

Raising the Ghost of Maolín Óg

"If O'Donnell had not restored Maolín Óg's cattle to him, the alternative would have been very serious indeed. A bardic attack was not so much a satire as a curse in verse; so much feared were the poets that some Elizabethan observers thought they were possessed of occult powers."

(From R. F. Foster's *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*)

Our greatest alchemy goes unremarked,
 Even the atom wrenched apart fades into insignificance
 Beside the subtle engineering in our heart of hearts.
 Bombs are mere braggarts' parlor tricks compared to this,
 Deft severing of ties that used to bind us hard and fast.
 Promethean, we've cut the cords of consequence,
 Split the very nucleus of history: cause amputated from effect.
 The ritual recitation of good sense
 Weaves a camouflage of reason,
 Attempts to bandage up the cut,
 But evidence will out,
 The truth is, rustling has become our way of life.
 Beyond O'Donnell's wildest dreams of plunder,
 Like some mad Noah on rampage,
 We herd the riches of the earth into the belly of our ship,
 No saving ark, but doomed hulk swollen with excess.
 Our poets, powerless to resist, have turned away
 And only conjure cleverness from words.
 So I would raise the ghost of Maolín Óg,
 Lure his spirit from the sleeping dead.
 Gaunt and terrible in rage, I picture his return:
 Words honed and shaped into a perfect blade,
 Precise and deadly as a spear, a curse forms on his tongue,
 Sharp, tailor made, I feel it aimed, anticipate its bite,
 Pray that it might lance through the numbing hide of swollen appetite,
 Prick dormant feelings back to life.

Chris Arthur