# “Go West!”[1] In Search of the “Greenwood” in Mike Parker’s *On the Red Hill*

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**Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to investigate the legacy of E.M. Forster’s queer rurality – the writer’s famous “greenwood” – in Mike Parker’s *On the Red Hill*, a 2019 memoir which brings together the political and aesthetic concerns of queer anti-urbanism and new nature writing. While analysing Forsterian “inheritance” and its impact onto Parker’s book, as well as the lives of its four auto/biographical characters, the essay explores the conjunction between queer sexualities (male nonheteronormativity in particular) and rurality in the 20th and 21st centuries, as well as the shift that has occurred with regard to the perception (and valorisation) of the non-metropolitan queer life.

**Keywords**: new nature writing, queer rurality, queer heritage, E.M. Forster, Mike Parker

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[1] The title of this paper borrows the phrase “Go West” from the 1979 song by Village People and its famous 1993 cover by the English duo Pet Shop Boys. The very song (by the latter performers) was Mike Parker’s “anthem of [his] Welsh research trip” in the 1990s (Parker 2019, 261).

> Our greenwood ended catastrophically and inevitably. [...] [T]he wildness of our island, never extensive, was stamped upon and built over and patrolled in no time. There is no forest or fell to escape to today, no cave in which to curl up, no deserted valley for those who wish neither to reform nor corrupt society but to be left alone. (Forster 1993, 254)
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> Although the American dream of the West [...] is a far cry from ours, there are overlaps. West is best for elemental landscapes soaked in mystery and crossed by the songlines of the elders. It is the repository of ancient arcana and the dreams of seers. West travels at a different pace, its only immutable appointment the setting of sun on the sea. In the States it is the Grand Canyon and Death Valley, Yosemite and the Navajo, Portlandia and Vegas, Beverly Hills and the Golden Gate. On this side of the Atlantic, it is Stonehenge and Avebury, tors and moors, Glastonbury and Caerleon, lost kings and drowned lands. It is Wales. (Parker 2019, 262)
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> Young Man 9: It's [*Howard's End* – R.K.] a hundred years old.
> Young Man 7: The world has changed so much.
> Young Man 3: Our lives are nothing like the people in your book.
> Morgan: How can that be true? Hearts still love, don't they? And break. Hope, fear, jealousy, desire. Your lives may be different. But surely the feelings are the same. The difference is merely the setting, context, costumes. But those are just details. (Lopez 2020, 9)

## 1. Queer Folks

Inseparability of queer sexualities and the city has long been acknowledged as the dominant (and sometimes *the only*) paradigm for thinking about the nexus between modern (both early and late) male nonheteronormativity and place. If, for example, one looks at the map of so-called "Uranian Europe" meticulously drafted by Graham Robb in one of the appendixes of his seminal study *Strangers*, one soon realises that the map showcases only three non-urban queer retreats: Fonthill Abbey, the house of William Beckford, Millthorpe, the rural idyll of Edward Carpenter and George Merrill, and Plas Newydd outside Llangollen inhabited by Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby (known as the Ladies of Llangollen) (Robb 2004, 278–279). In an introductory part to his study of homosexuality in the turn-of-the-20$^{th}$-century London, Matt Cook states what appears to be an indisputable truth to most proponents of urbanised gay, lesbian, and queer studies: "Think of 'gay' men and 'gay' culture and we think of cities, form ancient Athens through

biblical Sodom and Renaissance Florence to Armistead Maupin's San Francisco or Pedro Almodovar's Madrid" (2003, 2).

Matt Houlbrook's partly historical and partly cultural investigation of the homosexual experience of the British metropolis from the end of WWI to the publication of the Wolfenden report is no less unequivocal about the city being the ultimate "queer space" (2006, 3). Having analysed a number of historical records (epistolary records in particular[2]), Houlbrook concludes: "'Being queer' is equated with the cultural experience of urban life" (3). If, according to the historian, the city means "speaking out," "fulfilment," and "being,"[3] the non-urban/rural space is synonymous with "silence," "repression," and most importantly "nonbeing" (3). Peter Ackroyd's *Queer City* published in 2017 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Britain decriminalizing homosexuality was equally enthusiastic about various opportunities that the city has offered to queer individuals over the centuries. Recreating the history of "gay London" from antiquity to the present day, the writer hailed the city as a "jungle and a labyrinth where gay life could flourish, [...] a phantasmagoria or a dreamscape, [...] upon which the queer man or woman could project the most illicit longings" (Ackroyd 2017, 149).

