



Open Library of Humanities



---

## Article

**How to Cite:** Rodger, C. 2020. Ian Hamilton Finlay's Topographical Poetics at Stonypath/Little Sparta. *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 11(1): 29, pp. 1–25. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/bip.2927>

**Published:** 08 July 2020

---

## Copyright:

© 2020 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

## Open Access:

*Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry* is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

## Digital Preservation:

The Open Library of Humanities and all its journals are digitally preserved in the CLOCKSS scholarly archive service.

---

**The Open Library of Humanities is an open access non-profit publisher of scholarly articles and monographs.**

## ARTICLE

# Ian Hamilton Finlay's Topographical Poetics at Stonypath/Little Sparta

Calum Rodger

Scottish Universities' International Summer School, University of Edinburgh, UK

[calumrodger@gmail.com](mailto:calumrodger@gmail.com)

---

While Ian Hamilton Finlay's garden Little Sparta is often more readily associated with the sculptural and plastic arts, Finlay always took care to describe the works in the garden as 'poems'. This article shows how this fact is far from trivial, but rather is fundamental to understanding the garden and its purpose. It defines the poetics of Little Sparta as *topographical poetics*, showing how the formal development of modernist and concrete poetry leads directly to the sculptural and site-specific poetry of the garden, and proposing a formal model of topographical poetics – considered as a compound of name, material, and environment – through which the garden poems can be read. It demonstrates this through close readings of 'MARE NOSTRUM', 'signpost' and other garden poems, showing how topographical poetics shifts the locus of the poetic from the voice to the place and, by extension, the self to the home, and goes on to examine some primary characteristics of the model, among them miniaturism, scalar oscillations and weather. It argues, moreover, that this poetic model was developed by Finlay to realise an ontological project (here defined as a tension between the 'poetic' and the 'homely') of realising a longing or homesickness for Arcadian and Utopian absolutes in order to become reconciled to their impossibility in the process of making a home in the everyday world. In so doing, it reveals how the garden realises tensions between culture and nature, classical and modern, absolutism and pragmatism, and art and life, and asserts Finlay's singular contribution to twentieth-century poetics.

---

**Keywords:** Ian Hamilton Finlay; Little Sparta; garden; topography; concrete poetry

---

## 1. Introduction

Ian Hamilton Finlay is among the most singular figures of Scottish art and letters of the twentieth-century, with a body of work remarkable both in terms of volume and formal diversity. Most famous is his *magnum opus* Little Sparta, a poetry garden at the poet's former home in the Pentland Hills of southern Scotland. The garden

covers five acres of ground and boasts several burns, a whole range of flora and fauna and Lochan Eck, the smallest body of water to appear on a Scottish OS map (dug by the poet, named after his son). Most remarkably, it is home to around 275 sculpted objects that make their habitat here. That it was voted Scotland's greatest artwork in a 2004 *Scotland on Sunday* poll<sup>1</sup> testifies to its singular achievement and international renown in the visual and plastic arts. But it is significant that the vast majority of these works feature text, with inscription and placing serving as the basic formal strategies. It is even more significant that Finlay described the works of the garden as 'poems', while his epitaph, with characteristic brevity, consists of one word: 'Poet'.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that Little Sparta is understood best not as an art garden but a poetry garden, and while this distinction may make little difference to the casual visitor, it is fundamental to any serious consideration of Little Sparta and, by extension, Finlay's sculptural work elsewhere. Little Sparta constitutes a radical development of modernist poetics in which the poem is no longer bound in the pages of a book, or tied to the utterance of a speaker, but rather given its own *place* in the world, entailing a shift in the poetic locus from *self* to *home*. This article proposes that this model be termed *topographical poetics*, arguing, moreover, that this model is not only one of formal innovation, but also ontological alteration.

The drive towards this alteration – to cast a poetics in terms of the home rather than the self – is present in Finlay's famous letter to Pierre Garnier of 1963, in which he gives the thinking behind his attraction to concrete poetry:

I approve of Malevich's statement, 'Man distinguished himself as a thinking being and removed himself from the perfection of God's creation. Having left the non-thinking state, he strives by means of his perfected objects, to be again embodied, in the perfection of the absolute, non-thinking life...' That is, this seems to me, to describe, approximately, my own need to make poems... though I don't know what is meant by 'God'. And it also raises the question that, though the objects might 'make it', possibly, into a state of perfection, the poet and the painter will not. I think any pilot-plan should distinguish, in its optimism, between what man can construct and what he

actually is. I mean, new thought does not make a new man; in any photograph of an aircrash one can see how terribly far man stretches – from angel to animal; and one does not want a *glittering* perfection which forgets that the world is, after all, also to be made by man into his *home*.<sup>3</sup>

Finlay's development of topographical poetics, over the following decades, is one and the same with the poet's drive to make the world 'into his *home*', 'striv[ing]', like the Russian Suprematist painter Kasimir Malevich, towards the 'perfected object', whilst in the same move recognising that this 'non-thinking life' is fatally out of reach and any '*glittering* perfection' disingenuous. On the one hand, 'the perfection of the absolute, non-thinking life'; on the other, its impossibility, at least as far as regards that crucial component 'life'. How, asks Finlay, might one 'strive' for a *homely* 'perfection', both playfully and painfully aware of the impossibility of its realisation as 'perfection', in the space 'between what man can construct and what he actually is'? Arguably, thanks to its arbitrary nature, language, having no essential, 'absolute' connection to its referents, is the ideal – perhaps the only – vehicle for this necessarily compromised 'striv[ing]'. This is why Finlay is a poet, and the works of Little Sparta poems. The 'poetic' is the primary touchstone by which Finlay orientates his project, finding a '*home*' for language in the topographical poetics of Little Sparta.

The question this article aims to answer is how such unconventional poetry should be *read*, and naturalised as an object of literary criticism. This is pursued by briefly tracing the formal development of topographical poetics from precedents in early modernist and concrete poetry, before turning to the garden poems themselves, drawing on the work of J. Hillis Miller and other critics to define topographical poetics in formal terms that make it approachable via close reading. In so doing, it elaborates on the relationship between 'perfection' and 'home' of the Garnier letter (here termed the 'poetic' and the 'homely'), proposing an opposition between the two terms through which the numerous oppositions of the garden and Finlay's work elsewhere might be usefully framed and understood. This line of argument complements study of the poems' formal aspects and asserts the garden's continued relevance and significant contribution to twentieth and twenty-first century poetics.

