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In Spite of Dungeon, Fire, and Sword: Peadar Ó Gealacáin and the survival of the Gaelic Irish Literary Tradition

Resumen

A medida que avanza el siglo XIX en Irlanda, la tradición literaria gaélica irlandesa, una de las más antiguas de Europa occidental, se encuentra en peligro de extinción. La incapacidad del idioma irlandés para encontrar un punto de apoyo en pueblos y ciudades, así como el posterior fracaso del movimiento literario de esta lengua en la transición al formato impreso, dejaron la literatura y la poesía encerradas en las tradiciones orales y manuscritas. Con la limpieza étnica de Irlanda por parte de Westminster en marcha, primero a través de la emigración forzada y luego a través de la hambruna, un pequeño grupo de escribas se propuso la enorme tarea de preservar este tesoro nacional viajando por el país y escribiendo las canciones, poemas y prosa que eran el resultado de siglos de esfuerzo literario por parte de los nativos irlandeses. Al final del período, la población había caído de casi nueve millones en su apogeo a menos de cuatro, y ya sin hablantes monóglotas de irlandés. Sin embargo, gracias a los esfuerzos de este pequeño grupo de individuos, conservamos la mayor parte de nuestra riqueza literaria. Este trabajo cuenta la historia de uno de ellos, Peadar Ó Gealacáin.

Palabras clave:
gaélico; tradición; manuscrito; escribas; hambruna

Abstract

As we advance through the 19th century in Ireland, the Irish Gaelic Literary tradition, one of the oldest in Western Europe, found itself in danger of extinction. The failure of the Irish language to find foothold in the towns and cities, and the subsequent failure of the language's literary movement to transition itself into the printed mode, left the literature and poetry locked within the oral and manuscript traditions. With the ethnic cleansing of Ireland by Westminster well under way, first through forced emigration and then through famine, a small group of scribes set themselves the mammoth task of preserving this national treasure by travelling the country and writing down the songs, poems, and prose which were the result of centuries of literary effort on the part of the native Irish. By the end of the period the population had fallen from almost 9.000.000 at its height to less than 4.000.000: with no monoglot Irish speakers left. However due to the efforts of this small group of individuals we retain most of our literary wealth. This work tells the story of one of them, Peadar Ó Gealacáin.

Keywords:
Gaelic; tradition; manuscript; scribes; famine

Mo ghrá é Peadar Ó Gealacáin, an scríbhneoir cliste a chuir roimhe de chuspóir amhráin na Mí a scríobh i leabhraibh ar cheasta go gcailfí iad.

This is how Seosamh Laoide referred to Peadar Ó Gealacáin in *Duanaire na Midhe* in 1914. This level of respect and honour is clear in other references that we have to this Irish scribe from the first half of the nineteenth century; they give us strong insight into the man himself and all he set out to achieve in his life's work. Eugene Finnerty wrote about him on the final page of Ó'Gealacáin's manuscript in Edinburgh (possibly his most famous):

> I doubt much if any of our national schoolmasters have the talent, perseverance, and patriotic feeling that this poor fellow possessed. He was one of the most simpleminded, honourable, and upright men I have ever met, and was I believe the last of that noble class of men of the last century called 'Hedge Schoolmasters'.

Later, Owen Smith from An Obair wrote:

> Peter Galligan is a man for whose memory I have the greatest respect, principally for his knowledge of the ancient tongue of Erin, and his labours in preserving fragments of its written literature.

But who was this Peadar Ó Gealacáin really, and why do we honour himself and his achievements today? How does he earn his place in a celebration of Irish literary work in Galicia in North Western Spain? What is our connection today in the first half of the 21st century to this impoverished Irish school teacher from the first half of the 19th century? He left behind him neither poetry nor prose which provide us with insights to one of Ireland's most turbulent periods: most especially Gaelic Ireland's. In spite of this, however, he has earned his place in the history of the Irish nation: and more particularly, in the history of the heroic efforts to ensure the survival of the language and literary wealth of Gaelic Ireland into the 21st century and beyond – in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword. I would like to highlight Ó Gealacáin's legacy through an examination of all aspects of this talented man and to show clearly his vital role in our nation's history.

Peadar Ó Gealacáin: the Person

Ó Gealacáin left us little information about himself. For instance, not only does he not inform us of the date of his birth, but he leaves us hints that contradict each other. We only know that he entered the world some time in 1792 or 1793 in Maigh nEalta in County Meath. He informs us in Ms.U that his mother was one Margaret Williams who had a sister by the name of Mary. He married Sinéad Ní Thanáiste from Maigh nEalta. Except for a reference to a son in a letter he wrote to Roibéard Mac Adhaimh in Belfast in April 1854, we have no knowledge that the couple had any other offspring. Apart from a short period he spend working for Roibéard Mac Adhaimh in Belfast in 1849/50, as far as we know he lived his entire life in Maigh nEalta.

