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MEIDHBHÍN NÍ ÚRDAIL

Observations on the text known as the *Leabhar Oiris**

The importance which Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* attached to the O'Briens of Thomond as key figures in Ireland's glorious past continued in subsequent Irish narrative tradition, resulting thereby in the emergence of what the present writer has termed elsewhere an 'O'Brien Saga', which was developed and promoted in five key eighteenth-century prose texts.¹ The first of these is a romantic literary re-enactment of the battle of Clontarf with the title *Cath Cluana Tarbh*, one of the most popular prose texts to be transmitted in the post-classical Irish manuscript sources.² Three discrete sets of annals, mainly concerned with Munster affairs, present their own particular encomium of the O'Briens of Thomond, while giving the battle of Clontarf and events surrounding it a central place in their respective narratives. The first in this post-classical triad of annals has come to be known as the 'Dublin Annals of Inisfallen' and the remaining two are described in the manuscript sources as extracts *d'Annálaibh Innis Faithlionn* ('from the Annals of Inisfallen').³ And, finally, the fifth text and subject of what follows below, that known in the manuscript sources as *Leabhar Oiris* (*LO*), which yet again praises Dál gCais and the heroic age with which this dynasty is associated.

* I am very grateful to Gordon Ó Riain for commenting on this article in draft. Translations of original passages in the Irish language into English are my own and, unless stated, material within square brackets is also mine.

¹ Ní Úrdail (2007a); Ní Úrdail (2008); Ní Úrdail (2011: 77).

² Ní Úrdail (2004); Ní Úrdail (2011).

³ Ní Úrdail (2005); Ní Úrdail (2007b).

Leabhar Oiris and its sources

Where a title is given, the manuscript sources have variants beginning *Leabhar Oiris agus annála ar chogaibh na hÉireann* ('Book of History and annals concerning the battles of Ireland'), yet *LO* focuses mainly on Munster matters rather than on events relating to Ireland generally. We do not know for certain who its compiler was except that he was 'a zealous partisan of Brian [Bórainmhe], as is shown by the omission of his less successful exploits'.⁴ The contents of the work is best divided into two parts, the first detailing Brian Bórainmhe's battles for supremacy from the time of the accession of Maol Seachlainn Mór son of Domhnall to the high kingship of Ireland in A.D. 976 (= AU 980) down to Brian's most famous battle of all at Clontarf in A.D. 1014.⁵

The second part of *LO* continues in the aftermath of Clontarf.⁶ It begins with the dynastic struggle within Uí Eachach Mumhan, which erupted into a battle between Cian son of Maol Muadh of the Cinéal nAodha branch and his kinsman, Domhnall son of Dubhdábhoireann of the Cinéal Laoghaire branch, resulting thereby in the killing of Cian and his two brothers, Cathal and Raghallach.⁷ This battle, so the manuscript sources, was fought in Maigh Guilidhe / Guile, a place which, according to the record of the battle in the aforementioned eighteenth-century 'Dublin Annals of Inisfallen', is situated in Uíbh Eachach or southwest Munster.⁸ Further details include a record of the struggle for succession in Thomond between Donnchadh son of Brian Bórainmhe and his half-brother, Tadhg, who was an equal claimant to the kingship of Munster, and mention is made of a battle between them in which Donnchadh's ally, Ruaidhrí son of Donnagán, king of Ara, was slain.⁹ Maol Seachlainn's death (= AU 1022) finds mention as well, as does the treacherous killing by the men of Éile of Tadhg Ó Briain 'at the behest of his own brother' (*ar n-a furáiomh d'a bhráthair féin*), Donnchadh.¹⁰ *LO* concludes by describing the latter's unsuccessful attempt at subduing Osraighe in 1027.¹¹

⁴ Best (1904: 74).

⁵ Best (1904: 78-93 §§1-47 l. 4).

⁶ Best (1904: 93-104 §§47 (l. 4)-72).

⁷ AU, ALC s.a. 1014; AI s.a. 1014 refers only to the death of Cian and his brother or kinsman (*bráthair*); cf. Ryan (1941: 141), Kelleher (1967: 240) and Ó Corráin (1978: 12).

⁸ *Cath idir Chian mac Maolmuadh et Domhnall mac Duibhdabhoireann a Maigh Guile a nUibh Eachach* (TCD MS 1281 (H.1.7), part one, f. 24r).

⁹ AU, ALC s.a. 1014; CS s.a. 1012 [= 1014].

¹⁰ Best (1904: 103 §64); cf. ATig. s.a. 1023; CS s.a. 1021 [= 1023]; AFM s.a. 1023. Donnchadh was deposed in 1063 by Tadhg's son, Toirdhealbhadh, whereupon he went on pilgrimage to Rome and died there in 1064. For Donnchadh's time in exile and death abroad as portrayed in a poem beginning *Dursan toisg Dhonnchaidh mheic Briain* ('Alas the journey of Donnchadh son of Brian'), see Ní Úrdail (2012).

¹¹ AU s.a.; AI s.a.; CS s.a. 1025 [= 1027].

