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In his poetry, Cumbrian writer Norman Nicholson (1914–1987) makes a case for the boundaries of defined and familial spaces. His 'boundary' of choice is the southern stretch of land between the Lake District National Park and the Irish sea. His life was one characterised by living on the edge of the National Park, even though some of his life passed in the period before the designation of the Park in 1951, and his wider poetry reflects a state of liminality in his thinking as a result. In his 1954 collection *The Pot Geranium*, there are conflicts with the edge of the Park and his home in Millom, just outside of the Park, as well as with the county of Cumbria more widely, and the Irish Sea.[1] Arguably, the main tensions in his poems arise from the relationship between his hometown of Millom and the Ironworks that were built on the periphery of the town, next to the Duddon estuary, in the nineteenth century. David Boyd writes of the Ironworks and related industry, 'The iron ore mines and the ironworks were the very reason for the town and the community coming into being and they had formed its lifeblood for the past century'; the presence of the Ironworks was fundamental to the fabric of life in the town, and still holds an important role in the history of Millom today.[2]

In his article 'The Second Chance', written for *The Listener* in September 1963, Nicholson describes Millom as 'a town with a jagged edge. There were wedges of wasteland driven hard between the houses'.[3] His description of the town as 'jagged' suggests that the boundary was raw and a work in progress; a harsh reality for those living in the small mining community. This boundary defines the Millom and South Cumberland space for Nicholson, as well as his personal emotional interaction with the landscape he labels as 'home'. The Ironworks permeate his home life intensely, and *The Pot Geranium* collection displays the hallmarks of a life lived in the shadow of a dominant industry. The boundary between the

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[1] It should be noted that, in Nicholson's lifetime, Cumbria was known separately as 'Cumberland' to the south and west, and 'Westmorland' to the north and east of the modern-day county.

[2] David Boyd, *Norman Nicholson: A Literary Life* (Great Britain: Berforts Information Press, 2015), p. 18.

[3] Norman Nicholson, 'The Second Chance', *The Listener*, 05 September 1963, p. 343.

Ironworks and the town of Millom also speaks to wider tensions which Nicholson draws upon in his poetry. The poet acutely explores the relationship between man and the landscape in his work, oftentimes choosing to show man as exploitative and somewhat violent toward the space. Andrew Gibson terms the area Nicholson writes about as the 'Atlantic Edge' and argues that the space 'fairly comprehensively determines the character of Nicholson's vision and the substance of what he has to say'.[4] Gibson also notes that Nicholson is unwilling to look outwards, and thus I would suggest that the boundaries that Nicholson creates in his poetry between Millom and the Ironworks not only prohibit his interaction with what is beyond the realms of the town and wider area, but also work hard to keep his gaze inward to such a specific strip of the British landscape, toward the edges prevalent on the outskirts of Millom town.

The collection, perhaps oddly, does also contain a series of poems best termed as 'otherworldly'. Whilst these poems take the reader and the poet away from the familiar grounds of Millom town and the Ironworks, they serve to demonstrate Nicholson's mode of thinking. The poet is either intensely focussed on his hometown, or he is otherwise dreaming of otherworldly spheres. The poems, including 'The Unseen Centre', 'The Undiscovered Planet', and 'The Expanding Universe', serve to widen the perspective of the reader, who is invited to think cosmically about man's place in the world, which perhaps links to Nicholson's wider environmental concerns. The otherworldly poems force the view of both reader and writer upwards, away from the small strip of British coastline we are otherwise focussed on in the collection, offering a wider view of the world than that available at home in Millom. In a short poem — 'The Unseen Centre' — the reader is asked to consider the moon (personified) which 'never sees the world | Round which she circles backward'.[5] As the poem closes, Nicholson maps the moon's experience onto the human experience, commenting that perhaps humans 'do not know | The unseen centre round which our bodies go' (ll.11–12). This poem demonstrates Nicholson's intensity of feeling over mankind's possible ignorance of nature and his place in it. Despite the poem's stated focus on the moon, his redirection of the reader's attention to the centres of their own orbits underlines the significance of specific physical space to his poetics.

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[4] Andrew Gibson, 'At the Dying Atlantic's Edge: Norman Nicholson and the Cumbrian Coast', in *Coastal Works: Cultures of the Atlantic Edge*, ed. by Nicholas Allen, Nick Groom, and Jos Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 77–92 (p. 80).

