

CONTEMPORARY IRISH POETRY IN THE CONTEXT OF ECOCRITICISM

SUMMARY FOR GENERAL PUBLIC

The project sets out to explore contemporary Irish poetry's response to and engagement with the issues that the recent developments in ecocriticism have brought into the spotlight. The poets whose work is primarily to be investigated – Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Paula Meehan, Paul Muldoon, Seán Lysaght and Maurice Riordan – evoke nature as a system whose complexity demands an altered perception of language and a more nuanced approach to how the human and the non-human interact. The analysis of the poets' work is thus on the one hand informed by the insights from biosemiotics, specifically by Donald Favareau's claim that a linguistic sign be regarded as a historically-motivated, relational construct whose meaning develops in a continuous process, so that all organisms, in his view, are both capable of reading signs and able to interact semiotically with one another, a dual perspective that undergirds the present exploration of Heaney, Meehan and Lysaght. On the other hand, the project is rooted in the critique of Western modernity proffered by Val Plumwood, who characterises it as "hegemonic centrism," stressing that "our [collective] failure to situate dominant forms of human society ecologically [has been] matched by our failure to situate non-human ethically." In view of this claim, the relations between the human and the non-human (or the dehumanized human) are deeply problematised, for a non-hegemonic interrelations assume that no clear borders between people and nature can be delimited. It is against this critique that non-normative relations between the human and the non-human in the poetry of Mahon, Muldoon and Riordan are explored.