ISSN 1753-2396 (Print)
ISSN 2753-328X (Online)

Journal of
Irish and Scottish Studies

Articles

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Volume 5, Issue 2
Pp: 175-188
2012
Published on: 1st Jan 2012

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UNIVERSITY PRESS

Homeless at Home: Poetics of Place in the Poetry of Tom Paulin

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Being an inseparable ingredient in shaping and defining the human conception of the self in relation to the world, place has always been conceptualised and employed to define networks of relationships, configure boundaries of belonging, and spin webs of mutuality. The self, as Homi Bhabha puts it, is 'at the centre of a series of concentric circles that move through various cycles of familial, ethnic and communal affiliations to "the largest one, that of humanity as a whole"'.[1] To be home 'is first to inhabit one's own body'.[2] The notion of home further extends to be the 'whole set of connections and affections, the web of mutual recognition that we spin around ourselves and that gives us a place in the world'.[3] But what happens if the web of mutual recognition is torn apart, if place is displaced, and if the self is uprooted from the intimacy of 'us' and thrown into the detachment of 'them'? Investigating the poetics of place in the poetry of Tom Paulin (1949–) is an attempt to explain how the impressive dilation of the circles of belonging force the exiled to embark on a voyage of discovery wherein unquestioned perceptions and assumptions about place and identity are challenged.

In his essay 'Roots–The Sense of Place and Past', Edward Shils writes: 'There is much sentiment about the place where one originated but it becomes articulated usually after departure from that place. As long as one remains fixed, there is little articulate expression of attachment to a place of origin.'[4] The relationship between man and his homeland mostly remains neutral as long as he remains resident in it; however, everything utterly changes when he is voluntarily or forcibly dislocated. Homelessness at home, ability to belong

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[1] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism' in Gregory Castle (ed.), *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology* (Oxford, 2001), 39–52.

[2] Deborah Slicer, 'The Body as Bioregion' in Michael P. Branch et al. (eds.), *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and the Environment* (Moscow, 1998), 107–16.

[3] Fintan O'Toole, *The Ex-Isle of Erin: Images of Global Ireland* (Dublin, 1997), 136.

[4] Edward Shils, 'Roots–The Sense of Place and Past: The Cultural Gains and Losses of Migration' in William H. McNeil and Ruth S. Adams (eds), *Human Migration Patterns and Policies* (Bloomington, 1978), 404–26.

neither to the homeland nor to the hostland, and feeling torn between *here* and *there* are the main symptoms of the displacement trauma.

'The empowering paradox of diaspora', writes James Clifford, 'is that dwelling here assumes solidarity and connection there. But there is not necessarily a single place or an exclusivist nation.'[5] In diaspora place is redefined 'beyond the historical opposition of here versus there, since to a certain extent, there has been both merged and emerged in the very characterisation of here.'[6] Such dramatic change in the politics of place, which bridges here and there, crosses cultural and national localities, and creates the effect of spatial compression, results in a continuous state of juxtaposition between different worlds.

Diasporans always remain entrapped in a weightless area located between a physical and an emotional world, each demanding full loyalty. The birth place left behind 'seems to be translated into a longing to be reborn through a ceaseless transposition of "coming and going"'.[7] Hence, belonging turns into 'a multifaceted, multilayered process which mobilises loyalty to different communities simultaneously'.[8] Each community has its claims, rights and duties among which diasporans feel totally lost – unable to choose between dwelling here and returning there.

The ambiguity and richness of the displacement trauma, which has recently attracted the attention of various academic fields, render it open to different approaches and multiple perspectives. Diaspora cannot be separated from colonialism which has resulted in the displacement of millions of people across the world. Taking into consideration that all wars are wars against nature, perceiving the dual estimation of culture and nature, and realising the inseparable relationship between place and diasporans, one comes to the conclusion that ecocriticism is as essential to the study of diaspora as postcolonial theory. Diaspora is closely associated with place – the subject matter of the ecocritical theory, which 'analyzes the role played by the natural environment in the community imagination at a specific historical moment, and examines the values assigned, or denied, to the concept of nature'.[9]

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[5] James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1997), 269.

