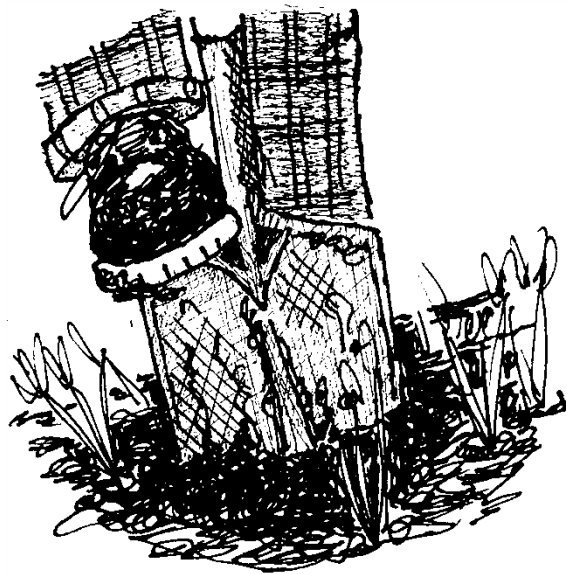


 Galway 2020  
Gaillimh European  
Capital of Culture  
CULTURAL PARTNER

Aistriú

MÁIRTÍN Ó DIREÁIN

# Rogha Dánta



## **Máirtín Ó Direáin 1910-1988**

### *Life and Literary Status*

Considered one of the triumvirate of modernising poets of the twentieth century, alongside Máire Mhac an tSaoi and Seán Ó Ríordáin, Máirtín Ó Direáin's poetry is frequently marked by a nostalgia for his home: Inis Mór of the Aran Islands, off the south coast of County Galway. Ó Direáin was an internal emigrant of sorts, leaving his cherished Irish-speaking home to work, firstly in the Post Office in Galway City, and then in Dublin where he worked an array of civil service posts until his retirement in 1978. During his lifetime, he published eight collections of poetry, drawing on the vernacular speech of his people and his own disillusionment with the 'deceitful city' in which he was forced to live and work. While his beloved island remained in his poetry throughout his life, his later works give stage to themes of corruption, emasculation and loss of morality, as his traditional beliefs were confronted with a changing world, a war and the prominent new role of women: his often conservative and traditional beliefs seemed at odds with the society around him, and his deeply held convictions of the proper place of men and women, their family roles and their various forms of labour, are often reflected in his poetry. His work, while deeply rooted in the Inis Mór of his childhood, and the Dublin of his adult working life, can also be read as a universal tale of dislocation and alienation, and as an experience of being isolated in an unfulfilling and menial working existence.

More information can be found on Máirtín Ó Direáin, and his work, in Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature: Volume II, 1890-2000* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 319-324.

See also, *The Dictionary of Irish Biography* at <https://dib.cambridge.org>

For more information in Irish, see [www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=1662](http://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=1662)

### **A note on these poems**

The poems here roughly follow this delineation between nostalgia and dislocation: 'Cuireadh do

Mhuire' ('Invitation to Mary') and 'An tEarrach Thiar' ('Spring in the West') are wonderful depictions of the life on Inis Mór which Ó Direáin has left behind. They are poems of nostalgia, homeliness and charity. In 'Stoite' ('Uprooted') and 'Deireadh Oileáin' ('Death of an Island'), however, the life of traditional crafts, hospitality and working the land have given way to the cruel and anonymous grind of city life, where people are isolated from one another, working and leading separate lives, and earning money only to be divorced from the fruits of their labour. The bittersweet memories of the poet's island life, a life of simplicity, tradition and clearly defined roles, are poised in direct contrast with the anonymity, confusion and dullness of his existence in the modern metropolis.

### **Language and translation**

Ó Direáin's lines are simple and understandable, and in the case of 'An tEarrach Thiar' ('Spring in the West'), especially, are bursting with rich onomatopoeia and imagery, highlighting the beauty of the Aran Islands. His poems are imbued with the traditional speech of the people of the Aran Islands, while adopting a formality and style that are unique to him. The poems below are written with short sentences, yet the musicality and rhythm of the language are undeniable.

'An tEarrach Thiar' and 'Cuireadh do Mhuire' are here translated by Peter Sirr, while 'Deireadh Oileáin' and 'Stoite' are translated by Frank Sewell. Both translators reconcile Ó Direáin's musical language with the English language, even though the structure is sometimes slightly altered, particularly in the case of the translation of 'Cuireadh do Mhuire' ('Invitation to Mary').

The Irish poems are taken from the collection *Máirtín Ó Direáin: Na Dánta* (2010). Translations by Peter Sirr are from *Leabhar na hAthghabhála / Poems of Repossession* (Cló Iar-Chonnacht & Bloodaxe Books, 2016). Translations by Frank Sewell are from *Máirtín Ó Direáin: Selected Poems / Rogha Dánta* (Cló Iar-Chonnacht, 2017). All poems are reprinted with the kind permission of Cló Iar-Chonnacht.

## **Cuireadh do Mhuire**

An eol duit, a Mhuire,  
Cá rachair i mbliana  
Ag iarraidh foscaidh  
Dod leanbh Naofa,  
Tráth a bhfuil gach doras  
Dúnta Ina éadan  
Ag fuath is uabhar  
An chine dhaonna?