If we set aside his scholarly work, this lack of clarity is evident in every aspect of Ó Gealacáin's life. It is clear from various notes in his manuscripts that he was knowledgeable on Latin, Mathematics, Astronomy, and Music; and he was fully competent and confident in his orthography in both Irish and English. He leaves us, however, no clues as to how he was educated; in particular as to where he learnt to write his first language, Irish. He does give us an occasional insight into the home he grew up in and the people who frequented the house. In Ms. K he wrote the names of some of the poets who would visit his parents during his youth:

> *James Tevlin of Billywood near Kells, Peter Daly, William Walsh (died about 1839), Matthew Monaghan of Mullagh, Patrick Reilly, Peter Coalrake, and Michael Clarke of Whitewood near Nobber.*

It is worth noting that Peter Daly was a prolific scribe of Peadar's father's generation; perhaps he saw the potential of his friend's young son and passed on his trade to him.

In spite of all this, however, the man's personality and mindset emerge from the pages of his manuscripts. The poems, the songs, the prose which he recorded, the little verses he used to fill in the gaps, and the references and remarks he would make in the sidelines; they all combine to tell their own story about the scribe and they empower us to comment on the intellect and intelligence that controlled and informed the hand that wrote and to provide insights into the man and how he viewed the world around him. An Irish Bard on seeing an Englishman hanging from a tree exclaimed as follows:

> Is maith do thoradh a chrainn,
> Rath do thoraidh ar gach aon chraobh.
> Mo léan gan coillte Inis Fáil,
> Lán de do thoradh gach aon lá.

His views on the conflict between the Irish and the English, between Protestant and Catholic, the Indigenous and the Planter stand out clearly in much of the poetry which he chose to preserve in his manuscripts: the likes of Briseadh na Bóinne (Mss. J and V), An Ministéir (Ms. V), An Gallbhoc (Ms. J), and Cáineadh Whealey (Ms. G). He shows a strong inclination towards nationalism in the poems of praise and elegies he chose: poems on the likes of Daniel O'Connell, and Eoghain Rua Ó Néill. Without exception the political material he chose reveals the scribe's nationalist, catholic and Gaelic disposition.

The picture we get of him is full of contradictions. He reveals himself as a pious man within the context of his time. All his works are peppered with little prayers and appeals to the reader to pray for the repose of the scribe's soul. Ms H is entirely

religious material; and many of his others include lives of saints, prayers, and various religious texts. On the other hand, however, he could be quite crude and irrelevant in some of his work. Enrí Ó Muirgheasa, on reading Ms. A had this to say about Ó Gealacáin: "Gallegan was a schoolmaster and a rather coarse minded fellow, judging by some English pieces which he considered worthy of a place in his manuscripts".

While it is true that much of the material in English is coarse in its content, it should be read in the context of the time in which it was written, 1824. And perhaps the contradictions we find are merely a reflection of his time.

It is clear that he was dedicated and enthusiastic in his work. The care and attention he gave to the manuscripts and the books in his possession is clear, and the clarity and neatness of his handwriting is more than impressive in spite of his circumstances. The many little rhymes in English and Irish that are manifest in his work are a testament to his respect for learning and his books.

> Whoever you be that borrows me,
> I pray you keep me clean,
> For I'm not like some linen cloth,
> That can be wiped again.
> The Book.

Or

> If thou are borrowed by a friend
> Right welcome shall he be
> To read and study – not to lend –
> But to return to me.
> Not that increasing knowledge doth
> Diminish learning's store,
> But books I find, if often lent,
> Return to me no more.

In addition to his work as a scribe he engaged in several other professions. As referenced above he was a teacher: some say the last of the hedge schoolmasters of the 18th and 19th centuries. Indeed in Ms. U he leaves a valuable account of his teaching activities between 1814 and 1826.

