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‘One glimpse of Ireland’: the manuscript of Fr Nicolás (Fearghal Dubh) Ó Gadhra OSA

Pádraig Ó Macháin

The hagiographical, historical and religious literature that emanated from the College of St Anthony in Louvain in the first half of the seventeenth century receives well-deserved attention from modern scholars. More diffuse elements of Irish literary activity are also attested there and elsewhere in the Low Countries at this time. One such element was the composition and transcription of Irish poetry. Not alone was verse composed and written down, but poetry that had been composed in Ireland over the previous four centuries, and that had, presumably, been brought in manuscripts from Ireland during these turbulent times, was copied into newly created anthologies.[1] This in turn caused new lines of textual transmission to emerge, and with the eventual loss of the original manuscripts from which the poems had been copied, these new lines of transmission became independent and very important.

There is ample evidence to suggest that a wide variety of the poetic relics of late medieval and early modern Ireland circulated among Irish exiles on the continent in the first half of the seventeenth century. These survivals were so representative of that branch of traditional literature that it could be said that the anthologies that were created from them – even those that were personal in motivation and selection – formed a true reflection of what was then extant of the matter produced by the poets of Ireland over four centuries or so. These anthologies, to a significant extent, inform our view today of the work of the Irish bardic poet. Indeed, were it not for the twin manuscripts that are Duanaire Finn[2] and the Book of the O’Conor Don,[3] written by Aodh Ó Dochartaigh at Ostend in 1627 and 1631 respectively, our knowledge of Irish poetry of the Early Modern period would be greatly diminished, such is the amount of otherwise unattested material found in them.

Composition and transcription on the continent reflected in microcosm the continuity of learning in Ireland at this time, and manuscripts written in the Low Countries give rise to the same questions as those that arise from their counterparts in Ireland, particularly with regard to scribal practice and textual survival. As in earlier times, the danger of destruction or neglect of manuscripts was ever present, and text-selection was determined by the environment in which a scribe operated and by what texts were available to him. The survival of material solely because it was transcribed in the Book of the O’Conor Don and Duanaire Finn shows how quickly exemplars could

[1] Pádraig Ó Macháin, ‘The iconography of exile: Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird in Louvain’, in Pádraig A. Breatnach, Caoimhín Breatnach, Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail (ed.), *Léann lámhscríbhinní Lobháin: the Louvain manuscript heritage* (Dublin 2007) 76–111; Pádraig Ó Macháin, ‘The flight of the poets: Eóghan Ruadh and Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird in exile’, *Seanchas Ard Mhacha* 21–22 (2007–8) 39–58.

[2] University College Dublin Franciscan MS A 20 (b); Myles Dillon, Canice Mooney, Pádraig de Brún, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Franciscan Library Killiney* (Dublin 1969) 39–43; Eoin Mac Neill, Gerard Murphy, *Duanaire Finn: the Book of the Lays of Fionn* Irish Texts Society VII, XXVIII, XLIII (London 1908, 1933, and Dublin 1954). A digital version of this manuscript is available on Irish Script on Screen (www.isos.dias.ie).

[3] In private possession; see Pádraig Ó Macháin (ed.), *The Book of the O'Conor Don: essays on an Irish manuscript* (Dublin 2010). A digital version of this manuscript is available on Irish Script on Screen (www.isos.dias.ie).

disappear without trace. It was also possible for a manuscript or text to have no descendants but to survive in seclusion from circulation and the perils of circumstance. Such was the case with Tadhg Ó Cianáin's account of the 'Flight of the Earls',[4] written in Rome in 1609, which seems to have been sequestered in John Colgan's room at Louvain before it had any chance of appraisal by the greater scribal community. Another secluded text, on a smaller scale, is Fr Séamus Carthún's poem on the state of Ireland, which was composed in captivity *c*. 1651.[5] It survives in only a single copy, together with versions of it in Latin and English.[6] It was written down by Fr Carthún's fellow Franciscan, Fr Antaine Ó Conchubhair, in Prague in 1659,[7] and appears to have remained thereafter within the environment in which it was transcribed, and thus to have been excluded from a potentially liberal reception from Irish scribes.

Other questions that arise are those of scribal intent and motivation, and that of scribal comprehension: to what extent texts were relevant to or were understood by a scribe. The presence or absence of the imperative of patronage is also an issue. Even where such an imperative is stated or obvious, questions ranging from variant-selection and orthography, to the positioning of poems in a manuscript or even on a particular page, remain open to discussion and interpretation. When the influence of patronage is neither overt nor discernible, to the extent that we may discount it entirely as a factor, the focus on the scribe naturally becomes all the more searching.

One of the many points of interest in the manuscript to be discussed here is that it presents some insights into questions such as these. It also adds to our knowledge of Irish poems that were circulating in the Low Countries in the first half of the seventeenth century. Finally, its subsequent history shows how, on its return to Ireland, the reception that was accorded it ensured that the manuscript passed from the seclusion of a private anthology to inclusion in the literary network of late seventeenth-century Sligo, which was its gateway to the wider Irish literary tradition.

The manuscript known as the O'Gara Manuscript, Royal Irish Academy MS 2 (23 F 16), was written between the years 1655 and 1659 by a member of the Augustinian order, Fearghal Dubh Ó Gadhra, whose name in religion was Fr Nicolás.[8] The writing was mostly done at Lille but at least three items were written in Brussels.[9] Thirty

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[4] University College Dublin Franciscan MS A 21; Paul Walsh, 'The flight of the Earls', *Archivium Hibernicum* 2–4 (1913–15) Appendix, and separately (Maynooth and Dublin 1916). A digital version of this manuscript is available on Irish Script on Screen (www.isos.dias.ie).

[5] R. Thurneysen, 'La lamentation de l'Irlande', *Revue Celtique* 14 (1893) 153–62. Cuthbert Mhág Craith (ed.), *Dán na mBráthar Mionúr* I–II (Dublin 1967, 1980) Poem 49.

[6] Niedersächsiche Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen, Cod. Histor. 773, f. 10.

[7] For Fr Antaine see Benignus Millett, *The Irish Franciscans 1651–1655* (Rome 1964) 148–9; idem, 'Some lists of Irish Franciscans in Prague, 1656–1791', *Collectanea Hibernica* 36–7 (1994–5) 59–84: 61–2.

[8] Described by Thomas F. O'Rahilly in *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy* Fasciculus I (1926) 6–18. Among the shortcomings of this description is the fact that the colophons and marginalia are not reproduced. A digital version of this manuscript is available on Irish Script on Screen (www.isos.dias.ie).

[9] Pp. 134–48 consist of two gatherings of four (number 144 repeated) with dates in March and July 1657. These colophons are: '16 Martii 1657 a mBrúseil san tír ieacht[air]' (136); '1657. 28. mar.' (141); **'**Feargal dubh 1657' (144a); '1657' (145); '1657. 18. maii' (147); 'A mBrússel .18. Maii 1657' (148). The earliest occurs in the margin of p. 136 beside the poem beginning 'Mór mo chuid do chumhuigh Thaidhg'; the last occurs p. 148 after the poem beginning 'Teallach coisreagtha clann

years later, when another scribe was adding a preface to the manuscript, Fr Nicolás contributed information to it which reveals that having studied in Spain, he enjoyed high status in the order in Ireland before being expelled to the Low Countries in the Cromwellian era.[10] There, his spare time was filled with writing the manuscript and with collecting materials for it. From this we can conclude that the commencement of the manuscript in the mid-1650s must have followed almost immediately on Fr Ó Gadhra's expulsion. In addition to this information, Fr Ó Gadhra's two invocations to the Blessed Virgin, which occur in the margins of pp. 5 and 180 of the manuscript, [11] are suggestive of a special devotion, and serve to secure the identity of our scribe as the priest mentioned in the list of Augustinian missionaries who were commissioned by Propaganda Fide in 1655: 'Pater frater Nicolaus a Sancta Maria in Flandriam relegatus est'. This is turn appears to distinguish him from his namesake 'Pater frater Nicolaus Gara' noted in a separate list as resident in Ireland, without missionary faculties.[12]

On returning to Ireland after his period of exile in Flanders, Fr Nicolás became prior of a number of Augustinian foundations in north Connacht – Ard na Rí (on the Sligo side of Ballina), Banada, near Tobercurry, Co. Sligo, where he was appointed in 1670, and Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo, where he was appointed in 1673; [13] a letter of Fr Stephanus Lynch OSA, dated September 1671, describes Fr Ó Gadhra as a 'vir doctus' and provincial definitor and visitator.[14] As he was such a prominent ecclesiastic, the question arises as to the relationship of Fr Nicolás to the main Ó Gadhra line, which was to provide two Archbishops of Tuam in the eighteenth century.[15] While that relationship remains unclear, from a number of associations of the manuscript with other members of the Í Ghadhra[16] – not the least of which is the pedigree of his namesake Fearghal Ó Gadhra, patron of the Four Masters, recorded in the manuscript

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Bhrían', on the same date on which the preceding item was written, 'Ionghnadh mhaisling a nEamhuin'. It is probable that the ten poems contained on pp. 134–48 were all copied in Brussels.

[10] This statement removes the possibility of Fr Nicolás having joined the order only after his expulsion: Alexander Boyle, 'Fearghal Ó Gadhra and the Four Masters', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 5th Series, 100 (1963) 100–114: 109. Since this article was written, new information concerning Fr Ó Gadhra's sojourn in Spain has been discovered in Madrid. It is hoped to publish this material in the near future.

[11] 'Felicissimae inter feminas, mulieri inter mulieres; matri inter matres; virgini inter virgines; immaculatae mariae semper virgini sit laus, et honnor per infinita secula seculorum Amen. Amen.' (p. 5); '19 Julii 1657 Laus Deo, gloriosissimae virgini mariae, et omnibus sanctis / Fr Fargallus Gara Augustinianus 1657 / [*change of ink*:] Felicissimae inter feminas; mulieri inter mulieres; matri inter matres; virgini inter virgines; immaculatae mariae semper virgini, sit laus et honnor per infinita seculorum secula nec non parenti Augustino Amen' (p. 180).

[12] Benignus Millett, 'Calendar of Volume 13 of the *Fondo di Vienna* in Propaganda archives: Part 2, ff. 201–401', *Collectanea Hibernica* 25 (1983) 51–2; Hugh Fenning, 'Augustinian martyrs and missionaries: 1649–1657', *Collectanea Hibernica* 36–7 (1994–5) 50–58: 55–6. The distinction was first brought to my attention by the late Fr F. X. Martin, whose generous help with Fr Ó Gadhra's background I gratefully acknowledge.

[13] Information from the Augustinian General Archives in Rome supplied to me in 1986 by Fr F. X. Martin.

[14] Patrick Francis Moran, *Spicilegium Ossoriense* 3 vols (Dublin 1874, 1878, 1884) I, 508–10: 510.

[15] Brian (d. 1740), who presented Charles O'Conor with the Annals of the Four Masters (RIA MS 1220: *RIACatg.*, p. 3279); and Mícheál (d. 1748).

