents in Contemporary Literature*, ed. by Aleksandar Stevic and Philip Tai-Hang Tsang (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 53-69 (p. 57).

the city only through absence as an ‘abandoned fairground’, with the grey, ‘ghostly’ inner-city spaces of deindustrialised districts like Highfield – the location of Bramhall Lane – contrasting with the lights of Meadowhall (foreshadowing Imtiaz’s later attack), but also against ‘the brightness’ of Pakistan, where Imtiaz has ‘been shining’.¹⁰⁰

Upon Imtiaz’s return from Pakistan, the text’s local specificity weakens further still, with Sheffield becoming ‘unreal’. As Imtiaz approaches his, he describes how he ‘stepped out of a fake car and went up the fake path and buzzed the fake doorbell, but it felt like only my arms and legs were working, the rest of me, all the important things inside, were refusing to take part’.¹⁰¹ The repetition of ‘fake’ sharply contrasts with Imtiaz’s recollection of Pakistan, where he feels ‘a great sense of solidness in the world’.¹⁰² Despite wishing he ‘could just be like everyone else’ and attempting to grasp a meaningful concept of citizenship for much of his life, for Imtiaz, existence in Sheffield is no more than an empty façade, aligning assimilation with both social and spatial disenfranchisement.

Pakistan forms a partial counterpoint to Sheffield in the novel. Imtiaz describes a profound sense of belonging while looking across the village at night from the roof of his uncle’s house, paralleling earlier scenes in which Imtiaz surveys Sheffield from his bedroom window. He describes the experience as such:

it might’ve been the most isolated place I’ve ever been, but I don’t think I’ve ever felt more connected to the world. Not in the packed streets of Sheff or at uni, not in England really, where I always felt that even though there were all the rush and noise you could want, I weren’t actually bumping up against life, instead just constantly moving out of its way.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 283.

¹⁰¹ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 279.

¹⁰² Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p.87; p. 258.

¹⁰³ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 203.

Despite the oppositionality Imtiaz constructs in his own psyche between his belonging in Pakistan versus his disenfranchisement in Sheffield, Imtiaz's unreliable narration does not appear to reflect his experiences of Pakistan elsewhere in the novel. Despite occasional instances of rootedness and emotional connection, the novel does not present us with a straightforward binary opposition between Pakistan and England in the way Imtiaz describes here. During his time in Pakistan, Imtiaz is continually at pains to avoid being regarded a '*valetiya*' (foreigner).¹⁰⁴ Upon his arrival to Lahore, he is immediately stopped by airport security on suspicion of a fake passport and trips out to the nearest city are hindered because he is not fluent in Urdu, with the workers in the tourist area mistaking him for a 'Britisher'.¹⁰⁵ Even his uncle refers to England as 'your country' a battle Imtiaz concedes that there is 'no point in fighting'.¹⁰⁶ Imtiaz's cultural alienation in Pakistanis further emphasised when, a soldier threatens to deport him, a situation Imtiaz eventually evades by supplying a fake name. Even Imtiaz himself describes himself as looking like an 'idiot tourist' and resents himself for being unable to grasp the intricacies of life in Lahore fully.¹⁰⁷ The subtleties of social conventions frequently mark him an outsider; thanking his family for their prayers after his father's death, Imtiaz recognises this to be a been a wrong move, making a mental note 'that saying thank you weren't the done thing over here', becoming a source of self-humiliation in the same way as the 'Asian

¹⁰⁴ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁵ Imtiaz's mother, Nasheen, quickly warns the guard that 'we're here to bury his abba, not line your pockets', indicating the move to be a scam, with the guards hoping to be paid off in return for their silence. Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 92.

¹⁰⁶ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 203.

¹⁰⁷ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 104.

Freshies' he mocks back in England.¹⁰⁸ In this sense, Imtiaz remains at the border of both territories, marked by cultural illiteracy in England and Pakistan.

Imtiaz's social abjection thus demonstrates the intersectional struggles of Muslims in Northern England at the start of the millennium. In this sense, it is in the act of terrorism that his resistance finds political expression, turning to Islamic extremism as a political ideology that he associates with revolutionary action. In a pre-meditated attack on Meadowhall as 'a chosen soldier', Imtiaz attempts to reconfigure an urban public sphere, a site of political action for the 'failed citizens' of British multiculturalism.¹⁰⁹ Defying the 'community cohesion' and managed diversity of political multiculturalism, Imtiaz's attack is a symptom of the desire to reconstitute himself and the members of his family as 'subjects of value' in the civic realm.¹¹⁰ Through an exploration of the abject 'multicultural' non-citizens of Sheffield, we might, therefore, read Sahota's debut novel as reposing the political problem of citizenship as being 'no longer a question of national character but of how multiple identities receive equal recognition in a single constitutional form'.¹¹¹ Nikolas Rose argues that this new relation between community, identity, and political subjectivity is exemplified in multiculturalism, and a set of political strategies which 'construct the citizen in terms of adherence to a code which once again justifies itself by reference to something natural, given, obvious, uncontestable'.¹¹² As we have seen, this 'natural' or 'uncontestable' code is, in *Ours are the Streets*, Britishness.

¹⁰⁸ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 94.

¹⁰⁹ Sahota, *Ours are the Streets*, p. 56.

¹¹⁰ Tyler, p. 214; Denham, p.1.

¹¹¹ Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 176.

¹¹² Rose, p. 192.

However, the revolt at the centre of *Ours are the Streets* is stuck in a structural paradox. While terrorism provides the conditions for resistance based on political action, this act simultaneously performs the ideological work of the state and legitimizes a national politics of race based on the ongoing subjugation of an interiorized other. The novel remains in tension with both the divisive narrative of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and a state-led image of Northern England as a hostile place; national belonging and individual agency are irreconcilable. Although *Ours are the Streets* appears to enable social and political abjection to be transfigured into what Imtiaz sees as a form of radical agency, the novel does not reconcile a participatory political subjectivity for Muslims with an ethical human ontology. Even though the actuality of the attack is open to question, in any event, the prospect of Imtiaz achieving individual agency within the boundaries of the state remains far from reach.¹¹³

Affective Citizenship, Agency, and the Neoliberal Migrant Narrative: *The Year of the Runaways*

There is a scene in *The Year of the Runaways* in which Randeep and Avtar, newly arrived in England, are sitting in Heathrow Airport in the middle of the concourse watching people depart. Having called a family contact to explore possibilities of work, Randeep reflects how far they are – both geographically and practically speaking – from finding employment:

‘There was only one [job],’ Randeep said. ‘It’s too far.’
‘Where?’
‘He said Scotland.’
‘How far’s that?’

¹¹³ It is not confirmed whether the attack actually goes ahead, but it is unlikely. The novel ends on Imtiaz’s emotional breakdown, asking his dead father to sit with him as he goes to sleep, prior to which Imtiaz has informed Becka of his plans.

Randeep shrugged. Avtar walked over to the fag-holed timetable on the lamppost. *Birmingham. Bristol. Derby. Edinburgh, Glasgow. Gravesend. Leeds. Manchester. Newcastle. Wolverhampton.* But no Scotland. 'It's not on there,' he said, sitting back down. 'Because it's too far.' 'But if that's where the work is...' ¹¹⁴

Randeep and Avtar's inability to connect 'Glasgow' and 'Edinburgh' to their idea of a distant 'Scotland' communicates both their lack of knowledge regarding Britain's geography but also the symbolic emptiness of place, meaning little beyond the ability to provide capital. *The Year of the Runaways* is a novel concerned with place, exploring the navigation of both contrasting geographies of 'home' and 'exile', and the process of achieving agency and citizenship in England. Moving between several areas of England and India, the novel's spatial optic is global but is also a locally particularised migrant story concerned with ordinariness and the micropolitics of everyday life in Sheffield. Frequent references to bus routes, street names, restaurants, takeaways, and convenience stores punctuate the narrative, creating a textual cartography which is easily locatable. Despite this spatial specificity, however, place in *The Year of the Runaways* appears to mean very little. Rather than being a place of familial roots, emotional connection or self-fulfilment, places within England function as sites of economic possibility and neoliberal self-reinvention experienced only through the pursuit of work.

Notably, *The Year of the Runaways* has attracted critical and popular attention as a conventional 'migrant story' and, unlike *Ours are the Streets*, is often placed alongside canonical figures of literary multiculturalism. Janet Wilson, for example, suggests that:

[t]he novel belongs to the established literary genre of migrant or diaspora fiction and is comparable to Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) in its referencing of both the homeland and the relocated community. As a familiar account of migrant hardship being overturned that

¹¹⁴ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 193.

gestures at the good luck migration story, it was acclaimed on publication and shortlisted for the Man Booker prize in 2015.⁹⁵

Despite 'regional novels' scarcely being considered for mainstream literary prizes, the fact that reviewers and critics have readily positioned *The Year of the Runaways* alongside the likes of Smith and Ali is less surprising, given the symbiosis between postcolonial fiction, prize culture and commercial success that Graham Huggan has identified as the 'postcolonial exotic'.¹¹⁵ Continuing the discussion of migrant belonging and a state-led multicultural Britishness, my reading of *The Year of the Runaways* takes as its departure point Gilroy's prediction that 'convivial culture' will emerge 'from the point where multiculturalism broke down'.¹¹⁶ Rather than presenting a 'good luck migrant story', it is my argument that *The Year of the Runaways* offers a migrant narrative which eschews 'cosmopolitan conviviality' in favour of an ultimately unobtainable 'good life', a neoliberal agency project which is continually compromised by an exclusionary state-governed concept of British citizenship.

In *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Lauren Berlant suggests that, since the 1990s, the social-democratic promise of the post-Second World War period in the United States and Europe has not been possible.¹¹⁷ The result, as Berlant sees it, is a neoliberal present experienced through an affective concept of 'cruel optimism', a process describing an attachment to, and fascination with, an increasing unobtainable and ultimately damaging

¹¹⁵ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 28.

¹¹⁶ Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.xi.

¹¹⁷ Berlant identifies particular promises that are fraying in a neoliberal and precarious present, including upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and what she describes as 'lively, durable intimacy'. *Cruel Optimism*, p.3.

pursuit of 'the good life'.¹¹⁸ According to Berlant, 'cruel optimism' is a way of understanding the attachments formed to fantasies of 'the good life' that are no longer sustainable when the promise of upward mobility has been replaced with an ongoing sense of crisis – a precarious present.¹¹⁹ The ultimate unreachability of the promises individuals make to themselves leads to an experience of the present structured around the persistence of 'aspirational normativity' where the *project* of obtaining the objects of desire becomes a foundational reality in the absence of reaching the goal itself.¹²⁰ In this context, the neoliberal present operates as 'a space of transition, not only between modes of production and modes of life, but between different animating, sustaining fantasies'.¹²¹ These 'fantasies' may take the form of multiple 'desires' that are not confined to work, including food, love, a political project, or a fantasy of 'the good life', all of which are associated with offering an improved quality of life. What is notable in Berlant's formulation is how attachment to these objects becomes 'cruel', with the pursuit of the object actively impeding the subject's 'flourishing'.¹²² In *The Year of the Runaways*, cruel optimism relates to a transnational class fantasy of 'the good life' based on the economic and social freedoms associated with migration to England, a neoliberal pursuit which informs all of the protagonists' life choices throughout the text. As we shall see, this optimism becomes 'cruel' through the continual suffering of austerity, homelessness, exploitative labour, racism, and emotional sacrifice.

¹¹⁸ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 1.

¹¹⁹ See especially, Berlant, 'After the Good Life, an Impasse: Time Out, Human Resources, and the Precarious Present' in *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 191-222.

¹²⁰ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 164.

¹²¹ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 261.

¹²² Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p.1.

The pursuit of 'sustaining fantasies' about the habitation of domestic space and the nuclear family are symptomatic of the cruel optimism inherent in state-sanctioned British citizenship. The novel presents the idea of 'the home' as fundamental to the perceived 'success' of migration, enabling immigrants to be recognised as British citizens, but complicates the neat association of domesticity and citizenship through the type of spaces Sahota's protagonists inhabit. The urban architecture of Broomhall, a residential area in south-west Sheffield, reflects an entrenched socio-economic deprivation and fragmentation. Shortly after arriving in Sheffield, Randeep observes the vastness of the train station, deciding that it 'must be a good city' before he is transported out of the city and into 'narrow, boarded-up, wretched-looking streets'.¹²³

Randeep's overcrowded shared house, provided by their boss so he can have all his staff in one place, encloses himself and his fellow workers from public view behind an 'overgrown front garden' where 'curtains were drawn haphazardly and giant cobwebs hammocked above the door', representing the invisible migrant labour fundamental to a global economy.¹²⁴ Inside, the rooms are packed with mattresses with 'grey crumpled sheets on them', and the wallpaper is 'torn in several places'.¹²⁵ Contrary to the promise of 'the good life' that has brought the men to England, their dilapidated living conditions evoke the illusory promises of multicultural citizenship, falling short of its promise of offering 'a new improved way of being'.¹²⁶ Despite Randeep's initial 'luck' of being provided with his own room, the luxury of space is short-lived; the house quickly

¹²³ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 201.

¹²⁴ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, pp. 202–3.

¹²⁵ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 202.

¹²⁶ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 1.

becomes a space of abjection, where England's 'failed' citizens are hidden from society, eventually turning on one another in the battle for both work and living space.

It is through Randeep's story that the novel presents a state-prescribed notion of migrant citizenship which relies on loyalty to the nation-state performed through the domestic sphere. Randeep's citizenship in England has been secured through a visa-marriage to Narinder, a young Sikh woman from London, who moves to Sheffield to be closer to Randeep and lend credibility to their arrangement. Sahota establishes a link between the domestic sphere and citizenship that necessitates a collapse of the political and the personal, resulting in the creation of what Berlant terms an 'intimate public sphere'.¹²⁷ In a US context, Berlant describes a rise of an 'intimate citizenship' based on 'a rhetorical shift from a state-based and thus political identification with nationality to a culture-based concept of the nation as a site of integrated social membership'.¹²⁸ Sexuality, reproduction, marriage and family values are, according to Berlant, no longer private concerns but central to debates about nationality and come to define how citizens should act.¹²⁹ In Britain, political multiculturalism's emphasis on the internalisation of 'national values' might be read as a parallel process, given that it removes political or civic agency from definitions of multicultural citizenship in favour of acculturation and assimilation.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 4.

¹²⁸ Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, p. 3.

¹²⁹ Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, p. 8.

¹³⁰ See Cattle and Denham.

In this context, Narinder and Randeep's visa-marriage enacts a British 'intimate citizenship', a state-managed blurring of private and public realms.¹³¹ Narinder believes it is her spiritual calling to marry Randeep and help him secure British citizenship. Despite her emotional coldness and insistence that the relationship is purely transactional, Randeep soon becomes invested in the idea of marriage and familial life. Traditional images of the family home become Randeep's object of attachment tied to the life he has promised himself upon arriving in England; this optimism is made clear in the note he leaves for Narinder before she moves into the flat he has rented for her, in which he offers to be of service 'day and night' and describes that flat as '*a new start for us both, maybe*'.¹³²

Randeep's enactment of an intimate public sphere thus serves as a performance of the conditions of British citizenship through the domestic sphere of the family home, with his legal citizenship and settlement in England predicated upon his 'successful' marriage to Narinder. Finding that he is alone in the flat for the first time, Randeep begins to perform ordinary acts he associates with married cohabitation; he locates 'an onion and some potatoes in the fridge and start[s] dicing them up. He'd surprise her with a sabzi'.¹³³ Randeep's association between success in the domestic sphere and British citizenship is reiterated by immigration officers who audit the authenticity of the marriage. The night before Narinder and Randeep's inspection,

they hung up their wedding photos, and around the TV Narinder stood the holiday pictures Randeep had brought with him on one of his first visits. They littered the bathroom with more of his toiletries, incorporated his clothes into her wardrobe, and hid the suitcase under her bed. She bought a pack of gummed Post-it notes,

¹³¹ Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, p. 2.

¹³² Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 9.

¹³³ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 242.

too, which she wrote on and stuck to the fridge: *Back at 6 p.m. today. Can you put the rubbish out, please? Mummyji called.*¹³⁴

This blurring of the public and the private locates a governed national citizenship premised on 'the home' and 'the family' insofar as legal residency is contingent upon the subject's successful performance of the social norms of domestication. The post-it note discursively represents how state-regulatory citizenship based on 'personal acts and identities performed in the intimate domains of the quotidian' has displaced democratic citizenship based on acts of political agency.¹³⁵ This version of citizenship based on domestic ordinariness demonstrates how multicultural practices results in the projection of public politics into the private realm as a mode of racialised state surveillance.

Similarly, when the immigration officers question Randeep and Narinder's plans for the future, they assume a joint identity rooted in traditional notions of home and the nuclear family. Upon the officers' suggestion that they will be 'looking to build [their] own family soon', Randeep replies that

the first thing we need to do is save up enough to buy a house. With a garden. Instead of renting. [...] There are some very nice areas to the south of the city. Near the Peak District National Park. Those are good areas for schools, too. After that we can start thinking about children.¹³⁶

Here, Randeep legitimises himself as an integrated citizen in the eyes of the state, aligning citizenship with the stereotypical conventions of domesticity and the practicalities of family life. The physical intrusion of the immigration officers into the home and subsequent interrogation of Randeep and Narinder about their personal lives enacts the

¹³⁴ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 243.

¹³⁵ Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, p. 4.

¹³⁶ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 245.

collapsing of the boundaries between the public and domestic realms which reduces citizenship to the adherence of social norms under the policing of the state.

This legal, state-sanctioned citizenship evokes the formalisation of British identity under Thatcher's 1981 Nationality act which, as Salman Rushdie puts it, effectively transformed citizenship into 'the gift of the government'.¹³⁷ Indeed, Randeep's intimidation by an Immigration Officer who becomes suspicious that Narinder has not taken Randeep's surname points towards a mode of state surveillance initiated by the Act. Tyler pinpoints the Act as a watershed moment in terms of an explicit politics of state-racism, observing how it was less about the constitutional rights of citizens but was 'an immigration Act designed to define, limit and remove the entitlements to citizenship from British nationals in the commonwealth' thereby creating 'aliens' within the borders of 'a newly circumscribed nation-state'.¹³⁸ Sahota's focus on the domestic as an intimate public sphere evokes how the Act rendered immigrants an 'invasion' on the nation, and in doing so located an Anglo-British identity 'in the moment of its vanishing, as whiteness, a command of the English language, and a certain kind of domestic space'.¹³⁹ Similarly, Randeep's performance of citizenship through the familial domestic sphere enacts the state's intrusion into the private realm of migrant citizens couched within the language of integration and national values. Here, British citizenship does not enable political participation and individual agency, but results in an intensely governed existence secured by structures of state-racism.

¹³⁷ Salman Rushdie, 'The New Empire within Britain', *New Society*, (1982), 417–21.

¹³⁸ Tyler, p. 54.

¹³⁹ Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) p. 15.

Further to the affective structures of British citizenship, *The Year of the Runaways* undermines a cosmopolitan ideal of multicultural belonging through failed neoliberal projects of freedom and self-reinvention through work. The title of chapter eleven – ‘WHAT PRICE FREEDOM’ – becomes the central question of the novel and its critique of the way that ‘modern selves have become attached to the project of freedom’ in the context of global economic migration.¹⁴⁰ Rose argues that ‘to be governed through our freedom [...] seems almost paradoxical. Freedom appears, almost by definition, to be the antithesis of government.¹⁴¹ To be ‘obliged to be free’, he explains, is a form of government domination, containing individuals within a way of life based on the capacity to be free to choose.¹⁴² In *The Year of the Runaways*, the pursuit of freedom emerges as a mode of domination, tethering migrants to exploitative work and a cyclical process of socio-economic deprivation. While Randeep’s legal citizenship forms an affective structure of cruel optimism leading to state-racism, Avtar’s student visa and Tochi’s status as an illegal immigrant only provide a gateway to a kind of employment that serves as an impasse in the pursuit of ‘the good life’. Limited in the economies in which they can participate, the conditions of informal and unofficial work do not offer social or economic fulfilment, leaving both men stuck in an endless paradox of ‘cruel’ entrepreneurial optimism.

On his first day in England, Tochi takes a job pot-washing for a restaurant in London. Reflecting on his luck, he ponders that ‘[m]aybe it was true what they said about

¹⁴⁰ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 379; Rose, p. 262.

¹⁴¹ Rose, p. 62.

¹⁴² Rose, p. 87 [original emphasis].

England. That this was where you could make something'.¹⁴³ Yet, despite what Tochi assumes to be initial good fortune, the exploitative conditions of his labour quickly manifest themselves; he largely resides in the confines of the restaurant, is forced to sleep on the kitchen floor – despite the promise of a mattress – and is paid 'a tenth of what he'd expected'.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Tochi convinces himself that saving enough money to return home is simply a matter of perseverance, after which 'he'd get there, *wherever there was*'.¹⁴⁵ Tochi's unwavering optimism towards the possibility of financial stability in the future articulates a present characterised by the persistence of 'aspirational normativity' in the process of life-building.¹⁴⁶ The absence of a clear end goal even in Tochi's own psyche foregrounds the unlikelihood of achieving the aspirations that brought him to England in the first place. The futility of Tochi's efforts is made visible in an exchange between him and an older colleague in the restaurant:

'How long are you staying here?'
'I can leave now.'
'In England, I said.'
'Until I've earned enough.'
'Then you're a fool.'¹⁴⁷

Warning against the cyclical traps of neoliberalism, the older man's comment identifies the process in which Tochi's optimistic temporal imaginary results in a repetition of actions, or 'sustaining fantasies', that merely prolong survival or prevent the reality of defeat.¹⁴⁸ The fact that Tochi believes that he 'can leave now' alludes to a false sense of

¹⁴³ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 82.

¹⁴⁴ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p.83; p. 86.

¹⁴⁵ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 84.

¹⁴⁶ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 164.

¹⁴⁷ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 89.

¹⁴⁸ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 2.

freedom, as he rationalises his engagement in work for very little financial gain on the basis that he can *choose*. Indeed, the unlikeliness of Tochi reaching his financial goals, and the optimism he assigns to his future, reflects neoliberalism's 'refusal of futurity in an overwhelmingly productive present'.¹⁴⁹

Tochi's lack of spatial freedom reflects the futility of his project, working to foreground his social alienation and lack of agency: 'most days [Tochi] stayed in the restaurant', remaining closed off from the city, observing the world from the inside of the restaurant's window.¹⁵⁰ The furthest away Tochi manages to walk is 'to the end of the street and around the corner [...] He always paused outside a shop that sold homes' where he 'calculat[es] how long it might be before he could afford one'.¹⁵¹ Tochi's lack of spatial freedom and exclusion from the city articulates the social entrapment brought about by the aspirational desire to live 'the good life'. His migrant narrative is based on assuming a temporal imaginary that simultaneously looks forward to 'getting ahead, to making it, *and* to a condition of stasis, of being able to *be somewhere* and to make a life, exercising existence as a fact, not a project'.¹⁵² Yet, in spite of his optimism, Tochi is both socially and spatially trapped; existing at an impasse, he only occasionally ventures outside to read property listings. In this sense, Tochi's narrative enacts a 'transnational class fantasy' which, in the context of Sahota's novel, commonly structures the lives of migrants through their affective experiences of economic precarity.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 179.

¹⁵⁰ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 86.

¹⁵¹ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 86.

¹⁵² Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 179.

¹⁵³ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 179.

In terms of optimistic attachments to the future, the idea of the self as project is central to Avtar's story. When Avtar arrives in England, he enrolls on a 'Computing and Security Systems' course at the College of North-West London as a condition of his student visa. Sahota constructs a binary between a state-led 'official' narrative of migrant experience in England and the lived reality of migrant 'structural contingency' experienced through financial precarity, casual work, insecure settlement, and continual class struggle.¹⁵⁴ For example, during a break on the building site Avtar is working on in Leeds, he stops to read his college documentation – he reads the title 'Preparing You for Your Future', while all around him 'lunchtime talk was of the latest raids'.¹⁵⁵ The snippet of motivational dialogue in his college folder exemplifies a neoliberal discourse of entrepreneurial self-reinvention supported by the British education system. This image sharply contrasts with Avtar's precarious reality sitting among industrial debris with his fellow migrant workers, all of whom are becoming increasingly worried about the possibility of police raids and subsequent deportation.

This disconnection between the 'official' migrant story and reality is continued, when, after failing his college exams, Avtar is beaten up by a loan shark, having fallen behind on loan repayments for his student visa. On his way back from London, he leaves the train at Leeds and observes the layout of the roads beneath him: 'Easy. It was all easy and yet he was still losing'.¹⁵⁶ Here, again, *The Year of the Runaways* aligns a successful concept of citizenship with spatial agency and the ability to navigate the city. At this point, Avtar rejects the 'good life'; he recalls recalling a soundbite from his college folder:

¹⁵⁴ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁵ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 223.

¹⁵⁶ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 420.

“*reaching beyond his dreams*” and tears up his college work, throwing ‘the white pieces into the air and watch[ing] them shower and drift’ until they ‘vanished’, signifying Avtar’s socio-spatial alienation and profound psychological crisis.¹⁵⁷ This image of Avtar’s college documents falling like snowflakes to the ground symbolises the fragility and unsustainability of ‘the good life’ now that the promise of upward mobility has been replaced with precarity and an ongoing sense of crisis.¹⁵⁸ This is a crisis which, as I have argued, is particularly acute for illegal immigrants and the ‘failed citizens’ of British multiculturalism.

The affective structures of the transnational class fantasy also underpin Avtar’s employment. Having shunned formal education for immediate employment, Avtar takes up casual work breaking down the fatbergs of underground sewers. Avtar and the other workers ‘wound tape around the tops of their boots so too much of the thicker shit wouldn’t find its way in’ when they enter the tunnel, noting that it was only ‘two arm-widths across’ with just ‘enough room to stand’.¹⁵⁹ The combination of the imagery established in this scene – from Avtar wading through human waste to battling what looked like ‘a writhing ten-foot-maggot’ underneath the surface of the city – embodies the structures of inequality that Zygmunt Bauman describes as the ‘fight for survival’ of a migrant underclass.¹⁶⁰ Both geographically and socially underground, Avtar and his colleagues are invisible citizens, whose ongoing precarity excludes them from the realm of everyday normality, becoming the ‘wasted humans’ produced by ongoing neoliberal

¹⁵⁷ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 420.

¹⁵⁸ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ Sahota, *Year of the Runaways*, p. 382-383.

¹⁶⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2004), p. 5.

struggle.¹⁶¹ Predicated on 'who performs best', Avtar's exploitative hand-to-mouth employment reveals the pursuit of economic freedom to be a cyclical process of inescapability, an 'inevitable outcome of modernisation, and an inseparable accompaniment of modernity'.¹⁶² Here, the novel rejects the 'official' migrant narrative centred on optimistic attachment to England's self-actualising potential as a place of individual freedom. As Gurpreet, a fellow worker, tells Avtar: 'It makes you only care for yourself [...] This life. It makes everything a competition' – reiterating how, for all of these men, there is little room for imagining revolution or indeed any future beyond the scavenging present.¹⁶³

Like *Ours are the Streets*, Sheffield's deindustrialised city space also undercuts the 'glitzy spectacle' of multicultural Britishness in *The Year of the Runaways*, to return to McLeod's phrase, and reiterates the unattainability of 'the good life'.¹⁶⁴ *The Year of the Runaways* relies on a dialectic between social and spatial freedoms, evoking what Louïc Wacquant identifies as a '*dualisation of the social and physical structure of the metropolis*' that relies on structural violence.¹⁶⁵ This duality between the social and the spatial emerges in the novel through persistent unemployment, and subsequent relegation to decaying neighbourhoods on the periphery of the city, and heightened stigmatisation in daily life through intracultural discrimination. After being forced to leave the house he shares with Vinny's other migrant workers, and realising he has no future with Narinder

¹⁶¹ Bauman, *Wasted Lives*, p. 5.

¹⁶² Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 386; Bauman, *Wasted Lives*, p. 5.

¹⁶³ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 225; Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 179.

¹⁶⁴ McLeod, 'English Somewheres', p. 27.

¹⁶⁵ Louïc Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), p. 25 [emphasis original].

beyond their contractual arrangement, Randeep is homeless and unemployed, and begins sleeping in the Gurdwara where he is asked to leave after a few days. An unnamed figure pointedly mentions that '[m]ost of the young men like you come together under the old railway bridge near the city. The one on the river, by the new flats.'¹⁶⁶ Here, the social and political abjection of illegal immigrants is inflected with internal prejudice, as Randeep takes on the status of the 'abject' non-citizen even within the Sikh community; finding a 'wide, bottle-green bridge' at the edge of the city, Randeep takes his place among three other figures 'all in shadow'.¹⁶⁷ Despite being in England legally, socio-economic and residential precarity position Randeep outside the realm of active citizenship and prevent him from assuming any degree of individual agency.

Randeep's spatial disenfranchisement renders him a 'failed citizen' who is effectively detained 'within the polis as its interiorized other' and pushed to the peripheries of the city.¹⁶⁸ The spatialisation of the precarious migrant underclass in *The Year of the Runaways* alludes to Wacquant's process of 'territorialised stigmatisation' that renders invisible those who are unable to perform within the accepted social norms of neoliberal agency.¹⁶⁹ Randeep's socio-spatial marginality locates the ways that British citizenship has been designed, as Tyler posits, 'in order to govern populations within the state by producing some subjects as successful and others as variously precarious or failed'.¹⁷⁰ In this sense, Randeep's socio-economic precarity and marginalisation might be

¹⁶⁶ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 379.

¹⁶⁷ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 380.

¹⁶⁸ Tyler, p. 62.

¹⁶⁹ Wacquant, p. 250.

¹⁷⁰ Tyler, p. 62.

read as a product of the neoliberal state and governmental approaches to race as he becomes a 'demonised other' figure in both the Gurdwara and Sheffield.

Sahota reinforces Randeep's status as a 'failed citizen' through the loss of 'placedness' registered through psychological and spatial dislocation. Realising that he is the last man left under the bridge, Randeep breaks down, leading to him visiting a sex worker (a decision he immediately regrets) and, afterwards, falling into a river.¹⁷¹ The narrative charts his psychological deterioration, describing how

he didn't know where he was. He didn't know these roads. They weren't full of shoppers. They were grubbier, most of the windows painted over. Signs. Chaddesden. Mickleover. Burton-upon-Trent. His heart was thick in his chest. He didn't know where he was going. He didn't know his place. He didn't know this country.¹⁷²

Sahota communicates Randeep's fragmented psyche through textual disjointedness, passages of frenzied emotional response and disorientating local geographic markers. The combination of extramarital sex with a stranger and the reality of Randeep's precarity has made visible the affective structures behind his optimistic attachment to migrant life in England and produced a feeling of local and national unbelonging. The derelict landscapes of 'Chaddesden', 'Mickleover' and 'Burton-upon-Trent' are reduced to empty signs that heighten Randeep's socio-spatial disenfranchisement. So, while Wacquant suggests that stigmatized territories 'provide propitious terrain for reformulating "from below"', in *The Year of the Runaways*, the promise of a politics of dissent does not materialise for migrant citizens. Instead, they occupy a paralysing

¹⁷¹ Although it is not confirmed whether Randeep jumps or accidentally falls into the river, he reveals to another figure under the bridge that he, himself cannot be certain: 'All he remembered was staggering along the towpath, suitcase heavy in his hand, seeing their faces. And then someone was pulling him out'. Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, pp. 406-407.

¹⁷² Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 460.

liminality and become simultaneously trapped both outside and within the parameters of the state.¹⁷³

Narinder experiences a similar spatial and psychological alienation; despite being born in England, she is unable to reconcile her faith and culture as a Sikh woman of Indian descent with any degree of agency in England. Before moving to Sheffield, Narinder is a devout Sikh, 'the girl from God', who volunteers at the Gurdwara daily and dutifully assumes the care of her father following her mother's death.¹⁷⁴ However, Narinder befriends Savraj, a young sex worker who manipulates Narinder into giving her money to send to her family in India, initiating a change in her. Reflecting on the excitement of 'going into the world and seeking [Savraj] out', Narinder gradually begins to challenge the patriarchal control of her brother and father; she rejects her arranged marriage, moves to Sheffield to marry Randeep and subsequently becomes estranged from her family.¹⁷⁵

This familial exclusion leads to Narinder's existential crisis articulated through her navigation of space. After an awkward meeting in Leicester in which she requests the deferment of her arranged marriage, Narinder arrives back in Sheffield and begins to question her faith, having 'only the vague apprehension that she needed space, clarity, air'.¹⁷⁶ Walking without direction, the novel charts Narinder's route

through suburbs in the south of the city – Nether Edge, Millhouses, Totley – full of brooding Victorian houses under a thin summer moon. Near a church, she stopped and looked across the green depth of the country, at the vast spirit of those giant hills. Is that where He was hiding?¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Wacquant, p. 250.

¹⁷⁴ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 248.

¹⁷⁵ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 263.

¹⁷⁶ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 323.

¹⁷⁷ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 323.

Narinder's breakdown, coded through the notation of specific spatial coordinates, appears to be a product of the linkage between spatial agency in the city and the identification of the self. This process is repeated towards the end of the novel, when Narinder avoids going home after work. Instead, she 'preferred sitting on her own by the window, letting the bus carry her through the city in the lovely pretence that she could stay sitting here forever, going round and round, observing'.¹⁷⁸ The image of Narinder circling the city without purpose reflects her lack of political and social agency as attempts to carve out a life for herself in Sheffield that she can reconcile with her family's aspirations. Just as Narinder resides on the peripheries of both English and Indian culture, she too circles the outskirts of the city – both geographically and temporally suspended at an impasse, and unable to take control of her future.

'WHAT PRICE FREEDOM'

This chapter has sought to demonstrate how *Ours are the Streets* and *The Year of the Runaways* might be read as regional 'multicultural novels' that reveal British political multiculturalism to be a national project centred on abjection and the formalisation of state-racism. Both novels articulate a racialised alienation and unbelonging in Britain, an experience of exclusion compounded by class, and Sheffield's socio-economic deprivation, inviting a critical engagement with a 'devolved' politics of race and nation.¹⁷⁹ I want to end this chapter by briefly discussing the epilogue of *The Year of the Runaways*, in which the narrative closure established through a retreat to assimilation seems to undermine the novel's attempt to imagine a counter-hegemonic politics of belonging in

¹⁷⁸ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 448.

¹⁷⁹ Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 3.

England. Instead, the novel appears to revert to the 'good luck migrant story' and places limits on the critique of state approaches to race and nation through presenting characters that ultimately find happiness in cultural assimilation.¹⁸⁰

Set ten years later, the epilogue offers an optimistic conclusion that neatly ties up the various stories of Sahota's protagonists, who have since become middle-class suburbanites: Avtar has married Randeep's sister, Lakhpreet, and is now living in his own home with his family; Randeep has secured a white-collar managerial role, living in a studio flat independently near to the home he has provided for his family, a 'modern semi with a neat stamp of a front garden'.¹⁸¹ This final image aligns citizenship with the domestic sphere, framing the novel as a success story of British multiculturalism.¹⁸² By the end of the novel Narinder moves with a new sense of purpose, free to navigate space on a global scale. After attending her uncle's funeral, she 'changed her flights and flew to Thiruvananthapuram and from there took a coach to Kanyakumari. She remembered Tochi mentioning the place and came because she wanted to, and *because she could*'.¹⁸³ While in Kanyakumari, Narinder sees Tochi (who has since returned to India) with his wife and children, watching him from afar at a community theatre. Observing his contentedness, Narinder decides to catch a night-train to Cochin, continuing her journey around India's cities. Given her new-found spatial agency, Narinder's eventual fate operates within neoliberal definitions of the project of global freedom and the ability to

¹⁸⁰ James Procter, 'The Postcolonial Everyday', *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/ Theory/ Politics*, 58.1 (2006), 62–80 (p. 73).

¹⁸¹ Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways*, p. 460.

¹⁸² Arun Kundnani, 'The Rise and Fall of British Multiculturalism', in *Resituating Culture*, ed. by Gavan Titley (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Pub, 2004), pp. 105–12 (p. 106).

¹⁸³ Sahota, *Year of the Runaways*, pp. 466–67 [my emphasis].

imagine oneself as what Berlant describes as a 'solitary agent who can and must live the good life promised by capitalist culture'.¹⁸⁴

Yet, rather than yielding to a straightforward celebratory cosmopolitan agenda, the novel's U-turn towards tropes of the 'successful' migrant narrative might also be read as possessing a greater degree of scepticism towards the future of race relations in England than it might at first appear. Melissa Kenny reads the 'improbable leaps of fortune' that have necessarily transpired to enable *The Year of the Runaways*' epilogue as an indication 'on the part of creative discourse [...] to think a clear path through the economic motivations and steps required to move from developing-world illegal immigrant to developed world middle-class mortgage-holder'.¹⁸⁵ Yet, I would argue that this unexpected sea change represents a reversion to a politically bankrupt assimilationist idealism that enacts the narrative impossibility of imagining alternatives to state-sanctioned notions of citizenship. Just as the prospect of Imtiaz's ultimate act of violence against his oppression never materialises in *Ours are the Streets*, the concluding lapse into a 'happy ending' in *The Year of the Runaways* reflects a dominant narrative of integration and political multiculturalism. Taken together, then, these two texts stage not only the abjection and suffering that accompanies state-sanctioned notions of citizenship and belonging in multicultural Britain but also the difficulty of finding a means of escape from such an experience.

To varying degrees, Sahota's novels represent critiques of the ideological thrust of state-national approaches to race that are informed by a commitment to locale. Both *Ours*

¹⁸⁴ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 167.

¹⁸⁵ Melissa Kennedy, 'How to Be Rich, Popular, and Have It All: Conflicted Attitudes to Wealth and Poverty in Postcolonial Fiction', in *Uncommon Wealths in Postcolonial Fiction*, ed. by Helga Ramsey-Kurz and Melissa Kennedy (Boston: Brill, 2017), pp. 287–304 (p. 289).

are the Streets and *The Year of the Runaways* complicate the view of Northern England as a place of racial prejudice, positioning the broader structures of the British state form at the core of their protagonists' social disenfranchisement and lack of belonging. Through decentralised accounts of the relationship between ethnicity, place, and national belonging, these novels both destabilise London as the centre of literary multiculturalism and highlight the productive role that places within Northern England play in imagining multi-ethnic experience within England after Empire. In doing so, Sahota's novels initiate a 'politics of location' resulting in the denaturalisation of Britishness within the category of literary multiculturalism.¹⁸⁶ The need for a viable alternative to the British centralised state form that emerges in Sahota's novels is beginning to present itself, as the following chapters of this thesis argue, as an urgent concern within Northern England's twenty-first-century literary imagination.

¹⁸⁶ Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 1.

Chapter 2: Post-British England and the Rural North

The 'Great British Summer' of 2012 is also a clear manifestation of a multicultural reinvigoration of state nationalism, featuring the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympics. The latter saw Danny Boyle stage 'Isles of Wonder', a vision of British history and culture that was simultaneously inclusive and diverse, with 27.3 million people across the United Kingdom tuning in to watch.¹ The spectacle featured multiple cultural and national references, from Dizzee Rascal, Rowan Atkinson, and the Sex Pistols to tributes to the National Health Service, Suffragette movement, and the presentation of ethnically diverse cricket teams. Central to this display of cultural heterogeneity, however, was the notion of Britain as a hegemonic, timeless multi-national formation, a continuity captured in the cameo of Queen Elizabeth alongside Daniel Craig playing James Bond, in a peculiar bridging of an archaic institution of Britain's class system and the modern-day nation. Yet, the Monarchy was not the only imperial formation taking centre stage during the opening ceremony. Boyle's 'narrative of the nation' began in pre-industrial England, presenting a rural panorama of lush, green pastures and peasants dancing happily around maypoles.² Titled 'England's Green and Pleasant Land', this bucolic image was set against a choral adaptation of William Blake's 'Jerusalem' – a hymn taken to be England's unofficial national anthem – and positioned England's rural idyll as a communal part of British history around which viewers were invited to unite. Shortly

¹ No named author, 'London 2012 Olympics Deliver Record Viewing Figures for BBC', *BBC Media Centre*, 13 August 2012 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2012/olympic-viewing-figs.html>> [accessed 13 May 2020].

² As Simon Featherstone and Tom Nairn have pointed out, the state-supporting function of the British monarchy is to maintain 'oligarchic caste rule' and provide a 'surrogate national identity' centred on belonging to a 'traditional State-family' and thus suppress a national awakening from below. See Featherstone, *Englishness: Twentieth-Century Popular Culture and the Forming of English Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 172; Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and Its Monarchy* (London: Verso, 2011), p. 136.

after, the approach of beating drums signalled the threat of the Industrial Revolution, disrupting Boyle's pre-modern pastoral vision. In the advent of urban modernity, these images of elegiac Englishness were contrasted – and ultimately subsumed – by the dominance of industrial Britain, conveyed on stage by the appearance of machinery as the green turf was literally ripped up on stage.

Boyle's production appeared to embody the paradox of the relationship between England and Britain (encapsulated in the term 'Anglo-Britain'), an association in which the former is both universal and perpetually negated.³ The opening saw Jerusalem take on a universalising role for the four nations in a distinctively Anglo-centric focus, relying on the conflation between England and Britain. This elision of England under Britain was apparent in the bold patriotic displays enjoyed by Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, compared to the performance of the pastoral as a stand-in for England, while the Industrial Revolution stood as the crucible for the emergence of British modernity. The violent stripping away of the English pastoral veneer to make way for the transformation of Britain via the industrial age reinforced this alignment of England with a mythological and unchanging rural tradition.⁴ Claire Westall and Michael Gardiner note how, in Boyle's

³ See, for example, Barnett, "The Fire and the Games. How London's Olympic Opening Confronted Corporate Values." *Open Democracy*, July 30 2012 <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/anthony-barnett/fire-and-games-how-london%E2%80%99s-olympic-opening-confronted-corporate-values> > [accessed 17 September 2020] and Aaron Bastani, 'Olympic Britishness and the Crisis of Identity', *Open Democracy*, August 3 2012 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/olympic-britishness-and-crisis-of-identity/> [accessed 18 September 2020]

⁴ Noting the mythological characteristics of this national display, Boyle himself has acknowledged in the guidebook to the Olympics that pre-industrial England was not all 'green and pleasant', but '[t]his is the countryside we all believe existed once.' See LOCOG (London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games), *London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony Media Guide* (London: London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, 2012), p. 19 <http://www.webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/0120730004223/http://www.london2012.com/mm/Document/Documents/Publications/01/30/43/40/OPENINGCEREMONYGUIDE_English.pdf> [accessed 13 May 2020].

staging of the nation, '[t]he British Empire was seen to erase England and the industrialist spoke for – and instead of – both the imperial and domestic other as capital and empire built the British state' in an elision that 'deflect[ed] the need to ask pressing constitutional questions'.⁵ The British imperial logic Westall and Gardiner identify here relies on a cultural construction of pastoral Englishness in place of a *political* Englishness – a role clearly performed in the Olympics' opening ceremony.

In contrast to Boyle's mythological imaginary of England, the recent novels of Sarah Hall appear to reject the ideological function of the English pastoral. In *Haweswater* (2002), *The Carhullan Army* (2007) and *The Wolf Border* (2015), rural Cumbria becomes a place from which to make visible the state-supporting function of pastoral Englishness. Hall's literary career to date reveals a longstanding preoccupation with 'the North'. All her novels are set – at least partly – in North-West England and are characterised by a particular interest in Cumbria. This location is politically significant. Cumbria's proximity to Hadrian's Wall and 'the debatable lands' alludes to historical territorial conflicts in Britain, while the roots of English regionalism today have been primarily found in the regions of the North-East, an area which has played a disproportionate role in the debate about regional devolution in England.⁶ The analysis that follows provides a reading of *Haweswater*, *The Carhullan Army*, and *The Wolf Border* in which the spatial territory of North-West England functions as a regional 'devolutionary' pull against centralised state power in Britain. Here, the supposed 'wild places' of Cumbria's uplands offer appropriate sites from which to explore the possibility of imagining England with its own political and institutional credentials outside of British state control. As we shall see, the

⁵ Westall and Gardiner, p. 2.