> An exact account of the several places in which I have taught, together with the dates as follows:
>
> My first commencement was in Ardamagh at Francis Flood's house, on 9th June, 1814; next at Tom Lynch's, near the bog, on the 1st February, 1815; then at Pat Muldoon's, 1st May, 1815; continued there till October, 1816, then left off; then commenced at my own place in June, 1817, two months; then commenced at Nancy Mac Mahon's Dec. 9th 1817 and continued there till 1st May, 1819; then removed to Christopher Gearty's house on 6th May, 1819, and continued there till 1st May, 1820; then removed to Owen Gearty's stable, on Monday 5th June, 1820, and continued there till Oct. following; then commenced at Pat Muldoon's on Wednesday, November 22nd, 1820, and continued there till 23rd May, 1821; commenced again at Widow Flood's, Ardamagh, on Thursday May 24th, 1821, and continued there till 23rd October following; then at Hugh Tully's Ardamagh, on Wednesday, December 21st, 1821, and continued there until May, 1822; then commenced at Widow Flood's again from May 1st, 1822 until October following; then commenced at P. Muldoon's on Thursday, January 2nd, 1823, until September 26th 1823, at which time I have drawn a memorandum of the above places, times and dates.
>
> [Addendum]
>
> After shutting up school at P. Muldoon's, Castlecom, September 26th, 1823, I had no school until February, 1824. I set out for Michael Clarke's Whitewood, and opened at his place on (?) February, 1824, and continued no more than a fortnight until I shut up again. Then I had no school until June following, when I opened school at Owen Cassidy's house, Tamlis, on Friday 4th June, 1824, and then removed to Philip Cassidy's, October 4th, 1824. I remained there till 19th October, and shut up school till November 19th, and did not begin again until 18th April 1825. Commenced in Cruisetown, Monday, 18th April, 1825, for twelve months.
>
> Peter Galligan.

In 1834, The Second Report of the Commissioners of Public Instruction records Ó Gealacáin teaching "Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Geography and the Catholic Catechism" in his own home in Baile Mhic Cathnaoin: he had fifty children enrolled and was earning the wage of the unqualified teacher of between £8 and £10 a year. He continued in this capacity until 1843 when a new generation of qualified school teachers began to emerge from Kildare Street on the new wage of £17.18.4 per annum. It is difficult to ascertain whether he gained a qualification to continue but as late as November 1850 he was referring to himself as a schoolmaster. However, in 1851 he mentions being offered a post as an usher in a National School in a letter to Roibéard Mac Adhaimh.

However it is as a scribe, an editor, and a conservator that Ó Gealacáin earns his place in history due to his contribution to the preservation of Irish language literary works which would have otherwise passed into oblivion with the death of those who held them within the oral tradition. This is particularly evident in the manuscripts he produced from 1843 onwards. Mss. J, K, U, and V are the primary sources for at least 90 pieces of poetry. The following is a sampling of the first verse of one from each manuscript:

Ceithre Ráithe na Bliana [1]

Tá an Fómhar dár dtréigbheál cúl feasta le féile,
Is gan againn ina dhiaidh sin ach fearthainn is fuacht,
Is an geimhreadh maol faethfaí ag teacht chugainn ina dhiaidh sin,
Is é a lomas na géaga is a ghnídh an roithneach rua.
Chuala mé aréir iad is mo chluas leo ag éisteacht,
Ceithre Ráithe na Bliana in iomrascáil chruaidh,
Bhí an urraim dá hiarraidh lena tabhairt don té ab fhéile.
Is níor umhlaigh sé aon acu an Gift a thabhairt uaidh.

Ardaíodh an Corpán ar Mhuin Thomáis [2]

Ag siúl na hoíche le Mhic Ghiolla Chlaonaigh,
Ba é sin ábhar aiteas, ba é sin ábhar aiteas,
Ní raibh fáil, dídean nó cead síneadh,
I measc na mairbh, i measc na mairbh.
Labhair sé go ciúin faiteach le Tómas Mhac Gathan,
Ba é sin a ainm, ba é sin a ainm,
Dá n-árdófá an corpán gan ollghairdeas,
Bhéarfaidh mé mart duit, bhéarfaidh mé mart duit.

Cat Phara Héat [3]

An gcluin sibh mé a dhaoine atá macánta saoithiúil,
An gcuala sibh an gníomh úd a rinne Pilib Bán,
Cat geanúil croíúil aigeantach líofa,
Ghoid sé as an tír é is nár thagaí sé slán.
Ba le Para Héat é is crónfaidh na céadta é,
Tá Anna le buaireamh go suarach ina luí,
Tá fir agus mná ina farraid gach lá,
Is tá daoine á rá nach n-éiríonn sí choíche.

An Bhean Bhreoite [4]

Is bean bhocht mise atá i dtinneas le ráithe,
Osadh nach bhfaighim aon lá ach i bpéin,
Piantaí gan fhortacht, tá ceangal mo chnámh liom,
Beidh mé gan bhíseach, muna bhfuighe mé leigheas,
Codladh gan chaoifeach, ní nár chleacht mise,
Scéal deimhin go fíor, gur chlaoigh gach aicíd mé,
Níor phóg fear an tí le mí nó le seachtain mé,
Is is cáil do mo dholaigh an ní sin féin.

