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The battle of Clontarf in later Irish tradition

MEIDHBHÍN NÍ ÚRDAIL

In considering the battle of Clontarf in later Irish tradition, an obvious starting point is a tale known as *CCT* which, according to the present writer, was one of the most popular Irish prose texts to have come down to us in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish manuscripts.[1] Its popularity may be ascribed in part to two reasons. First, at the heart of the tale's message is the fact that the battle of Clontarf amounted to Brian Bóraimhe's victory over centuries of foreign heathen oppression, a message which, as will emerge below, appealed to Irish scribes. Second, rather than being a laconic record of events, *CCT* presents the historical battle as a story in which 'heroes shine and villains play their sinister parts and dramatic incidents are invented or exaggerated for the benefit of the reading public'.[2] These two reasons are not exceptional to this prose tale, of course, as the same could be said (and indeed has been said) about the earliest literary account we have in Irish concerning the battle, that in the early-twelfth century Irish text *CGG*. Many of the plot details in the Modern Irish story, in fact, ultimately derive from those forming part of the account of the battle in the latter Middle Irish text.

Two further factors have ensured the popularity of *CCT* among eighteenth- and nineteeth-century scribes. Given in the first instance that most of the tale's manuscript sources are of Munster provenance, we can hardly be surprised that a Clontarf story presenting Brian Bóraimhe and the O'Briens of Munster as heroes *par excellence* should find favour with scribes from that province in particular. Added to that is a second factor, namely the influence on the tale's transmission of *FFÉ* which Geoffrey Keating, alias Séathrún Céitinn (*c.*1580–*c.*1644), compiled *c.*1634. Keating's prose and style of presenting events in Ireland's past in an intelligible idiom found great favour with Irish native men of letters. When we consider, for example, that about sixty copies of this work form part of the manuscript collection of the Royal Irish Academy alone, we may be confident that, within the parameters of scribal texts, *FFÉ* was very popular among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scribes. It will become apparent presently, moreover, that it was Keating's particular interpretation of events at Clontarf that would resonate with Irish scribes when they turned their hands at compiling their own transcripts of *CCT*.

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What, we may ask, of the scribal evidence itself regarding the transmission of this Modern Irish prose tale as we have it in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish manuscripts? We don't know exactly when *CCT* was first composed and by whom, but it certainly was in existence as an independent text in the first half of the

[1] Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail (ed. and trans.), *Cath Cluana Tarbh. 'The battle of Clontarf'*, ITS, 64 (London, 2011).
[2] John Ryan, 'The battle of Clontarf', *JRSAI*, 68 (1938), 1–50 at 3.

seventeenth century when it appeared as part of the contents of an anthology of prose tales relevant to Munster, all of which were interlinked by a series of annals beginning at AD 174 and coming down to AD 1138.[3] While the original compilation has not survived, six eighteenth-century copies of it tell us that its title was *Leabhar Gearr na Pailíse*, or 'the Short Book of Pallas'.[4] The present writer has suggested that An Phailís incorporated into this title refers to the townland of Pallas, Co. Kerry, Pallas Castle being the chief residence of Mac Carthaigh Mór, which was located near Beaufort Bridge, Killarney.[5] The following colophon incorporated into the two earliest transcripts of *LGP* by the Co. Meath scribe Seón Mac Solaidh, alias John Solly (*fl.* 1715), provides further information:

> Ag sin foras feasa clainne Mhīleadh Easpāinne, 7 ar ghabh lánrīghe Ēireann dīobh 7 rīghe dhā chōigeadh Mum[h]an fo leith. Sgriptum per me Eugenium Carti Baile an Oilēin aedibus Domini Tadei Dermisi Cormaci Carti anno domini 1648 undesimoque Januarii. Arna athsgrīob[h]adh le Seón Mac Solaidh a mBaile Hardaman a bporraisde Thighthe Callain a cCondae na Mid[h]e 7 a mbarūntacht Shlāinghe da charaid ionm[h]uin Risdard Tiubear, an t-ochtmhadh lā .x. dho m[h]ī Feab[h]ra an b[h]liadhain d'aois an Tig[h]earna 1715/16. Is gach duine dā lēighfidh nō dā ccluinnfid[h]e dā lēaghadh ē tugadh beannacht ar anmoinn na dēisi rēimhrāidhte madh beo marbh iad.[6]
>
> That is the basis of knowledge about the descendants of Míl Easpáinne, and those of them who assumed the full kingship of Ireland and the kingship of the two provinces of Munster in particular. Written by me Eugenius Carti Baile an Oiléin in the house of Lord Tadeus son of Diarmaid son of Cormac Carti anno domini 1648 and on the eleventh of January. Having been rewritten by Seón Mac Solaidh in Harmanstown in the parish of Stackallan in Co. Meath and in the barony of Slane for his dear friend Richard Tipper, the eighteenth day of the month of February the year of our Lord 1715/16. And everyone who will read or will hear it being read let him give a blessing on the soul of the two aforenamed be they alive [or] dead.

The prose anthology, then, was completed in 1648 by one Eugenius Carti who resided at Baile an Oiléin – probably the same as Oileán Ciarraí (Castleisland), Co. Kerry – thereby suggesting that he probably belonged to the Coshmang branch of Clann Charthaigh. Munster genealogies in the eighteenth-century *Leabhar Muimhneach*, in fact, specify three separate septs within this Coshmang branch, i.e. Molahiffe (Maigh Laithimh), Fieries (Na Foidhrí) and Cloonmealane (Cluain Maoláin), and the same source traces the Molahiffe branch in descending order from Eoghan son of Cormac, king of Desmond (d. 1359), down to the aforementioned 'Lord Tadeus son of

[3] Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, pp 37–8, 40–1.
[4] Ibid., pp 42–7.
[5] Ibid., p. 44.
[6] BL Egerton MS 106, fo. 132v; a similar colophon in RIA MS 23 K 37 (p. 172) is dated 24 February 1715/16. Unless otherwise stated, this and other accompanying translations below are by the present writer; the macrons in this passage and elsewhere represent a length mark which is not visible in the manuscript source.

