Clíona Ní Ríordáin
Stephanie Schwerter (Eds.)

THE POETS AND POETRY OF MUNSTER

One Hundred Years of Poetry from South Western Ireland

With a Foreword by Declan Kiberd

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Foreword

Declan Kiberd

When Daniel Corkery published *The Hidden Ireland*[1] in 1925, he produced the first major work of literary criticism in the Free State and, arguably, one of the earliest exercises in global postcolonial theory. It was also an attempt to appropriate for Munster a powerful version of the poetic tradition in Gaelic Ireland and did not engage with the rather strong voices of south Ulster poetry (éigse Oirghialla) from the eighteenth century. It also reinforced what Osborn Bergin called 'the temporary top-dogism of the Munster dialect' during the Revival period—though that would later be replaced by a period of hegemony for Connacht Irish (due to its central location between other dialects in the heyday of electronic media and also to the prose masterpieces of Máirtín Ó Cadhain). More recent decades (especially during and after the Northern Troubles) have witnessed a boost for Ulster Irish.

J M Synge once opined that any work of art is possible to one artist at one time and in one place; the sense of place has generally been very important to Irish writers. But it is dangerous to generalise these points. Most artists are likely to agree with the Flaubert who said 'Bohemia is my native country.' Yet generalisations have proved irresistible to contemporary critics who have, for example, contrasted the introverted nature of an Ulster poetic with the more explosive, extroverted nature of southern poetry. This in practice was often reduced to a comparison/contrast between Derek Mahon and Paul Durcan (which ignored a lot of the inwardness of Thomas Kinsella and the explosiveness of Cathal Ó Searcaigh).

There has been in modern times a Munster style of rugby (physical propulsion by muscular forwards) versus a Leinster mode (fluid movement created by running backs). One could probably offer a somewhat similar contrast between Gaelic football as played in Tyrone and its style as played in Kerry. But how might these things connect with poetry? Is it advisable even to

make such an attempt? Possibly not… but such attempts always seem irresistible.

What can be asserted with confidence is that poetry has enjoyed periods of intense achievement in Munster, often evoking a strong communal response. This would have been true, as Corkery showed, of eighteenth-century Gaelic writing, but also in those *INNTI* poets of the 1970s, who published in the journal of that name, and who often attracted large audiences to their public readings (which had strong counter-cultural dimensions, as the Irish language enjoyed a new flowering). If one had asked *INNTI* poets 'what are your influences?,' they might have cited forces from the teaching of Sean Ó Tuama to the example of American beat poets. Equally, in tracing the efflorescence of the Munster short story as practised by Seán O'Faoláin or Frank O'Connor, one could cite the provocation of Daniel Corkery both as a model and counter-force along with the work of the Russian Chekhov. Indeed, there are so many demonstrable links between poetry and the short story in twentieth-century Cork that it is difficult to chronicle the development of the one without narrating the tale of the other.

Arguably, Gaelic tradition provides a connecting tissue in all of this creativity. The Munster poets described by Corkery met together at a local 'cúirt', the equivalent of the gentlemen's club which was a focus of literary production in Augustan London. The Londoners met in coffee houses, and the Gaels in taverns; but the functions were very similar. The poets met to read out works for mutual criticism and the exchange of manuscripts, savouring one another's individual qualities. That tradition lived on in the *INNTI* poets but also in the work of major poets such as Michael Hartnett (who also translated the poems of forerunners like Ó Bruadair and Haicéad). Just as the coffee-house authors produced verse epistles, the Gaels adopted that form known as 'barántas' or warrant. Each group looked up to a self-constituted leader in their discussions, one who often encouraged robust disputation. The prevalence of satire in Munster and London allowed the poets to present themselves as radical nostalgists, spokespersons for a lost, defeated tradition.

In effect, this permitted poets to function both as dissidents and conservators. That blend of the archaic and avant-garde is one major element which has passed from the 'hidden Ireland' of Corkery to the contemporary poetry of Munster. Poets may feel marginalised, yet somehow also central exponents of subterranean values. Influences from revolutionary Europe and ancient classics underlay a poem such as Merriman's *Midnight Court,* just as echoes from Bob Dylan and bardic rhetoric may be heard in "(Positively) Sráid Fhearchair."

In the words of the great Italian novelist Lampedusa, things had to change so that they might remain basically the same. Many of the 'hidden Ireland' poets such as Ó Súilleabháin and Ó Bruadair wrote in both Irish and English, as did in more recent times Seán Ó Ríordáin and Michael Hartnett. The literary public devoted to poetry was, if anything, greater in the earlier period when the artists offered oppressed people a rare form of self-expression. A people who cannot identify with the government or army will always find a world elsewhere in style and rhetoric. Words have always been weapons of the disarmed; Thomas Kinsella has in our own time written with some envy of that hidden eighteenth-century people full of voices. There are, despite Kinsella's nostalgia for what he considers a lost world, many strong voices still audible today, after the 'great silence' of the mid-nineteenth century. They also speak from a marginal position, but this time in a land that has tasted the fruits of political independence and no longer relies so heavily on poets to articulate a suppressed social consciousness. This is not wholly a bad thing, for it leaves each artist even more free to express a personal vision in works often characterised by extreme experimental audacity. They are at liberty to critique the tradition, even as they add significant riches to it.

Declan Kiberd, October 2022

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1 Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Gill & Company, 1983 [1925]).

Introduction

Clíona Ní Ríordáin, Stephanie Schwerter

Measaim gur suairc don Mhumhain an fhuaim
Dá mairionn go dúbhach do chrú na mbua
Tarraing na dtonn le sleasaibh na long
Tá tarraing go teann nár gcionn air chuaird.

['Tis time for Munster now to cheer,
'Twill glad our wasting clans to hear,
The dash of the wave 'gainst the ships of the brave;
And gallant hearts are drawing near.]

"Rosc Catha na Mumhan"
Piaras Mac Gearailt[1]

The critic Aodh de Blácam characterizes Piaras Mac Gearailt's "Rosc Catha na Mumhan," [the battle hymn of Munster], as 'one of the best half-dozen Jacobite poems.'[2] Composed in the mid-eighteenth century by a poet who presided over a school of poetry, 'Cúirt na mBurdún' [the Versifiers' Court], in the area of East Cork and West Waterford,[3] the poem identifies the province of Munster as a locus of poetry, trade and rebellion.[4] The song still holds sway in popular memory and has been recorded by music groups such as The Chieftains and The Wolfe Tones. The most telling account of it in contemporary writing occurs in a work of prose written by Theo Dorgan. *Sailing Home*, Dorgan's tale of his voyage from Antigua to Kinsale. As the ship approaches Ireland, the song comes to mind, and Dorgan refers to its assonantal power and the fascination the onomatopoeia conjured up for him as a schoolboy. For Dorgan, the song was 'a first call to native identification'[5] and as his ship draws closer to the shore he expands on what Munster represents in a lyrical passage that resumes what the province means for him:

> Hartnett's sweet province of plenty and heartbreak, of ruin and peasant, of famine and greed, of great houses and fallen lords, of hazel grove, pasture, moorland and bog. Munster where Spenser […] fell on the oak woods like a storm, a province raped to build the warships of a nascent empire. Mun-

> ster of swordsmen fleeing to exile, to die in the service of foreign kings. Munster of famine ships making way out of Queenstown, their holds crammed with destitute labourers, singers and servant girls, thieves, teachers, farmers and craftsmen, new-wrenched into exile from a land where soldiers rode to escort grain and cattle and hides bound eastward for Bristol and London. Munster where Spanish traders shipped wines and silk from the south, where Viking invaders found refuge and founded cities. Munster whose poor shipped out in the British Navy, died in red uniforms in desert and jungle and mountain far from home. Munster whose educated sons officered regiments and commanded districts in the ranks of Empire. Munster whose desperate sons and daughters would battle the Empire in their native hills. Munster whose Fuseliers fell in their thousands, like scythed grain in the harvest of the Somme.[6]

Dorgan's ode to a version of Munster's heritage is explored in the closing pages of his journey, when, overcome by the sight of land, he pens this tribute to his native place. His account of the province displays an acute awareness of the variegated history of the land, its intertwined cultures, the importance of trade and the place of migration and emigration. His awareness of MacGearailt's poem and the literary history of Munster is a testament also to the endurance in living memory of the literary history of Munster. Interestingly, Dorgan's account of Munster is that of a province that includes the poetry of Edmund Spenser and Michael Harnett, laying claim to the English literary tradition and the Irish one, in a form of embodied intertextuality that persists in the literary practice of certain contemporary poets.

Munster's literary history is also embodied in anthologies published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by John O'Daly and Sean Dunne. The anthologies explored the poetry that emerged from the same territory.[7] With translations by James Clarence Mangan, O'Daly's anthology offered an insight into the Irish language poetic tradition that had flourished in Munster from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century—the same tradition that Daniel Corkery would excavate in *The Hidden Ireland* more than 70 years later in 1925.