Occasionally he mentions his sources. In the few references he gives us he is transcribing from the oral tradition or from the work of previous scribes. In the Cambridge Manuscript, for example, after Laoidh an Choin Dhuibh he states *The aforesaid pieces were dictated to me by Patrick Bird, June 5th 1828.* In the same manuscript (but 22 years later) he states after a long piece on shopping *Transcribed the above from an old copy I got from that family Horath and finished it on Thursday Feb 21st 1850.*

In addition to transcribing the literary tradition, he would collect the manuscripts of scribes who preceded him. Many of these were in poor condition and Ó Gealacáin would fix them and recover them before leaving a short account inside the cover of how and in what state they came into his possession.

This long lost manuscript belongs to Mr. Patr. Reilly, Robertstown who lent it in the year of --- to the late Francis Farrelly of Tullypole Parish of Moynalty who lent it to some other man and from that man to another man it was at last found by P. Gallegan with a third or fourth borrower about 2 or 3 miles below the Tory bush after a close research for it about 3 days. I hope it will not be used in such a manner again. It was repaired on the 19th of August by P. Gallegan.[5]

This valuable manuscript was repaired and rebound on Saturday 13th July 1844 by P. Gallegan Cainstown near Moynalty in the County of Meath for his own use and improvement and for the benefit of others who may happen to get it after his death. It contains many valuable chapters, 1st on the penitence of sin, 2ndly on the attonement of sin, 3rdly on the absolution of sin, and 4rthly on the indulgence granted to sinners. The whole constitutes a volume worthy of being preserved and transcribed.[6]

Gentle Reader. This valuable MS. was originally transcribed by one Michael Harte of Taafe's Town in the Parish of Donough Patrick, upper Barony of Kells and in The County of Meath, it was finished by him on or about the 14th of August in the year of our Lord 1719 as he himself has written in page 504 of this MS. In the course of many years afterwards it fell into the hands of one Francis Farrelly, Tullypole, Parish of Moynalty in said county who was an eminent Irish scholar. He kept it in his possession while he lived and after his death it was a present of by Farelly's widow to P. Gallegan Senr. who has it in his library. He has neatly and properly repaired it on September 21st A.D, 1847 in Cainstown, Parish of Moynalty... [7]

And:

This manuscript was transcribed and finished about the 9th of March A.D. 1829 by one Michael O Callaghan or as he calls himself "Mithchael Múmhaineach Ua Ceallachan" ... Munster Michael Ó Ceallachan. But unfortunately like many other Mss. the beginning and end of this happened to be destroyed by neglect of not covering it in time; it was shortly afterwards made a present of by O'Callaghan to one James Byrne a County Meath man who remained for some time in the Co. Cork. It was afterwards sold by said Byrne to P. Gallegan who is the proprietor of it now. It was neatly

> repaired and bound by the owner about the latter end of October, A.D.1845.[8]

Often he would create a whole new copy as he did with Ms. R:

> Peter Gallegan finished this book on Monday evening April 11th 1825 and transcribed it from an old Manuscript of Francis Cassidy's formerly of Cross Street, which manuscript (I believe) was bequeathed to Mr Phillip Cassidy who was brother to the above Francis Cassidy, and transcribed more of it from a small manuscript which was written by Pat Reilly Robertstown. The transcription continued about 3 months, nearly incessantly.

Peadar Ó Gealacáin was one of the most prolific scribes of his time and indeed was the most prolific Ulster scribe of the 19th century. We have 26 manuscripts[9] written directly be him but we know that he wrote more. It is said, for instance, that a box full of his papers was burnt in 1920 when the British had expressed an interest in them during a raid on the family home.

> I have seen some of the poet's writings at my uncle's house but left no value on them at that time. They were written on copybooks bound together with a coarse twine, faded greenish ink, written with a bad pen or quill. Those books were burnt by my uncle in 1920 when the tans were raiding and were most curious to know what they were all about.[10]

This leaves us unsure about the more prolific and busy periods of the scribe; we have nothing from him between 1827 and 1838, for example. It is unlikely, however, that we will uncover further works at this point in time.

We do have, however, a large body of work which represents the full scope of Ó Gealacáin's work. His first piece was commenced in 1822 and his final was completed in 1854. The content of the manuscripts is broad, consisting of poetry, prose, mythology, and history. They contain heroic stories, love stories, and disaster stories. The material is of both a religious and a lay nature. When he was gathering the material himself he drew on major and minor as well as unknown poets. Some of the manuscripts are copies of other works which he happened upon and which were in a state of ill repair; but the majority is his own work. Some of these reflect a great effort on his part and they are major collections; some others reflect a lesser effort on his part. If any single trait unites the work it is the neat hand writing and his clear confidence in his orthography in both Irish and English. He was an artistic scribe, using the Gaelic script for Irish and the Italic script for English; and his work is easily read today.

