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## CHAPTER ONE

PATRICK MORGAN MACSWEENEY (1873–1935)\*

Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail

### INTRODUCTION

Following his appointment as Scribe in Dublin’s Royal Irish Academy in December 1865, Seosamh Ó Longáin (1817–1880), his wife Maria (*née* Hickey, c.1833–1894) and their family, relocated from the civil parish of Whitechurch, on the outskirts of Cork city, to their new home in the capital city at 24 North Summer Street. Some four years later, Ó Longáin would encounter his future son-in-law, Jeremiah Joseph MacSweeney (1837–1924), who joined the Royal Irish Academy when appointed Librarian there in the year 1869. We know besides from the Irish Church and Civil Records that MacSweeney married Maria O’Longan (1851–1931) on 28 April 1872. The marriage took place in St Mary’s Pro-Cathedral, Dublin, where it was performed by Fr T.J. O’Reilly and witnessed by Andrew Cafferty and Catherine O’Regan.<sup>1</sup> Maria was the eldest child of eleven in all born to the renowned Cork scribe and his wife.<sup>2</sup>

The newly weds settled at 2 Caroline Row, Ringsend, where, on 17 April 1873, Maria gave birth to the couple’s first child, Patrick Morgan.<sup>3</sup> Four days later, on 21 April 1873, he was baptized Patricius Morgan MacSweeney in the convent chapel of St Agatha’s parish in North William Street, with Joannis Flannigan and Hanna O’Langon as witnesses.<sup>4</sup> We may note in passing here that the choice of Christian names was in deference to the child’s paternal grandfather.<sup>5</sup> By 1876, the MacSweeneys were residing at 22 Russell Place, North Circular Road, Dublin, where their second child, Jeremiah, was born on 28 January of that year.<sup>6</sup> In the years 1878–1892, Maria gave birth to eight more children at Russell Place, two of whom died in infancy.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Irish Church and Civil Records, available at <https://churchrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/> and <https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/civil-search.jsp>.

<sup>2</sup> Ní Úrdail, *The Scribe in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, 123–4, n. 18; Ní Úrdail, ‘*An Ghaeilge do Choimeád ar Bun agus ar Buaintseasamh*’, 89–90, n. 108.

<sup>3</sup> [https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth\\_returns/births\\_1873/03198/2172750.pdf](https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1873/03198/2172750.pdf); cf. Breathnach and Ní Mhurchú, ‘Mac Suibhne, Pádraig (1875–1935)’, 59.

<sup>4</sup> <https://registers.nli.ie/registers/vtls000633464#page/182/mode/1up>.

<sup>5</sup> He is named Morgan Sweeney on the church record of his marriage to Marian Donovan on 24 June 1832 in Clonakilty, Co. Cork, available at <https://churchrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/>. On 30 May 1837, their son Jeremiah was baptized in St Colman’s Catholic Church, Macroom, Co. Cork, and the baptismal record identifies Patt McSwiney as father and Margaret Donovan as mother.

<sup>6</sup> [https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth\\_returns/births\\_1876/03070/2091469.pdf](https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1876/03070/2091469.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Eugenius Joseph (b. 17 February 1878; died of whooping cough on 27 February 1881); Michael Terence (b. 10 June 1880); Maria Agnes (b. 20 July 1882); Margaret Mary (b. 9 July 1884); Grace (b. 9 June 1886; died of convulsions on 16 June 1886); Eugene Joseph (b. 4 July 1887); Anna Aloisia (b. 16 June 1889); Joseph John (b. 1 July 1892).

#### CHILDHOOD YEARS AND STUDENT LIFE

Turning our attention to the eldest of the MacSweeney brood, Patrick Morgan MacSweeney, editor of *CCC*: he attended the Christian Brothers O'Connell School, North Richmond Street, in Dublin's north inner city. According to the school's registers, he was admitted at the age of ten to classroom number five in August 1883 and was transferred to classroom number six in August 1884.<sup>8</sup> The school's confirmation register, moreover, states that 'Pat McSweeney' of '22 Russell St' was confirmed on 4 March 1884 by 'Bishop Donnelly',<sup>9</sup> the reference there being to Nicholas Donnelly (1837–1920), Roman Catholic auxiliary bishop of Dublin.

Writing about what MacSweeney described as 'our splendid National Museum', we may infer from the following passage that both he, and probably his siblings, were familiar with the Royal Irish Academy from early childhood when their father brought them into the building to view some of its cultural gems:

The present writer has been acquainted since childhood with that Museum. Before its transference to Kildare Street it was housed in a room known as the 'Long Room,' in the 'Gold Room' (now the Manuscript Room), and in the basement (or 'crypt' as it was called) of the R.I. Academy House, 19 Dawson Street, Dublin. After [George] Petrie's time it was in charge of the Librarian, Mr. Edward Clibborn; later, on the appointment of Mr. J[eremiah] J[oseph] MacSweeney, in 1869, as Librarian, a Curator of the Museum, Major Robert MacEniry, and a Clerk of Council, Mr. Robert Macalister, LL.D., were appointed. The present Curator (in Kildare Street) is Mr. George Coffey.<sup>10</sup>

Having passed the Matriculation Examination for The Royal University of Dublin in the summer of 1891, Patrick Morgan MacSweeney attended University College, the Jesuit-run institution on St Stephen's Green, where he achieved first-class honours in Celtic (summer 1892, summer 1893), second-class honours in English (summer 1892) and he graduated with a BA Honours degree in 1894.<sup>11</sup> He then read for an MA degree in English under Professor Thomas Arnold (1823–1900), younger brother of the English Victorian poet Matthew Arnold (1822–1888), and graduated in 1895.<sup>12</sup> As a graduate of the University of not more than three years' standing, he was eligible to enter the Chancellor's Gold Medal for English Prose Composition 1896. The topic set for that particular year was 'Love of Nature in English Poetry'. MacSweeney won the competition and The Royal University of Ireland subsequently published his prizewinning essay.<sup>13</sup>

#### LECTURER AND PROFESSOR

Embarking on a career as Lecturer, MacSweeney taught English and French literature both at University College and Loreto College on St Stephen's Green.<sup>14</sup> The household returns for the Census of Ireland 1901 inform us that the MacSweeney family were living by then at

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<sup>8</sup> 'Christian Brothers North Richmond Street Dublin School Registry', 47.

<sup>9</sup> 'Registry of Confirmation in the Christian Schools, N Richmond St Dublin 1858–1886', 77.

<sup>10</sup> MacSweeney, *A Group of Nation-Builders: O'Donovan — O'Curry — Petrie*, 83–4.

<sup>11</sup> The Royal University of Ireland, *The Calendar for the Year 1892*, 340; The Royal University of Ireland, *The Calendar for the Year 1893*, 398; The Royal University of Ireland, *The Calendar for the Year 1894*, 370.

<sup>12</sup> The Royal University of Ireland, *The Calendar for the Year 1896*, 266; Kevin, 'Father Patrick M. MacSweeney, M.A.', 343.

<sup>13</sup> The Royal University of Ireland, *The Calendar for the Year 1896*, 101–2; The Royal University of Ireland, *The Calendar for the Year 1897*, 402; MacSweeney ('Massan'), *Love of Nature in English Poetry*, a copy of which is in the National Library of Ireland.

<sup>14</sup> Thom, & Co., *Thom's Irish Who's Who*, 156.

Hollybrook Road, Clontarf West, including Patrick Morgan, aged twenty-seven, competent in both Irish and English, whose occupation is named ‘MA. Prof. Mod. Literature’.<sup>15</sup> The description of him on the title-page of his edition of *CCC* confirms that his position as Professor of Modern Literature was at Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, Dublin.<sup>16</sup> It was during his time in Clonliffe, moreover, that he found his vocation to the priesthood. He still carried on teaching honours English, Irish and French at Holy Cross, but set about his studies at the same time as a First Theology Student in September 1903.<sup>17</sup>

Four years later, on 25 May 1907, Patrick Morgan MacSweeney was ordained in St Mary’s Pro-Cathedral by William Walsh, Archbishop of Dublin (1885–1921).<sup>18</sup> In the same year, the newly-ordained priest was appointed Professor of English and Irish in Clonliffe, a post he held until 1910.<sup>19</sup> He then took up a lecturing position in English at St Patrick’s College, Maynooth, and the Irish Catholic Hierarchy subsequently appointed him to the Professorship of English in the college on 25 June 1912.<sup>20</sup> A year later, he became Editor of the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, the ecclesiastical journal recognized as being ‘the official organ of the national seminary’,<sup>21</sup> and he remained in this role for over twenty years until his death in 1935.