However, in recent years one has observed a counter approach to the above-mentioned paradigm in the form of queer anti-urbanism, which, in its critical version, appears to challenge urbanised queer studies and their various tenets (briefly stipulated above). Most importantly, it attempts to divulge the latter's "chronic [...] dismissal of rurality" and prove that "queer life beyond the city is as vibrant, diverse, and plentiful, as any urban-based sexual culture" (Herring 2010, 5, 6). Scott Herring's *Another Country* of 2010 has turned out to be particularly illuminating with regard to queer "metronormativity,"[4] which the study expertly deconstructs, and "critical rustic-

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[2] In one letter its anonymised author confesses the following: "I have only been queer *since* I came to London" (Houlbrook 2006, 2; my emphasis).

[3] The city is further described as a space of "affirmation, liberation, and citizenship" (Houlbrook 2006, 3).

[4] A view that the city is the only possible site for the emergence of queer identity, culture, community, etc. Herring borrows the term from Jack Halberstam who defines it in the following manner: "This term reveals the conflation of 'urban' and 'visible' in many normalizing narratives of gay/lesbian subjectivities. Such narratives tell of closeted subjects who 'come out' into an urban setting, which in turn, supposedly allows for the full expression of the sexual self in relation to a community of other gays/lesbians/queers. The metronormative narrative maps a story of migration onto the coming-out narrative. While the story of coming out tends to function as a temporal trajectory within which a period of disclosure follows a long period of

ity," which the scholar defines as an "intersectional opportunity to geographically, corporeally, and aesthetically inhabit non-normative sexuality that offers new possibilities for the sexually marginalized outside the metropolis as well as inside it"[5] (Herring 2010, 68).

Although Herring (after Jack Halberstam) considers E.M. Forster (alongside, for example, Marcel Proust, Henry James, and Thomas Mann) to be the notable pioneer of modernist metronormativity (2010, 33, 153), one could argue that some aspects of Forster's writing might well be seen as harmonious with selected principles of queer anti-urbanism, while Forster himself might be acknowledged one of spiritual forefathers of queer rurality. A category that appears to be the strongest ally in the positive re-valuation of non-urban sexual cultures is, of course, Forsterian "greenwood"; or, given its various mutations in the twelve-year period between its first and last appearance (1902–1914; see Wood Ellem 1976), its specific incarnation as a homoerotic (natural/rural) retreat – the kind where, as Kelly Sultzbach and Claudia Rosenhan have persuasively argued, a "prominent accent on land use politics" and a "focus on environmental ethics" (Sultzbach 2016, 30) meets an "intra-action between self and environment" (Rosenhan 2018, 277). This greenwood creates the conditions for an "entanglement with nature" which "serves [one's] mental, and moral[6] development, *as well as* [one's] sexual being" (Rosenhan 2018, 283; emphasis in the original). This greenwood is not so much an escape from persecution, a refuge, but, above all, an opportunity.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the legacy of Forster's queer rurality (understood after Herring as "at once a geographic entity and a performative space" [Herring 2010, 12][7]) – his "greenwood" – in Mike Parker's *On the Red Hill*, a memoir which brings together the political and aesthetic concerns of queer anti-urbanism and new nature

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repression, the metronormative story of migration from 'country' to 'town' is a spatial narrative within which the subject moves to a place of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution, and secrecy. [...] [T]he rural is made to function as a closet for urban sexualities in most accounts of rural queer migration" (Halberstam 2005, 37).

[5] An example of such "critical rusticity" could be England's "lesbian capital," i.e. the village of Hebden Bridge, which is the only queer non-urban/non-metropolitan place acknowledged by Ackroyd in *Queer City* (Ackroyd 2017, 231).

[6] And, one could be tempted to add, environmental.

[7] "[W]e should theorize 'rural' or 'non-metropolitan' locales as performative geographic positions that have often enabled individuals and group subjects to experience themselves as distinct from dominant spatial performatives of the 'urban' or the 'metropolitan'" (Herring 2010, 13).

writing. While analysing Forsterian "inheritance" and its impact onto Parker's book and the lives of its four auto/biographical characters, this essay's major concern will be the exploration of the conjunction between queer sexualities (male nonheteronormativity in particular) and rurality in the 20th and 21st centuries, as well as the shift that has occurred with regard to the perception (and valorisation) of the non-metropolitan queer life.

