

*In Spite of Sea and Centuries:
An Irish Gael looks at the Poetry of
Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain*

It would be gratifying to be able to report from Ireland that the appearance of *Dàin do Eimhir* in 1943 established Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain at once and for good in the esteem of Irish Gaelic speakers. The collection was indeed received favourably in the literary magazines of the time, without, it would appear, any marked awareness of the revolution in the Gaelic poetic tradition which was implicit in the work. At least, if such awareness there was, it largely failed to communicate itself to those of us who were reading our university courses in Celtic studies a decade later. Our exposure to Scottish Gaelic literature, in my view even then altogether too slight, hardly went beyond a ritual poem or two from Alasdair Mac Mhaighistir Alasdair and Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir and whatever we cared to discover for ourselves in Watson's *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig*. In one way, this failure was remarkable in that a new vitality was just then manifesting itself in Irish Gaelic literature: a new determination to break out of repressive traditional moulds and tackle the preoccupations of the mid-twentieth century, to win new audiences and treat new themes. A programme of which, one would have thought, the poetry of Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain should have come as a powerful and uncannily accurate fulfilment.

But of course, the Gaelic cultural tradition was then, as it still is, barely able to maintain itself by the constant efforts of a small minority. A fitful flame at best, and heavily dependent on coterie of university graduates, whose quickly-succeeding generations fail to pass on or refuse to pick up ideas and values just as in any other area of human society. And so, in one way or another, the name of Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain passed us by, we who were too young to have known his brother, Calum Iain, who had left such memories behind among folklorists and in the Conamara Gaeltacht. We were busy understanding and reducing to some sort of critical order the new harvest of poetry and prose in Irish, Máirtín Ó Direáin, Seán Ó Ríordáin and Máirtín Ó Cadhain, and were shamefully oblivious for the moment to the other branch of the Gaelic tradition beyond the Sea of Moyle.

For my own part, it was the hazard of a visit to Scotland that was to reveal to me the poetic world of Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain. On a spring evening in Kyle of Lochalsh with an hour to spare, my friend and guide among the glens and kyles of Wester Ross, Colm O'Boyle, chanced to remark that we were close to Plockton. So it happened that I walked on Talisker shore before I read 'Tràighean' and saw the "mùr eagarra gorm" of the Cuillin before experiencing what the alchemy of a powerful poetic imagination had made of them. All those landscapes in their stark spring majesty were fresh in mind when, back in the plains and rank hedgerows of

Leinster, I sat down to scan a copy of *Dàin do Eimhir*, its cramped typeface and grey wartime paper. The grey pages opened casements for me onto a land of what Poussin might call *délectation*, a country, to use the words of another Scottish Gaelic poet, “far an do bhuaidhaich na Gàidheil” (where Gaeldom lived and throve).

For this Gaelic voice was above all alive, something which came to me with a sense almost of shock, since so many writers are awarded reputations in minority cultures and turn out to be more remarkable for effort than inspiration. This poetry was master of the element in which it soared and glided and stopped. Vast landscapes passed below its eagle eye, and homely detail was as clear to its glance as mountain ranges. It roved the worlds of past and present as easily as it did its native country, and woke echoes of the universal imagination in my memory of other lands and literatures, as though Pascal’s eye had gleamed with recognition in

Lionmhoireachd anns na speuran,	Multitude of the skies,
òr-chriathar muillionan de reultan,	golden riddle of millions of stars,
fuair, fad as, lòghmhor, àlainn,	cold, distant, lustrous, beautiful,
tosdach, neo-fhaireachdail, neo-fhàilteach.	silent, unfeeling, unwelcoming.

A solitary heron between the “frail beauty of the moon” and the “cold loveliness of the sea” becomes the vehicle of an intensity of contemplation, of an unsentimental, creative community. It recalls the early Irish lyrics of the Culdee monks, or the *sumi* drawings of those other practitioners of solitude and austerity, the Zen Buddhist monks of mediaeval Japan:

Mise mar riut ’s mi ’nam ònar	I am with you, alone,
ag amharc fuachd na linne còmhnaird,	gazing at the coldness of the level kyle,
ag cluintinn onfhaidh air faolinn	listening to the surge on a stony shore
bristeadh air leacan loma ’n t-saoghail.	breaking on the bare flagstones of the world.

