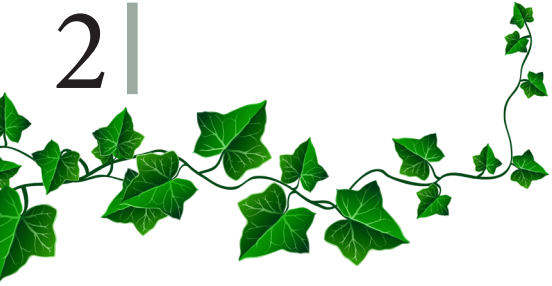


Máire Bhuí Ní Laoire

1774 - 1840





Máire Bhuí Ní Laoire lived in the western parts of the Parish of Iveleary, quite close to the Parish of Kilmacomogue (Bantry)

In Brian Brennan's book – *Máire Bhuí Ní Laoire A Poet Of Her People*, published by Collins Press in 2000, he describes Máire Bhuí as “a true local heroine; a popular Munster folk poet of the nineteenth century whose creative contribution barely registers in Irish literary scholarship.” Commenting on the relative obscurity of her poems and songs, he goes on to say that “she came from an Irish literary tradition that remains virtually inaccessible to all but the Irish-speaking or Irish-reading minority of the Irish people”.

Máire Bhuí was illiterate. Her poems and songs were orally transmitted. This puts her on the far side of the class divide, separating the less privileged strata of Irish society – characterised by oral tradition, the Irish language and poverty – from the side representing literacy, English and all the trappings of patriarchal and colonialist modernity.” However, much of her work is now written down and preserved in

archives. Two of her poems/songs *Ar Leacain na Gréine* and *Cath Céim an Fhia* were (officially or otherwise!) part of the curriculum for those of us who attended Inchiclough National School in late 1950's. The first poem, with extracts hereunder, express her hope that the French invasion into Bantry Bay in 1796 would help the Irish peasants in their struggle with rack rents, landlordism and evictions, inflicted on them by the English laws, and then her disappointment when it failed.

Theobald Wolfe Tone went to France in 1796 and persuaded the ruling Directory that a French-backed rebellion in Ireland could be a first step towards a French military victory over the English. In December 1796 the expedition arrived into Bantry Bay, led by General Hoche. On board was Wolfe Tone and 15,000 troops. Tone had arranged an uprising in Ireland to accompany this French landing. The idea was supported by many including the

poets of Munster. Máire Bhuí Ní Laoire was one such poet, and she wrote her song *Ar Leacain na Gréine* (On A Sunny Hillside) in which she expressed hope that the English would be defeated, and the United Irishmen, founded in Belfast by Tone, would gain dominance.



Image: The Destruction of the French Armada, James Gillray
Image in the Public Domain



By Máire Bhuí Ní Laoire Extracts from

AR LEACAÍN NA GRÉINE

By Máire Bhuí Ní Laoire

Gach duine acu chífir míniḡh dóibh brí
mo scéil,

Each one that you see, explain to them the gist of the news

Go bhfuilimid as tíocht ḡo buínear faoi
ḡhrán is faoi philéar

*That in full strength they are coming, well-supplied with
bullets and shot –*

Gearradh ḡhroí an Laoiseach, san
Spáinneach dá réir,

*Stout-hearted supporters, hastening, Louis, and the
Spaniard complying –*

Go Banba as tíocht ḡan mhoill le ḡrásta
Mhic Dé.

*To Banba they are coming, without delay, by the grace of
God's son.*

Mar caithfidh dul síos ḡo hÍochtar Clár
Luirc lem scéal

For I must go to the North of Lorc's Plain with the news

Go bheaca-sa an Fleet I bhFaoide 'na
lánchumas tréin.

*That I have seen the Fleet in Whiddy, equipped in full
power.*

6 |

The invasion in Bantry Bay 1796 was a failure for many reasons including fog and storm at sea and a severe off shore wind when those of them who succeeded in making it in to Bantry Bay, Crown forces in Cork city were quickly alerted, came to Bantry, were accommodated there. Hence, the expedition leaders, had little choice but to abandon their attempted landing, and returned to France.

Máire Bhuí articulated the disappointment of the nation in the following extract from her song 'On a Sunny Hillside'.

