

Paula Meehan's Greek journey: environmental footsteps

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The article focuses on the most elaborate of Paula Meehan's 'Greek' poems, 'Flight JIK Olympic Airlines 016 to Ikaria, Greece' (Painting Rain, 2009), inspired by her journey to Ikaria, in the framework of travel writing and ecocriticism. By transforming the matrix of W. H. Auden's 'Musée des Beaux Arts', and by representing a specific case of ecopoetry, Meehan's text challenges the precepts of footsteps and vertical travel genres. The comparison between the two poems has been contextualized by the Irish poet's environmental, political and artistic concerns, as well as her other poems, essays and travels in Greece.

Keywords: Paula Meehan; W. H. Auden; Greece; travel writing; ecopoetry

Ever since the beginning of Paula Meehan's travels in the early 1970s, the image of Greece has become prominent as a physical and imaginary territory in the poetic and essayistic output of this established Irish writer (Dublin 1955-). At the same time, the body of her texts inspired by the country's natural and cultural heritage has intertwined with larger environmental, political, and artistic concerns. These interactions, resulting in a subversive approach to literary genres, will be explored below with a focus on the most elaborate of Meehan's 'Greek' poems: 'Flight JIK Olympic Airlines 016 to Ikaria, Greece' (*Painting Rain*, 2009).¹ When examined in relation to travel writing categories and tenets of ecopoetry, the poem can be read as a specific case of what has been termed footsteps narrative, one that undermines the essential conventions of this travel-writing genre, but also, through its intertextuality and ecopoetic qualities, 'propel[s] author and reader alike to a deeper awareness and critical understanding of the politics of travel'.²

1 P. Meehan, 'Flight JIK Olympic Airlines 016 to Ikaria, Greece', *Painting Rain* (Manchester 2009) 73.

2 C. M. Keirstead, 'Convoluted paths: mapping genre in contemporary footsteps travel writing', *Genre* 46.3 (2013) 285–315.

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When Paula Meehan embarked on her Greek voyages in 1972, she chanced upon a turbulent time – the military dictatorship of 1967–1974 – yet the political circumstances escaped the attention of the sixteen-year-old enjoying her holidays in Crete.³ Her second visit to Crete, in 1977, defined by hard physical work during the summer, marked a greater awareness of Greek contexts: having graduated from Trinity College Dublin, she was already familiar with classical civilization, one of the subjects she read at TCD. Several trips later, with a steady penchant for islands and motivated by the appeal of mythology, she found herself in Ikaria: ‘The myths were so specifically connected to the landscape, to place that it was for me the start of a lifelong relationship with the Greek landscape. I had a simple desire to see where the stories played out in place.’ Ever since 2007, Meehan has been gradually discovering the island’s recent history as a place of exile for political prisoners during and after the Greek Civil War. Her own working-class roots, political activism, and tight bond with nature and oral culture⁴ complete the picture of this second home, as she likes to think of ‘her’ Greek island.

Writing about Ikaria as a site of historical memory and secular pilgrimage, Elena Mamoulaki has defined two categories of visitors to the island motivated by ‘the traumatic legacy of the Left’: the descendants of former exiles and the ‘new-age traveller[s] who visit Ikaria in search of a liberal lifestyle related to a communal way of life’, ‘quasi-hipsters’ with ‘alleged leftist inclinations’.⁵ Although Meehan’s sympathies lie on the Left and with a non-conventional spirituality, she falls into none of these categories. Her reasons for travelling are not related to tourism or history research. Yet the pattern of her Greek travel can be defined as a departure from the mythological element and its landscape towards the knowledge or experience of the political and the social in the real world;⁶ and it is exactly the amalgam of these ingredients which informs much of Meehan’s ecocritical thought.

Her engagement in environmental issues has been examined most importantly by Kathryn Kirkpatrick in two seminal articles (2010, 2013) and by Eóin Flannery in *Ireland and Ecocriticism* (2015).⁷ Once a student of Gary Snyder’s, Meehan has

3 J. Kruczkowska, ‘Between Ireland and Greece: interview with Paula Meehan’, in eadem (ed.), *Landscapes of Irish and Greek Poets* (Oxford 2018) 165–71 (165–7). All information in this paragraph comes from this interview unless specified otherwise.

4 See J. Allen Randolph, ‘The body politic: a conversation with Paula Meehan’, *An Siomach: A Journal of Literature, Culture, and the Arts* 5.1-2 (2009) 239–71. For the connection between ancient Greek oral culture and Irish islands, see George Thomson’s writings on the Blaskets.

5 E. Mamoulaki, ‘In search of exile past: pilgrims and visitors to the island of Ikaria and their bearing on the historical past’, *International Journal of Tourism Anthropology* 5.3-4 (2016) 204–20, Durham Research Online (2017) 1-2.

6 This later knowledge of the political and social life includes reading Louis MacNeice’s *Ten Burnt Offerings* (London 1952), where he describes his visits to Ikaria in the 1950s when the island was still a site of imprisonment.

7 K. Kirkpatrick, ‘Between country and city: Paula Meehan’s ecofeminist poetics’, in C. Cusick (ed.) *Out of the Earth: Ecocritical Readings of Irish Texts* (Cork 2010) 108–26, and Kirkpatrick ‘Paula Meehan’s gardens’, *New Hibernia Review* 17.2 (2013) 45–61; Eóin Flannery, ‘“things which can neither be written,

devoted a number of poems and essays to the coexistence of nature and politics, nature and the city, resources and endangered species; but also, in an ecofeminist vein, the position of women as related to class, race, religion, and stereotypes of culture versus nature.⁸ In terms of 'elemental ecocriticism',⁹ we may classify much of Meehan's work under 'water' which it notably celebrates, the fact partly responsible for her love of Greek islands with their 'sea-girth garden[s]'.¹⁰ Discussing the world's genetic memory in 'Planet Water', Meehan writes:

There is something weirdly harmonic in this sense of having lived in another element. All my life, as far as I can remember, I have dreams where I live in water, can breathe in that element. I wake from these dreams refreshed, as if I've tuned into a part of the self that has yet to know or to be distressed by the dualistic and dangerous human sense of being separate from the rest of nature.¹¹

These oneiric sensations can be further linked to Meehan's environmental perception of the sea as a place of the evolution of humankind in a deep time perspective.¹² Simultaneously, the reader of her work can sense a strong geocentric outlook, not only related to the origin of species, but also obvious in reference to islands combining the land and the sea in one geographical entity. In *Geomantic* (2016), especially, the presence of Greece combines with the earth-divination which gives the collection its title and which I discuss later in this article. In such a perspective of her poetry, the Greek island is a stay against the ebb and tide of Irish national turmoil, but at the same time exemplifies global environmental concerns.

