個別論文

Sacral kingship and feminine fecundity: Allegorical images of Ireland in Irish-Gaelic aisling poetry

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概要

アシュリン（aisling: アイルランド語で夢の詩 , vision poem）は 17 ～ 18 世紀のアイルランド・ゲール語の詩の一種である。暗号化された内容が特徴的で、スチュアート朝の王たちの復活に関連していることが多い。政治的宗教的抑圧期を通して、アイルランドの原型的イメージ（アーキタイプ）を利用することで、政治上の自由を奪われた悲しみとイギリスの支配に対する政治的抵抗の両方が伝えられる。しかし、アシュリング詩人によって使用されるイメージ像の発端はもっと以前の文学や文化的伝統に遡る。そして、それは 21 世紀のアイルランド文化に現在でも反映されている。本稿では、アイルランドのアシュリング詩歌に登場する諷喩メージの神話的歴史的根源をまず検証し、これらのイメージがアシュリン詩人によってどのように活用されているかを説明し、アシュリンにおけるアイルランドのアーキタイプが現在のアイルランド文化にどのような影響を与えているかを考察する。

Keywords : allegory, archetypes, early modern poetry, Irish-Gaelic, Irish mythology

1. Introduction

In 2016, an 18th century Irish poem suddenly became a viral hit on YouTube. In the poem “Mó ghile mear,” sung by the University College Dublin choir, a young maiden laments the loss of her darling, whose departure overseas has not only left her sleepless and poor, but has also left silent the very landscape around her（Mac Domhnaill, “Mo Ghille Mear（My Gallant Hero）”）. This type of allegorical poem, called *aisling*, rose to prominence in Ireland during the 17th and 18th centuries and was primarily composed in Irish（also called Irish Gaelic）by *filidh*, or Irish Gael bards. Using the otherworldly figure of a *sídh-bhean*（“fairy woman”）or *spéar-bhean*（“sky woman”）as allegory for Ireland, the aisling typically laments the loss of the old Gaelic order that started with the Henry VIII’s imposition of the Church of England in the late 16th century, was hastened by the disastrous Battle of Kinsale（1601）, and culminated in the permanent exile of Hugh O’Neill in the Flight of the Earls（1607）. The misfortunes and catastrophes which befell the Irish during the

Cromwellian invasion and the Williamite wars in the mid- and late-1600s eventually led to expression of unfulfilled hope in the aislings of the 18th century.

However, the use of the female image as a metaphor for Ireland is not confined to the aisling. From early Old Irish literature of the 8th century up to the modern era, depictions of Ireland as a woman are extent. Evidence from archaeological and historical records indicate that, far from merely a literary device or conceit, this depiction is rooted in pre-Christian mythology and beliefs of sacral kingship, that is, the symbolic marriage of the king and the land. The image of Ireland as a chaste maiden, fertile mother, and barren crone in representative poetry of the 17th and 18th centuries thus reflects an ancient Irish tradition, as seen through contemporary political situations by the poets.

This paper examines the extent to which Irish poets of the early modern era used the concept of sacral kingship to portray Ireland. First, I will examine the mythological background of the imagery of the "Queen" figure（Bălinişteanu 8）and how it came to be imported into Irish poetry. Then I will briefly examine the "early aisling" of the early 17th century, as the *filidh* begin to use ancient symbolism to address contemporary politics. Following that, imagery of "true aisling" of the later 17th and early 18th centuries will be examined in detail. Finally, I will touch upon modern criticism of aisling and the "Ireland as woman" metaphor resulting from its use to promote 20th century Irish nationalism. [1)]

2. From myth to literary representation

The tradition of depicting Ireland as a woman and the ritualistic marrying of a ruler to the land, the sacral kingship, dates from 8th century Old Irish literature（Williams 23）. Prior to the coming of Christianity to Ireland, there were many pagan deities who represented the "Mother Goddess," each representing a specific locale or region of Ireland. By the end of the medieval period, many pre-Christian Irish deities became figures of the *sídh*, supernatural beings associated with the Celtic underworld, or poetical representations of Ireland, or both. [2)]

Three Irish deities are important for the purposes of this essay: the sun-goddesses Ériu, Banbha, and Fódla. Reference in ancient Irish legends to the land of Ireland as "Hibernia," the Latin word based on Ptolemy's "Ieqvou," or Ierne, which itself stems from the hypothetical *Ivernos, the name of a pre-Goedelic sun-goddess, seems to indicate that the name Ériu was adopted by the Irish from the Greeks（O'Rahilly 23）. A related name Iriu, a Brythonic, pre-Irish word which later became their word for "land," became combined with Ériu and together represented the land of Ireland itself（11）.