[5] Norman Nicholson, 'The Unseen Centre', in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Neil Curry (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2008), p. 210. Further references to poems by Norman Nicholson will be abbreviated in the text.

Today, what remains of the Ironworks in Millom amounts to a nature reserve on the very edge of the town, hemmed in by the Duddon Estuary. Visitors and locals can walk around the site, read tourist information boards, and see the scant remains of an industry long lost. While there is no fanfare at the site about this key part of Millom's history, Nicholson frequently wrote of the importance of the Ironworks in the lives of the people of Millom. When the Ironworks were finally closed in late 1968, Nicholson commented in *Greater Lakeland*:

> One hundred years of continuous production of iron has come suddenly to a stop. Reporters, television cameramen and others flocked to the town like sightseers at an accident, and the picture they gave to the public was one of a dying town on the edge of nowhere, full of disconsolate people trudging along streets of decaying terraced houses.[6]

Nicholson wrote of how the dying town of Millom reflected how the Ironworks site was responsible for the community's existence, and that the townspeople were somewhat lost with its closure. Just metres away from the Ironworks, down Devonshire Road, the houses of Millom begin, with little separating the Ironworks from the homes of its former workers. The boundary between the two spaces is blurred, perhaps denoting the close connection between work and home life that was present when the Ironworks were running in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This boundary also speaks to the immense influence of the Ironworks, and of the rock underlying the landscape, in the fabric appearance of the town itself. Indeed, of the closure of the Ironworks in 1968, David Boyd notes, 'The Ironworks closure thus had obvious implications for all kinds of immense human suffering to the unfortunate former blast furnacemen, all of their dependents, and, ultimately, for the whole town'.[7] Millom, in essence, was a town bound by its Ironworks and associated quarries.

Nicholson seldom left Millom, in what is now Southern Cumbria. He spent his life in a terraced house in the town centre, which shaped his perspective on his immediate landscape significantly. Black Combe looms large over Millom to the north, and the town is hemmed into the south and west by the Irish Sea. To the far north lie the mountains and lakes of the Lake District, and Millom itself is segregated from much of the rest of southern Cumbria to the east by the Duddon Estuary. In Nicholson's time, there was only a single road leading down to this secluded section of Cumbrian coastline, and even today, access to the area surrounding Millom requires a decently long journey from other parts of the county. In his prose *Greater Lakeland* (1969), Nicholson wrote of Millom, ‘Yet, even in its isolation, Millom is quite typical of Greater Lakeland as a whole. For the area has always been physically detached from the rest of Britain’.[8] As such, Millom’s geographical location places it on several boundaries. The parameters of the boundaries identified in Nicholson’s work — particularly that between his home in the town and the Ironworks on the outskirts of Millom — are constantly in flux which creates a sense of instability and a lack of self-definition in the poet’s writings.

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[6] Norman Nicholson, *Greater Lakeland*, (London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1969), p. 146.
[7] David Boyd, *Norman Nicholson*, p. 23.

His poetry creates a harsh beauty in the area, which is juxtaposed against the antecedent writings of Wordsworth and his colleagues, who focussed mainly on the idylls of central Lakeland to the north. The Millom area is fundamental to Nicholson’s life, and his writings work to centralise the space on a universal level by exhibiting acute sentiment for the space, exhibited in the later work of Yi-Fu Tuan — ‘Place can acquire deep meaning for the adult through the steady accretion of sentiment over the years’.[9] Nicholson’s lifetime of work demonstrates this growing sentiment, given that both his prose and poetry focus on a life lived in and around Millom. Nicholson’s life was spent in the town, save for a short spell in a sanatorium in the south, and so he likely developed sentiment for the place due to its role in forming his identity. In his autobiography *Wednesday Early Closing* (1975), the poet writes that ‘I thought of myself as a Millom boy, not as a Cumbrian’.[10] Here, Nicholson demonstrates a self-definition that is centred on a particular small mining town, not the wider county.

However, the poems of *The Pot Geranium* seem conflicted in their author’s feeling for the space and for the Ironworks themselves. Nicholson displays his inner conflict by blurring the boundaries between the town and the Ironworks, creating a sense of community sprung from the landscape. He finds within his home the characteristics of sentimental attachment to space that any reader could relate to their own home landscape, whilst also demonstrating a level of uncertainty toward the industry that defined his. The poet also creates human images from static objects and scenes in the landscape, and frequently uses the images of children to emphasise his sentiment for, as well as the emotional turmoil of, the space. This ambivalence towards the Ironworks is indicative of a fundamental characteristic of Nicholson’s work, by which he could be considered an environmentally prophetic poet. Starting with his earlier poetry of the 1940s (particularly the *Rock Face* collection of 1948), the poet established a strong environmental concern, oftentimes giving voice to what he saw as the voicelessness of nature and the landscape. In *The Pot Geranium*, this prophetic tone reads as deep concern for society's environmental future and is particularly poignant when read considering twenty-first century anxieties surrounding the developments of climate change.

