A critical and creative examination of the
‘extrospective’ poetry of Keith Douglas

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* Denotes all poems included in my first collection, Otherwise Unchanged.
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For Jayne

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Abstract

This is a creative response to the poetry of Keith Douglas (1920-44), focusing particularly on what he described as his ‘extrospective (if the word exists) poetry’.¹ My work takes the form of sixty-four of my original poems, plus a thesis of 40,000 words. In my poems Douglas’s extrospective approach is reinterpreted and re-applied to my life, interests, and experiences, including that of being paralysed from the shoulders down and left dependent on a ventilator to breathe, following a spinal injury in 1987. The poems are selected from over 1,000 written during my six years of research and they look at different aspects of what Douglas was doing in his poetry, as well as his ideas about poetry. My 40,000 word thesis was written alongside my selection of poems and it includes three chapters. The first constitutes an examination of Douglas’s use of the term ‘extrospective’ and what his poetry reveals about this definition. Chapter Two explores a selection of poems and publications written since Douglas’s death in order to shed more light on aspects of extrospection. Finally, Chapter Three builds on the previous two chapters to provide an account of my own extrospective poems, on the understanding that these poems are the main focus of the thesis. My work is important because although Douglas’s life and poetry has attracted the attention of poets and critics such as Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill, Desmond Graham, William Scammell, Roger Bowen, Jonathan Bolton, Adam Piette, Neil Corcoran, and Jon Glover, extrospection has not previously been considered in its own right in great depth.

Project aims and approaches

Without wishing to repeat too much of the information provided by my abstract, it is worth re-affirming that this project constitutes a creative response to Keith Douglas’s extrospective poetry. The aim was to produce a body of my own original poems based on Douglas’s ideas about extrospection, and to write a thesis of 40,000 words, in the hope of shedding light on the importance of Douglas’s extrospective poetry from a practical, as well as an academic view-point. Over the course of my research I have sought to come to terms with what writing extrospective poetry involves, and how it affects what a poet does, how he or she reacts to experience, and what happens when extrospection is applied to subjects that were beyond Douglas’s range. The sixty-four poems selected from those I have written over the course of my research address topics that feature only rarely in Douglas’s poetry, as well as those which can be considered to be his more regular themes. All of these poems have been written from a point of view that can be regarded as extrospective and they have emerged alongside my critical investigation, often leading to further discoveries, as reflected in my third chapter. This, in turn, has influenced the evolution of the poems, ensuring that the two strands of my thesis have remained mutually dependent throughout.

While my thesis began as a series of several long chapters, for the sake of clarity and ease of reference, I eventually decided to employ sub-headings within the chapters, an approach that is especially valuable in the final chapter. Thus, the consideration of extrospection in my own writing is now organised into nine distinct sections, the first of which, ‘Hospital,
extrospection, extremis, and paralysis’, discusses the common ground between Douglas’s experience of extremis, as exemplified in his battlefield poems, and my poems relating to injury, trauma, and hospitalisation. Sub-section ii, ‘Extrospection in relation to poetic form and structure’, focuses on how far writing extrospectively depends on a clear understanding of poetic form, and explains the differences between how this works in my poetry, and that of Douglas. In iii, ‘The flexibility of extrospection and its application to non-hospital-related poetry’, it is the adaptability of extrospection that is addressed, while under sub-heading iv, ‘My poems and Jayne: developing bifocal or “double” extrospection’, the latter becomes a shared experience that cements my relationship with my wife, Jayne. Sub-section v, ‘Extrospection and the poetry of nature’, moves further outside the parameters of Douglas’s writing, while adding to the idea of objectivity being too fallible to capture the less obvious aspects of the natural world. In vi, ‘Extrospection at home: in pursuit of the ordinary’, Douglas’s approach is applied to the everyday interests and activities that make up the fabric of much of my civilian life, contrasting with the military emphases of vii, ‘Extrospection at war: writing with and without experience’, and viii, ‘The need to address the unspeakable: extrospection and Holocaust’, both of which disclose extrospection’s ability to bridge the gap between first and second-hand experience. Finally, in ix, ‘Douglas and beyond: learning and further development’, I return to the subject of my disability in relation to extrospective poetry.

In order to complete my poems and my thesis, I have drawn heavily on my own experiences as well as making extensive use of available primary,
and secondary sources, such as the Keith Douglas archive BC MSc20 at the library of Leeds University. The correspondence that Douglas shared with his professional and personal acquaintances has been especially valuable and has provided intimate details of a private context that is not necessarily accessible through his poems. Because Douglas defined his approach to poetry by contrasting it with those of his military and civilian contemporaries, I have had to consider a wide variety of poetry, critical reactions, and other sources, which has led to a diverse discussion of the primary issues. As a result, there are occasions on which individual poets, and poems, are analysed in depth, with this being necessary to establish the validity, or otherwise, of Douglas’s views and definitions. It is hoped that these discussions lead to a deeper understanding of what extrospection means rather than serving as distractions.
A collection of my extrospective poems

_Inert_

Compunction controlled you then, the open hands of infants stretching towards the amazement in a fire-grate, the spinning dynamic you had to end in the bike-wheeling school-run, your foot’s flesh and bone to brake it and strike an infinite blow. You crank the brass lever on the Wells machine to breathe history another life, play witness to, or reverse, the march of evolution, kill off the morlocks and save pals before they set out that morning, waiting on salvos from the Rhine to sow them new rows. There are tactics you use for diversion, take the tunes you’ve never shaken from youth and apply them to yourself, count poppies for amusement’s sake or the squares of white tiles and strip-lights as they move you, corridor to theatre, with doctors counting you out.
Divested

Once they start to cut his clothes from the lost acquaintance of his limbs, he is all head, an uncaged centre of attraction to be strategically tested for human feeling, a needle, here, or here, no, hold it there before its feathers shook it fro not much, a little a little higher. Otherwise it’s the murmur of a bedside story.

Exhaustion stifles with its mauve pillow, tomorrows cross the lights and the ceiling tiles, become the aura of an angled torch or a yellow lamp, thoughts free to poke around, reporting back with the slimmest pickings between the tumult of the most basic needs. There are others.

Their voices and smells make them real. The cushioned swish of a fresh page I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. Atticus, who else? and the skillful avoidance of the Nigger word, beginning to feature rather often.

Later he will smile at the softly softly ripped apart, a doctor rather bigger than the word, grinning, pointing out he’s read the book and he doesn’t care. They should read it properly. Absorbed. Quickly translated into myth re-jigged beside a breathing machine’s remote squeal.

Gaps appear, to be crammed daft with hostage-taking, a slide on a wall he can’t see, a nurse dismembered, a few yards of long grass. He will know this to be a trick and not, in a game of dreamt roulette, find it undispelled come morning.

It becomes an incremental yearning for something tangible, something real. One night in particular will unpack the smell of burning wood, its hiss. There’s a point at which you let them come and it’s almost gentle. He’ll wake, that’s all,
to a spree of cards and clothes removed.

Out of it

Words are as bulky as remorse if they come at all. The bubble in my throat gives and takes breath to the ventilated hum and back. There are nights and days now, certainties to pick the bones of. The killers have receded to the darker corners at the rim of waking. Movements and sounds connect and are made to explain themselves. A nurse drifts in and out of range in a swish of the nearest sunflower curtain. Voices, faces, settle their differences, know who they are from the time before. Their B & B offers pleasant views of the sea-front and the pedal-boat lake. Belief thrives on a lack of options. A sense of space supplements my lying down. There are three more, two opposite, and one to the right. There are windows high up I'll see once I'm sitting. There's a match later. Then the spelling board to guide their fingers down, along, down the things whispering's never going to help. C-H-E-C-K T-H-E C-A-R F-O-R B-O-M-B, which my dad goes and does before they all go and the killers return from the corners.
Hospital slide-show

When they come for the nurse she does not exist. She’s born where light smears the wall of what we know to be a hospital ward.

Is this the first time I see the dead? I keep the colours, just in case. There are the quills of a deep grassy sea hot with blood, and a uniform’s white in certain places. We met by accident on a train, or reading somewhere else not entirely in our own thoughts. Not for long enough to really know the wide open of the eyes as more than a smashed mirror, epiphany’s stopped now. Otherwise it’s so much worse than a still birth. She’s soundless, processed like the gunner of the ball turret, and yes, they may well hose her from the green presumed to be spreading beyond the glass, those who took her with a gun that is, and for whom she lies with careless knees.
A frieze depicting four centaurs

John adores the sun with oil
plastered in nurse's handfuls on skin
brown in the way his holiday knew
diving from a boat in too little water,
grinning like a wall's fuck you.
I can never fully forget his time
for something early and awful with a hatchet,
his own non-reciprocal scars
sparking the grimace of ward glass.

Wheeled into place on his immediate right
a part of Tom has stayed a boxer
familiar with John Conteh, looking
so much like him, he could almost be him.
But it won't be confusing in a few years
when we're joined by the real one in a Toxteth
church. Between now and the funeral, the grin
and the baffled stare, the crap jokes,
will slide into an impossible slur over tins
of Guinness. A fourth, Billy, may join us
with a jug of cordial and navy rum
through a long straw. This being summer
there are always others coming round
in starched rows, learning the lie
of the ceiling's tiles. Billy in a shirt
or a jumper at all times, wants
Elvis instead of Tom Jones, the voice
of storms clotting on Saddleworth Moor.

The view from here could be plenty worse.
A girl-friend or a sister is playing tennis
moving as if her shadow doesn't know.
In a world of such small surprises,
tonight will be a goulash or a cheese salad,
the first Dirty Harry, and Bronson's
Death Wish, either One or Two.
The sun has begun its quest for answers.
You can tell as we lengthen across the short grass.
In conversation with Chiron

His laughing has a wildness to it
tonight with barley wine
stripping him to National Service
and clothes the colour of the desert
somewhere past Cairo, details
fazed by the following morning

and ever since. But there are definites.
A joke rolls across the ward
lacking the needed finish,
laps the space I fill
with him, with me. Letters
hand-scrawled by his son-in-law

feature hieroglyphics,
or will. Already he's explained
finding the sound of the khamseen
in stalks of wheat, or counting
the numbers of floods or cattle,
the airy syllables in a cartouche,

is basically what keeps him here.
Young enough to be unable to think of him
any younger, this still feels like
wisdom bandy-kneed in the clear
of the Red Sea. His arms
and splinted hooves punctuate,

applauded by the bent stalk
where his laughing quivers
a sand-bag paunch. There's a drunk
skill in his manipulating
his twin-handled safety mug,
his not scalding it across his lap.

One of his teachings from tonight
will concern the nature of experience
as a rite of passage, how what
we've shared is several life-times
stuffed into that one impact
woken from, or dived into.
IVP – *intravenous pyelogram*

Does this qualify as perfusion?
There is movement at the foot of the table
that I know relates to an injection,
dye into one of the veins
in one of my feet, completed
with a delicate Indian courtesy,
thanking me for what exactly?

The giving, the yielding, is the vein’s.
Enforced patience could not
be easier unless it were the nerveless
inspection of the collimator,
passing up and through the abdomen,
the aperture winking when its done,
set to repeat, reconfirm.

There’s time between assessments
for *Goodbye to all That*,
Challoner as war’s rumour,
briefly at a billet’s window,
his fatal wound from Festubert
presumably interred somewhere
and his cap-badge immaculate.

Not him as such, but the means
of seeing and recording the vapid,
the otherwise unseeable, He was there,
Graves says, with his regiment
miles down the line, adrift.
Your fingers find my temples
drawing their small circles.

These do not appear as mist
sculpted on a series of black
screens, bones under water,
milky swirls of star-birth.
Soon, a man we’ve never met
will place his hand on my shoulder,
stare deep and tell me

Jesus loves me. It will happen
between the bread and the cheese sellers
of a market here for the weekend.
In a week the hospital will have written.
The collimator hums
as you and the doctor shelter
behind a glass breakwater.

*Latest meeting with the consultant*

The consultant and nurse in low discussion share a corner, stare deep into charts – we’ve all of us been here before, when this territory was warm and young. They communicate by looks and hands, assemble their blocks of certainty address me by my first name and with the quiet of soft concern. I’m touched, or could be, if I hadn’t been here so long.

Screened from his room by frosted glass and walls of pale yellow or olive, sensed more than seen at first, a courtyard twenty yards wide, where the sun burns from a square of sterile blue, lets stones forget in piles they were ever fire and lava, mud and shore, life gasping and flapping in the shallows before the heat baked it dry.

We have met before, this moist-eyed man and I, first as strangers who climbed gingerly into the same thirsty river-bed, feeling its dust and fissures through our feet, and now with the dead earth smashed apart.

His eyes are still sharp, but he moves and speaks more slowly, as if this is draining him. He uses words like seizure, scar and scan in a gentle meandering stream, warns what this latest episode means, or could do, what happens when your brain sparks out.

The condition is strangely reassuring, like his smooth-as-palm-oil voice. The sun, I notice, is lower in the glass and slanting east across the tiles.

If I didn’t have to beat the traffic, I’d take a turn round the courtyard and see its gravel and boulders under-water.
Woman who looks like Sophia Loren

(Southport Hospital, 1989)

An arrival heralded the week before as the faintest ripple of broken sun on the marine lake, John fetching those of us outside one by one and then, over the blade edge of hospital coffee, nostalgic for an unlikely verging on impossible girl, if I liked old films, and Sophia Loren.

I freely said yes, I thought so, especially *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, Christopher Plummer, swayed by a mania that could hear the gods in marble rows laughing, that actually became a god. Sophia was there as well, preceded by the chaise longue of her lower lip and the voice of Vogue newly widowed.

Outside again when the debut happens, horizon salted past its natural life and the soft rhythm of the passing cars. John, with a leather wallet, pulls her into that round-the-corner-reaching-light beloved of painters of small boats. German, or so John says, and yes an exact likeness passport-sized.

If it isn’t there, then we’re back on the ward under a more constant speculation. She still glows, but perhaps while blinking her ostrich lashes. If not, it could dawn on us she’s not unused to being seen, gently handled by her quarter inch of white frame, her fresh-looking colour laughing more wisely, and for so long.
Jospice visiting day

(For Tom)

Quite a pleasant drive with the coast approaching pines with faint suggestions, then leaning harder. This by way of answering farms and seasons pulsing the raw crops

where the soil has stared through the winter. Open skies as well, the land having levelled drawing closer. Will the voice have the strength to make it over the low hum

always there, the susurrus breathed by machines day on day? Conditions today are shifting giving light to patches of road, the photo when I arrive, found

lying shrunk in tatters in India, was it? Seems it started there, with the need as painful in its sheer insistence as that obsessive sun. There’s a brief note

on the Jospice mission, and then an awkward wait for clearance, seeing the eyes relearning names and shapes. The funniest thing is never meeting them, not once,

those he’d call his friends and his family, that is, though there’ll be a time I’ll be touched to find out what they do is come with their daily changes after I’ve gone home.

When he’s bright enough, we’ll be sipping Guinness just about made drinkable once ribena pinks the froth. Or brandy, again a pleasure not to be dodged, not

yet, at least. A joke has me guessing longer than it should. It rolls from his lips like treacle, growing so its meaning becomes enormous. Finally, words click.

Getting what it is has him sliding into would be laughing, more in relief. A handbag lies beside me, which, when he sees it, has him calling it mine. Yes.
Nodding slowly, letting the moment ripple through him, making easy our human contact. Driving back the evening with headlights full on, what do those sparks mean crossing former ward-space and winding up here? There was boxing, something in that assessing what it was to face an opponent head on maybe, the same buzz

football gives us, Liverpool red on matchdays. Seems so fragile feeling the coast’s recession slipping over us with his drunken, stumbling grimace, his weak joke.
Bruise from my Baclofen pump re-fill

A tide-mark that won’t be washed clean
aggravates an October leaf’s
diminishing gold an obscene
yellow. A confirming relief
accepts its history. Meaning
attaches its clockwork breathing
to the day or the day before
with the doctor’s head setting pores

alight as he leant down, too mild
to say my talking didn’t help,
but saying it with the stretched smile
of a tolerance palpably
remote. The way a pond might smile
at the burden of a yelping
dog from the world next door, or rails
when a glance of sun gets impaled

on a wall. He’d worked the needle
a way in, testing the soap-bar
swelling through my skin with freedom
aware of its liberty, marked
the path he’d follow to bleeding
a little after, as if stars
were guiding him through the ceiling’s
flat neon. All the while, feeling

for the point he had to be sure
wasn’t lying, there was Burma
wanting to be remembered, born
under similarly pressed terms
to those in which I tried turning
protocol over again, form
being there just for the breaking,
though this time I left it shaking

in its tepid rain. Not that much
to build on anyway, just that
he’d mentioned it once when I’d touched
behind the blind smile, when his trust
couldn’t stop itself erupting
as the needle drew and then flushed
the valve inside me, and the bruise
waited a few days to come true.
The Promenade Hospital at Southport

Victorian Gothic shrinks in its towers
and collapses in on its wards, a mill-town
stranded after a charabanc jaunt
feeling the nimbleness of the wind flaunting
its distance. The red of terraces impounds
itself, sways, disempowered

by the sudden lack of soot to lean
on for support, dizzy watching the gulls
spell what they are on rapid transitions
of greys and blues. It stays official
even here, ambitiously sullen
hoisted over its pinch of green

breath. I didn’t know, not
initially, more than the gasp of doors
wheezing clear as I passed between
the split differences of nows and when
I was inert as a starfish on a concrete floor,
hadn’t got as far as what

it stood for, life and death aside
that is. Crossing the slabs of light
its windows dangled on tiptoes for abacus
weeks I couldn’t help tabbing
as they passed, it’s a fag-end’s flight
once we’re out, a moment gliding

of its own accord. The marine lake
from where I was I couldn’t see
more than the shine of, sits on its mirror
as the wavelets catch the leaf murmur
of summer’s breaking. But no sea
otherwise, just beach, like a mistake

that can’t correct itself, a pier
with nowhere else it can even begin
to dream of going. Hard to think
from here, turning the salty wrinkles
round to face the world for a minute
instead, where I was, the nearest
corner, or one less confronting
and confronted. Somewhere the gulls travelled
for the sake of blowing open I suppose,
and convalescence binds the coast
to what it promised. I watch it gather its bricks towards its heart, stunted until it calls me back. Change flicks at the track-suit they’ve poured me in for getting up, mimicking the whack of sails. Its line’s stretching retracts from its limit, measures an instant freedom against the ward’s estrangement.
Tony McCoy at the Cheltenham Festival

A mud-flecked McCoy is down-beat after his first winner this time around, a festival good thing on the fourth day. Not the wet sting of the down-pour, but the cold chime knowing and hating how it sounds when someone says coma, induced or otherwise. Especially when it’s as close as yesterday’s card and you’ve been there, you’ve had a ward swim into colour and shape, blend with the dreamt film you get used to more quickly than you’d think. Knowing the lad so well won’t have helped much, nor the chance he saw the moment what it all means came crashing home from the back of Galaxy Rock, the horse up on its feet, blowing, battlefield eyes, but otherwise fine. With the stands and rails steaming over his shoulder, his own mount, At Fisher’s Cross, being counted against yesterday’s losses, streams of questions wanting to offer more to the viewers than muted caveats, McCoy’s answers doff their hard hat, give back all the joy of familiar death. The noise ripples across him, lifts and wafts the youth-green and Irish-gold hoops of his silks. The scales will report nothing outside formality once he accepts the hands and holds a souvenir, faces the cold facts of all those lenses shallow with staring through beaded water.
New admission, Southport, ICU

Rumours of an attempted suicide
navigate intervals between our beds
and what moves behind the curtains’ usual
closure. Relatives enter next with heads

like wilted flowers, dumb-struck and dazzled
by their strange immersion. Voices are hushed
on instinct. Looks make hurt attempts to pass
over the lungfuls of soft percussion

in the search for answers. Nothing from him
at this stage except the sporadic moans
of birthing cattle, the disrupted trim
of honeycombed blankets, and the tubes grown

part of him. A provenance replaces
his lack of any more context than that
he was magic-carpeted through gazing
doors with. We learn what we take to be facts

giving him both Oldham and Manchester
for a home town. Nurses talk in segued
instalments, each fresh one an expansion
of the last, until, before he’s found legs,

so to speak, before he’s articulate
he’s fully explored, even the music
of his African skin’s the party trick
of a Christmas uncle. Once he’s used up

they move him to less urgent wards, ones filled
with those who can breathe, who push their own chairs
the startled dancers reconnecting wills
to limbs. Glimpses then, but only rarely

when he coincides with nurses the doors
admit and expel, and with a lunch-time
he’s brought to my side, an improvised cure
more than anything, to feed me with hunched

fingers, to find a way out of his maze
of splintered mirrors. Just that once, talking
enough to catch sight through his eyes’ dead glaze
of life stumbling out of its awkwardness.
Time by Clifton Marina

An orange-tipped butterfly
winks from a shimmer of leaf
and sun, an image rich
in potential, this year's,
this spring's, linking kids

on climbing-frames, icecreams,
land once swarming with a disguising
grass. We find a place
you like, reducing their colours
to the spark on water, their sounds

like a distant train or traffic,
the more remote being heard
in a bird-sung calm. We've a lake
keeping them where they are,
a ditch on our other side

left by the canal's running dry.
Some of the thinner trees
in this part were never here.
You tell me in a way that cuts
to the seed-drop, clears

like November wind. Yes, but
having said that, what they grow from
is dead leaves, shapes
in paper. What made me think
there'd be nothing left of last

year? The bigger trees,
the ones we find faces in,
I won't say they knew you,
but you're right, they've been here more than
long enough. The 'buildings', too,

red brick, slotted
under low roofs, guarding
rubbish. A man asks us
what they mean, what they are,
accepts they could be clinging on

from the war, bunkers,
shelters? More likely remnants
of an industry long decamped,
the better for our not knowing.
Dens? Yes, sometimes,

but you were more for the branches
than anywhere else, watching,
sleeping in the filtered sun,
undemanded. Further back
where you’d struggle taking me

rabbits tore open
in your hands, wet gloves,
fetching a quid or two
from the butcher when you’d got enough.
Kids, eh? The tow-path

returns by the river, us
and couples pulling dogs.
Black daub on a bridge
says ‘bridge unstable, ha ha’.
It trembles crossing,

or clicking on a statue of a heron.
Be so good, wouldn’t it,
if that butterfly was still here?
From Lochaline to Isle of Mull

A nothing much of a journey
with you as my gaze watching churn
and small turmoil of exchange
from the upper deck, naughtly-eyed
with light and wind, an abortive
sea-weave caught and disarranged,

shaking from itself as white sparks.
You make these things remarkable
with me parked up behind steel
walls. Not the least indication
from here of the box hull breaking
waves. We’re taken not feeling

the remotest change, those of us
eating in rows, or reading, bussed
from one coast to the next blind
happening. By which time you’ve returned
camera-happy and face burning
like a born again. Gates grind

their molars, struggle to open
a concrete pier, an empty slope
where gulls mope on hollow wings
and hollower sounds. Our next shots
should be backwards from the jetty,
with the boat just beginning.
Stalking one of Sunart's otters

A difficult moment aside
when a wet stone has you sliding
on its riddle of golden,
almost mustard-coloured seaweed,
it’s captured fairly easily,
by your pressing through the gild

with the bracts popping as you go,
by us slowing, pulling over.
How you know from the tangle
of shore-spoil, a particular
movement in the drift-wood, live rock
with a slick line, jaws fanging

a fish-chunk, gets me. But you do,
the second we leave the road too,
even showing me first, gaze
extending beyond your finger
to a point between Sunart’s fringe
and its shingle. I’m dazzled

you can creep so close, following
where the sheen becomes ruptured pool.
From the yellow hem you trace
where it left you with your jeans drenched
and your view-finder still clenching
its essential displacement.
There’ll be an angle from which we’re changed
in the jade of the Victorian tiles
every time our talking it over
finds a way between us. At that range
our thoughts lose themselves, become the smiles
the dead fill their own with. A camera
spears a moment through the evening droves
to make its own. Its wincing hammers
another into the black and white
ranks of faces we’ve seen, or we’ve heard,
or a part of us feels we should know
the difference in. In a certain light
a radio voice leaning on the words
buzzing towards us from the table
next along, could be seeing his ghost
in a mirror. His lines, made stable
for us, seem to fascinate themselves
with the prospect he’s been moving from
ever since the lens came down. There’s one
your son went to see with school solving
some of those enormous ifs, aloof
from the rest, more known, or more recent,
ergo larger. Their naming goes on
for several life-times in the friezes
behind the menu, with each dated
not at birth, but as they were that day
their instants found them. A busy night
told it is by the nearest waitress
swells and empties around us. We stay
as long as the wall-tiles can hold us
to our latest promises we might
return before we get much older.
Man walking

(by Stanley Park, Liverpool)

A wrap of flowers lifts him from pavement and cemetery wall to convergence at the point he makes of early morning, our seeing each other see him at the same time, and our letting on we have, like him, made something of the journey to which, in the great scheme, he’s really nothing. A man, heroic in his middle-age, and his bearing some of what’s inside

for all the road and its morning to see. His bouquet seems to be spring, a reflection of the swathe and breath of blossom, fruit and may, ornamental peaks of cherry dusting

the green of park, the timing of the parked cars. A sense, then, of destination only wants confirming by a fall of petal on the dark of his back or his shoulder, a kiss

for us to remember him by.
A buzzard from Rose Cottage

In our pictures I can study how it'll wait old-man-shouldered with the bodies of mountains at its back, an hour, maybe more, silhouetted among the bare branches, wired to that one point.

Similar but closer when caught in binoculars, a thoughtless presence, born to the purpose. Could even be a candle-flame in so far as a flame can stand for hours bending, and then curve to nothing. It happens once, lifts earth on a long wing kept stiffly to the weather as it moves the valley. It can be followed beneath the radar unfolding with the rolling and rebuffs of terrain. Croft walls and houses hold the shadow, and then lose it. When it closes on the bark the world has found a new colour. We miss the moment it re-folds in the curled breath of pre-dark.
Leopard in the sugar-cane

(Mumbai)

A couple walk beside a field
resting between its bursts of cane
and its mornings. They match their strides
to the same beat, barely conscious
of the change. As they walk he turns
his head to hers, saying something
lost to the dark on either side
of love. She seems to smile, but looks
straight on instead. A bridge, a stream
as thick as tar tonight, then left
to where the track follows closer
still to an undulated land
of drowsing farms. A moped threads
a way past them, floats its motor
on the sounds of dogs with collars
like keekar or babool, and throats
like months without their rain. A sky
as spoilt for stars as any sea
dazzled by the sun expresses
what they’ll have seen before. A streak
of heat disturbs the ragged growth
surely not more than forty-odd,
fifty-odd feet from where they move
in tune. It leaves its dog or pig
behind, hunches and slithers tight
to where the road edges further
in. A fringe of bushes holds it
where it is, then eases open,
shivering as it wriggles free
and waits again. Before they’re gone
they click in the patient hunger
of its eye, laugh over nothing.
Jayne's leopard

You leave your hotel, stepping like her
at first, feet on the cooled froth
of the beach you bored of quickly enough
in the sun. Sounds hatch around you
walking alone through the lean curves
of the coconut grove. Monkeys, and the mongrel
answers trotting, then stopped to startle
them back to the branches. The blurred incursion
of a moped on the back of making a night
of a day’s work. Mostly the weird
chorusing you can’t place, the crickets
even at the water’s edge with the world
supposedly receding there. You sense
as much as see the stars, the stretch
and shatter of the black surf, your eyes
already respondent to the rise. You spell
your love on the raw sand, send it
spiralling from the toes you curl and claw
across the shore. Done, a shiver
sneaks up your arms, sufficient to charm you
the way you came. The grove again,
and then the sleek of a back sloping
from view, looking you over, licking
the night to know you from passing through.
Jayne’s barn owl

As if it waited on your drive
back alone on edge of our night,
suspending its stooping over
the road, its dissolving cover
into a dream expressing flight
as a completeness divided

by its sound. Around the Greyhound
was it? Or as you passed the wood
on water by the dam again?
Only once with me though, and then
I missed it, waking to the flood
of your smile and the windscreen’s space

instead. The magic of it stands
against the logic of the road
being quieter then, your eyes
having room to watch the rising
of the brick farms, and your slowing
down when you drive with the strands

of one of our good days shyly
untangled. But then it must help
you’ve had this happen thereabouts
before, that you drive with the dare
fused, the thrill primed. It also helps
it waits there to raise its silence.
Hen Harrier

You always see things
first, which makes the ground-hugging
swoop so much more, first

over my window
and then yours, not a seagull
quite, even before

we read up and know
over our glasses and warming
down towards the shared

sleep we came here for,
but, as it quarters the rough
grasses, a hunter

scouring the same time
we keep following his rise
and fall all the way

to the fringe of trees
the light seems drawn to, the deep
surrendering green.
Half-lit on a return journey

Along precisely the same route as this morning, and colluding with exclusively half light, deer grow from the turf. By that tree the day got brutal with, two or three in the breezeless dusk fighting,

pretending. Some explore the dirt by a picnic table inert, then disturbed the way clouds are, moving from us in their own time, like dead relatives in a dream, and dissembling if we stare too hard, too long. The hills and road are not heather, but they allude to the truth in that colour as a softer incarnation, an antique pink untraceable in the day’s protracted fall from itself. The deer carry this with them in their fur, resisting an insistent progression into blue dark. It rests an hour on the forests by Sunart’s shore between pure cold and horned flesh.
Bill Shankly on a T-shirt

*I was made for Liverpool*

*and Liverpool was made for me,*

this in a modest white on my lucky,

my match-day T-shirt,

and on a background the colour of brick

verging on dried blood.

All right, that doesn’t cut it,

not as precisely as I’d like,

but something of that honest strength,

that blind faith, thrives

in a red more grounded, more sober

than the gloss of your average replicas

named and numbered. The fact

they could have pressed onto the front

of mine any number

of these perfect epitaphs, that whispers

volumes in his gentle rasp.

I’m sure I heard it first

on a record saved from a jumble-sale

around the time the man

was dying. The funny thing was

I’d feel myself through the pops

and snaps of needle-dust,

swelling with that trapped belief,

like fields shaking with weather

which went to nothing. Like streams.

My favourites are the famous reductions

of the famous. Bobby Moore

with the gold still wet on his winning

smiled to a shadow – *Rubbish*

before the match, a crock,

a cripple on legs weak

with a night’s dancing. And then,

*What a player,* re-cast

as a god with the win secured.

Or, yes, of course, the lad

he made a *monster* of, given steaks
for strength, like Joe Louis,
returning weeks on
wanting a word with the boss

and his girl-friend as pregnant as it’s telling.
A more serious note. His Utopian,
his social vision. His child’s
affirmation, his miner’s, if you like,

working for the same goal,
sharing in the rewards. There’s a statue
eight foot and near a ton
on a granite plinth. I pass

the arms like an angel’s girders
with the Kop on one side,
the Church of Christ on the other,
always with my T-shirt burning.
Hillsborough remembered

(Anfield, 13 April, 2014)

Following the granite’s gilded brand
all the way from waking and falling
into truth, fingers smooth the furrowing
light of a decent day. Legacies
accumulate from choruses of touches as tender
as the latest hearts and scarves left
flickering at the gate, the group we pick
our way through. The usual waiting
and reading, or just thinking, needs and spreads
more today. Prayers drift
across the flame, the same each time
with both the names and the game born
in mind, admitting that it matters, it really
does, daft as it sounds, sensitive
to wanting to win this one
as much for them and the shame of missing
years. The youngest was or is
ten, so we’re talking about him being
thirty-five in circumstances fairer
than they ever are. The difference stares
back with a boy’s eyes, about to
blink, to say something, then settles
into private reverie drifting and reaching
to where any of us were when
we heard and knew. A numbness hangs
over a minute gathered in the middle
of the flags and songs, drags a seagull
from its shadow, straddles the wind and the one
bottle someone’s forgotten to stop
before it rolls by the hoardings and the roaring
calm, the crowd warmed and cooled
in the same breath. The circle breaks
from the pre-kick-off freeze, players
with commemorative badges, a shimmering blast
of white noise from the whistle’s now.
May 2005, Champions League Parade

It wasn’t exactly long
after that we did
meet, for real I mean,
rather than in a moment belonging
between the crowd and the middle
place of dreams. Still,
I get the feeling, as the street
thickened, and the bus peeled

loose from its expectation,
you’d have found me somehow, joined in
the same victory songs
by the same gate, pressed
yourself against me as a groyne
for the lolloping great horse
to trample first, hanging on
tight as a matter of course,

with more about it than when
the police-woman put herself
there instead. There’s no
chance there wouldn’t have been
a spark, given the wealth
of energy we’ve given everything
we've done, your screaming through
the match for my Liverpool.
Burnden Park and the dogs

The jog-trot from here to the sweet shop
on the corner was miles further than the stroll
it is now, and the supermarket rolled
across the breath and fag-ends, the crowds stooping

through the weather. The whole place
had sharper and cleaner edges, the voices
rang a little truer, the noise
that first time, keeping pace

with your brother-in-law, especially. Losing
2-1 to Bristol City
and taking decades to put it right
with you there to see it, bruises

into a private folklore you’d have just forgotten
another afternoon, in favour of the next
win. Turning right a stretch
of tussock and the last of the winter’s throttled

growth remembers you with old Joe
to the dog-track and the winnings he’d stash in the space
inside his wooden leg, or the days
you’d see the players from the weekend going

through the motions on the training pitch
between the cinders. I swap you this
past for mine, Anfield and a mist
off the Mersey, Dalglish and chips.
Salvation Army clothes bin

Thrilling at the weight of the contact
clunking behind the bin-bags
as they tumble in, one thump
soft and heavy as a coma
for every one, and the rumble
after as the darkness comes
foaming from the tagged sins

of how many years
would that be now? years of
him to be dragged from the wardrobe
into so much space you could swim there
naked as the stars, hoarding
their dead light for the women
you could have been, off pier,

rolling the whiteness of their fire
between your breasts turned
wild again, and even more so
with the thought of the ragged men
who'll be wearing him tomorrow
down the road by staggers,
knowing how hard you've earned this.
Picturing you as a girl

With your head too big for your tiny body
tucked neatly underneath, weightless,
and a starling you’ve tamed perched on your finger,
there’s so much of you here I know

through the blurs of the lost edges. Dark
fills the bird and your hair, the stripes
across your vest. Between there’s the light
of your smile starting to laugh itself open,

but the sparks are missing from the bird. It’s the shape
of itself, but in velvet, or wet coal.
How long would you say you could m its form?

And how many other birds did you try it with
before that broken-legged survivor
got its wings? A good few
for certain, and each time you found one

clutching the same unlikely hope
they’d take to your dishes of bread and milk
without just curling under in a few days’
time, flat-eyed. Some, like the starling,

would have been injured. Others you’d pick
from the nest or the bushes and make them yours
when anyone asked, orphans, lost,
or best of all, needing to be taken

home. The same conviction screams
whenever something flies in front of the car.
Picture of you at a party

Barton’s aerodrome or The Mag
bring you and your eighties glad rags
spinning back into focus
with another chance to work out
how well we might’ve been suited
if the thought isn’t broken

before it starts. You’d have ripped me
for the way I spoke with your lips
glossed up, steps ahead of me
with boyfriends in tow and a year
more of the world experienced
as a sheer fact. I’d have seen

that much then, whether we’d spoken
or not. The picture’s openness
would have woken something though
either way, or yours rather, if
it was even close to the gift
and the difference I know

it as here. A drink, maybe three
into the version of the scene
in which seeing and liking
develops into your laughing
at me, my sensing after you
we’ve been drifting in, striking

the same note, it would have been there
anyway. If the lens could snare
the same clarity with light
and not much more going for it,
it’s a safe bet you would have poured
through and drawn me as tightly

to you as you do now, boyfriend
or no boyfriend. No harm joining
from here, loitering outside
the shot and our then having time
do us the sort of favour time
doesn’t seem to care about.
Pictured riding

Leaning out of a pylon
and a sky not far removed
from your jodhpurs, the white blaze
of a face that stays aloof,
gives you a confidence lost
on me, glossed with the same grin
I get across me in bed
when you’re ready and pin-sharp
especially, not a hint
of the winter-lipped tremble
I’d still get anywhere near
the horse you peer through the lens
towards us from, not knowing
what you’d show me looking back
over the pictures you’ve scanned
and sent, handed me to stack
against the present, asking
without asking if I would
really have fancied you then,
making sense of the raw cold
it must have been if the sky
and off-white of your jumper
matter, closing the distance
by the yes you know’s coming.
Picturing us

An early one of us at a lunch or dinner sometime near a Christmas has almost too much light, like it’s punched a hole in the dark and caught us hunched over a kiss, your left hand resting against my chest, your right reaching round to my other shoulder and locking us in, and our smiles the ones we found closest to us when the light found us more than we knew we were, shocking us closer together still than the weeks before could have known, even if hope we’d be more had started the sequence of causes and effects rolling, tweaked the nerve of it, or we were open already to the chances of years lapping up around us, carving us an island in which any nearness would be our own and appearances explain themselves as a hereafter.
Jayne’s holiday aubade

Night dives between your straining thighs.
The window’s bothered me a few days.
You find the gap, Miss Practical
on your tiptoes on the Welsh bed.

