**Unless otherwise stated, translations are by the author**.

Daniel Corkery, in his well known work The Hidden Ireland, which deals with eighteenth century Irish poets, has written: "What we know of these poets is really only such an image of them as our peasant folk-mind created for itself. These traditional accounts have not yet been sifted or examined with care: we should only accept them with great caution. "[1] This is still good advice but since that was written by Corkery in 1924 many scholars have published excellent editions of Irish poetry from the various manuscripts available to them. For example, Cumann Merriman has published the works of some of the Clare poets and Pádraig Ó Fiannachta and Eoghan 0 hAnluain deserve special mention for the work they have done in editing and publishing the works of the Clare poets. [2] Still many remain to be published, and one of them is the poet Micheal Coimin who has made a distinctive contribution to 18th century Gaelic literature.

**THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND**

In order to appreciate the Gaelic literary tradition of Clare, and in particular Micheál Coimín, one should at first examine the broader Gaelic tradition of which Clare was very much a part. The Gaelic tradition in Clare was part of the Munster tradition and Clare poets were in contact with their fellow poets in Limerick, Cork and Kerry. We know that there were over sixty Gaelic poets and scribes in Clare composing in Irish from 1700 to 1860 and many of these left behind a very large body of work dealing with various aspects of native learning.[3] Courts of poetry were held at various places in Clare and there was an unbroken tradition of copying and exchanging manuscripts. Many of these manuscripts have survived and from them we can see how lively and vibrant the literary tradition was.[4]

In an essay entitled The Irish Language in County Clare in the 19th Century Caoimhin 0 Danachair claims that:

the ordinary language in the late 16th and early 17th century of County Clare was Irish - Irish maintained its vigour. This is shown, for instance, by the large number of poets who flourished in county Clare during the 18th century and by the quality of their poetry.[5]

In the first half of the 18th century we had four Clare poets who left important works to us: - the McCurtins, Aindrias and Aodh Buí, Micheál Coimín and Seon Ó hUaithnín whose work has been published by Eoghan Ó hAnluain[6]. The McCurtins were traditional poets with a certain training from the old bardic schools. They

**MICHEÁL COIMÍN**

**GAELIC POET OF MILTOWN MALBAY (c. 1688-1760)**

*by Muiris O Rócháin*

expected and received a degree of patronage. To the end of his days Aindrias McCurtin of Moyglass, Mullagh, regarded himself as a professional poet. No proper edition of his poetry has been published, but a partial edition was published by Liam Ó Luanaigh in 1935.[7] Aodh Buí was a much travelled poet and in his poetry we get a glimpse of the political set up of the time as well as his own difficulties.[8] Of all his contemporaries poets in Clare the one most closely identified with Micheál Coimín was Seon Ó hUaithnín. Seon 0 hUaithnín was born in Kilshanny in 1688 and his father, a Catholic, was High Constable of Corcomroe and the antics of his son caused him great embarrassment. He fled to Spain around 1700 and joined the Irish Regiment in service there.[9] His brother Daniel became a famous admiral in the Spanish navy.[10] Eoghan Ó hAnluain, who published his poetry, says of 0 hUaithnín: "The earthiness of his poems particularly on girls unfortunate in marriage while lacking polish leaves Brian Merriman in the shade."

**THE BURNING OF THE MANUSCRIPTS: CONTRADICTORY ACCOUNTS**

Micheál Coimín is probably one of the most fascinating and interesting poets of all his contemporaries. He wrote poetry and prose and is credited with being the only known author of a Fenian Lay. He was a protestant farmer who lived near Miltown Malbay. Tomás F. 0 Raghallaigh writing in *An Claidheamh Soluis* on 4th August, 1917, gives the genealogy of Micheál Coimín as follows:

The family of Micheál Coimin has long settled in Clare and they claim to be descended from the Comyns who were Earls of Buchan in the thirteenth century. Having lost his ancestral estate in Cromwellian confiscations, Patrick Comyn obtained in 1675 a farm of the land from the Earl of Thomond at Kilcorcoran in the parish of Kilfarboy (north of Miltown Malbay): and here his son Michael was born. In 1702 the poet married Elizabeth Creagh, niece of Sir Michael Creagh, a former Lord Mayor of Dublin.[11]