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[8] Nicholson, *Greater Lakeland*, p. 23.

[9] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspectives of Experience* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 33.

[10] Norman Nicholson, *Wednesday Early Closing* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1975), p. 131.

The Pot Geranium is bound by the Millom landscape. The poems explore Nicholson's conflict in sentiment between his hometown and the Ironworks, demonstrating his fear but also his subtle respect for the industry that economically supports the town he has lived in his entire life. He centres himself on the town and, as remarked by Andrew Gibson, is unwilling to look beyond the remit of the town boundaries, aside from the few 'otherworldly' poetic inclusions of the collection, which themselves underline the significance of centring oneself on a particular physical locality. Nicholson's locality, then, is the immediate Millom and Hodbarrow landscape. The collection, as such, is foreshadowed by the narrative of Nicholson's titular poem, 'The Pot Geranium'. The potted geranium is a metaphor for Nicholson himself, and the familiar image of the poet in his tiny top-floor bedroom is introduced:

> I turn from the window
>
> (Letting the bobbins of autumn wind up the swallows)
>
> And lie on my bed.[11]

The poet appears confined to a space, unable to move beyond it. Kathleen Jones writes of the titular poem, and wider collection, in her 2013 biography of Nicholson *The Whispering Poet* that he 'had spent his whole life in the small attic room he had occupied since he came back from Linford Sanatorium — an indoor plant, like the geranium'.[12] The potted geranium is also a metaphor for how Nicholson perhaps believes man must approach nature: with care and compassion. The plant is cared for by the poet, nurtured until growth. This image suggests themes that become prominent as the collection goes on, particularly the need to care for nature, rather than destroy it.

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[11] Norman Nicholson, 'The Pot Geranium', in *Collected Poems*, pp. 179–180, ll. 19–21.

[12] Kathleen Jones, *Norman Nicholson: The Whispering Poet* (Great Britain: The Book Mill, 2013), p. 141.

As Jones also writes, the poem is a 'personal testimony' of Nicholson's, and he takes care to construct the boundaries of his existence as the town of Millom in the opening lines.[13] The poet begins the text with a detailed journey of the eye along the features of the town he sees from his bedroom window. The reader is taken through the streets of Millom, from gable-ends to the town's flagpole before Nicholson abruptly turns away from the scene. Whilst the Ironworks are not mentioned at all in the poem, the narrative is an important foreshadowing of the remainder of the collection in the way the poet is bound to Millom and unlikely to leave. His room in St George's Terrace is one of boundaries. In the poem, he likens the small space to a tent, with the medicalised 'white walls' (l.22) engulfing him as he lies on the bed. He is tightly bound to his mattress, and cannot move, and then the reader is introduced to the image of the geranium, and therefore the image of Nicholson himself.

The poet draws on William Cowper here, of whom Nicholson wrote a biography in 1951. Similar to Nicholson, Cowper lived a solitary life and was aware of the boundaries of the space in which he lived. Nicholson writes of Cowper's work: 'life, on the whole, was a sad one, yet his poetry is largely the poetry of pleasure; there is often an underflow of melancholy'.[14] This view seems familiar as we read Nicholson's own *The Pot Geranium* collection. Winter beckons in the titular poem of the collection, and Nicholson's relationship with the town and the Ironworks is governed by an existence lived in his bedroom in a house on St George's Terrace. He ends the poem with the now-familiar sentiment that underscores the entire collection; that is, he is 'confined as a limpet| To one small radius of rock' (ll.45–46). As he goes on to do throughout the collection, Nicholson grounds his narrative and thinking in the presence of the rock, demonstrating his attention to environmental detail. The important symbol of the rock anchors the reader's understanding of the stripped and exploited earth, appearing as shorthand for man's negative impact on his environment and landscape. Furthermore, the image of confinement at the end of 'The Pot Geranium' also indicates the poet's awareness of the boundaries within his own life, and how they affect his interaction with the world outside. He suggests that he is isolated and alone, mirroring his descriptions of Millom as being on the edge of Cumbria, and the edge of mainland Britain and the Irish Sea.

