

A Magnet for Troubled Souls

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Abstract

My talk is concerned with those drawn to bridges as a means of release from a world of torment.

Based around 'Belongings', a sequence of poems written about my relationship with my son, I tackle the theme of 'Love and death on the bridge'.

Philip Larkin wrote, in 'Bridge for the Living', - a work commissioned for the opening of the Humber Bridge:

'Reaching for the world, as our lives do
Always it is by bridges that we live.'

Bridges may be beautiful in design and possess the power to connect people and places – but, for some, they have a more sinister connotation.

bridge

you stretch across the Humber,
bright magnet for keen tourists,
seductive in your elegance
and panoramic vistas;

a vicious snare for fragile souls
unseen on saucer-souvenirs,
bodies dredged from lonely shores,
drowned beneath your piers.

I watched this magnificent structure being built – the longest single-span suspension bridge in the world when it opened in 1981. I could not imagine the significance it would assume for my son, increasingly troubled by disturbed thoughts and voices.

landmark

we watched it rise out of the sea
vast concrete towers
cables stretching across the void

crowds gathered on the shore
to gawp and speculate
routine sunday pilgrimage

food wrappers
accompanied the usual flotsam
along the water's edge

stone by stone it grew
until the first cars came
hovering in space

you biked there at night
gazed into the murky depths
for your private view

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I aim to explore, through a series of snapshots, how an illness may develop – a tenderness of mutual concern too – through the irresistible pull of the bridge. These personal moments are intended to resonate, with regard to the understanding and treatment of those who are mentally ill and their carers.