

the determinants of gender and class shaping contemporary lives have other, distinct forms and textures in the literary texts we carry forward from the distant past. Yes, we live—as did the trobairitz—in a misogynistic world. But as subversive as the original poems might be, they inhabit their formal and historical world in a way that is troublingly downplayed by Keelan’s collection.

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Tom Pickard, *hoyoot: Collected Poems and Songs*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2014. 298pp. £19.95

Since his youthful days as the co-organizer of the Morden Tower poetry series in mid-1960s Newcastle, Tom Pickard has made it his project as poet, polemicist, and activist to earn recognition for Northern English working-class culture as a living and legitimate culture. Pickard’s career has seen him expand the scope of this project geographically and historically, documenting working-class struggle from strategic positions beyond his native Tyneside region, while mining the region’s economic and cultural history for the radical traditions that could ground a national and international working-class culture. *hoyoot: Collected Poems and Songs*, the most recent and complete gathering of Pickard’s poetry, captures precisely these far-reaching dimensions of his ongoing career as a poet at once of dissidence and agitation, and of recovery and reclamation.

Divided into three large chronological sections, *hoyoot* highlights three distinct phases of Pickard’s work: his “apprenticeship” as a youth in Newcastle to Basil Bunting and other Objectivist masters, when he applied the *melopoetic* principle of their modernist free verse to capturing the speech and songs of the Northern coal pits and factories (1968–1978); his defiance as an international poet-documentarian to Thatcherism, Reaganism, and their reactionary legacies, when he began using topical and commemorative political poetry to expose the class warfare at the heart of rising neoliberalism (1979–1999); and his return as a master poet in his own right to the landscape and folklore of his ancestral Northumbria, where the ballad traditions of the Anglo-Scottish border have resurfaced in his poetry as both historical material and a living voice of protest. *hoyoot* expands on two previous, slimmer collections of Pickard’s poetry—*Tiepin Eros* (Bloodaxe Books, 1994) and *Hole in the Wall* (Flood Editions, 2004)—adding significant detail to the political poetry of the 1970s and 80s and to the historical, documentary-oriented folk poetry of the past decade.

For its stunning comprehensiveness, the present collection also brings with it a highly concentrated focus on Pickard’s longstanding dual roles as

an oral poet and an oral historian. It's no accident that the subtitle of *hoyoot* calls attention to the fluid boundary between poetry and song in his work: from the early lyric poems written for performance at Morden Tower, to the street-protest songs of *Jarrow March*, to the full-fledged "folk-opera" of *The Ballad of Jamie Allan*, Pickard's work over the years has been about breathing new life into working-class identity by insisting on the voice as the thing that holds it together through a history intent on destroying it.

*hoyoot* arranges the poems of Pickard's first phase in a way that puts their themes into dramatic conflict: poems about love, sex, child-rearing and their affective bonds to ancestry and tradition are interleaved with poems about the life-sapping and destructive power of industrial capitalism. The regenerative promise of a growing family in "To My Unborn Child," a poem dedicated to the poet's son Matthew ("then I found you had been there / all time before me"), is quickly rechanneled into protests against economic servitude, as in "The Daylight Hours," an invective against the National Assistance Board officers who routinely threatened to break up the young family by denying them dole money:

A hev gorra bairn  
an a hev gorra wife  
an a cannot see me bairn or wife  
workin in the night

so go way mr doleman  
av got something else ti do  
than spen me daylight hours  
workin for thou

This "song for dole wallahs," from *High on the Walls* (1968), Pickard's first volume of poetry, was written at a time when he lived as a "work conchy," by his own description—a "conscientious objector" to the forms of labor available to him as a young man marginalized by the depressed postwar economy of the industrial North. "The Daylight Hours" bears the marks of the trade he served instead, reviving the traditional culture of the Tyneside as counterculture, both by refining his own early poetry and by building (with Connie Pickard) an audience at Morden Tower for its oral delivery. In the poem, Pickard submits the Geordie dialect to modernist procedures of compression and objectification: the ballad meter is condensed to mostly two- and three-beat lines, with an emphasis on the heavy silences between them, while the phonetic particularity of the dialect is rendered as a series of minimal, selfsame signs ("hev gorra" for *have got a*, "av got" for *I've got*), not marked diacritically as aberrations from a linguistic norm. At the same time, calling this poem a song ascribes a popular as well as a personal voice to it, an act of framing that

places this and Pickard's other early lyrics squarely within the community at Morden Tower that constituted itself as a kind of latter-day oral culture. As text, as song, this poem gives Geordie invective the look and the sound of an autonomous, authoritative public language, an instrument of solidarity against the reigning economic and social order. "Remember... / we built ourselves a tower," Pickard writes in "To Friends Who Must Go," and "All it took was our friendship, / nowt else to build our fort."

