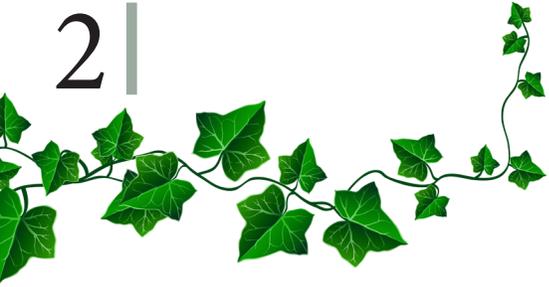


# Máire Bhuí Ní Laoire

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 LEACAIN 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*

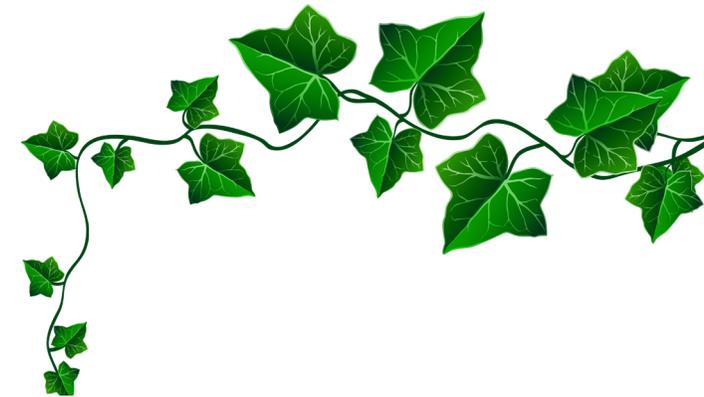
*And our men chained they keep,  
like the queen on the far lands of  
yore.*

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](http://www.talesandscaels.wordpress.com)



Cois abhainn Ghleanna an Chéama in Uibh  
Laoshaire 'sea bhímse

Mar a dtéann an fíá san oíche chun síorchodladh  
soil

A's machnamh seal liom féiniis a's déanamh mo  
smaoince

A's éisteacht I scoillte le binneghuth na n-éin;

Nuair a chuala an cat has teacht aniar,

Is glór na n-each a's teacht le sians,

Le fuaim an airm do chrích an sliabh

Is níor bhinn linn a nglór.

Thánadar go naimhdeach mar a tíoífa gárda de  
chona ní

Is mo chumhasa na sárghir 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 Fhía

*By Máire Bhuí Ní Laoire*

A's féachaint ar an nGárda a's teacht láidir 'na  
dtimpeall,

A's lámhach is a's líonadh is a's 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 sárghir I scoim áthais le Clanna Gaeil

Is chomáineadar na páintigh le fánaidh ar seol.

Is gairid dúinn go dtáinig lámh láidir ar dtimpeall

Do sheol amach ar ndaoine go 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 díz iad, drib orthu is fóid,  
 Ní iarrfaim cúirt ná stáitse, beidh árdchroch 'na  
 suí asain  
 Agus an chnáb go slachtmhar snímhte le díoltas  
 '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 fhráoi  
 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 brící 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 michid 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

Ní 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

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Clár Éire Ildánach  
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