Fr MacSweeney would soon become a familiar figure on campus and, in the words of Monsignor Richard Sherry (1923–2018), ‘Maynooth took him to her heart at once and knew him as “Paddy Mac”’.<sup>22</sup> He appeared regularly, for instance, before the College Literary Society and at annual meetings of the Maynooth Union of past pupils, appearances that, according to his former student and subsequent colleague in the English Department, Fr Neil Kevin (1903–1953), were ‘eagerly looked to events’.<sup>23</sup> The Union sponsored and subsidized the ‘Maynooth Manuscripts Publications Committee’, active from 1906–1915, and Fr MacSweeney was co-opted in 1912. In that role, he oversaw the completion in 1913 of the task of arranging the O’Curry Manuscript Collection in the library for binding.<sup>24</sup> Along with his academic duties at St Patrick’s College, he also acted as Examiner in English to Ireland’s Intermediate Board of Education as well as Examiner in English, Irish and Irish History to the National University of Ireland.<sup>25</sup>

#### PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

Fr MacSweeney seems to have been greatly admired as an inspirational teacher by those who attended his lectures. Fr Neil Kevin, for example, maintained that ‘[h]e had no weakness for talking like a book, but he knew the art of making the book talk’.<sup>26</sup> An important aspect of his pedagogical approach involved his own role as a facilitator of learning, as we can see from the following passage, once again from Fr Neil Kevin:

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Dublin/Clontarf\\_West/Hollybrook\\_Road/1270025/](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Dublin/Clontarf_West/Hollybrook_Road/1270025/).

<sup>16</sup> MacSweeney, *Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh*, [iii].

<sup>17</sup> Sherry, *Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, Dublin*, 114.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Staff and Student Register of Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, DDA / Clonliffe Collection’ (uncatalogued); Gaughan, *The Archbishops, Bishops and Priests*, 181.

<sup>19</sup> Sherry, *Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, Dublin*, 267.

<sup>20</sup> Anon., ‘Record of Irish Ecclesiastical Events for the Year 1912’, 526; Corish, *Maynooth College 1795–1995*, 266.

<sup>21</sup> Corkery, ‘Periodically from Maynooth’, 572.

<sup>22</sup> Sherry, *Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, Dublin*, 114.

<sup>23</sup> Kevin, ‘Father Patrick M. MacSweeney, M.A.’, 346.

<sup>24</sup> Corish, *Maynooth College 1795–1995*, 286.

<sup>25</sup> Thom & Co., *Thom’s Irish Who’s Who*, 156.

<sup>26</sup> Kevin, ‘Father Patrick M. MacSweeney, M.A.’, 338–9.

I remember meeting him for the first time, when as a student I entered his class for a two years' course in English. There were eight of us in all, that year. Before we set to work he gathered us round him, and made, what I was soon to discover, was a characteristic declaration of policy. 'This is not going to be a class,' he said, 'but a kind of round-table literary conference.' After that it was not a matter of 'setting to work,' but of getting mightily interested in the books, and the talk, and the professor. Father Mac wanted a certain understanding to exist between his students and himself. He always conducted his class — particularly that small class in the room of tables and chairs — as if it were a conference, to which each one had come out of a disinterested regard for literature. With him, one read and listened *con amore*, or one committed literary treason, and was wholly out of place. He warred, eloquently, against what he would call a mere examination mentality, against the making of literature a means to an end. The greatest crime he could envisage was a Philistine striving for the necessary thirty-five per cent, and then selling one's books, and going on one's way, forgetting.<sup>27</sup>

Students encountered in 'Father Mac' a man who, on the one hand, had an excellent command of his subject while having, on the other, a unique ability to pitch it at the level of his students. Thus, for example, the words of another former student:

*Ag féachaint siar dúinn anois ar an gcúpla bliadhain a chaitheamar fé n-a stiúradh trí chluanaibh toirteamhla litridheachta an Bhéarla agus trí gharbhthuath na teangan, chímíd a fhusacht a dhein sé gach aon rud dúinn le n-a léigheann agus le n-a fhoidhne. Do thuig sé ár laige go maith i gcúrsaibh teangan agus mhaolaigh sé a shiubhal féin 'á ísliughadh féin chun lámh c[h]abhartha a thabhairt dúinne. Ach is ins an litridheacht is mó a bhí seans aige chun gach ar fhoghlumigh sé agus gach ar smaoinigh sé do nochtadh chun maitheasa dúinn. Thógadh sé sómplaí agus samhlaoidí as gach áird: ó gach aon litridheacht idir s[h]ean agus nua: ó shaoghal an chinne d[h]aonna sa bhaile 'gus i gcéin: ó'n saoghal spioradáltha agus go mórmhór ó shaoghal an t-sagairt, mar do thuig sé agus níor dhearma[i]d sé riamh cé uaidh a tháinig an file agus an fhilidheacht agus an dlúthbhainnt idir s[h]aoghal an duine agus an litridheacht.<sup>28</sup>*

Looking back now on the few years that we spent under his navigation through the rich pastures of English literature and through the tough territory of the language, we see how easy he made everything for us by his learning and by his patience. He well understood our weakness in language matters and reduced his own speed, lowering himself to lend us a helping hand. But it was mostly in literature that he had an opportunity to reveal for our benefit everything that he learned and everything he thought. He would take examples and illustrations from every quarter: from every kind of literature, both old and new: from mankind's life at home and abroad: from spiritual life and especially from the life of the priest, because he understood and never forgot where poet and poetry came from and the close connection between man's life and literature.

#### THE IRISH LANGUAGE

Among his revered teacher's laudable traits, the same former student singled out for special mention 'his love of the Irish language and for Irishness' — *a ghrádh do'n Ghaoluinn agus do'n Ghaedhealachas*.<sup>29</sup> We might expect, of course, that a love of this kind came naturally to Fr MacSweeney, in light of the illustrious tradition of Irish learning in which his maternal

<sup>27</sup> Kevin, 'Father Patrick M. MacSweeney, M.A.', 339.

<sup>28</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, 'An t-Athair Pádraig Mac Suibhne', 42, with accompanying translation by the present writer.

<sup>29</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, 'An t-Athair Pádraig Mac Suibhne', 42.

forebears were steeped. However, this particular student suggests that it did not always sit easily with his academic mentor whose primary area of research involved a language which, in his own opinion, was wrongfully and forcefully foisted on Ireland's Irish-speaking population:

*Dubhairt sé uair gur teanga iasachta dó féin an teanga a bhí ghá mhúineadh aige: teanga iongantach gan amhras chun smaointe agus mothughadh do thaisbéaint do'n tsaoghal; teanga ársa a bhféadfadh an fód do sheasamh le h-aon teanga fé'n spéir; ach teanga iasachta mar sin féin do'n Éireannach, teanga do cuireadh air le feall agus do coimeádadh ann le fórsa. Ní raibh aoinne sa tír a bhféadfadh an sgéal do thuigsint níos féarr. Síolruigheadh é ar thaobh a mháthar ó mhuintir Longáin — daoine a dhein níos mó ná an furmhór chun an Ghaedhilge do choimeád beó agus chun an litridheacht do shábháil.<sup>30</sup>*

He once said that the language he was teaching was a foreign language to himself: a brilliant language, of course, to reveal thoughts and feeling to the world; an ancient language that could stand iground against any language under the sky; but a foreign language nonetheless for the Irishman, a language that was foisted wrongfully on him and was kept within him by force. There was nobody in the country who could better understand the matter. He was descended on his mother's side from the Long family — people who did more than most to keep the Irish language alive and salvage literature.

It seems reasonable to assume, then, that Fr MacSweeney sought in his own way 'to keep the Irish language alive and salvage literature'. He adopted an active role, for example, in *Cuallacht Chuilm Cille* (The League of St Columba), the students' association at St Patrick's College, an early contribution of his being a lecture delivered in 1912 on Eugene O'Curry (1794–1862) whom he described at one point 'as a leader in the renaissance of Celtic studies, a star-soul in the East to guide us to the magic cradle of the Celtic West — a leader true to his mission to the end'.<sup>31</sup> Some two years later, members of the League present at a lecture entitled 'Dublin' heard him expound upon the development and history of the capital city 'through Celtic, Danish and Norman periods when the Celt is again gaining the mastery of his own'.<sup>32</sup> Fr MacSweeney was already an active member of the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League, of course, having been elected a member of its committee when it was founded in Dublin in 1901.<sup>33</sup> In the years 1910–1912, moreover, both he and his colleague, Fr Gerard Nolan (1874–1942), Professor of Irish in Maynooth, appear to have attended lectures delivered in the School of Irish Learning both by the school's director, Carl J.S. Marstrander (1883–1965), and one of the school's co-founders, Kuno Meyer (1858–1919).<sup>34</sup>

We find further proof of the cleric's efforts on behalf of the Irish language in the two publications for which he is best known, namely his edition for the Irish Texts Society of *CCC* (1904) and *A Group of Nation-Builders* (1913), the latter intended as a personal homage to the Celtic scholars John O'Donovan (1806–1861), George Petrie (1790–1866) and the aforementioned Eugene O'Curry. Fr MacSweeney was known besides for his deep regard for Irish-language poetry, as confirmed in the following passage by a former student:

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<sup>30</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, 'An t-Athair Pádraig Mac Suibhne', 42, with accompanying translation by the present writer.

