

Claire Warden

Ugliness and Beauty: the Politics of Landscape in Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole*

The multi-spatial landscape of the North-West of England (Manchester–Salford and the surrounding area) provides the setting for Walter Greenwood's 1934 play *Love on the Dole*. Both the urban industrialized cityscape and the rural countryside that surrounds it are vital framing devices for the narrative – these spaces not simply acting as backdrops but taking on character roles. In this article Claire Warden reads the play's presentation of the North through the concept of landscape theatre, on the one hand, and Raymond Williams's city–country dialogism on the other, claiming that *Love on the Dole* is imbued with the revolutionary possibility that defines the very landscape in which it is set. From claustrophobic working-class kitchen to the open fields of Derbyshire, *Love on the Dole* has a sense of spatial ambition in which Greenwood regards all landscapes as tainted by the industrial world while maintaining their capacity to function independently. Ugliness and beauty, capitalist hegemony and socialistic hopefulness reside simultaneously in this important under-researched example of twentieth-century British theatre, thereby reflecting the ambivalent, shifting landscape of the North and producing a play that cannot be easily defined artistically or politically. Claire Warden is a Lecturer in Drama at the University of Lincoln. Her work focuses on peripheral British performances in the early to mid-twentieth century. She is the author of *British Avant-Garde Theatre* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) and is currently writing *Modernist and Avant-Garde Performance: an Introduction* for Edinburgh University Press, to be published in 2014.

Key terms: inter-war theatre, Manchester, landscape theatre, politics of theatre, naturalism.

THE NORTH-WEST of England is a space of shifting values, topographies, and identities, an area where politics, modernization, and economic ownership have always affected the material landscape. The major urban conurbations sit closely alongside some of the most breathtaking scenery in Britain. To the inhabitants of the conjoined yet fervently distinct cityscape of Manchester–Salford, the differentiation between the areas either side of the River Irwell – Manchester and Salford – is extremely important.

Yet, apart from the natural divide of the river, the two cities merge almost seamlessly together. In many ways this conjoined urban space has historically acted as a centre point. As Andrew Davies and Steven Fielding have it: 'Whilst industrialization went through its heroic phase, the two cities seemed to be blazing a trail, not only for the rest of the

country, but for the world'.¹ Beyond this hub, Greater Manchester stretches from Stockport in the south to Rochdale and Bury in the North; and these smaller urban areas sprawling together form a larger conurbation.

Further out from the city, the green fields of Cheshire, the rugged hills of Derbyshire, the mountains of north Wales, and even the beaches of Blackpool and Southport, are within easy reach. This diverse topography, and particularly the relationship between Manchester–Salford and the countryside that surrounds it, was important for mid-twentieth-century writer Walter Greenwood. He was born and raised in Salford, and his play *Love on the Dole* (1934), adapted in collaboration with Ronald Gow from his 1933 novel of the same title, is situated in Manchester–Salford and the surrounding rural area. In this play, landscape becomes a

composite space of different (at times, contradictory) values, experiences, and meanings.

In its presentation of landscape, *Love on the Dole* both pre-empts and can be read through recent theoretical approaches which point to the complexity of the landscape–theatre relationship. The ‘theatre’ as a static building is clearly and inextricably associated with the rise of the urban cityscape. But the ‘theatre’ as a folk form has a myriad of rural and agricultural associations. Aside from theatrical buildings and traditions, landscape can be (in its various guises) a significant theatrical device.

It can simply provide a visual background or, more likely, intrinsically suggest particular narratives or themes. In order to bring new insights into Greenwood’s play, in this article I will tap into the broad, interdisciplinary field of cultural landscape studies, understanding the Northern landscape as the ‘multifarious interplay between the land and human adaptations to and indeed of it’,² with this description as relevant for the rural environment as it is for the urban.

In doing so, I work directly out of the intentions and methods of Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs in their seminal edited collection *Land/Scene/Theater* (2002). Many essays in this collection focus on the dramatic text rather than the text in performance as such. This is a deliberate decision, as a great many practitioners, directors, and theoreticians have explored the landscape in terms of set design and staging. Usefully, they suggest that ‘what is more difficult to discern, and therefore more important to theorize, is the landscape in the text’.³

For Chaudhuri and Fuchs propose something more than simply accepting landscape as a background for action; indeed, they claim that ‘on the threshold of modernism, theatre began to manifest a new spatial dimension, both visually and dramaturgically, in which landscape for the first time held itself apart from character and became a figure on its own’.⁴ Here is landscape as an almost anthropomorphized character rather than a passive backdrop.