In the poem 'Winter by the Ironworks', Nicholson breaks down whatever minimal boundary existed between the Ironworks and the town in the minds of the residents, juxtaposing the innocence of children playing in the slag heaps with the almost monstrous presence of an industrial stronghold. His *Greater Lakeland* looks back at his childhood adventures in similar landscapes, down at Hodbarrow: ‘We always went the same way, through the old Hodbarrow Mines [...] We walked along cinder paths or kicked our way through the bracken, raising spurts of red ore-dust’.[15] Clearly, the memory of time spent exploring the abandoned mines and wasteland of industrial Millom as a child persisted into Nicholson’s adulthood, and into his poetic work. The children in ‘Winter by the Ironworks’ are depicted as being on the edge of danger, perhaps; early in the poem, the industrial remains of the slagheaps are described as ‘breaking wire and willow, | Choking gulley and grid’.[16] Nicholson uses this description to map the image of ‘choking’ onto the innocence of the children, and so despite their enjoyment of the slagheaps, they are on the boundary between the safety of home and the danger of the Ironworks and slagheaps. Nicholson takes care to emphasise the children’s throats, as just one line later he writes that they are ‘smoking with dialect’ (l.8). The images of ‘smoking’ and the earlier ‘choking’ forge a clear connection here, but Nicholson also offers a further definition of home with his reference to the dialect. In Cumbria, particularly, dialect is still spoken; Nicholson draws on this as a defining feature of his local space.

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[13] Jones, p. 141.

[14] Norman Nicholson, *William Cowper* (London: John Lehmann Ltd., 1951), p. 7.

Furthermore, the slagheaps are presented as overpowering and overwhelming parts of the landscape; they seem invasive and unwelcome. Tellingly, the recurrent trope of the rock also appears subtly in ‘Winter by the Ironworks’. Nicholson describes the iron as ‘crag-icy’ (l.12), which draws the reader’s attention to the importance of the rock in the mining industry. As the poem closes, Nicholson writes that ‘Water and stone | Are shown here to the eye for no more than a moment’ (ll.18–19); the stone is being blown away on the wind, demonstrating the meaninglessness it holds to man as he exploits the landscape through industry. However, the poet opens ‘Winter by the Ironworks’ with the apparent fragility of the industry when he describes the slagbanks as ‘seeming-permanent also’ (l.3), with reference to the snow, drawing on the wider setting of winter in the poem. In ‘seeming-permanent’, the poet is suggesting that the image is not as it appears and implies that the snow (and the Ironworks) are impermanent, much like the slagheaps. Nicholson also likens the slagheap dust to snowflakes, suggesting impermanence and instability of the children’s surroundings —

> Slowly,

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[15] Nicholson, *Greater Lakeland*, p. 25.
[16] Norman Nicholson, ‘Winter by the Ironworks’ in *Collected Poems*, p. 191, ll. 6–7.

> Slag-flake and-fall slither and crumble over
>
> Back-garden fences. (ll.4–6)

Whilst the slagheaps are the fabric of the space they call ‘home’, there is a sense that it might all end once the industrial era closes, and the source of their fun and enjoyment — the slagheaps — will disappear in much the same way as the snow. The fragility and impermanence of the snow and the Ironworks is destabilising for the reader: with the implication that the snow and the industry will not last, the reader is left to wonder what is next for the town and for the children.

This inclusion of the image of the children heightens the emotional turbulence in the poem because it not only draws on an image of innocence, but it also plays with the prospects of Millom. If the children are to represent the next generation of the town, and the Ironworks disappear much like the snow, one is forced to question what is left for them. This speaks to the larger environmental concerns that underscore the collection; Nicholson is beginning to question what will be left for man in the area once he exploits the natural resources which are available to him. While ‘Winter by the Ironworks’ was written and published over a decade before the closure of the Millom Ironworks in 1968, Nicholson’s prophetic instinct emerges in his understanding of the impermanence of the town’s industrial output. This instinct is a reflection of his attention to the physical world, as well as his understanding of humanity’s deep reliance upon it. This understanding is perhaps best seen in his 1959 novel *Provincial Pleasures*, which depicts a year in the fictional town of Oddborough — modelled on Millom — when Nicholson wrote that ‘Every Oddborough child is joined by an umbilical cord, stretching back through the ooze to the shelled, creeping creatures of the warm lagoons’. Nicholson believes that he is bound to his hometown, and therefore perhaps feels a sense of responsibility for its future.[17] In the context of the land’s history, the Ironworks’ decline is inevitable, but its existence is merely a shadow of a deeper, almost primordial connection between the land and its inhabitants, necessitating the natural environment’s continued preservation.

