

# The Yorkshire Stridings

Photographs by Ian Beesley

Poems by Ian McMillan



Medieval stone rose cross marking the boundary between Yorkshire & Lancashire.

**Yorkshire:** historic county of Northern England and the largest in the UK.

**Ridings:** The ancient county of Yorkshire had three ridings, North, West and South

**Stridings:** to walk with long regular or measured paces.

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## THE AMBITION OF THE YORKSHIRE STRIDER

To stride in all Yorkshire weathers.

To stride to Yorkshire places unstridden by me or others.

To place one foot in front of the other in the Yorkshire way.

To nod minutely to my fellow-striders, catching their eye like a cricketer might catch a high, high ball:  
casually, with skill and love.

To stride rather than ambling.

To listen intently to the birds singing in Yorkshire dialect: Aye, Aye, Aye.

To stride through Yorkshire towns and villages as though they are living maps of themselves.

To stride across Yorkshire moors and beaches as though you are in a film.

To stride rather than strolling.

To notice each Yorkshire cloud as though it is the first Yorkshire cloud or the last Yorkshire cloud.

To stride home knowing more about Yorkshire and the world and yourself than you did when you strode out.

To notice as much as you can to keep in a memory bank for the times you are stuck on a failed train.

To stride rather than loping.

To always have striding ambitions: there will always be more Yorkshire. Always.

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Whitby Abbey

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## STRIDING

Late night striding is the best, as one day curves into the next with an audible click.

The moors are more mysterious at this time; they seem to hold more secrets, more stories, more narratives that begin and end in Yorkshire dark.

Time itself seems to stand still like someone on the top of the moor stands still to take in the stars.

Then Time turns and walks forward, slowly as a clock.

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Sandsend towards Whitby

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Runswick Bay



Runswick Bay

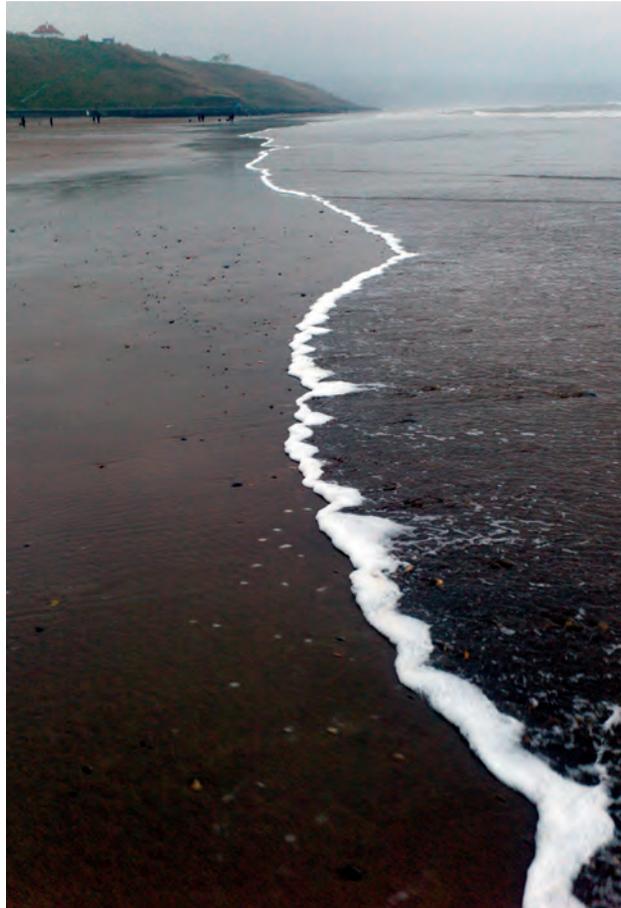


Sandsend



Whitby

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Whitby

## STRIDING

Stand at the top of the slope and listen beyond your breathing, beyond the cars on the distant road, beyond the aeroplane behind the clouds.

Listen beyond the breeze giving narrative to the moving leaves in the tiny wood and beyond the cows making themselves heard in a field bordered by fences and a sense of yesterday.

Listen beyond the shouts of children far below by ice-cream van.  
Listen beyond them all and you will hear the Yorkshire light.

Then turn and stride.

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Whitby



Whitby harbour

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## STRIDING

Afternoon striding is the best. The sun lowers itself in the sky, as though it is leaning in, as though it wants to tell you something about time. The streets are busy as the schools empty and someone runs up the hill and someone dawdles and someone opens a car door and shouts something welcoming in an accent that has hardly changed for a hundred years; man walking past the school to fight in First World War would have understood it perfectly, until the guns sent them deaf.

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Whitby harbour

# Striding along Magnetic North across Ilkley Moor

Since early times European navigators believed that compass needles were attracted either to a “magnetic mountain” or “magnetic island” somewhere in the far north or to the Pole Star.

The magnetic field in a MRI scanner is aligned to Magnetic North and so to the Pole Star.

Both the scanner and magnetic north are symbolic of navigation and journeys, one in the literal geographical sense and the other in a metaphorical sense as in a journey through the body navigating tissues and organs.

This series of images represents a walk towards Magnetic North; it references time, the unseen and the circular shape of the MRI scanner.

All images were taken facing Magnetic North along an imaginary line starting from the MRI scanning unit at Bradford Royal Infirmary and traveling across the Yorkshire countryside.

The first part of this journey took me over Ilkley Moor and sites there included an ancient stone circle, a number of cup and ring marked stones, the Doubler stones allotment and an abandoned millstone quarry.

(It is believed that the cups on cup and ring marked rocks may have been cut for medicinal purposes, water collected in the cups would dissolve the salts from the rock and these solutions were believed to have healing properties).

