

## A Cork Scribe in Victorian London *Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail*

### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The focus in this chapter is a Cork scribe, Thomas O'Connor (*alias* Tomás Ó Conchubhair), who emigrated to London in 1820 where he worked as a tailor and died around 1870. I first came upon him while conducting research some years ago on a text known in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish manuscripts as *Leabhar Oiris* (Book of History), which is essentially an encomium of the O'Briens of Thomond and this dynasty's battles for supremacy in Ireland in the tenth and eleventh centuries.<sup>1</sup> I was intrigued to discover that of this work's twenty-six sources, one was completed outside Ireland in 1848 by O'Connor "in the city of London" (*a ccathair Londoine*).<sup>2</sup> My subsequent findings have uncovered eighteen extant manuscripts written entirely or in part by this Cork scribe when he was living in London, and these are preserved today in the National Library of Ireland, the Royal Irish Academy, University College Cork, NUI Galway and St. Malachy's College, Belfast.<sup>3</sup> A further source containing O'Connor's Irish translation of the first book of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (written about the year 1860) is now lost, but a copy may be consulted on microfilm.<sup>4</sup>

This scribal corpus as a whole encompasses prose and poetry in Irish and English (some of the poems being O'Connor's own compositions), and while there is evidence to suggest that our scribe set about producing handwritten books before emigrating to London, those in his hand that have survived were all written during his lifetime in the Victorian city. He also compiled extensive lexical lists in Irish with accompanying translations in English, and added copious explanatory notes and glosses in English to his scribal texts in Irish. Moreover, he corresponded regularly in English both with family members at home and, in particular between 1847 and 1855, with the Irish-language scholar, publisher and scribe, John O'Daly (c. 1800-78).<sup>5</sup> The addresses accompanying his correspondence recall the *milieu* of another contemporary man of letters, namely Charles Dickens. We find him writing from "12 Duke St. Jermyn St." in Piccadilly between 1847 and 1849, for example, except that in one instance (July 1849) he was based in "92 Chancery Lane" in Holborn, and by the year 1855 "19 Shepherd St. Oxford St." in Mayfair was his address.<sup>6</sup> O'Connor's movement from place to place within a short number of years is probably best explained by his work as a tailor and tallies, in fact, with contemporary evidence concerning the peripatetic nature of foreign tailors who migrated to London during the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

Books (handwritten and in print) were a key part of this Cork man's life in Victorian London. For instance, in a letter written around 1849, he tells John O'Daly that he had "procured a card for the Irish Ms library in the British Museum" on Great Russell Street.<sup>8</sup> He visited "Tegg's Establishment" — the bookshop and publishing company run by William Tegg, which during his lifetime was located in Pancras Lane and in Queen Street.<sup>9</sup> He was a frequenter of "Orr's on the Strand" — the publishing business run by William Somerville Orr and situated on London's main thoroughfare, the Strand.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, we may infer from one letter that he was a regular caller to booksellers in Holywell Street and Holborn.<sup>11</sup>

It seems likely that having a skilled craft as a tailor as well as being literate in Irish and in English were important factors in ensuring O'Connor's integration into his host society in London. This may explain why he appears not to have returned to Ireland on emigrating to Britain, thereby leaving unfulfilled the wish expressed in a letter (mentioned further down in our discussion) by his brother Michael that the two be reunited again in "the dear 'old land'." His correspondence contains clear and informed views on the Irish language, and it presents, indeed, a man who preserved his Irish identity by keeping abreast of contemporary political and social issues in Ireland via *The Nation* newspaper. John Denvir's contemporary study of Irish tailors living in nineteenth-century Britain is of particular relevance here in that it gives some indication of what O'Connor's own life there may have been like:

It is an admitted fact that you find a greater amount of political intelligence among tailors than any other class of artisans. The nature of their occupation in some measure explains this. It is not a noisy craft, like the smith's or carpenter's, and, without neglecting their work, a number of them in the one room can readily carry on political and other discussions. It is quite a usual thing in London and elsewhere for the men in a workshop to employ one of their number to read a newspaper, while the rest listen to and digest for future discussion the news of the day and other matters. The Irish are undoubtedly the cream of the craft. In fact, the Irish tailor, being gifted with the imaginative powers of his race, is often a real artist. In some of the best and most fashionable shops in London you will find the Irish cutter at the top of the tree, and, to his credit be it said, he is generally a sterling patriot.<sup>12</sup>

These observations point to an environment informed by debate and discussion, especially for Irish tailors who migrated to London yet who remained fiercely loyal to their native homeland. Not only is it evident in O'Connor's correspondence that *The Nation* was an important source of information for him on Irish political and cultural matters, as noted above, but it is also clear from his political verse that he was a supporter of Young Ireland and the Irish Confederation. As will be evident presently, William Smith O'Brien (1803-64), in particular, features in O'Connor's verse where he is hailed as Ireland's *buachaill bán* (fairhaired boy).

Thomas O'Connor, then, is one of a handful of Irish scribes that we know of who emigrated to Britain where he produced handwritten books both for his own use, and for that of other interested parties in London and in his native homeland. His time of departure to London accords with the first wave of emigration by pre-Famine migrants from Ireland during the 1820s for whom Britain was the principal destination, whether that movement was temporary, seasonal, or permanent.<sup>13</sup> Given that no passenger lists exist of people who crossed the Irish sea by ship to Britain — such passengers to England, Scotland and Wales being essentially regarded as internal migrants — it is not possible to track those involved, and very little is really known about how their personal stories unfolded thereafter. O'Connor's manuscripts and his correspondence are thus especially valuable for the insight which they give into the life of an Irish *émigré* living in Victorian London during the first half of the nineteenth century.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

In an intriguing biographical note in one of his manuscripts, our scribe states that he was born in the townland of Knockanevin in the civil parish of Templemolaga in north Cork in 1798. His father was Patrick, son of Thomas son of Michael son of Thomas *an tSneachta* (of the Snow), and the sobriquet by which the family came to be known derived originally, he tells us, from Nóra *an tSneachta*.<sup>14</sup> A common pattern of Irish-language sobriquets, of course, is that an adjective referring to hair colouring or to the colour of the skin often accompanies the personal name.<sup>15</sup> In this case, the choice of the noun *sneachta* (snow) may be due to the fact that the eponymous Nóra had hair as white as snow, or indeed that she was of remarkably fair complexion, or even that she may have been an albino.

