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Reinventing the Local: Neologism in William Barnes

Veronica Alfano

At the heart of William Barnes's best-known poetry is a set of contrasts: rural life as marked by both nostalgic inertia and fluid vitality, linguistic strangeness as both forbiddingly disorienting and tantalizingly half-familiar, speakers as both generic and idiosyncratic. Critics have tended to approach these defining issues by focusing on the poet's use of Dorset dialect. However, I argue that they are best understood by carefully assessing not only Barnes's regionalisms but also his overlooked neologisms. After explaining the ideological basis of this poet's tendency to coin words, I demonstrate how his invented terms can elucidate the interlinked debates above — and, in the process, can shed new light on Barnes's conception of his authorial identity.

It is unsurprising that analyses of the poetry of William Barnes, whom Coventry Patmore famously dubbed 'The Dorsetshire Poet', tend to focus on his use of regional dialect.[1] Within this critical tradition, one particularly prominent debate surrounds Barnes's depiction of time and change. Martin Dubois, for instance, hears an elegiac strain in his dialect verse, locating it 'between the stability of the past and the turbulence of the present'; likewise, Sue Edney claims that Barnes 'attempted to recover a relationship between local words and local things that emphasized stability even through adversity'.[2] While T. L. Burton and K. K. Ruthven believe that 'Barnes freeze-framed rural Dorset just before industrial modernity [...] disturbed its inhabitants', Annmarie Drury insists that the poet's 'local aural communities' are not 'bygone sites in need of preservation but socially dynamic, creative, and emotionally formative worlds'.[3] Barnes's work, which comes across as essentially static and nostalgic for some readers, for others is equipped to embrace mutability and transformation.

A second, and related, scholarly crux has to do with the position of audiences who are unfamiliar with the dialect in which Barnes writes. For Marcus Waithe, Barnes evokes 'an enclosed and exclusive community that avoids any outward transaction with the reader'. Ultimately, the poet 'neither expels us nor lets us in'. Drury, however, counters that his work issues 'an invitation' to those 'outside the aural community of Dorset'. Reading Barnes, E. M. Forster explains, is like crashing a friendly family gathering: 'One misses many of the allusions, one is not connected with the party by blood, yet one has no sense of intrusion.'[4] It seems that in this poetry, linguistic unfamiliarity need not simply be alienating; it can also heighten curiosity and pleasure.

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[1] Coventry Patmore, 'William Barnes, the Dorsetshire Poet', *Macmillan's Magazine*, June 1862, pp. 154–63. Many thanks to Annmarie Drury for the insightful comments she provided on a draft of this article.

[2] Martin Dubois, 'William Barnes's Economy', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 41.3 (2012), pp. 301–17 (p. 314), doi:10.1093/camqtly/bfs014; Sue Edney, 'William Barnes's Place and Dialects of Connection', in *Class and the Canon: Constructing Labouring-Class Poetry and Poetics, 1750–1900*, ed. by Kirstie Blair and Mina Gorji (Palgrave, 2013), pp. 191–210 (p. 202). Alan Hertz, although he is less interested in the role of dialect, also investigates Barnes's depictions of 'stability beneath mutability'. Alan Hertz, 'The Hallowed Pleäces of William Barnes', *Victorian Poetry*, 23.2 (1985), pp. 109–24 (p. 111) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40003673> [accessed 14 January 2025].

[3] T. L. Burton and K. K. Ruthven, 'Dialect Poetry, William Barnes and the Literary Canon', *English Literary History*, 76.2 (2009), pp. 309–41 (p. 315), doi:10.1353/elh.0.0048; Annmarie Drury, 'Aural Community and William Barnes as Ear-witness', *Victorian Poetry*, 56.4 (2018), pp. 433–53 (p. 434) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26630740> [accessed 14 January 2025]. W. J. Keith makes a point similar to Drury's when he describes Barnes's poem 'Harvest Hwome' as 'no reconstruction of moribund folk-practice but a vigorous account of a living event'. W. J. Keith, *The Poetry of Nature: Rural Perspectives in Poetry from Wordsworth to the Present* (University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 72. Marcus Waithe, too, holds that Barnes's people are not 'framed as poignant symbols of a fading ideal'. Marcus Waithe, 'William Barnes: Views of Field Labour in *Poems of Rural Life*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Matthew Bevis (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 460–74 (p. 464), doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199576463.013.036.

[4] Waithe, pp. 464, 469; Drury, 'Aural Community', p. 437; E. M. Forster, 'William Barnes', in Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy* (Arnold, 1951), pp. 209–12 (p. 209).

Finally, Barnes's use of dialect raises questions of individuality and collectivity in his verse. The work of Drury and Waithe again nicely encapsulates this issue. Drury explores the relationship between the shaping of an aural community and 'the private emotional condition of individuals within the community'. And along similar lines, in considering the dynamics of stasis and change that absorb so many Barnes scholars, Waithe comments both on the 'human specificity' of Barnes's poetry and on its 'quality of stability, the sense of a "steady-state" world, consisting of eternal types'.[5] Though their voices are appealingly intimate, Barnes's speakers frequently register as representative.

Crucial to Barnes's best-known poetry, then, is a set of interlinked contrasts: rural life as marked by both nostalgic inertia and fluid vitality; linguistic strangeness as both forbiddingly disorienting and tantalizingly half-familiar; speakers as both generic and idiosyncratic. I argue that these defining issues are best understood by carefully assessing not only Barnes's use of dialect but also his overlooked neologisms.[6] After explaining the ideological basis of this poet's tendency to coin words, I demonstrate via close readings how his invented terms can elucidate the debates above — and, in the process, can shed new light on his authorial self-conception.