⁶ John Tomaney, 'The Idea of English Regionalism', in *The English Question*, ed. by Robert Hazell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 158–73 (p. 158).

disentanglement of England and English rural space from its cultural surrogate suggests the possibility of England's emergence as a politically autonomous nation, a possibility that I herein refer to as 'post-British'.

Before turning to these texts in more detail, I want to set out the function of the pastoral that Hall's novels appear to complicate – that is, the maintenance of a depoliticised mythological England. The Olympic Games opening ceremony is just one example of the contemporary cultural appropriation of the most celebrated and lasting evocation of England's 'Old Country' as the 'green and pleasant land' coined by William Blake in his verse in 1804.⁷ Yet, the founding of an entire national consciousness on Blakean elegies of England had implications for the nation's own status: where in the constitutional functioning of the British Union did Englishness have its place beyond a mythical principle? Ian Baucom argues that 'struggles to control the idea of Englishness over the past 150 years have largely been struggles over places endowed with the capacity to evoke a sense of the nation's essential continuity over time'.⁸ Baucom outlines the ways England has occupied a unique position in the Union and the British imagination, since the simultaneously literal and metaphorical spaces of the English countryside have been understood both within and outside of literary culture as a synecdoche of the nation's consciousness that constructs, maintains, and circulates myths of a unified national identity in place of a codified, *political* identity.⁹ In this sense, the pastoral idyll operates as a substitute for an institutionalised English national identity,

⁷ William Blake, *Milton, A Poem: The Illuminated Books of William Blake*, ed. by Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi, 1993, p. 4
<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/07/The_prophetic_books_of_William_Blake%2C_Milton.pdf> [accessed 17 September 2020].

⁸ Baucom, p. 4.

⁹ Baucom, p. 4.

and has contributed towards the difficulty of imagining a politically activated England that may threaten the Union.¹⁰

As I noted in the Introduction, conversations regarding the political status of England emerge from a particular context of debate regarding the future of the Union. The constitutional instability Nairn observed in *The Break-Up of Britain* was set to concretely materialise twenty years later, leading to the New Labour government of 1997 proposing the matter of devolution to Scotland, Wales, and London. Yet, Westminster's concessions during the 1990s did not end the debate about the tenability of the Union; Nairn's study continued to influence a whole generation of scholarship on the future of the British state, and where England fit within this constitutional arrangement.¹¹ England became less 'the gaping hole' in the devolution question and increasingly took centre-stage in the debate about what it meant to be English in the wake of Britain's perceived imminent break-up.¹² But what makes England such a peculiar case is the easy slippage that is often noticed in the relationship between England and Britain; the fact that they are essentially 'two sides of the same coin' is precisely what makes conceiving of England-without-Britain – or Britain-without-England – just short of an impossibility.¹³ As Boyle's display demonstrated, in the absence of an institutionalised political Englishness, the pastoral idyll has functioned in the cultural sphere as a depoliticised national identity that supports the suppression of England in Anglo-Britain.

¹⁰ Baucom, p. 4.

¹¹ For an elaboration of this conversation, see 'The Literary English Question' in the introduction of this thesis.

¹² Hazell, p. 1.

¹³ Krishan Kumar, *The Idea of Englishness: English Culture, National Identity and Social Thought* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 4.

The idea of the English pastoral is intimately connected to a timeless, imaginary 'old England' associated with the rise of the English rural novel in the 1930s.¹⁴ Christine Berberich argues that H.V. Morton's *In Search of England* (1927), presents a nostalgic version of rural England which, in turn, 'helped establish and, importantly, perpetuate, the myth of England as a prelapsarian, pastoral country, famed for its rolling hills and pastures green'.¹⁵ Further, the development of new mass printing technologies during the 1920s and 30s 'saw the rise of memoirs and periodicals that focused on England's countryside'.¹⁶ As Bluemel explains, 'everything from novels to travel guides to picture books and pamphlets exhorted readers to head out of cities, into the countryside, if not to a villa, then to a garden suburb or weekend retreat'.¹⁷ The mythological construction of the English countryside Bluemel notes here retains contemporary cultural currency today; it is monetised in the heritage industry and subject to nostalgic celebration in period dramas in aristocratic rural settings typically taking place within the English country home. ITV's *Upstairs Downstairs* (1971) and *Brideshead Revisited* (1981) are two of the most famed cultural examples of the cult of the countryside in English television series. More recently, *Downton Abbey* (2010-) has epitomised a Conservative 'National Trust' projection of England and English rural space.¹⁸

¹⁴ Dominic Head advances this argument in great detail. See *Modernity and the English Rural Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 19–55.

¹⁵ Christine Berberich, 'Bursting the Bubble: Mythical Englishness, Then and Now', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 51.2 (2015), 158–69 (p. 159).

¹⁶ Kristin Bluemel, 'The Regional and the Rural', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the 1930s*, ed. by James Smith, (Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 160–74 (p. 161).

¹⁷ Bluemel, p. 161.

¹⁸ See Katherine Byrne, 'Adapting Heritage: Class and Conservatism in *Downton Abbey*', *Rethinking History*, 18.3 (2014), 311–27.

Further to the idealised pastoral Englishness noted above, the pastoral 'tradition' has largely been associated with the South of England. For instance, Peter Mandler describes Englishness as it came to be represented in late nineteenth-century literature as '[n]ostalgic, deferential and rural'.¹⁹ In these accounts, he suggests, Englishness 'identifies the squirearchical village of Southern or 'Deep' England as the template on which the national character had been formed and thus the ideal towards which it must inevitably return'.²⁰ Criticising the tendency to view Englishness as characterised by 'cultural stagnation' and 'rural nostalgia', Mandler argues that Englishness has functioned as a generalised, stretchy cultural 'template' and incorrectly associated with the South of England.²¹ Dominic Head makes a similar point, noting that, contrary to the idea that the pastoral idyll is found exclusively in the South of England, in literary culture, 'the English rural tradition embraces a much wider geographical range, and strikes repeatedly discordant notes in its treatment of place and national consciousness'.²²

¹⁹ Peter Mandler, 'Against "Englishness": English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 7 (1997), 155–75 (p. 155).

²⁰ Mandler, p. 155.

²¹ Mandler, pp. 155–56; See also: Head *Modernity and the English Rural Novel*, especially pp.195-196; We can see a historical political mobilisation of this template of Englishness in Former Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin's 1924 speech to members of the English patriotic group, the Royal Society of St George, in which he mobilised pastoral images of England. Projecting a deeply nostalgic and celebratory evocation of England as Arcadia, Baldwin described the sounds of England as 'the tinkle of the hammer on the anvil in the country smithy' and 'the corncake on a dewy morning'. The toast both promoted an exclusory national that entirely elided Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland but was also rooted in a vision of England that cented on the South. Baldwin's use of the Southern pastoral as the *de facto* image of England offers a very obvious historical illustration of the mobilisation of this 'stretchy' pastoral idyll for a political agenda that emerged at the same time the regional-rural novel reached its prime in the 1930s. See Stanley Baldwin, 1924, cited in 'Stanley Baldwin | Formative Years, Into Parliament', *BBC*, 18 December 1997 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special_report/1997/uk_politics/stanley_baldwin/40375.stm> [accessed 17 September 2020].

²² Head, *Modernity and the English Rural Novel*, p. 13; See William Cobbett's *Rural Rides* (1830) for an early example of English rural writing focused on the reality of agricultural decline and rural poverty in the South of England.

It is worth noting, however, that pastoral evocations of the English countryside were more concretely appropriated within wider culture than in the rural novel itself. The literary treatment of the pastoral has always been complex and self-conscious.²³ Early twentieth-century rural writing, for example – especially that focused on farming practices – is punctuated with images of inequality, hardship, and exploitation.²⁴ As Bluemel puts it regarding the rural tradition of H.E. Bates and Winifred Holtby, these writers ‘do powerful cultural and aesthetic work contesting the South-East England rural ideal maintained by a 1930s print culture fixated on thatched roofs, village greens, and hedgerows’.²⁵ Indeed, rural writing is often highly self-reflexive, as epitomised in Stella Gibbons’ satirical caricature of the ‘simplicities’ of rural life in opposition to the city in *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932).²⁶ Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) also illustrates the distinction between cultural appropriations of the pastoral idyll and its literary representation, having been crucial in instilling a ‘Southern’ misconception of the violent, ‘untamed’ rural Northern landscape. For instance, Brontë’s text is characterised by rural violence, yet the novel has always functioned entirely separately in the cultural sphere. Despite its anti-pastoral depiction of West Yorkshire’s rural landscape, the novel has fed into an idealised ‘cult of the countryside as part of the leisure industry; West Yorkshire is

²³ Thomas Gray’s 1751 ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’, for example, provided a model for exploring the English countryside during the second half of the eighteenth century. See Dustin Griffin, *Patriotism and Poetry in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 166–67.

²⁴ See Head, “‘The Everlasting Land’: Farming and the Novel’ in *Modernity and the English Rural Novel*. pp. 56–91

²⁵ Bluemel, p. 163.

²⁶ Terry Gifford cites the first major work of self-reflexive anti-pastoral writing as Stephen Duck’s 1736 poem ‘The Thresher’s Labour’ in which he repudiates the idealisation of the English countryside. See *Pastoral* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1999), p. 121.

often referred to as the 'Brontë Country', and continues to inspire day trips to Haworth where tourists partake in 'The Wuthering Heights walk'.²⁷

Terry Gifford's *Pastoral* (1999) identifies the ongoing cultural purchase of idealised evocations of the English countryside, setting out four forms of the pastoral. First, a literary device relying on a process of retreat and return; second, any literature that describes the countryside with explicit contrast to the urban; third, pejorative use of the term 'pastoral' that signals scepticism towards an oversimplified and idealistic pastoral vision, and fourth, a form 'neutrally descriptive of literature concerned with a life of pastoral farming practices in raising grazing animals'.²⁸ These versions of the pastoral are overlapping and can occur simultaneously, but Gifford attributes this third iteration to the English pastoral idyll. In contrast to the idealising tendencies of the pastoral, post-pastoral literature 'possesses acute awareness of the culturally loaded language we use about the country, accepting responsibility for our relationship with nature and its dilemmas'.²⁹ Yet, the post-pastoral is inherently different from the notion of anti-pastoral, which entirely rejects celebration of the land, serving as a kind of reconciliatory 'bridge' between the pastoral and anti-pastoral. Gifford's summary of the post-pastoral is worth quoting at length here:

What is needed is a new term to refer to literature that is aware of the anti-pastoral and of the conventional illusions upon which Arcadia is premised, but which finds a language to outflank those dangers with a vision of accommodated humans, at home in the very world they thought themselves alienated from by their possession of language. Such a term should enable 'a mature environmental aesthetics' to sift the 'sentimental pastoral' from the 'complex pastoral' in a way

²⁷ The 'Wuthering Heights Walk' is easily locatable on several rambling and tourism websites. See, for example <https://www.routeyou.com/en-gb/route/view/361697/walking-route/the-wuthering-heights-walk> [accessed 17 September 2020]

²⁸ Gifford, *Pastoral*, pp. 1–2.

²⁹ Terry Gifford, 'Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral and Post-Pastoral as Reading Strategies', in *Critical Insights: Nature and Environment*, ed. by Scott Slovic (Ipswich: Salem Press, 2012), pp. 42–61 (p. 45).

which takes account of the urgent need for responsibility and, indeed, advocacy for the welfare of Arden, informed by our current and updated best judgements of what that should be.³⁰

Considering Gifford's definition, the literary form of the post-pastoral has constitutional implications in the context of Britain, where the rural idyll has served as a cultural construction of Englishness. Unlike the politically quietist formation of the English pastoral, Gifford's environmentally conscious post-pastoral would render visible the illusions inherent in the rural idyll and complicate an imagined national consciousness centred on a romanticised vision of rural simplicity.

While the anti-pastoral mode was established long before the twenty-first century, there appears to be a gradually intensifying post-pastoral consciousness in contemporary English fiction. Depictions of the rural set in Northern England have tended towards a distinctively post-pastoral rural imaginary. Ross Raisin's *God's Own Country* (2008), Andrew Michael Hurley's *The Loney* (2014), Jenn Ashworth's *Fell* (2016), Naomi Booth's *Sealed* (2017), and the novels of Ben Myers, represent twenty-first-century accounts that align Northern England with a distinct suppression of the pastoral mode.³¹ These texts separate their rural environments from the idealising tendencies of the pastoral; they present gothic, unsentimental accounts of Lancashire and the Yorkshire Moors. Raisin's novel, for example, is told from the perspective of nineteen-year-old Sam Marsdyke, who is forced to work on his family farm instead of attending the local school.³² This rural portrait explores the isolation of family farming and the

³⁰ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 151.

³¹ A similar trend has emerged in English rural drama. See, for example, *Jerusalem* (2009), Jez Butterworth's self-conscious satirical critique of the English pastoral.

³² Francis Lee's film *God's Own Country* (2017) is a notable cultural comparison (despite having the same name as Raisin's novel, it is not a film adaptation) in its account of a young sheep farmer in Yorkshire.

narrator's troubled adolescence, juxtaposed against the city incomers looking for postcard views of Goathland's rural landscape (the site of ITV television series *Heartbeat* (1992-2010)). Similarly, Myers' representation of rural Yorkshire consciously eschews an idealised pastoral mode and depict the countryside as an inherently violent space. The prologue to his first novel, *Pig Iron* (2012), references artist Francis Bacon: 'Even within the most beautiful landscape, in the trees, under the leaves the insects are eating away at each other; violence is a part of life'.³³ This anti-pastoral drive is particularly pronounced in Myers' historical novel, *The Gallows Pole* (2017), which tells the true story of David Hartley and the Crag Vale Coiners in the eighteenth century. This pre-industrial history of the rural North configures the Calder Valley as a gothic space of criminal enterprise, territorial violence, and regional myth.³⁴ These texts position Northern England's rural topography as a site of wilderness that resists human influence; their depictions of the land are visceral and decidedly unromantic, often the setting for brutal acts of violence and the renegotiation of power. In this sense, these novels speak to a wider literary trend in which Northern England has functioned as a fertile site for creative – and political – depictions of rural life which draw attention to the artificiality of the pastoral. All the novels noted above would provide a fruitful corpus for critical investigation, but I argue that Hall's novels are especially notable for how they interrogate the English pastoral within a distinctively regional frame.

The pastoral critique of *Haweswater*, *The Carhullan Army*, and *The Wolf Border* for example, intersects with tensions between region and nation – specifically, the

³³ Ben Myers, *Pig Iron* (Hebden Bridge: Blue Moose, 2012) n.p.; This reference is important to a post-pastoral reading of the novel, given that Bacon's paintings are known for their visceral, raw imagery and brutal evocation of the human and its likeness to the animal. For more on Bacon's art, see Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* (Continuum: London, 2005)

³⁴ See also Fiona Mozley's *Elmet* and Sarah Moss' *Ghost Wall* in Chapter 4.

deprivileging of rural-regional priorities under what is presented as the industrial vision of a vastly unequal, centralised British state. In Hall's tragedy, *Haweswater*, Mardale's agricultural community is flooded to create a reservoir providing water for the city of Manchester, a project depicted as part of a wider national project of industrial modernity. *Haweswater* embodies a tension characteristic of rural-regional fiction, between attachment to older ways of life and the recognition that change is inevitable. This realisation is brought into stark focus in Isaac Lightburn's untimely death at the end of the novel. Returning to the site of the lost village, his drowned body in the reservoir becomes an emblem for the irreconcilability of local priorities with the unceasing forward momentum of twentieth-century British urban modernity. *The Carhullan Army* amplifies this disconnection between region and nation, and articulates the consequences of Britain's global endeavours through concerns of climate crisis and environmental disaster. Set in the not-so-distant future, the novel imagines economic collapse and global warming as eclipsing Britain as a multi-national state form, with the flooding of the River Thames signalling the disintegration of the former British political system. In this dystopia, the historical institutions the British state are stripped away and replaced by a newly formed totalitarian government body termed 'The Authority'.³⁵ Escape from this controlled society is only possible for the protagonist by undertaking a treacherous journey to a feminist ecotopia in a mountainous area of North-West England, where a regionalist movement to challenge The Authority is in the making. The political energies of the North that emerge in *The Carhullan Army* find a more historical expression in *The Wolf Border*. Set against the political backdrop of the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum, the novel centres on an ecological conservation project in Cumbria that will

³⁵ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), p. 15.

see wolves reintroduced into England for the first time in 300 years. In the novel, these constitutional and ecological preoccupations merge as the central plot of wolf reintegration becomes entangled with the parallel national narrative of Scotland's secession from Britain and, as Hall imagines it, the ensuing dissolution of the Union.³⁶

Contrary to Anna Cottrell's assertion that Hall's preference for the regional is 'hardly new or daring', I suggest that Hall's fiction frequently positions Cumbria as a privileged site from which to stage post-British politics and evoke the prospect of an independent England.³⁷ This chapter identifies a preoccupation throughout *Haweswater*, *The Carhullan Army*, and *The Wolf Border* with the two narratives of devolution in England that we saw in the introduction to this thesis. Returning to Robert Hazell's observation that there is both a 'UK version, about rebalancing England's place in the Union post-devolution' and 'an English version, about decentralising the government of England', this chapter focuses on the relationship between the two, suggesting that these texts are concerned with the possibility – or rather, the impossibility – of effective regional government in England while the nation remains part of the Union.³⁸ As this chapter demonstrates, *Haweswater*, *The Carhullan Army*, and *The Wolf Border* offer only an emerging vision of post-British autonomy for England that is never fully realised. Equivocating between a commitment to the disruptive politics of rural wilderness and pastoral retreat, the post-British potential of these novels ultimately remains contained

³⁶ Hall has revealed that she intended *The Wolf Border* to be a state-of-the-nation novel, indicating a wider exploration of twenty-first-century Britain than has previously been the case in her work. See Jonathan Ruppin, 'Sarah Hall', *Foyles*, 2017 <<https://www.foyles.co.uk/sarah-hall>> [accessed 17 September 2020].

³⁷ Anna Cottrell, 'The Power of Love: From Feminist Utopia to the Politics of Imperceptibility in Sarah Hall's Fiction', *Textual Practice*, 33.4 (2017), 679–93 (p. 682).

³⁸ Hazell, p. 221.

within the pastoral structures that maintain a depoliticised mythological England and preserve the Union.

Region and Nation

The post-pastoral qualities of Hall's work emerge in the dislocation between regional and state national approaches to the land, a political conversation located within the pastoral trope of the country versus the city.³⁹ While Hall's first novel, *Haweswater*, foregrounds the tensions between region and nation that she returns to in her more recent work, the prospect of a post-British England is, in this novel, far from reach. In contrast to the organised dissent of *The Carhullan Army*, *Haweswater*'s North is unable to challenge the dominance of Britain's industrial vision, with regional unrest only ever amounting to mere 'rumblings' among the community.⁴⁰ Upon hearing of plans to flood the village, a local farmer reflects that 'Parliament was a long way south, and seldom this far-reaching. But its law was final'.⁴¹ Aligned with the priorities of Westminster, the dam project sits uncomfortably alongside the agricultural priorities of the region and its residents. The novel's contemplation on the enduring sovereignty of British institutions points to the lack of democratic participation in England and indicates the difficulties of imagining an alternative to the jurisdiction of the centralised state. Samuel Lightburn's unsuccessful attempt to foment discontent within the local community underlines the limits of current forms of parliamentary democracy; he waits for 'the multitude of voices that did not

³⁹ See Raymond Williams' influential analysis of this dualism in *The Country and the City* (London: Vintage, 2016).

⁴⁰ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002), p. 91.

⁴¹ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 53.

come', hinting at a democratic deficit in the area.⁴² *Haweswater's* central conflict concerns a socio-economic and political division between the native Cumbrian community and Manchester City Waterworks. The hierarchical chasm between Mardale's locals and the semi-fictional corporation evokes the uneven development implicit in British urban modernity, enacting the disjuncture between both regional and state-national priorities as well as an intra-regional division between metropolitan and non-metropolitan communities.

Haweswater's opening scenes foreground the contrast between Mardale's small-scale local economy and the nation's burgeoning industrialisation; the area 'consisted mostly of tenant farmers' with the land 'devoted to the grazing of sheep, cattle and mountain ponies' and 'a little agriculture where the soil was deep enough'.⁴³ Here, the rural North is a place of isolation far removed from the workings of modernity, where the villagers '[live] independently from the rest of the country, almost separate from the world'.⁴⁴ Detached from the industrial developments of larger cities, Mardale's residents live as part of a localised micro-economy of 'exchange and barter, with the swapping of produce as it was needed [...] carrots for eggs, smoked ham for cigarettes or tobacco, apples for the occasional postage stamp'.⁴⁵ While the novel represents Northern England's metropolitan areas as having recovered from the First World War, in rural

⁴² Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 53.

⁴³ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 29.

⁴⁴ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, pp. 37–38.

Cumbria, 'there is not much recovery yet. Tenancies do not fall from trees in this part of the country, especially now'.⁴⁶

The central antagonism of *Haweswater* is the building of the dam, a metropolitan-orientated project that is said to be of benefit to the entire country. The construction entails the expropriation of the village and the evacuation of Mardale's rural community, with their small-scale agricultural ecosystem deemed insignificant compared to larger, industrial projects in big cities like Manchester. As Michael Woods explains, the rural is always understood to be part of a wider national economy, society or environment with 'the state in capitalist societies [making] decisions impacting on rural economies in line with this imperative'.⁴⁷ This submission of regional-rural communities under the dominance of a metropolitan-orientated state project emerges in *Haweswater*. The way in which the corporation's dam project is characterised – 'it will benefit the country *entire*' but disrupt only the local community – articulates the social and political implications of geographic distance from Westminster and the ongoing disenfranchisement of regional rural communities.⁴⁸

In the novel, Manchester City Waterworks representative, Jack Liggett, symbolises a hegemonic, external 'other' figure in this division. Jack's presence in the village is initially perceived as accidental, with locals noting how 'he could not be in the right place, must have somehow become dislodged from his metropolitan setting'.⁴⁹ At this stage, Jack

⁴⁶ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 108.

⁴⁷ Michael Woods, *Rural* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 232.

⁴⁸ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 49 [my emphasis].

⁴⁹ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 44.

is perceived as an imposing outsider whose 'foreignness' is made conspicuous from his immediate arrival into Mardale:

He was dressed for dinner, or a dance, like an unusual, exotic bird, its silk and sheen foreign in the cold landscape. The artist thought to himself that the man was not lost. He had come to the valley as a man would enter a room to receive a guest – territorially, impossibly possessive, and with charm, politeness, with a tip of a hat, a warmly shaken hand. He, the stranger, assuming control.⁵⁰

Jack's territorial authority signifies a national hierarchy that neglects regional-rural priorities; as Daniel Lea puts it, Jack's 'rationality [is] based on national rather than local duty'.⁵¹ Here, and elsewhere in the novel, Jack's role in the reservoir construction serves as a reminder of the insignificance of Northern rural communities to a national project focused on industrial development.

Jack's concern with possessing a golden eagle buttresses this dominating position. Upon his arrival in the village, Jack makes a bet with a local poacher to capture and kill a golden eagle so that he can display the bird in his home 'as a proletarian prize', affronting his privileged colleagues at MCW.⁵² Jack ruminates that the bird 'was no Indian tiger, no polished ivory tusk, it was not another country usurped, or the spoils of exotic adventure. It was indigenous, a symbol of the beauty of the islands, the hub of the empire'.⁵³ The bird's native status alludes to MCW's expropriation of the village, positioning the development within the language of colonialism. This association is also reflected in the structural function of the eagle as a trigger for *Haweswater's* first tragedy – Jack's death.

⁵⁰ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 44.

⁵¹ Daniel Lea, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: Contemporary British Voices* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 158.

⁵² Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 200.

⁵³ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 199.

Later in the novel, after Jack falls in love with Janet, the poacher presents Jack with the bird as agreed, mortifying him, and causing him to seek atonement by returning the bird to its nest. Here, the golden eagle's regional credentials – a protected species which can now be found only in remote parts of Scotland and the Northern English uplands – encode Cumbria's oppression under the larger territorial grasp of the centralised British state.⁵⁴ Although Jack's view of the bird is detached from 'exotic adventure', his enlistment of a local poacher to capture and kill the bird on his behalf emphasises his disconnection from the region. At this point, he is framed as an outsider, unfamiliar with the intricacies of the region and its native species. Jack's inability to recognise his role in the marginalisation of Mardale's community reinforces his status as an outsider. Just as the Indian tiger is a symbol of British imperial conquest, so too is Jack's desire for the golden eagle as a class-inflected trophy signifying his seizing – and subsequent obliteration – of Cumbrian territory.

Haweswater's insistence on Cumbrian dialect – a formal device absent elsewhere in Hall's novels – also communicates the corporation's close relationship to what is represented as a Westminster-inspired wave of industrialisation. The use of dialect can be observed most clearly during exchanges between Jack and the local community: 'yor t' fella that's gonna mek lake bigga' / 'Yes I am'.⁵⁵ In staging an opposition between Standard English and regional dialect, *Haweswater* gestures towards the cultural and political chasm between Jack and Mardale's agricultural community. This linguistic

⁵⁴ For more on the conservation of the golden eagle in Cumbria, see <https://www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-explorer/birds/birds-prey/golden-eagle>;

The reference to the golden eagle in *Haweswater* also foregrounds a preoccupation with wildlife conservation and the national park that concerns Hall returns to in *The Wolf Border*.

⁵⁵ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 81.

division works to establish the complex hierarchal structures that designate Northern England as the nation's 'other' and define it against hegemonic metropolitan modernity. Reciting the process of reservoir construction in oversimplified terms, Jack views the locals' concerns as little more than a nostalgic reluctance to engage in modernisation. Jack speaks to the locals in 'another tongue, or in abstracts far removed from the life of these men and women. His purpose was inconceivable'.⁵⁶ The perceived untranslatability of the dam project to the locals in the passage drives a wedge between 'national interest' and its metropolitan discourse of development and the 'parochial border towns' of Cumbria, pointing towards the socio-political implications of perceptions of the region as a provincial backwater.⁵⁷

It is notable, however, that Hall's fiction after *Haweswater* retreats from the use of dialect and a delimited regional mode while retaining an insistence on local identity markers. In *The Carhullan Army*, for example, one of the first things Sister notices about Jackie is her accent sounding like 'the country's rural equivalent [of her own]'.⁵⁸ Similarly, in *The Wolf Border*, when Rachel returns to Cumbria after a period of living in the US, Pennington's secretary questions her authenticity: 'You're local? I don't hear an accent'.⁵⁹ Yet what distinguishes these accounts from *Haweswater*, even as they appear superficially to echo many of that novel's preoccupations and engage with a similar setting, is that their central concerns of climate change and animal conservation are inherently global while at the same time experienced within a local frame. Janet

⁵⁶ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 42.

⁵⁷ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 43.

⁵⁸ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 78.

⁵⁹ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), p. 11.

Lightburn recognises that she is 'in a place too remote to fall prey to political or industrial assembling. [...] Now she has had to alter her vision. She must look with new eyes'.⁶⁰ It appears that Hall's fiction also 'alters' its vision. *Haweswater's* politically inert North gives way to a much more politically activated North in *The Carhullan Army* and *The Wolf Border*, both of which register the decentralising potential of a regional voice attuned to national and global shifts.

The devolutionary thrust of *The Carhullan Army* is registered much more explicitly, with Cumbria's mountain regions depicted as post-British spaces operating outside of state jurisdiction. *The Carhullan Army* takes the political 'rumblings' of *Haweswater* to the extreme in systematic plans to overthrow the government. The novel's exploration of the relationship between region and nation takes place within a distinctively global frame; Britain is now a diminished colony dependent on American paternalism, whose constitutional collapse has coincided with planetary environmental crisis. In a continuation of *Haweswater's* motif of water, *The Carhullan Army* sees the flooding of London's River Thames and destruction of the Houses of Parliament. The material destruction of the Houses of Parliament in the novel parallels the disintegration of the British political system. *The Carhullan Army's* fragmented structure and epistolary narrative formally register this constitutional collapse; the narrative unfolds retrospectively in a series of confessional records recovered after Sister is captured by The Authority, with some records marked 'complete' and others 'partially corrupted' or with 'data lost'.⁶¹ Emilie Walezak suggests that the records of the interrogation, in which Sister details her life at Carhullan, signify 'the destruction of a familiar national identity

⁶⁰ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 112.

⁶¹ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army* n.p.

from the near past' while also being an attempt to 'resist dissolution' of Cumbria's regional identity under the centralised military government.⁶² Building on the tension between the national and the regional Walezak identifies here, I propose that this fragmentary narrative also has a devolutionary function in the novel. In offering an individual narrative in opposition to the state, Sister's records provide a means of telling a defiantly regional story that eschews national affiliation, with the fragmentary narrative style symbolising the 'break-up' of the British multi-national bloc.⁶³

Yet, in this novel, the end of Britain has not led to the decentralisation of political power or any recognisable version of radical constitutional reform. Instead, the state has simply been replaced by an unofficial governmental body named 'The Authority', leading to heightened inequalities between citizens and state-style apparatus. Sister describes how '[t]here was no verification of what the structure of government really looked like now, whether it was impenetrable, or whether it had vanished altogether, and in its place something else existed'.⁶⁴ When Sister arrives at Carhullan, she is told that 'London's finished. We're no longer the region we were [...] we're back to being a country of local regimes'.⁶⁵ But this is no radical regionalism. Hall indicates that a kind of despotic regionalism has transpired; in the novel's fictional setting of Rith (a play on former Cumbrian capital, Penrith) there are strict surveillance measures with the land divided into 'zones' that 'do not allow for transference', binding people to their regions at the time

⁶² Emilie Walezak, 'Landscape and Identity: Utopian/Dystopian Cumbria in Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army*', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 60.1 (2019), 67–74 (p. 69).

⁶³ Nairn, *Break-Up*, p. 1.

⁶⁴ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 39.

⁶⁵ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 104.

of governmental collapse.⁶⁶ Sister describes how '[a]nyone living beyond the designated sectors was considered autonomous, alien' and were 'no longer part of the recognised nation. The Authority simply called them Unofficials'.⁶⁷ The division of Rith's population into 'official' and 'unofficial' categories signifies a last-ditch attempt of state control in which the governmental apparatus takes steps to protect itself and ensure its own continuity. These state-supporting measures extend to the closure of the public realm and the loss of the civic. 'The Authority' are 'an affront to the rights of the public', with the regime led by 'power hungry', 'bigot', Powell, who has suspended general elections, bound people to their zones to prevent public protests, and created a militarised police force.⁶⁸

The Carhullan Army's concern with British constitutional culture also pertains to the relationship between England – both symbolic-pastoral and national – and Britain. Allusions to a 'distorted' image of England under Britishness mark representations of Cumbria's ruined countryside:

People from the South had once bought retirement homes here, under the blue shadow of its fells. After the fuel crisis it had been left to its own devices, and slowly it must have emptied like all the others, before the orders were finally given to evacuate. On the wall of one cottage someone had written the words Rule Britannia in red and white paint. They had tried to draw the Cross of St George but it looked distorted, bent out of shape. I couldn't tell if it was an act of vandalism or one last loyal statement from the proprietor before leaving.⁶⁹

Noting how people from the South of England had used Cumbria as a site of retreat, Sister's reflection alludes to the association of Englishness with the rural landscape, but

⁶⁶ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 15.

⁶⁷ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 15.

⁶⁸ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 26.

⁶⁹ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 22.

also a distinctively Anglo-Britishness. The painting of 'Rule Britannia' in red and white, and the failed attempt at painting the St George's flag, exemplify a slippage between England and Britain while also alluding to the former's suppression in Anglo-Britishness. Sister's inability to discern whether the 'distorted' St George's Cross was a final display of national allegiance, or one of vandalism, registers the slipperiness of exactly what constitutes England. This concern with England following the collapse of Britain is evidenced elsewhere in the novel, underlining the cultural functioning of England in the former Union. Locals reflect that 'of all the English traditions to have been compromised, the weather was the saddest', drawing attention to England's existence in a cultural capacity.⁷⁰ In this sense, to varying degrees, both *Haweswater* and *The Carhullan Army* position Cumbria as a privileged site to render visible the contradictions inherent in Anglo-Britain and critique both the suppression of England and regional inequality under the centralised British state. This prioritisation of placed forms of community and democracy also appears to reflect the priorities of what Gardiner terms 'a minor literature of England'.⁷¹ Such a literature would 'return experience to local contexts, working between dialects and showing the connectedness of the many facets of the state [...] but it may also aim to thoroughly re-provincialise the writing of England'.⁷²

⁷⁰ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 6.

⁷¹ Gardiner, *Return of England*, p. 146.

⁷² Gardiner, *Return of England*, p. 146.

Contested Territories

Cumbria's role as a contested territory in the history of the Union acts as a buttress for England's 're-provincialisation' in *Haweswater*, *The Carhullan Army*, and *The Wolf Border*. *Haweswater* frequently references Cumbria's former historical status as borderland between England and Scotland, inviting parallels between the region's history and the novel's present conflict. For instance, one of Jack's walks near the village takes him towards 'the old Roman route', a reference to the Roman Conquest which re-emerges when the army arrives to destroy Mardale, described as 'a phantom sighting of Roman legionaries, marching south from Hadrian's Wall'.⁷³ Likewise, after the construction of the new Burnbanks village to house the dam's construction workers, the novel references to the 'old border myths and long-ago frictions of the area'.⁷⁴ *Haweswater* thus situates its narrative of regional marginalisation in 1936 as part of a longer history of regional inequality and conflict; these political references foreground how Cumbria's topography has served as a key site of political and territorial contestation within the Union, positioning the area as an appropriate site from which to stage the novel's post-British politics. In this sense, given that novel was published just five years following the devolution of Scotland, Wales, and London, *Haweswater* echoes claims for devolved governance from recent British history within a distinctively Northern rural context.

A similar decentralising sentiment underpins *The Carhullan Army*, which depicts Carhullan as a strategic geopolitical location whose history Sister traces back to the Ancient Britons and the Romans:

It was, and had always been, removed from the faulted municipal world. It sat in the fields, the sheltered lull before the final ascent of the High Street range. There

⁷³ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 149, p. 219.

⁷⁴ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 219.

was a panoramic view point for miles. The Romans knew it and they raised a fort there that Carhullan's byes and pens were later built around. And before the Centurions, the Britons had a site nearby; five weather-pitted standing stones which leant awkwardly towards each other, west of the paddocks. The Five Pins they were called.⁷⁵

The remaining standing stones testify to Cumbria's status as a former Celtic Kingdom, while the presence of a Roman fort 'heralds proleptically the final siege of The Authority headquarters in Rith when the women fighters occupy the medieval defensive castle of Rith that Hall relocates on top of Beacon Hill'.⁷⁶ These recurrent allusions to the region as conflicted borderland with Scotland and the border reivers situates *The Carhullan Army's* as part of a history of national conflict. The novel presents Cumbria's past and the topographical features of its landscape as particularly well-suited to territorial battle, framing the area's rural landscape as a place of political possibility.

Building on the historic constitutional references of *Haweswater* and *The Carhullan Army*, *The Wolf Border* positions the relationship between England and Scotland within a twenty-first-century, devolutionary context of wider constitutional uncertainty. The novel foregrounds the potential for a post-British England in establishing a counterpoint between Northern England and the devolved nation of Scotland. The positioning of *The Wolf Border's* ecological narrative against the backdrop of the Scottish Independence referendum is not a mere geographic coincidence, but works productively to highlight the exclusions inherent in Anglo-Britain. Rachel's initial reservation about the rewilding project concern its location in England, a country that she considers to be 'particularly

⁷⁵ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, pp. 54–55.

⁷⁶ Walezak, p. 69.

owned'.⁷⁷ Conversely, the opposite is happening across the border, where land is being de-privatised and returned to public hands:

[Rachel] is aware of the reform plans across the border – public acquisition of private land, recalibration of resources – a notion that must make the likes of Thomas Pennington more than a little uncomfortable. The BBC is full of debate about independence and the forthcoming referendum; she's been surprised by how close the polls are, how troublesome the matter is proving for Westminster.⁷⁸

In Scotland, the hierarchies of land ownership that have characterised the British class system since feudalism are being readily dismantled as the nation prepares to rebuild itself anew, presenting post-British Scotland as an increasingly egalitarian civic space compared to England. Hall's reference to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in this scene functions as a comment on the ideological construction of Britishness. As its name implies, the BBC has occupied a position in the national imagination as a cultural symbol of the Union. Jean Seaton notes, for example, that the BBC has helped to define Britain-as-nation and thus become part of Britain's unwritten constitution.⁷⁹ Yet, recent socio-political tensions throughout Britain in the post-Brexit-vote period have seen the organisation's role as 'uniting the nation' called into question, with debates concerning the contradictions in the BBC's unifying status as a nationally funded corporation in such a divided present.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 29.

⁷⁸ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 26.

⁷⁹ Jean Seaton, *Pinkoes and Traitors: The BBC and the Nation, 1974-1987* (London: Profile Books, 2015), pp. 13–14; For a discussion of recent attempts at cultural devolution including the BBC, see the introduction to this thesis. See also: Gardiner and Westall, 'The BBC and British Branding', *Open Democracy*, 27 May 2016 <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/ourbeeb/bbc-and-british-branding/>> [accessed 1 August 2020]

⁸⁰ The BBC came under attack by both tabloid newspapers and Boris Johnson for its decision to censor the lyrics of 'Rule Britannia' and Land of Hope and Glory at the Last Night of the Proms in August 2020. In response to this change, the Prime Minister publicly demanded that the BBC stop the 'cringing embarrassment' about the nation's history. See, for example, two contrasting approaches to the conflict published on the same day: Jim Waterson, 'Proms Row: Johnson Calls for End to "cringing Embarrassment"

In contrast, *The Wolf Border* communicates the perceived ‘radicalism’ of Scotland through intertextual reference to the Scottish Renaissance of the 1980s and 1990s, which has functioned as a form of cultural devolution for the nation.⁸¹ Prior to a healthcare appointment, Rachel listens to a radio station on which Scotland’s First Minister is ‘[g]oaded, accused of being racist, an economic dunce, but he maintained optimism, Scotland was, is, and will be a beacon of social enlightenment. He quotes one of the country’s premier writers: work as in the early days of a better nation’.⁸² The writer in question here is Alasdair Gray, whose fiction forms a significant contribution to the revival of Scottish literary nationalism; his dystopian novel, *Lanark* (1981), was ‘significantly supported by a wave of left-leaning nationalist journals [...] including *Cencrastus*, *New Edinburgh Review*, and *Radical Scotland*.’⁸³ This intertextual reference gestures towards literature’s potential to accelerate a devolved national consciousness in lieu of political devolution, indicating an awareness of the relationship between literary and political forms of devolution. The relationship between literary and political devolution in Scotland is coded architecturally, with Gray’s quotation written on Holyrood’s Canongate Wall. In *The Wolf Border*, the ‘early days of a better nation’ refers to Scotland but may also speak to a potential independent England. Rachel’s hope that ‘the country as a whole will one day rewild, whatever its manmade divisions created at

over UK History’, *The Guardian*, 25 August 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/aug/25/boris-johnson-scolds-bbc-over-suggestion-proms-would-drop-rule-britannia>> [accessed 21 September 2020]; ‘The Sun says The BBC does not represent Britain, why is the nation being forced to fund it? *The Sun*, 25 August 2020 <<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/12499252/bbc-does-not-represent-britain/>> [accessed 21 September 2020].

⁸¹ See, most recently, Scott Hames, *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution: Voice, Class, Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020) and Cairns Craig, *The Wealth of the Nation: Scotland, Culture, Independence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

⁸² Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 102.

⁸³ Gardiner, *Return of England*, p. 120.

the ballot box' indicates a vision of Scotland progressing towards a post-British nationhood and evokes the potential for England's own political 'rewilding'.⁸⁴ *The Wolf Border's* rewilding project thus stands as an allegory for a post-British politics of England located in Northern England.

Yet, it is worth noting that the novel distinguishes between cultural forms of devolution and the dissolution of the British state form. *The Wolf Border* highlights cultural devolution's inadequacy to yield a political praxis that transcends British state structures, simply substituting legislative power for a depoliticised civic nationalism. This ambivalence echoes Christopher Whyte's assertion that 'in the absence of elected political authority [in pre-devolutionary Scotland], the task of representing the nation has been repeatedly devolved to its writers'.⁸⁵ The process of cultural devolution Whyte outlines here emerges in Hall's work; her fiction tends to a similar task for England, speaking from a region that has a particular historical relationship with Scotland and which has been defined by longstanding socio-economic and political marginalisation. In this way, *The Wolf Border* indicates how both Scotland and Northern England are disadvantaged by the spatial biases of the centralised British state. In doing so, Hall indexes the limits of devolution for affecting a meaningful redistribution of power between the nation and the state.

Even the case for Scotland's independence remains exclusively discussed by 'grey-haired' retirees and 'the district's rich', which suggests that independence from Britain may simply result in a lateral redistribution of power between two already existing

⁸⁴ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 234.

⁸⁵ Christopher Whyte, 'Masculinities in Contemporary Scottish Fiction', *Modern Forum for Language Studies*, 34.2 (1998), 274–85 (p. 284).

political elites.⁸⁶ *The Wolf Border*'s depiction echoes the class dynamics implicit in the management of British rural space. This scene replicates the initiatives of conservation charities and interest groups such as the John Muir Trust, an organisation that now owns eight estates in Scotland under the remit of protecting and managing 'wild' land.⁸⁷ Likewise, in Hall's vision of an independent Scotland, antiquated British hierarchies remain part of the political fabric and matters of 'the World Heritage status bid, new speed limits on the lakes, the Scottish polls [and] the wolf-project' remain uncomfortably upper-class affairs.⁸⁸ The end of the novel communicates a similar pessimism when the future of the wolves is negotiated at Holyrood, a state-mandated institution signifying only a lateral transfer of power.

The Wolf Border thus presents a version of state-led devolution which manifests itself more as a reshuffling of local power rather than 'instigating a complete social rethink.'⁸⁹ The novel remains critical of the capacity of literature as a substitute for legislative power and acknowledges the de-politicisation implicit in cultural forms of devolution as decentralisation. Paradoxically then, *The Wolf Border* reimagines the political narrative of Scotland while simultaneously exposing how independence is an illusion 'often projected onto the cultural sphere through its persistent lack in the political sphere'.⁹⁰ So, while the novel goes as far as imagining a post-British Scotland, it

⁸⁶ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 95.

⁸⁷ John Muir Trust, 'For Wild Land & Wild Places', *John Muir Trust*, 2008 <<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/our-work>> [accessed 26 May 2020].

⁸⁸ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 95.

⁸⁹ Michael Gardiner, 'Literature, Theory, Politics: Devolution as Iteration', in *Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. by Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 43–50 (p. 46); See also: Nairn, *After Britain*.

⁹⁰ 'Introduction', in *Beyond Scotland: New Contexts for Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, ed. by Gareth Carruthers, David Goldie, and Alastair Renfrew (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 11–16 (p. 15).

offers only a guarded prognosis for progressive politics in a country still dominated by class interests and the institutional remnants of the British state.