Writing to John O'Daly on 5 October 1847, O'Connor recalled in passing that it had been twenty-seven years since he was in Ireland — a throwaway remark that fixes nonetheless the year of his departure to London to 1820.<sup>16</sup> Additional biographical information may be pieced together from a number of disparate sources. In the 1851 England census, for example, “Thomas O'Connor,” born in Ireland and aged fifty-two, is recorded as residing at that time in 19 Shepherd Street, London, with his wife “Bridget O'Connor,” also fifty-two years of age and from Ireland, along with the couple's children, Mary, aged twenty-five years and born in Bristol, and John, aged one-and-a-half years and born in London.<sup>17</sup> We know from a lament composed by O'Connor himself, moreover, that a second daughter, Caitlín, died on 19 May 1845.<sup>18</sup> Other nuggets of information are contained in the following letter, dated 23 December 1893, from Monsignor James O'Laverty, PP (1866-1906) in Holywood, Co. Down, and addressed to fellow Gaelic revivalist Fr Eugene O'Growney (1863-99):

In looking through old MSS, which I purchased in Dublin a good number of years ago, I find a Translation into Irish of the 1st Book of Paradise Lost. It is by one Thomas O'Connor, who, from letters accompanying it, seems to have been a tailor, resident for many years in London, and it would appear was designated Tamas [*sic*] *an tSneachta*. He had a brother named Michael, also an Irish poet, who wrote to him from Mitchelstown on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1861, complaining that he had not heard from him for more than 20 years. Thomas was then a widower, but seems to have remarried, for on Dec. 15<sup>th</sup> 1870 a Mrs O'Connor writes from 11 Gilbert SL, Oxford SL, to a charitable lady seeking assistance for her husband as “being very old and sick having no means + very poor.” One of the letters from Michael to his brother is written from Corroughmore probably near Mitchelstown and asks him would he not wish to return to the old land and be buried in “Marshallstown.”

This [is] all I can discern regarding the poet, who ventured to translate into Irish the Paradise Lost.<sup>19</sup>

Monsignor O'Laverty's account here proves, of course, that our scribe was still living in London in December 1870, albeit in abject poverty. The two letters he mentions by “a brother named Michael” have also survived and supplement the biographical information captured in the 1851 census record. In the first of these (dated 15 July 1861), Michael O'Connor alludes to the death of Thomas's “loving wife” as well as to the marriage of the couple's daughter Mary. He refers, moreover, to living at one time in “the great metropolis of England” but his contact with Thomas ceased on his return to Ireland. It would appear that Michael, like his brother, was also a tailor by profession as he requests in the same letter “some patterns by post they would be very

welcome. And I would pay the postage myself.” His concluding wishes are that Thomas accept his “rough scroll as a sincere token of remembrance a pledge of affection, undying love and esteem.”<sup>20</sup> These sentiments were evidently accepted in the spirit in which they were given as some weeks later we find Michael responding to a letter (now lost) from his brother in London. Dated 4 August 1861 with “Corroughgorm” given as the address, the letter expresses sorrow at the death of those close to Thomas — “I mean your wife and daughter [Caitlín].” Michael wonders whether he will ever be able to welcome his brother home from London “to the dear ‘old land’” and wishes to learn more “about Mary’s husband” and his “trade.”<sup>21</sup>

Evidence of further contact between our scribe and members of his family at home re-emerges in 1865. On 30 July of that year, Michael, writing from “Corroughgorm,” requests that his brother in London “inform” him as to how his son “Patt is getting on” in that city and hopes that Thomas may have “the kindness of advising and directing him [...] for I know the counsel of old age is necessary for the young and inexperienced mind.” It appears that Thomas had enquired about the contents of a manuscript in his brother’s possession as Michael concludes his short letter with “the names of the pieces contained in the manuscript.”<sup>22</sup> Some days later, on 9 August, “Kate Connor” sent a letter from “Corragurm” thanking her “dear brother” Pat for informing the family that he and “uncle Tom and wife” were well, thus confirming that our scribe had remarried by then. Their mother’s wishes, Kate continues, are that Pat attend “Mass every Sunday and she telles [*sic*] you not to make free with any bad company,” and the family hopes that he may return home to Ireland soon.<sup>23</sup>

Taking these family letters together, it appears that Michael O’Connor and his son Pat lived — for a while at least — in London. This also applies, it seems, in the case of the Cork scribes Patrick Dunlea (*alias* Pádraig Ó Duinnshléibhe) of Ship-pool near Innishannon and Edmond Copely (*alias* Éamonn Caplas / Edmundus Caple).<sup>24</sup> Besides, the evidence in their manuscripts suggests that these scribes befriended O’Connor, and it appears that all three formed part of an active literary coterie in London during the 1830s and 1840s, which produced original compositions in verse as well transcripts of texts in Irish (both prose and poetry) from earlier periods of the language. It is worth remembering, of course, that by the 1820s, ferry services operating between Cork and Bristol accommodated migrants from Munster and South Leinster who took the southern route from Cork to Bristol, South Wales and London.<sup>25</sup> The manuscripts by O’Connor, Dunlea and Copely help us to track these scribes to their ultimate destination, London itself, though it also seems possible that a degree of seasonal migration may have been involved in the case of Copely and Dunlea.