Linguistic retrospection and originality are inextricable for Barnes. A philologist as well as a poet, he shares in the wider Victorian anxiety that increasingly standardized education threatens to erase the regional dialects that encode a 'purer' and more ancient version of English. He laments that 'English is now, to the ears, less distinctive than it formerly was, or than is the Dorset speech'.[7] This speech, as Thomas Hardy confirms in his preface to an edition of Barnes's poetry, is rapidly vanishing: education 'has gone on with its silent and inevitable effacements, reducing the speech of this country to uniformity, and obliterating every year many a fine old local word'.[8] The

[5] Drury, 'Aural Community', p. 440; Waithe, p. 463. Drury, to whose work I owe a good deal, also links Barnes's depiction of emotion to his role as a priest. Annmarie Drury, 'William Barnes's Dual Vocation and the Management of Feeling', in *Victorian Verse: The Poetics of Everyday Life*, ed. by Lee Behlman and Olivia Loksing Moy (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), pp. 123–42, doi:10.1007/978-3-031-29696-3_7.

[6] This article employs a broad definition of *neologism* that includes novel adjectival compounds. Such an approach, while preserving the peculiarities of Barnes's linguistic ideology (I argue that one should understand his novel compounds in the context of his prose treatises), also draws attention to the fact that *many* nineteenth-century poets — including those who are less frequently associated with lexical unorthodoxy — do coin words. For a recent perspective on the importance of compounding in Victorian poetry, see Joseph Phelan, '"Bloomluxuriance": Compound Words in the Poetry of the 1830s and 1840s', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 75.1 (2020), pp. 1–23, doi:10.1525/ncl.2020.75.1.1. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for providing useful comments on this topic.

[7] W. Barnes, *Early England and the Saxon-English* (Russell Smith, 1869), p. 114.

[8] Thomas Hardy, Preface, in *Select Poems of William Barnes*, ed. by Thomas Hardy (Frowde, 1908), pp. iii–xii (p. iii). On this subject, see also Charles Mackay, *The Lost Beauties of the English Language: An Appeal to Authors, Poets, Clergymen, and Public Speakers* (Bouton, 1874). Mackay fears that English is 'perpetually losing' its vernacular riches, calling on authors to preserve 'the spoken language of the English and Scottish peasantry' (pp. vii, xviii).

Dorset vernacular, more than simply a charming local phenomenon, is a source of national pride for Barnes because he sees it as the best remaining approximation in contemporary English of 'pure' Anglo-Saxon. As Chris Jones remarks, 'the country speech in which he presents his poems to the world is not merely regional [...] it is the closest idiolect within English to a literary standard of great prestige and precedent', which explains 'Barnes's co-identification as a native of both a regional and national *ethnie*'.[9]

In idealizing such 'purity', Barnes maintains that English need not incorporate words from other languages (such as Latin, Greek, or French) in order to generate new vocabulary. Instead, it can recombine its own terms via what he calls 'the outbuilding of our speech from the word-stores of the land-folk'.[10] As he explains in an essay titled 'Corruptions of the English Language', linguistic borrowing can even be taken as 'proof of national inferiority':

> That we have not equivalents for many terms we borrow, I will allow; but to say that we could not *make* such by composition, would be a different thing. Where the marching intellect in England seeks new words from other languages, the Germans compound them with the greatest ease and accuracy from their own; and whatever they can do with their language, we can do with ours.

On this principle, a penitentiary might instead be called a 'mendstead', hydrostatics could become 'waterweightlore', to 'backshine' might describe the act of reflecting

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[9] Chris Jones, *Fossil Poetry: Anglo-Saxon and Linguistic Nativism in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 164, 153, doi:10.1093/oso/9780198824527.001.0001. Andrew Phillips, too, observes that Barnes is a 'language-patriot' because 'his home-love made him also love the speech of the Saxon English, reflected in the dialect of Dorset folk'. Andrew Phillips, *The Rebirth of England and English: The Vision of William Barnes* (Anglo-Saxon Books, 1996), p. 107.

[10] Barnes, *Early England and the Saxon-English*, p. 124. As Sue Edney puts it, for Barnes the 'purity' of local speech 'mirrors the purity [...] in the ideal relationship of rural communities to their landscape'. Sue Edney, '"Times be Badish vor the Poor": William Barnes and His Dialect of Disturbance in the Dorset "Eclogues"', *English*, 58.222 (2009), pp. 206–29 (p. 229), doi:10.1093/english/efp023. Barnes is of course not the first to propose that English should produce its own lexicon rather than absorbing terms from other languages. Classical scholar John Cheke writes in 1557, for instance, that 'our own tung shold be written cleane and pure, unmixt and unmangeled with borrowing of other tunges [...]. If either the mould of our own tung could serve us to fascion a woord of our own, or if the old denisoned wordes could content and ease this neede, we wold not boldly venture of unknowen wordes.' Cheke, dedicatory letter to Sir Thomas Hoby (translator), in *The Book of the Courtier, from the Italian of Count Baldasarre Castiglione* (Nutt, 1900), pp. 12–13. And in 1573, the Anglican priest Ralph Lever defends the use of coined terms 'compounded of true and ancient English words'. Lever, quoted in Francis R. Johnson, 'Latin versus English: The Sixteenth-Century Debate over Scientific Terminology', *Studies in Philology*, 41.2 (1944), pp. 116–17 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4172651> [accessed 14 January 2025]. Jonathan Roper draws similar comparisons to Barnes in 'English Purisms', *Victoriographies*, 2.1 (2012), pp. 44–59, doi:10.3366/vic.2012.0059.

light, and polyglots could be dubbed 'manyspeeched'.[11] Barnes's dialect verse, too, involves not only preserving well-worn vocabulary but also using it to coin new terms. A deeply conservative fixation on linguistic 'purity', in other words, also licenses striking creativity. As Andrew Phillips notes, 'by being traditional, he was being *radical* — going to the roots of English.'[12] Indeed, when it is recombined into compound neologisms, the very form of English that Barnes praises as most natural and authentic can come across as bizarre and anomalous (it is hardly obvious that, say, 'tway-sounded' means 'disyllabic').[13]