<sup>31</sup> Cuallacht Chuilm Cille, 'From a lecture on Eugene O'Curry by Father MacSweeney, M.A.', [5].

<sup>32</sup> Cuallacht Chuilm Cille, 'Comments', 96.

<sup>33</sup> Breathnach and Ní Mhurchú, 'Mac Suibhne, Pádraig (1875–1935)', 59.

<sup>34</sup> Ó Muirí, 'Ó Gramhnaigh, Ó hIceadha, Ó Nualláin', 75–6; cf. Ó Nualláin, *Beatha Dhuine a Thoil*, 187.

*Bhí sé de nós aige comparáid a dhéanamh idir f[h]ilí Shasana agus filí na h-Éireann, agus an té go mbeadh dúil aige san dá threibh do mhothóchadh sé, cé go raibh áit fé leith ag filí Shasana ag bórd an mháighistir, go raibh áit níos giorra fós dó ag ár bhfilibh féin ar theinteán a chroidhe.<sup>35</sup>*

He had a habit of comparing England's poets and Ireland's poets, and the person who would have a fondness for both tribes would feel, even though England's poets had a special place at the master's table, that our own poets had an even closer place to him at his heart's hearth.

Fr MacSweeney was certainly familiar with important sources for Irish-language poetry, a fact that is evident, for instance, in his two-page (undated) response to a query addressed to him by a certain Mr Osborne. Being away on holidays from Maynooth, he was based in 'Barren Hill House, Bailey, Howth, Co. Dublin' — the MacSweeneys had moved to Howth in or before 1911 when, according to the household returns for the census of Ireland of that year, Jeremiah, 'Librarian [and] Retired Secretary' (aged 73) and his wife Maria (aged 60) were residing there with their two youngest children, Annie (aged 21) and Joseph (aged 18), both undergraduate students.<sup>36</sup> It would seem that said 'Mr Osborne' was of the opinion that Fr MacSweeney was the author of a work on eighteenth-century poets in the Irish language and was enquiring about the publication's details:

Dear Mr. Osborne,

I regret that I have not the honour of being the author of a work on the Irish 18<sup>th</sup>. Cent. Poets.

I had written some articles long ago in Reviews but kept no list. You will find information in Dict. Nat. Biog. sub. nom. also Standish H. O'Grady's Cat. of Brit. Mus. mss. (unfinished); O'Reilly's Irish writers; D'Arbois de Jubainville Catalogue; Best: Catalogue (Nat. Lib. Ireland): Prefaces 7 Fr. Dinneen in his editions of Irish poets.

Unfortunately the aesthetic + much literary side has not received adequate treatment anywhere.

My address till Sept. 5<sup>th</sup>. is as above. I am on holidays + away from Maynooth. With sincere respects

Yours faithfully  
P MacSweeney.<sup>37</sup>

#### DEATH

As mentioned earlier, Patrick Morgan MacSweeney remained on as Editor of the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* until his death in 1935. The journal's March issue appeared posthumously and the publishers, Browne and Nolan Limited, included an appreciation on 'the passing of a distinguished Editor':

In sending out the March issue of the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* it is our melancholy duty to announce the death of the Editor, the Rev. Patrick M. MacSweeney, M.A., which occurred at Maynooth on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, while this number was being prepared for press. So brief was his fatal illness that those members of our producing staff whose

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<sup>35</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, 'An t-Athair Pádraig Mac Suibhne', 43, with accompanying translation by the present writer.

<sup>36</sup> [http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Dublin/Howth/Sutton\\_South/20721/](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Dublin/Howth/Sutton_South/20721/).

<sup>37</sup> NLI MS 49,491/2/108 in the autograph letters signed collection, ca. 1603–ca. 1972, available at <https://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000534666>.

business it was to keep in touch with him while the monthly work was in progress had no idea that he was lying on his deathbed, and that the end was to come so soon and so unexpectedly.

As it is however, this number of *I. E. Record* is Father MacSweeney's own; the selection of the literary matter is his; the order in which the contributions appear is as he furnished it to us. In the following pages, therefore, readers have in their hands the last work to which our deeply-lamented Editor put his pen. For ourselves, as the publishers, the occasion is a sad one. The cordial association of more than a score of years has been broken by the death of Father MacSweeney; and today, when we deplore the passing of a distinguished Editor, we likewise mourn the loss of a much respected colleague and friend.<sup>38</sup>

According to his death certificate, he had been suffering from myocarditis for six months before his death of heart failure in Maynooth at sixty-two [*recte* sixty-one] years of age.<sup>39</sup>

In its catalogue of important ecclesiastical events for the year 1935, the *Irish Catholic Directory* included the death of Fr MacSweeney, 'Professor of English at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth', on 7 February, 'after a brief illness'.<sup>40</sup> An obituary in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* acknowledged that 'by his death this journal has been deprived of the enlightened guidance of a priest of genuine piety, as well as of a scholar of wide culture', while a notice in *Irisleabhar Muighe Nuadhad* described him as 'a gentle, kind old man and a lecturer whose fame and reputation were spread all over Ireland' (*sean-fhear caoin cneasta agus léigheachtaidhe a raibh a chlú is a cháil leathta ar fud na h-Éireann*).<sup>41</sup> A series of obituaries also featured in the local press just days after his passing, including the following from *The Irish Press* which appeared under the heading 'Students' last tribute. Funeral of Rev. P.M. MacSweeney at Maynooth'. Besides capturing the solemnity of his obsequies, the piece provides us with further biographical *vignettes*:

After Solemn Office and Requiem Mass in Maynooth College Chapel the funeral of Rev. P.M. MacSweeney, M.A., Professor of English took place to the College Cemetery on Saturday. The coffin was borne through the Park to the graveside by relays of students. Most Rev. Dr. [Francis Joseph] Wall, Bishop of Thasos, who presided, pronounced the Absolution at the catafalque and officiated in the cemetery. Mass was celebrated by V. Rev. J. F. Canon d'Alton, M.A., D.D., D.Litt., Vice-President of the College; deacon, Rev. F. Ryan; sub-deacon, Rev. J. Sheehan; and Rev. T. Flood, Master of Ceremonies. The music was sung by the College Choir, directed by Rev. M. Treacy, Lic. Mus.

The large assembly of clergy and laity, in which were many who had been students under the late Professor, included the Bishop of Down and Connor, Most Rev. Dr. [Daniel] Mageean; Rev. P. Dunne, representing the Archbishop of Dublin; Mr. Sean T. O'Ceallaigh, Vice-President of the Executive Council, and Mr. W.A. Honohan, representing the Minister for Finance.

The chief mourners were: Rev. M. MacSweeney, C.C., Aughrim Street, Dublin; Rev. E. MacSweeney and Mr. J. MacSweeney, M.A. (UCD) (brothers); Sister M. Celestine, Stanhope Street, Dublin (sister); Sister M. Thaddeus; V. Rev. J. Murray, P.P.,

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<sup>38</sup> Brown and Nolan Limited, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 45, [225].

<sup>39</sup> [https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths\\_returns/deaths\\_1935/04830/4301941.pdf](https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1935/04830/4301941.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> Anon., 'Record of Irish Ecclesiastical Events for the year 1935', 590.

<sup>41</sup> The Editor, 'Obituary', [337]; Cuallacht Chuilm Cille, 'Cursaí na bliadhna', 111.