The original function of Ériu as the goddess of rivers and streams appears in medieval Irish tales as the queen who hands a golden cup of liquor to the new king. This image of sovereignty which the land bestows upon the king links many major female figures in Irish lore to the same archetypal function of the Earth Mother: Medb or Maeve, "she who intoxicates," comes from the

name of the cup-bearer at the king's feast, and Aoife, the wife of Cú Chulainn, is linguistically related to Aoibheall or Aoibhill, a sun-goddess later represented as a *sídh-bhean* in County Kerry. This mythological representation of Ireland as woman is also part of the sacral feast of the *banais rígi*, or "wedding feast of kingship,"（O'Rahilly 17）which symbolized the union of the king and the land.

An example of this mythological pattern in medieval Irish literature is a tale sung by the Ulster poet Eochaidh Ó hEodhasa at the inauguration of Hugh Maguire to the Irish chieftainship in 1589. The tale, based on a longer medieval tale of Niall Naoighiallach, "Niall of the Nine Hostages," contains an extended allegory concerning the sacral kingship.

In the original 11th century story, Niall goes to a well with a golden cup to retrieve water for his older brother Brian, both sons of Eochaidh Muighmheadhóin, High King of Ireland. As he approaches the well, Niall meets a hag who refuses to give him water. While other medieval tales depict Ireland as needing only a kiss from a "Prince Charming" type figure, in this tale Niall must additionally promise to marry the hag. On the way back to Brian on horseback, the hag transforms into a "yellow-haired virgin. Sun and wind would take fire from her unruffled queenly countenance; white was her form as ever the fresh snow of a single night"（Breatnach 331）. Niall then asks her "who art thou, thou maid of many shapes," and she responds that she is Ireland（literally, "I am Sovereignty"）. She goes on to explain that the well represents the "Isle of Fódla of the bright streams" which Niall, by his promise to marry her, has won as bride for himself and all his descendants.

The version of this tale sung in 1589 by Ó hEodhasa, however, also takes into account the contemporary political realities of a 16th century Ireland invaded by English forces:

> The tearful young woman [in Ó hEodhasa's poem] is Ireland...the knight-errant figures Fermanagh's chief; the malignant downfall that disfigured her [i.e., turned her into a hag] is the foreign horde; and the salutary bath that restores her charms means English blood that must be spilt.（Breatnach 327）

From this Irish tale and others of the time period Breatnach deduced a basic structure of rightful kingship during the medieval period which Irish poets and storytellers continued to draw upon throughout 17th and 18th centuries. [3] Because the land was related to the figures of various female goddesses, agricultural and material prosperity became associated with the sexual status of the goddess Ériu（later Éire）as she either supported or rejected the validity of the kingship. Thus, if the king did not symbolically wed the land, or if he was unjust or was not a rightful king, the land's fertility would suffer; the land would remain a chaste maiden, incapable of nurturing her people. As O'Brien states:

> No king could come rightfully to power without going through a form of symbolic marriage

> with the sovereignty — accompanied by sacrifice and divination — and this remained the case until as late as Elizabethan times. Without these rites the King's reign was impious; the crops would rot in the ground and the cattle would die.（27-28）

However, if the king were unrighteous and the land continued to be prosperous, the reverse must be true as well; in other words, if crops did not die and yet the ruler was not proper, the land itself had turned against its people. Thus, as the old Gaelic order crumbles from English invasion, Irish Gael *filidh* depict the withholding of nurturing from native Irish as the result of the Ireland's transformation from fertile motherhood to non-nurturing state, as either a violated chaste maiden or an unnatural mother. The first image is that of an innocent victim whose violation at the hands of unjust usurpers prevents her from wedding the true king and bringing prosperity to her children; the second a wicked or chthonic mother-figure who cannot nurture her children, yet nurtures the children of other goddesses. Sometimes the poets reveal their ambivalence; some depict Ireland as cooperating with the invaders and therefore nurturing the wrong children, while others say she has been sexually violated because her children have not protected her. Still others utilize both images simultaneously, perhaps reflecting a cyclical waxing and waning of the poets' personal fortunes and hopes. These images of Ireland in poems of the first half of the 17th century slowly increased in intensity as it became apparent to the poets that the world they once knew would not return.