Weather tears and fidgets in the stone,
scuds clouds across the recent dawn.
This was a grain barn on a cattle farm
with a baby owner in black and white
plonked on top of a working shire,
standing with his hair at his father’s hip,
bright as the whitewash. Blond he was, like us,
he was happy telling us at great length
limping on a horse-kick set hard.
Your T-shirt helps, covers and not.
The window slams. No sun to speak of,
so no John Donne. But screw morning,

with you timeless in your red knickers
and the owner whistling from the barn next door.
Pte George Ellison, killed 11-11-1918

Bang in the centre of two more faces
done no favours by the resolution
of a time all but blown out, he’s a haze
of print and pixels. His looks, those loosely

of so many more, give nothing of years
he’d already had before the first sparks
struck at Mons. Forty, he was, when they geared
him up for the latest war heard barking

over the lines, as revealed by the list
of numbers he’s echoed by, encoded
for the plinths, suggesting a history
of fighting, or service at least, life owed

as opposed to being possessed. Details
of a family, a wife, Hannah, son,
James, stack up in a terrace in Leeds, lean
towards a future. Morning blunders on

half 9, news of unspecifed Germans
in a wood skirting the same nothing town
it all started from, interminable
as ripples in a photograph, nailed down

to their origins. Then, the momentum
elegy demands breaking from cover
and dropping him on the turf, homing in
on the point to be made of time’s other

alternatives, by which he passes seen
and ignored by rifles already snapped
and being cleaned. That, or he lends meaning
to the clang of bells and gilded trappings

of the paper-signing by being there
openly a few hours later, falling
upright through the trees and only wearing
dirt green not to be stripped to his bollocks

and stung to bits as he’s traipsing back. Part
of a more general drift, in that case, soft
focusing as they fill gaps in the hearts
of trains and tables, vacantly coughing

green air or the dregs of soil. The pit-shafts
it would be next, his name and face erased
instead of fixed in print, among those lit
by working lamps, his coal-skin still blazing.
Domodedovo airport, 24-1-2011

(For Anna Yablonskaya)

An instant flowering of a sun develops over several frames, a white need at the centre you can’t pin to any one person in particular,

to shadows gathered in a lobby waiting on arrivals, a face worked or lived with suddenly unfamiliar, a star, the dreamt matter rising

in nocturnal water, crossed by a system of eccentric ripples drooping them on stacks of luggage, benches on the rather perfect repetition of the marble floor,

sculptures under circles of dust as shy and elusive as the sense of what, what happened here clanging deep inside the ear, our capacity to understand

by any other method than pointing the exact second on a replay, the disappearing hereafter, a melting away, a burning off even of their shadows.
Albert Richards, war artist, 1919-1945

Looking, he says, for that perfect picture
catching the German army in retreat,
the point at which the march turns
a heel-mark in the summer. He’s found their horses

in an orchard, their table-legs sticking out
from bloat bellies. A boy there was
in one town tying a tricolor
to an iron rail, and men like reddlemen

part of the machine making din
from iron ore. A landing strip
grew from a concrete cross on fields
screaming with gold fire. Elsewhere

Horsa gliders, piled up,
poking the picture’s eye out
with their cardboard tails, their insignia still ours
in a dozen parts. He takes a Jeep

and his colours to the night, the dark
strafed with the ticks of crayoned bullets,
the night which rumbles wire over Caen,
or buckles slabs of itself in the foreground

of another pretty town. He sees
people move like grass, people
shift and vanish in the billows of so much
sky. Hills suit him, let him

peer down through candle-wax explosions
into tiny lives, lives that slide
on green tiles. Or the view through the bay-door
of a plane, of his Jeep in a Dutch field

folding his portrait of himself in flames.
On deck with the secret sleeper

A vast expiration of lucid stars
new and uncluttered by light’s noise, ageless
by his terms, quivers darkly above him,
unfolds a languid arm, a cold caress.

His subconscious voice succumbs, relaxes,
absorbs the slow percussion of the sea,
the warm thrum of turbines, plate-steel clenching,
the night gushing its refreshing sweetness.

He'll whisper as much in his letters home
and immerse in his old familiar pain,
knowingly and deliberately confuse
Cwmaman’s heavy hills with the contours

of each undiscovered land. Faces blend
degrees of separation. A brown girl
flexes by a brothel wrapped in Welsh vowels,
the New World’s eyes stare whiteness from the mines

and the tireless pit-wheels of his dreaming.
He’ll save his last thought for the flimsy deck.
He’ll let the rancid stink of the troopship
slip quietly through his fingers, his secret

guarded by the round hull of a lifeboat.
It’s conceivable he was felt soft-shoed
and in shorts passing through the sleeping men
to lie stripped above, turn grey with the moon,

if not by the lads triple-tiered in bunks,
then by the ancient hand of the spectre
who shakes him to himself in the morning
to douse the place he lay with clean water.
Losing Alun Lewis in the Americas

We were wordless and weaving lividity through colour, the hot clamour of people, both in step and following the same regimental line.
For a while he was profiled against an encroaching night, clumsy by his jaw’s slight curve
and the calm humanity of his cheekbones. His lip hitched a half smile, Cwmaman and our newer world, touching auras through their fingertips like strange galaxies kissing. Above the sweat of marching I smelt oranges, moistness, bleeding into perfume-clouds wriggling from lit bordellos, unsure if the scent was ours or something acquired on board, a germ carried in our lungs shared between the lot of us, or at least, the rest of us.
He had become less obvious, slipping between the sleepers by midnight to have the stars and bare moonlight to himself, observing his skin transformed, or writing home to Gweno, the words melting from his veins.
We passed brown babies in shawls with their pot-bellies groaning
and old women who gestured and flexed V–signs. Some young girls mingled among us, tugging our sleeves. Where I struggled,
he was water to their hands moving freely through the crowd, now obscured
as our column began to lose its order.
Shalimar Gardens, Lahore, 1943

Replacing embers of dark robins
collecting thinly on the garden walls
by first light, light yet to be bugled
to high day, a brown soutane
and a white beard, a pair of specs
made natural by a dab of sun,
like he’s been recently touched by Renoir
and left drying where the shade snaps.

A masked smile, the stillness and movement
of water, greet him among the terraces
with an extended hand, reassuring
that the elements have agreed their mutual terms.
Among the privacy of the parched trees,
Lahore seeming otherwise deserted,
he’s almost obliged to be the first to talk,
semi-fluent in valleys’ French.

Wales, he says, is a green land,
Cwmaman village dark and small,
made smaller still by the soaring hills,
and does the priest ache for his home?
and what is the difference between God and war?
one reflection to another, the priest to the soldier,
the calm of Shalimar, the smooth water,
*My son, you lack our consolations.*
Jasmine tea at a pavement café

An afternoon to dream the guns
to wisps of cloud from Tel Aviv,
an interplay of light and shade
over textured stone, serves to give

precision to a moment, cuts
arrangements of pavement-tables
in the white flags themselves, and him
with them, stretching from the stable

core of his recovering flesh
with a newspaper browsed away
to obituaries, an upbeat
scoop from the sands of Alamein.

Jasmine tea, a taste picked up
in Cairo, re-evokes a girl
and her lover, keen-eyed with smiles
locked in photographs and a world
of dust between them, now a name
to parade on her skillful tongue,
shuffle and replace with a lad
still out there somewhere, or wrongly

supposed. His darkness nearly told
until he caught it by the mane,
opted for the easy mirage
in maybe and something painless

on red pillows. Her hair swirling
and dispersing inside the cup
spins the same overwhelming scent.
Her barter and low yes ripple

in the murmur of slow traffic,
talk from assemblies of young men
dressed in the desert and the sun,
women happy knowing again

where the tan ends, offering thanks
to the dunes for their coin. Or no,
that was night in another town
somewhere in his unguarded groan,

a time well outside the remit
of what the black print hammers down.
Keith Douglas painting dancers

The lads at bayonet practice have been replaced. Between the cracked plaster, their packs are removed and laid upon an arena of eggshell blue, almost serene, with the green of their dead youth.

They rise from themselves, uncoiling, flexing into shape from the soil, each a small miracle. Flutes can be heard in their rehearsals where their yesterday is dispersed and night bursts through. An astute observer will already know as their movements come to a slow and remote recognition. Their characters, such as they are, are not unfamiliar, but stars grow aware of their new flesh and colour them accordingly. They seem immune to the orders of their former painter, much to his amusement. Reds implode in favour of a soft bleeding into steady silvers, sucked into a separate state. Their change exceeds his preferred arrangement, and their strangeness. His study at Christ’s Hospital tied them down, planted them in columns, the sounds of drill pounding in their blood.

Palestine better becomes them. Here, in his billet, they have bloomed, a consummation of sorts, their eyes reflecting smashed mirrors, their minds freed from their birth’s terror. Who they were is dried water.
Keith Douglas returning Masha

(Avenue Fouad 1er, Rouchdy Pasha)

The doll, Masha, is returning intact, the way he received her from his lover become a friend. The gesture, in not intending more, has him almost believing it’s bare transaction. He’s burning beneath his shirt from his morning swim, his absorbing the Corniche with its myth in mind. It’s renewed as soon as left, which amuses that sense of his being unleashed from the permanent, being born with the cord already hanging its wet rope on the birthing-room floor. The deserts are so famous for men like him, the namelessness that disdains or forgets what earth feels like. Masha is untangled from his kit, with apologies for the ubiquitous powder which failed to discriminate one stillness from another. The sun’s fly-swarms tended not to crowd her so her purity’s unsullied.

The girl sharing her doorway with his memory of their nights, accepts the doll, rubbing its face as clean as her dress allows. Where’s she been, poor thing? And to think of the debt he owes her, all that luck she’s stored behind those bland eyes, and gave him. Lent, he reminds her, the gentle correction in his hint of a smile. Alright, lent, but there all the while, even after the trip-wire went off in his face. She’s his saviour. And now he’s ready to give her back. It’s over for him out here. Back to England now. And after England, something Consular laughs.
itself towards a promise. Here
would be nice, somewhere where living
comes unquestioned, somewhere thinner
than England will be. She’d ask him,
she really would, if he’s better.
And he’d lie, for once, to let her
keep him hers with the splinter masked,
the end unwritten on his skin.
Syrian road-trip 1941

In pyjamas from the doorway of a two-roomed hut, a teacher in a former life emerges from the darkness, his urgency unremembered. The inside reeks of chickens, and children gnawing on their thumbs. It was their mother who answered first, with Arab French long unraveled from its formal self, an officer left squirming in the liquid sun. His henchmen loiter by their truck with worthless soil clinging to their desert beige, dust on their forearms from a night on the hillside. Three local pounds does the trick and they’re passing round coffee and meagre fags, the lights visible across the scrub’s age.

The schoolmaster invites him in, possibly discerning an edge he can comprehend, a distance equating to an existence like stretched camel-skin, a fledgling desire to reach past the thinness.

The mother and some thirty eggs return from surrounding dwellings. The officer and the father are immersed in their own breathing, reassembling and re-telling their previous lives, gulping their dregs gums curling from disarming smiles. The officer remembers Lawrence’s comments on an obese England, feels the chill rejoining the ring of men yawning in the rawness of a winter morning’s blue miles.
Treblinka’s trees

(By no means to be seen as eugenic metaphor, for all they were set to fail or grow at the same moment, and despite the vagaries making some of them stand firmer and taller, while the frailest trees fold over. The fact is, covering mattered more than the pseudo of excusing as the time flexed, finally, the forests fell further and further behind them, blinding the spaces to reminders of their waste, preserving what they’ll tell you, all of them, was always such a peaceful place you’d picnic here, spend the night blending with the slight disturbances of the wind turning in the wood, the sounds you only seem to hear after absences, after the vast silences, miles on the midnight rails under the eyes of the stunned and the stupefied, the farmers, let’s face it, who’d be familiar with at least part of that logistical process by which this or that one’s weeded out sooner or later. In the sun their straightness shimmers, their bark climbs the darkness pervading decades from the fact. They’ve fattened from the rush of needing to push a screen across, of course, from an order herded through an afterthought, grafted on a circumstance. A confirming, a disguise rising above itself, hovering in the breath expended there. Or is that our tendency to want this to be a more haunting scene than it already is, death’s insistence?)
Memories of the women, Grabow

(After Claude Lanzmann's Shoah)

They were missed by the men, mostly. Their beauty filled working mornings with more thoughts than the work itself ever could. But they would look like perfection, pain and graft being concerned only with those whose men were poor, those who’d be found scrubbing their hands and nails to stubs, or, in the worst cases, with jobs because their men couldn’t get good jobs of their own. So yes, they’re all missed.

In a street lined with the sloping roofs of homes emptied and filled time and again, the nods and arms folded across bosoms confirm it was a shame. While, with their eyes set in their heads like nails, also saying their own lives have improved no end since. They’re sellers of eggs now, and they live in homes they like, rather than small ones at the broken end of town.

Then to a man wearing a cap the sun and rain must have become over the years who’ll say they stunk. Really, they stunk. Passing the men the smell would be thick in your nose after the work they did all day peeling their skins, letting them dry. But good money. All of their men seemed to be tanners here with such beautiful wives waiting at home with hair like crow’s wings.

As he talks, needing the questions twice each time, others collect loosely around his words who saw beauty in those women of theirs, who saw how it was they were lined up in the square and made to wait there for the vans. And in the church, with vans coming up from the woods, forty or fifty green-sided vans with their cries rising inside like birds.
Simon Srebnik outside the church in Chelmno

(After Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah)

So many gather outside the church today because they know the date of procession days so well. Their smartest clothes and best shoes wait for the Virgin to rise above work and families, time to watch the parade of carts and horses living here has depended on this long. The tower ripples bell chimes over their lifetimes of forest, birch trees with trunks like moonlight, patches of farms, and love beside the river. Standing between the crowd and what their eyes suggest is not right somehow, a man with the face of knowing the place he grew from, going on sixty. Hard to tell exactly, only by counting back to when he drifted down the slow green Narew and sung of the girls who cried down from Prussian windows when they could see the troops head off to war. Or younger, if forty years have passed since then, but looking more aged, more like the face of the forest’s dark paths beyond the road. A camera presents the crowd to worlds as far beyond them as star-shine, carves each one a mark against the white pause talking begins to invade. A voice asks how much they knew, or saw, if they heard the boy he was with guards for company sliding songs they taught him there along the tired stream, which their consensus assents they must have, they did, recalling how he’d the voice of birds and angels. One elected to speak for all explains away their being too scared often to help, their attempts to sneak bread across the lines to ones they could tell were packed in trains, or just behind them inside the church, until the morning drove the few miles up from the forest and drove them all back again. He nods, or wearies an actor’s smile
diminished only once it's the priest who talks instead, informs him of the great sin Jews, with apologies, letting him know he doesn't mean it personally, soiled their hands with. Christ was killed by Jews, an equation left to balance out, before the church doors open to let the procession fall through.
Song of Simon Srebnik

(After Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah)

Beginning with a river
and the drifting of a song
through thirty more years of trees,
a reprise full of longing

for a white house, a distance
the song risks losing, leaning
over, a man’s returning
with it burnt in, to the scene

he left. Forty-seven now,
but the frown looking ageless,
born that way. Except the ones
who knew once how he could drag

his melody down and back,
can unpack the boy again
hearing how the same tune sheds
its embedding, all the grain

on its slender stem, hearing
how it pierced their working days
with the weight of their knowing
what his boat towed behind, grazed

against. Their voices take turns
at what’s worn away. He sang
because the soldiers made him,
a display, a way to hang

some goodness on the nail. Or,
he sang purely to save his life.
He sang so they’d hear him sing,
so he’d bring them in. A knife,

that song of his, a wire’s tear,
as we hear him sliding past
and the camera frames his face
for us, traces the distance

in every line. An always
in his following the same
stream. Always singing the way
they’ll all say they heard him, him

and the soldiers, to the leafs
the alfalfa grew, the field
on the far bank he'd grub in
for those rabbits the soldiers

had as pets between the pyres.
Remember Steinlauf

(After Primo Levi’s *If This Is a Man*)

Scrubbing at his scrawn without soap and the coal set to cover him. The word frivolous occurs, moves away though, questioning its own pertinence. Old Steinlauf must know washing that way, it cools you down, it works at the man inside, drowns him if he’s not careful, turns blue beneath the sallow. He’ll not stop, doesn’t matter what anyone tells him, they’re just trying to mend a hole in the fog. He’ll not stop, this or the other side. It’s this keeps him wired to his own routine inside routine. A soldier’s boot, before the clogs stomped him blisters, commands itself to walk that bit taller than the wooden shuffle. You pick your feet up, you have to out do, out work. His hard-bitten smile comes over, scuffing the skin with the jacket he’s been holding safe between his knees, then hauls it back on. Simple as good and sin, chess-piece vision cut from the Alps before they caved in. But it works, it works for him. One miracle bears another, and it all helps.
Lilith of Camp Buna, Auschwitz, 1944

(After Primo Levi's *If This is a Man*)

We must imagine the pattern of a war unravelling bombs from a flakless sky, guns not even bothering with the arc needed to trace where they plough across drowsing like summer bees. West.

They move West, losing themselves from the sun rising behind their bubble glass. Of the two men we find pressing their bellies in the mire, one is sufficiently clear-headed to keep it sharp, the impact, the taking cover in whatever form it comes to hand, metal pipe, a ditch they dug between them, before events kicked them from the dirt, having left them there as long as the numbers on their right arms.

The man he crouches with has a name: Tischler, meaning carpenter. This too he records. The latter speaks better in the tongue he doesn’t try to share with the one we’re indebted to. Enough passes between them to discuss a girl hunched in the earth somewhere close, humming the remoteness of a folk song rocking her shoulders to its other time, stopping only to mend her hair. And an apple Tischler pulls from the hunger they all of them wear beneath their eyes and their cheek-bones. But this happens before the girl, because for both of the men this could be their birthday; they could both be twenty-five. She’d be younger, or she always was. Lilith Tischler calls her, at which point we know more than the man who at first believes him. Lilith, the first woman, Lilith, who told Adam where to go, who wanders the void in constant need. Their first apple it was, for a whole year.
Canto waiting for soup

(After Primo Levi’s *If This Is a Man*)

All this in an hour of waiting for their soup passes between a pair of what remain men setting themselves aside from their stooping companions, partly by the space they engender between them, something verging on abstraction, but also tethered to the constant sense of practical need these places subtract to once the memory of what they were has faded from the hard bone. Though even the interaction the two men engage in begins from, is made partly from, a need to teach one of them how to speak Italian. They’ll start with words they say all the time, the things which can be pointed out and laid a hand on, eaten, or else stolen and then eaten, but less openly, the *now* which stretches so far, like a river swollen by a long winter the banks of which collapse under the strain, a black river unfolding over the past and the future and lapping against the sides of any trace of landscape they might remember, flooding the smallest gaps a face in a doorway, the weight of a hand might otherwise shine from. They’re carried from there to Dante, the Teller finding it in strands, pulling them apart, feeding them carefully to his Listener, beginning with the poet finding Ulysses in a talking flame shared with Diomed, the point of the flame glowing and reshaping in time with Ulysses’s words. An image, a pattern, begins to grow from the first metaphor as the men get herded through their world of work, the shadows of barbed wire crossing the edges, the odd blink of a world outside them so easily lost with its spires and its wooded towns, lost with so much the one
with Dante on his dry tongue has seen expire,

ghosted away. Just the embers where it shone in his youth. Not that they’re older here, as such, so much as eroded. But he must go on

once he’s started, rejoining after he’s touched the part about Penelope’s ancient faith in Ulysses’s image. And his, not much less,

but seduced by the vastness tugging at waves of open sea. Just that returns, the great sea itself, turning over and over, wet caves

smashing their heads apart, salt mouths releasing and regaining hold on their brief solidity: an idea both of the men can feel teasing

their routine, their living at the beck and call, the yelp poised on the metal taste of whistles capable of wrenching a man from his soul

in the one blast, there like a jagged blister the mind keeps stepping on. Yet dissipated by what the Teller offers up as a gift

to his Listener, something stronger than waiting to see whether the waters will come for them of their own accord, something more elated

in its embracing what exists past the dumb as tomb-stones standing there on someone’s order; an active word breaking from the drummed in

and actually, actively, just setting forth instead, a concept the Listener finds himself more than able, more than ready to support

having sailed himself, he says. So he’s a wealth of such sweet hours of his own he can call on to help the words come across an unhelpful break as they’re pushed by. Even so, it all falls into place now, this notion of their being able to step outside the wire, climb the walls

with the guards and the kapos dulled by seeing too much of the same eternity that keeps the two men talking. One’s ignoring the scene
change of a different cloud passing in its sleep. The Listener’s sucking nutrition from the lines the first gives him at least a peephole into,

aware all the time of the sun’s rising sign wearing out their one hour together before the soup’s ready to be carted out on time.

Time they’ve got no claim on, time in cold storage, time frozen like a hand on a length of steel wanting more than a thin light from the morning sun. And then the rhymes gum on his tongue, feeling wrong somehow, not fitting the way they should do. Until the speech, until Ulysses appeals
to something those who’ve gone that far with him hold inside them, have buried in the distances gazing from blank eyes they hardly acknowledge his shape against the sun with, unresisting the path that’s brought them so far from the memories of what was real, the words they have for histories.

It’s this point the Teller’s lost mountains stem from moving freely between Milan and Turin on a train, on a train’s fluid resemblance to the past it must have taken him through more times than enough. And back to the broken crew faced with a mountain of their own, a forward pressure as the stink of the soup hangs its dew over the final minutes of their journey. The Teller’s clawing at the last, the last few tercets, the whole point. The remnant he’s turning over on its stave, trying to work towards, glimmers when the sun hits a wave. A burning need to get it just right starts edging forward on the sores of his wooden shoes, that shuffle he’s learnt as defence against the remorseless diurnal rhythm trodden out by the life’s worth of a pit-horse, the towering endlessness of days meant to be exactly as bereft as this might not be if the lines can be pinned to the moment of their meaning. If only.
If there wasn’t the soup under its wet skin,

the cough of the punctual wakening to its own overbearing importance, drawing them in. That, precisely that, makes an inverted cone

of water beneath Ulysses and his men, tipping the wood of their boat at the skyline, pulling the whole lot down into eventual

absence, leaving them choking on the saline. New words test themselves against finality announcing the soup, striking at the nail-head

with an iron hammer. The banality of it all sloshes in the bowls before them. The Teller holds his Listener back, a stalling

the words he’s after answer by reforming.

And over our heads the hollow seas closed up. There’s hope the Listener finds in his exhorting,

the same sense of it as a way of growing out from the visible shell of the general humanity gulping it down in grey rows.

Kraut und Rüben. Kraut und Rüben extending into the day before and the days to come in a single identical dimension.

The voice of Ulysses at last succumbs to the hell-flame the poet bound him in, his boat a mess of match-wood for the sea’s slow tumbling.

The Listener knows enough now to stay afloat: the Italian for looking as far beyond as the vision allows, the word for remote

surviving the latest line-up for the once a day of the soup-call, and the chunk of bread they get, even what it means to have wandered

so far on the Teller’s breath, to be led there.
The night before the train comes

(After Primo Levi’s If This Is a Man)

Among the children to be washed tonight
Emilia, who is a Levi, is three years old.
She will be washed because there will be another morning.
She will be washed because she has a mother
and mothers attend to their children here.
This will be done, and their clothes will be washed
and hung in the morning on the barbed wire
like flowers floating on twists of briar.

A man called Gattegno will gather to him
his sons and his daughters, their wives and their men.
The women will finish their making ready
and will relax their hair. They will form a circle,
a circle to be formed on the naked ground.
At the centre of the circle will be the Yahrzeit candle,
lit in the shadow of their father’s fathers.
The family will gather in the lager’s heart.

Food will be shared, and those who are not
lamenting, may be drunk or making love.
Or they may gather with old Gattegno.
There will be few among them who do not know.
Words will acquire a life’s weight.
Tomorrow, or the next day, Emilia,
three years old and Aldo’s daughter,
will be washed again in the engine’s water.
Primo Levi and the barber Ashkenazi

(After Primo Levi's If This Is a Man)

Are we, should we be shocked, on reading new hope passed across to the man who guides us, helps us come to terms, by a barber? Primo tells us how it stays as remote as stars, the news dared, even then, as a whisper only, hinted by a change of expression by the barber.

Those he shares with the death and pain around him grow equivalent, so the gentle barber makes a difference already, just by being new. And also, it seems, by being Greek, strange, wild when heard in the space outside the sick-ward talking. Primo describes his asking what gives.

Then, receiving his shave, we get his answer pointing out through the window, winking, sweeping west with one of his hands. The words should carry further, Morgen, and alle Kam’rad weg. All gone, the Wehrmacht outside the wire. It should be massive, but, when he tells us, there’s a flatness.

Hope inside is conditioned. That’s what’s offered, knowing what, in the captor’s mind, defeat means. Hoping always depends on circumstances. That could be at the heart of this, his almost numbed acceptance, as if the news was written years before in a language lost to his soul.
Returning, Romanian border

(After Primo Levi’s If This Is a Man)

Either he’s cadged paper en route, or the transformation’s rooted in the beautiful and strange tug of war between there and home. There constitutes a grey camel being stumbled through the change from one grade of track to the next, a crossing point where selected details click against that page he carries, as if he knew this would be worth adding to the list of scenes he’s been arranging all this time. Romania it is, with Russia filling the distance with the miscellaneous ghosts of ones who made it there, and ones the liquid movement of the Front marched off, burnt in their clusters at the roadside. Home is released by spoken emblems he can tease out from pieces of language on a wayside hut. The words for bread, milk, and wine pull him further from this world to belonging somewhere. Far off, native sounds, stems, inflections, rise through the clamour, the remembrance of a face on glass or water. And the girls he sees riding like peasant girls who’d uncurl from Abruzee,
or from Venice. We’d be wanting these signs in his place. They’d haunt us after shunting name to name hammered in, painted in the tar sometimes, of towns aching with war. Re-emergent, we’d be claimed,
surely, by familiar anchors he finds along the embankments where the tank tracks dug in. The camel drags its wounded face
across the page, leaves him facing
those liaisons he struggles
to piece together. Others join
his waiting. They’ll have the old train
broken down in a few days.
Plenty of time to remember
where he found them, or they found him,
how they came to be retraced.
Division of bread

(After Robert Antelme’s The Human Race)

The blind guy takes his bread from his pocket and cuts it into three, giving the first to one of his two friends, before knocking the other friend with his elbow. Bread bursts out of nothing. The two friends are woken together by the gift of its broken reality. Each takes what’s offered them between the seeing thumb and finger-ends before carving it into cubes, lending them gravitas denied the birds coughing and swallowing life over and over in the fields outside the Lager. Each man, aware of what this means, will discover his own way of eating. For the two friends it has to be made to last, staving off the worst of the bone-gnawing hunger. Soft compliance follows the rough grudge of crust at a rate they measure against the pain and each other. For the blind guy the gain is in large pieces he can feel muscle on his tongue, in lying down with the weight inside him. The two friends are contracted to making sure neither is left waiting longer with nothing in hand, neither hacked by that envy want breeds. Once it’s finished the possibilities, even of bins and of chunks turning to stone, of bread green with wasting, dry up. Only the needing remains, amplified by the thought bleeding through the times they’ve watched the kitchen, they’ve seen potatoes carried in and out, or seen the guards gorge themselves drowsy. They begin to think in bread-hours, the number between a man alive and not. News hinted at the day before, altering patterns drawn and re-drawn past the wire, becomes the lawns and houses they left behind. The bread shines and flickers out. The three men will resume the rhythms of work and sleep on the straw and stone of the church floor. When tomorrow slides open, they’ll ache for bread in the gloom.
Henri and the Pole wait for a train

(After Tadeusz Borowski’s *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*)

No transports for the last few days equates to the stinking malaise and the haze of a summer in which only the yards and lines of people move. Eating defines what they mean, those with something from home and the time to sit up and taste it, against those with soup and the slops they can pilfer from others with as little. Legs hanging from their top bunk, niggled by the lag between silver and gold days when the ramp’s swarming with new arrivals and alarms crack like storms, Henri, the Pole and one or two others have bread and tomatoes, dreams of good red wine. A steady prayer rolls like a dry stone in a gutter beneath them. A rabbi, eyes shut as he mutters the beauty of another world, shares his bunk with several more strewn or hunched in the sunken thoughts neutered of context by the metal gates, the trains the men above them wait to hear clattering in. Say they run out of people. What then? The question’s natural, sensing almost anything can fray to nothing in time. For Henri the thought’s hardly an easy one to dwell under long. The Pole, he’s got his family back home and with luck they’ll keep bread coming right through summer. When the cold slices in it might not matter anyway. He shouldn’t flatter himself. That bundle he keeps roped up is always a blade-edge.
from safe in a place like this. Laid bare, betrayed, his hope’s as cheap

as anyone’s, and he should know, should Henri. The prayer shows them where hope goes, what it does here, and the others packed in like eggs in a basket, six at once, wedged, knotting legs and arms and fears
together until neither he nor the Pole could tell what they’d be apart. Seeing outside walls takes a man so far, but you need and you still hurt. The heat pricks beads in their neat summaries, falls

over them all with the same weight as the door when it gets rattled open. Late, but definite news from the ramp. A fresh transport for Henri, and a new landscape of clubbed hands, the several

seconds it takes to wolf his food and elbow a path through the wood of stripped bodies, with the Pole as well, to witness for himself how the next load empties its wealth and the hell there coughs up gold.
Shock

(After Otto Dov Kulka's *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death*)

The sky remains everything it was. The Russian with lost eyes hasn’t moved, leans, realising what they all know, in average greens and beaten greys. If you touch the wire, you die. A wooden pole or shovel rests in his hands, holds the same sculpted pose. As the rush becomes more remote, a rattle of voices edges in. One grabs the work from the Russian’s hands, dabs at the boy, until the wire lets him go. Even as he slips down, the boy understands the riddle behind it all, and with giddy clarity. The great joke resounds throughout the compound. Life gathers in vague herds, the way it has done since the first trains came lumbering towards the ramps. An aftermath loses nothing of its past, stands, or shuffles on wooden heels, aches as hard between the rations, bakes and freezes in its bones. The brands blister his fingers and palms, smell as sweet and honest as they would in any other solid world outside the miles of work and swells of birch and smoke. Only the care he takes not to be noticed hunched around his wounds for the next month cracks the certainty, breathes that air the Russian seems to cope without as he watches the boy twist, drop to his shadow, the steel soup-bowl he was holding when the rim caught.
Exit Leon

(After Piotr Rawicz’s Blood from the Sky)

A goat to be tamed, to nuzzle the hand as warm and alive as wounding. The lawyer, Leon, is given words that seem so much bigger than his or anyone’s mouth, an image for suffering straight from a text the synagogues dried to nothing as long ago as the oldest photographs stretching albums and families back to their first, their fountainheads. Leaders’ words, or an actor’s waiting on death, at once both concealed and seen as it homes in. Weighted with poignant reference to how his audience, the two who might have ‘survivor’ written inside their blood, should regard their lives as a precious witness, and how estranged from themselves they’ll be in the time they’ve left to become a part of the world again. And apart, both life, and its echo. Speaking to let the words and their impact settle between them, age and experience turn to the future knowing that boots are coming to take and burn and extinguish. There, in the space between them, the couple sit down and listen harder than guns and walls to the goat, the metaphor sucking heat from the lawyer’s fingers. Naomi, Boris, a ghetto soon to be ripped to picture-frames. Toys, and suitcases. Boris there as a portal through which the lawyer’s speech can extend towards, and encompass us. Then the human detail of stillness snaps with Naomi picking the Magen David from jackets, outfits for she and Boris to wear once Leon gets led away from the scene with milk on his fingers, trailing his words.
Ghetto morning

(After Piotr Rawicz's Blood from the Sky)

Boris shows us transition poised between last light and first, and then rips it down the middle, making darkness and day so sharp they cut dreams down to ash and the sour of bones. A morning folded back on an empty bed, through which she, up before him, is working at the factory benches, taken away by cold. And milling people, streets with a sense of change to carry forward into arrangements. No more room there left for abstracts, or time. Instead, the concrete stares us back through his gazing down on vendors hawking roubles and sweets, a central figure drawing crowds to his next performance, pale, meek, hardly what we'd expect to matter. Words reach through the window, persuasions soft with sweetening, like the whisper affecting love, extending gentle promises. Donnesque, death as sleeping, if they want, or as lightning, done in seconds, millefeuille, tasting of honey cake the seller's recent grandmother used to make. For children, more than anyone, those who really love them, left to us as Boris shuts his eyes, gets dressed, pictures infinite detail, slides of plasma stained to show us precisely how they all fit.
Boris and prisoners at the Jewish Cemetery

(After Piotr Rawicz’s Blood from the Sky)

The difference hinges on the life
they’re given, how much detail marks
them out from all those fronting dark
realities, who’ve had belief
dissolved in favour of the truth
in hunger. Boris shows us shapes
of men, a mass of them, escaped
from fears he can’t just keep aloof
from all the stuff that goes with him
surviving. Hammers raise their heads
and shatter bits of stone. His dread
compels him, holds him at the rim
of every grave the group assigned
attack, peripheral, but part,
despite himself, of what they are
and do. He concentrates on signs
the stones have carried on their fronts
from eras back. Each letter torn
from context suddenly adorns
another world, becomes the blunt
expression raised and dropped again
on order, finds a duller sound
consistent with the pummelled ground
of pauseless marching, faces stained
with what they’ve lost. The letter shin
invokes or speaks of divine help
withheld. It leaps above the yelp
and groan of hammers, homing in
on Boris, Boris also fixed
on how it breaks its meaning, splits
apart from palms where blessings sit
like patient birds, or candlesticks
for someone’s wife’s or mother’s faith
unblemished over time, a tree
the weather felled where Boris sees
a man who died too early. Wraiths
in twists of limb perform, contort,
involve him. *Lekhem*, bread. The word extends its hands towards him, heard the way a dream is, voice of thought

invoking him in turn to throw a piece of chocolate down, to see them crane their necks, to watch and keep the moment safe, to save the stones.
Boris metamorphoses

(After Piotr Rawicz’s Blood from the Sky)

Between Naomi drowsing his shoulder numb with rhythmic travel, lost in the river-run of dreams, and each advertent dog-watch guessing them busted of Boris’s blond hair

and her distraction, change has its chance to make him new. A farm-hand grows from his ancient line’s artistic fingers, voice like black earth breaking his own like a summer’s cooked reed,

and blowing in as platform replaces sky beside the word NIGORILOY. Someone sings up easy loves of nation, land, arms, syllables glancing the winter’s thin light

across the distance Yuri will wobble down drunk after hours of train. And do what, this man who blended work with reading how strong even the smallest becomes when forged hard

with what he is inside, in his bones? The life of Boris, bored to death on the way, unpeels its slough and lies with screwed-up war news where mute expressionless gazers keep watch

for chinks of difference, study his looks against Naomi’s hair and biblical eyes. A cow with bacon stuffed like love in her skirt next to a boy who could spot a strange bird

from fields away, or villages even; guards with glass to see through years that were never his at all, accept their Yuri, sound lad raised on a farm to the tune of chilled rails,

their partisan, with tresses the hay-fields wear to stubble. Pretty, next to him, darker-skinned and haired, they’ll let Naomi pass too for a legitimate lover, deep-eyed

and mournful as she is. She’ll have met him where and how exactly? Spanish perhaps, and him as local as they come. It’s some fate brings an exotic as far as round here

and weds or beds her. Doorways and windows drift
beside them, see the rub of his trousers graze
his circumcision, and their shared dream
catching its flame in October’s white breath.
View from the Lieutenant’s hut II

(After Piotr Rawicz’s Blood from the Sky)

Epiphany cracks a light on the yard
and scorches the darkness open, reveals
that fear we’ve had gnawing. Faces transform
the cabbages. Boris smashes the glass
to capture the Deuteronomy rising
up from the row of heads, from the gaping
sockets, reminding what there is left
of them that the Lord is One, that the Lord
remains to be called upon. From the moon-scape
carved in the blinking marble of having
somehow to come to terms with a scene
from Goya, to blood, like oil, on the hand
we owe its confirming to. As if human
witness is touching, almost despite
itself, for a man like Boris; the lens
can’t help but be scarred for good in the act
of staring the sun to ashes. The thought
of artists with bleeding eyes, or the weeping
glass of devoted windows, attaches
Boris to those interred in the yard,
the beacons they throw towards him, his skin,
translucent as tissue-paper. The yokel,
Boris as Yuri Goletz, becomes
more fragile than ever. Boris’s mask
erodes to the cheek-bone poking its marrow
out of the chinks. A whack on his forehead
brings us to Boris next to Naomi,
both with the hut’s Lieutenant explaining
down his attack as kindness protecting
Boris against himself, and the heads
the pigs have been at outside as a breed
apart, as distractions better ignored
by Yuri and Mrs Goletz, his words
as gracious as milking angels. Polite,
obsequious even, when he invites
himself to their world by way of repaying
what they’ll have suffered here. In another
time they’d be friends, of course, in a kinder
climate, with just the raising and letting
fall of his hands withheld from the scene.
Boris taken out for questioning

(After Piotr Rawicz's Blood from the Sky)

A mirror revolving the world
in its mahogany socket
swims his image to the surface
of sixty-six days, unearthing
the man from that copy locked in
in his cell’s blindness. Like a pearl

knifed and levered a hinge of light
when his vision fills with a face
to which he’s introduced: that blank
at first, before his white panic
bolts from the difference. Displacing
the version of him held tight to

the screen behind his eyes so long
it’s become him, the pulped matter
of fact of pain, the portrayal
of another him on display
in a fairground. As a flattened
landscape, to which he half-belongs,

his features in their reflections
and slants of light shift, inviting
and rejecting, lashing themselves
to the kisses of dissolving
names and girls, a river’s brightness
lanced with sun-darts. His defections,

from a truth an Officer’s voice
explains for him in guide-book terms,
melt away. A matchstick rises
from the desk to help surprise him
from himself. The questions, warming
to their sound, obscure his choices

for him, let silence answer back
with nothing more than his being
accepted as an estrangement
from the words they press him with. Change
hardens into fact, freeing up
the chance that with every impact

broken into the welted mauves
and saffrons of storm-clouds, he drifts
closer towards, or further from
the fire. The match-ends stack up. Four
on the desk now, their brevity embracing him with the loving
tendencies of fingertips left asleep. A promise resonates in liturgy, the numbered bones announced in the mirror, honing each of them to the vague pleasure of the snap they’ll make reflected back at him. An expertise, bored at its own prowess, offers up possible escapes, nirvanas infiltrated through the bargain of a name he can sense hovering beyond what the mirror explores.
Chapter One

What did Keith Douglas mean when he referred to
‘extrospective’ poetry?