This multi-faceted conception of landscape is at the very centre of this article; and

architect Paul Groth’s understanding of the ‘cultural landscape’ perhaps best describes the way that Manchester–Salford and the surrounding countryside are presented in *Love on the Dole* in his claim that ‘landscape meanings can be interpreted as noble, nostalgic, or uplifting expressions of choice and group life, and they can also be seen as those of economic exploitation, racism, capitalist accumulation, and lack of chance’.⁵

What is interesting about Groth’s description is that these almost oxymoronic ways of imagining and reading landscape reside symbiotically. In accordance, the landscape of a play like *Love on the Dole* can be read through Groth’s conclusions not as empty space but, rather, imbued with political ideologies. Manchester–Salford is at once a site of socio-economic suppression, an image of hegemonic systems of governance, and simultaneously the fertile ground of potential working-class solidarity and eventual revolution.

The Battle of Bexley Square

In treating the landscape in *Love on the Dole* as a dramatic character, as active and tangible as any human character, we find that the Northern cityscape becomes a commentator, reflecting the socio-political reality of both the actors on the stage and the audience watching. While Manchester–Salford was a centre of commercial production, this particular cityscape has also always been at the heart of left-wing political agitation. Raymond Williams’s significant 1973 study, *The Country and the City*, compares Manchester and London, pointing to the particular importance of the former for the history of class relations and the growth of capitalism: ‘Manchester is at the centre of explicit industrial conflicts in ways that London was not’.⁶

In addition, Friedrich Engels’s influential *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844) focused on this specific Northern urban space as a political and economic hub. Engels referred to the area as ‘the classic soil on which English manufacture has achieved its masterwork and from which all labour movements emanate, namely, south Lancashire with its central city Manchester’.⁷

Dependent on the division between the owners of industry and the workers, Manchester–Salford became a commercial centre and, consequentially, a site of potential political unrest. As Marx and Engels suggested in *The Communist Manifesto*, ‘The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy.’⁸ The industrialized city is central to the creation of this working class and thereby the efficacy of any potential political revolution. This potential largely remained latent, but from the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 onwards Manchester–Salford retained a prominent position in the politically engaged British consciousness.

But it would be far too easy to place the rural space in contrast to this, to make the assumption that, while the city is at the heart of any possible political revolution, the country is a place of peaceful escape and unsullied tradition. Groth immediately questions this assumption by challenging traditional understandings of landscape in all its myriad forms, saying ‘city, suburb, countryside, and even wildernesses are all human constructs, all touched by human management. All are cultural landscapes.’⁹ No landscape stands apart from human interaction, even the most

desolate moor or isolated tundra. In the broadest sense, all landscapes are political.

Two separate incidents of the 1930s provide case studies and both can be read as political performances in their own rights; both had music at their centre and the Northern ‘sets’ were vital to the efficacy of the protests. The first, the Battle of Bexley Square, took place in Manchester on 1 October 1931. Well-known protesters Eddie and Ruth Frow provide some background for this event:

In 1930, unemployment in Salford had shot up to one in four being registered out of work. By 1931, it was almost one-third of the adult population and conditions were grim.¹⁰

The Battle of Bexley Square was a response to a number of political issues, both national (the means test – an assessment to identify whether an individual could receive unemployment benefits) and local (housing conditions in the Manchester area). Protesters came up against a strong police force and there were a number of severe injuries. The Frows continue,

The demonstrators, having gone to protest against what they considered to be a gross injustice and to



Contemporary newspaper photo of the ‘Battle of Bexley Square’, 1931.

present a petition to their elected representatives, had found themselves forced to fight against a well-fed and trained army.¹¹

This specifically city-based event was theatricalized in *Love on the Dole* and, indeed, the final scene focuses on the protest which Mrs Bull describes as ‘a bloody war!’¹² Ewan MacColl, co-founder of local agit-prop theatre group the Red Megaphones, took part in this demonstration. Of the subsequent feelings after the mounted police attacked, MacColl recalled, ‘until now the marchers have been concerned only to defend themselves, but now the mood changes: a note of fierce hatred, deep and vengeful, is heard as the marchers break *en masse* through the barricades. The square has become a battlefield.’¹³ Greenwood’s biographical account corroborates MacColl’s narrative:

Helmets began to roll, truncheons were drawn and used; wrestlings, punchings, women reaching out to scratch and claw; placards being snatched and smashed, men going down, then, above the uproar.¹⁴

The language of conflict is used in all three distinctly theatrical descriptions of the scene. In a period defined by international tension, here is an example of local, intra-city hostility. It points to the inevitable enmity of a city rooted in such pronounced class differences and such determined commercial interests.