Meehan's choice of her first and last Greek destination, Crete and Ikaria, has been dictated by numerous reasons. The poet herself ascribes it to Greek mythology (the mythological connection of Daedalus to both islands) and the compelling endurance of the Icarus myth in Anglophone culture,¹³ to her interest in 'pre-Classical culture of the

nor spoken, nor read": ecopoetics and ecofeminism in Paula Meehan and Moya Cannon', in *Ireland and Ecocriticism: literature, history, and environmental justice* (New York 2015) 56–89.

8 For tenets of ecofeminism, see e.g. T. Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge 2011) 111–19 and G. Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London 2012) 26–30.

9 I refer to the studies of the imagery inspired by principal physical elements (see e.g. J. R. Padilla, 'Seamus Heaney's *elemental* ecopoetics: earth, water, air and fire', *The Journal of Ecocriticism* 1.2 (2009) 21–30).

10 Meehan, 'The Island', *Geomantic* (Dublin 2016). For Meehan's trope of the garden in the postcolonial and ecofeminist interpretation, see Kirkpatrick, 'Paula Meehan's gardens'. In the Ikarian context, the contentions of Kirkpatrick's article can be applied to the poems mentioned above and e.g. to 'Deadwood' (*Painting Rain*, 17).

11 Meehan, *Imaginary Bonnets with Real Bees in Them* (Dublin 2016) 59. For water in Meehan, see also P. Villar-Argáiz, "'Act locally, think globally": Paula Meehan's local commitment and global consciousness', *An Sionnach* 5.1–2 (2009) 180–93.

12 See e.g. Meehan's 'The Sea Cave' in *Geomantic* and 'Sea' in *Painting Rain*.

13 Most famously in the last page of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Meehan observes that the myth 'is a strong thread in Joyce's work' (in Kruczkowska, 'Between Ireland and Greece', 167; for mythological correspondences, see 166–8).

islands', as well as perceived correspondences between Greek and Celtic island mythology. The affinity between Ireland's and Greece's insular topography may not be decisive, yet a resemblance of Greek islands to the Aran has been embraced by at least three major Irish poets, Meehan included.¹⁴ Their choice of the iconic Irish West – vestige of national language and myth, but also a symbol of exile – seems not coincidental here, and may signalize the precariousness, if not impossibility, of the pastoral mode in the modern age (de)regulated by globalization and the climate crisis.

Eventually, with some years of travel to Ikaria behind her, Meehan decided to republish a selection of her early verse in the volume *Mysteries of the Home* (2013), where the front cover features her own painting of the house she has been renting in the Ikarian village of Therma, and the back-cover photograph of herself on a ship passing a Greek island. These details not only proclaim the author's presence as a visual artist (continued in subsequent volumes of poetry) but assert the importance of the eponymous 'home' located in Greece. Ikaria offers a vantage point on past creative years and the idea of home in general – the theme ranking among the most urgent of Meehan's writing, and one meticulously elaborated especially in the later *Museum* volume (2019) in the Irish context. In a wider angle of Meehan's oeuvre, the notion of home remains inextricable from the etymology of ecopoetry – *ecopoiesis* – as 'home-making'. Grounding his argument in the linguistic roots of the term, Jonathan Bate defines ecopoetry as 'not a description of dwelling with the earth . . . but an experiencing of it', where the superstructures of poetry – its language, style, and metre – contribute to its phenomenological character responding to the phenomena of nature, of the Earth understood as home.¹⁵ We will note all these features in the analysis of Meehan's ecopoem below. 'Embedded and embodied' ecopoetry, as Eóin Flannery aptly summarizes Bate's reasoning, 'does not, then, merely furnish objective, physical descriptions of non-human ecologies, but (re-)creates the cadences of the Earth's song'.¹⁶

Incorporating many of the aspects considered above, 'Flight JIK Olympic Airlines 016 to Ikaria, Greece' (the full text reproduced below) also questions the postulates of two travel writing genres: what has been termed footsteps and, to a lesser extent, vertical travel writing. In *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*, Maria Lindgren Leavenworth defines the term 'footsteps' as founded on two travelogues – of the first and the second journey – where 'the first journey supplies an itinerary which the second traveller repeats, and the first travelogue is continuously

14 Meehan draws comparisons between the commitment of the diaspora to their home island in both countries. Other Irish poets who have observed the resemblance between Greek and Aran Islands include Meehan's partner Theo Dorgan (Kruczkowska, 'Temenos, Eurydice, Ithaca: interview with Theo Dorgan', in *Landscapes of Irish and Greek Poets*, 176) and Derek Mahon: Kruczkowska, *Irish Poets and Modern Greece: Heaney, Mahon, Cavafy, Seferis* (Basingstoke 2017) 14, 32.

15 J. Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge, MA 2000) 42.

16 Flannery, "things which can neither be written...", 57.

used in the second journey narrative for purposes of comparison and contrast.' Lindgren Leavenworth further observes that 'modern travelogues in the popular footsteps genre not only explicitly acknowledge sources of inspiration, but are structurally contingent on them.'¹⁷ The first capacity in which Meehan's poem challenges this definition is the conjunction of acknowledgement and contingency: while 'Flight JIK...' is indeed 'structurally contingent' on its source of inspiration, that source has been carefully hidden. Only the reader whose ear is tuned to the cadences and formulations of the original will recognize the covert analogy, coded in the echoes of the primary structure and phrasing.

Flight JIK Olympic Airlines 016 to Ikaria, Greece

The plane judders on final approach: I think there's something wrong –
 only the kick of katabatic wind off the mountain. I've understood
 nothing of the air hostess' tense preamble, place
 all my faith in one-breath meditation till we are landed and taxiing along
 the runway, plane and shadow joined at last. I step into the waiting 5
 scent of wild thyme and baking earth which must be
 what the boy Icarus smelt as he fell, not plunging, but skating
 the thermals down. The cypress and the piney wood,
 the holm oaks – smudge of green beyond Chrysostomos, the colour he forgot
 in his blue rapture of sky and Aegean when he set course 10
 for the searing heart of the sun. The exact spot
 of his burial is disputed. The way of myth to give a carthorse
 wings and call it Pegasus; the way of myth to turn a maid into a tree

has brought me here to see where the story ends – away
 from the toxic island of my birth, its slings and arrows, that I may 15
 understand the nature of my failure. To hear the father's cry
 over the drowned body of his son, in the ancient light that shone
 on the bronze-workers at their cire-perdue, their leathers green
 from the copper smelt, their nifty casting seen
 in the elegant lineaments of the myth. I scan the sky 20
 for rain. The craft fails me: this contraption fails. I move on.

