

Abstract

The depiction of land as feminine is the fundamental concept of the trope of the feminized land. The trope has its origin in the female image of sovereignty which entered the Irish literary tradition as early as the medieval period and is tightly connected with the concept of sacral kingship. Since then, the female figure has been altered and adjusted, and appears in many forms – she is the old hag that transforms into a beautiful woman in the Uí Néill propaganda tract “Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin” (“The Adventure of the Sons of Eochaid Mugmedón”), the vision in Aodhagán Ó Rathaille’s “Gile na Gile” (“The Glamoured”), and the sorrowful mother lamenting being abandoned by her children in Patrick Pearse’s “Mise Éire” (“Ireland”). This thesis focuses on how the trope of the feminized land has manifested itself in more recent Irish poetry.

Firstly, the historical development of the trope is delineated while paying attention to different modifications of the trope and how it mirrors changes in the political context. The second part of the thesis focuses on Seamus Heaney’s poetry collection *North* (1975), which has received wide critical attention mainly for its engagement with the Troubles. An analysis of the poems in which the feminized trope can be spotted is offered, which also illuminates the relationship between Heaney’s poetry and the politics and history of Ireland. The aim of this thesis is to offer a new perspective on Heaney’s poems by examining the parallels between the trope’s form in older texts and *North*, and importantly, by observing Heaney’s innovations and modifications of the trope. In three parts, Heaney’s complex metaphors are analyzed: “Antaeus”, “Hercules and Antaeus” and “Bone Dreams” are explored in the first subchapter, followed by a series of bog poems – “Come to the Bower”, “Bog Queen”, “Punishment”, and “Kinship”, which offer us the trope in its most archetypal form. The last subchapter focuses on the group of poems that feature mainly the traditional depiction of Ireland

as a ruined maid, fallen victim to rapacious England – “Ocean’s Love to Ireland”, “Aisling”, “Act of Union” and “The Betrothal of Cavehill”.

In the third part, the thesis touches upon the feminist critique of Heaney’s poems, as the usage of the trope of the feminized land became a focus of many critics’ work, including Eavan Boland, Patricia Coughlan, or Edna Longley. The discussion of the feminist critique is accompanied by an overview of the various ways in which the trope is depicted in the works of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Bidy Jenkinson, and Eavan Boland.