

## Epitaph for a Musician: Rhoda Coghill as Pianist, Composer and Poet

And Spirit's new mysterious theme  
Only the dead musician hears.<sup>1</sup>

Rhoda Coghill (1903–2000) was one of Ireland's best-known pianists during the early and middle decades of the twentieth century. However, Coghill also attempted to establish herself as a composer in the post-Free-State years, before switching her creative focus to poetry in the mid-1940s while still maintaining her busy performance career. Reassessing Coghill's legacy is timely given how Irish musicology has evolved in the past decades, particularly with the publication of *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland* (2013) which constitutes a major effort to evaluate how diverse works, performances, individuals and organizations have shaped music in this country. Axel Klein has examined Coghill's cantata *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*, while Richard Pine has noted her long-time role as accompanist with Radio Éireann (later, from 1966, RTÉ: Raidió Telefís Éireann).<sup>2</sup> Further research has highlighted how Irish women such as the composer Ina Boyle and Feis Ceoil founder Annie Patterson influenced the twentieth-century art-music scene;<sup>3</sup> and recent initiatives such as Claire Cunningham's *Women of Note* radio series for Lyric FM in 2012 have in turn brought this work to mainstream audiences. This article seeks to clarify the chronology of Coghill's artistic endeavours, highlight the availability of archival material, examine the stylistic

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<sup>1</sup> Rhoda Coghill, 'Epitaph for a Musician', *Time is a Squirrel* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1956).

<sup>2</sup> Axel Klein, *Die Musik Irlands im 20. Jahrhundert* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1996), 178–85. I wish to thank Anja Bunzel for translating this material. See also Klein's short entry, 'Rhoda Coghill', in Harry White and Barra Boydell (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, 2 vols (Dublin: UCD Press, 2013), i, 213. Another brief article on Coghill is Sarah M. Burn, 'Coghill, Rhoda (Sinclair)', in *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>, accessed 20 July 2015. On Coghill's role in Irish radio, see Richard Pine, *Music and Broadcasting in Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005): 92–93, 383–84 and *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> See Ita Beausang, 'Ina Boyle', in *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, i, 119–21. Annie Patterson is one of the key figures discussed by Jennifer O'Connor in *The Role of Women in Music in Nineteenth-Century Dublin* (PhD diss., Maynooth University, 2010).

features of her music and poetry and consider the impact of her performance career on her work.<sup>4</sup>

### **Coghill the performer**

If Coghill's name is known today it is due mostly to her reputation as a formidable pianist. Archival materials show that the young Coghill was committed to exploring modernist Russian and French music, some of which left an imprint on her own scores. Meanwhile, the trajectory of her professional activity overlaps with the histories of Radio Éireann/RTÉ and, to a lesser extent, the Feis Ceoil. In documenting these intersections, I attempt to show that Coghill negotiated a set of institutional values shaped by nationalist cultural politics and sometimes sexist norms too.

Her early activity in music charts her rapid progress from prodigy to establishment figure. Coghill learned the piano from her mother at home in Marlborough Road, Donnybrook, before being enrolled at the Patricia Read Leinster School of Music.<sup>5</sup> By 1918 the fifteen-year-old was billed as a star attraction at Dublin's Theatre Royal.<sup>6</sup> Having won every major piano trophy at the Feis Ceoil and gained her MusB degree at Trinity College Dublin, Coghill became, by the middle of the 1920s, a fixture on the professional circuit. Following a performance of Liszt's Sonata in B minor, one of the Hungarian rhapsodies, Busoni's arrangement of some Bach chorale preludes and 'the most strenuous' of the Chopin *études*, one critic hailed the 'brilliance of her keyboard work' as 'almost astonishing'.<sup>7</sup> Reviews from this period also emphasize Coghill's focus on recent works by Scriabin and Debussy. She was especially drawn to the latter even though the sensual subtleties of French impressionism did not necessarily suit her strengths as a performer. In the aforementioned recital of Liszt, Bach-Busoni and Chopin, she also played Debussy: the same critic claimed that her 'highly analytical type of mind' produced an unsatisfying interpretation of *La Cathédrale engloutie* and

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<sup>4</sup> The main resource is Trinity College Dublin's uncatalogued but extensive Rhoda Coghill collection, in the Manuscripts and Archives Research Library. It contains most of her manuscripts, numerous files relating to her career as a performer, some professional correspondence, and personal effects such as diaries and certificates. I am grateful to Jane Maxwell for facilitating my access to these materials in August 2012. Recordings of Coghill's music are available in the Contemporary Music Centre, Ireland.

<sup>5</sup> As mentioned by Coghill in an interview with Ray Lynott, broadcast on RTÉ FM3 on 14 October 1993.

<sup>6</sup> Advertisement for concert to be held on 5 May at the Theatre Royal (*The Irish Times*, 4 May 1918), in which she was billed as a 'child pianist'.

<sup>7</sup> 'Pianoforte Recital: Miss Rhoda Coghill', *The Irish Times*, 21 November 1925, 9.

that her account of *Les Papillons* was 'too carefully calculated'.<sup>8</sup> This formative study of French modernism doubtless influenced her compositions, discussed below. Notable events in Coghill's fledgling career during that decade included an acclaimed London debut in 1923;<sup>9</sup> studies with Artur Schnabel in Berlin (1927–28);<sup>10</sup> a broadcast on 2RN in 1927;<sup>11</sup> a concerto debut (Tchaikovsky No. 1) later that year with the newly formed Dublin Philharmonic Society Orchestra;<sup>12</sup> and appointment as Feis Ceoil accompanist in 1928.<sup>13</sup> As well as appearing with the Dublin Philharmonic as a soloist, she sometimes played in the double-bass section, including on the occasion of the Philharmonic's inaugural concert on 26 March 1927.<sup>14</sup> She was further appointed that year to serve on the managing committee of this orchestra which, among its other achievements, championed the work of contemporary Irish composer Ina Boyle via two performances of her *Magic Harp* rhapsody in 1928 and 1929.<sup>15</sup>

So it was that, by the end of the 1930s, Coghill had become embedded in the nation's emerging musical infrastructure—she was part of its only real orchestra, radio station and major educational initiative (the Feis Ceoil). While continuing to give solo performances in Ireland, Coghill was mostly in demand as an accompanist. She had begun to carve out this niche as a teenager, collaborating with singers such as Jean Nolan and Percy Whitehead in engagements at the Abbey Theatre.<sup>16</sup> Later partnerships included a piano-duo broadcast with Frederick Stone from the BBC Belfast station in

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<sup>8</sup> 'Pianoforte Recital: Miss Rhoda Coghill', 9. For a more positive account of Coghill performing Debussy, see 'Miss Coghill's Pianoforte Recital', *The Irish Times*, 23 February 1920, 3.