We are fortunate to have two biographical sketches of Micheál Coimín, one written in English by Séamus Mac Cruitín about 1845, and the other written in Irish by Micheál Ó Raghallaigh of Ennistymon in 1853.[12] Both of these accounts are substantially the same and Séamus Mac Cruitín in his "Biographical Sketch" writes as folows:

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Michael Comyn lived at Kilcorcoran within a mile of Miltown Malbay. He belonged to the Protestant profession and observed better household economy than any of his contemporary bards: hence he maintained a regular independence for life and left his next heir so well circumstanced as to get very respectable connections, and to support the title Justice of the Peace. Little however, can now be recorded of this bard besides his productions, and of these few have transpired to posterity, the chief part having been committed to the flames after his death by his son Edward Comyn. It is to be regretted that any prejudice or affection should have induced the son to destroy the effusions of so judicious a father ..."[13]

The one thing both accounts give of Micheál Coimín is the burning of his manuscripts by his son. Micheál 0 Raghallaigh writing in 1853 said:

*"Ba náireach lena mhac go raibh a athair ina fhile. Dá bhrí sin do dhóigh sé an mhéid a bhí sa teach dá shaothar tar éis a bháis."*

(His son was ashamed that his father was a poet, therefore he burned all his remaining manuscripts in his house after his death).

Local tradition contradicts both of these accounts. Jackie McMahon, a native of Kilcorcoran, described to me in 1972 how local tradition has a different telling of the destruction of the manuscripts. According to Jackie, Coimín "had three daughters and a son and his wife was

jealous of the son and once when Micheál Coimín was in Ennistymon they got a servant boy to break into his library and destroy most of his manuscripts. When he returned he accused his son and the son said nothing but left. He went to Liscannor and then to France where he joined the Irish Brigade." Seosamh MacMathúna in his book *'Kilfarboy': A History of a West Clare* Parish[14] gives a fuller account of the burning of the manuscripts than Jackie McMahon but agrees with local tradition that it was not his son who burned the manuscripts. Undoubtedly the more colourful version is the folklore telling of local tradition but which is true is hard to make out.

Tomás Ó hAodha,[15] the Miltown dramatist and Irish scholar, compiled a play at the beginning of this century, on Micheál Coimín's son entitled *Seabhac na Ceathramhan Caoile* which was produced for the Oireachtas in 1906 and won critical acclaim from Pádraig Mac Piarais. In his introduction to the play Tomás Ó hAodha wrote:

The hero of the drama, *An Seabhac* was no myth. He was a son of Micheál Coimín, the author of *Laoi Oisin* and he lived within a short mile of where I was born. He was an extremely handsome man and of splendid physique. In addition he was possessed of lion-like courage, was a dexterous swordsman, a noted duellist and the idol of the people amongst whom he lived ... Nearly all the characters in *Seabhac na Ceathramhan Caoile* lived, moved and had their being during the period 1740 to 1750 to which the drama refers, and many of the incidents

and situations in the drama have been taken from events which occurred in the family of Micheál Coimín. It will therefore be seen that I have gone back to the tradition of the people among whom I was born for the materials of my drama."[16]

This agrees with the local tradition of Micheál Coimín which has survived to the present day and it would be hard to conclude from this that 0 Coimín's son burned his father's manuscripts.

Briain MacCumhghaill who edited Sean de hÓra's[17] poetry has a poem entitled *Ag moladh Eamoinn Choimin* and in the final verse he states:

*Ag Malbay thiar tá an grian- fear greanta*

*Fial, fliuch, fairsing, saorthach*

*Plannda fior gan chealg gan ghangaid*

*Ná masla thabhairt d 'einneach;*

*Is flaith 's is triath é dian i gceannas*

*Chum fiacha fáda a réidhteach;*

*Bail ó Dhia air, guidhim sean's raith,*

*Ar Éamonn leabhair leigheanta."*

(On Malbay west lives this fine beautiful man, generous, well built and free.

