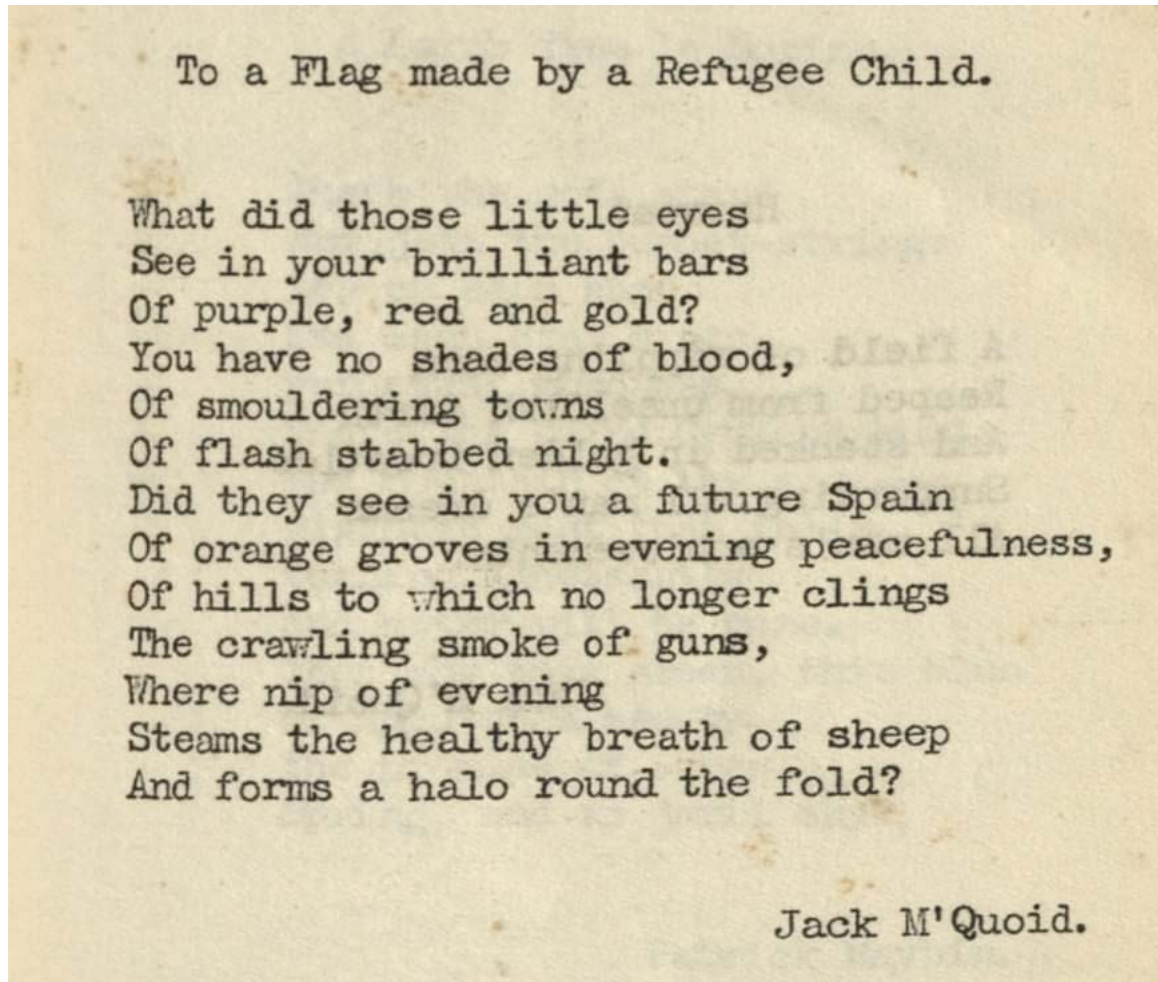


## To a flag made by a refugee child

A poem by Jack M'Quoid (1910 – 1985)



In 2019 the Association for the Basque Children of the UK 1937 (BCA'37 UK) in partnership with the Museum of Childhood, Ireland toured our exhibition to visit libraries in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Co. Mayo, Co. Leitrim, Derry and Belfast. The exhibition was due to end in 2020 in Belfast but the final event was postponed because of the first COVID shutdown.

As exhibitions do when they visit new places memories and histories were revisited and revived; this is what happened in 2019, with stories surfacing of Basque Children being offered sanctuary from the War in Spain by individual Irish people. The Irish Government officially supported the rebels, so there was never any official involvement, but we hear, for example, about the children of the Eguia Miluca family – Elena, Itziar, Javier, Josu, Nerea, and their mother who accompanied them (this was itself very unusual). All the child passengers who travelled from Bilbao to Great Britain had identification badges with a number on them. These five children have the numbers 4153 to 4157 and their mother has number 4158. There was also mention of a child who arrived in Ireland on a fishing boat in 1941 with other members of the PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasca/The Basque Nationalist

Party, the Basque Government in exile) who had to leave France because of the danger they were then in after the fall of France in WW2.

I am very pleased to have received a poem and correspondence from Karl O'Hanlon which has brought to light the stories of children who came to Belfast after time in the colony at Bray Court, Maidenhead.

The poem by Jack M'Quoid takes as a starting point the eyes of a Basque girl. What does she see when she is sewing a Republican Flag? Does she see the bombing of Bilbao and the firebombing of Guernica? Or in the colours purple, gold and red do her eyes see the olive groves of Spain, the sun, and the blue sky? Jack McQuoid thinks she sees the flag, death and pain, and the peaceful pastoral Spain where, like the sheep at rest in the sunset in Ireland, the hope of being guided back to her home and her parents lives on in her imagination.

Jack McQuoid was a travelled poet who in Belfast in 1937 was friends with John Hewitt (1907 – 1987) a more famous and published poet. Hewitt was a radical socialist whose views did not particularly find favour with the Unionist City Council. He and his wife hosted Basque children at their home at 14 Shandarragh Park. One of the possibly two girls who stayed with them was Laura Martínez Tolosa who was aged 14 years in 1937. Her brother Eduardo, who was 7 years old, was also in Belfast at the Agnew family home at 7 Garnerville Road.

So the refugee child daydreaming as she sews a flag may have been Laura.

*Simon Martinez*

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