## LIFE IN LONDON

The Irish Confederation, the nationalist independence movement established in January of 1847 by members of Young Ireland who had seceded from Daniel O’Connell’s Repeal Association, found an eager following among Irish migrants in London.<sup>26</sup> In March of that year, for example, plans to form confederate clubs were discussed at a meeting in the “Green Man” tavern on Berwick Street and by December 1847 the “London Confederates” were well established in the Victorian city.<sup>27</sup> Most of its members in Ireland, albeit cultural nationalists, were not proficient in Irish, and even though the language may have been an important symbol of identity for them, their focus was not primarily on promoting its revival. The aforementioned John O’Daly, also a member, was an exception, in that he believed that confederate

clubs should run formal classes for the teaching of Irish in order to ensure both the language's survival in Irish-speaking parts of Ireland as well as its revival in English-speaking parts of the country.<sup>28</sup> The "London Confederates" held similar views, as is borne out, for instance, by an advertisement published in *The Nation* on 2 October 1847 "on the subject of an Irish language class in London."<sup>29</sup>

Not only did confederate clubs in London succeed in setting up formal classes in Irish, but our own Thomas O'Connor was appointed tutor for interested members. In the following passage, from a letter dated 5 October 1847, we find him requesting that John O'Daly send over copies of his primer *Féin-Theagasc Gaoidheilge. Self-Instruction in Irish*, the first edition of which had appeared in 1846:

The Irish Confederation has formed an Irish Class here and they are calling on me to get them Irish Books. If you could send over about 2 dozen of your Elementary you would confer a lasting obligation on us. Send them either to the Confederation 83 Dean Street Soho Square or to Orr's on the Strand. I saw [sic] by the Nation Newspaper that you were over the Irish Class in the Dr Doyle's Club. I like to see that the Confederation are encouraging the Language and you are lending all your aid to it.<sup>30</sup>

A set structure quickly evolved for the weekly meetings hosted by the confederate club in Soho where "Mr O'Connor" came to be regarded as an effective tutor. Thus, a report on London's "Davis Club" published in *The Nation* on 15 January 1848 stated:

This Club holds its meetings three times every week. On Monday we hold a general public meeting open to all persons, at which the principles of the Irish Confederation are explained, and lectures are occasionally delivered. We enrol members on this occasion. On Wednesday we read the papers and books belonging to the Club. The Irish class, consisting of about 20 young men, exceedingly anxious to acquire a correct knowledge of the language of their forefathers, is instructed by its respected tutor Mr O'Connor.<sup>31</sup>

This same report referred to "presents of books" received by the club as well as the following newspapers which members could consult: *The Nation*, *The London and Liverpool Advertiser*, *The Cork Examiner* and *The Limerick Advertiser*. In addition, the club had forwarded a contribution "for six copies of *Peter Carroll's Register* and for *The Dublin University Magazine*," and Thomas Daly, Thomas O'Connor, Mr James J. Fitzgibbon and Timothy O'Mahony would act as vice presidents for six months.

O'Connor also touches on Thomas Daly in his aforementioned letter to John O'Daly of 5 October 1847 where he describes him there as "a nice sensible young Fellow," albeit "not an Irish scholar," who was born in London.<sup>32</sup> He entrusted some scribal material, moreover, to that same "sensible young Fellow" to be delivered to John O'Daly on one of his trips to Ireland.<sup>33</sup> We may note in passing here that when the French revolution of 1848 sparked hopes of an imminent revolt in Ireland, Thomas Daly articulated the new mood by requesting that confederate club members form a rifle brigade; and he recommended learning both "La Marseillaise" and "Fall, Flag of Tyrants."<sup>34</sup> This in itself gives some idea of the revolutionary euphoria in London at that time, as captured by a member of the same club that employed Thomas O'Connor as its Irish-language tutor.

Teaching Irish, rather than forming part of any rifle brigade, seems to have remained O'Connor's role in the Confederation. By 18 September 1848, he was requesting more copies of John O'Daly's "Book" and expressed the hope that the two would soon meet in person in London:

I hope I will have the pleasure of seeing you in London ere long if you can spare time. I send you the names of a few subscribers to your Book viz. Mr John Jessep 12 Duke St. Jermyn Street London, 2 copies. Likewise Messers [David] Glasco [*sic*], Donald Matheson, David O'Keeffe, Arthur O'Leary and Wm Lynch, one copy each.<sup>35</sup>

Three of the foregoing, in fact, feature among members of the Soho club of the London Confederates who had forwarded subscriptions to the movement in the Autumn of 1847: "Donald Matheson 1s," "David Glasgow, 2s 6d," and "David O'Keeffe 2s 6d."<sup>36</sup> A fourth, "Wm Lynch," is also likely to have been a member of the London Confederates and is probably the William Lynch who, according to a letter bound into one of O'Connor's manuscripts, was a chemist based in Brook Green, Hammersmith, West London.<sup>37</sup> Originally from the Mitchelstown area, a lament was addressed to him on the death of his father, also William (Uilliam Ó Loingsigh), "who died in Galbally [Co. Limerick] the twenty-fifth of August 1841."<sup>38</sup>

How long Thomas O'Connor continued in his role as Irish-language tutor in a formal capacity is not clear, but it would seem that he also provided private tuition. This is the implication of a note (4 July 1849) by "R. Atkins" addressed to O'Connor at "92 Chancery Lane City," in which he expressed his hope "to be able to resume my study of the Irish Language with you which I shall do with much pleasure."<sup>39</sup> This may also apply in the case of "J. Mc Swiny" of "13 Clarence St. Waterloo Town, Bethnal Green," who on "13<sup>th</sup> 1847 [*sic*]" informed O'Connor that he would "be at leisure on tomorrow and will do myself the pleasure of spending a few hours with you."<sup>40</sup>