Readers of Barnes have sometimes dismissed his habit of coining words, rarely discussing it in the poetry and occasionally regarding it as an infelicitous affectation in the prose. W. J. Keith, for instance, concludes that it is only when Barnes 'allowed himself to ride his philological hobbyhorse to extremes' that his writing became 'cluttered with revived archaisms and idiosyncratic neologisms'.[14] Alan Chedzoy points out that some of Barnes's signature published terms, such as 'birdlore' for ornithology,

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[11] [Barnes], 'Corruptions of the English Language', *Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1830, pp. 501–03 (pp. 502, 503). The latter two neologisms are from [Barnes], 'Corruptions of the English Language', *Gentleman's Magazine*, November 1830, pp. 393–96 (p. 395).

[12] Phillips, p. 102, emphasis in original. On the relationship between linguistic retrospection and reinvention, see Larry McCauley, '"Eawr Folk": Language, Class, and English Identity in Victorian Dialect Poetry', *Victorian Poetry*, 39.2 (2001), pp. 287–300, doi:10.1353/vp.2001.0014; Christine Ferguson, *Language, Science and Popular Fiction in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle: The Brutal Tongue* (Routledge, 2006); Barbara Barrow, *Science, Language, and Reform in Victorian Poetry* (Routledge, 2019); and Will Abberley, *English Fiction and the Evolution of Language, 1850–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), doi:10.1017/CBO9781316181683. Frances Austin and Bernard Jones remark that with his coined compounds, Barnes 'extends the range of his vocabulary in a way that is in harmony with the older habits of the language and the Wessex dialect'. Frances Austin and Bernard Jones, *The Language and Craft of William Barnes, English Poet and Philologist (1801–1886)* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p. 71. On the interaction of regional and national Englishes in Barnes, see also Martin Dubois, 'Dialect, Victorian Poetry, and the Voices of Print', *English Literary History*, 90.4 (2023), pp. 1069–98, doi:10.1353/elh.2023.a914016.

[13] William Barnes, *An Outline of English Speech-Craft* (Kegan Paul, 1878), p. 3. It is worth noting that in the hands of someone like Australian composer Percy Grainger, Barnesian neologisms — 'keyboard-swinking' for practising piano, for example — are explicitly intended to divide and exclude. Grainger, a frank racist and antisemite, writes that his 'blue-eyed English' is designed as 'cut-off, islandy speech [...] hard for outlanders to master'. Letter of 1 April 1939, in *The All-Round Man: Selected Letters of Percy Grainger, 1914–1961*, ed. by Malcolm Gillies and David Pear (Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 4, doi:10.1093/oso/9780198163770.001.0001. But Barnes, while he did pursue the kind of speech that might 'be understood by common English minds and touch English hearts', did not frame his linguistic project in terms of baffling foreigners; his approach was essentially anti-elitist (*Early England and the Saxon-English*, p. 106). A charming confirmation that Barnes saw Anglo-Saxon neologisms as natural and accessible rather than recondite can be found in his daughter's account of his interactions with his grandchildren. She mentions 'what amusement their queer sayings and doings caused him, especially when they coined words which he considered valuable, such as "put outer" for "extinguisher", or "baby cart" for "perambulator"'. Lucy Baxter [Leader Scott], *The Life of William Barnes, Poet and Philologist* (Macmillan, 1887), p. 294.

[14] Keith, p. 77. Forster also sees the neologisms as evidence of provincialism (p. 210). More recently, however, readers such as Chris Jones have taken Barnes's coinages seriously.

were not included in the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'probably because [Frederick] Furnivall and his colleagues took the view that these were neologisms dreamed up by a mere eccentric, but never actually spoken by anyone, and therefore not real English words at all'.[15] But those odd neologisms — even when they are not explicitly positioned as replacements for borrowed words — get right to the heart of poetry that so often focuses on the interaction between the old and the new, and that is especially fascinated by how much-loved local places can be both stable and volatile as new generations come to inhabit them. Barnes's coinages capture the same tensions between nostalgia and reinvention, between the unknown and the recognizable, and between tradition and individuality that play out in the themes of his poetry.

In an 1882 letter to Robert Bridges, Gerard Manley Hopkins — himself a contributor to Joseph Wright's 1898 *English Dialect Dictionary* and an inveterate neologizer — voices his admiration for Barnes's language. Barnes tries to create, says Hopkins,

> an unknown tongue, a sort of modern Anglosaxon, beyond all that Furnival [*sic*] in his wildest Forewords ever dreamed. He does not see the utter hopelessness of the thing. It makes one weep to think what English might have been [...]. I am learning Anglosaxon and it is a vastly superior thing to what we have now. But the madness of an almost unknown man trying to do what the three estates of the realm together could never accomplish! He calls degrees of comparison pitches of suchness: we *ought* to call them so, but alas![16]

Yet Barnes did in fact see the utter hopelessness of the thing. In March 1833 a correspondent wrote to *Gentleman's Magazine* that

> much as I object to the indiscriminate and often unasked-for introduction into the English language of foreign words, where we have equivalent ones already, still I doubt whether the compounds, proposed by Mr. Barnes, of pure English words, will ever come into general or even partial use.[17]

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[15] Alan Chedzoy, *The People's Poet: William Barnes of Dorset* (History Press, 2010), p. 256. On Barnes and the *OED*, see also, Willis D. Jacobs, *William Barnes, Linguist* (University of New Mexico Press, 1952). As of March 2025, the *OED* entry for *lore* specifies that 'In the *Gentl. Mag.* for June, 1830, p. 503, a correspondent suggested that English compounds of *lore* should be substituted for the names of sciences in *-ology*: e.g. *birdlore* for ornithology, *earthlore* for geology, *starlore* for astronomy, etc. The suggestion was never adopted, though some few words out of the long list of those proposed are occasionally used, not as names of sciences, but in the sense above explained.'