The Mass Trespass on Kinder Scout

In light of the theoretical basis of socialism as engendered by an industrialized proletariat, such an urban-based event is unsurprising. However, only a year later, a strikingly similar event occurred just a few miles away on Kinder Scout in the Derbyshire countryside: the Mass Trespass of 1932, when demonstrators from local villages and the larger cities flooded out on to the hills advocating freedom in the countryside, the opening up of so-called private paths. It was a war over land ownership. Again Ewan MacColl participated in this event, afterwards writing a now famous local song, ‘The Manchester Rambler’:

I’m a rambler, I’m a rambler from Manchester way
I get all my pleasure the hard moorland way
I may be a wage slave on Monday
But I am a free man on Sunday.¹⁵

The chorus of this song points to a number of key themes for the current article. The city is a place of capitalist oppression while the countryside denotes freedom and liberation from the urban everyday. Yet the freedom of the countryside is an overtly political concept. It does not suggest an uncritical escape, but rather a propagation of individuality; one is no longer a ‘slave’ but a ‘free man’, and such a transformation is an active challenge to the hegemony. Ben Harker describes the conclusion of the Trespass as follows:

Triumphant, the marchers gathered on the peak before returning to Hayfield singing ‘The Red Flag’ and ‘The Internationale’ and shouting ‘Down with the landlords and ruling class and up with the workers!’¹⁶

Harker’s description is reminiscent of the 1930s urban protests. The songs are explicitly Communist in association; the challenge is for and by the workers. Despite a few arrests, in this instance, the country becomes a *more* successful revolutionary space than the city, with this (again, overtly theatrical) event contributing to real changes in law.

Reimagining the Battle of Bexley Square and the Mass Trespass, it immediately becomes clear that *both* the city and the country were implicated in the 1930s disturbances. These are landscapes that can be read in diverse ways, interrupted by politics, class relations, economic tensions; they correspond to Fuchs and Chaudhuri’s suggestion that ‘the assumed singularity of landscape, as implied, for instance, by the common notion of landscape as space that can be taken in at a single glance, has been strongly contested’.¹⁷

The whole diverse, multi-spatial Northern landscape was implicated in the socio-economic tensions of the 1930s. In fact the city and country become increasingly difficult to separate with the very descriptions of the city underscored with images of the country. Most famous, of course, is Friedrich



The mass trespass on Kinder Scout, 1932.

Engels's notion of the 'classic soil', a fascinating description of the Northern city that intrinsically points towards the interdependent relationship between city and country. For beneath the sprawling city is soil, the very essence of the natural landscape.

Interdependence of City and Country

As Lewis Mumford expressed in his celebrated study, *The Culture of Cities* (1938), 'the story of every city can be read through a succession of deposits; the sedimentary strata of history'.¹⁸ Landscape is multi-layered, imbued with economics, societal changes, and power relations. Further, this layering effect is not necessarily evolutionary. For J. B. Priestley, just three years earlier, Manchester–Salford was not an enlightened, urban city, but visibly returning to a pre-civilized terrain; using Mumford's terms, the deposits seemed to be overwhelming any sense of ordered strata. Priestley

insisted that Manchester exists on an adage: 'More money, more muck; more muck, more money.'¹⁹ The 'money' and 'muck' collect on top of one another, continuously vying for pre-eminence while actually remaining inextricably (economically) connected.

This notion of a layered landscape, geological strata that create a mixed terrain, was taken up by Greenwood in his autobiography, in which he remarks: 'The hideous face of the town under which the field lies buried is of brick, the clay for which was dug out of the vanished meadows where once the skylark sang.'²⁰ It is not just that the city was built on the countryside, but the substance of the country is transformed into the key materials of the city. And as the natural substances are burned and refined, the 'muck' again covers the city, producing a composite ecosystem. This new 'soil' enables growth, the rooting of the ugly 'weeds' of the polluted cityscape, but also the germination of political engagement.

While *Love on the Dole* does not directly state alternatives or remedies for the scarred landscape, it consistently presents the issues to educate the audience, potentially enabling them to imagine new possibilities and solutions. Greenwood's play, an important, under-researched example of 1930s landscape theatre, attempts to navigate the socio-political realities of the inter-war Northern space.

Love on the Dole and Urban Naturalism

To provide a little necessary narrative background, *Love on the Dole* focuses on a 1930s family, the Hardcastles. The family members are inextricably linked (one might even say trapped) within a specific urban landscape: Hunky Park, Salford. While there are moments of joy, laughter, and love, the play largely chronicles the increase in unemployment and pressures of growing poverty in this part of the cityscape. Against this backdrop, the audience witnesses the gradual dissolution of the family as the hardship becomes almost unbearable.

