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## **Reconceiving the British Isles: The Literature of the Archipelago**

**Series Editor: John Brannigan**

**General Editor: P.J. Mathews**

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ALICE ENTWISTLE

'NEITHER HERE NOR THERE': DYNAMISM, DEIXIS AND  
CULTURAL POSITIONING IN SOME CONTEMPORARY  
POETRY\*

THE CULTURAL CRITIC LOTHAR FIETZ HAS EXPLAINED HOW THE NOTION OF 'PLACE' (ONCE A RHETORICALLY USEFUL POINT OF REFERENCE IN AN ARGUMENT) CAME TO SERVE THE NOW-TRUISTIC SEPARATION OF A REGIONAL OR 'PERIPHERAL' CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS FROM ITS MORE 'UNIVERSAL' CENTRE (*POETRY IN THE BRITISH ISLES* 15). AS FIETZ'S CO-EDITOR, HANS-WERNER LUDWIG REHEARSES ELSEWHERE IN THE SAME ANTHOLOGY, THE CENTRE-PERIPHERY PARADIGM HAS EXERCISED A POWERFUL INFLUENCE OVER BRITISH AND IRISH CRITICAL INTEREST IN 'POETRIES OF PLACE' FROM AT LEAST THE TIME OF MATTHEW ARNOLD AND PERHAPS PARTICULARLY IN THE LATER DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY (47-69). BUT HOW MUCH USE IS THIS IN SOME WAYS DEFINITELY DIALECTICAL PARADIGM TO A POEM LIKE BERNARD O'DONOGHUE'S 'WESTERING HOME'?

THOUGH YOU'D BE PRESSED TO SAY EXACTLY WHERE  
IT FIRST SETS IN, DRIVING WEST THROUGH WALES  
THINGS START TO FEEL LIKE IRELAND. IT CAN'T BE  
THE CHAPELS WITH THEIR CLEAR GREY WINDOWS,  
OR THE BUZZARDS MENACING THE SCOOPED VALLEYS.  
IN APRIL, HAVE THE BLURRED BLACKTHORN HEDGES  
SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT? OR POSSIBLY  
THE MOTORWAY, WHICH SEEMS TO LOSE ITS NERVE  
MILE BY MILE. THE HOUSES, UP TO A POINT,  
WITH THE MASONED GABLES, EACH UPPER WINDOW  
A RAISED EYEBROW. MORE, THOUGH, THAN ALL OF THIS,  
IT'S THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE SPIRIT:  
THE OLD THIN ACHE YOU THOUGHT THAT YOU'D  
FORGOTTEN—  
MORE SMOKE, ADMITTEDLY THAN FLAME;  
LESS TEARS THAN RAIN. AND THE WHOLE BUSINESS  
NEITHER HERE NOR THERE, AND THEREFORE HOME. (*HERE  
NOR THERE* 51)

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\* A version of this paper was first delivered at the Ireland-Wales Symposium 'Ireland and Wales: Correspondences', convened by the Ireland-Wales Research Network at Cardiff University in September 2009. Grateful thanks are due to Claire Connolly, Katie Gramich and Paul O'Leary for convening that event, and to Bernard O'Donoghue, Ciaran Carson, Zoe Skoulding, Catherine Walsh and Simonetta Moro for their kind permission to reproduce the texts and visual image used.

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THIS SHREWD TEXT DISCERNs A KIND OF CULTURAL COMMONALITY BETWEEN WALES AND IRELAND NOT SO MUCH IN THE FEATURES OF THE RURAL LANDSCAPE THROUGH WHICH IT 'WESTERS' – THE MANIFESTLY WELSH CHAPELS AND BUZZARDS – AS IN THE UNCERTAINTIES ('POSSIBLY') ASCRIBED TO THE FALTERING MOTORWAY; THE SCEPTICALLY 'RAISED EYEBROW[S]' (PUNNINGLY, 'UP TO A POINT') OF THE HOUSES. AND THEN THERE IS THE FAINTLY POLITICAL GESTURE AT SOME KIND OF SCANT SHARED 'SPIRIT': THAT 'OLD THIN ACHE'. THE NUANCES COMBINE IN THOSE CRYPTIC AFTERTHOUGHT-LIKE LAST LINES: 'AND THE WHOLE BUSINESS / NEITHER HERE NOR THERE, AND THEREFORE HOME.' IT IS OF COURSE NOT AT ALL CLEAR WHAT 'BUSINESS' IS 'NEITHER HERE NOR THERE'? THE PARALLELS BETWEEN WALES AND IRELAND? THE ATTENTION WE HAVE BEEN ASKED TO PAY THEM? OR, PERHAPS THE OVER-RIDING IMPRESSION, THE VERY NATURE OF THE PLACES THEMSELVES? AT THE SAME TIME, THAT SHRUG – 'NEITHER HERE NOR THERE' – IS TRANSFORMED BY THE POEM'S CLOSING PHRASE. FAMOUSLY, THE SCOTTISH POET-CRITIC ROBERT CRAWFORD IDENTIFIES 'THE THEME OF HOME [AS] PERHAPS THE MAJOR THEME OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY POETRY IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD' (*IDENTIFYING POETS* 14). IN THE LIGHT OF CRAWFORD'S OBSERVATION, I AM STRUCK BY THE WAY IN WHICH O'DONOGHUE'S FINAL WORDS AT ONCE UNDERMINE AND ARE UNDERMINED BY THE SENSE OF INCONSEQUENTIALITY BY WHICH THEY ARE FRAMED; HERE, THE CONVENTIONALLY COMFORTING IDEA OF 'HOME' IS, PARADOXICALLY, BOTH LOCATED AND REFUSED IN AMBIGUITY, IN A PHRASE WHICH SELF-CONSCIOUSLY UNDOES ANY SENSE NOT SIMPLY OF ITS POSITION, BUT OF ITS VERY *POSITIONABILITY*.

