

'Tá Gaedhil bhocht cráidhte': memory, tradition and the politics of the poor in Gaelic poetry and song

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The marginalisation of the Irish language, at once the most profound proof and consequence of Ireland's colonial experience, has, ironically, made it more difficult for us to see that experience for what it was. Dominant trends in Irish historiography over recent decades have ignored, excluded or refuted the colonial dimension, effectively normalising Irish history since the sixteenth century by assimilating it instead to more benign models, notably those of the 'British Archipelago', 'Ancien Regime' and 'modernisation'.¹ These have offered new comparative (especially European) frameworks, and insights not available in the traditional focus on the operation of British 'rule' and of resistance to it. However, if taken to extremes, all are as distorting as the crudely reductionist colonial model they quite properly reject. However, the colonial element can and should be understood, not as the sole, totalising paradigm, but as one indispensable to our understanding of the particularity of Irish experience, and a key context for all facets of 'modernisation'. In reconsidering its importance, historians will have the benefit of the more nuanced, sophisticated understanding of colonialism worldwide, developed mainly by literary scholars in recent years, and too often dismissed as over-theoretical, polemical, or lacking in detailed historical understanding.² Liam Kennedy, for example, has little difficulty in demonstrating the inappropriateness, indeed offensiveness, of any comparative 'Third-World perspective' in analysing 'the course of economic and social change in Ireland after 1800'. But this is a straw man, setting up the crude colonial model that bears least comparison with Irish experience, and ignoring the fact that modern post-colonial theory has emphasised complexity, hybridity and ambiguity rather than the 'simple dichotomy between colonist and colonised' that defines Kennedy's presentation of it.³ Discounting its lunatic fringe, post-colonial criticism can help the historian to

¹ See, in particular, Steven Ellis, *Tudor Ireland* (London, 1985); Philip Robinson, *The Plantation of Ulster* (Dublin, 1984); Michael McCarthy-Morrogh, *The Munster Plantation* (Oxford, 1986); Hugh Kearney, *The British Isles* (Cambridge, 1989); Sean Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power* (Oxford, 1992); Cadoc Leighton, *Catholicism in a Protestant Kingdom* (Dublin, 1994); L.M. Cullen, *The Emergence of Modern Ireland* (London, 1981); J.J. Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society* (Dublin, 1973). ² For an excellent survey, see Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1993). ³ Liam Kennedy, 'Modern Ireland: Post-Colonial Society, or Post-Colonial Pretensions?' in *Irish Review*, 13 (Winter, 1992-3), pp. 107-21.

formulate new questions, develop fresh approaches and to reassess the value of unregarded material.

Perhaps the main reasons for current fashions in Irish history writing are over-reliance on official and elite archives, and a lack of interest in literary sources, and indeed in cultural history generally. This applies particularly to Irish language materials in the early modern and modern periods. Even a superficial survey of Gaelic political poetry between the Williamite Settlement and the Famine highlights the centrality of a traumatic experience of dispossession at the hands of foreign settlers in the world view of the surviving Gaelic elites, and the power of the 'memory' of that experience among the 'underground gentry' of wealthy Catholic farmers in the eighteenth century, and ultimately also for the rural poor in their conflicts with the agents of landlordism, the Established Church or the imperial state, all perceived as a continuum in the tyranny of 'Gail' [foreigners] over 'Gaeil' [native Irish].⁴ Between the rebellions of 1798 and 1848 a significant corpus of political songs and poems in Irish illustrates the continuing strength of the seventeenth-century anti-colonial tradition, but also how it was adapted to meet the profound cultural and social changes of this period. Some of this material, often called 'amhráin na ndaoine' [songs of the people], survived in the oral tradition, and only began to be collected at the end of the century; some was written mainly by scribes and teachers and survives in manuscript form as poems which bear the strong influence of the literary tradition; the rest was in macaronic form and printed in cheap broadsheets at the time, though usually without date, or the name of the printer (much less the writer).⁵ The three categories have much in common, but the 'subaltern voice' of 'peasant insurgency' is to be heard most clearly in 'amhráin na ndaoine', while the learned tradition eventually took on clearer middle-class and O'Connellite perspectives. The broadsheet songs celebrated as much as they reflected a popular culture in flux, eclectically mixing the traditional and the contemporary just as they mixed Irish and English.

Many songs or poems in all categories were composed on a particular occasion, but the extent to which they can be taken as reflecting the political views of their composers or their listeners is problematic. All were shaped to some degree by a still powerful literary tradition, and allowance must always be made for the conventional use, not only of various tropes and motifs, but of language itself. On the other hand, the more formal nature of the songs (compared to folk stories) meant that they were less prone to significant change in transmission and much of the manuscript poetry is undoubtedly contemporary.⁶ Also, the popularity of the songs

⁴ The phrase 'underground gentry' is Kevin Whelan's. See, 'An Underground Gentry?: Catholic Middlemen in Eighteenth-Century Ireland' in his *The Tree of Liberty* (Cork, 1996).

⁵ On the oral tradition, see Ríonach Uí Ógáin, *An Rí Gan Choróin* (Dublin, 1984). The manuscript tradition is surveyed in Meidhbhín Ní Urdail, *The Scribe in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Münster, 2000). For an edited selection of macaronic verse, see Diarmaid Ó Muirthe, *An tAmhrán Macarónach* (Dublin, 1980). ⁶ Ógáin, *An Rí Gan Choróin*, chapter. 2; Breandán Ó Conchúir, *Scríobhaithe Chorcaí: 1700-1850* (Dublin, 1982).

and some poems is clear in their wide distribution, whether in the oral tradition, or in manuscript and, in the case of the 'amhráin', doubtless owed a lot to the tunes they were sung to. While giving all due weight to literary or folkloric conventions, it is possible, and important to read or listen to them as voices carrying across the great divide of the Famine, the perspectives and concerns of the long vanished community, largely absent from official or elite sources which either distort, or are deaf to the dominant Gaelic element of this popular culture (and the modern scholar, no matter how knowledgeable or sympathetic, can only hear it faintly). The reiteration of language and motifs across oral, manuscript and printed forms is testimony to the continued appeal of the seventeenth-century anti-colonist tradition, while the introduction of contemporary political ideas and language shows that this was still a vibrant culture. The evidence provided by this material for the politics of the poor is, at the same time, indirect, immediate, incomplete and indispensable.