[6] Benzi Zhang, ‹Beyond Border Politics: The Problematics of Identity in Asian Diaspora Literature›, *Studies in the Humanities*, 31 (2004), 69–91.

[7] Ibid., 70.

[8] Nadia Lovell, 'Introduction: Belonging in Need of Emplacement' in Nadia Lovell (ed.) *Locality and Belonging* (London, 1998), 1–13.

[9] Enzo Ferrara, 'Review of Steven Rosendale (ed.), *The Greening of Literary Scholarship:*

Several points of convergence between ecocriticism and postcolonial studies make them well suited for the investigation of diaspora. First, both approaches 'firmly situate their analyses in the historical contexts from which specific mechanisms of exploitation have evolved, and both are inextricably linked to social and political activism'.[10] Furthermore, ecocriticism and postcolonialism are concerned with the complex relationship between the social and political centre and its margins. Thirdly, ecocriticism de-privileges the human subject, while postcolonial theory, in a structurally similar fashion, is concerned with the relative de-centring of the colonisers and their discourses. In both cases, 'such de-centring also involves the attempt to recenter the silenced other and to listen to his or her voice'.[11]

Both schools of thought share an ultimate goal; namely, to challenge the dualistic estimation of culture and nature, civilisation and primitiveness, centre and margin, or victimiser and victim. The combination of ecocriticism and postcolonialism – which will be hereafter termed as the 'eco-colonial' theory – aims at reinvigorating the anthropological insights of the former, and integrating them with the ecological tendencies of the latter. Using ecocriticism alongside and against postcolonial theory will illustrate the use of nature as a multifaceted metaphor for living and longing, exoticism and belonging, coexistence and nostalgia, otherness and togetherness.

Through an 'eco-colonial' approach to the paradox of homelessness at home in the poetry of Tom Paulin (1949–), this article aims at investigating the homologies between nature and diasporans, and exploring the ways in which diaspora poetry addresses intersections between racial oppression and exploitation of nature. Locating Paulin's poetry in the context of regional histories, cultural confrontations and environmental pressures will also reveal how a potentially productive tension between an imposed and an inherited culture can create imaginative forms to articulate the diasporans' cultural in-betweenness.

Emerging from a minority nationalist background in Northern Ireland; feeling torn between Leeds, England, where he was born and Belfast, Northern Ireland, where he was brought up; experiencing the contradictions of the Unionist culture to which his family belongs; advocating Irish Republican attempts for independence, and enduring the agonies of Ireland where 'terror,

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Literature, Theory and the Environment', *American Studies International*, 41 (2003), 238–40.

[10] Christine Gerhardt, 'The Greening of African-American Landscapes: Where Ecocriticism Meets Post-Colonial Theory', *Mississippi Quarterly*, 55 (2002), 517.

[11] Ibid., 517.

persecution, and privation seemed to have followed one upon the other through centuries without respite', Tom Paulin has always felt entrapped in a weightless area between conflicting worlds each demanding full loyalty.[12] As Paulin puts it:

> I felt disaffected from my background, the whole Unionist culture – not that my parents voted Unionist – and I read Orwell in the absorbed way one does at that age. There's a sense, particularly in Irish culture, of deliberate – in fact doctrinaire – disloyalty. I grew up in a culture that was officially Loyalist, but I came to see that it was a rotten society: I left it not for political reasons but simply because I wanted to get away from the claustrophobia of that society.[13]

To resolve the trauma of claustrophobia and avoid suffocation under the enormous tribal, national, and religious pressures, Paulin had to embark on a lifelong journey from alienating hybridity to international displacement.[14]

Failure to belong to a homeland, a political ideology or even a religious dogma has nurtured Paulin's feeling of alienating hybridity. Fascinated by James Joyce's hero Stephen Dedalus, Paulin started to question the authority of place on human consciousness, investigate the dangers of imprisonment under the siege of national identity, and examine the potentials inherent in placelessness. In an interview with Eamonn Hughes, Paulin says:

> Looking back now after years of writing, I realise that at some level I'd always felt that I didn't belong anywhere and that, indeed, I didn't come

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[12] Richard J. Loftus, *Nationalism in Modern Anglo-Irish Poetry* (Madison, 1964), 24.