My warrior sweet, of the fleet don't talk any more

So distressful to me the grief it has brought to our shore

The winds blow so fierce o'er the deep, to scatter them sore

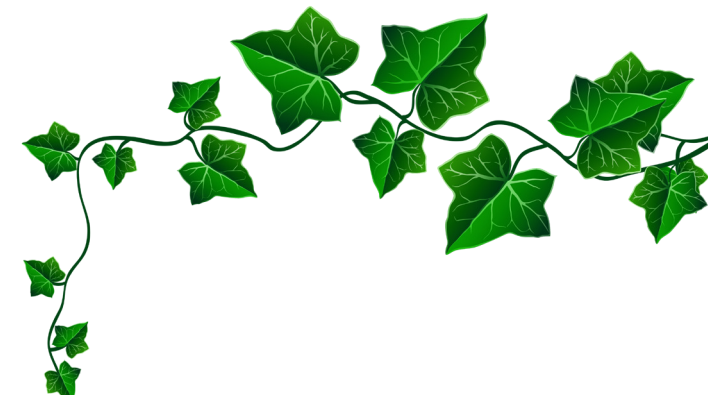
And our men chained they keep, like the queen on the far lands of yore.

A few years later, in 1882, the Battle of Keimaneigh took place between the Whiteboys who were known locally as Rockites and the local battalion of yeomanry. The scene was The Pass of Keimaneigh, which at that time was just a sheep path through the Shehy Mountains, between the summits of Bealick and Foilastookeen. Máire Bhuí Ní Laoire lived nearby and, apparently witnessed the skirmish. From that experience comes her famous poem Cath Céim an Fhia.



Above: Vintage postcard showing Inchegeela lakes between Inchegeela and Ballygeary

Below: Keimaneigh Pass, image credit: Mike Searle from www.talesandscaels.wordpress.com



Cois abhainn Ghleanna an Chéama in Uibh
Laoshaire ‘sea bhímse

rMar a dtéann an fía san oíche chun síorchodladh
soil

As machnamh seal liom féiniis as déanamh mo
smaoince

As éisteacht I scoillte le binneghuth na n-éin;

Nuair a chuala an cat has teacht aniar,

Is glór na n-each as teacht le sians,

Le fuaim an airm do chrích an sliabh

Is níor bhinn linn a nglór.

Thánadar so naimhdeach mar a tíoífa gárda de
chona ní

Is mo chumhasa na sárphir do fásadh faoi bhrón.

Níor fhan bean ná páiste I mbun áitribh ná tí acu

Ach na gártha do bhí acu, agus mílte olaíón,

Cath Céim an Fhia

By Máire Bhuí Ní Laoire

As féachaint ar an nGárda as teacht láidir ‘na
dtimpeall,

As lámhach is as líonadh is as scaoileadh ‘na dtreo;

An liú gur lean a bhfad I scian,

Sé dúirt zach flaith gur mhaith leis triall:

‘Gluaisigí mear tá an cath dá rian agus céimis ‘na
chomhair’

Thánadar na sárphir I scoim áthais le Clanna Gaeil

Is chomáineadar na páintigh le fánaidh ar seol.

Is gairid dúinn so dtáinig lámh láidir ár dtimpeall

Do sheol amach ár ndaoine so fíor-mhoch féin sceo,

An Barrach ‘na bhumbáille, Barnet agus Beecher,

Dedges agus Faoitigh is na mílte eile leo;

Rí na bhfeart go lazaidh iad,
 Gan chlá, gan mheas, gan raith, gan séan
 I dtiúnte teasa a measc na brian gan faoiseamh go
 deo!
 Céad moladh mór le hÍosa nár dhíolamair as an
 dtóir
 Ach bheith as déanamh grin de is 'á insint ar só
 Is an bhliain seo anois atá asain beidh rás ar zach
 smíste,
 Cuirfaim insa díg iad, drib orthu is fóid,
 Ní iarrfaim cúirt ná stáitse, beidh árdchroch 'na
 suí asain
 Agus an chnáb go slachtmhar snímhte le díolchas
 'na scomhair;
 Is acu atá an tslat, is olc í a riall,
 I gcóistíbh greanta is maith é a ngléas,

Gach sórd le caitheamh - fleadh agus féasta - as
 béaraibh ar bórd,

Gurabh é deir zach údar xruinn liom sara scríochna
 said deire an fhómhair

Ins a leabhar so Pastorina go ndíolfaid as an bpóit.

Do bhí Smith ar a thár anáirde árdleacain fhrasóigh
 dhuibh,

Ba shránda bhí a shnaoí is gan taoimnte ar a thóin;

Nár bheire crích is fearr iad an t-ál so Chailbhín
 chaoithigh,

Nár shéill riamh do Chríost, ach puimp agus póit.

Beidh na sluaithe fear as teacht gan chlach ar
 lonzaibh meara, is fada é dtriall,

Is an Franiscach theas nár mheathluigh riamh I
 bhfaobhar is I gcór,

Beidh cathracha á stríocadh agus tinteacha á lasadh
 leo -

Tá an cáirde fada díolta is an líonrich 'na
scomhair.

