

The Metaphor of Rape in Seamus Heaney's North

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Abstract:

This paper deals with Seamus Heaney's use of the metaphor of rape in *North*, focusing only on two representative poems: "Ocean's Love to Ireland" and "Act of Union". The study adopts the psychoanalytic approach to probe deep into the unconscious minds of both the victim and the victimizer. It aims at showing how Heaney uses the metaphor of rape to expose the English imperial exploitation of Ireland. The study comes to the conclusion that Heaney's use of the metaphor of rape extends the Aisling tradition in Irish poetry by presenting Ireland as a vulnerable and submissive female victim, whereas England is portrayed as an

aggressive and arrogant male rapist. This use of the metaphor of rape adds much to the meaning of the two poems, and helps us understand better the nature of this relationship, which is enforced by England and undesired by Ireland, and its negative consequences. This shocking image of rape reflects the physical and psychic violence imposed upon the Irish by the English invaders. In spite of the moments of reluctant silence, Heaney's sympathy is always with the raped victim, not with the rapist. In both poems, there are some Oedipal dynamics at work, but they are more prevalent and intentional in "Act of Union" than in "Ocean's Love to Ireland". Heaney, who is emotionally

attached to his mother Ireland, feels angry to see her "possessed and repossessed" by his illegal and rival father England, which is the core of the Oedipal Complex in the two poems.

Key Words:

Seamus Heaney – rape – North - 'Ocean's Love to Ireland' – 'Act of Union' – colonization – Oedipal Complex – Aisling tradition.

الملخص

يتناول هذا البحث استخدام شيمس هيني لاستعارة الاغتصاب في مجموعته الشعرية "الشمال"، مقتصرًا على قصيدتين نموذجيتين؛ هما: "حب المحيط لأيرلندا" و "حدث الوحدة". وتبنى الدراسة منهج التحليل النفسي لسبر غور كلا من الضحية والجاني، وتهدف الى توضيح كيفية استخدام هيني لاستعارة الاغتصاب لفصح استغلال إنجلترا الاستعماري

لأيرلندا. ولقد خلصت الدراسة إلى أن استخدام هيني لاستعارة الاغتصاب هو امتداد لتراث "الايشليج" في الشعر الأيرلندي وذلك من خلال عرض أيرلندا كأنتى خاتمة يسهل اغتصابها، بينما تصور إنجلترا على أنها ذكر مغتصب وعدواني ومتغطرس. ولقد أضاف هذا الاستخدام لاستعارة الاغتصاب الكثير الى معنى القصيدتين وساعدنا على فهم أفضل لطبيعة هذه العلاقة القسرية من جانب إنجلترا والغير مرغوب فيها من جانب أيرلندا وكذلك الآثار السلبية المترتبة عليها. كما تعكس هذه الصورة الصادمة للاغتصاب ذلك العنف الجسدي والنفسي الذي وقع على الأيرلنديين من قبل الغزاه الإنجليز. وعلى الرغم من لحظات الصمت المتردد لهيني فإن تعاطفه دائما يكون مع الضحية المغتصبة وليس مع الجاني المغتصب. وتعتلج بعض

ديناميكيات عقدة أوديب في القصيدتين، ولكنها أقوى وأكثر انتشاراً في قصيدة "حدث الوحدة" عنه في قصيدة "حب المحيط لأيرلندا". ويشعر هيني - المرتبط عاطفياً بوطنه الأم أيرلندا - بالغضب عندما يراها تغتصب المرة تلو المرة من قبل والده الغير شرعي، خصمه إنجلترا؛ وهذا هو محور عقدة أوديب في القصيدتين.

Introduction:

Rape has been a recurrent metaphor for colonial relationships in literature. There is a tendency in Irish literature to represent Ireland as a wronged woman; a tendency which has its roots in the Aisling tradition of the Irish poetry. Aisling is a poor, vulnerable maid who stands for Ireland or the Irish nation. She is usually raped by an aggressive male figure who represents the imperial England. Josep M. Armengol explains this

tradition: "*Actually (political) aisling poetry ... is usually based on the personification of the Irish land as a defenceless, pure, and weak woman who is repeatedly raped or ravished by an English invader, always in very 'masculine' terms*"(8). It is the responsibility of the Irish nationalists, then, to restore the dignity of this maid and, consequently, that of their homeland. This is the core of the conflict between the Irish, who are trying hard to restore the freedom and fertility of their land, and the English, who are always possessing and repossessing this land.

Seamus Heaney (1939 - 2013) is a poet of international acclaim, who won the Noble Prize in literature in 1995 for writing art for art's sake and for universalizing the suffering of his

Catholic community. Since Heaney is a Catholic born in Northern Ireland of Protestant majority, he has felt alien and never experienced an Ireland free from the British colonization. His sense of belonging to an Irish society is sometimes disturbed by this imperial rule. He writes: "*At school I studied the Gaelic literature of Ireland as well as the literature of England, and since then I have maintained a notion of myself as Irish in a province that insists that it is British*" (*Preoccupations* 35). Heaney is an amazing mixture of the English and Irish traditions. He is torn between two cultures: one of his invaded homeland, Ireland, and the other of the invader, England. He speaks, writes, publishes and teaches in English, but he is not involved in the English preoccupations and perspectives.