In 1985, Seán Dunne acknowledged the work of both O'Daly and Corkery in the introduction to his anthology, *Poets of Munster*.[8] The structures of the titles of O'Daly and Dunne's anthologies are closely connected: in both instances, Munster is designat-

ed as a point of origin, a geographic root, a territory from which the poets emerged. Whereas Daniel Corkery acknowledges the existence of schools within the Munster territory, (the district of Sliabh Luachra or the poets of Croom for example) and draws his readers' attention to the fertile ground that was home to such poets, Dunne makes no claims for the unity of purpose or for the existence of a variety of poetry that could lay claim to the adjectival designation of Munster poetry. His introduction, placed under the sign of Seán Ó Ríordáin's poem "Ceol Cheanntair,"[9] implies that the poetry collected within the covers of his anthology was the music of the district, translating onto the page an accent, an inflexion or perhaps a dialect. Yet, the poem also contains an impossibility trope: 'Ceol a chloistear fós sa Mhumhain/Fiú in áiteanna 'nar tréigeadh an chanúint' [A music still heard in Munster/Even in places where the dialect was abandoned],[10] suggesting a ghost tattoo of linguistic identity, a musical trace that connects 'blas is fuaimeanna na Mumhan' [the accent and the sounds of Munster]. Dunne's concluding paragraph seems to come down squarely on the side of an absence of unity:

> Taking all these poets together, it can be seen that the differences between them are greater than the similarities. They have only Munster and poetry in common. Their themes and styles are as varied as the province itself and that, in the end is how they must be seen. They are not a school but a group of different voices whose words deserve to be heard.[11]

Critical thinking has shifted since the 1980s and the study of literature has also been influenced by developments within the social sciences. While Seán Dunne concentrated on the lack of unifying features, from what may be considered to be a Jakobsonian perspective of prosodic and thematic concerns, and concluded, justifiably, that there was no school of Munster poetry, the present volume adopts a stance inspired by the historical methods of Fernand Braudel. It offers an observation of poets and poetry in Munster and proposes a cartography of poetry in the province for the period 1922 to 2022. The dates chosen are significant, they correspond to the creation of the Irish Free State and the society that emerged during the century that followed. The one hundred

years of independence post-1922 have led to many developments during which policy decisions regarding support for the Irish language led to the Irish language becoming a normalized vector for literary creation. Significant too were the decisions taken with regard to the arts, traced in Kevin Rafter's recent volume on arts policy, *Taoisigh and the Arts*.[12] The creation of the Arts Council in 1951, and Aosdána in 1981, have had a significant impact on the lives of artists, poets included. It is fitting therefore that the critical impetus for the volume is not solely historical. The other guiding intellectual presence is that of Pierre Bourdieu whose study of the relationship between culture, power and stratification meant that he was aware of what could be called the relational mode in terms of cultural production.[13] Munster, in this instance, can be viewed not simply as a geographical location but as a field[14] of cultural production; the works produced within that field can be read in relation to each other and to the circumstances in which they were produced. Bourdieu's thinking was finely attuned to the questions of culture, its prestige and symbolic value. His radical contextualisation allows the reader to see cultural production, in this instance poetry, relationally within the space in which it is produced:

> Different classes and class fractions are engaged in a specifically symbolic struggle to impose the definition of the social world most in conformity with their interests. The field of ideological positions reproduces in transfigured form the field of social positions. They may carry on this struggle either directly in the symbolic conflicts of everyday life or indirectly through the struggle waged by the specialists in symbolic production (full time producers), in which the object at stake is the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence-that is to say, the power to impose (and even indeed to inculcate) instruments of knowledge and expression of social reality (taxonomies), which are arbitrary (but unrecognized as such). The field of symbolic production is a microcosm of the struggle between the classes. It is by serving their own interests in the struggle internal to the field of production (and to this extent alone) that these producers serve the interests of groups external to their field of production.[15]

Bourdieu's vocabulary in this definition of the symbolic value of culture is influenced by his sociological training, yet the elements he identifies as the transformation in the field of cultural production are central to the mapping of poetry in Munster in an account

that wishes to take stock of the framework in which this poetry emerged. Bourdieu's work has gone on to influence many other social scientists such as Gisèle Sapiro and Pascale Casanova in the area of the sociology of literature. In the spirit of the work of Casanova and Sapiro, this book argues that whereas writers like Piaras Mac Gearailt functioned within poetry courts, and his predecessor Aogán Ó Rathaille lamented the disappearance of the patronage system, the contemporary equivalent of patronage and poetry schools are to be found in arts policies and schools of creative writing. The results of these policies can be seen in the various institutions and festivals that function throughout the southwest of the country and in the support offered to individual poets via bursaries and the allocation of the *cnuas*, an annual stipend awarded for a period of five years, to those poets who are members of Aosdána. This network can be seen as a nexus which promotes and encourages literary production in the southwest, offering venues, events and support for people who want to pursue a literary career in the province. Recent work in the sociology of literature,[16] has highlighted the role of these policies in stimulating a sense of literary community and in promoting literary identity.

The editors of the present volume have identified three strains of poetry that co-exist within the territorial boundaries of the province of Munster. The volume explores Irish language poetry written in the dialect of Munster Irish. It also addresses poetry in the English language, some of which explores Munster's history and literature. Finally, it turns its attention to experimental poetry in English which draws on a modernist strain that can be traced back to the work of Thomas MacGreevy. In offering an account of the writing that corresponds to these different categories, certain patterns emerge, patterns that are due to the importance of such trends in a poetic *habitus*. This volume aims to chart these different communities of poets whose work has been fostered over the last one hundred years. The book can be seen as a successor to the aforementioned anthologies, seeking to be as comprehensive as *Poets and Poetry of Munster*, while striving to bring many hidden poets into the limelight, in the manner of Corkery. It should prove an invaluable addition to the compre-

hension of poetry in Ireland since the post-war period, tilting the balance southward, offering readings that sit in harmony with, and in counterpoint to, the twin tunes of Northern and, to a lesser extent, Dublin melodies. And while the essays offer individual readings of the various poets, they also take stock of the circumstances in which the poems are nurtured onto the page. By identifying mentors, festivals, and institutions that seek to foster poets and their poetry and by comparing the characteristics and thematics explored in various poetic outputs, relationships and networks are identified that anchor the work in the materiality of poetic life in Munster, notably via educational institutions, cultural policies, literary festivals, and by the presence of a body devoted to the promotion of Munster Literature.

Under the heading of experimental poetry, Melania Terrazas leads the charge, reviewing and contextualizing the work of Thomas MacGreevy. MacGreevy can be connected to the strain of experimental poetry that continues to flourish in Munster, via Augustus Young, and later through the much lamented SoundEye festival and the vibrant presence of Trevor Joyce who has been a fixture in Munster's literary landscape for several decades. Joyce himself is the subject of an essay by David Mitchell Clark.

Several essays on the pioneering Irish language poets Seán Ó Ríordáin (Ríona Ní Churtáin) and Máire Mhac an tSaoi (Rióna Ní Fhrighil) follow in chronological order. Ní Churtáin's essay draws on French critical thinking and identifies the existentialist nature of Ó Ríordáin's work. This is a thread that runs through many other essays on both English language and Irish language poets. While Ó Ríordáin and Mhac an tSaoi are clearly identified by critics as being in the vanguard of poetry in Irish between the 1950s and the 1980s, Grace Neville will add to the shading and substance of the period with her essay on Seán Ó Tuama. Ó Tuama is all too often overlooked as a poet and consigned to a subaltern role as an academic and mentor to a later generation of poets, Neville's essay takes account of the multi-talented facets of Ó Tuama's life and work.

Another poet, who occupied the role of mentor, tutor and associate of Ó Tuama, is John Montague. His work will be explored

by the British critic Damian Grant. Clíona Ní Ríordáin in her essay on the poetry of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin will focus on the historical dimension in the poet's work. Catríona Clutterbuck explores the medieval dimension in the poetry of Bernard O'Donoghue, a trait he shares with his fellow poet Ní Chuilleanáin; Clutterbuck devotes particular attention to the thematic of pity in O'Donoghue's work. It is in Máire Ní Annracháin's essay on Pádraig Mac Fhearghusa that we place ourselves firmly in the hidden Munster dimension of this volume. Ní Annracháin argues that Mac Fhearghusa makes a strong contribution to the Gaelic tradition, yet his work is neglected and forgotten. This essay redresses the balance.

The essays that follow explore the poetry of a generation of writers who attended UCC from the end of the 1960s to the beginning of the 1980s. Individual essays are devoted to some of the *INNTI* poets, such as Gabriel Rosenstock (Pádraig de Paor), Liam Ó Muirthile (Padraigín Riggs), Colm Breathnach (Caitríona Ní Chléiricín) and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (Brian Ó Conchubhair). Some of these poets have already been the subject of extended critical essays. However, this volume offers renewed critical perspectives, such as Ní Chéiricín's Lacanian analysis of the poetry of Breathnach; the extensive archival work of Ó Conchubhair reveals new facets of Ní Dhomhnaill's early writing. The poetry of Paddy Bushe, Michael Davitt, Doireann Ní Ghríofa, Louis de Paor, and Maurice Riordan is explored from the perspective of linguistic hybridity and the circulation of influences between Irish and English language traditions. Further essays are devoted to the English language *compadres* of the *INNTI* group: Greg Delanty (Thomas O'Grady), Theo Dorgan (Pilar Vilar Arguiz), Seán Dunne (Stephanie Schwerter), Thomas McCarthy (Thomas Dillon Redshaw), and Gerry Murphy (Patrick Crowley); these critical writings by leading European and American academics identify key relationships and strains in the poetry and chart the links between the two groups. Of particular importance in these essays is the influence of translation and the poetry of other literary traditions, Greek for Delanty and Dorgan, Russian in the case of Seán Dunne.