INTERESTINGLY 'WESTERING HOME'S' LAST LINE SUPPLIES THE TITLE OF O'DONOGHUE'S 1999 COLLECTION *HERE NOR THERE*. FOR ME, THE EQUIVOCATION OF THIS CAREFULLY SUGGESTIVE CHOICE OF PHRASE CONTRIVES THAT WALES AND IRELAND TOGETHER AND SEPARATELY INSCRIBE A STATE OF NOT JUST TOPOGRAPHICAL BUT CULTURAL AND (AT THE CLOSE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, AMID THE REALITIES OF DEVOLUTION) *POLITICAL* IN-BETWEENNESS. INDEED, THE POEM'S DELIBERATE-SEEMING INTEREST IN SUCH UNCERTAINTIES SEEMS TO ME TO TROUBLE THE OPPOSITIONAL RELATIONSHIP AT THE HEART OF THE CENTRE-PERIPHERY DIALECTIC WHICH FIETZ AND LUDWIG – NAVIGATING THE OUTER REACHES OF THE CULTURAL LIFE OF THE SO-CALLED 'BRITISH ISLES' – MUST UNPICK. TO COGNITIVE LINGUISTS, THE PREPOSITIONS 'HERE' AND 'THERE' HAVE A DISTINCT AND DEFINITIVE FUNCTION: THEY MARK OR FRAME THE OPERATION OF 'SPATIAL' OR 'PLACE' *DEIXIS*; A TERM WHICH SIGNIFIES THE CAPACITY OF LANGUAGE TO POINT AND

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POSITION; TO SPECIFY LOCATION. AS WE'VE SEEN, O'DONOGHUE DEPLOYS THE SAME SIGNIFIERS IN PRECISELY THE OPPOSITE WAY: HIS PHRASING DESTABILIZES, TO THE POINT OF DENYING, THE REASSURINGLY REFERENTIAL DEICTIC FUNCTION WHICH MARKERS LIKE 'HERE' AND 'THERE' TECHNICALLY, NORMALLY, CARRY. HE IS NOT THE ONLY POET WRITING IN IRELAND AND WALES TO USE THESE SIGNIFIERS IN THIS COUNTER-INTUITIVE WAY. A NUMBER OF REGIONALLY-IDENTIFIED POETS SEEM TO ME TO BE URGING US TO SIDE-STEP, OR AT LEAST THINK OUTSIDE, THE INCREASINGLY EXHAUSTED-SEEMING CIRCULARITY OF THE PERIPHERY-CENTRE MODEL. I'D LIKE TO SEE CRITICAL ATTENTION SHIFT, AT LEAST PARTLY IN RESPONSE TO THE AMBIGUOUS USE WHICH WRITERS LIKE O'DONOGHUE MAKE OF SPATIAL DEIXIS, TO THE LESS-DETERMINISTIC, MORE BROADLY RELATIONAL AND ARGUABLY, IN OUR TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY MOMENT, PRODUCTIVE ISSUE OF *CULTURAL POSITIONING* IN WHAT SOME HAVE CHOSEN, PERHAPS CONTENTIOUSLY, TO CALL THE 'ATLANTIC ARCHIPELAGO' (KERRIGAN).

CRITICS HAVE BEEN SLOW TO CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF DEIXIS ON THE LITERARY TEXT. MOST TREATMENTS OF LITERARY DEIXIS FOCUS ON NARRATIVE PROSE AND ASPECTS OF NARRATOLOGY; CONTRASTINGLY FEW CONSIDER POETIC DEIXIS IN ANY DEPTH, AND FEWER STILL THE MULTIPLE WAYS IN WHICH A POEM'S DEICTIC ACTIVITY MIGHT SIGNIFY BEYOND THE ESSENTIALLY MECHANICAL INTRIGUES OF THE DEICTIC 'SHIFTS' THEY SEARCH. YET, AS COGNITIVE LINGUISTS ACCEPT, BY DEFINITION TEXTUAL DEIXIS NECESSARILY REGISTERS THE CULTURAL-POLITICAL CONTEXTS OUT OF WHICH IT EMERGES. AS KEITH GREEN EXPLAINS, IF '[DEICTIC TERMS] ARE, AS A RULE, EGOCENTRIC ... THEY ARE ALSO REFERENTIAL. REFERENCE ALWAYS TAKES PLACE WITHIN A SUBJECTIVE FRAME. DEICTIC REFERENCE IS THUS ... PARTLY TIED TO CONTEXT AND PARTLY CREATES THAT CONTEXT' (*NEW ESSAYS* 17). ELSEWHERE, PETER STOCKWELL NOTES THAT SINCE 'OCCURRENCES OF DEICTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE DEPENDENT ON CONTEXT, READING A LITERARY TEXT INVOLVES A PROCESS OF CONTEXT-CREATION IN ORDER TO FOLLOW THE ANCHOR-POINTS OF [THOSE] EXPRESSIONS' (*COGNITIVE POETICS* 46). THESE REMARKS ENDORSE GISA RAUH, HELPFULLY DEFINING DEIXIS AS A 'MECHANISM OF RELATING' (*ESSAYS ON DEIXIS* 47). THIS RELATIONAL FUNCTION IS CHIEFLY WHY, WHEN READ BACK INTO THEIR HISTORICAL, GEOGRAPHICAL OR CULTURAL CONTEXTS, THE SEMANTIC FEATURES OF DEIXIS CAN COME TO INFLECT THE CONSTRUCTION OF AUTHOR, SPEAKER, READER EVEN TEXT. SIGNIFICANTLY, THE CULTURAL CRITIC SUSAN FRIEDMAN FIGURES IDENTITY AS 'A POSITIONALITY, A LOCATION, A STANDPOINT, ... AN INTERSECTION'; BY EXTENSION, AS SHE