He suffers from a "cultural schizophrenia", which has inculcated a sense of guilt that has conditioned his response to the crisis of his own country. Shedding some light on Heaney's divided loyalty between Ireland and England, Alan Shapiro remarks that "*If Irish culture is his wife, English is his mistress, and to satisfy one is necessarily to betray the other*" (13).

North (1974) is Heaney's fourth collection. It is a post-colonial text which culminates his poetic process. In an interview with Monie Begley, Heaney describes *North* as "*the book all books were leading to*" (169). This book consists of two distinct and complementary parts: the first explores Northern Europe over the last 2000 years, and the second deals with contemporary Northern

Ireland. The past of the first is used to illuminate the present of the second. In *North*, Heaney is most concerned to bring to light what is hidden in the past and within the Catholic psyche. He records the great suffering of the Irish Catholics at the hands of the English colonizers. Published six years after the eruption of violence in Northern Ireland and three years after Heaney's abandonment of Ulster to live in the South of Ireland, *North*, as Mark Mackichan observes, "*marks Heaney's first attempt to articulate the Irish cultural trauma of Bloody Sunday and the Troubles on a wider scale*"(7). Here, he develops several images and symbols to reflect the agony of his own community, using the metaphor of rape to depict the imperial exploitation of Ireland by England. Two poems, representative of this

metaphor in *North*, are: "Ocean's Love to Ireland" and "Act of Union". These two poems will be the focus of this study because they represent the use of the metaphor of rape most daringly to shed a flood of light on the disturbed relationship between England and Ireland, form a unity in dealing with the English colonization of Ireland and its tragic consequences in both the past and the present, and are widely read.

Since psychoanalytic thinking has become a necessity in modern life, a psychoanalytic reading is essential for enriching our understanding of the two poems under study. This study raises a number of questions and seeks to answer them. First: How does Heaney use the metaphor of rape? What does the use of this metaphor add to the meaning of

the two poems? Second: Where does Heaney's sympathy lie? Does it lie with the victim or with the victimizer? Does his cultural schizophrenia prevent him from taking sides? Third: Are there any Oedipal dynamics at work in these two poems? Does Heaney feel the Oedipal Complex in his relationship with both Ireland and England? The study ends in a conclusion which sums up the answers to these questions.

Although Heaney was not regarded as a political poet, he could not live in isolation from the bloody strife taking place in his own country. He is not happy about England's tireless efforts to strip his country of its freedom, culture and language. He frequently asserts his own Irishness, making his own characters masks for his sense of

Catholic isolation in a province governed by the Protestants who belong to England. In an interview with *The Paris Review*, Heaney asserts: "*I am certainly a person with an Ireland-centered view of politics. I would like our understanding and our culture and our language and our confidence to be Ireland-centered rather than England-centered or American-centered*" ("The Art of Poetry" 110). In spite of all his commitment to the Irish cause and his adherence to his roots, Heaney is unwilling to use his poetry as a medium for political discourse. He hates to wear the mantle of a political poet, and resents the role of the spokesman of his community. He refuses to reduce poetry to a mere propaganda or reportage; it is an art which should not be overshadowed by political attitudes. However, as a human

being, Heaney cannot forget his human concerns. Therefore, politics is part and parcel of his own life.

Heaney's greatness lies in his ability to do with words what a skilful painter can do with his brush. He is a magician who can lead words to yield their harvest of meaning wherever and whenever he likes. He is capable of creating detailed images charged with meanings and loaded with connotations. It is through his frequent use of imagery, that Heaney is able to allow insights into the Irish history of suffering. Michael Parker remarks that Heaney moves from "*the womb of words ... to the origins of conflict, which began with England's occupation of Ireland*"(134). His use of forceful imagery gave breath to what the Irish Catholics felt within themselves. Born in

Northern Ireland, Heaney was part of the Catholic minority suffering under the yoke of the tyranny of Protestant majority. Political turbulence and daily massacres in Ulster have left their indelible mark on his character and art. When the Troubles hit his country, he had to rise to the occasion and find images and symbols suitable for communicating the agony of his race. Commenting on the outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland in 1969, Heaney claimed that the focus of his poetry had changed: "*From that moment the problems of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament*" (*Preoccupations* 56).

Heaney's images are often charged with sexual connotations which enrich his poetry with

layers of meaning. He uses metaphors to reinforce the depth of his poetry and stress the themes tackled. In *North*, Heaney uses the metaphor of rape to compare the colonization of Ireland to a violent sexual act, a rape, which subjugates not only the body of the victim to the will of the rapist but her psyche as well. It is a shocking image which fosters sympathy for the raped victim and incurs hatred for the aggressive rapist. Karen Marguerite Moloney points out how the metaphor of rape is used here as a synonym for colonization:

Rape reduces another person to sexual object; colonization discounts another nation as conquest. In doing so, both acts forego a relationship of reciprocity between equals; both relish the assertion of power over someone or

something else. This commonality between the exercise of individual and large-scale domination explains why practices that subjugate a race, class, or sex are described as rape in popular parlance (Seamus Heaney and the Emblems of Hope 73).

Both "Ocean's Love to Ireland" and "Act of Union" are two frequently discussed poems from *North*, using the metaphor of rape to expose the ugly face of the English colonization of Ireland. They present the Irish colonial history in sexual terms. Raphael Ingelbien asserts that "the dominant trope", in these two poems, "is that of rape and intensive male domination"(175). Elaborating this point, Haris Qadeer observes that this rape is

both physical and psychological: "*Rape is not just the physical exploitation of a body but it, in a larger sense, is the exploitation and subjugation of the psyche as well*"(9).