Diarmaid son of Cormac'.[7] Moreover, one 'Teige M'Dermod M'Cormac', lord of Coshmang, is named in the Patent Rolls of Elizabeth for the year 1589, and according to the Annals of the Four Masters, this same Tadhg of Molahiffe died in 1581 in a skirmish at Aghadoe during the Desmond wars.[8]

It cannot be claimed with certainty, of course, that Eugenius Carti was the original compiler of *LGP*, but the above colophon, copied subsequently by Seón Mac Solaidh into his early eighteenth-century transcripts, leaves no doubt that by the late 1640s *CCT* existed as an independent tale when it formed part of this anthology's contents. Indeed, the compiler of *LGP* may have been guided in his work by his contemporary, Geoffrey Keating. We may note, for example, the reference in the same colophon above to a *foras feasa* of the descendants of Míl Easpáinne, which recalls the title of Keating's history, *FFÉ*. Equally, the distinction between the two provinces of Munster (*dhá chóigeadh Mumhan*) is also significant, as this may have been inspired by *FFÉ* where the place-names Cúigeadh Eochaidh Abhradhruaidh and Cúigeadh Chonraoi mic Dáire designate east and west Munster, respectively.[9] Furthermore, Keating stated that the battle at Clontarf was fought on the Friday before Easter (*an Aoine ria gCáisc*), 1034, a conclusion he reinforced with an accompanying quatrain on the death of Brian Bóraimhe, beginning *Cheithre bliadhna tríochad* ('Four years and thirty'). The date 1034 for the battle occurs not only in the earliest extant sources of *LGP*, but it was also reproduced in most sources of the text of *CCT* which once formed part of the anthology's contents.[10]

What contemporary relevance would *LGP* have for a member of the Coshmang branch of the McCarthys in the 1640s? The prose tales that seem to have comprised its contents celebrate a glorious era in Munster's past. The source originally concluded with the death of Cormac Mac Carthaigh in 1138, one of the ablest and most widely esteemed rulers in the province. By contrast, the end of the sixteenth century was marked by much division and political restiveness. We have noted above that in the particular case of the Coshmang branch, Tadhg, lord of Coshmang, died in 1581 while serving with the earl of Desmond against his overlord, Mac Carthaigh Mór, and the English forces. It appears, then, that *LGP* was essentially a prose compilation of Mac Carthaigh interest, but it gathered together prose tales focusing on the triumphs of a glorious past, from which the intended seventeenth-century reader may have inferred that such glory could be retrieved through unity of purpose rather than by division of loyalties. Fortuitously, the source itself, or a subsequent copy, reached Dublin in the early decades of the eighteenth century and transcripts of its contents (including *CCT*) were made by scholar-scribes based in the capital city.[11] That this should be so, of course, tallies with an overall feature of Irish literary scholarship at that time, whereby many primary sources were becoming

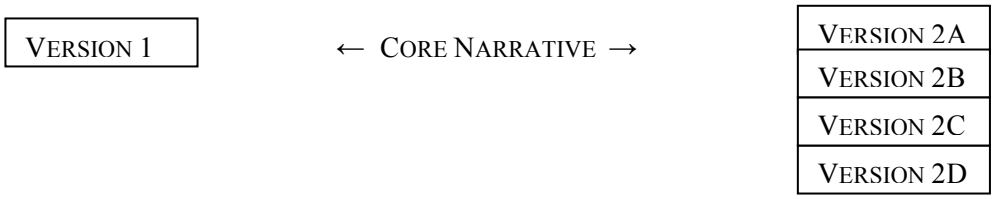
[7] Tadhg Ó Donnchadha (ed.), *An Leabhar Muimhneach maraon le suim aguisíní* (Baile Átha Cliath, n.d. [1940]), pp 209–10.
[8] James Morrin, *Calendar of patent and close rolls of chancery in Ireland from the 18th to the 45th of Queen Elizabeth*, 2 vols (Dublin, 1861–2), ii, p. 170; *AFM* 1581 [v, 1756].
[9] *FFÉ*, i, pp 120 (l. 16)–122 (l. 39); cf. Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail, '*Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*: establishing a literary canon' in Pádraig A. Breatnach et al. (eds), *Léann lámhscríbhinní Lobháin. The Louvain manuscript heritage* (Dublin, 2007), pp 139–67 at 145; Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail, 'The literary legacy of Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*' in Pádraig Ó Riain (ed.), *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn. The History of Ireland by Geoffrey Keating*, ITS Subsidiary Series, 19 (London, 2008), pp 52–67 at 57.
[10] Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, pp 12–13, 38–9.
[11] Ibid., pp 2–3, 46–7.

available via a network of exhange practised by scribes who had begun to gravitate towards Dublin.[12]

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Turning now to *CCT* itself, ninety transcripts, dating from the period between 1701/2 and 1890, have survived.[13] A further 'incomplete' text in a manuscript 'in handwriting, presumably, of John Browne, of Waterford' and described in the early years of the last century is now missing.[14] The tale's title recalls the historical battle that occurred at Clontarf near the city of Dublin on Good Friday, 1014, and its two main protagonists, namely Brian Bóraimhe and his son, Murchadh, once flourished in tenth- and eleventh-century Ireland. We have to do here, however, with a literary re-enactment of the historical battle at Clontarf, whereby the main characters are cast as foils to heathen Viking invaders who are eventually overthrown and expelled from Ireland. *CCT*, then, belongs to the genre of Irish romantic tales (*scéalta rómánsaíochta*) that presents virtually interchangeable heroes (in this case Brian Bóraimhe and his son Murchadh) and details their exploits, adventures and encounters with the marvellous and the Otherworld.[15]

Notwithstanding the extraordinary number of manuscript sources for the tale, certain literary embellishments and innovations are evident in this substantial amount of material which makes a division into the following manageable textual groups possible:



The core narrative relates to that part of the narrative common to *all* transcripts of *CCT*. It has also been preserved as a text in its own right in twenty-four manuscripts, written between 1715/16 and 1853, and this too is the text that once formed part of the

[12] Nessa Ní Shéaghdha, 'Irish scholars and scribes in eighteenth-century Dublin', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland. Iris an Dá Chultúr*, 4 (1989), 41–54.

[13] For a description of eighty-nine surviving sources, see Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, pp 226–54. In 2013, two years after the publication of the latter, a further manuscript containing *CCT* came to light. It was acquired by the Royal Irish Academy, now RIA MS 12 K 50, and was written by 'E[a]dbhard Ó Troith' (p. 325), who gives no date or place of transcription.

[14] Patrick Power, 'Irish MSS. in Waterford', *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge*, 14 (1904–5), 647–9, 692–5, 707–9, 728–9 at 729; cf. Pádraig de Brún, *Lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge: treoirliosta* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1988), p. 87, no. 405.

[15] On Irish romantic tales in general, see Gerard Murphy, *The Ossianic lore and romantic tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1961), pp 37–55; Alan Bruford, *Gaelic folk-tales and mediaeval romances. A study of the Early Modern Irish 'romantic tales' and their oral derivatives* (Dublin, 1969); Joseph Falaky Nagy, 'In defense of rómánsaíocht', *Ériu*, 38 (1987), 9–26.

contents of the aforementioned *LGP*.[16] Material added to the opening passage of the core narrative yielded a variant text, named Version 1 above, which has been transmitted in thirteen manuscripts written between 1701/2 and 1859. Version 2 refers to a separate text, of which there are four variants, 2A, 2B, 2C and 2D, preserved in fifty-three manuscripts written between 1702/3 and 1890. Unlike Version 1, Version 2 differs considerably from the core narrative in that its compilers derived passages, sometimes almost verbatim, from *FFÉ*. We find these passages from Keating's history spliced onto the core narrative of our text, and the result of such scribal cutting and pasting is a separate version, the Version 2 narrative.