Crucial to any reassessment of this period from the perspective of popular culture is the fact that 'Ireland was at all points between 1750 and 1850, an intensely bilingual and diglossic society'.⁷ The replacement of Irish by English, rapid and total at the level of elites and power, was slow and tortuous at lower social levels, following as yet unexplored patterns of social, generational and local interaction. Bilingualism, often of great sophistication and operating at most social levels, was crucial to communication between landlords and tenants, servants and masters, town and country, illiterate parents and their educated children, and in some instances magistrates and those arraigned before them. The bilingual punning in the macaronic song, 'Do Tharlaigh Inné Orm' [Yesterday I Met With], even counterpoints language acquisition with sexual initiation.⁸ Irish continued to be spoken in areas where the market economy was most developed and Anglicisation seemed most complete; in urban as well as rural Wexford, for example, before and after the 1798 rebellion.⁹ And, just as most people lived with apparent ease between two languages, they also moved between the cultures these languages encapsulated, accommodating the catch-cries of contemporary European revolution, for example, to the traditional hopes invested in the restoration of the Stuarts. Thus, the importance of the Gaelic song tradition in the pre-Famine period should not be confined to the large rural underclass on marginal land, now the majority of monoglot Irish speakers. These were, overwhelmingly, the main victims of the Famine, but the cultural impact of the catastrophe was also evident in the more rapid erosion of traditional bilingualism. Niall Ó Cíosáin has argued persuasively against the simplistic opposition of 'traditional' with 'modern', 'oral' with 'print' culture, 'Irish' with 'English'. Instead, cultural change involved uneven movement along a continuum,

⁷ Niall Ó Cíosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750-1850* (New York, 1997), p. 6.
⁸ Ó Muirthe, *Amhrán Macarónach*, no. 24. ⁹ See my 'Subaltern Voices? Poetry in Irish, Popular Insurgency and the 1798 Rebellion' in *Eighteenth Century Life*, 22/3 (November 1998), pp. 31-44.

with bilingualism playing a crucial role, and ‘amhráin na ndaoine’ articulated central rather than marginal elements of popular political culture. Bilingualism was also crucial in the interpenetration of print and oral cultures, documented so well by Ó Cíosáin. This gave new force and focus to what he calls the ‘mythic and folkloric’ foundations of ‘popular political ideas’. Literacy levels among the Irish poor were comparatively high in this period, and while this was achieved mainly through English, a significant minority acquired literacy through Irish. There was, remarkably, ‘a minor explosion of Irish language printing between 1800 and 1850’, centred mainly in provincial towns. This produced religious texts primarily, but there is also evidence for large print runs of broadside ballads in Irish, and in different combinations of Irish and English. Literacy normally involved reading skills only, and even in the extensive private, or ‘hedge’ school system, these were normally developed through use of the ubiquitous chapbook literature, featuring in particular, chivalric romances like *The Seven Champions of Christendom* and romanticised outlaw or criminal biographies, like the those of Redmond O’Hanlon and James Freney.¹⁰

Both types were assimilated to the Gaelic romance tradition, the latter in ways particularly subversive of the colonial settlement, their heroes being depicted as true aristocrats, the descendants of the dispossessed Gaelic nobility. In the same way the appeal of the new slogans coming from revolutionary France was conditioned for many in this bilingual world by their echo of traditional hopes for the overthrow of the colonial ruling class, with French help. I have argued elsewhere that this appeal was both limited and temporary, even in the case of United Irish activist, Micheál Óg Ó Longáin, and this is borne out by the continued strength of the tradition after the failure of the rebellion.¹¹ Far from any transformation of popular political attitudes, or the establishment of a new culture of ‘the Republic in the village’, the Gaelic song tradition in particular, continued to use the crude,

¹⁰ Ó Cíosáin, *Print and Popular Culture*, pp. 81, 155, 159, chapter 5. ¹¹ Dunne, ‘Subaltern Voices?’, pp. 38–9. While sceptical about Ó Longáin’s membership of the United Irishmen, I pointed to echoes of United Irish language in some of his 1797–1799 texts. I am now persuaded by my colleague, Breandán Ó Conchúir, who is preparing the first scholarly edition of Ó Longáin’s poetry, that the evidence for the poet having been an active United Irishman is rather stronger than I imagined, while the case for echoes of the United Irish message in the texts is somewhat less convincing. The tantalising indications of United Irish involvement in Ó Longáin’s manuscript notes to the poems of this period are strengthened if the phrase ‘an tan cuireadh suas mé’ (introducing, ‘I dtarngaireacht Naomh’) is read as ‘the time I was “up”’, rather than ‘the time I was put up’ (i.e. lived) (see *Scríobhairthe Chorcaí*, p. 104), and by the references to cropped hair and the flag in Royal Irish Academy G 24, p. 206. The instructions in English for sword exercises in Ó Longáin’s hand (RIA G 28, n. 14, pp. 313, 340) constitute ‘an exceptional appearance of extraneous matter in one of his manuscripts’, according to Breandán Ó Conchúir (note to the author), who also sees significance in the gap in the manuscript evidence for Ó Longáin’s scribal work from mid-1797 to mid-1798. I am particularly grateful to Breandán Ó Conchúir for the manuscript references.

anti-colonist language of the seventeenth-century poets, like Ó Bruadair, featuring not only the shorthand of racial and sectarian hatred – ‘Sacsain’ [Saxons], ‘Danair’ [Vikings], ‘búir’ [boors], ‘fanatics’, ‘bréan-shliocht Calvin’ [foul descendants of Calvin] – but also the dehumanisation of the colonists by use of animal imagery – ‘faolchoin’ [wolves], ‘allachuin’ [wild dogs], ‘na póirc’ [pigs]. Traditional expressions of anger and the savouring of precise, painful revenge on the settlers persist, especially in Munster songs, such as those of Pádraig Phiarais Cúndún (1777–1856). An early *Aisling*, for example, ‘I gCéin dom Seal go hUaigneach’ [In Exile and Lonely Once] prophesies ‘dearg-scrios / Ar Hanobher is Hollónt’ [bloody destruction on Hanoverians and Hollanders]. The ‘fanatics’, their ‘clé-shliocht tuathail mioscuiseach’ [wicked spiteful descendants] will be forever ‘gan fíon, gan feoil, gan fearantas’ [without wine, meat or estate]. Over forty years later, in one of his final songs, he was still identifying the enemy, as Ó Bruadair had, in terms of the crass materialism, low-class origins and religious extremism attributed to the seventeenth-century settlers – ‘méirliigh Bhreataine / Bhréagach, mheascaithe, an chéird do chleachtadar / Craos is drúis, gan géilleadh d’aitheanta / Ag glaoch ar Chailbhin mar ghárda’ [robbers from Britain, lying, of mixed blood, who traded in greed and lust, refusing to obey the commandments, but calling on Calvin for protection]. Despite his enthusiasm for O’Connell, deliverance, for Cúndún, meant ‘réabadh danar as Clár Luirc’ [the tearing of the Danes from Ireland].¹²

