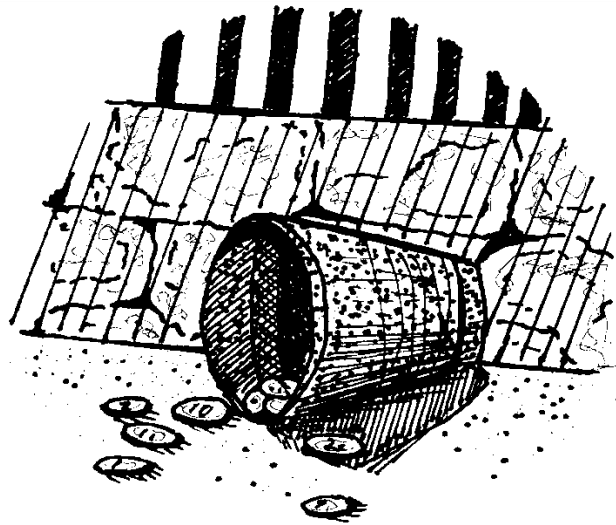


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LOUIS DE PAOR

# Fáilte Uí Dhonnchú



**Louis de Paor**  
**1961-**

*Life and Literary Status*

Louis de Paor is one of Ireland's foremost modern Irish language poets and has been involved with the contemporary Irish language poetry revival since he was initially published in the pioneering 1970s poetry journal, *Innti*, alongside other modernising writers such as Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Gabriel Rosenstock, and Liam Ó Muirthile. He was born and raised in the suburbs of Cork city, has lived in Australia for a substantial period of time, and has taught in University College Cork, Thomond College of Education (presently the University of Limerick), and in the National University of Ireland Galway, where he is currently the director of the Centre for Irish Studies. His poetry deals with a plethora of themes, including family life, love, politics, history, and memory, all of which are underwritten with intense, imaginative imagery that draws on light, darkness, and Irish folklore. To date, he has published eight collections of poetry in Irish, along with six bilingual volumes of his work. Robert Verdon has described him as '... a master of the elegy, the cold-eyed, warm-hearted poem that catches you when you least expect it.'

De Paor, more than any other poet writing in the Irish language, has used his work to question the processes of colonisation and racism perpetrated by the Irish people, which can be seen in poems such as 'An Dubh ina Gheal' and 'Didjeridu', in which he casts an unforgiving eye on the crimes committed against the native peoples of Australia by white settlers. He played a central part in the documentary, screened in 2013, *An Dubh ina Gheal*, which sought to explore and question the link between the Irish in Australia and their role in the Stolen Generations and dispossession of native Australian people.

More information can be found on Louis de Paor at [www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poet/item/7524/30/Louis-De-Paor](http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poet/item/7524/30/Louis-De-Paor)

**A note on this poem**

In the following poem, 'Fáilte Uí Dhonnchú', de Paor portrays without sentimentality the treatment of Romanian people by the Irish people and state in the 1990s, when the number of Romanians arriving into Ireland increased dramatically. The historical, religious, and cultural significance of Galway city is contrasted with the poverty of the Romanian woman, who begs outside St Nicholas's church in the marketplace. The city is alive with the sounds and smells of culture, yet the woman is alone, unwelcome and hungry. The title of the poem, 'Fáilte Uí Dhonnchú', is a play on the phrase 'Fáilte Uí Cheallaigh' (Kelly's welcome) meaning a generous welcome. 'O'Donoghue's Welcome' refers to the then Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, John O'Donoghue, who held that office from 1997 to 2002. He was accused of operating a disastrous policy on asylum seekers and refugees. The title of the poem is undoubtedly sardonic, and the supposed 'dea-mhéin' (good will) of the Irish government is shown to be meaningless; in the city of tribes, her lonely figure reminds us of our hypocrisy. Despite the easily accessible language, however, a surreal atmosphere is created through the olfactory language and descriptions of the city.

**Language and translation**

De Paor writes in the Munster dialect and this poem reflects his tendency to employ the use of long sentences, imbued with rhythm and music.