Ian Beesley



Neolithic stone circle Ilkley Moor



The Doubler stone Ilkley Moor

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Cup and ring stone Ilkley Moor



The Swazitika stone Ilkley Moor



Abandoned millstone Ilkley Moor

## MAGNETIC NORTH

My teacup handle points to the window,  
My hair seems to lean to the vast outdoors,  
The pen on my desk spins, and then stops.  
I could walk from this place in a long straight line  
Through fields, over moors, by the walls that stretch  
And snake overland to the top of the map:  
Magnetic North is calling me home.

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# Striding the limestone pavements



Malham Cove



Limestone pavement Malham

## LIMESTONE

The earth  
Thinks  
Wrinkles its brow.

Furrows  
Deep in thought.  
Trying

To remember something,  
Anything,  
About the day before  
yesterday.



## THE LIMESTONE TREE

From a distance, anyway.  
A tree made of stone  
Like a statue to the seasons

Roots in the limestone,  
Branches in the air,  
Pointing to the grey

Limestone sky.  
From a distance, anyway  
You look the branches

Point in one direction,  
One point of the compass:  
Limestone.





The limestone walls of Mastilles Lane Kilnsey

## LIMESTONE AS STORYTELLER

Walls line the path  
Like narrative devices;  
Here, a mystery:  
The missing stone.  
Here, a twist:  
The half-open gate.  
Here, a moment  
To stand on reflect  
Before the tale  
Moves on.  
Here, a folk-memory  
Of backbroken craftsmen  
Placing stone upon stone  
To an ending  
The wind will howl through.

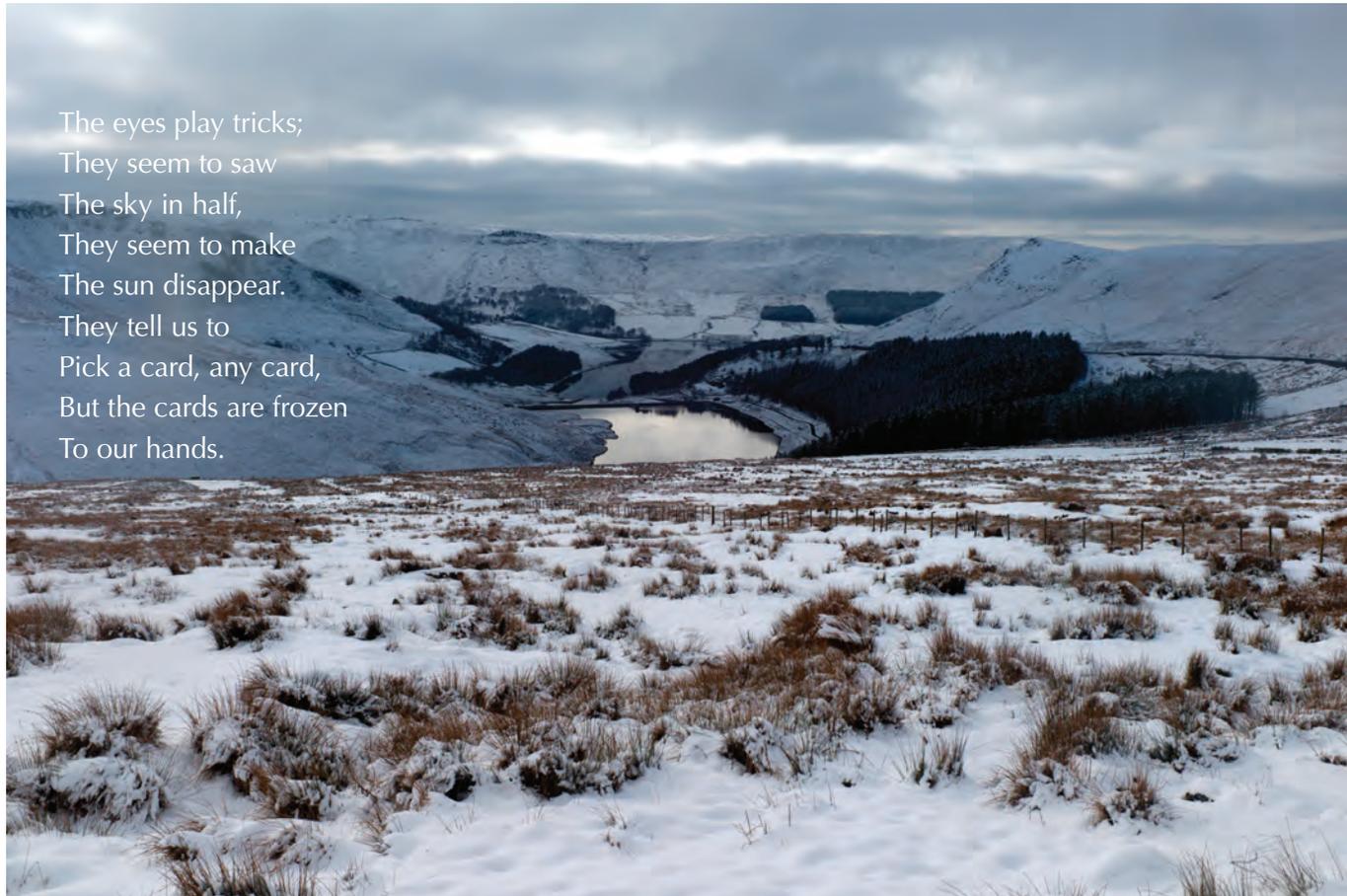


# Striding in search of the white mountain hare



History's huge footprints  
Covered, uncovered  
By the snow's  
Brief cloak.  
At this bookend of the year  
The moor's breath hangs  
Waiting for a hare's  
Exhalation.