The North and the (Post-)Pastoral

While the uses of the land prioritised in *Haweswater* (small-scale agriculture), *The Carhullan Army* (environmental sustainability), and *The Wolf Border* (rewilding) create the conditions for deconstructing the pastoral idyll, their depiction of rural space overlays multiple pastoral and post-pastoral modes. From its opening pages, *Haweswater* appears to commit to the post-pastoral. The novel presents Mardale's rural territory in terms of its agricultural use value; the village is not a place of rural retreat, but of home and work for tenant farmers and 'a little agriculture where the soil was deep enough'.⁹¹ The novel viscerally describes the reality of farming practices, puncturing any association of space with an image of a 'green and pleasant land'. In *Haweswater*, Janet's intricate familiarity with agricultural practices emphasises their cruelty; her knowledge spans from understanding how to 'pry open the mouth of an unorphaned lamb to introduce milk through a fake teat' to the most efficient ways to kill livestock, 'the point on the side of a head to place the rifle barrel, exact inches from an eye, where the bullet will meet the least resistance'.⁹² As the narrative voice reminds us 'there are no miracles in this dale'.⁹³

Haweswater's blurring of the boundary between the human and the non-human reinforces this post-pastoral thrust. The novel opens during Ella Lightburn's labour as

⁹¹ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 29.

⁹² Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 22.

⁹³ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 6.

she gives birth to Janet, a process describes as 'beyond animal'.⁹⁴ This scene foregrounds *Haweswater's* collapsing of the hierarchy between humans and the land, with Janet's birth likened to the slaughtering of animals on the farm; Ella's groans are described as 'the torrid calls of the cattle and sheep in their herds when their time came, a stuck bellow, a panicked bleat'.⁹⁵ This description anticipates Janet's close relationship with the farm that comes to define her life and death in the novel, while also evoking another characteristic Gifford attributes to the post-pastoral, that '[w]hat is happening in us is paralleled in external nature' and 'our inner human nature can be understood in relation to external nature'.⁹⁶ As the novel progresses, Janet comes to symbolise the novel's struggle to separate ideas of nature and culture and the innate separation of the human from the land. Hall's treatment of gender echoes this role. When Janet is older, her father reflects that she 'territorialises the old notions [...] There are no absolutes to be found in the blood on her wrists, and under her nails. She has feral qualities not belonging to either sex'.⁹⁷ The fact that Janet does not conform to the expected gender roles of the 1930s parallels her rejection of the 'old notions' of the rural as an idyllic space; just as Janet is described as possessing 'feral' qualities, so too, does Cumbria's landscape.

Janet's affair with Jack reiterates these 'feral qualities'. Their sexual encounters reaffirm Hall's blurring of the human and non-human, both in their instinctual physicality and the way in which Janet approaches Jack as a predator pursuing its prey; '[h]e did not know that she was more aware of his movements within the valley than he was of hers.

⁹⁴ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 6.

⁹⁶ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 156.

⁹⁷ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 73.

That the direction of her walks was dependent on first pinpointing his location or hearing word of where he had been'.⁹⁸ The violence of the encounters themselves reiterates this visceral animalism: 'there were always injuries. Bruises as she struggled to leave him' and '[p]ieces of her hair torn out when she demanded he leave'.⁹⁹ Jack and Janet's bodily struggles articulate the coming together of two contradictory approaches to the land as Hall 'makes use of the staple fictional convention of the union of opposites'.¹⁰⁰ While Jack is initially presented as an outsider due to his association with MCW, later, we learn of his familiarity with Cumbria's landscape, complicating the rural conventions of the threat of the 'outsider'. It is revealed that Jack previously visited the area as a child and knew the fells intimately 'to the point of being able to climb Helvellyn at night'.¹⁰¹

Jack's attitude towards his relationship with Janet also demonstrates a complex pastoralism. Aligning sexual pleasure and the recuperative effects of the land on his psyche, Jack reflects that 'the fulfilment of a high climb and the sensuality of [Janet's] body [...] brought a level of contentment beyond any he had reached in the past. The two at once seemed to offer a spiritual answer'.¹⁰² Jack's alignment of the female body with 'nature' and the mythical properties he attributes to the combination of these acts exemplifies the colonial impulses that undercut the narrative's post-pastoral vision. Yet, his relationship with Janet does to some extent alter Jack's approach to the reservoir project and his pre-disposition to the Mardale community; he transitions from being

⁹⁸ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 119.

⁹⁹ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 120.

¹⁰⁰ Dominic Head, 'The Farming Community Revisited: Complex Nostalgia in Sarah Hall and Melissa Harrison', *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, Forthcoming [Unpublished Manuscript], p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Head, 'The Farming Community Revisited', p. 4.

¹⁰² Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 147.

‘[o]ne of those classless types who believes that [the countryside] is about scenery and escape’ to being allowed ‘free passage. As if he, too, now belonged in part to the region’.¹⁰³ Jack’s relationship with Janet initiates a transformation of his character and his subsequent reframing in the novel – he transitions from being described as a figure of metropolitan dominance and hegemony to possessing an intimate knowledge of Cumbria’s landscape. The novel appears to distinguish between pastoral and post-pastoral approaches to the region’s rural space, between Jack’s territorial bravado and anthropocentric pastoral position and Janet’s intimate but nevertheless anti-pastoral affinity with the land established through farming practices.

Haweswater’s most explicit, self-conscious engagement with the pastoral idyll resides in the character of Paul Levell, a landscape painter who refuses to include the human form in his work, instead ‘push[ing] the limits of Lakeland geological existence’.¹⁰⁴ Levell represents a complication in *Haweswater*’s post-pastoral vision as it encompasses both the farmer and the artist’s view of the landscape. Yet, despite being a landscape painter, Levell’s non-human depictions of Mardale are post-pastoral in that they insist on the viewing the landscape as a ‘wilderness’ free from human interference and cultivation, a form of what Head describes as ‘impersonal modernism’:¹⁰⁵

Humans were, without exception, banished from the bleak, natural scenes, as if unable to survive or simply not welcome in the wilderness created by Levell’s brush save for a suggestive form in a rock, a women’s back surfacing in the river as a stepping stone.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 180, p. 149.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁵ Head, ‘The Farming Community Revisited’, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ Sarah Hall, *Haweswater*, p. 38.

Levell's village portraiture represents a counterpoint to William Wordsworth's poetry, whose representations of the Lake District have been appropriated in popular culture and turned the region into a national artefact. The force of the Wordsworthian Lake District has cultural purchase today. Known as 'Wordsworth's County', the area's tourism centres on the National Trust's Wordsworth House, encouraging an experience of the grounds as they were described in his poems.¹⁰⁷ Scott Hess notes that Wordsworth's influence has seen the Lake District presented as 'an aesthetic sphere, dominated by the arts in general and poets in particular', referencing Wordsworth's influence on the construction of the national park.¹⁰⁸ This appropriation of the countryside was decidedly pastoral, a popular misreading of Wordsworth's often anti-pastoral poetry which has augmented a Wordsworthian 'tradition' of 'aesthetic leisure and spirituality, separated from everyday work, subsistence, and economic activity'.¹⁰⁹ In the character of Levell, then, Hall reworks a key figure in the ways in which depictions of rural space are often appropriated as part of the pastoral idyll in the English cultural imagination.

The Carhullan Army's environmental consciousness continues Hall's deconstruction of the pastoral idyll. This novel disassociates the rural landscape and pastoralism through the potential of Northern England's mountainous landscape, suggesting a synergy between rural wilderness and political autonomy for the region. *The Carhullan Army* represents an explicit attempt to harness the Northern wilderness as a tool against governmental structures. Despite occupying the space once known as the Lake District, Carhullan is far from a place of rural retreat. Upon her arrival, Sister is kept

¹⁰⁷ See <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wordsworth-house-and-garden>

¹⁰⁸ Scott Hess, *William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship: The Roots of Environmentalism in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012), p. 13.

¹⁰⁹ Hess, p. 15.

in a metal tank and subject to physical and psychological torture, a process performed for a second time she joins Carhullan's army as a test of her commitment to overthrowing The Authority. This distinctively unsentimental regime extends to all aspects of existence on the farm: material goods are markedly absent, clothing is functional, dietary intake is dependent on energy expenditure and bodily protection against the weather (with butter added to meals in the winter), and days are filled with militarised exercise or tending to the farm. The characterisation of Carhullan's leader, Jackie Nixon, reiterates this hardened quality:

She was always depicted formidably; hard-cast, like granite. People in the region were wary even of her name. old as it was – stock of ironmongers, masons, and the bowmen of the North. In Rith it was issued like superstition from the mouths of those discussing her and her girls. 'Jackie Nixon,' they said. 'She's one of the Border Nixons. They were the ones who went out with bulldogs to meet the reivers'.¹¹⁰

Jackie is presented as part of a distinctively Northern place-myth, deeply rooted in the region's history, framing her as the driving force of Cumbria's post-British potential. Having rejected the jurisdiction of The Authority, she is now 'formidably' of the region, whose 'hard-cast' character is intricately tied to Cumbria's former role in the nation's historical territorial conflicts.

Indeed, Cumbria's mountainous landscape appears to hold political potential in its wildness. In contrast to the pastoral idyll associated with the South, the supposed 'wild places' of the North hold the possibility of 'independent communities', with Sister reflecting that '[s]omething durable and extraordinary could be created in these mountains'.¹¹¹ Upon her arrival at Carhullan, Sister notes the changes in the landscape: 'I

¹¹⁰ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 49.

¹¹¹ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 55.

could feel it already, that I was entering her country, her domain. *It was a raw landscape, verging on wilderness*'.¹¹² Here, the novel registers socio-political transitions in Cumbria's material terrain. Any notion of a bucolic rural idyll is literally punctured as 'the rock was beginning to show through the grassland' as Sister transitions from the control of The Authority to Carhullan.¹¹³ *The Carhullan Army* frequently positions the wilderness of Northern England's rural landscape as a fertile site for the staging of post-British politics; Carhullan is located in 'the disputed lands. They have never been settled. And those who live in them have never surrendered to anyone's control'.¹¹⁴ The novel explicitly ties Carhullan's project to a democratic form in which current centralised governmental structures are no longer visible – as Jackie reminds us '[r]evolutions always begin in the mountain regions. It's the fate of such places'.¹¹⁵ The prospect of ongoing pressure for radical governmental reform appears to be confirmed on the novel's final page in Sister's defiant assertion that she does not 'recognise the jurisdiction of this government', ending on an emphatic rejection of the British institutional system.¹¹⁶

However, *The Carhullan Army*'s post-pastoral vision is not sustained, and, like *Haweswater*, the novel overlays pastoral and post-pastoral modes. Hall forecloses the political potential of *The Carhullan Army* in the novel's return to the idealising tendencies of pastoral approaches to the landscape. Despite the apparent initial rejection of sentimental attitudes towards the land at Carhullan, as the novel progresses, a focus on

¹¹² Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 50 [my emphasis].

¹¹³ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 50.

¹¹⁴ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 195.

¹¹⁵ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 195.

¹¹⁶ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 207.

the transformative effects of the rural emerges: “‘There’s nothing like this place for rehabilitation,’” Sister is told, “‘It’s working with the land that does it. Getting back to basics’”.¹¹⁷ Sister, too, reflects that she had often thought of the landscape as ‘a place of beauty and escape’; even after her treacherous journey to the farm, she finds the landscape ‘more beautiful than ever’.¹¹⁸ Later, Sister’s post-pastoral expectations of rural wilderness are often undermined. When she arrives at Carhullan, Sister notes that, in contrast to ‘[a]fter the austere expanse of the fells’ during her trek, ‘the farmland seemed peculiarly cultivated’.¹¹⁹ Here, the novel foregrounds the contradictions and complexities of the pastoral mode; even in Carhullan, the landscape is not free from human influence and cannot be considered ‘wilderness’.

These complexities also register structurally. Like *Haweswater*, *The Carhullan Army* relies on the inherent pastoral opposition between the country and the city. Sister’s move to Carhullan is essentially one of rural retreat from the corruption she perceives taking place in England’s urban spaces; her initial journey to from Rith to Carhullan, followed by her later return, enacts what Gifford described as ‘the ancient pastoral impulse of retreat to a rural landscape and return to the city’.¹²⁰ Considering the complexity of the novel’s engagement with the pastoral, Deborah Lilley suggests that ‘the novel begins to shift the pastoral into new forms. Sister’s understanding of the landscape is newly tempered by her anti-pastoral experiences, which supplement, rather than

¹¹⁷ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 131.

¹¹⁸ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, pp. 174–75.

¹¹⁹ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 65.

¹²⁰ Gifford, ‘Pastoral’, p. 44.

overcome, the pastoral vision with which she came to it'.¹²¹ Thus, despite the novel's commitment to the disruptive politics of Northern rural wilderness, the novel cannot be considered entirely post-pastoral. Rather, it equivocates between pastoral and post-pastoral impulses, reflecting an ambivalence towards the possibility of overthrowing centralised state structures and decoupling England from the pastoral. These paradoxes develop alongside Sister's realisation that Carhullan is far from an egalitarian utopia or a radical redistribution of power compared to that of The Authority. Jackie's reign is supported by social inequalities, with Carhullan reliant on a 'system of control' and a strict 'hierarchy'.¹²² This limited renegotiation of power indicates a scepticism towards the prospect of regional devolution, presenting a regional democratic form in which one unequal system of control has simply been replaced by another. In this sense, *The Carhullan Army* offers only an emerging vision of post-British autonomy for England that is tentative and never fully realised. There are, however, signals that this project remains open-ended. Right before the seizing of Rith, Jackie mentions that Cumbria is 'still missing a big predator in the chain' and she would like to see wolves back in England, a reference of particular significance given the focus of *The Wolf Border*.¹²³

If *The Carhullan Army* appears to initiate a post-British vision for Northern England, it is in *The Wolf Border* that these politics find their most successful post-pastoral outlet. *The Wolf Border* dismantles elegiac images of the countryside in England; Chapter One is titled 'Old Country', the novel's first allusion to an ideological construction

¹²¹ Deborah Lilley, 'Unsettling Environments: New Pastorals in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army*', *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, 20.1 (2016), 60–71 (p. 67).

¹²² Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 84.

¹²³ Sarah Hall, *The Carhullan Army*, p. 184.

of Englishness characterised by artistic treatments of the rural landscape. At the beginning of her project with Pennington, Rachel becomes frustrated that 'people here don't care about the country in any deep way, they just want nice walks, nice views, and a tea room'.¹²⁴ In contrast, Rachel possesses a local affiliation with the land rooted in her childhood memories. Upon her return from America, Rachel realises that 'England is unreal, a forgotten version, with only a few pieces of evidence left to validate it'.¹²⁵ This musing aligns the landscape with a pastoral version of Englishness, yet, when the novel evokes the landscape on a micro scale it is much more vivid. When Rachel returns to Cumbria, she quickly becomes reacquainted with the 'spruce and sagebrush, the rancid vegetable smell of the paper mill downriver from the Reservation. Cumbria's signature aroma is immediately recognisable: upland pheromones'.¹²⁶ Her sensorial familiarity decouples the landscape from the mythical rural and reframes it in localised terms through the notation of specific reference points. Hall's prioritisation of a local connection to Cumbria's topography – a characteristic of Rachel's role on the wolf-project – signals the landscape's demythologisation and England's own counter-pastoral return as it becomes geographically rooted and 'placed'. The kind of 'grounded ecology' the wolf-project represents is opposed by groups who reinforce the country's 'green and pleasant land' as a synecdoche of a national consciousness. When Rachel attempts to answer the public's questions, the protesters sing a song 'written to the tune of Jerusalem'.¹²⁷ This performative ode to a mythical version of Englishness alludes to Blakean elegies of the

¹²⁴ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 35.

¹²⁵ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 23.

¹²⁶ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 9.

¹²⁷ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 154.

pastoral idyll and, in drawing on a hymn frequently co-opted as England's unofficial national anthem, elevates rural space beyond a material and placed reality.

The material fact of the wolves in *The Wolf Border* also establishes connections between the novel's rewilding project and a post-British vision of England. Counterposing fantasies of the pastoral imaginary, the physical presence of wolves on the Annerdale estate initiates a post-pastoral reconfiguration of English rural space as the land becomes used for an environmental cause, rather than being reduced to a national iconography or object of aesthetic contemplation. The novel's epigraph, for example, communicates the bond between the wolves and a kind of decentralised politics: '*Susiraja* (Finnish) – Literally 'wolf border': the boundary between the capital region and the rest of the country. The name suggests everything outside the border is wilderness'.¹²⁸ Here, the wolf-project highlights the disconnection between Westminster – a symbol of Anglo-British hegemony – and what is referred to as 'the rest of the country'. In this sense, the novel's title translates into a case for decentralised politics in England emerging from a space of wilderness, a landscape Hall often attributes to Cumbria in particular and Northern England as a whole.

The project of rewilding *The Wolf Border* thus necessitates a post-pastoral commitment to English rural space. Graham Huggan's explanation of the ecological value of rewilding is particularly instructive for reading the wolf-project in post-pastoral terms:

Rewilding is not the romantic idea of restoring [natural ecosystems] to their putatively original state, which is recognised by practitioners as illusory; rather, it reflects the pragmatic need to boost their in-built capacity for regeneration, such

¹²⁸ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, n.p.

as by performing reintroduction experiments that might encourage natural ecological processes to start.¹²⁹

The Wolf Border was published during an emphatically post-pastoral moment in Britain in which there has been a significant focus on ecological conservation and rewilding; there are, for instance, parallels to be drawn between the novel's fictional Annerdale estate where the wolf enclosure is located and Paul Lister's Alladale Wilderness Reserve in the Caledonian Forest.¹³⁰ In the novel, the highly political project of rewilding contains the potential to bypass regional and, as the wolves make clear, national lines of demarcation. The transgressive politics of rewilding disregard humanmade territorial divisions and, in *The Wolf Border*, expose the ways these divisions serve to reinforce regional inequality. In this sense, the novel's concern with rewilding appears to map onto its post-British project.

The literary function of the wolves in *The Wolf Border* also encodes an ambivalence towards the possibility of achieving a post-British England; they are overdetermined spatial metaphors whose symbolic purpose becomes increasingly slippery. The wolf has long been used as a literary device for exploring human, political, social, and environmental preoccupations. The figure of the wolf, as Karen Jones points out, is often 'a symbol of ecological vitality located in the wilderness': because of its biological proximity to the domestic dog, the wolf is a suitable device for navigating the porous boundary between civilisation and 'the wild'.¹³¹ Likewise, in *The Wolf Border*, the

¹²⁹ Graham Huggan, 'Back to the Future: The "New Nature Writing", Ecological Boredom, and the Recall of the Wild', *Prose Studies*, 38.2 (2016), 152–71 (p. 169).

¹³⁰ See <https://alladale.com>.

¹³¹ Karen Jones, 'Writing the Wolf: Canine Tales and North American Environmental-Literary Tradition', *Environment and History*, 17.2 (2011), 201–28 (p. 202); The figure of the wolf is bound up in rural images of wild Northern landscapes, particularly North America, alluded to in Rachel's initial work with wolves in Idaho.

wolves are indifferent to the humanmade boundaries of North/South and wilderness/civilisation. The novel's intent focus on the physicality of the wolves dismantles the illusory mechanisms of the pastoral idyll. The wolves and their rewilding demonstrate a post-pastoral commitment to presenting 'the fact of an animal, not the myth'.¹³² Described by Rachel as creatures of 'geographic success', the physical presence of wolves on the Annerdale estate in *The Wolf Border* symbolises momentum for constitutional change. The material fact of the wolves punctures the pastoral throughout the text. What Rachel finds most fascinating about the wolves is their physical attributes, their 'extraordinary jaw' and 'small, clever, yellow eyes', an animal 'perfectly made'.¹³³ Yet, the novel avoids reducing the wolves to myth, rendering their entire journey visible: from their arrival from the US and the delivery of the pups, to their paw prints in the ground following their escape. Upon the birth of the new wolf pups, Rachel reflects that '[t]hey become almost like mascots for exactly what no one is sure, a beleaguered England, an England no longer associated with Scotland's great natural resources'.¹³⁴ Explicitly lent to a national England, the concurrent narratives of the birth of the wolves and the birth of an independent Scotland collide.

This is not the only function of the wolves in the novel, however. While here the wolves appear to signify the prospect of 'rewilding' England as a politically autonomous nation, they are later deployed as cultural symbols and pet projects for political figures. This slippage is most clearly observed during a passage in which the novel draws attention to how the centralised state form has accelerated regional inequality within

¹³² Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 35.

¹³³ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 7; p. 253; p. 3.

¹³⁴ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 326.

England. As the Scottish polls tip towards a majority Yes-vote, Sylvia remarks that she 'would like to see a shift to more regional power, too [...] A lot of Cumbria's needs are not London's or Cornwall's. My concern is what happens in England if they go'.¹³⁵ Sylvia's comment aligns the uneven distribution of political and financial resources throughout England to its precarious position within an increasingly unstable Union. The difficulty of imagining an independent England in the novel is partially due to a democratic deficit: as Rachel quickly becomes aware: 'regardless of democracy, the greater schemes are led by the upper echelons'.¹³⁶ Rachel's musing characterises the 'English Question' as national only insofar as it is regional, suggesting that the discussion that surrounds the break-up of Britain must also address political, financial, and social inequality in regions within England. Nonetheless, despite Sylvia's acknowledgement of these implications, it is not long before any potential regional grumblings are pacified. Rachel notes how '[t]here's been no more trouble around the fence periphery', a beneficial outcome for England's Prime Minister, who, after the Scottish Yes-vote is 'desperate for good press, progressive politics – especially in the regions where there is growing agitation for devolved powers – and the project qualifies'.¹³⁷ Here, the symbolic value of the wolf-project is harnessed by political figures for their own self-legitimising agenda – in this case, for preventing increased momentum for regional devolution in England.

So, while previously the wolves symbolised the potential for a post-British England, here they are seen to potentially become part of a *state* project. The slipperiness of the wolves throughout the novel indicates an ambivalence towards the possibility of

¹³⁵ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 179.

¹³⁶ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 25.

¹³⁷ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 260.

achieving a post-British England, especially one that may be attuned to regional inequality throughout the nation. The wolves' various symbolic functions ultimately remain unresolved, suggesting a reading of the wolves and their rewilding in *The Wolf Border* as manifestations of the novel's inability to overcome the ideological stranglehold of Britain and the pastoral.

Freedom and Enclosure

The Wolf Border's critique of British state dominance also concerns the competing regional and national tensions implicit within the bureaucratic regulation and increasing privatisation of English rural space.¹³⁸ Woods argues that neoliberal thinking has come to dominate state approaches to the rural through a combination of the privatisation of natural resources – in attempts to manage the 'national countryside' as one unit, for example – and the re-regulation of nature in ways that facilitate free market enterprise.¹³⁹ Indeed, English land enclosure, especially from the 1800s onwards, is also a politics of social class; as E.P. Thompson observed in 1963, enclosure represents a form of 'class robbery' and has been used as a method of social discipline for 'the village poor'.¹⁴⁰ As he puts it, the privatisation of land through enclosure 'became a matter of public-spirited

¹³⁸ It is important to clarify that there is an extensive history of land enclosure in Britain dating back to the mid-eighteenth century. For an history of enclosure between the eighteenth and nineteenth century, see Gordon E. Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure in England: An Introduction to its Causes, Incidence, and Impact* (London: Routledge, 1997). For an analysis of enclosure since the onset of neoliberalism in the 1980s, see Brett Christophers, *New Enclosure: The Appropriation of Public Land in Neoliberal Britain* (London: Verso, 2018). In literary culture, enclosure is perhaps most famously associated with poet John Clare, whose regional and ecological sensibilities stood in contrast to parliamentary enclosure during the early nineteenth century. See John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) and, for an ecocritical approach to Romanticism more broadly, see Katey Castellano, *The Ecology of British Romantic Conservatism, 1790-1837* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

¹³⁹ For more on the state regulation of the countryside in Britain, see Woods, pp. 231-265.

¹⁴⁰ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1963), p. 195.

policy for the gentleman to remove cottages from the commons, reduce his laborers to dependence, pare way at supplementary earnings, drive out the small holder'.¹⁴¹ The private ownership of what had previously been publicly-owned land drives *The Wolf Border's* exploration of the tensions between region and nation, as Hall locates these questions within a longer history in which land was a central component of the British class system. When the novel rewinds to Rachel's childhood, she recalls an experience of rural space that is clearly demarcated and owned. In contrast to a pastoral idyll, she remembers instead a 'fence built tall and seriously, up into the trees. The wire is thick and heavy, knotted into diamond-shaped holes'.¹⁴² In this sense, the uneasy tension between freedom and enclosure as part of the rewilding project operates within the politics of private and public space and their intersection with inequalities between region and nation.

The entire project depends upon Pennington's impulse, whose hegemonic dominance underscores the way ownership of and control over rural space is intrinsically political: his vast ownership of immense land signifies the hierarchies of an anachronistic British class system. Pennington's privatisation of common land for the wolf enclosure emblematises the lasting power of Britain's landowning political elite and conveys Hall's pessimism towards the possibility of achieving an egalitarian post-British England. As Williams has already argued, enclosure of the commons facilitates the 'steady concentration of power in the hands of the landowners' which in turn represents 'a conscious national system and interest in the constitution of landowners as a political

¹⁴¹ Thompson, p. 219.

¹⁴² Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 5.

class'.¹⁴³ More recently, George Monbiot has criticised the ways in which Britain's rural environment has been managed through 'successive acts of enclosure that have led to a shrinkage of the commons'.¹⁴⁴ Kathleen Jamie likewise identifies how changes in uses of the land have accompanied this privatisation of the rural environment, suggesting that while previously 'the wild land was a working place, whether you were a hunter-gatherer, a crofter, a miner [...] now it seems it is being claimed by the educated middle classes on spiritual quests'.¹⁴⁵ *The Wolf Border's* class-inflected rewilding project certainly reflects the moral complexities of the way ecological developments are imbricated in socio-economic relations; the project has essentially been made possible because of the processes of privatisation Williams and Monbiot identify above. It is driven by the wealth of Britain's aristocracy, described by Rachel as a member of the 'ebullient, boyish elite' who 'owns almost one fifth of her home country'.¹⁴⁶ She remains unimpressed by Pennington's expansive estate and attitude towards his 'latest environmental venture', an experiment enabled as a result of his manipulation of the Game Enclosure Bill.¹⁴⁷

In centring the wolves' rewilding on privately-owned and cultivated territory, the novel deconstructs ideas of the rural 'wild', recognising the very idea of 'wilderness' as an impossible necessity. Rachel's return to Annerdale as an adult illustrates this paradox. Rachel reflects that 'she did not know it [as a child], but in reality it was a kempt place, cultivated, even the high grassland over the fells was manmade. Though it formed her

¹⁴³ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 147.

¹⁴⁴ George Monbiot, *Feral: Searching for Enchantment on the Frontiers of Rewilding* (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 167.

¹⁴⁵ Kathleen Jamie, 'A Lone Enraptured Male', *London Review of Books*, 6 March 2008 <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v30/n05/kathleen-jamie/a-lone-enraptured-male>> [accessed 26 May 2020].

¹⁴⁶ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 15; p .3.

¹⁴⁷ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 15.

notions of beauty, true wilderness lay elsewhere'.¹⁴⁸ Rachel realises that her childhood landscape has always been subject to constant human influence and regulation; it is by no means 'wild'. Her dissonance highlights the way experiences of the English landscape are contingent on modernity's innate separation from the countryside, an association she is forced to reject when she returns to Cumbria years later. In *Deep Ecology* (1985) Bill Devall and George Sessions pinpoint wilderness as fundamental to a new ecological consciousness, defining it as 'a landscape or ecosystem that has been minimally disrupted by the intervention of humans, especially the destructive technology of modern societies'.¹⁴⁹ Both 'wild' enough to accommodate the wolves, yet simultaneously governed by human interests, *The Wolf Border's* ambivalent landscape locates the contradictions embedded within notions of 'rewilding' and 'wilderness' and thus presents Hall's partial prognosis for imagining a post-British re-inscription of rural space.

Governing interests over land in *The Wolf Border* primarily pertain to Pennington as the legal owner of the estate. The significant ideological divisions between Pennington and Rachel characterise the entire wolf project. While Rachel's ecological and professional commitment to the wolves is clear, she is never able to fully appraise the project due to 'the hegemony, the unsettling feeling of imbalance' she recognises between her, Pennington and his loyal Gamekeeper, Michael.¹⁵⁰ In particular, the freighted relationship between Rachel and Michael – and the position he occupies in the social hierarchies of land management – reflects both the gendered and class-based inequalities that have facilitated the maintenance of a British landowning elite.

¹⁴⁸ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 29.

¹⁴⁹ Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology* (Utah: Gibbs Smith, 1985), p. 10.

¹⁵⁰ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 29.

[Michael] is not happy about being replaced in the chain of command. [F]or now [Rachel] holds the lateral position, perhaps even a higher position. Certainly [he is] not happy about the reconstitution of Annerdale, with its new apex predator. She represents dire competition, beyond his experience.¹⁵¹

Michael is an anachronistic symbol of aristocratic ruralism, a stark opposition to Rachel's progressive approach to the land. He is proud of his position on the estate enabled by its 'old orders', opposing both the redistribution of power that the wolf project represents socially and the material threat of the wolves.¹⁵² After all, the working relationship forged by the fathers of both Michael and Pennington secured the former's continued role on the estate – his claim to the landscape is 'all in the blood'.¹⁵³ Rachel's entry into Pennington's employ thus signifies the breakdown of this social order centred on ancestral lineage and class division. Rachel herself reflects that Annerdale is 'a realm so antiquated it seems impossible that it has survived reformist centuries'.¹⁵⁴ Here, the reconstitution of Annerdale refers to the end of a current social arrangement in the politics of land management and the emergence of a new system in which Michael's position is compromised; the reality that his legitimacy on the estate survives only as long as Pennington underwrites it is made starkly clear. In this sense, Michael's social standing on the estate is bound up in Hall's wider exploration of the logic of land management and rural decline. Beyond *Haweswater*, farmers barely appear in Hall's fiction and, in *The Wolf Border*, Pennington's concern with the rural landscape does not extend to farming purposes, but to monetising the aesthetic value of the land in a bid for World Heritage status.

¹⁵¹ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 117.

¹⁵² Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 117.

¹⁵³ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 94.

¹⁵⁴ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 281.

As such, *The Wolf Border* demonstrates how modern conservation strategies have gone hand-in-hand with the maintenance of the interests of a landowning class. The fact that Rachel has been conscripted into a role left vacant by Michael's marginalisation registers this tension. Her role cannot be considered straightforwardly progressive. Although Rachel's presence on Annerdale hints at the destabilisation of old class hierarchies based on ancestral lineage, in many ways, she is simply replacing Michael in an already existing chain of command which ultimately continues to serve Pennington. Rachel herself 'begins to feel a little uncomfortable, part of the machinery of segregation, which always enables the elite'.¹⁵⁵ So, as much as Michael's resistance to the rewilding project indicates a desire for the continuation of British class relations linked to the separation of English rural space and modernity, the social hierarchies of the rewilding project problematise the wolves' status as symbols of England's progressive future.

The wolves' inability to exist outside of governing structures further complicates their symbolic disruptive potential in the novel. In contrast to Rachel's local and professional credentials as a zoologist, Pennington possesses a colonial paternalism towards the land and the rewilding project; for him, the wolves are little more than an ecological experiment, a 'hope-and-glory' project key to recreating 'the British soul'.¹⁵⁶ Rachel's uneasiness about her living arrangements, and the above-average pay, gesture towards Pennington's social and professional dominance over her as the native expert. Rachel continually tries, but ultimately fails, to reconstitute their power relations and 'get to know the system' so that she may ascertain 'where she herself fits into it'.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 281.

¹⁵⁶ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 56; p.80.

¹⁵⁷ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 84.

Pennington's orchestration of the wolves' early release from their enclosure highlights Rachel's lack of agency. The very fact that the Earl of Annerdale still owns his estate signifies his absolute authority and foreshadows his ability to evade accountability over the eventual fate of the wolves. The wolves are taken first to a managed estate owned by a member of the political elite skilled at manipulating the powers at Westminster, and their impromptu release speaks of his vast power. Pennington's ability to override Rachel's decisions and dismantle the wolf-project 'as he wishes' is analogous to the limited political autonomy offered by state-managed devolution, in which the British state always retains its political grasp.¹⁵⁸ The fate of the wolves is ultimately uncertain and becomes tied up in the Scottish Prime Minister's project of rebuilding the nation. As Rachel herself notes, 'not much has really changed [...] now our free Caledonian cousins may actually have to put theory into practice'.¹⁵⁹ While there are endless renegotiations of power in the novel, the wolves remain subject to ongoing management, even as they cross the border and enter the territory of a newly independent Scotland.

Despite the outcome of the referendum, *The Wolf Border* imagines Anglo-Britain's ongoing cultural grip on the national imagination of England and, to some degree, Scotland. Rachel's forced administration of the wolves' invasive sterilisation, a treatment she believes is 'the price of partial freedom', communicates the reality that the rewilding will always remain governed.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, it is possible to read *The Wolf Border* as a critique of devolution as it occurs within the institutions of the British state. Given the wolves' pacification under human influence and the rewilding's eventual outcome as the Prime

¹⁵⁸ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 414.

¹⁵⁹ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 413.

¹⁶⁰ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 339.

Minister's token gesture towards upholding Scotland's new environmental policy, freedom from governing structures is only ever partial, a process of containment and pacification, rather than a radical redistribution of power. The wolves' planned relocation to Ben Nevis, one of Scotland's most iconic cultural symbols, also indicates a contained, partial freedom.¹⁶¹ The culmination of the rewilding project thus signals a retreat of *The Wolf Border's* post-pastoral vision for English rural space, ending instead on an image of a commodified national iconography in Scotland. The nation's most cultivated 'wild spot' functions here as a mirror image of Annerdale: Ben Nevis, host to 125,000 walkers a year, is hardly 'wild'. It is useful at this point to return to Jackie's assertion in *The Carhullan Army* that everything radical happens 'in the mountain regions'.¹⁶² While in Hall's previous novel the mountains provide a space for radical political change, *The Wolf Border's* mountain regions are instead subject to fierce regulation. Pennington's interference in the project of Scottish independence and excitement that the wolves will become 'a new icon for a new nation' implies that the figure of the wolf will once again be reduced to its symbolic value, an 'icon' realigned with historic and geographic myth.¹⁶³

In this sense, Britain's continuing domination, its anachronistic class system, and institutional remnants prevent the novel from achieving the post-British potential it initially imagined. The project's fatality is suggested for a final time when a lorry driver hits one of the stray wolves. The driver has bought into the Scottish Prime Minister's political appropriation of the wolves and wanted them to make it to Nevis, 'he was for

¹⁶¹ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 430.

¹⁶² Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 195.

¹⁶³ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 423.

them, a Yes voter'.¹⁶⁴ The syntactic ambiguity in this line enables the 'Yes' to take on a dual significance, referring to both his outlook on the wolves' reintegration and his voting choices in the referendum. What is more, the fact that the wolf subsequently dies as a result of the collision indicates that the idea of rewilding has always been a fantasy, suggesting a pessimism toward the realisation of post-British potential either side of the border.

Alternative Unions

There is, then, a limited degree of post-British potential to be found in the representation of Cumbria in *The Wolf Border*. However, by way of conclusion, I want to examine one of the ironies of this novel that captures complexities of the novel's post-pastoral vision. While I have suggested that Rachel's professional narrative in many ways facilitates a post-pastoral understanding of England and English rural space, Rachel's personal narrative exists in conflict with this project insofar as the novel tends towards the pastoral mode when she forges emotional attachments. The landscape bears heavily on Rachel's emotional ties to both Alexander and his daughter, Chloe, and in the development of her familial reunion with Lawrence. While at the novel's outset Rachel does not form emotional or geographic ties, she undergoes a personal transformation in which the 'uncivilised spirit' characteristic of Hall's protagonists becomes tamed.¹⁶⁵ This process of 'taming' occurs in Rachel's shift in attitude towards romantic relationships. Initially emotionally detached, her relationships with men generally end after they have

¹⁶⁴ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 430.

¹⁶⁵ Lea, p. 154.

had sex, and consequently, 'she has never really made it past the first argument with a man'.¹⁶⁶ Her matter-of-fact approach towards sexual partners is aligned with her treatment of the land: it is raw, visceral, and inherently unromantic. She describes kissing as 'one of evolution's stranger necessities' in the same way her role as a conservationist enables her to see through Pennington's sentimentality towards the land.¹⁶⁷ However, her developing relationship with Alexander and her unplanned pregnancy initiate a transformation of her character towards forms of place-bound emotional attachment. Rachel's attraction to Alexander is not instinctual. She does not immediately find him attractive and in contrast to her previous brief sexual exchanges, she gradually transitions from sex as power – from knowing someone will 'want to fuck' a woman 'like her' – to sex as an emotionally-invested act that roots her to place.¹⁶⁸ When Rachel finds herself pregnant after an uncharacteristically vanilla one-night stand with her friend, Kyle, she tells her GP that she does not have relationships, 'just sex'.¹⁶⁹ Yet, the event of becoming pregnant instigates a softening in Rachel's approach to relationships as she moves away from what Cottrell describes as 'fierce aloofness' towards a desire for place that is associated with the local.¹⁷⁰

Rachel's reunion with Lawrence – primarily achieved during walks through the countryside and watching the wolves in their enclosure – similarly evokes these pastoral tendencies. During their awkward first meeting, the potential sighting of the wolves breaks the tension in Lawrence and Rachel's reunion; Lawrence is 'taken by the

¹⁶⁶ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 218.

¹⁶⁷ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 40.

¹⁶⁸ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 39.

¹⁶⁹ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 81.

¹⁷⁰ Cottrell, p. 683.

exoticism' of Rachel's job and, when they reach the top of Blencathra, Rachel 'suddenly feels moved' to be with him.¹⁷¹ The unexpected emotional connection with her brother is tied to the catharsis that attends their freely roaming the rural landscape. Later, when they walk through the land surrounding the enclosure, Lawrence 'occasionally glanc[es] over, with a possessive tenderness, as if she might stumble'.¹⁷² The stability of the landscape affords Rachel the vulnerability to establish the emotional connection to Lawrence she never had as a child. This impasse in *The Wolf Border's* post-pastoral representation of the rural is also emphasised in Annerdale's restorative role during Lawrence's recovery from addiction. Upon the breakdown of his marriage, Lawrence is exiled from the domestic sphere and the landscape becomes a place of retreat and recovery. When Lawrence is discharged from a brief stay in the hospital, he is prescribed 'recuperation and isolation in the countryside' in which Rachel's cottage 'will be a sanatorium'.¹⁷³ The novel emphatically represents the landscape as bearing restorative qualities; it enables Lawrence to undergo a process of convalescence so that he may 're-enter the world' after he has become re-domesticated.¹⁷⁴ The characters' 'rewilding' therefore results in the process of taming as the novel grapples with the contradictions embedded within rewilding and wilderness. Significantly, these passages necessitate a temporary abandonment of the novel's political project in favour of Hall's characters' personal narrative; they emphasise 'fertility, resilience, beauty, and unthreatened

¹⁷¹ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, pp. 125–26.

¹⁷² Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 162.

¹⁷³ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 317.

¹⁷⁴ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 354.

stability in nature', qualities that Gifford attributes to the 'idealising' tendency of the pastoral mode.¹⁷⁵

It is thus in the refusal to neatly reconcile competing versions of pastoral and post-pastoral that *The Wolf Border* offers a productive engagement with the complexities of imagining a post-British England. Ultimately, the novel is unable to resolve its own counteracting impulses towards pastoral retreat and a post-pastoral representation of rural space. Like *Haweswater* and *The Carhullan Army*, *The Wolf Border* also appears to operate within the 'mature environmental aesthetics' Gifford attributes to the post-pastoral. These aesthetics 'go beyond the closed circuit of pastoral and anti-pastoral to achieve a vision of an integrated natural world that includes the human'.¹⁷⁶ We might consider these texts as part of this movement that attempts to define a pastoral that avoids the traps of idealism in seeking to find a discourse that can both celebrate and take some responsibility for nature without false consciousness. In this sense, *Haweswater*, *The Carhullan Army*, and *The Wolf Border* might be read as a *disruption* of the pastoral mode, reflecting the deeply entrenched social and political barriers to a post-British England as much as a political urgency for change.

Given the outcome of a referendum that took place the year following *The Wolf Border's* publication, the dissolution of Britain that Hall's work often imagines seems increasingly possible. Hall's critique of the centralised state form and vision of an independent Scotland is even more prescient in the context of the UK's vote to terminate its membership of the European Union in 2016. This outcome brought existing geographic, political, and socio-economic divisions throughout the archipelago into

¹⁷⁵ Gifford, 'Pastoral', p. 49.

¹⁷⁶ Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 148.

unprecedented public prominence and called into question once again the tenability of a union between the four nations that comprise the UK. Variations in support for leaving the European Union, and governmental uncertainty, have already led to further strain on Britain's constitutional integrity. In the media, the Leave vote was perceived as more to do with England's internal divisions than with European relations, replayed as a revolt against Westminster's political elite by a disenfranchised working-class English population located beyond the parameters of the M25. Rachel's reflection at the close of *The Wolf Border* that there is potential to change 'the fabric of British politics, state definitions [...] if people want it badly enough, if they are tired and hopeful' takes on a new significance in a post-Brexit-vote context.¹⁷⁷ If, as a consequence of Britain's deepening constitutional fissures, there lies the potential for the emergence of a national England, placing literary politics beyond London is all the more urgent.

¹⁷⁷ Sarah Hall, *The Wolf Border*, p. 423.

Chapter 3: Brexit England and the Deindustrial North

On 4th February 2016, the front page of the *Daily Mail* asked: 'WHO WILL SPEAK FOR ENGLAND?'.¹ The headline, presented in bold capital letters, was a call to arms, demanding that the English public make a choice between becoming a self-governing nation or remaining under stranglehold of European administration:

Are we to be a self-governing nation, free in this age of mass migration to control our borders, strike trade agreements with whomever we choose and dismiss our rulers and lawmakers if they displease us? Or will our liberty, security and prosperity be better assured by submitting to a statist, unelected bureaucracy in Brussels, accepting the will of unaccountable judges and linking our destiny with that of a sclerotic Europe that tries to achieve the impossible by uniting countries as diverse as Germany and Greece?²

Despite what these rhetorical claims imply, voting 'Leave' alone was never going to deliver self-governance for England, but this fact is all but irrelevant because the *Daily Mail* was not actually referring to England alone.³ The editorial board go on to note that that 'of course, by "England"... we mean the whole of the United Kingdom', adopting a view in which England is interchangeable not only with Britain but with the entire UK.⁴ Unknowingly, the *Daily Mail's* call for sovereignty neatly captured what Nairn described as the 'English enigma' in which England is central to the Union and appears to speak for

¹Daily Mail 'DAILY MAIL COMMENT: Who WILL Speak for England?', *Daily Mail*, 4 February 2016 <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-3430870/DAILY-MAIL-COMMENT-speak-England.html>> [accessed 30 March 2020]; Significantly, the headline is also an allusion to Arthur Greenwood's denunciation of Chamberlain's efforts to strike a deal with Adolf Hitler on eve of war in 1939. Rather than the Nazis, on this occasion, the threat was membership of the EU, although the editorial stresses: 'Nobody is suggesting there are any parallels whatever between the Nazis and the EU'.

² *Daily Mail*, n.p.

³ See Aisla Henderson et al.'s analysis of this headline and the relationship between English nationalism and Brexit: Henderson et al., 'England, Englishness and Brexit', *The Political Quarterly*, 87.2 (2016), 187-199.

⁴ *Daily Mail*, n.p.

the UK entirely, while simultaneously being characterised by political absence and a status which is 'different from the standards of modern nationalism'.⁵ The problem, as Anthony Barnett writes in his critique of the editorial, is that the suppression of England 'lies at the heart of Theresa May's project for Brexit Britain'.⁶

As the headline implies, Brexit represented a deepening of the UK's constitutional crisis, especially in terms of the political future of England. The referendum campaigns positioned Brexit as a nationalist project that 'sought to realign the United Kingdom's place in the global order framed within powerful English national narratives', a move captured in the increasingly frequent assertion that the outcome of the referendum was 'England's Brexit'.⁷ The aftermath of the vote was characterised by a rhetorical commitment to the UK and governmental efforts to contain this politicised Englishness. The danger of a potential English nationalism (whether progressive or reactionary) was clear in May's first speech as Prime Minister after the referendum. In October 2016 at the Conservative Party Conference, May attempted to assure the Party of her commitment to constitutional stability in light of the vote to terminate membership of the European Union:

[b]ecause we voted in the referendum as one United Kingdom, we will negotiate as one United Kingdom, and we will leave the European Union as one United Kingdom. There is no opt-out from Brexit. I will never allow divisive nationalists

⁵ Nairn, *Break-Up*, p.293. For Nairn's elaboration on Englishness, see especially pp. 291–305.