(from *Painting Rain*, Manchester: Carcanet, 2009; reprinted by kind permission of the Author and Carcanet Press, Manchester, UK)

17 M. Lindgren Leavenworth, 'Footsteps', in A. Pettinger and T. Youngs (eds), *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing* (London 2020) 86.

Only on subsequent readings do we identify the connection of Meehan's poem to a source text, with a vague sense of its presence somewhere in line 7 (the word 'skating') and alert curiosity in line 11, ending with 'spot'. On closer inspection it transpires that the line-ending system of 'Flight JIK...' reproduces that of an English classic, W. H. Auden's 'Musée des Beaux Arts' (1938; 1940), whereas some of its internal phrases and images have been creatively modified. A later glimpse at two pages of Meehan's personal travel notebook of 2007, the year of her first journey to Ikaria, validates the hypothesis about the literary context: one of the pages has been illustrated with her own drawing of the mountains, the sea and winged Icarus preparing to land; the other bears a copy of Auden's poem.¹⁸

Auden never visited Ikaria, although he visited Athens a few times.¹⁹ Yet he travelled to Brussels and visited its Museum of Fine Arts in 1938,²⁰ where he admired a series of paintings by Pieter Breughel the Elder, the artist well-travelled in France and Italy but not in Greece.²¹ Subsequently, Auden devoted his poem ('Musée...') to those paintings, most prominently to Breughel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, representing a ploughman in the foreground, the sea with a ship in the background, and barely noticeable legs of a drowning person in the corner. The focus of Auden's text is the status and place of suffering in the world: a natural reaction to the world politics of the late 1930s, one that Meehan correlated with 'a foretaste of Nazism, the whiff of the camps',²² and one of the critics with Auden's and Christopher Isherwood's trip to China described in *Journey to a War* (1939).²³

Therefore, a further challenge Meehan's 'Flight JIK...' presents to the definition of the footsteps genre pertains to its cardinal premise, where a second traveller is supposed to repeat the itinerary of the first journey. The traditional footsteps chronology has been reversed: one expects the first expedition to be the 'authentic' one, while in this case Meehan's real journey to Ikaria follows the predecessor's virtual trip there via art. Meehan's 2007 journey described in 'Flight JIK...', corroborated by the poem's factual title, has been nonetheless negotiated by two or even four foreign cultures (Flemish – Breughel's, and English – Auden's; and possibly, ancient Rome and Jerusalem, as Ovid

18 Meehan, Unpublished notebook (my personal correspondence with Paula Meehan, 21 May 2020).

19 For the first time most probably in the mid-1930s, then thrice after 1964 (N. Jenkins, 'The travelling Auden', The W. H. Auden Society, 2003, <https://www.audensociety.org/travellingauden.html>, 20 May 2023).

20 L. de Vries, "Fall of Icarus": Ovid or Solomon?, *Simolius: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 30.1-2 (2003) 5–18 (5).

21 Some of these paintings were copies painted by his son: A. F. Kinney, 'Auden, Bruegel, and "Musée des Beaux Arts"', *College English* 24.7 (1963) 529–31 (529). There are numerous references to Italian landscapes in Breughel's paintings; see e.g. K. Lichtert, 'New perspectives on Pieter Bruegel the Elder's journey to Italy (c. 1552-1554/1555)', *Oud Holland* 128.1 (2015) 39–54.

22 In Kruczowska, 'Between Ireland and Greece', 166

23 A. Nemerov, 'The flight of form: Auden, Bruegel, and the turn to abstraction in the 1940s', *Critical Inquiry* 31.4 (2005) 780–810 (784–8).

and Ecclesiastes/Solomon are counted among Breughel's inspirations²⁴), by two or four different artefacts (a painting, an ekphrastic poem, and additionally, a mythological and biblical story), and by a Belgian cultural institution. In result, the reader faces a triple (quintuple?) palimpsest, not only intertextual and interdisciplinary, but also, seemingly, hybrid in its approach.

Rather than simply hybrid or multicultural, however, the palimpsest hints at postcolonial implications, reaching beyond the usage of the term in the footsteps theory, where 'postcolonial. . . developments' seek to address 'the inability to represent the encountered Others', or where 'residual imperialism' of contemporary travel writing leads the second traveller into the "remote" or "unchartered" territories despite the passing decades and even centuries'.²⁵ As an Irish author's composition in English, 'Flight JIK...' has been historically conditioned by the loss of her nation's mother language to that of the colonizer. The text has been filtered through another Anglophone canonical ('central') text. Meehan clearly performs an act of defiance: she is testing the language in the exercise of crafting a poem whose structure would partially but decisively mirror Auden's major achievement. As she once remarked,

[m]y relationship with the English language is so skewed because of my history, our history. It is my relation with the colonising power. I am using this language that has the possibility for being a prison. As I said, it is a great language to work in because it is always a big challenge to take words that, in a way, don't match anything in your real experience and try to find the experience in the word that already exists.²⁶

What would otherwise pose an obstacle to Meehan's pursuit, in 'Flight JIK...' becomes a facilitator: a time machine and a vehicle for contemporary travel. 'The word that already exists' bridges the gap with the distant past and legendary dimension of the Icarus myth. Meehan constantly plays on the word 'craft', one of its meanings alluding to the plane that transports her to Icaria, another to Bronze Age craft, and a third to the poetic method: the verse matrix of Auden's footsteps. It is only at the end of the poem that we start to doubt the efficiency of this labyrinthine design, or the blessings of the colonial linguistic heritage, when the author concludes: 'this contraption fails'. It is not only that the language fails to 'match anything in your real experience'. The final statement of the poem can also be qualified as expressive of Meehan's desire to escape exhausted literary forms, or the 'prison of the prior texts', to quote James Buzard.²⁷ Throughout the whole poem she finds Auden's model hardly compatible with the

24 For the latter, see De Vries, "Fall of Icarus", 17–18, an art-historical perspective on the painting.

25 M. Lindgren Leavenworth, *The Second Journey: Travelling in Literary Footsteps* (Umeå 2010) 188; Kierstead, 'Convolved paths', 286.