Saddleshworth Moor



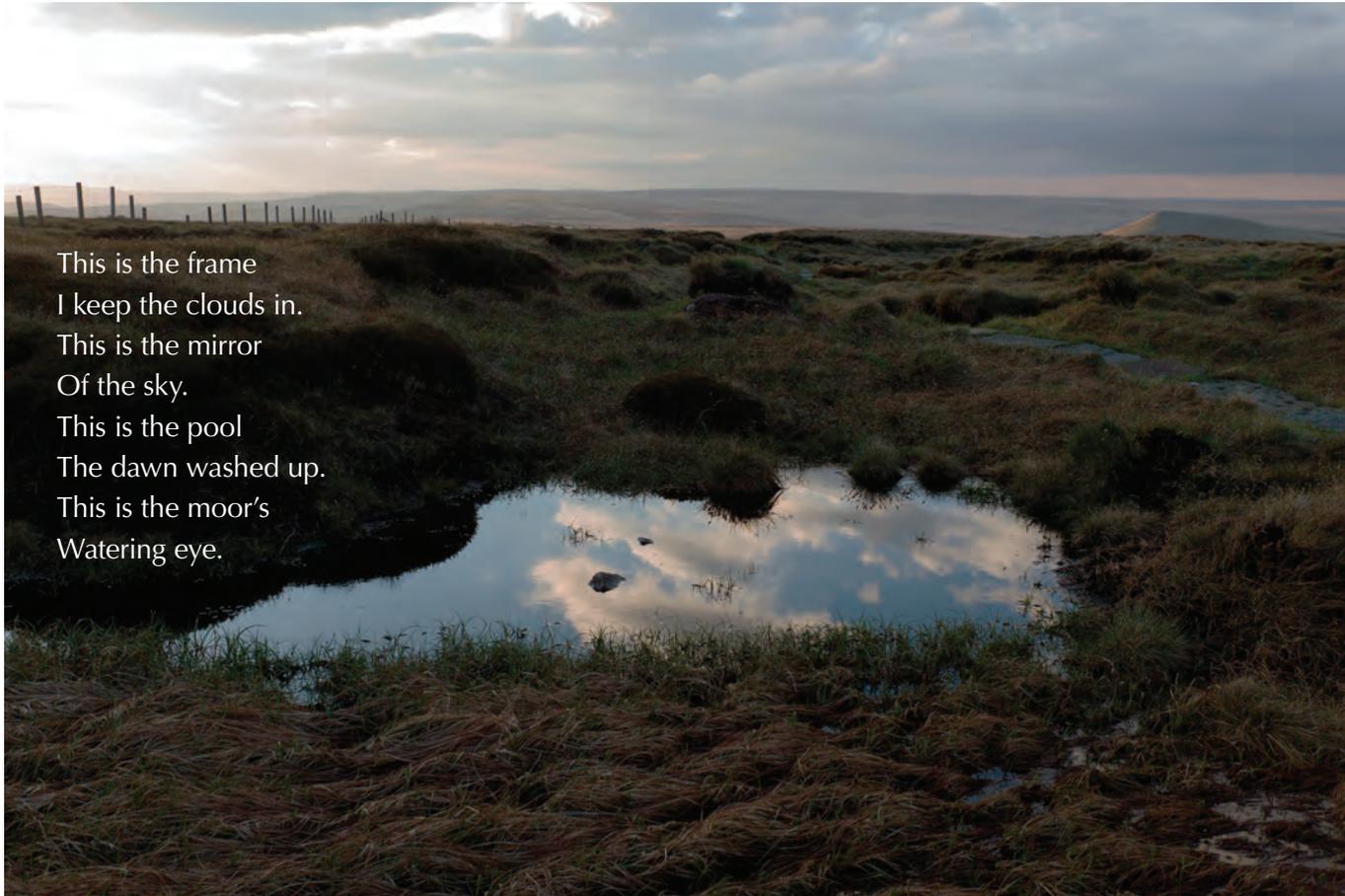
The eyes play tricks;  
They seem to saw  
The sky in half,  
They seem to make  
The sun disappear.  
They tell us to  
Pick a card, any card,  
But the cards are frozen  
To our hands.

Saddleworth Moor



Up the ladder to spring  
And the Moon's monocle  
Watching the moor  
For signs of hare.

Saddleworth Moor



This is the frame  
I keep the clouds in.  
This is the mirror  
Of the sky.  
This is the pool  
The dawn washed up.  
This is the moor's  
Watering eye.

Saddleworth Moor

Tell me the legend  
Of the line of walkers  
Who strayed too near  
A fallen branch  
And were turned into fenceposts  
That will always be walking.

I can't tell you the story  
I don't know the ending  
And anyway,  
You're changing...