⁶ Anthony Barnett, *The Lure of Greatness*, p. 115.

⁷ Ben Wellings, *English Nationalism, Brexit and the Anglosphere: Wider Still and Wider* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), p.150; Barnett, 'It was England's Brexit' in *The Lure of Greatness*, pp. 100-113.

to undermine the precious Union between the four nations of the United Kingdom.⁸

The former Prime Minister's public allegiance to the Union is significant in several ways. First, May's 'one United Kingdom' unionist rhetoric is demonstrative of how long-standing constitutional tensions within the UK – especially an English democratic deficit – played a decisive role in the outcome of the EU Referendum.⁹ Second, the speech exemplifies the extent to which a Westminster-located Britishness dominated political practice both before and after the referendum. It is also significant that May's concern with the threat of nationalism appears to pertain solely to the integrity of the British archipelago, rather than the entire UK, given that the remainder of May's speech towards the Party's vision for achieving a 'Global Britain' after Brexit.¹⁰ However, the idea that the multiple and contrasting nations of the UK voted 'as one' is a falsity, and, in this account, little more than a last-ditch attempt at maintaining Britain's integrity as it comes under increasing scrutiny.¹¹ As we have seen in the preceding two chapters, a Union based on notions of 'stability' and 'continuity' has been crucial in the postcolonial imagination of Britain as it attempts to reassert itself after the breakdown of Empire, the establishment

⁸ Theresa May, 'Keynote Address' (presented at the Conservative Party Conference, ICC, Birmingham, 2016) <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-may-conference-speech-article-50-brexiteu-a7341926.html>> [accessed 25 March 2020].

⁹ For an analysis of Brexit and Ireland, see Tony Connelly, *Brexit and Ireland: The Dangers, the Opportunities, and the Inside Story of the Irish Response* (London: Penguin, 2017).

¹⁰ The project of 'Global Britain' as the lifeblood of the Conservative Party's post-Brexit vision has replaced by a similar globally orientated rhetoric by Boris Johnson, and his promise to 'unleash Britain's potential' ahead of the general Election on 12th December 2019. See Boris Johnson, 'Our Plan | Conservative Manifesto 2019'. *The Conservative Party*. <<https://www.conservatives.com/our-plan>> [accessed 28 July 2020].

¹¹ Westall and Gardiner, p. 4. Energies for Scottish Independence following the victory of the Leave campaign were bolstered by election of Boris Johnson as Prime Minister. See Harriet Sherwood, 'Is Scotland finally set to bid farewell to the union?' *The Guardian*. 11 August 2019. <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/aug/11/snp-scotland-independence-referendum-brexiteu>> [accessed 19 November 2019].

of devolved institutions in 1997, and now, following the Brexit vote.¹² However, given the constitutional fractures revealed by Westminster's negotiations with Europe and the devolved nations, and the disunity with which the UK – and indeed, England itself – voted in the referendum, there remains the question of what a post-Brexit Britain may look like, or whether it might exist at all.¹³

Writing Brexit: From State-of-the-Nation to Place

Literary culture has turned to the question of post-Brexit Britain, and England's place within it, with a surge of novels that responded to the Brexit vote as a manifestation of an inward-looking Englishness associated with a reactionary nostalgia. As I mentioned in the introduction, there has been a renewed literary interest in England in the post-Brexit-vote period. Bruno Vincent's *Five on Brexit Island* (2016), Sam Byers' *Perfidious Albion* (2018) and Ian McEwan's *The Cockroach* (2019) offer pessimistic visions of Brexit-era Englishness, while Fiona Shaw's *Outwalkers* (2018) utilises dystopian allegory as a narrative centred on the securitisation of territorial borders. Shaw's young-adult *bildungsroman* imagines a future of constitutional rupture and governmental surveillance that encloses England from the rest of Britain and the wider world. In this novel, the border between England and Scotland has been closed, with Englishness

¹² This rhetoric was likewise mobilised during May's general election speech in which she urged the public to 'remove the risk of uncertainty and instability' and give Britain 'the strong and stable leadership it demands'. Theresa May, 'PM Statement: General Election 2017'. Delivered 9 June 2017. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-general-election-2017>> [accessed 28 July 2020]

¹³ England was the country which voted most decisively for Brexit. Scotland voted to remain by 62 per cent to 38 percent, Northern Ireland voted to remain by 55.8 per cent to 47.5 per cent, while Wales only very narrowly voted to leave by 52.5 to 47.5 per cent. See Barnett, *The Lure of Greatness*, p.101 and Mike Wayne, *England's Discontents: Political Cultures and National Identities* (London: Pluto, 2018), p.199.

emerging as a similarly protectionist formation. The refrain of government vans playing: ‘Our English shores stand clean and proud, Our English shores stand clean and proud’ punctuates the narrative.¹⁴ Similarly, *Autumn* (2016), the first novel in Ali Smith’s Seasonal Quartet (2017; 2019; 2020), conveys a metropolitan desire to escape England and retreat to the Remain-voting nations of the UK after the referendum: ‘All across the country people looked up Google: move to Scotland. All across the country, people looked up Google: Irish passport applications. [...] All across the country, everything changed overnight – in Smith’s text, England is both a fragmentary and deeply divided place marked by geographic, political, socio-economic and cultural fault lines after ‘the end of dialogue’.¹⁵ It is only the unlikely connection between Elisabeth Demand – a university lecturer in her thirties – and 101-year-old Daniel Gluck which offers a glimpse of a society unmarred by social and territorial borders.

While these authors offer broad ‘state-of-the-nation’ critiques of a reactionary Englishness hostile to immigration, literary culture has also turned to England’s socio-economic margins to explore the divide between a *localised* version of Englishness associated with Northern England and a London-centered ‘Global Britain’. This is a polarisation which, as we will see in Chapter 4, was intimately connected to the North-South divide. Brexit emphasised the tensions between two conflicting geographic and class narratives within England: a ‘Little England’ whose identity was distinct from Britain and associated with the rise of working-class anti-immigration sentiment, and a state-led narrative of ‘Global Britain’ that was associated with a metropolitan, liberal

¹⁴ Fiona Shaw, *Outwalkers* (Oxford: David Fickling Books, 2018), p. 24.

¹⁵ Ali Smith, *Autumn* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2017), p. 59; p. 112.

elite.¹⁶ Reflecting this division, the emerging body of work Kristian Shaw has termed 'BrexLit' readily identifies social class as an urgent concern.¹⁷ Joe Kennedy goes as far as to suggest that the Brexit novel 'appears to denote a contemporary declension of the condition of England novel, a mode which has always concerned itself with the social schisms underlying a given English polity and the tenability of those polities in the face of such fractures'.¹⁸

There are, however, limitations to a Brexit discourse which straightforwardly associates Brexit with the working class. Indeed, Brexit was not an exclusively *working-class* 'revolt' as has often been suggested. Lisa Mckenzie rightly points out how

temporarily framing working-class politics, identity and culture around 'Brexit' and consequently dismissing the outcome as irrational or xenophobic betrays a lack of sociological understanding of the long-term progression of narratives and markers of class as a social and longitudinal formation over generations.¹⁹

As I demonstrate throughout this chapter, Brexit has occupied space in the national imaginary as a set of interlocking geographical, socio-economic, cultural, and political polarities. This is not least because the referendum itself hinged on a linguistic binary of 'yes/no', but also because this oppositionality frequently elides nuanced and complex manifestations of class that are bound up in a history of uneven development and structural inequality. Further, what is also too often missing from accounts that seek to

¹⁶ See also David Goodhart's controversial analysis of this social schism which, as I explore in Chapter 4, describes the divide between Leave and Remain in the territorialised nomenclature of 'Anywheres' and 'Somewheres': David Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017).

¹⁷ Kristian Shaw, 'BrexLit', in *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*, ed. by Robert Eaglestone (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 15–30 (p. 18).

¹⁸ Joe Kennedy, 'The Brexit Novel?', *The New Socialist*, 29 October 2017 <<https://newsocialist.org.uk/the-brexit-novel/>> [accessed 10 October 2019].

¹⁹ Lisa Mckenzie, 'The Class Politics of Prejudice: Brexit and the Land of No-Hope and Glory', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 68.1 (2017), 265–80 (p. 268).

explain the referendum result is the fact that the wealthy, land-owning rich was a largely Leave-voting demographic.²⁰ Phil O'Brien likewise argues that 'the clammer to point the finger at an imagined working class' elides the reality that 'the Leave campaign was not only orchestrated by those wedded to the ideology of neoliberalism but was also able to mobilise a broad-based coalition of voters which is much more wide-ranging than the "left behind"'.²¹ Despite England's Eastern coastal towns, affluent areas in the Southern shires, and parts of rural England reliant on agribusiness also being majority Leave-voting demographics, the English nationalism associated with the Leave vote was readily attributed to the post-imperial nostalgia of an English working class, broadly located somewhere in 'the North'.²²

Barnett's analysis of the vote identifies this manoeuvre, noting that 'the London media rushed to the North of England, to see if Brexit could be blamed on the lumpen working class missing out on the benefits of economic growth' therefore placing 'all the weight of reporting onto a mythological real country with authentically poor health'.²³ Likewise, writing shortly after the referendum, Zadie Smith notes how London was often labelled an 'outward-looking city [...] so different from these narrow xenophobic places

²⁰ The Electoral Commission, *Results and Turnout at the EU Referendum*, 25 September 2019 <<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/results-and-turnout-eu-referendum>> [accessed 22 July 2020].

²¹ Phil O'Brien, *The Working Class and Twenty-First-Century British Fiction: Deindustrialisation, Demonisation, Resistance*, p. 15.

²² For a rare critique of this narrative in the media, see Zoe Williams, 'Think the north and the poor caused Brexit? Think again' *The Guardian*. 7 August 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/aug/07/north-poor-brexite-myths>> [accessed 17 September 2019].

²³ Barnett, *The Lure of Greatness*, p. 107.

up north'.²⁴ The association Smith identifies here suggests a historical homogenising tendency rooted in stereotypes surrounding Northernness, and the ongoing contribution of London exceptionalism towards the development of a regressive narrative of the North as both insular and inherently 'local'. Smith herself admits that, while she 'wanted [this account] to be true', she eventually concedes that Brexit revealed the 'deep fractures in British society' that must be acknowledged, 'between north and south, between the social classes, between Londoners and everyone else'.²⁵ Literary production published after the Brexit vote readily explores these fractures. Amanda Craig's *Lie of the Land* (2017), Kenneth Steven's *2020* (2017), Douglas Board's *Time of Lies* (2017), and Jonathan Coe's *Middle England* (2018), for example, all seek to explain Brexit by returning to England's socio-political margins.

This chapter considers two novels whose exploration of Brexit might be considered 'devolutionary'. Both Anthony Cartwright's *The Cut* (2017) and Adam Thorpe's *Missing Fay* (2017) represent regional registrations of a democratic deficit in Northern England, approaching Brexit in various ways as a symptom of the socio-economic realities of uneven development and the inadequacies of the centralisation of power in Westminster. In what follows, I consider how these texts respond to a dominant polarity within Brexit discourse between a reactionary, working-class North synonymous with deindustrialisation and an outward-facing, London-centered Britishness.²⁶ Although this chapter focusses on novels published after the Brexit vote, my

²⁴ Zadie Smith, *Feel Free: Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2018), p. 27.

²⁵ Zadie Smith, p. 27.

²⁶ See, for example, Tim Oliver, 'An English Foreign Policy: Little England or Little Britain?' *The London School of Economics and Political Science*. 23 April 2017. <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/an-english-foreign-policy-little-england-or-little-britain/>> [accessed 5 February 2019].

understanding of 'Brexit literature' extends to works published prior to the EU referendum in 2016 and to texts which are not solely driven by this particular event in British political history. Brexit was a product of decades of structural inequalities and uneven development throughout Britain, and we cannot fully understand this political event in isolation, or without considering the socio-economic and geo-political events preceding it. John McLeod adopts a similar position, pointing out that, like the milieu it represents, 'Brexit fiction, too, is nothing new'.²⁷ Indeed, there are several texts which might be productively approached as anticipating the conditions that resulted in Brexit. Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012), Jonathan Coe's *Number 11* (2015) and John Lanchester's *Capital* (2015), are some of the most frequently cited works in literary analyses of Brexit literature published prior to 2016. It is also worth noting that, thematically, *The Cut* appears very similar to Cartwright's earlier novels; *Heartland* (2009), *How I Killed Margaret Thatcher* (2012), and *Iron Towns* (2016), all explore the implications of deindustrialisation, working-class disaffection, and the experiences of communities that remain affected by the socio-economic shifts of Thatcherism. They too, might productively be considered Brexit literatures. Likewise, as we will see in the next chapter, Fiona Mozley's *Elmet* (2017) and Sarah Moss' *Ghost Wall* (2018) in Chapter 4, historicise several social and geographic tensions underpinning the referendum within a longer frame of English regional inequality – specifically the continuing impact of deindustrialisation – and attempt to nuance the narrative of insularity that became synonymous with the leave vote.

²⁷ McLeod, 'Warning Signs: Postcolonial Writing and the Apprehension of Brexit', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 56.5 (2020), 607–20 (p. 609).

In this sense, I also want to draw attention to my use of the term ‘deindustrial’ here, rather than ‘post-industrial’. While ‘post-industrial’ indicates a completed development consigned to the past, ‘deindustrial’ acknowledges the ongoing effects of the decline of Britain’s industrial economy, and the continued presence of the altered socio-economic relations it produced. My thinking here is informed by O’Brien’s work on what he describes as the ‘deindustrial novel’, where he proposes that post-industrialisation ‘suggests a clear break between before and after and a sense of finality’ and is at risk of contributing towards the notion of ‘a post-class society’.²⁸ Both *The Cut* and *Missing Fay* approach deindustrialisation as a continued development structuring twenty-first-century working-class experience, and so I continue to use the terms ‘deindustrial’ and ‘deindustrialisation’ throughout this chapter.

The Cut explores how ‘the local’ became associated with a reactionary form of ‘Northern’ deindustrial nostalgia in the context of Brexit. One of the earliest examples of ‘BrexLit’, *The Cut* was commissioned as a response to the referendum by Peirene Press (a publisher specialising in ‘European novellas’) and given the task of ‘building a fictional bridge between the two Britains that opposed each other on referendum day’.²⁹ The form of the novel echoes Brexit’s overarching narrative of division. Arranged in alternating chapters titled ‘Before’ and ‘After’, *The Cut* tells the gradually merging stories of filmmaker Grace Trevithick – an embodiment of London-based cognitive labour – and Cairo Jukes, a precariously employed manual labourer symbolic of the so-called ‘left behind’

²⁸ Phil O’Brien, ‘The Deindustrial Novel: Twenty-First-Century British Fiction and the Working Class’, in *Working-Class Writing: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Ben Clarke and Nick Hubble (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 229–46 (p. 232).

²⁹ Shaw, p. 16; Anthony Cartwright, *The Cut* (London: Peirene Press, 2017), n.p.; For more on ‘Peirene Now!’, the social activism project for which *The Cut* was commissioned, see: <https://www.peirenepress.com/about/> [accessed 22 September 2020]

working class. *The Cut's* narrative structure and thematic concerns rely on binary oppositions; the text follows Grace's exchanges with Cairo and his family in the weeks leading up to the referendum, with the aim of better understanding the voting choices of England's 'ordinary people'.³⁰ Told through their contrasting perspectives, the narrative captures a political discourse in which the deindustrial North and metropolitan London became competing, incompatible ideologies of class and geography.

During the same year, Adam Thorpe published his crime-thriller-cum-Brexit-novel, *Missing Fay* (2017). Set in Lincolnshire – the highest Leave-voting county in England – this localised exploration of Englishness takes the form of a 'whodunnit' narrative, with the disappearance of fourteen-year-old Fay interwoven with the lives of Lincoln's residents.³¹ The non-linear narrative unfolds in vignettes told through the perspectives of several individuals with some connection to Fay. Notably, Fay continues to inhabit the narrative after she goes missing, forming a point of connection between multiple characters and implicating them in her case. The reader first encounters Fay in David's story, in which he becomes increasingly distracted by her 'MISSING' poster while on a family holiday in rural Lincolnshire. Fay is also connected to Sheena, who supervises Fay's work experience placement and is one of the last people to see her before she goes missing. Elsewhere, Fay inhabits the novel as a spectral presence. Bookshop owner, Mike, becomes psychologically haunted by Fay and believes that one of his books is possessed by her spirit, while former steelworker, Howard, glimpses Fay in a local park and mistakes her for the ghost of his own daughter who went missing previously. Cosmina, a healthcare assistant from Romania, possesses vital information regarding Fay's fate,

³⁰ Cartwright, p. 22.

³¹ See 'Lincolnshire Records UK's Highest Brexit Vote', *BBC News*, 24 June 2016 <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36616740>> [accessed 22 September 2020].

while Chris, a television producer turned postulant Trappist monk, encounters Fay in a prophetic vision in his sleep. Utilising the generic conventions of crime fiction, Fay's mobilisation as a spectral presence maps a localised social network rooted in each character's role in Fay's disappearance and addresses the need for collective social responsibility in the present.

Missing Fay is not the only novel published shortly after the Brexit vote that centres on the disappearance of a young girl in a local English setting; Thorpe's novel has been readily compared to McGregor's Derbyshire-based *Reservoir 13*, which similarly utilises the central crime – the disappearance of Rebecca Shaw – as a way in which to explore the intricacies of place.³² In McGregor's novel, the 13-year-old goes missing while she and her family are on holiday in a village in the Peak District; the narrative unfolds through a series of local efforts to find her.³³ Notably, both *Reservoir 13* and *Missing Fay* are *local* English crime novels, flowing between the perspectives of their characters and their everyday lives. As the novels progress, it becomes clear that they are less concerned with police procedures – in *Missing Fay*, police presence is virtually non-existent – but more about the places in which they are based and the everyday lives of their communities. Contrary to typical crime narratives, the project of locating Fay or Rebecca is not what drives the novels, with their disappearance serving only as a necessary conduit for the exploration of urgent contemporary social concerns. Shaw describes *Reservoir 13* as a 'rejuvenated state-of-the-nation novel' that reveals 'the breakdown in

³² See Anthony Cummins, 'Missing Fay by Adam Thorpe review – gone girl in Lincolnshire'. *The Guardian*. 11 June 2017. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jun/11/missing-fay-adam-thorpe-review>> [accessed 20 December 2019]

³³ The narrative form of McGregor's prequel, *The Reservoir Tapes* (2017), relies more forcefully on investigative tropes of the conventional crime novel.

communication that led to an emergent “Little Englander” mentality’.³⁴ Shaw’s observation here also maps on to *Missing Fay*’s focus on a small English town and the multi-vocal narrative told by the town’s residents and visitors. However, further to the ‘Little England’ narrative, I would add that, in both novels, this placed, English ‘rejuvenation’ of the state-of-the-nation novel also articulates a fraying of the relationship between England and Britain that demands further critical investigation. Thorpe captures England’s overdetermination in the twenty-first-century cultural imagination. While the novel rarely mentions the word ‘England’ directly, there are frequent references to a *cultural* Englishness: the idealised ‘grassy villages’ of a mythological English pastoral; the ethnonationalist connotations of the St George’s flag; growing hostility towards Europe’s democratic influence; and references to England as a territory under threat by immigration.

This overdetermination is achieved considerably in both novels with recourse to shifting modes of nostalgia in an English national and regional psyche. While the original coinage – combining the Greek for ‘return to home’ (*nostos*) and pain (*algos*) – relates to a profound longing that produced physical and psychological effects, nostalgia has since become displaced from its medical origins. As Tammy Clewell finds, by the eighteenth century, ‘nostalgia ceased to be regarded in pathological terms, it assumed a temporal form [and...] came to name [...] an emotional longing for a lost time’.³⁵ Especially in a literary context, the term has long-standing links with regionalism.³⁶ There is a tradition in the English regional novel to tie nostalgia to a specific form of parochial working-class

³⁴ Kristian Shaw, ‘BrexLit’, p. 21.

³⁵ Tammy Clewell, *Modernism and Nostalgia: Bodies, Locations, Aesthetics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 5.

³⁶ See Phyllis Bentley, *The English Regional Novel* (Crows Nest, New South Wales: G. Allen & Unwin, 1941).

culture. Dominic Head points out that since its emergence in the 1920s and 1930s, 'the more overtly political element of this regional consciousness, rooted in the recognition of economic hardship, is that it has the plight of the working classes at its heart'.³⁷ However, Head goes on to explain that the regional novel's political consciousness is often limited by 'the problem of the backward look', which avoids 'the inevitable onward march of progress' and results in a regressive, a-political nostalgia that fails to confront the challenges of the present.³⁸ As Stuart Tannock suggests, 'hostility towards nostalgia is fuelled in particular by the recurrent co-option of nostalgia by conservative, reactionary politics', but such critiques risk conflating nostalgia with 'the desire for a stable, traditional, and hierarchised society'.³⁹ Akin to Tannock, Alistair Bonnett suggests that the past holds the potential to make a radical intervention in debates about the present, arguing that 'the difficulty of dealing with sudden and massive social change' is precisely the condition of nostalgia 'in its distinctly modern form'.⁴⁰ For Bonnett, 'nostalgia exists within and against modernity and is integral to the radical imagination' rather than acting as a barrier to it.⁴¹

So, then, we might say that nostalgia is often stuck in a dichotomy in which it is seen as either necessarily reactionary or as a politicised response to profound social upheaval. Svetlana Boym's influential study, *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), usefully distinguishes between 'restorative' and 'reflective' nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia is

³⁷ Head, *Modernity and the English Rural Novel*, p. 129.

³⁸ Head, *Modernity and the English Rural Novel*, p. 129.

³⁹ Stuart Tannock, 'Nostalgia Critique', *Cultural Studies*, 9.3 (1995), 453–66 (p. 455).

⁴⁰ Alistair Bonnett, *Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 19.

⁴¹ Bonnett, p. 19.

regressive in that it signals a return to 'the original stasis', whereas reflective nostalgia is more forward-looking, suggesting 'new flexibility' and emphasising 'social memory'.⁴² Boym explains that while restorative nostalgia prioritises *nostos*, and proposes to rebuild the lost home, reflective nostalgia dwells in *algia*.⁴³ Restorative nostalgia often manifests itself in complete reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, cherishing 'shattered fragments of memory'; the former is limited by its idealising tendencies, viewing the past as 'a perfect snapshot'.⁴⁴

Boym's distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia offers a critical framework to think through the literary implications of how a parochial, restorative kind of nostalgia became yoked to a non-metropolitan iconography located somewhere in the North. Both *The Cut* and *Missing Fay* resist a neat distinction between reflective and restorative nostalgia. While the novels utilise nostalgia to prioritise the voices of socio-politically marginalised communities, undercutting this potential is a return to restorative nostalgia that reinforces a set of cultural stereotypes the texts appear to challenge. Both *The Cut* and *Missing Fay* oscillate between a reactionary – or 'restorative' – engagement with the past that reinforces stereotypes surrounding the North while at the same time evoking a radical – or reflective – nostalgia that mobilises the spectral to highlight the need for alternatives to the present.

⁴² Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. xviii; p. 49.

⁴³ Boym, p. 45.

⁴⁴ Boym, p. 49.

Geographies of 'Little England': *Missing Fay*

Thorpe situates *Missing Fay* within a range of specific micro-geographies within Lincolnshire, from its struggling coastal towns and deindustrialised rural fringe to its demonised council estates and gentrified streets lined with boutiques for wealthy residents and tourists. What is notable about the novel is how, through this bricolage of spatial settings, it attempts to represent both Lincolnshire and England as heterogeneous, highly differentiated places. While Lincolnshire is rarely considered to be part of Northern England, *Missing Fay* invokes a broader Brexit discourse in which a discursive construction of 'the North' became an ideological shorthand for a range of socio-economic and cultural class assumptions that transcended geographic parameters.⁴⁵ Lincolnshire returned one of the highest majority leave votes in the UK at 69.9%, and consequently became synonymous with a working-class leave-voting 'North' in the media. The day after the referendum, the *Independent* published an article titled 'Why the North of England will regret voting for Brexit', singling out several areas including Yorkshire and the Humber, Hartlepool, Blackpool, and North-East Lincolnshire as 'summaris[ing] the feeling: the North wants out'.⁴⁶ *Missing Fay* appears to write back to this dominant narrative that pitted two constructed poles of 'North' and 'South' in opposition with one another. Nowhere is this dynamic clearer than in the novel's first vignette, which establishes a view of Lincolnshire as part of a reactionary 'North' when tourists visit the area from London. *Missing Fay* opens on the story of David and Lisa Milligan, who come to represent the cosmopolitan outlook of 'Remain', while Cleethorpes and its residents

⁴⁵ See also p.196 for an elaboration on this idea and the particular role that deindustrialisation plays in the discursive construction of 'Northerness'.

⁴⁶ Kirsty Major, 'Why the North of England will regret voting for Brexit', *The Independent*, 24 June 2016 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/why-north-england-will-regret-voting-brexit-a7101321.html>> [Accessed 12 April 2021]

are framed within an iconography of the North as a reactionary regional backwater and the 'left behind' of the Leave camp. The remote spatial setting of this scene characterises the area as a place of regional stasis, set on a run-down beach just off a 'very straight and very depressing coastal road', where David, Lisa and their children are taking an increasingly vexed family holiday.⁴⁷ Eco-keen David and Lisa have left England's capital city in search of the unspoiled natural beauty of the rural landscape, having decided on the Lincolnshire coast after a recommendation from one of their friends. The recommendation is given by a resident of Muswell Hill – a fashionable urban village in London – alluding to middle-class perspectives of England's non-metropolitan places as mythical 'other' spaces operating outside of modernity. Lisa's friend describes Lincolnshire as 'authentically mysterious and eerily unknown', a classification David later questions. He contemplates how 'England is so tiny, how could anything be mysterious and unknown?', foregrounding the localisation of England and frames the nation's non-metropolitan spaces in terms of their 'authenticity' and disconnection from urban modernity.⁴⁸

In contrast to Lincolnshire's localised characteristics, the Millingtons – born in Australia but now living in London – are not rooted place. The novel situates the family as part of a larger global network, with several references to multi-national organisations and the climate crisis. The first word spoken in the novel by David and Lisa's six-year-old child, is 'fracking', while David's job at Ecoforce, a multi-national association exemplifies planetary connectedness and alludes to a cosmopolitan, global citizenship.⁴⁹ David,

⁴⁷ Adam Thorpe, *Missing Fay* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2017), p. 3.

⁴⁸ Thorpe, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Thorpe, p. 1.

however, retreats to Lincolnshire, under the impression that it is 'the land time forgot', to escape the present and the technology governing their lives in London.⁵⁰ Condemning his children's attachment to technology, he remarks: 'That's what we'll be doing the moment the climate apocalypse happens. We won't even lift our heads from those tiny screens'.⁵¹ David's restorative nostalgia for the simplicity and authenticity he associates with the English landscape does not materialise; his children remain fixated on technology and the availability of fast-food chains, while even the supposed backwater of Lincolnshire's coastal landscape is now altered by invasive mass corporatisation. The presence of remnants of global trade also prevents the convalescence of David's rural retreat:

the waitress has asked a valid question. Why had they come? Why did he leave New Zealand in the first place? To be more connected, less out in the planetary wop-wops? Connected with what? The great liberal-capitalist highway lined with fuckin Macca's and KFCs?⁵²

The residue of global capitalism has infiltrated even the most remote areas of England, altering David's experience of an idealised version of rural England. Pressing his toes into the sands of the beach, David ruminates on his altered coastal surroundings. He tries to 'picture himself as a hominid walking here a million years back, with a very simple life pattern, with straightforward thoughts and feelings and finely tuned sense receptors' but is prevented from accessing this pre-modern vision due to 'a huge bright-blue shipping container in his sight line, dumped for no discernible purpose in front of the concrete seawall'.⁵³ The shipping container marking Lincoln's seemingly remote coastline

⁵⁰ Thorpe, p. 8.

⁵¹ Thorpe, p. 25.

⁵² Thorpe, p. 25.

⁵³ Thorpe, p. 2.

embodies materially both the omnipresence and reach of contemporary global capitalism, just as the concrete seawall shatters the illusion of a natural landscape unmarked by human influence. At this point in the novel, David's nostalgia appears to be a symptom of 'a new understanding of time and space' divided into the local and the universal.⁵⁴ While his life in London and employment at a global organisation demonstrates a universalised conception of space, his retreat to the remote landscape of the Lincolnshire 'looks backward' and communicates a 'yearn[ing] for the particular'.⁵⁵

The area's tourist economy further breaks down David's illusion of Lincoln as an area of unspoilt 'natural' beauty. In one of several moments of irony in the novel, David becomes frustrated at the presence of 'static caravans and bungalows' occupying the coastline, having overlooked how, in his view, 'coastal towns are basically run-down housing estates with amusements'.⁵⁶ Even when David reaches the coast itself, he condemns the landscape's desolation: 'Lincolnshire spreads out behind him, as flat and featureless as the Outback. He'd go insane if he had to live there'.⁵⁷ Lincoln's residents also worsen the trip, with the tense parochial exchanges that David encounters in the town signifying the insular 'Little Englandism' that was perceived to be behind the Leave vote:

David's mouth is a tense coil of rope [...] The pasty, bored-looking and mostly fat folk seated outside the café are watching him, as Brits do. Not minding their own business. Stickybeaking into private matters neighbourhood fucking watchfulness. He glares back and they turn their heads away.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Boym, p. 12; For an extensive analysis of the tensions between local and global experiences of time and space, see Chapter 4.

⁵⁵ Boym, p. 11.

⁵⁶ Thorpe, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Thorpe, p. 25.

⁵⁸ Thorpe, p. 18.

Lincoln appears to be a town in isolation, despite the lack of physical borders in this scene. Read in the context of Brexit, the residents' 'neighbourhood watchfulness' parallels a contracted, insular nationalism concerned with territorial boundaries, emblematising the desire to 'pull up the drawbridge' associated with the Leave campaign.⁵⁹ This fierce localism also communicates internal divisions throughout England. David's inability to reconcile the idealised Lincolnshire coast of his liberal imagination and the bleak socio-economic realities of the place foregrounds a critical paradox in the trip. His longing for a remote English landscape and subsequent disdain for the area's decline locates an irony in the metropolitan desire to turn back the clock by retreating to England's socio-economic margins. He is ultimately unaware of his privilege and neglects how, for many deindustrialised coastal towns, tourism remains their primary income source. In this sense, the trip sets up a class-inflected binary opposition throughout the novel between an assumed metropolitan South-East associated with 'Global Britain' and England's non-metropolitan peripheries.

The parochialism that David observes of Lincoln's locals also alludes to how EU membership was conveyed as a direct catalyst for rising immigration and the erosion of parliamentary sovereignty.⁶⁰ In both *Missing Fay* and *The Cut*, hostility towards inward migration and the view that England is 'under threat' operates within a distinct set of socio-economic and geographic correlations associated with a deindustrial white working class.⁶¹ Thorpe locates the novel in 2012, directly in the middle of the eight years

⁵⁹ Satnam Virdee and Brendan McGeever, 'Racism, Crisis, Brexit', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41.10 (2018), 1802–19 (p. 1811).

⁶⁰ Kristian Shaw, 'BrexLit', p. 27.

⁶¹ See, for example, Gillian Evans' analysis of far-right populism and post-industrial communities in 'Brexit Britain: Why We Are All Postindustrial Now', *American Ethnologist*, 44.2 (2017), 215–19; Ben Pitcher,

between the global financial crisis and the Brexit referendum. This temporal setting and frequent references to the recession invite a reading of Brexit as the culmination of years of structural decline in England's non-metropolitan peripheries, especially during and after the financial crisis of 2007-8. Similarly, Satnam Virdee and Brendan McGeever pinpoint the recession as accelerating the development of a particularly reactionary and hostile Englishness:

This racialising nationalism has borne a particularly defensive character since the 2008 crisis. It is defined not by imperial prowess or superiority, but by a deep sense of loss of prestige; a retreat from the damaging impact of a globalised world that is no longer recognisable, no longer "British". The decline of empire, then, has not led to the overcoming of the English imperial complex, but its retraction into a defensive exclusionary imaginary: we are under siege, it is time to pull up the drawbridge.⁶²

While the anti-immigration sentiment captured in Thorpe's novel echoes Paul Gilroy's diagnosis of a resurgent 'postcolonial melancholia', this 'defensive exclusory imaginary' also appears to be a response to regional uneven development and the spatial biases of a metropolitan-orientated national project.⁶³ *Missing Fay's* focus on Lincoln's local specifics and the ordinary lives of its inhabitants communicates how the town has been unable to recover from the processes of deindustrialisation: struggling retailers, run-down social housing estates, and working men's clubs in which former labourers return to the community forged through manual labour all punctuate the narrative. In contrast to the Millingtons' global orientation, Lincoln is a place of socio-economic decline and rising anti-immigration sentiment.

'Racism and Brexit: Notes towards an Antiracist Populism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42.14 (2019), 2490–2509.

⁶² Virdee and McGeever, p. 1811.

⁶³ Gilroy, *After Empire*, p. 109.

Missing Fay situates Brexit within a history of regional uneven development in England, depicting gatherings in the style of working men's clubs characterised by restorative nostalgia. Former steelworker, Howard, reflects that he and his friends are 'feller[s] of habit' and that 'their annual Monopoly pub crawl [has become] a shadow of its former self', echoing an attachment to the past that results in stasis and cyclicity in an unsatisfactory present.⁶⁴ There is also a racist nativism pervading these meetings that captures a contemporary anxiety that England is under threat. Euroscepticism characterises the novel's depiction of working-class communities, identifying a concern with the looming threat of Romania joining the EU: 'We're all as one in Europe: he's looked it up, and in January 2014 – in less than two years – Romanians won't even have to have a work permit. They'll be a proper part of the family.'⁶⁵ Later, an explicit juxtaposition of Europe and Englishness emerges in a lament of 'European mollycoddling' shortly followed by a description of the 'St George's flag streaked here and there with bird muck'.⁶⁶

This hostility towards supranational bureaucratic influence and immigration extends beyond Europe. A conversation between former British Steel workers in a working men's club further intensifies this English ethnonationalism:

⁶⁴ Thorpe, p. 51.

⁶⁵ Thorpe, p. 193.

⁶⁶ Thorpe, p. 53; This allusion to the absence of English parliamentary autonomy also forebodes the political restructuring that occurred following Scotland's decision against secession from the UK in 2014. In his first speech after the Scottish Independence referendum result, then Prime Minister David Cameron made the case for England to have its own independence in the form of English Votes for English Laws (EVEL). Thomas Docherty proposes that EVEL 'is at the very core of Brexit and informs the "decision" to secede from the ECJ; and its source lies in a speech that stirred up a sense of resentment among the English whose troubles – it was alleged – stem from the fact that they were supposedly not making their own laws, while the Scots, Welsh and Irish had all "taken control" of their lives'. See 'Brexit: Thinking and Resistance', in *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*, ed. by Robert Eaglestone (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 181–95 (p. 186).

'Christ, another four for the Pakis,' says Don, making him jump.
'Too many Pakis, too many runs,' says Ian.
Gary crosses his stretched legs at the ankles. 'There aren't too many of them over our way, over here, though. Are they? Mostly doctors or teachers or summat.'
'We don't want 'em,' says Don. 'Not on top of the Polacks and whatnot. Romanians. Any minute now'.⁶⁷

This anti-immigration sentiment is presented as a working-class response to the perceived weakening of England viewed as an island nation; repeated references to 'too many' immigrants frame England as a territory that has, in the opinion of these men, reached its limits. This narrow Englishness is reiterated in cricket references, alluding to an exclusory nationalism rooted in sporting culture, and associated with the kind of loyalty to England prioritised by the Tebbit test.⁶⁸ Likewise, when Howard mentions Cosmina, a Romanian nursing home assistant caring for his mother, he notes how '[h]is mates don't want to know. There are always exceptions, they say. Stolen someone's job, she has. Someone native'.⁶⁹ In addition to the association of Englishness with cultural hostility and racism, there are also other socio-political allusions at work in the Brexit context. Thorpe's choice to locate working-class debates concerning English sovereignty in the spatial setting of a local pub gestures towards Nigel Farage's campaign throughout the EU referendum in which he 'extolled the virtues of UKIP as "the people's party"'.⁷⁰ Farage was frequently pictured with a pint in-hand, performing a 'pint, fag and cheeky grin routine' in an ideological manoeuvre to present himself as an 'ordinary' man 'of the

⁶⁷ Thorpe, p. 71.

⁶⁸ For more on the Tebbit test and English ethnonationalism in the Powell and Thatcher period, see Chapter 1 (especially pp. 65-66).

⁶⁹ Thorpe, p. 58.

⁷⁰ Elena Block and Ralph Negrine, 'The Populist Communication Style: Toward a Critical Framework', *International Journal of Communication*, 11 (2017), 178-97 (p. 185).

people' that was crucial to the credibility of his wider anti-elitist stance.⁷¹ As Thomas Docherty puts it, 'Gove's attack on experts, Farage's beer-swilling – all of this is designed to secure affiliation of "the people" by being authentic'.⁷² There is also a regional correlate to note; Farage's drink of choice was often a pint of bitter, a beverage heavily associated with working-class masculinity, especially in Yorkshire and Lancashire in Northern England.⁷³ In this sense, the scene echoes a regional stereotype of 'Northern' working-class authenticity harnessed in Brexit media and political discourse while also demonstrating the intersection of class and geography during the referendum.⁷⁴

This narrow version of Englishness was a central component of UKIP's rise during the 2015 General Election and was later replayed leading up to the Brexit referendum. The Party's provocative poster featured a long stream of migrants at the Croatian-Slovenian border under the slogan 'Breaking Point' and was intended to be the first of a series of adverts to be released by UKIP each day until polling day.⁷⁵ Emblematic of the far right's populist strategy, the poster aimed to target a disenfranchised working class and anxieties surrounding further socio-economic decline using inward migration as a scapegoat. At the same time, UKIP's campaign more broadly relied upon an 'island myth' of the state-nation as a colonial power and developed into a Euroscepticism and racist

⁷¹ Nick Robinson, *Election Notebook: The inside Story of the Battle over Britain's Future and My Personal Battle to Report It* (London: Transworld Digital, 2015), p. 9.

⁷² Docherty, p. 192.

⁷³ See Karl Spracklen, Jon Laurencic, Alex Kenyon, "'Mine's a Pint of Bitter'": Performativity, gender, class and representations of authenticity in real-ale tourism'. *Tourist Studies* 13.3 (2013), 304-321.

⁷⁴ There is also a further irony here, in that the English nationalist sentiment Farage so readily harnessed heavily relied on the Anglo-British suppression of a civic, political Englishness in favour of an ethnonationalist English identity. The day after Brexit, Farage declared that June 23rd would be remembered as Britain's 'Independence Day', a claim which essentially redirected legitimate claims for representation away from the political elite onto Brussels and immigration.

⁷⁵ An image of the poster can be accessed at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukip-breaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants>

resentment inseparable from restorative post-imperial nostalgia.⁷⁶ Becoming synonymous with the Leave campaign, the poster constructed a homogenous figure of 'the migrant' as both a security threat to Britain as an island nation and 'an economic threat to the domestic working class'; this was, of course, in addition to the bureaucratic stranglehold of Brussels which was also positioned as a threat to British sovereignty.⁷⁷

Missing Fay appears attuned to this populist narrative, identifying resistance to immigration in the years leading up to the referendum. For example, when Sheena reflects on Lincoln's urban development and demographic diversification, she notices that

Lincoln isn't quite as local these days. *Burgeoning* is how the estate agent Damon now puts it in his flash corner window at the top of the hill where the old record shop used to be: *burgeoning* blah blah in its *sylvan setting between fen and wold*. Quite the poet. *Burgeoning* with foreigners, that's for sure.⁷⁸

Sheena's musing embodies a binary opposition between inward immigration and the English local, viewing outsiders as a territorial threat; the repetition and emphasis on 'burgeoning' allude to a risk of both cultural erosion and overpopulation and invoking UKIP's 'breaking point' discourse. This perceived erasure of a 'local' English culture is a product of anxieties surrounding the socio-economic implications of immigration, and augments a set of regional and class archetypes associated with the Leave vote. Here, the idea of English political autonomy subscribes to a kind of polarising logic circulated within media and political discourse, which focused on oversimplified associations of

⁷⁶ For a comprehensive examination of this development, see Ina Habermann, 'Introduction: Understanding the past, facing the future' in *The Road to Brexit: A Cultural Perspective on British Attitudes to Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 1-18.

⁷⁷ Virdee and McGeever, p. 1806.

⁷⁸ Thorpe, p. 131.

class and region. However, while here *Missing Fay* relies on class and regional stereotypes, there are moments in which the text attempts to understand how personal loss has a part to play in attitudes towards socio-political shifts in the present. For example, when Howard attempts to go back to the park where he was playing with his daughter before she disappeared, the event is presented as psychologically disorientating, told through stream-of-consciousness narration in which the past and the present are hard to distinguish. In this scene, Howard's personal history and memories with his child blur with the politics of the present in a way that positions Howard's individual loss alongside a national loss of English national identity:

Look sweetheart, we are under the trees. There are red apples on branches, unbitten by frost. Crocuses and snowdrops. In January! All that global warming nonsense. They'll always be dreaming up something to scare you out of your wits. Floods of immigrants. The demise of the indigenous. Bye bye, England.⁷⁹

The juxtaposition of the past in Howard's mourning for his daughter with the loss of England in the present alludes to a restorative nostalgia that offers little potential for achieving satisfactory alternatives to the present. Notably, however, this familial interaction from the past appears to be more empathetic than Howard's present cultural environment. There is a recognition that racial hostility is inherently ideological and 'dreamed up' to illicit fear. While these moments of human connection appear to enable a view of the present that goes beyond the populism of Brexit, they are only fleeting, offering glimpses of Howard's potential to complicate dominant polarising political perspectives.

While these Lincoln inhabitants experience England as a culture increasingly under threat and whose political sovereignty is compromised by EU bureaucracy,

⁷⁹ Thorpe, p. 56.

Englishness forms an alienating presence throughout Cosmina's narrative. Cosmina describes how England 'stretch[es] all about her, with its English trees and birds and grasses in which English insects crawl and spin and hum and jump. The English river swirls past and English fish rest as if dazed by the sunlight in its current'.⁸⁰ Cosmina's description alludes to a mythological Englishness residing in the rural landscape, and the emphasis on 'English' in particular foregrounds her status as an outsider. This is a landscape dissimilar to that of Romania, whose geographic contours and small-scale local agriculture are contrasted with England's 'monotonous fields' of globalised agriculture and migrant labour. Here, there are 'no horses pulling ploughs or wagons', and 'no locals work in them'.⁸¹ For Cosmina, England is conspicuous as an alienating lived experience, articulated in labour forms open to her, differences in the material landscape, and the social conventions. She notes how 'people in England are always chatty and smiling when they aren't drunk or in their cars – when something turns them into scowling monsters' or in the milky cups of tea 'just the way English people want them', a 'secret recipe [Cosmina] hasn't yet found'.⁸² These subtle notations locate an exclusory Englishness based on social codes that Cosmina is unable to grasp; they characterise her experience in Lincoln and coalesce to reinforce an experience of social isolation and nostalgia for the familiarity of her family home in Romania.