The final essay in the book examines the work of poets who have come to prominence over the past two decades. Chief among

them are Patrick Cotter, Ailbhe Ní Ghearrbhuigh, Billy Ramsell, and Leanne O'Sullivan. The essay identifies the mentors and literary forebearers of these poets, such as Matthew Sweeney, and offers literary lineages. As well as offering an analysis of their work, this chapter also examines the factors that enable the emergence of poets who contribute to Munster's literary prestige and cultural capital.

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1 Piaras Mac Gearailt, translated by Robert Dwyer Joyce in *After the Irish*, Gregory A Schirmer (Cork: Cork University Press, 2009), p. 131.

2 Aodh de Blácam, *Gaelic Literature Surveyed*, (Dublin: Talbot Press [1929] 1973), p. 328.

3 'Filíocht Sheacaibíteach Phiarais Mhic Gearailt,' *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr*, vol. 22, 2007, p. 164-188

4 Breandán Ó Croinín, *Filíocht Phiarais Mhic Gearailt*, (Tráchtas Ollscoil Mhaigh Nuad, 2013), p. 5-99.

5 Theo Dorgan, *Sailing Home* (Dublin: Penguin, 2004), p. 274.

6 Theo Dorgan, *Sailing Home*, op. *cit*., p. 274-275.

7 However, the Jacobite dimension of MacGearailt's rousing call to arms ensured that the poem did not figure in *Poets and Poetry of Munster*, edited by John O'Daly and published in 1849. *Poets and Poetry of Munster* is a work in the tradition of anthology-making that commenced with James Hardiman's *Irish Minstrelsy* in 1831.

8 Seán Dunne, *Poets of Munster An Anthology* (Dublin: Brandon/Anvil 1985)

9 Seán Ó Ríordáin, *Dánta* (Indreabhán: Cló Iar-Chonnacht 2011), "Ceol Cheanntair," p. 159.

10 Seán Ó Ríordáin quoted in Seán Dunne, *Poets of Munster An Anthology*, op. cit., p. 11. Translation is by Seán Dunne.

11 Ibid, p. 26.

12 Kevin Rafter, *Taoisigh and the Arts* (Dublin: Martello Publishing 2022).

13 See Randal Johnson's "Introduction to Pierre Bourdieu," *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press 1993), p. 6.

14 'Field' is a translation of the Bourdieu's term *champ*, 'a structured space with its own laws of functioning and its own relations of force, independent of those of politics and economy, except, obviously, in the case of the political and economical fields.' Editor's introduction to *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 6. op. cit.

15 Pierre Bourdieu, "Symbolic Power", *Identity and Structure: Issues in the Sociology of Education*, edited by Dennis Gleason. Dimiffield, England: Nefferton. Bourdieu, Pierre, Luc Boltanski, R. Castel, and Jean-Claude Passeron, 1969, p. 112-19.

16 Gisèle Sapiro, *La Sociologie de la littérature* (Paris: La découverte, 2014), Gisèle Sapiro, Cécile Rabot, *Profession écrivain ?* (Paris: CNRS, 2017).

Thomas MacGreevy's Experimental Poetry: The Munster Connections, Continental Modernism and Ambivalence

Melania Terrazas

Introduction

Thomas MacGreevy was born in 1893 in County Kerry, Ireland. He prepared for the entry-level grade of the British Civil Service, working in Dublin, where he also acquired a broad knowledge of the arts, visiting galleries and attending plays, concerts, and operas in the Irish city.[1] Between 1912 and 1913, MacGreevy worked in the civil service in London,[2] trained in writing and became a man of connections. He was fascinated by the innovation and experimentation of avant-garde painting, literature, and intellectual groups in London. In 1914, MacGreevy volunteered to fight for the British Empire in World War I out of a sense of patriotic and moral duty. He enlisted despite the complex colonial relationship between Ireland and Britain. For MacGreevy, the war was fought in defence of the highest principles of religion. As soldiers' pay allowed many lower-class Irish to cope and survive, they enlisted for the First World War and 'created a space where an Irish socialist movement could push towards an independent Irish state.'[3] As Roy Foster argues, the growth of the new nationalism constituted 'the prelude to the separatist struggle that began with the 1916 Rising.'[4] Susan Schreibman observes that during his summer holiday in 1916, the Prime Minister of Ireland, Éamon de Valera, asked MacGreevy to take notes 'on the state of political feeling'[5] in County Kerry and prepare a report, but he objected to doing this because he wished to leave work behind during his holiday, rather than attend to political matters. From that moment onwards, his stance towards the Irish nationalist political struggle became neutral.

During the 1920s and 1930s, MacGreevy's creative and critical productivity made a significant move to London and Paris. As Alanna Green explains, 'he insisted upon the need for Irish artists and critics to be as well versed in continental art as they were in indigenous (often nativist) Irish traditions.'[6] In the winter of 1923–1924, MacGreevy contributed to *The Klaxon* and established the strongest relationship with modernist authors. This little magazine 'invoked a different Irish tradition from that of the Celtic Twilight.'[7] MacGreevy's piece "Picasso, Mamie [*sic*] Jellett and Dublin Criticism" constituted a defence of Dublin artist Mainie Jellett, 'the first resident artist to exhibit a Cubist picture in Dublin' and he blamed 'the English tradition' for Dublin's artistic circles' resistance to such art.[8] Here, MacGreevy also claimed that music, like any other art, was a medium of expression for human emotion, rather than an instrument of thought.

Regarding his poetry, as the editors of the present volume point out, of the three strains of poetry that co-exist within the territorial boundaries of the Munster region: Irish language poetry, English language poetry and experimental poetry in English,[9] MacGreevy's does fit into the last category. However, his position at this time cannot be understood without bearing in mind the cultural context in which he worked. Irish origins and modernist intentions became further intertwined because *The Klaxon* was published at the very beginning of the Irish Free State and amid political turmoil, during the winter of 1923–24. The magazine did not last beyond the first number though.[10]

In *The Klaxon*, issues of cultural independence and language were interrelated; in fact, these and the dynamics of modernist aesthetics and elites would affect MacGreevy's cultural identity significantly. Given his roots and worldview, it is not surprising that, from then onwards, as often occurs with postcolonial subjects, these various factors contributed to disturbing his feelings, setting up contradictions between the 'self' and the 'other,' establishing a native-alien clash of cultures and initiating feelings of ambivalence and in-betweenness. In sum, Thomas MacGreevy's mixed feelings about poetry would affect him, as an Irishman in England and Europe, later in his life.

In this chapter, an extended analysis will be made of continental modernist aesthetics in an attempt to investigate, first, its cultural influence on MacGreevy's art criticism and poems, and second, to illuminate the idiosyncratic nature of his ambivalent stance on art and his Irish cultural identity.[11] In doing so, the aim is not only to read MacGreevy's experimental poems against aspects of modernism but also to encourage a closer reading of his open-minded modernism and his wider social and political views. Even if these have contributed to the distinct critical and literary prestige of Munster, they have largely been neglected in scholarly writing.

1. MacGreevy's Irish Modernist poetry: ambivalence

MacGreevy's constant visits to the two European capitals of art, London and Paris, as well as the transnational influences from the coteries and artistic circles he encountered at the time, affected his stance as a poet and art critic, making it ambivalent, causing it to range between the subjective and the objective, and even rendering it moralistic. In two art reviews written in 1926 for the British magazine *The Connoisseur*, MacGreevy expressed his disdain for London's modernist establishment:

> THE London Group Exhibition included no picture of outstanding interest. There were exhibits by perhaps half-a-dozen painters whose work, though of minor importance, showed disinterested artistic purpose. And there was a wilderness of canvases, which could scarcely be surpassed in their amateurishness at the most provincial of provincial exhibitions. […] The seven sculpture exhibits included a head, *Enver*, by Mr. Jacob Epstein, which had more purely sculptural quality than is usual in this artist's work. If Mr. Epstein could reach the standard he attained here more frequently, his work would provoke less controversy, though no doubt it would also be less widely discussed.[12]

At this time, MacGreevy showed a very conservative stance towards certain Modernist artists from the London Group. The review was arguably crude, condescending, and absurdly wrong about Jacob Epstein, who is regarded as a very significant artist today. In the second review, "Old Coloured Prints," whether influenced by his Irish nationalism or his experience of the First

World War, MacGreevy shows himself to be in favour of prints of soldiers, as he praises 'several straightforward studies of the magnificent ships of old times; and […] many pleasing plates, notably one of a *Brigade of Horse Artillery* and one of the *1st Regiment of Life Guards*, by an unknown artist.'[13] For Green, MacGreevy's 'aesthetic opposition to English art' was 'set up as the foundation for an Irish cultural republic that […] had yet to be realized as free from British imperialism and aesthetic influence.'[14]

These two reviews, however, contrast with others he wrote a few years later when T. S. Eliot began commissioning reviews from him for the high-profile London literary journal *The Criterion*,[15] away from the social and religious pressures of the Irish Free State. MacGreevy's ambivalent stance did not go unnoticed by art critics and admirers. Regarding his book *Richard Aldington: An Englishman*, published in 1931, Edgell Rickword claimed that MacGreevy was right when he argued that 'the English "achieve verbal felicity on the way to something else" when he [MacGreevy] shows how the verbal perfection of Aldington's Imagiste ideal has been expanded by him into something less finished in detail but more vital.'[16] Rickword concludes bitingly:

> It would, perhaps have made more pleasant reading if the author had resisted the temptation to diverge so often into the exposition that he considers necessary, of his own points of view on questions of nationalism and religion. And if he must think that English poetry has only one example[17] of 'religious exaltation' fit to compare with those in French, at least he ought to have quoted our unique specimen correctly and not ruined its rhythm. These grumbles apart, I think no exception can be taken to his appreciation of Aldington's genius.[18]

Rickword was quick to identify the relevance of the Catholic aspect of MacGreevy's identity and his appreciation of continental culture in Ireland in the 1930s. He also drew attention to MacGreevy's support for Irish nationalism and the Irish language, and his use of the English language and European traditions of international modernism. In sum, MacGreevy's roots and transnational cultural identity and influences seem to have involved a real tension for him during the formation of the new Irish state.