[16] *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 7 vols (Oxford University Press, 2006–24), II: *Correspondence, 1882–1889*, ed. by R. K. R. Thornton and Catherine Phillips, (2013), pp. 550–52 (p. 551), emphasis in original.

[17] 'H. B.', 'On English Compounds', *Gentleman's Magazine*, March 1833, p. 202.

Barnes responded to his critic that

> I doubt as much as he does, whether the compounds I have proposed will come into general use; I shaped them chiefly to show that the language was capable of self-enrichment [...]. I do not wish to work any great change in the English language; nor am I vain enough to think I could do so if I would.[18]

His neologisms, then, can be understood not as presumptuous policy proposals but as rueful counterfactuals ('what English might have been') — thought experiments that epitomize his poetry's paradoxically clear-eyed version of idealizing reminiscence.

In order to understand how Barnes's lexicon reflects the changing-yet-unchanging nature of the Vale of Blackmore, one might first consider how it mirrors the relationship between place and selfhood that his poems explore. His titles and refrains sometimes render individuals essentially synonymous with environments: as the 'primrwose in the sheäde do blow' and the 'thyme upon the down do grow', so do 'pretty maidens grow | An' blow' in Blackmore. For 'Emily ov Yarrow Mill', 'Ellen Brine of Allenburn', Meäry 'o' Morey's Mill, | My rwose o' Mowy Lea', the 'Lovely Maid ov Elwell Mead', 'merry Bleäke o' Blackmwore', 'Linda Deäne ov Ellendon', and 'Ellen Dare o' Lindenore', as well as for the three siblings whose three oak trees are literally 'a-cal'd by our niames', patterns of sonic iteration underscore the interweaving of beloved people and beloved locales.[19] And at times, it seems that language is durable enough to guarantee people and places a certain kind of stability. One speaker muses that 'my dear life do seem the seäme' as long as the 'hwomely neäme' of a loved one 'still do bide' (*PRLTC*, p. 113); another uses this same rhyme in acknowledging that while 'ev'ry thing ha' chang'd its feäce' in Pentridge, 'still the neäme do bide the seäme' (*HR*, p. 175).

Inevitably, though, passing time means that these places, these people, and these words must all accommodate mutability. Houses are abandoned, people die, and words

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[18] W. Barnes, 'Formation of the English Language', *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1833 Supplement, pp. 591–93 (pp. 591, 593).

[19] Barnes, *Hwomely Rhymes: A Second Collection of Poems in the Dorset Dialect* (Russell Smith, 1859), pp. 1, 47, 23, 40, 53, 82, hereafter *HR*; Barnes, *Poems of Rural Life, in the Dorset Dialect, Third Collection* (Russell Smith, 1863), pp. 41, 45, hereafter *PRLTC*; Barnes, *Poems of Rural Life, in the Dorset Dialect: with a Dissertation and Glossary* (Russell Smith, 1844), p. 257, hereafter *PRLDG*. Subsequent references to these three texts are given in parentheses in the main text. Hertz, too, observes that Barnes often 'blurs the distinction between person and place' (p. 116); on that topic, see also Edney, 'William Barnes's Place and Dialects of Connection'. These patterns of sound echo the medieval Welsh versification technique known as *cynghanedd* (literally, 'harmony'), which Hopkins also imitated. Barnes adjusted his orthography, 'translated' his verses into standard English, and revised individual poems over the course of his career; the versions given here are from the original printings of his Dorset collections, although some poems had already appeared (in slightly different form) in periodicals.

are reconfigured. As I have pointed out elsewhere, for Barnes the concept of 'home' can be reimagined precisely *because* it is rooted in the local. The speaker of 'Liady-Day an' Ridden House' finds it traumatic to 'leäve the heth | Wher vust his children drā'd ther breath', packing up his goods but feeling that he leaves memories behind (*PRLDG*, p. 46). But 'Woak Hill', spoken by a man who moves to another house after his wife passes away, is tellingly different. Because his possessions are 'all a-sheenèn | Wi' long years o' handlèn' — testifying to constant use like the 'glossy-knobbèd' walking stick of another Barnes poem — he can rearrange them elsewhere to create a home that is new but suffused with reassuring familiarity. In the same way, the deep-seated local distinctiveness of Dorset speech motivates Barnes's coining of new compounds. 'Woak Hill' describes the hand with which the speaker clutches at his dead wife as 'aïr-reachèn'. The word 'reach' implies both fruitless fumbling and successful communion — an appropriate choice for a speaker who feels both the aching absence and the phantom presence of his wife, and for a coinage that signals both a quasi-private mode of communication with a lost loved one and a powerful expansion of the reader's lexicon.[20] The departure of a family member may leave what another poem calls 'wordless gaps' in the conversation, but neologisms allow Barnes and his speakers to fill those gaps, finding a language for that which is both elusive and accessible, that which partakes of both the past and the present (*HR*, p. 42). This language attunes one to 'The Vâices that Be Gone', to 'Looks A-Know'd Avore', and to 'The Music o' the Dead', all titles that Barnes converts into incantatory refrains. In the words of 'A Wold Friend', it allows speakers to converse with (and readers to reinhabit) 'vâices that be still' — voices of Dorset and of the deceased that are still, and that still are, despite time's depredations.[21] English sparks national pride in Barnes due both to its ancient lineage and to its capacity for self-enrichment; accordingly, his neologistic practice balances novelty with the long local history implied by the careful diacritical marks of a word like 'aïr-reachèn'.[22]

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[20] *PRLTC*, p. 10. 'The Beaten Path', in which the 'glossy-knobbèd staff' appears, is on pp. 103–05 of this collection. For an extended reading of neologism in 'Woak Hill', see Veronica Alfano, 'Neologistic Nostalgia in Thomas Hardy and William Barnes', in *Nineteenth-Century Neologisms*, ed. by Padma Rangarajan and Michele Speitz, special issue of *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* (forthcoming).