3. Banbha and Fódla in early to mid-17th century Irish poems

Pre-aisling Irish poetry of the early to mid-1600s reflected the turbulent times. After the Flight of the Earls in 1607, Irish Catholic gentry had hope in the proposed religious tolerance by King Charles I, but his quarrels with the English Parliament and the subsequent English Civil War that followed sent the entire region into chaos. By 1650, Cromwell's invading army had terrorized and destroyed much of Ireland, with atrocities committed by both Catholic and Protestant forces. Representative Irish poetry of the early 1600s includes "Óm sceol ar ardmhagh Fáil"（"At the news from Fál's high plain"）by Seathrún Céitinn, "Mo thruaighe mar táid Gaoidhil!"（"It kills me to see the state of the Irish!"）by Fear Flátha Ó Gnímh, and "A Bhanba, is truagh do chor!"（"O Ireland, your plight is a sad one!"）by Eoghan Ó Dubhthaigh.

In Céitinn's "Óm sceol ar ardmhagh Fáil"（"At the news from Fál's high plain"）, Ireland is referred to by the mythological name Fódla, an image of motherhood which the poet says Ireland has perverted. Ireland, instead of nourishing its own children, feeds the "litter of every alien sow." The invocation of "sow" adds to the intensity of this image, as the sacred swine or boar in Celtic tradition figures prominently in early medieval Irish and Welsh epics. In Ó Gnímh's "Mo thruaighe mar táid Gaoidhil!"（"It kills me to see the state of the Irish!"）, the figure of Banbha is used to describe Ireland and the Gaels as "mutual strangers," as neither recognizes the other due to the transformation of "noble Ireland" into "another England"（sz. 10）. In both poems, Ireland has

“allowed the wave” of foreign invaders “to go through her,” a powerful image of sexual violation; yet by the word “allowed,” the poets imply that this is not a violation, but a surrender and a rejection of the right of the Irish claim to sovereignty. Like Ó Gnímh’s poem, Ó Dubhthaigh’s “A Bhanba, is truagh do chor!”（“O Ireland, your plight is a sad one!”）also begs Ireland, “Do not become a new England!”（sz. 3）The poet implores Banbha to awake and protect her fame and reputation, calling her “O famous mother of kings”（sz. 4）, a reference to Banbha’s mythological role as king-maker and guardian of sovereignty. Thus in Irish poetry of the early 1600s, the names Banbha, Fódla and Ériu/Éire have become synonymous for Ireland as a whole. The fact that these individual appellations no longer refer to goddesses or *sídh-bhean* of specific regions of the island indicates a growing sense of Irish national pride as a political as well as cultural entity.

By the mid-1650s, the imagery of Ireland as woman has become more harsh and condemning. The image of the chthonic Earth Mother is strongest in the poems of the prolific poet Dáibhí Ó Bruadair. For example, in “Créacht do dháil mé im árthach galair”（“A wound has poured me a bowl of sickness”）, he depicts Ireland not only as a perverse mother but faithless lover as well. After roundly condemning Ireland for rejecting the Gaels and all their descendants, the poet characterizes her as a “cunning mother/tricky and vexing, perverse and stubborn,” who seems determined to deny the Gaels what Ó Bruadair believes is their right. She has “forsaken her race” by ignoring the marital bond she promised her “Gaelic king.” In strongly damning language, Ó Bruadair describes Ireland’s unbecoming conduct as that of an adulterous wife, employing jarring language which strikes modern readers as extremely sexist.