[16] In particular Seaán Ó Gadhra discussed below. Note also manuscript p. 215 (inner margin, transversely): 'Charles Gara his book if it be lost or stolen', perhaps identifiable as Fearghal Ó Gadhra's son, father of Archbishop Brian mentioned above (n. 15); see Nollaig Ó Muraíle, 'The autograph manuscripts of the Annals of the Four Masters', *Celtica* 19 (1987) 75–95: 89.

at p. 126[17] – it is safe to assume a close connection to the main line of this Sligo family.[18]

The picture of a learned ecclesiastic collecting and transcribing Irish material in the Low Countries is a familiar one, and Fr Nicolás belongs, to some extent, to this seventeenth-century tradition. In contrast to the Louvain project, however, there is nothing in his manuscript to suggest that his work was part of any community endeavour. On the contrary, it appears that as a scribe he is a loner, and that what he writes in his manuscript is occasioned by his personal circumstances and motivations. His book is neither a patron's manuscript (such as the Book of the O'Conor Don) nor a community manuscript (such as the Book of O'Donnell's Daughter).[19] That is not to say that it does not have textual links, as we will see, with these and other manuscripts that were produced in Flanders. Nevertheless, as conceived by its scribe, the O'Gara Manuscript was a purely personal anthology, made by Fr Nicolás for his own use, and hence, for example, the large amount of marginal material in it that will be mentioned below, and the less than disciplined style of writing.[20]

Of the original manuscript 218 pages survive today.[21] A bifolium (now pp. i–iv) – the first leaf of which acted as a new front wrapper, the second containing an address to the reader (see appendix below) – was added to the manuscript in 1686. That address refers caustically to the fact that many poems were removed from the book after its completion, and from the 'Clár' (table of contents, pp. vii–viii)[22] we know that these missing poems were 24 in number, covering what were then pp. 214–53.[23] Identifying these poems enables us to form an impression of the overall contents of the book, and of the material that was available to Fr Nicolás in Lille and Brussels. Inclusive of marginal quatrains and poems, and of the material in the missing leaves, we have a

[17] Reproduced in Fearghus Báiréad, 'Muintir Ghadhra', in S. O'Brien (ed.), *Measgra i gcuimhne Mhichíl Uí Chléirigh* (Dublin 1944) 45–64: 61–2.
[18] For suggestions that Fr Nicolás was a native of Galway, see Diarmaid Ó Catháin, 'Augustinian friars and literature in Irish: 1600–1900', *Analecta Augustiniana* 58 (1995) 101–52: 110.
[19] Ó Macháin, 'The flight of the poets', 40–41.
[20] While the text-frame is ruled in dry point on the rectos, no line-ruling is now discernible. Fr Ó Gadhra follows the upper line of the frame as a guide for his first line of text, and all other lines follow this. The absence of line-ruling explains the sometimes slanted appearance of Fr Ó Gadhra's lines. In addition to deficiencies of calligraphy and lay-out, the quality of some of the texts preserved by Fr Ó Gadhra is often the subject of adverse comment by editors and scholars; e.g. written 'most incorrectly' (Standish Hayes O'Grady, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the British Museum* I (London 1926) 358, 374), 'text has many imperfections' (Brian Ó Cuív in *Celtica* 16 (1984) 90).
[21] Pp. v–viii, 1–215 (skipping 77, repeating 144 and 180, pp. 118–19 missing). The leaves consisting of pp. v–vi and 214–15 appear to be the original wrappers. Where detectable, the watermark is a commonplace fleur-de-lis.
[22] Tables of contents feature in some manuscripts produced in Spanish Flanders at this time, and demonstrate the influence of the conventions of printed books (Pádraig Ó Macháin, ' "A llebraib imdaib": cleachtadh agus pátrúnacht an léinn, agus déanamh na lámhscríbhinní', in Ruairí Ó hUiginn (ed.), *Oidhreacht na lámhscríbhinní* Léachtaí Cholm Cille 34 (Maynooth 2004) 148–78: 151). This convention is listed among the features of print culture which illustrate 'the victory of the punch cutter over the scribe' in Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The printing press as an agent of change* (Cambridge 1979) 52 (citing S. H. Steinberg).
[23] Missing items listed in O'Rahilly, *Catalogue*, 8. The final item on the Clár is the poem beginning 'Gé shaoíle a taidg nach dearnus' (L. McKenna, *Iomarbhágh na bhfileadh: the contention of the bards* Irish Texts Society XX, XXI (London 1918) Poem 16), which is listed for p. 253. In the normal arrangement of half-quatrain per line of manuscript, this poem would cover 400 lines of manuscript, or at least six pages. This makes it likely that the manuscript is missing 46 pages from this section.

total of 203 items of verse in the entire manuscript, practically all of which belongs to the type of poetry of the classical, Early Modern era, known as bardic verse.

In order to gauge what categories of verse within the broad bardic family were included and excluded by Fr Nicolás from his anthology, we can use as a measure the greatest single collection of this type of poetry, the manuscript known as the Book of the O'Conor Don. Written between January and December of 1631 at Ostend, just over forty miles north of Lille, this manuscript originally contained 386 poems, of which 353 survive today.[24] Because it was written just over twenty years earlier than Fr Ó Gadhra's manuscript, and in such geographical proximity, it is only natural that we should have both manuscripts in mind when we talk about the availability of bardic material on the continent in the first half of the seventeenth century. The premise that a common pool of literature, an exiles' library, was at the disposal of men of learning in Flanders at this time is unprovable. The most we can say is that surviving manuscripts are suggestive of an abundance of material circulating in the Low Countries in the first half of the seventeenth century. Comparison between the contents of the Book of the O'Conor Don and the O'Gara Manuscript (when both were intact) shows that 73 of the bardic poems in the latter are also found in the former, but what is not included in each can be equally illuminating.

Two particular sequences of bardic verse not found in the Book of the O'Conor Don are included in his manuscript by Fr Ó Gadhra, sequences that belong to both ends of the bardic era. The first is the group of ten largely elegiac poems on pp. 21–4[25] that are attributed to the tenth-century figure, Gormfhlaith, the language of which is thought to be of the twelfth century, the transition period between late Middle and Early Modern Irish. It is one of the striking features of Irish textual history that traces of these poems are found only sporadically elsewhere: in the sixteenth century in the Scottish manuscript anthology known as the Book of the Dean of Lismore; in the eighteenth century in the manuscripts of Uilliam Mac Mhurchaidh of Kintyre; and in the nineteenth century in a manuscript written in Co. Meath by Peadar Ó Gealacáin.[26] While the two Irish sources appear to belong within the literary manuscript tradition, there is evidence in the Scottish sources for the existence of this series of texts outside of the strict confines of written literature.[27] Another genre with textual connections to the Book of the Dean of Lismore is the *fianaigheacht* poetry that was copied uniquely by Aodh Ó Dochartaigh in Duanaire Finn, the sister-manuscript of the Book of the O'Conor Don. The Gormfhlaith poems in the O'Gara Manuscript, and the *fianaigheacht* poetry in Duanaire Finn, are an indication that among the Irish community in exile in the Low Countries in the seventeenth century there existed collections of poetry which in type were on the fringes of mainstream bardic verse. Though available to scribes for copying, it appears that they were only rarely otherwise selected for inclusion in manuscripts.

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[24] These figures are inclusive of double copies of poems (14 originally, 11 surviving), and of an eighteenth-century item on f. 334. For details see Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'An introduction to the Book of the O'Conor Don', in Ó Macháin, *Book of the O'Conor Don*, 1–31: 26.

[25] Written continuously with no space between individual poems, but with the closure to each piece indicated in the margin.

[26] Osborn Bergin, *Irish bardic poetry* (ed. David Greene and Fergus Kelly, Dublin 1970) 202–15; Anne O'Sullivan, 'Triamhuin Ghormlaithe', *Ériu* 16 (1952) 189–99. Discussion in Pádraig Ó Macháin, *Téacs agus údar i bhfilíocht na scol* (Dublin 1998) 15–17.

[27] See further Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'Scribal practice and textual survival: the example of Uilliam Mac Mhurchaidh', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 22 (2006) 95–122.

The second group of poems included by Fr Nicolás, but not found in the Book of the O'Conor Don, comprises eleven poems from the controversy known as 'Iomarbhágh na bhFileadh', dating from the second decade of the seventeenth century. These poems were written on pages that are now lost from the manuscript, but the table of contents shows that they formed a sequence from p. 230 to the end of the book. It is of interest to note that numbered among them was a poem that is not attested elsewhere,[28] and that what in most other manuscripts is one of the opening poems of the Iomarbhágh, 'Dáil chatha idir Corc is Niall', was included by Fr Nicolás in his manuscript (p. 60) four years before he copied that sequence. These texts contain a wealth of *seanchas*, traditional learning, and it is perhaps that aspect of both the Iomarbhágh and the Gormfhlaith poems that appealed to Fr Nicolás.

Of the varieties of bardic verse present in the Book of the O'Conor Don but absent from the O'Gara Manuscript, an obvious category is that of lighter verse such as satire, and particularly *dánta grádha* of the type found in ff. 24–7 of the former manuscript. With the exception of the popular poem beginning 'Goll mear míleata' (p. 132),[29] *fianaigheacht* poetry is also absent from the O'Gara manuscript. The most noticeable absence of all, however, is that of any significant concentration of religious poetry, a category that occupies ff. 43–125 of the Book of the O'Conor Don. Thirteen religious poems are found in the O'Gara Manuscript, seven of which are either addressed or contain references to the Virgin Mary, to whom Fr Nicolás had a special devotion.[30] The proximity of the poet Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn (1550–91) to the Augustinian foundation at Banada is mentioned below, and the absence of significant religious compositions among his surviving work has been noted elsewhere.[31] It may be that sponsorship of, or interest in bardic devotional poetry, was not part of the culture of the Augustinians of Banada, and that the scarcity of such poetry in the O'Gara Manuscript might support such a view. In the light of matters discussed below, however, a more positive interpretation is that the selection by Fr Nicolás represents his personal interest in bardic verse as a repository of *seanchas* rather than of religious sentiment. The bardic poems in the O'Gara Manuscript are therefore predominantly secular, and are addressed to representatives of over thirty families, the most prominent being the Í Néill, who are represented by twenty-two poems, eight of which concern Toirdhealbhach Luineach Ó Néill (d. 1595).