The main incidents making up the content of the core narrative may be divided into the following sections:

> **§1-3** An army, led by Brian Bóraimhe and his son Murchadh, gathers at Clontarf to do battle against Maol Mórdha son of Murchadh, king of Leinster, and his Viking allies.
> **§4** Unwilling to spill blood on Good Friday, Brian Bóraimhe remains apart from the battle in prayer in his tent.
> **§5** Maol Seachlainn Mór, king of Meath and ally of Brian Bóraimhe, abandons the battlefield.
> **§6** Murchadh encounters a friend (Dubhlaing Ó hArtagáin) on the battlefield and follows him to the Otherworld where a supernatural woman (Aoibheall of Craglea) foretells their deaths and that of Brian Bóraimhe.
> **§7** Murchadh and Dubhlaing return to the fray, but Murchadh must quench his insatiable thirst by drinking regularly from the well of Clontarf.
> **§8** Those guarding the well on Murchadh's behalf are killed by a Viking band and once their blood mingles with the water of the well Murchadh is unable to drink it.
> **§9** Murchadh dies at the hands of a Viking warrior.
> **§10-11** Brian Bóraimhe is killed by a fleeing Viking but his death marks the end of Viking oppression in Ireland.
> **§12-13** Toirdhealbhach son of Murchadh dies at the weir of Clontarf and the opposing armies suffer heavy losses.
> **§14** The bodies of Brian and Murchadh are transported for burial to Ireland's primatial church in Armagh.
> **§15** Maol Seachlainn Mór describes to his kinsmen the horrors of the battle which he witnessed.
> **§16** As instructed by his father, Donnchadh son of Brian pays twelve score cows to the primate of Armagh on Easter Sunday.
> **§17-18** While Donnchadh Ó Briain returns homewards to Thomond with his wounded army, tensions are already beginning to erupt within Munster.

The characterization of Brian Bóraimhe as summarized at section four as a pious bystander is one which finds its primary parallel in the account of the battle of

[16] Twenty-three manuscripts are discussed by Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, pp 2, 36, 37, 38, 226–35, at a time when the existence of RIA MS 12 K 50 was not known (see above, fn. 13). The core narrative of *CCT* in the latter manuscript is on pp 110–28.

Clontarf in the Middle Irish *CGG* text, where we learn that he 'opened his psalter and he began to clasp his hands and to pray after the battle had commenced' (*ro oslaic a shaltair, ocus ro gab i clasecul a llam, ocus ic airnagi dar eis na cath*).[17] According to the Modern Irish *CCT* narrative, however, Brian Bóraimhe's absence from the battlescene is not so much motivated by his advanced years, but by his unwillingness to shed blood during the Lenten season. The text tells us that he retires from the fray to his tent, complete with 'his psalter before him and his crucifix in his hand while chanting his psalms' (*a psaltair ina fhiadhnaise agus a chrosfhighil ina láimh agus é ag gabháil a psalm*).[18] According sources for Version 2A, moreover, he prays with 'his rosary beads in his hand' (*a phaidrín ina láimh*). It will be clear from the above that Brian Bóraimhe does not appear again until further down in the narrative at sections ten and eleven. We find him at this point refusing a request by his servant that he flee from the battle on horseback at the height of the ferocious battle. His bravery, so the text, costs him his life when he falls prey to a retreating Viking who cleaves Brian Bóraimhe's head with an axe, but not before Brian himself manages to overcome his enemy.[19]

Sections five to nine present the main protagonist of the core narrative of *CCT* – undoubtedly Murchadh son Brian Bóraimhe – not only because of his heroic contribution on the field of battle, but because a series of motifs is attached to him, which highlights the supernatural and valorous aspects of his character. We find him, for instance, encountering a supernatural friend, Dubhlaing Ó hArtagáin, who has abandoned the magical Otherworld to bolster the cause of Brian Bóraimhe's troops on the battlefield. This mysterious intervention derives ultimately from an interpolated passage in the Middle Irish account in *CGG*, which tells of one Dúnlaing Ua hArtagáin who appears to Murchadh and describes the delights of his paradisiac homeland. Unlike the passage in *CGG*, in which Murchadh recognizes his supernatural visitor on the battlefield, Dubhlaing in the narrative of *CCT* is not immediately visible to the Dál gCais hero. This is because he is wearing what is called 'the magic veil', or *féig*(*h*) *fia*(*dh*) / *fé fia*,[20] a protective magic veil or cloak given to him as a gift by the supernatural Aoibheall to ensure his safe passage from the Otherworld by keeping him invisible from the mortal world. On discarding his protective cloak, Dubhlaing becomes visible to Murchadh who, in turn, follows his friend into the Otherworld where the heroes learn of their terrible fate from Aoibheall in an ensuing metrical dialogue between the trio.[21]

Prophecy is without question an important part of the narrative of *CGG* and involves this otherwordly woman foretelling the death of Brian Bóraimhe when she appears to him on the eve of the battle. Her role in *CGG* is less pronounced, however, whereas Aoibheall plays a significant part in *CCT*. As Dubhlaing's very powerful lover (*leannān lánchumhachtach*), we are told that Aoibheall initially managed to entice Dubhlaing away from the mortal world to her magic dwelling.[22] She recalls the well-informed supernatural helper of Irish romantic tales when, in this instance, she tries to avert the catastrophe awaiting Murchadh and Dubhlaing in Clontarf by convincing them to remain with her in the Otherworld and not return to the fray. She

[17] *CGG*, pp 196–7, §113; the accompanying translation here and elsewhere from *CGG* is that of its editor, J.H. Todd.
[18] Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, pp 110–11.
[19] Ibid., pp 118–23.
[20] *DIL* s.v. *féth*; see also Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, pp 53–4, 136.
[21] Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, pp 52–4, 112–19.
[22] Ibid., p. 54.

fails in this, but Murchadh's encounter with Aoibheall forms part of an overall development concerning him in later tradition where we find him in other romantic tales entering the Otherworld through a dark magical mist, for example, and confronting supernatural beings there, or where in another instance he is is sought out at the court of his father by a mysterious ambassador from the Otherworld in the form of a druid (*draoi*). Journeying to the Otherworld by means of a lake, Murchadh's encounters with the supernatural are predominantly adversarial.[23] Essentially, then, this particular son of Brian Bóraimhe who was killed in the historical battle of 1014 has, by the later medieval period, become Murchadh the universal ahistorical hero who confronts the marvels of the Otherworld.