Unlike poets earlier in the century, Ó Bruadair does not mention Éire by name at any point in the poem, although the mother figure obviously represents Ireland. Near the end of the poem, Ó Bruadair mocks the names of the English plantation settlers and then invokes the names of legendary female personages from Irish lore such as Déirdre and Aoibheall, as well as the “elegant ladies of [Tuatha] Dé Danann”（sz. 20）, creating an extreme contrast to the image of Ireland as an unjust mother. The invocation of Aoibheall in particular is appropriate, considering that in the aislings of Aodhgán Ó Rathaille in the following century the name will be applied to an Ireland awaiting her true husband.

The 17th century poetic image of the faithless lover, an aspect of the unnatural mother image or the chaste maiden who shirks her duty, is also represented in a small section of the anonymous poem “Do chuala scéal do chéas gach ló mé”（“I heard the news which pierced me daily”）. The majority of this poem concerns itself with the lost golden age and with apocalyptic images from the traumatizing Cromwellian invasion, but lines 61 to 64 seem to place a share of the blame on Ireland. The images of earlier poets, who dwelt at length upon Fódla’s short comings, has been condensed in this poem to just four lines, which combine both perverse mother and faithless wife images with the invocation of three ancestor figures:

It scalds my heart and breaks it, by God,

to see the wife of Criomhthann, Conn, and Eóghan,
sharing her bed with foreign men,
with no mention of her rightful children.

The explicit reference to the legendary founders of Munster, Connacht and Ulster, rather than a vague "high king," again seems to point to a growing sense of Irish national identity, setting the stage for the effectiveness of the aisling.

4. Early aisling: Aogán Ó Rathaille

Expanding upon the earlier images of Ireland as mother and maiden, the new genre of the aisling from about 1690 to 1770 focused on Ériu's status as abandoned, lovelorn maiden, sometimes chaste, sometimes brutally violated. Given the association of Irish goddesses both with Ireland and the *sídh*, it seems only natural that the two should become essentially the same figure for Irish *filidh*. This connection between *sídh*-lore and allegory has particular value concerning the aisling of Aogán Ó Rathaille, who is generally given credit for inventing the genre (Ó Tuama 60).[4] In the aislings of Ó Rathaille, in which the name Aoibheall has particular importance, the nature of the woman as a *síbh-bhean* serves to further strengthen her allegorical stature as Ireland.

Ó Rathaille's "An aisling" ("The vision"), written between 1709 and 1715 as rumors of a Jacobite invasion led by the Stuart Pretender spread, gives its name to the new genre. In it, the poet dreams that he is whisked away to the Otherworld, where he meets a "flock of joyous girls" (line 3) of the *sídh* who light three candles above the harbors, each candle representing one of the three kingdoms of Ireland, Scotland, and England. The poet questions them about their task, but not their identity; the "lady Aoibhill, of aspect bright" (line 13) is their leader, and she delivers the message of hope to the poet. Although Aoibhill makes no claim to being a bride-in-waiting for the return of the king, her name identifies her with Aoibheall, a *sídh-bhean* of County Clare and a sun goddess of Munster lore. Thus, Aoibheall is another originally tribal version of Ériu and therefore Ireland (O'Rahilly 3). This mythological representation also explains the persist symbolism in Ó Raithaille's poetry of King James and his descendants in exile as the sun which banishes all fogs of grief ("Metamorphosis 1603," sz. 13).

One poetic element that sets the aisling apart from its 17th century predecessors is the detailed description of the woman's face. The images of the rose and the lily contesting for supremacy in her beauty is thought to stem from Jacobite poetry (Murphy 45).[5] Yet the color coding already exists in Irish tradition: for example, in the tale of Niall Naoighiallach and the hag queen by the well, after the woman metamorphoses into a beautiful maiden, the images of "sun and wind" taking "fire from her unruffled countenance" and her appearance described as white "as ever the fresh snow" clearly contrast red and white. The representation of these colors by the specific words rose and lily may have come from Jacobite coded language, but the images themselves are prevalent

even in the Ulster Cycle, which was first written down in the 12th century but stems from oral traditions of the 8th to 11th centuries. [6]