A true Irishman without treachery or spite who would not insult anyone,

A prince and chieftain who rules well and settles many a dispute.

God be with him, I wish him luck and wealth. On Eamon the learned scholar.)

**A GAEL AND GALL: AVOIDING CONTEMPORARY ISSUES**

Daniel Corkery in *The Hidden Ireland* says of Coimín:

Michael Coimín shared it seemed in some of the flashy doings of the squireens, and hearing of these incidents, we would be perplexed if we did not know of his different station in life: though a Gael, he could afford to have his fling, even to the breaking of the law. We are told that he abducted a young lady, Harriet Stackpoole, from her father's house (it was a favourite recreation with the bloods of the time); we learn also that of the very small harvest of songs, eight or nine all told, that remain to us from his hand, three of them deal with this escapade of his. Sharing thus both in the recklessness of the Anglo-Irishmen and in the traditions of the Gael, he is a more interesting figure; and one regrets the want of fuller information. [ 18]

Coimín was well respected by the ruling classes in Clare at the time and when his fellow poet Seon Ó hUaithnín was being tried in Ennis Court for writing a treasonable poem Micheál Coimín was called in as interpreter. Séamus Mac Cruitín describes the incident as follows:

The 'treason' song was laid before the grand Jury, but none of them able to read the Irish language (in which it was written) it became expedient to send for a translator and Michael Comyn was specially chosen for the occasion. This gentleman made his grave appearance muffled in a large frieze top-coat

which elicited a jeering remark from the judge: 'How full of frieze you are Mr. Comyn!' 'It's the wool of my own sheep I wear my lord' retorted the spirited bard. During the interpretation of the song in question 0 hUaithnin was heard to cry out in Irish '0 Michael, should I be hanged for it do not spoil the song!' The translator however, tempered the spirit of the original so well that the author was acquitted... [19]

Michael Coimín is often accused - and I think with some justification - of avoiding contemporary themes in his literary work. He avoids any current political or contentious themes in his writings. Corkery was right when he said "Coimín's Protestantism, I believe, accounts for this avoidance of his own time and the themes it suggested".[20] In *Féilscribhín Thomáis de* Bhaldraithe[21] edited by Seosamh Watson, Eoghan Ó hAnluain gives an account of a poem written by Toirdhealbhach MacMathghamhna, Co. Clare, where he deplores the tyranny and suffering of his people. He asks Coimín to reply to the poem and Coimín's reply is one verse where he states:

*Nár sost go fóill is fearr sinn, 'S an tórmach so nár n-intinn*

*A ua na dtriath ba tréine i dtreas, Ar eagla céim dár n-aimhleas.*

(We are better off silent at the moment

While this mounting turmoil is in our mind

As the strongest of the chieftains are in rebellion And it might be harmful to our predicament.)

Toirdhealbhach MacMathghamhna replied to this verse but he failed to get any further response. Coimín was in no way going to antagonise the authorities.

**EXPLOITING FENIAN LORE:**

**TWO ROMANTIC TALES**

Máirín Ní Mhuiríosa in *Traidisiun Liteartha na nGael[22]* claims that Coimín prepared a special edition of *Foras Feasa ar Eirinn* for publication but died before getting around to publishing it and the manuscript was subsequently lost. Outside of his major literary works the small amount of poems that survive are mainly love poems. These poems are humorous and would be considered a bit bawdy to be included in any school anthology. One such poem begins as follows:

*Mo chumha is mo chreachsa fear na seanaoise*

*Sínte caite i bhfail an bhainbhin dhuibh*

*Da mba liomsa teach is teach na Páráise*

*Dar mo chubhais nil máith ó mheath mo phreabaire aoibhinn*

*Faire go deó cé phósfadh fear den tslí úd*

*Ach preabaire d 'ogthear, mómhrach maiseach, bríomhar*

*Do rachadh don Róimh faoi dhó seal den oíche*

*Is do scaipféadh an brón go deo lena phreabaire aoibhinn.*

(My sorrow and pity for an old person

Stretched tired as if in a pigsty

If I were to gain admittance to Heaven

What good is it when my sexuality has failed Whoever would marry a person like that