Greenwood placed two relationships at the heart of the play. The first, the romance between Harry Hardcastle and Helen, begins with hopeful expectation but ends with the loss of Harry's job, an unwanted pregnancy, and an absence of available housing.²¹ The second, the relationship between Harry's sister Sally and the politically engaged Larry Meath, concludes with the death of Larry and Sally's sacrificial submission to local bookmaker and entrepreneur Sam Grundy in order to secure jobs for her increasingly desperate family.

In the 1930s it was an extremely popular play. First performed by the Rusholme Rep Theatre in Manchester in 1934, by 1935 it was enjoying a run in London. In 1936 there was a version in New York, and by 1937 the play had also been seen in Paris. Later there was a successful film version (1941) and since then the play has enjoyed a number of revivals, most recently at Bolton's Octagon Theatre (2010), only a few miles from Hunky Park. Its success is quite remarkable for what is a noticeably local play.²²

The limited scholarship on Greenwood has focused on the play/novel's political ambiguities and rather gloomy presentation of an inarticulate, uneducated, and reactionary working class. Stephen Constantine, for example, centres his argument on the make-up of Greenwood's audience. The readership for the original novel and, indeed, the audience for the play, were both predominantly middle class.²³ This claim is substantiated by Stephen Ross, who makes the more damning declaration that Greenwood was 'implicating himself in a bourgeois aesthetic ideology that subverts the novel's ostensibly progressive aims'.²⁴ Again his problem lies with Greenwood's audience: 'Catering to middle-class discursive epistemology and cultural awareness, Greenwood affirms middle-class values over working-class potential.'²⁵

However, both articles do acknowledge the novel/play's *potential* as a radical work. Ross claims that, although his caricatures undermine the political intention, 'Greenwood creates the possibility of resistance',²⁶ while Constantine concludes that, while *Love on the Dole* did not produce any profound changes in governmental policy, 'it is probable that it contributed to a shift in public opinion'.²⁷ Certainly the 1941 film, he claims, challenged middle-class assumptions about working-class identity and intention.²⁸

While there are problems such as Ross and Constantine outline, to relegate *Love on the Dole* to a category of reactionary melodrama or middle-class entertainment seems reductive. There is, necessarily, a political intention in this play, namely bringing a class-ridden, economically driven landscape to the stage, and engaging the audience with hidden working-class experience. In Larry Meath, the central advocate for political change, we have an extremely sympathetic hero, and his incarceration and death are less a consequence of any shortcomings in his theories and more a condemnation of the justice system.

While *Love on the Dole* has none of the buoyant optimism of, say, an agit-prop street sketch,²⁹ in its presentation of landscape and Northern spaces, the play is a challenge to a comfortable bourgeois audience and a



Stills from the 1941 film of *Love on the Dole*. Above: Sally (Deborah Kerr) with Larry (Clifford Evans). Below: street gossip with the Salford neighbours.



statement of solidarity with proletarian spectators.

Intimate Proletarian Spaces

Extricating Greenwood's play from the 'bourgeois melodrama' put-down, it can be loosely contextualized alongside a number of engaged, working-class, naturalistic theatrical narratives that appeared in broadly the same period, and which also situated their action within industrial landscapes. John Galsworthy's *Strife* (1909), for example, is set during a strike at a tinplate works, which is described very specifically as being 'on the borders of England and Wales'.³⁰ The set clearly illustrates the differences between classes, moving from the well-furnished dining room of the Manager's house in Act One to the kitchen of the Roberts's cottage in Act Two, 'very barely furnished, with a brick floor and white-washed walls, much stained with smoke'.³¹ The disparity between these two spaces makes broader political and economic comments.

D. H. Lawrence's *A Collier's Friday Night* (written in 1909, but unpublished until 1934 and unperformed until 1939) is another play that examines a specifically working-class environment. Like *Strife* the play is set in the kitchen/living room of a working man's house.³² Against this backdrop the Lambert family experience some of the same generational strains as the Hardcastles of *Love on the Dole*, with tension between the pitman father and his more educated children.

Then there is Robert Tressell's 1914 novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, adapted for the stage in 1936 by Tom Thomas of the Workers' Theatre Movement.³³ In a similar manner to *Strife*, the narrative theatricalizes the tension between the forces of capitalism and the working class. Like *Love on the Dole*, these plays rely heavily on landscape and spatial context in order to advocate distinctly left-wing positions. Cottage rooms, kitchens, and Tressell's factory provide microcosms for larger issues of class exploitation, ill health, and potential workers' solidarity. Small and personal spaces are implicated in far wider political systems.

