

Paul Muldoon

LAMENTATIONS



Gallery Books

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PART ONE

The Churchyard at Creggan

from the Irish of Art Mac Cubhthaigh
(Art McCooey, 1715-1773)

In the churchyard at Creggan I slept, sad as sad, last night,
till a young girl came to me with a kiss at first light;
what with her blush-bright cheek and her hair's golden sheen,
it did my heart good to gaze on that lovely young queen.

'O kind young gentleman, throw off your great sorrow-load
and get up and follow me down the road
to one sweet country the English don't as yet hold in thrall,
where music will lull you from hall to pleasure-hall.'

'O beautiful queen, are you Helen for whom slews were slain
or one of the nine Muses of the Parnassian strain?
In what land were you reared, O unclouded star,
that the likes of myself might consort with your avatar?'

'Don't ask me that question, for to this side of the Boyne I'm
unreconciled,
what with having been reared near Grainneog as a fairy child,
I who elicited in their bard-halls the bards' most lucid tones
of an evening in Tara and by morning in deepest Tyrone.'

'That the O'Neills of Tyrone have left us is my deepest
heart-stab
while their branch in the Fews are restless under their slabs;
those who never turned their backs on the bards, like Niall
Frasach's fresh-faced crew,
but showered us with clothes at Christmas in exchange for a
verse or two.'

'Since the rout of the tribes at Aughrim and the Boyne,
worse luck,
the Irish, who've always stuck by their poets, have themselves
become unstuck.'

Wouldn't you be better off in a fairy fort with me by your
flank
than have Williamite arrows hitting your heart point-blank?

'I wouldn't leave for all the gold that went with the kings to
their mounds.
I'm loath to leave my friends who're still above ground,
never mind my wife to whom I promised so much when she
was young.
Were I to desert her now I know she'd be sorrow-stung.'

'You don't have a single relative who's still alive and well.
You're piss-poor, penniless, a hollow-eyed hallion without a
hope in Hell.
Wouldn't you be better off with a girl with a soft touch
than have these so-and-sos come down hard on your poems
as such?'

'O beautiful young queen, though falling for you's been my
fate,
I won't go down that road unless you stipulate
that, be it on the Shannon, the Isle of Man, or in Egypt I die,
it's in my own sweet-smelling churchyard at Creggan I'll lie.'

PART TWO

The Lament for Art O'Leary

A reimagining of *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*
by Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill
(18th century)