In what follows, the analysis will show that there was a substantial problem here: modernism was radical, negated Catholic beliefs, and aimed at changing people's concept of the world; intense Roman Catholicism was conservative and regressive, interested in control alongside an intense spirituality. MacGreevy's defence of Mainie Jellett in *The Klaxon* was after all the defence of an *Irish* cubist. Was that evidence of where his allegiance and interests truly lay?

In May 1934 MacGreevy published his unique volume of poetry, *Poems*. He saw Irish culture as broken by its colonial submission and believed that if he harnessed this tension, applying his transnational cultural apprenticeship in Europe to his verse, he would be able to restore the Irish spirit. He offered 'alternative views of Irish writing'[19] and a new 'view of Irish nationhood and art' in *Poems*.[20] It was his active use of the visual imagination that gave MacGreevy's poems their distinctive quality; in this respect, it was influenced by Aldington's work.

Imagism allowed MacGreevy to link the textual and the visual in his poetry just as much as they enabled him to relate dance and music. A poem such as "Homage to Hieronymus Bosch"[21] is relevant here because it deals with issues that belonged to the Irish cultural psyche and identity in Imagist, yet also melodic terms:

> A woman with no face walked into the light; […]
> She stopped,
> And he stopped,
> And I, in terror, stopped, staring.
>
> Then I saw a group of shadowy figures behind her.
> It was a wild wet morning
> But the little world was spinning on. […]
>
> But my teeth chattered
> And I saw that the words, as they fell,
> Lay, wriggling, on the ground.
>
> There was a stir of wet wind
> And the shadowy figures began to stir
> When one I had thought dead
> Filmed slowly out of his great effigy on a tomb near by

> And they all shuddered
> He bent as if to speak to the woman
> But the nursery governor flew up out of the well
> Of Saint Patrick,
> Confiscated by his mistress,
> And, his head bent,
> Staring out over his spectacles. […][22]

From his first visit to the Prado Museum in Madrid in the mid-twenties, MacGreevy adored the grotesque images and religiosity of some paintings of Hieronymus Bosch such as the *Adoration of the Kings*.[23] However, the poem was also partly inspired by Kevin Barry, a young Irish republican paramilitary, who took part in an attack upon a British army truck carrying supplies. "Homage to Hieronymus Bosch" expresses the architectural destruction and human suffering in Dublin during 1916–22. Barry was sentenced to death by the British government and MacGreevy, who was at Trinity College at the time, wanted him released. He, and several other former army officers, asked the Provost of Trinity College to petition for Barry's reprieve, but the Provost refused; Barry died on 1 November 1920 at the age of 18 and has since become a significant point of reference for Irish republicanism. MacGreevy later explained the poem's title to M.E. Barber: 'You will see that the Homage to Bosch title was chiefly a warning to the reader to expect images that were not exactly Parnassian.'[24]

The line '*Filmed* slowly out of his great *effigy on a tomb* near by' (this author's emphasis) contains good examples of distinctly modernist and un-parnassian images. The poem is intensely visual and constitutes an opportunity for contemplative reflection. Secondly, there is significance, essential movement, and activity suggesting the suddenly-released energy of the mind, a vortex of activity. Thirdly, it deals with the human form. Fourthly, it tends towards detachment; and, finally, it is committed to life outside the artist's studio.

"Homage to Hieronymus Bosch" is also spare, with little ornament. MacGreevy did not make adverbs or adjectives work hard, or engage with complex rhyming schemes or stanza patterns. Rather, the poem unites a variety of audible effects with a

commitment to the visible. As Green claims, 'the poem is in a sense about the difficulty of finding coherent language to make sense of the incoherent, endlessly frustrated yet endlessly vital spirit of Ireland.'[25] MacGreevy not only bridged the gap between the visual and the verbal arts in "Homage to Hieronymus Bosch," but he also made dance more human.

The Irish poet Michael Smith asserts that: 'the cadence of his free verse has the fine delicacy of Eliot's poetry, but what MacGreevy learnt from the imagists, especially Aldington, was the use of the image to articulate experience.'[26] MacGreevy's use of rhythm and his dexterity in choosing the evocative image were very relevant to his style, yet the melodic nature of his poetry is also explained by the influence of 'the Ballet Russe and the Latin Mass.'[27] In his lecture *On The Music of Poetry*, Eliot described how 'a poem, or a passage of a poem may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and […] this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image.'[28] MacGreevy not only achieved these effects in poems such as "Homage to Hieronymus Bosch"; he was both 'loyal to his commitment to European modernist art'[29] and his roots as a poet from Munster.

MacGreevy held that music was one of the mediums of expression of human emotion, not an instrument of thought. Added to this, the similarities with the modernist context of the Imagists, the Vorticists, and then the Surrealists in Paris, encouraged him to experiment with the English language. Bearing in mind these facts, MacGreevy shows that he can be connected to the 'experimental poetry' strain that continues to flourish in Munster with contemporary poets such as Trevor Joyce, who 'has been a fixture in Cork's literary landscape for several decades,'[30] as chapter 20 of the present collection reveals.

McGreevy's *Poems* included modernist experimentation, and this was related to the artistic avant-gardes of his time because he used an innovative approach to poetry-making and pushed the boundaries of creativity and ideas to write poems that were radical and reflected an originality of vision. MacGreevy's poems tackle elements of sound poetry ("Did Tosti raise his bowler hat?") and conceptual art ("Gioconda"), yet some of them are unneces-

sarily difficult, or obscure ("Sour Swan"). Furthermore, they include indigenous themes and are very patriotic. They evoke crucial episodes in the history of Ireland, such as the Easter Rising, or political entities, such as the Irish Free State ("Homage to Hieronymus Bosch") and touch upon topics that belonged to the Irish cultural psyche and identity, such as Irish nationalism ("Dechtire"), the Irish woman as a personification of the Virgin or the idea of Mother Ireland ("The Six Who Were Hanged"). These poems were written not in Dublin but in London, and nationalism and the power of faith were prominent features of MacGreevy's creative writing at the time. In sum, MacGreevy's poetry related to Modernism and his Catholic beliefs and Irishness at the same time.

2. MacGreevy's unpublished poems: uniqueness

The last section of this chapter will focus on two poems by MacGreevy, which he chose not to publish, or to collect in *Poems*. The first, "For an Irish Book, 1929" appeared in *Transition* 18 in November 1929 and was not collected in *Poems*; the second, "La Calunnia e un Venticello" was written in the late spring or early summer of 1928 and remained among his manuscripts. Both poems are an apologia for James Joyce and an attack on Wyndham Lewis.[31] The first poem reads as follows:

> A rich fig tree
> The large leaves lovely to see
> The fruits delicious to taste
>
> It was manured with a dung of English literature
> And a slag of Catholic theology
> But these have been tried elsewhere
> Here the earth was fertile
> The root strong
> The gardener knew how to entrap the sun
> And to anticipate the listing
> Of even the gentlest wind.[32]

In 1929, MacGreevy lived in Paris and was the assistant secretary of the art journal *Formes*. This put him at the centre of Joyce's literary circle. At that time, the former was infatuated with the latter,

and MacGreevy was drafting "The Catholic Element in Work in Progress," included in the collection entitled *Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (1929), which was supervised by Joyce and his acolytes.[33] Here, MacGreevy and three other contributors to *Work in Progress* parodied Lewis's satire *The Apes of God* (1930). Lewis, who had much admired Joyce, became opposed to his work in 1927. For MacGreevy, Joyce 'stood for a European/Irish Catholic man and an artist who combined literary modernism and free thought without forsaking his heritage.'[34] Accordingly, 'the rich fig tree' and its 'fruits delicious to taste' would represent Joyce's production, which was 'manured with a dung of English literature / And a slag of Catholic theology,' as opposed to 'these' which 'have been tried elsewhere,' which might well refer to others' production, implying that they did not produce so many 'delicious fruits' or attain so much success as Joyce.

Written at the time "The Catholic Element" was published, "La Calunnia" is inspired by Rossini's opera *The Barber of Seville*. Although "La Calunnia" was unpublished, the poem shares many aspects, such as its free verse and its perfect balance between meaning and sound, with other published poems examined earlier. This is the text of "La Calunnia":

> The apes of the fanaticisms
> Grow facetious
> And think to confuse the issue
> By whispering blackhearted othernesses in obscure galleries.
> But that is not the end.
> They whispered similarly
> About Molière
> Who routed them
> And about Racine
> And about Cézanne
> Two who defeated them
> By allowing them immediate victory.[35]

Geoffrey Taylor wrote to MacGreevy, 'The poem indeed is good. Obscurish of course unless you explain it's about Windam Luis [*sic*] ...'[36] And in its final typescript form, there is no allusion to Lewis, except for one small but evidential detail: '[t]he apes,'[37]

which is an allusion to Lewis's 1930 novel *The Apes of God*. Here, Lewis is accused of using the arguments of a 'fanatic,' of being 'facetious,' and of confusing 'the issue.' Lewis equates art in general with satire, implying that his separation from the moral defines the genuinely artistic. 'The Enemy's satire is based on coldness and anti-emotionalism, approaching things and people in a detached and objective rather than subjective way.'[38] When MacGreevy implies that Lewis's writing lacks discipline ('think to confuse the issue') he is evidently wrong. Satire theorist Dustin Griffin explains this frequent misunderstanding: 'many of the traditional features of satiric discourse suggest that the satirist does not really know where he is going,'[39] however, satirists' views are often deliberately dialectical and historically conscious.