[13] Tom Paulin in Vincent B. Sherry (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol. 40: *Poets of Great Britain and Ireland Since 1960*, (Detroit 1985).

[14] Hybridity, which commonly refers to 'the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation', is an enlightened response to racial / colonial oppression. As Homi Bhabha maintains, hybridity combines / articulates the oppressors discourse with 'differential knowledges and positionalities' that both estrange ‹identity› of that discourse and 'produce new forms of knowledge' or 'new sites of power.' Hybridity can be divided into two types: syncretism and alienation. Syncretism refers to combining the homeland and the hostland cultures through integrating the best in each within a new suitable culture. Alienating hybridity, as Hogan puts it, 'is the paralysing conviction that one has no identity, no real home, and that no synthesis is possible.' See Aschcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London, 1995), 118; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1995), 120; Patrick Colm Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity: Crisis of Tradition in the Anglophone Literatures of India, Africa and the Caribbean* (New York, 2000), 17.

> from anywhere. There's tremendous pressure both in English culture and Irish culture to proclaim roots, ancestry, tradition, the past. I have no concept of ancestry … But I think that ancestor worship can be dangerous.[15]

Cherishing no national or historical connections with the place where he was born or the place where he was raised, Paulin feels entrapped in an alien land inhabited by helpless victims aspiring for freedom.

In his poem 'A Just State' published in his first volume *A State of Justice* (1977), Paulin depicts Ulster as a totalitarian state or a concentration camp where countrymen are shackled with chains of fear and tortured with enforced uniformity:

> The children of scaffolds obey the Law.
> Its memory is perfect, a buggered sun
> That heats the dry sand around noon cities
> Where only the men hold hands.[16]

On the pretext of protecting homeland from enemies, justice is ironically enforced through terror, tyranny and isolation:

> The state's centre terrifies, its frontiers
> Are sealed against its enemies. Shouts echo
> Through the streets of this angry polity
> Whose waters might be kind.[17]

Comparing the coloniser's scheme for suppressing the colonised to the human abuse of nature, the poem ends with an image of a hunting trap set tactfully to prevent any attempts of escape from the homeland camp:

> Its justice is bare wood and limewashed bricks,
> Institutional fixtures, uniforms,
> The shadows of watchtowers on public squares,

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[15] 'Tom Paulin: Interviewed by Eamonn Hughes' in James P. Myers (ed.), *Writing Irish: Selected Interviews with Writers from the Irish Literary* (New York, 1999), 116.

[16] Tom Paulin, *A State of Justice* (London, 1977), 24–5, lines 1–4.

[17] Ibid., 25, lines 5–8.

> A hemp noose over a greased trap.[18]

On the phonological level, Paulin depends on alliteration to delineate an image of a contact zone where cultural dualities and racial conflicts have distorted the human conception of national and natural space. The words 'scaffolds', 'sun', 'sand' and 'cities'—in the first stanza—are musically associated to portray an unreachable homeland turned through years of sectarian violence and colonial oppression into a raised platform for execution of countrymen or a heated barren desert void of shelter and nourishment. Similarly, the words 'state', 'centre', 'sealed' and 'streets'—in the second stanza—convey the dimensions of a nation isolated not only from its citizens but also from the outside world.