Happily, Finlay's work is finally beginning to receive the critical and cultural attention it deserves, as demonstrated by the first international conference dedicated to the poet's work, 'Little Fields, Long Horizons' at the University of Edinburgh in July 2017, and Creative Scotland's Sharing Little Sparta project (2016–2017), which has widened access to the garden and supported a number of artist residencies. It is hoped this article will contribute to this sea-change and, moreover, encourage further work on Finlay within the field of literary criticism.

## 2. The Modernist Precedent

In the mid-1960s a solitary ash tree stood next to a dilapidated farmhouse on a barren moor in the Pentland Hills of southern Scotland, a few miles north of Biggar. It did not remain solitary for long. Finlay moved into the farmhouse in the late summer of 1966 with his wife and collaborator Sue and young son Alec (a daughter, Ailie, was born a couple of years later) and immediately began construction on what would become one of the most remarkable gardens in the world. It became so remarkable that when the tree finally fell over half a century later it was not only a tree that fell; it was the ocean.

The garden was Stonypath, adopting its more famous name Little Sparta in the late 1970s (for reasons described below, the garden will be referred to by its dual identity Stonypath/Little Sparta from here on). But the 1960s, so Alec Finlay tells us in his introduction to *Selections: Ian Hamilton Finlay*, was the 'golden age in the creation of Stonypath'.<sup>4</sup> Among the numerous garden poems composed, built and installed during this period was a stone plaque, affixed to the ash tree by the Finlays, and constructed in collaboration with stonecutter Nicholas Sloan. It reads 'MARE NOSTRUM'<sup>5</sup> – our sea – the epithet by which the Romans knew the Mediterranean. Revisiting Stonypath shortly after the tree had fallen for *the road north* project, Alec Finlay quotes a letter from his father to Sloan describing the poem's impetus:

Except on very calm days, (which are few, as you know), the ash fills the garden with its sea-sound. When people ask why so many poems refer to the sea, or comment that it is odd to find so many sea-references so far from the sea itself, I often point to the Ash Tree and say, *That is our sea.*<sup>6</sup>

The 'MARE NOSTRUM' plaque asserts in language the implicit metaphorical relationship experienced by the poet in the garden, whereby the wind in the branches is felt (and, with the plaque, *written* and *read*) as the swelling of the ocean's waters. It thus establishes the fundamental metaphorical equivalence of an inland garden in which 'so many poems refer to the sea': that land is sea, and sea land. The 'content' of nature is rendered as poetic through name ('MARE NOSTRUM') and material (the stone plaque, the typeface) – that is, as metaphor and form. The formal operation of this equivalence is akin (but not identical) to the juxtapositional technique pioneered by the Imagists, especially Pound, and further explored by the concrete poetry milieu of the 1950s and 60s (in which Finlay was an active participant). Here it is possible to trace the formal modernist lineage of this most thematically classical of poems, and indeed the garden as a whole.

Finlay's topographical poetics develops from two principles of modernist poetry: equivalence of form and content, and the juxtapositional method. Roman Jakobson formulates these dicta in structuralist terms with his notion of 'poetic function', constructing a theory that both naturalises the initial radicalism of these developments and allows the entire canon to be read cognisant of them. As poetic function is that which focuses 'on the message for its own sake',<sup>7</sup> it is defined according to two primary features, the first, aesthetic (or formal), and the second, metaphorical. In the first case, poetic function is concerned with 'promoting the palpability of signs',<sup>8</sup> therefore is dominant in any utterance where the emphasis is on the material qualities of the words themselves. The signifier is presented not as a transparent vessel for the signified, but a source of aesthetic experience in and of itself, through which likenesses in sound correspond to likenesses in idea. In the second case equivalence, which ordinarily exists only across the paradigmatic axis of language, is 'promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence',<sup>9</sup> so that any sequence of ideas potentially builds associative relationships or, as Jakobson puts it, 'anything sequent is a simile'.<sup>10</sup> The distillation of the poetic to these features – equivalence between form and content and the projection of metaphor from the connective to the entire sequence – is the theoretical legacy of the modernism from which Finlay's concrete poetry grew and the ground on which his topographical poetics is constructed. Nevertheless,

poetic function in both of these modes is distinct from that conceived by Jakobson in a fundamental sense.

In Jakobson, as in conventional poetry, poetic function is construed as an aural phenomenon, made palpable in time through heard sequence. This marks conventional verse (whether in closed or open form) as effectively linear, that is, one-dimensional – a necessary condition of any aural, time-based art. Concrete poetry breaks free from the linear constraints of conventional verse, constructing a poetry based not on prosody but on figure-ground relationships. Consequently, Jakobson's 'palpability of signs' is reconstituted in a spatial field of two dimensions rather than a temporal track, as in this famous early example of the form, Eugen Gomringer's 'wind':<sup>11</sup>

```

      w w
      d i
      n n n
      i d i d
      w      w
  
```

The poem is perceived as a visual structure, without the beginning and end points that mark linear verse. Existing in two dimensions, its boundaries are marked instead by a perimeter. This was the major breakthrough of the early concrete poets: to recalibrate poetic function in terms of a primarily *visual* 'palpability of signs'. In concord with Finlay's Malevichian 'perfected object', Gomringer describes the concrete poem as 'a reality in itself'. It is 'a play-area of fixed dimensions', an atemporal (insofar as it has neither beginning nor end) 'invitation'<sup>12</sup> of a poem, for us to join and leave when and however we wish.

This makes the concrete poem reader-centric to an unprecedented degree. As Mike Weaver puts it in a 1966 essay, 'the act of perception itself is the first preoccupation of concrete poetry'.<sup>13</sup> In the case of 'wind', we may recognise the darting movements of our eyes as a kind of kinetic metaphor for the movement of the wind, but only if we consent to engage with the poem for long enough. Its 'reality in itself' is justified insofar as the poem is not tied to the presence of a speaker, simply because

such a speaker does not – and could not – exist. Its autonomy thus comes at a cost: poetry loses its ability to *utter*, that is, while the language still speaks in some sense, it has lost its voice, its status as (potential) utterance. As Finlay puts it, '[t]he Muse of concrete poetry reversed Mnemosyne's gift; depriving the poet of song, she gave him sweet eyesight'.<sup>14</sup> The poem loses its attachment to voice and so to presence; instead, it is a made object in the world, a clear prefiguration of the sculptural garden poems at Stonypath/Little Sparta – a poetry not of voice, but of place.