But a bouncing young man, gentle, elegant and active

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That would go to Rome twice nightly

And would disperse sorrow forever with his sexual prowess.) [23]

Michael Coimín composed two original romantic tales *Eachtra Thoirlbh Mhic Stairn* and *Eachtra Thriur Mhac Thoirilibh.* These were circulated in manuscript form in Clare and were well known and part of *Eachtra thriuir Chloinne Thoirilbh* was collected in Clare in this century[24] Much of the action in them takes place in Co. Clare and the author was obviously very familiar with the traditional lore and topography of the county. Máire Mac Néill in *The Festival of Lughnasa* says of Coimín's tales

Comyn's romance *Eachtra thardhealbhaigh Mhic Stairn* was circulated in manuscripts: not until the twentieth century did a version appear in print. In eighteenth century Clare there was still a demand for manuscript compilations and there were scribes to copy them, so we need not underestimate the influence of a late fiction spread of this medium. The tale has a strong local appeal as the author set the action in Clare. There has been some speculaton as to the use Comyn may have made of local tradition in which he must have been well versed. It would appear that although he used episodes familiar in oral manuscript narratives he treated them with complete freedom of association, and so it would be foolhardy to accept localised events in his tale as having come from folk belief."[25]

It would be difficult to know how much of *Torolbh*

*Mac Stairn* is his own and how much of it is lore. The story briefly is as follows. It begins:

*Do bhi se ag súil le hais an chuain gur shroich doire dluith diamhair coille do bhí ar bhruach na haille agus do chonnaic ann tríur ban ag súil le céile gan éinne ag feitheamh orthu..."*

(He was walking near the harbour when he reached a secluded mysterious wood on the banks of the cliff and there he saw three women without anyone paying any attention to them.)

Torolbh was the nephew of Canute, the king of the Danes, and the most beautiful of the three women he sees walking along, Fionnabhartach, he falls in love with. She disappears and he finally catches up with her at the great assembly of Tara and they marry. Torolbh then goes off on more adventures and eventually when Fionnabhartach is sailing back to Ireland she drowns. Torolbh is so distressed that he then decides to continue fighting in the hopes he will be killed. One night Fionnabhartach appears to him in a dream (Aisling) and tells him not to kill another person. He agrees and goes on to 'Coill na Marbh' (the Wood of Death) to repent. Here he meets an old Jew who converts him to the true religion. An angel appears to them and tells them they are nearing death. They both dig their own graves and lie into them and die.[26]

Both of his romances are situated in the Ireland of Cormac Mac Airt and Fionn Mac Cumhaill and they show a good knowledge of Fenian lore. They are romantic tales with a sentimental turn in them. Both tales are very similar.[27] Alan Bruford in his study *Gaelic Folktales and Mediaeval Romances* states:

Coimín's two romances are virtually sentimental novels on the English pattern, as may be seen from the end of the ETS, where the norse hero fails to dim the memory of his dead fairy wife by flinging himself into battles all over the world, and finally lies a hermit with a Jewish companion who converts him to the true faith. This, and its sequel in which Torolbh's scattered family are reunited before a rather badly-managed tragic end, became extremely popular with Munster scribes, though they never seen to have reached folk tradition.

Although Coimín made a change in the traditional romantic novel of the time one could hardly accept what Bruford said. There is very little attempt here at character development and the characters are the typical black and white characters of the folktale. Cathal 0 hAinle, in a study of the novel through the centuries written in Irish says of the 17th century romantic novels:

*Litríocht an éalaithe be ea an cinéal sin agus bhí dúil as cuimse ag an bpobal idir uasal agus iseal ann ... locht eile a bhí ar na scéalta sin a laghad baint a bhí acu leis an saol mar atá dáirire. Na heachtaí a dheannann an laoch, an gabha as a dtagann sé, nil aon bhaint acu lena bhfuil ar chumas an duine dhaonna; agus is minic a thagan an draiocht i gceist freisin agus tagann an stil fhoclach leadránach leis an méid sin ar fad. "[28]*

(This type of literature was the literature of escapism and the general public of all ranks had an

abiding interest in it - another fault with those stories was that they had very little connection will real life and no great themes come into them and their style is often long winded and tiresome.)

