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Tom Bristow

**‘Contracted to an eye-quiet world’:
Sonic Census or Poetics of Place
in Alice Oswald**

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TOM BRISTOW

'Contracted to an eye-quiet world': Sonic Census or Poetics of Place in Alice Oswald

When a man makes a poem, makes it mind you, he takes words as he finds them interrelated about him and composes them... It isn't what he says that counts as a work of art, it's what he makes, with such intensity of perception that it lives with an intrinsic movement of its own to verify its authenticity.

William Carlos Williams (from 'Author's Introduction' to *The Wedge*)

put your ear to the river you hear trees
put your ear to the trees you hear the widening
numerical workings of the river

Alice Oswald (from 'River', *Poems for Heale Garden*)

History can be built through geography. A key question raised by the transatlantic and ecocritical academies is whether it is as important to localize writing as it is to historicize it. Two poets, William Carlos Williams, located in New Jersey, and Alice Oswald, a poet of England's south-west peninsula, meet this enquiry through their linguistic and anthropological surveys of the Passaic river and the river Dart, respectively. Contesting that history should take precedence over geography, these poems interrogate position, place and perspective of voice drawing from the especial concern of the poets to involve the human within place. In the works *Paterson* (1946–1958) and *Dart* (2002) division and duality are challenged by ideas of participation and co-evolution that in turn deny the need for transcendence and promote the necessity of practical involvement. Furthermore, in these surveys a poetics of immersion develops an aesthetic form that triggers bi-directional agency, which enables subject and object to become extensions of each other. Williams and Oswald