26 L. M. González Arias, "Playing with the ghosts of words": An interview with Paula Meehan', *Atlantis* 22.1 (2000) 187–204 (201).

27 J. Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to 'Culture', 1800–1918* (Oxford 1993) 170.

‘southern exposure’, her own included (Ikaria), and with her engagement with nature. These concepts bear on Meehan’s notion of the pastoral mode, but also on ‘Flight JIK...’ as a version of a language-oriented ecopoem, to which we can apply Leonard Scigaj’s description of ‘sustainable poetry’. In Scigaj’s outline of the genre,

Language is often foregrounded only to reveal its limitations, and this is accomplished in such a way that the reader’s gaze is thrust beyond language back into the less limited world that language refers to, the inhabited place where humans must live in harmony with ecological cycles.²⁸

In the course of this article we will return to these determinants of Meehan’s poem in more detail.

Auden’s interpretation gained a canonical status for later literary works (William Carlos Williams’ ‘Landscape with the Fall of Icarus’ of 1962 being the most famous of other renditions of the story, closely following Auden’s scenario) and was influential also for art historians. The canonization may have resulted from the fact that Auden’s text was published at the moment when the Belgian Museum of Fine Arts succeeded in promoting this relatively freshly discovered painting (1912) and its hitherto underrated author into one of the world’s finest.²⁹ Meehan, in turn, attempts to escape that canonical status (or prison) of Auden’s text in her ‘second journey narrative’ by continuously using ‘the first travelogue . . . for purposes of comparison and contrast’, as in the footsteps definition.

Consequently, ‘Flight JIK...’ undermines the English original in its tone, outlook, and depiction of landscape and myth. Despite her turbulent flight and painful reminiscences of Ireland, Meehan comes across as affirmative and active, in contrast to the negations of Auden’s poem (‘never wrong’, ‘never forgot’, ‘did not . . . want it to happen’), its determinism (‘there always must be / Children’, ‘martyrdom must run its course’, ‘the sun shone / As it had to’) and passive approach. Instead of ‘the aged . . . reverently . . . waiting / for the miraculous birth’, Meehan’s speaker ventures on a journey that may lead to a miraculous rebirth of her own, the regeneration provided by Greek landscape: ‘I step into the waiting / scent of wild thyme and baking earth . . . The cypress and the piney wood, / the holm oaks – smudge of green beyond Chrysostomos...’. Auden’s Biblical references to the birth of the Messiah, however ironic, have been replaced with alternative spirituality: ‘I . . . place / all my faith in one-breath meditation’. Interestingly, Meehan’s objection to Auden’s ironic mention of Christianity in this 1930s poem belonging to the decade of his Left engagement may convey her objection to the more decisively Christian outlook of his later poetry.³⁰

28 L. M. Scigaj, *Sustainable poetry: four American ecopoets* (Lexington, KY 1999) 38.

29 See De Vries, “Fall of Icarus” 5. We may thus be facing a case of Breughel-Auden ‘canon footsteps’.

30 Breughel’s painting can also be interpreted in the light of the Bible, bearing references to Ecclesiastes and Genesis (De Vries, “Fall of Icarus” 18).

Generally, Meehan as a staunch opponent of the Irish theocracy³¹ frequently voices critique of institutional religion. In another poem of the same collection (*Painting Rain*), for instance, 'St John and My Grandmother – An Ode', she is looking from Ikaria in the direction of Patmos, the island where John wrote the Apocalypse, and is frightened by 'the use / to which the holy book is put'.³²

In Meehan's subversive reworking of Auden's version of the myth, Icarus is 'not plunging, but skating / the thermals down', taking control of his movement instead of heading for Auden's 'splash' and 'disaster'. More, he seems to truly enjoy this sports-like activity, pacing it in recreational slow motion. Rather than picturing him 'forsaken' as the source text does, Meehan seeks his father to keep him company: Daedalus, an accomplished fellow craftsman, engages with his son in *mythopoiesis* and later despairs over his death. While 'Musée...' targets the obscure position of suffering in human life and in history, 'Flight JIK...' reports on an extraordinary reunion with a place of shelter: 'away / from the toxic island of my birth'. The word 'toxic' reverberates with *toxon* and thus with the 'arrows' of the poem, as if Ireland was not only poison, but also a bow shooting the speaker away from it and enabling the flight (in both senses). An artist herself, Meehan also reveals heightened sensitivity to and awareness of the landscape: she uses her own brush to paint a new picture ('smudge of green', 'light that shone / on . . . workers . . ., their leathers green', 'the elegant lineaments of the myth'). Ultimately, in her footsteps narrative, she challenges Auden's and Breughel's 'most unGreek landscape[s]',³³ suffused with Northern features, representing a Northern mindset estranged geographically and culturally from the original story. She does so by restoring the myth to its original Aegean landscape. This is Meehan's redress by nature, the 'writer as righter' act, to borrow Seamus Heaney's phrases,³⁴ a step in environmental justice.

The Northern features of Auden's landscape – snow and ice – relate to two other paintings which Auden saw in Brussels together with *The Fall of Icarus* in 1938 and whose description he incorporated in the first stanza of his poem, i.e. Breughel's *The Numbering at Bethlehem* and *The Massacre of Innocents*, both of which represent winter landscapes with Flemish peasants.³⁵ Yet it was Breughel's landscape that Meehan has termed as 'most unGreek'; and her intuition could not be closer to historical truth. The landscape in this painting 'functioned . . . as the primary message carrier', in Simon Schama's view,³⁶ and it performs a similar function in Meehan's poem. As Lyckle de Vries has argued, Breughel's *Icarus* should be associated with the

31 The poet's own formulation (Kruczkowska, 'Between Ireland and Greece', 170). Besides her writings and comments on extreme Catholicism, Meehan is known for her activism, e.g. in repealing the Eighth Amendment of the Irish constitution.