A statistical analysis of the date of the texts in the manuscript reveals the extent to which it and the Book of the O'Conor Don parallel each other with regard to the spread of poems over the centuries that bardic verse was practised. The material selected by Fr Nicolás ranges in date from the twelfth century to his own era. Excluding the marginal quatrains and stanzas, and also eight poems for which no date

[28] Beginning 'Dána do throidis a thaidhg', listed in the index (p. viii) as having begun at p. 252. The Book of the O'Conor Don, while not containing the sequence of poems, does contain a single *Iomarbhágh* poem at f. 398v.
[29] The poem forms part of the romantic *fianaigheacht* tale entitled 'Imtheacht an dá nónbhar', dated by its editor to the sixteenth century (Máire Ní Mhuirghesa, *Imtheacht an dá nónbhar agus Tóraigheacht Taise Taoibhghile* (Dublin 1954) 102–6). It enjoyed an independent popularity in Irish and Scottish manuscripts from the seventeenth century on, and also occurs in the Giessen manuscript (*c*. 1689: L. Stern, 'Notice d'un manuscrit irlandais de la Bibliothèque Universitaire de Giessen', *Revue Celtique* 16 (1895) 8–30: 17). In the O'Gara Manuscript the poem has the appearance of a page-filler (see below).
[30] See n. 11 above. The poems occur at pages 15–16, 46–7, 51–2 , 75, 121–5, 149.
[31] Ó Macháin, *Téacs agus údar*, 6–7.

can be suggested,[32] we are left with 172 poems of which 6% belong to the twelfth century, 7.5% to the thirteenth, 9% to the fourteenth, 13% to the fifteenth, 35% to the sixteenth, and 29.5% to the first half of the seventeenth century.[33] Comparison of these figures with those for the Book of the O'Conor Don and for bardic verse in general[34] shows a general agreement between all three sets, particularly in the notable increase in the amount of bardic verse that survives from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, relative to the preceding centuries.

Far from their being marginalised or removed to any degree from mainstream Irish scholarly tradition, on this evidence an abundance of sources was available to the learned exiles of the seventeenth century. In relative terms, Irish society in exile was just as rich and representative in its literary remains as the society that it paralleled back in Ireland. The above comparison suggests, furthermore, that in addition to demonstrating this acknowledged wealth of sources, the O'Gara Manuscript and the Book of the O'Conor Don also reflect the loss of manuscripts that had occurred before their time, in that they both indicate a relative scarcity of surviving bardic poems from the period before the sixteenth century. Nor is it unreasonable to conclude from the comparison with the general statistics that these two anthologies have both contributed significantly to shaping the picture that we have today of bardic verse. This in its own way is a significant legacy to modern Ireland from the seventeenth-century Irish community in exile, comparable with that of the hagiographical or counter-reformation works that emanated from Louvain.

When it was intact, the O'Gara Manuscript contained 107 bardic poems not found in the Book of the O'Conor Don. It also contained 27 poems, primary copies of which are not found in any other manuscript; as it survives today, it has 22 unique bardic poems. These unique items range in date from the thirteenth century to the seventeenth century. The thirteenth-century pieces are two poems ascribed to Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe: one (p. 110) addressed to Niall Ó Gairmleadhaigh who died in 1261,[35] the other (p. 169) addressed to Aodh Ó Conchubhair, King of Connacht, who died in 1274.[36] Seventeenth-century poems unique to the manuscript include two Í Bhriain elegies (pp. 32, 185) by Tadhg mac Dáire Mheic Bhruaideadha, an address (p. 70) by Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird to Aodh Ó Néill, Earl of Tyrone, asking him to return from Italy to Ireland,[37] and two poems (pp. 65, 68) addressed to Toirdhealbhach mac Airt (Óig) Í Néill and apparently referring to a visit by him to London in 1607. The former of these poems to Toirdhealbhach is ascribed enigmatically 'S. mhá colcc*an*' and is thought to be the only recorded poetic

[32] 'An tu Aidhne déis do rig' (p.118)**, '**Ceart roinneas Día Dáil gCais' (p. 217), 'Da grádh nach beanfainn do Bhrían' (p. 214), 'Ní dóith dhuit misi a Margreg' (p. 220), 'Diúltaim dod sheirc a shaoghail' (p. 121), 'Éasga ar nglanadh grás Muire' (p. 47), 'Gabhuim bealach go dún Dé' (p. 15), 'Teach suain na horchra an aird tíar' (p. 175). With the exception of 'Éasga ar nglanadh', all these appear to be unattested elsewhere; the first four in the list were on pages now lost from the manuscript.
[33] The figures for the two extremes of the time-line are probably skewed by the allocation to the 12th century of the Gormfhlaith sequence, and the inclusion in the 17th century of the 'Iomarbhágh' poems.
[34] Ó Macháin, *The Book of the O'Conor Don*, pp 26–7. For bardic poetry is general the figures are twelfth century 0.5 per cent, thirteenth century 6 per cent, fourteenth century 9 per cent, fifteenth century 15.5 per cent, sixteenth century 32.5 per cent, and seventeenth century 36.5 per cent: data from Dr Katharine Simms's ground-breaking Bardic Poetry Database (http://bardic.celt.dias.ie/).
[35] 'Atá sunn seanchas Muáin': Nicholas Williams (ed.), *The poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe* Irish Texts Society LI (Dublin 1980) Poem 12.
[36] 'Dearmad do fhágbhus ag Áodh': ibid. Poem 14.
[37] Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'Poems by Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird', *Celtica* 24 (2003) 252–63: 262 § 39.

composition attributed to the noted hagiographer Fr John Colgan, who died at Louvain, fifteen miles from Brussels, in 1658 while the manuscript was still being written.[38]

This ascription to Colgan, along with the presence in the manuscript of other seventeenth-century poems, is indicative of the contemporary personality of the book. Poems of exile, composed on the continent,[39] and poems of the new genre of the desolation of the Gaoidhil,[40] were included by Fr Nicolás alongside poems – such as that on the killing of Domhnall Ó Súilleabháin Béarra in Madrid, 1618 (p. 160)[41] – that referred to events that were not too distant from his own time. One poem in particular brings the contemporary element in the manuscript right up to the time of writing. This poem begins 'Maircc fríth le furtacht Éiri[o]nn' (p. 195), and it is a lament for the death of Sir Féidhlim Ó Néill (Féidhlim Ruadh mac Toirdhealbhaigh mheic Éinrí). One of the leaders of the confederacy of 1641, in which Toirdhealbhach mac Airt Óig (mentioned above) also took part, Féidhlim was executed in March 1652/3, about the time that Fr Ó Gadhra was expelled from Ireland and just two years before he commenced his manuscript.[42] The poem is not unique to this manuscript, as another copy, with readings generally superior to Fr Ó Gadhra's, exists in a fragment that is bound in as pp. 669–84 of Trinity College Dublin MS 1337 (H.3.18).[43] For all that it was a recent composition, however, it would seem that the author's name was unknown to either scribe.

The poem opens with a general statement of the families who have fallen or declined while defending Ireland, and who have been dispossessed by the English (*Goill*). This has continued for five hundred years, culminating in the 'Flight of the Earls'.

> O dhul Uí Neill tar sál soir
> s Uí Dhomhnuill mhuighe Murbhoidh
> ní mor ágh aoínfhir dár bhfonn
> Gaoídhil do ládh fá leatrom. (quatrain 10: p. 196.16-17)
>
> *Since Ó Néill and Ó Domhnaill (of Murbhach's plain) went east across the sea, no-one of our land has prospered: the Gaoidhil were placed under oppression.*

[38] 'Rob soraidh an séadsa soir': Cuthbert Mhág Craith, 'Seaán Mhág Colgan cct', in Terence O'Donnell (ed.), *Father John Colgan O.F.M. 1592 –1658* (Dublin 1959). Pádraig A. Breatnach notes a reference to Colgan's Christian name as 'Eoin' (Breatnach et al., *Léann lámhscríbhinní Lobháin*, 3 n. 3), and perhaps Fr Ó Gadhra's curious 'S.' represents his own uncertainty as to the correct form of his name. It is noteworthy that this poem was omitted from Fr Mhág Craith's *Dán na mBráthar Mionúr*.
[39] 'A bhean fuair faill ar an bhfeart' (p. 24), 'A fhir téid go Fíadh bhFuinidh' (p. 225, missing), 'Diombháigh triall ó thulchaibh Fháil' (p. 214), 'Slán uaim don dá aodhaire' (p. 191).
[40] 'Mo thrúaighe mur táid Gaoídhil' (p. 14), 'Cáit ar ghabhadur Gaoidhil' (p. 26), 'Iomdha éagnach ag Éirinn' (p. 156), 'Anocht as úaigneach Éire' (p. 168). Two poems by Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa also contain this theme in part ('Fríoth an uainsi ar Inis Fáil' p. 49, and 'Beag mhaireas do mhacraidh Gaoidheal' p. 66).
[41] 'San Sbáinn do torneadh Teamhuir': R. B. Breatnach, 'Elegy on Donal O'Sullivan Beare (†1618)', *Éigse* 7/3 (1954) 162–81. The poem is preceded (p. 159) by a poem on the death of Ó Súilleabháin's son, Diarmaid, also in Spain.
[42] Sir Féidhlim's career during the confederacy is outlined in Micheál Ó Siochrú, *Confederate Ireland 1642–1649* (Dublin 1999), and Pádraig Lenihan, *Confederate Catholics at war, 1641–9* (Cork 2001).
[43] RIA MS 803 (3 A 17) pp. 440–56 is a nineteenth-century copy from the O'Gara Manuscript.

When hope seemed lost, however, Féidhlim emerged to unify the country against the English:

> Fir Thoraidh[e] is Trágha Lí
> ba humhal íad dúa Énrí
> s fir Leámhna lé luadh goile
> is slúadh mearrdha Músgroídhe. (quatrain 57: p. 198.7–8)
>
> *The men of Tory and of Tralee were submissive to Henry's grandson, and the men of the Laune with reward of valour, and the swift host of Muskerry.*

In the ensuing war, he avenged the expulsion of the clergy:

> Díbirt easbog is ord mbocht
> nír éisd sé día do dhuthrocht
> gan dórtadh a chrú fán ccléir
> lé molltar clú ó ccatNéill. (quatrain 20: p. 196.35–6)
>
> *Such was* [*his*] *commitment that he did not hear of the expulsion of bishops and poor orders without shedding his blood on account of the clergy, by which* [*deed*] *the stock of warlike Niall is exalted.*

The result was a blow against the advance of the Reformed religion:

> Do bhíodh acu déis a ccath
> seanmóir ar shráid[ibh] cathrach
> tré Fhéidhlim iodhan Ó Néill
> an ionadh léighinn Lutéir. (quatrain 64: p. 198.21–2)
>
> *Because of pure Féidhlim Ó Néill they* [*Irish warriors*] *used to have, after their battle, a sermon on city streets instead of Luther's learning.*

It is difficult to conceive that this poem, with its references to religious struggle and particularly to the expulsion of the clergy, did not hold a powerful resonance for Fr Nicolás. Its inclusion in this manuscript along with related near-contemporary material enables us to consider the proposition, in the context of the question of scribal comprehension, that for him at least, and probably for many other scribes and literary men of the time, bardic verse, even at this late stage, was still a vital and well-understood medium of discourse. To extrapolate further, when Fr Nicolás copies thirteenth-century poetry and seventeenth-century poetry, and work from the intervening centuries, he is not engaged in an antiquarian exercise, but rather he is transmitting an art form that was still of relevance in the mid-seventeenth century.[44]

