

Acknowledgements

When I first discussed the outline of this book with Dr Richard Jones in summer 2014, we were enjoying a bumper season of Red Admirals and outsized artichokes. Richard worked in the Geography department at the University of Exeter, and we had plans to create an app for Dartmoor that would explain physical aspects of the landscape, matched with excerpts of literature. I would like to think that we had an indefinite but important sense of the poetics of each other's subject. Mud was not just mud for Richard, but the beginnings of narratives of memory, adventure and trauma, from stories of caked showers when attempting to corral his samples to the uncovering of skulls when coring in China. My memories of learning physical geography at school included the savouring of new language ('cwm', 'arête', 'col') and the imaginative acts of trying to square the diagrams of glaciers with recollections of family hikes on Coniston Old Man and Helvellyn. Both of us were responding to the poetics of place in different but connected ways: bloom lines on Ordnance maps react to the landscape of Dartmoor in an imaginative way just as literature might respond expansively to its tors. I can see Richard smiling: 'Yes, but when you get lost in the fog near Ponsworthy, try getting home with a poem'.

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Our children grew, and then there was COVID. I would like to thank all those colleagues and friends who have been so generous with their time in reading draft chapters during this difficult period, including James Byrne, Nikolai Duffy, Ben Harker, Marius Hentea, Peter Howarth, Tim Kendall, Angelica Michelis, David Miller and Sandeep Parmar. Especial thanks must go, as ever, to Emma Liggins, who had a major influence on the final shape of the book. A clumpy or overly complicated sentence is (Quorn) mincemeat in her eyes. An Arts and Humanities Research Council award in 2017 allowed me to explore the ideas surrounding metamodernism with a wonderfully diffuse and enthusiastic set of academics, students, writers and non-academics, including Jeroen Boon,

Katherine Burn, Linda Ceriello, Andrew Corsa, Greg Dember, Tom Drayton, Alison Gibbons, Robert Gould, Mika Hallila, Chantal Hassard, David James, Dennis Kersten, Janien Linde, Sarah Maclachlan, Divya Nadkarni, Alistair Noon, Kasimir Sandbacka, Will Self, Samuel Stuart-Booth, Robin van den Akker, Niels van Poecke, Tim Vermeulen, Usha Wilbers and Graham Young. I shall always be grateful for their papers, readings and conversations in European countries and towns that, during the COVID epidemic, have been very difficult to visit. As noted by some PhD students and early-career researchers, the conferences and symposia were remarkable for their supportive environments and a lack of academic ‘edge’. Staff at Arendsnest in Amsterdam provided us with a perfect final venue: Bockbier on tap after the curtain closes; I am not sure we shall ever organise an event in a more salubrious abode. I would also like to thank the following colleagues, whose insights have improved this book, whether on the scale of Zoom support, discussions about theoretical contexts, copyright requests or a tweaked sentence: Robert Eaglestone, Martin Eve, Suzanne Fairless, Tony Frazer, Daniel Gavin, John Goodby, Angela Jarman, Germaine Loader, Gail Marshall, Edgar Mendez, Berthold Schoene, Portia Taylor, Scott Thurston, Dale Townshend, Jeffrey Wainwright, Tony Ward and Dinah Wood.

I am grateful to a number of staff at the Geoffrey Hill and Tony Harrison archives held in the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds. Even with an electrical fault that took out the entire campus at one point, they still managed to accommodate me. Colin Taylor kindly allowed me to use a reproduction of his painting ‘Mother Courage no. 3’ for the cover of this book. The following publishers have granted copyright permission to reproduce extracts for Chapter 5, and lines of poetry from the authors discussed in this book: Arc, Bloodaxe Books, Faber and Faber, Graywolf Press, Knives Forks and Spoons, Oxford University Press, Salt and Shearsman Press. Some material for Chapter 5 is reproduced by permission from my chapter ‘Modernism and the “Double Consciousness” of Myth in Tony Harrison’s Poems and *Metamorpheus*’, in *New Light on Tony Harrison*, ed. Edith Hall (London: Oxford University Press) © The British Academy 2019. The Don Paterson excerpt from ‘The Sea at Brighton’ from *Landing Light* is reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company LLC on behalf of Graywolf Press, www.graywolfpress.org © Don Paterson 2005. The extracts from Geoffrey’s poems are used by permission of the literary estate of Sir Geoffrey Hill. Jeremy Hill and Kenneth Haynes kindly allowed me to quote from his poems and the extensive Geoffrey Hill archives in the

Brotherton Library. Tony Harrison himself agreed that I could use material from his own archives in the Brotherton. In his characteristically direct way, Tony commented that ‘I wouldn’t have put the stuff in there if I didn’t want people to use it’. If I have missed any copyright permissions, we would be happy to correct this in future editions of this book.

I would like to thank the series editor, Peter Boxall, for offering unwavering support and for responding patiently to my requests about submission details. I am indebted to Ray Ryan from Cambridge University Press for his initial faith in this project: we first exchanged emails about the book during that hot summer and autumn of 2014. My amazing family – Emma, Polly and Clara – has kept me going during some difficult years of changing jobs, COVID and family illness. They are indeed, as Polly once said, ‘electric to glitter’. They even responded kindly to a flat in Newark when I worked in Lincoln. Last but not least, the late-night cheese boards in Tavistock with Richard and Sharon Gedye have kept me fuelled with ideas and striking dreams for many moons.

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In 2016, Richard was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Despite increasing debility, he still walked with us to those tors and around the Devon and Cornwall coast: Cotehele, Bere Alston, Fowey. Just before he lost his eyesight, we wandered into an old railway cutting above Tavistock, exploring the tea-coloured water and sharp edges of dynamited stone. Chatting about mutual friends, he laughed in his characteristic way: ‘There’s been too many funerals this year!’ Typical of Richard’s humour, it is still the most astonishing thing I have ever heard anybody say. In April 2019, we visited his memorial stone at Urswick tarn in Cumbria. The village was peaceful and unseasonably warm, and our families milled around the stone’s position at a jetty’s edge. A plaque explains that ‘Dr Jones was a physical geographer whose research at this tarn and elsewhere around the world added greatly to knowledge of the Holocene’. Given that this book completes the project that I had first discussed with Richard six years earlier, it would be suitable to end these acknowledgements with a poem:

Marl

Hérons stumble the fetch: Urswick
holds its flash, setting the tarn
with our wake, appropriate
as our grief through laughter, where grass
spikes the meniscus and sun-motes blur
our digital snap. Hug

the embarrassment of this plaque:
mourning as clear as fish that roll
air and under the boardwalk. We
taste the edge of marram, faces
in all-shore directions; eyes
string the reed buntings jittering
their pad. Marl adds
to our knowledge of the Holocene:
your core sampler hods to pollen
where forests mould to a crick
and insects peat our memory. Grain
fires the cap to a dating spree.
Photos out-tilt the jetty's pitch, as
we walk out in our guilty retrieval.

