

## Forgotten Poets of the Emerald Isle

Hello, I'm Michael Finley, professor of literature at the University of Southern North Dakota, and author the forthcoming study, *Forgotten Poets of the Emerald Isle*.

We are all familiar with Ireland's glorious laureates of Ireland, the Becketts, the Joyces, the Yeatses and the Shaws. But there are many others as well. Tonight I will tell you about four of them.

I think you will discover, as I did in my research, that sometimes things are forgotten ... on the merits.

Our first poet is ...

## **PADRAIC MAHONEY, OF COUNTY CLARE 1887-1933**

*A respected magistrate, and a champion trout fisherman, Mahoney went mad in his 53<sup>rd</sup> year, and took to holding court in the vestry of Trinity College, wearing naught but rubber boots and his underclothes. His work was noted for its bluntness but also its truth. It was in the condition of madness that he composed this definition of what it is to born of the sod.*

### **We Irish**

It is said we hate the body  
and tis true.

It is said we punish  
with silence  
and we do.

Slow to anger, slow to judge,  
good thing we never hold a grudge.

It is said we sing the sweetest songs  
since Rosie fingered Dawn --

but ... then ... we have ...  
our downsides ... too.

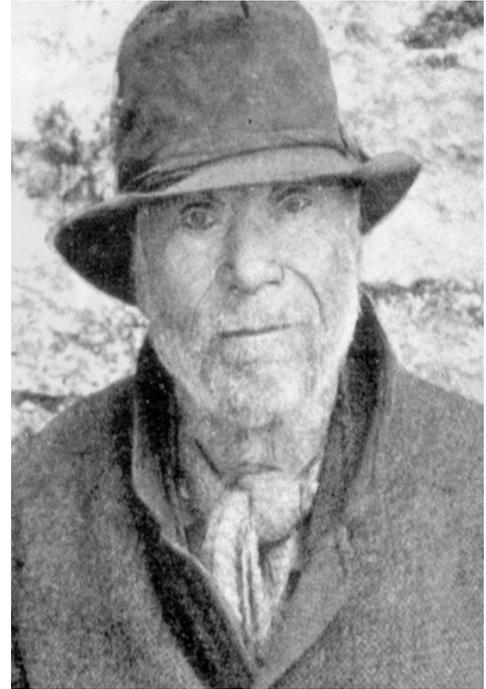


## DANIEL DOAKS, OF KILFENORA 1725-1793

*An exterminator by trade, Doaks was as proud of his verse as he was of managing the rat population of half the county. The legend on his shop door read, "We guarantee to kill all but two, as in the Holy Scripture. Besides, killing them all is bad for business."*

*Prepare for a vision of impenetrable gloom. The supersensitive may want to move to the back. Oh, I see you already have.*

*The poem I have selected is addressed to Doaks' brother-in-law. Stu Mulligan, a shearer of sheep who had suffered a series of reversals.*



*In the last stanza, it says "the lord is demanding his rights." This references the ancient right of the landlord to the first fruits of his property – sometimes extending to the marital bed. But between you and me, I think he is saying something ominous about God.*

## Mulligan

Mulligan, Mulligan  
when will ya learn?  
Your son is on fire.  
your dotter's been burned

Mulligan, Mulligan  
Where is your brain?  
The missus has cheated  
ya time and again

Mulligan, Mulligan  
when will ya quit?  
Yer work has been canceled.

Yer house smells of shit.

Mulligan, Mulligan  
Time for a rest  
The ball's in the chamber  
the hammer is pressed

Mulligan, Mulligan  
run away down.  
The lord is demanding  
his rights ... from ... now ... on.