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EXPLAINS, EACH OF HER COGNATE TERMS DEPENDS ON 'A POINT OF REFERENCE; AS THAT POINT MOVES ... , SO DO THE CONTOURS OF IDENTITY' (*MAPPINGS* 22). SO WHAT HAPPENS TO IDENTITY WHEN THAT POINT OF REFERENCE – FOR COGNITIVE LINGUISTS, ITS DEICTIC *ORIGO* – DISSOLVES; WHEN THE SUBJECT'S 'POSITIONALITY [OR] LOCATION' IS LEFT IN ABEYANCE, AS O'DONOGHUE ENSURES, 'NEITHER HERE NOR THERE'? AND WHY MIGHT POETS LIKE CIARAN CARSON, AND YOUNGER WRITERS LIKE CATHERINE WALSH AND ZOË SKOULDING, WRITING OUT OF THEIR RESPECTIVE IRISH AND WELSH CULTURAL/HISTORICAL CONTEXTS, LIKE O'DONOGHUE DEPLOY THE MARKERS OF SPATIAL DEIXIS TO COMPLICATE RATHER THAN CLARIFY POSITION? I'M GOING TO START BY EXPLORING THE CULTURAL-POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF THIS SUGGESTIVE TEXTUAL HABIT, BEFORE EXAMINING HOW AND WHY IT MIGHT BE RELEVANT TO THE SHAPING CULTURAL AESTHETICS OF TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY IRELAND AND WALES.

AS PAUL WERTH HAS NOTED, THE MARKERS OF DEIXIS WORK AT LEAST PARTLY THROUGH THEIR CAPACITY TO 'CALL UP AN ENTITY AND KEEP IT IN MIND' ('HOW TO BUILD A WORLD' 64). THIS CAPACITY HAS BEEN SHREWDLY EXPLOITED BY THE NORTHERN IRISH POET CIARAN CARSON, WRITING OUT OF THE ENTRENCHED CULTURAL DIVISIONS OF HIS NATIVE BELFAST. CARSON'S AWARD-WINNING WORK *BELFAST CONFETTI* (1989) TIRELESSLY SEARCHES THE RISKS AND EXIGENCIES OF SELF-POSITIONING AMID THE CITY'S NOTORIOUSLY FREIGHTED AND FRACTURED STREETPLAN. PUBLISHED A DECADE BEFORE O'DONOGHUE'S POEM, WHENEVER AND WHEREVER CARSON'S BUOYANTLY MOBILE TEXT POINTS IT IS WITH ASTUTE, IF CASUAL-SEEMING, IMPRECISION. TAKE THE MOMENT WHEN, HAVING BEEN AMBUSHED ON A BIKE-RIDE THROUGH THE CITY, THE SPEAKER OF 'QUESTION TIME' IS INTERROGATED BY A GROUP OF UNIDENTIFIED CAPTORS. THE INCIDENT IS RECOLLECTED BY THE VICTIM IN THE DEICTICALLY CONFUSING PRESENT HISTORIC TENSE:

I AM THIS MAP WHICH THEY EXAMINE...; A MAP WHICH NO LONGER REFERS TO THE PRESENT WORLD, BUT TO A HISTORY, THESE VANISHED STREETS; A MAP WHICH IS THIS MOMENT, THIS INTERROGATION, MY REPLIES... (*BELFAST CONFETTI* 63)

NOTE HOW THE IMPLIED 'HERE' OF 'THIS MAP ... THIS MOMENT' AND THE IMPLIED 'THERE' OF 'HISTORY, [THE] VANISHED STREETS' MERGE SELF-PROTECTIVELY IN 'I', BOTH ROOTED AND DEFYING PLACEMENT IN PRESENT AND VANISHED WORLDS ALIKE. THE FRAGMENT NOT ONLY PROJECTS BUT MEDIATES WHAT EAVAN BOLAND HAS DESCRIBED AS THE 'DUALITY TO PLACE ... THE PLACE





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(99). THE AMBIGUITIES ARE FURTHER COMPOUNDED BY THE POEM'S REFRACTING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC COMPLEXITY IN THE TWINNED, SIMILARLY BILINGUAL ENVIRONMENTS OF WALES AND BELGIUM: FOR SKOULDING, AS FOR IRISH POET-CRITIC EAMON GRENNAN, 'THE SIMPLE FACT OF DUAL LANGUAGE ... BECOMES ITSELF AN IMAGE OF POSSIBILITY, THE POSSIBILITY OF ACCOMMODATION AND THE RICHNESS THAT IS ITS CONSEQUENCE' (*FACING THE MUSIC* 375).