The translation provided has been taken from a bilingual collection of de Paor's, and the individual translator is not named; Bidy Jenkinson, Mary O'Donoghue, and Kevin Anderson are all credited with the translation of the entire volume. The translation is faithful to the original poem, and while it perhaps cannot capture the musicality of de Paor's words precisely, it succeeds in reflecting the meaning of the poem to an English language audience.

The poem below is taken from the bilingual *Ag Greadadh Bas sa Reilig: Clapping in the Cemetery*, which was published in 2005. This work is republished here with the kind permission of Cló Iar-Chonnacht.

## **Fáilte Uí Dhonnchú**

Ar shráideanna naofa  
Chathair na d'Treabh  
mar a bhfuair Cromail,  
de réir an tseanchais,  
lóistín dá chapall i sanctóir eaglaise,  
tá boladh spíosraí san aer  
a chuirfeadh faobhar  
ar ghoile Céile Dé.

Tá port feadóige ag séideadh  
as bolg an tseanbhaile,  
anáil na staire isteach  
tré fhallaí fuara  
dheisceart Chonamara.

I lár an aonaigh  
lena súile bó, tá bean  
ón Rómáin ina suí le geata  
meánaoiseach an tséipéil,  
cárta mór faoina muineál  
mar a bheadh peaca marfach  
á admháil aici i láthair na bhfíreán.

*Ladies and gentlemen...*  
a deir an pheannaireacht chaol,  
is ní scoithfí níos tapúla í  
dá nochtfadh sí cíoch  
nó géag theasctha.

*Ladies and gentlemen... please.*

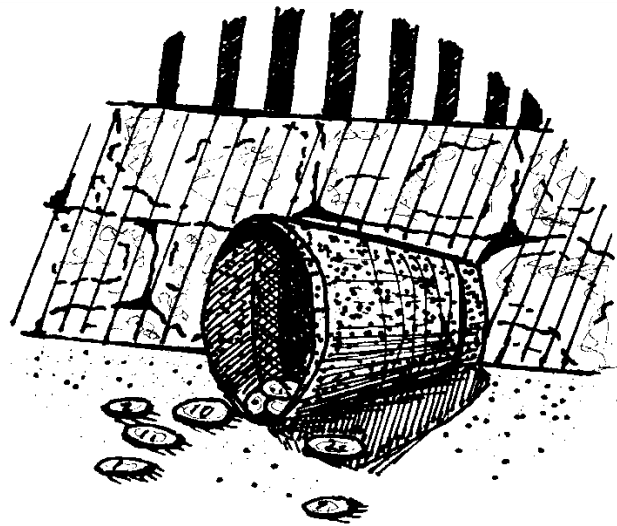
Tá an cupa *polystyrene* os a comhair  
ag cur thar maoil le dea-mhéin  
an Aire Dlí agus Cirt (sic),  
a goile ag ceol le hocras.

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LOUIS DE PAOR

# O'Donoghue's Welcome



Translated from  
**Fáilte Uí Dhonnchú**  
by Louis de Paor

## **O'Donoghue's Welcome**

On the holy streets  
of the City of the Tribes,  
where legend has it  
that Cromwell stabled his horses  
in the sanctuary of a church,  
there's a smell of spices in the air  
that would whet  
the appetite of God's wife.

A tin-whistle tune blows  
from the belly of the old town,  
the breath of history  
through the cold walls  
of South Connemara.

In the middle of the market  
with her cow-eyes,  
a Romanian woman  
sits at the gates of St Nicholas's,  
a placard around her neck  
as though she were admitting  
a mortal sin before the elders:

*Ladies and gentlemen...*  
says the scrawny handwriting  
and we wouldn't pass her  
any quicker if she exposed  
a breast or a withered limb,  
*Ladies and gentlemen... please.*

The polystyrene cup at her feet  
is filled to the brim  
with the best wishes  
of the Minister for Justice (sic)  
her stomach singing with hunger.