Perhaps the most important aspect of the French influence on the aisling is the specific use of allegory. Aisling poets avoid directly stating the woman's name; through cultural and mythologies references, the reader or listener is invited to identify her with Ireland, a coding device which allows the poet to protect himself in politically oppressive times. Ó Rathaille even says in "Gile na ghile"（"Brightness most bright"）there are "tidings I keep from my poem for sheer fear"（line 12）. In that particular aisling, the poet uses the image of a maiden whose flushed cheeks contrast with pale skin and yellow hair to prove she comes from "a higher world"（line 8）. The woman, who remains nameless but obviously represents Ireland, gives the poet a message, "tidings of one returning by royal right"（line 10）, and then vanishes at the invocation of Christ's name to the *sídhe* of Luachair. There, the poet remonstrates her for consorting with "that drawn gaunt creature"（line 25）instead of a "man most fine, thrice over, of Scottish blood...waiting to take her for his tender bride"（lines 27-8）. The woman commences to weep in shame and sends the poet on his way.

Though some of the elements of later aisling are not present in "Gile na ghile," namely the questioning of the woman's identity, the description of the woman's nature and avoidance of specific naming sets the genre standard. The woman's supernatural origin and beauty connects her with the ancient goddesses, and her stature as promised bride to the rightful king gives her the aspect of the goddess Ériu, manifestation of the fertility of the land itself. Ó Rathaille also clearly explicates in the final stanza（termed "An Ceangal," "the Knot"）of the aisling the dire consequences of the land not in symbolic union with the rightful king. As in the earlier medieval tales of *banais rígi*, the poem reflects Irish beliefs in sacral kingship:

> Pain, disaster, downfall, sorrow and loss!
> Our mild, bright, delicate, loving, fresh-lipped girl
> with one of that black, horned, foreign, hate-crested crew
> and no remedy near till our lions come over the sea.（lines 33-36）

Ó Rathaille's final aisling, "Mac an cheannaí"（"The merchant's son"）depicts a wholly unique version of Ireland as woman. A departure from a typical figure of either the faithless spouse, the perverse mother, or the old hag, the maiden of "Mac an cheannaí" remains ever faithful to her merchant's son, a savior who never appears. The poet describes the woman as passive, gentle, meek, sweet, weak, and sad, a chaste maiden who will remain "barren" and unable to fulfill the role of Banbha, mother of the Irish. The "gentle maid" is identified as Ireland early in the poem（"darbh ainm Éire," line 3）who once was "Wife of Brian who ruled the Fianna," but has reverted to the status of chaste maiden since her rightful ruler and husband is dead and gone. Yet the maiden cannot remain young for long; the poet warns that this pleasant king's woman will become an old crone（literally, a "dried twig," "beidh sí 'na spreas, an rí-bhean deas," line 15）, because she will not

sleep with any man other than the true king（“go mbeadh sí ‘na spreas gan luí le fear”）.

Éire does not have to wait long for her spouse in this poem: it is the poet who brings news of the king, and after he quietly tells the woman that her king is dead, Ireland shrieks in anguish and dismay, “And her soul departed in one leap”（line 63）. The final stanza ends not only with Ireland barren and fruitless, but also completely devoid of any hope whatsoever. And yet the choice of the poet to set his verse to popular song rhythms of the time（Ó Tuama 155）set the tone for the later aisling poets Seán Clárach Mac Dónaill and Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin.

5. Banbha in the song-aislings of Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin

Throughout the 18th century, Irish poets wavered between condemnation and sympathy, influenced by resurgent hopes of renewed political ascendency connected with the fortunes of the Old Pretender, James III, and the Young Pretender, Prince Bonnie Charlie, heirs to the Stuart dynasty in exile. The most well-known of these poets is Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin, who deliberately wrote his aislings in the form of songs for popular consumption.

By the time Ó Súilleabháin was writing aislings, the Jacobite era had all but ended: the poet himself wasn’t born until 1748, a full three years after the defeat of Bonnie Prince Charlie at Culloden, and he likely did not elicit public acclaim until the 1760s, at the earliest. However, the hope remained that the Stuart court in Paris（which continued to appoint Catholic bishops in Ireland until James III’s death in Rome on January 1, 1766）would at some point return. The aisling by that point had already reached substantial popularity, attested by the popular songs such as Mac Dómhnaill’s “Mó ghile mear”（see **“6. The legacy of the aisling in popular Irish culture”**）. After the deaths of some 400,000 in the Famine of 1739-1741, the ill-fated Jacobite rebellions of 1715, 1745, and 1798, and the Act of Union in 1801, it became increasingly apparent that the Gaelic order was not coming back. And yet the unfulfilled hope still remained, represented by the song aisling.

