

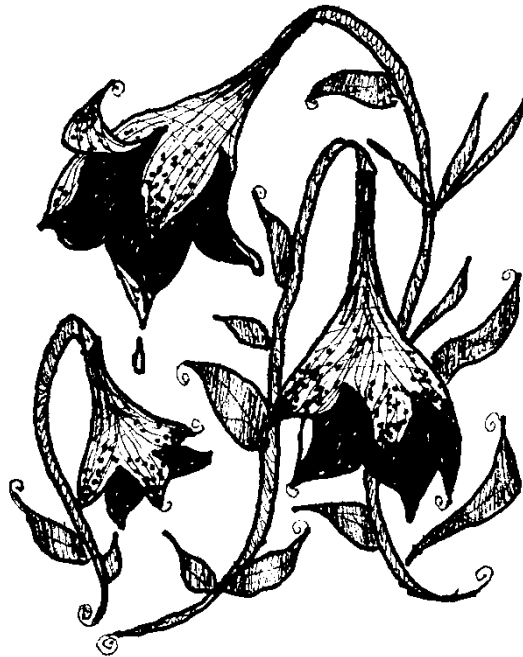
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Aistriú

PÁDRAIG Ó HÉIGEARTAIGH

Ochón!

A Dhonncha



Pádraig Ó hÉigearthaigh **1871-1936**

Life and Literary Status

Pádraig Ó hÉigearthaigh was born in 1871 in the Uíbh Ráthach Peninsula of Co. Kerry and was forced to move with his family to America at the age of 12, after they had been dispossessed of their home. Pádraig went on to work in a cotton factory in Springfield, Massachusetts, where he was to live out the rest of his life, only returning to Ireland once, in 1935. Ó hÉigearthaigh's work is a fascinating example of emigrant literature, as not only did he never return to live in Ireland, but, as an adult English speaker, he taught himself Irish while in Springfield, using the book *Poets and Poetry of Munster*.

He contributed frequently to *An Claidheamh Soluis*, the Irish nationalist and revivalist newspaper back in Dublin, taught Irish classes, worked for the local branch of Conradh na Gaeilge (an Irish language revival organisation) when it was established in 1897, and raised his family of three daughters and four sons through Irish while still in Springfield. Seán Ó Ceallaigh describes thus: 'Entering his Irish-speaking home, where I was often an honoured guest, was like stepping into a ceilidhe in Iveragh or Corcaguiny, or in Conamara, the native place of his cultured wife, Catherine A. Ward. The home language being thus a happy blend of the South and the West, it was but natural that he should attract around him the most earnest Gaels of that very Irish city...'

More information can be found on Pádraig Ó hÉigearthaigh, and his work, in Louis de Paor (ed.), *Leabhar na hÁthghabhála: Poems of Repossession* (Bloodaxe Books and Cló Iar-Chonnacht, 2016), 29-31.

For further details in Irish, see:
www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=342

A note on this poem

The poem below gives an account of Ó hÉigearthaigh's deep grief at the drowning of one of his sons, Donncha, and was published in 1906.

The anguish of the father who speaks in the poem is compounded by the fact that his beloved child will be buried abroad, and not in the father's ancestral home alongside family.

Pádraig Pearse, the eminent Irish nationalist, poet, and signatory of the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic, was the original translator of the poem when it was published in *An Claidheamh Soluis*, and stated that: 'I am more conscious in this than in the previous cases of the inadequacy of my English prose to render either the deep melody of the original or the exquisite delicacy of its phrase'. It is notable that the poem's later translator, Thomas Kinsella, whose interpretation appears here, chose, along with Seán Ó Tuama, this poem to close the seminal work *An Duanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed*: 'The poem, in its simple conventional expression of a profound grief, makes a moving end to the high literary tradition of three centuries.' That a self-taught emigrant could elevate his mastery of Irish, while in Massachusetts, to produce such a beautiful work, is undoubtedly a feat worth noting.

Language and translation

The poem draws strongly on the Gaelic oral tradition, is written in traditional song metre and shows the hallmarks of the keening poetry of loss and heartbreak. It is very formal in its layout, employing the standard vocabulary of affection, love, and devastation, and shows little deviation from the keening poetry composed in the centuries beforehand. With this the reader is reminded of the close links between Ó hÉigearthaigh's own brand of Irish, which was highly influenced by the traditional poetry of Munster.

The translator of the poem, Thomas Kinsella, faithfully represents Ó hÉigearthaigh's grief in his translation, 'My Sorrow, Donncha'. While closely following the layout of the original Irish work, he is inventive in translating some of the Irish turns of phrase, even coining the noun 'honeymouth' to reflect 'béilín meala', to remain close to the metre and form of the original.

