

## Achoimre / Abstract

### **‘*Nóra Mharcais Bhig*’ and the Unspoken Birth**

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‘*Nóra Mharcais Bhig*’ is an Irish-Language short story by Pádraic Ó Conaire which was published in 1909 in *Nóra Mharcais Bhig agus Sgéalta Eile*. It dramatises the predicament of an unmarried woman who feels compelled to emigrate from rural Ireland to urban England to wait out her pregnancy and give birth. Ultimately, Nóra is forced to endure the enormous penalty of permanent exile because she does not fully conform to some of the ethical and religious norms espoused by her father and her local community. Remarkably, Ó Conaire manages to tell her story without mentioning the word ‘pregnancy’ or ‘birth’ and while the reader is left in no doubt about the nature of her personal crisis, unanswered questions remain about how Nóra’s pregnancy ended, about where she gave birth and about the fate of her child. The story’s silence regarding those questions mirrors Nóra’s own cautious silence in relation to her situation and it also mirrors the dysfunctional century-and-a-half long silence of Irish society about birth outside of marriage. This paper aims to demonstrate that Ó Conaire’s story is a powerful social commentary on the forces within Irish society which worked together to create the ‘unspoken birth.’