The manuscripts can be divided into three categories: those which he created himself in his youth; those he wrote under the patronage of people like Roibeard Mac Ádhaimh in Belfast; and those he created through his own volition later in life. It is clear that he was under different influences during the various periods. There is a marked difference between, for instance, Ls XXIV in Belfast which he wrote for Mac Ádhaimh in 1844 and 3B38 in the RIA which he compiled ten years later with no external influence. Neither are his works from the 1820's comparable to those of his later period. You can feel the authority and depth of his knowledge in his comments on the pieces they contain.

To get a fuller understanding of this we can look at his two most well-known manuscripts: The Edinburgh manuscript and 3B38 in the RIA.

The Gallegan Manuscript in Edinburgh

In 1855 Peadar gave a collection of sixteen manuscripts to Eugene Finnerty. We can only be certain of two of those manuscripts today, one of which is the Edinburgh Manuscript. Peadar was in poor straits by this time and nearing the end of his life and the fact that he included this manuscript (his most valued one) is testament to the fact that he needed money badly. It isn't known what Finnerty paid him but he was confident that he had recompensed him adequately.

> I trust that I have to a certain extent rendered him independent and happy in his latter days, without him applying to any society whatever for support, (for which he had the greatest abhorrence).

It is a large manuscript which shows the scribe undertaking his work with renewed vigour.

> Peter Galligan's Sixth Volume, being a collection of Irish Songs and Poems, etc, and also a good few pieces in prose. Transcribed himself from Peter Daly's Manuscript and from other authors of the Irish Language. Commenced August 10th, 1841.

He worked regularly on the manuscript over the following two years. It contains the poetry of Meath and several pieces of prose and is the most valuable manuscript from that period in Ulster. Altogether it contains 256 separate items. It includes poems of all four major Ulster poets of the previous century (Séamas Mac Cuarta, Art Mac Cumhaigh, Peadar Ó Doirnín, and Cathal Buí Mac Giolla Gunna) along with samples of the work of numerous lesser known poets. Many poems are anonymous. It also contains several prose works. On page 160 we find *Eachtra an Chearnaigh Chaoilriabhaigh* and on page 178 we have *Siabhrugh Sigh agus Inneiridh Mhic na Míochomhairle i cComhradh agus a nDán*. Of the 850 pages in the manuscript he says he copied the first 600 from O'Daly's manuscript and supplied the rest himself. He added many notes after the pieces which illustrate his own view of the material he was writing down and which often provide an insight into the poet and the times they lived in. After the song Máire Chuisle on page 230 he wrote the following lines about the English translation:

> This is a heavenly air certainly, but the above English verses have no resemblance of a translation. English verses have been frequently written to this air. The late George Ogle, Member of Parliament for Wexford, was author of a pleasing song beginning; "As down by Banna's banks I strayed", whose principal charm lies in the Irish termination of each stanza: "ah, gra ma chree mo cholleen oge, ma molly a store". But the original given above is far superior to any English version that ever was or ever can be printed.

And after Ar Inían Bhiatach Mhaigh nEalta:

This song was composed by one Wm. Brien, a native of King's County. He was by profession a tailor, and after having rambled from his own county he came to Moynalty, Co. of Meath, and by some means got himself into the favour of Miss Mary Betagh, daughter of a gentleman of that name. He composed several songs for her, and at last he found means of stealing her away to his native place and married her, where they remained till she died. He then composed an elegy for her. And after An Reagaire Tórpach:

> Brian Rábach alias Bryan Clarke was a natural Irish poet and composed many beautiful songs [...]. I could not find out where his native place was, but that he lived a considerable part of his life in the neighbourhood of Nobber in the County of Meath. In his youth he became enamoured with a young woman and one day coming to her father's house, as he went in, whom did he meet but another young man a 'rival of his' [...]. This 'Rival' was distributing a bottle of whiskey in company with his 'darling' and no sooner had Bryan gone in than the 'rival' hid the bottle under the seat on which he sat, for fear of Bryan knowing anything of the affair [...]. This ungenerous treatment caused Bryan to compose the following verses as it occurred.