Staffordshire; Rev. M. McCarthy, S.J., Milltown Park, Dublin and the Misses Murray (cousins).<sup>42</sup>

The grave itself is located today in row three of Maynooth College Cemetery.<sup>43</sup> As is clear from the final paragraph above, moreover, one of Fr MacSweeney's sisters was a member of the Religious Sisters of Charity in Stanhope Street, Dublin. His brother Michael would go on to become parish priest of Maynooth in 1938 where he died on 19 March 1947, while his brother Eugene was chaplain to St Mary's Blind Asylum, Merrion Road, Co. Dublin, and died on 7 July 1952.<sup>44</sup> The abovenamed third brother, 'Mr. J. MacSweeney, M.A. (UCD)', refers to the youngest of the MacSweeney siblings, Joseph J. MacSweeney (1892–1956), who taught Old English grammar and the history of English sound-changes in the English Department of University College Dublin and died in 1956.<sup>45</sup>

#### PUBLISHED WORK

Before returning to the two books for which Patrick Morgan MacSweeney is best known, namely *CCC* and *A Group of Nation-Builders*, we may touch briefly on a number of other publications by him that, albeit less well known, showcase nonetheless the breadth of his scholarly interests. The first of these, the aforementioned prizewinning essay 'Love of Nature in English Poetry', is an account of over fifty pages that appeared about the year 1896 under the pseudonym 'Massan'.<sup>46</sup> Beginning with examples from Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry by Cynewulf as well as passages from the Old English heroic poem *Beowulf*, the reader then encounters discussions on Chaucer, 'this great man, who was essentially the poet of Nature'.<sup>47</sup> Adhering to what is now regarded as the common divisions of British literature, MacSweeney moves on chronologically from the Old and Middle English periods, and discusses poets and examples of verse from the Renaissance (1500–1660), the Neoclassical Period (1660–1785) and the Romantic Period (1785–1832). Coming down to his own time with an examination of the Victorian Era (1832–1901), he focuses on Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) whose treatment of nature was 'mainly attracted by scenes of historic interest' whereas, as a poet of nature, Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892) 'holds high rank, and may be said to have, to a certain extent, done for the scenery of southern England what Wordsworth did for the Lake District'.<sup>48</sup> This meticulous survey displays MacSweeney's unquestionable command of his subject. He has reviewed what he himself calls in his concluding remarks 'a bead-roll of splendid names, from

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<sup>42</sup> Anon., 'Students' Last Tribute. Funeral of Rev. P.M. MacSweeney at Maynooth', *The Irish Press* (11 February 1935) 8. The following brief anonymous notices and obituaries also featured in the local press: 'Maynooth Professor Dead', *The Evening Echo* (8 February 1935) 1; 'Late Rev. Patrick MacSweeney, M.A.', *The Evening Herald* (9 February 1935) 2; 'Death of Rev. Patrick MacSweeney, M.A.', *The Evening Herald* (10 February 1935) 8; 'Death of Rev. Patrick MacSweeney', *The Irish Independent* (8 February 1935) 7; 'Loss to Maynooth College', *The Irish Press* (8 February 1935) 7; 'Father MacSweeney', *The Irish Press* (9 February 1935) 8; 'Funeral of Rev. P. MacSweeney, M.A.', *The Irish Times* (11 February 1935) 3; 'Funeral of Rev. Patk. MacSweeney, M.A.', *The Sunday Independent* (10 February 1935) 9.

<sup>43</sup> Maynooth College Cemetery, burial of Presidents, Vice-Presidents, Professors and Deans 1880–1995, available at <https://avergeen9.wixsite.com/maynoothcemetery2/main-section>.

<sup>44</sup> Sherry, *Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, Dublin*, [109], 114, n. 5; anon., 'Very Rev. M.T. MacSweeney', *The Irish Independent* (20 March 1947) 2; anon., 'Deaths', *The Evening Herald* (20 March 1947) 7; *The Evening Herald* (8 July 1952) 7.

<sup>45</sup> An obituary notice appeared in *Report of the President of University College, Dublin, 1955–1956* (1956) 57–8. His death certificate cites cardiac failure as the cause of death in his lodgings at 96 Lower Leeson Street on 3 October 1956, although a second address is noted for him at 'Barren Hill House, Bailey, [Howth], Co. Dublin' ([https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths\\_returns/deaths\\_1956/04406/4147708.pdf](https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1956/04406/4147708.pdf)).

<sup>46</sup> See n. 13 above.

<sup>47</sup> MacSweeney ('Massan'), *Love of Nature in English Poetry*, 13.

<sup>48</sup> MacSweeney ('Massan'), *Love of Nature in English Poetry*, 50, 52.

Cynewulf down to Tennyson. Few literatures can boast such an unbroken chain of glorious work as this; and no literature, we venture to say, can compare with English in the unrivalled excellence of its Nature-Poetry'.<sup>49</sup>

Encouraged by what he observed as a renewed interest in Irish as a spoken language, MacSweeney turned his attention to a different subject entirely in February 1903 when he published his thoughts on Irish dialects in *The New Ireland Review*. These he divides into three broad groups, but he believes that an analysis of the oldest surviving texts in the Irish language could impart further interesting information:

The dialects, which we group roughly under the names, Munster, Connaught, and Ulster, would be found to have counterparts in the oldest texts, perhaps too, we should be enabled to recover the characteristics of the old literary Leinster dialect, which is now almost extinct. Editors of Irish texts must, therefore, be on their guard against changing word forms which may not conform to artificial standards, for in doing so they are eliminating evidence of a most important kind, and in the case of poetry are hopelessly damaging it as a work of art. Again, care must be taken in suggesting that unusual word forms are due to a so-called 'corruption'.<sup>50</sup>

Besides making a case for the importance of literary sources, he calls for a comparative study of the three Irish dialects:

Dialectic differences at the present day may partly take the form of the conservation in one dialect of forms older than those in another. The chronicling of such differences between dialects in the matter of vocabulary, grammatical forms, and pronunciation, offers a wide and fruitful field for the future student of Irish dialects.<sup>51</sup>

As to which of the three 'is the best', that 'will depend upon the criterion you apply'. Should it be 'richness of vocabulary', for instance, then 'the dialect of poets, like [Egan] O'Rahilly, and [Owen Roe] O'Sullivan, is the richest', but if the criterion is 'the eminence and number of great literary names', then 'many will return you the same answer'. Should it be 'the native character of the population', then the dialect of Connaught, 'where the best Irish is to be found', remains the obvious choice because 'Cromwell and his followers crowded the best of our race into Connaught'. Laying down 'modern representatives of a dialect' as a criterion, '[t]hen you will be told that Munster men display the greatest literary activity', but to ask which dialect has remained relatively resistant to change, 'you will receive diverse answers, which may or may not be true'. It may even prove 'hopeless' to expect a definite answer to such a question, although looking to the history of the dialects of France 'may help to clear the air'.<sup>52</sup> In that country, the political pre-eminence of Paris certainly ensured that Northern French would achieve literary pre-eminence and making a case for Ireland's capital city is quite a different matter altogether:

Now, *ceteris paribus*, it is clear that the dialect of Dublin the metropolis, if it had one, would soon take the lead over the other dialects of Ireland. It would by degrees develop

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<sup>49</sup> MacSweeney ('Massan'), *Love of Nature in English Poetry*, 52.

<sup>50</sup> MacSweeney, 'Irish and the Question of Dialect', 340; reprinted by Cuallacht Chuilm Cille, 'From "Irish and the Question of Dialect"', by Father McSweeney', 90.

<sup>51</sup> MacSweeney, 'Irish and the Question of Dialect', 340; reprinted by Cuallacht Chuilm Cille, 'From "Irish and the Question of Dialect"', by Father McSweeney', 90.

<sup>52</sup> MacSweeney, 'Irish and the Question of Dialect', 341.

organically a literary dialect amongst its educated population which would impose itself on the educated minds of the country whilst, underneath, a colloquial dialect would co-exist with it, spoken by the masses, as in the case of Paris, London, or Berlin. The Anglicisation of Dublin has, however, prevented any such development up to this, whilst the existing Irish dialects have led separate existences, interfering little with one another.<sup>53</sup>

Despite this state of affairs, MacSweeney alerts his reader to an interesting development whereby '[t]he superior urban condition of Munster readers' has rendered Munster Irish 'if not richer, at any rate more in harmony with the necessities of modern life'. Thus, 'it might be predicted that Cork, with its important urban life, would impose its literary dialect on the dialects of the less urbanised portions of Irish-speaking Ireland'.<sup>54</sup> Such a forthright promotion of the Munster dialect of Irish accords, of course, with a key position of the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League of which, as noted above, he himself was an active member since the movement's foundation in Dublin in 1901. Even so, he tempers his point of view in the article's concluding section by stating that the foregoing 'by no means implies that other dialects will cease to produce literary works for a long time to come'. He is also of the opinion that '[t]he best dialect for a man at present to study is surely that one which his environment and, therefore, his opportunities make it easiest for him to acquire'. Indeed, once Dublin takes its place as the literary centre of the Irish language, 'as in tract of time it will probably do', a Leinster dialect, both colloquial and literary, will begin to emerge and blossom.<sup>55</sup>

A third lesser-known publication was based on a lecture that Patrick Morgan MacSweeney originally delivered to members of the Maynooth Union in 1910. Featuring some of the most distinguished writers in France, it was subsequently published in pamphlet-form in the same year under the title *Some Neo-Catholic Movements in Literature*. Although comprising just over ten pages, there is once again no doubt about the author's remarkable understanding of French literature, especially his in-depth knowledge of the late nineteenth-century symbolist movement that originated in France. Beginning with what he regards as the tension confronting those 'who take their religion seriously, and who at the same time have developed in them the instinct for art', his intention here is to explore the relationship between the Catholic Church and what he styles 'pure Literature'.<sup>56</sup> Citing a number of authors who spearheaded the French Symbolist movement in the final decades of the nineteenth century, he thinks that what had hitherto been a scientific approach to literature was giving way in recent times to 'the belief in mystery and in an unseen world beyond'.<sup>57</sup> Some Symbolists had turned away from the Catholic Church but reconverted later in life — novelist Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848–1907), and poet, dramatist and short-story writer François Coppée (1842–1908) being cases in point. In a final flourish, he argues that a firm possession of 'Catholic Truth, whilst it is no guarantee of merely executive skill, is a real guarantee of a power to comprehend the ultimate drift of a work of literature or of a work of art, and hence its influence upon conduct'.<sup>58</sup>

History was yet another subject dear to Fr MacSweeney's heart and in a fourth publication, an article that appeared in *Irisleabhar Muighe Nuadhad* in its issue of 1929, he emphasized the importance for any nation of understanding its past. His opening comments concern the

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<sup>53</sup> MacSweeney, 'Irish and the Question of Dialect', 341–2.