The aislings of Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin enhance the image of Ó Rathaille’s “Ireland as woman” allegory by emphasizing her physical features. Ó Rathaille is primarily concerned with the political message the woman brings and only describes her face to give her a supernatural, mythological appearance; Ó Súilleabháin presents a clearer image of the allegorical figure as a physical woman instead of merely an abstract representation of Ireland. In two poems, the poet describes the allegorical *sídh-bhean*’s hair in particularly luxurious language:

Ba trinseach tiubh buí-chasta ar Órdhath	In thick bright-plaited tresses of gold
a dlaoi-fholt go bróig leis an mbé...	The lady’s hair flowed to her shoe...
	（“Ceo draíochta,” “The magic mist,” lines 17-18）
...a céibhe ar fad ‘na mbúclaíbh	Her hair was held in buckles
ag tabhairt síos ar scéimh an óir	And fell with a golden gleam,

go craobhach casta ciumhaisbhuí　　Branching, curling, yellow-edged
'na bhfonsaíbh go béal a bróg...　　In tresses to her feet...
（"Im aonar seal ag siúl bhíos," "In solitude I walked a while," lines 5-8）

Ó Súilleabháin's Ireland is "a girl who travels the lands"（"Im aonar seal ag siúl bhíos" line 21）, an image which connects her even more strongly with Aoibheall and Ériu, who, as sun goddesses, wandered through the sky each day from east to west. In both "Ceo draíochta" and "Im aonar seal ag siúl bhíos," the poet asks the woman three times if she is a famous woman such as Helen of Troy, Déirdre, or, tongue firmly in cheek, a *spéir-bhean* of the type who appear in aisling poems. In "Ceo Draíochta," the woman replies that she was recently married "For a while to the justly crowned king/Who ruled Caiseal of Conn and of Eoghan,/Whose pre-eminence was questioned by none"（lines 45-8）, but has not consummated the symbolic union because the king is overseas. Again, she clearly identifies herself with Aoibheall and, by extension, with Ireland.

However, when the poet questions her in "Im aonar seal ag siúl bhíos" the woman says that he asks "in vain" because she is "none of those sorts"（line 20）. Her identity remains a mystery, though from her references to "her lion" one can infer that she is again Ireland. The woman in the "Ceo draíochta" lays on the side of a hill with the poet, who describes her in intimately physical, erotic language:

's ba mhín cailce a ci' cruinne a gcóir chirt　　Breasts rounded, chalk-white and shapely,
dar linne nár leonadh le haon.　　Never sullied by another, I'd vouch.
（lines 22-24）

But the unnamed woman of the "Im aonar seal ag siúl bhíos" says she is

's mo chréachta ar leathadh ag búraibh　　Wounded by the foreigner's blows
'om shú bhíd 'na slaoda 'om dheol.　　Dry-suckled by the mob.（lines 23-24）

In both poems, the woman is a chaste maiden who waits for her kingly husband; and in each, the poet holds out a tentative, vague hope, that "there will come another day"（line 29）for the rightful king to return.

Finally, in the aisling "An spealadóir"（"The mower"）Ó Súilleabháin dreams of a beautiful queen whose description and consort give her a more Venus-like appearance. Though the poet refers to Classical mythology, the woman figure still primarily represents the fecundity of the land. The function of the male god Cupid, generally represented in Roman mythology as Venus's son, to inflict the arrows of love upon unsuspecting humanity is dramatically rendered:

Upon her snood blithe Cupid stood, his quiver full of darts,

As poets tell, with intent fell to penetrate the hearts
Of all who, greatly venturesome,
To greet this lovely maid might come,
Whence heroes bold were stricken dumb,
To death were resigned.（sz. 3）

Where Cupid's arrows formerly caused the heroes of Ireland to become speechless at the sight of the goddess, now the venturesome resign themselves to die just to see her. Yet clearly the woman represents Ireland not as lover but the chaste maiden, a status the translator exemplifies with the word "snood," a headband worn by unmarried women in Scotland and northern England. Again, the woman is questioned as to her identity, but she is not Helen, or Déirdre, as usual; in this poem, Ó Súilleabháin explicitly states she is "the rightful Queen,/The spouse of Charles," the Stuart messiah who remains in exile "o'er sea"（sz. 6）, and for whom she waits patiently still.