Saddleworth Moor

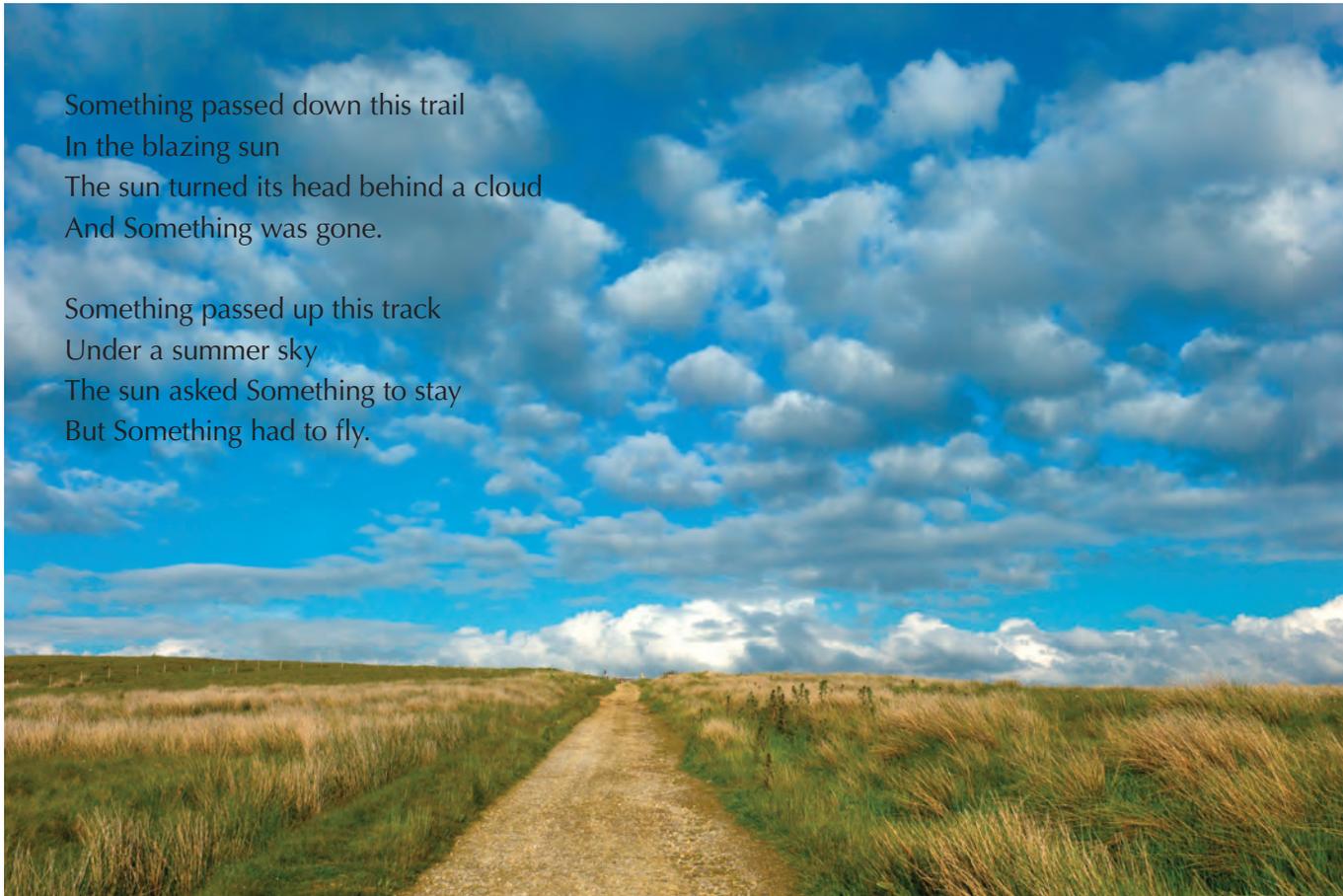


It feels like the moors  
Are bright green creatures  
Coming down to the water  
To drink.  
The water is sharp  
Sharp as that moment  
When memory and history  
Collide.  
It feels like the sky  
Will never get dark,  
Hare on the horizon  
Moon-still.

Saddleshworth Moor

Something passed down this trail  
In the blazing sun  
The sun turned its head behind a cloud  
And Something was gone.

Something passed up this track  
Under a summer sky  
The sun asked Something to stay  
But Something had to fly.



Saddleshworth Moor

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From the horizon this horizon,  
The one you're standing in,  
Is purple; reminds you  
Of that scarf your mother wore

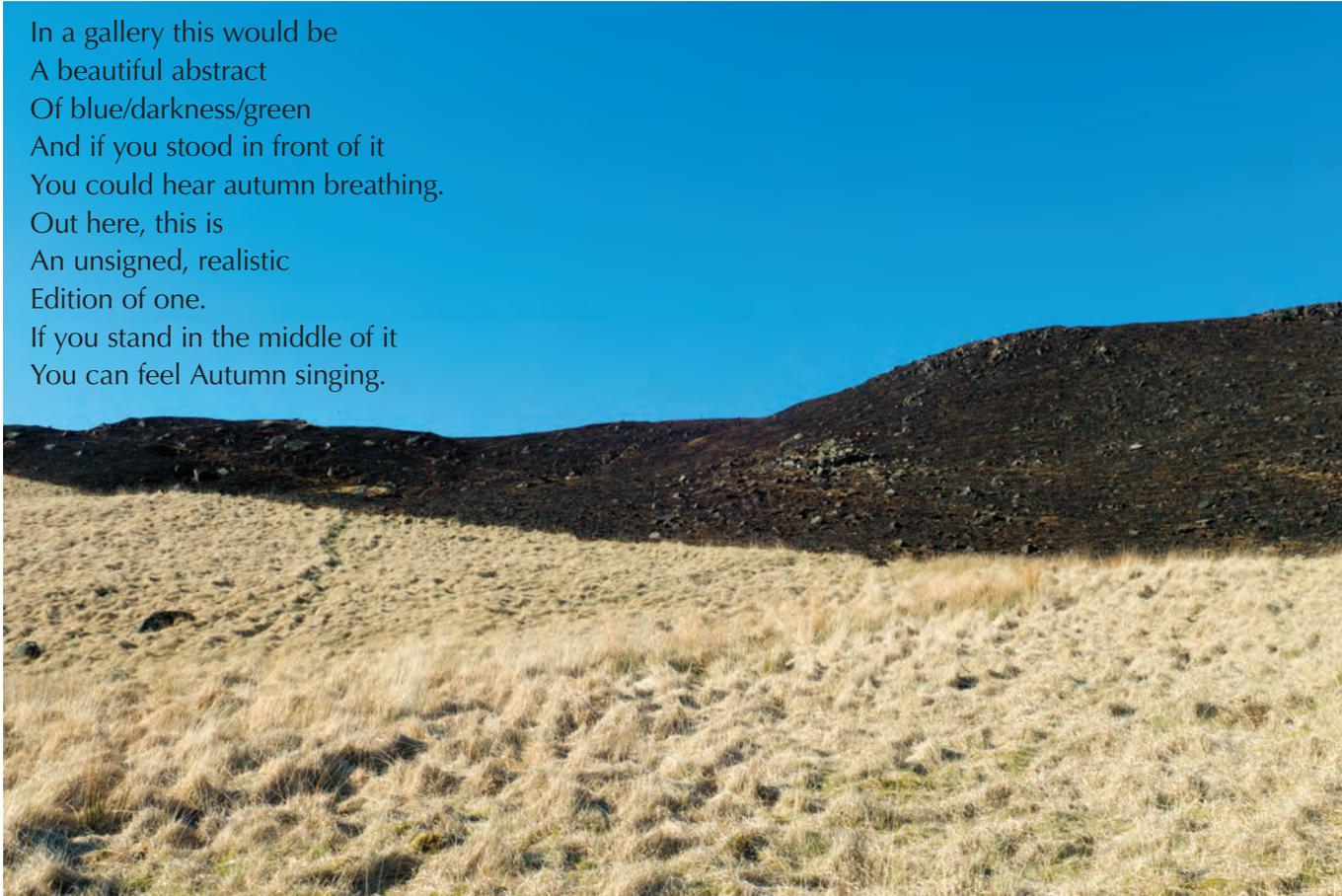
When she waved, that summer,  
From so far away, so far away  
She almost touched the sky  
With her waving Don't know