A yet more fiery anger, combined with a similar ‘elision of time’, marked the songs of his contemporary, the west Cork poet, Máire Bhuí Ní Laoire (1774?–1849). Although illiterate, she was married to a relatively prosperous farmer, and proud of her descent from a well known Gaelic family; ‘De natives chirt Uíbh Laoghaire mé / Is de shíolra mhaithe Gaedheal’ [I am one of the true natives of Uíbh Laoghaire and a descendant of Gaelic aristocracy]. Her surviving compositions on political events range from comment on the attempted French landing at Bantry in 1796 to the aftermath of Repeal, and combine a sense of contemporary excitement with a frame of traditional reference. Her best known song, ‘Cath Chéim an Fhiaidh’ [The Battle of Keimaneigh] gives a graphic account of a clash in 1822 between local Whiteboys (including her son) and a force of Protestant yeomen, or, as she would have it, ‘clanna Gael’ [the native Irish] and ‘na páinthish’ [well-fed] or ‘conaibh nimhe’ [rabid dogs] of the Muskerry Volunteers. The latter have rebarbative Planter names and these are rehearsed in a manner reminiscent of Ó Bruadair’s early poems, ‘Barnet agus Beecher / Hedges agus Faoitigh’ [Barnet, Beecher, Hedges and Whites], and God will cast them, ‘I dteinte teasa ameasc na bpian / Gan faeseamh go deo’ [In fiery flames amongst the suffering, everlastingly, without relief].¹³

¹² See, Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty* pp. 59–96. R. Ó Foghludha, *Pádraig Cúndún: 1777–1856* (Dublin, 1932), pp. 1–5, 106–7. For Ó Bruadair, see T. Dunne, ‘The Gaelic Response to Conquest and Colonisation: the Evidence of the Poetry’ in *Studia Hibernica*, 20 (1980), pp. 7–30. ¹³ The phrase ‘elision of time’ is Oliver Macdonagh’s in *States of Mind* (London, 1983), p. 2. D. Ó Donnchú, *Fillocht Mháire Bhuí Ní Laoighaire* (Dublin, 1931), pp. 55–8. For an

Máire Bhuí Ní Laoire's prediction that, 'Ins an bhliain seo anois atá againn beidh rás ar gach smíste' [In this year every boor will be run out] was based on 'gach údar cruinn' [every accurate authority] and especially on what was 'Ins a leabhar so Pastorini' [in this book of Pastorini's].¹⁴ Her reference to 'the book' which she must know only at second hand may reflect awareness of her illiteracy; it certainly illustrates Ó Cíosáin's argument that 'the case of Pastorini shows a popular culture appropriating and transforming those elements in print culture which correspond to its own motifs'.¹⁵ The 'book' Máire Bhuí may have heard read was almost certainly a chapbook or cheap pamphlet which bowdlerised the learned commentary on the Apocalypse of St John, published in 1771 by an English Benedictine Bishop, under the pseudonym, 'Pastorini'. Its popular appeal lay in its apparent prophecy of the triumph of Catholicism over Protestantism in the year 1825, and this expectation may have been crucial to the process by which the bourgeois programme of 'Catholic Emancipation' acquired an enthusiastic mass-following, as Donnelly has pointed out. His discussion of Pastorini and Captain Rock also highlights the fact that millennial cults are often connected to 'intense individual and collective anxiety and insecurity', particularly 'in colonial countries', and the evidence of the Gaelic song tradition would appear to support his view that, as well as its pragmatic, concrete objectives, there was indeed a strong sectarian and millenarian dimension to peasant insurgency in this period.¹⁶

In the literary tradition, which provided the most important field of reference for the songs, the expectation of 'supernatural assistance or deliverance' from foreign oppression was a powerful motif since the twelfth century. From the seventeenth century, as Ó Buachalla has shown, the traditional prophecy of 'na Gaill d'ionnabadh agus Banba a shaoradh' [to banish the foreigner and free Ireland] had acquired the more specific hope for the banishment of 'sliocht Liútair agus bodaigh an Bhéarla' [the descendants of Luther and English-speaking churls]. Although its main concern was the restoration of the old elites and the establishment of the old religion, this prophetic tradition was also 'potentially and eventually a radical rhetoric' in its ultimate form, the Jacobite *Aisling*, according to Ó Buachalla.¹⁷ Certainly, its core message of 'communal liberation' and restorative justice would have gained new force when the audience of the songs changed from the remnants of oppressed elites to local activists among a dispossessed peasantry, but the degree to which the prophecy was coded in cultural, and especially in sectarian terms made it 'radical' more in terms of a continuing rejection of seventeenth-century colonialism than in relation to late eighteenth-century revolution or reform.

extended listing of local planter names, see the response by Diarmaid Mac Sheáin Uí Conchúir to her poem, 'Tá Gaedhil Bhocht Cráidhte', pp. 64-5, 78-80. **14** *Ibid.*, pp. 55-8.

15 Ó Cíosáin, *Print and Popular Culture*, p. 197. **16** James S. Donnelly, Jr, 'Pastorini and Captain Rock: Millenarianism and Sectarianism in the Rockite Movement of 1821-4' in Samuel Clark and J.S. Donnelly, Jr (eds), *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest 1780-1914* (Madison, 1983), pp. 102-39. **17** B. Ó Buachalla, 'Irish Jacobite Poetry' in *Irish Review*, 12 (1992), pp. 40-9. See also his expanded treatment in *Aisling Ghéar* (Dublin, 1996).

Poets imbued with the learned tradition, like Ó Longáin and his friends, found it difficult to escape or even for long to transcend the Jacobite mould. When the old, but long empty hope of French help was suddenly fulfilled only to be as suddenly dashed, and brief dreams of restoration were overwhelmed by the nightmare of 1798, frustration at the limitations of the tradition were clearly expressed in Ó Longáin's 'Le hais na Sionann Séadaigh' [Beside The Jewelled Shannon] (1805). It gave him a well-rehearsed explanation for the catastrophe – disunity, drunkenness, irreligion – but its conventional message of hope was now unendurable. Thus the vision is silenced, 'Is bean ar mire i gcéill tú / Is níl éifeacht id' ghlór' [you are a mad woman, and there is no significance in your words.] Ó Longáin never returned to the emphasis on social justice that marked his invocation of the hopes invested, 'I dtairngreacht Naomh' [In the prophecy of saints] in 1797, looking to 'an talamh go léir bheith saor go buan' [all the land free forever]. Even his poem welcoming home his cousin Tomás in 1817 after eighteen years transportation for an unspecified insurgency role as 'Captaen Steele', while it laments that nothing has changed – 'gach fanatic bréan go séanmhar seascair . . . Is clanna bán Gael . . . go dealbh gan aon rud' [every foul fanatic comfortable and secure, while the native Irish are poor and have nothing] – yet all it has to offer are the worn out clichés of 'Danair' driven out by 'gasra laoch' [army of heroes] coming from abroad. A late poem on Daniel O'Connell praises him in equally traditional terms, in contrast, for example, to Tomás Rua Ó Súilleabháin's view of him as fulfilment of the prophecy, 'Go bhfuil se scríofa i bPastorína / Go maithfear cíos do Ghaedhealaibh / Is go mbeidh fairrgidhe breac le flít ag teacht / Isteach thar pointe Chléire' [That it is written in Pastorini that the Irish will be absolved from all rent, and that the sea will be dotted with ships coming around the headland of Cape Clear.]¹⁸