In *Time and Western Man* (1927), Lewis described how he reached his conclusions: 'I have allowed […] contradictory things to struggle together, and the group that has proved the most powerful I have fixed upon as my most essential Me […]. This natural matching of opposites within saves a person so constituted from dogmatism and conceit.'[40] In the personality so conceived, the differing selves are nevertheless related. Dialogue between the elements of a personality is essential for its integration. Thus, Lewis's apparently contradictory writing did not lack discipline at all; his views were innovative, dialectical, and historically conscious. He designed his satiric theory conscientiously and as a response to its time and place. Lewis's satire is clearly referential because it either consists of an attack on individuals or mankind as a whole or is an incisive critique of historical events. It is a sustained attempt to critique existing reality grounded in a rejection of all forms of dogmatism. MacGreevy's stance in "La Calunnia," however, is related to the subjective and this is shown in the wide range of renowned artists referenced in the poem.

Regarding the subjective aspect of "La Calunnia," Schreibman argues that MacGreevy 'chose not to reprint prior to 1934 'La Calunnia' in *Poems*'[41] because he might have felt the poem to be subjective, as 'unworthy as the quintessence of poetic discourse' because it 'ran counter to a theory MacGreevy spent his most artistically productive years developing.'[42] MacGreevy was for the

objective in art; his poem "Crón Tráth na nDéithe" is a telling example of this Lewisian modernist objectivity as well.[43] In an essay on Jack B. Yeats's use of the imagination, MacGreevy exalted and identified with Yeats's mature style after 1924, saying that his work was 'the consummate expression of the spirit of his [Irish] nation at one of the supreme points in its evolution.'[44] Yeats's style was heralded by MacGreevy because, 'imagination' was 'primarily the faculty of relating the ephemeral to the unchanging,'[45] again identifying himself with the subjective in art. However, there could be another reason why "La Calunnia" remained unpublished; one that relates MacGreevy's strongly committed Catholicism, his view of the role of the writer and art critic in society, and the rhetoric of satire, which again drives this discussion back to Lewis.

MacGreevy's Catholic idealism might have triggered his sense of dislocation and ambivalent attitude towards the meaning of his unpublished poems targeting Lewis. As Tim Armstrong notes, 'MacGreevy used his art history to formulate a genealogy for the Irish painter [Jack B. Yeats] who will avoid both abstraction and satire.' Further, 'the best possible basis of this inclusive art for MacGreevy is Catholicism.' However, satire 'is more readily avoided within the collectivity of the Catholic tradition, which (implicitly) furnishes a set of shared symbolic resources and practices.'[46] Armstrong quotes MacGreevy on Eliot:

> Catholics, who have the habit of accusing themselves of their own sins in confession, are less inclined to be satirical about the other fellow than non-Catholics are. That is why the literature of indignation flourishes more in Protestant than in Catholic societies. It is why Mr James Joyce is, philosophically, a more just writer than say Mr Wyndham Lewis […]. It is why Mr Eliot's verse has purified itself of merely social elements as he has moved towards Catholicism.[47]

MacGreevy was a very strongly committed Christian, for whom T.S. Eliot's Christianity was not enough. According to Hutton-Williams, Eliot's conversion 'unsettled' MacGreevy so much because 'The Anglican church arguably represented the stumbling block of the Catholic transnational imagery that was so intimately connected to MacGreevy's political vision.'[48] As Green concludes,

'MacGreevy sought to find a middle ground in his complex relationship with Catholicism, his deep love for Ireland and his Celtic heritage.'[49]

"La Calunnia" was not published, perhaps, because the meaning revealed to him his mixed feelings about the nature of art, his alter-ego and the ambivalence and in-betweenness he experienced as a postcolonial subject at this particular time of his life. His transnational Irish modernism thus ended up reproducing the same power structure it sought to resist.

MacGreevy gained even more notoriety when later in his career he gave occasional lectures at the National Gallery in Dublin. However, the outbreak of the Second World War fully exposed him to the horrors of fascism. MacGreevy struggled to put food on the table, at least until he became Director of the National Gallery in Dublin, where he worked from 1950 to 1963. He played a very important role in the arts in Dublin. As McMahon explains, after Samuel Beckett received the Nobel Prize for Literature, the former asked the latter if he could write a letter in tribute to MacGreevy's contribution as a writer. McMahon gave the note to the comprehensive school in Tarbert so that 'it could be framed on a wall to remind the children of the village that from this small place an important man of European letters was born, who always remained proud of his roots.'[50]

Conclusion

It is beyond doubt that MacGreevy's shared experiences, first with The London Group and then with the circle of Imagist friends and artists, contributed to shaping the personal characteristics of this very notable man of art and letters, individualist by trade and 'exiled' as a result of his life choices. MacGreevy's contribution to *The Klaxon* shows how important this avant-garde project was in criticising prevailing values in the distinct historical, social, and political context of a colonized Ireland.

This chapter has read noteworthy poems written by MacGreevy against aspects of continental modernism, always keeping in mind his contradictory attachment to Ireland and Catholicism.

This reading reveals the visual nature and meaning of such poems; MacGreevy's support for Joyce's attack on Lewis in *Work in Progress* shows the power of Lewis's criticism and its relevance to an understanding of the experience of modernity, which was seriously underestimated and misunderstood by MacGreevy.

The examination of his "For an Irish Book, 1929" and "La Calunnia" has attempted to complement Schreibman's and Armstrong's fine analysis of the nature and implications of MacGreevy's unpublished poems by drawing attention to their objectivity, yet also to the difficulty of remaining constantly attuned to Catholic dogma as a feature of his Irish cultural identity. MacGreevy's stance as a cultivated and open-minded modernist and an ambivalent postcolonial subject is worth further analysis.

MacGreevy's position was not stable and was arguably inconsistent. He was influenced by aspects of what is regarded as modernist experimental methods and his uncertainty over how modernist he wished to be. When MacGreevy praised continental modernism or worked 'objectively,' that was evidence of his clear commitment to Modernism. All in all, MacGreevy was always an Irish Catholic from Munster, and a European in a way that compromised neither.

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1 John Coolahan, "Thomas MacGreevy: The Man and His Work," *The Listowel Literary Phenomenon* (Connemara: Cló lar-Chonnacht, 1994), p. 60–64.

2 Susan Schreibman, "Thomas MacGreevy," in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography: from the earliest times to the year 2002*, vol. 5. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 1064.

3 Alanna L. Green, *Thomas MacGreevy: Poetry, Art, and Nation* (PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 2017), p. 15.

4 Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 461, qtd. in Alanna L. Green, *Thomas MacGreevy*, op. cit., p. 15.

5 Susan Schreibman, "'When we come back from first death,' Thomas MacGreevy and the Great War," *Stand To!*, January 1995, p. 15.

6 Alanna L. Green, *Thomas MacGreevy*, op. cit., p. 72.

7 Tim Armstrong, "Muting the Klaxon: Poetry, History, and Irish Modernism," in Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davies (eds.), *Modernism and Ireland: The Poetry of the 1930s* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), p. 44.

8 Thomas MacGreevy, "Picasso, Mamie [*sic*] Jellett and Dublin Criticism," *Klaxon* vol. 1, no. 1. (Winter: 1923-24), p. 23–27. Thomas MacGreevy Archive.

9 Clíona Ní Ríordáin and Stephanie Schwerter, *The Poets and Poetry of Munster* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2023), p. 15.

[10] *The New Statesman*, 17 January 1924. See William T. O'Malley, "Modernism's Irish Klaxon", (*Technical Services Department Faculty Publications*. Paper 19, 7 October 2003), p. 4.

[11] I gratefully acknowledge Alwyn Harrison's and Alan Munton's invaluable comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this discussion.

[12] Thomas MacGreevy, "'The London Group' and 'Old Coloured Prints,'" *The Connoisseur* (March 1926), p. 189.

[13] Alanna L. Green, *Thomas MacGreevy*, op. cit., who cites Francis Hutton-Williams 'The Other Dublin: London Revisited, 1925-27', in Susan Schreibman (ed.), *The Life and Work of Thomas MacGreevy: A Critical Reappraisal* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 147.

[14] Ibid.

[15] T. S. Eliot's letters to Thomas MacGreevy reveal how friendly and generous the former was towards the latter, regularly taking articles and book reviews from Thomas MacGreevy from 1925 to 1927, and again in 1934 (See *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, vols. 2 and 3 (London: Faber & Faber 2009).

[16] Edgell Rickword, 'Moderns Look at Moderns' in *Edgell Rickword: Essays & Opinions 1921–1931*, ed. Alan Young (Manchester: Carcanet, 1974), p. 268.

[17] This could be John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1677).

[18] Edgell Rickword, *Edgell Rickword: Essays & Opinions*, op. cit., p. 269.