Ultimately, this cost proved too high for the early concrete poets, Gomringer included. By the 1960s his work had developed towards a permutational, minimalist linear verse, as in 'Book of Hours', the very name of which suggests a readmission of the temporal:

your mind

my mind

your word

my word

your question

my question

your answer

my answer

your song

my song

your poem

my poem<sup>15</sup>

The extreme brevity and simple repetition of the lines create a kind of echo chamber, the reverberations of which hint at space while remaining temporally bound, acknowledging the medial frontier even as it formally retreats from it. A similar retreat can



be seen in the work of Haroldo de Campos, another of the form's inventors, whose long poem 'Galaxies', which occupied the poet from the early 60s through to the 70s, achieves a similar effect through more baroque means: 'and here I begin I spin here the beguine I respin and begin|to release and realize life begins not arrives at the end of a trip'.<sup>16</sup> Other concrete poets, such as Dom Sylvester Houédard, travelled in a different direction. Houédard's later 'typestracts' (so named by Edwin Morgan by concatenating 'typewriter' and 'abstract') lose the semantic wholeness of the word, instead using the typewriter as a visual art-making machine in the realm of geometrical and expressive abstraction. If concrete poetry is 'Between Poetry and Painting' (as the title of a 1965 exhibition at the ICA suggests), then these cases demonstrate a move away from this intermedial frontier. In Gomringer and de Campos's case, it is back to the line. In Houédard's case, it is across the border towards the visual arts. In his own idiosyncratic way, however, Finlay remained a frontier poet.

Even as Finlay first discovered the work of Gomringer and de Campos in 1962 he was already aspiring towards a poetic beyond the limits of the page, in pursuit of the 'perfected object'. The poems of his first concrete collection *Rapel* (1963), contemporaneous with his letter to Garnier, are presented as loose-leaf poems on glossy card in dimensions much larger than the average poetry book, suggesting that these poems are designed for the mantelpiece rather than the bookshelf.<sup>17</sup> The same year Finlay published 'Pear – Appear – Disappear', later followed by 'First Suprematist Standing Poem' (1965), both of which are designed, as the name of the latter suggests, to 'stand' like a greetings card, on a table or mantelpiece. In conventional verse the 'palpability of signs' is an aural phenomenon. In concrete poetry, it is primarily visual, though it encompasses also what Weaver calls the 'spelling-sound relation'<sup>18</sup> – language's phonetic echo – and our own kinaesthetic processes when reading. The astonishing formal innovation of Finlay's topographical poetics is to intensify and extend these processes to all the senses, using neither paper, ink nor voice but nature itself (and the materials it presents the sculptor) to engineer these responses. Nevertheless, these responses remain fundamentally poetic, depending upon semiotic and linguistic means. The invitation presented by the concrete poem develops, at Stonypath/Little Sparta, into a physically immersive

*encounter* in which signs are made palpable in terms of not only sight but also touch, sound, smell and even taste. With this in mind, it is now possible to turn to the poems themselves, in order to determine the precise formal mechanics of topographical poetics in action.

### 3. Topographical Poetics

Topography: from the Greek *topos* – place – and *graphia* – writing. As J. Hillis Miller observes in *Topographies*, it is 'a complex word'.<sup>19</sup> Drawing his terms from *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, Miller describes how etymologically topography has had three distinct meanings. The first – 'obsolete' and 'most literal' – is 'the description [in words] of a particular place'. The second is the 'exact delineation [...] of the physical features of any place or region', whereby cartographic symbols replace linguistic description. The third, which arises from the second by metonymy, is 'the configuration of a surface'; here the word no longer refers to the naming or the mapping of a territory, but the territory itself.<sup>20</sup> It is, as Miller puts it:

[...] the product of a triple figurative transference. 'Topography' originally meant the creation of a metaphorical equivalent in words of a landscape. Then, by another transfer, it came to mean the representation of a landscape according to the conventional signs of some system of mapping. Finally, by a third transfer, the name of the map was carried over to name what is mapped.<sup>21</sup>

How does this etymology bear on the present use of the term, as topographical poetics? One of Finlay's earliest garden poems, 'signpost',<sup>22</sup> erected at the perimeter of the incipient garden in 1969, helps to frame the issue.

The poem comprises a white-painted wooden signpost pointing in eight directions. Seven of the eight points of the poem enumerate the names of different fishing-nets ('stack net|ring net|seine net|salmon net|drift net|trawl net|herring net'); the eighth plays on the repetition of 'net' to cast its semantic net towards a cosmic dimension: 'planet'. In a letter to Morgan describing the development of the poem, Finlay writes:

[...] the idea came from long pondering the several sea-like denizens of the Stonypath moor, and the evening silhouette of an old signpost that stands there... I finally found that the *poem* had come to occupy the imagined ports, and I set about the usual *gnome*-task of *realisation* via joiners and signwriters... When the poem is ready [...] I will erect it within our fence, but perhaps some local authority will one day dignify its moor with a replica... It is a nice, or *right*, idea, isn't it? *Naming* the world with the right wee names.<sup>23</sup>

Like the 'MARE NOSTRUM' plaque, the poem sets up a metaphorical equivalence by which land is *named* as sea so that it may be read as such. Finlay's letter, like the poem itself, is unspecific as to *how* it should be read. Perhaps the 'sea-like denizens' are cattle read as boats, and bushes as buoys. These associations remain open, but it is the metaphorical casting of the nets over the landscape, this act of renaming, that makes them possible at all. The paradigmatic exception, meanwhile – 'planet' – brings us to awareness of the cosmic whole which keeps this elemental, metaphoric (land/sea) opposition in balance. A conventional poet may state the equivalence as baldly as 'the oceanic moor', but it is the uniquely topographical compound of metaphor ('sign'), object ('post') and landscape ('moor') which gives the image (though we would better say 'encounter') its vitality.

It can be argued that each of these components – metaphor, object and landscape – correspond to the three definitions of topography described by Miller. The first is that 'metaphorical equivalent in words of a landscape' – the basic act of naming – while the second uses a non-linguistic construct already loaded with potential meaning (note how the poet was inspired by a pre-existing 'old signpost' to make the poem). The third, meanwhile, is the metonymic transfer of 'what is mapped': the territory itself. What is remarkable about the poem is that it performs a synthesis of these three definitions in terms of its component parts: language, material and environment. The 'nets' are metonymical of the sea, while the 'signpost' presents the means for their casting over the 'moor'. The reader's role thus becomes analogous to the fisherman (and perhaps the poet's to the boat-builder, or net-weaver), hauling in the subjective associations and poetic resonances this equivalence invites. Finlay provides the vessel, but the haul is our own.