BRADFORD-BORN AND RAISED IN IPSWICH, SKOULDING CAME TO WALES (WHERE SHE HAS SINCE SETTLED, NEAR BANGOR) AS A YOUNG ADULT. HER WRITING HAS BEEN PREOCCUPIED FROM THE FIRST WITH THE LINGUISTIC, AND BY EXTENSION CULTURAL, RICHNESS AND POSSIBILITY WHICH CHARGES WELSH, AS MUCH AS IRISH, AESTHETIC LIFE. NOW FIRMLY EMBEDDED IN, AND IDENTIFYING ALBEIT CAUTIOUSLY WITH, HER COUNTRY OF DOMICILE, THE POLITICALLY-SENSITIVE TENDENCIES OF SKOULDING'S OWN CONSTRUCTION OF PLACE AND/OR LOCATEDNESS ARE LIGHTLY VOICED IN THE MESHING PERSPECTIVES OF 'PRESELIS WITH BRUSSELS STREET MAP'. SPEAKING IN INTERVIEW, SOME YEARS BEFORE HER APPOINTMENT AS EDITOR OF *POETRY WALES*, SKOULDING REMARKED, 'EVEN WHILE YOU'RE IN ONE LOCATION, YOU'RE SIMULTANEOUSLY LINKED TO MANY OTHERS' ('A CITY' 61). A PREOCCUPATION OBTAINING IN MUCH OF HER WRITING, THE COMMENT SUMMONS THE CULTURAL/POLITICAL GEOGRAPHER DOREEN MASSEY, DECLARING THAT 'THE GLOBAL IS IN THE LOCAL IN THE VERY PROCESS OF THE FORMATION OF THE LOCAL' (*SPACE, PLACE AND GENDER* 120). IN THE NEXT BREATH, SKOULDING REVEALS THAT HER OWN ANTI-ESSENTIALIST ATTITUDE TO THE IDEA OF LOCATION, OR PERHAPS TO THE POSSIBILITY OF LOCATEDNESS, LICENCES, FUELS AND JUSTIFIES THE CREATIVE AND PROFESSIONAL CLAIMS SHE MAKES, AS BOTH WRITER AND EDITOR, UPON HER OWN CULTURAL CONTEXT: 'FOR ME, THIS [SENSE OF GLOBAL INTER-CONNECTEDNESS] ... GETS BEYOND THERE BEING AN ESSENTIAL WALES AND WHO IT BELONGS TO AND WHO'S ALLOWED TO WRITE ABOUT IT' ('CITY' 61).

IN FACT, AS SHE HAS EXPLAINED ELSEWHERE, SKOULDING'S CREATIVE MATURATION HAS BEEN BOUND UP WITH, AND NURTURED BY, HER SENSE OF THE AESTHETIC POSSIBILITIES WHICH WALES, IN ALL ITS BILINGUAL RICHNESS, AFFORDS HER:

WALES IS WHERE MY WRITING TOOK SHAPE; I WRITE IN ENGLISH IN A BILINGUAL COUNTRY, AND I KNOW THAT THIS CONTEXT MAKES ME SEE ENGLISH AS A PROVISIONAL CIRCUMSTANCE RATHER THAN SOMETHING TO BE TAKEN FOR



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GRANTED: MY NATIONAL IDENTITY AS A WRITER IS THEREFORE A SET OF NEGOTIATIONS RATHER THAN A FIXED POINT WITHIN CLEARLY DEFINED NATIONAL BOUNDARIES. COMPLEX RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES DEFINE WALES AS MUCH AS CYMRAEG ITSELF DOES, AND THEY DEFINE EUROPE TOO ('BORDER LINES' 40).

GIVEN THESE VIEWS, IT PERHAPS SHOULDN'T SURPRISE THAT SKOULDING HAS DESCRIBED THE PROCESS OF WRITING ITSELF IN SUGGESTIVELY (ANTI-DEICTICALLY) *DYNAMIC* TERMS: AS 'A WAY OF BEING DELIBERATELY IN BETWEEN, OF MOVING THROUGH THE CONTRADICTORY SPACE BETWEEN HERE AND THERE (OR GLOBAL AND LOCAL, WELSH AND ENGLISH, HUMAN AND NONHUMAN)' ('WANDERING' 24). SHIFTING US BETWEEN TEXT AND CONTEXT, FROM THE AESTHETIC TO THE POLITICAL, THE ANALOGY SHE DRAWS BETWEEN WRITING AND MOBILITY IS NOT ORIGINAL. HOWEVER, IT MERITS ATTENTION FOR REMINDING US THAT SPATIAL DEIXIS CAN BE UNSETTLED FOR REASONS WHICH RESONATE BEYOND THE GEO-POLITICAL LIMITS OF PLACE, HAVING TO DO WITH THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF THE AESTHETIC. IN POETRY, THIS TAKES US TO THE QUESTION OF FORM AND TODAY, FOR ME, THE RESTIVE, SCRUPULOUS IDIOM OF CATHERINE WALSH.