Cathal Ó hAinle praises Coimín for the realism in it where he gives a very vivid picture of African women.[29] Coimín was undoubtedly well versed in traditional Irish literature and we know he had a copy o *An Leabhar Muimhneach* written for him by his contemporary Aindrias Mac Cruitín. In the North Munster Antiquarian Journal, volume 25 (1983) Siobhan de hOir in her study of the Mount Callan ogham stone[30] states: "Michael Comyn who wrote prose and verse in Irish, has also been accused of forging the stone ... In any case the ideal of Michael Comyn forging the stone is completely out of character." This is true but it also proves that Coimín had a high profile for learning and scholarship among the ordinary people of West Clare. Mairín NI Mhuiríosa also mentions this in two articles on Briain 0 Luanaigh published in *Feasta,* 1963131]

**TRADITIONAL FOLKTALES AND A FENIAN LAY**

Undoubtedly Michael Coimín is best known as the author of the Fenian Lay *Laoi Oisin i dTir na nOg.* This is the only Fenian Lay whose author we know of and it is often known as *Comyn's Lay.* Athough this composition is widely attributed to Coimín there is a certain doubt about whether he was the author or not. I referred earlier to the two biographical accounts of Coimín's and neither of these two contemporaries ascribe the poem to Coimín. Bryan Ó Looney who translated it in 1859 is believed to be the person to attribute the lay to Coimín.

Daithi Ó hÓgain in his recent publication *Fionn Mac Cumhaill - Images of the Gaelic Hero* says:

Michael Coimín did not invent this story as it is a version of an old and widespread international folktale which describes how a man goes to the land of the immortals, where he magically remains young but ages suddenly when he returns to his native land. Several echoes of the folktale are in fact found in mediaeval Irish literature, but these do not involve Oisin or the Fianna. That some version had come to be associated with Oisin before Coimín wrote his lay emerges from what we find in folklore ... These oral versions we can accept as representing the general form of the folk story which Coimín had heard and which he decided to write up into a lay.[32]

It would be appropriate at this point to give some description of the lay, its form and content. The version I am using is the lay as published in *Laoithe na Féinne* by an Seabhac in 1941.[33] There are one hundred and fifty nine quatrains in the Seabhach version written in a form described as *rannaíocht mhór* such as is found in later lays like *Laoi Oisin in dhiaidh na Féinne.* The whole poem is in the form of a dialogue between Oisin and St. Patrick. It begins with St. Patrick asking Oisin how he lived for so long after the Fianna:

*A Oisin uasail, a mhic an Rí,*

*Dob fhearr gníomh gaisce agus glia*

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*Aithris dúinn anois gan mhairg*

*Conas do mhairis tar eis na bhFiann.[34]*

(O noble Oisin, son of a king who was famous for his deeds in battle

Tell us without sorrow how you lived after the Fianna.)

Oisin replies stating how the Fenian survivors after the Battle of Gabhra were hunting one foggy morning when their hounds gave chase to a harmless deer. Soon afterwards they were approached by a beautiful girl on a white horse. She greeted Fionn and tells her story. She is Niamh Cinn Oir, daughter of Rí na nÓg. She is in love with Oisin and put him under a spell *(geasa)* to go with her to Tir na nÓg. And her description in general agrees with what we know of the traditional Irish belief of the happy otherworld.

*Si an tir is aoibhne le fáil*

*An tír is mo cáil anois fan ngréin Crainn ag cromadh le torthaí is blath Is duilliuir ag fás go barr geag*

*Is fairsing innti mil agus fíon*

*Is gach uile ní da bhfeachaidh súil*

*Ni rachaidh caitheamh ort led ré Meath na éag ni fheicfidh tú.[35]*

(It is the most wonderful country to be found The most famous country anywhere

The trees are laden with fruit and flowers And the leaves grow high on top of the trees There is abundance of honey and wine

And plenty of everything the eye can see

You will never grow old during your stay there Decay or death you will not see.)