Sections seven to nine of the core narrative of *CCT* present us with another important motif: that of the hero's insatiable thirst, which he must slake at regular intervals by drinking water. The hero in this instance is once again Murchadh son of Brian Bóraimhe, whose downfall is unavoidable once his Viking enemies realize the importance of the well and that of the warriors guarding it. A summary execution of the appointed guards results in their blood mingling with the water of the well, rendering it undrinkable when Murchadh next arrives to quench his thirst. This motif of the well in the core narrative of *CCT* finds parallels elsewhere in Irish and Scottish Gaelic traditions, and is an important plot detail that adds to the central role accorded Brian Bóraimhe's heroic son in our tale.[24]

Sections twelve to thirteen focus on yet another character, Toirdhealbhach son of Murchadh, who, so the narrative, is 'the most accomplished 15-year-old man in his own time' (*fear cúig mbliadhan ndēag dob fhearr lāmh ina aimsir féin*). This young man also emerges as a key character who relentlessly pursues his Viking foes as far as the Irish sea. His valour costs him his life for 'he was found on the morrow with a Viking beneath him and a Viking in each hand and a stake from the weir of Clontarf through him having been drowned by the torrent of the full tide' (*frīoth ē arna mhārach agus Lochlannach faoi agus Lochlannach is gach lāimh dho agus cuaille do choraidh Cluana Tarbh thrīd arna bhāthadh don bhuinne rabharta*).[25]

There is one final character who is also of importance in the core narrative of *CCT*, namely Maol Seachlainn Mór or Maol Seachlainn son of Domhnall of Meath. We know from the annals that, on coming to power in 978 as ruler of the midland territory of Midhe, he was Brian Bóraimhe's primary opponent in the northern half of Ireland, but that he lent his support to the Munster king at Clontarf. His characterization as presented in section five of *CCT* is very much that of friend turned foe, however, one who acts as a foil to the heroic Brian Bóraimhe in abandoning the battlefield. And, when Maol Seachlainn re-appears in section fifteen as part of the post-battle section of the narrative, we find him delivering in direct speech an eyewitness report of events on the battlefield at the request of his kinsmen.[26] Now, while the early twelfth-century *CGG* narrative was the inspiration for this dramatic monologue, in that work the speech underlines the savage nature of the conflict itself rather than drawing attention to Maol Seachlainn's inactivity. Maol Seachlainn in *CCT* morphs into a betrayer who withdrew his support for Brian Bóraimhe at Clontarf with the result that his speech amounts to the specious delivery of a cunning traitor.

[23] Ibid., pp 54–5.
[24] Ibid., pp 55–7, 116–19.
[25] Ibid., pp 49, 122–5.
[26] Ibid., pp 112–13, 126–9.

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The foregoing overview of the main incidents of the core narrative of *CCT*, together with the tale's important plot details concerning its main protagonists, alerts us to a central aspect of Irish-language tradition: the one-time historical event at Clontarf has been remoulded into a fictionalized fight complete with rhetorical flourishes. Any discussion of the battle of Clontarf in later Irish tradition, however, must acknowledge the profound effect of Geoffrey Keating's *FFÉ*. The fact that we find passages taken almost verbatim from this history of Ireland points to the work's canonical influence on subsequent narrative tradition. Specifically, it was Keating's particular understanding of pre- and post-battle events which caught the fertile imagination of the successive compilers of *CCT*, and resulted in the Version 2 narrative mentioned above. Even in matters of style, the opening section of the Version 2 narrative of *CCT* contrasts with the annalistic-style of the opening both in the core narrative and in Version 1 of the tale. Version 2, then, begins not just by drawing particular attention to the exalted status of Brian Bóraimhe in his campaign to consolidate his political power in Munster and beyond, but, more importantly, it includes a colourful plot detail explaining how the battle of Clontarf came about in the first place. Taking this plot detail from Keating's *FFÉ*, scribes grafted it onto the core narrative of the romantic prose tale and produced thereby a different version of events, namely the Version 2 narrative of *CCT*.

The plot detail itself sets the scene in Brian Bóraimhe's residence at Kincora (Ceann Cora), and it is Gormfhlaith, wife of Brian Bóraimhe, who emerges as an ambitious woman who castigates her brother, Maol Mórdha son of Murchadh and king of Leinster, for bowing down in vassalage to the O'Briens of Munster. Gormfhlaith persists in rebuking her brother for not being like his father and grandfather, and warns that Brian's son would demand vassalage of Maol Mórdha's offspring. We find a somewhat sobre depiction of this already in the Middle Irish *CGG* text, and while Keating reproduces this characterization of Gormfhlaith as an ambitious woman who promotes her Leinster connections he embellishes it as follows:

> Agus ar rochtain dóibh go Ceann Choradh, cuiris rí Laighean a ionar dhe is tug da shiair, do Ghormfhlaith, inghin Mhurchadha, .i. bainchéile Bhriain, an t-ionar do chur chnaipe ann. Do ghlac an ríoghan an t-ionar is tug urchor de san teinidh do bhí 'n-a fiadhnaise, is do ghabh ag iomcháineadh ar a dearbhráthair tré bheith fá mhoghsaine ná fá dhaoirse do neach san domhan, 'an ní,' ar sí, 'nar fhaomh th'athair ná do sheanathair'; is do ráidh go sirfeadh mac Briain ar a mhac an ní céadna. Acht cheana fá cuimhin lé Maolmórdha comhrádh na ríoghna [...] .
>
> And when they reached Ceann Choradh the king of Leinster took off his tunic and gave it to his sister Gormfhlaith, daughter of Murchadh (that is Brian's wife), to fix a clasp in it. The queen took the tunic and cast it into the fire that was in front of her, and proceeded to reproach her brother for being in slavery or subjection to anyone on earth, 'a thing,' said she, 'which neither thy father nor thy grandfather brooked'; and she added,

> that Brian's son would make the same demand of his son. Now Maolmórdha kept in mind the queen's remarks [...] .[27]

The cumulative effect of Gormfhlaith's remarks, together with a subsequent quarrel between Maol Mórdha and Murchadh son of Brian Bóraimhe during a game of chess, moves Maol Mórdha to seek allies in war against Thomond. Accordingly, the role of Keating's Gormfhlaith is that of instigator of open warfare at Clontarf. Version 2 of *CCT* reproduces Keating's interpretation of what caused the outbreak of the battle, namely the words spoken by an ambitious woman and inciter of violence, who sought the downfall of her own husband, but this text goes further in embellishing Keating's own embellished presentation. One example will suffice here, that contained in a footnote to a translation of *CCT* which was intended for publication by the *Celtic Society* in the late 1840s:

> The flimsy pretext used by the Queen of Ireland to pick a quarrel with her brother was only assumed; and her anger was only the outpouring of the mind of an ambitious woman, who seeing that her own children by Brian had no chance of the crown of Ireland while his sons by a former marriage stood in the way, resolved to stir up a revolution in the hope that her son, the King of Dublin, or her brother might chance to succeed instead of her step-children, in case her own other children would be set aside.[28]