BORN IN DUBLIN IN 1964, WALSH HAS BEEN PUBLISHING HER UNCOMPROMISING, SPATIALLY-SELF-CONSCIOUS POETRY SINCE THE MID-EIGHTIES, MOSTLY WITH RADICAL SO-CALLED LITTLE PRESSES LIKE HER OWN HARDPRESSED POETRY, CO-FOUNDED WITH BILLY MILLS, ALTHOUGH HER TWO LATEST COLLECTIONS ARE WITH SHEARSMAN. IN MY VIEW WALSH HAS EARNED TOO LITTLE CRITICAL NOTICE, EVEN FROM ENTHUSIASTS OF THE SO-CALLED NON-MAINSTREAM OR INNOVATIVE POETRIES, PERHAPS BECAUSE HER WORK RELENTLESSLY DISCOURAGES ITS READERS FROM TAKING ITS HERMENEUTIC POSSIBILITIES TOO MUCH FOR GRANTED; IN DOING SO IT MAKES FOR AN EXACTING EVEN CHASTENING READING EXPERIENCE. I WANT TO BEGIN WITH AN EXCERPT FROM *IDIR EATORTHA* (1996), ITS GAELIC TITLE LOOSELY TRANSLATING AS *BETWEEN WORLDS*.

[SCRAPING SHOVEL  
ON CONCRETE]

"THE GREY LEAF"  
"THE GREEN LEAF"  
"THE GREY GREEN LEAF"  
"THE GREENY LEAF"  
"THE GREY EY LEAF"

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"GRAINY LEAF GRAINY LEAF GRAINY GREY GREEN LEAF  
OF A TREE"

"OFF A TREE"

"OF A TREE OFF ON A PAVEMENT OFF OF A TREE ON A  
PAVEMENT"

"GRAINY GREY GREEN LEAF OF A TREE OFF OF ON A  
GREY GRAINY PAVEMENT GREEN LEAF GRAINED DIRTY  
RAIN TRAILS"

"TWEET TWEET"

"IF I HAD A LITTLE BIRD"

"CONDITIONAL"

"DEPENDENCY CLAUSE"

"NOT ON"

"WHERE IS IT?" "WELL WHERE IS IT?"

[SCRAPING OF SHOVEL ON CONCRETE]

[SHORT RAPID BRUSHSTROKES – HARD BRISTLE ON  
CONCRETE]

"GRAINY, GRAINY GREEN, GREY GREEN, JUST GREEN"

"A JUST GREEN LEAF ON A"

...

"OK THEN, A GREEN LEAF ON A GRAINY GREY PAVEMENT"

"PAVEMENT'S WRONG"

"WHAT'S IT?"

"FOOTPATH, A GRAINY GREY FOOTPATH."

[CLATTERING OF SPADE, BRUSH ON WOODEN CART]

[HUMPHING]

[HEAVY BREATHING]

[TRUNDLING CART]

"SOUND OF WHEELS"

/QUIETLY

"WHAT, IS THE SOUND OF WHEELS"

"ON A GREY FOOTPATH?"

"WHAT IS THE SOUND OF A GREEN LEAF ON A GRAINY"

"NO, NOT GRAINY, THEN"

"START AGAIN"

"HERE WE ARE. THERE'S WHERE IT IS." (36-38)

ARGUABLY CONVERSING WITH BOTH BECKETT AND JOYCE, THIS  
PERHAPS MERCILESSLY INDETERMINATE-SEEMING FRAGMENT,  
FLAUNTING ITS CONVERSATIONALITY, MAY WELL (THOUGH IT  
NEEDN'T) APPEAR DIALOGIC. BUT WHETHER WE UNDERSTAND IT AS  
INTERIOR MONOLOGUE, OR AS DIALOGUE (BETWEEN TWO OR  
PERHAPS MORE VOICES), WE ARE LEFT ASKING *WHO*, PRECISELY, IS  
TALKING? WHAT ABOUT? WHY? INTO WHAT CONTEXTS ARE THESE

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LINES – EACH IN ITS SEPARATE, AT TIMES COMICALLY MINUTE,  
ADJUSTMENTS – POINTING (US) OR BEING POINTED?

BY WAY OF ANSWER, I WANT TO TURN TO ONE OF WALSH'S FINEST CRITICS, ALEX DAVIS, RIGHTLY WARNING THAT WALSH'S 'DISJUNCTIVE, DISORIENTING POETRY ACKNOWLEDGES LANGUAGE AS A MEDIUM WHICH CONSTRUCTS OUR RELATION TO OTHERS, TO OBJECTS, TO OURSELVES. HER POETIC SUBJECTS ARE ALWAYS *IDIR EATORTHA*, CAUGHT BETWEEN TWO WORLDS' (*A BROKEN LINE* 170). I AGREE; SELF-EVIDENTLY, THE MULTIPLE 'WORLDS' MEDIATED BY THIS SHARPLY INTELLIGENT POETICS ORBIT THE CENTRAL PROBLEMATIC OF LANGUAGE, THE 'MEANING' OF ITS CONSTITUENT PARTS ALWAYS DEPENDENT ON THE NEGOTIATIONS WHICH THE ASSIGNATION OF 'MEANING' NECESSITATES. POISED BETWEEN VOICE AND/OR VOICES (SOUNDING AT TIMES VERY LIKE A GROUP WRITING-EXERCISE), BETWEEN SINGULAR AND PLURAL, BETWEEN WRITING AND TALK, TEXT AND INTERTEXT, BETWEEN PARTIALITY AND COMPLETEDNESS, MY SELF-EDITING EXCERPT INSISTENTLY INVITES US TO CONSIDER HOW WE MIGHT READ (OR 'POSITION') IT. ON ONE HAND, IT CONJURES GRENNAN, AVERRING 'TALK IS "IRISH" AND IS COMMUNITY, AND WHEREVER ANY OF US IS WRITING WE ARE ALL TRYING TO TALK – TRYING IN OUR VARIOUS WAYS, OUR PERSONAL DIALECTS, TO TALK OURSELVES AND OUR WORLD INTO EXISTENCE, INTO COEXISTENCE' (375). YET THE TEXT'S DUALITIES, IN VARIOUS WAYS AS CONVINCINGLY RECALL JOHN GOODBY, NOTING 'IRELAND'S INTERSTITIAL GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION BETWEEN THE TWO MOST POWERFUL ANGLOPHONE CULTURES AND ... [THEIR COMMON] HISTORY OF COLONISATION, PLANTATION, SETTLEMENT AND EMIGRATION.' (*IRISH POETRY SINCE 1950* 10)