A number of these working-class naturalist pieces appeared from the burgeoning Unity Theatre movement which had hubs across the UK. As an example, in 1938, just four years after Greenwood's play was premiered, Vance Marshall wrote *A.R.P.*, a piece that focused on a working-class London community against the backdrop of a rising fascist movement. Again the action takes place in a small working-class urban household where a disenfranchised family attempt to understand the complex ongoing political situation in Spain and, by connection, across Europe.³⁴

In 1947, Ena Lamont Stewart wrote *Men Should Weep*, based in the tenement blocks of Glasgow.³⁵ This play was, again, produced by a Unity theatre, and gives a constant feeling of claustrophobia. While characters do leave the small rooms of the Morrison family, the audience do not and the action is entirely played out within the confines of the grubby tenement. Sean O'Casey's 1924 *Juno and the Paycock* had focused on a similar two-room tenement in Dublin.³⁶

Intimate proletarian spaces are constant backdrops for the plays of Arnold Wesker. Though written considerably later, *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1958) begins in 1936; again, it is initially set in a working-class home, this time in the East End of London. Act Two moves forward ten years, when the Kahn family have moved into a council block in Hackney, and the play's twenty-year narrative eventually moves to 1956, presenting working-class Jewish experience through economic pressures and war, partly narrating the changes in working-class experience through the changes in set. As Wesker mentions in his stage directions, coinciding with the Kahns' move to the flat in Hackney, 'The working class is a little more respectable now, they have not long since voted in a Labour Government.'³⁷

Given its distinct Northern backdrop, focus on familial relationships, and constant sense that the landscape is transforming the characters' personalities and appearances, Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1958) is an extremely important example of this geographically based politics. It is a play

which, just like *Love of the Dole* some two decades earlier, bases its action specifically in the Salford cityscape and was produced by Theatre Workshop, a company that had its origins in Manchester–Salford, performing their agit-prop theatre (under the name the Red Megaphones) around the same time as Greenwood was writing *Love on the Dole*.

Despite the time lapse, the Manchester–Salford of Delaney’s play seems remarkably similar to the cityscape of *Love on the Dole* with its polluted river, poor housing, and the equally poor health of its occupants. On arriving at their new house, Jo and Helen note the terrible smell, the proximity of the slaughterhouse, the cold, and a lack of privacy that was previously examined in *Men Should Weep*.³⁸ Again, here are the small rooms, the encroaching cityscape, and, above both, broader ideological issues of inequality, poverty, and governmental responsibility.

What unites these predominantly naturalistic readings of industrialized landscapes is a determination to provide a provocative image of the twentieth-century city that is working-class, centred on the home (whether respectable and welcoming or meanly furnished and poorly built) and the place of work (the factory, the mill, or the pit). And all the playwrights’ settings and narratives were based partly or wholly on their own experiences, none more so than for Greenwood, whose own setting for *Love on the Dole* was based on his background in the Hanky Park area.

Again, like many of the other examples above, the narrative for *Love on the Dole* was influenced by Greenwood’s specific political experiences of this space. He recollected: ‘For us who were young the air was filled with tension. Pickets at the dock gates, pit heads and factories.’³⁹ It is this fraught excitement coupled with markedly real depictions of urban and rural space that really defines this play. It negotiates that difficult, permeable boundary between naturalism and melodrama, reacting to community experience in an increasingly tense industrialized space.

But – and here is the primary reason why *Love on the Dole* is worthy of a reappraisal – Greenwood’s play stands apart from all

these examples in its presentation of landscape. For Galsworthy, Marshall, Lawrence, Tressell, Wesker, and Stewart, the action takes place in a strikingly claustrophobic setting – sometimes single streets or particular tenements, sometimes simply one or two rooms. *Love on the Dole* ambitiously places a multi-spatial landscape on the stage, from the small house of the Hardcastles to the Salford streets to the local countryside – and, eventually (though only through suggestion) to the Welsh hills.

Furthermore, *Love on the Dole* ends with the terminal disintegration of the Hardcastle family. In its lack of a positive finale, Greenwood’s play is distinct from the humorous Mancunian satire of, say, Harold Brighouse’s *Hobson’s Choice* (1915)⁴⁰ or the upbeat revolutionary fervour of one of the Red Megaphones’ short agit-prop sketches.

In *Love on the Dole*, as in *Men Should Weep*, it seems that the industrialized space has finally overwhelmed any sense of hope or emancipation. It is, in many ways, a rather bleak tale of inescapable circumstances. So potential political change, though not entirely crushed, remains latent. Despite its rather disheartening finale, the play nonetheless retains a socialistic feel. The characters are overwhelmed by the capitalist landscape, but perhaps the audience need not be.