Like the maid of "Ceo draíochta," whose voice dropped notes "Deliciously sweet and melodic/ As a *sí*-harp"（lines 21-22）, the spouse of Charles in "An spealadóir" reminds the poet of the music of the past. Her sweet voice adds to the typically erotic description by Ó Súilleabháin:

Her glossy tresses, flowing free
Like spume upon a troubled sea
Came tumbling downward to her knee,
And streamed in the wind.
.....
Her gentle voice was soft and low,
Like harmonies of long ago
On harp or magic viol, though
'Tis wildly I speak:
Her skin the lily put to shame,
Her posture that of swan on stream,
Her chiseled brows a classic frame
For roses in cheek:
Her shapely breast still unconfessed to lovers who deceive（sz. 3 and 4）

Here the poet does use the words rose and lily, as well as swan, to describe the conflicting images of beauty in the allegorical woman. The "shapely breast" image repeats from the "Breasts rounded, chalk-white and shapely" of "Ceo draíochta," and she too remains "still unconfessed." However, in "An spealadóir," the poet gives Ireland a handicraft: "Her fingers deft at warp and weft a tapestry would weave," perhaps a comparison to the tapestry which the poet weaves with his words. Ireland's qualities as a loom-weaver could also represent the goddess's invocation as a Celtic

Venus-figure.

The most interesting aspect of this poem occurs in the aisling-woman's typical message of hope. As usual, she predicts that the prophecies of old will come true and the messiah will return from overseas; curiously, "Charles" will not drive the invaders out from all of Ireland, but just from the tribal lands of Aoibheall（sz. 7）. Whereas previous aislings seemed to concern a rescue of all of Ireland, this "rightful Queen" appeared only concerned with Munster. This seems to contradict earlier images of the various goddesses of the Gaels combining into one earth mother figure. The kingly spouse of "An spealadóir" does not representÉriu as a nation, reflecting the poet's regionalism rather than any growing sense of Irish nationalism. However, despite individual poet's interpretations of the allegory, the fundamental aspect stays true in all versions: Ireland as woman, whom a Stuart king should marry for the king to be a rightful ruler, the land fertile, and the native people prosperous.

6. The legacy of the aisling in Irish popular culture

"Ireland as woman" remained an influential image through the late 19th and early 20th centuries and found particular expression during the Irish Literary Revival movement, which indirectly led to the Easter Rising of 1916 and Irish Free State in 1922. A typical example of the image in this time period occurs in the nationalist drama *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*:

> *Peter* [to Patrick, laying a hand on his arm]. Did you see an old woman going down the path?
> *Patrick*. I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen.（Yeats 57）

Even after Ireland became an independent state and suffered through a brutal civil war, the 1937 Constitution of Ireland was fairly imbued with the image of "Ireland as woman." In contrast to pre-Irish independence discourse in which Ireland was depicted as a helpless maiden or a seductress/destroyer, Ireland was represented throughout the 1937 Constitution as either an unwed virgin or a mother（Collins and Hanafin 55）. The language in the constitution could be seen as deliberate design that promoted the image of a romanticized Gaelic Ireland that was rural and Catholic; or, it could be seen as a continuation of a long tradition in Irish literature that began centuries ago. Either way, the legal framework of the early 20th century Ireland was heavily influenced by the nationalistic, patriarchal concept of motherhood（Hanafin 249）.

In popular culture of the late 20th century and early 21st century the "Ireland as woman" metaphor remains influential. Seán Clárach Mac Domhnaill's 18th century Jacobite song "Mó ghile mear" may have become a YouTube hit only recently（incorrectly labeled as "Mo Ghille Mear" online）, but the song itself has been recorded multiple times since the early 1980s. Although the lyrics are told from the point of view of a woman lamenting the loss of her beloved, the song has recently come to be sung by both men and women, with perhaps the most famous rendition

translated（very）loosely into an English pop song by the Chieftains and Sting in 1995. The folk song in various versions remains very popular throughout Ireland, Scotland, Nova Scotia, and other regions with a strong Celtic cultural connection.

