

## In the Company of an Invisible Man

Harry Rose (June 2014)

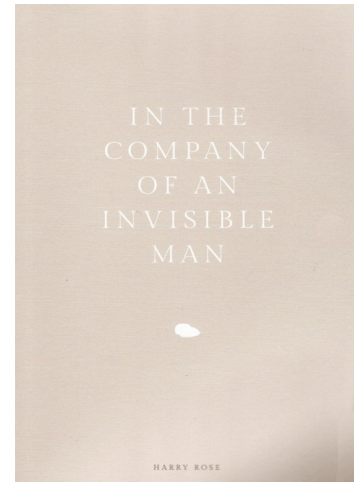
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### ROCKS AND MOUNTAINS

The building blocks of our world – rocks and mountains – sculpt the very land we live on. As communities grow and populations increase, people shape and form the landscape to suit their needs. For all that these landscapes may change however and be marked by man, it is important to remember that they are equally capable of leaving their marks on us. The depths of these marks are subjective, their impressions environmental and influenced by our own physical experience and personal engagement with the land.

In his body of work, *In the Company Of An Invisible Man*, Harry Rose explores notions of loss, memory and human relationships within landscape geography. Specifically, his work focuses on a particular landscape that has influenced him personally as well as professionally. Having kept his distance from this place for some time, Rose has been drawn back to photograph this landscape nonetheless, to reflect and find some inner peace. Retracing walks and journeys from countless miles travelled through his youth Rose guides us through the landscapes he photographs giving the audience access to treasures and memories collected along these routes. Through significant objects, rock minerals, childhood photographs, immersing himself back in to this environment, Rose explores not individuality but an awareness of self and a search for identity in a key psychological landscape formed from his subjective experiences.

“What delight! What felicity! You give me fresh life and vigour. Adieu to disappointment and spleen. What are men to rocks and mountains? Oh! What hours of transport we shall spend! And when we do return, it shall not be like other travellers, without being able to give one accurate idea of any thing. We will know where we have gone – we will recollect what we have seen. Lakes, mountains, and rivers shall not be jumbled together in our imaginations; nor, when we attempt to describe any particular scene, will we begin quarrelling about its relative situation. Let our first effusions be less insupportable than those of the generality of travellers”.\*1

Taken from Jane Austen’s novel *Pride & Prejudice* (1813) this excerpt illustrates two perspectives on humans and our relationship with the landscape around us; firstly, our cathartic regard for time spent in our natural rather than urban environments, and secondly, a landscapes natural longevity compared to our spiritual and mortal selves (for example, the insignificance of man compared to the physical scale of the natural landscape and our own exaggerated sense of self). Collectively, humans have been walking on this planet for a short period of time; individually, we are here shorter still, though in the company of few creatures whose life cycles surpass our own.

Through the planting of trees and the dedication of benches, nature and the natural landscape have often been used metaphorically to memorialise ourselves, so that we may live on long after our bodies have expired. Rocks and mountains last forever, after all. The landscape itself where Rose photographs is deep in North Wale in the Dyssini Valley and rural Gwynedd. Gwynedd is the second largest county in Wales, ye remains one of the most sparsely populated. Carved by glaciers and exposed to the elements, it is as wild as it s breath taking, and has been very much a part of Rose’s life since infancy. The area itself is renowned for it’s richness in natural resources. Set in Snowdonia National Park, this is a location rich in slate mines, and further north, gold mines were abundant for a short while, though the gold rush has long since left these valleys. Locally the landscape teams with remnants of stone and people living with the land. Whatever

history has happened here, you can be certain that the imposing rocks and mountains have born silent witness to it all, and shall long outlast any person who chooses to live there.

To visit brings restfulness here, and a long enduring peace. The community here depends on each other to stay alive, their fate tied to the land as much as they work it. What goes hand in hand here is life and death; a natural order that takes pace in such a quiet and unassuming manner that you begin to think things have a way of taking care of themselves. There is no falsity in this way of life, no arrogance or pretence. Life here is what it is. Whatever is taken is put back in to the land. The make up of this land is built on carbon and minerals compacted under pressure over time. The great patience of nature in creating such a world is reflected in the rural way of life that governs this valley, dictated by seasons and the mercy of the elements. For all that it is exposed, there is a power, prestige and consistency here that never fades over time. Any intervention is one made by man, and is done so with purpose and sympathetic to the land around them. White quartz for example, like exposed skeletons from under the ground clawing the sky, are cleared from land for farming but are then used to adorn walls, gardens and buildings as decorative stone. They are collected, treasured and celebrated.