[44] For old texts and manuscripts read by the historian Lughaidh Ó Cléirigh, see Damian McManus, 'The language of the *Beatha*', in Pádraig Ó Riain (ed.), *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh ... historical and literary contexts* (London 2002) 54–73: 56 n.4. For the case of the poet Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa see Carney's comment: 'I think we may safely say that he was thoroughly acquainted with the greater part of the literature that has survived in 14th and 15th century manuscripts: he must have read a considerable amount of Old Irish' (*The Irish bardic poet* (Dublin 1967) 10–11). In the matter of the lawyers, cf. Patterson's observation: 'Without stronger contrary evidence we may reasonably assume that the sixteenth-century scribes did indeed understand a good part of the written tradition, which they

The inclusion of this lament for Féidhlim Ó Néill points to Fr Ó Gadhra's engagement with contemporary events, at the level of literature at least. Another reflection of this is a poem of prophecy that he inscribed on the final page (p. 133) of a gathering immediately preceding the section of his book that was written in 1657.[45] This poem begins 'Abuir dhamh a Mhaoíltamhna' and represents an adaptation, unique to this manuscript,[46] of a poem beginning 'Abair a Mhaoil Tamhlachta'.[47] The earliest version of the poem refers to the punishment of the sinful Irish through the conquest of the English, before predicting that this conquest will come to an end at an unspecified time. In addition to other alterations and omissions, the version of the poem in the O'Gara Manuscript has a unique penultimate quatrain that reads:

> Míle bliadhghan is sé chéad
> dhá fhiothcad sa seacht déug
> tig an tarruinguire fhíor
> mar deir an tailgíon. (p. 133.26–7)
>
> *One thousand years and six hundred, two twenties and seventeen, the true prophecy will come to pass, as St Patrick says.*

This expression of hope for 1657 may represent a further and somewhat awkward modification, by Fr Nicolás himself perhaps, to an already modified poem.[48] In any case, it indicates again the contemporary element centrally present in the contents of his manuscript.

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continuously manipulated so as to harness it to contemporary legal concerns' (Nerys Patterson, 'Brehon Law in late medieval Ireland: "antiquarian and obsolete" or "traditional and functional"?', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 17 (Summer 1989) 43–63: 52). One of the measures of the demise of learning in the seventeenth century was the increasing inability to read and understand the old books; cf. Tadhg Ó Rodaighe's remarks in J. H. T[odd], 'Autograph letter of Thady O'Roddy', *The miscellany of the Irish archaeological society* I (Dublin 1846) 112–25: 123.

[45] See n. 9. Pp. 132–3 were filled in by Fr Nicolás casually over time (indicated by changes of ink) with the poem beginning 'Goll mear míleata' (p. 132), and on p. 133: (i) a list of the countries of the world by continent, (ii) 'Abuir dhamh a Mhaoíltamhna', (iii) a stanza beginnng 'Más fíor as dáonacht go fóill do chleacht' (Thomas F. O'Rahilly, *Búrdúin bheaga*: *pithy Irish quatrains* (Dublin 1925) § 86) and (iv) a note on the career of Brian Bóramha.

[46] Nineteenth-century transcripts of the poem from O'Gara in RIA MSS 160 (23 O 43) and 1071 (24 P 19) may be ignored.

[47] Nicholas O'Kearney, *The prophecies of SS. Columbkille, Maeltamhlacht, Ultan . . .* (Dublin and London 1856) 94–9; Seosamh Laoide, 'Tairngire Mhaoilruain Tamhlacht', *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 14 (1904–5) 838–9. Earliest copy in the sixteenth-century Mac Aodhagáin manuscript, TCD MS 1363 (H.4.22), p. 160, col. b.23–z. The poem contains an early use of *Béarla* meaning English language; for examples of this from the midlands in the sixteenth century see Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'The hand of Conall Ó Mórdha', *Ossory Laois and Leinster* 3 (2008) 54–72: 58. Outside of poetry, Dr Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha has referred me to a an instance of 'Béarla' (*English language*) occurring in a medical text written in the Tipperary region *c*. 1515 (Brian Ó Cuív, *Catalogue of Irish language manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and Oxford College Libraries* I–II (Dublin 2001) I, 291).

[48] Supporting the proposition that the quatrain – which breaks the metrical pattern of the poem – was inserted to suit 1657 is the fact that the final quatrain (not found in the earliest version) is rendered obscure by such a date: 'Cíbé bliadhghain anna mbíadh / diagh ndíagh a naoí sa hocht / an airuibh aoíse rígh na ríogh / ní bhíadh críoch ar mhéad a holc' (Any year of the Lord having a 9 followed by an 8 will contain endless evil); if the original were of the sixteenth century, this would give a date of 1598 for its first adaptation.

Not alone is the contemporary, non-antiquarian element traceable in the manuscript, but one can argue for localised influences also. Quite a number of the poems in the O'Gara Manuscript are anonymous, but ascriptions are recorded in the case of the work of over thirty poets, of whom the most popular is Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn (d. 1591). The manuscript contains sixteen poems by Tadhg[49] – seventeen if we include a poem on a lost page (p. 219).[50] Together with the Book of the O'Conor Don and National Library of Scotland MS 72.1.44, it constitutes one of the major sources for the work of this poet. This may reflect a special interest in the poet as, in the generation preceding Fr Ó Gadhra's, Tadhg Dall lived in the neighbourhood of the Augustinian Friary of Banada, in the townland of Coolrecuill, just a couple of miles distant along the banks of the Moy. It was to Banada that Fr Ó Gadhra returned after his exile, and it was also possibly the point from where he had been expelled.

It is also noteworthy that the poetic family represented in the manuscript by the largest number of individual members is not the Í Uiginn, but rather the Í Dhálaigh, who are represented by fifteen individual members, far out of proportion to their representation in other comparable manuscripts. This may merely reflect the thrust of a particular source that was available to Fr Nicolás, but the fact that they are well distributed throughout the book, rather than concentrated in a specific section, suggests not. It could be, therefore, that Fr Ó Gadhra was conscious that one of the earliest and most renowned of the Í Dhálaigh was Muireadhach Albanach Ó Dálaigh, who was associated with Lissadell in north Co. Sligo.[51]

Whether such local considerations had any bearing on Fr Nicolás's selection of texts is impossible to say for certain, but there is no doubting the Sligo presence in the manuscript, exemplified by the genealogy of Fearghal Ó Gadhra of Moygara on p. 126, already alluded to. There are places in the manuscript when Fr Nicolás lets slip small details that show his familiarity with the tradition that he was recording. For instance, after inscribing the short didactic poem beginning 'A fhir threabhas in tulaigh' as a page-filler on p. 75, Fr Ó Gadhra adds the comment: 'Ase Máol muire úa huigginn .i. dearbrathair thaidhg dhaill adubhairt na tri rainn. / do bhí nardeaspacc túama agus fúair bás ar ttilleadh ón Róimh An anuorb san tír íeachtuir' (*Maol Muire Ó hUiginn i.e. Tadhg Dall's brother said the three quatrains. He was Archbishop of Tuam and he died having returned from Rome in Antwerp in the Low Country*). This appears to be the only record of any detail of the death Maol Muire Ó hUiginn; and notable also is the casual familiarity of the local historian with which Fr Nicolás

[49] Including poems on pp. 42, 46 and 102 which are unascribed, and that on p. 120 which is acephalous; for the poem on p. 42 see Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn: foinse dá shaothar', in Pádraig Ó Fiannachta (ed.), *An dán díreach* Léachtaí Cholm Cille 24 (Maigh Nuad 1994) 77–113. Eochaidh Ó hEódhasa is the second most well-represented in the manuscript, with fourteen items in all (including 'Beir oirbhire uaim go hAodh' on the lost page 214). The best represented poet in the Book of the O'Conor Don is Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird, a contemporary of Ó hEódhusa and Ó hUiginn.

[50] Poem beginning 'Mo chean duit a Ghráinne gharbh': Eleanor Knott (ed.), *The bardic poems of Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn (1550–1591)* Irish Texts Society XXII, XXIII (London 1922, 1926) Poem 33. Knott's Poem 22a is ascribed to Brian Ó Domhnalláin by Fr Nicolás, and is not counted here.

[51] Brian Ó Cuív, 'Eachtra Mhuireadhaigh Í Dhálaigh', *Studia Hibernica* 1 (1961) 56–69. Nine of the Í Dhalaigh poets in the manuscript are associated with Munster. The manuscript contained only one poem of Muireadhach's ('Fada an chabhair go Cruachain' p. 223, now lost). On the order of the poems in the manuscript Ó Cuív remarked: 'It is likely that his [*sc.* Fr Ó Gadhra] arrangement reflects the way in which the material became available to him from time to time' (*The Irish bardic duanaire or 'poem-book'* (Dublin 1974) 11).

mentions Maol Muire's relation to Tadhg Dall, again the only unambiguous record of that relationship.[52]

Another instance of local familiarity is the stanza in accentual metre from Co. Sligo which may have been part of a longer poem but which Fr Nicolás jots down as a filler at the bottom of p. 90:

> A bhratach air a bhfaicim an ghrúaim a fás
> do banneadh leat an eagluis do bhúanchomhéud
> da maireadh fear sheasda na gcruadhthrodán
> feadh thamhairc do bheith agad don túaith na hait.[53]

Fr Ó Gadhra later appended a note to this stanza saying that it is an *abhrán* composed by Seaán Mac Céibhfionn[54] for Ó Conchubhair Shligigh, Sir Donnchadh mac Cathail Óig. He thus records, again in a casual manner, perhaps from memory, an otherwise unknown piece of verse concerning a man who died in 1609.[55]

These items are part of a large quantity of page-fillers and marginal items that are present in the manuscript and that serve to emphasise the personal nature of the anthology. Generally speaking, Fr Nicolás, if material is available to him, has no compunction about beginning a new item with only a few lines left to fill on the page, as happens for example on pages 137 and 140. Sometimes he will extend the rudimentary ornamentation to fill out the remaining space on the page and he will begin his text on a new page (pp. 144a–145, for example). His usual solution, however, when he has space to fill on a page, is either to jot down single verses or quatrains, or, if the space is somewhat larger, to include short poems that fulfil the same function of filling up the available space. There are twenty-one single stanzas and quatrains scattered throughout the manuscript, and in addition to these there are many short poems that seem to have been afterthoughts, or to have been inserted merely to fill space rather than having been included as part of the 'canonical' series of historic bardic poems. Examples of such page-fillers in the manuscript are the poems beginning 'A mhacaoímh mhaoídheas do shlat' (p. 88, attributed to 'Ó hEodhasa'),[56] and 'Slán uaim don dá aodhaire' (p. 191, attributed elsewhere to Maol

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[52] Knott, *Tadhg Dall* I, xvi; Tomás Ó Rathile, *Measgra Dánta* (Cork 1927) 204. O'Grady initially took Antwerp as referring to a place of writing of the manuscript, but he altered his view of this subsequently (*Catalogue*, 339 and 442).

[53] 'Flag on which I see dejection growing, it was you who used always to guard the Church; if he were alive, the man who endured the hard battles, all that you see of the land would be yours in compensation for that.' O'Grady (*Catalogue*, 356) reads *dob annamh leat* 'seldom hath it been thy lot'.