This combination of old and new perspectives was not unusual, and a crucial shift in the way prophecy was invoked marked the popular song tradition, moving from the old hope of the restoration of 'the ancient faith, and the ancient though fallen families', to the expectation of social justice.¹⁹ This shift reflected the continued dilution of elite learning, but even more the fact that the audience for political songs in Irish now consisted almost entirely of the rural poor, whose survival was tied to the level of rents and tithes, who were terrifyingly vulnerable to courts and officials, and whose enemies were perceived in sectarian even more than class terms, as their own identity was articulated more and more through a resurgent Catholicism. Thus Raftery invoked Pastorini in anticipation of victory by local Catholics over 'New Lights' and 'Orangemen' in a song urging payment of the Catholic rent. His appeal connects the Emancipation campaign to the practical

¹⁸ Tadhg Ó Murchú, 'Micheál Óg Ó Longáin, 1766–1837', (MA thesis, UCC, 1940), no. b19; R. Ó Donnchadha, *Micheál Óg Ó Longáin, File* (Dublin, 1994), nos 7, 15, 37; James Fenton (ed.), *Anhráin Thomáis Ruadh: the Songs of Tomás Ruadh O'Sullivan, the Iveragh Poet* (Dublin, n.d.), no. xxv. ¹⁹ James Hardiman (ed.), *Irish Minstrelsy, or Bardic Remains of Ireland, with English Poetical Translations*, 2 vols (London, 1831), vol. 1, xxv.

concerns of his hearers. 'Ní mór insa gcíos é agus saoróidh sé *taxes*, / An deachmha ní glaofar mar deantaí oraibh cheana, / Beidh ceart agus dlí daoibh i dtír is i dtalamh' [It is a little thing in the rent and it will free (us from) taxes, tithes shall not be called for as was done to you in the past, there will be right and law for you in the country and in matters of land].²⁰

Likewise, Máire Bhuí expects that the fulfilment of prophecy will mean 'talamh gan chíos' [land without rent] and revenge on 'an t-ál seo Chailbhin choimhthigh' [this foreign litter of Calvin's].²¹ This is echoed in some of the macaronic verse of the broadsheets, combined with echoes of the elite Gaelic tradition, and elements of English language discourse, like the liberation rhetoric of O'Connell, and even the romantic language of the Catholic antiquarians. Thus, in the remarkably hybrid song, 'The Huntsman's Tragedy', an adaptation of the *Aisling* format, the spéirbhean refuses the poet's offer of marriage,

For I am intoxicated by Luther's breed
 Tá mo chlannsa gach am dá dtraochadh [My family are all the
 time worn down]
 Le sean dá gcéiseadh le taxeannaí [For long persecuted with taxes]
 But now if you join me we will release them
 And set Milesians at liberty

In another verse she conjures up 'flít bhreá Fhrancach' [a fine French fleet] coming to help 'Our Catholic boys'. She also invokes the authority of 'leabhar na n-údar' [books by authorities] to prophesy, 'Beidh na búir seo go dubhach faoi bhrón [these boors will be sorrowful] Our Catholic true men will soon outdo them / And Orange juries for their deeds shall groan'. O'Connell, a true 'prionsa Gaelach' [Gaelic prince] is endeavouring 'to set our nation from bondage free'.²² The eclecticism of popular culture in this bilingual world was particularly clear in such songs, and, as discussed below, the depiction of O'Connell often involved an adaptation of traditional perspectives to a romantic liberation rhetoric, which itself had been designed in part to fit the tradition. This was facilitated greatly by the regular equation of 'Gael' and 'Caitliceach' in political poetry from the middle of the seventeenth century.²³

While the defeat of the traditional enemy was commonly predicted in blood-thirsty language, actual celebration or encouragement of peasant insurgency is rare enough in the poems that survive, particularly those composed by scribes or schoolteachers whose paymasters were better off Catholics, most influenced by the old elite tradition and more inclined (and able) to connect it to the new politics of

20 Ciarán Ó Coigligh (ed.), *Raiftearaí: Amhráin agus Dánta* (Dublin, 1987), pp. 97-9. The translation is based on Douglas Hyde's, in *Songs Ascribed to Raftery* (Dublin, 1903), p. 123. 21 *Fillocht Mháire Bhuí*, pp. 37-9, 55-8. 22 *An tAmhrán Macarónach*, no. 49, also no. 53. 23 See Dunne, 'The Gaelic Response', pp. 17-20.

O'Connell. It is heard, instead, in what is more clearly 'folk' poetry, by illiterate songsters, such as Máire Bhuí Ní Laoire and Raftery. Máire Bhuí applied the common perception 'Tá Gaedhil bhocht cráidhte' [The poor Irish are tormented] to those sentenced to death or transportation by the courts and, unusually for the song tradition, suggested links between contemporary peasant insurgency and 1798. 'Clanna saírfhear dá gcrochach anáirde / 's dá gcur síos láithreach 'sa chroppy hole / Tá na loingear lán díobh dá gcur thar saile / Mo chumha go bráth sibh faoi iomad yoke' [The best men are being hung and put immediately into croppy graves. The ships are full of them being sent overseas. My sorrow forever for you, suffering under many burdens]. 'Cath Chéim an Fhaidh' graphically depicts the aftermath of the affray with the yeomanry as a massacre of unarmed country people and ends with an incitement to 'a Chlanna Gaedheal' to fight and gain revenge. 'Bíodh bhur bpíicí glanna i gceart i ngléas . . . Tá an chabhair ag teacht le toil ó Dhia / Agus léirídh na póirc [Let your clean pikes be in order, help is coming with God's will, and subdue the pigs].²⁴

The two songs in praise of 'Na Buachaillí Bána' [Whiteboys], tentatively attributed to Raftery by Hyde, may not have been composed by him, but one of them can be found in three manuscript versions, indicating that it had some currency. It begins with a rejection of the Protestant bible, but quickly turns into a glorification of the Ribbonmen (who may, indeed, have included Raftery among their number).

Ach geallaimse daoibh an té a gheofas saol,
 Go bhfaighidh Ribbonmen luach a sláinte,
 Ar son gach uile oíche dá rabhadar 'na suí
 Faoi shioc, faoi shneachta is faoi bháisteach.
 Cíos an rí ní bheidh feasta lena íoc,
 Deachmha ná ní ar bith ní bheidh trácht air,
 Beidh talamh ina luach agus Clanna Gael suas
 Agus Sasanaigh buartha cráite.

[But I promise ye, whoever of ye shall have life, that the Ribbonmen shall yet get the price of the health (they have lost), on account of every night they were sitting up, under frost, under snow and under rain. There shall not in future be any king's rent to pay; tithes or anything of that kind there shall be no talk of. Land shall be had for a fair price, and the Clanna Gael on top, and Sassanachs troubled and vexed.]