Ochón! A Dhonncha

Ochón! A Dhonncha, mo mhíle cogarach, fen bhfód so sínte;
fód an doichill 'na luí ar do cholainn bhig, mo loma-sceimhle!
Dá mbeadh an codladh so i gCill na Dromad ort nó in uaigh san Iarthar
mo bhrón do bhogfadh, cé gur mhór mo dhochar, is ní bheinn id' dhiaidh air.

Is feoite caite 'tá na blátha scaipeadh ar do leaba chaoilse;
ba bhreá iad tamall ach thréig a dtaitneamh, níl snas ná brí iontu.
'S tá an bláth ba ghile liom dár fhás ar ithir riamh ná a fhásfaidh choíche
ag dreo sa talamh, is go deo ní thacfaidh ag cur éirí croí orm.

Och, a chumannaigh! nár mhór an scrupall é an t-uisce dod' luascadh,
gan neart id' chuisleannaibh ná éinne i ngaire duit a thabharfadh fuarthan.
Scéal níor tugadh chugham ar bhaol mo linbh ná ar dhéine a chruatain –
ó! 's go raghainn go fonnmhar ar dhoimhin-lic Ifrinn chun tú a fhuascailt.

Tá an ré go dorcha, ní fhéadaim codladh, do shéan gach só mé.
Garbh doilbh liom an Ghaeilge oscailt – is olc an comhartha é.
Fuath liom sealad i gcomhluadar carad, bíonn a ngreann dom' chiapadh.
Ón lá go bhfacasa go tláith ar an ngaineamh thú níor gheal an ghrian dom.

Och, mo mhairg! Cad a dhéanfad feasta 's an saol dom' shuathadh,
gan do láimhín chailce mar leoithne i gcrannaibh ar mo mhalainn ghruama,
do bhéilín meala mar cheol na n-aingeal go binn im' chluasaibh
á rá go cneasta liom: 'Mo ghraidhn m'athair bocht, ná bíodh buairt ort!'

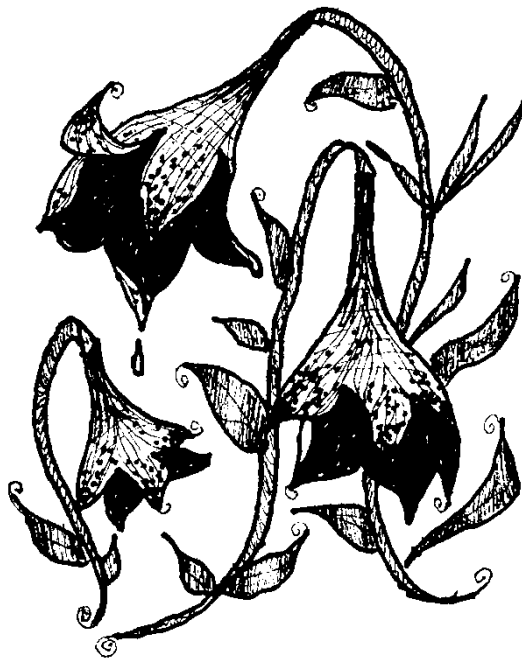
Ó mo chaithis é! is beag do cheapas-sa i dtráth mo dhóchais
ná beadh an leanbh so 'na laoch mhear chalma i lár na fóirne,
a ghníomhartha gaisce 's a smaointe meanman ar son na Fódla –
ach an Té do dhealbhaigh de chré ar an dtalamh sinn, ní mar sin a d'ordaigh.

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THOMAS KINSELLA

My Sorrow, Donncha



Translated from
Ochón! A Dhonncha
by Pádraig Ó hÉigearthaigh

My Sorrow, Donncha

My sorrow, Donncha, my thousand-cherished under this sod stretched,
this mean sod lying on your little body – my utter fright...

If this sleep were on you in Cill na Dromad or some grave in the West
it would ease my sorrow, though great the affliction and I'd not complain.

Spent and withered are the flowers scattered on your narrow bed.
They were fair a while but their brightness faded, they've no gloss or life.
And my brightest flower that in soil grew ever or will ever grow
rots in the ground, and will come no more to lift my heart.

Alas, beloved, is it not great pity how the water rocked you,
your pulses powerless and no one near you to bring relief?
No news was brought me of my child in peril or his cruel hardship
– O I'd go, and eager, to Hell's deep flag-stones if I could save you.

The moon is dark and I cannot sleep. All ease has left me.
The candid Gaelic seems harsh and gloomy – an evil omen.
I hate the time that I pass with friends, their wit torments me.
Since the day I saw you on the sands so lifeless no sun has shone.

Alas my sorrow, what can I do now? The world grinds me
– your slight white hand, like a tree-breeze, gone from my frowning brows,
and your little honeymouth, like angels' music sweet in my ears
saying to me softly: 'Dear heart, poor father, do not be troubled.'

And O, my dear one! I little thought in my time of hope
this child would never be a brave swift hero in the midst of glory
with deeds of daring and lively thoughts for the sake of Fódla
– but the one who framed us of clay on earth not so has ordered.