[54] *Alias* Mac Céibhionnaigh, author of two surviving poems: one addressed to Cormac Uai[th]ne Ó hUiginn in the Book of the O'Conor Don (f. 13v), and a religious poem in RIA MS 97 (24 P 21, p. 237, imperfect in G 1304 (f. 129r)). Cf. 'Connoghor, Shane, and William M'Keaven' listed as kerns among the followers of Brian Ó Ruairc in 1588 (Fiants § 5227).

[55] 'Seaan mac ceibhfionn adubairt an tabhrán. do donnchadh mac cathail óig .i. ó concobhuir Sligi.' The second item (p. 2) in the O'Gara Manuscript is an elegy ('Síon choitcheann cumhadh Gaoidhil') on the same person by Cormac Ua hUiginn, mac an Ghiolla Coluim; see Tomás Ó Raghallaigh (ed.), *Filí agus filidheacht Chonnacht* (Dublin 1938) 256–63.

[56] Of this poem its editor remarked: 'It is well-known that occasional verse found but little favour with the compilers of manuscript anthologies of bardic literature. This, no doubt, was mainly due to the fact that such verse had as a rule no political or social significance. A contributory reason for the disfavour, which must have carried weight with scribes whose interests were literary rather than political or social, is found in the ephemeral nature of the compositions themselves. Many of them would have

Muire Ó hUiginn),[57] both of which are squeezed in at the bottom of pages.[58] It is interesting to reflect on the fact that these two poems, when they occur in the Book of the O'Conor Don (ff. 24v, 25v), are also accorded positions removed from the core, canonical interest of that manuscript, among the miscellaneous section which includes *dánta grádha* and other light verse. Such verse derives from the milieu of the professional cultivation of poetry, and forms part of the continuum that was Irish tradition. To a scribe intent on anthologising the formal creations of the master poets, however, its status is secondary, and this status is reflected in the physical position accorded it in both the O'Gara Manuscript and in the Book of the O'Conor Don.

These marginal and filler items are indicative of the informal personality of the manuscript, a personality that is reinforced by the very style of writing and the absence of comprehensive line-ruling referred to in n. 20. Another aspect of this is that three poems, or parts of poems, occur twice in the manuscript. One of these, the short gnomic poem beginning 'Tearc agam adhbhur gáire' (p. 176), was repeated a year later (p. 181) in virtually identical form within a few pages of its first occurrence. It could be that Fr Ó Gadhra forgot that he had written the piece the year before; or perhaps the second copy is an effort at making a cleaner and tidier copy than the first: scribal slips in quatrains 2 and 7 are absent from the later copy. In the case of the two other repeated items, it seems clear that Fr Ó Gadhra genuinely forgot that he had already made copies of them earlier in the book. Tadhg Camchosach Ó Dálaigh's poem 'Bean ar n-aithéirghe Éire' occurs first at pp. 55–6. Fr Ó Gadhra not only makes a second copy (pp. 141–3) of this poem, but leaves space at the end where his exemplar is clearly defective, although the complete poem had already been copied by him. Comparison of the two versions shows that he was using manuscripts representing two different textual traditions. In the case of the third poem, Tadhg Dall's 'Mairg fhéagas ar Inis Ceithleann' (pp. 101–102), it appears that Fr Nicolás bethought himself after eleven quatrains of the second copy (p. 127) – which seems again derived from a slightly different manuscript tradition – where he remarked: 'ta an dan so sgriobta an áit eile sa leabhar so' (*this poem is written elsewhere in this book*).

With such an amount of core and incidental material at his disposal, it is legitimate to ask what acquaintance if any Fr Nicolás had with the surviving manuscripts that are thought to have been on the continent at the time that he was writing, recalling that it is mentioned in the preface to his book that he assembled the contents from various exemplars (*cartacha* 'manuscripts'). An analysis of those contents shows that some texts are also to be found in a handful of manuscripts that are still extant and that are known to have been in the Low Countries just before Fr Ó Gadhra's era. The Book of the O'Conor Don, which has 73 poems in common with Fr Ó Gadhra's book, has been mentioned already. To a much lesser extent, the O'Gara Manuscript also shares texts with Franciscan MS A 25 (12 poems), The Book of O'Donnell's Daughter (Brussells MS 6131–3, 6 poems), Brussells MS 2569–72 (1 poem), and Brussells MS

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been occasioned by some passing incident which when forgotten would render them pointless or unintelligible.' (R. A. Breatnach, 'A pretended robbery', *Éigse* 3/4 (1942) 240–244: 242).

[57] Ó Rathile, *Measgra dánta*, Poem 53. For some of the single stanzas see T. F. O'Rahilly, *Dánfhocail* (Dublin 1921) §§ 13, 22, 191, 212, 223.

[58] Underlining their secondary status in the manuscript is the fact that neither poem is included in Fr Ó Gadhra's index. For filler poems observed elsewhere cf. Anne O'Sullivan, 'The Tinnakill duanaire', *Celtica* 11 (1976) 214–28: 214 n.7.

20978–9[59] (2 poems). Having examined several of the texts of these manuscripts, comparing them with those in the O'Gara Manuscript, I have, to date, found no text in any of them that can be identified as the exemplar for the same text in O'Gara.

We have no way of knowing the number of *cartacha* consulted by Fr Ó Gadhra over the five years it took for him to compile his book. The only connection with another manuscript of which I am aware is with one that was written in 1744–5 by the Cork scribe, Seaán Ó Murchudha na Ráithíneach: RIA MS 3 (23 L 17). The contents of this manuscript derive from two books: one by Uilliam Ruadh Mac Coitir (now RIA MS 1387 (23 O 78)), the other a manuscript described by Ó Murchudha as 'leabhar seannda do sgriobh an deighchléireach Domhn*all* Ó Gadhra éigin, acht ní bhfuarus amach cá ham'.[60] This exemplar was at the time in the possession of Séamus Mac Coitir of Castlelyons, Co. Cork, and from it Ó Murchudha chose 68 bardic poems with which he filled the first half of his manuscript to f. 96. These poems are divided almost equally between northern and Munster subject matter, and 27 of them are shared with the O'Gara Manuscript, seven of them occurring only in these two manuscripts. Analysis of those seven poems shows evidence for affinity in some cases,[61] and wide divergence in others.[62] In the cases that show affinity, the most that can be said is that those poems share a close textual history. And so the direct connection, if any, between the texts preserved by Fr Domhnall Ó Gadhra – about whom no more information has yet come to light – and those preserved by Fr Nicolás, remains an enigma.

It has been remarked above that the contents of the Book of the O'Conor Don and of the O'Gara Manuscript demonstrate the richness of the literary remains to be found among the Irish community in exile, and the great loss of manuscripts that must have occurred both before and since they were transcribed. The evidence of the textual tradition of those of the poems in O'Gara that have been examined, negative though it is, reinforces those conclusions. Even though the time of writing was 1655–9, even though the place of writing was very far removed from what would be considered the heartland of Gaelic culture, there was still a significant amount of material available to Fr Nicolás, in writing and perhaps even in memory, on which he drew to form his manuscript. When we read the O'Gara Manuscript today, we are looking at poems copied from books that no longer survive. Though the contents of the manuscript include a poem such as 'A mheic ná meabhraigh éigse' (p. 94), which laments the contemporary neglect of poetry, and other poems on the downfall of the Gaelic nobility (n. 40), this is not a book that reflects a literature either in decline or in transition. Rather, it highlights the richness and variety of five centuries of core literary activity.

This in itself is an indication of the position of Fr Nicolás as traditional man of letters. Despite the fact that he is writing as a pastime, despite his awkward penmanship and

[59] This manuscript was considered by Brian Ó Cuív to have textual connections to the Book of the O'Conor Don ('A seventeenth-century manuscript in Brussells', *Éigse* 9/3 (1959–60) 173–80: 175); see however Pádraig A. Breatnach, 'The Book of the O'Conor Don and the manuscripts of St Anthony's College, Louvain', in Ó Macháin, *Book iof the O'Conor Don*, 103–22: 111–12.
[60] RIA MS 3 (23 L 17), f. 96v ('an old book written by the good cleric, one Domhnall Ó Gadhra, but I have not discovered when').
[61] E.g. poem beginning 'Fada as othrus éag Donnchaidh' (O'Gara p. 201, Ó Murchudha f. 13v).
[62] Particularly the poem beginning 'Cathaigh réd meanma a mic Briain' (O'Gara p. 8, Ó Murchudha f. 92r).

the fact that he is producing what is in many ways a very personal anthology, he is still as much at the heart of the tradition as are his contemporaries elsewhere on the continent and in Ireland. Support for this interpretation of Fr Ó Gadhra comes from two of his own colophons. On p. 126, at the end of his three-column genealogy of his namesake and head of his family, Fearghal Ó Gadhra of Moygara, he states: 'Anno 1656 / mas breug dhamhsa so is díol ar seanchuibh eile gan andleacht fein dfaghail' (*In the year 1656, if I err in this it is proper that other historians should not get their due*); that is, if the genealogy be faulty, the fault lies with *senchuíbh eile* 'other historians'. Then, having filled out the vacant fourth column with some verses, Fr Nicolás adds a second colophon, in which he catches the apologetic note prevalent among contemporary and near-contemporary writers in Irish:[63]

> Gabhuim párdún ag gach áon do leidhfios ni ar bith da bhfuil san leaburso ar na dhroch deachteadh no ar na droch sgriobha gan aithfear do thabhairt orum. do brigh nach raibh fear mo athteagaisg aguum [*sic*] An brathar bocht don ord Augustin .i. Fr Fearghal úa gadhra[64]
>
> *I crave pardon of all who will read anything that has been badly composed or badly written in this book, [and I ask them] not to blame me since I had no-one who would instruct me anew. The poor brother of the Augustinian Order i.e. Brother Fearghal Ó Gadhra*

There are clues in these two colophons to Fr Ó Gadhra's perception of his status within the world of Irish letters. First, in his recording of the genealogy of Ó Gadhra we infer from his reference to '*other* historians' that he regards himself as a *seanchaidh*, a chronicler of traditional history, and in this context we recall the inclusion by him of the Gormfhlaith and *Iomarbhágh* sequences referred to above. Second, there is the telling reference in the second colophon to his re-education, implying that he once possessed such learning. It may not be reading too much into this to conclude that Fr Nicolás, before he went to Spain to be educated for the priesthood, had received some exposure to traditional native learning, perhaps as part of the preparatory education available in Ireland in the early seventeenth century for prospective student priests.[65] This interpretation points to his scribal work as re-activating his involvement in learned Irish tradition.

It would be a mistake, however, to regard Fr Ó Gadhra's work as being founded on cold, disinterested scholarship. We have already seen how relevant to his own situation and background some of the poems that he transcribed must have been.

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[63] E.g. Seón Carsuel, *Foirm na n-urrnuidheadh* (ed. R. L. Thomson, Edinburgh 1970) 12; Flaithrí Ó Maolchonaire, *Desiderius* (ed. Thomas F. O'Rahilly, Dublin 1941) 1–2; Froinsias Ó Maolmhuaidh, *Lucerna Fidelium* (ed. Pádraig Ó Súilleabháin, Dublin 1962) 11. Such statements combine the medieval 'mea mediocritas' (Tore Janson, *Latin prose prefaces: studies in literary conventions* (Stockholm 1964) 125) with the reality of the decline of learning in the seventeenth century.