FOR ME, GOODBY'S TOPOGRAPHIC READING OF WALSH'S MULTI-DIMENSIONAL WORK HELPFULLY VENTILATES DAVIS' CENTRALISING OF HER SENSE OF THE RELATIONAL POTENTIALITY OF LANGUAGE. WHAT GETS LOST IN DAVIS' REMARKS IS THIS POETICS' DETERMINATION TO ARTICULATE ITSELF IN AND THROUGH ITS AIRILY CRYPTIC FORMS: THE SPATIAL ARRANGEMENTS INTO WHICH THE TEXT ORGANISES ITSELF, AND DEMANDS THAT WE NEGOTIATE AS WE READ – MAP – IT. THE EQUIVOCAL FINAL LINE LEAVES US SOMEWHERE EQUALLY, PRODUCTIVELY, EQUIVOCAL: BETWEEN THE 'HERE' OF THE 'WE' (WHO MIGHT AND MIGHT NOT INCLUDE US) AND THE 'THERE' OF AN ALL-TOO AMBIGUOUS 'IT'. IN HER TERRIFIC WORK *ON FORM*, ANGELA LEIGHTON ARGUES THAT WE COME CLOSEST TO UNDERSTANDING FORM – AND SPECIFICALLY POETIC FORM – WHEN WE CONSTRUCT IT AS FUNCTION:

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TO BE A "CAPACITY FOR" KNOWING, RATHER THAN AN OBJECT OF KNOWLEDGE, SHIFTS ATTENTION TO A KIND OF KNOWING WHICH IS AN IMAGINATIVE ATTITUDE RATHER THAN AN ACCUMULATION OF KNOWN THINGS ... IT DOES NOT CLOSE DOWN INTO AN ACHIEVED INTERPRETATION BUT REMAINS OPEN TO ENDLESS PERMUTATIONS OF MEANING' (27).

CONFIRMINGLY, WALSH HAS HERSELF REMARKED 'I DON'T SEE WHY THERE SHOULD BE ANY ONE DEFINITIVE INTERPRETATION OF ANYTHING ANYBODY HAS WRITTEN. OR ANY TWO OR THREE DEFINITIVE EXPLANATIONS OR INTERPRETATIONS' (*PROSPECT INTO BREATH* 181). FROM MY ANGLE, HER PRIZING OF THE PROLIFERATIVE POTENTIAL OF LANGUAGE-AS-TEXT IMPLICITLY ARGUES THE CULTURAL-POLITICAL IMPORT OF THE AESTHETIC; I CAN'T HELP BUT READ IT, LIKE GOODBY, AS DRAMATISING 'THE REFUSAL OF CONTEMPORARY IRISH POETS TO BE CONTAINED BY THE BOUNDARIES OF THE ISLAND, THE CONFINES OF EXPLICITLY "IRISH" SUBJECT MATTER' (*IRISH POETRY* 371-372). I FIND WALSH'S TESTING IDIOM INSISTENTLY INSCRIBING, AND BEING NUANCED BY, ITS AUTHOR'S RESOLVE TO RESIST THE OPPRESSIVE EFFECTS OF THE KIND OF AESTHETIC, CULTURAL-POLITICAL, POSITIONING WHICH MENACES HER: THAT INSTINCT FOR ME MAKES MOST SATISFYING SENSE OF THE SPATIAL/FORMAL POSSIBILITIES OF THE FRAGMENT QUOTED ABOVE, NOT TO SAY THIS REJOINER:

"AH WELL, AND UP YOURS TO WITH A, STOP THERE. STOP RIGHT THERE.  
HERE. HERE, THERE, ANY PLACE. SPACE. STOP RIGHT THERE, THAT'S  
HERE, WAS THERE, WAS HERE THERE ANY WHERE – WHAT A LOAD OF (*IDIR EATORTHA* 39)