32 Meehan, *Painting Rain*, 82

33 Meehan about Breughel, in Kruczkowska, 'Between Ireland and Greece', 167.

34 See S. Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (London 1995) and *Writer & Righter* (Dublin 2010).

35 Kinney, 'Auden, Bruegel, and "Musée des Beaux Arts"', 529–30.

36 S. Schama, 'Dutch landscapes: culture as foreground', in P. C. Sutton et al., *Masters of 17th-century Dutch landscape painting* (Amsterdam 1987) 66.

genre of the so-called world landscape (sixteenth-century Dutch landscape painting with an optics influenced by cartography), a moral tale (ethics of labour), and emblems of modernity (the ship as a symbol of industry, trade and prosperity).³⁷ It is not to be identified with any real landscape. Strangely enough, Meehan's anti-Christian and anti-didactic poem also epitomizes labour, craft and modernity (the plane). Instead of treating Icarus as a idle pleasure seeker represented by disappearing legs, however, she places him centrally, both in the labour section (one of the bronze workers; airman; writer) and the pleasure-seeking one (glider), as if equating the two perspectives.

Often teaching Auden's 'Musée...' in a political context,³⁸ Meehan has devised a strategy against appropriation. 'Flight JIK...' is not the only reworking of Auden's poem that advances an argument or restoring the Ikarian landscape to the palimpsest in question. In the Greek-Anglophone context, one can mention, for instance, Constantine Contogenis' 'Ikaros' (2004) and 'There Are No Ploughs on Ikaria' (2010). Like Meehan, the Greek-American poet (New York 1947-) observes that Breughel 'gets the island wrong' and that 'Auden vouches / for the painting, and gets it wrong', too.³⁹ Yet the focus of Contogenis' poem is elusive. Is it the power of humans over nature ('a few quick generations / split up fields to fierce gardens'), or exactly the opposite, the power of nature over humans ('no furrows distract' them 'from this sea', the island and the sea look deserted)? The author seems to hint at Ikaria's (America's?) modern history as a place of exile for political prisoners ('A few intolerant States / exile resisters') but at the same time denies it ('No torturer of talent / would take work in such a place', while we know that there were poets, artists and composers among the political prisoners in the Aegean). In 'Ikaros',⁴⁰ Contogenis' protagonist appears as passive, 'unable / to read clouds' and 'caught / by a thermal', unlike Meehan's hero; yet he also contacts the dead and enquires into the living animal and human world, which vaguely reminds us of Meehan's speaker, as we will see.

Part of Meehan's strategy against appropriation, the Ikarian nature in 'Flight JIK...' is not 'indifferent to man', as Auden's critics claim in reference to 'Musée...'.⁴¹ For the Irish poet, nature is all-embracing and activating of the human senses, mostly welcoming,

37 De Vries, "Fall of Icarus" 9–11. He proposes the following title for the painting: 'World landscape at sunset with a plowing farmer, an idle shepherd, a hopeful fisherman, a merchant vessel, a dead body, and the Fall of Icarus'. Breughel's landscapes, according to Müller Hofstede, are 'primary example[s] of a world that is as efficient as it is beautiful, since it is organized in a sensible way' (ibid, 9).

38 Meehan, *Imaginary Bonnets*, 19.

39 C. Contogenis, 'There Are no Ploughs on Ikaria', in C. Ricks (ed.), *Joining Music with Reason* (Chipping Norton 2010) 73.

40 C. Contogenis, 'Ikaros', in D. Kostos (ed.), *Pomegranate Seeds: An Anthology of Greek-American Poetry* (Boston 2008) 91–3.

41 See e.g. P. Marchetti, 'Auden's landscapes', in S. Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden* (Cambridge 2005) 209.

sometimes dangerous, but never indifferent. 'Feeling at home'⁴² in Ikaria translates into human participation in the ecosystem: as Meehan phrases it elsewhere, in the island she and her partner feel 'creaturely / ourselves'.⁴³ In her 'holistic vision' of the world she believes in 'the interpenetration of all species and all creatures on the planet' and 'was always trying to find a way to integrate nature that didn't privilege [her]'.⁴⁴ As evinced by many 'Greek' poems in *Painting Rain* and *Geomantic*, Ikaria has enabled such an immediate and unequivocal integration: with her Greek surroundings, its forces of nature, her Ikarian house and garden, her husband, even the rest of the food chain and the afterlife. 'We have to integrate ourselves, or reintegrate ourselves', she declares, holding Christianity responsible for the disruption in this process.⁴⁵ This attempt at reintegration coincides with some of the fundamental assumptions of environmental writing, where 'human history is implicated in natural history' (Lawrence Buell), and the postulates of ecopoetry, whose 'central concern is recognition of human entanglement in the world' (David Borthwick).⁴⁶

Habitually twice a year Meehan stays in Therma – location of ancient hot springs and the Asclepius oracle – and returns to Ireland 'mind and body nourished'.⁴⁷ Ikaria, generally known for high life expectancy,⁴⁸ becomes her private site of healing. In Greece Meehan has 'recognized something that chimed with an Irish sense of landscape, of the sacredness of certain places, of wells, of guardian spirits'. This synthesis of nature and spiritual values, characteristic for pre-Christian societies in Ireland and Greece, and crucial to Meehan's sensibility, also stands in opposition to the patriarchal order of Greek mythology and Roman literature (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), where women and animals are equally manipulated. Some passages of 'nature description' in 'Flight JIK...' openly sabotage that order. Representations of a maid changed into a tree, or a carthorse made to fly (lines 12-13), which could potentially elicit vehement response from ecofeminist readers, can nevertheless work as empowering metaphors, just like other images of shapeshifting in Meehan's work diagnosed by critics. Kathryn Kirkpatrick, for instance, suggests that Meehan's 'ecofeminist poetics recuperates a shamanic role for the contemporary poet', which the critic traces back to the Celtic tradition and to Gary Snyder's work.⁴⁹ In Ikaria, where,

42 Meehan, *Imaginary Bonnets*, 18.

43 Meehan, 'The Island'.

44 Allen Randolph, 'The body politic', 249, 266.

45 Kruczkowska, 'Between Ireland and Greece', 170.

46 L. Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, nature writing, and the formation of American culture* (Cambridge, MA 1996) 7; D. Borthwick, 'Introduction', *Entanglements: new ecopoetry* (Isle of Lewis 2012) xv–xxii (xvi).