And after Amhrán an Phíopa Dhuibh:

> The learned Irish antiquarian, Mr. Matthew Monaghan, was always in the habit of going home with his scholars where he was kindly accommodated, as he always led a single life till he died, which was about the year of our Lord [...]. At one of his places of entertainment there happened to be lodged in the same house a poor travelling beggarman who had his bed fixed in the chimney corner convenient to the fire, and before he had got on his clothes in the morning he spent a considerable time rummaging his wad for his pipe, as he was in the habit of smoking tobacco, and it seems that the pipe was lost and could not be found. Mr. Monaghan being seated by the fire and of course was eye-witness of the transaction, wrote the following lamentation for the poor man for the loss of his pipe.

And after Dán an tSagairt Méise Charraic Leic:

> By the word "Sagart Méise" is generally understood by old men and women to be a kind of temporary priest often spoken of in Irish ancient fabulous tales, as for example sagart méise agus cléireach maide, from which the word took its rise, as being so frequently mentioned in former times, to marry or unite lovers together, as King's sons, King's daughters, etc. Carrickleck is a large solid rock of freestone famous for its quantity of millstones, tombstones, window-stools, gate-piers, columns and carved stone for different uses which it produces and (which) are frequently taken up there in several places. Carrickleck is situated in the N.E. part of the County of Meath about two miles north of Nobber in said county. It is an eminence and commands a view of Sliabh Guillinn, the Bay of Carlingford, and part of the ocean. There was a part of the above rock which nearly resembled a human form, and therefor it was called by the neighbouring inhabitants Sagart Méise Charruig Leic. That form was attacked by some of the residents of the place who broke it down with crowbars and sledges in many pieces for some particular use. And as the Irish bard Coalrake lived very convenient to that place, and where the rock is situated, and knowing the circumstances so well, he composed the following dialogue between himself and the Saggart Méise.

This is indeed one of the more valuable manuscripts of the period. The scribe spend two and a half years working on it and was proud of his achievement; he would often mention "my large Irish Manuscript".

3B38 RIA

Amongst all the manuscripts which Ó Gealacáin has left us 3B38 stands out as the only attempt the scribe made at publishing his own book. Reading it, one gets the sense that at a late stage in his life he is celebrating his achievements. It consists of 332 pages and was written between 1853 and 1954, containing a mixture of poetry, prose, and various other items. Although as some point some pages of another manuscript were added to it, the continuity and flow leave no is no doubt that it is a single piece of work; it contains a table of contents that corresponds exactly to its pages. The fact that he gives it a title in English on the first page reflects the fact that he was one of the few Irish speakers left in this eastern county in the immediate years following the famine.

> A select collection of Irish Songs And Poems, from the great O'Durnan, the Bards of Donegall, and others. Together with some Fragments of Irish History, &c. Commenced on Tuesday April 5th 1853.

It contains much more than Ó Doirnín's and the Donegal poets' poetry, however; it is a blend of the major and minor poets of Oirghialla, some anonymous songs and various other material. It begins with eight of Ó Doirnín's poems and there are three others throughout the work. From page 23 on he has a large body of his friend Aodh Mac Domhnaill's poetry. Again the major Ulster poets feature heavily; he has thirteen poems by Séamas Mac Cuarta, six by Art Mac Cumhaidh, and one by Cathal Buí Mac Giolla Gunna. It also contains the work of many lesser known poets: Tadhg Ó Tiománaí, Cormac Mac Sheáin, Antoine Mór Ó Dochartaigh, Séamas Dorrian, Eoghan Mac Giolla Íosa, Pádraig Mac an Linndeáin, Brian Tailliúr, Pádraig Ó Seónam, Feardorcha Ó Mealláin, Proinsias Nuissniún, Seon Birt, Mac Uí Dhuibhgeannáin, Micheál Ó Cléirgh, and Arg Mag Uinneas. Thirteen poems are anonymous. It contains one blend of prose and poetry from Donegal Turas Phádraig ar Éirinn (St Patrick's visit to Ireland).

Several pieces suggest that the poet was still researching his material as they are incomplete and have neither title nor poet. "I think there is more of this" he often writes after them. There is great variety in the work and they represent the type of material he showed an interest in throughout his career. As happens in many of his other manuscripts he often appends his own opinion of the pieces.

> Notes and remarks on the Foregoing Elegy.
>
> As to what relates to the aforesaid dirge or elegy. It is the grandest and most sublime composition, ever yet composed in any language. There is nothing in either Homer or Virgil can come near the original of it and its translation is not very inferior if turned into verse.