AS THESE WORDS MIGHT BE TAKEN TO IMPLY, WALSH SEEMS INCLINED TO UNDERSTAND HER RELATIONSHIP WITH HER OWN CULTURAL CONTEXT, FOR LITERARY-POLITICAL IF NOT GENDER REASONS, IN TERMS OF A PREDICAMENT EXTENDING BEYOND QUESTIONS OF PLACE AND THEME. OF HER PARTICULAR LITERARY HERITAGE, SHE CONTENDS 'YOU ARE ONLY SUPPORTED IF YOU ARE A PART OF THAT TRADITION, THAT SAME TRADITION WHICH MUST CELEBRATE ABOVE ALL ELSE YOUR SENSE OF IRISHNESS AND YOUR SENSE OF BEING PART OF AN ONGOING LINEAR TRADITION OF IRISH WRITERS, WRITING OUT OF A SENSE OF BONDAGE ALMOST' (*PROSPECT* 188). FROM THIS PERSPECTIVE, WALSH'S RUTHLESSLY JUDGED, FORENSICALLY ANTI-REFERENTIAL DISMANTLING OF AESTHETIC EXPECTATIONS OBLIQUELY REPUDIATES THE KIND OF *LITERARY-CULTURAL* POSITIONING TO WHICH THE CRITICAL

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COMMUNITY AND THE ACADEMY AT LARGE (IRISH OR OTHERWISE)  
IS GIVEN. WALSH ADMITS

THE WORK ... IS DELIBERATELY WRITTEN TO HAVE A CERTAIN  
KIND OF AMBIGUITY. IT IS NOT MEANT TO BE OPAQUE ... I AM  
SIMPLY TRYING ... TO [MAKE] A PERSON AWARE OF CONTEXT  
OR IDEA AND AFTER THAT TO HAVE THEM QUESTION IT. I  
DON'T HAVE ANY ANSWERS FOR ANY OF THE THINGS I WRITE  
ABOUT. BUT IF I CAN MAKE PEOPLE QUESTION THESE THINGS  
AND APPROACH THEM FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES, EVEN *IF BY  
THE WAY I WRITE, I NECESSITATE THEIR APPROACHING IT IN  
SEVERAL DIFFERENT WAYS, ONE AFTER THE OTHER, OR  
SIMULTANEOUSLY OR ON DIFFERENT OCCASIONS IN  
DIFFERENT WAYS*, WELL THAT'S WONDERFUL' (*PROSPECT* 184-5  
[MY EMPHASES]).

I WANT TO CONCLUDE BY RETURNING TO SKOULDING, WHOSE  
MOST RECENT WORK (PUBLISHED IN LATE 2008 AND  
DISINGENUOUSLY ENTITLED *FROM HERE*) REPLAYS THE CULTURAL-  
POLITICAL POWER OF THE AESTHETIC FROM ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE  
AGAIN. THIS SLENDER PAMPHLET, JUXTAPOSING 12 NINE-LINE  
LYRICS BY SKOULDING WITH VISUAL IMAGES BY NEW YORK ARTIST  
SIMONETTA MORO, DEVELOPS ON WALSH'S POETIC AND POLITICAL  
EXAMPLE IN BOTH ITS DELIBERATE TESTING OF GENERIC AND  
FORMAL LIMITS, AND ITS INTERROGATION OF THE TOO-EASILY  
OCCLUDED CULTURAL POLITICS OF AUTHORSHIP. A NOTE AT THE  
END OF THE PAMPHLET EXPLAINS

"FROM HERE" WAS AN EMAIL COLLABORATION DURING THE  
SUMMER OF 2008 THAT BEGAN WITH A CHANCE MEETING ONE  
RAINY AFTERNOON DURING . . . A CONFERENCE AND FESTIVAL  
OF PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY AT MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN  
UNIVERSITY. OVER THE FOLLOWING WEEKS SIMONETTA SENT  
DRAWINGS FROM NEW YORK, I SENT POEMS BACK FROM  
BANGOR IN NORTH WALES AND THE SEQUENCE DEVELOPED  
AS A CONVERSATION.

GENERATED IN THE SHARED INTERCONTINENTAL, INTERCULTURAL  
*VIRTUAL* SPACE OF EMAIL AND THE INTERNET, DISTURBING THE  
AESTHETIC DIVIDE BETWEEN TEXT AND IMAGE, *FROM HERE* RINGS  
THE CHANGES IN A NEGLECTED TRADITION OF FEMALE POETIC  
COLLABORATION, IN THE LOGIC OF ITS GENERIC AUTHORIAL  
DYNAMISM. TO WHAT / WHOM DO WE LOOK, FOR THE CONTEXTS  
BY WHICH WE MIGHT INTERPRET THIS TEXT? IN BOTH CASES, *IN  
BOTH WAYS AT ONCE*. NOT ONLY DO THE SPARE, ELEGANT, LENS-  
LIKE TEXTS AND IMAGES CONTRAST, CONVERSE YET COMBINE WITH

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EACH OTHER IN THE SPACE OF THE PRINTED CONSTRUCT – THE ARTEFACT – THEY INHABIT. THEMATICALLY AND VISUALLY, IMAGES AND TEXTS ALIKE ALSO INVITE US TO IMAGINE OURSELVES INTO THE NOTIONALLY ANTITHETICAL POSITIONS OF BOTH OBSERVER/READER AND PARTICIPANT/INTERLOCUTOR, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY DENYING ANY SUCH CONTROLLING PERSPECTIVE.