Where she waves from now;  
I hope it's somewhere like this  
With wide horizons and heather.



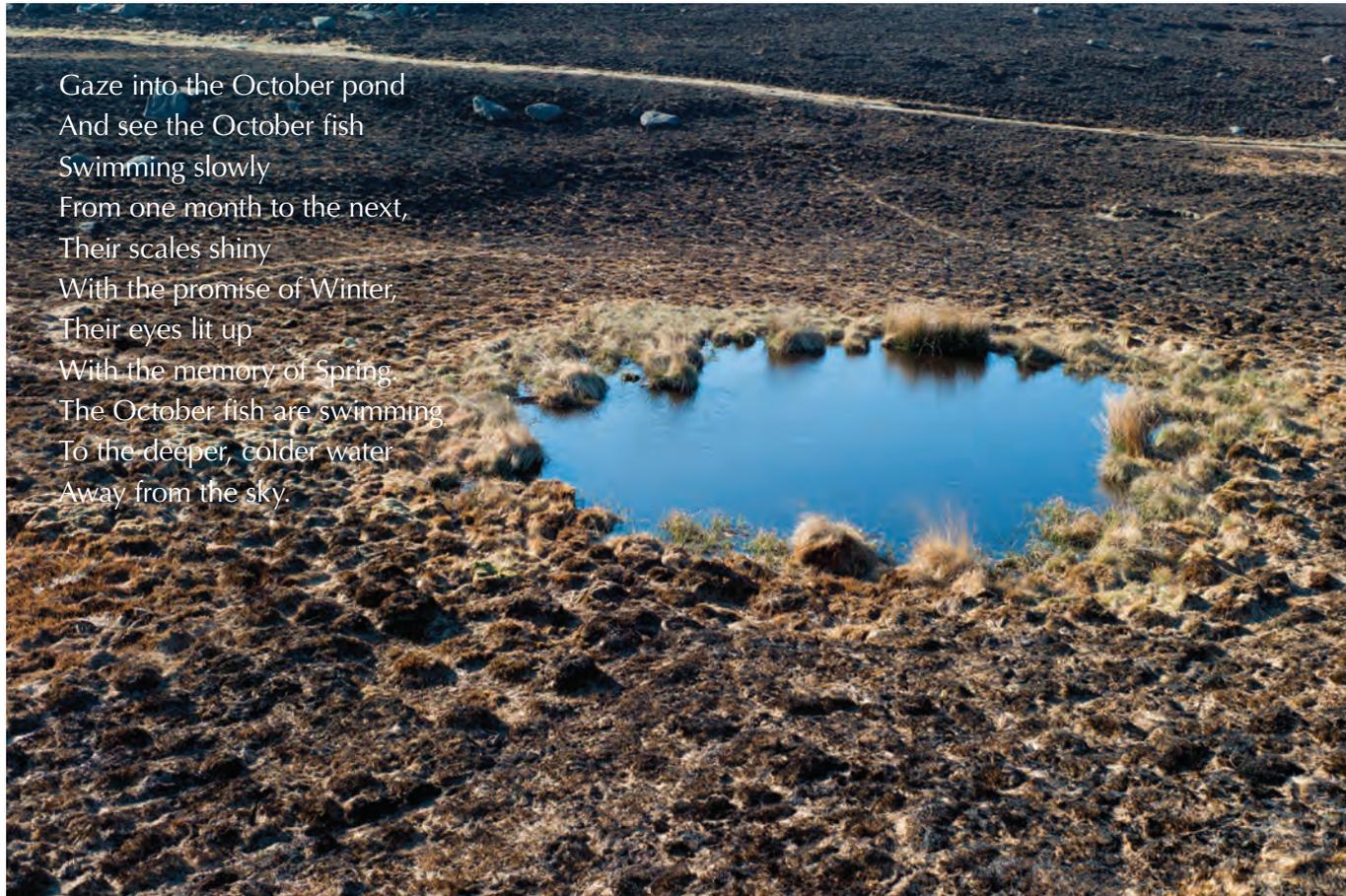
Saddleworth Moor

In a gallery this would be  
A beautiful abstract  
Of blue/darkness/green  
And if you stood in front of it  
You could hear autumn breathing.  
Out here, this is  
An unsigned, realistic  
Edition of one.  
If you stand in the middle of it  
You can feel Autumn singing.