The title of "Ocean's Love to Ireland" is a parody of Sir Walter Raleigh's incomplete poem, "Ocean's Love to Cynthia", in which Raleigh expresses his love for Queen Elizabeth I who is presented as Cynthia, the moon goddess and the symbol of chastity. Raleigh is an Elizabethan poet, gallant courtier, and sea captain whose colonial adventures in both Ireland and America brought him fame and love of the Queen herself. Heaney's title "Ocean's Love to Ireland" is ironic because "Ocean" stands for Raleigh who never loved Ireland. He was an anti-Catholic born to a Protestant family in Devonshire.

His keen interest in the Queen is ironically reflected by Heaney in the following lines:

*... his superb crest inclines to
Cynthia*

Even while it runs its bent

*In the rivers of Lee and
Blackwater.*

(40)⁽¹⁾

Shedding some light on these lines, Karen M. Moloney writes: "*Raleigh's real focus is Elizabeth. Ireland matters little to him 'save as an instrument to solicit royal favour'*" ("Heaney's Love to Ireland" 279). This disparity between Raleigh's treatment of the English Queen as a Goddess and the Irish maid as something insignificant is the target of Heaney's irony.

"Ocean's Love to Ireland" deals with the English colonization of

Ireland during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in the 16th century. This colonization is portrayed as an act of raping or sexual conquest. Ireland, as in the Aisling tradition, is a passive female victim, whereas England is an aggressive male rapist:

Speaking broad Devonshire,
Raleigh has backed the maid to a tree
As Ireland is backed to England
And drives inland
Till all her strands are breathless:
'Sweesir, Swatter! Sweesir, Swatter!'

(40)

These lines show Raleigh's confidence and superior strength in contrast with the maid's passivity and complete submission. He embodies the imperial brutality and fierceness. Being an English colonizer and enemy of the Irish, he

has come to ravish the Irish land only to win the Queen's favour. His savage rape of an Irish maid is based on one of his amorous adventures, mentioned by John Aubrey in his book, *Brief Lives*:

He loved a wench well; and one time getting up one of the Mayds of Honour up against a tree in a Wood ('t was his first Lady) who seemed at first boarding to be something fearfull of her Honour, and modest, she cryed, sweet Sir Walter, what doe you me ask; Will you undoe me? Nay, sweet Sir Walter! Sweet Sir Walter! Sir Walter! At last as the danger and the pleasure at the same time grew higher, she cryed in the extasey, Sweesir, Swatter, Sweesir, Swatter (418).

The metaphor of rape, in Heaney's opening lines, connects

between the act of rape and colonization, between Raleigh and England, between the ravished maid and Ireland. Unlike Aubrey's maid who is English, Heaney's is an Irish who stands for Ireland. Therefore, when she is backed to a tree, she looks like Ireland which is geographically backed to England, a position which suggests to the viewer that England, "the tall kingdom", is lying over Ireland's shoulder and is going to take her from behind. Jessica Wren Butler stresses this relationship between the maid and her land: "*Raleigh was instrumental in depressing the Irish resistance, so Heaney has him back both the maid and Ireland to 'a tree'*". In raping the Irish maid, Raleigh rapes the Irish land; the first is real and the second is metaphorical. Patricia Coughlan elaborates this

relationship between the maid and her land, raising her to the status of a heroine: "*This glide from woman to land, which turns women as literal sufferers of rape into women as symbol of victimhood, resolves itself into a recapitulation of the Mother-Ireland, Cathleen Ni Houlihan, aisling-heroine motif*"(39)

The Irish maid stands for the divine Mother or the fertility Goddess of Sovereignty who has been given various names throughout the ages. She is the sky-woman "Aisling" or the poor old woman "Eriu". Her blight is the blight of the whole country, and to rape her is to rape the Irish land. Karen M. Moloney asserts that "*Raleigh's rape victim is, in reality, 'the divine mother Eriu conceived anthropomorphically,' and her mistreatment ensures not fertility, but blight*"("Heaney's

Love to Ireland" 274). This rape is a violation and physical humiliation of the maid who has been ruined, and a political conquest of Ireland which has been destroyed. It is an act of disrespect which, as Moloney goes on in the same reference to assert, "*transforms them both: self-respecting maid into a wearisome castoff and Gaelic Ireland into English-occupied, deforested waste*"(286).

Raleigh's lust for wealth and power is the motive behind his heartless cruelty. Nothing can stop him from achieving his purpose. That is why he "*drives inland/ Till all her strands are breathless*". Here, Heaney deliberately mixes military strategy with sexuality. The word "strands" refers both to Ireland's sandy shores and to the maid's curves of the body (breasts and thighs). The word "breathless"

is also significant because it refers both to Raleigh's cruelty in chasing his breathless rebels and to the maid's breathlessness during the rape. Therefore, Raleigh's driving "inland" refers to his moving forward towards the centre of the city to put down the Desmond Rebellion, and to his forced sexual penetration of the Irish maid. The movement of the rhythm in this line: "*And drives inland*", from iamb to trochee, enacts the actual movement of penetration. It is here that the images of sexuality are mixed with the images of imperial expansion and colonial exploitation.