Ten manuscripts containing the chronicle as part of their contents were known to Richard Irvine Best and he lists these in the introduction to an edition of *LO*, which he published in the first volume of *Ériu*.¹² The source for Best's edition is an undated transcript by Seón Mac Solaidh (*alias* John Solly) of Harmanstown, Co. Meath, which forms part of the contents of RIA MS 23 E 26 (pp 194-207).¹³ To Best's list of ten we may add a further sixteen scribal sources, all of which may be dated to between 1711-1712 and c. 1848.¹⁴ It is only in more recent times, 1997 in fact, that one of these came to light, during a stock-check by Abbotsford Library in Scotland.¹⁵ The manuscript in question, now in the study at Abbotsford, shelfmark E 2, contains as part of its contents an incomplete text of *LO* on folios 52r-57v, and it was transcribed in Dublin between 1725 and 1727 by the Tipperary scribe Muiris Ua Nubhadh (*alias* Maurice Newby) 'from the book of Tadhg son of Seán Ó Neachtain' (*as leabhar Thaidhg mac Seain Ui Neachtuin*).¹⁶ That 'book' is now RIA MS 24 P 41, which Tadhg Ó Neachtain began compiling 'in Dublin' (*an Ath Cliath*) in 1723.¹⁷

Seventeen transcripts in all of *LO* were produced in the eighteenth century.¹⁸ Ten of these were by Tadhg Ó Neachtain and scribes associated with him and his father, Seán, who together set about promoting Irish scholarship in Dublin in the early decades of that century.¹⁹ The earliest four extant scribal witnesses for *LO* were written between 1711-1712 and 1714 by Diarmuid Ó Conchubhair (*alias* Dermot O'Connor) from Limerick, whose main claim to fame was a controversial English translation of *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, printed in 1723.²⁰ While based in Dublin in 1720 (where he wrote part of the contents of BL Egerton MS 133 in that year), Ó Conchubhair became acquainted with the Ó Neachtain scholars and so began, it would seem, the circulation of *LO* in the capital city. As well as his

¹² Best (1904).

¹³ The scribe did not add the date 1711 to his text of *LO* in this manuscript (*pace* Best 1904: 75). Mac Solaidh (fl. 1715) and his work are discussed by Walsh (1933: 197-201), Harrison (1988: 40-41) and Ní Mhunghaile (2011: 132, 133-134).

¹⁴ Ní Úrdail (2011: 257-264).

¹⁵ Ó Macháin (2000).

¹⁶ Abbotsford MS E 2, f. 105v, f. 159v; for Ua Nubhadh (fl. 1711-1727) and his manuscripts, see Ó Duibhir (1982: 74-76) and Ó Macháin (2000: 148).

¹⁷ This date and place of transcription occur in part (a) of the manuscript (p. [84]), most of which appears to have been written during the 1720s, while a table of contents was added subsequently ('1741 Beal. 21', p. [viii]); cf. Ó Concheanainn (1970: 3611).

¹⁸ An acephalous text in RIA 23 P 13, pp 93-102, is undated but the handwriting is that of the Limerick scribe, Seón Lloyd (d. c. 1785).

¹⁹ For Seán (d. 1729) from Co. Roscommon and Tadhg Ó Neachtain (d. c. 1752) from Dublin, see Risk (1975), Ó Háinle (1986: 113-119), Harrison (1988: 24-25, 40-43), Ní Shéaghda (1989: 42-45) and Ó Háinle (1991).

²⁰ TCD MS 1296 (H.2.5), pp 214-232; RIA MS 23 L 4, pp 165-178 (fragmentary text); Cashel MS 22, pp 157-166; Maynooth C MS 98, part (b), pp 231-245. For Ó Conchubhair (fl. 1711-1730) and his work, see Ó Cuív (1958-1961), Ó Madagáin (1974: 32-33, 88-9), and Ó Catháin (1987: 71-87).

transcript in RIA MS 23 E 26, the aforementioned Seón Mac Solaidh had completed a second text of *LO* by the early 1720s.²¹ There followed the near contemporary transcripts by Tadhg Ó Neachtain and Muiris Ua Nubhadh, mentioned above, and two transcripts of *LO* were made by the Dublin scribe Aodh Ó Dálaigh (*alias* Hugh O’Daly) in the 1740s and 1750s.²² Ó Conchubhair, Mac Solaidh, Ua Nubhadh and Ó Dálaigh are among twenty-six scholars in all named by Tadhg Ó Neachtain in a poem written c. 1728 and beginning *Sloinfead scothadh na Gaoidhilge grinn / dá raibhe rém rae a nDuibhlinn* (‘I will name the best of the accurate [*or* lovely] Irish language that ever was during my lifetime in Dublin’), which celebrates Dublin’s vibrant literary scene in the early decades of the eighteenth century.²³

Among the nineteenth-century sources, most are of Munster provenance. A notable exception is the fragmentary text of *LO*, which forms part of the contents of UCC MS 115 (pp 104-111), a manuscript which was written in 1848 by the Cork scribe Tomás ‘an tSneachta’ Ua Conchubhair ‘in the month of February’ (*ansan Miosa Feabhra*) ‘in the city of London’ (*a ccathair Londoine*) where he had settled c. 1820 to work as a tailor.²⁴ An unfinished translation into English accompanying an Irish original has also survived and this material, in the handwriting of Nicholas (O’)Kearney (*alias* Nioclás Ó Cearnaigh), was probably completed in Dublin, c. 1847.²⁵

Interpolated passages

As a historical record concerning Munster during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, *LO* begins as follows:

*Callann anno domini sé bliadhna seachtmhoghadh ar naoi gcéad
Maolseachlainn mac Domhnaill do ghabháil ríge hÉireann.
Cogadh mór le Domhnall mac Faoláin rígh na nDéise 7 le hIomhar Phuirt
Láirge ar Bhrian Bórainmhe mac Cinnéidigh 7 ar Chian mac Maoilmhuaidh,
gur airgeadar 7 gur loisgeadar Corcach 7 urmhór Mumhan, do loisgeadar 7*

²¹ RIA MS 24 A 2, pp 288-318. The compilation of this manuscript was begun on 4 March, 1718, ‘in Harmanstown in the parish of Stackallan’ (*a mBaile Hardaman a bporaisde Tighe Callain*, p. [i]), Co. Meath, and it was still in the scribe’s possession in 1723 (front flyleaf).