Grimy Beauty: the Capitalist Landscape

Despite the grimness of the landscape, Greenwood depicts beauty and hope in surprising places and, through this unconventional imagery, makes his strongest political intervention. Conventionally, ‘beauty’ is not a term that would be associated with the 1930s Northern city. Manchester–Salford is a place of ‘poverty and pawnshops and dirt and drink’,⁴¹ where ‘the town’s dark breath stained everything’.⁴² Williams suggests that the modern industrialized metropolis has ‘an oppressive and utilitarian uniformity’,⁴³ and Greenwood examined this overwhelming sense of dull monotony.

The play opens with a street meeting heard outside the Hardcastle house in which

the Speaker refers to 'grey, depressing streets, mile after mile of them'.⁴⁴ Greenwood set up the urban backdrop from the off, presenting it as a homogeneous collection of inadequate houses, where the colour seems to have been removed (or obscured) from the very brickwork. This is particularly noticeable in a surviving photographs of the original production – the interior of the Hardcastle house is dark and clearly lacking any privacy, with two neighbours peering through the window. It seems almost drained of colour.

Yet even here a flicker of beauty remains, with Larry referring to Sally as 'a flower in Hanky Park. A rose growing on a rubbish-heap'.⁴⁵ In this 'classic soil of Communism' is a single flower. It is a conventional even hackneyed image, but it presents the city in rural terms. With nostalgic yearning, Greenwood looked at the urbanization of Trafford Park and exclaimed, 'farewell, woodland ways and singing birds'.⁴⁶ He bemoaned the loss of the fruitful rural soil that has been covered by the city, but in the play a new flower is beginning to grow. Initially, then, the imagery of this play may appear clichéd, but in the face of overwhelming poverty, Sally represents a striking moment of beauty.

If directly applied to the Northern landscape, ugliness and beauty are less oppositional than one might imagine, a fact made clear in Larry and Sally's conversation as they walk in the hills. The two central characters escape the claustrophobic streets and journey into the Derbyshire countryside. Certainly they are moved by the natural beauty of their surroundings, but Sally is particularly struck by the sunset and asks, 'Why is it so red?'⁴⁷ Larry's response leads us to question the very notion of beauty:

They say it's the sunshine through the smoke. Hanky Park's over there – thirty miles away. It's a queer thing that all that foul smoke should make beauty for us up here.⁴⁸

The 'dirt and the smoke and the foul ugliness of it all'⁴⁹ provide an artificial yet beautiful sky. Most remarkable of all, surrounded by the detached beauty of the country landscape, it is the city, a place they both hate and wish to escape from, that really strikes them;

at this distance the city causes the countryside to appear more beautiful. One might expect the city to make the country more attractive only *by contrast*; that by comparing the polluted cityscape to the clean country air, the latter necessarily becomes all the more beautiful. Yet here the city directly impacts the countryside, making the already striking sunset more beguiling.

The Inescapable City

But the recurring image of the sinister city invades this trip later in the scene after Larry confides that he has lost his job. His fear of poverty and the need to postpone their impending wedding lead Sally to respond as follows:

It's different up here now the sun's gone down. I think this place has changed. It's growing dark – and, oh, Larry, I'm afraid – I'm afraid.⁵⁰

Despite the earlier synthetic beauty of the city, the urban landscape remains a terrifying space of incarceration. Interestingly, just as the sun was made more beautiful by the pollution, it has now been masked entirely by the encroaching cityscape.

In the 1941 film version of the play, this merging between the two spaces – the city and the country – is accentuated. At the end of Larry and Sally's trip into the hills the camera pans up to track the clouds. When it pans down again, the scene has changed; gone are the hills and trees, and in their place is one shadowy chimney, the brickwork indistinct in the polluted air. Again, it is as if the cityscape has infiltrated the very landscape of the country.

The city appears almost inescapable. The only real ways out of this urban space seem to be war (for the soldiers who will be conscripts) or death. There are, of course, other obvious, short-term escape mechanisms: drinking and gambling, while not able to provide physical escape, do afford a temporary diversion. These are themes taken up in Richard Hoggart's influential *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), which examines both in overtly escapist terms, in the belief that



Rare surviving photo of the original 1935 production, with two neighbours peering through the window.

participation in the pools or raffles is, at heart, a reflection of working-class superstition, a testing of 'luck'.⁵¹

Options – and 'Diversions'

Interestingly, this is exactly the term that Harry Hardcastle uses to describe his weekly bet with bookmaker, Sam Grundy: 'And if I'm lucky I'll buy you those shorts and anything else you want.'⁵² Drinking, too, is mentioned in Hoggart's text, and, while limited drinking is accepted as an important part of city life, 'drink is still regarded as the main pitfall for a working-class husband'.⁵³ While both are modes of fantasy, simultaneously they also trap the drinkers/gamblers in inescapable behaviours.