In some places he abandons the literary genres and ventures into history. From page 167 to 172 he transcribed a passage on the ancient history of Ireland by Philip F. Barron MRIA. He mentions The Psalter of Tarah, The Psalter of Cashel, Psalter na Rann, Leabhar Binin nó Leabhar na gCeart, Leabhar Gabhála, Leabhar Bhaile an Mhóta, Leabhar Breac Mhic Owen nó Leabhar Rua agus Leabhar Lecan. He writes a short paragraph describing most as follows: "The Psalter of Tarah, A collection of Chronicles authenticated in a solemn Convention of the states of Ireland, in the reign of King Leary. This venerable record has disappeared for many Centuries, with the exception of some fragments" (167–72). He follows this with a list of thirty battles fought in Ireland since before Christ to the Battle of Clontarf, 1014.

According to the many dates he enscribed on the edges of the pages he worked consistently on the manuscript. He began on April 5th 1853 and had written 77 pages by the 21st of the same month. He was on page 191 by 24th November but unfortunately left no dates after this. He didn't bring the work to a proper finish and didn't write anything of worth consequently.

It is difficult to give full justice to Ó Gealacáin in a piece of work such as this. We can review every one of his works, but it will still leave us with a poor understanding of the man's genius. It is only through a reading of his manuscripts that one can hear his voice fully and this would require at least one of his works be published, as he seems to have intended to do with 3B38.

Peadar Ó Gealacáin: Scholar

Ó Gealacáin is known as a scribe today; but we must ask does this title give him justice. As we have seen he taught, he published, he translated; he was an editor, a poet, a collector, and a conservator. He critiqued many of the pieces which came his way. His friend Aodh Mac Domhnaill described him as *Príomhstaraí agus Oide Eolais ró-ámhuidh Bhaile Mhic Chathnaoin* (the principle historian and source of knowledge in Baile Mhic Chathnaoin). He was one of the oppressed, however: denied the opportunity to accumulate the academic credentials necessary that he achieve the high esteem in the colonial education system which had been imposed on Ireland since the fall of the Gaelic order in Kinsale in 1601. In spite of this his work reveals him as one of the final inheritors of the Gaelic system of learning which had fallen into disuse but of which small pockets remained (and remain) in the mind and lives of the Irish Gael. We'll never know what heights he would have risen to had the Gaelic system managed to flourish in Ireland.

There is one measure, however, which can give us an idea of his standing in today's academic world. We can measure the references to his work in modern academic works. A quick visit to the shelves of the Irish books in UCC's Boole Library revealed Ó Gealacáin and his work amongst most of the most prominent works on Irish Literature. There are substantial citations of his work in all of the following publications. Seosamh Laoide: *Duanaire na Midhe*; Dáithí Ó hÓgáin: *An File*; Enrí Ó Muirgheasa: *Dánta Diadhá Uladh, Céad de Cheoltaibh Uladh*, *Dhá Chéad de Cheoltaibh Uladh*, *Amhráin na Midhe*; Pádraig Ó Foghlú: *Éigse na hIarmhí*; Aodh de Blacam: *Gaelic Literature Surveyed*; Seosamh Watson: *Mac na Míchomhairle*; Robert Welsh: *A History of Verse Translation From the Irish 1789–1897*, *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*; Ó Muirthile; *An tAmhrán Macarónach*; Iosold Ní Dheirg: *Vade Mecum na Gaeilge*; Tomás Ó Máille: *Amhráin Chearbhalláin*; Ní Laoire: *Bás Cearbhaill agus Farbhlaidhe*; Breandán Ó Buachalla: *Aisling Ghéar*, *I mBéal Feirste Cois Cuain*, *Peadar Ó Doirnín - Amhráin*, *Cathal Buí - Amhráin*; Tomás Ó Fiach; *Art Mac Cumhaigh – Dánta*; Seán Ó Gallchóir: *Séamas Dall Mac Cuarta – Dánta*; Seosamh Mag Uidhir; *Pádraig Mac a Liondain – Dánta*; Colm Beckett: *Aodh Mac Domhnaill – Dánta*; Seán Ó Dufaigh/Diarmaid Ó Doibhlin; *Nioclás Ó Cearnaigh – Beatha agus Saothar*; J.E. Caerwyn Williams/Máirín Ní Mhuiríosa; *Traidisiún Liteartha na nGael*; and (of course) Ciarán Dawson: *Peadar Ó Gealacáin – Scríobhaí*.

Leabhar Dhiarmada agus Léachtaí Choilm Cille

Peadar Ó Gealacáin died in poverty in 1861. We know little of his final years except that he spent them in Maigh nEalta. He was a man who had devoted his life to the preservation of the literary tradition and language of his people and his death marked the end of a long tradition of manuscript writing. In spite of the many laments and elegies he transcribed in Irish, it was a sign of the times that he was mourned in English in Nugent's Correct and Genuine Moore's Almanack.