On 10 October 1942, John Hall wrote a letter to Keith Douglas’s mother in which he criticised two of her son’s recent poems, ‘Christodoulos’, and ‘Egypt’. Replying on 10 June 1943, Douglas mounted a passionate defence of his recent ‘extrospective (if the word exists) poetry’.¹ In this chapter, I intend to establish what Douglas meant by ‘extrospective’ poetry, thinking about characteristics that he mentions in his letters, such as honesty, economy of expression, writing from first-hand experience, writing in a way that resembles ‘reportage’,³ and writing poetry that was outward-looking, as opposed to introspective, lyrical, or inward-looking. I will also consider implied aspects of Douglas’s definition of extrospective poetry that are not mentioned in his prose, such as the way it can involve looking at the world beyond the poet and capturing visual environmental detail. Associated with the latter trait is the contention that extrospective poetry can involve different types of ‘seeing’, including the physical process of seeing objects and surroundings, as well as ‘seeing’ wider political, social, and historical realities. As part of this exploration, I am contending that Douglas understood ‘extrospective’ to be more than a disposable term, and that he was advocating a definitive approach, a way of writing poetry that he felt was the most appropriate response to his circumstances and experiences. In the process of this argument, I will examine how far examples of Douglas’s work exemplify extrospection. I will also consider some of the potential biographical, cultural, and contextual origins of Douglas’s extrospective
poetry, on the basis that these findings have been applied to my own extrospective poetry in Chapter Three of this thesis.

i Keith Douglas’s definition of extrospection

An early indication that Douglas regarded extrospective poetry as an important development, with a set of distinct characteristics, is provided by asking what Hall disliked about ‘Christodoulos’, and ‘Egypt’. Both were written a month earlier than Hall’s letter, and Hall felt that both failed to live up to earlier examples of Douglas’s work, which he had praised for ‘a perfection which is extraordinary among the poets of his generation’. In comparison, Hall felt that the new poems lacked ‘emotional and intellectual validity’, as well as any simplicity of expression of ‘thoughts and feelings’, with these qualities allegedly having been sacrificed in favour of remoteness. In other words, Hall believed that his friend’s poetry had changed between their time at Oxford University and 1943, and not for the better. T. S. Eliot had put it differently when he wrote to Douglas two years earlier (15 February 1941), though he too had noticed that Douglas’s poetry was developing, suggesting that Douglas had ‘completed one phase which begins with the very accomplished juvenilia’, and ‘started on another’, that Eliot was keen to see ‘developed to the point of formal mastery’.

In another letter to Hall, written 10 August 1943, while admitting that he may have been ‘awkward and not used to the new paces’ of his latest poetry, Douglas disagreed with Hall’s view that he was writing ‘cleverly, but not movingly’, and criticised his correspondent for being ‘in a backwater’, and having ‘nothing to write about that is relevant’. He also suggested that
'reportage and extrospective (if the word exists) poetry'\textsuperscript{14} were what had ‘to be written just now, even if it is not attractive.’\textsuperscript{15} Douglas went on to explain that his intention was ‘to write true things, significant things in words each of which works for its place in a line’,\textsuperscript{16} in ‘rhythms’\textsuperscript{17} that had been ‘chosen to enable the poems to be read as significant speech’\textsuperscript{18}.

Douglas’s idea of extrospective poetry was, therefore, that it was practical, journalistic, economical, objective, and realistic. To this can be added that it was dependent on experience, often that of combat and travel, and that it was based on seeing, and reacting to, the world beyond the poet. For Douglas, extrospection also reflected ‘the careful absence of expectation (it is not quite the same as apathy) with which I view the world’,\textsuperscript{19} and constituted ‘a true reflection’\textsuperscript{20} of a general ‘state of mind’\textsuperscript{21} affecting ‘many others to whom I have spoken; not only civilians and British soldiers, but Germans and Italians’.\textsuperscript{22} Extrospection was, therefore, an approach that displayed an awareness of prevailing cultural and psychological conditions, at the same time as exhibiting the aforementioned formal and technical tendencies.

\textbf{ii Douglas, Auden, and the New Apocalypse}

In defining his poetry as extrospective, in 1943, and in setting out what writing extrospectively involved, Douglas was also explicit in distinguishing it from his earlier work: ‘In my early poems I wrote lyrically, as an innocent, because I was an innocent.’\textsuperscript{23} The demarcation is between the past, and the present, but it is also between his particular definitions of lyricism, and extrospection, and it is the latter distinction that formed the basis of his
criticism of Hall’s poetry. Whereas extrospection could cut through what Douglas called the ‘humbug and unnecessary detail’, the ‘Bullshit’ of ‘irrelevancies, of “attitudes”, “approaches”, propaganda, ivory towers, etc., that stands between us and our problems and what we have to do about them’, Hall’s poetry could not. In Douglas’s terms, ‘To write on the themes which have been concerning me lately in lyrical and abstract forms, would be immense bullshitting,’ with the implication being that the same should have been true of Hall.

Effectively, Douglas was recommending his extrospective approach as a remedy for what he perceived to be the flaws of more ‘musical verse’, with this being applied to all those of his poetic contemporaries who had failed to effectively respond to the upheavals of the Second World War, specifically, ‘poetic pioneers and land-girls in the pages (respectively) of New Writing and Country Life, [...] desperately intelligent conscientious objectors, R. A. M. C. Orderlies,’ and ‘students.’ This attack occurs in Douglas’s essay, ‘Poets in This War’ (c. May 1943), in which Hall is again criticised for ‘writing very involved verses with an occasional oblique and clever reference to bombs or bullets’, from ‘the headquarters of the International Art Club in London’; as are ‘Tambimuttu’, then editor of Poetry (London), and those of Douglas’s fellow student-soldiers who had ‘sprung up among the horrors of War Time Oxford’. Perhaps more significantly, ‘Henry Treece’ is another of Douglas’s targets, and is referred to as being ‘now the head of some sort of poetic school, of what kind I am not sure’.

Douglas clearly believed in the distinctions to which he drew attention, just as he believed in the validity of his approach. It is this conviction that
informs the view expressed by A. T. Tolley, and Bernard Spencer, that Douglas's poetry was indebted to the dominant voices of English language poetry of the 1930s, W. H. Auden included. In Tolley's words 'The best wartime work of the generation – of Douglas, Ross and Allison – has an ironic, realist stance that in fact owes a good deal to writing of a similar stance from the thirties.' Tolley's view is convincing, because, as an Oxford undergraduate, Douglas must have been well aware of the major poets of the 1930s, even though his letters make no specific mention of Auden.

What Tolley is doing here, however, is aligning Douglas with a particular poetic camp, a line of writers that he associates with stylistic and tonal conservatism, reportage, and restrained expression. This line can be extended as far as the so-called 'Movement' poets of the 1950s, the relevance and pitfalls of which I will explore in Chapter Two of this thesis. Tolley juxtaposes what he regards as the Auden-inspired group, with young soldier poets, many of whom, he contends, differed from Douglas by producing poetry that rejected 'the acerbic modernity of Auden and New Verse'. Tolley's argument refers to the 'unironic seriousness' of 'writing that was often grandiose and vacuous, as in the work of Sidney Keyes or the radical Alex Comfort.' Temptingly, Tolley's opinion of the output of Sidney Keyes resembles that expressed by Douglas, for whom Keyes was 'technically quite competent', but had 'no experiences worth writing of', as might be gathered when Tolley confirms that 'Keyes was killed in his first action'.

If Tolley is correct, it seems that Douglas, and other poets, had to choose between two ways of writing, with compromise being out of the
question. On the one hand, they could embrace the ‘lyricism’, to which Desmond Graham’s biography of Douglas refers, with Douglas’s conception of lyricism corresponding to the paradigm offered by The Lyric Theory Reader, where poetry can be ‘considered lyric when it represents an utterance in the first person, an expression of personal feeling, [...] Or [...] when it foregrounds the musicality of language by appeal to the ear or the eye.’ Alternatively, Douglas and his contemporaries could write what Adam Piette describes as the ‘Non-introspective reportage’, that was ‘demanded not only by the logic of his [Douglas’s] own poetic gift, which was naturally moving away from Donne-like metaphysical verse towards a tougher semi-demotic plain style, but by the ordinary ways of feeling amongst the ranks.’

Tolley’s polarisation gains support from the fact that Bernard Spencer described the 1940s in similar terms. Spencer, who, according to Jonathan Bolton’s Personal Landscapes, British Poets in Egypt During the Second World War, ‘became particularly close’ to Douglas during his time in Cairo, alluded to ‘two tendencies’. For Spencer, the first of these was ‘noted in Dylan Thomas and certain poets on whom he has had an influence – Welsh and Scottish above all,’ and went ‘towards the fantastic, the rhetorical, and the violent.’ What Spencer, Tolley, and arguably Douglas, had in mind in these allusions were poets associated with, or drawing inspiration from, The New Apocalypse, and The White Horseman, anthologies, edited by J. F. Hendry, and Henry Treece. Like Tolley, Spencer suggests that the political, and aesthetic opposite of these poets was ‘a poetry of the streets’, in which ‘objectivity predominates’, exemplified by ‘Auden and MacNeice.’ More pertinently, Spencer could have cited his own poetry, Alan Ross’s ‘Fog’, in
which ‘Men write letters / On deck, lean on the rails smoking’,\(^{58}\) or the same poet’s ‘J.W.51B, A Convoy’, in which the observation of the sailors is more detailed:

> And Poulson waddled crabwise to his Action Station
> And Smith wrote home on thin, ruled paper
> And Wilson read Spicy Stories in his hammock,
> And Reeder, McGregor, Wood and ‘Blood’ Reid
> Played Uckers on the tea-wet, tilting table.\(^{59}\)

This is all the more significant given that, like Douglas, Ross based these poems on first-hand experience, with David Hughes noting that he ‘spent three years of perilous service in the Royal Navy as a rating in escort destroyers on Arctic convoys to Russia,’\(^{60}\) before being ‘posted to ships defending the East coast of England’.\(^{61}\) In common with much of Douglas’s extrospective poetry, Ross’s war poems are rich in visual detail, as might be expected from a poet who ‘stuck to what was real – life on board a destroyer in wartime, as I experienced it. No more, no less’.\(^{62}\) It is no coincidence that Hughes remembers Ross as ‘a good working journalist, both as a sports reporter on the *Observer* from 1950 to 1971 and as a strikingly original editor of *London Magazine* for forty years’,\(^{63}\) reinforcing the connection between extrospection, observation, and reportage.

iii *Personal Landscape* and the case for co-existing opposites in Douglas’s poetry

However, that the views of Tolley and Spencer misrepresent the complexity of British poetry of the 1930s and 1940s is demonstrated by the inclusion of Douglas’s ‘Leukothea’, and ‘These Grasses, Ancient Enemies’ (sister poem to his Middle-Eastern poem, ‘Syria’), in the ‘Third Collection’ of the neo-
Further doubt is cast on the validity of regarding the poetry of the 1940s in such polarised terms by the *Personal Landscape* magazine, of which Spencer was joint-editor during his British Council activity in war-time Egypt, and to which Douglas was a significant contributor. Notably, the journal also featured poets as diverse as Spencer, fellow joint-editors, Lawrence Durrell, and Robin Fedden, the former contributor to the *New Apocalypse*, and *The White Horseman*, G. S. Fraser, Terence Tiller, Olivia Manning, George Seferis, and C. P. Cavafy. As Jonathan Bolton suggests, because the *Personal Landscape* group began ‘as a chance coterie of individuals possessing disparate artistic sensibilities’, there may be truth in the argument that the magazine and its writers were characterised by an ‘ability to occupy a middle ground between the antithetical tendencies of public and private schools of poetry, between logical and illogical semantic systems’. As Bolton suggests, this is a trait that ‘can be attributed to the variety of personalities and styles that *Personal Landscape* managed to incorporate into its “lyric total.”’ For this reason, any attribution of a general style to the poets based in Cairo and Alexandria would be dangerous, but given their eclectic nature, it is reasonable to argue in favour of their poetry encompassing both of the extremes suggested by Douglas, Tolley, and Spencer. By extension, this points the way to the same thing happening in Douglas’s poetry, because he was very much a part of the expatriate literary community and a more complex poet than simplistic polarities might assume.

This possibility is supported by the fact that Lawrence Durrell’s poetry, and his *Alexandria Quartet* (1957-1960), also exemplify this balance
between lyrical introspection, and poetry that he suggested was concerned with ‘the object’, or as Bolton notes, possessed a definite sense of ‘landscape’. Some degree of common ground is also hinted at by Tolley’s contention that the *Personal Landscape* poets were ‘faced with the prospect of spending the rest of the war in Egypt’, having, as Roger Bowen put it, been ‘grafted artificially on the native African plant’. Since Douglas first defined his poetry as extrospective while he was serving in North Africa and the Middle East, it is vital to our understanding of his approach that what Durrell and others of his coterie thought and wrote is also considered. This is especially pertinent if Bolton is correct in arguing that Douglas’s ‘poetry owes much to the mentorship of Spencer and Durrell, and to the expatriate literary culture in Egypt’. In short, alongside military combat, these influences may have been another source of Douglas’s extrospective writing, and may have helped to shape the outcome of the relationship between his experiences and his poetry.

Their variety means that the extent to which the *Personal Landscape* poets can be spoken of collectively, as a definite group, is dubious, as underlined by Robin Fedden’s contention that ‘The writers share no common outlook and subscribe to no common policy; in spite of the efforts of well-meaning and misguided critics who see flocks and shepherds everywhere’. It is clear, however, that he believed these poets were ‘united only in exile’, with this condition being associated with ‘stagnation’, rather than ‘tragedy’, and having constituted ‘a very powerful factor in conditioning the way people and poets react to difficulties ‘out of all proportion to the trials which at first appear to be tangibly involved’. Douglas and the *Personal
Landscape poets were therefore presented with a new context, that was often rendered in poetry combining personal reflection and observation. That Fedden’s view is supported by Spencer, who connected the outsider’s feeling of ‘exile’\(^80\) to loneliness and travel, ‘separation tinged with nostalgia’,\(^81\) further demonstrates how the experiences of a soldier, such as Douglas, could resemble those of expatriate civilians. They too found their lives dislocated by the war. No-one was immune to what Bolton termed ‘the kind of homesickness, estrangement, and identity crises commonly experienced by exiles.’\(^82\)

This is exemplified by Spencer’s responses to Egypt, which incorporate observation, and expression. So much is this the case that Bolton points to Douglas and Spencer having shared ‘comparable manners of emotional detachment, an “extrospective” orientation, a descriptive precision, and self-effacement.’\(^83\) What they also shared was Spencer’s belief in the need for a poet to be aware that ‘faced with injustice, violence and squalor, he may either get numb, frigid, over-intellectual, or soft, sentimental’.\(^84\) These pitfalls are certainly avoided in Spencer’s ‘Egyptian Dancer at Shubra’, which presents the reader with a scene balanced between exotic lyricism, and tawdry mundanity, namely the spectacle of a ‘supreme’\(^85\) dancer, who ‘leaned / naked in her dancing skirt’,\(^86\) surrounded by the familiarity of ‘workday things’,\(^87\) and ‘men’s awkward clothes and chairs’.\(^88\) ‘Yachts on the Nile’ is more lyrical, but, again, the catalyst is the external environment, the sight of sails on the river ‘Like air on skin, coolness of yachts at mooring, / a white, flung handful’\(^89\).
In Douglas’s case, we find that objective visual scrutiny, and less obviously extrospective aspects, are drawn together in many of the poems that he wrote while in Egypt and the Middle East. There can be no doubting the lyricism of ‘Song’, with its elegiac two-line refrain: ‘For the poisonous sea and a cruel star / the one by day and one at night have charmed me’, or the invitation of ‘Dead Men’ to ‘Come / to the west, out of that trance, my heart’. Equally, a more prosaic objective assessment of the unfamiliar is discernible in the ‘streets dedicated to sleep / stenches and the sour smells’ of ‘Cairo Jag’, or the fact that ‘Enfidaville’ begins: ‘In the church fallen like dancers / lie the Virgin and St. Therèse’. More persuasively, ‘Vergissmeinnicht’ combines both elements, observing the wounds of a soldier ‘mocked at by his own equipment / that’s hard and good when he’s decayed’, while reflecting that ‘here the lover and killer are mingled / who had one body and one heart.’

Another explanation for this combination is provided by the fact that, during their time in Egypt, Douglas, Spencer, and Durrell shared creative and social connections, as well as vital poetic influences, in the respective forms of George Seferis and C. P. Cavafy. This, again, offers the possibility that extrospection and exile might be related, and suggests a line of influence by which the *Personal Landscape* writers were all connected. So far as the development of extrospection is concerned, it is notable that Peter Mackridge has advanced the view that among the elements included in Cavafy’s poetry was the legacy of ‘Parnassian’ poetry, which included ‘antique scenes, and […] often aspired to resemble sculptures’, perhaps explaining the opening lines of Douglas’s ‘Egyptian Sentry’: ‘Sweat lines the statue of a face / he
has’. For Roger Bowen, the influence of Cavafy and Seferis was part of a general appreciation of Greece and Greek poetry, among the *Personal Landscape* poets: ‘that subject – the country, its culture, its loss – was to be a preoccupying topic’. The fact that *Personal Landscape: An Anthology of Exile* contains translations of poems by Seferis, Cavafy, and Elie Papadimitriou, and begins with Bernard Spencer’s ‘Greek Excavations’, does little to detract from this view. The same can be said of Nanos Valaoritis’s role as a collaborator in the *Personal Landscape* project.

**iv Douglas as a man of action: the soldier’s view**

Although the majority of contributors to *Personal Landscape* were civilians, their influence proved significant with respect to Keith Douglas’s development of an approach to poetry that often related to military subjects. As is apparent in his exchange of views with John Hall, Douglas placed great emphasis on having something definite about which to write, with the expressed turning point being ‘Alamein’, meaning the battle, or battles of El Alamein. In the first sentence of *Alamein to Zem Zem* (1946), his prose account of the role he played in the war in the desert, Douglas underlines that his writing is experiential, though *Alamein to Zem Zem* was intended to be a personal reflection on his experiences, rather than a campaign history: ‘I am not writing about these battles as a soldier, nor trying to discuss them as military operations. I am thinking of them […] as my first experience of fighting: that is how I shall write of them.’

While *Alamein to Zem Zem* is a prose response to exile, estrangement, battle, and war, it addresses similar themes to those of
Douglas’s contemporary poetry, and is integral to our understanding of extrospection. Douglas’s comment about not wishing to write as a soldier is potentially confusing, but can be interpreted as a means of distinguishing between official, or historical writing, and a more individual reflection, based on first-hand experience. Battle became important, not simply because it affected Douglas’s regiment, and not because of its significance with respect to the outcome of the Second World War, but due to its impact on Douglas as an individual. He was going into battle for the first time, and being exposed to the threat of death and injury, which, in turn, had an impact on his poetry. It is because Douglas wrote *Alamein to Zem Zem*, and much of his war poetry, in the light of this consciousness, that exposure to the physical and psychological extremis of mechanised military service can be considered to have been a fundamental aspect of his extrospection, and an important creative stimulus. Danger was a part of Douglas’s world, and his extrospective writing, because his aim was to write about what he encountered outside of himself, as opposed to expressing the inner feelings alone.

At this point, it must be acknowledged that whatever his intentions may have been, Douglas’s perception of his circumstances, his experiences, and the world around him, was a personal one. In addition, while he may have regarded the poetry of those on the home-front as being introspective, rather than extrospective, and as being written by poets who lacked his battlefield experience, when Dylan Thomas, or J. F. Hendry, wrote about the Blitz in ‘A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London’, and
‘Midnight air-raid’, they were writing about the world around them too. What they were not doing, however, was writing as soldiers on the front-line.

This did little to undermine Douglas’s belief that a psychological and experiential chasm separated his experience from the experiences of those on the home-front, the ‘English civilians’, who ‘have not endured suffering comparable to that of other European civilians’. This dismissal of the domestic impact of the Second World War is unjust, but it does support Ted Hughes’s claim that some form of ‘purposeful, high, official motive’ informed Douglas’s extrospective poetry. Once again, this indicates that Douglas considered extrospection to be a significant development, rather than a disposable term. Hughes regards the presence of an official motive as having been common to Douglas’s poetry and Wilfred Owen’s, and contends that the latter’s motive was evident in the fact that he ‘carried about, in his pocket, photographs of trench horrors [...] his idea being to shock his non-participant fellow citizens into an awareness of the new day dawning in the trenches.’

The claim that Owen kept battlefield photographs in his pocket has been challenged by Dominic Hibberd, yet, the fact that Hughes attempts to link Owen and Douglas through their concern with ‘facts’ is telling. For Owen and Douglas, the extent of the physical damage that twentieth-century weaponry could inflict on the human body was a fact. The same might be written of the civilian victims of aerial bombardment and naval blockade during the First and Second World Wars, but the difference is that, before they were killed in action, Owen and Douglas had both inflicted death and injury on their enemies. This is the distinction between having a definite subject, and having ‘nothing to write about that is relevant’.
Douglas’s willingness to embrace action is reflected in both his life, and his extrospective poetry, with the impetuous abandonment of his Staff posting in search of combat, and the epithet ‘shit or bust’ from his batman, being typical of his approach to war and poetry. Douglas did not simply recognise experience, but embraced it, regardless of how unpalatable that experience was. Thus, poems such as ‘How to Kill’ provide an excellent example of what extrospective poetry involves. In ‘How to Kill’, Douglas considers what it means to kill from the killer’s view-point, and from that of his victim, ‘the soldier who is going to die’. The reader is afforded access to the thought processes of a first-person speaker, who studies a human target through his gun-sights, recognises that his target ‘smiles, and moves about in ways / his mother knows, habits of his’, and then makes ‘a man of dust / of a man of flesh’. The target, having been assessed through Douglas’s extrospective gaze, becomes nothing. The command is given and the deed is done: ‘The wires touch his face: I cry / NOW. Death, like a familiar, hears.’ The writing is objective in the extreme, reflecting another strand of extrospection, alongside its experiential basis, its honesty, and its assimilation of visual detail.

Douglas’s use of the word ‘familiar’ draws attention to another characteristic of extrospection, alluding, as it does, to the creatures that superstition believed accompanied witches, drank their blood, and acted as their agents. While the reader watches the first-person speaker, and the first-person speaker watches his human victim, a dark magic takes place, a theme that is reinforced by subsequent references to ‘sorcery’, and ‘Being damned’. Despite the fact that, in legal terms, the speaker’s responsibility
is shouldered by the army and the government that takes the decision to wage war, it is apparent that Douglas regards the act of killing, and the profession of soldiering, as a Faustian contract. The implied result is that the speaker will also be damned to a violent death, a situation to which he reacts with what Hughes refers to as ‘the cool note of certainty’.¹¹⁹ In other words, there is a definite link between Douglas’s extrospection, and a fatalism that related to the belief that ‘hell cannot be let loose twice: it was let loose in the Great War and it is the same old hell now’,¹²⁰ which rendered ‘tautological’¹²¹ ‘Almost all that a modern poet on active service is inspired to write.’¹²²

Michael Hamburger reinforces Douglas’s assessment, as well as suggesting that the inevitability of experience in the minds of contemporary artists and intellectuals affected the tone of Second World War poetry, including that of Keith Douglas, leading to a more matter-of-fact recognition of modern war and its effects:

The Second World War was [...] very much more predictable than the First World War, as far as intellectuals and artists were concerned. This is one reason why it produced far less poetry of outrage and pity comparable to the work of Wilfred Owen, Georg Trakl and Charles Vildrac.¹²³

What Hamburger does not say is that the ‘poetry of outrage’,¹²⁴ to which he refers, was the exception rather than the rule. So far as the First World War is concerned, poets such as Wilfred Owen effectively constituted an evolution from the predominant Georgian mode of expression, the spiritual ‘patriotism’,¹²⁵ ‘martyrdom’,¹²⁶ naturalism, and pastoralism proposed by C. H. Herford in his lecture on ‘National and International Ideals in the English Poets’, delivered in the John Rylands Library, on 4 June, 1916, at which point much of the most groundbreaking poetry of the conflict had either not been
written, or was not in print. Thus, when Keith Douglas alluded to the poetry of
the First World War, he was expressing the poetic dilemma of not wishing to
merely replicate the reactions of the more ground-breaking poets of the First
World War, but to write in a way that was equally individual, with this, too,
representing a strand of his extrospective approach. This presents a
dichotomy, with extrospection being an individual reaction to personal
experience, but one that was conscious of public responsibility, despite
Douglas’s claim that ‘I don’t give a damn about my duty as a poet.’

**v Extrospection and ‘visual’ poetry: thinking in pictures**

While *Personal Landscape* included poems that observed external
environments, and while these poems often depended on objectivity akin to
that Mackridge identified in Cavafy, Douglas frequently turned his
extrospective gaze on battlefields, torn landscapes, and bodies. When this
occurs, however, the result is distinct, even when we compare his poetic
descriptions of wounding and mutilation to those of Siegfried Sassoon, who,
like Douglas, recognised that his poetry was often ‘visual’, and that
‘Thinking in pictures is my natural method of self-expression.’

Notably, Jon Silkin argues that the poetic fruit of Sassoon’s poetry was ‘directness, clarity,
and even a ferocious sharpness’, an immediacy which is equivalent to that
of visual art, and one that is apparent in Douglas’s extrospective poetry.

Silkin’s assessment is supported by Sassoon’s ‘Counter Attack’, in which
there is emphasis on the physical appearance of the German dead, their
‘green clumsy legs’, ‘naked sodden buttocks, mats of hair’, and ‘clotted
heads’.
Sassoon’s descriptions differ from Douglas’s, however, in that while they are visual, they are not as objective as Silkin’s analysis might lead us to believe. Unlike much *Personal Landscape* poetry, Sassoon’s images do not exist on their own terms. They are presented to the reader as part of a densely-stressed coagulation, and are inseparable from evocative adjectives. The effect is horror, particularly counterpointed by ‘the jolly old rain!’ and the intention is to shock the audience into awareness of the human impact of warfare on the Western Front. The subjectivity of Sassoon’s poetic approach is unmistakable in view of the ‘wilful defiance of military authority’ of his ‘Soldier’s Declaration’ of July 1917.

Douglas also bemoaned an experiential chasm between combatants and civilians, when he rebelled against military authority by heading for Alamein without permission, but his motivation differed markedly from that of Sassoon in making his ‘Declaration’. Douglas acted out of a desire to experience battle. Sassoon acted to raise awareness of the suffering of his fellow men, and protested against it, the same ‘high official motive’ in idealistic terms, as Wilfred Owen. Douglas’s extrospection was personal and politically neutral by comparison. This indicates that while his poetry might be visual, Douglas was not guilty of replicating Sassoon in writing it.

The contention that Douglas’s extrospection is at least as observational as Sassoon’s, is reflected in the fact that he was an accomplished ‘graphic artist’, as well as a writer, and that ‘Alamein to Zem Zem contains several drawings of scenes of desert-fighting’, as noted by Geoffrey Hill, in “I in Another Place”, Homage to Keith Douglas’. As with Isaac Rosenberg, Douglas’s reactions to his experiences of combat include
poetry, prose, and visual art, although his painting and drawing is less celebrated than that of Rosenberg. One of numerous relevant examples of this convergence is the visual description of the ‘Libyan soldier’, whom Douglas found ‘reclining’ in ‘a weapon-pit beside us’, with ‘his arms flung out, one knee bent, his eyes open’, but with ‘no equipment nor arms’. Another example adds a sexual dimension to the appearance of a dead German soldier: ‘He was like a cleverly posed waxwork, for his position suggested a paroxysm, an orgasm of pain’. Equally pertinent is the reflection of ‘Snakeskin and Stone’ that a dead man’s ‘bald head is a desert / between country of life and country of death’, a playground for

the flies
who know the dead bone is beneath
and from the skin the life half out.

vi Extrospection and the threat of death in battle

Douglas’s extrospective lens did not avoid the physical reality of death, wounding, and mutilation, indeed, as Geoffrey Hill observes, he was drawn towards these subjects, to the point that they achieved an aesthetic simplicity in their own right. This explains Ted Hughes’s reference to Douglas’s ‘inclination to a hieratic, marionettish, inner detachment and pitching of the voice, which may have to do with […] a passionate but stylized alienation, or may simply be a […] sensitivity to the puppet quality of spirit life.’ The comparative transience of physical existence, the ease with which life becomes death in the eye-blink of the ‘NOW’ of ‘How to Kill’, and the unique appearances and transitions of the dead, become a truth, consistent
with the honesty that Douglas insisted was part of his extrospective approach to poetry.

The personal implications of this truth are embraced in ‘Simplify me when I’m dead’, and it is a truth at which Douglas arrived relatively early in his military odyssey, the poem being dated 7 May 1941, and Douglas having left port for the Middle East in June 1941. ‘Remember me when I’m dead / and simplify me when I’m dead’, Douglas repeats as the opening and closing lines of his final poem before leaving England. In doing so, he steps outside of himself to watch his own body being stripped of its ‘colour and the skin’, ‘the brown hair and blue eye’, by ‘the processes of the earth’. In every sense, as Douglas left Southampton for the Middle East, he perceived himself ‘by distance simplified’, with the distance to which he refers representing death and extrospection, as well as that of leaving port. Unlike Rupert Brooke’s ‘The Soldier’, or Thomas Hardy’s ‘Drummer Hodge’, in ‘Simplify me when I’m dead’, there is no sense of the speaker’s body being remembered as part of ‘a foreign field’, or growing ‘to some southern tree’. He is reduced, until all posterity can say of the ‘minute man ten years hence’ that ‘He was of such type and intelligence’. It is no coincidence that Douglas wrote what was his most extrospective poem, up until that point, with the prospect of his personal involvement in the Second World War about to crystallise into reality, reinforcing the argument of a causal impact.

The truth inherent in this extrospective reduction is revealed by the dead German gunner of Douglas’s Vergissmeinnicht, with ‘the dust upon the paper eye / and the burst stomach like a cave’. It is also apparent in the final two lines of ‘Cairo Jag’, in which ‘a man with no head / has a packet of
chocolate and a souvenir of Tripoli',\(^\text{158}\) the fatalities of ‘Dead Men’ reduced to ‘a vapour tasteless to a dog’s chops’,\(^\text{159}\) or those of ‘Landscape with Figures 2’, who ‘bear the cosmetic blood and hectic / colours death has the only list of.’\(^\text{160}\) Therefore, it is clear that extrospection involves confronting the reality of a given set of circumstances, regardless of how disturbing the context might be, lending further weight to the idea that much of what Douglas meant by the term can be associated with poetic honesty, and with unflinching observation of his circumstances, experiences, and surroundings.

The purity of Keith Douglas’s vision of death as a form of truth, a reality, by comparison with which life becomes transient and illusory, depends on the distance of ‘Time’s wrong-way telescope’,\(^\text{161}\) both in terms of tone, and the ability to perceive the dead as randomly arranged objects, inseparable from tourist souvenirs or battlefield wreckage. This distance is not only extrospective, it signals Douglas’s acceptance that death is inevitable, and natural, even when it is the result of artificial violence. In tonal terms, this manifests itself as objectivity, and it is the polar opposite of the ‘white eyes writhing’\(^\text{162}\) and ‘froth-corrupted lungs’\(^\text{163}\) of Owen’s ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’, or the pity of Rosenberg’s ‘Dead Man’s Dump’, in which the precise observation and representation of the moment when ‘our wheels grazed’\(^\text{164}\) a soldier’s ‘dead face’\(^\text{165}\) is coupled with the pathetic repetition of the plea ‘Will they come? Will they ever come?’\(^\text{166}\) Owen, Rosenberg, and Douglas were individuals writing in different physical, and cultural conditions, but the difference in the tone of their poetry is also a result of different aesthetics, or approaches, certainly in Douglas’s case. As I have already demonstrated, the emphasis he placed on economy and lack of
ornamentation was a choice made partly in response to, and partly as a remedy for, what he considered to be the flaws of more lyrical and musical poetry, and he was quite serious in advocating his extrospective approach to others, perhaps adding to the idea that extrospective poetry remains valid long after Douglas’s death. It is certainly a recommendation that I have taken seriously in my poetry.

vii Douglas and Rosenberg: influence and effect

Despite this tonal difference, Douglas’s ‘Poets in This War’ testifies to the extent to which his extrospective poetic vision was influenced by Rosenberg, particularly when Douglas either wrongly attributed the harrowing conclusion of ‘Dead Man’s Dump’ to Wilfred Owen, or else regarded the two poets as part of a common expression of anger and pity. Despite his possible misconception, it was Rosenberg’s image that was uppermost in Douglas’s mind, when he wrote, ‘Instead, arose Owen, to the sound of wheels crunching the bones of a man scarcely dead.’

Further, it is Rosenberg to whom Douglas’s ‘Desert Flowers’ refers. Douglas takes account of the fact that ‘the flowers’ of the battlefield remain alive, despite the surrounding carnage, an observation that admits to being preceded by the plucked ‘parapet’s poppy’ of Rosenberg’s ‘Break of Day in the Trenches’, thereby reinvoking the weight of symbolism with which Rosenberg’s original line was invested, and allowing Douglas to establish a discourse with his predecessor: ‘Rosenberg I only repeat what you were saying.’

Equally pertinent to Douglas’s extrospective poetic vision is Rosenberg’s ability to combine natural, artificial, or industrial elements to
create a single image, particularly as this ability owes much to an artistic detachment, by virtue of which all physical forms can be considered on equivalent visual terms. Rosenberg writes of ‘the swift iron burning bee’,¹⁷¹ in ‘Dead Man’s Dump’, and equivalent hybridisations of nature, and weaponry, are among the sights available in the ‘new world’¹⁷² of Douglas’s ‘Cairo Jag’, where ‘the vegetation is of iron / dead tanks, gun barrels split like celery’,¹⁷³ and ‘the metal brambles have no flowers or berries.’¹⁷⁴

Consequently, the war beyond Cairo becomes a world in which everything is newly revealed through extrospective examination. The features of the landscape, townscape, and battlescape, acquire new values that become more comprehensible viewed in this way. Extrospective distance is necessitated, because the natural order of familiar values has been disturbed in a manner that resembles the subconscious inversion of Macbeth’s ‘So foul and fair a day I have not seen’,¹⁷⁵ words uttered directly after the protagonist’s involvement in battle. This disruption of values confirms Douglas’s portrayal of combat and war as unique experiences: ‘to read about it cannot convey the impression of having walked through the looking-glass which touches a man entering a battle.’¹⁷⁶

Douglas’s extrospective approach, and what occurs in poems such as ‘Cairo Jag’, and ‘How to Kill’, is not simply a case of the artist and poet surveying and recording visual aspects, however, or reflecting the detachment and dissociation of the professional soldier. Patrick McGuinness refers to a combination of the ‘real and unreal’¹⁷⁷ in ‘How to Kill’, and is correct, as it is a poem in which abstraction and immediacy meet beneath the extrospective cross-hairs of the speaker’s gun-sight. It is also a poem in
which the psychological, physical, and metaphysical implications of this immediate battlefield experience are realised, suggesting an introspective aspect, as well as an extrospective one.

viii Extrospection, total war, and obsolescence

The extrospection of ‘How to Kill’ is part of Keith Douglas’s reaction to a global conflict moving closer to what Carl von Clausewitz regarded as the theoretical parameter of ‘the absolute form of war’.178 His war was one of rapid technological advancement, in which killing and destruction could be conducted on an increasingly massive scale, and with greater efficiency. Douglas’s reaction appears far-reaching, even paradoxical, in that it involves actively seeking the experience of warfare; being fascinated by that experience; being certain that his own end would be as violent as those of the dead and wounded that populate his poetry, prose, and drawings; considering this certainty with a mixture of fascinated discovery and irony; and finding himself, and his class of soldier, becoming obsolete.