As danger and pleasure grew higher, the maid's protestations turned into gasps: "'Sweesir, Swatter!' 'Sweesir, Swatter!'" Heaney quotes the same words reported by Aubrey (quoted

above). This line is very suggestive. The panting sound is the shortened version of: 'Sweet Sir, Sir Walter'. The maid's irregular breathing and excited emotional state reflect the great physical and psychic violence imposed upon her. The alliteration of the sound /s/ enacts this emotional shock. Being tied to her land, the maid's breathlessness also suggests the exhaustion of the Irish economic resources by Raleigh and his fellow English colonizers who left great destruction behind. The strangling of the maid's voice, under the rapist's sexual assault, moreover, reflects Heaney's "personal inability", as Eileen Cahill observes, "*to articulate the political reality of Northern Ireland*" (63). The maid's breathlessness, above all, suggests a glimpse of pleasure amidst the terror of rape on the part of the

maid, which may suggest Ireland's partial agreement on this union. It sheds some light on Heaney's divided loyalty which sometimes hinders him from taking sides.

The Irish maid is inferior to Raleigh in class, sex and race. Therefore, it was something easy for him to violate her:

He is water, he is ocean, lifting

*Her farthingale like a scarf of
weed lifting*

In the front of a wave.

(40)

Raleigh is "water" and "ocean" because he was a sea captain and because the Queen used to call him "The Shepherd of the Oceans", nicknaming him "Water". The ocean washes Ireland's Western shore, a metaphor of "colonial rapacity". He lifts the skirt of the maid as easily as a wave lifts "a

scarf of wood". The repetition of the word "lifting", followed by an enjambment, suggests the insignificance of the victim in the rapist's eyes, and indicates her complete surrender to his masculine superior strength. Like her homeland, she is too weak to defend herself against the sexual assault of this heartless aggressor. He is as unstoppable as a rising tide. In his comment on the above lines, Karen M. Moloney supports this idea:

With the unrelenting momentum of an ocean current, Raleigh is wheedling, trapping, ravishing, ignoring boundaries and pressing inland – an ambitious soldier and colonizer to whom Irish sovereignty is as inconsequential as a slip of seaweed in a massive wave, or a young maid's skirt ("Heaney's Love to Ireland" 276).

In England, Raleigh's fame will rise on water for winning the Queen's favour, while, in Ireland, his reputation is built on "dark seepings" because of his repulsive crimes:

In London, his name

Will rise on water, and on these dark seepings:

Smerwick sowed with the mouthing corpses

Of six hundred papists, 'as gallant and good

Personages as ever were beheld'.

(40)

In 1580 Raleigh and his fellow Elizabethan colonizers landed in Ireland to put down the Desmond Rebellion which was supported by a troop of six hundred Papists from Spain and Italy. The Pope sent this troop to strengthen the

revolt against the anti-Catholic administration in both Ireland and England. Being unprepared for the fight, they unconditionally surrendered to the English forces at Smerwick. Their plea for mercy was met with a gruesome massacre; all of them were brutally killed. It was Raleigh who orchestrated such mass killings. He began and oversaw the execution of these "*gallant and good/ Personages*", irrigating the Irish plantation with their blood and seeding it with their corpses. The Desmond dynasty was destroyed and the Irish land was confiscated from the Gaelic nobles and given to the English colonizers and lowland Scots to keep them loyal to the royal crown. The confiscation of the land looks like a rape in robbing the victim of her will and chastity, and the new settlers represent a newly-born bastard child. The

natives become strangers on their land, and their culture is devalued in favour of that of the colonizer.

Ireland, in its colonial predicament, is similar to the victim of Raleigh's act of rape. Both of them are violated by Raleigh. He has made a ruined maid out of Ireland. Her voice can no longer be heard effectively because she complains in Irish. He has dissipated her dreams of possessing fleets to defend herself, and deprived her of the chance to be helped by the Spanish prince who has spilled his gold uselessly:

*The ruined maid complains in
Irish,*

*Ocean has scattered her
dreams of fleets,*

*The Spanish prince has spilled
his gold*

And failed her.

(41)

The Catholic Spanish King, Philip II had plans to invade Britain. Catholic Ireland would certainly have benefited from his victory over the English but, unfortunately, his plans had been thwarted in the naval battles led by the English Captain, Howard of Effingham. In this way, Philip II failed Ireland. The ruined maid complains in Irish, not in English, because she wants to distance herself from her rapist's language, and to assert her Irish identity and culture.

Unlike her homeland, the Irish maid cannot be possessed because she is the muse of the Aisling tradition in poetry. If her body is possessed, her soul is still free. She fades from their "somnolent clasp", and is reduced to an image of "ringlet-breath and dew"; she

fades but never disappears. She knows the safest place to hide in and wait for the suitable moment of reappearance. She recedes into the heart of nature:

Rush-light, mushroom-flesh,

*She fades from their somnolent
clasp*

Into ringlet-breath and dew,

*The ground possessed and
repossessed.*

(41)

It is through suffering that this ruined Irish maid is raised to the position of the divine Mother Eriu or the fertility Goddess of Sovereignty whose death means the death and infertility of the land, while her rebirth means its renewal and fertility. Heaney hopes that the night of agony and colonization will lead to a dawn of freedom and independence. Karen

M. Moloney observes a glimpse of hope in these lines: "*The four images ... suggest progressive movement forward, a journey from the night which closes on sixteenth-century Gaelic culture to the dawn that promises it some form of survival*" ("Heaney's Love to Ireland" 284).