<sup>9</sup> 'AKS', 'Miss Rhoda Coghill's London Debut: Success at Steinway Hall', *The Irish Times*, 15 June 1923, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Klein, 'Rhoda Coghill', 213.

<sup>11</sup> The recital is listed in 'Broadcasting Today', *The Irish Times*, 4 April 1927, 3. 2RN, founded in 1926, was the first radio station established in the Irish Free State.

<sup>12</sup> 'Dublin Philharmonic Orchestra: This Afternoon's Concert', *The Irish Times*, 29 October 1927, 6. The Society was an amalgamation of the Dublin Symphony Orchestra and the Dublin Philharmonic Choral Society.

<sup>13</sup> Noted in 'Feis Ceoil: Names of Prize-Winners', *The Irish Times*, 26 May 1928, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Pine, 37.

<sup>15</sup> News of Coghill's appointment to the committee was reported in 'The Week's News of Ireland', *The Irish Times*, 16 April 1927, 12. Performances of *The Magic Harp* are mentioned in 'Obbligato', 'Dublin Philharmonic Orchestra: Recitals for the Royal Dublin Society', *The Irish Times*, 5 November 1929, 4.

<sup>16</sup> See *The Irish Times* references to concerts featuring these performers on 1 October 1921 and 7 March 1923.

1939.<sup>17</sup> That same year Coghill became the resident Radio Éireann accompanist and would remain in this post until her retirement in 1968.<sup>18</sup> Once installed at Radio Éireann, Coghill managed to organize a small-scale performance of her 1923 rhapsody for solo tenor, chorus and orchestra, *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*. Shortly afterwards the broadcaster took steps that hinted at its growing support for native contemporary composers. In September 1941, the programme 'First Performances' premiered E. J. Moeran's song settings of texts from Joyce's *Chamber Music* and Arthur Duff's specially commissioned *Irish Suite for Strings*. A similar broadcast in 1944 featured a new Moeran song-cycle, this time based on Seumas O'Sullivan's poetry.<sup>19</sup> While these were undoubtedly positive developments, the frequent allusions to Irish literature and localities in the new works suggest that these contemporary-music initiatives were grounded in the older patriotic ideology as espoused by *Conradh na Gaeilge* founder and future President of Ireland Douglas Hyde at the inauguration of 2RN on 1 January 1926.<sup>20</sup> Hyde had emphasized radio's potential for nation-building. Making specific reference to music in this speech, he stated: 'A nation is made from inside itself; it is made first of all by its language, if it has one; by its music, song, games and customs'.<sup>21</sup> Hence, in its early years, the station prioritized indigenous traditional music above art music. Coghill, who accompanied the soprano Violet Burne in both aforementioned recitals (of September 1941 and October 1944) that featured song settings by Moeran, must have been aware of how Irish composers were expected to conform. The station acted as 'the chief motor of musical development but also at times a brake on that development' before 1960.<sup>22</sup> Coghill's compositional output from this period comprised song settings of the Irish poet 'Æ' (George Russell): these embraced the national spirit and would thus prove suitable for broadcast by the baritone Tomás Ó Súilleabháin

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<sup>17</sup> 'Quidnunc', 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 6 January 1939, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Coghill's appointment was reported in 'Pianist's Appointment', *The Irish Independent*, 29 July 1939, 13.

<sup>19</sup> For more on 'First Performances', see 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 16 September 1941, 3. The second concert was reviewed in 'New Irish Music', *The Irish Times*, 21 October 1944, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Pine, 3. Hyde was the first president of *Conradh na Gaeilge* (Gaelic League), an organization founded in 1893 which worked to revive the Irish language and preserve Irish culture.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Brian O'Neill, "'Lifting the veil": the Arts, Broadcasting and Irish Society', *Culture and Society*, 22/6 (November 2000), 763–85, abstract at <http://mcs.sagepub.com/content/22/6/763>.

<sup>22</sup> Pine, xxvi.

and others.<sup>23</sup> As the daughter of a Scotsman and a Dublin woman, both of whom were members of the Congregational Church, Coghill may have felt removed from Irish nationalist discourse.<sup>24</sup> As well as participating in initiatives to further the cause of Irish composers, Coghill pursued performance roles that ranged from playing ‘unashamedly popular’ material with the Radio Éireann Singers in the mid-1950s to accompanying visiting international artists such as Léon Goossens and Josef Suk.<sup>25</sup> As a measure of her accomplishments, she received a Jacob’s Radio Award for ‘Outstanding Service to Broadcasting’ in 1970—yet some commentators were slow to recognize the value of her work while she was active.

This reflected wider societal prejudice against professional women at the time. Radio Éireann routinely discriminated against its female musicians by paying them at a standard rate which was only 80% of what their male colleagues earned.<sup>26</sup> Coghill herself was exempt from this discrepancy, as both the orchestral leader and accompanist were paid slightly higher (identical) rates. As a state body, the station also upheld the Civil Service ban on employing married women. Coghill (who never married) had been recruited as a direct result when the original station accompanist, Kitty O’Doherty, was forced to retire for this reason. A tendency to dismiss Coghill’s work also emerged in published opinion that had been formulated during the 1940s—chiefly, Séumas Ó Braonáin’s chapter ‘Music in the Broadcasting Service’ and Charles Lynch’s chapter ‘The Concert Pianist in Ireland’ in Aloys Fleischmann’s landmark mid-century volume *Music in Ireland*.<sup>27</sup> Coghill is merely a footnote in Ó Braonáin’s chapter.<sup>28</sup> Lynch does not acknowledge her at all, even though he and his readers would have known that Coghill juggled accompaniment duties with a notable record

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<sup>23</sup> Ó Súilleabháin’s performance is mentioned in ‘Candida’, ‘An Irishwoman’s Diary,’ *The Irish Times*, 12 May 1950, 5.

<sup>24</sup> For a perspective on identity issues as applicable to one of Coghill’s peers, see Ruth Stanley, *Joan Trimble (1915–2000) and the Issue of her ‘Irish’ Musical Identity* (MA diss., University of Limerick, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Pine, 384 and 92. Goossens was mentioned as soloist in a Radio Éireann Symphony Concert to be given on 26 January 1947 (*The Irish Times*, 11 January 1947, 7). Coghill accompanied Suk in a radio broadcast in May 1975 (‘Next Week in the Arts: Music’, *The Irish Times*, 17 May 1975, 12).

<sup>26</sup> Pine, 66. Pine details the government’s efforts to dissuade the station from employing women at all.