There is also a sense, in the opening of ‘Winter by the Ironworks’, of the malignant presence of the industrial site. Under the guise of the snow, the slagbanks move ‘softly’ (l.1), and ‘slither’ (l.5) throughout the properties of the town. The movement is sneaky, the word ‘slither’ recalling the snake in the Garden of Eden (Nicholson himself was religious). The poet is suggesting that despite the prosperity that the Ironworks brings to the town, the site is also a blot on the landscape. This moment demonstrates his inner conflict of sentiment: whilst he appreciates the presence of the Ironworks as fundamental to the space which he inhabits, he also recognises the shortcomings of having such industry on the doorstep. David Boyd writes of the Ironworks, which sprung up in Millom and nearby Askam, and their decline:

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[17] Norman Nicholson, *Provincial Pleasures* (Carlisle: Bookcase, 1959), p. 20.

> Not long after the worldwide adoption of the Bessemer process, further developments in steelmaking production technology, along with cheaper foreign imports, had slowly but inexorably been shrinking Millom's traditional market for low phosphorus haematite iron.[18]

This decline of industry frames Nicholson's ambivalence towards the Ironworks, and representations of the site in his poetry are defined by the waste it left behind, thus indicating the exploitative nature of man's work on the landscape.

What overshadows 'Winter by the Ironworks', though, is the invasive presence of the slagheaps, and the reality that they are the discarded remnants of industry that have become part of the town adjacent to the site. Millom is a grey and desolate place in the poem, characterised mainly by the industrial waste from the Ironworks. As the poem ends, Nicholson writes of the slagbanks floating away in 'the woosh of the wind' (l.18), demonstrating the ease of dispersion of the Ironworks' influence on the town and wider area. The poet also implies in 'Winter by the Ironworks' that the waste from the Ironworks is uncontrolled and infects the wider landscape without regulation; this is a perceptive understanding by Nicholson of the threat to the environment from heavy industry. Conversely, the poem comments culturally and socially on the importance of industry in the area and, considering that the Ironworks shut in 1968, Nicholson is perhaps foreshadowing the emotional turmoil that would come when the industry was eventually dismantled. David Boyd goes on to write, 'Nicholson himself had witnessed the human suffering caused by the Depression of the 1930s, and he feared a return to similar dire circumstances when the Ironworks was closed-down'.[19]

The pervasive influence of industry — whether the Ironworks or other quarrying activities in the area — is also seen in the poem 'Millom Old Quarry'. The poem is conversational, beginning with someone speaking to Nicholson. The story is simple: the town of Millom came from the matter taken from a single hole in the ground. As the speaker says in the opening: '"They dug ten streets from that there hole"'.[20] The material was used to build the town; the town therefore, quite literally, comes from the rock. The industry that created the quarry to mine for the rock is fundamental to the fabric of life lived in Millom. The boundary between the town and the Ironworks, for Nicholson, is therefore blurred. The material architecture of his life lived in Millom would not exist without industry, but the industry is also a point of contention in his time spent in the town.

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[18] Boyd, *Norman Nicholson: A Literary Life*, p. 12.
[19] Ibid., p. 19.

Nicholson's reference to the rock extends beyond his poetry, though, and into his prose. In his 1949 book *Cumberland and Westmorland*, Nicholson notes that 'Perhaps in no other part of England has the life and character of a district and its people been so controlled by the nature of the rock and by the forces which have acted upon it', further commenting that 'even when the industrial revolution came, it was the rock which laid down the form it was to take in the two counties, for it is coal and iron ore which have made modern Cumberland and Furness'.[21] Socioculturally, both 'Winter by the Ironworks' and 'Millom Old Quarry' (and the wider collection to an extent) are important, as Nicholson draws on the context of industry supporting a town on an economic and social level. This image is a reality that could occur anywhere, even though Nicholson focusses it on Millom specifically. He hints at a desolate future for the town, and perhaps intimates that the over-reliance on a particular industry is fatal for any community, even if the community is one that first sprung from the existence of that specific industry.