## 2. New (queer) nature writing

True to the poetics of new nature writing, as well as the poetics of the memoir, *On the Red Hill* is a "cross" (Miller 1996, 3), a hybrid nature-/life-narrative which recounts, in equal measure, the story of the Welsh countryside, landscape, and nature, focusing in particular on Rhiw Goch, the titular "Red Hill," as well as the lives of four gay men who have owned and inhabited the very place located in the Powys county.

Parker's book shares a number of characteristics with the paradigmatic specimens of new nature writing,[8] a relatively recent trend in contemporary British literature.[9] Its form is experimental[10]: the volume is divided into four parts; each part consists of four

[8] What it does not share with new nature writing is its "elevated tone," a specific writing style which combines heightened lyricism, spirituality, and literariness, and which has been rightfully mocked by Kathleen Jamie (2008). This style became widely associated with new nature writing despite the fact that Jason Cowley, one of its first theoreticians, hailed its language which was supposed to be "free from cliché" (2008, 9). The very queerness of *On the Red Hill* (and its author) also challenges the conviction that new nature writing is the domain of "white, middle-class Englishmen" for whom "Cambridge is still the centre of the world" (9) and that it has substituted "culture-nature axis" with "literature-landscape," thus becoming socially and environmentally *un*conscious (Cocker 2015).

[9] Jos Smith traces the beginning of this literary phenomenon to Richard Mabey's 1996 *Flora Britannica* (2017, 1), while most would name a special issue of *Granta* magazine published in 2008 and entitled "New nature writing" (issue no. 102) in which Jason Cowley's introduction provided some of the first theorisations of this literary development (Cowley 2008, 7–12). Today, perhaps the best known volumes associated with new nature writing are Helen Macdonald's *H is far Hawk* (2014) and Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places* (2007) and *Landmarks* (2015). See Cocker 2015 and Moss 2019 (the latter with reference to new nature writing's problems with gender and ethnic diversity, the former with its dilemma regarding the notion of "wildness" and predominantly urban/metropolitan audience).

[10] "The best new nature writing is [...] an experiment in form" (Cowley 2008, 10). According to Smith, the trend's aesthetics is based on "self-reflexive conflict with convention" (2017, 26).

sections titled after four elements, four cardinal points, four seasons, and four principal male characters. It provides its readers with a novel and thoroughly unorthodox way of thinking about space and place,[11] thus producing what Jos Smith calls a "counter-map" (2017, 6) in which rural Wales becomes a "truly *fairy* place" [my emphasis] with a "queer cunning in the air," a "quiet tolerance," and "no shortage of [queer] comradeship" (Parker 2019, 58, 9). It focuses on a specific locality (Wales, Powys county, Rhiw Goch), and, while studying its nature, history, and people in detail, the book embraces methods and instruments typical for a variety of disciplines such as social history, environmentalism, botany and ornithology, anthropology, and ethnography.

Though the book does narrate the story of gay men's travels to (and exploration of) non-urban Wales, it does not partake in the "lyrical pastoral tradition of the romantic wanderer," the very feature which Jason Cowley associated with "old nature writing" (2008, 10).[12] Instead, *On the Red Hill* appears to be highly alert and attentive to the political and social present-day reality (the book opens with a first same-sex civil partnership ceremony in the county), to the now,[13] including human influence and often detrimental effect on nature, as well as larger processes such as globalisation and economic changes.[14] Like most of the Anthropocene-conscious writers and their works, Parker and his contribution to new nature writing are imbued with a new understanding of nature (which is neither a straightforward opposite – of man, culture, etc. – nor a passive object to be studied [Smith 2017, 12–17]), as well as of the relationship between humans and nature. It is also imbued with a sense of loss – an elegiac tone, which Cowley has identified as another marker of new nature writing (2008, 11), having been introduced in the book's prologue with the death of George and Reg, the owners of Rhiw Goch, a gay couple[15] who

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[11] Smith claims that in new nature writing place is an "open-ended and experimental process, an ongoing performance of social and cultural reality that is in often difficult dialogue with other scales of place" (2017, 21).

[12] "[T]hey don't simply want to walk into the wild, to rhapsodize and commune: they aspire to see with a scientific eye and write with literary effect" Cowley states (2008, 9).