²² TCD MS 1287 (H.1.13), pp 59-85; TCD MS 1280 (H.1.6), ff 64r-72v. Ó Dálaigh (fl. 1725-1758) is discussed by Ní Shéaghdha (1989: 46) and Ó Macháin (2006: 96-98).

²³ Twenty-six quatrains, edited by O’Rahilly (1912-1913a: 158-161); cf. Harrison (1988: 135-7).

²⁴ For this scribe (1798-c.1865), originally from Knockanevin in North Cork, and his poetry, see Ní Dhonnchadha (1953); cf. Ó Conchúir (1982: 54).

²⁵ RIA MS 23 E 4, pp 117-149, pp 116-164, respectively; cf. Ní Úrdail (2011: 263, 264). For this scribe (c. 1802-c.1865), who moved from Drogheda to take up a teaching post in Dublin in 1844, and his poetry, see Ó Dufaigh, Ó Doibhlin (1989).

*do airgeadar 7 do hionarbadh Domhnall mac Faoláin ó Chluain Fi[o]nnabhair gona dhuirtheach.*²⁶

Anno domini 976 Maol Seachlainn son of Domhnall assumed the sovereignty of Ireland.

A great battle by Domhnall son of Faolán king of Déise and Iomhar of Waterford against Brian Bórainmhe son of Cinnéidigh and Cian son of Maol Muadh, and they ravaged and burned Cork and most of Munster, they burned and ravaged and drove out Domhnall son of Faolán from Cluain Fionnabhair together with its oratory.

The style of presentation in the foregoing passage is laconic and somewhat lacklustre, and this is generally a feature of other entries in the work.

There are, however, two narrative interpolations in *LO* (one each in parts one and two) where this is not the case, so that rather than simply being a cryptic chronicle concerning tenth- and eleventh-century Munster, the presentation is particularly animated in style and augments what is otherwise a matter-of-fact record of events. Given the partisan nature of *LO* in favouring Dál gCais of Thomond, small wonder that the text should pay special attention to the battle of Clontarf and matters preceding the conflict itself.²⁷ The latter, in fact, comprise the work's first interpolation, its description being one informed by motifs relating to the supernatural and to the Otherworld, while casting the historical characters Brian Bórainmhe and his son Murchadh as foils to heathen Viking invaders. This first interpolation finds a parallel, moreover, in the aforementioned romantic prose tale *Cath Chuana Tarbh*. Murchadh, in particular, emerges as a key figure on the battlefield, and these accounts agree in including as part of his final combat Murchadh's 'banishing' (*díochur*) and 'killing' (*marbhadh*) of all cavernous creatures and water monsters.²⁸ Thus, the battle against heathen Vikings at Clontarf has come to symbolize the overall triumph of good over evil in *Cath Chuana Tarbh* and *LO*.

As the present writer has discussed the interpolated passage in the first part of *LO* elsewhere,²⁹ the concern here is with its counterpart in the second part of the work. Part two of *LO*, as noted above, begins with the battle for supremacy within Uí Eachach Mumhan, and specifically with the political tensions between Cian son of Maol Muadh of the Cinéal nAodha branch and his kinsman, Domhnall son of Dubhdábhoireann of the Cinéal Laoghair branch. The battle itself is only mentioned in brief, the focus being rather on celebrating, both in prose and verse, the heroic age of Dál gCais, while mourning the passing of its heroes, Brian Bórainmhe and his son Murchadh,

²⁶ Best (1904: 78 §§1-2). Cluain Fionnabhair in the above was possibly at or near Kilfenora, Co. Clare (Hogan 1910: s.n. *Cluain Findabrach*).

²⁷ Best (1904: 83-93 §§23-47 l. 4).

²⁸ Best (1904: 87-88 §33); Ní Úrdail (2011: 81, 118 §9, 141-142).

²⁹ Ní Úrdail (2011: 78-81).

Conaing son of Donn Cuan and nephew of Brian, and, in particular, Cian son of Maol Muadh.³⁰ This second interpolated section has also been preserved as a discrete prose tale with the title *Cath Moighe Guile* in ten manuscripts, dating from 1705 to 1858, and a version thereof was printed by John MacNeill (*alias* Eoin Mac Néill) with the title ‘Cian Mac Maolmuadh’ in volume seven of the *Gaelic Journal* although he gives no source for this printed text.³¹

The narrative begins as follows:

7 do fhógair cath ar Dhomhnall mac Duibhdábhoireann. Do ollmhuigheadar teacht do chum an chatha do gach leith go Magh Guilidhe. An lá roimhe an gcath do ghabhadar cuid do ghiolladhaibh Chéin trí Cheann Eich, 7 do ibheadar bainne do bhí ag teacht go saor Mocholmóg naomh; 7 ní dhearna Cian comhairle le Mocholmóg nó muinnterdhus; 7 ní mar sin do rinne Dornnall mac Duibhdábhoireann, acht tháing go Mocholmóg 7 do rinne umhla dhó, 7 do ghluais uaidh chum an chatha; d’a ndubhradh an rann:

*A Dhómhnaill, ó théig[h]e soir
an gormfhód atá fod’ throigh,
go dtí leat ar ndíth a shluaigh
ceann Chéin mic Maoil Mhuaidh mic Broin.*³²

And he [Cian] declared a battle on Domhnall son of Dubhdábhoireann. They prepared to come to the battle from every direction to Magh Guilidhe. The day before the battle some of Cian’s attendants passed through Kinneigh, and they drank milk which was intended for the craftsman of saint Mo Cholmóg; Cian did not consult with Mo Cholmóg or make friendship [with him]; that is not what Domhnall son of Dubhdábhoireann did, rather he came to Mo Cholmóg and paid him homage, and moved on to the battle; whence the quatrain was said:

O Dómhnall, when you travel forward, along the illustrious [or green] land which is beneath your foot, may the head of Cian son of Maol Muadh son of Bran come with you after the slaughter of his [Cian’s] host.

³⁰ Best (1904: 93-101 §§47 (l. 4)-54).

³¹ Ní Úrdail (2011: 265-267); MacNeill (1896-1897).

³² Best (1904: 93-94 §47). Goedheer (1938: 62) took *do ghabhadar cuid do ghiolladhaibh Chéin trí Cheann Eich* to be a reference to horse theft on the part of Cian’s attendants, probably because lower-case *eich* appears in the printed text. The townland of Ceann Eich (Kinneigh) is in the present-day barony of Cairbrigh Thoir (Carbery East), Co. Cork. I follow the manuscript source for the printed text (RIA 23 E 26, p. 202) in retaining *soir* (q. 1a) and *gormfhód* (q. 1b) rather than reproducing Best’s *thoir* and *an ghormfhód*, respectively, and I emend *Maoilmhuaidh* (in the printed text) to *Maoil Mhuaidh* (q. 1d) for the purpose of *aicill* rhyme (: *shluaigh*). Following the manuscript reading *Mo cholmog*, an emendation *Mo Cholmóg*, rather than *Mocholmóg* as in the printed text (q. 1a), would indeed give one internal rhyme in the first couplet (: *gormfhód*). However, the variant reading *A Dhómhnaill*, listed by Best for q. 1a, seems to be what the context requires here, and, no other internal rhymes occur in the quatrain in any case, apart from the *aicill* rhyme in the second couplet.

Given that Domhnall son of Dubhdábhoireann pays homage to the saint, the blessing which he receives ensures his victory in battle:

Do chuadar i gcoinne a chéile go Magh Guilidhe, 7 tugadh cath eatorra i n-ar marbhadh Cian mac Maoilmhuaidh 7 Cathal 7 Raghallach, a dhías dearbhráthar, triúr mac Mhaoilmhuaidh mic Broin, go n-ár deisceirt Mumhan eatorra; 7 do badh mór an sgéal sin, Cian mac Maoilmhuaidh do mharbhadh re Domhnall mac Duibhdábhoireann, óir ní raibh i nÉirinn i n-a aimsir féin neach budh fearr eineach is uaisle nó an Cian sin. Is mar adubhairt Mac Coisi, ag tabhairt tuarasghála shleachta Éibhir Fhinn ós áird do Mhaoilsheachlainn, rígh Éireann, ar ndiultadh an tsaoghail dó féin, 7 é i gCluain mic Nóis 'na chomhnaidhe, gan dul tar crosaibh Chluana amach:

*Inneósad mo theist ar Chian
mac Maoilmhuaidh na n-eachradh ndian:
ní fhaca mé thiar nó thoir
a shamhail do shiol Éibhir.³³*

They faced each other at Magh Guilidhe, and a battle was fought between them in which Cian son of Maol Muadh was killed and Cathal and Raghallach, his two brothers, the three sons of Maol Muadh son of Bran, and the destruction of south Munster between them; and that was a great calamity, Cian son of Maol Muadh killed by Domhnall son of Dubhdábhoireann, for nobody better in honour and nobility than that Cian flourished in Ireland during his own time. And as Mac Coise said, giving an account of the descendants of Éibhear Fionn publicly to Maol Seachlainn, king of Ireland, having rejected life himself, and he living in Clonmacnoise, without going over the boundaries of Clonmacnoise:

I will relate my account of Cian son of Maol Muadh of the swift steeds: I have not seen in the west or east such a descendant of Éibhear.

It is not so much the battle for supremacy itself, then, which is of importance, but rather the gallant era evoked by the historical figures Cian, Cathal and Raghallach, i.e. the sons of Maol Muadh, Domhnall son of Dubhdábhoireann and Maol Seachlainn Mór of Meath.

The reference in the above passage to Mac Coise of Clonmacnoise moves the narrative onto the next part of this second interpolated passage of *LO*, one which comprises testimonies in prose and poetry in *ógláchas*, mainly of *rannaíocht mhór*. This material is attributed to the aforementioned Mac Coise as well as to Mac Liag and one Mac Giolla Caoimh (also referred to in the scribal sources as An Giolla Caoimh), poets who came to be associated in Irish tradition with Maol Seachlainn Mór and Brian Bórainne.³⁴ The language of the poems clearly indicates that they are later compositions

³³ Best (1904: 94 §48).