Images of winter are present in two other poems of *The Pot Geranium* that blur the boundaries between the Ironworks and the town of Millom. The comparatively short 'Weather Ear' opens the first three-line stanza with mention of the poet laid in bed, able to hear 'the bray | Of the furnace hooter'.[22] The setting is winter once more, and the poet acknowledges that if he can hear the furnace hooter from bed, the wind will travel from the east and the weather will be cold. He emphasises the association between the darkness and coldness of winter with the Ironworks, bringing forth once more a sense of the negative influence of the Ironworks site in Nicholson's life — particularly his childhood. In *Wednesday Early Closing*, Nicholson describes that, as a child:

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[20] Norman Nicholson, 'Millom Old Quarry', in *Collected Poems*, pp. 181–182, l. 1.
[21] Norman Nicholson, *Cumberland and Westmorland* (London: Robert Hale Ltd.; 1949), p. 10.
[22] Norman Nicholson, 'Weather Ear', in *Collected Poems*, p. 186, ll. 1–2.

> We could walk down Devonshire Road to the Ironworks, with its great funnels and furnaces, smoking and blaring, like a battleship aground on the tidal banks of the Duddon. The town lived perpetually in the groan and hum of the furnaces…[23]

The image of the rock comes into play once more, in the closing of 'Weather Ear': '"No wind at all, and the street stone-deaf with a cold in the head"' (l.9). The link here is made between the stone and the body (the reference to deafness and the 'head'); this personifies the rock beneath the county and suggests that it is suffering.

Similarly, in the poem 'The Buzzer', the poet wakes on an evening in winter to hear 'the palaeolithic roar | Of the foundry buzzer' in the distance.[24] Again, Nicholson nods to the influence of the rock in 'The Buzzer' with mention of the Palaeolithic era; for the poet, his life is inextricably bound by the rock beneath the landscape. Reference to the county's ancient identity — 'paleolithic' — contrasts with the modernity represented by the Ironworks in Nicholson's poems. This contrast serves to frame the permanence of nature against the seeming-impermanence of the Ironworks, indicating that nature will persist beyond the influence of man. In both 'The Buzzer' and 'Weather Ear', the poet is at home in the town, but the Ironworks are ever-present in his waking hours. He is in bed, arguably a place of safety but also vulnerability. The setting echoes that of the titular poem 'The Pot Geranium'. He cannot rest because of the domineering presence of the Ironworks on the edge of town, which appear close to him even though his home on St George's Terrace is a mile away. The image of Nicholson as a child waking to the sound of the Ironworks is torturous, kept awake by the near-perpetual activity there. Further to this, the poems withdraw the use of sight from Nicholson as he lies in bed in the darkness, so he can only experience the Ironworks through sound. The sound appears to surround him and is in a way more oppressive than the mere sight of the factory, as the sound bleeds beyond the physical boundaries of the Ironworks and further blurs the lines between the town and its industry.

As previously mentioned, each moment in both 'The Buzzer' and 'Weather Ear', takes place on a winter's night. As such, the poet underscores the Ironworks throughout *The Pot Geranium* with associations of winter, darkness, and the cold. This association is not a pleasant one, and suggests that Nicholson's relationship with the Ironworks site was not one of fondness, but was instead one of entrapment and fear. The images of winter and the darkness also enclose the narrative into the small space of Nicholson's terrace-house, top-floor bedroom. He is confined to the space, yet the presence of the Ironworks filters through the darkness toward him. There is a sense of being trapped by the industry, speaking more widely to the reliance on the Ironworks by the community for economic, social, and cultural security. Nicholson himself never worked at the Ironworks but had family members who did. His connection to the site was familial in a sense, but his poetry does not offer delight in his relationship to the industry in any form. Again, in much the same way as the Ironworks and slagheaps were a malignant presence for the children in 'Winter by the Ironworks', Nicholson draws on the same image in 'The Buzzer'. He writes of hearing the sound in the nights of his childhood, before bringing the reader to the present day, suggesting that the fear ignited by the sound as a child has persisted into adulthood — 'That buzzer, heard in boyhood, meant that nerves | Had stick-o'-rogered through a sleepless night' (ll.6–7). The emotionally-triggering sound of the buzzer is one that will have trapped the poet, with him unable to hear beyond it. At the poem's close, Nicholson notes that he is transported back to childhood with the sound of the buzzer, which age cannot block out for him — 'And the buzzer wakes the boy whose bed I lie in, | Whose dubious dream is me' (ll.19–20). By bringing the image of Nicholson as a boy into the final lines of the poem, the poet is invoking a scene of innocence and vulnerability of himself compared to the Ironworks, in much the same way as he did in 'Winter by the Ironworks'.