[13] After Cowley, one could insist on new nature writing being a "moral enterprise" (2008,9). Also see Smith 2017, 5, 28.

[14] Especially ones that seriously affect the countryside, e.g. property and land ownership. As Parker admits, "of our many contemporary anxieties, property is by far the most incandescent. We are all consumed by its white heat, however loftily we pretend otherwise. For so many, the housing ladder has vanished from view, and shows little prospect of reappearing" (2019, 115).

[15] Though they remain highly uncomfortable with the category. When during the same-sex civil partnership ceremony the Powys registrar calls them "gay," the two men appear to be

in 1972 moved from Bournemouth to mid-Wales in search of their own "greenwood." But *On the Red Hill* is also a legitimate specimen of the memoir, and one of the genre's prime parameters, namely its "travelling" between "categorical oppositions of the self and other, autobiography and biography" (Kusek 2017, 70), becomes particularly helpful in revealing and acknowledging the legacy of E.M. Forster and its impact not only onto the lives of the book's four gay characters, but, first and above all, onto the book itself.

It might be argued that a transgenerational desire for the greenwood – here represented by Wales and its "Red Hill" – is one of the most conspicuous themes of Parker's life-cum-nature writing. This desire for the "queer rural" (Parker 2019, 6) certainly affects the four main characters of the book: George Walton and Reg Mickish, as well as Mike Parker and his partner Peredur (Preds) Tomos, who inherited Rhiw Goch after the former couple's death in 2011. Early in the volume Parker confesses to his love of the "not-city" (287) and his unambiguously queer anti-urban perception of the countryside. He states the following:

> If the countryside appears at all in gay histories, it is usually only as a place to escape from, and as swiftly as possible. For many of us, this is a pattern that never fitted. Since childhood, the green places have called us the loudest, and although we did the urban thing to burst from the closet, the lure of the rural soon overwhelmed the anonymity of the city. It didn't even feel like a choice, but something intrinsic that would have been dangerous to resist, like the act of coming out itself. (5–6)

Throughout the book, Parker repeatedly emphasises the fact that queer rurality is a legitimate way of being in/experiencing/expressing the world for nonnormative sexualities. In order to substantiate his claim, the writer puts forward a variety of examples of nonnormative individuals who, over the centuries, have established a positive relationship with the countryside (particularly Welsh countryside), and, consequently, have become the "pioneers" of queer rurality: from the Ladies of Llangollen, G.M. Hopkins, the painter Cedric Morris, Edward Carpenter, twice in the book called "the great queer rural hero" (125, 290) who "mapped out" the queer rural life for the likes of Parker himself (295), to gay men like George and Reg. Parker's self-reflexive account is quite

highly irritated: "[Reg] might have just married the man he had been living with for nearly sixty years, but he still didn't want anyone, least of all a pen-pusher from the county council, calling him A Gay" (Parker 2019, 3).

illuminating with regard to the changing status of the non-metropolitan queer life. He admits to a variety of difficulties that a nonheteronormative male faces when considering "shak[ing] off the city" (22): from "farmerphobia" (206), threats imposed by "small-town morality" (256), to widespread beliefs that the best a gay man might hope when moving to "Llan-nowhere" is "to be ignored and to die a lonely old queen"; and the worst "to be hanged like a hillbilly Mussolini from the nearest lamp post" (7). Though Parker's queer rurality is by no means an idyll (he does recognise the longevity and persistence of homophobia in the countryside and duly documents its various manifestations), he, nevertheless, staunchly resists the notion that the city is the exclusive space of "affirmation, liberation, and citizenship" (Houlbrook 2006, 3) available to queer individuals. "Every parish had its hen lanc [Welsh for 'the confirmed bachelor']," Parker states, often living undisturbed, perhaps with his special friend, his brother, blood or otherwise. His twin, even, sharing a bad and a midwinter birthday, their old farm neatly bisected by the frontier between Wales and England: *On the Black Hill* redux" (2019, 375).

The story of Parker's own life is, perhaps, the best example of this pro-rural and anti-urban shift that has been the experience of a number of queer individuals. The writer confesses that "going West" – which to a Birmingham-born gay man meant, in the early 1990s, an amalgamation of coming-out and sexual liberation, exploring the countryside, and, quite literally, moving to Wales – has been his dream since early youth. For example, he discloses his obsession with an "isolated white house on a green hillside" that he developed as a twelve-year-old having watched a video for the Boomtown Rats' "I Don't Like Mondays." "Its stark purity seared into me, and I was forever searching it out, the place of my recurring dream. It was, I knew, in Wales," the author states (303).