Both drinking and gambling are mentioned as accessible distractions in *Love on the Dole*. The first is most evident in the lives of the local women who add gin to their tea, the

latter in the omnipresent Sam Grundy, a representative figure of capitalism similar to Wilder in *Strife* or, perhaps, Peter, Helen's lover in *A Taste of Honey*, who could even be read as a caricature of the businessman, an image seen in many agit-prop sketches of the period. In this way Grundy is not so much a naturalistic character as a symbolic representation of unscrupulous capitalism. And so, just as the city itself interrupts Larry and Sally's idyllic countryside, Grundy makes an appearance as they walk through the hills. Sally sees his likeness in the clouds, a 'big black fellow with a bulge in him'.⁵⁴ It prefigures Sally's final capitulation to Grundy's own country 'idyll' in rural Wales.

As a young man Greenwood caught a glimpse of his fate: 'In this safe job which was mine for life I saw myself imprisoned for the rest of my days, like one of the skylarks the local miners kept in tiny string-topped cages.'⁵⁵ But for his central female character,

Sally, new employment brings a highly ambivalent possibility of escape. After Larry's death she takes up Grundy's offer of work. Though she is termed a 'housekeeper' there is a strong suggestion of prostitution. Grundy's house is in rural Wales and a neighbour, Mrs Bull, envies Sally's good fortune:

Three or four months at that there place of his in Wales, with only nice weather in front of her – why, woman, she'll be new-made over again.⁵⁶

Mrs Bull presents the country as an escape, a place of good health and freedom; her description reminds the audience of Larry and Sally's earlier walks through the Derbyshire countryside. There is, once again, an implicit suggestion of sunshine ('nice weather'), a potent and recurring image. But, with the overwhelming desire to retain a semblance of respectability, Sally is rejected by her father and mocked by most neighbours. She will be receiving money for her 'duties', so the countryside becomes implicated in the economic system of the city; just like Manchester–Salford, Wales is constructed by profit-oriented capitalism.

The conditions and lack of prospects in the city mean that Sally turns to the country, not (as might be expected and as Mrs Bull seems to suggest) as a landscape of peace and tranquillity, a place gently to recover from the death of Larry, but, rather, as a *commercial* possibility. Clearly Sally's 'escape' is inextricably connected to her position as not only a member of a disenfranchised working class but also as a working-class woman.

While soldiering and death are the options for men, prostitution and death seem the only way for women to leave Hanky Park. Women who stay in the industrialized cityscape seem to be particularly influenced by their environment. This is as true for Maggie Morrison in *Men Should Weep* and Mrs Boyle in *Juno and the Paycock* as it is for Mrs Hardcastle and the Hanky Park women. Sally's journey from Salford to rural Wales is, in many ways, a reversal of the long-standing country–urban migration; Sally is going to the country for work whereas in the

previous decades an inordinate number of people had made the opposite journey, arriving in the desperate slums of the industrialized city.

Whether Sally's journey is, in any real sense, an escape remains questionable. Indeed, if read through Larry's political teachings, she seems to have broken away geographically only to be newly implicated in the capitalist system; using Greenwood's own description, the 'skylark' has only swapped her cage. Given the feudalistic history of the countryside, this is unsurprising. Though Larry encourages Sally to leave Hanky Park, she is unable to escape to their rural utopia and, instead, is firmly implanted in what Larry refers to in his initial speech as 'the legacy of the Industrial Revolution',⁵⁷ a legacy that provides even fewer prospects for its women than for its men.

Altering and Creating Landscapes

Towards the end of *The Country and the City* Raymond Williams sums up as follows:

I have been arguing that capitalism, as a mode of production, is the basic process of most of what we know as the history of country and city. Its abstracted economic drives, its fundamental priorities in social relations, its criteria of growth and of profit and loss, have over several centuries altered our country and created our kinds of city.⁵⁸

Williams creates a dynamic sense of 'city' and 'country' in flux, historically determined and both implicated in the class struggle. *Love on the Dole* pre-emptively embodies Williams's conclusion. This is a play that cannot simply be consigned to a category of urban melodrama, bourgeois entertainment, or even as part of the early twentieth-century genre of working-class naturalist narratives. In its focus on landscape and the characters that move within it, *Love on the Dole* has a significant political agenda, to present the profound and inescapable connections between place and people, and to overcome the difficult aesthetic challenges of moving characters from space to space.

