

Published in Caoimhín Breatnach, Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail, Gordon Ó Riain (eds), *Lorg na leabhar. A Festschrift for Pádraig A. Breatnach* (Dublin: National University of Ireland, 2019), 381–409

## *AN tÁR AGUS AN tOCRAS: A CLARE SCRIBE'S RESPONSE TO THE GREAT FAMINE*

*Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail*

### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

MÍCHEÁL Ó RAGHALLAIGH, *alias* Michael O'Reilly, has come to be associated with Ennistymon in the northwest barony of Corcomroe, Co. Clare. Published accounts of him include a brief mention in an overview of the poets of that county published by T. F. O'Rahilly as well as those by Pádraig Ó Fiannachta and Eilís Ní Dheá.<sup>1</sup> Pádraig de Brún has suggested that the 'Michael Reilly' employed as a teacher for the Clare district by the Irish Society in 1826 is perhaps the same as our scribe.<sup>2</sup> In light of a colophon written in 1855 in which Ó Raghallaigh tells his reader that he was seventy years of age, he was born in 1785 or 1786.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, according to a note by a fellow scribe, Domhnall Mac Consaidín (*fl.* c.1845–1876) of Kilnamona in the barony of Inchiquin, it appears that Ó Raghallaigh may have been a native of Co. Cavan and it would seem that he died in 1856.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, if we are to believe what George Macnamara mentioned in passing in an article on the O'Davorens of Cahermacnaghten in northwest Clare, it was a particularly gruesome death, Ó Raghallaigh having been 'poisoned by rat-poison, probably arsenic, accidentally put in a cake of which he partook, sometime in the early fifties of the last [i.e. nineteenth] century, and his books and MSS. were scattered to the four winds of heaven'.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> T. F. O'Rahilly, 'Notes on the poets of Clare' *An Claidheamh Solais* (22 September 1917) 11; Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, *Léas ar ár litríocht* (Má Nuad 1974) 97–9; Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, 'The poem book of Clare' *Dál gCais* 7 (1984) 41–5 (at 41–2, 45); Eilís Ní Dheá, 'Micheál Ó Raghallaigh: scríobhaí ó Inis Díomáin' *The Other Clare* 16 (1992) 18–20; Eilís Ní Dheá, 'Scríobhaithe lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge i gContae an Chláir 1700–1900' in *Clare: history and society. Interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county*, ed. Matthew Lynch and Patrick Nugent (Dublin 2008) 139–55 (at 146, 147, 151).

<sup>2</sup> Pádraig de Brún, *Scriptural instruction in the vernacular: the Irish Society and its teachers 1818–1827* (Dublin 2009) 436.

<sup>3</sup> *Air na sgríobh le M. Ó Raghallaigh a nInnis Tígh Meádhain. Aois Chríost 1855 an tan fo haois dó fēin .x. agus trí xxíod Flathus Dé dā anam. Amen.* 'Having been written by M. O'Reilly in Ennistymon. A.D. 1855 when he himself was seventy. The Kingdom of God to his soul. Amen' (G LSB MS 9, p. 255). The macrons here and in subsequent passages quoted below represent a length-mark which is not visible in the scribal source. Scribal abbreviations are expanded silently, while capital letters, word division, punctuation and material within square brackets are editorial. Accompanying translations into English, unless otherwise stated, are by the present writer.

<sup>4</sup> 'Some time in the year 1846, Michael O'Reilly, an old *seanchuidhe* who lived in Ennistymon, but who was a native of the Co. Cavan sent a messenger, with an Irish letter, written in poetry, to Bryan O'Looney requesting that he would send him the loan of his Irish MS copy of Keatings "Foras Feasa ar Eirinn" in order to lend it to a man of the name of White who resided in his neighbourhood. Mr O'Looney complied with the request, but after O'Reilly's death, which occurred in the year 1856, he (Mr O'Looney) sent for his manuscript to White who (tho' he had the MS. in his possession at the time) denied having known any thing about it!' (UCC Murphy MS 63, p. 479).

<sup>5</sup> George U. Macnamara, 'The O'Davorens of Cahermacnaughten, Burren, Co. Clare' *Journal of the North Munster Archaeological Society* 2/2 (1912) 63–93 (at 75 n. 15).

## MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

The likelihood of such a violent death notwithstanding, it is fortunate that at least eighteen of our scribe's manuscripts have emerged from this so-called scattering 'to the four winds of heaven' and these are housed today in the Royal Irish Academy, the National Library of Ireland, the Russell Library in NUI Maynooth, the James Hardiman Library in NUI Galway and the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester.<sup>6</sup> Their contents tell us something about the kinds of texts that were of special interest to Ó Raghallaigh, while they also alert us to the sources that were available to him for further transcription.

His earliest extant manuscript, for example, now Manuscript 79 in the John Rylands Library, comprises a treatise on Irish grammar and metrics attributed to Tadhg Óg (son of Tadhg Dall) Ó hUiginn, together with the fourth and final part of *Rudimenta Grammaticae Hibernicae*, namely the treatise on Irish bardic poetry known as *Ealadha an Dhána Gaoidhealda*, and Míchéal Ó Cléirigh's *Foclóir nó Sanasán Nua*.<sup>7</sup> All of this material Ó Raghallaigh transcribed in 1809 'in the parish of Kilmanaheen in the barony of Corcomroe and in County Clare' (*a bporáiste Chill Mainnighthin a mbarúntacht Chorco Mriúagh agus a g[C]untáe an Chláir*).<sup>8</sup> He went on to complete a transcript of the treatise associated with Ó hUiginn a year later (for which see below) and would transcribe it again, together with the remaining foregoing texts on grammar and lexis in Manuscript 79 in the John Rylands Library, between 1828 and 1831, now RIA MS 3 B 30. According to a scribal note in the latter source, moreover, Ó Raghallaigh copied Ó hUiginn's work in 1828 from a manuscript written in Rome in 1630 (recte 1660) by 'the poor friar' (*an bráithir bocht*) Tomás Mac Mathghamhna, who himself copied it 'from Tully's copy' (*as leabhrán Thuileagna*).<sup>9</sup> The latter is to be identified with Fr Tuileagna Ó Maoil Chonaire OFM, *alias* Tully Conry, who copied the grammar in Madrid in 1659 and wrote pedigrees of Ó Maoil Chraoibhe and Mág Raghnaill, as well as a list of saints, in April and March of the previous year, again in Madrid, and who would go on to examine and record the

<sup>6</sup> A full inventory in Eilís Ní Dheá, 'Saothru an léinn Ghaelaigh i gContae an Chláir 1700–1900' (unpublished PhD thesis, University College Cork 2003). Following the printed catalogue (Kathleen Mulchrone, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy* XVI (Dublin 1936) 1990), Ní Dheá tentatively ascribes RIA MS 23 O 40 (no date or signature) to Ó Raghallaigh. On the basis of comparison with material signed by our scribe in other manuscripts, however, the present writer can confirm that the handwriting in the latter is indeed that of our scribe.

<sup>7</sup> The metrical section of the first treatise here was originally published by Dubhglas de h-Íde, 'Prosodia na Gaedhilge' *Lia Fáil* 4 (1932) 139–75 (at 146–69), although he was not aware of the earliest extant copy in TCD MS 1431 (D.4.35) by Tuileagna Ó Maoil Chonaire, 1659. The entire work is also known as *Graiméar Uí Maolchonaire* since it was published under that title in Parthalán Mac Aogáin, *Graiméir Ghaeilge na mbráthar mionúr* (Baile Átha Cliath 1968) ix, 109–42, in deference to Tuileagna Ó Maoil Chonaire's text. On Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn and the authorship of the work itself, see Paul Walsh, 'A link with Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn' in *Irish men of learning*, ed. Colm Ó Lochlainn (Dublin 1947) 74–9. The *Rudimenta* was published by Mac Aogáin, *Graiméir Ghaeilge* 3–106, and while its author is generally accepted to be Bonaventura, *alias* Giolla Brighde, Ó hEodhasa, evidence to the contrary is discussed by Caoimhín Breatnach, 'The transmission and authorship of *Rudimenta Grammaticae Hibernicae*' in *Dá trian feasa fiafraighidh: essays on the Irish grammatical and metrical tradition*, ed. Gordon Ó Riain (Dublin 2017) 223–39. This volume's honorand has focused on the rhetorical and stylistic precepts of the final section of the *Rudimenta* in Pádraig A. Breatnach, 'Poetics and the bardic imagination' *Celtica* 27 (2013) 95–113 (at 105–13).

<sup>8</sup> Manchester MS 79, unnumbered page.

<sup>9</sup> RIA MS 3 B 30, p. 72.

contents of the fifteenth-century Book of Pottlerath (*Leabhar na Rátha*) and other manuscripts at Oxford in August 1673.<sup>10</sup> It will be proposed presently that Ó Raghallaigh's exemplar was itself a copy in a manuscript (M MS C 21) owned by him. Suffice it to note at this point, that the grammatical and lexical material deriving from the Franciscan project on the Continent during the seventeenth century features prominently in his manuscripts.