Adding to the sense of Douglas’s extrospective approach possessing a psychological dimension, it becomes possible to suggest that he was affected by a sense of estrangement and isolation in the face of wider events. If this was the case, he would not have been alone in being left behind by the accelerated progress of the war. The regiment with which Douglas served in the desert war, the Nottinghamshire Yeomanry, experienced a shift in terms of its role and identity as a result of the conflict. Before it became a mechanised unit, the regiment began the war as a traditional mounted force, having been ‘mobilized as a horsed cavalry unit’,179
in September 1939, and, in February 1940, it even took part in ‘a mounted charge down a main street with drawn swords’.\textsuperscript{180}

Belonging to such an idiosyncratic regiment could only have exacerbated Douglas’s isolation, and his extrospective detachment, as would the impact of the deaths of leading regimental icons, as recorded in \textit{Alamein to Zem Zem}: ‘Piccadilly Jim’\textsuperscript{181} was ‘killed as one might say, typically, while he was standing up in his tank, shaving under shell-fire’,\textsuperscript{182} ‘Tom’,\textsuperscript{183} whom Douglas regarded ‘as a sort of Universal Aunt’,\textsuperscript{184} had been ‘killed by a shell: another institution gone’,\textsuperscript{185} and ‘Guy had been killed by a shell as he was making a forward recce in his jeep along the road on the enemy side of Enfidaville’.\textsuperscript{186} Douglas's regret is summed up by his comment that their ‘assumption of superiority, that dandyism, individuality, and disregard of all the duller military conventions and regulations, had made the regiment sometimes unpopular […] but always discussed and admired’.\textsuperscript{187} But, largely thanks to his extrospective honesty, and objectivity, he could step back from his empathy, perhaps verifying Hamburger's view that in poems such as ‘Sportsmen’, at the same time as writing of the men who met death and injury with archaic courage, Douglas was writing of himself, or at least an aspect of his own identity, because he ‘was very much a product of pre-war upper-class England, with all the virtues and gallantry of that “obsolescent breed of heroes,” but without the stupidity that could take its code for granted.’\textsuperscript{188} Accompanying the possibility of this empathic connection, is Hamburger’s contention that ‘Douglas knew that the very virtues which he and his fellow officers were fighting to defend could not long survive even a victorious war’.\textsuperscript{189}
ix Early signs: Douglas as an extrospective child

Michael Hamburger’s analysis permits the hypothesis that, while his military experiences contributed to Douglas’s extrospection, the roots of his approach to poetry may also be found in the psychological impact of his upbringing and his social status. For example, there is evidence in Douglas’s early letters that he was already attracted to the idea of military service while at Christ’s Hospital boarding school, perhaps in the image of his father, Captain Keith Sholto Douglas. Writing to his mother in 1928, young Keith expressed genuine pleasure at taking part in a ‘lovely’ drill with his classmates and ‘Sir Roger de Covely’, marching ‘in a long single file’, before splitting into ‘two ranks’ and bowing.

Douglas’s early letters also testify to the emergence of the simultaneously fascinated and detached tone of his later writing: ‘Thank you for your letter. I pulled my tooth out myself so I did not have any thing to make a fuss about. I just pushed it forward and I heard it snap and then pulled and it came out.’ A further aspect of the individuality that is essential to Douglas’s extrospective creativity is reflected in the problems that the emerging poet encountered with authority while at school. Having taken a rifle without permission, Douglas wrote to the Headmaster of Christ’s Hospital, in December 1935: ‘I have nothing against Major Hodgson, who sets spies and expects lies. But to Mr Edwards who expects loyalty and gives none, I cannot be loyal’.

Based on this evidence, it seems that, in writing extrospectively, Douglas may have been responding to an integral part of his own personality, his individuality, as well as reacting to the circumstances of the
Second World War for practical reasons, or in response to an accumulated culture of expectation regarding the results of industrialised, mechanised, and ‘absolute’ war. What the war provided was the raw material, the experience, the proving-ground, within which Douglas’s brand of creativity could operate most effectively, and on which he could fix his extrospective vision, especially if, as Clausewitz proposes, war involves ‘the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam’.196

Therefore, Douglas’s extrospective approach to poetry presents a problem. Douglas argued that the poetry arising from his ‘creative spirit’197 had altered in response to the war, and become more extrospective as a result. On the other hand, some of the origins of his extrospective method may have pre-dated the Second World War. His approach may have owed a considerable amount to an isolationism born of boarding schools, and the distance between a child and a father, who served in the First World War, and who, William Scammell notes, was ‘away a good deal’198 thereafter, because he ‘had difficulty finding work’.199 This is particularly relevant in poems such as ‘Cairo Jag’, or ‘Vergissmeinnicht’, in which Douglas writes unemotionally about violent death and physical injury.

x Extrospection and personal rejection

That there may be more to Douglas’s extrospection than the simple equation linking his approach with war, or what Hughes regards as ‘a kit for emergency use under adverse, extreme circumstances’,200 gains additional support from poems such as ‘The Prisoner’, written in 1940, while Douglas was undergoing his officer training, or ‘Canoe’ (May 1940). In these
examples, Douglas’s extrospective vision is applied to the emotional extremis of intimate relationships, albeit against the larger backdrop of life, death, and the brevity, and peculiarity of conscious existence. ‘The Prisoner’ also reinforces the view that Douglas was already capable of writing extrospectively before he left Sandhurst and acquired any battlefield experience, although battle gave his writing greater focus and clarity. Having begun with the physical intimacy of ‘Today, Cheng, I touched your face / with two fingers’, the speaker concludes that ‘I touched a mask stretched on the stone- / hard face of death.’

That Douglas can be regarded as a disillusioned lover in a broader context than that represented by ‘The Prisoner’ is supported by his letter, of March 1941, to his long term friend, Jean Turner. Here Douglas described himself as being ‘Broken-hearted at the collapse of my relations with Natasha [Litvin]’, underlining the association between isolation and extrospection. This hypothesis is underlined by another of Douglas’s letters, this time written to Olga Meiersons, between March and June 1942. Douglas wrote of being surrounded by a protective coating, behind which he was emotionally vulnerable, despite his sexual punning: ‘Also I hope you aren’t entirely made of india-rubber. I have a rubber outside myself, but the inside is of more sensitive and fragile material, so be careful.’ Douglas’s extrospective revelation exhibits self-protective, as well as analytical tendencies, when, in ‘Syria’, he refers to being wrapped ‘in the separative glass cloak / of strangeness’, the purpose of which is to deflect and protect, as well as to expose the speaker to his own gaze. It seems that once the protection of the
exterior shell had been penetrated and the lover's rejection had been confirmed, all that remained was the extrospective gaze itself.

Equally significant is the fact that, on 29 October 1942, among the poems that Douglas sent to Hall was 'The Knife'. This poem is crucial from an extrospective viewpoint, because it describes the passion of the speaker and his lover, and the manner in which their relationship has evolved into distance following her rejection of him. The speaker is reduced to 'a bird / with a message, a dead man, a photograph'. The lover, once rejected, is examined by the extrospective lens as he stands at a distance from his physical self, and he is seen, or imagined, in physical terms, despite his trauma having been psychological. The poem is dedicated to Milena Gutierrez-Pegna, to whom Douglas had recently been engaged, either officially or unofficially, and by whom he had been snubbed for Norman Ilet, exposing what he referred to in tangible terms as the 'old wound' of an earlier relationship with Betty Sze. For Douglas, it was 'the worst night I've ever spent, bar one', but, typically, it was also one that he wrote about in a recognisably extrospective fashion.

xi Acceptance, fatalism, and detachment

Douglas's rejection added to the fatalistic irony of his poetry, though his fatalism was also that of an age aware of the implications of industrial war. In Jon Pikoulis's analysis, this gave Douglas's poetry the 'careless' attitude to death of 'the beggar woman' of his 'Egypt', a figure who

found nothing different from death
but the difference of moving
and the nuisance of breath.
The purity of her extrospective gaze is effectively that of her creator. Thus, Douglas subjects himself to his own scrutiny as the beggar woman ‘listlessly finds you and I / and the table, are the same colour.’ He thereby reduces his life, and life in general, to existence, and animation to stasis, as the table and the soldier are awarded equivalent objective status.

The same effect occurs when, in ‘Mersa’, the speaker melts into a landscape of physical objects, dead things, at one with ‘the skeletal town’, ‘sand as pale as salt’, ‘a guesthouse built / and broken utterly’, ‘the wind and dust’, ‘faces with sightless doors / for eyes’, and ‘a dead tank alone’. In the final quatrain, life is perceived as a fleeting aberration prior to the permanence of death, an allusion replete with further physical and psychological implications. In the ultimate act of extrospection, the speaker’s feet are seen as petrified blocks, at which

The logical little fish
converge and nip flesh
imagining I am one of the dead.

As with ‘Cairo Jag’, ‘Vergissmeinnicht’, and the ‘Landscape with Figures’ series, there is an undeniably visual aspect to ‘Mersa’. The imagery is drawn directly from Douglas’s physical environment, the things he saw and experienced, which might lead to the erroneous conclusion that this is all he had in mind when he defined his poetry as extrospective. However, it is important to remember that Douglas’s extrospective methodology emerges as complex, and as having origins which include the impact of his childhood and education; his rejection by various lovers; the prevailing fatalism of a generation remembering the First World War with a second major conflict impending; his experiences of military discipline and combat far from home;
and the death of friends in battle. To this extent, it is possible to see extrospection as relating to the poet’s internal concerns, a personal landscape of psychological dimensions, as well his physical surroundings. If some of his extrospective poems reflect rejection and exile, for example, they do so without abandoning visual observation, economy of expression, honesty, practicality, and reportage. On the other hand, if Douglas’s poetry reflects what he saw and encountered, it does so at the same time as including less obvious, and more abstract concerns, those based on the poet’s emotional, psychological, or intellectual responses, for example. Douglas’s extrospective poetry also remains prescriptive, judging by the views expressed in ‘Poets in This War’, or his letters to John Hall, emphasising and advocating what could be described as ‘realism’ in poetry.

In the following chapters, I will consider the extent to which the realistic approach to poetry that Douglas defined in 1943 may, or may not, have remained important and feasible following his death, including with respect to my own writing and experiences.


6 Hall, in Douglas, A Prose Miscellany, p. 121.


8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.


11 Hall, in Douglas, A Prose Miscellany, p. 121.

Ibid.
Ibid.
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Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid, p. 266.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Spencer, Complete Poetry, p. 262.  
Ibid.  


Spencer, Complete Poetry, p. 262.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
David Hughes, in Ibid, p. vi.  
Ibid.  
Ross, in Ibid.  
Hughes, in Ibid, p. vii.  
Bolton, Personal Landscapes, p. 7.  
Ibid, pp. 7-8.  

Bolton, Personal Landscapes, p. 9.  

Bolton, Personal Landscapes, p. xix.  

Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Bolton, Personal Landscapes, p. xiv.  
Ibid, p. 11.  
Spencer, in Personal Landscape: An Anthology of Exile, p. 76.  
Spencer, Complete Poetry, p. 87.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.

Ibid, p. 83.

95 *Ibid*.


106 *Ibid*.
109 *Ibid*.
113 *Ibid*.
114 *Ibid*.
115 *Ibid*.
116 *Ibid*.
117 *Ibid*.
118 *Ibid*.
121 *Ibid*.
122 *Ibid*.


Douglas, Complete Poems, p. 124.


Sassoon, in Silkin, Out of Battle, p. 132.

Jon Silkin, Ibid, p. 133.


Sassoon, The War Poems, p. 94.

Ibid.

Ibid, p. 95.


Hughes, in Douglas, Complete Poems, p. xxvii.


Hill, “‘I in Another Place,” p. 6.

Douglas, Alamein to Zem Zem, p. 38.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid, p. 50.

Douglas, Complete Poems, p. 100.

Hughes, in Douglas, Complete Poems, p. xxiv.


Ibid, p. 74.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Douglas, Complete Poems, p. 74.

Ibid.

Ibid, p. 111.

Ibid, p. 97.

Ibid, p. 96.

Ibid, p. 103.

Ibid, p. 74.


166 *Ibid*.


173 *Ibid*.

174 *Ibid*.


180 Lindsay, *Sherwood Rangers*, p. 3.


182 *Ibid*.

183 *Ibid*.

184 *Ibid*.

185 *Ibid*.

186 *Ibid*, pp. 143-44.


189 *Ibid*.


191 *Ibid*.

192 *Ibid*.

193 *Ibid*.


196 Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 89.

197 *Ibid*.


Chapter Two
Extrospection after Douglas

In this chapter, I wish to build on the understanding of extrospection established in Chapter One. Having argued and demonstrated that Keith Douglas's extrospective poetry was not limited to one particular characteristic, and that although it sometimes involved looking at the poet’s physical surroundings, it was not exclusively visual, I will continue to regard extrospection as an approach to poetry that encompasses a number of ideas about style, on the one hand, and subject matter on the other. Consequently, I will explore how far Douglas’s economy, practicality, objectivity, honesty, visual emphasis, reportage, and interest in ‘realism’, as a means of distinguishing his poetry from that of movements such as the New Apocalypse, are relevant to the work of selected writers from 1945 to the present day. These poems and poets have been chosen as a result of extensive reading and, as well as demonstrating the continuing significance of Douglas's definition of extrospection, will provide an opportunity for me to discuss some aspects of what I feel is extrospective in poetry. This will provide an indication as to whether extrospection remains a practical approach to poetry in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, including in the work of poets who address war-related subjects, as well as those who apply extrospective approaches to civilian contexts. One of the most important aspects investigated is the relationship between extrospection and personal trauma, as demonstrated in the poems by Simon Armitage, Elizabeth Jennings, Sylvia Plath, Seamus Heaney and Thom Gunn. This investigation will also prepare the ground for my final chapter, in
which many of the themes explored here are discussed in relation to my own selection of extrospective poems.

I will begin by looking at some of Douglas’s immediate successors, starting with the poets and poetry associated with what has come to be known as the Movement, with particular reference to Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, and D. J. Enright. I will also look at selected poems by writers involved with anthologies such as *Mavericks*,¹ and *The New Poetry*,² including Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill, and Dannie Abse, with each example being chosen on the basis that they highlight different aspects of extrospective poetry. In doing so, I am not necessarily claiming that Douglas exerted a direct and causal influence on the poets and poems discussed in this chapter, although neither is this ruled out. What matters is the existence of common characteristics and approaches, along with their implications.

i The possible extrospection of the Movement poets

When the Movement took its name from J. D. Scott’s ‘In the Movement’, which appeared in the *Spectator*, on 1 October, 1954, the article seemed to identify a connection between the character of post-war Britain, especially England, and the development of a new approach to writing. What I wish to establish is how far the principles outlined were ones that Douglas would have recognised in his own extrospective writing. Having read Movement poetry before I came across that of Keith Douglas, I already had a sense of its reserved register, orderliness, and structural regularity before beginning my research. I was also aware of Larkin, in particular, as a significant and divisive figure when I started writing and thinking about my own poetry,
enjoying his control and acute observation, but being frustrated by what I felt was his tendency to hide his emotions behind the poems. Discovering at least some of these tendencies in Douglas’s work prompted me to ask whether there might be ways in which poets associated with the Movement might be what Douglas would describe as extrospective, and ways in which they were not. Arguably, the Movement consisted of contributors to Poets of the 1950s (1955), and New Lines (1956), edited by D. J. Enright, and Robert Conquest respectively, in which case it included Enright, Conquest, Amis, Donald Davie, John Holloway, Jennings, Larkin, John Wain, and Gunn, but did these writers really have as much in common as their collection within these books might lead us to believe, and, if so, was what united them something akin to Douglas’s extrospection, or even mine?

In addressing these questions I am conscious that, as Martin Dodsworth argues, writers such as Anthony Thwaite, George MacBeth, Vernon Scannell, Philip Oakes, Gordon Wharton, and G. J. Warnock, also ‘make up the penumbra of the Movement’. I am also aware that ‘there is something arbitrary’ about referring to the Movement in the first place. However, as Edward Larrissy’s ‘Modernist Survivors’ indicates, it remains possible to identify polarities between what we can loosely identify as the Movement poets, and alternative approaches to poetry: ‘As one moves into the fifties, the Movement reaction against neo-Romanticism is anything but friendly towards a revival of modernism.’ Poems such as Amis’s ‘Against Romanticism’, in which the speaker longs for ‘Woods devoid of beasts, roads that please the foot’, indicate that Larrissy has a point. Consequently, I will reflect on similarities and differences between the approaches adopted by
leading members of what has been referred to as the Movement, in comparison to those adopted by Hill, Hughes, and Abse, and consider the implications with regard to extrospection. In Chapter Three this exploration is extended to include my poetry, but at this point it is important to understand how far extrospection played a part in what these poets were doing, not least because they have been influential in the development of my personal interpretation of extrospection.

The first indication that there is common ground between Douglas and the Movement emerges in Thom Gunn’s claim that there was at least one thing uniting leading Movement figures, even if, in general, he looked back on the whole thing as ‘a lot of categorizing foolishness’. For Gunn ‘What poets like Larkin, Davie, Elizabeth Jennings, and I had in common at that time was that we were deliberately eschewing Modernism, and turning back, though not very thoroughly, to traditional resources in structure and method.’ This view concurs with Douglas’s argument that ‘A lyric form and a lyric approach will do even less good than a journalesque approach to the subjects we have to discuss now’. Since Douglas defined his extrospective poetry as an alternative to introspection, the Romanticism of writers such as Henry Treece, and what he thought of as ‘lyricism’, it is safe to say that in opposing the same type of poetry as Douglas did, the Movement poets were adopting an extrospective position, or one that was very similar to it.

Further affinities between Douglas’s approach and that of the Movement poets emerge when the positive aspects of extrospection are considered. Firstly, Douglas proposed to write ‘true things, significant things in words each of which works for its place in a line’. Secondly, he claimed
that he wanted to write poems that could ‘be read as significant speech’.\textsuperscript{13} Thirdly, he hoped to ‘reflect the cynicism and the careful absence of expectation (it is not quite the same as apathy) with which I view the world’.\textsuperscript{14} Fourthly, he expressed his intention to write about the war as he had ‘experienced it’.\textsuperscript{15} The result of his pursuit of these ideals was often visual poetry, written economically, in response to external events, using carefully-observed formal arrangements of stanza, line, and metre, but it was also largely realistic poetry. As discussed in Chapter One, Douglas did not write in this way to the exclusion of other approaches, or always avoid ornamentation and lyricism, but the fact that writing extrospectively was his intention allows for comparisons with the ambitions of the Movement. If such a correlation exists, then it supports the suggestion that the type of poetry Douglas was writing remained important and relevant after his death, and that there were members of the Movement who, in some of what they did, can be thought of as extrospective poets.

With respect to the first of the aforementioned tendencies that Douglas’s associated with extrospection, there is a similar emphasis on reality in Robert Conquest’s introduction to the New Lines anthology. The ‘poetry of the fifties’\textsuperscript{16} is, according to Conquest’s polemic, ‘empirical in its attitude to all that comes’,\textsuperscript{17} and displays a ‘reverence for the real person or event’\textsuperscript{18} that is ‘indeed, a part of the general intellectual ambience […] of our time’.\textsuperscript{19} There is no doubt that reality is also demanded in Larkin’s ‘Lines on a Young Lady’s Photograph Album’, with ‘photography’\textsuperscript{20} being praised for showing ‘A chin as doubled when it is’,\textsuperscript{21} and persuading the speaker ‘That this is a real girl in a real place, / In every sense empirically true!’\textsuperscript{22} It is
equally clear that this echoes Douglas’s concern with writing ‘true things’ in his extrospective poetry.

It is also noteworthy that, in Douglas’s words, seeking to write the truth in his extrospective poetry meant avoiding ‘Bullshit’. As previously suggested, attached to the use of the term, ‘Bullshit’, is the sense that the poet or writer must be unequivocal in his pursuit of truth. As an example, Keith Douglas pulls no punches in ‘Gallantry’, when asking ‘Was George fond of little boys?’. The ‘awful pie’ of Larkin’s ‘Dockery and Son’ also insists on uncompromised detail. Thom Gunn’s ‘Lofty in the Palais de Danse’ provides a further example of unstinting honesty as the speaker, an off-duty soldier, eschews the artifice of sentimental attachment to the girls he picks up at the dance hall: ‘I kill the easy things that others like / To teach them that no liking can be lasting’. Again these particular Movement poets can be seen to share some of Douglas’s extrospective characteristics.

The existence of common ground between Douglas’s extrospective poetry and that of poets affiliated loosely under the Movement banner continues with respect to writing poetry ‘that can be read as significant speech’, adopting the ‘conversational’ tone of ‘a kind of stiffened smart demotic – spinal, not cerebral, prose.’ While Clive Wilmer associates this quality with Larkin, ‘No modern poet more subtly captures the inflections of ordinary speech within the constraints of demandingly complex stanzas’, the same applies to Douglas’s ‘The Prisoner’ (1940), ‘Canoe’ (1940), and ‘Cairo Jag’ (1943). ‘The Prisoner’ begins with an intimate personal address: ‘Today, Cheng, I touched your face / with two fingers, as a gesture of love’. ‘Canoe’ is more speculative, but the tone remains conversational: ‘Well, I am
thinking this may be my last / summer’,\textsuperscript{33} just as it does in ‘Cairo Jag’ as Douglas ponders whether to ‘get drunk’,\textsuperscript{34} or ‘cut myself a piece of cake’.\textsuperscript{35}

That Wilmer might be correct about the demotic qualities of Larkin’s poetry, and that this means there are further similarities between Larkin’s poems and Douglas’s extrospective poetry, is supported by a reading of Larkin’s ‘Maiden Name’, and ‘Church Going’. Among the most demotic of Larkin’s contributions to \textit{New Lines}, these poems do little to detract from the idea of Larkin as an extrospective poet, with ‘Maiden Name’, like Douglas’s ‘The Prisoner’, beginning as an address to a second party: ‘Marrying left your maiden name disused.’\textsuperscript{36} ‘Church Going’ is a more convincing case, because it contains a larger number of conversational asides, and approximations, such as the ‘brass and stuff / Up at the holy end’,\textsuperscript{37} and the allusion to the church roof: ‘Cleaned, or restored? Someone would know: I don’t.’\textsuperscript{38} Further to this point, it could be argued that ‘Church Going’ is extrospective from the outset because, along with Douglas’s ‘Vergissmeinnicht’, it is based on the physical act of looking directly at the ‘holy’ ground of the dead, communicating these observations in prosaic and clear terms.

Larkin is not alone among alleged Movement poets in writing in a way that echoes some of Douglas’s extrospective writing and using what Douglas would call ‘ordinary speech’,\textsuperscript{39} as the poetry of Kingsley Amis indicates. If Amis’s familiarity was intended to reintroduce the ‘verbal’,\textsuperscript{40} or ‘literary hygiene’,\textsuperscript{41} that Deborah Cameron claims ‘most clearly differentiates them [the Movement] from their modernist predecessors’,\textsuperscript{42} and that Wilmer considers to have been the Movement’s ‘main achievement’,\textsuperscript{43} then ‘Ode to me’ is significant. Here, Amis marks his fiftieth birthday, and parodies Dylan
Thomas’s ‘Poem on his Birthday’, which reflects on turning thirty-five in terms dense with natural images, such as ‘the mustardseed sun, / By full tilt river and switchback sea’, and a ‘house on stilts high among beaks / And palavers of birds’. When Amis answers Thomas in colloquial terms, it is difficult not to hear Keith Douglas applauding his parody of one of the leading figures of the romantic revival of the 1940s. It is equally difficult to deny that what Amis is doing matches the tone of some of Douglas’s extrospective poetry:

Fifty today, old lad?  
Well, that's not doing so bad:  
All those years  
Without being really buggered about.  

As I have previously contended, alongside other significant factors, the tone of Douglas’s extrospective poetry was partly a result of his military training. Thus, that similar influences can be found in the work of the Movement poets, can be seen as further proof of the approach that Douglas espoused continuing to be valid after his death. Although John Wain, and Larkin, may have failed their army medical examinations, Donald Davie, Robert Conquest, Amis, and Thom Gunn did undertake military service, of one form or another, sometimes resulting in pragmatic and soldierly poetry, in which echoes of Douglas’s extrospective poems can be heard. For example, the tone of Keith Douglas’s ‘Gallantry’ is discernible in Amis’s ‘A Reunion’. The latter is loaded with similar candour, intimacy, and cynical disrespect for officialdom to that of ‘Gallantry’, often articulated through private details. Amis, for example, celebrates Sandy McClure as a man whose ability to perform ‘Killing take-offs of his mates’ would ensure him a legacy that compensated for him having been ‘a real / Panjandrum of shits
on his day’, though the latter characteristic also seems to inspire the speaker’s admiration. Once more, the similarity between Douglas’s extrospection and Movement poetry cannot be ignored.

Connected with military service, and directly associated with Douglas’s development of extrospective poetry, are the themes of travel and exile, as seen in ‘Syria’, ‘Egyptian Sentry’, ‘Egypt’, ‘Mersa’, ‘Cairo Jag’, and ‘Enfidaville’, themes perhaps informed by Personal Landscape, the war-time journal that contributed to Douglas’s development as a poet. Once again, the same extrospective themes emerge in poems written by the New Lines poets, despite accusations that they ‘were philistine, and insular too.’ As Conquest notes, at least ‘Six or seven poems in New Lines are set abroad,’ reflecting the fact that, although much of the poetry of the Movement was domestic and familiar, some its members were sensitive to changes in their surroundings. Notable examples include Conquest’s own ‘In the Rhodope’, ‘Anthéor’, ‘Nantucket’, and ‘Near Jakobselv’. The fact that New Lines begins with Elizabeth Jennings’s ‘An Afternoon in Florence’ lends weight to Conquest’s contention, while reinforcing the impression of there having been approaches in common between Douglas’s extrospection, and significant poets of the 1950s and 1960s. Chapter Three will demonstrate that my poems of travel and place draw on what is often the detached and objective tone of these Movement poems, along with the poems that Keith Douglas wrote in North Africa and the Middle East, ‘Mersa’, ‘Enfidaville’, ‘Egypt’, and ‘Cairo Jag’ included.

That Jennings’s ‘An Afternoon in Florence’ is also characterised by a definite experience of place adds to the idea of there being similarities with
Douglas’s extrospection, not least when Jennings writes that ‘eyes make room for light and minds make room / For image of the city tangible’. As is the case with much of Douglas’s extrospective poetry, ‘An Afternoon in Florence’ is predominately a visual poem, although, in Jennings’s case, the acts of looking and seeing have a spiritual dimension that is not necessarily apparent in Douglas’s work. Jennings describes epiphany, in addition to watching light fall on the Italian city: ‘We look down on the city and a dream / Opens to wakefulness’, but the poem remains extrospective as well as metaphysical when it refers to ‘definite sunlight, and an afternoon ‘out of time’.

‘An Afternoon in Florence’ is not a one off. Among Jennings’s other contributions to New Lines, are ‘Florence, Design for a City’, ‘Not in the Guide Books’, and ‘Piazza San Marco’, with each drawing on the poet’s experiences of being ‘a stranger’ and having ‘a mind that is wide’, allowing ‘the city to settle between our thoughts, / As between those hills, and flower and glow inside.’ Jennings was not alone in providing poems of this type to New Lines, as Enright’s ‘Laughing Hyena, by Hokusai’, ‘Mid-Mediterranean: September Evening’, ‘Latin Festival’, ‘The Wondering Scholar’, and Gunn’s ‘On the Move’, all testify. These poems in which the poet is open to unfamiliar surroundings are the clearest evidence yet of extrospective characteristics among poets linked to the Movement.

‘On the Move’, in particular, not only extrospectively observes a physical environment, but celebrates Gunn’s emigration to America, in 1954, as well as the liberation that he experienced on encountering the local gay scene. There is merit in Michael O’Neill’s belief that ‘On the Move’ is a poem in which ‘Romantic fires continue to burn, albeit in modes that play up
rationalist control', but this does not mean that the poem cannot be considered extrospective, because, in ‘Actors Waiting in the Wings of Europe’, Douglas also combines observation with a sensibility close to that exhibited by Gunn. Douglas experiences self-loss, while Gunn wishes to become part of the biker gang’s energy and sexuality. They represent new experience, just as combat did for Douglas, exceeding nature, and forcing the conclusion that ‘Much that is natural, to the will must yield.’ Yet, most importantly, the bikers are seen, before their significance is realised: ‘On motorcycles, up the road, they come: / Small, black, as flies hanging in heat’.

Although it was written eight years after New Lines, the same visual and extrospective emphasis informs Larkin’s ‘Sunny Prestatyn’, in which, like so many of Douglas’s poems written while he was away from England, the speaker is an outsider observing the world around him. The observation of ‘Sunny Prestatyn’ is associated with vulnerability and violence, both of which occur because of a process that objectifies the central figure, just as it objectifies the speaker of Douglas’s extrospective ‘Simplify me when I’m Dead’. The primacy of sight, with respect to the relationship between observer and subject, in Larkin’s poem, is first evident in the impact of the poster’s message: ‘Come To Sunny Prestatyn / Laughed the girl on the poster’. Having been seen, the girl becomes emblematic of a feminine sexuality that surrenders to masculine control and fascination, including that of the poet, as is the case with the ‘pasty Syrian’, and the ‘Turk who says she is a princess’, in Douglas’s ‘Cairo Jag’. The objectification of the female form resulting from this type of extrospective approach not only results in the
poster-girl’s degradation, as ‘scrawls’ set her fairly astride / A tuberous cock and balls, it also establishes that the woman on the poster could not be protected from the realities of a modern Wales to which she may not have belonged. Consequently, ‘Sunny Prestatyn’ provides a link between Keith Douglas’s methodology of extrospective observation, and Larkin’s post-war Britain, demonstrating that there are similarities in the extrospective approaches that the two poets adopted when writing about their surroundings.

Further, while it could be argued that in the wake of the publication of recent texts, such as The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry (2013), previous work carried out on the Movement by writers like Blake Morrison is outdated, so far as my thesis is concerned it should not be ignored that the latter alludes to an affinity between Douglas and the Movement on several occasions. Morrison begins by including Douglas in a list of poets exempted from association with the perceived shortcomings of ‘the poetry of the 1940s’, by which the Movement writers are adjudged to have ‘meant the poetry not of Roy Fuller, Alun Lewis, Keith Douglas and Henry Reed, poets it admired on the whole’. It is possible that Morrison over-reaches by second-guessing an alleged Movement attitude that may not have existed at all, but there may still be some truth in these claims. There are certainly common extrospective characteristics in their poems, the possibility that they could be thought of as anti-utopian included. Despite recent reassessments of the Movement, there is still plenty of value in looking at the work of Morrison and others, as long as we bear in mind that more recent work has been carried out which calls the existence of the
Movement into question. I have tried to remain open-minded about these issues and consider influential poems and poets on an individual basis, and as contributory factors in the development of my own extrospective poetry.

ii A significant difference: the Movement's reticence

The possible similarities between Douglas’s extrospective poetry and that of some members of the Movement aside, there is one important respect in which Douglas's extrospection differs from that of poets such as Larkin. The crux of this difference is that 'in failing to deal with large subjects like the war and the H-bomb, Movement poets were evading their obligation to engage with the central issues of the time.' This is not something of which Douglas could be accused, given his attempt to address 'our problems and what we have to do about them,' and it would contradict his prediction that 'the whole body of English war poetry of this war, civil and military, will be created after war is over.' As I have indicated in Chapter One, for Keith Douglas one essential quality of extrospective poetry was that it should consider all events, regardless of how disturbing those events might be. In his case, having experienced battle and seen the dead, Douglas was duty bound to write about them. What he could not do was ignore them, like the ‘homosexual Guardsman returning from Dunkirk’, crying ‘Oh my dear! the noise! and the people!’ While other poets ‘sprung up among the horrors of War Time Oxford’ might be able to ‘turn a delicate shoulder to it all’, or write ‘very involved verses with an occasional oblique and clever reference to bombs or bullets’, Douglas could not. If criticism of Larkin and other members of the Movement is justified, and they did avoid difficult subjects,
however extrospective they might have been in other ways, there were some ways in which they did not fit Douglas’s definition of the term.

If there was a general attitude of avoidance among Movement poets, there are exceptions, with possible cases in point being Wain’s ‘A Song about Major Eatherley’, Enright’s ‘No Offence’, and Davie’s ‘Rejoinder to a Critic’. In addition, the clinical efficiency of post-war Germany has sinister implications in ‘No Offence’, when the speaker is

Shepherded through the door,
Marshalled across the smooth-faced asphalt,
And fed into the mouth of a large cylinder
Labelled ‘Lufthansa’. 

Significantly, however, this poem was published in 1960 and did not appear in any of what have been thought of as the Movement anthologies, which may signify that Enright moved away from possible Movement principles, or that the poems included in New Lines, and New Lines – II (1963) did not accurately reflect the variety and depth of Enright’s poetry. On the other hand, Davie’s ‘Rejoinder to a Critic’ does appear in New Lines, and refers to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, firstly by alluding to ‘Love’s radio-active fall-out on a large / Expanse around the point it bursts above’, and then by asking, ‘Alas, alas, who’s injured by my love?’, before ‘recent history answers: “Half Japan!”’. 

Despite these exceptions, the view that there were significant poets within the Movement anthologies who diverged from Douglas’s extrospective approach by ignoring the twentieth-century’s most traumatic events, is supported by Robert Conquest’s introductory comments to New Lines – II. Conquest dismissed the claim that violent times are best dealt with by abandoning ‘sanity and hope’, ‘writing on violent themes’, or ‘disrupting’.
‘the structure of the verse […] in various ways’. Instead, he proposed order, on the basis that it is ‘both egotistical and insensitive to proclaim that the circumstances of modern life are so different from anything that has gone before that they open up hitherto unsuspected psychological depths to be exploited, or expose entirely new methods and attitudes.’

In making his case, Conquest admitted that ‘English poets were unaware of the existence of the darker elements in the human personality, and of large-scale suffering, until psychoanalysts and world wars drew attention to them’, but did little to indicate that this may have been a flaw.

This leaves us questioning whether there were other poets of the 1950s and 1960s who, like Enright in ‘No Offence’, were closer to Keith Douglas’s belief that one of extrospective poetry’s functions was to ‘look at’ ‘our problems and what we have to do about them’. One answer is provided by some of the more unlikely contributors to New Lines II, Ted Hughes included, with other possibilities existing in journals such as Poetry and Poverty, Grub Street, Poetry Manchester, and Chanticleer, or the anthologies, The New Poetry (1962), and Mavericks (1957). The latter was intended to promote new poets ‘who, without the advantages of publicity, are making a valid attempt to grapple with problems beyond those of technique (important though these may be) and to communicate, lucidly and honestly, what they feel to be significant experience.’ It is worth drawing attention to the term ‘significant experience’, as this reflects Douglas’s emphasis on writing about his own significant experiences. It also suggests what I regard as the extrospective intention not to look away when confronted with the darkest of realities:
I never tried to write about war (that is battles and things, not London can Take it) with the exception of a satiric picture of some soldiers frozen to death, until I had experienced it. Now I will write of it.89

The same extrospective emphasis can be found in The New Poetry as A. Alvarez’s introductory essay forces us to admit that poets did, and still do, face a dilemma when it comes to writing about difficult subjects, a decision by which Douglas was also affected and which is explored in relation to my own poetry in Chapter Three. Alvarez frames a polarity when he warns against ‘gentility’,90 and in favour of poetry that combines ‘openness to experience’91 with ‘technical skill and formal intelligence’.92 The contrast is further defined as being between poetry founded on ‘a belief that life is always more or less orderly, people always more or less polite, their emotions and habits more or less decent and more or less controllable’;93 and poetry which acknowledges that ‘we have mass extermination’,94 and ‘we have concentration camps run scientifically as death factories’,95 ‘genocide, and the threat of nuclear war’.96 In view of Douglas’s extrospective emphasis on facing up to violent events, it is hard to imagine that, had he survived the war, his realism would have allowed him to ignore atomic weapons and the Holocaust, although that is exactly what the otherwise extrospective Larkin did do. Douglas, it seems, would have been more likely to fulfil Alvarez’s criteria than Larkin. I could make the same claim for those of my poems which are concerned with war, Holocaust, or the personal extremis of injury and hospitalisation, as each engages directly with these subjects, approaching them with the objectivity and realism that I have argued in Chapter One was typical of Douglas’s extrospection.
iii The extrospective spirit of Ted Hughes

That *The New Poetry* was willing to engage with major contemporary issues in a similarly extrospective vein to that advocated by Douglas, is demonstrated by the fact that it includes John Berryman’s ‘New Year’s Eve’, which refers directly to ‘this sore word genocide’,97 ‘brownshirt Time’,98 and, more obliquely, ominous mills, where ‘White fine flour everywhere whirled / Ceaselessly, wheels rolled, a slow thunder boomed’.99 Ted Hughes’s ‘A Woman Unconscious’ provides another example of this anthology’s willingness to consider human atrocity, as ‘Russia and America circle each other’,100 and ‘Threats nudge an act’101 that could leave ‘Earth gone in an instant flare’.102 Hughes counterpoints this public danger with a more intimate scene, ‘a lesser death’,103 on a ‘white hospital bed’,104 a woman ‘numb beyond her last of sense’,105 who has ‘Closed her eyes on the world’s evidence’.106 This, however, does not erase the external unease of Cold War, or alter the fact that, in recognising the threat of nuclear war, Hughes was being extrospective.