The other aspect of Keating's influence on the battle of Clontarf story in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish manuscripts was his contrastive representation of Brian Bóraimhe and Maol Seachlainn of Meath. In the account of kingship, for example, Brian Bóraimhe, so Keating in *FFÉ*, succeeded to power 'by the strength and bravery of his feats of valour and championship, driving the foreigners and the Danair out of the country, and not by treachery' (*lé calmacht is lé cródhacht a ghníomh goile is gaiscidh, ag ionnarbadh eachtrann is danar as an gcrích, agus ní go cealgach*). The tenure of Maol Seachlainn Mór, however, was one given 'to luxury and comfort and ease, a line of action that was useless for the defence of Ireland at that juncture' (*do shádhaile is do sheascaireacht is do shuaimhneas, inneall fá héadtarbhach ré cosnamh Éireann an tráth soin*).[29] As such, then, Keating cleverly succeeds in contrasting Brian Bóraimhe, the resolute protector of territory and honourable sovereign who revered the Church as well as its vocation to learning, with his predecessor, Maol Seachlainn, who forfeited his claim to the kingship of Ireland. Now, while it is true that the theme of Maol Seachlainn as friend turned foe is central to the core narrative of *CCT*, as mentioned above, both Keating – and the scribes of the Version 2 narrative after him – go even further in presenting Maol Seachlainn as the consummate traitor, a depiction that encouraged certain Munster scribes to add their own condemnation to that already found in Keating's history. Let us look first at Keating's *resumé* of Maol Seachlainn's character as presented in this damning clarification to the reader:

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[27] *FFÉ*, iii, p. 268 (ll. 4208–16) with accompanying translation on p. 269.
[28] RIA MS 23 E 4, p. 48. The project to have the text published was subsequently abandoned by the *Celtic Society*; cf. Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, pp 5–6.
[29] *FFÉ*, iii, p. 256 (ll. 4020–2) with accompanying translation on p. 257, and p. 248 (ll. 3888–90) with accompanying translation on p. 249, respectively; cf. Bernadette Cunningham, *The world of Geoffrey Keating. History, myth and religion in seventeenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), pp 145, 176.

> Féach, a léaghthóir, bíodh gurab ar sluagh Briain do bhí Maoilseachlainn is fir Mhidhe ag teacht go láthair an chatha, maseadh do bhí do cheilg idir sé féin is Lochlonnaigh nach táinig san ordughadh i measc shluagh Briain, acht is eadh do rinne é féin is a shluagh d'anmhain do leathtaoibh an chatha, amhail ro orduigheadar Lochlonnaigh dó.
>
> Observe, O reader, that though it was as part of the host of Brian that Maoilseachlainn and the men of Meath came to the field of battle, still through a plot between himself and the Lochlonnaigh, he did not come into the battle array amongst Brian's host, but what he did was to remain with his host beside the battle, as the Lochlonnaigh had directed him.[30]

Not only do we find this negative characterization of the Meath king in the Version 2 narrative, but we also find that Keating's withering sentiments aroused further expressions of provincial loyalty among certain Munster scribes. Sources for Version 2A, for example, describe how Maol Seachlainn's perfidy in standing idly by was brought to Brian's attention before the battle of Clontarf commenced:

> Ro fhág Maol Seachlainn Rígh Midhe an cath faoi Mhurchadh agus faoi Dhál gCais óir do bhí do cheilg idir é agus Lochlannaigh gan teacht san gcath, agus ro chuir gort treabhtha idir a mhuintir agus an cath, agus an tan do hinseadh san do Bhrian do thuig gur le ceilg do sheachain an cath agus a-dubhairt gurab a n-éagmais do-rin sé féin gach áthas riamh dá ndearna riamh.
>
> Maol Seachlainn King of Meath left the battle to Murchadh and Dál gCais since there was a plot between him and the Vikings not to enter the battle, and he placed [a distance of] a ploughed field between his people and the battle, and when Brian was told that he understood that it was because of a conspiracy that he [Maol Seachlainn] avoided the battle and he said that every victory that he [Maol Seachlainn] himself ever achieved was futile.[31]

Versions 2C and 2D likewise highlight the perfidious aspect of Maol Seachlainn's character:

> Cuireas Maoilseachlainn fios ós íseal go Rígh Laighean an oidhche roimh an ccaith dá rádh leis teacht do chur an chatha do bhrígh gur chuir Brian Donnchadh mac Briain agus trian an tsluaigh Mhuimhnigh mo chreacha Aoíbh cCinnsiolla, agus do gheall féin go ttréigfeadh Brian san ccaith.
>
> Maol Seachlainn sent word secretly to the King of Leinster on the eve of the battle telling him to come to fight the battle because Brian sent Donnchadh son of Brian and a third of the Munster host to plunder Uí Chinnsealaigh, and he himself promised that he would abandon Brian in the battle.[32]

[30] *FFÉ*, iii, p. 284 (ll. 4474–9) with accompanying translation on pp 285, 287.
[31] Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, p. 72.
[32] Ibid.

In some sources for Version 2B, moreover, the reader is addressed with the rhetorical question: (*ó*) *nach truadh a léightheoir an cheilg sin do bhí ag Leath Cuinn chum Muimhneach*? ('(o) reader is that plot which Leath Cuinn had against Munstermen not a pity?').[33] A particularly striking example is the reaction by the scribe Diarmuid Ó Maolchaoine (*fl.* 1764–87) from near Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare, who finished his text of *CCT* in 1787 with a direct address to his reader:

> Bíodh a fhios a léightheóir […] gurb[h]o tré fheall agus chum fealla air Bhrían Bhóirbhe mac Cinnéide chum teacht asteach ionna Árdrígh Ēirionn do-rinne Maoilseachluinn Mór, agus fir Mhídhe, an tarang úd as cath Chluana Tairbh tarsna guirt béatála agus claídhe, agus as íad do thug túarusgabháil úatha 7 dob é a mían lingneamh uim thráthnóna air a mbíodh beó do chaithibh Bhríain, Mhurchaidh, Thoirdhealb[h]aigh, Dhubhlainn, agus Dáil gCais, agus a mbīodh beó díobh do mharb[h]adh air an láithir sin, ag sin Cath Chluana Tairbh.[34]
>
> Know o reader […] that it was because of treachery and with a view to treachery against Brian Bóraimhe son of Cinnéide becoming High King of Ireland that Maol Seachlainn Mór, and the men of Meath, drew back from the battle of Clontarf across a lea-burned field and ditch, and it is they who gave a report and it was their desire to jump in the evening on all the survivors of the battalions of Brian, Murchadh, Toirdhealbhach, Dubhlaing, and Dál gCais, and kill all those alive there, that is the Battle of Clontarf.

Another compelling example is that completed *c.*1813 by the Waterford scribe Uilliam Breathnach (*fl.* 1812–18) who concluded that Maol Seachlainn's treachery amounted to a conspiracy against the men of Munster:

> Ionus gurab ē sinn Catha Cluana Tarbh 7 feall Rígh Laighion 7 Mhídhe do shaoil Gaoidhil do thabhairt fa d[h]aorsmacht 7 moghsaine Lochlainig. Acht faraoir trēim[h]se g[h]airid 'na dhíagh sinn do-rin Mac Mhurchadh Laighionn 7 Laighionnac[h]aibh sinn do thabhairt fa d[h]aorsmacht Gall, acht tiocfa[i]dh an lā a ionna mbeidh Ruagadh na Loc[h]lannach aig Muimhneachaib[h] ortha is náirbho fada uat[h]a ē.[35]
>
> So that that is the Battle of Clontarf and the treachery of the Kings of Leinster and Meath who thought to bring the Gaels under submission and bondage to the Vikings. Unfortunately however a short while after that Mac Murchadh of Leinster and the men of Leinster brought us under the slavery of Foreigners, but the day will come when they will suffer [a fate similar to] the Banishing of the Vikings by the Munstermen and let it not be far from them.

