

***A Rumoured City: New Poets from Hull*, edited by Douglas Dunn (Bloodaxe, 1982)**

Poetry, like prose, happens anywhere. Hull got its clearance on this from Andrew Marvell many years ago; and if that singular Member of Parliament would have little in common with today's ancient and modern city lodged unexpectedly in the triangle of flat country between the Humber and the North Sea, it is still as good a place to write as any.

Better, in fact, than some. For a place cannot produce poems: it can only not prevent them, and Hull is good at that. It neither impresses nor insists. When your train comes to rest in Paragon Station against a row of docile buffers, you alight with an end-of-the-line sense of freedom. Signs in foreign languages welcome you. Outside is a working city, yet one neither clenched in the blackened grip of the industrial revolution nor hiding behind a cathedral to pretend it is York or Canterbury. Unpretentious, recent, full of shops and special offers like a television commercial, it might be Australia or America, until you come upon Trinity House or the Dock Offices. For Hull has its own sudden elegancies.

People are slow to leave it, quick to return. And there are others who come, as they think, for a year or two, and stay a lifetime, sensing that they have found a city that is in the world, yet sufficiently on the edge of it to have a different resonance. Behind Hull is the plain of Holderness, lonelier and lonelier, and after that the birds and lights of Spurn Head, and then the sea. One can go ten years without seeing these things, yet they are always there, giving Hull the air of having its face half-turned towards distance and silence, and what lies beyond them.

These poems are not about Hull, yet it is unseen in all of them, the permission of a town that lets you write.

Philip Larkin