> Not many days after our dear friend departed,
> Eternity's agent another bard smote;
> I mean our dear Galligan, kind and true hearted,
> Who latterly from old Kilmainhamwood wrote,
> For thirty years he among your diarians,

Was second to none among quodlibertarians,
Tho' dreaded by pedants and abecidarians,
They might for instruction his writings oft quote.[11]

Ó Gealacáin was a bridge between two world orders which have been in conflict in Ireland for a long time. In his later work he reveals his view of himself as the last vestige of the language and its tradition. *Oh Heavens! Was there ever anything half so sweet or to be compared to our dear but long neglected Irish Language* he wrote in the Edinburgh manuscript. When he died in 1861, he had no idea that in the immediate years following a new generation would come forward who see the language and its traditions in a new light and who would bring the project forward throughout the world into the 21st century. He was buried in the cemetary in Cill Mhaighneáin agus his grave remained unmarked until Éigse Oirialla placed a headstone on it in 1992. However, he most likely built his own headstone in the poetry, the songs, the stories, and other material which would have followed him into the grave had he not sat night after night to write them down. Shortly after his death a whole new energy came into Irish. It was introduced into the schools. It began to speak poetry and literature anew, and it was properly coded and a proper script developed to allow this new literary work to be published. It was the end of the era of the scribe and Peadar Ó Gealacáin would most likely been at the fore in celebrating this as he well understood the difficulties and challenges it entailed. The manuscript tradition was a noble trade practiced in Ireland since the arrival of Christianity almost until the 20th century. While it was a noble trade at the beginning it became the domain of the oppressed and dispossessed towards the end; those of least esteem in their own country. Ó Gealacáin describes very well in a particular passage in the Edinburgh manuscript the depth of suffering and difficulty it meant and I'll terminate with his own words on this.

Now my reader I will shortly terminate my long and laborious task and let you know a little further information on the contents of this manuscript, which, if preserved, will be a memorial for ages.

This ends my dear reader, this large and comprehensive manuscript, which is lengthened to 722 pages, including the contents, making in all about 4 quires of paper in octavo, or eight leaves in a sheet as folio.

The transcription of it commenced on the 10th August, 1841, and was completely finished on the 10th February, 1844, a period of 2 1/2 years, at intervals, that the writing of it cost. And what a vast quantity of ink and pens have been used in the work, together with the price of candles in the Winter season. Therefor to value all, it has been truly and correctly estimated that the manuscript is lawfully and honestly worth £5 sterling, if it ever be sold, which I believe it will not, as it is a most valuable collection containing more or less of the productions of all the principal Irish Bards both ancient and modern.

My gentle reader when this page you see
let your prayers and blessings for the writer be,
If I be dead invoke the power on high
To save my soul when in the dust I lie;
Or if I be living pray for my success,
and length of days with peace and happiness.

A léitheoir ghrá tráth a chífeas tú mo rann
Bíodh d'urnaí chráifeach pháirteach i do cheann:
Más ní go bhfuil mé sínte síos i gcré
Le m'anam a shábháil guigh de ghnáth Mac Dé;
Nó más ní go mairim, bíodh d'acmhainn go tréan
Fá mé a bheith saolach le gach rath agus séan.

Foirceann agus finit ar an mórshaothar seo leis an scríbhneoir réamhráite ar an deichiú lá den Mhí Feabhra na Faoillí, sa mbliain d'aois ár dTiarna míle go leith gan gó, sé chaogad ar dhá fhichid agus a ceathair fá dheo, i mBaile Mhic Cathnaoin, i bParóiste Mhaigh nAltaigh, i gContae na Mí in aois a dheich mbliana ar dhá fhichid, lá fheile Peadair seo a chuaigh thart.

Beannacht Dé lena anam go Cathair na Glóire, óir b'ait leis go dearfa dánta agus ceolta. Peadar Ó Gealacáin

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Notes

1 Ms U, 378–9, 8 véarsa.

2 Ms J, 31–2, 11 véarsa.

3 Ms W, 130–4, 12 véarsa.

4 Ms K, 325–8, 4 véarsa.

5 Ms. 4. de chuid Uí Chomhraidhe in UCD.

6 Ms. 38 in UCG.

7 23.C.1 (RIA).

8 24.P.11 (RIA).

9 There is a full catalogue at the end.

10 Ó Buachalla. 1968. Appendix B. A letter to Máiréad Ní Con Midhe from Pádraig Ó Gealacáin.

11 Nugent's Correct and Genuine Moore's Almanack 1861, lch 37.

Título:
Peadar Ó Gealacáin y la supervivencia de la tradición literaria gaélico-irlandesa

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