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*Ó Doibhlin*

## A Poet in Exile to Our Lady of Perpetual Help

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# A Poet in Exile to Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Queen among queens, fair flower of womankind,  
Gentleness itself to soothe God's wrathful claim,  
tree of radiance, patroness, fast friend of our hallowed band,  
that our ancient conceit be forgiven us, make now a timely prayer.

The Lord of the spheres takes delight in His child unstained  
whom Christ chose without rival to hold him as nurse on her  
knee;  
I picture in her the Spirit repose and take his ease.  
My prop is she when life crushes me, the one to speak up in my  
case.

A beacon I see her to guide those who faint in the way;  
lithe stem is she unblemished from green shoot to bloom;  
though shrill be my protest when menaced by sickness or pain,  
to the folds of her mantle I turn for shelter and shield.

If I sit by the campfire among blades sharp and swift to the draw  
where an enemy's vengeance can readily find its hour,  
or I sail aboard warfleets through wave-break and tide-rip and  
dread,  
my succour is she in their havoc; not one do I fear.

Though hemmed in by demons from the depths of dark Acheron  
and beguiled by this devious world every day that dawns,  
though greed like a lightning bolt drive me to lie in my teeth,  
the mild modest Lady brings to nothing their hoard of ruse.

The Lord of the dew-washed creation has chosen this Maid  
to speak a reprieve for us all when we call on her name;  
day by day we look for her favour till death be our fate  
and till Christ in his limber draughtnet take the souls of us all.

*(?Aodh Buí Mac Cruitín, c 1680 – 1755)*

The Gaelic original of this poem was found in a manuscript in the Maynooth library by Donncha Ó Floinn, sometime professor

## A POET IN EXILE TO OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP

of Irish. It is rich in the spirituality of post-Tridentine or Baroque Europe. Its Marian devotion reflects the cult of Mary, Help of Christians, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and Mary full of grace, even the Mediatrix of all grace. In its wider context, the fifth verse is based on the world, the flesh and the devil as in the Letter of John.

The first stanza clearly shows the author to see himself as a member of the poetic caste, whose tradition it was to add a verse of praise of Mary to each of their eulogies, just as he is well aware of their traditional reputation for arrogance. Culturally, the haunting preoccupation with final salvation is matched by the dramatic vigour of the Baroque imagination.

Though unattributed in the manuscript, this Munster composition fits no author so well as the Clare poet Aodh Bui Mac Cruitín, for the imaginative sweep mirrors admirably the latter's adventurous career; educated by his uncle, also Aodh Mac Cruitín and professional poet; turn by turn, literary man in the Dublin of Dean Swift, exile on the high seas and officer in the Irish Brigade, scholar in the circle of the Irish College in Paris and finally clandestine schoolmaster back in his native Clare. Few historical figures encapsulate so well the intellectual life of penal Ireland.

(Original text in : *Ó Doibhlin, Manuail de Litríocht na Gaeilge*, vol. iii, p.188-189)