[33] Ibid., p. 73.
[34] RIA MS 24 C 14, pp 27–8.
[35] Dunnington MS 1, p. 356. This manuscript is one of two which belonged to Michael Dunnington, Lexington, Kentucky, described by Edgar M. Slotkin, 'Two Irish literary manuscripts in the Mid-West', *Éigse*, 25 (1991), 56–80.

This and much more evidence besides in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish manuscripts tells us that the scribes (especially those in Munster) were undoubtedly influenced by Keating's negative depiction of the Meath king in *FFÉ*. Crucially, however, their presentation of Maol Seachlainn as one attempting to excuse his lack of involvement in the battle of Clontarf shows a certain literary sensibility to characterization on their part, and this sensibility, in turn, further enriches the overall plot of *CCT* itself. It is also important to note that the evidence of such engagement with the material that they set about transcribing suggests that the scribal text carried with it an intimacy for them that allowed them to project their individuality onto it. When we consider, then, the overall transmission of *CCT* with its extraordinary number of transcripts, we are reminded that the scribes worked as copyists on the one hand, of course, but as inventive authors on the other, whose creative sense was provoked by their activity in dealing with their texts. Indeed, the present writer has argued that the variety of transmission of *CCT* calls into question the fixity or permanence of the scribal text in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland. In other words, instead of dealing with an authoritative, fixed or uniform text, we have to do here with a variety of texts, each with a potential for uniqueness.[36]

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It was noted at the outset of this paper that an obvious starting point for any treatment of the battle of Clontarf in later Irish tradition is *CCT*. This prose tale is but one example, albeit an important one, as four other literary re-enactments of Clontarf the historical event have also been transmitted in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish manuscripts. They too form part of the story that evolved around 1014 the historical event. Three discrete sets of annals, mainly concerned with Munster affairs, present their own particular encomium of the O'Briens of Thomond, and they accord the battle of Clontarf and events surrounding it a central place in their respective narratives. The first in this post-classical triad of annals is known as the Dublin Annals of Inisfallen, while the remaining two are described in the manuscript sources as extracts *d'Annálaibh Innis Faithlionn* ('from the Annals of Inisfallen').[37] The fourth example is that referred to in the manuscripts as *Leabhar Oiris agus annála ar chogaibh na hÉireann*, or 'Book of History and annals concerning the battles of Ireland'. The intent here again is to praise the O'Briens of Thomond and the heroic age with which this dynasty is associated.[38]

We may briefly touch on just one of the foregoing texts, the Dublin Annals of Inisfallen, which came to be thus known because of a Latin ascription given to it by

[36] For further discussion, see Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, pp 90–101.

[37] Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, 'The Dublin Annals of Inisfallen .i. na hannála i MS H.1.7, T.C.D.' in Séamus Pender (ed.), *Féilscríbhinn Torna. Tráchtaisí léanta in onóir don Ollamh Tadhg Ua Donnchadha*, *D.Litt.*, *in am a dheichiú bliana agus trí fichid*, *an ceathrú lá de mhí Mheán Fhómhair*, *1944* (Corcaigh, 1947), pp 183–202; Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail, '*Annála Inse Faithleann* an ochtú céad déag agus cath Chluain Tarbh', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland. Iris an Dá Chultúr*, 20 (2005), 104–19; Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail, 'Some observations on the *Dublin Annals of Innisfallen*', *Ériu*, 57 (2007), 133–53; Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, pp 82–90.

[38] Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, pp 77–81; Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail, 'Observations on the text known as the *Leabhar Oiris*' in Ailbhe Ó Corráin & Gordon Ó Riain (eds), *Celebrating sixty years of Celtic Studies at Uppsala University: proceedings of the eleventh symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica. Acta universitatis Upsaliensis.* Studia Celtica Upsaliensia, 9 (2013), 149–66.

the Revd Charles O'Conor (d. 1828) to distinguish it from the Bodleian Annals of Inisfallen in excerpts he printed of both in 1825.[39] The main thrust of these annals, now part one of TCD MS 1281 (fos. 14r–78v), is the recording of historical events mainly relevant to Munster from AD 250 down to AD 1320. The work was commissioned by Dr John O'Brien, Roman Catholic Bishop of Cloyne and Ross (1748–69), who was particularly interested in the role played by his eponymous ancestors in Irish history. In light of this, it should come as little surprise that the most substantial entries in this set of annals focus on matters relating to the O'Briens of Thomond. Seventeen transcripts in all of this compilation have survived.[40]

The description of events for the year 1014 is the work's first considerable entry. Brian Bóraimhe, at this point, is depicted as Ireland's gallant sovereign who, together with his heroic son Murchadh, leads the native Irish to victory. As paragons of Christian virtue, father and son are portrayed as foils to the heathen Viking invaders, but the striking feature of the entry for the year 1014 is the shift from a laconic and somewhat lacklustre style of presentation characterizing the narrative before this point, to one that is animated in tone. As with *CCT*, we find a battle of Clontarf story opening with a catalogue of the opposing forces converging to do battle at Clontarf. The narrative swiftly moves on to a duplicitioius Maol Seachlainn of Meath, a motif which, as mentioned already, ultimately derives from Keating's colourful interpretation of the Meath king's role at Clontarf:

> 1014 Kl Sluag[hadh] mór le Brian Borúmha mac Cinnéide Rígh Éireann et le Maolseachluinn Rígh Mídhe go hÁith Cliath ag tabhairt catha do Ghallaibh et do Laighnibh um a ttaoiseacha Lochlannach[a] et um Maol Mórdha mac Murchadh Rīgh Laighean gona rīog[h]ra et go [t]trí catha uime, gur chuir Maolseachloinn teachta chuige ós ísiol dā inisin gur chuir Brian Don[n]chadh mac Briain go nglasláith Dháil cCais et go [t]trían shlúagh sleachta Eōghain Mhōir air cheann chreach Laigheann et Ó cCinnsealach, et geallas féin go bhfúigfeadh Brian et deich ccéad do Mhídheachaibh leis. Ó 'd-choncadar Gaill et Laighnig Brian air uathadh sochuídhe air faithche Áith Cliath a n-oireachtas, tángadar féin seacht ccatha 'na choinne, et do roinneadar a ttrí iad féin .i. sluag[h] Lochlannach lán d'arm is d'éide ó mhullach go lár um Caralas mac Eibhricc et um Anrudh mac Eibhric, dā mhac rīgh Fionnlochlanach, et um Dolat et Conmhaol, dá thréinmhíleadha, et Gaill Áith Clíath mar aon reo. An dara slúagh .i. Maol Mórdha mac Murchadh Rīgh Laighean gona Laighnibh, et an treas sluagh le Gallaibh na nOileán um Luadar Iarla Inse hOrc, et um Bruadar taoiseach Danair, et Gaill Innse Céad, et Manainne, et Sgiticc, et Leodhasa, et Cinn Tīre, et Oirear Gaedhil [*sic*], et Coirbhreathnaicc et Breathnaicc Cille Minne [*sic*] et Coir na Liogóg gona rīoghaibh uile, et fós Gaill ó Thíre an tSneachta et ó na Gaothloíghibh Meódhanach[a].
>
> 1014 Kl. A great hosting by Brian Bóraimhe son of Cinnéide King of Ireland and Maol Seachlainn King of Meath to Dublin fighting the Foreigners and the Leinstermen, led by their Viking rulers and Maol Mórdha son of Murchadh King of Leinster together with his chiefs and

[39] *Annales Inisfalenses, ex duobus codicibus, Dubliniense et Bodleiano*, Rerum Hibernicarum Scriptores Veteres, 4 vols (Londinii, 1814–26), ii, pp 1–83, 1–122.
[40] Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, pp 267–71.