In his article 'Building, Dwelling, Moving: Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin and the Reverse Aesthetic', Scott Brewster argues:

> Tom Paulin has long positioned himself as both outsider and critical insider, developing a poetics of awkward location. His work has shown an increasing preoccupation with the potential of makeshift and peripheral structures that are to some degree placeless. The mobile 'homes' surveyed in his poetry seem to thwart any sense of affiliation, yet these often anomalous and 'inauthentic' spaces symbolise the condition of living 'in' history, with its terrors and possibilities. The neglected interiors and peripheral structures that litter these poetic landscapes challenge the desire for rootedness and authenticity.[19]

To develop the 'poetics of awkward location' where the centre and the peripheral, the insider and the outsider, the real and the illusionary are paradoxically interwoven, Paulin depends heavily on imagery of the senses. The contrast between the visual images of children obeying the law and men holding hands—in the first stanza—creates an effect of temporal and spatial compression combining all Irish generations in a cycle of oppression and submission. The tactile and visual image of the 'buggered sun / That heats the dry sands around noon cities' are ambiguously contrasted with the tactile, auditory and visual image of shouts echoing 'Through the streets of this angry polity / whose waters might be kind'. The images of dry hot sands

[18] Ibid., 25, lines 9–12.

[19] Scott Brewster, 'Building, Dwelling, Moving: Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin and the Reverse Aesthetic' in Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft (eds), *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture* (New York, 2006), 149.

within the centre and the kind waters locked off by the frontiers distort spatial and national relations. Within the borders of such a displaced place, locations and affiliations of enemies, allies and citizens are hardly identified.

Nature plays the role of a double agent; it is manipulated by the colonisers to facilitate ultimate control of the colonised, and used by the oppressed to flee from the harsh realities of a country feeding upon its own men. In the last stanza the visual images of 'bare wood', 'limewashed bricks' and 'greased trap' clarify the colonisers' scheme not only for abusing nature but also for turning it against the colonised. Wood is uncovered, bricks are painted with lime and traps are greased to ensure the ultimate submissiveness of the colonised.

The word 'hemp' in the final line of the poem reveals Paulin's subsequent reactionary choice towards the feelings of homelessness at home. Hemp is a tall Asian coarse plant cultivated in many parts of the world as a valuable source of fibre as well as drugs. Not only does the 'hemp noose' point out the prey-hunter relationship between the Irish and their homeland, but it also refers to Paulin's choice to lose consciousness of place and time. The only way to escape the tortures of spatial enslavement is an enforced sleep or a spiritual hypnotisation surpassing the limitations of national space into the unlimited realms of poetic imagination. As Jonathan Hufstader puts it:

> Paulin often attempts to put himself to sleep so that he may wake up again in a different place, some free and equal republic, although he finds himself again experiencing the horror of a gloomy city under a dictatorial regime (Northern Ireland) or a bourgeois 'tennis-suburb' where money is the tyrant (England, where he now lives).[20]

Such enforced sleep can be further clarified through examining Paulin's poem 'Before History' published in his second volume *The Strange Museum* (1980).

Immigrating to England in the 1970s – first to study at Hull University and Oxford University and later to work at the University of Nottingham – Paulin moves from the spatial compression associated with the historical burdens of colonisation, racial and sectarian conflicts to the multidimensional spaciousness created through a process of sleeping and awakening. The claustrophobic apprehensions and the cycle of trapping and fleeing endured at home are

[20] Jonathan Hufstader, *Tongue of Water, Teeth of Stones: Northern Irish Poetry and Social Violence* (Kentucky, 1999), 189–90.

abandoned in favour of a process of imagined liberation from the shackles of time, space and identity. In 'Before History', Paulin depicts a timeless moment preceding all the recorded evils of humankind. With a consciousness liberated through sleep from historical burdens, the poet manages to view his homeland in new lights. Yet, once the machinery of time and place are turned on, the poet wakes up again to face the trauma of homelessness at home:

> Mornings when I wake too early.
> There is a dead light in the room.
> Rain is falling through the darkness
> And the yellow lamps of the city
> Are flared smudges on the wet roads.
> Everyone is sleeping. I envy them.
> I lie in a curtained room.
> The city is nowhere then.
> Somewhere, in a dark mitteleuropa,
> I have gone to ground in a hidden street.[21]

Sleep, as Jonathan Hufstader maintains, provides Paulin 'with an escape from history – not in the conventional sense of losing consciousness, but because, when he awakes, he enjoys a few moments of altered consciousness.' Paulin recreates his mind 'while characterising his city, Belfast or London, as just another dreary site of oppression, like a middle-European city under Stalinist regimes.'[22] Linking the urban city street and the natural ground, the confined curtained room and the spacious mitteleuropa, the above ground roads and the underground hidden streets, Paulin recreates the contact zone where his homeland and hostland cultures are clashing and interacting. The gloomy atmosphere is always interpenetrating to remind the reader of the harsh realities surrounding the timeless world of dreams.