<sup>27</sup> Séumas Ó Braonáin, ‘Music in the Broadcasting Service’, in Aloys Fleischmann (ed.), *Music in Ireland: A Symposium* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1952), 197–206; Charles Lynch, ‘The Concert Pianist in Ireland’, in Fleischmann, *Music in Ireland*, 177–84. Ó Braonáin was a former director of Radio Éireann.

<sup>28</sup> She is listed as Station Accompanist on p. 204.

of virtuoso concerto performances that included Beethoven's 'Emperor' in May 1944, the Schumann concerto in January 1945, Beethoven No. 4 in December 1946 and Rachmaninov No. 2 in May 1948. In fact, according to conductor Michael Bowles of the Radio Éireann Orchestra, Coghill and Lynch 'were as much a box-office attraction as almost any celebrity from England'.<sup>29</sup> Still, despite any challenges Coghill may have encountered as a woman working in this environment, she made her livelihood as a versatile pianist.

### **Coghill as composer (and arranger) and the Feis Ceoil**

Some of Coghill's female contemporaries (e.g., Joan Trimble and Dorothy Parke) enjoyed minor successes, while Ina Boyle achieved a degree of international recognition. Indeed, Axel Klein argues that it was women such as Boyle and Coghill who led the vanguard of modern composition in Ireland during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>30</sup> The inhibiting factor in Coghill's compositional career appears to have been her lack of international contacts. Boyle regularly travelled to London, where she had lessons with Ralph Vaughan Williams and maintained links with a community of British composers. On the other hand, in Dublin Coghill contended with a nationalist cultural mindset, limited opportunities for performance and almost no outlet for publication.

Her published original output was minute, comprising the *Gaelic Fantasy* for solo piano (1939)—officially titled *Saoirdhréacht Gaedhealach*—and *The Might of Love*, which appeared in a Quaker songbook collection in 1981.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the firm of Pigott in Dublin had published two of her arrangements of Irish airs for voice and piano: *Creeveen Cnó* (1925) and *Among the Heather* (1926). Coghill's radio work facilitated the dissemination of a handful of her other unpublished scores through live performances and broadcasts. *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking* had its full premiere in 1990. Four other original songs became known through her collaboration with Ó Súilleabháin: having broadcast *Refuge* and *Parting* in 1950, the pair recorded these plus another 'Æ' setting—*When Mine Hour is Come*—and a further original song—*Jenny Kissed Me*, after

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<sup>29</sup> Pine, 93.

<sup>30</sup> Klein, *Die Musik Irlands*, 179.

<sup>31</sup> Rhoda Coghill, *Saoirdhréacht Gaedhealach don phianó* (Dublin: Oifig on tSoláthair, 1939). John Sheldon (ed.), *Quaker Song Book* (London: Stainer & Bell, 1981). For more on *The Might of Love*, see the TCD Coghill collection, Box 1, File 2, Items 1–5.

a poem by Leigh Hunt—in January 1968.<sup>32</sup> The ‘Æ’ settings date from 1941, but the provenance of *Jenny* is uncertain.<sup>33</sup> To summarize, the only Coghill compositions that definitely reached the public domain are as follows:

Table 1

<i>Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking</i> , for solo tenor, chorus and orchestra (text: Walt Whitman)	composed 1923; performed 1990
<i>Saoidhréacht Gaedhealach (Gaelic Fantasy)</i> , for solo piano	composed 1930s; published 1939; orchestrated 1972 <sup>34</sup>
<i>Refuge</i> , for voice and piano (text: ‘Æ’, George Russell)	composed 1941; performed 1950
<i>Parting</i> , for voice and piano (text: ‘Æ’, George Russell)	composed 1941; performed 1950
<i>When Mine Hour is Come</i> , for voice and piano (text: ‘Æ’, George Russell)	composed 1941; performed 1950
<i>Jenny Kissed Me</i> , for voice and piano (text: Leigh Hunt)	composed 1939?; performed 1968
<i>The Might of Love</i> , for voice and piano (text: A. J. Hilty, translated by Coghill)	composed 1970s; published 1981

Several other unpublished original pieces are archived in TCD. Based on that collection and the current works-list in *Grove Music Online*,<sup>35</sup> Coghill’s remaining

<sup>32</sup> The recording took place on 24 January 1968. It may be accessed on cassette tape 199/73, side B, Contemporary Music Centre, Ireland. The recital also included *Among the Heather* and *The Old Woman of the Roads*.

<sup>33</sup> The TCD *Jenny* manuscript is undated. I suggest that it was written around 1939, as it seems a likely contender for the Feis Ceoil ‘Original Song’ competition Coghill entered that year.

<sup>34</sup> The manuscript of the arrangement for piano and orchestra is dated ‘Thursday 24 February’—and indeed Coghill performed it with the RTÉ Light Orchestra in the *Music of the Nation* programme broadcast on 15 March 1972. Details of the broadcast are available in the RTÉ Radio Sound Archives. The manuscript, a full score, is a revised version of the piano work and bears the title *Fantasy on Three Irish Airs for Pianoforte and Orchestra*. It is archived as N222 in the RTÉ Music Library. I wish to thank Lindsay Dowling for facilitating my access to these materials.

<sup>35</sup> Burn, as note 2.

original compositional output is as listed below in Table 2. She was most prolific in the 1920s and early 1930s, with a burst of activity again in the early 1940s, before going silent. (The song published in 1981 was plausibly written out of a sense of Christian duty, for Coghill was a devout Quaker.) After an ambitious start in 1923 with the rhapsody, the composer realized that it had no immediate prospect of performance, scaled down her forces and turned definitively towards art song. She was then rarely tempted to explore other genres, with the exception of the *Gaelic Fantasy*. The songs of 1941 coincided with Coghill's early years at Radio Éireann and capitalized on her ready access to the country's best singers. As settings of texts by the nationalist poet 'Æ' (Russell), the songs also explicitly supported the station's cultural values, which increased the likelihood of their public transmission (as first happened in 1950).