While *Missing Fay* depicts Lincoln as a localised place, the novel critiques 'Little England' sentiment by drawing attention to England's reliance on migrant labour and connectedness to a global economy. The frequent presence of migrant labour in the novel

⁸⁰ Thorpe, p. 88.

⁸¹ Thorpe, p. 85.

⁸² Thorpe, p.70; p. 90.

rejects the idea that England's socio-economic margins are disconnected from the workings of globalisation. For instance, when Cosmina is sacked from her job as a health care assistant, her friend encourages her to apply for work at a global fish-processing firm, promising her accelerated upward progression:

Madalina wants her to come to Grimsby, where there is skilled work available in the fish-processing factories or the chilled-food plants. Madalina is already assistant team leader in 2 Sisters Food Group after only one year. Better, she claims, than being a healthcare assistant. You could join 2 Sisters Food Group and rise to manager status, buy a house with a garden after a few years, with Romania properly in the EU so no permanent-residence problems.⁸³

The scene reflects a migrant narrative similar to that which we saw in Chapter 1, whereby migration to England promises economic return if one works hard enough, while locating England's supposed regional backwaters within a supranational economy. Here, Grimsby represents England's port towns, whose local economy formerly relied on the fishing industry; significantly, these areas were majority Leave-voting geographies and are often associated with industrial decline.⁸⁴ In the globalised present, the fishing economies of these towns are now dominated by low-paid labour in factories, packing food for supermarket chains. 2 Sisters Food Group – a large corporation that includes Five Star Fish – supplies Iceland and Morrisons, further emphasising how localised trade has been

⁸³ Thorpe, p. 89.

⁸⁴ With a 15.4% majority, Yorkshire and the Humber returned the fourth highest regional vote in favour of Leave. Former fishing town, Hull, for example, voted Leave by a decisive 67.6% versus 32.4%, in favour of Leaving the EU. 'Results and Turnout at the EU Referendum,' EU Referendum, Electoral Commission. <<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/results-and-turnout-eu-referendum/>> [accessed 22 July 2020] The Electoral Commission, *Results and Turnout at the EU Referendum*, 25 September 2019 <<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/results-and-turnout-eu-referendum>> [accessed 22 July 2020]

For a geographic analysis of uneven development and the referendum, see Gordon MacLeod and Martin Jones, 'Explaining "Brexit capital": Uneven Development and the Austerity State', *Space and Polity*, 22.2 (2018) 111-136.

deprivileged in favour of large-scale production methods and alienated migrant labour. Within this supranational context, *Missing Fay* also registers how increased geographic mobility has gone hand-in-hand with a migration system and economic climate that views immigrants only in terms of their exchange value. As Cosmina reflects, 'no one here could care less that she is already a graduate, except that it has allowed her into the country in the first place. She is useful, that's all'.⁸⁵

Hence, *Missing Fay* presents a particularly working-class version of local Englishness associated with 'Little England' and hostility towards immigration. However, the novel also locates a conflicting version of Englishness as a commodified, middle-class culture, echoing the Green Conservatism advocated under David Cameron's coalition government.⁸⁶ For example, Lincoln's Old Town works as an architectural image of 'quintessential' English culture. Lincoln's Cathedral, Lincoln Castle and Steep Hill are highly commercial tourist sites that welcome thousands of visitors each year. *Missing Fay* intervenes in discourses of Englishness as a commodified culture, with much of the action taking place near Steep Hill. For example, Sheena's childrenswear shop, Mother Hubbard, is merely decorative. The boutique is housed in a sixteenth-century cottage with sea-saw walls and floors, functioning as an architectural metaphor for a paradigmatic English heritage; it caters to exclusively middle-class sensibilities, 'drawing the sort of mum who drives a silver Lexus RX and whose budget cares for itself'.⁸⁷ Located on Totterhill, Mother Hubbard trades alongside various other independently owned, 'hipster', bijou shops catering for Lincoln's wealthy residents or tourists' tastes. Not 'the illustrious Steep Hill

⁸⁵ Thorpe, p. 81.

⁸⁶ For more on Green Conservatism as a Britishness project, see Neil Carter, 'Vote Blue, Go Green? Cameron's Conservatives and the Environment', *The Political Quarterly*, 80.2 (2009) 233-242.

⁸⁷ Thorpe, p. 127.

itself, but its neglected sister. [...] ‘I’m at the posh end,’ Sheila jokes, ‘We talk different up there’. Not all together a joke, in Lincoln’.⁸⁸ Rather than making purchases, tourists stop outside and take pictures of the building because it is ‘old and typically English’.⁸⁹

Mother Hubbard embodies what Kennedy terms the ‘aestheticisation of national identity’ which masks a ‘sociologically spectral’ political Englishness. As he explains, England has been

made tasteful by a middle-class and basically middlebrow literary and musical and decorative culture that leans not only on the patriotic penchants nestled in the left-leaning figures like Orwell, but on the Anglocentric turn within criticism, fiction, poetry, travel writing and memoir over, roughly, the last decade... if the middle classes, the argument seems to run, can demonstrate their patriotism through an optimistic traditionalism, the ‘sociologically spectral’ might be appeased in time.⁹⁰

Chapter 2 demonstrated how the pastoral literary mode has contributed towards a placeless cultural Englishness and served as a bulwark for the British state against a *political* Englishness. In a similar vein, Kennedy argues that middle-class appropriation of pastoral England in popular culture became ‘a cornerstone of austerity politics’ under David Cameron, with Green Toryism helping to reduce Englishness to a bricolage of cultural signifiers, demonstrated in the TV-series ‘The Great British Bake Off’ and heritage apparel such as Hunter and Cath Kidston. This association between middlebrow cultural constructions of English heritage breaks down in the novel. Contrary to its quaint exterior, Mother Hubbard is far from ‘quintessentially’ English or exclusively ‘local’; its formerly handmade fabrics have been switched to ‘sweatshop machine-operators in

⁸⁸ Thorpe, p. 127.

⁸⁹ Thorpe, p. 246.

⁹⁰ Joe Kennedy, ‘Terror In The Terroir: Resisting The Rebranding Of The Countryside’, *The Quietus*, 13 December 2013 <<https://thequietus.com/articles/14114-country-life-british-politics-uncanny-music-art>> [accessed 20 December 2019].

China', presenting a version of the nation reliant on globalisation's uneven development and is less 'gentle England' than it is corporate and exploitative.⁹¹

The artifice and exclusions inherent in this commodified cultural Englishness are rendered acutely visible in the novel, with Fay's working-class narrative pitted against Sheena's middle-class sensibilities. Just as the novel imagines a parochial Englishness threatened by migration, the 'quintessential Englishness' of Lincoln's Old Town is threatened by an *internal* social other. As I noted in Chapter 1 concerning racialised internal others, Imogen Tyler's 'social abjection' describes the way the neoliberal state relies on the maintenance of interiorised 'others' who are demonised to harness support for particular state agendas, acting as scapegoats for many inequalities and structural cleavages caused by neoliberalism.⁹² In Thorpe's novel, this abjectifying neoliberal class discourse characterises Fay's relationship with Sheena. Sheena moves between disdain for Fay and a kind of gestural, tokenistic affection; she enjoys 'the irony' of having a child from 'gutter level England' in her upmarket clothing store, noting that her customers will 'probably think the girl's a shoplifter at first'.⁹³ The dissonance between Fay and Mother Hubbard's demographic locates conflicting poles of Englishness simultaneously occurring in Lincoln: a middle-class and highly commodified genteel England and the 'gutter level' working-class England. While Sheena develops a somewhat maternal affection for Fay, her attempts at helping her are largely self-validating gestures; there

⁹¹ Thorpe, p. 128.

⁹² Tyler, p. 10.

⁹³ Thorpe, p. 144.

always remains a distance between the two. Fay is seen as an object of fascination and a class object 'outside the domain of the social proper' by Sheena.⁹⁴

Mike and his antiquated second-hand bookshop also feature in this class division. When Mike learns of Fay's disappearance, he refuses to display her 'MISSING' poster, viewing her upbringing as a threat to the muted sophistication of his independent store. As the novel progresses, however, thoughts of Fay increasingly bear on his conscience, and he reluctantly installs a copy of her poster in his shop window, noting how it is '[s]o out of place in here, he can't bear it. Never read a book in her life'.⁹⁵ Mike's prejudice appears to be an idealised imaginary Englishness that he feels has been lost. Resurfacing from his fixation on the 'MISSING' poster,

Mike feels the present like abdominal pain. Almost everything good has been thrown aside – horse-drawn waggons, dew ponds, hay stacks, folk remedies, small bookshops, flowering meadows, letterpress printing, looms. The list is endless. The villages of England used to be sleepy, grassy little places. Now they're metalled and scrubbed, sub-picturesque drive-thrus. They'll do the same to countries like Romania; they are already doing it to Poland. Intensify! Advance! Grow up, you ignorant peasants! Or starve!⁹⁶

Mike's restorative nostalgia locates a mythological version of England characterised by villages and 'grassy little places', but also there also appears to be a conscious critique of the economic project of the EU. Mike not only idealises the English landscape, but also forms of pre-mechanical printing associated with the Luddites, a group of textile workers who opposed the machinery set to replace their jobs in factories during the early

⁹⁴ Tyler, p. 161.

⁹⁵ Thorpe, p. 211.

⁹⁶ Thorpe, p. 211.

nineteenth century.⁹⁷ Here is a further reference to tensions between local and supra-national systems. The replacement of the individual labour by mass technologisation also speaks to a contemporary literary economy that deprivileges independent book retailers and favours mass corporations such as Amazon.

Lincoln's internal spatial divisions also reflect Fay's demonisation and mirror her and Sheena's socio-economic and cultural distance. Fay's residential estate is entirely 'other' to the image of 'quintessential Englishness' represented by Sheena's Totter Hill boutique:

The girl lives in the Ermine, on the west side, which is the rougher half of the council estate up on the northern edge of the city, when you'd expect the rough half to be the east. As a matter of fact, edge isn't the right term because the estate is pretty much the North of Lincoln. Sheena has never more than skirted it. Parts of the city are no-go, or no-go for faint-hearted law-abiding types like herself.⁹⁸

Told at this point from Sheena's perspective, the passage offers a neat articulation of the spatialisation of class relations that demonise those residing in state housing. Fay inhabits a kind of 'abject border zone' that is geographically and socially far removed from the 'well-to-do' residents of the town. Fay's occupation of the Ermine estate fundamentally limits her access to categories of morality and respectability, compounding her abjection.⁹⁹ The council estate is commonly associated with major social problems during New Labour's premiership. As Tyler explains, this period 'marked a new era in class relations in Britain' when the council estate signified 'the moral boundaries of the nation-state, intensifying Thatcher's configuration of the spaces as

⁹⁷ David Linton, 'The Luddites: How Did They Get That Bad Reputation?', *Labor History*, 33.4 (1992), 529–37 (p. 529).

⁹⁸ Thorpe, p. 133.

⁹⁹ Tyler, p. 160.

barracks for the poor'.¹⁰⁰ The term is highly loaded and bound to a history of socio-political tensions, with cultural representations of such places foregrounding their status as sites of austerity, criminality, and the anti-social behaviour of an underclass 'other'.

Andrew Burke notes that

the spaces [of council estates] are routinely associated in the popular imagination as the sites of, and symbols for, the major social problems of contemporary Britain (crime, poverty, anti-social behaviour), but such identification, by politicians and media especially, frequently serves as a cover for anti-working-class and anti-immigrant sentiment.¹⁰¹

The social stigma Burke describes here reached its peak during and after Thatcher's assault on council estates that effectively labelled its residents the 'enemy within' and positioned them as 'other' within the public consciousness.¹⁰² Burke goes on to identify the symbolic role of the council estate as a microcosm for broader patterns of uneven development. He suggests that 'the council estate 'dramatise[d] the connections between local conditions of existence on the peripheries of contemporary British culture and the national, even global, political decisions and conditions that g[a]ve rise to them'.¹⁰³ The disconnection between Fay and the 'well to do' residents of the town foregrounds how Brexit merely activated a set of already existing social cleavages that are too complex to

¹⁰⁰ Tyler, p. 160; See, for example, Channel Four's *Benefits Street* series. Lynsey Hanley's *Estates: An Intimate History* (London: Granta, 2014) and Owen Jones' *Chavs: the Demonization of the Working Class* (London: Verso, 2016) also provide popular accounts of the symbolism of the council estate in contemporary Britain.

¹⁰¹ Andrew Burke, 'Concrete Universality: Tower Blocks, Architectural Modernism, and Realism in Contemporary British Cinema', *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, 5.3 (2007), 177–88 (p. 176).

¹⁰² While Thatcher's 'enemy within' referred to Trade Unions during the Miners' Strike, the term has since been deployed extensively in various disciplines to refer to social groups who were marginalised under Thatcherism. See Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, p. 153-178.

¹⁰³ Burke, p. 176.

be reduced to a set of rhetorical polarities: 'Leave' versus 'Remain, 'poor' versus 'rich', 'North' versus 'South' .

Fay's inability to access the category of 'victim' in the novel reaffirms this class dynamic, as she comes to signify the human potential wasted by the political neglect of working-class communities and deindustrial towns. Fay is rarely perceived as an innocent victim or considered outside of class stereotypes. The only character in the novel who does not view her as at least partially responsible for her disappearance is David, who misreads Fay as a '[n]ice middle-class English girl' due to Sheena's oakwood beams occupying the background of Fay's 'MISSING' poster.¹⁰⁴ David's reaction is markedly more sympathetic – causing him to reflect on the possibility of his own child going missing – than Fay's fellow residents in Lincoln. For instance, Mike's reaction to Fay's 'MISSING' poster does not extend to viewing her beyond her socio-economic circumstances. He notes how some posters have been taken down, 'presumably as more details have emerged of the girl's home life, her truancy, her being caught shoplifting in a community supermarket on the day of her disappearance and a string of similar offences'.¹⁰⁵ It is not until Fay is read as middle class that she becomes a victim of a crime, rather than perceived as a criminal herself.

The relationship between Fay's class status and her ability to access victimhood illustrates a process of social abjection. As the daughter of a family in receipt of state support, Fay functions in the novel as a scapegoat for structural inequalities. She becomes a victim of meritocracy as a 'key ideological term in the reproduction of neoliberal

¹⁰⁴ Thorpe, p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ Thorpe, p. 190.

culture'.¹⁰⁶ This ideology underpins Mike's rejection of the idea of social inequality and the prospect of Fay's limited opportunities. He laments that social disadvantage is simply 'a myth [...]. Like the myth of impoverishment. Free school, free healthcare, free transport to school, free council house, free school trips, just about everything.'¹⁰⁷ Mike's logic is emblematic of an ideology central to neoliberalism which ignores the realities of structural inequality and places all blame onto a demonised working-class 'abject', as Tyler would describe it. In Mike's account, the problem is inequality, but inequality produced by members of the working class themselves, capturing the irony of a class discourse that demonises the poor. The referendum saw a tidal wave of political and media rhetoric that cast Leave voters as members of a scapegoated working class, resulting in 'social abjection'.¹⁰⁸ Fay's disappearance acts as a form of symbolic class violence against a stigmatised other. It alludes to the Brexit "blame game" that has focused especially on working-class Leave voters' and has stigmatised them in the public imagination.¹⁰⁹ In the novel, class stigma goes hand-in-hand with both a restorative nostalgia for an idealised and socially conservative English past and locates an exclusory experience of England that limits social connection and equality.

While *Missing Fay's* central crime emphasises the social exclusions inherent in middle-class appropriations of 'quintessential Englishness', it also serves as a warning against a restorative nostalgia for a mythological national past. As we saw in the previous chapter, wolves are inhabiting England's margins; in Thorpe's novel, they are never

¹⁰⁶ Jo Littler, 'Meritocracy as Plutocracy: The Marketising of "Equality" Under Neoliberalism', *New Formations*, 80.80 (2013), 52–72 (p. 69).

¹⁰⁷ Thorpe, p. 150.

¹⁰⁸ Tyler, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Mckenzie, p. 269.

explicitly seen but form a mythological presence indicating Fay's fate. The figure of the wolf becomes a continually radiating presence in Thorpe's 'whodunnit', with frequent allusions to *Little Red Riding Hood*: Fay attends a stage adaptation of the tale, featuring 'a bloke with a stupid wolf face what wouldn't stay on', and later, Cosmina experiences nightmares of a demonic wolf.¹¹⁰ She recalls the story told by her mother when Cosmina was a child, in which a wolf 'persuaded three young goats to let him into their house' and 'the mother returns to find blood splashed on the walls and the heads of the two eldest children lying on the window sill'.¹¹¹ Cosmina's version of the tale allegorises the anxieties surrounding immigration during the referendum, representing the threat of the 'outsider' penetrating the family home.

However, while here the wolves appear to signify the threat of a migrant 'other', becoming a scapegoat for a range of socio-economic and geopolitical concerns, elsewhere in the novel the wolves are explicitly associated with – and contrasted against – pastoral England.¹¹² Just as in *The Wolf Border*, the figure of the wolf cuts through the pastoral idyll as a cultural symbol of Englishness. This political function is explicitly registered in *Missing Fay* when David remarks that his adaptation of *Little Red Riding Hood* 'defend[s] the wolf from the usual pastoralist propaganda', explicitly positioning the wolf in opposition to pastoral myth.¹¹³ Further, allusions to *Little Red Riding Hood* also warn against the dangers of a restorative nostalgia attached to a mythological or 'fairy-tale' idea of Englishness. For example, Cosmina's attachment to an idealised version of

¹¹⁰ Thorpe, p. 45.

¹¹¹ Thorpe, pp. 87–88.

¹¹² There is a further irony here in that the original version of *Little Red Riding Hood* by Charles Perrault is of European origin.

¹¹³ Thorpe, p. 40.

England prevents her from passing on key information that might help find Fay. Cosmina finds a torn red coat in a nearby woodland that looks like the one Fay was wearing on the day of her disappearance; Cosmina initially mistakes the item of clothing for ‘a sheep torn apart by a wolf’ but afterwards contemplates the probability of it belonging to a girl she recently saw on a ‘MISSING’ poster.¹¹⁴ Further to this sacrificial imagery, the coat is now brown from the dirt, but was ‘once red’, alluding to the archetype of female victimhood central to *Little Red Riding Hood*.¹¹⁵ While Cosmina notes the similarity of the coat – and the coincidence of its location – she eventually dismisses the evidence, rejecting the possibility of wolves in ‘gentle England’.¹¹⁶ In this sense, like Fay, the wolves remain a moralising spectral presence cautioning against mythological attachment to an imagined nation. Ultimately, the novel suggests the limits of the past as a resource for responding to the inadequacies of the present, and instead, underlines the need to establish collective social responsibility in the present.

Nostalgia and the Deindustrial North: *The Cut*

In *Missing Fay*, we have started to see that Brexit’s ‘English Question’ has a definitively regional dimension. Having set out the multiple, conflicting versions of Englishness in Thorpe’s exploration of pre-Brexit England, the second part of this chapter concentrates more directly on this regional correlate and interrogates the symbolic role of deindustrialised space and working-class nostalgia in Cartwright’s Brexit novel. I

¹¹⁴ Thorpe, p. 77.

¹¹⁵ Thorpe, p. 77; This trope is later reinforced when Fay's skin is described as 'snow-white'. Thorpe, p. 135.

¹¹⁶ Thorpe, p. 128.

consider how *The Cut's* ambivalent nostalgia responds to the way constructions of the North became synonymous with the Leave vote both in the run-up to and after the referendum, reifying an image of the North as a localised antithesis to the outward-facing Britishness associated with London. We can see this dynamic most clearly in Grace's documentary project, which embodies the intranational relations between an ambiguously defined deindustrial 'North' and an equally constructed 'South' of England. Although Cartwright locates the novel in Dudley, a small town in the Midlands, Grace is described as travelling 'North' to speak to Leave voters – and very much views Dudley as part of the North – in a way that indicates how the region operates in the national imagination. In Cartwright's Brexit narrative, the North is more of a socio-economic category, whose cultural representation operates within specific class-inflected characteristics, rather than a precisely defined geographical territory.¹¹⁷ Hazeldine suggests that

what most binds the North together is industrial tradition plus political discontent—but it shows up across the whole gamut of socio-economic indicators: output, jobs, incomes, house prices, education, life expectancy. The aggregated statistics point to a fissure running east to west between the Humber and Severn estuaries, stranding the northern regions, the West Midlands except Warwickshire and the East Midland counties of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire in the zone of relative economic disadvantage.¹¹⁸

Just as Hazeldine proposes that the North is based more on socio-economic and political indicators than geography, Grace's documentary is premised upon a 'discursive, cultural

¹¹⁷ See Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). For a discussion of how 'Northernness' has effectively operated as a socio-economic class category since industrialisation, see Philip Dodd, 'Lowryscapes: recent writings about "the North"'. *Critical Quarterly*. 32.2 (1990) 17-28.

¹¹⁸ Hazeldine, 'The Revolt of the Rustbelt', p. 54.

version of the North in which ‘class and region have become [...] elided’.¹¹⁹ Doreen Massey proposes that we think relationally about the spatialisation of capitalist production, maintaining that ‘questions of geography in the United Kingdom reflect not just the formal relations of production, but wider questions of politics, power and social class’.¹²⁰ Taking Massey’s view that places are not simply physical locations but ‘articulations of social relations’, I read Cartwright’s engagement with the North less in terms of precise territorial boundaries, than in the ways *The Cut* replicates a polarised political discourse wherein an imagined version of the North became a fulcrum of the Leave vote.¹²¹

Mapping onto this geographical displacement between metropole and deindustrial periphery is a socio-economic class division. *The Cut*’s use of regional dialect establishes how socio-economic configurations of class operate within broader regional power dynamics. Cairo’s regional vernacular – of ‘we’m’ ‘yer’ ‘doh’ and ‘yow’ – is juxtaposed with Grace’s Standard English, demonstrating a kind of postcolonial power relation between the two.¹²² *The Cut* initially articulates the ‘invisible veil’ between them linguistically.¹²³ When Cairo’s interview with Grace is broadcast on the television, ‘they put subtitles over his words, translated into his own language, and sometimes they did not. But there he was, playing on some endless loop, making sense and not making sense

¹¹⁹ Philip Dodd, ‘Lowryscapes: Recent Writings about “the North”’, *Critical Quarterly*, 32.2 (1990), 17–28 (p. 17); Dave Russell and Stephen Wagg, *Sporting Heroes of the North: Sport, Region and Culture* (Newcastle: Northumbria University Press, 2004), p. x.

¹²⁰ Doreen Massey, *Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. 295.

¹²¹ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Chichester: Polity Press, 1994), p. 22.

¹²² Cartwright, p. 40; p. 10; p. 24; p. 18.

¹²³ Cartwright, p. 19.

at all'.¹²⁴ The image of Cairo watching himself on television in which his regional dialect has been translated demonstrates a class manoeuvre in which the working-class subject is unable to speak for themselves. Here, Cairo's words are appropriated and effectively given back to him by a middle-class narrator to be broadcast to the nation. The scene's suppression of Cairo's local idiom embodies how '[t]he othering of the North operates within a specific set of power relations, in which the North is subordinated to a London and South-East centric locus of national economic, governmental, media and cultural power'.¹²⁵ The translation process explicitly enacts a process in which particular places within England are, as Mike Savage puts it, 'moralised through the lens of the dominant London worldview'.¹²⁶ The way Cairo's words are mediated by London-based media is analogous to Westminster's political stranglehold within the constitutional organisation of the Union. In devolutionary Britain, even though power has been devolved to local governments, these powers are frequently shown to be subordinate to, and easily overridden by, Westminster.¹²⁷ Cairo's inability to represent himself is continued throughout the novel, as voice becomes an allegory for regional political autonomy and representation.

¹²⁴ Cartwright, p. 21.

¹²⁵ Henrietta Phillips, 'A Woman Like That Is Not A Woman, Quite. I Have Been Her Kind': Maxine Peake and the Gothic Excess of Northern Femininity', in *Social Class and Television Drama in Contemporary Britain*, ed. by David Forrest and Sue Vice (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 149–64 (pp. 150–51).

¹²⁶ Savage, p. 263.

¹²⁷ Governmental handling of regional lockdown measures during the Coronavirus pandemic explicitly illustrates this power dynamic. For example, Westminster's decision to force Greater Manchester into tier 3 before reaching a deal regarding financial support with the region's mayor, Andy Burnham, communicated publicly the limited autonomy of local and regional governments compared to Westminster.

The decentralising potential of regional dialect has already been identified as a recurring aesthetic in Cartwright's work. O'Brien pinpoints a 'Dudley demotic' in Cartwright's novels, noting how they

merge a form of Standard English with an explicit urban and industrial working-class Dudley accent and dialect. Quotation marks, separating the language of the characters from the authorial third-person narrator, are never used. This collapses the distance between the two and positions the narrative voice closer to the subjective experiences of the novel's working-class characters, presenting them as equivalents.¹²⁸

While O'Brien's suggestion that Cartwright's deployment of regional dialect resists dominant class structures certainly holds true, the radical potential of *The Cut's* regional dialect can also be problematised. On the one hand, the novel's idiom operates as a counterpoint to Grace's documentary in which Cairo takes authorial ownership of his experience; this authorial refocusing is devolutionary in the spatial sense in that it offers a decentralised narrative perspective focused on ordinarily marginalised voices. In this respect, regional dialect provides a voice for a voiceless constituency, providing a polemical challenge to the authorities and conventions (both literary and political) whose vested interests in British Unionism have been maintained by neglecting the voices of deindustrialised communities but also through persistent insular images of provincial locales.

On the other hand, the association of regional dialect with otherness and the parochial undercuts the political potential of this decentralised narration. *The Cut's* utilisation of regional dialect to prioritise deindustrial working-class voices is complicated by what Raymond Williams terms 'the orthography of the uneducated'.¹²⁹ In

¹²⁸ Phil O'Brien, 'The Deindustrial Novel', p. 233.

¹²⁹ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2001), p. 245.

the novel, the narrative voice and Grace's speech are written entirely in Standard English, while only Dudley's residents' speech is represented in dialogue with an unconventional spelling. According to Williams, the 'error' is in 'supposing that the ordinary spelling indicates how proper people speak'.¹³⁰ Cartwright's use of 'you' for the narrator, and 'yer' for Dudley's residents reinstates the community's otherness against their difference from a standardised national, linguistic form.¹³¹ This tension is reinforced by the novel's use of social realism, a style 'heavily associated with the depiction of (especially) northern life' and 'authentic', gritty working-class cultural representation.¹³² Thus, regional dialect forms a stumbling block for the novel, signalling an impasse in its devolutionary politics; it is both politically enabling and a self-exoticising lens that reinforces uneven power relations between the North and South of England.

Similarly, *The Cut* reflects how the media perpetuated class-inflected stereotypes surrounding the North during Brexit. Grace and Cairo's relationship is defined by this cultural disconnection. During one of their first meetings, Cairo expresses his frustration at this tendency, explaining how: 'on the telly and that, papers, just been told we'm all stupid, held up for ridicule'.¹³³ Cairo's lament situates the representation of majority Leave-voting areas in the media within a larger history of prejudice against towns such as Dudley, referring to the Dudley Ferris Wheel construction in 2016. The event led to media coverage humiliating the town and residents' despair that much-needed public funding had been spent on 'Britain's worst tourist attraction', offering views of factories,

¹³⁰ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 245.

¹³¹ Cartwright, p. 63.

¹³² Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 5. See also 'Historicising the Literary North' in the introduction to this thesis.

¹³³ Cartwright, p. 43.

concrete buildings, and car parks.¹³⁴ Consequently, the area and its inhabitants were mocked by the press in an ideological manoeuvre that held up the town and its residents as embodiments of regional backwardness and a nostalgic opposition to modern urban development. This contextual reference speaks to a complex social geography that came to bear on Brexit debates in which ‘the subjective notions of class are bound up with place and location’, emphasising the role of the media in perpetuating a reifying cultural imaginary of deindustrialised places and their communities.¹³⁵ As we have already seen in *Missing Fay*, there is a dominant narrative in the UK in which “real people” need to be listened to and “respected”, but in practice this tends to amount to the circulation of a one-dimensional portrait of “provincials”.¹³⁶ The reference to the Ferris Wheel engages with these tensions, paralleling a Brexit discourse that was invariably simplifying and always came down to a fallacious binary opposition between an uneducated working-class North and a socially progressive, liberal Southern elite. We can read Grace in a similar way to the Millingtons in *Missing Fay*, a bastion of metropolitan authority and class privilege, while Cairo serves as a regional metaphor for dispossession and poverty.

The deindustrial aesthetics of *The Cut* emerge from within existing regional narratives of place, mobilising a regional motif of deindustrialisation as a mechanism for re-establishing class within the national conversation. Emphasising a history of uneven development, *The Cut* draws attention to the socio-economic processes that continue to

¹³⁴ *The Telegraph* captured the public outrage caused by the wheel. See “‘Britain’s worst tourist attraction’: Ferris wheel gives panoramic views... of Dudley’. *The Telegraph*. 15 March 2016. <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/howaboutthat/12194700/Britains-worst-tourist-attraction-Dudley-West-Midlands-ferris-wheel.html>> [accessed 20 November 2019].

¹³⁵ Savage, p. 295.

¹³⁶ Joe Kennedy, *Authentocrats: Culture, Politics and the New Seriousness* (London: Repeater Books, 2018), p. 11.

shape the region's cultural iconography and its place in the wider national imagination. As Williams writes of the Welsh industrial novel, 'industrial work and its characteristic places and communities are not just a new background: a new "setting" for a story. In the true industrial novel they are seen as formative'.¹³⁷ Industrial ruins and dilapidated buildings feature prominently in Cartwright's depiction of Dudley. Descriptive passages of the landscape are punctuated by buildings and factories that once signified economic progress and modernity in the town, but are now 'totally disintegrated' and left as out-of-place anachronisms of a forgotten place and time.¹³⁸ Industrial remnants serve as temporally displaced, residual class symbols and architectural embodiments of persistent uneven development. The industrial wasteland that Cairo is casually employed to clear symbolises the alienation of communities systematically dismantled since the Thatcher period, but it is also a material registration of regional uneven development and persistent social and economic inequality. Throughout the novel, the space is an emblem for deindustrialisation. It becomes a magnified symbol of what Katherine Cockin terms the 'Northern wasteland', forming a microcosm for an entire regional consciousness centred on industrial labour.¹³⁹

In *The Cut*, Dudley's urban environment forms a historical palimpsest that triggers nostalgia for industrial labour and the 'structure of feeling' of a futureless present.¹⁴⁰ The persistence of deindustrialisation (and its implications) still structures the present, reflecting the Derridean process of hauntology. The term is a homophone of 'ontology',

¹³⁷ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 221.

¹³⁸ Cartwright, p. 22.

¹³⁹ Cartwright, p. 37; Cockin, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 134.

describing a disruption of the present by the past's persistent 'haunting'.¹⁴¹ In Mark Fisher's application of the concept, hauntology is a product of 'the slow cancellation of the future', but holds political potential in its refusal to be consigned to the past in categories of 'retro' or 'heritage'.¹⁴² For Fisher, hauntology metaphorically represents *'the agency of the virtual: with the spectre understood not as anything supernatural but as that which acts without (physically) existing'*.¹⁴³ The spectral presence of industrial labour, understood as both 'ghosts of the past' and material fragments that provoke memories of that past, haunt the novel in the way Fisher describes. It registers a socio-economic disconnection between region and nation through collective historical experiences manifested as a kind of haunting. For example, the spectral presence of industry characteristic of Dudley's townscape renders acutely visible how the spatial divisions of labour are constructed and reconstructed over time, solidifying the processes of uneven development in the contemporary:

Cairo would bolt down the hill, racing the water that ran off and ended up in the Severn, down and over the Rowley Road and through Warren's Hall and past the ponds and the gravel where they used to sometimes torch the cars and down the black paths, past the ruin of the engine house where the engine had pumped water from the mine, and the coal had fired the engines and the furnaces, and forged the country as it became. *And here were the ruins, and here were the ghosts of people among them.*¹⁴⁴

These frequent references to the closure and subsequent privatisation of steelworks during the 1990s textually replicate the community's inability to escape

¹⁴¹ See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994)

¹⁴² Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014), p. 4; p. 15.

¹⁴³ Fisher, p. 12.

¹⁴⁴ Cartwright, p. 100 [my emphasis].

deindustrialisation's spectral presence and its aftermath, despite their labour 'forg[ing] the country'. Yet, contrary to the political potential Fisher ascribes to hauntology, the presence of the past appears to be more closely tied to a restorative nostalgia in *The Cut*. The shift from localised spatial co-ordinates to nameless 'ruins' and 'ghosts' utilises the language of the spectre, and represents the local community as being stuck in the past and isolated by a prevailing image of stasis; the material environment and its populace are both haunted by and trapped within a regional iconography 'dominated by nostalgia and a spectral history of oppression'.¹⁴⁵

These architectural anachronisms also embody the cultural inertia and political powerlessness felt within deindustrialised communities and help establish what Williams describes as a 'residual structure of feeling'.¹⁴⁶ Williams emphasises that this residual structure is formed in the past but remains very much alive in the present. He explains that

[t]hus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social and cultural institution or formation.¹⁴⁷

Williams goes on to suggest that this residual structure of feeling may have an alternative or even oppositional relationship to the dominant culture. Likewise, in *The Cut*, the affective experience of widespread political inefficacy stands in opposition to a national politics that neglects deindustrialised communities:

'We've had enough,' is what [Cairo] said [to Grace], with the sun on the footballer, and the church and the castle behind him and the soft shadow of the buildings and

¹⁴⁵ Henrietta Phillips, 'A Woman Like That', p. 151.

¹⁴⁶ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 134.

¹⁴⁷ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 122.

his face dusted with some unknown material, which he would no doubt breathe in and whatever it was would be there in his lungs, *burning through the years*.¹⁴⁸

This alignment of Cairo's body with the inevitability of the side-effects of industrial work and its health implications not only symbolises a regional democratic deficit in his lack of agency and voice, but corporeally registers years of industrial decline that continue to shape perceptions of the region and its inhabitants. The spectral image of Cairo standing in the town inhaling debris from disintegrating buildings aptly depicts the dangers of industrial work, but also how it was nonetheless central to the formation of the self.

The novel's nostalgic narrative mode also articulates the loss of labour as a form of place-bound self-identification. In Dudley, as in many other industrial English towns, identity – particularly working-class masculinities – was at one time something forged through work.¹⁴⁹ Now, in the late capitalist era of globalisation and flexible accumulation, employment is scarce and, in *The Cut*, usually takes the form of insecure manual labour. Cairo embodies this shift in his casual role clearing an industrial wasteland, describing how his manager, Tony,

pays them all in dog-eared notes in cash bags from the post office like they are men from some bygone era. Like they are men who would go walking up the lane here from this factory back when it was still standing, men with an early Friday finish, going to tend their allotments and stand up at bars and walk their dogs and go home to their families and fill in the football coupon and dream of a week at the seaside. As if there is any of that anymore.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Cartwright, p. 21 [original emphasis].

¹⁴⁹ See, for example, Massimiliano Molona, *Made in Sheffield: An Ethnography of Industrial Work* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009); for an excellent account of deindustrial labour and masculinity in a transnational context, see Sherry Lee Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialization: Working-Class Writing about Economic Restructuring* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

¹⁵⁰ Cartwright, p. 37.

This restorative nostalgia for a working-class culture alludes to how class discourse in Britain has shifted from blue-collar respectability to that of an idle underclass that reduces class identity to a moral choice. Cairo is mourning the loss of his respectability, a specifically localised formation of culture and place-bound identity gone by. Cairo's observation that '[m]en like Tony are never skint. Significantly, these men have cashflow problems, issues with liquidity and leverage and solvency, words Cairo knows but has no clue as to their meaning, doesn't want to either', articulates the inter-echelons of class. The nuanced language of wealth is untranslatable to Cairo, with words such as 'cashflow' and 'liquidity' little more than soundbites that are unable to cohere in his psyche.

The Cut's nostalgia does not primarily concern the financial implications of industrial decline, but the displacement of a specifically gendered working-class culture and identity. During an interview with Grace, Cairo's father reflects that 'there used to be work for all the men. Man's work, not like now [...] There used to be a culture that went alongside the work'.¹⁵¹ Cairo's father experiences the contemporary through loss, now that the material security of industrial labour has given way to precarity. Here, nostalgia pertains to a particular form of working-class subjectivity tied to productive industrial labour. This is an identity to which Cairo's father has a deep personal affiliation – his ancestors were 'nailers', 'puddlers', 'coal pickers' and 'navvies' – but which he cannot translate to the contemporary employment landscape centred on cognitive or alienated labour.¹⁵² As Sherry Lee Linkon writes, although the work itself was often unpleasant and dangerous, 'the mythology surrounding productive labour, with the associated benefits of the family wage, labour, solidarity, and physical prowess has long played a key role in

¹⁵¹ Cartwright, p. 55.

¹⁵² Cartwright, p. 46.

defining working-class masculine identities'.¹⁵³ In a similar vein, *The Cut* explores how the modern condition of flexible, post-Fordist production methods prevent the forging of shared communal histories, instead, creating a form of cultural alienation in which the spatial divisions of labour compound the relations of gender and class. We can thus think of the disintegrated factory and ruins of industry as nostalgic symbols emblematic of disaffection with the flexible production methods of the global contemporary, evoking a desire to return to a past that at least offered some form of stability and continuity.

Unlike the identity-bearing capacity of community-based labour, the 'gig-economy' of zero-hour contracts results in a contaminated historical presence of industrial labour; it is 'like a plague, eating away at them all', continually haunting the present.¹⁵⁴ These men are 'from some bygone era', experiencing the contemporary as what Zygmunt Bauman describes as 'an age of Nostalgia', characterised by 'an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world'.¹⁵⁵ The loss of localised manual labour highlights the socio-economic and cultural resources for constructing masculinity that industrial work made available for most of the twentieth century throughout the UK. Yet, despite offering a form of class solidarity associated with industrial labour, this form of nostalgia is at risk of being restorative in that it also masks the hardships associated with this kind of work. Cairo's father's longing for the stability of Fordism elides the deeply entrenched class stratification that occurred alongside such forms of production; it succumbs to a limitation of nostalgia Tannock identifies insofar as it 'gloss[es] over contradictory or

¹⁵³ Sherry Lee Linkon, 'Men Without Work: White Working-Class Masculinity in Deindustrialized Fiction', *Contemporary Literature*, 55.1 (2014), 148–67 (p. 148).

¹⁵⁴ Cartwright, p. 101.

¹⁵⁵ Cartwright, p. 37; Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), p. 3.

negative components that compromise the sense of possibility found in such spaces and in such sources' and does little to imagine alternative political avenues for the present. In this sense, the 'plague' that is 'eating away' at Cairo's father and others like him takes on a double meaning, referring both to the literal contamination from exposure to asbestos in industrial work, and a figuratively corrosive, restorative nostalgia.¹⁵⁶

The capitalist reworking of public space also occurs alongside the elimination of identity-bearing productive labour in the novel. On the way to an interview with Grace, Cairo approaches the new Castlegate leisure complex, a development which appears at odds with the local environment: Cairo describes how 'the name of the complex was new, the whole development, cinema, gym, diner and so on, like it was bloody California'.¹⁵⁷ The allusion to California provides a comparison between globalised 'world cities' such as Los Angeles – the centre of the Hollywood entertainment industry and American 'mall culture' – and places where globalisation manifests itself in vast uneven development and sectoral decline.¹⁵⁸ Marked by profound loss, Cairo's nostalgia responds to the removal of places that enable personal connection through productive labour and the rise of non-places offering work only in the service sector.¹⁵⁹ For example, the old County Ground that Cairo's great grandfather helped to construct is now the site of the business park. His relationship with the business park evokes Marc Augé's assertion that supermodernity and globalisation have produced identity-less places marked only by the exchange of capital; these identity-less non-places have replaced former places which are strongly

¹⁵⁶ Tannock, p. 457.

¹⁵⁷ Cartwright, p. 39.

¹⁵⁸ Doreen Massey, *World City* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. 1.

¹⁵⁹ There is a further irony in that the Dudley Sports Centre was rendered unsafe by and eventually closed due to mining subsistence. See <<http://www.blackcountrycommunity.co.uk/articles/holeinground.html>> [accessed 14 June 2019].

settled in space and time, leading to the loss of an area's tradition and history.¹⁶⁰ Spatial exclusion configures this erasure, with Cairo experiencing a kind of cultural disenfranchisement from local space due to urban regeneration initiatives. Cairo's recollection of his experience of the grounds during his childhood intersperses their conversation, remembering how he snuck 'on to the site as a kid with his mates, after it had been abandoned'.¹⁶¹ Despite his personal and ancestral links, the material processes of capital have erased his historical connection with space, an attachment that has since been replaced by identity-less urban developments. The site 'used to be somewhere' but Cairo's rooted identity with the space is now 'long gone', an assemblage of empty signs that are devoid of any local or historical meaning.¹⁶²

Similarly, *The Cut* also mobilises nostalgia as a response to how the processes of neoliberal modernity are felt as occurring only to the benefit of metropolitan centres. Cartwright associates the affective experience of simultaneous deindustrialisation and the creation of corporate non-spaces with a democratic system that ignores the implications of uneven development:

[People] are tired. Tired of clammed-up factory gates, but not even them anymore, because look where they are working now, digging trenches to tat out the last of whatever metal was left. Tired of change, tired of the world passing by, tired of other people getting things that you and people like you had made for them, tired of being told you were no good, tired of being told to stop complaining, tired of being told what to eat, what to throw away, what to do and what not to do, what was right and wrong when you were always in the wrong. Tired of supermarket jobs and warehouse jobs and guarding shopping centres.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. by John Howe (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 77–78.

¹⁶¹ Cartwright, p. 40.

¹⁶² Cartwright, p. 44; p. 28.

¹⁶³ Cartwright, p. 101.

Illustrating the local community's political inertia, Cartwright's depiction of Dudley's community evokes a regional iconography characterised by stasis, nostalgia, and anachronism. This operates within a broader narrative of division that dominated media and political discourse during the referendum, as deindustrial working-class identities are positioned as out-of-time, juxtaposed against the country's metropolitan areas and the rest of the world 'passing them by'. Despite the scene's sentimental characteristics, Cairo's nostalgia is not a restorative desire to return to the past but appears closer to a reflective nostalgia that is a product of the inadequacies of the British centralised state form. This reflexivity emerges in the passage's direction at Grace and the use of binaristic language, creating an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy from a *local* perspective, subverting the dominant authorial hierarchies of media and political discourse that render communities such as Cairo's voiceless.

The Cut's regional devolutionary potential thus resides in the ways it addresses how the Leave vote was invariably caught up within a larger constitutional crisis and the need to resolve uneven development throughout England. Clearly embedded in both Cartwright's representation of regional-national relations and the Leave campaign's slogan of 'taking back control' was the desire to revolt against the injustices of centralised power in Britain and could be directed at both Brussels and a Westminster-located political elite. Ultimately, Cairo's contempt at being told 'what to do and what not to do' encapsulates how the continual marginalisation of several working-class groups has 'led to their democratic rejection of the UK's membership of the EU as another layer of government'.¹⁶⁴ The way *The Cut* mobilises reflective nostalgia as a vehicle for regional

¹⁶⁴ Virdee and McGeever, p. 268.

devolution indicates scepticism towards the novel's commissioned task of reconciling the 'two Britains' of Brexit and unifying the nation.