[19] J. C. C. Mays, 'How is MacGreevy a Modernist?' in Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davies (eds.), *Modernism and Ireland: The Poetry of the 1930s* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), p. 125.

[20] Ibid., p. 128.

[21] Hieronymus van Aeken was a Flemish painter born in the mid-fifteenth century known from his birthplace as Bosch.

[22] Thomas MacGreevy, *Poesía Completa*, *Collected Poems of Thomas MacGreevy*, Luis Ingelmo (trans.), Bilingual Edition, (Madrid: Bartleby Editores, 1971), p. 34-35.

[23] Thomas MacGreevy, *Collected Poems of Thomas MacGreevy: An Annotated Edition,* Susan Schreibman (ed.), (Dublin: Anna Livia Press, 1991), p. 104.

[24] Karen Elizabeth Brown, 'The Pictorialist Poetry of Thomas MacGreevy and the Aesthetics of Waste', *Études britanniques contemporaines* 43 (December 2012), p. 42.

[25] Alanna L. Green, *Thomas MacGreevy*, op. cit., p. 60.

[26] Michael Smith, 'A Talent for Understanding', in Susan Schreibman (ed.), *The Life and Work of Thomas MacGreevy,* op. cit., p. 269; quoted in Alanna L. Green, op. cit., p. 169.

[27] J. C. C. Mays, op. cit., p. 108.

[28] Helen Gardner, in Michael North (ed.), *T.S. Eliot, The Waste Land*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), p. 88; Alanna L. Green, op. cit., p. 127.

[29] Francis Hutton-Williams, 'The Other Dublin: London Revisited, 1925–27', in Susan Schreibman (ed.), *The Life and Work of Thomas MacGreevy,* op. cit., p. 148.

[30] Clíona Ní Ríordáin and Stephanie Schwerter, op. cit., p.16.

[31] I am grateful to Susan Schreibman for responding to my queries about Thomas MacGreevy's unpublished poems.

[32] Thomas MacGreevy 'For an Irish book, 1929,' *Transition*, vol. 18, November 1929, p. 118-119.

[33] William F. Dohmen, 'Chilly Spaces': Wyndham Lewis as Ondt,' *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 4, *Finnegans Wake Issue*, 1974, p. 368.

[34] Thomas MacGreevy, *Collected Poems of Thomas MacGreevy: An Annotated Edition*Susan Schreibman (ed), (Dublin: Anna Livia Press, 1991), p. 61.

[35] *TCD* MS 7989/2/47.

[36] *TCD* MS 8117/94.

[37] Susan Schreibman, 'The Unpublished Poems of Thomas MacGreevy: An Exploration', in Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davies (eds.), *Modernism and Ireland: The Poetry of the 1930s* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), p. 145.

[38] Melania Terrazas, 'Wyndham Lewis's Theories of Satire and the Practice of Fiction', in Tyrus Miller (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wyndham Lewis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 62.

[39] Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), p. 39–40.

[40] Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, Paul Edwards (ed.), (Santa Rosa CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1993), p. 132-133. First published 1927.

[41] Susan Schreibman, 'The Unpublished Poems of Thomas MacGreevy: An Exploration', op. cit., p. 144.

[42] Ibid., p. 146.

[43] See Alex Davis's discussion of the poem, which is also said to have been influenced by T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. 'Irish Poetic Modernisms: A Reappraisal', *Critical Survey*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1996, p. 186–197.

[44] Karen E. Brown 'Thomas MacGreevy and Irish Modernism: Between Word and Image', in Edwina Keown and Carol Taaffe (eds.), *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 99-100.

[45] Thomas MacGreevy, *Jack B. Yeats: An Appreciation and an Interpretation*. (June 1945) p. 28, qtd. in Susan Schreibman, 'The Unpublished Poems of Thomas MacGreevy: An Exploration', op. cit., p. 142.

[46] Tim Armstrong, 'Muting the Klaxon: Poetry, History, and Irish Modernism', in Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davies (eds.), *Modernism and Ireland: The Poetry of the 1930s* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), p. 57, 49.

[47] Thomas MacGreevy, *Richard Aldington: An Englishman* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931), p. 16.

[48] Francis Hutton-Williams, 'The Other Dublin: London Revisited, 1925–27,' in Susan Schreibman (ed.), *The Life and Work of Thomas MacGreevy,* op. cit., p. 149.

[49] Alanna L. Green, *Thomas MacGreevy*, op. cit., p. 132.

[50] Jim McMahon, 'Tom's Saturday Friends in the Gresham', in Susan Schreibman (ed.), *The Life and Work of Thomas MacGreevy,* op. cit., p. 264.

Rooted Cosmopolitanism in Máire Mhac an tSaoi's Poetry

Rióna Ní Fhrighil

Introduction

Máire Mhac an tSaoi (1922–), one of Ireland's foremost Irish-language poets, is perhaps most readily considered a 'Munster poet' on linguistic grounds: her poetry is written in what she describes as 'the wonderful medium I was privileged as a child to absorb, the Irish language of Corca Dhuibhne.'[1] There is a reference here to the extended periods Mhac an tSaoi spent as a child in the home of her maternal uncle, Monsignor Pádraig de Brún, in Dún Chaoin [Dunquin], on the Dingle peninsula, where she was exposed to the riches of both the oral and literary tradition of the local Irish-speaking community.[2] This wealth of material would later sustain her literary imagination, although inflected with her modern sensibility. Mhac an tSaoi is one of the triumvirates, along with Máirtín Ó Direáin (1910–1988) and Seán Ó Ríordáin (1916–1977), credited with cultivating modernist poetry in Irish in the first half of the twentieth century.[3] In his discussion of twentieth-century poetry in Irish, Louis de Paor notes that the choice of regional dialect as a literary medium has been a marked choice for poets of Irish and influences how literary works are both read and received.[4] Mhac an tSaoi consciously and unapologetically cultivates the dialect of Dún Chaoin, often deviating from standard orthography in her poetry to replicate the sound patterns of the spoken language.[5]

The register in which she writes, however, is decidedly literary, often slightly archaic, rather than demotic. She completed a minor MA thesis at University College Dublin on the poetry of Pierce Ferriter,[6] a seventeenth-century Gaelic poet whose family were of Anglo-Norman provenance and owned land on the western part of the Dingle peninsula.[7] Ferriter then is one of Mhac an tSaoi's many enabling literary exemplars. Notwithstanding this

clear affinity with the linguistic and literary resources of the Irish-speaking area of the Dingle peninsula, this essay will argue for a reading of Mhac an tSaoi's work that takes full cognizance of the impact of global modernity and intercultural exchanges on her literary oeuvre.

1. Literature, politics and diplomacy

It is important, from the outset, to acknowledge the intellectual milieu in which Mhac an tSaoi was reared, a milieu that could be characterized as rooted yet cosmopolitanism. Unlike, for example, Ó Direáin and Ó Ríordáin, both of whom came from humble backgrounds, Mhac an tSaoi, born and raised mostly in Dublin, belonged to the ruling class in the newly established Irish state and her capacity in the spoken idiom was matched with scholarly training in Celtic studies and modern languages.[8] Her aforementioned uncle, Monsignor Pádraig de Brún, was a polyglot mathematician, poet, translator, and president of University College Galway between 1945 and 1959.[9] During their extended holiday stays in his house in Dún Chaoin, he introduced Mhac an tSaoi and her siblings to a plethora of sources, which he translated into Irish, including *Antigone* by Sophocles, *Athalie* by Racine and *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson. The latter he translated extempore as he read aloud to the children. It was in this setting also that she became acquainted with Shakespeare's historical plays.[10] Her mother, Margaret MacEntee (née Browne), was also an Irish and Modern Languages graduate who later lectured in Irish at UCD.[11] Her understanding and enthusiasm for classical love poetry in Irish, in the tradition of *amour courtois*, had a profound and lasting influence on both the form and content of Mhac an tSaoi's poetry.[12]

The cosmopolitan sensibility that infuses much of Mhac an tSaoi's poetry was not mediated by exposure to world literature alone. Her public status and that of her extended family involved extensive travel and an informed awareness of global affairs. Her father, Seán MacEntee,[13] was a Fianna Fáil politician who held various ministries during his political career between 1918 and

1965, while her husband Conor Cruise O'Brien served as an Irish government minister, as an Irish senator, as Irish representative at the United Nations and later as a European Member of Parliament. Although often described in terms of her relationship with these prominent statesmen, her contribution to public life is noteworthy and deserving of more attention. A recipient of the prestigious National University 'Travelling Studentship Award,' she spent two years at the Institut des Hautes Études, at the Sorbonne in Paris, in the immediate aftermath of World War II, occasionally reporting on post-war Paris for the *Irish Press* newspaper.[14] She was the first woman called to the bar in Ireland and the first woman recruited as an administrative officer to the Department of External Affairs by competitive exam. Her time as a civil servant included a two-year posting as *chargé d'affaires* at the Irish Embassy in Madrid (1949–1951) and membership of Ireland's second delegation to the United Nations in 1957.[15] Unlike other female poets who felt excluded from the narrative of national history,[16] Mhac an tSaoi's poetry is marked by a sense of personal connection with national history in the making. Indeed, as many critics have noted, her poetry capitalizes on the intersection between her private and public life.[17]