Deonaigh glacadh  
Le cuireadh uaimse  
Go hoileán mara  
San Iarthar chianda:  
Beidh coinnle geala  
I ngach fuinneog lasta  
Is tine mhóna  
Ar theallach adhainte.

*Nollaig 1942*

## **An tEarrach Thiar**

Fear ag glanadh cré  
De ghimseán spáide  
Sa gciúnas séimh  
I mbrothall lae:  
    Binn an fhuaim  
    San Earrach thiar.

Fear ag caitheamh  
Cliabh dá dhroim,  
Is an fheamainn dhearg  
Ag lonrú  
I dtaitneamh gréine  
Ar dhuirling bhán.  
    Niamhrach an radharc  
    San Earrach thiar.

Mná i locháin  
In íochtar díthrá,  
A gcótaí craptha,  
Scáilí thíos fúthu:  
    Támhradharc síothach  
    San Earrach thiar.

Tollbhuillí fána  
Ag maidí rámha  
Currach lán éisc  
Ag teacht chun cladaigh  
Ar órmhuir mhall  
I ndeireadh lae  
    San Earrach thiar.

## **Stoite**

Ár n-aithreacha bhíodh,  
Is a n-aithreacha siúd,  
In achrann leis an saol  
Ag coraíocht leis an gcarraig loim.

Aiteas orthu bhíodh  
Tráth ab eol dóibh  
Féile chaoin na húire,  
Is díocas orthu bhíodh  
Ag baint ceart  
De neart na ndúl.

Thóg an fear seo teach  
Is an fear úd  
Claí nó fál  
A mhair ina dhiaidh  
Is a choinnigh a chuimhne buan.

Sinne a gclann,  
Is clann a gclainne,  
Dúinn is éigean  
Cónaí a dhéanamh  
In árais ó dhaoine  
A leagfadh cíos  
Ar an mbraon anuas.

Beidh cuimhne orainn go fóill:  
Beidh carnán trodán  
Faoi ualach deannaigh  
Inár ndiaidh in Oifig Stáit.

## **Deireadh Oileáin**

Trua bheith fireann ar an uaigneas  
Gan ach cian sa teach is duairceas,  
Cumas gach fir ag dul chun fuaire  
Ó ghlac an cian mar chéile suain.

Má obaid ár mná dá n-ualach,  
Má thréigid cré, cloch, gach dualgas,  
Dár dhual dá máithreacha a thuargadh,  
A ndaoradh ní ceart i mo thuairim.

Má obaid fós do smacht an ghnáis,  
Má éalaíd leo ó chogar cáich,  
A ndaoradh arís ní cóir dá bharr,  
Ní peaca bheith baineann thall.

Tá an saol céadra i ngach áit  
Ag meath go mear gach lá,  
Fir is an cian ag céadladh de ghnáth  
A thuarann go luath a bhás.

 Galway 2020  
Gaillimh European  
Capital of Culture  
CULTURAL PARTNER

Aistriú

PETER SIRR / FRANK SEWELL

# Selection of Poems



Translated from the Irish language originals  
by Máirtín Ó Direáin

**Invitation to Mary**

*Translated by Peter Sirr*

Where will you find this year, Mary,  
shelter for your holy child?

Every door is shut against him  
by human pride and human hatred.

Let me, if you'll allow, invite you instead  
to a distant island in the western sea.

Candles will shine a welcome in every window  
and a turf fire blaze in every hearth.

*Christmas 1942*



## **Spring in the West**

*Translated by Peter Sirr*

A man scraping clay  
from the tread of a spade  
in the mild calm  
of a warm day:  
    sweet the sound  
    of Spring in the west.

A man slinging  
a creel from his back,  
the red seaweed  
glittering  
in the light  
on a stone beach:  
    beautiful the sight  
    of Spring in the west.

Women standing,  
their coats tucked up,  
the ebbtide pools  
like mirrors beneath them:  
    the peaceful sight  
    of Spring in the west.

The hollow beat  
of oar strokes,  
a currach full of fish  
coming in to shore  
on a still gold sea  
at the end of the day:  
    Spring in the west.

## **Uprooted**

Translated by Frank Sewell

Our fathers  
And their fathers before them  
Grappled with life,  
Wrestling the bare rock.

Bliss was theirs  
When they encountered  
Nature's beneficence,  
And zeal was theirs  
As they withstood  
The power of the elements.

One man built a house,  
Another a boundary  
Or dry stone wall  
That outlived him  
And preserved his memory.

We, their children  
And their children's children,  
Must hole up  
In private rentals  
Where the landlord  
Would charge money  
For the damp on the walls.

We'll be remembered yet:  
A pile of papers  
Buried in dust,  
Left behind  
In a Govt. office.

## **Death of an Island**

Translated by Frank Sewell

How sad being male in the wilderness,  
With nothing but lonesomeness at home,  
Each man's vigour freezing up  
Since he took sorrow as a bedmate.

And if our women rejected the burden,  
Abandoned soil and rock, all duties  
That their mothers knuckled down to,  
I don't believe it's right to blame them.

If they threw off the yoke of custom,  
Escaping all their neighbour's whispers,  
Still they shouldn't be condemned;  
It's no sin being female there.

Everywhere, the old way of life  
Is fading with every passing day;  
Men and loneliness cohabiting –  
The usual sign the end is nigh.