Table 2

<i>A Song of St Francis</i> , for voice and piano (A. N. Maughan)	1921
<i>I Will Not Let Thee Go</i> , for voice and piano (Robert Bridges)	1924
<i>I Love All Beauteous Things</i> , for voice and piano (Bridges)	1924
<i>Mary Moriarty</i> , for voice and piano (Winifred Mary Letts)	1925
<i>Messages</i> , for voice and piano (Francis Thompson)	1925
<i>When Childher Plays: Four Pieces for Piano</i>	1926
<i>Peasant Woman's Song</i> , for voice and piano (Dion Boucicault)	1926
<i>Erster Schnee</i> , for voice, oboe and piano (Otto Siepmann, translated by Coghill)	1931
<i>Call Not Thy Wanderer Home</i> , for voice and piano ('Æ', George Russell)	1941

In parallel to her compositional activities, Coghill also arranged Irish folk music. Inspired by her copy of P. W. Joyce's *Ancient Irish Music*, a compendium of one hundred airs, her arrangements married traditional melodies to various poems. Not all of these were by Irish writers but she was especially drawn to Padraic Colum. With the exception of *Caoine*, all extant arrangements, listed below in Table 3, are for solo voice and piano.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In collating these arrangements the sources I used were the TCD Coghill collection, Axel Klein's private collection (RISM: D-Fklein), and a report advertising a forthcoming performance of *At the Fore of the Year* (see 'Miss Jean Nolan's Recital', *The Irish Times*, 7 December 1926, 5). The relevant items in the Klein collection are the five extant Colum arrangements listed in Table 3.



Table 3

<i>Meg Merrilies</i> (John Keats)	1922
<i>Creeveen Cnó</i> (anon.)	1924
Six songs (Padraic Colum):	1925–26
<i>The Old Woman of the Roads</i>	
<i>A Ballad-Maker</i>	
<i>Over the Hills and Far Away</i>	
<i>The Hawk-Questing Maid</i>	
<i>I'll Bring You These for Dowry</i>	
<i>At the Fore of the Year</i> (no longer extant)	
<i>Among the Heather</i> (William Allingham)	1926
<i>I Saw Her Once</i> (J. C. Mangan)	1942
<i>Caoine</i> , for violin and piano	1926

Records of Coghill's output—particularly those reports that appeared in the Irish press while she was active— frequently conflate her compositions and arrangements.<sup>37</sup> Her artistic decisions may have contributed to confused perceptions of her work: as both composer and arranger she chiefly worked in the song genre; both her original songs and her arrangements were inspired by authors associated with the Irish Literary Revival (e.g., Colum and Russell); and she was productive in these dual areas during the same periods (the mid-1920s and early 1940s).

Coghill's sometimes ambivalent creative practices constitute an understandable response to a complex Irish musical culture. Those same cultural values help to account for why commentators did not always distinguish between her original compositions and her arrangements. The blurring of these two categories was symptomatic of deeper cultural anxieties whereby native music and the European art-music tradition coexisted in an uneasy relationship. Ever since the Gaelic Revival, cultural activists had championed 'the preservation of traditional Irish music as an emblem of Irish dispossession and repossession, second only to the Irish language itself'.<sup>38</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>37</sup> For examples of references to Coghill's 'songs' (in reality, arrangements), see 'Quidnunc', 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 27 January 1928, 4 and 'Culwick Choral Society: Last Night's Concert', *The Irish Times*, 19 March 1937, 8. Burn (as note 2) does not distinguish between original songs and arrangements in the works-list. Klein ('Rhoda Coghill') lists *Among the Heather* and *Creeveen Cnó* as compositions rather than arrangements.

<sup>38</sup> Harry White, *Music and the Irish Literary Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

as Harry White argues, the folk repertoire attained a political prestige which meant that ‘any other form of serious musical endeavour was, for many ideologues of Irish culture, unthinkable.’<sup>39</sup> Those who tried to align their work with the European art-music tradition felt obliged to quote folksong, ‘even to the point of interrupting the flow of symphonic and operatic discourse’.<sup>40</sup> This aesthetic tendency, which White identifies within individual works, may also be mapped onto the overall picture of Coghill’s catalogue. It is striking how the early twentieth-century European style of *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking* is interrupted by dutiful paeans to Irish folksong. Perhaps the composer felt that she had little choice in the matter. This aesthetic was effectively mandated from an early stage, at the highest official levels, in the form of Feis Ceoil competitions. For aspiring composers without international connections this annual music festival was the key to further advancement.

Founded in 1897, the festival aimed to promote music in Ireland, through concerts, lectures, performance competitions and composition competitions.<sup>41</sup> Early composition contests inspired interesting choral and orchestral works but later records reveal that the festival distorted the meaning of ‘composition’ entirely. Annual syllabi from the 1920s to the 1940s (when Coghill was involved) show that ‘composition’ competitions continued in name—but in reality usually denoted ‘arrangement’.<sup>42</sup> For example, each of the four categories in 1927 required entrants to arrange airs from the 1914 *Feis Ceoil Collection of Irish Airs Hitherto Unpublished*.<sup>43</sup> As the 1930s progressed there was more emphasis on new music, with the most common category being that of ‘original song’. Sometimes candidates were instructed to set texts by Irish writers, which mirrors Radio Éireann’s commissioning preferences in the 1940s. Rarely did purely instrumental music feature—although in 1937 one of the competitions called for ‘an original pianoforte solo’, while a more specific ‘piano solo founded upon Irish theme’ contest followed in 1941.<sup>44</sup> Organizers do not appear to have engaged much with composition teachers, for many entries came from individuals like Coghill who were no longer in

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<sup>39</sup> Harry White, *The Progress of Music in Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 76.

<sup>40</sup> White, *The Progress of Music in Ireland*, 79.

<sup>41</sup> Karol Mullaney-Dignam and Jimmy O’Brien Moran, ‘Feis Ceoil’, in *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, i, 372–3: 372.

<sup>42</sup> Syllabi are archived in the Feis Ceoil Association Records, MS Collection List 92, National Library of Ireland (henceforth NLI). See MS 40228/4 for syllabi spanning 1927–36; MS 40228/5 for 1937–43; MS 40228/6 for 1944–52.

<sup>43</sup> NLI, MS 40228/4: 1927 syllabus, 32.

<sup>44</sup> NLI, MS 40228/5: 1937 syllabus, 32; 1941 syllabus, 35.

training. Given these circumstances it would have been unreasonable to expect high standards. Yet, adjudicators regularly lambasted competitors in the annual reports published in the syllabi. In 1931 Hamilton Harty lamented that the neophytes ‘apparently know little or nothing of the rules of composition’, while the following year he complained that ‘the majority have neither ideas nor technique’.<sup>45</sup> That composers were expected, but reluctant or unable, to conceive their works along nationalist lines is evident from Harty’s remark: ‘it is regrettable, I think, that so few of the pieces submitted were really Irish in idiom’.<sup>46</sup> The festival’s horizons had narrowed from its founding vision, or at least shifted to prioritize political ideology rather than musical imagination. That composition categories frequently changed, in the decades from the 1920s, indicates a lack of consensus about what benchmarks novices should aim for; the fact that they were no longer tested on their abilities to write on a grand scale or challenged to produce a symphonic movement or operatic scene suggests a lack of faith in the fundamental notion of Irish art music.