Heaney's sympathy lies with the victim, not with the rapist. Raleigh is presented as a rapist who is blinded by his lust for money, fame and sex. He can commit brutal crimes just to please the Queen and win her favour. He has abused this weak and helpless victim and looked down upon her as something insignificant. Therefore, the author cannot sympathize with him or with England as an imperial power who crushes the pride of the weak and defenceless Ireland. Contrary to this, he takes the side of the ruined

Irish maid who is sinned against, not sinning; she has committed no crime to be brutally raped by this arrogant English invader. She has been ruined, but she remains true to her origin; she refuses to complain in English, the language of her rapist, and insists on using her own language to assert her Irishness. It is through suffering that she was regenerated and elevated to the status of the divine Mother Eriu or the fertility Goddess of Sovereignty. Heaney's Oedipal Complex is reflected in his sympathy for the ruined maid who stands for his mother, Ireland, and in his negative feelings for Raleigh who stands for his illegal father, England, a rival who rapes his mother, Ireland. The last line of the poem is pessimistic because it suggests that the English colonization of the Irish land seems to have no end: "*The ground*

is *possessed and repossessed*", dissipating the Irish hope for independence.

Like "Ocean's Love to Ireland", "Act of Union" extends the Aisling tradition in Irish poetry by presenting the colonized Ireland as a wronged woman ravished by "the imperially male" England. Josep M. Armengol observes: "*Whereas 'Ocean's Love to Ireland' ... deals with the beginnings of the systematic colonization of Ireland during the Elizabethan period, 'Act of Union' refers to the historical moment when the English colonisation of Ireland became politically official*"(14). Both of the two poems use the metaphor of rape to help us understand imperialism and its tragic consequences. In "Act of Union", Heaney presents the signing away of 'The Act of Union' as a violation of a female.

The title of "Act of Union" has a double meaning: The first is political and the second is sexual. The political refers to that historical moment when Ireland was incorporated into England to form the United Kingdom in 1800. The sexual refers to a forced sexual union, a rape of the passive female Ireland by the aggressive male England. SORCHA GUNNE and ZOE BRIGLEY THOMPSON draw our attention to this pun: "*Heaney's pun on the word 'union' equates the domination of imperialism with the gendered violence and violation of rape*"(2). The political Act of Union was signed after a long period of political unrest and turbulence. The Irish hoped that it would bring them independence, peace and welfare. However, it brought them nothing but prolonged troubles and renewing suffering. These troubles reached

the climax on the Bloody Sunday (January 30th, 1972) when the British soldiers gunned down thirteen Catholics and injured many others, which incited Heaney to write this poem, "Act of Union".

This political Act of Union turns metaphorically into a forced sexual act of union, presenting England as an indifferent rapist and Ireland as a raped victim, suffering from the pains of an unwelcome pregnancy, troublesome delivery and demon offspring. Jonathan Allison remarks that the poem "*presents Anglo-Irish relations in terms of reluctant coition and presents impregnation as a myth of colonial domination*"(117). The entire poem is an extended metaphor of rape which sheds much light on the political relationship between England and Ireland. The poet uses the sonnet form, which is

conventionally associated with love poetry, satirically to draw the readers' attention to the absence of this great value of love from this sterile, colonial relationship between the viciously violent England and the submissively feminized Ireland.

The poem looks like a first-person narrative where England, the colonizer, is the narrator himself. The "imperial male" England is addressing Ireland, a female pregnant with his bastard child. It is through the use of this persona that Heaney gives us an insight into the Irish nationalist view of colonization and the English perspective on it. The Irish nationalists believe that the English occupation of their country looks like a rape where Ireland is the vulnerable victim and England is the lascivious rapist who forces Ireland into something she never

wants. Heaney deliberately portrays Ireland as a female to show her vulnerability and helplessness, which tempts England to rape her. It is here that Heaney shows his Irish nationalism in the language of the imperialist England. Of course, England, being the narrator, tries to reconsider this nationalist view of colonization and to present his own point of view which sometimes contradicts the reality.

It seems that the actual act of rape took place in "Ocean's Love to Ireland", while in "Act of Union" (a subsequent poem) the stress falls on the negative consequences of this sexual assault. England is speaking to Ireland in a language which is highly suggestive:

To-night, a first movement, a pulse,

As if the rain in the bogland gathered ahead

To slip and flood; a bog-burst,

A gash breaking open the ferny bed.

(43)

These lines suggest two meanings: The first is a case of a childbirth or delivery, and the second is a sexual assault or rape. As for the first meaning, we see a pregnant woman ready to give birth to a child. In this sense, the "first movement" and the "pulse" are those of the foetus inside his mother's womb. The rain, the flood, and the bog-burst suggest the breaking of the woman's waters. The fourth line: "*A gash breaking open the ferny bed*" suggests and enacts the pain and agony at the moment of delivery.