Parker is also disillusioned with the city and the utopian myth of its unbridled liberating potential,[16] and regularly reminds his readers of similar, if not equal opportunities that rurality may offer to queers: "Away from the cities and the commercial gay scene – on walks up hills and by rivers, in cafes and country pubs, at parties and raves in quarries and forests – I found comrades, sensed others and heard whisper of many more" (256–257). The last pages of *On the Red Hill* are the final attempt to dismantle the fantasy about urban superiority and rural inadequacy, and to reconcile queer rurality and queer urbanism: "[t]he revolution over the last half-century in notions of gender, sex and sexuality is real and massive; it lives in the fields and hills just as happily, and just as unhappily, as it does in the streets" (375).

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[16] "For too many, the city has become just another closet" (Parker 2019, 287).

Commonplaceness of queer rurality, its ordinariness and plurality which Parker vehemently insists on, is also exemplified by the figures of George and Reg. The two men and their move to rural Wales in 1972 appears to resist interpretations that would easily appease the proponents of either queer anti-urbanism or radical queer rurality. Though Parker often refers to them as "pioneers," they are presented as far from being as radical and unconventional as, for example, Edward Carpenter; on the contrary, upon moving to Wales, they were "respectable, conservative[17] gentlemen, lower middle-class sons of London shopkeepers and already middle-aged" (59–60). Also, their decision to abandon Bournemouth was the product of various desires, necessities, and circumstances: including George's previous experience with travelling across Britain (prior to WWII) and the spirit of male comradeship that he enjoyed at the time; demise of the Dorset coast as a prime UK holiday destination in the 1960s (due to the rise of mass international tourism and discovery of the Spanish coastline) and its effect on the socio-economic and professional conditions of both men; as well as the fantasy of having one's very own Millthorpe, or Pound Farm (inhabited by Cedric Morris and his companion Arthur Lett-Haines), or – most likely given the couple's frequent weekend visits to the place, Clouds Hill, a solitary cottage and the former house of T.E. Lawrence.[18] "He [George] wanted his own version [of Clouds Hill]," Parker concludes. And adds: "[A] manly pied-à-terre, remote and self-sufficient, smelling of leather and books, lit by candles and warmed by open fires. To persuade Reg, he packaged it as their own Howards End, a bower of flowers with a 'sense of space, which is the basis of all earthly beauty'" (176).

If in case of Reg and George an impetus for the move from the city to the countryside might have only partly and rather indirectly come from Forster,[19] it soon transpires that Forster should, indeed, be recognised as *the* architect behind Parker's desire for the

[17] Parker highlights George's love of the royals and Mrs Thatcher (2019, 121).

[18] Though not necessarily a beach hut in nearby Beaulieu, a famous meeting place for homosexual friends and acquaintances of Lord Montagu, which saw the events leading to his and Peter Wildeblood's arrest and imprisonment in 1954, and which George and Reg visited in 1952.

[19] Parker notes that Forster was the sole representative of gay literature in George's and Reg's impressive collection of books. In this collection Forster's oeuvre was represented only by *Howards End* and *A Passage to India* (Parker 2019, 26) and there is no evidence that either man has ever read *Maurice*. Elsewhere Parker adds that one of George's books was the 1977 biography of Forster by P.N. Furbank (163), which must have introduced George to the writer's posthumous work.

"greenwood," as well as behind *On the Red Hill* itself – the book which quite unambiguously takes for its motto the following line from Maurice: "Men of my sort could take to the greenwood" (Forster 1993, 12; Parker 2019, 2). Parker is quite explicit about the transformative function and identity-shaping role that Forster has played in his own life. He credits the Merchant Ivory adaptation of *A Room with a View* with helping him to come out as a gay man in 1985 (214–215). The book's (and movie's) famous skinny-dipping scene is believed to have provoked Parker's love of water and swimming, and resulted in him becoming an "aquaphile" (216). He also clearly links the origins of his "search for the queer rural" (6) with reading and watching *Maurice*. As a twenty-year-old student, Parker "secretly ached for a country house weekend of skinny-dipping larks, spied on from behind a tree by a handsome gardener, who later that night would climb into my chamber and have me on crisp white linen" (215).