The process by which 'signpost' achieves its effects calls to mind the Jorge Luis Borges story 'On Exactitude in Science',<sup>24</sup> in which is envisioned a cartography so precise that the map grows to cover exactly the territory it measures. The poem presents a similar superimposition, naming and thus mapping place *on top of* 'the configuration of [its] surface', by means of a 'delineation' that depends upon language and the materials it is cast in. As Stonypath/Little Sparta develops this delineation becomes more precise, as the poet not only writes the 'sign' and places the 'post' but cultivates the 'moor' itself. Nevertheless, the basic units (language, material and environment) remain the same, and so Finlay's poetics are topographical in every sense of the word, born of the impulse to '*nam[e]* the world with the right wee names'.

In topographical poetics the uncultivated environment is analogous to the line for conventional poetry (or silence, if performed) and the page, or the grid, for concrete. While the metaphorical superimpositions of 'MARE NOSTRUM' and 'signpost' have their precedent in the juxtapositional poetics of modernists such as Pound, topographical poetics constitutes a radical reinterpretation of poetic function that posits the site, rather than the utterance, as its basic unit, itself the sum of language, material and environment. As such, it is necessary to reformulate two of Jakobson's key dicta to accommodate the topographical model. Where poetic function as traditionally conceived focuses on 'the message for its own sake', topographical poetics focuses on the *place* for its own sake (and in Finlay's case, this place is intimately tied to the idea of home). Moreover, as Jakobson states that 'anything sequent is a simile', in topographical poetics we should say that anything *proximate* is a simile, as in the case of 'MARE NOSTRUM'.

The plaque asserts a metaphorical equivalence which is (as Finlay's letter to Sloan suggests) already implicit throughout the garden, sewn together with a tissue of nautical references from the Scottish fishing-boat to the aircraft carrier. The rustling of the leaves becomes the metaphorical vehicle for a tenor of waves – lapping, swelling, crashing – thus revealing the basic opposition in the imaginative framework of Stonypath/Little Sparta, present also in 'signpost': the elemental conflict between sea and land. Sea is not land, but as the plaque asserts and the garden demonstrates, by the power of metaphor it may become as such. While this does not resolve the

conflict – though the metaphor may ring 'true', sea nevertheless remains sea and land land – it holds both forces in balance for that moment of poetic apprehension. It thus calls to mind Finlay's famous definition of the concrete poem, again from the letter to Garnier of 1963: 'a model, of order, even if set in a space which is full of doubt'.<sup>25</sup> As a conventional map imposes an order on its territory, so Finlay's garden poems imaginatively cultivate their 'space [...] of doubt' in service of a poetic 'order'.

The site-specific nature of the poem and the crucial role, both aesthetic *and* semantic, that environmental factors play in its 'completion', are the defining formal traits of topographical poetics. This use of metaphor is designed to bring opposing forces and disparate areas of culture into a brief poetic harmony, in order to create a more nuanced and enlightened awareness of our immediate surroundings and the cosmic and historical forces to which we are susceptible. The 'MARE NOSTRUM' plaque is a synecdoche for Little Sparta as a whole: a composed – which is to say, *named* – space wherein this balance can be achieved. Through this act of naming, the garden becomes a *place*, whereby culture impresses its stamp on nature. In common nomenclature, the ash tree is only an ash tree. But by naming it 'MARE NOSTRUM' the tree enters into dialogue with its surroundings and those who perceive it. This balance is also a tension, with the conflict and the connection here between untamed nature and the composed place also that between literal and metaphorical meaning, the poet using the materials of nature to compose the poetic realities of the garden. This connects the two realities, presenting their conflict in a constant, steady focus whilst at the same time establishing a formal unity by means of metaphorical equivalence.

As the garden develops it gives Finlay a much greater degree of compositional control than the early 'signpost' permits. This allows him to engineer associations with much greater precision, and so achieve something like the equivalence of form and content (or, here, naming and environment) found in modernist and concrete poetry. The understated poem 'HORLOGE DE FLORE'<sup>26</sup> is one such example. The poem comprises two labelled plant beds containing dandelions (the first 'HEURES', the second 'MINUTES'). When the season is right, dandelion clocks can be picked and blown to discover the 'HEURES' and the 'MINUTES' in the manner of the old

childhood pastime. According to the topographical model, the plants themselves are as much a part of the poem as the text; certainly, the poem would make little sense without them, as they play a crucial syntactic and semantic role. Moreover, it is the act of plucking and blowing the dandelions that completes the poem, much as Gomringer's 'wind' only starts to blow with the movement of the eye. While the poem might be described, following Gomringer, as an advanced 'play-area', the full metaphorical implications of the reader's act only come into focus with reference to the rest of the garden, wherein the French Revolution has a strong presence.

The use of French text and visual similarities with other garden poems that associate, for example, the women of the French Revolution with various potted plants, encourage us to read the blowing of the dandelion as a metaphor for the guillotine, cutting short the 'HEURES' and the 'MINUTES' of its victims. Sensory responses and subjective associations are thereby augmented and complicated with metaphorical relationships constructed by the garden itself. As such, this small poem demonstrates the strengths of topographical poetics: firstly, its physically immersive mode encourages an engagement that *directly* invites activity likely to be rich in subjective association; secondly, its participation – by virtue of its site-specificity – in a much larger whole allows for the further development of a range of poetically engineered metaphorical resonances.

Having determined its mechanisms, it is now possible to consider some of the characteristics of topographical poetics. Foremost among these is the precedence of culture over nature in terms of the garden's formal hierarchy. Naming is always a cultural act, and Finlay's work emphatically acknowledges this tension between untamed nature and the process of cultivation that makes it habitable. 'Certain gardens are described as retreats when they are really attacks',<sup>27</sup> reads one of his most famous aphorisms. This describes Finlay's antagonistic attitude towards bureaucratic and metropolitan concerns (with Little Sparta a riposte to Edinburgh, 'Athens of the North'), but prior to this interpretation it asserts the struggle against nature which is the prerogative of any gardener. Following from this point is the lack of ostentation in the garden. Its means are usually miniaturist and inscription serves as the basic formal strategy. For all its classicism, we are more likely to find a tree reimaged

as a column than a real column, and even its 'Temple of Apollo' is ultimately just a renovated cow byre. This gives rise to another crucial characteristic of topographical poetics, captured in Finlay's aphorism '[w]here the viewer is solitary, imagination is the scale'.<sup>28</sup> That is, the aesthetic effects and metaphorical associations of the garden poems are most effectively brought out by the solitary encounter.