[64] 'Droch deachteadh' misread by O'Grady as 'dhroichdhearmad' (*Catalogue*, 360). Cf. 'Gabh agam dá réir sin a léaghthóir deighbhreathaigh gan aithfer do thabhairt orm um lochtt dá ndearnus ann do thaoibh litri nó dhermuid agus aleith risin orthographia agus risin deachtadh ...' (Brian Mág Niallghus, 1608: UCD Franciscan MS A 19 f. 61v).

[65] Cf. the case of Fr Hugh Ward, among whose preparatory teachers in Connacht was Thadaeus Higgin, possibly Tadhg Dall's son who was a poet, grammarian and Sheriff of Sligo (D. J. O'Doherty, 'Students of the Irish College, Salamanca (1595–1619)', *Archivium Hibernicum* 2 (1913) 1–36: 29 (§ 76)). Another native man of letters listed among the teachers in this source is Tuileagna Ó Maoil Chonaire (§§ 47, 55, 72).

Furthermore, being a manuscript compiled for his personal use, it contains a number of colophons and marginalia, some of which give expression to his own emotions and to his reaction to the material that he is copying: the two invocations to the Blessed Virgin have already been mentioned (n. 11). Other colophons, as we have seen, give dates and locations,[66] or comment on the incomplete state of a particular text.[67] On p. 88 there is a contemporary marginal comment recording the defence by the Spanish of the disputed town of Valenciennes, thirty miles south-east of Lille, and the defeat of the French, 15 July 1656.[68] Among the more personal colophons is one on p. 117 referring to Fr Ó Gadhra's own emotional situation as an exile:

> 12. Febh A Líle san tír iachtuir .1656. sguirim *agus* me dubhach brónach go maidin. agus ar feadh mo bheatha, acht amhain go mbearuinn áon amharc ar eirinn. Fr. Feargal. ua gadhra don ord Augustin.
>
> *12 February in Lille in the Low Country. 1656. I cease* [*writing*], *depressed and sad until morning and for the rest of my life unless I get one glimpse of Ireland. Brother Fearghal Ó Gadhra of the Augustinian Order.*

This longing for one glimpse of Ireland is the strongest expression in the book of Fr Ó Gadhra's love and concern for his country, and of his emotional connection with his scribal work. There are other, more restrained hints at the closure of four poems that were relevant in one way or another to his own situation in exile. At the end of one of the poems on the downfall of the Gaoidhil, beginning 'Mo thruaighe mar táid Gaoidhil' (*I lament the condition of the Gaoidhil*), in a variation on the usual scribal indication of the bardic feature of *dúnadh* ('closure') he adds (p. 14): 'Mo thruaighe míle úair' (*I lament it a thousand times*). At the end of another poem on the same theme, 'Cáit ar ghabhadur Gaoidhil' (*Where have the Gaoidhil gone?*), Fr Ó Gadhra writes (p. 27) 'Cáit. nescio'[69] (*Where, I do not know*). At the closure of the lament beginning 'Fada re hurchóid Éire' (*Ireland has long endured injustice*), he adds (p. 29) 'fada. fada. fada dona le hurchoid ere, agus ni deireadh di mo denar' (*Long, long, long indeed has Ireland endured injustice and it is not finished alas*). This latter entry is written not in Fr Ó Gadhra's Gaelic script, but rather in the hurried cursive secretary hand employed by him in the two invocations to the Virgin noted above. Finally, on a page now numbered 214, but originally an end-wrapper,[70] at the end of the poem beginning 'Diombáigh triall ó thulachaibh Fáil' (*It is sad to leave the hills of Ireland*), Fr Nicolás simply repeats, again in secretary script, the closure three times 'Diombaigh Diombaigh Diombaigh' (*sad sad sad*). Together with other details discussed above, these colophons confirm that the O'Gara Manuscript is far more

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[66] See n. 9. Other scribal dates and comments are: 'Laus Christo' (p. 4); **'**1655' (p. 46); '10 Decembris anno domini. 1655' (p. 73); 'Jesus Maria' (p. 101); 'Joseph' (102); **'**ultimo Feb. 1656' (p. 121); '1658' (p. 184); '12. Maii 1659 san tír iachtuir' (p. 213).

[67] 'ni bhfúair me an cuid eile don dán so' (p. 120); 'gan criochnughadh' (cancelled, p. 131); 'gan criochnughadh mur sin' (pp. 136, 143); 'nír dúnadh riamh é' (p. 178); 'teasda dha rann don duain so' (p. 190). In some of these cases (pp. 131, 136 and 178 apart), Fr Ó Gadhra leaves space for the missing text to be filled in later.

[68] '15 July 1656 do togbhadh campa Vailincían agus tugadh ár mór ar na Francchuibh'.

[69] Possibly later changed to 'nesci*er*o'.

[70] See n. 21. We know from the table of contents (p. viii) that the original p. 214, lost before 1686, contained two poems, those beginning 'Beir oirbhire uaim go hAodh', and 'Dá grádh nach beanfainn do Bhrían'.

overtly the work of an exile than comparable manuscripts such as the Book of the O'Conor Don.

Séamus Carthún's poem on the state of Ireland, composed while its author was in prison, and copied in Prague by Fr Antaine Ó Conchubhair in 1659, just as Fr Nicolás was completing his manuscript in Lille, never appears to have made the transition from private to public ownership *via* the scribal tradition. The copies of texts made by Fr Nicolás were also done as a pastime, in his spare hours in exile, and the manuscript containing them – and we may note that there is no suggestion anywhere that he ever wrote anything other than this one manuscript – bears many signs of its personal nature. This book was conceived and executed in the centre of the Irish community in exile, where so many representative sources were available to scribes. Its contents were vital to Fr Ó Gadhra in a way that takes us beyond the notion of the scribe as a passive, disinterested conduit. The manuscript might have been fated to seclusion from subsequent tradition, however, were it not that, with the return of Fr Nicolás to Ireland, it was absorbed into learned society in north Connacht and thus passed from personal composition to public recognition.

We do not know when Fr Nicolás returned from exile. The next date associated with him after 1659 is 1670, when he was appointed prior of Banada (n. 13). It is unclear whether it was on the continent, or following its return to Ireland, that his manuscript lost the 46 pages that were removed deliberately from it. That it passed through other hands can be deduced by occasional non-scribal jottings which are mixed in with Fr Ó Gadhra's own jottings in French, Spanish, Latin, and Irish on what is now page v of the manuscript, a page that functioned as an outside wrapper in Fr Ó Gadhra's time.[71]

On the return of scribe and manuscript to Ireland, the next dateable event in its history was the prefixing to it by an un-named scribe of a bifolium, the second leaf of which (now pp. iii–iv) contains the address to the reader, dated 5 June 1686. Standish Hayes O'Grady called this address 'a modest but highly didactic and indeed pedantic little preface'.[72] Nevertheless, in addition to biographical details mentioned above and presumably supplied by Fr Ó Gadhra, this document (see Appendix below) contains other points of great interest. Replete with the scholarly apparatus of side-note references to biblical, classical and contemporary scholars, the preface loosely follows the medieval convention of time, place, author, and the reason for writing. The reason for writing is the one that most occupies the author. He first establishes (§ 1) that the regeneration or re-cycling (*athnuachradh*)[73] of tradition from age to age is standard practice in both biblical and pagan literatures, citing particularly the example of the

[71] Many of these jottings are difficult to decipher. At the top of the page Fr Ó Gadhra has written an appropriate inscription for a book written in exile: 'Epetaphium [? &c] doctoris / subtilis patris fratris Joanis / duns scoti / Scotia me genuit Anglia me Suscepit / gallia me docuit / [C]olonia me tenet'. Some jottings are retrospective in nature: the notes in French record the death of James I in 1625, and of the Duke of Buckingham in 1628. The note in Spanish records the accession of Philip IV in 1605. The main Irish jottings are copies of marginal verses from the body of the manuscript: 'Níor eamhgigh sí éanach fa a nglacfadh a lámh' (scribal, cf. p. 19) and 'Más fíor as dáonacht go fóill do chleacht' (non-scribal, cf. p. 133); and a quatrain beginning 'Dha thrí uisge meic an easpuil' (scribal, not found in what survives of the manuscript). The name 'Faral Gara' also occurs here.

[72] *Catalogue*, 340 n. 2.

[73] Not in the Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of the Irish Language*. The Academy's *Corpas na Gaeilge 1600–1882* (Dublin 2004) lists the two examples in Pádraig Ó Súilleabháin (ed.), *Buaidh na Naomhchroiche* (Dublin 1972) lines 3973–4, 7768, a seventeenth-century Connacht text.

Ten Commandments being referred to in different books of the Old Testament, and the genealogy from Adam being cited in both Old and New Testaments. The writer then establishes (§ 2) that Ireland has a literature as ancient as any other, and then, having included Fr Ó Gadhra's biographical details (§ 3), he turns to the contents of the manuscript.

He outlines the categories of poems to be found in the manuscript (§ 4), claiming them to be representative of every type of bardic poetry ('dán ar gach gnáthaisde'). The categories listed are 'dréachta diadhachta duain leanabuídheacht, duain mholta, deireadh saothair, duain teagaisg, cumunn duain tseanchusa, droighneach, ógláchus, marbhnadh'. Most of these categories and metrical types are discernible in the manuscript,[74] but at least one of them – 'duain leanabuídheacht' (birth or infancy poetry) – is not to be found, even when the missing items are taken into account.[75] In addition it is to be noted that 'cumunn' appears to stand alone in the list. This section is then followed by the two closing paragraphs (§§ 5–6), which emphasise the generosity of Fr Ó Gadhra in bequeathing his manuscript to the nation ('nasiún') that he loves, and excusing any errors that may remain.

In the matter of general style, the preface invites comparison with such influential works as Keating's 'Díonbhrolach' to his *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*,[76] and, perhaps more pertinently, the 'Proloquium ad lectorum' to Roderic O'Flaherty's *Ogygia*, which was published a year previously, 1685.[77] We are fortunate, however, that a more precise parallel to the preface survives in another Sligo manuscript, written just over twenty years later. Maynooth MS B 8 is an important work written in Sligo town between 1701 and 1705 by Heinrí Ó Carraic (*alias* Mhac Carrtha). It contains a collection of bardic poems, as well as possibly the earliest surviving transcript of the 'Cuimre Craobhsgaoileadh Chineadh Éireann agus Albanscot', made by Ó Carraic in 1705 from An Dubhaltach Mac Fhir Bhisigh's original of 1666.[78] To this transcript was added *c*. 1708 a three-page preface headed 'Oráid chum an léightheóra et díonbhrollach na hoibreso' (pp. 97–9).[79] In style, rhetoric and presentation this preface is remarkably similar to that prefixed to the O'Gara Manuscript. The argument proceeds – again, in the third person, and with copious side-notes – from biblical and classical precedents for the respect for and preservation of learning, to its

[74] For 'duan deiridh' and 'duan deiridh shaothair' (a poem composed by a poet on the completion of his bardic training) see Mhág Craith, *Dán na mBráthar Mionúr* Poem 4.9 (and note vol. II, 371), and Eleanor Knott, *Irish syllabic poetry 1200–1600* (Dublin 1974) 73 q. 5 (= Láimhbheartach Mac Cionnaith, *Dioghluim dána* (Dublin 1938) Poem 70.5). Perhaps the latter poem ('Atám i gcás idir dhá chomhairle' p. 231, also an example of 'droighneach') is one of the poems intended here.

