Eoin Mac Cárthaigh and Pádraig de Paor (editors), *Máirtín Ó Cadhain 2020*. Dublin: Cló Léann na Gaeilge, 2023. xiv + 167 pages. EUR 25.00.

Recent years have seen the steady emergence of English-language translations of Máirtín Ó Cadhain's work, most notably of *Cré na Cille* (1949) – translated as *The Dirty Dust* (2015) by Alan Titley and *Graveyard Clay* (2016) by Liam Mac Con Iomaire and Tim Robinson – as well as a selection of short stories under the title *The Quick and the Dead* (2021). Such translations have ensured that Ó Cadhain's work now features prominently on the shelves of many more Anglophone speakers than it may well have done otherwise, and it is likely that the coming years will see increased critical engagement with Ó Cadhain in the English language as a result. It is important to remember, however, that there already exists a large body of quite brilliant criticism on Ó Cadhain in the Irish language. Now, with the publication of *Máirtín Ó Cadhain 2020*, we are presented with what amounts to a Who's Who of Ó Cadhain's Irish-language critics of the past few decades.

Based on papers delivered at the eponymous conference held by Trinity College Dublin in November 2020 to mark fifty years since Ó Cadhain's death, this collection features a mix of academic and personal essays, all in the Irish language. It begins with the opening words of the conference by Seán Ó Cadhain, nephew of the writer and Director of Iontaobhas Uí Chadhain. Seán's account of his uncle stresses the ordinariness of his character – a common theme throughout – but also depicts him as a man with fervently held political views. This nicely tees up the first essay by Cathal Ó Háinle in which he explores Ó Cadhain's letters to friend and fellow socialist Eoghan Ó hAodha. These letters give a fascinating insight into Ó Cadhain's time as a lecturer in Trinity from 1956, most especially the level of dedication that he put into his teaching and the deleterious effect that this had on him personally and creatively. Ó Háinle's is not the only essay in this collection to make ample use of the archival material now available at Trinity, with Mícheál Briody's exploration of unpublished writings of especial interest, most particularly the scripts of Ó Cadhain's public lectures. Briody's detailed breakdown of the various manuscripts in the archive should result in this essay becoming essential reading for Ó Cadhain scholars embarking upon archival work for the first time. Another piece that engages extensively with the archive is Colm Ó Cuaig and Charles Dillon's essay on their editing and digital publication of Ó Cadhain's lexicographical work for the Department of Education and An Gúm between 1937–46. During this time Ó Cadhain assembled over one million words encompassing definitions, synonyms and, most interestingly, extended passages of text featuring words from the Galway dialect. Ó Cuaig and Dillon note that these lively passages

resemble pieces of flash fiction and provide a unique insight into an understudied period of Ó Cadhain's writing. As they convincingly argue, Ó Cadhain as author is always present in Ó Cadhain as lexicographer (p.151).

Beyond the archive-based essays, Máirín Nic Eoin's examination of Ó Cadhain's fears of nuclear destruction is perhaps the standout from the collection. Nic Eoin focuses on the short story 'An Sean agus an Nua' but also places his writings in the broader context of Irish-language writing on the threat of nuclear annihilation, particularly that of Máirtín Ó Díreáin and Eoghan Ó Tuairisc. Nic Eoin highlights Ó Cadhain's linking of the nuclear arms race with the destruction of minor languages and cultures from the areas where nuclear sites were located. She then astutely places Ó Cadhain's reading in an ecological context, noting how he seems to have identified a phenomenon that Naomi Klein has more recently written about using the term 'sacrifice zones' (p.40). Another of the highlights of this collection is Ian Ó Caoimh's reading of the paratextual material in the posthumously published *Athnuachan* (1995). Ó Caoimh delves into Ó Cadhain's impulse towards meta-fictional experimentation, noting the thorny issues of narrative positioning in both *Athnuachan* and *Cré na Cille*, made most apparent through the 'Nóta don Léitheoir' (Note to the Reader) in the former. This is a sprawling and impressive exploration of the complexities of Ó Cadhain's writings, touching also on his tendency towards textual and structural repetition across the works, but most particularly in the short stories. Another piece that deals with this predilection towards repetition is Caitlín Nic Íomhair's examination of the 'fáinne fí', or vicious circle, present in many of the early stories, where characters try and fail, fall and rise, again and again (pp.97–8). This focus on the early stories is a welcome one, given that they have at times been dismissed as being less sophisticated than the later, more urban-based, ones. Máire Ní Annracháin's contribution is also focused on the stories, particularly the Biblical allusions present in 'An Seanfhear'. This is a clever reading that identifies the subtle ways in which Ó Cadhain wove Biblical references into this story, while also mixing in pagan Gaelic motifs. The final contribution, Pádraig de Paor's reading of ends and endings in *Cré na Cille*, is by far the most theoretical piece in the collection, drawing on theories ranging from René Girard's 'désir mimétique' to Alasdair MacIntyre's distinctions between *telos* and *finis*. De Paor compares Ó Cadhain's exploration of time and teleology with those of such disparate figures as Jean-Paul Sartre and Quentin Tarantino in a piece that once again underscores the philosophical complexity of Ó Cadhain's writings.

Yet what makes this collection perhaps most refreshing is its embrace of the more informal and personal reflections on Ó Cadhain regarding

what it has meant to engage deeply with his work. In Titley's contribution, he dwells on the challenges associated with translating Ó Cadhain, though he eschews any all-encompassing theory of translation, instead emphasising throughout that it is 'an bhraistint' (feeling) that dictates the business of translation (p.134). As Titley rightly notes, when translating somebody like Ó Cadhain, one is aware that one is not simply translating language but also the very concept of a canonical literary figure (p.138). This sense of the magnitude of Ó Cadhain's place in Irish-language literature is most apparent in Gearóid Denvir's reflections. Denvir's piece notes the importance of Ó Cadhain to his generation of undergraduates, particularly the fact of having a 'mórscríbhneoir […] inár dteanga féin' (major writer […] in our own language; p.76). Denvir is one of a diminishing number of Ó Cadhain's readers who can claim to have spoken to the man himself, and his first-hand account of Ó Cadhain the oral examiner is a particularly amusing anecdote in which Ó Cadhain interrupts the examination to engage in toponymics regarding a townland near his home.

This anecdote nicely sums up an aspect of Ó Cadhain's writing and activism that comes through in so many of these essays: his fierce intellectualism and cosmopolitanism never took from his dedication to and fascination with his own people and place. With its mix of the personal and the academic, this excellent and varied collection is a fitting tribute to the 'mórscríbhneoir' himself.

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Paige Reynolds, *Modernism in Irish Women's Contemporary Writing: The Stubborn Mode*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024. 228 pages. GBP 70.00.

Something about Ireland continually thwarts liberal dreams of progress. There is a story that many are desperate to tell, about a triumphant, if belated, accession to liberal modernity. Constitutional reform presents a new Ireland, confidently shrugging off retrogressive ideologies. What to do, then, with the most recent referendum result, in which Ireland opted to keep its 'woman in the home' clause? The reasons behind this defeat are complex, of course, but as far-right violence continues to spread across the island, it feels past time to end this collective delusion that we are inevitably moving towards something called 'progress'. Clearly the stories we need to tell are a lot more complex.