Having made her mark in the Feis as a performer, the composition/arrangement competitions beckoned for the ambitious Coghill.<sup>47</sup> She was victorious on a few occasions: in 1924 her *Creeveen Cnó* arrangement earned the song prize; the following year, an unnamed piece won the ‘arrangement for piano solo of airs’ category; and it was later reported that her *At the Fore of the Year* arrangement won a prize in 1926—however, *Among the Heather* is a more likely contender.<sup>48</sup> Having earned official Feis approval, *Creeveen Cnó* and *Among the Heather* were published by Pigott, in 1925 and 1926 respectively. Not only were scores publicly disseminated through this conduit, but sometimes they were also channelled back into the Feis, to be mastered by candidates in the singing competitions—one of Coghill’s arrangements (not identified, but likely to have been the recently published *Among the Heather*) was announced as a test piece in 1926.<sup>49</sup> Effectively, via the ‘composition’ leg of the festival, Coghill and others

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<sup>45</sup> NLI, MS 40228/4: 1931 syllabus, 38; 1932 syllabus, 38.

<sup>46</sup> NLI, MS 40228/5: 1940 syllabus, 36.

<sup>47</sup> For records of Coghill’s Feis Ceoil awards, see TCD Coghill collection, Box 1, File 3, Item 19, ‘Diplomas, Certificates, Awards’.

<sup>48</sup> The *Creeveen Cnó* manuscript is in the TCD Coghill collection: Box 2, Item 30. On the 1925 song, see ‘Feis Ceoil Association: Prizes for Composition’, *The Irish Times*, 1 July 1925, 5. The 1926 ‘Irish Song’ manuscript is archived as Box 2, Item 10. The reference to ‘At the Fore of the Year’ appears in ‘Miss Jean Nolan’s Recital’, *The Irish Times*, 7 December 1926, 5.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Feis Ceoil Syllabus’, *The Irish Times*, 23 January 1926, 5. Coghill was also on the syllabus for the 1928 Denis O’Sullivan Medal: see ‘An Irishman’s Diary’, *The Irish Times*, 27 January 1928, 4.

were enlisted into providing new, suitably patriotic material for performers. Still, the inventiveness of these arrangements, produced by those with classical training, could not leave Irish music in an unaltered 'pure' state. If the Feis succeeded in adding another dimension to folk music, its policies and practices did little to stimulate a school of composition. On the contrary, it may have alienated its target audience, as indicated by how Coghill's entry was the only one received in 1925 for the piano arrangement category.<sup>50</sup> For all its flaws, however, Feis success did bring tangible professional benefits. By the end of 1926, Coghill's arrangements of *Among the Heather*, *At the Fore of the Year* and *Over the Hills and Far Away* were being positively received at public recitals, enabling her to cultivate a reputation beyond that of performer.<sup>51</sup>

### **Coghill's main compositional activity, 1923–41**

#### i) *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*

Reflecting in 1993, Coghill mused that 'I haven't really composed a great deal ... I've written some songs ... I did a Fantasy for Piano based on Irish airs.'<sup>52</sup> In addition to these, in 1923 she produced a significant work for large-scale forces: a setting of Walt Whitman's *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking* as a rhapsody for tenor, chorus and orchestra.<sup>53</sup> The score originated as an orchestration exercise, with Coghill later explaining that her love of the sea had inspired the choice of *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*.<sup>54</sup> Whitman's extended freeform poem is narrated by a man reflecting on his boyhood memory of watching a pair of mockingbirds nest on the beach. One day the female bird failed to appear and her mate lamented her death. Listening to this plaintive birdsong, the boy found himself 'translating the notes' into a meditation on life and death. The poem's transcendent spirituality doubtlessly resonated with Coghill's Quaker beliefs.<sup>55</sup> Despite starting out as a study, then, this score appears to have developed into quite a personal work. The rhapsody intensifies the introspective mood of

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<sup>50</sup> As reported in *The Irish Times* on 1 July 1925, 5.

<sup>51</sup> Two concerts in December 1926 featured these songs. See 'Miss Jean Nolan's Recital', *The Irish Times*, 7 December 1926, 5 and 'Fit Interpretation of Songs', *The Irish Times*, 11 December 1926, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Coghill, interview of 14 October 1993 (as note 5).

<sup>53</sup> Frederick Delius had used the same poem in 1904 for a setting, *Sea Drift*, for baritone, chorus and orchestra. Coghill claimed no knowledge of this work at the time of composing her rhapsody.

<sup>54</sup> Coghill, interview of 14 October 1993 (as note 5).

<sup>55</sup> Whitman was associated with Quakerism, which might explain Coghill's interest in his work.

Whitman's text. The composer partly achieved this effect by omitting from her setting the stanza beginning 'The aria sinking', which is narrated by an emotionally distant third party. Otherwise, the word-music relationship is quite direct, insofar as the declamatory solo tenor part conveys how Whitman's narrator remembers 'translating' birdsong into meaningful language. The choir and orchestra play an important dramatic role: the opening 'endlessly rocking' phrase in the text, for example, is mirrored in the orchestra's undulating quavers, while the woodwind accompaniment to lines such as 'I must be still to listen' suggests birdsong. The choir is predominant in the earlier narrative stanzas and in the conclusion, where the sea seems to whisper 'Death, Death'.<sup>56</sup>

*Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking* issued from a young, inexperienced voice but it has retrospectively been hailed as 'one of the most forward-looking Irish compositions in the first half of the twentieth century'.<sup>57</sup> Certainly, this rhapsody eschews the folk influence that colours turn-of-the-century large-scale works by figures such as Michele Esposito, Harty and Charles Villiers Stanford. Instead it gestures towards continental European musical developments, its tonal language inflected with allusions to the whole-tone scale. Instances of sustained dissonance intended to unsettle the listener enrich the poetic depth of the score, particularly as it draws to a close. As Coghill put it: 'when the repetition of the word "death" occurs, I decided, well that's a little bit too final, and I made the French horn play just an A sharp, a tone above the note the choir were singing "death" on'.<sup>58</sup> By 1923 Coghill had 'a certain knowledge of ... modern music ... and a fair knowledge of modern harmony', acquired through playing Scriabin and Debussy and by analysing piano reductions of Stravinsky scores.<sup>59</sup> Her pianistic encounters with Stravinsky further allude to why this rhapsody was such a singular work: although its creator proved gifted at handling orchestral resources, she had never even heard a real orchestra.<sup>60</sup> Orchestral activity had ground to a halt in the

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<sup>56</sup> My observations are based on Coghill's manuscript and the only recording of the work to date. The manuscript is archived as Box 2, Item 1 in the TCD Coghill collection. The 1990 recording, conducted by John Dexter with Frank Dunne (solo tenor), the Guinness Choir and RTÉ Concert Orchestra, was accessed on cassette tape RTÉ/401, side A, in the Contemporary Music Centre, Ireland. For detailed commentary on Coghill's setting, especially its orchestration, see Klein, *Die Musik Irlands*, 179–84, in particular the music examples on pp. 180 (bars 1–4) and 183 (bars 349–50).

