

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS delivered by: **AN TOLLAMH SÉAN Ó COILEÁIN**, University College Cork, National University of Ireland, Cork on 4 June, 2004, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **LOUIS MULCAHY**

A Sheánsailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

Is fada riamh atá triall ar Ghaeltacht Corca Dhuibhne ag filí, ceoltóirí, scoláirí, bailitheoirí béaloidis agus lucht foghlama an Gaeilge; ag airí rialtais agus ag Uachtaráin, agus ag cuairteoirí eile de gach saghas, ó chian agus ó chongar. Tá aon ní amháin le rá ina dtaoibh ar fad: gur mó a thugadar leo as ná mar a thugadar ann. Ní mar sin do Louis Mulcahy: níor chuirteoir lae ná seachtaine é siúd; norbh aon 'lá breá' é. Tá curtha fé sa cheantar aige, samhradh agus geimhreadh, le naoi mbliana fichead anuas, agus tá rud déanta aige nár dhein aon aire rialtais ná aon roinn stáit riamh: tá fostaíocht curtha ar fáil aige do leathchéad éigin duine de mhuintir na háite; ní amach a bheidh a n-aghaidh sin feasta, ach dírithe ar a ndúchas agus ar a n-oidhreacht féin. Agus is é an dála céanna ag Louis Mulcahy féin é: go luath tar éis do an áit a bhaint amach agus láthair tí agus oibre a cheannach ann, thug sé féin agus a bhean Lisbeth le fios gurb í an Ghaeilge ba rogha leo mar theanga teaghlaigh agus mar theanga saothair, agus sin mar atá riamh ó shin. Agus cé gur sa Danmhairg a saolaíodh Lisbeth, gur fíodóir den chéad scoth í féin, déarfadh údair áirithe gur fearr an Ghaeilge atá aici ná mar atá ag Louis.

Born in Wexford in 1941 and educated at St. Peter's College there and later in Limerick, Louis Mulcahy worked as a cameraman in RTE from 1963 to 1975. It was while there, in 1965, that he married Lisbeth Lundsager, a skilled weaver of tapestries, and began to develop his own interest in the craft of the potter. They holidayed regularly in Corca Dhuibhne and finally, in 1975, came to live there with their three young children. At the time, it must have seemed to many, perhaps even to themselves, to be a hopelessly romantic venture. Louis would have to begin all over again in a new profession with none of the security of the old, far from the cities and markets he would have to reach. He had come for the beauty of the place and the winter storms, although their attraction must have been considerably lessened by the sight of his heavy kiln shelves being tossed like straw about the yard in Cloichear.

But the place was always more than a location. In Louis Mulcahy's work one senses an elemental quality, something of the earth, that reaches backwards to the mesolithic settlement at nearby Ferriter's Cove (Cuan an Chaoil) and all around to the seven thousand years of archaeology and human culture of the area. His huge glazed pots, the height of a man, seem to echo and renew great prehistoric cauldrons. Potadóireacht na Caolóige has itself become part of the cultural tour of Corca Dhuibhne, no more to be missed than the monastery at Riasc or Gallaras Oratory or the Beehive Huts, or the Great Blasket, or Kruger's Pub - and perhaps visited more often than any of these. His annual sale in November has extended the tourist season in the area by several weeks, providing additional income to local shops and guesthouses and enhancing the social life of the area.

Total sales last year amounted to €2.2, with pre-tax profits of €150,000 - not a huge margin, but neither that nor volume was ever the real issue. There are markets to be developed further, particularly in the U.S., strategies and technologies to be explored, but the real challenge will always be the individual one. It has always

been a matter of art rather than of craft, of working at the edge, of testing skills against materials and testing the materials themselves to the utmost in kilns heated to a temperature of 1300° C in order to achieve the highest quality. There are the inevitable mishaps and breakages consequent on this search for perfection, but he has created standards and designs for others to emulate when they can and to imitate when they cannot. To an extensive pottery range he has more recently added handpainted silk and cotton shades to complement his own lamps as well as those in greater need of such enhancement.

In May 1996, potters from as far away as Spain and Denmark assembled in West Kerry to celebrate the twenty-first anniversary of Louis Mulcahy's arrival there. This event, fondly remembered as 'Craic na Caolóige' represented the largest convocation of potters ever held in Ireland, a fitting tribute to a master.

There are many other things one could say of Louis Mulcahy, such as his having been chairman of the Crafts Council of Ireland and a member of the highly influential Government Task Force on Small Businesses. But it is primarily as an artist that we honour him here. For him art always took precedence.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totaeque Academiae.