> three battalions along with him, and Maol Seachlainn sent a message to him [Maol Mórdha] secretly telling that Brian had sent Donnchadh son of Brian with the young champions of Dál gCais and a third of the hosts of the descendants of Eóghan Mór to plunder Leinster and Uí Chinnsealaigh, and he himself promised that he along with ten hundred Meathmen would leave Brian. When the Foreigners and Leinstermen saw Brian with a diminished host in a gathering on the outskirts of Dublin, they themselves advanced as seven battalions against him and divided themselves into three, i.e. a Viking host equipped with arms and armour from head to toe led by Carolus son of Eibhric and Anrudh son of Eibhric, two sons of the king of the Norwegians, and led by Dolat and Conmhaol, two strong warriors, and the Foreigners of Dublin with them. The second host, i.e. Maol Mórdha son of Murchadh King of Leinster with his Leinstermen, and the third host with the Foreigners of the Isles led by Luadar Jarl of the Orkney Islands, and Bruadar ruler of the Danes, including the Foreigners of Inis Céad, and Man, and Shetland, and Lewis, and Kintyre, and Argyll, and the Corr-Britons and Britons of Ceall Mhuine and Coir na Liogóg with all their kings, and also Foreigners from Tír an tSneachta and the Maeotian marshes.[41]

The record continues with a passage reiterating Maol Seachlainn's duplicity, while Brian Bóraimhe, by contrast, is exhalted as a warrior-king:

> Ar riaradh a shluaighte amhla san do Bhrian, do luidh féin mar aon le Murcha mac Briain 'na measg ón cceann go roile dá ndúsgadh chum crōdhachta a n-aighidh na n-allmhúrach, et ró fhoillsicc dóibh gan luighid meanma do ghabháil tré Dhonnchadh mac Bríain go [t]trian sluagh Muímhnicc d'imtheacht uatha ōir is ag creachadh Laighean et Gall do bhí; iar san nochtas dóibh gur fada bhādar fir Ēirionn fá anbhruid na Lochlannach n-allmhúrdha ag marbhadh iomad ríghthe et príomhthaoiseacha et ag sīorargain 's ag losgad[h] dúnta et cealla et eaglaise Dé go mionnaibh Naomh; et ró ráidh sé do ghuth árd: 'A cháirde, ró thug an Coimdhe cómhachta et calmachta díbhse aniúgh chum an annfhlathas Lochlannach fór fhearaibh Éirionn do shríanadh go bhruinne [*sic*] an bhrátha, et chuim na n-iomad feall et ceallairgthe sin do dhīog[h]ailt fhorra an lá so 'nar fhuilling Críost féin bás ar bhúr soin.' Et taisbeánas dóibh an tan san an chros-fhighil ina láimh chlídhe et a chloídheamh go ndornchlainn óir ina láimh dheis, dá fhoillsiúghadh dóibh go bhfúigheadh féin bás mar aon leó dá cosnamh.
> Iar san gabhas Brian et Murchadh go sluagh Dáil cCais ag ionnsaighe lucht na [n]deich ccēad lúithreach um dhís m[h]ac rīgh Fionnlochlanach, ach d'ēalaigh Maolseachloinn gona Mhidheachaibh, mar do gheall an oidhche roimhe sin, et do chuir gort eatartha et an chath; acht nír luighdig sin meanmain Bhriain ná an Dáil cCais, ōir do chosnamhadar an cath go ró dhásachtach.[42]

[41] TCD MS 1281, part one, fo. 22v.
[42] Ibid., fo. 23r–23v.

> After Brian arranged his hosts thus, he himself went together with Murchadh son of Brian amongst them from one to another encouraging them to valiant deeds against the foreigners, and he indicated to them that they should not lose heart at the departure from them of Donnchadh son of Brian and a third of Munster hosts for they were plundering the men of Leinster and the Foreigners; after that he [Brian Bóraimhe] revealed to them that the men of Ireland were for a long time under the oppression of the foreign Vikings killing many kings and chief leaders and constantly plundering and burning fortresses and monasteries and churches of God containing saints' relics; and he said in a loud voice: 'Friends, the Lord granted you powers and strengths today to curb the Viking oppression of the men of Ireland till Doomsday, and to exact vengeance for those many treacheries and church-plunders this day on which Christ himself died on your behalf.' And he showed them then the crucifix in his left hand and his gold-hilted sword in his right hand, revealing to them that he himself would die together with them protecting it.
> After that Brian and Murchadh and the Dál gCais host set about attacking the ten hundred armoured men led by the two sons of the king of the Norwegians, but Maol Seachlainn absconded with his Meathmen, as he promised the night before, and established a distance of a field between them and the battle; but this did not diminish Brian's courage nor that of Dál gCais, for they contested the fight very fiercely.

Clearly, Brian Bóraimhe, as depicted here, is not only a source of strength for his men, but he is also protector of the crucifix (*crosfhighil*). Rather than adopting the more passive role of an elderly king who opts to remain in prayer apart from the combat, he is a king pitted against foreign oppression and plundering at Clontarf, one who above all else is an active defender of the cross. Valiantly brandishing a crucifix in one hand and wielding a sword in the other, this is a portrayal of the Munster king that would undoubtedly have appealed to his descendant, he who commissioned the work, the aforenamed Dr John O'Brien. Indeed, it would also have engaged the same reader whose episcopate was one of vigilance and steadfastness in the defence of the liberties of the Catholic church in eighteenth-century Ireland.[43]

These annals' dramatic description of Brian Bóraimhe circulating among his troops does not, it seems, occur in other Irish-language sources. However, it does appear in English-language tradition, for example, in that nationalist ballad by William Kenealy (1828–76) 'Stand ye now for Erin's glory!', which is essentially a poetic paraphrase of the above passage.[44] Sylvester O'Halloran (1728–1807) also reproduces his version of this vivid description in his *A general history of Ireland*:

> Brian rode through the ranks with a crucifix in one hand, and his drawn sword in the other. He exhorted them as he passed along, 'to do their duty as soldiers and Christians, in the cause of their religion and their country. He reminded them of all the distresses their ancestors were reduced to, by the perfidious and sanguinary Danes, strangers to religion and humanity! That *these* their successors waited impatiently to renew the same scenes of

[43] For Dr O'Brien's episcopal difficulties, see James Coombes, *A bishop of penal times. The life and times of John O'Brien, Bishop of Cloyne and Ross 1701–1769* (Cork, 1981), pp 40–69.
[44] Edward Hayes, *The ballads of Ireland*, 2 vols (London, 1855), i, pp 81–3.