Rebuilding place, reclaiming history and recreating national consciousness may have provided the poet with moments of psychological balance; yet, they could not satisfy his hunger for beauty, love and security:

> This is the long lulled pause
> Before history happens,
> When the spirit hungers for form,

[21] Tom Paulin, *The Strange Museum* (London, 1980), 1, lines 1–10.
[22] Hufstader, *Tongue of Water, Teeth of Stones*, 193.

> Knowing that love is as distant
> As the guarded capital, knowing
> That the tyranny of memories
> And factual establishments
> Has stretched to its breaking.[23]

For diasporans, homeland can be defined as 'the ethnoscape of reference and the focus of what has been called "long distance nationalism".'[24] In Paulin's case, such focus has been either stretched to encompass other worlds or fragmented to exclude possibilities of synthesis. With no definite focal point for nationalism, the poem remains plagued with the tortures of alienating hybridity.

In 'Before History', colours play an essential role in defining the poet's relationship with place. The contrast between light and darkness is skilfully manipulated to differentiate between the dreams of belonging and the realities of alienation. Isolated from the world in a 'curtained room' or a 'hidden street', the poet is always locked in a shaded area void of pure colours. The 'dead light' in his room or the 'yellow lamps of the city' are distorting rather than embellishing images. Nature fails to alter the poet's conception of colour and space. The early morning intensifies the poet's isolation as he is awake while all people are asleep. Similarly, rain and wet roads smear the burning light of the city lamps. Distorted images and impure dark colours testify the fact that building new relations with a hostland permanently alters the diasporans' relationships with their homelands.

In her article 'World View', Michela Wrong writes:

> The evening reminded me what a complex, tortured and incestuous thing a diaspora can be. As westerners, we tend to assume that the most challenging experience confronting a migrant worker or asylum-seeker arriving in Britain will be his relationships with the local people and officialdom. In fact, the most difficult relationship to negotiate is the one with his own community of communal solidarity.[25]

A permanent feeling of attachment to the homeland is articulated by

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[23] Paulin, *The Strange Museum*, 1, lines 11–18.

[24] William Safran, 'The Jewish Diaspora in a Comparative and Theoretical Perspective', *Israel Studies,* 10 (2005), 38.

[25] Michela Wrong, 'World View', *New Statesman*, 14 February 2005, 57.

diasporans in a variety of ways. 'One common feature of many diasporic communities', writes James Macauley, 'remains a sense of attachment to a homeland, whether "real" or "imagined"'.[26] Some simply believe that they can never be fully assimilated in their host nation, or that they may never be allowed to do so. Many maintain a special sense of 'memory' (often frozen at the point of emigration) and express the often improbable belief that they will eventually return to the homeland. For others, a strong sense of group identity is defined by a continuing relationship with the homeland, through economic links, family and social networks, cultural links and political organisation. Diasporans' attitudes towards their homelands also include 'bitterness among those who consider themselves "exiles", anger at the dispersal in the homeland, contempt for the "homeland" in the host country, and conflictual issues between returnees and resident populations.'[27]

In 'Before History' Paulin seems to combine many of the above reactions in a complicated mixture of love and hatred, attachment and isolation, togetherness and othernerss. The poet's sense of attachment to Northern Ireland is maintained through a set of memories urging his soul to seek a replica of the love and beauty once cherished at home. Unfortunately, the poet's dreams for building new ties with his homeland through maintaining a strong group identity are painfully frustrated. He is awake in a curtained room or a hidden street envying all those who enjoy peaceful sleep. The image of 'the guarded capital' intensifies the ambiguity of the poet's reaction towards his homeland. His attachment to Ireland will remain protected in spite of all the acculturation forces faced in the hostland or he will remain isolated from a homeland shielded against its own citizens.

