



Video 4:

Offcomer

'Offcomer' is a Cumbrian dialect word, used to describe somebody who has moved to Cumbria from somewhere else (or, in my case, someone who was born here, but whose parents weren't).

Offcomer

by Katie Hale

I come from a land that was nobody's land
and anybody's. I come from a war
of accents and blood, from heather
taking root in the bones of clans,
while the wind whispers
the old names. I come from a land
where villages are crumbled and sunk, where stories
disturb the bottoms of lakes.
I come from a land of drownings.
I come from a land where water
is ammunition hurled from the sky. My childhood
was a scrap yard of animals,
of death and disinfectant, of 4x4s and smoke.
I come from a land where rivers
unburden themselves
into farms and villages, where they carpet the city
in a rainbow of diesel and mud.
I come from the fire and the flood.
I come from a land of scythed vowels, of consonants
let tumble like ghylls down the backs of throats. I come
from a land of poems trudded across the fells
like coffins. I come from a naked land, a land



veined in stone, baring itself to the wind. My land
is bracken and gorse and the slow
gorging of ticks. My land
is height and electric skies, is water
locked behind dams.

I cannot hold my land; it is a voice thrown
back across the valley. It speaks
with the deep-throated roar of fighter planes.

No, I am not of this land. My skin is a prairie,
my hair and eyes an Irish peat and sky,
my bones a midlands town.

But put your ear to my chest.
Between my stereo heartbeats, you will hear
water, the raucous gathering of clouds.

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'Offcomer' was first published in *Frogmore Papers*. It appears in Katie Hale's pamphlet *Assembly Instructions* (Southword Press, 2019), and Cumbrian anthology *This Place I Know* (Handstand, 2018).

