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Michael Longley's *The Ghost Orchid*

Through my reading of Longley's poetry and the other readings of this class so far, I have noticed that modern Irish writers are tied to the land. In Dr. John Burrison's Irish folklore class, he had mentioned that the people of Ireland have strong ties to the land and the land is a goddess for the pagan Irish. From the twentieth century readings that we have gone through so far, I am starting seeing the ties that contemporary Irish writers have with the land. Maybe not in the sense of being tied to worshipping the goddess Danu; however, the imagery painted in Longley's poems and short story are dripping with temporal diction. The short story Baucis & Philemon and the poem The Couplet, the longest and shortest entries, show Longley's love of the Irish landscape and becoming one with the land.

In the story of Baucis and Philemon, the land depicted in the story is of bogland and farming lands. The diction makes me think of cold and wet land that is contrasted with the warmth of the gathering between the couple and the gods Juniper and Mercury. The land in the story is later flooded by the gods to cleanse the land of those who slammed doors in the faces of gods, but the old-thatched-roofed house emerged from the land as stone with a roof glistened like gold (Longley 25). In opposition to the cold and wet images of the short story, the poem has warming images of fire and it depicts the land as a living person. The narrator explains that he once wrote about the flowers were slowly engulfing the ground and the body of the land that lay underneath the surface (Longley 27).

The connections to the land explain to the characters of both the short story and the poem becoming a part of the land. In the short story, Baucis and Philemon's home are built out of the land (both the home that they built and the one built for them by the gods) and they also become apart of the land once they died by morphing into intertwining trees. In the poem, the land is an allusion to a person's body, but that body is being engulfed with flowers/small flames.

The characters in both narratives become the a part of the land and I believe that this shows Longley's connection to the land through his nationality. Many of his poems related to the land and the animals of Ireland, namely the otter. I'm not sure if there is a connection to the pagan belief that the land is a goddess; however, if there are a connection and the land has been divided it is as though the goddess' head was removed when the Republic separated from Northern Ireland. Though, I'm positive, there is a separation from the pagan to Christian faith I wonder has there been a separation between the people and the land. Or, could there be a connection of people in general to the land from which we're from without a religious element?