Hughes was ‘seeing’ the violence of the world around him, perhaps inevitably, having been born in 1930 and having lived through the same war in which Keith Douglas fought, albeit as a boy ten years younger than Douglas. This fact was not lost on Hughes, and he actively sought to bring Douglas’s poetry to a wider audience by editing and introducing *Keith Douglas: Poems Selected by Ted Hughes*,107 in 1964. Clearly Hughes’s extrospective willingness to write about war did not end with ‘A Woman Unconscious’ and the Cold War. Hughes developed a deep bond with the life and poetry of both Keith Douglas and Wilfred Owen, effectively awarding
them the status of surrogate kin: ‘Owen, […] grew to represent my father’s experience, and later on Douglas my brother’s (who was in North Africa through the same period).’ To this we can add Anthony Rowland’s observation that the impact of the First World War was also obvious in Hughes’s ‘private, early days spent in “a kind of Mental Hospital of the survivors” of World War I’. With this in mind, in Douglas’s terms, it would have been dishonest for Hughes not to have written about the First and Second World Wars, given his personal connection, making his poetry extrospective in that sense at the very least.

It is tempting to look for links between Hughes’s war poetry and his nature poetry, not least because it was as a keen observer of the natural world that Hughes first appealed to me. We need to remember though that while Hughes could and did immerse himself in nature, especially while growing up in the West Ridings, he did not experience military combat other than as a spectator on the home front, and as a witness of war’s impact on the lives of his father and his brother. The difference is important because it means that, in writing about war, Hughes had to use his imagination to some extent, an approach that might be deemed less direct and experiential than that of the nature poems, of which Hughes wrote:

There are all sorts of ways of capturing animals and birds and fish. I spent most of my time, up to the age of fifteen or so, trying out many of these ways and when my enthusiasm began to wane, as it did gradually, I started to write poems.

What connects Hughes’s nature poetry and his war poetry, despite this distinction, is his willingness to recognise nature and war as phenomena, to engage with his subjects to such an extent that he could become part of their often violent contexts. As Hughes explains it, this involves two different
processes, and ‘two worlds’,\(^{111}\) which we can equate to extrospection and introspection, or the conscious and the subconscious:

Sharpness, clarity and scope of the mental eye are all-important in our dealings with the outer world, and that is plenty. And if we were machines it would be enough. [...] For better or worse we have another, and that is the inner world of our bodies and everything pertaining. It is closer than the outer world, more decisive, and utterly different.\(^{112}\)

Hughes argues that when writing poetry of any sort these are worlds that we ‘have to live in simultaneously’.\(^{113}\) This is demonstrated in ‘Hawk Roosting’ when Hughes attributes an imagined first-person voice to a subject that is based on his experience of the natural world: ‘I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed’.\(^{114}\) The same balance is also evident in the assimilation of contextual detail (even if it was acquired second-hand), and the imaginative projection of Hughes’s war poetry.

The contention that Hughes was an extrospective poet is supported by his interviews with Ekbert Faas, in which he outlines the choice between ignoring or accepting the fact ‘that once given licence most people will dutifully, zealously, zestfully inflict ultimate pain on others’.\(^{115}\) When Hughes describes the natural inclination to ‘refuse to accept’\(^{116}\) the ‘reality’\(^{117}\) of human violence, to ‘dissociate ourselves from it’,\(^{118}\) he is paraphrasing Robert Conquest’s call for order, before rejecting it. Like Douglas, Hughes wrote about violent events because they ‘happened’,\(^{119}\) citing Blake and Yeats as examples: ‘the poets simply felt compelled to make an image of what they saw – at the same time trying to impose some form of ethical control on it.’\(^{120}\) While Hughes may not have experienced battle as an active participant, he did have access to witness testimonies and a wealth of other sources in sufficient quantity to write about war and violence as undeniable
facts. He did not look away, but echoed Douglas’s extrospection by turning towards these subjects.

This extrospective compulsion is evident in Hughes’s ‘Bayonet Charge’ and ‘Six Young Men’, both of which appeared in *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), and both of which refer to the impact of modern war. ‘Bayonet Charge’ begins with a physical onslaught, jolting the poem’s human subject, plunging him into the drama of a soldier ‘stumbling’ into action, with ‘Bullets smacking the belly out of the air’. The hard facts of human violence and extremis are also expressed in the natural form of ‘a yellow hare that rolled like a flame / And crawled in a threshing circle, its mouth wide’, but the poem originates from Hughes’s engagement with the forces that machine-gun ‘King, honour, human dignity’, with the rattle of the word ‘etcetera’. Hughes may not have witnessed this violence at first-hand as a specific event, but he negotiates this potential difficulty by presenting military violence as part of an aggressive condition, a reality that he could readily experience, one that the pike, hawk, and thrushes of his nature poetry also displayed. Consequently, it is possible to claim that the general inclination of ‘Bayonet Charge’ is extrospective, even if some of the poem’s drama has been imagined.

The same claim is more easily made for Hughes’s First World War poem, ‘Six Young Men’, as it replicates the experience of looking directly at a photograph. The drama of ‘Bayonet Charge’ is replaced by extrospective recognition of visual detail, and by the speaker’s reaction to the image. The appearance of the picture’s subjects is recorded with objective clarity, adding to the suggestion that ‘Six Young Men’ is a poem that fulfils at least some of
the requirements of Keith Douglas’s extrospection: ‘One imparts an intimate smile, / One chews a grass, one lowers his eyes, bashful’.\textsuperscript{127} Initially, it is perpetuation that is most in evidence as ‘The celluloid of a photograph holds them well / Six young men, familiar to their friends.’\textsuperscript{128} Only once it is revealed that ‘Six months after this picture they were all dead’,\textsuperscript{129} is the illusion shattered by the extrospective reality that is also apparent in Keith Douglas’s poetry, since the one certainty concerning the young men is that ‘all were killed’.\textsuperscript{130}

As with Douglas’s ‘Landscape with Figures 2’ and ‘Landscape with Figures 3’, as well as some of my own poems that are discussed in Chapter Three, there is a reflexive quality to the extrospection of ‘Six Young Men’, as if, having begun by looking at an object or a scene, the speaker’s gaze is then turned on himself. In the ‘Landscape with Figures’ series, the speaker concludes that ‘I am the figure writhing on the backcloth’,\textsuperscript{131} and ‘I am the figure burning in hell’.\textsuperscript{132} Similarly, the second stanza of ‘Six Young Men’ describes the postures and attitudes of the six young men, who ‘are trimmed for a Sunday jaunt’,\textsuperscript{133} but then draws the speaker into the scenario, connecting him to the subjects of the poem’s extrospective gaze through a shared experience of the photograph’s physical environment. While the photograph of the men allows them to exist in the past and the present simultaneously, as both the dead and as their own artefact, their surroundings extend beyond them and become part of the speaker’s history. Just as the six young men stood in the vicinity of the seven streams before they died, so too has the speaker: ‘I know / That bilberried bank, that thick tree, that black wall’.\textsuperscript{134} This connection underlines the inevitability of the
speaker’s death and the inescapable nature of mortality as an extrospective reality on a wider scale.

Essential to the choice that Hughes and other poets, myself included, have had to make between writing about violence and ignoring it, and equally central to extrospective engagement with subjects such as war and Holocaust, is the problem outlined by Theodor Adorno’s question as to whether, following the Holocaust ‘any art now has a right to exist; whether intellectual regression is not inherent in the concept of committed literature because of the regression of society.’\(^\text{135}\) Connected with this contention is the danger that, in representing the Holocaust, ‘something of its horror’\(^\text{136}\) might be ‘removed’\(^\text{137}\) and that, in ‘turning suffering into images, harsh and uncompromising though they are, […] the victims are used to create something, works of art, that are thrown to the consumption of a world which destroyed them.’\(^\text{138}\) The difficulty remains, even though Adorno balanced his concern with the admission that ‘it is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it.’\(^\text{139}\)

How Douglas might have reacted to the problem of writing poetry after the Holocaust is conjectural, but it is likely that extrospection would have been central to his approach, in view of its importance to his battlefield poetry. It has certainly been essential to my poems about the Holocaust, as will be seen in Chapter Three. Anthony Rowland suggests that poets can approach these subjects, although he advocates negotiating ‘controversy through indirection’,\(^\text{140}\) citing Hughes’s ‘Your Paris’, ‘Pike’, ‘Hawk Roosting’, and ‘Crow’ as examples of acceptable post-Holocaust poetry. Another
paradigm is provided by Andrew Motion’s ‘Anne Frank Huis’, which sees the speaker re-discovering ‘how / the bookcase slides aside’, and how impossible it is to ‘help / but break her secrecy again’. As noted by Michael O’Neill, however, Motion’s poem avoids the details of ‘Anne Frank’s terrifying, never-mentioned fate’. Although Rowland advocates caution, his attitude does not involve refusing to write about awkward subjects altogether, a stance that is extrospective to some degree.

The same extrospective interest in brutal reality is evident in Hughes’s Crow (1970), which, arguably, ‘forms an example of a self-conscious post-Holocaust poem by gesturing towards twentieth-century atrocity as a whole in the form of allegory.’ This may be an accurate assessment, since, in ‘Crow Goes Hunting’, aggression is linked with the language and imagery of human conflict. Crow’s attempts to understand his world take the form of words, to be used as weapons. When Crow discovers a hare that has ‘converted itself to a concrete bunker’, his reaction is typical of a world dominated by violence: ‘Crow turned the words into bombs - they blasted the bunker.’

Despite this, Crow’s malevolence extends beyond conflict to embody a more pervasive negative force. Once hatched, he is the recurring answer to the catechism of ‘Examination at the Womb-door’: ‘Who owns these scrawny little feet? Death. / Who owns this bristly scorched-looking face? Death.’ This makes him apocalyptic in a general sense, incorporating the Holocaust, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki, but without direct reference, and without obvious empathy, further defining Hughes as a poet prepared to face the twentieth-century’s most catastrophic events. Crow becomes an emblem of an increasingly technically-advanced world, but one
with little room for humanitarianism, one guided by the undeniable aggressive instinct of Douglas’s ‘How to Kill’. In Hughes's assessment, Crow lacks the maturity to understand his nature. Either ‘he evades the reality in himself’¹⁴⁹ or he ‘cannot yet recognize it, so does not take responsibility for it, and so remains infantile’,¹⁵⁰ which may reflect the reluctance of twentieth-century society to admit the violence of the human condition and to deny culpability for war and Holocaust.

Having argued that the Crow poems might allude to historical realities, we need to remember that they can also be seen as an exercise in myth-making, with Crow living what Hughes refers to as ‘a legendary life’.¹⁵¹ This might indicate that Hughes was moving away from realism and extrospection, and that he was moving closer to the subconscious world of the imagination, or ‘the faculty of creating a picture of something in our heads and holding it there while we think about it.’¹⁵² This contention is given greater credibility by the fact that among Hughes’s influences in writing Crow were ‘the Trickster Tales of early and primitive literatures.’¹⁵³ Since the protagonist of these tales is a sort of ‘demon of phallic energy, bearing the spirit of the sperm’, a ‘Holy Fool’, who ‘refuses to let sufferings or death detain him’, regardless of the ‘fatal mistakes he makes’, it is easy to see Hughes’s point. This has presented, and perhaps continues to present poets with the dilemma of having to choose between realism, and poetry founded in the subconscious, story-telling, and mythology. My extrospective poetry does not engage with this debate directly, but in my nature poems I do accept the subjectivity and flawed nature of human perception and understanding, as is discussed in Chapter Three. Yet, my nature poems are
still rooted in reality, just as Hughes tells us that ‘the playful-savage burlesque of Trickster’s inadequacies and setbacks’ remain ‘an integral part of the intrinsic human realism.’ It follows that extrospection continued to have a role to play in Crow, as Hughes drew on the ‘outer world’ as well as the ‘inner world’.

iv The sensitivity of Geoffrey Hill: Hill as an extrospective poet

Neil Corcoran argues that willingness to write about problematic subjects of this sort unites Hughes with Geoffrey Hill, and separates both from the Movement: ‘a fundamental effort of both, [...] is an undermining of the discourses of English civility and decorum in which the Movement had its being, in the interests of a response to the historical realities of post-war Europe.’ Despite Corcoran’s possible over-eagerness to polarise, it is true that Hill is another example of a significant poet whose work has provided an alternative to the approach proposed by Conquest. The fact that Edward Larrissy alludes to ‘common ground’ between Hill’s poetry ‘and that of modernists and neo-modernists’ also implies that Hill’s poetry is less reserved than that of Larkin and other writers for whom difficult subjects were best avoided, as does the idea that Hill’s œuvre is characterised by its ‘resistance to easy assimilation’. The difference can be seen as emblematic of the breadth of Douglas’s extrospection, in that Larkin’s poetry reflects the tonal economy that Douglas advocated, while Hill’s poetry exhibits a willingness to face ‘our problems and what we need to do about them.’ Since both aspects are essential to Douglas’s definition and understanding, it seems that Larkin and Hill are extrospective in different
ways. In Hill’s case, the one thing he does not do when reacting to the major historical traumas of his time is ‘turn a delicate shoulder to it all’. Rowland contends that ‘Hill’s vision of awkward, resistant, yet democratic, art appears to be much closer to that which Adorno outlines in his essays “Commitment” and “On Lyric Poetry and Society”’, but, in dealing with the Holocaust in poems such as ‘Two Formal Elegies’, ‘Of Commerce and Society’, ‘Ovid in the Third Reich’, ‘I had Hope When Violence was Ceas’t’, ‘September Song’, ‘Domaine Public’, ‘History as Poetry’, ‘Two Chorale-Preludes’, and The Triumph of Love, Hill is also close to Douglas’s extrospection. Both poets refuse to ignore difficult realities in their work. While the Movement largely avoided these issues, ‘Representations of the Holocaust have preoccupied Hill throughout his œuvre’, generating an ‘uneasy, but necessary, collaboration between the concentrated lyrical moment, and an appreciation of the potential “barbarism” of unreflective writing in a post-Holocaust context.’

Hill’s awareness of the Holocaust as a historical reality that occurred during his life-time, and his consciousness of the dangers inherent in addressing such a problematic subject, inform his post-war poem, ‘September Song’, in which a merger occurs between the past and the present, Holocaust and the domesticity of a bonfire. It is highly unlikely that Hill would describe himself or his poetry as extrospective, but it is still possible to argue that in ‘September Song’ Hill’s position is extrospective on two grounds. Firstly, he displays a willingness to ‘look at’ the Holocaust and write about it. Secondly, the poem’s speaker, who may not be Hill, observes and is part of a definite physical environment. This remains true, even though
the speaker discusses a situation that does not initially seem to be his or her own, because he or she is drawn into the context of the Holocaust when alluding to ‘September Song’ as a personal ‘elegy’. The juxtaposition between the impersonal and the personal is increasingly apparent in the poem’s second stanza, in which, on the one hand, there are ‘routine’ processes and physical phenomena, ‘so much Zyklon and leather’, ‘estimated’ death, and the march of ‘Things’ ‘sufficient, to that end’. On the other hand there are the ‘cries’ of humanity in response to ‘patented / terror’. Both of these allusions have their roots in the same historical reality, regardless of the contrast they suggest between the mechanical and the human. Even though it can be argued that Hill’s poetry is less autobiographical than that of Keith Douglas, the former’s empathic connection with the victims of genocide is obvious in the statement that ‘This is plenty. This is more than enough’. That he does not maintain an entirely impersonal and objective position is an indication that the Holocaust has to be confronted. It also suggests that we should be affected and angered by genocide, whether we are being extrospective or not. This lesson has been influential throughout my Holocaust poems and is apparent in the attempts I have made to remember the victims as individuals, rather than as a number. Notably, in ‘September Song’, the conclusion that there should be no more murder, no more genocide, is preceded by three extrospective observations of the external environment, the last of which has a significant physical impact on the speaker, rendering him or her human too:

September fattens on vines. Roses flake from the wall. The smoke of harmless fires drifts to my eyes.
This may be taken as a suggestion that Hill is sensitive to the dangers of writing inappropriately, but accepts them, by making that dilemma his subject. Ultimately, it seems that ‘For Hill, the avoidance of self-indulgence is bound up with artistic responsibility, and the requirement to respond to historical atrocities with committed lyricism, at the same time as accepting that these are events plainly resistant to artistic representation.’\(^{177}\) That extrospection is not only the source of these problems, but a potential solution, is revealed in the balance that Hill achieves between writing about the Holocaust, and writing about the need, or desire, to do so.

Extrospective recognition also underpins ‘I Had Hope When Violence was Ceas’t’, although it does so alongside an awareness of ethical issues. The poem’s use of personal pronouns directly associates the speaker with ‘Our flesh oozing towards its last outrage.’\(^{178}\) Given Hill’s sensitivity to the issues surrounding the adoption of the persona of a victim, his incorporation into an environment in which ‘Dawnlight freezes against the east-wire’, \(^{179}\) and ‘The guards cough “raus!” “raus!”’, \(^{180}\) invokes the manner in which internment and extermination have become part of public post-war consciousness. In identifying with the inmates, it is possible that Hill also identifies a public, and even journalistic fascination with atrocity, questioning his own interest in the subject, as well as that of the reader. Since Keith Douglas’s understanding of extrospection includes what he referred to as journalese and reportage, it might be argued that his Holocaust poems provide an example of extrospection being queried through extrospective means. If so, this occurs despite the fact that extrospection is integral to Hill’s choice of subject matter.\(^ {181}\) It also takes place regardless of Hill’s lack of first-hand experience
of the Holocaust, because Hill has had access to the reports of those who were victims and witnesses, allowing him to consider the subject's real and imagined events with an awareness that is based on reality. This approach also has an important part to play in my poems on these subjects, as seen in Chapter Three.

**v Dannie Abse, Anthony Rudolf, and Jon Silkin: extrospection and personal impact**

In preparing my own poetic responses to the Holocaust, I found it invaluable to draw on the testimonies of witnesses and victims, such as Primo Levi, rather than writing solely from an outsider's point of view. I also looked at the work of Jewish poets in order to find out how they have reacted to the events of the 1930s and 1940s, and was fascinated to discover that extrospection, or something very similar to it, has played a part in their writing. This encouraged me to think that I could employ an extrospective approach in my Holocaust poems, while bearing in mind Hill's implied warning regarding the dangers of writing gratuitously and without sensitivity. Having discussed how extrospection has played a part in the Holocaust poetry of Hughes and Hill, two of recent British poetry's most enduring and important, but non-Jewish figures, it will therefore also be revealing to address the role this approach has played in the work of Dannie Abse, Anthony Rudolf, and Jon Silkin, three British writers of Jewish origin whose poetry has helped to shape mine. In Abse's case, Holocaust and Jewish identity are addressed in poems such as 'A Night Out', 'White Balloon', and 'Jew'. In the first of these poems Abse assumes the role of a detached observer, who, along with his wife, attends
‘the new Polish film / at the Academy in Oxford Street’,\textsuperscript{182} part of an audience, who ‘peered through the cut-out oblong window / at the spotlit drama of our nightmares’.\textsuperscript{183} As a result, the speaker becomes representative of a post-Holocaust generation lacking first-hand experience of the war and the death-camps, but viewing a recreation of past events from the comfortable distance that Abse undermines by recognising its existence. The speaker and his wife can return to a normality comprising ‘coffee / in a bored espresso bar nearby’,\textsuperscript{184} the ‘comfortable suburb […] / where, arriving home, we garaged the car’,\textsuperscript{185} an ‘au pair girl from Germany’,\textsuperscript{186} reassurance that ‘the children’\textsuperscript{187} are safe, and, a final image, in which the protagonists ‘undressed together, and naked together, / in the dark, in the marital bed, made love.’\textsuperscript{188} Elements of the Holocaust are present in this domestic environment, but made safe, though they retain their sinister echoes, undermining the observer’s separation from the events portrayed in the film. The distance provided by extrospection and the passage of time do not guarantee immunity from the fact that, in another world, undressing precedes extermination, as Abse is keenly aware.

‘White Balloon’ also displays an extrospective recognition of the relationship between domesticity and Holocaust, distinguishing between them by beginning with the confessional statement: ‘Dear love, Auschwitz made me / more of a Jew than Moses did’,\textsuperscript{189} then adding the counter-statement ‘But the world’s not always with us’.\textsuperscript{190} This separation allows the expression of everyday emotions, admitting ‘Happiness’ \textsuperscript{191} ‘like an unexpected guest / with no memory of the future either,’\textsuperscript{192} and concentrating on the present, which is personified as an actual, or imagined child. Yet, for
all its apparent innocence, the image is as illusory as the idea that the present can remain immune from the impact of history. When ‘Happiness’ picks up a white balloon, plays with it, and climbs the stairs, what he encounters is ‘the landing’s darkness’, ‘the moon above Masada’, and ‘abandoned for the night, / the icecream van at Auschwitz’ realities that cannot be ignored and that demand to be written about, just as they did for Douglas, Hughes, Hill, and in those of my Holocaust poems featured in Chapter Three.

In contrast to Hill’s self-questioning approach, or the lyricism of Abse’s poetry, Anthony Rudolf’s Zigzag (2010) presents recorded interviews, with the author’s grandfather, as prose poems, in which the Holocaust is discussed with the extrospective detachment and honesty for which Douglas strived: ‘A Jew in them years, you could kill him like a cat. / A Jew in them years, they killed them all out.’ Mass extermination is dealt with as an undeniable matter of fact: ‘A book tells people / to take a couple of Jews and kill them like rats.’ It is a contextual phenomenon as tangible and obvious as the walls and shells of Keith Douglas’s tank. The information, and the views imparted, are pared down, and, consequently, in keeping with the ‘Bullshit’-free extrospective writing that Douglas advocated. While Keith Douglas’s extrospective poetry may have exerted a direct influence on Hill and Hughes, it is unlikely to have done so in the case of Rudolf’s grandfather, but this does not alter the fact that similar emphases occur within his personal recollections. The connection between extrospection and first-person testimony that occurs in Anthony Rudolf’s Zigzag is equally essential to the Holocaust poems that I have included as part of this project,
because the majority are based on primary sources such as Primo Levi’s *If This is a Man, Remembering Auschwitz*. This is explored in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Jon Silkin’s approach to the events of the Holocaust is also instructive, as it involves an attempt to understand what might be thought of as beyond comprehension. Not only can I relate to this ambition where my poems about war and Holocaust are concerned, but it is also relevant to the poems I have written about my experiences of injury and hospitalisation, many of which try to make sense of what was an instant transformation. Once again, it is notable that Silkin’s responses to the Holocaust involve extrospection, as they recognise the existence of atrocity and genocide as realities that are embedded in historical and cultural discourses, as well as what Jon Glover refers to as the poet’s ‘historic, Jewish identity’. As a result, in Silkin’s poetry, these events become almost endemic, a dark part of the human condition, just as the death of the ‘eight hundred’ Jews of York is as ‘persistent / As a gross tumour’, in part one of ‘Astringencies’. As Glover reflects, the same effect and the same emphases contribute to Silkin’s ‘Resting Place’, ‘which returns again to York and to the sale, in 1230, of land to the Jews for a burial plot’. Silkin’s ‘Genocide’ extends the poet’s interest in the worst excesses of human history into an attempt to understand the origins of the poem’s subject, leading to the suggestion that

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The answer seems that power
Is possessed by those
Incapable of asserting
What they believe.
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This may seem to be an abstract, philosophical conclusion, as opposed to one characteristic of extrospective poetry, but it arises from a definite
context, namely ‘Those who raped / Tibetan girls’, or castrated the men ‘To prevent a fruitful Tibet’. The development of the poem is typical of that of many of Douglas’s extrospective poems, as ‘Genocide’ moves from the definite, to the hypothetical. Extrospection, therefore, continues to play an important role in Post-Holocaust writing, not least by providing the objective distance required to allow poets to confront these issues, though this is not to suggest that Silkin and others did not also write more subjectively. In Silkin’s uncollected poem, ‘Much did you think’, he mounts a passionate defence of his poetic interest in Holocaust and in Jewish identity, but does so in the process of voicing the extrospective refusal to ignore contextual realities, echoing Ted Hughes’s response to criticism of his choice of subjects:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Just as long as the pain} \\
\text{Of this insolence} \\
\text{To us remains unadmitted} \\
\text{I will speak of the Jews.}
\end{align*}
\]

vi Private pain: Extrospection in Simon Armitage, Elizabeth Jennings and Sylvia Plath

The poetry of Abse, Rudolf, and Silkin demonstrates that extrospection can play an important part in responses to trauma and extremis that has both global and private repercussions. The same is true of Keith Douglas’s ability to write about the Second World War ‘selfishly’, and of battles as an individual undergoing his ‘first experience of fighting’, despite being one of so many soldiers who became ‘just little pieces of food / swirling in an uncomfortable digestive journey’. What I now wish to consider is how far extrospection can play a part in poetry that is concerned with private trauma relating more specifically to physical or mental injury. In January 1942
Douglas walked into a trip-wire and, in the resulting explosion ‘was hit in the right foot, right calf, left thigh, the small of his back, under his left arm, and in his left shoulder’. Yet, despite spending six weeks in hospital, he did not write about this incident and its impact directly in his poems. Death and wounding are recurring themes, as is his own mortality, but that is as close as his poetry comes to engaging with the trauma of his injury. Since my extrospective poetry does address the extremis of my spinal injury, paralysis, and the two years I subsequently spent in hospital, the example of post-Second-World-War poets who have written about personal trauma, using the observational and realistic techniques that are so typical of Douglas’s extrospective poetry, has been invaluable in terms of developing my poetic responses.

In the case of Brian Hill’s and Simon Armitage’s combined film and poetry project, *The Not Dead* (2007), it is not his own situation that Armitage addresses, but he succeeds in writing empathically about suffering that takes place on an intimate, rather than a more public or generic level. Armitage admits that he is a civilian writing about military experience, like most twenty-first century poets, who would ‘think twice before setting a mouse-trap, let alone enlisting for active service’. In common with Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill, and my own war poetry, however, this lack of experience does not prevent Armitage’s extrospective engagement with war and its psychological impact. The final poem of Armitage’s project, ‘Laura’s Poem: The Manhunt’, presents war not simply as the soldier’s concern, but as part of an ongoing, domestic reality, one affecting a soldier, Eddie, and his partner, Laura. Armitage moves closer to the human subject of ‘The
Manhunt’ by writing in Laura’s voice, using what he has learned from first-hand interviews. As a result, the reality of the relationship between Laura and Eddie, the affection with which Laura attempts to ‘trace / the frozen river which ran through his face,’\textsuperscript{213} and the ‘blown hinge of his lower jaw’,\textsuperscript{214} becomes undeniable. The poem ends with a final sentence in which, having ‘widened the search’,\textsuperscript{215} Laura closes in on the incendiary nature of Eddie’s psychological injury, an ‘unexploded mine / buried deep in his mind.’\textsuperscript{216} Thus, Armitage’s attention to detail and his extrospective engagement with the subject of conflict reveals the attempts made by two victims to confront the private arena of their ‘problems’\textsuperscript{217} and ‘what’\textsuperscript{218} they needed ‘to do about them.’\textsuperscript{219}

When it comes to writing more self-referentially, including in my own poetry, extrospection also becomes a means of addressing personal trauma. The examples of Elizabeth Jennings, Sylvia Plath, Thom Gunn, and Seamus Heaney may seem disparate, or eclectic, but they do have this in common, and it is through my interest in the work of each of these poets that I have been able develop my own extrospective reactions to extremis. I am aware that these poets have been affected by developments taking place in British, Irish, and American poetry since the Movement, and that extrospection exists alongside these tendencies, rather than to their exclusion, but the important fact, so far as this thesis is concerned, remains that an extrospective approach is a vital part of these poets’ responses to personal extremis.

In the example of Jennings’s \textit{Recoveries} (1964), and \textit{The Mind Has Mountains} (1966), it is worth considering Edward Levy’s claim that, in these two collections, ‘the acute suffering both of self and of others is stared
squarely in the face'. The background to these poems is what Levy refers to as ‘the incumbency which made necessary her journey through the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* of personal suffering’, but the poems are often objective assessments of illness and hospitalisation, based on the extrospective ability to adopt a position that is simultaneously detached, and involved, the ‘separative glass cloak’ of Douglas’s ‘Syria’. In many of Jennings’s hospital poems the poet also becomes the subject of her own scrutiny, seen as if through the eyes of a third party, a process that I have also used, sometimes to cathartic effect.

‘Pain’, the opening poem of Jennings’s ‘Sequence in Hospital’, considers the poet’s situation in psychological, physical, and perceptive terms. Jennings is able to see, as well as be herself, just as Douglas becomes the ‘figure writhing on the backcloth’ in the second of his extrospective ‘Landscape with Figures’ trilogy. Writing in the first person, initially, Jennings is at her ‘wits’ end and with ‘all resources gone’, a passive condition mirrored when, in the final detail, she watches herself struggle as ‘the needle thrusts in.’ In poem VI, ‘Hospital’, Jennings looks beyond herself, instructing her reader to ‘Observe the hours which seem to stand / Between these beds and pause’, or to ‘Observe the tall and shrivelled flowers, / So brave a moment to the glance.’ While the act of looking is symptomatic of the dissociative effect of physical or psychological extremis, it is also an indication of the correlation between extrospection, and antinomian dissolution, an effect characteristic of Keith Douglas’s ‘On a Return from Egypt’, and ‘Actors waiting in the wings of Europe’. Despite the differences between their circumstances, Jennings and Douglas share a
sense of threat and vulnerability that coincides with a heightened awareness of the external environment, the ‘one dreamer’ in ‘Hospital’, who ‘Weeps under pillows at his lack’, or the ‘One with the photographs of grandchildren’ in ‘The Ward’. For both poets, and for me in the hospital poems that I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three, it may even be the case that it is the ability to adopt a position that is both self-referential and objective that makes these poems possible at all. Having said this, it is wise to exercise caution in Jennings’s case, given Michael Schmidt’s contention that, although ‘She attempted suicide more than once’, what differentiated her from poets such as ‘Sylvia Plath, whom she admired, and Anne Sexton, whom she didn’t’, was that for Jennings poetry was ‘a way back from the edge, not a peek over it’.

This distinction notwithstanding, there were similarities between Jennings and Plath, as Jane Dowson establishes: ‘Both poets had breakdowns and periods of hospitalisation [...] that lay their poetry open to reductive interpretations as the expression of psychological crises’. This similarity considered, along with Jennings’s description of Sylvia Plath as a ‘marvellous poet’, it is not surprising to find that, like Jennings, Plath’s attempts to engage with extremis also depend on a visual sensitivity that is close to that of Douglas’s extrospective poetry. Once again, we find the poet able to consider her body and her situation from an externalised perspective. It is even less surprising in view of the affection with which Plath describes Keith Douglas in a letter written to her mother on 7 June 1962. Here Douglas is not so much an influence as a member of the family, a kindred spirit, the ‘marvelous young British poet’ about whom ‘Ted did a beautiful
program’, and his loss is a personal tragedy: ‘Both of us mourn this poet intensely and feel he would have been like a lovely big brother to us. His death is really a terrible blow and we are trying to resurrect his image and poems in this way.’

George Steiner’s ‘Dying is an Art’ associates Plath’s later poems with ‘proud nakedness, making claims so immediate and sharply urged that the reader flinches’, adding that ‘They are too honest, they have cost too much, to be yielded to myth.’ The connection with Douglas’s claim that he wanted ‘to write true things, significant things in words each of which works for its place in a line’ is immediately obvious. Steiner identifies that the problem with writing about Plath’s later poems lies in the extent to which they are overshadowed by her suicide, the sense of moving towards death almost inevitably, but this too echoes the strength of Douglas’s conviction that he would be killed in battle. Desmond Graham records that shortly after enlisting in 1939, while Douglas and some friends were ‘passing a Great War Memorial, he casually commented that his name would be on the next one.’ It might be contended that Douglas differed from Plath in that he had less control over his fate, and his death was as inadvertent as my spinal injury, but that would take insufficient account of either the complicated nature of Plath’s condition, or the manner in which Douglas actively sought out danger. Less debatable is the fact that Douglas and Plath both had a clear sense of their own mortality, and that this was frequently reflected in their most self-referential poetry, a relationship between traumatic experience and creativity that my poems also tap into in equally extrospective terms, with the body and what happens to it in sharp focus.
Plath’s ‘Cut’ and ‘Lady Lazarus’, both of which were included in Ariel (1965), bring this type of extrospective clarity to bear in successions of images describing the experience of injury, and attempted suicide respectively, and both generate shock through unexpected metaphors based on physical and visual sensation. In ‘Cut’, Plath echoes the detachment that characterises the closing lines of Douglas’s ‘Mersa’, beginning when the accidental cutting of her thumb becomes a cause of excitement: ‘What a thrill – / My thumb instead of an onion.’ Images are suggested and replaced. The thumb is a ‘sort of hinge’, then, it is ‘like a hat’. In framing these comparisons, Plath’s method approaches that of an artist attempting to represent a scene. As mentioned in Chapter One, Keith Douglas was a keen graphic artist, and the same applies to Plath as she is described in Ted Hughes’s ‘Drawing’: ‘You drew doggedly on, arresting details, / Till you had the whole scene imprisoned’. Plath’s ‘Cut’ also exhibits this desire to capture physical details. As might be expected of such a visual poem, the colour of the thumb becomes important, the top of the thumb being ‘Dead white’, establishing a connection with Plath’s mortality, but allowing her to remain immune, as long as she maintains an objective distance, just as Douglas does in ‘Simplify me when I’m dead’, and just as I do when looking at my own body from an externalised perspective in my hospital poems.

The balance that Plath strikes between detachment and involvement is more exaggerated in ‘Lady Lazarus’, but she continues to consider her body in extrospective terms, through metaphor and simile, describing her skin as ‘a Nazi lampshade’, her ‘right foot’ as ‘A paperweight’, and her ‘face’ as ‘featureless, fine / Jew linen.’ The adoption of Holocaust
imagery is controversial, prompting Steiner to question whether Plath’s ‘final poems’\textsuperscript{255} are ‘entirely legitimate’,\textsuperscript{256} but among the possibilities arising from these specific references is the suggestion that the poet was intentionally addressing the nature of speculation. In ‘Lady Lazarus’, media interest in the speaker’s attempted suicide is personified as a patriarchal presence, the equivalent of which is perceived to be retrospective fascination with the details of the Holocaust. It is arguably this aspect of Plath’s extrospection that remains especially pertinent in the twenty-first century, as we become increasingly subjected to constantly available sources of news that are often visual in nature. It certainly raises issues that are relevant to my hospital and Holocaust poetry.

vii Extrospection and the body: Seamus Heaney and Thom Gunn

Seamus Heaney’s ‘Chanson d’Adventure’, a sequence of three twelve-line compositions, included in the \textit{Human Chain} collection (2010), provides another twenty-first century example of a poet addressing personal extremis in terms that can be considered extrospective, and is, consequently, also important in the context of my attempts to understand the role and importance of extrospection in my poetry and that of others. Although ‘Chanson d’Adventure’ begins with two lines from Donne’s ‘The Ecstasy’, in which love is physical, as well as ethereal: ‘Love’s mysteries in souls do grow, / But yet the body is his book,’\textsuperscript{257} Heaney’s sequence also provides a physical description of the beginning of a journey by ambulance, an experience with which I am also familiar, having been carried to hospital by ambulance after my spinal injury and numerous times since. As well as being
‘Strapped on, wheeled out, forklifted, locked / In position for the drive,’\textsuperscript{258} the speaker is ‘Bone-shaken, bumped at speed’,\textsuperscript{259} details that are observed, experienced, and recorded in terms that Douglas might have recognised in his own work. The sense of the speaker as passive and helpless, a subject of physical activity, rather than its initiator, is characteristic of many of my own extrospective poems, including those in which I am forced to adopt the role of a spectator, rather than being able to participate in activity.

In the second of Heaney’s ‘Chansons’, extrospective consideration of a physical reality is equally insistent, breaking through the speaker’s meditation with ‘a hooked-up drip-feed to the cannula’.\textsuperscript{260} Similar is true of the third element of Heaney’s sequence, as the speaker regards his body, and the extremis of his situation, in aesthetic terms, drawing a comparison with the antique sculpture of ‘The charioteer at Delphi’,\textsuperscript{261} who ‘holds his own’,\textsuperscript{262} but has lost his left hand altogether, while gripping a set of ‘bronze reins astream in his right’,\textsuperscript{263} from which the horses have vanished. The speaker’s body, and that of the Delphic charioteer, stand for the same failure to successfully ‘walk with one foot exactly / in front of the other’\textsuperscript{264} that occurs in Jon Glover’s medical examination in ‘Back to the Diagnosis’. What survives of Heaney, and the Delphic charioteer, is equally disconnected, equally representative of physical malfunction, and equally convincing proof of the continuing relevance of extrospection as a means of coming to terms with difficult experiences. As with the Holocaust poetry of Abse, Rudolf, and Silkin, or the hospital poetry of Glover, and Jennings, it is chiefly the objectivity of extrospection that makes this engagement possible. Glover can search for and find pertinent comparisons to help make sense of his medical
examination, such as ‘the verbs that didn't / agree’,
\textsuperscript{265} or ‘the ball that dropped short’, \textsuperscript{266} and the same is true of Heaney’s ‘Chansons’. Extrospection becomes a means of understanding what might otherwise be beyond comprehension, a trait that plays an important part in the hospital poems that I discuss in Chapter Three.

The later poetry of Thom Gunn provides further testimony as to the continuing significance of extrospection as a means of confronting physical and personal trauma. It also constitutes another object lesson with respect to the manner in which I have been able to explore the relationship between objective realism and the body in my own poetry. \textit{The Man with Night Sweats}\textsuperscript{267} contains poems such as ‘Words for Some Ash’, and ‘Still Life’, in which the homosexual Gunn displays the courage to address the subject of AIDS among his friends. Gunn did not suffer from AIDS, but is a witness to the physical and human impact of a disease by which he must have felt himself to have been under threat. The emphasis throughout these poems is on the physical reality of the situation, just as it is in the uncompromised detail of wounding and death in Douglas’s ‘\textit{Vergissmeinnicht}’ and ‘Cairo Jag’.