<sup>57</sup> Klein, 'Rhoda Coghill', 213.

<sup>58</sup> Coghill, interview of 14 October 1993 (as note 5).

<sup>59</sup> Coghill, interview of 14 October 1993 (as note 5).

<sup>60</sup> Klein, *Die Musik Irlands*, 184.

capital during World War I and remained largely dormant throughout the political instability of the early 1920s. Apart from Vincent O'Brien's short-lived efforts with the Dublin Symphony Orchestra (1920–22), there was no infrastructure until the establishment of the Dublin Philharmonic Society in 1927.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, the young Coghill lacked opportunities to hear her rhapsody. Remembering the situation, she stated in 1993 that 'I had no orchestra to try it out on. There were choirs ... but they had no orchestra to provide the accompaniment, and I put it aside and forgot about it for a long time'.<sup>62</sup> At Radio Éireann in 1939, Coghill persuaded conductor Jim Doyle to lead 'a little performance' of the work; with no available choir they made do with a quartet of voices, a small orchestra whose members struggled with the music, and the accomplished soloist Robert McCullagh.<sup>63</sup> Coghill found herself waiting an astonishing sixty-seven years from the time of the work's completion for its full premiere. Having finally heard the work she had envisaged, she remarked: 'I quite like it now. I'm glad I did compose it.'<sup>64</sup> As of 2015, the 1990 premiere remains the only performance, although its recording has been broadcast a handful of times.

ii) Gaelic Fantasy (*Saoirdhréacht Gaedhealach*)

After the disappointment of the rhapsody going unheard, what little Coghill did compose throughout the rest of the 1920s was in the song genre. Then, in the early 1930s, she wrote her only piece for solo piano. The *Gaelic Fantasy* followed a period of intensive study of the piano but it was actually a Feis composition competition which gave impetus to the work.<sup>65</sup> Coghill dedicated the score to her occasional duo partner Frederick Stone, who played it—presumably, premiered it—in a broadcast on 5 September 1935.<sup>66</sup> Stone paired Coghill's piece with Chopin's *Fantasia in F minor* and reprised it a few months later alongside Liszt's arrangement of Schumann's *Frühlingsnacht*.<sup>67</sup> Such nineteenth-century contextualization seems appropriate in light of the *Gaelic Fantasy's* moments of intense chromaticism. By way of example, the *Fantasy*

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<sup>61</sup> Jeremy Dibble, *Michele Esposito* (Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2010), 170.

<sup>62</sup> Coghill, interview of 14 October 1993 (as note 5).

<sup>63</sup> Coghill, interview of 14 October 1993 (as note 5).

<sup>64</sup> Coghill, interview of 14 October 1993 (as note 5).

<sup>65</sup> In the interview of 14 October 1993, Coghill did not clarify the year of the particular competition to which she referred.

<sup>66</sup> *The Irish Independent*, 5 September 1935, 4.

<sup>67</sup> 'On the Wireless: Daily Programme Review', *The Irish Times*, 10 February 1936, 4.

opens with a brief folk-melody gesture in the E Dorian mode—but this gesture is underpinned by a chain of seventh chords descending chromatically. The work's normative tonal idiom stems from the folksong material used throughout: the first section is based on an air in E minor, the second a jig in D major, and the third a reel in E minor.<sup>68</sup> Although the *Gaelic Fantasy* is a piece of only eight pages, it gives a good sense of Coghill's compositional voice. Unlike her Feis arrangements of similar material, it reconceptualizes folk music using a late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century harmonic vocabulary—however, this harmonic idiom became a bone of contention between the composer and her publisher.

Success at the Feis secured the *Gaelic Fantasy*'s publication in 1939 with *An Gúm*<sup>69</sup> at a time when the country lacked a dedicated music press, but this opportunity came at a cost. More than fifty years after the work's publication, Coghill remained dissatisfied with the edition. In 1994 she provided the researcher Axel Klein with a list of revisions that she wished to make to the score.<sup>70</sup> Apart from an extra thirty-seven bars to be inserted after bar 123 (the first bar of the last page), the remaining corrections seem relatively trivial, mostly comprising the modification or addition of accidentals. However, Coghill asserted in 1994 that 'errors' in the published score had arisen only because the editor at *An Gúm* had insisted that she change a number of pitches considered too discordant.<sup>71</sup> At least one example lends credibility to this claim: at bar 57 the e' – g' – g' left-hand figure in the printed edition should have read e' sharp – g' – g' flat. In this case editorial alteration had nullified the intended chromatic colour. The *Gaelic Fantasy* was retitled as *Gaeilge* and its dissonant edges softened. The effect of this was to amplify the music's diatonic, folk-tune qualities. In that sense, Coghill's score was edited in the same nationalist spirit that had earlier established a preference for traditional music over art music.

As noted above, however, in the early 1970s the composer attempted to reassert her artistic voice by producing a revised version of the score for piano and orchestra,

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<sup>68</sup> The three tunes are respectively titled 'Caoineadh Aodha Mhic Raghnaill', 'Anonn ir Anall' and 'An Tigín Súgaí'.

<sup>69</sup> Coghill, *Saoidhréacht Gaedhealach* (as note 31).

<sup>70</sup> I am grateful to Axel Klein for sharing this information and Coghill's annotated score with me in private correspondence (2 September 2012). Coghill presented Klein with the corrections when they met in 1994.