He then prays that he may see 'Peelers lag marbh sínte [policemen stretched out dead], 'Liberty Trees . . . ag lucht Ribíní' [Ribbonmen displaying the Liberty tree], and two local informers with 'a gceann i mbarr spíce in áirde' [their heads high on

spikes]. He envisages, 'Pairlimint thart agus Gaeil ar a gceart / lucht Ribíní in airm is in éide' [Parliament finished, and the Irish established in their rights, with Ribbonmen armed and uniformed], and he would like to be 'ag ruaigeadh na nGall as Éirinn' [driving the foreigners out of Ireland].²⁵

A song which Raftery did compose also presented the resistance to tithes in terms of armed insurgency and traditional ends. It begins, 'Éirigi suas, tá an cúrsa ag teannadh libh / Bíodh claoimh agus sleá agaibh i bhfaobhar géar' [Arise, the occasion is coming. Let your swords and spears be sharp]. Invoking prophecy, it anticipates the end of Lutherans and 'an lá ag na Caitlicigh' [victory with the Catholics], whose 'drochmheas agus ruaig' [contempt and banishment] is traced back to the English Reformation. Munster has already risen and the war won't stop 'go leagfar dóibh deachma agus cíós dá réir' [until tithes and rents are reduced for them]. Victory will also mean,

Bheadh Gaill ar a gcúl is gan teacht ar ais acu
 Agus Orangemen brúite I gciumhais gach baile againn
 Breitheamh agus jury i dteach cúirte ag na Caitlicigh
 Sasanaigh marbh is an choróin ar Ghael.

[The foreigners will be on the retreat, with no hope of returning, and Orangemen forced by us to the outskirts of every town. Catholics will have judge and jury in every courthouse. The English will be dead and the Gael crowned.]

Control of the courts will also, presumably, mean the end of the transportation of 'Buachaillí Bána . . . go Botany Bay' [Whiteboys to Botany Bay].²⁶ As we have seen, Máire Bhúí Ní Laoire also saw the tithe war as part of the age-old conflict between 'Clanna Gaedheal' and 'an tál seo Chailbhin choimhthigh' [this foreign litter of Calvin's], and the last verse of 'Cath Chéim an Fhaidh' reflects a certain war weariness. She is stopping not only because she feels old, but 'Tá iomarca 'en drochchroidhe agam do bhuidhin na mbolg mór' [I have too much enmity towards the fat-bellied crowd]. While she still urges 'Beidh gach sáirfhear croidheamhail is a phíce 'gus a shleagh 'na dhóid' [Every brave man will have his pike and spear in his hand], this will be on the basis, 'gan súil le sásamh choidche ná díol as go deo' [without expecting satisfaction or payment ever].²⁷

This poem also harks back to an even older literary tradition. To quote Ó Héalaí, it is 'faoi anál cathanna na laoithe fiannaíochta' [under the influence of the accounts of battles in the Ossianic poems], though less so, he notes, than a fascinating prose text of the same period, written in east rather than west Cork, and describing a tithe affray at Rossmore in 1833.²⁸ Its author, Dáibhí de Barra, was a

²⁵ On authorship, see Ó Coigligh, *Raiftearal*, pp. 8-9. For the text, *ibid.*, pp. 105-6. ²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3. ²⁷ *Filíocht Mháire Bhúí*, pp. 55-8. ²⁸ P. Ó Héalaí, 'Filíocht na Mumhan san

contemporary of Ó Longáin and an important scribe and the author of other interesting prose works. His mock-heroic account of the 'battle' between local people and the soldiers and police accompanying the magistrate to enforce the collection of tithes reflects his knowledge of the 'Gaelic' romance tradition, but it also manages to employ archaic language to reflect his community's attitudes to authority, including the hated new police, 'go nách raibh air druim talmhan aon drung badh tharcainníde agus ba fhuathmhaire aige Gaodhalaibh ná iad' [so that there was not on the face of the earth a crowd more despised and more hated by the Irish than they]. The struggle, as ever, is between 'na laoiCh Chatolice' [the Catholic heroes], or 'na Gaodhalaibh' [the native Irish], who win a famous victory over 'na hAllmhuraig' [the foreigners], 'slua Gallda' [ditto], 'na muca dubha' [the black pigs].²⁹ Two years earlier, lamenting the much bloodier tithe affray at Carrickshock, during which twelve policemen were killed, Amhlaobh Ó Súilleabháin was in more sober mood. 'Is dona an obair í seo do clanna Gaodhal, óir déanfadh na Sasanaigh díoghaltas ortha' [This is bad work for the children of the Gaels, for the English will take vengeance for the slain].³⁰ And the battlefield extended to the courts, often referred to in the songs as a feared part of the apparatus of the ancient foreign tyranny. As one anonymous folk-song put it, 'Beidh ann seisiún ceathrúnach idir Gaeil is clanna Gall' [There will be quarter sessions there between the native Irish and the foreigners].³¹

The Tithe War was portrayed in terms of peasant insurgency and Jacobite prophecy even by Daniel O'Connell's local and loyal songster, Tomás Rua Ó Súilleabháin. The song 'An Gheadach dá Crúdhadh 'san Ghleann' [Milking the Cow in the Glen] focuses humourously the question of the recovery of a cow impounded to pay a widow's tithe. Beginning with O'Connell's attack on tithes, and the expectation of the arrival of the Stuart help, it moves on to urge direct and bloody action. 'S a bhuachailí gluásidh le chéile . . . Chum na gcluas a bhaint anuas de dhraighbhéaraibh / Is iad do ruagairt as Éirinn in am' [Go together boys . . . to cut the ears off the drivers and expel them from Ireland eventually]. The defeat of 'sliocht Liútair' [the descendants of Luther] and 'brúididhe an Bhéarla' [English-speaking brutes] will mean 'prionsa na nGaedheal gceart mar cheann' [the prince of the true Irish in command]. The last verse has a more modern, O'Connellite tone, saying that he would write to explain to everyone in Ireland 'cad é an chuing atá 'dtaoibh na ndeachmhaidhe' [the oppression involved in the tithes] leading to 'meetings ar thaoibh chnuic ag Gaedhealaibh' [the Irish holding meetings on hillsides]. But he ends traditionally; the desired outcome is still the local oppressors 'dá ruagairt le chéile thar tuinn' [being driven overseas together].³²

Naou Céad Déag' in P. Ó Fiannachta (ed.), *Léachtaí Cholm Cille 1972*, vol. iii (Má Nuad, 1972), p. 52. 29 B. Ó Cuiú, 'A Contemporary Account in Irish of a Nineteenth-Century Tithe Affray' in *Proc. R.I.A.*, vol. 61, C, 1 (1960), pp. 1-21, p. 8. 30 M. McGrath (ed.), *Cinnlae Amhlaoibh Uí Shúilleabháin*, 4 vols (London, 1928-37), vol. 3, 15/12/1831, p. 94. 31 T. Ó Concheanainn (ed.), *Nua Dhuanaire*, iii (1978), p. 19. 32 Fenton, *Amhráin Thomáis Ruadh*, no. xxvii.