Oisin and Niamh bid goodbye to Fionn and the Fianna and on the back of the white horse head towards the sea which parted from them. They see, many wonderful things on their journey to Tir na nOg and Oisin manages to rescue the daughter of Tir na mBeo from a great ugly giant. The description of the giant here is very similar to the account we get of a giant in another Fenian lay, *Cath Chnoic an Air.[36] Laoi Oisin* describing the giant states:

*Nior bheannaigh is nior umhlaigh dúinn Ach d'fhéach i ngnúis na hóg-mhná D'fhogair cath is comhrac tréan*

*Is chuas féin ina chomhdhail [37]*

(He didn't salute or before us

But looked at the young woman's face He declared battle and hard fighting And I went to confront him.)

Finally they arrive in Tir na nÓg. Oisin is greeted by Rí na nOg and told he will enjoy everlasting life and perpetual youth there. Oisin and Niamh are married and they have two sons, Fionn and Oscar, and a daughter Plúr na mBan. Oisin however, having spent three hundred years there becomes homesick and asks permission to return home. This is given to him reluctantly and he is sent home on a horse that brought him to Tir na nOg having been warned by Niamh not to dismount telling him that if he does he will suddenly age and never return.

*Do chuir si mé fa gheasaibh cruaidh*

*Dul is teacht gan buain le ban*

*Is duirt si liom de bhuaidh a mbrí*

*Da mbrisinn iad nach casfainn slan*

*Do gheallas di gach ní gan bhréag*

*Go ndéanfainn fein a ndúirt sí liom.[38]*

(She cast me under a binding spell

To go and come on her command

And she told as a result of her power If I broke the spell I would not survive

I promised her everything truthfully

That I would fulfill everything she told me.)

She does her best to persuade him to remain in Tír na nOg and tells Oisin that all the Fianna are dead. Nevertheless he sets out and reaches Ireland. On arrival he is disillusioned having found no trace of the Fianna and finds Almhain the home of the Fianna overgrown with weeds. While he is on his return journey to Tir na nOg he sees three hundred men trying to lift a large stone. They ask him for assistance in lifting it and he lifts it with ease, but in lifting it he breaks a girth and falls from the horse and he is immediately transformed into a blind decrepit old man.

*Do chailleas amharc mo shúl*

*Mo dhealbh, mo ghnúis agus mo scáil*

*Do bhíos im seanóir bocht, dall*

*Gan bhrí, gan mheabhair, gan áird.*

*A Phádraig, sin agat mo scéal*

*Mar thárla dhom féin gan gó*

*Mo dhul is m'imeachta go beacht*

*Is mo theacht thar n 'ais ó Thír na nÓg.[39]*

(I lost the sight of my eyes, my appearance, my face and shadow

I was a poor blind old person, senseless, mindless,

without significance.

Patrick, this is my story that happened to me without any doubt

My going and exact departure, and my return from the land of youth.)

The whole narrative is interspersed with dialogue between Oisin and Pádraig. The *laoi* gained instant popularity. It was widely circulated in manuscript form and copies of it were reputedly taken as far afield as the Hebrides.[40] Versions of it have been collected from virtually all the Irish speaking districts in the country from Rathlin Island to Carbery in South West Cork. It is even found in English in parts of the country and was also known in Scotland.[41] It was very popular in Clare and Séamus Ó Frighil a retired school teacher in Miltown Malbay remembers having heard it recited by a Fitzgerald man who lived north of Miltown Malbay. This man used to come to Miltown Malbay selling turf and was a native Irish speaker. The story is easily memorised and many, people who learned it sang it. Professor Breandán 0 Madagáin in an essay entitled *"Functions of Irish Song in the Nineteenth Century"* published in *Béaloideas 1985* says of The Fenian Lays:

Ossianic *laoithe* or *lays* were still an important part of the entertainment repertoire in the last century and there is evidence of them being sung, with their own distinctive music ... at least into the earlier parts of this century.