More intimately and poignantly still, there comes to an Irish Gael the dawning realization that the predominant accents of this voice are not foreign ones at all; they require little of that accommodation of ourselves to different assumptions, to values learned from a different kind of past, which is demanded by the more triumphant traditions of the great nations. Gaelic Ireland and Gaelic Scotland were of course a cultural continuum down to the seventeenth century and in spite of widely differing circumstances since then, the Gaelic speaker in both countries today looks back on the three centuries since then as a tale of harassment and contempt for Gaelic culture, of ‘mìorun mòr nan Gall’, of the decline almost to elimination of Gaelic-speaking people.

Oddly enough then, the Irish Gael, particularly if, like the present writer, he comes from an Ulster background, is immediately drawn to that radical aspect of his social and political attitudes which are so evident a feature of the poetry of Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain. There exists, at least in Ireland, a widely-popularised stereotype of the Irish Catholic Gaelic speaker as obscurantist, exclusivist and unshakably conservative in social and political attitudes. I believe it to be a sustainable thesis that such is the case insofar as he accedes to and accepts the bourgeois values, which in Ireland have always been part and parcel of the cultural imperialism of English. However that may be, the Irish Gael knows himself to have an inheritance of exclusion and discrimination which has by no means disappeared in the politically independent Republic of Ireland. Memories of landlordism in rural Ireland or of the slums of pre-independence Dublin ensure a ready response to:

Chan eil mo shùil air Calbharaigh	My eyes is not on Calvary
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no air Betlehem an àigh,
ach air cùil ghrod an Glaschu,
far bheil an lobhadh fàis;

nor on Bethlehem the Blessed,
but on a foul-smelling backland in Glasgow,
where life rots as it grows;

or again to the Highland woman's slavery in:

Am faca Tu i, Iùdhaich mhóir,
ri'n abrar Aon Mhac Dhé?
Am fac' thu 'coltas air Do thriall
ri strì an fhìon-lios chéin? ...

Hast Thou seen her, great Jew,
who art called the One Son of God?
Hast Thou seen on Thy way the like of her
labouring in the distant vineyard? ...

Chan fhaca Tu i, Mhic an t-saoir,
ri'n abrar Rìgh na Glòir,
a mìosg nan cladach carrach siar,
fo fhallus cliabh a lòin.

Thou has not seen her, Son of the carpenter,
who art called the King of Glory,
among the rugged western shores
in the sweat of her food's creel.

And it is perfectly understandable that the *saeva indignatio* at what has been done to the poor and defenceless should express itself in a mistrust of churches which profess to love the Lord God with heart, mind and strength and forget the latter half of the great commandment. Or how could we fail to sympathise with the hunger for a better world of 'Am Boilseabhach'

nach tug suim
riamh do bhànrainn no do rìgh;
nan robh againn Alba shaor,
Alba co-shìnte ri ar gaol,
Alba gheal bheadarrach fhaoil,
Alba àlainn shona laoch.

who never gave heed
to queen or to king;
if we had Scotland free,
Scotland equal to our love,
a white spirited generous Scotland,
a beautiful happy heroic Scotland.

The passions aroused by the Spanish Civil War were of course long settled into history when my generation came to read *Dàin do Eimhir*, but the reflections of that drama in the poetry of Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain were profoundly instructive for us, if I may apply so detached a word to that intimate lyricism. The same must be said of those poems which came out of the author's experience of war in the Western Desert which we read in *Four Points of a Saltire*. They obliged us to recognize the obverse side of Irish independence and political neutrality; they armed us to make essential distinctions and establish priorities among the attitudes which have come to make up Irish separatism. One effect of those attitudes and of Irish history during the last half-century has been a certain self-absorption and introversion, not least in writing in Irish, and so it came to us with unusual freshness to hear a Gaelic poet say:

Oir chunnaic mi an Spàinn cailte,
sealladh a rinn mo shùilean saillte,

For I have seen Spain lost,
a sight that has made my eyes salt,

or to find names like James Connolly and Dimitrov, Lenin, Liebknecht and Garcia Lorca, rubbing shoulders in lines of Gaelic, even if some of them did not belong to our pantheon. I suppose, heaven help our narrow minds, it was even a matter for mild surprise that this poet who shared our mythology from the emigration of the nineteenth century back to the Sons of Uisneach should show himself concerned over a pair of Englishmen, Cornford and Julian Bell. And we were similarly compelled to reflect on the sovereign truth of the artist by a poem from the Second World War like 'Curaidhean' which did not hesitate to mention in the same breath the epic heroes of Auldearn and Culloden (no less!) and an obscure little English gunner who stood his ground. War, like art, has no room for comfortable prejudice.

