

KEY IDEAS ON THE LASTING EFFECTS OF COLONIZATION (IRISH POETRY)

Mary O'Donnell ("Growing into Irish through Galicia"), Oonagh Warke ("Learning Irish"), Keith Payne ("A Suburban Sunday").

Main aspects of form and content in the selected poems (theme, structure, imagery, lineation, sound patterns).

N.B. I will provide some examples here, but I do not expect you to reproduce the same ones in the exam. You should be able to find your own examples.

1. Mary O'Donnell "Growing into Irish through Galicia"

Theme: The poetic persona's reconnection with her Irish vernacular language and with Gaelic culture through the contact with Galicia (the language and the alleged Celtic background).

Structure: 3 main parts. 1. first two stanzas (hearing Celtic music played on the streets and the Galician language used by Galician writers). 2. 3rd stanza (reflection on the reasons why she has neglected the Irish language). 3. 4th stanza (poetic persona's change in attitude, as she has become more open to other languages than English)

Imagery: Repetition of the metaphor English-silk (in allusion to the softness of English sounds). Sea-life imagery: tide, shell, mussel, grit, pearl (the hearing organ resembles a shell and this brings about the sea imagery).

Lineation: Notice the layout of the poem: a longer line usually followed by a shorter line. The repetition of this layout creates a visual rhythm that matches the rhythm of the music and of the language.

Sound patterns: Notice l. 3 in the 3rd stanza: blame, background, Border, bashful. There is an evident repetition of the initial consonant sound /b/: this alliteration reinforces her discomfort with her neglect of the Irish vernacular.

2. Oonagh Warke "Learning Irish"

Theme: Recuperating one's vernacular language by learning it and remembering the way one's elders spoke it.

Structure: This one-stanza poem follows the pattern of a walk to the family farm: Lines 1-7: a stranger arrives, although he bears a resemblance to the family men; lines 8-22: the stranger's arrival propitiates going for a walk across a forest while the family's sayings are remembered; lines 23 to the end: entering the farm house and inhabiting the language.

Imagery: Notice the oxymoron (brief paradox) 'strangely-kin' on line 7: the Irish language is strange because it has been forgotten even if it was the language spoken by the elders in the family.

Lineation: The abundance of enjambments reinforces the idea of a long and continued walk.

Sound patterns: Alliteration: photographs-father-fingers /f/ to highlight the family memories.

3. Keith Payne “A Suburban Sunday”

Theme: Childhood in a middle-class family in Ireland in the early 1980s (reference to the hunger strikes of Irish republican prisoners in 1980 and 1981)

Structure: 2 main parts. 1. Lines 1-7: Family life on Sundays (pubs, reading newspapers); the poetic persona speaks of ‘we’ (family) and ‘you’ (mother). Lines 8-9: The poetic persona shifts the attention to himself and his reactions as a child (colours, drinks, drawing of fantasy animal: unicorn).

Imagery: Dead metaphor: varnish over the fact (pretend you do not notice something)

Lineation: Peculiar 9-line stanza, each line with 9 syllables (model followed: Paula Meehan’s poems in *Geomantic*). Effort to fit personal and political experience into a strict poetic pattern.

Sound patterns: Notice the similar pronunciation of I and eye /ai/. See this assonance on line 8: I’d eyes. This reinforces the visual memory of childhood.