Rose demonstrates his engagement and alliance with the landscape by mirroring this practise in his work. Like a Gemmologist, he has collected rocks of Quartz and Pyrite (Fools Gold) from the ground and photographed them removed, enlarged and represented as being precious stones for his audience to study. Their attention has a purpose, namely that as well as being of the landscape, they are of such size that Rose has been able to remove from this environment. They are talismans of a presence or association that cannot be removed from this landscape, a physical anchorage of something Rose is eager to retain and possess.

The path and memories that Rose has trod and made here are reflected in his photographs of this landscape as well as the well worn desire lines crisscrossing mountains and the bare broken rocks that permeate they skyline. Every element and subject is purposefully framed to be the focal point of each photograph. Some are literal. Some are simply understood. Motifs of weathered rocks stood on end like tombstones; colossal trees with limb like arteries reaching for the sky, uprooted and torn down in their prime; mounds of rocks piled high resembling improvised graves covered in stone. Layers of thought, feeling and experience made to converge all in to one. They are all individual portraits of Rose's connections projected on to the landscape, offering an answer to where his Invisible Man may be found. As the audience, we are made to follow Rose's journey through this landscape and deduce what the individual stories linked to these objects could be.

“Men seek retreats for themselves, in country, by sea, in the hills – and you yourself are particularly prone to this yearning. But all of this is quite unphilosophic, when it is open to you at any time you want, to retreat in to yourself. No retreat offers more relaxation than in to his own mind, especially if he can do in to thoughts there which put him at immediate and complete ease; and by ease I mean well ordered life”.\*2

Informed by photographs from his family album, Rose hints at the legacy that binds him to this land, pointing to holidays, adventures and rights of passage turning from a boy in to a man. We are led through the landscape via the paths of these photographs, as well as by their two human subjects - a young boy and an anonymous man. We first meet the child, running alone down a path that divides the landscape around him. Is he running ahead of us, the audience and the photographer, or is he lagging behind? Running away in fear or following in the footsteps of an Invisible man? From purple heather to the velvety mountains far off on the horizon, there is a freedom and romanticism about this landscape that implies a fondness and sentimentality between photographer and child. We are bidden to follow them forward wherever they may go, guiding yet vigilant.

The next time we meet this young child however, he is crying, vulnerable and small, huddled amongst a stone out crop. This time, the audience is impassive – we are only able to observe this child, not engage with or comfort them. Finally, we see the child held by an anonymous subject, still looking away from the camera and photographer, maintaining a physical and psychological distance between the two. Who took these photographs? Why are these photographs important to Rose in his landscape years later on? Forgotten, they would not hold any importance at all. As for our next guide, the anonymous man; in the same way as we never see the face of the young boy, we are not shown the distinguishing features of this guardian. He is

clearly older, and positioned in the same way amongst rocks and features in the landscape that the audience is able to draw direct relations between the two figures.

In the final appearance of the young boy, held by an anonymous subject, it is implied that this character needs support in this landscape, whether emotionally or physically though is unclear. In comparison, the anonymous man appears stronger not simply because of his maturity, but more powerful and autonomous becoming steadily more prominent in the landscape. In this work, he remains alone and facing away from the audience, static and calm yet looking ahead to whatever lays beyond. We look for an explanation as to why this growth has occurred. Mirrored in the way each of these subjects appears in the landscape, what is it that has altered this man? The photographer (and the audience through his eyes) however has remained isolated from those he is photographing. Why is there this distance between these subject and camera?

“All that is gold does not glitter, Not all those who wander are lost; The old that is strong does not wither, Deep roots are not reached by the frost. From the ashes a fire shall be woken, A Light from the shadows shall spring; Renewed shall be blade that was broken, The crownless again shall be King”. \*3

Nature is arguably the true measure and monument of all life and the pride of man is to think we may ever conquer and overcome such earthly powers. Living in a time where modern medicine, technology and science allow us to entertain the possibility of extended lifetimes, it is still by no means a guarantee. Even now in a digital age with the ability to record and preserve through sound, photography and writing, we can extend our existence. All matter is subject to erasure and decay; all that we are able to control is how we are remembered and how we remember others. With the inclusion of an Urn, this black totem is a final revelation as to the nature of Rose’s attachment to this landscape; a punctum and arrest in an otherwise scenic journey.

This landscape has left its mark on Rose, the implications of which will be felt by himself and his enduring family for years to come. We look to nature for stability in an ever-changing world, and a way of erasure or escapism from the torridity of 21<sup>st</sup> century life. With the passing of time, who knows what future visits to this landscape will impress on Rose, or change as he continues to develop and grow as a man. For guidance and reflection, it is certain he will return to this land to feel closer to and seek out the company of this Invisible man.

## REFERENCES

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- 3 – Tolkien JRR. (1954) *The Lord of The Rings*