<sup>54</sup> MacSweeney, 'Irish and the Question of Dialect', 342.

<sup>55</sup> MacSweeney, 'Irish and the Question of Dialect', 342, 343.

<sup>56</sup> MacSweeney, M.A., *Some Neo-Catholic Movements in Literature*, [3].

<sup>57</sup> MacSweeney, M.A., *Some Neo-Catholic Movements in Literature*, 9.

<sup>58</sup> MacSweeney, M.A., *Some Neo-Catholic Movements in Literature*, 14.

mystery of life and mankind's general inability to comprehend it. Only the hard graft of scholarship can solve such a conundrum:

*Ní thuigeann éinne fánaidheacht an fhánaidhe istigh ann féin. Agus is é an rud is giorra dhúinn féin an rud is lugha a thuigmíd. Mar baineann gach éinne brígh fé leith as an saoghal, geibheann an léightheóir a bheag nó a mhór de thairbhe as an stu[i]déar a dheineann sé. Níl tairbhe ar bith le fághail ag éinne as aon bhrainnse léighinn gan dlúth-stu[i]déar agus dian-mhachtnamh ar an méid atá idir lámhaibh aige agus ba chóir dúinn go léir an méid sin do choiméad glan nár n-aigne.<sup>59</sup>*

Nobody understands the wanderings of the wanderer within himself. And the closest thing to ourselves is what we least understand. Because everybody interprets life in a certain way, the reader reaps its rewards more or less from the studying he conducts. Nobody gets a single benefit from any branch of learning without close study and intense reflection on what he is engaged in and we should all keep that much clearly in our minds.

He then turns to the manner in which Ireland's great leaders of the past have been airbrushed out of history. He is certain that never was there a time more contentious and complex in the country's past than that of the sixteenth century. The English policy of 'surrender and regrant' was well established by then and the anglicization of Ireland's native population, both of Gaelic and Norman origin, was at its most intense. Nonetheless, Gaelic Ulster, and especially the powerful Uí Néill of Tyrone, vehemently opposed such political change. Concluding with two illustrious members of the latter family, namely Toirdhealbhach Luineach (d. 1595), king of Tyrone, and his immediate successor, Aodh Ó Néill (d. 1616), it is his considered opinion that, of the two, Aodh remains the one 'who deserves affection and respect and honour' (*thuilleas cion agus meas agus urraim*). A certain amount of criticism, however, should be directed at 'the other man':

*Maidir leis an bhfear eile, níor innseadh a sgéal fós ach ní dócha go mbeidh a ainm i mbéalaibh na ndaoine mar atá ainm Aodha. San sémhadh céad déag do chaith sé a shaoghal ach níorbh iad smaointe na h-aoise sin a bhí in uachtar a chroidhe. Bhí saghas 'dilettantism' ag baint leis i gcomhnaidhe agus níor thuig sé brígh na ceiste in Éirinn le na linn féin. Bhí uabhar agus maothas na ríghthe i gcomhnuidhe ann. Fear mustair dob eadh é agus b'fhearr leis moladh na bhfile ná a raibh d'ór i gcríochaibh na h-Éireann.<sup>60</sup>*

As to the other man, his story has not been told yet but his name will hardly be on the mouths of people as is Hugh's name. He lived his life in the sixteenth century but the ideas of that century were not uppermost in his mind. There was always an air of 'dilettantism' about him and he did not grasp the essence of the question [or problem] in Ireland during his own lifetime. There was always the pride and vanity of the kings in him. He was a man of arrogance and he preferred the praise of the poets more than all the gold in the regions of Ireland.

In support of this estimation of Toirdhealbhach Luineach, Fr MacSweeney quotes the opening two quatrains from the bardic poem beginning *Nodlaig do-chuamair don Chraoibh* ('At Christmas we went to the Creeve') by the sixteenth-century poet, Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn. The Christmas in question was 1577 when the Ulster chieftain issued an Ireland-wide invitation to

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<sup>59</sup> Mac Suibhne, 'Teagasc ón Stair', 53; accompanying translation here and that of the next passage by the present writer.

<sup>60</sup> Mac Suibhne, 'Teagasc ón Stair', 57.

poets to a feast in his mansion in the Creeve, near Coleraine, Co. Derry. Not only is it evident from the ensuing discussion of the poem that Fr MacSweeney was very familiar with its contents, but he most likely had to hand the two-volume edition of Ó hUiginn's poems with accompanying translation and notes that were published by the Irish Texts Society in 1922 and 1926, respectively. He obviously regarded the poem as a public relations gesture, and in this he was most likely influenced by the words of its editor, Eleanor Knott (1886–1975), who wrote that it was composed 'probably in order to ascertain his [Toirdhealbhach Luineach's] standing in public opinion, and increase popular feeling in his favor'.<sup>61</sup>

Coming now to *CCC*, it is not clear why this tale was chosen to be published as part of the Irish Texts Society's main series. Prospective editors were being discussed at council meetings and members who convened at St Ermin's Hotel in London on 25 March 1902 heard Fr Patrick Dinneen / Pádraig Ua Duinnín (1860–1934) suggest 'Mr P. Mac Sweeney M.A. as a fit editor of a text for the Society'. Instructed to write to him about the matter was the Honorary Secretary who, at that time, was Eleanor Hull (1860–1935).<sup>62</sup> On 22 April 1902, MacSweeney's response was read out to council members who had gathered together at 57 Long Acre within London's Convent Garden. While he stated that he would be unable to undertake any work for the Society at present because 'his time was so fully occupied', he 'might be be able to do so' later on that year. His own expressed wish was to edit poems by eighteenth-century poets, 'preferably the "Poems of O'Connell's"'.<sup>63</sup>

At some point thereafter, MacSweeney had set about working instead on 'the tale of Fergus mac Leide' for the Society and his manuscript containing 'a portion' of the text, with accompanying translation in English, was laid before council members attending a meeting on 28 October 1902. It was agreed to refer this work-in-progress to Douglas Hyde, first President of the Society (1898–1949), 'for his opinion'. MacSweeney's request for guidance on how to treat 'the use of old forms found in the ms. from which he was copying' was also discussed. It was decided that it was best for him to use 'the modern form of such old words', but that the latter be discussed in accompanying notes, or by means of a glossary or in a separate grammatical introduction.<sup>64</sup>

When the Council met again on 11 November 1902, proceedings included the reading out of Hyde's response to 'the speciman of Mr. MacSweeney's prose tale' confirming that it seemed to be well worth publishing but that he (Hyde) would need to see more of it before providing the Society with a proper evaluation. The translation thus far was 'literal but not literary in any way', and MacSweeney should be instructed to send more of what he had copied as well as any further portions of the translation that he had finished. Council members convened again on 16 December 1902. Proceedings included the reading out of a letter addressed by MacSweeney to the Society informing it 'that he had been unable to complete the transcription + translation of his manuscript', but that he hoped to deliver on this after Christmas.<sup>65</sup> This seems to suggest that the project was expected to be completed in 1902, the year which, incidentally, appears on the half-title of the printed volume itself.

A letter by MacSweeney was read out at a council meeting that took place on 15 April 1903 at 20 Hanover Square, London, and attenders heard 'that he was making progress with his book'.

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<sup>61</sup> Knott, *The Bardic Poems of Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn. Vol. II*, 222

<sup>62</sup> ITS Council Minutes, 25 March 1902, [12]; Ó Riain, 'Council of Society and its Officers', 70.

<sup>63</sup> ITS Council Minutes, 22 April 1902, [14].

<sup>64</sup> ITS Council Minutes, 28 October 1902, 33–[34].

<sup>65</sup> ITS Council Minutes, 11 November 1902, 35; ITS Council Minutes, 16 December 1902, 37.