This brings us to the intriguing case of M MS R 68 as it connects the work of Ó Raghallaigh with that of another seventeenth-century Franciscan friar on the Continent. This document comprises a transcript of *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* made by Fr Ennri Mac Ardghuil OFM, *alias* Henricus Ardelius, in the Irish Franciscan college in Prague in 1663.<sup>11</sup> Fr Mac Ardghail is most likely to be identified with 'Henricus Ardelius' on whom the conferring of tonsure and the four minor orders at Prague is recorded under 19 December 1653 as well as his ordination to the subdiaconate in the same year.<sup>12</sup> His manuscript made its way to Ireland and on coming into Ó Raghallaigh's possession, our scribe set about supplementing what transpired to be a particularly lacunous text of *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* with the help of what he styles 'another doctor' (*dochtúir oile*) or authority:

*Bidheadh a fhios agad a léightheoir an tan do fuair mise an seanleabhar so go raibh tríoc[h]ad duil[l]eóg deith tollta le luch agus do bhain mise na duil[l]eoga tollta as. Agus fuair mé dochtúir oile agus do sgríobh mé an mhéid easbadh do bhí air mar is léir dhuit. Agus bí cinnte go bhfuil an stair foirlíonta anois. M. Ó Rághallaigh.*<sup>13</sup>

Know, o reader, that when I got this old book, thirty leaves of it were perforated by a mouse and I took the thirty perforated leaves out of it. And I got another authority and wrote the amount it was lacking as is clear to you. And rest assured the history is now completed. M. O'Reilly.

Fortuitously, Fr Mac Ardghail's original colophon outlining the date and place of his scribal work was preserved, and we also know from a colophon accompanying Ó Raghallaigh's work that the manuscript had made its way to him in Ennistymon by 1838 when, in that year, he finished supplementing the text of the first book of the

<sup>10</sup> Walsh, 'A link with Tadhg Dall' 74–9; Mac Aogáin, *Graiméir Ghaeilge* xi–xii, xx–xxi; Cuthbert Mhág Craith, *Dán na mBráthar Mionúr* II (Baile Átha Cliath 1980), 205–6; Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'Tuileagna Ó Maoil Chonaire and the Book of Pottlerath' *Ossory, Laois and Leinster* 4 (2010) 244–8.

<sup>11</sup> Described in Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, *Clár lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge Choláiste Phádraig Má Nuad* IV (Má Nuad 1967) 48–50; cf. Canice Mooney, 'Irish Franciscan libraries of the past' *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 60 (July–December 1942) 215–18 (at 222).

<sup>12</sup> Benignus Millet, 'Irishmen ordained at Prague, 1628–1700: additions and corrections to Mathäus Höslér's list' *Collectanea Hibernica* 39–40 (1998) 23–31 (at 29). It is not clear whether he is to be identified with the Anraí Mac Ardghail OFM who copied (or indeed originally translated into Irish) *An Bheatha Dhiadha* in Rome in 1694 and who himself is thought to be the same as Proinsias Mac Ardghail, head sacristan at Saint Isidore's College, 1689–1697; cf. Anselm Ó Fachtna, *An Bheatha Dhiadha nó An tSlighe Ríoghdha* (Baile Átha Cliath 1967) x–xii. Interestingly, the following note on the Mac Ardghail transcript of the *Foras Feasa* is present in UCD Ferriter MS 14, which itself preserves the only complete transcript of *An Bheatha Dhiadha*, and suggests that the scribe, Pádraig Feiritéar (1856–1924), may have taken them to be one and the same friar: 'Do aithscríobh Enrí mac Árdghail "Forus Feasa" An Chéitingigh i bh-foghlumthigh na n-Éireannach i b-Práig i m-Bóhéime Aug. 4 .1663. Is é an leabhar-san anois as áiremh 68, O Renehan Collection, i Maigh Nuad[h]at' (*recto* of front endpaper).

<sup>13</sup> M MS R 68, p. 237.

*Foras Feasa*. How and when exactly it came to be his possession is not clear, but it exemplifies nonetheless the phenomenon of the exiled cleric's book returning to Ireland.

Other material also noticeable in Ó Raghallaigh's manuscript corpus are *fianaigheacht* verse and verse by poets who flourished in Munster during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as his own autograph poems in Irish. He appears to have produced his final dateable scribal work between 1854 and 1855, and this is preserved in Manuscript 9 in the collection of Irish manuscripts known as *Lámhscríbhinní Breise* in the James Hardiman Library, NUI Galway. The volume is again a collaborative venture, in this instance between Ó Raghallaigh and Mícheál Mac Mathghamhna (*fl.* 1855–1866) of Liscannor, Co. Clare.

In addition to the eighteen surviving manuscripts to which Ó Raghallaigh contributed entirely or in part, he produced a list of Irish-language texts in his possession and this today forms part of the Windele Collection in the Royal Irish Academy.<sup>14</sup> We know of two more sources containing material by him, namely manuscripts [2] and [3] that once belonged to the collection of Mac Clancy Gaelic Manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland, but are now missing and are available only on microfilm (positive 494).<sup>15</sup> His contribution to MS [2], a transcript of the Life of Saint Margaret, was completed in 1841 'for the use of Maurice McConsidine in Ennistymon' (*c[h]um úsáide Mhuircheartuig Mhic Consaduinn a nInnis Díomáinn*).<sup>16</sup> His scribal work in MS [3] comprises verse by eighteenth-century Clare poets and yet another copy, his third, of part of the aforementioned treatise on Irish grammar and metrics associated with Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn, which he made in 1810. Once again, Ó Raghallaigh acknowledged its transcription before him by Fr Tomás Mac Mathghamhna, 'our poor friar', who himself copied it in Rome from a copy by Tuileagna Ó Maoil Chonaire.<sup>17</sup>

Our scribe had at least five further manuscripts in his possession. To two of these he added emendations and notes, and provided a table of contents in a third while he presented a fourth as a gift to fellow scribe John O'Brien (*fl.* 1826–1835) of Kilnamona, Co. Clare.<sup>18</sup> He rewrote material in a fifth volume (M MS C 21) which, as Eugene O'Curry informs us in two notes by him in the upper margin of pages one and

<sup>14</sup> RIA MS 12 M 12, f. 59, signed 'Mich<sup>l</sup> O'Reilly Ennistymon'. The list includes texts forming the contents of M MSS R 68, R 70, R 97 and G LSB MS 9, as well as M R MS 66 which he had in his possession (cf. n. 18 below).

<sup>15</sup> Pádraig de Brún, *Lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge: treoirliosta* (Baile Átha Cliath 1988) 79 §356; Ní Dheá, 'Scriobhaithe lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge i gContae an Chláir' 151, 155 n. 66.

<sup>16</sup> NLI Mac Clancy MS [2], p. 47. Other contributions to this manuscript are by Tomás Mac Mathghamhna (d. 1852) and an unidentified scribe; on the former, see de Brún, *Scriptural instruction in the vernacular* 354 n. 2, and Pádraig Ó Riain, 'The MacMahons: scribes of Ennistymon' in *Mount St. Joseph Ennistymon*, ed. Martin McNamara (Ennistymon [1974]) 64–6 (at 65–6).

<sup>17</sup> *Aitchim guibhe speisialta gach aon léighfios an gramadachso ár mbráithir mbocht Tomás Mac Mathghamhna do sgríbh as leabhrán Thuileagna ogham chonnsaine ē san Róimh*, 'I beseech a special prayer of everyone who will read this grammar of our poor friar Thomas Mac Mahon who wrote it from Tully's copy of consonantal ogham in Rome', NLI Mac Clancy MS [3] (unnumbered page); cf. n. 9 above. The spelling *guibhe* here, i.e. /gəv'ə/, reflects the word's pronunciation in the Irish of Co. Clare; cf. Nils M. Holmer, *The dialects of Co. Clare I* (Dublin 1962) 111 §209. NLI Mac Clancy MS [3] is mainly the work of Mícheál Ó Fireaghladh, *alias* Michael Frawely, who according to one colophon (unnumbered page) was writing for Seán Ó Máille in 1851.

<sup>18</sup> RIA MS 23 L 34 (part ii) and M MSS R 66, R 71, C 25, (part a), respectively. RIA MS 23 L 34 (part ii) is unsigned and undated, but Pádraig Ó Macháin ('Sir Walter Scott's Irish manuscript' *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 20 (2000) 147–55 (at 154 n. 7)) has rendered dubious Eugene O'Curry's identification of the hand (Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy XXIV* (Dublin 1940) 2868) with that of Tadhg Ó Neachtain.

sixty-one, he acquired from Ó Raghallaigh in 1839. The original scribe of M MS C 21 was Fr Séamas Ó Muraideagh OP, *alias* Jacobus or Jacques Murry (d. 1767), who wrote it in 1729, and although he gives no place of transcription, the date probably accords with the time spent by this cleric in Louvain.<sup>19</sup> Significantly, Fr Ó Muireadhaigh indicates in one of his colophons that he wrote the manuscript on 2 August of that year for Séamus Ó Dála. The latter is to be identified with James Augustine O'Daly OFM, Canon and Treasurer of the cathedral of Tournai, and Bishop of Kilfenora (1726–1749), while the date of August 1729 coincides with Bishop O'Daly's only known visit to his diocese from May to November of that year.<sup>20</sup> As in the case of the foregoing manuscript containing a transcript of *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* by Fr Mac Ardghail (M MS R 68), we have here again an example of the phenomenon of the repatriation of Irish manuscripts written by Irish exiles in Europe. When and how Fr Ó Muireadhaigh's manuscript made its way to Co. Clare and to Mícheál Ó Raghallaigh is not certain, but given that present in most of it are copies of the aforementioned grammatical and lexical works deriving from the seventeenth-century Franciscan project, it seems likely that it was our scribe's exemplar for his earliest transcription of this material in Manuscript 79 in the John Rylands Library which, as noted above, he completed in Kilmanaheen parish in 1809.