The second meaning, which is more persistent and enduring than the first, describes a sexual assault or rape. The first and the fourth lines sustain this meaning since "night" suggests an evil movement to assault the victim sexually. That is why there is "a pulse" which is the first physical contact and a sign of the victim's heartbeat and terror. The fourth line tells us that it hurts because it is a forced entry: *"A gash breaking open the ferny bed"*. It is a sexual assault which causes physical and psychological injuries. The "ferny bed" and the "bogland" are symbols of a female's sexual organ. In this sense, these lines plant images of rape and forced entry. Thomas Spitzer Hanks points out that this opening passage *"suggests an identification between the bogland and the feminine subject of the poem, whose 'ferny bed' is broken*

open by a 'gash' that is at once vaginal and penetrative". These rich images also suggest the violence of the act of the English invasion of Ireland and the ensuing suffering inflicted upon the Irish, represented by this raped woman.

Heaney's use of prosody reinforces this meaning of rape. The pauses in the first line: "To-night, a first movement, a pulse" foreshadow something sinister about to take place, which is the rape. The consonance in: boglandd, gatheredd, aheadd, and the alliteration of the sound /b/ in: bug-burst, and in: breaking, bed enact the harshness and pain of the act of rape, which stands for the invasion of Ireland by England, and the subsequent agony on the part of the Irish. Besides, the recurrent use of enjambment in the poem suggests that the sexual act is taking place.

As he does in "Ocean' love to Ireland", Heaney gives us (in "Act of Union") a sexually aggressive picture of the relationship between England and Ireland. They are pictured as a man and a woman lying together; England is "the tall kingdom' leaning over the shoulder of the helpless female Ireland who can not shun or welcome England's sexual offer:

**Your back is a firm line of
eastern coast**

*And arms and legs are thrown
Beyond your gradual hills. I
caress*

*The heaving province where
our past has grown.*

*I am the tall kingdom over
your shoulder*

*That you would neither cajole
nor ignore.*

(43)

Here, we have a geographical metaphor. If we look at the map of both England and Ireland, we see two figures lying together; one is masculine and the other feminine. Ireland is the feminine figure sitting in front of the masculine England who is leaning over her shoulder as if trying to take her from behind, while Ireland is trying to escape from his grasp. Topography is used to give a female persona to Ireland: Her "back is a firm line of eastern coast" and the "gradual hills" are the curves of her body as a female. The throwing of her "arms and legs" beyond her "gradual hills" suggests a violent act of rape. Sorcha Gunne and Zoe Brigley Thompson explain this metaphor of rape:

*Heaney unproblematically
equates the violated land to the
violated woman, drawing out*

this metonymic comparison as the eastern coast of Ireland is the woman's back and the landscape her body. The speaker in the poem is 'the tall kingdom' over her shoulder – the rapist leaving his 'legacy'(2).

As it has been shown in "Ocean's Love to Ireland", the colonized Irish land is also personified here as a raped female. There is a close connection between the woman's body and nature. Stressing this bond, Elmer Andrews remarks that Heaney "is open to intuitions that relate human female psychology and sexuality to the landscape"(3). The raped Irish woman is again elevated, through her suffering, to the status of the fertility Goddess of Sovereignty. Karen M. Moloney observes that "*in 'Act of Union', the identification of the female character's body with Irish*

landscape broadly suggests connection to the sovereignty motif" (Seamus Heaney and the Emblems of Hope 73-74).

Why would Ireland "neither cajole nor ignore" England? It is because the male England is much more powerful than the female Ireland and, therefore, leaves her no choice but to submit to his will as a rapist, and accept his presence as a colonizer. Supporting this idea, Michael Parker writes: "*After a brief proprietorial caress, the speaker makes it plain to his listeners that the only feasible response to his enforced suit is submission*"(143). It also means that Ireland is in a state of reluctance; she can not accept or refuse England's offer of the act of union. This reluctance sheds some light on Heaney's divided loyalty between Ireland and England. He has given Ireland feminine

features, attractive enough to tempt England to rape her, and uses the word "our" before past to assert the antiquity of this relationship. That is why he sometimes hesitates to condemn or approve of England's colonization of Ireland.

The reference to their mutual past, signified by the word "our", suggests that Ireland is pregnant with a bastard child, the outcome of this illegal relationship. The mutual past that has grown in the "heaving province" is the English legacy that "culminates inexorably" within Ireland's "borders":

Conquest is a lie. I grow older

*Conceding your half-independent
shore*

*Within whose borders now my
legacy*

Culminates inexorably.

(43)

The English colonial legacy within the Irish borders refers to those Protestant English people emigrating to Ireland as a result of the union. In this sense, Ireland was entered, possessed and planted with the English seed. This seed sprouts endless violence represented by those destructive troubles smiting Northern Ireland as a result of this conquest.

Why does England say that "Conquest is a lie"? This is one of Heaney's many suggestive statements in the poem. It suggests that England has realized that his tactics in Ireland have failed and that he has never fully conquered or subjected Ireland to his will. It also suggests, in England's view, that the English conquest of Ireland is not a rape or conquest at all because both England and Ireland want it, and

have derived much benefit from it. However, the Irish nationalists believe that it is a rape and a conquest which should be defied and rebelled against. In this sense, England appears to be lying to the readers. Conquest is a lie also because, as Jonathan Allison observes, it is built upon a lie which is "*the untruth that Britain has the right to colonize Ireland*"(119). It also implies that the invasion of Ireland by England is mutually damaging; both the colonized and the colonizer will pay dearly for this false act of union and its undesired consequences. James Simmons sustains this meaning, asserting that "*England is going to suffer as much from the bastard province as Ireland suffered from the original rape*"(57).