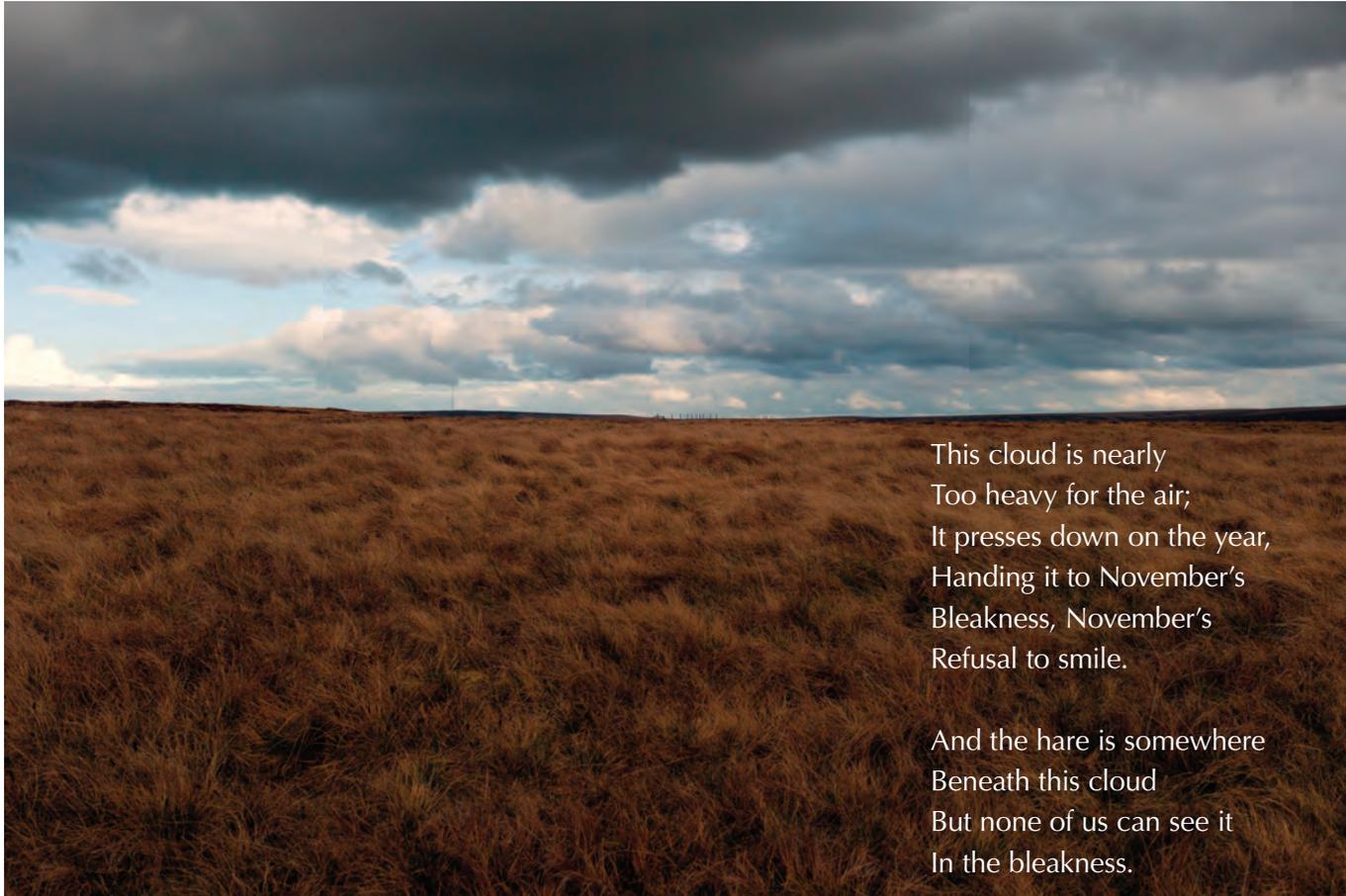
Saddleworth Moor

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Gaze into the October pond  
And see the October fish  
Swimming slowly  
From one month to the next,  
Their scales shiny  
With the promise of Winter,  
Their eyes lit up  
With the memory of Spring.  
The October fish are swimming  
To the deeper, colder water  
Away from the sky.