[21] *PRLDG*, pp. 243, 246–47, 234. Burton emphasizes that Barnes 'wished to depict *both* people's natures *and* their language — indeed for him the two were inseparable'. T. L. Burton, 'What William Barnes Done: Dilution of the Dialect in Later Versions of the *Poems of Rural Life*', *Review of English Studies*, 58.235 (2007), pp. 338–63 (p. 349), doi:10.1093/res/hgl141.

[22] In fact, Burton and Ruthven point out that Barnes's attempts to capture deep-rooted Dorset speech in print also reflect his own creativity: 'In the absence of a commonly accepted system for transcribing the allophonic specificities generated by dialectal diversity, Barnes devised his own' (p. 319). Considering the benefits and drawbacks of an English phonetic alphabet, Barnes maintains that 'The conservative nature of type-language is a good as long as it can conserve

Moving through a landscape that is also a wordscape, then, Barnes's characters experience both continuity and disruption. In an old homestead, 'The aïry mornèns still mid smite | Our windors wi' their rwosy light', yet 'we must bid a long farwell | To days an' tides in Culver Dell' (*HR*, p. 61). Conversely, though Pentridge House has been 'burnt to ground', it easily rises again in the memory ('There spread the hall, where zun-light shone') (*HR*, p. 64). 'Hallowed Pleaces' are made holy by their long association with fleeting 'times o' youthvul glee' — and that same dynamic between the comfort of tradition and the awareness of change generates such vernacular coinages as 'well-hetted' and 'windor-sheädèn' (*HR*, pp. 77, 78). As 'The Hollow Woak' puts it, passing time does not erase years gone by but can instead 'show the wold times' feäce | Wi' new things in the wold things' pleäce' (*PRLTC*, p. 30). Just as Blackmore is subjected to fond nostalgia yet not consigned to the past, so dialect words can be creatively recombined.

Indeed, Barnes's lovingly detailed descriptions of Blackmore's landscapes and inhabitants tend to produce flurries of coined compounds. 'Good Night', for instance, rhymes 'green-wheel'd mills' with 'dark-back'd hills' before introducing the 'swift-swung zweep' of birds and greeting a 'zunsmote maïd' (*PRLTC*, pp. 27, 28). 'Vields by Watervalls' emphasizes its neologisms via the internal rhymes of 'flow'ry-gleäded, timber-sheäded', 'woody-zided, stream-divided', and 'dëaisy-whitèn'd, gil'cup-brightèn'd' (*PRLTC*, pp. 71, 72). The proleptically nostalgic speaker of 'Went vrom Hwome', seeking to savour and preserve the essence of the place he will soon leave, admires its 'stream-be-wander'd dell' and 'elem-sheädèn light' (*PRLTC*, p. 83). Deep-rooted new words, it seems, are needed to represent these places with absolute accuracy and precision — and the strategy of compounding strives almost to make a series of impressions simultaneous, to momentarily pursue a blissful atemporality that the poems nonetheless deem unsustainable.

Occasionally, there is indignant revisionary force to these words. 'The Love-Child' — this word is itself, of course, a Germanic euphemism for the pejorative French-derived 'bastard' — dubs its title character a 'God-gift'; such renaming is of a piece with the speaker's distress at the way in which this girl has been 'a-treated wi' scorn' by those who should value her most (*PRLTC*, p. 51). But more often, the coinages show Barnes seeking a characteristic language to reflect the characteristic sights and sounds of Dorset. The displaced speaker of 'Jenny Out vrom Huome', struggling to recapture

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the breathsound-speech', but nonetheless sees value in 'the upfilling of our alphabet by new letters' that more accurately represent actual pronunciation. William Barnes, *A Philological Grammar* (Russell Smith, 1854), pp. 22, 20. For a detailed account of Barnes's approach to dialect spelling (including his use of diacritics), see also Burton, 'What William Barnes Done'.

the feeling of the place 'wher I da long var', imagines being carried back by what she names 'wild-riavèn winds' (*PRLDG*, p. 154). 'Fifehead' mentions 'the charmy childern's glee' (*HR*, p. 144): when Barnes elsewhere defines the regionalism *charm* ('a noise, a confusion of voices'), he associates it with the Old English word *cyrm* ('clamour'). Transforming this ancient term into an adjectival neologism, then, indicates a sound that is both familiar and utterly distinctive. Similarly, when 'Sound o' Water' insists on the specificity of its speaker's origins ('I born in town! oh, no, my dawn | O' life vu'st broke bezide theäse lawn'), it attunes readers' ears not just to the soaring and intricate songs of nightingales but to the 'high-wound zongs o' nightingeäles' (*HR*, p. 119). No other bird could, one imagines, offer such a song. This language seems to spring from the landscape itself. As Hopkins says of Barnes in letters to Bridges and Patmore, 'it is as if Dorset life and Dorset landscape had taken flesh and tongue in the man [...] he is like an embodiment or incarnation or manmuse of the country, of Dorset, of rustic life and humanity.' Tellingly, Hopkins adds that while Barnes provides 'epithets, images, and so on which seem to have been tested and digested for a long age in their native air and circumstances', these are in fact 'of his own finding and first throwing off'.[23] Just as Hopkins himself aspires to do in his nature poetry, Barnes seeks to channel or translate the inscape of his surroundings — and in doing so, to demonstrate the generative vitality of the locally tempered linguistic elements he rearranges.