The metaphor of rape, standing for colonization, is best seen in the following lines:

And I am still imperially

*Male, leaving you with the
pain,*

*The rending process in the
colony,*

*The battering ram, the boom
burst from within.*

(43)

The words: "imperially/Male", "pain", "the rending process", "the battering ram", and "the boom burst from within" suggest a rape which is violent and rapacious. England's imperial maleness is stressed through a number of phallic images, such as: "the battering ram", and "the boom burst from within". "The battering ram", specifically, is a very significant phallic image because it is a symbol of a man's sexual organ, and it has mythical allusions to the Trojan Horse which was used in the Trojan War to break open the city of Troy.

Therefore, the colonization of Ireland is compared to the destruction of Troy. It is so violent that it tears the colony apart. Ireland is victimized for the sake of the English rapist's pleasure.

The connection between the destruction of the city of Troy and the English conquest of Ireland, through the mythical allusion to the Trojan Horse, suggests that Heaney is affected here by W.B. Yeats's poem, "Leda and the Swan", where Yeats also uses the metaphor of rape to portray the English conquest of Ireland:

*A shudder in the loins
engenders there*

*The broken wall, the burning
roof and tower*

And Agamemnon dead.

*(W. B. Yeats: Selected Poetry
127)*

Zeus, the king of gods, comes in the form of a swan to rape the beautiful girl, Leda. The product of this rape is Helen of Troy, the most beautiful woman who was the cause of the Trojan War with its consequent annihilation of the city of Troy, and subsequent death of Agamemnon, the leader of the Greeks, who was treacherously killed by his wife on his tragic return from this war. Zeus, the rapist, stands for England, and Leda, the victim, represents Ireland. Yeats's Helen of Troy, whose beauty is destructive, equals Heaney's "obstinate fifth column", the demon offspring of England's rape of Ireland.

England's enforced and undesired union with Ireland has produced a bastard child who has become a source of threat to his father and pain to his mother:

*The act sprouted an obstinate
fifth column*

*Whose stance is growing
unilateral.*

*His heart beneath your heart
is a wardrum*

*Mustering force. His parasitical
And ignorant little fists already*

*Beat at your borders and I
know they're cocked*

At me across the water.

(43)

The act referred to here is the act of rape. The bitter fruit of this rape is "an obstinate fifth column". This is one of Heaney's several multi-layered phrases in the poem. Perhaps it refers to the Protestant paramilitaries who hate the Catholics and are determined to keep the North Protestant, or to the Protestant Unionists who are, as Daniel Tobin names them, "the

descendants of the planters"(135). It also suggests The Irish Republican Army (IRA), who are fed up with the persecutions of the English colonizers, and are ready to fight for their freedom. It is likely that this phrase also refers to Ulster, the bastard province of the North, with its erupting violence. Mary Jean Corbett writes: "*Ulster is itself a product of the past that has survived into the present, cleaving to the mother from whom it cannot be divided*"(1). It is more convincing to say that the "obstinate fifth column" refers to the whole situation in Northern Ireland, including all the previous suggestions. Stressing this point, Elmer Andrews writes: "*Perhaps it is the entire situation in Northern Ireland which Heaney is treating as the offspring of the Act of Union*" (102).

This bastard male child represents the disturbed relationship between

the two countries. He is suffering from the Oedipal Complex; he is in union with his mother but looks at his father as a rival. Therefore, he fights him "across the water". Jay Parini writes: "*The second half of 'Act of Union' concerns itself with fathering and the inevitable Freudian duel for the possession of the mother*"(119). This duel between the child and the father is the core of the Oedipal Complex. Shedding a lot of light on this duel, Constance Jacson observes that

the second sonnet recalls the Freudian Law of the Father where the child searches for the phallus in the mother without any success. The phallus in the Law of the Father is the masculine symbol of power. The child goes on to search for it in the father By using the consonantal "cocked", Heaney uses a pun to highlight the child's desire

to replace the father and become the owner of the phallus (27).

Being a nationalist Catholic, Heaney himself shares with this bastard child the Oedipal Complex towards his mother Ireland and his illegal father England. He is emotionally attached to his motherland, and feels angry to see her in the possession of the English invader, his rival father. That is why he is fighting him, depicting his colonization of Ireland as a devastating rape. Heaney has sought for the phallus (fame) in his mother Ireland but he did not find it, so he is looking for it in his father's language and tradition. Even though he sometimes finds himself unable to tell the truth, his loyalty and sympathy are always with his wronged mother.

The child is causing a lot of pain to his mother by beating at

her borders, and he is threatening his father "across the water" of the Irish Sea. His heart is beating beneath his mother's heart like a "wardrum", seeking independence at all costs. He will grow up and take arms against his careless and insulting father, England. Violence begets violence; it is an endless cycle of violence started by the English aggressor. That is why the poem ends pessimistically, offering no solution to this cyclic violence:

No Treaty

*I foresee will salve completely
your tracked*

*And stretchmarked body, the
big pain*

*That leaves you raw, like
opened ground, again.*

(43 - 44)

The pain caused to Ireland by England has no cure; nothing can

heal her opened and bleeding wounds. Michael Parker spots this pessimistic end:

Narrator and author join together in the poem's conclusion, which sees no end in sight to Ireland's anguish. For Heaney, the wounds created by the Act of Union will always remain 'raw' in the Irish consciousness. Treaties and truces might provide temporary relief, but they can never heal the 'running sore' (144).