Giving it the title ‘Caithreimh [sic] Conghail Clairighnigh [sic]’, he hoped to deliver the text and translation by 21 April, the appointed date for the Annual General Meeting of the Irish Texts Society. Convening at this meeting at 20 Hanover Square, members were informed that ‘Caithreimh [sic] Conghail Clairighnigh [sic]’ had been ‘carefully prepared’, that the accompanying translation in English was ‘almost completed’ and that the editor ‘hopes that the work will be ready to go to press before the summer’.<sup>66</sup> This would not come to pass, although council minutes of a meeting of 13 October 1903 record the work as being ‘nearly ready to begin printing’.<sup>67</sup>

By 19 April 1904, the project was at proof stage. According to the minutes of a council meeting held on that date, MacSweeney ‘had received [the] final proof of his book up to p. 64’ and ‘that he had now 84pp. of print’, the latter equalling ‘47 pp. of his ms. of which there are 136 pp. in all’.<sup>68</sup> One of several Celtic scholars of international standing nominated to membership of the Society’s Consultative Committee was Kuno Meyer.<sup>69</sup> Attendees heard that the German academic had already seen MacSweeney’s work in its entirety and ‘expressed himself as very pleased with it’.<sup>70</sup> At a meeting of 27 September 1904, however, council members heard from a letter addressed by MacSweeney to the Society that he was ‘refuting that the text and translation of his book was finished’ and that ‘he was engaged on the Introduction and Glossary Notes’. Gathering together on 18 October 1904, council members learned that the entire text and translation with glossary ‘was in print’ while the introduction, indices and additional notes ‘were partly printed’. Meanwhile, the Honorary Secretary was directed to contact ‘Messrs Galway for estimates for printing this volume’.<sup>71</sup>

A letter addressed by MacSweeney to members of the Society’s council was read out at a meeting on 8 November 1904. It provided a table of contents of the book which ‘was now practically completed’. Attendees at that meeting were also presented with an estimate for binding by ‘Galway + Co.’, namely ‘1,000 vols. similar to volume I of the I.T.S. publications’ at five shillings per volume, and this was accepted.<sup>72</sup> By 13 January 1905, council members agreed that the Editor be paid twenty pounds for his work, a remuneration fee that was gratefully acknowledged in ‘a letter of thanks by Mr. Patrick Mac Sweeney’ that was read out at a council meeting on 28 March.<sup>73</sup>

*CCC* had, in fact, appeared in December of the previous year, just five months after Fr Dinneen’s *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* ‘was launched from the press’. Praised as ‘a fine story’, it was ‘edited with the most thorough and careful handling, by Patrick MacSweeney, M.A., who inserts in his Preface the recorded opinion of O’Curry, that in the purity and elegance of its language the tale is the best Irish romance he has ever met’.<sup>74</sup> To this we may add that Eugene O’Curry had recorded his high praise for the literary merit of *CCC* in the third

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<sup>66</sup> ITS Council Minutes, 15 April 1903, [30]–31; ‘Irish Texts Society. Comann na Sgríbeann Gaedhilge. Annual Report, 1903. List of Members. List of Publications’, [3]. The tale has no title in MacSweeney’s seventeenth-century manuscript source (RIA MS 40 (23 H 20)), although a reference to ‘Caithrem Conghail Claireinigh’ occurs in its conclusion (p. 38); cf. O’Rahilly, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy*, 123.

<sup>67</sup> ITS Council Minutes, 13 October 1903, [64].

<sup>68</sup> ITS Council Minutes, 19 April 1904, 83.

<sup>69</sup> Ó Riain, ‘Council of Society and its Officers’, 72.

<sup>70</sup> ITS Council Minutes, 19 April 1904, 83.

<sup>71</sup> ITS Council Minutes, 27 September 1904, 91; ITS Council Minutes, 18 October 1904, 95.

<sup>72</sup> ITS Council Minutes, 8 November 1904, 99.

<sup>73</sup> ITS Council Minutes, 13 January 1905, [102]; ITS Council Minutes, 28 March 1905, [104].

<sup>74</sup> ‘Irish Texts Society. Comann na Sgríbeann Gaedhilge. Annual Report, 1905. List of Members. List of Publications’, [3]–4; cf. MacSweeney, *Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh*, xxxvi .

and final volume of his handwritten catalogue, completed in 1843, of the collection of just over two hundred Irish manuscripts bought in the same year by the Royal Irish Academy from the booksellers Hodges and Smith.

It is not clear, as stated above, why *CCC* was chosen to be published as part of the Irish Texts Society's main series, nor is it recorded in council minutes why MacSweeney was given the task of editing this particular text. When approached by the Society, his own choice, as we have seen, was rather to edit eighteenth-century Irish poetry. Be that as it may, given that the tale's main characters belong, for the most part, to the Ulster cycle, it still would have appealed to him. In his opening general remarks to the edition itself, for instance, MacSweeney articulates both his own special interest in epic literature and his belief that epics in the Irish language could yield valuable insights into the rich tribal history of early Irish society, particularly when complemented by evidence from Ireland's archaeological remains:

An interesting feature, however, of Irish Epic is the variety and number of the minor sagas dealing with heroes of the second grade. The fact is a testimony to the individuality and independence of the tribal communities. How far we can recreate the tribal history of Ireland from the data afforded us by the Epic Literature has yet to be seen. No systematic attempt has been made to co-ordinate the historic facts which undoubtedly lie hidden in our great literary romances. The solution of the problems connected with them will depend upon a thorough examination of the growth of the various tales, and a comparison not only of their language, but of the treatment of the different characters with which they deal. We may also hope that a more thorough comparative study of the antiquarian monuments scattered over the face of our land will bring the same support to the traditions embedded in our literary remains that the archaeological discoveries in the domain of Roman and Greek Antiquities have brought to the traditions of their respective literatures.<sup>75</sup>

Besides, the editor believed that developing a comparative study of Ireland's literary and archaeological remains would greatly enhance the knowledge of Early Western European civilisation and '[i]t is in view of this development that, in part, I offer this first edition of the *Caithréim Conghail*'.<sup>76</sup>

There remained, of course, a more general idealistic reason that prompted MacSweeney to produce an edition of *CCC*, one which he outlined in the following passage from the work's preface:

Of those who have lost their native language, the majority have settled down in the literary territories of the stranger, and, till but lately, seemed little disposed to return home again. To remedy this sad state of the national mind has been the glorious work which the men of the Gaelic movement have set themselves to accomplish. Were their efforts to cease even now, they would leave an indelible impress on the national mind of Ireland. But those efforts are not ceasing and shall not cease. The intellectual elites are returning to the old home of native culture, to enrich it, perhaps, with the spoils gathered in foreign lands. Like our hero Conghal, we shall have no objection to raiding our neighbours for literary spoil; but, having done so, let us, like him, weary for the return to the beloved homeland, to lay at the feet of our mother Erin the results of intellectual achievement;

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<sup>75</sup> MacSweeney, *Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh*, [ix]– x.

<sup>76</sup> MacSweeney, *Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh*, x.

and let us, when in enforced exile, re-echo with him those great sentiments which express the pent-up longing of a true Irish heart —

*Ion[h]muin tír an tír úd thiar  
Ulaidh go n-iomad a ngiall  
Éire go n-iomad a port  
In[n]te as áil liom bheith anocht.*

Dear is yonder land in the west,  
Ulster of the many hostages!  
Ireland of the many strongholds  
In it I long to be to-night.

To those who have never wandered in exile, and to those who have returned, I offer this brilliant product of the Irish File's art.<sup>77</sup>

In referring to 'the men of the Gaelic movement' above, it is difficult not to imagine that MacSweeney was recalling with pride the achievements of his own predecessors. His grandfather, Seosamh Ó Longáin, became a member of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language (*Cumann Buan-Choimeáda na Gaedhilge*) when it was officially launched in Dublin in December 1876 and he also served on the Society's first Publication Committee when it was set up in April 1877.<sup>78</sup> His father, Jeremiah MacSweeney, moreover, would remain an active member of the same movement for almost forty years, working as its Secretary from November 1877 until February 1914 as well as serving on its Publication Committee.<sup>79</sup>

Approaching Patrick Morgan MacSweeney with the task of editing a text for the Irish Texts Society as part of the latter's newly-established series may have found favour with council members, given the auspicious scholarly credentials of his maternal forebears. This, in fact, was a particular focus of an anonymous author's glowing review of *CCC* that featured in *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* in 1905:

*Fear gnóthach is eadh Pádraig Mac Suibhne, agus nuair a chuimhnighmíd ar a liacht saothair [sic] a bhain le socrughadh an téacs agus a laighead aimsire [sic] do b'éidir leis spáráil chuige is eadh is mó is iongnadh linn feabhas a dhéanta agus méid an eóluis atá curtha le chéile fé chúram is fé shlacht ann. Deir an sean-fhocal gur treise dūthchus 'ná oileamhaint. Soluíd áluinn ar fhirinne an tsean-fhocail seo is ea Pádraig Mac Suibhne féin, mar do shíolruigh ar thaobh a mháthar ar éan-chuma ó thréibh go raibh cáil an léighinn is na scoláireachta orthu le sna ciantaibh.<sup>80</sup>*

Patrick MacSweeney is a busy man, and when we consider all the work involved in arranging the text and the lack of time he could spare for it, we find all the more surprising the excellence of its completion and the amount of knowledge that is brought together carefully and properly in it. The proverb states that instinct is stronger than upbringing.