As Ríonach Uí Ógáin has shown so comprehensively, O'Connell was the great folk hero of this volatile bilingual world and the remarkable range of material about him in the folk archives includes hundreds of contemporary songs, many of them in Irish, or in macaronic form.³³ They constitute crucial evidence of the enduring power of the Gaelic political and literary traditions, and of attempts to adapt or transform them in an age of mass politics, centred on Westminster. Elements of bardic praise poems jostle with the anti-settler language and gaming metaphors of Ó Bruadair, the many variations on the Jacobite *Aisling* tradition, the old motifs of oppression and liberation and their new expression in O'Connellite rhetoric, and with elements of contemporary democratic and even pacifist politics. The mixture shows a culture in transition, but also highlights the dynamism of the insurgency tradition which constituted for O'Connell both a great strength and a great challenge. While, as Ó Tuathaigh points out, his rhetoric of grievance was very close to the millennial language of the poetry, the extreme nature of that language underlines the problem of harnessing popular grievance without becoming its prisoner.³⁴

Part of that strength was the widely held view of him as the great Gaelic chief who would fulfil the prophecies and lead a successful rebellion against the foreigners. Ó Súilleabháin's anachronistic depiction of O'Connell with, 'a chlaidheamh fola 'na dhóid chun éirigh' [his sword of blood in his hand for slaughter] is confined to songs in Irish, according to Ní Ógáin. Even when there was praise for his 'teanga líofa, blasta dáimh' [articulate, sweet, learned tongue] the expectation of victory in these songs was usually, 'geobhaimíd le toradh claíomh é is cloifimid na Sasanaigh' [we will achieve it through the sword, and will defeat the English].³⁵ Thus, for example, Máire Bhuí expected, 'Go mbeadh Repealers is a bhforsáí tréana / Agus cognamh Dé á stúiradh, / Agus buidhean an Bhéaria gan fion gan féasta / Agus strealladh piléar dá ndúiseacht' [That the Repealers and their strong forces would be directed by the helping hand of God, and English speakers without wine or feast, woken by a barrage of bullets].³⁶ Likewise, the exhortation of 'Spéirbhean ag Trácht ar Reipéil' [The Vision Woman Discoursing on Repeal] by fellow west Cork songster, Diarmuid Ua Mathghamhna, is 'glan do phíce is bíodh sé ar faobhar' [clean your pike and let it be sharp]. Camps will spring up on the hillsides, 'Ag díbirt thréada choimhthigh Chailbhín' [driving out the foreign herd of Calvin].³⁷

But, while important, this was only one aspect of the popular perception of O'Connell, as reflected in 'amhráin na ndaoine'. Almost the entire range of literary and political reference points provided by the Gaelic tradition can be found,

33 Uí Ógáin, *An Rí Gan Choróin*, especially chapter 2, and appendix B. **34** Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, 'Gaelic Ireland, Popular Politics and Daniel O'Connell' in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, 34 (1974-5), pp. 21-34. **35** Fenton, *Amhráin Thomáis Ruadh*, no. xviii; Uí Ógáin, *An Rí Gan Choróin*, pp. 94-6. **36** *Filíocht Mháire Bhuí*, pp. 61-3. **37** An tAth. P. Ó Dineen (ed.), 'Spéirbhean ag Gracht ar Reipéil' in *Gadelica*, 1/1 (1912), pp. 16-18.

appropriately, in the songs of Tomás Rua. For example, he composed a bardic-style lament for the departure of the chieftain from his territory when O'Connell first went to Westminster, or 'Feis na Sacsan' [the parliament of the Saxons]. His comparison of O'Connell with Moses was also a traditional motif, and became a commonplace of contemporary rhetoric as well as song, but few employed it, as Tomás Rua did, to invoke the God of the Israelites as a God of wrath, smiting Lutherans and Calvinists, while O'Connell is 'ag fiach ar na diabhlaidhe le fada / Anois is ariamh tá dá stialladh is dá stracadh' [long in pursuit of the devils, now and always rending and tearing them]. He reworked Jacobite imagery, with 'an Catoilic trúp' [the Catholic troop] waiting for the word from 'Cormac Stiubhart' [Cormac Stuart] or 'an scathbhuipe Dónall' [Daniel, the strapping fellow], with his sword ready to wreak havoc. He is 'de phór Milesius' [descended from Miles Hispaniae] and the hopes he carries resonate with those invested in James II by Ó Bruadair, revenge on 'na búir' and 'na crón-phoic' [tawny buck goats], and 'do thógfadh siúd an brón de Ghaelaibh' [that they would remove the sorrow from the native Irish].³⁸ Virtually all the elements of the tradition are combined with the image of O'Connell as a modern constitutional politician and with the expectations of the rural poor, in the remarkable first verse of Tomás Rua's song welcoming his hero home after the Clare election.

'Sé Domhnall binn Ó Conaill caoin
 An planda fíor den Ghaedheal-fhuil
 Gur le feabhas a phinn is meabhair a chinn
 Do scól sé síos an craes-shliocht
 Go bhfuil sé scríbhthe I bPastorini
 Go maithfear cíos do Ghaedhealaibh
 'S go mbeidh farrgidhe breac le flít ag teacht,
 Isteach thar pointe Chléire.

[Sweet, gentle Daniel O'Connell is the true scion of Gaelic blood, who by the excellence of his pen and his intelligence has flayed and brought low the greedy descendants (of the foreigners). It is written in Pastorini that the native Irish will have remission of rent, and that the sea will be dotted with ships coming in around the headland of Cape Clear.]³⁹

Not long afterwards, when O'Connell was on his way to London to take his seat, another teacher/songwriter, Seán Ó Braonáin stepped in front of his carriage in Ardfert, and recited a similar poem, but using more martial and blood-thirsty language: every verse ends with the refrain, 'Is beidh Clanna Gaeil gan spleáchas re hálmhach na n-allachon' [and the native Irish will not be subject to a litter of foreign dogs]. Again prophecy is invoked, anticipating the expulsion of Lutherans

and Calvinists, and the return of the old ruling families. Then, 'Biaidh gleo-ghoin laoich le fórsa cláiomh / a' sceóladh a gcinn do dhanaraibh' [the battle-wounding warriors, by the force of the sword, will be removing the heads of the foreigners]. There are verses attacking O'Connell's political enemies, English and Irish, showing sophisticated understanding of contemporary realities, which seems at odds with the largely traditional expectation of the hero's impact on 'Feis na Sagsanach' [the parliament of the English, i.e. Westminster].

Brisfear ris is réabfar na dlithe claona cheapadar
 Glaofar rí d'fhuil Ghaeil arís
 I réimheas chríochaibh Banba
 Agus réx do shiolrach Shéamais chríonna
 A' rialú ríocht na Breataine
 Is beidh clanna Gaeil gan spleáchas re hálmhach na n-allachon

[He will break and rend the crooked laws they passed. A king of Gaelic blood will again be called to rule over Ireland, and a king, a descendant of old James to rule over the kingdom of Britain – and the native Irish will no longer be subject to a litter of foreign dogs.]⁴⁰

Of course, Ó Braonáin had no such expectations, which are rehearsed instead as a dramatic assertion of the belief that lay at the heart of O'Connell's appeal to the Irish speaking population, that through him would be achieved liberation from a foreign tyranny, the prism through which the rural poor had long focussed their sense of injustice.