[75] A number of poems addressed to youths (but not infants) occurs in the manuscript: 'A mic gur meala t'árma' (p. 110); 'Cathaigh réd meanma a mic Briain' (p. 8); 'Maith an locht airdriogh óige' (p. 177); 'Ní tráth dod dhol a Dhiarmaid' (p. 185).

[76] David Comyn and Patrick S. Dinneen (ed.), *The history of Ireland by Geoffrey Keating D.D.* Irish Texts Society IV, VIII, IX, XV (London 1902, 1905, 1908, 1914) I, 2–94.

[77] *Ogygia: seu, rerum Hibernicarum chronologia . . . Authore Roderico O Flaherty Armigero* (London 1685) 25–44. The popularity of classical allusion in post-Cromwellian works by O'Flaherty, John Lynch and Nicholas French is noted in W. B. Stanford, *Ireland and the classical tradition* (Dublin 1976) 204–6.

[78] Described Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, *Lámhscríbhinní Gaeilge Choláiste Phádraig Má Nuad* Fascúl IV (Maynooth 1967) 125–30. See Nollaig Ó Muraíle, *The celebrated antiquary: Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh, c.1600–1671: his lineage, life, and learning* (Maynooth 2002) 304–5.

[79] Printed with minor errors in *Éigse suadh is seanchaidh . . . iar na chur in eagar. . . ag comhdhaltaibh do Chuallacht Choluim Cille atá ag Maigh Nuadhad* (Dublin [1909]) 36–9.

preservation in Ireland, to the particular case of Heinrí Ó Carraic, the scribe of MS B 8, whose affection for his country (‘baidh agus claon lé na nasiún’) has caused him, though a busy merchant, to assemble this book at every available opportunity (‘an gach eidirsgíth dha bfhuair’, cf. O’Gara ‘an gach eidirsgís da bhfuair’). These rhetorical and verbal correspondences are further underlined by the use of the word *cartacha* in both to signify manuscript sources, and by the repetition in B 8 of two side-references already employed in the O’Gara preface: ‘Chron 1 cap. 1’ and ‘Mat. cap. 1’ (O’Gara: ‘Cronic .ca. 1’ and ‘Math. 1.’), the latter referencing the genealogy of Christ as it does in the O’Gara manuscript. Such correspondences are suggestive of identity of authorship.

Whereas the preface in Fr Ó Gadhra’s manuscript is unsigned, this is not the case with that in B 8. This document, though transcribed by Heinrí Ó Carraic, retains the closing blessing and signature of its author (p. 99):

> Anois (mur luach saothair ghaedhalach), go saoluighe Dia is na grasaibh é fein et a churum amhuil athchuingheas / a caraid ionmhuin / Seaán o Gadhra[80]

In transcribing this closing section, it appears beyond doubt that Ó Carraic has preserved the name – Seaán Ó Gadhra – of the author of the preface to his transcript of Mac Fhir Bhisigh, and also of the preface to the manuscript of Fr Nicolás Ó Gadhra. This is reinforced by another document by Seaán Ó Gadhra, written in 1719: two genealogies (‘ascendendo’ and ‘descendendo’) of Rodericus Mac Dermott, son of the Mac Diarmada, Brian. The genealogy traces Mac Dermott’s pedigree to and from Adam, and was apparently provided for him on his departure from Galway for Madrid, 3 August 1719.[81] These genealogies are signed ‘Jo Gara’ and ‘J Gara’ respectively,[82] and are characterised by heavy side-annotation, referencing the authority of Ó Dubhagáin, Colgan, Keating, O’Flaherty and Lynch, and that of three manuscript sources: Codex Lecanus, Codex Cluanensis and Annales Dungalensis. For the biblical section of the genealogy, reference is made in a side-note to three sources: Genesis 5 and 10, Chronicles (‘Parilipomenon’) 1.i, and Matthew 1, the last two familiar to us already from the O’Gara preface, and from that in the Ó Carraic manuscript.

Further corroboration of his authorship is provided by a reading of the poetry of Seaán (*al*. Seaán Óg) Ó Gadhra, much of which is preserved in a manuscript written 1758–61 by Ruaidhrí Ruadh Mac Diarmada, possibly he for whom the genealogy was provided in 1719.[83] In a poem entitled ‘Tuireadh na Gaoidheilge agus teasdas na

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[80] ‘Now, as a Gaelic reward, may God preserve him and his family in the graces, as his dear friend Seaán Ó Gadhra entreats.’

[81] RIA MS 1219 (C iii 1) Part B, pp. 23–8. This document formed part of a miscellaneous collection of papers once in the possession of Charles O’Conor, included with the manuscript of the Annals of Connacht.

[82] RIA MS 1219, pp. 25, 28; wrongly reproduced in the RIA *Catalogue* (p. 3276) as ‘F. Gara’.

[83] RIA MS 745 (I v 1) Section C pp. 3–91; signed ‘Rodericus mac Dermott’ p. 91. Note that in the O’Gara Manuscript the name ‘[Teirllough ?] McDermott’ has been scribbled over twice on what is now p. 215, apparently by Charles Gara, whose name occurs on the same page (n. 16 above). In Mac Diarmada’s manuscript (pp. 7–22) occurs a translation of a Tadhg Dall poem into Latin by ‘Mr. John O’Gara’ and into English by ‘James O’Gara Junior B.A.’; the latter may be the scribe Séamus Ó Gadhra (*fl*. 1715) who wrote the fragment RIA MS 1185 (24 C 55), pp. 471–3. Regarding Seaán (Óg) it is worth mentioning that one of the Fearghal Ó Gadhra’s sons was named Seaán (Báiréad, ‘Muintir Ghadhra’, 55 n.73).

hÉirionn',[84] the author contends that he, Roderic O'Flaherty and Tadhg Ó Rodaighe were the last in Connacht to be competent in traditional scholarship in Irish, and in Latin and English, and in particular in the reading of manuscripts. He also refers with distaste to clerics who travel in Europe and then return speaking European languages but with little regard for their native Irish language, by which token one can deduce the attraction that such a cleric returning with a manuscript of bardic poetry might have held for the poet. From the aspect of the learned preface prefixed to Fr Ó Gadhra's manuscript, the significant lines of this poem are those in which he enumerates the various poetic categories and metres in Irish, among which are:

> Duain leanbaidheacht, duain mholta, duain réidhte,
> Duain chumainn, duain tseanchuis gan chlaenadh,
> Duain deirigh saothair[85] i gcrích an léighinn.

Here we have some of the categories listed in the preface to the O'Gara Manuscript. In addition to consolidating the identity of the author of that preface as Seaán Ó Gadhra, this poetic list also resolves the crux of the isolated 'cumunn' as it occurs in the list in the preface, where it is now obvious that it signifies love poetry, another category not found in the manuscript. We can also deduce that in listing the various types of poetry in that preface, the author was merely attempting to convey the comprehensive nature of the manuscript, and we should not be surprised, therefore, if specific examples of some of the types of poetry adduced by him are not readily discernible in the book.

Despite the ostentatious show of learning, a serious point is being made in this preface. Having established the role of the O'Gara Manuscript in the regeneration and renewal of Irish literature, we are told that we should be indebted to Fr Nicolás for his generosity in bequeathing this *oighre* ('heir', or possibly 'inheritance') to the nation, and that – echoing his own colophon on p. 126 – we should forgive whatever faults of writing it might contain. At its close, the preface assumes the character of an *envoi*, and also, perhaps, the character of Fr Nicolás's last testament. It indicates that, at the very least, a readership beyond his own personal use was now envisaged for the manuscript, as distinct from when it was first compiled thirty years previously. It is made clear that the O'Gara Manuscript is now seen as Fr Ó Gadhra's gift to posterity.

Seaán Ó Gadhra himself was to have a hand in the publicising of that new prominence achieved by a once private anthology. In his elegy for O'Flaherty (d. 1718), he lists his various achievements and accomplishments, and includes references to the notable manuscripts that O'Flaherty had read. Among these was 'Codex O Gara':

> Omniparens Codex O Gara, gaza benigna,
> Ex multis libris grande volumen opus
> Vivus amor patriae, non lucrum, coepta movebat.[86]

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[84] Ed. Torna [Tadhg Ó Donnchadha] in *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 14 (1904–5) 712–20; reproduced in An tAthair Mac Domhnaill, *Dánta is amhráin Sheáin Uí Ghadhra* (Dublin 1955) 11–18; Ó Raghallaigh, *Filí agus filidheacht*, 424–31. In the prologue to this poem, Ó Gadhra gives his address as Cnoc Reamhar. Two townlands named Knockrawer (barony of Corran) are within ten and fifteen miles respectively of Banada priory: those in the parish of Kilturra and the parish of Kilshalvy, Co. Sligo.

[85] MS: 'duain deirigh, saothar'. 'Infancy poem, praise poem, conciliatory poem, love poem, poem of accurate history, graduation poem at the completion of learning.'

Apart from this being the earliest recorded external reference to the manuscript of Fr Nicolás, we may note also the references to its having being compiled from many books, and, in particular, the motivation of *amor patriae* that lay behind its writing, a fact that is also stressed in the preface to that manuscript: (*méd geana agus cumaoine an scribhneora ar a nasiún go generáilte agus ar a chineadh go spesialta* ('the extent of the writer's affection and kindness towards his nation in general and his kin in particular')), and which is also deducible, as we have seen, from Fr Ó Gadhra's colophons.

