

‘Clearances’ for Ekphrastic Poetry: Virginia Woolf’s and Seamus Heaney’s Cultural En-Gendering of Reverse Ekphrasis

Estella CIOBANU
Ovidius University of Constanța

Abstract: *This paper studies excerpts from Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse and certain early poems by Seamus Heaney as instances of what I call “reverse ekphrasis”. Heaney’s “Clearances” sonnets describe various house activities so vividly as to conjure them before the reader’s eyes like in a genre painting. So too does “Digging”, Heaney’s profession of faith. Such uncanny artistic similarity of these two manifestly different kinds of poems, examined alongside fragments of the dinner party scene in Woolf’s novel, indicates the cultural en-gendering (in Teresa de Lauretis’ terms) of artistic topoi.*

Keywords: *reverse ekphrasis; genre painting; still life; en-gendering (Teresa de Lauretis); To the Lighthouse (Virginia Woolf); “Clearances” (Seamus Heaney); “At a Potato Digging” (Seamus Heaney); “Digging” (Seamus Heaney); “The Wife’s Tale” (Seamus Heaney);*