The version by the UCD Choir in Irish Gaelic is *a cappella*, accompanied only by the *bódhran*, a traditional handheld Irish drum, and features a male lead singer. However, the text used by the UCD Choir（supplied in the notes to their YouTube video）is a bit corrupted from the original, which was used by singer Mary Black in 1984:

Seal dá rabhas im' mhaighdean shéimh,	Once I was a gentle maiden,
'S anois im' bhaintreach chaite thréith,	But now I'm a spent, worn-out widow,
Mo chéile ag treabhadh na dtonn go tréan	My consort strongly plowing the waves,
De bharr na gcnoc is in imigéin.	Over the hills and far away.
Curfá	*Chorus*
Sé mo laoch mo Ghile Mear	He's my hero, my Gallant Darling
'Sé mo Shaesar, Ghile Mear,	He's my Caesar, a Gallant Darling,
Suan ná séan ní bhruaireas féin	I've found neither rest nor fortune
Ó chuaigh igcéin mo Ghile Mear	Since my Gallant Darling went far away.

Thanks to the different song versions, the English lyrics and the song title itself have varying translations. "My gallant darling" is the most common, but "My dashing darling," "My gallant hero," "My hero," "My bright hero," "Our hero," and, most tellingly, "My land" have been used. In all versions, however, the central image of the political aisling turned folk song remains: an ancient image, a metaphor of the land pining for a just ruler, a melancholic keen for what never truly could have been.

7. Conclusion

The maiden-mother-crone allegorical representation of Ireland awaiting her true kingly husband, developed from the early 1600s and popularized in the political aislings of the 1700s, has remained influential in 21st century Irish popular culture. Stemming from Old Irish mythological tales of sacred kingship and fertility rites, the depiction of the land as an otherworldly fairy or sky-woman awaiting the true ruler inspires artists, poets, songwriters, and politicians alike in an ever-changing, increasingly globally-connected Ireland.

Notes

1）As noted by Orwell（1945）, "Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism"（"Notes on Nationalism"）. Orwell further notes in the same essay, "Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily

and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power" not for oneself but for the nation or group to which the individual belongs. While Orwell lists "Celtic nationalism" as a "positive nationalism" in his famous essay, the term "nationalism" generally has a negative connotation and often implies a sense of fanatical devotion. Both historically and scholarly, the term "nationalism" rather than "patriotism" is used to describe the political and militaristic movement for an independent Irish state.

2）The terms *sí*, *síd*, *síde*, *sídh*, and *síodh* are used by various authors. Technically, "sídhe" denotes the mound where fairies live; however, in keeping with modern custom, This paper prefers to use *sídh*, generally pronounced [shee] by modern Irish speakers, to indicate "fairy people." The term *sídh-bhean* refers specifically to a *sídh* woman.

3）The seven stages Breatnach（334）identifies are: 1. hero victorious in a hunt, 2. animal is cooked and eaten, 3. the search for water with the royal cup, 4. the encounter with the *puella senilis*, 5. "coition" or "osculation," 6. Crone's metamorphosis into maiden, 7. bestowal or promise of sovereignty.

4）In Gerard Murphy's opinion, the first real aisling poet was Eoghan Ruadh Ó Súilleabháin.

5）Murphy claims that, despite the traditions of fairy-love aisling and prophecy-aisling poetry in Ireland, the true allegorical-political aisling evolved primarily from non-native origins. The allegorical nature of the woman figure in the aisling, "though undoubtedly heralded and influenced by the older native types"（Murphy 44）, stems from French political poetry of the 16th and 17th centuries, perhaps introduced by the Franciscan Irish poets in exile in Louvain, Belgium. However, this contention ignores the early medieval Irish tradition of using Irish mythology to symbolize the land and its union with the rightful ruler. While the specific use of allegory may have been influenced by French poetry, the metaphor of Ireland as woman is a much older tradition.

6）In Jacobitism, the white rose represented the Stuart kings over the sea.

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