³⁴ Ó Lochlainn (1942); Ó Lochlainn (1943); Ó Riain (2007: 57-58).

projected back into tenth-century Ireland. In mourning the passing of a number of historical characters associated with Dál gCais, including Cian son of Maol Muadh, their *ubi sunt?* theme serves to celebrate a former Golden Age in Ireland's history.

The first poem of five quatrains and beginning *Fada bheith gan aoibhneas ann* ('A long time being without delight there'), is attributed to Mac Liag. The poet considers his futile lot, now that Brian, Murchadh, Cian and the heroic world associated with Kincora are gone forever, and he resigns himself to a life of uncertainty, and even fear, on an island on the Shannon:

*Fada bheith gan aoibhneas ann
mar nár shaoileas go bráth bheith,
mar do bhádhús i gCeann Coradh caoimh,
níor bh'uamhan liom aon dom' chreich.*

*Dá maireadh Brian Binne Builg,
is Murchadh ó Luirg na long,
ní bhéinn-si i nInnse an Ghoill Duibh,
mar a dtiosaigh tuil is tonn.*

*Dá maireadh Conaing na gcuan,
armáil sluagh, laoch nár lag!
Fear mar é Eachtar na sluagh,
ní léigfeadh mé uadh i bhfad.*

['S é]³⁵ *do-bheir mé duilbhir, doirbh,
nocha gcluinin tairm na dtriath;
níor bh'ionann is siubhal suairc
d'á ráinig ar cuairt go Cian.*

*Do chuadhús go Cian an Chairn,
níor thriath gan tairm an tír theann,
ní raibh acht Brian na mbrat sróil,
triath budh chóir do chur 'n-a cheann.*³⁶

A long time being without delight there as I did not ever imagine being, when I was in beautiful Kincora, I did not fear anybody plundering me.

Had Brian of Beann Bolg lived, and Murchadh from Lorg of the ships, I would not be in Inis an Ghoill Duibh, where flood and wave converged.

³⁵ Square brackets in Best's printed text.

³⁶ Best (1904: 95-96 §50). I follow MacNeill (1896-1897: 68, 71) in capitalizing *Brian Binne Builg* (q. 2a) and *Luirg na long* (q. 2b), as well as in emending the peculiar reading *ormhuill* in the manuscripts (and reproduced also by Best) to *armáil* (q. 3b). *Bolg* is common in place names (O'Rahilly 1946: 44-45) and among the place names called *Lorg*, one is on Loch Erne (Hogan 1910: s.n. *Lorcc*), which would fit the context here. Also, emending *do bhádhús* and *nár* to *do bhá* (q. 1c) and *nachar* (q. 3b), respectively, gives the required seven syllables in each line while emending *caoimh* to *caomh* (q. 1c) restores *aicill* rhyme (: *aon*).

Had Conaing of the harbours lived, armour of hosts, a mighty hero! A man like he Hector of the hosts, would not grant me leave from him for long.

It is this which makes me melancholy [and] dissatisfied, I do not hear the tumult of the lords; it was not a pleasant journey for all who came to visit Cian [now that he exists no more].

I travelled to Cian of Mizen Head – the mighty territory – he was not a lord without fame, there never existed a lord who could be compared to him, save for Brian of the satin cloaks.³⁷

In the second poem of eleven quatrains and beginning [*Is*] *uathmhar an oidhche anocht* ('Tonight [is] dreadful'), which is attributed to Mac Giolla Caoimh (or Mac Liag in some scribal sources), the speaker is on a journey 'to the river Jordan' (*go sruth Órthannáin*) in search of a better life. He recalls with sadness the generosity bestowed on him by Brian Bórainmhe, Murchadh and Cian:

[*Is*] *uathmhar an oidhche anocht,*
*a chuideacht[a]*³⁸ *bhocht, gan bhréig!*
Crodh ní saoilte dhibh ar dhuain
ar an dtaoibh-si thuaidh do'n Ghréig.

As é Dia fa deara dhúinn
gan ár súil re dúais na rann;
ró-mhór fuaramar d'a chionn,
*[is] baoghal liom aithbhear thall!*³⁹

Tonight [is] dreadful, truly, o poor company! You should not expect wealth for a poem on this northern side of Greece.

It is God who caused us not to expect a gift for poetry; too much we received for it, I fear retribution yonder!

It is not, however, his sorrowful plight alone which the speaker mourns here, but rather what was at the heart of the relationship of poet and patron in medieval Ireland, a relationship neatly captured in the poem by the references above to *duan* and *duais*. *Duan* or *dán* in the sense of 'poem', of course, but *dán* is also to be understood to mean 'gift, talent, craft,

³⁷ My translation of this quatrain's first couplet is tentative. It could be, for example, that *an tír theann* (q. 5b) is a copying error for *an tuir / tor teann*, thus an alternative translation might be 'I travelled to Cian of Mizen Head, the strong hero was not a lord without fame'; cf. *turr teann*, 'sturdy tower' (MacNeill 1896-1897: 68, 71). James Hardiman (1831: 208-211) published a version of this poem but his accompanying translation is entirely fanciful.

³⁸ Square brackets in this case as in Best's printed text.

³⁹ Best (1904: 96 §52); a version of this poem was also published by Hardiman (1831: 202-207) with an accompanying, fanciful translation.

profession’, and derived ‘directly from the primary inherited meaning “gift”, “something bestowed”, Lat. *dōnum*, Skt. *dānam*’.⁴⁰ Given, then, that *dán* earns the poet his *duais* or ‘reward’, the speaker of the foregoing poem is lamenting the important reciprocal relationship which once obtained in Ireland between poet and patron, but which is now no more.