For us, of course, the Great Famine had broken our people's patience with

fighting the wars of Empire and not since Francis Ledwidge died in the mud of Flanders had our poetry expressed the pathos of men caught in wars not of their making; as Mac Gill-Eàin puts it:

<p>a threòraicheadh bho thoiseach àl gun deòin gu buaireadh agus bruillean cuthaich gach blàir air sgàth uachdaran.</p>	<p>led, from the beginning of generations, unwillingly to the trial and mad delirium of every war for the sake of rulers.</p>
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This, then, was a poet who refused to settle for the easy certainties of that kind of romantic nationalism which in Ireland we associate with the name of the Gaelic League, with the manicheism and self-indulgent pathos with which it tries to conjure the demons of our painful history. Mac Gill-Eain took another and more uncompromising stance. We could fully appreciate his satire of the 'fior-Ghàidheal', *mutatis mutandis*, in 'Road to the Isles':

<p>Théid mi thun nan Eileanan is ataidh mi le m'bhaotalachd mu bhruthan sìth an Canaidh 's Eige, mu ghusgul ròn an Eirisgeidh, mu chlàrsaichean 's mu Eilean Bharraidh.</p>	<p>I will go to the Isles and I will swell with my vapidty about fairy knolls in Canna and Eigg, about the voice of seals in Eriskay, about harps and the Isle of Barra.</p>
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Ireland has had more than its share of this kind of thing, which in the popular mind sometimes tends to supplant a genuine sense of traditional values. But we whose culture is Gaelic had failed to fight it with this kind of irony, failed maybe to see our concern for our own culture in a wide-enough human context, as our share of the world-wide and everlasting struggle against the big battalions, against the mercenary and the hypocrite, the racist and the exploiter of others. Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain had proclaimed his change of course clearly enough, and in his own characteristic terms in 'Clann Ghill-Eain':

<p>Chan e iadsan a bhàsaich an àrdan Inbhir-chéitein dh'aindeoin gaisge is uabhair ceann uachdrach ar sgeula; ach esan bha 'n Glaschu, ursann-chatha nam feumach, Iain mór Mac Gill-Eain, ceann is fèitheam ar sgeula.</p>	<p>Not they who died in the hauteur of Inverkeithing in spite of valour and pride the high head of our story; but he who was in Glasgow the battle-post of the poor, great John MacLean, the top and hem of our story.</p>
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The twentieth-century social revolutionary is the contemporary incarnation of a heritage of pride and courage which long found its outlet in the mythical memory of a battle against hopeless odds.

That the poet should turn so naturally and unaffectedly to an event of almost three centuries earlier is an aspect of the Gaelic mind which often seems puzzling to the Anglo-Saxon. (Even the largely de-Gaelicized Irish are still accused periodically of being obsessed by their past.) But to the Irish Gaelic reader it is an instinct which brings us a thrill of recognition and an impulse to clasp this man to us as one of our own in that solidarity to which he himself alludes in his moving elegy on his brother, enduring in spite of sea and centuries:

<p>... an fhéile Nach do reub an cuan, Nach do mhill mìle bliadhna: Buaidh a' Ghàidheil buan.</p>	<p>... the humanity that the sea did not tear, that a thousand years did not spoil: the quality of the Gael permanent.</p>
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Nothing perhaps in the work of Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain makes a more powerful and-immediate appeal to the Irish Gael than the full measure in which he possesses and is informed by the quality fundamental to so much of both branches of the Gaelic tradition. We both, I believe, call it *dùthchas* and it is a term as untranslatable as *virtù*, or *honnêteté*, or *gemütlichkeit* in their respective languages. In an effort to explain it in English, the Royal Irish Academy's dictionary of the common Old Gaelic languages uses such terms as "inheritance, patrimony; native place or land; connexion, affinity or attachment due to descent or long-standing; inherited instinct or natural tendency". It is all these things and, besides, the elevation of them to a kind of ideal of the spirit, an enduring value amid the change and the erosion of all human things, all the more cherished in cultures like ours with the unbearable pain of past overthrow and present decline, and the spectre of imminent dissolution.

