

Louis MacNeice was born on September 12, 1907, in Belfast, Ireland. He attended Oxford, where he majored in classics and philosophy. In 1930, he married Giovanna Ezra and accepted a post as classics lecturer at the University of Birmingham, a position he held until 1936, when he went on to teach Greek at Bedford College for Women, University of London. In 1941, he joined the British Broadcasting Company as a staff writer and producer. Like many modern English poets, MacNeice found an audience for his work through British radio. Some of his best-known plays, including *Christopher Columbus* (1944), and *The Dark Tower* (1946), were originally written for radio and later published. Early in his career, MacNeice was identified with a group of politically committed poets whose work appeared in Michael Roberts's anthology *New Signatures*. MacNeice drew many of the texts for *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay* from the *New Signature* poets. *Modern Poetry* was MacNeice's plea for an "impure" poetry expressive of the poet's immediate interests and his sense of the natural and the social world. Despite his association with young British poets Stephen Spender, W. H. Auden, writer Christopher Isherwood, and other left-wing poets, MacNeice was as mistrustful of political programs as he was of philosophical systems. He was never a member of the Communist Party or any other political groups, and he was quite candid about the ambiguities of his political attitudes. "My sympathies are Left," he wrote. "But not in my heart or my guts." Although he chose to live the majority of his adult life in London, MacNeice frequently returned to the landscapes of his childhood, and he took great pride in his Irish heritage. His poetry is characterized by its familiar, sometimes humorous tone and its integration of contemporary ideas and images. In addition to his poetry and radio dramas, MacNeice also wrote the verse translation *The Agamemnon* of Aeschylus (1936), translated Goethe's *Faust* (1951), and collaborated with Auden on the travelogue *Letters from Iceland* (1937). In August of 1963, MacNeice, on location with a BBC team, insisted on going down into a mineshaft to check on sound effects. He caught a chill that was not diagnosed as pneumonia until he was fatally ill. He died on September 3, 1963, just before the publication of his last book of poems, *The Burning Perch*. He was 55 years old.