The third poem of twenty-seven quatrains and beginning *Ráith Raithleann ráith Chuirc is Chéin* (‘The fort of Raithleann, the fort of Corc and Cian’), is attributed to Mac Giolla Caoimh. It tells how the men of Munster appealed to Corc, king of Cashel, to extend his power westwards (*druid siar i gcoinne na gcath*), an appeal which was supported by Raithleann, fostermother of Corc and wife of Torna. Corc promises to build a fort (*longphort*) in west Munster and to have it named in honour of Raithleann (*Ráith Raithleann do bheith d’a ghairm*).⁴¹ Renowned for its hospitality and generosity to all visitors, this ancestral seat of the Cinéal nAodha branch of Uí Eachach flourished down to the time of Cian son of Maol Muadh, and its subsequent demise is a cause of much regret for the poet, as captured here in the poem’s first and final quatrains:

*Ráith Raithleann [ráith] Chuirc is Chéin,
truagh a Dhé mar atá anocht,
gérbh iomdha giolla glan gaoth
do bhíodh taobh re taobh ’sa phort.*

*Is mé Mac Giolla Caoimh cóir:
rachad do ’n Róimh d’a dtig cá[i]ch,
do choimhbhris mo chroidhe im’ chliabh,
gan Cian do bheith isan ráith.*⁴²

The fort of Raithleann, the fort of Corc and Cian, a pity, o God, how it is tonight, although many a pure wise youth used to be side by side in the fortress.

I am honest Mac Giolla Caoimh: I will go to Rome to which all come, Cian not being in the fort, broke my heart in two in my bosom.

The final quatrain above recalls an apologue in a poem attributed to Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh (d. 1387), beginning *Teach carad do-chiú folamh* (‘A house of a friend I see empty’), in honour of Conchobhar son of Toirdhealbhach Ó Briain (d. 1328). Ó Briain’s house, once a haven of

⁴⁰ Watkins (1976: 272-273); cf. the treatment of the essential function of the *ollamh* of classical Modern Irish Poetry by Breatnach (1983: 53-54) and Breatnach (1997: 100-101).

⁴¹ Best (1904: 98-101 §53). Ó Riordáin suggested (1942: 143-144) that *Ráth Raithleann* was the same as Lisnacaheragh ringfort in the townland of Garranes (Na Garráin), about six miles north of the town of Bandon, Co. Cork.

⁴² Best (1904: 98, 101 §53) with square brackets as in the printed text; the readings of Best’s manuscript source in lines b and d, i.e. *cách* and *ráth* (RIA 23 E 26, p. 205), respectively, should be restored.

hospitality for poets, lies deserted and reminds the poet of Mac Giolla Caoimh who, having arrived late to a feast hosted by Brian Bórainhe, prophesied the desertion of Kincora before departing on pilgrimage to Rome.⁴³ It would seem, then, that the *ógláchas* poem in *LO* is drawing on a literary tradition concerning Mac Giolla Caoimh which goes back at least to a fourteenth-century poem in *dán díreach*.

The narrative of *LO* then reverts to the synoptic style which dominated in the opening passages down to the account of the battle of Clontarf, as is evident from the following example:

*Bás C[h]éin 7 Bhriain 7 Mhurchadha i n-aon bhliadhain amháin i gcath Chluana Tarbh 7 i gcath Mhuighe Guilidhe. Ar gclos do Dhonnchadh mac Briain, Cian do mharbhadh do Dhomhnall mac Duibhdábhóireann, táinig féin sluagh do neartughadh le Mathghamhain mac Céin, gur marbhadh leis Cathal mac Céin mic Duibhdábhóireann.*⁴⁴

The death of Cian and Brian and Murchadh in one year in the battle of Clontarf and in the battle of Magh Guilidhe. Once Donnchadh son of Brian heard that Cian was killed by Domhnall son of Dubhdábhóireann, he himself came with a host to strengthen Mathghamhain son of Cian, and Cathal son of Cian son of Dubhdábhóireann was killed by him.

Further events, presented in similar synoptic fashion, follow and, as mentioned earlier, *LO* concludes with a description of an unsuccessful attempt at subduing Osraige by Donnchadh son of Brian Bórainhe in 1027.⁴⁵

Literary context

The two interpolated passages in parts one and two of *LO* bear testimony to the importance of Murchadh son of Brian Bórainhe and Cian son of Maol Muadh, respectively, as literary figures in their own right, and they form part of the wider literary backdrop which attaches story-themes to these historical persons. Murchadh, of course, emerges elsewhere as an important character in Irish and Scottish Gaelic sources.⁴⁶ His contemporary, Cian, while less known than Murchadh, perhaps, is no less important. For example, in the Early Modern Irish romantic tale *Leigheas Coise Chéin (LCC)*, the title character in question is Cian son of Maol Muadh.⁴⁷

⁴³ Quatrains 12-18 of the poem published by Mac Cionnaith (1938: 400-402).

⁴⁴ Best (1904: 101 §54) with square brackets as in the printed text.

⁴⁵ See n. 11 above.

⁴⁶ Ní Úrdail (2000).

⁴⁷ Bruford (1969: 134-136); O'Rahilly (1912-1913b: 281-283).