This spirit pervades the poetry of Mac Gill-Eain and it is this which ensures him an enduring audience in Ireland and brings him at once into such intimacy with that audience. We find it in the homely sense of family which nerves him in the sand of Libya:

Agus biodh na bha mar bha e,
tha mi de dh'fhir mhór' a' Bhràighe,
de Chloinn Mhic Ghille Chaluim threubhaich,
de Mhathanaich Loch Aills nan geurlann,
agus fir m' ainme – có bu tréine
nuair dh'fhàdadh uabhar an léirchreach?

And be what was as it was,
I am of the big men of Braes,
of the heroic Raasay MacLeods,
of the sharp-sword Mathesons of Lochalsh;
and the men of my name – who were braver
when their ruinous pride was kindled?

Even if we are not immediately aware of how the men of Braes struggled for their land, or what precisely was the descent of Clann Mhic Ghille Chaluim, we recognize the note. It is perceptible in his sense of the value of one's own place, the *petite patrie*, which, like the gods in Patrick Kavanagh's well-known line, makes its own importance felt, as in 'Gleann Aoighre':

Tha eilean beag 'na mo chuimhne
's e 'na laighe air cuan deich bliadhna...

There is a little island in my memory,
lying on a sea of ten years...

Am feasgar ud air a' bhearradh
thuig mi an nì nach b' aoibhinn...

That evening on the ridge
I realised the unhappy thing...

a dh'aindeoin gach spàirn is dichill,
ged bhiodh Leathanaich is Leòdaich,
Clann Mhic Neacail is Clann Dòmhnail
air tòir an agairt,

in spite of every struggle and persistence,
though MacLeans and MacLeods,
Nicolsons and MacDonalds,
were urging their claim,

nach fhaighinn-sa an nì a dh'iarr mi...

that I would not get the thing I wanted...

In a wider sense, it is to be found in the poet's profound attachment to the places and landscapes of the Gàidhealtachd, in the characteristically Gaelic pleasure in naming places, and consequently in the rich nomenclature of the Gaelic lands, which I at least feel is rivalled in picturesque, poetic or homely detail only by the Arabs. Think of a poem like 'Tràighean':

Nan robh sinn an Talasgar air an tràigh
far a bheil am bial mór bàn
a' fosgladh eadar dà ghiall chruaidh,
Rubha nan Clach 's am Bioda Ruadh...

If we were in Talisker on the shore
where the great white mouth
opens between two hard jaws,
Rubha nan Clach and the Bioda Ruadh...

And the eye of imagination summons reefs and headlands, rocky shores and whole islands, and vast seascapes to be the witnesses of his exaltation – Talisker and Prishal, Moidart, Mull and Tìree, and Scotland itself. The Gaelic reader must nurse his own wound that the true and meaningful names of these places, just as in Ireland, are condemned to survive only in barbarously mutilated forms. These places and landscapes are the constant correlative with which the poem translates his passion. His lady is dawn on the Cuillin and benign day on the Clarach and the distant Butt of Lewis is no adequate destination for his desire's journeying ('Camhanaich', 'Fo Sheòl'). Their names become the loving catalogue of the features of Skye and of the memories of human fellowship attaching to them, their warmth chilled by the realisation of the people's fate:

Eilein Mhóir, Eilein mo dheòin,
Eilein mo chridhe is mo leòin...
chan eil dòchas ri do bhailtean
éirigh àrd le gàire 's aiteas,
's chan eil fiughair ri do dhaoine
's Ameireaga 's an Fhraing 'gam faotainn.

Great Island, Island of my desire,
Island of my heart and wound...
there is no hope of your townships
rising high with gladness and laughter,
and your men are not expected
when America and France take them.

Maìrg an t-sùil a chì air fairge
ian mór marbh na h-Albann.

Pity the eye that sees on the ocean
the great dead bird of Scotland.

