Rewriting the Home(land):
Greta’s Journey through Space and Time in
After Easter

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“All writing is an act of repossession” — This is how Anne Devlin once described her position as an exiled writer (Chambers et al. 111). The fact that she is living in England, after being born and brought up in Belfast, Northern Ireland, makes her sensitive to questions of experience and memory in personal and national histories of Ireland. The Troubles–ridden landscape of Northern Ireland becomes a site in which Anne Devlin’s heroines negotiate their quests for voice and visibility. In her first play, Ourselves Alone (1985), Anne Devlin foregrounds ‘the exclusion of women from the public realm and their enclosure within the domestic realm’ (Rea 206). Three young women, Frieda, Josie and Donna, struggle against the isolation and the violence that permeate their daily lives and their violated home becomes a metaphor for their nation. It is through Josie and her relationship with an English double agent, and her resulting pregnancy, that the female body becomes a metaphor for female subjectivity and exposes the very real vulnerability that women suffer at the hands of colonial and patriarchal control.

Her second play, After Easter (1994), again focuses on the questions of gender, religion and nation as Anne Devlin stages a personal narrative of self–realisation through the character of Greta, who is journeying ‘home’ to Belfast after fifteen years away. As Una Chaudhuri has pointed out,
“the incoherence of cultural difference in the late twentieth century rewrites the discourse of home, homeland, family and history” and “an emblem of this difference is the shift of focus in drama from actions of leaving home to homecomings” (91–2). Fintan O’Toole, as the critic Aidan Arrowsmith notes, also concludes that issues of the diasporic identity and journeys to and from home are the ‘very heartbeat of Irish culture’ (Arrowsmith 129). In *After Easter*, Greta’s literal and spiritual journey through space and time, which enables her to become reconciled with and rewrite her ‘home’, is explored. Greta needs to remember and to forget the jumble of emotions from the past in order to reclaim her diasporic identity in a new territory. As Scott Brewster notes, her identity is not a social but a geographical one created from the hybridity that come with relocation (126). In this essay, Greta’s diasporic identity and the way she reconciles with Irish questions of home and homeland will be examined.

In *After Easter*, Greta’s Belfast home exists as an actual space where her family are still integral to their locality, but also as a magical and powerful space that dominates Greta’s past, present and future. There, Greta confronts multi-layered meanings of home from which she is unable to separate herself. In her interview, Anne Devlin said, “before I can forget I have to remember and before we can put down this particular burden that is our history, we have to recall certain things that have not been visible during a certain period”(Chambers et al. 117). To forget and, at the same time, to rewrite her dislocated identity, Greta needs to remember and revisit her history back home. Greta’s journey is painful, but it is accompanied by supernatural visions and finally by the ability to rewrite her relocated home(land).

Greta’s opening monologue, which begins with the words, “I have often found when you can’t do anything else you can always sit on the road”(1), succinctly acknowledges her ‘sense of simultaneous marginalization/discrimination and insignificance/non-signification as an invisible Irish woman in England’ (Arrowsmith 138). As Wanda Balzano has also pointed out, Irish women and their attempt to (re)discover their feminine identity have been doubly overshadowed not only by the dictates of patriarchy, but also by the ‘otherness’ of Ireland: that is, they are