This tale forms the contents of two manuscripts from the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries, namely BL Egerton MS 1781 (folios 147r-149v) and RIA MS B iv 1 (folios 180r-184r), respectively. *LCC* in the Egerton manuscript was written by an anonymous scribe at the house of Niall Ó Siaghail about the year 1484 and it was published with an accompanying translation by Standish Hayes O’Grady in *Silva Gadelica*.⁴⁸ Mathghamhain son of Cian was the eponymous ancestor of the Uí Mhathghamhna, and, interestingly, the Egerton manuscript also contains a near contemporary transcript (folios 129r-146v) of a translation into Irish by Fíngin Ó Mathghamhna (d. 1496) of the *Buke of John Maundeville*, which Ó Mathghamhna completed in 1475 at Ros Broin, castle of the O’Mahony’s in southwest Munster. The Egerton text was completed by Diarmaid Bacach Mac Parrthaláin in the barony of Tullyhaw, Co. Cavan, in 1487, probably under the patronage of the family of Mac Shamhradháin, lords of Tullyhaw.⁴⁹

LCC, together with *Dithreabhach Glinne an Phéice* and *Giolla an Fhiugha*, two romantic tales which have come down to us in scribal sources from the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively, constitute what has come to be known as the ‘Dalcassian Cycle’ because they feature historical personages – Cian, Brian Bórainmhe and Murchadh – who flourished at the time of the battle of Clontarf.⁵⁰ Of this triad, *LCC* proved to be one of the most popular oral tales in nineteenth-century Scotland despite the dismissive sentiments of the scribe of its seventeenth-century Irish source, Dáibhidh Ó Duibhgeannáin, for example, who informed his reader that ‘that [is] a terrible tasteless story without a doubt’ (*sgél dona míbhlada sin a ngan amhrus*).⁵¹ The tale clearly found favour also with Gerald Fitzgerald, eighth Earl of Kildare (1477-1513), because ‘The leching of Kene is legg’ was one of twenty texts in Irish in the Earl’s library and formed part of a larger catalogue of works in the possession of the Fitzgeralds of Kildare, compiled between 1525 and 1526, and preserved today in BL Harley MS 3756.⁵²

⁴⁸ Flower (1926: 526); O’Grady (1892: 296-305, 332-342).

⁴⁹ Stokes (1899) reproduced the Irish translation from an undated transcript written in the Franciscan monastery at Kilcrea near Bandon, Co. Cork, now MS 598 (ff 52r-69v) in the Bibliothèque Municipale in Rennes, but also added material from the last folio in the Egerton manuscript as this is lacking in the Rennes manuscript; see Flower (1926: 526, 540-541), Ní Úrdail (1994: 5-6) and Ó Mathúna (1995: 31-33). The Rennes manuscript is described by Dottin (1894), while Abercromby (1886: 68) maintained ‘that it is a very early copy, made perhaps within a couple of years of’ Ó Mathghamhna’s original translation of 1475.

⁵⁰ Bruford (1969: 134-146, 257, 262).

⁵¹ RIA B iv 1, f. 180r. Fr Paul Walsh has discussed Ó Duibhgeannáin’s expressions of weariness elsewhere in the same manuscript, including the scribe’s criticism of the literary merits of *Buile Shuibhne* (Ó Lochlainn 1947: 27-31).

⁵² O’Grady (1926: 154); cf. Mac Craith (1989: 228-232).

LCC presents us in its opening section with one Ó Crónagáin, a retainer of Cian son of Maol Muadh, who encounters a greyhound in pursuit of a hare. The hare takes refuge in Ó Crónagáin's arms and is immediately transformed into a beautiful young woman. She brings him to an exquisite hostel where 'an elderly couple' (*lánamhain aosta*) awaits them, prepares a feast in their honour and makes ready 'a chamber and an elevated bed' (*iomdhaigh 7 ardleabaidh*) for their overnight stay. The Scottish oral versions of the tale include a description of three vows which the woman extracts from Ó Crónagáin before retiring to bed with him, namely that he never invite his king (Brian Bórainhe) to a feast without her consent, that he never reprehend her about her former state as a hare and that she never be left on her own with another man.

The couple returns the next day to Ó Crónagáin's home which has been transformed in the meantime from a miserable hut to a beautiful mansion. Living happily together as man and wife for three years, Ó Crónagáin decides to host a banquet in honour of Brian Bórainhe and his retainers. During the feast of three days and three nights, Cian, in a moment alone with the otherworldly creature, succeeds in insulting her, leading her to transform herself into a mare, breaking Cian's leg with a kick and disappearing entirely. This section of *LCC* is somewhat more dramatically recounted in Ó Duibhgeannáin's seventeenth-century text than in that by the unnamed scribe of the fifteenth-century Egerton text and reads as follows:

A-dubhairt Cian re mnaoi Í Chrónagáin go ttuc sé grádh ró-mhór dhi 7 gurbh fhearr leis go mbiadh féin 7 í féin a n-úaigneas ag coimhlionadh toile dá chéile 7 a-dubhairt sisi nach bíadh sí féin aige go bráth. Do éirigh Cian agus do leag í. Do éirigh sisi 7 do éidh sí 'fé!' 7 do sgread sí 7 do-rinne sí láir mhór ghroidheadh dhi féin 7 do léig sí dochum an doruis í, 7 do rug Cian ar chois deiridh uirre 7 do thóg sise a cos 7 do bhúail sí Cian ar a chois féin do phreib, 7 do bhris sí a chos 7 [do] imthigh sí féin roimpe.⁵³

Cian said to Ó Crónagáin's wife that he loved her very much and that he would prefer if he himself and herself would be alone fulfilling [their] desire for each other and she herself said that he would never have her. Cian got up and knocked her down. She herself got up and cried out 'woe!' and screamed and changed herself into a large brood mare and made for the door, and Cian grabbed her hind leg and she herself lifted her leg and kicked Cian on his own leg, and she broke his leg and bolted off herself.