The subject of Gunn’s ‘Words for Some Ash’ is the ‘Poor parched man’,\textsuperscript{268} for whom his friends ‘had to squeeze / Dental sponge against’ his ‘teeth’,\textsuperscript{269} ‘So that moisture by degrees / Dribbled to the mouth beneath.’\textsuperscript{270} In physical terms, he has become ‘a bag of ash / Scattered on a coastal ridge’,\textsuperscript{271} a fact dealt with in honest, and extrospective terms, but terms that also recognise that the dead man is a part of a more expansive whole, consisting of the liquid for which he longed in his suffering: ‘unseen streams’,\textsuperscript{272} ‘the water’s play’,\textsuperscript{273} and ‘the currents’ argument.’\textsuperscript{274}
‘Still Life’ is equally unsparing, beginning with an image that the speaker confesses he will ‘not soon forget’, \(^{276}\) namely ‘The greyish-yellow skin / To which the face had set’. \(^{276}\) Unlike the example of ‘Words for Some Ash’, there is little room for remembering the dying man’s humanity. Replicating the effect of ‘Simplify me when I’m dead’, the subject of ‘Still Life’ is entirely objectified, robbed of identity by his condition, as the speaker notes ‘The angle of his head, / Arrested and reared back’. \(^{277}\) Once more, the approach is unquestionably extrospective, with the victim reduced to a series of jotted visual details. The overriding fact remains that of imminent death, as represented by the final detail of ‘The tube his mouth enclosed / In an astonished O’. \(^{278}\)

The courage to confront extremis, the recognition of death as an absolute condition, the extraordinary dissociation, and the aesthetic sensitivity of ‘Words for Some Ash’, and ‘Still Life’, despite the fact that they ‘refer to friends who died before their time’, \(^{279}\) could all have been drawn directly from Douglas’s poetry. Equally, the objective clarity with which the body is perceived in *The Man with Night Sweats* has much in common with the focus of Plath’s later poetry, as well as Jennings’s sequence of hospital poems. This testifies to the relevance of extrospection as a means of writing about extremis that continues to affect the twenty-first century. This evidence suggests that there are situations in which the ‘practical utility’ \(^{280}\) of Douglas’s approach is as viable now as during the Second World War, and that there are precedents for writing of my own experiences in equally objective and realistic terms, as seen in Chapter Three.


8 Kingsley Amis, in *New Lines*, p. 46.


20 Philip Larkin, in *New Lines*, p. 28.


32 Douglas, Complete Poems, p. 67.

33 Ibid. p. 40.

34 Ibid. p. 97.

35 Ibid.


37 Ibid. p. 20.

38 Ibid.


45 Thomas, Collected Poems, p. 170.

46 Amis, Collected Poems, p. 133.


48 Ibid.


50 Conquest, in New Lines, p. 310.


52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid. p. 5.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.


59 Thom Gunn, in New Lines, p. 32.

60 Ibid.


63 Ibid.

64 Larkin, The Whitsun Weddings, p. 35.

65 Ibid.

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid, p. 89.
70 Ibid, p. 353.
71 Ibid, p. 351.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.


78 Donald Davie, in *New Lines*, p. 67.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
82 Conquest, in *New Lines – II*, p. xxiii.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid, p. xxiv.
86 Ibid.

91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid, p. 21.
94 Ibid, p. 22.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
97 John Berryman, in *The New Poetry*, p. 36.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid, p. 152.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.


112 Hughes, ‘Myth and Education’, p. 143.
113 Ibid.

117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
120 Ibid, p. 266.
122 Ted Hughes, New Selected Poems, p. 16.
123 Hughes, New Selected Poems, p. 17.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid, p. 18.
133 Hughes, New Selected Poems, p. 18.
134 Ibid.

137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid, p. 188.
140 Rowland, Holocaust Poetry, p. 154.
142 Motion, Selected Poems, p. 16.

Hughes, *Crow*, p. 48.


Hughes, ‘Crow on the Beach’, p. 242.

Hughes, ‘Myth and Education’, p. 142.
Hughes, ‘Crow on the Beach’, p. 239.


Hughes, ‘Myth and Education’, p. 143.


Edward Larrissy, ‘Modernist Survivors’, p. 36.


Ibid.


Primo Levi, *If This is a Man, Remembering Auschwitz*, (New York: Summit Books, 1986).


228 *Ibid*.


230 *Ibid*.


234 *Ibid*.


236 Elizabeth Jennings, 'Interview (26 August 1993)', in Dowson, ‘Towards a new confessionalism’, p. 64. (This citation is indirect, and the original source has not been consulted).


239 *Ibid*.


241 Steiner, ‘Dying is an Art’, p. 296.

242 *Ibid*.


244 Graham, *Keith Douglas*, p. 79.


246 Plath, *Ariel*, p. 15.

247 *Ibid*.


251 *Ibid*.

252 *Ibid*.

253 *Ibid*.

254 *Ibid*.

255 Steiner, ‘Dying is an Art’, p. 301.

256 *Ibid*.


265 Glover, Magnetic Resonance Imaging, p. 51.
266 Ibid.
269 Ibid.
270 Ibid.
271 Ibid.
272 Ibid.
273 Ibid.
274 Ibid.
275 Ibid, p. 65.
276 Ibid.
277 Ibid.
278 Ibid.
280 Hughes, in Douglas, Complete Poems, p. xvii.
Chapter Three

Personal reactions to the concept of extrospective poetry

Having explored the origins, nature, application, and continuing importance of Keith Douglas’s extrospective approach to poetry in the previous chapters of this thesis, I will now reflect on how an awareness of Douglas’s methodology has contributed to my poetry. I will also argue that my poetry does not simply replicate Douglas’s approach and methodology, but builds on his achievements, resulting in a unique style, breadth, and application.

Since I have written more than 1,000 poems during the course of my research, and applied the principles of Douglas’s extrospection to subjects as diverse as my experiences of disability and hospitalisation, war and Holocaust, natural subjects, travel, my relationship with my wife, Jayne, and ekphrastic poetry in response to visual art, this chapter will consider a cross-section of the work I have produced, and explain the importance of extrospection as a part of my creative process.

i Hospital, extrospection, extremis, and paralysis

I have already drawn attention to the relationship between extrospection and extremis in Douglas’s writing, as well as in that of other significant poets of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and have demonstrated the importance of experience in writing of this nature, including the manner in which extrospective poetry helped ‘to maintain an intensely personal poetic vision in a wartime political climate that continually threatened the private life of the individual.’¹ It is in the light of these discoveries that I have approached my experiences of disability, and life-threatening injury. Having suffered a
serious spinal injury, during a judo tournament in 1987, I was left paralysed from my shoulders down, and unable to breathe, except for short periods, without the assistance of a ventilator. Physical injury, and the lasting memento of what Bernard Spencer refers to as ‘our bit of Death inside us’ aside, what I also experienced, as a result of my injury, was an immediate immersion into a new world, one comparable to that on the far side of the ‘looking-glass’, through which Douglas crashed. That there are direct comparisons between my situation, and that of Douglas, is reflected in the latter’s recognition of instantaneous transformation in the sections eventually omitted from ‘Cairo Jag’. Here, the speaker’s ability to immerse himself into his environment, and to consider it in extrospective terms, is an epiphany, rather than an evolution:

In a moment
will fall down like St. Paul in a blinding light
the soul suffers a miraculous change.

Writing ‘Cairo Jag’, Douglas was aware that mechanised battle could have an immediate, fatal, or mutilating impact, not least because he was recovering in hospital having been injured in a trip-wire explosion. This is likely to have exaggerated his sense of estrangement, and his tendency to see, think, and write extrospectively, enabling him to step back from events and view them from a distance, and it is this ability to create distance between remembering, and describing, experiences, on which examples of my hospital-related poems are based, particularly ‘Out of it’, ‘Inert’, and ‘Divested’. While the former of these reactions to trauma assumes a first-person voice, ‘Inert’, and ‘Divested’, use the third-person, reflecting the dissociative consequence of serious injury, but all three of the poems rely on
the objective space that extrospection provides. There are grounds to suggest that this distancing equates to the exile undergone by the *Personal Landscape* poets during the Second World War. The manner in which Lawrence Durrell addressed the problem of being away from England, and ‘personal crises, such as the dissolution of his marriage’, is particularly relevant to the approach adopted in my hospital poems, because he created a persona, that of ‘Conon, an ancient Greek philosopher’, through which he could regard the trauma of ‘a love, / Fragmented everywhere by conscience and deceit’, from an outsider’s perspective.

My hospital poems do not involve the assumption of a persona, but do attempt an equivalent level of dissociation, viewing personal trauma from an external perspective. In the case of ‘Out of it’, this generates a relationship between disorientation, and the poem’s regular linear rhythmic structure of three accentual stresses, as is reflected in an initial struggle to generate sound: ‘Words are as bulky as remorse / if they come at all.’ Spatial separation allows a disturbing reality to be recorded as a series of details, imposing regularity on the initial experience, and its recollection, as well as replicating the process of regaining consciousness, coming to terms with altered circumstances. Beginning with the recognition of breathing via ‘the ventilated hum’ of artificial respiration, the poem becomes more concrete. Further complementing the extrospective methodology of Douglas’s later poetry, the speaker distinguishes that ‘There are nights and days / now’, empirical ‘certainties to pick / the bones of’, although the solidity of these anchors is undermined by the presence of ‘The killers’, left over from the speaker’s hallucinogenic dreams, who persist in ‘the darker corners at the
rim / of waking’.\(^{13}\) Reality shifts, but does so around an extrospective fulcrum, as is represented when ‘A nurse drifts / in and out of range’,\(^{14}\) and ‘Voices, faces, / settle their differences’.\(^{15}\)

Although he did not refer to his own hospitalisation in his poetry, similar effects occur in Douglas’s ‘Sea Bird’, when, ‘through a curtain of thought’,\(^{16}\) the speaker observes ‘a dead bird and a live bird’,\(^{17}\) with the latter assuming an ethereal quality, rising into flight ‘like flame, / colours I can’t believe are so’,\(^{18}\) then vanishing like ‘a ghost’.\(^{19}\) Douglas’s ‘Actors waiting in the wings of Europe’ provides another uncanny impression of a tangible context: ‘There is an excitement / in seeing our ghosts wandering’,\(^{20}\) but, unlike ‘Sea Bird’, and in common with my ‘Out of it’, this example is associated with extremis, and the dissociation that can occur faced with an inescapable, and ominous reality.

This extrospective disembodiment sustains my ‘Inert’, as I step outside of my own physicality, writing about myself, and my trauma from the point of view of a knowing, and neutral observer. This echoes Douglas’s ‘Simplify me when I’m dead’, particularly in view of the latter’s speculative interest in what ‘a learned man may say’,\(^{21}\) when looking at the poet’s ‘skeleton perhaps / so stripped’,\(^{22}\) and concluding that ‘“He was of such a type and intelligence,” no more’.\(^{23}\) One important distinction between ‘Inert’, and ‘Simplify me when I’m dead’, is that the detached speaker of ‘Inert’ reaches into his own thoughts and memories, beginning with the statement ‘Compunction controlled you then’,\(^{24}\) before listing his childhood attraction to ‘the amazement / in a fire-grate’,\(^{25}\) or ‘the spinning / dynamic’\(^{26}\) of a bicycle wheel. These fragments, however, along with the imagined re-enactment of
cranking ‘the brass lever’ on H. G. Wells’s time machine, ‘are tactics you use / for diversion’. The fundamental reality is that of physical trauma, of ‘the squares of white tiles / and strip-lights’ in the ceiling, ‘as they move you’ from ‘corridor to theatre, / with doctors counting you out’.

The application of extrospective distancing, and the resultant ‘separative’ condition identified in Douglas’s ‘Syria’, play an even more important part in my ‘Divested’. This is because, from the outset, the details of injury and extremis are more starkly rendered:

Once they start to cut his clothes  
From the lost acquaintance of his limbs, he is  
all head.

Douglas’s recommendation that extrospection might be the most suitable means of addressing ‘our problems and what we have to do about them’, is borne out in the graphic descriptions of wounding, death, and mutilation that occur in his ‘Vergissmeinnicht’, ‘Cairo Jag’, and Alamein to Zem Zem. The ambition of my ‘Divested’ is to face up to extremis in an equally objective manner. The wounds to which Douglas alludes are not his own, but the logic of employing extrospection to personal extremis, as occurs in Elizabeth Jennings’s ‘Sequence in Hospital’, is a natural extension of the principle of coping with a given scenario, in both psychological and poetic terms. More than that, the approach that proves effective in Douglas’s poetry can test and probe, attempting to establish the differences between living, wounded, and dead soldiers, or, in ‘Divested’, between activity and paralysis in the body about ‘to be strategically tested for human feeling, a needle, here, or here’. In place of Douglas’s extrospective investigation, there are the subject’s ‘thoughts free / to poke around’.
When Geoffrey Hill refers to the manner in which Douglas’s poetry ‘approached an idea again and again in terms of metaphor, changing position slightly, seeking the most precise hold’, it is this experimental aspect of extrospection to which he alludes, as does Douglas’s ‘Landscape with Figures 1’, through its reference to those ‘who like Thomas come / to poke fingers in the wounds’. The same search for solidity forces the speaker of Bernard Spencer’s ‘In a Foreign Hospital’ to focus on ‘a small green insect’, that ‘flings itself ‘Against my bedside light’, ‘with a noise / tiny and regular, a “tink; tink, tink”,’ reflecting that extrospection is part of the poet’s attempt to understand, rather than just to recognise, the world around him. Perhaps, like the ‘unlucky’ metaphorical ‘explorers’ of Douglas’s ‘On a Return from Egypt’, who have ‘come back, abandoning the expedition’, there is little more to discover than inexplicable facts, but it remains significant that the personified thoughts of ‘Divested’ do not drift, but are described as ‘reporting back / with the slimmest pickings between the tumult’. An attempt is made to understand, albeit one destined to fail. As with ‘Inert’, reality is as elusive as it is insistent, exacerbating the desire for comprehension.

While, for Douglas, any failure to explain life, death, and battle, might leave chaos and violent confusion, for the disembodied speaker of ‘Divested’, disorientation threatens in the shape of the same hallucinogenic figures that emerge in ‘Out of it’. Paradoxically, there is an explanation for these presences, but, while the speaker can appreciate this information as a third-person observer, he cannot do so as a first-person subject, because this assimilation requires clarity and experience. The third-person speaker knows
that, deprived of physical stimulation and nervous responses, the body becomes remote, and the brain generates alternative realities. In the words of ‘Divested’, ‘Gaps appear, to be crammed daft / with hostage-taking’,48 or, more horrifically still, ‘a nurse dismembered’,49 in ‘a few yards of long grass’.50 The latter image recurs, in ‘Hospital slide-show’, as ‘the quills of a deep grassy sea / hot with blood, and a uniform’s white’,51 the figure of the poem’s final line, who ‘lies with careless knees’.52 At the time, these hallucinations were empirical, or seemed to be, which lends a cathartic element to their retrospective de-activation via extrospective poetry, and the awareness that it was all ‘a trick / and not, in a game of dreamt roulette’,53 although one that would be ‘undispelled come morning’.54

In alluding to the search for certainty and truth that is intensified by dislocation and exile, and in previously citing Hill’s analysis of Douglas’s battlefield poems, I have already touched on another important way in which writing extrospectively has helped me to come to terms with the circumstances of my injury and paralysis, because one of the devices that recurs in Douglas’s poetry is visualisation through metaphor, with this process being used to either familiarise, or defamiliarise, according to the requirements of individual poems. Most obviously, in Douglas’s poetry, the attempt to describe his inner demons assumes physical form in the uncompleted ‘Bête Noire’. His sense of fatalistic dénouement is personified as ‘a jailer’,55 who ‘Allows me out on parole’,56 an unwelcome other voice, who ‘breaks into my conversation with his own words / speaking out of my mouth’,57 and as ‘A medieval animal with a dog’s face’,58 whose ‘proper place’59 would be ‘Notre Dame or Chartres’.60 Even though Douglas also tried
to draw the ‘beast’,\textsuperscript{61} by which he felt both haunted and hunted, as ‘black
care sitting behind the horsemen’;\textsuperscript{62} ultimately, ‘Bête Noire’ was to be ‘the
name of the poem I can’t write’;\textsuperscript{63} because the beast proved ‘indefinable’.\textsuperscript{64}
Yet, as he suggests, this does not mean that the relationship between
expository poetry, and metaphorical image, was wholly unsuccessful, as it
was possible to ‘see his tracks (anyone may see them), in some of the other
poems’.\textsuperscript{65} Arguably, traces of the ‘monster’\textsuperscript{66} appear throughout Douglas’s
poetry, including, as Desmond Graham indicates, ‘Landscape with Figures’,
in which ‘a demon had offered him the delights of war’s destruction and the
fascination of the dead’.\textsuperscript{67} The same is true of the ‘person or a wraith’,\textsuperscript{68}
waiting behind the ‘window’\textsuperscript{69} of ‘On a Return from Egypt’, or the macabre
dancers of ‘A Ballet’, which contains the shocking revelation that ‘she has a
dead face and a yellow eye / and he has no limbs’.\textsuperscript{70} More pertinently, it is
likely that the beast is associated with the dead soldiers that Douglas
encountered, and by which he appears to have been fascinated, bringing
metaphor and reality into direct proximity.

The same association between image and fact informs my ‘A frieze
depicting four centaurs’, and ‘In conversation with Chiron’, as both poems
present the strangeness and clumsiness of paralysis through the classical
metaphor of the centaur. While Thom Gunn makes use of the same image, in
his ‘Tom-Dobbin’ poems, to represent the physical amalgamation of male
homosexual intercourse, the point at which there is an ‘imperceptible
transition’\textsuperscript{71} of ‘skin melting downward into hide / at the centaur’s waist’,\textsuperscript{72} in
my centaur poems, the image suggests separation. Firstly, there is the literal
distinction between paralysis and activity that often occurs among people
who have suffered spinal injuries, with this varying according to the level at which the spinal cord has been damaged. Secondly, there is the spatial separation of confinement, a condition that is akin to the exile by which the *Personal Landscape* poets were affected. Thirdly, there is the temporal separation of commemoration and mythologisation.

Thus, ‘In conversation with Chiron’ includes a reference to the central character’s awkward physicality: ‘His arms / and splinted hooves’,73 ‘the bent stalk / where his laughing quivers / a sand-bag paunch’,74 and the ‘drunk / skill’75 required when ‘manipulating his twin-handled safety mug’.76 The separative impact of spinal injury and paralysis is made obvious by the manner in which his feet have become more like hooves than feet, especially when the muscle spasms, that are another complication associated with spinal injury, cause his legs to jerk, and his feet to rattle on the foot-plates of his wheelchair. The central character’s centaur-like nature extends beyond his paralysis, however, adding depth and plausibility to the relationship between extrospection and metaphor. Attributing the name Chiron to the protagonist alludes to his influence on younger patients, myself included, as a teacher in the mould of his civilised namesake, who, in Greek mythology, tutored Actaeon, Achilles, Theseus, and Perseus, among others. Within the parameters of my poem, Chiron’s education and cultural awareness are evident in the ‘letters hand-scrawled by his son-in-law’,77 which ‘feature hieroglyphics’,78 and his having explained ‘finding the sound of the khamseen / in stalks of wheat’,79 or his being able to count ‘the numbers of floods or cattle, / the airy syllables in a cartouche’.80
Similar distinctions between past and present, activity and passivity, are embodied through the same metaphor in ‘A frieze depicting four centaurs’, although, on this occasion, the centaurs more closely resemble the violent horde depicted in relief on the Centromachy metopes of the Parthenon. They are not scholars, or teachers, but are more animalistic in their urges. Consequently, in the opening lines of my poem, ‘John adores the sun with oil / plastered in nurse’s handfuls on skin’, indicating a reliance on natural pleasures, bordering on worship, which not only reflects the reality of sun-bathing just outside the hospital, and being unable to apply sun-cream without assistance, but also invokes the link between centaurs and Apollo. These centaurs may be passive, but exhibit the potential to become unruly. John is ‘grinning like a wall’s fuck you’. In a second example, ‘a part of Tom has stayed a boxer / familiar with John Conteh’, while a third patient, or centaur, Billy, has the ‘voice of storms clotting on Saddleworth Moor’.

In the case of ‘A frieze depicting four centaurs’, the isolation, or exile, of the central characters from themselves, is more exaggerated than that of ‘In conversation with Chiron’, because they are more statuesque, and set apart from the rest of the hospital, except for an anonymous nurse, and ‘A girl-friend or a sister’, who ‘is playing tennis’, and ‘moving as if her shadow doesn’t know’. Any interaction with the latter is denied, but this does not prevent her from being objectified by the patients, for whom spectation has become paramount, reinforcing the link between paralysis, exile, separation, and extrospection.

That both Chiron, and the subjects of ‘A frieze depicting four centaurs’, have effectively been transformed into living myths, accentuates their
isolation, not only from the world, but from time, particularly when ‘A frieze depicting four centaurs’ concludes with the abstract reflection ‘You can tell as we lengthen across the short grass’, effectively enmeshing the speaker in the same state of permanent difference. While this condition mirrors the manner in which Douglas is an observant outsider in ‘Cairo Jag’, ‘Dead Men’, and ‘Egypt’, it also betrays the influence of George Seferis, and C. P. Cavafy, whose poetry integrates modern and classical themes, and both of whom frequently focus on visual phenomena, particularly in Cavafy’s case, for whom the body is often sculptural. In Cavafy’s ‘One of their gods’, the combination of personal aesthetic fascination, physical reality, and mythology, results in an equivalent logistical estrangement to that which occurs in my hospital poems. In Cavafy’s poem, the identity of a handsome young man becomes entangled with that of a god, who has descended from Olympus, to enjoy ‘that part of town that only at night / comes alive, with orgies and debauchery’, thereby preserving him as the photographic emblem of a single moment, much as my centaurs are preserved. Adopting a similar approach in these poems about my experiences of hospital, not only breeds objectivity, but also succeeds in protecting the memory, allowing it to be studied without being damaged, with this, therefore, providing a cathartic benefit. While ‘One of their gods’ is not especially notable for its use of metaphor, it relates to the manner in which images of this type are deployed in my poetry, and that of Douglas, because it bridges the gap between the real and the mythological, forming a hinge, in much the same way as metaphor connects otherwise distinct ideas or objects, with the effect that reality is presented alongside the surreal, the uncanny, or the fabulous.
The relationship between extrospection, myth, and reality, has been equally important in my ‘IVP – intravenous pyelogram’, ‘Latest meeting with the consultant’, and ‘Woman who looks like Sophia Loren’. As with ‘In conversation with Chiron’, human interaction takes place between the speaker and third parties, but does so in what might be described as an otherworldly environment. This allows the poems to reach across the physical parameters of empirical context, and into a more suggestive arena, the understanding of which depends on my ability to balance syntax and image.

Thus, ‘IVP – intravenous pyelogram’ begins with uncertainty, reflecting the disorientation of medical procedures, before an explanation is provided. This effect is amplified by the use of medical terminology in the opening rhetorical question ‘Does this qualify as perfusion?’, disturbing any sense that reality can be entirely relied upon. As with ‘Out of it’, ‘Inert’, ‘Divested’, and ‘Early morning on the ward’, a grasp for details occurs when ‘There is movement at the foot of the table / that I know relates to an injection’, supported by the confirmation of ‘dye into one of the veins / in one of my feet’, before the balance is tipped back towards ambiguity, as the injection is completed with ‘a delicate Indian courtesy, / thanking me for what exactly?’.

This interaction also informs the use of metaphor in ‘Latest meeting with the consultant’, although here the poem presents a comforting familiarity in the opening lines, arising from the presence of ‘The consultant and nurse in low discussion’, studying ‘charts – we’ve all of us been here before’, and assembling ‘their blocks of certainty’. One of the effects of this routine
is to recreate the pattern of existence within a hospital for the long-term patient and the consultant, and the ability of their camaraderie to reach beyond the context of the medical meeting: ‘We have met before, this moist-eyed man / and I, first as strangers’.\(^97\) It is for this reason that the relationship between the two central characters is described in terms of a metaphor that also possesses a dreamlike quality, relating their first meeting to climbing ‘gingerly into the same thirsty river-bed, / feeling its dust and fissures through our feet’.\(^98\)

With the example of ‘Woman who looks like Sophia Loren’, extrospection plays a more definite part in the equilibrium between visible solidity and mythological commemoration, because the fulcrum for the interaction is not a literary device, but a photograph, that of a former girlfriend of John, the hospital-worker, with whom the first-person speaker converses. As with ‘Latest meeting with the consultant’, what precedes the revelation of the photograph suggests regularity, as John brings wheelchairs in from outside the hospital, and seeks the speaker’s opinion on Sophia Loren, over communal ‘hospital coffee’.\(^99\) These extrospective absolutes are then contrasted with the intangible vision of the ‘marine lake’,\(^100\) and the introduction of the ‘unlikely / verging on impossible girl’,\(^101\) for whom John is ‘nostalgic’,\(^102\) and whose mythic status is magnified by her similarity to Sophia Loren. This transition moves further from the established facts of the poem’s context, once the Hollywood goddess appears to replace the woman in the photograph, carrying the speaker into the illusory world of The Fall of the Roman Empire. The film also juxtaposes the poem’s two main themes, by counter-pointing ‘the chaise longue’ of Sophia Loren’s ‘lower lip / and the
voice of Vogue newly widowed',\textsuperscript{103} with the vision of Christopher Plummer
'swayed by a mania / that could hear the gods in marble rows / laughing'.\textsuperscript{104}

The polarity becomes that between two ways of seeing, one being conditional, and the other being more objective. Extrospection itself is explored, the truth of subjectivity, and the subjectivity of truth, through a gaze that looks unemotionally, and without complication, at an incident of great intimacy, and that preserves the moment, along with the photograph’s ‘fresh-looking colour / laughing more wisely, and for so long.’\textsuperscript{105}

\textbf{ii Extrospection in relation to poetic form and structure}

If approaching an idea through metaphor and image can facilitate a degree of understanding, Douglas’s extrospective poetry suggests that it works alongside poetic structure and formal arrangement, as exemplified by his frequent use of regular quatrains, or sestets, for example, and lines of regular metrical or syllabic length. Douglas’s ‘Egypt’ is based around quatrains of alternating rhyme, and lines that are predominantly, though not exclusively, octosyllabic, as are ‘Vergissmeinnicht’, and ‘Christodoulos’. ‘Gallantry’ is similar, but employs the enveloping rhyme-scheme that is also a feature of the sestets of ‘How to Kill’, ‘Actors waiting in the wings of Europe’, and ‘The Trumpet’. So frequently do these arrangements occur within many of Douglas’s most extrospective poems, that it is difficult to avoid claiming that structure, rhyme, and metre are integral to this approach. Without wishing to suggest that the frequent regularity of his stanzas aligns Douglas with a strand of English poetry, preceding W. H. Auden, and eventually extending through Philip Larkin, it seems reasonable to associate this characteristic
with the imposition of control and order on circumstances that could often be extreme.

Directly associated with Douglas’s attention to poetic form, is his interpretation and deployment of enjambment. It is this feature that helps to inform the relationship between syntax and structure in his poems, protecting line-endings, so that lines remain isolated units, or allowing the sense of a line to continue its logical development beyond its expected parameters. This is crucial to understanding Douglas’s poetry, because he places so much emphasis on logic and clarity, intelligible communication with the reader, allowing him to present military combat in empirical and digestible terms. Consequently, in ‘How to Kill’, there is a classical balance to the combination of line-length, enveloping full or partial end-rhyme, and logically progressive continuations of lines, where this is demanded by the syntax of the poem. This is counter-pointed by the fact that the first three lines are all end-stopped, and form a single sentence:

Under the parabola of a ball,  
a child turning into a man,  
I looked into the air too long.\(^{106}\)

But fluidity becomes more apparent as the poem develops, without any loss of control, as befits a description of the first-person speaker’s ability to end a life whenever he chooses. There is only one occasion in ‘How to Kill’ on which the use of enjambment transgresses stanzaic borders, as well as line-endings, but the progression does not unbalance the poem. This may be because it is rapidly arrested by a medial full-stop:

Death, like a familiar, hears  
and look, has made a man of dust  
of a man of flesh.\(^{107}\)
Jonathan Bolton considers a similar stanzaic enjambment, in Douglas's ‘This is the Dream’, to be ‘both striking and original’, adding that ‘there is no precedent in English verse for this innovation within the otherwise conventional use of the quatrain’. The link between the second and third quatrains of Edward Thomas’s ‘Adlestrop’ indicate that Bolton’s claim is questionable, however:

What I saw
Was Adlestrop – only the name
And willows, willow-herb, and grass.

There is also at least one roughly contemporary equivalent in Bernard Spencer’s ‘Base Town’, collected in Personal Landscape. As with the occasions in Douglas's poetry when the stanzaic enjambment is arrested by a cessura at the first or second stress of the following stanza, the effect in ‘Base Town’ has an unsettling impact related to the underlying threat of war:

Their charred plane fallen in the cratered square
Held twisted in it all

Their work, Their hate, Their failure.

The existence of formal arrangements of this type in Spencer’s poetry, as well as in Douglas's military, and non-military poems, including those which refer to the latter’s relationships with various lovers, encourages the opinion that a desire for understanding and control is at the heart of their writing, and cannot be separated from a predominantly extrospective approach. Crucially, Douglas’s ‘The Knife’ begins with a rhetorical question to a lover, before the speaker attempts to provide some form of explication, with enjambment playing an important part in the process: ‘Can I explain this to you? Your eyes / are entrances the mouths of caves.’ In this instance, the
process is not supported by a recognisable rhyme-scheme, but it is in ‘The Prisoner’, as demonstrated by the initial quatrain:

Today, Cheng, I touched your face
with two fingers, as a gesture of love,
for I can never prove enough
by sight or sense your strange grace.¹¹³

Once again, this is of direct relevance to my experiments with extrospective poetry, and not only in my hospital poems, but on a wider basis. Unlike Douglas, however, the application and interpretation of structure in my poems incorporates forms derived from Welsh, and Celtic poetry, as well as accentual, and more loosely classical variations. The effect, or the ambition, of these poems, bears comparison with that of Douglas’s extrospective poetry, in which themes of control and disorder, and their antagonism, are addressed, alongside observation, passivity, and participation.

‘Jospice visiting day’ represents a relevant example of my using a prescribed form to describe and reflect on a first-hand experience, as well as attempting to invoke the tensions between sentence, syntax, and line, or stanza. The form being interpreted in this example is the Sapphic stanza, with the metrical and syllabic pattern being maintained throughout, despite frequent linear and stanzaic enjambments. The result is a fluid syntactical and narrative movement around a definite frame, the opening lines of which echo the scene-setting of the first stanza of Douglas’s ‘Vergissmeinnicht’:

Three weeks gone and the combatants gone
returning over the nightmare ground
we found the place again, and found
the soldier sprawling in the sun.¹¹⁴

In ‘Jospice visiting day’, however, the combination supports a less urgent tone, with the first-person speaker providing a present-tense account of a
journey through agricultural and coastal landscapes, although there is journalistic economy in the omission of a main verb from the opening two lines of my poem: ‘Quite a pleasant drive with the coast approaching / pines with faint suggestions, then leaning harder.’ The supple drift is more obvious in the second sentence, as is the theme of seasonal flux, and the fluctuating rhythm of life and death:

This by way of answering farms and seasons pulsing the raw crops

where the soil has stared through the winter.

Again, there is no main verb, which, as in ‘Cairo Jag’, helps to support the impression of the speaker assembling details as they occur, with this, in turn, being consistent with first-hand experience, even though the poem was written retrospectively. The effect could almost be described as a stream of consciousness, particularly when, following the third sentence, the syntax is jolted by the sudden introduction of a whole new subject, which, initially, appears to have no connection with the previous narrative:

Will the voice have the strength to make it over the low hum

always there, the susurrus breathed by machines day on day?

The question resembles that with which ‘Cairo Jag’ begins, ‘Shall I get drunk or cut myself a piece of cake [...]?’ in that it provides access to the private arena of the speaker’s thoughts, a device that allows the poem to develop fresh narrative strands, without doing so too obviously. As an indication of the possibilities that arise from the effective consideration and integration of syntax and structure, the new development that takes place at this point in ‘Jospice visiting day’ is especially pertinent, not least because it
demonstrates that, to a greater extent than is apparent in Douglas’s poetry, it is possible for the speaker to be less than authoritative. This adds a new layer to the tension between the poem’s structural, and narrative elements, the more so, if the imposition of a definite form in Douglas’s poetry can be associated with the desire to assert control over the uncontrollable. This is because it reflects the extent to which my poetic responses to experience do not simply follow Douglas’s considerable achievements, but attempt to develop them, and shape them into an approach that is uniquely attuned to my voice. This grows in importance with respect to the specific nature of my physical, as opposed to my poetic voice, and the equilibrium that I have had to establish between enunciation, and being dependent on a ventilator to breathe. Since the ventilator controls the rate and length of my breathing, and since my inspiration and expiration occurs passively, I have only partial control of my speech, which increases the desire for formal control in my writing. Controlling the relationship between poetic syntax, fluidity, and structure may serve as a means of compensating for a loss of control in other areas.

The fact that ‘Jospice visiting day’ assembles, or, more accurately, reassembles an experience, from a variety of external details, at the same time as drawing on personal and subjective responses, can also be regarded as proof of the flexibility that an extrospective approach affords. This is a feature of Douglas’s ‘On a Return from Egypt’, and ‘Actors waiting in the wings of Europe’, in both of which a balance is struck between various discourses, some of which might have been thought to be at odds with Douglas’s general approach. In ‘Jospice visiting day’, the consequence of
interweaving solidity and movement, or introspection and extrospection, is a multi-faceted tone, a narrative poem that is simultaneously informative, elegiac, lucid, vulnerable, and, in the closing stanzas, flecked with the humour of two young men united by their shared experience of extremis. Having introduced the subject of ventilators and mechanical breathing, via a subconscious rhetorical question, the narrative reaches its destination at the Jospice, where the speaker arrives at his friend’s bedside. While the complications of the inmate’s condition are avoided, along with his admission to the hospice from the Spinal Injuries Unit, what does emerge is the complexity of the situation, the blend of trauma, and making light of the obvious, all of which unfolds within, or around, the regular parameters of the Sapphic stanza, from the moment that ‘A joke has me guessing longer / than it should’, and then ‘rolls from his lips like treacle, / growing so its meaning becomes enormous.’ Once the joke is understood, ‘letting the moment ripple / through him, making easy our human contact’, the return journey ‘Driving back the evening with headlights full on’ affords the chance for reflection, completing the narrative, and bringing the tension between stanzaic structure and syntax to a natural conclusion. Fittingly, the final word retains the impression of private thought, despite being presented as a formal, public, utterance, and lending support to the theory that the relationship between structure and fluidity in ‘Jospice visiting day’, as well as in Douglas’s poetry, equates to the co-existence of extrospection, and introspection, the polarities that Douglas’s definitions would seem to deny:

Seems so fragile feeling the coast’s recession slipping over us with his drunken, stumbling grimace, his weak joke.
Structural considerations are also to the fore in ‘Bruise from my Baclofen pump re-fill’, with the form, on this occasion, resembling ottava rima, except that the lines of my poem are octosyllabic, rather than the iambic pentameters often associated with this arrangement. Ottava rima is not a form that is favoured in Douglas’s poetry, but the lessons of his understanding of the extent to which stanza, line, metre, rhyme, and syntax can work together remain relevant. Just as Douglas’s early poems ‘Strange Gardener’, ‘.303’, and ‘Caravan’, and later examples, such as ‘Egyptian Sentry, Corniche, Alexandria’, ‘Christodoulos’, and ‘The Offensive 2’, begin with enjambments, which compromise the formal arrangement, so does my poem. The effect is disorientation, particularly combined with a metaphorical description of bruising, based on natural colouration:

A tide-mark that won’t be washed clean
aggravates an October leaf’s
diminishing gold an obscene
yellow.\textsuperscript{124}

Already, there is antagonism between sentence structure, and linear structure, and the impact of the end-rhyme linking ‘clean’,\textsuperscript{125} and ‘obscene’\textsuperscript{126} is softened, without being lost completely. The rhyming stresses do not disappear, but neither are they allowed to dictate syntactical curtailment, as the sense of the poem flows between and through its structure. As is often exemplified in my hospital-related poetry, formal and syntactical disorientation revisit the bewildering otherworldliness of the poem’s medical context, the procedure to which the title refers, the unique clinical intimacy of the bond between the doctor and the patient, with unwritten rules as unique as those by which the killer, and the human target, of Douglas’s ‘How to Kill’, become part of a single event. It is the human connection between the two
participants that provides the opportunity to make sense of the surreality of their situation.

Another aspect of the meeting that is reflected in the poem’s structural fluidity is the temporal shift that occurs from immediate present, to the immediate past, the bruise, as it appears a day after the baclofen pump refill, and the procedure itself. The connection between the two consists partly of my ventilated ‘clockwork breathing’, and partly of my recognition of how little separates the poem’s present from

the day or the day before
with the doctor’s head setting pores
alight as he leant down.