Published in *Hwomely Rhymes* in 1859, 'Our Bethpleace' nicely illustrates the role of Barnes's neologistic imagination:

> How dear's the door a latch do shut,
> An' geärden that a hatch do shut,
> Where vu'st our bloomèn cheäks ha' prest
> The pillor ov our childhood's rest;
> Or where, wi' little tooes, we wore
> The paths our faethers trod avore;
> Or clim'd the timber's bark aloft,
> Below the zingèn lark aloft,
> The while we heärd the echo sound
> Droo all the ringèn valley round.
> A lwonsome grove o' woak did rise,
> To screen our house, where smoke did rise
> A-twistèn blue, while eet the zun
> Did langthen on our childhood's fun;

[23] *Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, II, pp. 744, 809.

An' there, wi' all the sheäpes an' sounds
O' life, among the timber'd grounds,
The birds upon their boughs did zing,
An' milkmaids by their cows did zing,
Wi' merry sounds, that softly died
A-ringèn down the valley zide.

By river banks, wi' reeds a-bound,
An' sheenèn pools, wi' weeds a-bound,
The long-necked gander's ruddy bill
To snow-white geese did cackle sh'ill;
An' stridèn peewits heästen'd by,
O' tiptooe wi' their screamèn cry;
An' stalkèn cows a-lowèn loud,
An' struttèn cocks a-crowèn loud,
Did rouse the echoes up to mock
Their mingled soun's by hill an' rock.

The stars that clim'd our skies all dark,
Above our sleepèn eyes all dark,
An' zuns a-rollèn round to bring
The seasons on, vrom spring to spring,
Ha' vled, wi' never-restèn flight,
Droo green-boughed dae, an' dark-tree'd night;
Till now our childhood's pleäces there
Be gay wi' other feäces there,
An' we ourselves do vollow on
Our own vorelivers dead an' gone. (*HR*, pp. 62–63)

After opening in what sounds like a comfortingly eternal present ('How dear's the door a latch do shut'), Barnes quickly shifts into the past tense. Throughout the poem, moments of apparently atemporal suspension — such as the gerunds of 'stalkèn cows a-lowèn' or 'zuns a-rollèn round' — give way to markers of pastness ('Did rouse', 'Ha' vled'). Despite the imagistic energy poured into depictions of birdsong and starshine that aspire to timelessness, shadows must lengthen and 'merry sounds' must die in this nostalgia-laden world. Even the sound of the trisyllabic rhymes juxtaposes stability and fluctuation: two consecutive lines ending in (say) 'all dark' give the impression of exact reduplication, of resistance to change, until a closer look reveals sonic variety within the uniformity ('skies all dark' / 'eyes all dark').

When the present tense returns in the final stanza of 'Our Bethpleace', it is to confirm that this well-known locale has become strange: 'now our childhood's pleäces there | Be gay wi' other feäces there'. Well marked both by descriptive poetic feet and by 'little tooes', snug behind latched doors and screening growths of oak, the homestead still cannot be fixed or controlled. Echoes that 'sound | Droo all the ringèn valley' and that 'mock | [The] mingled soun's' of cows and roosters also emblematize the bittersweet experience of the poem's speakers, who encounter an uncannily fading and elusive version of their childhood home. Their birthplace has become an echo of itself, the same and not the same.

What is more, the poem's speakers are themselves figures of echo. Determinedly plural, always a 'we' and never an 'I', they recapitulate the past and prefigure the future; they tread 'the paths our faethers trod avore' and allow their own joys to be replaced by the happy faces of others. Individual lives, anchored in the cycling seasons, must also be located within the context of cycling generations that tend to convert individuals into types.

All this is encapsulated in the neologism that appears in the final line of 'Our Bethpleace': the speakers muse that they are following their own deceased 'vorelivers'. Barnes's word pays homage to the predictable patterns of human life, forming itself via a recognized prefix and suffix. Yet its striking newness (emphasizing earlier life, fore-living, rather than the earlier death signalled by 'predecessor') also mirrors the 'other feäces' that Barnes's speakers come upon. Mildly disconcerting yet not opaque, in Drury's words 'almost but not quite familiar', this coinage allows readers to feel the tantalizing semi-estrangement felt by those who revisit their childhood haunts: it is, like this landscape, just tinged with illegibility. Indeed, it reflects what Burton and Ruthven identify as Barnes's ability to distance himself from Dorset dialect for the sake of deeper understanding and engagement, 'so that he could study it as if it were ancient Greek'.[24] Accordingly, the word 'vorelivers' displays this poet's own creative touch — he often substituted 'fore-' for 'pre-', opening one book with a 'fore-note' rather than a 'preface' — while also grounding itself in extant roots and in the Dorset speech that highlights communal identity.[25] Without the regional rendition of initial 'f' as 'v', 'vorelivers' would lack the double chime of consonance that lends it an aura of well-proportioned equilibrium. Change and stasis, strangeness and familiarity, the individual and the collective are held in balance.

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[24] Drury, 'Aural Community', p. 436; Burton and Ruthven, p. 318. Relatedly, Waithe remarks that Barnes, as a priest and schoolteacher, was familiar with the world of rural labour yet not part of it (p. 466).

[25] Barnes, *Early England and the Saxon-English*. This book offers 'fore-elders' as another alternative for 'ancestors' (p. 104).

In an appreciation of Barnes written soon after his death, Hardy calls him 'probably the most interesting link between present and past forms of rural life that England possessed'; in addition to being 'a complete repertory of forgotten manners, words, and sentiments', Barnes gilds his Blackmore scenes with a Wordsworthian 'light that never was'.[26] 'Fancy', which was published in Barnes's third collection of Dorset verse in 1863, uses neologism not only to inhabit a liminal temporality but also to navigate between faithful imitation and reinvention of lost time — a process that illuminates Barnes's authorial identity, as it permits him to be both compiler and innovator:

In stillness we ha' words to hear,
    An' sheäpes to zee in darkest night,
An' tongues a-lost can haïl us near,
    An' souls a-gone can smile in zight;
When Fancy now do wander back
    To years a-spent, an' bring to mind
    Zome happy tide a-left behind
In weästen life's slow-beäten track.