## POETRY

As was the case with many Irish scribes in the modern era, O'Connor was also a poet, and almost thirty poems have come down to us which we may attribute with certainty to him.<sup>41</sup> Two, in particular, are personal in nature, the first being a lament on the death of his daughter Caitlín in May 1845. Beginning *Éistidh feasta, a charaidh, go scéithfead / éacht is easba is measa dá mb'fhéidir* (Listen, friend, and I will reveal / a great loss and worse death if it were possible), the poet reveals his own grief and that of his wife as a result of their terrible loss.<sup>42</sup> The second poem, another lament, begins *A dhearbhráthair dob fhearr fós dá bhfaca mé riamh* (O best ever brother of all that I've ever seen), the brother in question being Pádraig "the hero" (*an leóghan*) who died in 1832. It employs a common motif found in Irish-language laments, that of otherworldly women mourning the dead one. In this case, we find them weeping at the waters of the Funshion, which river rises in the Galty Mountains, flows southwest towards Kildorrery, Co. Cork, before eventually joining the River Blackwater north-east of Fermoy:

*Atá bean sídhe Chonchubhair go dubhach ag sileadh na ndeór  
Is Áine chiúin fá smúit ag frasadh 'na cómhair  
Aoibheall chlúmhair na Mumhan fá scamalaibh bróin*

*Cois Fuinnsean úir mo phúir! mar ar feartuigheadh an leóghan.*

*Fáisc, a líog, fád dhíon an leóghan so fút  
Is congaibh i dtaisce gan scaipeadh an luaithreadh id chluíid  
Luan na Breithe ar sméideadh Ríogh na ndúil  
Pádraig Apstal is Molaga ag díon an cholúir.<sup>43</sup>*

Connor's fairy woman is mournfully shedding tears and gentle Anne in grief crying profusely; renowned Aoibheall of Munster under clouds of sorrow near the fresh Funshion alas! where the hero was interred.

Embrace, o flagstone, under your protection this lion beneath you, and keep safe [and] unscattered the ashes in your protection; [till] Judgement Day at the beckoning of the King of the elements, [may] Patrick Apostle and Molaga protect the dear one.

The motif of the grieving otherworldly women suggests on the one hand the general sense of sorrow which permeates Munster on the death of this "best ever brother," while it conveys on the other the poet's deep regard for his native parish and its environs through which "the fresh Funshion" flows. That Molaga, moreover, of all the Irish holy men and women, is pressed into service here along with one of Ireland's principal saints, may seem unusual, unless we bear O'Connor's native credentials in mind: his native parish of Templemolaga was named after the saint, while the townland of Knockanevin where he spent his formative years was where the saint is said to have founded his first church.<sup>44</sup>

Apart from the foregoing two laments, O'Connor's compositions are mostly political poems of the *aisling*-type. His main concern is Ireland's freedom from what he regarded as the tyranny of English rule and this in spite of (or perhaps indeed because of) living for some fifty years in London. The Young Irishman William Smith O'Brien emerges above all as his "dearest love" (*míle stór*):

*Anmhaoín is mioscais le binb is gaoi 'gus móid  
Fealladh 'gus dalladh ar an aicme do dhíol mo leóghan,  
Le deónadh Mhic Muire beidh briseadh ortha is scaoileadh fós  
'S mé i dtosach an chatha dá strathadh le mhíle stór.<sup>45</sup>*

Poverty and hatred, venom, darts of pain and oaths [of destruction], betrayal and blinding be upon the mob who sold my hero; with the help of the Son of Mary destruction will befall them and dispersal too, and I in the vanguard directing it with my dearest love.

In another *aisling*-type poem Smith O'Brien is hailed as "the fairhaired boy" (*an buachaill bán*) who will return from overseas to rid Ireland finally of foreign persecution. O'Connor's millenarian assurance is that once all foreigners are driven out, "William," in enjoying the "open affection" (*saor-chion*) of the Irish, will become their rightful leader:

*Éist a chéibhfionn is scuir dod ghéar-ghol,  
Cé fada ár dtréigint is do bhuidhean ar fán,  
Beidh slóighte tréinfhear le hairm ghéara*

*Ag ruagadh béaraibh arís tar sáil,  
Beidh maidhm is raobadh ar Ghoill an éirligh  
Dá scuabadh i n-éinfheacht as críochaibh Fáil,  
Is go deo 'na dhéigh sin beidh Uilliam fá shaor-chion  
Is chifir Éire aged Bhuachaill Bán.<sup>46</sup>*

Listen o fairhaired one and refrain from weeping: though we have long been abandoned and your troop scattered, throngs of strongmen with sharp weapons will drive the tyrants again o'er the sea; there will be defeat and uprooting of the slaughtering foreigners, routing them in one swoop out of Ireland, and forever thereafter William will enjoy open affection, and you'll see Ireland belonging to your Fairhaired Boy.

The influence of contemporary balladry in English is also evident in O'Connor's political verse. Political sentiments, as conveyed in Irish-language poetry, did not always accord with those propounded in *The Nation* during the 1840s, for example, and to this end the Young Irelanders looked to translations into Irish of political ballads in English.<sup>47</sup> The romanticism pervasive in Thomas Moore's songs did not find a parallel in Irish either, and translations of this material were also in demand at that time. The heading accompanying one such translation by O'Connor reads: "A translation from Moore's Irish Melodies — 'O Breathe not his Name' — 1840, Thomas O'Connor."<sup>48</sup> Moore's original of two verses commemorates Robert Emmet's historic utterance during his famous speech on foot of his trial for high treason in 1803, in which he demanded that his epitaph should not be written until his country had taken her place among the nations of the earth:

Oh! breathe not his name, let it sleep in the shade,  
Where cold and unhonour'd his relics are laid:  
Sad, silent, and dark, be the tears that we shed,  
As the night-dew that falls on the grass o'er his head.<sup>49</sup>

Unlike the original in English where the word "shade" in the first line here might at best be lightly ambivalent, suggesting the shade or disembodied soul resting in the shade, O'Connor's text is far more explicit:

*Ó! ná luadh amháin a ainm, léig do codladh 'san scáth  
Mar a bhfuil go fuar neamh-aineamhach a thaibhse ar lár  
Ciúin ceasnuightheach dubhach biodh ár ndeóra go trom  
Mar an drúcht oidhche thuiteann ar an bhféar ós a chionn.<sup>50</sup>*

Instead of "his relics" (*a thaisí*), he gives us "his ghost" (*a thaibhse*) resting "in the shade" (*'san scáth*) in the first couplet. Thus, in this translation, Robert Emmet lives on as a ghost among his people who must remain "troubled, concerned" (*ceasnuightheach* in the second couplet) about his unwritten epitaph. Indeed, it would seem that O'Connor here is stoking the embers of clandestine revolutionary activity towards a free Ireland which would "take her place among the nations of the earth."