2. Literary inheritance

Her five Irish-language poetry volumes—*Margadh na Saoire* (1956) [The Hiring Fair], *Codladh an Ghaiscígh* (1973) [The Hero's Sleep], *An Galar Dubhach* (1980) [Depression], *An Cion go dtí seo* (1987) [The Amount to Now] and *Shoa agus dánta eile* (1999) [Shoa and other poems]—are not, perhaps, fully indicative of the influence Mhac an tSaoi exerted over poetic discourse in Irish in the twentieth and twenty-first century. A large selection of her poetry, along with some new poems, was published in dual-language format in 2011. The collection titled *An Paróiste Míorúilteach / The Miraculous Parish* (2011) introduced a substantial part of Mhac an tSaoi's poetry to an English-language audience for the first time. Although all translators worked directly from the Irish-language originals, replicating Mhac an tSaoi's scholarly attention to the phonological

qualities of Munster Irish and the formal traits of classical poetry in Irish, posed a particular challenge. In most cases, priority was given to precision in vocabulary and imagery over form, thus enabling the bilingual reader to move between the originals and the translations.[18]

The significance of Mhac an tSaoi's debut collection was immediately apparent to the literary critic John Jordan who drew attention to the extent to which Mhac an tSaoi's poetry and sensibility were shaped by, yet transcended, the local:

> She is a prober of the condition of love, and no living Irish poet has brought more honesty and insight to the subject. This is a large claim, but to those with Irish, a reading of 'Freagra' and the astonishing 'Ceathrúintí Mháire Ní Ógáin' should be sufficient confirmation. The first suggests that at last a European mind is at work in Irish verse (i.e. verse written in Irish), and the Quatrains are, unquestionably, the finest sequence of their kind written in Irish since the efforts to create in the revived language began. What is most important is that this sequence stands comparison with the greatest of its kind in English, of our time: I mean the love and desire poems of the ageing Yeats.[19]

The dramatic monologue "Ceathrúintí Mháire Ní Ógáin" [Mary Hogan's quatrains] lauded by Jordan and subsequently acknowledged as a literary artefact of national importance,[20] makes Mhac an tSaoi's confident engagement with a predominantly patriarchal literary tradition manifest. This sequence of eighteen quatrains, divided into seven sections, replicates in parts the formal qualities of the genre of the *dánta grádha* [classical love poems] but relates the conflicting emotions and the tortuous thought processes of a female narrator involved in a forbidden love affair. Máire Ní Ógáin is a folklore figure rebuked for her female folly.[21] The quatrains attributed to her in this sequence draw on stock motifs of the *dánta grádha*, but are infused with female sexual desire and an unrepentant rebuke of church authority and public opinion:

II	II
Beagbheann ar amhras daoine, Beagbheann ar chros na sagart, Ar gach ní ach bheith sínte Idir tú agus falla –	I care little for people's suspicions, I care little for priests' prohibitions, For anything save to lie stretched Between you and the wall —

Neamhshuim liom fuacht na hoíche, Neamhshuim liom scríb is fearthainn, Sa domhan cúng rúin teolaí seo Ná téann thar fhaobhar na leapan – Ar a bhfuil romhainn ní smaoinfeam, Ar a bhfuil déanta cheana, Linne an uain, a chroí istigh, Is mairfidh sí go maidin.	I am indifferent to the night's cold, I am indifferent to the squall or rain, When in this warm narrow secret world Which does not go beyond the edge of the bed— We shall not contemplate what lies before us, What has already been done, Time is on our side, my dearest, And it will last till morning.[22]

In section four of the sequence, prefiguring later feminists' deconstruction of motherhood, the trope of the benevolent, lactating mother is inverted to dramatic effect:

Tá naí an éada ag deol mo chíchse, Is mé ag tál air de ló is d'oíche; An garlach gránna ag cur na bhfiacal, Is de nimh a ghreama mo chuisle líonta.	The child of jealousy is sucking my breast, While I nurse it day and night; The ugly brat is cutting teeth, My veins throb with the venom of its bite.[23]

While the narrator of the sequence appears unable or unwilling to act with resolve, oscillating between sexual yearning and reproach, the female persona in a later poem "An dá thráigh" [The two ebbs] ends an abortive love affair. The self-reproach at having taken decisive action is dramatized through a series of disturbing maternal metaphors:

Tuileann an léan im choim Mar theilgeann fuarán fé chloich; Mé ag iompar na croise dúinn dís Ó scaras led bhéal anocht. Is mé an leanbh baineadh den gcín, Is mé an lao—is an té do scoith. […] Gach ar agraíos riamh Mar chomharthaí dearfa ar chion, Ní hionann sa scála iad Led chur ó dhoras mar seo – Is mé an mháthair sháraigh a broinn; Níor leoite marthain don rud!	Anguish courses through me As a fountain gushes from below ground; I carry the cross for both of us Since I parted from your lips tonight. I am the child torn from the breast. I am the calf—and the one who tore it away. […] All that I ever swore As true signs of affection, In no way compares To banishing you like this –

	I am the mother who thwarted her womb; The thing didn't stand a chance.[24]

Whether these poems are transgressive reimaginings that consciously draw on treacherous female personae from Early Irish literature to rebuke a sanitized and unambivalent portrayal of femininity and motherhood, or whether they are expressions of an internalized misogyny that betrays an essentialist understanding of femininity and motherhood, is debatable.[25] What is certain is that Mhac an tSaoi did not feel burdened by the weight of the literary tradition itself. Having edited and published a scholarly edition of two Irish medieval Arthurian texts[26] and completed a thesis on Ferriter's poetry, Mhac an tSaoi does not dismiss the bardic and the later literary tradition as monolithic and oppressively patriarchal, but rather engages with it confidently and authoritatively, exploiting established poetic forms and linguistic riches for her contemporary purposes. Speaking of the pain of unrequited love, she explains, 'I was fortunate in having the exquisite traditional love songs in eighteenth-century Irish and the classical love poetry of the Irish *amour courtois*, to teach me how to turn heartache—my own and that of others—to some account.'[27] As Nic Dhiarmada has argued, it may very well have been the traditional form and the classical register of the sequence "Ceathrúintí Mháire Ní Ógáin" [Mary Hogan's quatrains] that saved it from the fate that would befall Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls* (1960) which was banned by the Irish censorship board four years later.[28]

3. Domestic interiors

Mhac an tSaoi's second collection *Codladh an Ghaiscígh* (1973) [The Hero's Sleep] is best appreciated in the wider context of the international women's movement. Published eight years before Eavan Boland's iconic collection *Night Feed* (1982), many of the poems in this collection prefigure the emphasis that other Irish poets, including Boland and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, would place on motherhood and the domestic interior in the following decade. Poems

such as "Codladh an Ghaiscígh" [Hero Sleeps],[29] "Do phatalóigín gearrchaile" [To a soft little girl],[30] "Gníomhartha corpartha na trócaire" [The corporeal works of mercy][31] and "Cré na mná tí" [The housewife's credo],[32] offer meditations on the multifaceted experience of motherhood, meditations that are further explored in her third volume *An Galar Dubhach* (1980) [Depression]. Máirín Nic Eoin has discussed the progressiveness of Mhac an tSaoi's explorations of motherhood that encompass the perspective of the non-biological mother and the stepmother, attuned to the social constructions of motherhood and the political potential of transnational maternal perspectives.[33]

The poem "Codladh an Ghaiscígh" [Hero Sleeps], like Boland's poem "Nightfeed"[34] and Ní Dhomhnaill's poem "Ag Cothú Linbh" [Breastfeeding],[35] is a dramatic monologue from the perspective of a mother observing her young child while pondering his future and how societal norms and expectations will impact on his life. Mhac an tSaoi has discussed this title poem on a number of occasions in relation to her own lived experience—a miscarriage and the subsequent adoption of an Irish-Ghanaian baby boy.[36] The poem, however, addresses larger, universal questions about interracial adoption, biracial identity, and cultural inheritance. The adoptive mother of the poem, though smitten by the physical beauty of the child of colour, is alert to ethical questions about the child's access to his native cultural and linguistic heritage and worries about his integration into a predominantly white society:

Do thugais ón bhfómhar do dhath Is ón rós crón. Is deas Gach buí óna chóngas leat. Féach, a Chonchúir, ár mac, Ní mar beartaíodh ach mar cheap Na cumhachta in airde é 'theacht. […]	Your colouring you took from Autumn, And from the dark rose. You light All yellows at your approach. Look, Conor, our son, Not made to our design but planned By destinies above. […]
Id shuan duit fém borlach Is fál umat mo ghean – Ar do chamachuaird má sea Fuar agam bheith dhed bhrath.	Enthroned on your sconce of gold. As you sleep beneath my breast My love is a wall around you – Out there in the world

	You are beyond my care.
Cén chosaint a bhéarfair leat?	
Artha? Leabharúin? Nó geas?	What will you bring to protect you?
'Ná taobhaigh choíche an geal',	A charm? A talisman? A taboo?
Paidir do chine le ceart.	'Never trust the white',
	Is the prayer of your people by right.[37]

In a poem published fourteen years later, in 1987, titled "Pádraig roimh an mbál" [Patrick getting ready for the ball],[38] the relative privilege of the mother raising children in a politically stable society is contrasted with the worries of mothers in war-torn countries such as Nicaragua, specifically mentioned in the poem. Of note, perhaps, is the fact that this was not a sentiment based on knowledge of far-off events mediated by newspaper or television reports but instead a response informed by the poet's six-week research visit to Nicaragua during the Sandinista régime.[39]