It is Forster's posthumously published work that helps Parker to hope for comradeship and space where same-sex desire could be freely enacted: "The greenwood. I literally pined. 'Two men can defy the world'. I slunk through the shadows behind Maurice and Alec, down to the boathouse, the evening sun reflected in ripples that washed the walls and there, stock-still in the dancing light, the outline shape of *him*, waiting" (215; emphasis in the original). *On the Red Hill* also features plenty of other, more or less subtle allusions to Forster's life and work: be it the Italian journeys of Reg and George (including a trip to San Gimignano); references to a nearby menhir called Carreg y Noddfa and its function as a sanctuary for "outlaws" (a word taken almost directly from *Maurice* [Forster 1993, 127, 135, 243, 254], a code name for homosexuals) – which, in turn, transforms Rhiw Goch and its vicinity into the paradigmatic "greenwood"; or Parker learning about the rules of living in the "greenwood" by taking a piece of advice from Edward Carpenter ("Oh, do sit quiet!") – one that was originally given to Forster upon his first visit to Millthrope in 1913 (Parker 2019, 348).

However, if "the lava flow of Forsteresque fate" (116) affects, to a different extent, all the auto/biographical characters of Parker's book, it remains particularly conspicuous with regard to the titular "Red Hill": Rhiw Goch, a new incarnation of Forsterian Howards End.

## 3. Queer inheritance

Typically for memoirs of place (also known as periegetic narratives [Kusek 2017, 111] or instances of "auto/bio/geo/graphy" [Rybicka 2014, 420]), *On the Red Hill* prioritises one spatial unit which not only becomes equipped with the memoirist's individual meanings, but is also a site of memory, a *lieu de mémoire*, a result of "cultural" and "humanistic geography" (Mitchell 2002, xi). This spatial unit is Rhiw Goch, an 18th-century farmhouse purchased by Reg and George in early 1980s and turned into their home, which, together with its narratives, memories, and meanings – all diligently reconstructed by Parker – becomes an exemplar of what I shall call "queer heritage," namely a "meaningful past"[20] that is recognised as queer and considered a resource for its contemporary users (present-day queer individuals).

However, crucially for my argument about the legacy of Forster, Rhiw Goch is not just heritage but also an inheritance, physical materialisation of *Howards End* that is passed down (officially, with "no *Howards End* deathbed scribble" [Parker 2019, 114]) from one generation of nonheteronormative males to another – from Reg and George to Mike and Preds. Rhiw Goch's resemblance to Howards End is, indeed, uncanny. With the fictional house (and its source, i.e. Rooksnest) it shares the same genius loci: "communal, convivial excess is its lifeblood" says Parker about the Welsh farmhouse he has inherited (31). It is bequeathed not to "biological" successors, but to "spiritual" heirs – and, one should add, the likes that have experienced dispossession, uprooting, and loss of home. Despite Rhiw Goch's double ownership/inheritance, the narrative of *On the Red Hill* leaves no doubt that the book's Ruth Wilcox and Margaret Schlegel are Reg and Preds – the latter a son of local farmers who first saw and fell in love with the Red Hill thirty years before he became its co-owner. "The six-year-old boy drank it all in, and with the same surety as the deathbed note in *Howards End*, a destiny was cast," Parker states (302). "The spell was cast," the writer adds elsewhere (114). Throughout the narrative Preds is presented as the right(ful)[21] heir to Reg's and George's house – more than Parker himself, despite his training in the history of queer rurality. As a Welshman, Preds re-claims the land once owned by his folks and later lost to large-scale agriculture and farming, as well as Englishmen buying (often holiday) property in rural Wales. As a modern environmentalist and farmer,

[20] I borrow this phrase from Sharon Macdonald's apt definition of heritage which she identifies as "meaningful pasts that should be remembered" (Macdonald 2009, 1).

[21] "Passing it on correctly is your last great duty to the place" (Parker 2019, 378).

he restores land to its past state and function: from a leisure to vegetable and fruit garden, from a B&B to a farmhouse. "This is what Preds has been training for all his life," says one of the couple's first guests to their newly inherited abode (373).