A second notable example is O'Connor's poem beginning *Diobháil mhór is díth dhamh féin* (Great destruction and woe has befallen me), a lament for Owen Roe O'Neill (*alias* Eoghan Rua Ó Néill, d. 1649), champion of the Ulster Catholic cause,



who returned to Ireland from the Spanish Netherlands and defeated Robert Monro at Benburb in June 1646:

*Díobháil mhór is díth dhamh féin,  
Nó do neach ar bith beo fuair comhrá do bhéil!  
Bhfuil dul 'san tsaol dá cruaidh croí  
Ná bheith ' caoine[adh] fan mbás sin Eoghan [Uí Néill].  
Och! ochón! is mise ' milleadh!  
Faraor géar éagfaidh tuilleadh!  
Súd é an t-ár ba mhó 'san gcruinne,  
Och! is tá tú i gcré.<sup>51</sup>*

Great destruction and woe has befallen me, or befallen any living person whom you addressed! Is there ever an event in life that hardened a heart more than lamenting that death of Owen O'Neill. Och! woe! I have been destroyed! Alas more will die! That was the greatest destruction in the world, och! and you are in soil.

Thomas Davis, too, recalled the historical event at Benburb in his own famous ballad "The Lament for Owen Roe" which first appeared in *The Nation* on 19 November 1842.<sup>52</sup> Davis, in fact, was the newspaper's most prolific writer of ballads, composing almost fifty over a period of three years during the first half of the 1840s.<sup>53</sup> Even though the date of O'Connor's lament is not certain, it seems reasonable to suggest that it was also composed about this time and that the English political ballads printed in *The Nation* were the catalyst in his case.

Among the friends that feature in O'Connor's correspondence in verse, the aforementioned Cork scribe Edmond Copely appears to have been part of an active literary coterie in London along with O'Connor during the 1830s and 1840s. One of Copely's poems "to his dear friend" (*dá charuid ionmhuin*), beginning *A chara mo chléibh do phríomh-fhuil chalma* (O beloved friend of brave stock), offers the following advice:

*Seachain ná géilligh féin do mheabhail-chlis  
Grathain an éithig do thréig an tAifreann,  
Is Muire, Banaltra an Áird-Mhic cneasta  
Gach tráth dá hainm le gráin thug aithis di,  
Óró 'gus masla go mór,  
An feallaire faon Luthérus ceannann,  
Do shéan na reachta maraon is Cailbhin uilc,  
Óró 'gus tuille den chóip,  
Dá gcabhair ba shaothrach Récs na Sacsan  
Ghaibh céim is ceannas ós cheann na hEaglaise,  
Óró is ba dhainid sin dóibh.<sup>54</sup>*

Beware do not succumb to deceitful tricks: the lying mob who deserted the Mass, and Mary, Nurse of the gentle High Son, always her name [uttered] with a hatred which reproaches her — oho and extensively with insult. The foolish deceiver white-headed Luther, who along with evil Calvin denied the laws entirely — oho and more of the band. Helping them the king of the Saxons

[Henry VIII] was most active taking position and leadership over the Church — oho and that was woe in store for them.

These lines establish an obvious distinction between a devout member of the Catholic church such as O'Connor and those designated in religious terms as *grathain an éithig* (the lying mob) who have renounced Catholic teaching. While this distinction informs Irish Jacobite poetry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it clearly was still meaningful to Copely and his coterie long after the demise of Jacobitism and the Stuart cause.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, *cóip* as in *tuille den chóip* (more of the band) above, is a pejorative term here, carrying the same negative connotations as in the Jacobite idiom when designating those who differ from the Irish on ethnic, religious, or linguistic grounds.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, in a second poem addressed to O'Connor and beginning *A shaorfhir de phréimhshliocht na seabhac gan ghruaim* (O noble man of the principal stock of cheerful champions), Copely has recourse to a central strategy of Jacobite rhetoric, namely announcing the imminent re-establishment of the natural order when the *Gaill* (Foreigners) who inhabit the land are finally banished. Aid from abroad, so his millenarian message suggests, will end Ireland's oppression *go buach* (victoriously) and ensure a resounding triumph *ar Ghallaibh an uabhair* (over the proud Foreigners):

*Tá ag téarnamh 'na Saesar tar calaith go buach,  
Go léadmhach le laochra mar aithrisid suaith:  
Beidh céasadh beidh traochadh beidh scaipeadh beidh ruaig,  
Le géirnimh ag Gaelaibh ar Ghallaibh an uabhair.*<sup>57</sup>

They are approaching victoriously like Caesar o'er the sea, proudly with heroes as experts tell: persecution, hunting down, dispersion, banishment by the Gaels will prevail with extreme force over the proud Foreigners.