> devastation and cruelty, and, by way of anticipation, (says he), they have fixed on the very day on which Christ was crucified, to destroy the country of his greatest votaries; but that God, whose cause you are to fight this day, will be present with you, and deliver his enemies into your hands.' So saying, he proceeded towards the center to lead on his troops to action; but the chiefs of the army with one voice requested he would retire from the field of battle, on account of his great age, and leave the gallant Morrogh the chief command.[45]

Given the similarity between this account and that in the Dublin Annals of Inisfallen, it is difficult to imagine that O'Halloran did not consult the Irish-language source for his own history. Besides, Brian Bóraimhe thus presented would have resonated with O'Halloran, a Limerick native with an abiding interest in Irish history.

The respective accounts by Kenealy and O'Halloran remind us, of course, that any discussion of the battle of Clontarf in later Irish tradition must also incorporate the important parallel world of English-language accounts. Even though it is true that the importance which Keating's *FFÉ* attached to the Uí Bhriain in Ireland's history finds parallels in subsequent Irish-language tradition, as outlined above, the evidence holds equally true for the work's influence on English-language tradition concerning the battle of Clontarf. In fact, most of these accounts, that by Sylvester O'Halloran included, follow Keating in representing an ineffectual and duplicitous Maol Seachlainn on the one hand, and an honourable Brian Bóraimhe on the other, one acclaimed as a pious ruler and tenacious protector of territory.[46] Moreover, English-language writers concentrated on the issue of the high kingship, although some softened their characterization of Maol Seachlainn as the disgraceful and disgraced sovereign. Charles O'Conor of Bellanagare (Béal Átha na gCarr), Co. Roscommon, for instance, is unusual among eighteenth-century writers for his somewhat ambivalent presentation of Brian Bóraimhe in his *Dissertations on the history of Ireland*. O'Conor devotes little attention to the conflict itself at Clontarf, except to emphasize its internecine character, rather he takes particular exception to the negative portrayal of Maol Seachlainn:

> Some writers, who drew most of their materials from modern *Romances*, accuse him of a malicious Desertion at the Battle of *Clontarfe*: But this account being irreconcilable with the whole Tenour of his Life and Conduct, and not in the least supported by *Tigernach*, or any other Writer who lived near the Period in Question, must be deservedly rejected.[47]

The specific passage in the Annals of Tigernach intended by O'Conor here is that part of Maol Seachlainn's obituary where he is hailed as 'the tower of supporting generosity and nobleness of the whole of the world' (*tuir chongbala einigh ⁊ uaisle*

[45] Sylvester O'Halloran, *A general history of Ireland*, 2 vols (London, 1778), ii, pp 262–3, with italics here and in the subsequent passages in English reproduced from the original; cf. Clare O'Halloran, 'The triumph of "virtuous liberty": representation of the Vikings and Brian Boru in eighteenth-century histories', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland. Iris an Dá Chultúr*, 22 (2007), 151–63 at 161.
[46] Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, pp 25–36.
[47] Charles O'Connor, *Dissertations on the history of Ireland* (Dublin, 1766), pp 264–5. The work was first published under the title *Dissertations on the antient history of Ireland* (Dublin, 1753), and a new and heavily reworked second edition appeared in 1766; cf. Clare O'Halloran, *Golden ages and barbarous nations: antiquarian debate and cultural politics in Ireland c.1750–1800* (Cork, 2004), pp 24–7, 87, 147; and Flanagan, in this volume, above.

iarthair domain uile).[48] Interestingly, although O'Conor was guided by Keating in comparing the qualities of both rulers, Maol Seachlainn emerges as the principled one who deserves recognition for honouring the title of High King by gracefully relinquishing it; and, Brian Bóraimhe remains for him a provincial king and usurper of the title:

> He gave the Title of *Brian* the best Colour it could bear, that of conferring his own upon him. He hereby preserved an able and virtuous Prince from the Odium of open Usurpation; and he supported him afterwards, as he engaged to do, by his whole Interest, which was still very considerable. The World was amazed at such a Conduct, and may be so still; because Mankind, unworthy of so exalted a Character, seldom frame a proper Judgement of it.[49]

O'Conor's argument continues by undermining the notion of a disgraceful, and disgraced, reign of Maol Seachlainn as advanced by Keating, and attributes instead the success of Brian Bóraimhe's rule to the benevolent support of his predecessor:

> MALACHY II, well deserved the Crown he resigned, and *Brian* departed from his Magnanimity in accepting it. By leaving it where it was, he might have the Merit of establishing a more orderly Form of Government in the royal *Hy-Niall* Family, and of laying the Foundations of a new Monarchy, which might have preserved the Nation from its approaching Destruction. *Brian* had not the Glory of doing this, and, perhaps, he had not the Power.
>
> On this great Man's Elevation to the Throne, he was rather to be pitied than envied. Without the Co-operation of the Prince who resigned to him, he would probably be obliged himself to resign in Favour of some other powerful Oligarch, or reign with his Faction in the Places subservient to his Government. With *Malachy*'s Assistance, he actually governed over most of the Provinces.[50]

O'Conor's is a conflicting view to that of O'Halloran: the latter highlighted the military and heroic aspects of medieval Ireland, and, as such, countered O'Conor's view of a society severely weakened by factionalism among its provincial kings and lesser chiefs.[51]

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To summarize, then, it is clear from the evidence in Irish-language sources that the battle of Clontarf became a literary creation – or, indeed, a re-creation – in later Irish tradition. Imaginative compilers formulated their own enhanced interpretation of the historical battle of 1014. The result of one such imaginative approach, and the main focus of this paper, was the Modern Irish prose tale *CCT*. As pointed out in the

[48] *AT* 1022, accompanied by Whitley Stokes's translation.
[49] O'Conor, *Dissertations on the history of Ireland*, p. 259.
[50] Ibid., pp 261, 262.
[51] Their conflicting view of Irish history in general led to their disagreement over the value of James Macpherson's *Ossian*, as discussed by O'Halloran, *Golden ages and barbarous nations*, pp 108–11.

concluding discussion, however, this text is but one of a cluster that forms part of a greater story about the battle of Clontarf, both in Irish- and in English-language sources. Taking this material in its entirety, it developed and promoted what the present writer has termed elsewhere an 'O'Brien Saga', whereby the O'Briens of Thomond emerge as key figures in Ireland's glorious past.[52]

[52] Ní Úrdail, '*Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*: establishing a literary canon', p. 148; Ní Úrdail, 'The literary legacy of Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*', p. 52; Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, p. 77.