The forcible blow delivered by the otherworldly shape-shifter causes Cian to spend a year with a wounded leg (*do bhí sé bliadhain a n-othras a choise*), as no doctor could knit together its dislocated bones or draw any poison which may have infected it. Once the year is up, the mysterious Vagrant (*Macámh an Fhadháin*) arrives, informing Cian that he is his nephew and

⁵³ RIA B iv 1, ff 180v-181r.

that he has come to heal the leg with a poultice (*ceirín*). Cian refuses all help until his nephew tells of his many adventures in the Otherworld.

There follows a substantial in-tale, in which Cian's nephew describes the challenges and adversaries awaiting him in various otherworldly regions – including the mysterious lands known as *Lochlainn*, *Cnoc Grafann*, *Dreollainn* and *Sorcha* – in order to recover his abducted wife. *LCC* concludes with the healing of Cian's leg and the Vagrant's parting words 'farewell to you and I think your leg is fine now since I came to heal you' (*gurab soraidh dhuitsi 7 dar liumsa as maith atá do chos anois úair is dot leigheas tánagsa*).

LCC, then, contains typical ingredients which make up the Irish romantic tale (*scéal rómánsaíochta*), namely the mortal hero (in this instance Ó Crónagáin) being lured into the Otherworld by a supernatural shape-shifter who needs assistance against an enemy.⁵⁴ There is also the motif of the love of a supernatural being for a mortal as well as an otherworldly figure (*Macámh an Fhadháin*) seeking out a mortal (Cian son of Maol Muadh). And, the Vagrant in *LCC* is the interchangeable hero who enters the Otherworld by going on a voyage overseas.

Compilation and transmission

Returning to *LO*, it was mentioned above that the work's second interpolated section, which mainly concerns Cian son of Maol Muadh, was transmitted as a discrete prose tale with the title *Cath Moighe Guile* in ten manuscripts.⁵⁵ It would seem that the earliest manuscript witness is that by Seaghan do Róiste, and although the scribe gives no place or date for his contribution, 'June 1705' appears on an unnumbered leaf by the second contributor to the manuscript, Pádraic Ó hÉthir.⁵⁶ If we accept that the earliest extant scribal witness of *LO* as a whole, namely that written in 1711-1712 by Diarmuid Ó Conchubhair, is the original, then *Cath Moighe Guile* would, of course, have circulated as an independent prose tale before it became the second interpolated passage in *LO* itself.⁵⁷

This seems likely if we consider the first interpolated passage in *LO*, that describing the battle of Clontarf, which, as mentioned above, finds a parallel in the individual prose tale *Cath Chuana Tarbh*. We know from scribal

⁵⁴ On Irish romantic tales in general, see Murphy (1961: 37-55), Bruford (1969) and Nagy (1987). Murphy's distinction between 'Irish Arthurian Tales' and 'Irish Romantic Tales', however, does not describe discrete genres as they are similar in style and content (Nagy 1998: 8-9).

⁵⁵ See n. 31.

⁵⁶ TCD MS 1416 (H.6.12), pp i-xxiii; do Róiste's signature is on p. lxxii of the manuscript.

⁵⁷ Reference to Ó Conchubhair and his transcript of 1711-1712 in TCD MS 1296 is included in n. 20 above.

evidence that this tale was in existence as an independent text during the first half of the seventeenth century when it formed part of the contents of a prose anthology which was completed in 1648.⁵⁸ As no date accompanies Seaghan do Róiste's work, however, and as there appears to be no other information to suggest when or where this scribe flourished, the text of *Cath Moighe Guile* could equally have formed part of the contents of *LO* before it came to be transmitted as a tale in its own right by do Róiste and subsequent scribes.

Ultimately, the matter of compilation, what came first and by whom, must remain at the level of speculation, but either way, we have to do here with material, which alerts us to the dynamic nature of textual transmission and composition during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The composition of *LO* is unusual, in that it begins and ends as a synoptic account of events in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries in Munster, and sandwiched in between as it were, when describing the battle of Clontarf in part one of the work, and the heroic age of Cian son of Maol Muadh in part two, the narrative takes off stylistically and thematically. We find a similar state of affairs in the eighteenth-century 'Dublin Annals of Inisfallen' referred to at the outset here, where the first substantial entry in these annals, that for the year 1014, amounts to a fictional re-creation in embellished prose of the historical battle of Clontarf.⁵⁹

This, of course, recalls Gerard Murphy's reference to 'the attaching of general story motifs and story plots to names which either certainly or probably belonged to historical persons'.⁶⁰ To Murphy's description we may now add the treatment of Murchadh son of Brian Bórimhe and Cian son of Maol Muadh in the interpolated passages in the text known in the post-classical manuscript sources as *LO*.

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⁵⁸ Ní Úrdail (2004: 196-198, 200); Ní Úrdail (2007a: 142-144); Ní Úrdail (2008: 56-57); Ní Úrdail (2011: 44-45).

⁵⁹ Ní Úrdail (2007b: 142-148).

⁶⁰ Murphy (1953: 194).

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