That the temporal disjunction is at odds with the doctor’s having tolerated the situation, is clear in his smiling

The way a pond might smile
at the burden of a yelping
dog from the world next door,

or metal rails, ‘when a glance of sun gets impaled / on a wall’. This draws support from my use of stanzic enjambment, as ‘on a wall’ marks the beginning of a new stanza. Consequently, the final rhyming couplet of the octave does not halt the narrative momentum. Instead, it serves as background emphasis, underlining the natural association of ‘rails’ and ‘impaled’, adding phonetic resonance to their logical affinity.

It is especially pleasing that the lasting impression generated by this poem, and by the subtlety with which the various formal and syntactical elements interact, is one of intimate calm, of mutual understanding. This survives, despite the first-person speaker’s conscious attempt to breach expected protocol, on the basis that it was ‘there just for the breaking’, by
asking about the doctor's background. Even having ‘touched / behind the blind smile’, and re-awoken a previous indiscretion, in which the speaker drew the doctor into conversation about his homeland of Burma, the speaker finds him unmoved, continuing to inject baclofen into the subcutaneous abdominal pump ‘as if stars / were guiding him’. In the ultimate satisfaction of the poem’s competing and co-operating discourses, formal and informal strands are brought together in a final couplet based on extrospective observation of the abdominal ‘bruise’ that ‘waited a few days to come true’. This further underlines the extent to which the structural effects of Douglas’s extrospective methods can continue to be an important part of facing up to difficult contexts.

One question that still needs exploring in relation to my experimental work with the structural aspects of Douglas’s extrospective poetry, is whether it has been possible to achieve similar results in poems that use identical formal arrangements to those that Douglas deployed. ‘The Promenade Hospital at Southport’, and ‘Tony McCoy at the Cheltenham Festival’, are both founded on the sestets of enveloping end-rhymes that are regular features of Douglas’s extrospective poems, while ‘New admission, Southport, ICU’ makes use of the same quatrains of alternating end-rhymes that occur in ‘This is the Dream’. In addition, my poems share Douglas’s willingness to combine full and partial rhymes, another trait that has implications for the art of balancing fluidity and structure, with partial rhymes being less obstructive to effective enjambment, than full rhymes. ‘Desert Flowers’ represents an apt case in point, as the first quatrains includes ‘flowers’, ‘saying’, ‘hour’, and ‘slaying’ as end-rhymes, creating an undeniable resonance that forces
attention on to the line-endings, slowing the pace of the poem, the more so in view of the long and open vowels, ensuring that weight falls on the quatrain’s final stress, ‘slaying’. The second quatrains is a different matter, with the less complete end-rhymes ‘fill’, ‘words’, ‘all’, and ‘discards’, facilitating a more rapid transition from one line to the next, on the three occasions where enjambments take place. Douglas’s ‘Enfidaville’ includes similar mixtures of rhyme and para-rhyme, as, in the opening sestet, ‘dancers’ and ‘plasters’, ‘Therèse’ and ‘days’, and ‘dust’ and ‘Christ’ barely chime at all, while, in the second sestet, the combinations are fuller: ‘candles’ and ‘doorhandles’, ‘streets’ and ‘greet’, and ‘bare’ and ‘there’. Learning from, and building on Douglas’s extrospective methodology, has, therefore, necessitated being just as conscious of how rhyme and enjambment work in conjunctions of this sort.

‘The Promenade Hospital at Southport’ develops this understanding so far that there are only three end-stopped lines in the poem’s eight sestets. Nowhere in Douglas’s poetry does an example as extreme as this occur, but the manner in which the poem’s end-rhymes and enjambments support syntactical evolution and narrative development, can be traced directly to Douglas. With respect to the enveloping rhyme-scheme of ‘The Promenade Hospital at Southport’, I have found that it is important to ensure that the central couplet of each stanza does not slow the pace, or interrupt the sense of the poem. This is a danger where rhyming couplets occur, and not one that is always negotiated successfully, even in Douglas’s most effective poems. The penultimate sestet of ‘How to Kill’ almost stops on reaching the central couplet: ‘Being damned, I am amused / to see the centre of love
diffused’. \(^{160}\) So much is this the case, that the following line threatens to become an after-thought: ‘and the waves of love travel into vacancy.’ \(^{161}\) By contrast, the central couplet of the final sestet is more successful: ‘with how like, how infinite / a lightness, man and shadow meet.’ \(^{162}\) Even though the second element of the couplet is end-stopped, the succeeding line springs more easily from the phonetic base into the two-syllable sentence ‘They fuse.’ \(^{163}\) This prepares the reader for the concluding argument that ‘A shadow is a man / when the mosquito death approaches.’ \(^{164}\)

The first sentence of ‘The Promenade Hospital at Southport’ is longer than the majority of those found in ‘How to Kill’, but it drifts across the stumbling block of the central couplet, and into the second half of the stanza, establishing a context that is simultaneously concrete and disorientating, partly because of the manner in which the idea of a ‘mill-town’ is abstracted, or uprooted, from its normal sense:

Victorian Gothic shrinks in its towers 
and collapses in on its wards, a mill-town 
stranded after a charabanc jaunt 
feeling the nimbleness of the wind flaunting 
its distance. \(^{165}\)

This prepares the way for a subsequent stanzaic enjambment, flowing through the structure, without destroying it. Again, the impetus is provided by a relatively long sentence, carrying the poem into the second half of the following stanza, deviating from Douglas’s tendency to use shorter syntactical units, and expanding on the structural and narrative balance of his extrospective poetry. That ‘The Promenade Hospital at Southport’ remains an extrospective poem, is underlined by the fact that the second sentence is heavily loaded with visual detail, such as ‘the red of terraces’, \(^{166}\) and the
conscious activity of ‘watching the gulls / spell what they are on rapid transitions’,\textsuperscript{167} with the latter also being associated with colour, in the form of ‘grey and blues’.\textsuperscript{168}

It is possible to claim that when the poem’s initial concentration on observed physicality moves in a more introspective, and, arguably, lyrical direction, this shift is also reflected in the fluidity of long sentences working around the endings of lines and stanzas, not least because the more personal tone coincides with the beginning of the poem’s fourth sentence: ‘I didn’t know, not / initially, more than the gasp of doors’.\textsuperscript{169} The effect is close to that of Douglas’s ‘Mersa’, in which extrospective focus on the appearance, history, and military present of the poem’s geographical location, acquire personal implications in the penultimate sentence: ‘I see my feet like stones / underwater’.\textsuperscript{170} In my poem, this change of direction leads into a more intimate sharing of experience between the poet and the reader. The hospital becomes a point, against which the first-person speaker can measure what has happened to him. He can also gauge how moving away from the hospital corresponds to the freedom of a widening vision, one literally stretching outside of the limitations of hospital windows, and ‘the ward’s estrangement’,\textsuperscript{171} to register a context that is both new and unchanged, strange and familiar.

The same concerns with the relationship between formal regularity, and narrative fluidity, are integral to ‘Tony McCoy at the Cheltenham Festival’, with the need to negotiate the central couplets of the enveloping sestets again threatening to bring the fluidity of the poem to a halt. The risk is especially apparent in the opening stanza, because the couplet involves a full
monosyllabic end-rhyme. What alleviates the obstacle is the fact that the two parts of the rhyme occur in separate sentences, thanks to a medial full-stop in the fourth line. Thus, the overriding emphasis remains on the poem’s syntactical development, the interaction between the opening two sentences. As with ‘The Promenade Hospital at Southport’, the opening sentence of ‘Tony McCoy at the Cheltenham Festival’ refers to an observable, external spectacle, but what is also in evidence is an economical and prosaic tone, allowing the poem’s context to be communicated with the journalistic clarity for which Douglas aimed in ‘Cairo Jag’, ‘Mersa’, and ‘Vergissmeinnicht’. The way that this works in ‘Tony McCoy at the Cheltenham Festival’ is clear in the colloquial terms of the first sentence, the easy adoption of racing parlance:

A mud-flecked McCoy is down-beat
after his first winner this time
around, a festival good thing
on the fourth day. 172

At this stage, there is no suggestion that the poem is written with an intricate structure in mind, or that the following sentence will have a more intimate and subjective tone, as the fact of the central character’s muted reaction to success at the Cheltenham festival takes on a less obvious, but increasingly human significance. Despite the fact that the change hinges on the word ‘coma’, 173 in order to encourage momentum, this term does not occupy a line-ending, but flows into the following line through the clarifying phrase, ‘induced or otherwise’, with the effect amplified by the soft rhyme ‘someone’:

Not the wet sting
of the down-pour, but the cold chime
knowing and hating how it sounds

when someone says coma, induced
or otherwise. 174
Once again, the sense of the poem cascades across lines, rhymes, and stanzas more freely than occurs in Douglas’s poetry, and comes to rest at another medial cessura. In a further development of Douglas’s approach, this transition prepares the way for the poem’s empirical reality to resonate at a personal level, for both McCoy, and the poem’s third-person speaker, the role that I have given myself in this particular drama. Whereas a third-person voice might ordinarily provide some level of immunity from personal revelation, on this occasion the observer is drawn into the poem, and speaks both from personal experience, and out of an empathic connection with the jockey, McCoy, as, not only had he experienced serious injury himself, but recently seen a friend and fellow jockey, J. T. McNamara suffer a spinal injury:

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Especially when
it’s as close as yesterday’s card
and you’ve been there, you’ve had a ward
swim into colour and shape, blend
with the dreamt film you get used to
more quickly than you’d think.175
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The second-person address ‘you’, is therefore multi-faceted, simultaneously serving as a first-, a second-, and a third-person address, and all within the parameters imposed by the poem’s complex form. Again, this sophisticated flexibility of syntactical implication does not occur in Douglas’s work, but owes its existence to that work, as does the manner in which the poem switches between extrospective reportage, and introspective speculation as to McCoy’s state of mind, the contention that ‘Knowing / the lad so well won’t have helped much’,176 or the experiential allusion to ‘the chance he saw the moment / what it all means came crashing home’.177 The impact of this
combination of perspectives is also present in the concluding sestet, as the third-person speaker steps back from his personal involvement, and returns to the objective description of post-race proceedings: ‘The scales will report / nothing outside formality’.\textsuperscript{178} The risk that, in assuming a more distant position in relation to the event, the speaker might become similar to ‘the cold / facts of all those lenses’,\textsuperscript{179} or the icons of media interest, is avoided by the fact that, like the camera-men, he is ‘staring through beaded water’.\textsuperscript{180} While the rhyme between ‘report’,\textsuperscript{181} and ‘water’,\textsuperscript{182} emphasises that the narrative has been brought to its conclusion, it also forces attention onto the final word, and implies that there may be other reasons why the speaker is ‘staring through water’.\textsuperscript{183}

With respect to ‘New admission, Southport, ICU’, similar effects are achieved by working within and around quatrains of alternating full and partial end-rhymes. Again, this allows me to provide a poetic reaction to hospitalisation and spinal injury that draws on first-hand experience, expanding from an initial sentence in which the poem’s context is established, albeit in more abstracted terms than the previous two poems:

\begin{quote}
Rumours of an attempted suicide
navigate intervals between our beds
and what moves behind the curtains’ usual closure.\textsuperscript{184}
\end{quote}

The balance between visual detail, and unusual syntax, parallels the poem’s fluid transitions between lines and stanzas, while invoking a further balance, or tension, between the certainties and rumours surrounding an admission to the spinal unit’s intensive care ward. What makes this a particularly important interpretation of these various relationships, is the fact that the poem is written from the point of view of a patient, who has lived through a similar
experience, and who possesses a veteran’s insight. The structure of this poem supports the dramatic scenario, and the induction of the patient and his relatives ‘with heads / like wilted flowers’,185 into a new environment of unusual sounds, not least through the use of muted rhyme-sounds, which imitate the noise made by ventilators and other hospital machines. Alienation is also reflected in the patient’s ‘sporadic moans’,186 like ‘birthing cattle’,187 the ‘tubes grown / part of him’,188 and the ‘search for answers’189 that unites the speaker and the relatives. Guesswork becomes one of the poem’s abiding themes, with ‘both Oldham and Manchester’190 suggested as the new admission’s ‘home town’,191 in ‘segued instalments’192 from nurses, until ‘he’s fully explored’.193 Eventually, he becomes one of ‘the startled dancers reconnecting wills / to limbs’,194 the ghostlike inmates of the wards set aside for rehabilitation, but the disorientation of his admission remains, as he tries ‘to find a way out of his maze / of splintered mirrors’,195 an impression that continues to be reinforced by the struggle between syntax and form.

iii The flexibility of extrospection and its application to non-hospital-related poetry

While there is close attention to structure and form in my extrospective hospital poetry, as well as in Douglas’s battlefield poems, the existence of similar arrangements in ‘The Prisoner’, ‘Behaviour of Fish in an Egyptian Tea Garden’, and ‘The Knife’, demonstrates that Douglas was able to apply his extrospective approach to non-military situations, as recognised by Ted Hughes’s allusion to the ‘essential utility for the job in hand’196 common to much of Douglas’s work. It has, therefore, been essential for my extrospective poetry to address a wide variety of subjects, some of which
feature prominently in Douglas’s work, and others of which extend beyond that scope.

One theme that recurs throughout Douglas’s poetry, both during his time in Egypt and the Middle East, and in his earlier writing, is that of travel. ‘Love and Gorizia’, ‘Villanelle of Gorizia’, and ‘A God is Buried’, written when he was fifteen, seventeen, and twenty respectively, embody the extent to which Douglas was affected by his encounter with Gorizia during the summer holidays of 1935. These poems also demonstrate his willingness to look beyond himself, and to be influenced by his external environment, a tendency that would be increasingly important in his later poetry and during his development of an extrospective approach. The latter is readily apparent in the ‘small streets and posters which the lamplight shews’,¹⁹⁷ and ‘the white-dusted avenues’,¹⁹⁸ ‘where the ruined palace faces the green / river’,¹⁹⁹ of ‘Love and Gorizia’, together with the instructions of ‘A God is Buried’, guiding the reader through the landscape: ‘Cross the green Isonzo. Go down / by the ruined palace of the archbishop, the machine-gun schools’.²⁰⁰ Although Gorizia is subsequently replaced as a subject, the appeal of new surroundings continues to inform later poems, either written at Oxford, as in ‘Soissons’ (1940), and ‘Soissons 1940’ (a separate poem, despite its title), or, during his army career, in examples such as ‘Syria’, ‘Egypt’, ‘Mersa’, ‘Saturday Evening in Jerusalem’, ‘Tel Aviv’, ‘Jerusalem’, and ‘Enfidaville’.

That similar interests dominate the pages of Personal Landscape is not surprising, in view of Robin Fedden’s recognition that once the expatriated poets found themselves in Egypt there was ‘nowhere else to go’,²⁰¹ since ‘The only way out of the Nile valley is into the deserts or back
across the Mediterranean into a closed Europe’. Fedden may have complained of ‘stagnation’ during his exile, but he, Lawrence Durrell, and Bernard Spencer were among those who joined Douglas in writing extrospectively about the world in which they found themselves. Fedden’s text explains these poems as a ‘reaction’ against Egypt’s ‘bone mould, temples, temporal and cultural isolation, an unreal society and a long war’, and concludes that ‘poets react by poetry’. It is likely that these concerns are present in the ‘stained white town’, and the ‘streets dedicated to sleep stenches and the sour smells’, of ‘Cairo Jag’, or the ‘sinful taste’ of ‘aniseed’, and the beggar-woman ‘diseased and blind of an eye’ in Douglas’s ‘Egypt’.

Equally, reaction against having moved to Fuad I University in Cairo, from his British Council posting in Salonika, plays its part in Spencer’s ‘Greek Excavations’, with its ‘minimum wish / For the permanence of the basic things of life’, or ‘for things which have a date, / And less of the earth’s weight’, while in ‘Delos’, the island where ‘Dolphins with backs like bows swim in mosaic’, is remembered for its troubled history of ‘Holiness and violence, violence of a sea that is bluer / Than blue eyes are’. More elegiacally, ‘Aegean Islands’ expresses a longing for ‘The dark bread / The island wine and the sweet dishes’, that ‘were elements in a happiness’, an inflection that also lends poignancy to the moment in Olivia Manning’s ‘Written in the Third Year of the War’, when ‘The creeping sun for the last time lit for us / The Acropolis and its tokens of ancient wars’, and ‘We faced the sea / Knowing until the day of our return, we would be exiles / from a country not our own’.
Besides reaction against unwelcome changes of circumstance, however, what these examples also exhibit is a connection to another environment, that of the Greek Islands, an affinity, as well as a sense of loss, the potential of which is explored in the poems I have written in response to my experiences of the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and the West Coast of Wales. Central to these poems is extrospection’s ‘painterly eye and habit, its pictorial exactness’, and the movement between observation and contemplation that Bowen attributes to Spencer, in whose locational poems ‘emphasis on the act and language of perception invariably directs our attention inward’ so that ‘the external discovery is only the beginning.’ Regardless of the fact that, unlike the Levantine experiences of Spencer, Durrell, and the majority of the other contributors to Personal Landscape, ‘Douglas’s war was constantly in motion’, the drift from external to internal is just as evident in his ‘Saturday evening in Jerusalem’. From an initial spectacle of ‘summer evenings’, in which ‘Jerusalem fills / with movement of people’, and the sight of ‘Young men and girls linked in fours or twos under the moon’, the poem concludes with the personal reflection that ‘among these Jews I am the Jew / outcast’.

Adopting this approach in my ‘Time by Clifton Marina’, leads from the image of ‘An orange-tipped butterfly’ that ‘winks from a shimmer of leaf / and sun’, and ‘kids / on climbing-frames, icecreams’ to more personal motifs, drawing Jayne and me into the poem, via the former’s connection with the eponymous location. The observation then continues through the combined gaze and speculative dialogue of the two central characters, becoming increasingly bilateral, and bridging the external and the internal as
‘We find a place you like’. This is most apparent when the attention turns to ‘The bigger trees, / the ones we find faces in’. The surroundings are no longer remote, but become part of implied conversation, which immediately increases their human value: ‘I won’t say they knew you, / but you’re right, they’ve been here more than / long enough.’ This can be seen as an echo of the manner in which Douglas’s extrospective poetry combines the lyrical aspects suggested by ‘anything expressed in words, which appeals to the emotions either in presenting an image or picture to move them; or by the music of words affecting them through the senses’, and the empiricism of writing like ‘a mathematician’, according to the principle that ‘every word must work for its keep, in prose, blank verse or rhyme’. The mode of address in ‘Time by Clifton Marina’ owes much to Douglas’s ‘The Knife’, or the point in ‘Jerusalem’, when, as ‘the dark theatre of the sky / encloses the conversation of the whole city’, the speaker and his lover are ‘islanded’ and ‘sit under the vault of it, and wonder’. Where ‘Time by Clifton Marina’ adds to these poems, is in combining the intimacy of dialogue, with the details of a definite place, and in completing the movement from external, to personal perspectives, by expanding to a broader panorama in the closing lines, the ‘Black daub on a bridge’ that ‘says bridge unstable, ha ha’, and the image with which the poem began: ‘Be so good, wouldn’t it, if that butterfly was still here?’.

iv My poems and Jayne: developing bifocal or ‘double’ extrospection

An alternative to the evolving perspectives of ‘Time by Clifton Marina’, is provided by ‘From Lochaline to Isle of Mull’, in which the external and
personal are merged from the outset, through ‘A nothing much of a journey with you as my gaze’. In the simplest terms possible, what this line refers to is the fact that I am in a wheelchair and physically unable to see as much of my surroundings as people who are able to stand up and move about freely. ‘Lochaline to Isle of Mull’ describes a ferry journey in which I could not see past the boat’s high sides. Jayne could, however, so my extrospective observation of the journey depended on Jayne’s experience of the situation, as well as my own. The closest that Douglas’s poetry comes to seeing the world through the eyes of a second person is in ‘Canoe’, with the projection ‘as you lie looking up for thunder again, / this cool touch does not betoken rain’; in ‘Egypt’, when the beggar-girl ‘listlessly finds you and I / and the table, are the same colour’; and in ‘Egyptian Sentry, Corniche, Alexandria’, with the poet providing a subjective assessment of the title character’s sensual and subconscious experiences of the city’s coastline:

he looks at the sea  
and does not smell its animal smell  
does not suspect the heaven or hell  
in the mind of a passer-by:  
sees the moon shining as a place  
in the sea.Only in ‘Canoe’ is this observation by proxy as intimate as that of ‘From Lochaline to Isle of Mull’, and even in this example, the process is not considered as a subject of the poem in its own right. It is my poem’s admission that ‘You make these things remarkable / with me parked up behind steel / walls’, that communicates how important mine and Jayne’s ‘shared extrospection’ is to our relationship, something which is absent from Douglas’s poetry. As I have previously outlined, one explanation for this
difference between ‘From Lochaline to Isle of Mull’ and Douglas’s extrospective work lies in my physical condition, as is implied by the allusion to my having ‘Not the least indication / from here of the box hull breaking / waves’, and being ‘bussed / from one coast to the next blind / happening’. Jayne, on the other hand, can roam, gaze, take pictures, and return ‘camera-happy and face burning / like a born again’. Not only does she serve as my eyes, she also constitutes a vital force, with whom I am united through dependency, gratitude, and the way in which we experience the ferry journey together.

‘Stalking one of Sunart’s otters’ provides a different take on the complexities of seeing, but remains conscious of the increased significance of the spectatorial role for anyone affected by paralysis. As with ‘From Lochaline to Isle of Mull’, the poem is associated with a specific location on the west of Scotland, and owes its genesis to affinity with that environment. Whereas ‘From Lochaline to Isle of Mull’ places me in a blind position, while Jayne takes pictures, in ‘Stalking one of Sunart’s otters’, I am able to watch her approaching the shoreline with the camera. The fluidity characteristic of the area’s transitions between land, sea, and air, are again evident, supported by the practice of stanzaic, and linear enjambment, as is the balance between extrospection and introspection, empiricism and lyricism. The facts of the situation are firmly established, although they are presented alongside a complex of less obvious emotions that arise out of my protective observation, and Jayne’s vulnerability: ‘A difficult moment aside / when a wet stone has you sliding’. The connection between the two central characters continues to be the focus of the poem in the second sentence, but does so
as part of an active interest in the surroundings, supplementing the seamlessness of the various human, natural, and environmental connections, as well as allowing extrospection to be seen as an approach that is perfectly adapted to poems that move between personal intimacy, and observation of the exterior world:

How you know from the tangle of shore-spoil, a particular movement in the drift-wood, live rock with a slick line, jaws fanging a fish-chunk, gets me.252

In an admission that moves beyond Douglas’s extrospective poetry, I am portrayed as vulnerable, less perceptive than Jayne, as is reflected when she shows me what she has seen, with her ‘gaze extending beyond’253 her ‘finger’.254 The two central figures merge through their extrospection, to such an extent that the poem’s final reference is to the camera’s ‘view-finder still clenching / its essential displacement’,255 once the otter, which is the subject of their gaze, returns to its element, and ‘becomes ruptured pool’.256

A similar triangular interaction between Jayne, me, and our surroundings, is also central to my ‘Meanwhile, back at the chop-house’, in which ‘There’ll be an angle from which we’re changed / in the jade of the Victorian tiles’,257 and ‘Man Walking’, as a man ‘heroic / in his middle-age’,258 and carrying ‘A wrap of flowers’,259 represents ‘convergence at the point he makes / of early morning,’260 and our ‘seeing / each other see him / at the same time’.261 In the latter example, the personal importance of the spectacle is more firmly sealed by ‘a kiss / for us to remember him by’,262 and there is less emphasis on the natural images and subjects of ‘Stalking one of Sunart’s otters’. The same is true of the ‘shared extrospection’ that occurs in
my most recent collection, *Rego Retold*.\(^{263}\) Rather than nature, these poems are inspired by the paintings, prints, and lithographs, of Dame Paula Rego, building on the artist’s observations, and visual representations of her subjects, first by observing the pictures, and then by reacting to them, once again resulting in a layered form of extrospection.

**v Extrospection and the poetry of nature**

With the exception of ‘Adams’, its sister poem, ‘Sea Bird’, and ‘The Marvel’, natural subjects do not feature extensively in Keith Douglas’s poetry, making their inclusion in my poetry an important departure from Douglas’s approach. Proof positive that, despite Douglas’s omission, his method is applicable to poetry that observes, or invokes, the natural world, is offered by Ted Hughes’s ‘The Hawk in the Rain’, ‘The Jaguar’, ‘The Horses’, ‘Gulls Aloft’, ‘Snails’, ‘Hawk Roosting’, ‘An Otter’, ‘Thrushes’, ‘Bullfrog’, and ‘Pike’. Connecting these poems is the fascination with external events, by which Douglas’s most extrospective poetry is marked, as well as a similar exploration of the forces by which life and death are defined. The dead of ‘Cairo Jag’, ‘Vergissmeinnicht’, and ‘Landscape with Figures 2’, are active. They are ‘clinging to the ground’,\(^{264}\) or ‘sprawling’,\(^{265}\) or they ‘wriggle’,\(^{266}\) generating the illusion of life in death, and, by extension, implying that life itself is illusory. Equally, the subjects of Hughes’s nature poems are impelled to struggle for survival in the face of inevitable mortality, as ‘Killers from the egg’,\(^{267}\) in ‘Pike’, as the roosting hawk whose ‘manners are tearing off heads’,\(^{268}\) or as the ‘attent sleek thrushes’,\(^{269}\) which are ‘More coiled steel than living’\(^{270}\) organisms, ‘Triggered to stirrings beyond sense – with a start,
a bounce, / a stab’. 271

My poetry on natural subjects attempts to take this sensitivity to the precariousness of life a stage further, by presenting animals and birds as suggestions, acknowledging their physicality, but allowing them to emerge from, and blend with, their environment, to move between the definite and the indefinite. As with Douglas’s battlefield poems, and Hughes’s nature poetry, the starting point for these portrayals is sensual response to the world beyond the speaker, with this being an actual, or a potential photograph in ‘A buzzard from Rose Cottage’: ‘In our pictures I can study / how it’ll wait old-man-shouldered’. 272 Adding to the visual perspective, the subject waits ‘an hour, maybe more, / silhouetted’, 273 and is ‘Similar but closer when caught / in binoculars’, 274 before acquiring the essential status of Hughes’s pike, hawks, and thrushes, or the kingfisher of Douglas’s ‘Sea Bird’, when the buzzard exists as ‘a thoughtless / presence, born to the purpose’. 275 The central theme of the predator watching, at the same time as being watched, is a more overt consideration of the act of visual scrutiny than occurs in Hughes’s poetry, but does bear similarities to Douglas’s ‘Egyptian Sentry, Corniche, Alexandria’, as well as my ‘Stalking one of Sunart’s otters’. 276 Whereas the Egyptian sentry remains inactive throughout Douglas’s poem, however, the subject of ‘A buzzard from Rose Cottage’ breaks from its stasis, by lifting ‘earth on a long wing kept stiffly / to the weather’, 277 and moving ‘the valley’, 277 just as Hughes’s hawk can ‘hold Creation in my foot / Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly’. 278 One fundamental difference between the hawk, and the buzzard, is that the latter remains objectified, inseparable from the act of seeing, and ‘can be followed / beneath the radar unfolding’. 279 Another
distinction is that, in the final analysis, the buzzard escapes the extrospective gaze, implying fallibility on the part of the observer, when ‘We miss the moment it re-folds / in the curled breath of pre-dark.’ This admission of flawed perception, and of human weakness, constitutes a form of self-questioning, and an interpretation of extrospection that is absent from Douglas’s poetry. It is also unparalleled in the afore-mentioned nature poems of Hughes, in which the speaker’s authority is unquestioned, even on occasions where personal emotion is registered, as in the primal fear of fishing for ‘Pike too immense to stir, so immense and old / That past nightfall I dared not cast’.

The implied human vulnerability, and empirical frailty, of ‘A buzzard from Rose Cottage’ are recurring features throughout my nature poems, and constantly allow the subjects to be more than they seem, to exist on different planes simultaneously. ‘Leopard in the sugar-cane’ is one of the more extreme examples of this process, with the predator only appearing as a physical presence in the last line of the fifth of the poem’s eight quatrains, and, even then, doing so as ‘A streak / of heat’, then ‘leaves its dog or pig / behind’, then ‘hunches and slithers tight / to where the road edges further / in’. The previous quatrains are devoted instead to ‘A couple’, who ‘walk beside a field / resting between its bursts of cane’. Wrapped in the worldly concerns of conversation ‘lost to the dark on either side / of love’, they are unaware of being watched, not only as poetic subjects, but as potential prey, when ‘they click in the patient hunger / of its eye, laugh over nothing.’ This, again, reflects the extent to which these poems deal explicitly with the multi-faceted nature of extrospection.
This theme runs parallel to those of converging animal, and human domains, and the leopard’s instinctive energy, as it ‘wriggles free’\textsuperscript{289} of a ‘fringe of bushes’,\textsuperscript{290} ‘and waits again’.\textsuperscript{291} In a second leopard poem, ‘Jayne’s leopard’, Jayne replaces the lovers of ‘Leopard in the sugar-cane’ as an embodiment of the point at which nature and humanity meet, with ‘The blurred incursion / of a moped’,\textsuperscript{292} and ‘Monkeys’,\textsuperscript{293} or ‘the weird / chorusing you can’t place, the crickets’,\textsuperscript{294} positioned at the polar extremities of that meeting-point. The fact that this poem, in common with ‘Stalking one of Sunart’s otters’, and ‘Man Walking’, was written for Jayne, not only ensures thematic continuity, but also allows the poem to remain poised between extrospection, lyricism, and intimacy, in the mode of Douglas’s most personal poems, including ‘Canoe’, ‘The Prisoner’, ‘Song’, and ‘Tel Aviv’. The point of divergence between Douglas’s examples, and ‘Jayne’s Leopard’, as well as my other poems on the subject of natural phenomena, is the fusion achieved when the poem observes integration, or some form of interaction, between the human, and the wild protagonists, as is reflected in the final image of the leopard ‘looking you over, licking / the night to know you from passing through’.\textsuperscript{295}

The personal and the natural are even closer in ‘Jayne’s barn owl’, although, once more, the natural presence is not definitively identified, other than in the poem’s title. The encounter occurs immediately, in this case, replicating the suddenness of flight, and retains the sentient aspect that occurs in ‘Jayne’s Leopard’, as well as Hughes’s ‘Hawk Roosting’, and ‘Pike’, as the opening lines describe the owl ‘As if it waited on your drive / back alone on edge of our night’.\textsuperscript{296} ‘Jayne’s barn owl’ is more overtly founded in
actual physical experience than my two leopard poems, drawing, as it does, on a journey home that Jayne and I shared, lending weight to the view that it is closer to the extrospection envisaged by Douglas. The same can be said for ‘Hen Harrier’, with the bird’s ‘ground-hugging / swoop’\textsuperscript{297} taking place initially ‘over my window / and then yours’\textsuperscript{298} and the experience being both shared, and dependent on visual estimation, beginning as ‘not a seagull / quite’\textsuperscript{299} before being more empirically recorded as ‘a hunter / scouring the same time / we keep following his rise’\textsuperscript{300} The latter image’s combination of abstraction and definition is repeated in ‘Jayne’s barn owl’, when ‘The magic of it stands / against the logic of the road’,\textsuperscript{301} and ‘Half-lit on a return journey’, in which ‘deer grow from the turf’\textsuperscript{302} and are ‘then disturbed the way clouds are, / moving from us in their own time’,\textsuperscript{303} encouraging the suggestion that they are ‘like dead relatives in a dream / dissembling if we stare / too hard, too long.’\textsuperscript{304} In the final case, the natural subjects are named and labelled, but exist on their own terms, moving between subconscious and conscious worlds, so much so that they are threatened by the poem’s extrospection, implying that, while an extrospective treatment of natural themes is effective, there are aspects which cannot be pinned down, gaps undetected by the viewer, a conclusion that exemplifies extrospective honesty. In the process, a new discourse is added to the relationship between poem, poet, and subject, the nature of which is intangibility.

\textbf{vi Extrospection at home: in pursuit of the ordinary}

Just as my nature poems testify to the flexibility and practicality of an extrospective approach in relation to events outside of Douglas’s poetic
range, adopting the position of an observer, focused on external events, has also proved fruitful in relation to everyday conditions and circumstances. Despite the influential precedents set by Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, Tony Harrison, Simon Armitage, and Seamus Heaney, by concentrating on contexts of immediate personal importance in my ‘domestic’ poems, some degree of originality is ensured. My extrospective reactions, consequently, constitute original extensions of Douglas’s ideas and methods. Typical of these poems, are those that address subjects such as football, music, and my relationship with Jayne. In ‘Bill Shankly on a T-shirt’, a personal passion for Liverpool Football Club is initially rendered through the words of former Liverpool manager, Bill Shankly, ‘I was made for Liverpool / and Liverpool was made for me’. This mantra is developed from its lettering in ‘modest white / on my lucky, my match-day T-shirt’, until it encompasses a way of life, a folk-belief exemplified by Shankly’s statue ‘eight foot and near a ton / on a granite plinth’, with ‘arms like an angel’s girders’, positioned ‘with the Kop on one side, / the Church of Christ on the other’. What Shankly’s voice also brings to mind, in colloquially-remembered terms, is my having ‘heard it first / on a record saved from a jumble-sale’, a recollection more poignant for the fact that this occurred ‘around the time the man / was dying’. While this reminiscence has an introspective element, its stimulus is a tangible artefact, an empirical object belonging to the world beyond the poet’s imagination and emotions. Consequently, the poem captures the role that extrospection plays in the co-existence of the past and the present, as do my ‘Hillsborough remembered’, ‘May 2005, Champions League Parade’, and ‘Burnden Park and the dogs’, in each of which, football-related memories
are activated by events experienced in the present.

‘Hillsborough remembered’ begins with the tactile experience of the memorial for the ninety-six Liverpool supporters, who died at the Hillsborough stadium disaster, initially by ‘Following the granite’s gilded brand’, then as ‘fingers smooth the furrowing / light of a decent day’ and thirdly through ‘choruses of touches as tender / as the latest hearts and scarves left / flickering at the gate’. It is only once these physical connections are recognised that wider implications begin to permeate the extrospective observation, as is evident when ‘The usual waiting / and reading, or just thinking’ take on greater importance, and ‘Prayers drift / across the flame, the same each time’. ‘May 2005, Champions League Parade’ differs from ‘Hillsborough remembered’, in opening with the conjectural suggestion that ‘It wasn’t exactly long / after that we did / meet, for real I mean’, prior to the introduction of definite contextual tropes ‘as the street / thickened, and the bus peeled / loose from its expectation’. Again, the physical environment is related to less immediately apparent concerns, in the form of a personal address intended for Jayne: ‘Still, I get the feeling’ you’d have found me somehow, joined in / the same victory songs / by the same gate.

Public and intimate coincidence also provide the impetus for ‘Burnden Park and the dogs’, but are more closely meshed from the outset, paradoxically through contrasting adult and childhood perceptions, and the altering state of the area around Burnden Park, former home stadium of Bolton Wanderers: ‘The jog-trot from here to the sweet shop / on the corner was miles further than the stroll / it is now’. The ‘sharper and cleaner
edges\textsuperscript{322} of a world in which ‘the voices / rang a little truer’,\textsuperscript{323} develop into a more precise memory of ‘that first time, keeping pace / with your brother-in-law’,\textsuperscript{324} and ‘Losing / 2-1 to Bristol City’.\textsuperscript{325} Addressed to Jayne, once more, the poem becomes increasingly personal, but continues to do so through an engagement with the area in its present condition: ‘Turning right a stretch / of tussock and the last of the winter’s throttled / growth remembers you with old Joe’,\textsuperscript{326} ‘the winnings he’d stash in the space / inside his wooden leg’,\textsuperscript{327} ‘or the days / you’d see the players from the weekend’.\textsuperscript{328} Just as Douglas’s ‘Canoe’ ends with the private affection of ‘my spirit that kisses your mouth lightly’,\textsuperscript{329} ‘Burnden Park and the dogs’ also finishes with actual or implied interaction, this time between my first-person voice, and Jayne. In my poem, however, the setting is a more overtly ‘working-class’, or ubiquitous environment: ‘I swap you this / past for mine, Anfield and a mist / off the Mersey, Dalglish and chips.’\textsuperscript{330}

This conclusion hints at the less unique, but equally significant application of extrospective methods to poetry, in which the object of interest is human relationships, and human behaviour. While these subjects have been explored extensively in extrospective poetry written since Douglas’s death, as well as in his own poetry, the frequency with which they appear in my writing ensures that they have to be considered a major theme. Experience remains essential to these poems, together with that honesty prized by Douglas in love poems such as ‘Canoe’, ‘Farewell Poem’, ‘The Garden’, ‘The Knife’, and ‘To Kristin Yincheng Olga Milena’, even though these examples each exhibit a tendency towards poetic, and often elegiac, effect. This is particularly evident in ‘Farewell Poem’, with its invocation to
'Please' remember ‘how being tired, you and I / among the little branches by the river’ ‘fell asleep embraced and let the shades run’ under the personified ‘sun, / till he had almost climbed enough’, and the self-conscious loss expressed in the ‘Here I give back perforce / the sweet wine to the grape’, of ‘To Kristin Yincheng Olga Milena’. 