Take, for example, the work 'WAVE',<sup>29</sup> which is in some respects a successor to 'signpost'. It comprises five stone blocks set on the gently swelling grass of the English Parkland section of the garden, each inscribed with the word 'WAVE' in various European languages. The blocks are only a few inches high and from certain angles are barely visible; nevertheless, they are enough to bring to mind the swell of oceans both near and far, reinforced by the otherness of the foreign text. But this imaginative overlay is compromised if we see another visitor ambling amongst the stones. The human world imposes on the imaginary; our fellow visitor sets the scale, and we are brought back to land, obliged to acknowledge the 'WAVE[S]' as the inscribed stone blocks and contoured lawn they really are. This scalar oscillation – from 'imagination' to the literal stones and lawn – is the play between metaphorical and literal meaning in 'MARE NOSTRUM' by other means, engineered again by name, material and environment. And indeed it is in this oscillation that the value Finlay's formal project – his topographical poetics – bears upon his ontological project, which plays out in the relationship between the 'perfection' and 'home' of the Garnier letter, here termed the 'poetic' and the 'homely'.

#### 4. The Poetic and the Homely

The play of scales and meaning described above is captured in the dual identity of the garden itself, and Alec Finlay's insistence on recognition of this dual identity – as Little Sparta *and* Stonypath, as imaginative poem-state and family home – is vital to any serious reading of Finlay's work. As the younger Finlay observes in *the road north* blog:

IHF's work is a lifelong dialogue between oppositions. The two terms [Stonypathian and Little Spartan] can be seen to be wedded together, speaking to the home and the imaginal domain it became. The Stonypathian is a

recuperation of the domestic, so crucial to IHFs work, so that Little Sparta is not an act of Imperial overwriting, as The Roman 'Mare Nostrum' was for the Mediterranean.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, Finlay's commitment to art is everywhere tempered by his commitment to life – to home, to family, to the very fact of existing on a barren Scottish hillside. The 'lifelong dialogue between oppositions' that constitutes the poet's work can only be fully understood with reference to this primary, pragmatic opposition – Stonypath/Little Sparta – through which the imperatives set by family life and (at least initially) relative poverty produce the tension between homemaking and homesickness, domestic realities and imaginative yearning, life and art. This tension is brought into even sharper focus with the knowledge that Finlay was agoraphobic, barely leaving Stonypath/Little Sparta between his arrival in 1966 and the mid-1990s. The garden was no vanity project, but an ontological imperative on which the poet's very sanity arguably depended. As Alec Finlay notes, through his work the elder Finlay was able to 'redefine his agoraphobia as cultural homesickness, an antique yearning for the temples of the Greeks'.<sup>31</sup> This redefinition consists of a rejection of biography and psychology (since both find their locus in a poetry of the self), positing home – as both homemaking and homesickness – as an alternative locus to build from. The 'striv[ing]' of the Garnier letter is recast here as an 'antique yearning' but, whether drawn from the radical modernism of Malevich or a Schillerian longing for the golden age, the means (and, perhaps, the ever-unreachable end) remain the same. The play and tension between metaphorical and literal meaning characteristic of topographical poetics is built into the dual identity of the garden, at once 'yearning' for a Temple and 'recuperati[ng]' in a cow byre.

Morgan records that one of Finlay's first questions was 'how can one write TREE and mean TREE?'<sup>32</sup> The same question has preoccupied theologians, philosophers, artists and poets since historical records began, and possibly well before that. Perhaps the most formative in Western culture are the stories of Genesis, wherein 'whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof',<sup>33</sup> and the fall of Babel, in which language is made multiple and so arbitrary, shorn of any essential attachment to its referents. This question – and the impossibility, short



of being a god, of finding the answer one really desires – *is* the 'poetic': the dream of an 'absolute' sign to rival Malevich's dream of the 'perfected object'. As such, a more accurate term might be the *poetic impossible*. Finlay pursues Jakobson's 'poetic function' from a position of ontological sickness, a 'yearning' for the ancients, for an Arcadia, an Eden, for language in its prelapsarian state. The 'homely', meanwhile, is the ballast of life, the recognition of and reconciliation with the fact that paradise can never be (re)gained. It is, moreover, in this homely reconciliation – with 'how terribly far man stretches – from angel to animal' – that one can find what the poet elsewhere describes as 'a sign of peace and sanity':<sup>34</sup> the concrete, and later topographical, poem. Or as he puts it in 'Detached Sentences on Exile', '[o]ur true home may be found in *exile*'.<sup>35</sup>

In terms of topographical poetics, this 'dialogue between oppositions' is rendered not in 'dialogue' as such (Finlay states in one of his *Detached Sentences* that '[c]oncrete poetry is not a visual poetry but a silent poetry',<sup>36</sup> true also of the garden poems), but in what can be termed 'constant flux': a state of difference and change, held in *place*. It is an idea which is traceable back to the pre-Socratics, particularly Heraclitus, whose work Finlay became acquainted with through reading scholars such as John Burnet and Edward Hussey and which had a profound influence on his poetics. Indeed, 'constant flux'<sup>37</sup> is a phrase Burnet uses in his reading of Heraclitus in *Early Greek Philosophy*, in which he also explores the philosopher's elemental opposition of sea and land appropriated by Finlay at the garden.<sup>38</sup> The point is elaborated in the poet's 1984 text *Interpolations in Hegel*, which suggests that Heraclitus, far from being the philosopher of flux as popularly conceived, is rather the 'philosopher of form'.<sup>39</sup> Where Hegel states '[m]utability lies in the notion of essence, and change is only the manifestation of what implicitly is', Finlay glosses '[i]t is the flux that fills out the form'.<sup>40</sup> For the poet, the task is to find forms that let the flux 'fill out', to find what Hussey calls the 'unity of opposites'<sup>41</sup> that is the cornerstone of Heraclitian thought. It is this compound of name, material and environment which lets the 'constant flux' 'fill out', in the play of metaphor and scale.