In an interview with Eamonn Hughes, Paulin maintains:

> I had a year in the States, from 1983 to 1984, and I became fascinated by the way in which Americans speak and the extraordinary energy of the language. At the same time, I was trying to push my language into Northern Europe, Germany and Russia to create a feeling of displacement – international displacement. That was the ambition.[28]

Spending a year in the United States has provided Paulin with a third level of

[26] James W Macauley, 'Editor's Introduction: Sociological Perspectives of the Irish Diaspora', *Irish Journal of Sociology,* 11 (2002), 3–7.

[27] Mary J. Hickman, 'Locating the Irish Diaspora', *Irish Journal of Sociology,* 11 (2002), 16.

[28] 'Tom Paulin: Interviewed by Eamonn Hughes', 123.

consciousness. He could view the Anglo-Irish crisis from a new perspective integrating the history of humanity at large. Hence, Paulin could finally reject alienating hybridity in favour of international displacement. Believing that all nations, in some stages of their histories, have endured the agonies of colonisation, civil war, enslavement and oppression, Paulin found solace in viewing himself as an international diasporan with a global identity:

> We've been given, until relatively recently, the notion of identity as a fixed concept, that identity is somehow like integrity: it's principled and it's unitary. In fact, identity is not like that. We are imaginatively bits and pieces and maybe they don't fit and maybe there are great gaps. Certainly, the Northern Irish experience has been one of fragmentation, and this may mean that imaginatively you have access to different cultures that you can raid for what you want. It means that things are fluid; they are unstable.[29]

The shift in Paulin's view of cultural and historical spaces can be further clarified through analyzing his poem 'Cush', published in Paulin's fifth volume *Walking A Line* (1994). The biblical title of the poem (which either means the eldest black son of Ham and the father of Nimrod or the Land of Cush – the countries south of the Israelites including Sudan and Ethiopia)[30] invokes a post-postmodern[31] conception of diaspora. Paulin integrates various worlds,

[29] Ibid., 124.

[30] 'Cush', *Biblical Encyclopaedia*, http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/cush.html [accessed 2 June 2010].

[31] Since the late 1990s there has been 'a widespread feeling both in popular culture and in academia that postmodernism has gone out of fashion.' In her book *Surpassing the Spectacle,* Carol Becker writes: 'We are in a moment of post-postmodernism, conscious of all that has come before, tired of deconstruction, uncertain about the future, but convinced that there is no turning back. I agree with Stuart Hall that the use of post in postmodern and post-postmodern means that we have extended, not abandoned, the terrain of past philosophical work.' 'In an atmosphere of dissatisfaction with the postmodernist lack of moral compass', writes Robert Greer, new insights have germinated based upon the notion that 'absolute truth does exist, yet must be understood in terms of personality and animation.' Prior to the 'celebrated "turn to language" (postmodernism) is the more fundamental "turn to relationship" (post-postmodernism).' Post-postmodernism witnesses 'the re-birth of utopia after its own death, after its subjection to postmodernism's severe skepticism, relativism and its anti- or postutopian consciousness.' Such resurrection of utopia, as Mikhail Epstein puts it, is not regarded as a social project with claims to transforming the world; 'it is an "as if" lyricism, an "as if" idealism, an "as if" utopianism, aware of its own failures, insubstantiality, and secondariness.' Post-postmodernism; thus, marks

cultures, ages and races asserting that in the age of globalisation, displacement turns into a common fate shared by all human beings:

> this could be scanning a recipe
> for a pretend morsel
> on a wide green leaf
> a way of waiting
> almost with prayer and fasting
> for the main course
> or it could be a pouffe from Turkestan
> a word out of Sanskrit
> that means something – not
> it's love in an arranged marriage
> or love in a love marriage
> a song in Hindi that asks
> why did you leave me with my desire?[32]

Offering a variety of choices – lingual (Sanskrit and Hindi), affective (love and arranged marriages) and religious (praying and fasting) – Paulin dilates the circles of belonging. In a globe where the boundaries of place, time and identity are permanently transgressed, man turns into a single, homeless satellite living in an eternal state of diaspora.