O'Curry's well known account describes his father's friend, Anthony O'Brien, entertaining his boating companions with songs and *laoithe.*

Often on a calm summer day, he used to go with a party on a boat to the lower Shannon and having rowed to the middle of the river, they used to lie on



*Siney Talty of Carhuduff, Miltown Malbay, pointing out the Coimín family grave in the old churchyard of Kilfarboy.  
(Photo: Eamon McGivney)*

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their oars there to uncork their whiskey *jars ... on* which occasions Anthony O'Brien was always prepared to sing his choicest pieces, among them were no greater favourites than Oisin's poems...[42]

Ossianic ballads were still sung in Ireland in this century and the last recording of a singer singing an Ossianic ballad was recorded from Seamas 0 hlghne, Mín an Churraoin, Glencolmkille in 1949.[43] Some Ossianic ballads still survive and are sung traditionally in Scotland today.

**'HEART MYSTERIES THERE':**

**THE INFLUENCE ON YEATS**

*Laoi Oisin* was translated into English in 1859 by Bryan O Looney and called *Lay of Oisin in the Land of Youth.* John O'Leary the Fenian gave a copy of it to Yeats which inspired him in 1889 to compose his long poem *The Wanderings of Oisin.* Yeats poem is longer than Coimín's and in his book *Literature in Perspective: W.B. Yeats*

Raymond Cowell states:

The theme of the poem (Coimín's) is large enough for any poet, and Yeats devoted fifty years to examining and re-examining every aspect of it. This conflict between body and spirit, emotion and intellect, is absolutely central to Yeats work and indeed over forty years, reviewing his life's work, Yeats asked in a letter: [44] "Is this perhaps the sole theme - Usheen (Oisin) and Patrick?"

Richard Ellmann who wrote a biography of Yeats claimed what Yeats saw in Oisin was the conflict in facing old age and having to come to terms with it[45]. In

*Yeats poem The Wanderings of Oisin St. Patrick on hearing* Oisin's story launches into a conventional sermon urging Ossian to repent or be damned.

But kneel and wear out the flags and pray for your soul that is lost

Through the demon love of its youth and its godless and passionate age.[46]

Although at the time Oisin is old and feeble he will have known of this and defiantly says he will join the Fianna rather than surrender for the sake of an insipid spiritual happiness after death. The poem finishes with Oisin unwilling to accept St. Patrick's request for conversion.

I will go to Caoilte, and Conán, and Bran, Sceolan, Lomar,

And dwell in the house of the Fenians be they in flames or at feast. "[47]

We can be grateful to a Gaelic poet in West Clare Micheál Coimín for being one of the primary motivators and inspiration to one of the world's greatest poets, W.B. Yeats. Coimín was also an inspiration to many people who learned Irish in the twentieth century because his poem was used and learned extensively in the schools. Many children learned of the world of Irish folktale and mythology by first of all reading *Laoi Oisin i dTir na nÓg.* The late Aindreas 0 Muimhneachain once stated on a radio programme that Michael Coimín's *Laoi Oisin* gave the inspiration to many Irish children to gain a love for Gaelic poetry and song.

Clare and Miltown Malbay in particular can be proud of Micheál Coimín. He left a unique heritage of prose and poetry to the Irish people and scholars to the present day hold him in high regard for his innovative contribution to Gaelic literature.

NOTES

1. Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland,* Gill & MacMillan, Dublin, 1924, page 285.
2. One of the aims of An Cumann Merriman is the publication of the Clare Gaelic poets. Since 1969 they have published the following authors and works:

Eoghan Ó hAnluain, *Sean ÓhUaithnnín* 1973.

Liam Ó Murchú, *Cúirt an Mheon-Oíche* 1982.

Art Ó Beolain, *Merriman agus Filí Eile* 1984.

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Diarmuid Ó Muirithe, *Tomas Ó Miochain* 1988.

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