The parent-offspring relationship is the subject of poems such as "Fód an imris: Ard-Oifig an Phoist 1986" [Trouble spot: General Post Office 1986][40] and "Bás mo mháthar" [My mother's death][41] in which the first-person speaker voices the perspective of the grown-up daughter. The latter is among Mhac an tSaoi's most poignant poems. The daughter-speaker contrasts the reality of her mother's death, in her absence, to the gradual and gentle passing in her presence that she had imagined and mentally prepared for. Characteristically, it is a poem that avoids a comforting resolution. A sense of loss also informs many of Mhac an tSaoi's later poems, especially the many elegies dedicated to family members and close acquaintances. Indeed, loss has been identified by Nic Eoin as Mhac an tSaoi's 'central and over-riding theme.'[42] Although literary laments were the preserve of the professional male bardic poet, the oral 'caoineadh' or keening tradition was a female one. Mhac an tSaoi draws consciously on that female oral literary tradition, while confidently imitating the more prestigious role of the male bard as a public recorder of births and deaths of import.[43] It is the brevity of form associated with Old Irish poetry—that predated the bardic tradition—that characterizes the poems written in the aftermath of her husband's death, in 2008. The poems "Ceann bliana" [One year after][44] and "Mo chumha" [Regret][45] are

considered amongst the poet's most accomplished work, in the words of de Paor 'a pure distillation of experience, discarding all inessentials to bridge the gap between word and world.'[46]

4. Narrating history

As indicated, Mhac an tSaoi's interest in Pierce Ferriter's poetry, in particular, was greatly influenced by the regular spells she spent as a child in her uncle's home in Dún Chaoin. The folk memory of Ferriter was and still is very much alive in that community and her uncle hosted well-known lexicographer and historian, Patrick Dineen (Pádraig Ua Duinnín), while he worked on an edition of Ferriter's poems.[47] In his introduction to Dineen's critical edition, Pádraig de Brún discusses the limitations of top-down, state-centred history that relies on Anglophone state documents and ignores both oral and written sources in Irish.[48] This alertness to the politics of historiography is evident in Mhac an tSaoi's oeuvre, in her prose works in particular, which include *A Concise History of Ireland* (1972) co-authored with Conor Cruise O'Brien; *An Bhean Óg Ón…* (2001) [The Young Woman From …], a work of historical fiction based on Ferriter's relationship with Meg Russell; *Cérbh í Meg Russell?* (2008) [Who was Meg Russell?], a work of non-fiction that sheds light on the social, cultural and political milieu of the Gaelic gentry in the seventeenth century; *Scéal Ghearóid Iarla* (2011) [The Story of Earl Gerald], a work of historical fiction based on Gerald fitz Maurice FitzGerald (1335–1398), the 3rd Earl of Desmond, and Irish poet. The omissions of official history that her work seeks to redress, or at least to engage with creatively, are not focused on gender but, rather, on language. It is through the subalternised language that she seeks to uncover the past.

Little wonder then, perhaps, that at least some of her poetry engages directly and astutely with Ireland's political history.[49] The poem "Cam Relige 1916-1966" [Birth Defect 1916-1966], for example, contains an early and perceptive critique of the revolutionary generation's human and political progeny; the offspring of the founders of the Irish Free State are apathetic while the resulting state is one marked by social inequality and conservatism, devoid

of the high-minded idealism of its instigators. The poem "Fód an imris: Ardoifig an Phoist 1986" [Trouble spot: General Post Office 1986] also references the 1916 Rising, in which both Mhac an tSaoi's parents were involved, her father prominently.[50] Dated seventy years after the Easter Rising of 1916, the speaker of the poem addresses her father, providing details that match Mhac an tSaoi's family biography. The narrator recounts a somewhat strained relationship with her father and, interestingly, in the context of this essay collection, contrasts his Ulster heritage with her mother's Munster heritage. The latter is clearly favoured by the speaker and closely connected with the Irish language in her mind:

D'éalaíomar uait thar Pháil na Gaelainne isteach; B'shin *terre guerre* ba linn fhéin, Is chuaigh sé de mhianach an Olltaigh Ionatsa Ár lorg a rianadh, Ár dtabhairt chun tíríochais – *Civilitie* Spenser D'oibrigh ortsa a chluain.	We retreated from you into the Pale of Irish; That was our familiar *terre guerre,* And the Ulsterman In you Could not follow our tracks Or tame our barbarism – Spenser's *civilitie* Had beguiled you.
Leanamarna treabhchas na máthar: *Kranz* barrghaoitheach na Mumhan; Ba tusa an seanabhroc stóinsithe, Sceamhaíl ort ag paca spáinnéar.	We took after our mother's tribe: The high-blown ways of Munster; You were the recalcitrant old badger Run to ground by howling spaniels.[51]

Reflecting on her father's temperament and political ideology, the speaker infers his disappointment with the two entities that he played a pivotal role in begetting: an independent state and his daughter. She declares in a matter-of-fact tone: 'Comhaos mé féin is an stat / Is níor chun do thola do cheachtar' [I am the same age as the state / And neither turned out as you wished].[52] There is little sense here that the poet feels 'outside history', removed from national historical events. Rather, as the daughter of a founding member of the Irish Free State, her personal and family history are intrinsically linked with the wider history of the state. It is this line of poetry that provides the title of Mhac an tSaoi's autobiography *The Same Age as the State* (2003), a text that further underlines the creative tension between her public and private life.[53]

5. External Affairs

To focus on the regional or the national context alone, however, is to miss the extent to which Mhac an tSaoi's poems, as well as her work as poet-translator, have been influenced by her extensive travel and familiarity with foreign affairs. The title of her fifth collection, *Shoa agus dánta eile* (1999) [Shoa and other poems], is indicative of this international dimension that was informed by personal experience. Her first encounter with Nazism at the age of twelve while en route to the Mozart Festival in Salzburg in 1934, is vividly recounted in her autobiography. Mac Craith correctly discerns echoes of this formative experience in the poem "Shoa," penned over forty years later.[54] Added to this, was the sense of shock and sadness felt by the entire community of Dún Chaoin on hearing of the death of the French-Jewish linguist, Marie Sjoestedt-Jonval, known locally as 'Máire Francach' [Máire, the French woman]. Sjoestedt-Jonval committed suicide when Paris fell to the Nazis in 1940.[55] Mhac an tSaoi's account of how this news impacted the local community contests the popular perception of Irish-speaking communities in the early to mid-twentieth century as insular or at a remove from contemporary European events.

The poem "Shoa," bears the subtitle "ar fheiscint dhealbh chuimhneacháin íobairt na tine i Vienna dhom—Samhain 1988" [on seeing the memorial to the Holocaust in Vienna—November 1988]. Like many poetic responses to acknowledged atrocities, this poem is ekphrastic and engages with the Holocaust at a remove by describing Alfred Hrdlicka's *Monument against War and Fascism* in Albertinaplatz, Vienna. The monument depicts a male Jew kneeling down to scrub political slogans off the pavements in Vienna as happened after the *Anschluss* in March 1938:

An seanóir Giúdach ar a cheithre cnámha, Ualach sneachta ar a ghuailne, Cianta an rogha ina ghnúis- 'Mar seo,' a deir an t-íomhá miotail 'Do sciúr mo chine "leacacha na sráide"' I Wien na hOstaire, leathchéad bliain ó shin-	The old Jew on his hands and knees, A weight of snow on his shoulders, Ages of election in his face – 'Thus' says the graven image, 'My people scoured "the flagstones of the street" In Vienna of Austria, fifty years ago – That and what followed –

É sin agus ar lean é- Ní náire feacadh i láthair Dé…	It is no shame to crouch in the face of God …
'Ach sibhse, na meacain scoiltithe, Bhur gcoilgsheasamh ar bhur "gcuaillí arda" Níl agaibh teicheadh ón aithis: Ársa na mBeann crapadh go hísle glún An Bheatha Ché insa láib Ar a chosa deiridh don mBrútach.'	'But you, the forked root-vegetables, Bolt upright on you "high stilts", You shall not escape defilement: The Ancient of the High Places stunted as low as the Knee, Eternal life in the mud, The Brute on his hind legs.'[56]

The intertextual references in the poem to the traditional Irish lament "Caoineadh na dtrí Mhúire" [The lament of the three Marys] are indicated by inverted commas and draw the reader's attention to the use of culturally familiar terms.[57] The lament is a humanized mother's perspective on the physical suffering of her son and it is to this sense of shared humanity which Mhac an tSaoi's poem appeals. Indeed, the date and location given as paratextual material are significant: the International Jewish-Christian Conference was held in Vienna in 1988.

The poem "Shoa" was written some years before a public controversy in which Mhac an tSaoi objected to the bestowal of the prestigious title of 'Saoi' [distinguished artist] on Francis Stuart (1902–2000), Irish poet and novelist, because of his involvement in war-time radio broadcasts which allegedly contained Nazi propaganda material. Given the emphasis on memory and the act of commemorating in the poem "Shoa," Mhac an tSaoi's actions were entirely consistent with her poetics: to ignore or conveniently forget, as she saw it, the personal history of a figure who was now to be honoured publicly by his literary peers in Ireland, was in her view, unethical and morally suspect.[58]

As noted already, Mhac an tSaoi spent two years in Paris in the immediate aftermath of World War II as a student of Celtic studies, and a further two years in the Irish Embassy in Spain (1948–1950). Her experience of mainland European culture directly affected her literary output. Although she initially wrote creatively in both Irish and English, her decision to cultivate her talent in Irish was due to her exposure to Lorca's poetry.[59] Her deep engagement with European culture is reflected in her commitment