My poetry on equivalent themes achieves a different effect by remaining relatively detached, as events and experiences unfold and are recorded. Thus, my ‘Salvation Army clothes bin’ begins with the description of an apparently ordinary event, in the form of Jayne’s donation of clothes to charity, a scene that is presented in terms that are more bathetic than lyrical, but one lifted above its context by Jayne’s reaction, her ‘Thrilling at the weight of the contact / clunking behind the bin-bags / as they tumble in’. While the poem grows more speculative as it explores the significance of the central figure’s actions, Jayne’s release from ‘the tagged sins / of how many years / would that be now?’, I remain an observer, relatively detached from the event, and reflecting in terms that replace the elegiac impact of iambic metre, with a trimetric accentual line, better-suited to capturing the irregularities of physical movement and speech. Consequently, when I celebrate Jayne’s disposal of her ex-husband’s clothes, through the resurrection of ‘the women / you could have been, off-pier / rolling the whiteness of ‘dead’ stars, ‘between your breasts turned / wild again’, the activity leaps accordingly, before being grounded by the prosaic reference to ‘the ragged men / who’ll be wearing him tomorrow’, and acknowledgement of ‘how hard you’ve earned this.’ The extrospective honesty of ‘Salvation Army clothes bin’ manifests itself in a detachment that
belies the fact that it is written about Jayne. Personal addresses are kept to a minimum.

‘Picturing you as a girl’ adopts a more obviously personal stance, while retaining a similar integrity, in this case to a photograph of Jayne as a girl. This does not mean that the occasionally lyrical tone of Douglas’s intimate poetry is repeated, but neither does the poem replicate the voyeurism, and hypothetical treatment of photography that occurs in Larkin’s ‘Lines On A Young Lady’s Photograph Album’. Instead, ‘Picturing you as a girl’ constitutes a love poem, even if it is one that opens with the visual detail of ‘With your head too big for your tiny body / tucked neatly underneath, weightless.’ Subsequently, the poem admits ‘the blurs of the lost edges’ that make the photograph inexact, before progressing into a character study of Jayne, with a ‘starling you’ve tamed perched on your finger’, driven by the ‘unlikely hope’ that this, and other birds ‘you’d pick / from the nest or the bushes and make them yours’, might ‘take to your dishes of bread and milk’. Again, I do not become directly involved in the poem, but remain a partial observer, a position that recurs in numerous poems written about photographs of Jayne, each of which is a literal echo of the photographic aspects of extrospection, as well as a distinct motif, corresponding to an individual aspect of our relationship. Other examples of these types of poems include ‘Picture of you at a party’, ‘Pictured Riding’, and ‘Picturing us’. Rather than simply describing what they see, these poems also speculate about less definite aspects of their subjects. In ‘Picture of you at a party’ we are told that ‘The picture’s openness / would have woken something’, ‘if / it was even close to the gift / and the difference I know’. While it could be argued that
this type of estimation compromises the integrity of physical observation and
the photographs on which these poems are based, it is equally possible to
claim that, in recognising the emotions generated by the photographs, as
well as the photographs themselves, the poems are demonstrating greater
integrity than would have been the case had these issues been avoided.

It is true that, as visual as these poems may be, they are not entirely
consistent with Douglas’s idea of extrospection, because the experiences
with which they deal are either contained within the photographs to which
they owe their origins, or are concerned with the photographs themselves, as
much as what they depict. Certainly the majority of Douglas’s Middle-Eastern
and battlefield poems draw on first-hand encounters, while in the series
typified by my ‘Picturing you as a girl’ some of what occurs takes place in the
imagination rather than in reality, but I would argue that this does not detract
from the poems’ essential honesty, just as it does not detract from Hill’s ‘Ovid
in the Third Reich’, in which similar imaginative projection occurs. ‘Salvation
Army clothes bin’ is less contentious, however, as are a number of examples
in which the immediacy of physical experience is directly associated with the
act of observation, including ‘Jayne’s holiday aubade’. The latter case
articulates and merges sexual, and practical discourses, the jarring syntax of
‘Night dives between your straining thighs’, and the concern that ‘The
window’s bothered me a few days’, to which the solution is Jayne’s ad-hoc
repair, ‘Miss Practical / on your tiptoes on the Welsh bed’. The poem’s
experience does include the location, the ‘grain barn on a cattle farm’,
where ‘Weather tears and fidgets in the stone’, and the photograph of ‘a
baby owner in black and white / plonked on top of a working shire’, but
culminates with another image: ‘you timeless in your red knickers / and the owner whistling from the barn next door.’

**vii Extrospection at war: writing with and without experience**

The dilemma of writing extrospectively, but without first-hand experience of a given subject, tests the flexibility and practicality of this approach to a greater degree with respect to the poems I have written on the subject of war and Holocaust, just as it does for Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill, and Simon Armitage. For Douglas, war became a part of his immediate environment, ensuring a seamless integration of approach and subject matter, and poetry that did not rely on an intermediate source. Writing from a civilian perspective has necessitated a different interpretation of Douglas’s methodology, one in which the subject is engaged via texts and artefacts, letters, photographs, reminiscences, those about Douglas himself included. As is the case with the argument in my preceding chapter addressing Simon Armitage’s *The Not Dead*, I regard these poems as extrospective despite my, or Armitage’s, lack of military experience, because they look beyond the poet’s personal circumstances to encompass another human being’s life, and because, like Hughes, Hill, Abse, and Rudolf, or the polemic editorial of Alvarez’s *The New Poetry*, they explore the human effects of war and Holocaust, rather than ignoring them. The manner in which my poems are applied to these ‘awkward’ subjects varies, as do the results, but the centrality of an external source is self-evident in many cases, as is the absence of any attempt to impose myself on the poems. The distance and detachment generated through the use of a third-person speaker allow the narrative and
syntactical elements of the poems to explain themselves, without too much interference. This remains true even though there is a degree to which these are poems that involve some degree of imaginative projection. Undeniably what these poems do is face realities without looking away. It is this that makes the poems typical of so much that Douglas had in mind when he defined his poetry as extrospective in 1943.

Echoing the effect achieved in the series of poems based on photographs of Jayne, My ‘Pte George Ellison, killed 11-11-1918’ begins with the extrospective observation of a photograph of George Ellison, officially recorded as the last British soldier to die before the Armistice ending the First World War. The emphasis here is clearly on the immediacy of the visual source, as reflected in the poem’s first syllable, and the reader’s instantaneous immersion into the first quatrain:

Bang in the centre of two more faces
done no favours by the resolution
of a time all but blown out, he’s a haze
of print and pixels.\(^{359}\)

The final line of the opening stanza insists on honest recognition of the poem’s source, but extends extrospective observation to the biographical context of the man represented by the photograph. Ellison’s image is supplemented by information that the photograph could not reveal, details of his military career, and the extent of his involvement in the First World War: ‘Forty, he was, when they geared / him up for the latest war’.\(^{360}\)

By the close of the poem, the extrospective observation of Private Ellison’s image has developed implications that are less obvious than the photograph, the possibility of his being alive, or dead, for example, ‘vacantly coughing / green air or the dregs of soil’,\(^{361}\) but these alternatives are born of
the detachment that is vital to what Douglas understood extrospection to be. The evolution is natural, because, once the image of Private Ellison is subjected to a gaze that assesses it firstly as an object, the gamut of contextual associations, from which it has been separated, can also be understood. This process is not impeded by my lack of personal experience of combat, and may even be facilitated by it, supporting the view that extrospective poetry is feasible in a wide variety of conditions and circumstances, and can help to compensate for the difference between active and passive observation, involvement and speculation.

Equally visual, and equally capable of bridging the gap between an event and its second-hand experience, is my ‘Domodedovo airport, 24-1-2011’, with the event in question being the bombing of Domodedovo airport, on 24 January 2011 and, more specifically, the footage of the event, broadcast on contemporary news reports. Consequently, the first of the poem’s five stanzas begins with a description of the appearance of the footage, an admittance, such as that of ‘Pte George Ellison’, that there is distance between the observing speaker, and the reality of the context, as the ‘instant flowering of a sun / develops over several frames’. In this example, extrospection is being examined, along with the difficulty of understanding exactly what occurs during the explosion, or what has occurred, as the immediate present becomes the immediate past, and is isolated by its repetition on the news. The limits of extrospection and reportage are exposed through the floundering ‘what, what happened here’, enabling the poem to form part of a wider enquiry, and become more than a literary representation of the speaker’s objectifying gaze.
A visual source also compensates for a lack of personal experience in my ‘Albert Richards, war artist, 1919-1945’, not through photography, or film, but through the work of official war artist, Albert Richards, extending the reach of extrospection further beyond that of Douglas. Motifs lifted from Albert Richards’s artistic reactions to the Second World War constitute an entry point into a narrative exploring his work, and his death in action. What images such as the German army’s horses ‘in an orchard, their table-legs sticking out / from bloat bellies’, 364 a boy in a French town ‘tying a tricolor / to an iron rail’,365 and ‘men like reddlemen / part of the machine making din / from iron ore’366 also do, that photography and film may not do to the same extent, is explore a subjective reaction to conflict, in the relatively objective terms of extrospection. A new layer of interpretation is added to the relationship between the poet and the battlefield, but the poem remains visual, even if it does so periscopically, or prismatically, reflecting the reality through two separate lenses. People moving through a field, and seen from Richards’s elevated vantage point, become tiny painted figures, which then ‘move like grass’,367 or ‘shift and vanish in the billows of so much / sky’368 when they feature in my poem. Similarly, tracer bullets are represented, first as coloured marks, before being transformed into ‘the dark / strafed with the ticks of crayoned bullets’.369

This developmental process is equally applicable to letters, including those of Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis. When these sources generate poems, the relationship is literary, rather than as absolutely visual as that which informs ‘Albert Richards, war artist, 1919-1945’, but this does not prevent the resultant poems from being extrospective. They deal directly with
artefacts, after all, and engage with subjects that involve looking outside my immediate environment, towards the broader landscape of other people’s experiences of combat. They explore beyond themselves, accumulate external detail, and then form their own conclusions. Precedents for this approach include Douglas’s ‘Desert Flowers’, with its opening address to Isaac Rosenberg, ‘Living in a wide landscape are the flowers – / Rosenberg I only repeat what you were saying’; Lewis’s ‘All Day it has Rained’, remembering a visit ‘To the Shoulder o’ Mutton where Edward Thomas brooded long / On death and beauty’, and ‘To Edward Thomas’, in which Lewis visits Thomas’s memorial stone, and recalls the moment when ‘suddenly, at Arras, you possessed that hinted land’. While these poems respond to the lives and works of poets of the First World War, my ‘On deck with the secret sleeper’, ‘Losing Alun Lewis in the Americas’, ‘Shalimar Gardens, Lahore, 1943’, ‘Jasmine tea at a pavement café’, ‘Keith Douglas painting dancers’, ‘Keith Douglas returning Masha’, and ‘Syrian road-trip’, make Lewis, and Douglas, the subject of extrospective fascination, in a way not possible for either poet, despite the detachment of Lewis’s ‘Observation Post: Forward Area’, ‘The Jungle’, and ‘In Hospital: Poona (1)’, or Douglas’s ‘Saturday evening in Jerusalem’, ‘This is the Dream’, or ‘On a Return from Egypt’.

Answering his own question ‘And where is love now?’, with the hopelessness of ‘Gone with the shambling oxen, / Gone with the broken plough’, Lewis faces the disintegration of his sense of identity with elegiac fatalism, the inevitability of the further question: ‘Or does the will’s long struggle end / With the last kindness of a foe or friend?’. It seems fitting,
therefore, that it is this sense of self-loss that my Alun Lewis poems explore, along with biographical details, such as those contained within his letter to his wife, Gweno, shortly after he arrived in South America with the South Wales Borderers. ‘Losing Alun Lewis in the Americas’ incorporates the poet’s description of the Governor’s ‘beautiful garden of bamboos and lime and acacia and palms,’ the black women mingled with the yellow and the white, cheering and making gestures of various meanings, ‘naked babies with huge bellies and navels like eyes’, and ‘Old shrivelled women’, combining them with the suggested exile of ‘In Hospital: Poona (1)’, in which ‘ten thousand miles of daylight grew / Between us’. Re-imagined in my poems, Lewis becomes the tangible figure of ‘Losing Alun Lewis in the Americas’, ‘profiled / against an encroaching night’; the apparition of ‘On deck with the secret sleeper’, ‘soft-shoed / and in shorts’ seen ‘passing through the sleeping men / to lie stripped above, turn grey with the moon’; and the soldier of ‘Shalimar Gardens, Lahore, 1943’, told by a priest ‘My son, you lack our consolations’. In other words, by adopting a third-person extrospective stance, my poems have the advantage of being able to scour Lewis’s writing, and present a retrospective impression of the impact of war on both Lewis, and his poetry, more than compensating for my not having shared his experiences more directly.

Entering into the same relationship with Douglas’s writing is even more rewarding, given his views on how war-poetry, and poetry in general, should be written. As with my Alun Lewis poems, my extrospective reactions to Douglas's life and work draw on the exiled soldier's sense of being 'alone
and cursed by God / like the boy lost on his first morning at school', extending his ability to 'see myself dance happiness and pain', when playing the 'dancer's choreographer's critic's role'. In the case of ‘Keith Douglas returning Masha’, the poem is also informed by Desmond Graham’s secondary account of the poet’s reunion with his former girlfriend, Milena Gutierrez-Pegna:

> After a miserable evening with another girl friend, Titsa, he went again to the cinema with Milena, this time alone. Then, in the morning, with 3,000 newly baked loaves and ‘Masha’, a doll given him by Milena for good luck, he drove back with Sergeant Nelson.

In keeping with the evidential and creative basis of this poem, it begins with the empirical statement that ‘The doll, Masha, is returning intact, the way he received her’, although the scenario in which the doll is given back to Milena is fictional. This adds a new dimension to the relationship between my poetry and Douglas’s, one in which extrospective observation morphs into new possibilities that differ from the bare facts. There are opportunities for different futures to replace that in which Douglas is killed by a mortar explosion. He extends beyond himself, towards a future in which he can return to North Africa, and escape England once again. His death can, in the terms of this poem, be ‘unwritten’, undermining the certainty of his extrospective gaze, and, in turn, generating space, in which the poetic imagination can move.

‘Keith Douglas painting dancers’ takes this combination of observation and speculation a stage further, by breathing life into figures painted on the wall of his study at Christ’s Hospital, and his billet during his time in Palestine, the former being ‘a large tempera picture by me of soldiers at
bayonet practice’, and the latter being ‘ballet dancers’, in ‘a large group portraying Der Tod und das Mädchen, to my own choreography and without costumes except for death's cloak’. In my poem’s terms, the two murals are seen as stages in an evolution that equates to Douglas’s own, rising from the imposed order of the eighteen-year-old Douglas at Christ’s Hospital, to become the creations of the twenty-two-year-old Douglas of Palestine. As ‘their packs are removed’, they appear to move of their own volition, ‘bleeding into steady silvers’, ‘immune to the orders / of their former painter’. Essentially, the soldiers have grown into dancers, reborn as abstract and ethereal presences, despite their extrospective objectification, or because of it, confirming the creative potential of subjecting empirical realities to conjectural alteration, and widening the scope of extrospection.

Hence, in ‘Jasmine tea at a pavement café’, the moment recorded in Alamein to Zem Zem, when ‘On the first morning of my sick leave at Palestine, sitting at breakfast among the pavement tables of a Tel Aviv cafe, I bought a paper, and read of Piccadilly Jim's death’, develops into an examination of Douglas’s state of mind, an elegiac, partly-fictionalised recollection of various actual, and imagined experiences: ‘An afternoon to dream the guns / to wisps of cloud from Tel Aviv’. Once Douglas’s ‘newspaper’ has been ‘browsed away / to obituaries’, reverie and transformation coincide, drifting from the facts, as ‘Jasmine tea, a taste picked up / in Cairo, re-evokes a girl / and her lover’. This vision of Marcelle, from ‘Cairo Jag’, is replaced, in turn, by the memory of another lover: ‘Her hair swirling / and dispersing inside the cup’, ‘Her barter and low yes’, although both figures haze in the final analysis: ‘Or no, / that was
night in another town’, representing the brevity of life in war, and the perpetual shifts of the Northern African desert. In comparison, my ‘Syrian road trip 1941’ adheres more closely to the scenario described in one of Douglas’s letters to his friend, Jean Turner. His meeting with the family of ‘a Syrian French schoolmaster who appeared to have gone native’, survives its translation into poetry, right down to the moments when ‘The schoolmaster invites him in’, and ‘The mother and some thirty eggs / return from surrounding dwellings’. The only deviation from the original letter occurs when Douglas ‘remembers Lawrence’s / comments on an obese England’.

My poems, therefore, indicate that, by engaging with external sources, experiences, and artefacts, extrospection is sufficiently flexible to provide access to experiences that would otherwise be outside of the poet’s reach. These poems also testify to the manner in which extrospection offers the choice to either represent, or to speculate, to consider situations from a point of view that may have been unimaginable to their original participants. By developing my own form of extrospection, partly through the necessity imposed by the limitations of my physical condition, and partly by way of compensating for a lack of experience, I have, therefore, been able to observe, not only that which does occur, or has, but that which might have done, had circumstances been different.

viii The need to address the unspeakable: extrospection and Holocaust

In Chapter Two, I have hypothesised that one of the demands placed upon the truly extrospective poet is that no subject, however challenging, should
be ignored, with this including the twentieth, and twenty-first centuries’ most catastrophic events. It is in this spirit that my war poems were written, and, by extension, a whole series of Holocaust poems largely based on the testimonies, letters, poems, and novels of writers such as Primo Levi, Piotr Rawicz, Tadeusz Borowski, Robert Antelme, Otto Dov Kulka, and Claude Lanzmann. When Anthony Rudolf writes of Levi’s *If This Is a Man*, that ‘This witness managed to turn himself into a participant observer, to stand outside himself and register the suffering passion of a young man caught up in a whirlwind of hate and destruction’, he comes very close to describing the author as an extrospective writer, especially when he adds that ‘The witness’s primary act is to tell what he saw, not to stand in judgment.’

Douglas too was a participant observer in relation to the battlefields of North Africa, after all, having fought there, observed the impact of fighting, and having then written about it. This remarkable objectivity has been vitally important to my Holocaust poems, as has the intention to concentrate, not on the horror and methodology of mass murder, but to consider each victim, and each witness, as an individual, rescued, if such a thing is possible, from the annihilating inclusiveness of numerical fact. This has much in common with the insistence on humanity that underlies many of my poems relating to hospitalisation and disability, and the manner in which my nature poems release the spirit of an animal or bird from the classification of its noun, allowing them to appear as if they had never been seen at all. Also invoked is Neil Corcoran’s view of Carol Rumens’s ‘Outside Osweicim’, the way in which the poem’s title ‘refuses the more familiar German word for the poem’s placename: Auschwitz’. Of course, the genocide addressed in my poem
cannot be undone, but remembering its victims, from an outsider’s extrospective position, as unique rather than generic, does strive to deny the racial, religious, and physical stereo-typing of the Third Reich’s state policy and procedure.

By way of explication, my ‘Treblinka’s Trees’, which draws on Lanzmann’s film, Shoah, deals with the problem of possible visual cliché, through the familiar combination of extrospection and discussion, comparing the appearance of trees, planted outside the eponymous death camp as a screen, with their historical and human implications, their impact on the reader, or viewer. From the outset, the trees are ‘By no means to be seen as eugenic / metaphor,’ regardless of how ‘they were set to fail / or grow at the same moment’, and notwithstanding ‘the vagaries making some of them stand / firmer and taller, while the frailer trees / fold over.’ The trees have an empirical explanation, born out in the comment that ‘The fact is, covering / mattered more than the business of excusing’. Yet, they are also representative of ‘absences’, ‘vast silences’, ‘waste’, the ‘logistical process / by which this or that one’s weeded out’, and ‘the breath expended there’, leading to doubt whether, for all the visual certainty of their existence, our lasting impression of the trees is informed by ‘our tendency / to want this to be a more haunting scene / than it already is, the dead’s insistence’.

The same image, or cliché, the same actuality and metaphor of trees and forests, constitute a theme throughout my poetic reactions to Shoah, serving as a backdrop to human dramas, histories, and questions. ‘Memories of the Women, Grabow’ includes ‘vans / coming up from the woods’.
alongside the recollection of the town’s murdered Jewish woman, whose ‘beauty filled / working mornings with more thoughts than the work itself’.

In ‘Simon Srebnik outside the church in Chelmno’, the title character’s face appears ‘more like the face of the forest’s dark paths / beyond the road’, reflecting his claim to be as much a natural part of the poem’s human landscape, as any of the procession-day crowd waiting for ‘the church doors’ to let the procession fall through’, or ‘the parade of carts / and horses living here has depended on’. In ‘Song of Simon Srebnik’, ‘the drifting of a song / through thirty more years of trees’, forms part of Srebnik’s childhood memories of having been selected, from among his fellow inmates, to accompany German soldiers on boat-trips up and down the Narew river. In each of these cases, the trees are clichés, because they are inseparable from the events of the Holocaust, and are, therefore, emblematic. They are also clichés due to the fact that their existence is not allowed to obscure other extrospective realities, such as the persistent legacy of lasting prejudice, including the claim that ‘Christ was killed by Jews, an equation left / to balance out’, in ‘Simon Srebnik outside the church in Chelmno’, or the belief that the Jewish women of Grabow ‘would look like perfection, pain / and graft being concerned only with those whose men / were poor’. Of primary importance among these other extrospective realities, however, is the insistence on the humanity of the Holocaust’s victims, the fact that they have not been erased from history, just as, in ‘Song of Simon Srebnik’, the title character can still remember the words of ‘that song of his, a wire’s tear, / as we hear him sliding past’.

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Extrospective engagement with the realities of the Holocaust through its written, physical, historical, and psychological legacies, carries a similar importance in the poems I have written in response to Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man*, an interaction rendered more justifiable by the fact that, like Lanzmann’s filmic investigation, Levi’s approach is, at the very least, extremely close to being extrospective, as is apparent in his claim that ‘when describing the tragic world of Auschwitz, I have deliberately assumed the calm, sober language of the witness.’ At the heart of Levi’s claim is the hope that ‘my account would be all the more credible and useful the more it appeared objective and the less it sounded overly emotional’, and this extrospective intent is to the fore in my ‘Remember Steinlauf’, ‘Lilith of Camp Buna, Auschwitz, 1944’, ‘Canto waiting for soup’, ‘The night before the train comes’, ‘Primo Levi and the barber Ashkenazi’, and ‘Returning, Romanian border’. What these poems prove, however, is not only the value of extrospective detachment and objectivity as a means of engaging with difficult subjects, but the ability of an objective approach to highlight the intimate, and the human, almost despite itself, just as Levi’s humanity emerges regardless of his objectivity.

Consequently, ‘Remember Steinlauf’ presents its title character as both a physical and a psychological entity, a man of action and motive ‘Scrubbing at his scrawn without soap / and the coal set to cover him’, on the one hand, and epitomising the need ‘to out do, out work’, to ‘walk that bit taller than the wooden shuffle’ on the other, because, as my third-person voice makes clear: ‘it works, it works for him’. The third-person observation may begin with physical description, but is not confined by the
The initial relationship between viewer and object, no more than that of ‘Lilith of Camp Buna, Auschwitz, 1944’ is restricted to recording the movement of aircraft: ‘They move West, losing themselves / from the sun rising behind their bubble / glass’.\textsuperscript{438} The poem grows in various directions, once the context has been established, encompassing the mythological implications of ‘a girl / hunched in the earth somewhere close’,\textsuperscript{439} described as ‘Lilith, the first woman, Lilith, / who told Adam where to go’,\textsuperscript{440} or Levi’s and Tischler’s shared food: ‘Their first apple it was, for a whole year’.\textsuperscript{441} The recognition of a world beyond that which can be directly observed also plays its part in ‘Canto waiting for soup’, based on an episode in \textit{If This Is a Man}, in which it becomes imperative that the author succeeds in communicating to his friend, ‘a gift’,\textsuperscript{442} ‘something stronger than waiting’,\textsuperscript{443} or ‘more elated / in its embracing what exists past the dumb / as tomb-stones standing there on someone’s order’.\textsuperscript{444} As a result, ultimately it is the message of the men’s ‘general / humanity’\textsuperscript{445} that is remembered, rather than ‘the soup-call, and the chunk of bread / they get’.\textsuperscript{446}

The poems I have written in response to Robert Antelme’s \textit{The Human Race}, Tadeusz Borowski’s \textit{This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen, and Other Stories}, and Otto Dov Kulka’s \textit{Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death: Reflections on Memory and Imagination}, share the approach of my Levi poems, beginning with the testimony of factual texts, and then developing an extrospective assessment of these sources to include other discourses. ‘Division of Bread’, for example, refers to an incident recorded in \textit{The Human Race}, in which ‘The blind guy takes his bread from his pocket / and cuts it into three’,\textsuperscript{447} sharing it with his ‘two
friends" and fellow prisoners, prompting the conclusion that 'Each man, / aware of what this means, will discover / his own way of eating'. Similarly, ‘Henri and the Pole wait for a train’, shifts from an empirical context, in which ‘No transports for the last few days / equates to the stinking malaise / and the haze of a summer’, to the suggestion that ‘Eating defines / what they mean, those with something / from home’. In the case of Kulka’s *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death*, the moment when the author ‘was caught on the electrified fence’, feeling ‘as though I had risen into the air and was floating a few centimetres above the ground’, is represented, in ‘Shock’, as stasis: ‘The sky remains everything / it was’, absolute fact: ‘If you touch / the wire, you die’, and, only then, as epiphany, when ‘The great joke resounds / throughout the compound’.

Those of my poems that react to Piotr Rawicz’s *Blood from the Sky* face a different challenge, because Rawicz articulates his experiences of war and Holocaust in the form of a novel, and through the persona of Boris, a Jewish aristocrat attempting to conceal his identity. The solution to this problem remains extrospection, however, and taking at face value Boris’s intention ‘to slip into a neutral country, where I’ll relate a few of the things that have been done to our people.’ When poems such as ‘Exit Leon’, ‘Ghetto morning’, ‘Boris and prisoners at the Jewish Cemetery’, ‘Boris metamorphoses’, ‘View from the Lieutenant’s hut II’, and ‘Boris taken out for questioning’, address anecdotes contained within Rawicz’s fictional narrative, the approach remains objective. The incidents are recognised as being part of a fictional narrative, but, at the same time, they are considered as representations of the struggle between humanity and the wider reality of the
Holocaust, the more so since Rawicz was writing in the light of personal experience of the struggle in question. Rudolph contends that Rawicz was writing ‘as if detached’, and because it was ‘required of him, both ethically and aesthetically’, leading to the view that voicing events in the form of a novel was part of a strategy, the aim of which was ‘radical “distancing” or “alienation” or “defamiliarisation” (or however we translate the Russian Formalist term ostraneniye), but the result of which is complicated by personal association. What my extrospective poems on war and Holocaust attempt is a movement in the opposite direction, one from the detachment of inexperience towards human connection, a starting-point that differentiates my extrospective writing, not only from that of Rawicz, or Levi, Antelme, Borowski, and Kulka, but also from that of Douglas.

What this means in ‘Exit Leon’ is a focus on the narrative and metaphorical aspects of the poem, beginning with ‘A goat to be tamed, to nuzzle the hand / as warm and alive as wounding’, coupled with an awareness that this image is artificial, since, before being given definite form in my poem, it exists only as a figure of the eponymous Leon’s speech:

All of us who remain here are going to perish in the weeks ahead. I’m not saying that isn’t a pity. Anyway, as tamer of my own downfall – and of yours, too – I may still have a chance to mould that fall, to break it in as I would a goat. And it will come and eat out of hands.

That it is this image to which my poem’s closing lines return lends it greater importance: ‘Leon gets led away from the scene / with milk on his fingers, trailing his words’, but, the suggestion that the incident is staged is also reinforced by the theatrical implications with which the word ‘scene’ is
Leon’s address to Boris, and the latter’s fiancé, Naomi, is described as ‘Leaders’ words, or an actor’s / waiting on death’,\textsuperscript{465} and is

\begin{quote}
Weighted with poignant
reference to how his audience, the two
who might have ‘survivor’ written inside
their blood, should regard their lives as a precious
witness.\textsuperscript{466}
\end{quote}

Similarly, the image of the goat is understood to be ‘the metaphor sucking heat from the lawyer’s [Leon’s] fingers’,\textsuperscript{467} and even Boris, the novel’s central character, is ‘a portal / through which the lawyer’s speech can extend / towards, and encompass us’.\textsuperscript{468} This supports the view that, to a greater degree than much of my other extrospective poetry, ‘Exit Leon’ constitutes a balancing act between a literary construct, and an all-too-real historical context, one that continues to challenge my interpretation and development of Keith Douglas’s extrospective model.

Despite the fact that my ‘Ghetto Morning’ is less obviously self-analytical and detached than ‘Exit Leon’, the same sense of being drawn into a literary, and quasi-historical narrative, persists, as does the suggestion that this other reality will not withstand the violence of its world. Just as Leon’s speech is made in the knowledge that ‘boots are coming to take and burn and extinguish’,\textsuperscript{469} in ‘Ghetto Morning’, ‘Boris shows us transition poised between last / light and first, and then rips it down the middle’,\textsuperscript{470} and a poison-seller offers ‘death as sleeping, / if they want, or as lightning, done in seconds,\textsuperscript{471} a form of \textit{millefeuille}, tasting of honey cake the seller’s / recent grandmother used to make’.\textsuperscript{472} ‘Boris and prisoners at the Jewish Cemetery’ presents a different scenario, but, once more, it is the persona of the hunted and haunted Jewish aristocrat, who ‘shows us shapes / of men, a mass of
them',\textsuperscript{473} the surreality of ‘Wraiths / in twists of limb’,\textsuperscript{474} who, like Leon, or Douglas’s ‘Actors waiting in the wings of Europe’, ‘perform’,\textsuperscript{475} and whose appeal for bread is ‘heard / the way a dream is,’\textsuperscript{476} or the ‘voice of thought’.\textsuperscript{477}

In remaining sensitive to distinctions between fiction and reality, my Rawicz poems embody the honesty and flexibility of Douglas’s extrospective ambition. These poems admit that there are situations, sources, and possibilities, that do not fall within the remit of direct observation, or personal experience, yet do so in the process of subjecting these texts and scenarios to the type of consideration consistent with what Douglas had in mind when defining, as extrospective, the poetry he was producing during his time in Egypt and the Middle East. It is this ambivalence that informs my war and Holocaust poetry, ensuring that the call to write about significant public events and crises is obeyed, without the speaker becoming too certain, too omniscient.

ix Douglas and beyond: learning and further development

The extrospection of these poems, therefore, falls into line with the fragility, vulnerability, and fallibility of the observation that occurs in my love, nature, and hospital poetry, with this being especially applicable when the speaker of the poem questions his own observation, struggling to describe precisely how other-worldly, or elusive, an experience, event, or source, might be. Consequently, the ultimate practicality of my extrospection may be that it is not always practical, and it may be this quality that renders my poems inherently human, a trait not always apparent in more empirical poetry, including prominent examples of Douglas’s own writing. In my extrospective
poems the natural world shifts in and out of focus, undefined subjects appear, and then slip out of view, individuals emerge from the historical events by which they have often been destroyed, hospitals, wards, and medical procedures play host to hallucinations that are, to all intents and purposes, experienced as realities, and I find myself having to see through the eyes of a second person, whether Jayne, Keith Douglas, Primo Levi, or Rawicz’s Boris. The spectatorial relationship between the extrospective poet, and his environment, demonstrated in Douglas, his fellow exiles and contributors to *Personal Landscape*, and innumerably since, is exaggerated by my disability, to the point that it is less a choice, a prescription, or a manifesto, than an inevitability, but one that continues to generate poems that are, if nothing else, adaptable, and unafraid to face the most intimate, elusive, or extreme, personal and public experiences.

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5 Bolton, *Personal Landscapes*, p. 51.


9 Lowery, ‘Out of it’.


Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Lowery, ‘Inert’.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Lowery, ‘Divested’.

Ibid.


Spencer, *Complete Poetry*, p. 106.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Lowery, ‘Divested’.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Lowery, ‘Hospital slide-show’.

Lowery, ‘Divested’.

Ibid.

Douglas, *Complete Poems*, p. 120.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Owen Lowery, ‘A frieze depicting four centaurs’, *Otherwise Unchanged*, p. 36.

Lowery, ‘A frieze depicting four centaurs’.


Lowery, ‘IVP – intravenous pyelogram’.


Lowery, ‘Latest meeting with the consultant’.


Lowery, ‘Woman who looks like Sophia Loren’.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
106 Douglas, Complete Poems, p. 112.
107 Ibid.
108 Bolton, Personal Landscapes, p. 152.
109 Ibid.


112 Douglas, Complete Poems, p. 91.
113 Ibid, p. 67.
114 Ibid, p. 111.
116 Lowery, ‘Jospice visiting day’.
117 Ibid.
118 Douglas, Complete Poems, p. 97.
119 Lowery, ‘Jospice visiting day’.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
125 Lowery, ‘Bruise from my Baclofen pump re-fill’.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
139 Douglas, Complete Poems, p. 102.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
Lowery, ‘The Promenade Hospital at Southport’.

Douglas, Complete Poems, p. 95.
Lowery, ‘The Promenade Hospital at Southport’.

Lowery, ‘Tony McCoy at the Cheltenham Festival’.

Lowery, ‘New admission, Southport, ICU’.

Ted Hughes, in Douglas, Complete Poems, p. xxvii.

*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.


*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.


*Ibid*.

*Ibid*, p. 89.

*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.

Bernard Spencer, in *Personal Landscape: An Anthology of Exile*, p. 16.

*Ibid*.


*Ibid*.


*Ibid*.


*Ibid*.


*Ibid*.


*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.


Lowery, ‘Time by Clifton Marina’.

*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.


*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.


*Ibid*.
Lowery, ‘Time by Clifton Marina’.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Owen Lowery, ‘From Lochaline to Isle of Mull’, Otherwise Unchanged, p. 22.
Ibid, p. 89.
Ibid, p. 86.
Lowery, ‘From Lochaline to Isle of Mull’.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Owen Lowery, ‘Stalking one of Sunart’s otters’, Otherwise Unchanged, p. 23.
Lowery, ‘Stalking one of Sunart’s otters’.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Owen Lowery, ‘Meanwhile, back at the chop-house’, Otherwise Unchanged, p. 5.
Lowery, ‘Man Walking’.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Douglas, Complete Poems, p. 97.
Ibid, p. 111.
Ibid, p. 103.
Hughes, New Selected Poems, p. 30.
Ted Hughes, in Four, p. 20.
Ibid.
Lowery, ‘A buzzard from Rose Cottage’.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Hughes, New Selected Poems, p. 30.
Lowery, ‘A buzzard from Rose Cottage’.
Ibid.
Hughes, New Selected Poems, p. 42.
Lowery, ‘Leopard in the sugar-cane’.
Ibid.
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Conclusions

Having begun my research with an understanding of extrospection limited to that suggested in Keith Douglas’s correspondence with John Hall, and his essay, ‘Poets in This War’, I now find the concept to be a broad compilation of ideas, influences, forms, and approaches linked by the simple idea of responding to the poet’s altering experiences and circumstances. Rather than the dichotomy implied by his attacks on the impracticality and artificiality of what he considered to be lyricism, and his advocacy of the experiential and economic reportage of extrospection, I have found that in reality Douglas’s poetry combined elements of these perceived polarities. It emerges that his extrospection could be as reflexive as it was objective, supporting observations of his surroundings, with personal reflection, and adding ornamentation, poetic effect, metaphor, and rhyme to predominantly regular stanzaic arrangements. The upshot has been poetry capable of responding to a variety of situations, including those associated with psychological and physical extremis. My research has also revealed that an extrospective approach has been influential following Keith Douglas’s death, both in formal and tonal terms, as a means of approaching the most significant and difficult issues of our time, and in relation to more personal experiences and crises.

This practicality and adaptability has been essential to the poems I have written, not only in response to Douglas’s life, work, and ideas, but in an attempt to build on his achievements, developing my own interpretation of extrospective poetry in the process. This has involved addressing subjects that do not occur in Douglas’s poetry, and considering the
extrospective process itself, with particular emphasis on its fallibility. Consequently, although my poems correspond to the ideal of observing the external environment, they recognise that absolute objectivity is seldom possible, because, having been observed, the source must be subjected to the poet's individual interpretation. In addition, I have learned to accept that tensions and antagonisms between the empirical, and the abstract, or ethereal, cannot always be resolved, and that it is often sufficient to simply reflect their co-existence. These discoveries have acquired additional relevance with respect to my physical condition, and my need to share extrospection with Jayne, to be dependent, in order to observe. In turn, this has allowed me to understand their importance with regard to individuality and humanity on a more general basis, as seen in my war and Holocaust poetry.

The latter subjects alone could have become a thesis in their own right, as could the impact that extrospection, or similarly objective approaches, have had in relation to non-British poetry, or, indeed, prose, including Douglas’s own, and that of his fellow Personal Landscape poets. However, these issues fall outside the remit of my thesis, the aims of which have been to explore Douglas’s theory of extrospection, establish how far his definition was descriptive, or prescriptive, examine whether his ideals were fulfilled in his own poetry, as well as that of the poets by whom he has been succeeded, and to produce my own series of extrospective poems, in order to increase my practical understanding of the concept.
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