47 Kruczkowska, 'Between Ireland and Greece', 169. Following quotes: *ibid.*, 166, 167.

48 See e.g. A. Anthony, 'The island of long life', *The Guardian* 31 May 2013, 10 May 2023.

49 Kirkpatrick, 'Between country and city', 124, 112, 121–2.

in the Asclepius oracle, ‘the dream drives the healing’, the poet finds herself at home as ‘a professional dreamer for the culture’.⁵⁰

In this shapeshifting manner, ‘the way of the myth’ in ‘Flight JIK...’ transforms itself into a real journey by air which ‘has brought me here’, suggesting the speaker’s metamorphosis. Ikaria evolves into one of Meehan’s liminal places. In the same *Painting Rain* collection, the author evokes the ‘threshold, the stepping over, / the shapechanging that can happen when / you jump off the edge. . . / the passage between inner and outer’ (‘Liminal’). Assuming the position of Icarus in ‘Flight JIK...’, she undertakes a ‘metempsychotic journey’, to use A. V. Seaton’s term.⁵¹ Apparently, instead of ‘role-play[ing] the behaviour of a previous traveller’, i.e. Auden, Meehan follows her mythical protagonist, much in the mode of Tim Severin’s reconstructions of legendary voyages. One of her objectives may again lie with ‘decolonising the mind’. She once claimed that myth, legend and poetry are three vehicles facilitating ‘the real journey [of finding] within yourself an identity of your pre-colonial being’.⁵² In that imaginary way, Meehan in other texts reinvents herself as a descendant of the legendary tribe of Milesians, or of Artemis the Bear Mother,⁵³ both of whom she associates with the eastern Aegean, the region where Ikaria is located. This process of self-reinvention or mind-decolonisation demands from the poet to emancipate herself from the influence of the classical references in English poetry which fostered her ‘tropism towards Greece and the Aegean’. In ‘Flight JIK...’ we witness a similar procedure, where the speaker has to overcome the shadow of Auden to identify herself with Icarus. In other words, in this footsteps narrative the identity of the first traveller has shifted, with the author undertaking to ‘role-play the behaviour of [the] previous [legendary] traveller’, Icarus, in order to complete ‘the real journey [of finding] within yourself an identity of your pre-colonial being’.

Another travel writing category to which we can refer the flight imagery of Meehan’s poem is vertical travel, defined by Michael Cronin as ‘travel down into the particulars of place either in space (botany, studies of micro-climate, exhaustive exploration of local landscape) or in time (local history, archaeology, folklore)’⁵⁴ at a decelerated pace. With the exception of modern history,⁵⁵ Meehan’s poem exemplifies all these

50 Kruczkowska, ‘Between Ireland and Greece’, 168; González Arias, “Playing with the ghosts of words”, 203.

51 A. V. Seaton, ‘In the footsteps of Acerbi: metempsychosis and the ‘repeated journey’, *Acta Universitatis Oulensis Humaniora* B.40 (2001) 121–138 (122).

52 González Arias, “Playing with the ghosts of words”, 196 (where Meehan explores the power of Bronze Age myth).

53 For the former, see Kruczkowska, ‘Between Ireland and Greece’, 166; for the latter, see Meehan, *Imaginary Bonnets*, 31.

54 M. Cronin, *Across the Lines: Travel, Language and Translation* (Cork 2000) 19.

55 Ikaria, called the Red Rock because of its Communist traditions, still votes Left. Its ‘living communitarianism’, Meehan says, ‘could be a template for sustainable small communities’ (Kruczkowska, ‘Between Ireland and Greece’, 169).

microinspections. Charles Forsdick presents vertical travel as the movement determined by 'the specific *downwards* vector'; however, contrary to his specification of the genre, 'Flight JIK...' does not foreground 'the worm's-eye view as opposed to the bird's-eye view'.⁵⁶ Meehan's poem combines both perspectives. On landing on Ikaria, her plane is struck by a 'katabatic wind'. In the Greek context, rather than meteorology, the term resounds with *κατάβασις*, a descent into the underground, frequently with the objective of consulting the dead (as in the *Odyssey*). With the background knowledge of Ikarian archeology, Meehan's reader expects to see the Asclepius oracle, which indeed materializes as the oracle of the dead (*νεκρομαντεῖον*), but in the next poem of the volume, the ominous 'Troika',⁵⁷ depicting the Ikarian sanctuary in Therma in terms bordering on the idea of hell (sulphur, deep orange colour, 'a wraith of steam'). This particular poem is worth a short detour in our narrative for the sake of comparison.

The speaker of 'Troika', immersed in 'a half dream' like the patients of the ancient oracle, experiences a vision of the otherworld: an unwelcome visit of her uncle's ghost whom she 'must have brought . . . packed / in [the] rucksack with Robert Graves's *The Greek Myths*'.⁵⁸ The surrounding Greek landscape allows her to interrogate the spirit about his violent deeds: 'I ask again what he meant by it in the shade / of this myrtle, . . . the thyme laden air / the salt taste of my skin on my tongue' (with the last element suggestive of speech acts). In the course of the poem, the same 'prophetic' landscape allows for a symbolic burial, when the speaker comes to terms with the difficult past:

. . . the Aegean turns blood red
for a moment, then fades to a pewter distance.
The moon is nearly full, stars are coming out
slowly, one by one, until the sky is a net
to catch me as I fall and fall and fall
further, willingly into its depths.

As well as 'Flight JIK...', this poem combines two vertical vistas relevant to a liminal, vaticinal experience: the speaker falls into the depths paradoxically synonymous with flight. The whole 'Troika' sequence ends by closing the door on the painful past, relegated to the realm of mythology and entrusted to the phantasmagoric landscape of the Greek island – strangely reminiscent of Auden's 'Musée...' with its ironically transformed ship: 'this Greek island / where one small boat putters out to sea / in a blaze of morning sunlight / dragging my attention in its wake'.

56 C. Forsdick, 'Vertical travel', *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*, 99–112 (103–4).

57 Meehan, 'Troika', *Painting Rain*, 74–80. The poem was composed before the EU Troika's infamous role in the Greek debt crisis (2010–2016).

58 Graves, anything but a feminist, is another English prism of classical references in Meehan's literary world, and another shadow to be overcome, just like Auden's.