This call to remember and memorialize reflects a major thematic pattern of the early poems, where memory (voluntary and involuntary) gives access to both the regenerative power of working-class traditions and their self-annihilating connection to deadening work. These poems are about transmission as much as they anticipate their own transmission, but a birthright may be partly a curse. In some poems, as in "Birthplace Bronchitis," this tension gives working-class culture its unique and perdurable character: "The thudding industrial hammer / is not much harder than the men it has made." By virtue of this strength, however, what these workers transmit to the next generation is a sensory reminder of sickness: "Our fathers are coughing up its grimy phlegm" after a lifetime at the hammer, "and we will know the taste." In the 1973 long poem "Dancing Under Fire," the image of "a coke works / coiled in the valley" sets off a series of visions in which destructive distillation fuels not only the coal-powered industry of the North but also the afterlife of its postindustrial generation. As if flourishing had to come from destruction rather than growth, "the soil we squeeze makes coal / to give fire the wings we need / to fly," and the process warrants the closing address: "father you built the lines I travel on / my direction was laid by your sweat and death." In between, the dream-image of "ancestor burning" and the subvocalized refrain "*cannibal cannibal cannibal*" underscore the perilous stakes of making culture under the press of capital. How does one survive when survival means devouring and being devoured by what keeps one alive? How does one find a future when the usable past is something close to social death?

The poems of Pickard's middle phase take up these problems in the context of a politically reactionary England and often from an international perspective. If the flashpoint for earlier poems such as "Dancing Under Fire" and "The Devil's Destroying Angel Exploded" had been labor movement actions like the 1972 UK Miners' Strike, then the flashpoint for the middle poems was Margaret Thatcher's ascendancy in 1979, the year this section of *hoyoot* begins. The most striking poems of this phase were written in the 1980s when Pickard was working as an oral historian in the Northeast, in London, and abroad. The poems and interview texts from *Jarrow March* (1981), Pickard's oral history of the 1936 unemployed workers' march, were completed in Warsaw during the volatile political period recorded in *Kronika*,

the author's journal from Poland, featured elsewhere in this issue. Taken in their contemporary context, the historical poems and texts from *Jarrow March* have the feeling of dispatches sent from the hotbed of Solidarity back to an England where the labor movement was preparing its go-for-broke fight against Thatcherism. In *hoyoot*, selections from this work appear under the title "Paddy Scullion's Jarrow March," named after the Jarrow town councilor and co-organizer of the hunger march. This portfolio condenses the book's collage of original interviews, historical news reports, commemorative poems, and documentary images (designed by Joanna Voit) into a soundtrack of two voices, intercutting Scullion's interview with select poems. Many of them ekphrases (almost captions) of historical photographs, the poems of *Jarrow March* effectively combine reportage, description, and protest in a rallying form of what Gwendolyn Brooks called verse-journalism. "Setting Oot" returns to an early and lasting theme, where surviving unemployment and hunger becomes a matter of intergenerational unity and transmission:

A marcher holds the hand of a small boy.  
Next to him a woman carries a smaller child in her arms.  
The bairn imprints the memory of a firm grip  
in his father's palm.  
With his mother they will walk to the town's border.

The banner rises above.  
The fluttering wings of their strength and love.

The history and polemic of *Jarrow March* are not strictly affirmative; the "crusade" did not triumph against unemployment and hunger. But the interviews posit both conditions as most acute in their demoralization of "honest to God people," as Scullion says, so the poems rightly come at them from a moral angle. Clasp hands to resist poverty's evisceration of family and community, hoisting the "Jarrow Crusade" banner for the three hundred miles between Tyneside and London—these signs of "strength and love" register the simple forms of civil disobedience that sustain working-class identity by demanding recognition for it. The sublimity of their figuration ("fluttering wings") signifies the belief that "defiant pride" itself, in the phrase Pickard got from an informant, gives meaning to direct action in a place like Jarrow or Gdansk.

Within Pickard's recent phase, *The Ballad of Jamie Allan* takes this strain of defiant pride back beyond the rallying cries of the proletarian 1930s, beyond even the pitman ballads of Tommy Armstrong and the Victorian music hall, and roots it near the origins of the popular ballad concept in British literary culture. Readers coming to *Jamie Allan* for the first time in *hoyoot* will note that Pickard's eighteenth-century Northumbrian piper

emerges through a signature style mixing reportage and song, historical research and ventriloquism, as in the book's title poem: "I was horse thief to his majesty / for dukes and earls I played / but I'm dying in a cell / that dukes and earls have made." Readers already familiar with the work should note that it is an "ongoing project," Pickard says here, and that the version in *hoyoot* contains two additional poems, "The Raw" and a "Footnote," the second of which tells the story of the outlaw-minstrel's pipes after his final imprisonment:

Banged-up in Durham  
he had the small pipes redeemed  
and delivered to his cousin,  
John Allan, at Bellingham, whose son  
"being obliged to leave the country,"  
sold them to James Young the younger  
who was drowned off Holy Island.

The pipes passed to his father,  
a Longframlington pedlar,  
and were inscribed  
"James Allan, 1777,  
by the Duchess of Northumberland."

When imprisonment and death stop Jamie Allan's airs from circulating, the instrument of his folk art takes their place—among itinerant folk like himself—in a marginal but unstoppable economy of transmission. The inscription on Jamie Allan's pipes, partly reconstruction, partly invention, ends *hoyoot* with one answer to the book's central questions: at its best folklore gives the written-off a tenuous hold on the past and the future, yet, as Pickard writes, "the story has clung on." So too for *hoyoot*: for all their investment in labor history and folk history, Pickard's poems possess a political urgency that gives them a startlingly contemporary feel. Their lasting value is their live rebuke to the forces of political reaction wherever and whenever they appear.

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