Paulin's belief in international displacement is further asserted through juggling multiple binaries, erasing spatial borders between Eastern and Western cultures, and eradicating the temporal markers separating the past, present and future. In his journey through the modern and ancient worlds, Paulin integrates languages, histories and cultures to challenge the dualistic estimation of blacks and whites, victims and victimisers, or slaves and masters:

> it's like that story where Saladin

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a return to many of the categories stigmatized by postmodernism, including totality, truth, and universalism. See 'Post-postmodernism', *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-Postmodernism [accessed 20 July 2008]; Carol Becker, *Surpassing the Spectacle: Global Transformations and the Changing Politics of Art* (Oxford, 2002), 26; Robert C Greer, *Mapping Postmodernism: A Survey of Christian Options* (Madison, 2003), 229; Mikhail Epstein, 'Conclusion: On the Place of Postmodernism in Postmodernity' in Mikhail Epstein, Alexander Genis, and Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover (eds), *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture* (New York, 1999), 460–1.

[32] Tom Paulin, *Walking A Line* (London, 1994), lines 12–24.

gets the better of Richard Lionheart
or like the difference
between a scarf and a heavy sword
or between
---air and morality
art and the law
deepblue and the devil
so many fatuous binaries
and all
to too much purpose[33]

The agonies of exile, communal detachment and alienating hybridity are relieved once diaspora is regarded as a common feature of life rather than a curse befalling ill-fated races:

walking down towards the bridge
not the dream of becoming
nor the dream of belonging
but the dream of Being[34]

In their book *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies*, Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer write:

> The way we perceive, interact with and ultimately change nature cannot be detached from who we are in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, nationality and geographical location … On every hike into the world of nature – whether we actually physically move through the landscape, or stay at home on the couch and watch a wilderness programme on TV or read a scholarly article in *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* – we carry minds full of cultural values, norms and attitudes that inform the ways in which we see, know, represent, inhabit and, ultimately, reconstruct nature.[35]

[33] Ibid., lines 33–43.

[34] Ibid., lines 103–6.

[35] Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer, 'Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Defining the Subject of Ecocriticism: An Introduction' in idem *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism* (New York, 2006), 14.

In facing the predicament of growing new roots in an alien hostland, diasporans have first to confront the legacy of their native soil. If diasporans' consciousness of nature is loaded with the tragic memories of colonisation, enslavement, subjugation, racial discrimination, resistance and sacrifice, several intersections between colonial oppression and the human exploitation of nature are established.

In Paulin's poem 'Cush' nature stands as a collective memory or an eye witness revealing and healing the agonies of the displacement trauma. 'The long sticks of sugar cane' which 'hide all that's uncrushable' are charged with the unbearable suffering of Negro slaves – the largest forced diaspora in human history. The 'sticky brown jiggery sweet ghurr' carry the memories of Indian and Chinese indentured labourers who were transported to the New World after the outlawing of Negro slave trade. The images of 'space ocean air', 'Silent Lands', 'the rawpaint plain river' and the haunted pilgrim 'slinking down from the mountain' establish nature as the only secure shelter for those who feel homeless, lonely and isolated.[36]

In responding to the trauma of displacement and the Irish ongoing plague of colonial hegemony, sectarian violence and racial discrimination, Paulin has moved from the agonizing despondency of alienation to the temporary relief of enforced sleep. To escape from the nets of religion, nation and language, Paulin had to free himself from the shackles of belonging and the bonds of history. Flying into the spacious realms of universal syncretism, Paulin could finally appreciate the potentials inherent in dwelling between cultures.

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[36] Paulin, *Walking A Line*, lines 28–9, 31, 79, 81 and 85.