A JOINT, CO-OPERATIVE APPROACH TO CREATIVE EXPRESSION RADICALLY DISTURBS THE CULTURAL AND AESTHETIC STATUS OF THE NORMALLY SINGULAR AUTHOR, LET ALONE THAT OF HIS OR HER LANGUAGE, IMAGINATIVE ENERGY AND ARTISTIC PRACTICE. AN EXPERIENCED COLLABORATOR, SKOULDING HAS CONSIDERED THE PRACTICE IN DEPTH, AS IS REVEALED IN AN ESSAY ENTITLED 'DISOBEDIENCE', CO-WRITTEN WITH HER COLLEAGUE AND FRIEND THE POET IAN DAVIDSON. THE ACCOUNT, DESCRIBING AND EXAMINING HOW THEIR JOINTLY-AUTHORED POETIC COMPOSITIONS COME INTO BEING, VIEWS LITERARY COLLABORATION AS 'AS MUCH AN ACT OF READING AS IT IS AN ACT OF WRITING. ON RECEIVING A SECTION OF THE POEM, WE EACH HAVE TO READ IT BEFORE RESPONDING. IT IS AN ACT OF INTERPRETATION AND AN ACT OF DISCOVERY' (*NECESSARY STEPS* 32). THIS SHARED, STEP-BY-STEP WRITING PRACTICE EMERGES AS 'NEGOTIATION OF AN UNMAPPED SPACE, ... INVOLV[ING] A CONTINUOUS RESPONSE TO A MOVING AND UNPREDICTABLE TEXTUAL LANDSCAPE' (33; 34). IN *FROM HERE*, THE COMPLEXITIES OF COLLABORATION ARE SHARPENED AND COMPOUNDED IN A TECHNOLOGICAL FORMAT WHICH FIRMLY RESISTS ANY CONVENTIONALLY SINGULAR OR STATIC PERSPECTIVE OR DEICTIC FRAME. AS DAVIDSON HIMSELF NOTES, THE INTERNET 'REDEFINES RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SPACE AND PLACE, CHANGES RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND PLACES, BREAKS DOWN RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SPACE AND TIME . . .' (*IDEAS OF SPACE* 163).

STAGING THE CREATIVE POSSIBILITIES ENSHRINED IN THE PROLIFERATING SPATIALITY OF THE INTERNET, *FROM HERE* ENDORSES MASSEY'S DESCRIPTION OF A 'SIMULTANEOUS MULTIPLICITY OF SPACES: CROSS-CUTTING, INTERSECTING, ALIGNING WITH ONE ANOTHER, OR EXISTING IN RELATIONSHIPS OF PARADOX OR ANTAGONISM' (3). THE COMPLEXITIES MASSEY ADUMBRATES ARE, AT LEAST IN PART, WHAT PROMPT GEOGRAPHER NIGEL THRIFT TO DECLARE THAT 'PLACE IN THIS NEW "IN-BETWEEN" WORLD [IS, BY DEFINITION] COMPROMISED: PERMANENTLY IN A STATE OF ENUNCIATION, BETWEEN ADDRESSES, ALWAYS DEFERRED' ('INHUMAN GEOGRAPHIES' 222). 'DISOBEDIENCE' AFFIRMS, 'IN A CULTURE OF SIMULTANEOUS EXISTENCES HERE AND ELSEWHERE ONE

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IS JUST AS LIKELY TO CONNECT ONE PLACE WITH ANOTHER AS TO DIG DOWN THROUGH THE DEPTHS OF ASSOCIATIONS IN A SINGLE LOCATION' (30).

IN *FROM HERE*, AS IN *IDIR EATORTHA*, THE USUALLY SEPARATE, SEPARABLE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN AUTHOR AND READER, BETWEEN TEXT AND EXEGESIS (BETWEEN, IF YOU LIKE, VARIOUS AESTHETICALLY REIFIED VERSIONS OF 'HERE' AND 'THERE') ARE COLLAPSED, IMPLICITLY IN ORDER TO REFUSE OR FRUSTRATE BY DYNAMIZING THE KINDS OF ENTRENCHED, OFTEN GENDERED, CULTURAL HIERARCHIES PERPETUATED IN AESTHETIC CONVENTION. LIKE CARSON AND, IN HIS LESS POLITICALLY ASSERTIVE WAY, O'DONOGHUE, IN REFUSING TO POINT – SPATIALLY OR AESTHETICALLY – SUCH WORKS 'POINT' US TOWARDS A DIFFERENT, OR AT LEAST CHANGING, KIND OF CULTURAL FUTURE, BY SKIRTING, DISSOLVING AND/OR LITERALLY DISPLACING THE HIERARCHICAL LOGIC OF THE CENTRE-PERIPHERY DIALECTIC WHICH I BEGAN BY DESCRIBING. THEIR AUTHORS OFFER AN ALTERNATIVE, MORE OPEN-ENDED (OPEN-MINDED?) UNDERSTANDING OF PLACE – OR RATHER *EMPLACEMENT* – IN THE MORE RESPONSIVE, MORE RELATIVISTIC, ALWAYS POTENTIALLY DYNAMIC, TERMS OF 'POSITIONING', IN THE HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND AESTHETIC (AS WELL AS GEOGRAPHICAL) CONNECTIONS THEY MINE. DESPITE THEIR MANY DIFFERENCES, WRITERS LIKE WALSH AND SKOULDING CAN BE FOUND DELIBERATELY PROBLEMATISING WHAT EAVAN BOLAND ONCE CALLED 'THE CARTOGRAPHY OF THE POEM' IN RESPONSE TO THE INCREASINGLY COMPLEX DEMANDS OF OUR CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL MOMENT ('AN INTERVIEW' 112).

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