#### CONCERNS ABOUT CHANGING LINGUISTIC ATTITUDES

As was the case with other traditional Irish scholars and men of letters in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland, Ó Raghallaigh could not depend solely on manuscript transcription in order to support himself. On at least two occasions he refers to himself as 'a tradesman' (*fear céirde / cearduidhe*) — although the precise nature of his particular trade is not entirely clear — and he mentions conducting his writing in his 'spare time' (*aimsir d[h]aoimhín*).<sup>21</sup> This is a reminder once again, of course, that the preservation of native literary sources had passed to people who, due to daytime labour, had only evenings and Sundays available to them for transcription.<sup>22</sup> Ó Raghallaigh had a deep regard for the Irish language, and was especially conscious of a personal duty to ply his pen and provide written sources for the benefit of subsequent generations. Such sentiments are to be found in particular in his manuscript work dating from the Autumn of 1846 and the immediate years thereafter, a period which in itself coincides with that of widespread starvation, disease and emigration in Ireland. That this should be so is no coincidence. We may note, for example, the following remarks taken from an opening address to his 'distinguished reader' in M MS R 97 (p. [i]):

<sup>19</sup> Described in Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, *Clár lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge Choláiste Phádraig Má Nuad V* (Má Nuad 1968) 45–7; on Fr Ó Muraideagh, see Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'Fr Séamas Ó Muraideagh OP (c.1703–1767): an Irish scribe and poet at Louvain' *Seanchas Ard Mhacha* 24/1 (2012) 104–13 (at 109–11).

<sup>20</sup> Ó Macháin, 'Fr Séamas Ó Muireadhaigh OP (c.1703–1767)' 111–12.

<sup>21</sup> M MS R 69, p. [i]; M MS R 97, p. [i]. Ó Raghallaigh styles himself at one point a 'Master of the hilt and Backsword' (n. 61 below), which probably suggests a pride in his skilful use of the sword rather than referring *per se* to pursuing a trade as a swordsmith.

<sup>22</sup> On the occupations of scribes, see Nessa Ní Shéaghdha, 'Gairmeacha beatha roinnt scríobhaithe ón 18ú agus ón 19ú céad' *Celtica* 21 (1990) 567–75 (at 568 n. 10 and 572 for our scribe); Louis M. Cullen, 'Patrons, teachers and literacy in Irish: 1700–1850' in *The origins of popular literacy in Ireland: language change and educational development 1700–1920*, ed. Mary Daly and David Dickson (Dublin 1990) 15–44.

*A léightheóir ionmhuinn dhearsnuidhe [sic] ag so tíomsúghadh ilchomasgaighthe do rinne mé ar fabhaill sgéalta do rēir mar tharla dom a bhfághail a seanleabharaibh eile agus beagán do sháothar ār bhfilidh léighionda san aois dhēanach. Is ar inntinn an Ghaoighilge do choimhéad agus go m[b]a cathamh aimsire ē don drung do thiucfac[h] tair m'éis do chnuasaighis iad. Aitc[h]im air gach léightheoir gan mē d'imgheargadh nā milleán do thabhairt dom trē iomad na lochtuidhe do thāngbhus leo san saothar so. Ōir is cearduidhe mē agus am aimsir d[h]iobhuīnn do sgrīobh mé an saothar so. Ōir bhí mē mōrān bliaghanta dá chnuasacht.*

Dear distinguished reader: here is a miscellaneous collection I made of fables as I happened to find them in other old books and a little of the work of our learned poets in the last century. It is for the sake of maintaining the Irish language and so that it would be entertainment for those who would come after me that I compiled them. I beseech every reader not to reproach or blame me for the many faults which they encountered in this work. For I am a tradesman and I wrote this work in my spare time. For I was many years compiling it.

His ‘many years compiling it’ fall just short of twenty years, Ó Raghallaigh’s being a substantial contribution of over five hundred pages to the manuscript, beginning with his text of *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* which he concluded ‘in the month of March 1827’ (*a mídhe Márta 1827*).<sup>23</sup> He finished his last dateable text in that volume, *Eachtra Lomnochtáin an tSléibhe Riffe*, on ‘the tenth day of the month of November the year of the Lord 1846’ (*an deithiodh lá do mhídhe na Seamhna aois an Tighearna 1846*) at a time when the potato crop had failed drastically for a second year in a row and the earliest known deaths from starvation had begun to emerge.<sup>24</sup> Ó Raghallaigh makes no direct reference to the devastating times which coincided with his finishing his contribution to this manuscript, although it is difficult not to think that such calamitous times had an effect on his morale, triggering thereby the feelings of futility and loss which seem to pervade its opening section. By way of illustration, we may take the following remarks from the opening address to his reader:

*Atáim dā iar[r]aidh gan leigint d’aos óg nō d’aos ainnbhios dul do sgrīobh ar an leabhar so. Mā nídhid beidh mo mhallacht aca:*

*Mallacht uaím ar gach n-aon  
do thōigfhios pean[n] a n-aon chéim  
is do cheapfach mar aisde ait  
dul do sgrīobh am starthuibh.*

<sup>23</sup> In its earliest extant manuscript witness (BL MS Egerton 1782), the main protagonist of this Arthurian tale is not called *an madra maol* but rather *in madadh moel*; see Caoimhín Breatnach, ‘The language and manuscript tradition of *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* and *Eachtra Mhacaoimh an Iolair*’ in *The matter of Britain in medieval Ireland: reassessments*, ed. John Carey. Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Series 29 (London 2017) 1–28 (at 1 n. 1).

<sup>24</sup> M MS R 97, pp. 31 and 104, respectively. The second contributor to this manuscript, the Clare scribe Conchubhar Mac an Airchinnigh, completed his text of *Oidheadh Chloinne Tuireann* (pp. 425–38) on 5 March 1817.

*Do bhr̃igh nach ttig liom a bheith cómh fada beo leis an sgr̃obhuin[n] so iarraim ar gach aon duine léighfios ann guidheadh ar anam an sgr̃obhnóir [sic] Mícheál Ó Rághallaigh.<sup>25</sup>*

I request that young people or ignorant people not be allowed to write on this book. If they do they will have my curse:

A curse from me on all who will take a pen in any circumstance and who would think it a funny feat to set about writing in my stories.

Since I cannot be alive as long as this manuscript I ask every single person who will read it that he pray for the soul of the writer Michael O'Reilly.

We have here, of course, another example of the ubiquitous invocation in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish manuscripts that every reader who would read the scribe's work would pray for his soul. However, in wishing that harm befall all who might defile his book because of ignorance, it would seem that Ó Raghallaigh in the accompanying quatrain — which, incidentally, appears twice elsewhere in the same manuscript<sup>26</sup> — is acknowledging a general lack of regard for the Irish language among his contemporaries.

A list of contents follows on from our scribe's address to his reader in the opening section of M MS R 97. This in turn is followed by two pithy quatrains that again address matters of pervasive ignorance and decline in native learning. The first of these is a variant version, probably Ó Raghallaigh's own, of one that forms part of the considerable collection of epigrammatic quatrains (*dánfhocail*) compiled and edited by T. F. O'Rahilly from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish manuscripts. According to the quatrain in the published edition, the subtle use of language in ignorant, unappreciative company is one of a number of life's useless expedients:

*Lán gaid do ghainimh thrágha,  
nó beart gaoithe ar ghualainn,  
greann dá chur i gcoidreamh  
idir bhoidrisg do dhaoine duairce.<sup>27</sup>*

Being witty in company with an ignorant but pretentious set of morose people [is as impossible as] a full rope of beach sand, or a parcel of wind on a shoulder.

To those in his variant version of the above, Mícheál Ó Raghallaigh adds poetic recitation, once a respected practice that has come to be regarded generally as being meaningless:

*Lán ga[i]d do ghainimh nō do ghráin,*

<sup>25</sup> M MS R 97, p. [i].

<sup>26</sup> M MS R 97, pp. 88, 337.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Francis O'Rahilly, *Dánfhocail: Irish epigrams in verse* (Dublin 1921) 43, no. 207; see *ibid.*, s.v. *boidrisg* (var. *bodraisg*), where the noun is derived from *bodaire* or *boidire*, with the ending of *gráisg*, *gram(h)aisg*, 'a set of ignorant but pretentious people'. For an alternative version of the above quatrain with the accompanying title 'Rudaí nách féidir a dhéanamh', see Seosamh Laoide, *Tonn Tóime* (Dublin 1915) 117, no. 6, i.e. *Lán gaid de ghainimh a thráigh, / nó lán mála de ghaoith a dtuaidh, / nó sgéal dhá innsint do mhnáibh, / nó dán do dhaoine duairc*.'

*nō cóiríomh an fheoir ghlas go hiomlán,  
nō buaint cnó air choill chríon [leg. chrín],  
nō rádh dánta le Mac Cruitín.<sup>28</sup>*

A full rope of sand or grain, or counting the green grass completely, or harvesting a nut on withered wood, or reciting poems by MacCurtin.

The MacCurtin in question is Séamas Mac Cruitín (1815–1870), and from poems composed jointly by him and Ó Raghallaigh as well as their correspondence in verse to each other, it is clear that the two were particularly close friends.<sup>29</sup> Mac Cruitín features again in the succeeding epigrammatic quatrain in M MS R 97 in which Ó Raghallaigh expresses the sadness he felt at the departure of his erudite companion to Dublin in 1840:

*Is uaigneach mise ó d'imthigh tu féin, a shaoíth,  
gan suaighfhear sultmhur do chanfach dom dān nō laoi,  
nō ' bhréagfach m'aighe le spreagadh na dtéad go caoin:  
mo mhíle beannacht chugad go ttagair go Tuamhumhain arís.<sup>30</sup>*

Lonely I am since you yourself have left, o wise one, without a pleasant scholar who would recite a poem or a lay for me, or who would divert my mind by strumming the strings delicately: my thousand blessings to you until you return again to Thomond.

