

discussed in the volume. Moreover, it engages the scholar of Late Antiquity to consider new contexts in the reception of Late Antiquity.

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## CLASSICS AND IRISH POETRY

IMPENS (F.) *Classical Presences in Irish Poetry after 1960. The Answering Voice*. Pp. x + 219. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Cased, £80. ISBN: 978-3-319-68230-3.

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This monograph offers a fresh and timely look at the classical tradition – and the function of the Classics – in the work of the Irish poets Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Derek Mahon and Eavan Boland. It aims to substantiate the claim that the relationship these poets had with the Classics was unique – that due to the democratisation of education in the post-war world and the ensuing decline in programmes dedicated to classical study, the post-1960 generation of poets was the first and last to marry a variety of socio-economic backgrounds with direct knowledge of classical texts and narratives. Combined with the religious and post-colonial forces that inevitably informed the poets' engagement with their source texts, their classical rewritings upset traditional binaries and reflected the historical and social changes that characterised Ireland and Northern Ireland in the late twentieth century.

Separate chapters consider Heaney, Longley, and Mahon and Boland. The first, however, offers a useful overview of the Classics in modern Irish poetry, focusing in the first instance on the work of W.B. Yeats, P. Kavanagh and L. MacNeice. I. begins by discussing Yeats' investment in Greek literature as a democratic medium that represents the people it addresses, and therefore as a model for an Irish national literature grown from but not outgrowing folkloric tradition. Kavanagh's disavowal of Yeats' vision of an ideal Ireland rooted in the romanticisation of the rural world swiftly follows, and I. details his use of Greek literature to offer a pastoral poetic that reflected the reality of living in the County Monaghan countryside in which he was raised. As for MacNeice, I. argues that his appropriation of classical material explores the tensions between ancient and modern literature and cultures, emphasising the need to maintain the historical integrity of the source text while simultaneously reflecting contemporary issues. Heaney, Mahon, Longley and Boland are located as poets who would both draw on their predecessors and emulate their drive to use the Classics to support their own poetic projects. I. argues that, in the absence of a common and inclusive Irish literary tradition, the Classics offered Heaney et al. a cultural heritage that transcended – and enabled them to speak across – borders, gender divisions and religious dichotomies.

Chapter 3 deals with Heaney, whose appropriation of classical texts, I. contends, allowed him to go beyond the topicality of his poems about the North and his own experiences. I. points out that Kavanagh's influence is present in the mid-1960s poems, which make use of mythology to support a vision of poetry rooted in the local: i.e. 'Antaeus', which takes the myth of the titan who draws his strength from the land and aligns it with the poet's voice, is itself grounded in Heaney's experience of growing up in

County Derry. I. highlights the inter and transnational perspective of collections such as *The Midnight Verdict* and *Electric Light*, demonstrating Heaney's use of the Classics (and other intertexts) to cast Irish poetry as a branch of European literature that demands a broad (i.e. less localised) critical frame, and situating it alongside other national literatures born from the common cradle of the Western classical tradition. I. attributes Heaney's fascination with *Aeneid* 6 to its ability to address the poet's grief at the death of his father outside of a Christian religious framework – a powerful tool in the Northern Irish context of the 1990s, which simultaneously allows the poet to redefine the parameters of Ireland's identity as a European (opposed to sectarian) space.

In Chapter 4 I. focuses on Longley's interest in rewriting Latin love elegies, poems that capture the tension created by a poetic imagination rooted in formal classical training (Longley studied Classics as an undergraduate), but deeply invested in the modern. In the poems 'Circe' and 'Nausicaa', for example, both allusions to the *Odyssey*, Homer becomes a distant subtext overwhelmed by James Joyce's *Ulysses*. I. argues that Longley's deployment of Latin love elegy as a poetic form can be read as a pacifist response to the increasing sectarian violence of the 1970s. Yet, like Heaney, Longley largely refuses to deal explicitly with the Northern Irish situation in his work – I. describes his only publicly commissioned response to the Troubles, a translation of Tibullus 1.10 produced in support of the organisation Peace People, as a politically neutral 'anti-war poem' that plays on the classical trope of a Golden Age destroyed by the exigencies of warfare. I. sees the *Iliad*, however, as providing Longley with a sustainable narrative pattern to address sectarian violence. In the poems that populate *The Ghost Orchid* Longley dispenses with battle scenes, choosing to focus instead on those instances that present characters not as warriors but as individuals – fathers, husbands and sons. I. argues that in doing so Longley demonstrates the incompatibility of violence and humanity, and emphasises the universality of suffering that characterises both sides of a conflict.