#### CORRESPONDENCE WITH JOHN O'DALY, 1847-1855

O'Connor's correspondence with John O'Daly from 1847 to 1855 tallies with O'Daly's seeking out of other native men of letters — poets, scribes and scholars of the Irish language — who provided him with copies of scribal texts for his own further transcription or for subsequent publication. As is evident in the two publications for which O'Daly is best known, namely *Reliques of Irish Jacobite Poetry* (1844) and *Poets and Poetry of Munster* (1849), the main thrust of his scholarship was Irish Jacobite poetry and texts in the Munster dialect of spoken Irish. O'Connor proved to be a valuable informant in these two areas, generously providing any contextual and linguistic information which he could and producing manuscript copies of texts at O'Daly's request. O'Daly proved to be an equally valuable informant for O'Connor on current affairs at home in Ireland, particularly when the publication of *The Nation* was banned during the period from July 1849 to August 1850.<sup>58</sup> He was also an important source for books and provided updates on the progress of the *Celtic Society*, which he and others had founded in Dublin in 1845 for the purpose of publishing texts in Irish.<sup>59</sup>

Included in O'Connor's earliest extant letter of August 1847 are transcripts of three poems — *Ós anfadh i mbliadhna d'fhiannaibh einge Fhéidhlim* (In this year of storm for the Fenians of Ireland) by the renowned seventeenth-century poet Dáibhí Ó

Bruadair (1625-98); an anonymous stanza beginning *Is fearra fa seacht don talamh a theacht* (To this country his [Duke of Ormond] coming [as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland] is sevenfold better); and Ó Bruadair's rejoinder beginning *A dhaoi re gliogar gibe thusa* (Oh dunce of inanity whoever you are) — all provided at the request of O'Daly who, by 1847, had hoped to publish an anthology of Ó Bruadair's poems under the title "The Civil Wars of Ireland."<sup>60</sup> O'Connor concludes with a request that he be informed whether O'Daly's "works are sold in London that I could get them."<sup>61</sup> Some weeks later, on 5 October 1847, we find O'Connor referring to a number of works in his possession and promising O'Daly a complete list "next week." His order at Orr's publishers on the Strand of "four copies of the King of the Race of Eber"<sup>62</sup> had arrived but he was still awaiting the delivery from Dublin of four copies of O'Daly's primer *Féin-Theagasc Gaoidheilge. Self-Instruction in Irish* which had appeared the year before. Enclosed in the same letter was "an order for Ten Shillings," the membership fee for O'Daly when proposing that O'Connor become a member of the *Celtic Society*, which was to be commended for exploring "the Records of my unfortunate country."<sup>63</sup> Membership of this body would ensure his free copy of its first publication, *Leabhar na gCeart* (Book of Rights), which had appeared in that year (1847).

By 15 October 1848, and by then a member of the *Celtic Society*, O'Connor was now transcribing material for another one of its founders, Fr Matthew Kelly (1814-58), Professor of French in Maynooth.<sup>64</sup> He wondered about its "Summary" — seemingly the Society's Prospectus which appeared in 1849 under the title *The Celtic Society or Irish Literary and Historical Association* — and he requested that O'Daly provide him with a copy of his primer *Féin-Theagasc Gaoidheilge. Self-Instruction in Irish* (a second, expanded edition of which was published in 1848), given that Tegg's Bookshop had none in stock. He articulated his disappointment with the Young Irelanders in the aftermath of their failed rebellion in Tipperary during the previous summer, and had heard that one of its leaders, Michael Doheny (1805-63), escaped via London while en route to France.<sup>65</sup>

On 12 October of the following year (1849), O'Connor enquired whether Fr Kelly wished "to keep the Tract which I send [*sic*] him and if he means to keep it I expect him to pay me for it or send me it back again if he please." He gathered that publication of O'Daly's *Poets and Poetry of Munster* was imminent, having read a review "in the Nation of last week (rather impartial indeed)." If O'Daly could not tell him where the book was to go on sale in London, he would welcome three copies directly from Dublin for which he would forward a half sovereign on their arrival; he would also require "three more quickly after. I have some few friends here who would wish to have copies of your Book."<sup>66</sup>

In a letter written at some point during 1849, O'Connor informed O'Daly that he was planning on consulting manuscript sources in the library of what was then known as the British Museum (now British Library). He was equally keen to acquire further printed books from Dublin, including "the Book of Rights if it is convenient to you to send it, and if the little Self Instructions are ready send them also where we can get them."<sup>67</sup> Being a frequenter of various booksellers, our scribe was in a position to advise as to whether O'Daly's books were available in London. On 4 March 1850 after a bout of illness, for example, he could venture out once again on a scouting expedition "all over Holywell St." and intended to "have a look about Holborn to see whether there are any there."<sup>68</sup> He was still making requests on behalf of friends in London in his final extant letter to O'Daly (27 September 1855), in this instance on

behalf of “a Mr Jordan” who wished very much to join the *Ossianic Society* “and wants to know how he can get the Jacobites [*sic*] Reliques over.”<sup>69</sup>

## CONCLUSION

From the early 1980s onwards, scholarly research on Irish immigrants in nineteenth-century Britain took off in earnest.<sup>70</sup> From the end of the 1990s, scholars focused specific attention on Irish cultural institutions in London in the final decades of the nineteenth century, as well as on the interest which the Irish in London had at that time in the Irish language, Irish history, literature, music and art. In-depth studies have been published, for example, of bodies such as *The Irish Literary Society* (1892) from which emerged *The Irish Texts Society* (1898), as well as London branches of *Conradh na Gaeilge* (1896) and *Cumann Lúthchleas Gael* (1896).<sup>71</sup> The contemporary information on the life of Thomas “an tSneachta” O’Connor and on his works in native Irish sources pushes the timeframe of this analysis on migration and the construction of cultural identities back at least fifty years. The man himself, moreover, is a fine example of an Irish immigrant who integrated well into his host society in Victorian London, yet who managed at the same time to preserve a distinctive Irish identity in continuing to advocate the cause of Irish cultural nationalism.

### **Manuscript Abbreviations**

NLI G:	Irish Manuscript Collection, National Library of Ireland, Dublin
O’Lavery:	Manuscripts once in the private possession of Monsignor James O’Lavery (1866-1906), now in St. Malachy’s College, Belfast
RIA:	Royal Irish Academy, Dublin
Torna:	Torna Collection, University College Cork
UCC:	University College Cork

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<sup>1</sup> Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh. ‘The Battle of Clontarf’* (London: Irish Texts Society, 2011) 77-81; Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail, “Observations on the Text known as the *Leabhar Oiris*,” *Celebrating Sixty Years of Celtic Studies at Uppsala University. Proceedings of the Eleventh Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica*, eds. Ailbhe Ó Corráin and Gordon Ó Riain (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2013) 149-66.