Mac Cruitín had left Co. Clare to take up a position on a teacher training course in the Central Model School that had opened in Marlborough Street in 1838.<sup>31</sup> Incidentally, he did not get on well in Dublin and was expelled after just two months in the capital city.<sup>32</sup> Be that as it may, we may ask why Ó Raghallaigh included his original expression of personal grief at losing a beloved friend and fine exponent of the Irish language in 1840 in this manuscript (M MS R 97) completed six years later. If we take the quatrain itself together with the items preceding it in its opening section, they seem to reflect an overall erosion of his morale as a man of letters and a lack of any hope for the future of the language which he deeply loved. Such feelings of futility and loss would surely have been accentuated by the context of his time, whereby a

<sup>28</sup> M MS R 97, p. [ii]. Further copies by our scribe are present in G LSB MS 2 (unnumbered page), comprising a substantial collection of verse mainly by eighteenth-century Munster poets, particularly by those from Co. Clare, as well as *fianaigheacht* verse, 1838–40; NLI MS G 1131 (p. 23), which source contains romantic prose and Munster poetry transcribed mainly by Ó Raghallaigh, 1847, but with a minor contribution 'per me Andrew Clancy' (p. 195) with a date of 'January 26<sup>th</sup> 1850' (p. 220).

<sup>29</sup> Thomas F. O'Rahilly, 'Notes on the poets of Clare' *An Claidheamh Solais* (8 Meadhon Fómhair 1917) 11; Ó Fiannachta, *Léas ar ár litríocht* 182–8; Ó Fiannachta, 'The poem book of Clare' 45; Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, 'Glac de dhánta Shéamais Mhic Cruitín' in *Folia Gadelica. Aistí ó iardhaltai leis a bronnadh ar R. A. Breatnach, M.A., M.R.I.A.* (Cork 1983), ed. Pádraig de Brún, Seán Ó Coileáin, and Pádraig Ó Riain (Cork 1983) 124–33; Brian Ó Dálaigh, "'The last of the hereditary bards of Thomond': Séamus Mac Cruitín 1815–70' *North Munster Antiquarian Journal* 47 (2007) 77–90.

<sup>30</sup> *Is do Shéamas Mac Cruitín do chan M. Ó R. an rann so iar ndul do go hÁit[h] Cliat[h] 1840*, 'M.O'R. recited this quatrain for James MacCurtin on his going to Dublin 1840', M MS R 97, p. [ii]; cf. a second copy with the heading *C[h]um S. Mac Cruitín an dán so, an tan bhí sé air scoil a nÁth Cliath. M. Ó R chan ē*, 'This poem is for J. MacCurtin, when he was at school in Dublin. M. O'R recited it', G LSB MS 9, p. 103.

<sup>31</sup> On which see John Coolahan, *Irish education: its history and structure* (Dublin 1981) 23.

<sup>32</sup> Ó Dálaigh, "'The last of the hereditary bards of Thomond': Séamus Mac Cruitín' 80.



population loss of the order of twenty-six per cent between 1841 and 1851 placed Co. Clare alone at the top of the mortality index during the famine of the late 1840s.<sup>33</sup>

#### SOCIAL COMMENTARY

During 1847, when the Great Famine was at its height, Ó Raghallaigh outlines its full human cost for the country's population as well as the distress felt in his own native parish of Kilmanaheen:

*A.D. 1847 bliadhain na gortan agus an riachtanais. Óir do sgrios an ghaothruadh blāth agus gasa na bpotátuidhe ionnus gur loibh siad uile. Nī rabh pótáta le buaint as talamh ag aon duine san b[h]Fōmhar mar ba gnáth bliadhanta eile. Nī raibh an corcaidh [leg. coirce] go maith mar ba gnáth nā an mhin ann. Dá bhrīgh sin bhí gorta agus riachtannais air gach aon duine san ríoghacht acht tānaig iliomad minne agus earbhur [leg. arbhair] go hÉirinn as America agus as ríoghachtuibh eile. D'éug mórán do na daoine a ngach áit san ríoghacht. Fiabhrus agus tinnios cuirp do thānaig orra do bhár[r] an oicrais agus is leis a d'éug na daoine san tír so. Do thuit breis agus míle duine sa bporóiste so ar feadh trí mhídh .i. Cill Mhainnithinn a cCorca Mruadh.<sup>34</sup>*

A.D. 1847 the year of famine and need. Because the strong wind destroyed the potatoes' flowers and stems, so that they all rotted. Nobody had a potato to pick from the earth in Autumn as was usual in other years. Oats were not as good as usual, nor was there meal. Therefore everyone in the kingdom was famished and in want, but much meal and corn came to Ireland from America and other realms. Many people died everywhere in the kingdom. Fever and sickness overcame them as a result of [the] hunger, and that is how [the] people in this country died. More than a thousand fell in this parish in three months, i.e. Kilmanaheen in Corcomroe.<sup>35</sup>

What three months of Autumn are intended by our scribe here is not clear, but his colophon to *Cath Gabhra* elsewhere in the same manuscript focuses on a localized crisis, that of over seven-hundred-and-sixty people dying of starvation in his parish during the first six months of 1847:

*Ag sin agad, a léightheoir, Cath Gabhra mar do chonarc mē é. Arna scrīobh a mbliadhain na gorta san mídh Ūinn. A.D. 1847 le Mīc[h]eāl Ó Rághallaigh. D'éacc le ocras a bporóiste Chill Mhanathuinn a seadh [leg. sé] mhídh don bhliadhainnsi seacht ccéad seacht ós cionn seasgadh do dhaoine.<sup>36</sup>*

<sup>33</sup> James S. Donnelly Jr., *The great Irish potato famine* (Stroud 2001) 170; Cormac Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and beyond: the great Irish famine in history, economy, and memory* (Princeton 1999) 60–1.

<sup>34</sup> M MS R 70, p. 549.

<sup>35</sup> Translation by Neil Buttimer, 'A stone on the cairn: the Great Famine in later Gaelic manuscripts' in *'Fearful realities': perspectives on the famine*, ed. Chris Morash and Richard Hayes (Dublin 1996) 93–109 (at 99); also Neil Buttimer, 'The Great Famine in Gaelic manuscripts' in *Atlas of the great Irish famine*, ed. John Crowley, William J. Smyth, and Michael Murphy (Cork 2012) 460–72 (at 465–6).

<sup>36</sup> M MS R 70, p. 269.

There for you, o reader, *Cath Gabhra* as I saw it. Having been written in the year of famine in the month of June A.D. 1847 by Michael O'Reilly. Seven-hundred-and-sixty-seven people died of hunger in the parish of Kilmanaheen within six months of this year.

Signs of his concerns about changing linguistic attitudes emerge again in a manuscript which he set about compiling in 1848, the year the potato blight had returned for a third consecutive year. In this instance, Ó Raghallaigh asks his reader's pardon for the quality of his work as it is not that of 'a true scholar' (*fiorchléireach*) and he continues:

*Acht tarais sin an tan do chonarcus dom nach raibh aoin[n]each do lucht mo chómhaimsire a' cnuas acht a bheag do shaothar árr bhfilidhe do mheas mē gan iad uile do léigint ar fán. Acht as beag an táirbhe iad do chosaint óir is náireach le ár n-aos óg teangadh a sinnsear dfólluim [leg. d'fhoghlaím]. Dá bhrígh sin nīdh b[h]iadh focal Gaoidhilge san ríoghacht a ccionn cēad eile bliadhain mā leannaid an nōs atā acabh<sup>37</sup> leam chuibh[n]e féin.<sup>38</sup>*

But besides that when it seemed to me that not a single one of my contemporaries was collecting but little of the work of our poets I decided not to let them all be lost. But it is little advantage to conserve them for our young people are ashamed to learn the language of their forebears. Therefore there will be no word of Irish in the kingdom in a hundred more years if they pursue the habit they have in my own recollection.

In four colophons in the same manuscript written between 1848 and 1849, he alludes to 'the year of destruction and hunger' — *bliadhain an áir agus an ocrais*.<sup>39</sup> One of these, his explicit to *An Teagasc Críosaíde* which he finished on 22 August 1848, refers to 'the year of destruction and hunger in which thousands of people died for want of food' — *bliadhainn an áir agus an ocrais ionnar éag na mīllte duine le uireasbadh bigh*.<sup>40</sup> Neil Buttimer has questioned what exactly the term *ár* ('destruction') could have meant to our scribe here and has suggested that a remark by fellow countyman Brian Ó Luanaigh (1828–1901) may provide an explanation. According to the accompanying heading in Ó Luanaigh's text of *I'm leaving you at last Mary*, this emigration song was '[w]ritten after the odious extermination of 47'.<sup>41</sup>

Ó Raghallaigh's analysis of desperate conditions in Ireland for the year 1847 is one of a number of annals by him which include reports on other contemporary early nineteenth-century incidents. In an entry for the year 1800, for example, he comments on the Act of Union which, in his opinion, was 'to bring the common parliament of Ireland from Dublin to London' (*cómhdhail coitcheann na hÉirionn do bhreith ó Áth Cliath go Londain*). The year 1805 marked the building of a new telegraph tower on the former site of what Ó Raghallaigh calls *Mothar Uí Ruaidhinn*, a fort on the Cliffs

<sup>37</sup> A scribal spelling suggesting a pronunciation /əʔəv/; cf. Holmer, *The dialects of Co. Clare* I 66 §125, 159 §249(d).