When feädèn leaves do drip wi' raïn,
    Our thoughts can ramble in the dry;
When winter win' do zweep the plaïn
    We still can have a zunny sky.
Vor though our limbs be winter-wrung,
    We still can zee wi' Fancy's eyes
    The brightest looks ov e'th an' skies,
That we did know when we wer young.

In païn our thoughts can pass to eäse,
    In work our souls can be at plaÿ,
An' leäve behind the chilly leäse
    Vor warm-aïr'd meäds o' new-mown haÿ.
When we do vlee in Fancy's flight
    Vrom daily ills avore our feäce,
    An' linger in zome happy pleäce
Ov mè'th an' smiles, an' warmth an' light. (*PRLTC*, pp. 68–69)

[26] Thomas Hardy, 'The Rev. William Barnes, B. D.', *Athenaeum*, 16 October 1886, pp. 501–02 (pp. 501–02, 502).

This poem offers assurance that the power of imagination can relieve any trouble or pain ('In work our souls can be at plaÿ'). But in so doing, it conflates imagination with memory. Fancy does not create *ex nihilo* but 'wander[s] back | To years a-spent' in order to conjure up a joyful realm of 'warmth an' light'. And this is precisely the basis of Barnes's linguistic philosophy: nostalgic retrospection underlies idiosyncratic invention. Coined compounds crop up in 'Fancy' at moments when the speaker is glancing both back in time and to a newly fabricated world: casting our eyes down the 'slow-beäten track' of life, we may replace our chilly leas with 'warm-aïr'd meads'. The phrase 'though our limbs be winter-wrung' captures the precise moment at which present reality is reimagined; this subclause, which finds a new name for a quotidian discomfort, leads into the confident main-clause declaration that 'We still can zee wi' Fancy's eyes'. Neologisms tend to slow the pace of reading, obliging us to pause and linger. In so doing, they enact the instinct of Barnes's speakers to slow or arrest the flight of time — and, in acknowledging the impossibility of that desire, to generate a palimpsestic landscape in which every pain or alteration adumbrates a past joy. Patmore writes that Barnes 'enables us to see common and otherwise "commonplace" objects and events with a sense of uncommon reality and life' (p. 156). This is true in 'Fancy', and it is true for the 'wold vo'ke' of 'Zunsheen in the Winter', for whom 'Noo vrost can whiten [...] | but what da bring | To mind agen ther yerly spring' (*PRLDG*, p. 191). It is true for inhabitants of Blackmore who use specific locales as reminders of well-known stories, who relish seeing 'The pliace a tiale's a-tould o'' (*PRLDG*, p. 250). And it is true for readers who encounter Barnes's dialect neologisms, which transform their apparently unassuming linguistic elements in order to underscore those elements' self-enriching potential.

Moreover, the stanzaic structure of 'Fancy' speaks to Barnes's ability to combine retrospection and reinvention. The first four lines of each stanza are ABAB tetrameter, a scheme often found in folk ballads and in communally sung hymns (for instance, Isaac Watts's 1707 'When I Survey the Wondrous Cross'). But the second four lines of each stanza shift into ABBA tetrameter — that is, into an *In Memoriam* stanza. Though this form was not original to Tennyson, he believed that he had invented it, and it came to be strongly associated with his famous 1850 poem.[27] Barnes's incorporation of it, then, serves several interlinked purposes. It tempers the conventionality and anonymity of his stanza with literary idiosyncrasy; it partakes of Tennysonian hesitation between progressing and wistfully circling back; it reinforces the association between Fancy's flights and elegy's orientation towards the past. And

[27] 'I believed myself the originator of the metre, until after "In Memoriam" came out.' Tennyson, quoted in Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir*, 2 vols (Macmillan, 1897), I, p. 306. See also, Denise Gigante, 'Forming Desire: On the Eponymous *In Memoriam* Stanza', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 53.4 (1999), pp. 480–504, doi:10.2307/2903028.

the poem's neologisms confirm the effect of its hybrid stanza. Words like 'slow-beäten' and 'warm-aïr'd' again ground their novelty in nostalgia for a deep-rooted oral culture, sacrificing typographical elegance in order to capture a more authentic Dorset delivery — yet the resultant swarms of diacritics and hyphenations also draw attention to individual creativity, as they come to comprise Barnes's distinctive visual aesthetic. What is more, the compound 'winter-wrung' derives its pleasing symmetry not only from its connection to orality and status as spoken language (via the repeated 'r' that blends the last sound of 'winter' into the first sound of 'wrung') but also from its connection to textuality and status as written language (via the repeated letter 'w' that lends its two halves a kind of visual alliteration). Barnes positions himself as archivist and author: Hardy's 'complete repertory' of folkways and preserver of a threatened vernacular, and at the same time a boldly innovative literary mind. Forster is right to say that he can 'conceal himself from notoriety beneath the veil of the Dorset dialect', but surely that very concealment licenses the imaginative power meant to honour the dialect's latent fecundity (p. 209). Like the speakers who register as representative types ('Fancy' again offers a collective 'we' rather than an 'I'), the poet is both obscured and revealed through his neologistic practice.

In closing, it will be instructive to juxtapose 'Fancy' with 'Vields in the Light', which appeared in Barnes's first (1844) collection of Dorset verse:

> Oon's heart mid leäp wi' thoughts o' jây
> In comen manhood light an' gây,
> When wolder vo'ke da goo an' gi'e
> The smilen wordle up to we;
> But dæs so fiair in hope's bright eyes
> Da of'en come wi' zunless skies:
> Oon's fancy can but be out-done
> Wher trees da swây an' brooks da run,
> By risèn moon ar zettèn zun.
>
> When in the evemen I da look
> Al down the hill upon the brook
> Wi' wiaves a-leäpen clear an' bright,
> While boughs da swây in yoller light;
> Noo hills nar hollers, woods nar streams,
> A-voun' by dæ ar zeed in dreams,
> Can seem much fitter var to be
> Good anngel's huomes though they da gi'e
> But pâin an' twile to souls lik' we.