The Limits of Nostalgia

Thus far, I have argued that Cartwright utilises nostalgia to confront the ways regional uneven development, democratic deficit, and discourses surrounding the North played a decisive role in the outcome of the EU Referendum. In mobilising a locally particularised working-class nostalgia for the industrial past, *The Cut* attempts to present a regionally decentralised cultural politics. The persistent spectral presence of industrial decline sits uneasily alongside political discourses of a unified nation-state and the international orientation of capital central to the ideology of 'Global Britain'. In doing so, the novel's thematic concerns reflect an urgency for radical constitutional reform. In terms of its potential as a commissioned Brexit novel, as I have already argued, much of *The Cut's* promise resides in the way it attempts to transcend media and political narratives that were primarily dominated by a homogenising and class-inflected version of the North that continues to exist in the cultural and national imagination. More, in focusing on an inherently placed politics at odds with unitary state-national politics, the novel offers a necessary account that seeks to 'break away from metropolitan stereotypes of small-town backwardness. To explore what happened with a sense of *where* it happened'.¹⁶⁵ Thus, we might read *The Cut* as an attempt to counter Brexit's media and political discourse, offering a cultural form of devolutionary politics which asks important

¹⁶⁵ Anthony Barnett, *The Lure of Greatness*, p. 103 [my emphasis].

questions about structural uneven development and political representation throughout England.

I want to draw my argument to a close by turning to one of the ways in which the deployment of nostalgia in *The Cut* ultimately prevents the realisation of alternatives to the present, suggesting that the novel's recommendation for routes out of a Westminster-dominated democratic system remain conflicted and ambivalent. The novel's aesthetic and thematic mobilisation of nostalgia equivocates between its potential as a devolutionary politics and as a barrier to imagining a radical alternative to the present. Nowhere is this ambiguity clearer than in Cairo's romantic, restorative nostalgia for his former boxing career, a pursuit that projects issues of political representation into the cultural sphere. Cairo's participation in boxing is self-actualising; it is associated with becoming democratically active in the public sphere and provides a route for reclaiming a cultural form of identity linked to a blue-collar, working-class masculinity located in the region's past. Cairo reflects that '[t]here is a whole history of men who got knocked senseless, in order to put food on the table, one of the many histories buried in the hill. He tells himself he is part of a proud Dudley tradition'.¹⁶⁶ Unlike his predecessors, Cairo's boxing does not serve as a source of financial income, but a cultural sphere in which to displace his desire for a political voice. In the absence of an adequate democratic system, in *The Cut* – as in much of Cartwright's fiction, men construct an alternative 'imagined political community' through sporting events.¹⁶⁷ Here, the reclamation of boxing, a sport deeply embedded within Dudley's local history, functions as an attempt to retrieve a place-bound voice, conveying the desire for regional representation.

¹⁶⁶ Cartwright, p. 12.

¹⁶⁷ Anderson, p. 6.

Cairo quickly becomes fixated on reclaiming his boxing career to gain control over his existence, equating boxing with a form of self-actualising potential rooted in place-bound memory. Cartwright describes the running route Cairo takes in preparation for his boxing match in terms of its local specifics:

Cairo turns left, along Watson's Green Road, into the gloom. He has the idea of running the opposite way up the hill, should meet the boy somewhere on Cawney bank, the other side of the watershed, where the water slips down the hill and on and on to the River Trent and then out to sea and then back again as rain on the hills.¹⁶⁸

A desire to move through the town and recover its history characterises Cairo's training. He becomes fixated on another runner – 'the boy from Lupin road' – and locating a sense of agency through his physical capabilities.¹⁶⁹ In the face of political disempowerment, Cairo's spatial practices are aligned both with his individual identity, to 'prove to himself that he's still got it in him', and a reclamation of the region's history.¹⁷⁰

Yet, despite his apparent mobility in this scene, Cairo's spatial pursuits eventually present themselves as failed attempts at agency that are evacuated of any political potential and leave him stuck in the past. Upon realisation that he is unable to keep up with the boy with whom he has become increasingly preoccupied, Cairo 'feels a sense of betrayal at this and he winds down the run as if he's slowing a clock'.¹⁷¹ Here, the emphasis on temporality and the continual haunting of the past prevents Cairo's success in the present; despite his best efforts, he is unable to access the boxing community to the

¹⁶⁸ Cartwright, p. 28.

¹⁶⁹ Cartwright, p. 27. The idea of running as liberating or emancipatory may also be an intertextual reference to *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, in which running is a form of resistance to institutionalisation and class domination.

¹⁷⁰ Cartwright, p. 27.

¹⁷¹ Cartwright, p. 29.

same degree as previously. Since Cairo's childhood, the industry has moved on and is now a kind of gentrified escapism from the demands of cognitive labour: there are 'white-collar bouts and unlicensed meetings on the first Friday of every month'.¹⁷² Cairo's inability to reconstitute himself in the cultural sphere echoes the absence of self-government to liberate himself from the stasis that has come to characterise his present. Cairo's failed mid-life experimentation with his former boxing career signifies the novel's ambivalent deployment of nostalgia. While Cairo's nostalgia for his sporting youth becomes a source for 'value and meaning', this romantic, restorative turn to the past fails to offer a resource for altering the present.¹⁷³

The limits of the cultural sphere to overcome the everyday realities of political and social abjection neatly capture the paradox of nostalgia and its purchase against the ills of the present. As Boym puts it, nostalgia 'works as a double-edged sword: it seems to be an emotional antidote to politics, and thus remains the best political tool'.¹⁷⁴ Cartwright places limits on nostalgia's capabilities and critiques – somewhat self-reflexively – how civic participation is often projected onto the cultural sphere in the absence of political representation in the public sphere. The novel continually grapples with this impasse, between a romantic longing for a particular cultural-historical moment and its potential as a vehicle for constitutional change. *The Cut*, then, does not offer a straightforwardly restorative nostalgia, but operates within multiple nostalgic forms that are competing and culturally cross-cutting. The novel gestures towards the productive

¹⁷² Cartwright, p. 10.

¹⁷³ Tannock, p. 455.

¹⁷⁴ Boym, p. 58.

potential of nostalgia, yet it also suggests the limits of the past as a resource for constructing alternatives to the present.

This chapter has examined two Brexit novels which respond to the referendum as a symptom of the crisis of the centralised British state form and uneven development throughout England. The first half of this chapter suggested that *Missing Fay* articulates the ways in which the idea of England as a 'local' counterpoint to 'Global Britain' was central to the desire for political representation emerging during the referendum, while the second half considered the idea of local England in a specifically 'Northern', deindustrialised frame. Here, I argued that *The Cut*'s dominant trope of deindustrialisation articulates the ways in which the North continues to occupy a discursive and political role as a provincial counterpart to the modernity associated with London. Taken together, *The Cut* and *Missing Fay* present Brexit as an emphatically non-metropolitan story bound up in the regional economic inequalities and the relationship between the political elites of Westminster and 'England-without-London'. In this sense, these fictions demonstrate that there was more at stake in the referendum than the future of the UK's relationship with the European Union; at stake too was the viability of Britain as a multi-national state and the political status of its largest component territory, which may be redefined, it seemed, from the peripheries.

However, to varying degrees, these novels end up repeating the polarisation and dichotomies on which they are based. The multiple ways Thorpe and Cartwright represent their spatial settings and their communities augment a reifying image of Northern England. Neither text imagines their localities beyond the rigid regional and class stereotypes that characterised much political discourse during the referendum campaign. *The Cut* is a regional polemic, but its reliance on restorative nostalgia and

dominant deindustrial tropes exists in tension with its decentralising potential. The central dichotomy between Grace and Cairo likewise appears to reinscribe a contemporary manifestation of an overly simplistic North-South divide. *Missing Fay* also registers the profound difficulties of imagining Lincoln beyond the regional and class stereotypes that characterised political and media discourse during and after Brexit. The novel also evokes archetypes of 'Little England' that undercut any attempt to give voice to the 'forgotten' working class, reinforcing the barriers to imagining a progressive English civic nationalism. Both novels grapple with the regional novel's formal and stylistic limitations and its association with working-class nostalgia, posing a question regarding a literary form that can adequately go beyond Brexit's political discourse. Ultimately, both texts underline the limits of folding politics into culture, providing ambivalent prognoses for the novel's role in altering Britain's cultural and political imaginary after the referendum. This ambivalence leaves the question of the Brexit novel's capacity to reconcile the regional and the national – and the local and the global – unanswered. It is to this question that I turn in the final chapter.

Chapter 4: Global Britishness and the Neo-Primitive North

There is a scene in Sarah Moss' 2017 novel, *Ghost Wall*, in which seventeen-year-old Silvie attempts to reconcile the European travel of university students her age with her own rootedness in place: 'Rome and Paris. Now you can go to Prague and Budapest too [...] Pete had already been to Berlin, after his exams, had seen some of the wall come down'.¹ In the aftermath of the crumbling of the Berlin Wall and the acceleration of European integration, the students reflect on their plans for inter-railing, while Silvie cannot comprehend how 'just moving around counted as a rational use of time and money'.² In contrast to the carefree mobility of the students from an unnamed city in the South of England, Silvie's outlook from rural Northumbria is tentative and cautious, observing several social and geographical borders:³

How do you get to Berlin? Can you start at the bus stop, do you take an aeroplane or the train, several trains? I knew many of the British Isles, Holy Island and Anglesey, the Orkneys and several of the Hebrides, but I had never been overseas. We didn't have passports. Where was the money coming from, what did Dan and Pete and Molly's parents think of these plans?⁴

Despite the narrative taking place during an unspecified period in the 1990s, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Silvie cannot comprehend European citizenship or travel. *Ghost Wall's* historical setting is important in the context of Brexit, with the unification of Berlin

¹ Sarah Moss, *Ghost Wall* (London: Granta, 2018), p. 16.

² Moss, p. 16.

³ In this chapter, I use the term 'neoliberal globalisation' to acknowledge that neoliberalism and globalisation are not mutually exclusive processes and effectively coincided to create a singular and dominant capitalist economic model throughout the UK during the 1970s and 1980s.

⁴ Moss, p. 17.

signalling closer European integration for the UK and the triumph of global capitalism.⁵ This territorial disintegration is also a political and cultural symbol of global interconnectivity. Padmaja Challakere notes that the fall of the Berlin Wall is often used rhetorically as ‘a model for a landscape without barriers’, suggesting a function similar to that of *Ghost Wall*, where national and supranational borders are being redrawn and contested.⁶ Challakere concludes that contemporary fiction ‘must refuse to narratively reproduce the cozily optimistic allegory of the fall of the Berlin Wall’ and instead, ‘reimagine “globality” as the experience of being “haunted by walls” if it is to become aesthetically and politically dynamic and cosmopolitan’.⁷ In *Ghost Wall*, Moss’ depiction of Britain shortly after the unification of Berlin is certainly ‘haunted by walls’, but what emerges is far from ‘cozily optimistic’ or cosmopolitan. The differing spatial optics between Silvie and the university students – one European, unhindered by territorial borders, and the other inherently placed, delimited by the archipelago’s geographical boundaries – embody the ongoing division between the English local and a Europe-facing Britishness. As we saw in the previous chapter, this dualism was central to a post-Brexit-vote politics of nation, captured in Theresa May’s commitment to a project of ‘Global Britain’.

By 2019, May’s construction of Britain as a global power after Brexit had been condemned as ‘intractable’ and a dangerous ‘Empire 2.0’, with the UK Parliament’s

⁵ Francis Fukuyama argues that the end of the Cold War marked the triumph of ‘liberal democracy’, and the end of ideological alternatives to global capitalism. As he puts it, the 1980s marked ‘not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government’. See Fukuyama, ‘The End of History?’, *The National Interest*, 16 (1989), 1–18 (p. 1).

⁶ Padmaja Challakere, ‘Aesthetics of Globalization in Contemporary Fiction: The Function of the Fall of the Berlin Wall in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000), Nicholas Royle’s *Counterparts* (1996), and Philip Hensher’s *Pleasured* (1998)’, *Theory & Event*, 10.1 (2007), n.p.

⁷ Challakere, n.p.

Foreign Affairs Committee suggesting it risked being ‘a superficial branding exercise’.⁸ David Goodhart’s controversial analysis of the referendum in *The Road to Somewhere* (2017) identifies the metropolitan orientation of May’s ‘Global Britain’. Borrowing May’s anti-cosmopolitanism rhetoric during her first speech after the referendum, Goodhart seeks to explain the Brexit vote and its causes through a caricature of two groups he describes as ‘Anywheres’ and ‘Somewheres’.⁹ Goodhart argues that ‘the old distinctions of class and economic interest have not disappeared but are increasingly over-laid by a larger and looser one – between people who see the world from Anywhere and the people who see it from Somewhere’.¹⁰ In Goodhart’s hierarchy of mobility, the latter are more situated in place and identify with their local environment, encompassing groups such as ‘the left behind’, while the former have ‘portable’ identities, and comprise a university-educated, liberal metropolitan elite.¹¹

By Goodhart’s logic, Silvie certainly appears to be a ‘Somewhere’; her identity is emphatically ‘ascribed’ to place (according to Moss, the origins of her name translate to ‘Northumbrian goddess’) while the university students are ‘Anywheres’, who possess a

⁸ Oliver Daddow, ‘GlobalBritain™: The Discursive Construction of Britain’s Post-Brexit World Role’, *Global Affairs*, 5.1 (2019), 5–22 (p. 5); David Olusoga, ‘Empire 2.0 Is Dangerous Nostalgia for Something That Never Existed | David Olusoga’, *The Guardian*, 19 March 2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/19/empire-20-is-dangerous-nostalgia-for-something-that-never-existed>> [accessed 31 August 2020]; Foreign Affairs Committee, ‘Global Britain: Sixth Report of Session 2017–19’, 2018, p. 3 <<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcaff/780/780.pdf>> [accessed 31 August 2020].

⁹ David Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2017), p. 3.

¹⁰ Goodhart, p. 3.

¹¹ Goodhart, p. 3.; Research from the Ashcroft Poll likewise highlights how voters who saw globalisation as a negative force voted by a large majority to leave. See <https://lordashcrofthpolls.com/2016/06/how-the-united-kingdom-voted-and-why/> [accessed 31 August 2020].

European outlook indifferent to place-bound modes of belonging.¹² Exploring the tensions between a past which is anchored in place and an increasingly borderless future, *Ghost Wall* tells Silvie's story as part of her father's re-enactment of British pre-history. Originally from an unspecified town in the North-West near Burnley, Silvie and her family travel to a remote rural location in Northumbria, joined by Professor Slade and a group of university students, and take part in an experiential archaeology project. Living as Ancient Britons, they leave technology behind, dress in Iron Age tunics, eat a Palaeolithic diet of foraged or hunted foods, and observe Iron Age rituals. Silvie's father, Bill, obsessively idealises the Iron Age, driven by a xenophobic desire for an ethnopurist Britishness. For Bill, the trip is more than a simple pastime. It presents the opportunity to validate his belief that there is 'some original Britishness somewhere, that if he goes back far enough he'll find someone who wasn't a foreigner'.¹³ Bill's conception of Britishness does not appear to include anywhere outside of England, however. Told from Silvie's perspective, the narrative centres on Bill's search for 'his own ancestry, a claim on something, some tribe sprung from English soil like mushrooms in the night'.¹⁴ In the isolation of a make-shift hut near Hadrian's Wall, Silvie's life is contingent on Bill's obsession with recreating Iron Age Britain; rather than travelling the globe and immersing herself in other cultures, she is living as Ancient Britons did, hunter-gathering and 'learning to walk the land the way they walked it two thousand years ago'.¹⁵

¹² Moss, p. 19.

¹³ Moss, p. 20.

¹⁴ Moss, p. 45.

¹⁵ Moss, p. 34.

The global citizenship of Britain's 'Anywheres' was the target of May's now-infamous assertion that 'if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere'.¹⁶ The former Prime Minister's attack on cosmopolitan identities appears to contradict her commitment to 'Global Britain' in the very same speech, indicating acceptance of 'the global' only insofar as it is part of a 'progressive' reframing of Britishness as a world power outside the EU. As we saw in the previous chapter, the tensions between England as an anachronistic and localised counterpoint to a 'global' Britishness has emerged as a recurrent preoccupation of literary responses to Brexit. Both *The Cut* and *Missing Fay*, for example, register the difficulties of going beyond the polarising rhetoric demonstrated by both Brexit discourse and Goodhart's analysis. Here, while at first glance Silvie appears to be a 'Somewhere', the perspective of *Ghost Wall's* protagonist operates at the intersection of a placed isolationism and a more interconnected social outlook, gesturing towards a dialogue between these two opposing sides of the Brexit culture war.

Ghost Wall is not the only Brexit novel in which there has been a primitive turn to place. Fiona Mozley's *Elmet* (2017) also centres on a family's isolation from the outside world. Located in a remote, unnamed rural area of Yorkshire, *Elmet* tells the story of Cathy and Daniel Price and their father, John. After the disappearance of Cathy and Daniel's mother, they move from the city to a house that John builds with his bare hands from the nearby wood, living self-sufficiently – but unlawfully – on unused land. According to John, the copse is 'theirs alone', with the family's self-contained lifestyle a deliberate attempt to keep the children away from what John perceives as the dangers of

¹⁶ Theresa May, 'Theresa May's First Speech to the Nation as Prime Minister: In Full', *The Independent*, 13 July 2016 <www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-mays-first-speech-to-the-nation-as-prime-minister-in-full-a7135301.html> [accessed 1 April 2020].

modern life; he wanted to 'keep us separate, in ourselves, apart from the world'.¹⁷ Cathy and Daniel are raised with little contact outside of their family and a few trusted friends, living without technology, mostly eating the seasonal produce that they hunt and gather. Central to both novels is a concern with time, pre-capitalist social practices, and place-identity established through environmentalism. Yet, neither *Ghost Wall* nor *Elmet* were published as historical novels. In both of these texts, the past occurs alongside the present as a response to the spatial and temporal implications of an increasingly 'global' Britishness.

Following on from the last chapter, the processes of what is another form of localised nostalgia will be the central focus of this final chapter. Chapter 3 argued that nostalgia had been mobilised in Brexit fiction as a rejection of the centralised British state form, demonstrating how the freighted relationship between the deindustrialised heartlands of England and its metropolitan core, and questions of England's political status, remain urgent constitutional concerns. Here, I directly address globalisation as a threat to the nation-state that has been harnessed by the British state and rearticulated as an explicit politics of nation in the post-Brexit-vote period. Both *Elmet* and *Ghost Wall* might be read as part of what Greg Garrard has termed 'Brexit ecocriticism', a subgenre of post-Brexit-vote ecocritical cultural production Garrard associates with new ecologies within deindustrialised cities.¹⁸ Garrard describes the aim of Brexit ecocriticism as depolarising debates surrounding the referendum by 'challenging and unpacking stereotypes of political opponents, while also seeking to historicise and ecologise the

¹⁷ Fiona Mozley, *Elmet* (London: John Murray, 2017), p. 48.

¹⁸ Greg Garrard, 'Brexit Ecocriticism', *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, 22.1 (2020), 1–15 (p. 3).

moment as it remains unresolved'.¹⁹ Following Garrard's view, we might read *Elmet* and *Ghost Wall* as two examples of Brexit ecocriticism, whose distinct manifestations of neo-primitivism attempt to reterritorialise England as a heterogeneous place, opposing the British government's post-Brexit-vote appropriation of globalisation under 'Global Britain'. While *Elmet* presents a version of neo-primitivism centred on environmentalism as a basis for establishing a decentralised place-identity, *Ghost Wall's* neo-primitive attachment to place is closer to an imperial nostalgia rooted in landscape aesthetics, a characteristic Garrard identifies within Brexit ecocriticism.²⁰ Despite their distinctiveness, both Moss and Mozley's neo-primitive narratives express nostalgia for place-bound affiliation in England. In his theorisation of the radical potentialities of nostalgia, Alistair Bonnett explains that

[i]n the time of modernity, solidarity and authenticity become idealised and identified with the past. Thus the hope of regaining community and the reintegration of life and labour constantly threatens to offer, or resort to, the pre-capitalist and organic past as a source of socialism's most basic hopes.²¹

By examining the primitive mode in these two novels, I suggest that post-Brexit-vote neo-primitivism represents a literary attempt to place or 'reterritorialise' England in response to globalisation in its current incarnation under the British state.²² In this sense, *Ghost*

¹⁹ Garrard, p. 14.

²⁰ Garrard, p. 3.

²¹ Alastair Bonnett, *Left in the Past Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 29.

²² I understand that 'deterritorialisation' has a particular philosophical understanding under Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Anti Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). However, my comprehension of the term here is distinctively spatial and evokes its anthropological use within globalisation studies. The way in which a universalising logic of global totality has led to the erasure of place-bound identity has been described as 'deterritorialisation', and primarily been used to describe 'the emergence of new forms of culture that are no longer anchored in place'. For example, Ursula K. Heise describes deterritorialisation as 'the emergence of new forms of culture that are no longer anchored in place'. Specifically, it refers to 'the detachment of social and cultural practices from their ties to place that have been described in theories of modernisation and postmodernisation'. Similarly, Arjun Appadurai suggests that deterritorialisation has

Wall and Elmet's neo-primitivism responds to a desire in Northern England for a pre-capitalist condition in which there has been a 'reintegration of life and labour' and return to a territorialised experience of space and time.

Neo-Primitivism as Reterritorialisation

The concept of globalisation is difficult to define singularly and has been approached from a diverse range of academic disciplines within the humanities and social sciences.²³ Fredric Jameson captures the elusiveness of the term, describing it as a 'postmodern proverbial elephant' existing 'in the absence of a single persuasive and dominant theory', while Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri emphasise how globalisation 'is not one thing, and the multiple processes that we recognise as globalization are not unified or univocal'.²⁴ In literary studies, globalisation appears to be gradually replacing earlier key concepts in theories of the global contemporary such as 'postmodernism' and 'postcolonialism'.²⁵ The term is now more frequently associated with the sub-field of

now become a shorthand for 'locality as a property or diacritic of social life comes under siege in modern societies'. See Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 158; p. 179, and Appadurai, *Modernity at large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 179. Anthony Giddens' notions of 'disembedding' or 'time-space distanciation' describe deterritorialisation in the context of globalisation, where identities and power structures become detached from fixed spatial co-ordinates. According to Giddens, this process occurs due to advances in technology that serve to 'empty' localised space by separating space and time. See Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 20.

²³ Appadurai's five 'scapes' of globalisation – ethnoscaples, technoscaples, ideoscaples, financescaples, and mediascaples – testifies to the multi-disciplinarity of globalisation. See *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 33.

²⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (New York: Duke University Press, 1991), p. xi; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. xv.

²⁵ Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, p. 4; For an analysis of the relationship between globalisation and postcolonialism, see Simon Gikandi, 'Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality' *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100.3 (2001) 627–658.

World Literature, which approaches literary production as a 'world-system' that is profoundly unequal and imbricated with the inequalities of international capitalism.²⁶ Arjun Appadurai examines the cultural dimensions of globalisation and the disjuncture between 'cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenisation'.²⁷ He suggests that 'the new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order than cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing centre-periphery models', identifying a range of theoretical implications especially for postcolonialism or economic analyses which often rely on such a binary.²⁸

Some of the earliest and most influential engagements with globalisation approached the phenomenon as an economic process and the spatial articulation of capitalist expansion.²⁹ From the 1970s onwards, globalisation became frequently associated with the economic model of neoliberalism, alongside

the deregulated expansion of speculative capital; rapid technological development, especially in communicative technology; transnational production and the weakening of labour movements; the reforming of some international trade agreements and an increasing multinationalisation of some corporations.³⁰

Despite the range of critical perspectives on globalisation alluded to above, globalisation's cultural and economic benefits are experienced very unevenly.³¹ While

²⁶ Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', *New Left Review*, 1 (2000), 54–68 (p. 55).

²⁷ Appadurai, p. 32.

²⁸ Appadurai, p. 32.

²⁹ See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Historical Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) and Doreen Massey, *World City* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

³⁰ Liam Connell and Nicky Marsh, *Literature and Globalization: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. xvii.

³¹ See Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* and Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007). For the literary implications of globalisation's uneven development, see Moretti (2000) and Sharae Deckard and others, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

bearing close commonality to the more utopian notion of cosmopolitanism, globalisation is much less unified and equal, leading to – and contingent upon – the process of ‘combined and uneven development’.³²

The linkage between globalisation and reterritorialisation reside in the former’s economic correlates, which have implications for the experience of space. For instance, David Harvey connects globalisation’s economic and spatial consequences, arguing that the economic processes of combined and uneven development are felt as, and intensified by, a particular spatio-temporal characteristic of global modernity termed ‘time-space compression’.³³ In his landmark study, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), Harvey coined ‘time-space compression’ to describe a deterritorialising process whereby the world is experienced as a smaller place.³⁴ Due to the development of technology and the interconnectedness of production systems across the world, social communication and financial expansion were no longer restricted by geographic distance or time, leading to an acceleration of everyday life that was increasingly detached from spatial co-ordinates and experienced instantaneously. This ‘compression’ of space and time is linked to uneven development because it relies on the ability to access a globalised social and financial arena, the absence of which results in a ‘disorientating impact upon political-economic practices, the balance of class power, as well as upon cultural and social life’.³⁵ The desire for a stable place-bound political and social life expressed in *Elmet* and *Ghost*

³² Deckard and others, p. 11.

³³ Harvey, p. 240.

³⁴ See especially, Harvey, ‘Time-Space Compression and the Postmodern Condition’ in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, pp. 240-270.

³⁵ Harvey, p. 284.

Wall and their dominant primitive aesthetics can be understood in part as a reaction to this disorientation.

The 'speeding up' of time and 'spreading out' of space has brought the nation-state's weakening as 'an imagined political community'.³⁶ Roland Robertson suggests that globalisation can be defined as 'the intensification of a consciousness of the world as a whole', while, for Ulrich Beck, globalisation 'denotes the processes through which sovereign national states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations, identities and networks'.³⁷ Echoing the observations of Robertson and Beck, Hardt and Negri propose that globalisation represents a new dematerialised version of Empire in place of the nation-state, arguing that 'the sovereignty of the nation-state, while still effective, has steadily declined' in the face of global capitalist forms of sovereignty in the last few decades.³⁸ In the same year, Jameson also asked whether globalisation means that the concept of the nation-state is simply 'over and done with'.³⁹ Yet, while many theorists often position globalisation in direct contradistinction to the concept of 'nation', and attempt to 'reach beyond the nation and around the globe', my approach to globalisation in this chapter concerns precisely how the state has appropriated a rhetoric of globalisation as an explicit state nationalist politics in the post-Brexit-vote period.⁴⁰ Under this state logic, Britain is

³⁶ Anderson, p. 6.

³⁷ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992), p. 11; Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992), p. 8.

³⁸ Hardt and Negri, p. xi.

³⁹ Fredric Jameson, 'Globalization and Political Strategy', *New Left Review*, 4 (2000), 49–68 (p. 50).

⁴⁰ Heise, p. 6.

reconfigured as an outward-looking global power, maintaining sovereignty in the face of globalisation's weakening of the national-state form.

Within this theoretical framework, primitivism's emphasis on place and the local can therefore be understood as a process of reterritorialisation. If globalisation represents a new deterritorialised politics of nation as a global entity, primitivism's privileging of a placed conception of environmental, political, and economic systems may represent a reaction to globalisation's erasure of geographic place. One of the earliest manifestations of primitivism from the 1750s onwards may be found in the figure of the 'noble savage', historically associated with the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who was said to exist in peaceful harmony with the natural environment.⁴¹ Notably, the noble savage was also heavily associated with nostalgia, in terms of an imagined past of ecological simplicity, authenticity, and anti-modern values.⁴² Michael Bell suggests that the term refers to 'the recreation of what many anthropologists have believed to be the most essential qualities of pre-civilised feeling and thought'.⁴³ Bell proposes two broad categories reflecting a divergence that has emerged in literary uses of primitivism. According to Bell, there are writers who 'attempt to actually recreate the mentality and sensibility of primitive man as it were from the inside' and those who 'use the primitive motif more externally as an idea or metaphor'.⁴⁴ This latter use of what Bell describes as 'conscious primitivism' identifies the potential of a primitive literary motif to comment

⁴¹ See Terry Jay Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁴² See Parita Mukta and David Hardiman's study of the ecological sensibilities epitomised in the noble savage as a form of nostalgia: 'The Political Ecology of Nostalgia', *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 11.1 (2000) 113-33.

⁴³ Michael Bell, *Primitivism* (London: Methuen and Co Ltd, 1972), p. 8.

⁴⁴ Bell, p. 6.

on or critique the present. Although there are commonalities between Bell's view of primitivism and my own use of the term, twenty-first-century manifestations of neo-primitivism appear to work differently in their specific spatial and temporal response to the new geopolitical developments of neoliberal globalisation.

It is important to note that the regional literary uses of primitivism I discuss here are distinct from historical imperial uses of the term to signify Eurocentric modernity defined against an uncivilized 'other'.⁴⁵ For example, Ben Etherington's *Literary Primitivism* (2017), proposes that literary primitivism was an aesthetic project formed as part of British imperialism. As a result, Etherington argues that it is 'commonly regarded a unidirectional ideological projection from the coloniser onto the colonised: a racial and imperialistic discourse according to which Western artists and thinkers idealise those non-Western peoples whom they suppose to be "primitive"'.⁴⁶ Here, Etherington identifies the association of primitivism as a colonial project, drawing on the argument that modernist literary and artistic production turned to the colonial periphery to rejuvenate imperialist sentiment by evoking colonial or tribal images.⁴⁷ Etherington goes on to identify how contemporary manifestations of primitive social practices may be re-deployed in literature and culture as a negation of the capitalist world system, touching briefly on the significance of primitivism's localised or spatial characteristics:

literary primitivism's futurity was decidedly local, pointing to the disaggregation of social realities rather than their unification. [...] [W]e might call this 'worlds

⁴⁵ See Victor Li's account of primitivism's colonial uses, *The Neo-Primitivist Turn: Critical Reflections on Alterity, Culture, and Modernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

⁴⁶ Etherington, p. xii.

⁴⁷ For an examination of literary modernism and the primitive, see Jed Etsy's *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) and Dominic Head, 'Rural Primitivism', in *Modernity and the English Rural Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) pp. 92-124.

literature': literature that projects divergent realities, creating a situation in which the universal will consist of the deepening and coexistence of all particulars.⁴⁸

Taking Etherington's proposition that literary primitivism might initiate 'the deepening and coexistence of all particulars', this chapter focuses on a contemporary version of primitivism that I refer to as neo-primitivism. In what follows, I examine neo-primitivism's place-bound potentialities, exploring the extent to which it functions in post-Brexit-vote literary production as a political praxis against the British state's appropriation of globalisation and its implications for the experience of place. Victor Li provides a useful explanation of the shift from primitivism to neo-primitivism, arguing that the latter 'follows the trajectory of Western thought from nineteenth-century evolutionism and the belief in universal histories of progress to twentieth-century cultural relativism and the so-called postmodern incredulity towards modern universalist narratives'.⁴⁹ In this sense, my use of neo-primitivism in this chapter describes a literary response to Brexit which attempts to represent England in localised, placed terms. To varying degrees, *Elmet* and *Ghost Wall* hint at a placed version of neo-primitivism located in both Yorkshire and the North-East that pulls against a state-led narrative of globalism that obscures socio-economic and political inequalities within England. In doing so, neo-primitivism emphasises how places within Northern England are affected by the reach of globalisation, contributing towards a territorialised representation of the North in particular and England as a whole.

However, it is crucial to note that while these novels acknowledge the political potential of a placed neo-primitivism, they do not provide a clear utopian vision of the primitive as an alternative to the present. Instead, primitivism helps articulate the roots

⁴⁸ Etherington, p. 172.

⁴⁹ Li, p. 3.

of anti-globalisation sentiment, rather than being offered as a possible democratic or political project. Both *Elmet* and *Ghost Wall*'s pre-modern lifeways are characterised by the persistence of historic social hierarchies including sexism, xenophobia and, for adolescent narrators Daniel and Silvie, alienation from the longed-for outside world. While *Elmet* presents an environmental primitivism that forges a localised egalitarian democracy based on ecological sustainability, placed networks, and social collectivity, this decentralising potential is undermined by the re-emergence of oppressive gender hierarchies, violence, and social isolationism. Likewise, returning to Svetlana Boym's 'restorative nostalgia', xenophobia and attachment to an imaginary ancestral Britishness underpins *Ghost Wall*'s neo-primitivism.⁵⁰ Ultimately, these neo-primitive imaginaries are limited by their idealisation of historical myth and reinforcement of systems of oppression, foreclosing any meaningful social or environmental promise.

Decelerated Times and the Environmental Ethics of Place: *Elmet*

In terms of negating processes of global modernity, *Elmet* emphasises a reconceptualisation of time and foregrounds the intimate connection between time, space, and place.⁵¹ The novel's title and epigraph, for example, not only reference a heavily decelerated 'glacial', geological version of time, but also situate the text within Yorkshire's longer cultural and political history:

Elmet was the last independent Celtic kingdom in England and originally stretched out over the vale of York... But even into the seventeenth century this narrow cleft

⁵⁰ Boym, p. xvii.

⁵¹ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), p. 14.

and its side-gunnels, under the glaciated moors, were still a ‘badlands’, a sanctuary for refugees from the law.⁵²

Both *Elmet*'s title and epigraph are taken from Ted Hughes' poetry collection, *Remains of Elmet* (1979), which is similarly embedded in a particular geography of Yorkshire. The collection presents Hughes' poetry alongside photographs of the Calder Valley where he grew up, a landscape which – as *Elmet* demonstrates – is saturated with history and the socio-economic implications of deindustrialisation in Northern England. Published one month after Margaret Thatcher's election victory, the bleak tone of Goodwin's black-and-white photographs alongside Hughes' poetry captures the disaffection felt throughout Northern England which, as we have already seen, is often articulated in the landscape.⁵³ This location of place within an intertextual historical lens reconnects space and time in the process of reterritorialisation, echoing neo-primitivism's prioritisation of local history as a kind of 'claim' to the land. The epigraph goes further in framing the geographic area of Elmet as a *political* territory, describing the place as a 'badlands', a 'sanctuary for refugees from the law', an 'independent' area outside the jurisdiction of the centralised British state and its laws. The area's status as the Celtic Kingdom also alludes to long-standing competing nationalisms within Britain as a multi-national state and England itself, framing the novel within a broader narrative of constitutional fractures and geopolitical division.⁵⁴ In the context of Brexit and current debates surrounding

⁵² Mozley, n.p.

⁵³ It is worth noting that Hughes has been identified as contributing towards decentralising momentum in regional poetry in the post-Thatcher period. James Underwood argues, with reference to Hughes' work, that 'behind "diversity" and "regional inequality" there usually lies a history of political, economic and social trauma – the very factors that make divergence necessary'. See James Underwood, 'Pit Closure as Art', in *British Literature in Transition: Accelerated Times, 1980-2000*, ed. by Eileen Pollard and Berthold Schoene (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) pp. 162-177 (p. 164).

⁵⁴ Since becoming the first British rural county to gain devolved powers in 2015, Cornwall continues to push for independence as a Celtic nation. In the event of an independent England, Cornish Celtic nationalism (the 'Cornish Question') would present an important internal tension to be resolved.

democratic deficit in Northern England, the novel's location is also notable, given that energies for a regional assembly remain in Yorkshire at a grassroots level.⁵⁵

Frequent allusions to stories and historical myths of the land root *Elmet* within a regional literary and cultural narrative of place. *Elmet's* neo-primitive rural wilderness evokes Yorkshire's previous literary function, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, as an anti-pastoral place of wildness and resistance. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* has been read as utilising the Yorkshire Moors to resist the South-East of England's internal colonisation of the North, serving as a symbolic uncivilised, primitive space.⁵⁶ Reviewers have also identified Mozley's mythologisation of the landscape, describing the novel as being at the forefront of 'Folk Realism', a new literary subgenre David Barnett argues is particularly suited to Northern England's rural landscape.⁵⁷ Similarly, *Elmet* has been described elsewhere as 'digging deep into the psychogeology of Yorkshire', reflecting the introspective turn towards place in contemporary English literary production that this thesis has traced thus far.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See the 'One Yorkshire' devolution agreement currently being pursued by 18 local authorities across the region: <https://www.york.gov.uk/council/one-yorkshire-devolution/1> [accessed 14 December 2020]

⁵⁶ Margaret Markwick, for example, reads *Wuthering Heights* as 'a rebuttal of the colonising tendencies of the south east's metropolitan elite'. "'Gold Put to Use of Paving Stones": Internal Colonialism in *Wuthering Heights*', *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature*, 134.1 (2018), 125–38 (p. 125). The intertextual link to *Wuthering Heights* is also evident in *Elmet's* female protagonist being named 'Cathy'.

⁵⁷ David Barnett, 'Folk Realism: The Literature Exploring England's Legends and Landscapes', *The Independent*, 2 March 2018 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/folk-realism-english-literature-countryside-legends-landscape-nature-gothic-writers-fantasy-a8234691.html> [accessed 11 October 2019]; Related novels that either centre on a particularly gothic psychogeography of place include Andrew Michael Hurley's *The Loney* (2014), Lee Harrison's *The Bastard Wonderland* (2016), the fiction of Ben Myers, especially *The Gallows Pole* (2017), Daisy Johnson's *Everything Under* (2018), and James Clarke's *Hollow in the Land* (2020).

⁵⁸ Catherine Taylor, '*Elmet* Leaves the Metallic Taste of Blood in the Mouth', *New Statesman*, 19 August 2017 <<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2017/08/elmet-leaves-metallic-taste-blood-mouth>> [accessed 11 October 2019].

Elmet's multi-layered decelerated temporalities pull against a universal standardisation of time. Anthony Giddens identifies the invention of the mechanical clock as key in the separation of time from space and the onset of modernity, solidified by uniformity in the social organisation of time; this standardisation of time established the pre-conditions for the 'emptying out' of space, the detachment of space from a sense of place.⁵⁹ In contrast to this process of 'time-space distancing', oral stories serve as historicised modes of belonging, providing Daniel's means to develop a relationship with the land. Mythical qualities and local stories that inflect the lives of its inhabitants infuse *Elmet's* geographical setting; Daniel describes how 'the soil was alive with ruptured stories that cascaded and rotted and then found form once more and pushed through the undergrowth and back into our lives'.⁶⁰ Later, he watches a hare running through the fields 'unlike any other' he has seen, describing the hare almost as an otherworldly creature, but also as a symbol of the mythological nature of *Elmet's* terrain: 'if the hare was made of myths then so too was the land at which she scratched'.⁶¹ Here, geography and history enmesh, with 'the ghosts of the ancient forest [...] marked where the wind blew'.⁶² Likewise, the stories John tells Daniel and Cathy are 'precious heirlooms' as they too become part of the history of the place.⁶³ John, in particular, is framed as part of a local mythology based on masculinity and violence, with a reputation '[a]mong certain types

⁵⁹ Giddens, p. 18.

⁶⁰ Mozley, pp. 5–6.

⁶¹ Mozley, p. 5.

⁶² Mozley, p. 5.

⁶³ Mozley, p. 16.

in the Yorkshire ridings and in Lincolnshire' and 'in the counties around there were few who had not' heard of him and his unparalleled physical strength.⁶⁴

Elmet's non-linear narrative also appears to reflect a temporally fragmented present. The opening scenes focus on the aftermath of the narrative's tragic conclusion, with Daniel walking up the railway line searching for Cathy before rewinding to the events leading up to the conflict that separated them. These brief vignettes in which Daniel retells the past are printed in italics, differentiating Daniel's present from his retelling of the main events; they occur against a recognisably modern backdrop of motorways, lorries transporting both goods and migrants across the world, and roadside cafés. When the narrative switches to Daniel's present, he describes how the memory of *'that evening in our house in the copse does not loosen. The stills do not fall from their reel. Each face and each gesture confirms its shape. Nothing slackens'*, echoing the persistence of the past and anticipating the violent final scenes of the novel.⁶⁵

The persistence of history and a decelerated experience of time are also bound up within *Elmet's* neo-primitivism. The novel frequently references contrasting temporalities, including a motif of seasonal change; nearly all of the chapters open on a description of local ecosystems and the season in which it is set, and descriptions of everyday life are heavily rooted in seasonal changes. The first thing Daniel recalls of moving to the copse is that they 'arrived in the summer when the landscape was in full bloom', and begins rooting himself and his home within this ecosystem: ⁶⁶

As soon as the external walls were up I planted seeds and bulbs [...]. It was the wrong time of the year to plant but some shoots came up and more came the

⁶⁴ Mozley, p. 19.

⁶⁵ Mozley, p. 16.

⁶⁶ Mozley, p. 4.

following year. Waiting is what a true house is about. Making it ours, making it settle, pinning it to the seasons, to the months and to the years.⁶⁷

Daniel's planting of the seeds and bulbs is a process of embedding, rooting himself and his house within a particular place and time; these gardening practices require patience and prolonged waiting periods, indicating a kind of permanence that allows an individual to dwell and form a place-bound sense of belonging. This desire to be 'in place' is reiterated in their home, which John builds using 'materials from the land and here about'.⁶⁸ Daniel boasts that it 'will last many dozen seasons longer' than houses in the nearest city, again returning to the idea of seasonal time as a controlling apparatus of everyday life and prioritising a stake in the land established through situatedness in place.⁶⁹

The decelerated pace of seasonal time contrasts with the intervals of trains that run by the woods' edge, indicating a simultaneously occurring modernity. Daniel, Cathy and John live beside the East Coast mainline, where trains travel from London to Leeds and further up to Edinburgh; these trains 'had timetables and intervals of their own' contrasting 'the long, indigo Adelantes and Pendolinos that streaked from London to Edinburgh' while the 'carthorse-trains chugg[ed] up to the knacker, they moved too slowly for the younger tracks and slipped on the hot-rolled steel like men on ice.'⁷⁰ This notation of multiple, differing temporalities and speeds pulls against globalisation's negation of time in time-space compression in favour of a territorialised experience of space and time. Daniel's recognition that '[i]n another world we might have grown up faster, but this was our strange, sylvan otherworld, so we did not' reiterates this

⁶⁷ Mozley, p. 9.

⁶⁸ Mozley, p. 8.

⁶⁹ Mozley, p. 8.

⁷⁰ Mozley, p. 7.

prioritisation of a decelerated experience of time and space.⁷¹ The ability to dwell in place is, in *Elmet*, a precondition for place-bound belonging while also indicating a neo-primitivism contingent on living synchronously with the rural environment and its seasonal cyclicity.

Elmet's environmental consciousness works productively to establish place-bound attachments that privilege the local. This ecocritical dimension relies on ethical and sustainable production methods, emphasising biocentrism and a non-hierarchical relationship with the non-human environment, and the ability to live from local produce that can be hunted or gathered without technology. While not strictly hunter-gatherers, Daniel, Cathy, and John's diet mostly consists of meat they have caught nearby. Using a bow and arrow, John hunts 'wood pigeon, rock dove, collared dove, pheasant and woodcock, if he caught them in the evenings coming to cover' and 'in the right season there was smaller game for breakfast', indicating an approach to food consumption which is environmentally conscious and sustainable.⁷² Importantly, it is comprised mostly of local animals and dictated by seasonal availability. *Elmet's* localised spatial setting echoes a new conceptualisation of the primitive marked by environmental consciousness, representing 'a world to which we should, apparently, wish to be returned, a world in which culture does not challenge nature'.⁷³ *Elmet's* association of the local with the environmental evokes the social and political movement of 'bioregionalism', which, as Timothy Clarke writes, 'proposes that human societies, their modes of production and cultures should reform themselves from the bottom up, decentralising to become

⁷¹ Mozley, p. 48.

⁷² Mozley, p. 12.

⁷³ Adam Kuper, 'The Return of the Native', *Current Anthropology*, 44.3 (2003), 389–402 (p. 395).

communities with close and sustainable relations to their local bioregions'.⁷⁴ As Clarke puts it, the goal of bioregionalism is to reduce to a minimum the physical distance between consumers and producers while also enabling the region to become 'a crucial agent in human identity and social organisation'.⁷⁵ In this sense, like the re-wilding project in Hall's *The Wolf Border*, *Elmet's* environmentalist neo-primitivism is imbricated with a regional decentralising impetus.

