Background information followed by a shorter, edited, version of the text.

Art Ó Laoghaire (born 1746, died 4 May 1773), an Irish Roman Catholic, was a captain in the Hungarian Hussars.

He married Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill (aunt of Daniel O’Connell) in 1767; she had been a widow from the age of 15 and was now 23. They had three children, Cornelius, Fiach and a third who apparently did not survive infancy.

Having returned home to Rathleigh House near Macroom, Cork, Ireland, the hot-tempered Art became involved in a feud with a protestant landowner and magistrate, Abraham Morris of Hanover Hall, Macroom. The feud between the two men continued and in 1773, Morris demanded that Art sell him the fine horse that Ó Laoghaire owned for £5. The Penal Laws stated that no Catholic might own a horse worth more than £5 and could be forced to sell a more valuable one on demand to any Protestant at this price. Art refused to sell and Morris persuaded his fellow magistrates to proclaim Art an outlaw, who could then legally be shot on sight. Morris led a contingent of soldiers that tracked Ó Laoghaire down to Carrignanimma on 4 May 1773, and he gave the order to fire on Art who was killed.

Morris was shot in Cork on 7 July by Art’s brother Cornelius,¹ who saw Morris at a window of a house in Hammond’s Lane where he was lodging and fired three shots, wounding Morris. The shots were not immediately fatal, but Morris died in September 1775: this was believed to have been as the result of the shooting.

Ó Laoghaire’s wife Eibhlin Dubh Ní Chonaill composed the long poem "Caoineadh Airt Úi Laoghaire" (Lament for Art O’Leary), mourning his death and calling for revenge.

The poem on your course by Brendan Kennelly is his rendition in English of her original lament and is a work of brilliance.

The following edited version of the poem ‘A Cry for Art O’Leary’ is for those who are not studying the poem in class with a teacher but wish to extend the scope of your material on Kennelly. First read the whole poem (it’s not hard) and then concentrate on these two extracts in order to shorten the task of preparation. They represent the brilliant flavour of the whole poem.
My lover (ll. 35 – 120)
My love's creature
Pride of Immokelly

To me you were not dead
Till your great mare came to me
Her bridle dragging ground
Her head with your startling blood
Your blood upon the saddle
You rode in your prime
I didn't wait to clean it
I leaped across my bed
I leaped then to the gate
I leaped upon your mare
I clapped my hands in frenzy
I followed every sign
With all the skill I knew
Until I found you lying
Dead near a furze bush
Without pope or bishop
Or cleric or priest
To say a prayer for you

Only a crooked wasted hag
Throwing her cloak across you
I could do nothing then
In the sight of God
But go on my knees
And kiss your face
And drink your free blood
My man!

Going out the gate
You turned back again
Kissed the two children
Threw a kiss at me
Saying 'Eileen, woman, try
To get this house in order,
Do your best for us.'

I must be going now
I'll not be home again
I thought that you were joking
You my laughing man

Poet fully captures the grieving woman.
Vivid images
Powerful verbs
Short insistent lines create feeling of movement and emotional power

Poem is unusual for its many climaxes,
its sustained tone of love, panic, grief and revenge.

Prophetic, eerie
detail signals her realisation of the fateful nature of his death. The cry against fate,
"My Man!"

Brilliant contrast – domestic life of young married couple described. A very dramatic poem – clear character, setting, action.
My man!
My Art O'Leary
Up on your horse now
Ride out to Macroom
And then to Inchigeela
Take a bottle of wine
Like your people before you
Rise up
My Art O'Leary
Of the sword of love
Put on your clothes
Your black beaver
Your black gloves
Take down your whip
Your mare is waiting

Go east by the thin road
Every bush will salute you
Every stream will speak to you
Men and women acknowledge you

They know a great man
When they set eyes on him

God's curse on you, Morris,
God's curse on your treachery
You swept my man from me
The man of my children
Two children play in the house
A third lives in me
He won't come alive from me
My heart's wound
Why was I not with you
When you were shot
That I might take the bullet
In my own body?
Then you'd have gone free
Rider of the grey eye
And followed them
Who'd murdered me
My man!
I look at you now
All I know of a hero
True man with true heart
Stuck in a coffin
You fished the clean steams
Drank nightlong in halls
Among frank-breasted women
I miss you.

A sense of Art's majestic form and dress and the adulation of the people, "Every stream..

Note the vernacular straightforward expression from the Irish, "God's curse..." And the tragedy of her situation being with child.
189 – 211 (end)

Jesus Christ knows well
I'll wear no cap
No mourning dress
No solemn shoes

No bridle on my horse
No grief-signs in my house
But test instead
The wisdom of the law

I'll cross the sea
To speak to the King
If he ignores me
I'll come back home
To find the man
Who murdered my man,

Morris, because of you
My man is dead

Is there a man in Ireland
To put a bullet through your head?

Women, white women of the mill
I give my love to you
For the poetry you made
For Art O'Leary
Rider of the brown mare
Deep women-rhythms of blood
The fiercest and the sweetest
Since time began
Singing of this cry I womanmake
For my man.