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[23] Nicholson, *Wednesday Early Closing*, p. 133.

[24] Norman Nicholson, 'The Buzzer', in *Collected Poems*, p. 226, ll. 3–4.

The effect on the reader is significant — once more, emotional turbulence is created by the image of a child. Nicholson's choice to include the image of himself as a child, or the images of children more widely in the collection, was perhaps an unconscious nod toward the influence of the Ironworks on his own childhood. This influence was so key and so profound to Nicholson that he took care to mention it in *Wednesday Early Closing*. The poet writes that the Ironworks never much factored into his experience of his home in Millom until an incident with his father, who had gone to work at the Ironworks and sprained his ankle. He was driven home and submerged his foot in a bath of hot water to aid the healing. Nicholson then remarks that:

> From that time onwards the Ironworks belonged to the world in which I lived. Before then, I have no recollection of them whatever… But now they had become real to me: they were the place where my father sprained his ankle.[25]

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[25] Nicholson, *Wednesday Early Closing*, p. 14.

His father brought home with him the injury, from a place the young Nicholson knew about but had never set foot in. As such, the Ironworks became tangible and more real to the young boy, and, since his father nursed his injury in the family house on St George’s Terrace, the Ironworks then arguably became part of Nicholson’s childhood definition of ‘home’.

Nicholson continues his use of human imagery throughout the collection, particularly in the poem ‘Reclining Figure’. Comparatively brief, the poem is simple in structure: seven two-line verse-paragraphs, complete with end-rhyme in each. The effect is that of quick storytelling; a parable or morbid folktale of an industry lost, yet remnants of it remain. The central characters of the poem are the slagbanks themselves, personified to heighten the emotional investment in the image undoubtedly, but also to bring characterful life to an otherwise static and vaguely pernicious presence on the edge of the town, between the houses and the Ironworks. Nicholson describes how the slagbanks lie stationary; they are huge masses, left over from production in the Ironworks; they almost bridge the gap between the Ironworks and the houses of the town. The personification of the slagbanks and ‘The man of iron’ in the poem inevitably draws parallels with Nicholson himself, and the other residents of Millom.[26]

The anonymity of the title — ‘Reclining Figure’ — lends a universal implication to the poem, and to the image of the now-stationary person or presence that Nicholson is writing about. The slagbanks are the detritus of industry and are left for ‘dead’ (l.7) because they are a useless by-product of iron ore mining. So, perhaps, is man. By paralleling the image of the slagbanks as a man with the people of Millom town, Nicholson foretells the future of the town’s economic status, which included mass unemployment upon the closure of the Ironworks in 1968. Elsewhere, the poem is littered with similar references to the decline of industry, as Nicholson mentions the ‘unchimneyed skies’ and the sleeping ‘man of slag’ (ll.10–11). The universal message from the poem is subtle yet vital. In the second line of ‘Reclining Figure’, Nicholson remarks that the slagbanks are nothing more than ‘A dross of smelting, dead and dry’ (l.2): a simple line, yet brim-full of meaning. His choice of the word ‘dross’ is important; the slagbanks are useless and serve no purpose to society. Yet, the image of the slagbanks appears in other poems, notably as a children’s playground of sorts in ‘Winter by the Ironworks’. Their importance and narrative relevance shift often, therefore, perhaps reflecting Nicholson’s well-disguised sentimentality for his hometown space. The waste from industry is now the source of joy and adventure for children, despite the previously negative connotations they perhaps once held.

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[26] Norman Nicholson, ‘Reclining Figure’, in *Collected Poems*, p. 192, l. 7.