<sup>71</sup> As note 70.

which she performed with the RTÉ Light Orchestra in a radio broadcast.<sup>72</sup> This version of the *Gaelic Fantasy*, which remains unpublished, incorporated all of the changes that Coghill would bring to Klein's attention more than twenty years later. The interpolated bars in the later arrangement treat the reel theme more extensively than in bars 108–23 of the original piano score. The new passage constitutes a repetition of the reel and subsequent motivic development of the material. Overall, the section from bar 108 to the conclusion amounts to approximately one third of the work, which creates better formal balance and a substantial rousing finale. It begins with a delicate, sparse statement of the reel, presented on piano with minimal violin accompaniment (bars 108–23). During the more richly orchestrated repetition and development of the theme, the piano outlines counter-rhythms (bars 133–6) and prominent ascending scalic figures (bars 152–9). The characteristic interplay between piano and orchestra suggests that Coghill was drawing on her experience as a concerto soloist, although the *Fantasy* is quite a modest work. In light of the composer's wishes and available materials, there is scope for a project to edit both the piano score and later ensemble arrangement.

iii) Song settings for voice and piano, after 'Æ' (George Russell)

Coghill was fortunate to have another outlet for disseminating her music: Radio Éireann, or, more precisely, the singers with whom she collaborated there. Coghill focused on the song genre which was understandable, given her accompanying experience and associations over the decades with singers such as Nolan, Ó Súilleabháin, McCullagh and Michael O'Higgins.<sup>73</sup> After submitting a piece (probably *Jenny Kissed Me*) for the Feis 'Original Song' prize in 1939, Coghill, perhaps energized by her employer's 'First Performances' programme that year, returned to song setting in a more sustained way in 1941.<sup>74</sup>

Coghill's short settings for solo voice and piano of four 'Æ' poems were her last real compositional efforts. The texts—*Parting*, *When Mine Hour is Come*, *Refuge* and

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<sup>72</sup> For details of the manuscript, see note 34. The broadcast is mentioned in radio listings. See 'Radio', *The Irish Times*, 15 March 1972, 23.

<sup>73</sup> Coghill and Nolan performed together at recitals such as the two mentioned in the *The Irish Times*, 7 December 1926, 5 and 19 March 1928, 4. McCullagh regularly sang Coghill's arrangement of *Among the Heather* (see 'Culwick Choral Society: Last Night's Concert', *The Irish Times*, 19 March 1937, 8 and 'The Musical Art Society: Enjoyable Concert', *The Irish Times*, 22 February 1940, 2). O'Higgins also performed it (see 'Gate Theatre Concert: New Ireland Choral Society', *The Irish Times*, 17 June 1941, 5).

<sup>74</sup> Lindsay Seymour won the prize. See 'Awards for Composers', *The Irish Independent*, 24 June 1939, 9.



*Germinal* (the setting of which Coghill titled *Call Not Thy Wanderer Home* after its first line)—are pensive meditations on life and death. The poetic spiritual themes, not unlike that of Whitman's *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*, evinced nuanced musical responses from Coghill. Her setting of *Refuge*, a text about a hunted faun, is particularly memorable. It conjures up a soundscape redolent of fin-de-siècle France by using characteristic major-second chords, whole-tone sonorities and a harmonically ambiguous ending. In *Parting* the emotional distance implied in the 'Æ' text is transposed to a musical setting by virtue of the song starting in F major and journeying to a D-major conclusion. These songs, alongside the earlier rhapsody and *Gaelic Fantasy*, affirm Coghill's harmonically experimental tendencies.

Analysing the songs from the perspective of Coghill's accompanist background is also instructive. The piano is usually understated, framing what are predominantly vocal interpretations of the poems with just a few solo bars of introduction and conclusion. *Parting* and *When Mine Hour is Come* are constructed on simple chordal accompaniments, although the latter song's reference to 'lordly light' justifies a brief excursion to the instrument's upper range. *Refuge*, as noted, inhabits an impressionist sound-world, while both it and *Call Not Thy Wanderer Home* feature more rhythmically complex accompaniments. Overall, these songs offer subtle explorations of the 'Æ' texts; the vocal articulation of the text is pre-eminent while the piano evokes the atmospheric setting. In retrospect, Coghill's literary sensitivities here seem not only typical of her musical aesthetic but a harbinger of her own burgeoning poetic voice. Although the 'Æ' settings were never published, radio performances with Ó Súilleabháin earned the composer some recognition.

Despite what might have seemed a promising situation for Coghill and other composers in 1941, the next two decades brought little improvement in the material conditions of Irish art music. In 1947, Arthur Duff complained that the challenge of finding publishers continued to constrain composers.<sup>75</sup> Eight years later nothing had changed and, responding to ill-informed debate on the matter, Ó Súilleabháin wrote a passionate defence of his composer colleagues:

Brian Boydell, Frederick May, John Reidy, Seoirse Bodley, Ina Boyle, Rhoda Coghill and John Beckett (to mention only a few of the names that occur to me) have all written excellent songs in the contemporary idiom. The reason for their comparatively infrequent performance is that they are, for the most part, unpublished ... our need for a music publisher in this country is just as

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<sup>75</sup> 'Irish Composers Have No Genius to Guide Them', *The Irish Times*, 31 March 1947, 4.

urgent as our much-publicised need for a concert-hall. The frustrating lack of a publisher naturally limits a composer's output.<sup>76</sup>

### From composer to poet

I'll find a fruit upon another tree,  
One day, so full of juice that I'll be sucking  
Until my very lips drip poetry

(Coghill, 'Lamenting a Sterile Muse', *The Bright Hillside*, 1948)

To view 'language as a substitute for music itself' is characteristic of the Irish literary imagination, White argues.<sup>77</sup> Coghill's artistic trajectory exemplifies this tendency, with 'Lamenting a Sterile Muse' reading as an ironic statement on the situation; contrary to the title, Coghill is not bereft of inspiration but is searching out a new medium for its expression—'a fruit upon another tree'. At least a few of her poems stem from a primordially musical mode, functioning as printed, verbal analogues to notated, performed scores. Coghill's turn to poetry thus seems a pragmatic response to decades of difficulty in trying to disseminate her work, rather than a rejection of music itself.

Her poems appeared in print from 1946, chiefly in her collections *The Bright Hillside* (1948) and *Time is a Squirrel* (1956).<sup>78</sup> These texts have received renewed interest in recent years, with a number of literary scholars calling attention to their verbal musicality. Speaking of *The Bright Hillside*, for example, Kathy D'Arcy writes:

The most striking aspect of it is the way in which the poet has, in fact, defamiliarized traditional verse forms by bringing her musical education and sensibility to bear on the metric rhythms. This formal innovation is married to a thematic musicality, and her speakers produce a kind of auditory-imaginist text, which is ornamented with sibilance, assonance and onomatopoeia.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Tomás O'Sullivan (signed in English), 'Songs of Ireland', *The Irish Times*, 22 June 1955, 7.

<sup>77</sup> White, *Music and the Irish Literary Imagination*, 9.

<sup>78</sup> Coghill, *The Bright Hillside* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co., 1948); Coghill, *Time is a Squirrel* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1956). 'At Twilight' was published in the *The Irish Times*, 14 September 1946, 4. Coghill also published her translation of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Engellieder*, 'Angel songs' (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1958).

<sup>79</sup> Kathy D'Arcy, "'Almost Forgotten Names": Irish Women Poets of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s', in Patricia Coughlan and Tina O'Toole (eds), *Irish Literature: Feminist Perspectives* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008), 99–123: 117.