Saddleworth Moor

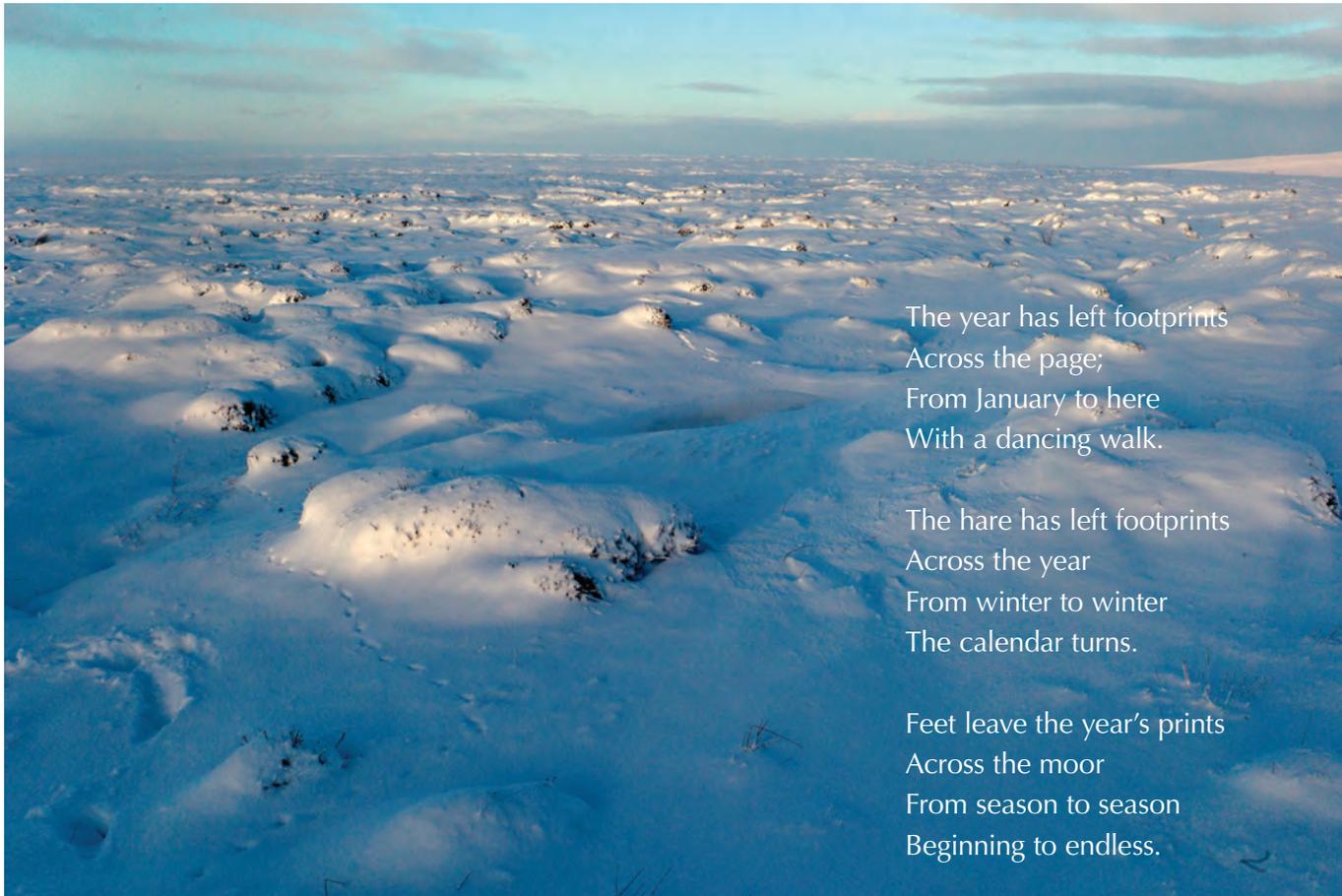


This cloud is nearly  
Too heavy for the air;  
It presses down on the year,  
Handing it to November's  
Bleakness, November's  
Refusal to smile.

And the hare is somewhere  
Beneath this cloud  
But none of us can see it  
In the bleakness.

Saddleworth Moor

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The year has left footprints  
Across the page;  
From January to here  
With a dancing walk.

The hare has left footprints  
Across the year  
From winter to winter  
The calendar turns.

Feet leave the year's prints  
Across the moor  
From season to season  
Beginning to endless.

Saddleworth Moor



## Striding the millstone grit

### SLOW POEM ABOUT A SLOW PLACE

The millstone grit  
The milestone grit.  
*Time and people*  
*Slowly shaped this landscape*

The heartstone grit  
The hearthstone grit.  
*Time and people*  
*Slowly shape this poem.*

The millstone grit  
The hillstone grit.  
*Time and people*  
*Slowly shape this landscape.*

The artstone grit  
The art's tone grit  
*Time and people*  
*Slowly shaped this poem.*



Millstone grit, pots & pans Saddleworth



Millstone grit above Widdop reservoir



Millstone grit Brimham rocks



Millstone grit walls. The Colne valley.



# Striding through York

## EACH WALK IS A GHOST WALK

York. Broad daylight, sunlight  
Reflected from rising river-water  
Into your shaded eyes. Ghosts

In daylight narrowed by old walls  
Glance into the evening as I walk by:  
Vikings, merchants, a boy running

From the past with a stolen apple,  
A woman carrying folded cleaning  
For the people in the big house.

I look, listen, make notes  
In the day's bulging notebook:  
Each walk in York is a ghost walk.





## THE NEW HEELS, THE OLD STONES

The new heels, the old stones.  
 Sat in my room on that first night  
 The new light, the old sun.  
 And looked through the window  
 The new day, the old York.

*And never thought I would see this:  
 The new smile, the old tears.  
 The learning rolled in my hand,  
 Carried through the streets  
 To a Yorkshire tomorrow.*

## HOW YORK THINKS

Lean your head to a York wall  
And listen to the city think.

York thinks slowly, takes its time  
Over each deliberation, builds  
An idea from prehistory, through  
History into memory, along  
Shambles and railway line,  
Riverside and Minster aisle,  
Season built on season, year  
Built on year. Listen, listen.





YORK THE YORK

Walk the York  
Talk the York  
Walk the Yark  
Talk the Yark  
Tark the Yark  
Tark t'Yark  
TarktYark.





# A Bradford striding



Striders footprints Centenary Square Bradford



Striders Centenary Square Bradford



Illingworth's mill Bradford

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Painted strider Bradford

These ghostly walkers  
Still lift their feet  
And put them down  
In a rhythm that never  
dies

Ghost walkers:  
No pounding sound  
Of feet. Just silence.  
And movement  
Always movement.

Walking  
Is thinking  
On your feet

Walking  
Is laughing  
On the way



Weaving shed and terraced housing view from Listers Mill



Painted striders Bradford



## STRIDING

Evening striding is the best. Pass the cricket club and see a ball bowled, a catch taken.  
Pass the chip shop and see a man in a white trilby stand with his arms folded, waiting  
for the moment of perfection.

Pass the kids on the bench tapping into the world.

Pass a lost dog sniffing for memories.

Pass the bus that then passes you.