<sup>2</sup> UCC 115, 56. See also Ní Úrdail, *Cath Cluana Tarbh* 264.

<sup>3</sup> On these manuscripts, see Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail, “Ón gCnocán Aoibhinn go dtí Londain Shasana: Tomás ‘an tSneachta’ Ó Conchubhair (1798-c. 1870),” *Celtica* 28 (2016): 89-122 (115-19).

<sup>4</sup> National Library of Ireland, positive 4041, made during the 1950s. See Pádraig de Brún, *Lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge: Treoirliosta* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988) 73 n.126. See also the letter alluding to O’Connor’s translation quoted at note 19.

<sup>5</sup> For further details on O’Daly, see Proinsias Ó Drisceoil, *Seán Ó Dálaigh: Éigse agus Iomarbhá* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2007); Pádraig de Brún, *Scriptural Instruction in the Vernacular. The Irish Society and its Teachers 1818-1827* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2009) 203-9.

<sup>6</sup> See Lee Jackson, *Walking Dickens’ London* (Oxford: Shire Publications, 2012) 10, 13-14, 72-3.

<sup>7</sup> See Charles Booth, ed., *Labour and Life of the People. Volume II: London* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1891) 316.

<sup>8</sup> RIA 24 C 56, 790.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. [783]. Thomas Tegg (1776-1845) began this business in London’s Cheapside in 1804. His son, William (1816-95), took over on his father’s death, the business being situated then at 12 Pancras Lane (1847-50, 1860-83), at 85 Queen Street (1850-60) and at 12 Doughty Street (1883-90), London. See

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James J. Barnes and Patience Barnes, "Tegg, Thomas," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. Henry Colin Gray Matthew and Brian Howard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 26-7.

<sup>10</sup> Sondra Miley Cooney, "William Somerville Orr, London Publisher and Printer: the Skeleton in W. & R. Chambers's Closet," *Worlds of Print: Diversity in the Booktrade*, eds. John Hinks and Catherine Armstrong (London: Oak Knoll Press and the British Library, 2006) 135-47.

<sup>11</sup> RIA 24 C 56, 830.

<sup>12</sup> John Denvir, *The Irish in Britain from the Earliest Times to the Fall and Death of Parnell* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1892) 391-2.

<sup>13</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979) 33, 38-9; Donald M. MacRaild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain, 1750-1922* (London: Macmillan, 1999) 14-15; Roger Swift, ed., *Irish Migrants in Britain 1815-1914: a Documentary History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002) 5.

<sup>14</sup> RIA 23 L 60, 46.

<sup>15</sup> Examples in the case of hair colouring are *bán* (fair / white), *dubh* (black), *rua* (red), while those of skin colour include *geal* (white), *gorm* (black), *búi* (yellow) and *dearg* (red). See Brian Ó Cuív, *Aspects of Irish Personal Names* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1986) 12-13, 27-8, 30-1.

<sup>16</sup> RIA 24 C 56, 776.

<sup>17</sup> "1851 England Census," <http://www.ancestry.co.uk>, accessed 23 January 2015.

<sup>18</sup> See this lament's opening line quoted at note 42.

<sup>19</sup> National Library of Ireland, positive 4041. See also note 4.

<sup>20</sup> O'Laverty AC. Michael is likely to be the same person as the "Michael Connor" whose property is valued at five shillings per annum in *Griffith's Valuation* (1852); see <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/griffith-valuation> (accessed 23 January 2015), under Condons and Clangibbon (barony), Marshalstown (parish), Curraghgorm (townland).

<sup>21</sup> O'Laverty AC.

<sup>22</sup> RIA 24 C 56, 292-[293].

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 297-8.

<sup>24</sup> For a brief note on Dunlea, see Breandán Ó Conchúir, *Scríobhaithe Chorcaí 1700-1850* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar Tta, 1982) 65.

<sup>25</sup> Lees, *Exiles of Erin* 45-6; M.A.G. Ó Tuathaigh, "The Irish in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Problems of Integration," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 31 (1981): 152 (149-73); MacRaild, *Irish Migrants* 66; Jacqueline Turton "Mayhew's Irish: the Irish Poor in Mid Nineteenth-Century London," *The Irish in Victorian Britain: the Local Dimension*, eds. Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999) 128-9.

<sup>26</sup> "Formation of the Irish Confederation," *The Nation*, 16 January 1847. See also Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the Famine* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990) 196-7.

<sup>27</sup> "London Confederates," *The Nation*, 20 March 1847; "St. Patrick's Day in London," *The Nation*, 27 March 1847; "London Confederates," *The Nation*, 17 April 1847; "London Confederates," *The Nation*, 10 July 1847; "London Confederates," *The Nation*, 18 September 1847; "Confederate Clubs," *The Nation*, 25 September 1847; "London Confederates," *The Nation*, 2 October 1847; "London Confederates," *The Nation*, 9 October 1847; "The Davis Confederate Club, London," *The Nation*, 11 December 1847.

<sup>28</sup> Ó Drisceoil, *Seán Ó Dálaigh* 93, 311-12, 322.

<sup>29</sup> "Answers to Correspondents," *The Nation*, 2 October 1847.

<sup>30</sup> RIA 24 C 56, [765].

<sup>31</sup> "Davis Club, London," *The Nation*, 15 January 1848.

<sup>32</sup> RIA 24 C 56, [777].

<sup>33</sup> His note written to O'Daly about 1849, for example, states: "I beg sir, you will excuse me for delaying you so long. You shall have the others as soon as possible. The poem of O'Neill I sent you before by T. Daly. — T. O. C —" (RIA 24 C 56, [825]).

<sup>34</sup> Lees, *Exiles of Erin* 228.

<sup>35</sup> RIA 24 C 56, 778-[779].

<sup>36</sup> "Meeting of the Irish Confederation," *The Nation*, 23 October 1847.

