Death in Máirtín Ó Cadhain’s Cré na Cille

Presentation by Erik Sellstrom

TRP2671H: A Christian Ending to our Life: Dying and Death in Orthodox Tradition
Máirtín Ó Cadhain

- b. 1906-1970 d.
- Born in Connemara in Galway on the west coast of Ireland
- School teacher, but dismissed due to IRA membership
- Irish author and advocate for the Irish language
- Interned in the Curragh during “The Emergency” (years of WW2)
- While in the Curragh, he wrote Cré na Cille, published 1949.
Cré na Cille: Overview

- The graveyard
- Dialogue and Interludes
- State of the Dead and Attachment to the Living
- Caitriona and Nell
Death and Irish Folk Beliefs in *Cré na Cille*

- The Power of Priests and Miracles:
  - John’s Gospel and Deflection of Death

- The Importance of the Graveyard Cross
  - The Importance of Social Memory

- Irish Purgatory
  - The Soul Remains with the Body Until There is No Body
Interludes: The Trumpet

I am the Trumpet of the Graveyard. Hearken to what I have to say! Hearken unto my voice...

The unturned sod is unwelcoming and sour with its lining of ice. The heart of the earth is acid sharp. As this is the meadow of tears...

Aboveground life is putting on the raiment of Spring. The pert peek of serendipitous stalks and the fresh smile which breaks on the bare earth are the basting thread of this suit of clothes. The radiant rays of the sun agleam on the shoulders of the clouds are its hem. It’s buttons are the clumps of primroses waving from the banks of every hedgerow and whispering behind every rock. Its lining is the love song of the lark chirping above in the high empyrean and pouring down through the diaphanous air on the ploughman, while the brushwood is the mellifluous melody which accompanies the birds in their building....
But already, the thread which the tailor teases through the eye of his needle is an emaciated rainbow on the horizon. The scissors of a gale is tearing the buttons out. The clothes are being unraveled by the ripping of the elegant twill. The aurora of gold in the field is being unburnished as the corn dips its head. The tempest fairy wind is roaring through the barn and sweeping away every ear, wisp, and grain left over from last year’s harvest...

For spring and summer have retired. They have been gathered up by the squirrel in his haunt beneath the tree. They have flown away on the wings of the swallow and with the slipping sun...

I am the Trumpet of the Graveyard. Hearken to my voice! Hearken unto me...
Lessons About Death and Life

• Time and Connectedness
  • What we do in life carries on, even though we are dead

• Sin – or the suffering we cause or allow to fester inside us - is the energy of death itself
  • Bitterness and resentment in life are mystical metaphors of our bodily decomposition in death, not the other way around

• Death cannot be prevented. Live as if you are certain of its coming