<sup>38</sup> M MS R 69, p. [i]. Cf. Ó Fiannachta, *Léas ar ár litríocht* 98, 109; Seán de Fréine, *Croí Cine* (Dublin 1990) 231.

<sup>39</sup> M MS R 69, pp. 13, 33, 170, 427.

<sup>40</sup> M MS R 69, p. 427.

<sup>41</sup> Buttimer, 'A stone on the cairn' 106; Buttimer, 'The Great Famine in Gaelic manuscripts' 468.

of Moher (*Aillte an Mhothair*),<sup>42</sup> as well as the building of other such towers ‘in the harbours of Ireland in every place it was regarded as suitable to do so’ (*ar chuante Éireann a ngach ionnad do chonarcus oiriobhnach chom a ndéanta*). A record of a heatwave in June 1820 caused the eradication of trout ‘in all shallow rivers’ (*a ngach abhain[n] iadoimhinn*) of Ireland, while the same year marked the death of George III, ‘king of England’ (*rīgh Seagsan*). The building of the Catholic church in Kilmanaheen parish on an acre of land donated by Andrew Stacpoole of Cragbrien finds mention under the year 1821, as does the arrival of King George IV to Howth on 12 August of that same year. 1827 marked the year when the population of Clare was counted and the inhabitants of Ennistymon amounted to a total of six-hundred-and-ninety-two.<sup>43</sup>

In other contemporary entries, Ó Raghallaigh concentrates on the overall distress and social unrest among the country’s population and these seem to provide some indication of the causes of poverty that culminated in the famine of the late 1840s. Part of his description of events for the year 1821, for example, reports on a violent wind raging throughout the evening and most of the night of 30 November ‘so that many houses throughout the Kingdom were knocked down’ (*gur leagadh iliomad do thíghthibh ar feadh na Rīoghachta*).<sup>44</sup> By the year 1833, he is drawing attention to Terry Alt violence in Co. Clare, the ‘Terry Alts’ being the county’s agrarian secret society that strove, among other things, to make potato ground available at lower prices.<sup>45</sup> Our scribe glosses it ‘Co. Clare’s small war’ (*cogadh beag Chontae an Chláir*) which, for all its succinctness, may better capture the state of affairs at grassroot levels than the following statement from an editorial published in the *Clare Journal* in March of the same year: ‘it is a source of great satisfaction to us that we are enabled to testify to the perfect peace and quiet that reigns, at least externally within our county’.<sup>46</sup>

Social commentary in some annals compiled by Ó Raghallaigh points to the decades leading up to the late 1840s as being a repeat of a pattern of famine and disease. For example, he singles out the bad weather conditions affecting the potato crop nationally in 1816 and in the years thereafter when a series of famines struck and potatoes — ‘the food of the people’ (*beatha na ndaoine*) — rotted in the ground:

*A.D. 1816 An Sámhra[dh] fliuch, agus an Fōmhar, ionnus gur loibh beatha na ndaoinne.*

*1817 An Samhra[dh] gortach le a rághtar Sámhra[dh] na deith pinninídhe.*

<sup>42</sup> The fort still stood in the final decades of the eighteenth century as ‘Fort Ruain, call’d Mohar’ and finds mention in John Lloyd, *A short tour; or, an impartial and accurate description of the county of Clare, with some particular and historical observations* (Ennis 1780) 6–7. According to Thomas J. Westropp, ‘Archaeology of the Burren: prehistoric remains (forts and dolmens) along the borders of Burren, in the county of Clare’ *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 35 (1905) 205–28, 342–61 (at 359), the fort was levelled in 1808 to provide material for a new telegraph tower.

<sup>43</sup> M MS R 70, pp. 548 and 463, respectively.

<sup>44</sup> M MS R 70, p. 548.

<sup>45</sup> M MS R 70, p. 548. On this movement, see James S. Donnelly Jr., ‘The Terry Alt movement 1829–31’ *History Ireland* 2/4 (1994) 30–5; Flannan Enright, ‘Terry Alts: the rise and fall of an agrarian secret society’ in *Clare: history and society. Interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county*, ed. Matthew Lynch and Patrick Nugent (Dublin 2008) 219–41.

<sup>46</sup> Enright, ‘Terry Alts’ 239–40.

*An bhliadhainn 1816 do bhí an Samhra[dh] agus an Fógmhar comh flioch gur loibh earmhar [leg. arbhar] agus pótaítídh. An Samhradh dar ccionn .i. 1817 do bhí gorta mór san ríoghacht ionnas nár fhéudabh<sup>47</sup> an cur do dhéanamh san Earrach, acht chu[i]r Dia an rath ar an mbeagán ionnas go raibh an bheatha comh saor agus farsain go ramh [leg. raibh] potáitídh ar phinnin a' chloch.<sup>48</sup>*

A.D. 1816 The Summer wet, and the Autumn, so that the food of the people rotted.

1817 The hungry Summer called the Summer of the ten pennies.

The year 1816 the Summer and Autumn were so wet that corn and potatoes rotted. The following Summer i.e. 1817 there was a great famine in the kingdom so that planting was not possible in the Spring, but God blessed the small amount so that food was so cheap and so plentiful that potatoes were a penny a stone.

The early 1820s saw extreme weather conditions, ranging from drought to persistent wet weather:

*A.D. 1821. An ruadhthriomach is módh dá mfurras [leg. mb'fhoras] a bheith. Do thosnaig[h] an cúigíodh lá dēag do Bhéiltinne go n-uige naoíghéadh lá déag don mhí Iúil agus gaoth adúagh ar feadh na raodh [leg. ré] soin. Níor tháinig aon lá tirim go n-uige an cúigéadh lá fíothchad don mhí Oichtmhí. Ionnas gur loibh fēur agus earabhar [leg. arbhar] ar feadh na ccūig seachtmhuinidhe dēag sin nīor tháinig lá tírrim.<sup>49</sup>*

*A.D. 1822. Samhra[dh] na gortan dā ngo[i]rth[e]ar san Mumhain Samhradh na minne. Do thánaig iliomad áirgíod agus min choirce ó Sheagsana chum na hÉirionn.<sup>50</sup>*

*1823. Isan mídh Seachtm[h]ídh d'ēag Peadar Mór Ó Lochlainn Prionsa na Bóirne. Bo ē a [sic] an duinne déaghnach do shliocht na ríghthe don chinne sin é agus d'ēag gan sliocht óna c[h]odluinn féin.*

*1823 Seamhradh an fhuachta oir nīor bhfeas Seamhradh seoch Geimhre[adh] acht trē bhlāth na talmhan.<sup>51</sup>*

*1823 Samhra[dh] an fhuachta. Oir bhí sé cómh fuar nár [sic] raibh aithint ar Shamhra[dh] seoch Geimhre[adh], acht trē bhlāth na talmhan agus ceol na n-éanlaith. A mídh Meádhain Fōmha[i]r an bhliadhainn chēadna d'ēag Peadar Mór Ó Lochlainn Prionsa na Bóirne. Ba ē an fear déaghnach don fhuil rīoghamhail. D'ēag sē gan sliocht dlisdionach.<sup>52</sup>*

<sup>47</sup> A scribal spelling suggesting a pronunciation /əv/ of the preterite passive ending; cf. Holmer, *The dialects of Co. Clare* I 70 §133, 77–8 §149.

<sup>48</sup> M MS R 70, pp. 463, 549.

<sup>49</sup> M MS R 70, p. 463.

<sup>50</sup> M MS R 70, p. 549.

<sup>51</sup> M MS R 70, p. 491.

<sup>52</sup> M MS R 70, p. 549; on Peadar Mór Ó Lochlainn, see n. 74 and n. 75 below.

A.D. 1821 The greatest mighty drought ever established. It began [on] the fifteenth day of May up to the nineteenth day of the month of July with a wind from the north during that time. No dry day came up to the twenty-fifth day of the month of October. So that grass and corn rotted during those fifteen weeks no dry day came.

A.D. 1822 The Summer of famine called the Summer of meal in Munster. Much money and oatmeal arrived from England to Ireland.

1823 In the month of September mighty Peter O'Loughlin Prince of the Burren died. He was the last person of the race of kings of that family and died without issue from his own body.

1823 The Summer of cold because Summer could not be distinguished from Winter except by the earth's bloom.

1823 The Summer of cold. Because it was so cold that Summer could not be distinguished from Winter except by the earth's bloom and birdsong. In September the same year mighty Peter O'Loughlin, Prince of the Burren, died. He was the last man of royal blood. He died without legitimate issue.

Included also in these contemporary nineteenth-century annals is a depiction of the 'night of the big wind' that swept without warning across Ireland on the afternoon of 6 January 1839, causing untoward damage and multiple deaths. The events sketched by Ó Raghallaigh in the succeeding entry for the year 1842, moreover, focus on further hurricane-force winds wreaking as much havoc, particularly on the people of Thomond:

*1839 An sédheadh lā do mhí January san oídhche do shéid stoirim ghaoithe do rin iliomad dīth ar feith na hÉirionn uile. Do leag tightheibh agus do mhairbh daoine agus áirnéis. Do leag agus do bhris coillte agus ní amháin a nÉirinn, ach ar fuaid<sup>53</sup> na hÉoirpe uile. Ní bhfuil cúntus a laoi nō a litir ar a chómhór do stoirim.*

*1842 An seachtead[h] lā fíothchad don Mhí Geinbhear ar maidin do thánaig gal gaoithe do rin uiriod eanachuinn [leg. anachain] do shubstain na ndaoine a dTuadhmmhumhain agus do rin an g[h]aoth shuas.<sup>54</sup>*

1839 On the night of the sixth day of the month of January a windstorm blew that caused much destruction to the tranquility of all of Ireland. It felled houses and killed people and cattle. It felled and broke woods and not only in Ireland, but throughout the whole of Europe. There is no account in poetry or prose of a storm of its magnitude.