These 'devolutionary', neo-primitive ethics are part of what Ursula Heise terms an emphatically 'environmentalist discourse of place', which confronts ecological challenges through an emphasis on locality.⁷⁶ These approaches emphasise 'the importance of a sense of place, the reinhabitation of the local through residence, intimate familiarity, affective ties and ethical commitment'.⁷⁷ The ethical correlate to neo-primitive hunter-gathering is visible in the shift away from anthropocentrism towards a non-hierarchical relationship with the land and the animals that inhabit it. For instance, John's hens live up close to the house to protect them against the winter cold, and there is a marked degree of care when he kills his prey: 'he would take it in his hands as quietly as he could then snap its fragile neck. The little creatures never even knew they were dead'.⁷⁸ Here, neo-primitivism's environmental consciousness prioritises sustainable production practices in contradistinction to the ecologically harmful practices of global corporations

⁷⁴ Timothy Clarke, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 130.

⁷⁵ Clarke, p. 131.

⁷⁶ Ursula K. Heise, 'Deterritorialization and Cosmopolitanism', in *Literature and Globalisation: A Reader*, ed. by Liam Connell and Nicky Marsh (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 157–70 (p. 157).

⁷⁷ Heise, 'Deterritorialization and Cosmopolitanism', pp. 157–58.

⁷⁸ Mozley, p. 114.

– a modern presence echoed in the persistence of heavy goods vehicles that run alongside the setting of their home.

Aside from occasional cakes and biscuits in the homes of their small circle of friends, the family follow a Palaeolithic diet, supplemented by eggs laid by hens they keep in their garden alongside their vegetable patch and berries picked from the sides of the road. In addition to the game caught by John and Cathy, the family source vegetables from the local market, or John occasionally trades for meat from Andrew (one of his few friends), which is either bargained for or paid ‘in kind’. Lengthy descriptions of food throughout the novel prioritise a localised food economy. For example, when Daniel fries eggs from his hens for the family breakfast, he describes the process in great detail:

The bacon was from the butcher, Andrew, who was also one of Daddy’s few friends. It was well salted and he had cut it thickly but I made sure the rind was crisp before I lifted it from the skillet. The eggs fried quickly in the bacon fat and took on the salt from the meat so their bottoms formed caramel crusts while the yolks remained golden. I warmed the plates first in the oven, then finished them with a fresh slice of bread.⁷⁹

This particularised description of Daniel’s food preparation – from tending to the hens to consuming their eggs – and his pride in the cooking indicates a grounded production and consumption method that requires local social connections, time, and care, contrasting with the mass food production enabled by time-space compression. This global market hinges on the illusion of the seemingly endless productive capacity of land and food resources from around the globe, and a detachment between production and consumption due to dependence on food imports and (often exploitative) manual labour.

The opposition between this situated, environmental neo-primitivism and burgeoning capitalist domination forms the central antagonism of the novel, and one

⁷⁹ Mozley, p. 126.

which is primarily explored through the politics of land ownership and the right to habitation. The freighted relationship between John and Mr Price concerns the tension between John's personal stake in the land and Price's legal ownership. The latter signifies a dematerialised capitalist hegemony, a form of deterritorialised power enabled by wealth and rentier capitalism. When Price's two sons arrive at John's house on the suspicion that he has killed one of their pet pigeons, this class-inflected dynamic is acutely visible. Tom and Charlie Price 'ascend the hill in their land rover' wearing 'green wellington boots and waxed jackets'.⁸⁰ In contrast, Cathy and Daniel are 'sitting among the trees of the copse, watching from afar; Daniel is whittling green ash' having 'stripped the tender bar from a piece the length of [his] handspan' while Cathy 'held the corpse of a small mallard between her knees and was pulling fistfuls of feathers from its dappled skin'.⁸¹ In this early juxtaposition of the two families, *Elmet* contrasts a visceral place-bound attachment to the land with Price's disembodied, contractual ownership. In contrast to John, Price's claim to the land is analogous to how space is conceived under globalisation and is characterised by a distance between the individual and material territory. The novel portrays Price in a language that alludes to the British landed rural elite, with the notation of the Land Rover and waxed jackets speaking to a kind of ecotourism, a metropolitan approach to the land caught up in global capitalism and its reliance on class difference and stratification.

When Price threatens to drive John and his family off the land, John bemoans that he 'knew [he and his family] would care for this land in a way Mr Price never could, and never would. Mr Price does nothing with these woods. He doesn't work them. He doesn't

⁸⁰ Mozley, pp. 111-12.

⁸¹ Mozley, p. 112.

coppice them. He doesn't know the trees. He doesn't know the birds and animals that live here'.⁸² An environmental commitment underpins John's pre-capitalist form of ownership here, but the land is also the place where Daniel and Cathy's mother used to live. The repetition in John's dialogue points towards his deep personal affiliation; the very idea that 'a person can write something on a bit of paper about a piece of land that lives and breathes [...] means now' to him.⁸³ Presenting multiple and competing claims to the material terrain, the novel privileges a neo-primitive place-bound affiliation based on local familiarity and non-hierarchical approaches to the land over Price's contractual claim concerned with the land's exchange value.

Mr Price's absentee landlordship and exploitation of his employees also signifies his hegemonic capitalist authority. When John, Daniel, and Cathy begin their plan to overthrow Price, they listen to local stories within the community, learning that Price has mostly inherited the land he owns or bought up former Right-to-Buy council homes. Reflecting on the experience of privatisation, a member of the community describes how:

At least when I paid rent to council, I felt I could get things fixed. It were a slow process, always, but someone would come eventually and see to it, or whatever. I knew who to go to. I knew there were some kind of, what's word, process, no matter how tricky. I gave my money to council and I kept place nicely and in return I got a decent place to live. Now it's a private landlord and he doesn't give two shits.⁸⁴

This scene captures the effect of rentier capitalism in which Price represents a capitalist class that no longer invests in productive industry in order to generate profit, and increasingly relies on rents which have no productive value. Contrastingly, despite its

⁸² Mozley, p. 121.

⁸³ Mozley, p. 202.

⁸⁴ Mozley, p. 169.

flaws, social housing during the post-war consensus at least offered a tangible process in which tenants knew 'who to go to' to address property inadequacies. In the present, it appears that British capitalism is increasingly emphasising unproductive profit mechanisms such as rents in an autopoietic process. These disembodied, expansive economic conditions neglect the material conditions of everyday life and augment a class system signified through landownership.

Subtle references to deterritorialised economic systems in the novel also link the abstract nature of capitalist control to powerful, but faceless, networks. For example, in the local area,

most people [...] rent their homes from Mr Price [...] and if they don't rent from Mr Price, their landlord is a friend of his. All the landlords round here go drinking and shooting up at the manor. They all have dealings, as they say. They'll have some money invested together, bubbling in the same pot.⁸⁵

This scepticism towards the possibility of overthrowing Price and his class of fellow landlords highlights how deterritorialised forms of power intensify the effects of existing social hierarchies imbricated in the politics of landownership. Despite the fact Price and the tenant reside near one another, Price's faceless wealth and abstract business connections in *Elmet* are analogous to the ways in which businesses operate under globalisation, forming a social distance between the two. Daniel and Cathy's short work on Price's potato farm reiterates Price's association with an unequal and deterritorialised global financial system. The other farmhands are mostly individuals recently released from prison, who warn Daniel and Cathy that work on the farm is so exploitative that '[h]ardly anyone wants to do it – not even the Lithuanians – not worth it', explicitly

⁸⁵ Mozley, p. 130.

locating Price within an economy of global processes whose systems of inequality inform and shape remote, non-metropolitan areas of England.⁸⁶

While these glimpses of unequal systems in *Elmet* draw attention to neo-primitivism's social and environmental benefits and its bioregional practices, the neo-primitive is complicated elsewhere, becoming much more critical and ambivalent. As the novel progresses, the idealised image of a close-knit family and their rural seclusion begins to falter. The family's neo-primitive isolationism must give way to enable a localised, collective revolt against Price. The narrative foregrounds the family's isolation as part of neo-primitive social practices, yet frequently alludes to its limits and resultant alienation; even Daniel pines for a world outside of his family and the copse, reflecting that 'though I loved watching birds and beetles, watching human beings was the thing I loved best'.⁸⁷ While John hopes that isolationism will strengthen his children 'against the dark things in the world', as Daniel reminds us, 'there was nothing of the world in our lives, only stories of it. We had been taken out of our school and our home town to live with Daddy in a small copse. We had no friends and hardly any neighbours'.⁸⁸

It is through speaking to the local community, and conversations with old friends, that John can foment enough support to help overthrow Price. John's political project requires an abandonment of the primitive isolationism that has characterised the family's existence in the novel thus far in favour of a political community centred on meaningful relationships, social collectivism, and hospitality. John, Cathy and Daniel have 'been alone for too long' and when they host a dinner to assess the possibilities that lie in the

⁸⁶ Mozley, p. 159.

⁸⁷ Mozley, p. 146.

⁸⁸ Mozley, p. 83.

community, Daniel describes how ‘the prospect of so many faces coming up the hill to see us felt strange, like we were to be stripped naked and paraded’.⁸⁹ Yet, he feels ‘excitement as well as fear’, as his own character develops through hospitality and the opportunity to foster personal connections outside of his immediate family.⁹⁰ This transition is apparent in Daniel’s preparations for the event:

I busied myself with arrangements for the food we would serve. I calculated the amount we would need and saw that we got it in the day before. I picked spring vegetables from the patch and chopped them into chunks before setting them on skewers to char over the fire [...] Daddy sorted most of the meat but I ground offcuts and entrails and made little patties with barley and spice.⁹¹

The everyday act of preparing food for the community indicates a social network centred on openness and localism, presenting pre-capitalist ethics centred on collectivity in opposition to the individualistic ideologies of Price. Social collectivism underpins Daniel’s preparations and challenges a global conception of space and time defined by dematerialised capital. The simplicity and ordinariness of the tasks and use of local produce emphasise the importance of place, community and belonging, while Daniel’s use of ‘offcuts and entrails’ utilises every part of the animal and indicates an environmental sensibility that is attuned to issues of waste. The lengthy descriptive detail and the sentiments underpinning the act indicate that placed manifestations of community are more conducive to developing ethical values and meaningful social relations, but it also suggests the limits of primitivist isolation.

Elmet’s historical backdrop of deindustrialisation also works productively as a reterritorialisation of space and time. Chapter 3 identified how deindustrialisation has

⁸⁹ Mozley, p. 165.

⁹⁰ Mozley, p. 165.

⁹¹ Mozley, pp. 165–66.

been represented in post-Brexit-vote fiction as a process of place (or ‘Somewhere’ to return to Goodhart’s phrase) often manifesting in the present through nostalgia or in the material environment as a hauntological reminder of localised and identity-bearing manual labour. *Elmet* draws on the social qualities of industrial work in the revolt against Price as a form of collective action that prioritises a placed social network. For instance, the preparations and relationships forged by group meetings are inflected with a kind of reflective nostalgia, functioning as a contemporary manifestation of the social relations of former trade unions:

The jobs had gone twenty years ago or more. There was just a couple of warehouses where you could get work shifting boxes into vans. At Christmas-time there were more boxes and more vans but still not enough. There were jobs here and there for women: hair-dressing jobs, nannying jobs, shop-assistant jobs, cleaning jobs, teaching-assistant jobs if you had an education. But if you were a man and you wanted odd jobs or seasonal farm work [the carpark behind the Working Men’s Club] was where you met.⁹²

This is what Sherry Lee Linkon calls the ‘half-life’ of deindustrialisation, a temporal process in which the effects of deindustrialisation continue to manifest socially and culturally even if the community itself has developed a new economy.⁹³ *Elmet* presents a contemporary neoliberal employment landscape shrouded in immobility and stasis, centred on low-skilled service work. The scene testifies to the ways globalisation brings about ‘the uneven insertion of different territories and social formations into the capitalist world market’.⁹⁴ Unable to recover from deindustrialisation, the area’s employment opportunities are far from the promises of ‘Global Britain’. Instead,

⁹² Mozley, p. 151.

⁹³ Sherry Lee Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialization: Working-Class Writing About Economic Restructuring* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), p. 1.

⁹⁴ David Harvey, ‘The Geography of Class Power’, *Socialist Register*, 34, (1988), 49–74 (p. 49).

individuals engage in in a technologised, mass-produced globalised market from below. Rather than experiencing globalisation in the form of planetary connectivity and mobility, globalisation manifests itself in warehouse work and precarious forms of labour that do not offer a secure income but unstable work lifting boxes into vans before being transported across the world.

While the deindustrial past appears to signify place-bound social relations and meaningful forms of embodied manual labour, *Elmet* presents a tentative and cautious view of the romanticisation of the past. Ewart, a former labourer and friend of John's, 'spoke of the way things had been when people who lived together in the same communities also worked together, drank together, voted together and went on strike together'.⁹⁵ The self-actualising potential of manual labour enables a historicised and 'placed' mode of belonging, representing the 'spirit' and 'pride' of both the work and the camaraderie that came with it.⁹⁶ Yet, even this community spirit proves to be less aspirational than it at first appears. *Elmet* distinguishes between Boym's politically enabling reflective nostalgia and reactionary restorative nostalgia. The workers' desire for a place-bound community is complicated by details that caution against straightforwardly idealising the past. After one of their meetings, Vivien confronts Ewan's outright celebration of the industrial years, pointing out that '[t]hose men who would come together so naturally to support one another would go home drunk and beat their wives'.⁹⁷ Vivien punctures Ewan's restorative nostalgia, stating that '[t]here are dreams,

⁹⁵ Mozley, p. 141.

⁹⁶ Mozley, p. 171; p. 19.

⁹⁷ Mozley, p. 172.

Ewart, and there are memories. And there are memories of dreams'.⁹⁸ So, while the novel highlights the inequalities of the contemporary globalised world, *Elmet* does not offer a straightforward advocacy of returning to the past as it emerges in both primitive isolation or the localised communities formerly associated with industrial work, offering versions of the past shot through with social hierarchies, oppression and marginalisation.

The treatment of gender elsewhere in *Elmet* reiterates the double-edged qualities of neo-primitivism's social practices. While the novel's neo-primitivism appears to offer the potential for anti-capitalist social and environmental practices and a meaningful place-bound affiliation, it is also characterised by a primal masculinity contingent upon acts of violence. John's livelihood has primarily been sustained by working for Price as a bare-knuckle fighter.⁹⁹ Daniel tells us early on, that John has fought and killed men 'in the peat fields of Ireland' or 'in that black mud of Lincolnshire', but never in gymnasiums or auditoriums.¹⁰⁰ John is frequently likened to an animal throughout the novel, blurring the boundary between the 'human' and 'animal' to present the violence of bare-knuckle fighting as an innate characteristic of primitive masculinity. During a fight, John stands '[a]s still as a wolf. His eyes [...] fixed on his prey', with this physical prowess an essential part of John's identity, instilling primal animalism from which he draws physical and mental strength.¹⁰¹ Likewise, Vivian compares John's fights to the breach of great whales, suggesting that, for John, fighting serves a similar, almost meditative purpose: 'Like one of the great whales. And when he fights it's like one of their breaches. But bloodier, much

⁹⁸ Mozley, p. 172.

⁹⁹ Notably, neo-primitivism's gendered corporeal economy enables John to engage in boxing as place-making act, unlike Cairo's unsuccessful attempt at re-entering the white-collar, yuppified boxing scene in *The Cut*.

¹⁰⁰ Mozley, p. 13.

¹⁰¹ Mozley, p. 218.

bloodier. And it isn't a lone act. It's not just an animal and the elements. But it's the same. It quenches him'.¹⁰²

As the tension between John and Price reaches its apotheosis, John is eventually convinced to 'return to the fold' by Mr Price in the hope of winning the legal rights to the land. Here, the physicality of bare-knuckle fighting represents a neo-primitivist rejection of disembodied capitalist modes of production, offering a corporeal form of productive labour. As John explains:

I win fights because I am suited to the rules of those fights, Cathy. They're a test of strength and speed and endurance and I am the strongest, fastest and toughest man in Britain and Ireland. But take away those rules and it's anyone's guess who'd win. If someone pulled a knife on me, or a gun...¹⁰³

John's admission creates a juxtaposition between the labour of capitalist and the primitive. Bare-knuckle fighting's emphasis on the capabilities of the male body resists the ways in which global economies appear to prioritise technology – represented here in the knife or the gun – and an inherently disembodied form of labour. Bill's world is 'about muscle', standing in contrast to the technologised nature of modern urban life and the shift towards cognitive labour.¹⁰⁴ The fact that John's body is 'all [he] owns', illustrates how, in *Elmet's* gendered labour economy, the dematerialised currency of modernity has been replaced by the body as a form of corporeal primeval economy.¹⁰⁵

While it is possible to read the novel's focus on unregulated and gendered physical labour as a localised economy in opposition to globalisation, John's primitive masculinity

¹⁰² Mozley, p. 95.

¹⁰³ Mozley, p. 123.

¹⁰⁴ Mozley, p. 21.

¹⁰⁵ Mozley, p. 112.

ultimately restrains him and limits his freedom in the present. John's physical capabilities keep him tethered to Mr Price and operate within a capitalist logic centred on the male body's exchange value. Keen to accumulate John's physical labour for his own ends, Mr Price monopolises John's reputation as 'the strongest, fastest and toughest man in Britain and Ireland' and his own expansive social network as leverage in their long-standing feud.¹⁰⁶ This commodification of the masculine body is clear in Price's warning to Daniel that, if John loses the fight, 'he must return to the fold'.¹⁰⁷ Price boasts of earlier times when John would work for him, earning him money when individuals would bet on John's opponents during a fight. Price 'used to own' John's muscles and 'his mind [...], his fists, and his feet, his eyes and his ears and his teeth', echoing capitalism's hegemony and an economic system that reduces John's body to the parts that produce capital for Price.¹⁰⁸ Significantly, John's opponent, 'The Bear', has travelled to England from Eastern Europe. In this battle, the right to habitation rests on the physical defeat of a European 'other' figure. The fact that the species of the brown bear – the largest predator native to Britain – was last seen in England in Yorkshire between 425 and 594 indicates a bridging of medieval history and the present, and allegorises the tension between the English local and European integration as a process of globalisation.¹⁰⁹ In *Elmet*, 'The Bear' is predatory once again, and comes to represent both the direct competition for labour power constituted by economic migrants from Eastern Europe and a burgeoning borderless world.

¹⁰⁶ Mozley, p. 123.

¹⁰⁷ Mozley, p. 200.

¹⁰⁸ Mozley, p. 200.

¹⁰⁹ Helen Briggs, 'Lost History of Brown Bears in Britain Revealed', *BBC News*, 4 July 2018 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-44699233>> [accessed 28 December 2020].

Elmet's concern with the confines of gender conventions communicates this critique; both Daniel and Cathy struggle with their identity in a social environment that relies on essentialist gender binaries and rejects Cathy and Daniel's battle against their bodies and the social codes attached to them. The siblings are two sides of the same coin: Cathy embodies the violence and anger of her father, while Daniel is introverted, often wearing cropped t-shirts with tight jeans like his mother. An antithesis to John, Daniel is 'skinny all over' with 'slender, pale buttocks' and 'underdeveloped muscles'.¹¹⁰ Unlike those around him, Daniel does not appear to perceive the world in gendered terms. He tells us that 'I did not even think of myself as a boy' and is socially alienated due to his inability to perform the prescribed version of masculinity typified by his father.¹¹¹

Inversely, Cathy appears to possess the qualities missing from Daniel's character. Cathy 'wanted to be every inch of [her father]' but 'believed what he said about how different she was [...] how she had to find a different way of surviving'.¹¹² Cathy's internal conflict operates within a broader context of female oppression; she learns to accept her role in a society in which women commonly 'disappear' into rivers. She becomes accustomed to men who 'watch [her] closely' and cannot imagine that 'a pretty face might not be closed around pretty thoughts'.¹¹³ Small but frequent references to a threatening male sexuality punctuate the narrative and eventually culminate in Charlie Price's attempt to rape Cathy. Describing the attack to Daniel, she normalises it as an inevitable part of adolescence, reflecting that it's just 'the way it goes'.¹¹⁴ Here is a fundamental limit

¹¹⁰ Mozley, p. 176.

¹¹¹ Mozley, p. 176.

¹¹² Mozley, p. 59.

¹¹³ Mozley, p. 7.

¹¹⁴ Mozley, p. 270.

of neo-primitivism. Despite its ecological and localised benefits as a territorialised social practice, neo-primitivism's blurred distinction between human and animal is manipulated to legitimate acts of sexual violence. As Cathy describes:

I thought they'd got the scent of the foxes, maybe they had, they would have flushed it for the lads to shoot. But then they got my scent and came at me and I jumped up from the grass and Tom had his gun pointed in my direction. [...] [T]hey found me again a few days later. And then again.¹¹⁵

Likening the attack to a predator hunting its prey, Cathy presents these systems of oppression and violence as almost intrinsic to humankind and cannot see an alternative to her marginalisation.

This pessimism towards alternatives to the present is further indicated in the novel's ending. This point at which *Elmet* reaches its narrative climax emphasises the limits of neo-primitivism as an alternative to the present, suggesting that one set of inequalities have been replaced by another. The novel's peripeteia is the death of Charlie Price – Cathy has, in fact, strangled him but it is widely assumed to be John – resulting in a showdown in which the family are captured and held hostage by Price and his men. Cathy's murder of Charlie is a temporary subversion of primitivism's rigid social boundaries that have continually governed her and Daniel, and ultimately kills her father (and possibly herself). The novel's finale sees John captured and stabbed by Price, and Cathy, having later being caught along with Daniel, stripped naked and taken into another room with Price's employees, creating an image of female sacrifice. Cathy fights back and emerges from the room with a torch and a bucket of oil, before combining the two to cause a fatal explosion for all in the house except Daniel, who she instructs to flee the

¹¹⁵ Mozley, pp. 271–72.

scene.¹¹⁶ Here, systems of inequality in the present have simply been replaced by alternative social relations and power dynamics, offering a self-consciously critical engagement with the neo-primitive that remains cautious of its situatedness in the past. As such, while *Elmet* utilises a neo-primitive mode insofar as it represents a return to place as a mode of affiliation established through an environmental consciousness, the novel offers only a tentative prognosis for its potential to offer an egalitarian social practice or a democratic alternative to the unequal power structures governing the global present.

Archaeologies of Britishness and Simulated Neo-Primitivism: *Ghost Wall*

While *Elmet* represents a cautious exploration of neo-primitivism, *Ghost Wall's* mobilisation of this motif is even more sceptical. In Moss' novel, a reactionary neo-primitivism rooted in racism, violence, and female oppression operates as an attempt to simulate an 'authentic' British pre-history. In the context of Brexit, Bill's propensity for an ancestral national history serves as a satirical critique of the attachment to a mythological national past and the dangers of extreme modes of territorial affiliation that, as we saw in the previous chapter, were associated with the Leave vote. *Ghost Wall's* neo-primitivism is explicitly concerned with national territory, with much of the narrative centring on an archaeological re-enactment of pre-modern British life. Returning to the polarisation of 'Global Britain' as a place of 'Anywheres' and a 'local England' as a place of 'Somewheres', *Ghost Wall's* exploration of territorial, historical affiliation gestures towards the suppression of England as a place within a globalised conception of

¹¹⁶ While Vivian informs Daniel that she saw a figure leaving the house after the explosion, causing him to go in search of his sister, whether Cathy leaves the house alive remains unconfirmed in the novel.

Britishness. Bill's archaeological project slips between the idea of Ancient Britain and a territorial notion of England, centring on finding 'some tribe sprung from English soil like mushrooms in the night'.¹¹⁷ Bill's primitive desires are emphatically *Anglo-British*, relying on a vision of England which is virtually indistinguishable from the British nation-state. While the novel remains sceptical of the destructive potential of nationalism, repeatedly drawing attention to the constructedness of 'nation', this slippage between England and Britain, along with references to the Roman invasion, Hadrian's Wall, and a concern with a close relationship with the land, all exist in tension with the way Britishness is experienced as a deterritorialised statehood, rather than a place-bound and civic nationalism.

Ghost Wall's title foregrounds Moss' concern with territory and the material and symbolic significance of both material and cultural borders. In this novel, 'Ghost Wall' refers to a battlement made by Ancient Britons, hanged with the skulls of their ancestors. The walls were intended to close off outsiders and reassert a blood claim to the land; as the novel explains, the wall was 'more of a symbol, rather than a military necessity.'¹¹⁸ Moss refers not only to the actual ghost wall used as one of the last attempts by the Ancient tribes to resist the Roman Empire, but it also to Hadrian's Wall. While Bill views the Hadrian's Wall as proof that the 'Britons' threatened the Roman Empire, Professor Slade reveals that it is simply 'a marker' of 'the edge of empire, it's not to keep the barbarians out so much as to show where they are'.¹¹⁹ There is a further symbolic

¹¹⁷ Moss, p. 45.

¹¹⁸ Moss, p. 45.

¹¹⁹ Moss, p. 25. It is worth pointing out that Moss acknowledges that those involved in the fight against the Romans would not have identified as British. In response to Bill's valorisation of Britishness, Professor Slade replies: 'Celts, we tend to call them these days though they wouldn't have recognised the idea, they seem to have come from Brittany and Ireland, from the West'. Moss, p. 45.

significance to note here, since the wall remains an archaeological symbol of Britain's own ongoing internal fragmentation and, in the context of Britain's ongoing constitutional instability, indicates that Bill's search for 'Ancient Britain' is more about locating a pre-Roman *England* than a unified Britishness. In Bill's view, the repercussions of the Roman Conquest are tangible today, and he dedicates his life to reclaiming a pre-Roman 'pure' and 'authentic' Britishness through reproducing their lifeways and rituals. When Bill looks at the remains of the Roman Wall, Silvie notes how it 'was only a ditch, that first day, but at least it was a Roman ditch, a physical manifestation of Ancient British resistance marked on the land' and notes how Bill was 'drawing strength from it'.¹²⁰

Ghost Wall's neo-primitivism centres on the mythic and spiritual qualities of the bog people, and their association with an ancestral blood-claim to the land. Living in a remote rural settlement as pre-modern hunter-gatherers, the lifeways Bill instils in his family and the university students are modelled on the lives of the Ancient British tribes, who sacrificed bodies to be preserved in bogs as part of a ritualistic practice. As both literal and symbolic bodies of the land, the bog people function in Bill's view as an archaeology of Britishness that is connected to geographical territory and historical lineage. *Ghost Wall* shifts temporally between Ancient Britain – indicated through the representation of sacrificial practices – and the 1990s. The novel's opening scene anticipates *Ghost Wall's* ending, describing a female victim hanging over the bog as she occupies the liminal space between her present life and her future as a historical artefact. An omniscient narrative voice tells us that 'there is an art to holding her in the place she is entering now, on the edge of the water-earth, in the time and space between life and

¹²⁰ Moss, p. 26. Given the novel's concern with reactionary nationalism, further parallels may be drawn here to 'the wall', Donald Trump's proposed extension of the Mexico-US barrier.

death, too late to return to the living and not time yet, not yet, not for a while, to be quite dead'.¹²¹ Throughout the novel, the pre-modern rituals of putting bodies into the ground to be preserved allegorises Bill's desire for a place-bound identity and ancestral lineage. For him, the bog people represent an ancestral Britishness established through place, history, and violence.

What makes bogs an appropriate symbol of reterritorialisation is both their emphasis on place and the necessity for a decelerated temporality and a particular set of ecological conditions. The names of bog bodies are with very few exceptions place names – such as Tollund Man; Grauballe Man; Lindow Man; Yde Girl; Windeby Girl; Weerding Couple – gesturing towards a territorialised understanding of place and place-bound affiliation.¹²² Bogs are also, notably, a liminal landmass – occupying the boundary between land and water – and the bog bodies themselves are noted for their unique biological composition. Karin Sanders' explanation of the usages and particular biological properties of bogs is worth citing here:

The anaerobic condition of the bogs provides an environment that slows decomposition significantly. The bog water and the peat in some instances contain chemicals that naturally convert bodies into leather-like envelopes of preserved skin and hair. As a result, bodies in bogs have been able to survive for centuries with perfectly preserved features, fingerprints, nails, hair, and other distinct individual traits.¹²³

As Sanders notes, bogs have particular environmental associations, with the preservation of the bodies reliant entirely on climate conditions; the bogs must remain within a specific temperature range and not dry out, preventing the bodies from being exposed to the air.

¹²¹ Moss, p. 3.

¹²² Karin Sanders, *Bodies in the Bog and the Archaeological Imagination* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 9.

¹²³ Sanders, p. 2.

Yet, it is not the archaeological prospects of the bogs or the biological features of the preserved bodies that fascinate Bill; as Silvie tells us, her dad loved that the bog people 'could now only exist as victim, as the objects of violence'.¹²⁴ There is a clear environmental sub-text to Moss' exploration of contemporary Britain and its socio-political fractures.¹²⁵ Further to the environmental consciousness of neo-primitivism, the novel makes several references to wastage, energy resources, and processed food, but for Bill, this ecological awareness serves only as a legitimating pretext to his imperial desires. His neo-primitivism appears to be closer to a violent re-incarnation of *Elmet's* environmentally oriented primitive aesthetics. Reading a book on a teenage girl recently recovered from a bog, Bill focuses only on the violence behind how she might have died, indicating an engagement with pre-history which is less about archaeological or ecological research, but the cruelty and recreation of social order through human sacrifice.

The ancestral qualities Bill attributes to the bog people and their rituals indicate that his fascination with this group is part of his imagination of Britishness predicated on bloodline. When Bill takes Silvie to a museum to see the Lindow Man, a bog body from Cheshire, he tells her 'that's where you come from, those folk, that's how it used to be', displacing the European origins of the bog people to present it as a form of British heritage.¹²⁶ The desire for the existence of a British pre-history is also evident in Silvie's description of her father's obsession:

¹²⁴ Moss, p. 69.

¹²⁵ The environmental thrust of *Ghost Wall* emerges more forcefully in Moss' most recent novel, *Summerwater* (2020). Set in a rural holiday park in Scotland in the aftermath of the EU referendum, the novel explores Brexit within a wider frame of climate crisis, making several references to Britain's reliance on EU support for ecological conservation.

¹²⁶ Moss, p. 39.

Dad would like to find a body up there, I thought, most of all he would like to be the one out gathering peat to see us through the winter, the one who, aching after hours of honest labour, leans on the spade once again, levers the clod that's lain for centuries over the compacted prehistoric trees of the peat bog and sees among the roots and frantic worms a human face, a face last seen two thousand years ago by the neighbours who led their friend naked across the moor, who bound him hand and foot.¹²⁷

Silvie's description of her father's desire for a version of Britishness he can excavate from the soil echoes a wider cultural functioning of the bog people, who have 'come to connote the sort of depth we associate with "roots" in the meaning of ancestry, pedigree, family tree, and national identity'.¹²⁸ Bill's attachment to bog bodies alludes to an ethnonationalism centred on ancestry and deep historical lineage that is both articulated corporeally and heavily affiliated with place.

Silvie's role as a kind of pet project for Bill's obsession with Iron Age Britain reiterates this place-bound sensibility. Her name speaks to the artifice underpinning Bill's mythologisation of Britishness and, according to the novel, originates from an Ancient British goddess. While Silvie believes her father's desire for her to 'have a proper native British name' is a product of his archaeological hobbies, the university students possess a degree of cultural capital attuned to the xenophobia underpinning Bill's primitive impulses.¹²⁹ Pete diagnoses that

he likes the idea that there's some original Britishness somewhere, that if he goes back far enough he'll find someone who wasn't a foreigner. You know it's not really British, right? I mean, *Sulvia*, it's obviously just a version of *Sylvia* which means – *of the woods* in Latin, I said, yes, I do know, a Roman corruption of a lost British word.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Moss, p. 91.

¹²⁸ Sanders, p. 12.

¹²⁹ Moss, p. 18.

¹³⁰ Moss, p. 20.

The weight that Bill ascribes to ancestral lineage and a tangible, 'original' Britishness occurs in opposition to the students' perspective, who understand the very idea of an innate Britishness to be a falsity. Bill wanted 'his own ancestry, [...] lineage, a claim on something. Not people from Ireland or Rome or Germania or Syria', echoing a regressive post-imperial nostalgia for a contracted and territorialised sense of national belonging.¹³¹ It is also worth noting both the regional and Roman correlates of Silvie's name. According to Professor Slade, Sylvia is 'a local deity' a 'Northumbrian goddess of springs and pools, co-opted by the Romans'.¹³² A product of the Celts and the Britons, the irony of Silvie's name forms another critique of the idea of Britishness as a 'native' identity to which one can return.

The symbolic association of the bog people within literary culture also indexes an irony in Bill's association of the bog people with an 'original Britishness'. Moss further complicates Bill's ethnopurist approach to Ancient British tribes and historicised sense of place, undermining his misplaced attachment to bog people as proof that Britain is both a geographic and ethnic formation dating back to pre-history. The intertextual significance of bogs in the wider context of the UK further complicates Bill's appropriation of the bog people to historicise and 'place' Britishness. Seamus Heaney's well-studied 'bog poems', for example, deploy the bog as a symbol for Irish national identity and its internal colonisation within the British Empire, with the poems becoming associated with The Troubles in Ireland.¹³³ Indeed, the literary significance of bogs in

¹³¹ Moss, p.45.

¹³² Moss, p. 10.

¹³³ Rob Giblett notes Heaney's popular cultural association with the bog as a symbol of Irish national identity. See *Postmodern Wetlands: Culture, History, Ecology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 245.

Heaney's poetry, *Ghost Wall's* unspecified historical setting of the 1990s – a decade in which the Good Friday agreement officially ended The Troubles – and Bill's outward hostility towards the Irish, all gesture towards a wider political backdrop of constitutional instability in the Union.¹³⁴ Silvie tells us that her father 'didn't like the Irish, tended to see Catholicism in much the way as the earlier form of Roman imperialism', viewing them as 'foreigners'.¹³⁵ The Irish literary connection to bog people points to flaws in Bill's logic, an irony further intensified by the fact that bog bodies are found in several different countries and cultures, with many located in parts of Northern Europe.¹³⁶

Returning to Goodhart's analysis of the Brexit referendum, an opposition between the regional stasis of 'Somewheres' and the infinitely mobile 'Anywheres' is played out in the dynamic between Bill and his family and Professor Slade and his students, who symbolise the local and the global, respectively. Both class and ideology immediately divide the group; Professor Slade and his students are middle-class, educated, and well-travelled cosmopolites from a university in an unnamed part of the South of England. They appear to represent a stereotype of what Lisa Mckenzie describes as "cosmopolitan" "Remainers", who are typically middle-class, urban, white-collar professions [sic] and who possess economic, social and cultural capital of much broader value'.¹³⁷ By contrast, Silvie's family are decidedly working-class; Silvie's mother is a supermarket cashier and her father, Bill, is currently a bus driver by trade, but not by

¹³⁴ It is worth noting Heaney's particular focus on the Danish bog (see 'The Tollund Man' and 'Punishment') to capture the violence of the 1970 in Ireland. Here, the sacrificial bog mythologically signifies a continual cycle of violence, an idea that implicitly underlines much of *Ghost Wall*.

¹³⁵ Moss, p. 45.

¹³⁶ Sanders, p. 2.

¹³⁷ Mckenzie, p. 271.

choice, as his frequent nostalgic visits to Newcastle's post-industrial ruins and docklands suggest. These socio-cultural divisions map on to *Ghost Wall's* exploration of globalisation, emphasising the complexities of discourses that dichotomise between an outward-facing cosmopolitan globalism and parochial localism, a duality that, as the last chapter argued, very much dominated political and media discourses during Brexit. In *Ghost Wall*, the particular social hierarchies of primitivism complicate a straightforward narrative of division:

The Professor appeared after breakfast and started organising people in a way that made me wonder if he thought they were Iron Age professors, or maybe as if he couldn't imagine that there were circumstances in which qualities other than being posh and having read a lot might put a person in charge of everyone else. My dad, I thought, knew as much as anyone about living wild off the land, foraging and fishing and finding your way.¹³⁸

In contrast to the university students and Professor Slade, Silvie and her father possess an intimate, 'ancient knowledge' of the environment that has been rendered meaningless in the global contemporary. In a similar way to John's environmental expertise in *Elmet*, *Ghost Wall* juxtaposes Bill's innate knowledge of the land against the metropolitan intellectualism held by Professor Slade, challenging the prioritisation of cognitive labour and the class-based structures that govern the global present. Bill's lifelong interest in the world of early Britons stems not from an elite education, but rather, from nationalism.

After the socio-economic restructuring onset by deindustrialisation, Bill devotes himself to studying Roman Britain and establishes a relationship with several archaeologists; these are men 'who'd passed the eleven-plus and made summat of themselves, had begun to exchange his self-taught expertise in outdoor survival, foraging

¹³⁸ Moss, p. 17.

and mountain craft for their answer to his questions and offprints of their research'.¹³⁹ Here, *Ghost Wall* establishes a distinction between primitive 'self-taught expertise' and formally recognised knowledge, but more specifically, to the elitist education system of grammar schools associated with the Conservative Party. For instance, Sylvie's isolation from mainstream civilisation also engenders the development of a new kind of knowledge and cultural currency:

I indulged myself with the idea that ancient knowledge runs somehow in our blood, that in time I could forget who fought in the War of the Spanish Succession and how to solve quadratic equations, and remember how to spin yarn and grind grain, to read the flight of birds and the growth of plants to tell me what was happening beyond my sight. My father's skills: redundant except for archaeological purposes.

Sylvie locates the complexities and double-edged nature of primitivism, emphasising how it prioritises a now-redundant environmental consciousness rooted in an ecological commitment to the land. Upon leaving the urban area in which she lives and moving to the experiment's isolated rural environment, Sylvie describes a reorientation of her subjectivity towards the land. This is especially the case, Sylvie reflects, when wearing Iron Age clothing: 'you move differently in moccasins, you have a different experience of the relationship between feet and land. You go around and not over rocks, feel the texture, the warmth of different kinds of reed and grass in your muscles and skin'.¹⁴⁰ Such a return to a visceral, grounded spatiality opposes the time-space compression's deterritorialising tendencies and points towards the need for alternative, and placed, environmental practices in the present. Like *Elmet's* environmental ethics of place, *Ghost Wall* draws connections between primitive isolation and environmental sustainability to critique the

¹³⁹ Moss, p. 93.

¹⁴⁰ Moss, p. 27.

technologised, mass-production methods of the present. The archaeological experiment relies on an emphatically pre-industrial form of labour and production; the acts of yarn spinning and grain grinding evoke corporeal, embodied labour which, in Bill's case, suggests a displaced desire for industrial work.

There is also a particular socio-economic class dynamic at work, alluding to a former meritocratic education system of both grammar schools and university grants. Bill and Silvie's anti-intellectualism evokes how much political rhetoric on the right demonstrates a scepticism towards intellectuals and, in particular, Michael Gove's now-infamous declaration that 'people in this country have had enough of experts'.¹⁴¹ As we saw in the previous chapter, this stance was aimed to stir up, and quickly became attributed to, working-class groups residing in small towns or rural areas, typically with low levels of progression to university and, as a result, perceived as being 'left behind' by globalisation. The association of Professor Slade and his students with a cosmopolitan outlook and citizenship further emphasises *Ghost Wall's* narrative of division. The students' ability to perceive the world as unhindered by borders contrasts with Silvie's limited spatial optic. She cannot comprehend the other students' spatial freedom in contrast to her own relative immobility, with Silvie's limited concept of the world extending only as far as the nearest town. The ordinary places she visits with her father comprise Silvie's world:

We held hands and I trotted, as always, to keep up with him, past the butcher where the pork and lamb and beef in the window were divided from each other like the animals on the toy farm at school by plastic grass, past the Post Office where I went with Mum every Thursday straight after school to pick up the Child Benefit and we queued on the dusty lino floor around the metal barriers, because Thursday was also the day you collected your pension so there were old ladies

¹⁴¹ Harry Mance, 'Britain Has Had Enough of Experts, Says Gove', *Financial Times*, 3 June 2016 <<https://www.ft.com/content/3be49734-29cb-11e6-83e4-abc22d5d108c>> [accessed 11 October 2019].

with sweets in their handbags for little girls who knew how to be winsome, which I didn't, mostly.¹⁴²

The sense of a well-established, unquestioned routine creates a tone of ordinariness rooted in the town; the local shop, school, and post office are everyday places but nevertheless form the boundaries of Silvie's world. The certainty with which Silvie explains that Thursday was the day you collected your child benefit, but also the day you received your pension, demonstrates a familiarity with a local community whose quotidian existence is marked by cyclicity and sameness. Even Silvie herself eventually begins to recognise that her childhood has been far removed from the processes of an external, global, world, describing university as an opportunity to 'leave childhood and dependence behind, to enter the world'.¹⁴³

What is notable about *Ghost Wall's* socio-economic and geographic tensions – between a metropolitan cosmopolitanism and regional stasis – is how they are explored within a distinctly deindustrial socio-economic frame that seeks to understand Bill's prejudices as a result of a history of socio-economic oppression and marginalisation in Northern England. While Moss largely critiques the reactionary qualities of the primitive, the novel also foregrounds the socio-economic structures that have contributed towards Bill's character. When Silvie recalls her life prior to the re-enactment, she describes childhood memories in which Bill would take her to see the ruins of the docks in Newcastle:

I followed him across the concrete waste. Cranes reared above us *like ceremonial pillars of a lost civilisation*, intricate with rust and disintegration. The windflowers and morning glory that are either holding together or pulling apart England's

¹⁴² Moss, p. 37.

¹⁴³ Moss, p. 29.

abandoned buildings and roads and railways flattened under the weather. Look at this, he said, look at it. Used to send ships all over the world from, here. Look at it now.¹⁴⁴

Here, once again, is a deindustrial landscape, similar to that which we have encountered in the work of Sahota, Thorpe, and Cartwright. The detailed description of the relics of industrialisation as ‘pillars of a lost civilization’ registers Bill’s disaffection with globalisation’s shift away from the production methods of local industries to deterritorialised global networks of finance capital. This passage complicates Bill’s primitive nostalgia. His mourning for an industrial past suggests that his obsession with Ancient Britain itself is a reaction to the loss of a placed, manual trade heavily associated with masculinity, and the unequal present in which globalisation is experienced through disintegration, abandonment, and loss. Bill’s preoccupation with Newcastle’s industrial past registers a history of uneven development that has been exacerbated by globalisation, presenting neo-primitivism as a reaction to the inequalities of global capitalism and the spatial biases of British urban modernity.

This stasis and isolation from ‘the world’ are attributed to the family’s status as ‘Northerners’. Silvie does not realise until meeting the students that she and her family live ‘up north’ – ‘up from where?’, she wonders, when the university students talk about their experiences of Northern England as though it is an exotic country. In this sense, *Ghost Wall* alludes to a spatial and discursive logic whereby the North is presented as England’s ‘other’ space, or, as Rob Shields writes ‘as the complete antithesis to the civilization of the southern metropolises’.¹⁴⁵ In the novel, this ‘otherness’ is not only a result of material socio-economic inequality, but also in geographic distance from

¹⁴⁴ Moss, p. 25 [emphasis added].

¹⁴⁵ Shields, p. 5.

Westminster. The metropolitan lens of the students and Professor Slade is especially evident when they mock Silvie's mother's accent, to which Silvie retorts: 'It's not another country, the North of England, it's not that far from you'.¹⁴⁶ Silvie and her family's Northernness reinforces their alienation and positions them at odds with the global urban modernity associated with the university students, highlighting how globalisation is inherently a metropolitan project, perceived as operating far away from the hinterlands of rural or post-industrial areas of Northern England. The trope of the North as 'other' is reiterated in the students' and the Professor's approach to the experiment as a whole. They are seeking only a 'flavour' of Iron Age life, an approach that sharply contrasts with the way in which primitivism becomes part of Silvie and her family's lived reality.¹⁴⁷ The differing approaches to the re-enactment, with the project described as 'just a game' to the students, enacts a fundamental social cleavage during Brexit between an educated metropolitan elite and non-metropolitan – often deindustrial – working-class communities, in which the legitimate socio-economic concerns in Leave-voting towns were diagnosed as ailments of regional backwardness, cultural hostility and parochial trivialities.