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<sup>77</sup> MacSweeney, *Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh*, [v]–vi; cf. Mac Lochlainn, 'An Ghaedhilge agus an Béarla', 75. The lines of verse quoted here form part of a longer poem recited by Conghal in Mac Sweeney, *Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh*, 166, 167.

<sup>78</sup> Ó Murchú, *Cumann Buan-Choimeáda na Gaeilge*, 66, 241, 244.

<sup>79</sup> Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, *Report for 1901*, 6, 43; Ua Duinnín, 'Diarmaid Mac Suibhne', 3; Ó Murchú, *Cumann Buan-Choimeáda na Gaeilge*, 5, 31, 48–57, 300–1, 303–4.

<sup>80</sup> Anon., 'Clodhanna Nua', 740; accompanying translation here and that of the next passage by the present writer.

Patrick MacSweeney himself is a fine example of the truth of this proverb, because [he] descended on his mother's side, in any case, from a tribe that for a long time had a reputation for learning and scholarship.

Having homed in briefly on the editor's grandfather, great grandfather and great great grandfather, Seosamh, Mícheál Óg (1766–1837) and Mícheál (mac Peadair) Ó Longáin (d. 1770), respectively, this review of *CCC* continues with the following laudatory flourish:

*Ní hiongnadh linn dá réir sin go mbeadh dūthchas an léighinn i bPádraig Mac Suibhne. Taispeáneann an chuma n-ar chuir an leabhar so fé eagar go bhfuil. Tá saothar maith macánta ann gan pioc den bhuaileam-sciath. Is minic a thugaimíd fé ndeara i leabhraibh den tsórd ag cur síos ar s[h]ean-litridheacht na nGaedheal, óradh agus líonmhaireacht focal ag tagairt do rudaíbh leathsmuigh den scéal ar fad. Ní bhacann Pádraig le rudaíbh iasachta, agus dá dheascaibh sin tá comhacht agus fuinneamh fé leith san gcuma n-a ndéineann freastal ar lucht léighte an leabhair. Tuigimid as a ghrádh do Bhanbhain agus an fonn a bhí air cion fir a dhéanamh ar a son. Sin í an sprid a dhéanfaidh 'ball bog den bhall chruaidh' agus a fhóghnfaidh dhúinn san ré chontabharthaigh chatha agus comhlainne atá rómhainn.<sup>81</sup>*

It is no surprise to us therefore that the tradition of learning should be in Patrick MacSweeney. The manner in which [he] edited this book shows that it is. It contains good honest work without any trace of trumpet blowing. We often notice in books of the kind describing the old literature of the Gaels, a gilding and overuse of words referring to things completely outside the story. Patrick does not bother with external things, and as a result of that there is a certain might [*or* authority] and energy in the manner in which [he] serves the readers of the book. We understand from it his love for *Banbha* [Ireland] and the desire that he had to play a man's part on her behalf. That is the spirit that will make 'a soft spot of the hard spot' and will be of benefit to us in the dangerous era of battle and fighting that is ahead of us.

Incidentally, we may note that rather than 'Pádraig Mac Suibhne', as per our anonymous reviewer above, Patrick MacSweeney himself generally used the English form of his name rather than the Irish-language equivalent. We find one exception in the Census of Ireland 1911 where two men named Pádraig Mac Suibhne are listed as residing in Collegeland, Maynooth. The age of one of these, thirty-seven years, tallies with that of MacSweeney because the 1911 census was taken on 2 April, just over two weeks before he himself would turn thirty-eight on 17 April.<sup>82</sup>

Further praise of the *CCC* would come four years later during the golden jubilee celebrations of Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, on 14 June 1909, when Archbishop William Walsh paid special tribute to it in describing it as a 'learned work' which was 'so ably edited by Father MacSweeney, for the Irish Texts Society'.<sup>83</sup> The Archbishop continued:

It is a work in which I take a special interest, not, indeed, that I can claim to have acquired a special knowledge of its contents, but that it has more than once furnished me with an effective answer to persons who seem to think that Irish is a handy sort of subject for

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<sup>81</sup> Anon., 'Clodhanna Nua', 740.

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Kildare/Maynooth/Collegeland/540537/>.

<sup>83</sup> [Walsh], 'The Archbishop's Speech', 21.

people to fall back upon, and get some distinction in, when they have no hope of distinguishing themselves in anything else.<sup>84</sup>

Contrary to the foregoing complementary reviews of the work, that published in 1905 by Edward Gwynn (1868–1941) in *Hermathena* was somewhat harsh by comparison. Gwynn did not doubt that ‘Mr. MacSweeney has performed his function as editor with great thoroughness’ and he singled out for praise the discussion of the literary qualities of the tale in the work’s introduction, itself written ‘with enthusiasm, and that is an excellent quality in an editor when it is allied to solid knowledge and a sound critical method’.<sup>85</sup> Nonetheless, the fact remained that ‘the Glossary is the least satisfactory part of the book’, it being ‘defective and not always correct’.<sup>86</sup> Even though ‘the editor generally shows himself a sound grammarian, he is not entirely impeccable’ and this Gwynn illustrates with fourteen subsequent examples.<sup>87</sup> When it comes to verse passages, moreover, he takes the editor to task for not always being guided by the metre and for unnecessarily reproducing manuscript spellings religiously, while in many cases emendations, where necessary, are not supplied.<sup>88</sup>

Now, whether Gwynn’s review put paid to any further editorial projects on Fr MacSweeney’s part is a moot point, but his next substantial publication, his fourth, was entirely different in content. Published in 1913 under the title *A Group of Nation-Builders: O’Donovan — O’Curry — Petrie*, he honours in this book of fifteen chapters the Celtic scholars mentioned earlier, namely John O’Donovan, Eugene O’Curry and George Petrie, for their extraordinary work on behalf of Ireland’s linguistic and cultural heritage as well as respectfully acknowledging their enormous contribution to preserving the country’s national identity. In a brief foreword, signed ‘P. M. MacS. St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth, July, 1913’, the author sets his stall out thus:

In the battle for intellectual freedom it is true to say that O’Donovan, O’Curry and Petrie are national heroes. They loved Ireland and the Irish people with a lasting love. They cherished the Past of Ireland, they revered it, and they believed in it. They determined that the Ireland of the Future should be bound to the Ireland of the Past by the strong links of knowledge and of love. They forged these links in the white-heat of patriotic research. They were, in every true sense of the word, Nation-builders; and we, their heirs, must not forget them. To prevent our doing so I have written this little book and to their memories I dedicate it.<sup>89</sup>

Fr Patrick Dinneen reviewed the book two months later in a September issue of *The Leader*. In seeing this project through to press, he was adamant that ‘a great favour has been conferred on the Irish people by Fr Patrick MacSweeney’ ([*t*]á *commaoin mhór curtha ar an sluagh Gaedhealach ag an Athair Pádraig Mac Suibhne*). He produced a fine piece of scholarship, written in a style that is ‘nice [and] readable’ (*deas so-léighte*). Indeed, the manner in which ‘the learned author’ (*an t-ughdar léigheanta*) describes what these three scholars achieved for the sake of their native country is both ‘excellent [and] earnest’ (*blasta dúthrachtach*). Each of them, as a result, has ultimately received ‘his own share’ (*a chion féin*) of the analysis.<sup>90</sup> Overall, this review concentrates on John O’Donovan and his achievements, and only in its

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<sup>84</sup> [Walsh], ‘The Archbishop’s Speech’, 21.

<sup>85</sup> Gwynn, ‘Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh’, 459, 468.

<sup>86</sup> Gwynn, ‘Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh’, 467.

<sup>87</sup> Gwynn, ‘Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh’, 460–5.

<sup>88</sup> Gwynn, ‘Caithréim Conghail Cláiringhnigh’, 465–7.

<sup>89</sup> MacSweeney, *A Group of Nation-Builders*, [ii].