Similarly, ‘the worm’s-eye view’ in ‘Flight JIK...’ coincides with the airy component when the location of the Asclepius oracle, Therma, emerges encoded in Icarus’ ‘skating thermals’. Meehan’s speaker is again literally falling into another dimension, with landscape liberating her powers of clairvoyance, and with the Icarus myth inciting, this time, poetic inspiration and achievement. For, last but not least, the bird’s-eye view in ‘Flight JIK...’ corresponds to the structural grid of Auden’s ‘Musée...’: as Meehan claimed in a lecture, ‘much of the truth force of a poem inheres in the rhythmic patterns’ which drive ‘the craft free of gravity, true agent of flight’.⁵⁹

The Audenesque pattern may also define the ecopoetic features of the poem. As Bate writes of ecopoetry,

rhythmic, syntactic and linguistic intensifications that are characteristic of verse-writing frequently give peculiar force to the *poiesis*: it could be that *poiesis* in the sense of verse-making is language’s most direct path of return to the *oikos*. . . because metre itself – a quiet but persistent music, a recurring cycle, a heartbeat – is an answering to nature’s own rhythms, an echoing of the song of the earth itself.⁶⁰

While neither ‘Musée...’ nor ‘Flight JIK...’ follow a regular metrical form, the reader discerns a pronounced rhythm in their language. Critical opinions that Auden’s ‘poem has no rhyme scheme – it’s a stream of unstructured consciousness’⁶¹ are unconvincing, especially if we look at the abundance of iambs in the text. Auden’s end-line scheme provides Meehan with the matrix for the footsteps genre, like the mould in the *cire-perdue* method evoked in her poem (‘To hear clearly the father’s cry / over the drowned body of his son, in the ancient light that shone / on the bronze-workers at their cire-perdue, their leathers green...’). Yet she subversively redirects Auden’s verse pattern to serve her own purpose: seek fidelity to the mythical landscape and its persistence to the present day, and reunite with the Ikarian song of the earth, with the *oikos*. In contrast to deep ecology notions, humanity has a role to play in this song. Commenting elsewhere on the kinship of memory and poetry, where ‘mnemonic devices – rhyme, rhythms and meters . . . were developed to make an art of memory’, Meehan observes that poetry-making (*poiesis*) persists in much the same form across times and cultures.⁶² Eóin Flannery finds this view ‘suggestive of the *humanity* embedded within the musical contours of poetry’.⁶³ These devices and images – Auden’s diagram, the ‘lineaments of the myth’, the poetic craft and Icarus’ flight (‘Flight JIK...’), geological and ‘aboriginal patternings’ (memory of the land and

59 Meehan, *Imaginary Bonnets*, 20.

60 Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 42.

61 J. Sutherland, “Musée des Beaux Arts,” “Their Lonely Batters” and “The Shield of Achilles”, British Library, 26 May 2016, <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/musee-des-beaux-arts-their-lonely-batters-and-the-shield-of-achilles>, 26 June 2022.

62 Allen Randolph, ‘The body politic’, 268.

63 Eóin Flannery, “things which can neither be written...”, 65.

its creatures, people included) and earth-divination practices of the later *Geomantic* volume – create a tightly interwoven network in Meehan's 'Greek' poems.

Connected with those overlapping geocentric and panoptic perspectives in Meehan's poetic output is the deconstruction of the English pastoral, a genre often interpreted in the Irish context as (post)colonial. The pastoral mode in/about Ireland – mastered by the Elizabethan poets active in the conquest of Ireland (Spenser, Raleigh) and those who supported it (Sidney, Milton) – has been perceived as based on power relations by Irish critics (Oona Frawley's classic *The Irish Pastoral*) and poets (such as MacNeice and Heaney, for instance).⁶⁴ Consequently, the traditional representations of Irish landscape as a female body, including the *aísling* and colonial romance tropes, were confronted with ecofeminist thinking, provoking a decided reaction on the part of women poets (Meehan, Medbh McGuckian, Eavan Boland, Nuala NiDhomhnaill) and their critics.⁶⁵ Meehan, nurtured by 'the dead hand' of English pastoral tradition, declares to have learned 'to decode these clues that led to a vision of the natural world, of aboriginal dreamtime, as I found it pied, coded and scrambled in this pastoral poetry'.⁶⁶ The process of decoding the pastoral cipher has led Meehan to perform global macro- and microinspections in the Greek context. Documenting her 'nine years in this house by the sea' in Ikaria, the poem 'The Handful of Earth' in *Geomantic* inspects the abuse of the land from a cosmic sweep to a handful of dust, with the optics of stars and wild birds funnelling into the earth's 'aboriginal patternings' and 'minutest narratives of grief'.⁶⁷ The opening line of another poem, 'The Last Lesson', reverberates with the 'genetic', 'geologic', and 'geomantic' memory of Meehan's Planet Water,⁶⁸ with the poet-seer reading in the history of the earth, while at the end of the text we discover the figure of 'the frail glider suddenly mythic' – Icarus – who 'is stopped for a moment as if to prove / the craft is lighter than the learning'. By means of the two merging perspectives, the later volumes of poetry and essays, *Geomantic* and *Imaginary Bonnets...*, offer a synthesis of Meehan's environmental thought. Yet this synthesis was already manifest in 'Flight JIK...', in the volume published seven

64 Oona Frawley, *The Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* (Dublin 2005); MacNeice, *Ten Burnt Offerings*; Seamus Heaney 'Traditions' (*Wintering Out* [London 1972]), 'Introduction' to *Beowulf* (London 1999), 'Eclogues in extremis: on the staying power of pastoral', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 103 C (1/2003) 1–12.

65 See e.g. McGuckian's 'The Heiress', 'The Hollywood Bed', 'The Soil-Map' (*The Flower Master and Other Poems* [Loughcrew 1993]), and their discussion in A. Garden, "Like a bee's sting or a bullet": eroticism, violence and the afterlives of colonial romance in Medbh McGuckian's *The Flower Master and Other Poems* (1993)', *Textual Practice*, 36.8 [2022] 1351–73; Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, 'Hag', *Pharaoh's Daughter* (Loughcrew 1990); Sean Crosson, 'Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill: reclaiming women's voice from song', in A. O'Malley-Younger and F. Beardow (eds), *Representing Ireland: Past, Present and Future* (Sunderland 2005) 59–68.

