Sean O’Brien was born in London in 1952. Shortly afterwards, he moved to Hull, where he grew up, thus firmly cementing an allegiance to the North of England. The railways and the past are recurring themes of Sean O’Brien’s frequently political but never preachy poetry. Image: Getty. JP O’Malley. 14 December 2012. 11:55 AM.

There is a particular place in Hull which has long ‘enslaved’ Sean O’Brien’s imagination – so much so that it has formed the basis for the titles of two of his four collections so far. It is a Victorian conservatory housing exotic plants and birds, a glass house, an ‘indoor park’, situated on Pearson Park where Philip Larkin lived. Walking into its Turkish-bath feel before its recent renovation, the conservatory conjured up an atmosphere of inaction, boredom, suspension, decay, all the things which made Hull its own myth – the sense of a city so far up the creek that it was at the end of the line with nowhere to go, with inhabitants who just seemed to end up there and never escape, stuck in the fathomless Humber mud. But for O’Brien, the conservatory also epitomises something strange and mysterious, ‘a piece of the exotic stuck right in the middle of the everyday … a kind of Victorian paradox of importing sweat-based plants into a frostbased climate.’ (TE)