An' when, by moonlight, darksome shiades
Da lie in grass wi' dewy bliades,
An' wordle-hushèn night da keep
The proud an' angry vast asleep,
When we can think, as we da rove,
Ov only they that we da love;
Then who can dream a dream to show,
Ar who can zee a moon to drow
A sweeter light to wa'ke below? (*PRLDG*, pp. 86–87)

This poem recognizes the delightful possibilities of imagination. It relishes the act of musing on loved ones, and it notes that 'thoughts o' jây' thrill the heart even if they do not come to fruition. Yet imagination remains firmly grounded in the external world: after all, it is roving through the moonlit fields that brings 'they that we da love' to mind, and the praise of nocturnal landscapes means that 'zunless skies' becomes less a metaphor for the disappointing nature of reality than a literal accompaniment to the 'risèn moon'. Ultimately, the here-and-now eclipses the world of dreams. 'Oon's fancy can but be out-done' by the presence of actual brooks and trees, just as the neat closures of the couplet structure are overflowed by the triple rhyme 'out-done' / 'run' / 'zun'. Nostalgia, too, which 'Fancy' at times conflates with imagination, is pushed aside to make way for the weighing of hopeful expectation ('jây | In comen manhood') against pleasure in the present moment. The passing of 'wolder vo'ke' is thus mentioned with barely a hint of regret.

There is a sense in which 'Vields in the Light' both engages with and quietly transcends the tensions I have located at the heart of Barnes's poetry (and of Barnes scholarship). This poem acknowledges turbulence, changefulness, and disappointment in the form of 'pâin an' twile'; it does not, however, turn to retrospection as an antidote or treat the past as a source of stability. It embraces the physical reality of the landscape, with its leaping waves and swaying boughs; yet local description here does not threaten to disorient or exclude, as it omits the *drongs* and *parricks* that elsewhere complicate a reader's sense of welcome curiosity. In the moonlight the vigorous specificity of the Vale of Blackmore is softened without being erased or mourned.[28] Finally, and relatedly, an isolated appearance of the first-person singular in this poem does not prevent the speaker from joining a 'we'. Christopher Ricks, meditating on

[28] This poem briefly mentions angels — and it is spiritual perspectives that tend to compromise the loving attention Barnes's speakers pay to the specificity of their surroundings. 'Oone Rule' appreciates the Stour River not on its own merits but because it symbolizes the way that 'we do bend | Our waÿ droo life' with God's guidance (*HR*, p. 160); 'Herrenston' ends by wishing that 'happy souls, droo greäce' might achieve 'A higher place than Herrenston' (*HR*, p. 166).

Barnes's debt to Wordsworth, identifies the 'unegotistical sublime' that turns 'My heart leaps up' into 'Oon's heart mid leäp'.[29] Some other poems in the volume strain to yoke together fine-grained detail ('Poll's uncle, chuckèn her below | Her chin') with more generalized language ('while our blood da rin in vâins | O liven souls [...] | mid 'em have the means o' griace'), but here the voice comfortably inhabits a lyrical space of quasi-subjectivity (*PRLDG*, p. 229). Emily Harrington associates lyric poems with 'impersonal intimacy'; Allen Grossman notes that the nature of any given lyric speaker derives from 'the verbal conduct of all other speakers who have inhabited the lyric cell'.[30] The tendency of this 'I' to become a type, then, has as much to do with the exigencies of genre as with depictions or perceptions of rural life.

What to make, then, of the coined compound 'wordle-hushèn'? My reading of 'Vields in the Light' notwithstanding, this word continues to speak to the Barnesian cruces I have identified. A neologism that incorporates a dialect variant of 'world' and a regional rendition of the gerund suffix, 'wordle-hushèn' demonstrates both nostalgic orthodoxy and innovation, both alienating oddness and inviting decodability, both the authority of a speech-community and an individual's creative touch. The unfamiliarity of 'wordle' is, in a sense, balanced by the visceral immediacy of 'hush'.

Yet the coinage also gestures at a suggestive new context for these debates by enacting in miniature a theory of the origin of language itself. 'Hush' is an onomatopoetic word, imitating the state of quiet calm that it describes or seeks to bring about; since the mid-1700s, as Michael Sprinker points out, scholars had been proposing that language might come from just such onomatopoetic imitation or from 'repetition of natural human emotional cries'.[31] 'Wordle-hushèn', with its felicitous orthographic conflation of 'word' and 'world', figures Barnes's Vale of Blackmore — already a source of local distinctiveness and national pride — as a microcosmic wellspring of Edenic speech.

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[29] Christopher Ricks, 'For Marilyn Gaull: A Note on Wordsworth and Barnes', *Wordsworth Circle*, 53.1 (2022), pp. 1–7 (p. 3), doi:10.1086/718230.

[30] Emily Harrington, *Second Person Singular: Late Victorian Women Poets and the Bonds of Verse* (University of Virginia Press, 2014), p. 3; Allen Grossman with Mark Halliday, *The Sighted Singer: Two Works on Poetry for Readers and Writers* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 265. It is worth noting that Harrington associates 'impersonal intimacy' chiefly with women poets.

[31] Michael Sprinker, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins on the Origin of Language', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 41.1 (1980), pp. 113–28 (p. 117), doi:10.2307/2709105. For a Victorian response to these theories, see, for example, Max Müller's *Lectures on the Science of Language, Second Series* (Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1864).