Finally it is worth noting again that while Heinrí Ó Carraic transcribed Seaán Ó Gadhra's preface into his manuscript, the preface to Fr Nicolás's manuscript is not in Fr Nicolás's hand. One may therefore wonder if the hand of the preface to the O'Gara Manuscript is in fact that of Seaán Ó Gadhra, a hand that is otherwise unattested.[87]

Following its adoption by the literary men of north Connacht, the next step in securing the position of the O'Gara Manuscript for posterity was the practical one of providing it with a more durable binding than the paper wrappers in which it had survived heretofore. This was effected through another connection of Seaán Ó Gadhra's, Brian Ó hUiginn of Dublin, who is commemorated in a note on p. ii (the second page of the new bifolium added in 1686), which records that the manuscript 'was bound by Bryan Higgins of the Citty of Dublin' in October 1715.[88] This is the Brian Ó hUiginn who was the subject of an elegy by Ó Gadhra following his death two months later.[89]

The manuscript subsequently passed through the hands of a number of owners, including those of Theophilus O'Flanagan who, in the early nineteenth century, edited what appears to have been the first text published from it, the poem beginning 'Mór atá ar theagosg flatha' which occurs at page 10.[90] Material from it was also transcribed into manuscript at this time,[91] and this also happened when the book was later in the possession James Hardiman.[92] Most important for the study of Irish literature is the partial copy of it that was made for Hardiman by Fínghin Ó Scannaill, a copy that now constitutes most of British Library MS Egerton 111. Standish Hayes

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[86] Ed. Torna [Tadhg Ó Donnchadha] in *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 17 (1907) 393–6: 394; Mac Domhnaill, *Dánta*, 60–62: 61. 'All-producing O'Gara manuscript, bounteous treasure, work drawn from many books, great volume, a lasting love of country, not of wealth, inspired [its] undertaking.' I assume that this is not a reference to one of the 'Ó Gadhra set' of the Annals of the Four Masters (which O'Flaherty used: Ó Muraíle, 'Autograph manuscripts', 92–4), to which work Seaán Ó Gadhra gives the usual title of Annales Dungalensis in the Mac Dermott genealogy mentioned above.

[87] There are certain general similarities – bespeaking indebtedness rather than identity – between the hand of Heinrí Ó Carraic and that of the scribe of the Ó Gadhra preface. One possibility is that Ó Carraic learned his writing from the tuition of Seaán Ó Gadhra.

[88] It appears that the surviving binding of full sheepskin with a gold-tooled decorative panel dates from the late 18th century. A conservator's report inside the back cover states that the text was very badly soiled prior to conservation in 1987.

[89] Noted O'Rahilly, *Catalogue*, p. 6; cf. Knott, *Tadhg Dall* II, 308. Ed. Torna [Tadhg Ó Donnchadha] in *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 14 (1904–5) 831–5; reproduced in Mac Domhnaill, *Dánta*, 29–36; Ó Raghallaigh, *Filí agus filidheacht*, 441–4. Cf. single stanza beginning 'Cléireach cronach croga ceiligh ceart' addressed to 'Brian O Higinn' by 'S.G.' in RIA MS 340 (23 M 23) p. 141.

[90] Theophilus O'Flanagan, *Advice to a prince, by Thaddy Mac Brody . . .* (Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Dublin 1808).

[91] RIA MS 1071: see n. 46.

[92] RIA MS 1422 (24 P 59).

O'Grady's lengthy commentary on the contents of this transcript amounts to a master-class in the historical context and literary criticism of bardic verse,[93] and hence represents another regeneration of the material in the O'Gara Manuscript in a way of which Seaán Ó Gadhra and Fr Nicolás would surely have approved.

The O'Gara Manuscript found its ultimate home in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, where transcripts were also made of some of its contents.[94] In the twentieth century it formed the basis for many of the editions of bardic verse executed by scholars such as Eleanor Knott, Osborn Bergin and Fr Lambert McKenna. The manuscript remains very much central to any discussion of bardic verse, and is still highly relevant to the study of Irish textual tradition. We may be grateful to Fr Nicolás for his diligent work in exile, and to Seaán Ó Gadhra for overseeing the transition of the O'Gara Manuscript from private to public use.[95]

[93] O'Grady, *Catalogue*, 339–486.
[94] E.g. RIA MSS 160 and 803 (see nn. 43 and 46); Eugene O'Curry's index to the manuscript is now NUI Maynooth MS C 23, pp. 136–46.
[95] I am grateful to Pádraig de Brún, Siobhán Fitzpatrick, Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha, and Éamon Ó Cíosáin for help and advice on various aspects of this paper.

Appendix: Address to the Reader, RIA MS 2 (23 F 16), pp. iii–iv

A leghthóir chairdeamhuil

[1] IS ionmheasda méad an chúruim agus na tairise do bhí ag ffar bprimhsinnsearaibh ar a noighribh agus ar a niarmua an tan do chungbhadar ar gnáthchuimhne gach dligheadh gach reacht agus gach caithréim prionsapáilte dha raibh eatorra ag a nathnuachradh ón aimsir go aroile do theagasg a niarsma sna haiceachta réimhráite.

As follus sin do thaoibh aitheanta Dé do scriobha ar tús an Exodus [*side-note*: Exod. .xx. c. 2. v.] ag a naithris a rís a nDeutronomi, [*side-note*: Deut. 5. 6.] agus an treas feacht mur do scriobh Ioshua sumpla dhiobh sin agus do dhligheagh Mhaoise go hiomlán ina leabhar féin. [*side-note*: Iosua. 8. 31.] Mur an cceadna an geiniolach ó Adhamh go Naoi an cheaduair, [*side-note*: Cronic .ca. 1] a rís ag a athchuimhniughadh ag Matha [*side-note*: Math. 1.] féchtar amhlaidh sin na hughdair phagánta ag niamhadh caithréimeann a ttriath agus a ttíre ag teagusg [io *deleted*]a ndisciobul ionta diaigh a ndiaigh mur is follus ag Virgil [*side-note*: Virg. lib^{o}. 6.] agus ag Flórus [*side-note*: Lucius Fl. 1.].

[2] Dearbhthar ag scribhneóiribh ughdardhásach go raibh ealadha agas litirdhacht aghmholta a nEirinn comhluath le haointir oile diarthar Eorpa go raibh filídh deisciobail agus órthóiridh dána dlighidh agus seanchusa aca na tteangthaib féin agus a noilithribh féchtar sin le iomad a naomh a neaccuilsi a scolta a screaptra sa saothar.

> An toighean dorcha domhain.
> an sruth aibhseach éagsomhail
> ni bhfuil acht baos righe ris .
> ni slighe daos an ainbhfis [*side-note*: Fear Feasa ón Cháinte]
>
> Nil intentatum [*sic*] nostri liquere poetae nec minimum meruere decus,
> vestigia graeca ausi deserere et celebrare domestica facta [*side-note*: Hor. de arte poetica]
>
> Indulsere viris venas ad metra Camoenae [*side-note*: Buchan. lib: 3^{o} de Sphaera]

[3] Acht cheana a sé scribhneóir an duanaire so an tAthair Nicolás *alias* Feargal Dubh O Gadhra Bráthair dórd S^{t} Augustín do bhi a cceim agus a ngradum ordheirc san órd a niomad dáitibh san rioghachtso iar ccriochnugha a léighinn dó ar tús san Spáin, do díbreadh a measg cháich don tír iachtair a naimsir Chromwel é, inar scríobh a ccathraigh Líle an gach eidirsgís da bhfuair an leabhar so agus dreas oile aga ttionól a measg na ccartacha ina ffuair iad.

[4] Léighmíd gurab sine an dán iná an prós gurab é is sochuimhnidhe agus is ealadhanta [*side-note*: Hesiod 4 / Homer Iliad] **[p. iv]** Atá go sunrach ann so dán ar gach gnathaisde, dréchta diadhachta duain leanabuídheacht, duain mholta, deireadh saothair, duain teagaisg, cumunn duain tseanchusa, droighneach, ógláchus, marbhnadh et reliqua gidheadh an iomarbháidh agus sgata do dhánta maithe do rugadh as an leabhar le sórt cúirialtuis saobhshuarcuis no (mur is ionráite) duarcuis, is mian a samhail do chur na nionadh féin, óir mur is follus ag an script: ní ffuil faoi an ngrein ní nuadh, [*side-note*: Eccl. 1.] **[5]** agus ag géilleadh don chomhairle úd. Duine do chaith a aimsir a ffóghluim ag fagbháil a shaothair ag neach ainbhfeassach sa naiceacht sin do ni dimbrígh dhá shaothar. [*side-note*: Eccle. 2.] a ccás nach ttuigtear so acht le haon mur an tí do chraobhsgaoil scribhinn na láimhe ar an mballa. [*side-note*: Daniel c. 5.]

[6] Iar mbreathnugha na réimhraitibh, tuig (a leighthoir chairdeamhuil) méad geana agus cumaoine an scribhneora ar a nasiún go generáilte agus ar a chineadh go spesialta ag ar fhag sé an toighre so, cronuigh go caoidheamhuil ma gheibh tu earráid uama no scribhneoracht ann

is béidh sásda dhá shaothar: athchuinghidh sé bhar nguidhe *in vitam aeternam Amen*. anois beo slán san mBéinnfhada é. 5^{o} Junii 1686.

Dear reader,

[1] *It is worth considering the extent of the care and fidelity shown by your eminent ancestors towards their heirs and descendants when they preserved in constant memory every law, every rule and every principal battle-roll that was* [*current*] *among them, renewing them from one era to the next so as to instruct their posterity in the afore-mentioned teachings.*

That is manifest in the case of the commandments of God being written first in Exodus [*and*] *being recited again in Deuteronomy, and the third time when Joshua wrote a copy of them and of the entire law of Moses into his own book. Similarly the genealogy from Adam to Noah the first time, being recalled again by Matthew. Observe in like manner the pagan authors glorifying the battle-rolls of their princes and countries, instructing their disciples regarding them one after the other, as is clear by Virgil and Florus.*

[2] *Authoritative writers assert that there were learning and panegyric literature in Ireland as early as any other country in western Europe, that they* [sc. *the Irish*] *had poets, students and gilders of poetry, law and history in their own language and in others. That is attested to by her numerous saints, churches, schools, writings and works.*

> *The dark deep ocean, the awful strange current: it is only foolishness to contend with it, it is no route for the ignorant.*
>
> *Our own poets have left no style untried, nor have those who dared to abandon the path of the Greeks and celebrate our homeland's deeds deserved the least honour.*
>
> *The Muses have granted to men talents for metres.*

[3] *In any case, the writer of this collection of poems is Father Nicolás* alias *Fearghal Dubh Ó Gadhra a brother of the Order of St Augustine, who enjoyed status and high honour in the Order in many locations in this kingdom after first completing his education in Spain. He was banished along with everyone to the Low Country in Cromwell's time, where he wrote this book in the city of Lille at every interval that he got, spending further time collecting them* [sc. *the poems*] *from the manuscripts wherein he found them.*

[4] *We read that poetry is older than prose, that it is more easily memorised and more artistic. Here in particular there is poetry of every usual type*: *religious pieces, infancy poetry, praise poetry, graduation poetry, didactic poetry, love* [*poems*], *historic poems,* droighneach, ógláchas, *lament etc. However the Iomarbhágh and a number of good poems that were taken from the book through a sort of a perversely enthusiastic or (more correctly) wretched curiosity, it is desirable that they should be replaced with like poems, since it is clear from scripture that there is nothing new under the sun.* **[5]** *And, adhering to that counsel, a person who has spent his time in learning and who leaves his work to an ignorant person, by that teaching he devalues his work, in the event that this* [*work*] *is understood only by someone like the person who made known the writing of the hand on the wall.*

[6] *Having considered the above remarks, understand (dear reader) the extent of the writer's affection and kindness towards his nation in general and his kin in particular on whom he has bestowed this heir. Rebuke him gently if you find an error of metre or writing in it and he will be satisfied with his work. He asks your prayer in eternal life Amen. He is now alive and well in Banada 5 June 1686.*