A song of Raftery's, 'Bua Uí Chonaill' [O'Connell's triumph] is, fascinatingly, more ambivalent. It begins with hopes of rebellion, 'go lasfaidh Éire le faobhar lann' [that Ireland will be lit up by sharp blades] once England becomes involved in a new continental war. This will mean, hopefully, 'go bhfaighe muid pléisúir ar *Orangemen*' [that we will have sport with Orangemen]. If the writings are true, 'Emancipation' should mean 'cead ag Gaeil bheith chomh hard le Gaill' [permission for the native Irish to be as high as the foreigners], but doubts are suggested. His conclusion, 'mara siocháin bhréige é, níl dochar ann' [if it's not a false peace, there's no harm in it] is hardly a ringing endorsement of O'Connell's achievement. He has every confidence, however, that Luther and his followers will be smashed against the rock of the Catholic Church. He expects that O'Connell's victory over 'an namhaid' [the enemy] will be greeted by 'gunnaí is lámhach is tinte cnámha' [guns and firing and bonfires] and while 'uasal is ardflaith' [noble man and prince] are congratulating one another, Raftery says *he* will drink to 'sláinte na bhfear ó Árainn go hInis Uí Chuinn' [the health of men from Aran to Ennis], that is, the

⁴⁰ P. de Brún, *Fillocht Sheáin Uí Bhraonáin* (Dublin, 1972), no. 25.

ordinary supporters of O'Connell, whose interests, the listener may feel, are in danger of being forgotten.⁴¹

Rafferty was a vehement critic of 'na Bíoblóirí' [promoters of the Bible, that is, in Irish], but many of his fellow poets were involved, especially as teachers for the Irish Society, which took a sophisticated cultural approach to the Protestant evangelical drive of the 1820s. It provided texts and organised bible readings in Irish, without commentary, and recruited its teachers mainly from such local Catholics 'as shall be found competent and willing to engage in the instruction of their neighbours in their native language'. Most regarded the work simply as a source of income, and denied proselytising; some even claimed to have exploited the schools to promote the language. Others were more cynical.⁴² It may be significant that some of the most unequivocal support for O'Connell in Gaelic poetry came from these cultural and economic pragmatists, and that they went furthest in adapting the tradition to contemporary political rhetoric. Aodh Mac Domhnaill, for example, who described himself as a 'file Ultach' [Ulster poet] (though he came from Meath) was exposed for making false returns of the numbers of his pupils to maximise his income from the Irish Society. He later turned to manuscript collecting, mainly for Robert MacAdam in Belfast, and only at that point started writing songs, and O'Connell, whom he saw at a meeting in Dundalk in 1843, was his hero. In 'Ceol Sheáin Bhui' [The Music of Yellow John, that is, England] the release of O'Connell from prison is seen as the first victory of Catholics since the Reformation against 'Seán', who will be banished, 'mar do rinne tú an éagóir ar ghaoltaí Mhilésius, / Dá gcrocaidh, dá gcéasadh 's dá lámhach' [because you did an injustice to the relatives of Milesius, hanging them, persecuting them and shooting them]. But the victory was achieved peacefully by O'Connell, who is compared to Moses. 'Ní chorraíonn bhur ndaoine 's ní bhristear an díl leo / Tá an tAthair Mathúin choíche dá nGardáil' [Your people aren't agitated and don't break the law. Fr Mathew is forever guarding them].⁴³ Mac Domhnaill was not only, like O'Connell, a pragmatist, he was also a man from a poor rural background who ended up functioning successfully in a middle class urban milieu for years.

The song tradition was modified significantly in such new contexts, as is evident also, for example, in the work of Seamus Mac Giolla Choille, or 'Dr James Woods'. Born near Crossmaglen in rural Armagh, he became an apothecary in Dundalk, which gave him the means to become an antiquarian and collector. He organised an 'Iomarbhá na bhfilí' [contention of the bards] in 1825, a traditional poetic competition in self-consciously antiquarian mode, but focused on O'Connell. His own contribution stressed O'Connell's eloquence as having done more for the Gael than all the kings of old. 'Is glé 's is suall linn fuaim do chinn / Ag míniú uait go dearscnaithe / Na reachta is dúil dúinn fháil gan roinn / Is

41 Ó Coighligh, *Raifstearaí*, no. 29. 42 P. de Brún, 'The Irish Society's Bible Teachers, 1818-1827' in *Eigse*, 19/2 (1983), pp. 281-332. 43 C. Beckett, *Aodh Mac Domhnaill: Dánta* (Dublin, 1987), no. 7.

cheanglós ár mbá le Breatain' [His 'literal translation' rendered this, 'Pleasant and sweet thy voice explaining with eloquence the tenor of the rights to which we are most justly entitled, which cannot be refused us, and which, when granted, shall join us in bonds of indissoluble union with Great Britain']. The winner of the competition, Art Murphy, also believed O'Connell would 'cement a lasting friendship and union between this country and England'. His student, Nicholas O'Kearney, was, according to Ó Fiaich, 'the best northern poet writing in Irish in the nineteenth century'. Strongly influenced by Davis, he also wrote songs in English for the *Nation*, and translated some of its ballads into Irish. Aodh Mac Domhnaill also wrote a lament in Irish on the death of Davis, which is highly conventional in its use of Fiannaíocht and biblical comparisons, but also introduces a significant new note into the poetry in adding to the usual pathetic fallacy, 'an náisiún seo faoi chumha' [this nation under sorrow].⁴⁴ Thus, as the Irish speaking population was being decimated by famine and as the centuries old tradition of political poetry died with it, some Gaelic writers (and they 'wrote' rather than 'composed', and are not to be found in the oral sources) who were entrepreneurial, antiquarian or otherwise 'modern' in outlook collapsed the old distinction, described by Ó Tuathaigh as between 'Gaelic Ireland' as 'a community' and Gaelic Ireland as 'a political and cultural concept'.⁴⁵ Only now does the abstract idea of 'the nation' find expression in Gaelic poetry.

However, while it was true that 'Gaelic Ireland as a community did not see the concept of "Gaelic Ireland" as a real political issue', the heirs to the learned tradition had long felt concern at what was happening to the language.⁴⁶ In this they were echoing the poets who viewed the decline of the Gaelic elite from the early seventeenth century in terms of cultural loss, and the new colonialism of the Cromwellians as characterised by cultural abrasiveness. Thus, the new settlers were 'bodaigh' or 'bastaird' or 'bruscar an Bhéarla' [churls or bastards or English-speaking rabble], and their rebarbative foreign names, or English phrases that encapsulated the new oppression were inserted into the poetry.⁴⁷ As we have seen, these literary conventions continued to find echoes in 'amhráin na ndaoine'. For Seán Ó Braonáin the coming of the Stuarts would mean 'díbirt aicme an Bhéarla' [the expulsion of the English speaking faction]; Tomás Rua urged, 'scaipimís brúid an Bhéarla' [let us scatter the English speaking brutes]; Cúndún believed he was persecuted by 'búr uile Béarla' [an evil English-speaking boor].⁴⁸ Nor was this mere literary convention at a time when landlords and their agents, the owners of tithes and their enforcers, local magistrates, the courts and the police still spoke a different language from the great mass of the rural poor. It needed no abstract concepts

44 Seosamh Ó Duibhginn, *Séamus Mac Giolla Choille c.1759-1828* (Dublin, 1972), pp. 58-64; Tomás Ó Fiaich, 'The Ulster Poetic Tradition in the Nineteenth Century' in Ó Fiannachta, *Léachtaí Chohm Cille*, III, pp. 20-37, p. 31; Beckett, *Mac Domhnaill*, no. 10. 45 Ó Tuathaigh, 'Gaelic Ireland', p. 22. 46 *Ibid.*, p. 33. 47 See Dunne, 'The Gaelic Response', pp. 16, 20, 24. 48 De Brún, *Fillocht Shealín í Bhraonáin*, no. 15; Fenton, *Amhráin Thomáis Ruadh*, no. xviii; Ó Foghludha, *Cúndún*, no. xiv.

like 'náisiún' to see rent, tithes or law as foreign tyranny – that was clear in the way the linguistic divide followed the lines of power.