<sup>37</sup> A note in O'Laverty 1 reads: "For Mr William Lynch PD No 2 Brook-Green Hammersmith London." He is also the *W[illia]m Lynch* who penned *Man is endowed with preconceiving [sic] skill* (18 lines), "Dedicated to Mr Thomas O Connor. By his most humble friend," in RIA 24 C 48, ff. 2r-3v.

<sup>38</sup> *Cum an tSaoi uasal ollamhanla .i. Uilliam Ua Loinnseadh. Air bhás a Athar noch d'éag san nGallbhaile an .xxv. do Lughnosa .xpt. mdccc. Xli* (the colophon to a lament on Lynch's death by the Cork poet Mícheál Mac Cárthaigh in O'Laverty 1).

- <sup>39</sup> RIA 23 L 60, 53-4.
- <sup>40</sup> Torna lxiv, 143.
- <sup>41</sup> Ní Dhonnchadha, *Tomás Ó Conchubhair* 19-57, 60-6.
- <sup>42</sup> The poem's twelve stanzas are edited by Ní Dhonnchadha, *Tomás Ó Conchubhair* 21-2.
- <sup>43</sup> The poem consists of four stanzas and an epilogue, edited by Ní Dhonnchadha, *Tomás Ó Conchubhair* 62-3. The accompanying translation in English above and those that follow are my own.
- <sup>44</sup> See James Grove White, *Historical and Topographical Notes etc. on Buttevant, Castletownroche, Doneraile, Mallow, and Places in their Vicinity*, Vol. 1 (Cork: Guy and Co., 1905) 9-10.
- <sup>45</sup> Ní Dhonnchadha, *Tomás Ó Conchubhair* 31.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid. 60.
- <sup>47</sup> Ó Drisceoil, *Seán Ó Dálaigh* 92-3, 114.
- <sup>48</sup> Ní Dhonnchadha, *Tomás Ó Conchubhair* 65.
- <sup>49</sup> Thomas Moore, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore Collected by Himself. In Ten Volumes*, Vol. 3 (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1841) 227.
- <sup>50</sup> Ní Dhonnchadha, *Tomás Ó Conchubhair* 65.
- <sup>51</sup> RIA 24 C 55, [193]-194, and RIA 24 C 56, 788-[789]. The poem remains unpublished.
- <sup>52</sup> James Quinn, *Young Ireland and the Writing of Irish History* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2015) 13, 46, 72-3, 132-3.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid. 46.
- <sup>54</sup> Ní Dhonnchadha, *Tomás Ó Conchubhair* 57.
- <sup>55</sup> See, for example, Breandán Ó Buachalla, "Irish Jacobite Poetry," *The Irish Review* 12 (Spring / Summer, 1992): 40-9; Breandán Ó Buachalla, "From Jacobite to Jacobin," *1798: a Bicentenary Perspective*, eds. Thomas Bartlett et al. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003) 75-96.
- <sup>56</sup> Breandán Ó Buachalla, "Ó Rathaille, na Cárthaigh agus na Brúnaigh," *Studia Hibernica* 31 (2000-1): 134-5 (119-38).
- <sup>57</sup> Torna lxiii, 33.
- <sup>58</sup> "Please, to send me all the News you possibly can. I can get no Irish papers now since the Nation is stopped." Thus reads an endnote to O'Connor's transcript for O'Daly of *An Buachaill Bán* (The Fairhaired Boy) by the Myross poet Seán Ó Coileáin (c. 1754-1817) in RIA 24 C 56, [823].
- <sup>59</sup> "Please, to let me know how the Celtic Society is going on," in RIA 24 C 56, [825]. Lasting just eight years, the Society was constantly troubled by financial constraints, particularly in the aftermath of the Great Famine. See Ó Drisceoil, *Seán Ó Dálaigh* 131-55.
- <sup>60</sup> NLI G 389, 85-8. The anthology itself was never published. See Ó Drisceoil, *Seán Ó Dálaigh* 169-70.
- <sup>61</sup> NLI G 389, 88.
- <sup>62</sup> John Daly, ed., *The Kings of the Race of Eibhear. Ríogha Sí Eibhir. A Chronological Poem by John O'Dugan with a Translation by Michael Kearney, A.D. 1635* (Dublin: John Daly, 1847).
- <sup>63</sup> RIA 24 C 56, 764-6.
- <sup>64</sup> For Fr Matthew Kelly, see Máire Ní Mhurchú and Diarmuid Breathnach, *1782-1881 Beathaisnéis* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar Tta, 1999) 52-3.
- <sup>65</sup> RIA 24 C 56, 782-4.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid. 786-[787].
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid. 790. The "Book of Rights" here refers to John O'Donovan, ed., *Leabhar na g-Ceart. The Book of Rights* (Dublin: Celtic Society, 1847), while "the little Self Instructions" refers to John O'Daly's primer, *Féin-Theagasc Gaoidheilge. Self-Instruction in Irish, Second Edition, Enlarged* (Dublin: Le Messurier, 1848).
- <sup>68</sup> RIA 24 C 56, 830.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid. 836.
- <sup>70</sup> Ó Tuathaigh, "The Irish in Nineteenth-Century Britain"; Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley, eds., *The Irish in the Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); MacRaild, *Irish Migrants*; Roger Swift, "Historians and the Irish: Recent Writings on the Irish in Nineteenth-Century Britain," *The Great Famine and Beyond. Irish Migrants in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Donald M. MacRaild (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000) 14-39; Swift, *Irish Migrants*; Donald M. MacRaild, *The Irish in Britain 1800-1914* (Dundalk: Economic and Social History of Ireland, 2006).
- <sup>71</sup> Pádraigin Riggs, "The Beginnings of the Society," *The Irish Texts Society: the First Hundred Years*, Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Series 9, ed. Pádraig Ó Riain (London: Irish Texts Society, 1998) 2-35; John Hutchinson and Alan O'Day, "The Gaelic Revival in London, 1900-22: Limits of Ethnic Identity," Swift and Gilley, *The Irish in Victorian Britain* 259, 262-71 (254-76); Swift, *Irish Migrants* 191-4.