**O’Donoghue’s Welcome**

**translated from Fáilte Uí Dhonnchú**

**by Louis de Paor**

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.