But, while 'amhráin na ndaoine' reflected this as a cultural legacy of colonialism, those poets who were also scribes and manuscript collectors, and tended therefore to live in or near urban centres, viewed the accelerating language shift with mounting concern because of its implications for the literary tradition. Thus Micheál Óg Ó Longáin turned increasingly after 1798 from the tradition of political opposition to the colonial settlement to the need to salvage the literary tradition, by saving the language itself. As early as 1800 he was writing, 'Tagraim libh a chlann Éibhir / leath bhur loit nách lánléir libh; / Méala daoibh tar aoin eile / ag dul d'éag don Ghaoidheilge' [I mention to you, children of Éibhir, that you don't properly understand half of your injury. The greatest grief, above all others, is Irish dying]. His main concern was to preserve 'an méid tá dár dteangain dhil / anois re fáil in Éirinn' [What can be found in Ireland of our beloved language].⁴⁹ Twenty years later when Cúndún mourned, 'ár dteanga mhilis marbh' [that our sweet language was dead] he did so in the context of the Gael being destitute and persecuted, but such laments did not usually concern themselves with the reasons why Irish speakers were abandoning the language.⁵⁰ Instead, these early attempts at the revival of Irish had a sense of crisis that was cultural and elitist rather than communal; the concern expressed for the living language was mainly as a bearer of the literary tradition.⁵¹ Living Irish and literary Irish were, increasingly, separate spheres. This helps explain the remarkable metamorphosis of the key figure of early revivalism, An tAthair Pól Ó Briain, from fluent speaker of his native Meath dialect and maker of songs as a rural schoolmaster to an ineffectual, often obscure, imitator of classical bardic language and forms (already archaic by 1600) as the first Professor of Irish in Maynooth. His opening address to his students in Maynooth combines regret 'nach maireann i láthair acht beagán ag a bhfuil fios nó tuigse na Gaedhilge' [that there are only a few alive at present who have a knowledge and understanding of Irish] with encouragement that they learn the language for their ministry 'do bhúr gcomh-chréatúirí dá bhfuil an iomad diobhtha, faraor gan Bhéarla, gan léigheann, gan fhoghluim, gan eolas, gan tuigse, gan inmheadhain, gan intleacht' [to your fellow creatures, too many of whom, sadly, are without English, learning, education, knowledge, understanding, inner life or intellect]. Their Irish clearly counted for nothing, while their lack of *English* was regrettable. This was not a lack in his fellow enthusiasts of the Gaelic Society, at whose first meeting in 1807 he declaimed a poem, 'Ardfaidhear meanmain Bhanba' [The spirit of Ireland will be elevated] to 'comhthionól na nuadh-bhreas Gaedheal' [a gathering of the new nobility of the Gael?]. The poem was an archaic and empty literary exercise,

49 Ó Donnchadha, *Ó Longáin*, no. 20. 50 Ó Foghludha, *Cúndún*, no. ix. 51 See, for example, the views of Dáibhí de Barra and Donnchadh Ó Floinn, in Ó Conchúir, *Scríobhaithe Chorcaí*, pp. 12–13, 275, fn. 529.

in painful contrast to the vibrant song tradition of the ordinary Irish speakers whose culture he now seemed to despise.⁵²

When he visited Cork in 1815, Ó Longáin greeted him with a poem, which described him, appropriately, as 'saoi nach eadrom san oideas' [a scholar not light in instruction]. In return, Ó Briain sent a poem to be read at the meeting that established a branch of the Gaelic Society in Cork, which began with an invocation of a golden age, when the clergy and learned classes were honoured, and urged the publishing of the great literary texts. When Ó Briain died in 1820, Ó Longáin wrote a poem which compared him to his 'ancestor', Brian Bóru, 'do ruaig na Danair' [who banished the Danes], and praised his 'uaisleacht aigne' [nobility of mind].⁵³ As Meidhbhain Ní Urdail has shown, the context in which Ó Longáin operated was changing in this period from the local or communal to 'more patron-centred scribal performance', which was city-based, increasingly antiquarian and involved with translation from Irish.⁵⁴ He is thus an important transitional figure in terms of Gaelic literary production and this also extends to his poetry. His earliest known poem (1785) is in macaronic form and celebrates Whiteboyism in a traditional, sectarian manner; most of his mature poetry is in conventional Jacobite mode, focussed briefly on the United Irish organisation and the 1798 rebellion; his later political poetry returns to conventional Jacobite forms, with little contemporary resonance, but his real concern now is the revivalist and antiquarian project of middle class enthusiasts and patrons.⁵⁵

The subaltern peasant voice continued throughout his lifetime and beyond, as we have seen, in 'filí pobail' like Máire Bhuí and Raftery, articulating a desire for justice and revenge, rooted in the enduring 'memory' of colonial expropriation that had both a literary and communal basis. As the community that mainly sustained that tradition became increasingly bilingual, and moved towards extinction, a scholarly, revivalist movement developed, which had little interest in the popular culture of the living language. Instead, it can be seen as part of the commodification of Irish, whose best known contemporary features are the provision of 'translations' and manuscript copies to order, and the development of a defining but subordinate 'Gaelic' dimension in the new Anglo-Irish literature. This dual process, the radical decline of the living language and the re-invention of Irish as a cultural emblem or artifact, offers complex and compelling witness to the profound cultural consequences of the Irish experience of colonialism, and the colonial basis of Irish cultural development.

52 Énrí Ó Muirgheasa, *Anhráin na Midhe: Cuid a hAon* (Dublin, 1933), pp. 64-107, especially pp. 85-7. The contrast between Ó Briain's early songs and his later 'learned' poems is well drawn in a sympathetic profile by Diarmuid Ó Muirithe, 'An tAthair Pól Ó Briain' in *Má Nuad agus an Ghaeilge: Léachtaí Cholm Cille xxiii* (Má Nuad, 1993), pp. 8-43.

53 Ó Donnchadha, Ó Longáin, nos 27, 30. 54 Ní Urdail, *The Scribe in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Ireland*, p. 77. 55 Dunne, 'Subaltern Voices?', pp. 38-42.

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