Anticipating later theories of landscape theatre, *Love on the Dole* illustrates 'the pro-

gressive exchange of position enacted in these plays between figure and ground – in other words, between character and landscape'.⁵⁹ Both the city and the country are highly subjectivized, imagined almost exclusively through the changing perceptions of the characters. This leads to intrinsically complex impressions of landscape; the polluted city is interrupted with moments of beauty; the country becomes a revolutionary space; and the relationship between the two becomes an elaborate dialogism.

Throughout, the Northern city is an obsession, at times a terrifying, haunting spectre and the site of working-class subjugation, but also the centre of potential revolutionary change. The country is not only a landscape of escape and uncritical relaxation; neither is the city purely a horrific polluted space; indeed all spaces in the multifarious landscape of the North-West of England seem inescapably bound up with the socio-political tensions of society in the 1930s.

Notes and References

1. Andrew Davies and Steven Fielding, ed., *Workers' Worlds: Cultures and Communities in Manchester and Salford, 1880–1939* (Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 1.
2. Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri, ed., *Land/Scapel/Theater* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2002), p. 2.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
5. Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi, ed., *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* (Yale University Press, 1997), p. 6.
6. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Hogarth, 1993 [1973]), p. 219.
7. Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 82.
8. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 1987 [1848]), p. 104.
9. Groth and Bressi, p. 5.
10. Edmund and Ruth Frow, *The Battle of Bexley Square* (Working Class Movement Library, 1994), p. 6.
11. Frow, p. 18.
12. Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, in *Plays of the Thirties: Volume 1* (London: Pan, 1966), p. 182.
13. Ewan MacColl, *Journeyman* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1990), p. 198.
14. Walter Greenwood, *There was a Time* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), p. 222.
15. Benny Rothman, *1932 Kinder Trespass: a Personal View of the Kinder Scout Mass Trespass* (Cheshire: Willow, 1982), p. 9.
16. Ben Harker, 'Ewan MacColl and the 1932 Mass Trespass', *History Workshop Journal*, No. 59 (2005), p. 223.
17. Fuchs and Chaudhuri, p. 12.
18. Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953 [1938]), p. 223.
19. J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: William Heinemann, 1935), p. 274.
20. Greenwood, *There was a Time*, p. 24.
21. Interestingly for our argument here, in the 1941 film version of *Love on the Dole* Harry and Helen also visit Blackpool, the vibrant lights of the seaside town standing in sharp contrast to the drab city. See *Love on the Dole*, dir. John Baxter, 1941, online at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdzF5LoF_10>, accessed 21 Jan 2012.
22. For the early history of this play see Ronald Gow, *Looking Back*, Walter Greenwood Archive, University of Salford, undated.
23. Stephen Constantine, 'Love on the Dole and its Reception in the 1930s', *Literature and History*, VIII, No. 2 (Autumn 1982), p. 234.
24. Stephen Ross, 'Authenticity Betrayed: the "Idiotic Folk" of Love on the Dole', *Cultural Critique*, No. 56 (2003), p. 192.
25. Ross, p. 205.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Constantine, p. 244.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
29. See Ewan MacColl and Howard Goorney, *Agit-Prop to Theatre Workshop: Political Playscripts 1930–50* (Manchester University Press, 1986).
30. John Galsworthy, *Strife* (London: Methuen, 1984).
31. Galsworthy, p. 19.
32. D. H. Lawrence, *Three Plays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 19.
33. Tom Thomas, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Richards, 1936).
34. Vance Marshall, A.R.P., 2nd draft with revisions, Unity Theatre Archive, V&A, THM/9/7/11, 1938.
35. Ena Lamont Stewart, *Men Should Weep* (London: Samuel French, 1983).
36. Sean O'Casey, *Juno and the Paycock and The Plough and the Stars* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972).
37. Arnold Wesker, *Plays 1* (London: Methuen, 2001), p. 33.
38. Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey* (London: Methuen, 2008), p. 8–11.
39. Greenwood, *There was a Time*, p. 54.
40. Harold Brighouse, *Hobson's Choice* (London: Heinemann, 1964).
41. Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, p. 145.
42. Greenwood, *There was a Time*, p. 24.
43. Williams, p. 223.
44. Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, p. 119.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
46. Greenwood, *There was a Time*, p. 18.
47. Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, p. 161.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, p. 123.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
51. Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976 [1957]), p. 138.
52. Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, p. 130.
53. Hoggart, p. 98.
54. Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, p. 161.
55. Greenwood, *There was a Time*, p. 127.
56. Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, p. 187.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
58. Williams, p. 302.
59. Fuchs and Chaudhuri, p. 31.