1842. The twenty-seventh day of the Month of January in the morning came a puff of wind that caused as much harm to the people's means in Thomond as the above wind caused.

<sup>53</sup> MS *ar f* [with abbreviation for *eadh* / *eagh*], pointing to a pronunciation as in the Irish of Co. Clare; cf. 'ar fuaid (fuigh) ... *ær fə'g*' (Holmer, *The dialects of Co. Clare* I 69 §130).

<sup>54</sup> M MS R 70, p. 549.

We may note the choice of *substain* (‘means’) above which encompasses both actual goods or possessions as well as psychological willpower or endurance in the abstract sense. A lack of means (literal and abstract) among the people of Thomond, in fact, made news some short months later in the regional press when the *Limerick Chronicle* of 5 May 1842 reported a food riot in Clarecastle. A similar riot took place in Ennis in June of the same year. When the town’s meal stores were attacked, the police opened fire killing three men and severely wounding many others.<sup>55</sup> Ó Raghallaigh’s annals for the years 1839 and 1842 immediately precede his entry outlining the severe distress of 1847 quoted above, and, taking these together with the remaining aforementioned contemporary nineteenth-century annals, they occur in a section in the same manuscript (M MS R 70) which he compiled between 1840 and 1848. It would seem, then, that in living through (and indeed surviving) a disaster of unprecedented proportions in the late 1840s, our scribe was prompted to consider, and record, other recurring events of a momentous nature that culminated in the Great Famine itself.

Direct social commentary is also a feature of Ó Raghallaigh’s poetical output. For example, the severe ‘distresses’ (*deacrachadh*) of the people of his native parish of Kilmanaheen in 1839 prompted the following attack — ten quatrains in *ógláchas* of *rannaiocht mhór* followed by a verse in *amhrán* metre — on the injustices of a rich clergy and the pervasive corruption of those in power:

## I

*Ann le do thoil, a Rígh na ríghthe,  
tá an dlighe so ag an ccléir  
gan na boicht do léigint asteach  
ag éisteacht aithfrionn Dé?*

## II

*Do léigh mise féin go fíor  
a scriptiúir an Aon-mhic shámh,  
gurab ag na boicht do bhí gan bhréig  
ríoghacht Dē go fíor le fagháil.*

## III

*Cúintrártha do bhriathra Dé  
tá ag ār ccléir dlighe agus racht:  
nach léigfid dod theampull féin  
acht an téadh [leg. té] a mbiaidh spréidh ’na ghlaic.*

## IV

*Le ing agus inghreim ducht [leg. docht]  
’sē chuirid le boicht a láimh,  
dá ndiobairt ō aithfioran[n] Dé  
an nuair [leg. a n-uair] nách mbíon[n] spréidh ’na ndáil.*

## V

*Ionnus go mbeidh agam múidhion [leg. maoin]*

<sup>55</sup> Timothy P. O’Neill, ‘Clare and Irish poverty, 1815–1851’ *Studia Hibernica* 14 (1974) 7–27 (at 23); James Kelly, *Food rioting in Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries* (Dublin 2017) 110, 134, 175–6.

*iomód féin fon dtír amach*  
*— mar do rinneadar ár ccuid ceannaighthe —*  
*is malladh [leg. mála] ar mo thóin agam.*

## VI

*Cnúsód chugam clúghamh na n-ēun*  
*is iar[r]fad mar iad oisdios [leg. eisteas],*  
*biadh agus deoch am shiubhal*  
*go mbeidh cise cruinn agam.*

## VII

*Iar ccasadh dhom don bhaile mhór*  
*ceannód cóir dom chorp,*  
*éadach dá fheabhas le faghāil*  
*agus buatais chróinn dom chois.*

## VIII

*Cuirfiod chugam teach is tab[h]uirne,*  
*is biad mar iad am ōstōir ait,*  
*a' mealladh gach baothneach ar baois*  
*do fhúigfig[h] ag ól am theach.*

## IX

*Ann sin nuair ' chaithfiod mo bhliadhainn*  
*a dtíghis dom féin go fearamhuil,*  
*tabharfad cuire[adh] don chlēir*  
*is biad am dorsoir [leg. dóirseoir] acabh.<sup>56</sup>*

## X

*Gach neach don phobal fúgham*  
*tan cheapaid siad s[i]ubhal asteach,*  
*bua[i]lf[e]ad 'na mbrollach mo lámh*  
*ag rā 'díol nō fan amach!'*

*An Ceangall*

*Atáid saoiithe gan amhrus a bhfearg leó féin*  
*a dtaobh suíge a' déanabh dlíge a measg aicme cómh claon:*  
*is iad drighdear na ndaoine tá a n-acfuinn is léir,*  
*is cead cainte ar an mbinnse ag bastard gan béas. Crích agus fóircheann.<sup>57</sup>*

## I

Is it your will, o King of kings, that the clergy has this rule not to allow the poor  
 in to listen to God's mass?

## II

Truly I myself read in the scriptures of the peaceful only Son, that without a lie  
 the kingdom of God was truly for the poor to be had.

<sup>56</sup> On this scribal spelling, see n. 37 above.

<sup>57</sup> G LSB MS 9, p. 102.

## III

Contrary to the words of God, our clergy has law and rule: that they will not allow into your own temple but the one with a fortune in his hand.

## IV

With difficulty and severe persecution they push out the poor, banishing them from God's mass when they don't possess a fortune.

## V

In order to have riches I myself will go out into the countryside — as our merchants did — with a bag at my backside.

## VI

I will gather together birds' plumage and like them [the merchants] request accommodation, food and drink on my journey until I have gathered together some treasure.

## VII

Having returned to town I will buy proper provision for my body, the best cloth to be got and tan boots for my feet.

## VIII

I will acquire a house and tavern, and will be like them [the merchants] a bloated<sup>58</sup> innkeeper, who will permit drinking in my house attracting every foolish silly person.

## IX

Then when I will spend my year housekeeping for myself manfully, I will invite the clergy and will be their doorkeeper.

## X

Every member of the public in my charge when they consider walking in, I will lay my hand on their chest saying 'pay or stay out!'

## Envoi

Doubtless there are experts angry with themselves about sitting [and] enforcing law among a class so crooked: the dregs of the people are clearly in power, and a boorish bastard on the bench is free to speak. The end and conclusion.

## MATTERS PHILOSOPHICAL AND SPIRITUAL

There is evidence that mass death by starvation in Ireland at that time prompted scribes to contemplate questions more philosophical and spiritual in nature. We may defer once again to Neil Buttimer who has called attention to the number of

<sup>58</sup> *Ait* in the original, tentatively taken here to be the genitive of *at* 'swelling' and by extension 'bloated' or even 'presumptuous'. Following the Irish of Co. Clare (Seoirse Mac Clúin, *Caint an Chláir* I (Baile Átha Cliath 1938) s.v. *ait* 'maith, aoibhinn'), an alternative translation might be 'good', but a negative attribute better befits the context.



moralizing texts that were transcribed in significant numbers immediately before and after 1850, including the poem *Cómhrá an Bháis agus an Duine Thinn* ('The Dialogue of Death and the Sick Person').<sup>59</sup> Buttimer has also cited texts in which the Irish Famine is perceived in terms of divine retribution, whereby God's faithful followers are saved while his enemies are punished.<sup>60</sup> It is in this connection that a series of quatrains by Mícheál Ó Raghallaigh himself are of relevance. The first of these is an epitaph that he translated at some point between 1848 and 1849:

*Cuimhne an [sic] d'aigne a dhuinne tan gheabhair am ghar:  
an nós 'na bhfuilir go rab[h]us am réim feadh seal;  
an nós 'na bhfuilim is gairid 'sis gearr uait í:  
bī [i] ccóir go nglacair do leabadh faoi thaobh don liog.*<sup>61</sup>

Remember in your mind o man when you will get close to me: that I was in my prime for a while the way you are; the way I am is near and it [feminine *cré* 'dust'] is soon: be prepared that you may take your bed under the side of the gravestone.

Our scribe's prayer in a second quatrain is that God give him the strength to withstand evil:

*A Rígh na cruinne do bheir luinnir fān ngrēin go moch,  
dīlte troma is toradh 'na dhiaidh go grod:  
scríobhaim chugad, mo cholpa, is féuchaim ort,  
is nā lēig tuitim níos fuide dom féin san olc.*<sup>62</sup>

O King of the world who brings brightness to the sun early, heavy floods and fruit soon afterwards: I write to you, my support,<sup>63</sup> and look to you, and let me not descend further into evil.

The same manuscript contains the following two Latin hexameters on the gifts given by the Holy Spirit: *Tu spiras ubi vis, tua munera dividis ut vis, das cuivis quod vis, quantum vis, tempore quo vis*. The Latin text, in turn, is followed in the manuscript by Ó Raghallaigh's accompanying translations into English and Irish in stanzaic form:

Your respiration as you wish you draw,  
you divide your gifts as you wish to all,  
you give to persons what you wish:

<sup>59</sup> On which see Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail, *The scribe in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland: motivations and milieu* (Münster 2000) 167–70.

<sup>60</sup> Buttimer, 'A stone on the cairn' 103–6.