This is finely demonstrated in 'WAVE', where the play between imaginative (swelling sea) and literal (rolling lawn) typifies the tension between the Little Spartan and

the Stonypathian, the poetic and the homely. It is important to note that our return to the lawn from our imagined ocean is as crucial to Finlay's work as the possibility of imagining that ocean in the first place. The garden, in its Little Spartan guise, strives towards the type of encounter where place is made palpable to the imagination, uninhibited by social and functional imperatives. The Stonypathian, meanwhile, is an acknowledgement of the limits of this model (emphatically so for the agoraphobic poet): that the distance between land and sea can *only* be traversed in the imagination. It is in this very formal technique that the garden derives its charm and wit, crucial features of topographical poetics which prevent the garden's naming processes becoming an 'Imperial overwriting'. There is a knowing playfulness built into the operation of the Little Spartan metamorphosis itself, as its necessary inversion – the reduction of an 'imaginative' scale back to a literal one, as in the waves once again becoming stones – has a comically jarring effect. The further we meditate on our poetic ocean, the more strange and threatening – *unheimlich* – it becomes. Our return to the homely bearing of the lawn, then, brings reassurance, giving rise to the humour of knowing ourselves safe all along. This becomes particularly significant with reference to the militaristic themes and imagery throughout the garden. The poet's series of aircraft carrier bird tables, for example, imagine the real birds which perch to eat the seed as fighter jets refuelling for their next attack. The miniaturist charm of these works (perhaps recalling Airfix kits) temper our responses to the complex, and potentially threatening, imaginative content therein, without – significantly – dispelling it entirely. But this play of scale and meaning would not be possible at all without the phenomenological encounter with the poems, which brings us to the final crucial component of topographical poetics: the weather.

## 5. The Weather

Every garden is a contradiction. At once both cultural and natural, it is an extension of home that provides no shelter. Nowhere is the tension between art and life more present. This tension produces the topographical poetics of Stonypath/Little Sparta, and is expressed in another of the poet's aphorisms: '[w]eather is the chief content of gardens, yet it is the one thing in them over which the gardener has no control'.<sup>42</sup> This is both the strength and limitation of topographical poetics. As the gar-

den's 'chief content', weather fatally compromises form and content's equivalence. It shows that even in the 'composed' garden the dominance of culture is not assured, that it must remain forever a battle. Such, however, is the thrust of Finlay's work. The garden is no idyll. Whether cast as a classical Arcadia, a modern Utopia or an Edenic correspondence of word and thing, the idyll is equivalent to the poetic impossible which remains, by necessity, out of reach. It is rather the 'striv[ing]' towards such an idyll and, in the very same process, becoming reconciled to the fact that it will never be reached, which constitutes Finlay's project. The limitation which weather places on topographical poetics, captured in Finlay's aphorism above, is the link between form and phenomenon which makes the encounter possible, making us aware at once of our distance from and proximity to both 'earth' and the 'non-thinking life'.

In *The Rule of Metaphor*, Paul Ricoeur observes that "the "place" of metaphor, its most intimate and ultimate abode, is neither the name, nor the sentence, nor even discourse, but the copula of the verb *to be*".<sup>43</sup> If this is the case, how can we locate metaphor in a poetics in which the copula is absent? The answer is already there in the juxtapositional method of modernist poetry and its implications are fully explored at Stonypath/Little Sparta: it is made more palpable by its very absence, as the *responsibility* for it is assumed by the reader, not the poet. Ricoeur goes on: 'The metaphorical "is" at once signifies both "is not" and "is like"'.<sup>44</sup> Hence of the garden we should say a) the garden is not the sea, and b) the garden is like the sea. Of the garden itself, however, nothing is *said*. The garden simply *is* and we are present within it. Meanwhile, the sea is made imaginatively present by virtue of its physical absence from the garden, as language and material catalyse the environment to bring it to mind. Given that the 'palpability' of the topographical poem comes to a large extent from its environmental context, it can be argued that the weather plays the role of the absent copula. As the movement of the reader's eye awakes Gomer's 'wind', so the wind itself awakens the sea in topographical poetics, acting as a kind of phenomenological guarantor for the imaginative activity of the poem as manifest in the mind and senses of the reader. It is by this method that the garden – or rather, the imagination of a visitor to the garden – is able to voyage so far whilst remaining palpably within its limits.

One last reading, of the relatively late garden poem 'ECLOGUE',<sup>45</sup> shows how this plays out in the context of the wider garden. 'ECLOGUE' sits in the English Parkland, built in collaboration with letter carver Caroline Webb. It constitutes a perfectly square dry-stone wall sheepfold with a wooden gate bearing a plaque reading 'ECLOGUE'. Set into each of the three inner walls are three black slate plaques, each with an inscription in elegant Roman upper case. The one on the left reads 'FOLDING'; in the centre, 'THE LAST'; on the right, 'SHEEP'. Visitors are free to enter the sheepfold if they wish, the gate held shut with nothing more than a length of frayed rope. This optional self-enclosure makes a subtle contrast with the English Parkland section more generally, which is one of the most open sections of the garden, and an additional, geometric contrast with the more 'natural', arboreal enclosures elsewhere.

The poem sets up a subtle contrast between the modern and the classical. Its name, of course, is classical (recalling Virgil); so too its material, especially the dry-stone wall. But despite this, its form is modern: topographical. A poem resembling a sheepfold is not a sheepfold but expresses an 'antique yearning' for a sheepfold. There is also – and probably not coincidentally, given the profound influence of the painter on the poet – a striking formal similarity to Malevich's first 'perfected object', his seminal painting *Black Square* (1915). Finally, as it invites physical activity from the 'reader' for its completion, so it recalls Gomringer's 'wind', and indeed the poem may be considered a realisation of Gomringer's 'play-area' by other means. As a poetic construction it is a 'field or force' for which the poet 'suggests [...] possibilities', according to which 'the reader, the new reader, grasps the idea of play and joins in'.<sup>46</sup> Most remarkable among these 'possibilities' is that of opening the gate, and stepping inside the poem.

Before we do so, we will have approached the poem from either the Lochan Eck section of the garden – the most wild – or the English Parkland – among the most cultivated. The poem thus marks out a self-contained liminal space at the border of nature (the Lochan Eck section) and culture (the Parkland), though it is only readable from the latter (cultural) vantage point. The use of dry-stone walls lends the piece an additional local flavour, with the technique characteristic of Scottish farming for

centuries, juxtaposed with the smooth slate and finely carved Roman letters. Of the three fragments, 'FOLDING|THE LAST|SHEEP', the last immediately calls to mind the livestock grazing on the fields beyond the perimeter. The first describes the activity of the shepherd, but taken in isolation may also suggest the folding of a page, particularly if we are familiar with the mechanisms of Finlay's early concrete poetry. Set into the walls opposite each other, this reading presents two contrasting poles of ancient and modern civilisation – the shepherd and the librarian. The central inscription acts as syntactical anchor. The 'SHEEP' are not those on the horizon, but the solitary 'SHEEP' standing before the pen – that is, the reader – so that 'THE LAST' becomes an elegiac invitation to open the gate (the mechanism of which echoes the 'FOLDING' of a page) and enter, with the reader becoming 'THE LAST|SHEEP' to Finlay's (and perhaps Virgil's?) shepherd. Before we enter, however, we may notice another reading. Standing directly in front of the gate, 'THE LAST' slate appears directly above 'ECLOGUE': not only 'THE LAST|SHEEP', but 'THE LAST|ECLOGUE' too – hyperbolically, the last nature poem.