Elmet and *Ghost Wall* thus utilise the political efficacy of primitivism as a territorialising force. At the same time, though, these novels foreground the limits of neo-primitivism as a social practice reliant on social isolation and one which is at risk of reproducing oppressive social structures. Indeed, what is notable about *Ghost Wall's* use of neo-primitivism is its self-conscious reflexivity. Unlike Mozley's naturalisation of environmental neo-primitive practices, Moss' explicit representation of a neo-

¹⁴⁶ Moss, p. 95.

¹⁴⁷ Moss, p. 7.

primitivism constructed through experiential archaeology continually foregrounds and critiques the neo-primitive mode, indicating its limited potential as an alternative to the present. The inability of *Ghost Wall's* neo-primitivism to exist outside of capitalist structures indicates its critical self-reflexivity, embodying what Li describes as a 'contaminated' neo-primitive 'alterity'.¹⁴⁸ Drawing on the work of Jean Baudrillard, Li proposes a subgenre of neo-primitive 'alterity' that encompasses '[p]articlar, local forms of otherness have been mobilized in the struggle against the universalizing metanarratives of a Eurocentric modernity'.¹⁴⁹ Crucially, the 'radical otherness' and authenticity of this version of neo-primitivism is undermined by its inability to exist outside of capitalist structures. As he explains, 'though the primitive has not vanished completely, in its present hybridized or contaminated form, it can no longer be posed as a radical alterity or alternative to Western modernity'.¹⁵⁰

We can see a similar 'hybridized' or 'contaminated' neo-primitivism underpinning Bill's experiential archaeology. Moss repeatedly foregrounds the contradictions of Bill's neo-primitive project. The novel hinges on a temporal tension between Ancient Britain and the modernity of the present, and frequently draws attention to the re-enactment's artifice. Unlike *Elmet*, *Ghost Wall's* neo-primitivism is an 'experiment' – Professor Slade and his students only really play around with the idea of Ancient British life.¹⁵¹ As Silvie points out, 'the Professor's dodging of bloodshed pretty thoroughly messed up the idea that our experiences that summer were to rediscover the lifeways of pre-modern hunter-

¹⁴⁸ Li, p. 32.

¹⁴⁹ Li, p. 122.

¹⁵⁰ Li, p. 32.

¹⁵¹ Moss, p. 30.

gatherers'.¹⁵² The humour and satire of Silvie's sharp first-person narration primarily communicate this artifice. While largely sympathetic towards her father's desires, Silvie draws attention to Bill's hypocrisy and how he too, is experiencing only a select version of Iron Age life. For example, Silvie critiques her father's idealisation of patriarchal social hierarchies, and reveals how Bill's rules are upheld only insofar as they reinforce his dominance over the group or suit his particular mood at a given time. Silvie recalls how tampons were eventually won as a concessionary item, after Bill asserts that 'in the old days women weren't going round forever bleeding all over the place'.¹⁵³ Similarly, Silvie recognises the injustice of Bill's anger at her and her mother for oversleeping, 'when he'd made us leave our watches at home and kept talking about a world without clocks'.¹⁵⁴ While Bill asserts that Iron Age British '[f]olk lived by their bellies and the sun' his desire for a return to solar time is compromised by a concurrent reliance on the contemporary social organisation of time.¹⁵⁵

Even the supposed 'wildness' of the re-enactment's geographic location exists in tension with Bill's pre-modern sensibilities, inflected with traces of tourism and modern agriculture. In a similar way to Hall's rejection of categories of 'wilderness' in *The Wolf Border*, Moss situates the re-enactment within a rural environment clearly marked by human influence. The ecology of the landscape itself is not suited to hunter-gathering. When Silvie and the students are sent to nearby moorlands to forage for their evening meal, they cannot source anything other than bilberries from this human-made landscape

¹⁵² Moss, p. 10.

¹⁵³ Moss, p. 13.

¹⁵⁴ Moss, p.15.

¹⁵⁵ Moss, p.15.

which, as Dan points out, has been specially cultivated for sheep farming. The landscape is continually foregrounded as an area with a history of being shaped by human interests. Silvie notes how a 'green signposted footpath' stands out on their route, also commenting how Hadrian's Wall looked like 'someone had drawn it with a ruler on a photo'.¹⁵⁶ The experiment's location in a rural landscape cultivated in the interest of both farming and tourism – and proximity to another human-made border – reflects the impossibility of achieving an 'authentic' or 'original' version of primitivism that is wholly removed from the civilising forces of modernity.

Likewise, the expansive reach of contemporary capitalist culture emerges in increasing references to the outside world that puncture the novel's neo-primitive narrative. For example, when Molly convinces Silvie to take a break from foraging to visit the local Spar, Silvie notes her fascination at the presence of ice creams, Hula Hoops, and Mars Bars and how she 'had almost forgotten to behave in the presence of electric lights and painted walls'.¹⁵⁷ As the novel progresses, Molly becomes gradually disillusioned with the project, noticing Bill's inability to separate the re-enactment from reality, and how he and Professor Slade are focused more on fighting rather than hunter-gathering. This realisation leads to a tension between her and Silvie, who retorts:

Of course I know it's not real, I said, but none of this is real, is it, this whole summer, the blankets came from a shop and you lot made the moccasins on a study day and the Prof had the grains delivered from the health food shop in Morbury, that's not the point. So what is the – she said.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Moss, p. 23.

¹⁵⁷ Moss, p. 82.

¹⁵⁸ Moss, pp. 121-122.

The objects' inauthenticity enacts how Bill's primitivist project is only an idealised simulation of the past, echoing Li's definition of neo-primitivism as existing only 'as a simulacrum, a model constructed by the human sciences precisely to replace the vanished or vanishing original'.¹⁵⁹ The capitalist functioning of the re-enactment alludes to the ways in which an 'anti-capitalist' or primitive way of life has been commodified to 'oppose Western modernity through its valorisation of primitive alterity, only to reveal its complicity with modernity's nostalgic fantasy of recovering premodern losses'.¹⁶⁰ Allusions to the pre-modern or 'tribal' authenticity are ubiquitous in contemporary culture. In the health and fitness industry specifically, there has been a recent resurgence of faux tribalism, demonstrated in CrossFit's meteoric rise since 2012, and the popularity of 'Xtreme' sports. In the wider cultural sphere, similar trends include the fetishisation of thrift and vintage stores, digital minimalism, the renewed popularity of Palaeolithic diets, and shoes that aim to replicate running and walking barefoot. Thus, while it might be tempting to read *Ghost Walls* neo-primitivism as a straightforward antithesis of modernity towards the turn of the millennium, it is ultimately revealed to be a 'new spatial logic of the simulacrum'.¹⁶¹ *Ghost Wall's* neo-primitivism is thus a *product* of the EU as part of the broader globalising forces of capitalism, a symptom of post-modern nostalgia for a pre-modern past.

The novel's exploration of gender hierarchies, culminating in the denouement, renders the blurred boundary between reality and simulacra starkly visible, functioning as an allegorical warning against mythologising the pre-modern past. Like *Elmet*, *Ghost*

¹⁵⁹ Li, p. 53.

¹⁶⁰ Li, p. 40.

¹⁶¹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 18.

Wall critiques neo-primitivism's ability to legitimate systems of oppression, with violence against women entrenched in both Mozley's environmental primitivism and Moss' neo-primitive re-enactment of Ancient British life. The numerous contradictions of Bill's belief system are bound in misogyny, an essentialist attitude towards gender roles, and the desire to govern women's bodies. Bill possesses a 'stretchy' version of Ancient British life that is contingent upon female oppression. Like Cathy, Silvie's gender dictates her participation in social activities; during the novel's first pages, she observes the male university students 'creeping off somewhere to do some boys' thing at which [she] would probably be more skilled'.¹⁶² Again, mirroring Cathy's narrative in *Elmet*, Silvie's oppression manifests itself in a primal masculinity contingent upon successfully performing acts of physical violence. Bill exemplifies this kind of masculinity, legitimised through the guise of Iron Age rituals. Bill beats Silvie and her mother at times for no other reason than he just 'needed to' however, when Bill catches Silvie swimming naked in the lake, the threat of the female body results in a particularly severe beating.¹⁶³ In a similar way to John's reaction to the physicality of bare-knuckle fighting, Bill appears to draw strength from the attack: 'it went on for longer than usual, as if the open air invigorated him, as if he liked the setting'.¹⁶⁴ Bill's physical violence against Silvie is almost a convalescence; the combination of the rural environment, the Iron Age belt, and a female victim enmesh in this scene to create the kind of power Bill associates with Ancient British life. Like *Elmet*, *Ghost Wall* demonstrates how primitivism can also enable

¹⁶² Moss, p.4.

¹⁶³ Moss, p. 65.

¹⁶⁴ Moss, p.62.

misogyny and violence while also reinforcing the extent to which the real and the simulation of the re-enactment have merged in Bill's psyche.

This blurring is intensified at the end of the novel, with Silvie's conscription into her father's ritualistic desires. This disturbing turn in the novel's neo-primitivist project is anticipated in an earlier scene, when the leader of the group's basket-weaving workshop tells Silvie that replicas are made so that 'you can test them to destruction if you need to'.¹⁶⁵ *Ghost Wall's* denouement sees the re-enactment 'tested to destruction' when Bill sacrifices Silvie to the bog:

[T]hey wanted to kill me at sunset. To march me up onto the moor to the beat of the drums and the bass chanting, to tie my hands and my feet, to put a rope around my neck that could be tightened and loosened for as long as blades and rocks could hold me wavering between life and death.¹⁶⁶

The novel's denouement operates allegorically to emphasise the dangers of romanticising a mythological past. Silvie is stripped and taken to the edge of the bog, mirroring the female sacrifice depicted in the novel's opening scene – here, reality and simulacra are rendered indistinguishable from one another. *Ghost Wall's* cyclical narrative – bookended with scenes of female sacrifice – emphasises how the idealisation of historical myth underpinning neo-primitivism is more suited to reinforcing social systems of oppression rather than offering alternative egalitarian futures. If *Elmet* presents us with a self-consciously tentative mobilisation of primitivism, this criticality is reflected and, in many ways intensified, in *Ghost Wall* and its emphasis on the human cost of nostalgia and its inability to operate outside of the structures of global capitalism.

¹⁶⁵ Moss, p. 33.

¹⁶⁶ Moss, p. 136.

Between 'Anywhere' and 'Somewhere'

Elmet and *Ghost Wall* thus offer guarded prognoses of neo-primitivism as a placed social and environmental alternative to 'Global Britain'. In terms of the efficacy of these novels as Brexit ecocriticism, while *Elmet's* environmental primitivism appears to get closer to imagining an alternative egalitarian democracy based on ecological sustainability, the re-emergence of oppressive violence and social isolation undermines the local networks, and social collectivity forged through neo-primitive lifeways. In *Ghost Wall*, neo-primitivism primarily emerges as the product of a reactionary nostalgia for an ethnopurist Britishness and cannot be imagined outside of the structures of capitalist modernity. Taken together, these novels emphasise the 'contaminated' logic of the neo-primitive as a limited aesthetics of alterity, and register the difficulty of imagining an alternative, progressive future for Northern England.

Despite this critical complexity, neo-primitivism indicates an ongoing need for the reconceptualisation of place-bound modes of belonging that goes beyond Brexit's polarising logic, and in which Northern England is not seen as necessarily regressive, anachronistic, or insular. This chapter has sought to show how *Elmet* and *Ghost Wall* represent a placed Northern English literary response to 'Global Britain' in the post-Brexit-vote period. The distinct manifestations of neo-primitivism in *Elmet* and *Ghost Wall* attempt to reterritorialise England as a heterogeneous and politically active place, opposing the British state's appropriation of globalisation as a politics of nation. Contrary to the idea that globalisation will see the world 'shrink' and become 'one place', the two texts I have considered here attempt to forge placed social and democratic practices in

England.¹⁶⁷ What these two novels suggest, then, is the need for a reconceptualisation of the relationship between the local and the global that goes beyond a simplistic dualism between a London-centred global Britain on the one hand and English regional or local isolationism on the other.

In this context, it is notable that both novels position their young-adult narrators as remedial counterpoints to the regressive correlates of primitivism exhibited in both texts. Occupying the space between childhood and adulthood, Daniel and Silvie also operate at the intersection of primitivism and modernity and can navigate these two opposing ideologies. Silvie dreams of freedom and entering the world of the university students but is simultaneously able to rationalise her father's obsessions, possessing an ecological understanding of the outdoors that they do not. As she tells us, '[i]t was not that I didn't understand why my father loved these places, this outdoor life. It was not that I thought houses were better'.¹⁶⁸ So, while Bill's neo-primitivism manifests in a reactionary attachment to a mythological British history that never existed in the way he imagines, Silvie's neo-primitivism is markedly more forward-looking and attuned to social and environmental issues of the present. Rather than evoking the past, Silvie's neo-primitivism represents an ethical underpinning for a more environmentally conscious future. Likewise, despite Daniel's affection for the ecosystems of his local environment, his lessons with Vivien result in him becoming fascinated by 'history and poetry and her travels around France and Italy and about art' and begins to see a 'world that suited me in a different way'.¹⁶⁹ Noting a growing difference in disposition between himself and

¹⁶⁷ Robertson, p.8.

¹⁶⁸ Moss, p. 6.

¹⁶⁹ Mozley, p. 88.

Cathy, Daniel tells us how he ‘came to prefer the inside to the outside [...]. And while I sat and read and drank tea, Cathy walked or ran through the fields and woods and, in her own way, she read the world too’.¹⁷⁰ It is in this non-hierarchical co-existence of two separate worlds that these novels imagine an alternative future for their respective geographies within Northumberland and Yorkshire most successfully, offering visions of social relations centred on hospitality, empathy, and environmental ethics.

These momentary glimpses of social relations occurring *within* a modern frame emerge for a final time at the end of both novels. *Ghost Wall* ends with Silvie being rescued from Bill and Professor Slade’s ritual by Mollie and the police before she is taken to stay in the safety of an acquaintance in the nearest city. Similarly, in *Elmet’s* closing scene, Daniel is waiting in Edinburgh train station on the chance he might find Cathy at the most Northern point of the railway line, watching ‘the web of tracks that bring people to this city from every point of the compass’.¹⁷¹ What Daniel and Silvie come to represent, then, is the possibility of a placed literature of England able to navigate global modernity and its consequences, posing a challenge to a state-supporting discourse of ‘Global Britain’. This is a project which is commensurate with a new literary vision of Northern England that goes beyond regional stereotype, insularity, and otherness. In this context, a progressive and placed literary North has never been more politically urgent or timely.

¹⁷⁰ Mozley, p. 88.

¹⁷¹ Mozley, p. 309.

Conclusion: Levelling Up?

Four years after the establishment of devolved parliaments in Scotland, Wales, and the Greater London Council, Sean O'Brien's 'A Northern Assembly' declared the need for devolved powers in Northern England:

Let the North, from Humber's shore to Tweed
Exist in verse, if not yet deed,
And let a poem legislate
For this ideal imagined state.¹

O'Brien's poem is indicative of the propensity to collapse politics into culture – if Northern England cannot have legislative powers, then regional devolution can exist 'in verse'. As should now be clear, there is a reason to be sceptical of projecting democratic issues into the cultural sphere in the way O'Brien's poem described. Across the border, it has already been seen that cultural devolution alone is not a sufficient challenge to hegemonic state structures – and can operate *within* them – thereby replicating the limitations of political devolution.² While displacing London as the cultural hub of England, and indeed Britain, may lead to a body of cultural production that envisages itself as representing regional identity, this cultural politics forms a modest first step in the reassessment of the constitutional terrain of Britishness. Also, despite setting out geographical parameters for his North, O'Brien's declaration that 'the North is poetry' captures how the North functions as a mythological, or 'poetic', construction in England's twenty-first-century cultural imagination. His poem is indicative of the paradoxical way

¹ Sean O'Brien, *Downriver* (London: Picador, 2001), p. 21.

² As mentioned in the Introduction, Scott Hames argues that Scottish cultural devolution (the 'dream') operated within the logic of political devolution (the 'grind') and therefore was always limited in the kind of radical political possibilities it could initiate. See *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution: Voice, Class, Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020) especially pp. vi-xii.

the North's cultural 'otherness' or self-exoticisation within literary culture has often been harnessed as a justification for regional political representation. However, these constructions run the risk of reinforcing the North-South divide and, in turn, bolstering Northern England's socio-economic and political subordination.

The kind of poetic mythology that characterises O'Brien's vision of Northern England in 2001 is just as strong in 2020. In an essay explaining his experiences in London as a Gibraltar writer after the Brexit referendum, M.G. Sanchez describes a hostile encounter as a symptom of the perpetrator's 'Northernness': "'Ere, you're not from round 'ere, are you?" he asked challengingly, all meekness having evaporated from his tone, his voice reeking of flinty, hard-edged Northernness'.³ Sanchez's essay appears to juxtapose the writer's cosmopolitan identity with an insular 'hard-edged' 'Northernness', operating within the reifying regional narrative this thesis has traced. Similarly, a mythological, parochial Northernness emerges in Luke Brown's post-Brexit-vote satire, *Theft* (2020). The novel relies both structurally and thematically on a cultural, geographic, and political polarisation of an isolated location in Northern England and the London metropolis, where the novel's protagonist, Paul, works as a literary journalist. Living in London in 2016, Paul is torn between the excitement of his current life and his past in Lancashire. *Theft's* fragmented narrative moves between London's cultural plurality and the monotony of the 'declining town' where Paul grew up, where many of his friends still live and where his sister has recently gone missing. The novel constructs Lancashire as a local space experienced through nostalgia and the town's continuing grasp over Paul's psyche, with the non-linear narrative moving between different points

³ M.G. Sanchez, 'Fifty Years of Unbelonging: A Gibraltar Writer's Personal Testimonial on the Road to Brexit', in *The Road to Brexit: A Cultural Perspective on British Attitudes to Europe*, ed. by Ina Habermann (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 234–44 (p. 234).

in his life. Although Brexit forms the contextual backdrop, with the novel clearly concerned with the divisions between London and deindustrialised parts of Northern England, the plot centres on the house jointly owned by Paul and his sister, an ‘unsellable terrace in a half-alive northern town’, which both connects Paul to his former life, and concurrently keeps him tethered to Fleetwood, a small coastal town in Lancashire.⁴

When he initially introduces the town, Paul reassures us that even though the house is ‘surrounded on three sides by the sea, we’re hardly isolated. It’s only forty minutes by tram to the nearest train station, and that’s only three hours from London. New trams, too, very comfortable – we’d live here if we could’.⁵ This moment of humour in the text, couched in the language Paul desperately deploys to try and sell the house, reflects an external view of Northern England in which the region is related only in terms of its closeness to London (however exaggerated, in this instance). The isolation of the house, and by extension, the coastal area around Fleetwood in which parts of the novel are located, operates within the reifying ‘Northern’ frame this thesis has sought to make evident and critique, and positions Northern England as an isolated, regional backwater far removed from the accelerated life of London. The insular community of Paul’s past, rising unemployment, working-class disaffection, and frequent references to the Leave campaign, construct Fleetwood in opposition to London’s polyphonic demography, where ‘we all think of ourselves as European, and are friends with Europeans, who do not threaten our jobs’.⁶ Ultimately, Paul’s internal struggle between his deep sentimental attachment to the place in which he grew up and his new identity in London’s creative

⁴ Luke Brown, *Theft* (Sheffield: And Other Stories, 2020), p. 16.

⁵ Brown, p. 13.

⁶ Brown, p. 107.

sector embodies England's own persistent state of conflict between the poles of North and South. As I have shown, this North-South divide is not merely geographic; it is also social, economic, and cultural, occupying twenty-first-century literary culture in new and continually evolving ways.

The overarching aim of this thesis has been to demonstrate how constructions of the North have functioned within the literary imagination as a barrier to a politically-activated England. Tracing a range of political contexts and their spatial settings – multiculturalism and the city, post-British England and the rural, Brexit and deindustrialisation, 'Global Britain' and the neo-primitive – I have explored the ways a persistent cultural North-South divide works to prevent the realisation of England as a national formation in twenty-first-century literary culture. As I have shown, this division between a constructed 'North' and 'South' has solidified the continuing polarisation of Englishness in which the South remains associated with Englishness *de facto* in contrast to a provincial counterpart located in the North. My argument here has been that the opposition of two contrasting narratives of England has led to the nation operating in a persistent state of conflict, thereby preventing the emergence of a cogent English civic nationalism that might end the Union. This thesis has therefore argued that demythologising, and 'placing' the literary North is a key step in resolving the literary 'English Question'. As the preceding chapters have shown, a placed articulation of Northern England holds the potential for the emergence of a national literature of England that would present a challenge to the British imperial formation of English Literature. Through an analysis of twenty-first-century representations of Northern England, I have identified a 'cultural politics of devolution' that encompasses a decentralised literary-critical practice, but which also concerns how texts themselves reflect the limits of *political* devolution as a constitutional process. The corpus of primary

works considered in this thesis situates the North at the centre of several contemporary political developments in Britain, and is characterised by the complexities of devolution as a state-led process: uneven development, tensions between regional and national powers, democratic deficit, and agency are central concerns to which these novels consistently return. As I have shown, these texts represent twenty-first-century attempts to decouple or 'devolve' the North (and often England), from Britain; they contribute towards a demythologisation of the North and offer placed articulations of the region.

Rewriting the North began by identifying the refashioning of Britishness and British citizenship under Tony Blair's New Labour government. Chapter 1 approached political multiculturalism as a politics of nation in devolutionary Britain, and an indication of the Union's disintegration that continued to unfold over the course of the next two decades. I considered the ways Sunjeev Sahota's *Ours are the Streets* and *The Year of the Runaways* explore the geographic and socio-economic elisions inherent in multicultural ideology, revealing political multiculturalism as a unitary state logic that relies on uneven development throughout England. Chapter 2 examined Sarah Hall's novels as paradigmatic case studies of an post-pastoral turn in Northern English rural fiction, considering the extent to which her treatment of Cumbria in *Haweswater*, *The Carhullan Army*, and *The Wolf Border* rejects the ideological function of an idealised English pastoral. These texts draw attention to how the pastoral idyll is more suited to the endeavours of the British Empire than to a national experience of England. The final two chapters focused on tensions between the English 'local' and the British 'global' in post-Brexit-vote fiction, exploring Brexit as a symptom of English regional uneven development. Chapter 3 offered a 'devolutionary' reading of Anthony Cartwright's *The Cut* and Adam Thorpe's *Missing Fay*, arguing that these texts utilise nostalgia to imbricate Brexit within a broader a crisis of the centralised British state form that was heavily tied

to conversations surrounding regional devolution and the 'English Question'. Another version of localised nostalgia was the central focus of Chapter 4, where I identified a neo-primitive trend in post-Brexit-vote literary production set in Northern England. Taking *Elmet* and *Ghost Wall* as examples, I explore the ways in which neo-primitivism can be conceptualised as a distinct attempt to reterritorialise England as a heterogeneous place, opposing Theresa May's vision of 'Global Britain'.

However, the regional political projects that my selected texts stage and explore are eventually foreclosed; their attempts to subvert regional iconographies of the North and confront their socio-economic or political marginality are either undermined by the formal, stylistic, or thematic contradictions of the texts or abandoned altogether. For instance, Sahota's challenge to literary multiculturalism was only partially realised. Just as the prospect of Imtiaz's ultimate act of violence against his oppression never materialises in *Ours are the Streets*, the lapse into a 'happy ending' in *The Year of the Runaways* reflects a dominant narrative of integration and political multiculturalism. These texts register not only the abjection and suffering that accompanies state-sanctioned notions of citizenship and belonging in multicultural Britain, but also the difficulty of finding a means of escape from such an experience. Similarly, *Haweswater*, *The Carhullan Army*, and *The Wolf Border* are unable to resolve their own counteracting impulses towards pastoral retreat and a post-pastoral representation of rural space, representing only a temporary disruption of the pastoral mode. Chapter 3 demonstrated the limits of nostalgia as a form of regional devolutionary aesthetics in post-Brexit-vote novels. The so-called 'left behind' narratives of Cartwright's *The Cut* and Thorpe's *Missing Fay* register the profound difficulties of imagining their localities beyond the polarising regional and class stereotypes that characterised political and media discourse during and after the EU Referendum. *Elmet* and *Ghost Wall*'s neo-primitivism also reflects the

dangers of turning to the past to address the inadequacies of the present, utilising a contemporary version of literary primitivism as a product of reactionary and damaging nostalgia. This self-reflective and ambivalent neo-primitivism demonstrates the ways in which any form of experimental democratic social organisation must contend with enduring legacies of imperialism, class, gender, and geographic divisions. So, while these novels acknowledge the inadequacies of the centralised British state form, they also communicate the complexities of imagining a progressive version of Northern England or a political alternative to the present. This thesis has thus identified several contemporary fictions that attempt to imagine a 'placed' or 're-provincialised' literary North as part of the process of achieving a national literature of England. However, despite this new and emerging, placed vision of the literary North, there is still some way to go to demythologise Northern England and present a viable challenge to the current political organisation of Britain.

In terms of the cultural politics of devolution, as we have seen throughout the preceding chapters, the 'devolutionary' characteristics of the texts reside in the formal and stylistic contradictions I outline above, reflecting the structural limits of devolution as a viable democratic alternative to the centralised British state form. It is helpful here to turn to Vernon Bogdanor's earlier definition of devolution in 1999, which makes the limits of this process as a radical alternative to Westminster centralisation acutely visible:

Devolution involves the transfer of powers from a superior to an inferior political authority. More precisely, devolution may be defined as consisting of three elements: transfer to a subordinate elected body, on a geographical basis, of functions at present exercised by ministers and Parliament. [...] Devolution involves the creation of an elected body, subordinate to Parliament. It therefore

*seeks to preserve intact the central frame of the British Constitution, the supremacy of Parliament.*⁷

Bogdanor's argument is of note because he proposes that devolution will *strengthen* the United Kingdom, rather than weaken it, highlighting how devolution is more conservative than it is a radical constitutional reform.⁸ Likewise, in his analysis of cultural devolution and Scottish literature, Berthold Schoene also notes how national devolution in the Scottish context is 'purely vehicular', suggesting that 'the British understanding of devolution might be described in terms of "transport" or "metaphor"'.⁹ So, too, the regional political projects staged in the novels I have examined have ended in complete abandonment or a mere 'reshuffle' of power. Taken together, these novels thus suggest a wider literary movement towards a rejection of existing models of sub-national democratic autonomy, reflecting the need for a post-British alternative to devolution, or at the very least a radical reassessment of the model of devolution on offer.¹⁰

This thesis has not aimed to provide a comprehensive account of the key features or recurring trends of contemporary literary representations of Northern England. In fact, this study has consistently argued against the view that there is an essential 'North' or 'Northernness' that can be identified within literary culture, or one to which we should aim to return. Instead, this thesis has provided a critical engagement with the North to reveal a current and under-theorised apparatus of the centralised British state form

⁷ Vernon Bogdanor, *Devolution in the United Kingdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 2–3 [my emphasis].

⁸ Bogdanor, p. 298.

⁹ Berthold Schoene, *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 47.

¹⁰ John Tomaney recently argued for wider scrutiny of regional devolution as a democratic model. See 'Limits of Devolution: Localism, Economics and Post-democracy', *The Political Quarterly* 84.4 (2016) pp. 546-552.

played out within literary culture. As I have shown, constructions of the North in the twenty-first century remain inflected by Northern England's long-standing socio-economic neglect and historical and cultural narratives of regional otherness yoked to the past. Despite their contemporary socio-political settings, the novels I have considered reflect, to varying degrees, how Northern England is in danger of being presented as culturally bankrupt often with moments of nostalgic or romanticised reverence. The contemporary representational fate of Northern England continually returns to deindustrialisation, realism, nostalgia, and the anti-modern, often becoming synonymous with working-class identity and defined in contradistinction to a metropolitan, and increasingly global London. In this sense, the North continues to function less as a geographic territory than a cultural metaphor for a range of socio-economic and political divisions between the British state and non-metropolitan areas throughout England and is open to being harnessed for particular political agendas.

There remains the need within contemporary literary studies for representations of Northern England that do not seek to understand the region through the historical or the archetypal. The prevailing vernacular mode of Scottish cultural devolution also does not appear to hold the same degree of political potential for regions within England. Katherine Cockin notes how, in modernist fiction, 'the regionalisation of realism has tended to reinforce the oppression of the North', and this holds true for twenty-first-century representations, too.¹¹ If demythologising the North is to help a placed England to emerge, then culture must go beyond the longstanding conventions of regional otherness that have retained cultural purchase in the twenty-first century. There is, then, a representational stumbling-block to contend with in contemporary literary depictions

¹¹ Cockin, p. 246.

of Northern England before we can move towards a progressive, and placed, English literature.

This thesis has opened up several related areas for further research. I have concentrated here on a discursive construction of the North that is deliberately loose in its geographic parameters. In a more geographically orientated study, there are vast intra-regional, socio-economic, and cultural differences within the regions that comprise Northern England which are yet to be explored. An obvious example of this might be Yorkshire, the largest English county, which has a longstanding poetic association with regional devolution; particularly, if we look to the cultural outputs of O'Brien, Peter Didsbury and Tony Harrison. Other notable spatial focuses might include writing based in Manchester and Liverpool, two of Northern England's most expansive and rapidly evolving commercial and creative centres. As more publishing houses establish second offices in Northern England – most recently HarperNorth in Manchester's Northern Quarter – there is potential to explore links between the decentralisation of England's literary production and a particular version of the North produced and circulated within these texts.¹²

Another productive avenue for further research is the way that critical discussions of the North-South divide run the risk of occluding other socio-economically or politically marginalised areas of England. London, for example, is a vastly polarised and unequal city, as the tragedy of Grenfell Tower in 2017 made starkly clear. As such, we must be wary of adopting an overly simplistic North-South discourse that elides the nuances of inequality within the South of England and of London itself. The Midlands would also

¹² See <https://www.harpercollins.co.uk/corporate/press-releases/harpercollins-announces-new-manchester-based-division-harper-north/> [accessed 2 December 2020]

provide fertile ground for a study of this kind, paying attention to how the polarising logic of the North-South divide erases the vastly differentiated areas of the region. In his examination of postcolonial writing from Nottingham, Leicester, and Birmingham, Thomas Kew notes that '[w]ithin the conceptual framework of the North-South divide, the Midlands are conspicuous only through their absence', becoming 'caught in the middle of a critical landscape that tends to reify, and thereby reinforce, the reductive notion of a North-South divide'.¹³ I would argue that Kew's observation and my own aim throughout this thesis are not as mutually exclusive as they might appear. As I have demonstrated - especially in my discussion of Cartwright's Dudley-based novel in Chapter 3 - the North functions as a geographically vague shorthand for deindustrialisation and working-class identity, eliding various other socio-economically marginalised areas within England and augmenting a state system that prioritises metropolitan London. By this logic, demythologising representations of Northern England to deconstruct the cultural North-South divide would simultaneously open up a decentralised discourse which allows areas within the Midlands to emerge as distinctive literary geographies.

I have concentrated on a relatively small selection of authors whose fiction represents literary interventions into the contemporary status of the North within a wider political context of constitutional instability, especially regarding what I have referred to as the 'English Question'. While this study's focus has not been to provide a comprehensive account of contemporary writings of the North, there are certainly other potential authors who this thesis might have productively considered. David Peace, for example, has been crucial in developing a post-Thatcher imaginary of the North, while

¹³ Thomas Kew, 'Regional Literary Cultures of the Midlands' (PhD Thesis, University of Leicester, 2017), p. 2.

more recently, Ben Myers' literary output, Michael Hurley's *The Loney* (2017), and Daisy Johnson's *Everything Under* (2018) each represent understudied twenty-first-century case-studies of Northern England as a gothic space, told through rural regional myth.¹⁴ The novels of Caryl Phillips may also represent a future opportunity for building on the research of this thesis. *A Distant Shore* (2003), *In the Falling Snow* (2009), and *The Lost Child* (2015) all concern Northern England in general and Yorkshire in particular. John McLeod, for example, reads Phillips' work as envisioning Leeds as 'bleakly prejudicial yet clinching alternative postcolonial possibilities which can be mined amidst the North's unhappy history of intolerance'.¹⁵ While Phillips' most recent novels could therefore prove an interesting comparison with Sahota's vision of the multicultural North, the prevalent regionalised class correlates of Sahota's two Sheffield-based novels felt more suitable for the purposes of this specific project. Paul Kingsnorth might also be considered central to the emergence of a national English literature; *Real England* (2008) and *The Wake* (2015) have both been read as pre-Brexit-vote texts, especially following Kingsnorth's public essay revealing the reasons behind his vote for Brexit.¹⁶

Rewriting the North has also contributed towards a growing body of literary and cultural responses to the Brexit vote. Robert Eaglestone's *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses* (2017), Ina Habermann's *The Road to Brexit: A Cultural Perspective*

¹⁴ For an analysis of Peace's fiction in relations to Northern regional identity, see David Forrest and Sue Vice (2015) 'A Poetics of the North: Visual and Literary Geographies', in *Regional Aesthetics: Mapping UK Media Cultures*, ed. by Ieuan Franklin, Hugh Chignell and Kristin Skoog (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) pp.55-67 and Katy Shaw, *David Peace: Texts and Contexts* (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2011).

¹⁵ McLeod, 'English Somewheres', p. 15.

¹⁶ See Christian Schmitt-Kilb 'A case for a Green Brexit? Paul Kingsnorth, John Berger and the pros and cons of a sense of place' in *The Road to Brexit: A Cultural Perspective on British attitudes to Europe*, ed. by Ina Habermann (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020); Greg Garrard also identifies Kingsnorth as part of 'Brexit ecocriticism'. See Garrard, 'Brexit Ecocriticism', *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*. 22.1 (2020), 1-15; Paul Kingsnorth, 'The Lie of the Land'. *Paul Kingsnorth*. 10 April 2017. <<http://paulkingsnorth.net/2017/04/10/the-lie-of-the-land/>> [accessed 8 August 2020]

on *British Attitudes to Europe* (2020), and Kristian Shaw's forthcoming monograph, *BrexLit* (2021), represent some of the earliest critical works related to Brexit within literary studies. Writing in the autumn of 2020, with the full extent of Brexit yet to be played out, the continually evolving nature of this political debate, and its responsive literary production, will certainly warrant future research. While Chapter 3 provided the first 'devolutionary' reading of Brexit fiction from a regional perspective, given the disparity of voting outcomes across the UK, there is also the potential for important comparative examinations of Brexit in a national context, paying attention to Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish fiction. Similarly, national approaches to Covid-19 robustly emphasised the divisions between the four nations of the UK, with the devolved Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish governments exerting their political autonomy and many feeling that Boris Johnson was acting as the Prime Minister of England alone.¹⁷ The divergence in approaches to lockdown measures between England and the devolved nations has also been accompanied by an explicit discursive framing of England in political terms, with gestures towards 'the English government' and 'the English health secretary'.¹⁸ In Wales, Plaid Cymru recently launched a report setting out a 'roadmap' for independence and an 'exploratory referendum', with the Welsh government's handling of the pandemic bolstering support for cutting ties with Westminster.¹⁹ These deepening

¹⁷ Martin Kettle, 'Boris Johnson Looks Increasingly like the Prime Minister of England Alone', *The Guardian*, 13 May 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/13/boris-johnson-prime-minister-england-coronavirus>> [accessed 14 May 2020].

¹⁸ Chris Deerin, 'How the Covid-19 Crisis May Accelerate the Break-up of the UK', *New Statesman*, 10 July 2020 <<https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/wales/2020/07/how-covid-19-crisis-may-accelerate-break-uk>> [accessed 10 August 2020].

¹⁹ Steven Morris, 'Plaid Cymru Sets out Possible Roadmap for Welsh Independence', *The Guardian*, 25 September 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/sep/25/plaid-cymru-sets-out-possible-roadmap-for-welsh-independence?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other&fbclid=IwAR04nvz2iIeh0P8ef1iK3n5tG1HZkl0X6f19K0XBEWL2JqwB_E75uBngf8Y> [accessed 25 September 2020].

constitutional cleavages indicate that the narrative of the British break-up is set to continue, unfolding in new, unexpected ways that require ongoing critical attention.

What might the future hold, then, for an increasingly placed English literature and the British Union? What role might literature set in and about Northern England play in this negotiation, and what may prove to be the terminal phase of Britishness? In what way could the literature of London, and its association with a cosmopolitan 'global' Britishness, contribute towards a national literature of England? These are all questions that contemporary literary studies must consider in the coming years, where the denaturalisation of Britishness is building momentum in disciplinary terms.

In *After Britain*, Tom Nairn predicted the difficulty of extracting England from Britain, suggesting that there is a much deeper uncertainty attached to post-British England than to any dilemmas currently experienced in Scotland, Wales, or Ireland.²⁰ Almost two decades later, there have been calls to abandon this 'English Question'. Writing in 2019, Alex Niven forcefully declared that '[t]he Break-Up of Britain must also be the Break-Up of England'.²¹ A year later, Niven reasserted his claim that we 'need to stop talking about the chimera that is English identity, and focus on more urgent, more tangible political projects'.²² For Niven, Englishness is too heavily freighted with a range of cultural meanings, including those associated with far-right populism and an exclusionary post-imperial ethnonationalism, to ever be an egalitarian civic nationalism. Yet, while Niven suggests abandoning England in favour of regional devolution as 'a

²⁰ See Nairn, 'On Not Hating England' in *After Britain*, pp. 192–222.

²¹ Niven, *New Model Island*, p. 128.

²² Niven, 'Why It's Time to Stop Talking about English Identity'.

necessary precondition of the coming egalitarianism of the twenty-first century', the fictions I have considered here suggest the need for a national England to emerge before a regional restructuring capable of egalitarianism can take place.²³ The overdetermination of Englishness has revealed itself not to be a reason to jettison the idea of England as a political nation centred on a progressive and liberal civic nationalism, but precisely what makes such a project even more urgent. A post-British England may, in-fact, go some way towards solving the imperial connotations attached to Englishness that have prevented English civic nationalism in the post-Empire and devolutionary period, marking a reconfiguration of England as a place, which would then be open to the decentralisation of power in more democratically meaningful ways.

This idea is not entirely new. As we saw in the Introduction, Michael Gardiner's notion of 're-provincialisation' hinged on the idea that a national literature of England would be 'more placed and more provincial', noting that this may engender a 'rethinking of national methodology'.²⁴ This 'rethinking' of a national methodology would need to address the exclusions inherent in narrow versions of Englishness and emphasise a heterogeneous, civic English citizenship; as Gardiner suggests, '[a]fter the negotiation of sovereignty [English literary] criticism is liable to open up to experience and lead to a diversity not tethered to narrowing and defensive values'.²⁵ Approaching England in placed, civic-national terms therefore rides against an ethnonationalist Englishness that must also be reflected in literary culture in the parallel destabilising of English Literature in disciplinary terms.

²³ Niven, *New Model Island*, p. 13.

²⁴ Gardiner, *Return of England*, p. 167.

²⁵ Gardiner, *Return of England*, p. 167.

However, despite their apparent methodological divergences in achieving Britain's break-up, I want to conclude on the proposition that Gardiner's call for a 'placed' England and Niven's emphasis on a 'radical regionalism' are not as contradictory as they might at first appear. Demands for a national English democracy in the cultural sphere have revealed themselves to be emphatically tied up with regional inequality and the spatial biases of the centralised British state form. Governmental attempts to redress these socio-economic and democratic imbalances have largely taken the form of infrastructural decentralisation targeting big cities (often Manchester) in Northern England – such as MediaCityUK and the Northern Powerhouse – which have proved inadequate for destabilising Westminster's political dominance, and also run the risk of further marginalising smaller, non-metropolitan localities including deindustrialised towns, rural areas, and coastal fringes. The government's most recent infrastructural project to address England's spatial imbalances promises to be little different. Boris Johnson's targeting of the so-called 'Red Wall' in the run-up to the 2019 General Election pledges to invest in marginalised and neglected areas, but has already been exposed as an empty 'mantra' whose distinct objectives are difficult to parse from earlier regional policies.²⁶

Rather than being a year of 'Levelling Up', 2020 witnessed the limitations of regional devolution as divisions between Northern England and Westminster hardened with renewed significance during the Covid-19 pandemic. England's local leaders clashed with the Westminster government regarding the decision to enforce a tiered lockdown system in some parts of the country, with Andy Burnham emphatically rejecting the government's level of financial support for Greater Manchester as it entered

²⁶ Tomaney and Pike, p. 43.

the tightest phase of lockdown restrictions in October.²⁷ Burnham pushed for a financial deal of 80% furlough for Manchester if the region entered tier-3 (rather than the 60% proposed by Westminster) which would match governmental spending during the national lockdown. Shortly after the easing of lockdown restrictions across areas of England, think-tank IPPR North published a public policy report detailing how Covid-19 has laid bare and exacerbated an ongoing North-South divide. The report notes that any national 'strategy for recovery from Covid-19 must recognise that the North will start its recovery from a more challenging position than other parts of the UK, because of pre-existing regional inequalities'.²⁸ In this context of apparent 'Levelling Up', regional devolution in its current form cannot bring about an egalitarian democracy for England that would address the socio-economic, geographic, and cultural disparities between London and marginalised areas such as Northern England. A push for a national England and the end of Britain must come before any regional democratic alternatives can emerge within England itself; Niven's call for a 'radical regionalism' premised on egalitarianism is contingent on the emergence of a post-British England, of which literary culture plays a crucial part. As I have shown, England's twenty-first-century literary imagination is increasingly locating these post-British energies in Northern England.

The fictions explored throughout this thesis indicate a larger trend within contemporary fiction towards a placed literary articulation of Northern England – a

²⁷ Burnham learned that Greater Manchester would be forced into tier-3 with or without a financial deal from Twitter, when passed a phone during a live press conference, tacitly illustrating the disjuncture between Westminster and local Mayors. For more on the regional divisions in England emphasised by responses to Coronavirus, see 'The Revolt of the North' *New Statesman*. 14 October 2020. <<https://www.newstatesman.com/covid-19-local-lockdown-north-england-divide-revolt-westminster-boris-johnson>> [accessed 15 November 2020].

²⁸ Marcus Johns et al., *State of the North 2020/21: Power Up, Level Up, Rise Up* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, December 2020) <<https://www.ippr.org/files/2020-12/state-of-the-north-2020-21-dec-20.pdf>> [accessed 17 December 2020].

process which is vital to England's literary re-provincialisation. This thesis has identified the beginnings of such a movement, but argued that there is still work to be done to demythologise Northern England in order to enable a form of re-provincialisation that does not reinforce the North-South divide. A 'progressive' reappraisal of both 'the provincial' and 'the North' is a necessary and crucial starting point in this process, and one that this thesis has initiated. As I have shown, literary representations and critical examinations of Northern England often remain marred by regional associations of the reactionary and the insular, reflecting the narrow horizon for political reform offered by devolution. A convincing and attractive prospect of a re-provincialised national England must, therefore, confront the issue of representing Northern England and offer ways of reading that go beyond the ideological opposition of North and South. The literary and the political correlates of this debate are not fading, and a placed literary articulation of Northern England is just the first step in achieving a post-British literature of England. As Britain attempts to assert itself as a global power, and England's literary production interrogates its own political footing, a critical practice that denaturalises Britishness is surely the task of contemporary English literary studies today.

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