Is, a Chlanna Gael na n-arán, ná stánaisí is ná
scríocaisí,

Is gear anois gan mhoill go mbeidh críoch ar bhúr
nshó

Tósaísi suas bhúr scráiste, tá an t-ál so le díbirt,

Go hífreann 'á dtíoradh idir thinteacha deo;

Bíodh bhúr bríci glana I sceart I ngléas

Téisi 'on chath, ná fanaisí siar,

Tá an chabhair as teacht le toil ó Dhia, agus léirisi
na póirc;

Sáithisi isteach go dána, in litreacha a dtáinig
rómhaibh

Is mitchid díbh é fháil is tá an cairde maith go leor.

Stadfad feasta 'em dhántaibh táim láimh leis an
scríneacht,

Tá iomarca 'em drochchroí asam do bhuidín na mbolg
mór

Ni sean dom a thuille a rádh leo, ná ra fearrde dom
mbuidhín é,

Ach ár agus sceimhle go dtí ar a scór;

Nára díon dóibh stad ar sheal dá ngléas,

Nára díon dóibh carrais, cnoc, ná sliabh,

Mar a mbíodh an seannach mear dá fhiadhach.

Agus a ghéim acu ar seol;

Beidh gach seairfhear croíuil is a phíce agus a sleá 'na
dhóid

Gan súil le sásamh choidhche ná díol as go deo.

Cath Céim an Fhia

By Máire Bhuí Ní Laoire

An English translation is offered hereunder

*By the river bank in Keimaneigh, in Iveleary I do be,
Where the deer comes nightly for its restful repose,
Thinking for a while, while pondering some memories,
Listening in the woodlands to the birds' melodious tones.
From the west came the sound of battle of horses' hooves, of armour's
rattle
Which quaked the hills in displeasing fashion, loathsome to report.
So they came viciously like a pack of venomous hounds.
I pity those valiant men for whom no leader can be found.
....
Without grief-cries and thousands of wailings,
As they watched the guard vigorously surrounding them,
Shooting and loading and firing in their direction.
The cry that went out far and wide –
It was what every prince who wished to be on the move said:*

'Move fast, the battle is being fought and let us go to meet it.'

The heroes joined the Clanna Gael at a mountain recess,

And they drove the fat rabble away down the slope.

...

Short was the time until a strong hand surrounded us

And led out our people into the fog of early morning.

Barry the bum-bailiff (was there),

Barnet and Beecher, Hedges and White and thousands of others besides.

O King of Great Deeds, may they be cast down into fires of heat,

In the midst of pain, without remission for all eternity,

Without reputation, without honour, without success, without prosperity.

A hundred great praises to Jesus that we didn't pay the penalty for the rout,

But lived to make a joke of it, and tell the story at our ease.

...

In this present year of ours, every boor will be put to rout

They will be knocked into the dikes, gutter be their shroud.

we don't hold court or inquest, the gallows is a-building,

And the rope with vengeance twisting for their ugly throats.

*They have the power, 'tis till they rule,
they are well appointed in coaches too.*

All sorts of food have this bear's brood for partying with pleasure.

An authority has informed me that before the harvest ends

The prophet Pastorini is declaring their measure.

...

Smith lay belly down on the black-heathered heath.

His bare backside and ugly features were loathsome to behold.

May they come to no better end, those foreign cubs of Calvin's

Whose God was pomposity and not the Christ, I'm told.

Many men will fast approach using a ship of vast proportion

And the French, down south, who are so stoic are ready for the fray.

Cities will be razed, fires will be flamed

Payment is due, the reckoning has come.

...

Dear beloved sons of Erin, do not stop or retreat,

For the task undertaken will soon be complete.

Keep up the courage, those runts must be routed,

In hell-fires to flounder and roasted apiece.

Have your long pikes cleaned and polished,

Go into battle, don't stay from it.

Help is at hand, that is God's promise.

Pulverise these porks. Regain possession of your ancestral abodes,

There to be seated and remain for evermore.

...

I'll sing no more – I've grown too old.

I'm full of spite for that bellied pork.

I've no more to say, I don't like their way,

Raided and routed – may that be their store;

May they have no respite in times of fight.

May they be roofless day and night, condemned to roam and taking flight

Like the game they oftentimes drove;

Every hearty country-boy whose pikes and spears are raised on high

Will ne'er be fully satisfied in the settling of their score.



Cork
County Council
Comhairle Contae Chorcaí

Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme
2017–2022



Extracts taken with kind permission of publishers.

We are very grateful to Séan O’Sullivan of
Cumann Staire Uíbhlaoghaire for pointing us in this direction.