Here, two poles at opposing ends of Western history meet: classical pastoral and radical modernism, 'yearning' and 'striv[ing]'. In a sense, these poles are equivalent to the poetic impossible, but rendered in terms of content rather than form. That said, as form and content strive towards equivalence in modernist, concrete and topographical poetics, so these poles at their absolute points are one and the same: the prelapsarian language of Eden, Virgil's classical Arcadia and the modern Utopia expressed in Malevich's 'perfected objects' are all impossible dreams of a static order in which language *must* be absolute, because to admit ambiguity and polysemy is to admit the possibility of misunderstanding, which would fatally compromise such a state. Framed as such, we are able to understand Finlay's enduring fascination with both classicism and the most uncompromising aspects of modernity. Both Apollo and Robespierre represent absolute myths which our 'mak[ing] the world into [a] *home*' must at once temper, and be measured by. Thus the 'constant flux' of topographical poetics is at once temperance and measurement.

What happens, finally, when we step inside 'ECLOGUE'? Nothing: we're just *there*. This could be Malevich's 'non-thinking' life, except for two things: first, we are *inside* the 'perfected object', and we are thinking; second, and contrary to the neutral *space* of the gallery's white cube, we are here, emphatically, in a *place* – on a Scottish hillside, in a poet's extraordinary garden – and nor could we forget it: there is rain, wind and sunshine, or some combination thereof, to remind us. Hence the wind rustling through the trees of 'MARE NOSTRUM' is the phenomenological guarantor not just of the metaphorical sea but also the literal earth and our place on and within it; it intimates, moreover, an 'absolute, non-thinking life', whether or not we 'know what is meant by God'. Weather is the copula that connects poetic and literal realities and in so doing hints at the limits of each. To borrow another phrase from the Garnier letter, it activates the 'level of "being"<sup>47</sup> engineered by the compound of name, material and environment that is topographical poetics.

## 6. Conclusion

There is a great deal more to be said about 'ECLOGUE', and the workings of Finlay's topographical poetics in general. Notably, the source of the text 'FOLDING|THE LAST|SHEEP' is not from a pagan but a Christian tradition, coming from the title of an engraving by 19<sup>th</sup> century artist Samuel Palmer, suggesting some of the complex and allusive ways in which Finlay uses the materials of tradition to strive towards a bridging of the gap between the classical and modern in a way analogous to his 'striv[ing]' towards the poetic Little Sparta from the homely bearing of Stonypath. There is a great deal more to be said too about the 'level of "being"' engendered by Finlay's work at the garden and elsewhere, not least how the oscillation between longing and reconciliation is rendered in the poems' content – a question especially pertinent to the poet's deeply and often unsettlingly ambivalent use of militaristic themes and imagery. This is beyond the scope of the present article, but perhaps there is a clue in the Garnier letter, not knowing 'what is meant by "God".' Galvanised by his battles with bureaucratic and cultural authorities, by the 1980s Finlay was railing against what he describes as 'secularisation of all forms of life'.<sup>48</sup> In a dispute with Strathclyde Regional Council over his Temple of Apollo he goes so far

as to describe the Temple as 'a *non-secular space*',<sup>49</sup> and so due the same tax relief accorded to a religious building. Of a piece with its Stonypathian playfulness, this term helps to frame the oscillations of topographical poetics, with the '*non-secular space*' an aperture for both Malevichian 'striv[ing]' and 'antique yearning'. Malevich – an abstract painter – strove to be 'embodied' in the 'non-thinking life', hence his pioneering of geometrical abstraction. Finlay – a topographical poet – desires the same thing, but in lieu of Malevich's faith has only a 'space of doubt', later rendered as, in Alec Finlay's words, 'cultural homesickness'. Hence the elder Finlay's attraction, despite his early ambitions as a painter, to the inherently polysemous medium of language. In this context, his antagonism towards 'secularisation' is not towards his contemporaries' perceived lack of faith in absolutes, but rather their lack of longing for faith in absolutes. One great challenge of Finlay's work is how the intensity of his longing – for 'model[s] of order' – extends to both Rousseau's state of nature and Robespierre's guillotine.

