



"Endangered Masculinities in Irish Poetry" examines the dynamic response of early modern Ireland's hereditary bardic professional poets to impinging colonial change. Having for generations validated the power of their patrons, policed communal norms and acted as self-conscious cultural custodians, these elite master-poets were both professionally obligated and personally motivated to defend both their community and their own way of life from renewed English aggression in the sixteenth century. Endangered masculinity, the oppositional rhetoric they crafted, drew on traditional poetic elements to evoke gender

norms going dangerously awry, thereby challenging colonial authority and demanding collective defiance and communal consolidation against the threat of emasculation, penetration, and dissolution posed by political domination and cultural assimilation. With Gaelic defeat and subordination in the early seventeenth century, bardic poets' nonprofessional and increasingly demotic successors reworked endangered masculinity to confront ongoing colonial cultural change while demonstrating the persistent siren call of English goods and culture. Drawing on feminist, postcolonial and gender theory, Sarah McKibben argues for the ideological, representational and linguistic complexity of early modern Irish poetry as at once contesting and engaging the colonial authority it faced. "Endangered Masculinities in Irish Poetry" analyses the emergence and transformation of endangered masculinity through a sequence of close readings of compelling poetic texts in genres including bardic elegy and satire, aisling (or vision poem),

accentual verse, song, oral lament and comic verse, with accompanying translations, to provide a novel literary-critical exposition of a vibrant and understudied poetic tradition.

Reviews:

'This is an examination of the native Irish poetic tradition's response to the increasingly aggressive English colonialism from the 16th to the 18th centuries. There are two phases in this response: the first dominated by the hereditary, professional bards intent on defending Gaelic culture, and the second of their non-professional, non-bardic successors who continued to resist English domination. Using modern feminist, post-colonial and even queer theory, McKibben argues for a sophisticated and nuanced reading of this poetry which evoked images of emasculation, penetration and dissolution to challenge colonial conquest and domination, portraying the threatened Gaelic civilisation in terms of Irish masculinity under threat.'

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'McKibben derives her scholarly and often elegant approach to our early modern Gaelic poetry from academic gender studies. ... Many aislings and political poems such as Aodhagan O Rathaille's were popular in their day, and it's hard to see how they couldn't still be, if the poems are allowed to speak for themselves, with translations and McKibben's succinct historical context. ... As a general rather than an academic reader, I found chapter 4, which interprets Caoineadh Art O Laoghaire a pleasure to read ... having so enjoyed this chapter, I returned to McKibben's interpretation of O Rahaille's Gile ne Gile with its text and Seamus Heaney's slightly loose but poetically true translation.'

Caitriona MacKernan Books Ireland March 2011