66 Meehan, *Imaginary Bonnets*, 38–9.

67 Meehan, *Geomantic*, 93.

68 Meehan, *Geomantic*, 25; *Imaginary Bonnets*, 59. Compare 'The Last Lesson' with 'The Feathers', another poem about Icarus, 'the earthbound carnal / who dream[s] flight', in *Geomantic*, 26.

years earlier and opening with the famous elegy for Irish wilderness ('Death of a Field', *Painting Rain*). Eventually, it may have been the Ikarian refuge that enabled Meehan to write one of the most celebrated poems about Irish 'progress'.⁶⁹

The environmental attitude of Meehan's 'Greek' ecopoem also brings it closer to Christopher Keirstead's account of the footsteps travel writing which 'can actually propel author and reader alike to a deeper awareness and critical understanding of the politics of travel, especially in postcolonial contexts'.⁷⁰ Although Meehan does not comment on Greece's colonial past (Ottoman rule), she does filter her text through the mode of writing burdened with an analogous postcolonial present (of her native land). Keirstead further clarifies that the understanding of the politics of travel is 'driven by the formal dynamics of the footsteps subgenre itself', by 'the prevalence of the form' and its intertextuality, defined by the critic as 'close' and 'intimate'. And indeed, the vehicle for Meehan's literary travel ('Musée...') has been veiled and questioned as if to be discovered and reconstructed in a close and intimate act of private reading. In Keirstead's view, footsteps travel writing 'holds a unique capacity to undermine the ideology of the self-invented, solitary traveler', where 'the borders of self and other . . . become permeable, reinforcing how much the traveler is always written on by others.' If we apply this description to Meehan's work, the term 'other', instead of being associated with the destination culture, or with the first traveller of the footsteps narrative, denotes the entire ecosystem (also as one of the victims of colonisation processes), the world, the Earth, or in ecocritical terms, the 'more/than/human' world.⁷¹ In contemporary Irish poetry, a similar perception of the 'other' in the panoptic sweep can be found in Derek Mahon's writings (for instance, in 'A Bright Patch') using the same Ikarian mythological framework to embrace nature in crisis, though it may be more justified to appreciate a reverse order of this particular text, with the environment's perspective dominating over the human.⁷² More importantly, however, Breughel's painting itself already contains an element of such a panoptic perspective: its world landscape 'with its high horizon and helicopter view' has been interpreted by Walter Gibson as 'an armchair traveler's look upon the structure of the earth compressed into a narrow space'.⁷³

69 The poem has been interpreted by numerous critics, e.g. by A. Sperry in 'Hearth lessons: Paula Meehan's ecofeminist economics', *Études irlandaises* 40.2 (2015) 109–20, and E. Flannery in "'things which can neither be written...'", 66–9.

70 Keirstead, 'Convoluting paths', 286.

71 I prefer this formulation, introduced by Justyna Stepień, to the 'more-than-human' term riddled with ambiguity (J. Stepień, *Posthuman and Nonhuman Entanglements in Contemporary Art and Body* [New York 2022] 8 ff.).

72 D. Mahon, 'A Bright Patch' in *Against the Clock* (Loughcrew 2018) 40. In the poem, Mahon addresses the sun in the era of global warming: 'the earth smoked, the seas shrank, it grew so hot, / and you whirled Icarus like a wounded pigeon / into the blue Aegean.'

73 De Vries, "'Fall of Icarus'" 9. The author refers to W. S. Gibson's book: *Mirror of the Earth: the world landscape in sixteenth-century Flemish painting* (Princeton 1989).

Distance, an essential factor of travel writing, also allows for a profounder awareness of one's own country and one's self. In 'Flight JIK...', Icarus and the speaker escape their prison countries (Crete with its labyrinth, and Ireland, 'the toxic island of my birth, its slings and arrows', respectively) to immerse themselves in 'the blue rapture of sky and Aegean'. Importantly, however, the colour blue connotes 'inner space' in Meehan's symbolic,⁷⁴ and a kindred 'lure of the island as a privileged inner space' has been argued by Godfrey Baldacchino in his *Handbook of Island Studies*.⁷⁵ Meehan's quest initiates her into the heightened perception of the future ('to see where the story ends') and of her own psyche and art (to 'understand the nature of my failure'). With the 'smudge of green' shining through the Aegean paradise blue, the journey to Ikaria may thus betoken an act of self-examination and aspiration rather than mere escapism.⁷⁶ However painful, recognizing failure leads to a liberation from fixed forms and expectations, both psychological and artistic. When enacting the myth, Meehan's protagonist lives through an insight instead of the final disaster because failure, 'a true friend / of my long night's journey into day',⁷⁷ permits her to 'move on'. These final words of 'Flight JIK...' herald a change.

In her footsteps travel narrative, Meehan has, in my view, managed to break free from Auden's shadow – towering over Irish poets and responsible for the American turn in Irish poetry, in Jeffrey Carson's diagnosis⁷⁸ – and from English pastoral constraints. Her next collection of poetry, *Geomantic*, marks a breakthrough in form: a turn to a short, terse lyric, a nine-liner in different stanzaic configurations, a new diction reflected in the cover image of the quilt-like form, the square consisting of nine fields of synthetic landscape painted by the author ('synthetic' as in 'synthesis', i.e. focused on essential features).⁷⁹ This change of diction, together with the environmental synthesis, portends Meehan's decoding the clues of tradition in order to arrive at 'an older, wilder relationship with an animal self that might be truly at home in creation'.⁸⁰ The process has been mediated by the poet's decades-long rapport with Greece, from the early Cretan experience that 'really laid the foundations for a relationship with [her] own creativity', to Ikaria granting her 'a sense that anything

74 Meehan, *Imaginary Bonnets*, 18.

75 G. Baldacchino, 'Preface', in G. Baldacchino (ed.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Island Studies* (London 2018) xix–xxxv (xxxi).

76 Self-examination constitutes an important element of the hybrid footsteps narratives as identified by Peter Hulme ('In the wake of Columbus: Frederick Ober's ambulant gloss', *Literature and History* 6.2 [1997] 18–36).

77 Meehan, 'The Poetry', *Geomantic*, 48. See also *Imaginary Bonnets*, 18.

78 J. Kruczkowska, Interview with Jeffrey Carson, 'Interviews', www.irellas.com.

79 Each of the eighty-one poems consists of nine lines; each of the lines consists of nine syllables. The nine squares of the cover image painting represent three landscape scenes, each repeated thrice. This strict formal poetic and artistic design further contributes to the perception of *Geomantic* as expressive of compact synthesis.

80 Meehan, *Imaginary Bonnets*, 39.

might happen'.⁸¹ Provided with the security and distance of that second – Greek – home, Paula Meehan distilled a new substance of *ecopoiesis* in the footsteps of the mythical flight, where the preceding ‘authentic’/virtual travellers – Auden and Breughel – acted as stepping stones into artistic freedom.

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81 Kruczkowska, ‘Between Ireland and Greece’, 167.