The obvious, possibly kneejerk question to ask is whether we *should* long for such things (and there is of course a very strong argument that we shouldn't, given the terrors of History both ancient and modern). But topographical poetics, voiceless, site-specific and prone to the vicissitudes of weather and decay, accepts longing as a given, and so according to Finlay a better question would be to ask if longing for a Rousseau is also to long, inevitably, for a Robespierre. For in the last analysis, this longing is never resolved by the garden (as if it could be), but is realised and preserved in the 'constant flux' of the poems therein. Such is the reconciliation of the homely, whereby the miniaturism, scalar oscillations and meteorological palpability of Stonypath/Little Sparta opens a '*non-secular space*' – a space of longing and recuperation – for these questions to be contemplated in the garden's relative safety. Even, that is, if we do not know 'what is meant by "God"', and even as we are aware, and as the poet elsewhere reminds us, that '[i]dyls end in thunderstorms'.<sup>50</sup> After all, we are under no obligation to open the gate and enter the sheepfold of 'ECLOGUE'. If we do consent to open the gate, however, it arguably realises a 'level of "being"' unlikely to be found in any of the libraries or art galleries of our contemporary metropolises.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> 'Little Sparta goes a long way in poll on Scotland's greatest art', *Scotland on Sunday*, 4 December 2004, retrieved from <<http://www.scotsman.com/news/little-sparta-goes-a-long-way-in-poll-on-scotland-s-greatest-art-1-1400569>> 9 April 2014.
- <sup>2</sup> As noted by Alec Finlay in 'Introduction', *Ian Hamilton Finlay: Selections*, ed. by Alec Finlay, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012) [hereafter referred to as *Selections*], p. 61.
- <sup>3</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, Letter to Pierre Garnier 17 September 1963 [hereafter referred to as Garnier letter], in *A Model of Order: Selected Letters On Poetry and Making*, ed. by Thomas A. Clark (Glasgow: Wax366, 2009) [hereafter referred to as MOO], p. 21.
- <sup>4</sup> 'Introduction', *Selections*, p. 43.
- <sup>5</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, 'MARE NOSTRUM' (date unrecorded, c.1970s), tree plaque, with Nicholas Sloan. Little Sparta Inventory, 4<sup>th</sup> Version (July 2012), unpublished.
- <sup>6</sup> Alec Finlay, *the road north – 57: Stonypath*, 21 January 2011, retrieved from <<http://the-road-north.blogspot.co.uk/2011/01/47-stonypath.html>> 30 April 2018.
- <sup>7</sup> Roman Jakobson, 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics', *Style in Language*, ed. by Thomas Albert Sebeok, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1960), p. 356.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Jakobson, p. 358.
- <sup>10</sup> Jakobson, p. 359.
- <sup>11</sup> Eugen Gomringer, 'wind' (1954), *Book of Hours and Constellations*, ed. and trans. by Jerome Rothenberg, (New York: Something Else Press, 1968), unpaginated.
- <sup>12</sup> Eugen Gomringer, 'From Line to Constellation' (1954), trans. by Mike Weaver, *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, ed. by Mary Ellen Solt, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1967), retrieved from *UbuWeb* <<http://www.ubu.com/papers/gomringer01.html>> 30 April 2018.
- <sup>13</sup> Mike Weaver, 'Concrete Poetry', *Lugano Review*, Summer 1966, p. 100.
- <sup>14</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, 'Detached Sentences on Concrete Poetry' (1964–1972), *Selections*, p. 135.
- <sup>15</sup> Gomringer, 'Book of Hours' (1965), *The Book of Hours and Constellations*, unpaginated.
- <sup>16</sup> Haroldo de Campos, *Novas: Selected Writings*, ed. by Antonio Sergio Bossa and Odile Cisneros, (Evanston: North Western University Press, 2007), p. 122.
- <sup>17</sup> In a letter to Gael Turnbull, 16 October [c. 1967] (National Library of Scotland Acc.12553.), Finlay expresses his appreciation of Turnbull's recent concrete poem 'Longings': 'Every time Sue tidies up, I retrieve it, and put it back on the far end of the mantelpiece, lefthandside, where I can get it when I want it, which is quite often.' Such is the habitat Finlay desires for his own concrete poems, poem-cards and poem-prints.
- <sup>18</sup> Weaver, p. 103.
- <sup>19</sup> J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 3.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> *Topographies*, pp. 3–4.
- <sup>22</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, 'signpost' (1969), painted wood, with Peter Grant.
- <sup>23</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, letter to Edwin Morgan, 23 May 1968, Glasgow University Library MS Morgan Acc. 4848 Box 35.
- <sup>24</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, 'On Exactitude in Science', *Collected Fictions*, trans. by Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 325.
- <sup>25</sup> Garnier letter, in *MOO*, p. 22.
- <sup>26</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, 'HORLOGE DE FLORE' (c. late 1980s or early 1990s), collaborator unknown, Little Sparta Inventory.



- <sup>27</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, 'Detached Sentences on Gardening' (1980–2005), *Selections*, p. 179.
- <sup>28</sup> 'Detached Sentences on Gardening', *Selections*, p. 181.
- <sup>29</sup> 'Five blocks' (1998), five blocks of Purbeck stone, with Nicholas Sloan, Little Sparta Inventory.
- <sup>30</sup> Alec Finlay, *the road north – 57: Stonypath*.
- <sup>31</sup> Alec Finlay, *Selections*, p. 17.
- <sup>32</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, quoted in Edwin Morgan, 'Early Finlay', *Cencrastus*, No.22, 1986, in *Wood Notes Wild: Essays on the Poetry and Art of Ian Hamilton Finlay*, ed. by Alec Finlay, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1995) [hereafter referred to as *WNW*], p. 22.
- <sup>33</sup> Genesis 2.19, King James Bible.
- <sup>34</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, quoted in Stephen Scobie, 'Concrete Poetry & Ian Hamilton Finlay', *Ubysssey: Special Poetry Issue*, Vol XLIX No. 45, 1968, p. 2.
- <sup>35</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, 'Detached Sentences on Exile', *New Arcadian Journal*, No.10 (1983), *Selections*, p. 188. Original italics.
- <sup>36</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Table Talk of Ian Hamilton Finlay*, (Mission, B.C.: Barbarian Press, 1985), *Selections*, p. 135.
- <sup>37</sup> John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908), p. 167.
- <sup>38</sup> Burnet, p. 164, 184.
- <sup>39</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Interpolations in Hegel* (1984), in *Cencrastus: Ian Hamilton Finlay Retrospective*, 22 (Winter 1986), p. 29.
- <sup>40</sup> *Cencrastus*, p. 27.
- <sup>41</sup> Edward Hussey, *The Presocratics*, (New York: Charles Scribner, 1972), p. 44.
- <sup>42</sup> 'Detached Sentences on Gardening', *Selections*, p. 185.
- <sup>43</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. by Robert Czerny, (London: Routledge, 1975; 1978; repr. 2003), p. 6.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, 'ECLOGUE' (1998), sheep fold with Caroline Webb, Little Sparta Inventory.
- <sup>46</sup> Eugen Gomringer, 'From Line to Constellation' (1954), trans. by Mike Weaver, *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, ed. by Mary Ellen Solt, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1967), retrieved from *UbuWeb* <<http://www.ubu.com/papers/gomringer01.html>> 30 April 2018.
- <sup>47</sup> Garnier letter, in *MOO*, p. 21.
- <sup>48</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Ian Hamilton Finlay* (Media Associates in conjunction with Eaton House Publishers, 1980), DVD.
- <sup>49</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, letter to Department of Assessor, Lanark Sub Region, undated (c. 1980), National Library of Scotland Acc 10374/03. Original italics.
- <sup>50</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, 'Detached Sentences on Weather in the Manner of William Shenstone', (Dunsyre: Wild Hawthorn Press, 1986), *Selections*, p. 207.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, whose funding for my PhD thesis, *From Stonypath to Little Sparta: Navigating the Work of Ian Hamilton Finlay*, awarded by the University of Glasgow on 22 May 2015, made possible the present research. I would also like to thank my PhD supervisor Prof Alan Riach, in the School of Critical Studies at the University of Glasgow, for his invaluable support throughout this period.

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

**How to cite this article:** Rodger, C. 2020. Ian Hamilton Finlay's Topographical Poetics at Stonypath/Little Sparta. *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 11(1): 29, pp. 1–25. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/bip.2927>

**Published:** 08 July 2020

**Copyright:** © 2020 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.



*Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Open Library of Humanities.

**OPEN ACCESS** The Open Access logo, featuring the words 'OPEN ACCESS' followed by a circular icon containing a padlock with a diagonal slash through it.