This sense of landscape and attachment to place is closely bound up with human relations, not merely with personal memories of friends and of their company as in 'An t-Eilean', but with a profound awareness of the community extended not only in place but also in time: an awareness of all those who lived and strove and were buried in this earth, not as remote figures in a history-book but as part of one's own flesh and blood. It is this same instinct, for example, which made the Irish Declaration of Independence of 1916 begin "in the name of God and the generations who are gone before us". So Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain can contemplate a ruined church in the Ross of Mull and pass in a line to the battle of Inverkeithing and the memory of a three-hundred year old poem. Once again the Irish reader may have to brush up his Scottish history or may never have heard the tradition of the seven MacLeans dying with the shout of "Fear eile air son Eachainn!", but he will have no trouble in stepping across the centuries with the poet or sharing the pathos of that tragic pride.

Not for one moment is the poet's attitude to that past defined by the sort of unearned emotion with which even sympathetic outsiders have often looked at Gaelic history; what one might call the "All their wars were merry and all their songs were sad" syndrome. The last verse of the poem we have just mentioned brings that flight of fancy down to earth:

Ach dé mu na ciadan eile
is ficheadan dhiubh cheart cho àrd
anns an spiorad ri'n ceann-cinnidh
is ri bràthair a' bhàird?

But what of the hundreds of others
of whom scores were quite as high
in spirit as their chief
or as the brother of the bard?

The art of rigorous control of lyric emotion is, it seems to me, a characteristic which makes Mac Gill-Eain's poetry an authentic continuation of one of the most enduring aspects of the Gaelic tradition, whether Irish or Scottish. Time and again, we find the upsurge of feeling reined in by an adamant detachment; the fervour of mediaeval religious verse by a detail of homely, almost homespun, realism; the glow

of the *amour courtois* by a sudden twist of irony; the lyric intensity of folksong by an expression simple to the point of *naïveté*. All through Mac Gill-Eain's poetry we find this same elegance and distinction of spirit, and know ourselves to be in the presence of a poet whom we in Ireland would be glad to account with Ó Bruadair and Ó Rathaille among the aristocrats of lyricism.

Nor is Mac Gill-Eain himself ever in doubt about the worth of his poetic inheritance; he has no hesitation about coupling Dante and Dugald Buchanan, or the black ships

a sheòl Odysseus a nall á Itaca
no Mac Mhic Ailein a nall á Uidhist.

that Odysseus sailed over from Ithaca
or Clanranald over from Uist.

When he would call to his aid the mythic lovers of the past, they start to him from all tongues indifferently, from Ireland and Scotland, Homer and the troubadours:

Do m' shùilean-sa bu tu Deirdre
's i bòidheach 's a' bhuaile ghréine...

To my eyes you were Deirdre
beautiful in the sunny cattle-fold...

an Una aig Tómas Làidir,
Eimhir Chù Chulainn agus Gráinne.
Bu tu té nam míle long,
úidh nam bàrd is bàs nan sonn.
's bu tu an té a thug an fhois
's an t-sith bho chridhe Uilleim Rois,

Strong Thomas's Una,
Cuchulainn's Eimhir, and Grainne.
You were the one of the thousand ships,
desire of poets and death of heroes,
you were she who took the rest
and the peace from the heart of William Ross.

an Audiart a bhuair De Born
agus Maoibhe nan còrn.

the Audiart who plagued De Born,
and Maeve of the drinking horns.

With ease and sureness he finds in old Gaelic literature the symbol which will most effectively embody his theme. The jealousy of the ageing King Conchobhar reaches into the grave to separate Naoise and Deirdre, his memory still haunted by the idyll of their dalliance in the Scottish glens about which Deirdre sang. How much more alive and unbroken is the long literary tradition of the Gaels for this poet than for anyone in Ireland!

Chan fhàg mi 'san aon uaigh iad
fad fin-shuaineach na h-oidhche,
a broilleach cìoch-gheal
ri uchd-san mór geal
tre shìorruidheachd na h-oidhche,
a bhial-sa r' a bial, r' a gruaidh
air cho fliuch 's bhios ùir an tuaim:
b' fhaide 'n oidhche na 'n Gleann Da Ruadh,

I will not leave them in the same grave
for the whole long night,
her fair breasts
to his great fair chest
throughout the night's eternity,
his mouth to her mouth, to her cheek,
for all the wet earth of the tomb:
the night would be longer than in Glen Da
Ruadh,

bu luasgan cadal Gleann Eite;
bidh 'n oidhche fada, 'n cadal fòil,
gun dìth shùilean air na doill.

sleep in Glen Eive was unrest;
this night will be long, the sleep tranquil,
the blind will need no eyes.