D'Arcy echoes what at least a couple of Coghill's contemporaries had perceived in 1948. Seumas O'Sullivan, editor of the literary review *The Dublin Magazine*, asserted in his foreword to *The Bright Hillside* that the poems contained 'a music which will eventually give their author full title to a place amongst the poets of our time'.<sup>80</sup> The poet Austin Clarke highlighted too how Coghill's musical vocation permeated this collection:

Miss Rhoda Coghill is a well-known pianist, who turned quite suddenly a few years ago to poetic composition. Her technique is scant, and she seems to me like a writer who works 'by ear' and yet achieves results. ... I suspect that Miss Coghill, in her avoidance of the five-finger exercises of verse, is reacting from the formal exactness of the nocturne and sonata, finding in poetry a free medium for imagination and emotion. She writes a good deal in the rough and ready measures of contemporary free verse, but her own inspiration has saved her most of the time from commonplaces of contemporary verse .... Here, without any doubt, is a new Irish poet.<sup>81</sup>

In 1940s' Ireland, poetry offered 'a free medium for imagination' and Coghill ranks among those writers of that generation who are now lauded for being 'formally innovative, sometimes experimental, in the modernist modes'.<sup>82</sup> So, it was poetry rather than music which became the vehicle for her aesthetic experimentation. Through poetry too Coghill engaged with issues that her work as a musician could not accommodate: she challenged mid-century Irish societal values by espousing what Coughlan describes as 'enquiring, reflective feminism'.<sup>83</sup> On this point, D'Arcy interprets 'In Wicklow' as an exploration of female disempowerment and reads 'The Young Bride's Dream' as 'a disturbingly frank reflection on the subordination of women through marriage'.<sup>84</sup>

Coghill's literary work also manifests recognizable qualities of her musical aesthetic. D'Arcy and Clarke acknowledged this, as did Coghill herself. 'Often I have a basic metre and over that I use rhythms that vary, as the rhythms in a musical phrase do,' she said of her poetic technique. Speaking specifically about 'Far Waters', she

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<sup>80</sup> Seumas O'Sullivan, 'Foreword', in Coghill, *The Bright Hillside*, viii.

<sup>81</sup> Austin Clarke, 'A New Poet?', *The Irish Times*, 18 December 1948, 6.

<sup>82</sup> Patricia Coughlan, 'Introduction', in Patricia Coughlan and Tina O'Toole (eds), *Irish Literature: Feminist Perspectives* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008), 1–15: 8.

<sup>83</sup> Coughlan, 8.

<sup>84</sup> D'Arcy, 117.

mused, 'this must almost be in rondo form'.<sup>85</sup> Such a comparison is borne out by the structural and thematic organization of the poem's five stanzas, which broadly mirror an ABACA form. Beyond rhythm and form, there is reason to believe that Coghill also evokes the art of accompaniment in at least a couple of poems. In swerving from orchestral composition to writing for voice and piano in the mid-1920s, Coghill had already capitalized on her art as an accompanist. Traces of this experience seem to linger in both her poetry collections too. Consider, firstly, 'In February, Snow' from *Time is a Squirrel*. It begins:

White was the snow's dayfall  
dream-white as flowers that hold<sup>86</sup>

This poem comprises a series of couplets and within each of these the second indented line echoes the first: Coghill times the second line as a composer would cue a delayed instrumental or vocal entry. The printed format of the poem is therefore visually analogous to a score for two musical parts. With Coghill's background this immediately calls to mind a strophic text-setting (either an arrangement or original composition) where the piano accompaniment sustains the lyrical theme throughout vocal rests. Other aspects of the textual interplay also point towards the poem's musical conceptualization. Staying with the first couplet, the words seem to develop motivically ('white' expands to 'dream-white'), the sonorities are subject to variation (from 'snow's' to 'hold'), while the second line sustains the mood of the first even as the latter falls silent. What I am proposing, then, is less a *reading* of 'In February, Snow' than a hearing of the poem. Rather than try to verbalize what seems to be a latent singer-accompanist mode, this hypothetical 'hearing' could assume the form of a rhythmicized recitative duet in which the upper and lower parts harmonize. One can apply a similar interpretation to the earlier poem 'Incantation in a Green Winter'. Like 'In February, Snow', this poem consists of a series of paired lines, although the visual layout is less arresting. It begins:

Be perfectly still, like the apple-twigs!  
Sit rigidly, till the mist wears thin  
  
and eyes can go from trees like ghosts  
to trees with low-lapped roots that hold<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Coghill, interview of 14 October 1993 (as note 5). 'Far Waters' was published in *The Irish Times*, 23 September 1950, 6.

<sup>86</sup> Coghill's original edition, in the TCD collection (Box 1, File 1, Item 4), is the basis for my analysis.

This incantation is uttered by two interrelated voices, as indicated by the capitalization of both lines in the opening couplet. Whereas 'In February, Snow' can be read as one voice divided between leading and supporting parts, the 'Incantation' presents two parts moving in counterpoint. Attention to metrical detail results in regular couplings between the upper and lower voices, such as 'perfectly'/'rigidly' and, later, 'flat ponds freeze'/'glass-bound trees'. So, beyond those texts with overt musical titles such as 'Epitaph for a Musician' and 'Introduction and Fanfare', both 'In February, Snow' and 'Incantation in a Green Winter' offer further evidence that Coghill's musical aesthetic was a defining element of her poetry.

### Conclusion

At least a few of Coghill's poems sit at a point in a broader creative continuum where the expressive mode modulates, where music transposes into a literary key—leading to the formation of strong intertextual and intermedial connections between Coghill's performance, composition and poetry. Underpinning and unifying these is her central aesthetic concern with the music-word relationship, which remained constant even as her voice only seemed to evolve poetically after 1941. This voice fell silent by the end of the 1950s and Coghill continued to work as a pianist while her literary and musical output mostly vanished into obscurity. In her late eighties, however, there was a brief revival of interest in her songs when several of them were performed at a National Concert Hall recital in 1989.<sup>88</sup> The following year Coghill revisited her 1923 rhapsody, which in 1990 was finally premiered.<sup>89</sup> Musicologists can build on these initiatives within an interdisciplinary discourse about Coghill's importance as an Irish creative force.

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<sup>87</sup> Excerpted from Lucy Collins, *Poetry by Women in Ireland: A Critical Anthology, 1870–1970* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 251.

<sup>88</sup> See Martin Adams, 'Song Recital by Mary Sheridan de Bruin', *The Irish Times*, 23 August 1989, 12.

<sup>89</sup> FM3 broadcast the premiere on 14 May 1990.