<sup>61</sup> *Fearlaoi ar na aistriúghadh ó S[h]ags-Bhēarla le M. Ó Raghallaigh* ('An epitaph having been translated from English by M. O'Reilly'), M MS R 69, p. 156, with a second copy on p. 258 of the same manuscript which (apart from the 1853 dating on the title page) was written between 1848 and 1849. Four further copies by our scribe, beginning *Smuain ad aigine a dhuine* ('Think in your mind o man'), in RIA MS 23 L 34 (part ii), p. 287 (cancelled); G LSB MS 2, unnumbered page; NLI MS G 1131, p. 79; NLI MS G 774 (8), item 1, which was 'Translated from the original English by Michael O'Reilly; Master of the hilt and Backsword'.

<sup>62</sup> RIA MS 23 L 34 (part ii), p. 285 (entire quatrain cancelled). Other copies by our scribe in M MS R 68, p. 237, and NLI MS G 1131, p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> For *mo cholpa* in the original *leg. mo cholbha* ? Cf. DIL C 324.24–32.

tis as much as you wish and when you wish you do.

*Tar[r]angann tú t'eanāil an tan is mian leat é,  
roin[n]ionn tú do chuid san tslighe is am leat féin,  
tugan[n] tú do neach an mhír is maith nō is mian:  
an tan is ait leat dēanan[n] tú iad go léir.<sup>64</sup>*

By the mid 1850s, Ó Raghallaigh's personal circumstances had taken a bad turn and we find him in the following quatrain requesting shelter of an unnamed priest:

*Is atu[i]rs[e]ach atáim — mo dhíth le tréibhse —  
ag feartha[i]n anuas ar mo leabharaibh Gaodhailge!  
A Sheaga[i]rt mo chroidhe ós dod dhlighse an fhéileacht,  
tabhair beagān beag díon gan scíth don Rághallach.<sup>65</sup>*

I am afflicted — my destruction for a time — by rain [falling] down on my Irish books! O dear Priest, as hospitality is your nature, give ceaselessly to O'Reilly a little shelter.

In a county where mass evictors and the consequences of famine clearances were notorious,<sup>66</sup> the quatrain recalls the overall trauma suffered by those who survived the Great Famine in Clare.

The above appeal to the generosity or hospitality (*féileacht*) of the anonymous priest is a reminder that traditional patronage accorded the native man of letters in the nineteenth century still remained a vital source of income for scribes by mid-century and beyond. Scribal texts in Irish were in demand among aristocratic patrons, and this probably explains why Ó Raghallaigh penned a letter on 31 July 1841 to Sir Lucius O'Brien (1800–1872), fifth Baronet of Drumoland and brother of William Smith O'Brien (1803–1864), leader of the Young Ireland movement.<sup>67</sup> In it he informs his addressee that at present he has but 'one manuscript to dispose of' because he had 'sold the two only valuable manuscripts' in his possession 'to Mr [John] O'Donovan of Dublin and his Colleagues'. Having transcripts of his own, however, he would willingly furnish Sir Lucius with copies of these 'or any other work' in his possession and concludes as follows:

I have many fragments of antient history in prose and verse also Genealogies of the antient families of the Kingdom. Andrew Finucane Esq. of Ennistimon house told me when I wrote a Genealogy of that Illustrious Family of that house for his use that he would represent me to your Honour's notice knowing you to be a lover of the Language.

<sup>64</sup> RIA MS 23 L 34 (part ii), p. 286 (both hexameters cancelled), followed by the note 'M. Ó R. cct.'

<sup>65</sup> G LSB MS 9, p. 103.

<sup>66</sup> O'Neill, 'Clare and Irish poverty' 25; Donnelly, *The great Irish potato famine* 144–56; Ciarán Ó Murchadha, 'The years of the Great Famine' in *Clare: history and society. Interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county*, ed. Matthew Lynch and Patrick Nugent (Dublin 2008) 243–64 (at 257–9).

<sup>67</sup> On whom see Donough O'Brien, *History of the O'Briens from Brian Boraimhe AD. 1000 to AD. 1945* (London 1940) 235–9; Ivar O'Brien, *O'Brien of Thomond. The O'Briens in Irish history 1500–1865* (Chichester 1986) 159–61, 171–2, 248 n. 6.

I take the liberty of subscribing myself your Honours [sic] humble and most obedient Servant. Michael O'Reilly.<sup>68</sup>

Directly preceding this letter in the scribal source is a copy of an elegy composed by the Clare poet Seon Ó hUaithnín (b. 1688) on the sudden death in France in 1717 of one of Sir Lucius' forebears, Lucius son of Sir Donough O'Brien, first Baronet of Leimaneigh and Dromoland, and beginning *Tuar goil crann teannta na tíre ar crith*, or 'The country's firm mast quivering [is] a cause for weeping' (9 stanzas).<sup>69</sup> This is a canny choice of poem on Ó Raghallaigh's part because its fierce anti-Whig sentiments would surely have resonated with Sir Lucius, a one-time Tory member of parliament for Clare whose ancestors had an established connection with the Tories:

*Bás fíorobann Laoisigh Uí Bhriain sa bhFrainc  
d'fhág daoine gan chuimhne gan chiall gan chaint;  
do chráigh tíortha gan síol mBlóid ag rialú ann,  
fás síos ar a naimhde agus pian in am.*

*In am anfa mar d'aithriseas ár gcrann ó bhris  
is gan do thaca againn ach seasamh ar ár n-ancaire:  
teann tagrach go maire sin is clann a mhic  
mar gheall againn lenár ndragan mear do scannraíodh Whigs.*

*Whigs ársa a scáile do sheachnaidís  
is go Parthas ní thráchtfaid le heagla roimhe;  
Styx áras na gceardaithe a mhairbh a rí  
is gur ar ardneamh atá an sárfhear nár chealgach croí.*<sup>70</sup>

The very sudden death of Lucius O'Brien in France left people confused, senseless and speechless; it tormented territories that the seed of Blod<sup>71</sup> [was] not ruling there, stifling their enemies and distress in time.

Since our protector [Lucius], as I said, came to an end in a time of turbulence and we are left depending on our anchor [Sir Donough O'Brien] for support: may he and the descendants of his son [Sir Edward O'Brien] endure firmly and boldly as our pledge for our valiant warrior who scattered the Whigs.

The Whigs rejected his venerable brightness and will not proceed to Paradise for fear of him; the Styx is the dwelling place of the tricksters who killed their king and the excellent man whose heart was not deceitful is in high heaven.

<sup>68</sup> NLI MS G 990, p. [61]. For general comments on this manuscript comprising mainly historical material collected by Sir Lucius O'Brien, see Ní Dheá, 'Scriobhaithe lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge i gContae an Chláir' 153.

<sup>69</sup> Eoghan Ó hAnluain (ed.), *Seon Ó hUaithnín* (Baile Átha Cliath 1973) 45–6. As pointed out by this volume's honorand ('Dandaimín don Ridire Brianach (1705)' *Éigse* 24 (1990) 121 n. 5), the date 1715 accompanying the poem's title in the latter edition should read 1717. As well as the copy by our scribe in NLI MS G 990, pp. [59]–[60], two further copies by him have come down in NLI MS G 1131, pp. 62–4, and NLI MS G 774 (8), item 1, all of which begin *Tuar guil teann teannta na tíre ar crith*, 'The country's firm support quivering [is] a cause for weeping'.

<sup>70</sup> Quatrains 4–6 in Ó hAnluain, *Seon Ó hUaithnín* 45.

<sup>71</sup> Blod son of Cas, eponymous ancestor of Dál gCais from whom the O'Briens of Thomond descended.

Taking letter and poem together, it would seem that Ó Raghallaigh was seeking to gain the sympathy of a prospective patron who belonged to a family that had a high regard for the Irish language as well as a genuine interest in the role of the O'Briens in Irish history.<sup>72</sup> Attracting such sympathy was all the more important, of course, given what our scribe regarded as the precarious state of the Irish language which, as mentioned already, became an increasing preoccupation for him by the second half of the 1840s.<sup>73</sup>

This brings us to a final example, the transmission of an elegy, composed jointly by Ó Raghallaigh and his friend Séamas Mac Cruitín, on the death of Peadar Mór Ó Lochlainn, and beginning *Tuar guil tréan don taobh so d'Éirinn árd*, or 'A bitter cause for weeping for this part of eminent Ireland'. According to two of Ó Raghallaigh's annalistic entries quoted already, Peadar Mór died in 1823 'without issue from his own body' (*gan sliocht óna c[h]odluinn féin*) while a brief second entry by him for the same year informs us that Ó Lochlainn died 'without legitimate issue' (*gan sliocht dlisdionach*).<sup>74</sup> His genealogy, also compiled by Ó Raghallaigh, states that he was the last in the illustrious line of O'Loughlins of the Burren, his grandfather, for example, being Brian Ó Lochlainn, patron of Aodh Buí Mac Cruitín (d. 1755).<sup>75</sup> It was for this same Brian, in fact, that Mac Cruitín's kinsman, Aindrias (d. 1738), compiled what has come to be known as 'The O'Loughlin Anthology' or *Duanaire Uí Lochlainn* (RIA MS E iv 3). Completed in 1727, this collection of texts deals with members of the Uí Lochlainn or kindred families who flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, or with the legendary Ulidians from whom they were held to have sprung.