It should also be noted that several the poems mentioned here — 'The Pot Geranium', 'Winter by the Ironworks', 'Weather Ear', and 'The Buzzer' — all use the repeated image of the wind to enhance the narrative line. In 'The Pot Geranium', Nicholson introduces the idea of the 'Trade Wind':

> It is the Gulf Stream
>
> That rains down the chimney, making the soot spit; it is the Trade Wind
>
> That blows in the draught under the bedroom door. (ll.42–44)

Then, in later poems, a familiar easterly wind appears. In 'Weather Ear' the poet writes that '"The wind will be in the east, and frost on the nose today"' (l.3); and in 'The Buzzer', the speaker describes 'Waking at night in winter, with a south-east wind | Coddling the town in smoke and the marsh smell' (ll.1–2). Finally, in 'Winter by the Ironworks', the 'woosh of the wind' carries away the material of the slagbanks that the children have been playing amongst (l.18). The image of the wind intensifies the coldness and harshness of the winter in Millom in the poems, but also represents movement amidst the static nature of Nicholson's own life. The wind moves through and beyond the town, whereas Nicholson does not; he can only imagine where the wind has come from on its journey, as well as only imagine where it may go next. The wind in the poems also brings with it the presence of the Ironworks; they intensify the sound of the industry, as well as carry the waste material through the town as if like snow. As such, something naturally occurring, such as the wind, carries a reminder of man's environmental damage, represented by the Ironworks themselves. It is a subtle crossover between man and nature in Nicholson's collection, a theme which permeates most of his wider work. These themes particularly mirror ideas present in 'God's Grandeur' (1877) by Gerard Manley Hopkins. Nicholson's personal book collection, inventoried after his death in 1987, included a copy of *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, so it is perhaps safe to look for the influence of Hopkins' 'God's Grandeur' on Nicholson's work.[27] Hopkins' poem refers to man's negative influence upon the earth:

> Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

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[27] *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited with notes by Robert Bridges (London: Oxford University Press, 1930),

> All is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
>
> And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell.[28]

Nicholson makes similar claims across his work: man's impact is visceral and tangibly felt by the personified landscape.

The Pot Geranium is one of Nicholson's best collections, drawing on his isolated geographical location on the edge of Cumberland (or modern-day Cumbria) and acknowledging his inability to be parted from the space. His sentimentality for Millom and the immediate area is strong and carves a narrative thread throughout the entire collection. He is also conflicted in his love for the area, because of the instability of the heavy industry relied upon by so many of his neighbours and friends. His seeming-anxiety over the longevity of the Millom Ironworks is to be considered when reading the collection, even though it predated any indication of the industry's closure in the following decade. Nicholson himself was not reliant in any way upon the Ironworks for financial security nor social connection, yet he was able to recognise the vital role the site played for many others around him. As such, whilst he himself is separate from the Ironworks, the site bleeds into daily life in the town, blurring the boundary between industry and home. The presence of the Ironworks is arguably a destabilising one, as the people of the town were economically reliant on the impermanent form of industry, or because there was no part of Millom town life that was not touched by the site.

As such, it would be hard to imagine Norman Nicholson's Millom without the presence of the Ironworks, because his poetry contains numerous references to the site, and commentary on its importance in the locality. Nicholson's childhood was littered with touch-points between himself and the Ironworks, and he observes the creeping influence of heavy industry on the landscape, whether through the site itself or the waste product encroaching onto the borders of the town. Even so, the repeated presence of the Ironworks as an image in Nicholson's poems demonstrates that his definition of 'home' is inextricably bound with the place. In the collection and, indeed, in his wider work throughout his life, Nicholson centres his focus on Millom, and poetically operates in the immediate landscape. He feels anchored by the various sight of Millom, including the Ironworks, his home in St George's Terrace, and the hill of Black Combe to the northwest of the town. He centres himself on the town despite his ambivalence toward the presence of the Ironworks, and the site arguably becomes the centre of the poet's world itself, because of the constant collision with his daily life. The Ironworks are hard to ignore, and so Nicholson has subsumed them into his vision of his hometown of Millom, and the reader begins to understand that it is difficult to write about Millom and the surrounding area without reference to the industry. In short, Millom does not exist in the way Nicholson knows it without the presence of the Ironworks, though he indicates that there may be a time where it must do so. I would argue that the entire collection is prophetic, displaying Nicholson's personal concerns for society's environmental future, predicated on his more immediate concern for the rock that lay below his home in Cumberland, from which he acknowledged that man came. The poet suggests that man needlessly damages the landscape; this is a theme that imbues a number of his other collections, including *Rock Face* (1948) and *Sea To The West* (1981) in particular. He hints at a time where society deteriorates because of the loss of the industry which it is so hinged upon, and the subsequent permanent damage to the landscape, but also offers the starting point for thoughts and concerns over the state of the environment as we find it today.

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[28] Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'God's Grandeur', in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Margaret Ferguson, Tim Kendall, and Mary Jo Salter, sixth edn. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2015), p. 1221, ll. 5–7.

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