## WE TURN NOW TO ETHAN CLOONEY 1901-1948 ...

*celebrated as the “Dove of Londonderry” – its sights, and sounds, and smells. This once-famous poem, “The Derry Air,” was that city's official ode, for about a fortnight, until the schoolchildren of that city pointed out a certain ambiguity.*

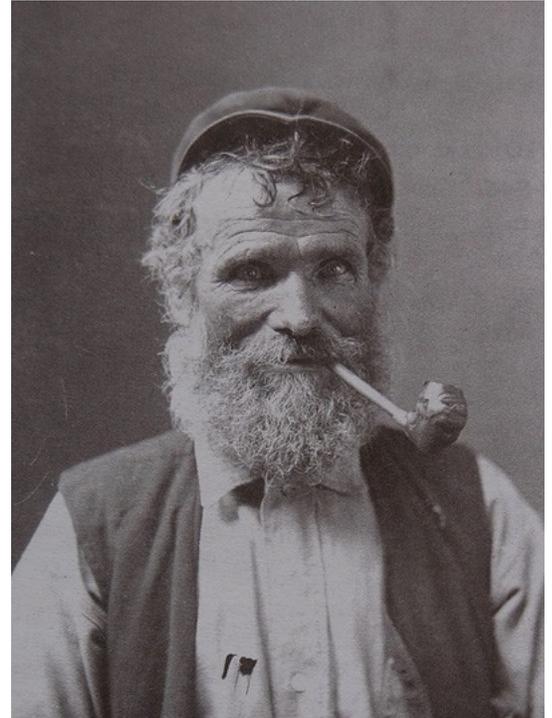
### The Derry Air, by Ethan Clooney

I thrill to sniff the Derry air  
at six o'clock in the morning  
The cocks have barely had their crow  
To the new day dawning.

The smell is of the oaken barn  
Where the livestock do lie down  
I close my eyes to savor it  
In my knuckle-biting town.

Betimes I choose to stand afar  
And glimpse the Derry air,  
It floats in on the River Foyle  
Like a muffin, sweet, and fair.

I do embrace the Derry air  
It makes me clench me teeth.  
The blinds are parted, the menfolk see,  
And sigh, and hold their breath.



## DR. RORY McCARTHY (1845-1916)

*Dr. O'Reilly was professor of history at University College.*

*He was noted for loading his poems with academic footnotes. A poem of only a few lines might thus take a half-hour or more to explain.*

*The poem I have selected, "Skibbereen," is in a form known as the hunger dream, recounting the delirium of the great famine of 1845 and 1852.*

*Now, to get those footnotes out of the way:*

- *Skibbereen, about 20 kilometers from Cork, the most southerly town in all Ireland*
- ***Major General Bill** was William Groves, British superintendant of relief operations in the south.*
- *I gave my eyes – it was common for the dead to lie where they fell, and for the ravens to pluck out their eyes*
- *Mangel-wurzel was a common field weed that grew edible tubers. The starving populace turned to mangel-wurzel as a last source of nutrition.*
- *The neckermost refers to the practice of draining blood from an animal's throat, for nourishment, until the animal died.*
- *8000-10000 victims of the hunger are buried in a mass grave at Abbeystrewery. McCarthy's poem is dedicated to them.*



## Skibbereen

Step to, step to, fair Skibbereen,  
don't let them know you are dreamin'.

Let my hounds come lick my fess  
For why should friends be afeared.

Let insects play tag-the-old-man  
amid the confines of his beard.

And bid the local beauties sigh,  
the ones I longed to be beside.

Sheila Murphy, you knew my vow  
I gave every aye for you.

Peggy McCarthy, kick over the hearth  
and prod me by that cheerful fire.

Fetch English Major General Bill  
who taught me how to lie still.

Here's to patting my round torso,  
Full to here with mangel-wurzel.

Now just a pint to please the host  
and tap it from the neckermost.

Don't dip your finger in the soup,  
you'll have it handed back to you.

O Mary Kilkenny with the lucky penny --  
O my comely girl Kathleen!

I shall live and I shall die  
in the happy Land of Ire

'Tis fine to be plying a ploughman's  
dream ... in Skibbereen