At least seven copies of the elegy on Peadar Mór Ó Lochlainn are extant today, and four of these are present in manuscripts containing contributions written by Ó Raghallaigh between 1838 and 1855.<sup>76</sup> The timing here is not insignificant, given that the poem laments the death of the last member of a family who, like the aforementioned O'Briens of Drumoland, played a prominent part in the patronage of poets and scribes in Co. Clare in the modern era.<sup>77</sup> Accordingly, it is a lament on the death of the very traditional system itself of patronage:

*Tuiridh* [leg. *Tuireadh*] *Pheadair Uí Lochlainn, Prionnsa déanach na Bóirne.*  
*Le M. Ó R. agus S. Mac Cruitín.*

# I

*Tuar guil tréan don taobh so d'Éirinn árd,*

<sup>72</sup> On whom, see Eilís Ní Dheá, 'Pátrúin agus pátrúntacht i gContae an Chláir san 18ú haois' *Léachtaí Cholm Cille* 34 (2004) 236–56 (at 250–2).

<sup>73</sup> Such preoccupation notwithstanding, it may be noted that an entirely different state of affairs prevailed in Co. Waterford where, for example, the production of Irish manuscripts by literate men increased during the first half of the nineteenth century; see Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'Saothrú na Gaeilge scríofa sna Déise aimsir an drochshaoil' *An Linn Bhui* 21 (2017) 225–41.

<sup>74</sup> See n. 51 and n. 52 above.

<sup>75</sup> M MS R 70, p. 433.

<sup>76</sup> G LSB MS 2, pp. 455–6; NLI MS G 1131, pp. 56–8; M MS R 69, p. 473; G LSB MS 9, pp. 93–4. Remaining copies in: NLI G 314 (pp. 112–14) by Tomás and Mícheál Ó Nialláin of Kilfenora, 1800–1823; RIA MS 23 L 40, part I (pp. 48–50), by Seán Ó Gouliachta, *alias* John Lysaght, of Kilshanny, 1857; NLI G 673 (pp. 12–13), an incomplete text (6 + 2 stanzas) by Mártan Ó Griobhtha of Kilrush, 1864.

<sup>77</sup> The O'Loughlins of the Burren are discussed by Ní Dheá, 'Pátrúin agus pátrúntacht i gContae an Chláir' 240–3.

*bás an tsaorfhla[i]th dub ēirde clū agus cáil;  
ba laoch mear lān-ēachtach ē a dtreas le nāmha[i]d,  
mo léunchreach go faonlag ē a n-ua[i]gh ar lārr!*

## II

*Air lārr ō leagad[h] sin Peadar mac Toird[h]ealbhaigh teann,  
a n-uaigneas leapt[h]an faoi leaca 'na luighe go fann,  
tā ' chēile cailce go hatursach [leg. hatuirseach] a' caoi go cruaidh,  
tā 'n tīrr mo dheacair dā dheasgadh sin choidhche a mbuairt.*

## III

*Is buartha Boirinn go huile is tīrrt[h]e Tuadhmhumhan,  
gan aon don fhuirionn ' ghluais chugain[n] ōn dtīrr adtuaig[h];  
mo thruagh mo thursadh [leg. thuirse] mo thobaist mo lēun le luagh,  
gan aon dā shliocht sin ' bheith again[n] 'na dhiaigh go buan!*

## IV

*Go buan dā maireadh sin cúiruidhe [leg. curadha] na Craoibhe Ruadh,  
laochra Ulladh go huile 'na ttrēan ttromshluagh,  
Conlaoch calma agus Fearg[h]us mhic [leg. mhac] Rusadh Ruadh,<sup>78</sup>  
do bheadh līon do shochraide agad do na laochra ' luadhaim.*

## V

*Dā lúadhain[n] go huile an fhuirionn ónar shíollraigh a phōr:  
Conc[h]ubhar mac Neasa is Cafach [leg. Cobhthach] mac Maolgach<sup>79</sup> mór,  
Cū C[h]olla[i]nn calma Cairbre is Conall cruaigh,  
a Chríost cā cabhair tāid uile fa līog gan luaid[h]!*

## VI

*Gan luaid[h] ō leagadh sin calmshliocht Ír mo chreach!  
Air feodh faoi leaca gan tacadh tá 'n tīrr air fad,  
go claoig[h]te caimhte [leg. caithte ?] gan cairid a ccūirt nā ' ccruas,  
an drong do mhairion[n] biad feasda ar dīth mo nuar!*

## VII

*Mo nuar mo dheacair mar d'imthig[h] na leōmhainn leat  
as Tuadhmhumhain taithneamhach ' thathaig [leg. thaithigh] do shinnsear seal!  
Mo thruagh le hathrais [leg. haithris] go bhfuil Lochlan[n]aig[h] Bóirne ar  
ceal,  
is uaisle chalma ceannusach [sic] Fōd[h]la ar fad.*

## VIII

*Tá Fódhla meata 's a fearrac[h]oin fann fóraoir,  
'sa cóip gan gradam ag gasarra [leg. gasra] Gall gan ghnaoi;  
annódhthach [leg. anshódhach] anacrach feasda beid gannshliocht Gaoidhil,*

<sup>78</sup> According to Keating, Fearghus Fairrge was the father of Rossa Ruadh and the latter was granted the province of Leinster by Eochaidh Feidhlioch; cf. Patrick S. Dinneen, *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn le Seathrún Céitinn*, D.D. Irish Texts Society 8 (London 1908) 158, 184.

<sup>79</sup> In the genealogy of Ceinéal Bógaine in Donegal, Meilge is named as the father of Cobhthach Án and Cobhthach Cearr; see M. A. O'Brien, *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae* I (Dublin 1962) 165.

*go seōlla cathair nimhe cabhair 'na cōir tair toinn.*

*An Ceangal*

*Do b[h]ās a Pheadair d'[h]ūig Boirinn gan réim ríghthe,  
gan fáigh gan flaithibh gan file gan léir-laoighthe;  
mo chrādh cā bhfuilid gach curradh don tsēantsíolrach,  
tānaig chugainn taid imthighthe mo chumhadh choidhche!*

*Mo dhaithnid dreóil [leg. dearóil] an pór bo [leg. ba] līomhtha lann  
nā mairid fós a bhfōirneart taoisigh teann;  
bheadh fearan[n] feōrghlan Fōdhla ag sinnsear seann  
le ceatha cród[h]adh gleódh agus caomsgur [leg. coimheasgar] ceann.  
Crīoch.<sup>80</sup>*

Lament for Peter O'Loughlin, the last Prince of the Burren. By M. O'R. and J. MacCurtin.

I

A bitter cause for weeping for this part of eminent Ireland, the death of the noble prince of the highest fame and reputation; he was a swift, most powerful hero in conflict with an enemy, my sorrowful destruction, he [lies] inertly in a grave in the ground!

II

In the ground since powerful Peter son of Toirdhealbhach was laid low, lying weakly in the loneliness of a bed under stones, his beautiful spouse sorrowful, weeping bitterly, [and] the country, alas, forever in sorrow because of that.

III

All the Burren and the lands of Thomond are sorrowful, without a single one of the troop [O'Loughlins] who moved to us from the land from the north; my regret, my affliction, my destruction, my loss to mention, that we do not have any of his offspring after him permanently!

IV

Had the warriors of the Red Branch lived permanently, the heroes of Ulster all in a strong, great multitude, brave Conlaoch and Fearghus son of Rusadh Ruadh, you would have your due number of allies of the heroes I mention.

V

Were I to mention entirely the band from whom his stock descended: Conchubhar son of Neasa and Cobhthach son of Maolgach, brave Cú Chulainn, Cairbre and hardy Conall, o Christ, what help [is it] they are all under a headstone motionless!

VI

Motionless since Ír's brave stock has been laid low my loss! The entire country is wasting away under headstones without support, oppressed, worn out without

<sup>80</sup> M MS R 69, p. 473.

a friend in court or in hardship, the multitude that survives will henceforth be in ruin my grief!

## VII

My grief, alas how the warriors departed with you out of pleasant Thomond that your ancestors frequented for a time! My regret to report that the O'Loughlins of the Burren, the noblest the bravest the most authoritative of all of Ireland are no more.

## VIII

Ireland is subdued and her warriors feeble alas, and her troop disrespected by a group of Foreigners without repute; the deficient race of the Gael will henceforth be miserable [and] wretched, until the heavenly city in its authority send aid for her across the sea.

## Envoi

Your death o Peter has left the Burren without a dynasty, without a prophet, princes, poet, accurate poems; my woe where is every champion of the venerable race that came to us, they are gone my sorrow henceforth!

My oppressive grief that the seed of the sharpest blades still does not live on through the great strength of a powerful leader; an ancient ancestor would have Fódhla's clear-grassed land through brave trials of battle and combat.  
The end.

This poem's sense of distress must have taken on a particularly poignant significance for the receptive audience of Ó Raghallaigh's time — for those readers and listeners who had survived the years of 'the destruction and the hunger' (*an t-ár agus an t-ocras*) culminating in the Great Famine of the late 1840s.<sup>81</sup>

## ABBREVIATIONS

BL	British Library.
DIL	<i>Dictionary of the Irish language. Based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials</i> (Dublin 1913–1976).
G LSB	Lámhscríbhinní Breise Collection, NUI Galway.
M MS C	O'Curry Manuscript Collection, NUI Maynooth.
M MS R	Renahan Manuscript Collection, NUI Maynooth.
NLI Mac Clancy	microfilm copy (positive 494) of four missing sources, [1]–[4], from the Mac Clancy Gaelic Manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland.
NLI MS G	Gaelic Manuscript Collection, National Library of Ireland.
NUI	The National University of Ireland.
RIA	Royal Irish Academy.
UCD Ferriter	Ferriter Manuscript Collection, University College Dublin.

<sup>81</sup> I am very grateful to Dr Eilís Ní Dheá and my co-editors for their advice on various aspects of this paper.