The fifth chapter combines discussion of Mahon and Boland, and an analysis of their classical poems. With a focus on his *Bacchae*, I. recognises in Mahon's classical pieces an eschewal of Irish subtexts and the deployment of language that centres his writing in a global Anglophone world. This, I. believes, reflects the tensions at the heart of Mahon's poems and plays in question, which are both grounded in an awareness of current trends in Irish poetry and a refusal to write material defined by specifically Irish contexts. This, like his profound engagement with the work of Ovid (the *exemplum* of poetic exile) mirrors Mahon's own sense of marginality as a self-imposed exile from his native Belfast. So, too, his Homeric poems, which I. proposes play with the temptation of forgetting about one's own land – Mahon's Odysseus, in 'Calypso', chooses to remain on his lover's island instead of returning to Ithaca. I. aligns Boland with Mahon as a poet rewriting the Classics from the margins of contemporary Irish writing, one who – feeling ostracised by the literary establishment due to her gender – tries to expand the limits of Irish poetry to accommodate female voices. I. shows how Boland's classical work achieves this by rewriting canonical works such as the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses* to highlight women's perspectives and roles in the narratives. In a particularly deft analysis I. argues that in the poem 'Daphne with her thighs in bark' Boland challenges Ovid's text by giving a voice to the nymph and reclaiming her sexuality. By casting Daphne as a frustrated housewife dreaming of what could have been, an *exemplum* against suppressing one's sensuality, the poet evokes the social pressures that trap women in the strict binaries of sexual subject or domestic creature; and yet this rewriting is tempered, as I. astutely observes, by Boland's refusal to acknowledge the sexual violence at the heart of the Daphne myth, rendering her version problematic as a feminist text.

The concluding chapter, ‘A Classical “Revival”?’’, reiterates the highly politicised context against which Heaney’s, Longley’s, Mahon’s and Boland’s poems must be read, and highlights synergies and discrepancies between the poets’ relationships with and use of the Classics in their work. I. closes by providing a survey of contemporary Irish poets currently producing work that engages with the Classics, including Peter Fallon, Theo Dorgan and Peter McDonald. This volume complements and builds meaningfully on its predecessors, W.B. Stanford’s *Ireland and the Classical Tradition* (1976) and B. Arkins’s *Hellenising Ireland* (2005). A small portion of the material covered, particularly in the second and third chapters, is necessarily well-trodden ground (an inevitability when dealing with writers like Yeats and Heaney), but the book’s detailed critical exegesis and firm grasp of historical, literary and classical contexts will be of great value to scholars of classical reception and contemporary Irish poetry alike, and I.’s perceptive, often original insights into several of the poems and plays make a meaningful contribution to the field.

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## THE SEA AND ITS PERCEPTION

ROVIRA GUARDIOLA (R.) (ed.) *The Ancient Mediterranean Sea in Modern Visual and Performing Arts. Sailing in Troubled Waters*. Pp. xvi+325, ills. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. Cased, £90, US\$122. ISBN: 978-1-4742-9859-9.  
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With its compelling title and evocative cover image, this volume promises a fresh look at a subject of enduring, and deserving, scholarly fascination. The sea already furnished a language of critical analysis to Hesiod when he lamented his single sailing from Aulis (*WD* 650–1). The archaic poet’s famous repudiation of seafaring likely drew on a robust tradition long accustomed to casting poetry and performance in the language of the sea, and the confluence of sea and song continued to be developed in subsequent centuries, resulting in an almost unimaginably variegated and entrancing complex of artistic self-reflection. The volume under review here, unfortunately, conveys little sense either of the richness of our ancient source material or of the potency of the ancient Mediterranean as a vector for modern reception. Far from presenting a vibrant new perspective on this most versatile of topics, the fourteen chapters collected by Rovira Guardiola deliver a hotchpotch of arguments often only loosely connected to the volume’s purported theme. The individual chapters raise questions of their own, some worthwhile, others less so, but there is almost no consideration, overt or otherwise, of the significance of the volume’s organising theme. I was left with little sense of why these specific pieces should be collected in a single publication or of the various authors’ particular interest in the overarching theme of the volume, except in so far as it relates tangentially to research already undertaken.

Although the individual contributions present their own problems, it is the deficiencies of the volume as a whole that I found most striking. Foremost amongst the shortcomings in this regard is the limitation of the volume’s range with respect to both ancient and modern materials. One hardly expects exhaustive coverage in an edited collection, but there is some