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The snicket Bradford



Painted striders Bradford





Gable end Bradford

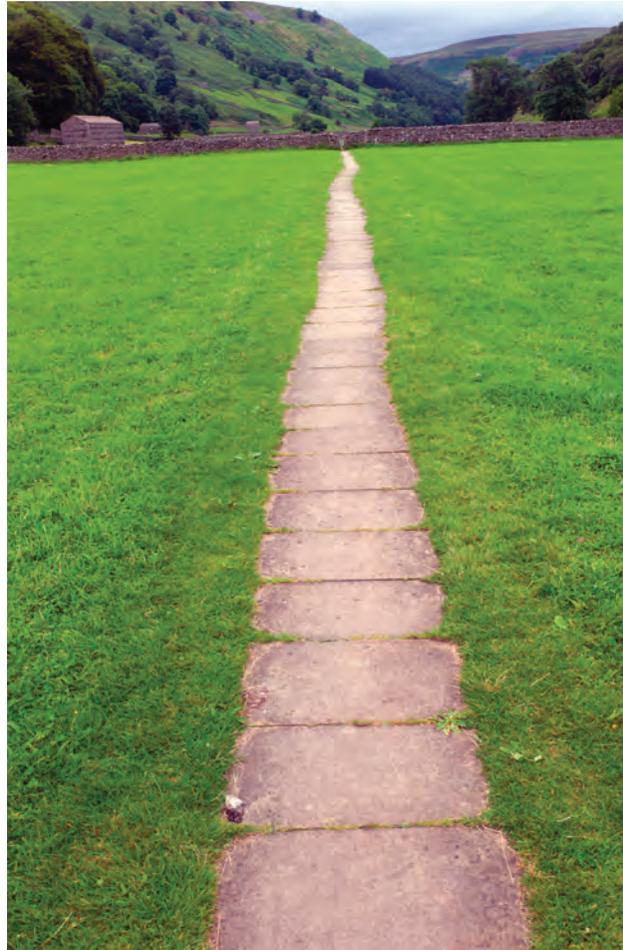


# Striding Swaledale

## STRIDING

A long walk across a landscape that remembers the footsteps of those who strode over it before; a surprise of birds hovering then swooping away faster than you can count them. The ghosts of the mill girls and pitmen who walked this way in the clenched mornings and exhausted evenings. A light that you can't define, but which seems to arrive, just on time, from the day before yesterday.

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Swaledale



Swaledale

## STRIDING

To the great force of Trudge I make obeisance in the rain. To the unseen pull of mud I sing songs that float to my cap's soaking neb. To the hovering presence of Stroll I put one foot in front of the other, again and again. To the choreographer of Stride I present the dance of the boots that never ends, that tightens the laces and clarts slap-dab in the treads, slap-dab and worse.

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Swaledale

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Swaledale



Swaledale

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Swaledale



Swaledale



Swaledale



Swaledale

# Striding the Yorkshire coalfields above and below ground

Early morning striding is the best.

Down the darkened path past the spread of ideas and consequences that a street-light consists of.

Past milk bottles gleaming on steps: full, empty.

Past the kitchen and the man filling the kettle.

Down the hill to where the pit used to be, where the huge hoppers of coal crossed the road on wires, where the Pit Bus passed, spraying mud and dust.

An ancient settee waits in a garden and mist enjoys a half-life in the valley.

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Rossington Colliery



## DRIFTED

Stand here and listen. Earth shifts,  
Slightly, as though a butterfly  
Has landed on a leaf's shadow  
Mistaking it for a leaf.

*Men worked under here. Beneath this.  
History has drifted this mine away  
Like water washes away that pattern of shells.*



The ground lifts momentarily  
Then sinks again. The movement  
Is so small as to be  
Almost no movement at all.

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### PIT SONNET: TREES

An underground forest is where I'm walking  
Crouched down, bent over, a question mark;  
There's a murmur somewhere the faint side of  
talking

And shadows of branches hang low in the dark.  
Trees made this coal. A swamp where I squat,  
A fossilized leaf is caught in my light.

I'm further in forest. I'm sweating, red hot.  
And the air is ancient, squeezed and tight.  
This walk through the forest is taking me back  
To a time when the forest is all you could see  
I click off my light and the hard wood turns  
black

And I can't see the coal for the tree.  
Each time I light the fire, history starts to burn.  
Trees have much to teach. I have much to learn.



### THE BACK, BENT

In the half-dark  
 The back, bent.  
 In the half-bent  
 Light, the back  
 Bends, half-aware  
 Of the dull pain  
 Of repetition, history.

In the half-light  
 The back, bending  
 In the half-awake  
 Light, the back  
 Bending, half-awash  
 With the harsh pain  
 Of history, memory.

In the half-gleam  
 The back glistens  
 With half-sweat,  
 Half-dirt; bends,  
 Listens for half-shifts  
 In the earth above;  
 Ear bent, rock-sweat.





Spring walk  
Summer walk  
Autumn walk  
Winter walk  
At a seasoned pace

The trees grow  
As we walk  
As we grow  
As we walk  
By the trees

## YORKSHIRE ELEMENTS

### WATER

Soaks you, Yorkshire does.  
Drizzle like a dripping tap  
Or a downpour wetting you through.  
And that word *water*  
Doesn't seem wet enough:  
Try *watter*.  
*Watter*: that's better. That's wetter.  
Wet watter.



## STONE

Feel it, under your shoes.  
See it, in the buildings that seem to say:  
We're here. We're Yorkshire. We're stone.  
As you walk on the paths and the pavement  
It waits, underneath, solid, ancient, older  
than any words you might use to describe it  
except by heck, by gum, by stooan.



## FIRE

Fire on the moors and the smoke  
Waves like Auntie Nelly's old scarf did  
That time she ran to tell us  
There was a fire engine coming.

Fire on the moors and the flames,  
If they had voices, would sound like her,  
Urgent, burning, Yorkshire:  
Can't tha hear't tingalarie?





AIR

Up here in the Dales, there's plenty of it.

Air, everywhere you look. Air.

Or 8 for breeathin wi.

Mornings, it's sweetest.

Just a few birds have flapped through it. Air:

Or 8 for singin' wi.

Fill your lungs with it, then

Run with it back to your house.

## WEATHER

All the elements at once, here:  
 Water spraying your face,  
 Air speeding over your hands  
 Sun bursting through for a second,  
 Burning, briefly burning,  
 Then hiding behind the clouds  
 solid as rock, grey as stone:  
 Ivry season i'wun day.



## THE TEN BEST STRIDES

The stride you almost didn't take but at the last minute your boots called you and you answered.

The stride that began in despair and ended in Tong.

The stride that went to places on the map's fold or by the atlas's staple.

The stride that seemed to walk itself.

The stride that seemed circular but ended up being square.

The stride that took you to the very edge of Lancashire and then hesitated and turned back.

The stride where you sang all the way.

The stride that made itself up as it went along.

The stride that began in winter and ended in a kind of hesitant spring.

The stride that made you want to stride again and again.

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