<sup>90</sup> Ua Duinnín, ‘An Dis Úd ’s an tAon’, 134.

concluding remarks does the work itself find mention, but this time not without a certain tone of caution. That Eugene O'Curry relocated to Limerick as early as 1815, for example, Dinneen deems to be most unlikely.<sup>91</sup> We know since, of course, that O'Curry settled there in 1824 or thereabouts, when he began working as a labourer, before taking on a role a short few years later as one of the keepers in the city's asylum for the mentally ill.<sup>92</sup> A second 'mistake' (*dearmad*) on Fr MacSweeney's part is his contention that the two manuscript copies of the extensive 'Irish-English Dictionary' by Peter O'Connell / Peadar Ó Conaill (1755–1826), those kept in Trinity College Dublin and the Royal Irish Academy, were the work of John O'Donovan.<sup>93</sup> Dinneen was particularly familiar with the Trinity College manuscript, of course, because he drew on it himself while working on the 1904 edition of his own Irish-English dictionary.<sup>94</sup> He does not elaborate further on the matter, but we may add in passing here that the two-volume transcript of O'Connell's dictionary in the library of Trinity College Dublin (TCD MS H.5.25 (1396)) was made by Mark Prendergast in 1841 from O'Donovan's own two-volume transcript (BLL MSS Egerton 84 and 85) of the autograph of O'Connell's work (BLL MS Egerton 83).<sup>95</sup> The source in the Royal Irish Academy, a copy of Prendergast's work, has no shelf mark assigned to it. Comprising twenty-eight volumes in all, it was compiled by an unidentified scribe about the year 1883 or 1884.

Turning in brief now to the contents of *A Group of Nation-Builders*, Fr MacSweeney's focus in the opening chapters is on the life of John O'Donovan and his major contribution on behalf of the Irish language, itself preceded by a short historical overview of 'the past from which he derives',<sup>96</sup> beginning with the Celts and coming down to nineteenth-century Irish verse. One might ask why the author does not include at that point in his account the poetry composed by his great grandfather, Mícheál Óg Ó Longáin, but we must remember that an edition of Ó Longáin's poems had not yet been published at that time. The first reference to his maternal forebears, in fact, occurs further down in the narrative in the context of Eugene O'Curry's 'famous catalogue' of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy 'whose work [we are laconically told] was completed by O'Longan'.<sup>97</sup> The reference here is to his grandfather, Seosamh Ó Longáin, who continued the cataloguing, begun by O'Curry, of the manuscripts formerly owned by the English archivist and scholar Sir William Betham (1779–1853).

The cleric returns to the monumental enterprise involving the cataloguing of the Academy's collection of Irish manuscripts as part of his discussion of Eugene O'Curry. There he describes what was done with the Betham Collection as 'that wondrous task, carried out by O'Curry, contributed to by Owen Connellan and [John] O'Beirne Crowe, and completed by the great Index Catalogue of [Joseph] O'Longan, which lies still, in manuscript, on the shelves of the Royal Irish Academy'.<sup>98</sup> Having dismissed 'some small defect of this gigantic work' identified by 'egotistical editors of a few pages of easy Irish', Fr MacSweeney is quick to impress on the unfamiliar reader that, in being descriptive in nature, the catalogue's purpose required a painstaking analysis of 'each and every one of the manuscripts'.<sup>99</sup> He continues:

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<sup>91</sup> Ua Duinnín, 'An Dís Úd 's an tAon', 134.

<sup>92</sup> de Barra, 'Saol agus Saothar Eoghain', 12.

<sup>93</sup> Ua Duinnín, 'An Dís Úd 's an tAon', 134.

<sup>94</sup> Ua Súilleabháin, 'Dinneen's Dictionaries of 1904 and 1927', 69–70.

<sup>95</sup> O'Grady, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 161–5; Ó Murchú, 'O'Connell, Peter [Peadar Ó Conaill] 1754/5–1826'.

<sup>96</sup> MacSweeney, *A Group of Nation-Builders*, [1].

<sup>97</sup> MacSweeney, *A Group of Nation-Builders*, 20.

<sup>98</sup> MacSweeney, *A Group of Nation-Builders*, 53.

<sup>99</sup> MacSweeney, *A Group of Nation-Builders*, 53–4.

I take a particular pleasure in thus emphasizing the greatness of the work of men like O'Donovan, O'Curry, and O'Longan, for it has frequently been exploited by others without sufficient and, at times, without any acknowledgement. As an example of this I should like to point, though for certain reasons I feel diffidence in doing so, to those peerless specimens of facsimile reproduction of the great vellum manuscripts by O'Longan. Take, for instance, the facsimile of the *Book of Leinster*. To this the late Dr. Atkinson prefixed an Introduction and analysis of contents — a good piece of work though not altogether his. The *raison d'être* of the Introduction was the facsimile of the manuscript by O'Longan. One would imagine that O'Longan's name should have appeared upon the title-page, but the real worker is relegated to an obscure position in the tail-end of the Introduction, whilst the title-page tells, in no modest way, the legend that the work is 'The Book of Leinster,' *et cetera*, with Introduction, *et cetera*, by Robert Atkinson, *et cetera*. The result is that I have seen it ignorantly referred to as the *Book of Leinster* by Robert Atkinson. Somewhat the same treatment was meted out to O'Longan in the case of the *Leabhar na h-Uidhre*, *Leabhar Breac* and *Book of Ballymote*.<sup>100</sup>

Interestingly, he establishes no familial relationship with 'O'Longan' — the general reader would most likely not be aware of this either, of course. Be that as it may, the reason for Fr MacSweeney's robust defense of his grandfather's scribal work (conducted, incidentally, between 1870 and 1880) is probably because he was acquainted with the unfavourable reception that it had received in some quarters at that time, a state of affairs that caused Seosamh Ó Longáin much personal distress about his own reputation as Academy Scribe.<sup>101</sup> His grandson is putting on record in the foregoing passage, then, the shoddy manner in which Ó Longáin himself was treated, not to mention the utter disregard for the man's remarkable scribing achievement in producing facsimile transcripts of Ireland's important medieval manuscripts. And, in bringing the singular effort of the scholarly threesome of nation builders and subject of his study to the attention of the general reader, we may wonder whether he also had in mind 'the enormous mass of unpublished material' in the handwritten books produced by his own maternal predecessors:

A fundamental error in estimating the labours of Petrie, O'Donovan and O'Curry is to judge them by their printed works alone. It is necessary to repeat this frequently, for the general reader cannot, from the nature of the case, become acquainted with the enormous mass of unpublished material which these three men left after them.<sup>102</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

We have seen earlier in our discussion that Fr Neil Kevin held Fr MacSweeney in high regard for his seminal influence on him as an inspirational teacher. As to Patrick Morgan MacSweeney the man, Fr Kevin had the following to say in an appreciation following the death of his mentor:

When summer comes he will be missing from under the tree below Stoyte House, where as unofficial chairman of a chance-constituted parliament, he was superbly happy, talking, listening, and smoking prodigiously. Sometimes a book of poems might be there, or one without a book, but with a very good memory, gave off an old favourite; or the stories went round, and the laughter arose, and, all the time, great clouds of smoke went up from the pipe of the genial chairman.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> MacSweeney, *A Group of Nation-Builders*, 54–5.

<sup>101</sup> Ní Úrdail, *The Scribe in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, 130–1.

<sup>102</sup> MacSweeney, *A Group of Nation-Builders*, 101–2.

<sup>103</sup> Kevin, 'Father Patrick M. MacSweeney, M.A.', 347.

Fr Kevin was himself Professor of English at St Patrick's College (1932–1953) and, in his tribute to the College in *I Remember Maynooth* (1945), we may close with his own words of admiration about his confidant. Standing in reverence at Fr MacSweeney's grave in Maynooth College Cemetery, the best epitaph for his former teacher is rather inscribed for him in the memories he has of him from his student days:

Stone seems peculiarly unfitted to be a medium for recording a memory of a spirit so buoyant. When I think of the days when he was my professor, the memories that come back are extraordinarily well defined, and, certainly, surely fixed enough to be engraved in the most unchanging and indestructable medium; but these memories are also multitudinous, one taking the place of another, endlessly. ... Some such fantastic adventure in lapidary literature would be necessary for a fitting commemoration of the inexhaustible sources of Father MacSweeney's eloquence.

But if I speak with the tongue of a student I must call him by a less formal name — 'Paddy Mac'. ... For there was in Father MacSweeney's professorial way some splendidly human quality which I find hard to name or describe, but which was such as the toiling towards academic heights seems to wear out in the generality of men. In a discreet, tasteful way he had applied his own natural gaiety, wit, mimicry and observation of men to the business of interpreting English literature and the success of it has become an affair of history at Maynooth. ... Of all the professors who had to contend with me I believe he is the one who is most indelibly fixed in my memory. I can remember more of the things that he said; and I think this is because he referred the affairs of the class-hall more often to life. ... Had I but one wreath to lay in this graveyard, where I could wish for many more, I would place it on the grave of 'Paddy Mac'.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Kevin, *I Remember Maynooth*, 177, 178, 179, 180, from the second enlarged edition of the work originally published in 1937.

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