Ireland's will remain a body with scars and marks of conflict. It is a stretchmarked body, bearing the traces of "the big pain" which is both physical and psychological. Haris Qadeer elaborates this point:

The rapist Britain dominates Ireland the ravished maid and brands her with 'stretchmarked body' and 'big pain' as a mark of brute supremacy of masculinity of

the colonizers. This refers to the psychological and historical scars of colonial neurosis (11).

The last image likens the raped woman, Ireland, to an "opened ground", which stresses the depth of her physical and psychological wounds, caused by the English colonization, and asserts the fact the rape has taken place; that is why she is still "opened". The word "again", which ends the poem, stresses the cyclic nature of this physical and psychological conquest where the Irish land, represented by the raped female in both poems, is "possessed and repossessed". As we have seen in "Ocean's Love to Ireland", Heaney's loyalty, as a nationalist Catholic, reveals itself. His sympathy lies with the victim, not with the victimizer. He grieves over his country's deplorable

conditions, presenting England as a brutal rapist who overpowers his victim, and every time he leaves her "raw" like an "opened ground".

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Conclusion:

It can be concluded that Heaney's use of the metaphor of rape to expose the brutality of the English colonization of Ireland extends the Aisling tradition in poetry. Ireland is presented as a vulnerable and submissive female who is too weak to defend herself, whereas England is portrayed as an aggressive male who shows no mercy in chasing his victim. The geographical postures of the two countries reinforce the effectiveness of this image. Ireland looks like a female sitting in front of the male England who looks taller and bigger. England is lying over

Ireland's shoulder, attempting to take her from behind while Ireland is leaning forward, trying to slip from his grasp. Heaney's use of the metaphor of rape adds much to the meaning of the two poems. It communicates the theme vividly and convincingly, and overloads the poems with layers of meaning, which overwhelms the reader. Rape is a shocking image, suitable for portraying the fierceness and brutality of the English colonizers in Ireland. It reflects the physical and the psychic violence imposed upon the feminine Ireland, and suggests a physical strength on the part of the English rapist, which tempts him to rape his victim easily. It also implies that the union between the two countries is enforced by England and undesired by Ireland. Instead of bringing welfare and independence to the Irish, it brought them extended

suffering and prolonged misery. The use of this image also helps us to understand better the English imperial exploitation of Ireland. Heaney uses an English persona to probe deep into the unconscious minds of both the victim and the victimizer. In this way, Heaney makes conscious what is unconscious and reveals the self to the self. In 'Ocean's Love to Ireland' and 'Act of Union', both the Irish female and her homeland are raped. The possession of the body stands for the possession of the land. Her suffering reflects the suffering of her Irish nation. It is through this suffering that the raped victim is regenerated and elevated to the status of the fertility Goddess of Sovereignty. In both poems, rape produces a bastard child; in "Ocean's Love to Ireland", it is the planters, brought by the English invaders to the

confiscated Irish land, while in "Act of Union", it is the "obstinate fifth column", standing for the whole disturbed situation in Northern Ireland.

Heaney's sympathy lies with the raped female who stands for the colonized Ireland. In both poems, the Irish raped victim is presented in a way which fosters our pity. She is vulnerable, weak, submissive and defenceless. She is exposed to a battering rape which ruins her physically and psychologically. However, she insists on complaining in Irish, not in English, to assert her Irishness and to distance herself from the language of her rapist. The English rapist is arrogant, aggressive, brutal and rapacious; nothing can stop him from achieving his aim because he knows no mercy in chasing his victim. He is blinded

by his lust for money, fame and sex. He can commit many repulsive crimes just for the sake of pleasure or fame. It is here that Heaney's nationalist sympathy with the cause of his country reaches its peak. He is against the English tireless attempts to strip his country of its freedom, culture and language. He tries to assert his own Irishness and to make his characters masks for his sense of Catholic isolation in a province governed by the English Protestants. However, he refuses to wear the mantle of a political poet or to play the role of the spokesman of his community so as not to reduce poetry to mere propaganda or reportage. That is why there are moments of reluctant silence or silent reluctance which reflect his 'personal inability to articulate the political reality in Northern Ireland'.

In both poems, there are some Oedipal dynamics at work, but they are more prevalent and intentional in "Act of Union" than in "Ocean's Love to Ireland". Being a nationalist Catholic, Heaney is emotionally attached to his motherland, Ireland. He looks at England as the rival who has deprived him of experiencing an Ireland free from the British colonization during his lifetime. He feels angry to see his mother, Ireland, "possessed and repossessed" by his illegal father, England. He has sought for the phallus (fame) in his mother but he did not find it, so he searches for it in the language and tradition of his father. However, his loyalty is always with his mother. In "Ocean's Love to Ireland", Heaney's Oedipal Complex is reflected in his sympathy for the ruined Irish maid who stands for

his mother Ireland, and in his negative feelings towards the English rapist, Raleigh, who stands for his rival father, England. This Oedipal feeling is intensified in "Act of Union", where the bastard child, like Heaney, stands for the disturbed relationship between Ireland and England. He is still in union with his mother, Ireland, but he fights his father across the water. The duel between the child and the father is a duel for the possession of the mother, which is the core of the Oedipal Complex in the two poems.

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Notes

- 1- All quotations from Heaney's poetry are from: Seamus Heaney, *North* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1975).

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