It would of course be inadequate and unjust to conceive of Mac Gill-Eain's relationship to the Gaelic tradition purely in terms of a rehearsal of historical memories and legendary motifs and in the echoing of poetic conventions. What is most exhilarating is the realisation that for him the 'dùthchas' of which we have already spoken is not an inert endowment from his people's past, but a source of vitality, a renewal of hope, and a pledge of life. Seen in the ominous perspective of the present situation of both Gaelic languages, this is perhaps what stirs the deepest

emotion in the Irish reader – the fulfilment, in art at least, of all that the Irish Revival movement from the Gaelic League on had hoped and worked for. Nothing less than the survival, the rejuvenation and triumphant restatement of the culture of a deprived and dispossessed people, of what Mac Gill-Eain himself calls

<p>.... an nì do-ruighinn buailte a dheilbh ar daoine anns an uaigneas, as an anacothrom 's as a' bhuaireadh gus na dhiùchd as am miorbhail.</p>	<p>.... the unattainable stricken thing that our people fashioned in obscurity out of hardship and passion, until there came out of it the marvel.</p>
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It is an effective answer to that nagging doubt so familiar to those who write in threatened languages like ours, and which Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain too expressed:

<p>Chan fhaic mi fàth mo shaothrach bhith cur smaointean an cainnt bhàsmhoir...</p>	<p>I do not see the sense of my toil putting thoughts in a dying tongue...</p>
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<p>ach thugadh dhuinn am muillion bliadhna 'na mhìr an roinn chianail fhàsmhoir, gaisge 's foighidinn nan ciadan agus miorbhail aodainn àlainn.</p>	<p>but we have been given the million years, a fragment of a sad growing portion, the heroism and patience of hundreds and the miracle of a beautiful face.</p>
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A typically Gaelic defiance, we would like to think, of what looks like hopeless odds. Eachann Ruadh nan Cath was no more dauntless at Inverkeithing.

This tragic pathos which haunts any thinking inheritor of the Gaelic past and lurks in Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain's poetry seems to me to achieve its *locus classicus* in the poem 'Hallaig', wherein, too, an unbroken courage faces the unthinkable, the disappearance of people and language and of all cultural freehold. For this reason the poem is an epitome of much of the specific attraction which the poet's work holds for Irish audiences. The outrage at injustice, held under iron restraint, is there; the burden of a history which tore a Gaelic people from their beloved places, from the loved faces of their friends and forebears; the 'tuainéal', the trauma, brought on by the contemplation of such wilful profanation of these holiest of human things; all expressed in a dream sequence which might itself be seen as a contemporary re-working of a Gaelic convention with a long history, the 'aisling', in an age which has seen a fresh significance in oneiric literature.

I would not have it thought, however, as a consequence of the preceding disquisition that the undoubted admiration in Ireland for Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain is based solely on the reflection in his work of preoccupations of our own, on a sort of Gaelic parochialism, as it were. Apart from the fact that many of these preoccupations are, it seems to me, our particular share of the pity and the pride of the human condition, this present consideration of our fellow-feeling is secondary, in the sense that it assumes and should be read against the primary achievement of a major lyric poet. The Irish Gael, too, is first caught and held by a poetry of private and public drama, by the golden love of 'Tràighean' and 'A' Bhuaile Ghréine' and 'Fo Sheòl', by the agonized love and remorse and the intimation of blight and death in 'Aithreachas' or the poems of 'An Iomhaigh Bhriste'.

This essay has chosen rather to dwell, with complacency and maybe self-indulgence, on those contingent things of our common inheritance which Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain has forged into a new permanence. For many of us still in Ireland, against all appearances, the remaking of the Gaelic tradition into new forms, perhaps even into the matrix of a new sense of communion, remains one of the profoundest and most lasting ways of binding up our many wounds, in Ulster, in

Eire, maybe for all I know in Alba too.

On bha t' ùidh anns an duine....
rinn thu Gàidheil dhe na Goill.

“Since your care was for the human being,” wrote Somhairle of his brother Calum Iain, “you made Gaels of the Gall.” When we in Ireland contemplate the resurrection of Gaelic culture accomplished in Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain’s poetic *opus*, the renewed sense of ourselves which it provokes in us, we might echo: “You made Gaels of the Gaels too”:

“Rinn thu Gàidheil dhe na Gàidheil”.

BRENDAN DEVLIN