



Contemporary Irish Poetry and the Pastoral Tradition

By Donna L. Potts

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In *Contemporary Irish Poetry and the Pastoral Tradition*, Donna L. Potts closely examines the pastoral genre in the work of six Irish poets writing today. Through the exploration of the poets and their works, she reveals the wide range of purposes that pastoral has served in both Northern Ireland and the Republic: a postcolonial critique of British imperialism; a response to modernity, industrialization, and globalization; a way of uncovering political and social repercussions of gendered representations of Ireland; and, more recently, a means for conveying environmentalism's more complex understanding of the value of nature.

Potts traces the pastoral back to its origins in the work of Theocritus of Syracuse in the third century and plots its evolution due to cultural changes. While all pastoral poems share certain generic traits, Potts makes clear that pastorals are shaped by social and historical contexts, and Irish pastorals in particular were influenced by Ireland's unique relationship with the land, language, and industrialization due to England's colonization.

For her discussion, Potts has chosen six poets who have written significant collections of pastoral poetry and whose work is in dialogue with both the pastoral tradition and other contemporary pastoral poets. Three poets are men—John Montague, Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley—while three are women—Eavan Boland, Medbh McGuckian, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill. Five are English-language authors, while the sixth—Ní Dhomhnaill—writes in Irish. Additionally, some of the poets hail from the Republic, while others originate from Northern Ireland. Potts contends that while both Irish Republic and Northern Irish poets respond to a shared history of British colonization in their pastorals, the 1921 partition of the country caused the pastoral tradition to evolve differently on either side of the border, primarily because of the North's more rapid industrialization; its more heavily Protestant population, whose response to environmentalism was somewhat different than that of the Republic's predominantly Catholic population; as well the greater impact of the world wars

and the Irish Troubles.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Professor Potts’s study, with its emphasis on place and place studies, the role played by nature in human and moral development, and its explorations of ecopoetry and ecofeminism, provides us with a new methodology for reading the works of contemporary writers that places their work at the centers of wider political, cultural, moral and ecological debates.”—Eamonn Wall, author of *Writing the Irish West: Ecologies and Traditions*

About the Author

Donna L. Potts is Professor of English at Kansas State University and the author of many articles on Irish poetry, as well as *Howard Nemerov and Objective Idealism: The Influence of Owen Barfield* (University of Missouri Press). She lives in Manhattan, Kansas.

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