If Rhiw Goch is not just a house but a "spirit," as Forster would have about Ruth Wilcox's house (2002, 70), or a "spiritual possession" as the character of Morgan says about Walter Pool's Hamptons house (another incarnation of Howards End) in Matthew Lopez's play *The Inheritance*[22] (2020, 107), then it should come as no surprise that the Red Hill is an "inheritance far beyond bricks and mortar" (Parker 2019, 114). Mike and Preds inherited not only Reg's and George's house but also their lives: "[W]e inherited their lives, and the challenge was – still is – to live them. To live *with* them" (Parker 2019, 10; emphasis in the original). With Parker, one might claim that they are Reg's and George's "sequel" (113).

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[22] Lopez'z play, which had its premiere in 2018, is a narrative governed by the principle of "transdiegetisation" (Genette 1982, 418–419) – a term I have borrowed from the transtextual lexicon of Gérard Genette. When talking about a derivational relationship between a given text B and a pre-existent text A from which the former has been derived (13), Genette identifies a number of formal operations (called transformations or transpositions), including diegetic transformations, i.e., changes in the diegesis ("l'univers où advient cette histoire" [419]) of a given hypotext and hypertext. In other words, transdiegetisation is a procedure which allows for the transfer of an action or character from one period to another or from one location to another. In the process, historical and geographical settings are (obviously) altered as are "les événements et les conduites constitutives de l'action" since "on ne peut guère transférer une action antique à l'époque moderne sans modifier quelques actions" (442). Nevertheless, what lies at the very heart of this operation is an understanding that a hypertext narrates a story that is essentially (i.e., pragmatically but also, one could further claim, epistemologically) the same as the one told by a hypotext, while readers can recognise the very fact by means of identifying various (textual) inscriptions preserved by this new diegetic world. *The Inheritance* is thus a transdiegetised version of *Howard's End* which transfers the action and characters from turn-of-the-20th-century England to turn-of-the-21st-century New York; simultaneously, it modifies the characters' vital statistics and other parameters (names, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, background, etc.). In Lopez's play – whose subtitle reads "inspired by the novel *Howards End* by E.M. FORSTER," a capitalised name on the play's cover implying Forster's co-authorship of the play – a Hamptons house owned by Walter Pool (a stand-in for Mrs Wilcox) is bequeathed to Eric Glass (Margaret Schlegel) who is deprived of his inheritance by Walter's partner, none other than Henry Wilcox, but later rightfully re-claims it. The play also features the character of E.M. Forster (named Morgan) who comments on the action and converses with a group of young men (a substitute for Greek chorus) and who emerges as a central figure for queer heritage.

I should claim that conceptualisation of inheritance as "past presencing,"[23] as history that not only repeats itself but is performatively re-enacted – which perfectly corresponds to new nature writing's alternative thinking about time (Smith 2017, 6) – might be discerned in Parker's book in two ways. Firstly, through the book's form and its very structure based on the principle of repetitiveness and loop – manifested, among others, by the trope of four seasons and natural cycles which provide the frame for the entire narrative. In *On the Red Hill* the trajectory of time is overtly cyclical resulting in queer temporality par excellence, one that is "not straight" (Dinshaw et al. 2007, 185). And secondly, through the figure of Forster and his ongoing presence – as a forefather of queer rurality, a source of literary inspiration and provider of the book's intertextual hypotext, an identity-shaping force in the lives of queer men, down to his hauntological appearance in the final pages of the book when New Year's Eve party at Rhiw Goch turns into a "celebration of yr hen lanc and his *eternal greenwood*" (378–379; my emphasis). In a fantastical scene – which, nevertheless, makes perfect sense in the context of the book's nonnormative vision of time – the transgenerational queer party is joined by the likes of E.M. Hopkins, Edward Carpenter and George Merrill, Emlyn Williams, Ivor Novello, W.H. Auden, Cedric Morris, J.R. Ackerley, Lord Montagu, and David Hockney – the figures that have shaped Parker's view of the conflation of rurality, queerness, and Wales. However, the most notable presence is that of Forster who is engaged in directing a remake of a nude bathing scene from *A Room with a View* which stars George, the late owner of Rhiw Goch (379–380). Though this very sequence *On the Red Hill* does not only testify to the performative re-enactment of history, but, most importantly from the point of view of the present essay, to a transgenerational conversation with queer past, a conversation with Forster.

[23] Understood here, after Sharon Macdonald, as actively engaging with the past, and not necessarily simply remembering it (Macdonald 2013, 12).

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